

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ADOPTION OF GENERATIVE AI TECHNOLOGY BY CHINESE MAINSTREAM MEDIA JOURNALISTS: A FIELD STUDY BASED ON J PROVINCE BROADCASTING AND TELEVISION

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Abstract: Generative AI technology is becoming increasingly important for media content production in the era of intelligent media. However, its adoption among some Chinese mainstream media has been slow. While previous research has largely focused on the macro-level impacts of generative AI on the journalism industry, the individual adoption behaviors of journalists have been underexplored. This study applies the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model and the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, using participatory observation and in-depth interviews at J Province Broadcasting and Television Station to identify the factors influencing AI adoption among Chinese journalists. The research was conducted in three phases, each employing different sampling and interview methods, and involved 30 journalists from diverse regions and media types. The findings reveal that social influence and curiosity drive initial adoption, while performance expectancy and effort expectancy are critical for continued use. Key barriers include organizational pressures, unfair compensation, technological limitations, copyright issues, and information security concerns. By integrating the UTAUT model with the TOE framework, this study offers a comprehensive analysis, identifying new influencing factors and providing actionable recommendations, such as optimizing compensation structures, clarifying technology application scopes, and enhancing awareness of human-machine collaboration. This research extends the application of these theoretical frameworks to a new context and provides empirical evidence supporting the ongoing transformation of media technology, offering practical insights for media organizations navigating the challenges and opportunities of generative AI technology.

Keywords: Generative AI; Mainstream media journalists; Technology adoption; Influencing factors; Participatory observation

1 INTRODUCTION

Generative AI technology, with its outstanding multi-modal content generation capabilities and strong cross-cultural adaptability, has redefined the boundaries of human-machine interaction, enhancing both the emotional resonance and media value of content[1]. This technology has significantly bolstered media productivity, influence, and service quality[2]. Adopting and effectively utilizing AI technology is not only crucial for the professional development of journalists in the era of intelligent communication but also essential for driving innovation within the news industry and facilitating the transformation of media organizations.

However, some mainstream media outlets in China are exhibiting a delayed adoption of generative AI technology, with certain journalists showing clear resistance to embracing new technologies. Compared to management, journalists display a more pronounced psychological resistance[3]. Consequently, this paper uses J Province Broadcasting Station as a case study to conduct an in-depth analysis of the key factors influencing journalists' willingness to adopt generative AI technology through participatory observation and in-depth interviews. The aim is to provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for advancing human-machine collaboration and promoting the intelligent transformation of the news industry.

2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERATIVE AI AND JOURNALISTS

The impact of generative AI technology on the news industry ecosystem extends beyond merely transforming content paradigms; it transcends functional aspects to reshape human-machine interaction patterns and alter the professional identities and perceptions of journalists[4]. The academic debate continues over whether generative AI is a boon or a bane.

Technological optimists argue that generative AI is a pivotal driver for the transformation and upgrading of the news industry. Its innovative applications in audiovisual news creation, smart application development, and cross-language communication [5] effectively reduce the repetitive labor burden on journalists. Furthermore, generative AI's auxiliary roles in public opinion monitoring, emotional intelligence, information filtering, and risk assessment significantly contribute to managing public discourse and establishing a healthy and orderly online information environment [6].

Conversely, scholars skeptical of this technology argue that the widespread application of AI in content generation (AIGC) has steered news production towards data-driven and machine-led processes, undermining the humanistic

values of journalism and challenging the professional judgment and creativity of journalists. The proliferation of formulaic, homogenized, robot-produced news blurs the diversity and richness of news expression[7], muddies the professional boundaries of journalistic behavior[8], transforms journalists from storytellers into data managers and analysts, and shifts the human-machine relationship towards competition[9].

Previous research has primarily focused on the functional contributions and value impacts of generative AI on the news industry but has paid insufficient attention to the dynamic and complex process of technology diffusion, particularly neglecting the subjective willingness of journalists. In the context of the accelerated arrival of the technological axis era, while human-machine symbiosis is the general trend, balancing technological progress with humanistic care—ensuring that technology serves the sustainable development of journalism rather than becoming mere technological accumulation—remains an urgent issue.

3 THEORETICAL BASIS OF TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION: UTAUT MODEL AND TOE FRAMEWORK

At the intersection of information systems and user behavior research, the domain of technology adoption offers rich perspectives and tools for exploring the drivers and barriers affecting journalists' adoption of generative AI technology, particularly through the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model and the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework. These frameworks provide complementary insights at both the micro-individual and meso-organizational levels, establishing a solid theoretical foundation for such studies.

The UTAUT model, a comprehensive theoretical framework in the technology adoption field [10], outlines four core determinants of individual technology adoption: 1) Performance Expectancy—the belief that using the technology will enhance job performance; 2) Effort Expectancy—the ease associated with the use of technology; 3) Social Influence—the impact of significant others on an individual's decision to adopt the technology; and 4) Facilitating Conditions—the degree of organizational and technological infrastructure support. Additionally, age, gender, experience, and voluntariness act as moderating variables, further enriching the theory. The UTAUT model has demonstrated high explanatory power in understanding technology adoption behaviors and has been widely applied across various fields, including psychology, education, and communication studies. How these elements interact within the mainstream media context to influence journalists' adoption behaviors constitutes a critical dimension of the analysis.

The TOE framework offers another unique tri-dimensional perspective[11]encompassing technology, organization, and environment, providing a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding technology adoption at the organizational level. It delves into how internal organizational structures and cultures, along with external environmental changes, profoundly impact technology adoption. This framework aids in identifying and understanding complex factors beyond the individual level—such as organizational culture, resource allocation, policy orientation, and market competition—that collectively influence decision-making and implementation processes in technology adoption. Current technology adoption studies often rely on quantitative methods [12], particularly utilizing surveys and structural equation modeling for analysis [13], with qualitative research being relatively scarce[14]. However, qualitative research holds unique advantages in exploring the subjective perceptions, cognitive changes, and behavioral logics of journalists during the adoption process of generative AI technologies. Methods such as participatory observation and in-depth interviews allow for deep immersion into the journalists' work and life contexts, capturing subtle details and underlying motivations that are difficult to reach through quantitative approaches. This provides a richer and more vivid empirical basis for theory building and offers more targeted guidance and recommendations for practice.

In summary, this paper combines the UTAUT model with the TOE framework to construct an analytical framework that addresses both the psychological and behavioral characteristics of individual journalists and the complex environments of mainstream media organizations. Additionally, key variables from other related studies, such as cost-benefit, technological superiority, organizational size[15], technological ethics, efficiency enhancement[16], peer pressure, perceived popularity, individual innovativeness, and technology anxiety, can also provide effective insights into the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the current state of generative AI technology adoption among mainstream media journalists?

RQ2: What are the factors driving the initial and continued adoption of generative AI technology by mainstream media journalists?

RQ3: What are the barriers to the adoption of generative AI technology by mainstream media journalists?

4 METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

This study employs participatory observation and in-depth interviews, conducted from September 2023 to January 2024 at the J Province Broadcasting and Television Station, to observe the work practices and technology usage of journalists. Compared to quantitative methods, this approach is more adept at capturing subtle differences and underlying motivations.

The choice of J Province Broadcasting and Television Station as the field site is primarily based on a comprehensive assessment of its industry background and technological capabilities. First, as an audiovisual media entity, it offers a more diverse array of reporting formats, richer technological application scenarios, and higher integration of technology compared to traditional print media. Second, J Province Broadcasting and Television Station ranks among the top in the

province and nationwide in terms of news convergence broadcasting index, news brand influence, economic strength, overall influence, and technology reserves, making it highly representative and valuable for research.

To ensure the systematic and scientific gathering of data, this study progresses through three phases, each employing different interviewing techniques based on the situation, including informal interviews, pre-interviews, semi-structured interviews, and structured interviews, totaling 30 participants. In the first phase, through participatory observation and informal interviews, researchers initially integrate into the working environment of J Broadcasting Corporation, gaining an intuitive understanding of the daily work and technological applications of journalists. Subsequently, pre-interviews with senior management capture a comprehensive view of generative AI technology's application at the organizational level, laying an empirical foundation for subsequent research and clarifying the specific direction of the research questions.

In the second phase, based on preliminary research, researchers identified "The Drivers and Barriers to the Adoption of Generative AI Technology by Mainstream Media Journalists" as the core issue. A relevant interview outline was designed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 journalists from various departments and positions within J Broadcasting Corporation. This phase involved an in-depth exploration of driving and hindering factors, collecting rich firsthand data.

Finally, in the third phase, after analyzing and comparing data obtained from the preliminary efforts, it was found that the UTAUT model and TOE framework provide effective theoretical bases for a detailed analysis of the factors influencing journalists' adoption behaviors. To validate and deepen earlier findings while enhancing the representativeness and applicability of the research, the interview outline was refined based on these theoretical frameworks. The sample scope was expanded to include structured interviews with 15 journalists from different regions, media types, and job positions within J Province.

5 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

This study rigorously adheres to the principles of scientific sampling to ensure the breadth and representativeness of interview subjects. Initially, stratified sampling and snowball sampling techniques were employed to select 15 representative journalists within the J Province Broadcasting and Television Station, covering diverse departments, positions, ages, and genders. To enhance the comprehensiveness of the research, the sample was subsequently expanded to include an additional 15 journalists from various regions, media types, and positions within J Province, achieving data saturation. Throughout the interviews, strict ethical standards were maintained to protect the privacy of participants and to ensure the authenticity and legality of the data.

Table 1 List of Interviewees

Code	Gender	Age	Media Type	Position
A01	Male	43	Broadcast Station	Senior Editor
A02	Female	36	Broadcast Station	News Anchor
A03	Male	31	Broadcast Station	News Anchor
A04	Male	39	Broadcast Station	Field Reporter
A05	Male	31	Broadcast Station	Editor, Columnist
A06	Male	30	Broadcast Station	Photojournalist
A07	Male	35	Broadcast Station	Broadcast Technician
A08	Female	35	Broadcast Station	Media Analyst
A09	Female	36	Broadcast Station	Technology Correspondent
A10	Male	30	Broadcast Station	Investigative Journalist
A11	Female	28	Broadcast Station	Political Reporter
A12	Female	40	Broadcast Station	Editor
A13	Male	31	Broadcast Station	Camera Operator
A14	Female	32	Broadcast Station	Technology Correspondent
A15	Male	30	Broadcast Station	Editor
B01	Female	29	Multimedia	News Editor
B02	Male	30	Newsroom	Producer
B03	Female	24	Newsroom	News Anchor
B04	Male	27	Newsroom	Field Reporter
B05	Female	36	Multimedia	News Editor
B06	Male	32	TV Broadcaster	Broadcast Technician
B07	Female	28	Newsroom	Political Reporter

B08	Male	40	Broadcast Station	Editor
B09	Female	30	Broadcast Station	Technology Correspondent
B10	Male	35	TV Broadcaster	Broadcast Technician
B11	Female	33	Multimedia	Broadcast Technician
B12	Male	38	Multimedia	Editor
B13	Female	37	Newsroom	Producer
B14	Male	26	Newsroom	Field Reporter
B15	Female	32	Broadcast Station	Technology Correspondent

6 RESULTS

The interviews primarily explored journalists' attitudes towards generative AI technology, their practical applications, and their reflections on human-machine relationships. The findings indicate that in terms of technical understanding, most journalists are only familiar with specific large language model products, with this familiarity largely stemming from trial usage or demonstrations by others. However, all interviewees acknowledged the potential of generative AI technology, agreeing that embracing new technologies is an inevitable path for industry development.

In terms of willingness to adopt generative AI technology, the interviewed group exhibited a generally low inclination, with significant attitudinal differences across departments. Those in the product, design, and technology departments showed the most interest. During the interviews, A04 from the product development department elaborated on the substantial potential of generative AI to enhance product innovation and optimize user experiences, predicting that the technology would become deeply integrated into all future products. Conversely, journalists from the editorial department were generally cautious, expressing doubts about its ability to meet the stringent demands of news work. "I think the accuracy of the content generated by this technology is at most 70%, which is intolerable for our journalistic work," stated B02, an editor.

Regarding adoption behavior, most journalists initially embraced the technology between late 2022 and early 2023, when the related products were newly launched and highly popular. However, interest waned shortly thereafter. Only a few journalists continued to use the technology persistently, mainly focusing on handling routine, repetitive tasks, with little motivation to explore the technology's full potential. A very small number of journalists displayed high enthusiasm for generative AI technology and maintained ongoing interest. "The development of generative AI technology has exceeded the imagination of most people; it can now achieve many things that ordinary humans cannot," noted B14, a photojournalist. Additionally, younger interviewees generally exhibited higher tolerance, acceptance, and frequency of use compared to their older counterparts, who often demonstrated greater professional confidence during interviews, believing that AI is currently unable to perform the core tasks of a journalist.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Driving Factors for Journalists' Technology Adoption

Interviews revealed that a dual drive of social influence and curiosity prompts journalists to initially adopt generative AI technology. Most respondents reported that their first encounter with and use of the technology were motivated by news, online information promotion, and positive recommendations and demonstrations from colleagues, friends, or leaders. This dissemination of information via social networks not only enhanced the credibility and attractiveness of the new technology but also accelerated its popularity and application among journalists through mechanisms of group identity and imitation.

Performance expectancy is the core driving force behind journalists' continued adoption of generative AI technology, with most interviewees expressing hopes of improving their work efficiency through its use. Additionally, effort expectancy serves as a catalyst for journalists' ongoing engagement with generative AI technology. Unlike traditional media tools, generative AI allows for interaction via natural language, greatly simplifying operational procedures and enabling even journalists without technical backgrounds to easily get started. This low-threshold user experience not only reduces learning costs and time investment but also enhances journalists' confidence in the technology and their willingness to adopt it. "I find it very easy and hassle-free; you just put the manuscript in, and it's proofread in no time," said B01, an editor.

Consideration of facilitating conditions does not directly impact journalists' willingness to adopt generative AI technology, but it significantly influences their preferences for specific technological products. For instance, journalists tend to favor domestic large language models like Wenxin Yiyao over more functionally superior but legally challenging-to-access models like ChatGPT. This choice reflects the rational decision-making and cautious attitude of journalists in the technology adoption process and underscores the significant impact of the policy environment on technology preferences.

7.2 Barriers to Journalists' Adoption of Technology

The factors influencing journalists' willingness to adopt technology can be explored at the organizational, operational, and ethical levels. Organizational factors significantly impact initial adoption, while operational and ethical factors primarily influence the willingness to continue adopting the technology.

7.2.1 Inverted pressure structure

Within broadcast organizations, the distribution of pressure forms a unique inverted pyramid structure, where the goal-oriented pressure faced by top management significantly diminishes as it trickles down, leading to a divergence in technological innovation needs across different organizational levels. This phenomenon is closely linked to the hierarchical structure, unique organizational culture, and existing management practices of traditional media organizations. Middle and upper management, as decision-makers, not only set strategic goals and make significant decisions but also face multiple pressures such as market competition, performance metrics, and shareholder expectations. Consequently, they are often more proactive in seeking technological innovations to address external challenges. "For the news industry, technology directly relates to a media organization's dissemination efficiency and competitive market presence, and generative AI represents a critical new opportunity for us," explained A01, Operations Director. However, as power and pressure decrease across organizational levels, frontline journalists focus more on executing specific tasks, prioritizing whether new technology can practically enhance work efficiency rather than its strategic significance. "I haven't felt AI technology making a big difference yet; I just use it as a decent search tool," mentioned political journalist A07. Additionally, the distortion and delay in information transmission between levels further mislead staff about organizational strategic goals, weakening their motivation to adopt new technologies.

7.2.2 Unreasonable remuneration system

The design flaws in compensation systems also play a significant role in journalists' lack of motivation to learn and apply new technologies. As Karl Marx described the press as "a literary profession with earnings," monetary incentives are crucial for journalists' professional development. Studies show that perceived fairness in compensation—comparing the economic and non-economic rewards provided by organizations against personal expectations—has a significant positive effect on media professionals' ability to utilize and explore innovative capacities[17]. However, within mainstream media, the work environment and salary levels remain relatively constant, with issues like insufficiently differentiated pay scales, unclear career paths, and ineffective incentives. "In-system incomes are fixed; exceptional abilities don't lead to high salaries, and poor performance doesn't impact unless there are major issues," noted A04 from product development. The disconnect between compensation and work efficacy means that improvements in work efficiency brought about by technological innovation do not translate into corresponding economic incentives, potentially increasing the learning burden on journalists and leading them to adhere to traditional work modes. Therefore, constructing a fair and reasonable compensation system is crucial for fostering innovation and competitiveness in the media industry.

7.2.3 Operational level factors

Under the backdrop of media convergence, journalists are increasingly tasked with non-traditional news production roles, such as writing promotional copy and drafting contracts, where generative AI technology can provide substantial support. However, significant differences in domain applicability are a major reason for the varied attitudes towards this technology across departments. Investigative journalist A06 noted, "There are many unofficial classifications of journalistic duties, such as political, economic, or public welfare reporters; or by work style, there are text journalists, undercover journalists, live broadcasters, photographers, etc." Different operational domains vary greatly in task rules and complexity.

In data-intensive and rule-specific domains (such as financial analysis or sports reporting), or tasks like manuscript polishing, grammar checking, and spelling correction, generative AI technology can significantly enhance work efficiency. However, for tasks with higher complexity and uncertainty, generative AI technology shows limitations. Firstly, the knowledge base of generative AI, which relies on existing data inputs, updates slowly and cannot fully meet the timeliness required by news reporting. Secondly, the authenticity of news demands on-site interviews and investigations, which current technologies cannot fully replicate. As undercover journalist A08 repeatedly emphasized, "News is not only about transmitting information but also about engaging emotionally with the audience; it needs warmth and values." The limited ability of generative AI to understand complex emotions still requires the professional integrity and humanistic care that only journalists can provide. Lastly, as conveyors of societal information and opinion leaders, the content, value orientation, and ideological delivery of news media are crucial. Current technologies are not yet capable of fully understanding and integrating the complex value systems and ideological frameworks that media carry. "Chinese media have strong value attributes and ideologies, and the outputs from artificial intelligence definitely do not align with our directional needs," stated A06, an investigative journalist.

7.2.4 Ethical level factors

Currently, content production with generative AI technology primarily adopts a hybrid creation model where humans provide creativity and machines enhance expression, playing a key role in content generation. However, the legal status of machines remains undetermined, leading to complex issues regarding copyright ownership[18]. Most journalists, wary of potential copyright disputes brought about by this technology, exhibit caution and concern. "It's still a big controversy whether the content belongs to the user or the AI company, so to avoid unnecessary trouble, I use it less," mentioned A04 from product development. Due to the unique nature of their work, journalists are particularly cautious about copyright issues to avoid potential infringement risks and legal disputes. Moreover, from an information security perspective, the widespread application of generative AI technology inevitably involves extensive data processing and storage. In this process, data security and privacy protection remain major concerns for journalists. "Domestic software

is still in continuous improvement, and while foreign ones are more mature, I'm worried about data leaks and privacy breaches," shared A01, Operations Director. Especially in a globalized context, cross-border data flows may increase the risk of data leaks, necessitating greater caution from journalists when making decisions about technological innovation.

8 CONCLUSION

Generative AI technology is not only an inevitable path in the context of media convergence but also a crucial engine driving deep media integration. Although generative AI currently has many limitations, interviewees remain optimistic about its future development. Investigative journalist A08 described it as an evolving organism: "As it ingests more and higher-quality data, I believe that in the future, you will only need to click a mouse to produce a beautiful article." Therefore, optimizing the AI usage environment and experience through exogenous measures can effectively promote journalists' willingness to adopt the technology, thereby achieving the goal of efficient human-machine collaboration.

8.1 Improving Goal Transmission Methods and Optimizing Compensation System Design

To address the irrational pressure structure within media organizations, senior managers should actively take a leading role by formulating clear strategic plans and conveying the importance and expectations of new technologies. This ensures that employees at all levels deeply understand and respond positively to these advancements. Simultaneously, multi-level mobilization and training should be organized to build consensus on execution, emphasizing the crucial role of new technologies in improving efficiency and competitiveness. Establishing a two-way communication mechanism is essential for eliminating cognitive gaps, actively collecting feedback from the grassroots, promoting organizational information flow and collaboration, and enhancing employees' confidence and motivation in applying new technologies.

To address the irrational aspects of the compensation system, establishing an incentive-based performance pay system can be considered. For example, introducing performance bonuses, setting reasonable remuneration based on workload, difficulty, and responsibility, and establishing technological innovation rewards to encourage journalists to actively adopt and promote new technologies. Through competitive job selection and pay-for-performance, employees' enthusiasm and innovation capabilities can be stimulated, promoting the widespread adoption and application of new technologies.

8.2 Precisely Defining the Scope of Technology Application and Reshaping the New Paradigm of Intelligent News Production

In news production, machines and humans each have their strengths, leading to a complementary coexistence. Machines excel at handling large volumes of structured but tedious tasks, such as information screening and preliminary sorting, while journalists bring creative thinking, news values, and humanistic care to the table, enabling them to conduct in-depth evaluation and optimization of machine-generated content. Therefore, accurately defining the application scope of generative AI technology, avoiding unrealistic expectations, and ensuring its practical application are essential. Reshaping the news production paradigm requires a global perspective and a redesign of production processes to achieve an organic integration of humans and technology, positioning technology as a powerful assistant rather than a replacement for journalists. By optimizing processes and establishing human-machine collaboration mechanisms, an efficient and intelligent news production ecosystem can be constructed, laying a solid foundation for the innovative development of the news industry.

8.3 Deepening Journalists' Human-Machine Collaboration Awareness and Strengthening "Prompt" Usage Training

In the context of intelligent news production, deepening journalists' awareness of human-machine collaboration is crucial. Journalists need to recognize the supportive role of generative AI, understand their leading position in news creation, and work closely with technology to enhance work efficiency and quality. Media organizations should intensify training for journalists on effective "Prompt" usage. Given the critical impact of "Prompts" on the output quality of AI models, training should focus on designing clear and effective instructions to guide the model in generating content that aligns with human expectations. Teaching techniques for optimizing model parameters and setting reasonable instructions can help reduce data bias and algorithmic limitations, thereby enhancing the accuracy and efficiency of generative AI in news production.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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