



UKieG

Are we staring disintermediation down the barrel of an AI gun?

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence is omnipresent; some would say omnipotent. Everybody's talking algorithms, rushing to create strategies and mourning the demise of boring, unintelligent mankind.

At the UK e-information Group's (UKieG) Zoom member forum on the afternoon of 29 June 2023, a key theme will be: 'Could AI help us communicate research better?' UKieG has been grappling with the AI conundrum for several years now, with AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) workshops featuring on our popular CPD programme.

Andrew Cox, senior lecturer at the Information School, University of Sheffield, presented at the June 2022 UKieG forum on 'AI: What you need to know.' He spoke to his independently researched report – *The Impact of AI, machine learning, automation and robotics on the information profession* – published by CILIP in 2020 (www.cilip.org.uk/researchreport). It called for a "joined-up and coherent response from information professionals, enabling us to maximise the benefits of AI, machine learning, automation and robotics for information users while mitigating the emerging risks".

The blooming paradigm of AI is driving an exciting new direction and agenda. Generative AI and AI-assisted chatbots as disruptive technologies provide daily news reports and screaming headlines. The media hype about AI text-generators like ChatGPT has been relentless, verging on hysterical. The frenzied debate touches on every aspect of the work of the library and information science community, with relevance to inaccurate, misleading 'fake news' and the critical appraisal of content

validity, digital literacy in education and research, data quality and management, ethics, intellectual property, plagiarism and legal compliance.

Online in the '70s, CD-ROM in the '80s and the World Wide Web in the '90s were perceived to pose existential threats to the profession. So, here we go again...

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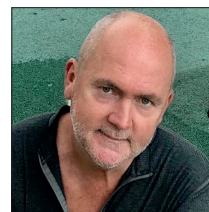
In February 2023 *The Guardian* reported on the "built-in bias", "offensive" and "badly wrong" answers of AI tools, including politically extreme, racist and sexist output. "Generative AI is doing some extraordinary things, but it's still not remotely intelligent. It doesn't understand the outputs it's creating and it's not additive, in terms of insight or ideas."

Another opinion piece declared:

"ChatGPT is causing a panic now – but it'll soon be as mundane a tool as Excel."

Cox argues that so much AI is out there already, immersed in our daily work and leisure routines: autocorrection, predictive text, transcription and translation tools, search personalisation and recommendations, for example. Arising new technologies including machine learning, NLP, sentiment analysis, text and data mining will require our knowledge and critical skills to evaluate them, inform their development and explore their potential and benefits. AI requires human input to be of any relevance or value. It is also built on data, so data literacy, management and integrity are fundamental, and we are well positioned to offer these skills as a data-rich profession.

Cox's message at UKieG's 2022 forum was not to obsess on the technology



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that underpins AI, but to prioritise creative thinking and developing a strategic roadmap and vision for the future. IT departments often dominate decision-making when it comes to the procurement and acquisition of enterprise systems. It's crucial to collaborate with them, cross-fertilise skills sets and converge in some areas. While we don't all need to morph into code writers per se, a regular review of our competency frameworks is essential.

Undoubtedly AI will render some routine tasks redundant, but the opportunities are endless.

The ultimate question has always been: "Will AI take my job?" I'm inclined to agree with a pundit on BBC Radio 4 earlier this year who answered: "Probably not, but someone who uses it better than you will." There lies the rub.

So, let's keep calm, carry on and get on with it. **IP**

References

- 1 UKieG's e-journal *eLucidate* <https://elucidate-ukeig.org.uk/index.php/elucidate/index>
- 2 *The Impact of AI, machine learning, automation and robotics on the information profession* www.cilip.org.uk/general/ResearchReport
- 3 *Are AI chatbots overhyped?* www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/feb/09/googles-bard-demo-what-went-wrong-chatgpt-chatbots-ai
- 4 *The ChatGPT bot is causing panic now – but ...* www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/07/chatgpt-bot-excel-ai-chatbot-tech