AI Can Now Make You Immortal – But Should It?

By Bernard Marr, February 21, 2023, Forbes.com

For as long as we've been around, human beings have fought against the inevitability of death. This struggle has given rise to religions that have dominated human culture for millennia and has been central to philosophies that have shaped our civilizations.

But might it be the case that a scientific solution to immortality is finally in sight? In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved to the stage where it looks set to revolutionize every aspect of our lives. It may just be possible that it's going to change the way that we think about – and perhaps even experience – death, too.

(…) Back in 2020, a Korean documentary crew worked with VR producers to allow a grieving mother to "reunite" with her dead daughter. It was a process that divided opinion, with many considering it morbid. However, the mother herself reported that the experience helped her through her grieving process and that she had no regrets about going through with it. (…) It seems a safe bet that in the near future this technology will converge with natural language platforms such as ChatGPT, enabling us to have real-time conversations with the deceased.

There's a chance the benefits will not end there, though – what if it can prevent valuable experience and expertise from being lost due to the inconvenient certainty of mortality?

If he was still around, would Einstein be able to build on the advances in our knowledge of physics that have been made since he died to solve some of the problems that today's scientists are still struggling with? Would Washington or Gandhi have been able to broker a peace deal that would put an end to conflicts raging around the world today? What kind of movies would Shakespeare be writing if he had not yet shuffled off this mortal coil?

Some have proposed that if we capture enough data during someone's life, it might be possible to keep them around indefinitely after their physical brain has gone. This may not be as difficult as it sounds – Microsoft researchers Gordon Bell and Jim Grey have estimated that logging every conversation that a human has over their entire lifespan would only require around one terabyte of storage.

Running a "digital twin" of a deceased person would allow us to continue to benefit from their wisdom as long as it's necessary. As we've been shown possible with machine learning, there's no reason that the "person" would have to stop absorbing more knowledge and improving their understanding of the world.

Of course, the obvious extension of this line of thinking is, why wait for them to die? If we can replicate someone after death, then we can replicate them while they are still alive. We could have 10 or 100 Einsteins, all working on solving different physics problems, or an individual Shakespeare for every person on Earth, dedicated to creating personalized stories and plays to keep them entertained. Running a business and don't have enough time to spend at home with your family? No problem, set your digital twin to work, keeping your empire running while you concentrate on what's really important.

Some of these ideas are encapsulated in the concept of digital eternity, an MIT research project that aims to explore the technological and philosophical requirements of creating digital twins that would effectively let us live forever. (…)

Perhaps with some technological assistance, some of you reading this may one day live on to see what attractions the future has in store – such as the Earth being swallowed by the sun in seven billion years' time, or with the death of the universe, far further into the future.