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“Migration of Authority” and Algorithm Training: Journalistic Roles in the Face of ChatGPT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to increase the understanding of how journalists react to new AI-based technologies, including chatbots. Using the theoretical framework and the framework of journalistic role negotiation strategies the discursive aspects of automated journalism were examined by conducting interviews in two cycles (2020/2021 and 2022/2023) with newsroom elites of leading Polish media organisations. In this study, we focus on the role negotiation in the face of technological innovation replacing journalists in their key institutional roles. The study develops the theory of journalistic roles, including the gaps between normative and cognitive roles. It shows that members of the journalistic elite are surprised by the pace of development of chatbots, accepting or ignoring the changes. Journalists expect their own cognitive roles to be enriched with AI training. When the perceived gap between aspirations and reality is too great, they ignore the potential of new technologies or “tame” them. Journalists emphasise that chatbots “are just a tool” which should be “subordinate” to humans, not a substitute for them.

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Introduction

After a phase of the automation of content distribution channels and algorithmic topic selection, the advent of chatbots is expected to signify the potential for high-quality text and image creation (Pavlik 2023). The new solutions fit into the concept of “automated journalism”, which is an adaptation of automated news creation technologies and algorithmic processes transforming data into narrative news texts with little or no human intervention (Danzon-Chambaud and Cornia 2021). The term “automated journalism” was coined before the “chatbot era” as it refers to technology at various stages of development. In this article we refer to AI as “systems that display intelligent behavior by analyzing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals” (European Commission 2018). Chatbots are software agents

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that enable access to services and information by communicating with users in natural, everyday language via text or voice (Brandtzaeg and Følstad 2018) and they may be designed to take the role of social actors (De Greeff and Belpaeme 2015). In our article a wide range of technologies are mentioned with emphasis on ChatGPT. However, it has to be noticed that the issues discussed in this article are not GPT-specific and they apply to all currently known advanced chatbots based on LLMs.

An important strand of research examines journalists' complex responses to technological innovation, from fears of innovation disruption to reinvention (Meier, Bracker, and Verhovnik 2017). Journalists and scholars highlight myriad possible benefits of the use of AI in journalism. GPT-3, a third-generation autoregressive language model that creates human-like text using deep learning (Floridi and Chiriatti 2020), could be a source of inspiration thanks to its ability to generate original ideas and content (Sirimanne 2023), but also augment and enhance existing processes. Kunova (2023) lists such tasks as generating headlines, translating, writing emails, posting on social media, and providing context for articles. Gathering data is another asset predicted by Archer Smith (2022). Relieving journalists of time-consuming duties may help to counteract overwork in this occupation (Archer Smith 2022; Cools and Diakopoulos 2024). Apart from positive expectations, there are also concerns regarding the possible negative impact of LLMs on journalism. One of the most common causes of apprehension is the possible boost of fake news and disinformation (Floridi and Chiriatti 2020; Kreps, McCain, and Brundage 2022) and lost of workplaces (Møller, Cools, and Skovsgaard 2025), as publishers invest in building relationships with AI platforms (Newman and Cherubini 2025).

In this study we focus on the work of chatbots that influences a rethinking of how journalists perceive and imagine their roles, defined by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017, 6) as "discursive articulation and enactment of journalism's identity as a social institution" which "set the parameters of what is 'appropriate' or 'acceptable' action in a given context".

Based on the existing findings of the concept of journalistic roles, and assuming that new technologies are associated with discursive processes, the presented qualitative study aims to increase understanding of how new AI-based technologies affect journalistic role negotiation, especially considering that these technologies are able to create content, which used to be a task that journalists had traditionally performed. Role negotiation is a fundamental issue analysed in our research project. Since the project concerns national newsrooms, we place the results on negotiation in the context of the changes taking place in these newsrooms (the introduction of AI does not occur with the same speed and effectiveness in each country). This newsroom-specific approach is consistent with the assumptions of the micro perspective, the need for what was indicated by Raemy and Vos (2021). Therefore, we first focus on how automation affects editorial relations and how it is perceived by journalists, in order to place the role negotiation strategies used by journalists in this context.

In particular, the study focuses on the questions:

(RQ1) How is the automation of journalism perceived by journalists?

(RQ2) How does automation affect editorial relations?

(RQ3) What strategies do journalists use to negotiate their institutional roles in face of Chat GPT?

The conducted study expands current knowledge on how roles are changing in the face of the automation of the key creative process of journalism: the creation of advanced content.

Journalistic Roles

Research on journalistic roles has a long tradition (Cancela and Dubied 2022; Cohen 1963; Hanitzsch et al. 2019; Hanitzsch and Vos 2018; Mellado et al. 2017; Raemy and Vos 2021). Journalistic roles are situational and sometimes conflicting sets of functions that may be combined in various ways across space and time, and several roles may be combined in a single story (Hallin and Mellado 2018; Mellado et al. 2017). Journalistic roles are flexible and adaptable (Mellado and Vos 2016), evolve over time and are subject to constant discursive (re)creation, (re)interpretation, appropriation and contestation (Hanitzsch and Vos 2018). Journalists may selectively choose to perform one role at one point in time and then switch to another role at another point in time (Vos 2022). As sets of practices, they can be combined and overlapped (Mellado and Vos 2016). According to Ferrucci and Vos (2017), journalistic roles are sometimes called “professional identities” because they refer to journalists’ enduring views regarding the profession’s distinctive methods, tasks and responsibilities.

Using the assumptions that journalistic roles can be studied in relation to normative ideas, cognitive orientations, professional practices and their narrated actions (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017, 2018), we consider them in the light of advances in the automation of content creation. Normative roles are abstract norms based on society’s expectations of journalism (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). Normative roles indicate how journalists are to meet societal ideals within journalism’s contract with the public, where society authorises journalism to provide content about the world, and in return, journalists are expected to meet communication needs and contribute to the development of democracy. In effect, this applies to roles such as analyst or detective, as well as providing clues, advice and, for example, enabling access to the discourse to other entities (Vos 2012). These roles should include journalistic roles related to the participation of journalists in political life and civil society (Mellado and Van Dalen 2014) and, for example, the role of providing entertainment and relaxation (Raemy and Vos 2021). Cognitive roles reflect the individual aspirations and ambitions of journalists and the goals they want to achieve through their work. These roles refer to specific behaviours, individual beliefs and values that journalists inherit as a result of professional socialisation (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017).

Research also points to a “gap” between the role journalists aspire to and the role they play in practice (Cancela and Dubied 2022; Mellado et al. 2020). So far, individual-level gap studies have shown that the disparity is particularly wide in roles more related to the democratic function of the press, such as the role of gatekeeper and the civic role (Mellado 2019; Mellado and Van Dalen 2014; Roses-Campos and Humanes-Humanes 2019). Features that may influence the gap were also identified (Mellado and Van Dalen 2014). Broersma and Peters (2016) suggest that discourses about journalistic roles emerged in the era of mass communication but such discourses have not adapted to the way journalists actually operate in the digital age. However, as Vos (2022) notes, the gap may be due to a lack of journalistic skills or adaptability. Furthermore, journalists may be committed to a normative role but their news organisation

may lack the resources to achieve it, or may give way to competing imperatives such as profit goals (Siegelbaum and Thomas 2016).

When journalists reflect on the roles they practise and make sense of their practice through “narrative roles,” they may rewrite institutional scripts (Vos 2016) and a normalisation of normative roles may then occur (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017, 128). This concept was developed in another theory that is the starting point of our research, the theory of journalistic role negotiation (Raemy and Vos 2021), according to which journalists often negotiate between personal identity, institutional aspirations and organisational needs. In this case, negotiation is a process in which journalists try to resolve the dissonances between their role aspirations and the reality of everyday work (Cancela and Dubied 2022). When reducing dissonance and negotiating their roles, journalists use strategies to reinterpret and reformulate role statements to remain consistent with their core values, and seek a balance between providing important and entertaining information (Raemy and Vos 2021). Adjusting professional aspirations to practice was called an “appropriation” strategy, while abandoning journalism was called an “exit strategy” (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). This study was undertaken to fill the gap by providing a deeper understanding of negotiation processes in the face of artificial intelligence technology potentially replacing journalists in their core tasks. The emergence of ChatGPT seems to pose a qualitatively new challenge, and the study of how journalists perceive the automation of content creation allows us to know how they now understand the role of journalism (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017, 115).

Method

Research on journalistic roles is often conducted nationally (e.g., Hallin and Mellado 2018; Raemy and Vos 2021; Roses-Campos and Humanes-Humanes 2019) and national cases help to deepen knowledge about a broader phenomenon based on journalists from a specific country. In our study, the sampling was conducted in Poland, however the results are not nationally specific. As in other countries, media organisations in Poland are experimenting with the use of artificial intelligence. In 2013, the leading Polish media organisations (e.g., Polityka Insight or Gazeta Wyborcza) began implementing data journalism tools (Kuś 2018). For example, the Interia portal ran the project “AI as a publisher”, in which AI “embodied” the functions of publisher and writer in one of the sections on the website (jsx 2023). The wp.pl news portal used an algorithm that produced texts about stock and sports results, company reports and weather forecasts, and Gazeta.pl used algorithms to create texts about football results (Wątor 2018). These small steps led to more pro-AI orientation in 2024, when Radio Kraków dismissed journalists and replaced them with AI-generated “presenters” (Associated Press 2024). This brief history of the presence of automation in Polish newsrooms reveals that journalists in Poland struggle with the same challenges as those worldwide. Especially the possibility of being replaced by technology is a worldwide concern (Cyrek 2023; Yerushalmy 2023).

The sampling for this study consisted of three inclusion criteria: (a) work in leading Polish media (defined by Newman et al. 2022), (b) extensive work experience and high positions in newsrooms, and (c) non-use of AI-based chatbots in professional work. The inclusion criteria a and b were established in order to include in the study representatives of the journalistic elites (Oniszczyk, Głuszek-Szafranec, and Wielopolska-Szymura 2020),

who are responsible for the socialisation process in journalism – the process which results in cognitive role orientation (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). On the basis of these assumptions, the study included journalists from the following offices: Polsat, TVN, Eurosport, Onet, *Wirtualna Polska*, *Interia*, *Rzeczpospolita*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Polityka*, *Wprost*, *Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna* and *Polska Agencja Prasowa*. The inclusion criterion *c* has been adopted to conduct research on people who are facing changes but have not yet adapted to them, which corresponds to the research question about negotiating roles in the face of upcoming changes, as role negotiation derives not only from practice but also one's own vision of changes (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017).

Questions concerning participation in the study were sent in both cycles to a total of 68 people (34 and again 34). These requests resulted in the following cumulative results: $n = 17$ positive answers in cycle I and $n = 16$ in cycle II. Not every journalist from cycle I agreed to participate in cycle II, therefore new participants were invited to provide comparable samples. Ultimately, 16 journalists participated in the first cycle (at the turn of 2020) (Appendix 1), and 15 in the second cycle (at the turn of 2023) (Appendix 2). Such a choice of interviewees and interview times allowed us to capture the possible evolution of the perception of automated journalism in a dynamic environment. The division into cycles resulted from the fact that we recognised that a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of institutional roles requires a long-term approach because journalists work in a technological environment with high dynamics of change (Deuze and Beckett 2022). Following the suggestions of Silverman (2013), we designed our study in such a way that both groups were comparable in terms of professional characteristics (positions, length of service), and demographic characteristics were also consistent (similar age group of journalists, newsrooms from large cities, of similar size). The two-stage study allowed for a deep understanding of the phenomenon and the identification of patterns that may be transferable to similar contexts.

To answer the research questions, the study was based on a qualitative method, with semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to freely talk about their work and provide insights into their experiences (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2012). In keeping with the semi-structured nature of the method, an interview protocol was developed with a core of questions that allowed the development of patterns in the analysis without compromising flexibility. The interview design for both series of interviews contained the same elements: (1) current institutional role, (2) the role of new technologies in journalism, (3) expected institutional role.

This structure gave the interviewees the opportunity to refer to their institutional roles and kept the conversation focused on topics important to them. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity in line with their expectations. Interviews were conducted one-on-one in person and recorded. Conducting interviews in person allowed us to meet journalists in their environment and get to the "heart of the matter" (Tracy 2020).

Once transcribed, interviews were coded using *in vivo* codes – "terms used by social actors to characterise their own scene" (Lindlof and Taylor 2017, 251). These instances of vivid language served also as category names. Categories were compared to each other and refined until the greatest precision was achieved. This "constant-comparative" approach was part of an iterative method of analysis that prioritises the relationship between data and emerging codes (Lindlof and Taylor 2017). To overcome lone investigator biases, the triangulation of researchers was applied. Results were discussed and

all authors agreed on the assigned codes and categories. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at <https://osf.io/w5f4s/>.

The applied research method followed the assumption of a positivist model of qualitative research, as it was a rational process of collecting information – through direct questions asked to participants, who stated their attitudes, beliefs, opinions and behaviour. The research was conducted following the assumption that what people said about their behaviour was what they did, and what they said was what they meant (Gordon 2011).

Results

Journalists participating in both cycles declared attachment to their profession. They defined journalism as an elite profession which served the social good. Their answers are consistent with an institutionalist view that journalism is a social institution (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). Journalists combined their work with fulfilling the normative functions of journalism: the importance of democracy, including keeping the public well informed. The analysis of the obtained data showed a number of key topics that could be divided into broad categories: (1) attitudes towards automation, (2) the impact of automation on professional relations in the editorial office, (3) the negotiation of institutional roles.

The perception of Automation in the Profession of Journalism

As the role negotiation is the process between narrated role and cognitive role, obtaining journalists' narratives about their work was the first crucial step of the study. The first question (RQ1) concerned the perception of automation by journalists in their professional work. Journalists were surprised by the public sharing of content-creating chatbots and their rapidly growing popularity. As one of them recalls: "I saw technological progress and thought that I would be able to do my job for a long time, because my editorial office would not be able to afford new technologies, and now I know how wrong I was" (Int. 25).

While during the interviews in cycle I, journalists expressed the belief that they had unique competencies, what came to the fore in cycle II was a feeling of surprise by the possibilities of the new technology and the rapidity of its expansion, as well as the quality of the content that it created. Journalists also noticed the creativity of the new technology: "I found myself trying to catch its flaws because it's so good at what it does that it may even be creative" (Int. 32). The emergence of the chatbot was treated as a stage in the process of increasing the importance of technology in the editorial office and of people from outside the editorial office who created competitive content. As one journalist noted, "the chatbot sped up the story" (Int. 31).

When journalists emphasised the benefits, such as saving time, and allowing them to engage in creative analytical and investigative work, they also said that it did not concern them directly, because their position in the editorial office allowed them to focus on quality. As one of the journalists stated: "In the editorial office, the greatest good is the time to think and work, which is why the robotisation of certain activities facilitates everyday work" (Int. 12).

When journalists talked about technological facilitation (Int. 1,4,7) and a new environment for creative graphics and video creation, they also emphasised requirements that were increasingly difficult for them to meet, such as support for new programmes and new hardware (Int. 6,11.12).

Another journalist spoke about the automation of journalism in the context of public service, noting that drawing from different sources can break information bubbles: “When we use different robots wisely, it will be easier to learn different opinions on the same subject” (Int. 11). The usefulness of automation was also associated with market goals:

We are dealing with texts that are indistinguishable from journalistic texts, but in fact they are only focused on clickbait, which is why you can also use this type of machines for various types of targeted content, which is even sold under the guise of journalism (Int. 1).

Journalists declared the need to create high-quality content, by which they understood not only writing content, but also the impact on its selection (Int. 1,3,9,10,12,13,15). Therefore, they were cautious of the need for the algorithmic identification of the topics they were supposed to cover, and they emphasised the importance of journalistic experience and reader habits. As one interviewee noted: “I think many readers of our magazine look at the author’s name first and then read the text” (Int. 13).

At the same time, there was scepticism regarding the possibility of further maintaining the current role of a human-journalist informing about the world. Doubts concerned the importance of practicing a socially useful profession and an anonymous author approved of it:

Unfortunately, the world, to use such a succinct phrase, is getting a little stupid. In the sense that it would seem that a journalist is a profession of public trust and that it should be important for the recipient, who says what the face and name is, what experience this person has. I’m afraid that this will have less and less importance, and the content itself will have more and more and its popularity will be counted with views (Int. 15).

In cycle I of the interviews, automation played the role of a tolerated supplement in everyday work, and journalists declared their more or less conditional acceptance of it. Automation was treated as a supportive addition, but not in competition with their skills. Journalists also identified the “commodisation of content” (content created with the support of automation, in their opinion, additionally lost the attribution of a luxury good). In cycle II, the emergence of ChatGPT was treated as a breakthrough experience for the journalistic community. Journalists declared interest and even fascination combined with distance towards chatbots, regardless of their place of employment, position and seniority.

The Impact of Automation on Professional Relations in the Editorial Office

The second research question (RQ2) concerned the impact on professional relations in the editorial office. In this case, three patterns of the perception of automation emerged: a tool for evaluating journalists’ work, a factor of self-reflection on the journalists’ own role, and a factor of selection.

As part of the first cycle of interviews, journalists noticed the impact of automation on editorial relations. One interviewee stated that automation contributed to changing the perception of what good journalism was:

In my company, automation gave managers an assessment tool. Now a good journalist is the one who writes not only good texts, but texts with high click-through rates for a given segment. Much is subordinated to analytics. That's why I think automation disciplines employees: if you don't follow this logic, you'll be a "dinosaur", such a fossil (Int. 12).

During cycle II, the chatbot was also assigned the role of a factor in matching journalists and recipients and shaping the market: "When we said that high quality would defend itself, we heard that our journalism would be niche. When I see what robots produce for average tastes, I have *deja vu* because I think it pushes us into this high-quality niche" (Int. 27).

As the AI changes the perception of what journalism should be, it affects the journalistic normative roles (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017) and thus influences the entire model of journalists' roles. Moreover, applying the framework of Raemy and Vos (2021), we may say that AI affects also institutional roles: society's expectations are changing and therefore what one does "for society" may also be forced to change.

The previously perceived sense of superiority due to professional experience and fulfilling a socially desirable role disappeared. One interviewee stated: "When I got to know GPT, I thought that it was even creative and created content that, after a small correction, I could put on the website, and then I felt that as a human being I was not so special anymore" (Int. 21). As the AI changes journalists' self-perception, it also affects their narrated roles. Being "special" is a cognitive orientation on values, and narrated performance no longer implements this value, which necessitates negotiations. Referring to Raemy and Vos' framework of role work, we may say that AI affects journalists' personal identity.

A journalist from a cultural weekly points to a chatbot as a market destroyer:

It seemed to me that proficiency in using digital technology gave an advantage in the editorial office. Now it turns out that it doesn't matter and anyone can use a chatbot because it's easy. You don't need to complete any courses. Well, at least I don't blame myself and my conscience is clear because I didn't fall in love with the killer of my profession (Int. 31).

Journalists admitted that their current unique competencies might not be enough when confronted with a chatbot. The exceptions were those who believed that completely automatic content creation would allow the selection of real elites of human-journalists:

I believe that the most important thing in journalism is to provide high-quality content that explains the world, and that is why replacing a journalist with a robot is not so bad, because in this way, we will get rid of media workers creating poor quality content on a copy-translate-paste basis (Int. 26).

Another journalist spoke in a similar spirit, describing the chatbot as a selection tool for "journalists – usurpers of journalism": "I see one good side in this, namely the end of 'those who humiliate our profession by producing 'for the search engine'. It is them who will be deprived of work by the chatbot the fastest" (Int. 19).

The results indicate AI's impact on journalists' organisational role, which is what they do for profit (Raemy and Vos 2021). The probable necessity to compete with chatbots will also affect journalists' normative and cognitive roles (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017), as they will be expected to work more efficiently and they will want to meet those expectations. The actual and narrated practice may not meet those expectations and lead them to negotiation strategies.

Negotiating the Role of a Journalist

The third research question (RQ3) concerned journalists' expectations of near future relations with automated journalism. This topic turned out to be particularly sensitive, as journalists tended to have radical opinions and to search for their place in a turbulent environment.

During cycle II of the interviews, chatbots were an important point of reference, thus their activity refers to journalists' "essence of daily practice" (Int. 23). However, journalists believed that chatbots could be just a passing fad:

Once the hype wears off, we will gradually get used to it as we are used to social media, which is why I think technology will change, but not journalism. The most important things will be the same: good informing, explaining the problem to the readers – this will not change (Int. 29).

Trying to defend their position, journalists (Int. 4,6,8,12) looked for arguments to delay this process, emphasising the weaknesses of the new technology. Chatbots were attributed with human flaws: "bias", "deceit" and "stupidity". According to one interviewee: "I think that chatbots have nothing to do with informing the public well; they will not capture the context, because they will not go to a meeting, ask an inconvenient question and catch the context" (Int. 18). This strategy of framing the narrative of technology as unreliable and therefore unnecessary has been called by us as "ignoring". This is a new strategy of negotiation, where journalists know that their narrated practice does not keep up with the technological progress, yet they tend to rather diminish the meaning of the technology than admit the emerging gap.

Another journalist combined retrospective with their prediction of future human-technology relations:

When I started my job, I believed that one day I would be teaching novice journalists, and it happened. But now I have a feeling that I will train artificial intelligence until it is as good as me. It's really surprising, but also humiliating (Int. 27).

Such framing of the future of journalism indicates a possible change in socialisation – a process of forming cognitive role orientation (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017) – which in the future may be aimed at AI instead of journalism novices. This possible "socialization" of algorithms was described by one of the journalists as a metaphor of assembly line work:

I think that when chatbots are widely used, we will be working on a twenty-first century assembly line and they will do it despite themselves. But the paradox is that the better they work, the worse it will be for them. The more good information they produce, the faster they will train a machine that will do what they do, only faster. That's why I think this fascination with the progress of chatbots may be unhealthy, and it is certainly perverse. Especially since it's just a tool (Int. 25).

This metaphor indicates further possible impact of AI: journalism elites "socialize" chatbots, but this is just a repetitive activity, which deprives them of creative work. However, this statement points to another negotiation strategy: "delegating responsibility" ("they will do it") (Raemy and Vos 2021).

Another statement touched on another paradox of the expected institutional role: "I never thought I would say this, but I think that as these machines become more perfect, we will be valuable and sought after as humans as we continue to make mistakes.

This is our uniqueness. We will not be sought after because we are better than machines, but because by making some exceptional mistakes we will be able to somehow improve them. But there will probably come a time when machines will perfectly imitate such errors" (Int. 30). Imperfection may become a value, which will consequently affect the role orientation and the role performance.

When journalists described their role as algorithm trainers, they pointed out how this role was incompatible with the cognitive idea of journalism as a social institution. They mentioned being replaceable, humiliated and deprived of their creative work, the transformation from those who should be assisted (media elites) into assistants. This emerging gap was negotiated by the strategy we name "taming" – when they perceive themselves as algorithm trainers, they underscore the social importance of this role and highlight that chatbots are merely tools that ought to be tailored to human needs rather than supplant them.

There was also the hope of preserving unique relationships between people: "The best journalists will defend themselves, because I believe that there will always be an intelligent recipient who will want to know what a human has written and will trust a human" (Int. 17). As well as ethical concerns: "A chatbot can help me with correspondence and provide raw material, but I can't imagine it being a co-author, for example. Definitely not. That would be unfair to the reader" (Int. 31). Narratives about "intelligent recipient" and being "unfair" while using AI reflect the strategy of formulating conditions: "conditions for the role of advocating a particular point of view" (Raemy and Vos 2021, 11)

Journalists declare a will to "cooperate" with automated solutions (Int. 18,22,23,30). Future relations with technology were described as "surprising", "new", "complicated" and "uncertain" (Int. 2,4,8). The nearest future was described as: "a journey into the unknown" and "a jump into the future" (Int. 2,5,10).

The automation of disinformation, in which chatbots play a special role, was pointed as a context for a new role of journalists – as defenders of the truth. As one interviewee stated:

The biggest challenge is and will be disinformation, which may be of better quality than before. That is why I think that a journalist will be needed more than ever, but not only as an informant, but as someone who tries to get to know this world, as an authority able to name what is true and what is not. However, when I look at this flood of information, I think that we can't do it alone and artificial intelligence can help us, but it must be somehow similar to us, so it needs to be trained. And that will be our role (Int. 22).

Pointing out the "authority" of journalism and a "flood of information" is discussing the ideal-practice gap. The claim "we can't do it alone" reflects the negotiation strategy of surrender (Raemy and Vos 2021). Surrender to AI domination was also pointed out in the vision given by a news service journalist: "Technology will cease to assist the journalist and the journalist will become the assistant of technology" (Int. 23).

In chatbots, journalists saw a harbinger of future threats to their work – such concerns being part of a relatively long tradition of similar declarations, for example, in the face of the growing importance of social media (Carlson 2015). Similarly to other studies (e.g., Nah et al. 2023), the chatbot is treated as a game changer of algorithmic journalism. Journalists saw the threat of losing their jobs to AI in the unspecified future. Therefore, they expected to widen the gap between performing cognitive and normative roles, but they

negotiated this gap by framing their role as algorithm trainers, who would provide the know-how especially about identifying and eliminating fake news.

In the face of new solutions being identified as a threat, journalists reached for the same arguments as when they had identified a previous threat to their roles (Gutierrez Lopez et al. 2022): idealising the past, they pointed to the disadvantages of new technologies and emphasised their own uniqueness (for example, the need for journalistic judgment) and experience in identifying social problems. At the same time, however, they appreciated that the new tools could make their work easier and, based on their imaginations and rumours heard, they saw the potential of content automation.

Thus, while cycle I of the research showed an ambiguous picture of conditional acceptance and slight corrections of normative and cognitive roles, cycle II brought suggestions of new cognitive roles, and new gaps between them and normative roles. Journalists saw themselves not only as entities supported by algorithmic journalism, but also as “trainers” of artificial intelligence. These roles appeared alongside the traditional roles, especially those of informing the public, and the educational role. The “assembly line” metaphor that appears in the context of training is well known from other media studies (Jones and Jones 2019), for example, studies indicate the frustrations of journalists training algorithms (Thurman, Dörr, and Kunert 2017). In our study, the assembly line metaphor symbolises the (opaque, at first glance) repeatability of providing new data to “learning” algorithms media workers (journalists as providers of unique data). It also applies to all work performed in the digital environment, regardless of the journalist’s position, because each contact with the chatbot means its “training”. Given this interpretation, a possible negotiation strategy is to assume that training the algorithm favours, for example, objectivity mentioned in the interviews (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017).

Journalists in cycle II negotiated their cognitive roles by referring to normative scripts, thus strengthening and consolidating established norms. In cycle II, in the face of the narrative (hype, according to one of the journalists) about the chatbot, they decided that chatbots are a factor of diverse selection, including the selection of journalists. Studies so far have shown that, compared to other professions, journalists report a high level of cynicism, measured as a sense of indifference or distance towards their work (Reinardy 2011). In our study, cynicism refers to the figure of a “worse” (pseudo) journalist when the benefits of chatbots were pointed out in the form of the elimination by chatbots of journalists creating low-level content.

Journalists, however, did not decide to adjust their professional aspirations so that their cognitive roles came in line with normative roles. Although they came to the conclusion that their journalistic aspirations were becoming fundamentally incompatible with practice (“chatbots” are gradually pushing them out of the profession), they did not decide to apply the exit mechanism, which could also mean a change of position or publisher (Cancela and Dubied 2022). They recognised that the problem did not apply to them due to their unique status (“the best journalism will defend itself”), and perhaps the chatbot would turn out to be another temporary “shiny technology” (Min and Fink 2021). They seemed to be anticipating, and unprepared to take action that might reduce the gap between ideals and practice.

Our study has revealed that AI affects the whole process of role negotiation, including institutional roles (“for society”), organisational roles (“for profit”) and personal identity (“for oneself”). This study also points out the use of three of the negotiation strategies

developed by Raemy and Vos (2021): formulating conditions, delegating responsibility and surrender. Moreover, we have identified two new strategies towards content-creating technology and the gap caused by it:

1. “ignoring”: referring to professional status, treating it as a passing technology or a technology that is not very favourable (because people are most important); and
2. “taming”: when they see themselves in the role of algorithm trainers, indicating the social significance of such a role and emphasising that chatbots “are just a tool” that should be adapted to humans, not replace them.

In the conducted study, journalists cautiously approved and ignored the automation of journalism (cycle I of the interviews) or distanced themselves and spoke cautiously about cooperation with chatbots, still seeing themselves as a reservoir of knowledge regarding high-quality journalism (cycle II). In both cycles, they focused on defending what they valued most. This corresponds to findings from previous research that in stressful times people focus on defending valuable resources, which may include self-esteem and employment (Hobfoll 1989).

The pressure of the changing newsroom shattered journalists’ faith in their ability to perform normative functions, leading to “normative failure” (Siegelbaum and Thomas 2016). In this research, this condition applies to journalists in both research cycles and occurs before chatbots appear in the newsroom. In the face of pressure, however, journalists referred primarily (usually indirectly) to their own uniqueness, previously identified by Milosavljević and Vobič (2019) as “self-admiration”, confirmed by a privileged status in the organisational hierarchy and an attempt to combine the innovativeness of new technologies with the role of guardians of quality.

Our research also confirms the findings that journalists struggle with the question of where to place human work in relation to automation and are not fully aware of the impact of artificial intelligence on their daily work, which affects the role of journalism in the society and harms the reputation and legitimacy of journalism as an institution (Jones, Jones, and Luger 2022). They are surprised by the pace of change and recipients’ acceptance of machine-created content, which confirms other findings (e.g., Wu 2020).

Conclusion

The categories of institutional roles are interrelated: normative roles shape cognitive roles that support actual journalistic practice. Practice, in turn, is subject to change and observation affecting normative and cognitive roles. Journalism is at the moment of redefining not only its practice but its normative roles. The introduction of new technologies such as AI and LLMs is partly responsible for the pressure for this change (Kotenidis and Veglis 2021).

Qualitative research on roles, role play and related professional engagement is still in its early stages. Our study aimed to fill this gap and focused on how media workers articulated their role, providing insights into the evolution of role narratives.

In general, the incorporation of ChatGPT (and other publicly available LLM-based chatbots) in the publication process will have an impact on our future perception of journalism. However, journalists are concerned that the same AI-based technology that supports

them may also replace them someday (Cyrek 2023). Such potential substitution affects journalistic authority and professional ethics (Diakopoulos 2019). For example the increasing integration of artificial intelligence tools in fact-checking processes presents emerging ethical challenges (Cuartielles, Mauri-Ríos, and Rodríguez-Martínez 2024). Among journalists, the sense of professional authority may be combined with the feeling that “they are able to work autonomously of any kind of influence, including algorithms” (de Haan et al. 2022, 1775).

Previous research has assumed that innovation may not only favour journalists, but also develop at the expense of journalists, whose identity consists primarily of performing normative routines that innovation can completely destroy (Ferrucci, Taylor, and Alaimo 2020; Siegelbaum and Thomas 2016). Therefore, our research leads to the conclusion that when an innovative technology (in this case, a chatbot) applies to key journalistic institutional roles, it reaches a level that determines the threshold of acceptance and non-acceptance for further role negotiations. Journalists either hesitantly “step back” and refer to familiar roles, or “give up”.

Journalists accept the uncertainty caused by the chatbot’s innovation and are open to further “speculative” negotiation of roles, even if they are unable to imagine and accept them (as in the case of the “algorithm trainer”). These journalists do not set rigid boundaries when negotiating their institutional roles. Others give in to the course of events, ignoring the challenge. Still, others seem to be losing ground under their feet and the scope for negotiating journalistic roles is narrowing for them. They expressed a strong reluctance to compromise on their ideals (Cancela and Dubied 2022) and set boundaries for negotiating their roles. Therefore, the hypothesis that journalists are not committed to one role and, in line with role negotiation theory, negotiate between personal identities is confirmed to a limited extent (Raemy and Vos 2021). To sum up, we assume that the field of role negotiation has limits, but these are fluid and individually determined.

However, while the conducted study confirms the fulfilment of normative roles as information providers and educators (Hanitzsch and Örnebring 2020), then after the appearance of chatbots, these are to be “automatically mediated” – at a transitional stage, AI can act as an intermediary between journalists and recipients. In this context, the practice noticed by journalists can be described as a “migration of authority”: from journalists (in the role of algorithm trainer) to AI, and their joint fulfilment of normative roles. It can be assumed that for journalists this will be a temporary role, until automation reaches a level that allows it to replace a human-journalist, while possibly maintaining the human-centric development of artificial intelligence during this process (Xu 2019).

The concept of algorithmic authority is not new – as interpreted by Lustig and Nardi (2015, 743), in everyday life “algorithmic authority is the legitimate power of algorithms to direct human action and to impact which information is considered true”. The results of the conducted study indicate that journalists expect a transitional stage of sharing authority between themselves and AI, and the emergence of “algorithmic power” within it, defined as the power of algorithms to direct human action and verify information, instead of relying solely on human authority (Lustig and Nardi 2015).

The role of media ownership and newsroom management may be crucial in this process, as journalists have to meet not only the expectations of society, but also follow the rules of market logic. At the end of the day, technology itself does not replace anyone at their job – their employers do.

In summary, considering the theoretical framework of Hanitzsch and Vos's (2017) journalism role model and the journalistic role negotiation strategy framework (Raemy and Vos 2021), our empirical research extends these theoretical concepts. First of all, we pay attention to the limits of negotiations. Journalists see the implementation of the innovation of generative artificial intelligence (GPT) as a dynamic, inevitable process. Faced with surprising, innovative machines performing key journalistic tasks, journalists negotiate their role, but they do not refer to their own previous experience with machines or the experience of others, because they do not have it. They recognise that they are losing their advantage as owners of unique competencies, but they do not know what competencies could lead to a new role. When looking for "ground under their feet" and when being "suspended" between roles, they decide to try to "come to terms with" the new role and "exit", which also means "giving up" in negotiations (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017, 129). They analyse the importance of current roles in future cohabitation with innovation (as in the case of "searching for the truth") and express hope that some will allow them to continue practising their profession. As for now, their cognitive roles they embrace are affected by five ways of discursive framing of their own practice. Three of them are known from the study of Raemy and Vos (2021): formulating conditions, delegating responsibility and surrender. We develop this negotiative theory by introducing two new strategies, used by our interviewees to cope with changes implicated by AI: ignoring and taming.

Limitations and Further Research

While it is important to be careful in extrapolating from small samples, the results of this research may be universal and not unique to a single media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

The limitations resulting from conducting the research in large media companies with a relatively high possibility of access to expensive technological solutions should also be pointed out. Therefore, the study presented here should be extended in the future to include smaller newsrooms and by applying other methods from the qualitative and quantitative traditions.

Since new technologies entering newsrooms are often designed outside journalism and a mismatch between tools and journalists' values is noticed (Gutierrez Lopez et al. 2022), the participation of journalists in the design of such tools, and personalisation in journalistic work are recommended.

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