

Study explores the concept of artificial consciousness in the context of the film 'Being John Malkovich'

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Amir Sing, assistant professor at BHU.

Recent technological advances, such as the development of increasingly sophisticated machine learning algorithms and robots, have sparked much debate about artificial intelligence (AI) and artificial consciousness. While many of the tools created to date have achieved remarkable results, there have been many discussions about what differentiates them from humans.

More specifically, computer scientists and neuroscientists have been

pondering on the difference between [intelligence](#) and "consciousness," wondering whether machines will ever be able to attain the latter. Amar Singh, Assistant Professor at Banaras Hindu University, recently published a paper in a special issue of Springer Link's *AI & Society* that explores these concepts by drawing parallels with the fantasy film "Being John Malkovich."

"Being John Malkovich" is a 1999 film directed by Spike Jonze and featuring John Cusack, Cameron Diaz, and other famous Hollywood stars. The film tells the story of a puppeteer who discovers a portal through which he can access the mind of the movie star John Malkovich, while also altering his being.

"As a humanities scholar, I have been engaged in the study of AI for the past few years," Amar Singh, one of the researchers who carried out the study, told TechXplore. "'Being John Malkovich' is an ambiguous film that invites a multitude of readings from a wide variety of critical theories. As I watched the film, I found that it brought to light many of the crucial issues that scholars are addressing in the field of AI."

Amar Singh is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Germany. Following completion of a project called "Remembering the Future Through Cinematic Symbols," he joined Prof. Ursula Kocher's "More Than Human" research group at BUW, in which he is exploring a variety of themes related to artificial intelligence. His recent paper builds upon work he has undertaken in his postdoctoral research.

"Today, technology affects our lives in an unprecedented manner, altering our perception of reality as a result," Singh explained. "In 'Being John Malkovich,' different characters exhibit altered perceptions as they attempt to hack the mind of John Malkovich. The film provides an excellent analysis of how entering a [virtual environment](#) can

alter/enhance/change our perceptions of reality by bridging the gap between self and other, something that we may not otherwise be able to experience in real life, helping us to expand our awareness."

Touching on the themes explored in the film "Being John Malkovich," Singh explores the concept of artificially induced consciousness in great depth. For instance, he theoretically assesses the possibility that machines could produce an "artificial human consciousness," which generates new knowledge about individuals, which is not already contained within them.

"There are emerging trends and problems that require a new method of addressing as our involvement with this technology grows," Singh explained. "This paper will hopefully encourage scholars to approach artificial intelligence from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives in order to overcome human biases and flaws."

Drawing connections with "Being John Malkovich," in his paper Singh touches on several important topics, including human and robot rights, virtual sex and rape, and disabilities, all of which are central to many current AI-related debates. In the future, his work could inspire more studies that draw parallels between films, philosophy and AI, to enhance the current understanding of machine intelligence, while also examining the potential of AI for exploring human consciousness.

"I am now exploring the future narratives of our symbiotic relationship with artificial intelligence as part of my postdoctoral research," Singh added. "When this project is completed, I intend to pursue other transdisciplinary projects relating to [artificial intelligence](#)."

More information: Amar Singh et al, Artificial Intelligence/Consciousness: being and becoming John Malkovich, *AI & SOCIETY* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s00146-022-01470-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-022-01470-7)

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