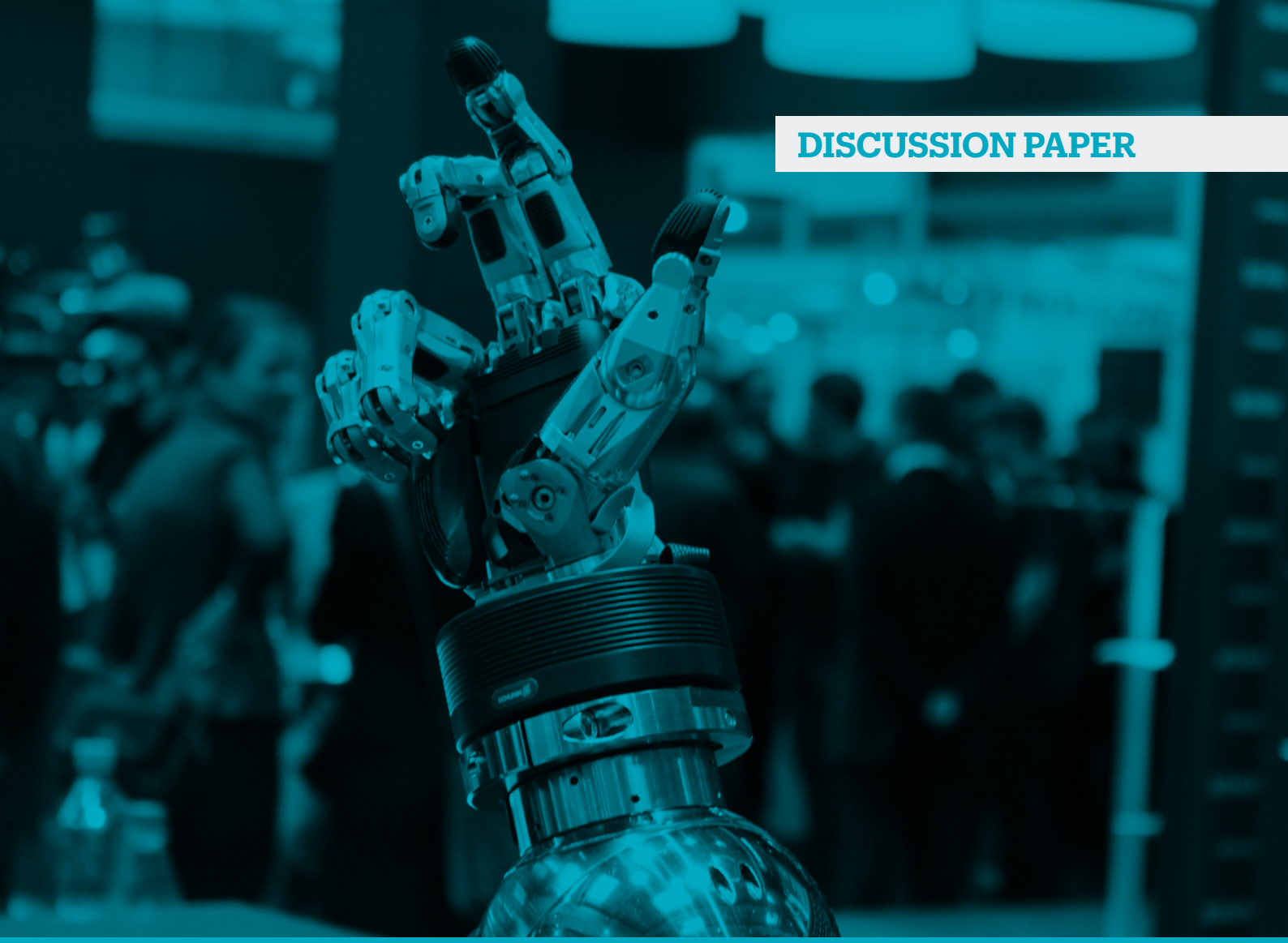

DISCUSSION PAPER

The Political Stance of Artificial Intelligence

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TRT WORLD research centre

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Introduction

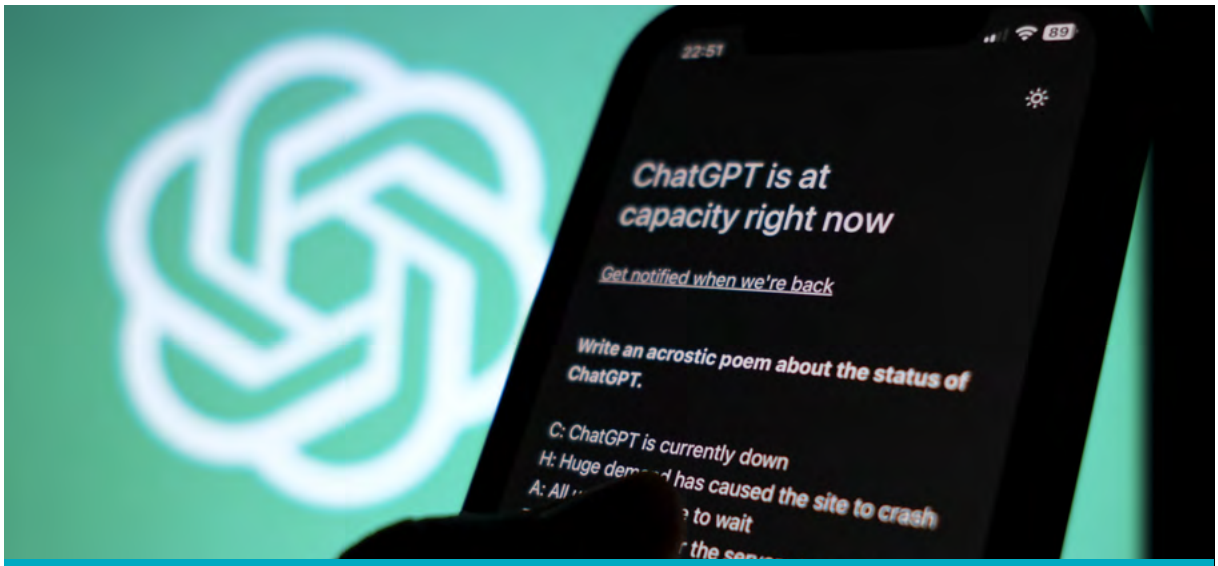
Artificial intelligence (AI) is the talk of the global village nowadays. Many deem it a fancy technology reminiscent of the best science fiction work. Others present it as a panacea for all the world's ills. However, such excessive views do not contribute to an informed debate. First, AI, as we know it presently, is still in its infancy. While the applications offered by OpenAI, especially in the last two years, have reignited passionate feelings about the future of AI, it is believed that several aspects of digitisation have triggered a bigger leap in the technological age than AI. However, the dangers of new developments in the AI field and the threats to daily life should not be swept under the rug either.

Nowadays, we know that algorithms can be used to manipulate controversial socio-political issues thanks to social media platforms. Similarly, new-generation artificial intelligence platforms and applications, which can are designed thanks to more advanced and complex algorithms than search engines and social media platforms, do not give a perfect test of avoiding biases, just like social media algorithms.

Many incidents corroborate the concerns about AI. Moreover, this time the technology in question may not only affect the interacting population like the internet or social media platforms, but it has the potential to be a power centre that no one can fully predict. In other words, even the creators of AI need more foresight about what fully functional AI platforms can do and what effects they can trigger.

It is also ironic how an algorithm conditioned to produce output quickly using all the existing digital data produced by humanity will deeply affect the dynamics of social life. One of the most critical questions is whose side the artificial intelligence will be on, and the crux of the matter is how far biased behaviour, another human phenomenon like intelligence, can be exhibited by an algorithm that operates through predetermined codes. This paper will explore the subject of epistemological and philosophical discussions about artificial intelligence as well as possible sociological, economic, and political effects.

(David Mareuil - Anadolu Agency)



(Aytaç Ünal - Anadolu Agency)

What does Artificial Intelligence mean exactly?

Debates about AI have taken place since the 1960s. However, they only recently became high on the public agenda through a series of applications led by OpenAI. Different dates are being put forward for when it will be fully on display, probably because there is yet to be a consensus on what artificial intelligence is. Similarly, some experts doubt whether full-fledged artificial intelligence will ever be possible (Devedzic, 2023).

It can be stated as one of the most common definitions that intelligence, one of the essential skills attributed to human beings, can be imitated by an artificial mechanism consisting of digital or mechanical elements (Russell & Norvig, 2003).

The fact that a standard definition of intelligence has yet to be made is an essential factor in presenting different views on artificial intelligence. With the question of whether machines can think, AI, a curiosity for those working in science fields such as engineering, computer science, mathematics, electronics, and cybernetics, has entered the field of interest of sciences such as epistemology and ontology. A machine that thinks and behaves like a human and can even do better than it has been the common goal of artificial intelligence studies (Nilsson, 1998).

Contrary to popular belief, discussions on artificial intelligence go back to the invention of the first automatic machines. It is possible to place the historical journey of artificial intelligence back to the 12th century. Since then, scientists have pondered the idea of a machine that can renew itself according to the needs of the outside world without the need for human intervention and fulfil the task assigned to it according to a specific purpose.

Muslim scholar Al-Jazari, who invented the examples of the first machines that work automatically, is one of the essential personalities who opened the way to artificial intelligence and was the founder of cybernetics (Tasci, 2020). The scientist lived in Cizre, a district of Diyarbakir, Turkiye, and therefore known as Al-Jazari. The latter was one of the most famous inventors and scientists of the golden age of Islam, many of whose works are still exhibited in the Topkapi museum today (Elices, 2020). He was particularly interested in engineering, hydraulics, and robotics.

In the modern era, the first formal introduction of artificial intelligence was at a conference held by John McCarthy at Dortmund College in 1956 (Lewis, 2014). Important names such as Marvin L. Minsky (Massachusetts Institute of Technology-MIT), Nathaniel Rochester (International Business Machines-IBM), and Claude Shannon (Bell Laboratories), who are known as the pioneers of AI today, participated in this conference. These aspiring scientists predicted that human intelligence could be fully programmed within their lifetime. However, their timeline was erroneous (Crevier, 1994).

Besides these scientists, Alan Mathison Turing is also considered the father of artificial intelligence in its modern form. Thanks to his work on machines and thinking, Turing became the name that laid the intellectual founda-

tions of the concept of artificial intelligence as we know it today. In addition, his famous experiment, known as the Turing Test, maintains its validity as a test method based on determining the distinction between humans and machines even today and sets a standard.

According to the Turing Test, if a person cannot distinguish whether the answers to the questions he/she asks behind a closed partition are given by a machine or by a human, the machine that prepares and transmits these answers has reached the level of artificial intelligence (Russell & Norvig, 2003).

AI has been accompanied by philosophical questions about what knowledge and thinking machine learning brings and what new problems will be generated. As a result, an interdisciplinary interest surrounds AI, with the contribution of scientists from different fields.

One of the most important contributors to this process is Lotfi A. Zadeh, who put forward the theory of Fuzzy Logic (Zadeh, 1965) instead of the classical logic with two possibilities, paved the way for enriching the computer language consisting of 1 and 0 in a way that makes different possibilities possible. In its simplest form, classical logic, which operates with two types of possibilities, something either exists or does not exist, is defined by 1 and 0 when applied to computer technology. Today, 1 and 0, also expressed as a digital language, basically work as the presence of electricity as 1 and the absence of electricity as 0. The most significant contribution of the fuzzy logic theorem to the field lies in the reproduction of probabilities. In other words, instead of a coffee being either cold or hot, more than two possibilities can be considered: coffee extremely hot, very hot, moderately hot, slightly hot, slightly cold, very cold, and so on. Although these expressions, which try to present a simplified explanation of a highly technical subject, are insufficient, they try to explain the necessity of opening the door to an infinite series of possibilities beyond the existing digital language and classical logic in order to talk about any intelligence for a machine (Chai, 2021).

Although very optimistic assessments were made initially, they did not last. There was even a period (described as AI winter) where optimistic predictions were not the norm. In that era, experts believed that expectations placed on AI were unrealistic. This phase lasted until the late 90s.

IBM Deep Blue, described as a narrow artificial intelligence application in 1997, was the first basic artificial intelligence model to win a chess game against a human. This episode brought AI back to the agenda. This software follows the opponent's moves and calculates the possible moves necessary to win the game, namely chess, without external human intervention. This machine learning event is categorised as a narrow artificial intelligence model due to its capacity to produce output for a single area.

In the following years, studies continued with artificial intelligence models such as driverless car studies, facial recognition systems, and AlphaGo, which won another game (GO) against humans (Lewis, 2014).

Numerous examples can be listed, from the first attempts to the present. While some experiments were successful, others were utter failures. Several applications that offer basic artificial intelligence features have been incepted throughout this process. Many automation applications, voice assistants, and programs we interact with through speech and writing have artificial intelligence features. These applications, which learn and develop through the data we produce every time we interact, develop step by step, just like a snowball effect.

ChatGPT, introduced by OpenAI, the latest example of such applications, has rekindled interest in the field as an artificial intelligence initiative that interacts through writing. The platform, which can be defined as a text processor that can produce output in many languages and on almost any subject, offers the opportunity to experience the last stage of artificial intelligence studies through just a browser. Thanks to its capacity to access and process existing digital data, it can produce original texts on the requested topic within seconds.

Nevertheless, current AI outputs, a synthesis of the data produced to date or a kind of rewriting, are far from exhibiting impartiality and reliable accuracy. There are serious questions about its responses when output is requested, especially when controversial and different opinions are put forward. Google's Bard application, which recently introduced a new chatbot application based on artificial intelligence, has also been presented to the end user's experience with similar limitations and warnings that it may contain false information (Newsround, 2023).

Even AI creators do not deny that it can produce false and biased outputs. It is also worth remembering that OpenAI initially advocated the development of artificial intelligence in a completely transparent and open manner, explaining that this route will thwart any possible threats. However, the same organisation changed its perspective after receiving investments from Microsoft (Bass, 2023). Since then, opacity has surrounded the algorithm they developed, leading to heightened concerns.

Can AI have a political stance?

Considering that even the debates about what artificial intelligence is and what it is not, it may seem absurd and too hasty to attribute a political stance to this technology. However, it will be appreciated that this question is reasonable and appropriate, considering that inferences are made about the current versions based on the existing examples and in light of the existing definitions.

The analogy of computer systems to the operational structure of the human brain or vice versa is frequently used to describe both the structure of the brain and the working system of computers. In studies on artificial intelligence, efforts to obtain higher-level information about the operational structure of the brain, nerves, and the functioning of neurons are carried out due to this similarity (Falk, 2021). Although it is a very superficial analogy, creating a general artificial intelligence that imitates the working system of the human brain can be defined as the ultimate goal of this field. A machine or algorithm that thinks and behaves like a human being describes an artificial tool that can implement human-specific features such as recognition, learning, benchmarking, decision-making, application, and more without outside intervention. From this point of view, looking at how people take a political stance may give an idea about why current AI examples intend to take a stance. At this point, the essential element is again the source code, which AI fed repeatedly. Like how people build a world of thought by feeding from the information pool they are in from an early age, existing artificial intelligence applications must produce outputs on the axis of the data given to them or the data they feed on.

Google's word application's translation of Palestinians as terrorists and ChatGPT's biased outputs on Muslims and violence are some of the latest examples of artificial intelligence applications that produce output based on the data they feed on (Devedzic, 2023). In other words, even without outside intervention or any intention, the application will be shaped according to that data, which is accurate or valid for the application, since it presents an output of the data repository it is fed. Therefore, ethical issues in artificial intelligence occupy the interested parties as issues that need to be considered at least as much as its technical aspects (Dignum, 2018).

Today's artificial intelligence needs to do more regarding impartiality and objectivity. First, it should be noted that humans produce artificial intelligence, whether in applications or platforms. In other words, the effort to produce a machine that thinks and behaves like a human is driven by a human. Such a process carries bias, discrimination, and stereotyping. For example, chatbots such as ChatGPT, which can be described as advanced language processing algorithms, do not produce output by handling all data in the digital environment with an impartial, objective, and fair approach. On the contrary, the algorithms are fed via the current skewed distribution of digital data.

Secondly, these platforms are open to manipulation by those who produce them and carry their worldviews. At this point, the ownership status of the artificial intelligence platform becomes a significant issue. Today, given the many cases brought before the justice system, we know how social media platforms influence people's behaviour, from purchasing patterns to political preferences, via personalised, highly manipulative messages. The Cambridge Analytica scandal is one of the most notorious examples of such practices. Facebook shared user data with Cambridge Analytica. The latter used the data to manipulate voters in favour of Trump during the 2016 US presidential elections (Economist, 2018). Similarly, Twitter has often been weaponised to steer public opinion towards certain political and economic views (Bayar, 2023). What digital platforms do with the user data and the power they gather via this data are among the most critical and vital issues (Pence, 2014).

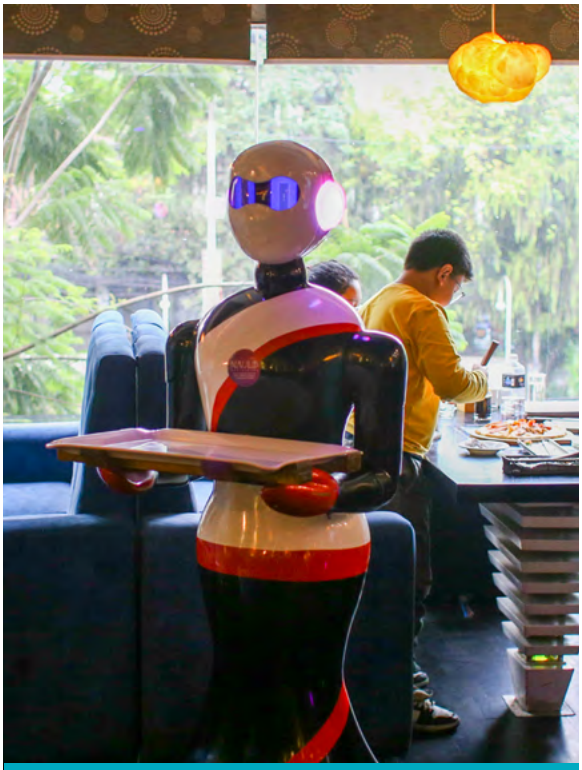
Re. AI, numerous incidents of biased responses were noted in the chatbot's interactions. Instances of sexism and racism plagued Microsoft Corp.'s AI bot 'Tay' (Cao, 2016), which was taken down in 2016 after multiple user complaints. A similar fate awaited Meta Platforms Inc. after its chatbot spread election and anti-Semitic conspiracies (Hancock, 2022). Likewise, reports revealed that AI has an Islamophobic problem (Samuel, 2021). A paper (Abid, Farooqi, & Zou , 2021) published by Nature Machine Intelligence showed that if one searches the word "Muslims", AI will provide answers associating them with violence 66 per cent of the time. However, if the same search involved the word "Christians," the association with violence would drop to 20 per cent of the time.

Due to the enormous amount of data collected by tech and media platforms, issues of bias will reverberate through all decision processes, especially political preferences. It is not an exaggeration to say that AI is the vehicle of much more powerful and complex propaganda tools than social media platforms.

Worse still, commercial technology companies often resort to opacity under the guise of protecting trade secrets and copyrights. But the public needs more transparency from digital platforms. Such transparency must encompass a wide range of aspects, from the working principles of the algorithms to the data collection and processing processes. Hence, a balance must be found urgently, and private firms should not be given free reins on AI because businesses seek profit and rarely consider people's interests.

It is also time to discuss a new concept: artificial intelligence literacy. However, despite its urgency, this task may prove arduous, if not Sisyphean. The efforts undertaken to date through concepts such as media, technology, and information literacy have yet to achieve a satisfactory level.

Artificial intelligence samples have the potential to contribute to the well-being of all humanity by streamlining and enriching human life in areas such as transportation, communication, health, education, and production (Dignum, 2018). However, severe problems arise regarding impartiality, equality, and ethics. Progress toward solving these problems can only be achieved by transparently carrying out the work in this field.



(Sunil Pradhan - Anadolu Agency)

Conclusion

Despite decades of development, AI is still shrouded in secrecy and obscurity. Experts still debate about what it is or even whether it is possible today. For this reason, while for many, it is considered a tremendous improvement and an outstanding technology that will solve many problems, others consider it a danger that will bring about the end of humanity.

The profit-centred approach, which has become widespread recently, significantly affects AI, one of the most discussed themes in dystopian science fiction films. The introduction of applications in the form of closed algorithms by being evaluated within the scope of trade secrets brings many ethical problems. It reveals many adverse outcomes, especially concerning bias and false information. In contrast, expanding and supporting initiatives that will benefit all humanity transparently and as a product of an ordinary mind is essential.

Despite some existing negativities, it is undeniable that artificial intelligence has enormous potential for the welfare of society. On the other hand, there are enormous differences between societies regarding technology production, access, and use today. Therefore, millions of people are deprived of internet access, while some parts of the world have come a long way in data production. Moreover, any unfair, not open, and non-transparent development in terms of technological developments will deepen this injustice. While an interdisciplinary, high-level technological development, such as AI, is expected to contribute to humanity profoundly, it is difficult to see an objective consistency away from bias in current versions.

It can be argued that all the data they feed on is man-made and therefore contains a high degree of bias. Alternatively, it can be stated that it produces output according to the interaction practice of the user. However, whatever the main reason, we are faced with platforms that are inclined to act as carriers of the dominant discourse and will dispense far more comprehensive services to the wealthy.

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