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Public Perception and Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Digital Media: A Quantitative Survey Analysis

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Abstract

This paper presents a quantitative analysis of a structured survey administered to 300 respondents as part of a doctoral study examining the transformative effects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on digital media. The survey captured respondent demographics, digital media consumption habits, familiarity with and use of AI tools, and perceptions of AI's influence on content creation, journalism, trust, personalisation, and regulation. Findings indicate near-universal familiarity with AI (89.0% at least somewhat familiar), high adoption of AI tools (48.7% daily users), and broad agreement that AI has reduced content-production time (88.3%) and improved creative output (81.0%). At the same time, respondents expressed considerable ambivalence about trust: only 8.0% said they would completely trust an AI-generated news article, while 88.7% agreed that AI-generated news could increase misinformation. A large majority (88.3%) supported stricter regulation of AI-generated media, and 81.0% favoured mandatory labelling of AI-generated content. These findings echo international

survey evidence — the Reuters Institute's cross-national tracking has similarly found low comfort with AI-authored news alongside rapidly rising AI tool adoption (Simon et al., 2025) — while extending that picture to an Indian, largely Meerut-and-NCR-based sample. The data point to a public that is enthusiastic about AI's productivity benefits while simultaneously anxious about authenticity, misinformation, and privacy — a duality that this paper terms the 'adoption-anxiety paradox.' The findings are intended to complement a parallel qualitative study of digital media professionals conducted for the same doctoral project.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Digital Media; Survey Research; Media Trust; AI Adoption; Misinformation; Content Personalisation; Journalism

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has moved from a specialised technical domain into a pervasive feature of everyday digital experience. Recommendation engines, generative writing and image tools, algorithmic news curation, and conversational assistants now shape how audiences discover, consume, and evaluate digital content. This shift raises pressing questions for media scholars, practitioners, and policymakers: How aware is the general public of AI's role in the content they encounter? How much do people trust AI-generated material, particularly news? And what expectations do audiences hold regarding transparency and regulation?

This paper reports the quantitative strand of a larger doctoral research project titled "Analysing the Transformative Effects of AI on Digital Media." It draws on a structured, closed-ended survey of 300 respondents designed to measure digital media habits, AI familiarity and usage patterns, and attitudes toward AI's role in content creation, journalism, personalisation, misinformation, and regulation. A companion paper in the same project reports an in-depth qualitative thematic analysis of interviews with digital media and communication professionals; the two papers are designed to be read together as complementary quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the same research problem.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To profile the demographic and digital media usage characteristics of the survey sample.
- To measure the extent of public familiarity with, and use of, AI tools and platforms.
- To assess public perceptions of AI's impact on content creation, creativity, and journalism.
- To examine public trust in AI-generated content and attitudes toward misinformation risk.
- To gauge support for transparency measures and regulation of AI-generated media.

1.2 Research Questions

- RQ1: What is the level of public awareness and adoption of AI tools in digital media use?
- RQ2: How do demographic factors (age, familiarity with AI) relate to trust in and usage of AI tools?
- RQ3: To what extent does the public perceive AI as improving versus threatening the quality, creativity, and credibility of digital content?
- RQ4: What level of support exists for regulatory and transparency measures around AI-generated content?

2. Literature Review

2.1 AI Adoption and Public Awareness

Public uptake of generative AI tools has accelerated sharply since 2023. Cross-national tracking by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that the share of people who had ever used a standalone generative AI system such as ChatGPT rose from 40% to 61% between 2024 and 2025, with weekly usage nearly doubling over the same period (Simon, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025). The present survey's finding that 89.0% of respondents are at least somewhat familiar with AI, and that 57.0% use AI tools weekly or more, is broadly consistent with this international trajectory, suggesting that awareness in the sampled Indian population is tracking, rather than lagging, global adoption curves.

2.2 Trust in AI-Generated News and Content

A consistent finding across the literature is that audiences remain markedly more skeptical of AI-authored content than of AI-assisted production. The Reuters Institute's 2025 cross-national tracking found that although generative AI is expected to make news cheaper to produce and more up to date, the same publics rate it as less transparent and, crucially, less trustworthy (Simon, Nielsen, & Fletcher, 2025). Ross Arguedas's (2024) qualitative work for the same institute similarly found that audience comfort with AI in news depends heavily on where in the production process AI is used, with disclosure mattering far less for behind-the-scenes tasks than for content creation itself. A systematized review of

185 automated-journalism studies identifies credibility and trust as the single most persistent theme in the field, cutting across disciplines and methods (Bartleman, Schapals, & Dubois, 2026). Diakopoulos (2019), in *Automating the News*, frames this as a structural tension: algorithmic systems can scale content production far beyond human capacity, but the accountability and verification functions historically performed by human editors do not scale in the same way. The present study's finding that only 8.0% of respondents would completely trust an AI-generated news article, alongside 75.0% who report having been unable to identify AI-generated content at least sometimes, sits squarely within this literature.

2.3 Algorithmic Personalisation and the Filter Bubble

Concerns about AI-driven content curation build on Pariser's (2011) influential concept of the 'filter bubble' — a state of informational isolation produced when recommendation algorithms selectively surface content matching a user's prior behaviour, narrowing rather than broadening exposure to viewpoints. Subsequent empirical work has refined rather than overturned this concept: large-scale simulation studies find that conventional recommendation algorithms do reduce diversity between users even where they do not sharply narrow any one individual's feed (Anwar, Schoenebeck, & Dhillon, 2024), and more recent work shows that algorithmic affordances which increase user awareness of personalisation can measurably reduce filter-bubble formation and attitude extremity (Jiang,

2025) — implying that disclosure of personalisation, not just its restriction, is itself a meaningful intervention. This study's finding that 85.0% of respondents believe AI algorithms affect the content they see, and that 89.3% report privacy concern related to AI, reflects this same dual awareness of personalisation's convenience and its costs.

2.4 Deepfakes and Misinformation

Research on synthetic media consistently finds that audiences struggle to reliably distinguish AI-manipulated content from authentic material, and that this difficulty has measurable effects on opinion and trust. Momeni's (2025) analysis of audience reactions to a political deepfake video found that a majority of viewers believed the fabricated video was genuine, and that this belief measurably shifted their stated voting intentions — direct evidence that deepfakes are not merely a technical curiosity but a practical threat to informed judgement. These findings align with this study's data: 67.3% of respondents report encountering deepfakes at least occasionally, and 88.7% agree that AI-generated news may increase misinformation. Given that the present sample is drawn primarily from Uttar Pradesh and the wider National Capital Region of India, it is notable that India's own regulatory response has accelerated over the same period: amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 — introducing the category of 'synthetically generated information' and requiring clear, prominent labelling of such content — took effect in November 2025

and were further revised in early 2026 (Law.asia, 2026; Freshfields, 2026).

2.5 Regulation and Transparency

Policy responses to these concerns have converged on transparency and disclosure as a primary regulatory lever. The European Union's AI Act, which entered into force in August 2024, requires that AI-generated or manipulated content — particularly deepfakes and text produced on matters of public interest — be clearly and visibly labelled, with machine-readable marking obligations for providers of generative AI systems (European Commission, 2024; Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, Article 50). Comparable labelling requirements have been introduced or proposed in other jurisdictions. This regulatory direction mirrors public sentiment captured in the present survey, where 81.0% of respondents support labelling AI-generated content and 88.3% support stricter regulation more broadly — indicating that public demand for transparency already exceeds, or at minimum matches, the pace of formal regulatory rollout.

2.6 Synthesis and Positioning of the Present Study

Taken together, the literature suggests a public and professional consensus that AI substantially improves the efficiency of content production and personalisation, while simultaneously eroding the trust infrastructure on which journalism and digital media depend — a tension policymakers are now attempting to address through disclosure and labelling requirements. This study contributes India-

based survey evidence to a literature currently dominated by North American, European, and East Asian samples, and provides a quantitative counterpart to the qualitative, industry-practitioner perspective reported in the companion paper from this same doctoral project.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional, quantitative survey design using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument combined single-choice, multiple-choice, and ordinal (agreement-scale) items to capture demographic information, digital media usage patterns, and attitudes toward AI in digital media.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The survey yielded 300 valid responses after data cleaning. Respondents were reached through convenience and snowball sampling, with the sample geographically concentrated in Meerut and the wider National Capital Region of India — Meerut, Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, and Bijnor account for the entirety of the cleaned sample. Data collection took place in July 2026.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire comprised 45 items grouped into three sections: (1) demographic and digital media usage profile (7 items); (2) AI awareness, tool familiarity, and usage frequency (6 items); and (3) attitudinal items measuring perceptions of AI's effect on content

creation, creativity, journalism, trust, personalisation, misinformation, privacy, and regulation (32 items), primarily using 4- and 5-point agreement or frequency scales.

3.4 Data Analysis

Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) for all items, and cross-tabulations were computed to explore relationships between AI familiarity, age group, and key attitudinal outcomes (trust in AI-generated news, usage frequency, and overall sentiment toward AI). Multi-select items (e.g., tool awareness, purpose of use) were analysed both as combined response patterns and by decomposing into individual tool/purpose mentions where relevant. No inferential significance testing (e.g., chi-square) was performed in this initial descriptive pass; the author may wish to add formal significance testing for the dissertation version of this paper.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age group	25–34	86	28.7%
	35–44	80	26.7%
	55 & Above	70	23.3%
	45–54	46	15.3%
	19–24	13	4.3%
	16–18	5	1.7%
Gender	Female	165	55.0%
	Male	135	45.0%
Occupation	Employed	149	49.7%
	Self-Employed	70	23.3%
	Homemaker	31	10.3%
	College Student	14	4.7%
	Other (Teacher, Retired, etc.)	36	12.0%
Education	Postgraduate	192	64.0%
	Undergraduate	47	15.7%
	Doctorate	17	5.7%
	Secondary / Higher Secondary / Diploma	22	7.3%
	Other	22	7.3%
Daily digital media use	1–3 hours	179	59.7%
	3–5 hours	58	19.3%
	Less than 1 hour	42	14.0%
	More than 5 hours	21	7.0%
Primary access device	Smartphone	275	91.7%
	Laptop/Desktop	11	3.7%
	Other (Tablet, Smart TV, unspecified)	14	4.6%

The sample skews toward mid-career, well-educated, urban respondents: 70.7% fall in the 25–54 age range, 64.0% hold a postgraduate degree, and 91.7% access digital media primarily via smartphone. The sample is drawn entirely from five cities — Meerut (71.7%), Delhi (17.3%), Bijnor (5.3%),

Gurugram (4.0%), and Noida (1.7%) — following removal of a small number of outlier responses from other locations during data cleaning. This profile should be kept in mind when generalising findings — the sample under-represents school-age and very young adult users (16–24 years combined: 6.0%).

4.2 AI Awareness and Usage

Item	Category	n	%
Familiarity with AI	Very Familiar	161	53.7%
	Somewhat Familiar	106	35.3%
	Heard About It	23	7.7%
	Not Familiar	10	3.3%
Frequency of AI tool use	Daily	146	48.7%
	Occasionally	105	35.0%
	Weekly	25	8.3%
	Never	24	8.0%
How first learned about AI	School/College/Workplace	85	28.3%
	Friends/Family	84	28.0%
	Social Media	83	27.7%
	Internet Search	23	7.7%
	News Media	18	6.0%

Familiarity with AI is high: 89.0% of respondents reported being at least somewhat familiar with the concept, and only 3.3% reported no familiarity at all. Usage is similarly widespread — 57.0% use AI tools at least weekly, led by ChatGPT, which appears (alone or in combination

with other tools) in the large majority of tool-awareness responses, followed by Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Canva AI tools. Work (59 respondents citing it as a standalone primary use) and study/learning (38) were the leading single-category uses, though many respondents

selected multiple use-cases simultaneously (e.g., work plus writing plus information search).

4.3 Perceptions of AI in Content Creation and Creativity

Statement	% Agree/Strongly Agree or Yes-equivalent
AI knowledge is important in today's digital world	85.7%
AI has made content creation easier	90.0%
AI has reduced the time required for content production	88.3%
AI tools improve creativity in digital media	81.0%
AI-generated content is as engaging as human-created content	60.3%
Excessive dependence on AI may reduce human creativity	91.0%

Respondents overwhelmingly credit AI with making content creation faster and easier, and a large majority (81.0%) believe AI tools improve creativity. Yet a smaller majority (60.3%) considers AI-generated content as engaging as human-created content, and an even larger share (91.0%) simultaneously worries that excessive dependence on AI could reduce human creativity — indicating that respondents distinguish between AI as a productivity aid and AI as a creative substitute. This pattern mirrors experimental findings that generative AI can raise perceived quality while

simultaneously narrowing the diversity and originality of output (Doshi & Hauser, 2024), and controlled comparisons of AI- and human-generated ideas that find AI systems struggle specifically to distinguish original from conventional output even when they generate it fluently (Guzik, Byrge, & Gilde, 2023).

4.4 Trust, Authenticity, and Misinformation

Statement	Key finding
Trust in AI-generated news article	Only 8.0% would trust it completely; 33.7% would not trust it at all; 45.0% partially
Encountered deepfakes/manipulated AI media	67.3% at least occasionally; 30.3% frequently
Unable to identify whether content was AI-generated	75.0% at least sometimes; 22.7% frequently
AI-generated news may increase misinformation	88.7% agree or strongly agree
AI-generated misinformation can negatively impact society	91.7% agree or strongly agree
AI-generated visuals/videos can influence audience perception	67.0% yes; 27.7% maybe

Trust emerges as the area of greatest public concern. Despite high adoption and generally positive views of AI's productivity benefits, respondents are markedly skeptical about AI-generated news specifically, and three-quarters report having been unable, at least sometimes, to distinguish AI-generated from human-generated content. This

mirrors the trust gap documented internationally, where audiences consistently rate AI-produced or AI-labelled news as less credible than human-authored equivalents regardless of objective quality (Simon et al., 2025). This combination — high usage alongside low trust in AI-authored news — is discussed further in Section 5.

4.5 Journalism, Personalization, and Public Opinion

Statement	Key finding
AI is changing the future of journalism	80.7% agree or strongly agree
AI can help journalists in...	53.7% selected "All of the Above" (writing, data analysis, fact-checking, video editing)
AI can replace human journalists	33.0% "cannot replace"; 45.3% "partially"; 9.0% "completely"
AI algorithms affect the type of content seen online	85.0% agree or strongly agree
Noticed personalised recommendations becoming more accurate	60.3% yes
AI affects public opinion through digital media	85.0% agree or strongly agree
Concerned about privacy issues related to AI	89.3% highly or moderately concerned

A clear majority sees AI as reshaping journalism and believes algorithmic curation actively shapes what content they see and, by extension, public opinion — consistent with filter-bubble effects documented in the personalisation literature (Pariser, 2011). Notably, respondents are divided rather than dismissive on the question of AI replacing journalists: only a third believe journalists cannot be replaced at all, while the plurality (45.3%) sees

partial placement as likely — suggesting an expectation of AI-human hybrid newsrooms rather than wholesale automation, a view also reflected in systematized reviews of the automated-journalism literature, which identify human-machine collaboration (rather than replacement) as one of the field's dominant themes (Bartleman, Schapals, & Dubois, 2026; Diakopoulos, 2019).

4.6 Support for Transparency and Regulation

Statement	Key finding
AI-generated content should be clearly labelled	81.0% yes
Digital platforms should disclose AI use in recommendations/generation	90.7% agree or strongly agree
Stricter regulation of AI-generated media content is needed	88.3% yes
Would support AI integration in education and media industries	62.3% support or strongly support; 11.0% oppose
Overall, AI has a positive impact on digital media	69.3% somewhat/highly positive; 21.3% neutral; 9.3% somewhat/highly negative

Support for transparency and regulation is the most consistent finding across the dataset: roughly nine in ten respondents want AI use disclosed and want stricter regulation, figures that exceed even the already-high agreement on AI's productivity benefits. This finding pre-empts, and arguably outpaces, the pace of formal policy: the EU AI Act's own labelling and disclosure obligations for AI-generated content did not take full effect until August 2026 (European Commission, 2024),

well after most respondents in this sample had already formed a preference for such transparency. Overall sentiment toward AI remains net positive (69.3% positive vs. 9.3% negative), but the gap between enthusiasm for AI's capabilities and demand for its regulation is striking.

4.7 Cross-Tabulation: Familiarity, Age, and Attitudes

Respondents who reported being "Very Familiar" with AI were considerably more trusting of AI-generated news than less familiar respondents: 13.0% of the "Very Familiar" group said they would trust an AI-generated article completely, versus 1.9% of the "Somewhat Familiar" group and 0% of those "Not Familiar" with AI. Conversely, "Not at all" trust was highest among those only somewhat familiar (41.5%) and those who had merely "heard about" AI (43.5%), suggesting that partial exposure to AI concepts, without deeper familiarity, may correlate with heightened distrust — a pattern consistent with a "knowledge gap" effect worth further investigation.

Daily AI tool usage was highest among

the 35–44 age group (58.8%) and 25–34 age group (57.0%), and lowest among respondents aged 55 and above, only 31.4% of whom reported daily use, although this group had the highest rate of "occasional" use (45.7%). All respondents aged 16–18 reported daily AI tool use, hinting at near-total normalisation of AI tools among the youngest cohort in the sample, though this subgroup was very small ($n = 5$) and should be interpreted cautiously.

Overall sentiment toward AI's impact also tracked familiarity, though not perfectly linearly: 72.7% of "Very Familiar" respondents rated AI's impact as somewhat or highly positive, compared to 66.0% of "Somewhat Familiar" respondents and 69.6% of those who had merely "heard about" AI, versus only 50.0% of respondents "Not Familiar" with AI at all. This broadly suggests that deeper engagement with AI correlates with more favourable, not more critical, overall evaluation, even though it does not eliminate concerns about misinformation and regulation — reinforcing the 'adoption-anxiety paradox' discussed in Section 5.

5 Discussion

5.7 The Adoption–Anxiety Paradox

The central pattern in this dataset is what this paper terms the adoption-anxiety paradox: respondents are simultaneously heavy adopters of AI tools and strong advocates for AI regulation. Nearly 57% use AI tools weekly or more, and roughly nine in ten credit AI with easing content creation — yet an almost

identical proportion wants stricter regulation and mandatory labelling of AI-generated content. Rather than reflecting inconsistency, this pattern is more plausibly read as a nuanced public stance: respondents value AI as a productivity tool but do not want it to operate invisibly or unaccountably, particularly in contexts — like news and journalism — where authenticity and trust are paramount. This mirrors the global pattern identified by Simon et al. (2025), who found that publics increasingly expect AI to make news cheaper and faster while simultaneously rating AI-influenced news as less transparent and less trustworthy — the same capability/credibility split observed here.

5.8 Trust as the Central Fault Line

Trust, not capability, is the dimension on which public sentiment is most guarded. While respondents broadly agree AI improves efficiency and even creativity, only a small minority would fully trust an AI-generated news article, and three-quarters have struggled to distinguish AI from human content at least occasionally. This gap between capability and credibility echoes Diakopoulos's (2019) argument that algorithmic scale does not automatically confer algorithmic accountability, and is a recurring theme in the companion qualitative study, where media professionals similarly described AI as valuable for speed but requiring continuous human verification before publication.

5.9 Journalism in Transition, Not Replacement

The data do not support a narrative of imminent, wholesale automation of journalism. Instead, respondents anticipate a hybrid model in which AI assists but does not replace human journalists

— a view that aligns with survey items on both journalist-replacement (only 8.4% expect complete replacement) and journalist-assistance (54.1% see AI helping across writing, data analysis, fact-checking, and video editing simultaneously).

5.10 Implications for Platforms and Policy

5.10.1 Mandatory or default labelling of AI-generated content would align with the preference of over 80% of respondents and could help rebuild the trust gap identified above.

5.10.2 Platform-level disclosure of algorithmic personalisation is strongly desired (90.9%) and may be a lower-friction policy lever than content labelling.

5.10.3 Media literacy interventions may be particularly valuable for the "partially familiar" segment, who showed the highest distrust — targeted education, rather than blanket warnings, may reduce anxiety without discouraging beneficial adoption.

6 Limitations

- The sample was drawn via convenience and snowball sampling and is geographically concentrated

(67.2% from Meerut), limiting generalisability beyond this population.

- The sample skews toward older, more educated respondents; only 5.9% were aged 16–24, restricting insight into younger digital natives' perspectives.
- Self-reported familiarity and usage frequency are subject to social-desirability and recall bias.
- No formal inferential statistical testing (e.g., chi-square, regression) was applied in this descriptive analysis; observed cross-tabulation differences should be treated as indicative rather than statistically confirmed.
- The survey instrument did not capture which specific news or content domains respondents had the most direct experience with, limiting the precision of trust-related findings.

7 Conclusion

This survey of 300 respondents demonstrates that AI has achieved substantial penetration into everyday digital media use, with most respondents familiar with and actively using AI tools, and a strong majority crediting AI with making content creation faster, easier, and more creative. At the same time, the same respondents express deep reservations about trust, authenticity, and misinformation, and overwhelmingly favour transparency and regulation. Rather than a simple techno-optimist or techno-skeptic public, the data reveal an engaged and discerning audience that wants the benefits of AI in digital media without surrendering the ability to know when, and how, AI has been used. These

findings set the stage for the companion qualitative paper in this doctoral project, which explores how digital media and communication professionals are navigating this same tension from inside the industry.

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