The Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) On Social Equity

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping society with unprecedented speed, offering transformative opportunities while exacerbating social inequities. This paper examines AI's dual impact: driving innovation and economic growth for a privileged few while deepening stratification through job displacement, unequal access to technology, and concentrated wealth among tech elites. In Vietnam, industries like garment manufacturing and logistics illustrate how AI automation marginalizes low-skilled workers and small enterprises, widening the gap between those with technological access and those without. The study highlights the urgent need for policy interventions to mitigate these disparities, including education reform, vocational retraining, data protection regulations, and equitable AI distribution. By analyzing global and local trends, the paper proposes strategies to harness AI for inclusive progress, ensuring it serves as a tool for collective advancement rather than a driver of inequality. A collaborative approach involving governments, businesses, and society is essential to build a fairer, sustainable future.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, social equity, stratification, policy intervention, inclusive development

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Never in the history of humanity has a technology developed so rapidly and exerted such profound influence as artificial intelligence (AI). From massive language models capable of writing texts, composing music, and programming software, to self-learning systems that can interpret medical imaging, drive autonomous vehicles, or predict financial market fluctuations, AI is now ubiquitous in every corner of modern life. For many, this represents a fourth industrial revolution—a monumental leap forward, bringing humanity closer to dreams of a smarter, more efficient, and wealthier society than ever before.

However, alongside this enthusiasm lies an increasingly evident truth: AI not only creates new opportunities but also exacerbates inequality, accelerates social stratification, and aggravates long-standing societal fractures. When access to technology is governed by capital, knowledge, and technical infrastructure, those in advantaged positions advance faster and further, while the rest are trapped in a reality they neither understand, control, nor can compete in.

This is no longer a matter of science fiction. It is the reality of 2025—a world where millions of workers are being displaced by machines, where wealth is concentrated in the hands of those who own data and algorithms, and where even education, healthcare, and justice are gradually being reshaped by artificial intelligence.

Social stratification driven by AI is not an inevitable outcome. However, if it is not identified, analyzed, and addressed promptly, it risks becoming an irreversible trend. Within the scope of this article, the author will analyze the direct impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on contemporary societal contradictions and propose solutions to coexist with AI while ensuring social equity.

I. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) DEEPENS THE WEALTH GAP

1.1. Artificial Intelligence (AI) - A driver of growth or a machine for widening inequality? In less than three years since the explosive growth of artificial intelligence (AI), the world has witnessed a rapid shift in power, wealth, and opportunity. From major technology corporations such as Google, Microsoft, and Amazon to trendsetting startups, AI has become a golden catalyst for those already advantaged by capital, data, and technology. However, on the other side of the development divide, millions are being left behind in a race they have no choice but to sit out.

According to a 2024 United Nations report, approximately 62% of the value generated by AI is concentrated in the hands of less than 1% of global enterprises. This figure is even more alarming in developing countries, where the disparity between businesses with access to AI and the rest is growing increasingly stark.

1.2. The beneficiaries: tech giants and the ultra-wealthy tech elite

AI is not merely a tool for optimizing efficiency—it is a lever of power. Corporations such as Alphabet, Meta, Apple, and Amazon have harnessed AI to expand their influence, control supply chains, and even shape the consumer behavior of billions.

In Silicon Valley, the wave of investment in AI has given rise to a new "tech aristocracy"—individuals who not only hold stakes in AI companies but also control large-scale language models, user data, and vast computational infrastructure. Venture capital funds pour money into any startup bearing the "AI" label, resulting in some individuals witnessing their wealth multiply tenfold in just 12 months.

This represents a new form of wealth accumulation—not derived from resource extraction or traditional manufacturing, but from encoded knowledge, user data, and the ability to predict consumer behavior through machine learning.

1.3. Those left behind: manual laborers and the informal economy

In Vietnam, the story of Ms. Tran Thi Lan—a veteran seamstress in District 12, Ho Chi Minh City—is a poignant example. "I used to sew for a small workshop, earning a few hundred thousand VND daily. But since they introduced AI-driven fabric-cutting machines and automated design systems, I lost my job. They no longer need me or my experience."

Ms. Lan is not alone. According to a 2024 survey by the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, up to 38% of jobs in Vietnam's garment industry—one of the country's key export sectors—are at risk of being fully or partially replaced by AI within the next five years.

A similar situation is unfolding for drivers, accountants, data entry clerks, customer service agents, and even lowlevel journalism. Jobs that do not require unique creativity or high emotional intelligence can be replaced by AI more cheaply and efficiently. The result is the emergence of a "semi-unemployed" class—individuals who are not entirely jobless but face increasingly precarious work, low wages, and gradual displacement by machines.

1.4. The impasse of small businesses and local startups

Not only individuals but also small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—which account for over 90% of Vietnam's economy—are struggling amid the AI wave. Mr. Le Van Trung, owner of a logistics company in Hanoi, shared: "We want to apply AI to warehouse management and delivery routing, but the implementation costs are too high. The software is entirely in English, there's no customer support, and hiring consultants is prohibitively expensive."

The stratification is evident here: large enterprises, backed by foreign investment or sufficient resources to hire experts, can easily transition to AI-driven digitalization. Meanwhile, most SMEs lack the skills, workforce, or finances to access these solutions, resulting in lower productivity, higher costs, and gradual exclusion from the market.

Some domestic tech startups, despite having innovative ideas, lack the resources to train their own AI models and are forced to rely on APIs from large corporations. This dependency means that Vietnamese customer data is stored overseas, and economic benefits are siphoned out of the local ecosystem.

1.5. The white-collar workforce is not immune

Artificial intelligence does not only impact manual laborers. In 2024, many businesses in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi began using tools like ChatGPT, Notion AI, and Copy.ai to replace or reduce the workload of marketing, human resources, and even legal departments.

A communications employee at a furniture company shared: "Now when my boss assigns a proposal, I just input ideas into ChatGPT. It drafts both the text and slides. The problem is that my work is becoming overly simplified, and my boss is considering reducing staff."

According to a Navigos Group survey, 46% of office workers in Vietnam feel that their jobs will be partially or fully replaced by AI within the next three years. A growing sense of insecurity is spreading—not only among manual laborers but also among those with degrees and specialized skills.

1.6. The social landscape: stratification becomes a chasm

As AI becomes a determinant of productivity, opportunity, and income, society is increasingly divided: • Those who can use AI versus those who cannot.

• Enterprises with technological infrastructure versus those without.

• Countries that develop original AI versus those that merely consume imported AI.

What is even more concerning is that this stratification is occurring faster than the ability of educational, legal, and social institutions to adapt. Without timely intervention, we may enter a new era—one where AI is not a tool for human progress but a mirror magnifying existing and emerging injustices.

"Artificial intelligence can liberate humans from repetitive labor. But if its distribution is inequitable, it will liberate some while digitally enslaving the rest." – Dr. Luu Khanh Hoa, technology policy expert, Fulbright School of Public Policy.

II. THE RISE OF THE TECH ELITE CLASS

2.1. Technology as the intangible asset of the "elite"

Artificial intelligence is not merely a tool but an intangible resource that its possessors can transform into wealth. This phenomenon is creating a new generation of ultra-wealthy individuals—not those who profit from oil, land, or manufacturing, but those who own, control, and optimize data and AI models. These are the "tech aristocrats" who are increasingly expanding their influence, not only within the technology sector but also globally, shaping decisions in economics, politics, and society.

Corporations such as Alphabet, Microsoft, Meta, Amazon, and Nvidia serve as prime examples. These companies do not merely develop AI technologies; they establish proprietary ecosystems where they continuously collect user data and control computational resources, thereby reinforcing their dominance and competitive advantage. As AI becomes indispensable across all industries, these entities hold the keys to power. What is distinctive here is that wealth transfer no longer occurs in traditional ways—from resource owners to workers or investors. Instead, technology corporations are increasingly developing closed-loop business models, where ownership of data and the ability to leverage AI for efficiency optimization become the most critical factors. This is the era of companies with access to vast datasets and immense computational power—they are the ones shaping and dominating the future.

2.2. The beneficiaries of ai models

While global society grapples with significant challenges related to social stratification, the rise of those enriched by AI is becoming increasingly evident. A notable example is venture capital funds, which have poured billions of dollars into AI companies in recent years. Beyond merely seeking profits, these funds have the potential to reshape the global economic landscape by determining who has the authority to develop and deploy AI. For instance, when OpenAI developed GPT, a language model capable of writing text, answering questions, and even generating artistic creations, the company's valuation skyrocketed, and major investors like Microsoft witnessed a substantial boost in wealth. Concurrently, other companies also reaped benefits from the AI boom, such as Nvidia, a key supplier of chips critical to AI systems. As AI adoption becomes a global trend, these companies continue to profit by providing the infrastructure and hardware that power AI models. This pattern is also evident across other sectors, where technology corporations increasingly control the global economy—not only through technology but also through ownership and utilization of proprietary AI models. Large corporations are no longer confined to the tech market; they now wield decision-making power in industries such as finance, manufacturing, healthcare, and education, further deepening societal stratification.

2.3. AI and occupational stratification

While AI opens significant development opportunities for a select few individuals and businesses, it simultaneously creates stark stratification across occupations. Jobs requiring creative thinking, strategic decision-making, or complex interpersonal communication are generally less susceptible to complete replacement by machines. However, in industries involving repetitive tasks or simple operations, AI has demonstrated superior capabilities in displacing human labor.

For example, in customer service, AI chatbots like ChatGPT have largely replaced call center agents and customer request handlers. In banking, the adoption of AI-driven automated advisory systems has reduced costs and enhanced efficiency. As a result, millions of workers in these sectors are gradually losing their jobs. Beyond this, AI is also transforming manufacturing and skilled labor. Automation companies like Tesla and other automotive manufacturers are leveraging AI to optimize production lines, diminishing the need for highly skilled workers. Consequently, the working class in manufacturing is increasingly marginalized, replaced by robots and automated technologies.

2.4. AI companies – Monopoly models and global influence

A defining characteristic of AI-developing companies is their ability to create monopolistic business models, where control over resources and data becomes the decisive factor. As companies like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft dominate markets, they compete not only on price but also by capturing new markets, thereby sustaining and reinforcing their power.

Particularly in sectors such as healthcare, education, and manufacturing, AI does not merely optimize processes but has the potential to reshape entire economic models. AI-developing companies hold the capacity to fundamentally alter how these industries operate, establishing monopolistic models with significant competitive advantages. Thus, stratification occurs not only within individual companies but across the entire global economy.

2.5. Social consequences: When AI creates opportunities and threats

AI is transforming not only the labor market but also the broader social structure. While some individuals and businesses achieve remarkable success through AI, others are sidelined from the competition. The growing

divide between those who own technology and those unable to access it has become a latent threat to societal stability.

Moreover, proprietary AI models risk creating a world where power and resources are distributed inequitably, with wealth increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and corporations. As AI becomes the determinant of everything—from employment and income to social influence—it fosters a deeply divided society, where stratification extends beyond economics to encompass culture and politics.

III. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND NECESSARY POLICIES FOR A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

3.1. The need for policy reform to ensure social equity in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) The increasing social stratification driven by AI is not a natural trend but a consequence of poorly considered policies and a lack of flexibility to adapt to the rapid pace of technological change. Without timely intervention, AI will further exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Therefore, developing appropriate policies to regulate and mitigate the impacts of AI is indispensable for a society aiming for equitable and sustainable development. The application of AI across industries—from manufacturing to finance, services to healthcare—not only boosts productivity but also generates profound social consequences. Large enterprises, with the capacity to invest in AI, can easily reduce costs, optimize processes, and increase profits. However, this often comes at the expense of significant job losses, while those without access to technology are increasingly left behind. Public policy must focus on addressing these impacts, protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, and enabling them to adapt to an increasingly technology-driven world. Failure to do so risks creating an "invisible divide" between those with access to AI and those without.

3.2. Reforming education and vocational training systems

To mitigate AI-driven social stratification, education and vocational training must be central to development policies. It is essential to build an education system that not only imparts theoretical knowledge but also equips students with practical skills to compete in an AI-dominated environment.

Integrating skills in data science, programming, and AI analysis into curricula from primary to tertiary levels is an urgent requirement. Furthermore, vocational training needs to be upgraded to meet the demands of the labor market in the digital era. Short-term skill development centers, online courses, and intensive technology-focused vocational programs will help narrow the gap in employment opportunities.

A notable example of positive change is the proliferation of online learning platforms offering AI and programming skills to individuals of all ages. Platforms such as Coursera, Udacity, and edX not only provide learners from diverse backgrounds with access to knowledge but also enhance their competitiveness in the global labor market.

Additionally, policies should emphasize the development of soft skills, enabling workers to leverage creativity, communication, and complex problem-solving—abilities that AI struggles to replicate. This approach not only helps workers retain employment but also ensures they can adapt to the dynamic work environment of the digital age.

3.3. Ensuring workers' rights in the ai era

As AI increasingly replaces traditional jobs, workers will need a robust protection system to ensure they are not left behind. Governments and social organizations must implement appropriate social welfare policies to safeguard workers displaced by automation. Programs supporting career transitions, retraining, and improved working conditions are essential to mitigate the adverse effects of AI.

One effective solution is the introduction of unemployment insurance and financial assistance for those who lose jobs due to technological changes. Such measures would provide them with the time and resources to acquire new skills, seek new employment opportunities, and avoid falling into poverty.

Additionally, career transition programs should be prioritized and expanded. Vocational training institutions and businesses need to collaborate closely to develop practical courses that not only equip workers with new skills but also enable them to pursue career opportunities aligned with current technological trends.

3.4. Measures to regulate ai development

Governments must establish stringent measures to regulate AI development, ensuring that the technology serves not just a privileged few but benefits society as a whole. A critical measure is the control and protection of personal data.

The use and exploitation of data are key drivers of value in AI models. However, a lack of oversight and transparency in data usage can lead to privacy violations and social injustices. Therefore, robust data protection policies, including regulations on users' control over their data, must be strictly enforced. Furthermore, governments should develop and implement policies holding technology companies accountable for

the societal impacts of AI. These companies must not only be responsible for the consequences of their technologies but also commit to sustainable practices, ensuring that AI is developed equitably and serves the common good.

3.5. Toward a more equitable future

To achieve a more equitable future, a revolution in public policy is needed—one where AI is not a tool for deepening stratification but a key to addressing existing inequalities. Policies should focus on minimizing AI's negative impacts on vulnerable groups while promoting sustainable, equitable, and transparent development models.

At the same time, establishing a robust system for education, vocational training, and workers' rights protection is crucial to reducing stratification and creating opportunities for everyone to participate in the digital economy. Governments must provide avenues for citizens not only to access technology but also to leverage it to improve their lives and livelihoods.

The development of AI cannot be halted, but it can be guided and shaped to serve the collective interests of society, minimizing stratification and inequality. In doing so, AI will cease to be a tool of an elite class and instead become a catalyst for shared progress for all.

IV. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence (AI) is not merely a technological leap but a powerful force with far-reaching impacts on every facet of society. While AI offers immense opportunities for those who can harness it, it poses significant challenges for those unable to access or adapt to it. The rising social stratification driven by AI is an issue that cannot be ignored, as it not only deepens existing injustices but also creates difficult-to-bridge gaps between social groups.

However, AI is not an uncontrollable force. Policies and interventions from governments, businesses, and social organizations can steer its development, ensuring that the most vulnerable are not left behind. Investments in education, vocational training, and workers' rights protection are critical steps to mitigate AI's negative impacts. Simultaneously, stringent regulations on data protection and oversight of technology companies' power are necessary to ensure fairness in AI utilization.

Ultimately, AI can become a tool for human progress if we manage and distribute it equitably. A more equitable future, where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from technological advancements, will only materialize through collaboration and immediate action. Sound policies and collective commitment will ensure that AI does not amplify inequality but serves as the key to building a more just and sustainable society.

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