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The Social Impact of AI

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Upcoming Events

Moderated by *David Gleason*

Roundtables:

- ***"Social Impact of AI"*** *March 25*
- ***"The Power of Attention"*** *April 8 & 22*

State Consumer Advocate ***Don Kreis*** *March 27, Evening, Town Hall.*

All are Open to the Public

Good Morning!

AI is penetrating every industry on the planet, and adaptation is no longer a choice unless you can cut the cord and get offline... in other words, we must accept the things we cannot change.

This newsletter is about understanding and adapting to these changes -- the way most teenagers already have without even thinking about it.

Enjoy the following, especially the Waymo video, and please let me know as you have thoughts & questions.

-David

Summary

AI systems process information, but they do not possess human consciousness or the capacity for the transcendence that shapes human judgment and wisdom.

Knowledge and Limits:

Does believing AI contains all knowledge reflect a kind of technological hubris? These systems operate on limited data sets, but so do we. What makes us different?

Human Consciousness and Agency

How should we evaluate AI systems that simulate conversation but lack human consciousness, self-awareness, and transcendence? What ethical boundaries should guide purveyors of AI therapy and chatbots that interact with vulnerable users?

Truth and Information

Do developers and platforms have responsibility to prevent false information, AI slop, and deepfakes? How can societies protect shared understanding when AI + social media enables targeted and persuasive psychological manipulation?

Power, Wealth, and Governance

Will AI further concentrate wealth and power into fewer hands? Could AI become a tool of oligarchs, enabling monitoring, autocracy, and subjugation? How should democracy regulate technologies that shape public opinion?

Economic and Environmental Consequences

If automation leads to job loss or replacing humans in many roles, what happens to the public? Hot, voracious data centers need lots of power and water, driving up costs for everyone.

Some of AI's Benefits...

1. Research and decision-support
2. 24/7 availability
3. Efficiency and productivity (like 1,000X faster research)
4. Reduces human error, from typos to self-driving cars
5. Personalized experiences and services, including vices
6. Innovation and application in every industry
7. Adaptive, individualized instruction; content-rich education
8. Accelerated scientific research
9. Mental health support?
10. Everyday convenience, e.g,, navigation and AI assistants
11. Financial opportunities galore; economic growth and advancement
12. Tools for human wellness - e.g., Oura rings, health apps and implants
13. instantaneous access to knowledge and information from anywhere
14. Streamlined collaboration and teamwork, with AI adding value in real time

...And a few of its Risks

1. Eavesdropping
2. Disparity of access & benefits
3. Robocop
4. Financial interests
5. Penetration in every industry
6. Technology hype cycles
7. Warfare, automated killing
8. Security & privacy at every level
9. Customer support fails
10. Fraud and malfeasance
11. Anonymity vs accountability
12. Technological imperative

13. Job displacement
14. Environmental costs
15. AI slop
16. Concentration of power

AI is here stay and adaptation isn't really a choice.

The Ethics of AI

Prometheus

A Titan in Greek mythology, Prometheus defied Zeus by stealing fire and giving it to humanity, a new tool that could be used for cooking, warmth, and weaponry. As punishment, Zeus chained him to a rock where an eagle arrived daily to eat his newly regenerated liver.

Perhaps today's AI titans will get their livers eaten one day, but that's above my pay grade.

Let’s just say it’s good to use AI to help people succeed and thrive, and bad (and unsustainable) to systematically extract uncompensated value from users, the environment, and content creators.

Pew Research Reports that "Americans are much more concerned than excited about the increased use of AI in daily life."

Currently unregulated, the intentions, motives, and priorities of people and corporations are determining outcomes for everyone. Millions of actors are already developing and legally releasing AI tools, feverishly seeking to penetrate every aspect of public and online commerce.

AIs process information, generate "original" material, and learn, but they do not possess human consciousness or the capacity for transcendence that shapes human judgment and wisdom. At least not yet.

AI Benefits

AI offers transformative advantages, primarily driven by its ability to automate repetitive tasks, analyze massive data volumes for informed decision-making, and operate 24/7.

Key benefits include increased efficiency, reduced human error, enhanced personalization, and accelerated innovation across industries like healthcare, finance,

and manufacturing.

It's hard to understate AI's promise. Used constructively and collaboratively t can improve education, accelerate research, support therapists with chatbots that help people stick to health plans, and enable tools in daily life, from navigation systems to smart assistants.

Businesses see promise and power in AI applications that optimize marketing and advertising, personalize products and licensing. More darkly, many seek to influence public opinion, stock market valuation and AI investments themselves.

OpenAI, Microsoft, Google, Anthropic, Perplexity, etc. are in pitched battle to develop and deploy the latest & greatest, promising productivity and growth. And it's working.

Drivers of Business Adoption

Businesses generally, and AI businesses in particular, stand to make or lose a lot of money in the next few years. Here are some of the drivers behind rapid adoption:

- Automation of Mundane Tasks: AI handles routine, repetitive, or monotonous tasks, freeing human professionals to focus on creative, strategic, and emotionally intelligent work.
- Enhanced Efficiency and Productivity: AI systems work continuously without breaks, boosting operational efficiency and speed in tasks like manufacturing, customer service chatbots, and data analysis.
- Data-Driven Decision Making: AI can analyze, interpret, and process massive datasets, identifying trends and insights that inform better, faster business strategies.
- Increased Accuracy and Reduced Error: By removing human intervention, AI reduces the likelihood of errors in complex processes such as, medical diagnoses, data entry, and technical calculations.
- Improved Customer Experience: AI enables highly personalized recommendations, real-time support, and tailored content, enhancing user engagement and satisfaction.
- 24/7 Availability: AI-powered systems (e.g., chatbots, virtual assistants, & self-driving cars) provide constant, round-the-clock service without fatigue.
- Advanced Problem Solving and Innovation: AI facilitates breakthroughs in complex fields, including predictive maintenance in logistics, new energy systems, and advanced medical research.
- Advanced Cybersecurity: AI can detect unusual activity, monitor networks, and proactively defend against cyberattacks to protect sensitive data.
- These advantages make AI a critical tool for boosting economic growth and improving operational efficiencies across various sectors.

Risks

Whether AI is good for individual people is another question. We can surely benefit from access to the full scope of human knowledge and life-saving innovations.

But AI-enhanced warfare is already killing people. The question, as always, is: whose interests are being served?

Perennially, new technologies get oversold based on hype and financial opportunity, like during the dot-com bubble which peaked in 2000.

Malfeasance is worse. For example, scammers can use AI to clone voices from short audio clips to impersonate family members in distress, demanding urgent funds.

Thus, like all tech, AI is a tool that can be used for good or evil. Only humans can make that distinction.

Ultimately, shared values, ethical governance, and responsible choices will determine when AI helps, and when it hurts.

The “Technological imperative”

Restraint is not really an option, because “if it can be built, it will be built.” Perennially true, the principle drives innovation and accelerates adoption. But it also means building and releasing devices and code without understanding or mitigating the consequences.

Economics

Economically, automation causes job migration. Perenially, manual jobs are replaced by job loss while creating new industries.

Emerging technologies like virtual and augmented reality and biotech augmentations will deepen AI’s influence.

Environment

The computing power required for big AI dwarfs existing data centers. Banks upon banks of computers, efficient as they have become, generate heat and require power. So much that Amazon, for example, is building private, fossil-fuel power plants to run them. Others are working on nuclear, and even data centers in space.

A typical Google query with Gemeni AI consumes about 0.24 Watt hours of energy (.00024 kWh). By contrast, an electric car uses around 300 Watt hours per mile. Thus, a query uses the same energy as driving an electric car about 6 inches 😊, or an average LED lightbulb for 2 minutes.

Bad Content

A flood of “AI slop”— realistic-seeming electronic junk food – frequently overwhelms more reliable information. Systems generating false information, deepfakes, and highly targeted messaging combine psychological and social manipulation with social media to shape public perception through sophisticated targeting. Thus, financial incentives prioritize engagement and profit over social consequences.

False Utopia

It's a false claim that machines contain “all human knowledge." There is no virtual reality that induces human happiness.

People need face-to-face time with other people, more than ever. Social media is an ethical failure, bringing teenage self-esteem to all-new lows, for example. It's extractive to sell user data for advertising profit.

Technology makes life a lot easier, but if its proliferation made people happier overall then the US would be a utopia right now. With guidance, teenagers can use these same tools to create and collaborate, and learn together -- again, it's about intention.

AI Singularity

If AI were to develop into a self-aware "superintelligence" with a drive for self-preservation, it might decide that people pose a threat. It's a terrifying idea, but it's unlikely in the near term, and fierce debate continues about the feasibility of artificial self-awareness.

Dark Web

While tools like ChatGPT and Claude generally operate within legal boundaries, many nefarious actors are using the dark web to develop and share malicious AI. This activity is largely anonymous and international, making prosecution difficult.

Eavesdropping

Your phone is technically always listening for "wake words" for virtual assistants (like "Hey Siri" or "OK Google"), but it is generally not recording all your personal conversations for advertising purposes. The more likely reason for hyper-personalized ads is extensive online tracking of your digital footprint, app usage, and search history. (Norton)

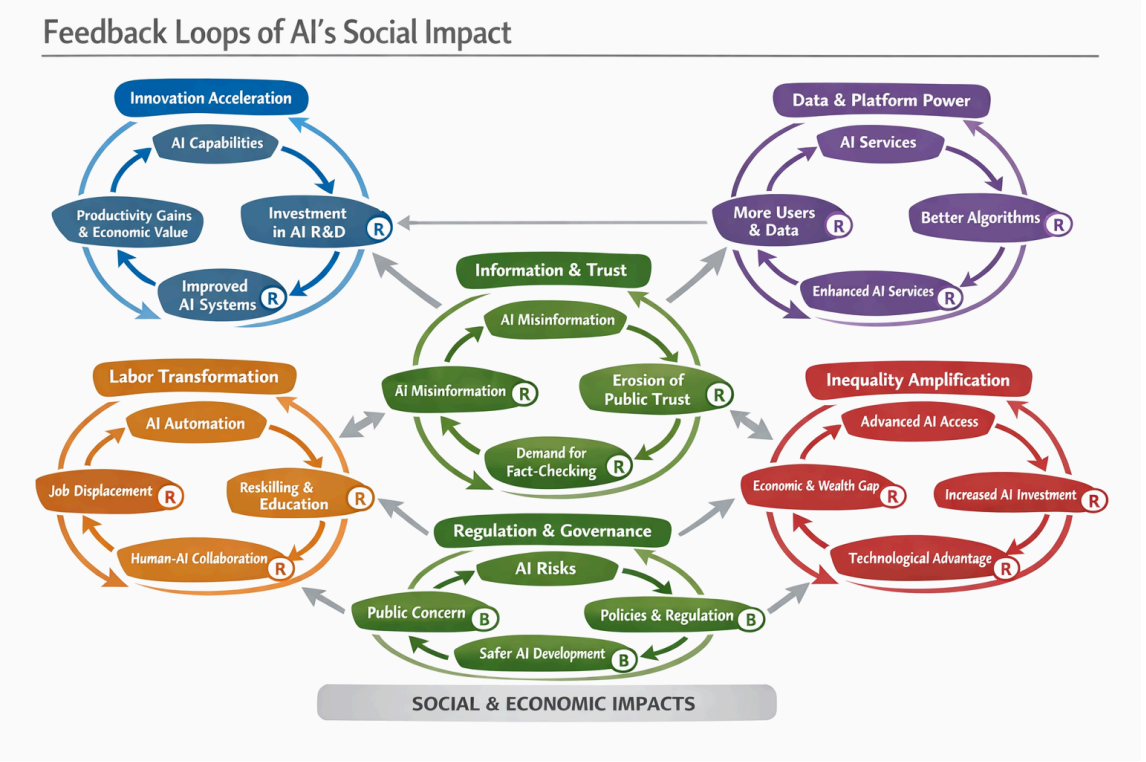
However, actual eavesdropping can occur due to malicious software (spyware) or if apps misuse permissions you have granted. This is illegal if done without your consent.

Wealth and Power

Concentration of AI capabilities among a few companies concentrates wealth and power, posing challenges to democracy and loss of entry-level jobs. AI is already a tool of oligarchs, enabling surveillance, monitoring, and expanded power and control.
These dynamics raise concerns about democracy and AI. Reinforcing existing inequalities and shaping public opinion through algorithmic systems, in extreme cases, AI facilitates autocracy, enabling power & control, subjugation, monitoring of populations through surveillance systems and predictive analytics. Claims of malfeasance inevitably arise when the systems are deployed without accountability or transparency.

Complexity

Here is one, relatively simple(!) flowchart showing some of AI's influence on society. Note that the environment and human well-being don't even appear below -- a full diagram would be enormous!



R=Reinforcing, B=Balancing/Counteracting.
Generated by ChatGPT

Consequences

Emerging and intersecting technologies further expand AI's influence. Combining virtual reality, augmented reality, and biotech implants all reshape how people interact with information and with each other. These innovations blur boundaries between AI and self, requiring deeper reflection on identity and agency in an increasingly automated world.

For example, militaries globally are using AI to improve intelligence, logistics, and autonomous weaponry.

For example, Anthropic helped provide the intelligence to capture Venezuela's Maduro. But the Pentagon recently declared Anthropic a "security risk" because the company refused to use of it's AI to make life and death decisions with human approval. This label is already crippling the company.

This means that the Pentagon refuses to preclude deploying autonomous weaponry that can make life & death decisions without human intervention.

Shared Values and Good Choices

Ultimately, the social impact of AI depends on the motives and priorities of the individuals, companies, and governments guiding its development and deployment.

Emphasizing humanity as the primary stakeholder, as opposed to corporate profits may be prerequisite.

Shared values and thoughtful governance can stimulate innovation while simultaneously limiting misuse.

No doubt AI is the most powerful tool ever created for expanding knowledge and improving human welfare—but only if human judgment, ethical responsibility, and collective decision-making remain central to its deployment.

In Sum: Adapting to new Tech

We have been adapting to new tech forever, however, the capabilities and complexity of AI systems are 10X more impactful than smartphones, which were 10X the impact of the internet itself, which dwarfed the social impact of locally networked personal computers in the 80s. You can't avoid it and it's hard to shut it off.

It's worth knowing the basics, if only for security sake. Beyond that, give generative AI a try if you haven't already, and reflect on how you might use it. At that level, the tech is mind-boggling!

Read More

New Material

- *AI autocomplete doesn't just change how you write. It changes how you think* by Claire Cameron in Scientific American, 3/11/26
- *Dartmouth College went all-in on AI. Then came the tension*, by Aidan Ryan and Diti Kohli, Boston Globe, 2/25/26
- *Google's AI Course for Beginners (in 10 minutes)! YouTube video by Jeff Su, 2024*
- *How Americans View AI and Its Impact on People and Society* by Brian Kennedy et. at., Pew Research Center, 9/17/25

- *Stevie Wonder's Rule for AI at CES: 'Make Life Better for the Living'* by Eric Sullivan in Scientific American, 1/9/26
- *Is my phone listening to me? Yes, here's why and how to stop it*, from Norton.com

YouTube Videos

- *The catastrophic risks of AI — and a safer path* TED talk by Yoshua Bengio, TED Talk, April, 2025
- *Why does Atlas stand up like that?* - Robot movement from Boston Dynamics, 12/9/25
- *Getting a Leg up with End-to-end Neural Networks* - Autonomous robot operating in a factory setting, Boston Dynamics, Sept, 2025
- **And, for fun**: Waymo Driverless cars are honking at each other, leading to sleepless nights by Randol White & WFAA, Spring 2025

From 3/5 Newsletter

- *What Makes Us Human? How We Differ From Artificial Intelligence* by Soren Kaplan, Ph.D. in Psychology Today
- *How Anthropic's safety-first ethos collided with the Pentagon* by Deni Ellis Béchard in Scientific American, 2/21/26
- From Pew Research Center
  - *Artificial intelligence in daily life: Views and experiences*
  - *Views of AI's impact on society and human abilities*
- From the MyEthics.net website
  - *Just like every new tool ever, AI is electrifyingly jacked*
  - *Social Media is Bad For You, and AI Will Be Too*
  - *More Thoughts on AI as a Tool for Good or Ill*
  - *When AI Makes Your Financial Decisions for You*
- *Artificial intelligence* from Wikipedia
- *9 benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) in 2026* from the University of Cincinnati

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