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# The Impact of Artificial Intelligence Technology on Journalistic Practices, News Narratives, and Ethical Challenges in a Local Media Outlet of Auckland

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## Abstract

The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the newsrooms has seen an increasing prominence against a backdrop of digitalization of the media landscape. Local media, significant in its role in serving a specific geographic area or community, is at the forefront of challenges from AI technology. This paper intends to explore the specific influences of AI over the norms and professionalism of journalistic practices in a local media under the lens of public discourse, to testify whether AI could facilitate the media in widening or narrowing democratic participation. The research approaches ethnography of Channel 33, a television Channel which is based in Auckland and targets the Chinese community, as a case study, and the findings intend to spark further research addressing this issue with different methods and providing counterbalance suggestions to the professionals and policy makers.

## Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI), as applied in journalism, is conceptualized as a series of algorithmic processes that produce and disseminate text and images (including videos) for public consumption, usually with minimal human oversight (Carlson, 2015). Against a backdrop of globalization and digitalization, the infiltration of AI into journalistic practices has been acknowledged by many existing scholarships, exemplified by cases such as chatbots like GPT-5 and DeepSeek, as well as the numerous AI image generators such as Sora. While working efficiency is improved in many newsrooms (Diakopoulos & Deborah, 2021), issues and challenges such as data transparency, privacy, and accountability have been highlighted by scholars (Sonni et al., 2004). It is recognized that AI technology has, in many ways, influenced journalists' roles and practices and news presentations as a whole. Nevertheless, any close-up examination of local media organizations remains marginal, usually because these media outlets are less scalable to maintain dominance in the media landscape and less confident in approaching AI (Rinehart & Kung, 2022). Local media, significant in its role in serving a specific geographic area or demographic group, and already grappling to stay viable under economic pressures, is not immune to these challenges

(Usher, 2015). This research intends to closely examine how AI has impacted journalistic practices and ethics in a specific media environment, and how the role of a local media outlet has been reshaped by AI technology under the lens of public discourse, to add to the dimensional examinations of AI's influences in journalism.

## **Planned Methodology**

The research aims to use ethnography to study Channel 33, a television channel based in Auckland that targets the Chinese community, as a case study. Ethnography is a widely used method to study the daily routines of a newsroom, including the processes of news-making and providing insights into journalistic practices (Cottle, 2007; Li, 2018; Tameling & Broersma, 2013). This study proposes to conduct the ethnographic observation of Channel 33's newsroom for a period of one month. Among the different methods of ethnography, such as interviews, field notes, and artefact analysis, participant observation is regarded as most effective in situations where factors at play are heterogeneous, deep cultural immersion is needed, and long-term engagement is possible (Aktinson & Hammersley, 1998). Channel 33 is a publicly owned television station aired through Freeview, New Zealand's major broadcasters' platform. It officially launched its service on November 16th, 2020, broadcasting round-the-clock and covering most cities in New Zealand. Using Mandarin as its main broadcasting language, its primary audience target is the Chinese community in New Zealand, with an approximate population of 200,000.

Channel 33 also strategized its social media channels from the start-up. It now owns its official YouTube channel, WeChat, TikTok, and other social media accounts to disseminate its media content. Resultantly, its audiences consist not only of local people in New Zealand but also of many overseas Chinese-speaking subscribers. This geographic hybrid of its market makes Channel 33 an ideal case study to investigate how AI impacts local media to compete in a global environment.

The main AI applications in the newsroom of Channel 33 include using chatbots at news selecting and interpreting, formatting agenda-setting, to the statistical analysis by social media, designing and producing graphics and illustrative pictures with AI generators.

The legitimacy of examining the strengthening or weakening of the political discourse from the newsroom practices is that journalism is traditionally positioned as a civic institution in service of the public (Christians et al., 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Lippmann, 1920, 1922; McNair, 2009; Siebert et al., 1956). It is widely agreed that the professional norms and ethics of journalism are pivoted toward the commitment to the public good, and when it comes to the question of politics and democracy, the characteristics of professional journalism emphasize the plurality within the bounds of generally accepted values (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018; Ornebring and Karlsson, 2022). The metrics to be applied to analyse the political discourse include basic liberal

democratic norms of civility, tolerance, inclusion, mutual recognition, and reasoned exchanges of differing views (Budarick, 2025).

The researcher is a part-time employee of Channel 33. Regarding this role's duality, the researcher acknowledges that these roles can create potential conflicts of interest and influence interactions, interpretations, and reporting. Therefore, the researcher will uphold the following principles during the research to minimize ethical issues:

- Disclose the researcher's role and the nature of the study where appropriate.
- Avoid using privileged access or insider information in ways that could harm participants or the organization.

## **Personal Reflections**

It is widely agreed that AI application has freed journalists for more intensive and creative job in news organizations (World Economic Forum, 2019), while the other side of the coin is that around 8% of journalism jobs will be jeopardized in next two decades due to the accelerated automation in newsrooms such as simple and routine news writing, weather forecasting and press releases summaries (Frey & Osborne, 2017). More importantly, focal debate over the professionalism of journalism has been highlighted, while the optimists advocate that human labour of journalism would rather be elevated to a higher level of overseeing the depth and value of news coverage than replaced (Diakopoulous, 2019). Meanwhile, other arguments concern that the

boundaries of journalism are re-determined as more amateurs enter the arena with the equipment of AI (Sonni et al, 2024). More news productions are combined with both human labour and AI rather than independently reflecting human journalists' personalities. These changes cause a paradigm shift in journalistic practices, as well as challenge traditional legitimacy and the authority of the journalism profession (Sonni et al, 2024).

Another major challenge addresses the norms and ethics of journalism. For example, when AI takes over the role of agenda-setting and gatekeeping, such as what to report and what to think about, the existing biases in news reporting tend to be amplified, creating echo chambers or filter bubbles that reinforce the polarization of opinions (Pariser, 2012). Furthermore, misinformation and disinformation also find their market empowered by AI tools, even though factchecking is increasingly applied in some news media outlets (Sonni et al, 2024). Consequently, this has become a disservice to the diversity and pluralism of media discourse, which impedes its significant role in facilitating democratic participation (Arora, 2023).

When it comes to local media, these challenges are even more salient as they used to align their productions and services more closely to local audiences but now have to grapple in the wider market.

Based on the researcher's existing observation, the proportional use of AI in the newsroom of Channel 33 aligns with the scholarly argument that AI has augmented newsrooms' working efficiency and sometimes broadens journalists' capability to produce more in-depth and high-quality content. Even though AI applications remain more as a supplement in the newsroom to journalistic expertise rather than a replacement, algorithms and big data from its digital channels are gradually reshaping the practices in the newsrooms, including news source selection, news narratives, news presentations, and programme organizing and editing. The overall presentation of news content tends to engage a particular segment of audiences rather than communicating diversified points of view. It is especially problematic when local media serves an important role in facilitating public discourse within a specific geographic area for a specific group of people.

As a result, this research intends to spark further research addressing this issue and providing counterbalance suggestions for professionals and policymakers. Besides, more multidimensional methods, such as content analysis or in-depth interviews in the newsrooms, should be encouraged to contribute to the study of the impact of AI on journalism.

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## Glossary

Freeview (New Zealand)

New Zealand's free-to-air television platform. It is operated by a joint venture between the country's major free-to-air broadcasters: government-owned Television New Zealand (TVNZ), government-subsidized Whakaata Māori, and the commercially-owned Sky Network Television.

## Short Bio

**Yang Guo** is a PhD candidate majoring in media and communication. She upholds an expertise in media and journalism, evidenced by both her career and educational background. She has relevant career experiences of 20 years from both China and New Zealand and has a master's degree in journalism.

Deliberative democracy principle: There should be respectful dialogue among informed and competent participants who are open to persuasion.

Communication and democratic erosion: The rise of illiberal public spheres.