

IIC SINGAPORE–TRPC FORUM

Privacy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Date: 21st November 2018
Venue: CMS Singapore

Event Summary



What exactly do we mean when we use the term artificial intelligence (AI) today, and what are some of the considerations and privacy issues related to AI today? Those were some of the key issues discussed by the four panellists who participated in the panel on “Privacy in the Age of

Artificial Intelligence”.

While AI may seem like a new technology today, with seemingly unlimited potential to do anything, the term itself has actually its roots all the way back to the 1900s. Further, history has shown that there have actually been several AI winters in the past, so we need to be cautious when managing our expectations on AI. Today, a lot of the hype on AI is likely to have been overstated and overblown by marketers when in reality a lot of the myths, such as AI rapidly overtaking human jobs are largely unwarranted. AI refers to a large cluster of technologies, and not just the singularity that is often presented.

A lot of the use for AI today revolves around machine learning, where machines are fed data to make sense of the data and become more accurate at predicting outcomes. While a lot of this data is fed and used, in reality only a small fraction of that data is personal data, implying little actual privacy implications. And while statistically, there may always be a risk of reidentification from the data, it is important to recognize that this is often not the purpose of collecting and analysing multiple datasets, nor are there no proper governance frameworks in place to manage this risk.

An example of where AI could be applied was for doctors. AI is not just about finding a cure for the world’s diseases, but also about optimizing resources for example alleviating the need for

doctors to perform menial tasks such as manually keying in and documenting consultations and diagnosis.

The concepts of explicit purpose, and explicit consent were also discussed, where panellists largely agreed that if defined too broadly, would stifle the progress of data scientists. Further in the case of consent, a lot of personal data is already being captured with or without a users' consent through IoT devices, and the conventional principle of obtaining explicit consent is going to be (or already is) outdated. Perhaps privacy would be less of an issue, if there was a system of trust and data protection in place. Who do we, and can we trust with our data?



Certainly, start-ups would not be the first to mind, given their primary focus is on getting their product to market, without spending additional resources on privacy-by-design or compliance.

Another issue discussed was the data of those who had passed away, and what governance procedures determined who could use that data, and how. Hereditary data could still significantly influence the lives of the children or relatives of the deceased.

When the topic of machine biasness was raised, panellists pointed out that the machine is only as biased as the dataset it is fed – nor are there even proper ways to assess the biasness of a machine. Alluding to how human beings all fundamentally have their own biasness, and how we are not even able to quantify a human's biasness much less a machine's. The idea of biasness, fairness, and ethics is complex, and these responsibilities should not fall solely on the shoulders of data scientists. A combination and collaboration of different resources, from data scientists to business users, to professionals in the fields and ethics are required.

Lastly, panellists were asked what they thought would be the trends or areas of concern moving forward. While fundamentally there has been a lot of recent hype generated around AI, ultimately if we cannot use AI to solve actual real-world problems such as poverty, or climate change, then what are the benefits to the world? Does it only serve to exacerbate the gap between the haves and the have-nots of technology?

TRPC and IIC Singapore would like to express our appreciation to CMS Singapore for hosting the forum which featured a full house attendance of over 40 participants.

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