Chapter 13
Non-Human Actors, Human Consequences:
A Sociological Inquiry Into the Social Restructuring by Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that artificial intelligence is not a neutral technology but a powerful social phenomenon reflecting and reshaping society. Using a systematic literature review, this chapter critically analyzes Generative AI, examining its societal embedding and consequences beyond purely technical assessments. The analysis reveals key themes: the tension between simulated intelligence and social understanding; how AI is socially constructed via concepts like habitus and habitability; and its function as a cultural medium that reproduces dominant norms. Furthermore, the chapter contends that the 'algorithmic bias' discourse obscures deeper issues of structural inequality, strategic opacity, and the corporate power shaping AI's development. This chapter synthesizes key sociological concerns about AI and asserts the discipline's essential role, not only in critiquing the technology but in actively participating in its design and regulation to foster a more equitable and democratic future.

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INTRODUCTION

Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously stated, "We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us." This observation has never been more relevant than in the age of artificial intelligence. While humans are the architects of AI, these complex systems are rapidly evolving from mere instruments into influential agents within our social world. They are not only performing tasks but are actively reshaping social structures, mediating our interactions, and influencing the very fabric of society. This dynamic creates a complex interplay of agency (Bozkurt, 2025), where AI systems, conceptualized as "non-human social actors", begin to exert their own influence, often in ways that are opaque and unintended. The power of AI is not neutral; it is embedded within and often amplifies existing social hierarchies and inequalities, raising critical questions about power, governance, and what it means to be human in a technologically saturated world (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2025). This paper, therefore, provides a comprehensive sociological analysis of Generative AI, moving beyond a purely technical assessment to critically examine how this transformative technology is co-produced by, and reciprocally reshapes, our social world, justifying the urgent need for a sociological framework to guide its development and integration.

RELATED LITERATURE: A SOCIOLOGICAL FRAMING OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

From Deceptive Spirits to Algorithmic Illusions: The Enduring Problem of Simulated Intelligence

While often framed as a recent technological revolution, the conceptual challenges posed by artificial intelligence are rooted in a much longer history of attributing agency to non-human entities (Şenocak et al., 2023). This history reveals a persistent tension between the simulation of intelligence and the achievement of genuine, socially grounded understanding. The 19th-century spiritualist movement, for instance, saw participants convinced of communication with inanimate objects during séances, an illusion that scientist Michael Faraday later demonstrated was produced not by external forces, but by the participants' own unconscious interpretive actions (Natale, 2022). This early example of "deceptive machines" highlights a foundational theme: the perception of intelligence is often a social projection rather than an objective quality of the technology itself (Natale, 2022).

This dynamic was formalized in the mid-20th century with the inception of AI as a research field. Alan Turing's "Imitation Game" famously proposed that a machine could be considered intelligent if its linguistic performance was indistinguishable