

## **The 2021 “SocAlty” study: “We are leaving the ivory tower and moving the dialog into the public sphere”**

**Ingolstadt, December 2, 2021 – Law, ethics, and data protection: the future of autonomous driving is raising questions. The 2021 “SocAlty” study from the &Audi Initiative offers possible solutions and stimulates public discourse regarding the new technology and the mobility landscape of the future. In an interview about the Initiative, Project Manager Saskia Lexen talks about insights from the study and the social dimensions of autonomous driving.**

### **Ms. Lexen, what objectives is the &Audi Initiative pursuing?**

The &Audi Initiative sees itself as an instigator for important topics in the automotive industry and it supports interdisciplinary exchange about new mobility technologies. The car of the future will offer us more and more comfort while simultaneously increasing safety on the road. However, we should also look at new technologies like autonomous driving in a nuanced way, despite all the enthusiasm for the benefits that come with it. That’s because we can only strengthen people’s confidence in technical innovations if we take a transparent approach. With the &Audi Initiative, we are leaving the ivory tower and moving the dialog into the public sphere. By doing so, we want to illuminate both opportunities and challenges behind advances in individual mobility. For autonomous driving to gain broad acceptance, not only technological maturity, but in particular the social dimension is therefore very important.

### **With the 2021 “SocAlty” study, the &Audi Initiative is taking up the subject of autonomous driving for the second time. What are the central concerns of the new analysis?**

As a car manufacturer, we see it as our duty to deploy new technology responsibly. With the 2021 “SocAlty” study, Audi seeks to contribute to the public debate about autonomous driving of the future. This study addresses central questions in the fields of law, ethics, and data protection: How does the car respond in an accident situation? Who is liable in an accident that involves an autonomous vehicle? Who does the generated data belong to? These are only a few of the questions and exciting considerations that the study looks at in detail. It also examines what mobility with autonomous vehicles might look like and what are the critical fields of activity on the road into the future. Consequently, the study is a practical foundation for actors and food for thought regarding the mobility transition all in one.

### **What is the state of the current discussion regarding autonomous driving?**

On one hand, it seems that society, at least here in Germany, isn’t ready for self-driving cars – debates are often driven by fears and it becomes apparent to me again and again even in personal conversations that expectations of technology are very high.

On the other hand, technology is increasingly a part of people's everyday lives and its presence is growing. The legal situation is changing and overall it's crazy how much is happening in the field. Our study starts here and we want to make a contribution to information and clarification.

**What kinds of expertise did the “SocAlty” study take advantage of?**

It wasn't just Audi employees who had a voice in the study. Altogether, 19 well known experts from the fields of law, ethics, and data protection participated, shared their thoughts on sometimes very complex questions, and pointed to possible approaches to finding solutions. However, the contents of the study should also not be understood as the absolute truth that claims to be complete. Rather, the opinions and expertise that the interviewed experts offer serve to move the discussion around autonomous driving forward in a holistic way

**What insights from the “SocAlty” study do you consider the most important?**

Above all, there is a consensus that the time has come to break away from future scenarios that have little relation to reality and to work together on a realistic vision. Over the long term, autonomous driving will change our society and in particular the mobility landscape for the better. Predictive technology can make road traffic safer. People will be able to go from point A to point B more comfortably and more dependably despite higher traffic volume. And specific groups of people whose mobility was previously limited will gain access to individual mobility offerings. All of that will become more efficient and climate-friendly than before by means of electrification and intelligent traffic guidance. In sum, the study creates a vision of the mobility landscape of the future that will look different in 2030 than it does today. But we'll manage that without science fiction. In turn, that creates appropriate expectations of technology's possibilities and limits.

**How can social acceptance of new technology be increased?**

The experts who participated in the study pleaded for transparent communication with the public, which thus far may not have had access to enough knowledge. Specifically where autonomous driving is concerned, that means knowledge about the current state of technical development and the possibilities and challenges that actually come with it.

As a result, many people today justifiably feel a degree of uncertainty and even skepticism with respect to liability and data protection or the reliability and safety of the technology. It is therefore extremely important for the future of autonomous driving to meet society and users in their current reality. That includes not underestimating people's habits and self-perceptions. For a lot of people, driving their own car still means freedom, flexibility, and self-determination. As many people as possible should be brought into contact with autonomous driving so that they can personally experience its advantages. In the process, it is important to clearly communicate the added value of autonomous driving of the future without neglecting the current limitations.

### **Where does the “SocAlty” study see the current technical obstacles?**

With respect to technology, infrastructure, and practicality, there is still an array of challenges. At the moment, key technologies such as edge computing still aren't sufficiently mature. That means that artificial intelligence (AI) is still unable to interpret humans' sometimes irrational or aggressive driving and respond to it correctly. On top of that, most regions of the world currently do not have an uninterrupted mobile network infrastructure like 5G to comprehensively bring this technology to the street.

### **With respect to autonomous driving, answers to legal and ethical questions have thus far been rare. What findings does the “SocAlty” study provide in that regard?**

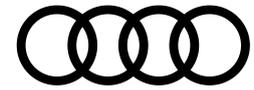
Above all, the study points out paths to more collaboration. It calls for an interdisciplinary and solution-oriented approach with respect to international legal standards or the way data is handled or ethical or safety-related matters. That's because the topic is much too complex and dependent on so many factors that it cannot be resolved by individual actors. Technology developers should contribute their expertise early with respect to, for instance, expanding the legal foundations together with regulators. That way, legislators themselves develop a technical understanding and, conversely, the manufacturer would benefit from the fact that the legislation being enacted beyond developments in technology or on the market. With respect to the ethical aspects, most of the experts recommend a shift away from theoretical discussions about unsolvable moral questions and toward a more solution-oriented approach to avoiding accidents. Additionally, the way that companies and organizations handle data in the future will play an increasingly important role for their reputations. Even today, international committees are already creating uniform data protection standards. And international data pools with anonymized datasets offer the basis for progress and will become even more important in the future.

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### **Short biography**

**Saskia Lexen** has been working for Audi Communications since 2017 and as a speechwriter for CEO Communications since 2019. Within the &Audi Initiative, she also deals with future technologies like autonomous driving and the positions that Audi can take at the intersection of technology and society. Saskia Lexen studied communications at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. She enjoys spending her free time on the water in a motorboat or sailboat and, as a Rhinelander in Bavaria, has also taken to the mountains.

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In 2020, the Audi Group delivered to customers about 1.693 million automobiles of the Audi brand, 7,430 sports cars of the Lamborghini brand and 48,042 motorcycles of the Ducati brand. In the 2020 fiscal year, AUDI AG achieved total revenue of €50.0 billion and an operating profit before special items of €2.7 billion. At present, around 87,000 people work for the company all over the world, 60,000 of them in Germany. With new models, innovative mobility offerings and other attractive services, Audi is becoming a provider of sustainable, individual premium mobility.

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