

DOCUMENT 1

Chatbots Are a Danger to Democracy

By Jamie Susskind Dec. 4, 2018

1. As we survey the fallout from the midterm elections, it would be easy to miss the longer-term threats to democracy that are waiting around the corner. Perhaps the most serious is political artificial intelligence in the form of automated “chatbots,” which masquerade as humans and try to hijack the political process.
2. Chatbots are software programs that are capable of conversing with human beings on social media using natural language. Increasingly, they take the form of machine learning systems that are not painstakingly “taught” vocabulary, grammar and syntax but rather “learn” to respond appropriately using probabilistic inference from large data sets, together with some human guidance.
3. Some chatbots, like the award-winning Mitsuku, can hold passable levels of conversation. Politics, however, is not Mitsuku’s strong suit. When asked “What do you think of the midterms?” Mitsuku replies, “I have never heard of midterms. Please enlighten me.” Reflecting the imperfect state of the art, Mitsuku will often give answers that are entertainingly weird. Asked, “What do you think of The New York Times?” Mitsuku replies, “I didn’t even know there was a new one.”
4. Most political bots these days are similarly crude, limited to the repetition of slogans like “#LockHerUp” or “#MAGA.” But a glance at recent political history suggests that chatbots have already begun to have an appreciable impact on political discourse. In the buildup to the **midterms**, for instance, an estimated 60 percent of the online chatter relating to “the caravan” of Central American migrants was initiated by chatbots.
5. In the days following the disappearance of the columnist Jamal Khashoggi, Arabic-language social media erupted in support for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who was widely rumored to have ordered his murder. On a single day in October, the phrase “we all have trust in Mohammed bin Salman” featured in 250,000 tweets. “We have to stand by our leader” was posted more than 60,000 times, along with 100,000 messages imploring Saudis to “Unfollow enemies of the nation.” In all **likelihood**, the majority of these messages were generated by chatbots.
6. Chatbots aren’t a recent phenomenon. Two years ago, around a fifth of all tweets discussing the 2016 presidential election are believed to have been the work of chatbots. And a third of all traffic on Twitter before the 2016 referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union was said to come from chatbots, principally in support of the Leave side.
7. It’s **irrelevant** that current bots are not “smart” like we are, or that they have not achieved the consciousness and creativity hoped for by A.I. purists. What matters is their impact.
8. In the past, despite our differences, we could at least take for granted that all participants in the political process were human beings. This no longer true. Increasingly we share the online debate chamber with nonhuman entities that are rapidly growing more advanced. This summer, a bot developed by the British firm Babylon reportedly achieved a score of 81 percent in the clinical examination for admission to the Royal College of General Practitioners. The average score for human doctors? 72 percent.
9. If chatbots are approaching the stage where they can answer diagnostic questions as well or better than human doctors, then it’s possible they might eventually reach or surpass our levels of political sophistication. And it is naïve to suppose that in the future bots will share the limitations of those we see today: They’ll likely have faces and voices, names and personalities — all engineered for

maximum persuasion. So-called “deep fake” videos can already convincingly synthesize the speech and appearance of real politicians.

10. Unless we take action, chatbots could seriously endanger our democracy, and not just when they go haywire. The most obvious risk is that we are crowded out of our own deliberative processes by systems that are too fast and too **ubiquitous** for us to keep up with. Who would bother to join a debate where every contribution is ripped to shreds within seconds by a thousand digital adversaries? A related risk is that wealthy people will be able to afford the best chatbots. Prosperous interest groups and corporations, whose views already enjoy a dominant place in public discourse, will inevitably be in the best position to capitalize on the rhetorical advantages afforded by these new technologies.
11. And in a world where, increasingly, the only feasible way of engaging in debate with chatbots is through the deployment of *other* chatbots also possessed of the same speed and facility, the worry is that in the long run we’ll become effectively excluded from our own party. To put it mildly, the wholesale automation of deliberation would be an unfortunate development in democratic history.
12. Recognizing the threat, some groups have begun to act. The Oxford Internet Institute’s Computational Propaganda Project provides reliable scholarly research on bot activity around the world. Innovators at Robhat Labs now offer applications to reveal who is human and who is not. And social media platforms themselves — Twitter and Facebook among them — have become more effective at detecting and neutralizing bots.
13. But more needs to be done.
14. A blunt approach — call it disqualification — would be an all-out prohibition of bots on forums where important political speech takes place, and punishment for the humans responsible. The Bot Disclosure and Accountability Bill introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, proposes something similar. It would amend the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 to prohibit candidates and political parties from using *any* bots intended to impersonate or replicate human activity for public communication. It would also stop PACs, corporations and labor organizations from using bots to disseminate messages advocating candidates, which would be considered “electioneering communications.”
15. A subtler method would involve mandatory identification: requiring all chatbots to be publicly registered and to state at all times the fact that they are chatbots, and the identity of their human owners and controllers. Again, the Bot Disclosure and Accountability Bill would go some way to meeting this aim, requiring the Federal Trade Commission to force social media platforms to introduce policies requiring users to provide “clear and conspicuous notice” of bots “in plain and clear language,” and to police breaches of that rule. The main onus would be on platforms to root out transgressors.
16. We should also be exploring more imaginative forms of regulation. Why not introduce a rule, coded into platforms themselves, that bots may **make only up** to a specific number of online contributions per day, or a specific number of responses to a particular human? Bots peddling suspect information could be challenged by moderator-bots to provide recognized sources for their claims within seconds. Those that fail would face removal.
17. We need not treat the speech of chatbots with the same reverence that we treat human speech. Moreover, bots are too fast and tricky to be subject to ordinary rules of debate. For both those reasons, the methods we use to regulate bots must be more robust than those we apply to people. There can be no half-measures when democracy is at stake.

Jamie Susskind is a lawyer and a past fellow of Harvard’s Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. He is the author of “Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech.”

QCM on Document 1 "Chatbots Are a Danger to Democracy"

Answer all questions on the ANSWER SHEET provided. No answers will be corrected on these pages.

You need to input your ID number on the top right field of the answer sheet, padding on the left with zeroes.

For example, if your ID number is "1234", you need to input "0001234" correctly on the checkboxes, just like the regular answers.

For questions 1 to 4, choose all answers that apply. For all other questions, choose the best answer.

1. In the article, what is « the caravan » a reference to:
 - a. The conservative migrant workers supported by the US president.
 - b. The migrants coming through Mexico to enter the US in October 2016.
 - c. The migrants arriving in the US from the Middle East after the 2016 election.
 - d. All migrant workers that are uprooted as a result of climate change.

2. Who was Jamal Khashoggi?
 - a. An Iranian journalist who covered the Iranian revolution in 1979.
 - b. A Saudi journalist who became a critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.
 - c. An Iraqi journalist who was close to the Saudi government for a time.
 - d. A Saudi journalist who was killed in an Embassy in Turkey in 2018.

3. In the context of Brexit, the term the "Leave side" refers to
 - a. the English who hope that France will eventually leave the EU.
 - b. the British MPs who support Theresa May.
 - c. anyone who supports England's departure from the EU.
 - d. All of the above.

4. In US politics, the term **midterms** refers to
 - a. The legislative elections that take place every two years.
 - b. The elections that come between two presidential elections.
 - c. Half of a presidential term.
 - d. Half of a senator's term.

Comprehension

5. In paragraph 1, it should be understood that
 - a. Elections carry a threat.
 - b. Artificial intelligence certainly had an impact on midterm elections.
 - c. Chatbots represent no threat to democracy.
 - d. The impact of chatbots on democracy is negative.

6. In paragraph 2, it should be understood that
 - a. There is less machine learning on social media than in the past.
 - b. Chatbots are taught grammar.
 - c. Chatbots learn to infer information in a chat (dialogue).
 - d. Machine learning contributed to the development of social media.

7. In paragraph 8, it should be understood that
 - a. The fast-growing progress in robot technology means that one can no longer assume that all participants in online political debate are human beings, as proven by a recent clinical exam using bots.
 - b. Despite the results of a recent clinical exam using bots, which show how efficient a bot can be, people can continue to believe that all those participating in the political process are human.
 - c. People know that they share the online debate chamber with nonhuman entities because today they assume that all participants are human.
 - d. None of the above.

8. In paragraph 14, it should be understood that
- The author believes that the current American legislation concerning bots will prohibit any future increase in their use.
 - The author believes that the Bot Disclosure and Accountability Bill is a good idea and hopes that it will not become law because if it did, many organizations would have to stop using bots for political purposes.
 - The author believes that amending the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 would prohibit only some organizations from using bots.
 - None of the above.

Choose the sentence that best sums up the content of the following sentence:

9. The most obvious risk is that we are crowded out of our own deliberative processes by systems that are too fast and too ubiquitous for us to keep up with.
- Due to their power and widespread presence, chatbots could push people out of their own debate of ideas.
 - As they have no real thoughts, chatbots could exclude themselves from the debate.
 - Because chatbots are fast and omnipresent, there is a chance that they understand more about current events than people do.
 - Because thinking takes time, and because chatbots do not need to think, they manage to dominate many conversations.

Are the following statement true, false, or not given?

10. The author writes that previously, although differences existed, people assumed that participants in political exchanges were human.
- True
 - False
 - Not given.
11. The Bot Disclosure and Accountability Bill effectively prohibits candidates from using bots today.
- True
 - False
 - Not given.

Vocabulary (in **bold** in the article)

12. Likelihood means:
- Possibility
 - Amiability
 - Probability
 - Eventuality
13. Irrelevant means
- Unrelated
 - Unreliable
 - Irrespective
 - Irresponsible
14. Ubiquitous means
- Nowhere
 - Seldom
 - Constant
 - Everywhere
15. To make up, here, is similar in meaning to:
- To pretend
 - To constitute
 - To invent
 - To disguise

General grammar

Among the 4 sentences, choose the one that is grammatically correct.

16.

- a. It is said this website to be unreliable.
- b. It is said that this website be unreliable.
- c. This website is said to be unreliable.
- d. This website is told to be unreliable.

17.

- a. There is lots more information to translate before you can post it.
- b. There are lot more informations to translate before you can post it.
- c. There is a lot more information to translate before you can post it.
- d. There are a lot more informations to translate before you can post it.

18.

- a. If I have more time, I would go out more often.
- b. If I had more time, I would go out more often.
- c. If I have had more time, I would go out more often.
- d. If I have more time, I would have go out more often.

Choose the phrase that best completes the phrase given to make a correct sentence.

19. ... to take pictures?

- a. Since how long are you using a smart phone
- b. How long have you been using a smart phone
- c. Since how long do you use a smart phone
- d. How long you use a smart phone

20. ... eating, clear the table.

- a. When you will finish
- b. When you will have finished
- c. When you had finished
- d. When you have finished