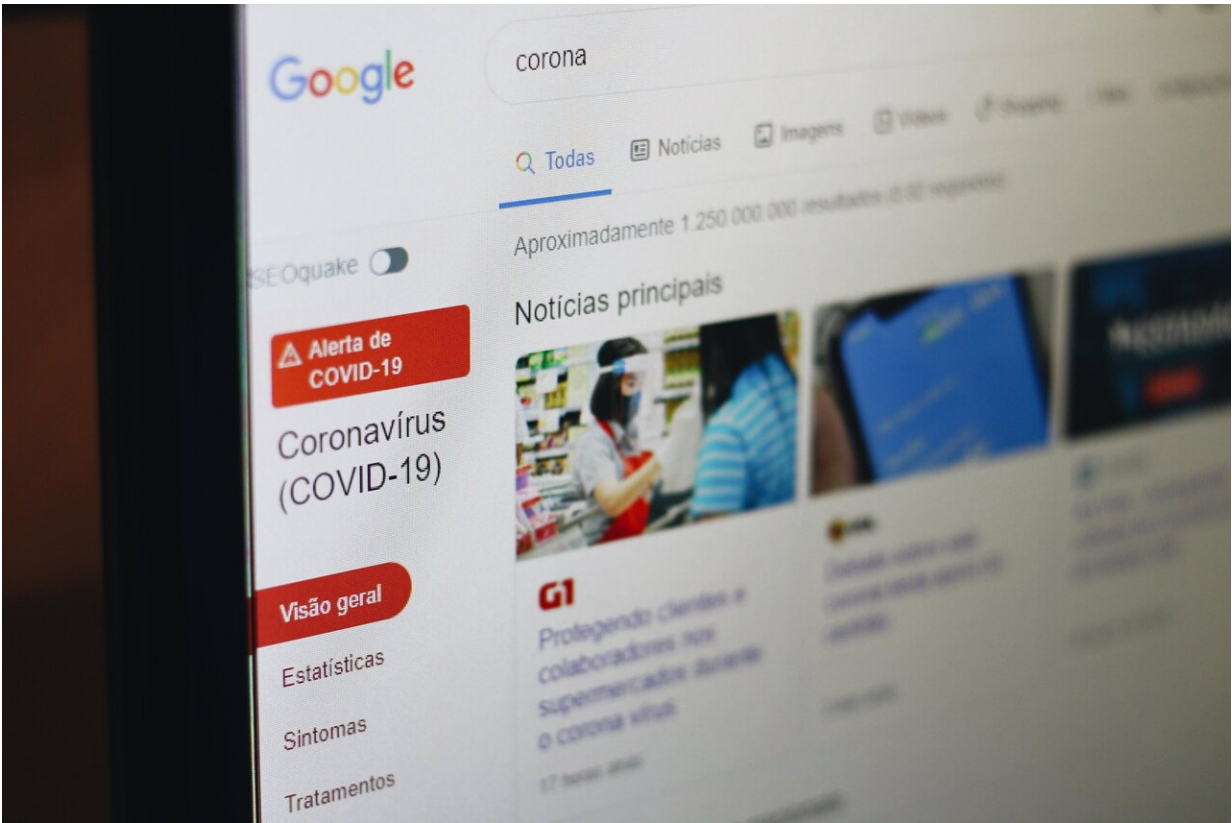


People are worried about the media using AI for stories of consequence, but less so for sports and entertainment

June 20 2024, by Amy Ross Arguedas and Nic Newman



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are disrupting many aspects of modern life, and the news industry is no exception. In a year with [a record-breaking](#) number of elections worldwide, there has been considerable soul-searching about the potential effect of so-called "deepfakes," and other synthetic content, on democracies. There have also been further disruptions to the business models and trust underpinning independent journalism.

Most audiences are just starting to form opinions about AI and news, but in this year's [Digital News Report survey](#), which we produced at the University of Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, we included questions about the subject in 28 markets, backed up with in-depth interviews in the UK, US and Mexico.

Our findings reveal a high level of ambivalence about the use of these technologies. They also offer insights to publishers looking to implement the technologies without further eroding trust in news, which has fallen in many countries in recent years.

It is important to keep in mind that awareness of AI is still relatively low, with around half of our sample (49% globally and 56% in the UK) having read little or nothing about it. However, concerns about the accuracy of information and the potential for misinformation are top of the list when talking to those who are better informed.

Manipulated images and videos, for example around the war in Gaza, are increasingly common on [social media](#) and are already causing confusion. As one male participant said, "I have seen many examples before, and they can sometimes be very good. Thankfully, they are still pretty easy to detect but within five years they will be indistinguishable."

Some participants felt widespread use of generative AI technologies—those that can produce content for users in text, images and video—would probably make identifying misinformation harder, which is especially worrying when it comes to important subjects, such as politics and elections.

Across 47 countries, 59% say they are worried about being able to tell what is real and fake on the internet, up three percentage points on last year. Others took a more optimistic view, noting that these technologies could be used to provide more relevant and useful content.

Use of AI by the news industry

The news industry [is turning to AI](#) for two reasons. First, they hope that automating behind-the-scenes processes such as transcription, copyediting and layout will reduce costs. Second, AI technologies could help personalize the content itself, making it more appealing for audiences.

In the last year, we have seen [media companies](#) deploying a range of AI solutions, with varying degrees of human oversight, from AI-generated summaries and illustrations to stories written by AI robots and even AI-generated newsreaders.

How do audiences feel about all of this? Across 28 markets, our [survey respondents](#) were mostly uncomfortable with the use of AI when content is created mostly by AI with some human oversight. By contrast, there is less discomfort when AI is used to assist (human) journalists, for example, in transcribing interviews or summarizing materials for research.

Here, respondents are broadly more comfortable than uncomfortable. However, we see country-level differences, possibly linked to cues

people are getting from the media. British press coverage of AI, for example, has been characterized as largely negative and sensationalist, while US media narratives are shaped by the leading role of US companies and the opportunities for jobs and growth.

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