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The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Journalists in the Western Balkans – Advantages and Challenges

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Abstract: With the evolution of artificial intelligence, numerous transformations are occurring across various fields, including journalism worldwide. These changes have also influenced the media landscape in the Balkan region. This study analyzes the impact of artificial intelligence on journalists and media in the Western Balkans, providing a clear overview of the advantages and challenges posed using new technologies in content creation, news reporting, and newsroom operations. The main advantages include data analysis, increased speed in news publication, real-time information accessibility, and automation of routine tasks. However, there are also significant challenges and risks, such as the spread of misinformation, dependence on algorithms, and, most critically, job displacement for journalists as AI gradually replaces them, a trend already observed in some media outlets in Albania. This study aims to explore how artificial intelligence is driving these changes. Through an empirical approach and case study analysis, it also seeks to propose strategies for leveraging AI in a sustainable and ethically responsible manner in journalism. The study also includes an in-depth analysis based on the questionnaire regarding how media outlets and journalists in the Western Balkans understand the importance of artificial intelligence in streamlining processes and also in reducing costs through its use. This study provides results on how journalists are integrating artificial intelligence with specific tools to achieve higher efficiency in their work, particularly in content and news production.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Artificial Intelligence Tools, Media, Journalism, Western Balkans

Introduction

The beginning of automation in journalism dates back to the technological transformation of newsrooms and broadcasting in the last three decades and has intensified in recent years. (Túñez-López, 2021). Projects promoted by Google to artificially generate thousands of texts oriented to local media with information generated from public data, or the decision of major agencies to publish algorithmically created news, which in the case of Reuters already accounts for more than a third of its production, and in the case of the Associated Press (AP) are both textual and video. (Túñez-López, 2021) The range of implementation of artificial intelligence into media organizations and journalists can appear as Biswali and Kulkarni (2024) emphasize, mainly for news gathering, for their production (content creation, packaging and repackaging), for news distribution to consumers, for translation, for filtering fake news, etc. Granados (2023) writes for Forbes that artificial intelligence technologies have the potential to improve content creation and the media consumption experience.

Meanwhile, Deuze and Becketti (2022) focus on the effects that artificial intelligence will have on the media and journalists, emphasizing the need for Artificial Intelligence Education, that is, familiarization with the set of rules and knowledge about it. They emphasize: "…, it should not be a history of technology, but a history of people: the people who train the artificial intelligence, the people who navigate these systems to report and connect with the audience, and the people who develop trusting relationships with journalism and journalists across a variety of platforms."

Simoni (2024) after studying the situation in 35 media organizations in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Germany, says that the effects of artificial intelligence on the news industry, the information environment, and the public arena are very poorly understood, adding that with every new technology that enters the news, the effects of artificial intelligence will be neither so terrible nor so utopian. The study emphasizes that

larger and better-resourced news organizations are more likely to engage in internal development of artificial intelligence while most other smaller publishers obtain solutions from third parties due to the high costs associated with personalized artificial intelligence. One of the most troubling findings of the study concerns the creation of lock-in effects that endanger news organizations, as the complexity of AI increases the control of AI companies over these organizations by keeping them connected. This, it seems, limits the autonomy of news organizations and journalists and makes these organizations vulnerable to price increases or changing priorities of technology companies.

Elmesselmani (2023), in the study of the impact of artificial intelligence on the "Al Jazeera" network, emphasizes that the majority of respondents did not agree that artificial intelligence can replace people in the newsroom to write articles, while 66% of respondents believe that artificial intelligence will increase the unemployment rate in the news as the industry will replace people; administrative jobs, news reporters and producers and editors. The results of the study emphasize that 39% of respondents on the "Al Jazeera" network believe that artificial intelligence will be useful if applied to the news industry, while 33% believe that it would not make a significant difference. A large number of respondents disagreed that artificial intelligence will respect the ethics of journalism. Furthermore, a report by the "Thomson Foundation" (2024) regarding the implementation of artificial intelligence in media organizations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia indicated that it generally does not exceed 15%.

Bosnian media outlets may inadvertently contribute to the perception of AI as distant and inaccessible, potentially hindering local efforts towards technological innovation and adoption. These efforts are crucial for providing audiences with a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with AI innovation, making it a high priority for public service media (Mahmutović, 2024). Evolving of AI can bring a wide array of social and economic benefits. However, the same specifications that unlock the possibilities of socio-economic development represent risks for negative effects on individuals and society (Bellaadem, 2023).

Purpose, Hypotheses and Methodology of the Study

Over a period of about 12 months, we aimed to analyze the development of artificial intelligence in journalism and media in the Western Balkans region. The first study published in 2024 for the Balkans region found that the use of AI was in its incipient phase (Gogo, 2024), while we focused on investigating what would happen in the coming months. Using a questionnaire method with open and closed questions, we obtained the responses of 20 journalists and media workers in April 2025. The countries included are Albania (10), Kosovo (3), Northern Macedonia (3), Montenegro (1), Serbia (3). The respondents included 16 journalists, 2 editors, and 2 others with different roles in the newsrooms.

The comparative hypotheses raised are:

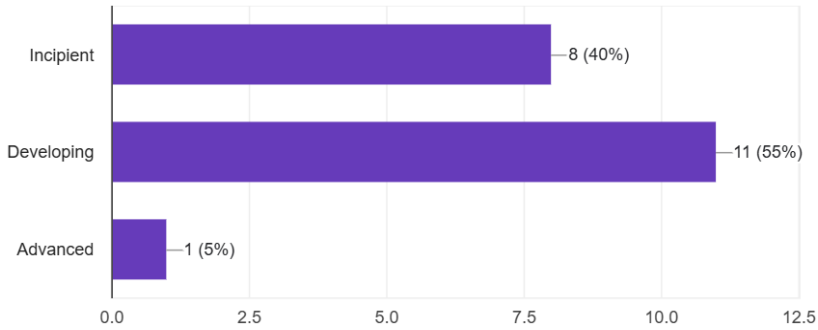
H1 - The use of artificial intelligence in the media in the Western Balkans has advanced, moving from the initial phase to a more developed phase. Journalists and media workers have begun to use more frequently the tools of Artificial Intelligence.

H2 - Journalists and media workers in the Western Balkans continue to be alert to the risks that artificial intelligence brings, such as authorship issues, disinformation, etc., but in a period of less than 1 year, they are convinced that their profession will reshape from the AI usage.

Data Analysis

The graph below shows what journalists and media workers think about the stage of development of artificial intelligence in the Western Balkans media. The response option "Developing" is significantly more prevalent than the option "Incipient." The conclusion, compared with the

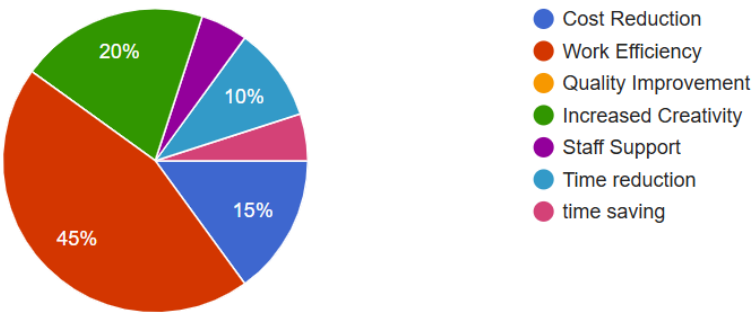
conclusion of the first study is that development is perceived in the use of Artificial Intelligence. Journalists suggest that AI is being used more frequently, and that the sector has progressed from the initial stage to a more developed stage.



Graph 1. At what stage do you think the use of artificial intelligence is in the media in your country?

When asked about examples of AI use by the media, workers mentioned various tools and practices. They noted that AI tools are being used for monitoring social media trends, translating and news structuring, generating images of politicians, using AI speakers to present news, automating news summarization, transcribing interviews, photo editing, content visualization and audio recording. Not all journalists confirmed the use of these AI tools in their media, but some provided specific examples. For instance, "Birn Serbia" exposed a false student during the anti-government student protests in Belgrade, employing translation, images, and titles, for downloading transcripts from audio interviews using ChatGPT Pro to summarize long-form content, enhance content visualization, generate creative headlines or an intro and perfom automatic text editing. On the other hand, when asked why some media outlets in the Balkans do not use AI, they listed reasons related to a lack of finances or experts, lack of technological infrastructure, fear of the new and the unknown, lack of education, discomfort of editors or owners, because they think they can work better than AI, skepticism about AI's accuracy and impact, as well as the fear of abuse and the desire to avoid fake media content.

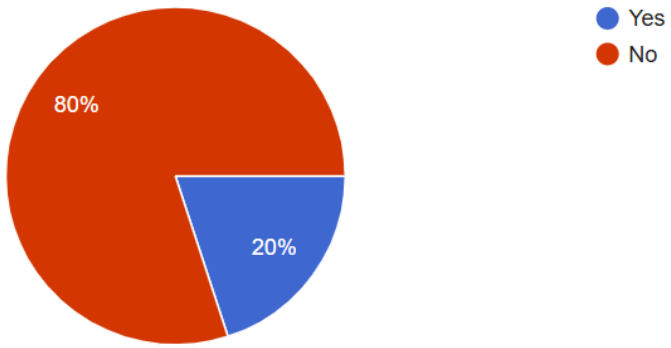
The journalists are convinced that the number one benefit of using AI is work efficiency, followed by increased creativity, cost reduction, and time reduction.



Graph 2. What are the benefits you have noticed from AI usage in media?

When asked how they think the journalism profession is being reshaped by the influence of AI and what new skills journalists should develop, the respondents stated that it will be dimensioned. But how? With more opportunities from the internet to develop stories faster, by automating routine tasks and enabling faster content creation, enhancing data analysis, and personalizing content delivery, this transformation requires journalists to develop skills in

data literacy, verification, and ethical use of technology. As the respondents replied, journalists are becoming more like “editors of intelligence,” combining human creativity with the speed of technology. They emphasized the need for journalists to develop skills in fact-checking, ethical AI usage, and training. Other respondents believe that AI cannot replace the brain, and beyond the benefits that AI brings, in some respects, it can negatively affect journalists, as they become lazier and do not put much thought into how to write a text, since AI helps them too much. According to them, since AI raises ethical concerns, a lot of work needs to be done on AI literacy. The majority of the respondents (80%) agreed that AI cannot replace journalists, while 20% believed that AI has the potential to replace journalists, editors, or other media specialists.



Graph 3. Do you think AI can replace journalists, editors, or other media specialists?

When asked how AI is affecting the processes of writing, editing and broadcasting or publishing news, they agree that AI is reshaping journalism by automating routine tasks and enabling faster content creation, but it also raises ethical concerns. According to the respondents, journalists should develop skills in data analysis, AI literacy, fact-checking, and using AI tools responsibly. Journalists are becoming more like "editors of intelligence," combining human creativity with the speed of technology.

Respondents were also asked whether AI poses risks to the media and journalism professionals. The questions and the replies relate to various concerns, including job reductions, the spread of incorrect information, and the potential risk to the work of journalists and media workers, as media owners may seek less spending and reduced fact checking, the spread of misinformation through deepfakes or AI-generated fake news, loss of jobs due to automation, reduced trust in media, and ethical concerns about transparency and accountability. Additionally, there is concern that journalists may become a bit lazy about the writing process, exploitation of intellectual property rights, lack of transparency in sources, and over-reliance on technology that may weaken journalistic quality. However, some of the respondents do not see real risks.

In terms of audience perception, media workers noted that some from the audiences see AI in media as innovative and efficient, while others worry about trust, bias, and loss of human touch. They noted that audiences may be curious but often do not understand which methods journalists use, especially in written content, while in videos, perceptions can vary depending on the importance of the presentation. Audiences could have mixed perceptions of AI in media, and some, as the respondents say, appreciate its efficiency, creativity, broader reach and speed, while others are concerned about authenticity, job displacement and ethical implications. Some respondents observed that most audiences are still unsure whether content is created by AI or humans. As they noted, people believe a lot of conspiracy theories and controversial compositions are often judged as frivolous.

Finally, the questionnaire concluded by asking respondents how they foresee the future of the media market impacted by AI and what changes they expect in the coming years. The respondents say that AI will enable faster news reporting, especially for routine stories, and improve audience targeting through advanced analytics. In the coming years, we can expect more AI-generated content and smarter news recommendation algorithms. They underline that essentially, AI will not replace quality journalism, but it will transform the way it is done. AI will transform the media by personalizing content, automating production, and speeding up news delivery. While improving efficiency, it will also change job roles and raise ethical concerns like misinformation and copyright. They suggest that the industry must adapt to these challenges.

They say that journalists will have more training and information regarding what AI can do for them. There will be more automation, but also greater challenges related to ethics, intellectual property, and maintaining quality. It will enable faster news reporting, especially for routine stories, and improve audience targeting through advanced analytics. AI will be used more widely for content creation and distribution, especially in routine news and financial reporting. In essence, AI will not replace quality journalism, but it will transform the way it is done.

Some of the respondents do not know what will happen because "…it's hard to imagine what lies beyond AI, because it has surpassed human mental capacity but still, I believe that artificial intelligence cannot replace genuine journalism" or "Maybe some human process can be replaced," or "Artificial intelligence will replace journalists in the distant future."

Conclusions

Previous study conclusions related to the period June-July 2024 (Gogo, 2024) show that the use of artificial intelligence in the media and by journalists in the Balkan region is in its initial phase and that journalists and media know little about artificial intelligence and the benefits that can come from it. On the other hand, it is seen that professionals are aware of the risks it brings, such as disinformation, lack of originality, ethical issues, privacy issues, adaptation to local languages and media, etc. It was certain that with the development of artificial intelligence, the profile of the journalist would change. Artificial intelligence, as they underline, will reshape the profession of the journalist in terms of the tools that the journalist will use, never questioning the journalist in the role they have held for a long time. It was evident during the study that journalists and media outlets in the Balkan region still have little knowledge of artificial intelligence and the benefits they can gain from its use in daily operations.

A comparative analysis of the data collected in the first study and the second one (for the period February-April 2025) confirms the following hypotheses:

H1 - The use of artificial intelligence in the media in the Western Balkans has advanced, moving from the initial phase to a more developed phase. Journalists and media workers have begun to use more frequently the tools of Artificial Intelligence.

H2 - Journalists and media workers in the Western Balkans continue to be alert to the risks that artificial intelligence brings, such as authorship issues, disinformation, etc. However, in a period of less than 1 year, they are convinced that their profession will reshape from the AI usage.

The analysis of the conclusions can be detailed as follows:

1. The conclusion in relation to the first study is that development is perceived in the use of Artificial Intelligence. Journalists report that it is being used more frequently, indicating a shift from the incipient stage to a stage of further development.
2. AI Tools are being used for: social media trend monitoring, translation and structuring the news, ChatGPT, AI to generate images of politicians, AI speakers presenting the News, AI for automatic news summarization, for automatic transcription of interviews, in photo editing or content visualization, and audio registration. People

working in the media industry think that perhaps some media outlets still don't use AI due to lack of funding, technical knowledge, or skepticism about AI's accuracy and impact.

3. AI is reshaping journalism by automating routine tasks and enabling faster content creation, but it also raises ethical concerns. Journalists should develop skills in data analysis, AI literacy, fact-checking, and using AI tools responsibly. Journalists are becoming more like "editors of intelligence," combining human creativity with the speed of technology. They need to develop skills in fact-checking and ethical AI usage.
4. AI is expected to enable faster news reporting, especially for routine stories, and to improve audience targeting through advanced analytics. In the coming years, more AI-generated content and smarter news recommendation algorithms are anticipated.

Essentially, AI will not replace quality journalism, but it will transform the way it is done. AI will transform the media by personalizing content, automating production, and speeding up news delivery. While improving efficiency, it will also likely change professional roles and raise ethical concerns, including those related to misinformation and copyright. The industry must adapt to these evolving challenges.

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