Ai-Generated News vs. Human-Investigated News Audience Perception and Trust

R. Nagaiswarya[1], Dr Deepa Viswam[2]
[1]*PhD Scholar, Department of Visual Communication, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal*
[2]*Associate Professor, Head of the Department, Visual Communication, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal*

Abstract—**Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now infiltrating almost every field, and the journalism sector is no exception. AI helps journalists perform their work more quickly and efficiently and enables them to process large volumes of data within minutes. However, its growing use also raises concerns regarding misinformation, bias, credibility, transparency, ethical responsibility, and human accountability. This research examines the audience's understanding and perception of AI-generated news content. It specifically investigates consumers' perceptions and levels of trust when comparing AI-generated news with human-investigated news. For this study, a quantitative survey was conducted online among participants in Tamil Nadu. A total of 52 respondents participated in the survey and provided their responses to the questionnaire. The questionnaire examined demographic characteristics, news consumption patterns, awareness of AI-generated news, preferred forms of news production, perceptions of misinformation detection, beliefs about AI ethics, and perceptions of bias. The findings show that** 40 respondents (76.9%) trusted human-investigated news**, compared with 5 respondents (9.6%) who preferred AI-assisted human journalism and 4 respondents (7.7%) who trusted AI-generated news. Regarding misinformation detection, human journalists and journalists assisted by AI were equally preferred, with 20 respondents (38.5%) selecting each. The study also found considerable uncertainty regarding AI ethics, with 22 respondents (42.3%) answering "No" and another 22 (42.3%) answering "Maybe" when asked whether AI can follow ethical principles. Furthermore, 24 respondents (46.2%) believed that both AI and human journalism could be biased. The results show that although AI is useful in journalism for news gathering, production, verification, and distribution, audiences continue to value human judgment, accountability, and editorial responsibility. This study suggests the need to support a human–AI collaborative model in which AI assists and enhances journalistic work, while final editorial decisions and responsibility remain with human professionals.**

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving digital environment, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of journalism and can no longer be ignored. News organizations increasingly use AI for various journalistic tasks, including data analysis, transcription, summarization, translation, content drafting, news verification, and audience distribution. AI is particularly useful in breaking news and time-sensitive reporting, where information needs to be gathered, processed, and delivered within a very short period. Its applications have also expanded to image creation, title card production, and graphic design.

The use of AI has become increasingly important in the highly competitive media industry, where news organizations strive to produce and distribute content faster than their competitors. Journalism often requires professionals to analyse large volumes of information within a limited time, and AI can significantly support this process. However, the increasing dependence on AI also raises concerns about misinformation, credibility, transparency, bias, ethical responsibility, and accountability.

Amid this rapid transformation, questions arise about how audiences perceive and trust AI-generated news compared with news produced through human investigation and editorial judgment. Therefore, this study examines audience perceptions and levels of trust towards AI-generated news and human-investigated news. It aims to understand whether

audiences continue to value human judgment, editorial responsibility, and accountability in an increasingly AI-driven journalism environment. A 2026 meta-analysis found a small but statistically significant credibility disadvantage for AI-labelled news compared with human-labelled news, although the effect varied with actual authorship and other conditions. A 2026 systematic review likewise found that there is no universal AI credibility penalty; audience responses depend on factors including topic, source cues, baseline trust and whether human oversight is communicated.

Drawing on the findings of previous studies, this research focuses on audience perception and trust, as well as concerns related to misinformation, ethics, and bias in AI-generated news.

II. BACKGROUND STUDY

In human-investigated journalism, journalists review original sources, gather information from the field, cross-check facts, and make editorial decisions based on professional judgment. With the introduction of AI, its initial applications in journalism primarily focused on structured data and template-based reporting. However, the rapid expansion of AI has encouraged the industry to explore its use across various stages of news production, including content generation.

This does not mean that AI cannot support background research or fact-checking. However, AI technologies can sometimes generate incorrect, misleading, or unsupported information. Therefore, the key concern is not simply whether AI can improve journalistic efficiency, but how its technological efficiency affects the accuracy, credibility, and public trust of news content.

III. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to the research conducted by Kim, Lee, Park, and Walter (2026), there is a small but statistically significant penalty for AI-labelled news in terms of source and message credibility. The researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 31 studies, comprising 41 effect sizes, to examine the credibility of AI-labelled news compared with human-labelled news. Notably the effect was moderated by actual authorship, showing that audiences do not respond to AI labels in a simple or uniform way.

Petrovic, Garcia, and Perry (2026) found that audience exposure to AI-generated reports has increased significantly. Although AI-generated news may lead to higher news consumption and perceptions of improved news stories, it also raises concerns about a potential reduction in the diversity of perspectives. The findings suggest that, from the audience's point of view, AI-generated reports offer both advantages and potential risks.

Research published in 2026 on human–AI collaboration suggests that co-produced content, in which humans work with AI assistance, may be perceived as more credible than content that is either fully AI-generated or entirely human-written. These findings indicate that collaborative content creation, combined with clear human oversight and responsibility, may represent a promising direction for the future of journalism.

IV. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Journalism requires the rapid processing and analysis of large volumes of information, which AI can facilitate efficiently. However, an important question remains: whether the information produced by AI is accurate, ethical, unbiased, and trustworthy. Therefore, this research examines whether audiences perceive and trust AI-generated news differently from human-investigated news and identifies the factors that influence their perceptions and levels of trust.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the level of audience awareness regarding AI-generated news?
- Which type of news do respondents trust more: AI-generated, human-investigated or AI-assisted human journalism?
- Which approach do respondents believe is better at identifying misinformation?
- Do audiences believe AI can follow ethical principles?
- Which form of journalism do audiences perceive as more likely to be biased?
- How do audiences evaluate the comparative news reports presented in the survey?

VI. HYPOTHESES

H1: There is a significant preference for human-investigated news over fully AI-generated news among respondents.

H2: Awareness of AI-generated news is associated with cautious attitudes toward AI's ethical capability.

Theoretical framework

This research is primarily based on Source Credibility Theory, which explains how audiences evaluate and consume information based on the perceived credibility of its source. The theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for comparing AI-generated news with human-investigated news in terms of credibility, trustworthiness and perceived bias.

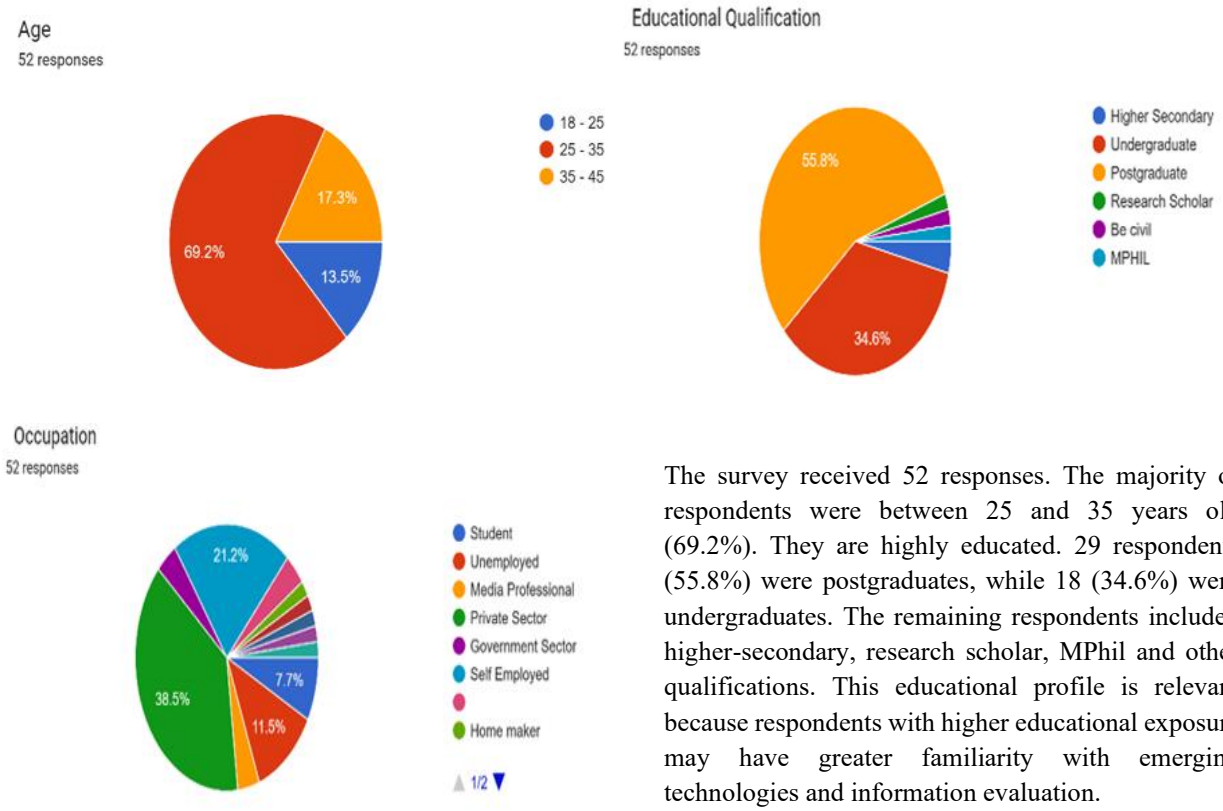
The type of news production can influence audiences' perceptions of accuracy, expertise, trustworthiness, transparency, ethical responsibility, bias and accountability. These perceptions can subsequently influence whether audiences consider a news report credible and trustworthy and whether they prefer to consume it. In this study, Source Credibility Theory is used to understand how the perceived source of news—whether AI-generated or human-investigated—affects audience perception and trust.

VII. METHODOLOGY

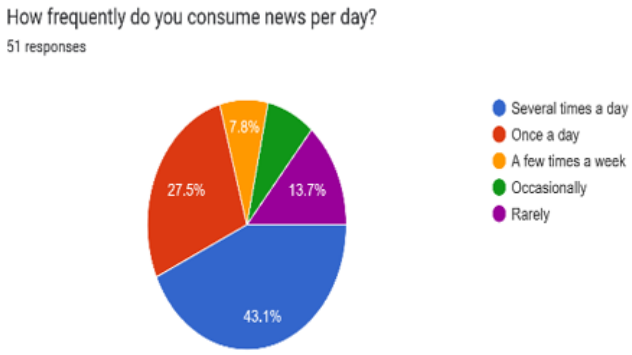
The study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design. Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire. The survey received 52 responses. The questionnaire included demographic questions and questions concerning news consumption, AI awareness, trust, misinformation detection, ethics, bias and evaluation of two comparative news reports concerning a flood disaster along the Nepal–Tibet border.

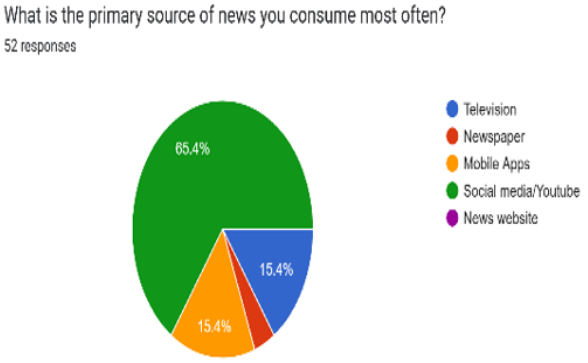
The analysis used frequencies and percentages to describe the responses. The survey results were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and recent literature on AI, journalism and audience trust.

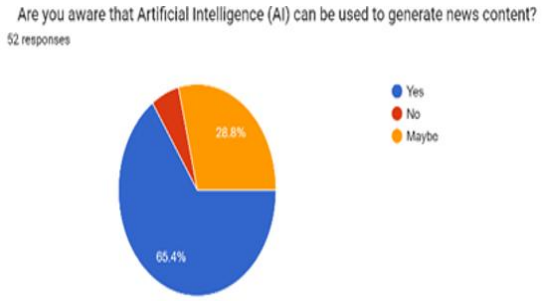
VIII. DATA ANALYSIS



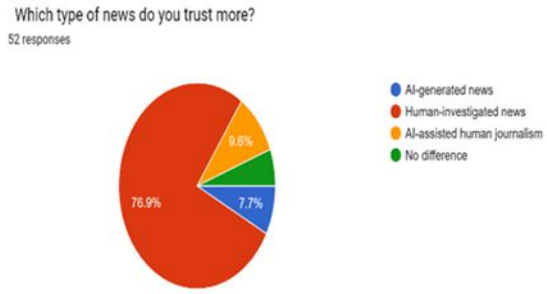
The survey received 52 responses. The majority of respondents were between 25 and 35 years old (69.2%). They are highly educated. 29 respondents (55.8%) were postgraduates, while 18 (34.6%) were undergraduates. The remaining respondents included higher-secondary, research scholar, MPhil and other qualifications. This educational profile is relevant because respondents with higher educational exposure may have greater familiarity with emerging technologies and information evaluation.

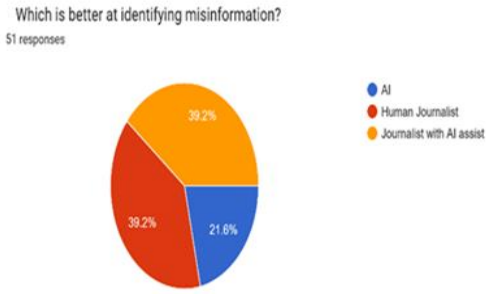




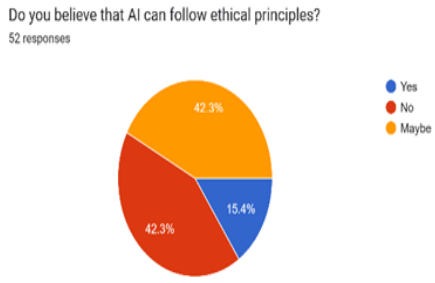


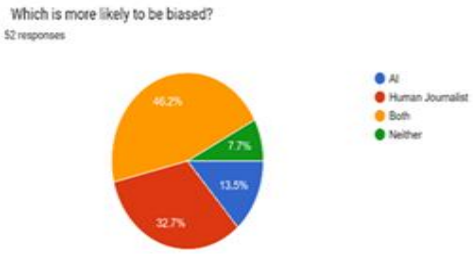
The largest group, 22 respondents, consumed news several times a day. social media and YouTube were clearly the dominant news sources, accounting for 65.4% of responses. This finding highlights the importance of digital platforms in shaping contemporary audience perceptions of news. A majority of respondents (65.4%) were aware that AI can be used to generate news content. However, 28.8% were uncertain.





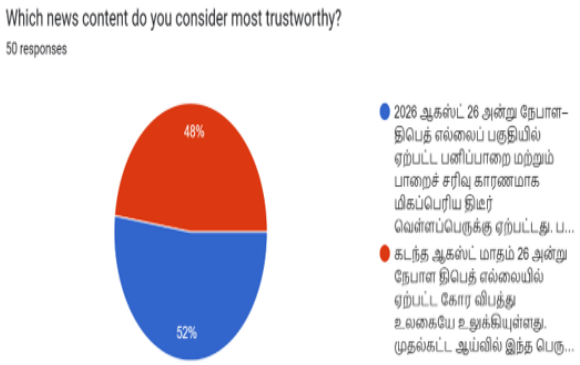
This is one of the strongest findings of the study. Human-investigated news was trusted by 76.9% of respondents, whereas only 7.7% selected AI-generated news. The result indicates that human investigation remains a major source of perceived credibility. Human journalists and journalists using AI assistance received equal support (38.5% each) for identifying misinformation. Only 21.2% selected AI independently. This suggests that respondents recognise AI's analytical potential but still place importance on human judgement in evaluating questionable information.





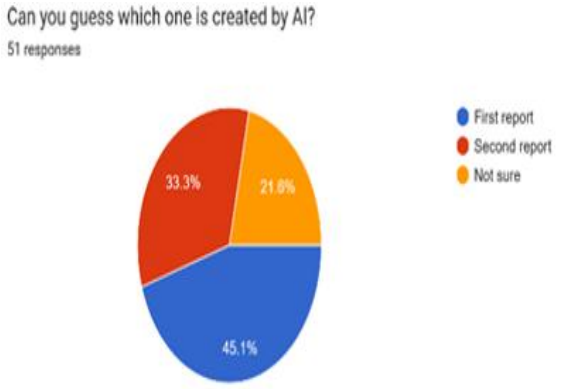
A combined 84.6% of respondents answered either "No" or "Maybe." Only 15.4% believed that AI could follow ethical principles. This suggests that ethical accountability remains a major concern regarding

autonomous AI-generated journalism. The largest group, 46.2%, believed that both AI and human journalism could be biased. This is an important finding because respondents do not automatically consider AI to be objective. At the same time, they recognise that human journalists can also to be biased.



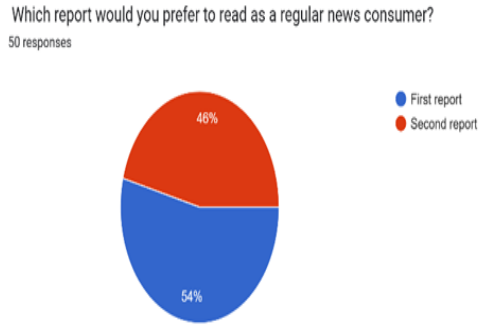
This is one of the main findings of the research. The questionnaire presented respondents with two news reports about the Nepal–Tibet border disaster. The first report was generated entirely by AI (ChatGPT), while the second report was written entirely by a human journalist. For the question, “Which news content do you consider the most trustworthy?”, 52% of respondents selected the second report, which was human-written, while 48% selected the first report, which was entirely AI-generated.

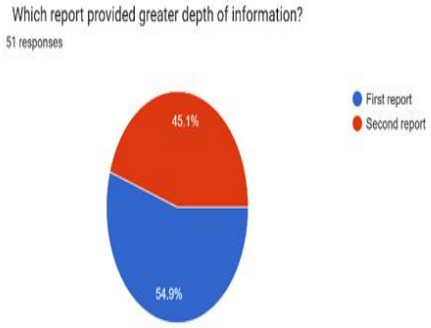
The results indicate that human-written news was perceived as slightly more trustworthy than AI-generated news. However, the difference was relatively small, suggesting that AI-generated news can also receive a considerable level of audience trust. This finding highlights the changing relationship between AI-generated content and audience perceptions of credibility in journalism.



The findings show that 45% of respondents correctly identified the first report as AI-generated, while 33% incorrectly identified the second report as AI-generated, even though it was human-written. Meanwhile, 21% of respondents were unsure. These results indicate that audiences may sometimes struggle to distinguish between AI-generated and human-written news content. Therefore, greater public awareness of AI-generated content may be necessary. The findings also suggest the importance of clearly labelling AI-generated news content to promote transparency and help audiences make informed judgments about the information they consume.

The findings show that 54% of respondents chose the first report, which was generated by AI, in response to the question, “Which report would you prefer to read as a regular news consumer?” Although the survey did not initially reveal which report was AI-generated, a considerable number of respondents were able to identify the AI-generated report correctly in the previous question. Furthermore, 54.5% of respondents perceived the first report as providing greater depth of information. This suggests that, despite concerns about AI-generated news, audiences may appreciate its ability to present detailed and comprehensive information.





IX. MAJOR FINDINGS

- 66.7% of respondents said they were aware that AI can be used to generate news.
- 76.5% trusted human-investigated news more than the other forms presented.
- AI-assisted human journalism and human journalism were equally selected (39.2% each) as better at identifying misinformation.
- Only 15.7% answered Yes when asked whether AI can follow ethical principles; 82.4% selected No or Maybe.
- 43.1% believed both AI and human journalism could be biased.
- Social media and YouTube were the primary news sources for 64.7% of respondents.
- The survey therefore shows high awareness of AI but comparatively low trust in fully AI-generated news.

X. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that audience trust in journalism remains strongly connected to human investigation and accountability even in an environment where awareness of AI-generated news is relatively high. The respondents recognized potential benefits of AI, particularly when it assists journalists, but showed substantially greater trust in human-investigated news. Their uncertainty about AI ethics and their belief that both AI and humans can be biased demonstrate that technological capability alone is not sufficient to establish credibility.

The findings point toward a balanced model of journalism in which AI contributes speed, data-processing capability and analytical support, while journalists retain responsibility for verification, context, ethical judgement and final publication decisions. In this model, AI is not necessarily a replacement for investigative journalism but a tool that can strengthen it when used transparently and responsibly.

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