



AI & Journalism

How do we enable the benefits and manage the harms of artificial intelligence in journalism?

CNTI's Assessment

The impact of AI is massive and widespread, and the landscape is changing rapidly. AI is already impacting news reporting, circulation and consumption. For newsrooms, the use of generative AI tools offers benefits for productivity and innovation. At the same time, it risks inaccuracies, ethical issues and undermining public trust. Taking advantage of the benefits while limiting the harms will require a careful balancing act.

Policy deliberation: Legislation will need to offer clear and consistent definitions of AI categories, grapple with the repercussions of AI-generated content for copyright and civil liberties and offer accountability for violations. The Artificial Intelligence and Data Act's failure to pass in Canada also suggests that deliberations will need to include avenues for meaningful public participation.

Public understanding: As newsrooms implement AI, they need to remember that while communicating about how they are using AI is important, transparency alone is not enough. The public largely lacks a nuanced understanding of journalistic practices, and they need that context to make sense of AI. That means transparency initiatives must include information about human journalists' work.

Governance: Without policy guidance, technology companies' own decisions will continue to dictate how AI is developed, implemented and used. Further downstream, publishers will be responsible for establishing transparent, ethical guidelines for and education about AI use. Forward-thinking collaboration among policymakers, publishers, technology developers and other stakeholders is critical to support public access to information.

What Makes It Complex

- I.** A lack of agreement about **what constitutes AI** makes scoping policy a challenge.
- II.** In considering legislation, it is unclear how to determine which AI news practices would fall within legal parameters and **how news practices differ** from other AI uses.
- III.** The quantity and type of data collected by generative AI programs introduce **new privacy and copyright concerns**.
- IV.** Establishing transparency and disclosure standards for AI practices requires a **coordinated approach between legal and organizational policies**. While it may make sense to address some areas of transparency through legal requirements (like current advertising disclosures), other areas are more appropriately addressed organizationally.
- V.** The use of generative AI tools to create news stories presents a series of **challenges around providing fact-based information** to the public.
- VI.** Content generators and policymakers need to be aware of **inherent biases** in generative AI tools and guard against them.

State of Research

Artificial intelligence is no longer a fringe technology. Research finds three-quarters of companies report AI adoption as of 2024. Experts have begun to document the increasingly critical role of AI for news publishers and technology companies, both separately and in relation to each other. And there is mounting evidence that AI technologies are routinely used both in social platforms' algorithms and in everyday news work, though the latter is often concentrated among larger and upmarket publishers who have the resources to invest in these practices.

There are limitations to what journalists and the public understand when it comes to AI. Research shows there are gaps between the pervasiveness of AI uses in news and journalists' understanding of and attitudes toward these practices. Audience-focused research consistently finds that news consumers often cannot discern between AI-generated and human-generated content. Audiences also perceive certain types of AI-generated news as less biased than human writers, despite ample evidence that AI tools can perpetuate social biases and enable the development of disinformation.

Future work should prioritize evidence-based research on how AI reshapes the news people get to see — both directly from publishers and indirectly through platforms. AI research focused outside of the U.S. and outside economically developed countries would offer a fuller understanding of how technological changes affect news practices globally. On the policy side, comparative analyses of use cases would aid in developing transnational best practices in news transparency and disclosure around AI.

State of Legislation

Regulatory responses to emerging technologies like AI vary by country and range from direct regulation to soft law (e.g. guidelines) to industry self-regulation. Some governments, such as Russia and China, directly or indirectly facilitate — and thus often control — the development of AI in their countries, allowing companies to collect and use individuals' data. Others attempt to facilitate innovation. Some, like the EU, actively seek to regulate AI technology and protect the public against its risks.

These differences reflect a lack of agreement over what values should underpin AI legislation or ethics frameworks and make global consensus over its regulation challenging. That said, legislation in one country can have important effects elsewhere. The EU AI Act, for example, inspired legislation in Canada and Brazil. It is important that those proposing policy and other solutions recognize global differences and consider the full range of potential impacts without compromising democratic values of an independent press, an open internet and free expression.

Legislative policies specifically intended to regulate AI can easily be weakened by a lack of clarity around what qualifies as AI, making violations incredibly hard to identify and enforce. Given the complexity of these systems and the speed of innovation in this field, experts have called for individualized and adaptive provisions rather than one-size-fits-all responses. Recommendations for broader stakeholder involvement in building AI legislation also include engaging groups, such as marginalized or vulnerable communities, that are often most impacted by its outcomes.

Finally, as the role of news content in the training of AI systems becomes an increasingly central part of regulatory and policy debates, responses to AI developments will likely need to account for the protection of an independent, competitive news media. Currently, this applies to policy debates about modernizing copyright and fair use provisions for digital content as well as collective bargaining codes and other forms of economic support between publishers and the companies that develop and commodify these technologies.