



We don't need AI - AI needs us

Description

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AI

There is a consistent narrative today that AI is an inevitability that we must simply accept. Media and large tech corporations portray AI as a [futuristic technology](#). Saying that society must quickly adopt it or otherwise risk being "left behind". However, this concept is inherently false.

In reality it is the generative AI and its corporate creators that rely on us.

AI survives off of human work

The truth is that AI is fundamentally unable to create. It rests on the backs of [real human expression and art](#). Everything that generative AI makes is based off of an endless supply of stolen data from researchers, artists, media sites, and even forums. Large language models (LLMs) use the wealth of data to essentially predict the most likely next image or word. Despite the common statements made by the tech's creators and benefactors, the reality is that generative AI doesn't actually know anything. [It simply strategically regurgitates the information its been fed](#). In the words of Jeremy Cioara, author and foundational member of an IT consulting organisation,

It's not truly creative! It's not truly human! It's not truly intelligent. It's an algorithm.

This means that without stolen data, information and art to draw on, (and massive water-wasting data centres), the LLMs lose their functionality. Generative AI cannot replace human work and creativity. It needs human work to function. This was proven in early 2025, where the heads of large AI corporations claimed to be [running out of data](#). This forced the LLM models to have to cannibalize their own content. Of course, this resulted in far more uncanny and plain incorrect outputs.

AI and human exploitation

LLMs don't just rely on human labour for its outputs but also its functionalities. In the technology's development, the data labelling and content moderation was done by [outsourced workers in East African countries like Kenya and Uganda](#). The workers driving this AI goldrush were typically paid [just over a dollar an hour](#) and forced to work in what can only be described as [horrific working conditions](#).

An ode to the colonialist system. Disenfranchising indigenous people and treating them as expendable tools for the sake of the wealth of a few white elites.

All of this goes to show how much AI relies and needs human work to function or produce anything, despite being touted as a replacement for them.

A world where workers are not human

This push for generative AI in the work place has a fundamental contradiction. If AI truly replaced the majority of human work it wouldn't just be bad for the general population. It would require the destruction of the very thing that these tech billionaires rely on for their wealth!

There is a possibility for AI to be used to decrease work. Which would give people the ability to focus less on labour but more on personal human expression and fulfillment. But, as many societal theorists and analysts [have said](#) the system we live in fundamentally prevents this. A capitalist system requires a lower class of work and workers. If AI erases that it would, in short, spell trouble for the businesses running these LLMs. Their business relying on this capitalist system.

There is also the short term fact that if more jobs are taken people will have less money to spend. Which would obviously not just be an issue for the companies but for society as a whole. Ironically the future that the most powerful in our world are pushing, [in the long term, would no longer benefit them](#).

So this leaves the question that if LLMs and its manufacturers are so reliant on human work, then why is generative AI being pushed as an "evolution" or a replacement of human labour? It's quite simple, these manufacturers need us to adopt AI because it's their short sighted bid to accumulate more power.

They need us to need it

When CEOs see AI, they identify it as a means to [having to pay less for workers and pay the workers they have less](#). AI is their investment. With the [potential to secure them the complete wealth and control they aspire for](#). The CEOs of these large tech corporations' ultimate aim is to give less while earning more. And LLMs can quickly make that dream reality.

With an economy fuelled by AI they can amplify their wealth with disregard to having to accommodate people. They have no interest in the long term societal results. These billionaires pour their money and resources into LLMs. They need it to become integrated into society as soon as possible in order to reap their rewards.

As the three authors of, *Feeding the Machine: The Hidden Human Labour powering AI* describe it:

“big tech feeds off the physical and intellectual work of human beings, be they Amazon workers, creatives, data annotators, content moderators. It’s really a much more visceral, political and global concept to show the ways in which all our labor is exploited and extracted by these companies.

That is how we find ourselves with AI centred graduation speeches and artists being told to quit in favour of professionally prompting LLMs. It is due to billionaires and tech CEOs needing us to embrace AI because it’s their investment and their wealth at stake. If AI fails and isn’t the big technology they expected, the CEOs would be left with the consequences of a massive failed investment.

It is clear that, generative AI isn’t an inevitable future for humanity, but a means for the rich and powerful to elevate themselves.

The outsourcing of labour to East African workers and the implementation of data centres in low income and marginalised communities is evidence that AI isn’t truly a new threat. It is simply another branch of the already existing fundamentally exploitative system of racial capitalism.

Featured image via Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

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