# BBC and Skinny Mobile highlight growing ethical challenges of AI in journalism



The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism is becoming increasingly prevalent, prompting both optimism and scepticism regarding its impact on the quality and integrity of news reporting. A recent wave of innovations, exemplified by initiatives from companies like Skinny Mobile and the BBC, illustrates the dual edge of AI’s use in media. While AI may enhance efficiency and reach, significant ethical and trust-related concerns linger, particularly as audiences grapple with the reality of machine-generated content.

Skinny Mobile, a low-cost telecom provider, recently leveraged AI in their advertising strategy by employing an animated clone of a satisfied customer, Jo, to endorse their services. Such a move reflects a trend in which brands aim to cut costs and boost engagement, yet surveys indicate a public wariness towards AI-generated journalism, with many consumers expressing a lack of trust in its validity. Interestingly, a recent case from the United States highlights this tension. Law and Crime—a television channel—deployed AI to recreate courtroom events from the Sean "Diddy" Combs trial based on transcripts. Although the channel ensures its outputs are accurate representations of the court proceedings, the synthetic nature of the content invites questions about authenticity and audience perception.

The media landscape in New Zealand has seen similar developments. In an earlier reveal, the Weekend Herald admitted to employing AI for editorial content. Although NZME, its publisher, acknowledged insufficient human oversight in this venture despite existing policies, the ramifications of such practices underline a pressing need for ethical guidelines in AI integration. Rivals like Stuff had strong editorial policies requiring transparency around AI usage—policies that were quietly rescinded in February, illuminating the shifting standards in the industry.

Conversely, there are signs of creativity in AI applications, such as AI-powered options offered by various news websites that convert text into audio. The New Zealand Herald has implemented a system resulting in more natural-sounding audio, even proficient in pronouncing te reo Māori, compared to the often stilted outputs from generic AI tools.

Distinguished figures, such as Tim Davie, the Director-General of the BBC, advocate for a structured and ethical integration of AI within the organisation. In a recent address, Davie underscored the BBC's role in combating misinformation and restoring trust in journalism, especially in the face of challenges posed by social media platforms. His vision lays the groundwork for a future where AI technology coexists with traditional journalistic values to foster a "healthy core of fact-based news."

The BBC is not merely an observer but a participant in the AI evolution. Laura Ellis, the BBC's head of technology forecasting, has outlined how the organisation employs AI to enhance its operations, from scanning extensive archives for relevant footage to implementing synthetic voices that localise weather updates. However, the BBC remains cautious. Ellis emphasises that the corporation does not engage generative AI without transparency and audience discourse, aiming to build trust while navigating the ethical minefield posed by AI use in news.

Yet, the BBC acknowledges past mistakes, such as when an AI service inaccurately summarised headlines attributed to the organisation, causing significant reputational damage. With trust in journalism at a low, the timing of AI advancements raises alarms; its potential for misinformation could exacerbate an already fragile media landscape. This reflects broader apprehensions among media organisations globally about AI’s implications. A coalition of media bodies recently called for ethical AI use in news, underscoring a collective initiative to safeguard real journalism against the pitfalls of technology.

AI's role in journalism remains a contentious topic. Some editors, like Claudio Cerasa of Il Foglio, praise its potential to cover niche topics and expand reporting capabilities. Cerasa stresses that AI should augment, rather than replace, human journalists, illustrating a balanced approach that could serve as a blueprint for other outlets exploring AI's integration.

In the UK, concerns regarding the future of quality journalism are growing amid a surge in "news deserts" and challenges to traditional revenue models, especially as generative AI technologies become more pervasive. The House of Lords has warned that without intervention, the disparity between reliable journalism and questionable online sources could lead to an irreparable fracture in media integrity.

As firms navigate these challenges, the question remains: how can AI and journalism coexist without compromising the core principles of truth, accuracy, and audience trust? The pathway forward involves continuous dialogue and collaboration between tech developers and media organisations, ensuring that the primary goal remains the delivery of credible news in an increasingly complex digital age.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/mediawatch/542423/mediawatch-ai-and-the-bbc> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c68bccc5-2a27-4472-a827-2dfc39e3c92c> - In a recent announcement, BBC Director-General Tim Davie outlined plans to double the global weekly reach of the BBC World Service to 1 billion people. This ambitious expansion aims to counteract global disinformation efforts and requires substantial additional funding. Davie emphasized the importance of enhancing regionalized English content and expanding services in key languages to address the challenges posed by social media platforms and misinformation. The proposed initiatives include internet-based TV streaming for areas with poor connectivity and AI-powered tools for fact-checking and children's education. These efforts underscore the BBC's commitment to modernizing its funding model while maintaining its universal public service mandate.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/italian-newspaper-gives-free-rein-ai-admires-its-irony-2025-04-18/> - Il Foglio, a conservative Italian newspaper, conducted a pioneering one-month experiment by publishing a four-page daily insert entirely written by artificial intelligence (AI). The initiative, deemed a success by editor Claudio Cerasa, boosted sales and will continue as a weekly section. Cerasa emphasized that AI will not replace human journalists but will augment reporting by covering areas lacking in-house expertise, such as astronomy. He highlighted AI's surprising capacity for irony and rapid literary analysis, although noting its limitations, including occasional factual errors. Cerasa views AI as a tool that, if used wisely, can enhance creativity and deepen journalistic practice.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/61fb43f20d945753a8c86881aa631d65> - A global coalition of media organizations, including the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), is urging artificial intelligence (AI) developers to collaborate in combating misinformation and safeguarding fact-based journalism. Announced at the World News Media Congress in Krakow, Poland, the 'News Integrity in the Age of AI' initiative encompasses thousands of media groups and outlines five core principles for ethical AI use in news. Key demands include requiring prior authorization for using news content in AI models, ensuring transparency in attribution, and making original sources clearly identifiable. The initiative involves major media associations such as the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, North American Broadcasters Association, and the Latin American broadcasters association AIL. The call to action comes amid rising tension between traditional media and AI developers, with some outlets—such as The New York Times—pursuing lawsuits against OpenAI and Microsoft over copyright concerns. Meanwhile, other organizations have entered content licensing agreements with AI firms. The debate continues over whether using copyrighted content to train AI models falls under 'fair use' provisions.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/b062ce44-9fbb-4d5c-a8ec-a58ff1bd8654> - A House of Lords committee has alerted that UK news coverage risks an irreversible fracture within the next decade due to a growing disparity between quality paid journalism and the increasing reliance on questionable online sources. The committee's report underscores the detrimental impact on society and democracy, highlighting the rise of 'news deserts' and significant advertising revenue loss in local news. In a bid to avert a 'two-tier' media environment, they suggest introducing tax breaks for local media hiring reporters and journalist training schemes. The report also critiques large US tech companies using generative AI to aggregate news, which erodes traditional media revenue and influence. It calls for updated legislation to protect copyright, fair deals with AI firms, and regulatory updates to address AI influence in news creation. The government is urged to respond within two months to these recommendations.
6. <https://time.com/6554118/congress-ai-journalism-hearing/> - Experts and media executives testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law, warning of AI’s threats to journalism. Key concerns include AI models using journalists' work without compensation, contributing to the decline in local news, and exacerbating misinformation. Since 2005, the U.S. has lost almost a third of its newspapers and two-thirds of its journalists due to the rise of digital platforms. Countries like Canada and Australia have passed laws requiring tech companies to pay for news content, with similar legislation proposed in the U.S. High-profile lawsuits, such as the New York Times suing OpenAI, highlight the legal battles over AI training on copyrighted materials. Generative AI critics argue for congressional intervention to ensure fair compensation, while some believe current copyright laws suffice. The hearing also discussed how AI-generated misinformation burdens newsrooms and risks spreading false information.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/mar/06/bbc-news-ai-artificial-intelligence-department-personalised-content> - The BBC is establishing a new AI department to offer more personalized content, aiming to reshape its news operations. This initiative includes creating a second department, BBC Live and Daily News, to ensure content works across all platforms. However, a recent BBC study into leading AI assistants found they had a tendency to create distortions, factual inaccuracies, and misleading content in response to questions about news and current affairs. The corporation has previously pledged that its use of AI 'will always be in line with its public service values' and must never undermine audience trust. The overhaul is part of a plan to ensure BBC journalism reaches the widest possible audience, regardless of where or how they find it.