



AI and Social Change: A Postmodern Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer just a futuristic concept; it is actively reshaping social structures and relationships in the present. This paper examines the impact of AI on social change from a postmodern sociological perspective. By critically analyzing the role of AI in transforming communication, economic opportunities, cultural norms, and power dynamics, the paper explores how AI challenges traditional narratives of progress, stability, and identity. Additionally, it delves into the implications of AI in a fragmented, postmodern society, addressing concerns such as bias, inequality, privacy, and the collapse of objective truths. Through this lens, AI becomes both a tool of empowerment and a force that reinforces social divisions, calling for responsible development and regulation to ensure equitable social change.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Postmodernism, Social Change, Technology, Sociological Impact, Economic Inequality, Algorithmic Bias, Social Norms, Digital Divide, Automation, AI Ethics, Technological Progress, Postmodern Theory

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents a significant departure from traditional technological progress. Unlike past innovations, AI is not just a tool used by humans; it actively participates in shaping behaviors, decisions, and social outcomes. Defined broadly, AI refers to systems and machines that can mimic human intelligence processes such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and even emotional responses. With the advent of machine learning, deep learning, and neural networks, AI now permeates various aspects of daily life—from personalized recommendations on social media to autonomous vehicles and predictive algorithms that guide healthcare, finance, and governance. AI, in its most advanced form, challenges the very nature of human agency, blurring the lines between the artificial and the authentic.

From a postmodern perspective, AI embodies the breakdown of traditional structures, grand narratives, and the idea of universal truths. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on fragmentation, relativism, and the questioning of established norms, provides a useful framework to examine AI's sociological impact. AI's rise compels a rethinking of concepts such as power, identity, and control, making it a potent force in shaping a rapidly changing social landscape. This paper seeks to understand AI's role in social change through the lens of postmodern theory, considering how AI disrupts the status quo and creates new realities while simultaneously reinforcing inequalities and biases.

What is AI?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that traditionally required human intelligence. These tasks include things like speech recognition, decision-making, problem-solving, learning from experience, and understanding natural language. AI systems operate through algorithms that allow them to process and analyze data to "learn" from it, thus improving their performance over time without direct human intervention. There are several types of AI, including:

1. **Narrow AI (Weak AI):** This type of AI is designed to handle a specific task, such as facial recognition, virtual assistants (e.g., Siri, Alexa), or recommendation systems on platforms like YouTube or Amazon.
2. **General AI (Strong AI):** This theoretical type of AI is capable of performing any intellectual task that a human being can. General AI is still a concept rather than a reality, with ongoing research aimed at achieving it.
3. **Machine Learning (ML):** A subset of AI, ML refers to algorithms that allow machines to



learn from data and improve their performance over time. This technology is often used in predictive analytics, language processing, and pattern recognition.

4. **Deep Learning:** A more advanced form of machine learning, deep learning uses neural networks designed to simulate human brain activity, allowing AI systems to perform highly complex tasks such as image and speech recognition.

AI technologies are integrated into many aspects of contemporary life, influencing everything from healthcare diagnostics to entertainment, employment, and social media. Its growing presence poses important questions about its role in social change and how it reshapes our understanding of human agency, relationships, and authority.

Social Change: Meaning and Definitions in a Postmodern Context

In sociological terms, **social change** refers to significant transformations in societal structures, relationships, or cultural norms over time. Traditionally, social change was seen as linear and progressive, driven by advancements in technology, economic systems, or political movements. However, in a **postmodern context**, social change is understood as fragmented, complex, and non-linear. Postmodern theorists argue that grand narratives or overarching theories of progress—such as those found in modernity—are no longer adequate to explain contemporary societal transformations. Instead, social change is seen as fluid, multi-dimensional, and shaped by diverse, competing forces.

Postmodernism challenges traditional ideas about truth, objectivity, and linear progress. In this view, social change is not a smooth or predictable process but is characterized by multiple, overlapping perspectives, often in tension with one another. This fragmented understanding of social change is well-suited to the analysis of AI, as it disrupts and complicates traditional ideas about technology, power, and identity.

Theories of Social Change: Postmodern Perspective

While traditional theories of social change, such as **evolutionary theory**, **conflict theory**, and **functionalism**, view change as progressive or driven by specific social forces, postmodernism emphasizes the complexity and contingency of social transformations. Postmodern theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-François Lyotard offer alternative ways of understanding social change that are particularly relevant in the age of AI:

1. **Foucault's Theory of Power and Knowledge:** Foucault's work on power and knowledge is central to understanding how AI shapes social change. For Foucault, power is not just something that is held by individuals or institutions; rather, it is diffused throughout society and embedded in everyday practices. AI, as a technology of control, can function as a tool of power by shaping the way individuals behave and make decisions, often without their explicit awareness. Through surveillance, data collection, and algorithmic decision-making, AI contributes to the regulation and normalization of social behaviors, reinforcing existing power structures.
2. **Baudrillard's Hyperreality:** Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where the distinction between reality and simulation becomes blurred, is particularly relevant when analyzing AI. AI technologies like virtual reality, deepfake videos, and personalized content creation contribute to the creation of hyperreal experiences—experiences that seem real but are, in fact, artificial constructions. In this sense, AI plays a significant role in the postmodern condition, where individuals navigate a world of simulations rather than concrete realities.
3. **Lyotard's Incredulity Toward Metanarratives:** Jean-François Lyotard argued that postmodernity is characterized by skepticism toward grand narratives or universal truths. AI exemplifies this skepticism, as it undermines the idea of a singular, objective reality by creating personalized algorithms that cater to individual preferences and beliefs. This leads



to a fragmented understanding of truth, where different groups and individuals experience different realities mediated by AI, further challenging the notion of a shared, unified social order.

Technology as a Factor of Social Change in the Postmodern Era

In the postmodern era, technology, and specifically AI, is no longer viewed as a neutral force driving societal progress. Instead, it is understood as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that influences society in contradictory and unpredictable ways. The postmodern view emphasizes the following:

1. **Disruption of Traditional Social Norms:** AI challenges established social norms and identities. The role of the human in a world dominated by intelligent machines raises profound questions about human autonomy, agency, and the nature of work. Automation, for example, threatens traditional labor practices while also creating new forms of employment and interaction. This creates a society that is increasingly mediated by AI, where old social roles and values are no longer relevant, and new, fragmented roles emerge.
2. **Fragmentation of Knowledge and Power:** AI technologies often operate behind closed systems, creating a knowledge economy where access to information and power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few tech corporations and governments. This technological centralization is a hallmark of postmodern power structures, where control is decentralized but omnipresent, shaping individual experiences and societal behaviors through algorithms.
3. **Creation of New Realities:** AI-driven virtual environments, social media, and digital identities create alternative social realities. These "constructed" experiences of reality, whether in the form of curated news feeds, virtual communities, or gaming worlds, reflect a postmodern world where individuals engage with multiple, simultaneous versions of reality.

AI and Social Change: Postmodern Sociological Analysis

1. **Economic Transformation and Inequality:** The postmodern view of economic change emphasizes the fluidity and unpredictability of AI's impact on the labor market. While AI offers the potential for new industries and opportunities, it also exacerbates existing inequalities, leading to job displacement for lower-skilled workers and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few tech giants. This paradoxical effect challenges traditional Marxist and capitalist theories of class struggle, as power is no longer solely tied to ownership of capital but also to control over data and algorithms.
2. **Social Inequality and Algorithmic Bias:** Postmodernism's critique of power relations is central to understanding AI's role in reinforcing social inequalities. AI systems, often trained on biased data, can perpetuate racial, gender, and socioeconomic biases. In this way, AI exacerbates pre-existing social divisions, making the social change it brings uneven and fraught with ethical dilemmas.
3. **Hyperreality and the Collapse of Objective Truths:** AI's role in creating hyperreal experiences challenges the very notion of objective truths. Personalized algorithms filter information based on individual preferences, creating digital echo chambers where people are exposed only to views that reinforce their beliefs. This contributes to the breakdown of shared societal norms and values, making it harder to establish a common ground for collective action.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence is a potent force of social change in the postmodern era, challenging traditional notions of progress, power, and identity. By disrupting existing social structures and



creating new forms of economic, political, and cultural interaction, AI forces a rethinking of how societies function and evolve. Through a postmodern sociological lens, AI reveals the fragmented, contradictory, and often destabilizing nature of contemporary social change. To ensure that AI contributes positively to society, it is essential to critically engage with its ethical implications, address its biases, and develop responsible frameworks for its use. Only by doing so can we navigate the complexities of AI-driven social transformation and create a more inclusive and equitable future.

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