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Emotion AI: Helpful Companion or Ethical Mystery Box?

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People constantly leave digital traces behind them, preserving and sharing their shopping habits, geographical locations, shared photos and reviews, and even their daily calorie burn or fitness achievements on various platforms. When this data is combined with AI the result promises convenience. Faster decision-making, route planning, program recommendations, while saving time and energy. It sounds helpful, but is it always a good idea?

The answer is not simple.

One new area of AI is **emotion AI**, which aims to **understand and respond to human emotions** using data collected from a variety of sources. It can combine facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and even physiological signals to supplement the usual digital footprint.

Proactive application of emotion AI raises important **ethical questions**. For example, how safely is our private data being stored and used? Are we fully aware of what we are sharing and with whom? These are not new or unusual questions when it comes to interacting with another person. We usually know who we can trust with our secrets and who we cannot. However, when the other party in a relationship of trust is not a human being, we are entering new, unknown territory.



One challenge is that emotion AI is not yet clearly defined, and ethical standards vary across cultures. What is acceptable in one society may be controversial in another. Nevertheless, there are ethical principles that most people agree on and that can be applied universally in the digital world: **fairness, transparency, data protection, and accountability.**

One of the most comprehensive regulations of these principles is the **European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act)**, which is expanded every year to cover the increasingly wide range of developments and applications in the field of artificial intelligence in the EU. This system of law ensures that ethical considerations are incorporated into a general legal framework.

Needless to say, ethical concern becomes even more serious when we move beyond traditional or generative AI to emotion AI. Unlike models that generate text, images or videos in the desired style, emotion AI is **designed to recognise and react to human emotions**. In theory, this creates more **empathetic and personalised user experiences**. But it also opens the door to **emotional manipulation**. Imagine a system that can sense when you're vulnerable or sad, and then nudges you toward a purchase, or even a political viewpoint, without you realising it. The ethical implications go far beyond simple data privacy.

As AI continues to evolve, we must ask ourselves: **what do we expect from emotion AI?** Should this be synonymous with ethical AI? At the very least, we should expect systems that respect our emotions and do not exploit them.