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FRANCESCO MARCONI (2020). NEWSMAKERS: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM. NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 216 PP., ISBN: 9780-231549356, DOI: 10.7312/MARC19136

It is a commonly accepted truism that technology has a tremendous impact on most aspects of our lives. It has also changed the ways public are consuming the content of the media and workflow of media outlets themselves. The proliferation of new technologies has enabled scholars to hypothesize over their profound significance for the changing journalistic profession (Nygren & Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015), which is clearly visible through the widespread use of social media by journalists for their work activities (Willnat & Weaver, 2018). In addition to the clear benefits, the evolution of the media sphere has also brought challenges. Through the process of datafication (Mayer-Schoenberger & Cukier, 2013), in which every social action is quantified we produce a staggering amount of data. Processing large sets of unstructured information has become a key part of daily professional routine for many journalists. This process, however, could be supported by the cutting edge in computing. Nowadays, with the further development of technology, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data became the buzzwords that grant almost magical properties to everything that incorporates them. The author of the reviewed book believes that the future of journalism will be closely tied to AI and provides a detailed compendium of these latest technologies and their potential implications for newsroom practices.

Francesco Marconi appears to be the right person to answer burning questions about the future of the relationship between technology and journalism. In addition to the academic experience gained at Columbia Journalism School and MIT Media Lab, he was a chief of R&D at the Wall Street Journal and led a team managing AI at the Associated Press. In the *Newsmakers: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Journalism*, Marconi often reveals the intricate issues related to AI and argues, that it can greatly augment traditional journalistic practices. The book comprises three chapters and is an excellent guide that will be of interest to both scholars and practitioners of journalism.

The publication begins with an intriguing introduction, in which the author gives a preview of further considerations by analyzing his own book with AI-based algorithms and provides a set of real-life examples from AI usage within newsrooms around the globe. The author also introduces a fictional character, *Newsmaker*, whose story will serve narrative purposes. *Newsmaker*

is a journalist trying to adapt to the digital era with the use of AI in her daily work routine. Consequently, the author also presents three points of impact where new technologies can support newsroom work: newsgathering, production and distribution.

The first chapter entitled “Problems” is aimed at presenting the status quo in the current model of journalistic work and outlining the opportunities that the implementation of AI in editorial offices can provide. Marconi starts this part of the book by sketching out the vision of the *Newsmaker* taking full advantage of new technologies in the “world of human-machine cooperation” (p. 20) – both in her private and professional life. Further, the author introduces acknowledged newsmaking elements (newsgathering, production and distribution) and emphasizes that by combining AI with each of them, the traditional model of journalism will be able to evolve. The process of gathering news has come a long way and has always been linked to the development of technology: from telephony to Web 1.0 and eventually social media (see Zubiaga, 2019). In the age of datafication, AI could provide “news about the news” (p. 32) which would make *Newsmaker’s* work more efficient. Journalists could also benefit from cooperating with machines during the production phase, alongside expanding their perspective on the story through the data. At this point, Marconi also tackles and demystifies the issue of potential job losses, that is often associated with the evolution of AI. In the words of the author, “the reporter should be the reporter, not the assistant and the reporter” (p. 38) and technology is there to augment the traditional journalistic process and should be perceived as evolution, not revolution. Moreover, using the example of the Associated Press, the author clearly states that there was no downsizing, indeed additional automation editors were being hired. He concludes the chapter by describing the need to change the current ways of distributing news in order to make it more dynamic and engaging for the audience. AI can help shift the logic of distribution from directing traffic to a website to take advantage of the richness of the Internet – the possibilities of digital storytelling, the multitude of formats available (e.g., infographics and video) and audience contact.

The next section of the book with the title “Enablers,” focuses on first-hand ways to apply AI in editorial processes. It begins with the conceptual definition of AI that should make it easier to understand for non-technical readers. Using *Newsmaker’s* story as an example, Marconi introduces the logic behind AI, which requires input data and is subject to a learning procedure. In the context of media outlets, this means that the newsmaking process can be enhanced with the automation of creating news and reinforcing existing journalists’ tasks for tailored needs, like e.g., automated analysis of millions of documents in order to find a story. However, what seems to be significant in the context of the message of this book, the author emphasizes that AI is unable to replace the journalist

because it is unable to develop „journalistic intuition”. He also notes that implementing these algorithms may be met with industry resistance, as automation and augmentation both have many potential uses in newsrooms, and whoever “think(s) about AI as a tool that can solve a problem or create an opportunity” (p. 70). Next, Marconi acquaints the reader with machine learning (ML) as another potent method for supporting the *Newsmaker’s* work, that could further help journalists with publishing optimization. Marconi also raises the controversial topic of news automation, highlighting both the NLG (natural language generator) software possibilities for newsrooms and the fact that human editors must be in control of this process. Thus, the future of media outlets would require the employment of a variety of new professionals, such as automation editors, computational journalists and newsroom tool managers. Importantly, the author continues to emphasize that the use of new tools does require new skills – such as a basic understanding of AI and support of programmers in the editorial office. Concluding the chapter and outlining further technological perspectives that may find application in the editorial office (e.g., VR headsets and drones), Marconi also points out potential problems that may be associated with the development of AI and ML. Deepfake as a disinformation tool is based on these technologies and contributes to the need for intensified fact-checking, but it can also erode trust in journalists and the results of their work.

The final chapter is devoted to the future of journalism in the era of new technologies. According to the author, its future is iterative journalism, which is “the idea of adjusting coverage in real time to serve the rapidly changing information needs of readers. This is possible by mixing editorial insights with audience feedback” (p. 130).

Marconi believes that journalism should be more empathetic and should put more emphasis on responding to the readers’ needs. This can be accomplished with the help of AI and by applying three steps. First, journalists should focus on “minimally viable” stories, where machines could take over the initial research in identification of what is meaningful to the audience. Second, by augmented audience understanding, journalists have the opportunity to contact their readers and look beyond just the quantitative data. Lastly, the author encourages to experiment with new practices in newsrooms and trying to become more interdisciplinary within the organization.

In conclusion, the author yet again emphasizes the need for the adaptation of media outlets to the new technological environment and that AI should not be feared, because it can enhance not just automate journalism. The undoubted merit of the book is the variety of examples of application of AI in practice and the language adapted to readers who are not tech-savvy. It also poses important questions about the future of the journalism profession, which cannot function isolated from technology. Marconi’s book provides insightful tips for the

professionals that could help to introduce advanced algorithms in their organizations but is also a valuable proposition for scholars interested in journalism studies.

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