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# A battle is brewing in No10 over AI regulation

JESS JONES



An increasing number of MPs are getting frustrated over the government dragging its heels on regulating AI – a technology it has identified as a potential “existential threat”.

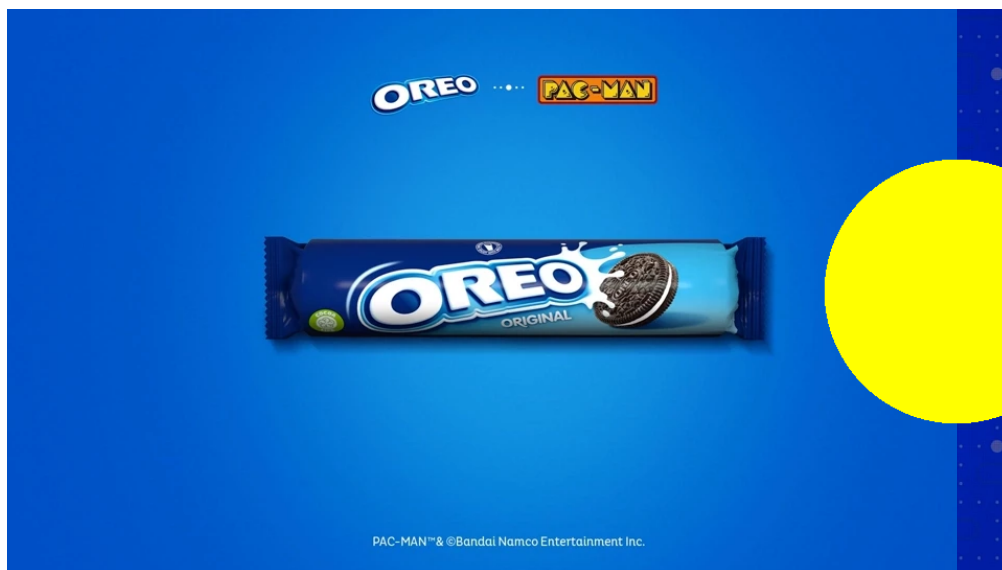
In the corridors of Westminster, a new war is emerging, not over cannabis or the Prime Minister's eating habits, but over the regulation of artificial intelligence (AI).

An increasing number of MPs are getting frustrated as the government bides its time on creating checks and balances over what it has identified as a potential "existential threat".

Lord Chris Holmes, an advocate for the use of technology for public good, is at the forefront of the sprouting charge pressuring the government to take a swifter, more active approach to regulating AI.

"We're building a raft of support and people behind that perspective at the moment," he told *City A.M.*

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"I think there's an increasing number of people and an increasing discussion around the need for right-sized, pro-innovation regulation... it's inevitable that that will only increase as we see further development, further deployment and further discussion of AI," Holmes said.

Opting for a decentralised regulatory model, the government aims to empower existing regulators rather than establishing a new oversight body. This move, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak argues, aligns with his vision of fostering innovation and propelling the UK to global tech 'superpower' status.

But last week's highly anticipated response from the British government to a consultation on AI regulation fell short of satisfying many critics.

Critics have argued that the government's response lacks urgency and fails to provide concrete regulatory frameworks.

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“I don’t think ‘wait and see’, which is largely the government’s response, should be seen as an option,” said Holmes, who is also Britain’s most successful Paralympic swimmer.

“If you take that, you will always be ‘waiting and seeing’ with new technologies, by their very nature. But you’ve got to lead, you’ve got to show leadership and you’ve got to get involved; stake a position,” he added.

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Lawyers have also noted the absence of decisive action.

Tamara Quinn, an IP and AI lawyer at Osborne Clarke, said that the response could be viewed as “underwhelming” given it has been nine months in the making.

Roch Glowacki, a senior associate at law firm Lewis Silkin, suggested the UK government may be “deliberately stalling” to see how the EU’s AI Act pans out first.

“It seems that the government is coming round to the idea that some sort of regulation will be necessary, but is certainly in no rush to produce a proposal,” he said.

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Holmes is clear he thinks that regulation goes hand in hand with the government's pro-innovation stance. He wants a light-touch AI authority that gives businesses consistency, clarity and stability. "You don't get that with no regulatory framework," he explained.

Conservative MP Stephen Metcalfe – who is co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary [Group for AI](#) but was not speaking to *City A.M.* on their behalf – noted that parliament is "very much split" on this topic.

He, however, believes the government's current approach is the right one.

"We have some fantastic regulators in the UK and I think equipping them with the tools they need to regulate their individual sectors, as AI plays a greater part in their day to day functioning is probably the right place to start," he explained.

Regulators including Ofcom, the Financial Conduct Authority, the Bank of England and Ofgem are due to report their strategic approaches to AI by the end of April.

A second reading of the AI regulation bill is expected in March, where policymakers will have the first opportunity to have a full debate on the subject.

Labour has suggested it could take a heavier stance on regulating AI. Peter Kyle, the shadow technology secretary, recently said legislators and regulators had been “behind the curve” on social media and that Labour would ensure the same mistake was not made with AI.

Commenting on the government’s latest AI announcement, Matt Rodda, Labour’s shadow minister for AI said: “While it is welcome to see the Government finally setting out some information about this crucial technology, Ministers are still missing a plan to introduce legislation that safely grasps the many opportunities AI presents.

“The United States issued an Executive Order setting out rules and regulations to keep US citizens safe and the EU is currently finalising legislation, but the UK is still lagging far behind with this white paper response being repeatedly delayed.”

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