Protecting public interest journalism while personalising the news

By Laura Gartry

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Preface

This project was prepared by Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Laura Gartry, an award-winning digital producer for Australia's premier current affairs program *Four Corners*. It is the product of a three-month industry-sponsored fellowship at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, funded by ABC.

The project explores how personalisation can coexist with the core values of public interest journalism, drawing on insights from interviews with media organisations, experts and academic literature.

Introduction

Almost without us noticing, personalisation has become a part of everyday life. We have never had access to more content, but increasingly our online world is becoming more individualised and streamlined. From suggested purchases, to customised music playlists and recommendations on what to watch, personalisation algorithms are omnipresent.

Given the volume of choice available, it can be eerily accurate and comforting to be presented with content tailored to our interests. But personalising the news, while largely necessary to survive in the current digital ecosystem, raises ethical and editorial challenges.

Public interest journalism plays a vital role in a democratic society by informing citizens, holding power to account, and fostering public debate. But these are often depressing stories on fatigued and complicated topics, and they can struggle to achieve the same level of engagement as other, more fun content.

This discrepancy raises the question: if users are increasingly exposed to content that aligns with their existing views and interests, how can we ensure that important, albeit less popular, stories reach a wide audience? More broadly: how do we balance technological advancement with journalistic integrity and user trust?

To help answer those questions, I spent time examining several approaches to personalisation, and reviewed the latest academic literature on news recommender systems. I also interviewed technical and editorial personalisation experts at publishers in Sweden, India, Canada, UK, and Australia, and spoke with leading figures in machine learning and academics on this topic.

Why personalise the news?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- News recommender systems (NRS) deliver undiscovered content to their intended audience more efficiently and effectively.
- This efficiency can increase the reach of content, and yield a better audience experience, all contributing to a better bottom line.
- In a news context, there is concern that less popular but important information may not surface as well, or an echo chamber may form around a user's interests.
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach for news personalisation, but most companies use a human-in-the-loop approach.

Many news publishers produce vast amounts of content, much of which remains undiscovered by the public.

News recommender systems (NRS) can counter this by providing relevant and valuable content, which can generate traffic, retain subscribers and engage audiences more effectively and efficiently.[1]

By delivering relevant content on their own platforms rather than through third parties, we can support the financial sustainability of news organisations which is also crucial for public interest journalism.

Sonali Verma runs the generative AI initiative for the International News Media Association (INMA) and works as an independent digital consultant.[2] She argues that personalisation, when implemented thoughtfully, with the right balance and safeguards, can enhance the reach and impact of public interest journalism rather than threaten it. By making news more relevant and accessible to individual users, personalisation can help ensure that important and a diverse range of stories reach a wider audience.

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[1] Möller, J., Trilling, D., Helberger, N., & van Es, B. (2018). Do not blame it on the algorithm: An empirical assessment of multiple recommender systems and their impact on content diversity. *Information, Communication & Society, 21*(7), 959-977. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2018.1444076.
[2] INMA is an umbrella industry group with 22,000 members across 90 countries, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences among media companies globally.

"Most news publishers produce a tonne of content that the public has no interest in and will never discover. So, if you can focus your resources on stuff that really matters and make it easy for people to find it, then you're doing your news organisation a service and you're building a better society," Verma told me.

Personalisation in news delivery can range from segmenting users based on locations and interests to providing highly individualised content experiences like a fully customised homepage.

It should be noted that personalisation is often most effective in serving loyal website traffic, because it becomes more accurate with regular visits as the data profile builds.[3]

The challenge then is ensuring that personalisation does not lead to users mostly seeing content that reinforces their existing beliefs or interests. There is also the risk of decreased visibility for stories which have significant public interest but lower popular appeal and might not surface prominently, thereby reducing their impact and reach.

Differing approaches to personalisation

Over the course of this research, I have found no two media companies doing personalisation in the same way. There is no "one size that fits all" approach, and it largely depends on an organisation's appetite for automation, innovation, reputational risk and computational resources. For example, Sky News UK has no personalisation on its homepage whereas Canada's *The Globe and Mail* is almost entirely algorithm driven.

Ahead of the pack, The Globe and Mail started using recommender engines around 2010, initially with basic site automation like "latest" or "most popular" topics.

This evolved into a composite scoring system to rank articles based on various metrics such as driving subscriptions, retaining subscribers, social media shares, and search traffic. High-scoring articles were automatically placed on the homepage according to topic and vertical parameters.

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[3] Thurman, N., & Schifferes, S. (2012). The future of personalisation at news websites: Lessons from a longitudinal study. *Journal of Media Business Studies, 9*(1), 21-41. doi: 10.1080/16522354.2012.11073537.

Despite the heavy use of algorithms, editorial curation remains. For example, the top three slots on *The Globe and Mail* homepage are always chosen by editors to highlight the most important stories, reflecting the newspaper's role in setting the national agenda.

Before moving onto new ventures, Sonali Verma worked at *The Globe and Mail* for 15 years, leading personalisation of their website from an editorial perspective.

"*The Globe* decided we want all of Canada to know what the three most important stories are right now. We don't care if you like them or not, if you want to read them or not. We think this is important, and that's why we're putting it there." Verma said. For instance, investigative series at *The Globe and Mail* are prominently featured to maintain public awareness, regardless of immediate reader interest.

In my experience as a digital producer, the top and most visible spots for stories on a website generally yield higher traffic. Any story given the large visual presence of lead slot on a homepage is going to have a significant boost in traffic, even if wasn't popular before. This makes the competition for these slots increasingly fierce, particularly if fewer slots are available to homepage editors to manually curate.

"Editors are crucial in maintaining the balance. While algorithms can help surface content based on user behaviour, it's the editors who ensure that significant public interest stories are highlighted," said Verma.

Other media organisations are more conservative in their initial attempts to personalise. ABC News, where I have worked for the past decade, is currently trialling a significant personalisation update and UX refresh to its website and app. Sensing the concerns this shift may bring, as well as the inevitability of personalisation being explored on all on platform products, the organisation released a Content Recommendations Editorial Policy.

"Personalisation will augment, not replace the core function of ABC News and information services. In addition to offering specialised services such as local news based on location, we will enrich the experience of users by alerting them to major stories they may have missed, and stories related to the stories they have already

seen, heard or read. This will ensure greater diversity and comprehensiveness of the offering, not less."[4]

While the homepage will remain editor-curated to provide a broad overview of news, the platform is introducing a range of personalised "For You" feeds.
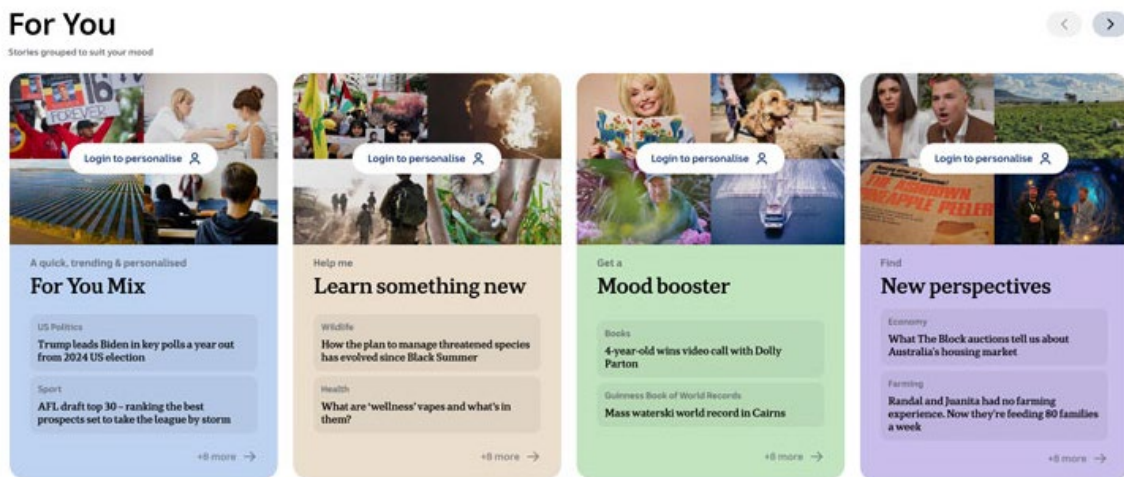
ABC News is launching its 'For You' feeds in the near future. Image: Australian Broadcasting Corporation

New Audience Lead Veronica Apap explained: "It'll feel like a social feed that you'll scroll through, and all the content in each feed will be around the particular theme. This isn't 100% personalised in the sense that there's no human interaction. Our front-page editors are in change of those collections. So, there is still human touch with these; it's just an affinity-based recommendations engine working over the top of that list."

A significant aspect of this iteration of personalisation includes emergency broadcasting tailored to relevant geographic areas, enhancing the relevance and immediacy of alerts. Additionally, the local news feature will provide users with news from their specific region, improving the relevance of content.

While many organisations use IP tracking for customisation, ABC is opting for login-based personalisation to enhance data privacy and content recommendations across devices. This means the ABC will need to work even harder to get the younger

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[4] Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2022) ABC content recommendations editorial policy. Available at: https://help.abc.net.au/hc/en-us/articles/4971242535183-ABC-Content-Recommendations-Editorial-Policy

audience to create accounts and read the news on platform, especially with Meta likely to ban news on Instagram and Facebook in Australia.

The ABC's personalisation features will evolve over time based on audience response, internal feedback, and technical capabilities. Currently, the recommendations are affinity-based, but future iterations may incorporate more nuanced algorithms considering journalistic values like timeliness and public service. This values-based approach is explored in the next section.

Integrating public interest values

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Recommender algorithms can enhance public interest journalism if designed with values-based parameters rather than just user engagement metrics.

- Professor Michael A. Osborne from the University of Oxford highlights the importance of defining the "reward function" in algorithms to prioritise public interest stories.

- Sveriges Radio (SR) added value rankings to its stories including: recorded on location, affected voices, providing new perspectives, and offering independent viewpoints.

- The latest literature suggests the most important levers for news recommender systems (NRS) to incorporate are diversity, recency, privacy, and transparency

Striking the right balance between algorithm-driven personalisation and editorial judgement is crucial for maintaining the integrity and reach of public interest journalism. While most recommender algorithms can identify and recommend content based on user behaviour and preferences, home page editors play a crucial role in ensuring that significant public interest stories are given prominence.

But the efficiency and effectiveness of content delivery algorithms can play a role in promoting and protecting public interest journalism too, if they are designed with specific values and goals in mind – in short: if they are given values-based parameters and not just user engagement metrics.

Professor of Machine Learning Michael A. Osborne from the University of Oxford said that defining the "reward function" or "loss function" within machine learning models is critical. "If your platform is only targeting a click-through rate or something similar, it's likely that those public interest groups will be dismissed relative to more popular stories," he said. "To surface the public interest stories, you need to give more thought into exactly what you want the algorithm to do. What is the goal exactly? And how can you bring your users on board with that goal?"

Integrating values into rankings

Sveriges Radio (SR) is Sweden's national public broadcaster and leading audio company with over 50 locations and 33 newsrooms across Sweden. It produces a vast number of news stories primarily focused on audio. These stories are summarised in three bullet points, with the audio being the main content.

Personalisation drives the news playlists, which form the initial news experience on their website and app.

However, they have developed a 'Public Service Algorithm' which integrates their key values such as:

- Stories recorded on location,
- Stories including affected voices,
- Stories providing new perspectives, and
- Stories offering independent viewpoints.

In doing so, they ensure that stories critical to public understanding and democratic engagement surface alongside those that are merely popular.

This method has been well-received within their newsrooms and is seen as a model for integrating AI in public service journalism in the industry. Olle Zachrison, the Head of Digital News Strategy at SR explained the algorithm evaluates news stories using three dimensions: general news value, lifespan, and SR's public service values.

The general news value dimension assesses the magnitude of the news (for example, an emergency evacuation near the user would be rated extremely high), while the lifespan categorises the story's duration from short to long-term. The public service values dimension focuses on the foundational principles of SR, such as being on location and including affected voices in stories.

Zachrison noted in our interview that the introduction of the algorithm has meant discussions about public service values are initiated at the start of the news production process, rather than as an afterthought. This approach encourages journalists to integrate the values into their work from the beginning, fostering more deliberate and value-driven journalism.

"We want the discussion about SR values to start at the beginning of the production process [...] because then it can be a force for changing the journalism. Because you can't slap on an affected voice, like, five minutes before publishing," he said.

However, he did note some digital staff feel constrained by the algorithm, seeing it as a "straitjacket" that limits their ability to manually curate news stories.

Some digital editors try to bypass the algorithm's constraints by using manual workarounds. For instance, they might pin top stories or alter publication times to

ensure certain stories get more visibility. This indicates a struggle between adhering to the automated system and maintaining editorial flexibility.

Value-aware news review

A systematic review of 183 papers on news recommender systems (NRS), published in June 2024, offers a detailed overview of the current state of value-aware NRS. [5] The authors of the paper called for a more value-aware and ethically responsible approach in the design and evaluation of these systems. It found that "news recommender systems are a part of the editorial function of news organisations and need to uphold journalistic values".

The authors identified 40 distinct values in news recommender systems (NRS) and categorised them into five main groups: standard, responsibility, user experience (UX), editorial, and technical. Among these 40 values, diversity, recency, privacy, and transparency were determined to be most crucial to the news industry.

Diversity ensures a range of topics and viewpoints, essential for informed public discourse. Recency keeps users updated with the latest news, maintaining relevance. Privacy safeguards user data, fostering trust. Transparency in algorithms builds user confidence and aligns with journalistic ethics.

It concluded that, in the future, there will be more demand for algorithms to have journalistic integrity. "With the increasing spread of false and misleading information ('fake news'), the demand for considering and acknowledging journalistic values has become louder and more evident."

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[5] Bauer, C., Bagchi, C., Hundogan, O.A. and van Es, K. (2024) 'Where are the values? A systematic literature review on news recommender systems', ACM Transactions on Recommender Systems, 2(3), p. 23.

Implementation challenges

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A 2023 Danish case study highlights the difficulties in integrating a personalisation algorithm with traditional news values. In this case, the final product ended up requiring manual inputs, predefined rules, and continuous monitoring to ensure local relevance and timeliness of news.

- Within a year, the project had failed due to insufficient integration and lack of support, highlighting the need for effective communication and collaboration between data scientists, editorial, and IT teams to align with journalistic values and ensure smooth execution.

- Successful integration of personalisation requires transformative practices across the organisation, including breaking down silos, ensuring value alignment, mitigating technical challenges, and developing a comprehensive strategy with involvement from all levels of staff.

- Open communication about how your algorithm works may be in line with journalistic principles, but it may not necessarily equate with increased trust.

MedieHuset case study

A [2023 study](#) by Anna Schjøtt Hansen and Professor Jannie Møller Hartley from Roskilde University in Denmark examined the evolution of a personalisation algorithm at a Danish regional news organisation, capturing the challenges inherent in shifting the definition of "the news" from a fixed set of articles to a dynamic, individualised news feed.[6]

They recorded concerns about loss of editorial control as editors and journalists at the news organisation initially struggled to integrate traditional news values into the algorithm.

"Two distinct versions of journalism were still present during this process: one that was reminiscent of the classical journalistic task of serving society, and the other that allowed for news to become individualised – and that one had not fully replaced

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[6] The news organisation studied in the article is referred to as "MedieHuset." This is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the workers involved in the project.

the other."[7] As a result, the newsroom needed to build control mechanisms involving a combination of manual inputs, predefined rules, continuous monitoring, and adjustments to ensure that the algorithm supported rather than undermining the journalistic mission.

For example, a significant aspect of this effort was ensuring the timeliness of news. The algorithm did not inherently grasp the concept of news timeliness, which could lead to outdated articles being recommended. To address this, editors proposed a system where each article was assigned a 'lifetime' or duration of relevance, which involved journalists manually setting how long an article should be considered timely. For instance, an article about a traffic accident would be marked to expire in terms of relevance after the congestion cleared, not based on ongoing interest.

Maintaining local relevance was another critical concern. To counter this, filters were implemented to ensure a certain percentage of the recommended content was local. This involved setting thresholds so that, for example, at least 50% of the recommended articles for a user were local news stories, even if the user's history indicated a strong interest in national or international sports.

Editors retained control over top stories or sections of the news site to ensure that important societal news reached all users, regardless of their preferences. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, editors prominently featured public health information and updates as top stories visible to all users, bypassing the algorithm's individual recommendations.

Algorithmic rules and guidelines were developed to better reflect journalistic values through collaborative efforts between editors and data scientists. This involved creating criteria within the algorithm that prioritised stories based on their potential societal impact, such as public safety announcements, significant local events, or important political developments.

Monitoring of recommendations and adjusting algorithm performance were crucial for ensuring that the algorithm continued to align with editorial standards and

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[7] Hansen, A. S., & Hartley, J. M. (2023). Designing what's news: An ethnography of a personalisation algorithm and the data-driven (re)assembling of the news. *Digital Journalism, 11*(6), 924-942. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1988861

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values over time and adjustments were made if important news types were underrepresented.

Finally, quantifying and standardising editorial decisions also became essential. This process involved translating nuanced editorial judgments into quantifiable data points that an algorithm could process. For example, a scoring system could be used where articles were assigned numerical values based on their newsworthiness, which the algorithm then used to prioritise content recommendations.

Since the publication of their research paper, Professor Hartley explained in our 2024 interview that the project had been abandoned and is currently only used for curating a newsletter.

So, what when wrong? Professor Hartley puts it down to a combination of siloed structure, insufficient integration and support, and unanswered journalistic and editorial concerns. This is what other news media organisations can learn from this.

1. Breakdown organisational silos

Ensure that different departments, especially those related to data science, editorial, and IT, are not working in isolation. There needs to be effective communication and collaboration across these teams to ensure smooth data flow, project execution, feedback and adaptation.

> *"The organisation was working too much in silos. So, the data department wasn't geared up enough, and only the people building the machine learning got resources put into them. The maintenance people that were maintaining the website were just, like, 'Can you send a ticket and we can fix it next month'."*

It is important to include journalists and editors in the development process to ensure personalisation algorithms meets journalistic norms and needs. This integration helps in making the system more relevant and acceptable to the editorial staff.

> *"What went wrong was that the resources they put in didn't match the organisational structure of collaboration. The data has to move around the organisation and that wasn't in place."*

2. Ensure value alignment

Data scientists and technical teams should get to grips with the core values and objectives of a newsroom, and not just its commercial interests or engagement metrics.

> *"It's important to take into account that the data scientists that you employ don't necessarily have those same values as the brand. I think it's really dangerous to have these satellites of data science people that are just like, doing their thing and thinking that you can just be like, 'OK, it's done. Let's turn it on'."*

Management should nvolve journalists and home page editors early in the process to address any concerns about how personalisation might impact their work or the integrity of the news.

> *"There were these discussions about journalistic values, but there wasn't a coherent organisation team behind that, that managed to draw in all the experiences. So that is a lot of journalistic values to include in one algorithm.*

3. Mitigate technical challenges

Anticipate technical issues and plan accordingly. Can the IT infrastructure handle the demands of a personalisation system? Will loading times be quick enough? Will data be integrated seamlessly?

> *"It was just loading too slow: there were empty boxes on the site."*

4. Develop and share a comprehensive strategy

A comprehensive strategy includes a clear roadmap, adequate resources, and a well-defined organisational structure that supports collaboration and innovation. Newsrooms should involve staff from all levels in the personalisation process, allowing adequate time for feedback.
This includes not only editors and journalists but also data scientists and technical staff. By doing so, everyone understands the goals and challenges, which fosters a more collaborative environment.

> *"Some organisations say, OK, there will be resistance, so we don't involve them until it's ready to press the button. And then there are the others who get that because of that resistance, we need to have them onboard from the very beginning and also have them co-design."*

Training is essential for everyone involved in the personalisation process. This includes not only technical training but also workshops that help staff understand how personalisation can enhance their work and the overall mission of the newsroom.

> *"A more embracing culture in the news organisation where people think, 'Oh, this is fun, this is something we want to know what's going on'."*

Cultural challenges and trust

As evidenced by the MedieHuset example, integrating personalisation into newsrooms is a considerable change management exercise which requires transformative practices across an organisation.

Jan Lauren Boyles, Associate Professor of Journalism at Iowa State University's Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, said that news organisations that are best situated for these types of transitions have created internal systems and structures to incubate innovation within the newsroom.

"Historically, news organisations that have invested in [re]training staffers around new technologies have seen positive returns from their technological investments," she said. "Given this fact, organisations would be wisely positioned to allocate resources toward community building within the newsroom, so that collaboration between journalists and technologists can thrive."

Senior lead for personalisation at the ABC Rebecca Manly is responsible for handling the personalisation vision, data integrity, and alignment efforts with ABC's editorial policies. In addition to the integration of technologists and editorial staff, she said change management structures should support staff through the process and provide training.

"Oftentimes we don't handle change as well as we would like. So bringing our industry along for the journey is critical for our success. Digital transformation needs to happen with the evolution of a crowded media landscape, but we need to ask ourselves how to implement it alongside a purposeful and intentional framework. I believe we have all of the building blocks to do this start to drive this forward in earnest."

In a world where tech companies dismiss concerns about how algorithms are built, news media can carve a unique space if they are willing to simply and clearly explain how they are curating the information experience. It might not result in building more trust, but this transparency and accountability may help users understand the broader context and importance of the stories they are presented with.[8]

 The ABC Content Recommendations Editorial Policy is a good starting point for this.[9] The guidance outlines the editorial principles adopted by the ABC to ensure that personalisation delivers a comprehensive service as required by the ABC Charter across genres consistent with its public service mission to inform, educate and entertain all Australians.

Dr Felix M. Simon, Research Fellow in AI and News at Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, said transparency and openness is generally something that audiences say they find important when it comes to assessing whether to trust a news outlet.

"Transparency is also one of the authoritative rituals of journalism – in other words, it is a marker through which journalism tries to set itself apart from other forms of media work, stress its commitment to the truth, and to win and retain legitimacy and trust," he said. "Therefore, there is both a normative and an empirical rationale to be transparent about how and why content is personalised, including with AI."

He also added a caveat: whether transparency is effective in substantively increasing trust or legitimacy is an entirely different question. There is the possibility that it

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[8] Toff, B., & Simon, F. M. (2023). "Or they could just not use it?": The Paradox of AI Disclosure for Audience Trust in News. *OSF Preprints*. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/abc123
[9] https://help.abc.net.au/hc/en-us/articles/4971242535183-ABC-Content-Recommendations-Editorial-Policy

could be ineffective or even backfire. "The cons could include a mismatch between what audiences see as transparency and what news organisations see as transparency," he said.

The future of personalisation

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Hyper-personalised news is coming, including format-based preferences.
- There are concerns generative AI will create further disruption in the media landscape by giving reduced visibility for original sources, and new risks of inaccurate information.
- The industry faces challenges with content ownership and potential legal issues with AI learning from news content. Collaboration or developing proprietary AI could be solutions.
- Ensuring public interest in AI development involves collaboration among media organisations, tech developers, and academia, as seen in initiatives like the EBU exploring AI for public service journalism.

Hyper-personalised news

The future of news personalisation lies in developing more sophisticated and hyper-personal algorithms. Meanwhile, the transformative potential of AI in journalism is rapidly evolving. Currently, the focus is on improving existing processes, but the future holds possibilities for entirely new approaches to journalism.

Scroll.in, a major news website in India, aims to personalise not just the recommendation of content but the format in which it is delivered. For example, a 500-word article could be condensed into three bullet points for quick consumption or expanded into a FAQ format for more context. This ensures that all news remains accessible while catering to different user preferences for information delivery.

Sannuta Raghu, who leads Scroll's AI Working Group, notes that rapid advancements in AI LLMs (large language models) could soon allow even smaller publishers to integrate sophisticated AI tools, enabling real-time querying and personalised news delivery.

SR's Zachrison, meanwhile, predicted a blend of automated geographic localisation and advanced conversational search capabilities. He emphasised the importance of adapting to changing audience behaviours, particularly in car environments where traditional radio faces existential competition from apps and CarPlay. SR is also exploring automatic transcription of audio to enhance accessibility for the 1.5 million Swedes with hearing difficulties.

When asked about the broader impact of generative AI, Professor Osborne expressed concerns about its potential to disrupt the media landscape. He points out that generative AI, which can create summaries of search results and news articles, might divert traffic away from original news sources and reduce their visibility and revenue. The possibility of AI-generated content presenting inaccurate or "hallucinated" information adds another layer of risk, potentially damaging the credibility of news.

"The consequences for users are potentially getting poor quality results, getting [...] hallucinated results that are entirely wrong. But the consequences for the media are potentially existential. It could mean the audience is entirely handed over to search platforms at the expense of the organisations generating the news," he said.

News Corp has already licensed its news content to Open AI which will be used in results and to feed the hungry Chat GPT LLM. T.J. Thomson and James Meese or RMIT University shared their thoughts on the conundrum now facing the industry:[10]

> *"There are unresolved questions over who owns the content. The* New York Times*, for example, is suing OpenAI over alleged copyright infringement. By inking deals with media companies, generative AI services like ChatGPT can ensure they stay clear of legal questions by paying to learn from their content.*
>
> *But could the media be signing its own death warrant by sharing its journalism? Or do we all benefit from the wider availability of reliable information?"*

A costly and unprecedented alternative might come in the form of an industry-wide collaboration to create an LLM to rival that of Google and Chat GPT. However, Professor Michael Osborne said it's not too late for news organisations to develop their own generative AI and join the race.

"I think we're still pretty early in this journey of figuring out what generative AI will do, how it can be used. So I'd certainly encourage media organisations to explore

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[10] https://theconversation.com/what-openais-deal-with-news-corp-means-for-journalism-and-for-you-230773

those use cases. But choose your technology partners with care because there are only a few purveyors of these generative AI models today, and most of them might see themselves as actively in competition with the media organisations."

The cost for licensing AI technologies from providers such as OpenAI, Google, or AWS might range from thousands to millions of dollars. Developing our own proprietary system is likely to [cost more](#).[11]

Perhaps less radically: media organisations may want to consider integrating their own generative AI bots to scour their own archives and provide answers with links for context. As users become accustomed to having instant fully formed answers at their fingertips, this might become necessary. And it's a good excuse to improve the crawling and mapping of news content for better on-platform search function, which (at least in my experience) has not been excellent in the past.

Ensuring public interest remains a part of the generative AI equation will involve ongoing research and collaboration between media organisations, technology developers, and academic institutions.

For example, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is exploring ways to use LLM's to automatically identify and prioritise stories with high public service values across its member organisations. A generative model may be the next iteration of this collaborative effort.

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[11] TechCrunch (2024) AI training data has a price tag that only big tech can afford. Available at: https://techcrunch.com/2024/06/01/ai-training-data-has-a-price-tag-that-only-big-tech-can-afford/

Conclusion

In digital development, you are often not going to have all the answers upfront. You need to go out and iterate. As one personalisation expert told me, the longer we delay it, the worse the outcome is potentially going to be because it will be done in a rush to catch up.

As ABC Personalisation Lead Rebecca Manly reflects, "Change equals risk because it's moving forward, but there's a risk of remaining stagnant and not serving all areas [of the public] as well.

"I think that change – digital change – is happening rapidly in the industry and if we don't evolve with the industry, it may slap us in the face.

"I am quite optimistic that we will be able to make significant developments in News personalisation if all parties come to the table. We have a significant opportunity to serve more audiences and... more effectively than we have before."

Integrating editorial judgement in the development of more advanced personalisation algorithms shows promise – as proven by several media organisations profiled here.

Models like the SR "Public Service Algorithm" and the human-in-the-loop approaches illustrate how personalisation can be aligned with journalistic values. Additionally, value-aware news recommender systems that prioritise diversity, recency, privacy, and transparency highlight the path forward for ethically responsible personalisation.

Protecting public interest journalism while personalising the news is not just a technical challenge but an ethical one, too. It is also a huge change management exercise within newsrooms.

It will require a thoughtful integration of technology with sound editorial judgment, and clear principles. And if we get it right, and for the sake of public interest journalism we must, there are many rewards to reap.