

IDEAS

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Nothing artificial about this intelligence

From Facebook bots inventing their own language to robot-assisted surgeries and men marrying dolls, AI is changing our reality in ways we wouldn't have imagined



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AS I TYPE THIS, THE NEWS APP ON MY PHONE flashes: iPhone 8 could come with abilities to detect human emotions. That's great, I reckon. My phone will now be able to do something that I still haven't figured out how to do in my relationship. The next time she's upset, all I need to do is simply flash my phone at her to decode the exact emotion. Takes the stress out of figuring it out all by myself.

LOVE, VIRTUALLY

Nothing in the world is more complicated than human relationships, and using technology to counter it is rather counter-intuitive. But not if you ask some men. Zheng Jiajia, a 31-year-old A.I. expert in China couldn't find a suitable life partner. So instead of drowning his sorrows at the local bar, he simply built one. Ying Ying, can utter a few simple phrases and identify characters and images. But Zheng has bigger plans. He is training her to cook and do household chores because, well, she's rather outside the ambit of feminism.

The trend has its roots in Japan, dating way back to 2009, with the launch of an app called Love Plus. Rinko, one of the virtual damsels within the app, is a sensation of sorts in the country, with many men taking her (rather, their phones) to parks, trips abroad, and even getting engaged. All she wants is what you want – and for most men, that's a dream – albeit a flawed one.

ELECTRONIC EMOTIONS

It is tempting to replace human emotions with the highly standardised, consistent emotions of artificial intelligence. But is it healthy? Well, one could argue that it is better to have a fulfilling, artificial relationship than a distressing, real one. That, however, would be oversimplifying the issue.

We didn't rise to the top of the food chain for nothing. If there's something that's distinctly different about humans, it's our superior intelligence. And it is this intelligence that will prod at your inner being, for it knows that what you're engaging in is ultimately nothing but an illusion – it doesn't really exist in the real sense. While there's already enough talk about technology disrupting human relationships, AI takes that disruption to a different level. But its effects aren't limited to relationships.

FICTION-REALITY BLUR

Tech fans are acquainted with the critically acclaimed TV series Black Mirror, which does a stellar job of depicting what could go wrong with our over-reliance on technology and AI in general. While some may watch it for sheer entertainment, the keenest observer would acknowledge that the bleak scenarios that it

projects aren't too far from the truth. Facebook had to shut its A.I. programme after its chat bots invented their own language and began communicating with each other! An incident that would hitherto belong to a sci-fi show is now a part of mainstream reality.

It isn't all doom and gloom, though. A.I.'s contribution to medical science is the stuff of science fiction, with robot-assisted surgeries becoming commonplace in the field. Surgeons today are relying on the precision of robots to conduct complicated procedures, and even some routine ones. The human hand is sometimes prone to error, but the mechanical prowess of a robot can drastically cut down medical mishaps, and even eliminate the possibility altogether as the technology continues to improve. An actual surgeon however will always be needed to control and monitor it, so A.I. here is more of an assistant to a doctor than a replacement.

Other professions though may not be as fortunate. From pilots and chefs to accountants and astronauts, many jobs might well be lost. Mine isn't too safe either. In January this year, a robot writer named Xiao Nan wrote an entire article in one second. Even my first sip of coffee takes way longer than that. However, I am banking on the hope that they will never be creative and can only churn out bland copy at best!

FUTURE TENSE?

Effective measures need to be put in place to ensure that the creation doesn't take over the creator, as amply demonstrated in myriad movies on the subject. There's no denying the benefits that A.I. brings to our lives – in domains such as medicine and manufacturing. But its flipside cannot be undermined either, especially with the more personal facets of our lives such as relationships. As I write this, I take out my iPhone and merrily quip "Siri. I love you." Pat comes the response – "All you need is love. And your iPhone." Rather touching. But then I say, "Siri, I really love you," back comes a rather cold response: "Impossible." Well, Siri does make a fair point. **U**



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