

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL CHANGE*

EDITORIAL

Artificial intelligence is not a new phenomenon, however, its accelerated development over the past several years has profoundly shaped contemporary society on a global scale. Following the experience of the pandemic and numerous debates on the so-called post-COVID society, it has become increasingly evident that we are standing on the threshold of a new social epoch, one that is ever more frequently described through the paradigm of artificial intelligence. This refers to a social context in which artificial intelligence is gradually becoming an integral part of everyday life, work, education, decision-making processes, and the formation of social relations. Reflections on an AI-driven society oscillate between optimistic expectations related to social progress and innovation, and serious concerns regarding the emergence of new risks and novel forms of social problems. Artificial intelligence thus simultaneously appears as a promise of social transformation and as a source of new social tensions.

Within such a context, it becomes clear that artificial intelligence cannot be viewed solely as a technical issue. Rather, it represents a profound social and sociological phenomenon that permeates structures of knowledge and labour, social trust, the body and identity, and leisure. For this very reason, artificial intelligence has become a highly relevant field of inquiry for the social sciences, particularly sociology, which is well positioned to analytically capture both the processes already unfolding before us and possible future scenarios.

This thematic issue seeks to contribute to that aim by bringing together contributions from various scientific disciplines and by fostering dialogue between established scholars and doctoral researchers. At its core are sociological perspectives, complemented by anthropological, technical, and bioethical approaches, originating from the scientific conference Artificial Intelligence and Social Change, held on October 22 as part of the Days of the University Department of Sociology at the Catholic University of Croatia. The conference brought together research teams from the Catholic University of Croatia, the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Croatian Studies and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Given that all contributions in this thematic issue draw on a shared empirical research design, the following section briefly outlines the methodological framework underpinning the presented analyses. The research for the Catholic University of Croatia was conducted by Henda Ltd., one of Croatia's leading market and social research agencies, with more than thirty years of experience in applying contemporary research methodologies and analytical approaches. All articles are based on a study carried out on the general population using the online method Computer Assisted Web Interviewing, administered through Henda's proprietary panel of approximately 16 000 registered respondents.

For each survey, respondents were carefully selected according to predefined criteria; questionnaires were not automatically available to all panel members. Instead, invitations were distributed in targeted batches based on the socio-demographic groups required to meet specific sampling quotas. The aim of the study was to provide relevant empirical data for the scientific analysis of specific social attitudes and behaviours among citizens of the Republic of Croatia. The survey was conducted on a representative sample of 500 Croatian citizens aged 16 and above, ensuring a high level of reliability and statistical validity. Data collection took place between June 23 and July 14, 2025. To ensure data quality, several control mechanisms were applied, including checks for straight-lining (excluding responses with identical answers across scale questions), timestamp analysis (excluding surveys completed unrealistically quickly based on expected completion times), minimum and maximum duration thresholds, and logical consistency checks during data processing. Each participant was rewarded through

a points-based incentive system, whereby accumulated points could be redeemed for retail gift vouchers.

Data processing and analysis were conducted using SPSS software, and results are presented for the total sample. The entire research process was carried out in full compliance with the principles of scientific methodology, the ISO 20252:2019 standard, the ESOMAR Code of Ethics, and GDPR regulations, thereby ensuring the highest standards of methodological rigor, data protection, and ethical integrity. Building on this shared empirical foundation, the articles included in this thematic issue approach artificial intelligence from diverse theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, collectively illuminating its social, ethical, and cultural dimensions.

In the article *Attitudes, Risks and Regulation: The Social Foundations of AI Adoption in Croatia* authors Petra Palić, Tomislav Belić, and Roko Mišetić provide an empirical contribution by distinguishing perceptual and attitudinal factors of AI adoption from traditional sociodemographic variables. The results demonstrate that trust in AI and perceived self-competence (AI self-efficacy) are by far the strongest predictors of AI use, while age, region, and similar characteristics exert only a marginal effect. The authors identify a phenomenon they term “informed structural anxiety”, in which technological optimism coexists with awareness of profound structural risks to the labour market. The article concludes that the Croatian public strongly supports the responsible development of artificial intelligence, accompanied by a clear demand for a regulatory framework that simultaneously enables innovation and protects society and workers.

The article *Who Did AI Leave Behind? Social Inequality Perceptions in the Use of AI Tools in Croatia* by Nikša Dubreta, Ivana Čavar, and Erik Brezovac addresses digital social inequality in the context of generative artificial intelligence. Building on the sequential model of digital inequalities, the authors demonstrate that although affordability remains an important barrier, the primary source of inequality increasingly lies in the practice of using AI tools itself. Frequency of use most strongly predicts knowledge, perceived usefulness, and feelings of competence, indicating that inequalities are increasingly produced through experience and engagement rather than stable demographic differences. The article introduces the concept of “utility literacy” and points to the need for public policies that move beyond infrastructure and basic digital literacy toward meaningful inclusion in everyday AI practices.

In *Predictors of Affirmative Attitudes toward the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Science within a Mertonian Ethos Framework*, the author team of Josip Ježovita, Toni Ćosić, and Lovro Knežević analyses attitudes of Croatian citizens toward the use of artificial intelligence in scientific work. Drawing on the concepts of digital citizenship, epistemic rights, and Merton’s institutional ethos of science, the analysis focuses on perceptions of AI’s impact on objectivity, judgment, and the ethics of scientific practice. The findings indicate moderately positive public attitudes, with the strongest predictors of affirmative views being frequency of AI tool use, trust in AI, and the belief that artificial intelligence is capable of making ethically sound decisions—interpreted by the authors through the concept of dataism. The article thus contributes to understanding trust in science in the digital age, highlighting citizens’ ambivalent relationship with algorithmic rationality and emphasizing the role of scientific institutions as key bearers of ethical and epistemic responsibility in the context of the expanding application of artificial intelligence.

In *Trust in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Its Acceptance in Croatian Society*, authors Mario Bara, Jeronim Dorotić, and Toni Ćosić analyse levels of trust in artificial intelligence and its social acceptance in Croatian society. Their analysis identifies a moderate level of trust characterized by cautious optimism, accompanied by pronounced ethical concerns and selective willingness to accept specific applications. A key finding indicates that trust in artificial intelligence is associated with frequency of use and levels of digital literacy, thereby contributing to a sociological framing of trust in AI as a contextual and institutionally conditioned process. The article underscores the importance of transparent, ethically grounded, and socially responsible regulation of artificial intelligence.

In *Attitudes of Croatian Citizens toward AI-Based Body Augmentation: Generational Responses to Transhumanist Worldviews*, authors Ivana Brstilo Lovrić, Odilon Singbo, and Paula Zujčić empirically analyze attitudes toward artificial intelligence as a means of technological enhancement of the human body. The findings reveal a prevailing restraint toward deep technological integration into the body, alongside a notably high proportion of undecided respondents, which is interpreted as a socially relevant analytical result. This indecisiveness is understood as a sign of active reflection on the boundaries of the body, identity, and humanity in the context of accelerated technological development. The contribution of the article lies in conceptualizing transhumanism as an open symbolic field and in highlighting generational differences as differences in understandings of the body and the future of humanity, rather than as simple differences in technological acceptance.

In *Domestication of AI Tools in the Everyday Lives of Croatian Citizens*, authors Damir Mravunac, Karla Žagi, and Valentina Petrović examine the use of artificial intelligence in everyday life through the theoretical frameworks of technology domestication, everyday life studies, actor-network theory, and the technology acceptance model. Empirical findings show that only slightly more than half of respondents can be considered users of AI tools, while non-use is most commonly associated with a lack of knowledge, interest, and trust. The authors conclude that the “domestication” of artificial intelligence often stalls at the initial stage of appropriation, with experience and perceived competence playing a crucial role in its routinized integration into everyday practices. The article contributes to understanding artificial intelligence as an active social actor rather than a neutral technical instrument.

Taken together, the contributions in this thematic issue demonstrate that artificial intelligence is a deeply social process rather than a purely technological one. Grounded in empirical analyses of citizens’ experiences and attitudes, this thematic issue sheds light on how technological change is socially interpreted, negotiated, and embedded in contemporary society.

Cordially,

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