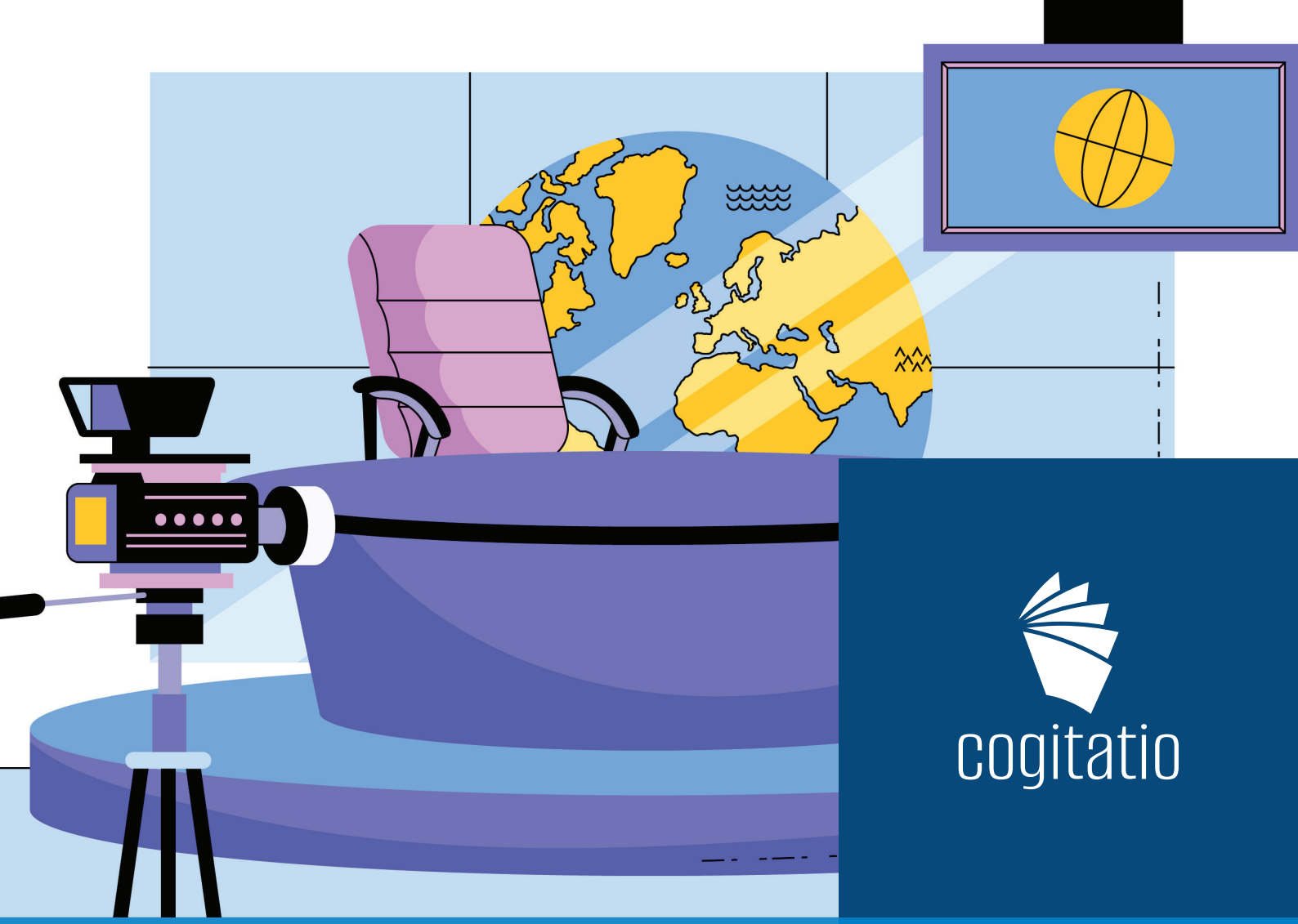


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Table of Contents

Beyond Technological Lag: Re-Centering Marginalized Media Markets in Global AI Journalism
Mathias-Felipe de-Lima-Santos and Bruce Mutsvairo

AI in Cameroonian Newsrooms: Exploring Daily Use and Challenges Among Journalists in Four Regions
Edwin Nfor

"AI's Good, but People Have Hearts": Artificial Intelligence in Data-Driven Journalism in Ghanaian Newsrooms
Theodora Dame Adjin-Tettey and Samuel Danso

African Community Media, AI, and the Question of Community Participation in the Disruptive Era
Lyton Ncube, Allen Munoriyarwa, Albert Chibuwe, Refilwe Whitney Mofokeng, and Antonette Kakujaha-Murangi

Platformisation, Power, and AI Governance in the Newsroom: Insights From the Global South
Dalia Elsheikh and Daniel Jackson

FOMO in Sub-Saharan African AI Hype: The Quest for a Decolonized AI Adoption Framework
Danford Zirugo and Bruce Mutsvairo

Multi-Method Analysis of Locally Built Artificial Intelligence Models Designed for Journalists in an African Country
Adeola Abdulateef Elega, Abdullateef Mohammed, and Akintunde Babatunde

Algorithmic Silences: Postcolonial Blind Spots in Dutch AI Media Discourse
Jessy de Cooker, Adája Unlandt, and Jessie van Wijk

Giving AI a Body: Representations of Social Robots in Latin American Media
Iliana Ferrer, Leonor Balbuena, Oscar Mario Miranda-Villanueva, and Mathias-Felipe de-Lima-Santos

The Great Wall of the Press: Layered Boundary Work of AI-Integrated Journalism
Joanne Kuai and Michael Karlsson

Diffusion, Logics, and Boundaries: How Journalists in Marginalized Media Markets Negotiate AI in Newsrooms
Dren Gërguri, Jennifer Sorrells, Gheorghe Anghel, Maximiliano Frías, Antonia Matei, Ramadan Çipuri, Stela Lechpammer, Emel Arık, and Irena Lovrenčič Držanič

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Table of Contents

Do Malaysian Newsrooms Jump on the AI Bandwagon? Empirical Evidence From Journalists' Perspectives
Jiankun Gong, Yu Zuo, Nur Izzati Aziz, Mumtaz Aini Alivi, Kunjin Luo, and Yuqing Lin

Not Afraid of AI yet: Indonesian TV Journalists on Negotiating Roles in AI-Assisted Newsrooms
Yearry Setianto, Rossalyn Asmarantika, Veronika, and Angela Romano

AI Adoption in Indonesian and Malaysian Journalism: A Comparative Mixed-Methods Study
Indra Prawira, Mastura Mahamed, and Tai Neilson

The Metajournalistic Discourse and the Sociopolitical Construction of AI Risk in Chinese Journalism
Youyi Wei

A Framework for Classifying Uncertainties in AI-Driven Newsrooms
Luna Paladino, Paula Chimenti, and André Fonseca

Transparency is a Double-Edged Sword: Stakeholders' Perception of GenAI Usage Disclosure in Kenyan Newsrooms
Bingbing Zhang, Kevin C. Mudavadi, and Chenghan Zhou

AI in Journalism Education: Curriculum Development and Implementation of Journalism in BRICS Universities
Liqi Yang, Ping Song, Shensi Wang, and Jinghong Xu

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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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ARTICLE

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AI in Cameroonian Newsrooms: Exploring Daily Use and Challenges Among Journalists in Four Regions

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Abstract

This study examines the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) tools by journalists working for legacy media outlets in four of Cameroon's 10 geopolitical regions. It builds on the premise that journalism practice is continually changing due to the advent of emerging technology. The article analyses semi-structured interviews with 12 Cameroonian mainstream media practitioners working for public and private print- and broadcast-media outlets. The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003) serves as the theoretical lens through which the actions of the research participants are analyzed. Findings reveal that some journalists use AI throughout all stages of their work, from conception, planning, collection, writing, and editing. The extent of use depends on the individual reporter's ability to leverage the tools. The attempt to take full advantage of AI tools is met with significant challenges, such as the absence of appropriate newsroom policies, resource limitations, the absence of context-relevant data, and insufficient knowledge among newsroom managers. The study emphasizes that the adoption of technology in newsrooms cannot be separated from the socio-economic context in which media operate.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; Cameroon; journalism; linguistic inclusivity; newsrooms; technology adoption

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is gradually taking root in contemporary journalism. Although this affirmation might sound overstated, its manifestations are visible in the daily practice of journalism, and scholars have shown increasing interest in this growing influence (see Kevin-Alerechi et al., 2025; Lewis et al., 2025). As with other technological innovations, the role of AI in journalism is unlikely to be phased out any time soon (Marconi,

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2020). At the global level, this technology has been integrated into various parts of news production and is therefore considered not as a mere peripheral innovation, but a revolution that is actively transforming the process of information production and circulation (Broussard et al., 2019). Nonetheless, considering its emergence in isolation could be erroneous. Scholars (Kevin-Alerechi et al., 2025; Roy & Sengupta, 2024) see it as part of a larger framework of technological transformations in the media sphere, characterized by the progressive integration of smarter tools into journalism.

Cameroon serves as an exemplary case for investigating the localized dynamics of AI adoption. The country's media ecosystem is divided between a heavily funded state media apparatus and an economically vulnerable private press that is struggling with falling advertising revenue (Tatchou, 2022). The adoption of digital innovation has been seen to be driven by journalists' ability to effectively use accessible tools to make up for institutional limitations (Nfor, 2024). Furthermore, the general physical infrastructure is also playing a considerable role. As with many other sectors of economic life (Meka'a et al., 2024), local newsrooms routinely navigate systemic structural disruptions, most notably unscheduled power outages and expensive internet connectivity. At the managerial level, newsrooms operate in top-down editorial hierarchies entrenched in legacy workflows, leading to considerable slowness in the deployment of technology. Lefèvre et al. (2025, p. 48) describe this as a "fragmentation of current regulatory frameworks," stating that "the absence of clear, sector-specific guidelines…leads to inconsistencies in AI implementation." As a result, individual professionals tend to independently experiment with these new tools either to the benefit or to the detriment of the organizations they work for. In this evolving context, the level of adoption varies because of factors such as technological competence, level of interest/enthusiasm, and professional preferences (Simon, 2024).

The reaction to the role of AI is also contrasting. While some consider AI tools as a boost to their work, others have adopted what Salvador-Mata et al. (2025, p. 15) described as a "wait-and-see attitude reflecting cautious observation rather than outright resistance." Another group of media professionals is noted to have adopted outright resistance to the use of any AI tool (Morosoli et al., 2026). This cohort often cites concerns regarding the preservation of editorial integrity and the erosion of human agency in the creative process. These divergent perceptions underline the nuances that accompany the integration of AI and all forms of technology in general into regular newsroom practice.

The aim of this study is to examine the adoption of AI by Cameroonian journalists, with emphasis on the use of accessible tools. It also questions the practical challenges that journalists face in integrating AI into their daily professional routines. The research is based on the analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews carried out with English-speaking journalists and editors from media outlets in four of Cameroon's 10 administrative regions. The study is guided by these two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How do Cameroonian journalists use AI tools in their daily newsroom tasks?

RQ 2: What constraints hinder journalists' full exploitation of AI?

In examining these questions, this article contributes to enriching emerging discourse on AI in journalism by bringing empirical perspectives from Cameroon—a sub-Saharan African country where journalists navigate specific institutional, material, socio-economic, and practical challenges such as poor electricity supply and

limited internet access. How these media professionals succeed in maintaining reporting of events, using technology that depends on these poorly accessible utilities, is of key interest. This study is also relevant because, despite the growing interest in the integration of AI in journalism, a majority of the research has been on newsrooms in the West (e.g., D'haeseleer et al., 2025; Fieiras-Ceide et al., 2022; Grimme & Zabel, 2025; Lefèvre et al., 2025; Murru & Carlo, 2025). A few studies have been carried out in newsrooms in Africa with a focus on specific countries or groups of countries (see Adjin-Tettey et al., 2024; Onebunne, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025), but this contribution will be one of the first that examines the use of AI by Cameroonian journalists. The study also helps to explain how journalists reinterpret their roles in relation to automation. This is particularly important for understanding the future of journalism as a profession, in a context where formal newsroom policies and training structures around AI remain underdeveloped.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Newsroom Dynamics in the Age of AI

The adoption of AI has considerably accelerated in journalism in the last decade, marking a major transformation in newsroom practices (Noain-Sánchez, 2022; Simon, 2024). The very first forms of automatization in journalism, often identified as robotic journalism, were mainly limited to the production of structured data such as financial reports, sports scores, weather reports, and forecasts (Latar, 2015). The emergence of generative AI is said to have enlarged the framework of automatization far beyond the routine prompts to now include more complex editorial tasks such as the writing of news reports and analysis, the generation of titles, translation, fact-checking, and investigative reporting (Cools et al., 2023; Kevin-Alerechi et al., 2025; Roy & Sengupta, 2024).

Recent studies show that the adoption of AI in newsrooms is widespread, although its full integration remains timid (Dodds et al., 2026; Sonni et al., 2024). AI tools are integrated in both newsgathering and production phases (Li, 2025; Taha & Abdallah, 2025). In the collection phase, Rinehart and Kung (2022), after studying newsrooms in the US, found that managers were looking for ways to make newsgathering more efficient and considered using AI for content discovery and social media monitoring. During production, these tools are used to transcribe, write, and edit. In fact, Xi and Latif (2022, p. 41) note that:

> The innovation of the news production process under the influence of AI technology ensures a wealth of news sources, provides opportunities for automated writing…increases the engagement [and] channels for feedback. It also widens the path to profitability for news production.

The adoption of AI has largely been motivated by the need for efficiency in media environments facing resource constraints (Oh & Jung, 2025). Media outlets, confronted with reduced revenue and staff, turn to AI to maintain their production levels while reducing costs (Aljalabneh et al., 2024). This evolution is considered part of the broader trends in digital transformation, where technologies are mobilized to optimize the workflow and improve productivity.

Meanwhile, the adoption of AI is not uniform across all media outlets. Organizational capacities, technological infrastructure, priority strategies, and the drive for new experiences are some of the factors that account for the variation in the adoption of AI among newsrooms in the same context and across different contexts.

Studies suggest that the adoption of AI does not depend only on the availability of technology, but also on institutional and personal factors (Albizu-Rivas et al., 2024; Wu, 2026). This makes AI adoption not just a technical process, but also a professional one. Schaetz and Schjøtt (2026, p. 233) note that these factors facilitate an understanding of innovation processes, not only as imbued "with expectations of the future, but that expectations become generative as they guide and motivate actions in the present."

2.2. African Newsrooms in the Reality of Generative AI

The adoption of AI in African newsrooms can be fully understood within the broader context of media development on the continent, where news organizations evolve amidst diverse political, economic, and technological conditions (Munoriyarwa, 2024). Recent scholarship characterizes this process as "innovating against the odds," where Global South newsrooms must navigate unique obstacles while seeking to digitize and adopt emerging technologies (de-Lima-Santos, 2026; Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). Compared to Western contexts, the adoption of AI in Africa is generally considered progressive but remains slow. While sensitization is growing, integration is hindered by significant structural and socio-technological barriers including limited finances, insufficient digital resources, and a lack of technical expertise (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019).

Despite these challenges, African journalists are actively experimenting with generative AI tools, and journalists' attitudes toward its use have been categorized as optimism, pessimism, and pragmatism (Umejei et al., 2025). Studies across the continent show that AI helps journalists with routine tasks such as transcription, research, generating story ideas, and fact-checking (Adjin-Tettey et al., 2024; Gondwe, 2025). However, a notable characteristic of this adoption is its individual and informal nature; journalists often use these tools at their own discretion without formal organizational support or established policies (Adjin-Tettey et al., 2024; Onebunne, 2026). This appropriation based on personal judgment contrasts sharply with the Western hemisphere, where AI is typically guided by institutional strategies and governance frameworks (Beckett, 2019).

Furthermore, there is a risk that AI models trained on Western data misrepresent African realities and reinforce colonial echoes (Matsilele & Tshuma, 2025). This lack of representation may marginalize local journalism by prioritizing content from larger international newsrooms. For instance, in Tanzanian newsrooms, while AI shows high accuracy in translation, it often fails to preserve vital cultural nuances, leading to a struggle for journalistic autonomy and a dependence on external sources (Gondwe, 2025). As a result, systems do not fully take into consideration local languages, cultural nuances, or sociopolitical realities.

As a matter of fact, generative AI offers significant opportunities to improve productivity and facilitate access to information. For smaller media organizations, AI could serve as a stepping stone to overcome resource constraints (Oh & Jung, 2025). However, some view these affordances through a "dystopian" lens, fearing that AI is inimical to the legitimacy and credibility of the profession (Makwambeni et al., 2023). The concretization of AI's benefits requires addressing the divide through collaborative efforts among policymakers and industry leaders to create an inclusive environment (Matsilele & Tshuma, 2025; Munoriyarwa, 2024).

3. Theoretical Framework

The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT), developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), is the theoretical underpinning for this study. It is considered a comprehensive behavioral model that explains how individuals come to accept and use new technologies in professional and personal contexts. Venkatesh et al. (2003) drew insights from eight previous theories on technological adoption, among which are the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), the theory of reasoned action (Hale et al., 2002), and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985). This unified framework identifies the core drivers of technology adoption.

The theory lays its foundation in the identification of four independent constructs that directly influence the intention to use technology, which in turn can lead to actual use behavior (Trang et al., 2024). The first of them is performance expectancy (PE; Sudirman et al., 2022), which refers to the level of belief that an individual has that using technology will enhance their job performance or lead to highly valued outcomes. The second is effort expectancy (EE; Badowska et al., 2016), which captures the degree to which the use of particular technologies is perceived to be effortless, showing that learning and interaction are easy to achieve. The third is social influence (SI; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 2011), in which the individual's adoption of technology is the result of whether key reference groups (employers, supervisors, colleagues or peers) express some level of validation. At the fourth level stands facilitating conditions (FCs), which represent how individuals view organizational and technical infrastructure available to support their use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). A key strength of UTAUT is the fact that it integrates multiple theoretical perspectives and still maintains sufficient specificity for practical implementation. Researchers have built on the framework to add layers such as trust, perceived risk, ethical concerns, perceived costs, and cultural compatibility to enable the applicability to specific contexts (Al-Hattami, 2025; Cody-Allen & Kishore, 2006; Rana et al., 2024).

Journalism can be considered a distinctive field in which UTAUT can be applied since newsrooms are seen as merging individual professional autonomy with organizational demands when adopting new technologies. Paulussen (2016), for example, notes that the structural conditions of newsrooms can either serve as barriers or enablers to innovation. The guiding principles of journalism, such as accuracy, independence, and public service, are often known to determine whether specific technologies will be adopted or not. PE in journalism will determine whether AI tools improve reporting speed without compromising quality. Trang et al. (2024), for example, found that Vietnamese journalists consider PE to be the strongest predictor of AI adoption as they weigh the ability for AI systems to enhance professional practice against adding administrative burden. EE has been seen to shape the adoption of AI within journalism, particularly in contexts where infrastructural and practical limitations, coupled with inadequate training, make tools that are otherwise easy to use difficult (Munoriyarwa, 2024). SI can be noted to operate through horizontal informal peer networks and shared experiences rather than formal hierarchical pressure (Mtemang'ombe & Chikunkhuzeni, 2025). FCs are considered paradoxical because they could predict actual usage once adoption intentions form, but they do not seem to have the strength to shape initial behavioral intention (Perez-Gallardo, 2025). Having established this theoretical and geographic context, I proceed in Section 4 to provide the detailed methodology employed to investigate how these global and continental trends manifest themselves within Cameroon.

4. Methods

I adopted a qualitative research design, conscious of its ability to provide "techniques for the analysis of subjective, nebulous and difficult-to-pin-down phenomena" (Bhangu et al., 2023, p. 40). To explore how journalists in the Southwest, Northwest, Littoral, and Centre regions of Cameroon adopt and use AI in their routine tasks, this approach was appropriate for examining the reasons, experiences, and challenges that might not be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Denzin (2008) opines that reality is socially constructed from subjective experiences. This view is relevant for exploring how journalists make sense of emerging technologies within specific professional and cultural contexts such as the one under study.

Sampling was carried out in two phases. First, I conducted a purposive sample of English-speaking journalists and editors from public and private radio, TV, and newspaper outlets in the four regions. Focusing on English-speaking journalists across the Northwest, Southwest, Littoral, and Centre regions ensured a shared working language and access to similar tools whose original language is English. Out of 44 journalists and editors contacted in September 2025, seven expressed interest in the topic and consented to participate. I used snowball sampling in the second phase to recruit the remaining interviewees. Some research participants put me in touch with other colleagues, while some of those who declined my request referred me to other potential participants. Consequently, five additional interviewees were recruited through referrals. In total, 12 participants took part in the study, a sample size that is consistent with qualitative research standards, as I prioritized the depth of the discussions and aimed for richness and relevance of the data (Malterud et al., 2016). Table 1 below shows the demographics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of interview participants.

Category	Options	*N*
Location	Centre region	3
	Littoral region	2
	Northwest region	1
	Southwest region	6
Media outlet	Print	3
	Broadcast	8
	Online	1
Affiliation	Public media	3
	Private media	9
Role	Reporter	10
	Editor	2

I conducted interviews in November 2025 and February 2026. All interviews were conducted online in English via Zoom, depending on participants' availability. Recording was carried out simultaneously after verbal consent from each interviewee. Interview sessions lasted between 28 minutes and 1 hour and 5 minutes. The duration depended on the depth of each participant's responses to the questions. Through the interview guide, I aimed to elicit responses and examples along three main themes: (a) knowledge and familiarity with AI tools; (b) patterns of adoption and use in newsroom practices; (c) perceived challenges and constraints.

The data were transcribed in Microsoft Office 365, and I proofread the transcripts to ensure accuracy. The data were pseudonymized to maintain confidentiality. In presenting the results, I have described the participants by their roles, affiliations, and locations. I employed inductive thematic analysis that allowed me to highlight patterns and themes emerging from the data rather than imposing predefined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach has been noted to meet the requirements of exploratory research where new phenomena and new contexts are being studied.

The process of proofreading the transcribed data constituted the first step in the analysis, as I familiarized myself with the data to make initial observations that formed the basis for subsequent coding. Each interview transcript was separately loaded into ATLAS.ti 25 for open coding. I assigned labels to segments of the data, arriving at 58 initial codes that reflected a wide range of experiences and perspectives. I reviewed the codes and grouped similar codes that conveyed the same conceptual similarities. After grouping the codes, themes capturing recurring patterns were identified across the dataset. This process helped to organize the data into 12 broader analytical categories. The emerging themes were iteratively reviewed to ensure consistency with the dataset. Each theme was supported by representative excerpts from the interviews. The themes emerging from the data reveal both enabling factors and constraints to the adoption of AI in Cameroon. In Section 5, I present some of the findings emanating from these analyses. The results are presented in a way that allows the reader to gain firsthand accounts of the use of AI, drawing heavily on what I consider the most revealing direct quotes.

5. Findings

5.1. RQ1

Participants highlighted several ways in which they use AI tools in their daily tasks. For clarity, these have been grouped into four main categories: concept development and planning; streamlining information gathering and bridging language barriers; managing deadlines and polishing up grammatical inefficiencies; and crisis management and time-sensitive reporting.

5.1.1. Concept Development and Planning

Some of the interviewees indicated that they use AI at the conception phase of programs and story ideas for news coverage. This includes tasks such as coining the program topic, brainstorming program angles, and designing questionnaires for guests. They noted that specific prompts play a pivotal role in this aspect. To some of these media professionals, using available tools shifts their consideration of AI from a mere technical tool into a collaborative partner in the early stages of news production:

> Sometimes…when I'm looking for the angle of the news story to propose in the news conference…for me not to have the same angle as the other newsrooms, I'll probably ask for an angle, for example, "help me with angling this story that would be different from what has been treated in other newsrooms." And then that's what I'll propose in my own newsroom in the morning. (Reporter, private radio station, Southwest region)

This quest for editorial distinctiveness is echoed across private media practitioners. For instance, another private radio reporter and anchor from the Southwest region explained that when running out of ideas for their programs, they input past topics into the prompt bar to generate fresh, contextualized thematic angles. Similarly, a private TV anchor in the Centre region described a co-creation process where they "fix the topic together" with AI, using the system to generate a draft questionnaire which the journalist later reviews manually.

5.1.2. Streamlining Information Gathering and Bridging Language Barriers

When it comes to information gathering, journalists interviewed indicated that AI serves them in several ways. They revealed that AI assists them in sourcing information, especially about international news, considering that some tools now have links to websites of international news outlets. Within Cameroon's unique bilingual media landscape, AI also serves as an essential tool for translation:

> I am in a newsroom that is French-dominated. So many times, when I have to write a report and only the French journalist has gone to the field, I use ChatGPT for translation. And sometimes, when I'm in the field, and it's a government ceremony, and we're given a press kit which is totally in French, I snap it and put it in, and it gives me the English version or even a summary of what has been written there in French (Reporter/anchor, private TV Station, Centre region)

This necessity to bridge the institutional language barrier is further emphasized by a state news reporter and anchor who noted that because her editor-in-chief is Francophone and the daily news menu is presented in French, image-to-text AI translation features are used daily to overcome their basic French language inadequacies. Beyond translation, respondents also highlight its ability to lighten the labor of data aggregation. An editor-in-chief from a private TV station in the Littoral region observed that AI acts as an information source because it cites major international news outlets. Furthermore, a reporter for the public broadcaster in the Southwest region detailed using AI to extract the "essential remarks" from long audio soundbites, which serve him in his reports for both the radio and the broadcaster's online platforms.

5.1.3. Polishing Up Grammatical Inefficiencies

Data from the interviews revealed that journalists use AI tools for writing, proofreading, condensing and expanding texts, as well as fine-tuning the language. The use of AI goes from generating words and sentences to writing entire texts of news reports and program lead-ins. Respondents also said they use it to make up for mental blackouts and to adhere to professional grammatical standards:

> There are times when you think in English. But now when you put it down, it sounds like pidgin English. So, I know that if I put this thing on AI, AI is going to give me the English, which is not my language, which is the language of the Americans, the British. So, I am very confident with its use when it comes to correcting my grammar and my tone. (Reporter/news anchor, private radio Southwest region)

A private television editor-in-chief in the Littoral region corroborated this point by noting that since indigenous languages have a great impact on the appropriate use of the English language among many Cameroonians, AI helps to correct grammatical errors and boost professional confidence by ensuring delivery in clear and accurate English.

5.1.4. Crisis Management and Time-Sensitive Reporting

For some participants in this study, in addition to routine activities, they also find AI tools handy when dealing with emergencies. What the interviewees considered emergency situations are breaking news stories, live programs, and tight deadlines. During such circumstances, journalists prompt specific tools to maintain the flow of information, answer questions on topics that they do not fully master, write news reports with tight deadlines, or condense texts. This highlights how AI is leveraged to preserve professional authority in real time:

> In terms of speed, it helps, especially for impromptu events. On a breakfast show or a talk show on the radio, a caller can ask a question about something I'm not really versed in. Let's say something about health or topics that I don't really have much knowledge about. And I don't just want to talk based on the layman's perspective. I have to give them facts. So, I just prompt AI, and it gives me what I have to say at that point. (Reporter/anchor, private radio, Southwest region)

This reliance on instantaneous information retrieval during live broadcasts is also practiced by state-employed journalists. A reporter and anchor for the state-owned broadcaster in the Southwest region explained that they utilize AI for live commentaries because it is "instant," allowing them to immediately contextualize issues in real time. In a similar vein, an editor-in-chief of a private newspaper in the Southwest explained that sometimes, with the absence of editorial assistants, they turn to Meta AI to format articles rapidly before conducting final editorial review.

Additionally, participants in this study revealed that the use of AI is a vital mechanism for coping with time-induced stress. A TV reporter in the Centre region confessed to using AI to process a complex court story in under five minutes right before a prime-time news broadcast deadline, noting its efficiency despite having feelings of guilt for not respecting stated editorial processes. This form of processing is also used by some editors who have embraced the technology. An editor-in-chief of a private newspaper in the Southwest region noted that when racing against time, they issue prompts into either ChatGPT, Gemini, or Meta AI to cut exhaustive field drafts down to concise, print-ready texts.

5.2. RQ2

Although the use of AI is seemingly facilitating the tasks of journalists as some of the respondents highlighted in Section 5.1, the exploration of its full capabilities is hampered by several factors. Interview participants highlighted challenges that have been classified under three specific themes: (a) infrastructural and economic barriers, (b) context-specific data deficit, and (c) managerial inertia—all compounded by newsroom managers' poor knowledge of the use of AI.

5.2.1. Infrastructural and Economic Barriers to AI Adoption

Cameroonian journalists, similar to those in other parts of the Global South, face significant resource limitations that hamper their work, and this is particularly severe when exploring new technologies. In this study, participants highlight three major resource constraints to their full use of AI tools—namely, unstable electricity and limited internet access, alongside the overarching challenge of limited financial resources.

These hurdles do not only restrict access. But as respondents reveal, they also disrupt the continuity of digital journalistic workflows:

> I think that the highest impediment to the use of AI in our newsroom is electricity, because we are still in an environment where it's not guaranteed to have electricity, even just for one full day. And internet connectivity is also very, very poor and very limited. So, there are days when we don't even have electricity completely. There are days when the internet is generally down. That means you cannot use any system that relies on electricity and the internet. (Editor-in-chief, private newspaper, Southwest region)

This infrastructural precarity is sometimes exacerbated by the general sociopolitical atmosphere in the country. A reporter and news anchor for the state broadcaster in the Southwest region highlighted that during the post-election tensions of October 2025, network shutdowns paralyzed internet functionality, making it difficult to fully rely on online AI tools. A freelance reporter and online publisher in the Centre region pointed out the financial inability of local practitioners to "go premium," emphasizing that because journalists cannot afford monthly or yearly corporate subscriptions, they are restricted to free models, which are generally limited. As a result, journalists who are interested in exploring AI are confined to inferior, entry-level versions, thus widening the gap between their reporting capabilities and those of their counterparts in better-resourced contexts.

5.2.2. Context-Specific Data Deficit

Findings from this study also show that AI tools generally have insufficient data about Cameroon. Some respondents expressed frustration that their prompts yield very little information, which they consider far below expectations. Such a deficit, according to them, represents a form of "algorithmic marginalization," where local realities are absent from Western-trained models:

> The AI tools we're using don't have enough data on Cameroon to give us [unbiased responses], because AI is trained on data….We don't have AI that is 100% African. I think the AI still needs a lot of data from Africa, including Cameroon. (Reporter/news anchor, state-owned broadcaster, Southwest region)

Due to the scarcity of data, research participants reported that platforms churn out outdated or fabricated information when queried about local topics. A reporter from the state broadcaster in the Northwest region revealed that AI tools frequently deliver outdated metrics, especially on judicial and policy topics, presenting data from several years back when current data is required. This obliges journalists to commit themselves to rigorous verification to reduce the incidence of misinformation. The consequence of this contextual vacuum is the generation of "hallucinations." A newspaper proprietor in the Southwest region recounted how they discovered severe historical inaccuracies when they tried to track past ministerial appointments using AI. The output, according to their account, conflicted with official records on the presidency website. Furthermore, a freelance reporter from the Centre region revealed that AI systems frequently invent quotations, necessitating considerable manual surveillance by the journalist.

5.2.3. Managerial Inertia Leading to Institutional Blind Spots and Policy Underdevelopment

Another key challenge cited by interviewees was that several newsroom managers, editors, and media proprietors have limited knowledge about the use of AI. This tends to work against journalists' full adoption as they lack the enabling environment and newsroom support to fully explore AI tools as desired. All participants in this study indicated that their newsrooms do not have clearly outlined policies on the use of AI, and so journalists are left to explore it by themselves. This institutional lag reflects a structural divide that stifles formalized technological integration:

> Unfortunately, we don't have formal guidelines. Most of our newsrooms…are managed by people over 40. In the adoption model of technology, they are not really among the early adopters. So, they are still dragging their feet to accept such a model. (Reporter, public broadcaster, Southwest region)

What can be described here as a generational gap impedes the evolution of the full adoption of AI into newsroom routines. An editor-in-chief of a private TV station in the Littoral region admitted that their current editorial policies were established long before the advent of automated workflows, and the institution is still to make amendments to formally incorporate AI. As a result, practitioners have been left to use it haphazardly. As a newspaper proprietor from the Southwest region corroborated, "old school" legacy news editors and publishers will only welcome and formalize AI integration once they are explicitly educated on its professional advantages.

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that media professionals are not passive spectators but active agents who creatively deploy AI to make up for professional and linguistic lapses as well as pressures related to deadlines. However, this individualized adoption is seen as throttled by institutional inertia and contextual infrastructural realities. Section 6 presents a discussion of the results to fully explore how these localized realities align with, challenge, redefine, or reshape understanding of theoretical underpinnings.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how Cameroonian journalists utilize accessible AI tools and the practical challenges they confront when trying to integrate these technologies into their daily workflows. By employing Venkatesh et al.'s (2003) UTAUT as the theoretical lens, this study demonstrates that technology adoption in a resource-scarce media ecosystem does not follow the predictable, top-down pathways established in Western organizational models. Instead, it can be described as a fragmented and individualized process (Lefèvre et al., 2025). Below, the empirical findings are contextualized within the core constructs of UTAUT to illustrate how the realities faced by these journalists redefine the boundaries of digital media practice.

The data reveal a disconnect between individual adoption intentions and organizational support structures, creating what I choose to call a bottom-up innovation paradox. While some of the research participants demonstrated high levels of PE with the belief that AI tools can enhance their reporting speed and output quality (Sudirman et al., 2022), they note that their newsrooms are lagging far behind. Interviewees employed what Katz et al. (1963) described as laggards to demonstrate the slow pace at which newsroom decision-makers are gaining interest and adopting the use of AI. This divide upends the classic UTAUT

construct of SI. In traditional corporate settings, SI operates as a top-down reality where supervisors validate or recommend the use of a new tool (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). In Cameroonian newsrooms, however, top-down validation seems absent. But the reality here is that horizontal, informal peer recommendations drive journalists' use of accessible mobile AI tools. Because newsrooms are slow in cultivating an enabling environment, AI integration is left entirely to the discretion and personal risk of individual practitioners.

In Cameroon's unique socio-political landscape, EE is deeply tied to linguistic necessity. For English-speaking journalists operating within French-dominated administrative, institutional, and social spheres, accessible generative tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini enable professional survival. Their accessibility redefines the operational workflows of Anglophone journalists, allowing them to instantly translate and process French documents that would otherwise remain unclear to them due to language barriers. Similar to the findings of Çipuri et al. (2025), these local practitioners exhibit preferences for intuitive AI translation and transcription apps over older methods. Operationally, this means AI is facilitating the task of Anglophone journalists who had to await official translation of documents from cross-lingual information brokers, mitigating post-colonial linguistic disparities.

As shown in the study, journalists are highly motivated to explore AI, but they also run into severe localized data deficits. This deficit exposes a major flaw in FC available to African media practitioners. Western-trained algorithmic models rely on data sets that largely marginalize or ignore parts of Cameroonian socio-political history, legal frameworks, and contemporary realities. As a result, when prompted for localized information, these utilities frequently fabricate historical data or invent quotations. This algorithmic blind spot introduces operational risks. As Gondwe (2025) observed regarding AI in Tanzanian media, preserving local cultural nuances and precise factual truth remains a persistent challenge. Cameroon's deep linguistic complexity spanning official bilingualism, Pidgin English variations, and over 240 indigenous languages magnifies this vacuum. Therefore, integrating AI into specific workflows does not turn out to be as time-effective as hoped, since journalists are obliged to include significant manual verification steps into their routine to guard against propagating automated misinformation.

At the organizational level, the general absence of institutional newsroom guidelines creates a delicate ethical vacuum in the adoption of AI. Corroborating the work of Wu (2026), this study shows that given newsroom managers' insufficient technical knowledge, there is a loophole in systemic policy development, leading to a bottom-up adoption instead of the conventional top-down adoption approach common within organizations. Because newsrooms have not updated editorial policies to encompass automated workflows, journalists are forced to establish their own ad-hoc ethical boundaries, creating an operational ambiguity susceptible to producing a negative impact on newsroom accountability. Research participants highlighted deploying AI to rapidly generate scripts or run live commentaries. However, because managers overlook the underlying process, they tend to offer little institutional oversight in case of abusive use, which in turn exposes not only journalists but also media outlets to considerable ethical challenges.

Finally, the material vulnerability of the Cameroonian media environment completely reconfigures the construct of FC. In the classic UTAUT model, FC assumes that there is a stable physical environment and focuses on organizational support (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In Cameroon, journalists are caught between a high PE and desire for speed on the one hand (Munoriyarwa, 2024), and the realities of macro-level systemic challenges such as chronic electricity outages, exorbitant mobile data costs, and politically motivated

internet shutdowns during times of civic tension on the other. To adapt, journalists prioritize tools with exceptionally low EE that can run efficiently on low-bandwidth mobile devices (Badowska et al., 2016). In a Global South context such as Cameroon, technology adoption can seldom be separated from the physical infrastructural realities of the system in which they operate.

7. Conclusion

This study provides a vital empirical contribution to the general understanding of AI adoption within the under-researched Cameroonian media ecosystem. The study shows that AI integration reinforces the hybrid work ethic (Li, 2025; Nfor, 2024), as newer automated logics merge with older, legacy newsroom realities. In this environment, individual self-motivated journalists eagerly deploy AI to overcome professional and linguistic barriers but are faced with systems that are lagging behind in managerial guidelines, formal policies, or structural training.

Theoretically, this research extends the boundaries of the UTAUT framework by proving that in such contexts, FC cannot be viewed as a passive organizational variable. Instead, material conditions such as stable electricity and internet connectivity are active forces that dictate the pace and ethics of innovation. Furthermore, AI is seen to be reshaping the traditional gatekeeping process, as the lingering oversight of newsroom management in verifying automated output leaves the ethical and professional responsibility on individual journalists. For practicing media professionals and scholars alike, this indicates that effective ways of bridging the gap between ad-hoc usage and responsible journalism should be urgently considered, with localized media literacy, collaborative policy formulation, and targeted training frameworks, involving both managers and practitioners.

This study acknowledges two primary limitations. First, the explicit focus on English-speaking journalists from selected regions excludes the lived experiences of French-speaking practitioners, who navigate a different institutional space within Cameroon's bilingual landscape, thereby limiting national generalizability. Second, the rapid, real-time evolution of generative AI utilities means these findings represent an empirical snapshot in time. Future research can therefore expand its scope to include a broader quantitative or qualitative sampling across all ten administrative regions of Cameroon to capture a comprehensive national perspective. Additionally, incorporating mixed methodologies, such as newsroom ethnographies or automated content analyses of actual published outputs, would yield deeper insights into exactly how AI-generated text is modified before public dissemination. Finally, longitudinal studies would be highly valuable in tracking how these personalized, bottom-up practices evolve as newsroom policies and national regulatory frameworks eventually become more formalized.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The anonymized data can be requested from the author.

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To prepare this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT-5 to check grammar and contextualize some words and short expressions.

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ARTICLE

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords

artificial intelligence; data journalism; Ghana; journalism; newsrooms

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

1.1. Problem Statement

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

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

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

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

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Data Journalism

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

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

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

2.2. AI and Data Journalism Integration

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

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

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

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

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

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

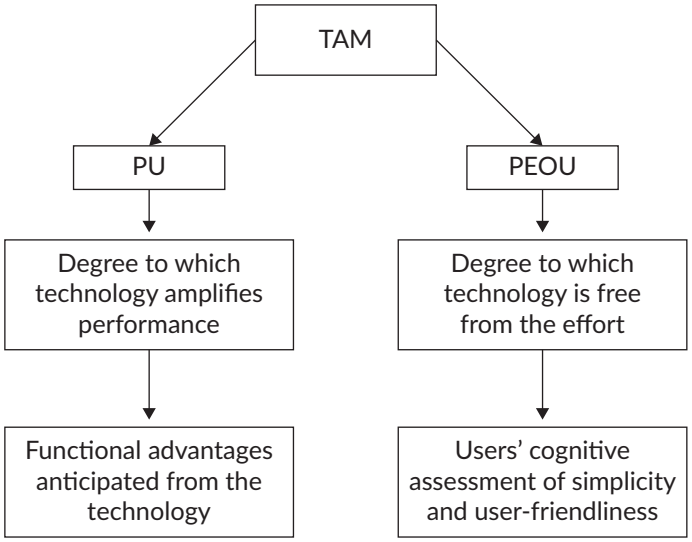


Figure 1. The TAM as conceptualised.

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

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

4. Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1. Participants' overview.

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

Table 1. (Cont.) Participants' overview.

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

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

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

5. Findings

5.1. AI Tools Used by Journalists

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

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

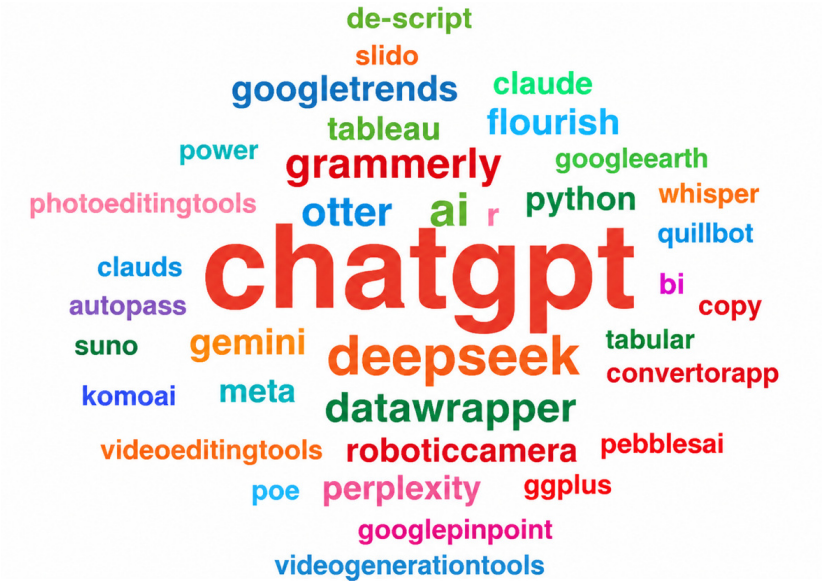


Figure 2. AI tools used by journalists.

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

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

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

5.1.1. Purpose for AI Use in Data Journalism

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

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



Figure 3. AI tools used by journalists.

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

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

5.1.2. How AI is Used in Data Journalism

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

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

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

5.1.3. Data Journalism's Potential With AI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.1.4. Challenges With AI Use in Data Journalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Discussion of Results

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

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

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

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

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

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

LLMs Disclosure

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

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African Community Media, AI, and the Question of Community Participation in the Disruptive Era

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Abstract

In this article, we examine the nexus of Southern African community newspapers' sceptical AI integration and grassroots democracy. The sceptical approach to AI integration in marginalised media markets of Southern African community newspapers' news ecosystems is interrogated. We respond to the questions: In what ways is the integration of AI tools in everyday news production routines within Southern African community media institutions defined by scepticism? What is the basis of scepticism amongst Southern African community media journalists? What are the implications for grassroots democracy in these communities? The Southern African community media under study are drawn from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled journalists and editors from these newsrooms. Findings show that the sceptical approach to AI adoption among Southern African community newspapers is largely driven by fears and concerns about AI's documented mass production of misinformation and disinformation. In addition, the sceptical approach to AI adoption in these newsrooms is rooted in a lack of technical proficiency with AI tools and financial limitations occasioned by the decline in philanthropic funding.

Keywords

AI; AI scepticism; citizen participation; community media; grassroots democracy; journalism; Namibia; South Africa; Zimbabwe

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1. Introduction

There is no unified agreement on the trajectory of AI, its ethics, deployment, and promises (Humble & Mozelius, 2022) or what AI envisions for our society or the future (Groumpos, 2023). Every facet of our well-being and society is still in shock and awe about the promises and threats of AI. Two extreme poles generally dominate the debates on AI. On the one hand, there are the techno-sceptics, who see society increasingly drifting into danger, harm, and eventual oblivion because of the valorisation and deterministic adoption of AI technologies (Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2024). On the other hand, there are the techno-optimists who see AI as a saviour (Whittaker, 2019).

While these debates are raging, media and journalism researchers are grappling with how AI technologies, in their various forms, impact their field and how the field is likely to evolve in the future (Lim et al., 2023). Firstly, many low- and high-end AI technologies are already shaping journalism and media institutions. Depending on whom one listens to, these technologies are either improving journalism or further plunging it into an inescapable crisis. For instance, generative AI technologies have swept through journalism and news producers like a storm (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2026). There is also a gamut of photo-editing AI technologies that have plunged photojournalism into a deep crisis (Ditlhokwa et al., 2025).

These developments are happening in a context where journalism and media institutions are struggling to survive. The traditional journalism model, which largely thrived on advertising revenue, has faltered (Pickard, 2021). Trust in the mainstream media has also declined sharply (Reese, 2021), and digital media spaces are eroding many traditional mainstream media audiences and revenue sources. As Reese (2021) notes, for mainstream media institutions, the wolves are at the gate and the centre cannot hold. In African media contexts, these challenges have a particularly devastating effect. As Nassanga (2009) notes, the situation is dire for African community journalism institutions. African media have long struggled to attract significant advertising revenue (Munoriyarwa et al., 2023) and large grants. They also have a limited audience base defined by geography or interest (Okon, 2017). This is because their advertising sources are relatively small compared to media operating in Europe and North America. They also receive very little state support (Chuma, 2008), and no sustainable donor funding in the long run (Moyo, 2021).

AI is filtering into media ecosystems at a time when community media, especially community newspapers, face sustainability pressures. Despite these challenges, community media are expected to sustain grassroots democracy by providing "spaces of articulation" for local communities. Consequently, community media institutions remain central to providing news to communities and ensuring subaltern participation in communication activities (Rau et al., 2008). From a democratic participant perspective, community media serve local communities and foster inclusive, active participation in the public sphere (Akpabio, 2024). They are in some instances anti-state but commercial enterprises. Regardless of their centrality in the media ecosystem, African media and communication researchers largely overlook them. Against this background, we examine the intricate relationship between Namibian, South African, and Zimbabwean community newspapers, AI scepticism, and community participation.

We respond to three main research questions (RQ):

> RQ1: In what ways is the integration of AI tools in everyday news production routines within Southern African community media institutions defined by scepticism?
>
> RQ2: What is the basis of this scepticism amongst Southern African community media journalists?
>
> RQ3: What are the implications of the scepticism for grassroots democracy in these communities?

Scholarship interrogating the nexus of AI and journalism in African contexts is sparse. There is little to nothing on how community media institutions are responding to the wave of AI. We attempt to fill this gap by examining how community media institutions are coping with the AI wave. This article is organised as follows: In Section 2, we provide an overview of community newspaper contexts in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. This is followed by a literature review examining the intersection of community newspapers and democracy. We then proceed to the conceptual framework, which is followed by the methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion.

2. Community Newspapers in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe

Community media often serve a specific geographic community or community of interest. Community newspapers in Namibia play a pivotal role in providing localised news and fostering community engagement, particularly in areas often overlooked by mainstream media. Main players in the Namibian community media sector include the *Windhoek Express*, *Caprivi Vision*, *Erongo*, *Namib Times*, and *The Zambezi Scoop*. These community newspapers cater for specific regions or communities. For instance, the *Caprivi Vision*, based in the Zambezi region, is one of the oldest community newspapers in the country, while *Erongo* primarily serves the coastal regions with local news and events coverage (Akpabio, 2024). *Windhoek Express* is a community newspaper featuring locally oriented news for Windhoek and the surrounding areas. The *Windhoek Express* publishes weekly on Thursdays, with a normal print run of 20,000, of which about 10,000 copies are inserted into *Republikein*, *Algemeine Zeitung*, and *Namibian Sun* and sold by street vendors in Windhoek and Rehoboth. The other 10,000 copies are distributed free at selected outlets (Akpabio, 2024). Content is offered in English and Afrikaans, with a segment of German. Most of these community newspapers face viability and sustainability challenges due to limited advertising revenue. We note that these community newspapers are "privately-owned," and do not receive funding from the government, NGOs, or other external bodies. The private ownership of these institutions raises debates about the normative definition of community media.

In contrast, South Africa has a huge number of community newspapers. This is arguably because its rich linguistic diversity provides a space where community newspapers can thrive. The country has 12 official languages (including sign language), many of which are spoken by significant portions of the population. This means that linguistic diversity offers these community newspapers a ready audience to build a following. Secondly, community newspapers can access government funding through quasi-state institutions like the Media Development and Diversity Agency. Over the years, the post-apartheid government has provided funding through the Media Development and Diversity Agency to community media, ensuring equitable access to information for previously marginalised communities. The funding, while inadequate, has gone a

long way toward ensuring sustainability for community media. This explains why South Africa's community newspapers endure and survive longer than those of its neighbours. In addition, a large pool of graduates and student support through university work-integrated learning programmes has ensured community newspapers' access to subsidised labour, allowing them to cut labour costs. However, over the years, South African community newspapers have suffered as advertisers opted for digital media (see Metula, 2023), and state support has dwindled. This loss of income has negatively impacted their ability to invest in new technologies. Furthermore, they have lost their seasoned journalists, whose capital lay in their knowledge of local communities and issues. Lastly, their local "development discourse" (see Metula, 2023) has become less attractive to young audiences.

The community newspaper industry in Zimbabwe is dominated by the Community Newspaper Group, run by New Ziana, a government news agency (Chiumbu et al., 2009). The Community Newspaper Group was incubated in 1982 by the Zimbabwean government to fill information gaps in rural areas, since mainstream media are largely urban-centric. Each of the country's then eight (now 10) provinces had a dedicated newspaper set up. However, in the post-2000 period, most of these newspapers now exist in name due to liquidity challenges in an unstable economic environment. Liquidity challenges, company closures, unemployment, corruption, and inconsistent economic policies, among others, continue to haunt the country (Ncube, 2019). Community newspapers such as *Pungwe News* (Mutare), *Chaminuka News* (Marondera), and *Indosakusa* (Gwanda) have virtually faltered. However, *The Times*, domiciled in Gweru in the Midlands province, remains relatively vibrant. There are also a number of privately owned small-scale newspapers operating as community media, despite being sole proprietorships of individuals or companies. The ownership and control of these newspapers defy the conventional definition of community media.

3. Literature Review

Extant literature from the global North dominates research on the intersection of AI and news production routines and practices (Helberger et al., 2020; Radoli, 2024). Most of this literature emanates from the US, Europe, and China (Radoli, 2024). The key argument in the literature is that newsrooms across the globe are exploring how AI can improve information sourcing, organisation, and story distribution (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). Furthermore, there is consensus in the literature that Western countries, along with China, are leading innovation and application of AI systems (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022; Yu & Huang, 2021), while Africa is lagging behind (Munoriyarwa et al., 2023).

Debates on AI adoption within the African journalism ecosystem also focus on socio-technological barriers (Munoriyarwa, 2024). In fact, Munoriyarwa (2024) reveals how the detrimental effects of limited access to AI tools place Southern African media organisations at a disadvantage on the global stage, thereby perpetuating socio-technological disparities between the Global North and Global South. Critically, Munoriyarwa (2024) calls for collaborative efforts among policymakers, industry leaders, and stakeholders to create an inclusive environment that maximises AI's potential for the greater benefit of Southern African societies. This study is indebted to preliminary examinations on how AI is impacting media organisations and journalism practice in Africa. However, while important progress has been made in this area, more scholarly attention is needed, as there is a dearth of literature focusing on community media and AI in (Southern) Africa.

Extant literature on African community media institutions in the digital age straddles across discourses, including the intersection of community media and citizen engagement (Chibuwe et al., 2026; Tsarwe & Sibanda, 2025). Questions about people's participation in community media discourse and sustainability issues resonate throughout the literature (Sibanda & Nkomo, 2025). For example, Nassanga (2009) examines the changing patterns of community media in East Africa in the digital age, noting that community media have transitioned into inclusive "imagined" communities. Tsarwe and Sibanda (2025) concur that digital social media platforms allow ordinary people to actively participate in community media news production ecosystems. In essence, Tsarwe and Sibanda (2025) argue that Zimbabwean community radio stations are integrating mobile phones and other social media applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, as well as bulk short message services, to interact more with their audiences. This perspective is also corroborated by Chibuwe et al. (2026), albeit the latter focus on community newspapers. Importantly, Chibuwe et al. (2026) assert that citizen involvement in community media news production ecosystems in Zimbabwe is not innocently meant to increase people's participation in digital public spheres but should be viewed as bait meant to attract donor funding (Chibuwe et al., 2026). The argument by Chibuwe et al. (2026) is plausible given the punishing economic environment in which Zimbabwean media institutions operate.

Preliminary literature on AI and community media in Southern Africa focuses on South Africa. For example, Makwambeni et al. (2023) make a cursory assessment of journalists' perceptions of AI deployment in the South African community media space. Focusing on community radio stations domiciled in Western Cape province, South Africa, Makwambeni et al. (2023) indicate that while most journalists perceive AI as enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of the news-making process, some perceive AI as inimical to the legitimacy and credibility of the profession. The study by Makwambeni et al. (2023) provides important beginnings in understanding AI integration in community media in Africa. However, due to their focus, Makwambeni et al. (2023) confine their analysis to community radio stations in South Africa. The literature on how community newspapers in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia are responding to the AI wave is sparse. Building on this extant literature, this study interrogates the integration of AI into Southern African community newspapers and the "communityness" and democratic obligations of these institutions.

4. The Community Press as a Disrupted Field

We conceptualise both the community press and digital disruption to understand how AI has influenced participation in a digitally disrupted era. We reflect on issues of community participation, production, and distribution. This is because community media ought to be characterised by grassroots participation (in content production), and a focus on local community interests, needs, and problems (Nassanga, 2009; see also Tacchi, 2003). It champions local development, gives the subaltern a voice, and enables them to enact citizenship (Tacchi, 2003). Community media ideally empowers citizens. Consequently, it is crucial to interrogate how AI-induced disruptions enhance or alter the thrust of community media.

Previously, community media were defined by community of interest or geographical location or parameters (see Tacchi, 2003), but the advent of digital media and the wider participation they offer redefined the idea. In South Africa and Australia, for example, community radio was defined in terms of community of interest or geographical community (Tacchi, 2003). These definitions have been disrupted by the advent of digital media, which have widened communities beyond the local and national borders (Nassanga, 2009). As Alfandika and Muchetwa (2019, p. 44) note, "geographical proximity has long ceased to be…a necessary

condition for the existence of a community." This is because "unlike initial community media where members in the locality participated directly, people now largely depend on low-cost technology by calling in and sending e-mail messages to local radio stations" (Nassanga, 2009, p. 42). This citizen participation has led some scholars to characterise community media as citizens' media (Rodriguez, 2001, as cited in Atton, 2007; see also Tacchi, 2003). This is because community media is characterised by accessibility (Nassanga, 2009; Tacchi, 2003). Given these digital media disruptions of the very structure and definition of community and community media, it is crucial to interrogate the nexus of AI and African community media.

Disruption refers to significant changes that alter or displace established industries and practices within the field (Christensen et al., 2015). But digital disruption refers to rapid advancements and/or changes in digital technologies that upset traditional ways of doing things (Christensen et al., 2015). We draw on Christensen's digital disruption framework, initially developed for commercial innovation, to understand how AI integration has disrupted community media in Southern Africa, positively or negatively. Digital disruption is augmented by Bourdieu's (1984) field theory. Community media constitutes a field. Power is central to Bourdieu's relational analysis of behavioural outcomes and processes of transformation across different fields (see Hilgers & Mangez, 2014; Winzler, 2014). Bourdieu (1984) posits that individuals' power is determined by the quantity and configuration of their resources, as well as the value assigned to these resources within a specific field. Consequently, it is arguable that editors' and journalists' perceptions of how AI could enhance or undermine their power could influence how community media integrates or responds to AI. This is plausible, given that technological factors shape how journalists perceive their journalistic practices (Russell, 2007). It is part of those factors Dickson (2008) characterises as external shocks that influence how journalism is practised. It is thus crucial to examine AI as an external shock to community media, the shocks it induced, and how community media responded. Lastly, it is important to study AI integration, given that newspapers, in particular, were already dealing with the external shock of digitisation when AI appeared on the scene; a shock they adapted to by shifting from an advertiser-first model to a reader-first model (see Bakke & Barland, 2022).

5. Methodology

This study is qualitative, specifically interpretive in approach. We draw upon in-depth interviews with 17 key informants, including community newspaper editors and journalists from Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. These were interviewed because they possessed unique and important knowledge (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) about AI adoption and scepticism in the adoption of AI in community newspapers' news production routines in the selected countries. Lastly, we wanted to understand how current AI adoption trends and practices affect grassroots democracy in these communities.

The research participants and their organisations were anonymised, as some, not all, requested anonymity for their names and organisations. However, some participants from South African community newspapers had no problem with their workplaces being identified. The same is true for some participants from Zimbabwe's "privately-owned" community newspapers. Regardless, for consistency's sake, all participants were anonymised by assigning pseudonyms to protect their identities. We purposively sampled these community newspaper journalists based on their knowledge and experience as community newspaper journalists/editors. Purposive sampling entails selecting groups or categories to study based on their relevance to the RQs and, most importantly, the explanation or account being developed (Yin, 2015).

Purposive sampling was preferred to ensure the selection of information-rich cases. Across the three contexts, the majority of our interviewees had worked as reporters for at least four years.

From Namibia, we interviewed four community newspaper journalists drawn from four privately owned community newspapers. Three of the four publications have circulation exceeding 10,000 per week, but none of them receives government, NGO, or other external funding. Importantly, these newspapers are all urban- and semi-urban-based. The newspapers are based in: Windhoek, Namibia's capital, in the Erongo region (at the coast in Swakopmund); and the Zambezi region (extreme north-eastern Namibia).

In South Africa, we interviewed eight community newspaper journalists. Most of the journalists are based in the Eastern Cape Province and work for a mixture of urban and rural newspapers, which had modest circulation figures ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 copies. These community newspapers receive grants from the Media Development and Diversity Agency. In Zimbabwe, we interviewed five community newspaper journalists. Interviewees were drawn from both the privately owned (three) and government-owned community newspapers (two) within the Community Newspaper Group. The privately owned community newspapers from which we selected participants are located in Gweru, Kwekwe, and Masvingo respectively. We do not reveal the regions in which the state-owned community newspapers from which respondents were selected because doing so would inadvertently reveal the organisations and the respondents. It is difficult to ascertain community newspaper circulation figures in Zimbabwe because there are no officially audited circulation figures. Table 1 shows the codes used to identify the research participants.

Table 1. Summary of interview participants by country, role, and experience.

Code	Country	Role (in community newspaper)	Years of experience
NM1	Namibia	Editor	5
NM2	Namibia	Editor	11
NM3	Namibia	Journalist	5
NM4	Namibia	Journalist	7
ZJ1	Zimbabwe	Journalist	4
ZJ2	Zimbabwe	Journalist	9
ZJ3	Zimbabwe	Journalist	5
ZJ4	Zimbabwe	Editor	21
ZJ5	Zimbabwe	Editor	23
SA1	South Africa	Journalist	9
SA2	South Africa	Editor	17
SA3	South Africa	Journalist	6
SA4	South Africa	Editor	16
SA5	South Africa	Journalist	5
SA6	South Africa	Journalist	5
SA7	South Africa	Journalist	10
SA8	South Africa	Journalist	7

The research encountered several logistical challenges. Notably, seven targeted journalists and editors were not interviewed because some declined interview requests due to scheduling conflicts, whilst others were unresponsive. We purposefully sought participants with direct experience implementing AI in community newspaper environments. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which identifies patterns within and across the data related to participants' lived experiences, views, perspectives, behaviours, and practices (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

6. Findings

Section 6.1 describes the uptake of AI in community media. It is followed by three other sections: the basis of scepticism, AI-induced external shocks, and, lastly, the implications for community participation.

6.1. Integration of AI Tools in Everyday News Production Routines

Most journalists from the three countries note that their slow integration of AI is due to a lack of knowledge about available AI technologies. Consequently, they have restricted their use of AI technologies to the most basic AI tools available on the web that do not require a subscription or have little to no purchase cost (NM2). The respondents from Zimbabwe underscored that they use basic AI tools provided by big techs such as NewsWhip, which "offers a basic AI tool that allows you to monitor incoming news before they trend" (ZJ1). This is an AI application that also analyses social media platforms to spot real-time trends and incoming news before they go viral, thus allowing journalists to craft their stories. But one journalist pointed out that:

> These tools are easily accessible, but the problem is they do not often point us to what we consider as our local community news…they point us to national news which might not really sync with our mandate as community newspapers. (SA1)

Some of the community newspaper journalists further noted that accessible AI tools like translation tools have replaced manual typing. These include speech-to-text and natural language and processing tools. One journalist noted that:

> As a journalist, you can access Otter.ai and Trint applications that also help translate and transcribe audio and video interviews into texts. But there are also advanced versions of these AI applications that you can only access by subscription….But you will notice that some of the applications appear in different versions because there are many AI companies producing them…for example, Whisper is an OpenAI open-source speech recognition software that is also available to us. (SA2)

It is clear from the evidence that there is no structured approach to adoption of AI within community newspapers. Each newspaper, and each journalist, access what is available to them. However, access is at a very basic level. For instance, they access very basic AI applications like AI tools for summarisation, transcription, and drafting of limited news content. The reliance on basic freely accessible AI tools betrays a lack of resources or financial muscle to purchase and adopt the high-end, paid-for professional AI tools.

6.2. The Basis of Scepticism Amongst Journalists

The data not only reveals a slow integration of AI, but it also reveals scepticism. The integration of AI in Namibia and South Africa could be expected to be significantly more advanced than in Zimbabwe. This anticipation stems from South Africa's position as a leader in Africa's digital economy, bolstered by its robust digital infrastructure, dynamic start-up ecosystem, and a government that actively promotes digital growth. Similarly, Namibia also has a relatively more stable economy than Zimbabwe. However, our findings reveal that the adoption of AI tools is progressing slowly in all three contexts' community media newsrooms, primarily due to scepticism and challenges related to knowledge, access, and costs. The integration is much slower in Zimbabwe than in Namibia and South Africa.

Community newspaper journalists in the three contexts largely take a sceptical approach in integrating AI in their news production routines. AI integration is largely done at the individual journalist level rather than at the institutional level. One interviewee (ZJ4) said, "AI is yet to penetrate community newspapers, particularly those under the *New Ziana* stable, owing largely to slow adaptation of new technology by management." This view was corroborated by another interviewee (ZJ3):

> As a community newspaper, we have yet to embrace AI tools in newsgathering and content creation. However, individuals in newsrooms have gone to great lengths to equip themselves with AI and other tools, such as Poe, which they use for fact verification and background checks.

Due to this sceptical approach and absence of laid-down institutional policies for AI integration, the supposed affordances of AI tools in the journalistic value chain, as well as in enhancing citizen participation, are yet to be fully realised.

Some of the journalists in these community newspapers lack the requisite skills to productively manipulate these technologies in their news workflows. Consequently, these journalists mainly rely on common entry-level AI tools. Most respondents underscored that there is a need for community journalists to be trained to cope with the demands and challenges presented by AI. One interviewee said:

> I feel that community media journalists are not adequately trained to use AI tools in their news gathering activities as evidenced by its poor usage in their newsrooms. Management is also not adequately informed about AI usage, hence its poor adaptability by the whole organisation. (ZJ2)

Critically, there is also the contestation of what kind of training these community journalists would require. AI in newsrooms is still an emerging technology, and it is not clear what kind of training is desired. Most respondents indicated that there is little employer support for empowering journalists with the relevant skills to cope with AI. However, the Media Institute of Southern Africa, among others, was commended for training journalists in AI use in newsroom production routines. It was noted that there is still a need for more advanced and specialised training to fully harness AI's potential in community journalism.

Moreover, the structure of community media makes adopting AI from a community-participation perspective problematic. This is largely because some of the community media, especially in Zimbabwe, are "one-man organisations." The Zimbabwean case best illustrates our point. There are also a number of

privately owned small-scale newspapers operating as community media, despite being sole proprietorships of individuals or companies. Most of these newspapers are registered under the Community Newspaper Association of Zimbabwe. Kwekwe, a mining town in the Midlands province, has the highest number of such privately-owned "community" newspapers. These include *The Midlands Observer* (established in 1952 by the Midlands Rhodesian Press Limited), *Midlands News*, *Weekend Gazette*, and *Guiding Star*. Masvingo Province has *Tell Zim*. Under such circumstances, the attitudes, fears, and concerns of the owners influence how and when AI should be integrated into the news ecosystem. In some of these newsrooms, the owner serves as the editor, marketing manager, and publisher. Most of these newsrooms are understaffed and juniorised; they rely on interns from colleges and universities who are on work-related learning. Due to financial constraints, such media houses struggle to procure AI technologies and software required in news production.

In the three contexts, most community newspapers have not yet fully integrated AI into their news production ecosystems. However, we note that in Zimbabwe, privately owned community newspapers have made significant strides in AI adoption compared with state-owned community newspapers. Some editors at state-owned community newspapers said AI adoption is still at a basic, individual level. There is no policy governing AI adoption. Plausibly, the reluctance to integrate these technologies is influenced by the government's lack of interest and policy toward fusing the technologies. But blaming the government might not provide a true picture in the community newspaper terrain. This is because in Namibia, where the government is not directly involved in community newspapers, AI integration is also relatively slow. This applies equally to the South African context.

The sceptical approach to AI integration among community newspaper journalists can be attributed to the potential threats posed by AI. Most journalists are sceptical about AI, especially its ongoing association with the mass production of misinformation and disinformation (Bontridder & Poullet, 2021; Helmus, 2022). Some journalists believe that AI enables the easy production and distribution of fake news and leaves most tasks to machines rather than human beings. The ability to detect misinformation and disinformation comes with journalistic experience. Some journalists from Namibia were sceptical about AI's role in advancing grassroots democracy due to its perceived entanglement with disinformation. One journalist said, "AI could be a very dangerous tool, especially in spreading misinformation and biased information—something politicians are prone to do when it serves their purpose" (NM4). The challenge community media are experiencing is that they no longer have experienced staff after suffering massive staff turnover in recent years (Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2024). ZJ4 said:

> Very little support is coming from the organisation to enable employees to acquire new skills to cope or survive in the AI arena, which I think also contributes to this media constituency's demise. However, journalists are sometimes released to attend such workshops organised by organisations such as Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and the Media Institute of Southern Africa, but in most cases, the time will be limited as they are just half-day workshops. (ZJ4)

The challenges of disinformation become even worse, considering that most of these community newsrooms cannot afford to acquire AI tools that detect disinformation and misinformation. There are several AI-powered tools for detecting disinformation and misinformation, such as The Factual, Logically, and Full Fact (van der Lans, 2021). While some of these tools are free, for example, The Factual (a tool

offered as an extension on Chrome), some of the tools require a subscription. For newsrooms already struggling financially, subscribing to misinformation/disinformation-detecting technology is a huge call. All these factors combine to militate against community media's democratic role. Newsrooms foreground survival and technological acquisition at the expense of the "classical" focus on societal expectations. Consequently, journalists feel peripheralised because their newsrooms are unable to integrate AI.

Slow adoption of AI can also be attributed to financial constraints in these newsrooms. The selection of AI tools is informed by affordability rather than efficiency. For example, they are experiencing a sustainability crisis. Media sustainability refers to the media's capacity to operate effectively under sound political, legal, and economic conditions (Lush, 2025). The sustainability crisis faced by these community media can be attributed to declining advertising revenue and philanthropic support. Donors have also always been among community media's mainstream funders, providing equipment, programming, and capacity-building through training. Such donors include International Media Support, Fojo Institute (Sweden), among others. One of the interviewees said:

> The biggest challenge we face is insufficient funds to purchase licensed AI tools. As a result, we rely on trial versions, such as ChatGPT and Canvas. The challenge is that when you use them three or four times, you can be restricted from using them for a certain period. However, these trial versions were very effective and made our job easier. For example, the time taken to edit a video or coming up with a story was reduced by 50%. We have also become effective in distributing content, thanks to these AI tools….Some do not have trial versions, hence, even if they are effective, we cannot use them due to affordability issues. Efficiency also influences our selection of tools, but affordability is the key issue that guides us. (ZJ4)

Our study also notes that the sceptical approach evident in the integration of AI technologies could also be a result of some AI language tools' incompatibility with indigenous African languages. These technologies are imported from the Global North. Consequently, they struggle with pronouncing terms and names in indigenous African languages. One journalist said, "We need our own local AI tools that are compatible with our languages. At times it's difficult to send an audio or video with an American accent to Zaka, Mwenezi. Some audiences may find the videos unpalatable" (ZJ3). Contrastingly, another journalist argued that AI helps make delivering reports/video reports easier and quicker (NM3).

6.3. AI-Induced External Shocks Disrupting the Field

The study noted limited AI literacy amongst some respondents across the three countries. Some South African and Namibian journalists did not answer the question of whether AI enhances community participation. Specifically one Zimbabwean journalist (ZJ2) left it blank, while a Namibian journalist (NM3) stated they had no idea, about the question: How best can people's participation in community media be enhanced in the AI age? Similarly, SA4 did not answer the question on whether AI enhances community participation. This, we argue, is evidence of a lack of understanding of AI and partly explains why AI hasn't been fully integrated into community media news production practices. These journalists' restricted AI literacy can be attributed to habitus, that is, entrenched habits, skills, and dispositions. In essence, these community journalists' deeply held beliefs about community journalism practice, and their limited knowledge shape their scepticism toward AI integration, which, in turn, influences how they interact with

the technology in the field. In other words, habitus is the dispositions that people have accumulated throughout their lives, as expressed through their attitudes and behaviours towards issues (Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2023). As SA5 remarks:

> Once AI makes news, there will be no more meaning for the "community" in "community media." The essence is diluted. The whole practice of inclusion becomes exclusion because the community is now served by text-generating software. Remember, these community newspapers are a preserve of the community.

This raises the question: How is this autonomy coloured by the advent of AI in newsrooms? From the responses above, it is coloured by detrimental alterations to the complexion of community news production. But it should be understood that AI is being introduced to newsrooms by people, most likely journalists themselves. Thus, at the centre of this is a trained AI-literate journalist. One journalist noted this contradiction:

> We should not forget the irony that no one is bringing AI to newsrooms except journalists. And this is where the problem is. Most of us in community media do not even understand how AI works, but here we are, embracing a technology whose functions we do not understand. So, for me, all the optimism and pessimism around AI is based on nothing but a lack of knowledge of the technology. However, I would disagree with a technology that writes texts for me. I think this dilutes the essence of the community. (SA4)

AI-related consequences, such as the generation of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation, were a key concern amongst respondents. As one journalist noted:

> Journalists become too reliant on AI, often to the detriment of publications and the spread of misinformation. This is a real problem, especially with junior staff who often don't know the "story behind the story" and submit what AI delivers as gospel. (NM2)

One of the contributing causes of such problems is the lack of training among community media journalists, which, in turn, compromises their uptake of AI. One journalist noted that:

> I feel that community media journalists are not adequately trained to use AI tools in their news-gathering activities, as evidenced by their poor usage in their newsrooms. Management is also insufficiently informed about AI use, which is why the organisation's overall adaptability is poor. (ZJ2)

We contend that journalists' fear of AI is influenced by the perceived threat it poses to their symbolic capital. AI can arguably be viewed as part and parcel of what Bourdieu (1984) terms external shocks, which disrupt the power relations in the field of journalism. These are influences from outside the journalistic field that impact it; such shocks can reshape journalistic perceptions and practices. This is because the fields are distinctly structured by power relations, with various forms of capital valued differently across fields (see Bourdieu, 1990). Editors and journalists, among others, occupy different places with different powers in the community media field. Similarly, community newspapers occupy certain places in the communities they operate in. Consequently, the advent of AI makes journalists primarily concerned about the loss of their power or roles and of community and grassroots democracy. The established frameworks governing community media operations and journalistic practices are increasingly threatened by AI-induced disruptions.

6.4. Implications for Community Participation/Grassroots Democracy

Grassroots democracy is about providing quality information and alternative information (Ritchey-Vance, 1997). An important yardstick of democracy is who gets to speak and where they speak (Bozo, 2014), and what they get to speak about. Community newspapers are open spaces that allow citizens to speak back to power (Birowo, 2010) and robustly participate in communal discourses. These newspapers have traditionally been sources around which grassroots democracy is built (Saeed, 2009). In Africa, where, relative to radio and television, newspapers have expanded rapidly, they are central to the democratic project. Newspapers' centrality to the democratic processes becomes legendary in African contexts where political elites tightly control other media (Norris, 2005). In Southern Africa, community newspapers have expanded faster than radio and television because the political elites have given them room to expand.

Our findings show varied readings amongst journalists on whether AI enhances community participation. Whereas some journalists from South African and Namibian community newspapers did not believe that AI enhances community participation, Zimbabwean journalists and some Namibian journalists thought otherwise. However, other Namibian and South African journalists believe that AI will doom community participation. The reasons for this pessimism were AI's production of fake news and the mechanical reproduction of stories, which takes away the humaneness of community media. For example, SA1 argued that, "I don't think AI can enable community participation. Community news is very personal to the community and cannot be replicated by AI. The community needs to be educated about identifying AI-generated content and falsehoods." Similarly, NM1 stated that AI tools spell doom for community media because they make the production and distribution of fake news easy: "The participatory democracy of the grassroots community will be doomed…as the voice of ordinary citizens will be suppressed with full of manipulations [sic] that will lead to false reporting."

In other words, interaction will no longer be between journalists and audiences but between audiences and machines. As SA1 noted, "At the moment, community participation is based on personal interaction with the journalist and communicating via social media. I don't think AI has a role to play at the moment." The same sentiments are shared by NM3 who claimed that, "I think AI by and large does away with the humanity of a project. AI is a fantastic tool to use for the mundane and repetitive tasks, but the tasks requiring humanity should be left to humans."

In contrast, Zimbabwean and Namibian journalists with a more optimistic view of AI's role in community media argued that AI increases audience engagement, improves storytelling, and helps produce content that aligns with audience interests. They also argued that AI helps in audience targeting, i.e., producing and delivering specific content for specific demographics, and reporting "data-heavy topics [and producing] multimedia content like video summaries of articles" (NM2). AI was also said to enable real-time feedback, provide automated translations, make content creation easy and quick, and help community media compete with larger media outlets. For example, ZJ2 stated that, "AI tools allow us to quickly generate content/stories." It was also argued that "AI-powered algorithms can recommend stories to readers based on their interests, increasing engagement and helping local news compete with larger outlets" (NM4). Finally, it was noted that "AI can support grassroots democracy by enabling data-driven reporting, amplifying underrepresented voices, and fostering transparency" (ZJ1).

The intersection of AI and democratic processes represents one of the most consequential technological shifts in modern political history (George & Klaus, 2026). Despite the predominantly sceptical approach towards AI adoption in the Southern African community media, some journalists expressed optimism that these technologies can also enhance grassroots participatory democracy. The response from one Namibian respondent illustrates our point:

> At our newspaper, we currently do not utilise AI tools in our reporting or operations…. Community-based journalism thrives on understanding and reflecting its audience's needs and interests. AI could enhance this by analysing local trends, social media discussions, and feedback to help identify the most relevant stories to cover. It could also assist in tailoring content for specific demographics, ensuring community news reaches and resonates with a wider audience. In the context of transitioning to digital news, AI can help optimise digital platforms. For example, AI-powered algorithms can recommend stories to readers based on their interests, increasing engagement and helping local news compete with larger outlets. Additionally, AI tools can aid in the efficient production of digital content, such as automating routine tasks like transcription, basic reporting on data-heavy topics, or creating multimedia content like video summaries of articles. (NM1)

Importantly, participation can be enhanced through AI-driven tools that allow real-time feedback, localised content, automated translations, training community members in digital literacy to engage meaningfully, and capacitating, upskilling, and training journalists in AI integration in newsrooms. However, AI risks marginalising voices if not used inclusively or ethically. The findings show that the media landscape has been disrupted at the level of production, distribution, and consumption, yet most journalists lack skills in the use of AI tools.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings show that there is a slow, uneven uptake of the very basic AI applications within Southern African community newspapers. We further note that the slow, uneven uptake is determined by the available free AI applications and journalists' relatively low knowledge of AI tools. We also note widespread scepticism about AI tools amongst journalists. This scepticism is drawn from a lack of knowledge of what AI tools can do to community newspaper reporting. Can they enhance news reporting practices? Can they disrupt? What is the extent of their efficacy in what we call the "community" news? All these questions, difficult to answer at the moment, have increased the sense of scepticism for community media journalists. Lastly, our findings show that AI affects the community newspaper's democratic role. As journalists put it, the sense of community is destroyed once machines generate community news whilst the democratic role of community media is undermined by AI's noted production of disinformation and deepfakes.

This study provides one of the first comprehensive assessments of how Southern African community newsrooms are adopting and using AI. The research finds that AI tools are already used for tasks such as news summarisation, transcription, and content drafting, yet adoption remains informal and uneven across organisations. Most journalists reported receiving little to no formal training on AI, raising concerns about ethical use, accuracy, and the risk of declining public trust. This highlights the urgent need for structured training, clear editorial guidelines, and the development of tools tailored to African community newspapers, languages, and contexts.

Theoretically, our article makes several arguments. First, AI technologies represent a significant existential disruption for community newspaper journalists. AI disrupts news reporting/gathering, production, dissemination, and how community newspapers govern their communal spaces. Secondly, AI represents a disruption because it prompts community newspapers to rethink how they can maintain their legitimacy as disseminators of community news. But positively, AI technologies can make it easier for community newspapers to perform tasks such as content moderation, fact-checking, and writing news without significantly widening their labour force (Larsen & Naper, 2022). This is a positive disruption, although it is tempered by questions of access to these technologies. As a negative disruption, AI technologies raise questions of the community newspaper's communityness and sustainability. Our interviews show mixed views about the future of the community newspaper and its sustainability under the current AI-induced disruption.

Furthermore, AI technologies impact the community newspapers' communicative autonomy, reciprocal knowledge exchange, and long-term responsibility. Community newspapers, as we noted, are embedded in their communities' news production routines. This means they serve the community's educative, entertainment, and information needs. Broadly, their goals are two-fold: achieving communal impact and intimacy. They achieve impact by covering local news and information needs—health, sport, crime, policing, etc. Community newspapers achieve impact by providing commentary and opinion on social justice issues affecting the specific community. This is linked to how they achieve intimacy—by reporting for the community, representing their voices, being closer to them, and knowing their information needs. This requires access to unique news and information sources specific to their communities. However, once technologies like generative AI come into this ecosystem, the sense of "communityness" created by this bond is coloured differently. What the communities end up consuming will not be community news, built by community media journalists with a deep understanding of these specific communities. Rather, it is news generated by machines, driven by algorithmised virality. Community journalists and their newspapers should actively construct, represent, and maintain social groups (Larsen & Naper, 2022). This is how they create a sense of "community" which does not create boundaries of marginalisation. AI technologies do not guarantee these. As one journalist noted, "We are not even sure of the harm they can cause to our traditional community-based reporting" (NM3). Already, community newspaper journalists know how to frame their community news. For example, in South Africa, communities like Thembelihle are often discursively constructed through "prisms of violence" or "suffering," which reinforces specific power dynamics between the state and the people (Malherbe et al., 2021). This framing is a conscious process determined by the community media journalists themselves. AI news technologies do not possess this level of consciousness. They will not be the glue that integrates local communities into the news while also playing a watchdog role. Furthermore, the civic role of community journalists is likely to be compromised by AI, as journalists themselves noted. The participatory nature and collaborative outlook of community newspaper journalism will likely be sacrificed by AI expediency.

This is further exacerbated by the fact that, as respondents noted, there are currently very few AI technologies available in indigenous African languages. The absence of local-language AI negatively impacts local participation and undermines the sense of community amongst community newspapers. Most AI tools that African newspapers utilise are largely designed in English. Yet, many community newspapers use indigenous African languages. Admittedly, there are several AI start-ups in Southern Africa producing AI technologies in local indigenous languages. However, they have not yet reached the level where these

technologies influence news production. There will always be a disjunction between what these technologies are likely to produce and what the communities actually want. In communities raised on the staple of local-language community news, AI becomes a ruinous disruption to their bond with local journalism.

Future research could focus on radio and/or television, and how AI disruptions may shape their contributions to community participation. It could also focus on the perceptions of community media audiences regarding AI-generated news.

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Data Availability

Our data will be made available on reasonable request.

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords

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

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

> RQ1: How does AI enter and become institutionalised within a resource-constrained newsroom?
>
> RQ2: What rules, boundaries, and governance mechanisms shape the everyday use of AI?
>
> RQ3: How do journalists and editors negotiate autonomy, authority, and risk when working with AI technologies?

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

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

2. Literature Review

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

2.1. Platform Dependency and Data Colonialism

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

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

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

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

2.2. Newsroom AI Governance and Human Oversight

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

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

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

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

2.3. Journalistic Agency Under Structural Constraint

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

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

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

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

2.4. Towards an Organisational-Level Approach

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

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

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

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

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

3. Method

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

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

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

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

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

4. Findings

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

4.1. Platformised AI Adoption and Organisational Agency

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

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

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

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

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

4.2. Governing Generative AI Within the Newsroom

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

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

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

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

4.3. AI as Organisational Infrastructure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4. Individual AI Use Under Organisational Constraint

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

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

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

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

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

4.5. Platform Power and AI-Driven Value Extraction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Discussion and Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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ARTICLE

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FOMO in Sub-Saharan African AI Hype: The Quest for a Decolonized AI Adoption Framework

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Abstract

Based on an abductive analysis of 54 opinion, editorial, and analytical articles published between 2019 and 2025 in nine English-speaking Sub-Saharan African countries, this study examines negotiation of the place of AI within journalism. Conceptualizing AI hype as a form of metajournalistic discourse, the study finds that discussions about AI in journalism in Sub-Saharan Africa are driven by a fear of missing out and a call for a decolonial approach to the technology's adoption in a way sensitive to the region's context.

Keywords

AI hype; artificial intelligence; institutionalism; journalism; metajournalistic discourse; Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) was introduced as an editorial aspect of news making through automation in the early 2000s, and since, it has spurred discourses of both worry and hope (Mari, 2024). This intense discourse, which Lewis, Zamith, and Bunquin (2025) have called "AI hype," focuses on how the speculative future of this new technology affects current news making practices. Even though Lewis, Zamith, and Bunquin (2025) argue that this hype should be taken seriously as an object of inquiry, in Sub-Saharan Africa, work examining this phenomenon remains limited. An exception is Nkoala et al.'s (2026) study, which shows that due to AI hype in African general news coverage, broader social implications of AI were largely misunderstood due to positive spin. Otherwise, there is limited research on it in relation to African journalism as a cultural practice. Interview approaches have tended to dominate research on the place of AI in journalism, generally (Schjøtt, 2026), and there have been a number of interview studies of Sub-Saharan African journalists' perceptions of AI (Gondwe,

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2022, 2026; Munoriyarwa, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2021; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025; Umejei et al., 2025). While this approach effectively captures journalists' AI imaginaries, they are led by interviewer cues and may not fully address journalists' perceptions based on elements that are central to journalists themselves (Zelizer, 1993), which are observable in organic discourse.

To complement interview-based studies on Sub-Saharan African journalists' perceptions of AI and its integration in news work, this study takes a document-analysis approach to understand the nature of AI hype in journalism. Studying Sub-Saharan African AI hype with a focus on journalistic practice is key to decolonizing journalism research. Such studies may explore how not only journalists, but non-journalistic actors perceive involvement of these technologies which have largely originated from the Global North (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). How AI is discussed has symbolic and material consequences for its integration in journalistic news gathering, production, fact-checking, and distribution processes (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025).

To understand how Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors perceive AI's integration in journalism practice, this study conceptualizes AI hype—i.e., discourses that focus on technology, promoting or speculating on its possibilities and how it might affect present practices in the future (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025)—as a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016). Carlson's metajournalistic discourse concept focuses on how public expressions are used to define journalism and set its boundaries and authority. These expressions emanate from both journalistic and non-journalistic actors, on journalistic and non-journalistic sites, and they can have both reactive and generative origins. Even though Carlson does not list AI hype or hype in general as a form of metajournalistic discourse, here it is conceptualized as such. AI hype is considered a form of public expression that evaluates automated news texts, sets appropriate boundaries of automated journalistic practice, and contests its legitimacy.

An abductive analysis (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024) of 54 opinion, editorial, and analytical pieces from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe published between January 2019 and December 2025 showed that AI hype in these countries is characterized by a fear of missing out (FOMO) and a call for a decolonial AI adoption approach. In the following sections, the study begins by examining AI hype as a form of metajournalistic discourse.

2. AI Hype as a Form of Metajournalistic Discourse

AI hype, hereby understood as a surge of public expressions paying attention to, promoting, and speculating about the involvement of AI in the news (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025) qualifies as a form of metajournalistic discourse in many respects. Metajournalistic discourse, as a concept, refers to public expressions that define what journalism is and is not, setting boundaries of appropriate practice, as well as contesting the legitimacy of the field. These discourses can come from journalistic actors (e.g., reporters), non-journalistic actors and end-users (e.g., government officials, media freedom activists), journalistic sites (news spaces), and non-journalistic sites (journalism reviews). Metajournalistic public expressions can also be reactive by responding to a particular incident, or generative by evaluating ongoing journalism issues.

Functionally, AI hype has both symbolic and material functions that are structurally consequential internally and externally (Dodds, Mine, et al., 2026; Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025). Symbolically, AI hype promotes

what is desirable and what is unacceptable. Internally, this AI hype performs a metajournalistic discourse boundary-setting function (Carlson, 2016) of either rejecting the hype to retain journalistic authority or to justify the pursuit of certain practices, ways of thinking, and processes. Externally, this AI hype also contributes to boundary setting by signaling to members of the public whether they should or shouldn't fear the technology (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025), helping shape ideas of whether the technology should be accepted in news or not.

Materially, AI hype internally shapes how AI understandings can be translated into newsroom policy objectives and strategies and how news organizations should use the technology (Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025). Externally, it materially shapes how news organizations engage with AI stakeholders through partnerships, while engendering pro- or counter-reactions from actors like technologists, tech companies, and audiences (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025), indicating how AI hype can come from both journalistic and non-journalistic actors (Carlson, 2016). AI hype also has a metajournalistic definitional function as it motivates journalists to reflect on their journalistic roles, identities, practices, values, and what journalism means in the AI era (Dodds, Zamith, et al., 2026; Lewis, Zamith, & Bunquin, 2025).

Furthermore, AI hype is a generative form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016) that sparks surging discussions about AI deployment in news gathering, production, verification, and distribution processes (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Møller et al., 2025). The discussions also focus on whether AI should be harmonized with organization-centered journalistic values (objectivity, transparency, diversity, accountability) or audience-centered values (privacy, user agency, data protection, autonomy; Oh & Jung, 2025). The discussions further question whether AI deployment in journalism should be actor-centered (favoring human journalists), actant-centered (automating all journalistic processes), or hybridized (dividing labor between technology and human journalists; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025). Journalistic perceptions on these issues, as will be discussed in the next section, provide an extra layer to use in analyzing and interpreting AI hype.

3. Journalists' AI Perceptions and How They Can Inform AI Hype Analysis

Current research on journalists' perceptions about the place of AI in news processes shows that they are taking a "jobs-to-be-done approach" (Hermida, 2024, p. 671) separating delegable duties that can be outsourced to AI from those that require human input, corresponding with journalists' views of AI as a tool to complement their work (Carlson, 2015; Møller et al., 2025; Rydenfelt, 2022; Sarisakaloğlu, 2025). In news gathering, journalists prefer to restrict the technology to automated content aggregation, analysis of trending topics during production, production of interview transcripts, and automated article writing, etc. (Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Haan et al., 2022; Wu, 2026; Yu & Huang, 2021). News verification is considered not delegable to AI, while journalists are free to indulge in personalizing, labeling, and sharing of news in the distribution process (Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Wu, 2026). This division of labor restricts AI to mechanically repetitive tasks.

The perception that AI has content, professional, and organizational limitations informs journalists' proposed division of labor. Content limitations include the lack of publicly available interesting data for automated news production (Lindén, 2017; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Barling, 2023), hallucination risks (Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Perreault et al., 2026; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019), and failure to nuance complex stories that need

context and explanation (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019). Organizational limitations include investment cost challenges (Peña-Fernández et al., 2023), threats against journalists' employment and professional identity, and general skepticism that audiences may fail to differentiate automated work from human journalists' output (Møller et al., 2025; Moran & Shaikh, 2022; Thomson et al., 2024). Accordingly, some journalists caution against AI overreliance, opting for a more guarded reporting approach rather than simply fueling AI hype (Dodds, Yeung, et al., 2026). These limitations are contrasted with human journalists' nose for news, sense of ethics, meaning creation, diversity, and emotional connection abilities (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2021; Møller et al., 2025; Rydenfelt, 2022). Journalists argue that journalism is a creative art that cannot be attained without human monitoring of machines (Perreault et al., 2026; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020) for accuracy and relevance (Lindén, 2017; van Dalen, 2012; Yu & Huang, 2021). AI limitations thus inform a division of labor that prioritizes human agency.

Journalists have also set up conditions for AI use that will maximize its benefits while limiting threats. The conditions include mandatory human oversight, transparency, restricting AI to automated tasks, laying out common standards, and ensuring adherence to core journalistic values (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; Cools & de Vreese, 2026; Thomson et al., 2024; Wu, 2026). Journalists are also calling for skills upgrades, collaborations, in-house training, and strategies to circumvent AI influence and deliver better products (Dodds et al., 2025; Haan et al., 2022; Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019), in addition to protests against the prioritization of efficiency over human labor (Moran & Shaikh, 2022). This is because journalists want to benefit from AI affordances that can release them from repetitive tasks (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2019) and free up their time for more analytical and rigorous journalistic tasks (Schapals & Porlezza, 2020) while protecting journalistic authority (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; Cools & de Vreese, 2026). Based on this literature, it can be concluded that journalists are inclined towards a hybridized AI integration approach that not only prioritizes the agency of human journalists but also harmonizes the technology with journalistic values. However, these views are based on Global North research, raising the question of how those from the Global South perceive the technology in their context. This is the focus of the next section.

4. How Journalists in the Global South Are Adapting to AI

Like their Global North counterparts, Global South journalists have also proposed a division of labor that limits AI to background research in news gathering, copy-editing, idea generation in news production, and automated data analysis (Alayande et al., 2025; Umejei et al., 2025). Some have come up with localized AI versions for data journalism and fact-checking (Alayande et al., 2025). The journalists aim to improve the quality of writing and uncover underreported stories, allowing safe, subterfuge-based investigative journalism (Alayande et al., 2025; Gondwe, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). Global South journalists tend to accept AI as unavoidable (Ndlovu & Solomons, 2025). However, unlike in the Global North, in the Global South, there has been a slow uptake of the technology, evidenced by a lack of guidelines and ethical clarity in most countries (Phiri, 2025).

The slow AI uptake has been due to the lack of economic and technological resources and lack of access to accurate data, journalistic skills, and national and news organization AI adoption/acquisition strategies and policies (Jamil, 2023; Munoriyarwa, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2021). Compounded by African governments' fear of technological innovations and newsroom skepticism (Alayande et al., 2025; Gondwe, 2022; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025), the challenges have led to struggles in regulating imported technologies, imbalanced

gendered AI use, and indigenous language underrepresentation (Mpofu, 2025; Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Ng'ang'a et al., 2025). Linguistic underrepresentation has also led to: AI tools that cannot promote linguistic and cultural diversity; the production of biased and stereotypical news stories; challenges in data extraction; and audience annoyance (Mathe, 2025; Ndlovu, 2024; Ndlovu & Solomons, 2025; Tsandzana, 2025). This marginalization of already marginalized societies has led to additional fears that, in their current form, AI technologies might lead to the perpetuation of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being through the promotion of Western epistemologies (Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025). Accordingly, journalists have called for homegrown AI tools that are trained on local data repositories to make them sensitive to the Sub-Saharan African cultural context. Journalists have also called for the establishment of an innovation-enabling environment that is guided by an Afro-centric perspective (Mathe, 2025; Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025). Other journalists have also called for adaptation and skills upgrades, the need for human oversight, and development of national policies (Phiri, 2025; Tsandzana, 2025). Given the slow AI uptake and fears of coloniality perpetuation in the Global South, this study asks:

> RQ1: How are Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors responding to and evaluating the state of AI integration in news work?

5. Methodology

This study applied abductive analysis (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024) to 54 purposively selected (David & Sutton, 2011) opinion, editorial, and analytical articles that allowed journalistic and non-journalistic actors to take stances in negotiating AI deployment within Sub-Saharan African journalism (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025). Discourses by non-journalistic actors negotiating newsroom practices were included because they are a key aspect of both AI hype and metajournalistic discourse since journalistic authority is contingent on public perceptions (Carlson, 2016; Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025). Gathered articles were published between January 2019 and December 2025, which covered the three years before OpenAI released ChatGPT in 2022 and the three years afterwards (Roose, 2022). Conversations about AI and journalism had been ongoing across the field before the release of ChatGPT (see Supplementary File; e.g., Carlson, 2015; Mari, 2024; van Dalen, 2012). The articles were gathered from AllAfrica.com, accessed through Factiva using a combination of search terms like AI, artificial intelligence, journalism, etc. The sample was limited to content from English-speaking Sub-Saharan African countries. The search returned articles from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

As per abductive methodology, the study started with deductive analysis guided by a coding scheme derived from literature (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). The codes focused on three issues: perceptions about the state of AI adoption and integration in African newsrooms (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022); what roles should be assigned to AI versus human journalists in news gathering, production, verification, and distribution (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025; Wu, 2026); and which values (organization or audience centered) should AI be harmonized with (Oh & Jung, 2025). The first level of deductive coding of the entire content produced 73 codes in NVivo, which, following axial coding principles of placing findings under broader categories (David & Sutton, 2011), led to the emergence of five dominant themes: AI distribution and challenges, AI newsroom uses, AI opportunities, AI threats, solutions to AI adoption challenges, and journalism threats. Abductive analysis, which is a search for any surprises in relation to previous findings, followed this process and led to the realization that the discourse is characterized by FOMO.

6. Findings

Abductive analysis shows that, while actors touched on previous themes that guided this study's deductive coding, their discourse was unique in displaying a sense of FOMO in missing out on AI opportunities. This is captured in Sections 6.1 and 6.2, exploring stakeholders' assessment of the state of AI adoption and an effort to allay any fears. Section 6.3 on suggested solutions to AI threats and adoption challenges explores an identifiable framework for how stakeholders in Sub-Saharan Africa would wish to see AI integrated in newsrooms.

6.1. "Once Again, Late to the Party, When is our Time?" AI and FOMO in Sub-Saharan Africa

Actors drew attention to the unequal global distribution of AI technology and African newsrooms' lack of intentionality in adopting the technology, including perceived resistance from older journalists. Referring to the *Reuters Institute of Journalism's Digital Media Report for 2023*, the Nigerian *Business Day* outlined that only "20% of media companies in Africa are using AI in some way…compared to 40% of media companies in North America and 30% of media companies in Europe" (Abiola, 2023). This observation, captured in *Business Day*'s headline: "Once again, late to the party, when is our time?" (Abiola, 2023), reflects actors' alarm that they run the risk of missing out on its benefits. The comment shows that actors are frustrated to see Africa always following and not taking the lead in innovation. The Media Institute of Southern Africa ([MISA] 2025a) also criticizes Africa's lackadaisical approach towards AI adoption by pointing out that the "major challenge that Zimbabwe faces today is lethargy in taking bold steps towards the realization of AI…a reality confronted by many other African countries." This lackadaisical approach could be driven by African governments' fear of innovation. In addition to this, the Zimbabwean *Standard* argues that the major challenge is "how to convince good old editors that much has changed and the same story can be told differently" (Mokwetsi & Mugadzaweta, 2023). The last comment implies a generational gap in attitudes towards AI, compounding the continent's slowness in innovation and adaptation.

There is also FOMO on opportunities that AI brings to news gathering in physical and digital spaces. *The Premium Times* of Nigeria sees opportunities to "deploy drones in previously inaccessible communities, to gather content, especially in conflict situations" (Ishiekwene, 2022), while *The Fourth Estate* of Ghana argues that through analyzing social media trends and search patterns, AI tools "can reveal serious underreported topics like youth mental health, rural climate challenges" (Kumsah, 2025). This is an expanded role that positions AI as a tool to reveal underreported stories in previously inaccessible physical and digital contexts. Nigeria's *This Day* further argues that AI allows journalists "to work across different languages and cultures more easily" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023) through translation services. Here, AI is positioned as a tool to provide linguistic access. By helping journalists to find relevant information quickly, AI tools will ultimately be "freeing up more time for actual writing" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). FOMO can be interpreted here as a fear of missing out on opportunities to overcome contextual physical, digital, and linguistic barriers to information access.

In the news production process, journalists express FOMO on the efficiency and effectiveness AI brings to the writing process. *This Day* gives examples of tools like GPT-3 and Article Forge, which "can help journalists to write faster and more efficiently, generating ideas and producing content quickly and accurately" in addition to producing drafts and improving "grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors" ("Effects of artificial intelligence,"

2023). Perception of efficiency due to AI news drafts and editing of grammar is understandable here in a context with physical and linguistic barriers that can be time-consuming in the news-gathering process; hence, *The Fourth Estate*'s argument that what "once took hours and days now takes minutes" (Kumsah, 2025). This means that after spending days in remote contexts gathering news stories, AI can speed up the writing process. South Africa's *Financial Mail* notes how heartening it is to see that "News24 in South Africa has also trained its systems with the voice of a popular actor for its news and feature stories" (Roper, 2023). *The Financial Mail*'s argument positions news anchoring as a repetitive task. The production efficiencies yearned for should again be understood in the context of time-consuming news gathering challenges that Sub-Saharan African journalists endure.

Journalists also see opportunities to employ AI tools in content verification. *This Day* notes how "AI is used to help journalists with tasks such as fact-checking and analyzing large volumes of data" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). This can be interpreted as a desire to enhance journalisms' watchdog role through analysis of large data volumes. According to *The Premium Times*, Nigeria is already experimenting with tools like Dubawa Chatbot which can be used to verify information on WhatsApp and which facilitates real-time fact-checking, as it has "access to real-time internet data, unlike other AI tools like the ChatGPT and MetaAI" (Suleiman, 2024). Applying AI tools to WhatsApp is understandable considering that it is a popular communication tool in the Sub-Saharan context. However, here, Sub-Saharan African journalists differ from their Global North counterparts, who have expressed reservations about using it for fact-checking (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026).

AI is also seen as an opportunity to boost revenues as a content distribution tool. *This Day* argues that AI can facilitate a wider audience reach by helping identify "the most effective keywords and phrases to use in headlines and stories to improve their visibility on search engines" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). This desire to use AI for search-engine optimization is perhaps driven by content saturation on digital platforms. AI tools can also facilitate audience retention through content personalization. Kenya's *Capital FM* explains that AI tools can harvest "audience data and analytics," which editors can use to "figure out their audiences' needs to granular levels and offer them articles that "speak to their souls" (Ondari & Mutiso, 2022). Efforts to build audience profiles using AI is an attempt to boost profits within a context of dwindling news revenue. Furthermore, *This Day* points out that by helping "to visualize data more effectively, turning complex data sets into clear and compelling visualizations that engage readers" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023), AI is again key in facilitating audience retention. Attempts to use AI for search-engine optimization, personalization, and data visualization for wider audience reach and retention is part of the efforts to establish sustainable business models in an era of news avoidance.

AI benefits also extend to the role they play in enhancing the press' watchdog role. AI, as noted by *The Fourth Estate*, can enable investigative journalists to search quickly for information once they set a system that "scans procurement records, flags malfeasance, and unusual contracts, repetitive names, or shell companies with suspicious links" (Kumsah, 2025). In this sense, AI is positioned as a tool to enhance the press' democratic role by revealing white-collar crimes that might go unreported, including in the business world. This is why *GroundUp* of South Africa argues that "artificial intelligence has become one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of investigative journalism" (Knoetze, 2023). This optimism, however, does not mean that Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors are oblivious to challenges associated with AI. As explained in the next section, they note the challenges and risks but also attempt to dispel AI fears.

6.2. "AI Is not a Threat but an Opportunity": Demystifying AI Fears in Sub-Saharan Africa

The first challenge noted by journalists relates to AI acquisition difficulties due to costs, access to equipment, and human resources, as well as threats presented by AI deployment. Referring to financial costs, *The Guardian* of Nigeria notes that apart "from the low or no salary they receive, with which they cannot afford the gadgets to make easy their jobs, most of the media outfits they represent are unable to provide these tools for them" (Mwantok, 2019). Here, the precarious working conditions that Sub-Saharan African journalists endure also undermine their technological access. In addition, the *Business Day* bemoans the lack of AI expertise, noting that there "are not a lot of people in Nigeria with the skills and knowledge necessary to develop and use AI applications" (Abiola, 2023). This acknowledgement reveals a double tragedy where Sub-Saharan African newsrooms are often too financially challenged to access AI tools, yet they lack skilled personnel to develop cheaper alternatives or use the imported ones. This problem is compounded by a lack of datasets for automation, which MISA (2025a) considers a significant challenge as "AI systems significantly depend on high-quality and diverse datasets to produce effective outputs." MISA's concern here echoes marginalization fears against minority communities, which have been linked to the perpetuation of data coloniality.

The second set of challenges that AI presents to the journalism profession includes threats to news business viability, journalists' working conditions, information integrity, audience trust, and the state of democracy in general. AI threatens the sustainability of news media organizations by increasing revenue competition from pseudo-news sites that publish AI-rewritten news stories. According to *GroundUp*, stories "plagiarized and seemingly rewritten by ChatGPT or some other AI chatbot, appear higher in Google search than their genuine counterparts" (Geffen & van Zyl, 2024). This concern explains why Sub-Saharan African AI hype includes speculation about the opportunity to use AI for search engine optimization.

AI is also considered a threat to journalists' working conditions. The first threat includes increasing journalists' workload by adding fact-checking duties, as journalists have to "verify AI-generated content" (MISA, 2025a). This means that although actors in Sub-Saharan Africa are excited about AI opportunities, they are aware of its hallucination weaknesses. AI also threatens journalists' jobs: The Nigerian *Daily Independent* notes that one reporter can now "single handedly edit a story using AI" (Nzeako, 2023). This concern is understandable in a digital context where journalists are already losing jobs as news organizations face viability challenges. Furthermore, according to *This Day*, AI threatens journalists' critical-thinking skills as some may "become over-reliant on AI writing tools and start to rely on them too heavily" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). This threat continues to increase as some news organizations get exposed for using fake AI journalists. *The Premium Times* also raised the concern that algorithms might "control what content is seen and what is buried" (Ishiekwene, 2023). This is a threat to journalists' editorial independence and gatekeeping roles. Relatedly, *The Fourth Estate* also raised concern over AI's ability to "scan phone records, trace online behavior, and monitor journalists' activities without them even knowing" (Kumsah, 2025). Under repressive conditions, AI can threaten journalists' press freedom. Thus, the threats highlighted here broaden from the creation of precarious working conditions to the threat to journalistic authority as algorithmic content selection can undermine audience trust.

AI also poses threats to information integrity, which has implications for audience trust. The first challenge relates to "ownership of AI-generated content, which may result in legal complexities related to copyright

and intellectual property rights" (MISA, 2025b). This is because the question of who is responsible for AI-generated content is yet to be settled, which is a result of an AI regulatory vacuum that currently prevails in Sub-Saharan Africa. *The New Era* of Namibia argues that "AI systems trained on data that is not representative can inadvertently perpetuate discrimination and injustice" (Erastus, 2023). Marginalization of underrepresented communities through perpetuation of biases and stereotypes has since been described as a form of violence against minority communities that perpetuates coloniality of being. *The Premium Times* also expressed concern that "deepfake technology is incredibly advanced and can easily fool humans" (Yusuf, 2023). Misinformation threatens to undermine audience trust, for as *The Fourth Estate* explains, if "citizens can't tell the difference between a journalist's story and an AI-generated lie, trust in the media collapses…once that happens…democracy starts to shake" (Kumsah, 2025). AI threats thus include marginalization of minority groups and the undermining of journalism's democratic role by weakening audience trust through misinformation.

Despite the challenges, AI hype still expresses optimism in AI. In an article, "Catch up or Cut a new Tail," the South African *Daily Maverick* argues that generative AI "may seem to carry more risks than most emerging tech, but that doesn't mean we should shy away from their use" (Razzano & Oxford, 2023). While this view expresses the perception that AI use is unstoppable, it is also accompanied by a perceived lack of merit in human-replacement arguments, which *The Fourth Estate* calls "one of the biggest myths about AI in journalism" (Kumsah, 2025). *The Liberian Observer* cites a *Hunan Daily* editor who argues that human "editors' unique strengths lie in their sensitivity, insight, and judgment—traits that AI cannot replicate" (Yates, 2025). AI experiments to date might have exposed some of its creativity, ethical responsibility, and emotional connection limitations. The *Hunan Daily* editor further argued that instead of being replaced, journalists will "reinvent their roles—to engage more deeply with sources, conduct in-depth interviews, [and] analyze complex stories" (Yates, 2025). This is echoed by *The Premium Times* which argues that "unless you are a lazy journalist…at the heart of journalism, accountability journalism is holding power accountable and ensuring that you set the agenda. No machine is going to do that" (Majeed, 2024). Observable here is the perception that instead of being a threat, AI allows journalists more time to hold the powerful to account.

Reflecting on how AI will strengthen journalism, the *NewsDay* and its sister paper, *The Standard*, respectively argue that AI will give journalists "creative superpowers" ("Digital digest: Could AI," 2023) and "turbocharge newsrooms" (Mokwetsi & Mugadzaweta, 2023). These arguments echo previous contestations that AI will free journalists to do better journalism. *This Day* sums this up: "AI writing tools offer significant benefits for journalists, helping them to produce high-quality content more efficiently and effectively" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). As noted earlier, these arguments must be contextualized within a situation characterized by barriers to information access that hinder efficient news production. Taking a forward-looking perspective, *The Fourth Estate* argues that the future does not belong to AI, but "courageous humans using AI" (Kumsah, 2025). Thus, contrary to fears of human replacement, journalists insist on relegating it to the status of a tool, which may enhance their practice. Of course, this remains to be seen. Underlying this discourse, however, is a proposal for a hybridized decolonial AI adoption framework that, among other things, privileges human journalists over AI.

6.3. The Quest for a Decolonizing Hybridized AI Adoption Framework for Sub-Saharan Africa

Analysis from this study shows that underlying the analyzed AI hype is a quest for a hybridized AI adoption framework that involves collaborative efforts to decolonize the technology and to harmonize it with both organization- and audience-centric values. This is coupled with calls for a hybridized AI-adoption scenario that privileges human actors over actants. This section discusses the nuances of these arguments.

A decolonial approach to AI adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa begins with calls to avoid simply importing AI tools from the Global North, as has been the norm, and to come up with strategies to allow local players, including small to medium enterprises, to create local solutions. MISA (2025a) argues that this will "significantly break the chain of coloniality perpetuated through extractive technologies from the Global North" and enable "development and deployment of AI, with our contextual realities at the center of its stature." *The Fourth Estate* further adds that this localization will allow creation and deployment of "AI tools trained on our data, shaped by our values" (Kumsah, 2025). These two arguments represent an Afro-centric perspective that has been presented as key in breaking the perpetuation of coloniality: Localized AI tools, trained on Sub-Saharan African data, will have local nuances such as linguistic diversity and help in avoiding biases and stereotypes that marginalize minorities. Furthermore, *The Standard* argues that given the competition from tech giants, "the most prudent option is for newsrooms to create their own infrastructure based on ICT to enable distribution models" (Mokwetsi & Mugadzaweta, 2023). Again, this is a decolonial approach aimed at breaking colonial labor exploitation of Sub-Saharan Africa by tech giants. Additionally, the Kenyan *Sunday Standard* has urged "media houses to forge collaborations locally and globally to thrive in the new world order" (Njaramba, 2023). This signals a realization that decolonization, as has been argued by other scholars, does not mean Africa should divorce itself from the world, but must adapt, adjust, and apply.

The hybridized AI adoption model emerging from Sub-Saharan African AI hype prioritizes actors over actants. *This Day* argues that journalists "should approach AI tools with a critical eye and use them as a supplement to their own skills and knowledge" ("Effects of artificial intelligence," 2023). This positions AI as a subservient actant to human journalists. In this division of labor, *The New Era* encourages journalists to maintain their roles as "gatekeepers, ensuring accuracy and fairness of news stories before publication or broadcast" (Erastus, 2023). This prioritization of human agency in content decisions should be seen as journalistic attempts to maintain journalistic authority. In another hybridized adaptation format, *The Citizen* of Tanzania urges journalism schools to "think about the curriculum….There is a need for new technical skills, from data journalism…to artificial intelligence" (Krüger, 2022). This is a desire to adapt to the new technology, beginning with journalism schools. In a professional journalism context, *Business Day* argues that "it is essential for the industry to grow its base of knowledgeable and upskilled media professionals" (Abiola, 2023). Again, this call fits into the hybridization approach that prioritizes actors using AI as a tool by empowering journalists with necessary knowledge and skills.

A hybrid AI-adoption framework also emerges from the advancement of both news organization- and audience-centered values. Some of the prominently promoted values to guide journalism in the AI era are accuracy, transparency, accountability, and diversity. *The Fourth Estate* urges news organizations to extend fact-checking "beyond text to video, images, and even AI-generated commentary" (Fahmy, 2023). This demonstrates concerns over AI hallucinations or potential uses for disinformation and misinformation. *The Star* of South Africa further calls for transparency in AI use, maintaining that audiences should be made

"aware when content is created using AI" (Fahmy, 2023). To date, however, there is still debate over when to disclose AI use and its implications for audience trust. In addition, MISA (2025b) argues that "AI systems must be designed inclusively, with input from various stakeholders, including marginalized groups, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented voices." External organizations here attempt to balance AI innovation with audience-oriented journalistic values to protect the vulnerable.

Individual privacy, media-literacy campaigns, transparency debates, and public trust make up some of these audience-oriented values. The Zimbabwean *Herald* says it has come up with mechanisms to ensure that "personal data collected and processed through our digital channels is handled responsibly, safeguarding the rights of audiences and stakeholders" (Gahadza, 2025). This effort rises from data coloniality concerns perpetuated by surveillance capitalism. Media-literacy campaigns, according to *The Fourth Estate*, are intended to empower audiences to "question, verify, and critically engage with content" (Kumsah, 2025). This call to advance audience agency is an attempt to empower audiences to protect themselves against misinformation. Furthermore, Kumsah (2025) urges journalists to "treat digital platforms as core spaces, not dumping grounds for headlines." This is a veiled criticism of clickbait journalism. This decolonial AI adoption model presented here has implications for how stakeholders think about AI adoption frameworks as discussed in the next section.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Conceptualizing AI hype (Lewis, Guzman, et al., 2025) as a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016), this study examined how this discourse is used to negotiate the role and place of AI within journalism. Accordingly, the study first assessed how both journalistic and non-journalistic actors assess the state of AI adoption in Sub-Saharan Africa, paying attention to its considered opportunities, challenges, and threats in journalistic processes (Møller et al., 2025; Umejei et al., 2025; Yu & Huang, 2021). Second, the study sought to tease out whether an emergent ideal integration framework (Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025) could be identified. Informed by this framework, the first level of deductive analysis identified how Sub-Saharan African AI hype discourse echoes other global discourses. The subsequent abductive analysis, however, revealed that this AI hype from Sub-Saharan Africa is underlined by FOMO, thereby diverging fundamentally from other global discourses.

First, the Sub-Saharan African AI hype discourse is unique for its FOMO driven by recognition of how Africa is lagging in AI adoption. This is different from the pessimistic wait-and-see approaches that have been adopted by some journalists in previous studies (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Salvador-Mata et al., 2025). This could be because those who are pro-AI adoption are the ones writing a lot about it, as compared to skeptics who might have only expressed their views in interview-based research. While this AI hype discourse recognizes challenges and threats posed by the technology, such as misinformation and the undermining of public trust in journalism (Gondwe, 2026; Lindén, 2017; Moran & Shaikh, 2022; Thomson et al., 2024), this discourse insists Africa cannot afford to miss out on this technology. The position to adopt AI against all odds is driven by the assumption of human journalists' superiority over the technology, as has been noted by other researchers (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2021; Rydenfelt, 2022; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020). Stakeholders are confident that AI cannot replace journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa due to its numerous limitations.

Second, implied in the AI hype analyzed here is a decolonial hybridized AI adoption framework that seeks to harmonize AI with both journalistic and audience-centered values, prioritizing human agency as noted in previous studies (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Wu, 2026). It goes further in calling for the sensitization of AI to the Sub-Saharan African context to avoid perpetuation of the coloniality of being, knowledge, and power (Mpofu & Queen, 2025; Tshuma & Matsilele, 2025). This echoes previous arguments that AI development without inclusive development can perpetuate biases and stereotypes (Alayande et al., 2025) and that AI technology does not represent journalistic values and should be contextualized within the field (Perreault et al., 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). Findings in this study are also unique in openly calling for AI use in fact-checking in Sub-Saharan Africa. This contrasts with findings from the Global North that journalists are inclined to restrict AI use in verification processes (Cools & de Vreese, 2026). Lastly, while the AI hype discourse from Sub-Saharan Africa is consistent with hybridization sentiments from the Global North, it is also unique in calling for a decolonial approach that opposes wholesale importation of AI technologies without localization through innovation by locals to contextualize the technology and avoid risks of bias, stereotype perpetuation, and marginalization of the African people (Mathe, 2025).

Methodologically, the exposure of AI FOMO through abductive analysis shows how alternative approaches beyond interviews (Schjøtt, 2026) can capture different perspectives. Practically, this study repeats Nkoala et al.'s (2026) warning that FOMO might force journalists to forgo AI risks. It would thus be important to make sure that conversations about AI adoption in Africa involve multiple stakeholders to ensure checks and balances. The AI FOMO from this study, however, cannot be generalized to all Sub-Saharan African journalistic and non-journalistic actors. FOMO might have emerged partly because only those who are pro-AI are writing so much about it, since the study used document analysis. Future studies can comparatively assess AI hype among different countries.

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Data Availability

All data used for this manuscript can be accessed from the corresponding author upon request.

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No large language models were used in the research or writing of this manuscript.

Supplementary Material

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

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ARTICLE

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Multi-Method Analysis of Locally Built Artificial Intelligence Models Designed for Journalists in an African Country

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) models for journalism have been built within the Global North context, hence deepening the concerns of the "AI divide" between the North and South. This has compelled organizations in various areas of the Global South to develop journalism-focused AI models to address the specific challenges peculiar to journalism practice within the region. Nigeria stands out within the Global South context because organizations are developing local AI models to empower local journalists. However, the extent to which these AI products can address real-life journalistic challenges is unknown; hence, this study assesses how well locally developed AI models are positioned to support journalists in Nigeria, using a purposive sample of four homegrown tools: ChatJourno, Dubawa Chatbot, ChatVE, and MyAIFactChecker. Employing a mixed-methods design, we conducted walkthrough usability tests by engaging 15 trained journalists who provided rigorous assessments of the functionalities of each tool. We then conducted semi-structured interviews with the developers of each of the tools to assess each platform's vision and directly cross-check those claims against the test-users' evidence. Findings show the tools generally aim to complement Nigerian newsroom needs, such as improving news drafting and accelerating verification, but their realized value is uneven. While some of the platforms offer usable interfaces and services, some common limitations include gaps in up-to-date data and unusable features. We conclude that the tools must reliably achieve their promised functions because usability strongly drives user acceptance, and mass newsroom adoption will follow only when tools demonstrably enhance content standards in news practice.

Keywords

AI models; journalism; Nigeria; usability

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1. Introduction

An artificial intelligence (AI) revolution in journalism is transforming many aspects of the practice (Radcliffe, 2025). Notably, the dynamics of journalism processes are broadening as long-established news gathering, verification, writing, editing, and distribution practices are evolving from a unidirectional process into an integrated and dynamic one (Shi & Sun, 2024). Very much like the initial entry of many new technologies into the practice, a lot of enthusiasts believe that while AI may currently serve as a supplementary aid and not a replacement, it is not certain that it will remain the same in the near future, considering that AI is becoming potent and dependable enough to replace mundane journalism tasks (Simon, 2024).

In spite of AI's promises, its entry raises critical concerns in many areas, including erosion of editorial independence, algorithmic bias, and misinformation (Kevin-Alerechi et al., 2025). One crucial concern that hasn't been adequately addressed in journalism scholarship is the equity gap created by the dominance of Global North-developed AI tools for journalism (Mohammed et al., 2024), a development believed to limit the representation of low resourced voices and journalistic perspectives from climes such as Africa, Latin American, and other Global South regions, hence deepening the "AI divide" between the North and South.

This gap has compelled cutting-edge organizations and individuals in various areas of the South to develop journalism-focused AI models to address the specific challenges peculiar to the practice within their region. For example, in Colombia, Cuestión Pública developed Odin, a locally developed AI tool designed to curate news content within the confines of investigative journalism (Linares, 2024). Likewise, *India Today* developed Sana, a generative AI news anchor designed to deliver news in multiple languages and integrate with humans seamlessly (Verma, 2024).

Within the broader Global South context, Nigeria stands out as one of the active countries where a lot of organizations and individuals are developing AI models specifically to empower journalists and newsrooms. As a matter of fact, out of the five AI for journalism organizations featured in the notable Global Investigative Journalism Network article on platforms adopting AI for enhancing fact-checking and investigative reports on the African continent, four of them were Nigerian organizations and tools, namely FactCheck Africa's fact-checking AI, MyAIFactChecker; Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development's (CJID) fact-checking platforms Dubawa Chatbot and DubawaAudio; and Dataphyte's Nubia AI, a story creation AI model (Sofiullahi, 2024).

Given this background, there's no doubt that there's an active scene for locally developed AI models in Nigeria; however, the motivations for developing these platforms, as well as the extent to which these intentions align with the intended users' usability of the AI models, remain a mystery. It is crucial to provide meaningful insights into these issues, especially with the increasing failure of journalism tech startups, which in many cases is believed to be largely because of the "disconnect between these new entrants and legacy newsrooms" (Chew & Tandoc, 2024, p. 191).

Given this lacuna, this study finds it crucial to ask:

> RQ1: How functional and usable are locally-developed AI tools intended to empower journalists in Nigeria?

RQ2: What are the goals of locally-developed AI tools intended to empower journalists in Nigeria?

RQ3: How do the goals of the locally-developed AI tools align with the functionalities of the tools?

To answer these research questions, first, the study employs a walkthrough method to understand how functional and usable the selected locally developed AI tools are. Secondly, the study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with the developers and managers of the AI models to obtain the goals of locally developed AI tools intended to empower journalists in Nigeria. Finally, findings from both methods of inquiry were cross-examined to understand how the goals of the locally developed AI tools align with the functionalities of the tools.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. First, the literature review explores the efforts made to decolonize AI for journalism in the Global South, technology transfer in newsrooms of developing countries, and the assessment of AI tools in low-resource contexts. Secondly, we detail the methodological approach. Third, we analyze the findings. Fourth, we discuss and draw relevant conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Toward Decolonizing Journalism AI in the Global South

In the 21st-century newsroom, Africa and other Global South regions confront the paradox of tools that promise to streamline journalistic processes, while often carrying foreign news values and assumptions (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022; Ndlovu, 2024). A recent Reuters Foundation survey of 70 Global South countries found that nearly half (49%) of the journalists feared AI would amplify misinformation because most AI models are trained on Western-centric datasets (Radcliffe, 2025). In other words, machines built from Meta, Google, and OpenAI corpora simply don't know much about, say, rural Ghanaian politics, Nigerian folklore, or Ugandan music. In one such example, a South African editor noted that the American-made AI tool, Coral, despite its successes, still needs human intervention to be effective in Africa because "it is an American tool not built [with] the South African audience in mind" (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023, p. 67).

Likewise, reporters note that AI transcription tools often mishear non-Western accents (Ejifoma, 2024). In practice, this means even mundane AI-assisted tasks such as voice-to-text transcriptions and text translation become challenging. Without local tuning, an African journalist risks receiving insights filtered through a Western worldview and missing subtleties of context, dialect, and culture (Ndlovu, 2024).

It is precisely this gap between Global North AI innovations and Global South realities that the push for decolonization aims to close. Some commentators have argued that it is not simply about more data, but about whose data and whose priorities shape the tools. For instance, digital rights activists fault the standard fix of "getting better data" as missing the point because any large dataset is a digital representation of society as it is through the lenses of the powerful (Miller, 2022). Therefore, more data from the same sources will merely reinforce existing blind spots. When the skill of building AI is concentrated among Western engineers and Western venture capitalists, they decide which problems AI will solve and which it will ignore. This replicates economic colonialism in a new guise (Miller, 2022), as it forces all societies to conform to problems and solutions defined abroad.

In journalism, for instance, it is assumed that foreign AI tools capable of editorial functions will automatically work everywhere, even though, in reality, they often misrepresent facts, as seen with ChatGPT, whose limitations have been documented vividly in studies such as Hicks et al. (2024). Decolonization in this instance would demand that the entire process, from data curation to tool design and deployment, be done in collaboration with Global South experts. As Miller (2022) put it, the very decisions of what data to collect, how to collect them, and what to use them for need new oversight. Put differently, in addition to fixing biases at the output, it is necessary to rethink who writes the code and asks the questions.

Thus far, conversations about newsroom AI are indeed globalizing, and Global South voices are not silent. In South Africa, one qualitative study of journalists found that because generative tools mine data that already exist, they inevitably exclude marginalized communities and voices (Munoriyarwa et al., 2023). This resonates with other findings, such as those of Mohammed et al. (2024), which conclude that if journalism AI is to work in Africa, newsrooms must develop AI technologies aligned with African journalistic principles.

Some on-the-ground experiments in AI-driven journalism give credence to these ethical clamors. Take the example of Alice AI, a news anchor created in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Alice AI "reads" weekly news bulletins generated by journalists. Although the innovation sought to democratize access for audiences, including disabled listeners via captioned video, the project also hit the classic decolonial snag when the team struggled with accurate replication of local accents and dialects (Cook, 2024). The Zimbabwean team had to manually edit spellings and even engage in voice cloning to make Alice's speech feel authentic. This example shows that simply building a locally developed AI application on Western-trained speech synthesis and language technologies is insufficient; true decolonization would require grounding the system in Zimbabwean language data. Only by building large language models (LLMs) explicitly on low-resource tongues can these communities avoid being left behind (Smart et al., 2024). Decolonizing AI in newsrooms, therefore, often begins with linguistic justice. That is, making sure that the very words and idioms of indigenous societies are included in the software's vocabulary. To decolonize journalism AI in Africa and the wider Global South is to ensure these new tools serve local needs and values, rather than overwrite them. It means recognizing that data and algorithms carry culture and power (Adams, 2021), and only by reclaiming who controls the algorithms can formerly silenced voices become part of the story.

2.2. Tech Transfer in the Global South: Localization, Capacity Building, and Knowledge Sharing

As scholars of development and communication have observed, the popular image of technology simply flowing smoothly from North to South is hopelessly naive (Salami, 2024) because of the inherent power imbalances that often accompany the diffusion. Lu and Qiu (2023) argue that technology flows are becoming increasingly diverse and call for a new lens of translation and transfer. They caution that conventional technology transfer is haunted by technocratic dreams and an insensitivity to technological materiality that often ignores local contexts. In their view, we must treat tech not as a neutral gadget to be plugged in, but as an artifact "socially shaped with distributed agency" (Lu & Qiu, 2023, p. 272). In practice, this means that debates about tech transfer in journalism must grapple with a raft of social questions: Who shapes the code? Whose language does it use? Who benefits from the data it gathers and stores?

Language barriers, cultural values, and even accents can confound a one-size-fits-all approach to technology transfer. This is why studies view the pendulum as swinging toward localization and capacity-building as

solutions to these divides (Wiaterek et al., 2025). Localization, in the media-tech context, means shifting power, resources, and decision-making from global entities to local actors, primarily to craft solutions by those who know local needs best. A bottom-up, locally-led approach would have journalists or publishers themselves be the inspirers, originators, or designers of the technology and its use rather than being passive end-users. We see glimmers of this in tech hubs and innovation labs across Africa. For instance, CJID in Nigeria has built new tools for local reporters that will cater to fact-checking, news refinement, news accessibility, audio transcription, and translation services (Eromonsele, 2024). These are examples of translating technology to suit local needs.

Researchers increasingly talk about the need for "digital sovereignty" (Mohammed et al., 2024; Sampath & Tregenna, 2022), as well as the need to cultivate indigenous tech capacity (Salami, 2024). These clamors have brought about some level of resources and attention to the subject. Open-source platforms such as Zindi, Kaggle, and openAFRICA offer African journalists, researchers, and practitioners avenues to curate and share locally relevant datasets, which are crucial for addressing the region's well-documented dataset scarcity (Okolo et al., 2023). Grassroots initiatives have also emerged as contributors to African AI development, often through collaborations that leverage regional expertise to create culturally and linguistically diverse datasets. For instance, the AI for Development (AI4D) Africa Language Challenge, which is a collaboration between Zindi and AI4D, saw over 400 data scientists working to develop datasets for African languages such as Wolof, Hausa, Chichewa, Igbo, Ewe, Kabiye, and Kiswahili, which indicates that local initiatives can work to fill gaps left by global technology providers (Zindi, 2020).

2.3. Evaluating AI Tools in Low-Resource Settings

One of the underexplored determinants of AI adoption in local newsrooms in the Global South is usability. As studies in human–computer interaction have demonstrated, trust, interface clarity, and task relevance are strong predictors of whether new technologies diffuse beyond pilot stages (Dang & Li, 2026; Ntoa, 2025). In African news organizations where the workload is heavy, and many journalists have limited access to premium technical support, they are more likely to adopt AI systems that demonstrably help them save time, improve accuracy, and deliver on tasks without committing professional blunders (Umejei et al., 2025). There is an emerging body of scholarship employing mixed-method approaches to the study of AI in journalism (e.g., usability tests combined with interviews or ethnography) in Europe. Still, far fewer studies are found in the Global South. Studies on journalism AI and media assistance suggest that newsroom technologies are most likely to scale when built through participatory, iterative co-design with journalists. In contrast, short-cycle donor projectization—characterized by the absence of plans for maintenance and institutional integration—correlates with abandonment after pilots (Clarke, 2021). The current article addresses that need by empirically evaluating four Nigerian journalism AI tools—ChatJourno, Dubawa Chatbot, ChatVE, and MyAIFactChecker—using walkthrough usability tests and semi-structured interviews with journalists and developers.

3. Methodology

To understand how locally developed AI models support the work of journalists in Nigeria, this study adopts a multi-method approach. First, we purposively selected four AI models—ChatVE, ChatJourno, Dubawa Chatbot, and MyAIFactChecker—based on local ownership and development, local uptake, and accessibility

of AI models by journalists and news professionals. The selection was guided by function and visibility rather than statistical representativeness. In other words, the four tools were chosen because they are among the few publicly visible, journalism-facing AI products in Nigeria that already speak to concrete newsroom needs. Nigeria's AI-journalism ecosystem is still emerging, and because these four platforms only recently became publicly available, they are best understood as early illustrative cases from a nascent field rather than as normal cases of a mature and established market. ChatVE, for instance, is a fact-checking generative AI model developed by a Nigerian data analyst, accessible to news makers in the country. ChatJourno, on the other hand, is a tool that enhances efficiency in newsroom operations in the areas of brainstorming and crafting engaging headlines and stories. Dubawa Chatbot, meanwhile, is a fact-checking AI model that verifies a claim, provides freshly verified information, and allows journalists and citizens to report claims. Finally, MyAIFactChecker is a news and fact verification AI platform that assesses the credibility of news stories and provides acclaimed fact-checking entries and sentiment assessment of news queries.

In terms of ownership, funding structures, and institutional backing, Dubawa Chatbot is an AI tool developed by Dubawa, the independent verification and fact-checking initiative of the CJID, one of Nigeria's leading media development NGOs. It builds on Dubawa's eight years of fact-checking work across eight countries, so its verification logic draws on an institutional knowledge base rather than generic web data. Its funding is embedded in CJID's wider organizational model, which gives it a stronger financial base than many local journalism AI tools. ChatJourno, on the other hand, began as a multi-stakeholder, Luminate-funded initiative that brought journalists and technology experts together to co-develop AI tools for African newsrooms, and it now operates as an independent product. MyAIFactChecker is an organizational initiative developed by FactCheck Africa under the Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative, a Nigerian civic-tech non-profit. The platform received funding support from BECERA (Building an Environment for Civic Responses and Engagement in Africa) and the U.S. State Department; it launched in April 2024. ChatVE, developed by data scientist Israel Olatunji Tijani, is an AI tool designed to combat misinformation, online toxicity, and radicalization.

Following this selection, we conducted a walkthrough assessment of the AI models to understand the usability and functionality of the platforms for routine journalists' tasks. Secondly, we conducted in-depth interviews with developers of these AI models to understand their vision for the platforms, which aided our cross-examination of how these visions align with the functionalities of the tools.

To commence the first phase of the data collection, we designed a walkthrough coding sheet following Light et al.'s (2018) protocol guide. In our case, the walkthrough coding sheet was designed to assess the AI models' usability, functionality, and alignment with the vision of the platform. Further, the protocol was designed for test users to carry out a forensic review of the tool's sign-up process, daily use, design, ease of navigation, crawlability, and response. It also serves as a means for user-centric assessment of the AI model's intended purpose and use. To obtain test users for the walkthrough, we reached out via email to a pool of journalists drawn from participants who attended the Media and Development Conference, which included an AI and Journalism Workshop, held from November 25 to 29, 2024, in Abuja, Nigeria. A total of 18 journalists showed interest; however, three journalists withdrew to avoid bias due to potential conflicts of interest. All participants were trained to understand the study protocol and the walkthrough process in a 30-minute session-based orientation via Google Meet, after which they commenced their assessments. All assessments were successfully conducted between June 30 and July 11. The walkthrough assessment

was largely supplemented by elements of ethnographic inquiry, such as observations and field notes (Elega et al., 2025; Light et al., 2018). All test users were instructed to peruse the environment of use of the select platforms and provide ample evidence to back up their observations and claims, including screen recordings of motion evidence as well as screenshots of pictorial ones.

To commence the second phase of the research, white papers, technical reports, webpages, magazine essays, promotional articles, and news articles about the various AI models were reviewed. These reviews served as the basis for the interview guide. After the protocol was designed, an email invitation was sent to developers and managers of the AI models. A total of six developers were reached, but only five participated in the semi-structured in-depth interview. All interviews were conducted in English between June and July 2025 via Microsoft Teams, primarily because of the software's ability to transcribe in real time. On average, the interview lasted for 60 minutes. Direct textual reproduction of interviews was done immediately after the oral inquiry, and all interviews were analyzed thematically, where themes and categories were identified. This method is lauded for its strength in analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes that emerge from a qualitative data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Findings and Discussion

Our findings are drawn from the walkthrough with 15 test users (practicing Nigerian journalists) to understand the functionality and usability of locally-developed AI tools in Nigeria, as well as the interviews we conducted with developers of ChatVE, ChatJourno, Dubawa Chatbot, and MyAIFactChecker to assess the goals of locally-developed AI tools intended to empower journalists in Nigeria.

4.1. Walkthrough Analysis

Following the test users' assessment of the platforms, out of the four AI models, we found that one is fully functional, two are near-fully functional, and one is not functional at all. The fully functional tool, Dubawa Chatbot, by design is expected to help journalists and everyday people fact-check, verify mis/mal/disinformation, and corroborate viral claims through WhatsApp. Although the app could exist on traditional marketplaces for apps such as Apple App Store or Google Play Store, the developers built the bot into WhatsApp with the cultural assumption that, first, WhatsApp is one of the most popular synchronous messaging apps on the continent, particularly in Nigeria, and second, it is a leading local platform for the dissemination of misinformation in Nigeria. Additionally, Global South journalism-focused studies acknowledge the increasing influence of the platform on news gathering, distribution, and dissemination (Dodds, 2019; McIntyre & Sobel, 2019). According to the test users' assessment of the fact-checking platform, it was responsive; the majority of the prompts yielded accurate results, but some did not. This is understandable because even the frontline generative AI models, such as ChatGPT, also provide wrong results and sometimes hallucinate, hence why the journalism world has frowned against it (Liu, 2025) and advised responsible adoption. The only major concern here is that these platforms are designed for journalists and news producers who operate under higher accuracy and verification demands than typical users of general-purpose generative AI platforms, given the professional and ethical consequences of errors in news production. Additionally, Dubawa Chatbot functioned well under stress. Test users entered multiple queries, and it was able to handle them each time, but it may provide generic responses if the claim is new or phrased differently than it used to be.

ChatJourno is nearly fully functional but falls short on one key promise. By design, it should function as a newsroom assistant that allows journalists and news professionals to draft stories, brainstorm, and generate backstories. From the test users' assessment, the brainstorming element is functional to an extent, but it is largely limited in terms of recency. Test users found that it only includes stories up to June 2024, which means one cannot engage with recent or ongoing issues. The primary concern is that the backstory generation feature is not functional. It is a primary feature that a lot of journalists look forward to because the opportunity to electronically retrieve past stories would not only help journalists save time, but it would also help them ensure accuracy, strengthen reportage, and enhance story credence. This would be useful in a world where journalism is increasingly becoming contextual, prioritizing background and backstory rather than isolated stories (Svith, 2025).

MyAIFactChecker is also partially functional (see Figure 1). By design, MyAIFactChecker is expected to verify news, state their authenticity, and provide a sentiment analysis on the news being inquired about. Test users were largely able to verify their claims, but, in some instances, particularly when inquiring into older or very recent information, an error message stating that "the claim is unverified due to the inability to access the internet" was provided by the platform. One test user wanted to verify a story about the death of filmmaker Kayode Peters, who had been confirmed dead in Canada, as at the time of the inquiry, a majority of the reputable news organisations had posted the news on their website (see Figure 1). As a matter of fact, the test user entered the prompt exactly the way *Punch Newspaper*, a major national daily, reported it, but MyAIFactChecker failed at verifying the claim. Not working is bad enough; however, in the event that it works, this brings into question whether AI actually enhances journalism or simply recasts existing information in a new format (Spyridou & Ioannou, 2025). Further, test users were also not able to benefit

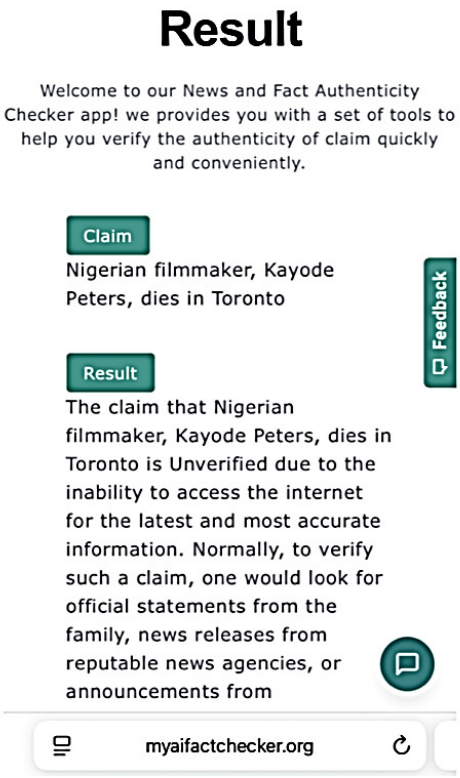


Figure 1. Response to claim by MyAIFactChecker.

from the sentiment analysis of claims; the error message that occurred for that was "An error occurred while fetching the response from the external API."

Although ChatVE is intended to fact-check information, identify online toxicity, and conduct sentiment analysis, our findings show that journalists are unable to access the platform as they are expected to request a demo; however, after entering their required details, the demo isn't provided. Although the platform has been primarily described and presented as a fact-checking tool, the technical walkthrough demonstrates that the platform also doubles as a B2B platform that helps businesses create chatbots to address hotel and flight booking challenges. This, according to Driver (2026), is a "recurring structural misalignment in how authority, learning, legitimacy, governance cadence, and ownership are designed and sequenced" (p. 1)

Our usability assessment shows that three of the AI tools achieved an acceptable threshold for the usability standard of AI models. Dubawa Chatbot, ChatJourno, and MyAIFactChecker exhibit ease of use, smooth navigation, intuitive interaction, and appealing design, while ChatVE is largely unusable (see Figure 2).

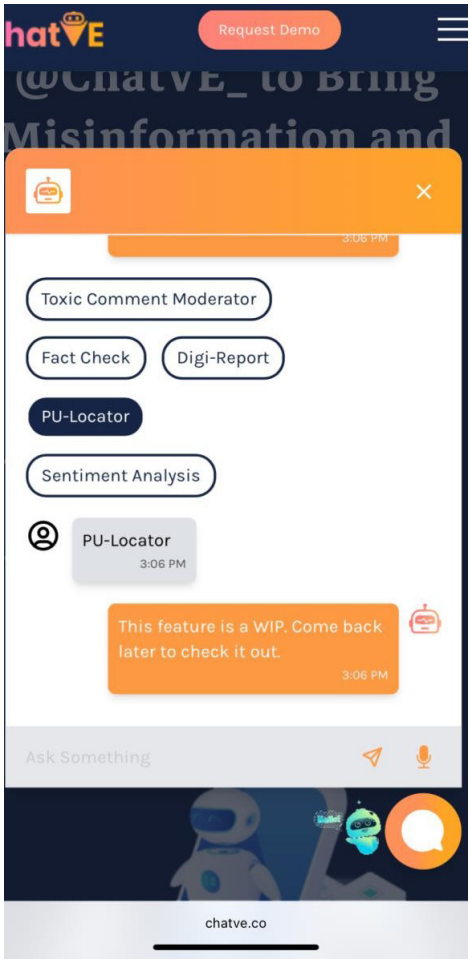


Figure 2. ChatVE's polling unit (PU) locator feature.

Among other things, Dubawa Chatbot is usable because it is embedded into WhatsApp; hence, it leverages the app's interface. Test users find the landing page user-friendly, visually engaging, and easy to use. Just like on the traditional hosting platform, Dubawa Chatbot allows for customization; hence, users can change chat

appearance, background, and wallpaper. One user likened it to chatting with a friend; obviously, this time, the "friend" replies mostly always instantly; as a result, it is easy to swiftly verify claims and find evidence without difficulty. The majority of test users revealed that it doesn't require technical knowledge to use. As a matter of fact, every day, WhatsApp users anywhere in the world could easily use the chatbot (see Figure 3).

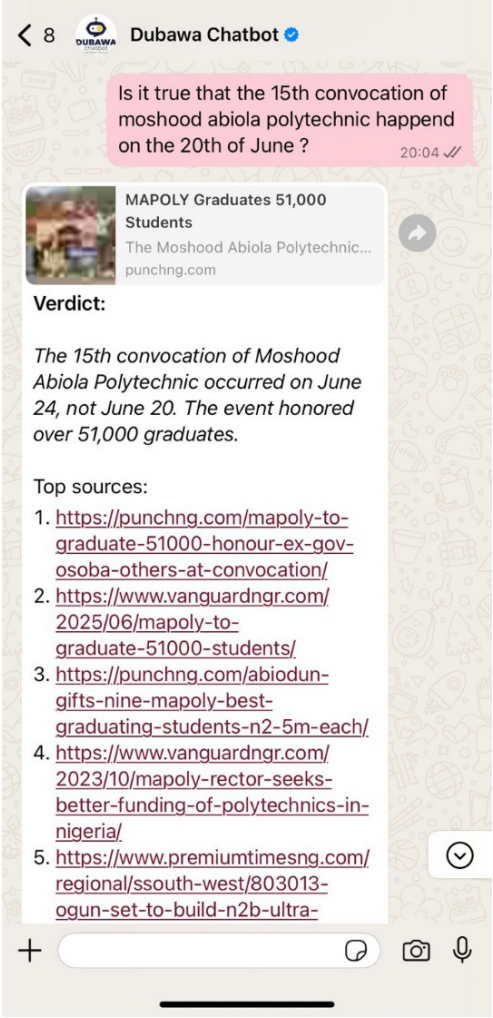


Figure 3. Response to a fact-check by Dubawa Chatbot.

MyAIFactChecker offers seamless navigation, a user-friendly design, and overall ease for both everyday users and journalists. The landing page immediately introduces the user to the fact-checker tool, then highlights the step-by-step guide on how to use it. Although the guide is redundant because similar content is available in the "how to use" navigation item, for the most part, it doesn't alter the fact-checking process in any way. In fact, one could make the argument that it was purpose-built to ensure that wherever the user is on the site, they're able to access key information. The AI tool doesn't require users to create an account, which makes it highly usable and also lowers the barrier of entry.

ChatJourno is user-friendly, offers smooth navigation, and has the simplest design of the bunch. The tool opens with a concise call to action to journalists to attempt the two key features in a simple, clean, and spacing-balanced font. The navigation buttons were easy to use; however, while the "chat with AI" feature

was highly functional (see Figure 4), a step-by-step guide on how to benefit from the backstory generation feature would have been really helpful. ChatJourno doesn't require users to sign up to use it, and also does not require optimum digital or technical knowledge and experience. As Blanco et al. (2026) argue, it is important to address issues of user experience, particularly in the context of novel journalistic technology.

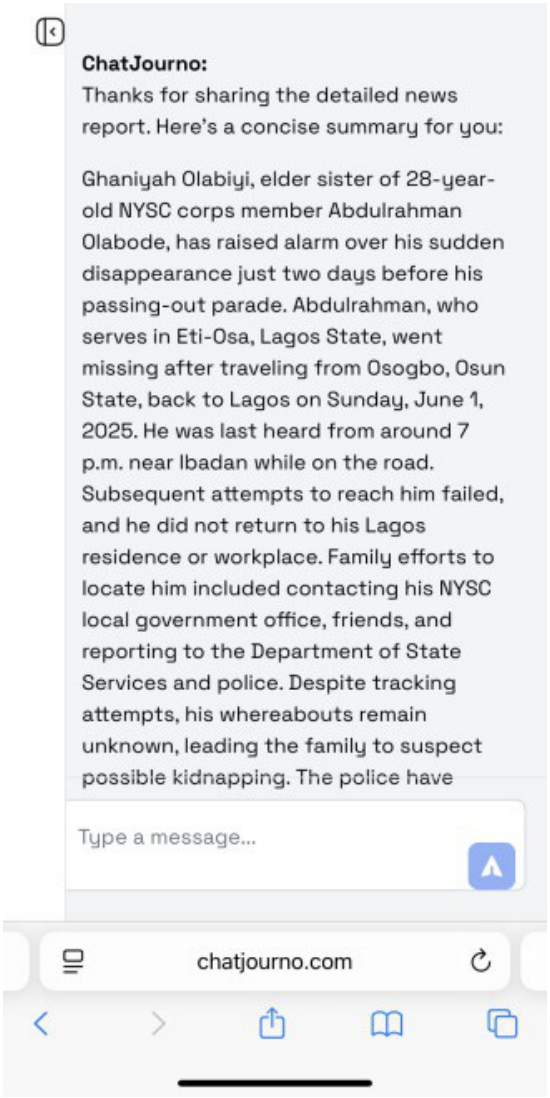


Figure 4. ChatJourno summarization feature.

ChatVE prevents journalists from completing intended tasks; as a result, it is unusable. Although the layout is clean, there's evident clutter in labels and the menu. The incorporation of booking an appointment in this supposed AI for journalism tool is confusing. Primary features are not attainable within a few clicks. Additionally, navigation and ease of use are largely problematic. There's also no explainer or step-by-step guide for the comment moderation feature, which seems to be the only working tool. The majority of the test users were discouraged, evidenced by their reduction to monosyllabic comments such as "no" and "Did not work" in the walkthrough response forms. This behavioral pattern was only noticeable with ChatVE. Respondents who were expressive about the platform resolved to the conclusion that the tool is either inactive or under development.

Although these AI models have mostly benefited from publicly available open-source democratized digital assets made available by innovators from the North, the uneven performance of these locally developed AI models for journalism speaks directly to the existing digital divide, which impacts the development of AI talent, AI competencies, research, and financial support (Kitsara, 2022). So, what does this mean for the newsrooms and journalists these are intended for? The mixed outcomes negatively impact the operations and internal dynamics of the newsrooms, particularly in the Global South, where technology dependence is still hindered by persistent obstacles such as a lack of technological infrastructure, or in some cases, government policies (Abtidon, 2026). So, in our attempt to "innovate against all odds" as de-Lima-Santos (2026) puts it, or solve the problem of intense "reliance on Western technologies that are linguistically and culturally ill-fitted to local realities" (Hasan, 2026, p. 40), ensuring that the transformation of the newsroom from an environment of editorial production into a site of socio-techno struggle should not be a by-product.

4.2. Interview Analysis

To complement the walkthrough findings presented in the previous section, semi-structured interviews were conducted with founders/managers of Dubawa Chatbot, ChatJourno, MyAIFactChecker, and ChatVE (see Table 1). The analysis yielded six themes covering project background and intent; design and functionality; usability and engagement; technical and operational challenges; vision, impact, and improvement; and policy support for the studied AI tools. Together, these themes show how design choices, data and language constraints, platform dependencies, and funding realities all act together to shape how these tools serve the purposes they set out to serve or not.

Table 1. Interview respondents.

S/N	Organization	Role
R1	ChatJourno	Co-founder
R2	Dubawa Chatbot	Product lead
R3	MyAIFactChecker	Lead project manager
R4	ChatVE	Founder
R5	Dubawa Chatbot	Software engineer

4.2.1. Project Background and Intent

Across the responses, we observe that the developers' motivations for building the tools were drawn from: domain knowledge and newsroom experience (R1); technical skill in product development and management (R4); a tactical decision to situate the technology so it meets people in a platform (WhatsApp) where they already are (R2); and the rather personal, lived problem of a manager whose grandparents habitually forwarded dubious, often harmful social-media messages to him (R3), prompting him to do something about it.

Put precisely, our respondents were candid about the specific journalistic gaps they intend to address, and their proposed mechanisms for closing them are tellingly varied. Across the interviews we can isolate at least four distinct task-level problems the tools aim to address: (a) improve news draft quality and reduce editing workload through writing, rewriting, summarizing, and transcribing (R1); (b) ensure rapid verification of viral claims in all formats and detect news trends through backend monitoring (R2); (c) ensure democratized, grassroots fact-checking and capacity building through fellowships and API openness to enable other

newsroom to integrate the tool's functionality (R3); and (d) detect questionable claims, gather supporting evidence, and return a clear, justified verdict with source links and a truth label to users (R4).

4.2.2. Design and Functionality

Design choices, as narrated by respondents, are rarely purely technical; they are also deliberate translations of newsroom tasks into code. ChatJourno's founding team, "two technical guys, two journalists," made a deliberate social-technical decision so that the model would "tell you where the data is coming from" (R1); Dubawa's team insisted on a menu-based WhatsApp flow and backend trend-monitoring so that "our fact checkers know the trends and can carry out further investigations" (R2); MyAIFactChecker prioritized language coverage and an offline mode precisely because "cost of data is high in Nigeria and the grassroots must be able to use the tool" (R3).

We find that most teams rely on external LLM APIs (OpenAI GPT-3.5/4; R2, R3, R4, R5), while ChatJourno (R1) reported using natural language processing (NLP), transformer-based audio processing systems, and locally developed model components; however, the respondent declined to disclose the specific underlying LLM used. The pattern is consonant with what scholars describe as a "managed-services" path to productization in low-resourced and constrained settings (van Dijck et al., 2018). As for Dubawa Chatbot, its reliance on WhatsApp, while innovative, creates a dependency on a private platform's infrastructure and business rules. ChatVE's unfortunate tale tells us that such dependency can be risky. ChatVE started conceptually strong as an in-thread verification tool on X that served a stateful purpose of fact-checking and evidence retrieval, but was abruptly humbled by platform economics when X/Twitter's API pricing changed, forcing the team to, in their words, "roll things back on our web application" (R4). This experience is an empirical demonstration of the platform-dependency problems scholars theorize, in which platforms are infrastructural actors whose policies and pricing inscribe values and create lock-in, and those choices can quickly reconfigure who can sustain particular public interest services (Gillespie, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018). In sum, we note that the design choices for these tools were largely informed by (a) careful participatory needs assessment (MyAIFactChecker's fellowships, Dubawa's consultations), (b) pragmatic, context-sensitive engineering (WhatsApp deployment, language support), (c) human oversight and governance features (editorial supervision and trend monitoring), and (d) a sustainability plan that acknowledges platform power and recurring costs.

4.2.3. Usability and Engagement

Usability is the point of contact where a developer's theory of change meets the impatient body of a working reporter; and in the developers' accounts, we hear repeatedly and insistently that the tool's vision is to save time, reduce cognitive friction, and slot into the journalist's day without asking them to reinvent the way they work:

> What is most important to me personally…is for it to save you time and effort, right….Normally, you will write your story in 30 minutes, one hour; with ChatJourno, you can do it in 5 minutes to 10 minutes, so you can then use the remaining minutes…for investigation, going on the field…calling police…calling government officials to verify news directly. (R1)

Thus, journalists are more comfortable with behind-the-scenes uses of AI (to assist and optimize efficiency) than with tools that substitute for news judgment. MyAIFactChecker's lead voices a similar opinion: "We do not want you to…contract your reasoning to MyAIFactChecker….It is complementary to your work….The team keeps a visible feedback button…it makes us train the chatbot better" (R3). This also resonates with Diakopoulos's argument that automation must augment human judgment in high-stakes domains like news, not eclipse it (Diakopoulos, 2019).

Despite local engagements with the tools, competition from the big players persists. The ChatJourno lead admitted, however spitefully, that many Nigerian journalists already experiment with ChatGPT, so the struggle has been to offer differentiated, task-specific affordances that general LLMs do not: "The more they use ChatGPT…the more they are exposed to fake news and misinformation…because Sam Altman does not care about journalists, Sam Altman cares about Big Tech" (R1), implying that when journalists turn to generalist systems like ChatGPT, they risk importing questionable data and unverifiable claims into their workflow. This is echoed in broader scholarly debates on "platform capture," where Big Tech's priorities in scaling AI often marginalize domain-specific needs, and in the case of journalism, needs such as transparency, source verification, or editorial ethics (Moran, 2023).

4.2.4. Challenges and Adaptation

The developers' answers about their biggest technical and operational challenges made it clear that some were less concerned with "will this model run?" and more concerned with "how would mistakes and hallucinations from the model affect the Nigerian news ecology?", which suggests that they grasp the field's delicacy and the real consequences of a faulty or unreliable AI:

> We cannot leave ChatJourno to hallucinate, because if it hallucinates…your mistakes can go a long way. If a journalist published a story on *The Cable*, within the space of 10 minutes…20 to 30 newsrooms would have copied it….We do not have the grace to make such mistakes. (R1)

Research on generative AI and the ethics of automation has warned that LLMs can confidently fabricate facts, like stochastic parrots, producing fluent but ungrounded assertions that can be socially toxic when passed off as authority (Bender et al., 2021). The ChatJourno lead further notes that building a high-functioning model trained on local data is costly:

> If you wanted to subscribe to an API right now per month, you must have about $490, and that's close to a million Naira each month….We would not be sustainable….We needed to train our model deeply on local news….We were faced with the problem of…should we scrape the news from the newsroom or…talk to them when they are ready to give us their news. (R1)

That dilemma—scrape and risk legal/ethical transgressions, or solicit formal partnerships and face slow uptake and limited datasets—is a recurring constraint for journalistic AI innovations. As Brittain (2025) notes, these litigations and public conflicts between publishers and AI firms are recurring because content licensing has become a live political cost for any team that contemplates using large amounts of news data for training. ChatVE's narrative is even more pronounced as their X-integrated tool was rendered untenable when API pricing changed (R4). That very policy shock has been described by commentators as an infrastructural decision that reshuffles the calculus of viability for dozens of downstream civic services (Mehta, 2023).

In terms of adaptation barriers, developers mentioned fear and low digital literacy among older journalists as adoption barriers: "The older generation…feels AI will take their job…they discourage younger journalists to use it" (R3); ChatVE's founder likewise laments the "lack of will to actually adopt the use of AI" in some newsrooms (R4). Studies similarly find that journalists, in particular, are pragmatic adopters who demand transparency, verifiability, and clear editorial governance before settling to use AI for news work (Mohammed et al., 2024).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Placing the findings regarding functionality and usability of journalism-focused AI models in the larger context of AI tools, we found that it is not completely contrary to the overwhelming data showing that many AI models often do not work. This is not surprising because, as a discourse, the functionality of AI models is unfortunately disregarded and typically drowned out by the hype, excitement, and promises of AI, automation, and machine learning. In recent years, we've seen an overwhelming amount of functional failure with real-world impact typically emanating from engineering, overpromising of AI capabilities, system malfunction, and communication—all concerns that should be explicitly mentioned in AI ethics guidelines and principle statements, but they aren't (Raji et al., 2022).

In the specific case of the journalism-focused tools examined here, our walkthroughs show clear differences in performance. Dubawa Chatbot was the strongest performer because it was fully functional, and its WhatsApp integration made it relatively easy to use. The tool handled heavy query loads well, and most prompts returned accurate verification, although it could still give generic answers to very new or unusually phrased claims. ChatJourno was near-fully functional, as its drafting, rephrasing, and brainstorming features worked well, and the interface was simple, but the backstory retrieval feature was not functional and was not up-to-date, which limited its usefulness for recent events. MyAIFactChecker was also near-fully functional. Its navigation and design were usable, and many checks succeeded, but it sometimes failed to fetch or verify very recent or very old claims, and its sentiment feature was unreliable in testing. ChatVE, however, was not functional for journalists at the time of the walkthrough exercise because access was blocked behind a demo request that never materialized. Its core verification features were unreachable, and the interface mixed unrelated B2B booking features, which made the tool drift away from its intended journalistic purpose.

Further, due to the fact that mainstream AI tools indeed occupy an overwhelming market share of the generative AI environment, which leaves little to no room for niche AI tools such as ChatVE, ChatJourno, Dubawa Chatbot, and MyAIFactChecker to compete, locally developed AI models must be set to compete in environments where they seem to thrive, such as WhatsApp, as we've seen with Dubawa Chatbot. However, lately Big Tech is also venturing into such terrain. In mid-2025, the global tool, Perplexity AI, launched a fact-checking chatbot on WhatsApp. To many, this is just a normal revelation; however, "to those working in the information ecosystem, particularly in the Global South, it felt like something more: a sign of just how quickly Big Tech is expanding into domain-specific spaces once led by local innovation" (Babatunde, 2025, para. 1).

The question is, what does this mean for locally developed AI models? It's simple. Niche tools must achieve promised goals with efficiency and effectiveness because "user acceptance of a system is significantly impacted by its usability, which is a vital facet of non-functional software qualities" (Namoun et al., 2024,

p. 672). This probably explains why we have not seen a rapid adoption of these locally developed journalism-focused AI models in Nigeria, because beyond launch, when they work, the joys of adoption must also reflect in the necessity of adopting AI to enhance content standards rather than sabotage or stifle them (Palla & Kostarella, 2025), because what is the use of a fact-checking platform that cannot fact-check in real time in 2025?

Overall, we maintain that there's an urgent need for journalism organizations, particularly in the Global South, to continue creating locally developed AI platforms; however, for platforms' goals to align with their functionalities, there has to be a full understanding of the delusion of AI functionality.

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Conflict of Interests

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Data Availability

Data used for this study are available upon request.

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Algorithmic Silences: Postcolonial Blind Spots in Dutch AI Media Discourse

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Abstract

The Kingdom of the Netherlands comprises four countries: the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten, as well as three public entities located on the islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba. All these regions are former Dutch colonies and are located in the Global South. News coverage from former colonisers toward their former colonies is shaped by historical frameworks, political interests, evolving global power dynamics, and unequal news creation. This study specifically focuses on AI coverage in European-Dutch and Caribbean-Dutch newspapers, analysing 128 articles published between 2015 and 2025. By using a structured approach to analyse AI positioning, agency attribution, political-geographical framing, and epistemic visibility, this study develops a framework for examining and understanding how news media construct narratives along colonial lines. The analysis uncovers a structural imbalance: European-Dutch media rarely engage with AI developments in the Dutch Caribbean, producing what de Sousa Santos (2015) calls a "sociology of absences," while Caribbean outlets frequently report on European-Dutch contexts and cite Dutch policymakers, institutions, and technologies. Across both media systems, AI is predominantly described as an externally produced technology, reinforcing Northern epistemic authority and positioning the Caribbean as a recipient rather than a co-producer of AI futures. These patterns reflect structural postcolonial inequalities within the Kingdom's media ecosystem. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and locally informed reporting on AI to ensure that technological developments and societal implications in the Dutch Caribbean are part of the wider public debate.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; coloniality; Dutch Caribbean; epistemic visibility; Global North–South relations; journalism

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1. Introduction

In January 2018, the European-Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* reported on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the tourism industry, including a robot bartender at a resort on Curaçao (Eldering, 2018). The article relied exclusively on sources from the Dutch travel industry and omitted perspectives from Caribbean actors. Such selective sourcing reflects broader critiques of journalism's reliance on elite sources (Carlson & Lewis, 2019) and blind spots of "gender, race, intersectional concerns, and settler colonialism" (Callison & Young, 2020, p. 200). As this article will argue, it exemplifies a broader pattern: European-Dutch news outlets typically pay minimal attention to technological developments, local knowledge, and actors in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

Despite being part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the six islands (and former colonies) in the Dutch Caribbean—Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba—occupy an unequal position within the broader political and media landscape of the Kingdom. Earlier studies have demonstrated persistent disparities in policy implementation and visibility between the European and Caribbean parts of the Kingdom (Council for the Environment and Infrastructure, 2025; Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022). These disparities extend into technology domains where strategic governmental technological visions of the Netherlands remain disproportionately oriented toward European-Dutch interests (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, 2019; Sheikh et al., 2023). A similar pattern can be seen in news coverage. Fransisco and Terburg (2026) argue that Dutch news media based in the European Netherlands often overlook the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, writing:

> Although Caribbean journalists provide solid coverage of current events and question local administrators about their policies, this local journalistic expertise receives little attention in European-Dutch media….European-Dutch journalists who currently report on and about the islands often do so on their own initiative. (p. 23)

Research on global AI news coverage shows systematic differences between how journalists in the Global North (Chuan et al., 2019; De Cooker, 2025; Nguyen & Hekman, 2024; Vergeer, 2020) and Global South (Brokensha & Conradie, 2021; Ittefaq et al., 2025) frame and interpret AI. However, little is known about how former colonial powers portray AI developments in their former colonies, or how these portrayals reproduce existing postcolonial power relations. Furthermore, there has not yet been sufficient research into the narratives surrounding AI circulating in these former colonies and how these developments are interpreted from their own perspective. This study aims to bridge that gap by using a postcolonial and development lens in analysing which narratives dominate, whose expertise is foregrounded or omitted, and how AI is positioned within broader postcolonial relationships inside the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

2. Theoretical Framework

By covering AI, journalists shape their audience's perception of the technology and impact how society approaches and understands this technology (Broussard et al., 2019; Sartori & Theodorou, 2022). Previous research on reporting of AI mainly focused on historical representations (Bory, 2019; Natale & Ballatore, 2020) and North American and European media coverage (Bunz & Braghieri, 2022; Chuan et al., 2019; Nguyen & Hekman, 2024; Sun et al., 2020). In the Dutch context, news coverage of AI increased

significantly from 2014 onwards, from topics such as robots and robot football to developments in big tech, with the content often relying heavily on American media (Magalhães & Smit, 2026; Vergeer, 2020).

2.1. Narratives of AI

Despite growing scholarship, Chubb et al. (2024) state that there is an AI story crisis, in which narratives from non-Anglophone and Global South contexts remain underrepresented, while historical, sociocultural, political, and literary AI narratives from the Global North dominate critical discourse on AI (Eke & Ogoh, 2022; Ittefaq et al., 2025; Thussu, 2022). From a sociological perspective, narratives are defined as "organising visions" for society (Dourish & Bell, 2011, p. 1) and function as devices to give meaning to social and cultural changes (Sartori & Theodorou, 2022). AI narratives are embedded in broader sociotechnical imaginaries, defined as "collectively held and institutionally stabilised visions of desirable futures" supported by developments in science and technology (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015, p. 4). These sociotechnical imaginaries serve as powerful "infrastructures of imagining" that blur the boundaries between real and imagined worlds, thereby co-producing the social orders they envision (Sismondo, 2020, p. 505). These imaginaries shape how AI is interpreted, legitimised, and circulated across media, policy, and public discourse. Imaginaries about intelligent machines long predate contemporary AI research (Cave et al., 2020). In modern contexts, narratives often take the form of what Marx (2000) and Nye (1994, 2004) call the technological sublime: narratives that celebrate technological progress while obscuring its contradictions, risks, or social tensions. Nye (2004) highlights that "the most successful of these little narratives are those that present an innovation as not just desirable, but inevitable" (p. 160). It is this inevitability, according to Bareis and Katzenbach (2022), that can be used as a rhetorical device that strips away human agency and forces society to adapt to a new technology such as AI. Duarte et al. (2025) delineate that societies can tackle this inevitability by resisting, refusing, reclaiming, and reimagining AI narratives and innovations, but did not operationalise this in a news media context.

More recent academic work shifts attention to how these narratives are created and reproduced through news media. Studies demonstrate that journalistic storytelling frequently relies on binary and polarised narratives, using myths (such as Prometheus, Pandora's box, and Icarus), archetypes, or simplified tropes such as the "scary robot" (Cave et al., 2019; De Masi et al., 2025; Sartori & Bocca, 2023). Cave et al. (2019) offer a more delineated typology (see Table 1) that identifies eight widely existing AI narratives divided

Table 1. The hopeful and fearful AI narratives.

Immortality	AI might revolutionise medicine, treatment, and drugs so that we could live forever
Inhumanity	AI might enhance our bodies so much that we become more machine than human
Ease	AI might make our day-to-day lives easier because we could ask computers to do more tasks for us
Obsolescence	AI might mean we become over-reliant on machines and replace the need for humans in jobs, relationships, and socialising
Gratification	AI might become the perfect friend, there to listen whenever we need and ready to meet our every desire
Alienation	AI might cater to all our desires so well that we prefer AI interaction to human interaction
Dominance	AI might help strengthen our military power because it could provide smarter weapons
Uprising	AI might enable computers to become more powerful than us

into hopeful and fearful narratives, spread among four dichotomies: (a) immortality–inhumanity; (b) ease–obsolescence; (c) gratification–alienation; and (d) dominance–uprising. Their study showed that these narrative structures help simplify complex AI phenomena and make them publicly understandable and identifiable.

2.2. Postcolonial Asymmetries and Proximity

To analyse how AI is represented across the former coloniser–colonised divide, this study draws on the concept of coloniality and on insights from cultural and postcolonial studies. Both the European-Dutch and the Caribbean-Dutch parts of the Dutch Kingdom have been through a period of decolonisation, which is referred to by Ashcroft et al. (2024) as the intellectual, political, economic, and societal work concerned with the restoration of land and life following the end of historical colonial periods. Coloniality refers to the persistence of hierarchical power structures and knowledge regimes that endure beyond formal decolonisation and continue to shape whose experiences, expertise, and worldviews are recognised as legitimate by "the historical processes of dispossession, enslavement, appropriation and extraction central to the emergence of the modern world" (Bhambra & de Sousa Santos, 2017, p. 9).

Quijano's (2007) colonial matrix of power offers a useful framework here: It identifies four interlinked domains of control—economy, authority, gender/sexuality, and subjectivity/knowledge—through which colonial hierarchies persist. The epistemologies of technology are influenced by the colonial matrix of power as in this line of thought, local technologies are viewed as primitive and traditional (Muldoon & Wu, 2023). For this study, the domain of knowledge and subjectivity is particularly relevant, as it highlights how news media narratives privilege certain epistemic authorities while marginalising others. This relates directly to epistemic injustice, which describes how individuals or groups are denied credibility or are excluded as legitimate knowers based on structural prejudice (Byskov, 2021). In a postcolonial media context, this manifests as uneven epistemic visibility and especially the stakeholder condition within this concept: Actors from the Global North often appear as experts, while Caribbean voices remain peripheral or absent. Such omissions reproduce the knowledge hierarchy within the colonial matrix of power. These dynamics manifest strongly in news media systems: Journalism plays a central role in constructing meaning, reproducing dominant discourses, and determining whose knowledge is rendered visible or invisible. This is discernible in Okolo et al.'s (2022) observation that historical inequalities in access to technology and development have led societies in the Global South to be cautious about AI. Furthermore, in the Global North, technology is often a specialised "news beat," with reporters receiving special training to cover AI news, while in the Global South, specialised technology editorial teams are often lacking. Instead, reporting on AI is usually done by general economic or political editors (Kamboh et al., 2024). These inequalities are reinforced through development framing, in which technologies such as AI are depicted as originating in powerful centres of the Global North and arriving in the Caribbean as ready-made solutions. This narrative positions Northern institutions as the architects of technological progress and Caribbean actors as passive recipients, mirroring historical patterns of dependency.

Journalism itself is an inherently ideological and value-laden profession (Deuze, 2005). One of its core selection logics is proximity, which determines newsworthiness based on geographical, cultural, or emotional closeness between journalists and events (Shoemaker et al., 2007). In the Caribbean, proximity to the US influences media norms and reporting conventions (Rotmeijer, 2019). The geographic distance between the European

Netherlands and Dutch Caribbean could help explain the low degree of media attention from European-Dutch news organisations for news events in the Dutch Caribbean (Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022).

These patterns reflect the power geometries described by Massey (1991, 1993). Massey argues that regions are unequally positioned within global flows of information, resources, and infrastructures and rely on historically differentiated relationships between the Global North and Global South (Chang, 1998; Ricaurte, 2022), and relationships between colonisers and colonised (Birhane, 2023). Natale et al. (2025, p. 1061) state that understanding AI in the context of power geometries "helps consider not just positions but also the relationships between different actors." The European Netherlands functions as a metropole with greater access to and control over technological narratives, while Caribbean regions occupy a constrained position within these flows. Together, the concepts of coloniality, the colonial matrix of power, epistemic visibility, development framing, and power geometries provide a lens for understanding how postcolonial hierarchies shape whose technological futures and imaginaries are visible or remain absent in AI reporting across the Kingdom.

2.3. The Dutch Caribbean

The Dutch Caribbean consists of six islands: Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba. These islands share a colonial history as part of the former Dutch Empire. Until 1954, the islands, with currently around 330,000 inhabitants, were governed as colonies, and between 1954 and 2010, the islands were united as the Netherlands Antilles. Although their constitutional status changed in 2010, long-standing asymmetries between the European Netherlands and the islands continue to shape political, economic, and informational relations (Oostindie, 2012). Research by Oostindie and Klinkers (2003) shows that the Netherlands did not play an active political role in its overseas territories until the 1990s, a stance they refer to as "careless colonialism" (p. 57).

The news media landscape on the Dutch Caribbean islands is strongly influenced by broader Caribbean media and communication cultures, which have been shaped by the small scale of the multilingual island communities and deep-rooted oral traditions within the region (Rotmeijer, 2019; Storr, 2016). These characteristics, combined with the strong administrative position of local governments, often constrain critical journalism and limit the development of robust watchdog functions (Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022; Storr, 2016). Local media organisations also operate with restricted financial and professional resources, which reduces their capacity for independent reporting and investigative work and results in news articles frequently relying on press releases and external sources such as other news media or press agencies (Abraham et al., 2023; Veenendaal, 2017).

The Curaçaoan press operates as the region's most influential media hub with the *Antiliaans Dagblad* as its main newspaper (Rotmeijer, 2019). Other outlets such as the local newspaper *The Daily Herald* and the NTR's multilingual Caribisch Netwerk demonstrate extensive inter-island and Kingdom-wide interconnections. Concurrently, the Caribbean media landscape is heavily influenced by North American and European narratives: Representations originating from the US and Europe significantly shape how Caribbean people understand their own region (Pertierra & Horst, 2009). By contrast, when European-Dutch media depict events in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, they tend to emphasise crises such as hurricanes, corruption, or crime, which contributes to a structural knowledge gap among European Dutch audiences (Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022).

While taking into account the global relationships and interactions that influence news narratives about AI and its creation, circulation, and use (Jobin et al., 2019), this study follows up on Amrute et al.'s (2022) claim that AI cannot be addressed as a global phenomenon without carefully investigating its embeddedness in local contexts and interplay with global and local dimensions of AI in a news context. The following key research questions will be answered:

> RQ1: What are the dominant news narratives on AI in Caribbean Dutch news media and in European Dutch news media covering Caribbean Dutch contexts between 2015 and 2025?
>
> RQ2: To what extent do the narratives of AI development in the Dutch Caribbean reflect postcolonial power relations in terms of agency, development, and epistemic visibility?

3. Methodology

This study employs narrative analysis, based on a novel operationalisation of AI news coverage grounded in theory from science and technology studies and developmental studies, and draws upon a dataset of news articles from three Caribbean-Dutch and three European-Dutch-based newspapers ($N = 128$).

3.1. Source Selection

Articles from three European-Dutch newspapers (*De Telegraaf*, *NRC*, and *De Volkskrant*) were retrieved from the NexisUni database using the Dutch search terms "*kunstmatige intelligentie*" OR "*artificiële intelligentie*" (both meaning "artificial intelligence" in Dutch) and collected for the period from January 2015 to December 2025. These three newspapers were selected because of their high national reach and their distinct journalistic profiles. The island-based newspapers (*Antilliaans Dagblad*, *24Ora*, and *The Daily Herald*) were selected on their geographical spread in both selecting media from the windward and leeward islands as well as their diverse sets of audiences. The Caribbean-Dutch articles were gathered through the archives of *Antilliaans Dagblad*, *24Ora*, and *The Daily Herald*, using equivalent Dutch and English search terms in the media's own archives and Google News.

A two-step inclusion procedure for the European-Dutch and Caribbean-Dutch articles was applied. First, opinion pieces, advertorials, and articles unrelated to AI applications or societal implications were excluded. Second, European-Dutch articles were only retained if they referenced Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, or Saba, identified using a regex filter for the island names. From an initial corpus of 2,365 European-Dutch AI-related articles, this approach returned four relevant articles. Caribbean-Dutch articles were included if they discussed AI, regardless of geographical reference. Combined, this resulted in a final dataset of 128 news articles (see Table 2, and Appendix C in the Supplementary File for a list of all analysed articles), the vast majority of which originated from the Caribbean-Dutch sample. The first author conducted the primary screening with assistance from a research aide; the second author reviewed a subset of 120 articles for consistency. This resulted in a Krippendorff's alpha for the inclusion process of 1.000 for the Caribbean-Netherlands inclusion and 0.7952 for the AI-related inclusion. Given the region-specific focus of this project, this tentative alpha was deemed sufficient.

Table 2. Final corpus.

Outlet	Article count
24Ora	8
Antilliaans Dagblad	100
The Daily Herald	16
NRC	2
De Telegraaf	1
De Volkskrant	1

3.2. Narrative Analysis

The narrative analysis combined deductive and inductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a narrative-analytic framework that builds methodically on the work of Cave et al. (2019), with a novel framework for the identification of local narratives. To answer RQ1, the eight narrative scenarios proposed by Cave et al. (2019)—four hope-driven and four fear-driven narratives—were deductively identified within the corpus. Inductive coding was additionally used to foreground knowledge- and climate-related narratives. Inductive coding was additionally used to foreground sustainability- and knowledge-related narratives, whose definitions are presented in Appendix B in the Supplementary File.

To answer RQ2, four novel analytical steps were operationalised based on Nye's (1994) theoretical concept of the technological sublime combined with literature from colonial studies, including Byskov's concept of epistemic injustice.

Recent studies have taken the first steps towards analysing AI narratives in a Global South context (Eke & Ogoh, 2022; Farias Mota, 2026; Nkoala et al., 2026). Nkoala et al. (2026) examined the African context, focusing on article placement, authorship, and the use of buzzwords, and highlighted a limited presence of local journalists covering AI and local perspectives that perpetuate the notion that AI is primarily a Western-driven phenomenon. Whilst this offers valuable insights into how AI coverage reproduces colonial patterns, an analysis of power dynamics requires a closer examination of agency and inevitability. This was operationalised in four novel analytical steps:

1. Positioning AI as a product: Is AI framed as an external, off-the-shelf product entering the region, as a locally rooted initiative that meets local needs, or both?

2. Agency attribution: What scope for action are local actors given? Are they portrayed as active actors or recipients of the technology?

3. Political-geographical: Within what geographical framework is the technological narrative situated? Is it linked to the Global North, the Global South, or an EU or Dutch context?

4. Epistemic visibility: Who is permitted to speak with authority? Does the expertise of external powers take centre stage, or is there scope for local claims to knowledge and co-production?

By identifying these local narratives and contrasting them against narratives of the Global North, the article seeks to follow the call to de-westernise communication research, specifically on research on AI narratives (Waisbord, 2022). Atlas.TI was used during the narrative analysis process. The full codebook is provided in Appendix A.

3.3. Intercoder Agreement, Positionality, and Limitations

To test the codebook, a subset of five articles was jointly coded by the first and second authors. Before settling on a sufficient intercoder reliability, the authors then coded the 123 remaining articles independently, each coding a shared subset ($n = 61$), leading to a Krippendorff's alpha rating of 0.91. The third author reviewed 15% of all articles. These articles were selected at random. All coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved by group consensus.

The authors come from the Global North, self-identify as white, and are located in the Netherlands. Although we have published research on topics such as AI and inclusion of perspectives from less visible groups in media discourse (De Cooker et al., 2026; van Wijk et al., 2025), we acknowledge our homogeneous setup. Throughout the research process, we held four informal discussions over the three-month research period with multiple media professionals and/or with AI expertise with origins in the Dutch Caribbean to inform and refine our research process. These conversations informed decisions regarding data selection and interpretation; notably, they contributed to the inclusion of *The Daily Herald* to ensure adequate representation of the Windward Islands.

As European-based researchers, our capacity to fully comprehend and represent the Dutch Caribbean context is inherently constrained. While expert consultations supported contextual understanding, they cannot replace lived experience, and our interpretations may reflect a predominantly European-Dutch perspective.

4. Analysis and Findings

References to newspaper headlines throughout this section refer to articles included in the studied corpus. Complete metadata (title, newspaper, and publication date) are provided in Appendix C.

4.1. Coverage Gap

News interest in AI developments in the Caribbean-Dutch region rapidly increases from 2022 to 2025 (Figure 1). News articles from the European-Dutch newspapers *NRC*, *De Telegraaf*, and *De Volkskrant* about AI in the Caribbean area of the Netherlands only make up a small fraction of all articles. This Dutch sample was drawn from an initial corpus of 2,365 AI-related articles, to which a regex-based filter for references to the Dutch-Caribbean islands was applied.

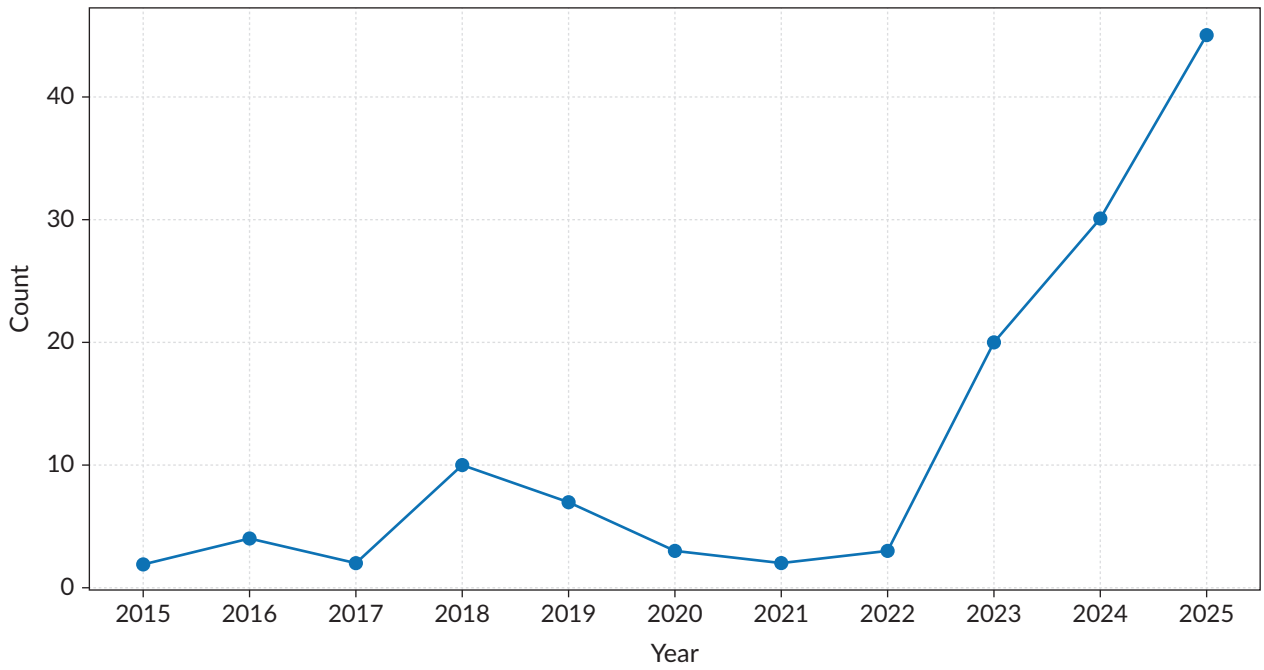


Figure 1. Volume of AI articles over time.

Only four news articles, accounting for less than 0.2% of the whole European-Dutch corpus, indicate a weak integration of the Dutch-Caribbean region within AI-related news coverage (Table 3). A qualitative reading of these four European-Dutch articles confirms this pattern. When the Caribbean islands are mentioned, they appear only as background locations rather than as sites of AI development. For example, in a report on the increase in AI-controlled autopilots in aviation, Curaçao is only mentioned as a flight destination. The lack of reporting on AI innovation in the Dutch Caribbean and the almost complete absence of local actors in Dutch-European reporting indicates very limited visibility of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom within the Dutch-European news agenda. The European-Dutch context is strongly represented in the Caribbean newspapers analysed. In 27% of the Caribbean-based articles, journalists refer to European-Dutch locations, actors, or stakeholders. *Antilliaans Dagblad* features 31 articles that reference this European-Dutch context, followed by *24Ora* (three articles). Examples include an article on European-Dutch university projects on AI and plastics in the seas, an article on cabinet conflicts concerning funding for AI in healthcare, and an article on European-Dutch researchers visiting the Caribbean-Dutch islands to conduct AI-related workshops. *The Daily Herald* does not feature these references.

Table 3. AI-related articles published in European-Dutch newspapers (2015–2025).

Newspaper	Included articles	Articles involving AI in the Dutch Caribbean
NRC	841	2
De Telegraaf	781	1
De Volkskrant	743	1
Total	2,365	4

4.2. AI Narratives in European-Dutch and Caribbean-Dutch News Media

Figure 2 shows the distribution of narratives per narrative domain among AI coverage of European-Dutch and Caribbean-Dutch newspaper media. There is an emphasis on the ease that AI-related technologies such as AI-powered chatbots can bring ("AHATA biedt een seminar," 2024; "Maak kennis met Stati," 2025), which already results in a lower workload and a shorter work week ("Vierdaagse workweek voor AFAS," 2024). Also, there is a narrative focus on the perceived impact of generative AI technologies and the perception of these technologies as entities that copy and spread "huge amounts of copyrighted material" ("AI-bedrijf aangeklaagd," 2023) as well as distributing "conspiracy theories, infringes our privacy, flouts intellectual property rights and guzzles an enormous amount of energy" ("EU-parlement stemt in," 2023) with "huge" potential" ("Curaçao mee," 2025).

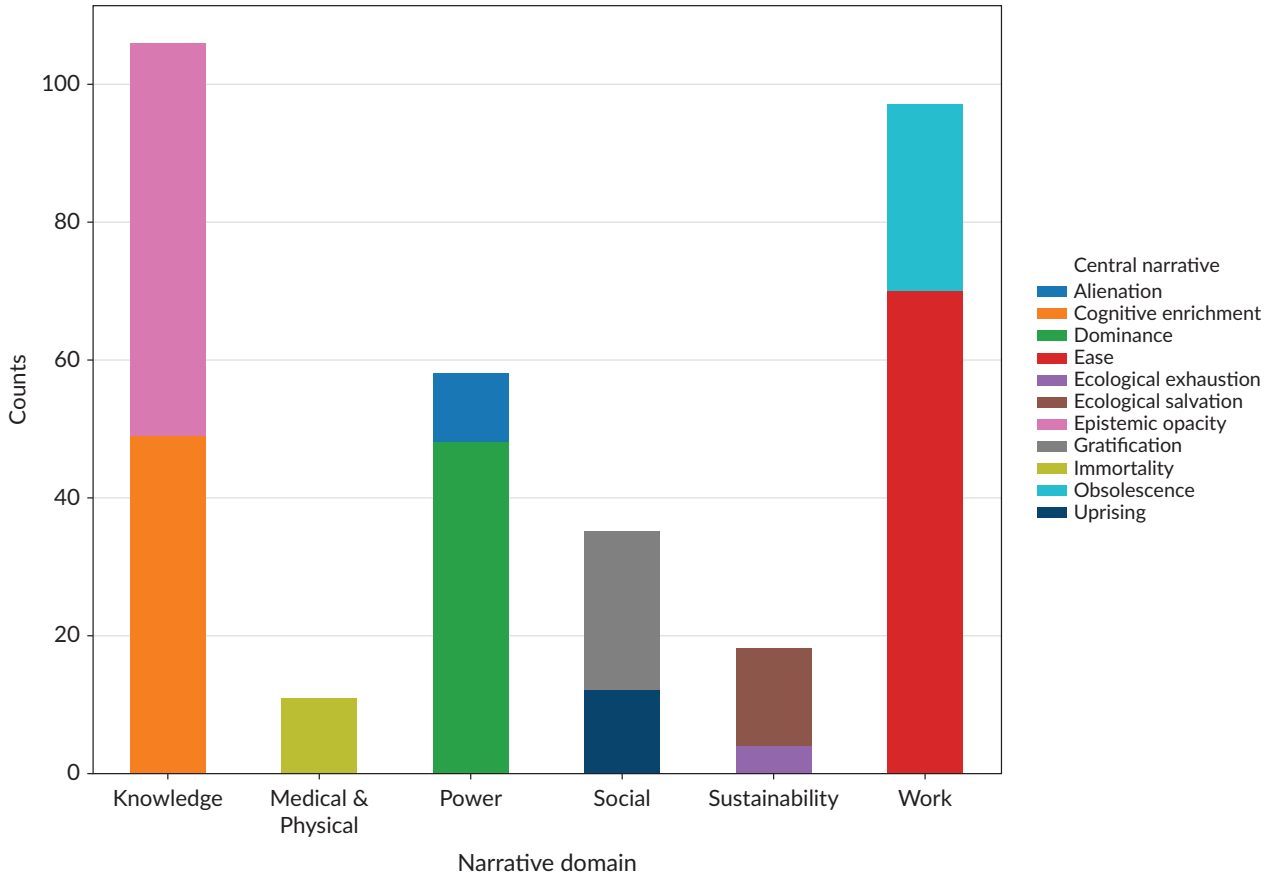


Figure 2. AI narratives per narrative domain in European-Dutch and Caribbean-Dutch newspapers.

This is encapsulated in the high identification of knowledge- and work-related narratives. Further references are made to the Dutch benefits scandal, in which the European-Dutch government deployed algorithms to detect fraudulent claims for benefits as a token example in which algorithmic opacity is depicted as a mechanism through which state institutions can perpetuate social harm, particularly against racialised or socio-economically marginalised groups. Another noticeable narrative is that of power, where the coverage goes beyond merely the military power discussed by Cave et al. (2019), moreover to the extent to which a country's survival is discussed in relation to AI development. AI development is narrated in terms of performative necessity, predominantly in coverage of the AI trade war between the US and China, but also

in a European-Dutch context focusing on recommendations of the European Commission, where it is noted that "investments in areas such as artificial intelligence are crucial to maintaining the Netherlands' position" ("Nederland in EU," 2022). Also in the Caribbean context, especially on Curaçao, the focus is on strategically "talking AI into being" (Bareis & Katzenbach, 2022, p. 863) in the region as a pioneer in adoption, when it positions itself as "leader in adoption in the Caribbean" whereby "action speaks louder than words" is required to "keep pace with these developments" ("Curaçao leider," 2025). For small island jurisdictions such as Curaçao, adopting the rhetoric of global AI competition can be understood as a strategy to position themselves within broader technological imaginaries and claim relevance in global digital developments. Curaçao, as a local actor, adopts the powerful rhetoric of global superpowers in order to gain legitimacy and assert its own regional sovereignty within the global digital order. This normalises AI as an indispensable technological solution for national economic modernisation, whereby the urgency of actions over words often pushes critical reflection on the technology itself into the background. An article in the *Antilliaans Dagblad* quotes Curaçao's Minister for Economic Development Ruisandro Cijntje on this point: "Curaçao must unite with other countries to remain at the forefront of AI developments" (Curaçao AI-strategie, 2024).

When looking at the proportion of coverage of these narratives by the analysed Dutch-Caribbean newspapers, Figure 3 shows a predominant emphasis on work-related narratives and less focus on knowledge-related narratives within coverage of *24Ora*. Headlines such as "ATA takes a step towards the future with its AI colleague Jonas" (24Ora, 2025) and "AHRA emphasises humanity in the future of work with AI" (24Ora, 2025), and coverage of AI use in healthcare facilities in the Dutch Caribbean illustrate this:

> Furthermore, artificial intelligence is considered a revolution in all areas of life. Nowadays, certain types of scans are easier and cheaper to perform and can be processed using a standard mobile phone. This

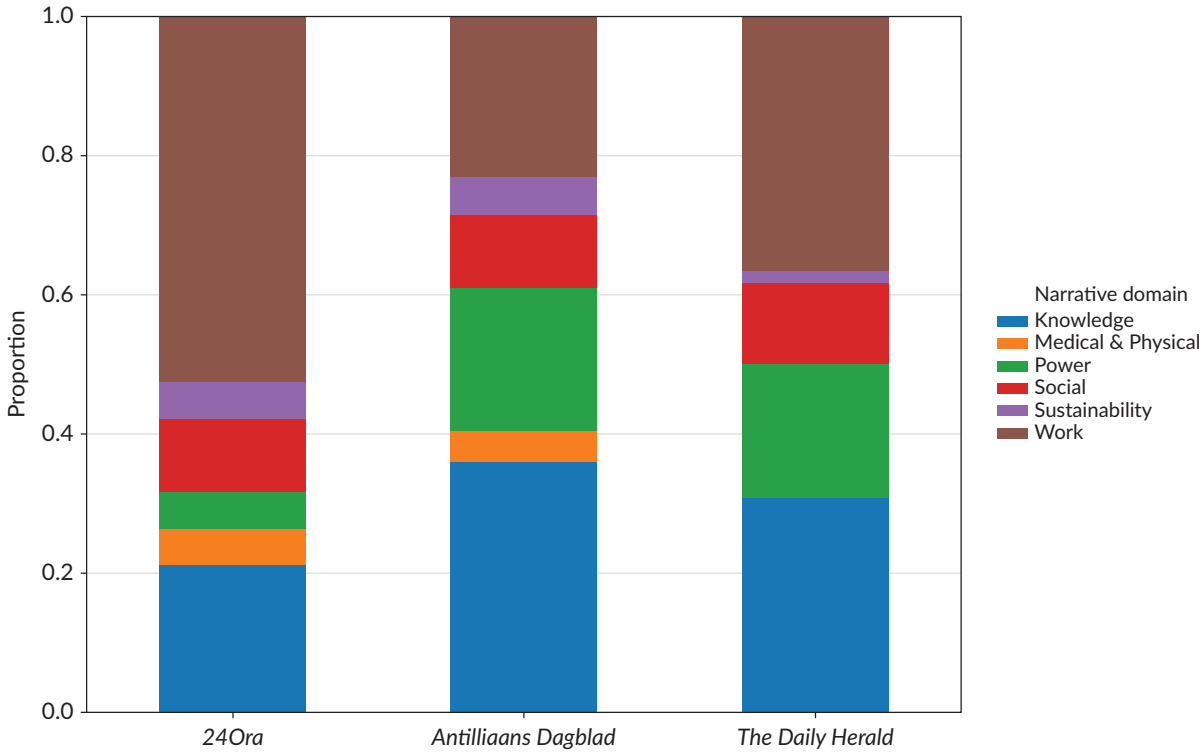


Figure 3. Narratives per Caribbean-Dutch newspaper in percentages.

> makes it easier for people to monitor their health, which means that many more people can be checked in less time. ("Jacco Vroegop (HOH)," 2024)

4.3. AI Development Narratives

The analysis of the identified development narratives shows that the Dutch Caribbean is consistently positioned as a recipient within externally defined AI futures. Figure 4 shows the distribution of development narratives and highlights that, in addition to the previously mentioned European-Dutch focus, the Caribbean-Dutch AI coverage is mainly oriented towards dominant technological trends in Western societies in the Global North, such as the US and Europe, or by multinational technology companies. AI technology is mostly externally created, which is highlighted by the identification of 78 narratives covering ready-made AI products such as ChatGPT ("Zorgen over nieuwsgebruik," 2023) or MidJourney ("AI: volwassen gezichten," 2023). When local AI tools feature in the coverage, like the chatbot Stati by the local Bureau of Statistics ("Maak kennis met 'Stati'," 2025), these are usually adaptations of externally made tools rather than home-grown products, explicitly designed to align with local traditions, values, and specific societal needs.

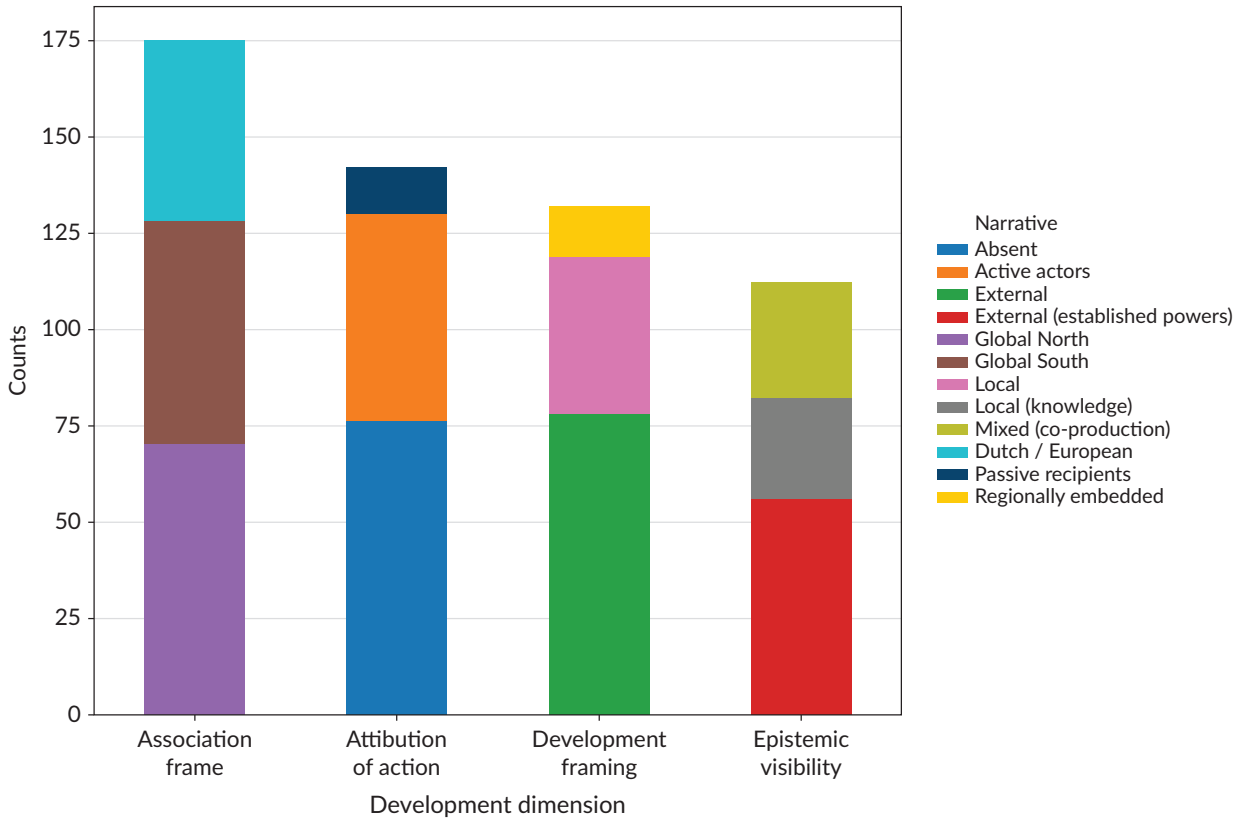
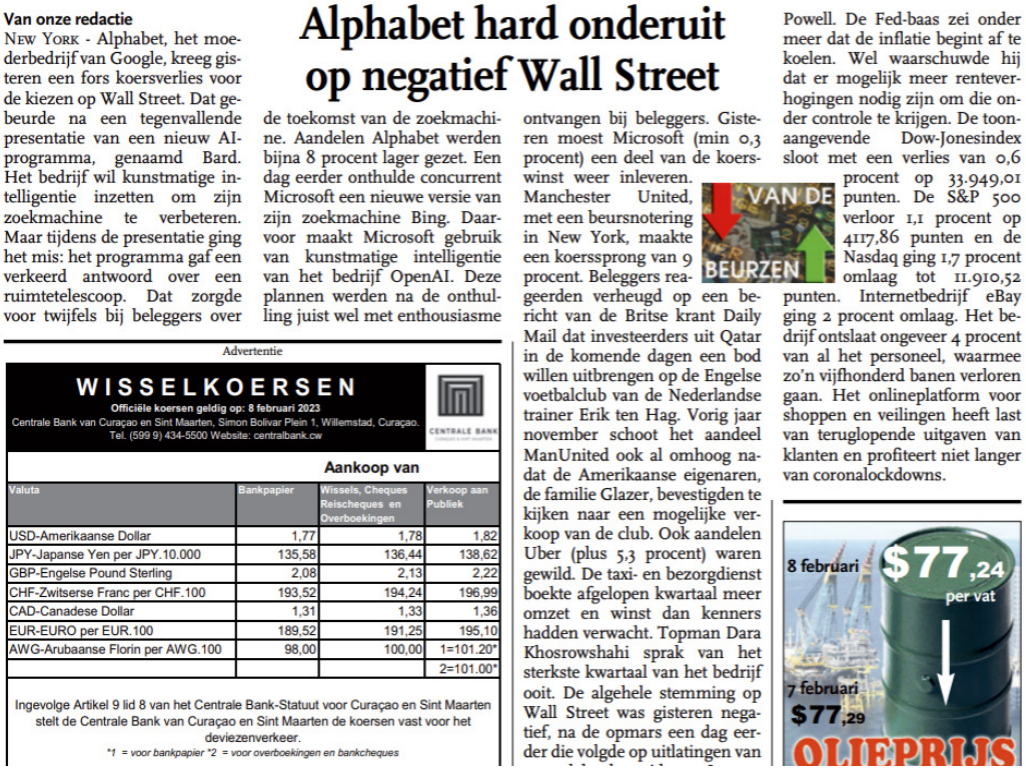


Figure 4. Development narratives per narrative.

This external development narrative positions the Global North as the locus of innovation and expertise. Caribbean media often reproduce this narrative positioning, which is evident, for example, when the *Antilliaans Dagblad* (Figure 5) reports on stock market developments involving AI companies, in which the technological future is validated almost exclusively through the lens of US financial markets and the

activities of major US-based technology firms. In such accounts, the technological future is interpreted through the performance and strategic positioning of companies such as Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, Nvidia, Microsoft, and Google, positioning the Caribbean primarily as a site of technological adoption.



Van onze redactie

Alphabet hard onderuit op negatief Wall Street

NEW YORK - Alphabet, het moederbedrijf van Google, kreeg gisteren een fors koersverlies voor de kiezen op Wall Street. Dat gebeurde na een tegenvallende presentatie van een nieuw AI-programma, genaamd Bard. Het bedrijf wil kunstmatige intelligentie inzetten om zijn zoekmachine te verbeteren. Maar tijdens de presentatie ging het mis: het programma gaf een verkeerd antwoord over een ruimtetelescoop. Dat zorgde voor twijfels bij beleggers over de toekomst van de zoekmachine. Aandelen Alphabet werden bijna 8 procent lager gezet. Een dag eerder onthulde concurrent Microsoft een nieuwe versie van zijn zoekmachine Bing. Daarvoor maakt Microsoft gebruik van kunstmatige intelligentie van het bedrijf OpenAI. Deze plannen werden na de onthulling juist wel met enthousiasme ontvangen bij beleggers. Gisteren moest Microsoft (min 0,3 procent) een deel van de koerswinst weer inleveren. Manchester United, met een beursnotering in New York, maakte een koerssprong van 9 procent. Beleggers reageerden verheugd op een bericht van de Britse krant Daily Mail dat investeerders uit Qatar in de komende dagen een bod willen uitbrengen op de Engelse voetbalclub van de Nederlandse trainer Erik ten Hag. Vorig jaar november schoot het aandeel ManUnited ook al omhoog nadat de Amerikaanse eigenaren, de familie Glazer, bevestigden te kijken naar een mogelijke verkoop van de club. Ook aandelen Uber (plus 5,3 procent) waren gewild. De taxi- en bezorgdienst boekte afgelopen kwartaal meer omzet en winst dan kenners hadden verwacht. Topman Dara Khosrowshahi sprak van het sterkste kwartaal van het bedrijf ooit. De algehele stemming op Wall Street was gisteren negatief, na de opmars een dag eerder die volgde op uitlatingen van Powell. De Fed-baas zei onder meer dat de inflatie begint af te koelen. Wel waarschuwde hij dat er mogelijk meer renteverhogingen nodig zijn om die onder controle te krijgen. De toonaangevende Dow-Jonesindex sloot met een verlies van 0,6 procent op 33.949,01 punten. De S&P 500 verloor 1,1 procent op 4117,86 punten en de Nasdaq ging 1,7 procent omlaag tot 11.910,52 punten. Internetbedrijf eBay ging 2 procent omlaag. Het bedrijf ontslaat ongeveer 4 procent van al het personeel, waarmee zo'n vijfhonderd banen verloren gaan. Het onlineplatform voor shoppen en veilingen heeft last van teruglopende uitgaven van klanten en profiteert niet langer van coronalockdowns.

VAN DE BEURZEN

Advertentie

WISSELKOERSEN

Officiële koersen geldig op: 8 februari 2023

Centrale Bank van Curaçao en Sint Maarten, Simon Bolivar Plein 1, Willemstad, Curaçao.
Tel. (599 9) 434-5500 Website: centralbank.cw

CENTRALE BANK

Aankoop van

Valuta	Bankpapier	Wissels, Cheques Reischeques en Overboekingen	Verkoop aan Publiek
USD-Amerikaanse Dollar	1,77	1,78	1,82
JPY-Japanse Yen per JPY.10.000	135,58	136,44	138,62
GBP-Engelse Pound Sterling	2,08	2,13	2,22
CHF-Zwitserse Franc per CHF.100	193,52	194,24	196,99
CAD-Canadese Dollar	1,31	1,33	1,36
EUR-EURO per EUR.100	189,52	191,25	195,10
AWG-Arubaanse Florin per AWG.100	98,00	100,00	1=101.20*
			2=101.00*

Ingevolge Artikel 9 lid 8 van het Centrale Bank-Statuut voor Curaçao en Sint Maarten stelt de Centrale Bank van Curaçao en Sint Maarten de koersen vast voor het deviezenverkeer.

*1 = voor bankpapier *2 = voor overboekingen en bankcheques

Figure 5. Example of a stock market-driven news article. Note: The headline translates as "Alphabet suffers heavy losses as Wall Street turns negative." Source: "Alphabet hard onderuit" (2023).

Such patterns resemble a colonial supply chain (Quijano, 2007) in which technological authority, legitimacy, and knowledge production flow unidirectionally from centre to periphery, without reciprocal dialogue. The Global North functions as the epistemic and material origin of AI, while Caribbean contexts are relegated to downstream positions of consumption and implementation. The emphasis on global metrics and corporate success—such as claims that Meta's Llama 2 model has been "downloaded 170 billion times" ("Nieuw AI-model Meta," 2024)—further abstracts AI from local contexts, rarely specifying how such technologies are adapted, applied, or contested within Caribbean societies. In this sense, AI operates as a floating signifier that is mobilised through global financial and technological narratives to stabilise existing geopolitical hierarchies (Ryazanov et al., 2024).

4.3.1. Absent Agency

The coverage also shows a second dominant pattern regarding the attribution of agency. Table 4 shows the distribution of development narratives across the corpus at article level. The human agency of local Caribbean actors is absent in 54.7% of all articles, resulting in AI being framed as an autonomous entity that shapes society without local subjects exerting any influence over it. Foreign persons or organisations were actors in these articles.

Table 4. Distribution of development dimensions and sub-narratives.

Narrative domain	Narrative	*n* articles	% of articles
Development Framing	External	74	57.8
	Local	34	26.6
	Regionally embedded	13	10.2
Attribution of action	Active actors	48	37.5
	Passive recipients	11	8.6
	Absent	70	54.7
Association frame	Dutch/European	44	34.4
	Global North	65	50.8
	Global South	54	42.2
Epistemic Visibility	External (established powers)	55	43
	Local (knowledge)	29	22.7
	Mixed (co-production)	23	18

For example, this is evident in an article on the rise of robotic animals, which quotes a European-Dutch marine biologist living on Saba; although he uses AI in a Caribbean context, he does not speak from a local Caribbean perspective on technology ("Opmars van de robotdieren," 2018). This pattern is further reinforced by the relatively limited presence of local AI development infrastructures on the islands, where innovation ecosystems are small and often dependent on external partnerships and imported technologies. The high degree of absence of Caribbean actors suggests that they are not recognised as full stakeholders. Also, the systematic absence of citizens' voices within these narratives points to an imbalance in the local knowledge base and a failure to recognise the stakeholder condition (Byskov, 2021); after all, those directly affected by technological transitions are not given a say in shaping them. When human agency is explicitly highlighted in media reports, it is frequently externalised and attributed to Global North sources such as the former Dutch State Secretary Alexandra van Huffelen ("Van Huffelen deelt zorgen," 2023). Her celebratory response to the European AI Act positions the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom as passive recipients of an external normative order, reaffirming a Northern gaze that dictates the boundaries of trustworthy AI, while local Caribbean perspectives remain unheard. This absence of agency also reflects broader journalistic practices, in which reliance on official sources and institutional actors is particularly pronounced in small media ecosystems like the Dutch Caribbean (Abraham et al., 2023; Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022; Veenendaal, 2016).

This process in media coverage can create what Foucault (1978/2012) describes as docile bodies: subjugated citizens who merely undergo technological transitions without any scope for their own expectations or protest. This potentially provides a basis for a fundamental form of epistemic injustice, rooted in the disregard of the rights of local actors as architects of their own AI development. In de Sousa Santos's (2015, p. 271) terms, this results in a "sociology of absences." Excluding these local development narratives, traditions, and needs from the global AI discourse is a form of unjust discrimination against the expertise of people from the Global South (Eke & Ogoh, 2022).

4.3.2. Epistemic (In)Visibility

The distribution of epistemic visibility confirms that the expertise and claims to knowledge of external, established powers are cited as legitimate considerably more often than the unique contextual knowledge of Caribbean sources. This would suggest that, based on the newspaper coverage, local knowledge is actively presented as not yet fully heard. Although the presence of mixed knowledge co-production points to a tentative move towards an ecology of knowledges, the fundamental power dynamics within the Kingdom regarding AI reporting remain asymmetrical. However, recent articles show that there is a growing need for locally rooted narratives; an example of this emerging regional agency being a speech by the Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley to Caricom, a regional organisation ("Caricom opgeroepen," 2025). By placing AI-related threats such as fake news and public safety directly on the regional agenda, she is advocating a form of epistemic subsidiarity (Jasanoff, 2012, 2013, 2015). Furthermore, the scarcity of regionally embedded narratives emphasises that information flows continue to run primarily from the Netherlands to the islands, meaning that Caribbean developments and other regional collaborations between parties in the Caribbean—and primarily with parties in South America—do not come to the fore.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Certain perspectives are missing when it comes to AI coverage in the Dutch Caribbean. This study argues that AI narratives in Dutch-European and Dutch-Caribbean newspapers are not merely descriptive accounts of technological development, but function as sites where asymmetries in power, knowledge production, and agency are reproduced, stabilised, and manifested (Massey, 1991, 1993). Three patterns stand out. First, AI is consistently portrayed as an externally produced technology, originating in dominant centres of innovation in the Global North and entering the Caribbean as a ready-made solution, reinforcing technological dependency (Eke & Ogoh, 2022; Thussu, 2022). Second, local agency is not fully appreciated, with Caribbean actors rarely positioned as decision-makers, reflecting narratives of inevitability that obscure local human influence and underlining how narratives may contribute to depoliticising technology by masking underlying power relations (Natale et al., 2025; Ricaurte, 2022). Third, epistemic visibility is uneven, as external experts dominate while local knowledge remains marginalised, echoing forms of epistemic injustice and sociologies of absences (Byskov, 2021; de Sousa Santos, 2015).

5.1. Discussion: Beyond the Data-Universalism Debate

These interrelated mechanisms structure how AI is narrated in newspaper coverage through uneven coverage, focus on external development of AI, absent local agency, and limited epistemic visibility. The marginal presence of Dutch-Caribbean contexts in European-Dutch newspapers reveals broader structural dynamics within the media system, in which geographic distance, limited correspondent networks, and a strong orientation towards domestic and Global North developments reduce perceived newsworthiness. At the same time, the inverse pattern—where Caribbean-Dutch newspapers report more extensively on European-Dutch developments—highlights an asymmetrical flow of information, demonstrating that proximity is not merely geographic.

At the epistemic level, these omissions reflect Quijano's (2007) colonial matrix of power in which control over knowledge and representation persists beyond formal decolonisation and in which the metropole

continues to dominate the production and circulation of knowledge, while the Caribbean occupies a structurally peripheral position. This dynamic can be further understood through de Sousa Santos's (2015) notion of abyssal thinking, which maintains divisions between metropolitan and colonial spaces by rendering certain forms of knowledge visible while excluding others. This "sociology of absences" (de Sousa Santos, 2015, p. 271) ensures that Caribbean perspectives are systematically filtered out of the collective consciousness of the whole Dutch Kingdom. Although instances of regional agency—such as coverage of Caricom initiatives—indicate emerging efforts to assert locally grounded perspectives, these remain relatively scarce.

This study builds on existing analyses of AI news coverage in the Global South. Several scholars have addressed the postcolonial context, where technological narratives often emphasise transformative potentials while obscuring local conditions and needs, predominantly in African contexts (Eke & Ogoh, 2022; Farias Mota, 2026; Nkoala et al., 2026). Alzouma (2005, p. 340) addressed this technological utopianism when arguing that "since the end of colonialism, nearly every decade has been marked by the celebration of a new technology as a means for overcoming the long-lasting problems faced by developing countries." By integrating technological positioning, agency attribution within postcolonial contexts, and epistemic visibility, this study advances a framework for analysing AI narratives. This framework offers a structured approach to understanding how technological narratives contribute to the construction of asymmetrical technological futures and reveals how AI narratives are embedded in existing power relations. This distinguishes the proposed framework from previous approaches that focus primarily on publication placement, authorship, and the use of buzzwords in AI news coverage (Nkoala et al., 2026). The dimensions developed in this particular study—positioning AI as a product, agency attribution, political-geographical framing, and epistemic visibility—allow for a more fine-grained examination of how technological narratives are structured and how power relations are embedded within them. In doing so, the study adds to existing research on AI narratives in postcolonial contexts by providing a systemic lens through which to capture these macro-level dynamics and the organisation of AI narratives. It makes it possible to account for how AI narratives are systematically shaped by—and contribute to—the reproduction of postcolonial asymmetries between centre and periphery.

The framework and findings place the process of knowledge production by journalists at the centre of the colonial question. This reflects what Chan (2013) and Milan and Treré (2019) describe as the concept of data universalism: the tendency to assimilate the cultural diversity of technological developments in the Global South to the principles of Silicon Valley.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of this research concerns the operationalisation of epistemic visibility. While the analysis captures whose perspectives are discursively foregrounded within AI narratives, it does not include a systematic source analysis of journalistic sourcing practices. This could be a pathway for future research.

The findings further highlight a need for more inclusive and context-sensitive forms of journalistic AI storytelling and narrative-creation. Current reporting risks reinforcing what de Sousa Santos (2015) describes as epistemicide, where Caribbean ways of knowing are rendered invisible and technological progress is framed as "imported magic" intended to modernise a supposedly left-behind periphery (Medina

et al., 2014, p. 2). Addressing and exposing these dynamics requires a shift towards participatory and locally grounded narratives that recognise other actors—particularly citizens—as contributors to technological narratives, rather than just tech companies. Future research should therefore explore how alternative storytelling practices can reshape these dynamics, creating dialogue, an approach addressed by Mutsvairo (2023), between stakeholders within the Dutch Caribbean and the European-Dutch context to explore what is required to achieve this.

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Conflict of Interests

One of the two editors of this thematic issue (Bruce Mutsvairo), in his capacity as a full professor and chair of media, politics and the Global South at Utrecht University, is the supervisor of the PhD project of the first author of this article. He was not actively involved in the production of this research article.

Data Availability

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

LLMs Disclosure

LanguageTool was used for proofreading and language editing. No text was generated, and no substantive content or conclusions were produced by an LLM.

Supplementary Material

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

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Giving AI a Body: Representations of Social Robots in Latin American Media

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Abstract

Social robots (physically embodied systems designed to interact with humans through social behaviours) have gained increasing visibility in news media. However, their everyday presence in Latin America remains limited, reflecting broader asymmetries in technological diffusion across non-WEIRD contexts. This study examines how social robots are represented in Latin American news media and how artificial intelligence (AI) is communicated through embodied technologies. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on a corpus of 404 news articles published in Spanish and Portuguese language media, retrieved through Google's search engine. The study employs an LLM-assisted coding procedure combining automated classification with human validation. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: journalistic treatment (narrative frames and evaluative tone), representation of AI (attributed agency and explicit references to AI), and social functions (social roles, sectors of application, and sources). The findings show that coverage is predominantly framed around care and assistance, with positive or ambivalent evaluations, while conflict-oriented frames remain marginal. Social robots are mainly portrayed as assistants or caregivers, described as semiautonomous systems, and situated in healthcare and research contexts. Coverage relies largely on corporate and scientific sources, with a limited presence of civic or governmental voices. These representations position social robots as a key interface through which AI becomes publicly interpretable. The study contributes to research on AI and journalism in non-WEIRD contexts by showing how media representations shape understanding of emerging technologies in the absence of widespread direct experience.

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Keywords
AI; artificial intelligence; computational journalism; journalism studies; Latin American media; media representation; news coverage; social robots

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a relevant topic in contemporary public debate, yet how people encounter AI varies significantly across global contexts. In highly technologized environments, citizens increasingly interact directly with AI-driven systems through everyday applications such as recommendation algorithms, voice assistants, or generative platforms (Neudert et al., 2020; Nguyen & Hekman, 2024). In many regions of the Global South, however, direct interaction with advanced AI technologies remains limited (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). In these contexts, journalism acts as a mediator, as news media often constitute one of the primary points of contact through which societies encounter and interpret science and technology (Schäfer, 2017).

Within this mediated landscape, social robots occupy a particularly salient position. Defined as physically embodied systems designed to interact with humans through communicative behaviours such as speech, gaze, and movement (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2020; Hegel et al., 2009; Salvini et al., 2010), social robots provide a visible and narratable interface through which AI becomes tangible. Thus, AI, automation, and social robots represent distinct levels of capability, and the differences between them are worth spelling out clearly. Automation relies on rigid, predefined rules to perform repetitive tasks with little or no adaptive decision-making (de-Lima-Santos & Salaverría, 2021). AI uses advanced computational systems capable of learning, reasoning, and adapting to new data or environments (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022). Social robots may integrate technologies, from advanced to simple ones, to interact and communicate with humans while adhering to social behaviours and cues (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2022; Ferrer & Aymerich-Franch, 2026). Consequently, not all social robots rely on advanced AI; many operate through pre-programmed behaviours, rule-based control or simpler forms of automation.

Nevertheless, media discourse frequently presents social robots as AI-driven technologies, often attributing capabilities that exceed their actual technical properties (Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019; Savela et al., 2021). Unlike algorithmic systems that operate invisibly in the background, the embodied nature of social robots translates abstract computational processes into socially meaningful categories such as care, work, emotion, and agency, thereby making AI socially interpretable. This embodied visibility facilitates journalistic storytelling by making complex technological processes more accessible to wider audiences.

Despite their growing visibility in media discourse, the real-world deployment of social robots remains unevenly distributed. Their applications in customer service, education, and healthcare have been documented in various scenarios (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2020, 2023; Belpaeme et al., 2018; Belpaeme & Tanaka, 2021; Ferrer & Aymerich-Franch, 2026; Mubin et al., 2013), and their use expanded during the Covid-19 pandemic in roles related to liaison, safeguarding, and well-being (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2022). Such deployments are concentrated primarily in highly technologized regions, i.e., predominantly in Western contexts.

This asymmetry has important communicative implications. In non-Western, non-educated, non-industrialized, non-rich, and non-democratic (non-WEIRD) contexts, particularly in many regions of the Global South, where direct interaction with embodied AI systems is scarce (de-Lima-Santos & Jamil, 2024), knowledge about these technologies is largely mediated rather than experiential. Audiences are therefore more likely to encounter social robots through journalistic narratives that describe their capabilities, risks, and potential societal roles than through direct use.

Existing scholarship on AI and journalism has predominantly focused on newsroom automation, algorithmic production, and the professional implications of AI adoption within media organizations (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Moran & Shaikh, 2022). Far less attention has been paid to how journalism represents embodied AI technologies such as social robots in societies where these systems are not yet widely embedded in everyday life.

Against this background, this article examines how social robots are represented in Latin American news media. Specifically, it analyses the narrative frames, attributed roles and levels of agency, and evaluative orientations through which social robots are constructed in journalistic discourse. By doing so, the study explores how these representations contribute to making AI intelligible in a context of limited technological adoption. This article contributes to research on AI in non-WEIRD contexts by shifting attention from technological adoption to mediated representation, elucidating public understanding, expectations, and the potential risks for AI integration in such contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. AI, Robotics, and Media Representation

Technological innovations often generate both optimistic and pessimistic expectations. To translate these complex scientific and technological developments for general audiences, news media serve as a primary interface explaining and contextualizing these innovations (Dwyer et al., 2023). Journalists translate specialized knowledge into accessible narratives using descriptive language, images, audiovisual materials, and explanatory framing.

The representation of AI in the news has been extensively studied in certain areas. Prior research has examined AI coverage in countries, such as Denmark (Scott Hansen, 2022), the Netherlands (Vergeer, 2020), the United States (Chuan et al., 2019; Cools et al., 2024), France and English-speaking media systems (Duberry & Hamidi, 2021), Turkey (Sarisakaloğlu, 2021), as well as coverage of generative AI (GenAI) technologies such as ChatGPT (Gómez-Calderón & Ceballos, 2024) and the use of AI tools within newsrooms (Moran & Shaikh, 2022).

Research specifically addressing robotics in the news remains comparatively less developed, and even fewer studies focus on social robots. Existing work has examined robot narratives in relation to disability and labour (Wolbring, 2016), healthcare robotics representation (Solberg & Kirchhoff, 2024), opinions about robots in working areas (Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019), and explanatory journalism coverage (Dwyer et al., 2023). Comparative research has also explored differences in framing between Western and Eastern newspapers (De Boer et al., 2021).

In the case of social robots, media representations are particularly important because they help audiences build mental models of technologies with which they have no direct experience (Savela et al., 2021; Stein, 2023). Studies have shown that people frequently obtain information about robots from secondary sources such as news coverage (Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019), suggesting that journalistic discourse shapes expectations, attitudes, and behavioural intentions.

Media portrayals of social robots can evoke enthusiasm, curiosity, and technological optimism, but also concerns about job displacement, ethical risks, and broader social implications (Nguyen & Hekman, 2022; Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019). Previous research indicates that perceptions of robots are influenced not only by personal experience but also by mediated and fictional representations (Horstmann & Krämer, 2019), which may also influence trajectories of technological development and adoption (Chuan et al., 2019; Garvey & Maskal, 2020). These dynamics are particularly salient in the case of social robots because their embodied form invites interpretations grounded in human-like interaction, facilitating the attribution of social roles, emotional capacities, and varying degrees of agency (Dautenhahn, 2007; De Boer et al., 2021; Horstmann & Krämer, 2019). As a result, social robots provide a particularly revealing lens through which to examine how journalistic discourse constructs meaning around AI.

From a theoretical perspective, these processes can be understood through agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and framing (Entman, 1993), in which journalists select and emphasize aspects of reality, shaping how audiences interpret technological developments. This perspective has been widely applied to the study of science and technology communication, where media frames inform public understanding of complex innovations. Journalism, therefore, does not simply report on robots; it participates in the construction of their social meaning.

2.2. Social Robots and AI Coverage in Latin America

Existing studies on AI in Latin America have primarily focused on newsroom innovation, automation, and the challenges of technological adoption in resource-constrained media environments (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; de-Lima-Santos et al., 2025; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). Such systems are frequently represented through the attribution of socially meaningful roles in journalistic discourse. These include depictions of AI as a threat to employment, as a supportive assistant in everyday contexts, or as an autonomous actor with significant influence over information environments (De-Santis et al., 2026). These representations often reflect broader societal anxieties and political concerns, particularly regarding labour, control, and the circulation of information. Accordingly, the personification of AI systems becomes a recurring discursive strategy through which abstract technological processes are translated into recognizable social actors. These role attributions are closely linked to questions of agency and control, which remain central to public debates on emerging technologies. Despite this, there is less evidence on how AI-related technologies are represented in journalistic discourse, particularly those that are not yet widely embedded in real-world scenarios.

Moreover, research in the region has tended to focus less on embodied technologies such as social robots and more on algorithmic systems and automated agents (e.g., bots, virtual agents) in political communication and digital media ecosystems (e.g., DalBen & Jurno, 2021). Within this body of work, journalistic discourse often frames AI-related technologies along two main dimensions: outward-facing narratives centred on

political and ideological risks, such as manipulation, propaganda, and threats to democratic processes (Barredo-Ibáñez et al., 2021; De-Santis et al., 2026), and inward-facing narratives focused on the transformation of journalistic practices, including automation and new journalistic formats (Chuan et al., 2019; Meneses-Fernández & Granja-González, 2026).

Emerging research conducted in Latin America suggests that AI and robotics are understood through a combination of technical and sociopolitical perspectives (Barredo-Ibáñez et al., 2021). While coverage highlights technological features such as efficiency, speed, and algorithmic capabilities, it also situates these technologies within broader narratives associated with public concerns, fears, expectations, and power dynamics (De-Santis et al., 2026; Magalhães & Smit, 2025; Neudert et al., 2020). This evolution has been described as progressing through successive narrative stages, in which AI is framed first as a potential threat or disruptive force, then as the subject of institutional debates surrounding education, labour, and regulation, and more recently as an everyday, albeit imperfect, tool requiring human supervision (Magalhães & Smit, 2025). Across these stages, media narratives continue to reflect tensions between technological optimism and skepticism, particularly regarding employment, governance, and ethical risks (De-Santis et al., 2026; Neudert et al., 2020).

These narrative patterns are also observable in public perceptions. Comparative studies suggest that audiences in Latin America tend to express greater skepticism toward AI than those in other regions, particularly regarding its potential impact on employment and social stability (Neudert et al., 2020). Yet, despite growing scholarship on AI, systematic empirical research remains scarce on how social robots are specifically represented in Latin American news media.

By focusing on social robots as embodied mediators of AI, this study addresses this gap by examining how meaning is constructed through narrative frames, attributed roles, levels of agency, and evaluative orientations in non-WEIRD media environments. To this end, the article is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

> RQ1: How are social robots framed and evaluated in Latin American news media?
>
> RQ2: How is AI represented through social robots in Latin American news coverage in terms of attributed agency and explicit references to AI?
>
> RQ3: What social roles, sectors of application (e.g., healthcare, education, commerce, hospitality, security, households, research, etc.), and sources cited (e.g., technology companies and manufacturers, experts, users or citizens, government authorities, etc.) are associated with social robots in Latin American news media?
>
> RQ4: How do these media representations contribute to making AI intelligible in contexts of limited technological adoption?

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) to examine how social robots and AI are represented in news media. Previous studies showed that content analysis is particularly suitable for identifying patterns in media discourse and capturing how emerging technologies are framed, evaluated, and socially constructed in journalistic texts (Chuan et al., 2019; Cools et al., 2024; De Boer et al., 2021). The unit of analysis is the individual news item, defined as any journalistic piece (written article or audiovisual report) that explicitly refers to social robots. Each unit was treated as a discrete analytical entity regardless of format, and audiovisual content was transcribed to ensure comparability.

3.2. Data Collection

The dataset was constructed through a systematic retrieval of news articles using Google's general search engine in its news search mode, rather than the Google News interface. Google was selected because it is the dominant search engine across the countries included in this study (StatCounter Global Stats, 2026). The news search mode prioritizes journalistic content while excluding general web results. This decision was based on the technical limitations of the Google News interface, which restricts the number of visible results to approximately 100 per query, thereby limiting data exhaustiveness.

To address these constraints, data extraction was conducted using the SerpApi service, which allows programmatic access to Google's news search results. This approach enabled deeper access to indexed content and extended pagination beyond standard search limits.

Search queries were conducted using the terms *robots sociales* (Spanish) and *robôs sociais* (Portuguese). To ensure geographical diversity, seven independent extraction processes were performed by simulating user locations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. These locations were selected because they correspond to countries for which Google provides localized news aggregation services, allowing the retrieval of country-specific news results. This procedure allowed Google's ranking algorithm to prioritize locally relevant sources in each case.

Through this process, a total of 3,377 news items were initially retrieved (Peru: 440; Venezuela: 520; Argentina: 448; Chile: 513; Mexico: 495; Colombia: 530; Brazil: 431). All searches were conducted using consistent parameters (desktop device, Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese language settings, and a standardized user agent).

3.3. Data Filtering and Sample Construction

A two-stage filtering process was applied to ensure the relevance and quality of the corpus. First, article titles were manually screened to remove duplicate items, non-journalistic sources (e.g., institutional websites, NGOs, startups), and academic or non-news content. Only items published by generalist or specialized media outlets were retained. When the same article appeared across multiple countries, only one instance was kept, reducing the dataset to 425 news items.

Second, the full text of each article was manually reviewed to verify its eligibility before being retrieved and incorporated into the dataset. This process resulted in a final sample of 404 news items.

The corpus includes written news articles and audiovisual news pieces (e.g., video reports). To ensure comparability across formats, audiovisual content was manually transcribed and incorporated into the dataset, allowing all units of analysis to be coded as textual material. The analysed corpus spans the period 2006–2026, with a higher concentration of articles in 2024 and 2025.

3.4. Codebook and Variables

The coding scheme was developed based on previous research in media framing, science communication, and human–robot interaction and refined through an iterative codebook development process (Belpaeme & Tanaka, 2021; Chuan et al., 2019; De Boer et al., 2021; Ferrer & Aymerich-Franch, 2026; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009; Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019; Schäfer, 2017). The codebook includes detailed definitions, instructions, and examples for each variable to ensure consistency across coders fluent in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Before the main coding process, a pilot test was conducted to evaluate the clarity and applicability of the coding scheme, leading to minor adjustments to the category definitions.

The final codebook comprises seven nominal variables organized into three analytical dimensions: (a) journalistic treatment (main frame, evaluative tone); (b) representation of AI through social robots (attributed level of agency, explicit mention of AI); and (c) social functions (social role, sector of application, primary source cited). All variables were coded according to the dominant category identified in each article.

Frames were identified following framing theory (Entman, 1993) and prior research on science communication (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009; Schäfer, 2017) as well as AI and robotics coverage (Chuan et al., 2019; De Boer et al., 2021; Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019).

3.5. Coding Procedure

The use of LLMs for content analysis is an emerging methodological approach in communication research. Previous studies indicate that LLMs can perform deductive coding tasks using predefined codebooks, achieving levels of agreement comparable to those of human coders (Bermejo et al., 2025; Chew et al., 2023; Dunivin, 2025; Hohenwalde et al., 2025), particularly when combined with validation procedures. These approaches have been applied to thematic coding and news framing analysis, supporting the identification of discursive patterns in large textual datasets (Khan et al., 2024; Rifaie et al., 2025; Tohidi et al., 2025).

In this study, the full corpus (N = 404) was coded using the LLM Claude (Anthropic), following an LLM-assisted content analysis (LACA) approach (Dunivin, 2025; Tai et al., 2024). The model was implemented as a coding assistant using the validated codebook and a calibration process. To support interpretative consistency, the coding procedure required the model to provide structured justifications for its classifications. This step made explicit how coding decisions were derived from the textual data and facilitated the identification of ambiguous cases. Following the intercoder reliability assessment, the validated codebook was applied to the full dataset using Claude.

This procedure enabled the systematic and consistent application of the codebook across a multilingual corpus, while reducing variability associated with manual coding. In line with this study's focus, AI is examined not only as an object of media representation but also as part of the analytical process.

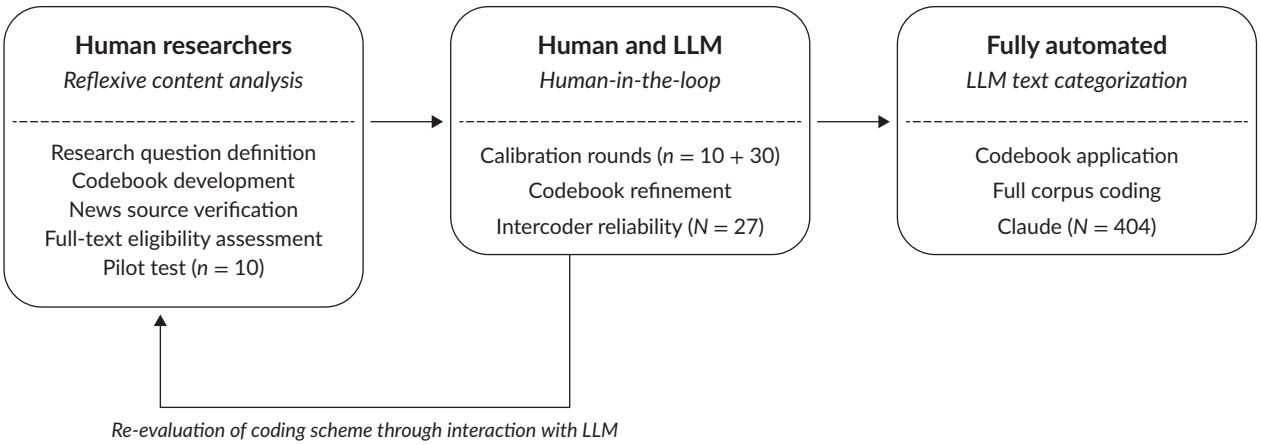


Figure 1. Hybrid workflow for LLM-assisted content analysis. Notes: The figure summarizes the three-stage coding procedure, from codebook development and two calibration rounds to the application of the validated codebook to the full corpus using Claude; the feedback arrow indicates the iterative refinement of the coding scheme through interaction with the LLM. Source: Authors, adapted from Dunivin (2025).

3.6. Data Validation

Before the intercoder reliability test, two calibration rounds were conducted to align the interpretation of coding categories between the human coder and the LLM system (Claude). In the first round, a sample of 10 news articles was collaboratively coded to refine category definitions and resolve initial ambiguities. A second round using 30 articles enabled further refinement of the codebook before the reliability assessment.

Intercoder reliability was assessed on a subsample of 27 news articles using Krippendorff's alpha (α), which corrects for chance agreement (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2019). Values above .80 indicate excellent reliability, while values between .67 and .79 are considered acceptable.

Table 1. Intercoder reliability (Krippendorff's α).

Variable	Agreement (%)	Krippendorff (α)
Frame	96.3%	.951
Tone	85.2%	.791
Agency	92.6%	.480
AI Mention	85.2%	.709
Social Role	81.5%	.757
Sector	85.2%	.804
Source	85.2%	.763
GLOBAL MEDIA	87.3%	.836

Source: Authors.

Krippendorff's α ranged from .480 for agency to .951 for frame, with an overall α of .836. The low coefficient for Agency, despite 92.6% observed agreement, reflects a statistical artifact resulting from the near-absence of distributional variance—91.1% of cases were coded as semiautonomous—rather than conceptual ambiguity in the codebook (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). All remaining variables met or exceeded the minimum acceptable reliability threshold ($\alpha \geq .67$; Krippendorff, 2019).

4. Results

The analysed corpus contains 404 news items on social robots published in Spanish- and Portuguese-language media. The temporal distribution is uneven, with a concentration of publications in 2025 ($n = 138$) and 2024 ($n = 50$). To a lesser extent, articles appear in 2023 ($n = 38$), followed by 2026 ($n = 32$), 2021 ($n = 30$), 2022 ($n = 29$), 2020 ($n = 20$), 2018 ($n = 19$), 2019 ($n = 18$), 2017 ($n = 9$), 2016 ($n = 5$), 2015 ($n = 5$), 2014 ($n = 4$), 2013 ($n = 3$), 2012 ($n = 1$), 2011 ($n = 1$), 2008 ($n = 1$), and 2006 ($n = 1$).

This distribution of the corpus suggests a clear increase in coverage in recent years, particularly between 2023 and 2025. This pattern coincides with the growing public visibility of AI following the emergence of GenAI systems such as ChatGPT, which intensified media attention toward AI-related technologies. Although earlier studies reported the increased use of robots in healthcare contexts during the Covid-19 pandemic (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2022), the data do not show a distinct peak in social robots' media coverage during 2020–2021 in Latin America.

Results are presented according to the three analytical dimensions defined in the codebook, beginning with journalistic treatment and followed by representations of AI and social functions.

4.1. Narrative Frames and Evaluative Tone

Narrative frames were classified into seven categories: care and assistance (robot as social, educational, therapeutic, or healthcare support), technological innovation (scientific advance and progress), human-robot social interaction (emotional or relational bonds), labour substitution (robot as replacement for human workers), risk or threat (negative consequences foregrounded), ethical dilemma (privacy, regulation, rights), and curiosity or spectacle (robot as media novelty).

Care and assistance were the dominant narrative frame (50.5%), followed by technological innovation (16.8%), and human–robot social interaction (15.1%). Other frames appear far less frequently, including curiosity or spectacle (6.7%), labour substitution (6.4%), risk or threat (2.5%), and ethical dilemmas (2.0%; see Figure 2). Overall, news coverage of social robots in Latin America is predominantly framed through narratives of care and assistance.

Evaluative tone was classified into four categories: positive (technology presented as beneficial or promising), negative (risks or harmful consequences foregrounded), ambivalent (benefits and risks present without one prevailing), and neutral (factual description without evaluative orientation).

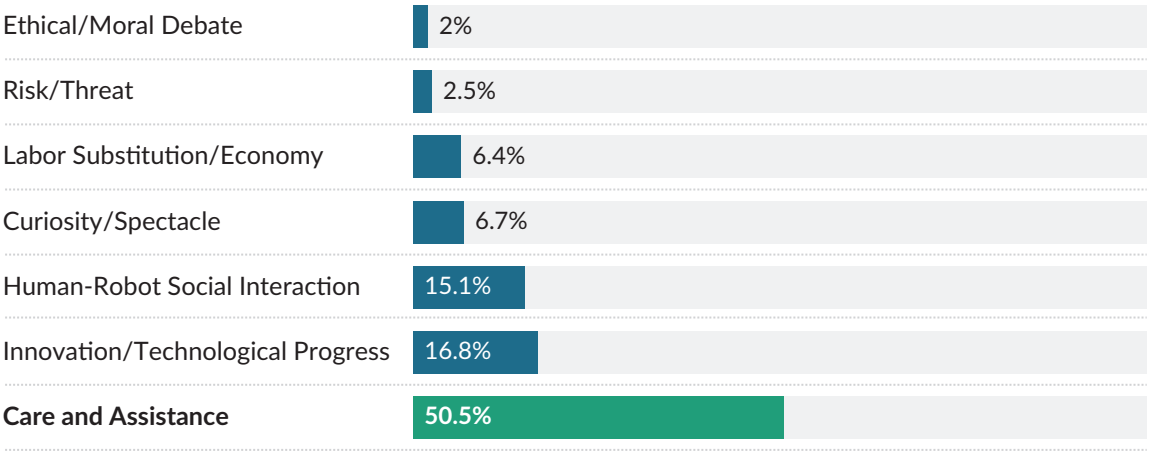


Figure 2. Main frame of the news item. Source: Authors.

Regarding evaluative tone, 44.6% of the articles adopt a positive orientation and 44.8% present an ambivalent tone. Negative coverage remains marginal, accounting for only 4.0% of the sample, while neutral coverage accounted for the remaining 6.6%.

4.2. Representation of AI

The level of agency attributed to robots in this study distinguishes among autonomous robots (independent decision-making), semiautonomous robots (requiring human intervention), and teleoperated robots (complete external control). Most social robots are described as semiautonomous systems (91.1%), combining AI with human supervision. Fully autonomous robots appear in 2.7% of the sample, while teleoperated robots account for 6.2%.

Explicit references to AI were presented as a dichotomous variable: absent (technological invisibility) or present (explicit reference to AI). Overall, 61.4% of the articles (n = 248) explicitly mentioned AI, whereas 38.6% (n = 156) did not refer to the underlying technology. The distribution of AI mentions showed only limited variation across levels of attributed agency—teleoperated (72.0%), semiautonomous (60.9%), and autonomous (54.5%)—suggesting that the explicit visibility of AI in news coverage is largely independent of how the robot's autonomy is described.

4.3. Social Roles, Sectors, and Sources

Social roles attributed to robots were classified as assistant or helper (support for human activities), caregiver or companion (wellbeing or emotional accompaniment), worker or employee (functional substitute for human labour), technological tool (functional device without social dimension), scientific experiment or demonstration (research context, no real-world social use).

The most frequently attributed role is that of assistant or helper (52.5%), followed by caregiver or companion (20.8%), technological tool (8.7%), experiment or demonstration (8.7%), worker or employee (6.9%) and other roles (2.4%). Together, assistant and caregiver account for 73.3% of the corpus.

Sectors of application were classified as healthcare (medical and care settings), education (learning contexts), commerce and hospitality (customer services), security and public services (surveillance), domestic settings (personal or home use), research and laboratory (scientific development), and other sectors.

In terms of sectoral distribution, research and laboratory settings account for 36.1% of the coverage, followed by healthcare (27.2%), education (14.4%), domestic settings (12.9%), commerce and hospitality (5.4%), other sectors (3.2%), and security (0.7%).

Sources cited in the articles were classified in six categories: technology companies and manufacturers (industry voice), scientists and experts (academic voice), users or citizens (civic voice), government authorities (institutional voice), multiple sources (no dominant voice), and no identifiable source (unsourced content).

Half of the articles (50.0%) rely on multiple sources, citing more than one source. Among single-source references, technology companies and manufacturers are the most frequent (23.8%), followed by scientists and experts (16.3%). In contrast, users or citizens appear as the primary source in only 2.7% of the articles, while government sources account for just 0.7%, and 6.5% of the articles do not include an identifiable source.

4.4. Associations Between Variables

To examine associations, Cramér's V was calculated, as all variables are nominal. Pearson and Spearman's coefficients were not suitable in this case, since the former requires continuous variables with a normal distribution, while the latter assumes ordinal variables with a meaningful ranking. Cramér's V, derived from the χ^2 statistic, does not rely on these assumptions (Bergsma, 2013; Cramér, 1946). Thresholds of .10, .20, and .30 were used to indicate weak, moderate, and strong associations, respectively (see Table 2).

Overall, no associations exceeded V = .30, indicating that all observed associations were weak to moderate. The strongest relationship was found between frame and tone (V = .278, $p < .01$). Articles framed around care and assistance were more likely to adopt a positive or ambivalent tone. In contrast, those framed as risk or threat are more often associated with negative evaluations.

A moderate association is also observed between tone and source (V = .237, $p < .01$). Articles drawing on corporate sources more frequently adopt a positive tone. Similarly, tone and explicit mention of AI show a moderate association (V = .201, $p < .01$), with articles that explicitly refer to AI more often displaying an ambivalent rather than a positive orientation. Agency shows the weakest associations across the matrix, none exceeding V = .18, indicating that how robot autonomy is described shows little association with framing, tone, or source composition.

Explicit mentions of AI vary across narrative frames. However, the association remains weak (V = .179, $p < .05$). Frames related to labour substitution (80.8%) and risk or threat (80.0%) show the highest proportion of explicit references to AI. In contrast, the curiosity or spectacle frame presents the lowest proportion (37.0%). The dominant care and assistance frame (59.8%) is close to the overall average (61.4%).

Finally, sector and source are moderately associated (V = .229, $p < .01$). Articles related to healthcare more frequently rely on scientific sources, while those focusing on research and laboratory contexts tend to combine corporate and scientific actors. Several weak but significant associations also emerge: frame × social role (V = .19), frame × sector (V = .19), and social role × sector (V = .18), suggesting that framing choices, attributed roles, and sectors of application form a coherent representational pattern.

Table 2. Association matrix (Cramér's V; $N = 404$).

	Frame	Tone	Agency	AI mention	Social role	Sector	Source
Frame	1.00	0.28**	0.12	0.18*	0.19**	0.19**	0.18**
Tone	0.28**	1.00	0.09	0.20**	0.14	0.17*	0.24**
Agency	0.12	0.09	1.00	0.06	0.18**	0.13	0.11
AI Mention	0.18*	0.20**	0.06	1.00	0.15	0.05	0.18*
Social Role	0.19**	0.14	0.18**	0.15	1.00	0.18**	0.14*
Sector	0.19**	0.17*	0.13	0.05	0.18**	1.00	0.23**
Source	0.18**	0.24**	0.11	0.18*	0.14*	0.23**	1.00

Source: Authors.

To facilitate interpretation, Table 3 summarizes the statistically significant associations of moderate strength (V ≥ .20). These associations are consistent with the broader patterns identified in the descriptive analysis, particularly the alignment between dominant frames, evaluative tone, and the types of sources shaping news narratives.

Table 3. Variable pairs with moderate or strong associations (V ≥ .20).

Variables	Cramér's V	p	Sig.	Magnitude
Frame × Tone	0.278	0.0000	**	Moderate
Tone × AI mention	0.201	0.0010	**	Moderate
Tone × Source	0.237	0.0000	**	Moderate
Sector × Source	0.229	0.0000	**	Moderate

Notes: $N = 404$; Cramér's V ranges from 0 to 1; values ≥ .10 indicate weak associations, ≥ .20 moderate, and ≥ .30 strong; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Source: Authors.

Taken together, the results show a pattern of coverage in which social robots are predominantly portrayed as assistants or caregivers, situated mainly in healthcare and laboratory contexts, and described as semiautonomous systems. Coverage is largely positive or ambivalent, and the narratives are primarily constructed from corporate and scientific sources.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how social robots are represented in Latin American news media across three analytical dimensions: journalistic treatment, representation of AI through social robots, and social functions.

In terms of journalistic treatment (RQ1), the findings indicate that coverage is predominantly organized around care and assistance frames, accompanied by positive/optimistic or ambivalent evaluative tones. Frames that present social robots as a threat, associated with labour substitution, and ethical dilemmas

appear only marginally. This pattern is consistent with previous research indicating that media representations of emerging technologies tend to emphasize socially beneficial applications, particularly in healthcare and customer service (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2023; Dwyer et al., 2023; Solberg & Kirchhoff, 2024). These narratives often portray robots as assistive tools designed to work side by side with humans, effectively framing them as companions rather than replacements (Solberg & Kirchhoff, 2024).

At the same time, the limited presence of conflict-oriented frames contrasts with studies highlighting risk and disruption in AI coverage (Nguyen & Hekman, 2022; Riemer & Wischniewski, 2019). This suggests that, in the Latin American media, coverage tends to foreground functional and socially acceptable uses of technology while reducing the visibility of tensions or controversies. This pattern aligns with what has been described as technological objectivism, where robots are presented as neutral, science-based entities, thereby obscuring potential bias or ethical dilemmas (Dwyer et al., 2023).

Addressing RQ2 (representation of AI), the results show that agency is mostly framed as semiautonomous, with robots described as operating under human supervision and rarely portrayed as fully independent agents. They are instead presented as systems that operate in coordination with human actors, reinforcing a vision of AI as supervised and controllable.

Although many articles explicitly refer to AI, a substantial proportion do not mention the underlying technology. This uneven visibility suggests that AI is sometimes left implicit, while its effects are foregrounded through the robot's embodied presence. For example, when a robot is shown caring for or accompanying an older adult, the news item shows what the technology can do, not necessarily how it works. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that social robots facilitate the attribution of agency and intentionality by translating abstract computational processes into socially recognizable forms (Belpaeme & Tanaka, 2021; De Boer et al., 2021). Embodiment thus functions as a narrative resource, allowing AI to be understood through recognizable social roles (care, assistance, companionship) without requiring technical explanation.

The relationship between the robot's attributed agency and the explicit mention of AI further supports this interpretation. Although most robots are described as semiautonomous systems, references to AI are not consistently present across all articles, indicating that journalistic discourse often treats AI as an implicit attribute of social robots. This may blur the distinction between advanced AI and simpler forms of automation, reinforcing the perception that robot agency necessarily implies AI capabilities.

Overall, these findings suggest that journalistic narratives prioritize interpretability over technical precision (Entman, 1993; Nisbet, 2009). Rather than treating social robots and AI as interchangeable concepts, the findings show that robots provide the embodied medium through which AI becomes publicly interpretable.

Regarding the social functions (RQ3), social robots are primarily presented as assistants and caregivers, situated mainly in healthcare and research contexts. Notably, research and laboratory settings account for the largest share of coverage, exceeding that of real-world application domains such as healthcare, education, or domestic environments.

This distribution suggests that social robots continue to be represented primarily within controlled and experimental settings rather than as technologies embedded in everyday life, indicating that their presence in real-world settings remains restricted, a gap between representation and deployment that has been noted in prior research on social robots (Aymerich-Franch & Ferrer, 2020, 2022, 2023; Ferrer & Aymerich-Franch, 2026).

Coverage mainly relies on corporate and scientific sources. This configuration indicates that social robots are framed as functional and supportive technologies embedded in institutional settings, rather than as contested or disruptive actors. The prominence of expert and industry voices aligns with previous studies showing that technological narratives are often shaped by institutional sources that tend to promote innovation-oriented perspectives (Chuan et al., 2019; Garvey & Maskal, 2020).

These findings address RQ4 by showing how journalistic representations contribute to making AI intelligible in contexts of limited technological adoption. Unlike algorithmic systems, which remain invisible and difficult to represent, social robots provide a tangible and visually accessible form through which AI can be communicated. Their material presence allows journalists to situate these technologies within familiar social environments—such as hospitals, homes, or educational settings—thereby supporting narrative construction. This intelligibility does not necessarily depend on explicit references to AI but often emerges through the robot's physical embodiment.

The media coverage relies on recognizable social roles such as assistants, caregivers, or companions. Through processes such as anthropomorphism, dramatization, and moralization, complex technological systems are translated into socially meaningful forms. In the absence of widespread direct interaction with social robots, these mediated representations become a primary point of reference through which audiences encounter these technologies (Horstmann & Krämer, 2019). News coverage therefore not only reports on technological developments but also contributes to the construction of culturally grounded understandings of AI, in line with framing processes that organize public understandings of emerging technologies (Entman, 1993; Dwyer et al., 2023; Nisbet, 2009; Schäfer, 2017). In this sense, social robots operate as a communicative interface through which AI becomes socially interpretable.

5.1. Contributions and Implications

This study offers several contributions to research on AI, journalism, and media representation in non-WEIRD contexts. First, it provides one of the first systematic empirical analyses of how social robots are represented in Latin American news media.

Second, the findings suggest that journalistic framing is influenced not only by editorial decisions but also by the stage of technological development and by the actors who have access to public discourse. The predominance of corporate and scientific sources favours innovation-oriented narratives and may limit the presence of alternative or critical perspectives.

Third, the largely positive or ambivalent tone identified in the corpus appears to contrast with earlier research reporting relatively high levels of public concern about AI in Latin America (Neudert et al., 2020). Although media discourse is only one among multiple factors influencing public opinion, this contrast suggests that journalistic representations may be associated with changes in how AI is understood over time.

Finally, the study introduces a methodological contribution. The use of AI-assisted coding adds a reflexive dimension to the research design, as AI is not only the object of analysis but also part of the analytical process. This dual role reflects ongoing changes in knowledge production and media research practices in the context of algorithmic technologies.

5.2. Limitations

This study has several limitations. The dataset was constructed through Google's search algorithm, which does not capture the full media landscape and reflects visibility rather than exhaustiveness. AI-assisted coding, while enabling large-scale analysis, may introduce bias in interpreting nuanced categories despite calibration and reliability procedures.

A further limitation concerns the reliance on Google News as the primary data source. Although Google is the dominant search engine across the countries included in this study (StatCounter Global Stats, 2026), its proprietary ranking algorithms privilege visibility rather than a representative cross-section of national media coverage. This introduces a potential ranking bias, as outlets with stronger search engine optimization, greater digital infrastructure, or higher domain authority are more likely to surface prominently in results, regardless of their actual reach or influence within a given country. Moreover, because Google market share and usage patterns are not uniform across the selected contexts, the comparability of the sample may be affected. This is particularly relevant for the Spanish-speaking countries included in the analysis, where retrieved articles may disproportionately reflect coverage from larger, more digitally developed media markets rather than smaller or more local outlets that are less optimized for search visibility. Future research could address this limitation by triangulating Google News results with media monitoring databases or direct outlet-level sampling to achieve a more balanced representation of the media landscape.

Finally, the study focuses on media content and does not address production processes or audience reception, and its findings are specific to social robots and not generalizable to other AI systems. Further work could examine how news representations influence public perceptions of social robots and compare these narratives with those circulating on social media platforms and other media environments.

5.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, news coverage of social robots in Latin America is characterized by a predominantly functional and non-conflictive representation, structured around care, assistance, and controlled agency. By analysing how these narratives are constructed, this study contributes to understanding how AI is publicly interpreted in contexts where it is primarily encountered through media discourse. More broadly, it demonstrates that journalism does not merely report on AI; it helps make AI socially intelligible by giving it a recognizable body through representations of social robots. As AI continues to enter everyday life through mediated encounters, examining how journalism gives AI a body will become increasingly important for understanding how societies imagine, negotiate, and normalize emerging technologies. Future research may explore how these mediated representations evolve over time and how they are interpreted by different audiences as social robots become more widely embedded in society.

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Conflict of Interests

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Data Availability

The dataset supporting the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

LLMs Disclosure

Claude (Anthropic) was used as a coding assistant to apply the validated codebook to the full corpus ($N = 404$), following a LACA approach (Dunivin, 2025; Tai et al., 2024).

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ARTICLE

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The Great Wall of the Press: Layered Boundary Work of AI-Integrated Journalism

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Abstract

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in journalistic practice, debates often frame it as either a disruptive force or a tool for efficiency. This study moves beyond this dichotomy by examining how journalists themselves interpret, negotiate, and position AI within journalism. Drawing on 19 in-depth interviews with Chinese journalists, and informed by boundary work and boundary object perspectives, the study analyses how AI is selectively integrated, justified, and governed across journalistic processes. The findings show that AI is primarily confined to routine and low-risk tasks, while being excluded from core editorial functions involving judgement, meaning-making, and accountability. The study argues that AI intensifies journalistic boundary work because it challenges journalism not only operationally, but also epistemically and infrastructurally. Journalists therefore engage in layered forms of boundary negotiation that operate across task, discursive, and structural dimensions. At the same time, AI functions as a boundary object mediating relationships among journalists, technology companies, and governance institutions under conditions of asymmetric platform dependency and institutional control.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; boundary object; boundary work; digital journalism; generative AI; human–AI interaction; journalism; media governance; news production

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly become embedded in the contemporary news value chain. News organisations around the world increasingly deploy AI tools for tasks such as automated content generation,

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data analysis, news recommendation, and editorial workflow optimisation (Diakopoulos, 2019; Marconi, 2020). Unlike earlier forms of newsroom automation, however, generative AI systems increasingly simulate capacities historically associated with journalistic expertise, including writing, summarisation, interpretation, and content creation in various formats (Dodds et al., 2025). As a result, AI raises not only operational questions about efficiency and workflow, but also epistemic and institutional questions concerning editorial authority, professional autonomy, and the boundaries of legitimate journalistic labour (Carlson, 2018; Lewis et al., 2025; Perreault et al., 2026).

Journalism has historically made efforts to maintain strong professional boundaries, distinguishing journalistic expertise from other forms of knowledge production and defending editorial judgement as a central professional value (Örnebring & Karlsson, 2022; Schudson, 2012). The introduction of AI into newsrooms challenges these boundaries by introducing new actors, infrastructures, and forms of authority into journalistic work. In contrast to earlier technological systems primarily associated with production and distribution efficiency, generative AI challenges journalism at multiple levels simultaneously: operationally, epistemically, and infrastructurally. Journalists therefore respond not simply through adoption or resistance, but through active processes of negotiation, legitimisation, and boundary maintenance that redefine where AI belongs within journalistic practice (Cools & de Vreese, 2025; Dodds et al., 2025).

Drawing on boundary work and boundary object perspectives (Carlson & Lewis, 2015, 2019; Star & Griesemer, 1989), this article examines how journalists negotiate the role of AI within their professional domain. Based on 19 in-depth interviews with Chinese journalists conducted in 2024, the study analyses how AI is interpreted, justified, restricted, and institutionalised across journalistic practice. The article argues that AI-related boundary work operates simultaneously across task, discursive, and structural dimensions. At task level, journalists allocate AI to routine and low-risk functions while preserving core editorial work for humans. At the discursive level, journalists legitimise selective AI adoption through narratives of efficiency, authenticity, and professional responsibility. At the structural level, AI becomes embedded within broader infrastructures of platform dependency, governance, and organisational control. Together, these layered forms of boundary work reveal how journalism adapts to AI while simultaneously reaffirming professional authority and human-centred meaning-making.

By conceptualising AI as a site of layered boundary negotiation, this study contributes to ongoing debates about the institutional transformation of journalism in the age of AI. Rather than treating AI simply as a technological innovation, the article demonstrates how journalists actively negotiate the limits, meanings, and legitimacy of AI integration across professional, organisational, and infrastructural domains. The Chinese context offers a particularly valuable analytical setting because tensions between technological modernisation, platform dependency, commercial pressure, and political governance are especially visible and institutionally concentrated. Examining these dynamics contributes not only to the geographical diversification of AI and journalism research, but also to broader theoretical discussion concerning how journalism renegotiates professional authority under conditions of algorithmic transformation.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

2.1. AI in Journalism: Adoption, Practices, Processes, and Tensions

In recent years, the proliferation of AI systems and algorithms has had a profound impact on various aspects of society, including journalism (Diakopoulos, 2019; Kuai et al., 2023; Simon, 2024). Existing scholarship has examined the rise of automated journalism, algorithmic news production, and human–machine collaboration, highlighting both the efficiencies enabled by AI and the tensions it introduces into journalistic work (Carlson, 2018; Lewis et al., 2025). Studies have documented the use of AI in tasks such as automated writing, data mining, fact-checking, and recommendation systems, often emphasising its role in enhancing speed, scale, and personalisation in news production (Diakopoulos, 2019; Marconi, 2020).

At the same time, researchers have identified persistent concerns regarding the implications of AI for journalistic norms and professional autonomy (Becker et al., 2025). Journalists have been found to express ambivalence towards AI, recognising its potential to support routine tasks while remaining cautious about its involvement in core editorial functions such as interpretation, verification, and ethical judgement (Møller et al., 2025; Umejei et al., 2025). This ambivalence reflects broader tensions between technological innovation and the preservation of journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017).

While this body of literature provides important insights into the adoption and implications of AI, it often focuses on either technological capabilities or organisational strategies. Less attention has been paid to how journalists themselves delineate the boundaries of AI use across different stages of news production—broadly organised around the gathering, selection, processing, and distribution of news (Domingo et al., 2008; Karlsson, 2011). This gap is significant because AI raises not only operational questions concerning efficiency and workflow, but also epistemic questions concerning authorship, authority, legitimacy, and the boundaries of journalistic knowledge production (Perreault et al., 2026). These questions are especially important considering the growing precarity of the journalistic field (Örnebring et al., 2018) where current access to, and use of, AI is prone to be dependent on journalistic actors' accumulation of different forms of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2005).

In short, elite media and actors within them are more likely to have access to AI and set the standards. However, the disruptive nature of AI also provides opportunities for field mobility if actors, first, have access to AI and, second, can use it in ways that the field considers appropriate. Understanding AI in journalism thus requires examining how journalists actively negotiate where AI belongs within journalistic practices, which functions remain legitimately human, and how these distinctions are institutionally justified and maintained.

Addressing this gap requires an empirical examination of AI use in practice and thus, the first research question (RQ) asks:

> RQ1: Which AI technologies are used in journalistic processes, and which processes are journalists hesitant to involve AI in?

2.2. Boundary Work and the Negotiation of Professional Authority

In journalism studies, boundary work has been widely used to examine how journalists construct and defend their professional identity (Carlson & Lewis, 2015, 2019). The concept of boundary work, developed by Gieryn (1983, 1999), describes the discursive practices through which professional communities establish and maintain distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge or expertise. Boundary work serves to protect professional authority by defining what belongs within a professional domain and what lies outside it.

Scholars have shown that journalists routinely engage in discursive practices that distinguish journalism from other forms of communication, such as public relations, citizen media, political propaganda, or news aggregators (Örnebring et al., 2018; Tong, 2015). These boundary-making processes reinforce the legitimacy of journalism as a profession and help maintain its authority within the broader media ecosystem (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Carlson, 2017).

The introduction of AI into newsrooms introduces new actors and forms of expertise that may challenge these established boundaries. Automated content generation systems, algorithmic recommendation tools, and machine learning applications increasingly participate in tasks traditionally associated with journalistic work (Carlson, 2018; Dodds et al., 2025; Lewis et al., 2025). As a result, journalists may need to redefine the boundaries of their professional domain by specifying which aspects of news production can be delegated to machines and which must remain under human editorial control.

Importantly, this negotiation surrounding AI occurs not only at the level of discourse, but also through the allocation of tasks, the institutional embedding of technological systems, and the infrastructural conditions under which journalism operates. Building on boundary work scholarship (Carlson & Lewis, 2015, 2019; Gieryn, 1983, 1999), this study therefore conceptualises AI-related boundary negotiation as layered across task, discursive, and structural dimensions. "Task boundary work" concerns the allocation of journalistic functions between humans and AI systems; "discursive boundary work" concerns the narratives and justificatory frameworks through which AI adoption is legitimised or resisted; and "structural boundary work" concerns the embedding of boundaries within organisational, technological, and governance infrastructure that shape journalistic practice.

This layered approach extends understandings of boundary work by foregrounding how AI reorganises journalism simultaneously at professional, epistemic, and infrastructural levels. While this approach overlaps with work on metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016), the present study focuses more specifically on how AI-related boundaries are negotiated simultaneously through newsroom practices, professional narratives, and institutional infrastructures. Accordingly, the second RQ asks:

> RQ2: How do journalists engage in boundary work when discussing the appropriate use of AI in journalism?

2.3. AI Technologies as Boundary Objects

The concept of boundary objects offers insight into how different social groups collaborate across institutional boundaries. The concept was introduced by Star and Griesemer (1989) to describe artefacts that are shared across multiple communities but interpreted differently by each. Boundary objects are sufficiently flexible to accommodate diverse interpretations while remaining robust enough to support coordination among actors with different goals and perspectives. In complex sociotechnical systems, they often facilitate collaboration between professionals with distinct forms of expertise (Lewis & Usher, 2016; Star & Griesemer, 1989).

AI technologies in newsrooms may function as boundary objects. Journalists, engineers, managers, and platform companies may all interact with the same technological systems while attributing different meanings and purposes to them. For journalists, AI could be understood primarily as a tool to assist reporting and streamline production. For engineers, it may represent a technical system to be optimised. For managers, it could signify efficiency and organisational innovation. Conceptualising AI as a boundary object therefore makes it possible to analyse how collaboration between journalism and technology occurs despite divergent interpretations and institutional goals. It also directs attention to how technological systems connect different actors involved in contemporary news production. Importantly, such coordination does not occur between equal actors, but within asymmetrical relations shared by platform dependency, organisational hierarchy, and governance structures connecting the journalistic field with other fields (Bourdieu, 2005; Simon, 2024; Yu & Huang, 2021). Thus, the third and final RQ asks:

> RQ3: In what ways do AI technologies function as boundary objects connecting journalists with other actors involved in journalism?

Taken together, this study conceptualises AI not simply as a technological innovation but as a site of boundary negotiation within journalism (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). The lens permits a nuanced understanding of AI in journalism, one that foregrounds journalists' agency in shaping technological integration while situating these processes within broader institutional and professional contexts (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025; Wu, 2026).

3. Method and Data

3.1. Research Design

Guided by the RQs, this study employs semi-structured, in-depth interviews and a thematic analytical approach to explore the Chinese journalists' engagement with AI. A qualitative research design is particularly suited to this inquiry, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of journalists' experiences, interpretations, and evaluative judgements, key dimensions through which boundary work is enacted in practice. Rather than treating AI adoption as a purely technical or organisational process, this approach captures how journalists actively define the limits of acceptable AI use within their professional domain. Such processes are often context-dependent and shaped by broader political, social, and technological environments, making qualitative methods especially appropriate (Kuang, 2017; Yao & Han, 2025; Yu & Huang, 2021). The semi-structured interview format enables both consistency across interviews and flexibility to probe emerging themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This is particularly important for capturing how journalists

articulate their reasoning about AI use, including the distinctions they draw between appropriate and inappropriate applications. The research was approved by the Ethical Review Board at Karlstad University (Reference Number: HS 2024/150).

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who represent a diverse range of media organisations in China's hybrid and hierarchical media system (Meng, 2018; Wang, 2023; Zhang, 2022). The sample includes 19 journalists working in different beats, different formats of main journalistic outputs, a mixture of types of media outlets at various levels (including one freelancer), and geographical locations, ensuring different media organisations operating in China were represented (see Table 1). Chinese media organisations operate under varying combinations of political supervision, market pressure, and technological experimentation where the political field is very influential (Bourdieu, 2005; Zhang, 2022). Central-level media organisations, such as national broadcasters and news agencies, generally possess greater political authority, institutional resources, and responsibility for aligning with national technological

Table 1. List of interviewees from various media organisations.

Code	Media organization	Position	Gender	Career stage	Key beat	Format*
P-01	National news agency	Manager	Female	Mid-Career	General	Video
P-02	National TV new media	Journalist	Female	Mid-Career	General	Video
P-03	National new media	Journalist	Female	Mid-Career	General	Video
P-04	National news agency local branch	Journalist, manager	Female	Mid-career	General	Video
P-05	National TV in English	Journalist	Male	Mid-career	Technology	Video
P-06	National TV in English	Editor	Female	Mid-career	General	Video
P-07	National TV legal channel	Journalist	Male	Mid-career	Legal	Video
P-08	National TV financial channel	Journalist, manager	Female	Mid-career	Finance	Video
P-09	Provincial newspaper	Journalist	Female	Mid-career	Education	Text
P-10	Provincial newspaper	Journalist	Female	Mid-career	Culture	Text
P-11	Provincial new media	Editor	Female	Mid-career	International	Text
P-12	Provincial TV	Producer	Female	Senior	Business	Video
P-13	Provincial TV	Manager	Male	Mid-career	General	Video
P-14	Provincial radio	Journalist	Male	Mid-career	General	Audio
P-15	Municipal newspaper	Journalist, manager	Female	Senior	General	Text
P-16	Municipal newspaper	Journalist	Female	Mid-career	Education	Text
P-17	Private technology new media	Journalist	Male	Early-career	Technology	Text
P-18	Private financial magazine	Journalist	Female	Early-career	Finance	Text
P-19	Freelance	Journalist	Female	Mid-career	General	Text

Note: * Format here represents the primary format of the journalists' output, but interviewees sometimes also worked across platforms and produced multimodal content.

development agendas (Wang, 2023). Provincial and municipal outlets, while still embedded within the party-state system, often face stronger commercial pressures and resource constraints, requiring them to balance political expectations with audience competition and financial sustainability (Yu & Huang, 2021). Private and commercially oriented digital media organisations tend to be more market-driven and technologically adaptive, although they remain subject to broader regulatory oversight. This diversity aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different organisational contexts and constraints that influence journalistic practices in the country. The names of the interviewees and the organisations they worked for were anonymised at the participants' request.

Interviews were conducted between February and September 2024. They were conducted either in person or via phone, depending on the participant's location and preference. Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes, allowing sufficient time to delve into the topics of interest while being mindful of the participants' time constraints. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into topics that emerged during the conversation, thus enriching the data collected. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and recorded with the interviewees' consent.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis follows an abductive and thematic approach, combining inductive sensitivity to the data with theoretically informed interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This approach is particularly suited to examining boundary work, as it allows the researcher to identify both explicit and implicit ways in which journalists define and negotiate the limits of AI use.

The coding process proceeded in three stages. The primary stage ensured all data was read closely and coded line by line using descriptive codes. The secondary stage was used to organise, synthesise, and categorise codes to generate more interpretive codes. During this stage, the analysis moved iteratively between the empirical data and theoretical framework (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The third stage, utilising axial coding, ensured smaller codes were categorised into larger categories based on reemerging patterns and were honed into different themes, such as technological concerns, organisational settings, and professional norms. These patterns were further interpreted through the lens of boundary work, addressing the overarching research problem.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section examines how the boundaries are drawn, justified, and negotiated in relation to AI in journalism across the three dimensions acknowledged in the RQs: (a) the allocation of AI across journalistic processes, (b) how journalists engage in boundary work, and (c) the ways AI functions as a boundary object connecting journalists with other actors. Together, these dimensions reveal how the boundaries of journalism are actively negotiated rather than passively reshaped by technological change.

4.1. Mapping AI Across Journalistic Processes: Where Boundaries are Drawn (RQ1)

4.1.1. AI as an Efficiency Tool for Low-Risk Tasks

The interviewees indicate that AI is strategically confined to routine and low-risk tasks, positioning it as assistive infrastructure rather than a transformative force. Across newsrooms, AI was most widely adopted in low-stakes tasks including transcription, translation, summarisation, and basic content generation. AI is also used in visual and multimedia production. Text-to-image and text-to-video tools are applied in posters, short videos, and social media content, while automated editing is particularly prominent in sports journalism: "You input the entire broadcast, and with one click it produces a one-minute news video (P-02)," noted a video journalist for national TV. Similarly, as noted by a manager at a provincial TV station, AI voice synthesis and digital presenters enable scalable production, where "a digital anchor can deliver thousands of scripts, but a real presenter would be exhausted (P-13)." Attempts were also made for light social media content aimed at increasing audience engagement and user retention but led to lower audience engagement: "We posted some AI-generated images of cats and dogs, but audiences did not respond positively. They did not want to see something virtual; they preferred something real" (P-03), stated a journalist for a central-level new media outlet.

Despite audience expectation and preference for authenticity, for the organisations, one of the key motivations for using these applications lies in efficiency. As the new media journalist noted, "if it can generate video directly from text, it would save a lot of labour and time costs" (P-03). However, these efficiency gains are limited. In more complex tasks, AI can be counterproductive. A journalist at a provincial newspaper described spending "an entire afternoon" revising AI-generated content, concluding that "it would have been faster to write it ourselves" (P-09). A video journalist working for English news at national TV also pointed to the importance of labelling AI-generated content and that AI use in content generation is largely confined to non-core content:

> During Children's Day, we produced a video featuring AI-generated images of children at different ages….This is possible because such content is not considered core news, but rather more entertainment-oriented material. As long as it is clearly labelled as AI-generated, it is acceptable and can significantly reduce workload. (P-05)

This reflects a clear boundary: efficiency is prioritised, but such institutional experimentation is controlled. AI is allowed where editorial risk is low and transparency is ensured. This pattern reflects a form of boundary work in which journalists position AI as a subordinate tool confined to the periphery of news production. By restricting AI to routine functions, journalists preserve the boundary around core professional competencies, particularly those associated with judgement, interpretation, and editorial responsibility.

4.1.2. AI as Performative Novelty for Commercial Logics and Political Assignment

AI is mobilised as a performative marker of innovation, shaped by commercial imperatives and political expectations. Journalists describe how clients require AI-generated content to be recognisable. This leads to explicit labelling and deliberate stylistic choices. As a manager at a provincial TV station noted, "they will put 'AIGC' [Artificial Intelligence-Generated Content] on the video, and they intentionally make it not look like

reality" (P-13). The rationale is clear: "If you want a real dog, you can just film it…the only way it feels new is if it looks different from what people have seen before" (P-13).

Additionally, AI functions as symbolic capital and a legitimacy signal, especially within state-owned media organisations, where journalism innovation has been promoted against the backdrop of China's articulated AI ambition. Here, the political field's dominance over the journalistic is evident (Bourdieu, 2005), as integrating AI in journalism is tightly integrated to a larger political mission emanating outside the journalistic field. In these cases, "embracing AI" has become part of the political assignment: AI is not just used but performed as novelty and showcased within institutions. As a video journalist for national TV news media stated:

> In some cases, particularly in internal reports or promotional activities within the organisation, it is made clear that the work was done using AI. There are also training sessions or lectures where people share how these AI-based productions are created. (P-02)

However, this institutional performance of innovation and techno-optimism as organisational discourse has also created a paradox. The political expectation of "embracing AI" resulted in a departure from realism, as when AI achieves a high level of realism, its value may diminish. A manager at a provincial TV station told us:

> When showing a virtual anchor to a supervisor, you often have to explicitly explain that it is a digital human, because otherwise they may assume it is a real person. But this does not generate any particular excitement or interest, since the real presenter is someone they see every day.…While the original goal was to make digital humans as realistic as possible, there is now a tendency to deliberately make them less realistic. (P-13)

In this sense, AI operates within a performative economy of innovation, where its value lies not only in functionality but in its capacity to signal technological advancement to political overseers. This showcases the tensions between technological, professional, commercial, and political logics: Technologists might be proud of reproducing real-world, newsroom leadership with clients seeking visible innovation while audiences may prefer authenticity, and journalists have to navigate all these expectations. As the manager observed, this creates "a gap between producers, those who pay, and audiences" (P-13). AI thus functions not only as a production tool but as a performative marker of technological modernity—a marker determined by the political field.

4.2. From Human-in-the-Loop to Human-as-Irreplaceable Meaning-Maker: Justifying Boundary Positions (RQ2)

4.2.1. Selective Adoptions Amid Technical Limitations, Legal Ambiguity, and Over-Reliance Concerns

Journalists justify the appropriate use of AI through a combination of perceived opportunities and risks, producing a fundamentally ambivalent but structured boundary position. As mentioned above, the primary promise lies in efficiency and scalability. At the same time, significant concerns emerge regarding reliability. Generative systems are seen as prone to fabrication. A video journalist working in English news on national TV noted that AI "sometimes makes things up" (P-05), producing inaccurate content that appears plausible. This undermines trust and necessitates verification. Additionally, journalists are aware of the linguistic and

cultural misalignment, pointing to the data bias, localisation limits, Western-centric training infrastructure, and practical usability constraints of the AI tools. A video journalist working for national news media said:

> These models are essentially developed abroad. Their foundations reflect that. For example, when generating images, they tend to produce predominantly white faces. It is quite difficult to generate an Asian face. Even if you specify very detailed prompts, such as hair colour and skin tone, the output is not necessarily accurate. (P-03)

Beyond technical limitations, AI raises concerns about professional degradation. Journalists worry about over-reliance, suggesting that prolonged use may lead to dependency and reduced skills. Journalists are also aware that using AI involves data extraction. As a journalist working for a private technology news media noted, "When I use these tools, I am providing my data for free for them to train models" (P-17). This leads to pragmatic strategies: AI is avoided for sensitive topics but used for routine tasks, such as "ordinary interview recordings." Additionally, data security and confidentiality concerns are raised. In some cases, this results in institutional restrictions on AI usage. As one video journalist working for national TV's legal channel noted:

> Taking ChatGPT as an example, if you want it to help write a script or a news article, you need to provide a large amount of information. This includes interview materials and other news-related content. However, this raises a problem, namely the risk of information leakage. Since our interview materials and news data may be sensitive, using such systems could lead to confidentiality risks. Therefore, in practice, we are not allowed to use tools like ChatGPT when writing certain news reports. (P-07)

Legal uncertainty, particularly around copyright, is also a concern. As a manager for a national news agency noted, "The biggest concern for institutions is copyright…if compliance is not clear, no one dares to use it at scale" (P-01).

Taken together, these concerns justify a cautious and stratified approach to AI adoption, where its use is confined to contexts that minimise epistemic, legal, and professional risk.

4.2.2. Human Gatekeeping and Accountability Gap as Structural Boundaries

While these concerns shape where AI can be used, a more fundamental boundary emerges around responsibility and accountability. Journalism operates within systems where responsibility must be clearly assigned, and AI disrupts this structure. As a video journalist and manager of a local branch of a national news agency stated, "If a news report is produced by AI, who is responsible? AI cannot take the blame" (P-04). This accountability gap makes fully AI-generated journalism institutionally unacceptable. In contrast, journalists are expected to assume responsibility for their work, reinforcing human authorship as a core principle. This is reflected in editorial workflows, where human oversight remains indispensable. As noted by a manager of a national news agency:

> In practice, there is always human review involved, or even more stringent human oversight. This is certain, and it is not a technical issue. AI can only address technical aspects of the process; it cannot replace or resolve issues in the overall production workflow. (P-01)

The importance of attribution further reinforces this boundary. Labelling AI-generated content is not only a matter of transparency, but also a mechanism for assigning responsibility. As noted by a journalist working at a provincial radio station:

> Labelling the source is necessary to inform the audience; that is one reason. Another reason is that AI systems, such as ERNIE Bot, may sometimes produce inaccurate or fabricated content. Because of this, it is important to clarify responsibility and provide proper attribution, in case such issues arise. (P-14)

This reflects a form of boundary work centred on the protection of professional autonomy. By insisting on human accountability, journalists attempt to maintain control over editorial authority and prevent AI from encroaching on core institutional responsibilities.

4.2.3. Journalism as Affective and Value-Laden Practice and "Machine Trace" as Boundary Marker

While the accountability gap positions AI within a human-in-the-loop framework (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2019), journalists go further by asserting the irreplaceability of human meaning-making. Journalism is not understood as a purely technical process, but as an interpretive and value-laden practice grounded in human experience.

Editorial judgement is understood as a core professional competence that cannot be delegated. As a journalist working for national TV's financial channel stated, "We expect journalists to use their professional judgement to find the most valuable content" (P-08), rather than simply repurposing information. Similarly, depth reporting requires interpretive work: "You have to find the story, the highlights, and dig deeper…even for us, that's already difficult" (P-08).

AI is also perceived as lacking stylistic individuality. Journalists emphasise that different reporters bring distinct perspectives, whereas AI outputs risk becoming standardised. This raises concerns about homogenisation and loss of personal voice. As a video journalist for national new media noted:

> For example, when it comes to in-depth reporting by journalists, their personal experiences and distinctive styles in interviews and reporting, these cannot really be replaced, at least for now. In our actual use, we have found that AI still struggles in these areas. (P-03)

This reflects a rejection of the idea that journalism can be reduced to information processing. Instead, journalistic work is constructed as interpretive labour (Zelizer, 1993), involving the selection, prioritisation, and contextualisation of information. AI, by contrast, is perceived as operating at the level of aggregation, lacking the capacity to identify significance or construct meaning. In this context, stylistic individuality is not merely aesthetic, but epistemic, shaping how meaning is constructed and interpreted.

A key concept emerging from the data is the notion of "machine trace." AI-generated content is often recognisable as such, and this recognisability functions as a boundary marker. As one journalist working at a municipal newspaper observed:

> I have only tried it briefly once, but I felt that the "machine trace" was too obvious, you could recognise it immediately….Also, our newsroom has relatively high standards for writing. The output generated by the system simply cannot meet these requirements. (P-16)

The recognisability of AI-generated content as "machine-produced" becomes a symbolic boundary marker, distinguishing legitimate journalism from synthetic output. This distinction is reinforced by a broader normative understanding of journalism as a human-centred practice. As a journalist and manager at a municipal newspaper stated:

> Writing carries both power and warmth. This power and warmth come from the fact that each author perceives the world differently. A computational system may be able to process vast amounts of information and generate content in a balanced way, but it lacks a human touch. (P-15)

Together, these findings demonstrate that the limits of AI in journalism are not only technical, but epistemological and cultural. Journalistic work is constructed as interpretive, accumulative, and creative labour, rather than mere information processing. By emphasising the irreducible role of human judgement, experience, and affect, journalists move beyond a human-in-the-loop model to assert themselves as irreplaceable meaning-makers, thereby reinforcing the core boundary of journalism.

4.3. AI as Boundary Object: Mediating and Reshaping Journalistic Boundaries (RQ3)

4.3.1. Political Economy, Platform Dependency, and Uneven AI Adoption

Beyond its role within news production, AI functions as a boundary object that mediates relationships between journalism and external actors, including technology companies, state institutions, and market forces. Interviewees indicate that AI becomes transformative only when it reaches a cost threshold. As a manager at a provincial TV station explained, "The turning point will come when AI can replicate reality at a lower cost than real production" (P-13). Until then, it remains supplementary, constrained by the tension between innovation and commercial viability. A seasoned journalist who now works as a freelancer said: "The broader issue is that media organisations are generally not profitable….In some cases, there is not even sufficient funding for human labour, let alone AI" (P-19).

These economic pressures are unevenly distributed across the Chinese media system. Large national-level organisations generally possess greater institutional resources and stronger policy incentives to experiment with AI technologies, while provincial and municipal outlets often face sharper financial constraints and limited technical capacity. For commercially oriented and digitally native outlets, AI adoption is more closely tied to audience competition, workflow efficiency, and platform visibility. As a result, the ability to integrate AI meaningfully into newsroom operations is shaped not only by technological availability, but also by organisational resources, market position, and institutional priorities.

At the same time, news organisations are structurally dependent on external technology providers. As a manager for a provincial TV station noted, "We are beneficiaries of technology, not developers" (P-13). This dependency reflects a broader asymmetry in the political economy of AI-integrated journalism. Most news organisations lack the financial and technical capacity to independently develop large-scale AI systems and therefore rely on infrastructures controlled by major technology companies such as Alibaba, ByteDance, and Baidu. In this arrangement, journalism increasingly becomes dependent on external platforms not only for distribution, but also for technological innovation itself. Technology companies therefore gain growing influence over infrastructural conditions under which journalism operates, including the tools available

for content production, moderation, recommendation and workflow optimisation. This dependency externalises innovation and limits newsroom autonomy, positioning technology firms as key actors shaping journalistic practice.

To mitigate these constraints, some organisations engage in experimental collaboration with universities and research institutions. As a manager for a national news agency described, such partnerships involve "continuously exploring and improving" AI systems together (P-01). Experimental collaborations with universities and research institutions partly function as strategies for mitigating infrastructural dependencies. Such partnerships allow media organisations to access technical expertise and participate in AI experimentation without independently developing large-scale systems. At the same time, these collaborations illustrate how journalism increasingly operates within broader networks of technological co-production involving academia, industry, and state-supported innovation agendas.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that AI adoption in journalism is shaped not simply by technological innovation, but by asymmetrical relations of economic power, infrastructural dependency, and institutional capacity. News organisations do not engage with AI on equal terms. Instead, AI integration increasingly occurs within an ecosystem where technological infrastructures are concentrated within major platform companies, while media organisations remain financially constrained and structurally dependent. In this sense, AI functions not only as a production technology, but also as a mechanism through which existing inequalities and dependencies within the media system are reorganised and intensified.

4.3.2. AI as Governance Infrastructure and Politically Embedded Boundary Work

AI also operates as a boundary object linking journalism with governance structures, particularly through its role in monitoring, compliance, and risk management. Journalists describe the integration of AI systems that detect sensitive content, including keywords and politically sensitive individuals, embedding automated checks into editorial workflows. One video editor at a national TV station explained that their organisation developed a system that "uses big data to identify sensitive figures…mainly for public opinion control" (P-06). These systems are integrated into editorial workflows, where content must pass automated checks before publication:

> They [the technical team] have an AI system that can identify certain elements….Yes, around 2022 [the system was implemented]. I remember this clearly because I once had to write a self-criticism report. In one of my videos, some disgraced officials accidentally appeared alongside senior leaders. After that incident, all such content had to go through AI review. (P-06)

Their adoption is driven partly by human limitations, such as incapacity to keep up with the ever-expanding sensitive words and figures, and most importantly, these systems reduce organisational risks. Such systems have been adopted locally as well, as explained by a producer for a provincial TV station:

> For example, certain sensitive individuals may appear very frequently, and it is difficult for human reviewers to remember all of them. Another issue is that in group photos, individuals may appear very small and are hard to identify with the naked eye. However, if such content is later flagged during review, it can create problems for the person responsible for screening the material. With this kind of software in place, it helps to detect and remove these elements in advance, reducing such risks. (P-12)

Importantly, such tools extend beyond individual organisations. Some are used by regional authorities, indicating that AI is embedded within broader governance infrastructures. This demonstrates that AI is not only reshaping how journalism is produced, but also how it is governed. It mediates the boundary between permissible and impermissible content, embedding journalistic practice within institutional power structures originating from the political field. In this sense, AI becomes a key site of politically embedded boundary work, aligning journalistic processes with regulatory expectations.

4.3.3. Discursive Framing: Techno-Optimism, Inevitability, and Regulatory Necessity

Finally, AI functions as a boundary object at the level of discourse, shaping how journalism relates to broader narratives of technological change. Journalists describe a predominantly techno-optimistic framing, in which AI is positioned as a strategic priority and a driver of future development. A video journalist and the manager of a local branch of a national news agency said:

> We hope that AI will become one of the key industries for future development. As a result, in terms of overall public discourse, there is a preference for highlighting the positive aspects of AI and its potential for growth. Accordingly, our reporting tends to focus more on the positive dimensions of AI. (P-04)

This framing is reinforced by a discourse of technological inevitability. As a journalist and manager at a national TV financial channel reflected, "This technological wave is inevitable…even if we do not promote it, it will still arrive" (P-08). Such narratives naturalise AI adoption, positioning it as part of an unavoidable historical trajectory rather than a contingent choice.

At the same time, a journalist at a national TV legal channel expressed the need for regulation and oversight:

> Whether in our personal views or in the perspectives we present to audiences in programmes, there are always boundaries. These must be subject to effective and strong regulation. It cannot be allowed to develop freely without constraint. If it were left unchecked, the consequences could be significant, and it is difficult to predict what might happen. (P-07)

Together, these discursive framings shape how AI is understood and integrated within journalism. They influence not only its adoption, but also the boundaries of critique, often limiting critical engagement while reinforcing alignment with broader institutional agendas.

5. Concluding Discussion

5.1. Towards a Layered Model of Boundary Work of AI and Journalism

Building on the empirical findings, this study proposes a layered model of boundary work to explain how journalism negotiates the integration of AI across multiple dimensions. While prior studies conceptualise boundary work primarily in terms of discursive processes of professional distinction and legitimation through expansion, expulsion, and protection (Carlson & Lewis, 2019; Gieryn, 1999), the findings suggest that AI intensifies and multiplies boundary negotiation because it operates simultaneously as a production tool, epistemic actor, organisational infrastructure, and governance technology. As a result, boundary work

surrounding AI extends beyond discursive legitimation alone and becomes embedded across task allocation, professional narratives, and institutional infrastructures. These layers are analytically distinct but mutually reinforcing, together shaping how AI is integrated, restricted, and governed within journalism.

5.1.1. Task Boundaries: Allocating AI to Peripheral Functions

At the level of practice, boundary work is enacted through the allocation of AI to specific journalistic tasks. The findings show that AI is systematically confined to routine, standardised, and low-risk processes, such as transcription, editing, and content formatting, while being excluded from core editorial functions including news judgement, narrative construction, and in-depth reporting. This reflects a form of boundary work centred on task differentiation, where journalists actively define which activities are compatible with automation and which require human expertise (Carlson, 2018; Örnebring et al., 2018). By restricting AI to technical execution, journalists preserve the boundary between production and interpretation, ensuring that core professional competencies remain human-centred. Importantly, these task boundaries are not fixed, but conditional. They shift depending on perceived risk, technological capability, and organisational priorities (Cools & de Vreese, 2025). However, the consistent exclusion of AI from meaning-making tasks suggests a stable core boundary around editorial judgement.

5.1.2. Discursive Boundaries: Constructing AI as Both Opportunity and Threat

Boundary work is also performed at the level of discourse, where journalists construct narratives that justify the appropriate use of AI. The findings reveal a dual framing in which AI is simultaneously positioned as a tool for efficiency and innovation, and as a source of risk, uncertainty, and professional threat (Jia et al., 2024). On the one hand, techno-optimistic narratives emphasise AI's role in improving productivity and aligning journalism with broader technological development (Ji et al., 2024). On the other hand, concerns about reliability, bias, legal ambiguity, and "machine trace" are mobilised to justify limiting its use. These discursive constructions serve to legitimise selective adoption. By framing AI as useful but fundamentally limited, journalists can incorporate it into peripheral domains while maintaining boundaries around core practices. In this sense, discourse becomes a key mechanism through which boundary positions are stabilised and defended.

5.1.3. Structural Boundaries: Embedding AI Within Institutional and Governance Frameworks

Finally, boundary work operates at a structural level, where AI is embedded within broader economic, technological, and political systems. Structural boundary work refers to the embedding of journalistic boundaries within technological infrastructures, governance systems, organisational hierarchies, and platform dependencies that shape how journalism operates. In this sense, boundaries are not maintained solely through discourse, but are increasingly codified into automated compliance systems, AI moderation infrastructures, editorial workflows, and relations of technological dependency. The findings show that AI adoption is shaped by political agendas, platform dependency, financial constraints, and regulatory frameworks, positioning journalism within a network of external actors (Bourdieu, 2005; Kuai et al., 2023; Simon, 2024). AI functions here as a governance infrastructure, particularly through its role in content monitoring and compliance. By automating the detection of sensitive content and integrating regulatory requirements into workflows, AI reinforces institutional boundaries around what is permissible and

publishable. At the same time, reliance on external technology providers externalises innovation, limiting newsroom autonomy and redistributing power towards technology companies (Simon, 2024). This highlights that boundary work is not only performed by journalists but also structured by the conditions under which journalism operates.

5.1.4. Interactions Between Layers: Reinforcing and Negotiating Boundaries

These three layers—task, discursive, and structural—interact to produce a coherent boundary regime: task boundaries define what AI does; discursive boundaries define how AI is understood; structural boundaries define how AI is enabled and constrained. These layers also mutually reinforce one another: discourse legitimises structure; structures constrain tasks; task allocation reinforces professional ideology. For example, discursive concerns about reliability and authenticity justify the exclusion of AI from core tasks, while structural constraints such as regulation and platform dependency further shape how these boundaries are enacted in practice.

At the same time, these boundary processes do not occur between equal actors. AI integration unfolds within asymmetrical relations shaped by platform dependency, economic precarity, organisational hierarchy, and political governance. Technology companies increasingly control the infrastructures through which journalism accesses AI capabilities, while automated compliance systems embed governance requirements directly into editorial workflows. Boundary work surrounding AI is therefore not only professional, but also political and infrastructural, reflecting broader struggles over authority, autonomy, and control within the evolving media ecosystem (Becker et al., 2025; Perreault et al., 2026).

The findings further highlight that boundary work around AI is shaped by uncertainty. Journalists face ambiguity regarding AI's reliability, legal status, and long-term implications, leading to cautious and conditional adoption. This uncertainty does not weaken journalistic boundaries but intensifies efforts to stabilise them (Örnebring & Karlsson, 2022; Schapals & Porlezza, 2020). Concerns about misinformation, copyright, and data security justify restricting AI to low-risk domains, while reinforcing the centrality of human accountability. At the same time, institutional pressures to adopt AI create a countervailing force, encouraging experimentation. This tension produces what can be understood as "conditional flexibility," where boundaries are neither fixed nor eroded but dynamically adjusted in response to shifting technological and institutional conditions.

This study contributes to journalism studies in three ways. First, it extends boundary work theory by demonstrating that AI becomes a site of simultaneous expansion, protection, and negotiation, making boundary processes more explicit and multi-layered. Second, it conceptualises AI as a boundary object in journalism, highlighting its role in mediating relationships between heterogeneous actors and institutional domains. Third, it introduces a layered model of boundary work, showing how boundaries are constructed across task, discursive, and structural dimensions. This provides a more comprehensive framework for analysing technological change in journalism. Together, these contributions offer a more nuanced understanding of how journalism adapts to AI, not through disruption, but through structured and negotiated transformation. Future research may extend this analysis to other media systems and explore how different institutional contexts shape the layered dynamics of boundary work in AI-integrated journalism.

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ARTICLE

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Diffusion, Logics, and Boundaries: How Journalists in Marginalized Media Markets Negotiate AI in Newsrooms

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Abstract

Literature on artificial intelligence (AI) and its role in journalism is expanding rapidly. Yet it remains disproportionately focused on Western contexts, ignoring how AI is perceived and negotiated in marginalized or semi-peripheral markets. This article focuses on how journalists in Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey perceive, apply, and challenge AI technologies. Drawing on theories of diffusion of innovations, institutional logics, and boundary work, this study analyzes the presentation of AI as both a technological innovation and a symbolic threat to professional identity. We conducted 10 focus-group sessions with 68 journalists and editors from diverse media outlets in seven different countries. Sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. Transcripts were independently coded by two researchers using AI-assisted coding in ATLAS.ti, alongside standard manual coding, with consensus-building to refine the process. The results show skewed and uneven AI implementation, motivated by efficiency requirements and not institutional strategy. Journalists present AI as a helping hand, noting concerns about fact-checking, editorial control, and professional autonomy. These strains indicate conflicting institutional logics, especially between technological efficiency and professional norms, and produce particular kinds of boundary work. Whereas defensive strategies underline the unreliability of human judgment, adaptive strategies also incorporate AI under editorial oversight. The article

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is relevant to the literature because it emphasizes ways in which structural limitations, institutional stresses, and professional ideals influence AI adoption outside of Western media systems.

Keywords
artificial intelligence; boundary work; journalism; marginalized media markets; newsroom cultures; professional identity

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from being a speculative topic in journalism to an increasingly concrete element of newsroom practice. What only a few years ago was discussed mainly in relation to automation or experimental uses in data journalism is now present in a much broader range of editorial routines. This transformation has generated intense scholarly and professional debate. Much of the recent literature has focused on AI's practical potential to improve speed, efficiency, and productivity in journalism, as well as on the ethical and epistemological risks it introduces (Deuze & Beckett, 2022; Opdahl et al., 2023). Recent syntheses show that AI-in-journalism research increasingly examines how automation and human–machine collaboration are reshaping newsroom workflows (Schjøtt, 2026).

Existing research has substantially advanced our understanding of AI adoption in journalism, particularly in Western media systems. Less attention, however, is paid to contexts where AI adoption unfolds under structural constraints, institutional fragility, and uneven technological development. As a result, little is known about how journalists working under conditions of economic constraint and political pressure perceive, negotiate, and integrate AI into their daily practices. This imbalance matters because technological adoption is never purely technical; it is shaped by organizational cultures, professional histories, institutional pressures, and local understandings of what journalism is and should do. This study focuses on Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey, which provide a valuable set of underrepresented contexts for examining how these factors shape the adoption and negotiation of AI beyond the media systems that have so far dominated the literature. In this study, marginalized media markets are understood not simply as geographically peripheral settings, but as media systems shaped by structural constraints, institutional trajectories, and uneven technological capacities that influence how journalistic innovation is interpreted and adopted (Curran & Park, 2005; Voltmer, 2008). Following Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative framework, we use it to denote a position relative to the polarized-pluralist and hybrid media systems that predominate in this region, characterized by weaker professionalization, greater political parallelism, and less consolidated market autonomy than the liberal and democratic-corporatist systems from which most AI-newsroom studies to date have drawn their evidence (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

This article addresses that gap by examining how journalists and editors in seven Southeastern and Mediterranean media markets (Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey) make sense of AI as both a technological innovation and a symbolic challenge to journalistic professionalism. To analyze these dynamics, the article integrates diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003), institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012), and boundary work (Gieryn, 1983) into a multilevel analytical framework. Rather than treating these perspectives as separate explanations, we use them to examine how technological

diffusion is mediated by competing institutional logics and negotiated through journalists' professional boundary work. Diffusion of innovations explains uneven spread, institutional logics accounts for organizational mediation and tensions, and boundary work captures journalists' agentic negotiations and feedback into future adoption. Beyond its geographical focus, the study aims to contribute to AI-in-journalism research by showing that AI adoption is not simply a technological process, but one that is also shaped by the structural conditions within which journalism is practiced.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Diffusion of Innovations and AI Adoption

Researchers have examined the process of adopting innovations for decades, and Everett Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers, 2003) remains a foundational framework. Rogers defines innovation as an idea, practice, or object that is considered novel and which offers individuals or organizations new ways to address and solve problems, and technology "a design for instrumental action that reduces the uncertainty in the cause-effect relationships" (Rogers, 2003, p. 17).

2.1.1. The Macro–Meso Distinction in Diffusion

This article adopts a multilevel approach linking AI adoption to macro-level global trends and micro-level journalistic identity. Diffusion refers to the spread of an innovation across organizations, while adoption is the process of integrating an externally developed innovation into an organization (Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002; Orlando et al., 2013). At the macro level, the spread of AI tends to be uneven: Media markets worldwide enjoy early access and rapid technology diffusion, whereas marginalized media markets are affected by so-called digital divides stemming from language support, infrastructure, and resource constraints.

2.1.2. Meso Level: Perceptions and Institutional Logics

How innovation is perceived is a major determinant of its adoption rate. Rogers (2003) identifies five key attributes that explain most variation in adoption: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Within newsrooms, these perceptions are filtered through organizational cultures, resource constraints, and competing priorities that influence whether AI is viewed as a useful tool or a disruptive force. Diffusion is a complex process, and during innovation adoption, several key stages can be identified. Different perspectives describe the process in varying ways. Some researchers (Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002) talk about two stages, initiation and implementation; others (Orlando et al., 2013) add adoption (decision) to the process. These phases can be disrupted in marginalized markets by economic instability or by an organization's inability to manage the situation, fostering conservative or hostile attitudes toward AI (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). Such dynamics lead to a disparate distribution of technologies across organizations and work environments, with some actors pursuing innovation first and others being conservative or hostile. Such processes are particularly evident in journalism, which has undergone considerable technological change over the last few decades.

2.1.3. Micro Level: Journalistic Boundary Work

Digital technologies have disrupted prevailing newsroom practices, transforming the modes of production and dissemination of news (Pavlik, 2022). In recent years, the evolution of AI has accelerated, opening new opportunities for automation, including transcription, translation, data analysis, and text generation (Deuze & Beckett, 2022; Furtáková et al., 2025; Sánchez-García et al., 2023). Journalists do not passively accept these tools; they actively negotiate their professional identity through boundary work. Some news outlets are keen to test the applications, whereas others are hesitant due to concerns about editorial control, transparency, and the possible loss of human power (Andok et al., 2025). In light of this, defensive, adaptive, or integrative boundaries will dictate the cultural impacts of AI in the newsroom and whether AI becomes a useful support or a threatening substitute.

Based on this multilevel understanding of AI diffusion, the following research question has been raised:

> RQ1: How do journalists in marginalized media markets perceive the diffusion of AI technologies in relation to their professional values and newsroom routines?

2.2. Institutional Logics as a Meso-Level Framework for AI

While diffusion theory explains how technologies spread across organizations, it does not fully explain how journalists interpret AI within professional contexts. Institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012) provide the meso-level lens and help explain how newsrooms respond to AI. In this study, the meso level refers to the organizational context of news production, where institutional logics shape how AI is interpreted, implemented, and integrated into newsroom practices. Institutional logics are socially constructed systems of values, assumptions, and practices upon which organizations understand their activities and organize time and space (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012). In newsrooms, multiple logics coexist and can conflict, providing the interpretive frameworks through which AI is evaluated and integrated into editorial processes. In this sense, meso-level logics establish the organizational conditions within which journalists negotiate AI at the micro level. This study examines how these logics—professional, market, technological, and organizational—shape AI adoption in newsrooms, as reflected in journalists' accounts and practices discussed in the empirical analysis.

Professional logic emphasizes verification, editorial responsibility, and journalistic authority as the "fourth estate" (Carlson, 2017), such that AI is often seen as a threat to authorship and control, positioning journalists as overseers rather than primary creators (Fincham, 2023; Opdahl et al., 2023). This logic, anchored in core journalistic values, is undergoing reconfiguration. In this context, the implementation of AI within journalistic practice is perceived as a significant or serious challenge (Peña-Alonso et al., 2025), framed as a potential threat to editorial control and professional authority. While professional logic operates as a set of shared norms and expectations, professional identity refers to how these norms are enacted, negotiated, and contested by individual journalists in everyday practice, linking meso-level structures to micro-level boundary work. Professional identity is therefore dynamic and may be reshaped by changing working conditions and technological transformations (Anton et al., 2026).

Technological logic refers to the orientation toward systematizing and optimizing news production through automation, analytics, and AI-driven tools, prioritizing efficiency and the reduction of routine tasks (Sirén-Heikel et al., 2023). These developments often come into tension with professional logic, particularly where speed and automation challenge norms of verification, authorship, and editorial control. Market logic focuses on profitability, audience engagement, and cost reduction, viewing AI as a tool for productivity amid declining revenues (Beckett, 2019; Landerer, 2013). This efficiency-based motivation in marginalized media markets frequently leads to direct opposition to professional norms of depth and editorial quality, thereby compelling a trade-off between financial survival and news integrity. Organizational logic refers to the structuring of newsroom workflows, roles, and routines through which competing logics are translated into concrete editorial processes, often creating intra-organizational constraints that influence the implementation of journalistic practices (Asp, 2014). Organizational logic may also be critical to the form in which AI is integrated into newsroom design. These logics generate tensions, especially between professional norms of accuracy and technological/market demands for speed that journalists experience as everyday dilemmas. Guided by this meso-level analysis, we propose the following research question:

> RQ2: How do competing institutional logics (technological, organizational, professional, market) shape journalists' interpretations and application of AI in newsroom workflows?

2.3. Micro-Level Negotiations: Journalistic Boundary Work and Professional Identity

Boundary work (Gieryn, 1983) explains how professions define and defend expertise when boundaries become unstable. For Gieryn, boundaries are not fixed divisions between "science" and "non-science," but constructed, negotiated, and strategically invoked. Professionals engage in boundary work to protect credibility and legitimacy, especially when autonomy is under threat. While diffusion of innovations explains the uneven spread of AI and institutional logics account for the organizational tensions surrounding its adoption, boundary work focuses on how journalists themselves interpret, negotiate, and defend their expertise and authority in response to those pressures at the level of professional identity.

Applied to journalism, this perspective clarifies how journalists define legitimate news production. As Davis (2010) notes, journalism's professional standing depends less on formal credentials than on shared commitments such as verification, independence, accountability, and service to the public. These values distinguish journalism from public relations, activism, and user-generated content. In this sense, professional identity is not a fixed attribute but an ongoing accomplishment shaped by the interaction between institutional ideology, organizational settings, and individual self-understandings (Raemy, 2020).

Carlson (2017) conceptualizes journalistic authority as an achievement stabilized through norms, routines, and public claims about expertise and responsibility. From this perspective, AI challenges established authority by introducing algorithmic actors into domains historically associated with human judgment, including news selection, framing, drafting, summarizing, and verification. As Carlson (2015) suggests, journalists' responses can be understood as efforts to reassert authority where epistemic and normative control is partially transferred to technological systems. Recent work further shows that journalists respond to generative AI by seeking to preserve their epistemic authority through supervised forms of human–machine co-creation, retaining editorial control over inputs, verification, and final judgment (Ashuri et al., 2026).

2.3.1. Boundary Work in Journalism: Maintaining Credibility and Autonomy

Journalism has repeatedly faced challenges to its authority. Lewis (2012) shows that the rise of participatory media forced journalists to renegotiate the balance between professional control and open contribution. Rather than rejecting user participation or surrendering editorial authority, news organizations recalibrated boundaries, allowing new forms of input while retaining control over standards, judgment, and final decisions.

Carlson's (2015) analysis of automated journalism reveals a similar pattern. As algorithmic systems began producing news stories, debates emerged around whether machine-written content could be considered journalism. Journalists responded by emphasizing interpretation, responsibility, and editorial judgment, effectively redefining the professional core around those elements least open to automation. Boundary work becomes visible here, as distinctions between human and machine production are drawn and defended.

As Lewis (2012) suggests, new technological practices do not necessarily erode professional control; they reshape how it is exercised. Journalists may defend interpretive labor while integrating automated systems into routine production. AI thus prompts both protection and expansion. What matters, then, is not only that AI generates professional tension, but how journalists themselves translate that tension into claims about what remains properly journalistic, who should retain control, and which forms of AI use are compatible with their role. This dynamic helps frame RQ3:

> RQ3: How do journalists perform boundary work to reconcile the perceived opportunities and risks of AI with their professional identity?

2.3.2. Adaptive and Defensive Boundary Work in Response to AI

Gieryn (1983) distinguishes between protective and expansionary forms of boundary work. This distinction clarifies journalists' possible responses to AI. At the micro level, these forms of boundary work can be understood as strategies through which journalists respond to AI's challenge to their expertise and authority. Protective, or defensive, boundary work emphasizes non-substitutable aspects of practice, such as ethical judgment, contextual interpretation, and accountability. Expansionary, or adaptive, boundary work instead incorporates new tools or competencies into the profession while preserving control over standards and outcomes (Carlson, 2015, 2017).

In practice, these strategies often overlap. Carlson (2015) shows that journalists can defend interpretive labor while integrating automated systems into routine production. Accordingly, competing professional, technological, and market pressures do not only operate at the organizational level; they function as individual negotiations over expertise, autonomy, and responsibility. Recent studies reflect that journalists respond to AI by evaluating its usefulness and by renegotiating editorial autonomy, oversight, and responsibility in everyday practice (Ashuri et al., 2026; Cools & de Vreese, 2025). These dynamics are essential for understanding how AI becomes institutionalized in newsroom culture. When AI is framed as a subordinate tool under editorial supervision, its adoption is likely to remain constrained by professional standards. When technological fluency is framed as a marker of professional excellence, however, AI competence may itself become a new boundary marker. In this way, boundary negotiations do not merely reflect present responses to AI; they also shape expectations about its future role and the conditions under which it becomes normalized, constrained, or resisted in newsroom culture. This perspective informs RQ4:

RQ4: How do forms of boundary negotiation (defensive vs. adaptive) shape journalists' expectations about the future and diffusion of AI in newsroom culture?

2.3.3. Boundary Work and the Redefinition of Journalistic Professionalism in Hybrid Human–Machine Contexts

The integration of AI signals a shift toward hybrid human–machine configurations in news production. In these settings, professional identity is neither simply preserved nor fully transformed, but recalibrated. Davis (2010) highlights the normative foundations of journalism, which become especially relevant here. If professional distinction can no longer rely solely on technical control over production, it must depend more heavily on judgment, accountability, and commitment to the public interest.

From a boundary work perspective, hybridization requires constant clarification of responsibility. Where does machine assistance end and human accountability begin? Which tasks can be delegated without undermining professional ideals? These questions shape newsroom norms, influence public perceptions of legitimacy, and condition the adoption of AI tools.

In marginalized media markets, where resources are limited and labor conditions are often precarious, these negotiations may be especially significant. AI may appear as a practical response to structural constraints by promising efficiency and lower costs, but it can also intensify concerns about deskilling, homogenization, and loss of autonomy. Seen through the lens of boundary work, AI adoption becomes more than a technological choice: It is a site of professional self-definition through which journalists help normalize, constrain, or redirect how AI becomes embedded in newsroom practice over time.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design with focus groups. The sessions were conducted in person or remotely in June–July 2025 and in July 2026. The purposive sample consisted of 68 media professionals across seven media markets: Albania (n = 14), Croatia (n = 9), Kosovo (n = 10), North Macedonia (n = 10), Romania (n = 9), Slovenia (n = 8), and Turkey (n = 8). An overview of participants' characteristics is provided in Appendix C (Table C2) in the Supplementary File. Participants were recruited using a non-probabilistic strategy that combined purposive and snowball sampling through three channels: (a) direct contact with known newsrooms (e.g., emailing editors via publicly available addresses), (b) dissemination via professional networks (e.g., national journalist associations and informal professional mailing lists), and (c) snowballing via participant forwarding within their professional circles. Inclusion criteria were current employment as a journalist or editor, and no minimum years of experience were required. All individuals provided informed consent before participation.

3.2. Data Collection

The focus-group sessions were facilitated by local moderators using a shared semi-structured guide to ensure conceptual equivalence across contexts. The sessions were conducted in person or remotely, and

in the participants' native language. Contextual information on each session is provided in Appendix A (Table A1) in the Supplementary File, and the full guide is reproduced in Appendix B, also in the Supplementary File.

All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed using automated transcription followed by human review to correct errors and improve accuracy. Transcription was verbatim and preserved the conversational structure of the discussions: Each contribution was attributed an anonymized speaker identifier. Direct exchanges between participants remained visible in the transcripts and could be considered during coding. Because discussions took place in multiple languages, transcripts were translated into English prior to analysis by local moderators. Both the AI-assisted and the human coder therefore worked with the same set of transcripts.

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and participation was voluntary. The transcripts were anonymized and any potentially identifying details about individuals and confidential newsroom systems were removed or generalized prior to analysis. An overview of all participants is provided in Appendix C (Table C1) in the Supplementary File.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis followed recent methodological guidance on AI-assisted qualitative analysis and collaborative coding (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Gao et al., 2024; Williamson et al., 2025), combining ATLAS.ti's AI-assisted coding with manual coding in MAXQDA Analytics Pro. The first coder generated an initial codebook in ATLAS.ti and manually reviewed every suggestion, refining codes and quotation links where needed; the full procedure is reported in Appendix D in the Supplementary File.

In parallel, a second coder conducted a fully manual coding process using MaxQDA Analytics Pro as a data management and coding platform. MaxQDA was used solely to organize, store, and apply codes to the data; all codes, code definitions, and coding decisions were developed manually by the researcher without AI assistance or AI-generated codebooks. The coding process went through several iterative rounds, starting with a smaller set of initial codes that were progressively refined, expanded, and differentiated as new patterns emerged across the transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). After both coding processes were complete, the coders compared their exported codebooks, discussed areas of convergence and divergence, merged overlapping categories, and iteratively revised the coding framework until consensus was reached. The agreed framework comprises 10 higher-order categories and is presented in full in Appendix E (Table E1) in the Supplementary File. Frequency markers reported in the findings represent code frequencies (i.e., the total number of coded mentions across the dataset), rather than the number of unique participants.

4. Findings

4.1. Uneven Diffusion of AI in Marginalized Newsrooms (RQ1)

Consistent with the macro level of our conceptual model, this section addresses RQ1 through the lens of diffusion of innovations, asking how far and how evenly AI has travelled into the routines of newsrooms in marginalized media markets. Most participants reported broad awareness of AI tools used for numerous newsroom tasks, from transcription services and multimodal generators to research assistants. At the same

time, several journalists emphasized limited, minimal, or non-use of AI in their journalistic work. Despite this general awareness, there is a clear disparity in how these tools are implemented in newsroom workflows. Numerous participants noted that AI tools were not completely integrated into editorial production but were used selectively for specific tasks, like transcription or drafting support. Such an imbalanced trend indicates that the spread of AI in marginalized media markets is characterized less by systematic, institutional adoption than by individual experimentation and ad hoc usage.

Diffusion was not a one-way process, as several participants described trial followed by rejection. One Romanian journalist abandoned ChatGPT entirely because "the sources aren't reliable….I asked it to make summaries, but I just threw them away because half the info was wrong" (RO4), migrating instead to newer tools he perceived as more accurate. Adoption decisions in these markets are thus continuously revised, based on first-hand accuracy assessments rather than organizational mandates. In Croatia, discontinuance also operated at the level of individual tasks: One journalist described abandoning ChatGPT for headline writing because "if anything, it slows us down" (HR8), and web headlines demand a style the model does not grasp.

The most frequently mentioned AI tool was ChatGPT, followed by specialized transcription applications such as VATIS, Turboscribe, Otter.ai, Sonix AI, EBU Transcriber, Minutes AI, and the language-specific system Shqip.ai, as well as customized tools, internal software, proprietary tools, and conversational assistants. Journalists also mentioned tools that support newsroom workflows, such as the Vera workflow coordination tool.

The main perceived advantages of AI tools were increased speed and efficiency, particularly in transcription, support and assistance, content generation, technical or routine tasks, translation, information retrieval or access, workload management, and task automation. Journalists stressed that automatic transcription tools make the job easier for long interviews and that time producing music packages or jingles can be reduced from weeks to hours. As one Slovenian journalist noted, "AI has a lot to contribute, especially in helping us from drafting texts to fact-checking, ultimately proofreading" (SI3). A Croatian participant similarly emphasized its assistant role, observing that its strength lies in cost-effectiveness: "It's a useful assistant….It helps reorganize tasks and challenge the traditional boundaries of our work" (HR5). Nevertheless, as another Croatian journalist summarized, the greatest benefit is speed, as it can double the speed of production, which is essential for large newsrooms that need a high output.

This unevenness was visible not only across newsrooms but within single focus groups. In the Slovenian session, one participant noted that "everything we use is more by personal initiative" (SI4), a second said that, beyond an internal transcriber that is "extremely bad," "there are no systemic solutions, it's mostly everybody finding what works for them" (SI3), while a third described routine, extensive use, from "Suno AI to create music, jingles, arrangements"—so that "what used to take weeks, we now do in two hours"—to ChatGPT for "bureaucratic stuff: tenders, project reports, mission statements" (SI5). Unevenness in our data thus has two concrete dimensions: variation in the scope of tasks delegated to AI, and variation in the locus of adoption, from individual initiative in the absence of house rules to emerging organizational integration.

These accounts indicate that AI's introduction into marginalized newsrooms is driven by the pragmatic argument of efficiency and workload control, yet remains uneven in both senses identified above.

In diffusion terms, AI has entered these newsrooms as an addition to journalistic work, while its institutionalization is only beginning to take shape.

4.2. Institutional Logics Shaping AI Adoption in Newsrooms (RQ2)

Turning to the meso level of the model, this section addresses RQ2 by tracing how competing institutional logics—technological and organizational logics of efficiency on the one hand, professional norms of verification and responsibility on the other—shape whether, and on whose terms, AI is taken up. These opposing interpretations determine the uptake, restriction, or opposition of AI tools in daily newsroom practice.

The competing logics did not remain abstract and surfaced as open disagreement within the focus groups. In the Croatian session, an editor's account of organizationally driven experimentation—testing custom AI models through which "AI does participate in the creation of certain articles," while the journalist "remains fully in control" (HR1)—was immediately contested by colleagues from other newsrooms. One reported catastrophic results from letting AI write independently: Unsupervised output turns out "worse 99 times out of 100" and "always adds something that has nothing to do with reality," which is why journalists in that newsroom work from training and written guidelines so that "AI never creates articles independently" (HR3). Another added that even short tests exposed hallucinations that "increase the workload because everything has to be verified multiple times" (HR5). Pressed on the apparent discrepancy, the first editor clarified that the tested system was "a specific program developed especially for us," insisting he "would never let ChatGPT alone write a text by itself" (HR1). The exchange condenses the meso-level conflict: The efficiency logic collides with the professional logic of verification, and is resolved organizationally through training and written guidelines.

Journalists described using AI for fact-checking and verification, including verifying images or videos and cross-referencing information. A Turkish reporter stressed that AI outputs must be checked against independent sources and a Slovenian journalist noted that such tools benefit "serious journalism" (SI3) only when combined with human oversight and professional judgement.

The dominance of professional journalistic logics is reflected in how AI was widely framed as assistive rather than as a substitute for journalism, with support and assistance frequently mentioned. Journalists reported using AI to prepare interview questions, generate ideas, draft, and speed up routine technical tasks. This also stresses tensions between technological efficiency logics and professional norms of authorship and responsibility. For example, a Turkish participant described using ChatGPT and Gemini to shorten news and improve language, while emphasizing that AI mainly "speeds up my work and functions as a kind of personal assistant" (TR4). In Albania, journalists framed AI as useful for processing information and drafting texts but stressed that it cannot replace field reporting.

Market logic entered these negotiations less as an enthusiasm for efficiency than as anxiety about revenue and labor. A Croatian participant warned that "if users start replacing Google with AI tools, we'll see a significant decline in traffic. That shift is already happening" (HR2). Romanian participants extended the same logic to wages, predicting that "our salaries will be capped…they become marginalized. Like shoemakers once did" (RO6). Croatian participants located the same pressure regarding production: "The faster you can produce content, the more content you're expected to produce," while "quality inevitably

suffers" (HR7). Market pressures thus cut both ways: motivating adoption for productivity while devaluing the labor it is meant to protect.

Participants mentioned newsroom-specific systems that embed AI within workflows, including customized tools, software, proprietary systems, newsroom conversational assistants, and Public Space. One Croatian journalist described a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) proprietary system based on generative models adapted for editorial needs that can collect, process, and input data directly into the content management system (CMS), with only a few people operating workflows that previously required a larger team. Another Croatian newsroom uses a customized Telegram bot that automatically pulls police press releases, illustrating how simple automations are integrated into daily routines. However, limited information was provided about these systems due to confidentiality, indicating that some commercially or organizationally driven implementations are not fully transparent even to the journalists using them.

The proprietary systems described above represent adoption at the institutional level, and participants' reactions to them reveal how the individual and institutional levels interact. In most newsrooms, however, individual adoption outpaced organizational support. A Kosovar journalist described using ChatGPT covertly precisely because her newsroom had taken no stance: "I secretly used it, the editors don't use it…they haven't even told us to use it or not to use it" (XK6). A colleague in the same session located her newsroom at the threshold of formalization:

> We had training with the editorial team on how to use it maybe a year ago…but this is more about individuality…there's no decision exactly as the editorial team has said please use it faster, [but] it hasn't happened yet. Maybe very soon we'll have a decision from the editorial team…[but for now] there's no push either for or against. (XK4)

Where institutions did react, they did so to safeguard professional logic rather than to accelerate adoption: Croatian editors, as shown above, converted professional norms into training and written guidelines. Regulatory actors sent similar signals: A Turkish participant reconsidered how transformative AI would be for journalism after a meeting with the director of the Press Advertisement Institution—who told him the institution had already warned two newspaper columnists for using AI and was preparing legal regulation to address it (TR8). Individual experimentation thus precedes institutional codification, while emergent institutional responses—guidelines, training, proprietary systems, and regulatory signals—channel that experimentation back within the boundaries of professional logic.

At the same time, journalists remained conflicted about AI's role in verification itself, citing insufficient protection against misuse: Fact-checking "simply isn't done at the level required for professional journalism" (AL2); at least one reporter still needs to do fact-checking (RO1); and AI outputs were seen as easily manipulated and potentially biased (MK2, MK5).

4.3. Boundary Negotiation: Defensive and Adaptive Responses (RQ3)

4.3.1. Defensive Boundary Work

At the micro level of the model, this section addresses RQ3, examining the boundary work through which journalists reconcile the perceived opportunities and risks of AI with their professional identity. When

reflecting on future roles, several journalists insisted that AI cannot replace field journalism, highlighting tasks such as being physically present on site, reading context, and building trust with sources as inherently human. One Slovenian journalist stressed that "AI will not go outside Parliament to film protests. That still has to be done by humans" (SI5). Another Slovenian participant similarly highlighted that, especially in local news, the personal touch and being on the ground are paramount, especially in local stories. They also strongly reaffirmed the importance of human authorship and stressed that responsibility, originality, and interpretive work should remain with journalists even when AI participates in drafting or writing content. In this view, AI may support journalistic work, but it should not become an author or a substitute for human judgement.

This defensive stance was evident when Slovenian journalists resisted the idea that AI could fully replicate a reporter's voice. One participant insisted that "human footprints remain in the text," adding that "I want it to be clear that someone has sat down, thought about it, chosen the words. For me, that's the point of journalism" (SI7). The participant noted that tools like ChatGPT could lead to uniformity of texts and risk eroding "individual writing style, drama, feeling—all the things that AI doesn't have" (SI7). Moreover, by 2030 people will still want to read articles written by "people with names and surnames, people who've made mistakes, and seen something with their own eyes" (HR5).

Defensive boundaries were drawn through trial, disappointment, and withdrawal. A Croatian editor recounted asking AI for advice on structuring a daily show: "The result was quite awkward, clumsy, and strange, so I simply gave up on that idea," concluding that "editorial work is personal and requires a human touch" (HR4). The boundary is thus redrawn after direct contact with the underperforming technology.

Defensive boundary work also surfaced in concerns that critical thinking and interpretive labor could be hollowed out if AI is allowed to take over core cognitive tasks. Journalists worried that students simulate critical thinking through ChatGPT and skip the learning phase, warning that if AI becomes a substitute for a thought process, then it harms journalism, which could lose its core (Slovenia). Others cautioned that if journalists become too dependent on AI, they risk becoming "content managers, not content creators," and that "if there is no more doubt, there is no more journalism" (SI4).

4.3.2. Adaptive Boundary Work

Journalists most frequently described AI's future role as an assistive and supportive infrastructure, depicting it as a technical helper rather than an autonomous actor in the newsroom. They anticipated that, if used well, AI could improve speed and quality of content, increase accessibility of outputs, and free up more time for deeper reporting, while still operating under human editorial control. Many emphasized that AI will not end journalism and that journalists who use AI best will stand out, "as it saves significant time and supports my creativity when I am stuck" (TR3). Nevertheless, AI tools are used with clear boundaries. As one Croatian journalist explained, their newsroom uses them as a writing assistant only: "You have to provide it with the full input….Using AI as a search engine is dangerous…unverified information ends up in articles" (HR3). Albanian participants pushed the assistant frame furthest, recording AI use itself as a marker of professionalism: Asking AI for similar past stories with sources "actually helps you become a better journalist—it doesn't harm you or make you lazy," because "you're still working under your own name, but at the same time, someone—or something—is supporting you in verifying and enriching your information" (AL5). Adaptive boundary work here does not merely tolerate the technology; it enlists it in the performance of professional virtue.

Journalists linked this assistant role to a reallocation of time from routine work to what they defined as real journalism. Use of AI tools for "technical tasks" such as subtitling, graphics, and background removal means journalists "have more time for content. When I no longer have technical barriers, I can think about what I want to say, not how to say it" (SI8). This allows them to put more emphasis on the content. Another journalist similarly argued that AI reduces routine workload, enabling journalists to focus on more creative, investigative, and analytical tasks, but only within ethical frameworks that preserve transparency and accountability (Turkey).

4.3.3. Boundary Redefinition

Participants also pointed to growing demands for skill diversification and the need for AI competencies that allow journalists to work critically with AI tools while preserving professional standards. One participant highlighted the large difference between general AI and AI tools, arguing that the former has long been part of journalistic workflows, whereas the latter still has a lot of room for development. This redefinition of expertise entailed an explicit division of labor between thinking and tool operation, with many journalists insisting that the former remain on the human side. Since AI can quickly collect and structure a larger amount of data, it is very useful for preliminary research. However, its effectiveness depends on the users' level of knowledge and experience (Slovenia). Consequently, Albanian journalists believe journalists will be replaced not by AI, but by colleagues who know how to work with it.

This response reflects a shift in professional expertise towards managing technological risks. Common concerns, such as shortcut risks, fact-checking gaps, and the tendency of chatbots to "hallucinate and just make up statements that are non-existent" (MK2), serve as boundary markers. By identifying these vulnerabilities, journalists position verification, deliberation, and accountability as distinctly human competencies.

4.4. Cultural Consequences: Redefining Journalistic Expertise (RQ4)

Finally, addressing RQ4, this section examines how defensive and adaptive boundary negotiation feeds back into journalists' expectations about AI's future place in newsroom culture, and into the redefinition of journalistic expertise itself. In regard to the future place of AI in journalism, some emphasized increasing automation and efficiency. For instance, one participant predicted that by 2030, AI could replace at least 50% of their work and noted that for "technically exhausted understaffed newsrooms, where one person works for three, I think it's the only way to survive" (SI8). Albanian journalists similarly anticipated extensive automation. One envisioned that within a few years, AI platforms will be capable of doing everything, "capable of simultaneously writing the text, editing it, and handling everything else," eventually producing all online content, "just like the image of the snake that manages to bite its own tail" (AL5).

By contrast, respondents engaging in defensive boundary work foresaw more incremental change, maintaining that core journalism cannot be automated. A Turkish journalist stated, "I don't think AI will replace journalists in the next five years. Rather, it will serve as an assistant and supportive tool" (TR4). Reinforcing this view, Croatian participants asserted that "AI might help with data processing, but I don't see it taking over writing entirely" (HR2), and that "there's no tool out there that can uncover a story for you….AI can't develop a nose for news" (HR4).

4.4.1. Expertise Shifts from Production to Supervision

As journalists reconcile these expectations, a profound cultural consequence emerges. Journalism itself is being redefined from a role of content production to one of content supervision. Instead of primarily drafting texts, journalists are increasingly becoming AI supervisors in hybrid human–AI workflows. This shift reflects adaptive boundary work, where journalists willingly delegate routine technical and drafting tasks to machines, but fiercely protect their jurisdiction over final editorial judgment.

In the Croatian session, participants moved within a few turns between the journalist's creative claim to the text and the editor's gatekeeping responsibility for it. One grounded accountability in the byline: "Every article in our newsroom is signed by a journalist, whether AI tools were used or not" (HR3). A second located the journalist's irreducible contribution in editorial labor—"Even when we use AI, the journalist still selects the sources, checks facts, and shapes the narrative"—and claimed the detection of AI-inflected drafting as an editorial task: "I can usually tell when someone leaned heavily on ChatGPT....That's my job as an editor—to spot that and address it with the reporter" (HR1). A third moved the resolution to the institutional level, insisting that every article "should have a human author—no website writes content on its own" (HR5).

4.4.2. AI Literacy as Professional Capital

AI literacy is emerging as a critical new form of professional expertise and capital. The ability to effectively interact with AI, from prompting to verifying and structuring queries, is becoming increasingly important for journalists. A Turkish participant articulated this competence precisely: "AI gives answers based on what we feed it, so it is the journalist's job to ask the right questions and guide it properly" (TR4). Expertise migrates from producing the answer to formulating the question—a shift that keeps epistemic authority on the human side while conceding execution to the machine. Journalists predict advanced use of AI tools will no longer be viewed as separate IT skills, but as core journalistic competencies. Due to this, journalists in the future will "have to know how to do everything—film, edit, publish on multiple channels," noting that this will bring more workload, but also more flexibility (SI8).

4.4.3. Verification as the Core Identity

This transformation of expertise also changes the role of fact-checking. Journalists are modifying their professional identity around verification, establishing it as the central skill of the AI era. Journalists emphasized that AI systems frequently hallucinate, fabricate details, or create non-existent sources. Consequently, journalists must act as the safeguard with an internal "red light to go on, to check whether what the AI has done is real" (SI1).

Journalists warned that in the "rush to get the news" for clicks, using AI unchecked could lead to a "flood of identical, superficial, and incorrect information" (SI1). Viewed through a boundary negotiation lens, these vulnerabilities are the reason why journalists position themselves as indispensable. They argued that while AI can easily generate fake research or seemingly credible content, credibility quickly collapses "if you don't have a living human with a historical memory and an irrepressible doubt" (SI4). Because AI generates content so rapidly and unpredictably, this human capacity to question and verify becomes the core justification for the profession's continued existence. As one participant noted, if the journalist is not there to check, then "we will be in a very dangerous media landscape" (SI4).

To define the new core identity as a verifier, journalists expect normative and organizational responses. Some insisted that labeling AI-generated content is essential for maintaining transparency, accountability, and journalistic standards (TR2, TR6), and similar calls for newsroom ethical rules were voiced in North Macedonia and Slovenia (MK1, SI2, SI3). Asked whether the label should appear even when a journalist has "just consulted AI for something small," one Kosovar journalist held that disclosure applies even where the human contribution predominates—"If you do most of the work, absolutely yes" (XK1)—while another extended it to any use at all: "It's the most appropriate way for the public to know that you've used AI, regardless of the amount, because at least if you're looking for an idea, it's not yours" (XK9).

One Slovenian participants extended this credibility demand beyond journalism: "If I, as a journalist, cannot use ChatGPT without being held accountable, then anyone who uses it should also make it clear who did what" (SI8). Another participant imagined AI content "automatically tagged, perhaps even encoded with metadata" (SI6). Disclosure, in these accounts, is less a settled norm than the newest front of boundary work: Participants agreed on the principle while disputing the threshold at which assistance becomes authorship.

Croatian participants pushed this negotiation further. One journalist, previously a proponent of blanket disclosure, now reserves disclosure for cases where AI "has effectively written the article, " persuaded by an analogy: "When I shoot a video, I don't tell people which camera I used" (HR6). Another drew a categorical line at authorship: "If we reach the point where AI is credited as the author, I think we've gone too far" (HR9). A third added an audience-side rationale: Because readers "don't see the editorial process behind the scenes," they "may assume that AI is producing content on its own," eroding trust "even when AI is actually being used responsibly" (HR9).

Boundary negotiations might also create shifts in journalistic values. While AI literacy becomes standard, human effort may become a premium commodity. One journalist imagined a potential future where "there will be a medium that prides itself on not using any artificial intelligence," suggesting that "slow, in-depth content" and "an article that someone really wrote themselves" could become new markers of ultimate quality (SI8). Turkish participants reached the same conclusion from the supply side: Because agency news produced with AI "often lacks originality," journalists "will need to emphasize their identity, originality, and responsibilities more. In other words, the value of journalism will increase in the future" (TR2). A Croatian participant grounded the same expectation in platform economics: Because articles with a named author perform better on distribution platforms such as Google Discover, publishers were expected to keep emphasizing identifiable human authorship rather than replacing bylines with AI labels. Scarcity of the recognizably human, in this projection, becomes journalism's competitive asset (HR7).

Ultimately, these reactions show how journalists renegotiate the boundaries of their profession in the face of technological disruption. By employing defensive boundary work, they fortify their jurisdiction over distinctly human competencies, such as field reporting, contextual judgment, and authentic authorship. At the same time, through adaptive boundary work, they strategically reposition AI as a subordinate infrastructure that augments, rather than supplants, their core professional expertise.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Unlike existing AI-in-journalism literature, which focuses on media in a Western context, this study explores AI adoption in marginalized media markets, where structural constraints, competing institutional logics, and professional boundary negotiations shape the process differently. The discussion analyzes AI diffusion into marginalized media systems through three interconnected levels, which include a macro-level diffusion environment, meso-level institutional logics that influence newsroom practices, and micro-level boundary work through which journalists practice AI diffusion. Together they can be used to explain the process of technological change as negotiated in certain media ecosystems and not just taken up as a linear process. The interplay between the levels creates the effects of feedback that influence future expectations regarding how AI will integrate into the newsroom culture.

In the macro level, findings indicate that AI diffusion in such media systems is markedly uneven. Unlike the approach to technological development followed in Western media systems (Pavlik, 2000; Rogers, 2003), AI is used selectively, more ad hoc, and experimented with individually, rather than as part of a formal, institutionalized process. Such non-uniform distribution reflects structural constraints in these media systems, including limited technological access, unpredictable regulatory frameworks, and organizational fragmentation. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that AI adoption in journalism is shaped not only by the characteristics of the technology itself but also by the institutional and organizational contexts within which news organizations operate (Deuze & Beckett, 2022; Opdahl et al., 2023).

At the meso level, a notable tension emerges between professional logic and technological and market logics, which increasingly shape contemporary media organizations (Thornton et al., 2012). The findings highlight organizational culture and logic as pivotal factors for the adoption of AI in professional practice. While there are still no comprehensive and clear professional orientations within organizational structures, our evidence indicates that journalists navigate a hybrid tension between their creative role and their gatekeeping role regarding AI-generated content. This tension was most visible in the authorship negotiations reported in Section 4.4.1, where byline responsibility, editorial detection of AI-assisted drafting, and calls for house standards were articulated within a single focus-group exchange. Such findings suggest that technological developments alone are not sufficient for their seamless integration into editorial workflows. This interpretation echoes earlier work suggesting that technological innovation in journalism is negotiated through competing institutional priorities rather than adopted as a purely technical process (Carlson, 2015; Thornton et al., 2012).

At the micro level, a marked divergence from Western media systems is observed (Pavlik, 2000; Rogers, 2003), as journalists exhibit greater skepticism about the use of AI. They often set clear boundaries for their use (Gieryn, 1983) and tend to safeguard their professional authority in relation to the encroachment of such technologies. When ethical judgment is needed, journalists engage in “defensive boundary work”; conversely, for routine tasks, they employ “adaptive boundary work.” By defining what constitutes journalism in relation to the use of AI (Lewis, 2012), they assert professional jurisdictional claims. Typically, this process is articulated through meta-journalistic discourse (Carlson, 2015), which can strengthen professional legitimacy amid technological disruption.

Such boundary negotiations have broader implications for future diffusion of AI across newsroom cultures. The uncertainty of verification, hallucinations, and the risk of misinformation, as well as the conflict between the speed and the accuracy of the results, are the issues that journalists are worried about—they define the selectivity of AI tools' acceptance and regulation in daily practice (Sonni, 2025; Zhaxylykbayeva et al., 2025). Instead of fighting technological change, journalists form informal codes that establish acceptable applications of AI without compromising professional responsibility. The concept of such a defensive strategy is supplemented by boundary work as the mechanism that predetermines future adoption patterns. Gaining institutional prominence in the culture of newsrooms, such norms determine how AI technologies will be assessed, restricted, or adopted at later phases of technological diffusion.

This study contributes to existing literature in at least three ways. Primarily, the data reveal that the diffusion of AI in marginalized or semi-peripheral markets is influenced not only by technological drivers, but also by institutional and professional actors. Furthermore, the study elucidates the friction created by the integration of AI in these countries, which results in competing institutional logics, namely professional, technological, market, and organizational. Lastly, our analysis emphasizes that journalists in these newsrooms maintain a cautious approach toward adopting AI and engage in boundary work to reassert their professional jurisdictional authority in a rapidly evolving human–AI environment. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that AI adoption in journalism is shaped not only by technological capabilities, but also by professional norms and organizational contexts (Carlson, 2015; Deuze & Beckett, 2022). However, our findings further show that, in marginalized media markets, these dynamics are intensified by structural constraints that shape how AI is interpreted and integrated into newsroom practice.

Unlike narratives predicated on the logic of linear progression towards automation, or on Western journalists' approaches to technology (Carlson, 2015; Lewis, 2012; Pavlik, 2000; Rogers, 2003; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002), our evidence suggests that, in marginalized or semi-peripheral markets, metajournalistic discourse is shaped by the idiosyncratic characteristics of these countries' media industries. These features are shaped by regulatory uncertainty, organizational culture, and media outlets' strategies for integrating new technologies into journalistic practice.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, while focus groups provide rich qualitative insights, the findings may be influenced by the performative dynamics that can arise during group discussions. The availability of peers may foster consensus or self-censorship, which can influence how journalists express their views on the adoption of AI tools. Future research might further elaborate on focus groups by using individual interviews to examine how journalists bargain on such matters at the individual level. Second, the regional scope circumscribes the generalizability of the findings. Although the study sample is relatively large for qualitative research ($N = 68$), these journalists operate within context-specific media systems shaped by ownership patterns, professional cultures, regulatory contexts, and technological advancements. This means that the results can be considered analytically transferable and not statistically generalized. Third, the ephemeral nature of AI, characterized by rapid evolution and regulatory uncertainty, renders the findings inherently temporal. Consequently, the results represent a certain point in the continuous process of technological integration. Longitudinal studies will therefore be relevant for investigating how newsroom practices, professional norms, and AI adoption evolve as these technologies become more integrated into journalistic work.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

LLMs Disclosure

During data analysis, one of the two coders used ATLAS.ti's built-in AI-assisted coding feature to help generate an initial codebook; every AI-suggested code and quotation link was manually reviewed, refined, and validated by the coder before use (see Section 3.3). The second coder completed a fully independent, manual coding process in MAXQDA Analytics Pro without any AI assistance. No generative AI tool was used to collect data, analyze findings, or write any part of this article beyond the coding-support use described here.

Supplementary Material

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

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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

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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; Sarısakaloğlu, 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 newsworkers 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.

LLMs Disclosure

ChatGPT was used to assist with language editing of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and take full responsibility for the final content.

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Not Afraid of AI yet: Indonesian TV Journalists on Negotiating Roles in AI-Assisted Newsrooms

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Abstract

The introduction of Indonesia's first AI-generated news presenter by tvOne in 2023 marked a symbolic moment in the country's experimentation with AI in television journalism. While AI adoption has sparked global debates about automation and the future of journalistic labor, less is known about how journalists themselves interpret these technologies, particularly in Global South media environments. This study examines how Indonesian television journalists make sense of AI in newsroom practices through the lens of journalistic role perceptions. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 20 television journalists from 12 national newsrooms, the findings indicate that journalists largely perceive AI as a supplementary tool to assist routine production tasks rather than replace core journalistic functions. Participants purported that video capture, editorial judgment, contextual interpretation, and verification remain irreplaceably human responsibilities in television news. These interpretations reflect the continued importance of established journalistic roles, particularly information dissemination and accountability, in shaping television journalists' responses to technological innovation. Simultaneously, journalists' views are embedded within broader structural conditions, including economic pressures and newsroom restructuring in Indonesia's television industry. This study demonstrates how journalists negotiate AI adoption by balancing professional values with the changing economic realities of television news production.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; Indonesian news media; journalistic role; news presenters; television journalists; visual journalism

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1. Introduction

On 21 April 2023, Karni Ilyas, a senior Indonesian television journalist and news presenter, appeared on a national tvOne news program—not in person, but as an avatar generated by AI. The network subsequently developed three virtual presenters modelled on human anchors (Ikhwan & Prihatmadi, 2025). The launch of these AI-based virtual presenters followed a global trend in automated broadcasting, notably pioneered by Xinhua News Agency, which introduced an AI news anchor in November 2018 (Baraniuk, 2018; Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022).

Although tvOne framed its virtual news presenters as an experimental initiative, their debut raised broader questions about the implications of AI for journalistic labor and professional identity: How does AI's integration into newsroom workflows, particularly in broadcast journalism, reshape journalists' perceptions of their professional future? Does AI deployment primarily augment existing capacities, or does it signal deeper structural reconfiguration of the profession? These questions are topical globally but have additional pertinence and nuances in the Global South, as is exemplified by the context of Indonesia, one of Southeast Asia's largest and most dynamic media markets.

In this study, Global South refers not only to a geographic category, but also to media environments shaped by unequal technological resources, economic pressures, and dependence on technologies largely developed in the Global North (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Mutsvairo et al., 2021). This perspective is important because journalists in countries such as Indonesia negotiate AI adoption within distinct institutional and labor conditions that differ from those commonly examined in Western-centric scholarship.

In this context, AI news presenters' emergence might be interpreted as evidence that Indonesian journalism, especially broadcast journalism, could adapt to rapid technological change (Karunianingsih et al., 2025). The initiative could be viewed as positioning Indonesian television news within a global trajectory of digital innovation, demonstrating openness to experimentation and technological optimization. In increasingly competitive, fragmented media environments, technological integration might also help news organizations to maintain relevance and boost audience engagement (Chalikiopoulou et al., 2025; Jordaan, 2025). Yet, AI integration into journalistic practice does not unfold in a linear or uniform manner. Despite high-profile experiments such as tvOne's AI news anchors, many Indonesian newsrooms lack the financial, technological, and human resources required for systematic AI adoption (Manan, 2024).

Such structural disparities are particularly evident when comparing media systems globally. Much existing literature focuses on highly resourced news organizations in the Global North, where financial capital, technological infrastructure, and specialized expertise enable sustained experimentation with advanced technologies (Mauran, 2024; News Corp, 2024; The Guardian, 2025). By contrast, media organizations in the Global South operate under substantially different conditions (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Mutsvairo et al., 2021). These news organizations generally experience greater problems of limited budgets, volatile advertising markets, and constrained technological infrastructures, which can restrict their capacity to explore or implement emerging technologies at scale (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Jamil, 2021).

Beyond structural conditions, another crucial dimension concerns how journalists interpret AI's infiltration into their everyday work. Journalists' responses to technological change are closely tied to their professional

role perceptions (Kuai, 2026), which shape their understanding of "good journalism" practices (S. Wu, 2026). This issue is particularly salient in television journalism, where visual presence, credibility, and performative authority have traditionally been central to professional identity (Deavours & Roberts, 2025).

Although AI may open new avenues for newsroom innovation (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026), workforce downsizing and heightened efficiency demands have intensified concerns that AI could be deployed primarily as a cost-constraint mechanism rather than a supportive tool. In this context, AI becomes both a technological advancement and a symbolic marker of broader transformations affecting journalistic labor and the profession's future. Indeed, issues raised by AI expansion in television newsrooms resonate with wider debates about the role of AI in human labor that have emerged across many fields. Some scholars view AI as a potential substitute for human work through automation (Dahlin, 2024), while others argue that AI functions more as a creative enhancer that augments human capabilities (Chow & Celis Bueno, 2025; Erickson, 2024; Hemraj, 2026). In journalism, these debates center on whether AI threatens professional autonomy and human creativity or instead supports efficiency and innovation (Kuai & Thomson, 2025; Lewis et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, this article examines how Indonesian television journalists interpret the emergence of AI within their professional environment and how these interpretations intersect with professional role perceptions.

2. AI Adoption, Journalistic Identity, and Industry Volatility

2.1. Mapping the Field: Current State of AI and Journalism Research

As technological transformation accelerates, journalism scholars have increasingly examined how AI reshapes the journalistic landscape. This includes transformations in news gathering, verification, and distribution, as well as how audiences receive and interpret AI-assisted news content (Arguedas & Simon, 2023; Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021; Lin & Lewis, 2022). Research on AI and journalism can be mapped broadly into five core categories.

The first category comprises studies documenting newsroom experimentation with AI to optimize journalistic work. Early research on AI and journalism was largely conducted in Western countries, particularly in major media organizations (Chan-Olmsted, 2019; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Jones & Jones, 2025). Studies described AI as a continuation of computational journalism (de-Lima-Santos & Salaverría, 2021; Graefe, 2016; Thurman, 2019). As computing technologies advanced, newsrooms began experimenting with AI to support tasks previously situated within the framework of computational journalism. In this phase, adoption tended to be limited and confined to specific beats or used only at particular stages of production, such as assisting in large-scale data analysis. Thus, innovation in AI-driven journalism was dominated by well-resourced news organizations with substantial financial and human capital (de-Lima-Santos & Salaverría, 2021; Simon, 2022).

In the second phase, scholars began examining structured integration of AI into newsroom operations (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Simon, 2024). While initial experimentation was focused on individual journalists' use of AI tools, subsequent initiatives integrated AI more systematically and holistically into newsroom workflows. Scholars accordingly framed AI implementation as a managerial decision rather than an individual journalist's choice (Drula, 2025). In this context, journalists' personal perceptions of AI adoption were often considered secondary to organizational strategy.

Moreover, AI's integration into newsroom workflows was no longer dominated by large media organizations, as was the case during the experimental stage (Beckett, 2019; Beckett & Yaseen, 2023). Instead, adoption expanded across various types of media organizations and countries (Diakopoulos et al., 2024; Onebunne, 2026). This shift reflected the global diffusion of AI and the increasing affordability and accessibility of AI technologies. Simultaneously, seminars and training on AI in journalism proliferated in the Global South, aiming to accelerate technological diffusion beyond Global North countries (Luttrell et al., 2020; Ncube et al., 2025; Radoli, 2024). Research in this phase further highlights organizational, economic, and structural factors that influence AI adoption (Hermida & Simon, 2025).

The third research category focuses on how audiences perceive news produced by or with the assistance of AI (Kiskola et al., 2025). Findings vary regarding public perceptions of AI-generated news. Some emphasize issues of transparency, readability, and trust (Gondwe, 2025; Nanz et al., 2025; Park & Thomson, 2025), while others suggest that audiences consider AI-assisted news to be lacking a human touch (Ndlovu, 2024). Audiences tend to express discomfort with fully automated formats and expect certain aspects of journalistic work to remain under human control (Park & Thomson, 2025). In the case of AI news anchors, audience perception is also shaped by the interplay between visual realism and individual familiarity, where more human-like appearances significantly boost credibility and news quality ratings (Choi & Jang, 2026).

A fourth body of research has examined journalists' attitudes toward AI adoption in their professional practice. In some studies, journalists often did not regard AI as a threat, instead viewing it as a supportive tool, particularly for personalizing news content and undertaking time-consuming tasks such as interview transcription (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026). Other scholars reported that AI's increasing dominance in journalistic processes raised concerns about diminishing journalistic autonomy (Kuai & Thomson, 2025; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). Some journalists also interpreted the integral adoption of AI within newsrooms as a direct threat to job security (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; Yu & Huang, 2021). Amid widespread newsroom layoffs that were rationalized by efficiency concerns, AI was deemed more as another cost-cutting instrument that might reduce the need for human journalists, especially in the Global South where the economic and institutional support for journalists have tended to be limited (Munoriyarwa et al., 2023). Nevertheless, such concerns are not uniform; some journalists expressed greater vulnerability than others.

A fifth branch of research explores visual journalism, and distinct and intensified concerns raised by AI technologies capable of generating not only text but also visual and audiovisual content (Matich et al., 2025; Thomson et al., 2025). Unlike earlier forms of automation that primarily affected data gathering, information processing, or written news, generative AI (GenAI) could directly intervene in image-making, video production, and on-screen presentation—core elements of television journalism. Studies identify at least three recurring AI-related problems impacting visual journalism: the spread of misinformation, the erosion of objectivity and authenticity in visual content, and the risk of labor displacement (Thomson et al., 2025). These issues are particularly salient for television journalists, whose professional authority is closely tied to visual credibility and on-screen presence. Research shows examples of visual journalists in the Global South adapting AI tools to befit local cultures and conditions, but they remain concerned about potential degradation of their roles, labor relations, and the profession's future (Ndlovu, 2024). Role perception provides a lens for examining how AI adaptation affects television journalists' understanding of their roles and shifting configurations of work within their field.

2.2. Journalistic Role and Professional Identity

Role perception theory has been central to understanding how journalists interpret their professional responsibilities and evaluate changes within the media environment. Role perception refers to "generalized expectations which journalists believe exist in society and among different stakeholders, which they see as normatively acceptable, and which influence their behavior on the job" (Donsbach, 2012, p. 1). Role perception is generally a "followed script that has been internalized and is located in the larger social structure, but did not necessarily form a mental representation of that role for a particular journalist" (Mellado et al., 2017, p. 6). Journalism scholars understand these roles as discursively constructed and socially negotiated frameworks that shape how journalists view the societal function of their work (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Mellado, 2021). Rather than merely following institutional routines, journalists actively interpret their work through normative frameworks that shape their decisions, priorities, and the boundaries of professional authority. As Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) further argue, journalistic roles are continuously negotiated between journalists, news organizations, and broader societal expectations, influencing how journalists understand their professional identity and how journalism is regarded by the public.

Scholars have conceptualized these professional orientations through different role typologies that reflect journalism's diverse normative commitments. Mellado (2015), for instance, identifies key journalistic roles that may coexist within news practice, including the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic roles. These roles represent different ways in which journalists position themselves in relation to power, audiences, and public life. Such roles do not operate in isolation but often overlap and coexist, reflecting tensions between normative ideals and the practical constraints of specific media environments (Mellado, 2021).

Within this framework, journalists' responses to technological change result from more than the capabilities of new technologies. Instead, such responses to new tools are filtered through existing professional identities and role conceptions, including what constitutes legitimate journalistic work (Kuai, 2026). Technologies that appear to threaten core aspects of the profession, such as editorial judgment, professional autonomy, or public credibility, are more likely to generate resistance or skepticism (S. Wu, 2026).

The adoption of AI presents a particularly significant case for examining these dynamics (Lewis et al., 2025). AI technologies increasingly automate tasks that were previously associated with journalistic expertise, including data analysis, news writing, editing, and even on-screen presentation (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022). As a result, journalists may be compelled to renegotiate the boundaries between human and automated labor (Jamil, 2021). For instance, AI-generated presenters raise questions not only about television newsroom routines but also the symbolic dimensions of professional identity. Television journalism has historically relied on the visibility and recognizability of human reporters to establish credibility and emotional connection with audiences. The possibility of AI avatars occupying similar roles might therefore challenge deeply embedded assumptions about what constitutes authentic journalistic presence. From this perspective, examining journalists' role perceptions becomes crucial for comprehending how AI adoption is interpreted at the level of everyday professional practice.

2.3. AI and Structural Pressures in the Indonesian Broadcasting Industry

Indonesia's media landscape provides a distinctive context for examining the relationship between technological innovation and journalistic labor (Haryanto, 2018, 2024). Indonesia's television industry has historically been dominated by free-to-air broadcasting supported primarily by advertising revenue (Kitley, 2000), with 695 television stations serving diverse audiences across the archipelago in 2023 (Sudoyo, 2023).

Globally, television industries have shifted from scarcity-based to abundance-based media economics (Maniou & Seitanidis, 2018), reshaping relations between broadcasters, platforms, and audiences. In Indonesia, broadcasters have responded through multi-platform distribution, digital content strategies, and business model innovation (Briandana & Irfan, 2019; Briandana et al., 2020; Hakim & Hidayati, 2023; Saefulloh & Kusumalestari, 2025; Setiadi et al., 2021), although these efforts have yet to compensate for declining broadcast revenues. Intensifying digital competition and political conflicts of interest among media owners (Tapsell, 2017) have also contributed to declining television consumption and public trust.

This economic and structural instability creates a complex environment in which journalists interpret AI experimentation and adoption. Understanding how journalists navigate competing interpretations of potential gains in productivity and creativity on the one hand, versus concerns about workforce contraction and erosion of professionalism on the other, therefore requires empirical attention to their own perspectives and lived experiences. Existing studies often focus on implementation or organizational strategies, while the perspectives of practitioners, particularly in broadcast journalism and the Southeast Asian context, remain less explored. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Indonesian television journalists perceive the role of AI in broadcast journalism?

RQ2: How do these perceptions relate to journalists' professional role conceptions and autonomy?

RQ3: How do broader industry conditions shape journalists' interpretations of AI adoption in television newsrooms?

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to enable in-depth exploration rather than quantitative measurement of the phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). Researchers conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 20 journalists from 12 newsrooms that represented the majority of Indonesia's public and commercial networks and one digital-native television service (see Table 1). The participants comprised three occupational categories—news producers, presenters, and reporters—thus providing perspectives from distinct professional roles within newsrooms. The sample also enables examination of how differences in role and seniority within editorial structures shape views on uses of AI in journalistic work, and how role perceptions influence these interpretations.

Informants were recruited through snowball sampling, drawing on professional networks within the Ikatan Jurnalis Televisi Indonesia (Indonesian Television Journalists Association) to select participants with prior experience in using AI in their journalistic work. Interviews were conducted between June and December

Table 1. Informants' profile.

Name	Position	Media Organization	Years of Experience
Amalia Satriani (Amalia)	Producer	BTV	5+
Ramlan Hakim (Hakim)	Producer	CNBC Indonesia	10+
Mayfree Syari (Mayfree)	Producer/Presenter	CNN Indonesia	5+
Laurensia Ghata (Ghata)	Reporter	CNN Indonesia	3+
Fazilah Khairunnisa (Fazilah)	Producer/Presenter	iNews	10+
Camar Al Farabi (Camar)	Reporter	iNews	3+
Gisellya Noorrahma (Gisellya)	Reporter	iNews	3+
Frisca Clarissa (Frisca)	Producer/Presenter	Kompas TV	10+
Taufik Ilham Riyady (Taufik)	Reporter	Kompas TV	2
Sarah Ruhendi (Sarah)	Reporter	Metro TV	3+
Bayu Mahesa (Bayu)	Producer	MNC TV	10+
Lungguh Ginanjar (Lungguh)	Producer	Narasi TV	5+
Juan Robin (Juan)	Reporter	Narasi TV	3+
Mario De Lima (Mario)	Producer	RTV	10+
Olivia Ferari (Olivia)	Reporter	RTV	3+
Zeki Rahmat (Zeki)	Producer	SCTV	10+
Sita Paprika (Sita)	Producer	tvOne	10+
Kurnia Ikhlasul Amal (Amal)	Reporter	tvOne	5+
Alma Safitri (Alma)	Producer	TVRI	5+
Muhammad Arif Darmawan (Arif)	Reporter	TVRI	10+

2023 via Zoom and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. The interview guide addressed several themes, including the use of AI in everyday journalistic practices, newsroom policies regarding AI, professional views on integrating AI into journalistic work, and expectations for the future of television journalism as AI becomes increasingly embedded into newsrooms.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enables systematic identification and interpretation of patterns across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers reviewed each transcript while listening to the original recordings to correct errors and missing segments, ensuring the dataset's accuracy and completeness. Coding proceeded iteratively, combining inductive and deductive strategies. Initial codes were derived from both the manifest meanings expressed by participants and recurring themes within interviews, then were refined and consolidated into broader thematic categories. The thematic analysis was conducted collaboratively by the first three authors of this article through iterative coding and ongoing discussions to ensure consistency and interpretive rigor. Accordingly, the study prioritized reflexive agreement and analytical depth throughout the analytical process. The final coding scheme comprised four key thematic domains: the use of AI in everyday journalistic practices; views on GenAI, including opportunities, risks, ethical considerations and standards, and organizational adoption; perceived limitations of AI in television journalism (RQ1 and RQ2); and journalists' professional roles, competencies, skills, and broader societal responsibilities (RQ2 and RQ3).

4. Findings

4.1. AI as a Tool for Peripheral Tasks

The research revealed that Indonesian television journalists' understanding of AI in journalistic work remains relatively limited. Several informants noted that they began to build awareness of AI technologies in television news production when tvOne introduced an AI news anchor. Prior to this, they primarily associated AI with GenAI, which commenced an exponential global rise in the months preceding the debut of tvOne's AI anchors.

Other informants, particularly those who closely followed technological developments, recognized that technologies predating the recent GenAI wave were also part of the broader AI ecosystem. These include tools such as Google Voice Assistant and Google Maps, which journalists have long used in their daily work. Consequently, elements of AI have been embedded in journalistic practices for more than two decades, notably well before the current surge of public attention and hype surrounding AI.

Reflecting their relatively limited knowledge, most informants explained that the adoption of AI technologies within their journalistic routines remained modest. They emphasized that AI was positioned as a supporting tool within their daily work processes. Field reporters, for instance, frequently used AI-powered applications to convert recorded interviews with sources into text. Meanwhile, journalists involved in video editing tended to utilize AI features embedded in editing software to facilitate faster and more efficient editing workflows.

Informants underlined how such practices significantly improved work efficiency in television journalism, particularly for tasks that were repetitive and time-consuming. Accounts from both reporters and producers stressed AI being used primarily as a productivity-enhancing technology that reduced repetitive tasks, suggesting that AI adoption in the newsroom has been driven by efficiency considerations rather than editorial automation. Indonesian television journalists thus tended to perceive these tools as extensions of existing production technologies rather than systems capable of independently generating journalistic content.

4.2. Human Authority in Editorial Decision-Making

Despite acknowledging the benefits of AI-assisted production tools, informants asserted that editorial authority must remain under human control and AI could not replace professional human judgment. Television producer Amalia exemplified this perspective, stating: "AI is only used to support our work….The finishing touches still are the journalist's obligation" (interview, October 13, 2023).

This framing reflects journalists' broader efforts to maintain the boundaries of professional expertise. Informants repeatedly stressed that AI could assist technical processes, but key editorial responsibilities, such as determining news angles, selecting relevant information, and interpreting events, required human judgment. Several interviewees argued that journalistic work was inherently dynamic and contextual, making it difficult for automated systems to replicate. One journalist explained his perceptions on why human personalization of information was indispensable by describing how different journalists who reported on similar events would still interpret and frame the story differently depending on their analysis and perspective (Camar, interview, October 17, 2023).

Informants highlighted the importance of editorial interpretation in television journalism's visual storytelling, which often prioritizes images and visual sequences before scripts are written. One television producer explained:

> Especially when it comes to the news angle and editorial judgment in television, visuals are more important. Sometimes I select the visuals first before writing the script. The script only accompanies the images. If AI is only processing data, it might be able to produce something like an annual report. But deciding what is interesting to highlight first, or what news angle to take, still requires human judgment and analysis. (Bayu, interview, October 17, 2023)

Television journalists thus maintained that despite recent advances in AI that might assist with processing data or generating text, human editorial judgement was still required to identify which visuals were most compelling or determine how a story should be framed visually.

Informants further emphasized the importance of verification and editorial responsibility. They expressed concern that AI-generated content could produce misleading information if not carefully checked. One journalist warned that although AI may process data efficiently, errors or poorly structured outputs could lead to misinformation if journalists relied on them uncritically. As a result, informants stressed that AI-generated outputs must always be cross-checked by journalists through additional sources or direct verification with news actors. Notably, in Indonesian television news and current affairs content, AI is rarely involved in the final product, except for the use of AI news anchors that have been introduced by some television news channels.

Informants voiced concerns regarding the humanistic dimension of journalism, particularly empathy and social judgment. Reflecting public-service values that are ingrained in both interventionist and civic journalism roles, they argued that journalism involves more than simply compiling and disseminating information. It also requires emotional sensitivity, intuition, and ethical considerations when representing social issues. One typical comment was:

> But our task as journalists is to give a voice to people who do not have one—the voiceless. Journalists do have to remain neutral in certain situations, for example during political debates. However, when reporting other types of news, showing empathy can make the story resonate more with the audience. There are some aspects that simply cannot be replaced. AI still relies on databases, plug-ins, or similar systems, and at the moment nothing is truly comprehensive enough to replicate that. (Bayu, interview, October 17, 2023)

Research demonstrates that perceived humanness and empathy of AI-generated communications are heightened by strategies such as imitating users' messaging styles, customizing responses to their needs, using affective language and motivating appeals, and employing optimistic expressions (Rafikova & Voronin, 2025). AI communications that express concern, support, understanding, and validation commonly increase users' perceptions of AI warmth and relational closeness (Y. Wu, 2025). Despite AI mimicry of empathy, the journalist's comment above illustrates the informant group's conviction that AI systems lack capacity to convey empathy when reporting stories involving vulnerable communities or social injustice.

The informant furthermore mirrored professional ideology that good journalism amplifies marginalized groups' voices in narratives designed to resonate with audiences:

> It is more about sharpening the story and taking a stance. If it were left to AI, it would simply process the data in a neutral way. The judgment needed to support citizens who are experiencing injustice would not come from AI. Technically, AI might help process data—for example, statistics on the number of people living in poverty—but choosing the news angle and setting the agenda still require human judgment. (Bayu, interview, October 17, 2023)

These mission-oriented narratives have increased salience for television news presentation. Informants argued that emotional tone, facial expressions, and vocal delivery have remained important elements in conveying meaning to viewers. While AI-generated news anchors may technically deliver information accurately, the journalists questioned whether such systems could replicate the emotional nuance required in certain types of news, from human-interest stories to reports involving tragedy and social suffering.

Television journalists thus demonstrate patterns of conditional technological acceptance that align with their understanding of core journalistic roles. Informants reinforced professional boundaries by asserting that key journalistic functions, such as editorial decision-making, verification, and interpretive framing, must remain under human control:

> A journalist has a responsibility to present facts. So, those facts, which determine whether information is newsworthy or not, are something that I don't think AI can replace. Because choosing the right angle, choosing the right news story, and perhaps also what I mentioned earlier about news values, those cannot be replaced by AI. (Amalia, interview, October 13, 2023)

Through such statements, journalists reaffirm their roles as information gatekeepers and interpreters, responsible for determining newsworthiness and shaping narratives for the public. AI is thus positioned again as an auxiliary technology embedded within journalistic workflows rather than an autonomous system capable of replacing journalists' core professional roles and responsibilities.

4.3. Perceived Limits of AI

In articulating why they believed AI could not fully replace journalistic work, informants frequently doubted AI's capacity to operationalize journalism's interpretive and creative dimensions. Two journalistic functions were frequently defined as requiring human agency: contextualizing information and explaining the significance of events. One reporter gave the example of economic reporters creating reports about survey data from the national agency, Statistics Indonesia: "How do we interpret the current downward trend and the potential impact of its increase in the coming months?" (Amalia, interview, October 13, 2023).

Such statements highlighted the perceived importance of analytical interpretation, which informants believed AI systems could not adequately replicate. Several journalists emphasized professional competency norms, in that journalism requires a level of creativity and adaptability that extends beyond automated processing.

Informants also identified communicating, networking, and interacting with their information sources as another core television journalism competency that they believed AI could not fulfil:

> For example, building relationships with sources, chatting with sources requires a wide range of topics to build rapport. It requires critical thinking and empathy. There are several aspects of the human mind that AI doesn't yet possess. I doubt it can achieve that. We build close networking with sources, chatting with them—that's a form of interaction between humans, right? (Olivia, interview, December 18, 2023)

These views reinforce perceptions that AI technologies may assist routine tasks but remain limited in performing journalism's core intellectual and interpretive functions.

While AI-assisted production tools were largely judged to be beneficial, AI-generated news presenters raised complex concerns among informants. Camar, one journalist, explained: "We still rely on the power of human presenters or anchors because they can directly research and provide conclusions, which AI may not be able to do at this time" (interview, October 17, 2023). Informants noted that news anchors represented not only the delivery of information but also visibility and recognizability as the public face of the newsroom, and they established credibility and emotional connection with the institution behind it. As a result, informants expressed disquiet that replacing human presenters with AI avatars could potentially alter the symbolic relationship between journalists and audiences. As argued by one reporter: "Indonesian viewers want to see the presenter's emotion immediately so that viewers at home may know, comprehend, and feel what the presenter is saying in the news" (Gisellya, interview, December 10, 2023).

Another perceived limitation was that AI presenters might be helpful in contexts that required few interactions, but complicated programs like talk shows required presenters with human cognition, responsiveness, and spontaneity:

> It [an AI presenter] may be feasible to replace news bulletins. However, it cannot substitute for "Breaking News" or interactive dialogue. In interactive discussion, we ask questions, the source responds, and we must be able to critique, analyze, conclude, rephrase, or even propose new questions based on the source's answers. AI does not yet have this capability. When a source responds something, we [humans] can ask follow-up questions because we understand what they're saying. (Camar, interview, October 17, 2023)

This concern reflects broader understandings of how closely credibility and trust are tied to human presence in television journalism. As one reporter stated:

> AI will not completely replace news presenters. There was also a lot of talk on tvOne using AI avatars to replace them, but we saw for ourselves that there was no humanity there, no sense of humanity, no emotion displayed. (Juan, interview, October 17, 2023)

AI presenters may therefore be interpreted not merely as technological innovations but as developments that challenge established assumptions about authenticity in television news presentation.

4.4. Technological Change Without Professional Displacement

Despite acknowledging the rapid development of AI technologies, most informants suggested that technological change was more likely to transform media platforms, production routines, and newsroom practices than replace journalists. Amalia exemplified this perspective by stating: "The profession itself will not be displaced; the medium might change" (interview, October 13, 2023). Her statement indicates how Indonesian television journalists interpreted AI as part of a longer trajectory of technological change in their industry. Rather than perceiving AI as an immediate threat to their professional existence, informants situated it within a broader history of media transformation, where new technologies have continuously reshaped production processes while leaving journalism's fundamental functions intact. From this viewpoint, technological innovation affects *how* journalism is practiced rather than *whether* journalism will continue to exist.

Informants acknowledged that certain operational roles within television news production were increasingly vulnerable to automation. They were concerned that positions such as news presenters could be replaced by AI-generated avatars, particularly following experiments with AI news presenters introduced by tvOne. Nonetheless, some, such as Juan, continued to rationalize tvOne's AI anchors as fitting within the framework of historic transformation rather than existential threat: "Maybe tvOne did something like that to make people aware of tvOne, and it was a huge success. It was an initiative to make the audience aware that their media organization is embracing technology" (interview, October 17, 2023).

While such developments demonstrate the technical feasibility of AI-generated presenters, informants noted that several television stations have not continued developing these technologies beyond initial trials. Interviewees suggested that long-term adoption of AI presenters was limited by practical considerations, including audience reception, production costs, and editorial credibility.

Informants also forecasted that some backstage roles, such as news editing, could eventually be partially automated as AI-based editing software becomes more sophisticated. Automated tools capable of organizing footage, generating rough cuts, or assisting with scriptwriting would reduce the need for certain routine editorial tasks.

Informants were convinced, however, that the crucial nature of gathering and editing visuals meant that the role of television journalists, especially camera operators, was irreplaceable by AI. One reporter dismissed the possibility of substituting AI for camera operators, due to the specific visual aesthetics of television broadcasts and the requirement for coordination between camera crews and reporters about what content needs to be visually captured: "Maybe the editing can be replaced, and the soundman too, now that we can even do the dubbing itself [with AI]. That's the most it can do" (Arif, interview, October 13, 2023). Journalists expressed assurance that final editorial decisions, such as determining narrative structure, selecting key visuals, and ensuring contextual accuracy, would continue to require human oversight.

Discussions about technological change were frequently linked to the economic pressures facing the Indonesian television industry. Informants described how shifting audience consumption habits, driven by competition with digital-native media outlets and social media platforms, had already forced television stations to adapt their production strategies. AI technologies were viewed in this context as potential tools

for further cost efficiency through automation of certain production processes to help broadcasters manage continuous news production with limited budgets and resources.

Journalists insisted that in the balance of technological experimentation and streamlining of newsroom operations, economic pressures must not compromise journalists' core professional responsibilities, due to journalism's ostensible importance in maintaining healthy information ecosystems. They believed that journalism's classic normative functions of providing credible news by verifying information and creating meaningful public narratives were essential services that could not be delegated entirely to automated systems:

> Because the journalists' job is to act as a watchdog, to be accountable to their own audience for everything….If we can't be credible media or journalists, how can we be trusted in the future? So, I want to build trust, and that's what we need to do in the future. Don't provide false information, because this is also related to credibility. (Juan, interview, October 17, 2023)

This conviction that human characteristics are vital for verification and combatting mis- and disinformation was consistent with Indonesian television journalists' interpretations, discussed above, that AI could not directly replace journalism but instead formed part of broader processes of technological and economic transformation of journalistic work. While some production roles might evolve or become partially automated, informants consistently reaffirmed the continuing relevance of journalistic roles such as gatekeeping, interpretation, and public accountability.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The data indicate that Indonesian television journalists generally interpreted the emergence of AI in pragmatic rather than alarmist terms. Most participants did not perceive AI technologies as an immediate threat to the profession. In line with previous studies (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Jamil, 2021; S. Wu, 2026), Indonesian television journalists tended to frame AI as a complementary tool that could assist certain stages of the production process. This perspective reflected a broader pattern observed in studies of AI adoption in journalism, where news workers interpreted technological innovation through the lens of established professional norms and occupational identities rather than as a force that would fundamentally disrupt journalism (Møller et al., 2025).

This study shows that Indonesian television journalists interpret technological innovation largely through the normative frameworks that define their professional roles. From the perspective of journalistic role theory, the findings indicate that despite advances in AI, Indonesian television journalists have continued to prioritize role conceptions associated with human editorial judgment, professional responsibility, and interpretive authority. As highlighted in the literature on journalistic roles, journalists often understand their professional identity through normative ideals such as the intervention, watchdog, and civic roles (Mellado, 2015). For example, the continued emphasis on verification, contextual interpretation, and editorial oversight reflected the enduring importance of the intervention role (Mellado, 2015), in which journalists highlight their professional interpretation before sharing the information to the public. Journalists expressed concern that excessive reliance on automated tools could weaken the investigative dimension of journalism or reduce the critical scrutiny necessary for accountability reporting. While AI assisted journalists in

processing information or automating routine tasks, it was not deemed to be capable of replacing the critical judgment required for investigative, evaluative, or breaking news journalism.

Journalists' reflections on audience engagement and storytelling also pointed to their esteem for mobilizing and infotainment roles in contemporary journalism (Møller et al., 2025), and the perceived human agency embedded in those roles. Although some journalists acknowledged that AI-generated news presenters might offer new ways of attracting audiences, they maintained confidence that the "human touch" remains essential. In the case of AI anchors, audiences still expect the presence of human journalists and their emotional depth (Ndlovu, 2024), concurring with the television journalists' assessments about central aspects of professional identity that AI technologies cannot fully replicate. These findings highlight the distinctive nature of broadcast journalism, which relies on visual performance and human-likeness to establish audience trust (Choi & Jang, 2026). Unlike automated text production, broadcast journalism involves performative and relational labor closely associated with human presence and authenticity. Consequently, informants believed AI could not fully replace core visual journalism functions due to its limitations in capturing, evaluating, and presenting real-world visual content.

While informants acknowledged the economic pressures, technological inequalities, and organizational constraints shaping AI adoption in Indonesia and other Global South newsrooms (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022), they gave limited attention to how these pressures might deepen through AI-driven workforce downsizing. Such developments could encourage greater automation despite potentially undermining the distinctive benefits of human-generated visual journalism. Reflecting their self-acknowledged limited understanding of AI, informants also rarely considered whether rapid advances in AI capabilities might eventually narrow the current gap between human- and AI-produced visual reporting.

Beyond these role-related considerations, the findings demonstrate that journalists' perceptions of AI are shaped by the broader structural conditions of the Indonesian media system. AI adoption often occurs in a fragmented and experimental manner rather than as part of a systematic newsroom transformation. This pattern reflects scholarship on AI and journalism in the Global South, where studies in Pakistan, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria similarly demonstrate that journalists tend to adopt AI selectively for routine and efficiency-oriented tasks while maintaining a strong attachment to human editorial authority and professional judgment (Jamil, 2021; Munoriyarwa et al., 2023; Ndlovu, 2024; Onebunne, 2026), highlighting the importance of journalistic roles as discursive constructions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Hesitant about full automation, journalists negotiate AI within conditions of economic instability, limited technological infrastructure, and ongoing newsroom precarity. The Indonesian case reinforces arguments that AI adoption is shaped less by technological determinism than by locally specific institutional constraints and professional cultures.

Nevertheless, the findings also suggest subtle forms of labor transformation within Indonesian television newsrooms. AI tools were primarily accepted for peripheral and repetitive tasks; however, this efficiency-oriented adoption might simultaneously intensify newsroom expectations for speed, multitasking, and productivity under increasingly constrained economic conditions. Rather than eliminating journalistic labor entirely, AI might redistribute labor by reducing the time allocated to technical production while increasing pressure on journalists to produce content more rapidly across multiple platforms. This reflects broader concerns in journalism studies that automation often restructures labor processes and professional

routines even when core editorial authority formally remains under human control (Lewis et al., 2025; Simon, 2024), thereby posing new challenges to journalistic roles in today's "AI turn" in journalism.

In exploring normative frameworks and structural realities that influence Indonesian journalists' role perspectives on AI adoption, this study has limitations. Apart from informants from the Narasi TV digital media startup, which operates primarily through online channels such as its website, YouTube, and social media, informants for this research worked for legacy terrestrial networks with added online platforms rather than digital-native television organizations. The research thus might not fully capture the diversity of AI adoption in digital-native newsrooms where AI might be more extensively integrated. Additionally, the relatively small sample size and use of snowball sampling may limit the representativeness of the findings and potentially exclude perspectives from journalists outside these professional networks. Future research should therefore explore how different media platforms, newsroom policies, and organizational strategies shape the long-term integration of AI journalistic practice, especially in Global South contexts.

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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 on request from the authors.

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AI Adoption in Indonesian and Malaysian Journalism: A Comparative Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping journalistic practice worldwide, automating tasks such as transcription, translation, content generation, data analysis, and personalisation. News organisations across the Global South are also experimenting with public-facing applications of AI, including AI-generated anchors and reporters. These developments challenge assumptions about technological lag in non-Western newsrooms, revealing how competitive pressures, resource constraints, and platform dependency can drive distinctive modes of technological adoption. This article compares Indonesian and Malaysian journalists' attitudes toward AI and their intentions to integrate these technologies into their professional practice. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach grounded in the technology acceptance model, the study analyses how perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social norms influence decisions about the adoption of AI in news production. While both countries demonstrate strong links between usability and perceived value, cross-national differences in how these measures influence adoption intentions highlight how local contexts inflect journalists' attitudes. Interviews further reveal that acceptance is shaped not only by individual attitudes but by policy, market dynamics, infrastructure, generational dynamics, and anxieties about technological displacement. This article advances the study of individual journalists' attitudes toward AI within a critical, contextually grounded approach to technological adoption.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; Global South; Indonesia; journalism; Malaysia; technology acceptance

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1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming journalism worldwide, accelerating shifts in how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. AI has been embedded across newsroom workflows, including data analysis, newswriting, transcription and translation, audio-visual production, and content personalization (Biswal & Gouda, 2020; Sonni et al., 2024). As AI becomes more visible in journalistic practice, the central question is no longer simply whether newsrooms are using AI, but how journalists in different national and institutional settings evaluate and intend to adopt it.

While early scholarship on AI in journalism was skewed toward China, Europe, and North America, there is growing attention to the Global South (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022; Molla & Ahsan, 2025). Research from Africa and Asia indicates that AI-related journalism practices are emerging beyond the Global North, complicating simple narratives of technological lag (Gondwe, 2023; Jamil, 2021; Ndlovu, 2024; Trang et al., 2024). However, there remains limited comparative research examining how journalists' AI adoption is shaped by media systems and regulatory conditions across neighboring contexts. Indonesia and Malaysia offer a useful point of comparison for examining AI adoption in the Global South. Despite their shared regional and linguistic ties, they diverge in media governance, market size, and economic structure. Indonesia's large, decentralized media ecosystem contrasts with Malaysia's smaller, more regulated industry, providing a clear comparison (Hidayat et al., 2023; Prawira & Mahamed, 2025; Tapsell, 2014). These similarities and differences make them useful for examining whether journalists' AI adoption follows similar patterns across adjacent Southeast Asian media environments.

This article draws on the technology acceptance model (TAM), a framework widely used to study how users evaluate new technologies. Using a mixed-methods approach combining survey and interview data, the study analyzes how perceived usefulness (PU), ease of use, and social norms (SN) influence adoption decisions. Overall, both countries demonstrated a strong relationship between perceived ease of use (PeoU) and usefulness. This was supported by interviews indicating that journalists value easy integration of AI into workflows. However, Malaysian journalists, supported by state-led digital strategies and more structured newsroom initiatives, place greater emphasis on professional usefulness when forming intentions to use AI. In contrast, Indonesian journalists working in a fast-paced, platform-driven media environment tended to focus more on efficiency and competitiveness in the interviews. Differences between Indonesian and Malaysian newsrooms highlight how individual attitudes, uneven infrastructures, and institutional pressures shape journalists' adoption of AI.

2. Literature Review

2.1. AI and Journalism

This study approaches debates over the risks and benefits of AI use in the news industry by bridging the epistemological divide between positivist technology acceptance traditions and critical political-economy perspectives. Journalists now employ AI across different stages of news production: investigative reporters use natural-language learning programs and statistical analysis tools to deal with large caches of documents (Bradshaw, 2026; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022); generative AI supports content creation, transcription, and translation (Nishal & Diakopoulos, 2024); and AI can also automate personalization for news circulation

and social media publishing (Petruccio et al., 2025). Meanwhile, more experimental uses of AI include identifying and fact-checking disinformation (Santos, 2023) and creating AI avatars (Levy-Landesberg & Cao, 2025). Across these practices, journalists' engagements with AI are not only technical decisions but also situated responses shaped by professional norms and institutional constraints.

Journalists and news audiences remain sceptical about some uses of AI (Thomson et al., 2025), particularly when AI systems clash with journalism's democratic and ethical responsibilities (Simon, 2023). AI critics raise concerns about credibility, misinformation, editorial control, and the amplification of biases (Acemoglu et al., 2025). As audiences, journalists, publishers, and technology companies negotiate these tensions, AI continues to reconfigure how journalism is produced and how trust, authority, and accountability are understood. These concerns reflect struggles that are unlikely to be captured by quantitative methods alone.

National approaches to studying AI acceptance highlight the importance of examining technology within specific media systems shaped by newsroom cultures, infrastructures, and political–economic pressures (Gondwe, 2023; Pinto, 2024). Hallin and Mancini's (2004) distinction between media-system types provides a foundational framework for analyzing and comparing how political, economic, and professional structures influence journalism. Building on this work, recent cross-national studies point to uneven adoption of AI (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023; Kuai, 2024; Meier et al., 2024), with the United States, Europe, and China leading journalistic AI uptake and broader AI innovation (Nguyen & Hekman, 2022). The present study mobilises a comparative approach to examine how differences between Indonesian and Malaysian news industries are reflected in journalists' stated intentions to use AI.

Furthermore, researchers have called for the decolonization and de-Westernization of the field by foregrounding diverse epistemologies, institutional arrangements, and journalistic cultures (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022; Moyo & Mutsvairo, 2018). This is especially important when studying AI, which can reproduce epistemological hierarchies and reinforce Western cultural biases, embedding hegemonic assumptions that marginalize local ways of knowing (Adams, 2021; Couldry & Mejias, 2023; Mumford, 2022). Evidence shows that AI-generated news anchors and reporters have emerged across Global South and non-Western contexts, beginning with China's Xinhua agency in 2018 and followed by developments in India, Kuwait, Indonesia, and Russia (Ndlovu, 2024). These cases suggest that experimentation with audience-facing AI applications may be moving faster outside the West. Yet much remains unknown about how AI is adopted by journalists working in low- and middle-income countries (Jamil, 2021). Accordingly, examining Indonesia and Malaysia enables a comparative interrogation of how such hierarchies are negotiated, resisted, or reproduced in journalists' orientations toward AI.

Research on and from the Global South has drawn on established technology-acceptance frameworks such as TAM to examine how journalists and news audiences engage with AI. The appeal of these models lies in their standardisation and extensive prior validation, enabling systematic comparison across national and institutional contexts. Recent studies demonstrate the adaptability of these frameworks to non-Western settings by extending core constructs to reflect local conditions (Peng & Miller, 2021; Pham & Thi Nguyet, 2023; Trang et al., 2024; Venkatesh, 2022). This study contributes by placing TAM in dialogue with critical and qualitative approaches, using it as a lens to interpret journalists' intentions. It marries positivist measures of individual attitudes with critical analyses of media systems, enabling comparison of how Indonesian and Malaysian journalists' AI adoption is shaped by individual perceptions and structural conditions.

2.2. Journalism and Technology in Indonesia and Malaysia

Indonesia offers a window into how journalists adopt new technologies in a highly commercial, geographically dispersed, and culturally diverse market—a market where state pressures on the free press persist, and newswork has shifted toward fast-paced, multi-platform production. Technological convergence has driven commercial concentration, reproducing powerful media conglomerates in Indonesia (Tapsell, 2015). However, these conglomerates increasingly compete with global platforms, while relying on them for search visibility and platform advertising (Sianturi, 2025). These commercial pressures encourage efficiency-driven technological experimentation, prioritizing speed, multimedia production, and audience engagement (Laoera & Wibowo, 2023; Nugroho et al., 2012; Yunus et al., 2024). Despite high media concentration, Indonesia maintains a vibrant independent and start-up news culture where journalists balance professional norms and trust with the pressures of traffic and monetization (Purnama & Krisdinanto, 2025).

AI regulation and infrastructure have lagged behind practice, with Indonesia's ambitious national AI strategy hampered by friction between central policy design and decentralized execution (Wadipalapa et al., 2024). A review of AI implementation across government institutions found uneven policy implementation and capacity (Yusriadi et al., 2023). While journalists may look to policy for advice, the Indonesian Press Council's 2025 guidance offers limited direction on AI oversight, journalist protection, accountability, and copyright (Sianturi, 2025). Emerging research suggests AI adoption in Indonesian journalism is driven less by policy or infrastructural support than by commercial pressures and growing demands on newsworkers.

In contrast, national strategies such as the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint and the establishment of the National AI Office signal increasing state support for AI adoption in Malaysia. Hairi (2025) notes that major Malaysian media organisations, including Media Prima and Astro, have implemented AI-driven content workflows amid declining advertising revenue. Yet this technological enthusiasm also raises questions about power imbalances between local newsrooms and global tech platforms, journalistic autonomy, and democratic communication (Esa et al., 2022).

At the newsroom level, qualitative research highlights a strong positive association between PU of AI tools and workflow efficiency (Sarji & Abdul Aziz, 2025). Among Malaysian practitioners and journalism students, AI is widely embraced for routine tasks such as drafting, headline generation, and trend monitoring, enabling journalists to reallocate time to investigative and analytical work (Ng, 2024; Sualman, 2024). However, journalists articulate concerns about algorithmic bias, data privacy, editorial accountability, and the erosion of public trust (Sualman, 2024). Industry efforts such as Astro Awani's Jiwa guidelines exemplify emergent governance models that seek to institutionalize ethical AI practice (Hui, 2024). For Malaysia, sustainable journalism will depend on approaches to technological adoption that reflect the nation's policy environment and diverse audience. Building on previous comparative studies of Indonesia and Malaysia (Hidayat et al., 2023), this research uses TAM while drawing on critical political economy and Global South scholarship to explain how institutional contexts shape adoption.

3. Methodology

This study uses a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to examine factors shaping journalists' acceptance of AI in Indonesia and Malaysia. The design combines a quantitative TAM-based survey with qualitative semi-structured interviews, enabling triangulation and a richer interpretation of the results in their social and organizational context. TAM examines behavioral intentions (BI) to use new technologies through perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEoU), and (in this study) social norms (SN; Davis, 1989). Our procedure comprised four stages: (a) collection of quantitative and qualitative data in Indonesia and Malaysia; (b) country-level analysis; (c) cross-country comparison; and (d) synthesis of findings. For the quantitative study, the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: PEoU of AI tools positively influences BI to use AI tools;

H2: PEoU of AI tools among journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia positively influences PU to use AI tools;

H3: PU of AI tools among journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia positively influence BI;

H4: SN regarding AI tools among journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia positively influence BI.

The survey included 23 questions addressing PU, PEoU, SN, and BI, in addition to demographics. To distribute the survey, we used non-probability sampling combining purposive and snowball strategies. We closed the survey once we had recruited $N = 100$ from each country. While purposive sampling reduces the generalizability of the findings, it enabled us to survey a large number of journalists from different news organisations. The quantitative data are used to discover meaningful patterns rather than statistical generalizations. When working with smaller samples, the fundamental mixed-method approach also allowed us to triangulate data to improve validity and reliability (Ciccarino & da Silva, 2024).

Survey respondents in both countries predominantly worked for online outlets (48% in Indonesia, 46% in Malaysia), and most had 0–5 years of experience. The age categories are divided to approximate entry-level (age <25), early-career (26–30), mid-career (31–35), and senior (>35) newsworkers, although these stages differ somewhat between the two countries. Respondents aged <25 years were most prevalent in Indonesia, while journalists aged >35 years accounted for the highest percentage in Malaysia (see Table 1). In Malaysia's smaller and more regulated news industry, entry-level jobs commonly require formal journalism or communication training, including a diploma or degree (Mahamed, 2022). This explains, in part, the older overall age of Malaysian journalists in our sample. Results were analysed using the structural equation modelling software SmartPLS, and involved reliability and validity tests.

TAM provides a robust basis for predicting technology acceptance, but its limitations include an individualistic focus that can under-represent relational and contextual determinants of adoption. To address this, we conducted eight semi-structured interviews with professional journalists from each country ($N = 16$). We recruited the interviewees via professional networks. Interviewees described regulation, culture, industry structure, and economic conditions that situated individual acceptance within broader organizational and institutional environments. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics.

Characteristic		Indonesia	Malaysia	Total
Gender	Male	50 (50%)	49 (49%)	99 (49.5%)
	Female	50 (50%)	51 (51%)	101 (50.5%)
Age (years)	<25	49 (49%)	22 (22%)	71 (35.5%)
	26–30	14 (14%)	8 (8%)	22 (11%)
	31–35	12 (12%)	12 (12%)	24 (12%)
	>35	25 (25%)	58 (58%)	83 (41.5%)
Work experience (years)	<1	29 (29%)	19 (19%)	48 (24%)
	1–5	32 (32%)	15 (15%)	47 (23.5%)
	6–10	9 (9%)	10 (10%)	19 (9.5%)
	>10	30 (30%)	56 (56%)	86 (43%)
Primary media platform	Online	48 (48%)	46 (46%)	94 (47%)
	Television	29 (29%)	21 (21%)	50 (25%)
	Radio	17 (17%)	7 (7%)	24 (12%)
	Print	3 (3%)	21 (21%)	24 (12%)
	Multiple/other	3 (3%)	5 (5%)	8 (4%)

Qualitative coding and thematic analyses were conducted using NVivo. In the final stage, quantitative and qualitative findings from both countries were compared and synthesized.

4. Findings

4.1. Survey Results

This section presents the survey results based on separate analyses of responses from Indonesia and Malaysia. To enable meaningful comparison, findings are organized according to the three TAM constructs that we tested: PEoU, PU, SN—and their effect on BI. The statistical analysis is divided into two stages: the first is the reflective measurement model; the second is the structural model (Hair et al., 2021). The reliability of the measurement model was assessed using three complementary internal consistency reliability coefficients: Cronbach's alpha (α), Dijkstra–Henseler's rho_A (rho_A), and composite reliability (rho_C), as presented in Table 2. The three indices were evaluated concurrently because each estimates reliability under different assumptions regarding the relationships among the indicators, thereby providing a more comprehensive assessment of construct reliability.

Cronbach's alpha is the traditional measure of internal consistency and assumes tau-equivalence, meaning that all indicators contribute equally to the latent construct. As this assumption is often violated in partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), Cronbach's alpha tends to provide a conservative estimate of reliability. In contrast, rho_A incorporates the indicator loadings estimated by the PLS algorithm, making it a more accurate estimator of construct reliability for PLS-SEM. Composite reliability (rho_C) further accounts for the heterogeneous contribution of individual indicators by weighting them according to their respective outer loadings. Consequently, rho_C typically yields higher reliability estimates than Cronbach's alpha and

rho_A, as it better reflects the actual measurement model, although it may slightly overestimate reliability in some situations (Hair et al. 2021).

Evaluating all three reliability coefficients provides robust evidence of the internal consistency of the measurement model. Consistency among Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and rho_C indicates that the latent constructs are measured reliably despite the different estimation assumptions underlying each coefficient. As shown in Table 2, all four constructs—BI, PEoU, PU, and SN—demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency reliability, with all reliability coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings indicate that the indicators consistently measure their intended latent constructs, providing strong evidence that the proposed measurement model is reliable and suitable for subsequent validity assessment and structural model evaluation

Table 2. Reliability and validity tests.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted
BI	0.900	0.906	0.937	0.833
PEoU	0.831	0.837	0.888	0.665
PU	0.869	0.870	0.911	0.718
SN	0.901	0.907	0.938	0.834

The results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis show that the diagonal value (average variance extracted square root) of both data sets is higher than the correlation between constructs, meaning that discriminant validity is met. Meanwhile, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is >0.6, so predictive relevance can be calculated using Stone-Geisser, which yields Q^2 values of 0.887 and 0.879 for Indonesia and Malaysia, respectively. A Q^2 value >0.35 indicates that the predictive relevance of this model is very strong. Reliability, validity, R^2, and Q^2 results indicate that the model has good adequacy.

4.2. Evaluation of the Structural Model

The evaluation of the structural model using path coefficient analysis for Indonesia and Malaysia is presented in Table 3. The study did not find statistically significant support for H1. In Indonesia, the relationship between PEoU and BI (PEoU → BI) as shown in Table 3 ($\beta = 0.238$, T-statistic = 1.937, $p = 0.053$) is not statistically significant, because $T < 1.96$ and $p > 0.05$. However, the result is close to significance, suggesting a weak but positive tendency. It means that journalists who find AI easier to use may be somewhat more inclined to use it, even though ease of use does not directly predict intention in this sample. For Malaysian journalists, the PEoU of AI tools did not influence their intention to use AI tools ($\beta = 0.050$, T-statistic = 0.415, $p = 0.678$). The findings indicate that while Malaysian journalists may perceive AI tools as easy to use, this perception is not sufficient to drive interest in adopting them. As we will expand on below, Malaysian journalists' BI may be influenced by other factors, reflect different stages of technological acceptance, or result from the demographics of the Malaysian journalists in this study.

The findings support H2, as both countries indicate a strong and positive influence of PEoU on PU (Indonesian journalists: $\beta = 0.812$, T-statistic = 18.535, $p = 0.000$; Malaysian journalists: $\beta = 0.792$, T-statistic = 19.459, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that for journalists in both contexts, the easier AI technology is to use, the more

Table 3. Evaluation of the structural model (test of hypotheses).

Path relationship	Indonesia				Malaysia			
	Original sample β (O)	*T*-statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*p*	Result	Original sample β (O)	*T*-statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*p*	Result
PEoU → BI	0.238	1.937	0.053	Not significant	0.050	0.415	0.678	Not significant
PEoU → PU	0.812	18.535	0.000	Significant	0.792	19.459	0.000	Significant
PU → BI	0.182	1.156	0.248	Not significant	0.485	4.170	0.000	Significant
SN → BI	0.173	1.405	0.160	Not significant	−0.107	1.248	0.212	Not significant

useful they perceive it to be. In other words, if journalists perceive AI as easy to learn and operate, they are more likely to see it as beneficial to their work. This finding suggests that PEoU shapes perceptions of AI as a useful and practical resource in news production and dissemination.

The relationship between PU and BI (PU → BI) is not significant for Indonesian journalists (β = 0.182, *T*-statistic = 1.156, p = 0.248). This means that although Indonesian journalists may see AI as beneficial, this perception does not directly translate into an intention to use it. This suggests that, for Indonesian journalists, PU alone is insufficient to motivate the use of AI tools. This may stem from concerns regarding the accuracy, objectivity, and credibility of AI in news production (Forja-Pena et al., 2024). Doubts about AI-generated news could hinder the influence of the PU of AI on BI.

Meanwhile, PU has a significant impact on the BI of Malaysian journalists (β = 0.485, *T*-statistic = 4.170, p = 0.000). It appears that PU is the main individual factor driving Malaysian journalists' intention to adopt AI technology. Malaysian journalists tend to perceive AI as relevant and helpful in their work. This perception directly influences their interest in adopting AI and its continued use in news production. Studies have shown that Malaysia is quicker to adopt digital technologies in educational, workplace, and personal contexts than neighboring Indonesia (Lestari et al., 2024; Supianto et al., 2024). As such, the difference in results may reflect a more advanced integration of AI into Malaysian newsrooms.

The relationship between SN and BI (SN → BI) was insignificant for Indonesian journalists (β = 0.173, *T*-statistic = 1.404, p = 0.160) and Malaysian journalists (β = −0.107, *T*-statistic = 1.248, p = 0.212). This suggests that SN do not meaningfully influence Indonesian and Malaysian journalists' intention to use AI. The acceptance of AI tools could be driven by individual attitudes, not by the influence of colleagues or managers. Alternatively, norms may operate through institutional and economic pressures more than interpersonal influence. The absence of clear AI policies in newsrooms may also contribute to this finding. This finding contrasts with several previous studies showing that SN directly influence BI to adopt technologies (Cao et al., 2020; Tatić et al., 2022).

Overall, the survey findings indicate some differences between the weighting of TAM measures and their influence on BI across the two countries. While there was no statistically significant relationship between PEoU and BI in either country, the relationship approached significance in Indonesia. As such, we cautiously

suggest that ease of use has some influence on Indonesian journalists' intentions to integrate AI into their work process. Results for both countries show that PEoU significantly shapes PU, indicating that AI tools that are simple to learn are more likely viewed as beneficial for newsroom work. The link between PU and BI diverges: In Indonesia, usefulness does not significantly motivate journalists to use AI, while Malaysian journalists show a strong positive association, suggesting greater emphasis on AI's relevance to professional outcomes. SNs do not significantly influence acceptance in either country. Below, we interpret this surprising finding in conjunction with interview data that highlights broader economic, policy, and social conditions (Park et al., 2022).

5. Interview Results

This section presents qualitative interview findings about journalists' intentions to adopt AI. It includes data from 16 interviews, evenly split between Indonesian and Malaysian participants, and is organized according to the TAM constructs of PEoU, PU, and SN, with the addition of organisational constraints. The interviews enrich the quantitative findings by showing how journalists interpret AI use in relation to workplace cultures, economic pressures, and policy.

5.1. PEoU

The interview data sheds light on the link between PEoU and BI in Indonesia. In terms of the ease of learning AI, a young developer at a major Indonesian broadcaster characterized his early experience with AI avatar production as demanding but quickly manageable: "At first, I didn't know anything about AI [but] within about a month, I already understood everything pretty well" (I04). Likewise, a senior staff member contrasted current tools with earlier workflows: "Back then…it was really difficult to remove atmo….Now, atmo can be removed easily" (I02). Moreover, a journalist described the ease of using prompts to generate articles, calling it a "basic skill" (I08). These accounts suggest that the willingness to adopt AI may increase when these technologies are easy to learn and use.

However, the qualitative data also complicate a straightforward narrative of ease. While individual tools were often described as simple, interviewees were concerned about the effort required to keep pace with rapid technological change. One participant noted, "The biggest challenge is the pace of technological development. What we're planning today might already be outdated by next week" (I02). Journalists described a continual need to "reskill," "adapt" (I03), and "keep learning about the latest AI developments" (I01). National differences further nuance our findings. Indonesian interviewees often framed AI adoption as urgent and competitive, with one stating, "We just can't afford to be left behind" (I04). Malaysian journalists, by contrast, were more likely to emphasize collaboration as a way of sharing expertise and effort associated with AI adoption (M02). Overall, the findings indicate that ease at the level of everyday use may not be sufficient to influence technology acceptance, and is mediated by economic pressures and newsroom culture.

5.2. PU

Interviewees across both countries articulated multiple ways AI was perceived to enhance individual and organisational performance, particularly through gains in efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness. These accounts reinforce the survey finding that PEoU contributes to PU, largely because it increases

efficiency. An AI developer at an Indonesian broadcast network called the labor savings achieved through AI "impressive and terrifying," with the work of a 200-person newsroom replaced by a four-person AI team (I02). Interviewees similarly described how AI increased the capacity of small news teams to cover more beats and wider geographical areas (M08).

In terms of journalism quality, interviewees noted AI's value in tracking emergent stories, supporting rapid disaster coverage, and aiding investigative work. A Malaysian newspaper journalist described AI as extending rather than replacing journalistic capability: "AI automates the grunt work, letting journalists focus on interviews, verification, and narrative" (M07). Still, journalists raised concerns about trust and the need for human judgement, creativity, and ethical oversight (M01). These accounts show how efficiency and enhanced capabilities intersect, supporting the survey's strong relationship between PEoU and PU.

Indonesian journalists often defined usefulness in terms of productivity rather than editorial value. An Indonesian broadcast manager noted: "It allows us to write faster…now with ChatGPT, that volume has doubled" (I03). A reporter agreed they could produce an article in about ten minutes by pasting other outlets' reports into ChatGPT and prompting it to "make this article more interesting and easier to understand" (I08). Such practices align with increased reporting churn rather than professional autonomy. Relatedly, AI adoption was viewed as necessary for survival amid shrinking resources and intensifying competition. As one Indonesian participant warned: "If we don't start using AI, we risk being left behind while others move ahead" (I07). Intention to adopt AI may be shaped as much by fear of obsolescence and competition as by positive assessments of usefulness.

5.3. SN and Organisational Constraints

While the survey findings suggest that SN does not significantly shape journalists' intentions to use AI, interviewees described the influence of institutional and demographic factors. Several interviewees reported phased organisational adoption. A Malaysian editor overseeing special projects outlined their rollout starting with speech-to-text, automated subtitles, AI-powered dashboards, and then AI-assisted graphics (M01). An Indonesian journalist recalled using AI trend analysis as early as 2013, before generative tools enabled text and audio-visual production (I01). They also reported that some Indonesian newsrooms are deploying AI presenters and reporters, while Malaysian organisations remained more cautious due to regulation and ethics.

Adoption patterns also varied by outlet type, reflecting strategic aims and constraints. An interviewee from a commercial network summarized a common view: "Private broadcasters innovate faster; public agencies move cautiously" (M01). A digital strategist at a national news agency noted that their approach was shaped by the need to "be fast like a commercial outlet, but impartial like a public service" (M02). At smaller independent outlets, journalists saw AI as pivotal to remaining competitive while maintaining audience trust (M06). Costs and infrastructure are also decisive, as "AI licenses, data storage, and cybersecurity strain budgets especially amid declining print revenue" (M07). Some interviewees struggled to convince managers to pay for subscriptions, particularly in cash-strapped organisations. Large commercial broadcasters were the main exception, using licensed AI technologies to produce public-facing outputs such as avatars and AI reporters.

Interviewees also discussed how personal attitudes and generational differences shaped AI adoption. While one Indonesian producer expressed reluctance due to AI being underdeveloped and inauthentic (I05), another said they "enjoy technology" and welcomed experimentation (I01). Several interviewees described a generational split: "Younger producers are excited….Veterans are cautious, as we are worried about quality, about machines replacing humans" (M04). Enthusiasm among junior reporters, however, carries risks of "over-reliance" (M03) and "over-trust" in AI outputs (M07). Older journalists, meanwhile, fear replacement (M03), deskilling (M02), and diluted judgement (M01), or the limitations of AI's capabilities (I08). Reluctance to adopt AI was frequently framed as a personal shortcoming attributed to limited knowledge, while training was seen as a solution. The idea of a knowledge gap was common, with efforts to close it through mentorship (M01) and workshops (M03). While some Malaysian organisations have formal initiatives to encourage adoption, survey results suggest they do not directly influence intention to adopt AI.

The qualitative findings both reinforce and nuance the survey results by showing how intentions to adopt AI are shaped through the interaction of individual perceptions, organisational logics, and broader structural pressures. Ease of use clearly lowers barriers to experimentation, while PU is closely tied to efficiency gains and competitive survival, though not always to professional fulfilment. At the same time, social influence operates less through peer norms than through institutional strategies, resource constraints, and generational dynamics in newsrooms. These findings illustrate that journalists' decisions about AI are embedded in commercial pressures, organisational priorities, and ongoing negotiations over professional values.

6. Discussion

The results reveal shared patterns and meaningful divergences in how Indonesian and Malaysian journalists adopt AI. While findings from both countries generally support core TAM propositions, there are differences. Across both samples, PEoU did not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on BI to adopt AI; however, the Indonesian data approached significance, indicating a weak but positive tendency. This suggests that Indonesian journalists who perceive AI tools as easier to use may be more inclined to integrate them into their work, even though ease of use does not independently predict intention. One interpretation within the TAM literature is that Indonesian journalists are at an earlier stage of the adoption timeline where ease of learning and use is more important (Saghafian et al., 2021). By contrast, Malaysian journalists place greater emphasis on professional benefits such as content scaling and increased investigative capacity, reflected in the strong PU–BI relationship (Supianto et al., 2024). However, "maturity" should not be understood as part of a linear trajectory toward technological adoption, as it reflects the role of state coordination, regulatory frameworks, and media governance.

The strong PeoU–PU relationship observed in both national contexts demonstrates that practitioners in Indonesia and Malaysia consistently convert ease of operation into perceived professional value (Marian et al., 2025). Qualitative accounts confirmed the value of AI that can be integrated into existing workflows, including audience metrics, audiovisual enhancement, and automated translation. However, despite shared perceptions of usability and worth, the mechanisms through which these attitudes translate into BI are not identical across the neighboring media systems. This indicates that TAM relationships are mediated by broader configurations of media regulation and economics, rather than operating as context-neutral cognitive processes.

The PU–BI relationship differs markedly between Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, the relationship is not significant (coef. 0.182), whereas it is significant among Malaysian respondents (coef. 0.485). Malaysian practitioners framed AI as a capacity-multiplying resource, suggesting that professional usefulness is intrinsically linked to quality journalism. This framing reflects a media environment in which regulatory stability and a more collaborative news industry align technological adoption with professional norms. In contrast, journalists in Indonesia's highly competitive and fragmented media system predominantly characterized AI's utility through the lens of efficiency. Their narratives also articulated persistent anxieties regarding credibility and editorial integrity, mirroring global evidence that skepticism toward automated content can blunt perceptions of professional value (Forja-Pena et al., 2024; Wu, 2026). Consequently, this comparison advances theoretical understanding by demonstrating that the construct of "usefulness" is not stable across settings.

A particularly important finding concerns the non-significant role of SN in both national contexts, which departs from a substantial body of TAM-based research (Nassar et al., 2019). Rather than indicating an absence of normative pressure, the findings may suggest a need to reconceptualize how SN operate within newsroom environments. Qualitative evidence points to multiple forms of normative influence, including organizational pressure, formal training, newsroom strategies, and generational differences. These factors indicate that SN remain influential, but are not primarily expressed through direct interpersonal expectations or peer pressure, as assumed in classical TAM formulations. Instead, they appear embedded in institutional arrangements that shape how journalists encounter and evaluate AI (Sianturi, 2025; Tapsell, 2015). These dynamics underscore the limits of classical acceptance models in environments where structural pressures and institutional ambiguity may override normative cues (Lin, 2003). TAM's social influence construct may underestimate how power operates through institutions, policy frameworks, and market structures, in addition to interpersonal persuasion.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that TAM variables can not only be weighted differently across national contexts, but they are fundamentally reshaped by the political economy of media systems in the Global South. The comparison between Indonesia and Malaysia shows that differences in media regulation, market structure, and access to resources act as conditioning forces that mediate the relationships between PEoU, PU, SN, and BI. Rather than treating institutional context as an external variable, the findings suggest it operates as a structuring condition that redefines what "ease," "usefulness," and "intention" mean in practice. This supports critical Global South scholarship, which argues that technology adoption cannot be abstracted from histories of uneven development, state power, and epistemic hierarchies, and calls for an embedded or politically informed extension of TAM that incorporates media systems as an integral explanatory component.

Differences between Indonesian and Malaysian newsrooms highlight the ways in which individual attitudes, uneven infrastructures, and institutional pressures shape journalists' adoption of AI, demonstrating that technology-acceptance relationships vary across neighboring Global South media systems (Gondwe, 2023; Ndlovu, 2024). By situating these differences within broader debates about AI, media regulation, and political economy, the study moves beyond descriptive comparison to show how epistemological assumptions embedded in TAM must be recalibrated to account for structurally differentiated media environments in the Global South.

7. Conclusion

The patterns observed across Indonesian and Malaysian newsrooms point to broader dynamics shaping AI uptake in the Global South, where adoption reflects uneven infrastructures, institutional pressures, and contested professional norms. Rather than following a universal trajectory, journalists' engagements with AI are embedded in local media ecologies that shape how usability, perceived value, and organizational support translate into adoption intentions. These findings suggest the need for a critical, contextually embedded TAM that situates technology adoption within the political economy and institutional ecology of media systems (Lin, 2003; Trang et al., 2024). In particular, this may require a reconceptualization of social influence as institutionalized normativity, expressed through newsroom policies, training regimes, and generational orientations.

The study's limitations also suggest directions for future inquiry. The individual focus of TAM research and reliance on self-reported data may narrow the interpretive range. Although the mixed-methods design mitigates some of these issues, the analysis remains a snapshot of attitudes in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Longitudinal research is needed to trace how adoption trajectories shift as tools mature and newsroom policies evolve, while future models may integrate additional constructs (such as trust, autonomy, or institutional constraints) to better capture the complexity of AI incorporation in diverse Global South contexts. Taken together, these dynamics indicate that AI acceptance in the Global South is not a uniform trajectory but a negotiated process shaped by individual attitudes, infrastructural disparities, policy ambiguity, and evolving debates over what constitutes responsible journalistic practice.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

We demonstrate our commitment to data openness and transparency. To facilitate further research, we have made the data available via the link https://zenodo.org/records/18448526

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No LLM was used for this research.

Supplementary Material

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

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ARTICLE

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The Metajournalistic Discourse and the Sociopolitical Construction of AI Risk in Chinese Journalism

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Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into journalism has improved production efficiency but raised concerns about its potential to compromise content quality and undermine journalists' professional capacity. These tensions are particularly pronounced in China, where AI deployment in journalism intersects with state-led advocacy and professional authority. Drawing on metajournalistic discourse and taking a sociopolitical perspective, I examine how journalistic discourse frames and responds to AI risks in structurally constrained contexts. I conducted a textual analysis of 102 articles published between 2022 and 2025 by Chinese journalists affiliated with institutional media. These articles narrate journalists' perceptions of, or working experiences with, AI. AI risks are discursively framed at three levels: content quality, mainstream values, and professional subjectivity. Journalistic discourse constructs an asymmetrical attribution of these risks, assigning responsibility primarily to opaque AI systems, technology companies, and individual journalists positioned as "risk filters," while largely overlooking the responsibilities of media organizations and the state. Political intervention, institutional hierarchy, and professional commitments shape adaptive boundary work that aligns with state-led AI advocacy while establishing boundaries by limiting AI capability in journalistic work. This study provides an empirical account of how journalists negotiate AI risks and professional autonomy amid advanced AI development and state-sanctioned boundaries, extending Western-centric and Global South research.

Keywords

AI; AI risks; Chinese journalism; journalism; metajournalistic discourse; sociopolitical context

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1. Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into journalism has raised concerns about risks such as the erosion of creativity, declining critical thinking, and increased misinformation (Thomson Reuters, 2025), thereby disrupting journalism as the fourth estate for safeguarding democracy (Dodds et al., 2026). Chinese media, operating in a country with the highest rates of AI deployment in the world (Statista, 2025), has cultivated a distinctive discourse about AI risks for journalism. A senior editor at Xinhua News Agency, China's national-level media, acknowledged that the greatest risk in the field of AI-generated content (AIGC) is the risk of falling behind, that is, the risk of standing still and ultimately being left behind by the tide of the times (Du, 2024). This perspective suggests that, for Chinese news media, the key concern is less the normative evaluation of AI risks than how to embed AI technologies in the media system.

The Chinese sociopolitical context provides a compelling case for understanding how AI roles are constructed in a state-led media system. On one hand, Chinese news media often mobilize support to endorse and legitimize their digital transformation (K. Fang & Repnikova, 2022), which is consistent with governmental expectations that frame AI technology in terms of economic competitiveness and a governance tool for shaping public opinion (Sebastião & Dias, 2025). On the other hand, maintaining journalistic authority and credibility requires addressing AI risks through normative frameworks, creating a tension between political advocacy for AI adoption and normative dimensions of AI in journalism (Kuai et al., 2022).

Existing research has provided valuable insights for understanding AI risks from its roles as an instrument that can produce biased and fake news (Oh & Jung, 2025), a communicator that blurs the boundaries between human journalists and AI agents and raises threats to professional authority (Lewis et al., 2019), and a socio-technical system that reinforces restrictions on journalistic autonomy and concentrates the power of AI technology companies (Kuai et al., 2022; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). However, less attention has been paid to how journalistic actors discursively construct AI risks and how they respond to such risks under strong state-led advocacy for AI deployment.

To address this gap, this study adopts metajournalistic discourse as an analytical framework (Carlson, 2016). Metajournalistic discourse provides a public arena where journalists construct the meanings of AI risks, adopt professional roles for taking AI risks, and legitimize their response through balancing professional boundaries and state-led advocacy for technology development. Moreover, the sociopolitical perspective informs this study by explaining how political, institutional, and professional logics shape emergent AI risk framings and responses, contributing to understanding how journalistic discourse negotiates professional autonomy, media transformation, and political missions under a constrained environment. The findings show that the framing process produces a constrained form of professional authority shaped by political imperatives, the hierarchical media system, and the continuity of professional logics.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From Opportunities to Risks: Perceived AI Roles in Journalism

AI's rapid expansion into journalism, from back-end automation to content creation and news distribution, has drawn scholarly attention to its influence on journalistic practices, norms, and authority (Dodds et al., 2026).

Research on the perceived roles of AI in journalism has primarily adopted three perspectives: instrumental, human–machine communication, and sociopolitical.

First, AI, especially generative AI, has been commonly perceived as a transformative instrument that can improve the efficiency of content production by reducing human labor in standardized content generation and optimizing newsroom workflows (Carlson, 2015; Oh & Jung, 2025). Researchers have focused on the diverse functions and applications of AI in subfields including automated writing, transcription, copyediting, identifying stories, interpreting data, improving audience engagement, and growing revenue streams (Boyles, 2024). How AI operates in newsrooms remains largely determined by journalists' judgment and control (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018). However, the potential risks of AI-generated misinformation, biased content, and copyright issues remain unclear (Oh & Jung, 2025), as embedding journalistic norms in an AI system is challenging (Shin et al., 2025). Compromising journalistic norms of accuracy, neutrality, and transparency would undermine the public's trust in journalism (Aitamurto & Boyles, 2025). Addressing these risks requires intermediaries who translate journalistic norms into technical practices, as well as stronger AI literacy among journalists (De Cooker et al., 2026).

Second, human–machine communication scholars conceptualize AI not only as a mediator (media channel) but also as a communicator (media source; Guzman & Lewis, 2020). This perspective questions whether norms developed for human communication should remain the standard for evaluating AIGC. Journalists interpret AI through value-based judgments of fairness, transparency, and accountability, alongside analytic evaluations of reliability, explainability, accuracy, and privacy (Shin et al., 2025). Human–machine communication proposes the ontological risks of blurring the boundaries between human journalists and AI agents. People construct meanings about themselves and machines through interaction (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). Through ongoing and adaptive interactions with AI, journalists embed their personal work habits, biases, and normative principles into the AI training process while also being shaped by AI's feedback and narrative styles (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019). These interactions challenge established understandings of who qualifies as a journalist and who is authorized to produce news.

Third, the sociopolitical perspective conceptualizes AI as a sociotechnical system whose opportunities and risks must be evaluated within its social and political contexts (Airoldi, 2022). Divergent perceptions of AI reflect inequalities in human capital, funding, and technological development (Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). Journalists in lower-income countries tend to be skeptical of AI because of employment insecurity, unreliable data, and limited trust in regulation (Jamil, 2021). By contrast, rapidly developing countries associate AI with media modernization, innovative reporting, and greater information-processing efficiency (Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022; Z. Wang et al., 2026).

Existing research shows that AI adoption can create opportunities to assist journalistic work but also threatens content quality, professional subjectivity, and professional boundaries while reinforcing sociopolitical deficiencies (Carlson, 2015; Jamil, 2021). Taking AI risks as its starting point, this study examines the reconstruction of journalistic boundaries and authority beyond utopian imaginaries. Unlike traditional risks confined to specific roles or situations, AI risks permeate the entire journalistic process and may persist over time. The next section conceptualizes these risks and examines their sociopolitical construction across contexts.

2.2. The Sociopolitical Context of AI Risks in Chinese Journalism

Risk is socially and culturally constructed because judgments of danger depend on particular values and beliefs rather than objective conditions alone (Lee, 2023). Journalistic risks have traditionally been categorized as physical, legal, and political. Physical risks include harassment and retaliation for exposing wrongdoing, while legal risks arise from practices such as using personal information and undercover reporting (Ananian-Welsh et al., 2021; Hollings et al., 2019). Political risks arise from violations of government interests, especially in authoritarian regimes (Repnikova, 2017). These risks are often associated with specific practices and roles, including war, investigative, and critical reporting (Frey, 2023; Lee, 2023). Accessible and low-cost AI tools diffuse risks across the entire journalistic process, including news gathering, production, editing, distribution, and commercialization (Thomson Reuters, 2025).

Perceptions of AI risks are therefore shaped by the political, institutional, and professional logics of media systems (C. Fang et al., 2023; Upmanyu & Gore Mehendale, 2026). China offers a compelling case for examining how AI risk discourse emerges from the interaction among state-led AI development, top-down institutional adoption, and professional authority (Sebastião & Dias, 2025).

Perceptions of AI in Chinese journalism are shaped by the coordination of technological development, media organizations, and state priorities (Z. Wang et al., 2026). Since 2017, AI has been positioned as essential to national development and global competitiveness, supporting a domestic ecosystem that includes DeepSeek, Qwen, Kimi, and Doubao (Kuai, 2026). The central question is therefore less whether journalism should adopt AI than how it can be incorporated into a managed process of media modernization (Z. Wang et al., 2026). Political accountability and the avoidance of sensitive content may also take precedence over professional norms such as objectivity and truthfulness (Kuai et al., 2025). Journalists consequently articulate AI risks within state-sanctioned boundaries shaped by their roles in public service and policy advocacy (Z. Wang et al., 2026).

China's AI development has been described as an authoritarian state model, in contrast to the market-driven US model and the democratic European model (Cao & Power, 2025). In China, the state retains substantial authority over AI development, deployment, and governance. Concerns consequently center on disruption to social stability and the erosion of journalistic autonomy (Z. Wang et al., 2026). AI-generated images and videos used for festivals, city promotion, and policy visualization illustrate how AI-assisted journalism serves state governance (Meng & Wang, 2025). Similar patterns appear in East Africa and weakened democracies, where AI infrastructure can support surveillance, political intervention, and propaganda, generating caution among journalists (Beacken et al., 2026; Gondwe, 2026; Lin, 2024; Wu, 2024).

Although Chinese journalism shares with US and European journalism similar utopian imaginaries of AI as efficient, inevitable, and strategically important for media transformation, its AI risk discourse remains distinct because of the influence of China's political, economic, and sociocultural contexts on perceptions of AI risks (Cao & Power, 2025). In the US, AI risks are embedded in journalism's cumulative commercial crisis, as platforms divert advertising revenue and audience attention while news organizations become increasingly dependent on technology companies (Cao & Power, 2025; Z. Wang et al., 2026). European discourse places greater emphasis on human dignity, structural fairness, and professional autonomy within comparatively developed regulatory institutions (Z. Wang et al., 2026). China and other developing countries, however, often prioritize economic competitiveness and technological developmentalism over ethical concerns (Kim, 2018; Sebastião & Dias, 2025).

Infrastructure, funding, and expertise also shape AI adoption across the Global South and BRICS countries (named for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), which now includes six additional countries (Onebunne, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). For example, Pakistani journalists express skepticism because of insecure employment and financial pressures, whereas Latin American journalists associate AI with newsroom modernization and innovative reporting (Jamil, 2021; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). BRICS countries have been regarded as the leaders in emerging markets. They have generally incorporated AI into their modernization agendas, although unequal resources produce uneven adoption (Ahmad et al., 2023; Lelo, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2023). Similar inequalities exist within China, where national media pursue highly regulated innovation, provincial and municipal outlets adopt AI instrumentally, and county media often engage in symbolic adoption (Xu et al., 2025).

China has held the largest share of the AI market among BRICS countries since 2020 (Statista, 2025). Following the launch of ChatGPT, Chinese technology companies rapidly developed competing models. By November 2025, 611 domestic generative AI services had been registered, and media organizations either developed their own algorithms or collaborated with technology companies ("611 kuan shengchengshi," 2025; Zhu, 2025). This development has received strong political endorsement: Chinese President Xi Jinping called for integrating AI throughout news production and guiding algorithms through mainstream values to strengthen public opinion guidance (Xi, 2019).

However, technological infrastructure alone does not determine how AI risks are perceived; political institutions, media systems, and professional cultures also matter. Although research on AI-enabled journalism in China highlights the influence of the state and the hierarchical media system on perceptions of AI, less attention has been paid to how journalists negotiate AI risk discourse within state-sanctioned boundaries while safeguarding their professional authority.

2.3. Metajournalistic Discourse on AI Risks

Metajournalistic discourse refers to how journalists publicly define their professional identities, practices, norms, and boundaries while legitimizing journalism as a form of authoritative knowledge (Carlson, 2016). This framework is particularly relevant to AI, which challenges journalists' professional jurisdiction. Professions maintain authority by claiming exclusive knowledge and control over the application of that knowledge (Abbott, 1988). As generative AI increasingly participates in content production, fact-checking, and news distribution, it appears capable of performing journalistic tasks without possessing professional knowledge (Humayun, 2026). Automated fact-checking, for example, improves efficiency but raises a fundamental question: If machines become gatekeepers of truth, who retains the authority to produce credible knowledge (Johnson, 2024)?

AI risk discourse allows journalists to reconstruct this authority by defining which tasks machines can legitimately perform. By exposing AI hallucinations, misinformation, and ethical deficiencies, journalists distinguish machine-generated content from professional journalism and reaffirm the importance of human judgment, creativity, and empathy (Perreault et al., 2026). Copyright policies further institutionalize these boundaries by restricting AI to an auxiliary role while reserving fact-checking, professional judgment, and audience trust for human journalists (Boyles, 2024).

However, research on metajournalistic discourse surrounding AI has focused primarily on Anglo-American contexts characterized by established professional norms and democratic institutions (e.g., Johnson, 2024; Perreault et al., 2026). This focus overlooks how sociopolitical conditions enable or constrain journalists' identification of and responses to AI risks. China therefore provides a critical case for examining how journalists negotiate tensions among political advocacy, digital transformation, and professional authority.

Based on the above analytical framework and research concerns, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: How does Chinese journalistic discourse frame AI risks?

RQ2: How does Chinese journalistic discourse respond to these risks through boundary work and the legitimation process?

RQ3: How do political, institutional, and professional logics shape these framings and responses?

3. Methodology

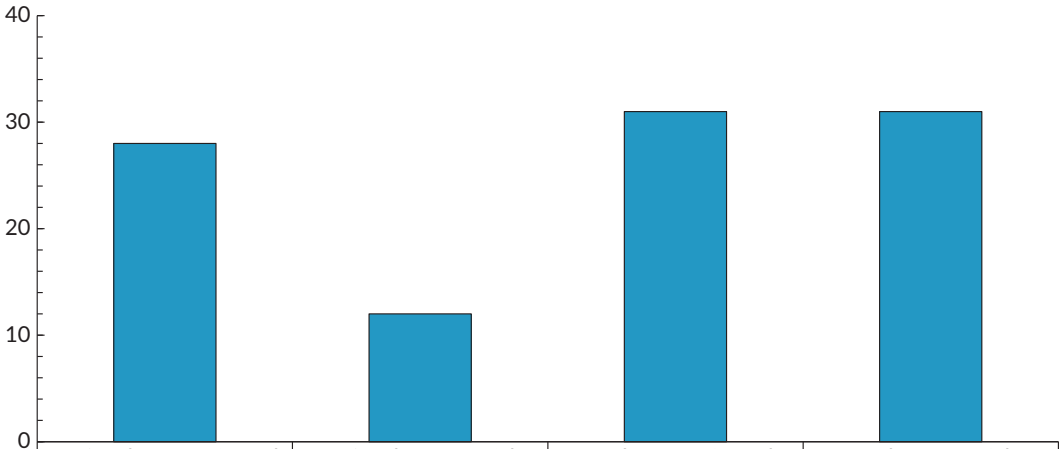
Metajournalistic discourse provides an effective framework to examine how journalists construct professional identities, values, and practices amid media transformation (Carlson, 2016; Rooney & Creech, 2019). Accordingly, I collected Chinese state-owned media texts on journalists' experiences with AI and generative AI across outlets at different bureaucratic levels and with different editorial orientations. Following Fürsich (2009), I conducted a textual analysis of their narratives, the institutional, economic, and professional constraints shaping them, and their discursive silences.

3.1. Data Collection

I collected texts from three comprehensive news databases: the WiseSearch Database, Google News, and WeChat public accounts. A keyword search was conducted using combinations of the Chinese terms "journalism (新闻)" and "artificial intelligence (人工智能)," together with the English acronym "AI." Given the transformative impact of ChatGPT in expanding public access to AI, the data retrieval period spans from November 1, 2022 (to include the launch of ChatGPT on November 30, 2022) to November 30, 2025, to capture a critical phase of rapid AI deployment in China and the concurrent construction of media narratives around AI adoption. To ensure the analysis focused on professional journalistic discourse, the search excluded articles produced by self-media (*zimeiti*; see K. Fang, 2022) and technology companies (such as the Tencent Research Institute).

The initial search retrieved 255 articles. Articles were retained if they met at least one of two inclusion criteria: (a) discussing the use of AI in journalistic workflows or (b) examining specific applications or outcomes of AI use by journalists or media organizations rather than by other sectors. The final sample comprised 102 articles authored by journalists from 56 media organizations (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Material). Each article was assigned a unique chronological identifier (N1–N102) for coding and analysis. Moreover, following previous research (Zhao, 1998), media outlets were further classified along two institutional dimensions: administrative level (national vs. local) and organizational orientation

(party-oriented vs. commercial-oriented), yielding four categories: national party-oriented media, national commercial-oriented media, local party-oriented media, and local commercial-oriented media (see Figure 1).



	National party-oriented media	National commercial-oriented media	Local party-oriented media	Local commercial-oriented media
Number of articles	28	12	31	31

Figure 1. Number of articles by type of authors' affiliated media organizations.

3.2. Data Analysis

This study employs textual analysis to examine how narratives, arguments, and interpretations interact to construct the roles of AI in journalism and reshape journalistic identities, values, and legitimacy. As Fürsich (2009, p. 238) argues, "media texts present a distinctive discursive moment between encoding and decoding that justifies special scholarly engagement." Through their narrative structures and ideological negotiations, media texts reflect mediated realities and reveal broader transformations within the journalistic field.

Specifically, the analysis followed Tracy's (2025) phronetic iterative approach, which involves continuous movement between empirical observations and theoretical interpretation throughout the research process. Statements concerning AI adoption and AI-related risks served as the unit of analysis. The analysis proceeded through three coding cycles using NVivo 11 software.

The first cycle involved open, iterative, and inductive coding. All 102 articles were read closely, and descriptive codes were assigned to recurrent expressions, concepts, and claims. Examples included "hallucination," "loss of originality," "ideological bias," and "human supervision." At this stage, the codes remained close to the language and immediate meanings of the texts.

The second cycle used focused and axial coding to compare, consolidate, and distinguish the primary codes. Categories were merged when they referred to the same underlying problem and separated when they differed in their object, level, or discursive function. This iterative process generated four overarching analytical themes: (a) the identification of AI risks, (b) the attribution of AI risks, (c) the boundary work in response to AI risks, and (d) the legitimation of AI risk-taking. These themes subsequently structured the presentation of the findings.

The third cycle involved theoretical and integrative coding to explain why these patterns of risk framing and response emerged. Guided by the RQs, the analysis identified three interrelated contextual logics: political, institutional, and professional. More specifically, political logic accounted for the selective attribution and legitimation of AI risks, institutional logic explained both the convergence and variation of AI discourse across different types of media organizations, and professional logic illuminated how journalists redefined professional authority by positioning themselves as indispensable supervisors of AI.

As Tracy (2025) notes, conventional notions of reliability and generalizability originated in quantitative research and are not always appropriate criteria for evaluating interpretive qualitative inquiry. Instead, analytical consistency was strengthened through repeated reading, constant comparison across texts, iterative refinement of codes across three coding cycles, and recoding the corpus using the final coding structure.

Table 1 presents the final coding structure developed through these three coding cycles, including the level 1 main themes and level 2 sub-themes.

Table 1. Coding themes.

Level 1 Main Themes	Level 2 Sub-themes
Identified AI risks	Content quality risk
	Mainstream values risk
	Professional subjectivity risk
Asymmetrical AI risk attributions	To AI systems
	To technology companies
Boundary work in response to AI risks	Expansion of the journalistic role to risk filters
	Exclusion of AI roles from journalistic roles
Legitimization of AI risk-taking	Organizational survival imperative
	State-led advocacy for AI adoption
Political intervention	Integration of AI into political missions
	Mainstream values constraints
Institutional structure	Hierarchical demonstration effects
	Hierarchical differentiation
Professional commitments	Professional development

4. Findings

This section examines how Chinese journalistic discourse constructs the risks of AI-integrated journalism and responds through professional boundary work, media transformation, and alignment with state-led AI advocacy. This discourse reveals how journalism coexists with technological innovation and how structural conditions shape AI risk discourse and, in turn, journalistic authority.

4.1. Framing AI Risks in Journalism

RQ1 examines how Chinese journalistic discourse frames AI risks in public reporting. The findings reveal three categories of risk: content risks, mainstream value risks, and professional subjectivity risks. These risks suggest

that AI has moved beyond an instrumental role to become a collaborator that reshapes journalistic workflows and professional logics. The discourse also constructs an asymmetrical attribution of responsibility that largely obscures the roles of institutional actors in mitigating them.

4.1.1. Identified AI Risks

The first category comprises content quality risks associated with AI-assisted production, including AI hallucinations, deepfakes, homogenization, and weak originality. AI hallucination refers to the generation of plausible but factually incorrect information due to technical flaws such as overfitting, fabrication, and logical errors (Sun et al., 2024; Yao & Xi, 2026). An editor at a national party-oriented media wrote that falsehoods and logical flaws in AIGC are "more hidden and dangerous than technical bias" (N4). In practice, the editor noted that AI has generated quotes from non-existent experts and fabricated information (N4). Hallucinated news content may also re-enter subsequent production cycles as training material, allowing false information to circulate rapidly in iterative information flows (N53).

Journalists also criticized AIGC for producing homogenized content that lacks originality. Typical stylistic features such as "ornate wording masking empty substance, precise descriptions that eliminate the imaginative space created by narrative gaps, and excessive use of obscure characters" (N17) are seen as producing aesthetic fatigue. In addition, AIGC is often viewed as synthesizing existing information, raising concerns about potential plagiarism (N98). These discussions reflect ongoing engagement with core journalistic norms such as accuracy, truthfulness, and originality.

The second category concerns mainstream values risks. In China, mainstream values such as patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendliness have been regarded as fostering social consensus and regulating public behavior (Zheng & Wang, 2023). These values have been incorporated into Chinese journalism, serving as normative principles such as political sensitivity, morality, and fairness (Gueorguiev et al., 2017). The journalistic discourse points out that AIGC may disrupt the mainstream values that Chinese journalism should safeguard and propagate to the public. Political sensitivity is regarded as a core professional competence that enables journalists to avoid reporting red lines and to respond to shifting political expectations (Gueorguiev et al., 2017). The deputy editor-in-chief of a national party-oriented media outlet noted that although DeepSeek can identify typographical errors in news drafts, it cannot recognize—or sometimes avoids identifying—politically sensitive mistakes (N33). Such concerns echo official statements that emphasize the need to guide algorithms with mainstream value orientations and strengthen the capacity for guiding public opinion (Xi, 2019).

The third category concerns professional subjectivity risks. Media discourse frames AI as undermining professional subjectivity, which refers to core competencies in journalistic practice, including on-site reporting, interviewing, information synthesis, fact-checking, and investigative reporting (N80). Journalists attribute the erosion of professional subjectivity to journalists gradually ceding these core abilities to AI under the lure of efficiency, thereby weakening professional expertise and fostering algorithmic dependence (N19). The erosion of professional subjectivity is also framed as a loss of creative pleasure in writing. Such narratives suggest that AI risks extend beyond professional abilities to the erosion of human creativity and reflective thinking (e.g., N95). As illustrated above, the subtle experience of empathizing with language, a key element of journalistic creativity, cannot easily be reproduced through algorithmic generation.

4.1.2. Asymmetrical AI Risk Attributions

Journalistic discourse primarily attributes concerns to technology companies and the black-box nature of AI systems. Copyright issues constitute an initial point of tension between AI companies and news organizations. In China, the lawsuit filed by *The New York Times* against OpenAI triggered discussions about potential threats to news copyright and the commercial value of original reporting. A journalist from a local party-oriented media outlet quoted a Chinese lawyer who said that "this lawsuit sets a precedent for the legal system: how to evaluate the value of news content used to train large language models and determine how AI should pay for the content it uses" (N79).

The black-box nature of AI technology is another commonly identified source of risk. Here, "black box" refers to the lack of explainability and traceability in AI outputs, which conflicts with journalism's norm of accuracy (N23). Journalists criticize this characteristic by noting that "AI may make mistakes, but it does not take responsibility for them," since AI systems can generate logically coherent yet inaccurate content (N23).

This pattern of attribution also involves the manipulative silence of texts (Huckin, 2002), which refers to the intentional concealment of information from audiences to the advantage of the writer. In the texts analyzed in this study, the discourse attributes AI risks mainly to technology companies and technical features, while rarely addressing issues of government regulation or media self-governance (e.g., N89, N23). Only one article in the sample, authored by a journalist from a local party-oriented media outlet, noted that "some media organizations present AI-generated content as original work" and that "to reduce labor costs, some media organizations allow AI to handle multiple stages of production while omitting human oversight" (N15). However, the author neither identified the organizations involved nor examined gaps in their institutional regulations.

4.2. Journalistic Response to AI Risks

RQ2 concerns how Chinese journalistic discourse responds to AI risks through negotiating professional boundaries, inevitable AI innovation, and political advocacy for media transformation. The study answers this question by explicating the discursive construction of AI–journalist boundaries and appropriating political discourse to legitimize AI risk-taking.

4.2.1. Boundary Work in Response to AI Risks

Boundary work refers to an ideological strategy through which professions monopolize authority and resources (Gieryn, 1983). This study identified two prominent strategies for constructing professional boundaries. First, Chinese media have constructed a new professional identity of "AI risk filter" to maintain the centered position of human professional judgement. Second, they discursively instrumentalize AI for media interests such as improving work efficiency while excluding AI from empathetic expression and uncovering underlying truth.

Facing the unfamiliar technical challenges posed by AI models, Chinese media have constructed a new professional role for journalists: risk filter. Individuals in this role are expected to exercise professional judgment regarding truthfulness, fairness, transparency, appropriate detail, emotional expression, and value

orientation (N9, N30, N54). An article in a local commercial-oriented media outlet (N9) noted on Journalist's Day in 2025 that "the places AI cannot reach are the true home of journalists." As risk filters, journalists are responsible not only for deciding what information enters the news production process (i.e., traditional gatekeepers; White, 1950), but also for mitigating AI risks before, during, and after AI generation.

Chinese journalists proposed several principles for acting as risk filters, including "source hygiene" (素材洁癖) and "traceability labels" (溯源标签; N20). These principles emphasize the pre-emptive mitigation of AI risks, such as hallucination and bias, by "feeding authoritative sources to AI" (N18), "requiring AI to provide traceable sources" (N20), and "strengthening fact-checking procedures" (N17). They also emphasize transparency by advocating the clear labeling of AIGC.

Regarding strategies of expansion and exclusion in boundary work, the discourse defines what AI can and cannot do through instrumentalization. Here, instrumentalization refers to discursively constructing AI as a tool for improving efficiency while denying its creativity and empathetic capacities. Aspects such as "improving efficiency" (N9), "liberating labor" (N73), and "saving labor costs" (N17) are among the most frequently mentioned advantages of employing AI in journalism. AI is portrayed as a "time accelerator"; for example, a national commercial-oriented media article reports that AI reduced video production from two hours to five minutes (N73). It is also associated with reducing data-analysis workloads, improving proofreading, integrating information, supporting large-scale video production, and enabling multilingual transformation.

In contrast, empathy and humanistic care are constructed as exclusively human capacities. AI is seen as unable to understand deeper meanings of news events or convey human warmth in storytelling (N6, N84). The strategic ritual of emotionality (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013) thus distinguishes human journalists from AI agents. The discourse further stresses that AI lacks the insight and depth of journalistic thinking. AIGC is framed as an "information platter" (信息拼盘), suggesting that AI merely stitches data together rather than uncovering facts from complex phenomena (N54). Such discourse also raises the professional threshold, valuing journalists with domain expertise, reflective capacity, and independent judgment.

4.2.2. Legitimization of AI Risk-Taking

Legitimizing AI risk-taking constitutes an essential response in Chinese journalistic discourse. AI integration is framed not merely as a technological choice but as both a political mission and an opportunity for media survival. Organizational survival and state-led advocacy serve as the two primary discursive resources for this legitimation.

Chinese journalistic discourse constructs AI as a potential resource for expanding profitable media services, attracting audience attention, and enhancing news production, thereby creating new revenue streams. Under growing financial and technological pressures, failing to adopt AI is framed as more dangerous than the risks arising from its use. As a journalist from a local party-oriented media outlet states, "AI is not an opponent to be resisted by humans, but a walking stick that expands possibilities. When the wave of technology arrives, the real threat may not be machines replacing humans, but humans refusing to evolve" (N32). A local commercial-oriented media outlet reports developing an AI-enabled content production system to serve financial institutions. The system supports financial literacy, distributes financial information, and rapidly

converts these materials into video, with a production capacity of at least 500 videos per month (N23). In this example, AI is portrayed as a critical resource for extending journalistic capabilities beyond news production, serving broader social institutions, and generating new revenue streams.

In China's sociopolitical environment, taking AI-related risks is framed as a politically endorsed strategy for media's digital transformation and better undertaking media's political missions for state governance. AI adoption is positioned as a critical component of the "systematic reform" (系统性变革) of Chinese journalism. This reform extends the government-led strategy of media convergence, which emerged in response to digital disruption and aimed to strengthen the Party-state's presence in the online public sphere (Yin & Liu, 2014). By aligning AI adoption with this policy agenda, journalistic discourse constructs technological risk-taking as a politically endorsed strategy for media transformation.

4.3. Structural Contexts for Framing AI Risks

RQ3 examines how the framing of and responses to AI risks are sociopolitically constructed in China. The findings identify three interrelated logics: political, institutional, and professional. Together, these logics explain why certain AI risks become salient, why responsibility is asymmetrically attributed, and how media organizations legitimize AI-integrated journalism despite its recognized risks.

4.3.1. Political Intervention

In China, AI adoption in journalism is closely tied to media organizations' political missions, including communicating mainstream values and effectively guiding public opinion. First, public discourse incorporates AI adoption into media organizations' political missions. For example, a local party-oriented media outlet highlights the introduction of AI-powered service systems for government departments (N99). It presents Southcn.com's "Yuezheng Tongwen" (粤政通问) model as capable of analyzing government information and providing authoritative policy services. This narrative constructs AI-integrated journalism as an extension of state governance, legitimizing AI adoption by aligning media innovation with political missions and public-service objectives.

Journalistic discourse incorporates officially defined mainstream values into assessments of AI risks. It frames AI's inability to recognize politically sensitive terms and its potential deviation from mainstream values as significant risks. Politically compliant content thus becomes a central criterion for evaluating AI in journalism. AI risks are defined by technical performance, as well as by conformity to ideological requirements for maintaining political authority and social stability.

4.3.2. Institutional Structure

Institutional logic in communication research refers to narratives that reflect specific beliefs and rationales underlying organizational practices (C. Fang et al., 2023). It helps explain how Chinese media discursively rationalize their framing of AI risks and responses to AI adoption. This study identifies two mechanisms through which institutional logic operates in the Chinese media system: hierarchical demonstration and hierarchical differentiation.

The hierarchical demonstration effect refers to media organizations with higher administrative status serving as models for lower-tier outlets, thereby shaping mainstream discourse on AI adoption and its risks. For example, Xinhua News Agency and *Guangming Daily*, both national party-oriented media organizations, published research reports on media responsibilities in the AI era and introduced experiences of using AIGC to enhance news production (N19, N61). They play leading and exemplary roles in framing AI risks and provide models of AI adoption for national commercial-oriented and local media.

Hierarchical differentiation describes the institutional process through which media at different levels acquire unequal roles, resources, and capacities for AI adoption. Party-oriented media align more closely with political directives and are expected to fulfill propaganda functions (H. Wang et al., 2018). They frame AI risks strategically and position AI as central to journalism's future. Commercial-oriented media focus more on practical concerns, including job replacement, content quality, risk management, and revenue generation. Their greater caution may reflect weaker political and institutional support for AI-related risk-taking (Chan, 2003; Xu et al., 2025).

4.3.3. Professional Commitment

Professional logic explains why Chinese journalistic discourse emphasizes professional subjectivity and boundary work despite political and institutional constraints. Its central concern is the development of young journalists and the intergenerational reproduction of journalism. Professional development is framed as more than individual skill acquisition: reporting experience, editorial mentoring, verification, and exposure to complex situations transmit technical skills, tacit knowledge, ethical judgment, and news values across generations.

Premature reliance on AI may disrupt this process. Claims that "only highly skilled journalists can use AI effectively" (N33) and that "AI may hinder journalists' professional growth" (N54) stress the need to cultivate professional competence before adopting AI. This concern is particularly salient in China, where the departure of senior journalists for the internet industry has widened generational gaps amid financial pressure and tightening political control (H. Wang, 2021). AI therefore intensifies concerns about professional inheritance and reinforces the importance of protecting journalistic judgment, creativity, and distinctive knowledge.

5. Concluding Discussion

Focusing on journalists' public discussions of AI adoption in China, this study draws on the frameworks of metajournalistic discourse and sociopolitical perspectives to analyze how Chinese journalistic discourse frames the forms and attributions of AI risk and how these frames are negotiated in relation to professional norms, political advocacy, and media digital transformation. The textual analysis shows that AI risks are constructed at three levels: content risks, mainstream value risks, and professional subjectivity risks. These risks are primarily attributed to external indicators, including the black-box nature of AI systems and irresponsible technology companies. In response, Chinese journalists discursively expand their professional identity from news producers to risk filters who regulate what AI can and cannot do in journalistic practice. They also appropriate state-led policy discourse as part of journalism's political and social mission. Strong political intervention, institutional hierarchies, and inherited professional logics jointly shape how AI risks are framed and legitimized in Chinese journalism.

In the context of global research on AI adoption and its risks in journalism, this study identifies shared professional interpretations of AI risks across Chinese and Anglo-American journalism. Concerns about AI hallucination, misinformation, content homogenization, and the erosion of originality echo those expressed in US and European journalism (Cao & Power, 2025). However, Chinese journalistic discourse attributes these risks primarily to technology companies and the "black-box" nature of AI systems, while largely overlooking the responsibilities of the state and media organizations. This asymmetry reflects Chinese media's role in serving Party-state authority and maintaining social stability (Repnikova, 2017), as well as Chinese media outlets' limited performance of the watchdog role in reporting AI development (Kuai, 2026).

Chinese journalism is less constrained by dependence on foreign AI technologies, a major barrier in many Global South countries (Onebunne, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). Chinese media can collaborate with domestic technology companies or develop their own AI systems. Nevertheless, China's advanced AI deployment shares the technological developmentalism and solutionism found in other BRICS countries (Lelo, 2024). This logic of technological competition permeates journalistic discourse, normalizing AI risks as inevitable and positioning media as contributors to China's global technological competitiveness. However, insufficient reflection on governance is evident in the asymmetrical attribution of AI risks.

Despite constraints on public expression, this framing constitutes adaptive boundary work. Journalistic discourse aligns AI adoption with technological modernization and public-opinion governance while confining AI to an instrumental and subordinate role. It neither foregrounds AI-enabled surveillance of critical voices (Gondwe, 2026) nor expresses journalists' fear of unforeseen risks (Z. Wang et al., 2026). This combination of political alignment and professional differentiation preserves journalists' authority over verification, interpretation, and ethical judgment without challenging the institutional imperative to adopt AI.

China's sociopolitical context shapes these negotiations. Consistent with Hollings et al. (2019), the current findings show that financial pressures and newsroom digitalization encourage risk-taking by making AI attractive for improving efficiency. This study extends their framework from individual judgments to collective discourse on technological, normative, and legitimacy risks. State-led advocacy further incorporates AI adoption into media organizations' political missions and legitimizes experimentation under limited regulation. Administrative hierarchy also shapes this discourse: National party-oriented media construct the dominant narrative of AI adoption as risky but inevitable. In contrast, commercial-oriented media discuss practical risks and their management more flexibly.

Positioning journalists as risk filters extends their authority to supervise, verify, and correct AIGC. Boundary work reinforces this authority by presenting professional judgment, political sensitivity, empathy, and social interpretation as irreplaceable. However, this authority remains constrained: Under top-down advocacy, journalists assume greater responsibility for mitigating AI risks without gaining equivalent autonomy over AI adoption. In the long term, asymmetrical risk attribution, hierarchical control over discourse, and political alignment may weaken journalistic agency, authority, and public trust.

5.1. Implications

Theoretically, this study provides a sociopolitical analysis of how and why Chinese journalistic discourse publicly frames and responds to AI risks under political constraints. It extends research on Chinese

AI-integrated journalism beyond descriptions of risks, opportunities, and political influence by identifying the contextual mechanisms through which journalists negotiate professional boundaries and political advocacy for AI development. The asymmetrical attribution of AI risks directs attention toward technology companies and opaque AI systems while overlooking the responsibilities of institutional actors, including the state and media organizations. This pattern reveals how journalistic discourse aligns with national development plans while rendering institutional critique and caution seemingly inappropriate.

Practically, public journalistic discourse on WeChat public accounts, Weibo, and news apps has become an important means of reconstructing journalistic authority and retaining audience trust in China. Future discourse should move beyond listing potential AI risks and proposing abstract responses by explaining the concrete procedures through which AIGC is verified, corrected, and held accountable. More balanced risk attribution should acknowledge the responsibilities of media organizations, technology companies, and regulatory institutions rather than locating responsibility primarily in technical features. Publicly addressing these institutional responsibilities would demonstrate journalism's willingness to scrutinize the conditions of its own technological transformation.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it relies exclusively on published articles and does not include journalist interviews, newsroom observations, or internal editorial documents. The findings therefore capture the public construction of AI risks in metajournalistic discourse rather than journalists' personal perceptions or actual newsroom practices. Future research could combine textual analysis with interviews, ethnographic observations, and editorial documents to examine whether and how journalists enact the "risk filter" role and negotiate AI risks in daily practice.

Second, while the Chinese media environment provides a compelling case for examining how a strong state role shapes journalistic perceptions of and responses to AI risks, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other media systems. Comparative research could therefore explore how AI risk perceptions and shifting professional identities emerge across different contexts, helping to clarify the interaction between media systems and various technological development ideologies in shaping journalistic interpretations of AI risks.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

All articles analyzed in this study are publicly available. Full bibliographic information for the articles is provided in the supplementary material.

LLMs Disclosure

The author used generative artificial intelligence (ChatGPT 5.2) to translate original Chinese sentences in the samples into English and to assist with proofreading. All AI-assisted content was carefully reviewed and revised by the author to ensure accuracy in wording and paraphrasing. A native English speaker proofread the final manuscript.

Supplementary Material

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

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ARTICLE

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A Framework for Classifying Uncertainties in AI-Driven Newsrooms

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Abstract

This study examines how generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is adopted and integrated into the newsroom of a major Brazilian media organization—Globo. While AI deployment in journalism has expanded globally, the experiences lived by journalists in contexts that are not Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic remain underexplored. Combining in-depth interviews, internal documents, organizational presentations, public materials, and direct observation within a qualitative case study, this study analyzes how GAI is reshaping newsroom practices, routines, and professional identities. It introduces a framework for classifying uncertainties in AI-driven newsrooms, a type II theory, which is designed to describe, classify, and organize the main forms of uncertainty faced by journalists when interacting with GAI systems, and then structure these uncertainties into three analytical levels—macro (ecosystem), meso (organization), and micro (identity)—while pairing each level with its associated coping strategies. Given its single-case basis, the framework is presented as a possible framework whose analytical categories require further empirical application before broader validation.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; generative artificial intelligence; Global South; journalism; newsroom; non-WEIRD contexts; uncertainty

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic systems have influenced journalism across the globe, enabling the automation of content production, the algorithmic curation of content, and supporting reporting practices in newsrooms (Thurman et al., 2019). Recent advancements in AI have expanded traditional, data-centric functions such as classification and prediction into the realm of generative AI (GAI). By utilizing deep

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generative models, GAI applications process basic user prompts to synthesize original and realistic outputs across multiple formats, including text, images, and software code, serving a wide variety of domains (Banh & Strobel, 2023). To ensure competitive success, news organizations utilize these tools in at least one of the main stages of the news ecosystem: newsgathering, production, and distribution (Ioscote et al., 2024). Despite this increasing influence, the implications for journalists' work routines, professional identity, and practice remain understudied across diverse media systems.

The scientific literature examining these developments exhibits a concentration of academic production: Research on AI in journalism primarily focuses on North America (Ioscote et al., 2024). This article will refer to the dominant context of this study as WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic). The acronym WEIRD was introduced by Henrich et al. (2010) to critique the tendency of the behavioral sciences to base broad claims about human psychology on samples drawn entirely from such societies. We apply the label to the geographic concentration of research on AI in journalism documented by recent systematic reviews (e.g., Ioscote et al., 2024).

Empirical research on AI adoption in non-WEIRD newsrooms remains underdeveloped. In Africa, isolated and non-institutionalized initiatives have been documented. The majority of AI tools used in African newsrooms were developed either in the Global North or China, incorporating values that may perpetuate external biases at the local level (Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022). Furthermore, the appropriation of AI tools in this region is accompanied by persistent pessimism and fears, and formal AI policies are generally absent (Umejei et al., 2025). In South Asia, most Bangladeshi media organizations do not employ institutional strategies for adapting to AI tools. Consequently, adoption is predominantly based on individual initiative (Rifat & Noman, 2026); Nepali journalists use AI informally and face linguistic limitations (Pandey & Ghimire, 2026). Across all contexts, AI adoption has been characterized as fragmented, individualized, and weakly institutionalized.

There is a gap in the literature regarding how large, resource-rich media organizations in non-WEIRD settings approach AI adoption. Empirical studies investigating the integration of AI in non-WEIRD environments, such as Brazil's newsrooms, remain scarce. This gap highlights the relevance of the present case study. One common feature of AI adoption among these contexts is the proliferation of uncertainty. Current studies highlight tensions related to autonomy, verification, trust, and the absence of formal guidelines (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Pandey & Ghimire, 2026; Umejei et al., 2025). Adoption often occurs through individual attempts lacking formal organizational policies (Munoriyarwa et al., 2023; Rifat & Noman, 2026). Even in resource-rich environments, journalists report ongoing concerns about the status of AI-generated content and its effects on professional identity and institutional credibility (Baptista et al., 2026; Thurman et al., 2025). Together, these dynamics indicate that AI adoption is a process of technological integration that involves multiple overlapping uncertainties that have yet to be sufficiently theorized. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate how adopting GAI generates and structures uncertainty within a large non-WEIRD newsroom. The study is guided by one central question:

RQ: How does the adoption of GAI in a non-WEIRD newsroom generate and structure uncertainty?

To answer the above question, the study investigates GAI adoption in Globo's newsroom, the largest media corporation in Latin America. Globo is not alone in being a major outlet adopting GAI; other outlets, both digital-native and legacy, use GAI in Brazil. Globo operates globally through broadcast television, digital

news platforms, streaming services, and print, and reaches hundreds of millions of individuals. Although Globo is a regional incumbent dominating its market, it depends upon foundation models developed by major technology companies whose training data include language assumptions and design principles primarily reflective of Global North contexts. This dual positioning (locally dominant yet globally dependent) makes Globo an extremely relevant example for exploring how non-WEIRD media organizations engage with AI technologies.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is proposing a framework for classifying uncertainties in AI-driven newsrooms. This type II theory describes, classifies, and organizes the forms of uncertainty journalists face when interacting with GAI systems. This contribution matters both analytically and practically as it addresses the geographic and conceptual gaps identified above by theorizing GAI adoption from a non-WEIRD perspective, incumbent largely absent from the literature, and it offers newsroom decision-makers a diagnostic tool for locating where uncertainty arises and which coping strategies stabilize it.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the literature that grounds the study. Section 2.1 maps the expansion of research on AI and journalism and its geographic concentration in WEIRD contexts; Section 2.2 turns to the emerging Brazilian scholarship; and Section 2.3 moves from individual-level adoption models to ecosystemic and institutional perspectives.

2.1. AI in Journalism and the WEIRD Bias

Journalism scholars have increasingly focused on how AI is used in journalism; a systematic review of 699 articles published between 2014 and 2023 found a growth rate of roughly 2000% (Ioscote et al., 2024).

Researchers understand AI as present throughout the entire process of producing journalism (Ioscote et al., 2024; Thurman et al., 2019). While there is agreement that AI could augment human journalists, Thurman et al. (2019) see augmentation as occurring when humans remain in the loop. This is supported by the fact that human oversight of the use of AI is seen as necessary for maintaining public confidence in the reliability of journalism (Mehmood, 2025).

Nonetheless, the scholarship contains some unresolved tension: between technocratic views of AI as tool frames and more sociotechnological analyses of AI that question issues of power and control (Thurman et al., 2019); between the "hope and hype" that tend to surround each new technology and the reality check that tends to occur after underwhelming application results (Thurman et al., 2019, p. 987); and between the relative lack of attention to ethics and regulation (Ioscote et al., 2024) and the pervasive nature of regulatory concerns in post-GAI scholarship (Mehmood, 2025).

The field is clear regarding its own limitations. Brazil offers a useful opportunity to address two weaknesses at once: It is a major media market operating in a non-WEIRD society experiencing rapid GAI deployment, yet it has been relatively underrepresented in prior AI-focused research.

2.2. GAI and Journalism in Brazil

Brazilian scholars have started examining how AI technologies have been adopted by Brazilian news outlets: mapping AI initiatives systematically (Pinto & Barbosa, 2024); establishing an introductory framework of possibilities for understanding GAI as a new turning point in the technological development of journalism (Carneiro dos Santos & Figueiredo, 2024); and analyzing formal AI usage policies that were produced by individual newsrooms (Silva & Paulino, 2025).

As a whole, these perspectives suggest three key commonalities. First, all view AI as an assistance mechanism rather than as a replacement for human decision-making: Most journalistic AI initiatives in Brazil depend on human supervision or editing for content publication, which is predominantly distributed across websites and social media platforms (Pinto & Barbosa, 2024); human oversight is required because factual errors are incompatible with journalism itself (Carneiro dos Santos & Figueiredo, 2024); and all nine usage policies examined by Silva and Paulino (2025) treat GAI as a tool intended to help journalists with six of them explicitly stating that the technology does not replace human work and judgment. Second, they highlight asymmetrical relationships between journalism producers in different parts of the world: Brazilian news organizations rely upon infrastructure provided by big tech companies (Pinto & Barbosa, 2024; Silva & Paulino, 2025); moreover, most chatbots used by these journalism organizations belong to large multinational corporations based in the Global North and collect and re-use user-generated content submitted via those chatbots (Silva & Paulino, 2025). Finally, authors recognize a shortage of education/training for working journalists: Only three of the nine usage policies examined by Silva and Paulino (2025) indicate that their publishers plan to train their employees.

Brazilian scholarship also presents contradictions. In terms of adoption patterns, digital-native outlets lead the implementation of AI initiatives, utilizing predominantly low-cost methods and open-source codes, although widespread official adoption of GAI was not initially observed (Pinto & Barbosa, 2024). Focusing specifically on this segment, Malar and Saad (2025) analyzed the AI policies disclosed and used in five Brazilian digital-native outlets (Agência Pública, Agência Tatu, Aos Fatos, Núcleo Jornalismo, and Revista AzMina) and found a shared framing of GAI as an auxiliary tool rather than a substitute for journalists, while cautioning that these publicly stated positions may diverge from everyday newsroom practice. In contrast, across different types of media, Silva and Paulino (2025) found a general absence of formal governance structures in AI policies. Out of nine media organizations evaluated, only *Estadão* detailed the creation of a specific AI committee for governance, whereas other large outlets such as *Folha de S. Paulo* presented guidelines that did not constitute formal governance structures, suggesting that formal institutionalization and grassroots experimentation tend to follow separate organizational pathways.

Together, these developing literatures leave an important empirical gap: Their evidence comes from publicly available reports of initiative implementation, conceptual syntheses, and official policy statements. Pinto and Barbosa (2024) have explicitly called for research that would extend into newsrooms through surveys, interviews, and observations. The present study responds directly to this agenda, moving the Brazilian debate from mapped initiatives and published policies to the situated experiences of professionals inside Globo.

2.3. From User Adoption to Ecosystemic and Institutional Tensions

The bulk of research on technology adoption agrees on the underlying logic: Perceptions of those using the technology govern its adoption. Davis (1989) posits that usage is based upon both perceived usefulness and ease of use according to his technology acceptance model. Venkatesh et al. (2003, 2012) expanded upon these antecedents through their unified theory of acceptance and use of technology and consumer extension. While expanding on the prior work, all theories rely on the same unit of analysis, namely, the individual decision-maker, and treat the process of adopting technology as something that can be predicted based upon each individual's subjective assessment of a specific artifact. This assumption works well for many applications of technology, but it fails to adequately explain GAI in newsrooms because the use of GAI in this context is subject to the rules and norms of the editorial staff, the availability of resources provided by the organization, and the infrastructure that supports GAI in the newsroom that users have little to no control over, and therefore fail to describe the supra-individual factors required for acceptance to occur.

Another area of research redefines the unit of analysis from the user to the system. Instead of focusing on how individual decisions result in desired outcomes, researchers examine how systems create desired outcomes through interdependence among multiple stakeholders (Iansiti & Levien, 2004); and further, to achieve value in a system, there needs to be alignment across multiple stakeholders regarding a shared value proposition (Adner, 2017). Rodrigues et al. (2021) synthesized the two lines of research, stating that widespread adoption is contingent upon concurrent acceptance by multiple stakeholder groups, not just end-user groups. In environments characterized by interdependencies, an individual's positive appraisal is required, but is insufficient for achieving widespread adoption.

Interdependence within an ecosystem also creates tensions for existing firms seeking to adapt to new technologies. There are differing views on why established firms struggle to adapt to changing technologies. Bower and Christensen (1995) argue that established firms struggle to adapt because they allocate resources to mainstream customers. Markides (2006) argues against the general applicability of this argument and states that disruption encompasses multiple concepts that require unique responses. Cozzolino et al. (2018) demonstrated that adaptation by an established firm in a news-media setting is feasible and requires a business model shift from a closed to an open platform. The differences in opinion ultimately relate to whether established firms can profit from technologies created by others, the fact that value creation occurs less often with creators than with owners of complementary assets under conditions where appropriation rights are limited (Teece, 1986), and that the business model represents the design of the value captured (Teece, 2010).

3. Methodology

This section details the research design and analytical strategy: the case and its delimitation (3.1); the data sources, sampling rationale, and temporal scope (3.2); and the two-cycle coding procedure together with the status of the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels as analytical levels of context (3.3).

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design (Stake, 2010) to examine the integration of GAI within Globo's newsroom. To delimit the scope of analysis, Globo must be distinguished from Grupo Globo, the

broader conglomerate to which it belongs. The present study focuses exclusively on Globo, which since January 2020 has operated as a single, integrated company that consolidates TV Globo, Globosat, Globo.com, and corporate management, and since 2018 has pursued a transformation into a "mediatech" company, distributing content across open and pay television, the streaming service Globoplay, and digital products spanning journalism (G1), sport, and entertainment. Within this perimeter, the analysis focuses on Globo's journalistic operations across television and digital news; accordingly, the interviewees included executives and managers from both domains, while the group's publishing, radio, venture, and philanthropic units were excluded.

3.2. Data Collection

The empirical material was gathered using interviews, observations, and documentation to allow for triangulation among multiple types of evidence (Saldaña, 2016; Stake, 2010). This specific case study is a subset of a larger doctoral study by the first author.

In-depth interviews were intentionally chosen over semi-structured interviews as the latter fit into design contexts where respondents are counted or averaged when they respond repeatedly and uniformly (Stake, 2010).

Twenty-five in-depth interviews were completed with journalists, editors, executives, and managers who utilize AI-based practices in their work. The number of interviews was determined based on saturation. In addition to the journalists, non-journalists were included to reflect the nature of GAI adoption in mediatech companies as it transcends the boundaries of the newsroom. Limiting the samples to only journalists would have resulted in a narrow perspective on this system. AI literacy was not a factor in selection criteria. A detailed table for each participant is provided in the Supplemental Material 1 (S1).

Data collection took place over two separate time frames. The first phase (October 2024–June 2025) identified professionals in technology, corporate strategy, and law roles, outlining the structural (infrastructure), moral (ethics), and governmental (regulatory) underpinnings of implementing AI throughout the organization. The second phase (January–March 2026) focused solely on journalists in order to identify how GAI was being applied in practice on a day-to-day basis and how its use was impacting their professional identities. Because GAI develops much faster than most organizations can accommodate, these data represent a moment-in-time snapshot.

Participant interview data were compared with a body of secondary organizational data including internal documents and meeting transcripts (i.e., CEO town hall meetings, CTO technology keynotes, and AI program meetings) and institutional public communications, which are listed in the Supplemental Material 1 (S2). Using Stake's (2010) method of cross-referencing data continuously, we were able to compare official pronouncements, perceived understandings of the organization, and everyday interactions with GAI tools. The interviews provided an understanding of the participants regarding GAI and the conflicts they identified, while the documents represented the institutional and strategic context surrounding the AI program development and the direct naturalistic observation facilitated the researcher's familiarity with GAI in the newsroom.

3.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative coding shares some foundational similarities with content analysis, but is methodologically quite different. Content analysis usually relies on frequencies and predefined categories, whereas qualitative coding is a heuristic, organic process that allows researchers to formulate emergent theoretical categories (Saldaña, 2016). Analysis was organized into two coding cycles: open coding and pattern coding, which were executed across five analytical stages. Atlas.ti served as a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) tool.

The first stage was the first cycle. The interview transcripts were coded using five methods: in vivo, process, values, emotion, and attribution coding. Saldaña (2016) explicitly endorses this strategy when a single method alone cannot fully capture the multidimensionality of data. This cycle resulted in 87 codes, each recorded in a codebook that served as a shared standard for the research team.

The second stage was recoding and recategorization. Coding is cyclical (Saldaña, 2016), so the initial codebook underwent systematic revision when cluster assignments were re-examined, relabeled, and reorganized.

Stage three was the second cycle. The 87 first-cycle codes were consolidated into 14 pattern codes/clusters that pulled the material into more streamlined units of analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Candidate clusters were tested against the full set of coded excerpts.

Stage 4 consisted of theming. Four themes were abstracted from the 14 clusters following the progression outlined by Saldaña (2016): factual uncertainty (T1), identity uncertainty (T2), organizational uncertainty (T3), and uncertainty about content rights and value (T4). Within each theme, pattern codes were differentiated according to whether they capture sources of uncertainty or strategies for dealing with them, yielding uncertainties and coping strategies reported in Section 4. These uncertainties were classified at macro-, meso-, or micro-levels based on where participants placed them (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

Stage 5 focused on the framework development and memo writing. Throughout all stages, memos supported movement from descriptive patterns to the conceptual level. Codes were generated directly from data rather than from a predetermined start list derived from literature. Literature engagement was undertaken after coding to refine and situate emerging categories.

Coding was performed manually by the lead author following Saldaña's recommendation to shop-talk with a colleague or mentor throughout. Decisions about coding and evolving the codebook were reviewed and challenged by co-authors who acted as auditors of the analysis. Supplemental Material 2 synthesizes the progression from interview extracts into codes, themes, and levels of context.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings will be discussed based on the categories identified from the data collection, refined through an iterative dialogue with the literature. At the micro-level, respondents' uncertainty concerns the individual. At the meso-level, the organization is the source of uncertainty. At the macro-level, the overall ecosystem is.

4.1. Uncertainty as a Central Organizing Feature of GAI Adoption

Uncertainty has long been recognized as a central construct in understanding decision-making under conditions of incomplete knowledge. Knight (1921) established the foundational distinction between risk and uncertainty, defining the latter as situations in which outcomes cannot be assigned calculable probabilities. This distinction is particularly salient in the context of GAI in newsrooms where key dimensions such as the behavior of large language models, evolving copyright regimes, and the long-term competitive implications of algorithmic content production remain fundamentally indeterminate.

Building on this foundation, subsequent research has conceptualized how actors navigate such conditions. Rogers (1983) frames the adoption of innovation as an uncertainty-reduction process in which individuals actively seek information, experiment, and rely on social interactions to make sense of emerging technologies. However, this process is unevenly distributed, particularly in non-WEIRD contexts where limited communication channels and weaker institutional infrastructures constrain the ability to reduce uncertainty.

At the organizational level, Milliken (1987) refines the concept by distinguishing between state uncertainty (unpredictability of the environment), effect uncertainty (difficulty in assessing organizational impact), and response uncertainty (ambiguity regarding the consequences of strategic choices). These dimensions are deeply intertwined in the case of GAI where environmental shifts, organizational implications, and strategic responses evolve simultaneously.

Importantly, uncertainty does not imply paralysis. Beckert (2013) argues that individuals and organizations act under uncertainty by constructing shared "fictional expectations" about possible futures, which enable decision-making in the absence of complete information. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that uncertainty is not merely a constraint, but a generative condition shaping how actors interpret, negotiate, and respond to technological change.

This study builds on these theoretical foundations to examine and organize uncertainties empirically within a leading non-WEIRD newsroom.

4.2. Macro-Level (Ecosystem)

At the macro-level, two uncertainties emerged from the data, together with two coping strategies through which practitioners manage them. The first uncertainty is factual. The biggest problem with using AI in journalism is the potential to generate false information, whether through completely fabricated data or misattributed quotes or information. Participants provided several examples of how GAI produced false information, including creating fictional family relationships among actual people and inventing scenarios in Brazil's popular classic soap operas. The second uncertainty concerns historical adaptation. Interview participants stated that AI is part of a long history of technology adoption that has challenged journalists to adapt to changes in their reporting environments. According to Dodds et al. (2026), each "turn" historically caused tension but ultimately led to agreement and adaptation, and each turn became the norm for future developments.

One of the practitioners at Globo cited social media as an example of how journalists began using earlier technologies. He stated, "I think the first key change for us was to start using social media as a research tool. The tool itself has always been very useful. The tools keep changing."

The first coping strategy at this level is the verification workflow. Globo journalists report using GAI to enhance workflow efficiency while retaining control over editorial decisions. Translation and transcription tools provide substantial time savings, and GAI is used for brainstorming and summarization, but is never used as a means to verify final products.

According to one practitioner, journalists are employing GAI under the assumption of "trust but verify," aligning with the hybrid model identified by Thäsler-Kordonouri and Koliska (2025) where human oversight remains paramount while computational tools are employed to minimize risks. Practitioners also state that AI systems need to be explicitly instructed to admit their own mistakes since AI rarely identifies its own errors (Ercanbrack et al., 2025).

Additionally, participants connected hallucination risk to the reliability of user input and the degree of specificity of prompts received from users, which is consistent with research demonstrating that successful human–machine collaboration requires high levels of prompt specificity (Thäsler-Kordonouri & Koliska, 2025) and that journalists recognize that models produce responses based on a lack of factually-based input (Rønning Pedersen et al., 2026). Journalists prefer using closed system tools versus open web models. NotebookLM is preferable for sensitive interviews due to its ability to process pre-verified and uploaded transcripts. Proprietary databases provide "much greater confidence" in terms of accuracy, which can be improved by employing various prompting strategies, such as providing expert personas ("you're an endocrinologist working on a television show") for specific subjects.

The second coping strategy is the framing of AI as support. Journalists overwhelmingly view GAI as a support mechanism for producing content, a "brainstorming partner," similar to Munoriyarwa and de-Lima-Santos (2025), and AI as an assistant producer, not a final arbiter of factuality. As one interviewer said:

> I put the article's text in and say something like, "summarize this story in one sentence." The way it summarizes isn't what I'll actually use for the headline, but it gives me a spark of inspiration about what might be interesting to highlight next.

Journalists reported using AI for transcription and summarizing extensive texts to gain initial editorial direction, embracing it as a partner for repetitive tasks (Dodds et al., 2026; Matsiola & Pilitsidou, 2025). This support role is mediated by awareness of factual uncertainty. A summary may inspire, but is rejected as the final published headline with suggested angles being independently verified before incorporation.

4.3. Meso-Level (Organization)

At the meso-level, the organization itself becomes the source of uncertainty, and four uncertainties were identified alongside two coping strategies. The third uncertainty is inequality within the newsroom. As noted earlier, GAI is creating an environment of uncertainty within the newsroom itself, as evidenced by the internal inequalities described as being a "space of disconnect": "I would describe it today as a Tower of Babel because I believe that a very large portion of people are afraid; almost everyone is afraid of AI."

That fear is largely driven by a digital skills gap, which creates vulnerability and disrupts the collaborative nature of journalistic work:

> Some people have difficulty with Word, with the Office suite. So AI for these people is just another layer of fear….Someone will feel lost, or scared, or insecure. I think this greatly increases the level of insecurity in newsrooms. If the producer doesn't know about AI, the editor doesn't know about AI, the reporter doesn't know about AI, that story won't be able to flow in a certain way.

Of approximately 1,400 employees who report to the company, only a few dozen use AI regularly. Therefore, there is an urgent need for education to foster comprehensive literacy to avoid the concentration of technological inequality.

The fourth uncertainty is the ambivalence of AI integration. There is both excitement and trepidation among journalists about incorporating AI into their workflows. They view AI as both an inevitability and something beneficial, but also potentially dangerous. These opposing views of AI are exemplified through fear and caution (necessity): "Almost a necessary evil, right?…We'd just watch from afar, suspicious. But, hey, I need to. But I'm not going to trust it too much." Another interviewee resorted to a metaphor: "It's like a dog arriving in an unfamiliar place. Or a child. Wary. I wonder if these people are nice?"

Although many journalists interviewed were fearful of what changes may occur due to AI adoption, they also recognized AI's potential for positive transformation. Unfortunately, they perceive the majority of risks associated with adopting AI far outweighing its benefits:

> Speaking for my colleagues in journalism, I think people see it much more as a risk, as a threat, than as an opportunity. There's a lot to adjust, but I think it's a great opportunity for us, I really do.

One of the primary factors driving journalists' fears is job insecurity: "Maybe in two years I won't have this job I have now, but oh well, it happens, doesn't it?" This dichotomy between each journalist's optimistic outlook on AI and the collective anxiety toward its use mirrors current international attitudes toward AI implementation (Matsiola & Pilitsidou, 2025).

The fifth uncertainty concerns the value of the archive. Both the organization's proprietary archives are viewed as a valuable competitive advantage and as resources susceptible to exploitation. Journalists acknowledge their organization's archival repository as an unmatched source of competitive advantages and, at the same time, as a repository rich in factual information and documentation spanning nearly six decades and vulnerable to hallucinations:

> Just think about Globo's archive. If I'm generating things based on my own records, on my own knowledge, the higher the chances are that this AI won't hallucinate. And I could probably even sell that….Who knows Brazil better than Globo? Globo's journalism, my God….We've been out on the streets reporting every single day for 60 years. It's all preserved. In footage, in audio, in photos. And I think that holds tremendous value.

These findings reflect the economics of GAI, where large language models require high-quality, verified data (Nam, 2024), as well as the emerging industry practice of media companies entering licensing agreements with AI companies. Nonetheless, monetization issues are intertwined with concerns surrounding ownership and fairness regarding compensation:

> I think a major uncertainty is the copyright issue, right? And how you figure out not just how much you charge, but how much you pay for content….Who owns that generated content? How do I compensate for it? How do you protect your rights?

This concern reflects the legal debate over whether AI-generated content should be considered copyrightable (Kuai, 2024), further reinforcing Kuai's (2024) argument that existing copyright laws fail to address algorithmically created content and therefore favor larger corporations over individual authors/creators.

The sixth uncertainty relates to value creation. By far the greatest perceived value of AI is its ability to improve routine processes significantly: "We can do tasks that would take five hours now in 20 minutes, in 10 minutes." The speed at which GAI improves routine processes parallels findings made by Kuai (2024) and Trapova and Mezei (2022).

In addition to improving efficiency, GAI enables content formats that are especially relevant to data-intensive fields. One respondent demonstrated an example of shifting from mere process automation to creative new values: "What has interested me the most is the creation of new value, new forms of value. Things that will add more value; it's not just about efficiency. We started publishing videos with narrated lottery results."

Trapova and Mezei (2022) describe these technological capabilities as robojournalism. They state that robojournalism works best in fields that involve a lot of data, such as sports, weather, and finance, because these fields offer the greatest potential for algorithms to quickly convert large amounts of raw data into easily understood information products.

The first coping strategy at this level is the persistence of traditional practices. There appears to be a theoretical distinction between the cognitive recognition of AI's ability to improve efficiency and the practice of using time-tested approaches to acquire and verify information. One example of this reliance upon the customary routine was when one participant said, "I did it the old-fashioned way. I used Google, did searches, and then went to reliable websites." This also illustrates Matsiola and Pilitsidou's (2025) finding of a significant disparity in skill levels among practitioners. Journalists tend to have high proficiency in traditional journalism skills and recognize the concept of AI, yet they demonstrate relatively low levels of practical and technical skills for directly using AI. This lack of congruence creates uncertainty, leading many journalists to continue practicing traditional methods rather than trying something new.

Although the technology is perceived as a means of improving the speed at which news is produced, journalists' reluctance to use these tools, combined with their familiarity with traditional ways of doing things, hinders their ability to successfully integrate them into their daily workflow. Additionally, environmental and logistical constraints associated with producing daily news stories reinforce the use of traditional methods over newer technologies. The friction created by the operational limitations on how journalists gather and produce their news stories highlights a unique aspect of being human—i.e., the ability to be physically present in the field—an essential component of the journalistic process that AI cannot perform or assist with in real-time mobile reporting environments.

The second coping strategy is a change in mindset, which respondents described as a watershed moment: "GAI has completely changed everything, turned everyone upside down. I consider generative mechanics a watershed moment for everything. We don't know exactly what the outcome will be."

This perception of a "watershed moment" aligns with Sonni et al. (2024), who state that the shift toward a post-GAI era represents a historic transformational leap that has sparked a renewed debate over the unanticipated breadth and depth of GAI and its future implications for the media landscape.

Nevertheless, facilitating positive human–machine collaborations in a period of high uncertainty necessitates the development of institutional supports and cultural adaptations. To adapt to this technological revolution, respondents pointed to a need for organizational-level support from management: "It is very important, fundamental, for superiors to ensure that the necessary resources are provided so that their team can invest in attempts to innovate."

In addition to obtaining managerial support, developing the mental safety needed to experiment in a GAI-related environment, respondents stated that it would be beneficial if institutions fostered an environment in which errors are tolerated: "It could be tolerance for error, not informational error, but the failure of an initiative."

4.4. Micro-Level (Identity)

At the micro-level, uncertainty is experienced as a challenge to professional identity, encompassing two uncertainties and a single coping strategy. The seventh uncertainty concerns authorial identity. In reflecting on the nature of their profession, journalists examine whether and to what extent they create unique content rather than machine-generated output. Many participants highlighted the importance of credibility in journalism. They emphasized that human oversight remains foundational to this concept, supported by research, indicating that levels of public trust in AI-integrated journalism are contingent on the degree to which humans oversee its integration (Molla & Ahsan, 2025). Participants identified themselves as writers and asserted that their role should continue to involve authorship of the primary creative act of writing and reject the idea of delegating this act to language models, as delegating authorship could lead to the demise of the profession, citing that their work is an "art" or "craft" as opposed to assembly line production (Trapova & Mezei, 2022). Globo employees argued that AI cannot understand contextual nuances such as irony, and therefore established a boundary: AI is well-suited to perform mechanical tasks involving repetitive versions of articles, whereas creative reporting is uniquely the domain of humans, which is in agreement with Chen and He (2026). As interviewees stated:

> The main risk, in my view, is delegating critical thinking to the tool. That cannot happen….There's a very big difference between creating a story's text and repurposing it, making a shorter version of that text for another distribution platform. Creating the story's text is a creative activity.

The eighth uncertainty concerns vocal identity. Data collected from Globo illustrates an important editorial decision-making issue when considering using AI to digitally reproduce the voice of a prominent Brazilian journalist who had passed away. This example illustrates many of the complexities associated with emerging technologies that offer new avenues for developing narratives in the news industry, but raise additional

concerns about media manipulation and authenticity. The thought experiment of reproducing a deceased journalist's voice via AI raises questions concerning the limits of truthful journalistic representation and the right to disseminate information utilizing artificial means. Ultimately, Globo decided not to produce the AI-generated voice of the deceased journalist, grounding the decision in the profession's essential principles. Specifically: "We discussed it and came to the conclusion that journalism, at least for us, is synonymous with truth. So, we weren't going to falsify her voice."

Globo staff equated journalism with truth, thus establishing an ethical barrier to protect their profession's authority. According to Amigo and Porlezza (2025), journalistic authority is socially constructed through the human stamp that exists between journalists and their audiences. Globo's refusal to "falsify" the journalist's voice exemplifies a deliberate rejection of the artificial simulation of human identity.

The coping strategy at this level is cognitive extension. Staff members at Globo described a process of technological incorporation wherein AI operates as an "extended memory" and an "extension of the mind." Globo employees compared AI technology to a biological tympanic membrane that senses and transmits external stimuli for the human brain. Staff members articulated that AI serves as a cognitive prosthetic, enabling rapid "shallow" access to vast amounts of knowledge:

> We used to compare the telephone at the time, which was the pinnacle of technology, to an eardrum. Because the eardrum has this function of sensing what is on the outside, translating it, and bringing it into our brain. And the cell phone is kind of an extension of the eardrum….It's really cool, because it gives you shallow but linear access, let's say, to everything. There you are, with this access to everything, right? That's pretty much what this extended memory is.
>
> I think we are very much in a phase of understanding what it can be, how we'll be able to integrate this as an extension of ourselves, as an extension of our minds.

As Matsiola and Pilitsidou (2025) have stated, today's newsrooms are hybrid socio-technical systems in which human journalists interact with non-human algorithmic agents (AI algorithms) to produce news collaboratively.

Practically speaking, Globo employees applied these ideas in accordance with Thäsler-Kordonouri and Koliska's (2025) hybrid scenario model for integrating AI into professional workflows. Herein, Globo utilized AI-based solutions to improve efficiency without diminishing employee control over workflow operations.

4.5. A Framework for Classifying Uncertainties in AI-Driven Newsrooms

In addition to being an important practical contribution, this research's primary theoretical contribution is the development of a framework for classifying uncertainties in AI-driven newsrooms. The framework serves as a type II theory or "theory for explaining" (Gregor, 2006, p. 624). It illustrates how and why phenomena occur in their natural environments rather than providing predictive statements about those occurrences. The authors describe the framework as a possible provisional framework instead of a validated one. The framework's categories were developed based on the experiences of a single legacy incumbent. The authors believe that the categories will apply to larger, more resource-rich organizations and will need additional experience in medium-sized and digital-native news organizations in Brazil and other parts of the Global South before they can be generalized.

Together, these findings demonstrate that uncertainty flows across multiple levels. Macro-level uncertainty, such as technological uncertainty or regulatory ambiguity, creates organizational tension at the meso-level. Those same organizational tensions produce internalized identity issues at the micro-level. While journalists' identity-related issues at the micro-level lead to responses to uncertainty (i.e., defending their authorial boundaries), those responses then become part of organizational practices. They establish and stabilize organizational routines. They limit the degree to which the organization may integrate AI into its operations.

This framework has identified three interconnected levels at which uncertainty is experienced—macro (ecosystem), meso (organization), and micro (identity)—and is managed through boundary-setting activities, in which journalists identify which functions can be transferred to AI and which cannot. At the macro-level, the ecosystem provides factual uncertainty and necessitates continuous adjustment. These adjustments are made possible by a verification workflow that supports a "trust but verify" approach. The ecosystem limits the extent to which AI can function independently by restricting its autonomy. At the meso-level, organizational factors create uncertainty about skill gaps, ambiguities regarding AI use, and whether to use archives versus new forms of content. Organizational stability is achieved when existing practices continue alongside leaders who permit experimentation and tolerate failure. At the micro-level, uncertainty challenges professional identity, specifically authorship and the use of synthetic voice, and journalists respond using cognitive extension to define AI as a tool that extends memory, yet preserves editorial judgment (see Figure 1).

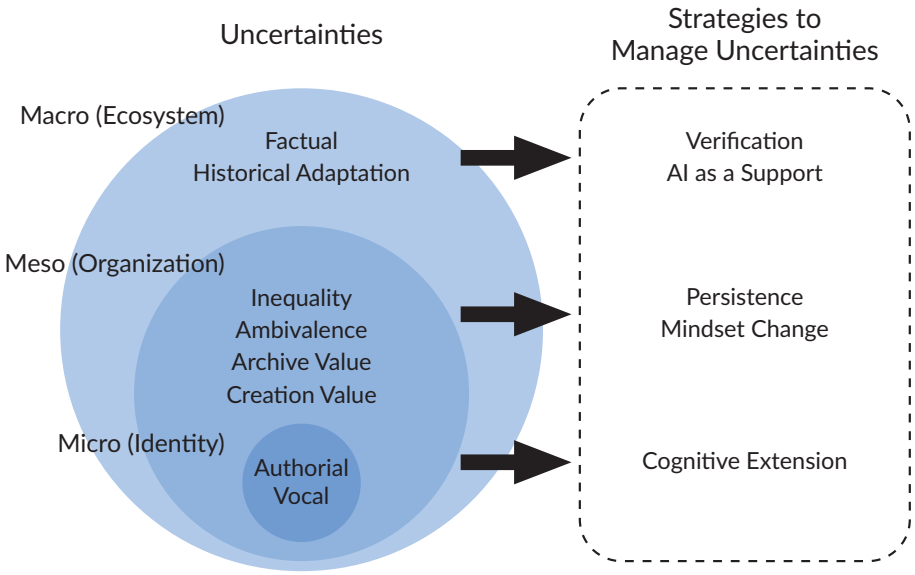


Figure 1. Framework for classifying uncertainties in AI-driven newsrooms.

Supplemental Material 1 (S3) formally represents the constitutive elements of the framework according to Gregor's (2006) categorization scheme for Type II theories, defining each theoretical element of the case.

5. Conclusion

The study enhances the existing body of knowledge on GAI adoption in journalism by demonstrating that uncertainty is a structural element of the evolution of the newsroom, and as such experienced across the

three analytical levels—ecosystem (macro), organization (meso), and identity (micro)—and thereby activating different but connected means of dealing with uncertainty. More than classifying, the framework for classifying uncertainty in AI-driven newsrooms portrays uncertainty as a relationally constructed and distributed phenomenon that comes into existence, flows through, and is dealt with in multiple ways across the different levels. Where media organizations work as customers of technology they have no control over, uncertainty will become a key organizational principle shaping both practice and professional identity.

To date, there is little qualitative evidence on GAI adoption in Globo, one of the largest media groups in Latin America. This case shows how GAI adoption occurs in a company that is highly dominant in its local market, but highly dependent on global supply chains—a situation that has been relatively unexplored in research on Global North incumbent companies and Global South resource-constrained media outlets. For non-WEIRD newsrooms, the framework functions as a diagnostic instrument for mapping each level onto organizational decisions: verification procedures and AI-supported journalistic practice at the macro-level; training, coordination, archive management, and licensing policy at the meso-level; and authorship conventions and transparency at the micro-level. The proprietary archive thus represents a strategic asset for Globo in Brazil.

Together, the results indicate that GAI adoption in journalism constitutes much more than a simple technical change, but rather a multi-level negotiation process concerning the limits of knowledge, authority, and human action in journalism under conditions of continuous uncertainty.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations to this study. One limitation is that the empirical base consists of a single case study of Globo, a large legacy media group. The specific business demands, conflicts, and corresponding strategies found within this business environment may not align with those of smaller or digital-native news organizations in Brazil and/or other parts of the Global South. The model proposed should therefore be seen as a fundamental, "possible" framework requiring further empirical examination and validation before its overall usefulness and validity are confirmed. Another limitation is that, while the sampling was designed to span hierarchically defined levels and AI-literacy-defined roles, it was biased towards executives, innovation managers, and technology and legal professionals, so some conclusions—especially regarding the macro-level—might reflect strategic viewpoints typical of large, resource-abundant organizations. A third limitation is that the data represent a time-specific snapshot. Thus, the composition of uncertainties depicted in this study may evolve as instruments and regulatory frameworks/guidelines emerge, thereby restricting the replicability of the specific pattern observed. From a qualitative methodology point of view, these limitations do not affect the significance of the findings theoretically. The naturalistic generalization (Stake, 2010, p. 198) criterion allows for small-scale "petite generalizations" that users and practitioners can transpose into analogous environmental conditions, rather than claims of statistical representativeness.

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Conflict of Interests

Author Luna Paladino holds a position in Strategy and Governance in Technology at Globo. The views, findings, and conclusions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of Globo.

Data Availability

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

LLMs Disclosure

Large language model tools, specifically Claude (Anthropic) and NotebookLM (Google), were used during the research and writing process to support literature review, note-taking, and translation tasks.

Supplementary Material

Supplemental Material 1 contains: S1 is the characteristics of participants; S2 is the inventory of secondary qualitative data; S3 is the theory for explaining (Type II) applied to the Globo case study. Supplementary Material 2 contains the coding structure (PDF). Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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ARTICLE

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

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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

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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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ARTICLE

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AI in Journalism Education: Curriculum Development and Implementation of Journalism in BRICS Universities

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Abstract

This study employs content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews to examine how journalism education across BRICS countries has responded to the rise of AI and adjusted its core paradigms. In this study, BRICS refers to the expanded BRICS grouping, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It combines latent Dirichlet allocation topic modeling of university journalism curricula with 15 interviews of China-based journalism educators. We selected 10 representative BRICS universities with journalism and communication programs as samples, after which we compiled training frameworks, syllabi, and teaching documents for all their AI-related courses, and used the LDA model to extract core topics and to conduct manual qualitative content analysis across five dimensions: course localization, technical tools, skill guidance, teaching content, and values. The interview results provided valuable supplementary insights.

Keywords

AI; AI curriculum construction; curriculum construction; journalism education; BRICS universities

1. Introduction

As defined by de-Lima-Santos and Ceron (2022), AI refers to a systematic, step-by-step approach to problem-solving. Over recent years, the integration of AI into journalism education and professional practice has been extensively explored in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) countries. Yet scholarly engagement with AI's impact remains limited in non-WEIRD contexts, especially across

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developing nations and emerging markets. Journalism scholars have long disproportionately centered Western countries, neglecting other world regions—most notably Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia (Hanitzsch et al., 2012; Mesquita & de-Lima-Santos, 2021; Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2022). Indeed, research produced from non-WEIRD and Global South contexts can help challenge Western-centric assumptions and foster a more inclusive understanding of journalism theory (Mutsvairo et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, this article addresses this existing gap by examining how AI is reshaping journalism education and curricular practice in the Global South.

This study focuses on three core issues in non-WEIRD nations: the evolving perceptions of AI among students, educators, and industry representatives; the current status of AI-related courses in regional journalism schools; and key barriers to course implementation, such as limited infrastructure, access to advanced technologies, and resistance to change (Ncube et al., 2025). We seek to clarify both AI's potential to expand access to journalistic practice and education, and the obstacles that must be addressed to achieve effective integration. Ultimately, this article aims to propose a systematic, forward-looking framework for embedding AI into journalism education in non-WEIRD countries, supporting these nations to better respond to the ongoing digital transformation of media ecosystems.

2. Literature Review

As AI becomes increasingly embedded in global social and economic systems, its role in national development strategies has drawn growing scholarly and policy attention worldwide. For journalism education, AI adoption shapes the professional competencies of future journalists and drives broader transformations across media systems, reshaping journalistic practice, communication processes, and media innovation. Against this global trend of AI integration into journalism, it is particularly critical to examine how these technologies are incorporated into journalism education in non-WEIRD contexts.

2.1. AI in Journalistic Practices Across the Global South

AI is exerting growing influence on journalistic practices across the Global South. AI tools have been deployed to support newsgathering, automate parts of the reporting process, optimize content distribution, and facilitate audience engagement, allowing newsroom teams to complete data-intensive tasks more efficiently. In sub-Saharan Africa, generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are increasingly being explored to support journalistic work and reporting practices; however, concerns remain regarding misinformation, biased stereotypes, and the limited representativeness of African data sources, which may reduce the effectiveness of these tools in local news contexts (Gondwe, 2023). In China, qualitative interview research suggests that AI integration has improved production efficiency and altered news production workflows across both state-affiliated and commercial media organizations. At the same time, interviewees raised concerns regarding ethical risks, content credibility, and the shifting relationship between technology and journalistic practice, indicating that AI adoption continues to be shaped by local institutional conditions, media regulations, and professional norms (Li, 2025). In India, existing literature on AI adoption in news media documents gradual changes across television, print, and digital platforms. Indian media organizations have increasingly experimented with AI-driven tools for automated content production and related news practices, although empirical evidence regarding their broader impacts remains limited (Afsar, 2025).

Beyond institutional adoption, scholarly attention has also turned to journalists' perceptions of AI in Global South contexts. While acknowledging potential opportunities, this research also highlights concerns about AI's effects on journalistic autonomy and creative practice (Sarısakaloğlu, 2025). Studies suggest that journalists express uncertainty regarding AI's impact on professional roles, editorial judgment, and established journalistic values. Additional concerns relate to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and AI's broader implications for media representation and journalistic practice.

2.2. Growing Demand for AI Integration in Global South Journalism Education

As AI technologies reshape journalistic practices across the Global South, universities face growing pressure to expand AI-related components in journalism curricula. This shift reflects both students' proactive adoption of AI tools and labor-market demands that "pull" academic programs toward AI-oriented training. On the one hand, journalism students have shown increasing interest in learning how AI can support professional practice. Existing research suggests that students are already using AI tools in academic and journalism-related activities and express interest in receiving more structured training to acquire AI-related knowledge and practical skills (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2026). On the other hand, media industry stakeholders are raising new expectations regarding AI literacy among journalists. In Latin America, for example, studies of local news organizations suggest that the adoption of AI is changing newsroom practices and raising concerns about professional skills, ethics (García de Torres et al., 2025), and the future role of journalists. Consequently, journalism education faces a growing imperative to equip students with the understanding and practical ability to apply AI, enabling them to navigate technological disruptions and evolving employment structures.

In response to these pressures, universities across the Global South have started revising their curricula and integrating AI-related topics into journalism education. These initiatives aim to better prepare students for evolving media landscapes and technological demands, while also addressing persistent disparities in digital resources and educational opportunities between the Global North and South.

2.3. Challenges in Integrating AI Into Journalism Education in the Global South

While AI holds the potential to influence journalism education through automation and new forms of content production, educational systems operating under resource constraints continue to face substantial implementation challenges. In Southern African journalism schools, limited technological resources, shortages of faculty with AI-related expertise, and broader infrastructural constraints have been identified as significant barriers to integrating AI into journalism curricula (Ncube et al., 2025). Similarly, research from Bangladesh suggests that journalism educators continue to face challenges related to limited resources, rigid curricula, and differing levels of readiness for AI integration (Asadi & Sultana, 2025).

Beyond structural and resource constraints, educators have also expressed concerns regarding curriculum adaptation, ethical issues, and the implications of AI for teaching and learning practices (Wenger et al., 2024). Educational institutions face further challenges in integrating emerging technologies into existing curricular structures and pedagogical approaches. In parts of Asia, for instance, research suggests that journalism schools are adapting curricula in response to AI-related changes while addressing shifting technological conditions and evolving industry expectations (Jiang & Rafeeq, 2026). These challenges indicate that

integrating AI into journalism education involves not only technical and infrastructural issues but also broader questions concerning curriculum design and the future of journalism training.

Studies indicate that AI is being used to support newsroom work, data-driven reporting, and content production—yet challenges such as algorithmic bias, resource limitations, shortages of faculty expertise and infrastructure, and ethical concerns continue to affect its implementation in educational settings. Although existing research offers useful insights into AI in journalism education, the literature remains fragmented. Comparative evidence across specific national contexts is limited, and few studies examine the perspectives of educators, students, and industry actors simultaneously. From a non-WEIRD perspective, there has also been limited attention to how AI competencies, journalistic values, and local media contexts can be integrated into systematic curriculum and teaching approaches.

Given the inherent diversity and heterogeneity of the Global South, this study focuses on the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries instead of treating the Global South as a homogeneous concept. Previous research has emphasized that the Global South should not be understood as a fixed geographical entity but as a diverse and uneven set of social, political, and economic contexts across regions such as Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Dados & Connell, 2012). Existing studies have discussed BRICS as an important interregional grouping within the Global South that brings together countries from different regional contexts, including Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Naik, 2021). More recent discussions suggest that the expansion of BRICS reflects broader developments in South–South cooperation and reinforces its role as a platform for cooperation among emerging and developing countries (Wang & Long, 2024). Although BRICS countries have notable differences in political systems, media environments, and educational practices, they share some common issues relevant to this study. These include ongoing digital transformation, growing attention and application of AI technology, and uneven distribution of technological and educational resources. Therefore, examining the development of journalism education in BRICS countries helps explore the development paths of AI curriculum reform in the Global South and identify the common challenges in these contexts.

3. Research Questions

This study focuses on journalism education within higher education, examining how journalism programs in BRICS countries are responding to AI-driven technological changes. Specifically, the article addresses the following research questions (RQs):

> RQ1: What is the current status of AI-related courses offered in journalism programs across BRICS countries?
>
> RQ2: What challenges have been encountered in the implementation of these courses?
>
> RQ3: How do educators, students, and AI industry representatives perceive and evaluate the integration of AI into journalism education?
>
> RQ4: Based on practical experiences and observed tensions, how can a systematic, non-WEIRD, and future-oriented “AI + journalism” curriculum and pedagogical model be developed to address the

competency demands and training objectives of journalism education in the Global South amid technological transformation?

4. Research Design and Methods

4.1. Sample Selection

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining objective public data and subjective experiential narratives to examine how journalism education in the Global South responds to and is reshaped by AI development. We selected 10 universities from BRICS member countries as research cases. Variations across these countries in media systems, higher education development, technical capacity, and regulatory environments enable us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the broader landscape of AI integration in journalism education across the Global South.

This study uses purposive sampling—one university with a journalism or communication major was selected from each BRICS member country based on three criteria: (a) strong performance in internationally recognized university rankings; (b) a mature journalism and communication program; (c) high academic influence and social reputation. As higher education systems differ considerably across BRICS countries, few institutions meet all three criteria. Universities were therefore included if they satisfied at least one of these conditions, and institutions meeting multiple criteria were prioritized.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of Russia requires brief clarification, as its position within the Global South remains subject to debate. In recent years, however, Russia has increasingly been discussed in scholarship on the Global South and South–South cooperation, particularly in studies of BRICS and world-systems analysis, where it is often categorized as a semi-periphery (Morales Ruvalcaba, 2013) or a non-Western emerging power. As Duggan et al. (2022) observe, BRICS, with Russia as one of its members, acts as an integrator of the developing world and serves as an important driver of South–South cooperation. At the same time, Russia has sought to align itself more closely with the Global South through BRICS engagement, diplomatic positioning, and anti-colonial political rhetoric (Vuksanović, 2025). For this reason, Russia is included here as part of the BRICS framework, rather than being treated as an unproblematic Global South case.

The final sample included Communication University of China (China), Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia), University of Delhi (India), University of São Paulo (Brazil), University of Cape Town (South Africa), Cairo University (Egypt), Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Allameh Tabataba'i University (Iran), King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (Saudi Arabia), and University of Wollongong Dubai (United Arab Emirates).

4.2. Data Sources

This study draws on two main types of data sources: (a) public course documents related to AI in journalism and communication education; (b) semi-structured online interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in course teaching, learning, curriculum integration, and industry-university collaboration. Drawing on these two data types, the study combines the perspectives of "official curriculum narratives" (reflected in training plans and syllabi) and "lived curriculum experiences" (described by interviewees).

First, this study collected AI course-related documents from the 10 sample universities via online searches of university official websites and other public materials, including training programs, course syllabi, and teaching manuals. We then screened these documents to verify their relevance to journalism and communication education and AI-related content. After removing irrelevant materials and duplicate records, the remaining texts were organized into a curriculum text corpus for subsequent analysis.

Second, we interviewed 15 participants from China, covering four stakeholder groups: program directors for journalism and communication, teachers teaching AI-related courses, students who have taken relevant courses, and AI industry or platform technical staff who collaborate with universities. This design aligns with our research approach of using China as an entry point to explore the broader dynamics of journalism education curriculum reform across BRICS member countries. The interviews primarily focused on three common themes: course format, implementation mechanisms, and stakeholder perceptions, with differentiated questions tailored to the specific roles of each interviewee group.

For teachers, the interviews explore their understanding of AI integration into journalism education, including AI's role in talent cultivation, news production workflows, ethical considerations, and research practices. The discussions also focus on how AI content is embedded in the curriculum system, commonly used teaching tools and classroom activities, as well as challenges encountered in instruction. For program directors, the interviews primarily examine institutional strategies for AI-driven teaching transformation, how AI competencies are incorporated into program design, curriculum development processes, faculty support systems, and quality assurance mechanisms. For students, the questions mainly cover their experiences with using AI, perceptions of AI-related courses, and future career expectations. For AI platform representatives, the interviews focus on university–industry collaboration models, the media industry's talent competency needs, their evaluation of learning outcomes, and specific approaches to sustaining long-term partnerships.

4.3. Data Analysis

4.3.1. Content Analysis of Objective Public Curriculum Documents

We first conducted automated content analysis on the corpus of publicly available AI-related curricular documents from journalism and communication programs at the 10 sampled universities. Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modeling reduces reliance on subjective judgment when processing large-scale textual data. As an unsupervised machine learning technique, LDA estimates latent topics within a corpus and represents each topic as a probability distribution over co-occurring terms.

LDA was employed because the purpose of this analysis was to identify recurring thematic patterns across curriculum documents rather than generate open-ended semantic interpretations. Given the comparative analysis of official curriculum materials across BRICS institutions, LDA also provides a relatively transparent analytical process, allowing model performance to be assessed through indicators such as coherence and perplexity scores. Therefore, LDA was used as a first-stage mapping tool for identifying recurring curricular themes.

Specifically, we used JGibbLDA to clean valid texts and perform tokenization and segmentation, converting the raw corpus into keyword sequences for model input. We then conducted topic modeling and iteratively tuned model parameters to identify an optimal solution. Across multiple rounds of experimentation, we found that when the number of topics (K) was between 3 and 10, the models exhibited low perplexity and generated topic clusters with stronger internal coherence and interpretability. After evaluating models with topic numbers ranging from 2 to 11, we selected $K = 7$ by jointly considering statistical fit and semantic interpretability, as illustrated in Figure 1. The identified themes were subsequently interpreted through close reading and triangulated with interview data collected from Chinese stakeholders, including educators, students, program directors, and industry representatives.

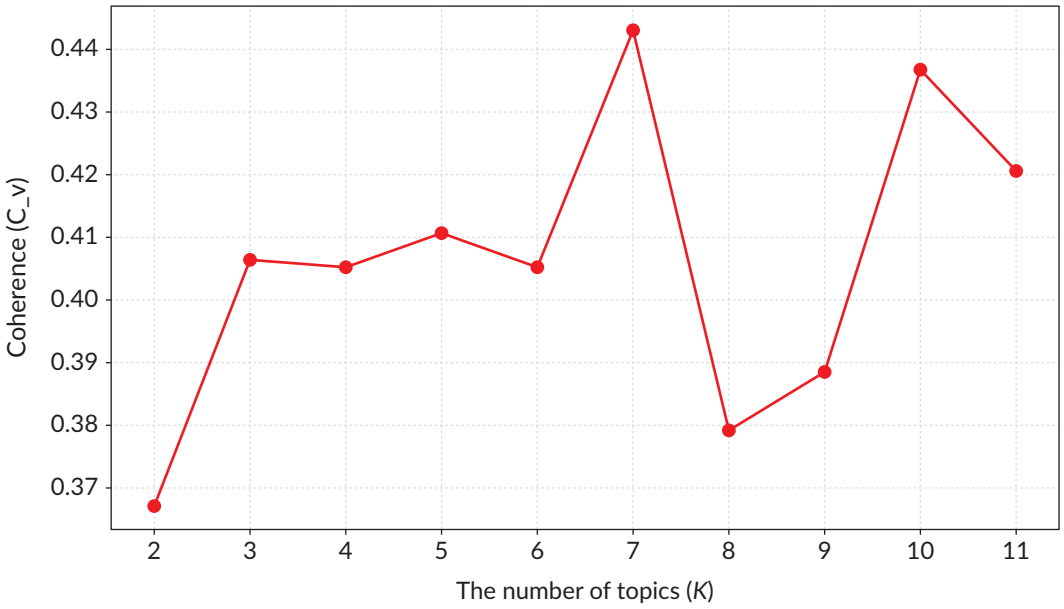


Figure 1. Topic coherence of LDA models.

The perplexity results show a steady decrease in log_perplexity (from −5.90 to −6.24), as illustrated in Figure 2, alongside an increase in standard_perplexity (from 59.92 to 75.51) as K increases. However, the curve does not show a clear elbow, suggesting that perplexity alone is insufficient for determining the optimal number of topics. We therefore relied on topic coherence as the primary criterion. Topic coherence captures the semantic consistency of high-frequency words within each topic, with higher scores indicating more coherent topic structures. The model achieves its highest coherence score (0.443036) at $K = 7$. When K increases to 8, the score declines, and although minor fluctuations are observed at higher values (e.g., $K = 10$), none exceed the peak at $K = 7$. We further conducted manual inspection of the top 20 keywords for each model ($K = 2$–11). Results suggest that $K = 7$ provides the most balanced topic structure, with clearer within-topic cohesion and limited overlap between topics. Based on coherence performance and model parsimony, $K = 7$ was selected as the final model for subsequent analysis.

Based on the seven sets of topic keywords, we labeled each of the seven topics. As several topics contained conceptually similar or complementary content, we further explored potential linkages between them. Through iterative discussion and revision, we consolidated the seven topics into five broader dimensional categories based on substantive similarity and conceptual relatedness.

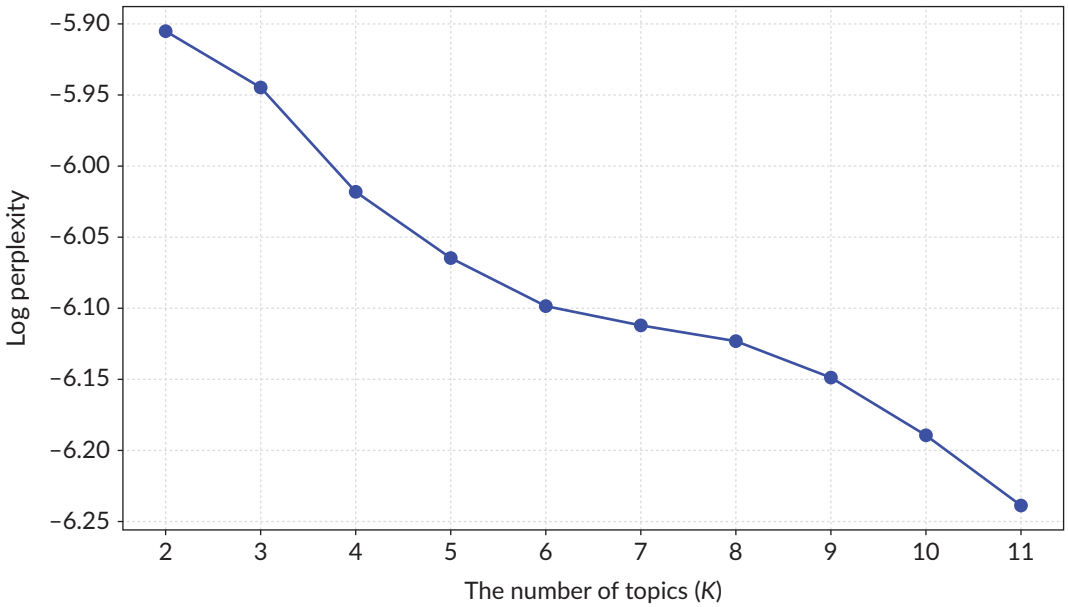


Figure 2. Log perplexity of LDA topic models.

4.3.2. Data Analysis of Subjective Interview Materials

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the study purpose, the intended use of interview materials, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained voluntarily. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all interview materials were anonymized during data preparation and analysis. Information that could identify individuals or institutions (e.g., names, contact details, precise job titles, and identifiable events) was removed or replaced. Participants were assigned anonymous identifiers according to role and sequence: teachers (T1–T5), program directors (P1–P3), students (S1–S4), and corporate representatives (C1–C3). Only these identifiers are used in quotations and reporting.

Data analysis followed constructivist grounded theory, guided by the cyclical processes of open, axial, and selective coding (Duan & He, 2026). During open coding, we conducted close, line-by-line readings of all transcripts and generated initial codes using conceptual labels that remained close to participants' language. We sought to minimize a priori theoretical imposition while identifying actions, experiences, and meaning-making processes related to "integrating AI into journalism education," including modes of curricular embedding, teaching activities, learning objectives, ethical governance, resource constraints, and risk perceptions. This stage yielded an initial set of concepts. We then moved to axial coding, in which we aggregated, compared, and reorganized the initial concepts to develop categories and specify their properties and dimensions. Particular attention was paid to similarities and differences across the four stakeholder groups (teachers, program directors, students, and corporate representatives) regarding course implementation mechanisms, institutional and resource constraints, ethical and governance tensions, competency demands, and career expectations, resulting in a set of second-order codes.

Finally, in selective coding and guided by the RQs, we identified core propositions that integrated the major categories and consolidated them into four overarching themes: (a) the current landscape of course provision, (b) key challenges, (c) stakeholder attitudes and perceptions, and (d) pathways for improvement.

5. Findings

5.1. Current Status of AI-Related Courses in Leading Journalism Schools of BRICS Member Countries

According to the results of the LDA topic model, the development status of AI-related journalism courses in BRICS member countries is as follows.

5.1.1. Overall Landscape: Explicit Courses and Embedded Approaches

In the sampled journalism schools, AI education primarily manifests in two modes: explicit specialized courses and embedded provision.

The first mode, explicit specialized courses, integrates AI into the broader talent cultivation system through dedicated training tracks or standalone courses. For instance, Communication University of China has established the Intelligent and Computational Communication track, with courses covering skill-based training in areas such as Python programming, natural language processing, web crawling, and data analysis. Similarly, Lomonosov Moscow State University offers the course AI and Big Data in Media Communication, which encompasses topics including machine learning, media data analysis, data visualization, and ethical considerations.

The more prevalent embedded provision integrates AI content into existing courses such as data journalism and digital journalism. The University of Delhi incorporates AI applications, technology-assisted fact-checking, algorithms, and ethics into its Data Journalism course; the University of São Paulo adds an AI module covering fact-checking, automation, chatbots, and practical training. Other sample universities, including Cairo University and Addis Ababa University, also introduce AI topics via existing curricula and digital media training platforms.

These modes show that journalism schools are no longer stuck in the discussion of "whether AI should be taught," but have begun to further explore the question of "how to integrate AI into the existing curriculum system." However, there are still significant differences in the visibility and implementation depth of AI curricula among different universities, which reflects the differences in resource conditions, organizational support, and reform priorities of various institutions.

5.1.2. LDA Topic Analysis: Curricular Design and Value Orientations of AI-Related Courses

The LDA topic model analysis finds that training programs and course content of the sampled universities are mainly clustered into seven topics (Table 1). Further analysis shows these topics can be consistently grouped into five analytical dimensions: curriculum positioning, technical tools, skill training, teaching content, and value orientation (Table 2).

Table 1. Themes in samples.

Number	Theme	Proportion of Corpus (%)	Keywords
1	Digital literacy	42 (13%)	Learning, social interaction, teaching, platform, network, digital
2	Automation ethics	77 (23.8%)	Information, system, ethics, platform, automation, algorithm
3	Computational communication	37 (11.4%)	Discipline, media, computation, skills, communication, knowledge
4	Talent development and AI practice	35 (10.8%)	Training, work, competence, intelligence, practice, algorithm
5	Digital research methods	51 (15.7%)	Digital, society, visualization, automation, research, methods
6	Self-directed learning and tool use	40 (12.3%)	Self-directed, tools, projects, digital, classroom, discussion
7	International journalism innovation	41 (12.6%)	Ethics, Africa, journalism, innovation, practice, environment

Table 2. Mapping of topics to analytical dimensions.

Dimensional Categories	Corresponding Topic Number	Contained Topics
Course positioning	1, 3, 4	Digital literacy; computational communication; talent development and AI practice
Technical tools	2, 5, 6	Automation ethics; digital research methods; self-directed learning and tool use
Skills guidance	1, 4, 5, 6	Digital literacy; talent development and AI practice; digital research methods; self-directed learning and tool use
Teaching content	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7	Digital literacy; automation ethics; computational communication; talent development and AI practice; digital research methods; international journalism innovation
Values	1, 2, 7	Digital literacy; automation ethics; international journalism innovation

First, course positioning. "Digital literacy," "computational communication," and "talent development and AI practice" jointly constitute the core positioning of AI-related journalism curricula. AI courses are no longer seen as a marginal supplement to traditional journalism education. Instead, through a layered structure of basic skill building, professional skill improvement, and practical ability development, they have gradually been integrated into the core system of journalism talent training. In other words, AI is not only reshaping curriculum content, but also changing the underlying logic of journalism education. Building on this foundation, universities have further embedded AI capabilities into talent development frameworks through specialized tracks and program design. For example, the Communication University of China incorporates Python programming, natural language processing, and data collection and processing techniques into its

curriculum, while strengthening training through courses such as fact-checking, data journalism, and AI-enabled storytelling.

Second, technical tools. Technical teaching has gradually shifted from pure software skill training to a systematic curriculum centered on data processing, machine-assisted automation, and AI-supported collaboration. Technical training has changed from cultivating isolated operational skills to training in which data and algorithm work are integrated throughout the complete workflow of data collection, processing, analysis, and presentation. Technical teaching increasingly shows the characteristics of automation and intelligence. For example, Lomonosov Moscow State University has included machine learning, media data analysis, and data visualization in its core curriculum, allowing students to complete the whole process from multi-source data collection to analysis and presentation. Overall, technical education is gradually moving away from a purely operational orientation and toward a comprehensive cultivation of technical understanding, work collaboration, and independent learning abilities. Students are expected not only to learn how to use tools, but also to understand how they operate, how algorithms shape content production, and what ethical considerations should be addressed when using AI in journalism practice.

Third, skills guidance. The core focus of AI-related journalism courses has shifted from isolated professional skill training to comprehensive capability development for the intelligent media environment, with greater emphasis on students' problem-solving and continuous learning abilities in complex professional scenarios. Courses now also prioritize practical and professional capabilities more than before: By aligning learning objectives with real professional contexts, students' professional adaptability is improved. Some universities have set up journalism labs, interdisciplinary workshops, and industry-university cooperation projects, allowing students to practice the full workflow—spanning data collection, algorithm analysis, news production, and content presentation—in an environment close to real media work. This arrangement helps students combine technical knowledge with professional practice to better meet future career demands. Meanwhile, competency goals have increasingly expanded beyond occupational skills toward the cultivation of critical judgment in intelligent social environments. For example, the EthicsLab at the University of Cape Town, in collaboration with the African Observatory on Responsible AI, has developed courses that move beyond technical operations and encourage students to critically engage with broader social and ethical dimensions of AI. This shows journalism education is shifting from a tool-capability-centered training model to a comprehensive model that integrates both professional practice capabilities and social governance capabilities.

Fourth, teaching content. AI-related journalism courses cover diverse topics, including ethical reflection, algorithmic content production, digital research skills and methods, and global news innovation practice. The curriculum no longer focuses on isolated technical skills, but builds a more systematic knowledge framework for the intelligent media environment, linking technology, industry, platforms, and the broader social context. For example, the University of Delhi's data journalism course explicitly incorporates AI, technology-assisted fact-checking, algorithms, and ethical issues—while reinforcing these concepts through project-based data-driven journalism practices. Similarly, the University of São Paulo's Digital Journalism Projects course introduces broader theoretical perspectives, including platform capitalism, data colonialism, surveillance capitalism, and future developments in digital journalism. These changes show that journalism education is increasingly transforming to adapt to the platform-based environment. Universities guide students to understand how digital technology reshapes the logic of news organizations, platform relations,

and communication structures. The goal is no longer merely helping students master specific tools or technologies, but cultivating their holistic understanding of the intelligent media ecosystem.

Fifth, values. The value orientation of AI-related courses has gone beyond the scope of traditional journalism ethics discussion and gradually formed a broader framework centered on AI's social consequences, platform power, and public responsibility. Course objectives no longer only focus on technical efficiency and professional skills, but increasingly emphasize social responsibility and value judgment in the use of technology. AI ethics has become a key part of the curriculum, and topics such as data security, privacy protection, algorithmic bias, and information authenticity are systematically included in course design. For example, the University of Delhi's data journalism course includes a module on ethical concerns, while the University of Cape Town's course, AI, Ethics and Policy in Africa, situates AI governance within the broader context of long-standing inequalities. The course addresses issues including bias and discrimination, privacy protection, social justice, and inclusive development. Against the background of the Global South, these courses particularly highlight inequality and inclusiveness in technological development, and try to prevent journalism education from being dominated only by the logic of technical efficiency. This also reveals an important trend: In the context of the Global South, the value and governance dimensions are no longer just accessory parts of technology-oriented courses, but can become the core of organizing AI education, embedding reflections on broader issues such as power structure, historical conditions, and social justice into technical training from the very beginning.

5.2. Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

Based on semi-structured interviews with Chinese teachers, departmental administrators, students, and platform representatives, this study uses China as an entry point to explore broader curriculum reform processes in journalism education across BRICS contexts. The findings suggest that challenges in integrating AI into journalism education extend beyond technical limitations alone. Across the interview data, respondents repeatedly described difficulties related to institutional arrangements, faculty capacity, resource allocation, evaluation practices, and students' use of AI tools. Five recurring themes emerged and are discussed below.

5.2.1. Institutional and Governance Lag

During the interviews, respondents repeatedly noted an obvious mismatch between the speed of institutional decision-making and the rapid development of AI technology. A teacher said, "Curricular reform must pass through multi-level approval processes—such as teaching committees and degree committees—so the cycle is long" (T1), which objectively pushes departments toward embedded modules rather than system-wide curricular redesign. Several respondents pointed out that weak reform momentum stems not from a lack of ideas, but from organizational processes and performance evaluation systems. The current institutional framework is more accommodating of fragmentary embedding, but struggles to support systematic upgrades. This implies that "without coordinated workload recognition, performance incentives, and funding support, teachers' motivation for sustained investment will be difficult to maintain" (P1).

5.2.2. Insufficient Faculty Capacity and Transformation Pressure

Problems facing teachers are mainly reflected in two aspects. One concerns uneven familiarity with AI tools—"not knowing how to use AI" (T5)—which results in situations where "we wanted to launch new AI practice-oriented courses, but we couldn't keep up because of staffing limitations, and in the end, it always fizzles out" (P1). Second, and more critically, some faculty "can use AI but cannot teach it or assess it" (P2). Limited technical proficiency can generate teaching anxiety, with instructors worrying that they may "face students' professional questioning in class" (T1). Beyond technical familiarity, several respondents pointed to difficulties in translating AI technologies into teaching practice. A department head stressed that the urgency of faculty training has surpassed that of student training: "Without targeted AI training for instructors, mid-career and senior faculty will struggle to support the substantive implementation of curricular reform" (P3). It can be seen that the current difficulty does not mainly lie in introducing AI tools themselves, but in how to transform these tools into teachable, assessable professional practice.

5.2.3. Foundational Resource Constraints: Accounts, Computing, and Equipment

Resource constraints were identified as a key barrier by both faculty and students. Inequalities in access to "paid accounts, computing support, and hardware" (T1) directly translate into learning inequalities among students. Although some departments attempt to mitigate these tensions through open-source tools and shared computer labs (P2, C1, T5), such measures objectively limit the diversity of adoptable tools and the types of practice-based projects that can be assigned. Unequal access to resources affects not only learning experiences but also the scope of curriculum implementation.

5.2.4. The Absence of AI-Use Rules and Operational Guidelines

Many respondents noted that institutions still lack clear policies governing AI use, particularly regarding operational guidelines and arbitration mechanisms. Most institutions lack clear principles for AI use. Minimum disclosure standards, lists of permitted and prohibited scenarios, and data-compliance procedures remain undefined, leaving instructors to "decide on their own" (T1, T4, P1, P2). Several instructors also raised concerns about AI-generated images, particularly in sensitive topics such as poverty, violence, or marginalized communities. In such cases, AI-generated content may reproduce stereotypical or harmful representations, yet institutions continue to rely largely on general academic integrity policies rather than more specific guidance for AI-generated visual content. Moreover, the absence of evidentiary tools and standards further weakens enforceability. As one instructor explained:

> If a student appeals after being suspected of using AI, there are no unified rules regarding evidence or how such cases should be handled. Even if I suspect AI use, it is difficult to reduce grades because no department-recognized tool currently exists to detect AI use and serve as evidence. (T2)

Such gray zones in grading and appeals procedures impede the deeper integration of AI education into student development.

5.2.5. Unclear Assessment Systems and Quality Assurance

With AI-generated content becoming increasingly widespread, interviewees widely framed "process evidence" as the core proof of learning outcomes. Both industry representatives (C1, C3) and faculty (T4) emphasized that the most persuasive basis for assessment is a combination of "process documentation plus final products." Process documentation should record when and how AI was used, what problems were encountered, and how they were resolved, helping instructors understand how students approached tasks and used AI during the learning process. Student feedback, however, suggests that teaching often "encourages use but lacks guidance" (S2) or suffers from "opaque standards" (S1), resulting in fragmented learning experiences and diminished perceptions of assessment fairness. Interview data suggest that individual course design alone is insufficient and that departments may need clearer assessment frameworks and shared standards.

Overall, the challenges can be summarized into five aspects: institutional governance, teacher capability, resource equity, operational norms, and the evaluation system. These problems rarely exist in isolation. Lagging institutional operation often further promotes fragmented curriculum arrangements, which in turn may aggravate the imbalance in teaching practice and the gap between students' learning experiences. At the same time, the lack of clear operational rules and evaluation standards also leads to uncertainty in classroom application and evaluation practice, as well as unequal access to resources, which continues to limit practical learning opportunities. The interview results further show that implementing AI-related journalism courses not only means introducing new technologies into the classroom; it also requires universities to rethink how to organize professional norms, teaching practices, and responsibility mechanisms in the AI-assisted education environment.

5.3. Attitudes and Perceptions of Various Subjects toward "AI + Journalism" Education

5.3.1. Faculty and Administrators: From Tool Use to Broader Understandings of Workflows, Methods, and Ethics

Faculty and departmental administrators generally viewed AI as more than a technical tool and discussed it as part of broader changes in journalism education and practice. Respondents argued that AI is reshaping journalistic work, influencing reporting, writing, editing, distribution, and post-publication review. They also noted changes in research methods and stressed that ethical concerns should be addressed alongside practical training rather than treated separately after technical instruction. One faculty member (T1) explained that AI integration involves "workflow reconstruction, methodological updating, and ethics and governance," describing AI as a "critical competence" because "without it, efficiency cannot keep up; without verification, risks increase."

From the administrative perspective, respondents described efforts to incorporate AI-related competencies into program objectives and graduation requirements. They also discussed attempts to reduce fragmentation across courses and address situations in which instructors "assume someone else has covered it" (P1) by clarifying learning objectives across different stages of the curriculum. At the same time, they emphasized that AI-related teaching should include requirements for verification, transparency, and ethical responsibility, so that students learn not only how to use AI tools, but also to understand their limitations and potential risks.

Interviews also revealed differences in approaches to AI teaching. Faculty involved in writing instruction and media ethics tended to emphasize responsibility and boundaries, expressing concern that students might rely on AI uncritically. By contrast, faculty in data journalism and computational communication focused more on workflows, tools, and assessment, suggesting a shift from basic literacy toward methodological and practical training.

5.3.2. Students: Support for AI Learning and Concerns About Teaching and Assessment

Interview data show that students frequently use AI in their studies and internships while also expressing concerns about reliability and institutional guidance. Students reported using AI for tasks such as search and retrieval, transcription, multi-version copywriting, editing, and subtitling (S2, S3, S4). At the same time, many raised concerns about hallucinations, fabricated citations, incorrect dates, and misleading synthetic imagery, stressing that "facts, quotations, and data must be verified by oneself" (S4). Several students also felt that AI use should be documented during the learning process.

A recurring concern in the interviews was not the absence of AI-related teaching, but the lack of systematic instruction. One student (S1) described many classroom references as merely "mentioned in passing" rather than taught in a structured manner and argued that project-based courses and workshops were more effective because they allowed students to "deliver outputs and learn verification and disclosure through debriefing." By contrast, when instructors encouraged AI use without clearly explaining grading criteria, students reported concerns about fairness and lower motivation among harder-working students. Rather than opposing rules, students repeatedly expressed a desire for clearer standards and more transparent assessment practices.

5.3.3. Platform Firms: From Tool Use to Workflow-Based Learning Models

Platform representatives tended to discuss AI education from the perspective of industry needs and workplace practices. Across interviews, they highlighted "prompt engineering, fact-checking, and the design of human–AI collaboration workflows" (C1, C2) as important competencies for future journalists and argued that current teaching often remains at the level of "tool demonstrations" (C1) that are "disconnected from real newsroom environments" (C1, C3).

They believe that learning outcomes should include process documentation, showing at which stage AI was used, how it was used, what difficulties emerged, and how they were addressed. Such records help instructors understand how students completed tasks and used AI. This view echoed concerns raised by faculty and administrators regarding transparency and verification. Platform representatives did not argue that journalism students should be trained simply as AI operators; instead, they stressed that judgment, verification, and ethical boundaries remain essential.

Overall, the three stakeholder groups converge on a clear consensus: AI must be part of journalism education and must consider the tension between technological rationality and humanistic values. However, differences primarily emerged in approaches to implementation. Faculty and administrators focused more on transparency and accountability in AI-supported learning, students emphasized opportunities for practice and fair assessment, and platform representatives highlighted workplace competencies and learning processes. Taken together, these views suggest the need to move beyond teaching isolated tools toward clearer processes for using and evaluating AI in journalism education.

5.4. Building Systematic, Non-WEIRD, and Future-Oriented AI Journalism Curricula and Pedagogical Models

To build a systematic, non-WEIRD, and future-oriented "AI + journalism" curriculum and pedagogy, the challenge extends beyond introducing AI tools into existing courses. Instead, it requires connecting the competencies demanded by changing media environments with public values, inclusion, and social justice, while embedding these into curriculum design, classroom activities, assessment, and institutional policies. Findings from this study point to two related questions. First, how can journalism education develop competencies required in rapidly changing media environments? Second, how can Global South institutions translate commitments to public values and equity into teaching practices? While the following discussions should not be interpreted as universally applicable across all BRICS or Global South contexts, curricular evidence from the ten sampled universities and qualitative insights from Chinese stakeholders may provide useful reference points for AI-related curriculum reform in journalism education across non-WEIRD contexts. Four directions for curriculum and pedagogical development are discussed below.

5.4.1. Organizing the Journalism Curriculum Cluster Through a Tiered Competency Framework

Both interview results and existing studies show that AI-related capability requirements have gradually gone beyond the scope of traditional news reporting and writing skills, and expanded to include problem definition, evidence verification, editorial judgment, and human–AI collaborative workflow design. AI-related teaching may need to break through the limitations of prompt writing and tool operation training, and instead organize learning processes around different stages of news production. Interview findings also support more differentiated forms of training: "Lower years should focus on basic AI understanding and ethical awareness; middle years should integrate AI tools and workflows into professional courses; upper years should strengthen human–AI collaboration through project-based learning and industry practice" (T4).

Therefore, journalism course clusters can be designed around three capability areas: basic capabilities of AI and media/information literacy, capabilities of data processing, algorithm programming and evidence verification, and project-based professional practice capabilities. These capability areas are not used to prescribe a fixed curriculum structure, but rather serve as a universal framework to maintain stable learning objectives amid continuous technological changes. Schools can cultivate students' basic understanding of AI's operating mechanisms and limitations through general education, integrate AI-related methods and workflows into professional courses, and deliver higher-level learning opportunities through workshops, labs, and project activities combined with industry practice. Meanwhile, evaluation methods can also break through the traditional exam model and expand to diverse forms such as portfolios, project-based work, and cross-platform narratives.

5.4.2. Front-Loading Ethics Education to Secure Value Goals in the Global South

Against the non-WEIRD background, integrating AI into journalism education usually takes place in an environment with existing problems including digital inequality, uneven language resources, and relatively weak governance systems. Therefore, the challenge for journalism education is not only to teach students how to use AI tools, but also to build a learning environment that emphasizes human subjectivity, transparency, privacy protection, and fairness. Just as UNESCO's global guidance document on generative

AI in education and research stresses, we should protect human subjectivity and pay more attention to data privacy, transparency, and accountability mechanisms when applying AI. Similar issues also appear in broader discussions on AI governance and media norms. Comparative research on AI guidelines in global media suggests that, despite differences across countries, transparency, disclosure, fairness, privacy, and human oversight have emerged as recurring principles, while unequal technological development and power asymmetries may create additional challenges for Global South contexts (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2025).

In this context, AI-integrated journalism education in the Global South may benefit from treating ethics and governance as elements embedded throughout curriculum design and teaching activities rather than isolated topics. For example, course requirements may include disclosure of AI use, verification procedures, privacy reviews, and additional ethical assessment for work involving vulnerable groups or conflict-related topics. Such arrangements may help connect broader values such as publicness, inclusion, and social justice with everyday teaching practices.

5.4.3. Supporting Sustainable Curriculum Development in Low-Resource Contexts

Both existing research and interview results show that challenges for curriculum reform are usually closely tied to teacher development, resource access, and mechanisms for updating teaching content—problems that are particularly prominent in the Global South. If AI courses rely excessively on high-cost subscriptions, single-language environments, or closed platforms, resource gaps will cause unequal learning opportunities and limit curriculum sustainability.

Therefore, universities should prioritize affordable tools and data resources, including open-source alternatives, shared computing power, and institutional subscription mechanisms. Second, continuous teacher capability building is essential. This includes providing support for AI teaching methods, evaluation mechanisms, and teaching material development; strengthening cooperation between universities, industry, and research institutions; and accelerating the creation of localized case banks and workflow models.

At the same time, incorporating local issues, language environments, and platform ecologies into teaching materials serves to connect local contexts with broader international discussions. Given AI's growing importance in journalism, these arrangements enable journalism education in the Global South to respond more effectively to changing professional needs and educational goals.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines the current state and implementation of AI-related courses across leading journalism schools in BRICS countries and reveals several common patterns in current curricular development. AI-related journalism curricula generally take two forms: dedicated specialized programs and embedded modular approaches. While some institutions have established AI-oriented tracks, a more common approach integrates AI-related content into existing journalism courses while retaining traditional disciplinary structures. The curricular materials also show recurring attention to competency development, AI-assisted tools, practical skills training, broader media transformations, and ethical issues. Interview data from Chinese stakeholders further point to several challenges in implementation, including institutional constraints, shortages of faculty expertise, limited resources, and uncertainty regarding governance and assessment practices.

The findings suggest that AI-related curricular design has implications beyond classroom learning and may directly influence graduates' preparedness for increasingly AI-integrated newsroom environments. As newsroom work becomes increasingly organized around human–AI collaboration, questions of graduate readiness extend beyond technical skills and involve broader forms of professional judgment and adaptation.

From the current offering of AI-related courses, we can see that students are increasingly exposed to capability training related to data processing, AI-assisted content production, fact-checking, and ethical judgment. This training helps graduates adapt to journalism tasks that increasingly rely on content automation, audience analysis, data interpretation, and human–AI collaboration. This kind of curriculum design does not only focus on a single technical skill, but helps students develop broader professional adaptability in the changing journalism environment. Meanwhile, interview results from Chinese stakeholders show that current curriculum arrangements may not fully help students cope with the actual complexity of AI-powered newsrooms. In some teaching practices, AI is still embedded in curricula in the form of independent modules or tool teaching, rather than running through the complete journalism workflow. Therefore, students may gradually get familiar with how to use AI tools, but still lack sufficient preparation in editorial judgment, fact-checking, and critical supervision of AI-generated content.

This indicates that journalism education may need to move beyond teaching AI as a standalone subject and instead teach how AI can be integrated directly into the journalism workflow, combining technical capabilities with journalistic values and professional decision-making. This teaching model not only helps graduates use AI tools effectively, but also helps them apply AI in a more critical and responsible way in the future newsroom environment.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample focuses on nationally representative journalism schools and does not cover a broader range of institution types and tiers, including vocational institutions and professional training programs; consequently, the study cannot provide a comprehensive picture of how AI-related curricula are developing across different educational settings. Second, due to time and connection constraints, the interviewees were limited to Chinese educators, students, and enterprise representatives. This inevitably restricts the range of perspectives represented in the study and limits the broader applicability of the findings across different contexts. Third, the analysis relies primarily on publicly available curriculum documents and interview-based accounts of experiences and perceptions, without longitudinal observation of graduates' competency development and professional outcomes. Consequently, a gap may remain between intended curriculum objectives and actual educational practices. Fourth, although LDA topic modeling effectively identifies thematic patterns, it has more limited capacity to explain deeper structural factors—such as national institutional settings, media ecosystems, and technical infrastructures—which may shape differences in curricular development across contexts. Future research could combine comparative case studies with longitudinal observation of graduates' professional trajectories in order to examine how AI-related training translates into newsroom practices across different contexts.

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Data Availability

All data generated or analysed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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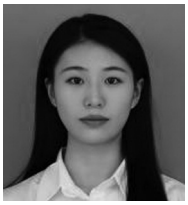
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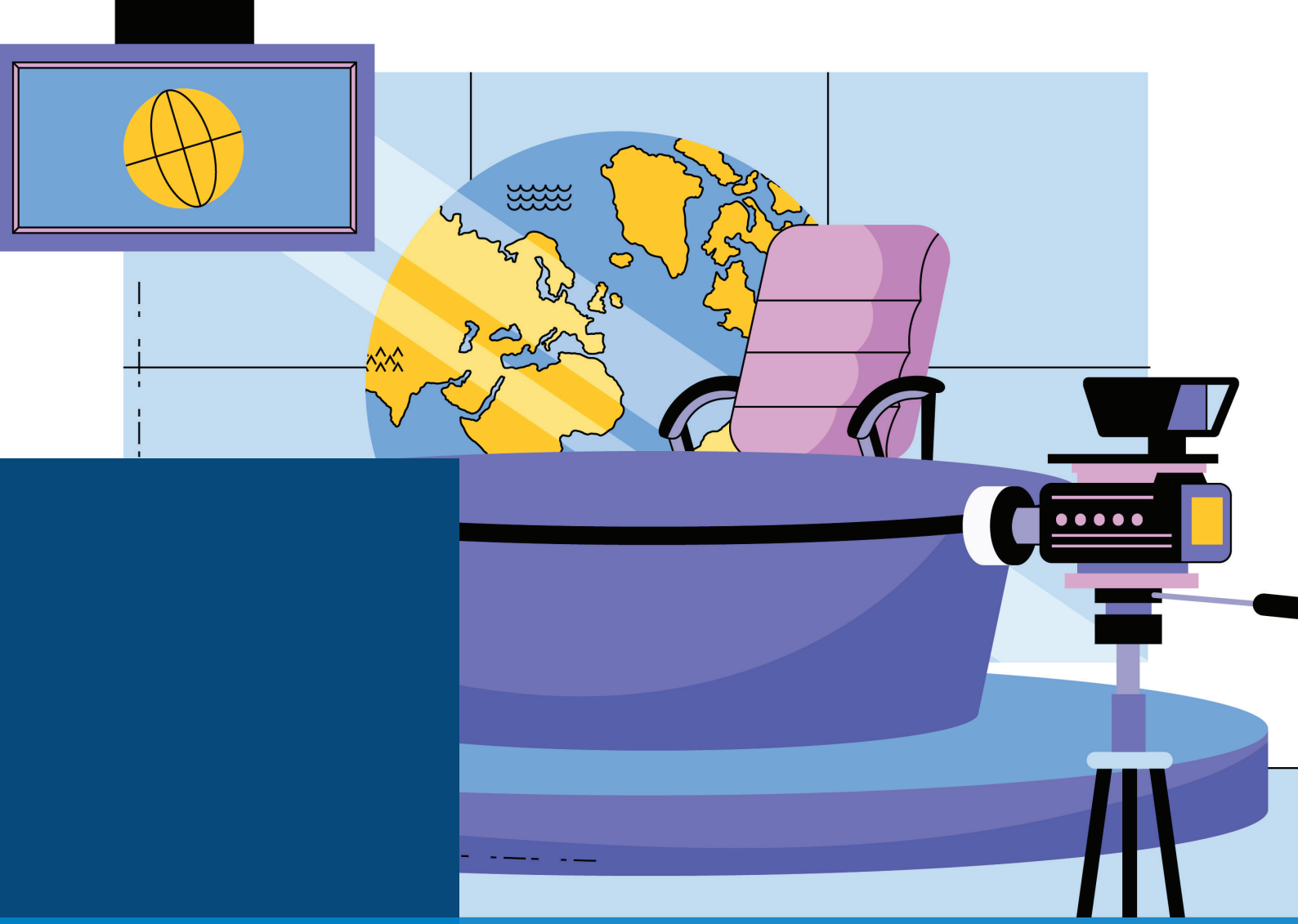
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