

Fundamentally unintelligent

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AI didn’t invent job automation or fake images. Better to worry anyway about social media, urges **Professor Brian J Ford**...



Nobody should be surprised that Artificial Intelligence will replace their jobs. It is digital automation, nothing more, and automation has been replacing jobs for centuries. If your job requires intelligence, then AI won’t stand a chance.

AI is fundamentally stupid. There is nothing intelligent about it. AI can create fake photos? Nothing new about that – the images of the Cottingley Fairies, faked up by Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, two teenagers who even fooled Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, date from the First World War. Piers Morgan was sacked from the Daily Mirror after publishing fake photos of army trucks that were never in Iraq.

It can make fake movies? If you saw the film Forrest Gump, you will have seen him chatting with President John F Kennedy. Five years ago someone faked a video of Nancy Pelosi to make her seem drunk. Faking videos is nothing new. If you often use ChatGPT you will see how often it makes mistakes – it invents facts and figures and gets things wrong in a way nobody with a shred of intelligence would ever do.

AI is not the reason to be worried – it’s social media that are the real threat. In the past, if you wrote something idiotic, false, or misleading, you would be unlikely to have it published. You might tell your friends, but that’s about all. Publishing cost money in those days, and an editor thought long and hard before consigning something to print. Now? Social media platforms can put your crazy notion in front of a million people at the click of a mouse. Editors exist to stop people publishing rubbish; little wonder there’s so much nonsense on the internet.

As a result, it is now becoming impossible to tell fact from fiction. Although the news media still survive, nobody under 35 reads a newspaper and few follow broadcast news. Their information comes from TikTok and a worrying proportion of those posts are ridiculous. Fact checking doesn’t work when your confirmatory source is equally wrong.

The recent Southport riots arose from a fictitious post claiming that the attacker was a muslim immigrant from a cross-channel boat. Not a word was true. That post originated on the Channel3Now website, which has Russian connections. It was reposted by Elon Musk on his X channel, who followed it up with a claim that “Civil war is inevitable” read by 9,800,000 followers, and we all know what happened after that.

“For a thousand years we have striven towards a greater understanding of the reality, but now it is open season for every crank in the world

None of this involved AI, or any specialised software. It was just rambling stupidity that influenced millions. How many lives have been compromised by the online anti-vaccine campaigners? There isn’t any AI involved there either – it’s the accessibility that spreads the claims. You

can compare the number of people who would see the facts published in the Guardian (105,000 sales) or The Times (120,000) with those following Josh Rogan (over 14,000,000 just on Spotify) or Andrew Tate (over 8,500,000 on X alone).

Those Large Language Models are nothing more than language emulators. They have no intelligence, for that is an inimitable property of living organisms; they simply create vernacular renditions of digitised data, and invent anything they cannot find. Of course they can “do things no human can do”; so can a stapler or a pair of scissors. They can automate a vast range of tasks that have previously been done manually, as we have seen in every walk of life.

It is the unchaperoned dissemination of any random thought and every bizarre proposal that’s the real problem we will face. Social media are undermining the fabric of communities. Nobody will know what’s true. For a thousand years we have striven towards a greater understanding of the reality, but now it is open season for every crank in the world.

You were raised on a bedrock of certainties and knew where to find out the facts. For the young that’s all evaporated – in this modern world they are raised on a fact-free diet.

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