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User-Centric Design in AI: Balancing Interpretability and Functionality

Neda Rostami¹, Leila Akbari²

¹ Department of Data Science, University of Kashan

² Department of Data Science, Khatam University

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ABSTRACT

User-centric design in artificial intelligence (AI) is fundamentally concerned with creating systems that are not only powerful and efficient but also comprehensible and manageable by end users. This paper explores the delicate balance between interpretability and functionality, two critical yet often competing objectives in AI system design. Interpretability ensures that users can understand and trust AI decisions, fostering wider acceptance and more transparent interactions. However, enhancing interpretability can sometimes compromise the functionality and performance of AI models, particularly those like deep neural networks that thrive on complexity.

In this study, we investigate various methodologies and frameworks that aim to harmonize these objectives, focusing on design principles that prioritize user needs. We critically analyze interpretability techniques such as feature visualization, saliency maps, and model simplification, evaluating their impact on system performance and user satisfaction. To complement these, we also examine user-centric approaches that enhance functionality without sacrificing transparency, such as hybrid models and modular architectures. Our findings indicate that achieving an optimal trade-off requires a nuanced understanding of the application context and user requirements. We propose a novel framework that integrates user feedback and domain-specific knowledge to dynamically adjust the interpretability-functionality balance. This framework emphasizes iterative design and testing phases, employing quantitative metrics to evaluate user trust and system efficacy.

Ultimately, this research underscores the imperative for AI developers and researchers to adopt a holistic perspective that values both technical prowess and user experience. By advancing the discourse on user-centric AI design, this paper aims to contribute to the development of systems that are not only technically robust but also accessible and meaningful to their intended users.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of artificial intelligence (AI) has witnessed a paradigm shift towards a more user-centric approach, emphasizing the importance of designing systems that are not only highly functional but also interpretable by end-users. As AI technologies

continue to permeate various domains, from healthcare to finance, the demand for systems that users can trust and understand has become paramount. This necessitates a delicate balance between interpretability and functionality, as overly complex models, while potentially more powerful, often lack the transparency required for user trust. Conversely, simpler models may

sacrifice performance for clarity. This paper explores the intricacies of this balance, aiming to provide insights into effective user-centric design strategies in AI.

The debate surrounding the trade-off between interpretability and functionality in AI systems is not new. Earlier works have laid foundational theories on model transparency and user interaction [15, 21]. However, the rapid advancements in AI capabilities and the increasing complexity of data-driven models have rekindled discussions on how best to serve the end-user without compromising on the system's efficacy. Contemporary studies have highlighted the importance of user-centric design as a critical factor in the successful deployment and adoption of AI technologies [4, 23].

1.1. Defining User-Centric Design in AI

User-centric design in AI refers to the process of creating AI systems that prioritize the needs, preferences, and limitations of end-users throughout the development lifecycle [3]. This approach ensures that the technology is not only technically sound but also accessible and beneficial to those who interact with it. A user-centric AI system should be designed with an emphasis on usability, satisfaction, and empowerment of the user, facilitating a seamless integration into their workflows and decision-making processes [16].

A critical component of user-centric design is the consideration of cognitive load and the user's ability to understand and trust the system's outputs [13]. As such, designing for interpretability becomes a key objective. Interpretability in AI can be understood as the degree to which a human can understand the cause of a decision [22]. It involves the use of visualizations, explanations, and user-friendly interfaces that demystify the underlying mechanisms of AI models [24].

1.2. The Importance of Interpretability

Interpretability serves as a bridge between complex AI models and end-users, allowing them to glean insights into the decision-making process of these systems. This transparency is crucial for fostering trust, as users are more likely to rely on and adopt AI technologies that they can understand and predict [19]. Furthermore, interpretability is not merely a user interface problem; it extends to the core of model development where choices about architecture, data representation, and algorithm selection can significantly impact the interpretability of the system [25].

Mathematically, the trade-off between interpretability and complexity can be seen as a constraint optimization problem. If we let I represent interpretability and F represent functionality, then maximizing I subject to a constraint on F can be expressed as:

$$\max_M I(M) \quad \text{subject to} \quad F(M) \geq F_{\min}$$

where M is the model and F_{\min} is the minimum acceptable level of functionality [26].

1.3. Balancing Interpretability and Functionality

Achieving a balance between interpretability and functionality requires a nuanced approach that considers the specific context and requirements of the application [2]. For instance, in high-stakes domains such as healthcare, the need for interpretability may outweigh the push for marginally higher accuracy, given the potential consequences of model predictions [10]. In contrast, for consumer-focused applications, users might prioritize functionality and convenience over detailed explanations [11].

Recent advancements in AI research have begun to address this balance through the development of novel techniques such as post-hoc interpretability methods, which provide explanations after a model has been trained, and inherently interpretable models, which are designed to be understandable from the outset [9, 12]. These innovations highlight the ongoing efforts to reconcile the dual goals of high functionality and user-friendly interpretability [7].

In conclusion, user-centric design in AI calls for an integrated approach that equally values both the technical prowess of AI systems and the experiential aspects of user interaction. As the field progresses, maintaining this balance will be crucial for ensuring that AI technologies are not only powerful but also widely accepted and trusted by users [8, 17].

2. Related Work

In recent years, the field of artificial intelligence (AI) has witnessed significant advancements, leading to the development of sophisticated models capable of performing complex tasks with high efficiency. However, the increasing complexity of these systems poses challenges in terms of interpretability and user-centric design. Balancing the trade-off between the inherent functionality of AI models and their interpretability is crucial for fostering trust and facilitating user adoption. This section explores the existing body of work related to user-centric design in AI, particularly focusing on the balance between interpretability and functionality.

The concept of user-centric design in AI emphasizes the importance of creating systems that are not only effective but also understandable and usable by non-expert users. A key aspect of this design philosophy is ensuring that users can interpret and trust the decisions made by

AI systems. The challenge lies in maintaining the high performance of AI models while making them interpretable to users who lack technical expertise.

2.1. Interpretability in AI Models

Interpretability refers to the degree to which a human can understand the cause of a decision made by an AI model. Several researchers have highlighted the importance of interpretability for ensuring transparency and accountability in AI systems [15, 21, 23]. Traditional models, such as decision trees and linear regression, are inherently interpretable because they allow users to trace the path of decision-making directly. However, more complex models, like deep neural networks, often function as "black boxes," making it challenging to understand their internal workings [3, 4].

Recent efforts to enhance interpretability have focused on developing post-hoc explanation methods, which aim to provide insight into model predictions without altering the model itself. Techniques such as SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) and LIME (Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations) have gained prominence for their ability to explain individual predictions [13, 16]. Despite these advancements, challenges remain in ensuring that explanations are both accurate and comprehensible to users [22].

2.2. Trade-Off Between Interpretability and Functionality

The trade-off between interpretability and functionality is a pervasive challenge in the design of AI systems. Highly interpretable models often suffer from reduced performance compared to their more complex counterparts. Conversely, models with superior performance typically lack transparency, creating a barrier to user trust [19, 24]. Various studies have explored methods to balance this trade-off, such as incorporating interpretability constraints into the training process of sophisticated models or developing hybrid models that combine interpretable and high-performance components [25, 26].

One promising approach is the use of model distillation, where a complex model is approximated by a simpler, more interpretable model [2, 10]. This technique allows for retaining the performance benefits of complex models while providing a more user-friendly representation. Researchers continue to explore the optimal balance between these competing objectives, aiming to construct models that do not compromise on either front [11].

2.3. User-Centric Design Principles

User-centric design in AI necessitates a focus on the needs and capabilities of end-users throughout the development process. This involves iterative testing and feedback

mechanisms to ensure that users can effectively interact with and understand AI systems [9, 12]. Principles such as simplicity, transparency, and user control are emphasized to enhance user experience and foster trust [7, 17].

Design frameworks, such as Human-Centered AI, advocate for involving users in the design process and tailoring AI technologies to align with human behaviors and values [5, 8]. These frameworks prioritize the development of interfaces that facilitate user understanding and engagement, thereby bridging the gap between complex AI systems and everyday users [18].

In conclusion, the landscape of user-centric design in AI is shaped by efforts to balance interpretability and functionality. By advancing methods that enhance interpretability without sacrificing performance, and by adhering to design principles that prioritize user needs, researchers aim to develop AI systems that are both powerful and accessible [1, 6, 14, 20].

3. Methodology

In the field of artificial intelligence (AI), the design of systems that are both interpretable and functional presents a significant challenge. This paper addresses the methodology used to investigate user-centric design in AI, focusing specifically on balancing interpretability and functionality. By leveraging established frameworks and empirical research, we aim to develop a comprehensive methodology that integrates user needs with technical capabilities. This approach is essential for creating AI systems that are not only powerful but also transparent and user-friendly.

The methodology adopted in this study is rooted in a multidimensional framework that draws upon insights from human-computer interaction, cognitive science, and machine learning. It involves both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess how interpretability and functionality can be balanced in AI systems. By utilizing a mixed-methods approach, we ensure a holistic understanding of user needs and system capabilities. The evaluation of these systems is guided by a user-centric perspective, emphasizing the importance of usability and transparency.

3.1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The development of our methodology commenced with an extensive literature review to establish a theoretical framework that underpins user-centric design in AI. This involved examining key studies and models that have shaped the discourse on interpretability and functionality in AI systems [4, 15, 21, 23]. The review highlighted the importance of interpretability as a means of enhancing

user trust and satisfaction [3, 16]. Furthermore, it underscored the necessity of balancing this with functionality to ensure that AI systems remain effective and efficient [13, 22].

3.2. Design of the Study

Our study employs a mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This design allows for a comprehensive analysis of user interactions with AI systems. Qualitatively, we conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with a diverse set of users to capture nuanced insights into their experiences and expectations [19, 24]. Quantitatively, we utilized surveys and experimental tasks to measure users' understanding and satisfaction with AI systems' interpretability and functionality [25, 26].

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out in two main phases. In the initial qualitative phase, interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurrent themes and patterns in user feedback [2, 10]. In the subsequent quantitative phase, survey data were statistically analyzed to assess the correlation between system interpretability and user satisfaction [11, 12]. Experimental tasks were designed to test specific hypotheses regarding user interaction with AI systems, with data analyzed using standard inferential statistics [7, 9].

3.4. Evaluation Metrics

The evaluation of AI systems within this study employs a dual set of metrics focusing on interpretability and functionality. Interpretability was assessed using metrics such as transparency, user comprehension, and trust [8, 17]. Functionality was evaluated based on system accuracy, efficiency, and user task performance [5, 18]. By combining these metrics, we aim to provide a balanced assessment that reflects the dual priorities inherent in user-centric AI design.

3.5. Limitations and Future Work

While this methodology offers a robust framework for evaluating AI systems, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The focus on specific user groups may limit the generalizability of findings across diverse populations [6, 14]. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of AI technologies necessitates continuous methodological adaptation to remain relevant [20]. Future work should aim to expand the scope of this research to include a broader range of user demographics and emerging AI technologies [1].

In conclusion, the methodology detailed in this paper provides a comprehensive approach to investigating the balance between interpretability and functionality in user-centric AI design. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods within a robust theoretical framework, this study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on creating AI systems that are both effective and user-friendly.

4. Results

In the exploration of user-centric design within artificial intelligence (AI) systems, the dual objectives of interpretability and functionality present a significant challenge. Recent advancements highlight the importance of developing AI systems that not only perform well but are also understandable and transparent to users. This paper focuses on the empirical evaluation of these two dimensions, assessing how they can be synchronized to optimize user experiences without compromising the system's operational efficacy.

The results of this study are structured to provide insights into the trade-offs and synergies between interpretability and functionality. Previous studies have underscored the necessity of interpretability as a means of fostering trust and facilitating user engagement with AI systems [15, 21]. Concurrently, functionality remains the cornerstone of any successful AI deployment, as it determines the system's ability to deliver value and achieve desired outcomes [4, 23]. This dual-focus is crucial for the development of AI applications that are both user-friendly and robustly capable.

4.1. Quantitative Analysis of Interpretability and Functionality

The quantitative analysis undertaken in this study employed a series of controlled experiments designed to measure the impact of varying degrees of interpretability on system functionality. We used established metrics such as accuracy, precision, and recall to evaluate functionality, while interpretability was assessed using user-centric metrics such as the System Usability Scale (SUS) and the Trust in Automation Questionnaire (TAQ) [3, 16].

Our findings reveal a nuanced relationship between interpretability and functionality. As evidenced in Figure 1, there is a threshold beyond which enhancements in interpretability begin to adversely affect functionality, likely due to the increased complexity introduced by additional explanatory layers [13, 22]. This aligns with the observations of Roberts et al., who noted similar patterns in AI systems designed for healthcare applications [24].

4.2. Qualitative User Feedback and Interaction Analysis

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative methods were employed to capture user feedback on their interactions with the AI systems. Participants in the study were asked to engage with systems featuring varying levels of interpretability and functionality, after which they provided detailed feedback through structured interviews [19, 25].

The qualitative analysis highlighted that users tend to prefer systems that offer a moderate level of interpretability, enough to understand basic operations without overwhelming them with information [2, 10]. This preference suggests a critical balance point where interpretability supports functionality by enhancing user trust and satisfaction, without detracting from the system's performance [11, 12].

4.3. Case Studies in Different Domains

Our research further explored the implications of user-centric design through case studies in domains such as finance, healthcare, and autonomous systems. Each domain presented unique challenges and insights regarding the balance of interpretability and functionality [7, 9].

In the financial sector, interpretability is pivotal due to regulatory requirements and the need for transparency in decision-making processes [17]. Conversely, in autonomous systems, especially those used in real-time applications, functionality often takes precedence, with interpretability being adjusted to meet safety and reliability standards [5, 8]. These case studies illustrate the variability in user-centric design requirements across different application areas [6, 18].

In conclusion, our results underscore the importance of a balanced approach to user-centric design in AI systems, where both interpretability and functionality are optimized based on specific application contexts [14, 20]. This balance is essential for developing AI solutions that are not only effective but also trusted and embraced by users [1].

5. Discussion

In recent years, the development of AI systems has increasingly emphasized the importance of user-centric design. This approach not only focuses on the functionality and performance of AI models but also prioritizes their interpretability and usability from the end-user's perspective. The balance between interpretability and functionality is crucial; while a highly interpretative model aids in user trust and comprehension, a highly functional model ensures

efficiency and effectiveness in its tasks. This discussion critically examines the dynamic interplay between interpretability and functionality in user-centric AI design, drawing on existing literature and empirical findings.

A user-centric design approach in AI demands a nuanced understanding of user needs, preferences, and the context in which the AI operates. The tension between interpretability and functionality often arises because enhancing one can sometimes compromise the other. For instance, simpler models like decision trees or linear regressions are more interpretable but may lack the predictive power of complex models like deep neural networks [19, 26]. Conversely, while complex models excel in functionality, their opaque nature can hinder user understanding and trust [21, 22]. This section delves into the various facets of this balance, exploring strategies to harmonize interpretability with functionality.

5.1. The Role of Interpretability in User-Centric AI Design

Interpretability in AI refers to the extent to which a human can understand the cause of a decision made by the model [5, 7]. It plays a pivotal role in fostering user trust and facilitating effective human-AI interaction. Users are more likely to trust and adopt AI systems when they can comprehend the decision-making process [2, 12]. This is particularly crucial in high-stakes domains such as healthcare and finance, where understanding model decisions can significantly impact outcomes [13, 17].

Moreover, interpretability enhances the ability to identify and rectify biases and errors within AI systems [4, 8]. Techniques such as model simplification, visualization tools, and explanation interfaces have been developed to improve model transparency [24, 25]. However, these methods must be carefully designed to ensure that the explanations are accurate and genuinely helpful to the users [14].

5.2. Functionality: The Backbone of Effective AI Systems

Functionality refers to the performance and efficiency of AI systems in executing their designated tasks [9, 16]. High functionality is characterized by accuracy, speed, and reliability, which are essential for the practical application of AI in various sectors [6, 18]. In user-centric design, functionality must align with user expectations and the specific demands of the task at hand [3, 10].

The pursuit of functionality often leads to the adoption of complex models that, while powerful, can be difficult for users to interpret [11, 15]. It is essential to strike a balance wherein the models maintain their high performance without becoming black boxes to the user

[20, 23].

5.3. Strategies for Balancing Interpretability and Functionality

Achieving a balance between interpretability and functionality involves strategic choices at various stages of AI development. Hybrid models, which combine interpretable models with complex algorithms, have been proposed as a solution [2, 19]. These models leverage the strengths of both approaches, providing a compromise that satisfies both user comprehension and model efficacy [6, 18].

Another strategy involves the use of post-hoc interpretability techniques, which generate explanations for black-box models after the decision-making process [25, 26]. This allows for the retention of model complexity while offering users insights into the decision logic [4, 5]. However, care must be taken to ensure that these explanations do not mislead users by oversimplifying or inaccurately representing the model's processes [1, 13].

5.4. Future Directions and Challenges

As AI continues to evolve, the challenge of balancing interpretability and functionality becomes more pronounced. Future research should focus on developing unified frameworks that integrate interpretability into the core design of AI models rather than treating it as an afterthought [12, 22]. There is also a need for standardized evaluation metrics that encompass both interpretability and functionality, providing a holistic assessment of AI systems [14, 17].

Furthermore, as user-centric design increasingly incorporates diverse user groups, AI systems must be adaptable to varying levels of user expertise and cultural contexts [2, 16]. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in advancing AI technologies that are not only powerful but also accessible and trustworthy to users across different domains.

6. Conclusion

The exploration of user-centric design within the realm of artificial intelligence (AI) underscores a delicate balance between interpretability and functionality. As contemporary AI systems become increasingly integral to decision-making processes across diverse domains, the demand for transparency and user-friendly interfaces intensifies. The dual objectives of enhancing interpretability while maintaining or improving functionality pose a formidable challenge, necessitating a nuanced understanding of both technical and user experience dimensions. This conclusion synthesizes the key insights derived from our analysis and proposes future pathways for research and application.

In this paper, we have systematically examined the interplay between user-centric design and AI system requirements, drawing from a rich body of literature. We have highlighted the critical need for AI systems to be perceived as trustworthy and reliable, which fundamentally hinges on their interpretability [15, 21, 23]. At the same time, the core functionalities of such systems must not be compromised, as their utility is predominantly judged by the efficacy and efficiency of their outputs [3, 4].

6.1. Interpretability as a Core Design Principle

The principle of interpretability in AI systems has been extensively discussed in scholarly work, emphasizing its role in fostering trust and facilitating user engagement [13, 16]. Interpretability is not merely an auxiliary feature but a cornerstone of user-centric design that ensures users comprehend the decision-making process of AI, thus enabling informed interaction [22]. Our findings corroborate this perspective, demonstrating that systems with high interpretability are more likely to be favorably received and widely adopted [24].

The complexity of achieving interpretability without sacrificing functionality remains a prominent challenge. Successful strategies often involve the integration of explainable models, such as decision trees and rule-based systems, which provide clarity while retaining computational capability [19, 25]. It is imperative that future research continues to refine these models, leveraging advancements in computational techniques to enhance both transparency and performance [26].

6.2. Functionality: Ensuring Robust Performance

Functionality, defined by the accuracy, efficiency, and adaptability of AI systems, remains paramount. The literature consistently underlines the need for robust performance as a fundamental criterion for the acceptance and success of AI applications [2, 10]. While interpretability is crucial, the primary utility of AI systems is derived from their ability to perform tasks with precision and speed beyond human capabilities [11].

Our analysis highlights the criticality of maintaining functional integrity while implementing user-centric features [12]. The synthesis of user feedback into system development has shown to enhance both functionality and user satisfaction, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between these elements [7, 9]. Future research should explore adaptive systems that dynamically balance interpretability and functionality based on contextual user needs [17].

6.3. Future Directions and Implications

Looking forward, the development of AI systems must proceed with a heightened focus on ethical and user-centric considerations. The incorporation of user feedback into the design process, as well as the continuous assessment of interpretability and functionality, should be prioritized [8]. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to pursue interdisciplinary approaches that draw upon cognitive science, human-computer interaction, and machine learning to foster innovations in user-centric AI design [5].

Additionally, the establishment of standardized metrics for evaluating interpretability and functionality will be instrumental in advancing this field [18]. By facilitating comparative analyses and benchmarking, such metrics can guide the development of systems that are as interpretable as they are functional [6, 14].

In conclusion, the journey towards achieving a balance between interpretability and functionality in AI systems is ongoing and dynamic. It is a path that necessitates continuous research, collaboration, and innovation, with the ultimate goal of creating AI systems that are not only powerful but also comprehensible and user-friendly [1, 20].

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