

The New “Khanfasharians” in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Unmasking the Rise of Pseudo-Experts in the Digital Era

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Summary

Throughout history, every era has known its “Khanfashari”, the person who wears the illusion of knowledge, presenting themselves as a scholar without ever truly approaching scholarship. In today’s age of artificial intelligence (AI), such figures have multiplied in modern forms, dressed in the cloak of “experts,” wielding dazzling terminology that captivates the public, misleads newcomers, and clouds the work of genuine researchers. This modern phenomenon mirrors the ancient story of “Al-Khanfashar,” recounted in *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb* and other Arabic sources. The tale tells of a man who claimed knowledge in every field. Six companions, doubting his pretensions, invented a fictitious word, Khanfashar, and asked him its meaning. Without hesitation, he fabricated an elaborate answer: he claimed it was a fragrant plant in Yemen that curdled camel milk, quoted a fabricated verse, and even attributed a false reference to Dāwūd al-Anṭākī before falsely linking it to the Prophet. When confronted, he was exposed as a fraud, earning the title “Al-Khanfashari”, a lasting symbol of pretension and intellectual deceit (Wikipedia, n.d.).



The Modern Khanfashari: Digital Pretenders in the Age of AI

Today, the Khanfashari of artificial intelligence no longer invents meaningless words but skillfully recycles real ones, without grasping their true essence or application. They speak with authority about machine learning, sentiment analysis, or decision-making algorithms, promising revolutionary platforms and innovations, yet offering neither published research nor functional prototypes.

These individuals thrive on borrowed vocabulary, using complexity as camouflage. They mesmerize audiences with buzzwords while avoiding the rigor that defines authentic expertise. Their confidence, not competence, becomes their credential.

The Social and Institutional Consequences

The danger of this trend extends beyond personal deceit, it has collective consequences. Organizations are often seduced by these pretenders, allocating budgets to projects promised to “transform the future,” only to end up with beautiful interfaces and nonfunctional algorithms.

As a result, AI, an exact and demanding science grounded in mathematics, statistics, and engineering, is distorted into a spectacle of illusion. It becomes, in the hands of pseudo-experts, a marketing weapon, a symbol of status, or even a tool of deception.

The Roots of the Phenomenon

At the heart of this intellectual epidemic lie three main causes:

1. **A psychological need for visibility:** A craving to appear knowledgeable without the effort of mastery.
2. **Profound intellectual emptiness:** A lack of foundational understanding compensated by verbal showmanship.
3. **A cultural environment that glorifies rhetoric over truth:** Where eloquence often triumphs over evidence, and applause replaces critical questioning.

Such individuals flourish in societies that do not value verification, where audiences rarely question sources, and where the distinction between the scholar and the imitator has become blurred.

Restoring Intellectual Integrity

To escape the grip of this phenomenon, societies must empower critical thinking and foster a culture of verification and accountability. Genuine knowledge connects words to action, a true expert does not merely speak but builds, tests, and presents measurable results.

The authentic scholar simplifies complexity, communicates with humility, and recognizes the limits of their own understanding. Meanwhile, the impostor thrives on obscurity, complexity, and applause.

AI is not magic nor mysticism, it is a discipline rooted in mathematics, statistics, algorithms, and experimentation. Those entitled to speak on it are those who have built, tested, and contributed measurable work to their communities. The new Khanfasharians, however, belong not in scientific circles but in literature, as cautionary tales of vanity, falsehood, and inevitable downfall.

Closing

The age of artificial intelligence has not only expanded human potential but also magnified human pretense. The challenge before us is to protect knowledge from distortion and science from vanity.

We must guard our collective awareness against this new intellectual epidemic. True progress begins not with loud claims but with truth, humility, and perseverance. For what is built on Khanfashar cannot stand, and what is built on knowledge will endure.

References

- Wikipedia (n.d.) ["Khanfashar"]. Available here (Accessed: 6 November 2025).

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