Examining Public Attitudes Toward Generative AI for News in Four Nations

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Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has rapidly become a central topic in society and academia. Generative artificial intelligence leverages large language models (LLMs) and multimodal models to generate data and new content such as text, images, or audio (Feuerriegel et al., 2024). Alongside growing popularity of GenAI applications such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek, news organizations are also increasingly experimenting with and adopting these tools to assist journalists in their daily work (Diakopoulos et al., 2024).

However, the deployment of GenAI by news organizations can implicate journalism's core missions by delegating responsibilities to non-human, black-boxed entities. This ambiguity in veracity, neutrality, and authorship can challenge journalistic norms like accuracy, objectivity, accountability, and transparency.

Additionally, increasing reliance on GenAI wihtin journalism can fundamentally alter how trust is established and maintained between news organizations and their audiences. This is because audiences typically evaluate trustworthiness based on journalists' assessments of events, selectivity of topics and facts and accuracy of depictions (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). When technology mediates these tasks, trust building may depend on perceptions of GenAI's trustworthiness, which can then extend to overall evaluations of news media and future usage intentions (Bodó, 2021). Therefore, understanding how news audiences assess and trust GenAI for news-related purposes and its adoption within newsrooms is crucial.

Research Questions

Against this background, this conference presentation examines public assessments of GenAI for news-related purposes and its deployment by news media across four countries (the United States (US), Germany (DE), German-speaking Switzerland (CH), and Japan (JP)). Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do people a) use and b) understand generative AI, and c) how do they evaluate generative AI, especially for news-related purposes?

RQ2: For what purposes do people a) think generative AI is currently used in newsrooms, and b) to what extent do they trust these uses by journalists?

RQ3: How do uses, knowledge, and evaluations of generative AI and its journalistic adoption vary between countries?

RQ4: How do individual-level and sociodemographic characteristics relate to news-related use, benefit/risk assessments, and trust evaluations of generative AI?

Our examination is primarily informed by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use, alongside other characteristics, predict technology acceptance and use (Davis, 1989; Davis & Granić, 2024). This model, along with related theories of attitude-behavior consistency and digital inequalities can help us understand how prior experience, subjective evaluations, and knowledge influence the adoption and assessment of GenAI for news.

Method

This study utilized a standardized, preregistered, cross-sectional quantitative survey. [1]Data were collected from May 29 to June 18, 2024, aiming for at least 1000 respondents per country after data cleaning. The four selected countries – the United States, Germany, German-speaking Switzerland, and Japan – were chosen to reflect macro-level differences in GenAI adoption rates, regulatory environments, media systems, and public discourse. These countries also offer geographic and linguistic diversity, allowing for robustness checks across diverse settings.

Sample

An international market research company recruited respondents, with samples stratified to be representative of the working-age population aged 18–64 by gender and region. This age cohort was prioritized due to more comparable access and motivation to adopt technology. The final sample after quality controls and removing speeders and straightliners comprised 4216 respondents with the following country-specific sample sizes: Germany: n = 1048, German-speaking Switzerland: n = 1063, Japan: n = 1038, and the United States: n = 1067. Sensitivity analyses comparing weighted and unweighted results for the 18-64 cohort showed no significant differences, therefore we report unweighted results. The overall sample included 50.56% females, with an average age of 43.22 (SD = 12.74), and an average political orientation of 6.36 (1 = left, 11 = right; SD = 2.16). Following ISCED's classification, 5.91% reported primary or lower secondary school, 59.91% higher secondary or short tertiary education, and 33.25% tertiary education as their highest qualification (0.93% preferred not to answer).

Measures

To measure key variables, we utilized several self-developed and established scales. For example, we measured *use frequency of generative AI* for news-related purposes with 11 self-developed items on a 7-point scale (1 = never to 7 = very frequently), focusing on news-adjacent activities like getting the latest news or learning about specific topics. These were combined into a mean index ($\alpha = .97$; M = 3.16, SD = 1.90). *Knowledge related to generative AI* was measured with six true/false items, informed by algorithmic literacy research, including, e.g., whether content generated by GenAI tools is always factually correct. Answers were combined into an additive index (0-6) ($\alpha = 0.69$; M = 2.47, SD = 1.82).[2]

[1] The preregistration and the full survey instrument are available here: https://osf.io/frpcu/?view_only=d44e0260d9474130bf26dee62254a796
[2] Due to space limitations, we do not report all measures and indices here.

Analytical Approach

The study's findings for the first three research questions (RQ1-RQ3) are presented through a narrative structure organized around key variables. To answer RQ4, four multivariate linear regressions were computed, with dependent variables including GenAI use for news-related purposes, perceived benefits, perceived concerns, and trust in journalistic GenAI use. Independent variables included factual AI knowledge, general news media use, learning about GenAI from social media/news media, gender, educational attainment, and age. Country dummies, with the United States as the reference category, were included to examine cross-country differences.

Findings

In the following, due to submission length limitations, we desciptively report several noteworthy key findings which we will expand on and visualize in the conference presentation.

Overall, respondents across countries do not use GenAI applications extensively. ChatGPT is the most popular (41%), followed by Gemini (19%) and Copilot (17%). Roughly 40% of respondents reported never using any listed app.Usage is most widespread in the United States (66%), followed by Switzerland (60%) and Germany (50%), with Japan having the lowest usage (41%).

In terms of news-adjacent purposes, GenAI tools are primarily used to learn about specific topics (M = 3.55), get factual answers (M = 3.49), and find solutions to daily problems (M=3.43). People rarely rely on GenAI for voting advice (M = 2.68), learning about political issues (M = 2.86), or getting the latest news (M = 3.04).Users who have used GenAI for news-related aims do not necessarily perceive it to be very reliable (M = 4.68).

Respondents acknowledge numerous benefits and concerns. Most opportunities are seen in GenAI's ability to take over repetitive tasks (M = 5.15), detect patterns and trends (M = 5.07), and save time (M = 5.05). Fewer respondents agree that GenAI enhances human creativity (M = 4.36) or provides personalized responses (M = 4.45). Positive assessments are more pronounced in the US (M = 5.11) than in Germany (M = 4.62), Switzerland (M = 4.57), and Japan (M = 4.55).

Nevertheless, risk assessments are generally higher than benefit assessments. Respondents are most concerned about GenAI being used to trick people (M = 5.29), causing job loss (M = 5.13), and providing one-sided information (M = 5.10). Concerns about outdated information (M = 4.60) or loss of common discussion ground (M = 4.75) are less pronounced. US respondents perceive higher concerns (M = 5.25) than those in Switzerland (M = 5.13), Germany (M = 5.03), and Japan (M = 4.59). Respondents in Japan consistently perceive fewer risks.

At the same time, factual knowledge about GenAI is limited across countries. Only about 6% answered all six knowledge questions correctly, and 16% answered all incorrectly. Despite the highest adoption and subscription rates, US respondents have the lowest factual knowledge, answering fewer than two questions correctly on average. Swiss respondents exhibit the highest knowledge, answering roughly three questions correctly on average.

On average, respondents believe news organizations in their country already use GenAI (M = 4.19), primarily for creating graphs and visuals (M = 4.32), generating images (M = 4.31), developing headlines (M = 4.25), and writing (parts of) stories (M = 4.19). Perceived use is lowest for fact-checking (M = 4.01) and recommending content (M = 4.07). Perceived use is highest in the US ($M = 4.76$) and lowest in Japan ($M = 3.58$). Trust in journalists' responsible use of GenAI is moderate ($M = 3.93$): People do not necessarily trust news written with AI (M and believe GenAI could harm journalism's quality. Relatedly, there is a strong desire for transparent disclosure of GenAI use, especially for entirely AI-generated articles ($M = 5.60$).

Looking at individual-level differences in attitudes toward generative AI as per *RQ4,* multivariate linear regressions revealed several significant relationships. For example, perceived benefits strongly relate to GenAI use and trust assessments. When people acknowledge many benefits, they are more likely to use these tools and trust their journalistic adoption ($\beta = .49$). Higher factual AI knowledge is related to lower perceived benefits ($\beta = -.08$) and higher concerns ($\beta = .14$). Older people tend to use GenAI for news-adjacent purposes less ($\beta = -.19$), perceive more concerns ($\beta = .11$), and trust journalists slightly less to responsibly adopt GenAI ($\beta = -.11$). Non-female respondents use these tools more ($\beta = .14$) and acknowledge fewer concerns ($\beta = -.08$). Mirroring the descriptive findings, Japanese respondents have significantly different attitudes than Swiss, German and US respondents. Prominently, US respondents generally have significantly different attitudes and usage patterns. This could be attributed to the US's decentralized AI regulation, faster rollout, and tech-optimistic, yet increasingly critical, news coverage of AI misuse. The counterintuitive finding of lower AI knowledge despite higher adoption rates in the US suggests that a saturated information environment might impede accurate knowledge acquisition (see e.g., Cui & Wu, 2021).

Concluding Discussion

Our study provides crucial initial insights into public attitudes toward GenAI for news across diverse international contexts spanning three continents: Asia, Europe, and North America. The findings reveal that, as of mid-2024, the majority of respondents do not frequently use GenAI for news consumption and information seeking purposes (for similar findings, see Fletcher & Nielsen, 2024). Despite this, the public is not entirely against GenAI, recognizing its potential to free up time and resources. Simultaneously, citizens acknowledge various concerns, including job loss, one-sided information, and manipulation risks. A critical finding is the relatively low domain knowledge about GenAI. This highlights an emerging AI divide and underscores the vital need for nationwide information campaigns to increase public AI knowledge, particularly among younger people who use these tools more frequently (see also Wang et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, citizens do not fully trust journalists to use these systems responsibly. This suggests that existing trust in manual news production may not extend to technology adoption, potentially altering trust-building processes if GenAI heavily mediates news production. Therefore, highlighting the tangible advantages of GenAI in journalism, such as freeing up resources for investigative work, is important for counterbalancing trust erosion. Tying this to the technology acceptance model, emphasizing benefits makes theoretical sense, too, because users are more likely to learn about and adopt novel technologies when they perceive them to be useful (Davis & Granić, 2024).

Our study has several noteworthy limitations owing to the cross-sectional and nonexperimental design. Moreover, in light of GenAI's rapidly evolving nature, it is likely that many individuals may not yet have stable or well-formed opinions, making it difficult to capture them accurately through standardized surveys. This highlights the need for in-depth qualitative longitudinal examinations which examine how audiences *actually* use GenAI for news-related and information seeking purposes. In future, scholarship should consider a more comprehensive set of democratic and nondemocratic and autocratic countries that vary regarding AI deployment, AI-related regulation, aggregated technology optimism, and media system factors such as journalistic professionalism on the supply and public news trust on the audience demand side.

Despite these shortcomings, the analyses already allude a complex interplay between risk and benefit perceptions, knowledge, and use frequency which future research needs to unpack. At the same time, scholars must also assess how news organizations perceive these tools and their struggles and opportunities when adopting them. If journalists increasingly rely on these technologies to perform core journalistic tasks such as writing and selecting what to report on, it can implicate the fulfillment of broader democratic missions such as autonomy and being a public monitor (Gutierrez Lopez et al., 2023).

Finally, we argue that an isolated analysis of journalistic GenAI deployment is not feasible. By shedding light on audiences' evaluations of this nascent technology and its journalistic adoption, we contribute to digital journalism scholarship and pioneer efforts to enhance our understanding of the audience's view of journalistic AI use. As generative artificial intelligence is likely to remain a pervasive force, continued research into its evolving uses, perceptions, and implications for journalism and democracy is essential.

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