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Prasanna S,

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No. 08, Arul Nagar, Seera Thoppu,

Maudhanda Kurichi, Srirangam,

Tiruchirappalli – 620102

Phone : +91 94896 71437 – info@iledu.in / Chairman@iledu.in



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CODE AND COURT: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF ALGORITHMIC DECISIONS ON LEGAL PRINCIPLES AND PRECEDENTS"

AUTHOR – DR SANCHITA RAY, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT SHARDA SCHOOL OF LAW, SHARDA UNIVERSITY, GREATER NOIDA, UP

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Abstract

The convergence of algorithmic decisions with established legal principles poses substantial challenges for legal systems worldwide. As algorithms play a growing role in decision-making across criminal justice, employment, healthcare, and financial services, issues surrounding fairness, transparency, accountability, and legal compatibility come to the forefront. Algorithms, sets of instructions for specific tasks, are foundational in computing and information technology. Algorithmic decisions, based on data inputs and programmed instructions, span applications such as credit scoring and predictive policing. Historically, algorithms were confined to scientific and military uses with minimal legal implications. By the late 20th century, personal computing and the internet introduced algorithms into daily life, raising legal issues related to intellectual property and privacy. In the 21st century, algorithms began to influence critical decisions in finance, employment, and law enforcement, highlighting traditional legal frameworks' inadequacies in addressing algorithmic bias and transparency.

Legal challenges include ensuring due process and fairness, as algorithms in policing and sentencing may lack transparency, affecting individuals' ability to challenge decisions. Anti-discrimination laws are challenged by algorithmic bias, necessitating measures to counteract biases in data. Privacy rights are at risk with extensive data processing by algorithms, requiring robust data protection laws like the GDPR. Legal systems must evolve to ensure algorithmic fairness, transparency, and accountability, necessitating ongoing monitoring, legal framework updates, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Keywords– Artificial Intelligence, Data, Privacy, Algorithm, Intellectual Property Rights, GDPR, Privacy Laws.

Introduction

The intersection of algorithmic decisions with established legal principles and precedents presents a complex challenge for legal systems worldwide. As algorithms become increasingly integrated into decision-making processes in areas such as criminal justice, employment, healthcare, and financial services, they raise significant questions about fairness, transparency, accountability, and compatibility with existing legal norms. Algorithms are a series of instructions or a set of rules designed

to perform a specific task or solve a particular problem. These are fundamental to all aspects of computing and information technology. Algorithmic decisions refer to decisions made by computer algorithms, rather than by human judgment alone. These decisions are often based on data inputs and programmed instructions, allowing algorithms to process information and generate outcomes or recommendations without direct human intervention. Algorithmic decision-making is increasingly used in various domains, including

finance, healthcare, criminal justice, employment, and marketing. Examples of algorithmic decisions include credit scoring, predictive policing, medical diagnosis systems, and recommendation algorithms used by online platforms.

Historical evolution

The intersection of algorithmic decisions with established legal principles and precedents has been a gradual evolution, shaped by the growing presence of technology in everyday life and the subsequent need for legal systems to address the unique challenges posed by these advancements.

In the early days of computing, from the 1940s to the 1960s, the use of algorithms was largely confined to scientific research and military applications. One of the earliest applications of algorithms was in computational mathematics, where they were used to solve complex equations and perform numerical simulations. For example, algorithms were developed to calculate trajectories in ballistics or to simulate the behavior of physical systems in scientific experiments. Military and scientific research institutions utilized algorithms to predict weather patterns, aiding in strategic military planning and civilian safety. These algorithms processed meteorological data to forecast weather conditions, helping to inform military operations, agricultural planning, and disaster preparedness. During World War II, algorithms played a crucial role in breaking enemy codes and encrypting sensitive communications. The development of algorithms like the Enigma machine and the subsequent efforts at Bletchley Park to decrypt German communications exemplify this military application. Algorithms were used in ballistic calculations for trajectory prediction of artillery shells and missiles. These calculations were vital for accurate targeting in military operations, including naval engagements and aerial bombardments.

However During this period (1940-1960), the legal implications were minimal because the

technology had not yet permeated the consumer market or critical societal functions.

By the late 20th century, with the advent of personal computing and the internet, algorithms began to influence more aspects of daily life, including commerce, communication, and entertainment. Legal issues started to arise, particularly concerning intellectual property, privacy, and data protection. For example, copyright laws were challenged by the digital reproduction and distribution of media, leading to legal reforms and new policies like the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in the U.S. in 1998.

As technology progressed into the 21st century, algorithms started to play a critical role in decision-making processes in areas such as finance (algorithmic trading), employment (resume screening software), and law enforcement (predictive policing). This raised significant legal questions around fairness, accountability, and transparency. It became clear that traditional legal concepts and precedents were not fully equipped to handle issues like algorithmic bias or the opacity of machine learning processes.

Today, with the pervasive integration of AI and machine learning, algorithmic decisions influence everything from credit scoring and hiring to judicial decisions and healthcare.

Intersection of algorithm and law

The intersection of algorithms and law is a complex and evolving landscape. Here’s a detailed exploration of how these intersections are manifesting and the legal challenges they bring:

1. Due Process and Fairness

Due process is a foundational legal principle requiring that laws and legal proceedings be fair. Algorithms, particularly those used in predictive policing, bail setting, or sentencing recommendations, can potentially undermine this principle if they are opaque or if their decision-making criteria are not disclosed. This raises concerns about an individual’s ability to

challenge decisions or to understand the basis of decisions affecting them, which is a core aspect of procedural fairness. For instance, in the United States, the use of risk assessment tools in sentencing has been criticized for potentially reinforcing biases present in historical data, thus affecting the fairness of sentences.

2. Equality and Anti-Discrimination Laws

Legal frameworks like the Civil Rights Act in the U.S., the Equality Act in the UK, or anti-discrimination laws in other jurisdictions are designed to protect individuals from discrimination based on race, gender, age, and other characteristics. However, algorithms can perpetuate and amplify existing biases if they are trained on historical data that includes biased human decisions. For example, hiring algorithms that learn from previous hiring decisions may replicate discriminatory patterns unless explicitly designed to counteract such biases. This presents a legal challenge in ensuring that algorithmic decisions comply with anti-discrimination laws.

3. Privacy Rights

Privacy laws such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union impose strict rules on the processing of personal data. Algorithmic decision-making often involves analyzing large volumes of personal data, raising concerns about privacy and data protection. The GDPR also includes provisions related to automated decisions, granting individuals the right to obtain human intervention, to express their point of view, and to contest decisions made solely on automated processes, thereby imposing a legal requirement to mitigate risks to privacy and personal autonomy.

4. Transparency and Accountability

Legal precedents emphasize the importance of transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, particularly in public administration and governance. Algorithms challenge these principles due to their often

"black-box" nature, where the decision-making process is not transparent. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to determine who is accountable for a decision, especially when an incorrect or harmful decision is made. Legal systems are thus challenged to develop standards and regulations that ensure algorithms are auditable and that accountability mechanisms are in place.

5. Intellectual Property (IP)

The development of algorithms frequently involves substantial intellectual property, particularly concerning proprietary software and data used to train algorithms. This raises questions about the accessibility of the algorithms' inner workings for purposes of legal scrutiny and oversight. Courts face the challenge of balancing IP protections with the need for transparency in algorithmic decision-making.

6. Adapting Legal Standards and Creating New Jurisprudence

As algorithms present new kinds of legal challenges, courts are tasked with interpreting traditional laws through the lens of new technology. This may involve adapting existing legal standards to accommodate the unique aspects of algorithmic decision-making or even developing entirely new jurisprudence to address issues that are unprecedented.

The complexities introduced by algorithmic decisions into legal systems can be illustrated through specific cases and examples from various countries. These instances highlight how courts, governments, and regulatory bodies are grappling with the need to integrate these technological advances while upholding established legal principles. Here are some significant examples:

1. United States: COMPAS Case

In the United States, the case of *Loomis v. Wisconsin* in 2016 brought significant attention to the use of algorithmic risk assessment tools in the criminal justice system. Eric Loomis was sentenced to six years in prison, in part based

on a risk assessment generated by the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) system. Loomis argued that the use of COMPAS violated his right to due process because the algorithm was proprietary and its decision-making process was opaque, thus preventing scrutiny of its fairness and accuracy. The Wisconsin Supreme Court ultimately upheld the use of COMPAS but acknowledged concerns regarding transparency and potential biases.

2. European Union: GDPR and Automated Decision-Making

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which took effect in 2018, addresses concerns about privacy and data protection in algorithmic decision-making. Article 22 of the GDPR provides individuals with the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing, including profiling, which has legal effects concerning them or significantly affects them. This regulation forces companies to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability in their use of personal data in algorithms.

3. United Kingdom: Facial Recognition Technology

In the UK, the use of live facial recognition technology by the South Wales Police Force was challenged in court in 2020. The Court of Appeal found that the use of this technology was unlawful, partly because it did not sufficiently take into account the risk of indirect discrimination. This landmark judgment underscored the need for law enforcement agencies to consider privacy rights and anti-discrimination laws when deploying advanced surveillance technologies.

4. Netherlands: Welfare Fraud Detection System

In a significant 2020 ruling, the Dutch court ordered the government to halt the use of an algorithmic system known as SyRI (System Risk Indication), which was used to detect fraud in welfare applications. The court found that the system violated human rights, particularly the

right to privacy, because it involved secret profiling and lacked transparency. This case was pivotal in highlighting the potential for automated systems to infringe on individual rights and the necessity for stringent oversight.

5. Canada: Algorithmic Impact Assessment Tool

In response to the growing use of AI and algorithmic decision-making, the Canadian government introduced the Algorithmic Impact Assessment (AIA) tool in 2019. This tool is designed to help government departments assess and mitigate the risks associated with deploying automated decision-making systems. The AIA is an example of proactive governance aiming to ensure that the use of algorithms aligns with legal and ethical standards.

These examples illustrate the diverse ways in which different jurisdictions are addressing the legal challenges posed by algorithmic decisions. They underscore the ongoing need for legal frameworks that can effectively manage the risks and uphold the rights and freedoms that are central to modern legal systems.

Conclusion

The intersection of algorithmic decisions with legal principles and precedents represents a rapidly changing area within the legal field. As algorithms become more integral to decision-making in various sectors, legal systems must continuously evolve to address new challenges. These include ensuring fairness, transparency, accountability, and the protection of individual rights. The dynamic nature of technology means that legal frameworks and precedents must be frequently reassessed and updated to remain relevant and effective.

To navigate this evolving landscape, an ongoing dialogue between technologists, legal professionals, policymakers, and the public is crucial. Technologists bring insights into how algorithms function and their potential biases. Legal professionals contribute an understanding of existing laws and principles

that need to be upheld or adapted. Policymakers can bridge the gap by creating regulations that balance innovation with protection of rights. Public input is essential to ensure that the application of algorithms aligns with societal values and expectations.

This collaborative approach aims to ensure that the integration of algorithms into decision-making processes supports and reinforces legal norms rather than undermining them. By fostering interdisciplinary communication and adapting legal frameworks proactively, society can harness the benefits of algorithms while mitigating their risks, ultimately promoting justice and equity in the digital age.

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