NEWS ARTICLE

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NTU Singapore partners with Alibaba to set up joint research institute for AI technologies

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The AI technologies developed through the collaboration will be tested on the NTU Smart Campus to demonstrate the effectiveness of the solutions. The two parties will also work together for building a crowdsourcing platform to connect researchers and industry practitioners around the world within an AI-focused R&D ecosystem.

artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to address societal challenges. This is Alibaba's first joint research institute outside of China.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between NTU President, Professor Subra Suresh and Alibaba Group Chief Technology Officer, Mr Jeff Zhang. The ceremony was graced by Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and Ministry of Health, Singapore. The Institute is being set up with multimillion dollar annual investment from Alibaba for an initial five years, starting with a pool of 50 researchers from Alibaba and NTU.

The University has built up deep expertise in key areas shaping the Fourth Industrial Revolution, such as AI, data science and robotics. NTU is a top university for AI research in global rankings compiled jointly by Nikkei and Elsevier, based on measurement of research citations between 2012 and 2016. NTU's LILY research centre which focuses on active living for the elderly has received several international AI awards.

The institute will seek to combine NTU's human-centred AI technology which has been applied to areas such as health, ageing, homes and communities, with Alibaba's leading technologies including Natural Language Processing (NLP), computer vision, machine learning and cloud computing to explore further technology breakthroughs and real-life AI solutions.

NTU students, staff and faculty will have opportunities to go on exchange to Alibaba's facilities and vice versa, while working on cutting-edge AI research. In addition, the two parties will work together for building a crowdsourcing platform to connect researchers and industry practitioners around the world within an AI-focused R&D ecosystem, encouraging global AI experts, research institutions and universities to join and contribute to the AI research community.

A key aspect of the Smart Campus vision revealed by NTU President, Professor Subra Suresh, in January this year, is the test-bedding and deployment of new technologies, policies, and practices on the NTU campus, that can inform and assist Singapore to become a Smart City and a Smart Nation.

The AI technologies developed through the collaboration will be tested on the NTU Smart Campus to demonstrate the effectiveness of the solutions so that they can be taken with confidence to the market in Singapore and rest of the world.

The aim is to deploy AI solutions over the next five years in scenarios ranging from home, retail, community and urban transportation to hospitals and nursing homes, to help people live healthier, smarter and happier lives.

Professor Suresh said: "Using AI technologies, we can address fundamental societal challenges such as ageing population which is a huge issue for cities with a rapidly ageing population such as Singapore. For example, virtual AI assistants can be deployed to improve work productivity and

"We are excited to work with the best and brightest around the world such as researchers at NTU to develop smart solutions for our future. Alibaba has been dedicated to working on technology breakthroughs and practical applications of AI, and this collaboration is another example of how we are advancing our technological leadership globally for better living and enabling businesses worldwide through innovation," added Mr Zhang.

NTU Singapore Vice President (Research) Professor Lam Khin Yong said key outcomes of industry-academia partnerships are innovation and education, where disruptive ideas are turned into marketable products and NTU students gain skills and knowledge for the 21st century workplace. "We are very excited to be partnering with Alibaba, a company that has made its mark in the world of e-commerce, e-payment, cloud computing and AI-driven technologies through their use of disruptive technologies and innovation over the last decade. Our research expertise will complement Alibaba's extensive business and technological experience to tackle challenging problems in their business ecosystem," he commented.   Ms Liu Xiangwen, Director, Technology Strategy Department at Alibaba Group, who will be Alibaba's lead for the joint research institute, said, "Our partnership with NTU Singapore demonstrates the close alignment of Alibaba's strategic vision with Singapore's Smart Nation initiative to leverage technology for the good of the community. We look forward to further strengthening Alibaba's competency in AI with the support of Singapore's strong R&D capabilities and co-create future-ready solutions for the world."

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