Is the launch of AI.gov a transparent way to gain public trust?

An essay on the use of AI.gov as a case study.

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Date: 07 November 2021

Course: Digital Government Citizen Interaction

Master specialization: Media Technology

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Semester: 1

Words: 1524

Introduction

In the summer of 2019, the White House held a summit on artificial intelligence (A.I.) and its use in the government ("OSTP", 2019). This conference highlighted the innovative efforts at Federal agencies and looked into the future for transformative A.I. applications. A couple of months later, the Federal Government of the United States launched AI.gov, a public website to access all governmental A.I. initiatives, information and data that are currently underway (Gillgalion, 2020).

This essay will focus on the launch of AI.gov as a way to see if Artificial intelligence can help government agencies in the public-sector (Dhasarathy, 2021). And to see if this initiative is an approach to gain the public trust in the government by being transparent. This is a serious case because citizens and experts worldwide are starting to worry about the effects of A.I. when it is not tightly regulated. For example, entrepreneur Elon Musk called for these regulations in 2017 (Gibs, 2017). Furthermore, can we see this transparency as a form of government 2.0 (chun et al., 2010)? According to the website AI.gov, the national A.I. initiative is to lead the world development of trustworthy A.I. in all public and private sectors (NAII, 2019). Being mindful of how technology impacts society, it is recognized that, as a part of the G20 human-Centered Artificial Intelligence principles in 2019, A.I., like other emerging technologies, may present societal challenges, including shifts in the labour market or with privacy, security and ethical issues ("G20 Research Group", 2019). Its goal is thus the cultivation of confidence and in A.I. development and fully realize its potential.

AI.gov summarizes its use in five guiding principles. These consist of the following: "driving technological breakthroughs", "driving the development of appropriate technical standards", "training workers with the skills to develop and apply A.I. technologies, "protecting American values, including civil liberties and privacy and fostering public trust and confidence in A.I. technologies", "protecting U.S. technological advantage in A.I. while promoting an international environment that supports innovation" (NAII, 2019). Finally, enabling an environment for human-centred A.I. to promote innovation in digital entrepreneurship, research and development, startups and adoption of A.I. (Gillgalion, 2020).

Concerning stakeholders are the government, (international) organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector. Furthermore, In May 2021, the Biden administration launched the new AI.gov, aiming to broaden access to federal Artificial Intelligence innovation efforts and add six new strategic pillars ("The United States Government", 2021). If we look at the essentiality of digital governance or digital democracy, A.I. becomes vital in the technical part (Andrews, 2019). It could also be used for a surveillance state (Lips, 2009) or cause a more digital divide (Van Dijk, 2012), but this essay will mainly focus on its use of digital democracy.

Transparent A.I.

As explained in the introduction, the U.S. government launched the website AI.gov to provide information on applications of A.I. including, documents, policy, strategies, and the latest updates from its government agencies or contributing organizations. Its goal is thus to work towards the U.S. becoming the leader in developing and using trustworthy A.I. ("The United States Government", 2021) and prioritizing open access to A.I.'s benefits for its citizens. Also, the six new strategic pillars on which AI.gov lean are: "Innovation", "Advanced trustworthy A.I.", "Education & training", "Infrastructure", "Applications", and "International cooperation". These strategic pillars can be used to assess the public value of AI.gov. Furthermore, as Andrews described, the public value theory works with the contribution of AI.gov to all these different fields in society, by seeking to address the ethical and public value issues affecting governance and regulations. Moreover, it seems to legitimize themselves to work towards a common good (Andrews, 2019).

A.I is primarily based on technology, resulting in that most innovation comes from powerful I.T. corporations (Dunleavy et al., 2005). addressed the power of these I.T. corporations and their long-term government contracts. He is concerned that their major influence of the corporate technology sector over government remains mainly at these accounts' limits (Dunleavy et al., 2005). Others (Fountain, 2001; Borins et al., 2007) describe as part of digital government the expanding role of political direction and development. These could apply to his new leadership styles relating to administering, decision-making, delivering services and concepts of citizenship (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). However, with the deployment of more sophisticated machine learning systems as part of A.I. and big data, there is the risk that the algorithms could cause ethical dilemmas if not well verified by human judgement (Diakopoulos, 2015). Algorithms were used for predictive policing but started targeting rather racially black neighbourhoods. (Lum & Isaac, 2016). Or teachers were getting unfairly sacked due to a bias in algorithms (O'neil et al., 2017). The government could step in to tackle these dilemmas, but this requires transparency on several levels (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002). Firstly, algorithms and computer processes should be made transparent and accountable. Like what interpretations of the rules are concealed within the algorithm? And what are the links introduced between each system? Street-level bureaucrats should be accountable for these decisions and could be asked to reveal their grounds and considerations (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002). Consequently, the U.S. government was first concerned with this with the Algorithmic Accountability Act (Clarcke, 2019). It established a committee on the development and implementation of Artificial Intelligence to conduct automated decisions of system and data protection impact assessments (Gillgalion, 2020). The committee also serves as a coordinating body to provide companies and academia with new data sources, and vice versa, to build A.I. systems within the government workforce (OSTP, 2019). AI.gov could thus be seen as reintegrating (Lips, 2009), meaning that it is part of more central poses and provides a more accessible window into the initiatives underway across federal agencies ("The United States Government", 2021).

Another aspect of the importance of AI.gov is to get the public trust that the government will not become a surveillance state, even though you could argue that the U.S. already is a surveillance state. For example, all the bad press around the National Security Agency (NSA) practices after 9/11(Pelkington, 2021). However, compared to other nations like China, which uses A.I. to become a totalitarian surveillance state (Mills et al., 2019), the integrated data sharing gives it, in this case, a more citizen-centric government and less a surveillance state (Lips, 2009). A whole other aspect is that if citizens are not up-to-date with the latest algorithmic regulations in government technology, it could increase the digital divide of its citizens. For example, when you lack the digital skills while searching, selecting and evaluating information in digital media. It gets hard to realize your news feed is actually all preselected by algorithms, and you get stuck in the filter bubble. (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016) This social stratification would lead to unequal participation getting caused due to the inequality of access to digital technologies in society (Van Dijk, 2012).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we could say that A.I. has thus become one of the most impactful technologies of the 21st century, becoming both a challenge and an opportunity in every aspect of society. Hence, AI.gov was launched as part of the national A.I. initiative to coordinate and gain visibility across the federal governments' sectors. With the purpose to serve the many communities involved in A.I. research, deployment, and development. Furthermore, sharing this information leads to transparency and open government, thus enabling better access to public services. This is very important to gain citizens' trust and be effectively a better service state and not a surveillance state (Lips, 2009). Yet, algorithms, A.I., and big data could also be seen as a liberation technology (Tucker, 2017), and if rightly regulated, as the source of innovation, education and infrastructure, like some of the strategic pillars. Lastly, we could ask if this website can deploy the hypothetical "new information state" (Dunleavy and Margetts, 2013). They implicate the essentials of digital government where the government becomes more integrated, holistic, and agile (Dunleavy et al., 2005). If so, it still leaves one question, because should it work to a smaller intelligent core, informed by big data, where the technology deployed in the public sector

becomes more and more sophisticated? And thus, the government as new public management (Dunleavy et al., 2005)? A last side note is that some other governments also launched a similar initiative. For example, the U.K. office for artificial intelligence (GOV.UK/ai) strengthened their gov.uk website with the same strategy. However, the U.S. government made it clear that it seeks to set an example to other countries across the globe (Poon, 2021). This is arguably quite important if working towards this transparent relationship within and outside the U.S. All and all coming back to the original question if AI.gov is really transparent? The answer would be that it is a good direction in providing the correct information on the government development. A.I. can still be abstract to some people, and the impact on our daily life could pass unnoticed. Yet this impact will develop and increase every day (Van Dijk, 2012). This website plays thus a small role in making sure citizens are rightly informed and not excluded from the Federal A.I. decision.

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