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Recommended Citation

Gregory Gondwe (2025) Is AI Bias in Journalism Inherently Bad? Relationship Between Bias, Objectivity, and Meaning in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. Harvard: Berkman Klein Centre.

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Is AI Bias in Journalism Inherently Bad? Relationship Between Bias, Objectivity, and Meaning in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in journalism has led to debates about the impact of AI bias, with critics arguing that AI systems perpetuate societal stereotypes and inequalities. Critics argue that AI systems, influenced by historical data and human biases, may exacerbate stereotypes, marginalize underrepresented voices, and skew news coverage, thereby reinforcing societal inequalities. However, this article contends that bias, while often considered detrimental, is an inherent aspect of journalism that has shaped news production for centuries. Drawing on a historical perspective, the article explores the relationship between bias and journalistic storytelling, arguing that bias can, if managed ethically, enhance the richness and relevance of news narratives. Therefore, the paper advocates for a balanced approach, recognizing AI's potential to identify and mitigate harmful biases, while preserving the human agency that makes journalism engaging and meaningful. In doing so, it questions the pursuit of a "perfect" AI system and urges the media industry to embrace bias in both AI-driven and human journalism.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Bias in Journalism, Media Ethics, Stereotypes, AI and Society, Journalistic Objectivity*

Introduction

The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalism has not only revolutionized newsrooms but has also sparked a rigorous debate about the implications of bias within these technologies. As AI systems continue to evolve and play an increasing role in content creation, data analysis, and audience engagement, concerns about bias and fairness are becoming more pronounced. Critics argue that AI's reliance on large datasets can perpetuate and exacerbate existing societal biases, reinforcing stereotypes and disproportionately marginalizing underrepresented groups. In particular, AI's generative capabilities in newsrooms—creating, curating, and editing content—have led to concerns about the reinforcement of harmful biases, particularly regarding gender, race, and socio-economic class.

Scholars such as Shin, (2024), Shin et. al. (2022), Datta, Whitmore, & Nwankpa (2021), and Smith, (2022) have raised alarms about how AI could distort the information ecosystem by amplifying biases in several ways. According to these scholars, when AI systems are trained on data that reflects societal biases—such as those related to race, gender, or socio-economic status—these biases are often perpetuated and magnified in the content generated or curated by AI. Algorithms used in news aggregators or social media platforms can create "filter bubbles," where users are exposed only to content that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs, thus further polarizing opinions. Additionally, generative AI models can produce biased language or overly simplified narratives, which perpetuate harmful stereotypes and marginalize underrepresented groups. These systems can also reinforce existing power structures by prioritizing mainstream narratives and sidelining diverse or alternative voices, leading to a skewed portrayal of events. As a result, AI in journalism

risks eroding public trust in the media, distorting the understanding of important issues, and fostering growing skepticism about the impartiality of news. Mhlambi (2020) and Gondwe (2023, 2024) have also emphasized that unchecked AI in media settings risks perpetuating inequalities, particularly in the context of race and gender, thus impacting journalism's ability to provide a fair and balanced portrayal of society.

On the other hand, there are voices that argue that the concerns surrounding AI bias are often overstated. Proponents of AI in journalism assert that bias is inherent in all forms of storytelling and journalism, human or machine (Datta, Whitmore, & Nwankpa, 2021). They argue that AI's imperfections reflect those of the humans who create and train these systems. The idea that AI can be trained to eliminate bias entirely may not only be unrealistic but could also threaten the human aspects of journalism that make it engaging and relatable. Many scholars contend that while bias, when unchecked, can be harmful, bias itself is not inherently detrimental to journalistic practice. In fact, bias—if thoughtfully and ethically managed—can be an essential tool for creating compelling narratives and providing depth and context in storytelling. Against the backdrop, the paper aims to critically examine the role of bias in AI-driven journalism, acknowledging both the risks and opportunities that bias presents, while advocating for a more balanced approach to AI integration in newsrooms.

The Role of Bias in Journalism: A Historical Perspective

Bias in journalism is far from a new phenomenon. In fact, it has been a long-standing feature of news production, reflecting the subjective nature of human storytelling. The concept of journalistic objectivity—often seen as a key pillar of responsible reporting—has been under scrutiny for much of journalism's history. From the early days of print media to modern-day newsrooms, journalists have always faced the challenge of making editorial choices that inevitably reflect their own biases, whether conscious or unconscious. Bias, in this context, is a lens through which the world is interpreted, contextualized, and narrated. For example, the earliest newspapers in the United States, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, were frequently accused of political bias in their editorial decisions. These newspapers often reflected the political leanings and ideological preferences of their owners or editorial teams. Even when journalism aspired to objectivity, political affiliations and societal perspectives shaped coverage, framing the public discourse in specific ways (McChesney, 2008). In the 19th century, newspapers like *The New York World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer, were notorious for sensationalizing the news, particularly with stories meant to stir public emotion and push political agendas. This type of journalism, known as yellow journalism, was built on the biases of its creators and served both to entertain and inform its audience.

In the current media landscape, bias continues to be an integral aspect of journalism. However, with the rise of AI, there is increasing concern about how these biases are transferred to machines. AI systems, particularly those designed to automate content creation or curation, are trained on vast datasets that reflect human biases, such as racial, gender, or political prejudices. This introduces the possibility that AI models may reinforce existing inequalities in the media. For instance, generative AI models such as GPT and others, when fed biased data, may perpetuate harmful stereotypes about certain groups or present skewed representations of reality. Critics argue that this reinforces the systemic issues already present in society, with AI merely reflecting the same biases as the human agents that create it (Coeckelbergh, 2020; Keles, 2023; Ntoutsis, 2020).

Bias as a Tool for Storytelling

Despite the valid concerns regarding AI's potential for reinforcing biases, the reality is that bias, when properly handled, has long been an important tool in journalism. The human element of journalism is inherently subjective—what is considered newsworthy, how a story is framed, and which voices are included, are all influenced by the biases of journalists, editors, and media organizations. As Gaye Tuchman (1973) argues in *Making News*, journalism is a social construction that is shaped by the values, beliefs, and interests of those who produce it. This does not mean that journalists are free to manipulate facts; rather, bias allows them to interpret and contextualize the facts in ways that make the story more meaningful to the audience. The power of bias as a tool for storytelling is evident in investigative journalism, where journalists actively seek to uncover hidden truths or injustices. This type of journalism often operates with a bias toward exposing corruption, inequality, or societal problems. For example, the Watergate scandal, which was uncovered by journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, is a prime example of investigative journalism driven by a bias toward holding those in power accountable. Their reporting, while subject to personal and ideological biases, ultimately led to a historic political shift, demonstrating how bias, when used ethically, can be a force for social good (Alexander, 1990; Perloff & Kumar, 2022).

In AI-driven journalism, bias can similarly be employed to enrich storytelling and highlight underrepresented issues. AI systems, if designed with sensitivity to ethical considerations, can help journalists identify important, yet overlooked, topics. AI's ability to analyze large datasets and identify trends or patterns that human journalists might miss presents an opportunity to expand coverage and bring attention to underreported stories. For example, AI could be used to track emerging issues in global health, environmental concerns, or social justice movements, providing journalists with insights that would be difficult to obtain through traditional reporting methods. Moreover, AI-driven journalism can be used to amplify marginalized voices that have often been left out of mainstream media narratives. By highlighting these voices, AI can foster a more inclusive media landscape that reflects the diversity of human experiences. Rather than seeing AI as an enemy of bias, it should be viewed as a tool that can enhance journalistic practices and help bring greater nuance and depth to stories.

The Pursuit of Perfection: The "Perfect AI" Dilemma

The aspiration to eliminate bias in AI journalism has become a widely accepted goal, with many seeing it as essential for upholding the integrity and fairness of the media. However, the pursuit of creating a "perfect" AI—one that can generate content free of any human bias—raises several complex ethical concerns. While the idea of an unbiased AI system that can produce objective, neutral, and fair content seems appealing, critics argue that it overlooks the essential role of human elements in journalism. These elements, such as emotional resonance, cultural context, and human judgment, are what make stories compelling and relatable to audiences. As Williams-Ceci, Macy, & Naaman (2024) observes, the drive to create a perfectly neutral AI could strip journalism of its humanity, potentially reducing it to a cold, impersonal exercise in information delivery.

The pursuit of a flawless, unbiased AI system may also overlook the reality that bias is an inherent aspect of how humans process and interpret information. Every piece of data that is input into an AI system reflects the biases of the people who generated it, whether consciously or unconsciously. For instance, the language used in training datasets, the selection of topics, or the framing of particular issues is shaped by cultural, social, and historical biases. Even if an AI system were designed to be "neutral," its outputs would still be influenced by the underlying data that drives the system, which is often far from unbiased. Therefore, attempting to create a completely

unbiased AI is not only unrealistic but could also result in unintended consequences that compromise the depth and richness of journalistic storytelling.

Journalism, at its core, is a human endeavor. The act of reporting, writing, and interpreting the news involves subjective choices—such as which stories to tell, which voices to amplify, and how to frame complex issues. Bias is not necessarily a flaw in this context but an essential part of what makes stories resonate with readers. It allows journalists to bring their perspectives and understanding of the world into the narrative, providing context, emotional depth, and relatability. If AI systems are designed to eliminate all forms of bias, there is a risk that they would produce content that lacks the nuance and complexity that human journalists bring to their work. This could result in sterile, uninspiring journalism that fails to engage audiences or reflect the diversity of human experience. Moreover, AI's inability to fully replicate human understanding highlights the limitations of striving for a perfect, neutral system. AI, by design, processes data without the context of lived human experience, which means it often misses out on the subtlety of human emotions, cultural nuances, and ethical considerations. These are essential for making informed, responsible decisions in journalism. For example, stories involving marginalized communities require journalists to go beyond simply reporting facts—they need to understand the cultural, historical, and emotional dimensions that shape those communities' lives. An AI system, no matter how advanced, would struggle to capture these complexities in the way a human journalist can.

There is also the issue of accountability in AI-generated journalism. As AI continues to be integrated into newsrooms, there must be clear responsibility for the content it produces. If AI is seen as the "perfect" arbiter of truth and objectivity, who is held accountable for its outputs? The risk here is that AI-generated content could be shielded from critique or scrutiny, leading to a lack of accountability in the journalistic process. This could also exacerbate the problem of misinformation or the spread of biased narratives that are embedded in the AI's training data. The focus on creating a perfectly neutral AI might also lead to a homogenization of journalistic narratives. The "perfect" AI would likely produce content based on patterns and algorithms that prioritize efficiency, standardization, and predictability. While this might increase the speed and volume of content production, it could also diminish the diversity of perspectives and voices. Journalism, when left to AI alone, might become too uniform, as the human instinct to challenge dominant narratives, question authority, and embrace diversity would be minimized. Additionally, the relentless pursuit of a bias-free AI system could have unforeseen social implications. It could reinforce the status quo by relying on conventional data sources and by prioritizing the most widely accepted views, thus stifling innovation, alternative perspectives, or the voices of dissent. Journalism is at its most dynamic when it challenges prevailing norms, uncovers hidden truths, and provides space for marginalized voices. A "perfect" AI system, in its drive for neutrality and objectivity, could suppress these vital elements of journalistic practice. Instead of striving for an unattainable "perfect" AI, the focus should be on creating AI systems that can enhance journalistic practices by identifying and mitigating harmful biases, while preserving the essential qualities of storytelling that make journalism human.

AI Bias as a Double-Edged Sword

Bias is an inherent part of how humans communicate, interpret, and make sense of the world. Every individual's perception of reality is shaped by personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts, which inevitably influence how they understand and process information. Similarly, AI systems, which learn from vast datasets generated by humans, are not immune to these biases. While AI bias can indeed be problematic, especially when it perpetuates harmful stereotypes or distorts coverage, it also presents opportunities for growth and

improvement in journalism. If journalists recognize and manage the types of biases AI can generate, they can leverage AI tools to enhance their work and address issues of fairness and representation. For example, AI can be used to detect biased language in news reports, suggesting alternative wording or framing to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes. This could be particularly useful in ensuring that stories are presented in ways that are more neutral, inclusive, and free of harmful generalizations about particular groups (Ha, Hong, & Jhaver, 2024).

Moreover, AI can serve as an effective tool for identifying gender or racial imbalances in coverage, enabling journalists to address disparities before a story is published. In journalism, where the lack of diverse representation has long been a concern, AI tools can play a pivotal role in promoting more equitable coverage. By analyzing patterns in media content and identifying areas where underrepresented groups are either marginalized or omitted, AI can provide insights that prompt journalists to adjust their narratives, ensuring that all perspectives are adequately represented. However, AI must be designed with sensitivity to the complexities of these issues, and its recommendations should be used as a guide rather than a replacement for human judgment. As Mhlambi (2020) highlights, AI systems should be seen as complementary tools that help journalists refine their work, rather than replace the critical thinking, ethical considerations, and empathy that human reporters bring to storytelling.

At the same time, the integration of AI into journalism requires a commitment to upholding the core values of the profession—truth, fairness, and accuracy. While AI systems can aid in identifying biases, they are not infallible and should not replace human decision-making. It is essential that AI's role remains supportive, assisting human journalists in making more informed decisions rather than dictating the terms of the narrative. AI can help journalists analyze large amounts of data, spot trends, and detect biases that may be overlooked in the rush to publish, but it is the human journalist who must ultimately ensure that the content aligns with ethical guidelines and reflects the complexities of the human experience. As a result, human journalists and AI systems can produce more inclusive, balanced, and engaging journalism that reflects the complexity of the human experience.

Conclusion

Overarchingly, I argue that integration of AI in journalism brings both significant opportunities and challenges, particularly when it comes to addressing bias. While AI has the potential to enhance journalistic practices by identifying and mitigating harmful biases, it also risks perpetuating existing societal stereotypes if not carefully designed and managed. As AI continues to evolve, it is crucial to understand that bias is an inherent part of both human communication and AI systems. The key is not to eliminate all bias, but rather to identify and mitigate harmful biases while allowing AI to complement the human aspects of journalism that make it compelling, engaging, and meaningful. AI can serve as a valuable tool in journalism by highlighting areas where gender, racial, or cultural imbalances may exist in reporting. By providing journalists with the tools to spot and address these issues before publication, AI can contribute to a more inclusive and representative media landscape. However, it is essential that AI does not replace the critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and empathy that human journalists bring to their work. Human judgment must remain central in the process, ensuring that the stories produced are accurate, fair, and aligned with the core values of journalism. Ultimately, the future of journalism will depend on a balanced approach that embraces the potential of AI while safeguarding the ethical standards that underpin the profession. AI should be seen as a complementary tool that enhances human judgment rather than replaces it. By working together, human journalists and AI systems can

produce more nuanced, diverse, and inclusive journalism that reflects the complexity of the world we live in, ensuring that the media continues to serve as a fair and accurate reflection of society.

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