

Jan KREFT
Monika BOGUSZEWICZ-KREFT
Mariana FYDRYCH

“GUARDIANS OF THE TRUTH” Journalists’ Resistance to the Algorithmization of Journalism

In defending their identity, journalists put professional values, such as objectivity, to the fore and argue that people are better than machines in view of cognitive, affective and moral abilities. They emphasize that algorithms are data-driven and inherently error-prone, leading to unexpected and unintended results and, in general, that algorithmic journalism is low-quality journalism. Furthermore, journalists take it for granted that society needs them as journalists to speak the truth and act ethically.

FAKE NEWS AND POST-TRUTH

Fake news refers to intentionally designed and presented false information or misleading statements¹ disseminated through planned channels and manipulating the cognitive processes of the recipient. In this interpretation, fake news is a modern version of disinformation related to cyberspace and social networks,² but it differs from disinformation in that its distribution channels are purposefully designed and planned.

Fake news comes in the form of images, texts, and videos. Among all these forms, those whose content is the most difficult to confirm include urgent information with very high propagation and reports and opinions on socially important issues that fit into conspiracy theories.³ Fake news is one of the elements of the so-called post-truth.⁴ “Post-truth” is a term illustrating the falsification of reality in the media space in order to build the popularity of an

¹ See Axel G e l f e r t, “Fake News: A Definition,” *Informal logic* 38, no. 1 (2018): 84.

² See Edson C. T a n d o c, Joy J e n k i n s, and Stephanie C r a f t, “Fake News as a Critical Incident in Journalism,” *Journalism Practice* 13, no. 6 (2019): 686.

³ See Victoria L. R u b i n, Yimin C h e n, and Nadia K. C o n r o y, “Deception Detection for News: Three Types of Fakes,” *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 52, no. 1 (2015): 4.

⁴ See Maciej F l a d e r, “Postprawda jako efekt błędnego poszukiwania prawdy,” *Teologia i Człowiek* 44, no. 4 (2019): 41.

individual or a political party,⁵ as well as falsifying other areas of social life. Understood in this way, it reduces truth to a derivative of popularity, and man to a verifier of content.⁶

TRUTH IN JOURNALISM IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

In the light of the rich tradition of scholarly research devoted to truth in journalism, post-truth and fake news signal the end of the project of shaping knowledge by promoting the scientific model as the only legitimate one.⁷ They also challenge the normative vision of journalism as an important, fact-based, and rational element of democratic public life.⁸ For decades, this idea was based on the belief in an “open mind” that enables one to take an authoritative position on reality. The consensus of the elites on issues fundamental to the functioning of societies included a “regime of truth” based on scientific knowledge. This post-ideological way of thinking was supposed to supplant totalitarian ideologies and signify the triumph of science.⁹ Knowledge was anchored in scientific principles defining truth-telling, and scientific truth was the core of the post-ideological doctrine.

The hegemony of this scientific “regime of truth” was based on the scarcity of information available to the end recipients of media messages. The ideal of “professional journalism,” understood as an important part of the truth-forming system, was gaining in popularity. The professional aspirations of journalists grew at that time, and the hierarchical division of knowledge flowing from the elites and experts consolidated the status of journalists as selectors and providers of information and its interpretation.¹⁰

This post-ideological order is no longer valid. The crisis of the technocratic liberal order consists, among other things, in an erosion of trust in facts and in journalism, and in the politicization of science. Moreover, the popularity of the Internet has destroyed the vertical structure of knowledge production and

⁵ See Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, s.v. “Post-truth,” <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/post-truth>.

⁶ See F l a d e r, “Postprawda jako efekt błędnego poszukiwania prawdy,” 41.

⁷ See Silvio W a i s b o r d, “Truth Is What Happens to News,” *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 13 (2018): 1869.

⁸ See Mats E k s t r ö m, Seth C. L e w i s, and Oscar W e s t l u n d, “Epistemologies of Digital Journalism and the Study of Misinformation,” *New Media & Society* 22, no. 2 (2020): 209–10.

⁹ See Jami C o h e n - C o l e, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 243.

¹⁰ See W a i s b o r d, “Truth Is What Happens to News.”

dissemination.¹¹ The frontiers of knowledge have become fluid, and dispersed communities, anchored in beliefs and ideologies, have unlimited opportunities to communicate, free of journalistic intervention. In the digital environment, the presence of fake news and post-truth shows that truth is the result of the social interpretation of reality, and collective sense-making in an environment of digital platforms and social media, and only a fraction of the content passes through the filters of modern journalistic “arbiters of truth.”¹² Such general conditions are conducive to destabilizing the narrative of truth dissemination by professional journalists, and concepts of factual and reasonable truth-telling are challenged or simply ignored.

ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM

Today’s technological innovations contribute to an uncontrolled and virtually infinite stream of information.¹³ Artificial intelligence algorithms are able to create readable content through data analytics (deep data analysis, data mining).¹⁴ Their potential is growing, not least because access to data is constantly increasing; every day mankind produces more than 2.5 quintillion bytes of data.¹⁵ To a large extent, algorithms can autonomously create textual and visual journalistic content in many formats, including long articles, headlines, tweets, and industry reports with graphic visualizations, as well as multiple versions of the same article for specific client needs.

Thus in practice, we are dealing with a new type of journalism: algorithmic journalism in which the content is created and distributed using algorithms, various types of data, and natural language generation and processing techniques. This type of journalism is referred to as “robot journalism”¹⁶ or “automated

¹¹ See Mats Ekström and Oscar Westlund, “The Dislocation of News Journalism: A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Epistemologies of Digital Journalism,” *Media and Communication* 7, no. 1 (2019): 263–65.

¹² See Waissbord, “Truth Is What Happens to News.”

¹³ See Gregory P. Perrault and Patrick Ferrucci, “What Is Digital Journalism? Defining the Practice and Role of the Digital Journalist,” *Digital Journalism* 8, no. 10 (2020): 1219–20; Jan Krefť, *Władza algorytmów: U źródeł potęgi Google i Facebooka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019).

¹⁴ See Noam Lempelshtrich Lataf, “The Robotic Journalist in the Age of Social Physics: The End of Human Journalism?” in *The New World of Transitioned Media*, ed. Gali Einav (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 68.

¹⁵ See Bernard Marr, “How Much Data Do We Create Every Day? The Mind-Blowing Stats Everyone Should Read,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/05/21/how-much-data-do-we-create-every-day-the-mind-blowing-stats-everyone-should-read/?sh=6ab9ca4c60ba>.

¹⁶ See Arjen van Dalen, “The Algorithms behind the Headlines: How Machine-Written News Redefines the Core Skills of Human Journalists,” *Journalism Practice* 6, nos. 5–6 (2012): 648.

journalism.”¹⁷ For the purposes of further argument, it is assumed to be “the advanced use of computing, algorithms and automation to gather, evaluate, compose, present and distribute news.”¹⁸

ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM AND JOURNALISTIC IDENTITY

Although individuals may consider themselves to be part of many different social groups, social identities often manifest themselves in occupations and professions.¹⁹ This is no different in the media environment, where the practiced profession seems to form the basis of a large part of the identity of journalists²⁰; an occupation is understood as a set of characteristics, beliefs, and values that people use to define themselves in specialized, skill- and education-based activities.²¹

This professional identity determines work-related attitudes and ethical behavior. It includes self-acceptance based on traits, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences²² and is built around normative practice, professional boundary-setting, and the concept of roles.²³ In this context, it should be emphasized that journalists are very proud to be members of their own professional community and strongly guard the definition of who can and cannot be part of this group.²⁴ Research also confirms that the professional identity of journalists is not very flexible.²⁵

As for ethics, in the context of the expansion of algorithmic journalism, the “shifting of responsibility” is noteworthy. An individual human being working

¹⁷ See Matt Carlson, “The Robotic Reporter: Automated Journalism and the Redefinition of Labor, Compositional Forms, and Journalistic Authority,” *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 3 (2015): 416.

¹⁸ Neil Thurman, Konstantin Dörr, and Jessica Kurnert, “When Reporters Get Hands-on with Robo-Writing: Professionals Consider Automated Journalism’s Capabilities and Consequences,” *Digital Journalism* 5, no. 10 (2017): 1241. All translations are our own.

¹⁹ See Glen E. Kreiner, Elaine C. Hollensbe, and Mathew L. Sheep, “Where Is the ‘Me’ among the ‘We’? Identity Work and the Search for Optimal Balance,” *Academy of Management Journal* 49, no. 5 (2006): 1031.

²⁰ See Carlson, “The Robotic Reporter,” 422–24.

²¹ See Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior,” in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7–24.

²² See *ibidem*.

²³ See Mark Deuze, “The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism for a Monitorial Citizenry,” *International Journal of Communication* 2 (2008): 855–57.

²⁴ See Patrick Ferrucci and Tim Vos, “Who’s In, Who’s Out? Constructing the Identity of Digital Journalists,” *Digital Journalism* 5, no. 7 (2017): 869.

²⁵ See Dominic L. Lassa, Seth C. Lewis, and Avery E. Holton, “Normalizing Twitter,” *Journalism Studies* 13, no. 1 (2012): 23–24.

as a journalist is no longer the only “moral agent.” Numerous other actors (journalists and non-journalists) are involved in creating content, such as media users and algorithms, programmers, data collectors and managers.²⁶ Still, journalists claim a special position and power in establishing the truth,²⁷ although such claims are increasingly difficult to defend. Many platforms shape communities, which in turn determine the meaning and veracity of messages without the help of conventional truth-keepers. Journalists and their weakening institutions are confronted with governments and opinion-makers waging propaganda wars and fighting for control over news and its interpretation. Above all, however, they are confronted with users creating and sharing content, and platforms managing the main streams of information.²⁸ The traditional information order is collapsing.

TRUTH AND THE NORMATIVE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM

The basic normative practice, namely the verification of veracity before publication, remains the core of journalistic identity. This underlies the status of authority in describing and defining reality. The commitment to telling the truth is also part of journalists’ discursive strategy in presenting their expertise. Such a commitment is the “essence of journalism,” distinguishing it from propaganda, entertainment, and art.²⁹ Commitment to the pursuit of truth is the first criterion for evaluating any work described as journalism. It is a basic “principle of journalism”³⁰ and an ethical duty.³¹

However, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel note in their classic work on the basics of journalism, it is a peculiar truth because truths are subject to revision, but meanwhile we act on them because they are necessary, and

²⁶ See Marko Milošavljević and Igor Vobič, “Human Still in the Loop: Editors Reconsider the Ideals of Professional Journalism Through Automation.” *Digital Journalism* 7, no. 8 (2019): 1112.

²⁷ See Marcel Broersma, “The Unbearable Limitations of Journalism,” *International Communication Gazette* 72, no. 1 (2010): 23; Barbie Zelizer, “When Facts, Truth, and Reality Are God-terms: On Journalism’s Uneasy Place in Cultural Studies,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004): 101.

²⁸ See Jan Kref t, *Władza platform: Za fasadą Google, Facebooka i Spotify* (Kraków: Universitas, 2022).

²⁹ See Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007): 71.

³⁰ See Marek Chyliński, “Prawda jako zasada dyskursu dziennikarskiego,” *Zarządzenie w Kulturze* 15, no. 2 (2014): 153.

³¹ See Katarzyna Konarska, “Media i prawda—czy mit prawdy?,” *Colloquia Anthropologica et Communicativa* 3 (2011): 203.

therefore journalism seeks a practical and functional form of the truth. This is not true in an absolute, philosophical or scientific sense, but is rather a pursuit of truth that can be acted upon in everyday life. Therefore, journalistic truth is a process that begins with the professional collection and verification of facts, then journalists try to provide a reliable description of their meaning.³² Such fact-checking gives the profession a unique status as one that confers a special kind of authority on journalism and establishes professional jurisdiction over news (although in practice there is no clear-cut procedure for consistently checking information).³³ Along with authority and expertise, journalistic identity is related to the central role of journalists in directing media production and circulation processes.³⁴

JOURNALISTS TOWARDS ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM CONSERVATIVE RESISTANCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO CHANGE

Research on journalists’ attitudes towards algorithmic journalism interprets journalistic identity as a source of resistance, but also as encouragement towards change under the pressure of efficiency, and as a resource for coping with uncertainty.³⁵

Algorithmic journalism is perceived as particularly destructive to journalistic professional activity, especially to journalists’ sense of job security.³⁶ In addition, journalists generally reject solutions that undermine their exercise of control over media content and appear to be a conservative community protecting its professional boundaries and rejecting solutions that violate the principle of the journalist deciding what the audience sees, hears, and reads.³⁷ Information created by a machine is therefore seen as a threat to the profession itself, as well as to journalists’ employment, and fears of technology are inherent in their work.³⁸

³² See Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*, 36.

³³ See Michael Schudson and Chris Anderson, “News Production and Organizations: Professionalism, Objectivity and Truth-Seeking,” in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, eds. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2009), 96.

³⁴ See Seth C. Lewis, “The Tension between Professional Control and Open Participation,” *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 6 (2012): 837.

³⁵ See Tamara Wittschge and Gunnar Nygren, “Journalistic Work: A Profession under Pressure?,” *Journal of Media Business Studies* 6, no. 1 (2009): 56.

³⁶ See van Dalen, “The Algorithms behind the Headlines,” 652.

³⁷ See Carlson, “The Robotic Reporter,” 429.

³⁸ See Pablo J. Boczkowski, *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 25.

In defending their identity, journalists put professional values, such as objectivity, to the fore and argue that people are better than machines in view of cognitive, affective and moral abilities.³⁹ They emphasize that algorithms are data-driven and inherently error-prone, leading to unexpected and unintended results and, in general, that algorithmic journalism is low-quality journalism.⁴⁰ Other research shows that journalists also underestimate the importance of algorithmic journalism.⁴¹ Furthermore, journalists take it for granted that society needs them as journalists to speak the truth and act ethically.⁴²

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHOD

With the emergence and spread of expansive automated journalism, the role of the journalist is fundamentally changing. In these circumstances, the following general research questions were formulated: (1) How do journalists perceive algorithmic journalism in the light of professional values? (2) How do journalists define their identity in the face of algorithmic journalism? (3) What arguments do they give for their reasons?

Other issues, such as economic pressures and the possibility of journalists losing their jobs in the face of the expansion of algorithmic journalism, were not considered in the study. Despite the awareness of their importance, it was recognized that these issues go beyond the established research framework.

A semi-structural interview was chosen as the research technique. The choice was dictated by the need to access data not available through indirect observation.⁴³ In addition, interviews are a time- and economically efficient way of investigating complex and subtle phenomena. The choice of an interview allowed for the open exploration of the topic and the possibility for the interlocutors to express their opinions and ideas in their own words, and to control the course of the conversation while being free to continue individual

³⁹ See Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind, *The Future of the Professions: How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 150–53.

⁴⁰ See Jaemin Jung, Haeyeop Song, Youngju Kim, Hyunsuk Im, and Sewook Oh, “Intrusion of Software Robots into Journalism: The Public’s and Journalists’ Perceptions of News Written by Algorithms and Human Journalists,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 71 (2017): 293.

⁴¹ See Mary Lynn Young and Alfred Hermina, “From Mr. and Mrs. Outlier to Central Tendencies: Computational Journalism and Crime Reporting at the Los Angeles Times,” *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 3 (2015): 382.

⁴² See Lewis, “The Tension between Professional Control and Open Participation,” 845.

⁴³ See Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2002); Mirosława Kaczmarek, Iwona Olejnik, and Agnieszka Springer, *Badania jakościowe – metody i zastosowania* (Warszawa: CeDeWu, 2018).

threads, and to ask all the interlocutors the same questions.⁴⁴ The interview data were transcribed verbatim and grouped, then analyzed for common patterns and themes. Some of the interviewees asked to remain anonymous.

The research was conducted among 18 respondents working for media organizations located in Poland. The respondents were journalists with over ten years of experience in the media. Their role was limited to the creation of content, and, in their work, they were confronted with content creation algorithms (mainly in the sports and financial sections) and recommendation algorithms. In order to diversify the workplaces of the interviewees, journalists representing the so-called traditional media (press, radio, television) and the media created in a digital environment were selected for the research. Some of the journalists were also employed in various editorial offices dealing with information, politics, economics, sports, culture, religion, automotive issues, lifestyle, science, tourism, health, art, entertainment, music, and so-called premium content.

The interviews were conducted from 2020 to 2021 (the full list of interviewees is included in Appendix 1). The interlocutors were assigned reference designations with consecutive numbers. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board of Research Federation of WSB & DSW Merito Universities.

Before the study, the journalists were informed about the possibilities of content creation and distribution as part of algorithmic journalism. Based on the initial conversations, most of the interlocutors have heard about the work of advanced technologies based on artificial intelligence. They had general knowledge of the technological possibilities of innovation and knew about the existence of simple algorithms or templates for content such as the weather forecast, the stock market or sports news. The journalists had no programming skills.

RESULTS

Data analysis allowed for the identification of key topics, which were divided into three broad categories: (1) the potential for creating and distributing fake news, (2) defending the status quo: the strengths of the journalist vs. the disadvantages of algorithmic journalism, (3) journalists on their superiority: a catalogue of qualities. Each of these categories is outlined below.

⁴⁴ See Kristin G. Esterberg, *Qualitative Methods in Social Research* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002).

FAKE NEWS CREATION AND DISTRIBUTION POTENTIAL

Algorithmic journalism is presented by journalists primarily in the context of it posing a threat to the fundamental journalistic principle, which is to provide true information. The potential for the creation and distribution of fake news is in the foreground: “Artificial intelligence, all mechanizations and robots can generate more harmful and false content, such as fake news, than reliable content, i.e., that which is verified by the human mind, not an algorithm. I believe that a machine cannot be taught morality and ethics.” (Int. Int.).

There were also references to specific mechanisms affecting an increase in the risk of disinformation: “If artificial intelligence begins to ‘suck in’ information, for example, from publicly available sources, it may also learn that the cellular network is carrying the Covid pandemic virus. If it is not able to sift out this type of information, it can become a source of disinformation in a moment.” (Int. GN). “If some information appears very often, an algorithm might prompt that this is true ... the algorithm may not distinguish between truth and lies, and accept a false theory which is strongly sponsored in posts, and cause disinformation.” (Int. Rz).

Deepfake was considered as a serious danger: “This is a much more convincing and dangerous phenomenon than falsifying a text itself. From what I read, it may be a major problem for journalism in the coming years.” (Int. Onet).

Another threat is that regarding responsibility for posted and distributed fake news, especially if its original source is attributed significant credibility. One of the interlocutors notes: “The main disadvantage is the issue of ethical responsibility for the material generated by artificial intelligence. This may have social consequences, because, for example, it will change people’s behavior. Providing false information will result in someone making a bad decision or it may cause panic, an artificial threat, etc. Who bears responsibility in such cases? Not a machine, not artificial intelligence. Is it the person who pressed the Enter key or the one who is the head of the given media organization? This is a fundamental problem for me: the danger that among the ethical issues to deal with will be the question about the responsibility for the consequences of using artificial intelligence.” (Int. F1).

DEFENDING THE STATUS QUO

THE STRENGTHS OF THE HUMAN JOURNALIST

AND THE WEAKNESSES OF ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM

Referring to ideal journalism, the interlocutors compared what they considered to be human qualities, which testify to the advantage of journalists, with the defects of algorithmic journalism. They indicated that their basic competences involve critical thinking and action which meet the standards of relevance and adequacy and they compared those qualities with the unreflec-

tive thinking of a machine, described by them as thoughtless, or deprived of the ability to connect cause and effect. “No automated tool can reach the level reached by real journalists who write the truth.” (Int. TVN).

The interlocutors attributed credibility only to humans. It was described as a “precious currency” which “cannot be automatically obtained, because it is something that journalists work for for years.” (Int. R). Among the advantages of journalists (and the disadvantages of automatic content creation), the unique possibility of the verification of content was emphasized: “It seems to me, however, that verification by a real journalist and sticking to the basic rules regarding information verification, taking responsibility for these publications—this cannot be done by any machine, automaton or program.” (Int. TVN).

“CATALOGUE” OF THE UNIQUE QUALITIES
OF HUMAN PERFORMANCE JOURNALISM

A catalogue of the unique qualities of human performance journalism emerged from the analyses of the data on the characteristics that interviewees believe determine the superiority of traditional journalism over algorithmic journalism. The following characteristics recurred in the statements:

(a) Sensitivity and empathy: “Humanity, after all, has a greater empathy, and sensitivity, which I don’t think even the best machine will ever develop. It will be possible to entrust the machine with a number of different tasks, but certainly not with the assessment of reality, sensitivity, empathy, and making analyses that are peculiarly human.” (Int. KAI).

(b) Spirituality: “A true journalist is not only a sensitive person, but a specifically spiritual one. By this I mean that he or she is a creator of cultural goods and at the same time has a mission to change the world for the better, simply guided by a higher good. It may sound exalted, but I believe that this is something unique that makes this profession different from others.” (Int. TVP).

(c) Following the truth: “The very idea of truth seems to me to be unique to journalism. I can’t imagine that algorithms will follow it. Maybe one day, but I hope I won’t live to see it, because it would shatter my whole world.” (Int. RZ).

(d) Morality and ethicality, which algorithms “cannot be taught.” (Int. Int.).

(e) Operating with particular stylistic devices: “When writing articles or books, a machine would not render certain modes of expression correctly. After all, it is not able to convey energy, a joke, humor, a certain writing style.” (Int. R).

(f) Creativity: “Creativity is needed in journalism, but also sensitivity, and probably no machine will have this.” (Int. TK). “I believe that this is something that a computer will not be able to do—it is about human creativity. The intention with which Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, for example.” (Int. Onet).

(g) Social engagement: “Robots will create a message and maybe it will even be perfect in form, it will have commas well inserted, because algorithms are really capable of creating a lot, but they will never create a socially engaged text.” (Int. WP).

(h) Imagination: “(A machine) will never replace the products of human imagination. It is not about creating fiction, especially in agency journalism, but about imagination understood as a certain predisposition and sensitivity attributed only to man.” (Int. KAI).

The above mini-catalogue consists of unique characteristics, indicated by the respondents, of the profession practiced by the “human” journalist. Since individual respondents gave different justifications for their position, in individual cases more than one statement related to an individual feature was presented.

DISCUSSION

In previous studies relating to the potential of artificial intelligence in creating and identifying information, both threats and opportunities were observed.⁴⁵ Our interviewees focused on the disadvantages, especially on the potential for creating and distributing fake news. Such interpretations seem natural, because the development of algorithmic journalism concerns the most important element of journalists’ professional identity—the verification of the veracity of information before publication. In addition, the use of hard-to-analyze algorithmic systems in content creation and distribution leads to problems with transparency as a key principle of journalistic ethics.⁴⁶

These issues were approached from different perspectives: the journalists looked for further arguments that would sanction the preservation of the status quo, i.e., professional identity built around their control over content and defining what is the truth. This is related, for example, to responsibility (including moral responsibility) for the content produced, which is one of the most significant problems of the gradual delegation of moral issues to artificial intelligence.

The journalists focused their statements on the uniqueness of the human journalist, an attribute which, in their opinion, is to ensure protection against being replaced by an “automaton/robot.” Sensitivity and empathy were emphasized as well as other features (the mini-catalogue) that journalists consider to be exclusively human. One of the key strengths is the ability to distinguish the

⁴⁵ See Young and Hermda, “From Mr. and Mrs. Outlier to Central Tendencies: Computational Journalism and Crime Reporting at the Los Angeles Times.”

⁴⁶ See Nicholas Diakopoulos and Michael Koliska, “Algorithmic Transparency in the News Media,” *Digital Journalism* 5, no. 7 (2017): 809–28.

truth, because in their opinion, the distinction between truth and lies is beyond the reach of artificial intelligence and seems to be the greatest challenge.

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With the development of algorithmization, the processes of content selection, filtration, and dissemination are evolving. While earlier journalists had a key influence on the above-mentioned processes, they gradually lost control over the process of creation and, even more so, of distribution of content; the control in question was transferred to programmers and managers of digital organizations, especially media platforms. The loss of such a control also contributes to an evolution from “fact-checking journalism” to deprofessionalization of journalism⁴⁷. Users and programmers play an increasingly important role, while the role of professional journalists decreases, and algorithmic journalism is generally free from the obligation to prove the credibility of sources.

At the same time, a discourse is emerging around issues such as content quality, access to and provenance of data, the “authority” of algorithms and their objectivity,⁴⁸ and responsibility for algorithmically created and distributed content.⁴⁹ These and other issues, for example, the accuracy of reported facts, constitute ethical challenges to algorithmic journalism. The algorithmization of journalism shifts the responsibility for content. The journalist is no longer the primary moral actor, as other agents,⁵⁰ of a journalistic and non-journalistic nature, such as, for example, algorithms, media organizations, NLG programmers/service providers, and data managers are involved in news creation at various levels. Thus, the importance of the individual decreases, while the importance of media organizations and the media system as moral agents increases.

Although qualitative research does not allow for generalizations, the interviews reveal tendencies to defend journalistic professional identity in the face of the expansion of algorithmic journalism. This defense, on the one hand, focuses on emphasizing the shortcomings of algorithmic journalism, and on the other hand, on emphasizing the unique competences of a “real” journalist. Importantly, none of the interviewees mentioned fake news created by journalists. What emerges

⁴⁷ See Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*.

⁴⁸ See Matt Carlson, “News Algorithms, Photojournalism and the Assumption of Mechanical Objectivity in Journalism,” *Digital Journalism* 7, no. 8 (2019): 1117–18.

⁴⁹ See Nicholas Diakopoulos, “Algorithmic Accountability,” *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 3 (2015): 401–2.

⁵⁰ See Barbara Trybulec, “Podmiot czy agent? Rozumienie podmiotowości w erze artefaktów poznawczych,” *Filozofia i Nauka* 2, no. 8 (2020): 89–115.

from the research is a picture of high competence (and good intentions) of “human truth journalism,” and potentially flawed algorithmic “fake news journalism.”

The identity of journalists in the context of their profession was constructed by our respondents around the declared care for the standards of public discussion, including, above all, care for presenting the truth. Journalists identified themselves as advocates of the quality of discourse, alluding to the (imaginary) role of “journalists as guardians of the truth” and depositaries of unique professional competences.

Annex 1

In-text reference	Media	Journalistic specialization
Television		
(Int. TVP)	Telewizja Polska (TVP)	News journalist
(Int. Polsat)	Polsat	News journalist
(Int. TVN)	TVN	News journalist
News service		
(Int. Onet)	Onet	Cultural journalist
(Int. WP)	Wirtualna Polska	News journalist
(Int. Int.)	Interia.pl	News journalist
Press/website		
(Int. R)	Rzeczpospolita	News journalist
(Int. GW)	Gazeta Wyborcza	News journalist
(Int. TK)	Tygodnik Katolicki	Religious journalist
(Int. GN)	Gość Niedzielny	Science journalist
(Int. E)	Eurosport	Sports journalist
Radio		
(Int. RZ)	Radio Zet	News journalist
(Int. RMF)	RFM FM	News journalist
News agency		
(Int. IAR)	Informacyjna Agencja Radiowa	News journalist
(Int. KAI)	Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna	News journalist
(Int. PAP)	Polska Agencja Prasowa (PAP)	National journalist
Freelancer		
Int. F1	Freelancer	Religious journalist
Int. F2	Freelancer	Cultural journalist

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Jan KREFT, Monika BOGUSZEWICZ-KREFT, and Mariana FYDRYCH, “Guardians of the Truth”: Journalists’ Resistance to the Algorithmization of Journalism
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Regardless of the term used, be it “robot journalism,” “automated journalism,” “algorithmic journalism” or “machine-written journalism,” the process of automatic content creation and distribution is progressing in the newsrooms. Meanwhile, exercising control over the creation and distribution of news is considered a fundamental element of journalists’ professional identity. The article presents the results of research on the perception of algorithmic content creation conducted among journalists in the context of their professional values and identity. The research was conducted with a qualitative method using a semi-structured interview technique with 18 journalists employed in leading Polish media. According to the study, algorithmic journalism is perceived by journalists primarily in the context of posing a threat to the fundamental journalistic principle of providing true information: what they bring to the fore is the potential for creating and spreading fake news. The respondents, who defended their journalistic professional identity, compared the disadvantages of algorithmic journalism with the unique competences of “human” journalists,

perceiving the latter as advocates of concern for the quality standards of social discourse and as “guardians of the truth.”

Keywords: truth, post-truth, journalistic identity, algorithmic journalism

Contact: (Jan Krefť) Department of Management and Economy, Gdańsk University of Technology, ul. Traugutta 79, 80-233 Gdańsk, Poland; (Monika Boguszewicz-Krefť) Business Faculty, WSB University in Gdańsk, Al. Grunwaldzka 238a, 80-266 Gdańsk, Poland; (Mariana Fydrych) Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University, ul. prof. St. Łojasiewicza 4, 30-348 Cracow, Poland

E-mail: (Jan Krefť) jan.krefť1@pg.edu.pl; (Monika Boguszewicz-Krefť) monika.boguszewicz-krefť@gdansk.merito.pl; (Mariana Fydrych) mariana.fydrych@alumni.uj.edu.pl

ORCID (Jan Krefť) 0000-0002-9294-7175; (Monika Boguszewicz-Krefť) 0000-0003-4129-8424; (Mariana Fydrych) 0000-0001-7706-9792

Jan KREFT, Monika BOGUSZEWICZ-KREFT, Mariana FYDRYCH, „Strażnicy prawdy”. Opór dziennikarzy przed algorytmizacją dziennikarstwa

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Bez względu na użyte terminy – od „dziennikarstwa zrobotyzowanego” (robot journalism), „zautomatyzowanego” (automated journalism), „algorytmicznego” (algorithmic journalism) i „pisanego maszynowo” (machine-written journalism) – w redakcjach postępuje proces automatycznego tworzenia i dystrybucji treści. Tymczasem sprawowanie kontroli nad tworzeniem i dystrybucją wiadomości jest uznawane za podstawowy element tożsamości zawodowej dziennikarzy. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczących postrzegania przez dziennikarzy algorytmicznego tworzenia treści w kontekście wartości zawodowych oraz własnej tożsamości. Badania przeprowadzono metodą jakościową wykorzystując technikę częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadów z 18 dziennikarzami zatrudnionymi w czołowych polskich mediach. Jak wynika z badania, dziennikarstwo algorytmiczne jest odbierane przez dziennikarzy przede wszystkim w kontekście zagrożeń dotyczących fundamentalnej zasady dziennikarskiej, jaką jest przekazywanie prawdziwych informacji, ponieważ na pierwszy plan jest wysuwany potencjał tworzenia i dystrybucji fake news. Badani, broniąc dziennikarskiej tożsamości zawodowej, konfrontowali wady dziennikarstwa algorytmicznego z unikatowymi kompetencjami „ludzkich” dziennikarzy, postrzegając ich jako orędowników dbałości o standardy jakości dyskursu społecznego i „strażników prawdy”.

Słowa kluczowe: prawda, postprawda, tożsamość dziennikarska, dziennikarstwo algorytmiczne

Kontakt: (Jan Kreft) Wydział Zarządzania i Ekonomii, Politechnika Gdańska, ul. Traugutta 79, 80-233 Gdańsk; (Monika Boguszewicz-Kreft) Wydział Biznesu, Uniwersytet WSB Merito, Al. Grunwaldzka 238a, 80-266 Gdańsk; (Mariana Fydrych) Wydział Zarządzania i Komunikacji Społecznej, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, ul. prof. St. Łojasiewicza 4, 30-348 Kraków

E-mail: (Jan Kreft) jan.kreft1@pg.edu.pl; (Monika Boguszewicz-Kreft) monika.boguszewicz-kreft@gdansk.merito.pl; (Mariana Fydrych) mariana.fydrych@alumni.uj.edu.pl

ORCID (Jan Kreft) 0000-0002-9294-7175; (Monika Boguszewicz-Kreft) 0000-0003-4129-8424; (Mariana Fydrych) 0000-0001-7706-9792