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I feel an urgent need to understand how AI will affect my life.

- Chris Armstrong.

UKeiG

## Conversations with a retired information scientist about the appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence

The UK e-information Group management committee was saddened that our chair David Ball passed away recently, only weeks after the loss of Douglas Veal, a great information scientist who co-chaired with David our prestigious international Tony Kent Strix information retrieval award panel. It dredged up thoughts of the movers and shakers past and present who have supported us over the years, since our inception as a special interest group of the Institute of Information Scientists in 1978 and now as a core part of the CILIP community.

HAVE had the honour to remain in contact with writer and poet Chris Armstrong, who joined UKeiG, formerly known as the UK Online User Group (UKOLUG) in 1986. He had a multiplicity of roles including chair, membership engagement, editor and web guru.

We were chatting recently, whimsically, about the notion of "rewinding" AI. He has concerns about the impact of large language models (LLMs) and chatbots. I was intrigued by our discourse. AI systems, he said, were "unconcerned with truth". Art, fiction and poetry are being severely compromised.

"AI used for necessary processes like NHS image scanning to speed up analysis, diagnosis and consultations, is wonderful. Unnecessary AI simply to make money for the lazy is not."

We all recall the option to resist "upgrading" to a new interface; to retain the comfortable "classic" look and feel; the familiarity of a Boolean-ly logical discovery comfort zone. We are now faced with gargantuan AI systems able to mimic humanity and rob us of our integrity and intellectual property. What next?

Recently our Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer waded in embracing this disruptive technology. He described AI as "the defining opportunity of our generation. It is not a technology that is coming, a future revolution on the horizon. It is already here, materially changing lives." Skills and talent lay at the heart of the growing momentum to "build sufficient, secure, and sustainable AI infrastructure". But, what of the threat to information integrity and literacy?

I rang Chris to chinwag about this latest gauntlet threatening the potential disintermediation of our profession. We kicked off with semantics.

"What do we really mean by AI? The term sweeps in general robotics which has limited intelligence through large language models which swallow and assimilate and 'learn' from huge, uncontrolled and unfiltered vats of text without permission, human interference, value adding or 'explaining'."

The crux of our conversation was the moral dilemma; the ability to produce pictures, novels, poems or works of art that are forgeries. "AI is creating vacuous content. A novel or a poem is a representation of an author's thinking. An AI creation is just some cleverly jumbled words with no life or meaning other than the lexical. It has no value."

"AI systems have no inherent morals or ethics. Neither do many of our leaders who make choices on our behalf, but at least they exist in the same bubble of morality. Do AI systems have even that basic 'morality' built in? What moral and ethical safeguards are there? Should we know what they are? Who decides on the morals or ethics? Are ours the same as Mr Trump's over the pond? Can his affect or infect ours?"

## **Cloud busting**

Chris also struggles with the vast energy consumption necessary for cloud computing data centres and generative AI systems. "Is this morally acceptable? Also, why would the MD of a company trust all his corporate information and documents to a remote/unknown computer? Is that responsible? What happens if there is a fire, data breach or power down - at the very least the company will be without its staff, customers, stock and financial data for a period! And have no control over their re-instatement."

Chris's take is that AI is being foisted on

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us whether we like it or not. Shouldn't we have the right to decide whether we want to revert to "ordinary, vanilla". Shouldn't we be able to decide whether the thing on the other end of a help line is human or artificial?

"As an information scientist, I was taught to look at multiple sources and to verify those sources. It seems to me that while AI search engines and chat bots may have at their robotic fingertips vastly more data - far wider and faster than I could ever hope to do - there is (in my limited experience) no, or little, information provided about sources. I know that there is weighting built into their algorithms a sort of sequential word probability at the lowest level, but I do not know whether that weighting extends to analysing sources. Nor do I know (if it is in fact built-in) on what that weighting is based. LLMs are not search engines nor do they present facts. They present word sentences built on the probability that the words work together, and the public think they are getting information!"

By using an AI chatbot or LLM to do your research, you are crossing your fingers and ceding the responsibility for information and data integrity to an algorithmic stranger. What will become of facts?

"For now, while I am still able to choose, I shall use search engines (and I know these all have some 'intelligence' built in) that allow me to assess the degree to which I can trust the answer."

Within this context, UKeiG is delighted to launch a new half-day online CPD AI course *Generative AI* and Retrieval Augmented Generation for librarians, information and knowledge professionals.

Generative AI chatbots are changing search expectations. Since the launch in 2022 of OpenAI's Large Language Model (LLM) chatbot ChatGPT user information behaviour has begun to change with significant implications for the library, information and knowledge profession. Generative AI has made finding and using information easier, but its reliability is questionable. There are many ethical issues around its training and its wider social and environmental impact. Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) offers to partly address these issues by enabling the integration of AI technology with a responsibly curated collection of relevant content to increase the reliability of its outputs. Our course will introduce you to the potential of RAG, as well as to definitions of AI literacy that are central to promoting responsible use.

This course is ideal for any library, information and knowledge professional interested in developing an understanding of Generative AI as it applies to their work. It complements UKeiG's course Artificial intelligence for librarians, information and knowledge professionals and you'll gain an understanding of the nature and impact of Generative AI, AI literacy, Large Language Models (LLMs) and how to enhance and augment them by creating a customised knowledge base and training a Large Language Model using a scholarly dataset.

The course introduces you to a brief history of Generative AI, how LLM's work, generative AI and information literacy and building your own RAG system. It will enable a lively and interactive environment in which participants can share their views and experiences and shape the direction of the discussion. It will also include a deep dive into the technology that is understandable to the non-coding professional and actionable for those with more technical skills.

Looking forward to seeing you there. Dates and times will follow shortly. If you're a CILIP member but haven't yet joined the UKeiG, you can update your preferences on the CILIP website.

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