Should the media tell you when they use AI to report the news? What consumers should know

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the media landscape, both for news organizations and consumers. Applications such as ChatGPT, Bard,

and Bing AI are creating new possibilities to assist in writing and researching the news, but these also raise ethical concerns.

One of the most pressing questions for news organizations is whether consumers should be told when they are reading a story created, or aided by, use of AI. Some, such as the technology magazine Wired and the BBC are already doing this, but other media outlets are not.

There are several arguments for and against disclosing this kind of information.

First, it would help to ensure transparency and accountability. Consumers should know how the news they are consuming is being produced, and they should be able to make informed choices about whether or not to trust it.

Second, disclosure could help mitigate the risks of bias. AI systems are trained using data, and that data can reflect the biases of the people who created it. As a result, AI-generated content can sometimes be biased. By requiring disclosure, consumers would be able to be aware of this potential bias and take it into account when evaluating the information.

Third, disclosure could help to protect consumers from misinformation . AI systems can be used to generate fake news, making it difficult for consumers to distinguish between real and fake news. By requiring disclosure, consumers would be able to be more skeptical of AI-generated content and be more likely to verify it before sharing it.

Against disclosure

One concern is that it could stifle innovation. If news organizations are required to disclose every time they use AI, they may be less likely to experiment with the technology.

Another is that disclosure could be [confusing for consumers](link). Not everyone understands how AI works. Some people may be suspicious of AI-generated content. Requiring disclosure could make it more difficult for consumers to get the information they need.

How things could play out

Here are a couple of examples to illustrate these concerns:

Imagine a news organization is using AI to perform real-time fact-checking and verification of statements made by public figures during [live events](link), such as political debates or press conferences. An AI system could rapidly identify inaccuracies and provide viewers with accurate information in real-time.

However, if the news organization were required to disclose the use of AI each time, it might lead to a reluctance to deploy such a tool. The fear of public perception and potential backlash could deter news outlets from leveraging AI to enhance the accuracy of their reporting, ultimately depriving the audience of a valuable service.

Another scenario involves AI-driven personalized news curation. Many news platforms use AI algorithms to tailor news content to individual readers' preferences, ensuring they receive information that aligns with their interests.

If news organizations were compelled to disclose the use of AI in this context, readers might become wary of perceived manipulation. This apprehension could deter news outlets from investing in AI-driven personalization, limiting their ability to engage and retain audiences in an increasingly competitive media landscape.

To mitigate these risks, publications such as the New York Times are

offering "enhanced bylines" that include more details about the journalists behind the stories and details about how the story was produced.

Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to require disclosure is a complex one.

However, it is essential to have a public conversation about this issue so that we can develop policies that protect consumers and promote responsible journalism, and retain and improve trust in journalism, which is falling in some countries.

In addition to disclosure, there are other things that news organizations can do to ensure that AI is used ethically and responsibly. They should develop clear guidelines for the use of AI. These guidelines should address issues such as bias, transparency and accountability. They should invest in training and education for their staff. Journalists need to understand how AI works and how to use it responsibly.

Finally, news organizations should work with highly informed groups such as Harvard's Neiman Lab, those working on policy, technology companies and academics, to develop ethical standards for using AI and tackle emerging issues critical to the future of public-interest news.

The use of AI tools in news is a significant development . It is vital to have a thoughtful and informed conversation about this technology's potential benefits and risks. By working together, we can ensure that AI is used in a way that serves the public interest and upholds the values of responsible journalism.

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