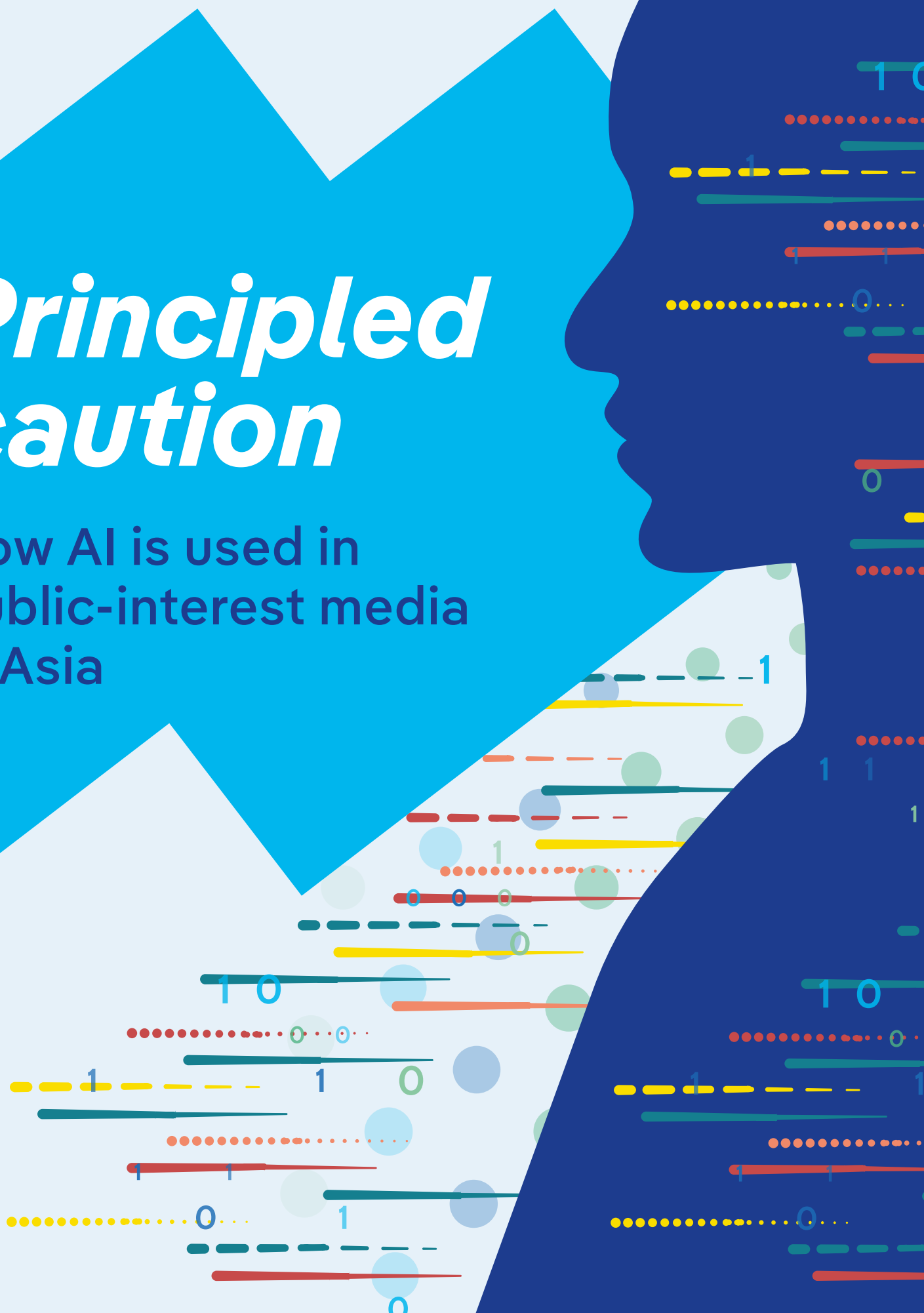


Principled caution

How AI is used in
public-interest media
in Asia



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Responsible

Carsten von Nahmen

Author (Asia Center)

Dr. James Gomez

Proofreading

Loveday Wright

Researchers (Asia Center)

Dr. Kiyono Hasaka
Ekmongkhon Puridej
Natthachai Khampeerapap

Editors

Hélène Champagne
Attila Mong

Layout

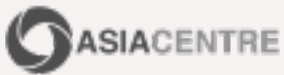
Jorge Loureiro

Illustrations

Marc Löricke

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Established in 2015, Asia Centre is a civil society research institute in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC). The Centre's core activities involve research, training and capacity-building, advocacy and media initiatives, with programmatic priorities on four key constitutional liberties: Freedom of religion or belief (Article 18), freedom of expression (Article 19), freedom of association (Article 20) and the right to political participation (Article 21). The Centre has collaborated with civil society organizations, development aid agencies, diplomatic missions, government institutions, international non-governmental organizations, and UN agencies to advance the cause of democracy and human rights. The Centre operates from its AI Hub and Research Hub in Bangkok (Thailand), Media Hub in Johor Bahru (Malaysia), and Training Hub in Phnom Penh (Cambodia).



Dr. James Gomez is the Regional Director of Asia Centre and a media expert with over 30 years of international experience working for international NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, public and private universities, research institutes and think-tanks. He is leading the Centre's efforts to research AI; support and encourage the AI transformation of the civil society and media sectors; and advocate on AI-related policy matters. He holds a Ph.D. from Monash University in Australia.

List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
KII	Key informant interview
LLM	Large Language Model
SEO	Search engine optimization

Executive summary

Public-interest media in Asia approach artificial intelligence (AI) with what can best be described as *principled caution*. Journalists recognize that AI tools can improve productivity in under-resourced newsrooms; however, they operate in environments where reputational damage from AI-generated content can carry serious consequences. Concerns such as factual errors, awkward or unnatural language or “AI slop”, risk undermining the credibility and authenticity on which public-interest journalism critically depends. As a result, AI adoption is often cautious and selective.

This caution exists within a structurally precarious media landscape. Public-interest media produces journalism most essential to democratic accountability, yet that work often conflicts with the interests of governments and corporate actors that dominate media revenue structures. Compared with commercial media, they are more systematically under-resourced.

Digitalization has partially mitigated this imbalance by enabling smaller outlets to reach large audiences online without the infrastructure costs of print or broadcast distribution. Within this trajectory, AI is widely viewed as a potential next stage in newsroom adaptation: A technology capable of expanding productivity at a time when demand for accountability journalism is increasing while financial and human resources continue to dwindle.

In this landscape, most existing research on AI in journalism has focused on Western and commercial media systems. Systematic analysis of how public-interest media in Asia are navigating AI adoption remains limited.

This report addresses that gap through a combination of desk research, survey and key informant interviews with public-interest media organizations across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

The findings reveal a landscape of principled caution alongside real and varied adoption. In editorial workflows, AI is used during the early (ideation, research support and early drafts) and final stages (language editing) of content production. Translation emerges as one of the most widely adopted applications. By contrast, non-text-based uses remain comparatively limited. Of note, exiled media organizations and those reporting on migration do not exhibit patterns of AI use that differ substantially from other media outlets. This convergence, however, reflects constraints in the availability, accessibility and suitability of AI tools.

At the same time, there exist differences across organizations and media roles. While many adopt AI cautiously (and advocate for such an approach), some individuals and outlets use these tools more extensively with less ethical scrutiny, sometimes treating them as shortcuts for routine editorial work. Such ungoverned adoption introduces its own risks, particularly for the sector, where credibility and public trust are central to its legitimacy.

Beyond these patterns of use, the constraints on deeper AI adoption are structural. On the legal and political side, AI regulation across the region is either absent or actively restrictive; media councils have not developed AI-specific frameworks; and authorities use regulatory ambiguity to threaten AI-assisted accountability journalism, while data privacy risks remain unaddressed by law.

While some journalists may develop familiarity with AI tools at an individual level, the absence of structured training programs and strategic direction limits how this knowledge is applied within newsrooms. As a result, AI use remains fragmented and uneven.

Technical limitations present additional challenges. AI systems frequently produce “hallucinations” and often generate “AI slop” outputs. Model performance also remains uneven in low-resource languages common across Asia, and the training data that underpins many systems can embed linguistic and cultural biases.

Meanwhile, the AI ecosystem remains highly concentrated within a small number of Big Tech platforms. The quality and functionality of these tools are also often contingent on paid access, reinforcing structural dependency among users. In contrast, open-source or alternative models tend to be either insufficiently effective or too technically complex for routine newsroom use.

Operationally, although AI is often framed within newsrooms as a tool that could contribute to long-term sustainability, its actual integration remains limited. Most organizations have not yet developed internal policies or governance frameworks to guide AI use, meaning adoption tends to be ad hoc rather than strategic. At the same time, AI is not widely approached in sustainability terms, as immediate operational pressures take precedence over longer-term planning. Chronic funding instability across the public-interest media sector further constrains investment in the prerequisites for AI adoption. As a result, there is limited capacity for sustained uptake of AI.

A comparison with other media markets, like Africa, suggests broad similarities in the types of AI applications, tools used and challenges faced. However, public-interest media in Asia appear more hesitant in their adoption of AI, with integration remaining cautious and often limited to low-risk applications due to significant legal risks from government regulation and enforcement—particularly as authorities readily frame perceived “irresponsible journalism” as justification for increased control. There is also less evidence of engagement with alternative models, such as those that are open-source.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across a range of stakeholders. Public-interest media organizations themselves should develop clear governance frameworks and editorial safeguards, as well as an operational pipeline for the AI implementation trajectory. Governments must ensure balanced regulatory frameworks, and they should support research and infrastructure that enable responsible AI in media. Technology

companies need to improve transparency, strengthen data protection safeguards, expand model performance to the needs of the region Asia; and they should strive to build more open-sourced models. Media development funders should invest in long-term AI capacity, governance and technological infrastructure rather than relying solely on short-term training programs.

Ultimately, the impact of AI on public-interest journalism in Asia will depend less on technological capability than on whether the sector can develop the governance frameworks, technical capacity and institutional support necessary to harness its benefits while protecting the credibility and independence on which public-interest media depend.

In a nutshell

“Principled caution”

Adoption is careful, selective and highly varied

Funding instability

Restricts secure, long-term, ethical and responsible AI adoption

Call to action

Journalism in the age of AI requires support for research, needs assessment, capacity building and development of media focused AI tools

Institutional deficits

Individual AI usage outpaces institutional structures and policies

Emerging AI workflows

There are recognisable AI workflows that are currently emerging

Methodology

Phase 1

Desk research

Existing research on media and AI in the region

Policy documents

Phase 2

Field research

37 survey responses

13 Key informant interviews

Phase 3

Analysis and feedback

Final report

Validation

1 Introduction

This report analyses the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within independent and public-interest media across eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Uzbekistan.¹ It examines how media organizations in these contexts are engaging with AI technologies, including their uses, opportunities and constraints. Chapter 1 introduces the report's methodology, public-interest media in Asia and the introduction of AI in the sector.

1.1 Methodology

The research for this report was conducted in three phases. First, desk research established the conceptual foundation of the study by mapping key trends in AI adoption. This phase drew on reports, policy documents and analyses produced by government agencies, independent media, civil society organizations and others. Second, the study undertook surveys and key informant interviews (KIIs). A total of 37 completed survey responses were collected (see Annex 1 for respondent profiles), which provided an indication of trends and gaps. 13 KIIs were conducted to refine the desk research findings. The results were then coded and thematically analyzed. Third, following data collection, the research moved into structured analysis and drafting, resulting in a draft report. Consequently, this report identifies practical examples of how AI integration can enhance output and address challenges within public-interest media. The draft was shared on March 14, 2025 with colleagues at DW Akademie for feedback (first round received March 17, 2026; second round received March 24, 2026) before its finalization.

Artificial Intelligence

AI can be understood broadly as encompassing machine-assisted algorithmic systems that simulates and/or mimics high-level human functions. However, the term is now increasingly associated with generative technologies. In contemporary usage, AI is often defined by systems powered by Large Language Models (LLMs), along with other tools capable of generating images, video and audio, frequently delivered through chatbot interfaces that mimic human-like interaction. While this report will distinguish between these definitions and does not treat AI as synonymous with generative technologies, it is important to recognize that this is how respondents—and the media sector in general—commonly understand and use the term, at least in colloquial contexts. This understanding also has implications for how different tools are perceived and adopted.

Public-interest media

“Public interest journalism” can be understood as journalism that produces “independent, high-quality and trustworthy news and analyses based on professional ethics and standards”. It provides “reliable facts, independent analysis, unbiased representation and universal access to knowledge,” enabling people to “make informed decisions that benefit themselves, their families and their communities” (*Miliken et al., 2025*). Public-interest media can operate across multiple platforms—print, broadcast, digital and social media—and may be nonprofit or for-profit. For the purpose of this report, “public-interest media” also includes individual journalists and media professionals who embody these characteristics (e.g. independent reporters and citizen journalists). The term does not include state-owned, state-controlled or state-affiliated media outlets.

¹ The choices were selected in consultation with DW Akademie to cover the wide-ranging contexts of Asia, as well as DW's priority areas. Larger markets, such as India, were not included due to the view that they might have led to different findings.



For the production of this research, the Asia Centre team's use of AI was based on its relevance. While Large Language Model (LLM)-assisted tools were used for initial literature scanning and thematic identification, the yield was minimal. Hence, the team relied more on the traditional Google search engine. The main use was that of NotebookLM to assist in interview transcription, which was manually cross-checked with the audio recording. However, all analytical synthesis, ethical oversight and contextual interpretations were executed exclusively by researchers. The final report went through a robust review process, involving senior researchers, several rounds of reviews by the DW team, and Asia Centre's Regional Director, as the research lead, to maintain the information integrity and accuracy.

1.2 *Public-interest media in Asia*

In Asia, public-interest media operate within environments that existing literature and global discourse do not always adequately capture. Across much of the region, media organizations face restrictive legal frameworks, including laws that limit press freedom and government or corporate interference in editorial processes. Reporters Without

Borders' World Press Freedom Index (2026) places several Asian nations among the most restrictive environments for journalists, where reporting carries risks of harassment, legal action or censorship.

Economic pressures further compound these constraints. Many outlets often struggle to achieve financial sustainability (*Journalism Funders Forum, nd.*) and, therefore, rely heavily on external funding sources such as grants, donor support, membership contributions and crowdfunding. However, the absence of stable, long-term financing mechanisms restricts strategic planning and organizational growth. Even before recent reductions in international development assistance, including cuts to funding from major donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (*Barbero, 2026*), several outlets in the region had already been forced to reduce operations or shut down entirely (*Ibid.*). Others turn to corporate funding arrangements that may jeopardize their editorial independence (*Cochrane, 2025*).

At the same time, the broader information ecosystem has become increasingly complex. The rapid proliferation of disinformation intensified public distrust toward news and media institutions (*Seo et al., 2024*). Political polarization and coordinated information campaigns further fragment audiences and challenge the authority of credible

journalism. Public-interest media are forced to continuously demonstrate their reliability through rigorous fact-checking, transparent editorial practices and consistent adherence to professional standards. Yet any perceived failure in accuracy, fairness or independence risks undermining the credibility not only of individual outlets but also of the broader ecosystem of public-interest media.² We will see that this informs the *principled caution* to the use of AI in independent journalism. In Asia, fact-based journalism is framed by authoritarian governments as fake news and legally prosecuted, hence there is a general aversion to risks of inaccuracy from AI.

Another significant feature of the region's media landscape is the existence of exiled or diaspora media³ who face distinctive challenges, such as limited access to audiences in-country and security risks for contributors inside the country (*DW Akademie, 2025*).

Despite these constraints, public-interest media continue to be vital. Digital transformation has enabled many to reach audiences directly through online platforms, lowering barriers to publication and distribution.

1.3 Introduction of AI in the media sector

The recent emergence of “modern” forms of AI should be understood as part of the broader digital transformation of the journalism sector. Since the late 2000s, the expansion of internet access and the rapid spread of mobile technologies and social media across Asia (*World Bank, 2025; Kemp, 2026*) have significantly altered the information landscape. Traditional media outlets are increasingly compelled to adapt to digital platforms and adopt new technological tools (*Dou, 2025*) to compete with an ever-growing number of digital-native news organisations and social media-driven information ecosystems.

AI represents the latest phase of this ongoing transformation. Although early forms of AI have been used in journalism (*Hu & Downie, 2025*)—primarily for narrow, task-specific automation—the widespread release of the LLM ChatGPT in 2022 marked a significant turning point. Today, a wide range of AI tools are used across the global media sector. More importantly, the growing normalization of AI within media infrastructures is signaling a shift from isolated experimentation toward more systematic integration into newsroom operations and everyday workflows.

However, far less attention has been paid to the specific subset of public-interest media in Asia, particularly at the cross-country and regional level. [Chapter 2](#) of this report seeks to address this gap by examining how public-interest media across the region are currently using, experimenting with or responding to AI technologies.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of AI has intensified several critical debates within the media sector. One major concern relates to the quality and reliability of AI-assisted journalism, including issues of bias, factual errors, “hallucinations” and the production of AI-enabled disinformation at scale (*Lachkar & Siswoyo, 2024; Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025*). Another concern relates to widening technological inequalities within the media sector, as smaller and independent outlets often face uneven access to AI tools and training. AI systems also continue to perform poorly in many low-resource languages commonly used across the region (*Sharwood, 2025*). Further, the growing reliance on AI tools developed by Big Tech companies risks increasing the sector's dependency on large digital platforms and proprietary infrastructures. In response, [Chapter 3](#) analyses these and other emerging challenges and structural constraints facing public-interest media organizations in the region.

Finally, [Chapter 4](#) presents recommendations aimed at supporting the responsible and sustainable adoption of AI within the sector.

² Note that governments also regularly use “professionalism” in the media sector as reasons for increased clamp-down on the sector.

³ In contexts where press freedom has deteriorated sharply—such as Myanmar after the 2021 military coup and Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power in 2021—many journalists and media organizations have been forced to relocate abroad. In other cases, exiled media have existed for longer periods due to sustained restrictions on press freedom in their home countries (Bhutan, for example). More recently, political crises in countries such as Bangladesh have also contributed to the emergence or expansion of media operating from outside national borders.



2 Current AI use in the media sector

This chapter explores the current approaches towards AI in public-interest media organizations in Asia. The findings show that adoption remains selective and task-specific, concentrated in areas where AI offers immediate efficiency gains without requiring substantial editorial oversight or organizational restructuring. Whilst experimentation is increasing, most uses remain assistive rather than transformative.

2.1 Text-based applications of AI in newsrooms

While differing in extent, public-interest media organizations demonstrate a broadly similar pattern in how AI is integrated into editorial production and newsroom workflows. The diffusion of LLMs has significantly shaped how journalists conceptualize and experiment with AI, though there are also emerging efforts to explore applications beyond text generation.

The most common editorial uses involve text-based tasks (*Tabassum et al., 2024; Niseiy, 2026; Djumanova, 2025*). This corresponds closely with how AI is understood by many key informants—implicitly equating AI with generative LLM tools. ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and comparable platforms are among the tools most commonly reported in survey responses (Survey question 4).

Notwithstanding actual uses that differ heavily between individuals, as a guideline, the sector currently positions AI tools at the beginning and end of the editorial workflow (*Ahmed, 2024; Tabassum et al., 2024; Djumanova, 2025; Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025; Gading, 2026; BBC Media Action, 2026*; KII02). At the outset, AI functions as a structured ideation tool: journalists use prompts to test headline ideas and explore possible story angles (KII03, 06, 07, 12). They also use these tools to support research tasks: summarize lengthy reports and research resources and materials. Towards the end of the workflow, AI may be used

to refine text—for example, improving clarity or optimizing wording for social media distribution (*Murtuza & Oliullah, 2025*; KII13). The primary objective of these uses is to enable journalists to process large volumes of information more efficiently and reduce time spent on repetitive tasks.

The central drafting stage of journalistic writing, by contrast, continues to be strongly advocated as a human-driven process. Respondents consistently stressed that original reporting, narrative development, and editorial judgement remain the responsibility of journalists themselves (*Liaquat & Shah, 2025*; KII07, 08, 13)—and central to public-interest journalism work. Some respondents reiterated “It is our journalists, they [oversee] all the needs, not the AI. AI is not the decisionmaker” (KII11) and “No matter how advanced AI [becomes], as long as you don’t go on the streets and interview people, you don’t have anything new” (KII04).

At the same time, several interviewees acknowledged that this norm is not always consistently followed across the media landscape. Concerns were raised about the unethical or careless use of AI by journalists (including citizen journalists (KII11)) who may lack professional training or disregard editorial standards (*Hastjarjo & Dewi, 2025; Listiyoningsih et al., 2025; Djumanova, 2025*; KII08). One respondent mentioned that while large media organizations have AI regulations, “I think small media on a regional level, they don’t have ... guidance in place” (KII07). In such cases, AI can facilitate the rapid production of untested, unverified and low-quality information, contributing to the wider problem of information disorder (Sonni, 2025; Djumanova, 2025 KII02, 04, 08).⁴

Recent LLM developments—particularly those offering “deep research” or advanced browsing capabilities—are also used and explored for information gathering and media monitoring (*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2025; Hastjarjo & Dewi, 2025; Alwatan et al., 2025*). Some journalists described using AI

⁴ Refer to Section 3.1.1.



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tools as advanced search systems capable of scanning online sources, identifying relevant information and organising background materials more quickly than traditional search methods (*Fatima et al., 2025; Djumanova, 2025; Listiyoningsih et al., 2025; KII05*). In a similar vein, AI is also being considered for its potential to support preliminary verification and fact-checking (*Prothom Alo, 2024; Raza et al., 2025; KII03, 05, 10, 11, 13*). Some organizations have experimented with AI-assisted web scraping or automated monitoring of online discourse in order to track emerging narratives or trending topics (*Tabassum et al., 2024; Listiyoningsih et al., 2025*).

Natural language processing techniques, for instance, are increasingly being applied to analyze procurement records, legislative documents, corporate filings and leaked materials, enabling journalists to identify irregularities, trace relationships between actors and detect anomalies that would be difficult to uncover through manual review alone (*Alim & Riadi, 2023; Roy, 2024*). Similarly, AI-assisted text analysis is being used to map disinformation ecosystems by tracking recurring narratives, identifying coordinated messaging and analyzing how particular frames evolve across platforms over time (*The Business Standard, 2025; Feroz et al., 2026*). These applications represent a qualitative shift in how AI is integrated into newsroom workflows. From a productivity tool supporting

content generation to an analytical infrastructure that augments investigative capacity. However, such uses remain uneven and relatively limited, as they require not only technical proficiency but also access to structured data, editorial integration and organizational resources that are not widely available across public-interest media (*AccountabilityLab, 2025*).

This caution towards AI reflects, in large part, the inherent nature of public-interest journalism. Such journalism frequently deals with politically sensitive issues, complex governance processes and nuanced social dynamics that require contextual interpretation and careful verification (*Djumanova, 2025; Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025*). Respondents argued that AI systems are poorly equipped to capture these subtleties and may introduce factual inaccuracies or overly simplified interpretations (*Bhangu et al., 2025; Ahsan et al., 2025*). Moreover, respondents agree that audiences tend to respond more positively to reporting that reflects on-the-ground perspectives and incorporates original analysis or nuanced arguments (*Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025; Ahmed, 2024; Murtuza & Oliullah, 2025; KII01*).⁵

Some argue it should not be used at all, as KII04 noted:

“

When making content like environmental reporting, it's not only sensitive, but it also involves a lot of discussion. If there's any fault in our reports, then it can invite a lot of trouble. So I think when you tend to use AI, you [should] also become more well aware of what you are, what your directions are and about the repercussions that would come if you don't do it properly. (KII04)

A related consideration concerns uncertainty about how AI-generated content may interact with search engine algorithms. Desk research found that automated writing could negatively affect search engine optimization (SEO) performance if platforms detect AI-generated patterns in published outputs (*Google, 2025*). One interviewee (KII02) noted that editors explicitly discourage journalists from using AI to write or significantly rephrase news stories in order to avoid possible penalties from search engines that could reduce the visibility of their content.

⁵ Interestingly, this is in contrast to research done for African journalists, who were found to be generally more optimistic about AI use and are more willing to adopt AI tools (also higher than the global average) (*Mitchell et al., 2025*). However, there is hesitancy within the sector in the same manner as their Asian counterparts (*Ogola, 2023*).

These concerns reflect broader shifts in SEO, as search engines increasingly rely on AI-driven systems to interpret user intent and rank content. While AI-generated content is not inherently penalized by search engines (*Storm, 2026*), its effectiveness depends on meeting quality criteria such as accuracy, originality and user value (*ResearchFDI, 2025*).⁶ Respondents' caution aligns with wider industry concerns that AI-produced content may fail to demonstrate the expertise and credibility prioritized in search rankings.

Another respondent expressed anxiety that AI-driven content optimization could deprioritize human rights reporting, noting that systems designed to maximize engagement or revenue may favor more commercially viable or high-traffic topics (KII07; *AccountabilityLab, 2025*). As AI tools enable increasingly predictive and performance-oriented editorial strategies, newsroom decision-making may become more closely aligned with algorithmic visibility metrics, raising concerns that less commercially attractive but socially important forms of reporting could be marginalized.

Taken together, these findings indicate that AI currently functions primarily as an assistive technology embedded within existing newsroom practices in the public-interest media sector. Its main contribution lies in improving efficiency in routine tasks and facilitating faster access to information. However, core elements of journalism continue to be regarded as inherently human responsibilities. As a result, normatively, AI adoption within the sector remains cautious. Nevertheless, there are stark differences within the sector and between each organisation.

2.2 AI for exiled media and migration reporting

Exile and migration (including diaspora, displacement and related fields) reporting operate under structural conditions that distinguish them from (the more) conventional media organizations, but these differences do not fundamentally transform how AI is currently used.

It is important to stress that the structural challenges facing those working in this field are real and specific. Existing research has shown that exiled journalists operate under conditions that are qualitatively distinct from conventional newsroom practice (*Wai & Andersson, 2024; DW Akademie, 2025*). They report remotely to serve

Non-text-based applications of AI in newsrooms

Beyond text-based functions, some newsrooms have begun experimenting with AI in visual and multimedia production (*Bhangu et al, 2025; Tabassum et al., 2024; Murtuza & Oliullah, 2025; KII09*). This includes the use of AI-generated design tools (e.g. Canva, MidJourney, DALL-E) to support digital storytelling (Survey question 4; *Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025; Murtuza & Oliullah, 2025*). A related category concerns audio and speech-based tools. Some respondents reported limited experimentation with voice generation and text-to-speech systems, primarily for podcast production and video narration. One respondent shared their AI usage in this aspect: "we are using the voice-over with AI because it will help us to produce short video content faster and more efficiently for us" (KII10). However, adoption remains exploratory, with greater resistance compared to text-based uses (*Febriany, 2025; KII02*) as these applications involve less direct human oversight and carry higher risks of producing misleading or fabricated content, particularly as outputs can be easily perceived as authentic by audiences.

More advanced applications are emerging in data-driven and investigative reporting. In countries such as Cambodia (*World Wildlife Fund, 2025*) and Indonesia (*Kidangoor, 2025*), AI is being tested to analyze satellite imagery for tracking deforestation, wildfires and land-use change in near real time, including identifying likely causes. Comparable approaches are being explored in other investigative domains, including the use of satellite and sensor data to monitor sea pollution and illegal fishing, air quality modelling to analyze industrial emissions, and AI-assisted pattern detection to identify corruption networks and procurement irregularities.

By contrast, the use of AI for audience engagement and distribution remains limited (*Bhangu et al, 2025; Tabassum et al., 2024; Djumanova, 2025; KII02, 05*). Although there is awareness of AI's potential for audience analytics, personalized distribution and platform optimization, these applications are not widely implemented (*Bhangu et al, 2025; Ahmed, 2025; KII06, 08*). Most organizations continue to rely on standard tools such as Google Analytics or built-in platform dashboards to track audience behavior (Survey question 4; KII13).

⁶ For Google's E-E-A-T standards on information integrity and SEO, see: *Shavaya & Gunther, 2025*.

fragmented audiences spanning in-country populations, diaspora communities and international stakeholders, and operate with small teams, limited funding and restricted access to sources (*Karimi, 2025; Wai & Andersson, 2024; KII08, 11, 12, 13*)—one respondent notes “we have only some [sources] inside the country, [and] nobody has gone through any training [on AI]” (*KII13*). Infrastructure further compounds this: respondents described working with intermittent electricity access and low-bandwidth internet as persistent operational realities (*Vincent et al., 2025; KII11, 12*).

“

As you know, Myanmar media—both inside the country and in exile—are struggling. [Many of us] are trying to [maintain] content quality [but we have] low-bandwidth internet. At the same time, there is strong interest in new technologies, especially AI [but then] we have very limited time [to explore these tools]. (*KII12*)

In principle, AI tools offer partial responses to some of these challenges. Translation and transcription tools can reduce the cost and time of communicating across multiple languages and diaspora networks these outlets serve (*KII11*). AI-assisted monitoring of social media and publicly available digital sources could substitute, to a limited degree, for inaccessible field reporting (*KII04*). Summarization tools could help small teams process larger volumes of remote information than their staff capacity would otherwise permit (*KII01, 04*).

In practice, however, these potential applications remain largely unrealized. A central issue preventing more comprehensive AI adoption and experimentation is that they operate under conditions of heavy censorship, legal ambiguity and constant threat. Many individuals lack secure legal status (often functioning on temporary or student visas or asylum arrangements), preventing them from formally operating as media. They are also under surveillance and threat in their host country. Myanmar journalists in Thailand are, for example, being surveilled by the military junta regime (*The Irrawaddy, 2022*); and many Afghan journalists exiled in Pakistan are being deported back to the country (*Sirat, 2026; Nader & Ghani, 2026*). To mitigate these risks, exiled media are often forced to operate semi-underground, remain highly mobile, and avoid establishing stable or visible organizational structures. These security risks leave little institutional or mental space to experiment with new tools.



DW Akademie “Next Chapter AI” workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand, November 25, 2025

In addition, AI tools themselves offer limited utility beyond basic functions. They are not yet sufficiently reliable for high-stakes, context-specific analysis, particularly in environments characterized by repression and information scarcity. More advanced applications would require time, technical expertise and financial investment that most organizations do not possess. Exiled journalists, therefore, do not appear to be using AI in substantively different ways from their more traditional counterparts (*Bhangu et al., 2025; Djumanova, 2025; KII06, 8, 11, 12*).

2.3 Language

Among the various uses of AI identified in this study, AI-assisted translation has emerged as the most widely adopted application across the organizations examined. Language tools are generally perceived as practical productivity aids that do not raise the same ethical concerns associated with AI involvement in content creation or editorial judgment. Nevertheless, divergences persist in the effectiveness and the level to which AI is used in these tasks.

Respondents report just slightly below the “average” level of reliance on AI for “language-related” tasks (translation).

The extent to which media organizations rely on AI for language-related tasks (Question 14)

COUNTRY	SCORE*
Afghanistan (Exile)	2.33
Bangladesh	2.75
Bhutan	3
Cambodia	3
Indonesia	3
Myanmar (Exile)	3.5
Pakistan	2.56
Uzbekistan	4

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

The effectiveness of AI translation tools varies depending on the broader technological ecosystem surrounding a given language. For one, respondents broadly agreed that the performance of AI translation tools tends to be stronger when translating into English (and other high-resource languages like French and Spanish (KII03)) than when generating output in many Asian languages (Niseiy, 2026; Bhangu et al, 2025).

Beyond immediate newsroom efficiency, AI-assisted translation into such high-resource languages is also viewed as strategically important for the broader mission of public-interest journalism. The ability to translate reporting rapidly into global languages enables independent and smaller outlets to communicate local issues to international audiences and amplify the concerns of marginalized communities (Medda-Windischer & Crepaz, 2025; KII10). For many organizations, translation therefore functions as a bridge between local reporting and global advocacy networks (Global Voices, 2022; KII04).

For languages represented in the study, particularly those with smaller digital footprints, the quality of AI-generated

translation tools is uneven, but generally low.⁷ This is especially evident in freely available LLM tools, which are often trained on more limited datasets and operate under technical constraints such as lower token limits or reduced computational capacity. As a result, translation outputs in these languages are more prone to inaccuracies, inconsistencies or loss of nuance.

However, there are emerging efforts to address this limitation through alternative technological pathways. In Pakistan, for example, new models are being developed and experimentally deployed with the aim of better capturing linguistic nuance within journalistic writing (Media Matters for Democracy, 2025). In Bangladesh, one media outlet reported developing a customized instance of Gemini to support its translation workflows (The Daily Star, 2025; KII01).⁸ Similarly, in Cambodia, the largest media outlet (not a public-interest outlet as defined by this report) is reported to have developed its own tailored model to assist with language processing (Fresh News, 2026; Protege, 2025). However, this is an option that is often beyond the reach of smaller public-interest or independent outlets. For more context, see Section 3.4 and AI Pioneer No. 2.

In any case, given current limitations, translated outputs still require substantial human correction (KII05, 06, 09, 10). Expectations are therefore also managed—journalists emphasized that they “do not expect too much” from automated translation (KII04). As a result, many described using AI primarily to produce a rough first draft of a translation rather than a publishable text (Tabassum et al., 2024; Bhangu et al, 2025; Djumanova, 2025; KII01, 06). Nevertheless, several organizations have introduced internal practices requiring human editorial review before publication (KII06), reflecting an awareness that translation—particularly in politically sensitive contexts—requires careful verification and judgement (KII06, 08, 10).

⁷ The Centre has validated information from respondents from the following language background: Bahasa Indonesia, Bangla, Burmese, Chittagonian, Dzongkha (including other Bhutanese dialects), Farsi, Jingpo, Khmer, Pashto, Rohingya and Urdu.

⁸ There are also emerging platforms like Kagoj.AI in Bangla (KII09), officially launched in December 2025 as first-ever government-led AI in Bengali language (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangtha, 2025).



3 Limitations, structural gaps and risks

This chapter identifies four main barriers stalling AI use in public-interest media in Asia: legal and political, capacity, technical and Big Tech dependency. Together, these barriers directly undermine the extent to which AI is readily and widely adopted in the sector and represent areas where actions must be taken.

3.1 Legal and political constraints

The legal and political environment constitutes the outermost constraint. The environment is defined by two overlapping dynamics that restrict more comprehensive AI adoption.

First, no legislation exists that directly regulates or facilitates the use of AI in journalism. Where national AI strategies or regulatory frameworks do exist, they are typically designed around broader concerns such as economic innovation, data governance or public-sector digitalization.⁹ In practice, journalists remain subject to existing laws that were not designed with AI in mind.¹⁰ These existing regulations are also restrictive rather than facilitating in nature, and limit media freedoms (*Oktarinda et al., 2025; Kudrathodja et al., 2024; Taban, 2025*).

This is of particular concern as regimes in the region have continued to leverage the fear of “western interference” or national security threats to clamp down on media freedoms. Meanwhile, governments also use

“anti-disinformation” narratives to penalize journalists (*Cambodian Centre for Independent Media, 2024; Bhutan Media Foundation, 2023; Afghanistan Journalist Centre, 2025*). Under the guise of technological regulation, these governments enforce self-censorship and dismantle the capacity of the media to hold power to account (*Palatino, 2025; Rama, 2024; Journalists’ Association of Bhutan, 2022; International Federation of Journalists, 2025*).

Regional AI governance also remains fragmented and limited. While the Association of Southeast Asian Nations recently expanded its guidelines to include Generative AI,¹¹ they still lack a journalism-specific focus. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation lacks formal frameworks beyond recommendations and workshops (*Goodson & Gandhi, 2025; Muhammadi & Hussain, 2025; Press Information Bureau (India), 2025*). Central Asia lacks such a regional mechanism (*Mamatkulov et al., 2025*) in the first place.

In the absence of laws, several international non-governmental organizations have developed a range of AI frameworks, including those from the International Federation of Journalists (2025) and the International Centre for Journalists (2024). Despite these efforts, a policy–practice gap persists.

The absence of formal regulation also intersects with the lack of credible professional institutions capable of providing sector-wide guidance on AI use in journalism. In many countries, independent media councils either do not exist or operate under varying degrees of government influence. Consequently, the region lacks a collective institutional mechanism through which journalists can develop shared ethical norms or practical guidelines for AI use.¹² Instead,

⁹ See, for example: Bangladesh (*National AI Policy 2026–2030 (2025)*), Bhutan (*National AI Strategy (2025)*), *Guideline for Generative AI Usage in the Civil Service (2024)*, Cambodia (*AI Readiness Assessment Report (UNESCO, 2025)*), Pakistan (*National AI Policy 2025: Developing AI Ecosystem and Ethical Data Governance (2025)*), Uzbekistan (*Law on AI (2026)*).

¹⁰ See, for example: Afghanistan (*International Federation of Journalists, 2021; Afghanistan International, 2025*), Myanmar (*Cybersecurity Law (2025)*), Pakistan (*Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance (2002, amended 2007)*).

¹¹ ASEAN *Guide on AI Governance and Ethics (2024)* and *Expanded ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics – Generative AI (2025)*.

¹² Indonesia Press Council issued a regulation titled “Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Journalistic Works” (2025). Independent Press Council Myanmar mandates compulsory AI labeling (*Human Rights Myanmar, 2024*).

decisions about AI adoption are largely left to individual newsrooms or journalists themselves (KII01, 02, 03, 08).

A further dimension of this constraint relates to how widely used AI systems sometimes refuse to respond to queries on politically sensitive topics ([Stanley, 2025](#); [Yadav et al., 2025](#)). In these instances and more, they inadvertently benefit authoritarian regimes seeking to limit the ability of independent journalism to carry out its work ([Uddin et al., 2024](#); [Sonni, 2025](#); [Afghanistan Journalist Centre, 2025](#)).

Survey results illustrate this experience. When asked how well AI tools handle politically sensitive content (Survey questions 21 and 22), respondents' answers were largely negative. Concerns included biased interpretations, mistranslating contextually loaded terms or relying on outdated or partisan sources when addressing conflicts or controversial topics. For instance, respondents noted that AI tools "often rely on biased sources," that there is "a lack of safeguards to protect public interests and human rights", and that "sensitive issues should be analyzed by humans and experts".

The ability of AI to handle issues in politically sensitive and restrictive environments (Question 21)

COUNTRY	SCORE*
Afghanistan (Exile)	2.34
Bangladesh	2.5
Bhutan	3
Cambodia	2.29
Indonesia	4
Myanmar (Exile)	3
Pakistan	2.34
Uzbekistan	4

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

AI itself has also introduced a broader set of risks for public-interest media operating within authoritarian or highly restrictive political environments ([Köckritz, 2025](#); [Human Rights Myanmar, 2025](#); [Central Asian Light, 2025](#); [Rahman, 2025](#)). Respondents consistently framed AI within this wider ecosystem, where state authorities increasingly deploy algorithmic systems to constrain journalism ([Human Rights Myanmar, 2025](#); [Engage Media, 2026](#); KII06, 08, 11).

One of the most immediate concerns relates to data security and the handling of sensitive information. Journalists using AI tools expressed uncertainty regarding how data is processed, stored and potentially accessed by third parties. In the absence of robust data protection frameworks, reliance on cloud-based AI platforms creates vulnerabilities: Sensitive information may be exposed through data retention practices or intercepted through state surveillance mechanisms ([Engage Media, 2026](#); KII06, 08, 11). One respondent from Myanmar emphasized, "at the same time, there are lots of concerns with safety and security coming from those platforms and then also to how we should use AI safely. So that's also very important because some of our members are based inside Myanmar" (KII08). Existing research reinforces the extent of these concerns. In Bangladesh, for example, 62 percent of respondents reported fears that AI technologies could be used by authorities to control dissent and restrict online journalism. In Pakistan, the figure was 48 percent ([Ahmed, 2025](#)).

Emerging evidence from countries such as Myanmar ([Human Rights Myanmar, 2025](#)) and Afghanistan ([Nowrouzi, 2025](#)) further illustrates the integration of AI into surveillance infrastructures, including the use of automated monitoring systems to track online behavior and identify dissenting voices. In such environments, the risks associated with digital journalism extend to encompass the entire information lifecycle. Furthermore, China's increasing footprint as the exporter of digital technologies ([Law, 2026](#)) gives rise to concern that AI-style AI tools for censorship and surveillance will be applied to other countries in the region as well.

Taken together, these dynamics point to a broader structural challenge: AI is simultaneously a tool for journalistic production and a mechanism through which journalism can be undermined. In the absence of strong data protection regimes, many therefore advocate for limitations of AI across the board.

AI-enabled disinformation and propaganda campaigns

Another challenge concerns the role of AI in accelerating both the scale and sophistication of disinformation and propaganda. For journalists already working under conditions of political pressure and limited resources, this intensifies an existing asymmetry: The volume of misleading or manipulative content expands faster than the capacity to verify and counter it.

Rapid advances in AI have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish authentic material from AI-fabricated content (*Mayeesha et al., 2025; Liaqat & Shah, 2025; KII04*). In countries where widely used languages are (relatively) well supported by AI systems, respondents already report that synthetic media is circulating in political communication spaces across the region (KII08, 11, 13; *Samaa TV, 2026; World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2025; Moroojo et al., 2025; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2025; Sonni, 2025*). In many cases, such content is deliberately produced for disinformation campaigns, including the use of deepfakes to discredit political opponents or incite hostility toward minority groups (*Human Rights Myanmar, 2025; KII06, 08, 12*). Though in countries like Bhutan, for example, the limited support for Dzongkha in major language models (*Jamtsho, 2019; Dunnell & Sikka, 2024; KII03*) has not seen such a proliferation of AI-generated information landscape disorder (KII03).

Meanwhile, there is expectedly a widening structural asymmetry within the information ecosystem. Actors engaged in disinformation production often have access to advanced generative tools and can operate at scale (*Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, 2025; Pakina et al., 2025*). By contrast, the verification technologies required to detect manipulated media remain costly and technically demanding. Independent newsrooms rarely possess the resources to deploy such tools systematically (*Kamruzzaman, 2025; KII08, 12*). As a result, public-interest media are increasingly required to operate in an environment saturated with synthetic content, while lacking the corresponding capacity to identify and counter it effectively.

3.2 Capacity constraints

Capacity constraints within news organizations themselves represent a further barrier to AI adoption. Survey responses (Questions 7 and 11, below) suggest moderate levels of perceived preparedness: Respondents rated their organizations' confidence in AI readiness at 2.83 out of 5, and their capacity to use AI responsibly and effectively at 3.02 out of 5. However, key informant interviews and supporting literature indicate that these figures likely overstate actual readiness.

Level of AI preparedness (organizational) (Question 7)

COUNTRY	SCORE*
Afghanistan (Exile)	2.67
Bangladesh	3.5
Bhutan	2.5
Cambodia	2.86
Indonesia	4
Myanmar (Exile)	2.75
Pakistan	2
Uzbekistan	4

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Capacity to use AI responsibly and effectively (organizational) (Question 11)

COUNTRY	SCORE*
Afghanistan (Exile)	2.67
Bangladesh	3.12
Bhutan	3.5
Cambodia	3.43
Indonesia	3
Myanmar (Exile)	2.75
Pakistan	2.67
Uzbekistan	4.5

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Capacity gaps related to AI (Question 12)

CAPACITY GAP	SHARE
Lack of staff skills or training	78.4%
Limited financial resources	67.6%
Limited technical infrastructure	45.9%
Lack of clear ethical or editorial guidance/policy	40.5%
Weak performance in local or low-resource languages	18.9%
Legal or regulatory uncertainty	10.8%
Organizational resistance or cultural barriers	10.8%
Product development or revenue innovation	8.1%
Personal lack of interest	5.4%

The capacity barriers identified in this research can be grouped into three interrelated areas: (1) Technical AI skills, (2) legal, ethical and risk-management knowledge and (3) strategic and editorial decision-making capacity.

One, technical and operational knowledge of AI tools. Respondents identified a lack of staff skills or training as a major constraint, while they also highlighted gaps in technical AI use specifically. These results suggest—and confirm existing literature—that while journalists are broadly aware of AI technologies (Seo, 2024; Ahmed, 2025; Djumanova, 2025), many lack the practical skills needed to integrate them into routine editorial workflows. One respondent commented on this issue as follows:

“**I think media organisations need to [understand] AI from the very start. That means simply start with what is AI? What [can] AI do? What is the future of AI? [Only] after that, [the specific capabilities of AI].** (KII12)

In practice, AI literacy within newsrooms typically develops through self-learning.¹³ Journalists experiment independently—often through online tutorials, trial-and-error or personal interest—before sharing knowledge informally with colleagues (Tabassum et al., 2024; Bhangu et al., 2025; BBC Media Action, 2026; Gading, 2026; KII01, 06, 09). Within many organizations, AI expertise therefore clusters around a small number of technologically inclined staff members who function as informal “tech champions” (KII01, 06). While this arrangement allows experimentation even in resource-constrained environments, it also reveals the fragility of current capacity structures: Organizational knowledge remains highly individualized and can quickly disappear if those individuals leave.

13 So are journalists in Africa (Mitchell et al., 2025).

Two, legal, ethical and risk-management knowledge. Survey responses (Question 13) indicate substantial training needs in areas such as legal and copyright issues, AI ethics and bias mitigation, data protection and digital security. AI systems can introduce risks ranging from biased outputs (KII10, 11, 13) and disinformation to copyright infringement and data privacy violations (*Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025*; KII03, 04, 05). As a result, journalists require not only technical competence but also the ability to critically evaluate AI-generated material and determine when its use is appropriate (KII02).

Primary skills and training gaps related to AI (Question 13)

ORGANIZATION'S TRAINING GAP	SHARE
Technical use	75.7%
Legal and copyright issues	51.4%
Editorial judgement and human oversight	48.6%
AI ethics and bias mitigation	45.9%
Data protection and digital security	43.2%
Strategic or managerial capacity	40.5%

Closely related is the concern that heavy reliance on AI could weaken core journalistic skills. These skills are traditionally developed through sustained practice—and, for many in the sector, seen as its lifeblood. If journalists increasingly outsource elements of these processes to automated systems, some editors fear that the craft of reporting itself may gradually diminish (*Tabassum et al., 2024*; *Tuasikal & Timmerman, 2025*; *Bhangu et al., 2025*; KII02, 04, 05). These concerns reflect professional anxiety about the cultural implications of AI adoption within journalism (*Besman & Evita, 2024*; *Vincent et al., 2025*; KII03, 04, 05, 07, 10). One interviewee described a training exercise in which a participant automatically consulted an AI tool rather than seeking information from primary sources (KII04):

“

I ran a training program some months ago on climate change reporting. One local journalist [immediately] used AI to check and then to generate ideas when I asked him [for his thoughts on] the content. [So now] it becomes like you automatically believe what ChatGPT tells you about things. That's a problem [if you don't go back] to the original sources. (KII04)

Three, strategic leadership and editorial decision-making related to AI adoption. Effective AI adoption requires editorial leadership capable of determining how and where automation should be introduced, how risks should be managed and how journalistic standards should be maintained. Across most organizations examined in this study, however, training directed at senior editors, managers or media owners remains largely absent (*Bhangu et al., 2025*; *Murtuza & Oliullah, 2025*; KII05). Without leadership engagement, AI experimentation tends to remain decentralized and informal. Potential AI applications at the organizational level are underway, though their impact remains limited (*Media Matters for Democracy, 2025*; *Henriksson, 2025*).

Notably, respondents frequently emphasized this governance dimension as the most urgent training need (KII01, 10). As one respondent observed, “what we must learn is, first, when not to use AI; then when and how to use AI” (KII02). This perspective reflects a broader awareness within the sector that technical adoption without ethical and editorial safeguards could undermine journalistic credibility.

Overall, the findings suggest that capacity building within the sector must extend beyond technical training alone. Improving AI literacy among journalists remains important, but the more consequential gaps concern governance, editorial judgment and organizational strategy. Without addressing these dimensions, improvements in technical skills alone are unlikely to translate into sustained and responsible AI integration within public-interest media organizations.

It is also important to note that respondents who have undergone AI-related training tend to be more supportive of its use (*Seo et al., 2024*; *Ahmed, 2025*; KII05). However, this finding requires careful qualification. On one hand, greater familiarity with AI tools and their capabilities may increase confidence and willingness to adopt them in

newsroom workflows. On the other hand, this pattern may reflect a self-selection bias, whereby those already interested in or positively disposed toward AI are more likely to seek out training opportunities in the first place. This can create a feedback loop in which knowledge and enthusiasm for AI remain concentrated among a relatively small group, limiting broader diffusion across the newsroom and reducing the likelihood of wider attitudinal change.

A respondent also highlighted a critical caution: Public misconceptions often link AI training with an endorsement of (bad quality) AI content, which can severely damage the reputation of the training organization. KII07 explained:

“

It's actually quite tricky when we conduct AI literacy training – we provide training, but some of it can be perceived as encouragement to just use AI. (KII07)

This perception creates a significant constraint on external training, as organizations fear it could undermine their trust and credibility. To protect their reputation, many keep such essential training internal, concerned that being seen as “pro-AI” might compromise their journalistic integrity.

3.3 Technical constraints

The adoption of AI in public-interest journalism is also shaped by the limitations of the technology itself. This section focuses on three of these constraints: factual reliability, quality of AI output (“AI slop”) and language capability.

The first concerns factual reliability, particularly the well-documented phenomenon of hallucination in LLMs. Research on generative AI consistently demonstrates that these systems perform far more reliably on “linguistic” tasks than on tasks requiring factual accuracy (KII07; [Gordon, 2024](#); [Liaqat et al., 2024](#)). In the context of public-interest reporting, the possibility that AI systems may generate plausible but incorrect information represents a serious professional risk ([Seo et al., 2024](#); KII04, 07). There are also concerns that AI-generated outputs may inadvertently reproduce or closely resemble existing copyrighted material, raising potential intellectual property and attribution issues for news organizations (KII04; [Baskoro, 2025](#); [Nimol, 2025](#)). For this reason, as noted across [Chapter 2](#), many journalists use AI tools primarily for workflow assistance rather than for substantive reporting (KII02, 06, 07; [Tabassum et al., 2024](#); [Djumanova, 2025](#)).

Responses from surveys and KIIs continue to reflect this concern as a central theme. However, it is also noted that this is already a well-known problem and some organizations are more actively trying to check the validity of information sources (KII04, 06, 11). Nevertheless, the readiness is uneven (KII04, 09, 10; [Bhangu et al., 2025](#); [Liaqat & Shah, 2025](#)) and the concern therefore extends beyond the technical limitations of AI systems to include questions about ethical awareness, accountability and the preparedness of newsroom leadership to govern the expanding use of such tools (see Section 3.2 above).

Key concerns related to AI (Question 20)

RISKS	SCORE*
Accuracy or hallucinations	3.78
Algorithmic bias	3.62
Legal or copyright liability	3.54
Source protection and safety	3.67

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

The second major constraint concerns the quality of AI-generated outputs and the perception of their “AI-ness” — often described as “AI slop” ([Willison, 2024](#); [Hanne, 2026](#); [Curtis, 2025](#); [Chuan, 2026](#)). Across formats, AI-generated material can appear subtly or even manifestly unnatural. These artefacts are particularly visible when systems attempt high levels of “realism”, especially for multimedia outputs.

Although systematic regional research remains limited, the increasingly widespread use of the term “AI slop” indicates a shared critique ([Rajput, 2025](#); [Ofra Regina & Faisal, 2025](#)). Respondents observed that audiences can identify poorly executed AI outputs (KII03, 11) and that perceived artificiality can erode confidence in editorial processes (KII08, 10; [Park et al., 2025](#)). As one respondent noted, audiences increasingly criticize media for “generously using AI” in content production (KII03), while another highlighted that AI content often fails to engage with the audience (KII11).

Respondents repeatedly emphasized that credibility is tied not only to whether information is correct, but to how it is presented (*Lhamo, 2024*; KII03, 08, 10). AI slop outputs can signal automation to audiences, even when the underlying reporting is sound. One participant observed that even among editors, there are debates regarding the potential loss of trust when using AI:

“

Many of the editors are discussing that we shouldn't be using AI for [newswriting], some other editors said that we shouldn't use AI portals at all because this will be really misleading [and we will lose] credibility. This is controversial and [there are] debates among ourselves. (KII08)

To ensure public trust, many newsrooms have maintained that journalists specify how AI has been used in the reporting process (KII01, 10). KII10 notes:

“

If we gather or scrape data with AI, we have to declare this is very important to [ensure] audience trust. The human presence is most important [and] it cannot be replaced by AI. (KII10)

At the same time, perceptions of “AI slop” are not uniform. Sensitivity varies across audiences, shaped by levels of media and information literacy and familiarity with digital environments (*Ousa, 2025*; *Dhahir et al., 2024*; KII04, 09).¹⁴ Skepticism also does not equate to outright rejection. One study of the channel Discover Pakistan, for example, found that 77.5 percent of respondents reported being more likely to engage with AI-assisted content, while 86.6 percent expressed support for increased AI use. A majority (80.7 percent) were aware of AI integration and reported general satisfaction with AI-driven personalization (*Zulfiqar & Ullah, 2025*). Another report moderate acceptance of AI in Indonesian news: public comfort sits at 44 percent for AI-assisted human reporting (*Park et al., 2025*). These findings suggest that audience acceptance is conditional: concerns arise primarily when AI use is visible in ways that signal low quality or reduced editorial control, rather than from the use of AI itself (KII10).

The third concern relates to language capability and contextual accuracy, an issue already introduced in [Section 2.3](#). These limitations stem both from uneven technical performance across languages and from deeper structural biases embedded in the training data used to build large AI systems (*Sonni, 2025*; *Graves, 2018*).

For one, there is a systematic unevenness and underperformance of AI systems across languages (KII03, 07, 11, 12; *Vargas-Parada, 2025*). Further, research demonstrates that improvements in high-resource languages do not automatically translate into comparable performance gains in low-resource linguistic contexts (*Wang et al., 2022*). As a result, the rapid progress of AI capabilities documented globally does not necessarily benefit the linguistic environments most relevant to public-interest media in this study.

Interview and survey findings confirm the practical consequences of this imbalance. Journalists reported persistent difficulties when using AI tools for translation, transcription and speech recognition in regional languages (KII03, 07, 08, 11, 12; *Sry & Nguyen, 2022*; *Veitsman & Hartmann, 2025*; *One to Many Research, 2025*). Systems frequently mistranslate culturally specific terminology, administrative titles or legal terms, sometimes altering meaning in ways that could affect the interpretation of politically sensitive material (*Khoda, 2020*; *Moroojo et al., 2025*; *Rogin & Corkery, 2023*; KII04, 11).

¹⁴ This is also the same finding as African audiences' sensitivities to “AI slop” (*Mitchel et al., 2025*).

Performance of AI tools in language-related tasks (Questions 14, 15)

COUNTRY	SCORE*				Overall
	Translation	Transcription	Text-to-speech	Multilingual content distribution	
Afghanistan (Exile)	3.33	2.33	2.33	3	2.61
Bangladesh	3.88	3.38	3.25	3.5	3.48
Bhutan	3.5	4	4	2	3.58
Cambodia	3.71	3.14	2.71	2.43	2.83
Indonesia	3.5	3.5	3	3	3.167
Myanmar (Exile)	3.22	3.22	2.44	2.33	2.78
Pakistan	3.5	2.25	2	2.25	2.42
Uzbekistan	4	4	3	3	3.67
Regional	3.56	3.14	2.75	2.69	3

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

As discussed earlier in [Section 2.2](#), translation is one of the few AI applications that many organizations have adopted more widely ([Djumanova, 2025](#); [Bhangu et al., 2025](#)). Even here, however, performance remains uneven (KII02, 08, 11, 12). While AI-assisted translation can help journalists produce multilingual content more quickly, outputs still require substantial human review to ensure accuracy and cultural appropriateness ([Bhangu et al., 2025](#); [Moroojo et al., 2025](#); KII07, 08, 11, 12). Outlets also do not yet view AI as a primary driver for these objectives, as human oversight remains essential for translation and substantial improvements are still needed for low-resource language models.

A second challenge arises from the structural biases embedded in AI training data. The training datasets used to build many leading AI models are dominated by English-language and Western-sourced materials ([Khan, 2025](#); [Birahim, 2025](#); KII11). KII08 noted, “AI output is [produced] from the perspective of [the West] ... if [it has not gone through] proper editing, that can also lead to misleading information or misunderstanding”. Consequently,

the knowledge structures embedded in these systems reflect global information hierarchies rather than the political and cultural contexts in which many journalists in Asia operate ([Tao et al., 2024](#); [Muhammad, 2026](#); KII10). Large language models do not simply reproduce information contained within their training data; they also amplify patterns within those datasets.

For journalists covering complex political issues in the region, AI systems frequently produce outputs that lack contextual precision (KII04, 09, 11; [Shahmerdanova, 2025](#)). Several interview respondents observed that AI-generated summaries or drafts often remove the specific vocabulary used in human rights reporting, flatten historically significant terminology or fail to capture the subtle implications embedded in official language (KII01, 02, 04, 09; see, for example: [Oversight Board, 2026](#); [Hoque, 2024](#)). In sensitive reporting environments, as discussed in 3.1 above, these omissions can determine whether reporting accurately reflects legal violations, protects sources or avoids political misinterpretation.

The capacity of AI to support cross-border or regional content exchange (Question 16)

COUNTRY	SCORE*
Afghanistan (Exile)	2.67
Bangladesh	3.13
Bhutan	3
Cambodia	3.14
Indonesia	3.5
Myanmar (Exile)	3
Pakistan	2.78
Uzbekistan	4.5

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Taken together, these technological constraints highlight that the barriers to AI adoption in public-interest journalism are embedded within the design and governance of

current AI systems. As a result, the challenge facing independent media organizations is not simply acquiring technical skills but navigating an AI ecosystem whose architecture and incentives were not designed with the needs of public-interest journalism in mind.

3.4 Big Tech dependency

The fourth constraint concerns the structural dependency of public-interest media on large technology platforms that dominate the global AI ecosystem. A small number of companies control the most widely used models, cloud infrastructure and application interfaces, shaping not only access to AI tools but also the conditions under which they can be used ([Umer, 2026](#); [Mediana, 2025](#); [Jalova, 2025](#)).

For most media organizations operating in resource-constrained environments, these systems are the only viable entry point into AI adoption. Tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini are frequently used because they are accessible, relatively affordable and require minimal technical integration ([Lhamo, 2024](#); [Bhangu et al, 2025](#); [BBC Media Action, 2026](#); [Gading, 2026](#); KII13). By contrast, building or hosting independent AI systems remains beyond the financial and technical capacity of most organizations ([Niseiy, 2025](#); [Lovett, 2025](#); KII04, 05, 08, 10, 11).



Rappler editorial offices in Manila, Philippines

This creates a structural asymmetry: While AI is increasingly embedded in newsroom workflows, control over its underlying infrastructure remains external. Media organizations depend on systems whose terms of service, data governance frameworks and content moderation policies are determined by private actors operating outside their institutional and regulatory environments. They also rely on outputs generated by these systems, which are shaped by training data and models that remain largely opaque to end users.

Geopolitical considerations also complicate platform choices. While alternative AI ecosystems—particularly those developed by Chinese technology companies like Deepseek—are sometimes available, they are rarely adopted at scale. Respondents cited concerns regarding privacy, political bias and potential censorship embedded within such systems (*Paat, 2025*; KII06, 07, 08, 11). KII05 illustrated “I never tried [DeepSeek], because I mean, I’m not trying to discriminate, but we [are just] not confident about their privacy [protection]”. However, it must be noted that decisions about which tools, on the whole, to use are driven less by these aforementioned concerns than by accessibility, usability and familiarity (KII03, 07, 09). Time (KII02, 12) constraints and limited technical capacity also restrict experimentation with alternative platforms (KII05, 07).

Efforts to reduce reliance on large technology providers remain tentative.¹⁵

Efforts to reduce Big Tech dependency? (Question 26)

MITIGATION METHODS	SHARE
Yes, through open-source or local models	26.83%
Yes, through partnerships or shared infrastructure	19.51%
Considering it, but not yet acting	29.27%
No/Not Applicable	24.39%

¹⁵ In Africa, efforts to reduce reliance on Big Tech dependency are also framed under the broader “decolonization” agenda. Such framing was not explicitly mentioned by this research’s respondents (*Mitchell et al., 2025*).

Although some respondents reported experimenting with alternative approaches, including open-source or locally hosted models, these efforts remain limited in practice. Even where organizations deploy “in-house” tools, these are often built on top of existing commercial models through application programming interfaces rather than representing fully independent systems (KII01, 06, 07).

A point of comparison emerging from this finding is the difference between the Asian approach and the African approach. Existing research on African public-interest media has shown that smaller organizations are making an effort to use open-sourced models (*Ogola, 2023*),¹⁶ while the sector as a whole is having similar discussions around reducing Big Tech reliance.

In this regard, what must be noted is that the perception of autonomy does not necessarily correspond to technical independence. Survey findings reinforce this ambiguity: While respondents reported relatively low levels of dependency on Big Tech platforms (average score 2.35), qualitative interviews suggest that this reflects differences in how dependency is understood rather than its absence in practice.

At the national level, some governments have attempted to address this imbalance through domestic AI initiatives. Examples include Indonesia’s *Sahabat.AI* and Pakistan’s *Sahafat.AI*, both of which aim to support local AI ecosystems; though their traction in the media sector is highly dependent on functionality, investment and performance (KII07; *Media Matters for Democracy, 2025*). In response, some governments have shifted towards partnership-based approaches, collaborating with major technology firms to build local infrastructure, as seen in Indonesia and Uzbekistan (*Knowles, 2026*; *Sharma, 2026*; *Microsoft News, 2025*; *Jalolova, 2025*). This represents a strategic pivot from technological autonomy towards managed integration, though its long-term implications for independence and governance remain uncertain.

¹⁶ Important to note that this report was published in 2023, which may not accurately capture present-day dynamics.



Uzbekistan

Afghanistan

Pakistan

Bhutan

Bangladesh

Myanmar

Cambodia

Indonesia



4 AI in the media business model

This chapter examines how AI is reshaping—and, in many cases, failing to reshape—the business and operational models of public-interest media in Asia. While AI is frequently framed and understood within newsrooms as a tool that could improve long-term sustainability, its actual integration remains limited.

4.1 Internal policies and governance structures

The first aspect concerns the presence of policies and governance structures guiding AI use. Amongst the organizations studied, the “push” to adopt AI tools does not follow a uniform pattern. In some media outlets, it is the senior management who sees potential operational advantages in experimenting with AI in order to address increasing workloads and resource constraints (*Bhangu et al., 2025; Moroojo et al., 2025; Djumanova, 2025*). However, a more common pattern emerging from the research is that AI use in operational contexts is largely driven at the individual staff level rather than through organizational strategies (*Tabassum, 2024; KII01, 02, 05, 06*). Survey findings reinforce an observation where leadership remains more cautious, while interest in AI adoption originates from editors or journalists who request access to the tools in order to improve their own workflow efficiency (*Tabassum et al., 2024; Moroojo et al., 2025*).

Extent to which AI initiatives are embedded in organizations (*Question 5*)

LEVEL OF AI ADOPTION	SHARE
Individual staff experimentation only	61.1 %
Pilot projects within specific teams	19.4 %
Organization-wide integration across functions	16.7 %
Dedicated AI budget and strategy in place	0 %
No AI use at present	2.8 %

Furthermore, experimentation appears more concentrated among more digitally-native organizations and those with younger staff members who are more familiar with emerging tools (KII02, 05, 08, 09).

What follows, as survey responses indicate, is that newsroom-level guidance exists in many organizations, but it is often informal. When respondents were asked about the clarity and communication of AI guidelines, just over half indicated moderate levels of communication, generally rating this between 1 and 3 on a five-point scale. In practice, this guidance frequently takes the form of verbal instructions or general editorial expectations rather than written or enforceable policy documents.

Existence of written, staff-accessible guidelines and/or policies on AI usage (Question 9)

SIZE	SHARE
Staff and/or general ethical principles	43.2%
Ethical standard related to AI (use, bias, accuracy, accountability), including transparency and disclosure of AI use	35.1%
Data protection privacy and security	29.7%
Copyright and intellectual property	10.8%
Others	29.7%

Questions examining the clarity and communication of these guidelines (Question 10) further illustrate their limited institutionalization.

Clarity of AI guidelines and/or policies (if at all) within organizations (Question 10)

COUNTRY	SCORE*
Afghanistan (Exile)	2
Bangladesh	3
Bhutan	4
Cambodia	2.57
Indonesia	3.5
Myanmar (Exile)	1.5
Pakistan	3.23
Uzbekistan	4.5

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Despite these limitations, survey responses indicate that some editorial safeguards are beginning to emerge. Most organizations report that internal discussions on AI governance are ongoing. Respondents widely acknowledged the need to establish internal guidelines governing AI use (KII04, 05, 08), and many organizations indicated that they intend to develop or refine such policies (*Dawn, 2025; Niseiy, 2026; Mengheng, 2025*). However, progress varies significantly across institutions. In some cases, policies remain in early stages of drafting or consultation (*Mengheng, 2025; KII03, 04, 05*), while in others, guidelines have already been introduced (*Afifa, 2024; KII01, 02, 07*).

AI editorial safeguards in place (Question 23)

TYPE OF EDITORIAL SAFEGUARD	SHARE
Mandatory human review and accountability of AI outputs	64.9%
Restrictions on AI use for sensitive reporting	48.6%
Audience facing transparency or disclosure practices	27%
Written AI usage policies and guidelines addressing bias and harm	21.6%
No policy so far	13.5%
Others	5.4%

The reliance on informal norms reflects a broader structural constraint. Evidence from both surveys and interviews suggests that most newsrooms continue to depend on personal ethics and professional judgement rather than codified governance frameworks (*Tabassum et al., 2024; Bhangu et al., 2024; Djumanova, 2025*). While such norms remain central to journalistic practice, relying on them alone creates a fragile system of safeguards (*BBC Media Action, 2026; Gading, 2026*). In the absence of clear institutional rules, journalists must individually interpret how AI should be used, increasing risks related to data protection, plagiarism, copyright infringement and the unintended exposure of sensitive information (KII04, 10; *BBC Media Action, 2026; Gading, 2026*).

This fragility is closely linked to organizational scale and resource constraints. Many independent media organizations operate with very small teams, often comprising only a handful of editorial staff (KII04, 05; [Avieson et al., 2024](#); [Niseiy, 2025](#)). In such contexts, there is limited organizational capacity to design, implement and enforce detailed governance structures (KII04; [Muthmainnah & de-Lima-Santos, 2025](#); [Cambodian Centre for Independent Media, 2024](#)). While AI tools may offer efficiency gains, the managerial and administrative resources required to institutionalize their use are frequently absent.

What is also to consider is the fact that the scope of such internal policies and guidelines remains relatively narrow, focusing primarily on editorial uses of AI. By contrast, limited attention has been given to governing AI use in internal or operational functions, reinforcing the broader pattern that AI governance remains concentrated at the level of editorial risk rather than integrated across the organization as a whole.

4.2 Strategic positioning of AI within organizational models

The second dimension concerns how public-interest media organizations position AI within their broader organizational strategy.

Despite growing interest in AI—whether from leadership, editors or individual journalists—its application within internal administrative, financial and human resource functions remains minimal ([Ahmed 2025](#); [Noerman et al., 2025](#)). Only a small number of respondents reported limited experimentation in areas such as drafting funding proposals, preparing internal documentation or producing presentations (KII01, 08). When asked directly whether AI had been considered for operational domains such as human resource management or financial planning, most respondents indicated that these possibilities had not yet been explored. This reflects a broader conceptual constraint identified in Section 1.3: Within many organizations, “AI” is effectively equated with generative tools for editorial tasks. As a result, the baseline understanding of AI remains anchored in newsroom applications, limiting consideration of its potential role in wider organizational functions.

Survey findings further indicate that AI is primarily conceptualized as a tool, more so for improving operational

efficiency than as a potential driver of revenue generation or product innovation. This orientation is reflected in the relative weighting of motivations for AI adoption: Language and translation needs, increasing output frequency and addressing resource constraints rank highest, while developing new products or services and competitive positioning remain comparatively low priorities. Reducing operational costs sits between these categories, reinforcing the view of AI as a support tool rather than a strategic growth mechanism. This finding was also highlighted explicitly by Pakistani, Cambodian and Myanmar respondents (KII02, 04, 08).

Primary motivations for AI adoption (Question 6)

MOTIVATION	SCORE*
Developing new products or services	2.54
Addressing resource constraints	3.19
Language and translation needs	3.95
Reducing operational costs	2.97
Increasing output frequency	2.27
Competitive positioning	2.89
Audience growth and engagement	2.89

*Scores range from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

Responses to whether AI has enabled the development of new products or services (Survey question 8) further illustrate the early-stage nature of integration. While respondents cited a range of experimental applications, most indicated that AI use remains exploratory rather than embedded within organizational strategy. A significant proportion reported that AI adoption is “not yet” realized or remains limited to individual use rather than organization-wide implementation. Taken together, these findings

suggest that AI is not yet conceptualized as a core component of organizational transformation, but rather as a supplementary tool for incremental efficiency gains.

This strategic orientation directly shapes sustainability outcomes. Survey responses indicate that AI has had modest effects on the resilience of media organizations. Responses concerning cost reduction illustrate a similar pattern. These results suggest that while AI can deliver efficiency gains, its impact on sustainability remains limited. For many organizations, the primary benefit lies in speeding up routine tasks rather than transforming their underlying economic model (*Tabassum et al., 2024; Bhangu et al., 2025; BBC Media Action, 2026; Gading, 2026*), as discussed above.

Extent to which AI adoption has contributed to organizational sustainability (Question 18)

ISSUE	SHARE
Primarily as a cost-cutting or efficiency tool	40.5%
Mainly for maintaining existing operations	35.1%
Some contribution to new services or products	18.9%
Some individuals use, nothing at organizational level	2.7%
We use as individually	2.7%
Significant contribution to revenue generation	0%

These results indicate that AI's contribution to sustainability is primarily incremental rather than structural. Respondents consistently emphasized that AI is most useful in accelerating routine tasks, thereby reducing time pressures on limited staff.

Extent to which AI adoption has reduced organizational costs (Question 19)

ISSUE	SHARE
No cost reduction	18.9%
1–10%	29.7%
11–25%	10.8%
> 25%	18.9%
Don't know	21.6%

4.3 Financial constraints and resource dependency

Interviews consistently highlighted the precarious financial conditions under which media organizations (in particular those that are independent) operate (KII04, 05, 06, 08, 11, 12, 13; *Niseiy, 2025; Lovett, 2025*). Limited and uncertain funding restricts their ability to make long-term investments in technological infrastructure or organizational capacity. KII08 observed:

“

At the moment, for our office, we do not provide any support for the use of AI but [some of the journalists] purchase [AI tools and services] by themselves for their work. (KII08)

One key feature of this concern is the sector's relatively high reliance on donor funding (*Nimol, 2025*). Such funding is typically structured around short-term, project-based outputs, prioritizing measurable deliverables over long-term institutional development. Several interviewees noted that while donors increasingly recognize the importance of AI, support tends to be concentrated on discrete training initiatives (KII04, 08, 09, 10). Funding rarely extends to core



A group of journalists from different departments are being briefed on the use of AI tools built by the in-house technical team at The Daily Star

investments such as technological infrastructure, software development or dedicated AI personnel (KII04, 05, 08, 10; [Liaqat et al., 2024](#); [Simon, 2023](#)).

Budget limitations also directly affect the feasibility of developing or adopting alternative AI systems. Unlike large commercial media organizations, most public-interest outlets lack the resources to build proprietary tools or invest in specialized infrastructure ([Bhangu et al., 2025](#); [Tabassum et al., 2024](#); [Djumanova, 2025](#); KII05, 06, 10, 11, 12, 13). Consequently, they remain dependent on existing external platforms, while lacking the capacity to meaningfully shape or adapt these technologies to their specific needs ([Bhangu et al., 2025](#); [Tabassum et al., 2024](#); [Murtuza & Oliullah, 2025](#); KII02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 11, 12, 13).

What must also be factored in is the growing extraction of value by Big Tech AI systems from the media ecosystem, particularly through their impact on traffic and revenue flows. This operates in two interrelated ways. First, AI-generated summaries embedded within search engines (such as Google's AI Overviews) are increasingly disintermediating news consumption by providing users with direct answers, thereby reducing click-through rates to original media sources ([Savage, 2025](#)). KII10, for example, noted, "our viewers are declining, the people getting their facts checked directly [from] AI overview". KII07 observed, "If you use AI more and more, it also makes the local media, national media suffer ... because our viewers are declining [due to AI Overview]".

Second, journalistic content is being absorbed into the training and retrieval processes of LLM models, similarly enabling users to obtain information directly through AI interfaces rather than visiting news platforms. In both cases, audiences are diverted away from primary sources, weakening the traffic base on which many public-interest

media organizations depend. For public-interest media, this creates a feedback loop: their content is simultaneously under-compensated within platform ecosystems and increasingly displaced by AI-generated outputs that depend, directly or indirectly, on journalistic labor without sustaining it. At the same time, these systems often lack the capacity to adequately contextualize, attribute or nuance information, raising concerns that the displacement of direct engagement with journalistic content may also degrade the quality and depth of public understanding.

This dynamic has, in turn, generated growing tensions between media organizations and technology platforms, with some outlets actively resisting or restricting access to their content in response to perceived extraction without compensation. These tensions are most visible in disputes over data licensing and content scraping. In response to concerns over unauthorized use of journalistic material, several large media organizations have begun limiting access to their archives ([McMahon, 2025](#); [Tobitt, 2026](#)) to restricting access to high-quality, verified reporting and "starve" AI systems of reliable training data (KII07). While such measures are intended to protect intellectual property and bargaining power of the media sector, they may create a negative impact where AI models have to instead increase reliance on lower-quality or unverified sources, contributing to the proliferation of inaccurate or low-value outputs.

Taken together, these factors help explain why AI integration across the sector at the institutional and operational level remains incremental and uneven. While journalists are increasingly aware of the potential value of AI tools, the organizational resources required to develop governance frameworks, build technical capacity and experiment with new models remain limited.



5 Recommendations

The recommendations below focus specifically on strengthening AI adoption among public-interest media in Asia, including organizations operating under political pressure, small independent outlets and exile media working across borders. The objective is not only technological adoption but the development of governance, operational resilience and public trust while reducing structural dependency on dominant technology platforms. Recommendations are addressed to various actors, as follows:

Public-interest media organizations

AI governance and accountability

- Prioritize platform governance framework, including privacy protections and the diversity of training data when evaluating AI tools for use.
- Integrate human verification requirements for AI-assisted tasks and products.
- Establish internal accountability and transparency procedures for AI misuse, including requirements to disclose when AI-generated errors occur and what corrective actions were taken.
- Codify protocols for AI use in sensitive reporting areas, including migration, displacement, ethnic conflict and humanitarian crises, where risks of misinformation, misidentification, biased narratives and state surveillance are particularly high.
- As a sector, establish sectoral self-regulation mechanisms (e.g. via coordination of an independent media council) with enforceable standards and empowered to review complaints, investigate misuse and issue binding guidance.

Operational innovation

- Expand experimentation beyond generative AI by adopting task-specific AI tools for data analysis, spreadsheet processing, document classification and other back-end functions.
- Integrate AI into audience engagement strategies, particularly to reach younger audiences through multilingual content adaptation, summarized news formats and platform-specific storytelling while maintaining editorial oversight.
- Create bottom-up learning pathways within newsrooms, enabling younger journalists and “tech champions” to share practical AI skills through peer mentoring, newsroom demonstrations and informal training sessions.
- Invest in secure data storage infrastructure and prioritize training for staff on sensitive data encryption.

Collaboration and exile media support

- Encourage collaborative infrastructure across public-interest media networks, including shared AI experimentation labs, pooled translation models, which could be coordinated by regional-level media development actors or a regional-level media collective or council.
- Consider AI’s specific role in fostering and maintaining cross-border reporting capacity of exile media organizations through features such as translation, diaspora audience engagement and monitoring of developments inside home countries
- Establish bilateral, regional and cross-regional networks for exiled media to exchange information.
- Implement a protocol for immediate organization-wide alerts upon the discovery of any new threats or information.

Governments

- Develop balanced AI policies (and AI regulatory frameworks only if strictly necessary) that protect press freedom while addressing issues such as copyright, transparency and data protection.
- Amend, repeal or develop implementation mechanisms to ensure that regulatory frameworks are not used to criminalize legitimate journalistic expression.
- Support public investment in LLM infrastructure for low-resource languages, including regional dialects and minority languages widely used across Asia.
- Promote public-interest research partnerships between universities, media organizations and civil society to develop locally relevant AI applications for journalism.

Technology companies

- Expand AI performance for Asian languages, dialects and multilingual environments, including tools for accurate transcription, translation and speech synthesis.
- Improve data governance transparency, allowing media organizations to control how uploaded materials are processed or used for model training.
- Provide secure enterprise environments that allow journalists to process sensitive information without risking exposure of confidential sources or investigative material.
- Reduce structural dependency by open-sourcing models (or open-core models) for local hosting options, which can be developed with the region's media sector.
- Develop journalism-specific toolkits and training programs tailored to public-interest media in using AI.

Donors and media development funders

- Provide flexible institutional funding that enables organizations to develop long-term AI strategies rather than project-based experimentation.
- Treat AI infrastructure as a core component of media sustainability and fund access to tools, governance development and internal experimentation.
- Support apprenticeship-based learning models that allow journalists to experiment with AI tools in real newsroom settings.
- Invest in non-commercial AI infrastructure for low-resource languages, recognizing that commercial incentives alone will not address these needs.
- Fund regional collaborative initiatives, including shared translation systems, open-source AI tools and cross-border journalism technology hubs.
- Establish regional knowledge-sharing platforms where public-interest media can exchange lessons on AI governance, operational workflows and risk management.
- Support independent research on AI's impact on trust in news, particularly among younger audiences who increasingly encounter information through algorithmically mediated platforms.

Strengthening responsible AI adoption will require sustained cooperation across the media ecosystem. For public-interest media in Asia, the priority is not simply technological adoption but building governance, linguistic capacity and institutional resilience that allows AI to support independent journalism rather than undermine it.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has provided a systematic understanding of AI adoption within public-interest media across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. By identifying concrete areas for strategic intervention, this research seeks to strengthen journalistic quality and prepare the sector for an AI-integrated future. The findings reveal that the AI adoption is currently taking place within public-interest media, but it is one of “principled caution” where adoption is careful, selective and highly varied. This evolution unfolds within a structurally precarious media environment where AI regulation is often absent or actively restrictive. While adoption remains cautious to protect journalistic credibility from risks such as hallucinations and biases, newsrooms are increasingly embracing AI as a powerful toolset to alleviate severe capacity and resource constraints. Currently, organizations primarily utilize AI for assistive, routine tasks such as translation, transcription, summarization, and early-stage content ideation and the final language editing stage rather than for broader organizational transformation.

The research highlights deep capacity deficits in the governance framework, institutional training, and leadership. These gaps often prevent individual AI literacy from translating into consistent, organization-wide policy formulation and enforcement. This challenge is further exacerbated by the funding instability and resource constraints that characterize the region’s independent media, restricting the long-term investment necessary for ethical and responsible AI adoption. Despite these legal, political, technical, capacity, and operational constraints, localized and innovative AI workflows are emerging. While AI has not yet generated entirely new, revenue-generating business models, strategic investments in customized AI infrastructures, such as in-house dashboards and media monitoring systems, present a critical pathway toward long-term operational resilience. To support this trajectory, the report recommends coordinated action among media organizations, governments, technology companies, donors and media development funders to invest in long-term AI capacity, governance frameworks, and secure technological infrastructure.

Finally, while future research should scale to encompass countries and regions not yet covered to provide a broader understanding of this technological shift, these findings must immediately be transformed into practical and actionable capacity-building initiatives. Fostering information sharing and advocating for policy change are critical next steps. Media organizations should lead public engagement efforts to build audience awareness and trust in an AI-integrated era. Ultimately, translating these insights into strategic planning and policy-relevant actions will ensure that the future of public-interest journalism remains firmly grounded in the principles of independence and the public good.



DW Akademie “Media Literacy Conference” in Phnom Penh in Fall 2025 with more than 60 experts

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Annexes

Annex 1: Survey respondent background

COUNTRY	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
Afghanistan (Exile)	3
Bangladesh	8
Bhutan	2
Cambodia	7
Indonesia	2
Myanmar (Exile)	4
Pakistan	9
Uzbekistan	2

Annex 2: Key informant profile

KII NO.	COUNTRY	DATE OF INTERVIEW
KII01	Bangladesh	February 24, 2026
KII02	Pakistan	February 26, 2026
KII03	Bhutan	March 2, 2026
KII04	Cambodia	March 2, 2026
KII05	Cambodia	March 5, 2026
KII06	Myanmar	March 9, 2026
KII07	Indonesia	March 9, 2026
KII08	Myanmar	March 10, 2026
KII09	Bangladesh	March 10, 2026
KII10	Indonesia	March 12, 2026
KII11	Afghanistan	March 12, 2026
KII12	Myanmar	March 17, 2026
KII13	Afghanistan	March 19, 2026

Annex 3: AI pioneers

The AI pioneers selected below exemplify emerging AI workflows among public-interest media in Asia and are only partly indicative of a broader and growing landscape of organizations and innovative approaches in this space.

AI pioneer 1: The Daily Star (Bangladesh)

Organization

The Daily Star is a high-circulating English-language daily newspaper in Bangladesh. It has already institutionalized AI across internal editorial workflows and is now moving toward audience-facing applications.

Explanation of AI use

The Daily Star is planning to develop an AI-driven audience interface—a personalised “dashboard” where algorithms curate news based on individual reader preferences. The goal is to increase engagement and audience retention. Note that it is still an in-house discussion.

Challenges expected

The effectiveness of personalization, whether it genuinely “hits home” for readers, will require iterative testing. Another key challenge lies in ensuring that AI-driven curation meaningfully reflects audience interests without reinforcing filter bubbles or echo chambers—a risk already observed in social media platforms. There is also a need to signal to users when content is AI-curated.

Funding and sustainability

This initiative is internally funded, reflecting The Daily Star’s broader strategic investment in AI. If effective, it may strengthen audience retention and create new revenue opportunities—both from the personalization of content delivery and from providing such a service to other media outlets.

AI pioneer 2: Media Matters for Democracy (Pakistan)

Organization

Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD) is a Pakistani non-profit focused on media development, digital rights and journalist capacity-building. Its initiative, Sahafat.AI, represents an effort to build a locally grounded AI system for journalism.

Explanation of AI use

Sahafat.AI is designed as an integrated platform supporting research, media monitoring, workflow management and basic fact-checking (*MMfD, 2025*). It also includes tools to analyze audience engagement and inform editorial strategies. The platform is tailored to local journalistic contexts, including language and reporting practices, positioning it as an alternative to global AI systems. MMfD developed Sahafat.AI and launched it in June 2025 (*SamaaTV, 2023*).

Challenges expected

Adoption remains limited. Journalists often default to established platforms such as ChatGPT due to familiarity, accessibility and ease of integration. Additional constraints include technical performance, scalability and integration into newsroom workflows. MMfD is addressing these barriers through training and capacity-building initiatives; as well as advocacy campaigns among the media sector.

Funding and sustainability

The initiative is sustained through partnerships, including collaboration with Samaa TV, which provides operational support and a testing environment. Its long-term sustainability depends on its ability to demonstrate practical newsroom value. While promising, it remains in an early stage of adoption.

AI pioneer 3: Tempo (Indonesia)

Organization

Tempo is a leading Indonesian media outlet known for its investigative journalism and editorial independence. Its AI tool “Tempo Assistant”, has been developed with the support of Google News Initiative.

Explanation of AI use

Tempo’s primary AI initiative is Tempo Assistant, an AI-powered archival platform designed to centralize five decades of reporting into a single digital asset management platform (*Fajriadi, 2026; JournalismAI, 2025*).

Tempo Assistant enables automated search, retrieval and organization of archival material. In addition, the platform includes a conversational interface that enables users to query the archive and extract insights from past coverage. A unique feature of this tool is therefore the ability to restructure institutional knowledge as a resource.

Challenges expected

A key challenge lies in ensuring the accuracy and contextual integrity of archived content when processed through AI systems. There are also technical challenges related to integrating large volumes of legacy data in a low-resource language into a unified system. As with other AI systems, there is a need to balance automation with oversight, particularly in how archival material is surfaced and interpreted. The success of the platform depends on whether users adopt it as part of regular workflows.

Funding and sustainability

The project was supported through a competitive international grant under the JournalismAI Innovation Challenge 2025 of Google News Initiative.

In terms of sustainability, Tempo Assistant has been linked to revenue-generation strategies. By improving access to archival content, the platform seeks to create opportunities for content licensing.



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