

The media, artificial intelligence, nation states and the future

Artificial intelligence with all the buzz in the media now with my limited understanding is based on another buzzword “algorithms” that processes data. So basically, a programmer writes instructions to perform some functions which is used to predict a user’s interests or activities on the internet and then using these predictions “returns” by generating content based on what was learned. Hence, machine learning.

You know how you search for a product or service on Google Chrome or Safari and all of a sudden you start seeing ads on social media platforms, that is AI at work. So yes, your devices may be listening to you but they are just not listening, they are learning as well. Scary and exciting, right? Now, you don’t really have to go through the stress of searching for a shop that has a particular product you need, all you have to do is search for it in your browser and viola, there are posts all over your social media feed advertising the product.

The media

In my opinion, the first “people”/“industry” to catch on to the AI buzz are social media companies, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google amongst others.

The old media, newspapers, TV and radio had the concept of feeding information based on the ground research for their listeners and viewers. for instance, Ghana had radio and TV stations for particular political parties. They use these stations to push their agenda, feed their listeners and supporters what they needed them to hear as well as what they thought they needed to see. Content on radio and TV has been manipulated since the dawn of time to push an agenda.

The new media on Social media platforms, YouTube, twitter, Facebook which all started as social platforms but are now media companies are using the same approach however, thanks to algorithms, they are able to easily discover and target users and track their behaviours using insights and analytics. With these analytics, they can create content to manipulate the targeted users’ views and opinions.

Instead of factual, balanced news, the media feed news that would get more views, more clicks, more streaming which in turn generate more money. It's almost as if with the help of AI, the media is being reinforced to create biased, misleading content.

Ads created with a selected demographic in mind. Contents are created on the understanding and knowledge collected based on the behaviour of users. For instance, by selecting a certain demographic for a certain content, algorithms learn to push the same content over and over again to this demographic which may/would definitely lead to a certain group of people thinking/believing a certain way no matter how good or bad this view and opinion is.

On the flip side, this has also made life easier for most people.

1. Facebook uses face recognition to recognize human faces in two or more images.
2. Facebook and Twitters' effort to fight misinformation involves AI by filtering articles based on fact checking.
3. Twitter uses Tweet recommendations making use of AI for recommending tweets on the user's timeline and ensuring that the relevant tweets are catered to them first.
4. It uses algorithms to flag and remove accounts that promotes extremists' groups, opinions or hateful tweets.
5. On the business side, it uses neural networking to display only the most intriguing part of an image for its thumbnail.
6. IG leverages AI to create its search function with its massive database to help users find images related to their favourite activities and experiences.
7. LinkedIn uses AI for offering job recommendations, suggesting people for the users to connect with and for delivering specific posts on the user's feed using Job/Connection Recommendations.
8. Snapchat leverages the power of computer vision, an AI technology to track your features and overlay filters that move with your face in real-time.

AI however can be used to control bias in the media. Andrew McAfee of MIT quoted "If you want the bias out, get the algorithms in". AI can assist in reducing the subjective

interpretation of the data of the human. This can be done by feeding data that will only consider the variables which improve their predictive accuracy.

For example, a start-up news company known as Knowhere uses a combination of machine learning tech as well as human journalists for creating its news stories. It is widely known for its impartiality.

The site uses its AI to select a story, taking into account the latest trends and explores thousands of news sources for gathering content irrespective of the opinions the sources propagate, while also looking in to the reliability of the source. Then based on this research, the AI writes its own “non-biased version of the story. By doing this, they control bias.

My Fears

As a psychology student, I see how images and videos can affect the mental health of individuals and I’ve been worried about how algorithms can be manipulated by the media which may cause psychological disorders such as depression, body dysmorphic disorders amongst others.

As a young person living in west Africa, I’m worried about politicians (if they come to understand AI, algorithms or employ individuals who do) can mess with my perceived “democracy”. Ad targeting.

As a woman who has been in the tech industry for years, I’m worried algorithms would be used to cut more of the people who identify as female from top positions by using targeting algorithms to weed them out before they get to recruiters

The future.

The future of AI and its use and misuse would in my opinion be based on measures nations, government agencies, big corporations and stakeholders put in place to regulate its usage by collectively taking into consideration the people who use these platforms, who interact with these platforms on a daily basis and ensuring it is developed in a responsible way which will benefit everyone.