Global audiences suspicious of AI-powered newsrooms, report finds

By **Sheila Dang**

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Figurines with computers and smartphones are seen in front of the words "Artificial Intelligence AI" in this illustration taken, February 19, 2024. REUTERS/Dado Ruvic/Illustration/File Photo Purchase Licensing Rights

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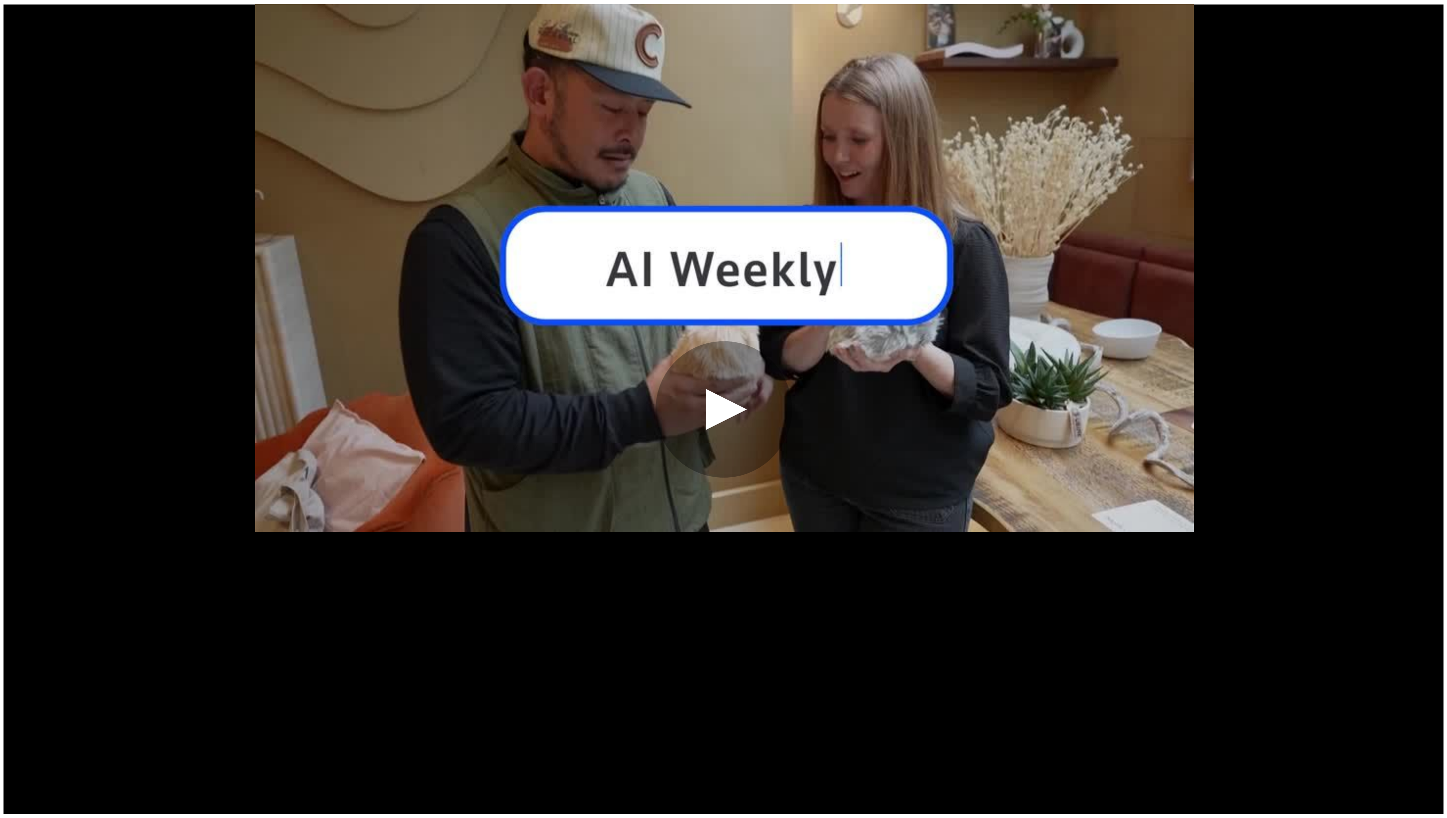
June 17 (Reuters) - Global concerns about the use of AI in news production and misinformation are growing, a report published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found, posing fresh challenges to newsrooms already struggling to engage audiences.

The institute's annual Digital News Report published on Monday, which this year is based on surveys of nearly 100,000 people across 47 countries, offers a picture of the hurdles news media faces in lifting revenue and sustaining business.



Newsrooms globally are working to address a new challenge with generative artificial intelligence, as tech giants and startups like Google and OpenAI build tools that can offer summaries of information and siphon traffic from news websites.

But the report found that consumers are suspicious about the use of AI to create news content, particularly for sensitive subjects such as politics.

According to the survey, 52% of U.S. respondents and 63% of UK respondents said they would be uncomfortable with news produced mostly with AI. The report surveyed 2,000 people in each country, noting that respondents were more comfortable with behind-the-scenes uses of AI to make journalists' work more efficient.

"It was surprising to see the level of suspicion," said Nic Newman, senior research associate at the Reuters Institute and lead author of the Digital News Report. "People broadly had fears about what might happen to content reliability and trust."

Concerns about false news content online rose by three percentage points from last year, with 59% of survey respondents saying they were worried. This figure was higher in South Africa and the U.S. at 81% and 72%, respectively, as both countries hold elections this year, the report said.

Another challenge facing news organizations is the general unwillingness of audiences to pay for news subscriptions. Following some growth during the pandemic, 17% of respondents across 20 countries said they paid for online news, a figure that has been unchanged for the past three years, the report said.

A significant proportion of news subscribers in the U.S. were also likely to be paying discounted rates due to trials or promotions, with 46% paying less than the full price for their subscriptions.

TURNING TO ALTERNATIVES

News influencers are playing a bigger role than mainstream media organizations in delivering the news to users of popular online platforms like TikTok.

In a survey of more than 5,600 TikTok users who said they used the app for news, 57% said they mostly paid attention to individual personalities, versus 34% who said they mainly followed journalists or news brands.

The findings show that newsrooms need to build a direct relationship with their audiences while also "strategically using the platforms to connect with people who are trickier to reach, like younger audiences," Newman said. "We see that these influencers have a bigger role on the platforms."

Vitus "V" Spehar, a TikTok creator with 3.1 million followers, was one news personality cited by some of the survey respondents. Spehar has become known for their unique style of delivering the top headlines of the day while laying on the floor under their desk, which they previously told Reuters is intended to offer a more gentle perspective on current events and contrast with a traditional news anchor who sits at a desk.

The Digital News Report surveyed people in the U.S., UK, France, Argentina and Brazil, asking them to name up to three mainstream or alternative accounts they follow for the news.

The top 10 individuals cited by respondents in the U.S. are most known for offering political commentary rather than original newsgathering, the report noted. These personalities included Tucker Carlson, a former Fox News anchor, Joe Rogan, who hosts the top podcast on Spotify and David Pakman, a progressive talk radio host.

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is funded by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Thomson Reuters (TRI.TO) .

Reporting by Sheila Dang in Dallas; Editing by Sam Holmes

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