

Editorial

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Artificial Intelligence is an integral part of our lives and though doomsayers may scream blue, there is no wishing it away. Not only has it transformed economies, boosted both production and consumption but has shaped the lives we live, the products we purchase, the relationships that we forge and the language we speak. Its benefits are wide and varied, literally in every sector. There is greater efficiency and has made processes and production cost and time effective. In the medical field, there is more accurate diagnosis and relatively risk-free procedures; in education, pedagogy can be tailored, evaluation and assessment made more specific; in the corporate sector, there is improved decision making and optimisation and innovation are the buzz words. Data is the driving force of Artificial Intelligence; it identifies patterns and is predictive in nature lending its ability to make targeted and informed decisions, and that too at superhuman speed.

Based on big data, algorithms, deep learnings and sensors etc, AI has infiltrated every aspect of the quotidian and is significantly influencing our choices and action but what is a matter of grave concern is that AI is governing our choices and belief systems as well. Grocery apps such as Big Basket, Zepto and Blinkit etc predict what one would like to order, and don't give the users time to think because it is at the doorstep even before due consideration has been given. Zomato and Swiggy decide when one wants to celebrate with a fancy meal delivered piping hot and if one is having a meltdown or feeling low, all it takes is a special delivery to uplift moods. More importantly, these apps know what one would like to eat and when. No more agonising over choices as the algorithm knows us better than we do. Based on our viewing choices, pop ups

inform what we would like to watch on OTT and Make my trip and its likes will send reminders about how stressful life has been and how it is imperative take a break and so on. Algorithmic life is definitely easier, and more comfortable, it spares us the time we would have spent thinking. And time is precious, it certainly cannot be wasted on thought.

We are no longer under the rule of colonial hegemonies but are firmly enslaved by capitalist coercions. Subtle dominance is woven through our purchasing power and aspirations, insidiously dictating our intentions and choices. Gramsci's ideological apparatus is resurrected in contemporary times as we, the prosumers, follow suit believing it to be our consent and choice. Furthermore, social and mass media and AI work in tandem to create images, simulacra which are far removed from reality, but the real danger is that the representations are more real than the reality itself. While AI's transformative potential has been much touted, not enough attention is being paid to the ethical concerns of its use and abuse. Biases are perpetrated and stereotypes reinforced as algorithms rely on large volumes of data which may already have biases latticed in them which get amplified as volumes increase manifold. The recent wave of ChatGPT's Ghibli-sisation of facial images should ring alarm bells as social media is flooded with anime forms of humans, flouting copyright issues which lie with Studio Ghibli and its founder Hayao Miyazaki, who calls it "an insult to life itself". Not only does it devalue the work of illustrators but also disrespects artistic creativity and integrity. This was only one example from recent times where AI swamped the public imagination and raised concerns of privacy and security. Consent is seldom factored as surveillance and data mining track preferences, lifestyles and behaviours. Lives are open books which are now being written by AI itself. Social media accounts are being monitored, manipulative advertising and ideological indoctrination writ large unabashedly, and what is even more perturbing is how it is being lapped up by the masses. Facial recognition carries hazards as can be evinced from the Cambridge Analytica scandal. An innocuous personality quiz app on Facebook, gathered data and profiled individuals which then led to targeted political advertisements to influence voters and sway elections. Such breaches of confidentiality are not just restricted to social media users for political gain but also to manipulate consumerism. Advertisements are targeted and consumer profiles used to bombard images and products leading to rampant exploitation. Chatbots have replaced customer service agents,

Grammarly corrects language, and apps offer to complete your sentence while Deepseek and Gemini – “ the most intelligent AI models, built for the agentic era” allure researchers with full length research at the click of an ‘enter’. The agentic era as a google search reveals is a new phase in the development of AI systems wherein it can autonomously plan, make decisions, execute and solve problems without human interventions.

AI is shaping the lives we live, in every conceivable sphere. And there is a greater need to set boundaries, to factor in ethical concerns about its limits. Its usage though much desirable needs to be responsible and accountable. Its processes need to be transparent and systems fair and unbiased. Discrimination and perpetration of biases and stereotypes should be mitigated. Furthermore, inclusivity and diversity must be consciously factored in whether it is in suggestive use of language or images or in any mode of communication. Privacy needs to be respected and prioritised and even more importantly data needs to be protected. Robust mechanisms should be in place to ensure there is no infringement and security risks. AI should also be accessible and foster digital literacy and competency. While its target is to promote growth and make systems more efficient and smoother, but it should not be at the cost of the user. The need of the hour is to make it more human centric rather than consumer driven. It should prioritise the wellbeing of the end user, and the buck should stop with the humans creating AI. It should be monitored at every stage from visualising to creating it as the ethical responsibility lies with the creator. Be it developers or researchers, industry leaders or academic institutions, the moral responsibility and accountability lies with all stakeholders. Civil society must also don the role of moral crusaders and be watchdogs to prevent breach of ethical boundaries. Ethics steering committees should be mandatory for every organisation involved in its creation to ensure accountability and transparency, to flag potential breaches and to guarantee commitments and safeguard interests. Compliances should be adhered to at every step and there should be checks and balances to mitigate any risk of unethical practices, even if inadvertent. Artificial Intelligence is an integral part of our lives, and its purpose should be to aid humans and not exploit, manipulate or replace them.