

Understanding Youth Digital Behavior: A Study on the Unconscious influence of AI on Decision-Making and Social Perceptions

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ABSTRACT:

AI is changing the way today's youth interacts with the digital world, influencing their decision-making, information-gathering and connecting with others. Nowadays, assistants, recommendation systems, and algorithm-curated ads are forms of AI that youth interact with in their daily digital spaces. The AI interactions of young people with content on different platforms is the focus of the paper. Monitoring the impact of AI on the behaviour, choices, perception and online experience of young people is more crucial than ever due to reliance on content and recommendation systems, automation and algorithmic moderation. Surveys were administered to investigate how frequently people use the AI-powered features, how relevant AI is in their decision-making, and what young people think about data privacy, trust and mental health. The findings reveal that youth are increasingly using AI products with a growing awareness of the impact and ethical issues faced because of AI technology, which suggests a complicated attitude of cautious acceptance. The findings stress on youth-centric approaches incorporating ethics and openness to develop AI systems. The key message is that designing AI systems which promote ethical care around children and young people's privacy is of utmost importance. Legislators, educators, and technology companies can work together to resolve these issues and create safer, more encouraging online spaces. In the end, the study calls for a holistic approach where AI can potentially enhance experiences without compromising the autonomy and mental health of youth.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Literacy, Decision Making, Content, Youth

Introduction

"We become what we behold. We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us."

- McLuhan Marshall. Artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly contributed to the process of digitalization in society by enabling collection and analysis of vast quantities of data more rapidly

than ever before. New technologies, improved business processes, and increased productivity have been achieved in many industries as a result. Youthful online behavior shaped by AI algorithms, since these choose the content we view on social networking sites or these enable us to find friended ads they suit the algorithm that decide what we see on these sites.

Over 90% of individuals on the Internet globally within the age group of 1775-1786 use AI-powered platforms daily, quite often without being able to realize the full extent of AI's effect. **(World Economic Forum, 2023)**. In order to maximize engagement based on previous actions, these platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Spotify, utilize machine learning algorithms to customize content and suggest media. Despite being designed to enhance the user experience, these systems may limit exposure to alternate views and reinforces pre-existing biases in ways that impact users' thinking, without their knowledge or awareness **(Noble, 2018)**.

Earlier, robots used to be complicated machines, only found in sci-fi films. These days, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has crossed from fiction to reality, but more so for people who lived in the era of smartphones. This is just the starting point. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is taking us to a highly personalized tomorrow where technology doesn't just respond to human needs but also evolves with them. With AI tech, the younger generation now enjoys music playlists that match their mood and learning platforms that adapt to their personal preferences. What's next, we wonder? Today's youth, by nature creative and adaptable, use AI in practically every area of their lives. AI has wonderfully infiltrated our lives, from waking up to an AI-based alarm clock to burning the midnight oil with late-night study tools. Also, entertainment is being transformed. Music, movies, books, and games are being recommended by AI according to individual preference. AI is not only a tool but rather a companion of this generation.

The youth are in a distinctive position in this AI-dominated world as they are the digital natives. Young people are always in contact using their technological savvy but at the same time, they are also more easily manipulated by small things introduced into algorithms **(Eubanks, 2018)**. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems are increasingly influencing choices people make, from what to eat or wear to what content to believe or dismiss, often unbeknownst to users.

Conceptual Framework

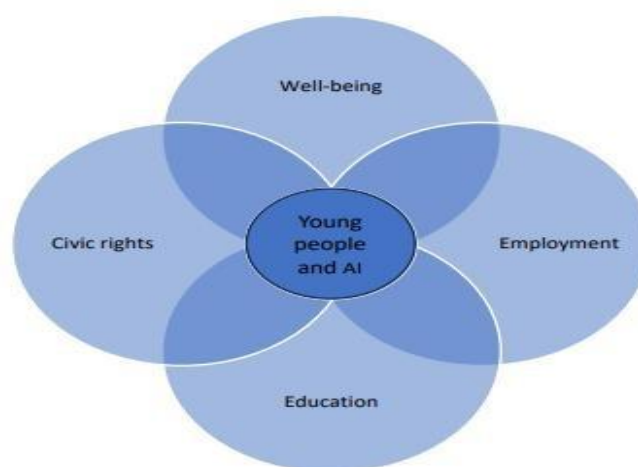
AI refers to the simulation or enactment of human intelligence in a machine, which is achieved through programming. It aims to enhance thinking, rationalization, and learning with computers. **John McCarthy was a Stanford University professor who coined the word artificial intelligence in 1955**. Artificial intelligence engages human intelligence and problem-solving does occur in many circumstances, involving datasets and computer science. Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to machine learning which predicts new output and shapes it using previous output. "Generative AI" is a term that refers to the creation of photos, movies, music, text, and 3D models by learning from pre-existing data.

According to the European Commission (2019), artificial intelligence (AI) refers to systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions with some degree of autonomy, to achieve specific goals. There are purely software systems that operate in the virtual world like voice-controlled assistants, image analysis software, search engines, speech and face recognition systems, and more which are AI-based. On the other hand, AI can also be embedded in hardware devices like advanced robots, driverless cars, drones or Internet of Things applications etc.

AI can perform complicated and detailed tasks remarkably well. In fact, it can diagnose certain types of cancer as effectively as doctors. In the data-heavy sectors like banking and insurance, it saves a lot of time for processing tasks like loan

applications quickly. During the pandemic, AI significantly curtailed the need for manual labor. It also increased productivity, a trend we will see in the near future to take the advancement of AI and machine learning. AI tools provide dependable results. When looking at an example, translation tools are excellent for small businesses that can communicate in customers' native languages. Also, AI virtual assistants are available round-the-clock. Given that they do not need rest, it makes the services more accessible and effective.

While AI is useful, it does have some downsides. Creating and executing AI can be very expensive and often requires advanced technical knowledge. There is also a lack of competency skilled people that can build and manage artificial intelligence tools. A second big problem is that AI systems can hold and furthermore enhance the bias in their training sets which can lead to unjust or inaccurate results. Most AI systems are designed for specific tasks and do not easily adapt to different situations. As artificial intelligence systems are deployed in the real world, they cause harm to the communities they are meant to serve.



Source: OECD (2021). Youth and the Digital Transformation

Review Of Literature

With the rising use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in digital spheres, the young generation now consumes information, communicates and makes decisions differently. Prior studies indicate that significant research on AI has been done in terms of technology, ethics, education, psychology, etc. More recently, some studies have been focusing on algorithmic influences, digital behaviour and youth well-being. A chronological account of important studies is given below.

Livingstone and Third (2017) explored the rights of children and young people in an ever-changing digital environment. According to their findings, digital technologies create opportunities for participation, learning and communicating. But also disempower young users through

privacy, surveillance and safety issues. According to the authors, children rights and responsible technology design should be priorities of digital governance. Nevertheless, it failed to look at the unconscious influence youth have towards decision-making by AI recommendation systems.

Noble (2018), in *Algorithms of Oppression*, showed that the search engines and recommendation algorithms are not neutral technologies capable of soothing prejudice. Algorithms shape perceptions of what we should think, feel, and buy, but how? Despite major advancements in our knowledge of algorithmic bias, this research focused more on search engines than on young users' behavioural responses to AI-enabled digital platforms.

According to **Eubanks (2018)**, automated decision-making systems have negative impacts on society. The authors of the study contended that AI-based systems determine human choice through invisible mechanisms of digital governance and algorithmic profiling. Though the work showed the social implications of automated systems, it barely touched upon the everyday AI interactions that youth have through social media and entertainment platforms.

The notion of an Online world (**Floridi, 2019**) refers to the idea that in our era (with artificial intelligence (AI) and data-driven technologies), physical and digital realities (society, environment, and economy) are becoming one. The ethics of AI governance require transparency, oversight, and the autonomy of humans, the study stated. The study primarily looked at AI's influence on youth digital behaviour but offered little empirical evidence.

The impact of digital transformation on young people: Opportunities and challenges created by digital transformation powered by AI (**OECD 2021**). According to the report, although AI offers better access for education, jobs and digital services, there is an increasing privacy and misinformation and digital inequality problem. While stronger AI literacy was called for youth in the report but unconscious behavioural influence was not empirically investigated.

UNESCO (2021) provided comprehensive guidelines on the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence in education. A report said that AI system should encourage transparency, fairness, accountability and respect for human rights while promoting digital literacy among learners. While offering important policy recommendations, it focused on educational settings rather than digital behaviours.

Icenogle and Cauffman studied adolescent decision-making research over a decade and revealed decision-making is influenced by developmental, cognitive and social factors. According to the authors, adolescents are particularly sensitive to outside influences during

digital use. Nonetheless, the review was held before the widespread use of generative AI and, therefore, did not investigate AI recommendation systems.

According to **Crawford (2021)**, Artificial Intelligence, far from existing independently as a technical innovation, is embedded in political, economic, and social systems. The results show that AI mirrors the values and power relations that are already in society, affecting users' experience. However, it focused more on the ethics of AI than evidence of youth's digital behaviour.

The World Economic Forum (2022) highlighted the significance of teaching ethical AI to empower youth for an AI-future, and fostering responsible innovation and digital skills among youth. The study contended that AI rules of the future should strike a balance between technological innovation and human wellbeing but it did not research behavioural changes amongst youth.

In a 2023 study, **Dwivedi** focused on the advent of generative AI technology, particularly ChatGPT. In addition, they examined its impact on education, business, research, and society. The authors mentioned the potential for increased productivity along with risks related to misinformation, dependence, ethics and critical thinking. However, the study focused on AI adoption broadly and not on unconscious AI influence on youth.

Future research on AI and youth should shift away from the previous social media harms debates towards stronger theoretical frameworks and more robust methodologies, explained **Oxford Researchers (2024)**. The authors stressed that longitudinal multidisciplinary studies capable of grasping fast-evolving digital ecosystems are necessary to understand the impact of AI on children's and adolescents' well-being.

A review of youth privacy concerns due to AI systems on social media, education technology,

and recommendation systems was completed by **Shrestha et al. (2024)**. A review revealed that younger users of social media love digitally personalising their experiences but are still concerned about data privacy and control. Governance of AI and Digital Media Ethics and optional selectivity should be encouraged through stronger privacy, better digital literacy and more empirical studies on behavioural outcome.

Ahmmad et al. (2025) carried out a structured literature review of filter bubbles, echo chambers, and algo-bias affecting the youth on major SSM. AI-driven recommendation systems are increasingly leading people to be exposed to selective information which could limit the viewpoints they consider and shape their perceptions of society. The need for greater algorithmic transparency and longitudinal research on AI-facilitated digital environments to assess behavioural ramifications was highlighted by the authors.

The literature review indicates a move from digital rights and online safety to algorithmic governance, AI ethics, generative AI, and youth digital well-being. Earlier studies mainly focused on the opportunities and risks of digital technologies, but the newer ones are more on algorithmic personalization, privacy, transparency and psychological outcomes. Despite these efforts, there is a lack of empirical investigations into the subconscious impacts of AI-based recommendation systems on youth decision-making and social perceptions in India. Few studies focus on youth's perception, trust and response to AI-enabled digital spaces. Most studies are conceptual, ethical or systematic. Other studies do not offer empirical investigations. By providing empirical evidence on the link between AI-driven digital interactions, decision-making behaviour, and social perceptions, the present study aims to fill this gap.

Research Gap

Although there is a considerable body of literature on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its applications, the questions of designing or making Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems work have not received much attention in the existing literature. Despite these studies being influential in shaping the opportunities and challenges of AI, not much attention has been paid on the more subtle and often unconsciously impactful AI on the everyday digital behaviour of young people. There is an absence of empirical evidence in particular that considers whether AI recommendation systems and personalized content cascades shape youth decision-making, information consumption, and social perceptions. Moreover, most of the literature is either conceptual or policy oriented. Also, it is mostly based on evidence from developed countries, which has not yet been subjected to examination, especially in a developing world perspective like India. With the increasing adoption of AI in the daily lives of children and young adults, there is an emergent need to investigate their understanding of algorithms influencing them, perceptions of trust and transparency, worries over privacy and digital autonomy, and the wider social consequences of ML and AI-mediated digital population. This study tries to address the study gaps noted in the literature by empirically examining the unconscious impact of artificial intelligence on Indian youth's decision-making and social perceptions around artificial intelligence in order to help further vital debate on responsible, ethical, youth-centric AI governance.

Research Methodology

The current study used a descriptive quantitative research design to examine the influence of Artificial Intelligence on youth digital behaviour and decision making. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire prepared on Google Forms. The questionnaire involved close-ended questions constituting the demographic characteristics, usage frequency of AI, user AI

engagement, influence over a user's decisions, privacy and trust perceptions and ethical issues.

The participants of the study were youth aged 1775-1786 years who use AI-enabled applications like YouTube, Instagram, Netflix, Spotify, ChatGPT, and other recommendation-based applications. They collected the data through convenience sampling and the questionnaire was sent through email and other social media.

A total of 150 valid responses were received and analysed. We used frequencies, percentages, and graphical representations to identify key patterns in how AI is used and perceived. Data was organized and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The respondents participated voluntarily, remained anonymous, and provided informed consent before taking the survey.

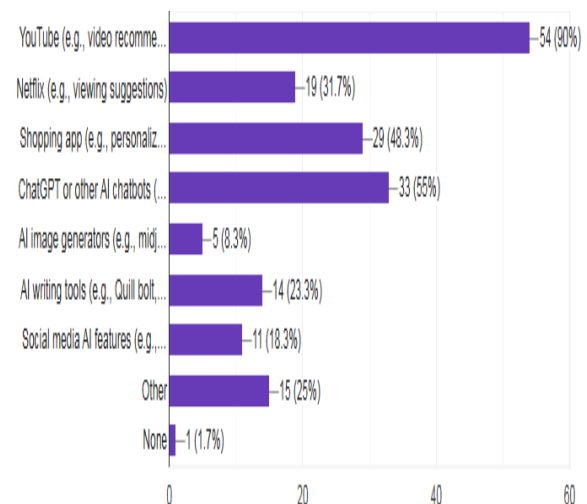
Research Objectives

1. To assess how frequently youth engage with AI driven content across digital platforms.
2. To evaluate the influence of AI recommendations on youth decision making and online behavior.
3. To explore youth perceptions and concerns regarding AI's role in shaping their digital experiences.

Research Questions

1. What are the patterns of youth engagement with AI-driven digital platforms?
2. In what ways does AI-mediated content shape youth decision-making and online behaviour?
3. How do youth perceive the opportunities and challenges associated with AI-driven digital interactions?

Insights from the Data: Patterns and Perceptions



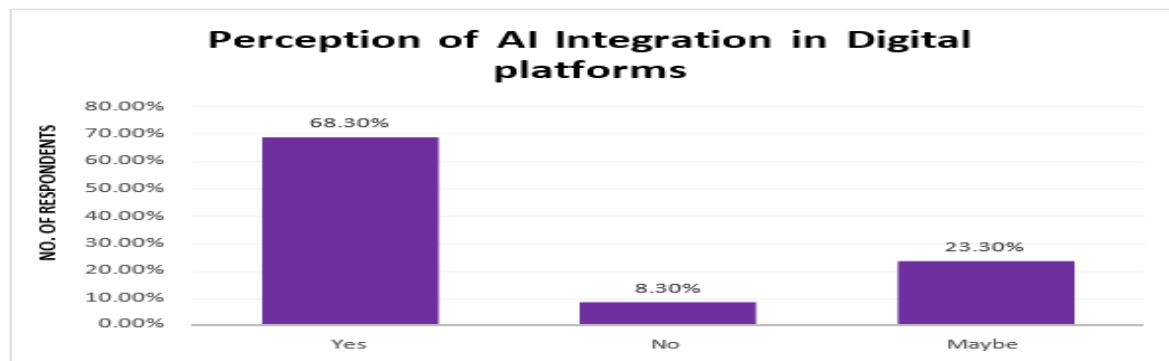
Nowadays, young people are constantly engaged with content that is modified and shaped by artificial intelligence in the digital world. According to the survey, most people use the “Recommended for You” or “Suggested Content” feature, with most saying they do so “often” or “sometimes”. This shows how AI-generated suggestions have become such a custom solution, that people do it as part of their everyday lives.

Source: Survey Data

Notably, YouTube, Instagram, and Netflix were mentioned repeatedly as prominent online sites where the youth mostly rely on the AI of these platforms for interesting and new information. Advanced algorithms monitor your viewing history, user preferences and behavior patterns in order to provide appropriate recommendations on time via these systems. As a result, users often find that they are being served a plethora of content from videos, to reels, to movies, to shows that is almost a perfect match to their interests without even looking for it. Many consumers are still oblivious to the extensive influence of AI on their digital lives. This indicates some form of passive adoption, where users mix with information suggested by an AI, without being fully aware of how intelligent systems are easing consumers into engagement. Artificial intelligence works in surfing environments almost invisibly because of its precision in prediction and the ease of use of interfaces. It's

more likely that consumers don't realize that AI is being utilized due to how natural and seamless

the digital experience itself is, making it feel part of the platform, rather than a tool.

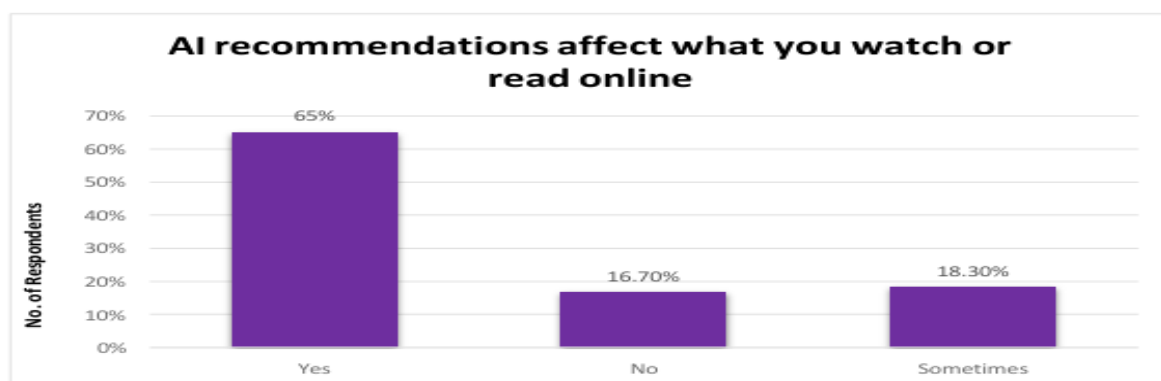


Source: Survey Data

The findings show that most young people do not contest the algorithmic nature of the recommendations they receive. People often interact with these suggestions because they're easy, not because they question how or why something is suggesting them. Many people believe that the AI "knows" their preferences which instils confidence in their ability to provide appropriate customized material, though that often doesn't get questioned.

The research further aimed to assess how much AI impacts the decision-making and behaviors of youth in the digital realm. Findings from the study indicate that AI has a significant and frequent silent impact on the online behaviors of young people.

The majority of the respondents agreed that suggestions about behavior, personalized content recommendations, and automated notifications do influence them. These cues often appear as personalized advertisements, video recommendations, prompts to share content, and suggestions to like or follow specific accounts. For example, some participants mentioned that they felt happy to scroll because of the personalized recommendations that would keep appearing, and that they were more likely to interact with the information after being gently reminded. Also some stated that AI suggestions affect their relations with peers and online communities, as well as the number and timing of their posts.



Source: Survey Data

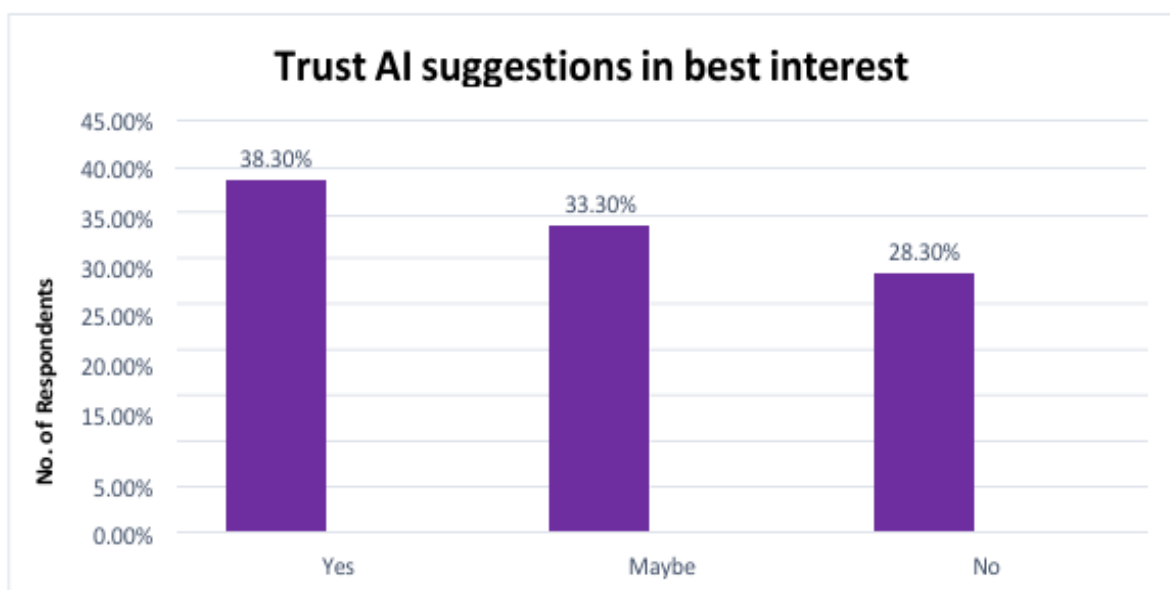
The responses indicates that people are increasingly utilizing algorithms to express themselves, engage with content, and navigate

online. Although this could bring about increased efficiency and convenience, it also raises questions of autonomy and overexposure, and

gives rise to outrightly manipulated environments driven by algorithms. AI is good for simplistic youths, bad for youths with a deeper and more informed understanding. You can try: Youth view AI as a powerful tool that makes their experience more exciting.

They want assurance that they are not being spied upon. Survey results show that many respondents are concerned about how much data is being collected about them by AI-powered platforms. In fact, many reported that they are either “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned.” Therefore, digital privacy is an important issue

for the youth. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents feel that platforms should be more open about how AI works, in particular when it comes to content filtering and personalization. Some have also remarked that after being shown similar things over and over again, you are stuck in a ‘digital bubble’ where you cannot get new answers. This, in turn, has led them to believe that algorithms are limiting access to real-life activities. In summary, the investigation sheds light on the perspectives and understandings that young people aged 16 to 24 have about the artificial intelligence underlying online games.



Source: Survey Data

Respondents were slightly optimistic regarding AI development. 38.3% Trusted AI while 33.3% were not sure about it. AI is becoming increasingly welcome, but the public is still looking for confirmation over its reliability and intentions. The remaining 28.3% who do not trust artificial intelligence cite concerns around transparency, ethics and possible abuses. They suggest that AI systems should be transparent, user-informed, and designed ethically if there is to be greater trust and acceptance. The perspective of the youth about AI is quite complex and even contradictory. AI is perceived by many as a fascinating and powerful tool that

enhances digital experiences. However, concern over data privacy, transparency and trust is growing. Results of the survey show that most participants are either ‘very concerned’ or ‘somewhat concerned’ about the amount of personal data collected by the AI-enabled platforms. Young people strongly want more transparency, particularly in the way content is filtered or tailored, as many believe that being exposed to same content all the time creates a confining “digital bubble.” They are also uncomfortable with the feeling that they are being always watched by technology and do not

know how their data is used for purposes other than personalisation.

Even with these concerns, the youth use AI-integrated platforms extensively in their daily life. Researchers found that emotion or ethics does not significantly discourage usage. Unlike the older generation which shows both unawareness of the AI and caution concerning it, young people show a growing knowledge of and caution of AI. In other words, they are aware of the consequences of it but believe it to be good for chatting, gaming and trending. There is a need to provide digital education and other new measures for improved transparency of AI systems to increase trust.

Research Findings

Insights from the survey reveal how the Artificial Intelligence (AI) has impacted the digital behaviour, decision-making and social perception of the youth. The following are key findings of the study.

1. Advanced AI-Powered digital platforms with high engagement

Most of the users frequently use features such as personalized recommendations, suggested content, and automated notifications according to their personal music, video and text platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Netflix and Spotify. Algorithmically-generated information or AI-driven content has become a part and parcel of their daily digital lives which shows their dependence.

2. Artificial Intelligence to Be A Game Changer Online

A large share of respondents claim that the recommendations made by AI influence their decisions regarding what videos to watch, what articles to read, what products to buy, and what online accounts to follow. It was discovered that personal recommendations could influence the choice of customers on the internet, without them searching for anything.

3. Limited Consciousness of Algorithmic Influence.

Many respondents often use the AI-generated platforms. However, the respondents believe that the algorithm does not tell them what to see. The results reveal that AI works silently in the background that constructs the users' preferences, interests and online behaviour without them even knowing.

4. Growing Challenges in Gains in Privacy and transparency.

According to research, respondents are mostly worried about the collection of personal data through AI applications. Those involved want greater visibility into how algorithms make decisions. They want those algorithms to provide greater clarity into how recommendations are made and how their data is used.

5. People still trust AI moderately.

Responses in the survey reveal an unbiased opinion regarding AI. Although most respondents rely on AI-generated recommendations for convenience and personalization, many remain uncertain or skeptical due to worries about bias, misinformation, and a lack of transparency. There is cautious acceptance and trust in AI technologies now.

6. Perception regarding digital filter bubbles.

A number of respondents noted that seeing similar things over and over again from AI limits access to views and perspectives. This indicates that recommendation algorithms might help create filter bubbles or echo chambers fostering beliefs about social reality without critical consideration of other perspectives.

7. AI as Opportunities and Challenges

In general, the respondents agreed that through AI digital experience would enhance convenience personalization and efficiency. Simultaneously, they also raised concerns about digital dependence, loss of agency, ethical problems, data privacy issues, and psychological effects from constant contact with AI. We can say that the youth consider AI as a new technological

advancement as well as newly emerging social and ethical problems.

In the daily digital activities of young people, artificial intelligence (AI) has permeated all areas of their lives. The new research shows that AI does more than influence what children watch. It impacts how they think and form opinions about society. The capability of algorithm technologies and their widespread use by youth for seeking information, entertainment and communicating with others is evident in these A.I. powered recommendation systems.

The results of this study reveal that AI is increasingly involved in curating behaviours in the digital world. However, there are concerns related to privacy, transparency, algorithmic bias and digital autonomy (Livingstone & Third, 2017; Noble, 2018; Eubanks, 2018; UNESCO, 2021; Crawford, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Policy Implications

The results of this study are significant for policy makers, educational institutions, technology companies and civil society organizations. Youth today live in an AI world. AI policies are needed that promote responsible, transparent and ethical use of AI technologies.

- It is recommended that governments bolster digital literacy and AI literacy initiatives to equip youth with the understanding of algorithmic recommendation systems and data privacy. In the school and higher education curriculum, the incorporation of AI literacy can enable the youth to assess AI content and other inputs.
- Schools should consider teaching about bias in algorithms and misinformation, and the possible impact of artificial intelligence on their actually beliefs, interpretations and choices in the content they see. Such initiatives can help young people become responsible and informed digital users.
- All technology companies should enhance transparency in two ways. First, they must offer explanations about the functioning of recommendation algorithms. Further, they

should make clear how the personal data of users is collected, processed, and used. The development of user-friendly, explainable AI systems can help check against trust-related risks, algorithmic manipulation and information filtering.

- To prevent privacy violations, excessive data collection, and discriminatory algorithmic practices, policymakers should strengthen data protection and ethical AI governance frameworks to safeguard all young users. The current digital privacy law framework and AI governance structures can help ensure responsible technology development if properly enforced.
- It is important to cooperate with governments, educational institutions, technology developers, researchers, and civil society organizations to create a safe, inclusive and ethical digital environment that balances technological innovation with the rights, autonomy and wellbeing of youth.

Conclusion and Future Directions

AI impacts the things we do outside of specific platforms. It influences global youth perspectives on technological aspects including data privacy, digital transformation, and ethical implications of AI development among others. The way young people create and negotiate online groups is increasingly impacted by social media algorithms, which change relationship dynamics. Meanwhile, virtual assistants obscure the difference between human and machine connection. In the event, AI has a complex effect on youth culture and behavior that is broad-ranging and permanent. To understand the complexities involved in this technological transformation, it is important to navigate the future of human-technology interaction in such a way that the next generation.

Future studies may also adopt a mixed-methods approach whereby quantitative surveys can be integrated with qualitative follow-up in-depth interviews or focus group discussions to gain greater insights into young people's experience,

attitudes and behavioural responses towards AI-enabled digital spaces. The rise of generative AI, virtual assistants, conversational AI and AI-enabled educational technologies also needs to be examined as they are impacting day-to-day life at a rapid pace. The conduct of similar studies with rural and urban youth, youth with different educational backgrounds, and youth from different socio-economic groups would help to know the variations better. Cross-cultural and cross-national studies may further interrogate how social, cultural, and regulatory contexts

influence youth interactions with AI technologies. The consequences will be huge in the future. AI technologies will redefine how we interact, form identities, make decisions, and act in social settings. If left unchecked, humans would engage in more manipulation, reducing autonomy and the diversity of opinion. Bridging the youth engagement and AI knowledge gap through responsible innovation, inclusive policymaking and education promoting digital citizenship will allow us to build a digitally informed and just future.

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