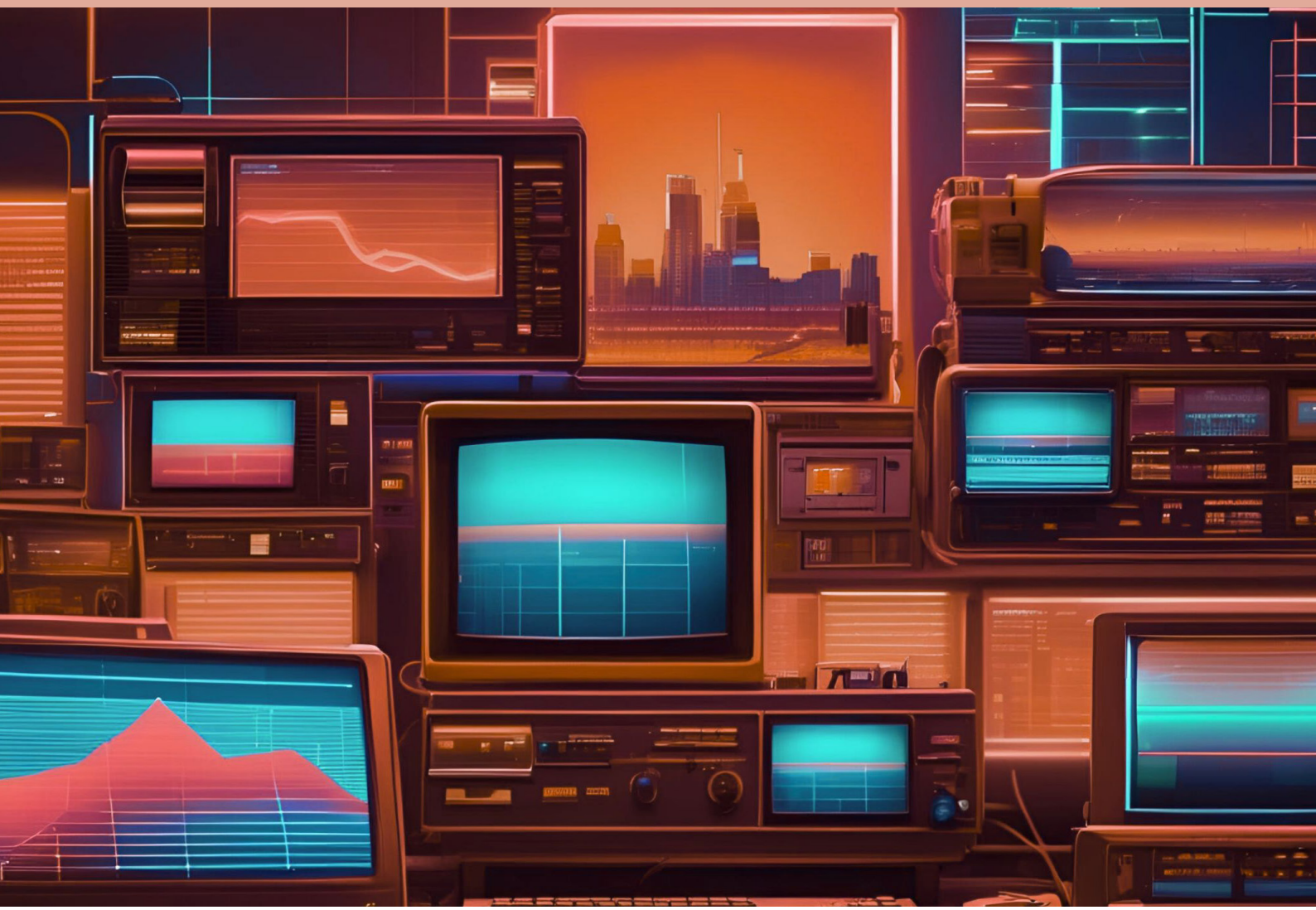
2024-25 Annual Report: Dynamic Coalition on the Sustainability of Journalism and News Media

Edited by Waqas Naeem, Daniel O'Maley, Courtney C. Radsch, Aws Al-Saadi, Lei Ma and Nompilo Simanje



IGF Internet Governance Forum

DYNAMIC COALITION | Sustainability of Journalism and News Media

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT:

GFMD GLOBAL FORUM FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

2024-25 Annual Report: Dynamic Coalition on the Sustainability of Journalism and News Media

On the theme of AI and Journalism

Edited by Waqas Naeem, Daniel O'Maley, Courtney C. Radsch, Aws Al-Saadi, Lei Ma and Nompilo Simanje

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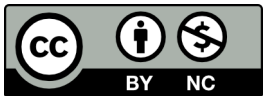

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Introduction: Independent Journalism, Media Viability and the AI Disruption

Co-coordinators: Aws Al-Saadi, Lei Ma and Nompilo Simanje [2025] and Waqas Naeem, Daniel O'Maley and Courtney C. Radsch [2024]

The Dynamic Coalition on the Sustainability of Journalism and News Media

Since the public launch of OpenAI's ChatGPT chatbot in November 2022, the familiarity and use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies have skyrocketed. A generative AI system can create content, including text and images, based on a given input or prompt using machine learning models that are trained on enormous amounts of data. Hundreds of millions of people are using generative AI chatbots on a daily basis now, according to estimates by industry observers and AI companies.

General curiosity, technological novelty and the dynamics of online virality have undoubtedly contributed to public uptake, but the turbo-charged AI development and adoption underway is driven by multi-billion-dollar investments by technology companies, venture capital firms, tech investment groups and geopolitical competition that has framed AI as an existential race.

Journalism and the news industry have been at the center of this period of generative AI disruption, from making deals and filing lawsuits to experiencing massive drops in referral traffic and competing with synthetic media for audience eyeballs and advertiser dollars. Many in journalism feel they must adopt or die even if they remain cautious and concerned, while others are embracing generative and agentic AI throughout the editorial, administrative and business sides of news publishing. As journalists test the use of AI for their work and news organizations report on its development, concerns about content authenticity, unauthorized use of intellectual property, and the potential decline in referral traffic to news websites, pose risks to information integrity and the sustainability of the media sector.

These opportunities and challenges have led to a variety of responses from news organizations, communication scholars and media development groups. Many have rallied behind calls for ethical principles and regulatory frameworks for AI development as well as ethical guidelines for AI use in newsrooms. Some have also warned against the concentration of power throughout the AI tech stack in a few big companies, which threatens a repeat of the harms that emerged from the dominance of search and social media companies in those markets, as well as the digital advertising market, and the lack of transparency and accountability

surrounding their operations and policies. Others have mobilized resources to bridge the knowledge gaps within the journalism community through capacity-building efforts, learning materials and awareness-raising initiatives about understanding the various dimensions of AI for journalism.

Reported evidence shows that news organizations are currently testing AI tools to increase efficiency through automation of newsroom tasks such as transcriptions, translations, headline generation etc. The automation potential has ignited the debate on human oversight of news production, especially in the light of AI hallucinations that produce misleading information. It will also lead to growing tensions about redundancies and job cuts at news organizations.

The alleged copyright infringement by AI companies to train their models is another developing issue with repercussions for the news media sector. There are more than 40 ongoing legal cases whose outcomes could provide precedent for compensation by AI companies to publishers for copyrighted content, such as The New York Times lawsuit against OpenAI for copyright infringement and the recent legal action by Reddit against Anthropic for allegedly scraping user comments without consent to train its chatbot. Most news organizations struggle to protect their journalistic work from being used by AI companies without permission, and without legal clarity on copyright they must resort to whack-a-mole efforts to block an ever evolving array of bots or de-facto give in to the unauthorized use of their work. The impact of these choices — restricting web crawlers and scraping and putting quality information behind paywalls and robots.txt exclusions while AI-generated synthetic media proliferates — will have profound implications for the future of the open Internet, digital governance, and AI development.

Just as AI technologies are disrupting the business model of the Internet, they will also have a significant impact on the financial sustainability of the news media. The ability of AI tools to generate and aggregate content and produce news-style summaries might altogether bypass the news media as information sources. Products and applications that repackage and republish journalistic content directly for chatbot users without permission or attribution to original publishers are growing rapidly. AI-powered search engine summaries and AI-driven content aggregators have already resulted in significant drops in referral traffic from Google Search (which controls 90 percent of the search market in most jurisdictions) and the attendant ad revenue that it previously generated. This could also potentially discourage users from accessing referenced news reports. While some large news publishers, such as the Associated Press and Axel Springer, have agreed to content licensing deals with AI companies, small and independent news organizations find it difficult to access similar opportunities. But AI tools might also lower the learning curve for local media to experiment with business development opportunities and build reader revenue models.

Our discussion demonstrates a fine balance between the promising possibilities and the depressing dangers of AI use with respect to independent journalism and media viability. Many of these opportunities and concerns are examined in this annual report by the Dynamic Coalition on the Sustainability of Journalism and News Media (DC-Journalism), with a view toward identifying solutions and making recommendations for digital policies and regulatory frameworks

to ensure independent journalism, public interest media and the open Internet remain viable in an AI-dominated landscape.

The annual report is a collaborative effort by the DC-Journalism. Members of the working group were invited to submit article abstracts on the theme of AI & Journalism, with the subthemes of AI governance, AI use for content production, the impact of AI on news business models and sustainability, the risks and harms related to AI, and the platformization of AI development. The submissions were shortlisted by the coalition's co-coordinators and the commissioned articles were produced by December 2024. The articles provide diverse and critical perspectives on the actual and anticipated effects of AI on journalism, with a cross-cutting focus on Internet governance and media viability.

RNW Media's Surabhi Srivastava, Sana Naqvi and Ana Garza Ochoa build on the experiences of their community of journalists and news publishers in "Reality or Hype? Adoption of (Generative) AI Technology by Digital Media Organizations in the Global South" to explore questions of equity and ethical impact in the use of AI within the news industry. Among other insights, the article indicates that some Global South news organizations have started to use AI tools to improve their news distribution and strengthen their audience engagement, which may indirectly lead to gains for their business viability and sustainability.

In "Future of Media in a World Full of AI-generated Content and Gen Z", Jenna Manhau Fung flips the perspective to the information needs and online habits of young people, in an attempt to understand how these patterns will be further affected by AI and the steps news media need to take to adapt to a future of online content consumption that is quickly becoming our present reality. Through this discussion, the article highlights the importance of regulatory oversight of AI development and identifies areas where AI use can enhance the capabilities of news publishers.

Over 60 countries around the world conducted national elections in 2024, giving observers and media experts a chance to study the impact of AI on election campaigns. Dr. Paromita Pain and Dr. Pallavi Guha reflect on how newsrooms reported on AI-generated campaign content and political misinformation in "AI, Campaigns, and Election Misinformation in India: A Case Study". The article also looks at examples of fact-checking, media literacy and AI self-regulation to recommend a collaborative roadmap for AI use for the information ecosystem.

Switching attention from political disinformation to investigative journalism, Mira Milosevic examines the increasing financial costs of tech services for news organizations in "Cloud and Data Processing Services for Newsrooms". The article argues that just as data-driven investigative journalism outlets plan to engage with AI and machine learning technologies, the proprietary nature of AI models and the dominance of a few large companies in the AI market will pose serious challenges to news outlets in terms of affordability, accessibility and data security. These concerns demand a joint response, which the article outlines with the example of the Journalism Cloud Alliance launched in 2024.

The annual report also features a compilation of significant work by Dynamic Coalition members about understanding AI's role for the future of journalism online. Through these highlighted instances, we learn about ongoing journalism

support initiatives, current research on trends and practices, and the ethical principles and regulatory recommendations for AI development that our community has contributed.

The insights shared through the articles and information contained in the annual report not only offer a birds-eye view of the adaptation of AI technologies in the news industry globally, but also present the complex interplay of opportunities and contextual risks of AI use through national and regional examples. These views inform us about the potential strategies to secure the future survival of independent journalism while also staying alert to technology-facilitated harms to our societies and democracies, harms that depend on the suppression and absence of reliable and trustworthy news and information. The freedom-of-expression and access-to-information considerations that underpin media development work for press freedom and the financial sustainability of independent journalism also naturally call for ethical and rights-respecting frameworks for the development and use of AI.

As the inputs of the annual report suggest, the multi-stakeholder spirit of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) – the theme of the 2025 IGF conference is 'Building Digital Governance Together' – is already at risk due to the rapid advancements, corporate concentration and unilateral decision-making in the AI sector. However, as you read the articles in this report, we are confident that you will pick up on the numerous recommendations for collaborative and multi-sectoral efforts to leverage AI technologies for media viability and public good. These suggestions offer hope. Digital policies can be enriched with the voices of stakeholders from the field of journalism, the media development sector, and the larger civil society to uphold the public interest and to ensure that the news media ecosystem thrives in a future revolutionized by AI technologies.

We hope that the contents of the DC-Journalism annual report will provide you with evidence and inspiration to initiate dialogue with policymakers, the private sector and the technical community in the IGF system and with policy-making processes beyond the IGF, so together we can chart out actions and strategies to build and strengthen the sustainability of journalism and the news media in the service of effective public participation and strong democracies.

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FROM OUR MEMBERS

The Paris Charter on AI and Journalism

Published on November 10, 2023, the Paris Charter on AI and Journalism represents the first global ethical benchmark for AI and journalism. It was published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) with 16 partner organizations: Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), Canadian Journalism Foundation (CJF), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), DW Akademie, European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), European Journalism Centre (EJC), Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), International Press Institute (IPI), Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), Pulitzer Centre and Thomson Foundation.

The charter notes that AI represents a considerable shift in information gathering and will profoundly alter the technical, economic and social conditions of journalism and editorial practice. It highlights that while AI systems may revolutionize the global information landscape, they would also present structural challenges to the right to information, which underpins the fundamental freedoms of opinion and expression. AI systems, the charter points out, can assist media outlets in fulfilling their social role of serving trustworthy information and enhancing the right to information, "but only if they are used transparently, fairly and responsibly in an editorial environment that staunchly upholds journalistic ethics".

The charter presents 10 principles:

1. Journalism ethics guide the way media outlets and journalists use technology.
2. Media outlets prioritize human agency.
3. AI systems used in journalism undergo prior, independent evaluation.
4. Media outlets are always accountable for the content they publish.
5. Media outlets maintain transparency in their use of AI systems.
6. Media outlets ensure content origin and traceability.
7. Journalism draws a clear line between authentic and synthetic content.
8. AI-driven content personalization and recommendation upholds the diversity and the integrity of information.
9. Journalists, media outlets and journalism support groups engage in the governance of AI.
10. Journalism upholds its ethical and economic foundation in engagements with AI organizations.

Read the full charter here.

Reality or Hype? Adoption of (Generative) AI Technology by Digital Media Organizations in the Global South: Perspectives, Reflections and Questions for Inclusive Digital Future(s)

Surabhi Srivastava, Sana Naqvi and Ana Garza Ochoa
RNW Media

Introduction

Is generative artificial intelligence (AI) "revolutionizing" the way digital media organizations based in the Global South function, or has reality failed to keep pace with the incessant buzz around AI? Moreover, how does this reality look different for these organizations, given the existing knowledge and power asymmetries pertaining to AI development and deployment between the Global North and South? These are the two main questions we set out to answer at RNW Media[1], by documenting and analyzing 'AI user stories' from members of Vine[2] — RNW Media's vibrant and diverse global community of journalists, media organizations, and development practitioners that use media for development.

The survey undertaken as part of this initiative was designed and implemented by RNW Media in January 2024 with Vine members from the Global South, and where English is not the primary language. The survey generated 124 member responses. In addition, the survey was also answered by our 8 network member organizations from Lebanon, Kenya, Mali, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Uganda. Follow up conversations were also undertaken with some members to further understand the nuances and complexities of using AI for their digital media activities.

The case studies and experiences explicated in this essay offer a snapshot of how AI, and predominantly generative AI, is influencing and gradually reshaping

1 RNW Media is an international digital media accelerator that offers leadership on young-people centered solutions that bring social change.

2 Vine comprises 25 organizations, over 80 digital media practitioners, and more than 6,000 alumni of RNTC (RNW Media's Digital Media Training Centre).

the day-to-day work landscape for digital media practitioners in the Global South, both at the individual and organizational level. Moreover, they also highlight the schisms, limitations, and apprehensions that exist in use of AI technology by Global South organizations, owing to broader socio-technological and geopolitical questions of who creates this technology, where is it (first) developed and deployed, who holds the knowledge to use it, and who gets to access this knowledge? Additionally, and importantly, who gets to participate and/or decide how this technology ought to be used to maximize social good and minimize harm – who benefits, who is excluded and who is harmed? These are questions that are salient for us and Vine, given our commitment to using digital media for catalyzing positive social impact and promoting digital space(s) that are safe, reliable and inclusive.

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As was proclaimed by several headlines in early 2023, pushed by publications primarily in the Global North, AI was set to change the (digital) media landscape for the better, by increasing efficiency and productivity, and freeing up time for media practitioners to focus their creative energies on producing meaningful content, understanding and engaging with their audiences more impactfully, and ensuring editorial rigor to promote information integrity.[3] AI was posited to help the already struggling media organizations to survive in a highly polarized and fractured digital media ecosystem. However, as the current trends indicate, while the headlines were on to something – even if peppered with hyperbole – it remains to be seen whether AI will influence and change digital media for the better.

According to a recent report published in the Columbia Journalism Review in February 2024, the adoption of AI technology by news organizations was drawn from factors such as "market pressures, hope and hype around AI, and competitive dynamics with a focus on innovation".[4] The report was based on interviews from news workers at 35 news organizations based in the U.S., the U.K. and Germany, as well as interviews from 36 international experts spanning the media industry, academia, technology and policymaking circles. Moreover, the deployment of AI at news outlets was confined to tasks spanning the production and distribution of news, including enabling "dynamic paywalls, automated transcription and data analysis tools in news production". Furthermore, the report noted that this "greater efficiency and effectiveness" is primarily context-dependent, with similar gains rarely shared by smaller and independent media organizations in the Global North, and being often non-existent for majority of media organizations in the Global South. While the current trends allude to AI being used primarily in a "support" role, the rapidly evolving advancements in AI may overcome this trend in the coming years to entirely replace media workers – thereby bringing about a more profound and systemic shift in the broader media landscape.[5]

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3 Daniel Ceniceros, "Generative AI's Potential Applications for Media and Digital Marketing," Forbes, October 16, 2023, Link.

4 Felix M. Simon, "Artificial Intelligence in the News: How AI Retools, Rationalizes, and Reshapes Journalism and the Public Arena," Columbia Journalism Review, February 6, 2024. Link.

5 Ibid.

Keeping this context in mind, our intention to understand how digital media organizations in the Global South are adopting AI becomes even more pertinent for two key reasons – first, to enable a space for sharing their experiences, given that such evidence-gathering and documentation exercises have been largely confined to the Global North, and second, to enable media practitioners in the Global South to take charge and become equal stakeholders in the discourse on AI and digital media – the discourse remains heavily dominated and steered by voices and stakeholders in the Global North, be it the Big Tech or Big Media.

AI User Stories – How is AI Being Used?

What, then, were the trends and insights we observed through these AI-user stories? We focus our discussion on three key pillars– a) automation of everyday (media) tasks to increase productivity and efficiency; b) emphasis on using AI for social good, and c) using AI as an important contributor toward shaping the sustainability trajectory of an organization.

Overall, the survey responses indicated a similar trend of using generative AI tools, primarily ChatGPT, for image generation, to spur creativity, and as a tool to analyze data efficiently and effectively. Vine respondents stated that these tools helped to enhance the quality of their everyday (media) work, through automated grammar checks, user engagement data analysis, and overall improvement in quality of the content output. They also cited the efficiency of AI in meeting tight deadlines, and having more time to focus on other complex tasks. However, some respondents also indicated that the delay in when ChatGPT was released in their region impacted how effectively they could utilize it for digital media activities, given the learning curve involved to use the tool efficiently.

Furthermore, Vine members also reported using AI to support and enhance decision-making processes within their organizations. For example, Raseef22, a digital media organization based in Beirut, Lebanon, shared about their experience of integrating ChatGPT into their Content Management System (CMS) to enable article translation in different languages, such as English and Farsi. This relatively mundane tweak had a profound impact – allowing for their content to be shared more widely, hence reaching newer audiences and new regions to drive a bigger social impact.

Nairobits, a Vine member based in Kenya, that focuses on bridging the digital divide and creating opportunities for young people to thrive, cited using AI in their communications department for content creation to bolster the visibility of the organization, thereby making the associated perfunctory tasks easier, and easing the overall workload on its team members. Similarly, Love Matters Africa, a digital sexuality education content platform for young people in Kenya, shared three concrete examples of how AI facilitates their content creation processes to ensure inclusion by, a) helping to contextualize images and make them relatable and representative for the audiences they serve, for example in terms of style, skin color, and settings, b) aligning content and images with emerging or trending issues that match better with the needs of their audiences, and c) capturing emotions from their audiences to the images that align with the mood of the post, thus understanding their audiences' reactions with more nuance and concrete data points.

Another Vine member, Reach A Hand Uganda (RAHU), that uses digital media for advancing young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Uganda, shared about developing and using an AI chatbot, accessible via WhatsApp, to ensure that young people have access to accurate and reliable SRHR information, thus helping them make informed choices and decisions related to their health and wellbeing. RAHU used this case study to indicate how AI has made information distribution easier, but also flagged its potential to reach marginalized groups and populations, and hence the need to make AI tools more accessible and user-friendly.

This brings to the forefront another salient trend that emerged from the AI user stories shared by Vine members – prioritizing the use of AI for (social) good. Many of the survey respondents highlighted that the use of AI to increase productivity must be coupled with using it ethically and mindfully to engender a positive social impact. For example, privacy and confidentiality, in relation to how AI tools gather and train on data, was of paramount concern for several respondents, and many noted that AI platforms must offer more transparency in this regard. In fact, they deemed it essential to build trust in AI technology in the long term. Moreover, respondents also cited the urgent need to ensure that cultural sensitivity is prioritized related to the development, deployment and localization of AI tech in the Global South to reduce its harm on those most vulnerable and marginalized.

Lastly, Vine members also highlighted their own responsibility, as organizations that use AI tech, in understanding, informing, and integrating feedback from their audiences in relation to use of AI tools, thereby ensuring more meaningful engagement and a relationship of trust with their audiences. This also entails, for instance, making more mindful choices around when to use, and when not to use, AI. For instance, RAHU shared that they recognized that human stories with real photos, rather than AI-generated images, resonated best with their audiences, while the use of AI was deemed acceptable for showcasing their products.

The third and last trend observed across the AI user stories points to the role that AI is playing in making digital media organizations future proof. With many Vine members investing and relying heavily on search engine optimization (SEO) to get eyeballs online, the use of generative AI, such as ChatGPT, to automate the formulation of SEO-friendly titles and summaries, was noted as crucial for bolstering and ensuring an organization's online presence and visibility, linked in turn to their long-term viability. However, as Raseef22 noted, this is also accompanied by the continuous investment in, for instance, refining and updating prompts [given to AI], so they evolve with the dynamic nature of the content and audience preferences to ensure optimal use of AI tools. In another example, Nairobits shared how they are utilizing AI for fundraising and resource mobilization, given that machine learning can offer significant insights into analyzing donor data and help target potential donors.[6] This again, however, must be coupled with the urgent need to invest in learning how to use AI effectively for fundraising, which can be a significant barrier for media organizations in the Global South that are often struggling with time and resource constraints.

6 "Artificial Intelligence for Nonprofits: Complete Explainer," Dataro, February 10, 2025, Link.

However, some organizations are also confronting these challenges in creative ways. An example is Raseef22 that has begun to integrate AI into its website by incorporating ChatGPT and Murf (an AI generator program) to engage with younger audiences as well as with audiences with disability, such as those with a visual impairment, thereby expanding their online reach by tapping into new audiences.

Discussion

The stories and experiences shared by Vine members can help us reflect better on the two questions that we shared at the very beginning of this essay related to AI adoption in media organizations in the Global South. To the first question, just as is the case for the bigger and more established media organizations in the Global North, from our sample of Vine members, it is evident that generative AI tools have been adopted, to some extent, to automate the mundane, routine, everyday (media) tasks and functions. While the survey did not inquire regarding the specific intention behind this form of adoption, it has reportedly served respondents in positive ways, most notably, by easing workload and freeing up valuable time to focus on tasks that require human attention and creativity. Moreover, for now, the use of AI remains in more of a support role, however, it is worth exploring in the next iteration of this research, how Vine members envision this role to change in the coming years, as AI technology continues to evolve rapidly.

Another avenue for further exploration could be to understand better whether there is a more structured and strategic vision behind adoption of AI by digital media organizations in the Global South. Given the overwhelming hype around AI in the last couple of years, is this adoption short-lived and a trend that will fade over time, or are digital media organizations integrating AI use in their strategic vision and priorities? This would be of particular interest for us as RNW Media, given our own internal journey as an organization to understand, articulate and incorporate AI into our broader strategic vision and goals, and thus, can help inform us how best we can offer support to Vine members, if needed and with the objective of mutual learning, to enable a long-term strategic approach for deployment and use of AI.

To the second question related to the existing global north-south divide in relation to AI, it is essential to acknowledge the socio-technological implications of AI technology – simply, that it cannot be viewed and understood in isolation from the context within which it is created and utilized. While some Vine members are more informed and have been working on issues related to advancing digital rights, it was a (pleasant) surprise to see AI ethics, and the emphasis on mindful and critical use of AI, being endorsed by the majority of the respondents. This reflects a more intuitive awareness and understanding of their positionality in the world, where often knowledge and technology created in the Global North has been forcefully imposed on the Global South – without informed consultation, consent, and respect for human rights of its peoples and communities. Therefore, while adoption of AI is deemed necessary, it is not devoid of the ethical considerations that enable use of AI as a tool to catalyze social change and advance public good. In this regard then, there is much to learn for media organizations in the Global North from their counterparts in the Global South,

and to affirm them as equal stakeholders in the broader conversation on how AI is shaping the media ecosystem globally. In fact, a global (media) north-south collaboration is the need of the hour to ensure that there are guardrails and regulatory frameworks in place, and that they are put in practice, to steer the development and deployment of AI guided by (media) ethics and human rights.

Lastly, media viability and sustainability are a pressing concern for media organizations and industry, globally. As illustrated from experiences shared by Vine members, AI is viewed as an important tool to ensure long-term sustainability – ranging from diversifying audiences, utilizing AI for fundraising, or employing AI for SEO, to remain relevant and visible in the attention economy. However, there remains a larger question regarding whether the power and resource differentials between the media ecosystem(s) in the global north and south can be overcome by media organizations using AI effectively for fundraising and sustainability? It is worth asking if a small-scale and/or independent media organization can "AI its way out" of the financial and trust crisis that confronts media organizations at a systemic level.

This, in turn, also relates to the uncomfortable question regarding what happens when AI begins to replace media workers, rather than simply assisting them? At RNW Media, where our focus remains on being people-centric and using AI in a support role, the dilemma of balancing adoption of AI with ensuring that sustainability also remains people-centered, poses an interesting yet difficult challenge that warrants further deliberations and discussions, both internally as an organization and with our Vine members. Moreover, the intersection of AI and media sustainability also brings to light the key question of how do we get back to the basics of building and solidifying trust with our audiences – an ingredient that is not only imperative for any media organization to flourish and thrive, but also particularly important for media organizations that aim to drive and engender social impact.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the responses and experiences gathered under this initiative. The modality of documenting these AI-user stories was primarily through a self-reported survey, which owing to constraints posed by both the survey methodology and self-reporting, resulted in a small sample size and limited response to survey questions. Moreover, while an attempt was made to follow-up on certain responses gathered, there was considerable loss to follow-up given that our members often operate in limited resource- and time-constrained settings, and hence, may not have had time to revert to follow-up. Additionally, the sample is not intended to represent all of the diverse experiences and stories of media organizations across the Global South, and within Global South countries. Nonetheless, they offer some useful insights that show exciting avenues for further research, and using a diverse combination of modalities of documentation and evidence gathering, contingent on availability of future funding and resources.

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FROM OUR MEMBERS

Center for Journalism & Liberty on AI and Market Concentration

The Center for Journalism & Liberty (CJL) at the Open Markets Institute has published important research on the increasing monopolization of AI development by Big Tech companies, leading to risks for competition, privacy, innovation and the environment. CJL maintains a Journalism & AI resource page with research reports, articles, and testimony.

CENTER FOR JOURNALISM & LIBERTY

Expert Brief: A Framework for Establishing Journalism's Value in Artificial Intelligence Systems

News publishers, along with the creative industries more broadly, must actively define the worth of their content and data by understanding how and why value is created throughout the generative AI process, from developing foundation models to powering real-time search, if they want to obtain fair compensation. But journalism cannot be expected to adapt its business models to the AI era without interventions by policymakers to correct market imbalances, enforce intellectual property rights, and require data access and transparency of AI systems. This brief provides critical insights into the prevalence of journalism in AI models and systems and proposes how the news industry and policymakers should respond to ensure the viability of independent journalism in the age of AI. Read the brief here.

The Case for Consent in the AI Data Gold Rush

Governments and standards bodies are addressing the tension between AI companies and data providers due to the use of copyright-protected data in building advanced AI models and the need to develop both clear legal and policy guidance as well as technical standards. The demand for text data has disrupted the formerly symbiotic relationship between text and data mining bots and publishers. This article notes that requiring explicit opt-in consent for AI training reinforces copyright interpretations, emphasizes content creators' authority over their work, and compels tech companies to develop systems that respect these rights. Read the article here.

Expert Brief on AI and Market Concentration

The brief examines the rising dominance of Big Tech in AI due to high entry barriers and anti-competitive practices and offers policy recommendations for building a fair AI ecosystem, including by strengthening merger control, enforcement of anti-trust laws, and regulation of cloud computing as a public utility. Read the expert brief here.

Stopping Big Tech from Becoming Big AI

This 2024 report by CJL looks at specific anti-competitive practices in AI, such as exclusive partnerships, self-preferencing, and the control of essential inputs like computing power. It describes the policy interventions needed to address them. Read the report here.

AI in the Public Interest: Confronting the Monopoly Threat

The 2023 research study explores the ways just a handful of Big Tech companies have already strategically positioned themselves to control the future of AI and magnify existing problems such as the spread of disinformation. Read the report here.

Future of Media in a World Full of AI-generated Content and Gen Z

Jenna Manhau Fung
Jen Z Issues

The steady decline of the traditional news industry over the past decade has led to financial struggles for media organizations worldwide. Policymakers are searching for innovative solutions to rescue the media industry, while industry players are exploring new business models, such as reader revenue (which includes offerings such as subscriptions), to diversify their revenue sources away from advertisement.[1] This is occurring against the backdrop of the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and a fundamental shift in news consumption patterns, particularly among the younger generation, who are increasingly turning to social media for information.

Journalism, as the fourth estate, plays a crucial role in democratic societies, and the survival of the media industry is essential for democracy. What will the future of media look like for traditional media organizations, news consumers, and workers in the industry, given the challenges posed by the evolving information consumption patterns and AI's impact on journalism? This essay is an attempt to find out the answer.

A Shifting News Consumption Pattern

The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 has already shown figures that support the trend of a shifting form of new consumption: nearly a third of their global sample (n=95,000) have consumed news content on YouTube on a weekly basis, while 13 percent of respondents used TikTok for news, surpassing Twitter/X (10 percent) for the first time.[2] In another survey, 85 percent of Canadian Gen Z respondents said they would first turn to social media — Instagram (38 percent) and TikTok (33 percent) — for news.[3]

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1 Katie Drummond & Anita Li, "Inside WIRED and the Future of Digital News," Toronto Public Library, YouTube. April 11, 2024, Link.

2 Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Amy Ross Arguedas, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2024), Link.

3 "Young Canadians are Increasingly Trusting News Broadly Shared on Social Media," Kaiser & Partners. November 15, 2023. Link.

These figures suggest a growing reliance on alternative outlets, particularly video sharing networks, for news consumption.

In an era dominated by user-generated content (UGC), journalism has evolved beyond its traditional boundaries. News can now be consumed in diverse forms, from news reporting on cable TV to news articles on the websites of traditional news outlets, to short videos created by TikTok influencers. In the U.S., news consumers are now equally likely to get news content from influencers or celebrities as they are from journalists or news outlets.[4] This further blurs the definition of journalism, as traditional news media and UGC, varying widely in quality, merge in the digital space, all while news consumers are shifting from a passive to a more active role in engaging in the process of journalism, from commenting on news in various forms to covering topics closer to journalism in a traditional sense independently.

As younger demographics gravitate toward alternative platforms, such as TikTok, for news, influencers or even ordinary users gradually become primary sources of information for them, reducing their reliance on traditional news outlets.[5] Some users may start to perceive TikTok as a source of unique news; the June 2024 report by Pew Research Center shows that 35 percent of its survey respondents believe news on TikTok provides information that they would not have been able to access elsewhere.

AI is Both a Blessing and a Burden for Digital Media

Generative AI further lowers the cost and enhances the efficiency of content creation, and the concept of "media" can no longer be interpreted in a traditional sense. Broadcasting, publishing, and reporting are now possible for anyone, in any form, through any medium. While AI-generated news presenters are still a rare and unsettling use case in journalism that fall into the "uncanny valley" and may cause discomfort and eeriness to many, most open and public online spaces are already infiltrated with AI-assisted or AI-influenced, if not AI-generated, content.[6,7]

The web has become a life-like yet somewhat impersonal "dark forest" populated by bots, data scrapers, algorithmically manipulated search results, and more, turning online space into a hotbed for mis- and dis-information.[8,9] AI algorithms,

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4 Elisa Shearer, Sarah Naseer, Jacob Liedke and Katerina Eva Matsa, "How Americans Get News on Tiktok, X, Facebook And Instagram," Pew Research Center, June 12, 2024, Link.

5 Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Amy Ross Arguedas, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2024), Link.

6 Chris Stokel-Walker, "TV Channels are Using AI-generated Presenters to Read the News. The Question is, Will We Trust Them?," BBC, January 26, 2024, Link.

7 Rina Diane Caballar, "What is the Uncanny Valley?," IEEE Spectrum, November 6, 2019, Link.

8 Maggie Appleton, "The Dark Forest and the Cozy Web," The Garden | Maggieappleton.com, 2020, Link.

9 Maggie Appleton, "The Expanding Dark Forest and Generative AI," The Garden | Maggieappleton.com, 2023, Link.

particularly those employed by social media, can amplify false information and stir conflicts between groups with differing ideologies on various topics, including gender, religion, and politics. This can turn social media into a battleground for propaganda, as seen in baseless claims about Algerian boxer Imane Khelif being a man or transgender person, and in foreign disinformation operations, such as AI-fabricated content, misleading narratives, and coordinated behavior spread across online platforms during Taiwan's 2024 presidential election.[10,11]

Although the Dark Forest Theory might suggest a negative connotation for AI-generated content, the use of generative AI for content creation is not inherently derogatory and can be beneficial in certain contexts. For example, when these tools are used appropriately, they could bridge linguistic gaps and help non-English speakers achieve academic writing fluency and linguistic proficiency on a large scale.[12] This application demonstrates how technological solutions can level the playing field for academic writers who face disadvantages, offering them an opportunity to compete on equal footing with those who have greater linguistic advantages.

In journalism, this potential equality is significant, as it amplifies the voices of non-English speakers on a global stage. For example, Rest of World, a non-profit publication reporting on tech news often overlooked by the Western-centric world, incorporates AI-powered Google Translate in their publications, providing translations of their English-language articles into Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, German and French.[13] In December 2024, the organization also adopted text-to-speech technology from OpenAI to offer narrated versions of their content. This usage of AI increases access for audiences who prefer audio formats or require accommodations for accessibility needs.[14]

By providing fairer access to resources, generative AI can mitigate disparities where those with more resources often have better opportunities to learn and master certain linguistic proficiency, resulting in superior writing skills. In this way, such technology can address inequalities faced by marginalized groups and create a more equitable environment for academic achievement. Over time, generative AI has the potential to eliminate language barriers, distill publication into more accessible knowledge, and enhance diversity and plurality of available information.

While attitudes toward the use of AI in journalism are currently more characterized by fear than hype, the evolving news consumption habits and familiarity with AI

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10 David Klepper, "Russian disinformation slams Paris and amplifies Khelif debate to undermine the Olympics," AP News, August 6, 2024, Link.

11 Chen-Ling Hung, Wen-Cheng Fu, Chang-Ce Liu, and Hui-Ju Tsai, "AI Disinformation Attacks and Taiwan's Responses during the 2024 Presidential Election," (Taiwan Communication Association & Thomson Foundation, 2024), Link.

12 Daria Bielik, "Language Power-Up: Are LLMs a Fair Play for International Students?," Centre for International Governance Innovation, February 13, 2024, Link.

13 "About Us," Rest of World, Link.

14 Jane O'Donoghue, "Listen Up: Rest of World Stories are Now Available with AI-powered Narrations," Rest of World, December 6, 2024, Link.

among the younger generation may create favorable conditions for the growth of AI in the media industry. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 reveals that individuals with greater AI awareness are more comfortable with its use in journalism. While text-based content is mostly accepted, video-based content is often a "deal breaker" for many. However, the study shows that participants developed and expressed more nuanced opinions about AI's implementation, indicating that our fear of AI may stem from a lack of understanding, while our comfort with AI in the content we engage with may gradually increase over time.[15]

The Right Approach to Counter Repercussions

Technological advancement in AI and the evolving media landscape are realities we cannot escape. To counter the repercussions these phenomena have on young consumers, the media industry, and democracy, numerous policies — particularly in AI governance — are emerging across different regions, aiming to mitigate the associated issues. The governance frameworks of AI systems around the world generally include key principles, such as ensuring human oversight and adopting a human-centric design.

Policymakers around the world are advancing the regulation of AI through various approaches. Some, such as the risk-based EU AI Act and the impact-based Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA) in Canada, adopt a "horizontal approach" that focuses on AI inputs, processes, and outputs.[16,17] Others, such as the U.S. and the U.K., employ a "vertical approach," regulating AI on a sector-by-sector basis.[18]

However, these principles vary by framework, so it is crucial to ensure robust public engagement, including with media and journalism stakeholders, in the AI policy development process to reflect a broader range of interests. Assessing whether or not AI policies adequately consider the impact on young consumers and their online information consumption requires nuanced and often indirect indicators, such as the inclusion of youth participation in the AI governance process. Even with youth involvement, as seen with the Declaration on Youth Participation in AI Governance at the Council of Europe in 2020, it only indicates that youth perspectives are included in the process and does not necessarily guarantee the inclusion of their voices in the outcomes.[19]

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15 Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Amy Ross Arguedas, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2024), Link.

16 "EU AI Act: First Regulation on Artificial Intelligence," European Parliament, June 8, 2023, Link.

17 Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, Artificial Intelligence and Data Act, (Government of Canada, 2023), Link.

18 Marcin Szczepanski, "United States Approach to Artificial Intelligence," (European Parliamentary Research Service PE 757.605, 2024), Link.

19 "Declaration on Youth Participation in AI Governance," The Council of Europe, December 1, 2020, Link.

The effectiveness of AI policies in addressing their impact on online information hinges on whether or not these policies incorporate sufficient mechanisms or practices to safeguard democratic functions and values. Since information is vital for civic engagement and informed decision-making on critical societal issues, it is essential that policies are designed to uphold these democratic principles.

A One-size-fits-all Policy Won't Solve Our Problems

While AI policies address broader issues, the specific concern of the future of media amid shifting information consumption patterns in the age of generative AI is multifaceted. For instance, the governance of UGC on social media primarily concerns content moderation; when children or youth are involved, this issue could intersect with discussions on online safety. We can also approach the same topic from the angle of information dissemination, with the focus of the discussion centered on platform governance and data governance. If we further combine the discourse with the increasing influence of AI in creating and disseminating information, especially political content, it further complicates the subject with considerations of ethics and universal values. Consequently, the discussion may extend to human rights and democratic values in our society.

The challenges we face cannot be resolved with a silver bullet but require cross-disciplinary governance. To manage the repercussions of AI on the future of media in a world full of AI-generated content, we need to modernize existing laws, ranging from privacy law to competition legislation. One of the main contributors to social media's negative impact on democratic societies is the susceptibility of their algorithms to information manipulation. This was especially evident during a global election year such as 2024.

The powerful algorithms of platforms such as TikTok not only reshape how news is distributed but also create a disruptive impact on how news is consumed. Studies tell us that whether or not one turns to TikTok for news, more than half of respondents (57 percent) see new articles and 55 percent obtain breaking news information on the platform.[20]

The social networks have transformed from merely tools for connecting with family and friends, into channels for influencers to "broadcast" content to a vast audience. Users are exposed to polarizing and radicalized content, often manipulated by political entities or even foreign influence. The impending U.S. TikTok divestiture and threat of a ban otherwise in 2024-25 underscores how States can view a social media platform from a "national security" perspective due to the vast amount of data collected from users and the competing interests of States and private actors to control information.[21]

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20 Elisa Shearer, Sarah Naseer, Jacob Liedke and Katerina Eva Matsa, "How Americans Get News on Tiktok, X, Facebook And Instagram," Pew Research Center, June 12, 2024, Link.

21 David Shepardson, "US Senate Passes TikTok Divestment-or-ban Bill, Biden Set to Make it Law," Reuters, April 24, 2024, Link.

Root Causes and Remedies for the Hurdles We Face

At the core of the concern, stemming from our increasing reliance on social media, is the fact that users lack the leverage to assert control over their data and privacy, or resist algorithmic manipulation, given the necessity of accessing these fundamental services in our increasingly digital society today. We are trapped in a system where our data, by default, is treated as a commodity to be freely and extensively exploited.

Big corporations are not the only entities that harvest data in aggregate for immense profit; political parties do as well. In Canada, current legislation imposes very limited restrictions on data collection by businesses gathering Canadian voters' data, which can be used for micro-targeting to influence voting behavior, on behalf of political parties.[22]

How and what information we consume online today is influenced by these underlying issues. Policymakers implement different interventions in hopes of mitigating these problems. Canada, for instance, has attempted to "rescue" the monopolized information on online streaming services for Canadians with the Online Streaming Act and support the news industry through the Online News Act, which mandates companies such as Meta and Google to pay Canadian news outlets for featuring news content or linking to their articles on their platforms.[23,24]

While the Canadian government has reached a deal with Google that secures $100 million annually from the tech giant to publishers and ensures continued access to Canadian news content on its platform, Meta has used its power to block Canadians' access to both domestic and international news on either Facebook or Instagram since August 2023.[25,26] Not long after the ban, a wildfire forced 48,000 Canadians from their homes; evacuees have said the ban impacted their ability to share critical news with one another.[27,28]

To adjust this asymmetrical relationship between users and data exploiters, we need not only comprehensive laws such as the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which mandates organizations to protect personal data and respect consumers' privacy rights, but also innovative policies that empower users with greater bargaining power in data sovereignty by recognizing data as a

22 Matt Hatfield, "Report: At least 91 Companies in Canada's Political Influence Industry," OpenMedia, July 30, 2024, Link.

23 "Online Streaming Act," (Government of Canada, 2024), Link.

24 "The Online News Act," (Government of Canada, 2024), Link.

25 Rachel Aiello, "'No Concessions' St-Onge says in $100M a Year News Deal with Google," CTV News, November 30, 2023, Link.

26 Jenna Manhau, "When the Caged Bird Sings: A Hongkonger's Memoir of Internet Freedom and Human Rights," EngageMedia, November 8, 2023, Link.

27 CBC British Columbia, "B.C. Government Once Again Asking Meta to Lift Ban on Canadian News for Public Safety," Youtube, May 6, 2024, Link.

28 Nadine Yousif, "Canada Wildfires: Trudeau Criticises Facebook over News Ban amid Crisis," BBC, August 21, 2023, Link.

valuable and fundamental asset — similar to time and money.[29] This would allow individuals to retain ownership and agency over their data. By fostering a more equitable data economy, social media corporations, which we rely heavily on for information today, will be incentivized to uphold ethical standards and prioritize consumer rights, thereby addressing the impact of recommender systems — often AI-powered nowadays — on our online information consumption.

News is at the Forefront of Defending Information Integrity

As the Internet becomes inundated with AI-generated content, online safety policies, such as the Australian Online Safety Act 2021, the U.S. Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) passed in July 2024, and the forthcoming Canadian Online Harms Act (Bill C-63), act as a crucial safeguard addressing issues previously identified regarding children and youth in online information consumption.[30,31,32] These policies add an additional layer of protection at the content level to balance youth's rights to be protected from harmful content with their rights to access information.

With the proliferation of information of varying credibility presented in many forms, ranging from fake news to content from social media influencers, how do we secure the truth amid the "information overload"?[33] An analysis by the Guardian Australia indicates that when news was removed from Facebook, Australian feeds were replaced by memes.[34] Similarly, the Canadian news ban on Facebook and Instagram revealed that a social media platform without news proved more toxic than expected, as misleading clickbait became more prevalent on the platforms.[35]

Despite Meta's assertion that news is not a solution to misinformation on its platforms — as the tech giant continued to push back against entering into a new agreement to compensate news companies in Australia in 2024 — news media remains a vital entity in the epistemological hierarchy that offers more authoritative and credible knowledge to democratic societies and is not "substitutable", as Meta claims.[36]

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29 "General Data Protection Regulation," EUR-Lex, May 5, 2016. Link.

30 "Online Safety Act 2021," (Australian Government, 2021), Link.

31 Barbara Ortutay, "What to Know about the Kids Online Safety Act that Just Passed the Senate," AP News, July 31, 2024, Link.

32 "Bill C-63," (Government of Canada, 2024), Link.

33 Asia Pacific Youth Internet Governance Forum, "Meet up with Industry Experts – Securing Truth in the Age of Information Overload," yIGF.Asia, n.d,, Link.

34 Nick Evershed and Josh Taylor, "'News on Facebook is dead': Memes Replace Australian Media Posts as Meta Turns Off the Tap," The Guardian, May 5, 2024, Link.

35 Leyland Cecco and Josh Taylor, "Misleading Clickbait is Prevalent on Facebook and Instagram in Canada after Meta's News Ban. Could it Happen in Australia?," The Guardian, March 5, 2024, Link.

36 Josh Taylor, "Meta Claims News is Not an Antidote to Misinformation on its Platforms," The Guardian, July 9, 2024, Link.

Generative AI is Shaking up the Workforce

While the role of news remains irreplaceable in society, the positions of news reporters are increasingly challenged. Job displacement in newsrooms has been evident from the mass layoffs in the news industry recently; for instance, CNN cut 3 percent of its workforce in 2024 as it strategically pivoted toward a digital subscription model and experimented with AI.[37]

This situation illustrates that AI has indeed started to impact journalists' jobs, however, we must also acknowledge that it is a business decision driven by shifting news consumption patterns and evolving audience habits, rather than AI alone.

AI is coming for writers' jobs because these tools aggregate information in a much more efficient way than humans.[38] However, the precise impact of AI on the future of work is uncertain; there is still substantial value in being a human writer. Tasks such as commentary, exclusive news, and investigations cannot be performed by machines with the current level of sophistication in generative AI.[39] But if a task can easily be replaced by a bunch of words piled up by an LLM that lacks reasoning abilities, the job might be suited for machines by today's standards.

Rather than replacing humans in the workforce entirely, AI will significantly alter the nature of many jobs.[40] While the Large Language Model (LLM) excels at mimicking human "logic", it is important to note that LLMs lack true reasoning abilities.

AI has its limits and will continue to need human input or oversight. Therefore, the misconception that AI tools function without any human assistance needs to be dispelled, and we should focus on re-evaluating which roles in journalism genuinely require human intelligence to thrive in the present digital future.

Embracing the Reality of an AI-powered Digital Future

Generative AI has the potential to be both disruptive and empowering to the media industry. While it introduces new challenges, it offers opportunities for independent journalism grappling with business viability by enabling small-scale news production and may even serve as a lifeline for local newsrooms struggling with resource and capacity constraints.

For example, assistance by International Media Support (IMS) for the implementation of AI newsrooms across MENA, Africa and emerging markets in Asia, such as Indonesia, in 2023 demonstrated AI's potential to enhance sourcing, production and distribution of news. The effort highlighted how AI can

37 Oliver Darcy, "CNN chief Mark Thompson Announces Sweeping Overhaul of News Network, Cuts 100 Jobs," CNN, July 10, 2024, Link.

38 Anna Cooban, "The Owner of Insider and Politico tells Journalists: AI is Coming for Your Jobs," CNN, March 1, 2023, Link.

39 Ibid.

40 "Discussion Insights and Priorities," Canadian Internet Governance Forum, 2023, Link.

improve resource allocation, reduce costs, and streamline workflows — factors that are critical to news sustainability.[41]

The deployment of generative AI in news production and distribution undeniably presents new legal and ethical challenges for news organizations.[42] However, the benefits of productivity and innovation that generative AI brings to newsrooms are equally significant.

This rapidly advancing technology has the potential to diversify the news media ecosystem at scale through innovative formats, such as podcasts, blogs, newsletters, and short videos on social media. These engaging formats appeal to younger audiences and could potentially draw them back to credible journalism rather than drive them towards loosely organized content created by Internet sensations.

Harnessing AI not only helps newsrooms monitor social media or complete tedious back-end tasks more efficiently, but also enables journalists and news organizations to navigate emerging issues in the endemic of misinformation and disinformation more effectively.[43.44]

For instance, a Spanish media group PRISA Media developed an AI tool to detect audio deepfakes.[45] This tool not only reinforces journalists' trust in audio content amidst misinformation but also safeguards the credibility of journalism by adding an extra layer of verification to the news production process.

Similarly, in Peru, a team of journalists, technologists and linguists, supported by the Google News Initiative, created an AI-powered tool to produce fact-checking journalistic content in three indigenous languages. The tool generates content in various formats, including audio which can be broadcast by radio stations across nine regions of the country.[46] These examples demonstrate that embracing technology to enhance publishers' capabilities is likely more advantageous than being overly skeptical of AI tools, which could otherwise risk rendering the news industry obsolete.

As the media landscape evolves with shifting information consumption patterns and the rise of AI, the future of journalism holds both challenges and promise.

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41 "Steps to Viability through Artificial Intelligence Implementation in Independent Public Interest Newsrooms," International Media Support (IMS), December 12, 2023, Link.

42 "Issue Primer: Artificial Intelligence in Journalism," Center for News, Technology & Innovation, October 11, 2024, Link.

43 Charlotte Hu and Amanda Downie, "How is AI being Used in Journalism?," IBM, November 15, 2024, Link.

44 Priyal Shah, "Tracking Disinformation? These AI Tools can Help," International Center for Journalists, July 26, 2023, Link.

45 Olalla Novoa, "How a Spanish Media Group Created an AI Tool to Detect Audio Deepfakes to Help Journalists in a Big Election Year," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, April 8, 2024, Link.

46 "Quispe Chequea: Una Plataforma de Verificación con Inteligencia Artificial en lenguas Originarias," OjoPublico, Decebmer 14, 2023, Link.

Traditional news organizations must innovate and adapt, while policies need to be inclusive, transparent, and responsive to diverse stakeholder needs.

Generative AI is a double-edged sword, making it imperative for AI governance to be integrated across regulatory domains, including consumer protection, data sovereignty, and online safety, to address the complexities of modern media consumption. Balancing all these dynamics will be crucial for preserving the credibility and essential role of news sources in fostering informed and engaged societies while also ensuring the sustainability of independent media.

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FROM OUR MEMBERS

IMS on AI for Public Interest Media

IMS (International Media Support) is assisting independent public interest media around the world with AI implementation. It is doing this by building capacity of media through AI courses and workshops and by providing ongoing support to media on a case-by-case basis to solve problems ethically and responsibly with AI.

IMS also has a strong idea of the funding landscape and it assists where necessary by networking media organizations and non-profits around the world to apply for AI-oriented funding to move their news operations forward.

With research reports for Latin America & Eastern Europe in 2021, and separately for Africa, MENA and Asia (Indonesia) in 2023, IMS has tried to explore the AI potential to strengthen public interest media as well as the challenges faced by local media to harness this potential. The common theme among these reports is that AI uses in newsrooms are gradually emerging but their pace is limited by knowledge gaps, resource constraints, the linguistic and contextual shortcomings of AI tools, and lack of collaboration.

To help local media partners experiment with AI applications for the production of public interest journalism and the business viability of their news organizations, the IMS AI Impact Fund has offered grants of typically up to 8,000 euros. The grants are accompanied with implementation support from the Digital Publishing Lab established by IMS and Danwatch.

The fund has helped La Silla Vacia in Colombia to use Chequeabot for fact-checking political claims for their lie detector section, CITE in Zimbabwe to develop the AI news presenter Alice to deliver news bulletins, and Raseef22 in Lebanon to work on text-to-audio conversion and realistic voice generation to make their Arabic-language articles accessible to a wider audience through podcasts. IMS has also brought on Paul McNally as an AI Advisor to work across the organization globally and offer assistance where necessary.

“We are channeling our support into how to move off the starting line to understand the role and potential of AI in the sourcing, production and distribution of news in local resource-strapped and under-skilled newsrooms,” said Dr. Clare Cook, Head of Journalism and Media Viability at IMS. “We are already seeing impact in terms of resource efficiencies, streamlined processes and cost savings, which are just as much a contributor to business viability as commercial sustainability. This is where we find the richest knowledge to move the dial.”

For more details, please visit the IMS website.

AI, Campaigns, and Election Misinformation in India: A Case Study

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In its 2024 Global Risk Report, the World Economic Forum said that India was at extreme risk for disinformation and misinformation while an April 2020 report by Foreign Policy had stated, "Rumor travels faster than the coronavirus in India".[1,2] India might be no stranger to "fake news" when it comes to politics, but the situation of political disinformation was particularly important because 2024 was the first election in the country after generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) became accessible. Fact-checkers have already warned that AI-generated misinformation and disinformation have blurred boundaries between news and false information more effectively than ever.[3] AI-created voice calls, messages, and images abound, and unverified information can reach even the most critical thinkers through a multitude of platforms, including print, television, and social media. Statista reported that, as of 2024, India had over 378.05 million Facebook users, making it the largest market for the social media platform, followed closely by Indonesia, Brazil, and the USA.[4] Besides, studies have shown that India has technically sophisticated personnel with companies adopting AI and ably leading world class research in the area.[5] The scale of India's social media usage and its related competencies complicates the fight against AI-generated misinformation, especially in the political arena.

In India, the use of AI in politics is nuanced. Narendra Modi, the present prime minister, has used this technology to effectively campaign in different Indian

1 "Global Risks Report 2024," (World Economic Forum, 2024), Link.

2 Bhavya Dore, "Arrests Spike in India for Coronavirus-related Fake News," Foreign Policy, April 17, 2020, Link.

3 Usha M. Rodrigues, "Are Social Media, AI and Misinformation Undermining Indian Democracy?," East Asia Forum, May 17, 2024, Link.

4 "Leading Countries Based on Facebook Audience Size as of April 2024," Statista, n.d., Link.

5 Rajesh Chakrabarti and Kaushiki Sanyal, "Towards a 'Responsible AI': Can India Take the Lead?." (South Asia Economic Journal, 2020, 21(1), 158-177), https://doi.org/10.1177/1391561420908728

states and in local languages using the government-created AI tool Bhashini to translate speeches in real-time.[6,7] However, issues arise when such tools are used to manipulate words, images, and messages. Arrests have been made in connection with doctored videos of Home Minister Amit Shah, and the ruling party has been accused of such manipulations as well.[8] Similarly, in West Bengal, an X user was threatened with arrest after an AI video meme of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was shared from the user's account.[9]

Fact-checking organizations work with various civil society, media and community groups to use imagery and storytelling to fight misinformation. But weakening the fight against AI-generated misinformation are also the local laws that increasingly seek to curb freedoms related to speech rather than address the root causes of fake news. In India, at the moment, AI seems to be negatively impacting the information ecosystem, but various organizations, public-private collaborations, and journalists are coming together to fight the menace. Thus, this is a situation that calls for scholarly explorations of uses of AI and an investigation of effective regulation and the obstacles that prevent its implementation. This is especially pertinent given the rise of AI in Indian newsrooms even though most media executives believe that AI will increase public mistrust in the media.[10]

The main purpose of this study is to examine the different roles of AI during elections in political campaigns and how newsrooms report on AI-generated campaign content and misinformation, using the case of the 2024 elections in India. In the process, this essay also discusses the current regulatory framework for AI in India, analyzes existing cyber laws that extend to AI use, and examines the impact of AI on political communication in India from a digital policy perspective.

AI and Politics

In 2014, when Narendra Modi ran for national elections to become the Prime Minister for the first time, he used holograms to simultaneously connect with India's population in various parts of the country.[11] Modi's bold move was the first time that the Pepper's Ghost technology — an illusion technique used for on-stage projections of off-stage objects — had been used to personalize a

6 Meryl Sebastian, "AI and Deepfakes Blur Reality in India Elections," BBC News, May 16, 2024, Link.

7 Anoop Verma, "Bhashini: AI Tool for Real Time Translations, Transactions via Voice Inputs in Local Languages," ETGovernment.com, April 12, 2024, Link.

8 Meryl Sebastian, "AI and Deepfakes Blur Reality in India Elections," BBC News, May 16, 2024, Link.

9 Outlook Web Desk, "Meme on Mamata Banerjee, Police Warn X Users," Outlook, May 6, 2024, Link.

10 Nic Newman, "Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2024," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, January 9, 2024, Link.

11 Chris Welch, "Indian Politician Morphs into Hologram to Reach Millions of Voters," The Verge, May 8, 2014, Link.

campaign to this extent.[12] Ten years later, the 2024 elections in the country were termed "India's first AI election" and the electorate was bombarded with deep fake AI-generated videos and images that, as the media reported, will effectively blur boundaries between the real and the fake very effectively.[13]

The development of AI image technology and enthusiasm around mastering it — along with political parties allocating a large part of their election budgets to AI developed media products to lend credence to their manifestos and discredit opponents — has led to deepfake videos where even long dead politicians have been resurrected to endorse current candidates.[14] In one video, Modi is shown to arrive at a podium, dancing enthusiastically, while in another the long deceased chief minister of a southern Indian state is shown to be endorsing his son's candidacy for elections.[15]

Using AI chatbots via NaMo, the prime minister's official app, enabled the ruling party to increase its reach about various developmental schemes and the claims of their positive impact. The government-created AI tool, Bhashini, helped Modi's speeches reach different corners of the country in the local language. This personalization of media is believed to encourage greater voter participation by emphasizing political incumbents' engagement with their unique concerns.[16]

Clearly, AI in the Indian political scenario has arrived and is here to stay. But given its association with fake news and misinformation, and as these AI-generated fake images and videos potentially spread online via different social media platforms, experts fear that they will affect elections not just in India but in other parts of the world as well.

Facebook, in India, has been accused of being weaponized to be a superspreader of such content, and reports state that the company approved different AI-generated election advertisements designed to incite violence with language that called for the murder of minorities while the elections were being conducted.[17]

Fact-checking AI-generated Misinformation

This is the reason why fact checking outlets and AI organizations have an important role to play in keeping the political information ecosystem as free

12 Agencies, "Modi's 3D Speeches in Guinness Book of World Records", Millennium Post, March 16, 2013, Link.

13 Mithil Agarwal and Janis Mackey Frayer, "How AI is Changing Elections around the World," NBC News, June 5, 2024, Link.

14 Janis Mackey Frayer, "AI Deepfakes of Politicians in India Pose Threat to Other Elections," NBC News, June 4, 2024, Link.

15 Ibid.

16 Deeplina Banerjee, Suyesha Dutta, Suvolaxmi Dutta Choudhury, "In Indian Election, AI Amplifies Political Reach but Magnifies Disinformation," Asia Pacific foundation of Canada, June 5, 2024, Link.

17 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Revealed: Meta Approved Political Ads in India that Incited Violence," The Guardian, May 20, 2024, Link.

from fake news as possible. India has 17 International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)-certified fact-checking organizations. Fact-checkers say that it is very hard to keep tabs on misinformation, especially when it peaks during sensitive occasions such as the elections, simply because by the time they have released the corrected information, the fake material has been shared many times over. Much of this has to do with India's active social media users. BBC research has conclusively shown that messaging platform WhatsApp (owned by Meta, which also owns Facebook) is an important driver of misinformation in India, where messages shared by friends and family are trusted. There is a belief among some quarters that legal actions against users forwarding misinformation on social media may be a way to deter the spread of misinformation, but there is no denying that technical refinements have made it extremely difficult to detect fakes.

Certain tech organizations and tech professionals have attempted to self-regulate their work on AI development. Three AI start-up founders, including the team behind The Indian Deepfaker, published the Ethical AI Coalition Manifesto ahead of the 2024 elections to promise to uphold the integrity of information in the Indian elections.[18] While deepfake and other AI-generated misinformation have certainly been concerning, general editing techniques and other means of manipulation have also created media content centered on fake information. Videos manipulated to get opposition parties to speak in support of political incumbents is just one example.

Reporting on Misinformation

Reporters Without Borders has ranked India as 159 out of the 180 nations in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, indicating a decline in press freedom in the country. In 2023, the Indian government said that it would create a fact-checking unit that could order social media platforms to take down news that it considered "misleading" about its activities. The Washington Post said this was a "dangerous step on disinformation". This unit was put on hold by the Indian Supreme Court in 2024.

Moreover, journalists tracking religious-based fake news are often attacked. Independent investigative journalist Rana Ayyub, who reports critically on the government, was targeted viciously with fake videos morphed with her face. In response to the threats to reliable news from online disinformation, news organizations, such as India Today, have set up their own fact-checking teams, for example the India Today Fact Check, that work to debunk misinformation. This practice is also followed by the Associated Press, The Times of India (Fact Check) and the Press Trust of India, among others.

For the 2024 election, SHAKTI, a consortium of news publishers and fact checkers in India, was created to help the detection of online misinformation and deepfakes. Considered the largest collaboration in India between publishers and fact-checkers to combat misinformation, this effort was supported by the Google News Initiative to create an archive that news publishers could consult to debunk fake news.

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18 Senthil Nayagam, Varshui CW, Divyendra Sindh Jadoun, "Ethical AI Coalition Manifesto," Ethical AI Coalition, n.d., Link.

Laws around AI

In 2015, the Planning Commission of India, designed to report directly to the prime minister and formulate five-year developmental plans and strategies for the social and economic uplift of the country, was replaced by NITI Aayog by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In 2018, NITI Aayog, in a discussion paper titled National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence: #AIforAll, stated that India's technical strengths would be leveraged to lead AI development with the government playing a central role, supported by private industries.[19,20] In a 2020 study, researchers had emphasized that while India had certainly taken many positive steps to developing and creating a positive response to AI technologies in different areas such as business and education, it substantially lagged behind the U.S. and China when it came to regulation.[21] Little has changed since then.

As of July 2024, there is no specific law that regulates AI in the country. The government may have established certain guidelines to safeguard the responsible development of AI technologies, but there are no explicit laws that regulate the production and dissemination of AI-generated deepfake videos and images. While Section 500 of the Indian Penal Code 1860 regulates defamation and the Information Technology Act 2000 has sections 67 and 67A that punish the publication of sexually explicit material electronically, these acts are not armed to fight deepfake material and crack down on its creators. Specifically with regard to the elections, the Election Commission might have advised political parties against deepfakes, but it had no rules with teeth to govern the generation and impact of AI content, and thus, researchers believe that this enhanced its exploitation. The Delhi High Court was petitioned to ask the Commission to formulate rules around the responsible use of AI in elections.[22] A court intervention would have been particularly pertinent given that people from the opposition parties have been arrested because of concerns raised by the Prime Minister's office regarding videos related to the current home minister.[23] However, the court appears to have turned down the petition citing the ongoing election cycle.[24]

AI and its regulation often have political undertones. In March 2024, technical firms were mandated to get permission from the Information Technology (IT) ministry before they could put their AI related technologies and products online. This was implemented when 'Gemini,' Google's AI-powered chatbot responded

19 Duncan McDuie-Ra and Kalervo Gulson, "The Backroads of AI: The Uneven Geographies of Artificial Intelligence and Development," (Area, 2020 52(3), 626-633), doi.org/10.1111/area.12602.

20 "National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence #AIForAll," p. 48, (NITI Aayog, 2018), Link.

21 Rajesh Chakrabarti and Kaushiki Sanyal, "Towards a 'Responsible AI': Can India Take the Lead?." (South Asia Economic Journal, 2020, 21(1), 158-177), doi.org/10.1177/1391561420908728..

22 Tanika Godbole, "India: AI-driven Political Messaging Raises Ethical Dilemma," DW, May 24, 2024, Link.

23 Ibid.

24 Nupur Thapliyal, "'Can't Pass a Direction in Middle of Elections, ECI will Take Action': Delhi High Court Closes PIL to Curb Circulation of Deepfake Videos," Live Law, May 2, 2024, Link.

to the question, "Is Modi a fascist?" with the answer that his government has been "accused of implementing policies some experts have characterized as fascist".[25] The directive was removed when concerns were raised that this decision could lead to negative impact on AI development in the country. The move has been described as "political posturing" and "regulatory overreach" but, as activists say, it does provide insights into how AI policy in the country might develop after the elections.[26]

Thus, to detect and stay safe from such fakes are now the responsibility of audiences. In some cases, creators and technology companies have gone on record to say that they would not accept proposals to create unethical content and will ensure to mark their work in ways that make it obvious that it has been AI generated. Initiatives such as the Google supported Factshala, a media literacy network led by journalists and other experts who conduct media literacy workshops in different Indian languages, try to systematically stem the distribution of misinformation through public education. They are working toward creating programs for first-time voters and college students as well; however, Digital Media Literacy is yet to be made part of K-12 curriculum or college education in India.[27]

Though the SHAKTI collective has reported that the volume of deepfake related disinformation in the elections was less than expected and all the parties involved were targeted, its effects on voter behavior are yet to be comprehensively understood.[28] While researchers who have studied the impact and prevalence of misinformation on digital platforms for years in India say that even though such AI-generated misinformation may not have had a measurable impact during the 2024 election cycle, it is the popularity of such misinformation that may prove to be negatively persuasive over time.[29] Thus, collaborations among technology companies, tech personnel, civil society, independent media and government organizations to build technologies that help detect AI-created misinformation over different platforms and to invest in public education may go the distance in ensuring an information ecosystem where fake information can be detected swiftly and effectively.[30]

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25 Yashraj Sharma, "India's Modi Government Rushes to Regulate AI Ahead of National Elections," Al Jazeera, March 13, 2024, Link.

26 Ibid.

27 Google India Team, "Fighting Misinformation in India Through our Products, Programs and Partnerships," Google Blog, March 31, 2024, Link.

28 Syed Nazakat, "Lessons Learned from the Fact-Checking Collective That Covered India's National Elections," Global Investigative Journalism Network, June 12, 2024, Link.

29 Kiran Garimella and Simon Chauchard, "How Prevalent is AI Misinformation? What our Studies in India Show So Far," Nature, June 5, 2024, Link.

30 Andrea M. Guess, Michael Lerner, Benjamin Lyons and Neelanjan Sircar, "A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment between Mainstream and False News in the United States and India," (PNAS, 2020, 117(27), 15536-15545), doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1920498117,

FROM OUR MEMBERS

GFMD on AI and Journalism at the World Press Freedom Day 2025

The 2025 World Press Freedom Day was commemorated by UNESCO in Brussels from 5 to 7 May 2025 under the theme of "Reporting in the Brave New World: The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Press and the Media".

The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) took an active role at the event by contributing to high-level panels on the future of independent journalism amid AI disruption and a global media viability crisis.

Speaking at a panel discussion on finding joint solutions to the global funding crisis for independent media, GFMD Chairperson Zoe Titus said,

> "Media viability is not just a development issue. It's a strategic issue and fundamental imperative for any country that is concerned with its national security and democracy."

During a discussion on information as a public good in the age of AI, GFMD Executive Director Mira Milosevic said,

> "Our members, especially those small community-based investigative journalism networks, are facing this multifaceted, increasing, and accelerated crisis — not only in funding, viability, and relevance but now, with AI, survival. And this is not just another challenge; this is a completely new dimension."

She added that AI advancements must work for the people and the planet — and not only for profit.

Read more about the sessions here.

Cloud and Data Processing Services for Newsrooms

Mira Milosevic
Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)

Summary

In an era where information flows at an unprecedented rate, the dynamics of data and investigative journalism are rapidly evolving. As a result, public-interest journalism is facing an unprecedented series of challenges in the digital age. Rapid growth of advanced digital technologies, particularly cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI), has revolutionized the way information is processed, stored, and analyzed.

These innovations have created new possibilities for investigative journalism, allowing reporters to handle vast datasets and uncover intricate details that would have been impossible to analyze manually. However, these same technologies also impose substantial financial burdens and operational difficulties, particularly for organizations committed to accountability and public-interest reporting.

This article explores the new challenges confronting public-interest journalism, focusing on the financial, technical, and ethical issues that have emerged with the rise of cloud computing and AI.

The Growing Role of Cloud Computing in Journalism

Cloud computing has become integral to the operations of modern journalism, particularly for organizations engaged in investigative and data-driven reporting. The ability to store and process large volumes of data remotely, without the need for extensive on-site infrastructure, has enabled newsrooms to undertake ambitious projects that require substantial computational power. However, the cost of cloud services has escalated significantly over the past years, posing a formidable challenge to the sustainability of public-interest journalism.

Collaborative, cross-border, investigative journalism often involves multiple journalists working with terabytes of raw data to expose wrongdoing and hold those in power accountable. The case of Distributed Denial of Secrets (DDoSecrets), a U.S.-based document-leaking collective and journalism non-profit, exemplifies the financial pressures faced by organizations that rely on cloud computing. When DDoSecrets received six terabytes of leaked emails from Mexico's Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA), the estimated cost

of processing this data was around US$200,000. This figure underscores the financial constraints that many investigative journalism organizations encounter as they grapple with the need to process increasingly large and complex datasets.

Lorax Horne, one of the editors of DDoSecrets, emphasized the crucial role of cloud computing in public-interest reporting. "Lacking cloud computing power slows us down, and this slows down meaningful journalism," Horne said. The ability to rapidly process and analyze data is essential for timely reporting, particularly in the context of breaking news or urgent investigations. However, as the volume of data continues to grow, the associated costs of cloud services are becoming increasingly prohibitive.

The Case of DDoSecrets: A Struggle for Resources

The challenges faced by DDoSecrets illustrate broader difficulties encountered by journalism organizations that rely on cloud computing. As Horne noted, DDoSecrets often hosts and indexes high-value datasets that might be illegal to possess in their countries of origin. This creates significant challenges in terms of jurisdictional compliance, data storage, and security. For example, DDoSecrets' entire domain is banned in Russia.

Another recent example was seven terabytes of emails originating from the Salvadoran National Police. As of two years ago, El Salvador is under martial law and there is very little due process for anyone accused of illicit associations, while arbitrary arrests and intimidation of journalists is on the rise.

"Media workers have expressed to us that they need help from DDoSecrets in order to be able to do research with this police dataset, as they would not be able to host these types of documents, on their own premises," Horne explained. "But we have struggled to index this dataset due to costs."

The processing of leaks to make them more accessible, such as through optical character recognition (OCR) and auto-translation, is also expensive. Horne recounted an early project involving a leaked copy of the Bahamas corporate registry, which had metadata in the form of stamps on the pages. The difficulty in capturing these rubber stamp impressions with OCR delayed the project and impacted the research that journalists from the European Investigative Collaboration (EIC) network were able to conduct with the dataset.

"Our challenge as journalists is to be prepared for the changes, so that we can continue to help to interpret the world to our audiences," Lorax stressed, adding:

> "We are failing our mission if we cannot physically or financially handle the format that information takes these days. We at DDoSecrets would love to do more analysis and releasing of data that has been redacted, like eliminating all the emails in the Mexican military dataset that are bloat (say, colleagues just emailing a song to each other). But with the current volume of submissions, we are often reduced to simply collecting and archiving the available data, hoping that in time others can help us to determine the long-term value of a new dataset."

The challenges extend beyond storing and processing data. The organization has been seeing delays in acquiring new cloud space in recent years. Small providers, which the organization prefers for their privacy-conscious practices, are facing supply chain issues with availability of hardware and new parts.

The Financial Burden of Digital Infrastructure

The financial burden of digital infrastructure and cloud computing costs is a challenge faced by many similar organizations. Paul Radu, founder of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), highlighted the broader financial challenges faced by investigative journalism organizations.

> "We currently pay a lot for cloud computing to power our database Aleph because we work with so much data. There are also some investigations we simply can't take on because we don't have the digital infrastructure we need," Radu explained.

Local journalism, too, increasingly relies on data analytics, further escalating the costs associated with server processing and storage.

To better understand the financial implications of these challenges and the tools and processes used by independent journalism organizations, the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and OCCRP developed a survey that was conducted among a diverse range of investigative journalism organizations and data journalism newsrooms. The survey, which received 18 responses in January and February 2024, aimed to gather comprehensive data on how these organizations utilize and manage various tools, process different types of data, and employ cloud services.[1]

The survey methodology involved a structured questionnaire that collected information on organizational structure, including the number of full-time journalists, current spending on data storage, and resource allocation for processing technology. The survey also explored the computational tools used by these organizations, the types of data processed, and the challenges faced in managing large volumes of data. Respondents were asked about their current and projected financial expenditures on data storage and processing systems, their use of computational and cloud infrastructure, and their satisfaction levels with these services.

Newsrooms See Growing Costs for Data Storage and Processing

The survey revealed a diverse landscape in terms of organizational size and spending. A significant proportion of newsrooms operate with fewer than 10 full-time journalists, while others have larger teams of up to 100 journalists. In addition to spending on cloud services, many organizations allocate substantial

1 The following organizations responded to the survey: AFVMC, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), Daraj Media, DataLEADS, DDoSecrets, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), iStories, Maldita, Mizzima Media, NGO LARP Ukraine, OGN (energy magazine), OCCRP, Ostro.si, Pulitzer Center, The Examination, The Policy Front, and Wired.

resources to staff salaries for managing data storage and processing technology. The survey found that organizations with higher spending on data storage and processing also tend to have higher staff salary costs, suggesting a correlation between increased spending on digital infrastructure and higher operational costs.

Budgets for data storage and processing vary significantly among organizations. While some spend less than US$5,000 monthly, others allocate between US$10,000 and US$20,000 per month. These figures indicate a significant financial commitment to digital infrastructure, with many organizations expecting to increase their spending on data storage and processing in the coming years.

The survey suggests a significant shift towards greater cloud data storage and processing, with 94 percent expecting increased use of audio, video, and large imagery processing in the future. Budget projections also reflect this trend, with the majority anticipating significantly higher spending on these technologies. On average, a 100 percent increase in spending is expected over the next two-to-three years.

These numbers reflect the growing importance of data processing and storage in journalism, as well as the escalating costs associated with these technologies. This indicates that even the smallest data and investigative newsrooms foresee annual costs exceeding hundreds of thousands of dollars for storage and processing services.

The survey also shed light on the digital toolkits used by journalism organizations. These toolkits include a mix of self-built and open-source tools, as well as business, analytics, and infrastructure software. The diversity of tools used reflects the wide range of data types handled in data journalism, from visual metrics to OCR-extracted text and email archives. However, financial constraints remain a critical barrier for many organizations, impacting their ability to manage growing data volumes effectively.

Financial and Security Challenges in Newsroom Data Management

The survey respondents identified several key challenges related to data management in journalism, as shown in Figure 1 (see Page 42).

Financial constraints emerged as the most significant challenge, followed by inadequate infrastructure and the need for technical expertise. With an average score of 3.5 out of 4, participants identified a lack of financial resources as a critical barrier, impacting their capacity to manage growing data volumes effectively. The current computational and cloud infrastructure used by the newsrooms appears inadequate for their aspirations and needs. According to the survey results, 53 percent of respondents indicated that their current computational and cloud infrastructure does not empower them to pursue the journalism work or investigations they envision for the next two-to-three years. This is particularly important in the face of growing data volumes and the increasing complexity of data processing.

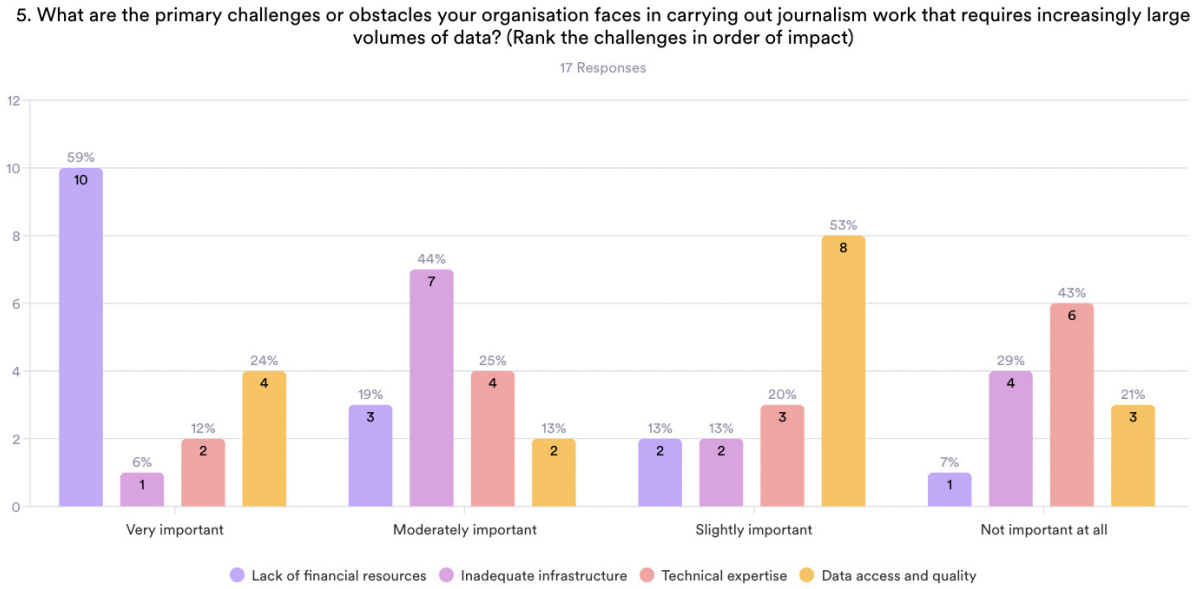

Figure 1: Primary challenges for journalism work with large volumes of data

Security concerns also play a critical role in the decision-making process when selecting computational and cloud services, with 59 percent respondents underscoring security as 'very important' when they are choosing computational and cloud services for use.

All but one respondent confirmed that they share concerns about the security of confidential and sensitive data when it is stored with cloud providers that are also developing their in-house AI foundation models. This highlights the need for secure and reliable cloud services that can protect sensitive information while meeting the demands of data-intensive journalism.

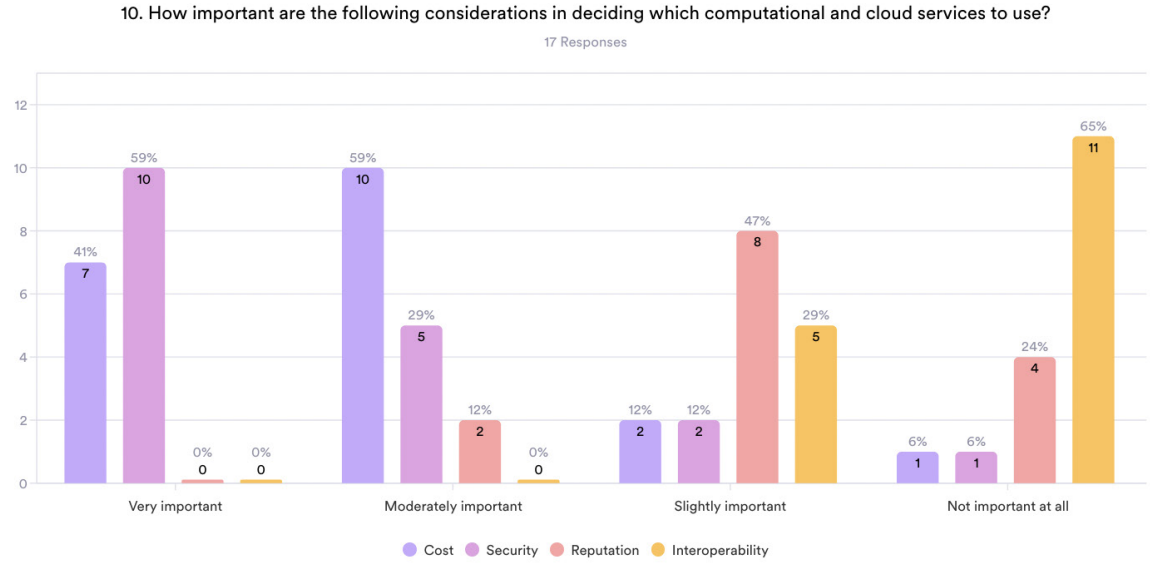

Figure 2: Important considerations for computational and cloud service decisions

It is worth noting that nearly 77 percent of the respondents reported not having ever switched cloud providers. Given the complex nature of the cloud, myriad interoperability requirements, and technical variations between the solutions

offered by different providers, there are likely to exist inherent barriers to switching or using multiple providers.

In addition to these challenges, the survey respondents emphasized the importance of capacity building and technological adaptation in preparing for the future. As the volume of data continues to grow, newsrooms will need more financial resources, robust protection, efficient decentralized processing solutions, and scalable infrastructure to manage these challenges effectively.

The Dynamics of the Cloud Infrastructure Market

The financial challenges reported by the survey participants are compounded by the fact that the cloud services market is dominated by a few large providers, including Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google Cloud Platform (GCP), and Microsoft Azure, which control both the infrastructure and software levels of cloud computing.

The concentration of market power among hyperscalers creates additional challenges for journalism organizations such as 1) acquiring discounts only for minimum spend contracts; 2) high costs for switching or working with multiple cloud providers; 3) tying and bundling. The business practices of these providers, including service bundling and high egress fees, restrict customer flexibility and perpetuate vendor lock-in.

According to a recent report by Wasabi, cloud storage costs can vary widely, and hidden fees, such as egress charges and application programming interface (API) request costs, significantly inflate overall expenses. For media organizations, these costs are substantial.

With very similar results to the GFMD and OCCRP survey, Wasabi's 2024 Cloud Storage Index survey respondents indicated that they allocate around 14 percent of their information technology (IT) budgets to public cloud storage services, on average. Overdrawn budgets due to hidden fees, alongside cybersecurity and data loss concerns, remain problematic for media and entertainment (M&E) organizations.

In total, 49 percent of the M&E organizations' public cloud storage bill was composed of fees in 2022, with the other half going to actual storage capacity used. When respondents were asked to rank various storage fees and their impact on cloud storage budgets, egress came in last, below API call fees, data operations fees, data retrieval fees, and data deletion fees. There is significant lack of understanding of many of these fee structures and it is difficult for many organizations to create an accurate, high-level picture of cloud service billing. Complex fee structures and cybersecurity concerns will remain major obstacles for many media organizations.

Similarly, according to a recent report on the cloud services market by the U.K. Office of Communications (OFCOM), U.K. broadcasters are heavy users of public cloud services across the cloud stack, which they use across both their internal operational systems and broadcasting-specific functions, including content production and content distribution.

A notable trend within this landscape is the vertical integration of Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) with other models such as Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) by the largest AI providers. Major players such as Microsoft, Meta, Google, OpenAI, and Amazon are increasingly investing in AI cloud infrastructure, bundling AI models with their hardware and cloud services. This convergence creates advantages for companies capable of offering a full stack, setting high barriers to new entrants who lack the substantial capital, patents, and technical expertise of the major cloud incumbents.

In essence, the vertical integration of cloud infrastructure with other services is creating market externalities that are further compounding the already existing dynamics of the Big Tech sector. For journalism and media organizations, this trend presents a critical business consideration. The integration of AI offerings with existing products further strengthens these companies, as seen in Google's bundling of its Gemini Ultra AI tool with other services and OpenAI's partnership with Microsoft, which extends into multiple platforms that benefit from Microsoft's cloud infrastructure for training advanced models. This is putting into stark relief the need for careful decision-making when purchasing services or developing alternatives to most known SaaS, PaaS, and IaaS solutions.

The Role of AI and Machine Learning in Journalism

AI and machine learning (ML) technologies have undoubtedly opened new frontiers for journalism, particularly for data and investigative journalism organizations. AI's ability to process vast amounts of data, identify patterns, and generate data analysis has transformed the way journalists approach their work. Nearly half of the GFMD and OCCRP survey respondents indicated plans to engage with AI within the next two-to-three years, for instance, highlighting the growing relevance of these technologies in the field.

A portion of respondents showed interest in using existing services as tools, especially for applications such as fact-checking. One respondent emphasized the widespread use of AI and ML technologies for document processing, expressing a commitment to expanding its use to meet emerging challenges. Another respondent underscored the intention to employ an existing LLM to assist journalists, presenters, broadcasters, and graphic designers.

Some respondents have shown interest in exploring the algorithms utilized by public bodies, while others are planning to develop tools using existing APIs to assist journalists. A few have already created tools in local languages and are now focusing on identifying effective tools that do not compromise security or privacy.

Yet, the proprietary nature of AI models and the dominance of a few large companies in the AI market poses serious challenges to affordability, data security, governance, accessibility, environmental sustainability, and ethical considerations.

Navigating these challenges to take full advantage of AI while maintaining the integrity and independence of their reporting is becoming a crucial business consideration for journalism and media organizations in particular. Furthermore, the concentration of AI expertise and resources among a few large companies

raises concerns about the potential for bias and lack of transparency in AI-driven journalism.

Conclusion: Collaboration and the Future of Journalism

Public-interest journalism is at a critical juncture, facing new challenges in the digital age that threaten its survival. The rise of cloud computing and AI has transformed the field, offering new tools and capabilities but also imposing substantial financial and operational burdens. As journalism organizations navigate these challenges, collaboration and strategic decision-making will be essential to ensuring that public-interest reporting can continue to thrive in the digital age.

The evolving digital landscape requires journalism organizations to balance the benefits of advanced technologies with the financial realities of maintaining such infrastructure. The emerging data and sector trends underscore the need for careful resource management and highlights the importance of securing favorable deals with cloud providers to mitigate costs, especially multilayered fees. Collaboration among journalism organizations and a strategic approach to digital infrastructure spending will be critical to sustaining public-interest journalism in the years to come.

Revisiting the GFMD and OCCRP survey, collaboration among journalism organizations is both critical and expected to yield significant advantages to address the challenges faced, including discounts from leading cloud providers, training for capacity building, the sharing of resources, and collective bargaining. The respondents also emphasized the need for support in learning and expert advice, particularly in the areas of technical and financial management.

Given the strong consensus among journalism organizations on the need for collaboration, GFMD and OCCRP launched the Journalism Cloud Alliance (JCA) in April 2024 to address the critical challenges faced by investigative journalism and data newsrooms arising from the significant expenses and constraints associated with cloud computing. With these challenges in mind, it aims to collaborate on finding ways to make data storage and processing capacity more accessible, secure, affordable, and sustainable for investigative and data newsrooms in order to facilitate the next big leap in investigative, enterprise, and accountability journalism to better serve the public. In 2025, it took the first step to accomplishing that goal: publishing the results of its in-depth technology and cloud services audit amongst JCA members and partners, the results of which offer a roadmap for its future strategy and ongoing development.

As journalism continues to evolve in response to these challenges, it is crucial that organizations remain committed to their mission of holding those in power accountable and providing the public with accurate and timely information. The future of public-interest journalism will depend on the ability of organizations to adapt to the changing digital landscape while maintaining the integrity and independence that are the hallmarks of the profession.

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FROM OUR MEMBERS

RNW Media's Haarlem Declaration on the Ethical Use of AI in Digital Media

RNW Media is a Netherlands-based international media development organization with a legacy of over 75 years and operations in more than 40 countries. RNTC, the internationally renowned training center of RNW Media, provides journalism and media training to journalists, media makers, and communication professionals. Through the Vine, RNW Media's global community, with more than 25 independent and public interest digital media, 80 media trainers, and 10,000 RNTC alumni, RNW Media facilitates media coalition, partnership and movement building.

Haarlem Declaration

Named after the city of Haarlem in the Netherlands, known for its digital innovation and home to RNW Media, the declaration is a direct outcome of the Digital Media Impact Summit 2024. Co-created through consultations with 88 public interest media, civil society groups, and media experts from 34 countries, it outlines a collective commitment to ethical AI in digital media.

The signatories of the Haarlem Declaration pledge to deploy and utilize AI responsibly in digital media in accordance with six ethical values and principles, including promoting ethical data practices and safeguarding information integrity and content authenticity. The declaration goes beyond theoretical commitments — it also sets out six tangible actions for signatories to implement, such as co-creating and implementing an Ethical AI Checklist and producing evidence-based research on both the benefits and risks of AI in media.

Sixteen media outlets, civil society organizations and academic organizations have endorsed the declaration, including Benbere (Mali), Manasati30 (Yemen), Community Media Network (Jordan), Radio Ergo (Kenya) and many others. Read the declaration here and the summary report of the Digital Media Impact Summit here.

Innovation Fun-d

To help local public interest media and civil society organizations to utilize digital media and AI for social good, RNW Media has provided nearly 3 million euros annually from 2022 through existing programs and projects. Recipients include Raseef22 which was supported to experiment with AI for content creation, audience engagement and fact-checking, and the Palestinian Counselling Center for using AI to convert text articles to audio products for young people with disabilities.

Through Innovation Fun-d, RNW Media provided grants of typically up to 20,000 euros. In 2024, the fund helped elToque Cuba to pilot an AI-powered YouTube video fact-checking tool and Media, Health and Rights Initiative of Nigeria (MHR) to develop a chatbot to engage with their audience safely on sensitive topics.

FROM OUR MEMBERS

CNTI Reports on AI and Journalism

CENTER for NEWS, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION.

The Center for News, Technology & Innovation (CNTI), an independent global research center, launched two new reports in 2025 based on surveys with the public and journalists to explore the effects of AI on journalism and news consumption.

What the Public Wants from Journalism in the Age of AI: A Four Country Survey

CNTI surveyed 4,037 people from Australia, Brazil, South Africa and the United States to understand their perspectives on a variety of questions about news sources, including the public attitude about the journalistic use of technologies such as AI.

The study found that people are "generally comfortable with journalists using technology for professional purposes" while there were differences in public perception across countries on the use of AI by journalists for image editing tasks. Read the report here.

What it Means to Do Journalism in the Age of AI: Journalist Views on Safety, Technology and Government

To determine the perceptions on AI use among the journalist community, CNTI surveyed 430 journalists from more than 60 countries. Based on the responses, the report provides a focus on four areas: Definition of news and journalism; relationships between news organizations and the government; technology and AI; and security and safety.

The study found that "journalists believe technology is improving their work, but they are hesitant about AI". Generally, around 70 percent of the respondents thought technology developments will have a positive effect on their ability to deliver journalism to the public. But the share of respondents who felt the same about AI was less: Only around 36 percent said AI will have a positive effect on enabling an informed public while around 38 percent were neutral.

Journalists in the Global South were more likely to think positively about the impacts of technology, social media and AI on journalism. Regardless, around one in every three respondents said "their organization is using AI on their own content".

Read the report here.

FROM OUR MEMBERS

WAN-IFRA Projects on AI for News Media

World Association of News Publishers

The World Association of News Publishers, or WAN-IFRA, is the largest international press organization in the world. It represents 3,000 news publishing companies and 40 publisher associations in 120 countries. WAN-IFRA has launched several projects to support news organizations to understand and use AI.

The Newsroom AI Catalyst and Prototype Development Fund

The Newsroom AI Catalyst is an accelerator program that combines hands-on experience, knowledge and tools to equip news organizations for scaling up AI operations in their newsrooms. It is open to 152 newsrooms across Europe, Asia Pacific, Latin America, and Australia & New Zealand. It is offered in partnership with OpenAI.

WAN-IFRA and Open AI have also launched a fund for accelerator participants. The fund offers $1.5 million in API credits to encourage AI use. Read more about the program and fund here.

AI in News Media Initiative

The initiative offers expert-led forums, specialized training opportunities and a dedicated community for WAN-IFRA members to learn about AI integration for newsroom productivity, business efficiency and revenue generation. More details about the initiative here.

AI Unlocked

WAN-IFRA teamed up with London-based media lab FATHM to guide its members about getting started with AI through virtual sessions, workshops, community discussions and knowledge sharing. Find out more about AI Unlocked here.

AI in Action report

In this 2024 report, the association compiled 10 global use cases of news publishers working with AI. Examples include tools and applications built by news organizations such as La Nacion, The Daily Maverick and Die Zeit. Read the report here.

Other Resources on AI and Journalism

- Guides, case studies, and training courses by JournalismAI.
  https://www.journalismai.info/resources

- AI and Responsible Journalism Toolkit by Desirable AI, a collaborative research program between the universities of Cambridge and Bonn.
  https://www.desirableai.com/journalism-toolkit

- Talking about AI: Newsroom Toolkit by Poynter Institute and MediaWise in partnership with AP and supported by Microsoft.
  https://www.poynter.org/mediawise/programs/talking-about-ai-newsroom-toolkit/

- Journalism in the AI era: Opportunities and challenges in the Global South and emerging economies by Damian Radcliffe for the Thomson Reuters Foundation.
  https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/TRF-Insights-Journalism-in-the-AI-Era.pdf

- The AI Accountability Network by Pulitzer Center.
  https://pulitzercenter.org/journalism/initiatives/ai-accountability-network

- Organizational AI for Journalism: A three-tier approach by DW Akademie.
  https://akademie.dw.com/en/organizational-ai-for-journalism-dealing-with-the-dilemma/a-71066279

- August 2023 Global Principles on Artificial Intelligence by 26 organizations.
  https://cdn.wan-ifra.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/06095924/20230905-Global-AI-Principles-Formatted.pdf

- Generative AI & Journalism: Content, Journalistic Perspectives and Audience Experiences by T. J. Thomson, Ryan J. Thomas, Michelle Riedlinger and Phoebe Matich for RMIT University.
  https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2025-02/apo-nid329601.pdf

- Generative AI in Journalism: The Evolution of Newswork and Ethics in a Generative Information Ecosystem by Nicholas Diakopoulos, Hannes Cools, Charlotte Li, Natali Helberger, Ernest Kung, Aimee Rinehart and Lisa Gibbs for the Associated Press.
  https://bit.ly/3HCamVf

- Introduction to AI for Journalists by the Google News Initiative.
  https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/resources/trainings/introduction-to-ai-for-journalists/

About the Dynamic Coalition

Established in April 2019, the Dynamic Coalition on the Sustainability of Journalism and News Media (DC-Journalism) is a multi-stakeholder initiative formally operating within the United Nations Internet Governance Forum. The coalition is meant to be a hub for the journalism, news media, press freedom, journalism support, and media development communities to engage with important Internet governance and digital policy matters.

DC-Journalism aims to address key policy challenges that impact the sustainability of journalism and news media in the digital age, including advertising dynamics, data governance policies, content monetization, regulation, anti-trust action, algorithmic accountability and emerging issues such as disinformation and AI. By bringing together stakeholders who have traditionally been absent from digital policy discussions, it strives to amplify the voices on independent journalism and press freedom for shaping digital policy and informing regulation. Indeed, such policies have significant impact on news media sustainability (including individual media outlets, journalistic networks, and media markets), but also impact a range of topics related to the broader IGF ecosystem, such as freedom of expression, access to information, digital inclusion, and algorithmic transparency.

To achieve its goals, the DC conducts the following activities in accordance with its 2019 charter:

Inform: It regularly creates opportunities to address the Internet governance community to explain the challenges to journalism and news media sustainability, and how these are directly impacting the spread of disinformation, threats to freedom of expression, and other relevant digital policy areas.

Disseminate: The DC acts as a central hub to share information, connect with new and existing stakeholders, and coordinate both within and beyond the IGF ecosystem.

Publish: It creates and promotes an annual report that highlights our work over the past 12 months.

Advocate: It ensures that the voices of the journalism and news media community are included in digital policy discussions and processes.

We invite interested stakeholders from across the IGF community to join our efforts.

Join the dynamic coalition by visiting our mailing list directory.

Sign up to our mailing list by writing to dc-journalism+subscribe@groups.io

For more information about the DC-Journalism annual reports, please visit our official webpage on the IGF website.

IGF Internet Governance Forum

DYNAMIC COALITION | Sustainability of Journalism and News Media

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT:

GFMD GLOBAL FORUM FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT