



AI News Anchors, Automated Journalism, and the Transformation of Journalistic Authority: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence is increasingly transforming journalism through automated news writing, algorithmic news selection, synthetic media production, and AI-generated news presenters. AI news anchors and automated journalism systems raise important questions about journalistic authority, audience trust, authorship, professional labor, and editorial accountability. While automated journalism has often been discussed in relation to efficiency and scalability, AI news anchors add a performative and symbolic dimension by visually representing news organizations through synthetic or machine-mediated personas. This conceptual article examines how AI news anchors and automated journalism reshape the relationship among news organizations, journalists, audiences, and machines. Drawing on automated journalism research, human-machine communication, algorithmic accountability, and journalism studies, the article proposes a three-dimensional framework: synthetic journalistic presence, algorithmic authorship, and accountable editorial authority. Synthetic journalistic presence refers to the use of AI-generated or virtual presenters to perform news delivery. Algorithmic authorship refers to the role of automated systems in generating, structuring, or modifying news content. Accountable editorial authority refers to the responsibility of news organizations to maintain transparency, verification, and ethical oversight when AI participates in journalism. The article argues that AI should not be understood simply as a productivity tool in newsrooms but as a communicative actor that can reshape professional identity, audience perception, and the social legitimacy of journalism.

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become increasingly visible in journalism. News organizations use automated systems to produce financial reports, sports updates, election summaries, weather stories, data-driven explainers, and personalized news content. Automated journalism is often valued because it can produce routine stories quickly and at scale, especially when structured data are available (Graefe, 2016; Carlson, 2015).

The development of AI news anchors extends automation from text production to news performance. Unlike traditional automation systems that operate behind the scenes, AI news

anchors appear directly before audiences as synthetic or virtual presenters. They read scripts, imitate human news delivery, and visually represent the authority of a news organization. This makes AI news anchors not only technical tools but also symbolic communicators within the news environment (Lewis et al., 2019; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

This development raises important questions for journalism and society. If a news story is written by software and delivered by an AI anchor, who should be regarded as the author, source, or accountable communicator? How do audiences evaluate the credibility of machine-generated or machine-presented news? How does automation affect the professional identity and labor of journalists? These questions are central because journalism depends not only on information delivery but also on trust, verification, institutional authority, and public accountability (Montal & Reich, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

Existing scholarship has examined automated journalism, audience perceptions of robot-written news, journalistic labor, byline disclosure, and human–machine communication in news. However, AI news anchors require further conceptual attention because they combine automated content, synthetic performance, platform visibility, and institutional branding. They make automation visible to audiences in ways that earlier forms of automated journalism did not (Clerwall, 2014; Lewis et al., 2019).

This article proposes a conceptual framework for understanding AI news anchors and automated journalism. The framework includes three dimensions: synthetic journalistic presence, algorithmic authorship, and accountable editorial authority. These dimensions help explain how AI changes the production, presentation, and legitimacy of news in contemporary media systems (Carlson, 2015; Hancock et al., 2020).

2. Literature Review

Automated Journalism and News Production

Automated journalism refers to the use of algorithms and software systems to generate news content from structured data. Graefe (2016) explains that automated journalism can support fast, low-cost, and scalable production of routine news, particularly in areas such as finance, sports, weather, and elections. This makes automation attractive to news organizations facing economic pressure and growing demand for continuous content (Graefe, 2016).

Carlson (2015) argues that automated journalism reshapes journalistic labor, compositional forms, and journalistic authority. His work is important because it shows that automation is not merely a newsroom efficiency tool. It also challenges normative assumptions about who produces journalism, what counts as journalistic work, and how authority is constructed in news production (Carlson, 2015).

Thurman et al. (2017) examined journalists' experiences with robo-writing and found that practitioners recognized both the possibilities and limitations of automated journalism. Journalists saw automation as useful for increasing immediacy, breadth, and specificity, but they also emphasized limitations related to judgment, news values, source quality, and interpretive sensitivity.

This suggests that automation may support journalism but cannot fully replace human editorial judgment (Thurman et al., 2017).

The literature therefore indicates that automated journalism is best understood as a hybrid process. Machines can generate texts from data, but human journalists and editors remain important for determining newsworthiness, verifying information, interpreting meaning, and maintaining professional standards (Carlson, 2015; Thurman et al., 2017).

Audience Perceptions of Automated News

Audience perception is central to the legitimacy of automated journalism. Clerwall (2014) investigated how readers perceive software-generated content compared with journalist-written content. The study found that readers did not necessarily perceive automated texts as less credible, although they evaluated human and automated texts differently in terms of qualities such as objectivity, descriptiveness, and pleasantness (Clerwall, 2014).

Wölker and Powell (2021) further examined news readers' perceived credibility and selection of automated journalism. Their experiment showed that credibility perceptions of human, automated, and combined content were largely similar, although automated sports content was perceived as more credible than human-written sports content. This suggests that audience responses to automated journalism depend on genre, context, and expectations (Wölker & Powell, 2021).

These findings are important for understanding AI news anchors. If audiences can accept automated written content under certain conditions, they may also accept AI-presented news when the content is clear, accurate, and institutionally credible. However, AI anchors introduce additional factors, including visual realism, voice, emotional expression, disclosure, and perceived humanness (Clerwall, 2014; Hancock et al., 2020).

Audience trust in AI news may therefore depend not only on content quality but also on presentation. A synthetic anchor may appear professional and consistent, but it may also raise concerns about artificiality, manipulation, or lack of accountability. Communication research must examine how audiences distinguish between human news presenters, AI-generated anchors, and hybrid human-machine news formats (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019).

Authorship, Bylines, and Disclosure

Authorship is one of the most important issues in automated journalism. Montal and Reich (2017) argue that algorithmic authorship raises complex questions about bylines, disclosure, and responsibility. When news is generated by software, it may be unclear whether authorship belongs to the programmer, the newsroom, the data provider, the algorithm, or the editor who supervises publication (Montal & Reich, 2017).

This issue becomes even more complex when AI news anchors deliver automated or AI-assisted content. The anchor may appear to be the communicator, but the message may be written by automated systems, edited by journalists, and approved by news managers. Therefore, the visible presenter may not correspond to the responsible author or editorial decision-maker (Montal & Reich, 2017; Lewis et al., 2019).

Disclosure is one possible response to this problem. Audiences may need to know when news has been generated, edited, or presented by AI. However, disclosure must be meaningful and understandable. Simply labeling a text as “automated” may not explain the degree of human oversight, the source of data, or the editorial standards applied to the content (Montal & Reich, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

In this sense, authorship in AI journalism should be understood as distributed. News organizations must clarify how humans and machines contribute to news production and who is accountable for errors, omissions, bias, or misleading presentation. Without such clarification, AI journalism may weaken public trust in editorial authority (Carlson, 2015; Diakopoulos, 2015).

Human–Machine Communication in Journalism

Human–machine communication provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding AI journalism. Guzman and Lewis (2020) argue that artificial intelligence challenges traditional assumptions about communication because machines increasingly participate in communicative roles. AI systems may no longer function only as channels but also as sources, agents, collaborators, or perceived social actors (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

Lewis et al. (2019) apply human–machine communication to automated journalism and argue that journalism studies should rethink the roles and relationships of humans and machines in news. Their work suggests that automated journalism should not be analyzed only through labor replacement or technological innovation. It should also be studied as a changing communicative relationship among journalists, machines, organizations, and audiences (Lewis et al., 2019).

Hancock et al. (2020) define AI-mediated communication as communication in which an intelligent agent modifies, augments, or generates messages on behalf of a communicator. This concept is highly relevant to AI journalism because AI can assist with story generation, headline optimization, translation, personalization, summarization, and presentation. As a result, news becomes a product of human–AI collaboration rather than purely human authorship (Hancock et al., 2020).

AI news anchors make this human–machine relationship visible. They do not simply support journalists behind the scenes; they appear as communicative figures that audiences can see and hear. Therefore, AI news anchors require analysis not only as production technologies but also as public-facing communicators that may influence perceptions of professionalism, credibility, and institutional identity (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019).

3. A Conceptual Framework

This article proposes a three-dimensional framework for analyzing AI news anchors and automated journalism: synthetic journalistic presence, algorithmic authorship, and accountable editorial authority. These dimensions are interconnected because AI journalism involves not only automated production but also public presentation and institutional responsibility (Carlson, 2015; Lewis et al., 2019).

Synthetic Journalistic Presence

Synthetic journalistic presence refers to the use of AI-generated or virtual presenters to perform news delivery. Traditional news anchors serve not only as readers of scripts but also as symbols of credibility, continuity, professionalism, and institutional voice. AI news anchors imitate this role by visually and vocally performing news presentation (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Lewis et al., 2019).

The significance of synthetic journalistic presence is that it changes the relationship between appearance and authority. A human anchor carries professional identity, biography, institutional affiliation, and personal accountability. An AI anchor may appear professional but does not possess human judgment, lived experience, or moral responsibility. This creates a gap between communicative performance and accountable agency (Hancock et al., 2020; Montal & Reich, 2017).

Synthetic presence may also influence audience trust. Some audiences may value AI anchors for consistency, neutrality, or novelty. Others may distrust them because they appear artificial, emotionally limited, or potentially manipulative. Audience evaluation may depend on disclosure, visual realism, news genre, cultural context, and the reputation of the news organization (Clerwall, 2014; Wölker & Powell, 2021).

Therefore, AI news anchors should not be evaluated only by whether they can imitate human presenters. The more important question is whether they support credible, transparent, and responsible journalism. Synthetic presence may improve efficiency or accessibility, but it should not obscure editorial accountability (Diakopoulos, 2015; Carlson, 2015).

Algorithmic Authorship

Algorithmic authorship refers to the role of automated systems in generating, structuring, or modifying news content. In automated journalism, algorithms may transform data into narrative texts, select story angles, produce headlines, or personalize information for different audiences. This changes the meaning of authorship in news production (Graefe, 2016; Montal & Reich, 2017).

Algorithmic authorship is not the same as independent machine creativity. Automated news depends on data sources, templates, software design, editorial rules, and organizational priorities. Therefore, algorithmic authorship is better understood as a distributed process involving programmers, journalists, editors, data providers, and machines (Montal & Reich, 2017; Carlson, 2015).

This distributed process raises accountability concerns. If an automated story contains an error, the cause may be faulty data, weak editorial oversight, biased templates, software malfunction, or inappropriate automation of a complex issue. News organizations must therefore establish clear responsibility structures for automated content (Diakopoulos, 2015; Thurman et al., 2017).

Algorithmic authorship also affects journalistic style. Automated stories may be effective for structured and repetitive topics, but they may struggle with context, interpretation, moral judgment, and narrative complexity. This suggests that automated journalism should be used carefully and primarily in contexts where data are reliable and editorial oversight is strong (Graefe, 2016; Thurman et al., 2017).

Accountable Editorial Authority

Accountable editorial authority refers to the responsibility of news organizations to maintain journalistic standards when AI participates in news production or presentation. Journalism's authority depends on verification, independence, transparency, public service, and accountability. These values remain necessary even when news is generated or delivered through AI systems (Carlson, 2015; Diakopoulos, 2015).

AI does not remove editorial responsibility. If a newsroom uses automated writing or an AI news anchor, the organization remains responsible for the accuracy, fairness, and ethical quality of the news. This includes verifying data sources, reviewing automated outputs, disclosing AI use, correcting errors, and explaining editorial processes when necessary (Montal & Reich, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

Accountable authority also requires protecting journalism from excessive automation. If news organizations use AI only to reduce labor costs or increase content volume, they may weaken the interpretive and investigative functions of journalism. Automated journalism should therefore support human journalists rather than replace the professional judgment that gives journalism social value (Thurman et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2019).

In this framework, AI is best understood as part of a human-machine editorial system. Machines can assist with speed, scale, and routine production, while human journalists provide judgment, context, ethics, and responsibility. The legitimacy of AI journalism depends on how well this system preserves public trust and editorial accountability (Hancock et al., 2020; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

4. Discussion

From Automation to Authority

Much discussion of automated journalism focuses on efficiency, speed, and cost. These are important issues, but they do not capture the deeper transformation produced by AI news anchors and automated news systems. The central question is not only whether AI can produce news, but whether AI-supported journalism can maintain the authority and public trust associated with professional journalism (Carlson, 2015; Lewis et al., 2019).

Journalistic authority is not created by information delivery alone. It depends on professional norms, institutional responsibility, public recognition, and the ability to explain how knowledge is produced. Automated systems may generate accurate reports, but they do not independently possess professional ethics or social accountability (Diakopoulos, 2015; Montal & Reich, 2017).

AI news anchors intensify this issue because they visually perform authority. A synthetic anchor may look and sound professional, but audiences may not know who wrote the script, what data were used, whether the content was verified, or who is responsible for mistakes. Therefore, the performance of authority must be supported by transparent editorial systems (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020).

The future of AI journalism should therefore be evaluated by its capacity to strengthen, rather than weaken, editorial authority. AI can support journalism when it improves accuracy, access, speed,

and coverage. It becomes problematic when it hides responsibility, reduces transparency, or substitutes synthetic performance for journalistic judgment (Carlson, 2015; Thurman et al., 2017).

Audience Trust and Disclosure

Audience trust is a central issue in AI journalism. Research suggests that audiences do not automatically reject automated news and may evaluate automated content as credible in certain contexts. However, trust depends on genre, presentation, source reputation, and audience expectations (Clerwall, 2014; Wölker & Powell, 2021).

Disclosure is important because audiences should know when AI is involved in news production or presentation. However, disclosure should go beyond a simple statement that AI was used. It should explain the role of AI, the level of human oversight, the source of data, and the editorial responsibility of the news organization (Montal & Reich, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

For AI news anchors, disclosure may be especially important because synthetic presentation can create an illusion of human presence. Audiences may need to know whether the anchor is virtual, whether the script is AI-generated, and whether the content has been reviewed by human editors. Clear disclosure can help prevent deception and support calibrated trust (Hancock et al., 2020; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

At the same time, disclosure alone is not enough. News organizations must also demonstrate that AI-supported content meets journalistic standards. Trust requires visible accountability, correction mechanisms, and editorial transparency, not merely technological labeling (Diakopoulos, 2015; Carlson, 2015).

Labor, Professional Identity, and Human Judgment

Automated journalism also affects journalistic labor and professional identity. Automation may reduce time spent on repetitive reporting tasks and allow journalists to focus on analysis, investigation, and interpretation. However, it may also create concerns about job displacement, deskilling, and the undervaluing of human judgment (Thurman et al., 2017; Carlson, 2015).

Lewis et al. (2019) argue that automated journalism should be understood through changing relationships between humans and machines. This means that the future of journalism is unlikely to be simply human or machine. Instead, it will involve hybrid workflows in which journalists collaborate with AI systems while negotiating authority, responsibility, and professional boundaries (Lewis et al., 2019).

Journalistic judgment remains essential because many news decisions cannot be reduced to data processing. Newsworthiness, fairness, harm reduction, public interest, contextual interpretation, and ethical sensitivity require human deliberation. Automated systems can assist but should not replace these professional capacities (Thurman et al., 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

Therefore, news organizations should treat AI literacy as part of professional development. Journalists need to understand how automated systems work, what their limitations are, how to verify outputs, and how to explain AI use to audiences. Such literacy is necessary for maintaining professional authority in AI-mediated news environments (Graefe, 2016; Lewis et al., 2019).

5. Future Research Directions

Future research should examine audience responses to AI news anchors across different news genres. Experimental studies could compare human anchors, AI anchors, and hybrid formats in terms of perceived credibility, trust, emotional connection, professionalism, and willingness to consume news. Such studies could extend existing research on automated text perception to audiovisual AI news presentation (Clerwall, 2014; Wölker & Powell, 2021).

Researchers should also investigate disclosure practices in AI journalism. Studies could test whether different forms of disclosure affect audience understanding and trust. For example, researchers could compare minimal disclosure, detailed process disclosure, and no disclosure in AI-generated or AI-presented news contexts (Montal & Reich, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

Qualitative research should examine how journalists and editors understand AI news anchors and automated journalism in practice. Interviews and newsroom ethnographies could reveal how professionals negotiate human–machine collaboration, editorial oversight, labor concerns, and professional identity (Thurman et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2019).

Content analysis could examine the quality of automated news and AI-presented news. Researchers could evaluate accuracy, source transparency, narrative complexity, context, bias, correction practices, and byline disclosure. This would help determine whether AI-supported journalism meets professional standards across different news domains (Graefe, 2016; Carlson, 2015).

Finally, future research should examine cross-cultural differences in acceptance of AI news anchors. Audience expectations toward news presenters, technology, institutional media, and disclosure may vary across countries. Comparative research would help explain whether AI news anchors are perceived as innovative, trustworthy, artificial, or problematic in different media systems (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Wölker & Powell, 2021).

6. Conclusion

AI news anchors and automated journalism represent an important transformation in the relationship between journalism, technology, and society. Automated systems can support news production by increasing speed, scale, and efficiency, while AI anchors can extend automation into the visible performance of news delivery. However, these developments also raise questions about authorship, trust, professional labor, and editorial accountability (Graefe, 2016; Carlson, 2015).

This article proposed a conceptual framework based on synthetic journalistic presence, algorithmic authorship, and accountable editorial authority. These dimensions show that AI journalism should not be evaluated only by technical capability. It must also be assessed by its relationship to journalistic values, audience trust, and public responsibility (Montal & Reich, 2017; Diakopoulos, 2015).

For the *Journal of AI Communication and Society*, this topic is significant because AI news anchors reveal the communicative and social implications of artificial intelligence in public information systems. As AI becomes more embedded in journalism, future research must examine not only whether machines can produce and present news, but how human–machine news systems can

preserve transparency, accountability, and democratic communication (Lewis et al., 2019; Hancock et al., 2020).

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