

A case study on AI-powered Social Credit Systems (SCS) in China

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Introduction

The Social Credit Systems (SCS) aim to rate citizens on their 'trustworthiness.'

These are government-run and are different from financial credit ratings in the West.

The government collects data via surveillance cameras, facial recognition software, complaints from people, medical, business, and government records.

Individuals who are 'model citizens' are rewarded materially and socially; those who aren't are penalized.

BUT: Different models of the SCS have been setup in 'prototype regions' by local governments.


So, we ask in this work: **How do social credit platforms vary between different regions in China... and how might different social credit platforms violate China's own AI ethics guidelines in different ways?**

Methodology

I collected information on 16 models from news sites and down scoped to the 5 most diverse models.

Results and Conclusions

Guideline	Xinjiang	Shanghai	Xiamen	Fuzhou	Shenzhen
harmony & friendliness		✓	✓	×	×
fairness & justice					
inclusiveness & sharing	×	✓			
respect for privacy	×	✓	✓	×	×
security & controllability					
shared responsibility	×		✓		
open collaboration		✓			
agile governance					

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- Participation not voluntary
 - Public website used to name and shame people
 - No information regarding requirement of consent
 - No public voting before SCS implementation
 - No facility to challenge the scores
 - No customer service helplines to make complaints or to understand the SCS better
 - Surveillance limited to traffic violations

Different SCS violate different ethics guidelines. In several cases, there wasn't enough data available to determine possible violations and such cases have been shown as ambiguous in the table.

Takeaways

More research needs to be done to avoid the overly positive or negative accounts on the SCS that we see in the media. These mini-experiments by local governments are helpful in studying the ethics of AI-powered control systems and the Chinese SCS will probably influence similar transitions for other nations.

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