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Artificial Intelligence in Journalism and Public Relations

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Introduction

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a profoundly transformative force, reshaping industries, professions, and the very fabric of public discourse. Within the fields of journalism and public relations, AI is not merely an incremental technological update but a disruptive presence that challenges established practices, creates powerful new efficiencies, and raises fundamental ethical questions. Articles available here synthesize the key findings and conclusions, that collectively map this evolving landscape. The texts provide a multifaceted view of AI's integration into the

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communication professions, covering theoretical frameworks for its adoption, empirical studies on professional realities in diverse national contexts, an analysis of the academic research field, and an examination of audience perception in the face of AI-generated content. They explore the conceptual models proposed for a symbiotic human-AI relationship in journalism and contrast them with the practical realities and barriers to adoption faced by professionals on the ground.

Understanding the integration of AI into communication requires bridging the gap between its theoretical potential and the complex, often challenging, realities of its professional adoption. While conceptual models offer strategic visions for a future where human and machine intelligence work in concert, empirical studies reveal a landscape of cautious experimentation, significant barriers, and uneven progress across different regions and professional cultures.

The theoretical model proposed by Fernandes offers a compelling vision for this future, introducing the concept of “slow AI journalism” as a qualitative counterpoint to the quantitative efficiency of “fast AI journalism.” Drawing on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze, Fernandes argues that the relationship between human and machine journalism should not be one of replacement but of synergy. In this model, "fast AI which excels at the high-volume, repetitive tasks of data analysis and automated content generation—is informed and improved by "slow AI journalism." This human-driven work prioritizes quality, nuance, contextual depth, and critical inquiry. By producing high-quality, linguistically rich content, human journalists can "teach" AI models, introducing the novel and singular elements that prevent automated output from becoming redundant. This creates a symbiotic relationship where human creativity adds indispensable value to machine efficiency, paving the way for a sustainable and ethically grounded business model.

However, this sophisticated theoretical framework stands in stark contrast to the on-the-ground realities of AI adoption in professional settings, as detailed in studies from Türkiye, Tunisia, Portugal, and Hungary. Research reveals that the primary mode of engagement is often tactical and operational rather than strategic, with significant concerns and barriers slowing deeper integration. This stark divergence between theoretical models and practical realities is not accidental; it is reflected and perhaps reinforced by the very structure of academic research on the topic.

To fully grasp the discourse surrounding AI in journalism, it is crucial to analyze the academic research field itself. Examining the trends, themes, and geographic distribution of scholarly work reveals the dominant paradigms shaping our understanding of the topic and uncovers potential biases and gaps in knowledge production.

A comprehensive analysis by Lendvai of 269 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2017 and 2024 offers a clear picture of this academic landscape. The study identifies a field that is growing at an explosive rate but is also becoming increasingly concentrated and geographically imbalanced.

This geographic imbalance suggests that the dominant academic discourse is shaped by the priorities of Western media landscapes. Crucially, this structural reality may be contributing to the very "uneven adoption" observed in professional practice; the prevalence of sophisticated theoretical models (Fernandes) developed in the Global North may be disconnected from, and thus fail to adequately address, the linguistic, economic, and infrastructural barriers faced by professionals in contexts such as Tunisia (Lahouij).

The proliferation of generative AI presents a critical challenge to information integrity, demanding new levels of vigilance from both audiences and communication professionals. As the lines between authentic and synthetic content blur, the ability to critically assess information becomes a cornerstone of a healthy public sphere, while professionals must grapple with a host of magnified ethical and practical risks.

First, an essential question is whether the public can discern AI-generated content. The study by Bányász and Váczi et al. offers a surprisingly optimistic answer. Their research found that non-expert participants demonstrated a high degree of accuracy in distinguishing AI-generated images from authentic photographs. This suggests that, at present, human perception remains a capable defense against visual disinformation. However, the study also revealed nuances in this capability: perceptual accuracy was influenced by the demographic characteristics of the individuals depicted in the images. Participants were more accurate when identifying images of women and elderly individuals, suggesting that visual cues related to gender and age may be more difficult for current AI models to replicate convincingly. This finding reinforces the critical need for media literacy initiatives to sharpen these innate critical faculties. Second, for professionals on the front lines, AI integration introduces a complex array of challenges that amplify existing pressures, particularly in high-stakes environments like war journalism.

At Fernandez’s the application of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy allows for a rethinking of the relationship between repetition and novelty, and quality and quantity in journalism. This conceptual work opens a path for a "slow AI journalism" model. In this model, high-quality, human-driven content – rich in nuance and ambiguity – serves to "teach" and improve the quantitative, rapid-output models of "fast AI". This creates a sustainable and symbiotic business model where qualitative human work holds high economic value precisely because it enhances the diversity and effectiveness of automated systems.

The following studies confirm the rapid growth of academic research on AI in journalism but also reveal a saturation of the field and significant structural imbalances in knowledge production. The discourse is overwhelmingly dominated by researchers from the Global North, creating a critical gap in understanding non-Western contexts. The study concludes with a call for a more inclusive, globally representative scholarly discourse and for interdisciplinary collaborations that can address the unique challenges faced by underrepresented regions.

Teixeira comes the conclusion that the implementation of AI in war journalism amplifies existing trends rather than creating a complete rupture with past practices. While AI offers new tools for old challenges—such as fact-checking and data analysis, it simultaneously intensifies deep-seated ethical issues related to disinformation, narrative bias, and source protection. The study reiterates that the "human journalist" remains indispensable for exercising the critical judgment, contextual understanding, and ethical oversight required in such a high-stakes environment.

Journalists' satisfaction with digital tools serves as a key indicator of their algorithmic literacy, but enthusiasm for technology does not necessarily equate to deep technical knowledge, concludes Couraceiro. Significant socio-professional differences exist, with younger journalists and those in local or online media showing greater adoption. The study concludes by highlighting the urgent need to foster critical algorithmic literacy as a core professional competency, enabling journalists to navigate the ethical and practical challenges of AI with greater awareness and agency.

Yildirim draws attention to the fact that that public relations professionals in Türkiye use AI primarily as a practical assistant for operational tasks like content creation but maintain a conservative and cautious attitude toward deeper integration. This hesitation is driven by significant concerns about data privacy, reputation management, and a lack of technical familiarity, particularly among senior managers. The study concludes that while AI's impact is growing, its integration is being shaped by professional anxieties and will require a concerted effort to build trust and technological proficiency.

Andok et al. provide rare empirical evidence on AI adoption among Hungarian journalists, with particular focus on the under-researched segment of religiously oriented and church-affiliated media. Conducted in 2023–2024 (N = 83), their study reveals markedly lower AI tool usage than reported in most international surveys. The authors demonstrate that Hungarian journalists are considerably more open to AI in visual, economic, and entertainment-related tasks than in public-affairs reporting or religious content, thereby protecting core domains of journalistic authorship and confessional identity. Generational differences prove minimal, whereas value-driven, theological-ethical commitments emerge as the primary moderating factor. Despite the acknowledged limitations of sample size and reliance on self-reported data, the article fills a significant gap in the global literature. It offers a compelling Central-European case of how normative professional cultures can substantially temper enthusiasm for technological disruption in journalism.

Bányász-Váczi's study demonstrates that non-expert users can differentiate between authentic and AI-generated images with high accuracy, although their perception is influenced by the depicted demographics (e.g., gender and age). This finding underscores that human critical perception remains a valuable defense against visual disinformation. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of fostering media

literacy and critical thinking to empower the public and mitigate the risks associated with the proliferation of AI-driven synthetic media.

These articles reveal that the integration of AI into communication is a complex and uneven phenomenon, characterized by a significant gap between theory and practice. The academic discourse, dominated by sophisticated theoretical models from the Global North (Fernandes, Lendvai), envisions a symbiotic future for human and machine. However, the reality of on-the-ground implementation is primarily tactical, conservative, and fraught with region-specific barriers related to language, cost, and training (Yildirim et al., Lahouij, Couraceiro). This theory-practice gap magnifies existing professional challenges, particularly in high-stakes environments where AI both creates and combats disinformation, intensifying ethical dilemmas and technical risks (Teixeira). In this context, the human professional's capacity for critical thinking, contextual understanding, and ethical judgment emerge as the most indispensable asset. Intriguingly, while professionals are rightly concerned about these amplified risks, the audience may be more resilient and discerning than is often assumed (Bányász-Váczi et al.), suggesting the core challenge lies less in technological determinism and more in professional adaptation and governance.

The future of the communication professions, therefore, hinges not on resisting technology, but on cultivating a new form of "human-in-the-loop" expertise grounded in critical thinking, rigorous ethical governance, and an advanced digital literacy capable of harnessing AI's power while mitigating its inherent risks.

We hope that the special issue of the *ESSACHESS* journal will be an important contribution to research in the field as well as to media and PR education.