

AI a 'fundamental change in the news ecosystem': Expert

April 20 2024



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Artificial intelligence [is shaking up journalism](#) and in the short term will cause "a fundamental change in the news ecosystem", media expert David Caswell told AFP.

A former employee at Yahoo! and BBC News Labs, the British broadcaster's innovation wing, Caswell spoke as industry leaders gathered in the Italian city of Perugia to discuss the biggest questions facing their trade.

How do you see the journalism of the future?

"We don't know. But what we are trying to do is to understand all of the possibilities or as many of the possibilities as we can. But I think there are some things that are becoming clearer: one is the fact that more media will probably be created and originated and sourced by machines. So machines will do more gathering in a lot of journalism, will do more of the producing, the audio, the video and the text, and will create the kind of experiences of consumption that consumers have.

That is a very fundamental change in the information ecosystem in general, and the news ecosystem in particular. This is structurally different than the one that we're in now. We don't know how long it's going to take—it may be two, four, seven years. I think it's going to be faster because there is very little friction.

People don't need new devices, new hardware, they don't need a lot of money as producers, they don't need technical expertise. All those things that were barriers in the previous generation of AI are no longer barriers, thanks to generative AI".

What are the latest developments underway in newsrooms?

"One class of development is in [new tools](#) that enable AI workflow, for example, JP Politikens in Denmark focused on making their existing products and activities more efficient. But it is also a basis for

transitioning their products, their workforce, the activities into this new AI world.

There is a tool that Google has built—the code name is 'Genesis'—that they are testing with publishers. Some publishers are building their own. There will be platform versions of these tools.

These are tools, you bring your news gathering on the left side: your PDF, transcripts, audios, videos.. roughly. It helps you do things like analysis, summaries, turn into scripts, audios. They're orchestrated by the tool.

What the journalist is doing is coordinating the tool, verifying the content all the way through to the end, and editing. The job becomes using the tool, like an editorial manager of this AI tool.

It technically works. But that's a different thing than putting it in a newsroom in a large operation and use it day in day out, months in, months out. That's a big question: is it going to be enthusiastically adopted, to be used in a way that isn't very productive in the long run or will that enhance the productivity of newsroom dramatically?"

What is the cost?

"In the last decade it was very expensive. It was very difficult: You need the data, you had to build a data warehouse, have an enterprise deal with Amazon or Google cloud, you had to hire data scientists, to have a team of data engineers. it was a major investment. Only the BBC, the New York Times, this level of organizations could really afford it.

That's not true with generative AI. You can run news workflow through interfaces that you pay 20 dollars a month. You don't need to be a coder. All you need is motivation, enthusiasm and curiosity.

There's lots of people in [news organizations](#) that would not have been involved in AI in the past because they did not have the technical background and now they can just use it. It's a much more open form of AI: both smaller newsrooms can do a lot with, and more junior individuals in more established newsrooms can do a lot with. I think it's a good thing, but it's also a disruptive thing. Often the internal politics in newsrooms are disrupted by that".

At what stage of AI are we at?

"AI has been around since the 1950s. But AI for practical purposes appeared with ChatGPT. It's going to be quite a while—years—before we really understand how to use them for valuable things. There are so many things that you can do with them.

The risk to journalism is that other organizations, [start-ups](#), [tech companies](#) will do things in the news faster than the news world itself. Lots of start ups have no editorial component at all. They are swiping the content of news organizations, some are covering niches: they are monitoring press releases, social media channels, PDF from reports".

What are the risks?

"Journalism has not been doing well for the last 10 or 15 years, there hasn't really been a credible vision of the future for how this is going to play out just in the social media world. What AI does (is) it gives news organizations a chance to change that situation, to participate in a new ecosystem. It's good to be optimistic, getting engaged, exploring, having projects, experiments, maybe changing your mindset, that's positive.

As Jelani Cobb, Dean of Columbia School of Journalism, says, '+AI is unignorable force that journalism will have to organize itself around'. It's

not going to adapt itself to journalism.

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Citation: AI a 'fundamental change in the news ecosystem': Expert (2024, April 20) retrieved 17 June 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2024-04-ai-fundamental-news-ecosystem-expert.html>

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