NTU University Works with Alibaba on Their First Joint AI Research Centre Outside of China

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Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) and Alibaba Group officially launched the Alibaba-NTU Singapore Joint Research Institute today at a ceremony graced by Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and Ministry of Health, Singapore.

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between NTU Singapore President Professor Subra Suresh and Alibaba Group Chief Technology Officer Mr Jeff Zhang marked the establishment of Alibaba's first joint research institute outside China. This multimillion dollar per year partnership from Alibaba is for an initial five years, starting with a pool of 50 researchers from both organizations.

The joint institute will seek to combine NTU's human-centred AI technology which has been applied to areas such as health, aging, 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.

Over the next five years, NTU and Alibaba will further push the frontiers of AI and deploy AI solutions in scenarios ranging from home, retail, community and urban transportation to hospitals and nursing homes, with the aim of enhancing the city's efficiency and helping people to achieve a healthier, smarter and happier life.

NTU Singapore President Professor Subra Suresh said:

Subra Suresh

"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 smart sensors can be used to watch the health of the elderly, with data stored on the cloud for continuous monitoring.

"These AI and cloud technologies will be developed and tested on the NTU Smart Campus to demonstrate the effectiveness of the solutions so that our partners can have confidence before taking them to the market in Singapore and rest of the world."

NTU has built up deep expertise in key areas shaping the Fourth Industrial Revolution, such as AI, data science and robotics. For instance, NTU's LILY research centre which focuses on active living for the elderly has received several international AI awards. NTU is also ranked the world's top university for citations in AI according to a 2017 list jointly compiled by Nikkei and Elsevier.

Mr Jeff Zhang, Chief Technology Officer of Alibaba Group, said,

"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."

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, both parties will work toward 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.

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 with NTU students gaining skills and knowledge for the 21st-century workplace.

Lam Khin Yong

"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."

Ms Liu Xiangwen, Director, Technology Strategy Department at Alibaba Group, who will be Alibaba's lead for the joint research institute, said,

Liu Xiangwen

"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."