AL JAZEERA ENGLISH. WILL AI TAKE YOUR JOB? TRANSCRIPT

Let's talk about AI and whether it's going to take your job. Throughout history, tech revolutions have transformed societies, often for the better, but they've also put people out of work. The printing press replaced scribes, robots replaced factory workers and online banking has cut out bank tellers.

With artificial intelligence, we're seeing another tech revolution, but at a pace and scale that's both incredibly exciting and also pretty scary.

Yolanda Lannquist: The level of AI technological progress that we can expect five years from now is basically unimaginable.

Will we still hire graphic designers when AI can generate images in seconds? Will we still need as many lawyers? AI can draft basic contracts and where do journalists like me fit in, if AI can sum up a news story and even present it?

Is your job under threat from artificial intelligence?

Anka Reuel: We'll increasingly have to ask ourselves the question where are humans actually still needed?

So how is AI already affecting the world of work and where is this all heading?

AI has been around for decades, but in the last few years, it really started going mainstream. More and more companies have been embedding different kinds of AI models into their workflows, products and services, things like recommendation algorithms used by streaming platforms, or AI systems that help banks detect fraud, but last year, a new tool came along - ChatGPT. ChatGPT version 3.5 was a big deal. Version 4 took the tech to a whole new level.

GPT-4 is a breakthrough in problem-solving capabilities. It's basically a powerful chatbot that can generate an answer to any question it's asked. It can summarize text, write computer code, and even write a poem.

Anka Reuel: It's taken the world by storm - literally 100 million users within the first month after release.

Professor Jack Stilgoe: ChatGPT does an extraordinarily good job of seeming human-like, and it does that through, you know, very, very clever training, huge amounts of data, huge amounts of computing power, but underneath the hood, it is designed to do one thing – which is just to predict what the next word in a sentence is going to be.

ChatGPT is the best-known example of a type of AI called generative AI. These are algorithms that look for patterns in huge amounts of data, and learn from those patterns to come up with new content – like text, images, video, or audio.

Adobe, for example, has added AI to its Photoshop software that allows you to add, extend, or remove content from images using a simple text prompt.

The technology is getting better and better all the time, and all sorts of companies are finding ways to apply it.

Professor Jack Stilgoe: There are some big, big changes happening and, most importantly, I think, huge amounts of money behind this push to automating a lot of cognitive tasks.

Generative AI has the capacity to actually create the kind of stuff and do the kinds of tasks that, until recently, we thought only humans could do. So there is no doubt the advances in generative AI, as well as other types of AI, will have huge implications in the workplace and we're already seeing it.

The tech company IBM says it's replacing 8,000 jobs with AI. It says back-office operations like HR will be among the first to go.

Yolanda Lannquist: We used to expect that the jobs requiring high skill, white-collar jobs, or creativity would be safe from AI automation, but what we're seeing with generative AI is that writing, design, coding, jobs involving creativity, are able to be done often in an indistinguishable manner from humans by generative AI.

So it's clear AI has the potential to eliminate a whole range of jobs, and several studies have shown that high-skill jobs are the most exposed to advances in AI. Look at this chart from the OECD, which recently did a big study on AI in the labour market, but these are still early days, and the OECD also found that, actually, the impact of AI on job levels has been limited so far and that, for the time being, more than replacing jobs, AI is changing them, and the skills that are required to carry them out.

So the bigger picture around how AI will affect jobs is actually quite mixed. It's a growing industry, which means new jobs are being created and in places where there are shortages of certain skills, AI could step in. A medical study found that using AI to read breast cancer scans is safe and effective, and can almost halve the workload of radiologists. In countries where there aren't enough radiologists, that's good news.

AI can also improve existing jobs by cutting out the more boring tasks and helping with the creative process.

Anka Reuel: I'm starting to frequently interact with ChatGPT in my day-to-day work. I basically have an almost free research assistant to help me brainstorm ideas, find and summarise literature, and help me code. I think instead of having jobs completely displaced, what we will see is workers basically working in cooperation with, collaboration with, those models and either being able to reduce their work hours, or getting more output, or more innovation.

Yolanda Lannquist: We can expect that humans can spend more of their time on critical thinking and judgment and interpersonal relationships and let the AI technology do the kind of work that it's more effective at.

Maybe the takeaway is this - AI can increasingly help or even beat us at certain tasks. So it's going to become more and more about identifying the areas where humans can add value, especially when we keep in mind the limitations of the technology.

AI models rely on content that humans have already created, and they're only as good as the datasets they're trained on. That data could be biased, unrepresentative, or out of date. Just check out the disclaimer on the ChatGPT website. In other words, it gets stuff wrong.

Professor Jack Stilgoe: They haven't been programmed to prioritise truth or authenticity. In most cases, the technology isn't nearly as good as a lot of the hype says it is.

Anka Reuel: A lot of people still fail to understand the limitations of those systems, and are becoming over-reliant on them and that can have real-world consequences, eventually. If you just like blindly trust the systems now, especially given that there's so much error in the output.

Whatever you think about it, AI is here to stay, and it's going to be an adjustment for everyone. As with any new technology, there will be winners and losers, but that's not so much about AI itself, it's about how humans decide to use it.

Professor Jack Stilgoe: Some humans will be empowered using these technologies, and some humans will be disempowered. So it's not humans versus robots – it's humans versus humans.

VOCABULARY

adjustment (noun) – a small change made to improve something or make it work better.

algorithms (noun) – a set of rules a computer follows to solve problems or make decisions.

biased (adjective) – unfair or showing favour to one side more than the other.

breakthrough (noun) – an important discovery or progress that helps solve a big problem.

cognitive (adjective) – related to thinking, learning, and understanding.

consequence (noun) – something that happens because of what someone did.

contract (noun) – a written agreement between people about what they must do.

dataset (noun) – a collection of information or facts used for studying or working with computers.

disempowered (adjective) – made to feel weak or unable to control things in your life.

draft (verb) – to write or draw something in a rough or first version.

eliminate (verb) – to completely remove or get rid of something.

embedding (verb) – putting something deep inside something else so it becomes part of it.

empowered (adjective) – given the power or confidence to do something.

extraordinarily (adverb) – in a very special or amazing way.

hood (noun) – the cover on a car or machine, often hiding parts inside.

implication (noun) – a possible effect or result of something happening.

indistinguishable (adjective) – so similar that you cannot tell the difference.

innovation (noun) – a new idea or way of doing something.

interpersonal (adjective) – about relationships and communication between people.

limitation (noun) – something that stops you from doing more or better.

output (noun) – the amount of work or result a person or machine produces.

over-reliant (adjective) – depending too much on something.

pace (noun) – the speed at which something happens.

potential (noun) – the ability to grow or become something better in the future.

predict (verb) – to guess what will happen before it does.

revolution (noun) – a big change that happens quickly and affects many things.

scale (noun) – the size or level of something compared to something else.

scribes (noun) – people in the past who wrote things down by hand.

throughout (preposition) – in every part or during the whole time of something.

underneath (preposition) – below or hidden under something else.

unimaginable (adjective) – so strange or big that it's hard to believe or think about.

unrepresentative (adjective) – not showing a true or fair example of something.

workflows (noun) – the steps or way work is done from start to finish.