

Chapter 11

Integration of Artificial Intelligence Into Austrian Journalism: A Potential Threat to Austrian Journalism?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to highlight the changes that journalism in Austria should expect. The authors analyse the data collected on Austrians' habits of consuming news through intelligent virtual assistants (IVAs). Furthermore, the importance and potential of the devices run by artificial intelligence (AI), such as IVAs and natural language generation software, are highlighted. The status quo and Austrian journalists' knowledge about IVAs and their predictions about the attitude of citizens towards those devices are outlined. AI in journalism industry is not only discussed as an assistant to ease the workflow of journalists in Austria; it is also represented as a potential threat which creates filter bubbles due to personalized news consumption through IVAs.

INTRODUCTION

Today, AI virtually has penetrated into all modern life, including the way we report it. Voice activated technologies are embedded not only in our smartphones, but also other devices such as smart home speakers (e.g. Amazon Echo or Google Home). News articles can be generated by algorithms using AI in the newsrooms. Whereas human journalists were thought to be a crucial part for the news generating process, contemporary IT tools enable machines to create content autonomously. The human journalist then can, or preferably should, read over the content generated by algorithms for its accuracy.

Thus, the ever-increasing demand for news on digital devices and the availability of structured data make the need of automation in journalism more popular than ever (Thurmann et. al., 2017). The journalism industry in its current existence is suffering from this pressure. Although there is some research covering

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the impact of IVAs and automation on the journalism industry in USA, UK and Germany, such analyses about journalism in Austria do not exist. Thus, this body of work is aimed at filling in the existing gap.

With regards to data collected on the utilisation of IVAs for news generation in Austria, it can be viewed as an extension of the former research conducted by the Chamber of Labour in Austria about IVAs (Krieger-Lamina et. al., 2019), which lacked detailed information about the utilisation of these devices in Austria.

The study about Virtual Assistants published in June 2019 by the Chamber of Labour in Austria is currently the only official study conducted to analyse Virtual Assistants with a focus on Austria. In their study, Krieger-Lamina et. al. (2019) write about a boom of expansion of Virtual Assistants within the last couple of years. While this is a very broad study that gives an overview about the status quo of Virtual Assistants in general, it lacks in-depth information about Austrians' attitude towards these devices and information about their utilisation habits.

The novelty of this chapter lies in its analysis and discussion of the collected data about Austrians IVA utilisation and the following objectives it sets to achieve:

- To signify the scope of use of IVAs for news briefings in Austria
- To show if Austrian journalists are aware of the potential changes required in news production and distribution due to audience's consumption of news via IVAs
- To discuss the potential threats following this innovation and define the steps that need to be taken in the current state of Austrian journalism to tackle those.

Through both, a quantitative and qualitative approach, the author has collected data to analyse these threats. She has also created a model to visualise and point out the risks following the integration of automated journalism into Austrian news media, by providing a step by step understanding of how this would lead to personalised news. A model of these two technologies combined has not been discussed in previous studies.

This chapter provides the readers with an understanding of two major technologies, automated journalism and IVAs, and gives an overview of the current state of research conducted about IVAs and automation in Austria. It also addresses the questions of integrating AI into Austrian journalism, the use of news briefing tools of IVAs in Austrian homes and whether this could be a potential threat to Austrian journalism. This is done by analysing the questionnaire results about the consumption of news through IVAs in Austria, based on demographic and geographic characteristics, comparing them with other countries and providing a risk assessment of the technologies involved. Recommendations on how to overcome the challenges and threats to Austrian journalism industry and exploit opportunities for long-term benefits, in the wake of these innovations, are also discussed.

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