A call for an Academia AI Act and for scholar's education

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The only constant is change, Heraclitus claimed, some 2500 years ago. Who knows what the great Thinker would say today, faced with the profound and rapid transformation that AI is generating in so many fields of human existence.

One of them is Research and Education. Are we, management scholars, prepared to face the ongoing AI revolution in our profession? AI, and in particular Generative AI, is a transformative technology that can profoundly modify the way we do research and education, but most of us are not prepared for change, to seize the big opportunities and face the significant threats it entails.

Back in 2018, Stephen Hawking stated that 'AI will be either the best thing that's ever happened to us, or it will be the worst thing', emphasizing the importance of approaching AI in a conscious and responsible manner.

There is some research on the subject, as a strand on the integration of Generative AI in research and education is growing. Also, several initiatives of academic organisations and scientific societies have been emerging, especially on an international level.

Let us briefly summarize the main issues.

In the field of Education, the aspects concern teaching, learning and student assessment. Challenges and risks affect teachers and students alike.

On the one hand, AI can certainly make training processes more efficient and effective, supporting and expanding teachers' role through augmentation and automation, refining assessment processes and analytics, customizing and enhancing learning content and experiences and sustaining digital literacy diffusion. Scholars can free themselves from routine low added-value activities and improve their effectiveness by managing interactive classes and personalized relationships, thus emphasising the human touch in education.

On the other hand, there are serious critical issues in using AI in education, related to contents, ethics, and learning processes. As far as contents are concerned, AI can produce fake, inaccurate, misleading or biased output and is unable to contextualize information; this risk is very serious, because the user cannot easily recognize potential harms, since the information's sources and algorithmics are not transparent or accessible. Regarding ethics, assessment processes have to deal with problems related to cheating and plagiarism; there are also complex and significant copyright issues concerning the materials produced by students and scholars. Above all, the use of AI can reduce the effectiveness of learning processes, which appear to be more efficient, actually tend to lead to superficial learning.

The development of creative, analytical, critical thinking, problem solving skills is severely hampered.

Let us now consider the Research field now. First of all, we can say that the research process can be strongly reshaped and became much more efficient: from idea generation to the formulation of hypothesis and research questions, from literature review to large scale data collection, from data analysis to the presentation of the results. The whole process is accelerated, including the writing of the output. Many of these functions are readily available for researchers. Generative AI tools, for instance, are already incorporated in some qualitative research software.

Nevertheless, the criticalities and the risks are considerable. The dark side of implementing AI in research relate to the reduction of the relevance and credibility of research, to compliance with ethical issues, to the impoverishment of the researcher's skills. First, the AI research process is lacking in creative and critical thinking and analysis, rigour - especially in terms of the difficulty of validating and verifying data and elaboration processes - originality and relevance of results. Second, ethical issues, concerning the intellectual property rights, the authenticity and reliability of information, the distortion of information due to database bias, and the integrity of researchers i.e. in terms of plagiarism or dishonesty are substantial. Lastly, using AI in research leads to a reduction in the skills of researchers, which may result in a lowered ability to direct and conduct research with the necessary human touch.

For some time now, we have been witnessing a proliferation of inadequate or irrelevant AI-supported papers, lacking impact for real stakeholder demands and non-compliant with ethical issues, including the identification of the authors' real contribution. This undermines the credibility of academic research, as well as the transparency and meritocracy of the system.

In this context, which is necessarily set out in a concise manner and therefore not exhaustive, our professional mantra revolves around the same key words: relevance-impact, rigour, ethics. AI challenges us to update our culture, our models and our procedures, but we have to embrace innovation in a conscious and responsible way. To achieve this, certain strategies must be put in place to support the change process.

First and foremost, political and academic institutions must clearly and uniquely define guidelines for the use of AI in research and educational activities, that are consistent with more general regulations. There is great need for clear guidance in this period of rapid change. So let us make a call for the creation of a sort of *Academia AI Act,* which can serve as a guide both for universities and individual scholars.

Secondly, we need to bridge the awareness and knowledge gap that exists in the academic community today. An incisive education plan must be implemented in the Academies to share the opportunities and risks of using AI in Academia. And later, when available, to disseminate the guidelines and the solutions mentioned above.

Innovation cannot be held back, but rather must be addressed consciously and responsibly.

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Academic or professional positions and contacts

Alberto Pastore
Full Professor of Management
Sapienza University of Roma - Italy
e-mail: alberto.pastore@uniroma1.it

Marta Ugolini
Full Professor of Management
University of Verona - Italy
e-mail: marta.ugolini@univr.it