Why we trust calculators more than AI

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Artificial intelligence may seem similar to a calculator but the relationship of humans with the former is not as serene as with the latter. We trust the results of computers, even if we don't know exactly how it can arrive at the result of a complex operation in a short time, while the relationship with artificial intelligence (AI) generates discomfort in

people. Why? The reason is that machines never stop learning and the more they perform new and unexpected tasks, hitherto entrusted to human intelligence, the more users distrust them, because they do not like to find their own prerogatives embodied in machines. This is what creates discomfort.

There is a fear of being overtaken by some super-intelligence and, staying in the economic sphere, of being replaced in the workplace by machines. And yet, we are immersed every day in algorithms and we deal with programs such as bots in our roles of telephone customers or bank savers. It is believed that bots are behind about 50% of internet traffic, that 40% of Wikipedia edits are the work of digital agents, without forgetting the presence on social networks of many accounts created by automated platforms and, last but not least, the boom in popular curiosity for ChatGPT, capable of producing written texts based on conversations with users.

In reality, "Algorithms work and evolve precisely because they no longer try to be intelligent. If anything, they can be seen as capable of communicating creatively and for informational purposes, but they are cannot be considered intelligent," explains Elena Esposito, Full Professor of Sociology of Cultural and Communicative Processes at Bielefeld and Bologna. She recently put out the book "Comunicazione artificiale. Come gli algoritmi producono intelligenza sociale" ("Artificial communication. How algorithms produce social intelligence," Bocconi University Press, 2022).

"In fact, the purpose with which algorithms are programmed is not to understand the data provided by our online behavior. The intention is to identify correlations between data and process them so that they are informative for users," says Esposito, a student of Niklas Luhmann, who not by chance proposes to move from the definition of artificial intelligence to that of artificial communication, positing a new

theoretical model to reiterate that the interlocutor with whom we interact is not a human being, but an algorithm. We need new rules and habits of behavior which, given the AI's multiple areas of application, must be promoted by national and supranational institutions, as well as families and individuals alike, according to their respective realms of pertinence.

How can talking about artificial communication reduce the discomfort felt towards AI?

First, because I hypothesize that the analogy between the performance of algorithms and human intelligence, which generates this discomfort, is misleading. Furthermore, because it allows for the emergence of new insights on the challenges and paradoxes that recent technologies pose. The numerous positive aspects of algorithmic intelligence remain, from the availability of more information to the higher speed with which to find it, passing through the cost-effectiveness of the process. But we can also ask ourselves how the growing intervention of AI affects, for example, our conception of the public sphere and the maintenance of social cohesion, considering the progressive customization of the information and services offered to each individual person, without he or she having even asked for them.

This creates a bubble that is difficult to get out of. It becomes more difficult to realize that there may be something different from what you already know and decide whether you want to find it out or not. In other words, the individual no longer knows what others know and that common ground of shared information that makes everyone feel part of the societal whole decays. But social cohesion and markets themselves vitally depend on that common ground of shared. In addition, one may wonder what are the effects of the different versions of AI in specific fields such as education or, finally, how our perception of the relationship between reality and fiction changes. More and more often, in fact, we can intervene not only on reality but also on fiction, which is

no longer the unalterable fiction of commercial movies or novel, by but an area with which we can interact and during the course of the story, such as for example it happens in video games.

The growing presence of AI in our lives changes our faculties? For example, in knowing how to remember and what to forget?

Let's say that there is a new relationship between people and oblivion. In the past we mostly committed ourselves to remembering things and forgetting proceeded by itself, it intervened spontaneously to select the information that shouldn't last over time. Now the difficulty is reversed and lies in remembering not to remember; you need to try harder to forget as all memories and information are preserved online. We can therefore reason on the final paradox we arrive at: to forget memories it is better to multiply them, to make one climb from the first place to the eleventh in the results of a search engine, since we know that people tend to read only the first few results.

Is it believable or illusory that machines can predict our future?

The future will forever be unwritten because it depends on human behavior, which is constantly changing. The future remains open, even if we can remember that AI offers a series of new tools to deal with the uncertainty of the future. However, if so far we have tried to anticipate it by relying on the calculation of probabilities, now the algorithms try to identify correlations between various possible configurations in the big data sets. And the correlations highlighted are not necessarily the most likely, even if the algorithms are partly based on probabilistic structures.

The result of trying to predict the future is that algorithms produce

indications about the future that are obscure to humans, since they are unable to understand how they were generated. These are predictions that end up recalling the divinatory practices of the ancient world, with their sibylline and cryptic responses. Precisely the practices from which science had to move away from.

Big data, machine learning and bots, there are some of the terms that describe the hi-tech scenario in which we are immersed. The implications of these technologies currently unfolding in our lives are vast. Thus questions arise such as "Will we able to control something that we do not fully understand?" or "Aren't the machines just getting too smart?"

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