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AI in German Media Companies and Digital Industries: Potential for Efficiency, Structural Change, and New Responsibilities

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a pivotal driver of structural transformation in media companies. This article argues that AI must be understood not merely as an efficiency-enhancing tool in German media companies and digital industries, but as an infrastructural force that restructures production, distribution, editorial authority, and public communication. Across media sectors, AI is legitimized through promises of automation, personalization, audience analytics, and cost reduction. In journalism, it is primarily deployed for routinized tasks such as transcription, summarization, data analysis, headline writing, and workflow support. AI does not simply optimize journalism; it shifts the conditions under which journalism remains visible, credible, and accountable. The decisive problem is therefore not technological capability as such, but the diffusion of responsibility within AI-mediated media environments. As search, aggregation, and answer systems increasingly mediate access to information, journalistic content risks becoming detached from recognizable authorship, institutional context, and editorial judgment. AI resilience is defined as the organizational and professional capacity to integrate AI without surrendering editorial accountability, source protection, public trust, or interpretive sovereignty. Its core requirements are clear responsibility chains, transparent labelling, robust verification, audience dialogue, competence building, and institutional governance beyond mere compliance. The broader conclusion is that AI's value in media industries is conditional: it can enhance productivity and even support diversity, but only where organizations align technological deployment with normative commitments to credibility, traceability, and human judgment. Without such alignment, AI becomes less a productivity tool than a catalyst of invisibility, mistrust, and weakened democratic mediation.

Keywords: Germany; public discussion; rapid change; mass-use; AI in daily life.

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1. Introduction

AI must be understood not merely as an efficiency-enhancing tool in German media companies and digital industries, but as an infrastructural force that restructures production, distribution, editorial authority, and public communication. This might not be common sense in every German newsroom, but it is indeed my personal perspective. It is uncertain for several journalists in Germany such as myself whether AI will be a curse or a helpful tool

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within daily business of media agencies. Therefore, we deal with AI and the public discussion around AI daily. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in media companies and digital industries has rapidly evolved from an experimental supplementary technology into a central factor in structural change. AI has a profound impact on production, distribution, management, and reception processes. In doing so, it is transforming both the economic logic of media companies and the conditions of journalistic work and the media public sphere (State Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia 2024). In this context, AI appears as an ambivalent key technology: on the one hand, it promises efficiency gains, personalization and data-driven control; on the other, it exacerbates problems of credibility, transparency and quality control (*Magazin für Kommunikation* 2025).

A central theme in the general debate on AI is its portrayal as a tool for automation and acceleration. Particularly in newsrooms and media-related fields, AI is primarily used where routine tasks can be standardized, such as in transcription, research support, or the analysis of large volumes of data (Media Lab Bayern 2026; State Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia 2024). The technology is thus primarily legitimized as a tool to alleviate workload, intended to compensate for scarce human and time resources. Particularly in an industry facing economic pressure and a shortage of skilled workers, AI appears as a means of maintaining productivity whilst simultaneously creating scope for more complex journalistic and creative tasks. In this sense, AI is not seen as an end in itself, but as a tool for implementing overarching strategic goals (Handelsblatt 2026).

AI is considered particularly valuable in digital industries primarily because it combines automation with data analysis and personalization. With the help of algorithmic systems, media companies can analyze their users' behavior more accurately, deliver content tailored to specific target groups and identify trends earlier. This not only strengthens audience loyalty but also increases the economic value of media offerings (*Magazin für Kommunikation* 2025). Media content is thus increasingly seen not only as a journalistic or cultural product, but also as a predictable and optimizable asset within digital markets (Handelsblatt 2026).

It is precisely here, however, that a fundamental shift in the logic of media production becomes apparent. It is clear that AI is not only changing journalistic workflows, but is also making the entire media landscape more data-driven and increasingly focused on efficiency, scalability, and monetization. This affects not only large platforms or streaming providers, but also local and regional media companies, which see AI as an opportunity to produce more content and expand their reach despite limited resources (*Landesanstalt für Medien NRW* 2024). In this context, AI is frequently linked to journalistic added value: It is said to safeguard diversity, strengthen local reporting, and indirectly promote journalistic quality by redistributing resources. However, this positive interpretation remains contingent on certain conditions (Handelsblatt 2026; *Landesanstalt für Medien NRW* 2024; *Magazin für Kommunikation* 2025).

The risks associated with the use of AI are also highlighted just as clearly in debates. Arguments frequently cited include erroneous results, disinformation, deepfakes, algorithmic biases, data protection issues, and a potential loss of journalistic rigor (Media Lab Bayern 2026; *Medienanstalt*

Rheinland-Pfalz 2025). This is particularly significant in journalism, as it is not merely speed and productivity that count here, but credibility, classification, and responsibility. The more AI is integrated into editorial processes, the more pressing the question becomes of how quality can be assured when machine-generated content is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from that produced by humans. The experiments described in several studies, in which participants were barely able to reliably identify AI-generated voices or presentations, point to a key problem of our time: The boundaries between authentic and synthetic media production are blurring (Media Lab Bayern 2026; *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* 2025; *Landesanstalt für Medien NRW* 2024).

It is striking in the media industry that the general debate centers less on whether AI should be used at all, and more on the conditions under which its use appears legitimate. Transparency, labelling, independent oversight, and binding accountability are repeatedly cited as prerequisites for social acceptance. AI is therefore not regarded as threatening per se, nor is it viewed as neutral. Its legitimacy depends on whether its use remains traceable and whether ultimate editorial responsibility remains with humans (cf. Media Lab Bayern 2026; Media Authority of Rhineland-Palatinate 2025; State Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia 2024; Handelsblatt 2026). This emphasis on human decision-making authority functions in virtually all discussions as a normative limit on technological automation: machines may assist, analyze, and make suggestions, but they must not autonomously determine content, interpretations, or journalistic priorities.

There is also another dimension that is particularly relevant to the media industry: AI is changing not only the producers' side, but also that of the users. Among young people in particular, AI is now firmly integrated into everyday information and learning practices (Media Lab Bayern 2026). It is used for schoolwork, research, and navigation in the digital space. At the same time, relevant analyses show that trust in AI-generated information is high, even though risks such as fake news or deepfakes are well known. It follows that the AI transformation of the media brings with it not only technological and economic challenges, but also social and educational policy challenges. Under these conditions, media literacy is no longer sufficient. Rather, an expanded AI literacy is required, encompassing the critical engagement with algorithmic response systems, synthetic content, and automated information flows.

Overall, this means that artificial intelligence is transforming the media industry and digital sectors on several levels simultaneously. It increases efficiency, supports data-driven decision-making, opens up new forms of personalization, and, under certain conditions, can even strengthen journalistic diversity. At the same time, however, it raises questions regarding quality, credibility, transparency, regulation, and competence. Its actual benefits depend largely on how it is embedded within organizational, journalistic and societal frameworks. This is precisely where the central challenge for media companies lies: to make productive use of technological possibilities without undermining the normative foundations on which journalistic quality and public communication are based.

2. The Response to AI among Major German Media Companies

AI is no longer a topic for the future in German media companies, but rather part of

everyday editorial life. Major brands in particular, such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*) and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*SZ*), and public broadcasters such as *Deutschlandradio* and *Deutsche Welle*, are under particular pressure: They must embrace technological innovation without jeopardizing their credibility. It is striking that these organizations do not view AI as a replacement for journalism, but primarily as a tool. The real conflict therefore lies less between 'man or machine' than between efficiency and responsibility.

At the *FAZ*, the approach to AI is more pragmatic and product-oriented. Since September 2023, the newspaper has been using generative AI in its app to summarize articles in four points (*Bundesverband Digitalpublisher und Zeitungsverleger* 2023). These summaries are labelled as AI-generated; users can rate them and report errors. At the same time, the *FAZ* draws a clear line: AI is intended to improve the digital business, for example in voice-over, transcription, archiving, and summarisation, but "original articles containing AI-generated text" are ruled out. The *FAZ* thus uses AI primarily where it enhances service, reach, and user convenience, but not where the editorial team's journalistic style is intended to come through. Later reports from 2024 also show that the *FAZ* technically supports this use with quality controls and views the feature as a means of retaining readers and attracting new subscribers (*Bundesverband Digitalpublisher und Zeitungsverleger 2023*).

The *SZ* appears to take a more experimental yet at the same time more principled approach to AI. As early as June 2023, in its transparency blog, the *SZ* emphasised that it would remain a "newspaper of authors;" AI should assist, but not supplant, the journalistic ethos. It is used, for example, for analysing large datasets, transcribing interviews, sorting research material, or moderating comments sections. At the same time, the *SZ* explicitly states that AI can neither reliably verify facts nor write longer texts in the editorial style; this is precisely where a boundary lies, one that stems from its own quality standards. In the transparency blog updates of February and July 2025, this approach is fleshed out: the publishing house and editorial team have their own AI team, systematically test applications, and develop some tools themselves to better safeguard source protection, data protection, and editorial confidentiality (Heger et al. 2025). As an example, the *SZ* cites the transcription tool "Arche", which was developed in collaboration with Microsoft.

What is particularly interesting about the *SZ* is that it not only uses AI internally to boost efficiency, but is also trialling it as a new journalistic format. For the 2024 European elections and the 2025 German federal elections, it made AI assistants available to its readers, which answered questions based on *SZ* articles, election manifestos and other editorially selected sources (Heger et al. 2025). In doing so, the editorial team made it very clear that these answers were generated by AI, may contain errors, and are not journalistic texts in the strict sense. At the same time, the *SZ* used the incoming user questions to identify gaps in its own reporting. This is remarkable because AI serves here not merely as a tool in the engine room, but as an interface between the editorial team and the audience. The technology is thus not merely rationalized but integrated into a model of more dialogical journalism.

The situation is even more sensitive in the case of public service broadcasting. ARD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-*

rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), ZDF (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*), *Deutschlandradio* and *Deutsche Welle* adopted a joint AI code of conduct in January 2026 (*Deutschlandradio* 2026). At its heart lies the 'human-in-the-loop' approach: editorial responsibility remains with humans, AI-generated content must be clearly labelled, and data quality, cooperation, professional development, and sustainability are also explicitly mentioned. The six guiding principles of the code are added value, responsible personalisation and diversity, editorial control and transparency, AI and data literacy, exchange and partnerships, and sustainability. This rule-based approach makes particular sense for public service broadcasting, as its remit extends beyond mere efficiency to include building public trust, ensuring balance, and fostering a democratic public sphere (*Deutschlandradio* 2026).

A negative example also illustrates just how seriously broadcasters must take this issue. In February 2026, it emerged that *Heute Journal* had used AI-generated and outdated images in a report without providing the labelling required by internal rules. *ZDF* subsequently announced mandatory training and stricter verification procedures (*Deutschlandfunk Kultur* 2026). This case is revealing because it highlights the fundamental problem: AI lowers the barriers to visual production, but at the same time increases the risk of journalistic errors. In the news sector, in particular, it is therefore not enough simply to allow or ban AI; robust verification processes are crucial. The fact that *ARD* and *ZDF* also took part in an international study in 2025 on the news quality of AI assistants – which found significant errors in 45 per cent of the responses tested – underscores why the public broadcasters are relying on scepticism, oversight, and regulatory frameworks (*Deutschlandfunk Kultur* 2026).

In their day-to-day editorial work, however, *ARD* and *ZDF* have long been putting AI to practical use: for instance, for facial recognition in videos, for analyzing usage data in media libraries, and for establishing shared networks for verification, countering disinformation, and editorial tools. Reports from 2024 and 2025 emphasise that AI should primarily serve a supporting role, so that journalists have more time for research and improving content. Here, too, the same basic idea emerges as with the *FAZ* and *SZ*: it is routine tasks, structuring, and distribution that are being automated, not the ultimate journalistic responsibility.

Comparing these three examples reveals a common pattern. None of the major German media companies regards AI as a fully-fledged substitute for editorial work, authorship, or responsibility. The differences lie more in the emphasis placed on these aspects. The *FAZ* uses AI more for service and product-related purposes, the *SZ* links it more closely to editorial innovation and transparent audience interaction, whilst public service broadcasting pays particular attention to standards, control, and legitimacy. This also has to do with the respective institutions: private-sector publishers must make digital products more attractive; quality newspapers such as the *SZ* distinguish themselves further through transparency and experimentation; and public service broadcasting must measure every innovation against its public service mandate.

Overall, the way these media companies handle AI shows that the crucial question is not whether journalism uses AI, but how. Major German media companies now accept the technology as an integral part of their work. At the same time, they draw the line

where credibility, style, source, and data protection, or the verification of facts, are concerned. This, perhaps, is the most important insight: AI is profoundly changing journalism, but it does not do away with its traditional standards. On the contrary — the more powerful the tools become, the more important transparency, editorial control, and a clear professional ethos become.

3. Journalism Itself Is Internally Discussing AI Intensively

An article by Leif Kramp and Stephan Weichert, published in April 2026, views AI not merely as a new tool in everyday editorial work, but as a profound transformation of the entire media landscape (Kramp and Weichert 2026a). This is precisely where its central strength lies. The article by Kramp and Weichert, published in the national journal *Journalist* of the German Journalists' Association – the trade union for journalists in Germany – is significant because two leading authors have distilled a national debate down to its core arguments and, for example, have prompted my editorial team to engage even more closely with the use of AI. The authors argue that it is not AI itself that threatens journalism, but the lack of clarity surrounding its use: a lack of clear responsibilities, vague rules, economic pressure, and a public sphere in which journalistic content is increasingly delivered via AI-supported search, aggregation, and response systems. In this text, therefore, AI does not appear as an isolated technology, but as a structural force that redistributes reach, visibility, trust and responsibility (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

What is immediately striking is that the article does not, in any way, deny the potential of AI. The authors acknowledge that AI is already being used productively in newsrooms and can speed up journalistic processes. It can summarise content, automate workflows, pre-sort information, and enable personalized content. In this respect, AI certainly boosts productivity. Reading between the lines, it becomes clear that it could, in theory, ease the workload on newsrooms, leaving more time for core tasks such as research, analysis, and engagement with audiences. The text is therefore not technophobic. It rejects both naive optimism about progress and blanket condemnation. Rather than treating AI as a panacea or a doomsday scenario, the authors make it clear that its value depends on the conditions under which it is used (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

It is precisely at this point, however, that the article's critique begins. According to Kramp and Weichert, the biggest hurdle is that many media companies are deploying AI before they have even clarified the journalistic purpose it is intended to serve. AI is treated as a cost-saving measure, a symbol of innovation, or an efficiency booster, but not as part of a well-thought-out editorial strategy. This is the real blind spot in the text. For if editorial teams experiment technically but fail to define what they stand for in normative terms, then AI becomes not a tool for strengthening journalism, but an amplifier of existing uncertainties. The authors criticize precisely this lack of direction: major media companies are tinkering with automation, personalization, and efficiency gains without, at the same time, sufficiently clarifying what role journalism is still supposed to play in a public sphere mediated by AI (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

The article thus places the question of responsibility at the centre of the debate. For the authors, one of the greatest dangers lies in the fact that AI prepares, structures, or influences judgements without there being

clear rules on who is ultimately responsible for them. Many editorial teams now have guidelines or ethical statements on the use of AI, yet the article describes these guidelines as too vague and not practical enough for day-to-day use. They state what is theoretically permitted, but offer no help in situations where decisions must actually be made under time pressure. This creates a dangerous state of ambivalence: on the one hand, AI is expected; on the other, it is treated as taboo (Kramp and Weichert 2026a). Journalists often do not know whether its use is encouraged, tolerated, or interpreted as a sign of their own replaceability. The text describes this uncertainty very precisely. It leads to fear, particularly fear of losing one's job, but also to uncertainty about one's own competence and to the worry that the open use of AI could be interpreted as an admission of one's own replaceability (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

According to the article, this ambivalence gives rise to an informal shadow operation. There is a great deal of experimentation, prompting, and testing, but too little open reflection and institutional accountability. It is precisely this, the authors argue, that constitutes a key obstacle to resilient journalism (Kramp and Weichert 2026a). Where AI is used but not clearly regulated, responsibilities become blurred. The impression of control is merely simulated, whilst, in reality, uncertainty and a lack of transparency are growing. This is a particularly important observation in the text, because it shows that the crisis lies not solely in the technology, but in the organizational culture. AI exacerbates a problem that already existed: a lack of clarity regarding who makes decisions in newsrooms, who takes responsibility for mistakes, and who ensures transparency towards the public (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

Particularly striking is the analysis of the risks associated with the use of AI. A key risk is that the very journalistic activities that are particularly labour-intensive, time-consuming and costly – foreign reporting, on-the-ground research, visual documentation, and in-depth contextual analysis – will be devalued. The article cites the case of the *Washington Post* as a symbol of this trend (Kramp and Weichert 2026a). The authors use this to demonstrate that journalism is not disappearing because it is superfluous, but because, within an AI- and platform-driven logic of attention, it appears too costly and insufficiently scalable. This is a crucial point: AI is changing not only the tools of the trade, but also the economic valuation of journalistic quality. Content that can be quickly summarized, aggregated or exploited algorithmically is favored. That which requires time, presence, and context comes under pressure (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

This leads to what is perhaps the most significant danger highlighted in the text: journalism itself becoming invisible. The authors describe a public sphere in which AI response systems are increasingly replacing the path to the actual article. Content continues to circulate, but without a clear source, without institutional context, and without a direct relationship with the audience (Kramp and Weichert 2026a). Journalism remains present as raw material, but loses its recognizable form as a social institution. This is precisely why Kramp and Weichert's title, "When We Become Invisible," is so apt. It refers not only to the fact that AI works invisibly in the background, but also to the fact that journalism itself loses its contours in an AI-mediated public sphere. It no longer appears as a responsible, contextualizing voice, but

merely as material processed by response engines (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

The authors link this diagnosis to a further danger: a loss of trust. The more AI is used in news production and dissemination, the greater the risk that the public will perceive journalistic content across the board as "AI-generated." The article uses the term "trust spillover" to describe this. What this means is that simply knowing that AI is being used can be enough to trigger general mistrust. Even where AI is used only in a supporting role, the public may get the impression that journalistic work is no longer authentic, no longer meticulous, or no longer the responsibility of a human being. This is so controversial because trust in journalism is not only tied to the end product, but to the notion of a responsible source. If this source disappears into the AI interface or becomes unclear, credibility is also undermined (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

Furthermore, the article views AI not merely as a practical issue for the media, but as a democratic problem. When big tech platforms and AI infrastructures determine which content is visible and the form in which public discourse takes place, power shifts away from editorial teams. The authors make it clear that editorial frameworks and guidelines alone are not enough as long as the overarching rules governing attention are shaped by actors who largely evade democratic accountability. At this point, the text moves beyond media analysis to offer a socio-political diagnosis. The question is then no longer merely how journalists work with AI, but whether and how journalism can still play an independent public role at all in an AI-mediated society. The article therefore speaks of a necessary new social contract for the digital public sphere (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

Overall, the text paints a clear picture: in journalism, AI is simultaneously an opportunity, a hurdle, an obstacle, and a danger. Its potential lies in efficiency, support and the chance to reorganise editorial work. The hurdles consist primarily of a lack of editorial strategy, unclear responsibilities, and weak guidelines. The obstacles lie in economic pressure, platform dependency, shadow use, and a lack of a culture of accountability. Finally, the dangers range from the devaluation of labour-intensive journalistic work, through a loss of trust and self-censorship, to journalism becoming invisible in a public sphere shaped by AI. The authors therefore argue that AI should no longer be viewed merely as a tool, but as a matter of resilience. For them, the crucial factor is not whether AI is used, but under what conditions. Only if editorial teams clearly assign responsibility, act transparently, and actively nurture their relationship with the audience can AI support journalism rather than gradually eroding it (Kramp and Weichert 2026a).

4. Media Companies are Introducing Stricter Regulations and Ensuring Resilience in the Field of AI

The position paper within the journalist community by Kramp and Weichert, entitled "AI Resilience in Journalism: A Framework and Recommendations for Greater Trust, Accountability and Digital Sovereignty," develops a distinctly structural-theoretical perspective on AI in journalism. Its fundamental premise is that AI does not merely expand journalism with individual tools, but rather shifts the conditions under which it is produced, distributed, and legitimized (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Even in the paper's introduction, AI is described not merely as a factor of

efficiency, but as a problem of power and responsibility: it intervenes in research, production, and distribution, and shifts visibility, liability, and accountability, and thus raises the question of whether journalism can remain reliable, accountable, and credible under AI conditions. In doing so, the document sets a clear focus: it is specifically not intended to be a collection of tools or a technology-centred user manual, but rather a normative and practical framework for editorial autonomy. (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Analytically, the white paper is particularly strong in its rejection of the widespread instrumentalism that characterizes the AI debate. It explicitly argues that the real question is not what AI can do, but what it does to the social fabric of the public sphere. This shift from a functional to a structural perspective is central (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Here, AI appears as infrastructure, not as a tool in the narrower sense. It operates in the background, structures attention, shifts meanings, and influences the conditions under which the public sphere emerges. According to the authors, journalism therefore finds itself at a "tipping point" because it no longer merely uses technologies, but is embedded in a technologically mediated public sphere whose rules are increasingly emerging beyond editorial control (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

From this perspective, it is also clear why the white paper places the concept of resilience at its core. Resilience is not understood in psychological terms as merely the resilience of individual actors, but as a multidimensional capacity to remain capable of acting under conditions of persistent disruption. The document expressly emphasizes that digital technologies do not cause isolated disruptions but rather ongoing disruptions, because they continuously alter routines, responsibilities, and evaluation criteria. Resilience therefore does not mean a return to the previous state, but rather the ability to manage uncertainty, dependency, and change in such a way that journalistic sovereignty is maintained or even strengthened. In this sense, "AI resilience" is a counter-concept to both the naive narrative of progress and the paralyzing doomsday diagnosis (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

A key strength of the white paper lies in its analysis of the current vulnerabilities of journalism. The authors describe a structural dual dependency: on the one hand, on platform algorithms that control visibility and reach; on the other, on technologies that directly intervene in editorial production processes (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

According to this analysis, AI exacerbates both dependencies simultaneously. It promises to ease the workload and automate processes, but it also deepens the devaluation of those journalistic services that are slow, expensive, and difficult to scale. Particularly striking is the thesis that journalism is shifting from an attention economy to a trust economy. Visibility alone is no longer enough; what becomes crucial is the ability to remain transparent, verifiable, and capable of building relationships within a synthetic public sphere (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

The document systematically unfolds its critique of AI along several lines of risk. Firstly, it highlights the epistemic risk: in an environment of deepfakes, synthetic voices, automated propaganda, and polished AI responses, there is a danger of a "reality slip" – that is, a state in which the distinction between fact and fiction becomes increasingly precarious. The white paper interprets this development not merely as a problem of disinformation, but as an attack

on the core promise of journalistic credibility. When reality no longer appears reliably verifiable, journalism loses not only its reach but also its social capital (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Secondly, the white paper describes an institutional risk: AI systems are becoming "second-order gatekeepers" because they not only control access to information but also generate or synthesize information themselves. This shifts value creation from journalistic content to technical infrastructure. Newsrooms run the risk of becoming mere suppliers of data and training data for systems that will later compete with their own content. The fundamental question is then no longer whether individual AI outputs are useful, but whether editorial independence can be maintained within an architecture shaped by platform corporations, model developers, and investors (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Thirdly, the white paper highlights a risk to professional ethics. It argues that whilst AI is taking on tasks that have long been regarded as core journalistic competencies, this very fact puts pressure on objectivity, accuracy, and originality. Of particular importance in this context is the chapter on the "jagged boundary" of AI's capabilities. There, the authors insist that, despite their impressive linguistic interface, modern AI systems do not understand anything, but merely calculate probabilities. The central confusion lies in mistaking availability for reliability and plausibility for truth. This is precisely what poses a significant risk to journalism: when linguistically polished results create the impression of competence, the temptation grows to replace judgement with plausibility (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

An analysis of the so-called "ELIZA effect" explores this critique in a historical context. The white paper reminds us that, since the 1960s, people have tended to attribute meaning, intelligence, and judgement to machines, even though these systems merely process formal patterns. The authors use this theme to demystify the current enthusiasm for AI: it is not the machine itself that generates authority, but rather the human attribution of authority. This also shifts the normative thrust of the text. The real problem is not the existence of powerful systems, but the willingness of organizations to uncritically accept their plausibility as a basis for legitimacy (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

It is worth noting that, despite its clear focus on the problems, the white paper does not dismiss the potential of AI. It explicitly acknowledges that AI can summarize texts, search through data, generate images, verify facts, and relieve the burden of routine tasks. Even within the proposed framework, efficiency is not rejected, but rather redefined in relational terms: Efficiency should not mean acceleration at any cost, but rather provide clarity on what can be usefully automated and what should not be "AI-fied" at this stage. The document therefore does not advocate a technophobic total rejection, but rather a conditional openness: AI can be useful, provided it remains embedded within responsible decision-making architectures (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

The true innovative contribution of the white paper lies in its attempt to systematically operationalize this integration. To this end, it develops an AI resilience framework that is explicitly intended not as a checklist, but as a guide for reflection and a framework for action. Frameworks should not be used to exercise control from above, but rather to enable professional self-efficacy, highlight areas of friction, and systematically identify responsibilities. The key questions are:

Where do we stand? What criteria do we use to make decisions? Where are new dependencies emerging without us reflecting on them? AI governance is thus conceived as a reflexive practice, not as formal compliance (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

In terms of content, the white paper divides this framework into seven areas of action. These areas are not intended to be additive but rather systemic; together, they map out the zones in which journalistic responsibility takes concrete form in the age of AI. These are transparency and labelling, human-in-the-loop, source and data trust, forensics and verification, ethics and accountability, competence building and organisational learning, and audience dialogue and relationship building. This selection alone is analytically revealing: it shows that the authors do not reduce AI resilience to error avoidance, but understand it as a combination of epistemic rigor, organisational clarity, and public relationship management (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

The white paper is particularly convincing where it develops "resilience" as a multi-level concept. At the individual level, resilience means remaining capable of sound judgement under time pressure and uncertainty, and not relinquishing responsibility to systems. At the organizational level, it is determined whether this individual judgement is supported by rules, roles, and audit trails, or undermined in day-to-day practice. At the societal level, journalism is understood as the infrastructure of democratic public life. This three-part framework prevents a simplistic personalization of the problem. It is not individual journalists who should bear the burden of the AI transformation; rather, editorial teams as organizations and the public sphere as an institutional context must become capable of learning (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

The analysis of the discrepancy between normative guidance and actual practice is also revealing. The white paper makes it clear that guidelines alone do not create resilience. Transparency rules, codes of ethics, and labelling requirements remain ineffective if they are not linked to clear lines of responsibility, verifiable decision-making processes, and a robust culture of error management. Put more bluntly, this means: transparency without accountability is meaningless; 'human-in-the-loop' approaches without competence building become a mere formality; and technical security without human connection undermines trust. This triad is among the most powerful passages in the document as it precisely identifies the limits of mere voluntary commitment (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

This assessment is backed up by empirical evidence in the form of the survey results on the working environment in journalism presented in the white paper. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that AI is rarely identified as an isolated problem, even though it plays an implicit role in many stressful situations (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

The general mood in newsrooms is described as predominantly negative; at the same time, the core values by which journalists distinguish themselves from AI systems remain classically professional: classification, contextualisation, research, reliability, credibility, and verification. This passage in particular shows that the white paper does not view AI as a singular crisis factor, but rather as an amplifier of existing structural problems such as time pressure, resource scarcity, and a lack of support (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

It is at this point that the concept of "shadow operations" takes on greater analytical clarity. The document suggests that AI is frequently used in newsrooms in ways that go beyond clear rules and responsibilities. This is interpreted not only as a compliance issue, but also as a quality problem: Inconsistent tones, uneven levels of scrutiny, diffuse chains of command, and new, opaque categories of error arise where technology is introduced without taking organizational learning processes and accountability structures into account. According to this logic, the transition to digital sovereignty consists precisely in transforming such informal practices into transparent, repeatable, and publicly defensible procedures (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Another analytically strong aspect of the white paper is its emphasis on dialogue with the audience. The fact that this aspect is treated as a distinct area of focus is by no means a given, and marks the text's genuine contribution to the AI debate. The document argues that transparency alone does not create a relationship. Dialogue begins when editorial teams explain their use of AI, engage with criticism, and tolerate uncertainty (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

For the audience, AI is usually "invisibly present:" texts appear faster and smoother, whilst at the same time uncertainty grows as to who is actually speaking. If editorial teams remain silent on the matter, mistrust arises; if they explain their use of AI, a connection becomes possible. In doing so, the white paper shifts the debate from technical system design to the communicative legitimization of journalistic practice (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

From a media policy perspective, the document expands on this argument by introducing the concept of "public-interest A." Whilst the EU AI Act is recognised as necessary regulation, the authors simultaneously identify a resilience gap: regulation primarily defines what AI must not do, but leaves open the question of what public-interest infrastructures need to be established to ensure that journalism does not remain trapped in proprietary dependencies (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

Particular emphasis is placed on the structural asymmetry vis-à-vis large technology conglomerates, which train their systems on journalistic content without ensuring transparency or oversight. The call for public-interest AI is therefore not a supplementary element of technology policy, but a consequence of the white paper's central thesis: resilience can only be achieved if the infrastructural prerequisites for public communication remain open to democratic shaping (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

In the final section, the white paper distils its arguments into a key concept from democratic theory: the new social contract. This concept is more than mere rhetorical flourish. It refers to an institutional framework within which responsibility is reorganized under AI conditions. The use of AI is legitimate only where responsibility does not evaporate, but remains organized and transparent. From this, the authors derive "new professional demands" for journalism: AI is not a question of tools, but of governance; transparency is not mere documentation, but relationship-building; the scarce resource in the AI age is not content, but judgement. The white paper thus shifts the benchmark of journalistic quality from speed to reasoned decision-making (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

In its overall conception, the white paper is therefore less a technical specialist document than a normative and practical blueprint for journalistic self-assurance. Its central argument runs throughout: AI

resilience lies neither in blind optimism about innovation nor in knee-jerk resistance, but in the ability to manage uncertainty at an institutional level. This gives rise to an understanding of journalism based on explainability, accountability, and the ability to build relationships. The document formulates this particularly succinctly in the concluding chapter: explainability outweighs efficiency, accountability outweighs scalability, and relationships outweigh authority. Journalism need not be a technical pioneer, but it must remain an institutional corrective (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

In summary, the white paper analyses AI in journalism not as a sector-specific innovation, but as an infrastructural shock to trust, accountability, and the public sphere. Its greatest strength lies in shifting the discussion away from the logic of individual tools and focusing it on organization, governance, and democratic legitimacy. The potential of AI is not disputed, but is strictly contingent upon certain conditions (Kramp and Weichert 2026b).

The main risks lie in the diffusion of responsibility, platform dependency, epistemic boundary dissolution, and the loss of journalistic visibility. Obstacles arise where guidelines remain abstract, competences are unevenly distributed, and editorial teams use AI within informal shadow structures. The document's alternative approach is termed AI resilience: understood as an organization-wide core competence, as learning governance and as a democratic infrastructure designed to keep the public capable of forming judgements even under conditions of synthetic mediation (Kramp and Weichert 2026b). The generations that have already grown up using AI will benefit greatly from its use in the near future. Those who have only come into contact with AI at a later stage are likely to face significant disadvantages within the media industry. The debate surrounding the use of AI in day-to-day editorial work shows that there is a genuine tension between the extensive use of AI to simplify editorial workflows and an awareness of the risks posed by AI.

5. Personal Experiences with AI in Everyday Working Life

The debate over the use of AI also shapes the author's day-to-day work as a sports editor at a German regional newspaper. Those in senior management often argue that match reports on Sundays from the lower football leagues are easier to produce using AI than by a human, who first has to make phone calls, then follow up, research the goalscorers, check the report for errors, and then publish it.

As a team, we have found over the past few months that the match reports generated by AI are not incorrect, but are sometimes poorly worded. It is also important to emphasise here that AI cannot replace interaction and contact with individual coaches, officials, or players, which is why, particularly on those time-critical Sundays, we deliberately refrain from using AI with a view to Monday's publication.

At the same time, however, AI components are certainly used for creating headlines and teasers, to be able to distil the facts more precisely under time pressure without becoming polemical. This tool helps to make quick decisions in the shortest possible time whilst maintaining journalistic standards.

The use of AI is not mandatory in our company, but it is increasingly recommended, particularly in the area of text editing. Here, AI is actively promoted as a support tool, which, from a practical perspective, is exactly what it can be.

It is important to note that the author first came into contact with ChatGPT three years ago during his training and was fascinated by its potential. At the time, using it in a professional context was out of the question for him, as he considered the AI to be too unreliable and untested. It was more fashionable to ask the AI for recipe ideas for the evening than to discuss journalistic topics.

Discussing topics with AI, particularly when dealing with difficult or complex subjects, is now part of everyday professional life and no longer considered unusual. At the same time, it is worth noting that not all media professionals share this enthusiasm for AI. Many still seem sceptical about the technology, harbour reservations or feel uncertain.

In this regard, much like in the public service media, numerous companies are holding AI workshops aimed at addressing these concerns and reservations. Three years after the launch of ChatGPT, AI in all its forms has become a frequently and routinely used system. The author has reservations about one thing: feeding all the gathered research into the AI and having it write a story from it.

Technically, this would be possible, but the author has serious reservations about it, fearing that the AI might alter or distort the core message of the text. However, AI is often used as a proofreading tool once a text has been written. It spots phrasing that a trained eye might no longer notice after 8,000 characters.

Declaration of AI Use

AI was used for this article to finalise the wording of individual passages. To check whether the articles that had been read and interpreted had been understood correctly, ChatGPT and Claude were used to verify whether the AI arrived at the same conclusion as the author. This was not the case, so the results were not used. The Deepl programme was used to translate the text, including its specific technical terms, from German into British English.

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