EXPLORING ETHICAL AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES OF AI INTEGRATION IN EUROPEAN UNION NEWSROOMS

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ABSTRACT *Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly reshaped the news media landscape in the fast-evolving digital ecosystem. While recent legislative measures and industry self-regulation initiatives have emerged to address AI's implications, the ethical challenges associated with its adoption in European Union (EU) newsrooms and the ways news media organisations navigate regulatory frameworks and internal initiatives remain underexplored. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the conditions under which AI tools are integrated into media organisations from both organisational and regulatory perspectives. Drawing on an analysis of 30 key documents and 41 in-depth interviews with media professionals and regulatory experts across three EU markets, the study uncovers key findings: a limited discourse on AI use in media organisations, significant disparities in AI implementation practices, and an absence of clear, actionable regulatory guidelines for addressing considerations in AI-driven news content.*

KEYWORDS

Authors' note

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid change in media consumption in recent years, driven by technological advancements and platforms, has transformed the landscape of news production and dissemination. The *Digital News Report 2024* by the Reuters Institute of Journalism proves that the significance of traditional media outlets like television and print has diminished over time despite remaining significant sources of information (Newman et al., 2024), to the benefit of services provided by media companies (mobile applications, push services), but also by players outside the news industry (search engines, social networks, content aggregation platforms). While 71% of respondents mention TV as a primary source for news, it is followed by online press (42%), social media (37%), and radio (37%) (European Parliament, 2023). Media usage varies by age, with younger respondents favouring digital platforms like social media and video apps. Hence, digitalisation in the news media industry has significantly diversified how people access information. These digital services use recommendation algorithms to prioritize, classify and promote selected content. While these recommendation systems (RSs) facilitate navigation and access to content, their sorting criteria are rarely explicit. This opacity appears to be a primary type of obstacle to users' ability to determine their own sources of information. Since the 2020s, the rise of AI has further amplified these dynamics as AI-based tools are increasingly integrated into platforms, blurring the boundaries between traditional journalism and algorithmic-driven journalism. Platform intermediation (Siapera, 2013) not only alters the relationship between news producers and audiences but also threatens core journalistic principles, including editorial independence and fairness. As platforms consolidate financial and informational power (Newman et al., 2020), the ethical challenges for news media organisations in maintaining professional standards while integrating AI technologies have become increasingly acute.

Digitalisation and the dominance of online platforms over media markets also impact news production and distribution practices. First, the integration of digital technologies in media organisations enables innovative opportunities (Sonni et al., 2024) when it comes to content creation, distribution, customization and audience engagement (Åkesson et al., 2018). Second, since the 2010s, media organisations have to deal with these platforms to reach their audiences (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2017), but also to make their news content visible, reachable and profitable. These new dependencies on intermediaries have an impact not only on the ability of news organisations to assert their editorial lines and brand specificities, but also on the very nature of news content and formats, with increased risks of misinformation (Shin et al., 2024) or disinformation. On a macro-economic scale, economic concentration within the sector benefits a small number of investors and ownership groups, risking reduced pluralism and diversity in news production (European University Institute, 2024; Hendrickx & Ranaivoson, 2019).

Both news media organisations and online platforms increasingly integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into their activities (Diakopoulos et al., 2024; Henriksson, 2023)[1]. AI has become central to digital media formats, streamlining editorial workflows, personalising content (Bodó, 2019), and enhancing user engagement through sophisticated AI tools (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023) such as news recommender systems (Napoli, 2015; Simon, 2024a). This has an impact on the structure of news media. The ethical challenges of using AI in newsrooms (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024; Dörr, 2023), such as transparency (Balasubramaniam et al., 2023), accountability, and fairness, are not peculiar to the media sectors. Yet, these concerns are particularly critical in the news sector, as they can undermine the ethical principles of the journalistic profession and its role in supporting democracy and informed public debate where ethical values like ensuring truth and accuracy, maintaining editorial independence, practicing fairness and impartiality, and upholding accountability are essential to sustaining democratic processes and an informed citizenry.

At the EU level, these reconfigurations are prompting regulatory interventions. The regulation of media activity is aimed both at asserting the specific nature of professions, ethical frameworks and economic models, and at integrating these activities with those of other players and services, in particular online platforms and social networks (Dragomir et al., 2024; Holtz-Bacha, 2024; Seipp et al., 2024). Recent EU legislative initiatives are particularly relevant: the *European Media Freedom Act* (EMFA) aims to safeguard editorial independence and pluralism; the *Digital Services Act* (DSA) aims to ensure a fair and open online platform environment; and the *AI Act*, sets transparency and risk-management obligations for AI use, including in media contexts.

In this context, this article seeks to examine the current extent to which professionals in news media organisations are adopting AI tools, how these organisations are managing their implementation, and the regulatory responses brought about by the associated challenges. The research question that guides our research is: Under which conditions are AI tools integrated into news media organisations from an organisational and regulatory point of view? Focusing on the French-speaking Belgian, French and Spanish markets, we highlight the ethical issues and risks associated with the integration of AI and compare the key insights from the different regulatory frameworks in these regions. This comparative analysis enables us to identify alternative or complementary approaches for the regulation of AI within news media organisations and the broader media sector.

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[1] For the purpose of this article, we adopt the definition of AI provided in Art. 3 of the *EU AI Act*: "'AI system' means a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments". This definition underscores the versatility and impact of AI in reshaping digital environments and media practices.

AI IN NEWSROOMS

This paper is situated within the literature on the political economy of communication, which analyses the power relations and forces that shape the production, consumption and distribution of resources (Freedman, 2014; Golding & Murdock, 1997). While political economy provides the overarching framework for understanding power and resource dynamics in society, the political economy of communication narrows this lens to focus on how these dynamics operate in media and communication systems.

From this critical perspective, we will analyse the relationships between media companies and AI technologies, taking into account both professional practices in a context of digitalization of uses and content, and market reconfiguration dynamics, particularly due to their internationalization, financialization and oligopolistic concentration (Hardy, 2014; Wasko, 2014). We will be paying particular attention to how AI discourse and usage relate to the dynamics of concentration and its effects on freedom of information, pluralism of opinions, as well as diversity (Gangadharan & Niklas, 2019; Knoche, 2013; Neff & Benson, 2021; Wasko, 2014). In the complex media landscape, power seen through the lens of the political economy of communication is not limited to the formal ownership of media outlets but also includes the ownership of data, algorithms and infrastructure (Seipp et al., 2023), which impacts the content and practices of journalism (Garnham, 2000; Sjøvaag & Ohlsson, 2024) as well as its influence on public opinion.

The multifaceted use of AI in news media organisations

The use of AI tools to perform tasks of varying complexity through automation has increasingly become a standard practice in the editorial and marketing departments of some media organisations. However, the precise uses integrated into business software and procedures are still heterogeneous and experimental, not least because of a gradual awareness of their effects on the deontological and ethical frameworks of journalism. A 2024 report for the Associated Press on generative AI in journalism (Diakopoulos et al., 2024) shows these tools concern both the production of news (e.g., content enrichment, fact-checking) and its editing (e.g., illustrations, formatting, tags, subtitling), distribution (e.g., sharing on platforms and social media) and audience monitoring (Prasad & Makesh, 2024). How these technologies are integrated into working environments differs according to the size of the media organisation and their financial capacity, with large media groups having an advantage, and to the priority a company gives to the economic value of its audience. Although some are not planning to exploit AI-based technologies, smaller and independent organisations appear to be at a disadvantage compared to larger outlets with the resources to implement more advanced audience strategies (Reviglio, 2023). Implementing AI tools as part of the daily work routine, training the staff (Noain-Sánchez, 2022) and maintaining an organised, structured and clean database for the use of proprietary AI and RSs also require substantial investments.

Research by De-Lima-Santos and Ceron (2022) highlights the positive contribution of AI in news media, exemplifying its productivity gains in planning, scheduling and

optimisation, alongside reducing the time and labour required for repetitive tasks and freeing the time of the teams to focus on more creative tasks. In editorial departments, AI helps document synthesis, translation, subtitling, multi-format editing and more sensitive tasks as source anonymization. For marketing activities, the personalisation of sales campaigns and offers is facilitated; machine learning models improve the predictability of users' expectations. Recommender systems are used by news organisations to structure and personalise the content media companies display on their websites and apps. Therefore, these efficiency gains combined with the customisation component help news media outlets create tailored experiences for readers and inform their business strategies. To stay competitive, media organisations must reconfigure their journalistic practices by integrating AI tools (Hardy, 2014). While the literature shows disparate use of AI in news media organisations, it also highlights ethical issues and their potential impact on society. The risks encompass a range of concerns, from over-reliance on automation and potential job displacement to ethical issues surrounding AI-generated content. Epistemologically, AI, particularly generative AI, questions the status of truth and facts, thought processes and editorial postures, and the common culture necessary for the cohesion of societies. For all these reasons, the growing use of AI is disrupting both the way the media operate and the recognition of their practices and productions in the general interest of society.

Associated challenges

The (over)reliance on online platforms as a news distribution and consumption vehicle presents risks not only to the independence and pluralism of the media but also undermines its critical position and creates platform dependency, threatening editorial autonomy (Dodds et al., 2023). Considering news media organisations as "gatekeepers and agenda setters" (Cools et al., 2021), editorial autonomy – the ability of journalists and media organisations to independently select, frame, and prioritize content without external interference – is particularly relevant. The growing dependency on platform algorithms for distribution and visibility can influence editorial choices, leading to shifts in news agendas and erosion of media pluralism (Simon, 2022). These concerns are central, as they directly affect journalism's democratic functions of holding power to account and fostering diverse public discourse. These risks apply equally to the general and specialized media, national and local (Jomini Stroud & Van Duyn, 2023). The algorithmic design of recommender systems may induce a reduction in the visibility of low-engagement content (Toff & Mathews, 2021). Concomitantly, the economic incentives and operating principles of social media platforms are shaping the editorial choices of local news outlets (Reviglio, 2023). Like any mediatization arrangement, platforms and social networks affect both news formats and content (Lafon, 2019). For example, the relative invisibility of articles on local politics on Facebook can be explained by their low engagement rate (Weber et al., 2019). Finally, the use of recommender systems and AI for search and hierarchical functionalities is leading to new tasks and skills for news organisations.

The digitalisation of the news media industry has profoundly transformed how audiences consume news, compelling journalists and editorial teams to produce and distribute content across a wide range of platforms (Sebbah et al., 2020). This shift requires

news content to be available in diverse written and audiovisual formats, enhanced with elements such as tags, subtitles, and translations. Additionally, media professionals must adapt to the logic of recommender systems (Weber et al., 2019) and "navigate the challenges of invisibility posed by the platform economy" (Lamot & Paulussen, 2024, p. 13), ensuring their content remains discoverable and relevant in a competitive digital ecosystem. Platforms influence news visibility by organising content through algorithmic curation and moderation. Challenges such as limited control over personalisation, questionable privacy protections, attention-grabbing strategies, and dependency on the social media ecosystem have driven news media organisations to experiment with alternative media formats like email newsletters and podcasts.

In pursuit of similar goals – audience engagement, retention, and efficiency – media organisations have also adopted data-driven news recommender systems on their own websites and mobile apps. However, as van Dijck et al. (2018) caution, datafication can undermine the independence of individual journalists and editors. Algorithmic personalisation on news platforms often clashes with the editorial identity of press organisations (Chakraborty et al., 2018). Specifically, the use of recommender systems disrupts the editorial balance of themes, opinions, and formats, occasionally leading to tensions with the established editorial line (Møller, 2023), a challenge underscored by our own findings. The editorial identity of a media company, which is defined by a balance within a structured set of news content, is thus threatened by the fragmentation of its productions into individualized items of "content" and their decoupling from their source (Wilding et al., 2018, p. 37).

News organisations are guided by ethical journalistic practices that serve as a framework for the selection of news and the drafting of editorial guidelines and codes of conduct (Diakopoulos, 2019a). These deontological rules and ethical frameworks are not rigid and vary based on changes in the production environment as well as in the news organisation's structure in terms of ownership and editors (Firmstone, 2024). Shilton (2018) highlights that algorithms and AI also embed the values of their designers and developers. In addition to the technological choices they make, the actions of these agents induce risks, be they cognitive biases (Brem & Rivieccio, 2024) or "value tuning" (Bazin, 2024) aimed at optimizing a model's response to an identified or hypothesized need. Given that these values are rooted outside the non-journalistic field, the use of AI-based tools by news organisations calls into question the ethical journalistic practices and the specificities of news production and dissemination

Alongside the journalistic aspects, all stakeholders, including AI technologies, "publishers, advertisers, data producers, governments, and users all have their own agendas in the political economy of algorithm systems" (Lindén, 2017, p. 73). Faced with these dynamics, public policies and institutions attempt to frame or regulate the balance of power between these stakeholders and to redefine the ethical, moral and operational principles and methods to ultimately safeguard journalism and the wider democratic public interests.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the increasing importance of AI in news media and the impact it has both within and outside these organisations, our research question is: Under which conditions are AI tools integrated into newsrooms within news media organisations from an organisational and regulatory point of view? Therefore, our research has two main objectives: (1) to better understand the conditions in which AI tools are integrated into professional practices; and (2) to assess the relevance of regulatory policies to the issues raised by these practices.

To address these objectives, our approach combines desk research with in-depth interviews, applied to a sample of 19 news media outlets, including public and commercial, traditional (press, radio, TV) and digital native media, in three markets: French-speaking Belgium, France, and Spain[2]. The selection of Spain, France, and the French-speaking part of Belgium is grounded in their shared characteristics of strong political parallelism and traditions of state intervention. Spain and France are classic examples of the "Polarized Pluralist" model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). While Belgium is generally classified as "Democratic Corporatist", Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 70) note that it is the case closest to the "Mediterranean" model considering "the relatively strong involvement of political parties in public broadcasting".

For that purpose, we have first analysed the websites of the 19 news media organisations in 2024, focusing on whether guidelines exist for AI deployment in their organisation and editorial decision-making. We selected 30 relevant documents: ethical and/or editorial chart, codes of conduct, privacy, and ethical principles towards RS and AI. In these documents, we identified the topics requiring these companies' attention, and the solutions and commitments proposed to address identified risks. In addition, we conducted 41 semi-structured interviews between November 2023 and November 2024. The interviewees included employees of the news media organisations listed below in Table 1, as well as legal experts and representatives of relevant regulatory bodies (see Appendix). To ensure consistency, the document analysis only applies to the organisations that we were able to interview. However, they represent the largest audiences in the three markets.

Finally, an important contribution of this paper is the inclusion of three European markets in the analysis. While the approach remains anchored in qualitative, in-depth research, our selection provides a diverse sample, representing different cultural, regulatory, and market contexts within the European media ecosystem. While we have remained cautious in the comparison of results due to such diversity, the comparative approach enriches a single-market case study and therefore reduces the gap towards generalisation.

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[2] For the Spanish market, the news media organisations and media groups included in this study are RTVE (Public Service Media -PSM-), El País, El Español, La Vanguardia, Atresmedia, and 20 Minutos. For the French market, M6, TF1, Le Monde, Mediapart, BFM TV, Libération, Canal Plus, France TV (PSM), Lagardère News, and Radio France (PSM). Lastly, for the French-speaking Belgian market, Le Soir, IPM Group, and RTBF (PSM).

RESULTS

Striving for Balance: Innovation, Ethics and AI Regulation in the News Industry

A still experimental integration of AI tools in news media organisations

The interviews we conducted show that, particularly since the end of 2022 and the public release of ChatGPT and other AI tools, heads of media organisations have initiated discussions with professional bodies and carried out training sessions to define how and to what extent AI tools are integrated. These actions were primarily taken to increase productivity, offer innovative products in a competitive information market, and weigh more in their power relations with the platforms that reach their audience.

Our interviews, however, show that the integration of AI into media organisations remains in a relatively experimental and cautious phase, with significant variability in adoption practices across different organisations and departments. Most interviewees commonly agreed that, from an organisational perspective, AI primarily enhances operational efficiency by reducing the time spent on routine tasks, though human oversight remains a key element. Interviewee 26-France explained that their group set up an in-house platform for generative AI and data in 2023, with points of contact in various teams, to "optimise certain actions that used to be automated and repetitive, such as Speech-to-text, which translates all our audio content into text, produces summaries for social networks, and organises our internal database". AI is also employed to suggest headlines for news articles, propose captions for social media posts, and even cover routine events like national lottery contests or sports. Some media groups are experimenting with new services, such as "a critical analysis tool for the article written by the journalist which will give him an opinion on the style, spelling, and possible discriminatory biases" (Interviewee 26-France).

Economic benefits of integrating AI: from productivity gains to audience engagement and retention

We observed major differences regarding the original format and the size of media organisations. With digitalisation and the centrality of online platforms, the written press had to invest in audiovisual production skills and resources. Radio, TV and print outlets recruited journalists for editorial work and to manage the editing of content on social networks. AI is also used to manage archives and make the most of them. The implementation of AI into business software has taken place under varying conditions: larger media groups, both public and private, have in-house IT departments or partnerships with research and innovation centres. Such groups have human and financial investment capacities that enable them to roll out new services across all their titles: tagging, titling, and summarisation for platforms in all formats. Smaller and web-only organisations have fewer resources at their disposal and appear to be even more cautious in their use of AI. These developments reflect broader trends in the media industry, where AI may be seen as a cost-saving measure that allows journalists to allocate more time to value-added tasks, as discussed by Beckett and Yassen (2023) and by Fieiras Ceide et al. (2024). Several

interviewees highlighted the efficiency gains that AI has brought to their workflows. Interviewee 6-Spain described a trial in which AI-generated newsletters, based on Afghan newspapers, were translated and summarised for journalists on the ground, allowing them to focus on refining content for the Spanish audience. Others discussed AI's role in optimising social media content and automating tasks such as election result reporting, further enhancing newsroom efficiency.

In addition to productivity gains, the integration of AI in newsrooms is also driven by strategies to capture and retain subscribers. Several interviewees, mainly from large private media groups, state that data management platforms and algorithmic processing enable both premium content offerings and better advertising targeting. The objective here is economic, with AI expected to increase the average revenue per user (ARPU). Interviewee 39-Belgium explains: "On the site, a banner is managed automatically by an algorithm, set up by marketing in collaboration with the editors-in-chief. The relative weighting of the most-read content, time spent, etc. can be adjusted, with a balance between free/paid/member content". Interviewee 5-Spain highlighted the AI's role in audience-related metrics, reflecting a broader trend of using AI for audience engagement and retention (Bodó, 2019). Some media we observed also experimented with offering their subscribers the option of filtering the content according to themes of their choice, but this service appears to be unsatisfactory and possibly counterproductive in terms of loyalty. The use of personalised recommendation systems may contribute to making the media's editorial line and the hierarchization of information less clear. This phenomenon has relatively little effect on media whose brands are already well established and recognized: "We can offer customization services to our subscribers because we have a strong brand, which is a guarantee of trust", explains Interviewee 33-France. Others choose not to use automatic recommendation on their own services, considering it essential that editorial management be run by humans and that their production cannot be fragmented: "What makes us who we are is a balance between hierarchical and echoing information. It makes no sense for us, and I think for our readers, to leave this to an algorithm. Our job is not to produce "content" but to offer keys to understanding our societies through a structured set of news analyses, seen as a whole" (Interviewee 29-France). For its part, French and Belgian public service media companies developed recommender systems for their platforms, "specifically designed to reinforce its role in promoting diversity and reinforce its position as a public service" (Interviewee 41-France).

The role of AI in the interactions with digital platforms

In terms of market structure, the increasing integration of AI could further concentrate power in the hands of a few dominant players who can afford to invest in advanced AI tools (Napoli, 2015; Simon, 2024b). Interviewee 1-Spain notes that while AI-driven tools are helping to reach underrepresented communities, smaller media organisations that lack the resources to invest in AI might struggle to compete in a market increasingly driven by technology. The Tech Giants are all designing tools and services for journalists and media organisations: Genesis for Google, and Semafor for Microsoft, for instance. The imbalance of power in favour of dominant players, due to their technological and

financial advantage, thus appears likely to affect media pluralism by reducing the diversity of editorial voices available to the public and increasing the homogenization of news content (European University Institute, 2024).

AI is also reconfiguring cooperation with the platforms and services that generate automatic content. In France, Spain and French-speaking Belgium, only a few but relevant media, have negotiated agreements with these stakeholders. OpenAI has partnered with Le Monde and Prisa Media to bring French and Spanish news content to ChatGPT. While such individual negotiation may benefit influential players who have a volume of quality content relevant to the needs of AI, it also minimises the collective capacity of media to defend their legal and financial rights against AI service providers. Interviewee 29-France sees this as essential: "We denounce press organisations that sign bilateral agreements with platforms. Obviously, such an approach only benefits the platforms, which are in the business of 'divide and conquer', imposing rules that are totally opaque."

Ethical reasons for limited use of AI by news media organisations and professionals

One key reason for the limited use of AI tools by news media comes from resistance by professionals in these organisations. To address this challenge, some media have set up internal training and awareness-raising working groups and practical discovery workshops. The cautious integration highlights a broader challenge for media organisations: balancing innovation with ethical responsibility, particularly regarding their contribution to the public good and maintaining editorial independence (Blassnig, et al., 2024). Hence, Interviewee 26-France, while explaining how AI is used by their organisation, emphasises that AI must always operate under human supervision, which is what most of the representatives we interviewed said: "AI should be applied with the same principles as traditional information, always requiring human supervision and validation". Interviewee 38-Belgium recalls: "But in all cases, the journalist remains central and responsible". These views align with broader discussions in the literature, including scholars like de-Lima-Santos and Ceron (2021) who argue that AI systems in media should be viewed as a tool to increase productivity rather than as a replacement for human-driven journalism: "AI is not a silver bullet for journalism, but it is a new tool that requires members of the news industry to possess more understanding to further support and bolster AI capabilities in newsrooms" (p.18). Some interviewees also see AI applications as opportunities to rethink the ethical dimensions of journalism: "Questions surrounding AI and journalism, in today's turbulent societal contexts, can enable us to reaffirm our societal and democratic responsibility," argues Interviewee 32-France.

On platforms like TikTok, where building community trust is paramount, they prioritise having a recognisable human presence. As Interviewee 14-Spain explains: "There is an AI tool that gives you the voice-over automatically. But it scares me, honestly. I mean, I do not like it at all, I just do not like it, it seems super artificial to me, very impostured". This sentiment echoes concerns raised by Nguyen and Hekman (2024), who argue that if not properly managed, automation in content creation could lead to a depersonalised media landscape, distancing journalists from their audiences. Additionally, Interviewee 16-Spain

emphasises that on-the-ground reporting and exclusive insights, which rely on human judgement, cannot be replicated by AI. This mirrors broader concerns in media studies about the limitations of AI in replicating human creativity and the ethical implications of over-relying on automated systems (Dörr & Hollnbuchner, 2017; Milano et al., 2020).

Fragmented AI governance

The rapid development and diverse applications of AI in the news media sector make it challenging to think and operate comprehensive regulations, both at local and international levels. Technology is evolving faster than legislation can keep up, making it difficult to establish regulations that remain relevant and effective (Simon, 2024b). There is no clear consensus on how to approach specifically AI regulation in news media. Some experts argue for more comprehensive regulations (Dutkiewicz & Krack, 2024), while others believe the industry should self-regulate to some extent (Porlezza, 2023), as there is a concern that overly strict regulations could stifle innovation and put news organisations at a disadvantage. Media regulation comprises three main methods: regulation, where government authorities impose legal standards and oversight on media operations; self-regulation, in which the media industry voluntarily establishes and enforces its own codes of conduct and ethical guidelines; and co-regulation, a hybrid approach that allows collaborative governance between the state and media entities (Csink & Mayer, 2014).

EU and national regulations of AI in the media sector in France, Spain, and the French-speaking part of Belgium

Several regulatory frameworks impact the use of AI in media sectors. However, they are usually not designed specifically for media. At the European level, the *AI Act* aims to comprehensively regulate the use of AI, but its impact on media sectors remains to be seen. The *AI Act*[3] defines AI broadly and categorises different technologies by their risk level, with more stringent regulations for high-risk systems. Media-related AI, however, is not classified as high-risk, meaning it is subject to lighter regulation. The *AI Act* requires developers to provide detailed technical documentation on AI models, training data and testing processes (Dutkiewitz et al., 2024), as well as a risk assessment. Our document analysis of media organisations' internal charters and ethical guidelines, combined with interview data, highlights that despite their increasing use of AI, many companies have not adopted specific transparency obligations regarding AI-driven news production. Consequently, it appears necessary to reinforce guarantees of transparency and risk monitoring, both concerning technical solutions and their integration into media organisations' editorial workflows**.**

At the national level, the regulation of AI in news media also appears to be fragmented and evolving in the studied markets. In France, the Law Against Information Manipulation[4], passed in 2018, does not tackle AI itself but emphasises algorithmic transparency, urging

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[3] Regulation 2024/1689. *Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act) (Text with EEA relevance).* https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj.
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platforms to clarify content sourcing and support media literacy among users: "Users must […] understand the operating principles of the algorithms that govern the organisation, selection and scheduling of this content" (p. 3), and platforms should identify "the sources of content from organisations and press agencies, and even put in place 'labels' and systems that "highlight information from these sources" (p. 4). The aim is to distinguish journalistic content from false information, unverified information or promotional content. In addition, as part of the France 2030 Plan[5], the French government has developed a strategy of investment in research and innovation to "accelerate the adoption of artificial intelligence" in a wide range of fields, although it has not yet given any specific thought to the media and information sector. Similarly, in Spain, news media organisations are not mentioned in the AI Strategy 2024[6] approved by the Spanish Council of Ministers. In August 2024, the government established the Spanish Agency for the Supervision of Artificial Intelligence[7] (AESIA), which has supervisory responsibilities, including inspection and sanctioning powers as outlined in the *AI Act*, and ensures the proper implementation of all national and European regulations concerning the use and development of AI. In Belgium, an Ethics Advisory Council on Data and AI was created in 2024, primarily intended for the application of good practices in the Federal public administration. According to the Belgian AI Strategy Report[8], policymakers acknowledge the importance of developing AI applications that adhere to robust ethical and legal standards. The *AI Act* does not deal explicitly with the specificities of the information media and news content (which was foreseen in a first version of the text). Media are considered as any content provider, but the fact that a human intervenes in the process leading to the publication of AI-generated content is enough to exempt the media from transparency obligations towards its audience (European Union, 2024, Art. 50).

Efforts to establish a regulatory ecosystem for AI in the media sector are currently underway. Interviewee 17-Spain pointed out that one of the major barriers to effective regulation of AI in the Spanish news media sector is the lack of a dedicated governmental body to oversee the sector and based on interview data, the same can be said about France and Belgium. This makes it difficult for media organisations to advocate for coherent policies on the use of AI tools in the newsroom. Reporters Without Borders (2025) however stresses that the EU should consider "the threat to European citizens' right to access reliable information as a 'systemic risk', requiring the utmost vigilance on the part of AI providers"

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[8] SPF Stratégie et Appui (BOSA). *Plan National de Convergence Pour Le Développement de l'Intelligence Artificielle.* Nov. 2022. https://bosa.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/documents/DTdocs/AI/Plan_national_de_convergence_pour_le_développement_de_lintelligence_artificielle.pdf

Self-regulation of AI use by the media

Alongside institutional frameworks, the economic players themselves are mobilising to redefine their professional practices and to influence the balance of power in the sharing of values associated with the use of AI. There is a push for media organisations to develop their transparency policies and ethical guidelines for AI use (Burnley, 2024) and, therefore, some media organisations may choose self-regulation to maintain control over their ethical standards and operational practices, preserving journalistic integrity and independence from external regulations that may not fully grasp the industry's nuances (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2024).

However, as we see in this study, not all news media organisations act swiftly or have clear standards for the use of AI in newsrooms, resulting in different approaches across the industry (see Table 1). Likewise, it is important to highlight that some organisations may lack the resources or expertise to develop comprehensive self-regulatory frameworks, leading to inconsistencies in how AI is integrated and managed.

Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of news media organisations' discourse on their use of AI. Around 60% of the media sites we analysed do not have an official discourse on AI. 40% mention or position themselves, to varying degrees and in different forms, concerning the integration of AI into their organisation, and only 20% express their ethical commitments linked to these technologies (most often by reaffirming the journalist's ultimate responsibility). Media organisations thus show limited integration of AI-related considerations into their ethical frameworks or policies. Most Spanish organisations added here, including major national media outlets such as El País and El Mundo, do not meaningfully address these topics. The sole exception is Atresmedia, a commercial media group which has developed a simple four-page policy on the responsible use of AI. In France, engagement with AI is somewhat more pronounced, though it varies across media. Organisations like Le Monde, TF1, and M6 incorporate discussions on AI into their ethical charters, linking these tools to innovation and technological disruption more than to ethics or deontology. However, Le Monde and France TV group stand out and address the ethical dimensions of AI usage. The French-speaking Belgian market demonstrates a similar approach to AI integration. RTBF, the French-language PSM, adopts a strong public interest-driven perspective, aligning its discussions of algorithms and AI with democratic values. It has for several years undertaken a series of actions internally and with the public to measure the issues linked to its potential uses of AIs and algorithms, to debate them and to formalise[9]. Commercial outlets, such as RTL Info, also engage with AI, focusing on innovation and internal training. Overall, at the time of the study, the findings underscore a lack of comprehensive public guidelines and limited engagement with the ethical regulation of AI tools in newsrooms, reflecting an underdeveloped discourse on their ethical and social implications.

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[9] RTBF. (2024, March 6). *Intelligence artificielle dans les rédactions: Comment l'utilisons-nous? Quelles règles pour les médias d'information?* Retrieved from https://www.rtbf.be/article/intelligence-artificielle-dans-les-redactions-comment-l-utilisons -nous-quelles-regles-pour-les-medias-d-information-11368742

Table 1. **Overview of Media Outlets' Ethical Guidelines and AI Discourses in Spain, France, and French-speaking Belgium.**

Type of Media	Name of Document	Discourse on Algorithms and AI	Ethical Discourse on AI
Name of the Media			
Spanish Market			
RTVE			
Public service media	Ethical Chart 2019 and Corporate Social Responsibility20223	No	No
El País (Grupo PRISA)			
National press	Ethical Chart from PRISA (the media group) 2019 + Ethical Chart from El País	No	No
El Mundo			
National press	Ethical Code and 'Good Practices' Chart	No	No
Atresmedia			
Commercial media group	Policy for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence and Related Tools	Yes	Yes
El Español			
Digital native newspaper	Not found	No	No
La Vanguardia (Grupo Godó)			
National press	Code of Conduct and Report on the Statement of Non-Financial Information 2022	No	No
20 Minutos (Grupo Henneo)			
National press	Ethical Code and 'Good Practices' Chart	No	No
French Market			
TF1 (Bouygues Group)			
Commercial television	Ethical Code and Deontological Chart	Yes (innovation)	No
France TV Group			
Public service media, Audiovisual	Ethical Chart and Deontological Chart	Yes	Yes
M6 (Bertelsmann Group)			
Commercial television	Ethical and Deontological Code	Yes (innovation)	No
BFM TV (Altice Group)			
Commercial news television	Deontological Chart	No	No
Canal Plus (Vivendi/Bolloré Group)			
Commercial audiovisual group	Ethical Chart and Deontological Chart, Environmental, Societal and Social Engagements	Yes (copyrights)	No

▶▶

Libération			
National press	Ethical chart and Editorial Independence Pact	No	No
Le Monde			
National press	Ethical and Deontological Chart	Yes	Yes
Mediapart			
Digital native daily news	Ethical and Deontological Charts, Contribution Chart	No	No
Paris Match (Lagardere/Bolloré Group)			
Commercial media group	Deontological Chart, Code of Ethics Ethical Chart (Group)	No	No
French-speaking Belgian Market			
Le Soir (Rossel Group)			
National press	Protection of Privacy	No	No
La Libre (IPM Group)			
Commercial media group	Ethical Principles	No	No
RTBF			
Public service media, Audiovisual	Deontological Chart, Privacy Chart	Yes (democracy)	Yes+

Source: Authors, November 2024

In contrast with these findings based on document analysis, several interviewees discuss the importance of internal guidelines for regulating AI's role in the newsroom. Interviewee 15-Spain mentions the creation of an AI oversight committee to ensure that AI-generated content is clearly labelled and respects certain standards. Interviewee 13-Spain also describes a (non-official) "small decalogue" of rules requiring human oversight for AI-generated content, particularly to prevent AI from producing interpretative or evaluative content: "Everyone has been caught off guard, even the technology organisations themselves have been caught off guard. In other words, nobody expected it to jump so quickly". Most have adapted their internal organisation:

> Since 2022, we have strengthened the pre-existing governance. For all ethical issues, the Data Management Committee and the Editorial and Algorithms Committee are supposed to confront each other. One trying to find anything that might be of interest to the company, to promote it, to demonstrate its usefulness, which is not always easy. On the other hand, we must make sure that we have the necessary safeguards in place, given our public service values, which we must absolutely preserve. (Interviewee 40–Belgium)

Scholars have repeatedly stressed the importance of transparency in AI-driven news creation, alongside human involvement in information validation (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2017). Without clear human oversight, AI could exacerbate misinformation and reduce accountability, thereby undermining public trust in news organisations:

> We translate content from the Washington Post once or twice a week. This was impossible without the help of an artificial intelligence tool. And so, at the end of articles that are signed "Washington Post", we display a block that is hyper-clear on how it's done: it's translated with the help of validated artificial intelligence tools, chosen by journalists, translated with, supervised by, and edited by humans. We try to be as detailed and transparent as possible. (Interviewee 37–France)

Media organisations that adopt AI without implementing rigorous editorial standards risk undermining their role as trusted sources of information (Banerjee et al., 2023; Blassnig et al., 2024). Finally, we have observed that these reflections and developments are also taking place thanks to professional organisations.

A call for public policies to tackle specific issues related to the use of AI in media

The interviews show that media face unique regulatory challenges when it comes to AI, as scholars such as Ouchchy et al. (2020) have noted. The debate on AI regulation is becoming increasingly significant due to the rapid evolution of AI and the complex ethical issues it raises, such as privacy concerns, intellectual property, and the risk of misinformation. "We are all trying to figure out how we anticipate, how we are going to do it and so on, but right now there is no conclusion because it is ongoing", explained Interviewee 5-Spain. Several interviewees noted that while regulations and best practices are still evolving, organisations are adopting a "trial-and-error" approach to AI integration and testing its capabilities while waiting for clearer regulatory frameworks. Nevertheless, Interviewee 9-Spain argues that, despite this regulatory ambiguity, there is an implicit understanding within the organisation about the limits of AI use, particularly in areas like content generation. De-Lima-Santos et al. (2024) argue that sector-specific regulations, such as those being developed for media, are essential to ensuring that AI systems operate in a way that protects both consumers and the integrity of the information ecosystem. The certification of practices through the combined action of legislators and professional organisations is claimed:

> Journalism is a profession, not a hobby. We have practices, we verify information, we have obligations, we have codes, we are accountable to the public, we have a mediator, we can be contacted, we are regulated... You can't publish just anything with AI, for example, even though there's nothing in the law to prevent it. But it's not just the law. I think regulation is important, but so is the coalition of players around common actions. I'm thinking of RSF's Trust journalism label initiative, for example, which is a way of certifying not news, but methods. (Interviewee 31-France)

Some legacy media also want to see their content treated differently from content produced exclusively by generative AI. For them, the objective is to define a label that can attest to the quality of a piece of information not for its own sake but according to the conditions under which it was produced. "It is certainly not a question of creating a 'Ministry of Truth', but of recognising virtuous professional practices," explains Interviewee 37-France. On a European scale, professional organisations such as News Media Europe,

while acknowledging that the *AI Act* constitutes a "first step" towards protecting content-related rights, are urging public decision-makers to effectively implement the controls and sanctions provided for: "It is essential that the template for the sufficient level of information that General Purpose AI model providers must make available enables effective exercise and enforcement of copyright and other fundamental rights". [10]

While self-regulation plays an important role, it is insufficient to address the challenges posed by AI. Interviewee 18-Spain, who represents a non-profit organisation focused on governance and transparency, notes that many efforts in the media sector are being driven by self-regulatory initiatives. However, Interviewee 17-Spain stresses that the current reliance on self-regulation lacks a holistic vision for digital transformation, and its societal implications: "How lost we are […]. Media today are more worried about how to extract money from AI, instead of worried about how to extract value from AI". Notwithstanding, a degree of scepticism about the current state of implementation arose during the interviews. Media organisations often seem to be waiting for clearer regulatory signals, but in the meantime, their implementation of AI technologies remains inconsistent (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2021; Diakopoulos, 2019b; Nguyen & Hekman, 2024). Overall, it seems that real-world implementation lags behind regulatory discussions.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the conditions under which AI tools are integrated into European newsrooms within news media organisations from both organisational and regulatory perspectives, focusing on the French-speaking Belgian, French, and Spanish markets. Addressing the research question, "Under which conditions are AI tools integrated into news media organisations from both organisational and regulatory points of view?", we employed two different methods, combining document analysis with in-depth interviews with media professionals and regulatory experts.

Our document analysis reveals a conspicuous scarcity of public debate and sector-specific regulatory guidelines surrounding the deployment of AI within media organisations. It also highlights the fragmentation of current regulatory frameworks and the absence of clear ethical standards adapted to journalism. The interview data confirm these regulatory gaps and provide deeper insights into organisational practices. Interviewees described the adoption of AI as largely experimental and cautious, with substantial variability across organisations and departments. They emphasized resistance to AI integration due to concerns over ethical implications, the weakening of editorial independence (van Drunen & Fechner, 2022), and risks related to optimizing visibility on distribution platforms. Interviewees also expressed concerns that AI-driven personalisation could erode editorial brands and public trust. Our interviews highlight the risk that the integration of AI tools into newsrooms increases fragmentation and task specialization, particularly in order to make content visible on distribution services. As a

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[10] Source: News Media Europe, *EU AI Act*: Joint statement from European creators and rightsholders, March 13, 2024, Online: https://www.newsmediaeurope.eu/news/eu-ai-act-joint-statement-from-european-creators-and-rightsholders/

result of this atomization of news and personalisation opportunities, the media's editorial charter, and the brand on which relationships of trust with the public are built are at risk of being weakened.

Moreover, our study highlights the fragmentation of current regulatory frameworks. The absence of clear, sector-specific guidelines in the markets analysed leads to inconsistencies in AI implementation and fails to adequately address AI's ethical and operational challenges in journalism. Additionally, the centrality of online platforms in news distribution has entrenched their dominant position, compelling media organisations to adapt their skills, technologies, and financial models to remain competitive. These dynamics risks undermining media pluralism and diversity by concentrating decision-making power within a few dominant tech entities. The growing influence of AI must also be understood in the context of contemporary dynamics of platform economics and the decision-making powers influenced by heightened concentration, especially of AI technologies.

To address the challenges identified in this study and to support the ethical integration of AI in the news media sector, we propose a series of recommendations that aim to enhance transparency, foster collaboration, and ensure accountability while empowering professionals and preserving the democratic values of journalism:

1. The adoption of transparent practices in content creation and distribution. This includes disclosing how AI tools influence editorial decisions, the nature of AI-generated content, and the data sources used, as already stipulated in the AI Act.
2. Promoting collaborative self-regulation initiatives among media entities can lead to the establishment of industry-wide ethical guidelines and best practices for AI integration.
3. Implementing comprehensive training programs to enhance AI literacy among media professionals, enabling them to effectively oversee AI-driven processes and ensure that human judgment remains central to editorial decision-making.
4. Establishing robust oversight mechanisms and accountability standards to monitor AI applications within media organisations, such as independent bodies to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

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Appendix

Interviewees their main role, and type of organisation they work for

Interviewee Code	Main Role of the Interviewee	Type of Organisation
1-Spain	Journalist, AI Expert	Legacy national media
2-Spain	Head of Digital	Legacy national media
3-Spain	Head of Big Data and Tech Innovation	Legacy national media
4-Spain	Head of Data Strategy	Legacy national media
5-Spain	Head of Digital Strategy	Legacy national media
6-Spain	Head of Tech Innovation	Legacy national media

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7-Spain	Researcher for University Chair with PSM	Academic institution
8-Spain	Head of Innovation, Product Owner and Social Media	Digital native news outlet
9-Spain	Managerial position	Digital native news outlet
10-Spain	Head of Digital Marketing and Audience	Commercial media group
11-Spain	Head of Audiences	Legacy national media
12-Spain	Head of Digital Strategy	Digital native news outlet
13-Spain	Managerial position	Digital native news outlet
14-Spain	Head of Social Media	Legacy national media
15-Spain	Chief Data Officer	Commercial media group
16-Spain	Managerial position, Head of Digital Strategy	Legacy national media
17-Spain	Managerial position	Media umbrella organisation
18-Spain	Media Governance Lead	Non-profit organisation
19-Spain	Legal and Policy Expert	Academic institution
20	Senior Legal Counsel	Umbrella organisation
21	IP Senior Legal Counsel	Umbrella organisation
22	Legal Counsel	Umbrella organisation
23	Senior Legal Counsel	Umbrella organisation
24	Senior EU Policy Advisor	Umbrella organisation
25	Head of Software Engineering	Umbrella organisation
26-France	Head of Innovation, Data and AI	Commercial media
27-France	Head of Digital	Commercial media
28-France	Managerial position, Head of Digital	Legacy national media
29-France	Head and Director of Publication	Digital native news outlet
30-France	Head of Digital	Legacy national media
31-France	Deputy Head of Digital	Legacy national media
32-France	Managerial position, Head of Legal Affairs	Legacy national media
33-France	Head of Digital	Commercial media
34-France	Head of the Digital Edition	Legacy national media

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Interviewee Code	Main Role of the Interviewee	Type of Organisation
35-France	Editor-in-Chief, Head of Strategy and Deontology	Legacy national media
36-France	Head of Innovation	Legacy national media
37-France	Head of Digital	Commercial media
38-Belgium	Journalist, Product Owner	Legacy national media
39-Belgium	AI Expert	Commercial media
40-Belgium	Chief Data Officer	Legacy national media
41-France	Deputy Head of Digital	Legacy national media

ISTRAŽIVANJE ETIČKIH I REGULATORNIH IZAZOVA INTEGRACIJE UMJETNE INTELIGENCIJE U NOVINSKIM REDAKCIJAMA EUROPSKE UNIJE

Bruno Lefèvre :: Aina Errando :: Adelaida Afilipoaie :: Heritiana Ranaivoson :: Louis Wiart

SAŽETAK *Umjetna inteligencija (UI) znatno je preoblikovala medijski krajolik u digitalnom okružju koje se brzo mijenja. Iako su se u posljednje vrijeme pojavile zakonodavne mjere i inicijative samoregulacije unutar industrije kako bi se odgovorilo na posljedice korištenja UI-ja, etički izazovi povezani s primjenom umjetne inteligencije u redakcijama Europske unije te načini na koje se medijske organizacije snalaze u regulatornim okvirima i internim inicijativama i dalje su nedovoljno istraženi. Ova studija nastoji popuniti tu prazninu ispitivanjem uvjeta pod kojima se alati umjetne inteligencije integriraju u medijske organizacije, iz organizacijske i regulatorne perspektive. Na temelju analize 30 ključnih dokumenata i 41 dubinskog intervjua s medijskim profesionalcima i regulatornim stručnjacima na trima tržištima EU-a, studija donosi ključne uvide: ograničen diskurs o korištenju UI-ja u medijskim organizacijama, značajne razlike u praksama implementacije te izostanak jasnih i provedivih regulatornih smjernica za rješavanje pitanja povezanih s novinskim sadržajem koji je generirala umjetna inteligencija.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

MEDIJSKA REGULACIJA, DIGITALNO NOVINARSTVO, UMJETNA INTELIGENCIJA, MEDIJSKA ETIKA, ALGORITAMSKO NOVINARSTVO

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