Elon Musk vs Mark Zuckerberg: Battle of the killer robots?

By Colin Thornton

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In recent months, the debate over whether artificial intelligence (AI) is evil or evolutionary has taken on a new level of urgency - and ferocity. This is primarily because two major tech innovators, Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg, have each embraced very strong and opposing views on the matter.

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To begin with, Musk has warned the likes of Facebook and Google about being too frivolous and careless with AI. He doesn't necessarily think it's a bad thing, but he believes that AI platforms need to be better controlled and monitored.

Zuckerberg, however, wants to go full steam ahead with development - and posits that AI is here to advance and assist humankind.

This high profile and well-documented difference of opinion has launched a public debate between the two - with Musk alleging that Zuckerberg's knowledge is "limited". Zuckerberg retaliated by saying that people who talk about AI being destructive are "pretty irresponsible."

Doomsday predictions…

This 'nerdy' debate essentially started with Musk, early in July, when he pushed for more proactive regulation of AI development. Musk asserts that AI poses a "fundamental risk to the existence of civilisation."

"I keep sounding the alarm bell, but until people see robots going down the street killing people, they don't know how to react, because it seems so ethereal," he has commented.

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Notably, Musk has also stated that AI platforms/entities will be top of the food chain - and will ultimately make us slaves to robots.

Here's where Zuckerberg comes in - taking a stance against Musk's dystopian vision. While hosting a Facebook live video stream from his home, one viewer asked: "I watched a recent interview with Elon Musk and his largest fear for the future was AI. What are your thoughts on AI and how could it affect the world?"

Zuckerberg's response?

"I have pretty strong opinions on this. I am optimistic. And I think people who are naysayers and try to drum up these doomsday scenarios – I just, I don't understand it. It's really negative and in some ways, I actually think it is pretty irresponsible."

Essentially, Zuckerberg believes in a utopian version of AI. For example, that it will save lives through the use of driverless cars.

"One of the top causes of death for people is car accidents, still, and if you can eliminate that with AI, that is going to be just a dramatic improvement," he stated.

That said, however, Facebook recently shut down two of its AI robots – after they created their own language and started to communicate with each other! Facebook did state that the move wasn't motivated by fear, but rather because the robots were not performing the tasks that they were created for (i.e. talk to people, not robots).

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This isn't the first time that an AI project has had to be shut down because of worrying developments, though. A Chinese chatbot famously went rogue some time ago - saying unfavourable things about the Chinese government. Microsoft and Walkers Crisps had similar experiences when their Twitter bots went rogue. Luckily, companies can simply switch these AI bots off, for now.

Looking ahead, only time will tell whether we are moving closer to Musk's dystopian vision of killer robots or a controlled, efficient environment whereby AI platforms/innovations improve our lives…

ABOUT COLIN THORNTON

Colin founded Dial a Nerd in 1998 as a consumer IT support company and in 2002 the business- focused division was founded. Supporting SMEs is now its primary focus. In 2015 his company, merged with Turrito Networks who provided niche internet services outside of the local network. These two companies have created an end-to-end IT and Communication solution for SMEs. Colin has subsequently become the managing director of Turrito. Contact him at info@dialanerd.co.za

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