

Ethical Challenges of AI Adoption in Indian TV Newsrooms: A Qualitative Study of Editorial Concerns

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Abstract

This study examines the ethical dilemmas associated with the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) in Indian television newsrooms. Utilizing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors, and media professionals, the paper delineates primary concerns including algorithmic bias, erosion of editorial control, transparency challenges, and opposition from newsroom personnel. Thematic analysis identifies a substantial deficiency in ethical frameworks and legislative norms regulating AI application in journalism. The research advocates for the creation of role-specific AI ethics rules and underscores the necessity of human oversight to maintain credibility, accountability, and journalistic integrity in a progressively automated media environment.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, algorithmic bias, editorial accountability, journalistic integrity, news

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming journalism by automating content creation, personalizing news dissemination, and improving newsroom productivity. With Indian television news channels increasingly adopting AI tools such as natural language generation, facial recognition, and sentiment analysis, concerns about the ethical implications of these technologies have grown (Desk, 2025). The implementation of AI in journalism raises concerns around transparency, accountability, and the possible deterioration of editorial judgement.

In recent years, artificial intelligence has facilitated the automation of repetitious work in newsrooms, including transcription, news summarization, and anchor-led broadcasting using synthetic avatars. The incorporation of these tools has also elicited ethical concerns. Scholars argue that algorithmic decision-making can perpetuate bias, compromise editorial independence, and undermine the trustworthiness of journalistic outputs (Christer, 2014) (Automating the News, n.d.). In the Indian environment, where media diversity and press freedom are already compromised, the unregulated implementation of AI presents distinct concerns.

Despite its efficiency, AI lacks the nuanced judgement and critical thinking that human editors provide. Studies indicate that while AI systems can generate grammatically accurate and timely content, they often fail to uphold ethical standards such as fairness, context, and balance (Types, Sources, and Claims of COVID-19 Misinformation, 2020). Moreover, Indian TV newsrooms face infrastructural, regulatory, and socio-political constraints that further complicate the ethical use of AI.

This study explores these challenges through a qualitative lens, seeking to understand how media professionals in Indian TV newsrooms perceive and navigate the ethical dilemmas posed by AI integration. By centering the voices of practitioners, the research offers grounded insights that can inform policy, practice, and academic discourse on responsible AI in journalism.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 AI in Journalism: Global Trends

The integration of artificial intelligence in newsrooms is transforming how content is produced, distributed, and consumed. Globally, AI is used to automate repetitive tasks such as earnings summaries and sports reports through Natural Language Generation (NLG) tools like GPT-3 (Guide to Automated Journalism - Columbia Academic Commons, n.d.) and to personalize news feeds based on user data (Thurman et al., 2017) (Thurman et al., 2019). Despite these innovations, scholars emphasize risks related to context-blind reporting—AI-generated texts often lack the depth and sensitivity required for topics involving politics, conflict, or ethics (Diakopoulos, 2019).

2.2 Ethical Dilemmas in AI-Driven Journalism

AI adoption is accompanied by several ethical challenges, three of which dominate academic discourse:

- **Algorithmic Bias:** AI systems often reproduce historical and structural biases present in training data. (Algorithms of Oppression, 2019) demonstrated how search engines reinforce racial stereotypes, while (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018) showed that facial recognition tools are less accurate for non-white subjects—findings that raise concern for AI adoption in racially and linguistically diverse countries like India.

- **Editorial Autonomy and Control:** Carlson (2015) warns of diminishing human editorial oversight when AI systems are used to optimize headlines or suggest news angles. High-speed automation pressures editors to compromise traditional checks and balances. Reuters' misclassification of war images during the Ukraine conflict illustrates the hazards of overreliance on AI.
- **Transparency Deficit:** AI systems are often "black boxes" opaque and difficult to audit. Ananny and Crawford (2018) argue that this undermines accountability and public trust, especially when audiences cannot discern whether content was generated by humans or machines. (Anthony, n.d.)

2.3 AI in Non-Western Contexts: India's Media Ecosystem

While most studies on AI ethics in journalism focus on the Global North, India's media environment presents unique challenges:

- **Sensationalism and Polarization:** Driven by competition for Television Rating Points (TRPs), Indian newsrooms tend to prioritize speed and emotion over accuracy, making them vulnerable to misinformation amplified by AI.
- **Lack of Regulatory Frameworks:** India does not yet have journalism-specific AI regulations comparable to the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act or the U.S.'s Algorithmic Accountability frameworks. Although NITI Aayog (Agrawal, 2024) has proposed guidelines for responsible AI, they remain largely aspirational and general in scope.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Complexity:** India's diverse languages, dialects, and socio-political contexts complicate algorithm training and performance. AI-driven sentiment analysis tools, for instance, often misinterpret regional expressions or sarcasm, resulting in flawed content decisions.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks Informing this Study

This research draws upon interdisciplinary theories that inform ethical reflections on AI in journalism:

- **Algorithmic Accountability Theory** (Diakopoulos, 2019): Emphasizes the need for transparency, auditability, and human oversight in algorithmic decision-making.
- **Global Journalism Ethics** (Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity And . . . , n.d.): Proposes adapting universal principles such as truth, fairness, and public accountability to emerging media technologies.
- **Postcolonial AI Critique** (Mohamed et al., 2020): Criticizes the imposition of Western-centric AI models in non-Western societies, arguing for culturally contextualized design and deployment of AI systems.

2.5 Research Gaps Identified

Despite the rapid adoption of AI in newsrooms, several research gaps persist—particularly in the Indian context:

- **Practitioner-Centric Research:** Most existing studies emphasize technical efficacy or theoretical concerns, with limited engagement with journalists' lived experiences and ethical reflections.
- **Institutional Constraints:** Literature lacks insight into organizational cultures that resist ethical AI implementation despite widespread awareness of its risks.
- **India-Specific Case Studies:** Few empirical studies analyze the ethical implications of AI anchors (e.g., Sana on India Today) or the role of AI in misreporting during high-stakes events such as the farmers' protests.

This review thus underscores the urgent need for grounded, context-specific qualitative research exploring how Indian journalists perceive and negotiate the ethical complexities of AI integration.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative descriptive research design** to explore how Indian television journalists perceive and respond to the ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence (AI) in newsrooms. Qualitative research is particularly suited to capturing the nuanced, context-rich perspectives of professionals navigating complex socio-technological transformations.

The study is grounded in an **interpretivist paradigm**, which acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective experiences of individuals. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the ethical concerns—such as transparency, bias, and editorial autonomy—that arise as AI technologies are increasingly integrated into editorial workflows.

3.2 Research Objectives

The key objectives guiding this methodology are:

- To understand how journalists perceive AI's role in editorial decision-making.
- To investigate ethical dilemmas (e.g., bias, accountability, transparency) experienced in AI-assisted newsrooms.
- To examine institutional and regulatory gaps affecting ethical AI deployment in India.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

A **purposive sampling** strategy was used to identify participants with relevant knowledge and experience. The study included **15 media professionals**, comprising senior editors, newsroom managers, and journalists from leading Indian television networks such as NDTV, Republic TV, and Aaj Tak.

Inclusion criteria:

- A minimum of five years of experience in television journalism.
- Direct exposure to or oversight of AI tools in editorial or production roles.

The sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, and regional media affiliation to ensure a range of perspectives. Pseudonyms were assigned to maintain confidentiality.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method. An interview guide with open-ended questions was designed to elicit detailed responses while allowing for flexibility and probing. Interviews were conducted in English and Hindi, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each, either in person or via secure video conferencing platforms.

Sample questions included:

- “What AI tools are currently used in your newsroom?”
- “Have you faced any ethical challenges while using AI systems?”
- “What safeguards or editorial checks are in place to address AI errors or bias?”

Interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using **Thematic analysis** following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase method:

1. **Familiarization** with the data.
2. **Generating initial codes** (e.g., "algorithmic bias", "job displacement", "lack of guidelines").
3. **Searching for themes** by grouping similar codes.
4. **Reviewing themes** for consistency and representativeness.
5. **Defining and naming themes** to capture the essence of the data.
6. **Producing the final report** linking findings to literature and theory.

NVivo software was used to support the coding process and ensure systematic data organization.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent, were assured of confidentiality, and were free to withdraw at any point. Anonymity was maintained through pseudonyms and data encryption protocols.

4. Findings and Thematic Analysis

Based on the qualitative interviews with 15 media professionals from prominent Indian TV news channels, five major themes emerged from the thematic analysis:

Theme 1: Algorithmic Bias and Misinformation

Participants widely expressed concerns about AI tools reinforcing existing social biases in news outputs. Several interviewees mentioned instances where facial recognition tools misidentified non-Hindu politicians in coverage or where automated tagging tools highlighted partisan slants in headlines.

“We noticed the language model would prioritize certain political parties’ content because of the dataset it was trained on.”
— Participant A (Senior Editor)

Theme 2: Erosion of Editorial Autonomy

Journalists have expressed concern about how algorithm-driven metrics like virality, and viewer retention rates are increasingly dictating newsroom decisions. Editorial teams often feel compelled to follow data-driven suggestions, even at the expense of journalistic values.

“There’s always pressured to go with what the algorithm suggests. It’s no longer about the newsworthiness but about what will trend.” — Participant D (News Producer)

Theme 3: Transparency and the “Black Box” Effect

A recurring concern was the lack of transparency in how AI systems arrive at editorial suggestions or decisions. Editors reported a lack of technical training and limited access to understanding how recommendation systems work.

“We use AI for placement and timing of content, but nobody really knows how it works. It’s a black box.” — Participant G (Digital Head)

Theme 4: Job Insecurity and Resistance to Automation

Younger journalists and scriptwriters, especially those in entry-level positions, perceived AI as a threat to their roles. While some saw it as a tool to assist with repetitive tasks, many feared job displacement and skill redundancy. “We’ve already stopped hiring copy editors for small bulletins. AI does it faster. But that’s scary.” — Participant K (HR Manager)

Theme 5: Absence of Ethical Frameworks and Policy Support

Most participants underscored the need for ethical guidelines specific to AI use in Indian media. There was a clear gap between newsroom AI adoption and institutional policymaking. “We need a framework, a code of ethics. Otherwise, it’s the Wild West of tech in journalism.” — Participant M (Ethics Editor)

Table 1: Summary of Emergent Themes

Theme	Core Concern
Algorithmic Bias	Reinforcement of stereotypes
Erosion of Editorial Autonomy	Metrics overtaking editorial judgment
Transparency Deficit	Inability to audit or interpret AI decisions
Resistance to Automation	Fear of job losses among junior staff
Lack of Ethical Frameworks	No regulation or institutional oversight

These findings reflect not only global AI-ethics concerns but also expose challenges unique to India’s newsroom culture, including language diversity, sensationalist pressure, and regulatory lag.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore a growing unease among Indian television journalists about the ethical implications of AI integration in editorial operations. These concerns align with, but also extend beyond, global discourses on AI ethics in journalism. Participants' reports of algorithmic bias are consistent with global studies showing that AI systems reinforce pre-existing social prejudices (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). The multilingual and multicultural makeup of the audience, however, further complicates the implications in the Indian context. Misinformation in vernacular languages, exacerbated by undertrained NLP systems, adds a distinct layer of complexity not often captured in Western research. The **erosion of editorial autonomy** in favor of algorithmic efficiency highlights a deeper philosophical shift in news values. Where editorial judgement once prioritized public interest and ethical reflection, AI metrics now emphasize engagement and virality (Carlson, 2015). This commodification of news challenges foundational journalistic principles, suggesting an urgent need for renewed conversations on ethics in digital media. The **transparency deficit**—referred to as the "black box" effect—validates concerns raised in algorithmic accountability literature (Ananny & Crawford, 2018). The inability of editorial teams to fully understand or audit AI systems points to a lack of technical literacy within newsrooms. This creates a structural imbalance where journalists must rely on opaque systems without agency to challenge or reinterpret outcomes. **Job insecurity and automation fears** represent a psychological and organizational challenge. Indian journalists express apprehension about AI replacing human creativity, particularly in entry-level positions. However, Indian newsrooms face this challenge without the cushion of institutional retraining programmes or media unions, intensifying the anxiety. Finally, the **absence of ethical frameworks** in India, compared to well-articulated policies like the EU’s AI Act or the U.S. Algorithmic Accountability Act, reveals a systemic gap in governance. Despite policy discussions initiated by think tanks like NITI Aayog (2021), actionable newsroom-level ethical protocols remain elusive. Collectively, these insights reveal a significant disjuncture between AI adoption and ethical readiness in Indian television journalism. They highlight the urgent need for interdisciplinary collaboration among journalists, technologists, ethicists, and policymakers to co-create culturally grounded, contextually relevant AI governance models for the media sector. Here is the **conclusion** section for your paper:

6. Conclusion

This study explored the ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) integration in Indian television newsrooms, revealing both promise and peril. Through in-depth interviews with media professionals, five critical themes emerged—algorithmic bias, erosion of editorial autonomy, transparency deficits, resistance to automation, and the absence of ethical frameworks. These concerns resonate with global debates but are intensified in the Indian context due to linguistic diversity, competitive market pressures, and regulatory voids.

While AI offers undeniable benefits, enhancing efficiency, optimizing content delivery, and expanding audience reach simultaneously raises foundational questions about journalistic integrity, accountability, and human agency. The findings show that editorial professionals often lack the tools or institutional support to interrogate or intervene in algorithmic decisions, leading to dependence on opaque technologies that may conflict with journalistic values.

Importantly, the study highlights the urgent need for India-specific ethical guidelines governing AI use in journalism. Unlike Western nations that are progressively legislating AI governance, Indian newsrooms operate in an ethical grey zone, risking both credibility and public trust.

In conclusion, responsible AI integration in journalism is not merely a technical challenge, it is a moral and institutional imperative. Transparency, inclusivity, and editorial independence must be the guiding principles for AI adoption as it continues to reshape media landscapes. Future research should continue to center practitioner perspectives and explore how policy, training, and collaborative governance can bridge the gap between innovation and ethics in Indian media.

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