

# AI: Fears will fade, opportunities will surface

 By [Craig Hannabus](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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It's 1492 and the printing press is starting to gain traction. This bothers a very select group of people very much. Monks, who had for hundreds of years been painstakingly copying out the scriptures word for word, are about to be replaced. A monk named Johannes Trithemius goes as far as writing an essay espousing the moral superiority of handwriting, claiming that handwritten books would last far longer than their printed counterparts. But nothing can stop the march of progress, and the printing press goes on to revolutionise the way we share information. Today, books are a cultural cornerstone, and monks are enjoying a lot more free time. It all worked out in the end.



The Havas Prosumer Report, *iLife*, has recently been released. With a focus on revolutionary technologies and the way that society perceives them, *iLife* provides some interesting insights into how the world is changing. Specifically, our attitudes towards that change. While the days of the lone monk facing off against the middle ages version of a tech giant might seem laughable today, people still have some very deep-rooted doubts around modern technologies. These doubts often come from places of self-preservation. We've seen how automation can cost people their jobs. We know that upskilling can be a tedious process which doesn't always pay off.

Finally, there's that old adage, we fear what we do not understand.

One of my favourite bits of wave-making tech is artificial intelligence (AI). Its potential to change our world fundamentally is not fully understood at this point. Despite that, it is safe to say that we are on to something big, very big. While I could gush all day about the potential of AI, *iLife* presents a slightly more conservative perception among the general public.

Less than half of the worldwide respondents, 49%, felt that AI would be good for society. In the South African context, this number is a whole lot better at 63%, a trend which seems to permeate the data underpinning *iLife*.

AI has always been a bit of a contentious issue. On the one hand we have Mark Zuckerberg's unbridled optimism; on the other, we have Elon Musk's doomsday warnings. It is a debate that raged throughout 2017, and it may account for the less than favourable worldwide views on AI.

In South Africa, we have always been an optimistic bunch when it comes to tech. We are, after all, ahead of our time. While the world was still clunking around on their desktops, we were a nation using mobile phones as our chief computing platform. While the rest of the world was trying to figure out the world of mobile online chatting, we'd been Mxit-ing for years already. We live on the bleeding edge because we're a nation of hustlers and opportunists, and AI is perceived as just another place that we're going to figure out and own, whose impact we will enjoy. So, yes, there are doubts and there are fears, but we're a nation of overcomers, and the data reflects that.

The bottom line is that AI, much like the printing press, will change the world. There will be detractors, fear-mongers, and people that don't really understand it, but they will not stop its progress. Fears will fade, understanding will grow, and opportunities will surface. Hopefully, much like the monks and the printing press, everything will be okay and we'll find ourselves with a lot more spare time on our hands.

## ABOUT CRAIG HANNABUS

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