

An Evaluation of Labour and Skill Transformation in AI Augmented Newsrooms

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Abstract- Artificial intelligence (AI) has shifted from peripheral utilities to core newsroom infrastructure, assisting tasks from transcription and translation to drafting, packaging, personalisation, moderation, and analytics. This article evaluates how AI augmentation is transforming labour and skill profiles in contemporary newsrooms. Through an integrative review spanning journalism study, human-computer interaction (HCI), computer supported cooperative work (CSCW), labour economics, media law/ethics, and organisational change, it maps role recompositing across editorial, data/visual, audience, product, and engineering teams. We synthesise evidence on productivity, quality, trust, and job satisfaction; identify risks including deskilling, opacity, bias, covert automation, safety/confidentiality threats, and the erosion of entry level pathways; and propose a layered human in the loop pipeline with governance mechanisms (disclosure, review thresholds, audit trails, and provenance controls). The analysis advances a competency framework that combines beat expertise, verification craft, model literacy, workflow design, and ethical/legal fluency, and outlines policies and training pathways to align augmentation with public interest outcomes. We conclude that sustaining journalistic quality and decent work requires deliberate sociotechnical design, investment in complementary skills, and incentive realignment away from pure engagement optimisation toward metrics that value accuracy, diversity, and civic impact.

Keywords: *AI In Journalism, Newsroom Automation, Augmentation, Labour Transformation, Skills, Human-AI Collaboration, Algorithmic Accountability, Media Economics, Governance*

I. INTRODUCTION

News organisations face simultaneous pressures: revenue volatility, platform intermediation, distrust, accelerated cycles, and the need to publish across multimedia channels. AI now permeates workflows: speech-to-text accelerates transcription; translation broadens source pools; named-entity recognition and event extraction speed research; large language models (LLMs) support ideation, summarisation, and

copy refinement; generative models create visual scaffolds; recommenders and experimentation platforms optimise distribution; and moderation tools triage toxic content. Early “robot journalism” projects centred on structured domains (earnings, sports, weather). The generative turn moved automation from back-office efficiency to front-stage creativity, raising questions about authorship, accountability, and labour design.

The debate has matured from replacement anxiety to the practicalities of augmentation: Which tasks are substituted versus complemented? What hybrid roles emerge? How do quality and trust fare under human-AI collaboration? What governance and training ensure AI serves public-interest journalism? This article offers a cross-disciplinary synthesis and a practice-oriented framework, with a deeper focus on Nigerian and African newsroom realities alongside global evidence.

Statement of the Problem

AI adoption promises throughput gains and coverage breadth, but absent deliberate design, it risks:

- Deskilling and role erosion as routinised cognitive tasks are automated, compressing entry-level ladders.
- Quality harms via hallucinations, subtle factual drift, style homogenisation, and bias propagation.
- Trust erosion when AI involvement is undisclosed, review thresholds are lax, or optimisation targets privilege engagement over public value.
- Labour polarisation, rewarding hybrid “editor-analyst-product” profiles while precarising peripheral roles.
- Governance gaps around provenance, consent, copyright, and accountability for errors.

- Safety and confidentiality risks, including leakage of sensitive material into external systems and misuse of synthetic media.

Research Questions

1. How are tasks and roles reconfigured in AI-augmented newsrooms across editorial, data/visual, audience, product, and engineering domains?
2. Which skills complement AI affordances and which are substituted or devalued?
3. What are the observed impacts of augmentation on productivity, quality, trust, and job satisfaction?
4. How do governance choices—disclosure, review thresholds, evaluation metrics, and data policies—mediate risks and benefits?
5. What training, organisational structures, and incentive designs sustain equitable skill transformation and public-interest outcomes?

Method and Scope

We conduct an integrative, narrative review of:

- Journalism studies on automation, augmentation, and algorithmic accountability (e.g., Carlson; Dörr; Diakopoulos; Graefe), with extensions from Nigerian and African scholarship and trade press.
- HCI/CSCW on human–AI collaboration, trust calibration, and interface design (Amershi et al.; Shneiderman).
- Labour economics on task-based, skill-biased technological change (Autor; Brynjolfsson & Mitchell).
- Media law/ethics on transparency, consent, and intellectual property (Ward; SPJ; Keller & Leerssen; Samuelson), including Nigeria’s regulatory environment (NITDA, NBC, ARCON).
- Organisational scholarship and industry reports on workflow redesign and capability building (Reuters Institute; ICFJ; WAN-IFRA), plus Nigerian media-industry commentary (Media Career Development Network; Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism/CIJ-Nigeria).

This synthesis informs a conceptual model and recommendations; it does not present new field experiments but aggregates cross-domain and Nigeria-relevant evidence into newsroom-applicable insights.

Literature Review

Global foundations: Automation and augmentation in journalism

- Template-based automation in structured domains (earnings, sports, weather) scaled output without proportional staff cuts, reallocating reporters to analysis (Clerwall, 2014; Dörr, 2016; Graefe, 2016).
- Augmentation has become the modal approach: AI supports extraction, summarisation, translation, and analytics, while humans retain reporting, verification, and narrative framing (Diakopoulos, 2019; Carlson, 2015).
- Content quality studies find machine-generated briefs adequate in narrow settings but brittle under ambiguity, underscoring human review and domain expertise (Kreiss, McGregor, & Mourão, 2023).

Human–AI collaboration and decision support

- HCI guidelines emphasise appropriate reliance, transparency of limits, and iterative feedback to counter automation bias (Amershi et al., 2019; Bansal et al., 2021).
- Calibrated trust improves outcomes when interfaces communicate uncertainty and provenance; without such cues, users either ignore valid advice or over-defer to flawed outputs (Lai & Tan, 2019; Shneiderman, 2022).
- Editorial experiments show AI-assisted headline generation and A/B testing can lift click-through but risk goal drift if quality and civic value are not part of objective functions (Tandoc, 2019; Munger, 2022).

Algorithmic accountability, bias, and quality

- News recommenders can optimise engagement at the expense of diversity and civic exposure (Beam, 2014; Helberger, 2019).
- Accountability frameworks call for explainability, auditability, and shared responsibility, especially for high-stakes content (Diakopoulos, 2015; Sandvig et al., 2014).
- LLM failure modes include hallucination and subtle paraphrase errors; retrieval augmentation and enforced citation mitigate but do not eliminate risks (Kreiss et al., 2023).

Labour economics and skill change

- Task-based skill-biased technological change (SBTC) predicts substitution of routine cognitive tasks and complementarity with nonroutine analytical, social, and ethical-judgment tasks (Autor, 2015; Brynjolfsson & Mitchell, 2017).
- Journalism-specific analyses foresee polarisation: rising demand for hybrid editorial-data-product roles while entry-level rewriting tasks shrink (Nielsen, 2022; Posetti, Bell, & Brown, 2023).

Organisational change and capability building

- Effective AI adoption aligns tools with sociotechnical redesign—risk-tiered review thresholds, mission-aligned metrics, training, cross-functional teams (Susskind & Susskind, 2015; Sambasivan, Holbrook, & Birhane, 2021).
- “Translation” roles (AI editors, newsroom technologists) bridge editorial norms and technical constraints (Lewis & Usher, 2016; Coddington, 2015).

Ethics, law, and governance

- Ethical codes stress transparency, accuracy, independence, and harm minimisation; AI assistance should be disclosed when material to authorship/accountability (SPJ, 2014; Ward, 2015).
- IP/provenance debates centre on training on copyrighted news, output ownership, and fair use (Samuelson, 2017; Keller & Leerssen, 2020).

Nigeria and Africa: Localised evidence, constraints, and practice

Digital transformation baselines

- Nigerian newsrooms have navigated platform volatility, ad declines, and the rise of audience teams, with data tools adopted unevenly across legacy print, broadcast, and digital-native outlets (Ojebode, 2013; Oso, 2012). Data journalism capacity has grown through CIJ-Nigeria (PTCIJ) trainings and Code for Africa partnerships, but resource constraints persist, especially outside Lagos/Abuja.

Automation and augmentation in practice

- Nigerian outlets report using ASR/translation, transcription, and basic summarisation for speed, and spreadsheets/BI tools for dashboards; investigative units (e.g., Premium Times, ICIR) emphasise verification and OSINT, experimenting carefully with AI for research assistance under strict review (ICIR, 2023; CIJ-Nigeria training materials).
- Radio-dominant organisations (Wazobia, BBC Pidgin, local FM stations) leverage ASR/translation to expand multilingual reach; verification bottlenecks remain acute during crises and elections (Dubawa, Africa Check Nigeria briefs).

Human capacity and skills

- Nigerian journalists identify skill gaps in data analysis, verification, and AI literacy; training demand is high but often grant-dependent (Media Career Development Network; Nigerian Guild of Editors seminars). Universities are adding data/AI modules, but curricula lag industry needs (Oketunmbi, 2021; Ogundimu, 2020).

Governance, safety, and ethics

- Nigeria’s regulatory landscape intersects with AI and data handling: NBC Code (broadcast content standards), ARCON (advertising), and data-protection instruments around consent and data transfer. Editorial policies on AI disclosure are emergent; some outlets publish transparency

notes during elections, but undisclosed automation risks reputational harm in a low-trust environment.

Inequities and entry-level pathways

- “Rewrite desk” and stringer tasks—traditional on-ramps—are among the easiest to automate, potentially narrowing apprenticeships. Local reporting, court/police beats, and community correspondents remain vital pathways; time saved by AI needs reinvestment to preserve such ladders (Nwachukwu, 2022; Arogundade, 2023).

Synthesis Augmentation is the operative reality in Nigeria and across Africa, but benefits depend on governance, skill complementarity, and resourcing. Risks concentrate around opacity, bias, deskilling, and misaligned incentives. Local conditions—intermittent connectivity, multilingual audiences, limited budgets, legal ambiguity—shape adoption patterns and emphasise the need for lightweight, offline-capable, privacy-preserving tools and clear newsroom policies.

Theoretical Framework

- Task-based SBTC: AI substitutes routinised text manipulation (transcription, rough summaries, boilerplate drafting) and complements nonroutine tasks (investigation, contextual analysis, ethical judgment, interpersonal reporting), predicting role recomposition and wage dispersion (Autor, 2015).
- Human–AI collaboration: Outcomes improve when systems surface uncertainty/provenance and afford oversight; roles are explicit across observe–orient–decide–act (Amershi et al., 2019; Shneiderman, 2022).
- Public-interest journalism ethics: Accuracy, fairness, independence, and harm minimisation constrain system design/usage; disclosure, verification, and accountability remain human responsibilities (Ward, 2015; Diakopoulos, 2019).

Conceptual Model: The Human-in-the-Loop News Pipeline

Layer A: Input and enrichment

- Capture via ASR, OCR, translation; enrichment via entity linking, timelines, clustering.

- Human responsibilities: consent checks, provenance logging, sensitive-source segregation, data retention limits.

Layer B: Generation and packaging

- Drafts for briefs, bullet points, headlines, social copy; template scaffolds for data stories; alt-text.
- Human responsibilities: reporting, fact-checking, narrative structure, ethical framing; change-tracked acceptance/rejection; style/mission alignment.

Layer C: Distribution and optimisation

- Recommenders, send-time optimisation, thumbnail selection, dynamic paywalls, experiment design.
- Human responsibilities: set objectives beyond clicks (loyalty, diversity, civic weight), monitor drift/fairness, de-biasing interventions, override powers.

Layer D: Assurance and governance

- QA for factuality, bias checks, source-citation enforcement, watermarking/content credentials; audit trails.
- Human responsibilities: accountable sign-off, disclosure, corrections, model evaluation, incident response.

Role and Task Recompositing

Reporting and editing

- Substituted/assisted: transcription, preliminary summaries, basic translation, first-pass rewrites.
- Complemented: source development, investigative leads, on-the-ground verification, sensitive interviewing, contextual analysis, ethical judgments.
- New micro-roles: prompt-as-brief drafting aligned to style/policy; uncertainty annotation; claim-by-claim verification with OSINT.

Data and visuals

- Substituted/assisted: routine charts/maps, code scaffolds, alt-text; templated data briefs.
- Complemented: data model design, exploratory analysis, visual narrative, interactive explainers.
- New micro-roles: dataset stewardship, notebook/code review, synthetic imagery risk assessment, watermark detection, content-credentials management.

Audience and product

- Substituted/assisted: segmentation, churn scoring, A/B scaffolding, auto-generated variants.
- Complemented: experiment governance, metric design tying engagement to mission, inclusion/accessibility audits, editorial-product boundary setting.
- New micro-roles: recommender policy tuning (diversity/civic constraints), transparency widgets, feedback loops to desks.

Copy desks and fact-checking

- Substituted/assisted: grammar/style cleanup, link checks, consistency.
- Complemented: legal/defamation review, nuanced verification, sensitive language choices, correction management.
- New micro-roles: automated claim detection triage, alignment of model memory with verified fact libraries.

Engineering and platform

- Expanded: ML Ops, evaluation harnesses with newsroom metrics, safety guardrails, privacy-by-design; red-teaming and synthetic media detection; secure “walled-garden” models for sensitive materials.

Training and Skill Transformation

Competencies that complement AI

- Model literacy: capabilities, limits, bias/hallucination risks, uncertainty signals, evaluation dashboards.
- Verification craft: OSINT, geolocation, metadata forensics, structured note-taking for audit.
- Prompting as editorial craft: translating news judgment into reproducible instructions; reusable prompt libraries with style/ethics constraints.
- Workflow design: version control, change tracking, handoff protocols, decision logs.
- Ethical/legal fluency: disclosure rules, consent/privacy, IP/licensing, safety for sources, watermarking/content credentials.
- Cross-functional collaboration: communicating editorial values to product/engineering; understanding objective-function trade-offs.

Training pathways

- T-shaped talent: deep beat expertise plus horizontal AI/data fluency.
- Micro-credentials: AI literacy, verification/OSINT, data visualisation, experimentation ethics.
- Rotations/residencies: desk–product–data exchanges to build translators.
- Sandboxes/simulations: newsroom labs with synthetic datasets and timed drills; structured post-mortems on AI-assisted pieces.

Impacts on Productivity, Quality, Trust, and Job Satisfaction

- Productivity: Time savings on transcription, translation, summarisation, packaging; expanded routine-beat coverage (Graefe, 2016). Gains are largest where content is structured and templates are mature; bandwidth/compute constraints in Nigerian newsrooms temper peak gains.
- Quality: Mixed effects—clearer packaging and breadth gains; risks of subtle factual drift, loss of distinctive voice, and homogenisation if review is cursory (Clerwall, 2014; Diakopoulos, 2019; Kreiss et al., 2023). Nigeria-based editors report

improvements in multilingual clarity but heightened vigilance for local names/places idioms.

- Trust: Disclosure of AI assistance maintains/improves trust; covert automation and undisclosed synthetic media degrade it. Recommender transparency and quality-weighted objectives curb click-chasing perceptions (Helberger, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2024).
- Job satisfaction: Positive when AI reduces drudgery and enables depth; negative where oversight becomes low-autonomy “AI janitorial” work or when KPIs overemphasise throughput (Susskind & Susskind, 2015; Bansal et al., 2021). Nigerian journalists emphasise autonomy, safety, and recognition for verification labour.

Risks and Mitigations

- Hallucinations/factual drift: Use retrieval-augmented generation; enforce citation with clickable sources; require human sign-off above risk thresholds; instrument claim checks for names/numbers/quotes.
- Bias/representational harms: Document datasets; include counterfactual prompts; add fairness constraints to recommenders; evaluate exposure diversity; diversify evaluation panels and language coverage (e.g., Pidgin/Yorùbá/Ìgbò/Hausa).
- Deskilling/ladders: Protect craft-intensive work; pair juniors with seniors on augmented tasks; reinvest time savings in field reporting; formalise mentorship and rotations; fund local-beat fellowships.
- Covert automation/accountability: Mandate disclosure labels and byline policies reflecting human oversight; maintain internal audit logs; conduct regular public post-mortems on assisted-content errors.
- Safety/confidentiality: Prohibit uploading sensitive source material to third-party systems; operate private models for confidential workflows; enforce access controls; adopt watermarking/content credentials and detection pipelines; train staff on secure handling.

- Goal drift: Add civic-weighted objectives (exposure to watchdog/solutions pieces), diversity constraints, and guardrails against clickbait proxies; empower editorial overrides; publish metric frameworks.

Governance and Workflow Design

Policies

- AI editorial policy: permissible use cases, disclosure standards, human review thresholds by risk tier (e.g., legal/health/safety), red lines (no undisclosed synthetic quotes; no deepfake depictions of real people).
- Data/IP policy: provenance, consent, licensing; retention/deletion; segregation of sensitive materials; first-party vs. third-party model use; compliance with data-protection instruments.
- Incident response: escalation for AI-related errors; rapid corrections; learning reviews; stakeholder communications.

Infrastructure

- Prompt/version control: store prompts with content; track edits; attach confidence/source fields; integrate with CMS.
- Evaluation harnesses: newsroom metrics for factual consistency, sourcing compliance, style adherence, diversity, accessibility; lightweight/offline-capable options for low-resource contexts.
- Provenance tech: watermarking/content credentials; synthetic-media detection; dashboards for monitoring assisted content.

Org structures

- AI editor/standards lead: policy stewardship, training, audits, incident coordination.
- Cross-functional governance: editorial, product, data, legal, security; quarterly reviews of metrics, incidents, model updates.
- Labour representation: unions/works councils involved in policy, training rights,

evaluation-metric transparency, automation impact assessments.

Case Patterns (Illustrative, Nigeria-aware)

- Earnings coverage augmentation: NLG produces first drafts; editors add context on strategy/market effects; bylines disclose automation plus editor oversight; dashboards track errors (e.g., ticker misreads).
- Multilingual source integration: ASR+translation expand interviews with rural sources; bilingual editors validate idioms and proper nouns; shared glossaries reduce drift; transparency notes disclose translation assistance.
- Crisis desks: AI summarises official statements and social chatter; verification desk geolocates media; publication blocked until dual-source corroboration; synthetic-video checks documented in CMS.
- Recommender governance: adding diversity constraints and civic weighting modestly reduces raw clicks but increases time-on-public-interest articles and subscriber retention; editors monitor drift and intervene on sensitive topics (elections/insecurity).

Discussion

Augmentation, not replacement, is the centre of gravity. Its benefits are not automatic: they depend on governance and investment in complementary skills, plus incentives that keep quality and civic value visible in decisions. Three cross-cutting insights emerge:

- Complementarity must be engineered: uncertainty/provenance UI, risk-tiered checkpoints, and clear human authority reduce automation bias and error propagation.
- Hybrid skills dominate: resilient professionals combine beat depth with model/verification literacy and collaboration fluency. Training must be continuous, practice-based, and integrated into workflows—not one-off seminars.
- Equity/sustainability hinge on ladders, metrics, and voice: preserving entry routes (local beats,

courts, communities) and recognising verification/governance work in reviews counteract polarisation and burnout. In Nigeria, support for regional outlets and language diversity is central to equitable transformation.

Conclusion

AI-augmented newsrooms can expand coverage, improve accessibility, and reduce drudgery. Whether they also strengthen journalism's public mission hinges on sociotechnical choices: explicit policies and disclosure, human-in-the-loop checkpoints aligned with risk, evaluation metrics that value accuracy/diversity, and sustained investment in complementary skills. Labour transformation should be designed, not incidental—upholding decent work and public-interest reporting. With governance foregrounding accountability and training that equips journalists as sense-makers and stewards of provenance, AI can be a force multiplier for quality rather than a shortcut to spectacle.

Recommendations

Editors and newsroom leaders

- Adopt an AI editorial policy with risk-tiered human review thresholds, disclosure standards, and red lines (ban undisclosed synthetic media; require citations for AI-assisted factual claims).
- Reinvest time savings in field reporting, source development, and explanatory/solutions journalism; align KPIs to civic impact as well as reach.
- Create an AI editor/standards function; run quarterly audits on assisted content (factuality, bias, sourcing, disclosure); publish summary findings.

Journalists

- Build T-shaped competency: deepen beat expertise; develop model literacy and advanced verification (OSINT, geolocation, forensics); document decisions for audit.
- Use a verification checklist on AI-assisted drafts: confirm names/numbers/quotes; validate

links/provenance; label uncertainties; never let AI “fill” unknowns.

Product and engineering

- Implement evaluation harnesses with newsroom-relevant metrics and calibration datasets; surface uncertainty/provenance in UI; log human decisions.
- Add diversity and civic-weight constraints to recommenders; expose “why am I seeing this?” explanations; monitor exposure fairness and mitigate drift.

HR/training institutions

- Offer micro-credentials in AI literacy, verification, data visualisation, experimentation ethics; institutionalise rotations between desks and product/data teams.
- Recognise verification, governance, and corrections in performance reviews; reward accuracy and public value, not only throughput.

Unions/works councils

- Negotiate training rights, transparency in evaluation metrics, and consultation on automation changes; set guardrails for surveillance/productivity tracking.
- Establish confidential reporting channels for covert automation or unsafe practices.

Regulators/funders

- Encourage transparency standards for AI-assisted content and synthetic-media provenance; fund training and shared verification infrastructure for smaller/regional outlets.
- Clarify IP/data-provenance rules for model training and outputs that respect journalism’s economic base while enabling innovation.

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