Happiness in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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The pursuit of happiness is central to all human endeavors. Employment is one of the major contributing factors in human happiness. But what will happen when many of the present job industries will be taken over by advanced robots. With the advancement in Artificial intelligence the prospects of mass unemployment are looming large. This paper discuss about the role of work in human happiness and despite being the business becoming more efficient and life become more easy with sophisticated new artificial intelligence there would be no guarantee of the enhancement of human happiness, specifically in context of joblessness. The job is not just a means to provide monetary benefits, but also contributes psychologically and socially in one’s life in a positive way. The monetary benefits can be compensated with the universal basic income but what about the purpose and meaning of life which are also defined by ones job. Various aspects related to job and human happiness has been discussed and at last it is recommended that the healthy and balance discussion regarding the opportunities and challenges. Artificial intelligence will bring in the society should be discussed before it is too late.

[Keywords: Artificial intelligence and happiness, Unemployment, Automation, Well being, Work force]

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1. **Introduction**

We stand at the beginning of a new era. What was once a science fiction is fast becoming reality? The fast pacing development of Artificial intelligence is ready to transform war, crime, justice, jobs and society- and our very sense of what it means to be human (Tegmark, 2017).

Any technology is supposed to be neutral in its nature. As it promises to contribute in flourishing the human values and its well being, so is also poses a threat to disrupt the prevailing social harmony. The most profound threat coming from the advancement of Artificial intelligence is of shifting the jobs from the hands of the human beings to the algorithm driven machines due to their increasing efficiency and cheaper cost. This in turn will eradicate the need of unskilled and semi skilled workforce from the market thus causing mass unemployment, inequality and consequently, widespread impoverishment around the globe.

Happiness is central to all human endeavors. From the very trivial act of scratching the skin to climbing the Mount Everest leads to some form of happiness. Although happiness is quite a subjective state, but there are some common factors among the general population which play a pivotal role in determining happiness such as relationships, health, finance, self esteem, employment etc. Employment is one of the leading factors which affect one’s happiness. What will happen if variety of jobs will be taken away by computer assisted machines, and people will be jobless? Job doesn’t give just a material gain in terms of money etc, which can be compensated through the universal basic income, but also the psychological rewards such as self esteem, purpose of life etc, which can’t be compensated so easily.

This work provides an outlook about the prospects of future happiness in this technological driven era specifically of Artificial intelligence. What is Artificial Intelligence and the positive and negative aspects related to it will be discussed firstly. Then the term happiness and its relation with unemployment will be derived from the past research. And at last various social and psychological aspects of jobs, impact of artificial intelligence on it and the need of timely and balanced debate related to the issue will be discussed.

1.1 **Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is an area of research whose main focus is on making machines such as computers, robot increasingly capable of executing various tasks which require human like intelligence. The researchers of AI test the machine’s proficiency in key parameters: learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and language. In other words Artificial Intelligence (deep learning especially) is a mechanized, simplified version of human neural networks and cognitive processing (Panova, 2017). The synthesis of several technological
advancements has enabled AI researchers to achieve breakthroughs and become commercially available.

Innovations in technology is the driving force behind economic growth, prosperity and improvements in living standards. It boosts productivity, thereby increasing per capita income and consumption. Technology also influences the nature and quality of work, as well as the structure of societies. The impact of smart phones and computers are the clear and most recent example of it. In other words it can be said that technology, institutions and society tend to evolve together (Geels, 2005). Technology disperses slowly and gradually over time, involving improvements and adaptations of existing technology. However, sometimes, technological change is so rapid and disruptive that it results in major advancement that, under the right circumstances, has ultimately transformed the organizational structure of societies and economies (Freeman, 1988). There are many areas such as nanotech, robotics etc which are blooming with the help of growing ability of artificial intelligence (AI) systems to autonomously solve complex problems (Davis, 2017). The lower cost of decentralized cloud-based computing, the availability of Big Data and the increasing sophistication of algorithmic machine learning play a major role in the advancement of AI (Rosso, 2017).

1.2 Artificial Intelligence and Work

The advent of artificial intelligence is considered as a 4th Industrial revolution in the discussions centered on new technology. Once designed and deployed, modern AI can form its own rules to interpret new data and design solutions with minimal or no human participation. Whereas the first industrial revolution was applied to tasks that required muscle power, AI is being applied to tasks that require brainpower. There is a sense of uncertainty prevailing regarding the impact of AI on jobs. Protagonists says that as it happened in the previous times, any new technology disrupt the existing financial market but with the passing time open a whole new avenue of jobs which were not imagined earlier. The very same thing will be happened with the AI too. On the other hand, many studies conducted on the impact of AI on job prospects bring a gloomy picture. According to them many of the jobs which are more manual and less cognitive, repetitive, does not require creativity will be snatched from the humans to the machines. Many tasks which require creativity, discretion, problem solving, flexibility and human interaction are unlikely to be automated, thus considered as safe. This general trend will likely to be persisting in the near future. However, the combination of big data, AI and rapidly expanding computational power makes automation increasingly viable in less routine tasks, such as diagnosing diseases, legal writing or navigating a car through busy streets (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). The impact of automation will be hard on developing countries than the developed ones due to the concentration of less skilled workforce there.
Workers with low and medium levels of education are more prone to fall prey to the job automation. Some studies suggest that in both developed and developing countries, workers with low and medium levels of education face greater risks of job automation (McKinsey Global Institute 2017). This make up the bulk of the workforce in the sectors that are potentially most affected.

1.3 Happiness and Unemployment

The subject of happiness has been the focus of study since time immemorial. Aristotle defined happiness with the term “eudemonia” which means indentifying one’s virtue, cultivating and the exercising them and living life in accord (Gupta, 2012). Fisher (2010) has described happiness in the form of pleasant moods and positive emotions, subjective well-being and positive attitudes. According to Diener and Diener (1996), happiness appears in form of joy and is a basic human emotion, falling happy is crucial to experience as human. With the advent of positive psychology, the research on positive psychology has become more main stream.

Martin Seligman (2006) founder of positive psychology has said that indentifying and cultivating fundamental strengths and using them every day in every aspect of life is the key to authentic happiness. Other scholars such as Fredrickson and Losada (2005) has said that growing, flourishing and thriving life and the motive of making this world a better place is what happiness is all about.

Employment plays a very important role in achieving happiness. It just not gives the monetary benefit but also a sense of purpose and meaning to one’s life. Feather (1990) provides an excellent overview of the link between unemployment and well-being. A major contribution is Johoda’s Functional Approach, which posits that participation in paid employment generates a range of functions in addition to income that are important for psychological well-being, such as a time-structure to the day, social interaction, self-identity and purpose (Jahoda 1982). Unemployment thus results in deprivation of these functions. Empirical studies finding an adverse impact of unemployment on happiness include Frijters et al (2003); Clark, Georgellis and Sanfey (2001) and Winkelmann and Winkelmann (1998). Di Tella et al. (2003) found that the unemployed are quite negatively affected by the loss of their jobs - even if this was controlled for income effects: Their study unveils that the mere fact of not having a job leads to a reduction in life satisfaction. Clark and Oswald (1994 : 655) claimed that “joblessness depressed well-being more than any other single characteristic, including important negative ones such as divorce and separation”.

Even though the negative relationship between unemployment and happiness seems well established the causation can be questioned: For example, unhappy people might be less effective co-workers and hence lose their jobs. Although unsatisfied workers perform worse than satisfied ones, Winkelmann
and Winkelmann (1998) showed with the help of longitudinal studies that the main causation runs from unemployment to life satisfaction.

As we have seen, the reference group is an important notion in regard to life satisfaction. For instance, the social norm of having a job might be weakened if many people lose their jobs. As self-esteem can be maintained due to the fact that it is more likely a general phenomenon than one’s own fault, a stabilization effect occurs.

2. Discussion

The prospects of joblessness of large segment of society is looming large due to the increasing machine intelligence, thus automating variety of jobs. And unemployment significantly contributes in human unhappiness.

The automation of various jobs with the more efficient artificial intelligence will leave us with a lot of free time and freedom from the demands of work. But does that free time will improve the human well-being significantly is the question needs to be ponder upon. Protagonists of artificial intelligence are talking about the universal basic income to compensate the loss of job, but the 2013 Gallup poll found that 68% would not quit their job even after winning a million dollars lottery (The Guardian, 2016). Work not just gives a monetary benefit but also infuses meaning and sense of purpose in the lives of doers. The happiest people in the world are those who experience both purpose and pleasure in their lives. Not all kinds of work and jobs create meaning or give a profound sense of purpose to the worker; rather many of it are quite unpleasant and make one’s life terrible. Many people hate their jobs for various reasons and want to come out of it, given their financial needs are met. For such people transfer of jobs to the robots through automation and universal basic income is of great help. But the challenge with this proposition is this that robots are not just replacing individuals but entire industries. There are indeed people who enjoy their work, but new smart robots are going to prey both satisfied and dissatisfied people with their jobs alike across various industries like, driving, manufacturing, accountants etc.

One of the most important aspects of artificial intelligence is not just that it will make the businesses more efficient, but also it proves to be beneficial for the society. For example, more than million people die in road accidents every year. If manual driving is replaced with the sensor based automated driving many lives can be saved globally. But to make a balance between this ethical aspect of artificial intelligence and newly found unhappiness of joblessness would be a tough task. If free time provided by the automation can be invested in an act one would find valuable, it presents as a moral imperative.

The identification with work is quite strong in a population. When two strangers meet the very next question after the name comes about the nature of work. With such a strong identification with work it is not clear whether one can
conceive the meaning of life totally disconnected from one’s job. Work plays a central role in one’s psychological well being. Purpose and meaning in life are quite a subjective issue. There is no such activity which is universally happy or unhappy in nature. Each person defines what pleasure and purpose means for himself. If people are able to free from their mental schema of meaning in life beyond their job, then only the psychological benefits of automation can be enjoyed in a true sense.

Presently in the society most people are conditioned to find their meaning in life only in their work or in other words they are schema of self is strongly influenced by their perception of work. Unless people change their perception they will not be able to reap the benefits of automation in a true sense.

But apart from value and meaning work also has other role to play in one’s life. In workplace person encounters with his fellow beings on a day today basis finding solution to the common problem. This personal encounter fosters love and solidarity among them. If the work is outsourced to robots how the relations would be sustained is an important question.

Skeptics also argue that Artificial intelligence is a double edge sword. On the one hand it will give free time to the people to do the things they really want to do, but on the other hand it will deprive them of the skill they need to use their time meaningfully. People were robbed of opportunities to improve themselves and lacked the initiative to find new ones.

Apart from the prospects of joblessness Artificial intelligence in social media and smart phone applications will increase overall digital user engagement time, along with the associated social problems of attention deficit, isolation, and sleep disorders. As artificial intelligence rises, so will the demand for face-to-face human counseling and connection.

Well, it is true that artificial intelligence endangers many of the present occupations in the coming decade, thus causing mass unemployment, there is no reason to put moratorium on its development. People by nature are largely risk-averse and tend to avoid discomfort and uncertainty. And as Artificial intelligence is here to disrupt the long held notions of work, people are becoming more anxious. History showed that, whenever new technology arrives, initially it presents a gloomy picture of mass unemployment as is happened in the industrial revolution but, also bring with it many types of new jobs which were unthinkable earlier. Who knows, the same might happen with artificial intelligence. In fact given the advantages it gives to humanity, it is is immoral to put brakes on its development. But it might be too late to think on the moral, psychological and social consequences of Artificial intelligence, when technology will arrive. The conversation must begin now.

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