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PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM: TRUST, ETHICS AND AUDIENCE PERCEPTION IN MALAYSIA

Shafezah Abdul Wahab

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Melaka, 78000 Alor Gajah, Malaysia

Email: shafezah@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism is rapidly transforming how news is produced, distributed and consumed. AI supports various tasks such as writing, editing, transcribing, translating, fact-checking and generating multimedia content. Tools like ChatGPT and Bard are increasingly used in newsrooms to enhance efficiency and manage large volumes of information (Yuan et al., 2024; Caswell, 2022). However, the adoption of AI also raises concerns related to ethics, accuracy, transparency and source reliability (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024; Noain Sánchez, 2022; Sonni et al., 2024), as AI-generated content may contain errors, misleading information or false references. This study examines audience reactions to AI-generated news on online platforms, focusing on how audiences perceive and evaluate such content in terms of trust and credibility. It also explores the implications of AI on journalistic practices, skills and expectations of news quality within the digital media ecosystem. A key research gap lies in the limited empirical research on AI in Malaysian journalism, particularly regarding its ability to handle the Malay language, sensitivity to local context and application across different news genres. Existing studies largely focus on Western contexts, leaving Malaysia and the broader Southeast Asian region underexplored. To address this gap, the study employs focus group discussions (FGDs) involving media practitioners, academics and Generation Z audiences to capture diverse perspectives. Thematic analysis is used to identify key patterns and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997). The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how Malaysian audiences assess AI-generated news compared to human-produced content, offering practical implications for media practice, policy and the ethical use of AI.

Keywords: *AI Journalism, Trust, Ethics, Audience Perception, Malaysian Media*

INTRODUCTION

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly expanding across various fields, including journalism. As newsrooms adapt to the fast flow of information and the large volume

of content produced daily, AI has become an essential tool for improving efficiency, supporting content creation, automating routine tasks and maintaining audience engagement (Yuan et al., 2024; Caswell, 2022). According to Banafi and Iaroshenko (2024), these developments have led journalists to increasingly rely on AI for writing, editing, transcription, translation, fact-checking and multimedia production. These advances are driven primarily by two key technologies: Machine Learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP). ML enables systems to recognise patterns and improve performance over time (Solanki & Jain, 2020), while NLP allows computers to understand and generate human language in a more natural and meaningful way (Carrasco Ramírez, 2024). Together, these technologies form the foundation of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Bard, which are now widely used in news production.

However, the growing role of AI in journalism also raises concerns regarding ethics and accuracy. Discussions among researchers and industry professionals increasingly focus on transparency, factual accuracy, appropriate sourcing and the overall reliability of AI-generated news (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2024; Noain Sánchez, 2022; Sonni et al., 2024). Although AI can speed up work and reduce pressure in newsrooms, it is not flawless. Dhiman (2023) notes that AI may misinterpret information, produce inaccurate or misleading reports and even generate false references. Therefore, human oversight remains essential to safeguard the quality and integrity of journalism. In this context, the study examines the AI-generated news and articles written by professional journalists in terms of accuracy, transparency and use of sources from an audience perspective. It also explores how Malaysian audiences interpret AI-generated news including their perceptions of trust, credibility and usefulness compared to content produced by humans. This issue is significant in Malaysia where research on the use of AI in journalism remains limited despite rapid digital media development.

To address this gap, the study focuses on Malaysian audiences who consume news online and are therefore more likely to be exposed to AI-generated content. It seeks to examine how these audiences evaluate AI-driven news in terms of trust, credibility, perceived impact on journalistic skills, and expectations of news quality within an AI-influenced media environment. In addition, the study explores audience perceptions of AI-generated or AI-assisted news content with particular attention to issues of credibility, authenticity, ethics, and engagement. To support this analysis, focus group discussions were conducted with media practitioners, academics, and representatives of younger audiences (Generation Z), providing a comprehensive perspective on the evolving landscape of journalism and audience behaviour in Malaysia. While the study acknowledges that AI can produce news content that is structured, clear, and seemingly neutral, it also anticipates that such content may lack depth of analysis and may be susceptible to errors or misleading information.

By integrating audience perspectives with expert insights, this study offers a timely and meaningful contribution to understanding the implications of AI-driven journalism in the Malaysian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Development and Applications of AI in Journalism

Journalism began experimenting with artificial intelligence (AI) in the 1960s and 1970s (Mari, 2024) mainly for simple tasks such as spell-checking and producing basic reports on sports and finance. A major turning point occurred in 2014 when the Associated Press used AI to automatically generate financial news (Blankespoor et al., 2018). This event marked the beginning of automated journalism and paved the way for the wider adoption of AI in newsrooms. As AI developed, it became increasingly integrated into everyday journalistic routines and now supports a variety of daily tasks (Chan-Olmsted, 2019). AI assists in writing, editing, fact-checking and data analysis (Parratt-Fernández et al., 2021) while also facilitating transcription, translation and multimedia content production (Banafi, 2024). According to Dhiman (2023), AI is now capable of generating code, editing documents and producing different types of multimedia content. In many newsrooms, AI is used to automate short news reports (Ruiz & Sánchez, 2019), monitor information flow and assist with fact-checking (Gutiérrez-Caneda & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024; Gonçalves et al., 2024; Sultan et al., 2024).

Alongside this growing integration, researchers have highlighted the role of more specialised tools. Sukhodolov et al. (2019) note that tools like Factmata are designed specifically for fact-checking and automated reporting, while generative AI systems such as ChatGPT help journalists develop ideas and produce content (Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2023). These technologies help reduce workloads and increase productivity (Iaroshenko, 2024). AI also supports data analysis and visualisation, making complex information easier to understand (Alimzhanova et al., 2024). Verma (2024), Yuan et al. (2024) and Dhiman (2023) further note that AI can personalise content, speed up news production through automated headlines and summaries and support multilingual reporting using translation tools such as ChatGPT and Bard.

Ethical Challenges of AI in Journalism

Although AI offers many benefits, it also raises significant ethical challenges. Suardana (2020) argues that one major issue is the inconsistent application of journalistic ethics. AI systems trained on biased or incomplete data may misrepresent certain groups, reinforce stereotypes or distort facts (Stinson, 2022; Cossette-Lefebvre & Maclure, 2023). Transparency is also a key concern, as journalists do not always disclose when AI tools are used in producing news content (Tolnaiová, 2023). Accountability adds further complexity. Mukta (2025) notes that AI cannot be held responsible for errors even when its outputs contain mistakes, misinterpretations or fabricated references (Ayub, 2024). In addition, some AI systems still struggle with producing more complex

forms of writing (Ruiz & Sánchez, 2019). Kidd and Birhane (2023) also highlight the risk of AI generating false citations or distorting factual details, which can contribute to the spread of misinformation. Therefore, researchers emphasise that human oversight and editorial judgment remain essential to ensure accuracy, context, and adherence to journalistic ethical standards (Peña-Fernández et al., 2023; Dijkstra et al., 2024).

Comparing AI Journalism and Human Journalism

Studies comparing AI-generated and human-written journalism show mixed results. Some research reports minimal differences in accuracy and reliability with certain audiences even expressing higher levels of trust in AI-generated content (Henestrosa et al., 2023; La-Rosa Barrolleta & Sandoval-Martín, 2024). However, other studies indicate that readers tend to prefer human journalism because it offers deeper interpretation and more nuanced analysis (Kanasheva et al., 2024). Research by Nah et al. (2024) also shows that AI content often focuses narrowly on specific topics, whereas human journalists are more capable of providing broader contextual understanding. Overall, these findings suggest that AI and human journalists function most effectively as complementary partners rather than direct competitors (El Nemr, 2024).

Research Gaps

Although international studies highlight both the strengths and limitations of AI in journalism, most research has focused on Western contexts, leaving regions such as Malaysia and Central Asia relatively underexplored. Despite Malaysia performing well in global AI readiness rankings, research on the impact of AI in local newsrooms and on how Malaysian audiences evaluate AI-generated content remains limited. Furthermore, little is known about the ability of AI systems to process the Malay language or to perform across different journalistic genres. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the use of artificial intelligence in Malaysian journalism, focusing on the quality, reliability and ethical dimensions of AI-generated news as well as audience responses to such content. The study also assesses the effectiveness of AI in handling the Malay language and producing content across multiple journalistic genres, an area that remains underexamined in the existing literature dominated by Western perspectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Media Credibility and Audience Perception Theory

Media credibility is a core factor that shapes how audiences engage with news and judge its trustworthiness. Atish (2024) explains that credibility refers to audience perceptions of trust, accuracy and professionalism in media content which are influenced by factors such as writing quality, tone, source use and the reputation of the publisher. Traditionally, credibility has been strengthened through adherence to professional standards including ethical responsibility, transparency and accurate reporting (Koliska, 2021). For example, Curry and Stroud (2021) found that news reports

demonstrating higher levels of transparency are more likely to be perceived as trustworthy by audiences. This suggests that credibility depends not only on factual accuracy, but also on openness and consistency in how information is presented.

However, the emergence of artificial intelligence has complicated traditional understandings of media credibility. Unlike human journalists, AI systems do not possess moral judgement, contextual interpretation or editorial discretion. As a result, scholars have increasingly examined how audiences assess AI-generated news compared with content produced by professional journalists. Studies by Henestrosa et al. (2023) and Clerwall (2014) show that when audiences are unaware of the origin of a text, AI-generated content may be perceived as equally or even more credible, largely due to its neutral tone and structured writing style. In contrast, when readers are informed that content is generated by a machine, trust levels tend to decline regarding analytical depth, originality and ethical judgement (Kanasheva et al., 2024; Nah et al., 2024). These findings highlight the critical role of source transparency in shaping audience perceptions.

At the same time, research indicates that for straightforward and factual information, audiences perceive little difference in credibility between AI-generated and human-written content (Henestrosa et al., 2023). However, as topics become more complex or interpretative, AI-generated writing is generally associated with lower levels of trust in both the content and its source (Henestrosa & Kimmerle, 2024). This emphasises the importance of context and content complexity in credibility assessments. Based on this understanding, this study aims to understand how audience trust varies according to content type, ethical practices and perceptions of whether news is produced by a machine or a human.

Journalistic Ethics Theory

According to Roberts (2019), ethical principles form the foundation of journalistic practice by guiding journalists to produce content that is trustworthy and socially responsible. These principles include respect for privacy, objectivity, confidentiality and a commitment to resisting censorship (Jacquette, 2016). Collectively, these standards promote fairness and ensure that information is accurate and truthful (Rezaee et al., 2024). Ethics therefore provide an essential framework for journalists in managing the complex responsibilities of the profession.

Among these principles, objectivity plays an important role. However, objectivity does not imply absolute neutrality; rather, it refers to a disciplined approach to reporting that prioritises fairness and transparency (Ward, 2011). In this context, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) define objectivity as a method of verification based on careful fact-checking and clearly attributed sources. Objectivity should therefore be understood as an ongoing professional practice that requires human judgement, contextual awareness and accountability, rather than a fixed condition. Transparency is equally

important, as it ensures that journalists openly disclose sources and handle information responsibly. Phillips (2010) argues that such practices help safeguard journalistic integrity and uphold professional standards. Accurate sourcing is also essential, as errors in reporting statistics or reliance on unreliable data can mislead audiences (Cushion et al., 2016). Consequently, audiences are increasingly encouraged to scrutinise numerical information more carefully, highlighting the fragile balance between data-driven reporting and the risk of misinformation (Albright, 2017).

The introduction of artificial intelligence in journalism, however, presents new ethical challenges. Unlike human journalists, AI lacks moral reasoning and cannot make ethical decisions independently (Sigsgaard, 2024). Although AI can generate news content quickly, it cannot fully assess context, verify facts reliably or consider the broader social consequences of its outputs. As a result, AI-generated news may unintentionally spread misinformation, reinforce bias or produce fabricated sources (Dhiman, 2023). These limitations emphasise the need to critically assess how well AI aligns with established journalistic norms.

Building on this ethical framework, the present study applies journalism ethics theory to evaluate both AI-generated news and news written by human journalists. Specifically, the study examines factual accuracy, source use and attribution, objectivity and adherence to professional standards from the perspectives of academics, media practitioners and Generation Z audiences. Through this approach, the study seeks to determine whether AI can meet ethical expectations in journalism or whether human oversight remains essential to ensure integrity and accountability in news reporting.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses focus group discussions (FGDs) as the main qualitative research method. FGDs are effective because they allow participants to engage in interactive discussions, enabling multiple perspectives to be shared and critically examined. This method is suitable for the present study as it encourages dialogue among participants, allows ideas to be developed through collective interaction and helps reveal group norms, tensions and insights that may not emerge through individual interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997). To complement this approach, thematic analysis is used as a systematic method to organise and interpret these diverse perspectives, facilitating the identification of patterns and themes across different stakeholder groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The combination of FGDs and thematic analysis enables the study to generate rich collective insights from multiple groups, including media practitioners, academics and young audiences (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Participants

To ensure a diversity of perspectives, three distinct participant groups were recruited.

The first group consisted of media practitioners working in newsrooms or digital media platforms in Malaysia, who provided professional insights into the use of AI in journalism. The second group comprised academics specialising in journalism, media ethics or related fields, contributing theoretical and critical perspectives. The third group involved young audiences aged between 18 and 30 years, who actively consume news through social media and digital news platforms, reflecting contemporary news consumption patterns. Each focus group consisted of six to seven participants, a size considered optimal for balancing diverse viewpoints while maintaining effective group interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The detail of respondents is shown in Table 1.0.

Table1: Respondent Demographic

Respondent	Organization	Positiion
A1	Astro Awani	Chief Editor
A2	Astro Awani	Senior Reporter
A3	Harian Metro	Senior Reporter
A4	Sinar Harian	Senior Reporter
A5	The Star	Senior Reporter
A6	CIJ	Senior Reporter
B1	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	Senior Lecturer
B2	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	Senior Lecturer
B3	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Senior Lecturer
B4	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Senior Lecturer
B5	Taylors College	Senior Lecturer
B6	Taylors College	Senior Lecturer
C1	Taylors College	Student
C2	Taylors College	Student
C3	Taylors College	Student
C4	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	Student
C5	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)	Student
C6	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Student
C7	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Student

Procedure and Data Collection

A semi-structured discussion guide was developed to facilitate the focus group sessions. The guide focused on participants' experiences and exposure to AI use in news production, their perceptions of content quality and credibility, ethical considerations and their level of trust in AI-generated news. During the sessions, the moderator encouraged open discussion by using guiding questions to explore topics in depth and allowing participants to respond to one another, thereby highlighting similarities and differences in viewpoints. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes depending on the flow of discussion. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and fully transcribed to ensure that all aspects of the discussion could be analysed in detail.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data were analysed using thematic analysis based on the six-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generation

of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the final report. This approach allows for both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) theme development, providing a systematic yet flexible framework for interpreting complex qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the focus group discussions, participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, the procedures involved and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained through anonymisation during transcription and secure data storage. In addition, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee to ensure compliance with established research ethics standards.

RESULTS

The focus group discussions indicate that artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping journalism and the ways in which audiences consume news. Participants noted that many users accept AI-generated content without critical evaluation when the content aligns with their existing beliefs. This tendency combined with shorter attention spans and a preference for fast access to information, has led to news being presented in more concise formats and consumed within a short period of time. As a result, a key challenge emerges between improving access to information and maintaining the quality and depth of news reporting.

At the same time, the journalism industry is undergoing major structural and technological changes. Social media platforms have redirected advertising revenue away from traditional newspapers, threatening the sustainability of print media. The rise of generative AI has further transformed how audiences interact with news, including declining click-through rates and engagement with mainstream media platforms. In this rapidly evolving environment, human roles remain essential. Skills such as critical thinking, communication and the ability to use AI through clear and effective prompts continue to be necessary. Media organisations must also understand changing audience habits, including those of younger generations such as Generation Alpha to ensure that news content remains relevant.

Issues of trust and audience engagement were also identified as key concerns. Participants suggested that news credibility can be strengthened through direct engagement at the local level and greater transparency about the use of AI in news production. Such measures may help reduce the spread of misinformation and support ethical journalism practices. Overall, AI is viewed as a supportive tool for journalists rather than a replacement for human roles. However, continuous skills training and

clear labelling of AI-generated content are essential to ensure that audiences understand the role of AI and maintain confidence in news quality.

In addition, the discussions revealed that Generation Z often relies on short-form content as an entry point to seek more in-depth information. The use of digital tools and AI applications such as ChatGPT and Gemini enables audiences to explore information independently. This reflects a shift towards more interactive and exploratory patterns of news consumption. Overall, the findings highlight the complex relationship between AI, journalism and audience behaviour. While technological developments offer new opportunities for efficiency and engagement, their use must be balanced with critical thinking, ethical transparency and sustained efforts to maintain trust and news quality as summarised in Table 2.0.

Table 2: Thematic Framework of AI in Journalism Based on Focus Group Findings

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting Evidence / Observations
Audience Behaviour & Media Consumption	Acceptance & Confirmation Bias	Audiences increasingly accept AI-generated content uncritically; AI reinforces pre-existing beliefs; short attention spans and demand for instant gratification reduce news to overly simplified content.
	Attention & Instant Gratification	News delivery is increasingly brief (5–7 seconds), undermining depth and journalistic integrity.
Disruption in Journalism	Structural & Financial	Social media eroded advertising revenue, impacting newspapers' sustainability.
	Technological	Generative AI alters engagement, leading to fewer clicks and reduced interaction with traditional news platforms.
Core Skills & Human Capacity	Critical Thinking & Soft Skills	Essential across generations; effective AI use depends on ability to craft precise prompts; highlights role of education in fostering analytical thinking.
	Adaptation to Change	Media must anticipate Gen Alpha and evolving consumption habits; continuous change is inherent in journalism.
Trust & Public Engagement	Hyper-local Engagement	Rebuilding trust requires direct interactions with community members.
	Transparency	Transparent use of AI reinforces credibility in an era of misinformation.
AI Implementation	Complementary Tool	AI supports journalism without replacing human judgement; strategic investment in upskilling is needed to adapt long-serving personnel to technological change.
	AI Labeling & Perception	AI-assisted content may be perceived as generic; labels should specify AI's role; acceptance varies by content type.

Gen Z & Media Habits	Short-Form Content	Brief clips (e.g., 7–30 seconds) spark curiosity and encourage deeper research; acts as a gateway to learning.

Audience Behaviour and Media Use: Acceptance, Confirmation Bias and Instant Gratification

The findings indicate that audience behaviour plays a crucial role in shaping how AI-generated news is received and used. Current audiences tend to accept AI content without critical evaluation, especially when the information aligns with their existing beliefs. A6 highlighted that this reflects confirmation bias, where individuals are more likely to trust information that reinforces their prior views (Nickerson, 1998).

As a result, AI news not only delivers information but may also reinforce existing societal perceptions, influencing how audiences interpret and make sense of events.
In addition to confirmation bias, psychological factors such as short attention spans and the desire for instant gratification influence interaction with news. B2 noted that news is often presented in very brief formats, typically 5–7 seconds. B1 gave the example:

> "*Within 5–7 seconds, an explainer video about Palestine can be shared to quickly capture public attention on what is happening.*"

While such formats rapidly attract attention, they risk reducing depth, context and complexity. Excessively brief reporting may weaken journalistic integrity, as complex issues can be oversimplified (McQuail, 2010). This encourages passive news consumption with audiences being less critical of sources and rarely seeking additional information.

B4 added that this behaviour creates a cyclical effect when audiences prefer news that is easy and quick to digest, media organisations and AI systems are incentivised to produce shorter and less nuanced content. A2 emphasised that journalists and media organisations have an ethical responsibility to balance accessibility with report depth, while B5 stated:

> "*Efforts to enhance media literacy are essential to help audiences recognise bias, assess source validity, and develop critical thinking.*"

Overall, these findings highlight that audience behaviour influences not only the reception of AI content but also media strategies. Acceptance, confirmation bias and the desire for instant gratification shape digital news consumption and require multi-layered approaches: enhancing media literacy and promoting ethical AI use in journalism.

Disruptions in Journalism: Structural, Financial, and Technological Challenges

The analysis shows that journalism faces significant disruption due to structural, financial and technological factors. A3 explained that social media has shifted advertising revenue from traditional media to digital platforms, creating serious financial challenges. A4 added:

> "*This has caused many media organisations to face financial difficulties, forcing staff reductions, limiting investigative reporting or seeking new revenue sources.*"

This shift indicates that the emergence of digital platforms has fundamentally changed the economic foundations of journalism (Napoli, 2019). Media organisations now confront not only content production challenges but also the need to maintain operational sustainability.

Generative AI also alters how audiences interact with news. C3 stated that AI content may reduce clicks and attention to mainstream media, while C6 added:

> "*Although AI allows content to be delivered faster and personalised, it also makes audiences less reliant on traditional news sources.*"

This creates a strategic dilemma on how media organisations use AI for efficiency and reach without losing audience trust and engagement. Structural and technological disruptions are interlinked. Limited revenue restricts the ability to produce quality reporting, while algorithms and AI content shape audience consumption patterns. A1 emphasised the need for content innovation, practical AI use and exploration of new business models to ensure journalism's sustainability in the digital era.

Core Human Skills: Critical Thinking and Adaptation

The findings emphasise that despite AI's growing presence, human skills such as critical thinking, creativity and ethics remain central to journalism. C5 highlighted that AI's effectiveness depends on humans' ability to provide accurate guidance and critically assess generated outputs. C4 added:

> "*Ongoing education and training are required to ensure journalists can use AI effectively and responsibly.*"

Adaptability was also identified as a key requirement for media organisations. A2 stressed that journalism must understand new audience habits, including Generation Alpha, who are more exposed to short-form content and interactive technologies. Organisations that fail to adapt risk losing relevance and audience trust. In conclusion, humans remain the most important element in integrating AI into journalism: AI speeds up tasks but cannot replace human judgement, creativity, or ethical reasoning.

Trust and Public Engagement: Local Interaction and Transparency

Audience trust remains a major issue. A5 emphasised that direct engagement with local communities helps rebuild trust. B3 supported this, noting:

> "*Close relationships between journalists and audiences allow local needs to be better understood and increase accountability in reporting.*"

Transparency in AI use is also critical. B1 noted that clearly disclosing AI's role in news production helps audiences understand reporting processes and reduces the risk of misinformation. Transparency encourages more critical and informed news consumption. In conclusion, technology alone cannot maintain trust; human-centred and ethical journalism remains relevant in the AI era.

Implementing AI: Support Tools and Audience Perception

AI is most effective as a support tool rather than a replacement for journalists. B4 noted that AI can assist with drafting content and data analysis, but final decisions require human judgment. Therefore, ongoing training is important for journalists less familiar with emerging technologies.

Audience perception also affects the acceptance of AI content. C2 stated that AI content without a clear explanation risk being perceived as generic. Transparent labelling helps audiences understand AI's role and enhances trust in the news.

Generation Z and Media Habits: Short-form Content and Digital Learning

The findings show that Generation Z consumes news differently from previous generations. C6 emphasised that short-form content such as brief videos, serves as a gateway to explore issues in greater depth. C1 supported this, stating:

> "*In this context, short-form content functions as an entry point to more detailed information.*"

Generation Z increasingly relies on digital platforms and AI tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini for self-directed learning, as highlighted by C7. However, A6 cautioned that overreliance on short-form content may risk oversimplification if critical thinking skills are not cultivated.

Overall, the findings emphasise that AI and Generation Z media habits are reshaping news consumption, requiring media organisations to produce content that is accessible, relevant, high-quality and capable of fostering digitally literate audiences.

Conceptual Framework

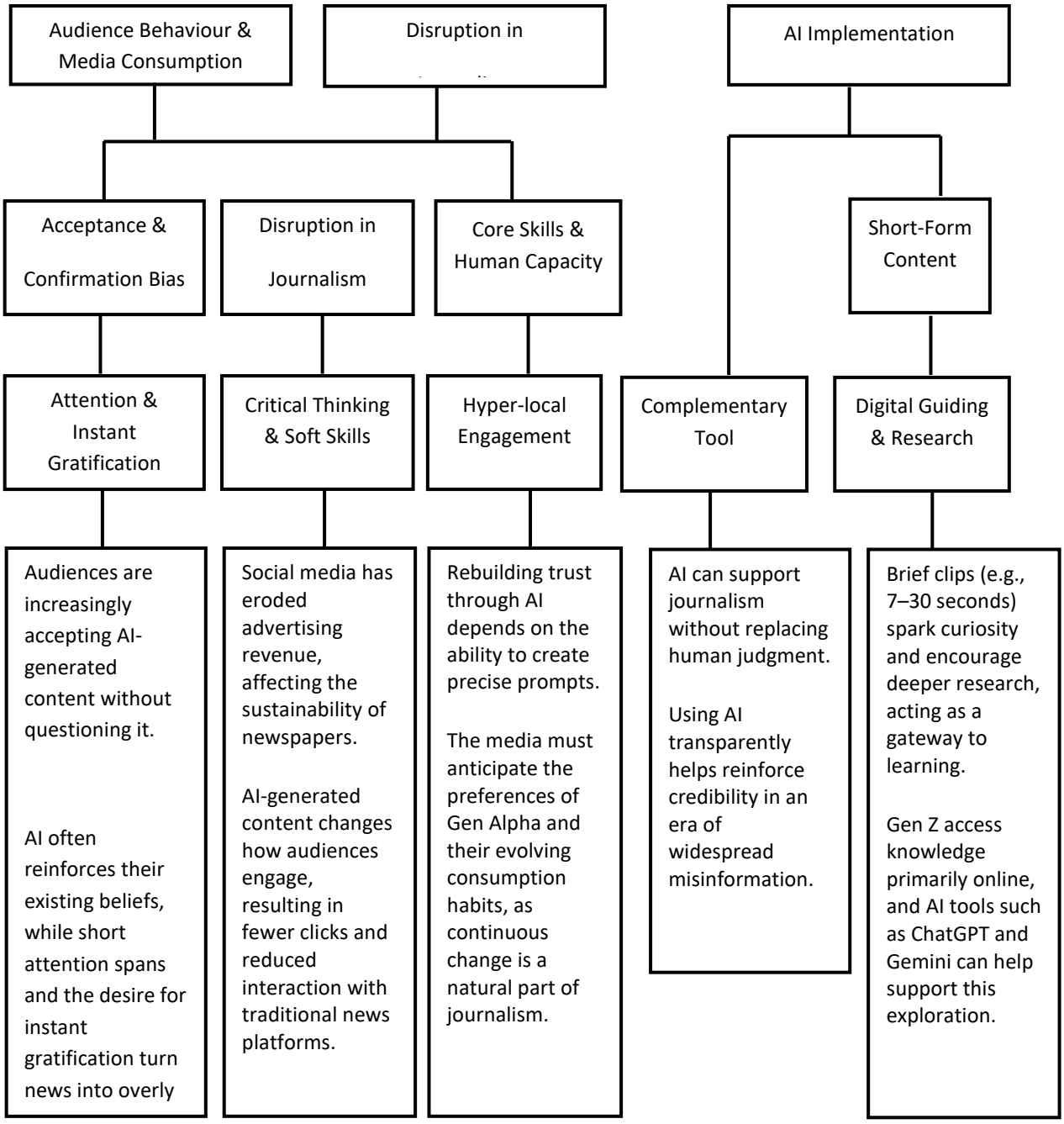

Figure 1.0 Conceptual Framework

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the media has caused a major shift, changing how news is produced, distributed and consumed. AI is more than just a tool for efficiency; it brings challenges such as reduced advertising revenue, pressure on human skills and the reinforcement of audience biases. At the same time, it provides opportunities to rebuild trust through transparency and engage audiences more deeply. This research examines AI's disruptive impact across three key areas: audience behaviour, the journalism industry and economics and ethical AI implementation. It

argues that journalism's future credibility depends on using AI strategically, transparently and with skill-conscious practice.

One of the first areas affected is audience behaviour and media consumption. Fast, algorithm-driven content feeds have created a culture of attention and instant gratification, where the demand for rapid news pushes journalism towards simplified content. If AI tools are used carelessly, they can reinforce existing beliefs, increasing gullibility and confirmation bias. Moreover, as AI-generated content becomes harder to distinguish from human-created news, audiences struggle to verify sources. Therefore, future research should examine how mandatory AI transparency affects bias reinforcement and whether it encourages audiences especially younger generations who primarily use news online to engage more critically.

The impact of AI extends beyond audience behaviour, significantly disrupting the journalism industry itself. Social media has already eroded advertising revenue, threatening the financial stability of traditional newspapers. Generative AI further changes audience engagement, often reducing clicks and interaction with traditional platforms as short summaries and automated content become more common.

Alongside these economic challenges, AI also affects core human skills. While it automates routine tasks, the importance of critical thinking, judgment, and soft skills grows. Effective AI use now depends on journalists' ability to craft precise prompts, shifting the focus from basic information gathering to more sophisticated interaction with automated systems. To rebuild trust, media organisations must prioritise hyper-local engagement and adapt to evolving habits of younger audiences, anticipating constant change.

Despite these challenges, AI offers significant opportunities when implemented strategically. It can enhance research and content delivery through digital tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini, which process large volumes of information efficiently, helping both journalists and audiences explore topics more deeply. Short-form content, such as 7–30 second clips can serve as an entry point for audiences, sparking curiosity and guiding them to more comprehensive reporting.

Most importantly, AI should act as a complementary tool that supports journalism rather than replacing human judgment. Combating misinformation requires transparency in AI use. Clearly disclosing where AI has been applied for summarisation, data analysis, or draft generation reinforces credibility and preserves the ethical boundary between human oversight and automated production. In this way, AI becomes a means to strengthen, rather than undermine, the trustworthiness and quality of journalism.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on current studies of artificial intelligence (AI) in media, future research should focus more closely on the various ways AI is transforming journalism. First, studies could examine audience behaviour on how AI-generated news affects critical thinking, fact-checking abilities and the reinforcement of existing biases. It would be useful to explore whether clear labelling of AI content can help audiences, especially younger users who mainly access news online, to think more critically and avoid confirmation bias.

Second, the economic and organisational impacts of AI require further study. Research could investigate how AI affects revenue, audience engagement and interactions across different types of media organisations, from traditional newspapers to fully digital platforms. Comparisons across countries or markets with varying levels of AI adoption could highlight the most effective business models while maintaining high journalistic standards.

Third, future studies should focus on changes in journalists' skills within AI-driven newsrooms. Research could examine how AI affects critical thinking, editorial judgement and the ability to use AI effectively through prompt writing. Studies could also explore how journalists use AI as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for human expertise. Finally, ethics and transparency remain crucial. Future research should examine how ethical guidelines, disclosure practices and audience trust influence the use of AI in news. Longitudinal studies could track changes in public trust as AI becomes more widespread in news production, helping media organisations maintain credibility in an automated environment.

Focusing on these areas, future research can provide a clearer understanding of how AI is reshaping journalism and guide responsible, ethical and audience-centred media practices.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that AI is becoming an important element in Malaysian journalism, transforming both news production and audience engagement. AI technologies, including generative tools such as ChatGPT and Bard, simplify routine tasks, automate content creation and enhance multimedia capabilities. These innovations offer opportunities for news organisations to improve efficiency, tailor content to audiences and respond quickly to the high demands of digital news cycles.

However, AI use also presents key challenges. Audience acceptance of AI-generated content without critical evaluation, combined with confirmation bias and the demand for short, easily accessible news, risks oversimplifying complex issues and reducing space for critical reflection. This behaviour encourages AI systems and news producers

to create increasingly brief and shallow content, potentially undermining depth and journalistic integrity.

The study also highlights structural and technological disruptions facing journalism. Declining advertising revenue, much of which has shifted to social media and digital platforms, threatens the sustainability of traditional newspapers and limits their capacity for investigative and in-depth reporting. Meanwhile, generative AI reshapes audience engagement, with fewer clicks on traditional platforms and changing consumption habits. These dual disruptions indicate the vulnerability of traditional journalism and emphasise the need for adaptive business models, innovative engagement strategies, and careful AI integration to maintain relevance without compromising journalistic standards.

Human capabilities remain crucial in addressing these challenges effectively. Critical thinking, human skills and the ability to produce precise AI prompts are essential for journalists to interpret AI output accurately, maintain ethical standards and provide contextually rich reporting. Media organisations must anticipate changing audience behaviour, including younger generations like Gen Z and Gen Alpha who prefer short, interactive and AI-enhanced content. The findings suggest that ongoing professional development and educational interventions are vital to cultivate analytical skills, ethical awareness and adaptability, ensuring that AI complements rather than replaces human expertise in newsrooms.

Trust and credibility emerge as key considerations in AI-driven media. Direct engagement with local audiences strengthens relationships and accountability, while transparency in AI use reinforces ethical practices and helps mitigate misinformation. Clearly labelling AI content allows audiences to understand the nature of reporting, manage expectations and maintain confidence in news reliability. For complex or interpretative journalism, human judgement remains essential, highlighting AI's limitations in producing nuanced or ethically sensitive content.

Finally, the study emphasises AI's impact on Gen Z media habits. Short-form content, from brief video clips to AI-assisted summaries, captures attention and curiosity, often acting as an entry point for deeper exploration and self-directed learning. Digital and AI tools provide exceptional access to knowledge for young audiences, but reliance on algorithmically curated short content also carries the risk of oversimplification and selective exposure. Media organisations and educators should develop strategies that combine engaging short content with pathways for more critical and in-depth engagement, nurturing digitally literate and critically aware audiences.

In conclusion, AI in Malaysian journalism presents both opportunities and challenges. Its effectiveness depends on a careful balance between technological innovation, ethical oversight, human expertise and audience engagement. By using AI as a

supportive tool, investing in professional development, maintaining transparency and promoting critical media literacy, news organisations can navigate the evolving digital ecosystem while preserving depth, credibility and trust the core of responsible journalism. This research provides a foundation for understanding AI's role in the Malaysian context and offers practical insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and educators aiming to shape an ethical and resilient AI-integrated news environment.

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