

From Typewriters to Algorithms: How AI is Redefining Journalistic Processes in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the labour, ethics, and professional journalism in the fragile media economy in Nigeria. Although the global community upholds AI as the key to efficiency, the situation in Nigeria uncovers some underlying contradictions between automation and autonomy, at which layered precarity, ethical ambiguity, and data colonialism are prone to become more acute due to technological dependence. This position paper is aimed at critically analyzing the implications of AI-driven automation on newsroom practices and power relations, putting them within the context of socio-economic and cultural realities of Nigeria. Based on the Political Economy of Communication and Actor Network Theory, the paper posit that AI is not just a tool but rather an agent in restructuring the journalistic practices, ownership and epistemic power. It argues that the experience of AI in Nigeria presents a two-sided process of empowerment by technological innovation and displacement by capitalistic rationalisation. The article adds to the current scholarship in Africa as it suggests a Human-AI Collaborative Newsroom Model, which is based on ethical innovation, situational inclusivity, and cultural sovereignty. It suggests that Nigerian journalism needs to overcome the passive reception and develop technological autonomy by developing local AI systems, providing ethical education, and revising policy. Essentially, it is argued that journalism can survive the algorithmic age not by opposing automation but by reasserting their moral and cultural agency in a way that machines are not substituting the truth but supporting it.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Journalistic Labour, Algorithmic Journalism, Newsroom Transformation, Human-AI covenant.

Introduction

The history of journalism in Nigeria; is quite basically the story of the labour of the people who have long mediated information with ink, tape recorders, and then, keyboards and cameras. The change between the era of typewriters and the emergence of algorithms does not simply constitute a technological advancement but also a reinterpretation of what it takes to be a journalist. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is restructuring the news production, distribution, and consumption structure across the globe (Kperogi and Ishiekwene, 2025; Onebunne, 2024; Zkariyyah et al, 2024). This has been also reflected in regional trends in West Africa where Ghanaian media practitioners are in the process of exploring AI tools in editorial optimisation and data-driven storytelling (Adefioye, 2024). This transformation is occurring in a weak media economy in Nigeria defined by precarity, infrastructural constraints and stiff political rivalry (Abdulrauf et al., 2025; Ezema, 2025; Usman and Emmanuel, 2025). The outcome is a complicated newsroom atmosphere in which technology holds the promise of freedom yet tends to bring havoc.

The Nigerian newsroom was traditionally formed based on physical routines as reporters used to handwrite notes, editors would scribble on the scripts by red ink, and typewriters would bang around the news any room. News work was a human activity to a great extent: people accumulated knowledge via mentoring, moral intuition directed gatekeeping, and the professional identity was formed according to a set of common values of truth and public service (Umejei et at., 2025). This ecology has started changing with the digital revolution that happened in the early 2000s. The internet connectivity, online publishing, and social media opened the new arena of immediacy and interactivity (Ashiru et al., 2023; Makinde, 2024). However, the introduction of AI is a much more profound break, a break that not only the way journalists do their jobs, but also what it means to be one.

Artificial intelligence (AI) systems that are methods of natural language processing, automated transcription, predictive analytics, and generative text systems (e.g., ChatGPT, Jasper AI, or NewsWhip) are now integrated into newsroom processes. They compose overviews, proposal of headlines, label bias, and even the ranking of stories using artificial metrics (Makinde, 2024). What used to be manual and intuitive is now machine enabled and data driven. The consequences of this change are extensive: judgments that were once made through editorial discretion are now more and more being computerised through algorithmic

optimisation, and all hierarchies in the labour force are giving way to dynamic networks of human-machine interaction. Diakopoulos (2019) rightly notes that journalistic work in the algorithmic era is not only cognitive but also computational.

These transitions are not easy in Nigeria because of the local realities. The majority of media houses work on a tight budget, with obsolete technology, and have fewer professional training opportunities (Makinde, 2024). The adoption of AI, therefore, increases existing disparities between the newsrooms of large cities and small cities. At the same time as the big platforms, like Premium Times and Channels Television, trial AI-enhanced analytics, community and state-owned media is mostly analogue, relying on human intervention and improvisation (Dipogiso, 2022; Omenugha, 2019). Similar trend is observed in Zimbabwe, whose media houses such as Zimpapers and Alpha Media Holdings have unequal AI adoption due to difference in resource availability and editorial concern (Mugadzaweta, 2025). Such an unequal adoption results in a dual tier journalism system, one with a digital empowerment, the other without a digital presence.

In addition, there exists the epistemic aspect of this change besides the economic one. The current use of AI systems is mostly trained on the Western data sets and linguistic patterns, which creates a risk of marginalising indigenous Nigerian expressions, languages, and views. According to Couldry and Mejias (2019), it can be called a sort of data colonialism, in which technology is used as the tool of subtle cultural domination. Gondwe (2025) also emphasises the inability of algorithmic translation systems within the Tanzanian media to reproduce cultural sensitivity as a part of the larger issues of linguistic bias and the erasure of epistemes in African newsrooms. This is existential to the state of journalism in Nigeria: Who is the arbiter of news worthiness in the age of algorithm? Who does AI systems constructed outside the continent boost or silence? Nigeria will run a risk of importing technology and with it, imbued ideological presuppositions, which will undermine its media sovereignty without conscious localisation.

This paper, thus, states that the purpose of AI in journalism in Nigeria should not be regarded as a technological improvement only but a shift in labour paradigm. The main thesis is that the future of journalism in Nigeria lies in its capacity to strike a balance between automation and autonomy and make sure that human ingenuity, moral reasoning, and contextual judgment are at the core of newswork. Instead of opposition to the AI, however, the issue that Nigerian newsroom should reclaim is to instill cultural intelligence, linguistic inclusion, and ethical protections when implementing the AI.

This argument is then continued to discuss the way AI is changing the architecture of newswork (Section 2), the twin nature of empowerment and displacement (Section 3) and ethical issues of accountability and authorship (Section 4). It subsequently suggests a HumanAI Collaborative Newsroom Model (Section 5), as a philosophical and practical course of traversing journalism through the algorithmic era with keeping the journalism door open to the public. In that regard, the paper will add to the current discussions related to the media future in Africa, stating that the technological change should not overshadow the long-term social value of journalism to inform, enlighten, and support the ideal of democracy.

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in journalism is both an opportunity and a crisis of meaning to the Nigerian newswork. AI has been a characteristic in the restructuring of newsroom practices, decision-making, and labour practices across the world (Diakopoulos, 2019; Pavlik, 2024). But in the imperfect media economy of Nigeria, defined by institution underinvestment, digital divide, and regulatory looseness, this technological shift demonstrates more contradictions than efficiency or automation of newsroom. What is perceived as a sign of innovation in the Western context is being perceived locally as a form of labour precarity, epistemic dependency, and ethical dislocation (Usman & Emmanuel, 2025; Ezema, 2025; Makinde, 2024).

Historically, Nigerian journalism has been transformed into the colonial idealism era, post-independence activism era, and commercialisation era fuelled by neoliberalism (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Oso, 2012; Umezurike, 2012). The stages have challenged the ethical and social principles of the profession. The algorithmic newsroom exacerbates those tensions to this day by redefining the notions of authorship, authority, and authenticity. Where editorial judgment once influenced news decisions, algorithmic mediated systems that put clicks and virality above civic responsibility dictate news decisions (Deuze, 2008; Kantola, 2016). This type of technological mediation is under threat of undermining the public mission of journalism, substituting the discretion of human with data demands, which might not always correspond to national or cultural values (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

To add to this issue, there is an unequal use of AI in the African media systems. As the machine learning analytics are being tested by elite organisations like Premium Times, the community outlets are still left behind technologically (Dipogiso, 2022; Omenugha, 2019). This disparity recreates structural inequalities and forms a dual system, with the digital empowered, and the digital left out (Mugadzaweta, 2025). Moreover, algorithms trained on mostly western datasets may contribute to what Couldry and Mejias (2019) refer to as the data colonialism which, in turn, may block other languages and ways of knowing out of the limelight

of digital visibility. Similar distortions can be seen in the Gondwe (2025) case about the Tanzanian media, which highlights how AI devices tend to be more inaccurate in the translation and narration of culture.

The issue is not, then, the adoption of AI, but the way in which Nigerian journalism will come to some sort of terms with the automation and autonomy. In the absence of ethical guidelines, localized innovation, and political point of view, the assimilation of AI might serve to institutionalize the reliance on external technologies and the erosion of the moral agency of the journalist. The future of journalism, as Gupta et al. (2024) warn, lies in the power that the society will give to AI, offering it chances to enhance and threaten it at the same time. In the case of Nigeria, the question is whether or not to make sure that the automation march does not de-humanize the conscience of journalism, but rather re-focus it on ethical imagination, cultural inclusivity and accountability to the people.

Research Objective

This paper aims to critically examine the role of AI in changing newsroom operations, redefining the journalistic labour, and altering professional power in the dynamic media environment in Nigeria.

Contribution to Knowledge

This paper contributes to the body of research on digital journalism by placing the adoption of AI in the context of the weak media economy in Nigeria, and the way in which automation challenges workforce, newsroom ethics, and governance. It connects the Political Economy of Communication and Actor-Network Theory to provide a decent insight into the process of co-production of journalistic realities by power and technology in the Global South. The Human-AI Collaborative Newsroom Model is a new model that brings a new definition of the relationship between human creativity and machine intelligence. It also places moral roadblocks in the production chain, focusing on transparency, accountability and humans in the news work by algorithms. In this way, the model offers a conceptual and practical avenue of incorporating AI tools without implying on journalistic independence and thereby deepening the current discussions on technology, ethics, and the future of news in Africa, and Nigeria specifically.

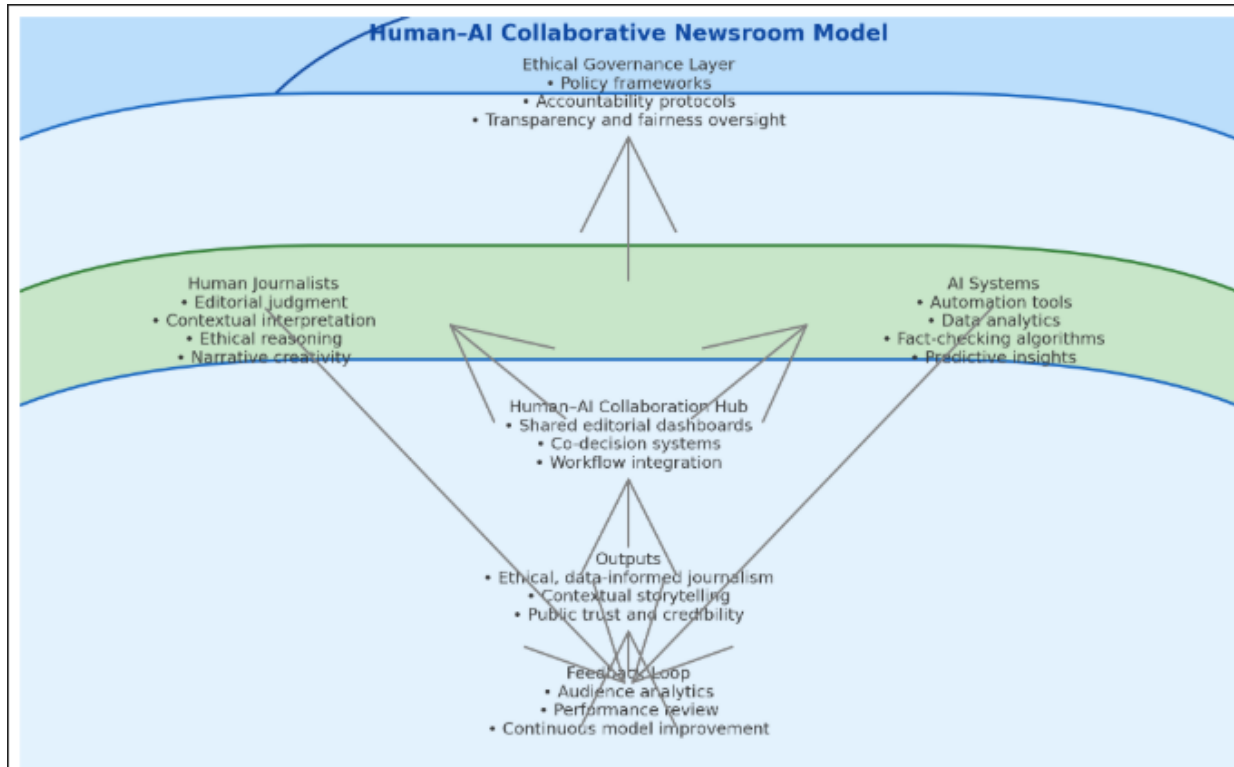


Fig. 2. Human-AI Collaborative Newsroom Model

Source: Omale et al (Author’s work, 2025)

(This is an original schema developed for this study, and has not been published elsewhere, hence no citation)

Interpretation of the model

The “Human-AI Collaborative Newsroom Model” illustrates a dynamic partnership between human journalists and artificial intelligence within an ethically guided media ecosystem. At the top sits the “Ethical Governance Layer”, which anchors the entire system in accountability, transparency, and fairness. Beneath it, human journalists bring editorial judgment, cultural insight, and moral reasoning, while “AI systems” contribute speed, data analytics, and predictive capacity.

At the centre is the “Collaboration Hub”, where human and machine inputs converge through shared dashboards and co-decision mechanisms to produce stories that are both data-driven and ethically grounded. The model leads to “outputs” characterised by accurate, contextual, and trust-building journalism. Finally, a “feedback loop” connects audience engagement and performance review back into the system, ensuring continuous learning and ethical recalibration. The model envisions a newsroom where human creativity and machine intelligence complement rather than compete, promoting a future of journalism that is technologically advanced yet firmly rooted in human values and public trust.

Literature Review

Historical Trajectories of Journalistic Labour in Nigeria

The evolution of Nigerian journalism reflects the broader political and economic transformations that have shaped the nation's social fabric. From its early roots in colonial resistance and nationalist advocacy, the press functioned less as a profit-oriented enterprise and more as an instrument of civic enlightenment and political mobilisation. The founding of *Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* in 1859 by Reverend Henry Townsend marked not only the birth of African journalism but also the intersection of literacy, faith, and freedom (Nyamnjoh, 2005). During this period, journalism was driven by idealism rather than remuneration, its labour grounded in moral conviction and collective purpose. This pattern mirrored broader African experiences, where early newspapers across the continent served as emancipatory instruments against imperial domination (Wasserman, 2013).

Following independence in 1960, Nigerian journalism began to professionalise, transitioning from activism to structured media practice. Training institutions and university departments of mass communication emerged, legitimising journalism as both a profession and an academic discipline. Yet this transition also exposed journalists to political co-optation and economic vulnerability. The press became a watchdog and a political instrument, navigating between autonomy and state control. Military regimes in the mid-1960s through the 1980s intensified this tension, as censorship and repression tested the ethical resilience of the profession (Ashiru et al., 2023).

By the mid-1980s, neoliberal reforms fundamentally altered the political economy of newswork. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 under the Babangida regime liberalised media ownership and invited private investment (Oso, 2012). Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012) argue that the neoliberal orientation of these reforms, while intended to liberalise the economy, effectively restructured Africa's political economy in ways that prioritised profit and private ownership over social welfare. Building on this perspective, Umezurike (2012) contends that economic liberalisation deepened dependency on global capital, widening inequalities that redefined the social responsibilities of the press. This echoes Nwaoboli's (2023) argument that the political economy of the new media continues to reproduce old hierarchies of ownership and control, albeit in digital form, reinforcing dependency on global capitalist structures.

Newspapers and broadcast stations like *The Guardian*, *Tell Magazine*, and *Channels TV* redefined professionalism through market competitiveness and editorial independence. However, commercialisation also commodified labour, reducing journalists to content

producers and making audience metrics the new currency of credibility (Ngobeni, 2024; Curran, 2013). As Oso (2012) notes, the journalist's survival increasingly depended on generating traffic and advertising value rather than civic enlightenment.

However, as commercial pressures deepened, journalistic integrity became increasingly compromised by unethical practices such as the "brown envelope syndrome," a symptom of economic vulnerability and weak institutional regulation (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012). This erosion of professional ethics foreshadowed the later challenges of digital precarity and algorithmic manipulation in the AI era.

This neoliberal turn established the foundation for today's digital precarity. The erosion of job security, the spread of freelance contracts, and the decline of collective bargaining have persisted into the AI era, where automation threatens to replace not just assist human labour. Thus, the colonial idealism, postcolonial professionalism, and neoliberal commercialisation of journalism each contributed to a layered understanding of labour that now confronts the technological challenges of algorithmic disruption.

The Digital Turn and the Emergence of Algorithmic News work

The early 2000s ushered in what scholars describe as the digital turn, a global reorientation of communication around mobile technology, the internet, and participatory platforms (Ayantola et al., 2025; Jenkins, 2006). In Nigeria, this transformation was catalysed by the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in 2001, which democratised access to information and enabled real-time citizen engagement. As social media gained prominence, the boundaries between journalists and audiences blurred, giving rise to what Nyamnjoh (2005) terms a "journalism of involvement," where both professionals and citizens co-create meaning in an interconnected digital sphere.

However, the benefits of digital expansion came with structural realignments in newsroom labour. Traditional gatekeeping gave way to algorithmic mediation, as visibility became determined by social media metrics and search engine optimisation rather than editorial judgment (Okocha, 2022). Newswork became a contest for clicks and trends, subjecting journalists to what Deuze (2008) and Kantola (2016) call the "ethics of speed," a condition where immediacy often overrides accuracy.

AI-assisted tools have further deepened this transformation. In leading Nigerian outlets such as *Premium Times* and *Channels Television*, machine learning systems now assist in transcription, sentiment analysis, and content recommendation (Makinde, 2024). While these tools increase efficiency, they also reconfigure authorship and accountability. Decisions once grounded in human intuition are now shaped by algorithmic systems that operate within opaque

logics. As Diakopoulos (2019) observes, “journalistic labour in the algorithmic age is no longer merely cognitive but computational.” Siapera (2017) reminds us that digital media technologies are not purely technical systems but socio-cultural constructs that reshape the relationships between journalists, audiences, and institutions.

The implications are profound: newsroom hierarchies are flattened, editorial decisions are data-driven, and performance is quantified through engagement metrics. Yet, this digital transformation has not been evenly distributed. Wealthier urban media houses experiment with automation, while regional and community outlets remain largely analogue (Omenugha, 2019; Dipogiso, 2022). This two-tiered journalism system widens technological inequality, echoing the economic divides established during Nigeria’s neoliberal transition. Deuze (2008) conceptualises this transformation as “liquid journalism,” a condition in which journalistic routines are continuously reshaped by technological innovation and shifting audience expectations. Extending this argument, Deuze and Witschge (2018) maintain that journalism can no longer be understood as a stable profession but as a hybrid practice constantly negotiating between automation, creativity, and audience participation.

Furthermore, AI’s epistemic implications raise concerns of cultural marginalization. As Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue, the dominance of Western-trained data models introduces a subtle form of *data colonialism*, where African linguistic and cultural nuances are underrepresented. In Nigeria, this means that AI may inadvertently distort indigenous narratives or exclude vernacular languages from digital visibility. Kantola (2016) similarly observes that digital journalism operates within a market-mediated immediacy, where the pressure for visibility displaces reflection and ethical consideration, a trend that resonates strongly within Nigeria’s click-driven media culture.

Despite these challenges, the digital era also offers new opportunities for innovation and civic accountability. Initiatives like Dubawa, Africa Check, and Civic Media Lab exemplify how AI tools can strengthen fact-checking, enhance data visualisation, and combat misinformation (Makinde, 2024). As Matsilele and Tshuma (2025) emphasise, African newsrooms are uniquely positioned to harness generative AI for contextual storytelling while simultaneously grappling with infrastructural, ethical, and linguistic limitations. These examples reveal that the current shift, while disruptive, also opens a path for reimagining journalistic labour as a hybrid of human creativity and machine intelligence.

In essence, the evolution of Nigerian journalism from colonial advocacy to neoliberal commodification and now to algorithmic automation demonstrates that each phase of transformation redefines not only how news is produced but also who controls its production.

The challenge of the AI era, therefore, is not simply technological adaptation but the preservation of journalism's moral centre within an increasingly automated ecosystem.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on two interrelated frameworks: the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). The PEC tradition, advanced by scholars such as Vincent Mosco (1996) and Herbert Schiller (1976), interrogates how ownership patterns, capitalist structures, and neoliberal ideologies influence media production, labour, and access. It argues that media systems reflect broader economic and power relations, shaping not only what is produced but also whose voices dominate public discourse. In the Nigerian context, this helps explain how AI adoption is filtered through commercial pressures, precarious labour, and global technological dependency (Mosco, 2014).

Actor-Network Theory, introduced by Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, extends this analysis by recognising both human and non-human entities, such as algorithms, data infrastructures, and newsroom technologies, as actors that co-produce social reality. In Nigeria, newsroom algorithms on platforms like Chartbeat act as gatekeepers, determining visibility much like traditional editors. Within this study, ANT provides a lens to examine how AI systems actively participate in shaping journalistic routines, ethics, and authority, revealing that technology is not neutral but embedded within networks of power, culture, and agency. (O'Doherty, 2019).

Materials and Methods

This paper adopts a narrative review approach, which prioritises interpretive synthesis and conceptual mapping over the strict procedural protocols of a systematic review. This methodology is particularly suited to emerging, interdisciplinary fields where the research landscape is fragmented and the objective is to construct a coherent argument from diverse sources (Ferrari, 2015; Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Our aim was not to be exhaustive, but to be insightful, drawing connections across theoretical, empirical, and polemical works to build a good understanding of AI's impact on Nigerian journalistic labour.

Search Strategy and Document Selection

To ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis, we employed a multi-phased search strategy. The process was designed to capture both the global discourse on AI in journalism and the specific nuances of the African and Nigerian contexts.

Phase 1: Database Searching

An extensive search was conducted across several academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and EBSCOhost (specifically Communication

& Mass Media Complete). To mitigate geographic bias and include vital grey literature, we also searched African institutional repositories (e.g., Covenant University, University of Pretoria), policy archives, and the websites of relevant organisations (e.g., Afrobarometer, Africa Check, Dubawa).

The search focused on publications between 2010 and 2025, a period marking the rise of data-driven journalism and the integration of machine learning into media workflows. The core search string was built around Boolean operators and tailored to each database's syntax. The primary string was: `("Artificial Intelligence" or "AI" or "algorithmic journalism" or "automated journalism") and ("journalism" or "newsroom" or "journalistic labour") and ("Nigeria" or "Africa" or "Global South")`

This was supplemented by targeted searches using terms like ` " data colonialism"`, ` "Actor-Network Theory media"`, ` "political economy of communication"`, and ` "brown envelope syndrome" ` to ensure coverage of the theoretical and context-specific dimensions.

Phase 2: Screening and Selection

The initial database searches yielded a broad pool of approximately 1,200 records, including journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and theses. This corpus was subjected to a two-stage screening process:

1. **Title and Abstract Screening:** Based on the inclusion criteria, we screened titles and abstracts. To be included, a source had to:
 - a. Primarily address the intersection of AI/digital technology with journalism, media labour, or media ethics.
 - b. Offer conceptual, empirical, or theoretical insights relevant to the Nigerian or a comparable media context.
 - c. Be published in English or have an English abstract with findings accessible for analysis.

This initial screening narrowed the pool to 187 potentially relevant documents.

2. **Full-Text Review:** The full text of these 187 documents was retrieved and rigorously assessed for quality and relevance. At this stage, we applied a more critical lens, prioritising works that offered substantive argumentation, empirical data, or robust theoretical framing. Sources that were purely technical, lacked scholarly rigor, or were only peripherally related to the core themes were excluded.

Final Corpus: The full-text review resulted in a final corpus of 84 documents that form the foundational literature for this narrative synthesis. This collection represents a purposive sample of the most salient and influential scholarship on the topic, balancing global theory with local specificity.

Phase 3: Thematic Synthesis and Snowballing

During the in-depth reading and analysis of the 84 documents, we employed an interpretive thematic synthesis. This involved identifying recurring patterns, tensions, and concepts related to labour, power, and ethics. This analytical process was not linear but iterative, with themes emerging and being refined through constant comparison across the literature. Furthermore, a backwards-and-forward snowballing technique was used, examining the reference lists of key papers (Diakopoulos, 2019; Couldry & Mejias, 2019) and tracking subsequent citations to identify additional seminal works, which were then subjected to the same inclusion criteria.

This multi-faceted strategy ensured that our review was both structured enough to be rigorous and flexible enough to capture the complex, interdisciplinary nature of the subject, which provided a rich evidence base for the critical position advanced in this paper.

Themes Identified

The paper identifies three interrelated themes that define the evolving relationship between technology, labour, and ethics in Nigerian journalism.

The first theme, “Algorithmic Reordering of Labour,” captures how AI technologies are redefining newsroom hierarchies and work processes. Tasks once grounded in human intuition, such as editing, verification, and news curation, are increasingly automated, transforming journalists into supervisors of machine-generated outputs. This shift challenges traditional notions of authorship, accountability, and creative agency, raising questions about the future of human relevance in newswork.

The second theme, “Power, Capital, and Technological Dependency,” reflects the structural inequalities shaping AI adoption in the Nigerian context. Guided by the Political Economy of Communication, this theme highlights how foreign-owned algorithms and proprietary technologies reinforce global dependencies, leaving African media systems vulnerable to data colonialism and economic precarity. The unequal distribution of technological resources across urban and rural media institutions further widens the digital divide, marginalising local voices and community journalism.

The third theme, “Ethical Reimagination and Human-AI Collaboration,” focuses on the need to balance technological efficiency with moral responsibility. It emphasises the importance of integrating cultural values, inclusivity, and ethical reasoning into AI systems to preserve journalism’s social purpose. This theme calls for a shift from resistance to responsible collaboration, where technology enhances rather than erases the human element in news

production. Olanipekun and Olakoyenikan (2022) similarly warn that without deliberate ethical integration, generative AI risks undermining public trust and journalistic accountability.

These themes illuminate the central argument of the paper: that the future of journalism in Nigeria depends on reclaiming human agency and ethical consciousness within an increasingly algorithmic media ecosystem.

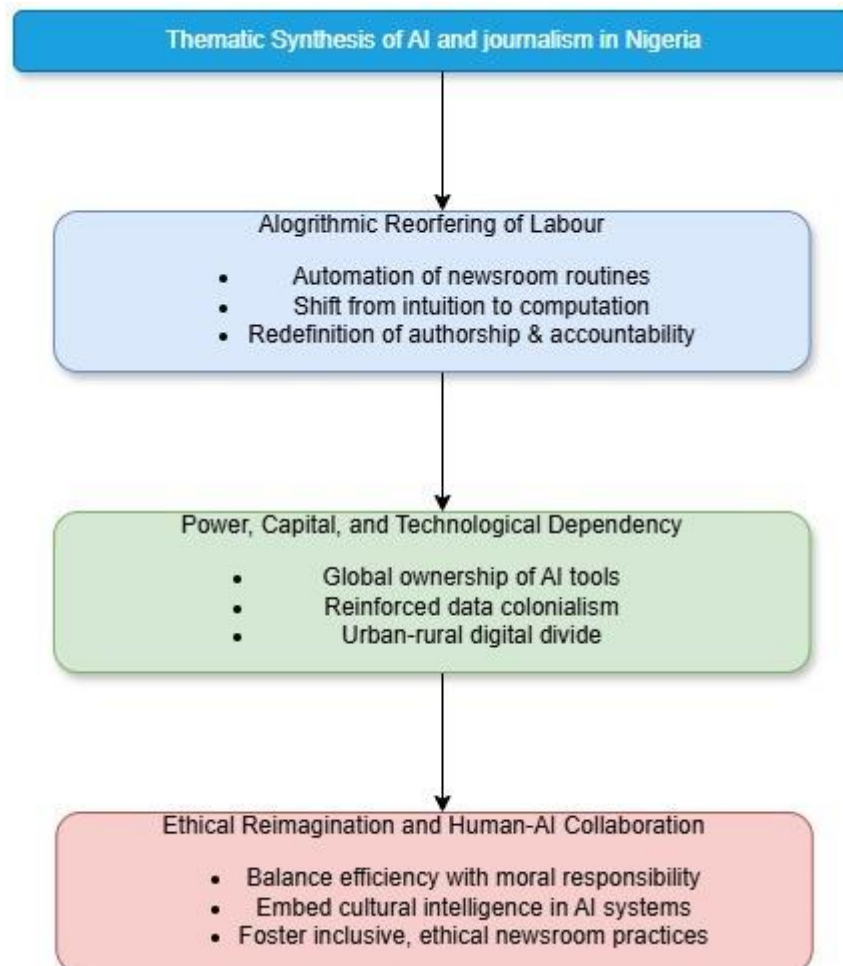


Fig. 1. A visual flow chart illustrating the thematic synthesis

Source: Omale et al (Author's work, 2025)

(This is an original diagram for thematic synthesis of AI and Journalism in Nigeria developed for this study, and has not been published elsewhere, hence no citation.)

The diagram above shows how the three major themes (Algorithmic Reordering of Labour, Power & Technological Dependency, and Ethical Reimagination) connect to the paper's central argument about reclaiming human agency and ethical consciousness in AI-driven journalism

Author's Position and Scholarly Standpoint

This paper advances a critical yet hopeful position: Artificial Intelligence (AI) should neither be romanticised as journalism's saviour nor vilified as its nemesis. As Gupta et al.

(2024) put it, AI represents both the peril and promise of modern journalism, offering efficiency and innovation on one hand, and ethical uncertainty on the other. Rather, it must be understood as a collaborative intelligence, a system that amplifies human potential while demanding new ethical vigilance. The argument here is not about resisting automation but about reclaiming the human essence of journalism in an age increasingly defined by algorithms.

Drawing from the perspectives of Pavlik (2024) on “algorithmic journalism” and Diakopoulos’ (2019) reflection on the reconfiguration of newsroom authority, this study situates AI as a socio-technical actor that reshapes, not replaces, journalistic labour. The Nigerian journalist, once celebrated for narrative intuition and investigative persistence, now shares cognitive space with machines capable of generating, sorting, and prioritising information at speeds that defy human limits. Yet, as Couldry and Mejias (2019) warn, this partnership exists within structures of data colonialism, where developing nations risk becoming mere consumers of foreign technologies that invisibly dictate epistemic norms.

From this standpoint, we contend that the true crisis of AI in Nigerian journalism is not technological displacement but epistemic dependency, a situation where local journalists surrender interpretive authority to global algorithms trained on Western cultural and political biases. Our position, therefore, emphasises technological sovereignty and ethical literacy as foundational to Africa’s media future. Nigeria must cultivate indigenous AI systems attuned to its linguistic, cultural, and democratic realities. A newsroom that cannot interpret data in Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, or Pidgin English cannot claim inclusivity in its technological evolution (Ezema, 2023).

We also align with Duncan (2023), who advocates for human-centred AI, and extend this principle by insisting that the “human” in this paradigm must reflect “contextual ethics”, “cultural empathy”, and “social accountability”. Journalists should not merely learn to use AI tools; they must also interrogate the invisible politics embedded within them. In this sense, AI ethics is not a technical checklist but a moral posture that affirms human judgment as the final arbiter of truth.

Thus, our scholarly position asserts that “AI should remain subordinate to human editorial oversight”, not only for accuracy but to preserve journalism’s moral mandate to inform, question, and serve the public good. The journalist must evolve from being a storyteller to becoming a technological conscience, ensuring that automation strengthens rather than sterilises journalistic values.

In conclusion, we stand for a hybrid philosophy of practice that fuses machine precision with human discernment. The future of Nigerian journalism must not be algorithm-driven but

“ethically co-created”, a future where data meets empathy, automation meets accountability, and technology serves truth, not dictates it. Only then can Nigeria move from being a passive adopter of AI to a proactive architect of ethical innovation in African journalism.

Reclaiming the Moral Centre of Journalism

The future of Nigerian journalism will not be determined by the speed of its algorithms, but by the depth of its values. While AI has undoubtedly expanded the capacity for newsrooms to gather, process, and distribute information, it also poses existential questions about authorship, truth, and public good. To remain relevant, journalists must evolve not as data labourers, but as ethical stewards of information in a world saturated by automation.

Thus, the call is for a “human-AI covenant,” a deliberate partnership where technology amplifies journalistic mission rather than undermines it. Nigerian journalism must reclaim its emancipatory voice, using AI not as a replacement for human judgment but as a catalyst for renewed civic enlightenment, social justice, and democratic accountability.

Only then can the Nigerian newsroom truly embody the promise of this age: a future where machine intelligence serves human truth, and journalism once again stands as the moral compass of society.

A Blueprint for Sustainable Transformation

The challenge before Nigerian journalism is to move from technological dependency to technological sovereignty, from reactive adaptation to proactive design. The Human-AI Collaborative Newsroom offers a roadmap for this transformation grounded in skill, ethics, and shared humanity.

In light of all these, the strength of Nigerian journalism in the AI age will not be measured by how many algorithms it deploys, but by how many ethical voices it preserves. The newsroom of the future will be hybrid, but its conscience must remain human.

Relevance of the Study to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as highlighted by Fund (2015), this study aligns with the SDGs by advancing Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) through its focus on responsible technological integration in journalism, and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by promoting transparent, ethical, and accountable media practices. It also contributes to Goal 4 (Quality Education) by fostering digital literacy and ethical awareness among journalists, ensuring that innovation in the media sector supports democratic governance and informed citizenship.

Conclusion

The Nigerian newsroom stands at a pivotal intersection where human creativity meets machine intelligence. As this paper has demonstrated, artificial intelligence (AI) is not merely an innovation in news production; it represents a profound reordering of journalistic labour, ethics, and epistemology. From the early years of postcolonial journalism characterised by manual gatekeeping and civic activism, to the digital turn that blurred boundaries between journalists and algorithms, the profession has undergone radical reconfiguration. Today, AI-driven tools ranging from automated reporting and content recommendation systems to deep learning transcription and audience analytics are redefining what it means to be a journalist in a democracy struggling for stability, accountability, and truth.

Yet, the challenge before Nigeria is not technological adoption but ethical direction. The infusion of AI into newsrooms has revealed critical vulnerabilities: algorithmic opacity, data colonialism, job insecurity, and the erosion of editorial autonomy. If unaddressed, these issues threaten to commodify journalistic work into a data service rather than a public trust. Hence, the imperative is to balance innovation with integrity to ensure that the moral centre of journalism remains human, even when machines amplify its reach.

Policy Recommendations

1. Institutionalise Ethical AI Guidelines for Media Practice

Nigerian media regulators such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) should urgently develop a national ethical framework for AI use in journalism. This framework must align with UNESCO's 2023 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, emphasising transparency, fairness, and accountability. Obiahu (2024) underscores the urgency of establishing Nigeria-specific legal and ethical frameworks that balance technological innovation with the imperatives of media integrity and human rights. Ethical audits should be integrated into newsroom workflows, ensuring that AI-driven content adheres to journalistic codes of truth, balance, and privacy.

2. Mainstream AI Literacy and Data Ethics in Journalism Education

Journalism curricula across Nigerian universities, especially within research-driven institutions like Covenant University, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University, and other Universities, must be updated to reflect the realities of algorithmic media production. Courses should move beyond digital literacy to cover AI ethics, data governance, bias detection, and automated content verification. As suggested by Odishika (2024) & Salaudeen (2023), media education must now cultivate "reflexive technologists" journalists who can both deploy and critique the tools they use.

3. Promote Human-AI Collaboration, Not Substitution

Rather than replacing journalists, AI should function as an assistive partner, augmenting investigative depth, speeding verification, and enhancing linguistic diversity in Nigerian reporting. Newsrooms such as The Guardian Nigeria and Premium Times could pilot Human–AI collaborative desks, where reporters and AI systems co-produce data visualisations, election monitoring, and conflict-sensitive reports. This model aligns with Couldry and Mejias’ (2019) argument for “data decolonisation,” a reassertion of human agency in data-driven systems.

4. Strengthen Labour Rights and Fair Compensation

With automation reshaping editorial hierarchies, there is an urgent need to protect journalists from economic precarity. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), in partnership with international bodies like IFJ and UNESCO, should establish collective agreements ensuring fair compensation, re-skilling opportunities, and social security for displaced or redeployed workers. Ethical journalism must be underpinned by dignified labour, not digital exploitation.

5. Invest in Local AI Research and Indigenous Technology Development

Nigeria must not be a passive consumer of Western AI technologies. Governmental funding through agencies such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) should support collaborative research between communication scholars, data scientists, and media practitioners. Developing indigenous AI models attuned to Nigerian languages, socio-political nuances, and fact-checking needs would help counter data dependency and epistemic bias embedded in foreign algorithms.

6. Reinforce Transparency and Public Trust through Algorithmic Accountability

Media organisations must disclose the extent of automation in their news processes. Algorithms that curate, rank, or produce news content should be subjected to periodic impact assessments, especially concerning bias, misinformation, and audience manipulation. As Diakopoulos (2019) notes, algorithmic accountability is essential for sustaining the credibility of journalism in the digital public sphere.

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