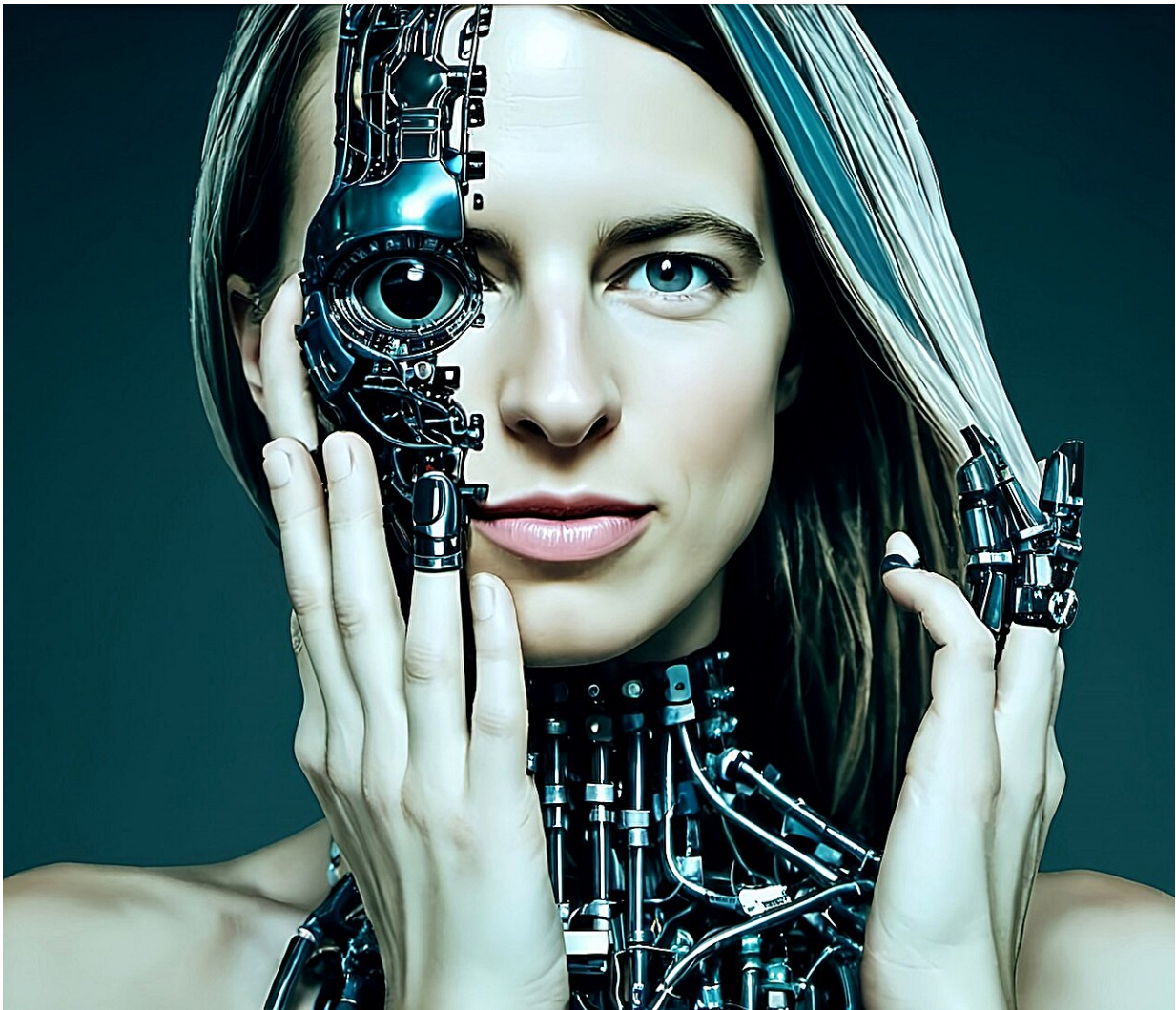


The danger of AI is that it's so good, you simply can't resist, says expert

September 5 2024, by Steinar Brandslet



This image was created with the help of artificial intelligence. The starting point is the small picture of Inga Strümke below. Note that the right hand has at least six fingers, currently a typical mistake when we use AI for help. Credit:

Kolbjørn Skarpnes, openart.ai

Inga Strümke does not believe artificial intelligence will take over the world with killer robots, but it might kill your spark. This is an area that needs rules, and Europe is about to get them.

Her office isn't necessarily boring, but the cell-like room behind the glass door at NTNU doesn't exactly reveal that this is the base of one of Norway's most renowned researchers, either.

Associate Professor Inga Strümke has become a kind of guru for people who are interested in [artificial intelligence](#) in Norway, partly because of her book "Machines That Think," but mainly because she likes to share what she can with the rest of us.

The European Union is now introducing new and stricter rules for the use of artificial intelligence, the so-called AI Act. As an EEA member, Norway will likely adopt the same rules.

"I'm not a fan of regulation for regulation's sake," says Strümke.

However, she sees several reasons why Norway should participate.

"Norway is part of Europe and the world. It is politically important that we continue to work closely with the EU on these issues. But beyond the purely political aspects, the AI Act is important for you and me. We shouldn't have AI that exploits people's weaknesses," she says.

The use of AI that can be dangerous or unfair will be subject to much stricter regulations than uses that appear to be more innocent. Some uses will simply be prohibited in the EEA and EU. You can see a summary in

the fact box below.

"The rules will protect consumers. They will ensure that we are safe and can trust the use of AI," says Strümke.

What if we don't get any rules?

Would it really be such a big deal if these rules were not put in place? Everyone knows that rules can be annoying.

"We could also ignore traffic rules. Everyone could drive as fast as they wanted. For a short time, that is. Until something goes horribly wrong. AI is such a strong commercial force. When Chat GPT was launched, it took just five days before it reached 1 million users," says Strümke.

Chat GPT is currently the most famous chatbot. Numerous pupils and students have already taken shortcuts by using it.

"We are not yet finished dealing with the use of AI in the education sector. You don't really learn that much when you let AI do almost all the work," says Strümke.

Regulations already in place

However, it is not the case that the rest of the world will necessarily adhere to the same strict regulations as the EU and Norway. For example, what is to stop China or the U.S. from having more relaxed regulations and thereby possibly gaining a competitive advantage?

"Nothing. We cannot prevent other countries from having different rules. But it is a myth that only the EU regulates the use of artificial intelligence. Earlier this year, the United States already had 58 different

regulations for the use of artificial intelligence, albeit distributed across various states. But it is not a free-for-all elsewhere either. We have to choose the type of society we want to live in. The EU has had a tendency to set a precedent for others," says Strümke.

The EU often leads the way

Other parts of the world often follow the same path that is taken by the EU. Strümke illustrates this by showing a USB-C cable, the new standard for charging cables in much of the world. It was recently introduced despite a lot of initial protests from technology companies.

This means that we avoid having piles of different charging cables lying around, one type is enough. As an additional benefit, USB-C transfers the most data and power, and the cable can be used in either direction. We can thank the EU for making USB-C the standard.

Similarly, much of the world has followed the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which gives us all greater control and rights over the type of information companies can collect about us.

She believes that the same thing could happen regarding artificial intelligence regulations as well.

Machines that think

Just a couple of years ago, the most advanced AI would probably not have envisioned that an artificial intelligence expert could become a sort of research celebrity. This hasn't, however, led to her having any prima donna tendencies, and that might be part of the secret.

Inga Strümke speaks so clearly that you almost think you understand

what her work involves. But just one glance at her computer screen is enough to make you realize that she is not exactly sharing everything she knows with us. It is full of programming language.

She is actually a physicist with a Ph.D. in particle physics, but she has concentrated on artificial intelligence in recent years.

Her specialization is [machine learning](#), which involves training artificial intelligence and explainable artificial intelligence. The latter deals with what artificial intelligence has actually understood and where this knowledge originates from.



The image used as a starting point to create the AI-generated illustration above.
Credit: Mona Hauglid

But that is not what she is best known for. Lately, if you live in Norway, you must have been living on another planet if you haven't seen her on TV or in some newspaper. She has decided to prioritize public information, while still spending a lot of time on research.

Earlier this year, her book "Machines That Think" had been on the Norwegian Booksellers Association's bestseller list for a whole year, but it wasn't originally her idea to write it.

Someone at the Kagge Forlag publishing house was smart enough to ask her, and after some guarantees that it would not be a waste of time, she started writing.

"I saw it as an opportunity to get a proper overview of the field of artificial intelligence," she says, "but it became more than a private exercise."

The book was finished after six months of writing and three months of back-and-forth with the publishers. "Machines That Think' has become an introduction to the field for tens of thousands of readers, and Strümke has long since given up trying to participate in all the events people invite her to.

No Terminator, but...

Inga Strümke is not worried that AI-driven killer robots will soon take over the world, but the massive, rapid advances in AI still present many problems.

She is afraid that we will lose our spark.

"We have always been used to slumping down in front of the TV and being entertained, but that isn't the same as what is happening now. Many people are sedentary all day long," she says.

"These services give such good recommendations and they know you so well that you simply can't resist. Various entertainment services and social media quickly learn what we like and simply feed us more of it.

Suddenly, you realize you have been sitting and watching TikTok or YouTube much longer than you intended."

"This is worse than coercion. These services give such good recommendations and they know you so well that you simply can't resist," says Strümke. "The services are able to do this because they collect information about you. Almost all of us have clicked on the buttons that give them permission to do so, and then it becomes legal. The new EU regulations can make this data collection more tricky, at least when it comes to using the information to keep us hooked in front of the screen for hours on end."

Strümke herself hardly uses social media anymore. Well, apart from Instagram. She is far too busy anyway.

A more sinister aspect is that AI doesn't just threaten our leisure time, it also threatens democracy.

Who gets your vote?

Political elections are also influenced by artificial intelligence. The most entertaining politician can get the most attention.

This is nothing new, but disinformation can be spread through deep fakes, image manipulation and targeted fake news.

Messages can be specifically tailored for individuals or groups using artificial intelligence and [social media](#), and this is something more problematic.

Lies and advantages for the attractive candidates have always been part of politics. During the 1960 U.S. presidential election, Richard Nixon lost to John F. Kennedy, and it certainly didn't help Nixon's case that he

appeared on TV looking unsteady and awkward, and without make-up, compared to his more charming rival.

"I am still undecided as to whether what we are seeing now is something completely new. But it is different than before. There is no longer the need for a large organization involving many people to influence an election campaign. All you need is enough computers," Strümke says.

"For example, a typical Russian propaganda strategy is not necessarily to lie directly all the time. Instead, people are bombarded with conflicting information until they get fed up. People are affected by digital fatigue. They get tired of it. It can also have a pacifying effect."

The strategy also opens the door for populists. People with simple messages that cut through the chaos, delivering exactly what you want to hear, often paired with rhetoric blaming some minority or presenting another convenient enemy.

So it's going to be a nightmare, right?

The use of artificial intelligence presents many dangers and pitfalls. The world is changing, and not everything seems to be moving in a positive direction.

What does Strümke think is going to happen?

"People often ask me if I am an optimist or a pessimist. What I can say is that I am never in between. Things could really end up going to hell, but it could also turn out to be really good," says Strümke.

"On the one hand, there are all the problems we face in the world. We humans are destroying the planet, eradicating species, destroying habitats, buying loads of things we don't need that have been shipped

from far away, and on top of it all, there's the looming threat of climate change. We have experienced less democracy and more unrest in recent years.

"Individually, we are not stupid, but our systems and the organization of our communities are not always that smart. Sometimes, artificial intelligence is part of the problem.

"On the other hand, there are all the possibilities, and the solutions might just benefit from artificial intelligence, if we use it wisely.

"I can't think of a single field where AI wouldn't be useful," says Strümke.

Provided by Norwegian University of Science and Technology

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