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How does ABC News report on the impact of AI in journalism between February and June 2024?

Introduction

During the age of exponential technological advancement, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly determining the course of news output. Although AI technologies may improve and accelerate journalistic processes, they also introduce complicated ethical challenges, especially when their use is not transparent to the audience. The audience's trust in the media is already weak, and the use of AI in newsrooms without the required transparency has the potential to further erode this mistrust.

The research question, "How does ABC News report on the impact of AI in journalism between February and June 2024?", is explored through the qualitative analysis of three recent articles from ABC News, each reporting on the role of AI in the context of journalism. The analysis is based on how they frame stories on AI. More specifically, the focus is on whether it is framed positively as an aid to journalists, or framed as a risk that undermines journalistic values. Framing influences how audiences perceive developing technology. As AI becomes increasingly prevalent in journalism, how it is portrayed by credible media outlets determines whether the public perceives technology as empowering or threatening.

This essay also examines key themes including the automation of news production, the future of public service journalism, and the tension between democratic accountability and the drive for innovation. Australia's public broadcaster, the ABC, is regulated through a public service

charter mandating editorial independence, and service to democratic discourse. Its coverage is therefore an important case study to understand how journalism addresses the ethical dimensions of AI. In addition, this essay also addresses whether ABC's reporting aligns with the principles of Solutions Journalism, which requires the media to look beyond the naming of problems and start investigating solutions. This will lead to demonstrate whether the ABC is helping to enable well-informed public engagement or is at risk of perpetuating mistrust and disinformation in the digital age.

Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

As AI is increasingly integrated into journalistic practices, it is important to evaluate how its use is reported to the public, especially from reputable media sources. Within Australia, the ABC has the key role of educating citizens. The ABC must maintain journalistic traditions of independence, transparency, and service to democratic debate. This makes its coverage of AI especially important because the ways it defines AI in the context of journalism can support or mislead the public's conception of ethical journalistic practice and technological risk. Entman (1993) describes framing as the selection of specific portions of reality and their enhancement to become more central to the communication message. Frames are used to define problems, detect causes, evaluate moral judgments, and propose solutions. The strength of frames is to influence the public's understanding relatively invisibly while appearing to be unbiased.

Entman's theory is especially applicable to the narrative around AI and journalism. The use of AI is often undetectable in newsroom practices, employed behind the scenes in activities such as editing, filtering, or the creation of headlines. The audience's perception of its value, danger, or neutrality is largely created through the ways they hear it discussed. If AI is universally discussed as an unstoppable, neutral tool, audiences may underestimate the risks it poses to ethics. Alternatively, if it is discussed mainly as something dangerous, this may create fear and immediate rejection rather than encouraging informed public engagement regarding its use. Therefore, framing analysis is an important method to look at the story around AI and journalism and the values it encompasses.

Two dominant narratives often appear in media coverage. Kools et al. (2023) argue that AI is typically framed in either utopian or dystopian terms, with few stories offering a balanced perspective. This tendency becomes particularly relevant when examining public service media

like ABC, which has a responsibility to provide transparent and nuanced reporting. The utopian frame frames AI as an instrument of transformation through the way it increases efficiency, helps to personalize stories, and simplifies mundane processes. This framing attributes AI as the key factor of journalistic survival in the digital age. Conversely, Simons (2024) notices the increasing use of dystopian framing, where AI is framed not only as a risk to truth but also to trust and accountability. Based on analysis of major Western media reports, Simons concludes that AI is regularly tied to misinformation, algorithmic bias, and the degradation of transparency. While these are genuine concerns, Simons believes that exaggerated dystopian framing without a proposed solution may exacerbate public distrust. Kools et al. highlight the importance of balancing innovation narratives with critical scrutiny to ensure that the public is not left to interpret AI's role through extremes of fear or hype.

McIntyre (2019) suggests that while conventional journalism focuses on highlighting problems, solutions journalism attempts to tell audiences what works to respond to social problems without taking an advocacy stance. Solution journalism in the context of AI may involve proposing guidelines for transparency, reporting on ethical AI tools, or demanding increased editorial control. Dodd (2022) reinforces the importance of Solutions Journalism in restoring public trust by focusing on how stories can highlight hope, leadership, and practical responses to social challenges. If such solutions are neglected in ABC reporting, it may inadvertently create public confusion or immediate opposition to all types of AI uses. Entman's model is used to identify the structure of the stories, while the solutions journalistic lens is used to analyse to what extent the stories enable informed, democratic engagement with AI.

Empirical Studies: Framing, Trust, and Automation

To effectively determine how ABC News frames AI in journalism, it is necessary to take into consideration new studies that examine how news coverage represents AI and automation.

Nguyen et al. (2023) consider how AI influences editorial control, contending that reporters are now forced to get more done in less time under the pressures of AI-governed newsrooms. The consequence is often a lack of transparency and ethical examination, especially concerning the ways AI is involved in the production of work. Reporters might extensively use automated tools without fully understanding them, which can lead to superficial or inaccurate descriptions of how AI is applied in journalistic processes and the ethical issues it raises. This is particularly

applicable to ABC News' coverage, in that even credible sources are likely to frame AI in a reductive manner, either as harmless tools or dangers, without adequate context or ethical consideration.

Bro (2023) makes an important contribution to understanding how journalism can break free from dystopian narratives rooted in fear. He suggests that mainstream journalism often adheres to the logic of "if it bleeds, it leads," favouring stories that provoke fear rather than balanced explanations. Such framing can inadvertently encourage a disconnection between the media and the public. Bro believes the use of constructive journalism can steer reporting towards thoughtful, prospective stories that still meet journalistic standards. Whether these constructive features are present in ABC's coverage of AI determines if the report serves to inform and empower the public or undermine public engagement.

While the studies mentioned above centre on framing and newsroom practice, Singer (2023) offers a needed ethical perspective. According to her, AI is incapable of acting with moral agency, and systems that only simulate ethical deliberation do not truly have accountability. This creates what Matthias (2004) calls the "responsibility gap," where the developers, users, or systems are to some degree incapable of being held accountable when something goes astray, particularly when the outcome is negative. Marconi (2020) deepens this concern by illustrating how AI systems are not just tools but actors that shape editorial judgment. As algorithms gain influence over what is deemed newsworthy, they challenge the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists and make accountability even harder to trace. Without strong human oversight, editorial decisions may be driven more by data than by ethical reflection. Together, Singer and Marconi emphasize that without transparency and clear human control, AI integration into journalism can undermine credibility, editorial integrity, and democratic discourse.

Together, these studies highlight the significance of how AI is covered in journalism, both in terms of what is stated, but also how stories are framed, sourced, and contextualized. If ABC News coverage is singularly utopian or dystopian without offering ethical context or solutions, it risks contributing to public misunderstanding or cynicism. But if it includes transparency, accountability, and constructive framing, it can serve to meet its public service function by facilitating responsible engagement with AI in journalism.

Framing Analysis of ABC News Journalism Examples

This analysis examines how ABC News framed artificial intelligence in the media in three news stories published between February and June 2024. Utilizing Entman's framing model, and drawing on the empirical research considered above, the analysis considers whether ABC utilized utopian or dystopian frames, and whether solutions-oriented journalism underpins its coverage. Each article is assessed based on how it defines the problem, identifies its causes, offers moral judgments, and suggests possible solutions. This approach helps reveal how ABC balances narratives of technological innovation with its ethical responsibilities.

The first article, "Deepfakes and 'the liar's dividend': AI is changing how we see the world" (Meade, 2024) takes on a primarily dystopian frame. The article frames the issue as the increasing danger of misinformation generated by AI, specifically deepfakes distorting public perception. The article diagnoses the cause as rising levels of sophistication in generative AI, which can alter video and sound content. The moral judgment is implicit but unmistakable. Such advancements threaten democracy directly, particularly when public officials are misrepresented and trust in the visual proof is undermined. The article describes the risks involved but fails to achieve the depth of solutions-based journalism, offering little insight into how journalists or platforms might address such threats. Although it relies heavily on expert analysis, the article does not explore structural solutions such as watermarking, improving AI transparency, or implementing regulatory requirements. This reflects Simons' (2024) argument that media coverage often emphasises dystopian concerns without offering constructive responses.

The second article, "Australians are still suss on AI-made news, while Meta steams ahead on AI training" (Roberts, 2024), presents a more balanced frame but one which still tilts towards the dystopian. It frames the problem through public scepticism of AI-generated news content, as referenced in a recent international poll. Australia is more sceptical than most nations, with fears around deception and misinformation being the focus. The article blames this distrust on low transparency and over-reliance on AI by technological platforms, as opposed to public broadcasters. The article discusses the need for clearer identification of AI-generated content and the suggestion that public broadcasters like ABC could play an educational role. Although it does contain moral critique regarding loss of trust, as well as some positive elements of solutions journalism, this tentative solution is not explored in depth. The framing complements

Kools et al.'s (2023) analysis by acknowledging risks but falling short in presenting meaningful or constructive pathways forward.

The third article, "AI-generated image of Victorian MP Georgie Purcell sparks calls for transparency" (McDonald, 2024), encompasses the most distinct association with both dystopian framing and solutions-focused reporting. The article identifies the problem as the unauthorised alteration of the image of a politician through the use of AI, which was published and distributed online. The cause is traced to the uncontrolled proliferation of generative AI tools and the absence of requirements to reveal information. The article clearly states that these actions are wrong, and misleading, and could harm the democratic process by undermining trust and accountability. Notably, this article includes calls by MPs for greater regulatory protection and stronger transparency standards in AI. These proposed measures shift the article closer to the principles of solutions journalism. Rather than concluding on a fatalistic note, the article investigates actionable remedies, thereby fulfilling Bro's (2023) criteria for constructive coverage. It aligns with the function of public service media in supporting well-informed public participation.

In each of the three articles, the frames used are overwhelmingly dystopian, most specifically regarding misinformation, manipulation, and distrustful public. The experimental article alone, though, uses constructive framing meaningfully. The result reinforces Simons' (2024) assertion that media tends to emphasize risk without responsibility, and Kools et al.'s (2023) claim that middle-ground stories are few. Singer's (2023) responsibility gap concern is particularly clear in the first article, where blame and responsibility are hinted at but left unresolved. Although ABC upholds high standards in sourcing and format, the articles reflect little exploration of ethical solutions, particularly considering the public broadcaster's charter commitments to democracy of discussion.

Conclusion

In this essay, this research explored how artificial intelligence was framed by ABC News between February to June 2024, and specifically how three articles represent the broadcaster's portrayal of the risks and duties of AI. Applying qualitative framing analysis with the aid of Entman's model, this research determined that ABC had primarily used dystopian frames, portraying AI as threatening public trust, ethical standards, as well as democratic debate.

Although one article engaged with some elements of solutions journalism, the broader pattern indicates sparse usage of constructive framing, with little emphasis on actionable solutions or media accountability.

By referring to empirical research, specifically the research conducted by Simons, Kools et al., and Singer, this analysis demonstrated how the reporting of ABC follows broader global trends in journalism, within which AI tends to be represented as highly desirable or very dangerous. The findings, though, did identify a missed opportunity. As a public service broadcaster, ABC is well-placed to fill the space between technological innovation and responsibility in a democracy. Its editorial standards and institutional purpose allow it to pioneer transparent, solution-focused reporting, particularly on new technologies, that the public is yet to be familiar with.

Ultimately, this essay contributes to our greater understanding of how AI not only applies to journalism but is explained to the public, influencing how democratic publics react to technological disruption. Journalism needs to do more than identify risk, it needs to inform audiences of ethical dilemmas and equip them with information to negotiate new media landscapes. A greater focus on solutions journalism, underpinned by transparency, accountability, and public interest, will ensure media organizations such as ABC meet their public duties and retain public trust in the digital world.

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