



Ethical Challenges Posed By AI

This article is based on [“Responsible AI – the need for ethical guard rails”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 17/03/2021. It talks about the Ethical challenges associated with Artificial Intelligence.

In just the last decade, [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) has evolved at an unprecedented pace. It has already helped increase crop yields, raised business productivity, improved access to credit and made disease detection faster and more precise.

More importantly, the more we use AI, the more data we generate, the smarter it gets. And as these systems become more capable, our world becomes more efficient and consequently richer.

It could contribute more than \$15 trillion to the world economy by 2030, adding 14% to global GDP. A study published in Nature reviewing the impact of AI on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) finds that AI may act as an enabler on 134 — or 79% — of all SDG targets.

However, just as AI has the potential to improve billions of lives, it can also replicate and exacerbate existing problems, and create new ones.

Ethical Challenges Associated with AI

- **Risk of Unemployment:** The hierarchy of labour is concerned primarily with automation. Robotics and AI companies are building intelligent machines that perform tasks typically carried out by low-income workers: self-service kiosks to replace cashiers, fruit-picking robots to replace field workers, etc.;
 - Moreover, the day is not far when many desk jobs will also be edged out by AI, such as accountants, financial traders, and middle managers.
- **Exacerbating Inequalities:** Using artificial intelligence, a company can drastically cut down on relying on the human workforce, and this means that revenues will go to fewer people.
 - Consequently, individuals who have ownership in AI-driven companies will make all the money. Also, AI could compound digital exclusion.
 - Further, investment is likely to shift to countries where AI-related work is already established, widening gaps among and within countries.
 - Therefore, without clear policies on reskilling workers, the promise of new opportunities will in fact create serious new inequalities.
- **Tech Addiction:** Technological addiction is the new frontier of human dependency. AI has already become effective at directing human attention and triggering certain actions.
 - When used right, this could evolve into an opportunity to nudge society towards more beneficial behavior.
 - However, in the wrong hands, it could prove detrimental.
- **Discriminating Robots:** We shouldn't forget that AI systems are created by humans, who can be biased and judgemental.

- It can lead AI facial recognition and surveillance technology to discriminate against people of color and minorities.
- **Data Privacy Concerns:** AI also presents serious data privacy concerns. The algorithm's never-ending quest for data has led to our digital footprints being harvested and sold without our knowledge or informed consent.
 - The case of Cambridge Analytica, in which such algorithms and big data were used to alter voting decisions, should serve as a potent warning of the individual and societal concerns resulting from current AI business models.
- **AI Turning Against Humans:** What if artificial intelligence itself turned against humans?
 - Imagine an AI system that is asked to eradicate cancer in the world. After a lot of computing, it spits out a formula that does, in fact, bring about the end of cancer – by killing everyone on the planet.

Way Forward

- **Whole of Society Approach:** Many countries, including India, are cognizant of the opportunities and the risks, and are striving to strike the right balance between AI promotion and AI governance — both for the greater public good.
 - NITI Aayog's Responsible AI for All strategy, the culmination of a year-long consultative process, is a case in point.
 - It recognizes that our digital future cannot be optimized for good without multi-stakeholder governance structures that ensure the dividends are fair, inclusive, and just.
 - In this scenario, a “whole of society” approach to AI governance will enable us to develop broad-based ethical principles, cultures, and codes of conduct.
 - So that societal trust can be developed for AI to flourish and bring about the extraordinary breakthroughs it promises.
- **Whole of World Approach:** Given the global reach of AI, such a “whole of society” approach must rest on a “whole of world” approach.
 - The UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation is a good starting point.
 - It lays out the need for multi-stakeholder efforts on global cooperation so AI is used in a manner that is “trustworthy, human rights-based, safe and sustainable, and promotes peace”.
 - Similarly, UNESCO has developed a global, comprehensive standard-setting draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to the Member States for deliberation and adoption.

Conclusion

Just as electricity allowed us to tame time, enabling us to radically alter virtually every aspect of existence, AI can leapfrog us toward eradicating hunger, poverty and disease — opening up new and hitherto unimaginable pathways for climate change mitigation, education and scientific discovery.

However, without ethical guard rails, AI will widen social and economic schisms, amplifying any innate biases at an irreversible scale and rate and lead to discriminatory outcomes.

Drishti Mains Question

Without adequate safeguards, AI can widen social and economic schisms, leading to discriminatory outcomes. Analyze.

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