

The Erosion Of Editorial Autonomy In The Age Of Artificial Intelligence

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AI is quickly reshaping newsrooms globally. Today, AI is used in journalism, from crafting articles to headlines, translating content, to analysing audience behaviour. These technologies have a lot of efficiencies, but they also pose an interesting, albeit important, question: What does it mean when algorithms are beginning to make editorial decisions instead of experienced editors?

Editorial independence has always been considered a cornerstone and a principle that has been upheld for decades. The role of the editor is very important in the public service because he/she is responsible for the selection, verification, contextualisation and presentation of information that serves the public interest. They take their decisions not just on the grounds of professional ethics but also on

the legal and constitutional principles that uphold the public's right to information and freedom of expression.

But now a more subdued change is taking place. AI is starting to impact editorial decisions, which were once solely made by human editors. Recommendation engines, automated content generation systems, predictive analytics, and engagement-based ranking tools no longer just affect what stories get prioritised, the way they are presented, and who ends up seeing them.

This change gives rise to significant constitutional and democratic questions. AI systems work on complex computational models which can be opaque, unlike human editors. Many high-quality AI tools are "black boxes" that are hard for many users to understand, especially as they relate to editorial suggestions, promotion, or even the prioritization of specific stories over others. The more it becomes unclear how decisions are made in editorial, the harder it is to keep track of accountability.

The second problem is related to the algorithms used to decide on the news value. There are numerous AI powered systems that fine-tune content according to the engagement rates, which can range from clicks to watch time or shares. These indicators can help to increase the audience reach but do not necessarily mean the audience is important. More civic-related stories might get less attention than more attention-worthy, but less significant, stories, which can reduce public exposure to a variety of perspectives.

Editorial independence is equally dependent on the freedom to question, investigate and verify information before publication, and the freedom to correct information when necessary. Individuals who edit and edit content can be challenged, held accountable, and expected to justify their decisions. However, AI-generated content can often contain biases embedded in the training data or generate incorrect information without offering a clear explanation of the reasoning behind their conclusions. This brings fresh challenges for establishing and maintaining editorial integrity and public confidence.

The repercussions are not limited to journalism itself. People need to have access to accurate, credible, and varied information that is key to informing public discourse. It will be harder and harder to tell the difference between accurate reporting and fabricated or manipulated content, as the AI content continues to

improve. The spread of misinformation can shape public opinion more quickly than corrections can do so.

AI-powered content creation also brings in another set of challenges for newsrooms due to its speed. The need to publish information rapidly might limit opportunities for verification, editorial review, and context analysis. Technology can be a great asset to efficiency, but journalism still requires careful fact checking, ethical judgment and editorial responsibility, which are all human traits. AI technology should instead be considered as a crucial tool of editing and not a substitute for editorial decision-making. Journalists can use technology to automate repetitive work, to do better research, to report in multiple languages, and to analyse data. Final decision making on selection, verification, placing and publishing news, however, should be with accountable human news editors.

With AI's ongoing transformation of the media landscape, safeguarding editorial integrity is more crucial than ever. Transparency in algorithmic systems, human oversight and accountability during the editorial process will be key elements in maintaining public trust in journalism.

Technology is not enough to define the future of journalism, it is how it is used that will make the difference. The ultimate independence of a free and independent press depends upon an independent editorial judgment that is transparent, accountable and public-interest based. The use of AI will clearly have a place in today's newsrooms, but it has the potential to reinforce, rather than supplant, the human values that make for responsible reporting.

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