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Ottawa's generative-AI consultation 'odd', too rushed: critics

POSTMEDIA NEWS

OTTAWA — The Liberal government's consultation on a code of conduct for ChatGPT-like generative artificial intelligence systems is too rushed and not public or transparent enough, according to critics.

"This is a very odd sort of consultation," said Teresa Scassa, a Canada research chair and University of Ottawa law professor specializing in artificial intelligence (AI) and privacy.

The public first became aware of the consultation in mid-August, when the government accidentally posted an online notice early. Innovation Canada then released more details about the voluntary code for Canadian companies developing generative-AI systems.

Experts have been urging governments to regulate the exponentially growing and likely transformative technology, which can be used to generate written text, photos, videos or code.

The voluntary code of practice would require companies to prevent malicious and harmful use of their systems, take steps to mitigate the risk of biased results, and ensure AI systems can't be

mistaken for humans, among other measures. It would be in place before Bill C-27, privacy legislation with an AI component called the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA), becomes law.

The government is holding roundtables with experts, civil society, and industry. The consultation began on Aug. 4 and will wrap up Sept. 14, according to the online notice.

"This is a very short consultation. It's only just become public. The roundtables are ... invitation only," Scassa noted. That means the process is not fulfilling key purposes of a consultation, such as transparency, democratic engagement and public education, she said.