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Digital Disruptions and Editorial Tasks Humanisation in Select Newsrooms in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

The constant advancements in digital technologies have continued to transform newsroom operations, reshaping editorial workflows, professional routines, and journalistic values. Editorial tasks such as news sourcing, reporting, page planning, and editing, which were largely manual in the past, are now performed using digital tools characterised by automation, speed, and interactivity. Although these innovations have enhanced efficiency, they have altered human involvement in the editorial production process, raising concerns about the humanisation of newsroom practices. This study examines the relationship between digital disruptions and the integration of human creativity and skills in handling editorial tasks in selected newsrooms in South-South Nigeria, namely The Tide, Pioneer, and Observer newspapers. The study identifies major forms of digital disruption influencing newsroom operations and examines how these changes have affected human participation in editorial processes. Anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory, the study adopts a survey research design. Data were collected through structured questionnaire and interviews. Census, otherwise known as total enumeration sampling, was used to capture two population streams comprising editorial staff and General Managers of the selected newspaper organisations. Thematic analysis was employed. The data reveal remarkable adoption of digital tools by reporters and editors for news sourcing, recording, and editing. However, this shift has affected editorial skills and craftsmanship, including adherence to house style, observational depth, writing artistry, and editing proficiency. The study concludes that digital disruptions have improved newsroom efficiency but risk diminishing human skill and judgment. It therefore recommends adopting newsroom technologies with deliberate human moderation and skills development to preserve editorial quality.

Keywords: Digital Disruptions, Editorial Tasks, Humanisation, Newsroom, Journalism.

Introduction

Newsrooms across the world are undergoing profound transformations following the constant evolution in technology and the rapid advances in tech tools. It is not in doubt that journalism has shifted from largely analogue and linear production processes to complex, technology-driven systems that are characterised by speed, interactivity, automation, and data-centred decision-making (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Pavlik, 2013).

In Africa, and particularly Nigeria, this transformation has been accelerated by the expansion of mobile internet access, the dominance of social media platforms, and the increasing creation and integration of digital tools into newsroom operations (Bassey, 2017; Mabweazara, 2015; Oso, 2012). Digital technologies such as social media platforms, digital reporting tools, content management systems, and real-time audience analytics are significantly reshaping the news gathering, processing, production, and distribution processes (Mbaziye, 2018; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2018). While these

innovations have enhanced the speed, reach, and competitiveness of media organisations, they have also intensified newsroom labour and altered professional routines in ways that were never imagined.

Some empirical studies conducted in Nigeria indicate that with the automation of the newsroom, journalists now operate under continuous deadlines and heightened pressure to generate online engagement, often with limited time for editorial reflection and ethical deliberation (Edegoh et al., 2020; Mbazie, 2016). Within this evolving media environment, concerns have emerged regarding the humanisation of editorial tasks within the production chain.

Humanisation refers to the extent to which editorial practices preserve human judgment, craftsmanship, ethical reasoning, empathy, and responsible gatekeeping despite increasing technological invasion (Ward, 2015). Traditionally, Nigerian journalism emphasised collective editorial decision-making, reporters' writing artistry, hierarchical gatekeeping, and strong normative commitments to social responsibility and public interest (Bassey, 2014; Oso & Pate, 2011). However, the growing reliance on automation, algorithmic content prioritisation, and audience metrics raises concerns about the marginalisation of human agency and ethical sensitivity in editorial decision-making and operations generally (Carlson, 2020; Diakopoulos, 2019).

In developing media systems such as Nigeria's, these tensions are particularly pronounced due to economic constraints, infrastructural challenges, and ownership and political pressures that shape newsroom practices (Mbazie, 2018; Oso, 2012). In the South-South geopolitical zone, where traditional print and broadcast media increasingly converge with digital platforms, journalists face mounting pressure to balance speed and efficiency with ethical responsibility and empathetic reporting (Bassey, 2017; Okon & Udoh, 2019). Going by the above conversation, this study examines how the adoption of extant tech tools in the news production process has affected human involvement and input in select newsrooms in South-South Nigeria, such as The Tide, Pioneer and Observer Newspapers, which are funded and published by state governments in South-South Nigeria, such as Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Edo State Governments respectively.

A curious observation of current practices in the newsroom will show how technology is already dealing a dangerous blow to human creativity. Technology adoption is making it more challenging for journalists and other back-shop players in the newsroom, such as proofreaders, sub-desk officers and the production crew, to be creative while delivering their duties. The quantity of information available on the internet and the tech tools that are available for use in news production have become a huge distraction. These distractions have made professionals and even media business owners bask in the belief that with technology, newsroom production is speedier and easier; they are hardly bothered about the loss of creativity associated with such realities.

Borger (2016) notes that the digital invasion of the newsroom has made it common for journalists to copy and not be original because they can get pretty much about whatever they intend to write about through templates that are available online. According to him, the adoption of tech tools and their application in news processing has led to editorial laziness, increased piracy and less human creativity. Usher (2014) writes that human creativity in newspaper page design has almost given way to web design because the dummy sheet, which was used to design newspaper pages to enhance visibility and aesthetic beauty, has almost gone extinct. Technology is eliminating newsroom creativity and turning editorial activities into a contest between humans and machines. Usher, however, concluded that professional journalists should be more deliberate about retaining their skills and putting them to use in the news process to retain journalism's stamp of quality.

Bulck and Tambuyzer (2013) reasoned in the same vein by saying that newsroom creativity benchmarks were going down as a result of digital invasion. While critiquing the utilisation of NewsAssist AI, a cloud-based artificial intelligence tool already being adopted by journalists and content creators around the world, Tameling (2024) states that AI tools may be seen as effective in improving newsroom productivity because they offer features that undertake instant transcription of audio and video files, automated extraction of content from PDFs, AI-supported story writing, editing, analysis among others, News Assist AI particularly has numerous potential downsides such as possibility of human creativity disappearance in the news production process, absence of human judgment, potential for bias among others.

According to him, although AI models seem advanced, they do not possess the human ability to understand context, emotions, and cultural nuances, which are critical elements in the interpretation of information accuracy and making subjective judgements or ethical decisions. It is a situation that many of us have found ourselves in: we are at a gathering, and the conversation has dried up. We have exhausted all of our witty anecdotes and interesting tidbits. It's time to tap out (p.567).

Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) assert that professionals in the information industry must moderate their use of extant tech-tools to maintain relevance in the newsroom. They believe that although technology has brought some innovations in news gathering, processing and dissemination, its impact on newsroom creativity is complex, and that while technology can enhance efficiency and data analysis, it may also lead to a decline in human-driven innovation through task automation, and could potentially reduce the need for critical thinking and nuanced storytelling.

Marconi and Siegman (2020) posit that technology, particularly artificial intelligence, has significantly reduced human involvement in many editorial functions because it has led to the automation of tasks such as content generation, basic editing, and even peer review reports. This development has raised concerns about the quality of content, the potential for misinformation, and the de-skilling of reporters and editors. Maintaining ethical standards in the news processing chain is critical to responsible journalism. As modern newsrooms become more significantly digitised, the news production process is losing the human touch, empathy, and the contextual understanding that are essential for impactful journalism.

Kperogi (2025), in his news commentary, asserts that journalists should be cautious while adopting digital tools in handling their editorial operations, because stories written with digital tools such as Artificial Intelligence have the tendency of not maintaining neutrality and can impose the American style of writing on Nigerian journalism, where pieces of writing traditionally adopt British English. He insists that news stories written with tools such as News Assist AI and ChatGPT have the tendency to sound alike at all times, which can rob journalists and media outfits of their uniqueness because their writing styles will gradually be erased. Kperogi argues that journalism will gradually lose its integrity if tools made by humans are used without moderation and recourse to the core principle of truth, which is needed to build trust and loyalty through human involvement. Only recently, precisely in July 2025, an AI video generator, named Veo 3, was unveiled at Google. It is already being used by people around the world to generate millions of high-quality videos for personal, public and commercial uses. It is one of the first video models to incorporate high-fidelity video outputs, native audio, and is the first with text-to-video and soon with image-to-video features. Veo 3 has the capabilities to handle a range of video generation tasks such as cinematic narratives, dynamic characters, animations, among others. It also has the ability to create more immersive experiences by not only generating stunning visuals, but also audio like dialogue and sound effects. This new video generator can synchronise sound by natively generating rich audio dialogue, effects, and music. It produces stunning, high-definition video that can capture creative nuances at the prompt of the user and stimulates real-world physics for authentic motion, from natural character movement to the accurate flow of water and casting of shadows. Analysing the characteristics of Veo 3, some tech experts are already of the opinion that the tool will heighten misinformation, financial fraud and other forms of online rascality in society if not moderated. This is because of its ability to replicate the image and voices of living humans, send messages to their loved ones and make demands that appear normal and realistic.

Boczkowski (2024) notes that the array of digital tools available in the newsroom is already having a profound impact on the traditional news industry and the human communication process at large. According to him, digital technologies have brought huge changes in the way and manner that news is gathered, produced, distributed, and consumed, so maintaining ethical standards while adopting digital tools in content creation has become increasingly difficult without human involvement, which should ensure oversight, review, accuracy, fairness, and alignment with the tastes and preferences of the target audience. Human input in the handling of editorial tasks, especially with the obvious contest between humans and machines, is crucial for preventing biases, maintaining quality, and fostering transparency in delivering content to the audience. By ensuring human involvement through the injection of physical creativity and moderation, bias in editorial scripts can be detected and mitigated. This is because tech tools and models are capable of inheriting biases and leading to unfair or discriminatory content. So human oversight becomes essential to

identifying and mitigating biases as well as ensuring fairness, accuracy and quality. They can generate text, but may lack the contextual understanding and judgment that characterise human writing. This makes human review a necessary activity in the newsroom to verify facts, ensure logical coherence, trust, accountability and high quality (Breazu & Katsos, 2024).

Wenger et al. (2024) posit that to ensure adherence to the ethical guardrails of journalism, digital tools usage in news production should be guided by established news reporting and editing principles that are bent on disseminating truth, promoting privacy, objectivity and public service. Wenger et al. (2024) argue that applying real-life media ethics to news copy is not in the nature of tech-assisted tools because they can sometimes produce unexpected or unintended results. According to them, human oversight should be used as a safety net to correct such unexpected results. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, in 2024 (Newman et al., 2025), used a broad representative sample of 1,004 UK journalists to conduct a survey aimed primarily at finding out how journalists and news organisations use artificial intelligence, and how it relates to other aspects of their work. The study revealed, among other things, that more than 56 per cent of UK journalists use digital tools such as AI professionally at least once a week, another 27 per cent use it less frequently, and only 16 per cent have never used it for journalistic tasks.

According to the study, in terms of broad task groups, journalists in the UK use Artificial Intelligence mostly for newsgathering and information processing or analysis; this also includes journalists who are writing or rewriting stories or those doing backend production. In a study conducted in 2020, Beckett set out to examine the implications of adopting ChatGPT, a conversational AI chatbot, on newsroom production. The study, which surveyed 40 newsrooms selected through critical case sampling across the UK, reported that ChatGPT's Generative Pre-trained Transformer nature and its ability to generate human-like text responses are a threat to reporters' writing style and editors' content-enhancing artistry. According to him, journalists, editors and other newsroom back-shop operators are fast losing their style while news content is losing colour and human touch. In their study, Haleem et al. (2022) surveyed how media content creators have adopted Artificial Intelligence tools in their operations; they reported that artificial intelligence tools by media content creators around the world had gained remarkable popularity. According to the study, no fewer than 100 million people around the world used artificial intelligence tools, especially ChatGPT, within the first two months of its debut. They further reported that ChatGPT has commanded huge attraction and appeal through its advanced Natural Language Processing, which is traceable to its capabilities to enable elaborate textual response generation in an interactive format. According to Hansen et al. (2023), who studied how journalists have explored ChatGPT writing and editing capabilities, the use of digital tools in newsroom production is affecting adherence to ethics, style and newsroom traditions. Roca et al. (2024) suggested that newsroom operators should adopt digital tools with huge caution in order to retain human touch and editorial quality. In a study completed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2025, a rigorous inquiry titled "MIT's First Brain-scan Study on ChatGPT Users", it reported deep and revealing results about Artificial Intelligence tool usage.

MIT held that rather than boosting brain function, prolonged Artificial Intelligence use has the tendency to make it dull. The institution posited that more than four months of cognitive data suggested that the human race may soon begin to wrongly measure productivity. In a study in which participants had their brains scanned while using ChatGPT, about 83.3 per cent of users could not recall a single sentence they had written just a few minutes earlier, but those writing without Artificial Intelligence tools had no challenge remembering the sentences they made earlier. From the study, it was revealed that brain connectivity dropped sharply due to a decline in neutral engagement and human involvement tasks.

The study further reported that when tested in later sessions after stopping ChatGPT usage, the earlier category of users showed continued under-engagement as their performance remained lower than those who had never used Artificial Intelligence tools, which signaled suggestion of more dependency and cognitive weakening. In his study, AI-Zoubi (2024) reported that although AI-assisted essays or pieces of writing can be technically solid, they are often highly "robotic, soulless and lacking in depth". According to the study, ChatGPT can make a writer faster at completing tasks, but it reduces the mental effort required for the writer to learn. He further reported that writers who began their trade without AI-assisted tools but adopted it later in their job are capable of retaining the best memory

and maintaining sound brain activities. And that using ChatGPT actually makes a writer feel empowered, but doing so may quietly offload their thinking.

Theoretically, this study is anchored in Technological Determinism, which suggests that technology- tools made by humans is the primary driver of social and cultural change, and that these tools shape or regulate how humans think, feel, act and organise the world around them. Often associated with Marshall McLuhan, the theory posits that technological advancements influence human behaviour and societal structures. It proposes that societies evolve through different technological ages. In critiquing the Technological Determinism Theory, Okeh (2022) asserts that the mere existence of technology or its constant evolution cannot sufficiently shape, influence or regulate the way humans interact with their social work. Part of the ideas behind this thinking is that while technology may be a critical part of human society, its actual utilisation, the manner of utilisation, and the indices that determine such utilisation remain crucial but often overlooked. He insists that technological tools should be adopted albeit with human moderation. The technological determinism theory is in sync with the object of the study in that it hovers around how the tools made by humans regulate their activities and the world around them. In today's digitised media ecology where newsrooms have become marked with automation, speed, hyper-textuality, interactivity among others, machines have predominantly made incursions into domains that were previously the exclusive preserves of humans.

Going by the conversation above, it is worthy of note that the constant evolution in digital technologies and their adoption in newsroom operations have without doubt triggered numerous changes in the way and manner news is sourced, processed, disseminated and consumed. As promising as digital technologies can be, their applications have shown signs of challenges to newsrooms' operations. The automation, speed and interactivity that accompany digital tool adoption in the newsroom have come with challenges such as a lack of human intuition, creativity, conceptualisation, and ethics, among others.

In their study, Amponsah and Atianashie (2024) reported that the adoption of digital technologies in newsroom activities has affected human creativity integration in the news production chain; they further reported that the development tends to rob editorial products of their originality, context and ethical compliance. From time immemorial, journalism thrives on a tripod of originality, context and compliance with ethical requirements; the integration of digital tools in editorial content creation is capable of stripping journalism of its quality if left unchecked. This is a concern that this study seeks to tackle. Given that the tendency for replication is an index in research, this study therefore investigated how the Tide, Pioneer, and Observer Newspapers have integrated or retained human touch while delivering editorial tasks in the face of obvious disruptions by digital technology.

The study examined the relationship between digital disruptions and the humanisation of editorial tasks in select newsrooms in South-South Nigeria; it specifically sought to:

- i. Determine how journalists in the South-South region of Nigeria have integrated human touch in editorial operations irrespective of digital disruptions.
- ii. Find out how digital tools adoption has affected human involvement in editorial operations in newsrooms in Nigeria's South-South region.
- iii. Find out the challenges faced by journalists in Nigeria's South-South region in integrating human touch and skills in editorial operations despite obvious digital disruptions.

Consequently, the study asks the following questions:

- i. How have journalists in the South-South region of Nigeria integrated human touch in editorial operations irrespective of digital disruptions?
- ii. In what ways has digital tools adoption affected human involvement in editorial operations around newsrooms in Nigeria's South-South region?
- iii. What challenges do journalists in Nigeria's South-South region face in integrating human touch and skills in the editorial operations despite obvious digital disruptions?

Methodology

The study adopted the survey design using mixed methods such as questionnaire and interviews to generate data. The study had two streams of population, the Editorial Staff and General Managers. A total of 138 Editorial Staff of the Tide, Nigerian Observer and the Pioneer who responded to items on the questionnaire were chosen through census, otherwise referred to as Total Enumeration Sampling, while the three General Managers who were interviewed were chosen through expert case sampling, a branch of purposive sampling. Structured questionnaire and interview guide were vetted by experts in the fields of communication research and measurements and evaluation. The test-retest methods and member checking were used to ensure validity of the two data types. The study yielded quantitative and qualitative data, which came in the form of numbers and texts. Quantitative data were analysed using the simple percentage format, while texts were analysed with the use of Miles and Huberman's thematic template by indulging in data familiarisation and theme development.

Results

Table 1: Sample Table

S/No	Organisation	Editorial Staff	General Manager
1.	The Tide	54	1
2.	Nigerian Observer	36	1
3.	The Pioneer	48	1
	Total	138	3

Source: Stations Admin. Department

Table 2: Respondents' opinion on digital disruptions in newsroom operations

S/No	Responses	n	%
1.	Drastic reduction in on-the-spot news sourcing	48	34.04
2.	Less human input in copy editing	47	33.33
3.	More utilisation of automated news writing	44	31.21
4.	No disruption in newsroom operations	0	0
	Total	138	100

Source: Field Survey, February, 2026

From the table, a remarkable number of the respondents think that digital disruptions have led to a drastic reduction in on-the-spot collection or sourcing of news, less human input in copy editing and more utilisation of automated news writing.

Table 3: Participants' Opinions on Digital Disruption in Newsroom Operations

S/No	Participants	Responses	Analysis
1.	Participant 1	Digital disruptions are showing up in different ways, such as reduced human involvement in the news production process.	The participants hold the opinion that human involvement in news sourcing, copy editing and news writing has reduced due to the challenge of digital disruption in newsroom operations.
2.	Participant 2	With digital disruptions, reporters and editors adopt online news sourcing and automated news writing.	
3.	Participant 3	Digital disruption in the newsroom has reduced human involvement in copy editing.	

Source: Interview, February, 2026

Table 4: Respondents' Opinions on Newsroom Operations Humanisation

S/No	Responses	n	%
1.	Read copies and edit manually	21	14.89
2.	Source news physically through interviews and event coverage	20	14.18

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3.	Write reports without using an automated system	22	15.60
4	No longer read copies manually, interview sources physically, cover every story, and write reports without an automated system.	75	53.19
Total		138	100

Source: Field Survey, February, 2026

The table shows that more reporters and editors are adopting digital systems to undertake their duties, while the number of journalists who make human inputs in the news production chain is reducing.

Table 5: Participants' Opinions on Human Involvement in Newsroom Operations

S/No	Participants	Responses	Analysis
1.	Participant 1	Human involvement in the news production process, such as sourcing, writing and editing, will accord the copies great quality.	The participants are of the view that human involvement in the news process will enthrone quality, originality, context and ethics.
2.	Participant 2	Reportorial ethics, style and editing artistry will be enlivened if the production process is allowed human involvement.	
3.	Participant 3	By allowing human involvement, the copy will be original, contextualised, and driven by ethics.	

Source: Interview, February, 2026

Table 6: Participants' Opinions on Challenges of Human Involvement in Newsroom Operation

S/No	Responses	n	%
1.	Manual involvement in the news has become a more taxing process	40	28.37
2.	Reporters and editors are becoming lazier.	42	29.79
3.	Physical inputs in the news production are more rigorous.	40	28.37
4	Reporters and editors believe in digitalised ways of handling newsroom tasks.	42	29.79
Total		138	100

Source: Field Survey, February, 2026

From the table above, a sizeable number of the respondents think that manual/human involvement in newsroom operations has become more taxing and rigorous. They are further of the opinion that laziness and belief in using digitalised work tools are challenges to human involvement in the news production process.

Table 7: Participants' Opinions on the Challenges of Human Involvement in Newsroom Operation

S/No	Participants	Responses	Analysis
1.	Participant 1	Reporters and editors are becoming very lazy in playing a physical role in newsroom operations.	The participants see laziness, rigour and complexity in manual involvement as challenges to newsroom operation humanisation.
2.	Participant 2	Many journalists and editors are not willing to follow the rigours of human involvement in newsroom production; this is a challenge.	
3.	Participant 3	With digital tools, human involvement in newsroom production has become more taxing. So manual reading of copies and editing have reduced.	

Discussion

Looking at the data that emerged from the study, most journalists who participated in the study have remarkably embraced digital technology in performing their editorial duties such as news gathering, writing and editing. This development has resulted in significant disruptions in the old order where physical involvement of humans dominated

the editorial workplace. The results show that on-the-spot sourcing of news and general human inputs in the news process have reduced drastically, giving space to more utilisation of automated systems in the news production process.

Digital disruptions in newsroom operations are showing up in diverse ways such as news sourcing, writing, page making, editing, proofreading and so on. Although some reporters and editors still use manual methods to undertake their responsibilities, the trend suggests that newsroom personnel should either shape into tech tools usage or shape out of the system. The responses from participants show that human input in newsroom production accords quality to editorial copies. Reportorial ethics, style, editing artistry, and context will be enhanced if more human moderation is allowed while adopting digital tools in newsroom operations. According to the data, the constant emergence of digital tools for adoption in newsroom work has made reporters and editors shy away from upholding more rigorous human techniques, so the use of direct human skill is becoming more taxing and difficult to adopt because of the speed, interactivity and automation that characterise digital tools usage.

Conclusion

The impact of technology on newsroom creativity is a double-edged sword. While digital technology offers powerful tools for efficiency, interactivity and speed, it also poses risks to human-driven input and innovation; this development gives news organisations the burden of striking a balance by leveraging technology's strengths and opportunities, and preserving the human element of contextual storytelling, ethics, critical thinking, and nuanced perspectives. By allowing human moderation in the adoption of digital tools for newsroom activities, a safety net against regurgitation from tech support tools can be achieved. The reasoning above aligns with Kperogi (2025), who asserted that ultimately, the effect of technology on creativity depends on how it is used and balanced with other activities. For Nigerian Journalists, a major implication of non-human moderation of digital tool usage in news production, especially AI, is that it will impose an alien style of writing on journalism pieces. From the scholarly views expressed in the body of this work, it has been established that human moderation is critical to the adoption of digital tools in news processing, because stories written with digital tools such as AI tend to sound alike at all times, and using AI tools could rob journalists and media outfits of their quality, uniqueness and writing styles. Writing in consonance with the views expressed above, Diakopoulos (2019) stated that new tools offering themselves for use in the newsroom should not replace human craftsmanship if journalism must retain its real value. He asserts that it is important to combine tech-tools usage with human moderation to retain creativity. Digital tools can enhance efficiency and speed up content creation, but they should not be a complete replacement for human intuition; this is because by combining digital tools' capabilities with human face judgment, the media will produce and serve more impactful content to their audiences. It is therefore the position of this study that digital technology tools usage in newsroom operations should supplement rather than supplant human involvement in the editorial content production. Digital tools' emergence does not amount to a straightforward productivity upgrade or an unquestionable tool for editorial efficiency. It is rather loaded with professional tension, needs for ethical negotiation and audience-mediated legitimacy.

Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

1. News organisations should encourage human involvement in digital tools usage to handle editorial tasks to retain creativity.
2. News reporters and editors should re-kit themselves with extant tech-tools albeit with caution in order not to lose editorial craftsmanship.
3. Media establishments should train reporters and editors on conscious use of tech-tools to avoid a total erosion of human involvement in the production process.
4. Reporters and editors should use the opportunity of exposure to tech-tools usage to build cognitive strength instead of dependency.

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