Immigration

AI use in Canadian immigration raising concerns | Sergio R. Karas

By **Sergio R. Karas**

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(February 27, 2023, 1:22 PM EST) -- Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used in many industries and sectors to streamline processes, make decision-making more efficient and improve overall productivity. Canadian immigration is no exception, and AI has already begun to play a significant role in the country's immigration system.

At the outset of the pandemic, the federal government amended the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* to require that applications for many visa categories be filed in electronic form. It also amended the legislation to authorize the use of electronic and automated systems by immigration officers to make decisions.

One of the main ways AI is being used in Canadian immigration is to assist with processing applications. Using AI algorithms and machine learning models can help to quickly identify potential issues or inconsistencies in applications, allowing immigration officers to focus their attention on the most complex or high-risk cases. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) claims that AI will speed up the processing time for applications and reduce the backlog of cases waiting to be reviewed, especially those that are considered routine.

Another way AI is being used in Canadian immigration is to support the decision-making process for visa applications. AI algorithms can analyze a range of factors, including an applicant's work history, education and other relevant information, to help determine their eligibility for a particular visa category. IRCC claims that this allows immigration officials to make more informed and objective decisions, reducing the risk of discrimination or bias.

AI can improve the integrity of the Canadian immigration system. AI algorithms can be used to detect fraudulent applications and identify potential security threats. AI can analyze an applicant's social media presence to detect any red flags or warning signs, such as evidence of terrorism or criminal activity. This helps to ensure that only those who are truly eligible are granted entry to Canada.

AI can also play a role in the integration of new immigrants into Canadian society. AI-powered chatbots can provide information and guidance about the Canadian job market and other important information that can help them to successfully settle in Canada. It can be used to match new immigrants with available jobs, based on their skills, experience and education, helping to speed up the integration process and support the growth of the Canadian economy.

Further, AI may improve the overall customer experience for those seeking immigration to Canada. For example, AI-powered virtual assistants can provide real-time answers to common questions like processing times, reducing the need for individuals to wait on hold or to search through extensive documentation. This can ensure that those seeking immigration to Canada receive the information and support they need in a timely and effective manner.

However, there are numerous concerns about the use of AI in Canadian immigration. Some argue that AI algorithms and machine learning models may perpetuate existing biases or stereotypes. If an

AI model is trained on historical data that includes discrimination or bias, it may continue to make decisions that reflect these biases, even if they are unintentional.

There are also concerns about transparency and accountability. Currently, it can be difficult for individuals to understand how AI systems are making decisions, and to challenge these decisions if they believe they are incorrect. This raises questions about the reliability and accuracy of AI, and whether individuals have the right to challenge or contest decisions made by AI systems.

Another serious concern is the potential for privacy violations. If AI algorithms are used to analyze an applicant's social media presence, they may gather sensitive information that could be used against them. Additionally, there are concerns about the security of the data collected by AI systems, and the potential for this data to be used for malicious purposes. As AI systems become more sophisticated, they can be used to launch cyberattacks or steal personal information, such as passwords or financial data. Strong security measures will have to be in place to protect personal data, audited by third parties.

Finally, there is a concern about the use of AI for mass surveillance. AI systems can be used to gather large amounts of personal data and to analyze it to identify individuals and track their movements. In an extreme example, the Chinese government has implemented a comprehensive surveillance system that leverages AI technology to monitor the behaviour and activities of its citizens. The AI surveillance system in China comprises various technologies, including facial recognition, big data analytics and cloud computing. It collects data from a wide range of sources and uses this data to build profiles of individuals. The AI algorithms then analyze this data to identify patterns of behaviour and predict threats to the government. This must never be allowed to happen in Canada.

In order to address these privacy concerns, it is important to implement clear and effective privacy regulations to ensure that personal data is collected, stored and used in a responsible and ethical manner and that individuals have control over it. It is also important to ensure that AI systems are transparent and accountable and that individuals have the right to challenge or contest decisions made by AI. This includes ensuring that AI models are transparent and that applicants understand how decisions are being made and ensure that individuals are protected from malicious or unethical use.

Despite these concerns, the use of AI in Canadian immigration is likely to continue to grow, as it offers many benefits that are too compelling to ignore. The speed and efficiency that it provides can help to reduce the backlog of cases waiting to be reviewed. The improved decision-making capabilities offered by AI can help to protect the safety and security of Canadian citizens if it is used in an ethical and responsible manner, with the appropriate oversight by independent watchdogs. Failure to do so may usher in the erosion of civil and constitutionally protected rights.

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