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Life Before AI: Cognitive Memory in the Age of Externalized Intelligence

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Abstract

The internet era introduced a new form of digital dependence, reshaping how humans think, connect, and process information. As societies adapt to the expanding role of artificial intelligence (AI), this dependence is evolving into something deeper, raising uncertainty about the erosion of critical thinking and independent creativity. The rapid development of AI is accelerating a shift in which human thought is increasingly externalized to intelligent systems. Concerns surrounding the ethical use of AI across domains such as creative writing, mental health, image generation, and military applications have complicated how this technological dependence is perceived, positioning it as both beneficial and potentially disruptive to human society. While this transformation has driven unprecedented innovation, largely led by a small number of powerful technology companies, it has also generated tension between optimism and concern among scientists, humanists, and the public. At the same time, a renewed interest in archiving life before AI and analog practices suggests a growing desire to reclaim forms of thinking and living less mediated by technology where the tech becomes an extension of the mind and body, not a replacement.

This paper examines the emerging conflict between human cognition and the rapid advancement of AI, focusing on how the outsourcing of thought is reshaping critical thinking, creativity, and human agency in contemporary society.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI Ethics, Cognitive Offloading, Machine psychology