

[The 2024 Computation + Journalism Symposium](#)

October 25-27, 2024

Hosted by Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

<https://easychair.org/conferences/submitted?a=33045128&submission=6955921&track=317843>

Kristi Tanner, PhD

Data Reporter

Detroit Free Press

Wayne State University part-time faculty

ktanner@freepress.com

Anjanette Delgado

Project Editor

Formerly Detroit Free Press

afrdelgado@gmail.com

Stephen Harding

Senior Product Manager, News Automation & AI

Gannett

sharding@gannett.com

Missing in Detroit: Creating a framework for equitable reporting and minimizing harm

Every day on average, nine people are reported missing in Detroit. Journalists are inundated with more emails and social media posts than they can manage from law enforcement looking for assistance from the public to solve missing person cases. Historically, socioeconomic factors such as race, gender, education, age and income have unfairly elevated coverage of some over others.

This talk will explain the automation process we created to cover every missing person reported in Detroit and keep track of when people are found – a machine learning and NLG workflow with journalists in the loop. We will review research and decisions made prior to publication to reduce harm and increase the opportunity for impact.

We're excited to show the careful considerations that newsrooms have to make when working with AI and sensitive subjects.

For example, after further research and a conversation with [Karen Shalev](#), professor of missing person studies at the University of Portsmouth, England, we are weighing including the first name only of missing children. Dropping the last name of missing youths aims to reduce the digital footprint for children who are later recovered where the "right to be forgotten" does not currently exist.

Another edit, a change in frequency and format, except in the case of serious missing alerts, was made after reading the work of Lampinen & Moore (2016) who discuss public fatigue and the “car alarm effect.”

Finally, we will continue conversations we are having with residents, law enforcement and researchers on increasing media coverage of missing persons without increasing vulnerabilities.

References:

Lampinen, J. & Moore, K. (2016). Missing person alerts: Does repeated exposure decrease their effectiveness? *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 12, 587–598. DOI 10.1007/s11292-016-9263-1

Drivsholm, M., Moralis, M., Shalev-Greene, K., & Woolnough, P. (2017). Once Missing Never Forgotten: Results of scoping research on the impact of publicity appeals in missing children cases. *Missing Children Europe*. https://pure.port.ac.uk/ws/files/7514950/Once_Missing_Never_Forgotten_final.pdf