



breaking news.

Rick Edmonds, a media analyst at the Poynter Institute, said there may not be quick payoff though voice-delivered news but that "news organizations see this as a way to build a bigger audience."

### **Ethical questions**

But giving tech platforms a bigger role in delivering news raises a number of ethical and legal questions, says Tim Hwang, head of the Harvard-MIT sponsored Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence Initiative.

"It really puts the platform in the role of curator in a very clear way," Hwang said.

Amid growing concerns on misinformation, Hwang said that device makers may be in a more difficult position in signaling credibility of certain news sources of reports.

"It's an interesting question about where this news comes from," he said. "We're just getting started with this and we don't have a lot of standards."

The media rights group Reporters Without Borders questions what it will mean to give tech firms' proprietary algorithms more power to choose the news being delivered.

Elodie Vialle, who heads the journalism and technology desk for the organization, said that voice assistants "are liable to reinforce the opaque and often pay-based methods of media content distribution that exist already."

Radcliffe said that "tech companies like Google, Amazon and Apple have already been digital gatekeepers to news for some time," and this is likely to increase with technologies such as smart speakers.

He said the firms need to be more transparent about how they choose news and sources.

"It's not enough to say 'we are not a media company' if you're distributing content, and making decisions about how to distribute it," he added.

Most of the updates are radio-style reports read by humans. But relationships with the news could be transformed if synthetic voices such as those from Alexa and Google are involved.

"A lot of these voices are modeled as being a trusted companion" which is different from the role of a news announcer, says Judith Donath, a researcher and advisor at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center who is writing a book about technology, trust and deception.

Donath said it is conceivable that computer-generated voices can offer some of the same emotion and tonality people expect, but this raises delicate questions.

"Are we comfortable having news delivered in a voice that conveys an emotional response to a tragedy or happy event, when the emotion was programmed in?" she asked.

© 2018 AFP

APA citation: Digital assistants hone skills to deliver the news (2018, September 16) retrieved 19 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-digital-hone-skills-news.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*