Professional Computing Ethics Essay 2018
Artificial Influencers.

A phenomenon which has seen a really rapid rise, linked to the widespread use of social media, is that of "influencers", that is people who have a significant following on social media (eg Instagram, Twitter) and endorse products or services to their followers, usually for payment. Many people trust these kinds of personal endorsements much more than traditional advertising, so there has been a boom in their "influence". Sometimes these influencers don't just endorse products or services, but establish or reinforce trends, e.g. clothing fashions, lifestyles, fads.

Apart from any ethical questions arising from the place, use and power of such influencers, there are also significant issues associated with some practices, such as "buying likes", to boost one's apparent reach and influence.

Now it has emerged that one or more (many??) of these influencers are in fact CGI constructs, i.e. not real people at all, but created, and therefore at the behest of their creators to endorse whatever their creators wish. One such is the CGI "model" Lil Miquela, reputed to have over 1 million followers, and another is Shudu, "the first cgi supermodel".

The use of AI creations does not stop at influencers, but companies are seriously developing and trialing the use of AI in customer help phone services, utilising voice/language recognition and interactive voice response. Many of the systems currently deployed are relatively simple, responding to your question/request with "did you mean...", which can be especially annoying when they consistently fail to understand you. But the technology is advancing rapidly, and soon you may not know if you are speaking to a human or not (shades of the Turing Test).

What ethical issues can you identify in the above scenarios? For instance, should creators of these simulators always tell you that you are seeing/speaking with/following a real person or not? Are there any circumstances in which "buying likes" might be legitimate? Explore these and other issues you can identify, and describe how you would address the ethical issues involved, citing the Australian Computer Society's Code of Ethics (see `http://www.csse.uwa.edu.au/undergraduate/units/CITS3200/ethics/Code-of-Ethics_Final_12.6.12.pdf`).

Some Resources

- The Conversation, 7-Aug-18:
  `http://theconversation.com/instagram-influencers-when-a-special-relationship-with-fans-turns-dark-100543`

- Wired, 1-May-18: `https://www.wired.com/story/lil-miquela-digital-humans/`.

- Ethical Psychology, 1-Jun-18: `http://www.ethicalpsychology.com/2018/06/cgi-influencers-like-lil-miquela-are.html` .

Some points to note for your essay

- Your essay should be 1500-2000 words (excluding references). Essays longer than 2000 words (excluding references) will not be marked. Please report the number of words on the front cover.

- For readability please typeset the text and use a 12pt serifed font, e.g. Times rather than Arial.

- Use 1.5 line or double spacing (in MS Word: Format → Paragraph → Line Spacing). Margins should be at least 2cm.

- Use Harvard format for your references. For assistance with this see:
  `http://guides.is.uwa.edu.au/harvard`

- Don't forget to put your name and student number on the front.

- Please understand that if you refer to someone else's work you will normally paraphrase their remarks and include a citation (in Harvard format). If you use the authors' exact words that is a quotation, so should be surrounded by quotation marks and include a citation. Cutting and pasting without quotation marks, and particularly without a citation, is **plagiarism**. BTW, paraphrasing involves reading something, understanding it (which may involve reading background documents) and then summarising the main points in your own words. Minor syntactic transformations on the starting text is not paraphrasing. If you are unsure of the difference I suggest you go to:
  `http://www.studentservices.uwa.edu.au/ss/learning/online_services/`
  `plagiarism_portal`
  In particular, follow the link to the FAQs and the link to the examples of what not to do.

- Hint 1: Excluding quotes – which must be accurate and within quotation marks – you should be aware that contractions, such as "doesn't", "won't", etc, are inappropriate in formal writing; spell the phrases out: do not, will not, etc.

- Hint 2: If you are using MS-Word, I strongly suggest you do not ignore the red lining (assumed spelling mistakes) and green lining (assumed grammatical issues). Both can be wrong, e.g. the difference between American and Australian/British spelling or specialist words unknown to the dictionary, but often these suggestions are right. Think about each one before dismissing it.

- Hint 3: A necessary condition for a good mark is at least one reference not given to you in the assignment description.

- A marking rubric can be found linked to the the CITS3200 unit timetable near where you find this essay description.

Examples of excellent essays have been kindly provided by 2013 CITS3200 students Jack Golding and Michael Martis (and made available here with their permission, of course).
`http://undergraduate.csse.uwa.edu.au/units/CITS3200/essay/Jack_Golding.pdf`
`http://undergraduate.csse.uwa.edu.au/units/CITS3200/essay/Michael_Martis.pdf`

Finally, please submit the electronic source document version using cssubmit, i.e. doc, docx, odt or tex. See the Unit Timetable on the Project web page for the date and time that the submissions close.

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Michael J. Wise
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