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An ethical analysis of media's usage of Artificial Intelligence. A case-study on Associated Press

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ABSTRACT. This article provides a theoretical examination of the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) by the Associated Press (AP), focusing on the ethical considerations inherent in its AI practices. With a historical legacy spanning 170 years, AP has evolved into a global news agency that embraces AI across various facets of its operations. The study explores AP's integration of AI in areas such as content generation, data journalism, language translation, and audience engagement, emphasizing the ethical dimensions of these applications.

The ethical framework employed by AP is scrutinized through an analysis of its coverage depth, content quality, and transparency. The study also delves into the ethical implications of AP's automatic content generation processes, which leverage AI algorithms for expeditious news production. Emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between AI and journalism, the research contemplates how technology can augment human capacities while necessitating vigilance against potential biases and misinformation.

Furthermore, the study scrutinizes how AP navigates ethical challenges in language translation, audience engagement, and market analysis through AI. The agency's use of AI to enhance multimedia elements, personalize content, and forecast audience interests prompts an exploration of the ethical implications of tailoring information to individual preferences. By examining the agency's multifaceted use of AI, the study contributes valuable insights into the evolving relationship between journalism, technology, and ethical responsibility.

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Ultimately, it underscores the imperative for news organizations to adopt principled approaches to AI integration, ensuring that advancements in technology align with ethical journalism practices.

Keywords: AI, media ethics, Associated Press

Ethics of Mass Media in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

Ethics in mass media plays a fundamental role in establishing quality standards and ensuring journalists practice their profession in accordance with these standards. Self-regulation systems aim to assist journalists in serving the public interest, forming a professional community based on solidarity, gaining public trust, and resisting political and economic pressures.[2]

This chapter aims to explain the concepts of ethics in mass media in the digital era, specifically identifying solutions that align with current needs, including those of the audience, journalists, and media institutions. The chapter is divided into two main sections to elucidate the role and functions of mass media, exploring the characteristics of ethics in traditional and contemporary mass media influenced by artificial intelligence.

As artificial intelligence systems find broader applications, ethical concerns grow regarding whether, how, and to what extent these systems should be subject to regulations. The complexity, unpredictability, and autonomy in decision-making and learning characterize artificial intelligence, posing challenges to conventional notions of legal responsibility and accountability.

The emergence of AI systems operating independently, with adaptive learning capabilities, represents a profound shift in the fundamental principles of law. This transformation is significant across various fields where AI applications are increasingly prevalent, extending beyond mass media.

Concerns related to the incorporation of artificial intelligence in newsrooms are multifaceted, extending beyond news production. Skepticism

[2] Bertrand, J., "Media Accountability Systems". 2003, pg. 3.

arises due to the complexity of intelligent agents and the numerous applications of AI in mass media. As intelligent tools may potentially erode ethical principles and core values of journalism, debates on these issues ensue. Some argue that intelligent tools could undermine ethical principles and journalistic values, while others emphasize the need for a balance between business perspectives (profitability) and human perspectives (social and perceptual)[3].

I believe both theories are valid, provided they coexist. In cases where legitimate concerns arise about the intrusive impact of artificial intelligence on journalism (affecting core values and ethical principles), a balance between profitability and human perspective is necessary. This implies a continuous pursuit of ethical principles while addressing the current needs of both the audience and media professionals. Therefore, adapting journalistic values and ethical principles to the current context, where artificial intelligence is pervasive, becomes essential.

Continuing this chapter, I aim to present various perspectives[4] on the adoption of artificial intelligence in media newsrooms, attitudes towards technological evolution, and its impact on the press.

It is undeniable that artificial intelligence presence in journalism is steadily increasing. However, the media industry's reliance on truth and trust remains crucial, even in a highly digitized world, necessitating the urgent establishment of ethical boundaries and rules.

One common argument against artificial intelligence is the lack of transparency in its operations: data collection automation, data processing, textual analysis for fact-checking, and labeling articles. Given these clear concerns, some experts suggest that ethics in artificial intelligence in the media industry should be segmented accordingly. Regulations should cover the ethical aspects of data collection, content generation, distribution of materials, and information analysis. This approach seems relevant given the complexity of the phenomenon, as a universal regulation for each element would be

[3] Noain-Sánchez, A. (2022). „Addressing the impact of artificial intelligence on journalism: The perception of experts, journalists and academics". Communication & Society, 35(3), 105-121, pg. 2. doi: https://doi.org/10.15581/003.35.3.105-121.

[4] ibidem

challenging. Additionally, there is a suggestion to create an individual code of ethics for each journalistic genre, considering the impact of artificial intelligence in various phases of the media industry.

In fact, the purpose of ethics in journalism is to assure both media organizations and the public that information exchange aligns with democratic values, integrity, accuracy, and fairness. The Society of Professional Journalists identifies four ethical principles underlying ethical journalism:

- Seeking the truth and reporting it.
- Minimizing harm caused by the publication of information.
- Acting independently to serve the public interest.
- Being accountable and transparent.

A report from the Finnish Media Council, part of the Media Councils in the Digital Age project co-funded by the European Commission, aims to contextualize journalistic norms, considering historical and cultural specificities. It explores how European media councils update and apply existing standards, identifying values aligned with the digital era. One highlighted issue is the labeling of sponsored editorial content or AI-generated content. While labeling sponsored content is not a new challenge, addressing the transparent categorization of press materials created with AI assistance requires innovative solutions.

Ethical codes for journalism serve as the framework for the profession, guiding journalistic behavior. However, the landscape of media is evolving, posing challenges to media councils to maintain clear and stable principles while adapting to new realities. The study suggests a trend toward a more general ethical code rather than a specific one for AI, emphasizing that a general code with minimal details effectively requires journalists to interpret the code, fostering adherence to its spirit and individual principles.

Considering the evolving media landscape and the constant changes in political, social, economic, and cultural contexts, it is essential to continuously update ethical codes to address new responsibilities. While a lengthy or convoluted ethical code may not be the solution, it should include norms serving as a guide for journalists practicing in a world where artificial intelligence coexists with familiar traditional methods.

The European Parliament has drafted numerous documents identifying legal implications and ethical concerns surrounding the use of artificial intelligence. When AI is employed to monitor or predict human behavior, it risks reinforcing negative stereotypes, fostering social and cultural divisions, and perpetuating exclusion. Additionally, it may undermine individual decision-making and equality of opportunities, presenting potential hazards to fundamental rights such as the right to life, fair trial, privacy, freedom of expression, and workers' rights.

Significant ethical, psychological, and legal questions surround the autonomy of intelligent robots and their effects on the doctor-patient relationship, especially in healthcare applications. These issues involve the protection of patients' personal data, concerns about responsibility, and the emergence of new economic and labor dynamics. Within the EU, these matters have not yet received comprehensive attention, highlighting the imminent need for an ethical code regarding AI usage to provide guidance for the responsible use of intelligent tools.

To address these complex ethical considerations, there is an urgent need for a robust and effective ethical framework guiding the development, design, production, and use of algorithms. This framework should complement existing national and EU regulations, prioritizing principles and values enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It should reflect fundamental principles of EU law, including non-stigmatization, transparency, autonomy.

Ethical considerations: Associated Press

Associated Press was one of the first media institutions to integrate artificial intelligence and automation. Currently, AP uses machine learning in key areas: collecting, producing, and distributing news. AP has been using intelligent tools since 2014 when the Business News office began automating stories about corporate earnings.

"Associated Press was one of the first news organizations to use artificial intelligence and automation to strengthen its basic news report. Today, we use machine learning in key points of our value chain, including data collection, news production, and distribution," is the message displayed on the Associated Press website regarding the use of AI.

Next, I will mention the areas of activity where Associated Press uses artificial intelligence.

- Coverage and Expertise:

AP is a news agency with a 170-year history, founded in 1846. Currently, it delivers 2,000 articles per day, 70,000 video materials per year, and 1 million photos per year. The agency operates in 250 locations in 100 countries worldwide.

- Depth and Breadth of Topics Covered:

AP delivers news in politics, sports, culture, business, science, climate, health, education, technology, lifestyle, religion, and entertainment. Since its establishment, AP has covered complex subjects, including investigative journalism or war journalism, reporting from conflict zones. AI is used to report on sports events from lower leagues or to generate business reports.

- Content Quality:

Accuracy and Reliability of Information: AP has integrated tools, publicly disclosed on its official website, to provide information about content. It uses bylines and datelines to inform the reader about the source of the data (dateline) and the author of the news (byline).

Editorial Standards and Information Verification Procedures: AP does not use non-original content (in terms of language and formulation). If information appears elsewhere for the first time, this is mentioned. The work of others is always cited.

Fact-Checking: AI tools assist in real-time fact-checking, making quick references to new information with existing databases, ensuring the accuracy of news reporting and reducing the risk of errors or misinformation.

- Automatic Content Generation:

AP uses AI-based algorithms to automatically generate news on subjects such as corporate earnings reports and certain sports events. These algorithms can process data and produce articles within seconds, significantly speeding up the news production process for routine events.

- Data Journalism:

AP leverages AI for data analysis and data-driven journalism. AI algorithms help analyze large datasets, identifying trends and patterns that may not be immediately apparent to journalists. This is particularly valuable for investigative reports and complex data-based narratives.

- Content Enrichment:

AP uses AI to enrich news content with multimedia elements. Automated processes can add relevant images, videos, and infographics to news articles, enhancing visual appeal and interactivity.

- Language Translation:

AI-based translation tools help AP provide news content in multiple languages, allowing a broader audience to access information.

- News Monitoring and Alerts:

AP uses AI algorithms to monitor news sources and social networks in real-time. This enables the detection of events and breaking news as they happen, ensuring timely coverage of important stories.

- Audience Engagement:

AI-based personalization and recommendation algorithms help AP adapt news content to individual reader preferences, leading to increased audience engagement on digital platforms.

- Content Distribution:

AP uses AI for optimizing the distribution of news content across various platforms and channels, including social networks, mobile apps, and websites. AI assists in spreading relevant content to specific audience segments.

- Interaction with Virtual Assistants and Chatbots:

AI-based chatbots and virtual assistants on the AP website provide users with instant answers to questions and help them navigate content more easily, improving the user experience.

- Predictive Analysis:

AP uses artificial intelligence for predictive analysis to forecast audience interests and trends. This helps in more efficient editorial planning and content strategy.

- Market Information:

In addition to news reporting, AP uses artificial intelligence to analyze financial data and market trends, providing insights and reports on economic developments.

- Transcription Services:

Speech recognition and AI-based transcription services help efficiently convert spoken words, such as interviews or press conferences, into written text. This streamlines the work of journalists and significantly reduces the time it takes for information to reach newsrooms and then the wider public.

- Transparency:

Associated Press frequently provides access to webinars and articles intended to show how the agency integrates artificial intelligence into data collection, news creation, and distribution processes.

Moreover, Associated Press has published a guide with the title *The Associated Press Statement of News Values and Principles*[5]. The ethical importance of The Associated Press publishing a comprehensive 27-page guide on News Values and Principles lies in the organization's commitment to transparency, accountability, and upholding journalistic integrity. Although this guide doesn't contain a specific chapter for the use of Artificial Intelligence, there are many phrases regarding the topic, especially on the subject regarding altering information of any kind.

[5] Associated Press. https://www.ap.org/about/news-values-and-principles/downloads/ap-news-values-and-principles.pdf.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this article provides a theoretical examination of how The Associated Press strategically employs artificial intelligence across various facets of its news production process, emphasizing an ethical perspective. The article delves into AP's use of AI, shedding light on its contributions to content generation, data analysis, multimedia enhancement, audience engagement, and predictive analytics. From the extensive integration of AI in newsrooms to its impact on journalistic workflows, AP stands as a pioneering force in embracing technological advancements while upholding ethical considerations.

The ethical dimension is accentuated through AP's commitment to transparency, exemplified by the publication of a detailed guide encompassing News Values and Principles. This commitment not only fortifies the organization's accountability but also serves as a valuable educational resource for journalists, fostering ethical decision-making in the realm of AI-driven news reporting. The ethical importance of AP's AI integration is underscored by its efforts to maintain accuracy, reliability, and adherence to journalistic standards. From fact-checking with AI tools to utilizing machine learning for real-time verification, AP leverages technology to fortify the veracity of news content. The organization's use of AI in enhancing multimedia elements, language translation, and predictive analysis not only streamlines news dissemination but also elevates the overall user experience, reflecting a dedication to audience engagement.

While AI expedites routine news reporting, journalists play an irreplaceable role in complex analyses, investigative journalism, and ensuring nuanced perspectives. The ethical use of AI, as exemplified by AP, involves a delicate balance between automation and human expertise, acknowledging the strengths of each in the pursuit of journalistic excellence.

In navigating the evolving landscape of AI in journalism, AP emerges as a trailblazer in adopting innovative technologies while upholding the core tenets of journalistic ethics. The article not only underscores the ethical importance of AI integration but also provides insights into the evolving dynamics of news production in the digital age. As media organizations

continue to grapple with the ethical implications of AI, the case of The Associated Press serves as a compelling model for responsibly harnessing technology to amplify journalistic impact while maintaining ethical standards.

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