

The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Local Media Journalism: Perceptions of Quality, Credibility, and Ethical Governance among Greek Media Professionals

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Abstract

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence into journalism has generated significant scholarly attention regarding its implications for content quality, editorial credibility, and professional ethics. However, limited empirical research has examined how journalists in small-scale, resource-constrained local media environments perceive and operationalize AI tools within their professional workflows. This study addresses that gap by investigating the perceptions of Greek local media professionals regarding AI integration in journalistic practice. Through a mixed-methods design combining semi-structured interviews and structured attitudinal measurement, data were collected from eighteen media professionals, including journalists, editors, and media technologists, working in Greek local media organizations. Thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed three principal dimensions of AI integration: operational efficiency in routine tasks, analytical enhancement in investigative reporting, and persistent normative concerns regarding algorithmic bias, transparency, and professional skill erosion. Descriptive statistical analysis of a composite attitudinal index indicated a moderately positive but cautious orientation toward AI adoption ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.64$). Findings further demonstrate that AI adoption in Greek local media remains predominantly experimental and individually driven rather than institutionally embedded. The study contributes to an underrepresented empirical context in AI-journalism scholarship and proposes a tripartite framework encompassing operational, analytical, and normative dimensions for understanding AI integration in local newsrooms. Recommendations are offered for structured AI governance, professional training, and curricular reform in media education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Journalism, Media Credibility, Quality Journalism, Local Media, Greek Journalists, Algorithmic Ethics, Newsroom Automation.

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Citation: Osman, Reda Fooly. (2026). The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Local Media Journalism: Perceptions of Quality, Credibility, and Ethical Governance among Greek Media Professionals. Arab Media Renewal Journal 1(1), 23 - 40.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become a defining force in the transformation of contemporary media ecosystems. From automated content generation and algorithmic news distribution to audience analytics and fact-checking systems, AI technologies are reshaping the fundamental processes through which information is produced, verified, and disseminated (Diakopoulos, 2019; Túnnez-López, Fieiras-Ceide, & Vaz-Álvarez, 2021). These developments have prompted sustained scholarly inquiry into both the opportunities and the risks that AI presents for the journalistic profession.

The adoption of AI in newsrooms has been documented across a range of tasks and editorial functions. Graefe (2016) provided one of the earliest systematic accounts of automated journalism, demonstrating that rule-based and template-driven systems could efficiently generate structured news content such as financial summaries, sports reports, and election results. More recently, generative AI technologies, including large language models, have expanded the scope of possible applications to encompass text composition, interview transcription, language editing, data visualization, and even preliminary investigative analysis (Dijkstra, de Jong, & Boscolo, 2024). These capabilities have catalyzed a broader discourse on how AI reconfigures professional boundaries, institutional structures, and the normative commitments that underpin journalistic practice.

However, the scholarly literature on AI in journalism has been characterized by notable geographic and institutional biases. A substantial proportion of existing research has focused on large, well-resourced media organizations in Western European or North American contexts (Newman et al., 2023). Comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to local media environments, where financial constraints, limited staffing, and fragmented technological infrastructure create qualitatively different conditions for AI adoption (Jamil, 2021). As Dijkstra, de Jong, and Boscolo (2024) observed in their comparative analysis of science journalism in Southern European countries, the challenges facing local media ecosystems are both structurally distinct and empirically underexplored.

The Greek media landscape exemplifies these conditions. Characterized by declining circulation, concentrated ownership, limited institutional investment in specialized journalism, and a professional culture in which individual initiative often compensates for organizational strategy, Greek local media present a particularly instructive case for examining the dynamics of AI integration (Kostarella & Palla, 2024). Despite the relevance of this context, empirical studies investigating how Greek journalists perceive, adopt, and negotiate the use of AI tools remain scarce.

This study addresses that gap by examining the perceptions of Greek local media professionals regarding AI integration in their daily journalistic workflows. Specifically, it investigates how these professionals assess AI's contribution to content quality and editorial efficiency, how they perceive its implications for journalistic credibility and public trust, and how they navigate the ethical challenges associat-

ed with algorithmic decision support. By combining qualitative and quantitative data from semi-structured interviews with eighteen media professionals, the study provides empirical evidence grounded in an underrepresented media context and contributes to the growing interdisciplinary literature at the intersection of artificial intelligence and media studies.

The research is guided by three primary questions. First, how are AI tools being integrated into the workflows of Greek local media professionals? Second, what impact do these tools have on perceived journalistic quality, credibility, and editorial integrity? Third, what ethical concerns arise from AI adoption in local media environments, and how do practitioners negotiate these concerns in their daily work?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on AI in journalism, quality and credibility frameworks, ethical governance models, and AI adoption in local media contexts, culminating in an identification of the research gap. Section 3 presents the theoretical framework grounding the study. Section 4 describes the methodology, including research design, participant selection, data collection, and analytical procedures. Section 5 reports the findings. Section 6 discusses the results in relation to the existing literature and theoretical framework. Sections 7 and 8 address implications, limitations, and directions for future research. Section 9 offers concluding remarks.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence in Journalism: Foundations and Developments

The scholarly engagement with AI in journalism has developed through several distinct phases. Early contributions focused primarily on the automation of structured content production. Graefe (2016) documented how rule-based systems and template-driven natural language generation platforms enabled the rapid production of formulaic news articles, particularly in domains such as financial reporting, sports results, and weather updates. These systems demonstrated that algorithmic content generation could achieve acceptable levels of accuracy and speed, although they raised immediate questions about the depth, contextuality, and editorial judgment embedded in the resulting outputs.

Diakopoulos (2015) introduced the concept of algorithmic accountability, arguing that computational systems embedded in news production are not neutral instruments but institutional actors capable of shaping public discourse. His framework emphasized the importance of transparency and public scrutiny in the design and deployment of algorithms within journalistic contexts. This perspective was subsequently expanded in his monograph on automating the news, in which Diakopoulos (2019) demonstrated that algorithms increasingly influence not only content production but also editorial prioritization, audience targeting, and the distribution architecture of news ecosystems.

The relationship between human journalists and automated systems has been further theorized by Lewis, Guzman, and Schmidt (2019), who examined auto-

mation within the framework of human-machine communication. Their analysis revealed that AI integration restructures newsroom hierarchies, redefines professional roles, and introduces hybrid forms of collaboration in which human editorial judgment and algorithmic processing are mutually constitutive rather than simply substitutive. This insight is particularly relevant for understanding the operational dynamics in local newsrooms, where resource limitations may amplify both the potential benefits and the organizational disruptions associated with AI tools.

More recently, the rapid proliferation of generative AI technologies has introduced new capabilities and new controversies. Dijkstra, de Jong, and Boscolo (2024) examined science journalism practices in four European countries and found that, while AI tools such as ChatGPT were beginning to be used for tasks including transcription, translation, and paraphrasing, the integration of these tools into journalistic workflows remained largely experimental and individually driven. Their findings indicated that journalists recognized both the potential of generative AI to improve accessibility and engagement and its risks regarding source reliability, factual accuracy, and editorial transparency.

Quality and Credibility in Journalism

The concept of journalistic quality has been theorized from multiple perspectives. Bachmann, Eisenegger, and Ingenhoff (2022) proposed a multidimensional framework for assessing news media quality that incorporates both content-based criteria, such as accuracy, depth, diversity of perspectives, and contextual completeness, and audience-based criteria, including perceived relevance, trustworthiness, and user satisfaction. Their model highlights the inherent tension between production-oriented and reception-oriented evaluations of quality, a tension that is further complicated by the introduction of AI into editorial workflows.

Credibility and public trust represent related but distinct constructs within journalism scholarship. Karlsson, Clerwall, and Nord (2017) demonstrated that transparency in journalistic practice, including openness about sources, methods, and corrections, is positively associated with audience trust. Fletcher, Schifferes, and Thurman (2020) examined the development of algorithmic tools designed to assist journalists in assessing the credibility of social media sources, finding that while such tools could improve verification efficiency, they also required careful calibration to avoid both false positives and false negatives in credibility scoring.

The global context of declining public trust in digital news environments, documented in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2023), underscores the urgency of understanding how AI integration affects credibility perceptions. If AI tools are perceived as enhancing accuracy and verification, they may contribute to rebuilding institutional trust. Conversely, if their use is associated with opacity, error, or the displacement of human editorial judgment, they may further erode public confidence in journalistic institutions.

Ethical Frameworks for AI in Media

The ethical dimensions of AI deployment in journalism have been addressed through both general and domain-specific frameworks. Floridi et al. (2018), in the AI4People initiative, synthesized five ethical principles for AI governance: beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, justice, and explicability. The addition of explicability as a fifth principle, encompassing both the intelligibility of algorithmic systems and the accountability of those who design and deploy them, is particularly salient for journalistic applications. In contexts where AI systems influence editorial decisions, content prioritization, or audience engagement strategies, the capacity to explain how and why particular outputs were generated is essential for maintaining professional accountability and public trust.

Noble (2018) contributed a critical perspective on algorithmic bias, demonstrating through detailed case analysis how digital systems can reproduce and amplify existing social inequalities. Her work established that algorithmic outputs are not value-neutral but are shaped by the data, assumptions, and design choices embedded in their construction. This critical lens is directly relevant to concerns about fairness, representativeness, and potential discrimination in AI-assisted journalism.

Binns (2018) advanced the theoretical discussion by situating algorithmic accountability within the political philosophical framework of public reason. Drawing on Rawlsian principles, Binns argued that algorithmic decision-making systems should be justifiable by reference to epistemic and normative standards that all reasonable individuals in a society could accept. This framework provides a normative foundation for evaluating the legitimacy of AI-driven editorial decisions and offers a principled basis for resolving conflicts between algorithmic outputs and journalistic values.

At the regulatory level, Helberger and Diakopoulos (2023) analyzed the implications of the European AI Act for media organizations, emphasizing the necessity of human oversight, transparency requirements, and accountability mechanisms to prevent unchecked algorithmic authority in news production. Their analysis highlighted the challenge of designing regulatory frameworks that are sufficiently specific to address the unique characteristics of AI applications in journalism while remaining adaptable to rapid technological change.

AI Adoption in Local Media Contexts

Research on AI adoption in journalism has predominantly focused on large national or international media organizations. Comparatively few studies have examined the specific conditions and constraints that shape AI integration in local media environments. Jamil (2021) investigated AI adoption in Pakistani journalism and found that structural and resource limitations resulted in fragmented, individually driven implementation rather than systematic organizational strategy. These findings resonate with the conditions in many local media ecosystems where investment in technology infrastructure is limited and where individual journalists often serve as the primary agents of technological innovation within their organizations.

Túñez-López, Fieiras-Ceide, and Vaz-Álvarez (2021) analyzed how AI reshapes newsroom structures, professional profiles, and content production models, confirming that the impact of AI extends beyond operational efficiency to encompass structural reorganization within media institutions. However, their analysis primarily addressed national-level media systems and did not specifically examine the distinct dynamics of local or regional media organizations.

In the Greek context, Kostarella and Palla (2024) examined the tension between sensationalist online journalism and quality-driven reporting practices. Their findings highlighted the fragility of journalistic standards within a media environment characterized by competitive pressures, declining revenues, and limited institutional support for specialized reporting. While their study did not directly examine AI integration, their characterization of the Greek media landscape provides essential contextual grounding for understanding the conditions under which AI tools are adopted and operationalized.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Collectively, the existing literature demonstrates that AI integration in journalism enhances efficiency, data processing capacity, and audience personalization while simultaneously generating concerns about transparency, algorithmic bias, professional identity, and editorial control. Substantial scholarship has addressed the conceptual, ethical, and institutional dimensions of AI in journalism at a general level. However, five specific gaps remain apparent in the literature.

First, limited empirical research has focused specifically on how AI tools function as decision-support mechanisms within local media ecosystems, where resource constraints and organizational structures differ markedly from those of large national media organizations. Second, qualitative evidence examining how journalists themselves perceive, interpret, and negotiate the integration of AI into their daily workflows remains insufficiently developed. Third, the linkage between ethical theory and practical newsroom application has been weakly operationalized, with most studies addressing ethical concerns at a macro level rather than examining how practitioners navigate these concerns in their professional routines. Fourth, geographic representation in AI-journalism scholarship has been disproportionately concentrated in Anglo-Saxon and Northern European contexts, with Southern European local media environments receiving comparatively little attention. Fifth, few studies have integrated operational, analytical, and normative dimensions of AI integration within a unified empirical framework.

This study addresses these gaps by providing perception-based empirical evidence from Greek local media professionals, examining how AI tools are operationalized across workflow, investigative, and ethical dimensions within a resource-constrained media environment.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives that together provide a framework for understanding the structural, cognitive, and environmental transformations associated with AI integration in media institutions.

The first perspective draws from technological determinism, which posits that technological innovation is a primary driver of change in social institutions, cultural practices, and professional structures (McLuhan, 1964). In the context of media, this perspective suggests that the introduction of AI tools into newsroom environments is not merely an operational adjustment but a structural transformation that reconfigures editorial workflows, professional hierarchies, and the distribution of decision-making authority. Technological determinism provides a lens through which to examine how the affordances and constraints of AI systems shape journalistic practice, sometimes in ways that align with professional values and sometimes in ways that challenge or undermine them.

The second perspective is media ecology theory, as articulated by McLuhan (1964) and further developed by Postman (1970). Media ecology treats media technologies not simply as channels for information transmission but as environments that structure human perception, interaction, and meaning-making. From this perspective, the introduction of AI into journalistic practice transforms not only the technical processes of content production but also the relational dynamics between journalists, sources, audiences, and the information ecosystem itself. The concept of media as environment directs analytical attention to the ways in which AI tools reshape the conditions under which journalistic work is conceived, executed, and evaluated.

Together, these theoretical frameworks enable the study to examine AI integration at multiple levels: the operational level of workflow and task management, the epistemological level of knowledge production and verification, and the normative level of professional ethics and institutional accountability. This multilevel analytical approach is consistent with the mixed-methods design of the study, which combines qualitative exploration of professional perceptions with structured measurement of attitudinal orientations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods design in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously through a single instrument and analyzed in an integrated fashion (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The qualitative component, which constituted the primary analytical focus, consisted of semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences with, perceptions of, and attitudes toward AI integration in their professional work. The quantitative component consisted of structured attitudinal items embedded

within the interview protocol, generating descriptive statistical data that complemented and contextualized the qualitative findings.

This design was selected for its capacity to provide both depth and breadth of understanding in an exploratory research context where the phenomenon under investigation, specifically the integration of AI in Greek local media, is at an early stage and has not been previously examined through systematic empirical research.

Participants

Eighteen media professionals working in Greek local media organizations were recruited through purposive sampling. The purposive approach was appropriate given the study's focus on professionals with direct experience of AI tools in their journalistic work. Eligibility criteria included current employment or regular freelance engagement in local media, a minimum of two years of professional experience, and active exposure to at least one AI-based tool in the context of journalistic practice.

The sample comprised ten journalists (55.6%), five editors (27.8%), and three media technologists (16.6%). The mean professional experience was 7.2 years ($SD = 2.8$), with a range from approximately three to fifteen years. All participants reported active use of AI tools: thirteen participants (72.2%) reported daily use, and five participants (27.8%) reported weekly use. No participant reported complete non-use of AI tools.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between April and July 2023. The interview protocol was developed through an iterative process involving pilot testing with two media professionals whose data were subsequently included in the final sample, as the pilot did not result in substantive modifications to the protocol. Each interview was conducted individually, either in person or via video conferencing, and lasted between thirty and seventy minutes ($M = 48$ minutes).

The interview protocol addressed five thematic domains: professional background and current role; experience with AI tools in journalistic practice; perceived impact of AI on content quality and editorial credibility; ethical concerns and governance considerations; and attitudes toward the future integration of AI in journalism. Within the final segment of the interview, participants responded to five structured Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) designed to measure overall orientation toward AI integration. These items addressed perceived efficiency enhancement, investigative capacity, credibility support, ethical governance requirements, and the necessity of human editorial oversight.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim. Transcription was initially performed using automated transcription software and subsequently verified and corrected manually by the researcher to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Coding was performed using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. Both deductive codes, derived from the interview protocol and the study's theoretical framework, and inductive codes, emerging from the data, were applied at the paragraph level.

Quantitative data from the structured attitudinal items were analyzed descriptively. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated for demographic variables, AI usage patterns, and attitudinal scores. A composite AI Adoption Sentiment Index (AASI) was constructed from the five Likert-scale items, and internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Given the small sample size ($N = 18$), inferential statistical tests were used sparingly and interpreted with appropriate caution, with primary emphasis placed on descriptive patterns and qualitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. All participants were provided with written information about the study's purpose, procedures, and data handling practices prior to their participation and gave informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained through the anonymization of all identifying information; participants are identified in the findings by professional category and participant number only. Audio recordings were stored securely and will be deleted following the completion of all analyses and publication. The researcher maintained reflexive awareness of potential interpretive biases throughout the analytical process.

Results

The findings are organized according to the principal themes that emerged from the integrated analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. These themes correspond to three structural dimensions of AI integration: operational efficiency, analytical and investigative enhancement, and normative governance.

Institutional Level of AI Adoption

Participants were asked to characterize their organization's current stage of AI integration. The distribution is presented in Table 1.

The predominance of the experimental category indicates that AI adoption in Greek local media has not yet reached an institutionalized phase. This finding is consistent with the interview data, in which participants described their engagement with AI as exploratory and self-directed. As one journalist explained, "We are experimenting, each one of us on our own. There is no organizational plan or strat-

egy. I started using ChatGPT because I was curious, not because anyone told me to" (Journalist 3). An editor similarly noted, "Our newsroom doesn't have a formal policy on AI. Some of us use it, some don't. It depends on the individual" (Editor 2).

Table 1. Institutional AI Adoption Stage

Adoption Stage	N	%
Experimental	15	83.3
Strategically integrated	2	11.1
Individual-based only	1	5.6
Total	18	100.0

Operational Efficiency and Workflow Optimization

Efficiency emerged as the most prominent and consistently endorsed dimension of AI integration. Sixteen participants (88.9%) reported significant time savings in routine tasks through the use of AI tools, with estimated reductions ranging between thirty and forty percent. Twelve participants (66.7%) stated that the time saved through AI-assisted automation of routine tasks allowed them to dedicate greater attention to investigative and analytical work.

The specific applications cited most frequently included automated transcription of interviews, language editing and spell-checking, translation between languages, and the reformulation of complex information for general audiences. As one journalist described, "I feel that AI has helped me to provide better content to my readers. Because I can do more quality reporting or be able to offer more substantive news, as with AI tools I save time in tasks related to organizing the material that I receive, in editing press releases and reading material, which would otherwise take me a lot of time" (Journalist 3).

Another participant emphasized the productivity benefits without displacement of human judgment: "We use ChatGPT every day for editorial spell checking. This doesn't mean that the position of editor has been eliminated. The final filter is always the person" (Editor 4). Across professional categories, the perception of efficiency gain was broadly shared, with journalists, editors, and technologists all reporting substantial benefits (Table 2).

Table 2. Perceived High Efficiency Gain by Professional Role

Role	Reporting High Efficiency Gain (%)
Journalists (n = 10)	90.0
Editors (n = 5)	80.0
Media technologists (n = 3)	100.0

The consistency of efficiency perceptions across roles suggests that the operational benefits of AI integration are recognized broadly within the professional community, regardless of specific functional responsibilities.

Investigative and Analytical Enhancement

Beyond routine efficiency, participants identified meaningful contributions of AI to investigative and data-driven journalism. Eleven participants (61.1%) reported using AI tools for processing large datasets, and eight (44.4%) described discovering new story angles or patterns through AI-assisted analysis. Thirteen participants (72.2%) reported using AI for cross-checking and verification of information.

One journalist highlighted the analytical value of AI in investigative contexts: “You can process a large amount of data with artificial intelligence and, let’s say, come to a conclusion, to get a news story that you wouldn’t get otherwise” (Journalist 7). Another emphasized the time-saving dimension of verification: “It can help to cross-check a piece of information to see if it’s valid. That could be very helpful to us because it’s a time-consuming thing to do, and the way journalism is practiced now, everything is done very quickly, and that is undermining the quality of our work” (Journalist 1).

A Spearman rank-order correlation between frequency of AI use and perceived investigative enhancement yielded a moderate positive association ($\rho = .46, p < .05$), suggesting that more frequent engagement with AI tools is associated with higher perceived analytical value.

Credibility and Trust Perceptions

Participants’ assessments of AI’s impact on journalistic credibility revealed a conditional endorsement. Fourteen participants (77.8%) indicated that AI enhances credibility when combined with sustained human editorial oversight. Four participants (22.2%) expressed concern that autonomous or inadequately supervised AI use could threaten credibility (Table 3).

Table 3. Perceived Impact of AI on Journalistic Credibility

Perception	N	%
Enhances credibility with human oversight	14	77.8
Potentially threatens credibility if autonomous	4	22.2

Editors expressed slightly higher levels of caution than journalists, with two of five editors (40.0%) identifying potential threats, compared to two of ten journalists (20.0%). However, given the small cell sizes, this difference should be interpreted with caution and is offered as a descriptive observation rather than a statistically confirmed finding.

The qualitative data illuminated the conditionality of credibility enhancement. Participants consistently emphasized that AI’s credibility-enhancing potential is contingent upon the preservation of human judgment as the final arbiter of editorial decisions. As one participant stated, “AI tools have significantly changed the way we work, particularly for investigative articles. They enable us to swiftly process

vast volumes of data, which is quite beneficial when we have short deadlines. But the moment you rely on them without checking, you lose credibility” (Journalist 8).

Ethical Risk Assessment

Four principal ethical concerns emerged from the interview data, ordered by frequency of mention (Table 4).

Table 4. Principal Ethical Concerns Identified by Participants

Ethical Concern	N	%
Algorithmic bias	13	72.2
Lack of transparency	11	61.1
Over-reliance on automation	10	55.6
Professional skill erosion	7	38.9

Algorithmic bias was the most frequently cited concern. Participants expressed apprehension that AI systems, trained on datasets reflecting existing societal biases, could produce outputs that are misleading or discriminatory without the journalist being fully aware of the distortion. One technologist articulated this concern comprehensively: “Generally speaking, AI possesses privacy issues, bias issues. I think misuse of AI might be an issue. We’ve seen AI-generated images; I saw one earlier this morning, it was the Pentagon in the US burning. That’s obviously fake, but it can be used to spread disinformation” (Technologist 3).

Lack of transparency, particularly regarding the provenance of AI-generated information, was the second most prominent concern. As one journalist observed, “If you ask AI something, you don’t know what the source is, so it can be even more complicated as well” (Journalist 1). This concern is directly linked to the journalistic principle of source transparency and has implications for the verificatory function that is central to professional reporting.

A descriptive comparison by professional experience suggested that participants with more than eight years of experience expressed greater concern about algorithmic bias than those with less experience, consistent with the possibility that more seasoned professionals possess a more developed awareness of the subtle ways in which systemic distortions can enter the production process.

Models of Human-AI Collaboration

Three operational models of human-AI collaboration were identified in the interview data (Table 5).

Table 5. Identified Models of Human-AI Collaboration

Collaboration Model	N	%
AI as editorial assistant	9	50.0
AI as analytical tool	6	33.3
AI as linguistic support	3	16.7

No participant endorsed a model of full AI autonomy in editorial decision-making. This finding confirms the persistence of a human-centered governance orientation, even among participants who were otherwise enthusiastic about AI's operational benefits. As one journalist summarized, "Of course, ChatGPT can help you, but it can't do your job. It's like the internet or like other tools you can use. If you use them in a good way, they're good, and if you use them in a bad way, they're bad" (Journalist 3).

AI Adoption Sentiment Index

The composite AI Adoption Sentiment Index (AASI), constructed from five Likert-scale items measuring perceived efficiency, investigative enhancement, credibility support, ethical governance necessity, and human oversight requirement, yielded a mean score of 3.9 (SD = 0.64) on a five-point scale. The internal consistency of the composite index was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$). This score indicates a moderately positive but measured endorsement of AI integration, reflecting an orientation characterized by pragmatic optimism tempered by normative caution.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a complex and nuanced picture of AI integration in Greek local media, characterized by tangible operational benefits, emerging analytical capabilities, and persistent ethical apprehensions. Three structural dimensions of integration, which we term the operational layer, the analytical layer, and the normative layer, provide an organizing framework for interpreting the results.

At the operational level, the study confirms that AI tools deliver substantial efficiency gains in routine journalistic tasks. The finding that nearly ninety percent of participants reported significant time savings is consistent with broader patterns documented in the literature on newsroom automation (Graefe, 2016; Túnéz-López et al., 2021). These efficiency gains are not trivial; in resource-constrained local media environments where journalists frequently operate under severe time pressure, the capacity to automate transcription, language editing, and data organization can meaningfully enhance the depth and quality of editorial output. This finding aligns with Dijkstra, de Jong, and Boscolo's (2024) observation that AI tools are increasingly used for repetitive tasks across multiple European media contexts.

At the analytical level, the study provides evidence that AI tools are beginning to support investigative and data-driven reporting in local newsrooms. The moderate positive correlation between AI usage frequency and perceived investigative enhancement suggests that familiarity with AI tools is associated with an expanding appreciation of their analytical potential. This finding is consistent with Diakopoulos's (2019) argument that algorithms can enable forms of journalism that would be impractical through manual methods alone, particularly in the processing of large datasets and the identification of non-obvious patterns.

However, the normative dimension introduces essential qualifications to these positive assessments. The prominence of concerns about algorithmic bias, transparency, over-reliance on automation, and skill erosion reflects the ethical tensions identified in the broader literature (Noble, 2018; Floridi et al., 2018; Binns, 2018). The finding that all participants rejected full AI autonomy in editorial decision-making underscores the enduring centrality of human judgment in journalistic practice. This is consistent with the principle of explicability articulated by Floridi et al. (2018), which holds that AI systems must remain intelligible and that those who deploy them must remain accountable for their outputs.

The predominantly experimental character of AI adoption documented in this study resonates with findings from other resource-constrained media environments. Jamil (2021) reported similarly fragmented and individually driven adoption patterns in Pakistani journalism, suggesting that the gap between AI's potential and its institutional realization may be a structural feature of local and developing media ecosystems rather than a temporary phase. The absence of formal organizational strategies, training programs, or governance frameworks in the Greek context indicates that the institutionalization of AI in local media is a process that requires deliberate investment and coordination.

The conditionality of credibility enhancement, with the large majority of participants endorsing AI's positive potential only when coupled with human oversight, has important implications for the design of AI governance structures in newsrooms. It suggests that the credibility-enhancing potential of AI is not intrinsic to the technology but is contingent upon the institutional and professional frameworks within which it is embedded. This finding aligns with the "dual advantage" model proposed by Floridi et al. (2018), which holds that the ethical deployment of AI can simultaneously enable beneficial applications and prevent costly errors, but only within a framework of appropriate governance and accountability.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings are consistent with the predictions of both technological determinism and media ecology theory. The structural transformation of journalistic workflows documented in the results illustrates the deterministic force of technological affordances, while the reshaping of professional identities, relationships with sources, and audience engagement strategies reflects the ecological dimension of media change. The tripartite framework of operational, analytical, and normative layers proposed by this study offers a structured model for examining these transformations across different media contexts.

Implications

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest several practical implications for media organizations, professional associations, and individual practitioners. First, the predominantly experimental and individually driven character of AI adoption indicates a need for

structured organizational approaches to AI integration, including formal policies, training programs, and governance frameworks. Without such structures, the benefits of AI may remain unevenly distributed within newsrooms, and the ethical risks may go unaddressed.

Second, the centrality of human oversight as a condition for credibility enhancement suggests that AI tools should be designed and implemented as decision-support systems rather than autonomous decision-making agents. This requires organizational cultures that prioritize editorial judgment and provide adequate time and resources for human verification of AI-generated outputs.

Third, the concerns about transparency and source provenance point to the need for professional codes of practice that address the specific challenges of AI-assisted journalism, including disclosure requirements for AI-generated or AI-assisted content.

Implications for Media Education

The study identifies a need for curricular reform in media and journalism education to incorporate AI literacy as a core competency. This should encompass not only technical proficiency in the use of AI tools but also critical understanding of algorithmic logic, awareness of potential biases, and ethical reasoning about the appropriate boundaries of automation in editorial practice. Such curricular development should be guided by the principles of explicability and accountability articulated in the ethical AI literature (Floridi et al., 2018; Binns, 2018).

Implications for Research

The study contributes to an empirically underrepresented area of AI-journalism scholarship and demonstrates the value of examining local media ecosystems as distinct research sites. The tripartite framework of operational, analytical, and normative dimensions proposed here may serve as a heuristic for comparative research across different geographic and institutional contexts.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of eighteen participants, while appropriate for the qualitative focus of the study, limits the generalizability of quantitative findings. Descriptive statistics and the composite attitudinal index are offered as contextualizing indicators rather than as population-level estimates. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples to enable robust inferential analysis.

Second, the study is situated within a single national context. While the Greek local media environment provides an instructive case, the findings may not be directly transferable to other national or regional settings. Cross-national comparative research would strengthen the external validity of the observed patterns.

Third, the data were collected during a period of early experimentation with generative AI tools, and the pace of technological change may render some findings

time-sensitive. Longitudinal research tracking the evolution of journalists' perceptions as AI tools mature and become more institutionalized would provide valuable dynamic evidence.

Fourth, the study relies on self-reported perceptions and does not include direct observation of newsroom practices or content analysis of AI-influenced outputs. Future studies combining perception data with behavioral observation and content evaluation would provide a more comprehensive picture of AI's actual impact on journalistic quality.

Fifth, this research examines the perspectives of media professionals and does not include audience perceptions of AI-assisted journalism. Future research should incorporate audience-side evidence to assess whether the credibility-enhancing potential identified by professionals is reflected in audience trust and engagement.

Conclusion

This study has examined the perceptions of Greek local media professionals regarding the integration of artificial intelligence into journalistic practice, with particular attention to the dimensions of operational efficiency, analytical enhancement, and ethical governance. The findings reveal a professional community that is pragmatically optimistic about AI's potential to improve workflow efficiency and investigative capacity, while remaining firmly committed to human editorial oversight as an essential condition for credibility and ethical accountability.

The predominantly experimental character of AI adoption in Greek local media indicates that the institutionalization of these technologies remains in its early stages. The absence of formal organizational strategies, governance frameworks, and training programs represents both a limitation and an opportunity: a limitation because the benefits of AI are not yet fully or equitably realized, and an opportunity because deliberate investment in structured integration could yield significant returns in terms of content quality, editorial efficiency, and professional development.

The tripartite framework of operational, analytical, and normative layers proposed by this study offers a structured model for understanding and guiding AI integration in local media environments. By situating the analysis within an empirically underrepresented context and integrating qualitative depth with descriptive quantitative measurement, the study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary literature at the intersection of artificial intelligence and media studies.

As AI technologies continue to evolve, the imperative for media organizations, professional associations, educational institutions, and policymakers to engage proactively with the challenges and opportunities of AI integration will only intensify. The evidence presented here suggests that this engagement should be guided by a clear commitment to the complementary principles of technological innovation and human editorial governance, ensuring that AI serves as an instrument for enhancing, rather than diminishing, the quality, credibility, and public value of journalism.

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