# Chapter 8
# Social Implications of AI

## ABSTRACT

*'Social implications' generally refers to anything that affects an individual, a community, and wider society. The social implications of artificial intelligence (AI) is an immensely important field of study since AI technology will steadily continue to permeate other technologies and, inevitably, our society as a whole. Many of the social implications of this technological process are non-obvious and surprising. We should ask ourselves, What type of society do we want and what role will AI play to influence and shape lives? Will people simply become consumers served by intelligent systems that respond to our every whim? Are we reaching a tipping point between convenience and dependency? How will AI affect social issues relating to housing, finance, privacy, poverty, and so on? Do we want a society where machines are supplementing (or augmenting) humans or perhaps even substituting humans? It is important to be as clear as possible about likely social implications of AI if it truly helps benefit individuals and society.*

*"Artificial intelligence will reach human levels by around 2029. Follow that out further to, say, 2045, we will have multiplied the intelligence, the human biological machine intelligence of our civilization a billion-fold." –Ray Kurzweil, Futurist and Inventor*

# BACKGROUND

*Social implications* generally refer to anything that affects an individual, a community or wider society. The social implications of artificial intelligence (AI) is an immensely important field of study, because AI technology is expected to steadily continue to permeate other technologies and, inevitably, our society as a whole. Although AI stands to bring about great societal benefits, it will certainly have its downside, as summed by the words of Ray Kurzweil, a futurist and creator of optical recognition technology who once said 'fire cooks our food and also can burn down your house'. Similarly, the problem of 'AI washing' threatens to overinflate expectations for the technology, undermining public trust and triggering a backlash (Waddell, 2019). The tech sector's 'fake-it-till-you-make-it' attitude plays into this problem. If AI is to truly be a force for good, it must have the capacity to develop from experience with people and learn from success and failures in social settings. Without self- and social-awareness, professional codes of ethics and increased levels of social and moral responsibility, society will never truly enjoy the benefits of AI (Whitby, 2003). Given that humans tend to use any notion of non-human agency as a convenient curtain behind which to hide their own culpability (Whitby, 1988), this may well serve the parts of society who would rather block the positive application of AI to protect their own self-interests, personal agendas and, most of all, economic and political power. With this in mind, we should ask ourselves 'what type of society do we want'? Will people simply become consumers served by intelligent systems that respond to our every whim? Are we headed for a society of abundance (Blumenthal, 2011), which, despite requiring a co-operative culture (Linde and Neuvonen, 2017), is instead fast approaching a tipping point between convenience and dependency? Will society ultimately become a fusion of human, machine and information systems (e.g. *trans-humanism*) that forges a new level of co-existence and interdependence between technology and humankind (Yoshiyuki et al., 2014)? Trying to prevent or opt out of advancements in AI is a misguided and futile strategy.

# AI FOR SOCIAL GOOD

To analyse potential applications for social good, the McKinsey Global Institute (Chui et al., 2018) conducted a study in which they compiled a library of

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