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Introduction

“AI is a rare example of an extremely hyped thing that almost everyone still underestimates the impact of – even in the medium-term.” That’s how OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, Co-Founder and CEO Sam Altman described AI just last year.

While it is yet to be determined exactly what that underestimated impact will eventually be, today MMTC stands as an artificial intelligence (AI) optimist. We believe that as a society, we will be able to address the various concerns and risks associated with AI. Being on the ground floor of much of the new developments, we should be able to take advantage of the significant benefits it is poised to bring. Through that lens, this series will examine some of these risks and benefits as it covers 1) the anticipated impact on business, as AI advancements make their way into the workforce; 2) the regulations and legislation being considered and used to maintain control over AI; and 3) the role civil rights groups and other Black and minority serving entities, like MMTC, can play in ensuring our communities are able to take advantage of AI, without being taken advantage of by those using AI.

What is AI?

First, let’s start with a working definition of the general term “AI.” In its simplest form, AI is the science of training machines to perform in ways similar to the human brain. It is a vast domain with numerous subfields and applications. John McCarthy, the computer scientist who coined the phrase artificial intelligence, [defined](#) it as “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines.” It is an umbrella term that features, as [IBM](#) puts it, “leverag[ing] computers and machines to mimic the problem-solving and decision-making capabilities of the human mind.” It is used in everything from your phone’s text messaging app as it provides word suggestions to finish your sentences, to the driver assistant functions in electric vehicles like Teslas and the Ford Mustang Mach-Es.

The most recent breakthroughs in AI have come from the subfield Generative AI (GAI). GAI is a form of AI that uses machine learning (ML) algorithms to generate new content, including, but not limited to, text, images, and music. Examples of GAI models include ChatGPT (text), MidJourney (images), and MusicLM (music). ML uses algorithms that process data to make improvements in performing tasks over time without being directly programmed for step-by-step instructions upfront. The algorithms “learn” by example as they are trained on massive amounts of data, from which the algorithms identify patterns that help improve its analysis and decision making.

What Is All The Fuss About?

The hype around AI kicked off after OpenAI [released](#) ChatGPT in November 2022. And maybe for the first time since the launch of the original iPhone, the hype seems to be warranted. The recent evolutions in AI have opened the door to a whole new set of possibilities. In recent months, AI has been used in a number of innovative, interesting, and inventive ways, including aiding in [potential hazardous asteroid detection](#), [helping stroke patients communicate](#) for the first time in years, and assisting radiologists more efficiently [detect abnormalities in breast cancer scans](#); just to name a few.

Amidst all the hype, AI's application in the business world reveals some of its major appeal. A common thread interwoven in the fabrics of AI is the pursuit of efficiency. Every advancement in AI seeks to become increasingly more efficient at whatever task it was programmed to perform. Because efficiency has long been a business buzzword, AI has been top of mind in the business sector. The terms "AI" or "artificial intelligence" were mentioned 827 times in the second-quarter earnings calls earlier this year.

Unfortunately, the developments in AI have not all been positive, especially not for Black and other minority communities. AI generated errors have significant real-world consequences for minority communities. Nijeer Parks, for example, was [wrongfully arrested in 2019](#) after an AI facial recognition software misidentified him as a suspect in a hotel shoplifting case. While the charges were eventually dropped, it took over six months and Mr. Parks was forced to spend 10 days in jail.

Mr. Parks is just one example: algorithms have been used to facilitate broader systemic racism in [policing](#); they have been responsible for directing physicians to allocate more resources to nonblack patients in [healthcare](#); and algorithms helping with [mortgage and renter application](#) reviews have been found to disadvantage minority applicants.

Why We Need To Be Involved

As AI proliferates, minority communities need to take an active role in its development and "training" now. Many believe GAI is still in its infancy. Emad Mostaque, founder and CEO of Stability AI, the company behind the text-to-image generator Stable Diffusion, [noted](#) earlier this year that "we're still at the iPhone 2G, 3G point" of the GAI life cycle. Mo Gawdat, author and former Chief Business Officer of Google X analogized this moment in GAI advancement to Superman's arrival on planet earth as a child. Assuming GAI is truly in its infancy, there is still time to ensure the community training is as diverse as possible, allowing us all to use its powers for good.

Taking an active role in AI's development means making sure we make our presence known in as many rooms that have a hand in training GAI as possible. This includes everything from entrepreneurial ventures, policy discussions, legislation, AI conferences, computer science webinars and the like. Whether you are an AI optimist or someone who thinks it will lead to our

extinction as a species, getting involved where you can be the best way to both reap the most benefits and mitigate the gravest harms. This column aims to occupy the policy room while bringing attention to as many others as possible.

Stay Tuned.