YOUR OPINION

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Of art, AI and accountability

THE recent Hari Raya celebrations saw a new trend ripple across social media. Alongside traditional family photos and festive greetings were artificial intelligence or AI-generated portraits of families and loved ones transformed into characters in a world taken straight out of a Studio Ghibli film.

Novel, accessible, and beautiful, these pieces of "art" were created in seconds with just a few typed words and an uploaded photo. But as they made the rounds, so did a deeper conversation: What does this mean for creativity, ownership, and consent? What about respect for artists or the ethical use of AI in content creation?

These aren't just academic questions; they're urgent ones as technology weaves ever more tightly into daily life.

AI tools are trained on vast datasets, often scraped from the work of human creators without their knowledge or consent. When we mimic an artistic style – be it Studio Ghibli or any other – it's not just a visual aesthetic we're borrowing; we're imitating a deeply personal visual language developed over years of lived experience. In this regard, AI doesn't create art, it performs a version of it.

When developed and used responsibly, AI can be a force of tremendous good. It can democratise access to creative tools, streamline workflows, enhance accessibility, and open up entirely new frontiers in storytelling, design, education, and innovation.

But unlocking that potential means putting ethics on equal footing with innovation. Responsible AI is about building fairness, transparency, and accountability into the DNA of these tools from the start.

It's about making sure that progress uplifts rather than undermines the human values at the heart of all creative expression.

When harm is caused by AI-generated content, who is held responsible? The developer? The platform? The end-user? Too often, the answer is unclear. It's like a self-driving car with no one at the wheel. When something goes wrong, everyone points in a different direction, yet the harm remains – very real and very human.

Audiences deserve to know whether the content they are engaging with is human-created or machine-generated.

To move forward responsibly, we need clear accountability frameworks that span the entire AI lifecycle from development and deployment to use and impact. This includes embedding strong self-regulation practices that promote transparency and ethical conduct from the ground up.

Fairness must guide the development of AI technologies. These tools should empower creators, not replace them. If we're serious about the future of creativity, we must carve out space for both innovation and integrity to coexist.

Encouragingly, both global and local initiatives are emerging to address ethical concerns surrounding AI and its use. Internationally, organisations like Unesco, the Partnership on AI, and AI Now Institute have outlined principles promoting transparency, fairness, and human oversight.

Industry players are also stepping up; Adobe and Getty Images, for instance, have taken a firm stance against unauthorised style imitation and now require clear labelling for AI-generated content.

Malaysia has also begun paving its own path. The Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry has issued the National Guidelines on AI Governance and Ethics, promoting responsible development practices and reinforcing the importance of ethical guardrails.

The Content Forum is also in the midst of updating the Content Code, a cornerstone of Malaysia's industry-led self-regulation, first introduced in 2004 and last revised in 2022. This ongoing revision aims to ensure the Code remains fit for purpose in a digital landscape increasingly shaped by generative AI.

We are inviting stakeholders – industry players, creators, and members of the public – to help shape the next evolution of the Content Code. Everyone is encouraged to share their insights, concerns, and ideas via the feedback drive portal at www.contentforum.my (open till May 31, 2025).

Every submission will be carefully reviewed, and a public consultation session will follow.

We are also exploring ways to integrate ethical considerations directly into content creation workflows, ensuring that self-regulation is a core feature, not an afterthought. As the Code evolves, we must look beyond today's concerns and prepare for tomorrow's content realities where trust is the currency, and integrity is the compass.

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Early maths learning crucial for development of youngsters

I REFER to the letter "Invest in quality preschool education" (*The Star*, April 17) in which the writers stressed the importance of quality early education not only for academic results but also for the emotional and social development of children.

As an educator myself, I would like to add another point to consider, namely how early childhood education can help to prepare children for learning maths in school.

Many students find maths difficult as they move up in school. I believe the problem is not due to the subject itself but because they did not get a strong foundation in maths during their preschool education.

Quality early childhood education can help children to develop an interest in problem solving, logical thinking and curiosity. These skills are also very useful when they begin learning numbers, counting, patterns and shapes in the later stages of their education.

In preschool, children do not learn maths from textbooks. Instead, they play, sing, listen to

stories and explore with hands-on materials. For example, they might group items by colour, compare two different lengths or build something using blocks. These activities already introduce basic ideas of classification, measurement and space. These early experiences give them confidence in thinking mathematically.

I believe early childhood education can help children enjoy maths. If they experience maths in a fun and relaxed way from young, they are less likely to be afraid of it later.

Many students feel nervous or anxious when they study maths at higher levels. This anxiety usually begins from a lack of early exposure or bad experiences in their early education. When children explore maths through games and discovery, they learn that it is not something to fear but something they can understand and enjoy.

Even adults harbour maths anxiety, which can manifest as a range of symptoms, including panic, stress, difficulty concentrating, and even avoidance of math-related situations.

In fact, I have met many adults who say "I'm just not a maths person" or avoid careers that involve numbers.

But it doesn't have to be this way. If we give children a positive introduction to maths in their early years, we can change the way they see the subject for life.

The letter also mentioned the difference in language ability between children from rich and poor families. The same difference also happens in maths. Some children do not have opportunities at home to play with puzzles or count things, and so they begin school already behind. This is why giving every child access to quality early education is very important.

Mathematical knowledge is not only for passing exams. In the future world, especially with the pervasiveness of technology and data, mathematical thinking will be even more important.

Children who are confident with maths from young may choose careers in science, technology or engineering later. They will also be better prepared to handle finances, make informed decisions and contribute to an economy that relies more and more on data and digital tools.

For all these reasons, I believe that investing in quality early childhood education is a very smart decision. It helps children grow in many ways, including in their thinking and problem-solving skills.

As an educator, I truly hope the next education blueprint (2026-2036) will include strong support for maths development in the early years to give all children a fair and strong beginning, and to help build a future generation that is confident, capable and unafraid of the subject and all that it entails.

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Are our children ready for the AI revolution?

THE disturbing news from a Malaysian school, where a student allegedly used artificial intelligence (AI) to create and distribute explicit deepfakes of schoolmates, is a stark wake-up call.

While shocking, this incident is sadly not isolated. Reports from South Korea showed that deepfake-related digital sex crimes more than tripled last year, overwhelmingly targeting young people.

This is a chilling indicator of a rapidly escalating global problem fuelled by increasingly powerful and accessible AI.

We cannot simply ban these technologies, as AI is becoming deeply integrated into our world, and its capabilities are expanding daily.

The critical issue is not access, but understanding. Are our young people, who are readily adopting these tools, truly aware of the profound harm they can inflict if they misuse them?

Do they understand the ethical implications and potential legal consequences of manipulating someone's image, particularly for creating non-consensual explicit content?

This situation demands a societal response as serious and sustained as our long-standing campaigns against smoking, drug abuse, or bullying. It's not enough to simply react after harm is done.

We urgently need comprehensive educational initiatives within schools to teach the responsible and ethical use of AI.

Young people must understand how easily these tools can be misused and the devastating impact such irresponsible actions have on the lives and well-being of their peers.

Furthermore, the responsibility extends beyond the classroom. Parents need to be more vigilant and engaged in monitoring their children's online activities and AI usage.

Perhaps this incident also forces us all to reconsider the images we share so freely on social media now that they can be easily downloaded and weaponised through AI with malicious intent.

Our legal and regulatory frameworks must evolve rapidly. While existing laws are being applied, we need clearer, specific measures to address the unique challenges posed by AI misuse, especially for minors who are disproportionately targeted.

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