

How will AI impact news and journalism?

How will the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) impact news brands and the news media industry?

AI means more than just smarter computers. Computers that can create, use logic and understand human patterns of behaviour are no longer the stuff of science fiction. We're seeing an increasing shift towards machines with advanced problem-solving and learning capability.

With AI shake-up in our imminent future, it's a good time to consider what artificial intelligence actually *means*. What can AI do for the media and news industry? What are the possible risks for using AI in news-gathering and writing?

What is artificial intelligence (AI)?

"Artificial intelligence" is a term first used in the 1950s to describe computer systems that could be designed to mimic the way that humans use reasoning to solve simple problems.

[Advanced artificial intelligences](#) are capable of learning and intelligent thinking, the ability to understand past behaviours and apply them to future problems that need to be solved. It's the meeting point of computing and psychology, mathematics and engineering.

AI involves some complex programming and scientific concepts, including:

- Machine learning: automated, analytical model-building. Machine learning describes the way a system uses past experiences and failures to improve its performance in the future. For example, [this AI learned how to play hide-and-seek through trial and error](#).
- Neural network: A computing system that draws inspiration from the design of the human brain.
- Computer vision: Computers or software learning to understand patterns in order to recognise the content of an image or video, such as whether a

video is showing a person, face, vehicle or building.

- Natural language processing: computers learning to understand the way that humans talk, write and communicate through language. If you've ever used a voice assistant such as [Siri or Alexa](#), the tech behind the AI's ability to understand your words is natural language processing, also known as NLP.

AI is already part of our everyday

If you watch Netflix, use Facebook or read news online, you've experienced the way that computing has been designed to complement and augment our daily lives.

AI is evolving in multiple directions: facial and speech recognition, smart search systems, digital personal assistants, tailored recommendations on your internet browser, [and the options are expanding all the time.](#)

Your social media feeds are curated by unseen AI that learns about your content preferences based on what you've liked in the past, and demographic traits such as age and gender. Netflix offers you more of what you like, your email composition window might give you some [tailor-made replies](#) based on how you usually write.

These AI make it easier for users to find the content they're interested in and hide content that is unlikely to capture their attention. Consumers save time on selecting their next TV show and the company benefits from increasing customer enjoyment of the platform, which in turn boosts watch time and brand affinity.

What does AI mean for news media?

AI is impacting how consumers access news media, especially on social media and search engines. Facebook's algorithm suggests news articles to users based on the mastheads and channels they've shown preference for in the past, or on topics that are likely appealing based on search history and social media interactions.

But what would happen if algorithms like these become the curators of our entire news media experience?

Increasingly, the news mix that you receive online will be curated based on your behaviour and traits. The news items you are seeing will differ from what your neighbour, or even your partner is seeing.

There will be benefits for journalists: companies like [Forbes](#) have begun experimenting with how its AI (“[Bertie](#)”) can help suggest article topics, sources and images to writers, and even put together simple drafts.

“Bertie’s artificial intelligence gives our storytellers a bionic suit – providing real-time trending topics to cover, recommending ways to make headlines more compelling and suggesting relevant imagery. We will regularly roll out new AI features to further augment our storytellers’ natural abilities.”

AI will increasingly step into the role of writer. [The Guardian Australia](#) has published articles written by its AI, ReporterMate, and according to the [New York Times](#), “roughly a third of the content published by Bloomberg News uses some form of automated technology.”

[Writing for Forbes](#), Robert Weissgraber of AX Semantics says AI may be one answer to the ongoing sustainability of news brands.

Weissgraber identifies some of the practical applications for AI in supporting journalism:

- Creation of more content, tailored for different platforms such as web and social media
- Creating data-rich stories that engage readers and are meaningful for audiences
- Improved dictation and other data-gathering support services

“The birth of AI-powered content generation technology offers a rare bright light for journalism, and other AI tools are making it easier for journalists to do a more thorough job under pressure,” he writes.

Should we be worried?

There are two distinct issues at play: AI being used to determine the *content* of news, and AI determining *access* to news.

Those who work in the news media industry are, understandably, unnerved by the idea of being replaced by software.

To the second issue: it is better for people to be exposed to a diverse range of ideas and sources, and some aspects of AI seem to encourage people to keep consuming more of the same, more of what they like, and more of what will keep them on the page.

Handing over all editing power to a self-learning algorithm raises all sorts of concerns about [“filter bubbles”](#) and “echo chambers”. Does this mean there is no longer potential for discovery, for serendipity? Part of the joy of flicking through a newspaper, journal or magazine is the ability to stumble upon ideas and concepts that I’d never considered previously. This can be stifled when the algorithm wants to feed you more of the same every scrolling moment.

We are still a fair way from human journalists becoming obsolete, even as [AI news reporting](#) increases in accuracy and fluency. Yes, AI will [automate the reporting of straightforward news](#) such as sports results, weather forecasts, earthquakes and even traffic conditions. Basically, anything where you can have a template and data input, AI can do it faster and more efficiently than us mere mortals. But what about in-depth analysis, political commentary, satire, opinion pieces? AI isn’t yet up to the task.

Perhaps some groups of news readers will choose to opt out of machine-curated news in favour of something with a little more human touch. If the recent [ACCC report into digital platforms](#) is anything to go by, there is a significant number of people who are fed up with the collection and use of their data for targeted services such as advertising and content curation. Will “curated by a human” be a selling point in the future?

The coming years will likely be dominated by conversations around the ethics and regulation of digital services, including the use of user data to fuel artificial intelligence. But this is one issue of many. We will see increasing experimentation with [voice assistance such as Siri, Google and Alexa reading the news](#). We will continue to grapple with [how to regulate tech giants Google and Facebook](#), brands that have become so integrated into the way media outlets operate.

Is this the end of human journalism?

Kindle didn't spell the end for books and radio hasn't been killed off by TV. There is likely still some time before human journalism, editing and news curation responsibility is handed over completely to a robotic reporter. However, anyone who thinks tech isn't impacting news brands is fooling themselves.