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PRESS RELEASE

How culturally sensitive should artificial intelligence be?

International conference hosted by the Divan Centre explores the ethical and intercultural dimensions of AI

Berlin, October 10, 2025 — The intercultural think tank Divan Centre, in cooperation with the Center for Humans & Machines at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (Berlin) and Hamad Bin Khalifa University (Doha, Qatar), hosted a symposium on intercultural artificial intelligence. On October 9–10, 2025, international experts from behavioral science, computer science, law, culture, and ethics gathered at Der Divan – The Arabic Cultural House in Berlin.

At the heart of the interdisciplinary exchange was one of today's most pressing questions: How do different cultures perceive artificial intelligence? And how can technology be designed in a way that reflects and respects cultural diversity?

The aim of the two-day symposium was to link technological innovation with the social, religious, and cultural aspects of AI. Researchers discussed how AI can be developed to be culturally sensitive — taking into account diverse value systems and languages, as well as technical, legal, and ethical challenges. AI, they emphasized, can also help preserve endangered languages and cultural rituals.

Topics ranged from “Slow AI” as a counter-model to efficiency maximization, to Arab-centered AI platforms, and research on AI and spirituality. One of the more sensitive discussions addressed the role of AI models as instruments in cultural power struggles.

According to the organizers, AI should not only excel technologically but also reflect the cultural complexity of the world. The focus, they stressed, is not only on progress and speed but also on humanity.

Speakers included Dr. Mengchen Dong and Prof. Iyad Rahwan (Max Planck Institute, Germany), Prof. Ingmar Weber (Saarland University, Germany), Prof. Mohammed Ghaly, Dr. Sanjay Chawla, and Prof. Mustafa Jarrar (Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar), Prof. Beth Singler (University of Zurich, Switzerland), as well as Prof. Mona Diab and Dr. Rafiya Javed (USA), and Dr. Hassan Abu Alhaija from NVIDIA, the global leader in AI computing.

A highlight of the conference was the presentation of FANAR (Arabic for “Lighthouse”) — an innovative AI platform from Qatar that combines the Arabic language, culture, and Islamic values with cutting-edge technology, thus contributing to the digital sovereignty of the Arab world.

In his welcoming address, Abdullah Al-Hamar, Ambassador of Qatar and Chairman of the Divan Advisory Board, emphasized: “Artificial intelligence is not just about data and algorithms – it is about humanity's shared pursuit of knowledge and progress.” AI has



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changed the way we think, work, and communicate. “Qatar recognized this change early on. Back in 2019, the country launched its National Strategy for AI – a roadmap aligned with Qatar’s National Vision 2030.”

Dr. Lorans Al-Hennawi, Director of the Divan, emphasized that the conference was more than just a scientific forum. “It is a bridge of dialogue between two great cultures, the Arab and the German, united by a shared belief in knowledge, innovation, and human cooperation.” That is why the Divan Centre is proud to have gained very strong partners in Qatar and other countries.

Prof. Iyad Rahwan emphasized the transformative role of artificial intelligence in shaping our daily lives, stating: “AI will power everything, from educational software to children’s smart toys; and from psychological counseling to news generation. It is important that such AIs reflect and respect the culture of their users.”

Highlighting the significance of cultural awareness in technological advancement, Dr. Ahmad M. Hasnah, President of Hamad Bin Khalifa University Doha (HBKU), remarked: “HBKU is pleased to co-organize this symposium with the prestigious Max Planck Institute Center for Humans Development and Der Divan – The Arabic Cultural House in Berlin. The question of how artificial intelligence can reflect and respect cultural diversity is vital for our region, where technological progress must align with our languages, values, and societal priorities. HBKU is committed to advancing responsible and inclusive AI through research, education, and partnerships that translate ethical principles into practical solutions for Qatar, the Arab world, and beyond.”

The AI symposium was one of many events organized by the Divan Centre, a political think tank in Berlin-Zehlendorf under the umbrella of Der Divan – The Arabic Cultural House. The Divan Centre promotes critical exchange through discussion events and conferences, thereby building bridges between the European and Arab worlds.