

AI and the Journalism Curriculum

WJEC 2022 Online Conference

Stream meeting summary and expert/background report (see wjec.net/2022-online-conference/ at conference streams tab) by rapporteur Jenny Wiik, Associate Professor, University of Gothenburg; panel chair Maarit Jaakola, Associate Professor, University of Gothenburg, and Co-Director at the Centre for Nordic Media Research (Nordicom).

This stream focused in on the (still) rather narrow topic of AI in journalism and how journalism schools should approach this emerging phenomena. The members of the group came with diverse angles to the discussion, sometimes focusing on other technologies or the meta level of datafication.

The session began with a presentation of a new WJEC/UNESCO book, *AI and Journalism Education*, edited by Dr. Maarit Jaakola (University of Gothenburg), which should be available in the Fall of 2022. Jaakola highlighted the text and talked about how important it is that journalists understand the full impact of AI on society. Since data-driven automated technology is already here and transforming all sectors, journalists need to be able to ask the right questions. In a final chapter, the book highlights how AI is changing journalism itself with automated workflows and distribution. It argues journalism educators must start thinking about how to integrate this new knowledge in the curricula. The manual's global perspective is intended to help educators worldwide.

The second presentation, by Professor Zhi Li (Communication University of China), was about virtual reality and how to use it in teaching. A virtual learning environment could make knowledge more accessible. For journalism education, AI can be combined with VR to 1) Provide virtual learning environments, 2) Interact with the students and 3) be the instructor for basic courses and modules.

The third presentation, by Dr. Colette Snowden (University of South Australia), focused on the influence of numeric thinking, brought on by datafication and new technology. She argued that the matter of numeracy is just as important as literacy, as so much of news material is built on mathematical and statistical foundations. But journalists are not really known to appreciate math, and numerical understanding is usually not a top priority for journalism curricula. Snowden explains this by long-time traditions and common practices in journalism conveying literacy as the core value. And although such conventions die slowly, she argued times are changing. The logic of big data is transforming not only journalism but also the surrounding society, and journalism schools need to take a more active stand toward this development.

The session ended with a presentation by Dr. Yanjun Zhao (Cameron University, U.S.) raising ethical issues around AI and media exposure. Our consumption of channels like YouTube are controlled by algorithms, personalizing the content based on behavioral and demographic data. The algorithm based recommendation system controls what people see or not see, and journalists need to be more aware of this phenomena and discuss 1) Does AI reinforce biases? 2) What are the consequences of these biases? And 3) What can we do to mitigate negative consequences? The presentation pointed out two actions that journalism schools can take to counter this development. First, they need to cultivate and encourage critical thinking and media literacy among students to enable them to detect and handle possibly skewed media content. And second, they need to more actively discuss the extremely important issue of

algorithmization, especially its ethical and media regulation components.

In sum, this session put a wide range of important aspects of AI and algorithms on the table. It is clear that journalism education needs to advance its competencies and understanding of this area, which is emerging very quickly. AI brings a lot of challenges, as discussed in the session, but also a lot of possibilities. Media houses are increasingly trying to find new ways to apply AI and automation in all parts of the news chain, and journalism education must keep up with the pace.

Recommendations

- 1) An introduction to AI (what it is and how it influences journalism and society) should be integrated into journalism curricula.
- 2) Since numerical thinking and understanding of data is increasingly important for journalists, journalism schools should try to move away from 'numeric phobia' in order to better train future journalists.
- 3) Although AI expertise is attractive and expensive, j-schools can try to engage guest lecturers and build networks with industry to gain access to that expertise.
- 4) The human capital in journalism will be increasingly important as many tasks are automated. Critical thinking, creativity, moral judgment, etc. – the core values of journalism – should be encouraged and cultivated in all possible ways.