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Journalism in the Age of Generative AI: A Theoretical Framework of Newsroom Automation, Editorial Authority and the Economics of Trust

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ABSTRACT

Generative artificial intelligence has entered newsrooms faster than any previous technology. Reporters use it to transcribe, translate and summarise; some outlets publish text, images and even presenters produced by machines; and platforms use related systems to decide which stories reach which readers. Research on these developments has grown rapidly, yet it remains fragmented. Studies of newsroom adoption, of audience responses to AI disclosure, and of platform distribution rarely speak to one another, and most draw on Western and East Asian cases. As a result, there is no framework that explains how automation at different points in the news process redistributes editorial authority and alters the economic value of trust, especially in media systems such as Nigeria's, where trust is scarce, newsrooms are under financial strain and journalists face political pressure. This conceptual, non-empirical paper addresses that gap. It integrates peer-reviewed scholarship published between 2023 and 2026 on generative AI in journalism, audience trust and AI disclosure, algorithmic news distribution and platform power, and Nigerian and African journalism. Every source was checked against its Crossref record and screened for retractions and editorial notices. From this synthesis, the paper develops a production–generation–targeting framework. Production refers to AI assistance in newsgathering and editing; generation refers to AI that creates publishable content; targeting refers to AI that personalises, ranks and monetises distribution. The analysis shows that each layer moves editorial authority to a different place: production shifts it towards tool vendors and workflow design; generation shifts it towards models and the people who prompt and check them; and targeting shifts it towards platforms and recommendation systems. It also shows that trust behaves as an economic asset whose value rises as synthetic content spreads, even as AI disclosure tends to lower perceived trustworthiness in the short term. Five propositions follow, concerning substitution under financial strain, the disclosure dilemma, the platform capture of audience relationships, the amplification of existing trust deficits, and the conditions under which editorial authority is retained. The paper concludes with recommendations for Nigerian newsrooms, regulators, journalism educators and platforms.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence; journalism; newsroom automation; editorial authority; news trust

Journalism in the Age of Generative AI: A Theoretical Framework of Newsroom Automation, Editorial Authority and the Economics of Trust

1. INTRODUCTION

On a busy evening in a Lagos newsroom, a reporter may use one AI tool to transcribe a press conference in Hausa, another to draft a summary for the website, and a third to suggest headlines that will perform well on social media. Hours later, a platform's recommendation system decides whether readers in Kano or Abuja ever see the story, and next to it may sit a synthetic video of a politician that no journalist produced. Generative artificial intelligence is no longer an experiment at the edge of journalism. It is woven into how news is made, what news is, and how it reaches people.

Scholarship has responded quickly. Reviews document the spread of AI across journalistic practices and the ethical problems it creates (Shi & Sun, 2024; Sonni et al., 2024). Studies of newsrooms in Greece, Egypt, Israel, the United Kingdom and elsewhere show journalists adapting AI to their work while worrying about accuracy, autonomy and jobs (Allam & Mady, 2026; Ashuri et al., 2026; Jones & Jones, 2025; Minotakis, 2025). Experimental research shows that audiences tend to trust news less when it is labelled as AI-generated (Mattis et al., 2026; Toff & Simon, 2025). Research on distribution shows how algorithms shape which news people see (Schellingerhout et al., 2025; Shi & Li, 2025; Voinea, 2025). African evidence is beginning to accumulate. In Nigeria, Onebunne (2026) finds that journalists view AI as double-edged: it boosts efficiency and creativity, but it may encourage intellectual dormancy and produce content that lacks journalistic values. In Zimbabwe, journalists have adopted generative AI pragmatically despite organisational ambivalence and limited resources, while criticising its Western-centric content and its weak handling of African languages (Chiridza & Mare, 2026), and audiences have responded to an AI newsreader with a mix of curiosity and resistance (Ndlovu, 2024).

Yet these literatures develop largely in parallel. Studies of adoption focus on journalists. Studies of disclosure focus on audiences. Studies of distribution focus on platforms. Few connect the three, and fewer still ask what happens to editorial authority, the recognised right of journalists and editors to decide what is true, important and publishable, when automation enters at each point. Usher (2026) cautions that much scholarship repeats the hype of the technology itself and urges scholars to look beyond the newsroom to the companies seeking to devalue journalism. The economic side of trust is also under-theorised. Iavich and Ivanishvili (2026) show that how news organisations govern AI adoption is linked to audience stability and financial performance, but this insight has not been built into a general framework.

The gap is sharper for African media systems. Nigerian journalism operates under financial pressure, political interference and, at times, physical danger (Danso, 2026; Jatula, 2025; Uwalaka et al., 2026). In such settings, the adoption of AI is shaped less by innovation strategy than by scarcity, and the consequences for trust may be more severe. This paper addresses these gaps. It aims to decompose newsroom automation into distinct layers, to explain how each layer redistributes editorial authority and affects the value of trust, and to draw implications for Nigeria's news industry. The guiding question is this: when generative AI enters the news process, who decides what is news, and what happens to trust and the business built on it?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Generative AI in journalism. Generative AI refers to systems, especially large language models and image generators, that produce text, audio, images and video in response to prompts. Shi and Sun (2024) describe its integration into journalism as tools, as platforms and as content producers. Sonni et al. (2024), in a systematic review, show its effects on journalistic practices, narratives and ethics.

Newsroom automation. Automation covers any delegation of journalistic tasks to computational systems, from transcription and translation to drafting, image creation, headline testing and distribution. Matich et al. (2025) remind us that many fears about generative AI in visual journalism repeat

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older concerns about technology and labour, which counsels against treating every change as unprecedented.

Editorial authority. Editorial authority is the institutional and epistemic standing of journalists and editors to select, verify and frame information for the public. Ashuri et al. (2026) treat it as epistemic authority and conceptualise generative AI as a "journalistic prosthesis" that can extend or undermine it. Perreault and Ohme (2025) show how journalists discursively defended their intermediary role when chatbots appeared to offer direct access to information.

Gatekeeping. Gatekeeping refers to the processes that determine which information becomes news and reaches audiences. Voinea (2025) argues that AI-driven curation and automated generation require gatekeeping theory to be reconceptualised, because decisions once made by editors are now distributed across algorithms and their designers.

News trust. News trust is commonly defined as audiences' willingness to be vulnerable to news media. Aharoni (2026) argues that this definition, focused on audience evaluations, struggles to capture trust in digital environments, and proposes a broader conceptual framework.

2.2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

Three theoretical traditions underpin the framework.

The first is the sociology of journalistic authority and boundary work. Journalists defend their status by drawing boundaries between legitimate journalism and other forms of information. Perreault and Ohme (2025) find that, in the early stages of ChatGPT, journalists in Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States saw addressable pitfalls in AI but worried less about the implications for audiences. Ashuri et al. (2026) show journalists in an Israeli news organisation integrating generative AI in ways designed to protect their authority as credible knowledge producers. Wu (2026) shows journalists using AI as individuals, guided by their own values, even before their organisations set rules. This tradition explains why authority is contested, but it says less about where authority moves when automation spreads.

The second is gatekeeping and platform theory. Voinea (2025) extends gatekeeping to AI-driven curation and generation. The "platform press" perspective centres the conditions under which news is produced and made meaningful in a platform environment (Ananny, 2023). Meese and Seipp (2025) find that major news outlets now adopt platform logics themselves, through subscription funnels, first-party data and personalisation. Olsen and Sjøvaag (2025) describe strategies of platform retraction through which publishers try to regain control of audiences and data. Zaid et al. (2025) extend the concept of media capture to platform dominance, showing how global technology firms add a new layer to political and economic control. This tradition explains the targeting layer of the framework.

The third is the economics and psychology of trust. Experimental studies converge on a disclosure dilemma. Toff and Simon (2025) find that audiences rate news labelled as AI-generated as less trustworthy even when it is not judged less accurate or fair, with the effect concentrated among those with higher prior trust in news. Mattis et al. (2026) find negative effects across all task-specific disclosures, varying with individual characteristics. Li and Lu (2026) show that AI-generated news images reduce trust regardless of disclosure strategy, although explaining AI use by external motives, such as protecting victims' privacy, works better than citing cost savings. D'haeseleer et al. (2026) find that audiences suspect disclosure of becoming "AI ethics washing" that shifts accountability from newsrooms to readers. The penalty is not unique to news. Across thirteen experiments covering many kinds of work, Schilke and Reimann (2025) find that disclosing AI use consistently lowers trust in the person or organisation that discloses it. In journalism, the penalty reaches the business model. Nanz et al. (2025) find in a pre-registered German experiment that people trust outlets using AI-generated news less, especially for political news, and are less willing to accept their advertising, although willingness to pay is unaffected. Iavich and Ivanishvili (2026) link governance choices to economic outcomes: limited disclosure and weak governance correspond with engagement instability and revenue contraction, while accountable approaches align with more stable

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performance. This tradition explains why trust is both fragile and valuable.

2.3 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Adoption in newsrooms. Minotakis (2025) finds Greek newsrooms concerned, unprepared and burdened by the past, with generative AI adopted through complex, often informal processes rather than top-down plans. Allam and Mady (2026) find Egyptian journalists using generative AI but concerned about accuracy, weak Arabic-language processing and limited training, and fearful of job loss, deskilling and reduced autonomy. Atasever et al. (2026) show that in Turkey, a media field shaped by neoliberal restructuring and authoritarian capture, AI is absorbed into already precarious conditions, intensifying labour disposability, deskilling and regulatory coercion, a condition they call generative precarity. Jones and Jones (2025) reflect on a three-year action research project at the BBC, highlighting how hard it is to fund and measure such work. Shin et al. (2025) map journalists' perceptions of AI ethics and how ethical principles are put into practice. Londoño-Proaño and Buele (2025) ask whether AI can replace journalists and argue for treating it as a complementary tool.

Nigerian and African journalism. Onebunne (2026), interviewing eighteen Nigerian journalists, finds a double-edged view of AI and a concern that generated content lacks journalistic values. Chiridza and Mare (2026), interviewing thirty Zimbabwean journalists, find that younger journalists use generative AI more than older colleagues and that respondents want investment in small language models attuned to African languages and contexts. Ndlovu (2024) finds that audiences in Zimbabwe both praised the AI newsreader Alice as innovative and objected to her lack of emotion, her accent and the threat she posed to journalists' jobs. Journalism education is also adjusting unevenly. Ncube et al. (2025) find Southern African journalism schools only beginning to respond to AI in their curricula, and Hossain and Dowling (2026) report enthusiasm among African journalism educators alongside barriers of infrastructure, unclear guidelines and limited expertise. Nigerian journalism also operates in a hostile environment. Jatula (2025) finds that the political wing of Nigeria's press became dysfunctional under the pressures of 2015 to 2023. Uwalaka et al. (2026) analyse more than 41,000 social media posts responding to the burning of a Lagos television headquarters and find that many users validated or encouraged violence against journalists. Danso (2026) reviews a decade of research on violence against journalists across Africa. Uwalaka (2023) shows how mobile social networking applications sustained the #EndSARS protest movement, illustrating how much of Nigeria's news ecology now runs through platforms.

Audience responses. Beyond the disclosure studies discussed above, Sui (2026) shows that audiences' cognitive dispositions, media literacy and awareness of fake news shape how they process AI-generated news that is not disclosed. Zhou (2026) examines whether AI or human authorship changes the hostile media effect, which the study reaffirms. Chen and Guan (2026) find that the public in China accepts AI in fact-checking but wants journalists to remain involved. Liu et al. (2026), using a nationally representative United States panel, find that social trust strengthens the link between public discussion of AI and the perceived credibility of AI and human–AI news. Morosoli et al. (2026) find that Dutch citizens want standardised transparency measures and the ability to hold news organisations and individual AI users accountable when rules are broken. Research on news avoidance shows that trust and avoidance depend on the wider information environment. Li et al. (2026) find, across countries, that individual factors matter less for news avoidance where the press is free, and Taher and Ismail (2025) identify news overload as a strong predictor of news avoidance in Egypt.

Distribution and economics. Shi and Li (2025) show, using agent-based tests on Douyin, how pre-selected and self-selected personalisation shape news diversity. Schellingerhout et al. (2025) find that YouTube's recommendations of conspiracy content depend on how personalisation is modelled. Lauerer and Beckert (2026) document hybrid advertising, such as native ads and advertorials, as a vital but normatively problematic revenue source for digital news. Meese and Seipp (2025) and Olsen and Sjøvaag (2025) show publishers trying to rebuild direct relationships with audiences.

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2.4 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Three gaps follow from this review. First, research treats AI in journalism as a single phenomenon, although tools that assist reporting, systems that generate content, and algorithms that target audiences have very different implications. Second, editorial authority and trust are usually studied separately, so the link between who decides and who is believed remains under-theorised. Third, African and particularly Nigerian newsrooms, where financial strain, political pressure and low trust shape adoption, are barely represented in theory-building. The production–generation–targeting framework addresses these gaps.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design. This is a theoretical, non-empirical article. It uses integrative conceptual synthesis to build a framework and derive propositions for later empirical testing. No human participants were involved and no primary data were collected, so population, sampling and instrument validation in the empirical sense do not apply.

Source identification. Literature was identified through structured searches of EBSCOhost databases accessed through the University of South Africa (Unisa) Library (Academic Search Ultimate, Business Source Ultimate, and Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts), the Crossref metadata service and the OpenAlex scholarly index, using terms such as "generative AI journalism", "artificial intelligence newsroom", "AI disclosure news trust", "automated journalism", "news personalisation algorithms", "platform press", "media capture", "news avoidance", "Nigerian journalists artificial intelligence" and "press freedom Nigeria". Searches were run between 20 and 21 October 2026.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Sources were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2023 and 2026 and addressed AI in news production, audience trust in AI-assisted news, algorithmic distribution and platform power, or journalism in Nigeria and Africa. Preprints, conference papers, editorials and editor's notes, book reviews, grey literature, items without a resolvable digital object identifier (DOI) or consultable abstract, and outlets whose peer-review practices could not be confirmed were excluded.

Verification. Each candidate was checked against its Crossref record for DOI, authors, title, journal, volume, issue and pagination, and was screened for retractions, corrections and expressions of concern through Crossref update metadata. Where an article is indexed in the EBSCOhost databases, its peer-reviewed status and bibliographic details were also confirmed there. Publication year follows the issue year where one exists. Forty-five articles met all criteria and are cited.

Analytic procedure. Sources were coded for the stage of the news process involved (production, generation or distribution), the actor whose authority was affected (journalists, editors, vendors, models, platforms or audiences), and the trust and economic outcomes reported. The coded material was compared across contexts to identify recurring mechanisms, which were then stated as propositions. Nigerian and other African evidence was used to test the fit of each proposition.

Bases of judgement and trustworthiness. Conceptual work is judged by clarity, parsimony, explanatory reach and falsifiability. Each proposition is stated so that it could prove wrong, and the discussion identifies evidence that would weaken it.

AI usage disclosure. Generative AI tools were used to assist with literature retrieval, metadata checking and language editing. The arguments, interpretations and conclusions were developed and reviewed by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the content. No AI tool is listed as an author, and no source was cited without verification against its publisher record.

Limitations. The synthesis is restricted to English-language journal articles from a four-year window. Peer-reviewed research on AI in Nigerian newsrooms is still limited, so several mechanisms rest on evidence from Zimbabwe, Egypt, Turkey and countries outside Africa. The framework is a lens for analysis and does not estimate magnitudes.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 RESULTS: THE PRODUCTION–GENERATION–TARGETING FRAMEWORK

The synthesis shows that generative AI enters the news process at three layers. Each layer performs a different function, moves editorial authority to a different place, and affects trust and revenue in a different way. Table 1 summarises the framework.

Table. 1. The production–generation–targeting framework of newsroom automation

Layer	What AI does	Where authority moves	Effect on trust and revenue
Production	Assists reporting: transcription, translation, summarising, editing, research	Towards tool vendors and workflow design; risk of deskilling	Errors damage trust in individual stories; efficiency may fund substitution rather than verification
Generation	Creates publishable content: text, images, voice, synthetic presenters	Towards models and the people who prompt and check them	Disclosure lowers short-term trust; undisclosed use risks brand-level collapse
Targeting	Ranks, personalises and monetises distribution	Towards platforms and recommendation systems	Separates trust from reach; platforms capture data, relationships and advertising value

Note. Compiled by the author(s) from the synthesis in Sections 2 and 4.1.

Production: AI as the reporter's assistant. In the production layer, AI helps journalists gather, process and edit information: transcribing interviews, translating, summarising documents, checking grammar and suggesting angles. Most newsroom adoption so far sits here (Allam & Mady, 2026; Minotakis, 2025; Wu, 2026). Authority appears to stay with the journalist, who decides what to use. In practice, it shifts in subtle ways. The tools' design, training data and defaults shape what is transcribed accurately, which languages are handled well, and which summaries look plausible. Allam and Mady (2026) report weak Arabic processing as a constraint, and Zimbabwean journalists report the same problem with African languages (Chiridza & Mare, 2026), which suggests that Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin newsrooms will face similar limits. Onebunne (2026) records Nigerian journalists' fear of intellectual dormancy, which is the risk that reliance on assistance erodes the skills on which authority rests. Authority therefore moves partly towards tool vendors and the design of workflows.

Generation: AI as the author. In the generation layer, AI produces content that is published with limited human change, including routine stories, summaries, images, voice and synthetic presenters. Here authority shifts more decisively towards models and towards the people who prompt and check them. The disclosure research shows the trust cost. Audiences discount labelled AI content (Mattis et al., 2026; Toff & Simon, 2025), react strongly against AI-generated images (Li & Lu, 2026), and process undisclosed AI news through their own dispositions and literacy (Sui, 2026). Synthetic presenters show the cultural side of the problem. Audiences of Zimbabwe's AI newsreader objected to her accent and lack of emotion, and some framed their resistance as a call to decolonise newsroom AI (Ndlovu, 2024). Generation also raises the question of whether journalism keeps its distinctive role. Perreault and Ohme (2025) show journalists asserting their role as intermediaries, while Londoño-Proaño and Buele (2025) argue that AI should complement rather than replace them.

Targeting: AI as the distributor. In the targeting layer, AI decides which audiences see which stories, in what order and alongside which advertising. Platforms, and increasingly publishers themselves, use personalisation and recommendation systems (Meese & Seipp, 2025; Shi & Li, 2025). Authority here moves towards platforms and their algorithms, whose objectives are engagement and revenue rather than public interest (Voinea, 2025; Zaid et al., 2025). Personalisation can also expose audiences to harmful content depending on how it is modelled (Schellingerhout et al., 2025). Targeting also governs the monetisation of news, including the use of hybrid advertising formats that blur journalism and marketing (Lauerer & Beckert, 2026).

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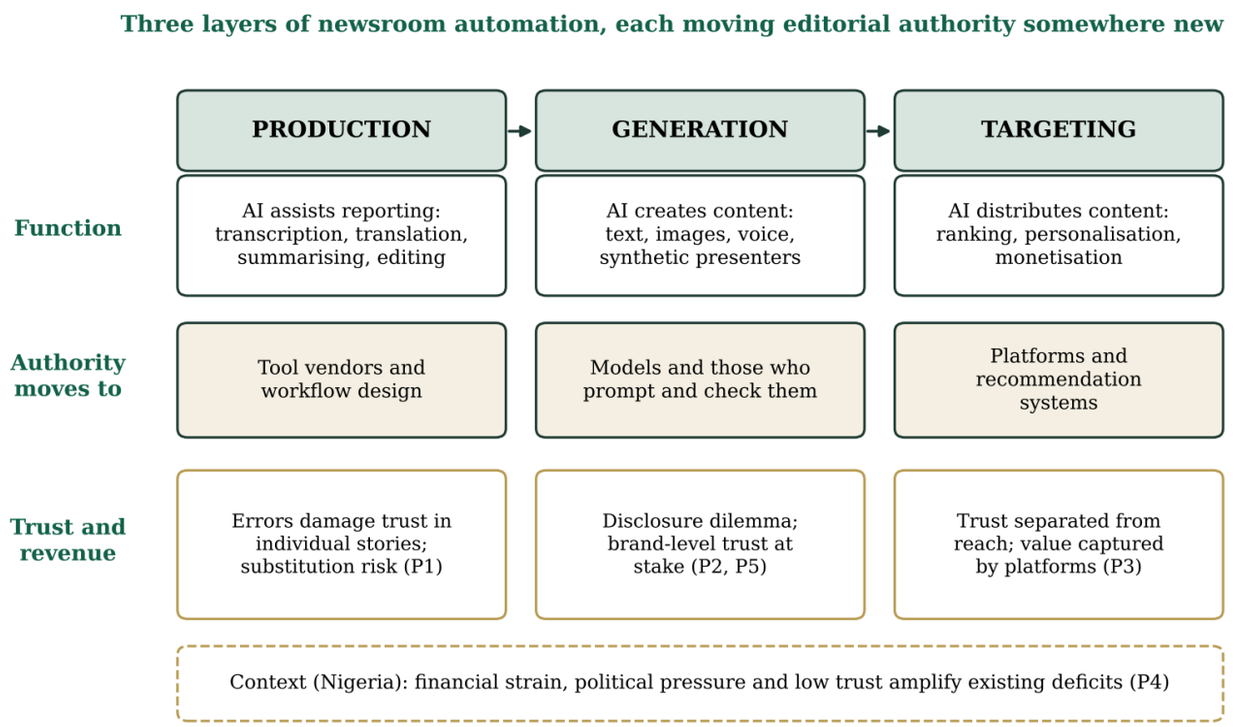


Figure. 1. The production–generation–targeting framework: three layers of newsroom automation and their effects on editorial authority and trust. Source: developed by the author(s).

Across the three layers, trust acts as the connecting currency. Production failures, such as mistranscribed quotes, damage trust in particular stories. Generation, if poorly disclosed or governed, damages trust in the news brand. Targeting decides whether a brand's trustworthiness reaches audiences at all, or whether its stories appear stripped of context in platform feeds. As synthetic content spreads, verified human journalism becomes scarcer and therefore potentially more valuable. Whether news organisations can capture that value depends on governance (Iavich & Ivanishvili, 2026). Five propositions follow.

Proposition 1: Under financial strain, newsrooms use AI to substitute for journalists rather than to augment them, and this weakens editorial authority from within. Where resources are ample, AI can free journalists for verification and investigation. Where newsrooms are under-funded, the same tools are more likely to replace reporting and editing staff, increasing output without increasing scrutiny. Egyptian journalists' fears of displacement and deskilling (Allam & Mady, 2026), Greek newsrooms' lack of preparation (Minotakis, 2025) and Nigerian journalists' concern about dormancy and value-free output (Onebunne, 2026) point in this direction. Turkey offers the closest analogue: there, AI has been absorbed into precarious, politically pressured newsrooms in ways that deepen labour disposability and deskilling (Atasever et al., 2026). Nigerian media organisations, many of which face weak revenue and political pressure (Jatula, 2025), are likely to experience this substitution pressure strongly. The proposition would be weakened by evidence that financially constrained newsrooms use AI mainly to expand verification and original reporting.

Proposition 2: Disclosure creates a dilemma in which honesty reduces short-term trust while concealment risks long-term collapse, so trust behaves as a collective good that individual outlets under-protect. Experimental studies show that disclosure lowers perceived trustworthiness (Mattis et al., 2026; Schilke & Reimann, 2025; Toff & Simon, 2025), and that AI-reliant outlets also lose some of the audience's acceptance of their advertising (Nanz et al., 2025). Each outlet therefore has an incentive to disclose minimally. Yet undisclosed AI use, once exposed, can produce sharp losses of

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engagement and revenue (Iavich & Ivanishvili, 2026), and audiences already suspect that disclosure may be used for ethics washing (D'haeseleer et al., 2026). Because the reputational damage of one outlet's scandal spills over to the news industry as a whole, trust behaves like a shared resource. Citizens themselves appear to prefer standardised transparency over ad hoc labelling (Morosoli et al., 2026). The proposition predicts that industry-wide disclosure standards, rather than outlet-by-outlet choices, will produce better trust outcomes. It would be weakened by evidence that outlets that disclose minimally suffer no long-term trust or revenue penalty.

Proposition 3: The targeting layer separates audience trust from audience reach, which allows platforms to capture the economic value of trustworthy journalism. When news is consumed through feeds, readers may encounter a story without registering its source, and the platform rather than the publisher holds the data, the relationship and much of the advertising revenue (Ananny, 2023; Zaid et al., 2025). Publishers' efforts to build first-party data and subscriptions (Meese & Seipp, 2025) and to retract from platforms (Olsen & Sjøvaag, 2025) are attempts to reconnect trust and revenue. In Nigeria, where news distribution relies heavily on social platforms, as the #EndSARS case illustrates (Uwalaka, 2023), the separation is likely to be acute. The proposition would be weakened by evidence that platform-mediated distribution preserves source recognition and returns most of the value to publishers.

Proposition 4: In low-trust, politically pressured media systems, generative AI amplifies existing trust deficits more than it creates new ones. Where audiences already doubt the independence of the press, AI-generated content is likely to be read as further evidence of manipulation. Research on news avoidance shows that individual distrust matters more where press freedom is weaker (Li et al., 2026). In Nigeria, the decline of political journalism (Jatula, 2025), public validation of violence against journalists (Uwalaka et al., 2026) and the wider pattern of attacks across Africa (Danso, 2026) form a context in which synthetic media and undisclosed automation can deepen cynicism. Hostile media perceptions, which persist in the generative AI era (Zhou, 2026), may also attach to AI authorship. Conversely, social trust can raise the credibility of AI-assisted news (Liu et al., 2026), which implies that the effect of AI depends on the trust already present. The Turkish case shows how AI adoption in a captured media field can deepen precarity rather than renew journalism (Atasever et al., 2026). The proposition would be weakened by evidence that AI adoption has similar trust effects in low- and high-trust media systems.

Proposition 5: Editorial authority survives automation only when accountability is institutional rather than delegated to audiences. Disclosure labels alone shift responsibility to readers, who must decide how far to trust labelled content (D'haeseleer et al., 2026). Authority is retained where newsrooms name the editors responsible for AI-assisted content, publish standards for each layer, audit outcomes and correct errors visibly. Journalists' own value-based use of AI (Wu, 2026), responsible-AI frameworks (Shin et al., 2025) and long-term engagement such as the BBC's action research (Jones & Jones, 2025) show how this can be built. Public preferences for AI-assisted fact-checking that keeps journalists involved (Chen & Guan, 2026) and citizens' wish to hold news organisations accountable for AI use (Morosoli et al., 2026) support the same conclusion. The proposition would be weakened by evidence that audiences grant equal authority to outlets that rely only on disclosure labels.

Table 2 applies the framework to Nigeria's news industry.

Table. 2. Applying the framework to Nigeria's news industry

Layer	Nigerian pressure	Risk	Response
Production	Thin staffing and weak revenue; limited tools for Nigerian languages	Substitution of reporters and editors; deskilling	Use AI to expand verification, translation and document analysis; invest in training
Generation	Low trust and political pressure on the press	Synthetic content read as manipulation; scandals spill over to the whole industry	Industry-wide disclosure standards; named accountable editors; visible corrections

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Layer	Nigerian pressure	Risk	Response
Targeting	Heavy reliance on social platforms for reach	Loss of audience relationships and advertising value to platforms	Direct channels such as newsletters and membership; fair revenue-sharing and source attribution by platforms
Context	Hostility and violence towards journalists	Self-censorship and erosion of independent reporting	Protection of journalists as a precondition for trustworthy news

Note. Developed by the author(s) from the propositions in Section 4.1.

4.2 DISCUSSION

The framework's first contribution is to show that "AI in journalism" is several phenomena. Debates often move between a reporter using a transcription tool, a website publishing machine-written stories and a platform ranking news feeds as though they were the same thing. The production–generation–targeting distinction clarifies that each layer raises its own questions of authority and trust. It is consistent with research that finds journalists comfortable with assistance but anxious about replacement (Allam & Mady, 2026; Londoño-Proaño & Buele, 2025), and with disclosure research that finds the trust penalty steepest for visible generation (Li & Lu, 2026; Toff & Simon, 2025).

The second contribution is to connect authority to economics through trust. Studies of disclosure measure trust as an audience perception, while studies of business models measure engagement and revenue. Iavich and Ivanishvili (2026) bridge these by linking governance choices to financial outcomes. The framework builds on this by arguing that trust is a collective asset of the news industry, that disclosure creates a dilemma for individual outlets, and that targeting allows platforms to capture value that trustworthy journalism creates. This helps explain why publishers seek to reduce platform dependence (Meese & Seipp, 2025; Olsen & Sjøvaag, 2025) and why the problem of media capture now includes technology firms (Zaid et al., 2025).

The analysis also engages critically with optimism about AI as a remedy for resource-poor newsrooms. Onebunne (2026) shows Nigerian journalists recognising efficiency gains, and such gains are real. Yet the framework suggests that in newsrooms with weak finances and political pressure, efficiency is likely to be used for substitution rather than for strengthening verification. Usher's (2026) warning against hype is apt. Generative AI does not change the underlying economics of Nigerian journalism, and it may sharpen them by lowering the cost of producing content while raising the value, and cost, of verification.

Journalism education is part of the answer. Southern African and wider African journalism schools are only beginning to integrate AI, held back by infrastructure, guidelines and staff expertise (Hossain & Dowling, 2026; Ncube et al., 2025). Unless training covers verification of synthetic content and the ethics of disclosure, the next generation of Nigerian journalists will adopt AI as Zimbabwe's younger journalists have, quickly and pragmatically (Chiridza & Mare, 2026), but without the institutional safeguards that protect authority.

Several limits deserve note. The disclosure experiments come mostly from Europe, North America and China, and audience responses in Nigeria may differ. Research on Nigerian newsrooms' use of AI remains largely qualitative and small-scale. The framework treats the three layers as separable for analysis, although in practice they overlap, for instance when headline generation is optimised for targeting. Future research could test the propositions with surveys of Nigerian newsroom managers on AI use and staffing, disclosure experiments with Nigerian audiences, and analyses of how Nigerian news circulates and is monetised on platforms.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Generative AI changes journalism at three levels: how news is produced, who or what generates it, and how it is targeted at audiences. Each level moves editorial authority somewhere new, towards tool vendors, models or platforms. Trust links the three, and its value rises as synthetic content spreads, even as disclosure lowers it in the short term. In Nigeria, where newsrooms face financial strain, political pressure and low trust, AI is likely to amplify existing weaknesses unless it is governed deliberately.

Several recommendations follow. Nigerian news organisations should adopt written AI policies that

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distinguish production, generation and targeting, name the editors accountable for AI-assisted content, and commit to correcting errors visibly. Industry bodies, including editors' and publishers' associations and media regulators, should develop common disclosure standards so that individual outlets are not penalised for honesty. Newsrooms should prioritise AI uses that strengthen verification, such as transcription and translation of Nigerian languages, document analysis and fact-checking support, over uses that replace reporting. Publishers should invest in direct relationships with audiences, through newsletters, membership and first-party data, to reduce dependence on platform targeting. Platforms operating in Nigeria should label synthetic media, give credible news sources visible attribution in feeds, and share revenue fairly with the publishers whose journalism they distribute. Journalism educators should train students and working journalists in AI literacy, verification of synthetic content and the ethics of disclosure. Finally, the security of journalists remains a precondition for trustworthy journalism, and no AI policy can substitute for protection of the press.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

The paper contributes in four ways. Conceptually, it offers the production–generation–targeting framework, which separates three layers of newsroom automation that existing research tends to merge. Theoretically, it connects editorial authority to the economics of trust through five falsifiable propositions on substitution, the disclosure dilemma, platform capture, the amplification of trust deficits and institutional accountability. Contextually, it places Nigeria's news industry at the centre of a debate dominated by Western and East Asian cases, showing how financial strain, political pressure and platform dependence shape the consequences of AI. Practically, it gives newsrooms, regulators, educators and platforms a structure for governing AI so that it strengthens, rather than erodes, the authority and trustworthiness on which journalism depends.

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