

Twitter drops image-cropping algorithm after finding bias

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Twitter has been reviewing its algorithms for possible bias and recently stopped using an automated system for image cropping.

Twitter said Wednesday it was scrapping an automated image-cropping system after its review found bias in the algorithm controlling the function.

The messaging platform said it found the algorithm delivered "unequal treatment based on demographic differences" with whites and males favored over Blacks and females, and "objectification" bias that focused on a woman's chest or legs, described as "male gaze."

The news comes a month after Twitter said it was launching an algorithmic fairness initiative as part of an effort to reduce bias on its platform introduced by automation.

Twitter in 2018 introduced a so-called saliency algorithm to crop images, aiming to improve consistency in the size of photos in one's timeline and to focus on their most important elements.

Rumman Chowdhury, head of Twitter's software engineering and a specialist in ethics and artificial intelligence, said the company determined after its review that it is preferable to leave the cropping decisions to users.

"We considered the tradeoffs between the speed and consistency of automated cropping with the potential risks we saw in this research," she said in a blog post.

"One of our conclusions is that not everything on Twitter is a good candidate for an algorithm, and in this case, how to crop an image is a decision best made by people."

The announcement comes amid heightened concerns over advanced algorithms which can deliver biased results due to a lack of data on minorities or other factors.

This week, Amazon said it was extending a ban on law enforcement's use of its facial recognition technology amid fears that its flaws could amplify racial bias.

Twitter's initiative calls for "taking responsibility for our algorithmic decisions" with the aim of "equity and fairness of outcomes," according to the company.

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