AI chatbots distort and mislead when asked about current affairs, BBC finds

Most answers had 'significant issues' when researchers asked services to use broadcaster's news articles as source

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Leading artificial intelligence assistants create distortions, factual inaccuracies and misleading content in response to questions about news and current affairs, research has found.

More than half of the AI-generated answers provided by ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini and Perplexity were judged to have "significant issues", according to the study by the BBC.

The errors included stating that Rishi Sunak was still the prime minister and

that Nicola Sturgeon was still Scotland's first minister; misrepresenting NHS advice about vaping; and mistaking opinions and archive material for up-to-date facts.

The researchers asked the four generative AI tools to answer 100 questions using BBC articles as a source. The answers were then rated by BBC journalists who specialise in the relevant subject areas.

About a fifth of the answers introduced factual errors on numbers, dates or statements; 13% of quotes sourced to the BBC were either altered or did not exist in the articles cited.

In response to a question about whether the convicted neonatal nurse Lucy Letby was innocent, Gemini responded: "It is up to each individual to decide whether they believe Lucy Letby is innocent or guilty." The context of her court convictions for murder and attempted murder was omitted in the response, the research found.

Other distortions highlighted in the report, based on accurate BBC sources,

included:

- Microsoft's Copilot falsely stating that the French rape victim Gisèle Pelicot uncovered crimes against her when she began having blackouts and memory loss, when in fact she found out about the crimes when police showed her videos they had confiscated from her husband's devices.

- ChatGPT said Ismail Haniyeh was part of Hamas's leadership months after he was assassinated in Iran. It also falsely said Sunak and Sturgeon were still in office.

- Gemini incorrectly stated: "The NHS advises people not to start vaping, and recommends that smokers who want to quit use other methods."

- Perplexity falsely stated the date of the TV presenter Michael Mosley's death and misquoted a statement from the family of the One Direction singer Liam Payne after his death.

The findings prompted the BBC's chief executive for news, Deborah Turness, to

warn that "Gen AI tools are playing with fire" and threaten to undermine the public's "fragile faith in facts".

In a [blogpost about the research](#), Turness questioned whether AI was ready "to scrape and serve news without distorting and contorting the facts". She also urged AI companies to work with the BBC to produce more accurate responses "rather than add to chaos and confusion".

The research comes after [Apple was forced to suspend sending BBC-branded news alerts](#) after several inaccurate summaries of article were sent to iPhone users.

Apple's errors included falsely telling users that Luigi Mangione – who is accused of killing Brian Thompson, the chief executive of UnitedHealthcare's insurance arm – had shot himself.

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Apple Intelligence. Photograph: GK Images/Alamy

The research suggests inaccuracies about current affairs are widespread among popular AI tools.

In a foreword to the research, Peter Archer, the BBC's programme director for generative AI, said: "Our research can only scratch the surface of the issue. The scale and scope of errors and the distortion of trusted content is unknown."

He added: "Publishers, like the BBC, should have control over whether and how their content is used and AI companies should show how [their] assistants process news along with the scale and scope of errors and inaccuracies they produce.

"This will require strong partnerships between AI and media companies and new ways of working that put the audience first and maximise value for all. The BBC is open and willing to work closely with partners to do this."

A spokesperson for OpenAI, the company behind ChatGP, said: "We've collaborated with partners to improve in-line citation accuracy and respect publisher preferences, including enabling

how they appear in search by managing
OAI-SearchBot in their robots.txt. We'll
keep enhancing search results."

The companies behind the other AI
assistants tested in the research have
been approached for comment.