PART 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM: THE RISE OF THE ROBOT REPORTER

A

Algorithmic journalism is best understood not as a single invention but as a convergence of newsroom economics and computational linguistics. What is often labelled the "robot reporter" typically relies on Natural Language Generation (NLG): software that converts numerical or categorical inputs into grammatically plausible narratives. This approach first flourished in finance and sport for a simple structural reason: these beats supply abundant *structured data*—earnings figures, league tables, match statistics—that can be mapped onto templates with relatively low ambiguity. Early outputs were short and formulaic, yet they established a precedent: if the informational substrate is standardised, textual production can be routinised. Over time, the same logic spread into routine public-safety updates and local business briefs, prompting a definitional dispute about whether the production of sentences from datasets constitutes "journalism" or merely automated description.

B

Proponents argue that the ethical and professional value of automation lies less in replacing reporters than in augmenting them. At scale, software can publish thousands of near-instant summaries—quarterly results, election precinct updates, weather disruptions—thus expanding coverage where human capacity is finite. More subtly, algorithmic systems can function as detection tools: by scanning large datasets, they can flag anomalies, outliers, or irregular spending patterns that deserve scrutiny. In this account, automation operates as a partner in the investigative process, performing the first-pass monitoring that would otherwise be too slow or too labour-intensive. Supporters claim that this redistribution of effort frees journalists to focus on interpretation, source-building, and accountability reporting—activities that require social judgement rather than computational speed.

C

Critics accept the efficiency gains yet question what is traded away. A common objection is "fluency without understanding": automated prose can sound authoritative while lacking the contextual reasoning that human reporting supplies. If the underlying dataset is incomplete, poorly defined, or simply wrong, the output may reproduce those errors with an air of precision, misleading readers who confuse grammatical competence with epistemic reliability. Beyond accuracy, there is a deeper agenda-setting concern. Because

automation works best when inputs are quantifiable, it tends to prioritise what is measurable—crime counts, prices, attendance, test scores—while sidelining issues that resist clean metrics and require field reporting, narrative explanation, or ethical interpretation. Over time, this can reshape editorial attention, pulling coverage toward data-rich topics and away from the social realities that are hardest to encode.

D

The problem of bias is therefore not restricted to “bad data”; it is also embedded in design. Choices about which variables matter, which thresholds trigger an alert, which comparisons are deemed relevant, and which baselines are treated as “normal” all shape the narrative that appears to be objective. A crime dashboard, for instance, may highlight particular neighbourhoods depending on how incidents are counted, which time windows are selected, and whether population-adjusted rates are used. Similarly, automated business reporting can frame a company as “surging” or “slumping” based on arbitrary cut-offs or selective peer groups. These decisions are value-laden, yet they can be obscured behind computational authority. Without transparency, audiences may not recognise that automated text is not neutral description but a mediated product shaped by parameter settings that encode implicit priorities.

E

Economic incentives intensify these dynamics. As advertising revenue migrated to platforms and digital ad rates undercut print, publishers searched for cheaper ways to produce content at scale. Algorithmic writing can reduce marginal costs for routine updates and satisfy demand for constant freshness—an advantage in markets where attention is monetised through volume and speed. Yet the same economics can encourage commodification: a flood of low-value articles optimised for search or platform distribution, competing for clicks rather than contributing to public understanding. Some organisations worry that when automation becomes a strategy for mass production, it erodes differentiation and weakens brand identity, because readers encounter interchangeable recaps rather than distinctive reporting. In this scenario, efficiency becomes a trap: content grows, but trust and loyalty thin out.

F

Ethics and liability become most visible when automation fails. If an automated article wrongly reports a company’s bankruptcy, misattributes a quote, or misidentifies a suspect, responsibility can be difficult to assign. Editors may have approved the practice but lack the technical literacy to audit the model’s logic under deadline pressure. Vendors may insist that the underlying code is *proprietary*, treating the system as a black box whose internal rules are commercially protected. This creates a governance dilemma:

accountability is demanded by audiences and regulators, yet explanation is constrained by commercial secrecy and technical complexity. Many newsrooms respond with human oversight requirements, correction protocols, and audit trails, but implementing these consistently is difficult when automation is deployed precisely to accelerate output. The ethical question is not whether errors will occur—they will—but whether institutional arrangements make it possible to detect, explain, and correct them without shifting blame onto the least informed actor.

G

Concerns about labour add a sociological dimension. Automation may displace entry-level writing roles that traditionally served as training grounds for young journalists, potentially narrowing the pipeline into the profession. At the same time, new roles can emerge: computational editors who manage templates and exceptions, data journalists who maintain pipelines, and auditors who test systems for bias and failure modes. Whether the workforce becomes smaller or simply different depends on managerial intent and investment in training. If automation is treated as a cost-cutting substitute, deskilling may follow; if it is treated as augmentation, upskilling becomes plausible. The passage does not claim a definitive net job outcome, because such outcomes vary by organisation, labour market, and the extent to which automation is paired with reinvestment in human expertise.

H

In the long run, public legitimacy may turn on disclosure, standards, and institutional trust. Some readers accept machine-written recaps—especially for routine domains—provided they are clearly labelled, while others view undisclosed automation as deceptive, interpreting it as an attempt to pass off low-cost production as human craft. Disclosure can also help audiences interpret limitations, such as when a report is generated from a single dataset with known blind spots. Yet transparency has trade-offs: publishers may fear that labelling reduces perceived value, even when accuracy is high. This is why governance matters. Auditing standards, bias testing, documentation, and correction norms can determine whether automated reporting enhances newsroom capacity responsibly or accelerates a credibility crisis. Ultimately, the robot reporter is unlikely to disappear; what will vary is whether it functions as assistant, amplifier, or substitute—and whether overall *trust* is strengthened or undermined by how the technology is governed.

Questions 14–19

Which paragraph contains the following information?

14 Publishers may experiment with automation partly because advertising revenue has shifted to platforms.

15 Early automation was most feasible in fields where information is highly structured.

16 Critics argue automation may push coverage toward topics that are easiest to quantify.

17 Trust may depend on whether machine-written content is openly disclosed to readers.

18 The passage suggests that design choices can shape the “objective” appearance of automated reporting.

19 Supporters argue automation can highlight unusual patterns that journalists can investigate further.

Questions 20–23

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

20 The passage suggests that algorithmic journalism invariably improves the quality of news reporting.

21 The passage indicates that automated stories may reproduce mistakes present in the input data.

22 The passage states that vendors sometimes keep key details of their systems hidden for proprietary reasons.

23 The passage states that most automated journalism systems are currently used by local newspapers rather than national outlets.

Questions 24–26

Complete the table below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Automation in newsrooms

Aspect	**Context**	**Key factor**
Initial adoption	Finance and sport supplied abundant structured data.	Templates could be used with relatively low **24** ..... .

Aspect	Context	Key factor
Error accountability	After an automated report failed, **25** ..... could be difficult to assign.	Proprietary code and technical complexity could restrict explanations.
Public legitimacy	Long-term acceptance depended on effective governance.	Inadequate governance could accelerate a **26** ..... crisis.

Answer Key

14. E
15. A
16. C
17. H
18. D
19. B
20. FALSE
21. TRUE
22. TRUE
23. NOT GIVEN
24. ambiguity
25. responsibility
26. credibility