Feedback International Journal of Communication Vol. 2 No. 3, 2025
ISSN (online): 3046-9465
DOI: https://doi.org/10.62569/fijc.v2i3.195
Received: June 2025/ Revised: August 2025/ Accepted: August 2025

Feedback International Journal of Communication
https://ejournal.agungmediapublisher.com/index.php/fijc

Reconfiguration of Media Communication in the Age of AI and Inequality

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Abstract. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the production, distribution, and consumption of information within digital media ecosystems. While AI offers unprecedented opportunities for innovation, efficiency, and personalization, it also risks deepening existing socioeconomic and digital inequalities. This study explores the complex relationship between AI, media access, and inequality in the digital era. This exploratory research employed a descriptive approach by analyzing secondary sources, including academic literature, media reports, policy documents, and online resources related to AI and digital media. Data were synthesized to identify patterns of structural injustices and regulatory challenges in both the Global North and Global South. The findings indicate that AI-driven tools such as automated journalism, algorithms, deepfake technologies, and generative models are reshaping traditional media workflows. While these innovations enhance efficiency and personalization, they also introduce concerns related to bias, misinformation, opacity in corporate practices, and the erosion of editorial authority. The analysis further reveals that structural inequalities and regulatory gaps mediate the benefits of AI, often privileging technologically advanced actors while marginalizing underserved groups. The study concludes that although AI has the potential to revolutionize media practices, its integration into digital ecosystems risks widening digital divides and reinforcing power asymmetries. Without inclusive policies, ethical leadership, and equitable access frameworks, AI may consolidate control in the hands of a few, thereby undermining media pluralism and social equity.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Digital Media; Inequality; Media Innovation; Digital Divide

1. Introduction

Information has always played a central role in the progress of human societies. As civilizations evolve, the availability and accessibility of accurate knowledge become essential for strengthening social institutions and building sustainable infrastructures (Nugroho & Wuryani, 2023). Much like the circulatory system that delivers oxygen to every part of the body, information flows ensure the vitality of society by dispelling ignorance, addressing conflicting perspectives, and promoting collective well-being. In this context, the media has long been regarded as a key institution responsible for

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fostering informed citizenship and encouraging peaceful coexistence. With the advancement of technology, particularly digital innovations, the media has sought to improve efficiency and expand its reach (Kim et al., 2023; Noain-Sánchez, 2022; Zhai et al., 2020).

Pavlik (2023) highlights how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping media landscapes by transforming processes of information production, distribution, and consumption. Scholars emphasize that while AI-powered tools such as automated journalism, deepfake technology, and generative models offer efficiency and personalization, they also pose risks to media integrity and public trust (Kwok & Koh, 2021; Neethirajan, 2021; Westerlund, 2019). Studies further show that poorer nations, struggling with weak infrastructure and limited digital literacy, are disproportionately excluded from the benefits of AI integration in media practices (Bazavan & Huidumac-Petrescu, 2023; Mantri et al., 2021; Zhai et al., 2020). This exclusion not only influences patterns of content creation and dissemination but also deepens disparities in public discourse and media access, ultimately sustaining the global digital divide.

In the literature, the integration of AI into media ecosystems is consistently associated with significant shifts in newsroom practices and audience behaviors (Anderson, 2011; Lamot & Paulussen, 2020). Blanchett (2021), for example, highlights that algorithmic personalization has transformed news consumption from a mass-oriented model to a highly individualized one. This phenomenon produces filter bubbles and echo chambers (Figà Talamanca & Arfini, 2022; Wolfowicz et al., 2023), narrowing access to diverse viewpoints and reinforcing political or ideological polarization. As a result, media platforms no longer serve merely as channels of information but also as spaces that actively shape, and sometimes distort, democratic discourse and social cohesion.

Another widely documented phenomenon is the rise of automated journalism. Regona et al. (2022) observe that many newsrooms increasingly rely on algorithmic systems to generate routine reports such as financial updates, weather forecasts, and sports coverage. While this innovation reduces operational costs and accelerates publication processes, it also raises critical concerns about editorial authority and journalistic accountability. On the one hand, media organizations can serve audiences more efficiently; on the other hand, the human dimension of journalism such as analysis, critique, and contextual depth risks being diminished.

A further phenomenon attracting scholarly attention is the proliferation of deepfake technologies and generative models capable of producing hyper-realistic texts, images, and videos. Chesney and Citron (2019) argue that such tools contribute to "information disorder," encompassing misinformation, malinformation, and disinformation that are increasingly difficult to detect or verify. For the media, this represents a double-edged sword: it expands creative possibilities while simultaneously threatening the credibility of journalism and the public's trust in factual information. These developments reinforce the view that AI functions not merely as a neutral technological tool but also as a form of power that can shape public opinion on a global scale.

Despite these growing concerns, a critical gap remains in research exploring how AI both bridges and widens inequalities in digital media ecosystems across different geopolitical contexts. Existing studies tend to focus on the technological potential of AI in media, but less attention is paid to its structural and ethical implications, particularly in the Global South where digital exclusion is most pronounced. Moreover, the discussion on regulatory loopholes, corporate opacity, and the ethical dilemmas surrounding AI in

journalism remains fragmented, calling for a more integrative approach to address the interplay between technology, inequality, and access to information.

This study is significant because it offers a nuanced understanding of AI's dual role: as a driver of media innovation and as a potential amplifier of global information inequalities. By revisiting the concept of the digital divide and situating it within contemporary AI practices, the study highlights the urgent need for inclusive, ethical, and transparent frameworks in media technology.

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between AI, media access, and inequality in the digital era. Specifically, it investigates how AI technologies are reshaping media production and consumption, the extent to which these changes exacerbate existing divides between the Global North and Global South, and the ethical challenges that arise from their integration. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to academic debates on media and technology while also providing insights that can inform policy, regulation, and inclusive media practices.

2. Method

This study adopts an exploratory design and employs a descriptive research method. Given the evolving and underexplored nature of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in digital media, an exploratory approach was considered appropriate for generating insights rather than testing hypotheses (Corbett & Durfee, 2004; Hay et al., 2020). The study relied primarily on secondary data sources, including academic texts, peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, historical records, and online resources. These materials provided the necessary foundation to examine the intersections of AI, media access, and inequality, while allowing the research to capture both theoretical perspectives and practical implications of AI integration in media systems (Creswell, 2003; Takona, 2024).

To ensure a systematic and comprehensive review, databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar were searched using relevant keywords including "Artificial Intelligence," "Digital Media," "Inequality," "Access," and "Digital Divide." The inclusion criteria required that studies be empirical in nature, employing either qualitative or quantitative approaches, and directly examining the relationship between AI, access, and inequality in the context of digital media. Eligible studies were restricted to publications in peer-reviewed English-language journals between 2018 and 2025 to capture contemporary debates and technological developments. Excluded materials included editorials, conference abstracts, and grey literature, unless they contained original data that satisfied the inclusion requirements.

In addition, Nigerian print news outlets were consulted as data sources to contextualize the study within a Global South perspective (Apuke & Tunca, 2019; Hassan et al., 2018; Ogbodo et al., 2024). These outlets offered valuable empirical evidence of how AI technologies are shaping media practices, access, and inequalities in a developing country context. Thematic analysis was applied to the reviewed materials to identify recurring patterns related to structural inequalities, regulatory gaps, and ethical concerns in the deployment of AI in media ecosystems. This approach allowed the study to synthesize diverse insights and highlight the complex and often uneven ways in which AI reshapes media innovation and access globally.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. AI and Media Production: Efficiency versus Integrity

The integration of AI into media production has fundamentally transformed newsroom operations and broadcasting workflows. Automated journalism has become a particularly visible example, where algorithms are employed to generate reports in data-intensive fields such as finance, sports, and weather. By automating these routine tasks, media outlets like the Associated Press can publish large volumes of content with greater speed and reduced costs. This allows journalists to redirect their focus toward more investigative or analytical work, thereby optimizing resource allocation in an increasingly competitive media environment (Bender, 2023; Heim & Chan-Olmsted, 2023; Jones et al., 2022).

Generative tools such as Adobe Sensei and RunwayML further illustrate the efficiency gains afforded by AI. These technologies automate traditionally labor-intensive processes like video editing, color grading, and even scriptwriting, reducing production timelines and budgetary demands. In the film and broadcasting industries, these applications have been welcomed as innovations that not only streamline workflows but also expand creative possibilities. For instance, independent filmmakers or smaller production houses can now access high-level editing and design capabilities that were once exclusive to large studios.

However, alongside these efficiencies lie concerns regarding editorial integrity and journalistic quality. The mechanization of content creation often strips reporting of nuance, context, and the human judgment necessary for socially responsible journalism. Automated journalism tends to reproduce factual data but lacks the ability to interrogate sources, challenge assumptions, or uncover systemic issues functions that remain central to the ethos of journalism. This shift risks transforming newsrooms into content factories, prioritizing speed and volume over accuracy, depth, and critical reflection.

Algorithmic bias further complicates the integration of AI into media production. Since algorithms are trained on pre-existing datasets, they inherit and replicate the biases embedded in those datasets. In journalism, this can manifest as disproportionate coverage, stereotyping, or the underrepresentation of marginalized voices. Editorial authority, traditionally exercised by human gatekeepers, becomes diluted as opaque algorithmic systems influence what content is created and how it is presented. The risk is that AI may reinforce systemic inequalities rather than democratize media access and representation.

Ultimately, the tension between efficiency and integrity defines the current discourse on AI in media production. While AI enhances productivity and democratizes access to advanced production tools, it simultaneously challenges the foundational values of media: accuracy, accountability, and public trust. The challenge for media organizations lies not in rejecting AI but in embedding it within ethical and editorial frameworks that safeguard journalistic standards. Without such measures, the very efficiency promised by AI could undermine the credibility and social responsibility of the media industry.

Table 1 AI and Media Production

Domain	Evidence/Example	Implications
Automated journalism	Associated Press uses AI to generate sports/finance news	Increases speed and output but reduces human editorial input
Generative production	Adobe Sensei, RunwayML streamline editing & scripting	Cuts costs and timelines; risks creative homogenization

Workflow automation	AI tools in newsrooms & broadcasting	Boosts efficiency but raises accuracy and accountability issues

Table 1 illustrates how AI is reshaping media production by enhancing efficiency while simultaneously raising questions about integrity and accountability. In the case of automated journalism, as seen in the Associated Press, AI enables faster and larger-scale reporting in areas like sports and finance, though this often comes at the expense of human editorial oversight. Generative production tools such as Adobe Sensei and RunwayML streamline labor-intensive tasks like editing and scripting, significantly reducing costs and timelines but risking creative homogenization as outputs become standardized. Similarly, workflow automation across newsrooms and broadcasting increases operational efficiency, yet it also introduces concerns about accuracy and the erosion of journalistic responsibility. Together, these examples highlight the double-edged nature of AI in media: while it delivers undeniable gains in productivity, it also threatens the values of originality, diversity, and credibility that underpin responsible journalism.

3.2. AI, Audience Engagement, and Digital Stratification

AI-driven personalization has fundamentally altered how audiences engage with media content. Platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, and Spotify employ sophisticated recommendation algorithms that analyze user behavior to predict preferences and deliver customized content. This personalization improves user satisfaction, increases engagement duration, and enhances platform loyalty. For media companies, such tools also provide valuable data that inform content strategies and monetization models. The result is an entertainment ecosystem where audiences feel their consumption is uniquely tailored, creating a perception of control and convenience (Ben-Tal et al., 2021; Chan-Olmsted, 2019; Hussain et al., 2024).

Yet, the same personalization systems that increase satisfaction also foster filter bubbles and echo chambers. By continuously curating content aligned with a user's existing preferences, algorithms reduce the likelihood of exposure to diverse viewpoints or alternative narratives. For example, political videos recommended on YouTube often reinforce the ideological leanings of viewers rather than presenting balanced perspectives. This not only narrows the informational diet of users but also intensifies polarization within societies. As such, algorithmic engagement mechanisms create an environment where comfort and familiarity take precedence over critical reflection and diversity of thought.

In addition, predictive analytics in AI have enabled more precise audience targeting, particularly for advertising and content placement. While this benefits media companies by optimizing revenue streams, it raises concerns about surveillance, privacy, and data commodification. The line between user empowerment and manipulation becomes increasingly blurred, as audiences are nudged toward content and consumption patterns that serve corporate interests rather than public ones. In this context, AI functions as both a tool of engagement and a mechanism of control, subtly shaping audience behavior in ways that are not always transparent.

The uneven distribution of AI technologies also underscores the persistence of digital stratification. In technologically advanced regions, audiences reap the full benefits of AI-driven personalization, enjoying seamless, data-rich experiences. In contrast, populations in the Global South, particularly those with limited infrastructure or low digital literacy,

remain excluded from these benefits. For instance, while urban users in developed economies can stream high-definition content with personalized recommendations, rural communities in Africa or Southeast Asia struggle with basic connectivity and limited access to AI-enabled platforms. This uneven landscape reinforces global disparities in access, participation, and representation.

AI-driven personalization produces a paradox: it enriches media experiences for some while deepening exclusion for others. For digitally empowered populations, it offers convenience, efficiency, and entertainment tailored to individual tastes. However, for digitally marginalized groups, it exacerbates existing inequalities by restricting access to information and media participation. The stratification not only divides audiences geographically but also socially and culturally, raising urgent questions about equity and inclusivity in the digital media ecosystem. Without deliberate policy interventions and ethical design, AI risks cementing a fragmented media environment where privilege dictates access, voice, and influence.

Table 2 AI, Audience Engagement, and Digital Stratification

Domain	**Evidence/Example**	**Implications**
Personalization	Netflix/YouTube algorithms recommend tailored content	Improves satisfaction but narrows exposure to diverse views
Predictive analytics	Forecast audience preferences for monetization	Supports targeted advertising; raises privacy & data concerns
Global disparities	Uneven infrastructure in Global South	Enhances gaps in access and deepens digital exclusion

Table 2 highlights how AI reshapes audience engagement while simultaneously reinforcing digital stratification. Through personalization, platforms like Netflix and YouTube enhance user satisfaction by recommending tailored content, but this comes at the cost of narrowing exposure to diverse viewpoints, thereby fostering filter bubbles. Predictive analytics further optimize content strategies and advertising revenues by forecasting audience preferences, yet such practices raise ethical issues concerning privacy and the commodification of personal data. Meanwhile, the global disparities in digital infrastructure mean that while users in developed regions benefit from seamless AI-driven engagement, many in the Global South remain excluded, a condition that not only limits access but also deepens existing inequalities in participation and representation within the digital ecosystem.

3.3. AI, Ethics, and the Global Information Gap

The integration of AI into media introduces a wide spectrum of ethical challenges that cut across questions of truth, responsibility, and justice. One of the most urgent concerns is the rise of deepfakes and disinformation, which threaten the credibility of journalism and the reliability of public knowledge (Bouderhem, 2022). AI-generated content, while technically sophisticated, can be weaponized to manipulate elections, distort public debates, or damage reputations. This undermines democratic processes by eroding trust in media institutions and weakening the public's ability to discern fact from fabrication.

Without regulatory safeguards, the capacity of AI to flood the digital environment with persuasive falsehoods poses a direct threat to societal cohesion.

Equally pressing are the intellectual property disputes emerging from AI's reliance on massive datasets, many of which are drawn from copyrighted media without consent or compensation. News organizations and creative industries have voiced growing concerns that their content is being harvested to train generative models, effectively extracting value without acknowledgment or fair remuneration. This dynamic creates new forms of "data colonialism," where knowledge and cultural products from various regions, especially the Global South, are appropriated to enrich dominant platforms headquartered in the Global North. The absence of clear legal frameworks around ownership, rights, and attribution leaves smaller media actors especially vulnerable (Heim & Chan-Olmsted, 2023; Jones et al., 2022; Noain-Sánchez, 2022).

The ethical risks of AI become particularly acute in the Global South, where infrastructural deficits such as unstable internet access, limited regulatory capacity, and low levels of digital literacy make societies more susceptible to exploitation. Reliance on global platforms like Facebook, YouTube, or TikTok compounds this problem, as algorithmic systems designed for commercial gain often prioritize sensational or polarizing content over reliable local information. This creates an environment where disinformation spreads rapidly, but resources for fact-checking, regulation, or media literacy remain scarce. The imbalance between global platform power and local institutional weakness widens the information gap and deepens inequalities in media ecosystems.

Another dimension of the ethical debate centers on accountability and transparency. AI systems often operate as "black boxes," where their decision-making processes are opaque even to their developers. For media audiences, this lack of transparency raises questions about editorial authority and who ultimately controls the narratives shaping public life. When algorithms decide which voices are amplified and which are silenced, issues of bias, discrimination, and exclusion are inevitable. For marginalized communities, particularly in contexts with weak democratic safeguards, this opacity means a diminished ability to challenge systemic injustices embedded in AI-driven media structures.

Addressing the ethical implications of AI in media requires more than technological fixes; it demands systemic reforms and inclusive governance. Efforts must focus on developing legal frameworks that protect intellectual property, ensure data rights, and regulate disinformation without stifling free expression. Equally, fostering media literacy and digital empowerment in the Global South is crucial to narrowing the information gap and enabling critical engagement with AI-driven content. By approaching AI as both a technological and ethical issue, societies can better balance its potential for innovation with safeguards against exploitation and inequality, ensuring that the digital future is inclusive, equitable, and just.

Table 3 AI, Ethics, and Information Gap

Domain	Evidence/Example	Implications
Misinformation & deepfakes	AI generates synthetic, hard-to-verify content	Erodes trust, threatens democratic processes
Intellectual	Disputes over training generative	Urges regulation for fair use

property	AI with copyrighted media	and compensation
Structural inequality	Africa: weak infrastructure & reliance on global platforms	Reinforces power asymmetries; widens global information gap

Table 3 illustrates how the ethical challenges of AI in media intersect with structural inequalities to widen the global information gap. The spread of misinformation and deepfakes through AI-generated synthetic content undermines trust in journalism and threatens democratic processes by making truth harder to verify. At the same time, unresolved intellectual property disputes such as the use of copyrighted media to train generative AI without consent highlight the urgent need for regulation to ensure fair use and compensation. These risks are compounded in regions like Africa, where weak infrastructure and heavy reliance on global platforms reinforce existing power asymmetries, leaving local media ecosystems marginalized and the global information gap increasingly entrenched.

4. Conclusion

This study has shown that AI is transforming media production, audience engagement, and ethical frameworks in profound ways, yet its integration also intensifies the global information gap. On the one hand, AI-driven tools enhance efficiency, automate journalism, personalize content, and streamline workflows, providing unprecedented opportunities for innovation. On the other hand, they reinforce inequalities by centralizing power in the hands of dominant tech corporations, deepening digital stratification, and marginalizing underrepresented communities, especially in the Global South. These findings suggest that AI is a double-edged technology capable of fostering creativity and efficiency while simultaneously threatening editorial integrity, inclusivity, and media pluralism.

The discussion highlights that these challenges are not merely technological but structural and political. Algorithmic curation, predictive analytics, and generative models reproduce systemic biases embedded in their datasets, amplifying dominant narratives and excluding minority voices. The ethical dilemmas, ranging from misinformation and deepfakes to intellectual property disputes and surveillance demonstrate that unregulated AI risks eroding trust and undermining democratic processes. Moreover, digital inequalities rooted in infrastructure, literacy, and socio-political contexts further widen the gap between digitally empowered actors and those excluded from meaningful participation. Thus, any governance of AI in media must prioritize diversity, accountability, and equity, moving beyond access-based interventions toward structural reform and inclusive innovation.

However, this study is not without limitations. Its reliance on secondary sources, including literature and media reports, means that the analysis is shaped by existing research gaps and lacks primary empirical data, especially from marginalized regions where AI's impact may be most pronounced. Future research should therefore adopt mixed methods approaches that integrate interviews, surveys, and case studies from both the Global North and Global South to capture lived experiences of digital inequality under AI. Comparative studies across different socio-political contexts would also enrich understanding of how AI-driven media practices reinforce or resist global hierarchies. In

addition, longitudinal studies could help track how AI reshapes media ecosystems over time, offering insights into both immediate risks and long-term consequences.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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