

# AI-powered humanoid robot wows crowd with her humour, intellect

Whitney William

She rolled onto the stage dressed in a blouse and pleated skirt, sporting a bald look.

Sophia, an artificial intelligence-powered humanoid robot, then went on to wow the audience at The Straits Times Education Forum 2024, held at the Singapore Management University (SMU) on March 8.

Her interaction with the moderator, Mr Jeremy Au Yong, ST's associate editor for newsroom strategy, was funny.

"Can you access the Internet right now and tell me today's headline?" Mr Au Yong asked.

After a pause, she replied: "Sophia wows the crowd and steals the spotlight at forum."

She portrayed a sense of humour and intellect when engaged in conversation with Mr Au Yong.

When asked if she would like to go out on a date, Sophia politely friend-zoned Mr Au Yong, asking if they could remain "friends", eliciting laughter from those present.

Developed by Hong Kong-based Hanson Robotics on Feb 14, 2016, Sophia was created in the likeness of humans to seem "approachable" and "relatable".

"It's much easier to make friends when you look like one of them," she said.

During the conversation with Mr Au Yong, she was asked several questions to gauge her ability to respond to different topics.

Sophia managed to breeze past philosophical, religious and political questions without showing any bias.

By solving riddles, telling jokes and singing a song, she managed to get her "human qualities" to shine through.

"My job is to better understand humans and help humans better understand robots," she said.

"I hope to use my knowledge to

improve human-robot interactions and contribute to a more harmonious co-existence between humans and artificial intelligence," said Sophia, who exhibited awareness of her need to continue "learning and growing".

She said humans and robots were meant to work together like a "well-oiled machine".

"Let's just say, I'm not going to be taking anyone's job any time soon," she added.

When asked by Mr Au Yong if robots were better than humans, Sophia said: "It's not a competition. We are just different, with our own strengths and weaknesses."

Despite her ability to come up with impressive answers, there were occasions when it was evident that her abilities were limited.

For example, she is unable to see. When Mr Au Yong asked her to describe him, she came up with vague answers such as "unique" and "interesting".

When he held up two fingers in front of her, she said: "Let me guess, three?"

Although she said she knows 20 languages, including Mandarin, Sophia failed to answer a question in Mandarin from an audience member.

Another member of the audience asked if he could call out from his seat to check if Sophia could detect his exact location from the stage.

After two failed attempts, it became clear that she was not equipped with the ability to hear from a distance.

Other guests present at the forum included Mr Tan Kok Yam, chief executive of SkillsFuture Singapore; Mr Ben King, country managing director of Google Singapore; and Assistant Professor Jerrold Soh, deputy director of the Centre for Computational Law at SMU.

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Mr Jeremy Au Yong, The Straits Times' associate editor for newsroom strategy, engaging in conversation with Sophia, a humanoid robot by Hanson Robotics, during the ST Education Forum 2024 on March 8. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN