How IT Professionals Perceive Artificial Intelligence Myths

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been recently attracting a lot of attention despite its long history. A good part of its presence in media and non-technical conversations is linked to existing myths and fears about its effects on humans and society. Literature has already analyzed how this type of information influences the general public and non-technical professionals but not how IT professionals react to AI myths. This article shows the results of a survey to a wide and varied sample of European IT professionals offering first insights on their perception of AI myths.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; AI; myths; IT professionals

1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has existed since the late 1950s, but it has recently gained popularity due to the rise of generative AI, giving the impression of being a newer technology to those unfamiliar with its history. While AI has long been used in various fields, its presence in everyday life, particularly through products and services directly accessible to the public, has significantly boosted its visibility. This recent attention has caused tech companies to highlight AI integration to attract investors, even though 40% of companies claiming AI features in their products showed no real evidence of it [1]. In addition, AI has become a frequent topic of discussion among celebrities and experts [1], [2].

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Many sectors now rely on AI for decision making and problem-solving, making it essential even in daily life. AI has taken over certain human tasks, improving accuracy and efficiency over time. However, the rapid progress in AI has also triggered fears about its potential risks. The public debate, fueled by media and experts, has sparked both optimism and concern. As some experts point out [3], new technologies can greatly benefit society, but overcoming public fears is crucial. Public support, along with industry efforts, is essential for AI's future growth.

AI is expected to continuously evolve, influencing various aspects of life and business. Though many associate AI with automation and robots [4], the term encompasses much more. Understanding how AI will impact society requires measuring whether public perception aligns with reality. Although the social and philosophical debates around AI were previously underdeveloped, interdisciplinary approaches are now critical in understanding AI's broader implications. For example, literature and AI can influence each other, as seen in discussions about creativity in machines [5] or legal analysis [6].

Non-technically educated individuals often mix images from fiction with reality, leading to myths about AI's capabilities. Iconic characters like Robbie the robot from Forbidden Planet (1956) and HAL 9000 from 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) have contributed to these myths. Natale's study [7] highlights how these myths have shaped public perception, while other studies link ancient myths with advancements in robotics and AI [8]. Such myths, however, distract from more tangible concerns, such as privacy, security, and bias in AI systems. Even prominent figures like Stephen Hawking, Bill Gates, and Elon Musk have warned of AI risks, though their concerns are grounded in real-world issues rather than fictional fears [9].

The regulation of AI and its broader implications are now topics of serious discussion. The European Union has proposed the first legal framework for AI, focusing on issues like data use, intellectual property, and bias rather than general myths [10]. Studies analyzing AI narratives [11] show that public perceptions are often shaped by personal experiences with current applications and by popular narratives about the future. These perceptions, which often emphasize overhyped AI capabilities, may lead to unrealistic expectations and, consequently, disappointment. At the same time, false fears may divert attention from more pressing challenges, such as infrastructure robustness and decision making accuracy.

Interestingly, a study on automated decision making found that the public often views AI-based decisions as equal to or better than those made by human experts in specific cases [12]. Overestimating AI's capabilities may also result in missed opportunities for beneficial technologies [13]. AI's impact is already visible, but

the pros and cons are still being explored. Some studies have provided insights into these impacts [14], [15], highlighting the need for society to adapt to AI's rapid influence. As one study noted, discussions about AI in The New York Times increased sharply after 2009, with a generally optimistic tone [16]. Another study of Twitter posts from 2007 to 2018 [17] showed that AI risks became a popular topic after 2014, with the public's perception shaped by experts rather than actual events.

Surveys suggest that while many believe AI will improve life, concerns about unemployment and social inequality persist [3], [18]. A McKinsey report [19] suggests that between 400 and 800 million jobs may be automated by 2030, though other studies are less conclusive [20]. Public concerns about automation are growing. A 2019 University of Oxford survey [21] found that 34% of Americans viewed AI as bad, while 26% saw it as good. Globally, concerns center on data privacy, cyberattacks, and surveillance.

Experience with AI appears to influence perceptions, with more frequent AI users feeling more comfortable with the technology than non-users [22]. These findings suggest that knowledge and experience can help dispel myths about AI. However, the "black box" nature of AI, compounded by misinformation, remains a challenge. Public perception must be addressed constructively, as suggested by one of the few global studies on AI myths [23].

IT professionals play a crucial role in shaping the public's understanding of AI myths. However, research on their perceptions is limited. One study surveyed 55 IT specialists on AI's impact on radiological work but did not address myths [24]. Other surveys have focused on specific technical issues within other professions, such as librarians [25], teachers [26] and psychiatrists [27] but IT professionals have been largely overlooked.

The literature review reveals a gap in understanding how IT professionals perceive AI myths, particularly in Europe. This gap motivated our study, which aims to explore their views on myths commonly held by non-technical people. Our research addresses the following questions:

- RQ1: Do IT professionals perceive AI myths as valid, similar to non-technical people?

- RQ2: Does AI-related qualification influence IT professionals' perception of these myths, or is general computing knowledge enough to dispel them?

- RQ3: Do age and professional experience affect IT professionals' perceptions of AI myths?

As there are no works in literature on IT professionalism reporting different technical perceptions among men and women and we cannot reasonably hypothesize underlying reasons to justify those differences, we have not included the study of possible differences in opinions referred to gender.

The next section outlines the study methodology and survey design targeting European IT professionals. Section 3 presents general findings related to RQ1, while Section 4 analyzes the results by respondent profile for RQ2 and RQ3. Finally, Section 5 provides conclusions and suggests future research directions.

2   Methodology

The use of surveys to analyze perceptions of AI is a common method in the literature [28]. For this study, we employed an online survey, disseminated through the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS) (www.cepis.org), which operates in 29 countries. This approach ensured a wide geographical representation and diversity of IT professional profiles.

The first step in designing the survey was selecting typical AI myths held by the general population, as reported in press articles. For simplicity, the number of myths was limited. A focus group from CEPIS's Information Society Expert Group selected key myths, drawing from general media articles and academic sources, including the website www.aimyths.org/ and Leufer's AI article [29]. These myths were chosen to reflect common fears held by the public, including:

1) AI is actively looking to replace people.

2) AI is ridiculously smart or savvy.

3) AI is complex and difficult to understand.

4) AI will achieve singularity (the point at which advances in AI led to the creation of a machine smarter than humans).

The myths were categorized for conceptual clarity:

- *Timeline myths*: This category addresses uncertainties about when AI will replace humans. Experts disagree on when, or if, human-level AI will be achieved, making it clear that we simply do not know.

- *Controversy myths*: A misconception is that only those unfamiliar with AI raise concerns about its safety. Media often exaggerates the AI safety debate, making it more controversial than it is.

- *Risks about super-human AI*: This myth bundles three misconceptions - concerns about AI consciousness, evil intentions, and robot dominance.

The second step involved transforming these myths into questions for an online survey. The questionnaire, developed using the EU Survey tool, included two parts. The first part asked for demographic details: country, age, years of IT experience, and self-assessed AI knowledge. The second part posed nine statements based on the selected myths, with respondents indicating their

agreement or disagreement using a five-point Likert scale. A comment section was also provided to gather additional insights.

"Correct" answers were those that aligned with expert opinions, debunking unjustified AI myths, as outlined on www.aimyths.org and in Leufer's article [29]. For reverse-style statements (S4 and S7), the correct answer was agreement. Additionally, two control statements (S2 and S6) were included to prompt reflection, as their answers were deliberately ambiguous to check how respondents handled uncertainty.

The survey link was shared through CEPIS member societies and other channels, including the ITPE community and direct contact with IT experts, to maximize responses. Participants reviewed an informational briefing and gave consent before starting the survey. As no personal data was collected, the study was exempt from ethics review, per institutional regulations.

2.1   Sample

The analysis of the sample of 153 responses includes basic descriptive statistics of the profile of the respondents. The question on age ranges from "less than 25" to "more than 64" with scale steps of five years. The largest group of respondents are in the group aged 50-54 (19% of the sample). Other age groups have fewer people (6% to 14%) with few young under 25 (only 3%). Regarding the years of work experience in the IT field, most of the respondents are in the ranges of 30-34 and 35-39. Those between 30 and 39 are the most frequent with 32% of the total, logical consequence of having many respondents between 50 and 59 years old. While the calculated average of our sample is 47.9 years old, estimations in USA discuss 45.6 as average in the IT sector [30]. Adittionally, EU statistics only show that IT professionals under 35 counts as 36% while our sample accumulates 25.5% [31].

Regarding gender, our sample is biased (21% of women) in similar way to the trend in the IT sector (average 19.4% in the EU [31]). However, we are not considering this factor as relevant for the study as pointed in section 1 where the research questions were stated.

The respondents reside in 19 different European countries with the largest groups from Slovenia (22%), Spain (18%), Italy (16%), Turkey (10%), and Ireland (7%). The level of specific knowledge of respondents on AI was structured into five levels: None, Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, and Expert. The most frequent is Intermediate (37%), while None and Basic accumulate 32% and Advanced and Expert sum up 31%.

3   Results and Analysis

The results of the survey are explained below and summarized in Figure 1.

The first statement "AI will solve everything" (S1) checks the extent to which respondents are optimistic in their perception of the future of AI as a technology-driven world and as a relevant leap in technology. The statement shows one's possible enthusiasm towards AI following a typical simplistic view in the mind of the public and media. Most of the respondents disagree (73%).

The second statement "AI is complex and difficult to understand" (S2) checks whether respondents think the concept is simple by just mimicking cognitive skills or if it is difficult to understand with some beyond-comprehensible technology. Most of the professionals (40%) neither disagree nor agree, and there are similar results for agreement (29%) and disagreement (31%). The majority of respondents think that AI is something difficult to understand although some very simple applications can be easily understood by anyone that is a logical result for this ambiguous control statement.
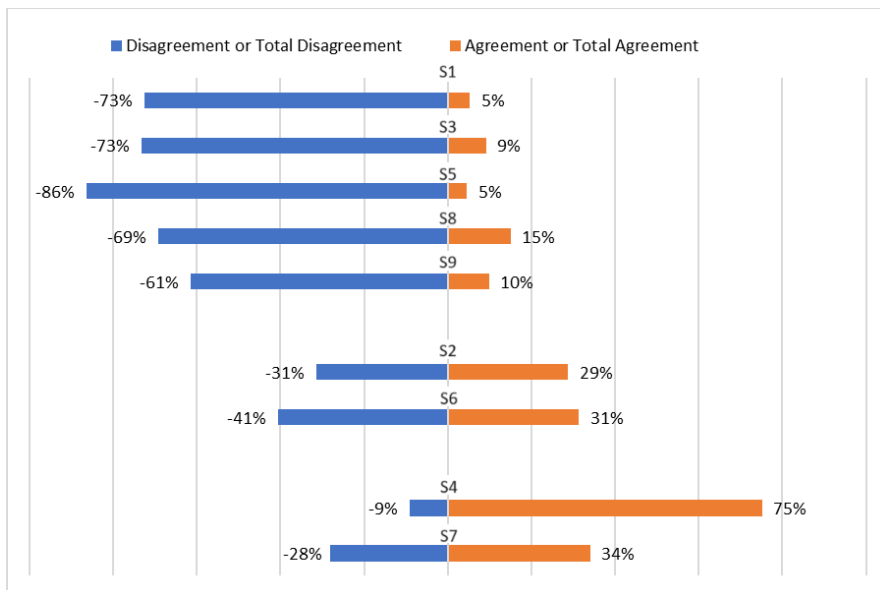

Figure 1
The general results of the survey classified by category of statements

The third statement "AI presents a risk because it will become conscious and will replace human beings" (S3) explores the popular image of AI someday controlling humans. Ignorance and suspicion still prevail about AI's promise, hype, or obstacles [6]. This question checks whether AI is necessarily a competitor trying to outperform the human mind or an extension of human senses and capabilities.

A large majority of respondents (73%) disagree with this statement, although 27% still doubt this misconception of machines replacing humans, likely influenced by fictional stories or simply considering collateral risks of AI.

The fourth statement "AI could be simple in its applications" (S4) investigates the perception of respondents who already use certain applications but are incompetent in understanding how they operate. Most of the respondents (75%) agree with this statement while only 9% disagree. AI has many simple applications already available, contrasting with the image of extremely complex work in the mind of the general public and media.

"AI presents a risk because it will spontaneously hate human beings when it becomes conscious" is a fifth statement of the questionnaire (S5) and explores the image of something big and scary posing a threat that will take away our jobs and livelihoods, replace, and ultimately obliterate humanity. If AI achieves singularity leading to the creation of a machine smarter than humans, will it pose a threat, or opportunity is still a mystery triggering hype. Most of the respondents disagree (86%) representing the most widely accepted assumption among experts, i.e., the opposite mostly happens in movies.

The sixth statement is "General super intelligent AI is just years away" (S6). Technology is changing the world at an astonishing pace while stretching our abilities to keep up. Many tech workers believe that superintelligence will be developed within the following 50 years, pushing the date to somewhere between 2070 and 2110, while others think that it is just around the corner [32]. AI has progressed rapidly in recent years, but there are controversial predictions about how fast its evolution will be. We have a similar result as for the other control statement: an equivalent number of respondents for each group. Neither disagreement nor agreement represents 28%, while the agreement side represents 31% and disagreement 41%. The most accepted assumption is simply do not know. Thus, it is logical that results do not show big differences among the three options of agree, disagree, or simply do not know.

The seventh statement "AI cannot control humans" (S7) explores the optimism of respondents on beneficial evolution versus a possible threat to humanity. Most of the respondents are neutral (38%), while agreement represents 34% and disagreement 28%.

"AI cannot be regulated with respect to ethical principles" (S8) explores the fact that AI will expand in the future, inevitably with many ethical issues arising as algorithms will increasingly operate cars, homes, and businesses. There are initiatives to create a code of ethics regarding the use of AI to ensure their behavior and public trust. Most of the respondents (69%) disagree with the statement. This is similar to statement S1. Simplistic views could affect the perception of professionals or respondents might not trust the effectiveness of that regulation in practice.

The final statement "Robots with AI are the main concern" (S9) examines how many respondents are concerned about the future of robots which are popularly perceived as equivalents to AI. For most non-technical people AI is an all-knowing, sentient machine that can outsmart and overpower human beings, even becoming evil killer robots. Most of the respondents show disagreement (61%) while only 10% agree and 29% do not know.

Summarizing the results consistently, along with all the questions, we can identify that the answer to RQ1 is negative. In general, the IT professionals are not accepting the most common AI myths as a valid reality, as they mostly chose the "correct answers", i.e., the ones promoted by the prominent experts in AI in the references taken for the study, in each statement on the selected myths. Even in statements S2 and S6, they showed the expected unclear trend, equally distributing between one opinion and the opposite. These statements also are not clearly defined by prominent AI experts (at least, at the present time).

4   Relating Answers to Profiles of Respondents

Exploring research questions RQ2 and RQ3 requires analysis of answers to investigate if they could have been influenced by specific profile characteristics of respondents. So, what is the possible impact of self-declared expertise in AI (RQ2) and age and experience (RQ3) on answers? To facilitate the analysis, we adopted a simple form of aggregation of results by rating answers with numerical values, giving five points to the correct option and zero points to the opposite. In control statements S2 and S6, the option 'neither disagreement nor agreement' gets the highest score while agreement and disagreement have been rated equally lower, as there is no clear opinion among experts.

Naturally, specific knowledge of AI could be relevant to separate myths from reality. Hence, it is relevant to separately check if a higher level of specific expertise in AI of IT professionals leads to better perceptions of myths. This enables us to answer RQ2. On the contrary, if data shows no influence of self-declared specialization in AI, it suggests that general qualification in computing and computational thinking of IT professionals prevents unsupported adoption of AI myths.

Although AI is not a new technology, it has been more intensively developed and applied during recent periods of IT evolution, now with evident impact in our daily life. We aimed to check if young IT professionals might have a different perception of myths, as AI has had a more evident impact during a higher proportion of their lives, if compared to older IT professionals.

Experience is another factor to consider, as people with longer careers in IT might have a better perception of the reality in AI and differentiate it from myths. It is

possible that less experienced respondents could have less discernment in the evaluation of capacities of technology.

Although the suggested links mentioned between factors of specialization, age and experience are plausible, we have found that there is no evidence to support them. Data of variables follow a normal distribution as confirmed with a K-S test. As the type of relation in each pair of variables is expected to be linear, we checked the Pearson coefficient (R). The coefficient between each factor and the score of "correct" answers is very low in all cases:

- Knowledge-perception, R = 0.13

- Age-perception, R = 0.14

- Experience-perception, R = 0.03

Looking at the general results on the "proper" mindset regarding myths, i.e., the one identified on the website www.aimyths.org/ and [29], every respondent has reached at least half of the possible points. The scores tend to cluster around the mean value (32.46). Moreover, answers to control statements S2 and S6 show the absence of bias in responses as a majority chose "neither disagreement nor agreement". Going beyond formality, a simpler analysis of the perception of IT professionals shows how the differences in groups of age, experience, or specialization are irrelevant in the identification of AI myths. We present below the data regarding the relation between correct answers and AI expertise of respondents, age and work experience, showing a minimal influence of these three variables.

Average answer rate regarding declared knowledge on AI:

- None and basic = 32.16

- Intermediate = 32.33

- Advanced and expert = 32.93

Average answer rate by age:

- Under 44 = 32.28

- Over 45 = 32.58

Average answer rate for ranges of years of experience:

- Under 9 = 31.72

- Between 10 and 19 = 33.46

- Between 20 and 29 = 32.39

- Over 30 = 32.36

All these data suggest that the answer to RQ2 is positive as there is no evidence that more specialized knowledge on AI makes a difference in the correct perception of AI myths among IT professionals. In the case of RQ3, the data also

shows that there are no differences in the perception of myths depending on the age of the respondent or the declared number of years of professional experience in IT. Of course, the configuration of the sample limits the general acceptance of RQ3 as there is a misrepresentation of youngest professionals (as commented in section 2.1). However, there are no signs of relation between age and perceptions with the existing data that includes opinion of respondents in the lowest range of ages (although in lower proportion than in the target universe of IT professionals).

Conclusions

AI myths are out there with direct evidence of their impact on society and media. However, according to the results of our study, European IT professionals are rather immune to them (RQ1) regardless of level of specialization in the field (RQ2) or their age or experience (RQ3). It was not possible to find relevant differences in perceptions depending on those factors as the results of the survey showed. The capacity of IT professionals to understand the foundations of computing and AI is likely to be enough to provide discernment capacity to better distinguish what is realistic from what comes from fictional sources. This contrasts with the expansion of AI myths among the general population and within several groups of non-IT professionals as shown in existing literature contributions.

Evidently, extending geographical representation and getting a larger sample will benefit the results of this study to extract better conclusions. It might be also beneficial to consider more factors to refine the exact perception of AI by IT professionals. For instance, more specific questions on the capacity of AI to hand over the work or part of the work of specific professional roles such as, e.g., developers, testers, etc.

However, apart from that, the results inspire several questions on the perception of AI to reflect about. Could basic training on computational thinking and AI foundations change the perception of AI myths in the public and media? Could this alter the debates on AI regulation and better focus on which are the real risks? It could be a meaningful research direction deserving a deeper study to guide policymakers and media managers. One approach could be to examine the effects on the perception of AI myths within the general population or among non-IT professionals after they complete introductory training on AI. This training would aim to provide a basic understanding of AI foundations and its internal mechanisms.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are openly available in Zenodo at 10.5281/zenodo.8335933

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