

# 'Job-killing' robots, AI under scrutiny in Davos

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Machines' ability not to only interact with but also to manipulate human beings causes deep suspicions

"Artificial intelligence and robots will kill many jobs."

It's a depressingly blunt statement for anyone to make, but even more so as it is the prediction of Jack Ma, CEO of the Chinese online sales giant Alibaba.

The rise of AI—its huge potential and fears over its potentially negative consequences—is just one of the big issues discussed at the World Economic Forum in Davos, along with breaches of personal data and fake news.

But it is probably [artificial intelligence](#) and the ability of machines to not only interact with, but manipulate human beings that raises the most suspicion.

Aware of growing governmental and public distrust, the giants of tech are trying to address the issues.

"Technology should always give people new opportunities, not remove them," Ma said.

But when IBM President Ginni Rometty admits that "100 percent of jobs will be somehow affected by technology," it might be a tough sell.

It's not just about jobs.

"People want to trust technology, as long as they know who is behind it," said Neelie Kroes, now a member of the Open Data Institute, after having been for years the European commissioner in charge of digital issues.

In recent months, US-based Uber, which connects individuals with drivers through an application, found itself in the hot seat after several murders perpetrated by its chauffeurs, notably in the United States and in Lebanon.

"You have to remember that the rating of a driver evaluates his driving but cannot predict if he is a serial killer," Uber director Dara Khosrowshahi told a panel at this week's economic gathering in the Swiss resort of Davos.

"In this situation, who is responsible, the individual or the platform?" wondered Rachel Botsman, an expert on the issue and author of the book "Who Can We Trust?"

Uber is the best known example of a fast-growing company with a bruised reputation: accused of bad working conditions and sexual harassment it has faced chaotic legal proceedings and massive data piracy, which have sapped the firm.



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"For a long time, the answer of many digital companies has been to say: we are only the software, the platform, but technology now penetrates every aspect of our lives, our trades, our homes, our relationships," said Zvika Krieger, who leads digital projects for the World Economic Forum, the organiser of the Davos meeting.

"Our response is no longer audible," he said.

## **'Too slow'**

In Davos, there was also concern about Internet giants hoovering up huge amounts of [personal data](#), sometimes illegally and sometimes sharing it with authorities.

"The danger is that we are too slow and that the world is destroying us while we are still asking who really owns our data," said German Chancellor Angela Merkel during her Davos speech.

In the same way, attitudes towards social networks and search engines are changing.

"The main question is whether Facebook and Google are technology companies or editorial companies, it is a question that remains unresolved," said Martin Sorrell, CEO of the British advertising giant WPP.

Amid the mistrust, Davos heard unique proposals from the digital world, which mostly rejects too much oversight by governments, believing it

would stifle innovation.

Marc Benioff, the outspoken CEO and founder of Salesforce, a major cloud services company, called plainly for more regulation of the sector.

"We're the same as any other industry," Benioff told CNBC in Davos.

Much like "financial services, consumer product goods, food—in technology, the government's going to have to be involved," he said.

Observers hailed what they saw as a change of heart by the titans of tech.

"Regulatory authorities in Europe have been complaining for years that big digital companies are not responding when they're called," said WEF's Zvika Krieger.

"Let's say they're picking up the phone now."

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