

Bad AI and Beyond: Exploring How Popular Media Shape the Perceived Opportunities and Threats of AI



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Introduction

We developed taxonomies and case studies of popular representations of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Through interviews and a large-scale survey, we determined how people discriminate between “good” and “bad” AI, and how media representations help shape these perceptions. We shared our initial results with undergraduate makers who used them to fashion games, videos, and written works about AI that we celebrated at our 2020 Festival. Meanwhile we have begun sharing our findings in forthcoming and in process scholarly articles.

Objectives

Our goals were to better understand how media representations shape public perceptions of AI and to explore how we might better represent everyday interactions with AI to the public.

Methods

We used qualitative and quantitative methods to determine public views of AI. Qualitative analysis was performed on responses to popular media, such as films, books, and games, to better understand what the public makes of the representations of AI it consumes. From this analysis, questions for focus groups were generated. We then analyzed focus group discourse to inform an online survey that provided quantitative data we could use to compare the views of the general public about AI with those presented in media. This research then informed the development of new representations which might better inform the public about AI.

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- What drives popular negativity about AI? Does the public have good reasons for such negativity that experts may not understand? Or has the public based its views of AI on misrepresentations?
- How might overtly dystopian representations of AI relate to the public understanding of insidious issues with AI and machine learning such as the biases of search algorithms?
- Can we produce narratives in different media modalities about AI that are more nuanced and complex than just the false dichotomy of good and bad? Could we develop a more accurately critical (and yet still exciting) model of AI-themed entertainment if we better understand how the public encounters AI?

Festival and Conversation

Featuring plenary conversations with Laeta Kalogridis and Bruce Sterling, the Bad AI and Beyond Festival spotlighted faculty research and creative insight into how we understand AI, while showcasing student video, prose, and poetry that gives new fictional and non-fictional accounts of AI's social impact. See more at <https://sites.utexas.edu/badaiaandbeyond/>.

Subsequently, members of our team collaborated with the Law School's Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice "Beyond the Future of Work" Pop-Up Institute to host a conversation about "Autofac, Science Fiction and the Future of Work" that featured Sterling in conversation with Simone Browne of the African and African Diaspora Studies Department and Nitin Verma of the School of Information.

Buddi-Bot!

At our festival we premiered a student-built computer game, Buddi-Bot, that dramatizes the introduction of AI into everyday life. Play the game at <https://sagalab.itch.io/buddi-bot> and learn more at <https://sites.utexas.edu/badaiaandbeyond/buddi-bot/>

Publications

A first paper reporting our findings, "Public Understanding of Artificial Intelligence through Entertainment Media" by Karim Nader, Paul Toprac, Suzanne Scott, and Samuel Baker, has been accepted by *AI & Society: Knowledge, Culture and Communication*, and more papers are coming soon.

