6 things to know about AI

Artificial intelligence technology is not new, but dramatic advances in generative AI have captured the world’s attention and are transforming the information landscape. Here are six news literacy takeaways and implications to keep in mind as this technology continues to evolve.

1. Generative AI tools are not objective ...

They are subject to the biases of the humans who make them — and integrate any biases baked into their training data. Data sets often include copyrighted, misleading and overtly biased material. These tools do not just learn human biases; they can also amplify, extend and entrench them.

Researchers have raised concerns about AI chatbots generating misinformation and providing responses that include conspiracy theories, pseudoscience and harmful content.

2. ... or reliably factual.

AI tools might feel authoritative and credible, but the responses they generate are routinely riddled with inaccuracies.

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3. It’s not all bad.

It can be easy to get swept up in alarmist takes, but AI tools also have tremendous upsides. For example, they can boost scientific research and make complicated or specialized tasks more accessible, like writing computer code or building websites. Some news organizations use AI to responsibly automate certain tasks, such as The Associated Press using AI to compile corporate earnings and sports box scores.

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4. Content is easier than ever to create — and fake.

AI chatbots and image generators produce text and visuals at an unprecedented scale — and have the potential to supercharge the spread of misinformation. Some tools are even being used to produce fabricated news broadcasts using realistic-looking AI anchors. Be ready to encounter even more information with less transparency about its origin.

Traditional signals of credibility — such as clean writing, academic footnotes or sleek website design — are relatively easy to fake in today’s information landscape. But AI chatbots make them easier than ever to game — at scale. Skills like “lateral reading” become even more critical.

5. It signals a change in the nature of evidence.

Don’t let AI technology undermine your willingness to trust anything you see and hear. Just be careful about what you accept as authentic.

The rise of more convincing fake photos and videos means that finding the source and context for visuals is often more important than hunting for visual clues of authenticity. Any viral image you can’t verify through a reliable source — using a reverse image search, for example — should be approached with skepticism.

6. Reputable sources matter more than ever.

Credible sources follow processes to verify information before sharing it, and this should translate into higher levels of trust. Professional journalism ethics — such as fairness, transparency and accuracy — can be seen in the quality of information published by standards-based news organizations. Generative AI tools don’t show the same concern for truth, verification or the public interest.

News Literacy Project

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