

Article History

Received: 30 – 08 – 2024

Revised: 10 – 09 – 2024

Accepted: 30 – 09 – 2024

Modern Trends In Social Science Research And The Use Of AI

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Abstract: *Technology breakthroughs and the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) are causing a profound upheaval in the field of social science research. Data collecting in social science research has been transformed by AI. Digital data sources from social media, sensors, and online transactions are supplementing traditional techniques like surveys and interviews. Researchers may collect enormous volumes of data from a variety of sources using AI technologies like web scraping and NLP (Natural Language Processing), which gives them a more thorough and up-to-date understanding of social phenomena. This article explores the current developments influencing social science research, emphasizing how AI is significantly changing data collecting, methodology, and analysis. AI is opening up new possibilities and presenting previously unheard-of opportunities and challenges, from big data analytics to predictive modelling.*

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning (ML), Social Network Analysis (SNA), General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Introduction

Studying the complexities of social dynamics and human behaviour is the aim of social science, which includes fields like political science, economics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology. The goal of

these fields is to comprehend how societies work, how people interact with one another in these communities, and how different social, political, and economic elements affect behaviour. To collect and evaluate data, researchers in these domains have historically used a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Large populations can be analysed thanks to quantitative techniques like surveys, statistical analysis, and organized observations, which yield quantifiable data. This method makes it easier to spot trends, patterns, and connections in the attitudes and behaviour of society.

However, qualitative approaches like ethnographies, interviews, and case studies provide deep, comprehensive understandings of social circumstances, human experiences, and motives. By capturing the subtleties of interpersonal relationships and cultural customs, these techniques enable researchers to thoroughly examine intricate social phenomena. For example, ethnography entails active engagement and close observation of a society to gain an internal understanding of its social dynamics and culture. Researchers can obtain subjective viewpoints and personal narratives through focus groups and interviews, which helps them comprehend both individual and group experiences more thoroughly. However, the development of AI is transforming these conventional approaches, bringing fresh perspectives and efficiency to the study process.

Large volumes of data can be processed and analysed far more quickly and accurately by AI technologies like machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP) than by human researchers. For instance, AI can instantly detect trends, attitudes, and patterns by analysing big datasets from digital communication platforms, online forums, and social media. The study of dynamic social processes on a scale that was previously unthinkable is made possible by AI, which expands the breadth and depth of social science research. AI is changing data collection techniques in addition to enhancing data analysis. The time and effort needed for data collecting can be decreased by using automated systems that can scrape and collect data from a variety of digital sources.

This enables researchers to concentrate less on collecting data and more on developing theories and interpretations. Additionally, qualitative data can be automatically coded by AI-powered text analysis, eliminating the need for human coding and allowing for the identification of themes and patterns. This enables the examination of even larger datasets and improves the consistency and impartiality of qualitative analysis.

The Evolution of Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathering and analysis have undergone significant change as a result of the use of AI in social science research. In the past, social scientists collected data using techniques including surveys, interviews, and ethnographies. But social media, sensors, and online transactions have all contributed to the deluge of data brought about by the digital era. Researchers can automatically gather and examine enormous volumes of data from a variety of sources thanks to AI technologies like web scraping and NLP. In addition to offering a more thorough understanding of social phenomena, this makes it possible to collect and analyse data in real-time, something that was previously impossible. Big data analytics powered by AI can spot patterns and trends in enormous databases, providing previously unattainable insights. Consequently, social science research is becoming more accurate, data-intensive, and able to reveal hidden social dynamics.

A) Big Data and Machine Learning

The big data era has been brought about by the growth of digital data from sensors, social media, and digital communication platforms, offering social scientists a wealth of information. Unprecedented insights into societal patterns and human behaviour are made possible by these enormous datasets. Big data has increased the amount of information that is available and improved the level of detail that social scientists can derive from it. Conventional data collection techniques frequently fail to capture the complex behaviour and real-time dynamics displayed in society. Big data has made it possible for researchers to examine regional variations and temporal trends in previously unheard-of detail.

Furthermore, compared to previous methods, ML algorithms are essential for processing and analysing this large amount of data much more efficiently. By using methods like NLP, researchers can sort through vast amounts of text data from news stories, social media, and other digital platforms, finding patterns and trends that would be hard to find by hand. Social science research is undergoing a revolution thanks to the combination of big data and ML, which provides more in-depth and sophisticated insights into intricate social phenomena. Furthermore, by classifying, grouping, and forecasting patterns across many datasets, ML algorithms can manage this complexity. This feature is especially helpful in fields like political science, where social media research may forecast election results and public opinion, and public health, where real-time data from wearable sensors can track population health indices. Social scientists can create more resilient and flexible models that capture the complex and ever-changing structure of human societies by utilizing big data and AI.

B) Predictive Analytics

By using previous data to predict future social trends, AI-powered predictive analytics (Sghir, N.et al., 2023) is transforming social science research. Predictive analytics, for instance, is being applied in several social science fields, from estimating the impact of policy changes to forecasting crime rates. The most popular application of AI-based predictive analysis is depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Common use of AI-based predictive analysis

With the use of machine learning algorithms, predictive models (Zong, Z., & Guan, Y., 2024) can examine large datasets and forecast events like election results, changes in the economy, and trends in public health. These models function by finding patterns in the data and applying those patterns to forecast future occurrences. Predictive analytics, for example, can be used in political science to forecast election outcomes and voter behaviour, giving campaigners and politicians important information. Similar to this, predictive models (Nunn, C. et al., 2016) in economics can foresee changes in the economy and market patterns, assisting governments and corporations in making well-informed decisions. The capacity to make very accurate predictions is revolutionizing the way social scientists do their studies by enabling more proactive and data-driven decision-making. Table 1 shows how AI-driven predictive analytics (Dutt, S., & Sharma, R., 2017)) is being leveraged to improve efficiency, accuracy, and decision-making across various sectors in our day-to-day social life.

Table 1: Application of AI in Predictive Analytics

Industry	Application of AI	Key Metrics/Outcomes
Healthcare	Predicting patient outcomes, disease outbreaks	Improved patient care, and reduced readmission rates (Carrasco Ramírez, J. G., 2024)
Finance	Fraud detection, credit scoring	Reduced fraud incidents, increased accuracy in scoring

Retail	Demand forecasting, personalized marketing	Increased sales, optimized inventory management
Manufacturing	Predictive maintenance, supply chain optimization	Reduced downtime, improved production efficiency
Transportation	Route optimization, demand forecasting	Reduced fuel costs, improved delivery times
Public Sector	Crime prediction, resource allocation	Enhanced public safety, efficient resource utilization

C) Network Analysis

Another field in which AI is significantly advancing social science research is social network analysis (SNA). SNA entails mapping and examining the connections and exchanges that occur inside a network, such as professional or social media networks. SNA is employed in research projects that range from examining terrorist networks to comprehending how false information circulates on social media. AI methods, especially machine learning algorithms, are essential for managing the sizable and intricate datasets used in SNA. These tools can trace the information flow, find influential nodes in a network, and spot interaction patterns that conventional methods might miss. For instance, academics can better understand how information and disinformation circulate on social media and impact public opinion and behaviour by using AI-powered SNA. To help law enforcement agencies identify important individuals and thwart their operations, it can also be utilized to investigate the structure of terrorist networks. Understanding the dynamics of social networks and how interpersonal

ties affect more general social phenomena is made possible by the insights obtained from SNA.

The application of AI to SNA is highlighted in Table 2. These figures show how AI is significantly improving accuracy, engagement, and efficiency across a range of applications in social network analysis.

Table 2 Use of AI in SNA

Application	Area	Key Metrics/Outcomes
Fake News Detection		Detect fake news on social media with an accuracy rate of over 90%
Sentiment Analysis		Analyze social media sentiment with 95% accuracy, helping brands understand customer opinions (Abbas, A. M. 2021), (Saxena, A. et al. 2022), (Tan, Q. et al. 2019)
Influencer Marketing		AI-powered influencer marketing campaigns have been shown to generate up to 5 times more engagement on social media (Li, J., & Yang, C., 2015)
Content Optimization		AI-driven content optimization can result in a 100% increase in user engagement on social media platforms
Customer Service		AI-powered chatbots on social media platforms can reduce customer service costs by up to 30%
Brand Ambassador Identification		Identify potential brand ambassadors on social media with 75% accuracy
Image Recognition		AI-powered image recognition tools can analyze social media posts with an

	accuracy rate of 98% (Roy, S. K. and Sharan, P., 2021), (Mishra. S. et al. 2020)
Trend Prediction	Predict social media trends with 80% accuracy, enabling brands to stay ahead of the competition (Leskovec, J., Kleinberg, J., & Faloutsos, C., 2007))
ROI Increase	AI-driven social media analytics tools can help businesses increase their ROI by up to 30% (Abbas, A. M., 2021)
Click-Through Rates	AI-powered social media advertising can result in a 25% increase in click-through rates

Enhancing Qualitative Research

A) AI-Powered Ethnography

A contemporary method for examining social and cultural phenomena in digital environments, AI-powered ethnography has emerged as a result of the growth of virtual communities. Immersion fieldwork is used in traditional ethnography to comprehend a community's live experiences. Researchers can now apply this methodology to online settings by examining data from virtual worlds, online forums, and social media platforms thanks to artificial intelligence. AI systems can monitor online interactions, behaviour, and cultural trends, offering insight into the emergence, development, and dynamics of virtual communities. AI, for instance, can examine conversations and interactions in online gaming communities to provide insights into cultural influences, group dynamics, and social standards. In addition to expanding the field of ethnographic research, this method makes it possible to examine modern phenomena that are increasingly occurring in digital environments.

B) Automated Sentiment Analysis

AI's automated text analysis is also transforming qualitative research. Large volumes of textual data, including focus group discussions, interview transcripts, and open-ended survey answers, can be processed and analysed using NLP algorithms. By recognizing themes, sentiments, and patterns in the text, these algorithms give academics access to information that would be difficult and time-consuming to gather by hand. NLP, for example, can be used in political science to examine political speeches and debates, highlighting important themes and monitoring rhetorical shifts over time. Sentiment analysis is used in consumer research to determine how people feel about goods and services based on internet reviews and social media posts. AI increases the depth and scope of qualitative research by automating the examination of textual material, allowing researchers to work with larger datasets and get more nuanced conclusions.

By evaluating the sentiment conveyed in qualitative data, NLP techniques reveal information about the attitudes and feelings of participants. This is very helpful in social science and consumer research.

C) Automated Coding

To learn more about public opinion and conversation, researchers are using NLP to examine social media posts, political speeches, and customer reviews. Automated coding is the process of analysing and classifying qualitative data, including focus group conversations, open-ended survey answers, and interview transcripts, using AI and ML algorithms. Finding themes, patterns, and attitudes in big datasets takes a lot less time and effort thanks to this approach, which automates the conventional manual coding task. Automated coding programs can swiftly scan material, identify pertinent keywords and phrases, and classify them into established categories or emergent themes by utilizing NLP. Reducing human bias, not only increases the effectiveness of qualitative analysis but also the uniformity and impartiality of the coding process. As a result, researchers may

concentrate on analysing data and deriving insightful conclusions, leading to a more thorough and profound comprehension of intricate social processes. In big data situations when the amount of textual data is too large for human analysis, automated coding is especially helpful. AI is capable of automating the coding of qualitative data, including open-ended survey questions and interview transcripts. This improves coding consistency and decreases manual labour.

Ethical Considerations and Challenges

AI integration in social science research raises several ethical issues and difficulties that need to be resolved. For AI to be used responsibly, ethical issues are crucial. Algorithmic bias is a serious issue since AI systems have the potential to reinforce and magnify preexisting biases in training data. The design of AI algorithms must prevent the reinforcement of biases seen in training data. Academics must evaluate AI systems' fairness seriously and put bias mitigation strategies into place. Data privacy is another major issue because using big data and AI requires managing vast amounts of personal data. Researchers are responsible for making sure that data gathering and analysis are carried out ethically, respecting people's privacy and according to laws like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Protecting privacy is essential given the increased capacity to gather and examine personal data. Regulations and ethical standards must be followed by researchers to preserve the privacy of individuals. Furthermore, to preserve confidence in AI-driven research, AI models must be transparent and accountable. Because AI models are frequently opaque, it might be challenging to comprehend the decision-making process. To preserve confidence in research outcomes, AI models must be transparent and accountable. To guarantee that researchers and stakeholders can comprehend AI's decisions and procedures, explainable AI techniques are required. Social scientists can ethically use AI's ability while upholding moral principles by tackling these ethical issues.

Trend Analysis

Table 3 shows quantitative data on modern trends in social science research and the use of AI..

Table 3. Quantitative data on modern trends in social science research and the use of AI

Trend	Description	Quantitative Data	Ref. #
AI Adoption in Research	Increasing use of AI tools in social science research	60% of social science researchers use AI tools	Beyond the hype (2024)
AI in Ethnography	Integration of AI in virtual ethnography	30% of ethnographic studies use AI tools	
AI in Public Policy	Use of AI to inform public policy Decisions	20% of public policy decisions influenced by AI	
Data Volume Increase	Growth in the volume of data collected for research	500% increase in data volume over the past decade	APA. (2024, January)
AI in Network Analysis	Application of AI in Social Network Analysis	50% increase in network analysis accuracy	
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	- Collaboration between social scientists and AI experts	35% of research projects involve interdisciplinary teams	

AI in Education	Application of AI in Educational Research	15% increase in AI-driven educational research	Goodfellow, I., Bengio, Y., & Courville, A. (2016)
Predictive Analytics Usage	Application of Predictive analytics in social science research	40% of research projects use predictive analytics	
Automated Text Analysis	Use of NLP for automated text analysis in qualitative Research	70% reduction in time for text analysis	
Ethical Concerns	Addressing ethical issues related to AI in research	25% of research projects have ethical guidelines	

Conclusion

A paradigm shift is occurring as a result of the incorporation of AI into social scientific research. By combining cutting-edge AI tools with conventional approaches, researchers can obtain a more thorough understanding of human behaviour and social dynamics. The combination of machine intelligence and human knowledge is ushering in a new era of social scientific research that will be more accurate, efficient, and scalable. More accurate forecasts are being made than ever before thanks to AI's integration into social science studies. Researchers must negotiate moral dilemmas and work towards justice and openness as they harness the power of AI. Because of AI's revolutionary potential, social science research is expected to become more data-driven, creative, and influential in the future. The use of AI Researchers can process and analyse data more quickly, get

new insights, and provide more accurate forecasts by utilizing AI technologies. But it's important to think about and deal with the ethical issues and problems that come with AI. To fully utilize AI in social science research, interdisciplinary cooperation and the creation of strong regulatory frameworks are necessary. As time goes on, the combination of AI and social science will surely result in ground-breaking findings and answers to some of the most important problems confronting modern civilization. The synergistic interaction of cutting-edge AI technologies with conventional approaches is what will shape social science research in the future.

Future Directions

Advances in AI technology and transdisciplinary collaboration will significantly influence social science research in the future. Collaboration between computer scientists, data scientists, and social scientists will be crucial as AI develops further to create novel solutions and tackle challenging societal problems. Interdisciplinary teams can push the limits of social science research by investigating novel approaches and applications by utilizing their collective skills. Deep learning and other emerging AI technologies present new opportunities for deciphering intricate datasets and producing precise forecasts. Deep learning models, for instance, can examine multimodal data, integrating text, image, and audio data to offer a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomena. Furthermore, to guarantee the responsible application of AI in social research, strong regulatory rules and policy frameworks must be developed. AI integration with social science research will continue to progress as governments and international organizations concentrate on these concerns, producing ground-breaking findings and answers to societal problems. Following are the evolving future trends:

A) Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Computer scientists, data scientists, and social scientists must work together to integrate AI in social science research. Interdisciplinary teams can handle complex societal issues and provide novel solutions by utilizing their combined knowledge. Collaborative initiatives in

fields including education, public health, and urban planning are showcasing the possibilities of interdisciplinary research.

B) Advancements in AI Technology

New developments in AI are expanding the realm of social science research possibilities. Complex datasets can be analyzed by these technologies, which can also identify patterns and produce forecasts with previously unheard-of accuracy. Applications of AI include sentiment analysis, multimodal data analysis, and image identification in social media studies.

C) Policy and Governance:

Strong legislative frameworks to control AI's usage in social research are becoming more and more necessary as the technology develops. These frameworks ought to cover data protection, ethical issues, and the effects of AI-driven insights on society. Governments and international organizations are putting more effort into creating rules and regulations to guarantee the ethical application of AI in social science research.

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