

Artificial Intelligence: Ten Fundamental Questions

When TikTok recently popularized a filter called 'Artificial Intelligence', users were fascinated as their images were transformed into idealized, almost perfect caricatures in an animated style. Meanwhile, the new Chat GPT platform continues to advance rapidly. The latest update, Chat GPT-4, an improved version from OpenAI, can understand and generate text, audio, and images, enhancing user interaction and automating tasks almost like an expert virtual assistant. This includes the ability to work and attach digital documents directly.

It seems we are not far from the scenarios depicted in Steven Spielberg's films, where machines perform many tasks for us. The truth is, digital technology is rapidly advancing, and there is evident innovation disruption.

We often assume we know all aspects of digital world innovations. However, there is a clear gap caused by age, digital illiteracy, lack of internet access, resistance to change, and poverty, among many other factors. As communicators, we have a responsibility to educate and inform about the latest developments, discoveries, and advancements in the vast world of communication and technology. Therefore, we present these ten questions to help clarify current advancements and what our stance should be regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI).

1. What is AI?

AI is a branch of computer science that enables the programming and design of hardware and software systems to endow machines with functionalities of human beings. It aims to recreate some type of intelligence, based on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences: logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, musical, kinaesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalistic.

2. How does AI work?

AI systems are developed on the basic principle of algorithms (a sequence of steps that define an operation on data to achieve results). AI systems perform calculations on not only abstract data but also organized data, making comparisons and identifying trends.

3. What is AI's source of information?

AI operates with data provided by humans. Information becomes sequences of basic numerical data. These sequences are interpreted, enabling comparisons. Various algorithms intervene, ultimately presenting choices based on the overall supplied information. This feedback helps systems improve their choices and results.

4. Can we say AI is true intelligence?

AI is not human or animal consciousness. We do not refer to intelligence in terms of reasoning and consciousness. AI is a system that presents results based on extensive calculations and comparative choices from numerical data.

5. Is AI a computer that talks to us?

AI systems are not a single computer, but systems supported on digital or physical servers. They are software designed to simulate conversations and respond quickly. The simulation is detailed, producing fast, precise, and articulate responses.

6. Is AI useful?

Technological and digital developments have their benefits. Ethically, technology in itself is not negative, though it can be used for personal and material gains without considering the good of the others. AI can enhance human capabilities and progress, but a lack of solidarity can result in negative consequences for some.

7. What are the ethical challenges of using AI?

AI's technological development impacts human actions. Technical issues such as programming with discriminatory principles, user privacy security, and developer transparency and accountability need addressing by authorities. Social effects, including job reduction due to automation, AI-influenced decision-making, digital literacy, and the social and environmental costs of these technologies, are not yet addressed in state or governmental policies.

8. What does the Church say about AI?

Since 2019, Pope Francis has highlighted the novelty and risks of AI. In February 2020, the Vatican hosted a Congress on AI. During his address, Pope Francis emphasized that AI is a gift but requires proper ethics for responsible use. In his message for World Peace Day on January 1, 2024, he reiterated the need to manage rapid transformations to safeguard fundamental human rights. At the G7 meeting in June 2024, he noted AI's powerful use in various human activities and its ambivalence: exciting for its possibilities but point of great concern for its potential consequences. The Church does not reject technological innovation but advocates for its proper use for humanity's benefit.

9. Salesians and AI?

Given AI's significant role in youth and education, the Salesians do attempt to address this challenge in various ways. They aim to integrate AI ethically and responsibly within their pedagogical model of preventive system with its objective of encounter and being close to the young. The recently established International Salesian Commission for Artificial Intelligence (ISCAI) seeks to leverage AI's benefits and address its implications on values and principles. Last month, the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome presented the book "Artificial Intelligence: In Search of Humanity," responding to Pope Francis's question during the World Communications Day: "What is man, then? What is his uniqueness, and what will be the future of our species called homo sapiens in the era of artificial intelligences?"

10. What should our stance be regarding AI?

As parents, educators, trainers, and pastors, we cannot ignore the advancements of the digital society. We must stay informed and be prepared to guide the use of new technologies and digital innovation. We must also educate in a sound conscience to choose principles of common good and progress for all. The temptation of exacerbated individualism, fuelled by virtual conveniences, could lead us to lose our sense of humanity.

In conclusion, let us not forget that intelligence and human relationships develop through daily and real interactions with others and by valuing the results of their application. We should strive to understand more about the opportunities the digital world offers and foster responsible use of the technological and digital tools available today.

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