

AI will create jobs: Accenture India Chairman

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Mumbai, April 10

Accenture, which now has over 50 per cent of its revenues coming from digital, is betting big on Artificial Intelligence as the company feels AI has the ability to enable socio-economic development in India, unlocking at least a trillion dollars of economic

value by 2035. In a conversation with *BusinessLine*, Rekha M Menon, Chairman and Senior Managing Director, Accenture in India, talked about how AI is transforming not just Accenture's clients but also the tech giant itself. Edited excerpts:

People are worried about AI taking away their jobs, and in several instances, bots have in fact replaced humans. Should humans worry about AI taking over?

AI is the 'alpha' of all technology trends, and someday it will be as pervasive as electricity, truly transforming the way businesses and societies function. Although a balanced view is now emerging, there is a widespread misconception that AI systems, including advanced robotics and digital bots, will gradually

replace humans. This may be true for certain jobs, but not all, and in fact AI will end up creating new jobs — many of which don't currently exist. The real power of AI is that it complements and augments human capabilities—enabling humans to achieve more, thus giving rise to new opportunities.

When Tesla and Edison were inventing electricity distribution about 140 years ago, nobody knew we were going to have microwaves and refrigerators to consume the electricity. Business leaders we spoke to echo this. About 63 per cent believe that intelligent technologies will result in a net gain in jobs for their company.

How is Accenture taking advantage of AI internally?
AI enables us to deliver our ser-

vices more effectively. It also creates a distinct opportunity to drive new business through new categories of services. We have created specific AI solutions in the infrastructure, cloud and network space, among others. We're also using AI to improve the efficiency of our internal processes, such as HR. For example,

in India we use an AI-based chatbot called Digital People Advisor (DiPA) that offers a personalised digital experience to our people while addressing queries related to HR processes, policies and procedures.

Accenture puts 60 per cent of the money we save through investments in AI into our training programmes, and over the past two years, tens of thousands of our people have now moved on to more high-value work, in some cases using AI and other technologies to provide more informed services to clients.

You've mentioned that India lacks an AI innovation ecosystem. Can you elaborate?
With the total expenditure on

R&D at 1 per cent of GDP, so far India's investment in driving a local innovation ecosystem has been vastly insufficient. In terms of patent applications per million, too, we lag behind other BRICS countries. When compared to the EU, or even China, our investments in AI are limited. However, we can easily bridge the gap because we have a strong foundation in place. Our universities have produced some of the best technology leadership driving innovation globally. In 2016, India was ranked third among G20 countries on the number of AI start-ups; large businesses are already showing how AI can improve lives, and the government has made a clear commitment to AI with the recently instituted task force.

What opportunity do you see AI presenting for Accenture and India?

AI and other advanced technologies can play a vital role in enabling socio-economic development in India, unlocking at least a trillion dollars of economic value by 2035. They can play a key role in addressing issues such as farmer

productivity, or helping improve our share of global goods and services exports.

From robots helping sanitation workers, to digital skills creating better job projects, and from helping schoolchildren get access to quality education to enabling the blind to 'see' the world around them, the opportunities to create social impact are tremendous. For Accenture, AI is all about creating greater value for clients, our people, and our communities.

How can AI help alleviate social development issues in India?

Healthcare, education, alleviating farmer poverty — these are just some examples of areas where AI can help. We already see healthcare providers using AI for personalised cancer care options and diabetic screening. Our own Accenture Labs in India have developed Drishti, an AI-powered smartphone solution to help the visually impaired improve the way they experience the world around them and enhance their productivity in the workplace. Similarly, the Ekstep foundation is addressing access to quality education for underprivileged children.



REKHA M MENON

Chairman and Senior MD, Accenture in India

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