

Mint Explainer | Why Pronto's physical AI training pilot is drawing scrutiny

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Bengaluru Startup Pronto Faces Privacy Storm Over Recording AI Training Videos Inside Homes

Summary

Physical AI training is seen across industries ranging from warehousing and logistics to production and assembly lines that require human intervention to fit specific parts. Is this phenomenon testing India's privacy rules?

Home services startup Pronto has found itself at the centre of a controversy following reports the company was piloting a system to let service partners record work carried out inside customers' homes. The recordings are intended to be used as training data for what many in the tech industry see as the next frontier of artificial intelligence: machines and robots that can operate in the physical world.

But what exactly is physical AI, why has Pronto's pilot triggered concerns, and is this really a new phenomenon? *Mint* explains.

What is physical AI?

Physical AI refers to systems designed to function in the real world— from factories and warehouses to homes. These systems are typically robots or autonomous machines built to navigate spaces and perform physical tasks.

Unlike large language models, which are trained on text and images, physical AI systems require audio-visual and sensor-based data to learn how humans perform actions. These include learning how a person grips a plate, fits a car

part, and performs other actions in a cluttered, unpredictable environment.

Simulations can help train such systems, but real-world data is considered far more valuable because of the unpredictability and variation involved in physical environments.

Given the scale at which the home services business operates in India, for companies offering physical AI training data, the opportunity is vast, and valuable.

Why are home services startups part of this conversation?

[Pronto](#), a home services startup has begun running what it calls a small and limited pilot around using its partners for AI-related training data.

According to Entrackr, which first reported the news, citing an internal memo from investor Gladebrook Capital, Pronto is "developing a data business leveraging its workforce to capture real-world household data for robotics labs."

The company has said the pilot is "very small" and fully opt-in, with customers required to give consent before each booking rather than through an approval during sign-up.

Pronto founder Anjali Sardana told *Mint* it's also an effort to protect their partners when bookings are made by consumers away from home. "There are people who told us they hesitate to book services when they are away from home, or wish they had more reassurance around what happened during a booking."

Other home services companies, including [Urban Company](#) and Lightspeed Venture Partners-backed Snabbt, however, said they wouldn't explore such a model.

How does it fit in India's data protection act?

Sardana said the recorded videos are encrypted and processed within the country and the footage is deleted after 48 hours. "Before deletion, anonymized derived outputs, such as non-identifiable keypoint mappings representing hand and arm movement patterns, may be generated. These derived outputs cannot identify an individual, home, or session."

India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 mandates that companies obtain specific, informed consent for every distinct purpose for which personal data is collected.

“If the data is genuinely anonymized and individuals are no longer identifiable, then it may fall outside the DPDP Act, since the Act regulates personal data. India still lacks a non-personal data framework that squarely governs anonymised datasets used for AI training,” said Nikhil Narendran, partner—technology, media and telecommunications practice at law firm Trilegal.

Sumeysh Srivastava, partner at the Quantum Hub, a policy consulting firm, said that the anonymization defense has limited standing under current law, since the [DPDP](#) offers no definition or benchmark for what constitutes anonymized data, there is no enforceable standard against which a company's practices can be measured.

While the DPDP's Data Protection Board provisions took effect in November 2025, the substantive obligations on consent and purpose limitation don't become binding until May 2027.

“The obligations set a clear test: consent has to be specific to a stated purpose, so a customer agreeing to a cleaning service wouldn't by itself be agreeing to have footage used for AI model training,” said Srivastava.

Is this happening in other industries as well?

Yes. The pattern is consistent across sectors wherever humans perform repetitive physical tasks at scale.

This isn't just a home services phenomenon but is seen across industries ranging from warehousing and logistics to production and assembly lines that require human intervention to fit specific parts.

It extends even to agriculture. Agricultural machinery manufacturer John Deere is seeking to integrate AI systems into its product lines to enable more efficient large-scale farming.

Other companies, like Cyn:LR, have created their own training data, but without using humans. In February, the company created its own intelligence model, which, when deployed on its own industrial robots, can be used in areas which have typically been harder to automate.