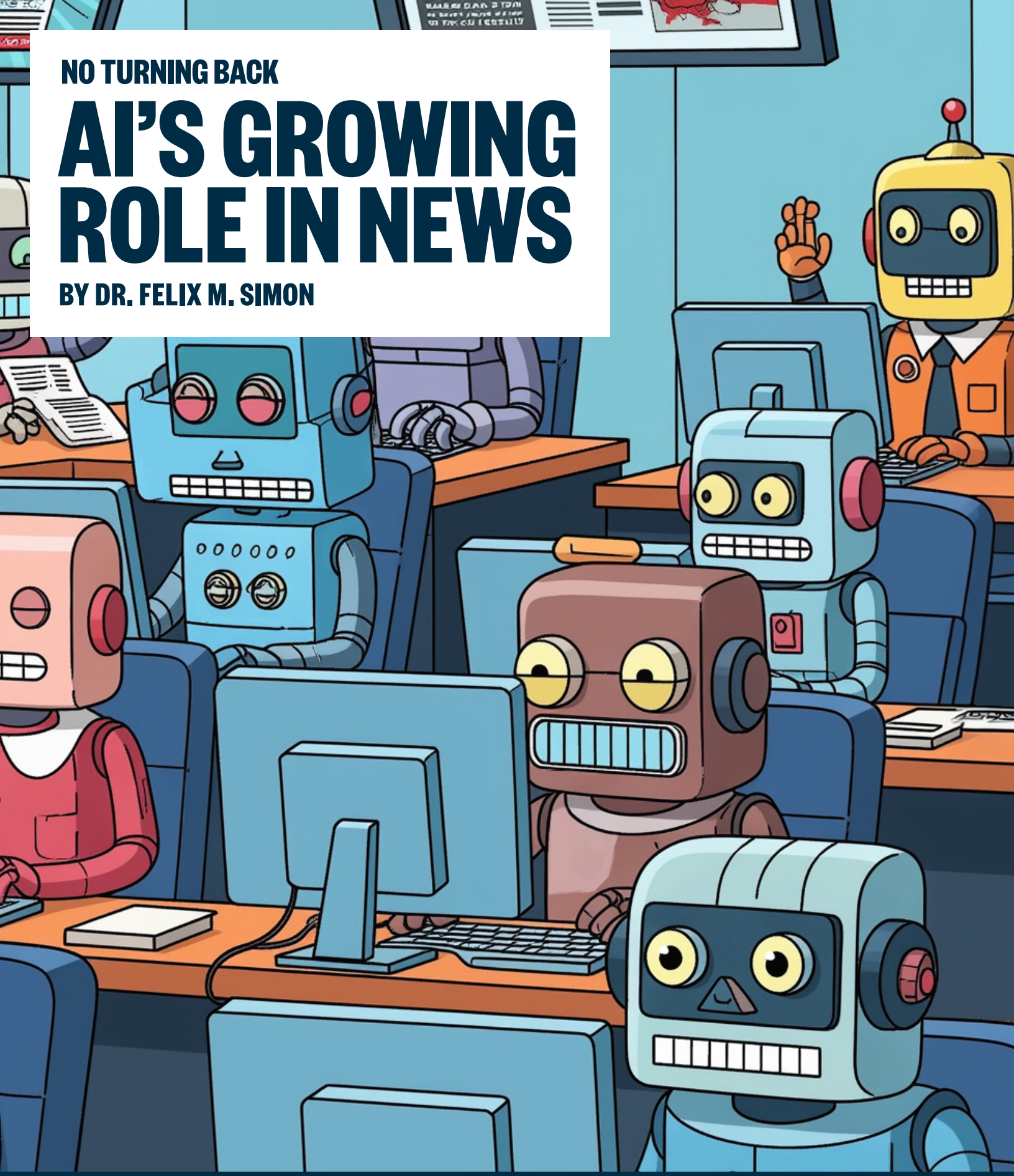
NO TURNING BACK

AI'S GROWING ROLE IN NEWS

BY DR. FELIX M. SIMON



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes key insights from a March 2025 gathering of approximately 80 UK and European media leaders hosted by Aspen Digital, a program of the Aspen Institute, in London. The convening addressed the evolving relationship between artificial intelligence and the news industry. Key points addressed in this report include:

- News organisations have, so far, primarily used AI for incremental improvements rather than revolutionary transformation. Most have focused on automating routine tasks like transcription, translation, and headline creation. Leading organisations have developed specialized AI applications to enhance efficiency and support existing journalistic functions.
- Senior leadership typically demonstrates greater enthusiasm for AI than do frontline staff, who often express concerns about job security, loss of autonomy, and risks to journalistic quality. To bridge this gap, many organsations have established internal training programs, created specialized AI roles, and identified internal "AI influencers" to encourage adoption and mitigate resistance.
- Publishers are increasingly concerned about AI-driven disintermediation, with platforms and AI systems potentially eroding direct audience relationships and declining referral traffic as AI systems increasingly deliver information summaries directly to users without directing them to news websites.
- Many executives advocate focusing on "distinctive journalism" that AI cannot easily replicate, including investigative reporting and nuanced analysis. However, questions remain about whether audiences will recognize this value distinction and whether such content will remain visible in increasingly AI-mediated information environments.

- A central dispute involves the use of publishers' content to train AI systems. Many technology companies have scraped news content without compensation, often justifying this through broad interpretations of fair use doctrine. While legal challenges progress slowly, news organisations have reluctantly begun forming partnerships with AI companies, seeking to extract some benefit, in the absence of definitive court rulings.
- Many publishers advocate for stricter enforcement of existing copyright laws and oppose copyright exemptions that favor AI developers. Some propose solutions including collective licensing arrangements or managed marketplaces to connect AI developers and rights holders.
- There are several gaps in the industry conversation, particularly regarding user perspectives. Despite frequent references to trust and transparency, limited attention has been paid to how audiences, especially non-expert or marginalized users, experience AI-driven news.
- Smaller media outlets, Global South news organisations, and freelancers are often overlooked in discussions around AI and news.

FOREWORD

When generative AI burst into public consciousness with the widespread release of ChatGPT in late 2022, many in the news industry experienced a familiar sense of dread. Social media had decimated newsroom business models and disintermediated audience relations for almost two decades. And here, so the thinking goes, is yet another set of technologies out to kill us. But that sentiment is misguided. To be sure, generative AI presents tremendous risk to news publishers, but—like the advent of the world wide web decades prior—it also represents an opportunity to fulfill the public service mission of journalism. Our series of convenings and reports, which started in early 2024, sets out to explore those two realities, while convening and advancing the field.

This report by Felix M. Simon intends to capture the state of the art in March 2025, when news publishing leadership, practitioners, and experts on the UK and European publishing world came together at the Thomson Reuters headquarters in Canary Wharf, London. We were struck by how quickly many of the leading news institutions are embracing AI tools, at least as experiments, and the care with which they are ensuring that these technologies support, and do not undermine, their public service mission.

In the next two years, as AI capabilities advance, Aspen Digital intends to expand this work to other regions of the world, including to the Global South, to expand the scope of learning about AI adoption and pitfalls, and to broaden the discussion to the information ecosystem writ large. We hope you will follow along with us on this journey.

Vivian Schiller
Aspen Institute

INTRODUCTION

In March 2025, about 80 European media leaders and industry figures gathered for a two-day convening hosted by the Aspen Institute at the Thomson Reuters headquarters in London, UK. The event aimed to discuss the latest developments in the AI and media landscape, hear case study presentations, and strengthen industry conversations on how AI—as one challenge and opportunity among many facing the news industry—can be adequately addressed.

This report provides an overview of high-level themes emerging from these conversations, placing them in the context of wider developments around AI, including some of the latest research on the subject. It is not intended as a comprehensive summary of every session nor can it claim to represent the entire industry's view, given the conference's stated focus on UK and European publishers.

The report is divided into three major sections which can be read independently. The first provides an overview of some of the latest industry experiments and developments around AI discussed at the event and details how various organisations have attempted to navigate between experimentation, adoption, and wider industry norms and principles. The second section examines the industry's perspective on what has—or will—happen regarding business models and journalism's future position (both as a public good and as a profession and business) in society, highlighting the challenges and opportunities presented by AI. Section three spins this further to take a closer look at the broader disruption to the news industry and information environment in the context of wider (geo) political and commercial struggles in which AI is entangled. This includes conflicts over data and distribution channels, as well as the contest for control over who gets to define the future. The conclusion draws broader lessons, including highlighting various blindspots insufficiently reflected in the conversations. Additional recommended reading is provided at the end.

A final note: This is not an academic piece of writing and should not be treated as such. To protect participants, we have applied the Chatham House rule, and quotes in this report have either been cleared with the speaker (and in some cases edited for clarity at the source's request) or been carefully checked to ensure they do not reveal the source.

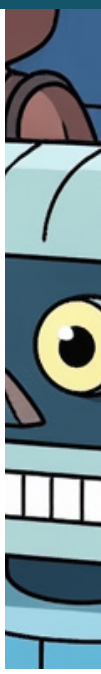
WHAT HAPPENED SO FAR? BALANCING EXPERIMENTATION AND ADOPTION WITH NORMS AND PRINCIPLES

1

RETOOLING, NOT REVOLUTIONISING

Despite the early hype around generative AI, early predictions that AI would not revolutionize the news industry overnight have largely proven to be correct. What emerged during the summit was that the technology has mainly been used for incremental improvements rather than changing the core motivations or practices of traditional news organisations. AI is further retooling the media in service of enhancing existing services rather than changing them from the ground up.[1]

> **AI is not an end, right? AI is the means to an end... we want to use AI to make our newsrooms stronger and to get our news out there into the world.**
>
> ALESSANDRA GALLONI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, REUTERS



Many news organisations present have so far approached AI with a mixture of caution and excitement, with the latter seemingly more pronounced on the senior leadership level. That enthusiasm is not always shared within wider teams, owing to concerns that range from luddism, in some rare cases, but mostly to concerns over job security, a loss of autonomy, greater dependency on technology companies, and the risks to journalistic quality.

MOTIVATIONS, MOTIVATIONS, MOTIVATIONS

There is no singular motivation for news organisations to use AI, but rather several interrelated factors. First, publishers contend a strong desire to use AI to enhance the core work of journalism. AI

is framed by many managers as a tool to assist journalists and other newsworkers in tasks such newsgathering, data analysis, and fact-checking, ultimately aiming to improve the quality and depth of reporting.

I think the big gain is being able to free journalists from the mundanities and baseline tasks that AI can take over so that they are deployed to drive capital-J journalism that really has impact.

DEBORAH TURNESS, CEO, BBC NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS

Second, there is a significant focus on improving efficiency and reducing costs, with the automation of routine tasks and optimising workflows seen as one way of allowing the news industry to do more with limited resources, particularly in an environment of budget constraints—although there was a tacit acknowledgment by some that AI can and will be used to cut back, or at least not further hire, around some roles.

Third, several executives and managers said that they are motivated by what they see as a need to adapt to changing consumer behaviour to reach new audiences, especially younger demographics who consume media in different ways.[2] The hope here is that AI would offer potential avenues for personalisation and delivering news in innovative formats, both of which are widely regarded as the best approach to make the news appealing in a competitive market where consumers have almost unlimited options and different forms of content vying for their attention.[3]

Finally, there is a defensive motivation to address the challenges posed by AI, such as the potential for disintermediation by AI platforms who can deliver news-like information directly. The idea appears to be that engaging with AI would allow news organisations to better understand and mitigate these risks while also exploring opportunities for new partnerships and revenue streams.[4]

SO WHAT HAS BEEN DONE? EXAMPLES FROM LEADING NEWS ORGANISATIONS

The high level view that emerged during the event—and which is mirrored by wider industry discourse—was that the news industry has now moved from experimentation to full-fledged adoption, at least for the organisations present. Many newsrooms now routinely employ AI for tasks seen as particularly repetitive and time-consuming, such as transcription, translation, and writing assistance for headlines, summaries, and similar content. Organisations have also begun developing and implementing internal AI-powered tools to enhance efficiency, for example, in analysing press releases, improving SEO, and assisting with various types of data journalism or investigative journalism. Some (but by far not all) examples heard during the event are listed in table 1 below.[5]

NEWS ORGANISATION	EXAMPLES OF AI USE CASES
The New York Times	The New York Times is increasingly using artificial intelligence in its marketing efforts and content management. Stephen Dunbar Johnson (President, International of The New York Times Company) notes that initial results indicate AI can deliver advertising more accurately and cost-effectively. Additionally, AI can support investigative journalism and assist with tasks such as translation where The Times has seen "immense improvement in translation, in terms of speed."
BBC	The BBC recognises AI's potential in translation services. "What I'm probably most excited about in terms of the impact is in our World Service area where we reach over 400 million people a week in 42 languages today." said BBC News CEO Deborah Turness. "The potential for AI to enable us to potentially one day double or even triple the number of languages that we are translated into is there. Over 70% of the world does not have access to free media. And our job is to be out there fighting disinformation and reaching people who otherwise are receiving propaganda."
The Financial Times	Among other uses, the FT is increasingly using AI for data journalism, building specific tools for various investigations, for instance alerting journalists or creating information with which they then can work. Many of these tools are purely for internal use, not unlike other software commonly used to conduct investigations or help in reporting.

NEWS ORGANISATION	EXAMPLES OF AI USE CASES
The Guardian	The Guardian is using AI primarily for quickly distilling information and improving behind-the-scenes processes. Additionally, the Guardian's Head of Editorial Innovation Chris Moran pointed out the potential of off-the-shelf AI tools: "My favourite one is not one we built: NotebookLLM. It really seems to change how our journalists think about how to work with AI. A lot of this technology is at its most useful when it's most mundane."
Reuters News	Reuters has developed a new AI tool named "Fact Genie" designed to quickly extract essential information from press releases, significantly speeding up the distribution of alerts. Editor-in-Chief Alessandra Galloni explained, "We've got a tool now which immediately calls on the LLM and presents journalists with the key snaps or the alerts they might want to send out," adding that this innovation has reduced by half the time between receiving a press release and distributing an alert to clients. Additionally, Reuters' Head of AI Strategy Jane Barrett discussed the company's use of their secure "Open arena" sandbox environment, hosted within Azure, allowing journalists to experiment safely with AI tools without risking data exposure.

Table 1: An overview of some AI use cases.

I believe that people want the same things but in different forms. The use of multimodal models will really change this and allow us to deliver things in new ways.

JOHAN LINDEN, MANAGING ENGINEER, SWEDISH TELEVISION

However, it was difficult not to get the sense that many of these examples were somewhat obvious—something also tacitly admitted by various participants on the sidelines of the event. The low-hanging fruits have, even if not all yet been picked in practice, at least been identified. The road ahead will require some tougher decisions and greater boldness. Consequently, it was perhaps not surprising that many participants emphasised the need for even more rapid experimentation with AI systems and tools.

> **Journalism has a fundamental choice: Either lead the transformation or retreat to a corner of the information ecosystem.**
>
> DAVID CASWELL, FOUNDER, STORYFLOW LTD.

MANAGING A JAGGED FRONTIER

News organisations have always operated a bit like the ship of Theseus, with the added wrinkle that the planks get updated continuously and that the ship remains in full operation whilst the work is underway.[6] This principle applies equally to managing the adoption of AI which presents them with a jagged frontier. While many systems' capabilities are increasingly advanced, they still fall short of expectations and present challenges around factual accuracy, bias, and various other issues. Nevertheless, there is a strong desire to embrace AI, reflected in recent industry surveys of executives and managers.[7] However, these same executives remain cautious about potential ethical and reputational risks. Hence, there exists a strong shared sense that careful navigation of this shift is needed—in part to avoid staff mutiny.

Several participants emphasised the importance of open internal communication and education to address the—in their words—understandable fear and confusion among some staff regarding AI, especially concerning potential loss of autonomy, or even jobs.[8] Some news leaders try to mitigate these concerns by positioning AI as a tool to serve journalism, not replace it. They stressed that people need time and encouragement to explore AI and see for themselves how it can enhance their jobs while establishing clear guardrails for experimentation. Other practical steps include AI training for journalists to increase familiarity with

and understanding of the benefits (but also pitfalls of the technology and adopting a "test and try" approach that encourages staff engagement and feedback).

Various news organisations have also set up working groups with representatives from both the newsroom and business side to examine the potential of AI and help manage adoption. Some larger organisations have created new roles, such as AI editors or heads of growth and innovation, to lead these efforts and provide a human face to the changes. The importance of such internal AI influencers to encourage adoption was also noted several times and seen as a good way to break down organisational silos—which have been shown to hamper innovation efforts[9]—and diffuse tensions.

I think there's a lot less tension in the newsroom now about that question of 'Will AI take my job?'. [...] We don't see AI as a job saver or a way of reducing heads and I think there's growing confidence within the newsroom that that is the case. We have also launched a pretty deliberate training program around AI. We'll only let journalists work on AI once they've gone through this training program and it's pretty rigorous and I think so far it's proven pretty effective.

NEWS MANAGER, ANONYMOUS

Some organisations found that starting with "entry-level drugs" like transcription and translation tools helped ease journalists into using AI.[10] Overall, the emphasis is on integrating AI thoughtfully and responsibly, ensuring that it aligns with core journalistic principles and enhances the work of human journalists. The prevailing sentiment was that this is an ongoing process that will require flexibility and continuous learning from employees and senior management alike.

How much of a difference this all makes in practice, however, remains to be seen. A recent industry survey by FT Strategies, for example, found that while senior leadership was broadly optimistic about AI (perhaps because AI will come for their jobs last), more junior staff held less rosy views of the technology.[11] And whilst proclamations about AI augmenting journalistic work reign supreme and assertions that it will be developed and used in line with "journalistic principles" are common, the fact of the matter is that such talk is likely not a long-term reality, at least when it comes to job security. Attentive observers could hear more than one admission that some jobs will likely be lost through restructuring.[12]

We should not only have sessions about AI for employees but also for board members. If you invest in it, you need to understand the risks.

OLE JACOB SUNDE, CHAIR, SCOTT TRUST

EVOLVING BUSINESS MODELS AND THE VALUE OF "DISTINCTIVE JOURNALISM"

2

AI-DRIVEN DISINTERMEDIATION: A GROWING THREAT TO PUBLISHER-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS

You'd have to be living under a rock to not feel the concern within the news industry that AI presents a major challenge to the business model of news organisations and the value of journalism to audiences. However, the effects of the technology are an outgrowth and intensification of a longer historical trend. The evolution of news media in the 20th century saw publishers gain considerable influence. The digital revolution, and the rise of platforms, fundamentally altered this landscape by centralising audience access and attention away from the news' properties.[13] As Ezra Eeman, Director of Strategy and Innovation at NPO, put it during the summit: "Publishers owned both the power to create great journalism and the power to distribute and monetise. But with the advent of digital, this value chain has increasingly come into the hands of others, from cloud infrastructure to app stores, to social media platforms."

The platforms, having disrupted various markets, are reinvesting heavily in infrastructure, including AI, to further expand their scale and scope. This strategic deployment of AI, and now generative AI systems, allows them to retain and extend control over both the availability and organisation of information—and helps them serve audiences, as well as the specific needs of clients such as business and governments.[14] As I wrote in 2021, "platform companies increasingly control both the means of production and connection in the news."[15] This now presents news organisations with intensified competition from both established platforms offering AI-driven products and services and potentially new, low to no-cost providers of content generated by AI.

No wonder then that executives at the conference repeatedly voiced concerns that AI-driven platforms or chatbots will further "disintermediate" publishers and erode the direct audience relationship they once enjoyed. This concern is particularly pronounced for younger audiences who increasingly discover news outside traditional channels and have weaker links to news organisations.[16]

With AI, and more specifically generative AI, the newsroom process also comes increasingly under pressure. In its most radical form, AI can go from raw data to generated output in the chat box. This also means that the power in the value chain is increasingly shifting to these bookends. Who owns the IP, the talent, the data, the data infrastructure? And who has the interface and the relationship with the consumer and the audience?

EZRA EEMAN, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND INNOVATION, NPO

Digital media have already had the effect of tethering people closer to each other and to information: it is easier than ever before to connect with others (including those removed in time and space) and to access and engage with information.[17] AI is now accelerating an age-long quest to make knowledge more easily searchable and malleable, "according to needs of the user and the demands of the moment".[18] News was long still part of this ecosystem, but has decreased in relevance in recent years due to changing audience behaviour as well as decisions by platforms and publishers.[19] There is now an overwhelming concern that AI further commodifies basic information users want and need at the expense of publishers: summary text articles, traffic reports, simple news briefs, cooking recipes, recommendations and the like are all at risk. This, publishers worry, could threaten revenue models as AI-generated content could compete even more strongly with news content and create a substitution effect—all the while news content loses visibility on digital platforms that the news industry does not control.

In the words of the Times' Head of Digital Ed Roussel, this is already happening: "Referrals are coming down for the media industry. What has been sustaining audience reach for the industry is Google Search. The click through rates from chat environments are significantly lower than Google search. So we might be about to lose a shedload of traffic."

Another senior participant, too, worried that "our relationship with our readers could be completely mediated by these companies [tech platforms]"—with knock-on effects for the availability of good information in the public interest.

The thing that keeps me up at night is once click-through collapses and AI becomes more integrated into platforms, what does that look like? We, as an industry, have not responded enough to that challenge.

CHRIS MORAN, HEAD OF EDITORIAL INNOVATION, THE GUARDIAN

Indeed, there are some anecdata indicating that this shift is underway, with clickthrough rates to websites in general seemingly declining where people are presented with AI overviews in Google Search, although it is early days and the impact hasn't been conclusively measured for news content specifically.[20]

THE VALUE OF DISTINCTIVE JOURNALISM—BUT WILL AUDIENCES SEE IT?

Many participants argued that, in this new environment, publishers should reorient their business strategies around exclusive, human-driven work that AI systems cannot easily duplicate. As Guardian CEO Anna Bateson put it, the news industry should "lean into what you are and what your purpose is." Original investigative reporting, nuanced analysis, strong branding, and reporting the "unknown unknowns" that cannot be easily discovered by machines, so the argument went by various participants, will prove to be the enduring currency of quality journalism and help news outlets secure their future. Or in the words of the BBC's

Analysis Editor, Ros Atkins: "We're making news for people who know the news. If something big has happened, really that's going to be everywhere […]. The difference will be what can we add on top of the fact that an event has occurred, something that adds value." Likewise, a focus on building genuine relationships with communities and emphasising human judgment, so the general hope, could help—something emphasised by Sky News CEO David Rhodes: "As a broadcaster we are further behind than the Guardian or The New York Times [on this front]. Our job was to blast something out for the widest audiences, but this didn't build community. So we are trying to create communities of interest around different things and different products."

We could be moving to a post-journalism society where we don't have the audience and the revenue to sustain journalism in the public interest.

JAMES HARDING, CO-FOUNDER AND EDITOR, TORTOISE MEDIA

This all may well be true and useful, but the proof is in the pudding. While such an approach may help in retaining existing audiences, it is an open question if it will help attract new ones. It also needs to be stressed here that there is no conclusive evidence to date that the majority of audiences will generally prefer "artisanal and hand-crafted" news over content partially or wholly produced with AI; and be willing to depart with both their attention, time, and money to support the same.

WHO GETS WHAT: INDUSTRY DISRUPTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE OVER A.I.

3

NEWS ORGANISATIONS: THE ROADKILL ON THE WAY TO UTOPIA?

A major topic dominating the conversation around AI is the power of technology companies developing and deploying the technology. These firms are attempting to integrate AI across industries and the public sectors, with the dual aim of generating revenue and staying ahead of their competitors. Meanwhile, many governments worldwide appear inclined to adopt AI in hopes of stimulating lagging economic growth and as part of a wider geopolitical dynamics, whilst businesses are exploring it primarily to reduce costs and gain advantage over their competitors. This has opened new fault lines, including with the news industry.

The core dispute is around the "fuel" of the recent AI boom: the vast amounts of data which are required to train foundation models.[21] Various technology companies have scraped data from the web, including content from news publishers and other creators. [22] The justification has often been a loose interpretation of the US fair use doctrine[23], under which it is legal to use copyrighted material without prior permission from the copyright holder on a case-by-case basis, as long as the use is for purposes such as commentary, criticism, news reporting, and research, or create a "transformational" new work. However, this interpretation has been called into question[24] as companies have begun building paid products based on this scraped content. While various cases make their way through the courts, governments, in the eyes of critical voices at the event, seem reluctant to enforce existing rules more stringently—or are even calling for copyright rules to be weakened to enable AI training and development.

A significant part of the discussions revolved around the UK government's approach to AI, particularly regarding copyright exemptions for training AI models which may harm content creators. Various participants raised concerns about the lack of wider economic and societal impact assessments of the UK government's planned AI copyright bill (the former, an economic impact assessment, the UK government has subsequently promised).[25] There was also a strong perception that UK government policy is driven by a desire to attract a few large tech companies at the expense of creators and the news media. As Baroness Beeban Kidron, a leading campaigner and member of the UK House of Lords noted: "I think we have a government, and a [science and technology] department, who are very persuaded that the frontier models are going to be running the world in a short time span and that the UK's best interest is in having part of the action."[26] Publishers at the event thus frequently raised concerns about AI models scraping their content without fair compensation or attribution. Matt Rogerson, the Financial Times' Director of Global Public Policy and Platform Strategy argued, "There is no value exchange from the extraction of copyright material from websites, use of that for training, use of that for retrieval augmented generation, no traffic going back to the website."

But while the court cases will likely take years to resolve, many news executives have meanwhile moved from resistance to careful engagement, trying to extract as much benefit from the situation as possible. Many at the event described "frenemy" relationships with AI firms, seeking partnerships in the hope of gaining an edge and making some additional revenue, but always wary of being undercut or cannibalised. Some of this is pure pragmatism: Reuters' Editor-in-Chief Alessandra Galloni, for example, observed, "It is public that we have done deals with some AI companies. We believe it is critical that publishers are paid for their IP and that AI tools are grounded in fact."

The political mood today is such that the (tech) companies do not want as much collaboration with the news media.

NEWS MANAGER, ANONYMOUS

Another senior executive acknowledged the necessity of making deals because AI companies were taking their content anyway, but expressed concern about the lack of genuine collaboration and the feeling that tech companies are acting unilaterally.

NO EASY SOLUTIONS

Easy solutions were few and far between. Participants strongly felt that the political mood and support was not in the camp of the news industry and creators—largely because, in their view, the state and corporate entities who own or influence the development of AI are engaged in a broader geo-political conversation and have seemingly bigger fish to fry. News features in this almost as a sideshow. The regulatory debates in the US, UK, EU and elsewhere reflect this dynamic, with strong influence from both US companies and the US government attempting to shape policy in various countries on the AI front. So what is to be done?

Undeterred, many participants argued for stricter enforcement of existing copyright laws to ensure that AI companies cannot freely exploit news content. They also expressed strong opposition to copyright exemptions, especially those with an opt-out model. Danielle Coffey, CEO of the News Media Alliance, for example, expressed strong skepticism towards an opt-out model for content usage, arguing that it provides no means for news organisations to control how their content is used or to prevent scraping and value extraction. Coffey also highlighted what she called the "ineffectiveness of current methods employed by news publishers to protect their content", such as terms of service and robots.txt files, which she said are frequently ignored by AI companies. She pointed out that even when companies claim to respect these protocols, they often find ways around them, such as using third-party crawlers. To address this, Coffey highlighted options including litigation to protect intellectual property and exploring voluntary and procompetitive collective licensing options, drawing parallels with the music industry.

Meanwhile, some like Madhav Chinappa from Human Native AI, advocated for a managed marketplace to connect AI developers and rights holders, aiming for a "win-win" through licensing—effectively suggesting a market-solution to this issue. He suggested a generous framing of the current scraping could be seen as a necessity for AI companies in the training of their models,

given the scale they need; implicitly suggesting a short-term reality that news organisations must contend with. He pointed out that different AI companies have varying needs and are potentially willing to license data. He also noted the challenges in licensing, especially the technical difficulties of accessing clean, structured data—nevertheless an argument that doesn't effectively address quite obvious cases of data appropriation.

Yet, some struck slightly more optimistic notes, pointing to shared concerns between the news industry and the technology sector that could provide room for collaboration. For example, Deborah Turness of the BBC emphasised the need to work with AI companies for mutual benefit when it comes to the accuracy in the output of AI systems and proper representation of sources: "We must find ways to work in full positivity with the industry, because I'm sure those who run the chatbots don't also want their brands to be damaged by the fact that they're delivering fake and dangerous news. We also want attribution and we want our brands to be prominent, because we can't lose our relationship with our audiences."

CONCLUSION

FALSE PROPHETS?

The future is uncertain and no one knows where things are going. While this might be accurate to an extent, there is risk in treating this as a truism. Some things truly cannot be known, but some developments can be reasonably anticipated and certain trends can be expected.

One source of purported wisdom about the future is often technology leaders themselves who openly proclaim their visions or intended directions when it comes to AI. The problem lies in reading these projections as more than what they are. They are certainly, to a degree, expressions of intent and they are probably also often provided in similar ways to what is known in central banking parlance as "forward guidance"—statements made in attempts to shape the direction of behaviour and markets.[27]

There is sometimes a lack of humility in the tech industry, where we think that we're experiencing everything we do for the first time. It stems from understandable excitement, but it's also beneficial to persuade everyone that things are changing fast and they need to keep up.

VERITY HARDING, FOUNDER, FORMATION ADVISORY

But it is dangerous to read too much into them, as one participant noted, because these people in their view do not have a crystal ball either: "It's weird that people who have made a lot of money in tech are being treated as public intellectuals. Just because you got lucky in tech, does not mean you have interesting things to say. But talking about long-term things also means you don't have to talk about the day-to-day nitty-gritty." While they might have some greater insight into aspects of the

technology—in itself an assumption contested by some leading computer scientists such as Melanie Mitchell[28]—they are not necessarily the best at anticipating how their systems and models will unfold in complex social systems, including in the information environment and the media. Ignorance is just as much part of their world as it is of everyone else's.

And there are problems in the here and now which risk getting sacrificed on the altar of chasing the future. As Antonio Zapulla, CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, put it: "We need guardrails and we need them really quick. We have concerns about AI and mass surveillance, privacy." These risks, so the view of many at the event, should be taken seriously but currently are falling by the wayside (especially with some technology leaders wanting to go in a very different direction[29]). A silver lining to these concerns, however, might be that recent research in the US and UK found that while people acknowledge potential long-term risks of AI, they are significantly more concerned about its immediate societal harms like than hypothetical long-term existential threats, and that focusing on existential risks does not seem to diminish these immediate concerns.[30]

THE THINGS WE DO NOT REALLY TALK ABOUT (BUT SHOULD)

While many topics received ample attention, several areas seem to fly under radar in current industry conversation. One of these, ironically, was the user perspective: Despite frequent invocations of "trust" and "transparency," few of the participants addressed how end users—particularly non-expert or marginalized audiences—are actually experiencing or will experience AI-driven news. It remains unclear whether many expectations will be borne out by reality, particularly regarding personalisation with AI where hard evidence of effectiveness and audience desire remains limited. This challenge was pointed out by Chris Moran, who argued that the ability to personalise content also fundamentally depends on "having the necessary data in the first place" and cautioned against seeing generative AI as a "magic wand" for everything. The lack of focus on audience perspectives in AI journalism discussions also, admittedly stems from shortcomings in the research landscape. Audience-centered research remains scarce compared to technical and business implementation studies, creating a vacuum where insights are needed. At the same

time, the rapid pace of AI development coupled with slow publishing timelines means published research is often outdated by the time it reaches decision-makers, forcing news executives to make strategic choices based on obsolete information.

The industry also needs to ask itself who gets heard—and who doesn't. While the challenges facing smaller or regional media outlets are often acknowledged, they can be more of an afterthought in general discussions of the topic—especially those in the Global South—as some attendees noted. Antonio Zappulla sharply criticised this gap: "I think we're talking about AI from a very Western perspective. We are working at the moment with newsrooms in Uruguay, Kenya, Tanzania, and we're seeing a very, very different set of problems." He noted significant barriers to access, and though these were decreasing, the obstacles were still significant. Conversations of AI and news would also benefit from including more smaller players and startups. Freelancers lack a voice in these discussions, too, as do small local or advocacy news organisations and what might be termed "news influencers." Yet all these stakeholders matter and have their own experiences, needs and issues when it comes to AI. They might also be sources of innovation and disruption in ways that easily get overlooked—or never implemented—at larger organisations.

These omissions in the broader discourse highlight the need for a continued and inclusive dialogue about AI in journalism and news—one that acknowledges the full spectrum of the industry rather than focusing primarily on its most privileged segments. Without this broader perspective, solutions and strategies developed may serve only a fraction of the news ecosystem while leaving the most vulnerable parts unprepared for the transformations ahead.

CODA

The industry's current approach to AI is mostly incremental, with organisations retooling existing processes rather than fundamentally reimagining journalism. While this cautious adaptation is understandable, some bold, forward-thinking strategies will be necessary to truly capitalise on AI's potential and prepare for future developments and upheavals. At present, most news organizations are reacting to technological changes rather than proactively shaping them. However, some organisations are

beginning to move beyond process-focused thinking toward product-oriented innovation with AI. Discussions about the need for more fundamental changes are increasing.

In this context, collaboration among news organisations is occurring more frequently than in the past, but competitive instincts still hinder more meaningful cooperation around shared problems. Many organisations maintain a "we will not talk to our competitors" mentality, and some major players rarely engage in industry discussions. However, if they examined the situation more closely, they would likely recognise that any competitive advantages they develop independently are ephemeral, while the larger challenges facing the industry cannot be solved in isolation.

Journalism's perspective on AI remains insular. As one participant observed when presenting views on how news organisations are missing opportunities with AI: "I am afflicting the comforted." There is a pervasive timidity in the industry: a reluctance to think expansively about AI's implications, partly due to existential concerns about how to keep the show on the road but also because many feel they cannot afford to experiment. In addition, the industry's tendency to view news as uniquely important often prevents them from looking beyond their immediate context to learn from other sectors or understand the news—and its strengths and weaknesses—from an outsider's perspective.

Finally, for all the attention on artificial intelligence, it is worth noting that AI represents only one of several significant challenges facing journalism. Other pressing issues—declining trust, audience fragmentation, a lack of diversity and representation within journalism's ranks, and political challenges to name just a few—cannot be neglected in the pursuit of technological advancement around AI.

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FURTHER READING

BOOKS, REPORTS, ARTICLES

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Radcliffe, D. (2025, January 28). *Journalism in the AI Era: Opportunities and Challenges in the Global South* (Technical Report). Thomson Reuters Foundation. https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/items/3917e786-5ccf-4fc9-9f27-d1f2636155be

Simon, F. M. (2024). Artificial Intelligence in the News. How AI Retools, Rationalizes, and Reshapes Journalism and the Public Arena. New York: Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/artificial-intelligence-in-the-news.php

Summerfield, C. (2025). *These strange new minds: How AI learned to talk and what it means*. Viking.

RESOURCES

The JournalismAI project at the London School of Economics provides training materials and a frequently updated database of AI case studies: https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/polis/JournalismAI

The Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford's runs the "AI and the Future of News" project which features industry reporting and research, especially on audience views of AI in news and changing news consumption patterns: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/ai-journalism-future-news

The Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University's Columbia Journalism School regularly conducts research on AI and news, with a focus on platforms: https://www.cjr.org/tow-center

The AI, Media & Democracy Lab at the University of Amsterdam conducts research on AI and news, especially within the Benelux region: https://www.aim4dem.nl/

The Generative AI in the Newsroom (GAIN) project explores the responsible use of generative AI in news production and is lead by the Computational Journalism Lab at Northwestern University: https://generative-ai-newsroom.com/about

The Center for News, Technology & Innovation (CNTI) regularly features issue primers on AI and news: https://innovating.news/topic/information-cybersecurity/artificial-intelligence-in-journalism/

ENDNOTES

[1] For more on this argument, see Simon, F. M. (2024). *Artificial Intelligence in the News. How AI Retools, Rationalizes, and Reshapes Journalism and the Public Arena* (p. 46). Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University. https://doi.org/10.7916/ncm5-3v06.

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[4] It should be noted that these motivations are based on what people say publicly and it is possible that some motivations are not said out loud, for example for strategic reasons. These statements should therefore be interpreted with a degree of caution.

[5] For an up-to-date list of recent AI use cases, please refer to the database maintained by the JournalismAI project at the LSE: https://www.journalismai.info/resources/case-studies.

[6] The Ship of Theseus is a thought experiment often used in philosophy. It asks if a ship that has all its parts replaced over time is still the same ship. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus

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[17] See also: Schroeder, R. (2018). *Social Theory After the Internet: Media, Technology, and Globalization*. UCL Press, p. 20 & 161.

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