



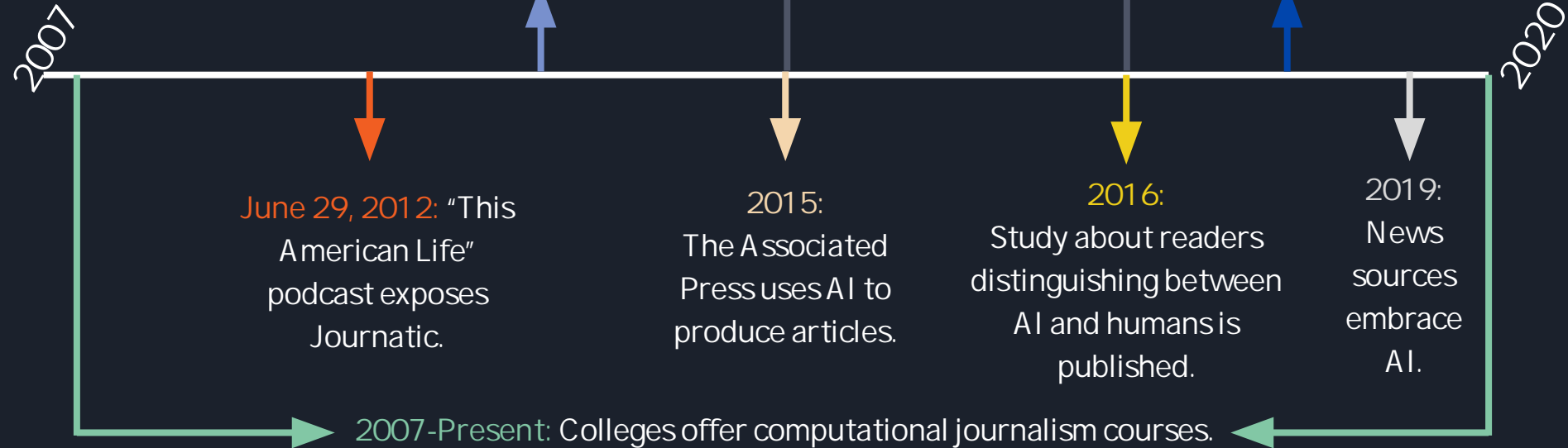
By Emily Krivograd



Argument

While technology's influence, including the use of artificial intelligence, in the field of journalism is meant to aid journalists and provide readers with quality news, it can create greater difficulties for journalists and change the way people consume their news, whether they know it or not. Journalists and news sources should move forward with caution when using artificial intelligence when producing news articles.

Timeline





BACKGROUND



June 2012: Journatic's Unethical Practices

The "This American Life" podcast exposed Journatic, a "news site" for claiming that their journalists were reporting on "hyper-local news" when, often times, the journalist did not even live in the same town-or even country.

But first, a little background on "This American Life" (TAL):

Just earlier the same year, the podcast's "Mr. Daisey and the Apple Factory" episode was exposed as fake news. The source, Mike Daisey, fabricated his story and little fact-checking was performed by the TAL team.

Why does this matter?

As a news source reporting on the spread of Journatic's unethical practices, this is ironic.

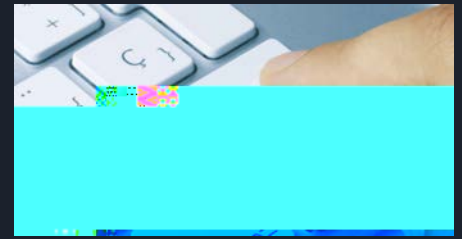


What Journatic Does:



2013: Journatic Rebrands

To preserve the reputation of Journatic after the TAL podcast, the company worked with Tribune executives and Hawthorne Strategy Group to rebrand as Locality Labs (or LocalLabs-they don't go by one name) and re-establish their credibility. o



Journatic represents the growing demand for quantity over quality.

While media companies face financial issues, they can turn to a company like Journatic to produce cheap, easy content.

Operations like these separate the work from the worker, so no one knows or cares who is producing the article.

News sites also want to produce content on a mass scale.


According to Nicole S. Cohen, communications professor at the University of Toronto, content farms use search-based algorithms to guide editorial policy for freelancers.

The use of metadata and algorithms lower production costs.

In the digital age, a news source's audience signals what kind of journalism will get the most attention, and therefore, what is produced.



2007-Present: Colleges Offer Classes in



More technology in the field of journalism, however, also sets the scene for a grim future of those who want to pursue careers in journalism.

While companies experiment with new ways to profit online, some journalists face mass layoffs.

New sources' technological tools and methods for reaching and keeping a wider audience runs the risk of making journalism into a commodity.






2015: The Associated Press Generates Articles Using Algorithms

In a Comedy Central episode of The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, journalist Hasan Minhaj explored the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and journalism.

In the video, Lou Ferrara, the chief content editor for the Associated Press, offered information on how they, a reputable source of news, are using AI and robot journalists to generate articles.

Additionally, he detailed that they believe robot journalists eliminate bias and only report factual information.

In other words, instead of humans writing a news article, a robot writes it.




The Associated Press maintains that by using AI in producing news stories, they are helping their journalists.

The use of AI started when their Business News Desk began automating stories about corporate earnings. Reporters were spending time on writing articles reporting earnings, numbers, and other factual, yet repetitive information. By using AI, AP's reporters can spend more time working on "higher-impact journalism" (Associated Press).

AP's AI Strategy:



The screenshot shows a presentation slide titled "AI Strategy" with the following text: "AP looks for ways to deploy artificial intelligence in everything we do, starting with how we gather the news, moving through the production process and, ultimately, how we distribute news to customers." Below this text is a large, colorful, abstract graphic that appears to be a stylized map or data visualization. To the right of the graphic, the word "Newsgathering" is visible, followed by the text "AP deploys a variety of news gathering tools to enable...".



2015-16: Locality Labs Owns Partisan Local News Sites

Websites appearing to belong to local news organizations were actually all operating under the same company, Locality Labs, LLC. as well as an organization called Metric Media.

For Metric Media, about three dozen of fake local news sites had appeared in Michigan, totalling to about 200 sites. Such sites operate under names like the *East Michigan News*, *Hickory Sun*, and *Grand Canyon Times*.

Out of all of these stories appearing on local news sites, only about 100 titles had the bylines of human reporters.





Readers already trust news sources as a reliable way to understand candidates in an election. If sites masquerading as news contain false information, readers are misinformed and the election can be swayed.

The general media (including both biased news and reputable news sources) may gain the reputation that they are trying to misrepresent information about:



- Certain candidates
- Limited government
- Tort reform
- Labor unions



2016: German Study on Computer-Generated Articles

Four professors teaching in Germany ran an experiment in which they presented articles that were either algorithmically created or written by a human journalist to an audience.

- 986 participants


- Participants rated two articles on credibility, readability, and journalistic expertise

- Article topics ranged from sports to finance

While technology had, at this point, assisted human journalists with research for awhile, this study acknowledged that the division of labor from humans to algorithms had changed.



The researchers found that participants rated articles written by bots as having higher credibility.



The study also discussed that while AI can reduce costs for news sources and give journalists more time to work on investigative pieces, many news sources believe that the AI-generated pieces will not contain bias, but will only report the facts. But is this true?


Put simply, no.

While AI is less error-prone, does not tire, and will not overlook facts, they can still have biases written into their algorithms by developers.

Additionally, the sources that the algorithms may use to produce an article may not be correct, so a computer-generated article can still spread misinformation.



2018: Threat of Legal Liability



The authors of the article also mentioned that most news platforms, such as radio, were not regulated according to the First Amendment until it reached wide societal use.

Additionally, proving actual malice when bots are responsible for writing a news article can be nearly impossible, as they do not have desires or agendas against a plaintiff.

Essentially, it may be years until legal regulations impact bots and news writing.





2019: News Sources Are Using AI

According to Forbes writer Nicole Martin, many news sources say that this AI technology is meant to assist journalists, not replace them.

Forbes uses Bertie, an AI-powered content management system that suggests content and articles.

The Washington Post released Heliograf, which generates articles from quantitative data (which is useful when writing pieces about financial statistics).

Bloomberg Businessweek uses Cyborg for content creation and management, making roughly a third of the content published with the help of some form of automated technology.



News Source's Perspective:

The use of AI can free up 20% of a journalist's time.

AI will help, but not replace reporters.

Using AI to do research will drive costs down.

Reporters have a better style to their writing, something a robot cannot mimic.

Reporter's Perspective:

Newspapers have already laid off reporters due to high costs.

Journalists still have to spend time writing several versions of a story to account for different outcomes when the system creates an article.

Reporters attempting to find work in the field and may have started by writing lower risk, short pieces now have their work generated by AI.

CONCLUSION

The background features a series of dark grey, parallel lines that create a sense of depth and perspective, receding towards the right. Overlaid on these lines is a stylized chevron shape. The upper portion of the chevron is a light green color, and the lower portion is a vibrant blue. The overall aesthetic is modern and minimalist.



What Does Technology's Growing Influence on Journalism Mean?

News sources have the choice to either embrace AI or they could monitor the AI to make sure generated articles are accurate and there are still available positions for incoming reporters.

Journalists can use the technology to help them, but should fact check articles to make sure all information is accurate and produced ethically. They also may have to become more technologically literate to stay marketable.

Readers may not be aware of whether a bot or a human is writing the news articles they read. As the use of technology in journalism grows, they may develop or grow some level skepticism as to if the information they receive is correct.







Writer's Review

To view the accompanying writer's review, [click here](#).