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AI and the Democratisation of Storytelling: Is Professional Journalism at Risk?

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The Rise of AI in Content Creation

In the age of artificial intelligence (AI), virtually anyone with a smartphone and internet access can generate content that mimics news reporting. Platforms like ChatGPT, Sora, and Synthesia have democratised content creation, allowing individuals to produce articles, videos, and even AI-generated news anchors, previously the domain of professional journalists. In Malaysia, independent activists harnessed AI to translate political speeches into multiple languages during the 2024 state elections, thereby enhancing accessibility for multilingual audiences often ignored by mainstream media. Throughout 2024, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) removed over 63,000 instances of misleading content, including AI-generated videos, deepfakes, and fake headlines, which were commonly used to deceive individuals, particularly through the impersonation of celebrities.

Additionally, a viral scam involved AI-manipulated footage of a Bernama TV anchor promoting questionable investment schemes. In response, the government urged Meta to eliminate this content, underscoring a troubling trend of exploiting trusted news sources for fraudulent purposes. This democratisation of storytelling has provided new avenues for citizen voices to engage with the public, especially in countries where media freedom is limited or politically constrained. These instances highlight how AI-driven misinformation undermines trust in public figures and official institutions, presenting an escalating challenge to journalism and media literacy.

Working With AI, Not Against It

Instead of fearing AI, journalists should embrace it responsibly. AI is significantly transforming journalism by providing tools that enhance efficiency and expand reach, but it also raises ethical concerns and questions about the role of human journalists. For instance, in Malaysia, KiniTV utilises AI to produce real-time subtitles, which helps broaden its audience. In

Thailand, The Standard uses AI trend analysis to inform its editorial direction. These examples demonstrate how AI can augment journalistic work without replacing it. AI can be a powerful tool for enhancing journalism, but it must be guided by human judgment, critical thinking, and a strong commitment to truth. Professional journalists are essential because they uphold these values, especially in an era characterised by deepfakes, clickbait, and content driven by algorithms.

Journalism schools in Malaysia should integrate AI into their curriculum. This inclusion is crucial as it recognises the changing skill sets needed for today's media professionals. Students must learn to use AI tools both effectively and ethically. Just as previous generations learned to operate cameras and editing software, today's journalists need to understand how to work alongside algorithms and generative models. AI is not the end of journalism; rather, it signifies a shift in the landscape. It offers both opportunities and risks. In skilled hands, AI can enhance storytelling; in untrained hands, it can distort reality. The role of professional journalists remains vital; AI cannot replace it. AI cannot make judgments, fact-check information, provide context, or consider the impact of its content.

Journalists must learn how to use AI effectively. They adhere to ethical codes, editorial standards, and public accountability. While technology may change the tools of journalism, it must never undermine its foundational principles. We must ensure that innovation does not come at the expense of integrity. In this new era of AI-powered storytelling, the role of the journalist, as the guardian of facts, context, and ethical responsibility, has never been more essential. Ultimately, while technology may change the tools of journalism, it must never erode the foundational principles of journalism. We must ensure that innovation does not come at the cost of integrity. In this era of AI-powered storytelling, the role of the journalist as a gatekeeper of facts, context, and ethical responsibility has never been more crucial.