

Homework 8

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1 Surveillance and facial recognition

Discussion of the ethical aspects of surveillance

There are a lot of ethical aspects when it comes to surveillance; one of them being AI systems being biased in a certain way. This is commonly caused by a technical failure in the designed system. It is not a matter of the system having a problem with the person in front of it, it simply does not recognize the person (in some cases) as the developers might have forgotten to account (or just been lazy) for any visual differences in different people [3]. While this in itself could be considered rather unethical there is something much worse. If the developers themselves suffer from biases and openly choose to exclude certain people when constructing the AI, then there is a real ethical problem. This is not as innocent as being lazy or forgetful; this is purely unethical [1,3]. To counter this I believe it is very important to always train the AI systems on a wide dataset so that it can register the vast majority of people using it. Otherwise the facial recognition part of the surveillance is rendered very insufficient and even unethical in a sense that some people are not affected by it (the people who are outside of the dataset).

Another ethical aspect of surveillance is the ability to identify criminals [1] without any physical interaction. As a result, the police would have a much safer workplace not needing to face dangerous people unnecessarily. What is more is that less people will be falsely accused of crimes. However this is largely linked to what was stated above; the training set has to include the vast majority of people. Otherwise it could be rendered very unethical to use the system as it could either let wanted criminals who are not a part of the dataset get away or register the wrong person [3] potentially leading to false convictions which is also

extremely unethical.

To conclude, I believe that facial recognition in surveillance as of now could and should only be used as a complement. It is simply not reliable enough to be able to fully cover all surveillance [1,2].

Short reflection on the ethics of surveillance

Finally, there is a huge ethical aspect to surveillance in general; when and where should you be watched? If every move you do is recorded with your face as proof of what you've done there comes a risk too. The ethical aspect of this is that many lives would probably be saved and the society we live in today would most likely be way more organized (e.g. imagine getting a ticket home every time you litter). However, I believe the unethical aspect here heavily outweighs the ethical; people would become depressed [4]. Being constantly watched means that you always need to be on your toes about everything and the privilege of privacy is rendered completely obsolete. If everything you do is put within a file, life would become rather anxious for a lot of people at a certain point. Because of this I do indeed consider privacy a basic human right, people are not meant to be watched and recorded all the time; the good of it would probably be outweighed by the bad in this case.

References

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