



## General Studies-3; Topic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

### Protecting children in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

#### Introduction

- We are now living among history’s very first “AI” generation.
- The children and adolescents of today are born into a world increasingly powered by virtual reality and artificial intelligence (AI).

#### Changes what AI can do?

- AI is not only changing what humans can do, it is shaping our behaviours, our preferences, our perceptions of the world and of ourselves.
- AI can and is being used in intelligent tutoring systems, tailored curriculum plans, and imaginative virtual reality instruction, offering interactive learning experiences that can improve educational outcomes.

#### Concerns / Challenges

- Not everyone can tap into the opportunities offered by AI.
- The expansion and deployment of AI is far outpacing our ability to understand its implications, especially its impact on children.
- According to UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as many as two-thirds of the world’s children do not have access to the Internet at home.
- In India, the divide between the digital haves and have-nots was underscored last year by the suicide of a young undergrad whose parents could not afford a laptop or smartphone at home.
- Unless we take rapid and concerted action to close this digital divide, AI will radically amplify societal inequalities among children of different races, socio-economic background, genders, and regions.
- Multiple reports identify virtual playgrounds and chat forums as “honeypots” for child predators.

- Children, from a tender age through adolescence, are becoming digitally addicted to video games and social networks.
- When children need to be learning concentration skills, emotional and social intelligence, their attention is being spliced into ever-thinner slices, and their social interactions increasingly virtualised.
- Right when children and youth are forming their initial views of the world, they are being sucked into the universe of fake news, conspiracy theories, hype, hubris, online bullying, hate speech and the likes.
- With every click and scroll, AI is sorting them into tribes, and feeding them a steady diet of specially customised tribal cuisine.
- All this is thrown at our children, right when it is so important to help them understand and appreciate different perspectives, preferences, beliefs and customs.
- Today AI toys can listen and observe our children, soaking up their data.

## **International Efforts**

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child urges all public and private actors to act in the best interests of the child, across all their developmental activities and provision of services.
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment 25, on implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and fulfilling all children's rights in the digital environment.
- UNICEF's Generation AI initiative is currently working with the World Economic Forum's Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and other stakeholders to realise the potential of AI for children in a safe and transparent way.
- The Government of India has put in place strong policies to protect the rights and well-being of children, including a legislative framework that includes the Right to Education.

## **Way Forward**

- In addition to closing the digital divide, we need to better protect children and adolescents on-line.
- Parents and guardians, societies and governments have the responsibility towards our young charges in this AI world.
- On mitigating on-line harms, we need a multi-pronged action plan
  - we need legal and technological safeguards
  - we need tools, like trustworthy certification and rating systems, to enable sound choices on safe AI apps.
  - we need to ban anonymous accounts.
  - we need enforceable ethical principles of non-discrimination and fairness embedded in the policy and design of AI systems.
- In short, we need safe online spaces for children, without algorithmic manipulation and with restricted profiling and data collection.
- Laws and policies to prevent abuses and violence, such as the National Policy for Children (2013), can be extended for children in a digital space.
- And in this interconnected world, the more we can agree upon multilaterally and by multi-stakeholder groups, the easier it may be to implement nationally and locally.
- Just as India proactively helped shape the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and gave the world the principle of *Ahimsa*, India could also galvanise the international community around ensuring an ethical AI for Generation AI.