

I AM A “THOU” THEREFORE “I AM”: EMBEDDING VALUES AND NORMS INTO INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

THANDO NKOHLA-RAMUNENYIWA

*Department of Computer Science, University of South Africa , C3-004 GJ Gerwel
Building 28 Pioneer Avenue, Florida Park
Roodepoort, 1709, Gauteng*

ERNEST MNKANDLA

*Department of Computer Science, University of South Africa , C3-034 GJ Gerwel
Building 28 Pioneer Avenue, Florida Park
Roodepoort, 1709, Gauteng*

The Enlightenment Era ushered in a platform for science to mark its epistemological territory, which has gained a following in a number of disciplines. One of these disciplines is technology. Technological advancements have progressed exponentially, to the point that on the ethics front, it has become challenging to catch up with this growth. Intelligent systems are a dimension of technological advancements that have on the one hand brought a considerable amount of convenience for society, and on the other hand presented ethical concerns that require attention. At times complimentary with capitalistic ideals, intelligent systems seem to be more appealing to the consumer than to the individual as a moral agent. Consequently, this paper aims to recommend a way forward when it comes to embedding values and norms into intelligent systems

Introduction

Max Weber’s articulation of modernity, humanity and technology carries with it a prophetic, realistic and enlightened message. In his work titled “Science and Vocation”, Weber boldly expresses the idea that rationalism and intellectualisation are the cornerstones of the modern human being’s fate, (1975:155). Technology is the vehicle through which these cornerstones find rest, and plays an integral role in the manner in which human beings perform functions. Martin Heidegger states that for humans, technology is used as a means to an end, (Heidegger 1954, cited in Dreyfus and Spinoza, 2003). This makes technology an

enabler – it allows humans to execute tasks, furthermore, enables human beings to perform these tasks quicker than before, e.g. Instant messaging verses posting letters. Nevertheless, as there are two sides to every coin, technology can also be a dis-enabler. For instance, there are cars that do reverse parking for drivers, which can easily disable the driver to learn how to do reverse parking, and hence create a dependency for the driver in that regard. What instant messaging and reverse parking technology have in common is that they both operate through an intelligent system. In addition to this, both examples involve a consumer, where in the former the consumer is a user of an information communication device sending instant messages, and in the latter, the driver is a consumer driving the car. This paper aims to argue that intelligent systems appeal to the consumer before they appeal to a person. From an ethical perspective, this can be problematic. A proposed solution to this shall be discussed with the intention of introducing values that need to be embedded in intelligent systems.

This paper will be compartmentalised into five major themes of modernity highlighted by Weber in Maley (2004:1). 1) Capitalism; Under this theme, intelligent systems will be discussed more thoroughly. 2) The creation of meaning in a secularised world- This theme uncovers the consumer using the intelligent system. 3) The individual; an elaboration will be made about the individual behind the consumer, 4) The role of values; this theme will introduce the values that need to be embedded in value systems. 5) A way forward will incorporate the role of values from the previous theme on the role of values. This theme will then be followed by a conclusion to close the paper.

1. Capitalism

Boltanski and Chiapello state that capitalism is premised on the ideology of continuous accumulation of wealth, where the owners of this wealth continuously

reinvest in it with the intention of preserving it, (2005:162). Even Patnaik elaborates on this preservation of wealth, stating that the default state of capitalism as “a self-driven order” coerces the wage earner (and the owner of production) as objects who keep the system going, (2008:17). What is appealing about this perspective is that the owner of production is himself/ herself also seen an object, as they are also coerced into the “self-driven order” to play their role as an owner in the system. Hence, for Patnaik (2007:18) it ends up becoming a system that was created for the objectification of the individuals, the breaking down of traditional structures, Migone, (2004:174), then consequently results in the alienation of the individual. This alienation is not just a physical phenomenon, but is accompanied by technology, which opens up yet another domain where this alienation is further perpetuated. A domain that capitalises on the broken traditional structures [resulting from alienation] is mentioned by (Migone 2004:174). This domain is virtuality.

Horsfield defines virtuality as a non-physical, non-tangible space that is computer-based, (2002:1). Although there are other spaces, which are not physically tangible and are not computer based, such as spiritual and psychological domains, the virtuality mentioned Horsfield has become more popular with modernity and technological development. The biggest misconception about computer-based virtuality is that it is not real just because it is not tangible. On the contrary, (Horsfield, 2002:1) and (Levy, 2008:16) affirm the view that virtuality is a form of reality. From this, it follows that tangibility is therefore not a sufficient condition for reality.

The intangible nature of the internet brings forth countless examples of reality. Moreover, as the internet disembodies the user, that should not take away from the users reality. In fact, Head states that in addition to technology providing humans with the realm of disembodiment, Heidegger highlights that it extends the reach of human being to a point where it allows them to form and control whatever

technology exposes them to (2011:23). One of the most common exposures that technology provides within the domain of disembodiment is intelligent systems.

Harel, Gal and Elovici (2017:5) provide an understanding of intelligent systems as being a system that operates within artificial intelligence. Hence, in order to understand intelligent systems, (Russel et al, 1995) in (Harel et al, 2017:5) define artificial intelligence as a name that covers any machine or tool used to execute tasks by mimicking the manner in which humans think, reason, make decisions or solve problems. This suggests that intelligent systems operate within the domain of artificial intelligence, allowing machines to process information in order to execute tasks, mimicking the human brain that processes information before executing a task. Intelligent systems follow a particular procedure to perform a task. Within virtual space, there is more room to explore in terms of task execution, where intelligent systems operate in vast space, not limited by tangibility and carnality like human beings. Although human beings, through disembodiment, are able to venture into this vast space.

Marketing allows companies to use their creativity and explore this vast space, and use intelligent system to assist in marketing their products. On social media platforms, these include pop up links and advertisement playing in the middle of Youtube videos. In addition, advertisement often pop up as click bait for the user to click on. Qu, Hibbach, Gollub and Potthast (2018:1) define click bait as a marketing strategy that is commonly used on social media platforms. Its aim is to entice the users of social networks with attractive phrases in order to get them to click on the link/video/article. When accessed, the bait is an anti-climax for the user, overpromising on the title, whilst the content does not match the sensationalised title. Marketers or advertisers usually engage in click bait strategy of advertising with the intent of increasing advertisement income. YouTube and Twitter are some of the social media platform where intelligent systems are used to benefit the click bait phenomenon. The role of the intelligent system with click

bait, especially when it comes to YouTube, is that it recommends videos based on the regularity of the type of videos a viewer watches. From that, the kind of click bait videos that will occur will be based on something that intelligent system knows a YouTube user would be interested to watch. Furthermore, this perpetuates consumerism on social media platform and echoes the sentiments of a capitalist objectives on social media.

2. Creation of meaning in a secularized world

Migone (2007:182) establishes that the objective of capitalism (even when it comes to social media), is based on ensuring that consumers increase their consumption. With increased consumption comes the need to increase the number of consumers, which comes with an overall increase in the level of consumption. From this, it follows that capitalism was designed to dig into the pockets of the consumer. Through the use of intelligent systems, consumerism has taken a more virtual dimension, reaching more places than it previously did. Virtuality then escalates consumerism, carrying with it the emotional, psychological and financial dimensions of the consumer. When it comes to click bait videos, the constant recommended videos, especially about pop-culture, seem to lure the consumer of social media into believing there is a void in them that pop culture can fill. A need for filling that void instantly with a click of a button may lead to a vicious circle of clicking videos recommended by intelligent systems. This phenomenon of constant, instant gratification is coined the User Gratification Theory.

According to Merad and Tajer User Gratification (UGT) is grounded on the idea that the media has a role to play in terms of fulfilling the needs of the society. These needs, together with satisfaction, have a positive relationship: where ideally speaking, the more needs are met the more satisfied the user, (2016:2). This

definition of UGT encapsulates the nature of consumerism, where consumption is based on identifying a need and then satisfying it. When it comes to social media, intelligent systems play a role in this regard as they provides a structure that helps to ‘satisfy’ the needs instantly, just a click away. Even when it comes to pop- culture, users spend most of their time as consumers who feel they need to know more about pop culture, where information about it is an instant click away. The more a consumer needs to know, the more they are satisfied. Nevertheless, with click bait links, satisfaction is a bottomless pit. Bearing in mind the sensationalised headlines that click baits offer, the consumer ends up consuming more time on social media trying to get more satisfaction and often not getting it. Consequently, this consumerism can alienate the consumer not only from their physical and social environment, but also from their values, norms and in extreme cases their meaning of life. This can compromise their human dignity.

3. The individual

Kant is one of the pioneers of human dignity, hence advocating for the individual behind the customer comes as no surprise. Maliks and Follesdal (2014:2) state that for Kant, individual human rights are worth defending because rights acknowledge that a person is identifiable as a moral subject that has worth and the role of responsibility. For Kant, this would be an important premise to remember when in interaction with others. In addition to this, Kant advocates for responsibility, even when interacting with others. To illustrate the importance of this interaction of human beings as moral subjects is the agency/structure theory. Anthony Giddens’ elaborates on this theory by highlighting the freewill of individual, and the structures that the individual interacts with structures, on a daily basis, (1984:17). Additionally, the individual in this regard is the agent, and social media platforms used by the individual that have intelligent systems are the structure.

To shed light on the former, Quante shares Hegel's philosophical view of agency by introducing the idea of "subjective (and moral) will" (2004:7). This "subjective and moral will" for Hegel captured the primary criteria for one to be called an agent producing action. This makes Hegel's concept of agency one that affirms Kant's previously mentioned view of what an individual is: In addition to an individual being a moral agent, the individual has the freedom to use reason to engage in action. They also have value systems within themselves that can assist how they follow these systems in a manner that is morally conducive.

4. The role of values

In his aim to introduce moral conduciveness, Buber lays out an argument about the two kinds of orientations in interaction (when it comes to the agent/structure dynamic), namely ego-based orientation and person-based orientation (Doriza, 2005:313). The ego-based orientation is labelled by Buber as the "I-It" orientation in which the individual does not have a holistic view of their existence: they only pay attention to a small part of themselves and acknowledge this as being complete (2005:313). This can be applied to individuals as consumers of social media platforms, where within those platforms intelligent systems such as those on Youtube, which predict their consumer behaviour, based on their online activity. It follows that the "I" is the individual using the social media platform with intelligent systems, and the "it" is the intelligent system. This is why the relationship between the individual and the intelligent system fits the "I-it" orientation. What this orientation also brings to light is the basis of the individual being a consumer. This consumerism takes away from the natural qualities of human beings that accentuates their rationality and freedom. This affirms the ego-based orientation mentioned by Doriza and can remove individuals from their physical surroundings and absorb them into virtual ontology. Zur and Zur (2011) confirmed this by stating that the isolation is physical, and hence speaks to

alienation that capitalist systems create, removing the individual from their surroundings.

The other orientation that Doriza mentions is the person-based orientation which compliments the individual as a moral agent. This person-orientation Buber coins as the “I-Thou” orientation where the individual “I” acknowledges the Other as a person just as the self is a person, and therefore appreciates and respects the Other when engaging with them (Doriza, 2005:314). Buber expresses this orientation as one where when facing the Other, one acknowledges the Other is held at high regard, removed from anything that can make him or her a “thing”. Understanding that the Other is a heavenly being, resembling a Godly being, (Smith, n.d: 8) . This is why the Other is a “Thou” because they are held great esteem, holding a very spiritual and humane quality that deserves recognition and respect. Without the face of the other, it is challenging to respond to the “I-Thou” orientation by Buber.

5. The way forward

From the above argument by Buber and Davy, the following recommendations that enhance the “I-Thou” relationship could be useful when it comes to embedding values and norms in intelligent systems:

- Granted, intelligent systems are an “it”, and by default introduce an “I-It” orientation. A suggestion here would be for designers of intelligent systems to bear in mind that the users of intelligent systems are human beings who have freewill, reason, rights and integrity. Identifying users as consumers first before human beings compromises their worth. Yet, if the individual is seen first as a human being with worth and integrity, the design of intelligent system in virtual space will require different input or enhance different qualities of a human being.

- Taking on from the above point, intelligent systems should, in the same way that they recommend videos to a user based on their past video viewing also suggest videos that can assist a user that is constantly watching videos of concerning content. For instance, instead of capitalising on a user who is always watching videos on celebrity gossip, intelligent systems can work with social media platforms to monitor behaviour of a user that may be watching videos or engaging in content that may be detrimental to their wellbeing. Hence, if a user is always viewing videos about gambling, intelligent system can suggest videos that could highlight the dangers of gambling, or how to get help when dealing with a gambling problem.
- Ultimately, the practical way to change how intelligent systems work is for the designers of intelligent systems to take on a person-based orientation when designing system. For this reason, they will positively impact the user by seeing them as ends in themselves “Thou’s”, instead of seeing them as a means to an end “consumers.”

Conclusion

It goes without saying that technology has both its positive and negative attributes. The former is seen by the manner in which the convenience that technology brings to light, as it enables individuals to execute tasks at a quicker rate than before. The latter on the other hand is when technology supersedes ethics and allows for loopholes which can breed unethical behavior that is not always accounted for. In addition, capitalistic ideals are sometimes easily intertwined with technology users who become consumers of technology. Social media is one of the major platforms of technology where individuals engage in intelligent systems, systems which in their virtual capacity become the breeding ground for consumerism. To respond to this, scholars such as Buber and Davy provide an insight which can

assist in finding recommendation to address this problem of the consumer identity overshadowing the individual as a moral agent. Intelligent systems need to be made aware that they are dealing with a “Thou” which is a sufficient condition to be respected as a moral agent.

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