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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND NEWS CONSUMPTION: A STUDY OF TRUST, CREDIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN AUTOMATED JOURNALISM

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The members of the Committee appointed to examine
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Abstract

  According to Gallup poll (2023), over the last 50 years there has been a decline in how much Americans trust mass media. While in the 1970's 72% of the population responded that they trust the media a 'great deal/fair amount', this number dropped to 34% in 2023. Given the decreasing public trust in news, this thesis focused particularly on analyzing trust in the organization, trust in the news story and perceived credibility in AI generative content. In addition to articles created by AI, this study also aimed to analyze how the public perceives information that has been personalized and distributed to users through machine learning. As machine learning is powered by AI and personalized content has become a common practice in the online universe, news outlets are using transparency markers to communicate with their audience about the personalization of news delivered to the user. Therefore, this thesis intended to analyze whether transparency about recommended content affects how individuals perceive news articles. Furthermore, this research also assessed whether an individual's level of acceptance towards AI can influence the credibility and trustworthiness of automated news. Results indicate that AI generated news articles are perceived as less credible compared to human traditional news. These findings have implications for news outlets seeking to adopt AI while trying to maintain and develop trust and credibility in the news. Future research directions and practical recommendations for newsroom practices are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research in media and communication studies seeking to understand media effects has been conducted for decades, and one of the most prominent theories is agenda-setting. Agenda-setting theory argues that despite having our own opinions, we are likely to discuss the issues that have been highlighted by the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). That is, popular discussions are limited to news stories defined by newsrooms.

Tsfati (2003a) argues that agenda-setting is moderated by skepticism towards the media, and that the effects of the theory are weaker for media skeptics than for non-skeptics. That is, how much the audience trusts the media can affect the strength of agenda-setting. According to Gallup poll (2023), over the last 50 years there has been a decline in how much Americans trust mass media. While in the 1970's 72% of the population responded that they trust the media a 'great deal/fair amount', this number dropped to 34% in 2023. Furthermore, back in the 1970's, only 4% of people responded "none at all" when asked about how much they trusted the media. By 2023, this percentage had jumped to 38% of the population.

As emerging artificial intelligence platforms gain prominence, discussions surrounding the use of these technologies come to the forefront. Within the journalism context, considerable attention has been directed towards assessing whether AI can produce content with the same quality as a human journalist (Pavlik, 2023). As the public trust in news has been decreasing in recent years, this research aims to test if news stories produced or personalized by AI can affect the audience's perception of credibility and trust in the news. Moreover, this study will explore whether the user's level of acceptance of artificial intelligence could also be a factor that affects how the public perceives automated news. In summary, the study aims to provide insights into the dynamics between automated content and public trust, which could potentially impact the anticipated results outlined in the agenda-setting framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

2.1.1Background

Agenda-setting is one of the most well-known theories of communication that aims to comprehend the effects of mass media (Coleman et al., 2009). The theory suggests that there is a relationship between the issues that are reported by the media (media agenda), and issues that are discussed by citizens (public agenda) (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). That is, despite having our own opinion, the media supplies the information that is going to be interpreted and discussed by the public.

As the media evolved, studies on agenda-setting were also updated to comprehend how the theory would still be applied and analyzed in different media, such as newspapers (Palmgreen, 1977), television (Watt et. at, 1993) and more recently internet and social media (Feezell, 2018). Moreover, agenda-setting has been divided into three levels: agenda of objects, agendas of attributes, and network agenda (Guo & McCombs, 2011). Each level represents a unique way of examining media effects of agenda-setting (Castro, 2014). Simply put, studies on agenda-setting suggest that the media performs the role of defining the issues debated by the public (first level); it can shape the perception of how the public interprets the news (second level); and can also influence the way in which the audience memorizes and connects different pieces of information (third level).

2.1.2 Agenda-setting in the digital age

The internet brought changes in mass communication (Roberts et al., 2002). While traditionally the public was not involved in news production, in the digital context, the roles of news producers and consumers are intertwined rather than separate (Jenkins, 2006). In other words, if previously the public was a passive audience that only consumed the content, now the public can be active and participate in content development. That is, internet and

digital platforms enable common citizens to produce content that previously was an exclusive function of journalists. Bruns (2005) named this audience participation in content development as user-generated content. This shift in content creation sparks discussions about how agenda-setting theory should be studied in digital space. Magalhães (2014) states that the internet may weaken the media effects perceived by the agenda-setting theory in traditional media. However, traditional media outlets are still crucial in shaping the online public agenda. According to Luo (2011), despite the internet expanding channels and the volume of information, it does not necessarily increase news diversity. Bowe & Wohn (2016) argue that now each person seeks information only that is about their own interest. In brief, while previously everyone consumed the same content regardless of their personal opinions, the internet allows users to only search for news that is in accordance with their previous beliefs. Consequently, this change in media consumption results in a more personalized news agenda.

In summary, the internet enables the creation of user-generated content, expands the quantity of available news sources, and offers the public the opportunity to choose which information to consume. Toff & Simon (2023) reflect that the digital challenge now is to understand how the public will perceive the use of generative AI for news content. This is particularly relevant considering the significant growth of this type of content since the launch of ChatGPT 3 in November of 2022. This raises the question whether the audience will trust news stories that have been produced by artificial intelligence instead of a human journalist.

2.2 Trust and Media Skepticism

Trust is defined as an individual's willingness to accept a vulnerable situation based on a positive expectation from the other (Riegelsberger et al., 2005). Vulnerability implies that something important can be lost, and therefore, becoming vulnerable is taking a risk

(Boss, 1978). Trust does not inherently involve taking a risk, but rather the willingness or readiness to accept the possibility of risk (Mayer et al., 1995). Knudsen et al. (2022) conceptualize trust as the relationship between a trustor - the actor placing trust - and a trustee - the actor being trusted. In the journalistic domain, Hanitzsch et al. (2017) define media trust as the audience's willingness to be vulnerable to the news, presuming that the organization will perform satisfactorily. Knudsen et al. (2022) argue that in this context, the audience is taking the risk by trusting that journalists are investigating the correct information the public needs to know to understand what is happening in the world. Williams (2012) reflects that there are three different types of media trust: trust in the news information, trust in those who deliver the news, and trust in media corporations. Kohring & Matthes (2007) emphasize that in the academic research domain, trust in news media has emerged under the perception of media credibility, and therefore, the terms are used correspondingly in the literature.

The subjective feeling of mistrust toward the mainstream news media is defined as media skepticism (Tsfati, 2003b). Furthermore, Tsfati (2003b) implies that media skepticism not only refers to the perceived credibility of the media but also encompasses feelings of anger towards the role that media plays in society. In other words, media skeptics believe that news outlets would be willing to sacrifice the accuracy of reporting in exchange for personal or commercial gains. This implies a person who is skeptical towards the media does not believe that the audience can trust the information disseminated by the press. Tsfati (2003a) argues that some audience members (trusting audiences) are influenced by the media more than others (media skeptics). Therefore, the media effects predicted by agenda setting are moderated by media skepticism. However, despite agenda setting effects being weaker for media skeptics than for non-skeptics, it is not absent (2003a). In brief, not trusting the media does not mean that the skeptical audience will have a completely different agenda from the rest of the public, but the influence of the media will be weaker. News sources of information

present new challenges in trust perception. Nowadays, the challenge lies in understanding how trust is perceived in automated and personalized news stories facilitated by machine learning and artificial intelligence.

2.3 Machine Learning

Machine learning refers to how computers can learn to handle data through algorithms, without having to be programmed by a human (Mahesh, 2020). In machine learning a computer will make predictions and decisions from what it has learnt previously from its own experience (Ray, 2019). That is, as the computer learns about a specific topic by collecting data related to it, its performance in analyzing that information will improve. In the media realm, machine learning has enabled systems to collect large amounts of data - both from users and news stories - and predict which type of news story will be most interesting for each user (Gulla et al., 2021). That is, machine learning directs personalized news according to the individual's preferences.

It is relevant to understand how technological advances in the digital world impact how news is being consumed online. Especially now that software can collect data and make decisions based on the information it automatically learns from the user searches. Thorson and Wells (2016) proposed a concept called curated flows, which argues that the current experience of getting information through news is unique for everyone since now *gatekeeping* is more collaborative. Gatekeeping refers to the process of selecting news that will be propagated (Shoemaker, 1991). In brief, among all the events in the world, the journalist - gatekeeper - will define what will become news or not. However, if previously the gatekeeping function was an exclusive role of the journalist, now the process involves five sets of curating actors: journalists, strategic communicators, individual medial users, social contacts, and algorithmic filters (Thorson & Wells, 2016).

2.4 Curating Actors

The first group of curation actors are journalists. Thorson and Wells (2016) highlight that the idea aligns with the original concept of gatekeeping, but researchers observe the process from a different perspective. Instead of emphasizing the role of the journalist in denying news – keeping events outside the "gate", in this curation perspective, the researchers highlight that the journalist is extracting what is most relevant and valuable to inform the audience. The second group of curation actors is strategic communicators. Professionals in this area produce content linked to commercial logic, that is, to promote the maximization of some type of profit (or the reputation of a client). Consequently, a person who is more exposed to strategic content is less likely to consume opposing ideologies. The third group of curating actors is the individuals themselves. In other words, digital media offers users the possibility of searching for content of their interest. Consequently, people will shape their information in ways that suit their own beliefs. The fourth group of curating actors refers to social curation. In brief, external influences formed by the opinions of the individual's human social network, such as friends, family, and colleagues, also influence the user's interests. Finally, the last group of curating actors is the curation algorithm. This phenomenon happens in the online context and refers to technologies used by large corporations that connect people to specific content based on the user's interests, offering personalized content through machine learning.

2.5 Personalized News

Personalized news refers to content adapted and targeted by news outlets to meet users' individual preferences (Gulla et al., 2021). Technological advances related to web 2.0 are factors that have led to personalized online content being proliferated, and "instead of accessing database linked HTML hypertexts that are the same for every web browser, users now encounter content that is highly customized based upon their complexly generated

algorithmic identities" (Reeves, 2016, p.9). Put differently, instead of the user searching the internet for the content they want to access, the websites themselves indicate personalized content of interest to the user. News companies started using automatic news dissemination technologies that spread news on digital platforms such as social media, using software agents called *news bots* (Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021). News bots indicate personalized news content to a specific person based on relevant previous searches from the user, through automated ranking algorithms (Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021). In other words, news outlets can now adapt news content according to readers' interests and beliefs, corresponding to the public's expectations. Thurman and Schifferes (2012) argue that there are two types of personalization: explicit and implicit. Although both allow consumers to receive news adapted to their interests, explicit personalization suggests that the user configures their preferred content, while implicit personalization refers to the use of software that monitors the individual's activities and collects data. That is, while in explicit personalization the user actively defines the content that will be targeted, in implicit personalization the user receives the content passively based on the data collected and without participating in the curation process.

In the sphere of advertising research, Simchon et al. (2024) found evidence that personalized ads to target audiences are more effective than non-personalized ads. Furthermore, the study also points out that this personalization can be automated using generative AI tools without losing efficiency. However, Kim et al (2018) indicates that the effectiveness of advertisements may lose strength if the user becomes aware of the personalization and believes that the targeted content may have been invasive when using personal information without consent. Simchon et al. (2023) proposes that informing the individual that the ad was directed at them could be a solution, as the transparency would increase the user's sense of autonomy in response to manipulation attempts. Based on these

empirical data and recognizing that there is a constant increase in distrust between users and news outlets, it is significant to endeavor for a deeper understanding of how these transparency markers would be perceived by users when they consume personalized and AI generated news content.

2.5.1 Transparency Markers

Transparency markers, also known as a type of content warning, refer to the message that individuals read prior to consuming a specific content, serving as an alert to prepare them for the information that is coming next (Bridgland et al., 2022). One example of content warning is when they are presented by the media, notifying that the content that will be displayed next may represent trauma (Boysen, 2017). Although research aims to understand these warnings' consequences in several different contexts, the debate remains controversial. Bridgland et al. (2019) argues that content warnings prior to photos can promote avoidance of the information that will be displayed as the alert increases anxiety and apprehension about such material. Within the videogame circumstance, Bijvank et al. (2009) shows evidence that some warnings can provoke interest and attractiveness towards the content by arousing curiosity around it. Bridgland et al. (2022) suggests that content warnings cause alerted individuals to prepare for a negative experience. However, once a group has access to the warned content, their emotional state evens out with the same state as the group that was not warned. In other words, despite initial apprehension, once individuals have access to the full content, the warning becomes irrelevant. According to Keene et al. (2019), this happens because the sequence and presentation of messages can affect how individuals perceive and process information. Given the context of content warnings, this implies that when users encounter a negative or anxiety-inducing message initially, following exposure to positive messages can balance the initial negative impact.

The use of content warnings has been widely explored in contexts such as the classroom (Bruce et al., 2022), violent movies (Bushman & Stack, 1996), or when the warning precedes a photograph (Bridgland et al., 2019). However, few studies have examined the use of content warning as transparency markers preceding news and providing context to the audience about who wrote the story. Freeze et al. (2021) investigated how transparency markers about misinformation in online news make users perceive the news as unreliable and less credible. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding how the audience perceives a news story with a transparency marker alerting that the information was personalized to the user. As the prevalence of exposure to personalized news through machine learning algorithms increases, news outlets are incorporating transparency markers to alert users that the content has been recommended. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate whether important journalistic elements such as trust and credibility can be affected when the audience is aware of the personalized content through transparency markers. Therefore, we pose it:

> **H1.** News articles with transparency markers stating "personalized for you" will result in lower trust in the organization (a), lower trust in the news story (b), and lower perceived credibility of the author (a) regardless of whether the author is portrayed as a human journalist or artificial intelligence.

2.6 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence refers to the branch of computer science that simulates human intelligence by recognizing patterns and learning information from data, without any - or little - human intervention (Broussard et al. 2019). Until recently, narratives involving artificial intelligence were limited to fiction (Ouchchy et al., 2020). However, AI was always portrayed in an exaggerated way, either extremely optimistic about what this form of technology could offer in the future, or exaggeratedly pessimistic with negative outcomes

(Royal Society, 2018). Now that the use of AI has expanded across industries, impacts are being seen in the economic, social and labor domains (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2017).

AI presents new functions for the use of technology in communication, what brings both challenges and opportunities to scholars (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). In other words, previously AI played the role of a mediator who communicated to people, and now AI has transformed into communicators who can communicate with people. That is, instead of mediating human communication, AI becomes a communicator itself (Broussard et al. 2019). Artificial intelligence can vary in function, being able to act as voice-based assistants that answer human questions like Alexa, or they can also act as a content producer when writing stories from raw data (Guzman & Lewis, 2020) such as Chat-GPT. If there is no transparency marker informing the reader that the content was produced by artificial intelligence, the public is not able to perceive differences between text written by a human and automated content (Loof et al., 2023).

From a journalistic perspective, automated news written by artificial intelligence created a *communicative norm* that it is impossible to be exercised by human beings, since there is no physical and cognitive capacity for human subjects to produce personalized content quickly as AI does (Reeves, 2013). Consequently, the tendency is for the audience to start consuming information online that was produced by machines and not by human beings. In addition to raising several questions regarding security, safety, accuracy, bias and user privacy, the use of AI in this context also raises concerns about how much the public trusts automated news (Toff & Simon, 2023).

The discussions surrounding the perception of AI are controversial and promote polarized debates in literature. Although Bunz and Braghieri (2021) suggest that AI is often seen as superior and more efficient than humans, Jussupow et al. (2020) argue that the public still prefers to interact with humans over AI. In the setting of AI as a content creator,

Henestrosa et al. (2023) indicates that credibility and trust of the news are not affected when the text is signed by AI. On the other hand, Toff & Simon (2023) shows evidence that the public perceives news labeled as AI-generated less trustworthy. Employing that AI is increasingly playing the role of content writer, there is a need to verify whether the public perceives automated news with the same levels of trust and credibility that it has in humans as authors. Thus, it poses that:

> **H2.** Participants who read news reports with transparency markers indicating human authorship will perceive higher credibility (a), trust in the organization (b), and trust in the news story (c) compared to those with markers suggesting artificial intelligence as the author.

2.6.1 Adoption of New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence

Davis (1989) developed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), that aims to comprehend why do users accept or reject technology. Upon discovering "why," the intention is then to understand how to increase user acceptance of emerging technologies. The study indicates that there are two major variables directly related to understanding individuals' attitudes toward the adoption of new technologies: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. To clarify, individuals are more likely to use a new technology if they find the tool useful, even if it is difficult to use. On the other hand, if people don't perceive the system as useful, they won't be willing to use it, regardless of the ease of the use. Despite both variables being determinants for predicting the adoption of new technologies, Choung et al. (2022) found evidence that perceived ease of use has a greater impact on the acceptance of these emerging technologies, such as AI. Therefore, high levels of perceived ease of use are analogous to technology acceptance.

Söllner et al. (2016) implies that trust is also a relevant factor for individuals to accept and use new technologies. Among the domain of technology, McKnight (2005) refers to trust

as the user's willingness to depend on and believe that technological systems have the necessary attributes that will preserve their interests. Taking the trust factor into consideration, Choung et al. (2022) extended the TAM and identified empirical support that trust plays a significant role for the individual in shaping attitudes and acceptance of AI technologies. In other words, the more people trust and believe they can depend on AI tools to perform functions that match the user's beliefs and expectations, they are more likely to accept and learn how to use these technologies. Mantello et al. (2023) found indication that people who feel more familiar with artificial intelligence find more uses for this type of tool. As evidenced in literature, the level of acceptance of AI can be measured by the perceived ease of use of the technology. Furthermore, it is relevant to examine whether acceptance of AI can be extended from the technology itself to the content produced by it. Therefore, we propose it:

> **H3.** Participants with higher acceptance towards artificial intelligence will exhibit higher levels of trust in the organization (a), trust in the news (b) and perceived credibility (c) of the news reports attributed to AI.

Chapter 3: Methods

A 2 X 2 condition post-test experiment with transparency markers (artificial intelligence vs journalist) and personalization of news (present vs absent) as the independent variables. Participants were randomly assigned one of the four conditions: a piece of news written by artificial intelligence and the content was personalized for the participant; a piece of news created by a human journalist and the content was personalized for the participant; a piece of news written by artificial intelligence and the content was not personalized for the participant; and a piece of news created by a human journalist and the content was not personalized for the participant. The dependent variables were trust (in the organization, and in the news media), perceived credibility in news, and technology acceptance model. The stimuli were created using a fictitious piece of news to ensure that all respondents of this study have not been exposed to the story or response prior to the study.

3.1 Procedure

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants read the stimuli at the beginning of the survey and confirmed their comprehension of the story through screener questions. Following the stimuli, participants were asked to complete the survey, and then were debriefed.

3.2 Participants

208 individuals first participated in the survey. However, 86 participants were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete responses, defined as failing to complete at least 50% of the survey. Exclusion criteria were implemented to ensure the reliability of responses, as incomplete surveys may indicate a lack of commitment with the questionnaire. Therefore, we can't count on accuracy in these responses. The final sample consisted of 122 undergraduate participants whose responses were included in the analysis. All participants were recruited from medium sized Midwestern university. The respondents were offered

extra credit for their participation in this study. Respondents were between the ages of 18-30 years old. Respondents consisted of 58% cisgender women (N = 69), 40% cisgender men (N = 40), 2.5% as transgender men (N = 3), and 5.9% prefer not to disclose (N = 7).

3.3 Stimuli

The stimuli were created using a fictional report and four fictional transparency markers to ensure that study participants were never exposed to this content before the survey. This was done so that the participants' previous biases would not influence their answers in this study. Furthermore, when creating the news story from scratch, we were also able to customize them according to the participants' responses to make the content look personalized. One survey with four different transparency markers were distributed randomly. A fictional report about food prices increases on campus (see Appendix A to find the stimuli) was shown to the participant, and under each news headline there is one of four transparency markers written: "Written by Pat Kelly"; "Written by Artificial Intelligence"; "Written by Pat Kelly and personalized to you"; and "Written by Artificial Intelligence and personalized to you". Regardless of what was written in the transparency marker, the news report was almost the same for all subjects. Despite the news story being the same for all participants, the headline of the story could vary according to what individuals believe is the most important aspect of dining on campus. To achieve this, participants selected at the beginning of the survey what they value most at mealtime: affordability, food diversity, or food taste. Based on this response, they will be directed to read the stimuli with a headline that mentions the selected factor. In this way, it will appear the content has been personalized for the participant. Following the reading of the news report and the transparency marker, participants were then directed to complete the rest of the survey.

3.4 Measurements

3.4.1 Trust in the organization

To measure the participant's trust in the organization, the 5-point Likert scale from Hon and Grunig (1999) was used. Questions measuring trust included the following: "I trust the author to provide the best available information", and "I feel that the author shares similar values as me".

3.4.2 Trust in news media

To measure participants' trust in news media following the stimuli, questions originally used by Strömbäck et al. (2020) were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Questions measuring trust in news media included the following: "The news article tells the whole story when covering food prices increasing on campus", and "The news article tells the whole story when covering food prices increasing on campus". Originally, the items created by Strömbäck et al. (2020) aim to mediate trust in "media content". In the initial study, researchers considered "media content" as all the coverage of a specific topic provided by a news outlet. However, to adapt to this research's objectives, we changed the vocabulary to measure the participants' confidence in relation to our stimuli. That is, instead of using the original phrase "The media is fair when covering topic x", we modified it to: "The news article is fair when covering food prices increasing on campus".

3.4.3 News credibility index

To measure credibility in news, the 7-point index scale from Karlsen & Aalberg (2023) was used. Questions included the following: "On a scale from 1–7 where 1 indicates 'to a great extent' and 7 indicates 'to a very little extent', to what extent do you trust the information in this news article?", and "On a scale from 1–7 where 1 indicates 'totally

neutral' and 7 indicates 'very biased', do you think that the news story is politically neutral or politically biased?"

3.4.5 Technology acceptance model

To measure the participants' acceptance towards artificial intelligence, a 7-point Likert agreement scale from Davis (1989) was used. Questions measuring A.I acceptance included the following: " I believe that it is easy to get AI tools to do what I want it to do", and "Learning to operate AI tools is easy for me".

3.5 Manipulation Check

To guarantee that respondents read and understood the news report, a screener questions was asked. This first question was asked immediately after the stimuli to ensure that participants paid attention to the instructions and understood the stimuli before responding to the survey. The screener asked what was written in the report's transparency marker: "This news article was written by Pat Kally"; or "This news article was written by artificial intelligence".

3.6 Data Cleaning Procedures and Analysis

86 participants were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete responses, defined as failing to complete at least 50% of the survey. In addition, participants who failed to correctly answer the author in the news article presented were also removed from the sample before the calculations. Exclusion criteria were implemented to ensure the reliability of responses, as incomplete surveys may indicate a lack of commitment with the questionnaire. Therefore, we can't count on accuracy in these responses.

Chapter 4: Results

Hypothesis 1 proposed that news articles with transparency markers stating 'personalized for you' would perceive less trust in the organization (a), less trust in the news story (b), and lower perceived credibility of the author (c), regardless of whether the author is portrayed as a human journalist or artificial intelligence. As the study conditions had unequal numbers, a Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to ensure that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not violated. The test results indicate non-significant findings for Trust in Organization (F (1, 120) = 1.715, p = .193), Trust in News (F (1, 120) = 1.115, p = .293), and perceived Credibility (F (1, 120) = 3.382, p = .068). These results suggest that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for all three dependent variables, supporting the reliability of further analyses. A dummy coding scheme was implemented to distinguish between personalized (coded as 1) and non-personalized (coded as 0) content experiences. This binary variable served as the independent variable for subsequent analyses. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of personalized content on three different dependent variables: trust in the organization, trust in the news, and perceived news credibility. Descriptive statistics indicated that the personalized group (N = 50) had a mean trust in the organization score of 3.50 (SD = .79), whereas the non-personalized group (N = 72) had a mean of 3.50 (SD = .53). For trust in the news, the personalized group had a mean score of 4.25 (SD = .97), while the non-personalized group had a mean score of 4.51 (SD = .91). Regarding perceived news credibility, the personalized group had a mean score of 4.33 (SD = .78), compared to a mean of 4.53 (SD = 1.08) for the non-personalized group. The ANOVA results revealed no significant differences between the personalized and non-personalized groups for trust in the organization (F (1, 120) = .016, p = .899), trust in the news (F (1, 120) = 2.733, p = .101), or perceived news credibility (F (1, 120) = 1.296, p = .257). These findings suggest that the personalization of content did not

have a statistically significant effect on participants' trust in the organization, their trust in the news, or their perceptions of news credibility. Thus, rejecting **H1**.

Hypothesis 2 posed that participants who read news reports with transparency markers indicating human authorship will perceive higher credibility (a), trust in the organization (b), and trust in the news story (c) compared to those with markers suggesting artificial intelligence as the author. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of different conditions on trust in news, trust in the organization, and perception of news credibility. The results indicated no significant effect of condition on trust in news, $F (3, 118) = 1.762$, $p = .15$, suggesting that the variations in conditions did not lead to a significant change in trust in news. Similarly, there was no significant effect on trust in the organization across the conditions, $F (3, 118) = 1.526$, $p = .21$. However, a significant effect of condition on the perceived credibility of news was observed, $F(3, 118) = 3.061$, $p = .030$. This suggests that the different conditions had a statistically significant impact on participants' perceptions of news credibility. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for the perceived credibility of news was significantly lower for Human-traditional news ($M = 4.91$, $p = .019$) compared to AI-personalized news ($M = 4.17$), as well as between AI-traditional news ($M = 4.20$) and Human-traditional news ($p = .010$). No other conditions showed significant differences in mean scores for trust in news and trust in the organization. These findings suggest that both news written by artificial intelligence were found to be less credible than traditional news written by human journalists. Thus, hypothesis 2 was partially supported, rejecting **H2a** and **H2b**, but accepting **H2c**.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that participants with higher acceptance towards artificial intelligence will exhibit higher levels of trust in the organization (a), trust in the news (b) and perceived credibility (c) of the news reports attributed to AI. A dummy coding scheme was

implemented to distinguish between low acceptance towards AI (coded as 0) and high

acceptance towards AI (coded as 1). This binary variable served as the independent variable

for subsequent analyses. To define what is considered low and high, we performed a

calculation of median splits. Rucker et al. (2015) argues that median splits can be used to

categorize two categories as "low" and "high". Previous literature used median splits to

analyze high and low acceptance of students and the use of educational technology in

universities (Nistor et al., 2019). Through median splits, we defined that scores below 4.52

would be perceived as low acceptance, and scores above 4.53 would be perceived as high

acceptance. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of personalized

content on three different dependent variables: trust in the organization, trust in the news, and

perceived news credibility. The ANOVA results revealed significant differences between the

low and high acceptance towards AI groups for trust in the organization (F (1, 115) = 7.201, p

= .008) and trust in the news (F (1, 115) = 5.198, p = .024). However, no significant

differences between the low and high acceptance towards AI groups were found in perceived

news credibility (F (1, 115) = 3.208, p = .076). Descriptive statistics indicated that the low

acceptance towards AI group (N = 64) had a mean trust in the organization score of 3.40 (SD

= .53139), whereas the high acceptance towards AI group (N = 53) had a mean of 3.64 (SD =

.45). For trust in the news, the low acceptance towards AI group had a mean score of 4.24

(SD = .88), while the high acceptance towards AI group had a mean score of 4.60 (SD = .84).

Regarding perceived news credibility, the low acceptance towards AI group had a mean score

of 4.30 (SD = .99), compared to a mean of 4.63 (SD = .97) for the high acceptance towards

AI group. These findings suggest people that had high acceptance of AI found news

organizations and news content to be more trusting than those who had low acceptance of AI.

However, high acceptance towards AI did not have a statistically significant effect on

participants' perceived news credibility. Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported, rejecting

H3c but supporting **H3a** and **H3b**.

Chapter 5: Discussion

With artificial intelligence increasingly transitioning from a mediator to a communicator, studies aiming to understand how individuals perceive content created by these technologies will be prominent. Given the decreasing trust the public has in news, this thesis focused particularly on analyzing trust and credibility in AI within the news context. In addition to content created by AI, this study also aimed to analyze how the public perceives information that has been personalized and distributed to users through machine learning. As machine learning is powered by AI and personalized content has become a common practice in the online universe, news outlets are using transparency markers to communicate with their audience about the personalization of news delivered to the user. Therefore, this thesis intended to analyze whether transparency about recommended content affects how individuals perceive news articles. Furthermore, this research also assessed whether an individual's level of acceptance towards AI can influence the credibility and trustworthiness of automated news. In brief, this research strives to expand the discussion and understanding of the use of new technologies in journalism through two advancements enabled by artificial intelligence: the production and personalization of news content.

The first finding showed evidence that there was no difference between credibility, trust in the news article, or trust in the news organization across all personalized and non-personalized conditions. In other words, both groups of participants, whether exposed to transparency markers signaling personalized content or not, did not demonstrate different levels of trust and credibility in the news or in the organization. Shin et al. (2022) argued that when people are aware of the use of algorithms, it helps to build trust in online platforms. In the context of this thesis, awareness of algorithm usage (personalized content), was created and tested through transparency markers. Although we didn't find evidence of increased trust via algorithm awareness, our results corroborate with Wang & Diakopoulos (2020) findings,

which suggest that in general, there is not much difference in readers perception of news between personalized and non-personalized articles.

The second finding is that participants perceived traditional news written by journalists as more credible than news written by AI. Karlsen & Aalberg (2023) pointed to empirical evidence suggesting a relationship between the intermediary sender and the public when it comes to news credibility. Their study argues that if people have sympathy for the intermediary sender, they tend to trust the news they share more, even if the information is questionable. To explain further, participants may have perceived the news story written by AI as less credible than the news story written by a human journalist due to a lack of affinity with the author (intermediary sender) of the news. In this case, a lack of affinity with artificial intelligence. This finding sustains the insights proposed by Toff & Simon (2023), which indicate that individuals tend to perceive generative AI news stories more negatively compared to professional human journalists.

As predicted, the third finding suggests that people with higher AI acceptance found news organizations and news content to be more trusting than those who had low acceptance of AI. However, both groups of participants did not differ from one another on news credibility. As individuals who accept AI exhibit high levels of ease-of-use (Choung et al., 2022), we can interpret these results as suggesting that individuals who find AI easy to use and consequently understand its capabilities and limitations are more likely to trust the content generated by it. Consequently, people who were unaccepting of AI perceive it as not being easy to use and may exhibit reluctance to trust content produced by it as they have a limited understanding of how AI operates.

Agenda-setting research may consider this study's findings, as they are relevant for understanding the relationship between media effects, trust, and credibility in automated

news. Agenda-setting studies aim to understand the relationship between media content and public opinion, with trust in the media being crucial for assessing the perceived effects. Our study reveals that we can interpret the results in two ways. The first theoretical implication is a concerning trend: the public perceives AI generated news as less credible. Therefore, if automated news lacks credibility, important topics covered by AI may not receive the necessary attention from the audience, regardless of their actual relevance. This could lead the public to overlook crucial issues in public discourse that were written by AI generated content. Consequently, this skepticism towards AI-generated news could prompt a shift in who shapes public perception in the era of automated content, as the media will fail to define what issues are important.

On the other hand, our results suggest that individuals who perceive AI as easy to use are likely to trust AI-generated news, thereby amplifying the influence of agenda-setting for those who accept this technology. Under that perspective, the media's role in shaping public opinion becomes increasingly intertwined with the adoption and perception of AI technology. Thus, future research should consider varying levels of media skepticism and technology acceptance among participants when measuring agenda-setting effects. That way, research can assess insights into media influence in the age of automation.

5.1 Practical Implications

There are many challenges faced by journalists today. In addition to the lack of credibility and perceived trustworthiness by the public, newsrooms face the challenge of keeping news updated in a globalized world with an increasing number of users generating content. Lean editorial teams need to deal with a high volume of information in a very short time to produce and write content. Therefore, this study has important practical implications, as by understanding how the public accepts and perceives the use of AI, newsrooms can

develop strategies to optimize news production with the assistance of emerging technologies. Opdahl et al. (2023) advocate that journalists should explore new AI tools in their daily work to facilitate tedious tasks, allowing more time for critical reflection, creativity, and quality journalism. However, researchers have shown that complete automation of news production remains undesirable, and journalists still bear responsibility for the journalistic product. In other words, although AI usage may not directly influence overall trust in news content and in the news organization, credibility can be affected since this concept is tied to affinity towards the authorship of the news content. Overall, understanding how the audience grasps AI usage can help newsrooms comprehend how to craft stories that will be perceived as credible, aiming to gain back some of the trust in news that has been lost over the past decades. This thesis results show that both news written by AI were perceived as less credible than news written by a human journalist. Therefore, we recommend against the implementation of automated journalism without human journalist oversight in newsrooms. This recommendation rationale stems from the audience's lack of affinity towards AI as an author, which diminishes the perceived credibility of the news. Furthermore, future research should examine the difference in perceiving AI as a tool versus a teammate. Specifically, investigate if individuals' perception of AI as a tool that helps journalists complete their tasks affects trust and credibility of the news. To conclude, future research should also examine AI literacy to develop social norms related to AI usage. That arises from the fact that, rather than simply accepting AI generated news, people should use technology critically. Developing a deeper understanding of AI can address our conflicting findings of credibility and technology acceptance leading to more trust.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

The main limitation is related to the news story that was created for the stimulus. We should have measured the strength of participants' attitudes towards the content of the story. The news article was about the increase in food prices at the university's residential dining. This consideration arises as we recognize that the extent to which people perceive, and trust information can be directly affected by how much the audience cares about the topic. In future research, measuring the strength of participants' attitudes towards the content of the news could provide valuable insights into understanding how crucial the context can be in determining how and when people place trust and credibility in news. Hofeditz et al. (2021) suggests that the actual content of the news is more important than the authorship of the text when assessing the credibility of an article. Future research should explore how audiences perceive trust and credibility in automated content, while also considering their perception of the subject matter. This involves analyzing participants' perceptions and attitudes towards different stimuli, including news topics that elicit varying opinions, such as politics. By doing so, future analysis can evaluate whether the use of AI influences how the public perceives information conveyed in news articles within controversial topics. This approach can evidence relevant findings regarding how future news outlets should proceed when crafting news articles.

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Stimuli - AI + Personalized News (group 1)

Facing the Hike: Navigating the Challenge of Affordable Eating on Campus

Food Prices on Campus to Increase by 20% Next Semester

Written by Artificial Intelligence and personalized to you

In an announcement that has sent ripples across the student body, the university's dining service provider has declared a significant price hike in food prices, set to take effect next semester. This 20% increase has sparked a wave of concern among students and faculty alike, as many wonder how this will impact the daily lives and budgets of the campus community.

The decision comes on the heels of a year marked by noticeable improvements in the quality and variety of food offered on campus, attributed to the university's partnership with its current food service provider. Students had previously lauded the provider for its diverse menu options and efforts to cater to a wide range of dietary needs.

${q://QID27/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} Kelly Semmler, expressed mixed feelings about the news. "While I've genuinely appreciated the better food quality this year, the 20% price increase is disheartening. It's going to make budgeting a lot tougher," Semmler said.

The price hike is attributed to rising operational costs, including ingredients, labor, and efforts to maintain environmentally sustainable practices. The dining service provider has pledged to continue offering high-quality, diverse food options while also exploring ways to mitigate the financial impact on students.

In response to student feedback, the university is considering adjustments to meal plan structures to offer more flexibility and affordability. Additionally, discussions are underway to introduce more budget-friendly meal options without compromising on nutritional value.

This price increase has also raised questions about the affordability of campus events that rely on catering services. Student organizations, known for hosting events that enrich the campus culture, fear the higher costs may limit their ability to organize such gatherings.

Sophomore and event coordinator for the Cultural Exchange Club, Diego Ramirez, highlighted the challenge. "Our events are a cornerstone of campus life. We're brainstorming ways to adapt, but it's a tough pill to swallow," Ramirez commented.

Despite the concerns, the university's administration and the dining service provider are engaging in an open dialogue with the student body to address these challenges. They encourage students to participate in feedback sessions planned over the next few months.

As the campus community braces for these changes, the conversation around affordability, accessibility, and quality of food services continues. With the semester drawing to a close, students and faculty are hopeful for solutions that will balance the scales between cost and quality in campus dining experiences.

Editorial Note: Please be aware that some portions of this news article have been generated by artificial intelligence technology. The content of this news article has been personalized to cater to your interests and preferences.

Affordable, Tasty, Diverse: The Triple Challange of Campus Dining in the New Semester

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Diverse Palates, Rising Prices: Can Campus Food Keep Up?

Food Prices on Campus to Increase by 20% Next Semester

Written by Pat Kelly and personalized to you

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Survey Measures

Trust in the organization (Hon & Grunig, 1999)

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being "strongly disagree", 3 being "neither disagree nor agree" and 5 being "strongly agree", rate your agreement with the following statements.

I trust the author to...

provide the best available information.

provide enough information.

provide truthful information.

provide timely information.

I feel that the author...

shares similar values as me

shares similar opinions as me

News credibility index (Kaslsen & Aalberg, 2023)

On a scale from 1–7 where 1 indicates 'to a great extent' and 7 indicates 'to a very little extent', to what extent do you trust the information in this news article?

On a scale from 1–7 where 1 indicates 'totally neutral' and 7 indicates 'very biased', do you think that the news story is politically neutral or politically biased?

Trust in news media (Strömbäck et al., 2020)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the news article coverage of food prices increasing on campus.

The news article is unbiased when covering food prices increasing on campus.

The news article tells the whole story when covering food prices increasing on campus.

The news article is accurate when covering food prices increasing on campus.

The news article separates facts from opinions when covering food prices increasing on campus.

Technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989)

Indicate your level of agreement with the following:

Ease of Use

I believe that AI tools are cumbersome to use. (reverse coded)

It is easy for me to remember how to perform tasks using AI tools.

Using AI tools requires a lot of mental effort. (reverse coded)

Using AI tools is often frustrating. (reverse coded)

My interaction with AI tools is clear and understandable.

I believe that it is easy to get AI tools to do what I want it to do.

Overall, I believe that AI tools are easy to use.

Learning to operate AI tools is easy for me.