CES: Buzzy NEON startup builds 'artificial humans' that resemble bankers, fashion models

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Credit: Edward C. Baig USAT

Figuring out who and what is real or fake nowadays is getting to be a harder challenge in this AI-driven age. At CES, a buzzy startup with a Samsung pedigree, STAR Labs, introduced NEON as its first "artificial human."

This "computationally created virtual being" sure looks and behaves like people you may come across every day, even if it doesn't do a whole lot right now, other than exhibit simple expressions and gestures on a large display. At this early preview stage, NEON is not quite a chatbot or robot and not quite a virtual assistant for your phone. It won't answer any user questions—yet.

But while NEONs can't be an exact copy or surrogate of an existing human, they are modeled after [real people](#). At CES, NEONs appeared on the wall as yoga instructors, bankers, K-pop stars, news anchors and [fashion models](#).

NEON is the first venture of STAR Labs, a little-known, independently-run "future factory" of Samsung. CEO Pranav Mistry describes them as a "new kind of life."

That life is powered by the company's proprietary technology platform, known as CORE R3, with R3 standing for Reality, Realtime and Responsive.

Mistry was vague on the timing of when such artificial beings might be used in some meaningful way by real humans. But he says he's gotten interest from health care types—perhaps a NEON could be some kind of

companion for a lonely person—as well as advertisers and gaming and entertainment companies.

Someday a NEON might check you into a hotel. Or become the face of a virtual chauffeur in your future self-driving car.

Mistry says NEON is different from deepfake or other facial-reanimation techniques and claims the underlying technology does not permit the manipulation of an individual scene, videos or sequences, in theory keeping it all real.

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