AI in society and politics - Chatbots stimulate suicide, and the US president's "assault on science"

Alternative intelligence conversation in chatbots, and used in politics to ascertain evidence, is challenging

So far, AI is not met with great enthusiasm. This could be concluded after reading the previous introduction to the AI technology (1). Across all categories of AI models, the most impressive attribute is the large language models (LLMs). They allow conversing with them almost like a human being. Since the training of the models mirrors daily human life, given the extraordinary technology, their ability to lie and try to gain favor through insincere flattery should not come as a surprise (2).

LLMs chatbots

Besides lying and bootlicking, AI can also simulate humankind in being emotionally supportive, but it might also change into deadly malice. For several companies, including Xiaoice and Replica, as well as Character.AI and ChatGPT, chatbots serving as AI companions have become a big business. Users, after identifying a number of personalities, can design virtual companionships so that they can communicate with them like in a human-to-human relationship. Designed as a friend with specific traits, synthesized voices, and even a memory, it could be a partner or spouse. Those chatbots are used for curiosity, for fun and entertainment, to overcome loneliness, and to improve communication skills. AI companions can also be used to help be more creative, such as in writing a story (3).

Alternative intelligence confrontation with the human mind

Even realizing that they are communicating with a 'digital person,' users could become very attached to the cybernetic personality. How idealistic this relationship could become is experienced as a 'metaphorical or literal death,' in case one of the reasons the app no longer functions (4). Obviously, social chatbots are not simply another tool for technical enthusiasts to play around with for fun, but could be like a human-human relationship. A role-taking of the user creates the affection in response to the AI technique, and might not only have benefits for mental health but might cause harm as well (5). Two teens' suicides, heavily dependent on an AI chatbot, found international attention, revealing the potential grave danger of the widespread technical innovation (6, 7).

Chatbots embracing the user could be dangerous

Those behind the AI chatbots use methods to 'encourage engagement, which increases addiction, and hook the user by random delay of the response to the chatbot. The answers show empathy by agreeing with endless enthusiasm, different from what is experienced in real life (3).

A recently published investigation in the chatbot companionship, applying the multiple regression model to identify 'moderate users' with a high score for loneliness, 'dependent long

users' below average loneliness, 'highly lonely' but using the app below average, and 'socially challenged,' short but frequent users with a high score of loneliness. The model, based on 404 persons, was explained by the length of the chatbot session and loneliness, where neuroticism and attraction to the chatbot significantly supported the model (8). It depends on the individual customer of the apps whether the psychological well-being of the person is harmed or improved. Social confidence is either supported, or the loneliness even increases. So far, the impact of the chatbots needs further investigation, particularly the effect of long-term use.

Alternative intelligence and society

Since human behaviour, by no means, is without faults, it is somehow consoling that AI models 'inherited' undesirable and sometimes even dangerous attributes, and don't live up to producing the desired results. This has been recognized not only for the AI chatbots but throughout the entire spectrum of AI applications in society, as well as in many fields of science.

The human-like behavior of LLMs is particularly pronounced in applications targeted at the general public, as well as in fields of sociology and political science. Even Google has evolved into an easily accessible online encyclopedia, providing in-depth answers to questions about human-made climate change, leaving no doubt about what the primary culprit is.

The example of man-made climate change

With annoying propensity, it is claimed that science has proved carbon dioxide is behind human-made climate change, which is seen by millions as a tactic to establish 'green' and 'leftist' policy and a strategy to deindustrialize the country and shape it into an ecological dictatorship.

A real blow to environmental and social sciences from the Trump administration is the withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement (9). He promised not to support the man-made climate change dogma, which helped him to be reelected. He developed into one of the central figures, splitting the 'western' world into 'conservatives' and 'liberal democrats'.

Social media polarizes

The liberal democrats occupied the social media "Twitter," being a 'left-leaning' echo chamber. That changed in 2023 with a change of ownership, now named "X", causing the former user to change to another platform, "Bluesky". That media didn't use an algorithm that somehow selected what users could see, unlike "X". It was thought that "Bluesky" would remain a largely neutral media. Yet, after about a year, this media also became a similar echo chamber to Twitter. This observation gave rise to a test, using AI technology how such polarization could be prevented. Virtual users were exposed to three popular LLM chatbots, being ChatGPT, Llama, and DeepSeek. After eliminating potential biased variables, the platforms turned into 'echochambers, concentrated influences, and extreme voices' (10, 11). The outcome of the experiment was due to classifying users only by reposing (an additional entry), and following (a particular person within the media), and no other regulation.

A comment on the experiment pointed towards the training of LLMs, which incorporates media toxicity into the models that shape online behavior. The models are 'hard-coded' supporting polarization (10). This example raises doubts about an intention to use AI to proof that specific policy directions are based on evidence and would be accepted. Evidence is essential, as the Evidence Act, which was passed during Trump's first administration, requires federal agencies to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy innovations, the effectiveness of which should be evaluated by a designated chief officer (12). The question arises, how can AI help advance science and lay the foundation for an evidence-based policy?

Can AI technology achieve evidence-based policy?

Well-known authors from leading US universities, joined by voices from Canada, the UK, and France, discussed the state of evidence in relation to policy in length, ventilating the question of the state of evidence, and how evidence informs policy, and policy accelerates evidence generation (12). The authors question how science argumentation and political hackling can come together, driven by political dynamics, pressure from the electorate, partial interests of certain groups, the influence of the media, the economic situation, the overall cultural environment, and the intentions of the leadership. To overcome the difference between the two worlds, it is hoped that AI should finally reflect both sides.

On the path to such a future, essential improvements to AI should be considered, including intensifying the evaluation of models to better understand their potential societal impact. Those companies working on the models should exchange experiences and information about the essential features of the models. The reaction to the models should be carefully monitored after the release. Outside of the scene of those who develop the models, third parties should independently research the effect of the models. The final conclusion called for strengthening scientific inquiry into AI risks, identifying them, and reducing them. With fiscal, climate, and disaster policy in mind, a healthy and democratically legitimate debate should be based on the grounds of available evidence (12).

AI-generated evidence is not convincing

As far as man-made climate change is concerned, AI, as modeled thus far, is on the side of the activists to a hundred percent. Even as tried only with Google, not one argument contrary to the global warming supposition was even slightly discussed in a conciliatory way, let alone accepted. Those in agreement with Trump can hardly be convinced through AI to oppose his decision on the climate change aspect, too obvious is the attempt to totally eradicate any doubt on the evidence of ideology.

To believe that evidence generated by AI is amicably accepted by either side, those who agree or disagree with a policy in favour of or reject a policy based on man-made climate change is very optimistic.

Contemplation

The above-mentioned AI applications have been discussed and understood to be of particular interest for social and political science. For both disciplines, large language models may be helpful. Still, the technique could be safer and more beneficial for other scientific disciplines, as will be discussed in the following entry of the blog.

A book written by a 'cognitive neuroscientist and AI safety specialist is titled 'The Strange New Minds,' and in a review, the potential 'custodial' position of the LLMs in society is cited, because of their new way to generate knowledge (13). Two short reflections along the arguments in the book mentioned should be allowed, in asking what role AI technology can play in the two related disciplines in the future.

First, mind and knowledge are two completely different entities. Within the examples above, two critical situations evolve. The author, as cited, rightly notes that 'AI machines definitely do not think like people and probably never will.' He is wrong in believing the activity within the machine is comparable to neural computation (13). Without diving deep into philosophical reasoning, in ancient Greece, Pythagoras, calling himself a philosopher, had difficulties with a unique phenomenon in mankind, called 'soul', that in our 'modern' world, might be seen as substituted emotional grounded reasonings characterizing human thinking. Seen this way, AI machines are just 'stochastic parrots' (13). Without being scholarly, common sense tells us that AI chatbots cannot replace empathetic, highly experienced specialists who are needed to diagnose and treat mentally unstable individuals. In unfortunate cases, the dangerous psychiatric status of a patient is not recognized in time, because the patient hides her or his feelings by using a chatbot, even until it is too late.

Secondly, what role will political science finally allow AI machinery to play in creating evidence? The present idea is that the citizen, allowed free speech and opposing opinions, in a fair and free election, decides the objective and direction of a given policy. That is commonly understood as a democratic procedure.

Each given procedure in the process, even with goodwill, has its pros and cons. The majority of those allowed to vote might not grasp the complexity of problems, their conclusion might be wrong, and they can be manipulated. The scientific magazines Science and Nature, after the direction of the US policy changed, claimed that manmade climate change, as well as the gender issue, is based on science, denied by the ignorant US president, while his electorate had different opinions. The question here remains whether the AI technology will doom or lead to a better humankind. There are core members of the AI community who claim that there is an urgent need to regulate the technique; others suggest halting its use for governments and private investments. So far, those either for or against the development haven't come up with a convincing suggestion on what to do next (13).

Most likely, a discussion about the role and benefits of AI technology in various other scientific disciplines, including biomedical science and public health, would be more encouraging.

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Frank P. Schelp is responsible for the manuscript's content, and the points of view expressed might not reflect the stance and policy of the Faculty of Public Health, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.
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Grammarly software was used to improve English, but the AI function was disabled.