ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr. Suparna Chakraborti

Associate Professor, Heritage Institute of Technology
Kolkata, West Bengal, India
suparna.chakraborty@heritageit.edu

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence is the manifestation of the Human endeavor to make his life 360 degrees better. This journey of Homo Sapiens started from the dawn of civilization and is an ongoing process. Generative AI is one such which has widespread impact on the education sector. These tools are still in their nascent stage of development and there is rapid progression in the ability of these tools. Thus in this context the ethical concerns are dynamic and just emerging. This article will consider the main, established ethical concerns in the context of the different stakeholders of higher education namely students, faculty members and management or administrators of an institution of higher education.

Generative AI as a technology is using complex algorithms and neural networks to understand and identify patterns which then is used to generate output that mimics human-like creativity. The main ethical concern is raised by this very technique - are we humans trying to create a machine which will hijack our adaptability and creativity (the two unique human qualities)? It is time to take a pause and define our requirement as human beings. We created, fashioned, designed machines which mimic our physical labour and the aim was to off-load human labour , then the next stage was to develop tools (computers, softwares} which were programmed to off-load our mundane, daily routine mental labour, but then with the vast potential of development in artificial intelligence are we trying to off-load our creativity to a machine? This is for what purpose? For what end? It is important to reflect what it means to be a human. So the first and foremost concern which is relevant for all the stake-holders of an Institute of Higher education is that of the displacement of the human player as the creator and bringing in a machine as a creator or co-creator. The teacher is uniquely placed because he/she is knowledgeable and skilled at generating unique perspectives, views and aspects and enlarge and expand the existing body of scholarship, knowledge that is uniquely there already present. Along with dissemination of knowledge the student is taught this skill so that he/she also is able to assimilate-think deeply –generate unique perspectives and innovate. With the popularisation of different AI tools as assistants which is positioned as a tool to increase our productivity there are two potential risks .Will this essential assistant become my nanny or my boss and how far is it ethical to allow this. If it remains my nanny; which is quite unlikely given the potential of development in this area, then my true potential as an independent human creator will never be developed and it will lead to dependence. If generative AI tool becomes my boss then I become a slave and am controlled by the machine. Both these cases are the ethical concerns and are examples of overuse and misuse of technology

The second ethical issue to be discussed is that of fairness, justice and accountability. This technology is essentially pattern match-making by pulling pieces together by absorbing large volumes of data from various unknown resources and then parsing pieces together to form its rich language learning models to answer end –user questions. As of now there is no transparency regarding the source of the data sets used by these tools and also the technological skill of the machine. Thus this tool is open to being used to create deep fake, biased and misinformed content. This tool may be used as a manipulative tool to spread bias, hate, generate fake narratives. Consequently, the ethical concepts of Justice, fairness and accountability stand compromised.

The intention here in this article is to use deontological and teleological ethical theories as touchstones to analyse the above mentioned issues. In the process both normative and descriptive ethical discourse will be taken into consideration.

Keywords: *Ethical Concerns, Generative AI tools, Justice, Fairness, Accountability, Manipulation*

INTRODUCTION

Technology is an integral part of our lives for the past 500 years making our life comfortable, providing solutions to our myriad problems. Disruptive technology like wireless communication developed in the 20th century is not new in the 21st century, also this technology interfaces with our individual and societal selves in varied aspects making our lives rich in many ways but at the same time bringing forth many ethical challenges. It is true that technology has created useful artefacts for us but at the same time it has to be remembered that the gas chambers of Auschwitz were also made possible by technological innovation only. Similarly we cannot imagine our world without the internet; it is as pervasive in our life as the air we breathe and still there is the problem of cyber-crime, depression and addiction to state a few.

Similarly, the latest and to some extent both stunning and disruptive technology of Generative Artificial Intelligence has brought about a new aspect in our life -it has started challenging the final and last frontier of human existence, it has started creating content, yes it creates content according to our requests, known as prompts .It is generating content which is being used by the human interface. Here technology is taking up an extremely socially relevant role, impacting our everyday life, our everyday existence. It is important to note that Artificial intelligence is actually part of the automation industry. This technology is scalable and has the potential to impact the content economy at the moment but as is true with any other innovation the uses at the moment are limited in our imagination but maybe unlimited in the potential of this technology. In this article an attempt will be made to discuss the ethical concerns that have surfaced due to this unique technology and its future potential.

Marx, one of the iconic social thinkers while formulating his theory about work had made an important statement about the difference of animals and human beings. In his book The German Ideology Marx writes-

"Man can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life". (Marx, 1987, p. 18)

In sum, this concept of work tells us that the human productive labor is what distinguishes human beings from other animals. Through their capacity to work, humans not only produce themselves individually, but through it they also produce their own history.

Homo sapiens is invested with the capability of creating new artifices from his circumstances. The journey of the human race is the journey of growth and all machines that are in use today have the human being as their creators. Extrapolating this argument, Generative AI tools are also our creation.

 Then the Ethical concerns pertaining to this new technology should be akin to the ethical concerns of other technological innovations which have taken both individual and social roles. Namely ethical concerns like transparency, accountability, responsibility and so on and so forth. But in case of generative AI tools like ChatGpt (launched first in 2022) ,Bard, Deepseek (the latest and the most innovative to join the race)the ethical concern is more foundational and fundamental in nature.

This is because of the very nature of this technology. All precursors of ChatGpt are using artificial, machine intelligence to mainly do analytical and summarising tasks. The main algorithm was to analyse large volume of data and come to specific and analytical conclusions. Helping the user in using the tool as an analytical assistant, which helps in improving productivity and also by minimising the occurrence of unforced errors of the human player. But Generative AI tools are built on a different technology. AI now manages the properties of electro magnetism to process texts with extraordinary skill and success and often with outcomes which are indistinguishable from those human beings could produce. These AI systems are known as Large Language Models (henceforth LLMs) and they are rightly causing a sensation, in that they are mimicking human activity. As a technology it is sensational in that this tool is engaging with the human as it is chatting, interacting with the human and then answering specific questions. But this does not mean that the tool is intelligent in any way as the Human brain is. This tool is not in any way similar to the cognitive process of the human brain or mind (Bishop, 2021). Generative AI tools are simply working on pattern matching, where large set of data is used for their training and without any intelligence whatsoever. They are trained to recognise textual patterns, instead of semantic understanding like human beings. Thus the resultant answers are sometimes surprising because they are very close to the text/image/design generated by a human agency. Here we have a technical agency generating similar texts to one created by human agency and the problem is about the absolute lack of understanding of the related agency. Some scholars have likened this act to that off a parrot which mimics and repeats human words without understanding the implications and meaning of the words. But here the AI tool is not mechanically juxtaposing textual units to create a semantically and grammatically correct text but then the tool is heavily relying on the data sets fed to it. It is like a new student who gets hold of few articles and writes an article by taking few lines from each of them and may be making rudimentary changes to complete the assignment without really understanding or acquiring the relevant knowledge. As an educator I am staring at the possibility of a large number of my students now relying on ChatGpt (the first and the most popular Generative AI tool launched by the Tech giant Open AI)for completing the task or assignment given to them without even checking on the veracity of the result.

ETHICAL CONCERNS

Now let us try to understand the human cost of this technology in higher education. I will start with few assumptions; the first is that this technology has the potential to develop itself in the near future and the results which now resemble the work of a mediocre student will definitely improve in the near future, secondly accepting the fact that this is an agency which will slowly gain popularity and start affecting not only the various stakeholders of higher education but also the general public across various strata of our society also. This technology will impact an individual in the way he negotiates his life and also impact the society collectively. I may draw an analogy to validate my viewpoint. Internet at first impacted the individual and then with services

like Face book & such social media sites has impacted the collective behaviour of the society. I'll limit this discussion to the stakeholders of Higher Education specially the knowledge seekers-Teachers and Students both. It is widely accepted that the fundamental technology is pattern recognition and then mimicking the same without understanding the meaning. I'll bring in the normative idea of creation and the difference in the views of Plato & Aristotle. According to Plato all poets were useless in society because their creation was termed as mimesis and was twice removed from truth; on the other hand Aristotle accepted that creation (poetic or literary creation) was mimesis but still it was important because the poet brought people closer to the original truth. The process of creation and the consequent result is unique and original because it has the stamp of views, perspectives of the individual human creator. It is this originality that is the stamp of the human race. This is based on two unique qualities of the human mind -the cognitive and imaginative function of the human mind. Ironically, all these vast body of creation, this collective treasure of the human civilisation is used as training material for ChatGpt; which will simply churn out text/image/design /an individualised novel/painting for the user without adding any value to the body of knowledge, beauty, art that is the treasure of this human civilisation on earth. I will recall the statement of Marx quoted earlier in this article ,it is through this unique creative labour a single individual creates himself and innumerable instances of such creative labour has resulted in our collective history we are so proud of. My verdict is that Generative Artificial Intelligence is no intelligence at all- mimicking and pattern matchmaking cannot be considered as an intelligent activity! This tool is not generating anything unique.

Ethical Discussion: Normative Ethics takes into consideration the idealistic condition with regard to what is right or wrong. The purpose is to formulate the 'norm' ,what we 'ought' to do .Descriptive ethics on the other hand takes into consideration the actual reality- how we behave; it presupposes the fact that following the norm is always unpopular and people, the society will deviate from the norm. Thus, descriptive ethical discussion accepts, identifies common, conventional behaviour   and then an attempt is then made to find the rightness or wrongness of that action or behaviour. Generative AI tools create content like, text, video, painting, poems, short stories based on instructions or prompts and any human being can claim the same to be the owner of that content. The ethical quotient of this singular action can now be analysed both from the perspective of Normative and Descriptive ethics. The following discussion is an attempt to use Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative (deontological normative theory) and consequentialism (teleological descriptive theory) to judge the ethical perspectives of using Generative AI in Higher education.

NORMATIVE ETHICAL DISCUSSION

Let us now focus on the various uses of these tools in higher education. Scenario1-the educator/teacher uses this AI tool to summarise large difficult body of knowledge and then decides to engage the students with this summarised knowledge; the benefit?-the teacher's productivity increases. The teacher can claim to have read and understood ten books in one day and disseminate knowledge with equal alacrity. The user /seeker of this knowledge - the student also uses this same generative tool to answer questions (framed by the educator using AI) on the same topic. In this case both the teacher and the taught have used AI to perform tasks which they 'ought' to using their own intellect. The benefit is that these tasks were performed in most probably one tenth of the time .If this action is performed by all students and teachers; the whole education system will become farcical. Now let us apply the two oft quoted normative ethical theories as touchstones to find the ethical quotient of this system.

Immanuel Kant came up with the theory of Categorical Imperative (a deontological theory) which emphasizes on the view that an action is ethical based on the moral temper of that action. According to him it is the motive (the means) and not the (consequence) of an action that is important. In simple words one may say that an action is right if it is done from a sense of duty and if the guiding principle of this action can be applied universally. The action here is engaging an advanced machine to generate content, or in other words off-loading the mental faculty of creativity to a machine and then using the same as one's own creation/content. By no stretch of human generated imagination can this be viewed as an action of duty. To use a simple example a poet is supposed to exercise his mental faculties and create a poem-a work of art and not engage a tool to do same for him and then fool the world by claiming the same to be his. To generalise, using artefacts generated by a machine with zero intelligence is not an ethical action. To conclude the Deontological theory when applied on the action of using Generative AI shows beyond doubt that this action is unethical.

Let us take up the Teleological theory of Consequentialism which advocates the importance of the result (consequence) over action (means). If the consequence of an action is good then that action is good. The idea of consequentialism in ethics was expanded to Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. Utilitarianism talks about the 'largest good for the largest number of people' as the criteria for deciding the ethical quotient of an action. Let us examine the possible long term result of the popular usage of ChatGpt by the major stakeholders of institutions of Higher education. The dependence on this tool will definitely increase and the result will surely be the cognitive, analytical and creative ability of the human brain. In an ideal higher education system ChatGpt will not add any real value because if used by the teacher this will compromise on the creativity

GAP BODHI TARU – Volume - VIII
March 2025
Special Issue on Artificial Intelligence in Interdisciplinary Studies

136

and allied skills of the teacher and is used by the student it will be an impediment in the development of any professional skill but merely will reproduce artefacts generated by the AI tool. Today the above consequence of widespread use of AI tool may appear to be only predictive without data to support this premise (generative tools are in use only for the last three-four years) but the preliminary indications experienced by educators are strongly pointing to such a scenario.

DESCRIPTIVE ETHICAL DISCUSSION

The brief discussion above on Normative Ethics has clearly shown that if Ethical theories are used as touchstones then the work produced by Generative AI tools are unethical in nature. This does not mean that the use and development of this technology will stop. Assuming that Generative AI as a tool is here to stay and this tool will overcome the performance challenges of the present and gain popularity and be in use across the world. I will try to analyse the ethical concern from the perspective of Descriptive Ethics.Scenario2-Training of Chat GPT and its use in generating content by the media houses. The first ethical challenge will be use of data sets as training material without prior consent. Ethically this is cheating, legally this is copyright infringement. The New York Times has already filed a legal suit against Open AI accusing it of using copyrighted articles of NYT for training which then is resulting in articles generated by Chat GPT quite similar to the copyrighted material. Another sacrifice will be the originality of a work. This is going to affect the content economy in a big way. The content creators will find there material used for training ChatGpt while others will find them being replaced by this AI tool. The SAG-AFTRA strike which had brought Hollywood to a standstill in July2024 is a perfect case where among many other demands the threat of AI was also mentioned. The president of SAG-AFTRA union Fran Drescher in an open letter to the union members had "expressed concerns about how artificial intelligence could exploit performers by using their likeness without fair compensation". Drescher also believes that artificial intelligence poses an 'existential threat" to the "creative professions" (Lowe,L &Williams,C.2023). Educators in the Higher Education System are both creators and innovators and if this AI tool is adopted by the content economy then also this will be unethical.

I'll flip this scenario and include the students. Let us see, if 100 students use this tool to answer exam questions/assignments with prompts which are very close because the question for all them is same the resultant so called answer will be same. The ethical challenge for the teacher will be whether to evaluate such answers or not. At present there is no way to check the stamp of artificial intelligence in a generated text and thus no way can this practice be stopped. We do not require an ethicist to declare this practice as unethical. Generative tools will be a hugely disruptive technology for the content economy and the education system. The ethical concern is that now AI is an assistant but in the near future it will usurp the very unique human quality namely creativity and imagination. I do not have a crystal ball to gaze at the future but warning statements are already there. I rest my case that the latest frontier of Generative AI is there with a lot of risk. I'll quote World renowned Physicist Stephen Hawking's views on AI to garner support for my views. During a talk at the Web Summit technology conference in Lisbon in the year 2017 he had said that the emergence of AI could be "worst event in the history of our civilisation" if collectively we do not find a way to control this development. He felt that we should be able to "employ best practice and effective management".(Kharpal,A. 2017). Stephen Hawking had made this statement approximately five years before the launch of ChatGPT!

AI AND THE FAKE WORLD

This technology has very little use for the human race. Yes it will benefit the industry just as other technologies have in the past by increasing productivity and profit margins but this type of growth is no growth at all. Rather, there is a lot of scope for the misuse of this technology. Deep fake videos, fraudulent content and narrative, zero responsibility, accountability and transparency are the few ethical challenges thrown upon us as a result of widespread misuse of this technology. Along with the deep penetration and attractive and addictive power of the internet in general and social media platforms in particular, AI generated content has super power to control and manipulate the mind of the masses. This technology can be used to generate fake content for the purpose of making profit, generate targeted localised riots, sway the mindset of the electorate, the list is endless—remember the human mind even if that is satanic in nature is creative and imaginative. I'll narrate few instances here and the knee-jerk reaction of the affected people to counter them. Bollywood actors Anil Kapoor and Amitabh Bachchan have sought to copyright their particular attributes. Delhi High Court has granted copyright protection or 'personality rights' against misuse by AI. Nobody can use Anil Kapoor's signature style of saying the hugely popular word "Jhakas". Similarly Actor Amitabh Bachchan has sought copyright protection for his "deep rich, powerful, baritone voice". These are single instances but they point to the larger malaise. Taylor Swift's sexually explicit video was uploaded at X erstwhile Twitter platform in the recent past. Yes the platform did make an attempt to block the random search of the fake video, but as of now we are unable to stop this. Laws are ineffective and the problem is that no social media platform can ensure freedom of speech if censorship is implemented even in a limited scale. Yes deep fake videos generated with the help of advanced AI tools are using social media sites to wreak havoc in an individual's life and also is creating chaos in the collective space with no

https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/

social and political boundaries. There are instances galore of deep fake videos being used for furthering political agenda. The most recent incident was the circulation of a video depicting a Google map spreading misinformation about the location of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. In a country like ours where religion is more an issue of emotion than logic these type of attempts raise serious ethical challenges.

CONCLUSION

The list of Ethical concerns while using Generative AI are many and since this has just started- ChatGpt developed by Open AI was launched in Nov.2022 there will be many more concerns that will come up as this technology develops. At the moment there are 180.5 million users of ChatGPT worldwide (Duarte, F.2024) and with more and more improved versions this will always be on the rise. According to a report dated November 2023 approximately twenty five percent of the videos that people watch are found to be fake afterwards.(Jain, S.2023) The above numbers have zero relevance from an ethical point of view but they are significant in that they show that the impact of this technology is widespread. I'll quote Elon Musk, one of the modern tech giants "We are witnessing the most disruptive force in history".(Economic Times,2023)He made this comment while in conversation with the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak during the first-ever AI safety summit held at London in Nov. 2023. As an ethicist my concern is very limited and that is it is destabilising the very concept of truth. Even a few years back content available in the internet had a high trust quotient but now everything can be fake. It may be or may not be but as an individual before even judging the quality of the content I will check on the veracity of the content and that is easier said than done. As an educator I find that my role is changing, I'll operate more as a medium between my student and technology each time trying to understand the percentage of technical input in my student's work. I'll conclude in an optimistic note by sharing the information that Elon Musk has announced the development of TruthGpt. (Next Gen n.d.) Also I'll assure that this article was not written with any input of ChatGpt whatsoever.

REFERENCES

[1] Bishop, J. M. (2021). Artificial intelligence is stupid and causal reasoning will not fix it. Frontiers in Psychology, 11, 2603.
[2] Duarte, F. (2024) February2 Number of ChatGPT users Exploding Topics https://explodingtopics.com/blog/chatgpt-users
[3] Jain, S. 2023November 30, The Rise of Deep Fakes, Forbes India https://www.forbesindia.com/article/news/the-rise-of-deepfakes-25-percent-of-videos-that-people-watch-are-later-found-to-be-fake/90077/1
[4] Jones,I.R. 2024, January 27, Taylor Swift deep fakes, BBC News https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-68110476
[5] Kharpal, A. 2012,November6,Tech Transformers https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/06/stephen-hawking-ai-could-be-worst-event-in-civilization.html
[6] Lowe, L & Williams, C. 2023 July 14,The SAG-AFTRA strike in Hollywood, explained. Today News https://www.today.com/popculture/hollywood-actors-sag-strike-2023-explained-rcna94122
[7] Marx, K. The German Ideology, in Marx, Engels, Lenin (1987). On Historical Materialism. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
[8] The Feed,2023 November 4, The Economic Times New
[9] Next Gen Invent.com (n.d.), The Tale of Two Billionaires: Elon Musk & Bill Gates'Generative AI views. https://nextgeninvent.com/blogs/generative-ai-views-of-elon-musk-and-bill-gates/