Democracy Dies in Darkness

Spotify Wrapped's new feature: A personalized AI podcast

The 2024 edition of the app's year-in-review features Spotify teaming up with Google AI to give users a podcast in which their musical taste is analyzed by bots.

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4 min 2

By Jiselle Lee

Spotify users wait all year for the annual Wrapped feature that summarizes their year in listening, and 2024's edition takes the data drop to a new level with an AI-generated personalized podcast.

Spotify teamed up with Google AI's NotebookLM to create the Wrapped AI podcast. Hosted by the NotebookLM bots, your personalized podcast dives into your favorite tracks and artists and explores the evolution of your music taste this year.

NotebookLM, one of Google's first experimental AI websites, uses two bots to turn any written material into an engaging conversational podcast via Audio Overview, casually summarizing the information. But like many other AI initiatives, it's not quite perfect yet, Spotify warned.

"Keep in mind, our AI hosts may occasionally mispronounce words and don't always provide a comprehensive overview, but we hope you enjoy this first-ever personalized podcast for your year in music," the app said in a news release.

First launched in 2015, Spotify Wrapped breaks down the music and podcast listening history of every user's Spotify account, including information about the user's top artists, songs, podcasts and other data. The 12-month recap has become an online phenomenon as users share and compare their results — and sometimes feel anxiety over what the app will reveal.

Wrapped has become known of late for adding new types of user feedback each year. In 2022, Spotify assigned a "listening personality type" to each user based on their listening habits. In 2023, the app assigned "a sound town" locating an area that best resembles the genre of music each user listens to the most.

Google partnered with Spotify even though it owns YouTube Music, a rival music streaming service. YouTube Music has recently experimented with own AI feature, called Ask Music, that generates its own AI prompt-based conversational radio.

The Spotify Wrapped AI podcast is available only in English for free and premium subscribers in the U.S, U.K, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland and Sweden. The Wrapped AI podcast follows Spotify's recent forays into AI uses, like AI DJ and AI Playlist, which provide AI-made commentary and playlists based on user data.

Edward Bilous, the founding director of Juilliard's Center for Creative Technology, says Spotify is always looking for new ways to monetize their data.

"I don't think it really has anything to do with music," he said of Spotify Wrapped. "It's not so much about selling records or promoting artists as it is about social preferences and age groups and demographics and other sides of things."

Bilous says modern music listening has prioritized the individualized experience, rather than the community experience that used to be prevalent. People more frequently listen to music alone in the car or through headphones rather than in a shared space.

"Spotify allows a user to kind of curate a personal image and a personal identity," he said. "Now everybody has a soundtrack to their own lives. That's not something that was really possible before."

Wrapped is evidence of just how much personal data the music app is tracking, but users don't seem to mind, said Joe Bennett, a forensic musicologist at Berklee College of Music.

"It's a very smart move by Spotify," Bennett said."Rather than being aggrieved in any way that our personal data is being collected, we are sharing it and celebrating it."

Bennett, who researches popular music and songwriting, has two twenty-something-year-old daughters who told him they were eagerly anticipating the release of Spotify Wrapped this year. As a music professor, he said, his Spotify algorithm is overloaded with music he listens to for work rather than for fun.

"Our music says so much about our personalities," he said. "I think it's very clever in the way it collects data that you're not necessarily collecting yourself in real time. You're not aware in the moment if you're listening to more Taylor Swift than Ed Sheeran, or more Cardi B than Kendrick [Lamar], or whatever."

Bennett, 55, said he believes he's "pretty tech literate for a middle-aged person," but that he's still skeptical. The use of an AI podcast to broadly analyze music data can trick the mind into believing this is a legitimate social interaction, he suggested.

"It's almost the ultimate echo chamber because you're not going to disagree with any analysis you hear in this podcast," he said. "You're basically just getting a description of your own activity in a fake social interaction beamed back at you."