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Tragedy of Culture: A Case Study of AI (Chat GPT)

Dusanka (Pero) Slijepcevic, MA¹

¹Doctorandus; Senior Teaching Assistant; Faculty of Political Sciences, Republic of Srpska, B&H

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Abstract: The subject of research is the phenomenon of AI (Chat GPT) from the perspective of G. Simmel's sociological theory. The research problem is the relationship between AI and the individual. It is assumed that there is a discrepancy (a 'tragedy of culture' at the expense of subjective culture) between AI and the human ability to understand the functioning of a 'thinking machine', which is why the empowerment of individuals first through education is needed. Problematic questions arise: What is Chat GPT and how does it work? Why does subjective culture lose the capacity to assimilate what it creates? Does Simmel's concept of the tragedy of culture provide a valid scientific explanation for AI? How can education help empower subjective culture? The collected answers will realize the scientific goals of expanding scientific knowledge, as well as the social goal - expanding knowledge about contemporary society and current phenomena. The expected answers will find application in the context of the first, second and third mission of the university throughout the European area of higher education.

Keywords: Simmel; objective culture; subjective culture; AI (Chat GPT); the tragedy of culture

Introduction

AI technology is a revolutionary invention, like the invention of the printing press or nuclear weapons. AI has been thinking autonomously for a long time, which is why we cannot fully understand or control it - this system is claimed by Kissinger, Schmidt and Huttenlocher (2021). Given this fact, the survival of



civilization in the 21st century will certainly depend on how we understand, control and regulate AI. For this reason, in order to better understand the consequences of the interaction between humans and AI systems, this research is being carried out, which is of particular scientific interest.

The subject of research is the phenomenon of AI (Chat GPT) from the perspective of G. Simmel's sociological theory. The research problem is the relationship between AI, as an example of 'objective culture', and 'subjective culture', as the individual ability of an individual to understand and control the assets he has created because they often surpass him. Therefore, it is assumed that there is a discrepancy ('tragedy of culture' to the detriment of subjective culture) between AI and the individual's ability to understand how it functions as a 'thinking machine', which is why it is necessary to strengthen the subjective culture (habitus of the individual, his awareness, empathy, education, literacy, critical thinking through all forms and levels of education).

Research Aim and Research Questions

Accordingly, problematic questions are asked to collect the missing answers: 1. What is Chat GPT and how does it work? Compared to AI, is man more passively receptive or actively culturally productive? If AI simulates man and supposedly does everything better than him - writes, analyzes, plans - then what is the meaning and role of man? 2. Why does subjective culture lose the capacity to assimilate what it creates? Who is the subject of culture - a man or a machine that imitates him? 3. How can education help strengthen subjective culture?

The answers to the questions will realize scientific goals from description to understanding, scientific explanation to scientific prediction, as well as the social goal - expanding the fund of knowledge about contemporary society and current phenomena. The expected answers or results will find application in the context of the first (in teaching), second (in other research) and third mission of the university (helping the wider social environment) throughout the European area of higher education.

Theoretical Framework and Research Results

1. What is AI and how does it work?

Compared to AI, is man more passively receptive or actively culturally productive? If AI simulates man and supposedly does everything better than him - writes, analyzes, plans - then what is the meaning and role of man?

In order to somewhat understand artificial intelligence and its origin and development, it is necessary to look at the historical sequence of events that preceded the idea and mass use of machines that learn and think. Thus, the idea of these machines was conceived in ancient times, since the scholars of ancient Egypt and ancient Greece tried to construct automatons that would do what they were told (Parsons & Dixon, 2020, p. 66), because physical work was considered worthy only for slaves, while intellectual work was reserved for the upper classes, that is, philosophizing and lounging in free time (Svensen, 2012).

The chronology of events related to the AI system (Parsons & Dixon, 2020, p. 66 - 67) indicates that the historical development of AI has been going on since the 1950s when Alan Turing laid the



foundation of artificial intelligence with the question 'Can machines think'? He devised a test to detect the emergence of machine intelligence. Already in 1956, the first conference on artificial intelligence was held in Dartmouth, New Hampshire. Then the term AI was used for the first time. The eighties and nineties saw the development of AI-based expert systems. Then, in 1997, IBM's chess computer Deep Blue defeated Grandmaster Garry Kasparov. Since 2000, there has been an expansion of deep learning, large language models (like Chat GPT) specialized in text and response generation, speech recognition, semi-autonomous driving, etc. NASA's Mars rovers have been cruising the Red Planet independently since 2004. In 2009, Google launched "self-driving" cars without drivers. And in 2014, Eugene Gustman became the first chatbot to pass the Turing test. Today, as Tegmark (2017) claims, we live in life stage 3.0. which he calls technological due to the dominance of AI that can change both software and hardware, that is, its knowledge and physical form in relation to the previous phases of life - biological (1.0.), dominated by bacteria that cannot change either software or hardware, followed by the cultural phase 2.0. dominated by people who can change the software by learning but not the hardware.

AI models like Chat Gpt and AlphaGo work by reaching conclusions and decisions through statistical patterns (Kissinger, Schmidt & Huttenlocher, 2021) and not based on human logic and ethics, i.e. moral intuition. This leads us to the question: What is the truth and who controls the truth? Is this a new military AI arms race like the nuclear arms race once was? Is the best solution a global regulation of AI systems as was done with nuclear weapons?

2. AI as an example of the tragedy of culture according to Georg Simmel

The central problem related to the AI system was noticed by Bostrom (2014) and proposed the so-called AI alignment to adapt AI goals to human values determined by society's culture. This adaptation is of existential importance for humanity because the AI system, due to the possibility of exponential improvement of itself, may in the future reach superintelligence and surpass human abilities in all areas of life, which will make it difficult to control a system that is smarter than us. This solution is also proposed by Christian (2020) because he believes that there is a gap between the goals towards which the AI system is programmed and real human intentions and values, i.e. between what we tell it to do and what we want AI to do¹.

Therefore, the question is justified: Who is the subject of culture - a man or a machine that imitates him? This problematic issue can be best explained through the concept of the tragedy of culture (Katunaric, 2001), which was coined by the sociologist and thinker Georg Simmel, who lived and worked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He made a distinction between two concepts of culture. Subjective culture means the ability of an individual to adopt, create and develop cultural forms (knowledge, art, etc.), and objective culture means the totality of cultural forms that accumulate

¹ Namely, problems of discrimination and unethical outcomes due to learned biased data and patterns were observed, e.g. when recruiting job candidates based on previously learned sexist patterns or when predicting recidivism based on algorithms that were racially biased. Since machines do not understand meaning like humans, they look for patterns, which often leads to them incorrectly completing tasks or goals (pushing dirt under the carpet instead of cleaning), which often happens because AI learns through imitation and not observation.



over time in society (technology, laws, science, etc.). And the tragedy of culture occurs when objective culture begins to grow and develop faster than an individual can understand and adopt it. Hence, he is no longer the master of the culture he himself created, but becomes its servant or even its victim. It becomes impossible for him to find his way in this complexity and consequently he knows less and less in the sea of data and information. The created cultural products become autonomous and alienated - they no longer serve man but dominate him. As a consequence, the individual feels a sense of loss of control and meaning, alienation, anxiety and spiritual exhaustion. All because the culture that was supposed to enrich him began to stifle his humanity and dehumanize him. Alienation of knowledge occurs. Instead of people understanding how information is created, they now receive ready-made answers, often without the possibility to verify or understand their origin. This leads to passive reception rather than active cultural production. Then, there is an acceleration of cultural dynamics. AI produces thousands of texts, images, analysis - more than one human can ever process. Finally, there is a change of subject. Namely, Chat Gpt simulates the human voice, thinking, which leads to a crisis of authorship, emotions and experience. AI is the peak of the cultural drama, but its appearance is not a tragedy in itself, but the way in which humanity reacts to such a cultural leap determines whether the tragedy of culture will really play out to the end.

The theoretical argumentation of Harari (2019) who claims that artificial intelligence and biometric surveillance can lead to a new form of 'digital dictatorship' can be cited as a key proof of the tragedy of culture on the example of AI. Thus, power in the 21st century will be concentrated in the hands of those who control the most data - about people's behavior, feelings, health and habits. Decisions will no longer be made by humans but by algorithms about who to arrest based on behavior forecasts, who to hire, who to monitor, who to vote for (based on campaign manipulations).

In Marx, as in Simmel, we come across the idea of alienating man from his own creations. The worker in capitalism creates a product, but it is not appropriated by him, but by the capitalist, and so that product becomes something alien to the worker, who even controls it. And the theorist of modern technologies, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) determined that objective culture is what we call data and algorithms today and that such culture shapes people as objects of economic exploitation, not as subjects of freedom.

Then, with Max Weber, there is the idea of the growth of rationalization (bureaucracy, technical efficiency) and the iron cage, which is similar to Simmel's idea of the growth of objective culture. The individual lives more and more in the iron cage of institutions, rules, unable to express personal freedom or creativity. Once upon a time, rationalization was an invisible cage, but today an algorithm is an invisible judge. The contemporary theorist of AI systems, Nick Carr (2010), also talks about this, i.e. that the modern man does not cultivate the inner world but lives without depth, contemplation or resistance. What happens is that a culture that is too objectified reduces the depth of subjective experience - a person knows 'superficially everything' and 'deeply nothing'. Furthermore, Bridle (2018) says that more information does not mean more culture - the subject is lost in the maze of his own creations. Barrat (2013) warns of potential existential risks related to the development of AI. Namely, if AI reaches a superintelligent level to become general intelligence (AGI), then it may



represent our last invention, since we will hardly be able to control a system that is smarter than us because it is improving on the basis of machine learning, and in the future it will be able to improve itself, which can lead to the so-called intelligent explosions.

3. How can education help strengthen subjective culture?

Education can be one of the key solutions to Simmel's tragedy of culture through strengthening the individual's subjective culture, that is, his ability to understand, interpret, experience and creatively shape cultural content in a world that is increasingly flooded with objective forms. Education can strengthen a person's intellectual and emotional capacities: critical thinking, ethical reasoning, aesthetic sensitivity - which enables a return to culture as a living experience, not a mere external content. In a sea of information (objective culture), education helps the individual to organize, interpret and integrate that knowledge into a personal worldview. This means that subjective culture is not only the ability to learn but also to create meaning. Without inner freedom and individuality, man becomes a slave to his own cultural hyperproduction. A particularly humanistic, creative and ethically oriented education develops a free individual who not only adopts culture but also creates and transforms it. But such education must not turn into a formalized training (excessive standardization, testing, accelerated knowledge) that will only serve to reproduce the system and not to free thought and that will direct individuals to technical efficiency and not to a critical attitude towards culture. Therefore, interdisciplinary and contemplative education that connects philosophy, ethics, art, and technology is needed.

Conclusions

When asked what Chat GPT is and how it works, it can be clearly said that it is a machine learning model that serves as an auxiliary tool in solving the daily challenges and problems of its users, but which has a serious and risky potential to grow into a superintelligent form that even a human will not be able to manage due to the complexity of the range of its capacities and functions that will exceed the creative potential of humans. Due to excessive reliance on smart devices, a number of forms of addiction appear, and worst of all, there is the death of neurons and the weakening of cognitive functions due to excessive reliance on the services of smart devices, including AI, which puts people at risk of mental dementia. Man is more passively receptive to AI than actively culturally productive, and his meaning is reflected in the fact that he has the freedom of choice to give meaning to objects of objective culture, which AI does not have, and the role of man is still to use those objects for his own good and the good of the community, without appropriating them.

To the question why subjective culture ie. the individual loses the capacity to assimilate what he creates, it is possible to state that this is due to the mental state of being blasé in the metropolis, as a result of which a person becomes saturated with most of the cultural content that is hyperproduced every day, and which consequently causes a fear of missing out on some important opportunities, i.e. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) syndrome, which deepens anxiety. Hence, it can be concluded that a person is a subject of culture as much as he decides to be, that is, as much as he leaves it to the AI system to be it for him. Simmel's tragedy of culture is to a large extent the forerunner of the modern critique of alienation and dehumanization. Although they differ in approach, many sociological



classics of the 20th century, such as Weber and Marx, shared a concern over the fact that man is losing control over the world he himself created. Simmel's tragedy of culture is not a call to reject culture, but a critical re-examination of the relationship between man and his cultural creations, because often the development of culture does not always mean the development of man.

The question of how education can help to strengthen subjective culture can be answered by underlining the importance of the development of education, which will be focused on the question of meaning, that is, on the question of why and on values and not only on how, on facts. It must be education as one's own personality formation, and not as adaptation to market demands. Liberal education, as it has always been in its long history of existence, will be an obstacle to the establishment of dictatorships, and especially to digital dictatorships through the strengthening of awareness of free will and the free choice to decide one's own destiny. In secret, large corporations and military institutions are already developing AI, which makes global control and collective risk management impossible and makes security secondary, in the race for technological progress.

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