WAN IFRA win EQUALITY & INCLUSION

The Age of AI in the Newsroom

Case studies from 8 media organisations

WRITTEN BY

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Funded by the European Union

EU4IM Independent Media

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Foreword

The Rise of Generative AI: A Transformative Moment for Journalism

The rise of generative AI marks a watershed moment for journalism, bringing both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges. This report highlights how newsrooms worldwide are integrating this transformative technology to enhance production efficiency and streamline workflows —particularly in resource-constrained environments.

The findings stem from a three-year initiative supporting independent media in the European Neighbourhood countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine under the EU4IM programme. Led by DT Global and supported by the European Union, WAN-IFRA is a proud consortium partner in this effort.

Throughout 2023, 30 media partners across the region participated in the pilot capacity-building programme, The Age of AI. As a final phase in the programme, select participants - including Diez (Moldova), Rayon.ua (Ukraine), and Baku Press Club (Azerbaijan)— applied for and received funding of approximately €15,000 to support their AI-driven initiatives over a six month period.

Expanding the Initiative: The Age of AI Goes Global

Building on the pilot's success, WAN-IFRA expanded The Age of AI programme in 2024 to WIN Advisory partners across Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Arab region. This extension was made possible through support from Sweden (Sida). However, unlike their peers in the European neighbourhood, no additional funds were made available for media to support their AI-driven inititatives.

Key Findings: The Impact of Funding and External Challenges

The disparity in outcomes between the two programmes underscores a critical challenge: implementing new initiatives without financial support significantly affects results. Beyond funding, management buy-in and political stability also play a crucial role. Unforeseen disruptions—such as those in Georgia and Lebanon—derailed some project activities, highlighting the fragile ecosystem in which many media organisations operate.

Yet, despite these obstacles, this report serves as a testament to the resilience and innovation of newsrooms. Media organisations continue to adapt, leveraging new technologies to better serve their audiences while optimizing workflows in resource-strapped environments.

The Path Forward: Leadership and a Culture of Innovation

This experience reinforces a fundamental truth: leadership and a culture of continuous learning are essential to driving change. By fostering collaboration—both across borders and within organisations—newsrooms have turned challenges into opportunities. They have developed sustainable strategies aligned with their long-term goals, proving that adaptability is not just a survival skill but a pathway to success.

Melanie Walker,
Executive Director,
Media Development
Founder, WIN
WAN-IFRA

**AI tools used to enhance clarity and structure of this text.*

About Author:
Lyndsey Jones

Lyndsey Jones is a digital transformation consultant and coach in performance-driven change.

Her expertise lies in advising companies on how to transform their workflows and organisational structures as well as coaching cross-functional teams in high performance.

She has coached senior executives and team leaders across many business sectors through various programmes including WAN-IFRA and WIN flagship coaching projects and the Financial Times's Headspring executive training venture. She is also a member of WAN-IFRA's expert panel.

She is the course architect of online modules on change management and content strategy as part of WIN's suite of Digital ABCs that help media businesses become sustainable in a digital world. She also created and served as lead trainer in the online training module *Age of AI*, funded by the European Union and administered within the EU4IM programme, of which WAN-IFRA is a consortium partner.

Lyndsey has written a business education book, Going Digital, published by Pearson and FT Publishing. An IE University digital tutorial is also available via Harvard Business Publishing. Previously, she was an executive editor at FT, where she played a key role in streamlining editorial operations and transforming the newsroom to shift its main focus from print to digital publishing while adding value to the business by increasing traffic and subscriptions.

Introduction

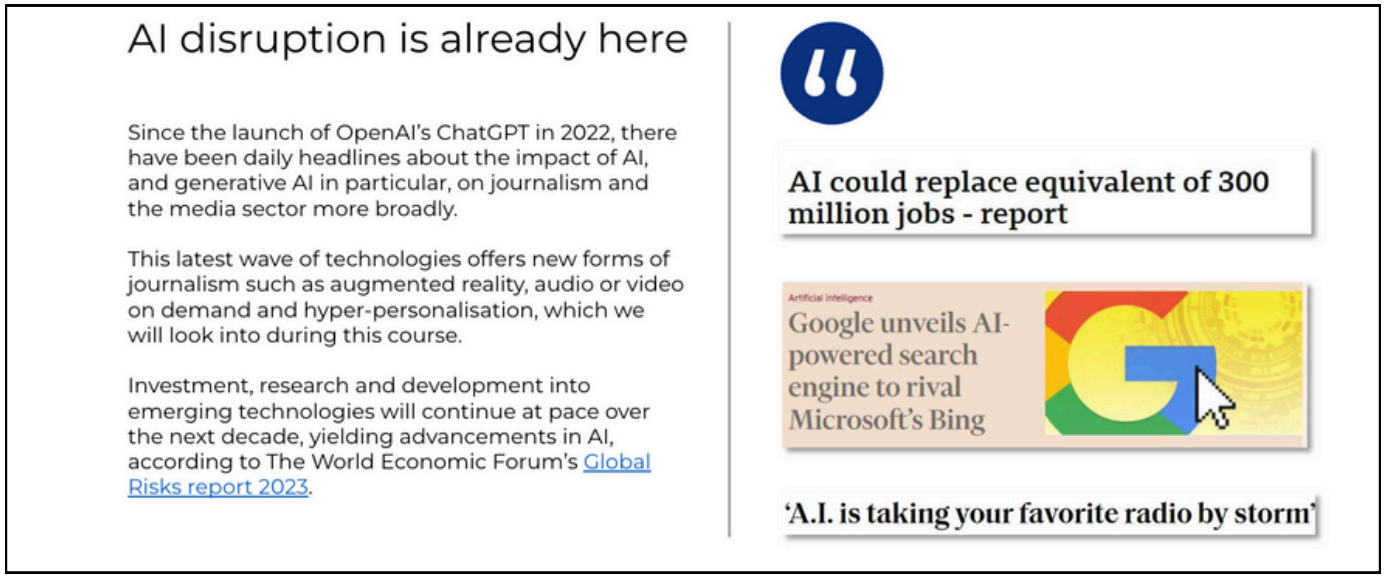
by Lyndsey Jones

Leaders from local publishers across Europe, Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia have embraced the opportunity to learn, test and monitor different ways of operating by using generative AI tools.

During 2023 and 2024, more than 100 teams from 21 countries speaking nine languages took part in the programme covering the Age of AI in the newsroom that aimed to encourage adaptive practice and actively develop a roadmap with metrics aligned to their company's north star goals. Impressively, some of the teams were not only devising new ways of working with AI tools but doing so while living and working in the midst of war. Others were targeting audiences who were likely to pay for news content in countries that typically were perceived to have a small market of users who may pay for digital news.

Digital journalism is part of our reality and in order to survive in the long term, all media professionals need to understand digital strategy and be ready to create change in their respective organisations. The global health pandemic, the climate crisis and now the emerging AI technologies have all made this need more urgent.

Common themes of AI in the newsrooms have begun to come to the fore, especially around transparency, accountability, data privacy, and keeping a journalist in the story production loop. WAN-IFRA created this course to help media organisations fill the knowledge gap that exists within their teams on the monumental impact of digital distribution on traditional journalism, and, crucially, how to translate this into practical, concrete action to help navigate the transition from print to digital.



Diez sprints towards increasing readership time

The Moldovan website Diez.md has a current audience of 600K. Most of the users are women: 77 per cent versus 23 per cent of men. This breakdown of audience share is also broadly seen across the social media platforms that Diez uses, with 12.4K followers on Instagram, and 77K on Facebook. Diez also typically has a younger user base with the majority (73 per cent) being in the age group 18-34.

The Diez team from Moldova worked quickly to put the audience first by improving the user experience with news summaries and audio versions of some articles in order to increase readership time.

They were aiming to improve user retention because despite achieving a milestone of over a million monthly views, the average article viewing time stood at 47 seconds. The team wanted to improve this metric to foster deeper engagement and connection with their users.

They were focused from the start, appointing a project lead, drawing up a strict number of tasks, and acting fast to create a product. They conducted sprints over a few weeks and analysed their results.

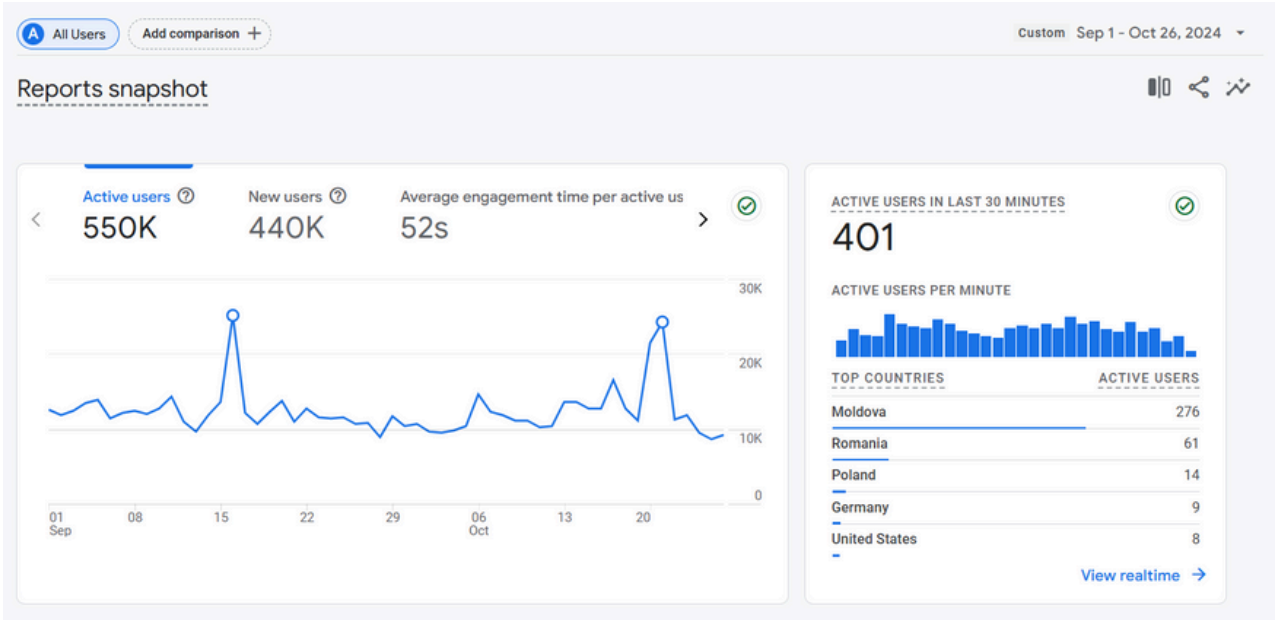
Steps to increase viewing time

Their goal was to cultivate a more immersive and enduring user experience, encouraging visitors to stay longer and delve deeper into their content. It worked because they managed to move the dial by 5 seconds, with the average viewing time now at 52 seconds.

They achieved this success by first devising a comprehensive strategy centered around the integration of cutting-edge AI technologies into their platform. They planned to implement two key AI tools: ChatGPT for article summaries and a text-to-voice application so users could listen to articles.

Several news groups have experimented with news summaries and have seen great results, increasing readership time and click-through rates to articles. The Diez team were hoping for similar results by giving a quick overview of each article's key points. They aimed to streamline the browsing experience and empower users to make informed decisions about which articles to explore further.

They also planned to cater for a more diverse range of users who prefer to listen to articles, hence the test with a text-to-voice AI application. “We were striving to increase accessibility for anyone who cannot read. We wanted to create a welcoming and inclusive digital space that resonates with diverse audiences,” Valeria Batereanu, editor in chief of Diez.



Key part of success was having a strategic plan

Their plan went ahead in several strategic stages, starting in early 2024:

1. They carried out research to identify the most suitable text-to-voice conversion tool for their platform and evaluated the options based on factors such as accuracy, naturalness of speech, and compatibility with their existing infrastructure.
2. At the same time, they explored the technical feasibility of integrating ChatGPT and the text-to-voice application seamlessly into their website, including integration of both tools into the Romanian and Russian versions of Diez.md.
3. They embarked on an extensive communication and promotion campaign to inform their readers and followers about these exciting new additions.This included creating user guides and tutorials to ensure that users were equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to leverage these AI-powered features effectively.
4. Finally, they planned to monitor the success of the tool promotion campaign and track user engagement metrics to gauge the effectiveness of the AI-driven enhancements. This would enable them to refine their approach and make iterative improvements to further optimize the user experience.

The approach paid off because they were able to implement the usage of the tools quickly by September 2024.

“The project represented a bold step towards redefining the relationship between users and content on our website,” says Ms Batereanu. “By harnessing the power of AI, we aim to empower users with greater control, flexibility, and accessibility, ultimately fostering deeper engagement and satisfaction among our audience.”

Tackling the challenges and explaining ‘the why’

There were challenges. Journalists had to be persuaded and motivated to buy in to using the new tools. “It’s natural to be a bit hesitant to something you don’t understand,” says Ms Batereanu. “But once they saw the results, and that it could make their stories more visible online, and we explained why they should use it, they bought in.”

The project included putting a button into articles that the user could click on to get a summary or listen to the audio. But in testing, it was taking too long to load, using vital extra seconds that may result in churn.

Also the summaries were not always accurate and they had to experiment a lot with prompt writing. They also found that the headlines were too generic and have since decided not to use AI for this purpose.

23 octombrie 2024, 14:53 Ana Mărgineanu

Vezi rezumatul

Ascultă textul integral

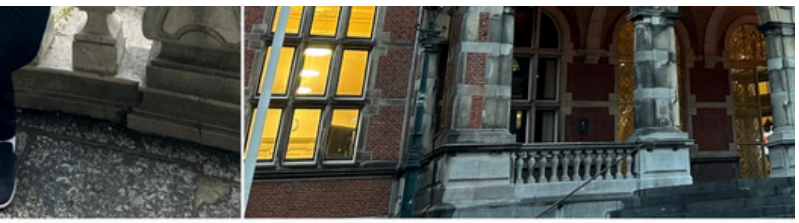
spre oportunitățile de învățare peste hotare încă de pe băncile școlii. După ce a fost atras de domeniul financiar și onomic, a decis să-și continue studiile universitare în Țările de Jos. La facultate, Radu a avut parte de un mediu ernațional, unde a interacționat cu oameni din diverse culturi și a înțeles provocările economice globale.

vacanța de vară, Radu a participat la un stagiu de practică la Banca Națională a Moldovei (BNM) în cadrul proiectului ldova Brain Gain, lansat de #diez în colaborare cu Ambasada Țărilor de Jos. Acolo a avut parte de o experiență practică loroasă, învățând despre operațiuni monetare, analize financiare și instrumente utilizate de instituția financiară. Tânărul a st impresionat de terminalele Bloomberg și a lucrat alături de angajații băncii, care l-au îndrumat pe tot parcursul giului.

perienta de la BNM l-a convins pe Radu că dorește să activeze în domeniul economic-financiar și nu exclude opțiunea a se angaja în cadrul acestei instituții. El consideră că există o varietate de locuri de muncă vacante în Republica ldova și ar fi bine să existe mai multe inițiative pentru a încuraja tinerii să se integreze pe piața muncii.

du îndeamnă tinerii să-și urmeze propriile dorințe și să-și dezvolte abilitățile pentru a contribui la dezvoltarea și inovația Moldova. El consideră că studiile peste hotare pot transforma oamenii și îi pot expune la diverse provocări care ajută la zvoltarea personală și profesională.

Ascunde rezumatul



sonală

Brain Gain Oportunități 5 octombrie 2024, 17:37 Nicoleta Botnaru

Vezi rezumatul

Ascunde audio

This led to creating rules on what to write and what not to, including, for example, always keeping a journalist in the loop to check the accuracy of the summaries. But journalists have saved a lot of time by using ChatGPT. They now take only about 10 minutes to write summaries, while before they could take about an hour per person.

Additionally, the text to speech tool was not able to create the correct text in Romanian but it is still in the testing stage. They did, however, create a minimal viable product in Russian, which is well used.

They also encountered other issues. Sometimes they would go too deep into development and not take account of user behaviour or they faced being overwhelmed by the amount of data available from Google Analytics. “It can be difficult to interpret data and act on insights,” says Sergei Yakupov, the Diez team coach.

One of the next steps is to improve tracking of the summaries and audio by using Google Analytics. User feedback and comments have so far been very positive. “This is very exciting for us as a team because we have started to think about how we can develop AI tools more for our readers. The conversation is very present in our office,” says Ms Batereanu.

The Diez team were successful, says Mr Yakupov, because they worked fast in developing a product they were passionate about: “They had a great commitment to create a product and can now see the opportunities for it.”

AI tool generates social media posts and boosts engagement

Baku Press Club is an international network of journalists with an interest in Azerbaijan. Its main purpose is to create a platform for Azerbaijanis working in the media industry abroad and foreign journalists with professional interests in the country. The club has 157,000 subscribers on YouTube and 66,800 followers on Facebook among others.

The Baku Press Club editorial team. From left: Ramila Gurbanli, author, Selim Ezizoghlu, editor, Gabil Abbasoghlu, editor-in-chief, Madina Useinova, correspondent, Gunay Ibadova, reporter, Rauf Orujov, editor.

Developers working for Baku Press Club have created a Gen AI tool that can help to prepare social media posts in Azerbaijani for their audiences on different networks, increasing page views by 7 per cent in five months.

The team were able to achieve results quickly, gaining almost 42,500 page views by November 2024, up from 39,500 in May, because they had a clear vision of what journalists needed at the start and built a tool with them in mind.

"They had a clear focus and did not go off on a tangent. This is one of the best projects in terms of development and it has potential commercial outcomes for the Baku Press Club," says Sergei Yakupov, the Baku Press Club team coach.

The keys to their success were creating a tool from the perspective of how journalists work, and collaborating with journalists once there was a prototype that could be enhanced from user feedback.

Dealing with resistance

The developers did have to overcome initial resistance to using the prototype in the newsroom. At the start, they had to sit with the journalists and input the articles into the tool as well as giving editors one-to-one training. This process took about two months to embed usage into workflows and also act on user feedback to make enhancements.

The generator tool condensed text from articles that were either uploaded via links or directly inputted into it by editors. It had been refined by using only the club's archived content including articles and posts published from 2018 to 2024 to ensure compliance with copyright and improve accuracy to limit the amount of "hallucinations" or mistakes.

"It works so well because it has a good interface, and is simple but powerful," says Mr Yakupov.

Editors can choose from a range of prompts to define the style and tone of the article or they can custom their own prompts.

"I was particularly impressed with how they created a set of prompts. They managed to limit hallucinations by creating a system that restricts AI because they only used Baku Press Club's archived material to refine the model.

"Using the archive alone does not restrict mistakes but they created a set of prompts that does," says Mr Yakupov.

Once the tool was up and running, it saved significant labour time in creating social media posts, "about half an hour per article", says software engineer Nicat Aliyev, who worked on the project.

Senior editors were also always kept in the loop to check the quality of the generated posts, ensuring they were accurate and made sense. They also evaluated the results and gave feedback to the developers in terms of what needed to be enhanced.

Funding from the EU4IM programme also helped to get this project off the ground because in Azerbaijan, government control over advertising and foreign grants limits independent media's financial resources.

"The grant enabled us to put dedicated resources into AI development. Since we already had a solid tech background, having two developers on the project meant we could make big inroads relatively quickly," says Ayxan Aliyev, senior software engineer overseeing the project.

The team met their goals which included:

- planning the use of content in social media (optimization);
- automating the process of "customizing" content for different platforms (adaptation);
- creating a tool to edit content depending on the audience (personalization);
- expanding the audience and maximizing the subscriber base; obtaining better analytics to understand growth opportunities; and
- improving the quality of service for subscribers and expanding the information services provided to them.

Next steps focus on commercial potential

The team's immediate next steps include working on other features to generate internal documents or translate long-form articles as well as integrating them into daily workflows. They are also aiming to streamline more workflows and better understand why journalists initially had difficulty in learning the tool.

"Our vision extends beyond social media automation. We're working on advanced document processing capabilities and developing more sophisticated AI workflows that can better adapt content across different styles, formats and domains while maintaining consistency," says Ayxan Aliyev.

Looking further ahead, the team would like to make the tool available online for other media companies globally because the tool works in 35 languages, from Japanese to Urdu. "We see significant potential for scaling this solution beyond Azerbaijan. We're exploring ways to make this platform accessible to media organisations worldwide while ensuring it remains efficient," Ayxan Aliyev.

Mr Yakupov agrees: "They could become a service provider for other companies if they think through the commercial benefits of this tool. Developing it further with this in mind could be a substantial way to make money if priced correctly."

How war pushes Rayon to move fast and develop revenue streams

Rayon.in.ua is a national network of 63 hyperlocal and thematic media outlets, including coverage of business, sport, culture and education. It operates in several regions of Ukraine including Odesa, Kirovohrad and Poltava. With up to 2 million users a month, the site operates on the principle of an aggregator, including regional events in the news feed. Its network page on Facebook has 6 million users a month and its YouTube channel has more than 2,000 subscribers.

Rayon was facing the challenge of not only rapidly scaling and recruiting journalists in each district of Ukraine to cover the war with Russia, but also looking after their well-being to ensure they did not suffer burn-out.

Despite the significant opportunities the expansion brought for the newsroom, it also raised issues for human resources, who were not only under pressure to attract talent, but also train, retain and develop staff.

Additionally, they wanted to preserve a unified corporate culture and ensure high standards of work across all sites, which was particularly challenging in a geographically dispersed environment, as well as find revenue streams to remain financially sustainable.

"Rayon has always operated with journalists across different regions of Ukraine, but wartime added new challenges – journalists pausing work for air raid alerts or relocating for safety. While major media organisations have the luxury of time to develop AI solutions, Rayon doesn't. War pushes them to move faster, be more agile," says Nazim Ragimov, AI integration mentor to the team.

Building financial sustainability

Rayon decided to experiment with AI to improve efficiency, saving time and costs, which helped to build financial sustainability.

Natalia Pahaychuk, head of innovative projects at Rayon, explains: "The deployment of AI for our newsroom in a time of war is an effective solution from a number of perspectives. We have accelerated many processes so they take less time. In the context of frequent blackouts, this is a lifesaver."

For example, by introducing the use of a GPT assistant in the grants department, the quality of applications was improved and the time taken to write them was reduced.

"We had tremendous results. It directly increased the editorial office's revenue. We managed to save resources: we did not hire additional people for grant writing, did not spend money on translation, and did not waste the team's time brainstorming ideas for projects," she says.

They also considered using AI tools in other areas and planned to implement the following:

1. Personalised programs for the training and development of journalists. They used AI to adapt, monitor and adjust the programs.
2. Automation and personalisation of onboarding processes. This included developing an AI-powered virtual chatbot that could provide employees with information in real time.
3. Assessment of the effectiveness of the editorial team by automating the collection of data on productivity, and analysing audience data, and the quality of written content.
4. Development of a corporate culture. The team planned to automate the collection and analysis of feedback to assess employee satisfaction with corporate initiatives as well as develop surveys.

Rayon.in.ua - Ukraine

Their project aimed to develop and integrate AI tools, including Chat GPT, implement a pilot and if successful, scale up across the network. They planned to:

- Ensure gender equality in the recruitment and career development process.
- Support the work-life balance during the Ukraine-Russia war, including using AI to help analyse the needs of employees for flexible working hours, to reduce the risk of burnout, especially for parents or carers.
- Increase gender sensitivity in content, by analysing articles to identify stereotypes or biases that may affect the perception of gender roles.

"We managed to improve the onboarding process of new employees and keep on top of corporate culture needs, so that it developed in an inclusive and equal way," says Ms Pahaychuk.

They achieved their goals by:

- Conducting several training sessions for the entire team of 50 journalists on how to use AI, including language model functionality, creating GPT assistants, text sampling and brainstorming.
- Devising an editorial policy on the use of AI, which included guidelines on transparency, ethics, quality and verification of information, application of AI work in editorial and training. "Final decisions are made by journalists because there are risks, including the possibility of spreading fake news or violating privacy," says Ms Pahaychuk.
- Introducing the practice of recording video meetings on AI.
- Organising a YouTube channel. "This is a new direction for us," she says. "We thought that converting video into text would help us increase the number of unique texts on our websites. Manually processing videos for articles is a long and routine job." AI extensions such as Glasp for transcription, and Claude, which processes text into articles, have reduced the time required to repackage video into text.

Expect the unexpected and adapt solutions

Overall, they have fostered a culture of experimentation and pivoting when necessary. "Sometimes we look for a solution for one need, only to find one for another," says Ms Pahaychuk. "For example, we thought that we could write texts for the website using GPT - a bad idea! But it is better to write grant applications using GPT - a good idea!"
They were also able to share the results of their experiments with the rest of the Ukrainian media market at local conferences as well as advising five other newsrooms in the country on how to work with AI.

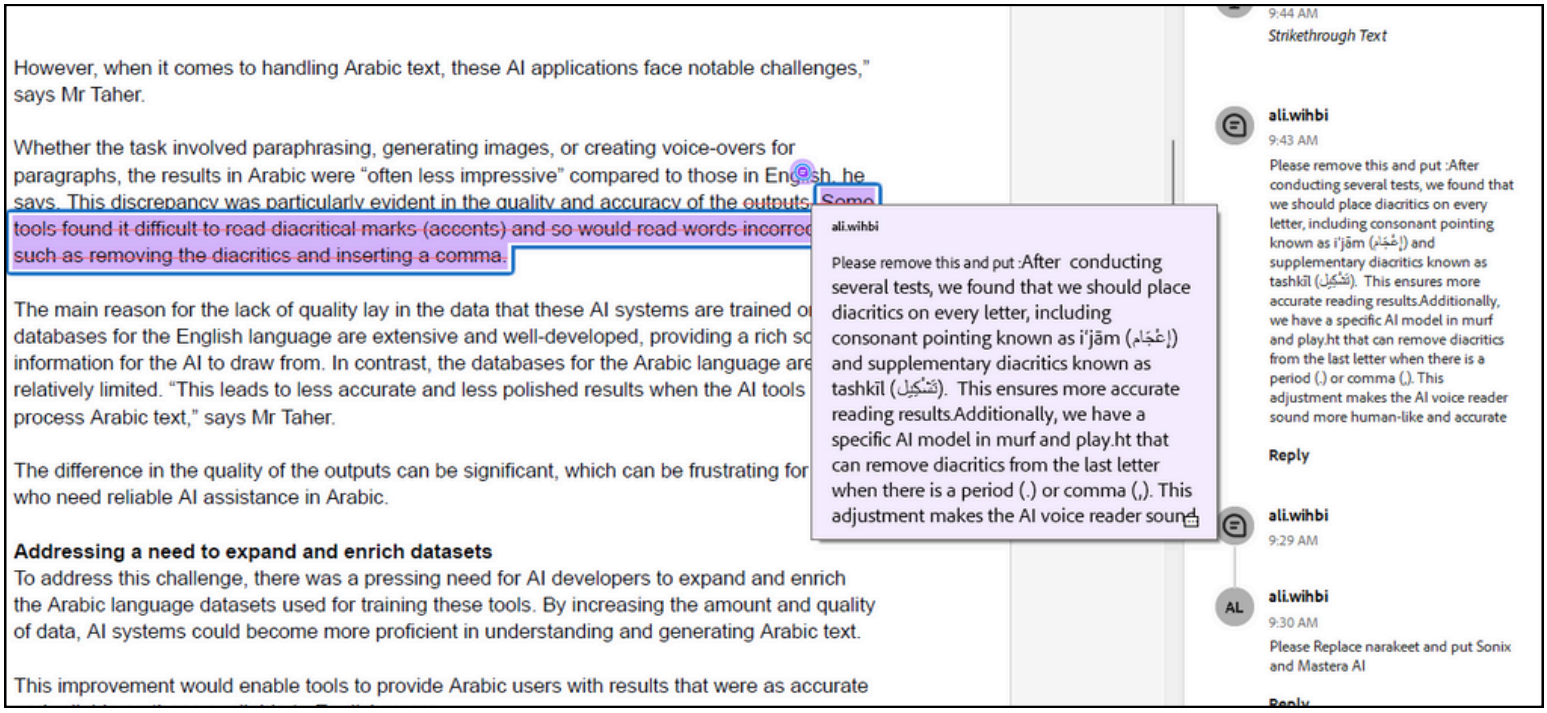
Despite achieving so much in challenging circumstances, they continue to push forward. They are streamlining HR processes to prepare them for automation, focusing on developing an AI assistant in the website's admin area to help journalists improve their text. A design for a prototype will be handed over to developers soon.

"I'm watching them build an AI-powered system that will automatically analyse and improve content, benefiting new hires and seasoned journalists. It will streamline what used to be a three- to six-month training process and provide automated editing support for the team. Despite working under wartime constraints, they're making remarkable progress. By year's end, they should have a solution that will significantly enhance their operations," says Mr Ragimov.

Ms Pahaychuk stressed the need for media managers to continue to look ahead: "If you haven't implemented innovations in your editorial team yet - do it immediately. Development is closely linked with the use of artificial intelligence, which increases team efficiency and opens up new opportunities for creativity and analysis."

Addressing the challenges of testing an Arabic text-to-voice tool

Al Araby Al Jadeed, the "New Arab", is a news website and an international Arab newspaper, published by Fadaat Media Limited. Launched in 2014, it is considered one of the largest websites in the Arab world in terms of the density of news that it publishes, according to its website. It has three main regional offices, in London, Qatar and Lebanon, with more than 150 journalists, editors and administrators, and correspondents in more than 50 cities worldwide.



The challenge for the team from Al Araby Al Jadeed was to build a business case for the company to invest in testing a text-to-voice tool because senior management were concerned about the quality of the output.

"Improving the performance of these tools in handling Arabic text was essential for gaining management approval and advancing our editorial processes," says Shafiq Taher, Beirut office manager.

But by October 2024, the development of the project faced a very different challenge after Israel launched its ground invasion of Lebanon. "We could not carry on with what we were trying to do because of the situation," says Mr Taher.

Ali Wihbi, information technology officer at Al Araby Al Jadeed, was forced to leave his home in Beirut because of the conflict. "I think about my family and neighbours. But as for my job, in IT you should always be available for staff for troubleshooting because tech is the main device employees work on."

"It's business as usual," says Mr Taher. "We are the same as medical staff - part of the emergency services. It is part of our job to let the world know what is going on."

Before these challenges, the team were testing the text-to-speech tool and were hoping to identify one that could create speech without errors.

Tackling accuracy and accents

But the tools and applications did not meet the necessary standards for accuracy and naturalness, posing a barrier to adopting AI-driven solutions for Arabic content creation and management.

Colleagues had experimented with some AI tools, including ChatGPT, Microsoft's Copilot, and Google's Gemini. "Each of these tools offered capabilities and potential benefits. However, when it comes to handling Arabic text, these AI applications face notable challenges," says Mr Taher.

Whether the task involved paraphrasing, generating images, or creating voice-overs, the results were "often less impressive" compared to those in English, he says.

After conducting tests, they found they should place diacritics (accents) on every letter, including consonant pointing known as i'jām (إِعْجَام) and supplementary diacritics known as tashkīl (تَشْكِيل). This ensured more accurate reading results.

Additionally, they have a specific AI model in Murf and Play.ht that can remove diacritics from the last letter when there is a full stop (.) or comma (,). This adjustment makes the AI voice reader sound more human-like and accurate.

But the main reason for the lack of quality lay in the data that these AI systems are trained on. While the databases for English are well developed, those for Arabic are relatively limited. "This leads to less accurate and less polished results when the AI tools process Arabic text," says Mr Taher. The difference in the quality of the outputs can be significant, which can be frustrating for users.

Expansion and enrichment of datasets

To address this challenge, AI developers needed to expand and enrich the Arabic language datasets used for training these tools. By increasing the amount and quality of data, AI systems could become more proficient in understanding and generating text.

This improvement would enable tools to provide Arabic users with results that were as accurate and reliable as those available to English users.

Getting more AI tools training on Arabic grammar would improve translation accuracy and this would affect other AI applications like content generation, image creation, and voice-over production. The primary goal was to develop an efficient system for converting Arabic text to voice and vice versa.

The team hoped to achieve this by using advanced AI-powered tools in text-to-speech (TTS) and speech-to-text (STT) to enhance accessibility, communication, and user engagement for Arabic speakers.

They planned to experiment with the following tools:

- Play.ht, which is known for its high-quality, natural-sounding voices.
- Murf.ai, which offered TTS features and parameters for fine tuning voice. This made it ideal for creating precise and accurate outputs in Arabic.
- Sonix and Mastera AI which provided STT functionalities. They were useful for their ability to handle text formats and produce high-fidelity audio.

The team's methodology to prove their case included:

- Inputting Arabic text, for text to voice conversion, to be processed through Play.ht and Murf.ai. These tools would convert the text into speech, creating high-quality audio files, which would be evaluated for clarity.
- For voice-to-text conversion, Sonix and Mastera AI would be primarily used for converting spoken Arabic into text. The algorithms would be able to transcribe audio inputs with accuracy, ensuring minimal errors and capturing the nuances of the language.
- These tools would be integrated into a unified framework and testing would be conducted to ensure the accuracy and reliability of TTS and STT functionalities. User feedback was also key for refinements.

The project aimed to achieve:

- Enhanced accessibility. This would provide an intuitive way for Arabic speakers to convert text to speech and vice versa. It would also improve accessibility for visually impaired users and those with literacy challenges.
- Improved communication. It would facilitate smooth conversions to improve communication across platforms, including educational tools, customer service applications, and content creation.
- Improved user engagement. High-quality audio outputs would enhance user engagement and experience, making interactions more effective.

The desired outcome was to enable the app to convert any given Arabic text into high-quality, natural-sounding Arabic voice without errors. This was still in the testing stage because of the Israel-Gaza war, but it was hoped that the user experience would be enhanced, ensuring accurate text-to-speech conversion for Arabic-speaking users.

As for their next steps, they are still working on other ideas, including an AI tool that could scan the newspaper and create 10 questions to form a weekly quiz.

“We don’t really have time to think about what we are doing [because of the demands on the newsroom during the war], but we would like to do quizzes based on the news,” says Mr Taher.

Culture of experimentation drives text to speech trials

Radio Africa Group is a fast growing and dynamic media company based in Kenya consisting of six national radio stations, one TV station and a national newspaper. Its media brands include Kiss FM, Classic FM, Radio Jambo, East FM, Smooth FM, Gukena FM, Homeboyz radio, Kiss TV and the Star newspaper and other digital assets such as mpasho.co.ke.

A culture of experimentation has helped to drive trials of AI tools at Radio Africa Group with a view to resolving staff shortages so that their resources could be used more effectively and efficiently.

Teams are encouraged to come up with innovative ways of working, particularly where costs can be saved. Being unafraid to try new things is key for a business to move forward.

In this environment, RAG rolled out testing of Eleven Labs, a text to speech and voice generator app, where they hoped to create advertisement audio clips for the group. They needed to cut voiceover costs by 30 per cent from the advertising budget and Eleven Labs cost $300 for 20,000 voices.

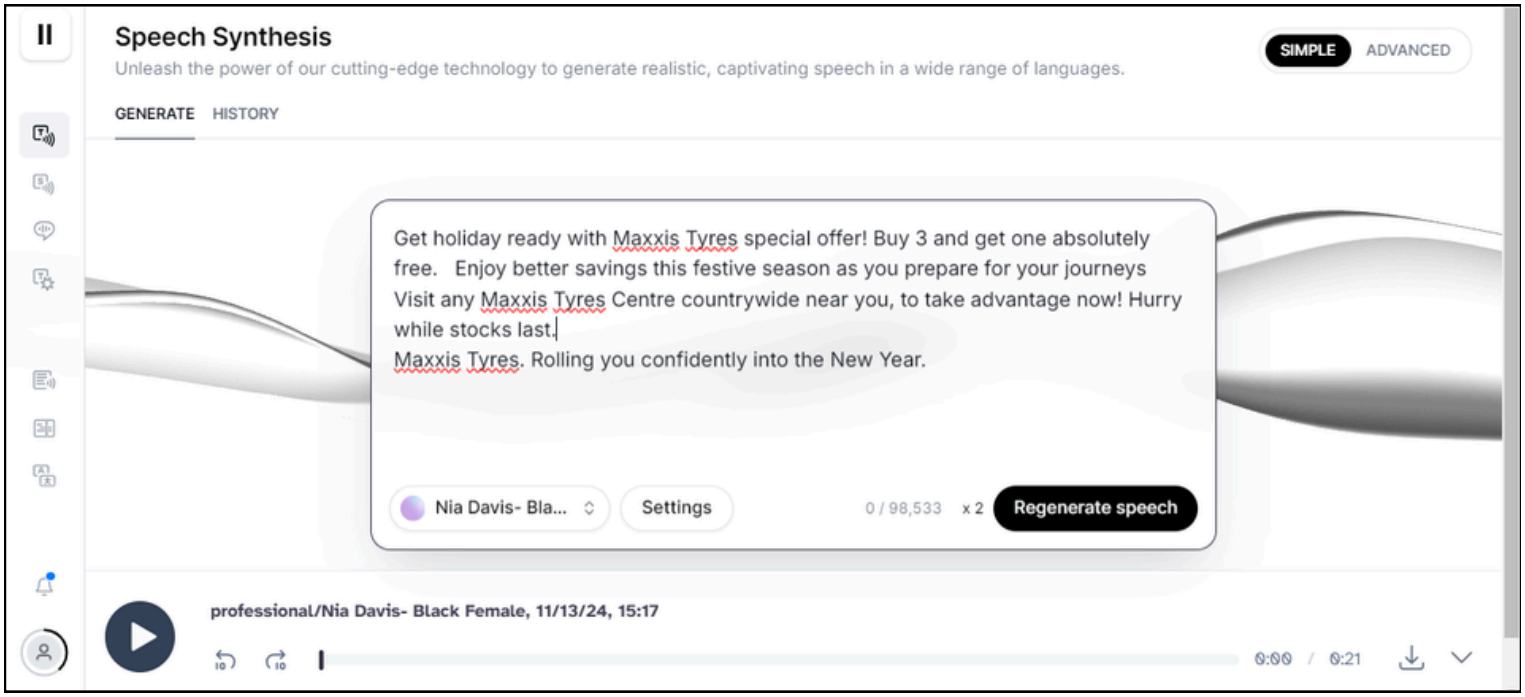
“We had a limited budget and were trying to save money. This also meant managing costs associated with voice-overs,” says Susan Kimachia, head of electronic news at RAG.

They tested the product over a period of a few months, setting up a small team to monitor, review and recommend adaptations to the process over that time. They found, for example, that the app did not understand Swahili words and that they had to spell them how they sounded in order for the app to get the right pronunciation.

"You have to be careful you don't spend too much time doing too many trials," says Ms Kimachia, "because this can eat up time on the app. You need to understand the tool and share knowledge within the company of what works best so that you get what you want from scripts."

At first, there was some hesitancy in using this tool - and AI tools generally - because staff feared it would lead to job losses. "It's not the intention to reduce the number of jobs," says Ms Kimachia, "but we should work alongside AI tools and use them to assist us to work more effectively."

To help dispel the fear around AI, they also made it clear that many AI tools were already in use at the company: Grammarly, to correct text, ChatGPT to help write press releases, and VideoGen, an AI video generator tool.



RAG tested creating advertisement audio clips using Eleven Labs, a text to speech and voice generator app

Change champions boost best practice

To go some way to improving communications internally, three AI champions were appointed from the team that attended the Age of AI in the newsroom programme. They make sure that teams are kept up to date with the latest trends and also best practice.

After that, the copy would be fitted into a digital story through another tool. They would cut and paste the article into a Generative AI tool such as ChatGPT to change it into a radio bulletin.

For the bulletin's audio, they planned to use ElevenLabs to change text to speech. The same tool could also highlight lines for radio adverts.

They also planned to check with the client whether they preferred AI-generated audio or a human voiceover artist. The cost benefit analysis once ascertained would lead the direction the advert took.

The experiment was successful with advertising and they plan to roll out usage of Eleven Labs to editorial next year. "We would like to transition this way of working from radio to social media, using the tool to create explainers," says Ms Kimachia.

Next steps include devising an AI policy across the company, which will be useful to guide staff on what they can and cannot use AI for. They will also continue to look at apps and experiment to find out what works best for them.

"Be open minded and always be willing to try new things," Ms Kimachia advises. "Don't lose out on opportunities because you are always doing the same thing the same way. AI tools can help you free up time so that your staff can focus on critical things that AI can't do. Keep abreast of what is on the market so you do not get left behind."

Radio Africa Group - Kenya

When they embarked on the programme in early 2024, the team aimed to improve the quality of stories in the newspaper and on the websites over three months. To demonstrate this they used the following metrics:

- little or no grammatical errors;
- short sentences;
- punchy headlines;
- supporting data;
- inclusivity — a variety of voices taking into account gender, people with disability, age
- groups and communities;
- no libel or misinformation/disinformation in 60% of the stories.

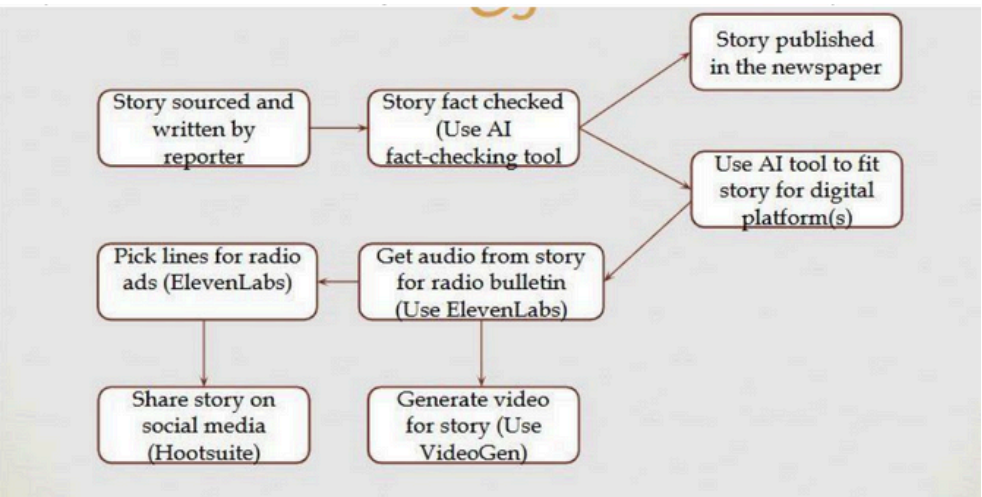
They set the following targets, which continue to be a work in progress:

- a 50% increase good quality productions in three to six months,
- faster processing of content, with deadlines met, and story turnover time on websites of 15 minutes maximum,
- increased audience engagement, with a target of 250,000 new readers on the websites
- in three to six months,
- audience retention, maintaining and increasing current numbers, and cost savings.

The tools they focused on were large language models Meltwater, ElevenLabs, Hootsuite and VideoGen. The content would be used across newspaper, digital, radio bulletins, adverts, and social media posts.

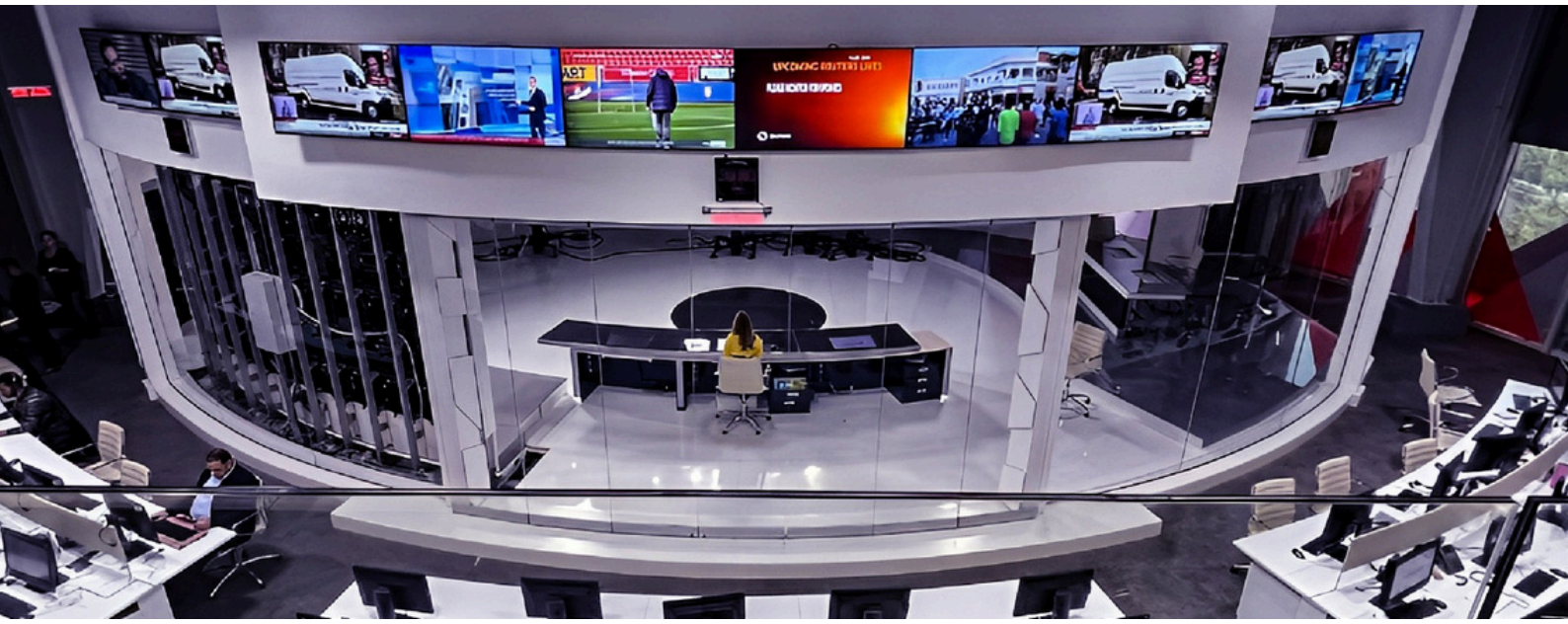
They mapped out the following workflows based on the tools they wanted to use:

The story would be sourced and written by a reporter who would prepare a newspaper story. Then it would be uploaded onto an AI tool for fact-checking.



Flexibility is key to keeping AI news anchor, face and voice recognition on track

Al Mamlaka, which means "The Kingdom", is based in Jordan and has more than 4 million followers on Facebook and almost 2 million on Instagram. The TV station started broadcasting and launched its website in 2018 amid hopes that the channel would present coverage with a "higher ceiling of freedom" amid its diverse 24-hour schedule of enriched content.



Being flexible and adaptable as well as a culture of continuous learning helped the team from Al Mamlaka to keep their AI project on track in order to automate routine tasks and enhance their digital content strategy.

They were looking at ways they could use AI systems, including developing an AI-powered news anchor, to lift some of the workload strain off the producers and journalists, especially during the night shift, to ensure 24-hour news coverage.

"This experience has highlighted the importance of flexibility as we work to integrate new technologies into established systems," says Noura Al Momani, the digital products lead at Mamlaka.

Much progress has been made to achieve most of their objectives to integrate AI to improve news production and analyse large data sets quickly.

"The project is well underway, with significant advancements in our digital department's analytics capabilities," says Ms Al Momani, who played a central role in advancing and integrating their new projects to enhance the digital ecosystem.

Another main learning point was the importance of continuous learning. "Journalists need to keep learning as this is a survival technique in life and work. Change is inevitable and as soon as you adopt new technologies the better," says Rula Abul Rous, a senior news producer at the station.

"Media entered a new phase with its challenges and opportunities. To survive in this new phase, much is needed on the personal and professional levels," she says.

By the end of 2024, several goals were on track to be met, including:

1. The usage of AI in the camera crane for face recognition so that the crane will move with the presenter in the studio.
2. Upgrading the Avid system to provide script writing and video services for journalists and producers.
3. A teleprompter to work on voice recognition.
4. An AI-powered interview transcription.

Leveraging AI tools to boost engagement

The plan for Jordan's first female AI TV presenter, called Raeda, remained in development. By using an AI anchor to provide timely, personalised news to a tech-savvy audience, they were projecting an increase in interaction rates with their content by at least 15 per cent.

"This is one of the most exciting aspects currently in development. Our AI news anchor is an innovative addition aimed at elevating our digital presence. Once launched, this AI-driven presenter is expected to maintain continuous engagement with our audience, delivering around-the-clock, customized news updates," says Ms Al Momani.

By leveraging AI tools, the project hoped to enable the company to enhance content production, marketing, and audience data analysis. The main aim was to increase efficiency, accuracy and engagement through automating data processing and providing insights in real-time.

"The major challenge for digital was how to quickly analyze large amounts of information to get something useful from it. Manual procedures were time-consuming and led to mistakes, preventing us from being able to see where we were going, what the audiences liked and how our content was performing," says Ms Abul Rous.

The team set the following objectives:

- **Automate data processing**: Use the AI tools to perform larger datasets analysis in a more efficient and accurate manner to reduce the time taken to do the analysis manually.
- **Predictive analytics**: Optimize content based on algorithms that analyze audience reaction and usage of the content such that it anticipates requirements for realigning content to the target audience's needs.
- **Real-time insights**: Act quickly to build trends or respond to the audience.
- **Personalized content recommendations**: Enhance user experience by offering personalized content recommendations based on individual user data.
- **Sentiment analysis**: Evaluate the sentiment of the audience towards some content and provide recommendations to editorial and creating content.

They also drew up a step by step action plan, which included in the first instance collecting data and developing machine-learning models to predict audience behavior and content performance by training the models on old data.

Then they configured platforms to provide real-time insights and generate automated reports as well as implementing personalized content recommendation systems.

Other steps included sentiment analysis integration to monitor audience reactions to published content as well as testing of AI tools, training staff and establishing a support system for troubleshooting and ongoing optimization. Finally, the performance of the AI-enabled systems was monitored and the impact on content strategy, audience engagement, and overall efficiency evaluated.

Overall, for the website they hoped to enhance relevant content, increase audience engagement and improve real time analytics. While with the TV station, they encouraged journalists to use AI tools for research and scriptwriting, and to save time and effort by producing automated in-house news reports and summaries.

While doing this, journalists "need to keep in mind the youth market in producing and presenting content on diverse channels and platforms," says Ms Abul Rous.

For now, key ongoing projects include:

1. Revamping the website by implementing AI-driven solutions.
2. Finalising the implementation of a video on demand portal to enhance content curation and ad recommendations through AI-powered systems. The goal is to create a more personalized and engaging experience for users.
3. Integrating social media accounts with the website to ensure unified content management and user engagement across all platforms.

"Our next phase will focus on fine-tuning analytics and exploring further AI applications, and we are looking forward to launching our AI news anchor. Additionally, we are prioritizing a stronger alignment between engineering and editorial teams to maximize AI's impact across workflows," says Ms Al Momani.

"We are also in the process of implementing real-time data tracking and preparing to launch AI-driven recommendations, which will help us make more informed content decisions."

The challenges of change

While some small and medium-sized media groups have accelerated their AI projects, others have struggled to make significant progress during 2024 because of facing unexpected problems.

These companies have typically faced common challenges when trying to transform the workplace, such as lack of training, change in senior leadership, and bureaucratic practices that slow response times.

Being unafraid to try out new things is key for an organisation to keep moving forward. Minimum viable products, where a basic product or service is developed with sufficient features to entice early adopters are a great way to get a new idea off the ground and generate feedback to improve it. But the teams need to be able to take their ideas forward.

Innovation costs can be kept down by using simple small-scale tests that get you to a point of confidence in the product to ask for more money to develop it. But this can still be a long road in low income economies in small to medium-sized media houses.

Staying ahead of the learning curve

Most people have to modernise to stay relevant professionally, keeping up to date with the latest trends and ways of working as the media sector changes rapidly.

As automation displaces jobs, the question will be whether new roles can be devised fast enough to absorb those who are displaced and can companies upskill staff to make that shift.

The demand for Gen AI skills by media businesses and individuals has already grown significantly, says the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 report.

The employees who succeed in this environment will be largely those who are continuously learning, keeping an eye on what is changing and being selective about what to be involved with.

They will need a combination of skills, emphasizing the importance of having an agile, innovative and collaborative workforce, where problem-solving and personal resilience are critical for success.

Reskilling and upskilling strategies will be essential, says the WEF report, in helping workers transition to roles that blend technical expertise with human-centred capabilities, supporting a more adaptable workforce in a technology-driven landscape.

Why senior leadership support is crucial

Senior management support is usually vital for the success of any change project. Without it, there is a risk of failure as team leaders are likely to encounter more hurdles, such as resistance or loss of budgets.

Also, while at the start of a project teams may have the backing of senior leadership, they need this backing to be continuous and were likely to have to go back to top managers to seek ongoing support, particularly when the senior team itself was in a state of flux.
Teams also need to think about how much transformation they can realistically achieve. There may be pressure to deliver quickly, but sometimes the process can take a lot longer, up to two years in some cases.

Some of the projects in the Age of AI in the newsroom programme were only able to get to the early stage of identifying gaps and content ideas, despite having collaborative and innovative teams, because of unexpected changes such as a senior manager leaving the company.

ZiFM Stereo navigates a change at the top to target diaspora

Radio station ZiFM Stereo is part of AB Communications in Zimbabwe. The group's vision is to be the leading creator and distributor of content through the development of online, on-air, print and outdoor media in Africa.

The ZiFM Stereo team were on course to target a new, paying market - the Zimbabwean diaspora - having secured senior management approval for their plan to automate workflows.

Their objectives included using AI tools to convert news and radio content into digital content formats such as summary articles, audio podcasts, video content, and social media content. Additionally, the budget required was relatively low, so that the project had potential to be achievable.

But the managing director who originally supported the project left the company. The changes in senior leadership meant that ZiFM Stereo faced a period of uncertainty over their plan. While the interim CEO supported the idea, progress of the project slowed as the organisation restructured its executive team.

In the meantime, the ZiFM Stereo team took small steps to keep the project on track. "We could have tried to push ahead," says Danis Dube, ZiFM Stereo station manager, "but we decided it was better to encourage the digital team to carry out more research and do some small-scale tests while we waited for things to stabilise."

The challenges of change

Originally, they had set an ambitious goal of achieving 1,000 digital-only subscribers in three months, and 10,000 in a year's time by using AI tools that could help them convert their on-air radio and news items into digital formats.

But for now, it was a case of testing their assumptions, targeting up to 4 million people who live and work abroad, and who regularly send remittances back to relatives. This is a high-income group of people who were likely to pay for content online.
The team focused on the type of content that this group of listeners and users engaged with, such as Zimbabwean policies, remittances, money, entertainment, social issues and international travel.

"Sometimes our coverage was very local and if we were to target the diaspora, we needed to change the criteria for some of our content. Our journalists had to think: how will this story affect the lives of those in the diaspora or their families who still live in Zimbabwe. That was the premise that we have started to test content on," says Mr Dube.

The ZiFM team are targeting content at 4 million Zimbabweans who work and live abroad

As for next steps, the team will continue to test out content ideas and follow up the development of the project. "This minor setback [of leadership change] will not hold us back, and we hope we will be able to implement this AI project imminently," says Mr Dube.

"We have no desire to sit back and let more time pass by while the digital landscape around us continues to evolve. This is a good lesson for us to be adaptable and constantly make adjustments when challenges come up.

"It is so important to break down big goals into smaller achievable steps. That makes it easier to get buy-in from team members and senior leadership."

Approaches to guidelines differ

While many media groups, such as the BBC, have drawn up and even updated guidelines on Gen AI usage across their companies and in their newsrooms in particular, the approach is not uniform.

Some journalists taking part in this programme were continuing to experiment with tools without direction on what was acceptable usage for that organisation.

Others had devised policies by having a bottom up, inclusive approach to help scope the guidelines. This helped the companies to consider a broader range of risks that might arise.

Common themes emerged, including:

1. keeping a human in the loop, whether that is fact checking or being responsible for what is published
2. Transparency to enhance trust in the brand
3. when to use Gen AI, and when not to
4. accountability
5. data privacy

Having said that, implementation could take too long, being held up by approval processes that lasted for months and impacted usage and training. Company culture and working practices could also hold back staff from publishing a short but evolving guide online.

SunStar shines light on AI policy

Created in 1982, SunStar Cebu is a news organisation based in Cebu City, Philippines.

Journalists at SunStar in the Philippines were being encouraged to experiment with generative AI tools despite having no company or editorial policy to guide usage.

The approach was to explore Gen AI's full potential but at the same time start to devise guidelines so that the tools would not be abused.

The newsroom was already testing many tools including those for:

- text correction
- headline and caption suggestions
- blurbs for social media posts, especially for entertainment and lifestyle features
- search engine optimisation, using keywords, and meta tags.

The company wanted to create an environment where journalists could feed their ideas into creating an AI policy. "We wanted to have an AI policy that's crafted using the bottom-up approach, i.e. through collaboration with people in the newsroom and our junior journalists. It's going to be 'our policy', not 'my policy'," says Laureen Mondoñedo, digital content director and project lead.

Her goal is to have the editorial team and management commit to the following four conditions in a policy by end of Q1 2025:

1. Always put a disclaimer on all AI-assisted content published for transparency purposes. SunStar was currently using a disclaimer: "This article was made with the help of an automated editorial system." "Putting a disclaimer will help us build and maintain trust and credibility. This will also ensure compliance with the journalism ethical standards," says Ms Mondoñedo
2. Human verification was key to ensure accuracy of content, so all information generated with the help of AI must go through a human editor before publication. To maintain trust in the brand, editors and reporters had to be responsible for the final output. "At the end of the day whether we use AI or not, we have to make sure that the news content we put out there is always based on truth," she says. "Generally, we don't rely on AI solely. We make sure that we have a person checking everything."
3. SunStar will not use AI to manipulate photos unless they are for illustration purposes. The photo must be published with attribution or disclaimer.
4. Journalists must not rely on AI alone for fact-checking. Information should be checked against authoritative sources, and use multiple sources. They found AI was limited, for example, in transcribing and translating words in the local language. "We don't rely on AI in this sense. We still listen to the interviews to ensure accuracy," says Ms Mondoñedo.

Without an AI policy, the journalists "did not know what was allowed and what was prohibited. Some decided just on their gut feeling," she says.

As for next steps, the newsroom is continuing to experiment and consider best practice and will finalise a policy soon. "Having an AI policy is very important for newsrooms because our journalists, whether we like it or not, are already using AI tools. We have to maintain transparency if we want to build trust," says Ms Mondoñedo.

Conclusion

Most people have to modernise to stay relevant professionally, keeping up to date with the latest trends, technologies and ways of working during a period of rapid change.

Automation, and the acceleration of generative AI in particular, is creating a disruption scenario for the media sector, and especially small and medium sized companies.

All of the case studies demonstrated how to stay ahead of the curve, prove crisis-resistant and bounce back from unpredictability and unexpected events. They typically shared these tactics:

1. They prepare. By being prepared you are more able to deal with the unexpected so keep an eye on AI trends and plan ahead
2. They adapt, flex and fail fast. You can get your AI strategy off the ground quickly. It only has to be short and can evolve. Review, assess and pivot if necessary.
3. They build trust. This is vital for all media companies. By being transparent with your AI policies, your users will know what content they are consuming and your staff will have clear guidelines under which they operate.
4. They have high levels of collaboration. This can either be internally across silos, with high-performing cross-functional teams and/or externally, making partnerships to flourish.

Key takeaways on transformation

1- Plan ahead - and even devise a comprehensive strategy. Having a structure can increase the likelihood of success because change is like an animal. It is very organic in the way that it moves around.
2- Senior leadership is vital for success.Those case studies that had buy-in from senior management were not held up by delays and could get going.
3- Appoint an advocate or champions for change to drive your project towards success, improving internal communications, coaching and keeping staff up to date with industry trends.
4- Communicate throughout the process often and repeatedly to see your vision and promote understanding of it that will lead to buy in.
5- Collaborate, involve and listen to your colleagues. This can really help to include and persuade staff to buy-in. A bottom-up approach, including applying it to the introduction of AI tools or a policy, will lead to longer lasting, embedded change.
6- Cultivate a culture of experimentation. Learn from and adapt entrepreneurial approaches to apply them to your own innovation projects. Experimenting, iterating and coming up with creative solutions to problems to help scale quickly. Those companies that took small steps, particularly where budgets were limited, and reviewed, modified their plans to take account of changing needs, and developed their idea fast, were more likely to succeed.

7- Plan to cater for more diverse user needs - and increase audience share. Spot the gap in your market and make sure you match your product with your user needs.
8- Expand and enrich your datasets. Data is everything today and digital transformation means using it and technology to drive change. It is essential to have the right foundations in place and if you do not have them, start building them by training the AI tools.
9- Continuous learning is a survival technique for not only individuals but teams and businesses as a whole. It is vital to stay ahead of the curve. Many groups were rolling out training programmes to keep abreast of trends.
10- Be flexible. You can edge your way to success by not being too rigid. Transformation involves building different habits, changing working practices and adopting new ways of thinking, sometimes at speed. Being open-minded to opportunities is a good mindset to start with.

Key takeaways on AI solutions

1- Many news groups in this programme were already using AI in the newsroom, for text correction, transcription and translation.
2- Trials were being carried out on converting audio or video content intro transcripts, news summaries and articles to increase readership time.
3- Chat GPT or other generative AI tools were being used to automate conversion of content into articles and social media posts as well as creating headlines, captions and previews.
4- Newsrooms were always keeping a journalist in the loop when AI-tools were being used to maintain trust in the content and brand.
5- Limitations were being found in translation and transcription as well as AI text to speech tools, such as the pronunciation of names in local languages. But journalists were starting to train these tools to recognise accents and words.
6- AI tools can help to improve efficiency, saving time and costs, which helps to build financial sustainability.
7- The tools were so far being seen as an assistant to - and not a replacement for - journalists, helping them to save time on routine tasks so that they could put more resources into high value content.
8- Personalisation was key - whether that is personalised training programs when onboarding staff or automated content for users.
9- Users were at the heart of the experiments, with teams looking to improve the user experience, with higher quality output to enhance engagement.
10- AI policies were being devised by collaborating with staff and asking for their input. They included guidelines on transparency, ethics, quality and verification of information, application of AI work in editorial and training.

About WIN

WAN-IFRA WIN (Women in News) is a leading global programme founded in 2010 by WAN-IFRA to advance gender equality and inclusion in the media industry. Working with media organisations, industry leaders, and journalists alike, WIN is now active in more than 30 countries across Africa, Southeast Asia, Eurasia, Latin America and the Arab Region.

We believe that inclusive newsrooms, boardrooms and content are key to building a media landscape that is more gender equal, inclusive, safe and financially healthy. WIN empowers people and organisations to work together in support of a healthier, lasting and inclusive news industry. We champion equality and inclusion, amplify underrepresented voices, and create opportunities for all who aspire to learn, lead and drive positive change in the media landscape. WIN, together.

www.womeninnews.org

About WAN-IFRA

The World Association of News Publishers, or WAN-IFRA, is the world's largest international press organisation representing 3,000 news publishing companies and technology entrepreneurs, and 60 member publisher associations representing 18,000 publications in 120 countries. Our mission is to protect the rights of journalists and publishers worldwide to operate independent media. We provide our members with expertise and services to innovate and prosper in a digital world and perform their crucial role in society.

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