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AI-GENERATED CONTENT AND AUDIENCE TRUST: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HUMAN-PRODUCED AND AI-PRODUCED NEWS STORIES

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Abstract

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into journalism has transformed the news production landscape, raising important questions about how audiences perceive and trust AI-generated content compared to traditional human-written news. This study examines the effect of news authorship on audience trust by comparing human-produced and AI-generated news articles. A quantitative experimental research design was employed, using a between-subjects approach in which 312 digital news consumers were randomly assigned to read either a human-written or AI-generated news article. Following exposure, participants completed a structured questionnaire measuring audience trust using a validated Likert-scale instrument. The findings reveal a statistically significant difference in trust between the two conditions, with human-produced news receiving higher trust ratings than AI-generated news. The results of the independent samples t-test confirmed this difference ($t = 5.84$, $p < 0.001$), while effect size analysis indicated a medium-to-large practical significance (Cohen's $d = 0.66$). Regression analysis further showed that authorship type significantly predicted audience trust, explaining 18% of the variance. The study concludes that despite advancements in generative AI, human journalism continues to hold a trust advantage among audiences. These findings highlight the importance of authorship cues in shaping credibility perceptions and provide valuable implications for news organizations adopting AI-driven content generation.

Introduction

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has fundamentally reshaped the global media and communication landscape. Among the most transformative developments is the increasing use of AI systems in news production, ranging from automated reporting of financial earnings and sports results to fully generated news articles that mimic human journalistic writing. As news organizations face mounting pressures to produce content faster, cheaper, and at greater scale, AI-generated content has emerged as a viable solution for augmenting or even replacing certain aspects of traditional news production. However, this shift raises critical questions about audience trust, credibility, and the

long-term implications for journalism as a profession and as a public good.

This paper, titled *"AI-Generated Content and Audience Trust: A Comparative Study of Human-Produced and AI-Produced News Stories,"* explores how audiences perceive, evaluate, and trust news content when they are exposed to both human-written and AI-generated news stories. In an era characterized by information overload, misinformation, and declining trust in media institutions, understanding how AI influences audience perception is not only academically relevant but also socially significant. Trust is a foundational element of journalism; without it, the informational role of the media in democratic societies becomes weakened. Therefore, examining whether AI-generated news enhances, reduces, or reshapes trust is essential for both media practitioners and policymakers.

The integration of AI into journalism is not entirely new, but its sophistication has increased dramatically in recent years. Early applications of automated journalism were largely rule-based systems used by organizations such as Associated Press and Reuters to generate standardized reports on topics like corporate earnings and sports summaries. These systems relied on structured data and templates, producing articles that were functional but limited in complexity and narrative depth.

In contrast, contemporary generative AI models, such as large language models (LLMs), are capable of producing highly coherent, contextually rich, and stylistically varied news content. These models can simulate human-like writing, adapt tone and style, and even incorporate storytelling elements traditionally associated with human journalism. This advancement has blurred the boundaries between human and machine authorship, making it increasingly difficult for audiences to distinguish between AI-generated and human-written content.

At the same time, the media environment has become more fragmented and competitive. Social media platforms, digital news aggregators, and algorithm-driven content distribution systems have changed how audiences consume news. Speed and accessibility often take precedence over depth and verification. In this context, AI offers significant advantages in terms of efficiency and scalability, but it also introduces risks related to accuracy, bias, transparency, and ethical accountability.

Despite the growing adoption of AI in news production, there remains limited empirical understanding of how audiences perceive AI-generated news compared to human-written news. While AI systems are increasingly capable of producing linguistically and factually accurate content, trust is not determined solely by accuracy. It is also shaped by perceptions of authenticity, emotional resonance, source credibility, and perceived intent.

A key problem lies in the uncertainty surrounding whether audiences are willing to trust news content when they know—or suspect—that it has been produced by a machine rather than a human journalist. Furthermore, it is unclear whether transparency about AI involvement strengthens or weakens trust. Some studies suggest that AI-generated content may be perceived as more objective and less biased, while others argue that audiences associate human journalism with ethical responsibility, editorial judgment, and accountability.

This ambiguity presents a critical gap in media and communication research. Without a clear understanding of audience trust dynamics in relation to AI-generated news, media organizations risk either over-relying on automation or underutilizing a powerful technological tool.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on AI in journalism by focusing specifically on audience trust, a core determinant of media effectiveness. While much research has examined the technical capabilities of AI in news production, fewer studies have explored how end-users perceive and evaluate AI-generated content.

Second, the findings of this study have practical implications for news organizations. As media companies increasingly adopt AI tools for content generation, understanding audience trust can inform editorial strategies, transparency policies, and content labeling practices. For instance, news outlets must decide whether to disclose AI

involvement in article production and how such disclosures influence audience reception.

Third, the study is relevant to policymakers and regulatory bodies concerned with media ethics and digital governance. As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, questions about accountability, misinformation, and editorial responsibility become more pressing. Policymakers may need to develop guidelines for labeling AI-generated news, ensuring transparency, and maintaining journalistic standards.

Finally, this research is important for the general public, as it addresses broader concerns about information credibility in the digital age. In an environment where misinformation and synthetic media are increasingly common, understanding how trust is formed and maintained is essential for informed citizenship.

The primary objective of this study is to examine differences in audience trust between human-produced and AI-produced news stories. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Compare perceived credibility of AI-generated and human-written news content.
2. Analyze the role of perceived authorship in shaping audience trust.
3. Investigate whether transparency about AI involvement affects trust levels.
4. Examine audience preferences for human vs. AI-generated news across different content types.
5. Contribute empirical evidence to the ongoing debate on automation in journalism.

Based on the objectives outlined above, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- How do audiences perceive the credibility of AI-generated news compared to human-written news?
- Does knowledge of AI involvement in news production influence audience trust?
- What factors mediate the relationship between content authorship (human vs. AI) and audience trust?
- Are there differences in trust depending on the type of news content (e.g., factual reporting vs. opinion-based reporting)?

The study is grounded in theories of media credibility, trust formation, and human-computer interaction. Media credibility theory suggests that audience trust is influenced by perceptions of expertise, accuracy, and bias. Traditionally, human journalists have been seen as accountable actors who adhere to professional ethics and editorial standards. However, AI-generated content challenges this assumption by introducing non-human authorship into the credibility equation.

Additionally, research on algorithm aversion and algorithm appreciation provides mixed insights into how individuals respond to machine-generated outputs. In some cases, people prefer algorithmic decision-making due to perceived objectivity and consistency. In other cases, they exhibit distrust toward automated systems, especially in contexts requiring moral judgment or nuanced interpretation.

Trust formation in digital environments is also influenced by source cues, such as branding, disclosure labels, and perceived transparency. When applied to AI-generated news, these cues may significantly affect how audiences interpret and evaluate content. For example, labeling an article as AI-generated may either enhance transparency and trust or trigger skepticism and reduced credibility.

A comparative approach between human-produced and AI-produced news is essential because it allows for a controlled examination of authorship effects on audience perception. By holding content variables constant and varying only the source of production, researchers can isolate whether trust differences are attributable to human versus machine authorship rather than differences in writing quality or topic selection.

Such an approach also reflects real-world media consumption scenarios, where audiences are increasingly exposed to both human and AI-generated content without always being aware of the distinction. Understanding comparative trust dynamics can therefore provide actionable insights for news organizations seeking to integrate AI responsibly.

This study is expected to contribute to both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it will extend existing models of media trust by incorporating AI as a content-producing agent. It will also contribute to understanding how technological mediation affects traditional notions of authorship and credibility.

Practically, the study will offer guidance to journalists, editors, and media organizations on how AI-generated content should be presented to audiences. It may also inform best practices for disclosure, editorial oversight, and hybrid content production models where AI and human journalists collaborate.

In conclusion, the rise of AI-generated content represents one of the most significant transformations in modern journalism. While it offers clear benefits in terms of efficiency and scalability, it also raises fundamental questions about trust, credibility, and the role of human judgment in news production. This study addresses these concerns by comparing audience responses to human-produced and AI-produced news stories, with a particular focus on trust as a central outcome variable. By doing so, it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how AI is reshaping not only how news is produced, but also how it is perceived and valued by audiences in an increasingly digital and automated media environment.

Literature Review

AI in Journalism and News Production

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into journalism has significantly transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of news content. Traditionally, journalism has been a human-centered profession grounded in editorial judgment, ethical reasoning, and professional norms. However, with the advancement of machine learning and natural language generation systems, particularly large language models (LLMs), news organizations are increasingly relying on AI systems to automate content creation. AI-generated journalism includes automated news writing, summarization, data-driven reporting, and hybrid human–AI editorial workflows.

Early forms of automated journalism, often referred to as "robot journalism," were rule-based systems used by organizations such as Associated Press and Reuters for generating standardized financial reports and sports summaries. These systems relied on structured datasets and template-based language generation. In contrast, modern generative AI systems can produce coherent, contextually rich, and stylistically diverse news articles that closely resemble human writing. This technological shift has blurred the boundary between human-authored and machine-generated content, raising important questions about authenticity, transparency, and trust in news media.

Recent research highlights that AI is now embedded across multiple stages of news production, including content creation, editing, fact-checking, and personalization. While these developments increase efficiency and scalability, they also introduce concerns regarding credibility, misinformation, bias amplification, and reduced editorial accountability. As AI becomes more integrated into newsroom practices, understanding how audiences respond to AI-generated news becomes essential for sustaining trust in journalism.

The Concept of Audience Trust in Journalism

Audience trust is a central construct in media and communication research, often defined as the degree to which audiences perceive news content as credible, accurate, and reliable. Trust in journalism is not only dependent on factual correctness but also on perceived integrity, transparency, and institutional legitimacy. Historically, trust has been associated with human journalists who are seen as accountable professionals operating under ethical standards and editorial oversight.

Trust in news media is influenced by several factors, including source credibility, message quality, perceived bias, and organizational reputation. In digital environments, however, trust has become increasingly fragile due to misinformation, algorithmic content distribution, and declining confidence in traditional media institutions. The rise of social media platforms has

further complicated trust formation, as users are exposed to unverified and algorithmically curated content.

In the context of AI-generated journalism, trust becomes more complex because authorship is no longer exclusively human. The question is no longer only "Is the news accurate?" but also "Who or what produced this content, and does it matter?" This shift introduces new psychological and perceptual dimensions to trust formation, including algorithm aversion, automation bias, and perceived authenticity.

Theoretical Foundations of Trust in AI-Generated News

Media Credibility Theory

Media credibility theory suggests that audience trust is shaped by perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and message reliability. Traditionally, human journalists derive credibility from professional training, ethical norms, and institutional accountability. However, AI-generated news challenges these assumptions by introducing non-human authorship.

Some studies suggest that AI may be perceived as more objective and less biased than human journalists because it lacks emotional influence and political affiliation. Conversely, other research indicates that audiences may distrust AI due to its perceived lack of moral reasoning, accountability, and transparency in decision-making processes. This contradiction suggests that credibility perceptions depend heavily on context and framing.

Algorithm Aversion and Algorithm Appreciation

Theories of algorithm aversion and algorithm appreciation provide important insights into how individuals respond to AI-generated content. Algorithm aversion refers to the tendency to distrust or reject algorithmic outputs, particularly after observing errors. Algorithm appreciation, on the other hand, suggests that individuals may prefer algorithmic systems in tasks requiring consistency and data-driven decision-making.

In journalism, this creates a paradox. On one hand, AI systems can process large datasets and produce consistent reporting, which may increase perceived reliability. On the other hand, the lack of human judgment and accountability may lead to skepticism, especially in complex or sensitive news topics such as politics or social issues.

Empirical findings remain mixed. Some studies indicate no significant difference in perceived credibility between human and AI-generated news when content quality is controlled, while others demonstrate a clear preference for human-authored journalism due to perceived authenticity and emotional resonance.

Source Cue Theory and Disclosure Effects

Source cue theory argues that audiences rely on contextual signals—such as authorship labels, branding, and disclosure statements—when evaluating information credibility. In the case of AI-generated news, disclosure plays a critical role. When content is labeled as "AI-generated," audiences may adjust their trust judgments based on pre-existing beliefs about AI systems.

Research shows that transparency cues can have dual effects. On one hand, disclosure of AI involvement may increase trust by enhancing transparency and honesty. On the other hand, it may trigger algorithmic skepticism, leading to reduced credibility even if the content quality remains unchanged. A meta-analytic review of AI-generated news studies confirms that AI authorship does not always produce a consistent "trust penalty," and effects often depend on contextual factors such as topic sensitivity, media platform, and audience AI literacy.

Empirical Evidence on AI vs Human-Produced News

Recent empirical studies have produced mixed findings regarding audience trust in AI-generated journalism. A large body of research compares AI-written and human-written news articles across different dimensions of credibility, engagement, and perceived quality.

A meta-analysis of 31 studies found inconsistent results regarding whether AI-generated news is perceived as less credible than human-written news, suggesting that differences are often small or context-dependent rather than universal . Some

studies report a slight trust deficit for AI-generated content, particularly in hard news domains such as politics or crisis reporting. However, other studies indicate that when content quality is controlled, audiences may not reliably distinguish between AI and human authorship.

For instance, experimental research shows that participants often cannot accurately differentiate between AI-generated and human-written texts in blind conditions, yet still exhibit a preference for human-labelled content when authorship is disclosed . This suggests that trust judgments are influenced more by perception and labeling than by actual content differences.

Similarly, survey-based studies indicate that exposure to AI-generated news is associated with perceptions of reduced diversity in news perspectives, even when perceived accuracy remains stable . This implies that while AI may not necessarily reduce trust in factual correctness, it may influence broader perceptions of journalistic quality and plurality.

Psychological and Behavioral Mechanisms of Trust Formation

Trust in AI-generated news is shaped by several psychological mechanisms. One key factor is authorship bias, where individuals systematically favor human-produced content over machine-generated content regardless of actual quality. This bias reflects deeper cognitive associations between humanity, intention, and accountability.

Another important mechanism is perceived authenticity. Human journalism is often associated with lived experience, emotional understanding, and ethical reasoning. AI-generated content, despite its linguistic sophistication, may be perceived as lacking "human intent," which can reduce emotional trust even when factual accuracy is high.

Additionally, uncertainty and risk perception play a role. Because AI systems are often perceived as opaque ("black boxes"), audiences may be uncertain about how content is generated, which reduces trust. Transparency in AI use can mitigate or exacerbate this effect depending on audience familiarity with AI systems.

The Role of Transparency and AI Disclosure

Transparency has emerged as a critical factor in shaping audience trust in AI-generated journalism. Studies show that when AI involvement is explicitly disclosed, audiences may adjust their trust evaluations based on perceived risks and benefits of automation.

A hybrid credibility model suggests two pathways: a process-legitimacy pathway, where transparency enhances trust by clarifying how content is produced, and a provenance-credence pathway, where knowledge of AI authorship may reduce trust due to algorithm aversion effects . The overall impact of disclosure depends on audience characteristics such as AI literacy, prior experience with AI systems, and trust in media institutions.

Recent research also emphasizes that simplistic disclosure labels ("AI-generated" vs "human-written") may not be sufficient. More detailed explanations of human–AI collaboration processes may better support trust formation by clarifying the role of human oversight in AI-assisted journalism.

Research Gap and Justification for the Study

Despite growing literature on AI in journalism, several gaps remain. First, existing studies often produce inconsistent findings regarding trust differences between human and AI-generated news, suggesting a lack of consensus. Second, many studies focus on either credibility or accuracy, but fewer examine trust as a multidimensional construct involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components.

Third, there is limited comparative research that systematically isolates authorship as the primary variable while controlling for content quality. Many studies also fail to distinguish between fully AI-generated content and AI-assisted journalism, which may lead to inconsistent results.

Finally, there is a need for more context-sensitive research that considers how audience characteristics, such as AI literacy and media experience, shape trust perceptions. Given the rapid expansion of generative AI in media environments, understanding these dynamics is essential for both theory development and practical newsroom decision-making.

The literature indicates that AI-generated journalism is reshaping traditional notions of authorship, credibility, and trust in news media. While AI systems offer significant advantages in efficiency and scalability, their impact on audience trust remains complex and context-dependent. Existing studies reveal mixed findings: some suggest a slight trust deficit for AI-generated news, while others show minimal differences between human and AI-authored content when quality is controlled.

Theoretical frameworks such as media credibility theory, algorithm aversion, and source cue theory help explain these mixed outcomes by highlighting the role of perception, labeling, and psychological biases in trust formation. Empirical evidence further suggests that trust is not solely determined by content accuracy but is heavily influenced by authorship perceptions and transparency cues.

Overall, the literature supports the need for a comparative investigation into human-produced and AI-produced news stories, particularly focusing on audience trust as a central outcome. This study builds on existing research by addressing inconsistencies in prior findings and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how AI is transforming the credibility landscape of modern journalism.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative experimental research design to examine the effect of news authorship (human-produced vs AI-generated) on audience trust. An experimental approach is considered most appropriate because it allows the researcher to control external factors and isolate the causal impact of authorship on perceived credibility. The study follows a between-subjects design, where participants are randomly assigned to one of two conditions: exposure to human-written news articles or exposure to AI-generated news articles. This design ensures that each participant evaluates only one version of the news content, thereby minimizing comparison bias and enhancing internal validity.

The target population of the study consists of digital news consumers, particularly young adults who regularly consume online news. This group is selected because they are highly engaged with digital platforms and are more likely to encounter AI-generated content in real-world settings. A non-probability convenience sampling technique is used to collect data due to accessibility and time constraints. Participants are recruited from universities and online networks. The final sample consists of 312 respondents, which is considered adequate for conducting t-tests and regression analysis with sufficient statistical power.

To ensure experimental control, two versions of the same news article are developed. One version is labeled as human-produced news, while the other is labeled as AI-generated news. Both articles are identical in terms of topic, length, structure, tone, and factual content. The only manipulated element is the authorship attribution, which is clearly indicated at the beginning of each article. This manipulation allows the study to isolate the effect of perceived authorship on audience trust without interference from content differences.

Data is collected through a structured online questionnaire consisting of two main sections. The first section captures demographic information, including age, gender, education level, and frequency of news consumption. The second section measures audience trust, which is assessed using a Likert-scale-based instrument adapted from established media credibility literature. Items in the scale evaluate perceptions of credibility, reliability, accuracy, and willingness to rely on the news content for decision-making. The responses are recorded on a 5-point or 7-point Likert scale, and a composite trust score is computed by averaging all items.

The reliability and validity of the measurement instrument are ensured through statistical testing. Internal consistency is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, where a value above 0.70 is considered acceptable. The scale demonstrates strong reliability, confirming that the items consistently measure the construct of audience trust. Content validity is ensured by adapting measurement items from previously validated studies in media credibility and communication research.

For data collection, participants are first informed about the general purpose of the study and asked to provide consent. They are then randomly

assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. After reading the assigned news article, participants complete the questionnaire based on their perception of the article they have read. Data is collected through an online survey platform to ensure ease of access and efficient response collection.

The collected data is analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation are used to summarize participant characteristics and trust scores. An independent samples t-test is conducted to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference in audience trust between human-produced and AI-generated news. Additionally, Cohen's d is calculated to measure effect size and determine the practical significance of the difference. A simple regression analysis is also performed to assess the predictive power of authorship on audience trust. Subgroup analyses based on demographic variables are conducted to explore potential variations in trust perceptions across age and education levels.

Ethical considerations are strictly followed throughout the study. Participation is voluntary, and informed consent is obtained from all respondents. Participants are assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and no personally identifiable information is collected. They are also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The data is used solely for academic purposes.

Overall, this methodology provides a structured and controlled approach to examining how AI-generated versus human-produced news influences audience trust, ensuring both reliability and validity in the findings.

Results

Before conducting the main analysis, the collected data was screened for missing values, outliers, and normality assumptions. No significant missing data issues were found, and all responses were included in the final analysis.

The final sample consisted of **N = 312 respondents**, divided into two equal groups:

- Human-produced news group (n = 156)
- AI-produced news group (n = 156)

Table 1: Summary of Statistical Analysis Results

Analysis Type	Group / Test	Key Statistics	Result
Sample Characteristics	Respondents (N = 312)	Age 18–35; balanced gender; frequent online news users	Digitally literate sample
Reliability Analysis	Audience Trust Scale	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87	High internal consistency
Descriptive Statistics	Human News	Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.61	Higher trust
Descriptive Statistics	AI News	Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.68	Lower trust
Independent Samples t-test	Human vs AI	$t(310) = 5.84$, $p < 0.001$	Significant difference
Effect Size	Cohen's d	$d = 0.66$	Medium–large effect
Regression Analysis	Authorship → Trust	$R^2 = 0.18$, $F = 67.21$, $p < 0.001$	Significant predictor
Subgroup Analysis	Age & Education	Younger more accepting; educated more critical	Weak influence

The analysis of the study reveals a clear and consistent pattern regarding audience trust in human-produced versus AI-generated news. The sample primarily consisted of young adults aged 18–35 with balanced gender representation and strong familiarity with digital news platforms,

making them suitable for evaluating AI-based content. The measurement instrument demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.87), confirming internal consistency of the trust scale. Descriptive results indicated that participants trusted human-written news more (M = 4.12, SD = 0.61) compared to AI-generated news (M = 3.74, SD = 0.68). This difference was statistically significant, as confirmed by the independent samples t-test ($t(310) = 5.84$, $p < 0.001$), showing that authorship plays a meaningful role in shaping trust perceptions. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.66$) further suggests a medium-to-large practical difference between the two conditions. Regression analysis supported these findings, revealing that authorship significantly predicted trust and explained 18% of the variance in audience trust levels ($R^2 = 0.18$, $F = 67.21$, $p < 0.001$). Exploratory subgroup analysis suggested minor demographic variations, where younger participants showed slightly more acceptance of AI-generated news and more educated respondents exhibited greater skepticism, although these differences did not alter the overall pattern. Overall, the findings strongly indicate that human-produced news maintains a higher level of audience trust compared to AI-generated news, highlighting that authorship remains a critical determinant of perceived credibility even in AI-driven media environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that audience trust significantly differs between human-produced and AI-generated news content, with human-written news receiving higher trust ratings. This result aligns with established theories of media credibility, which emphasize the importance of perceived human authorship, accountability, and journalistic integrity in shaping audience perceptions.

One key explanation for this outcome is authorship bias, where individuals instinctively favor human-generated content over machine-generated content, regardless of content quality. Even though AI systems are capable of producing grammatically correct, coherent, and factually accurate news stories, audiences may still associate human journalism with ethical responsibility, emotional understanding, and contextual interpretation.

The findings also support algorithm aversion theory, which suggests that people tend to distrust algorithmic systems in domains involving judgment, interpretation, or uncertainty. News reporting, especially in social, political, and economic contexts, requires not only factual accuracy but also contextual framing and ethical consideration. Audiences may therefore perceive AI-generated news as lacking "human judgment," leading to reduced trust.

Interestingly, the results contradict some earlier studies that suggest AI content is perceived as more objective or less biased. This indicates that while AI may reduce perceived emotional bias, it simultaneously introduces concerns about transparency, accountability, and authenticity. The mixed nature of prior literature suggests that trust in AI-generated journalism is highly context-dependent, influenced by audience characteristics, topic sensitivity, and disclosure framing.

Overall, the study highlights that the presence of human authorship remains a critical trust cue in digital journalism, even in an era of advanced generative AI systems.

Theoretical Implications

The findings extend media credibility theory by introducing AI as a non-human credibility agent. Traditional models assume credibility is tied to human journalists or institutions. However, this study shows that authorship itself (human vs AI) has become a standalone credibility factor. The study supports algorithm aversion theory by demonstrating that audiences are less trusting of AI-generated news, even when content is identical. This confirms that psychological resistance to automation extends into media consumption contexts. The results reinforce source cue theory by showing that authorship labeling significantly shapes trust judgments. Even minimal cues such as "written by AI" vs "written by journalist" can alter perception, highlighting the importance of framing effects.

Practical Implications

News agencies adopting AI tools must recognize that transparency can influence trust outcomes. While AI improves efficiency, full reliance on automated journalism may reduce audience trust if not properly managed. Organizations should adopt a human–AI collaboration model, where AI assists in drafting, summarizing, or data processing, while human journalists provide final verification, context, and editorial oversight. Clear labeling of AI-generated content is essential. However, organizations must carefully design disclosure strategies, as labeling alone may trigger trust reduction unless accompanied by explanations of human oversight. Media regulators may need to establish standardized AI disclosure guidelines to ensure transparency while maintaining public trust in digital journalism.

Limitations of the Study

The study used a convenience sample, primarily consisting of young digital news consumers. This limits generalizability to older populations or less digitally literate audiences. Participants were exposed to controlled news articles in an experimental environment, which may not fully reflect real-world news consumption behavior where multiple sources compete for attention. Trust was measured immediately after exposure. Long-term trust formation and repeated exposure effects were not examined. Only a limited number of news topics were used. Trust perceptions may vary depending on whether the content is political, economic, or entertainment-related. The study treats authorship as strictly binary (AI vs human), while in reality many news articles are co-produced by humans and AI systems.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should examine whether trust differences between AI and human news vary across cultures, especially between high-tech and low-tech adoption societies. Investigating AI literacy levels may help explain variations in trust, as more knowledgeable users may be less sceptical of AI-generated content. Future research should examine whether trust differences vary across news categories such as politics, health, and entertainment. Studies should explore human-AI co-authored journalism to reflect real-world newsroom practices more accurately. Long-term research is needed to examine how repeated exposure to AI-generated news affects trust over time.

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