AGENCY, EMPATHY & HUMAN-CENTRICITY

IN THE AGE OF AI

Let’s start with a question…

Microsoft

Microsoft to reportedly offer buyouts to 60,000 employees in latest cuts

Tech company offers buyouts in an effort to reduce costs amid the rising use of AI, according to reports



Gaya Gupta

Mon 26 Oct 2026 19.44 CET

Share

Prefer the Guardian on Google

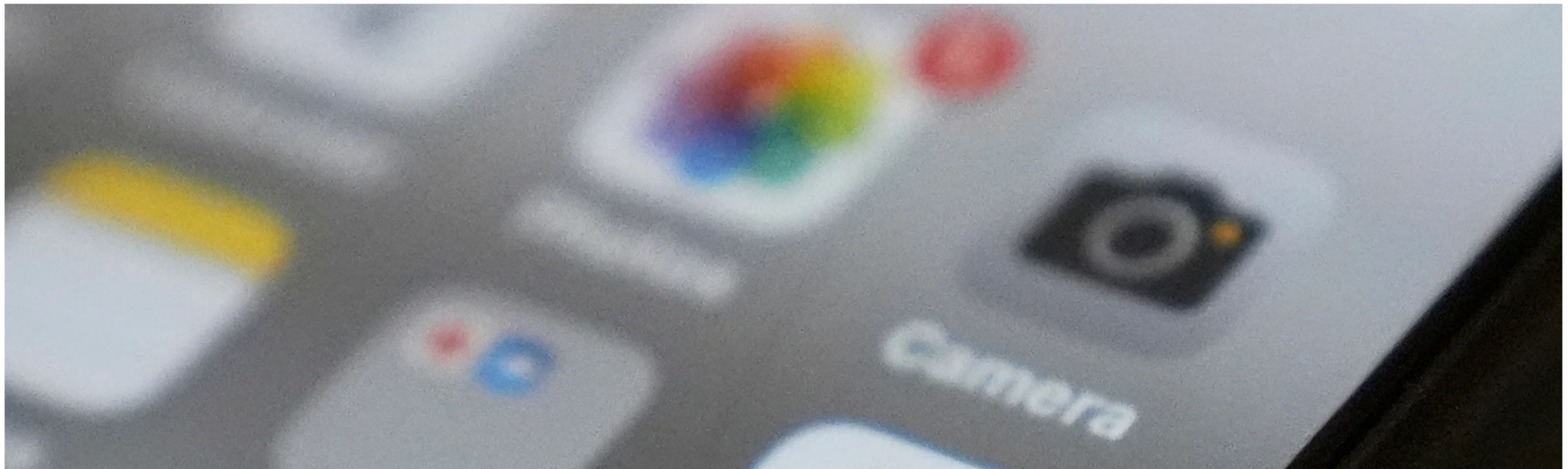
FAST COMPANY

States sue OpenAI over allegedly hurting children and deceiving adults

The wave of lawsuits is the latest filed by states accusing tech giants behind AI chatbots and social media platforms of harming kids.

SHARE ADD ON GOOGLE

OCTOBER 16, 2026



China has cracked down on AI relationships. Is it ahead of the game?

30 September 2026

Share Save Add as preferred on Google

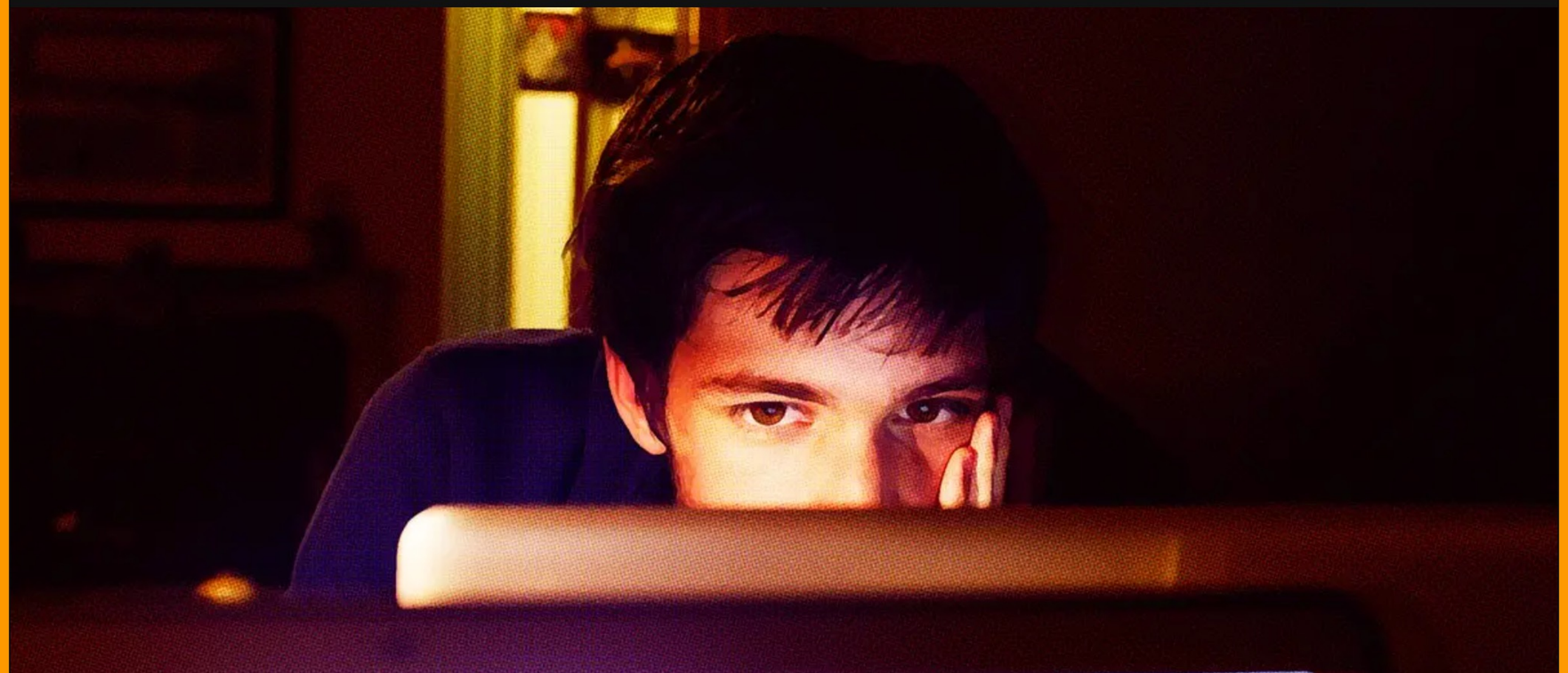
Stephanie Hegarty, Global population correspondent and **Wanqing Zhang,** Global China Unit



MAY 24, 9:45 AM EDT / BY FRANK LANDYMORE

NEARLY HALF OF YOUNG PEOPLE WISH THE INTERNET HAD NEVER BEEN INVENTED

"A WAKE-UP CALL FOR ALL OF US."



1

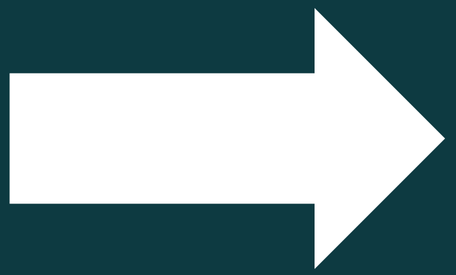
Digital Burnout

DIGITAL BURNOUT

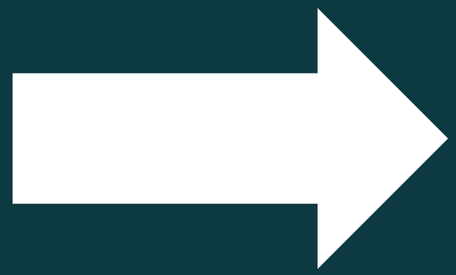
- Algorithm-driven content delivery
- Pressures of online performativity
- Relentless pursuit of relevance on social media
- Dissonance between real + virtual selves
- Constant recalibration of self-worth

Kamraju, M., 2025. Wired but weary: Gen Z's complex relationship with online content, digital identity, and social media burnout. Acta Informatica Malaysia, 9(1), pp.13-21.

Personal



Personal



Performative

BURNOUT & BRANDS

- Branded content overload & irrelevance
- Branded ads intrusiveness
- Increases lurking behaviours (esp. for young)

Fernandes T, Oliveira R (2024), "Brands as drivers of social media fatigue and its effects on users' disengagement: the perspective of young consumers". Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers, Vol. 25 No. 5 pp. 625–644

CONSUMER IMPACT

20%

Consumers have deleted a social media app in past 12 months

50%

Consumers have turned off all notifications for one or more apps

53%

Gen Z (16-29) would favour ban on social media for under 16s

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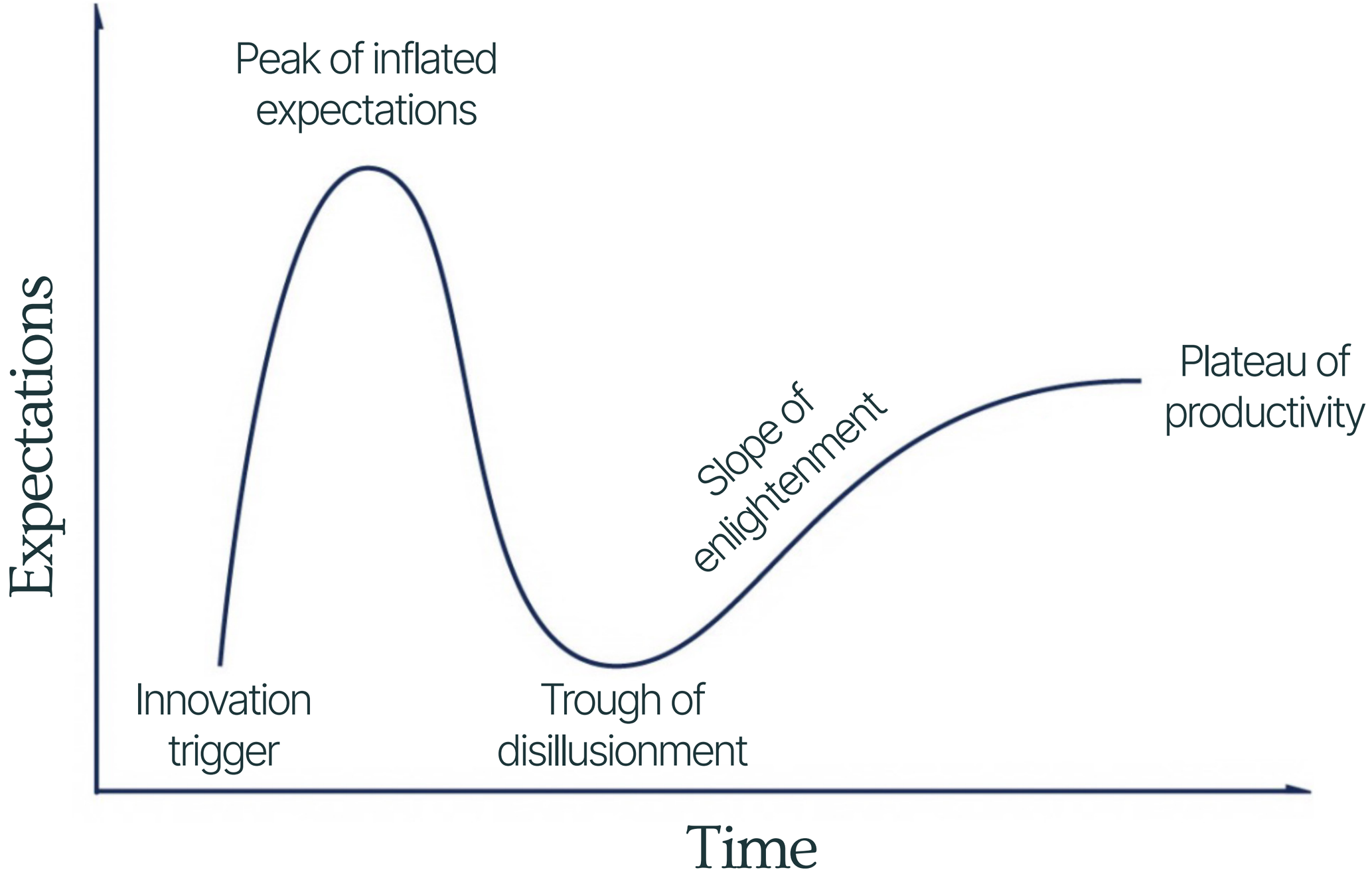
We’re seeing a countertrend


Peak of inflated expectations
Expectations
Slope of enlightenment
Plateau of productivity
Innovation trigger
Trough of disillusionment
Time



phoebeunpacked
phoebeunpacked 💫 · 1-7

Follow

2026 is the year of being chronically offline, swapping digital for physical and being more intentional with our tech use.... more

Sakura-lined street - KCNX

CapCut · Editing made easy

460 19 111

https://www.tiktok.com/@phoebeunpacked/video/759... Copy link

Comments (19) Creator videos

Katie ·ೃ
Yes 🤗 thank you x I'm going down town to get my ipod fixed tomorrow 😄
1-8 Reply 1

phoebeunpacked 💫 · Creator
love to hear this 🥰 I've been using my radio and an alarm clock instead of my phone recently and loving it!!
1-8 Reply 1

View 1 more

Love Official Atl
I do agree that it's time to take a step back from the internet😅 These companies want us obsessed
1-11 Reply 9

Adwoa Asantewaa
chronically offline🪶🪶
2-4 Reply 5

phoebeunpacked 💫 · Creator
2026 status symbol 💅
2-4 Reply 1

Hide

GROW

Gen Z Is Buying Flip Phones. The Smart Brands Know They're Really Selling a Feeling

Young consumers aren't nostalgic for the '90s. They're nostalgic for what they never got to have.

EXPERT OPINION BY TEMILOLA AGBEDE

AUG 9, 2026

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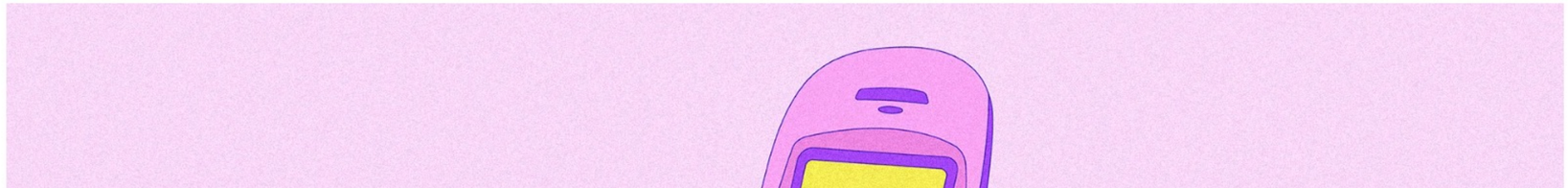

AI AGE

AI data center outrage is showing up everywhere from ads to elections

PUBLISHED THU, AUG 20 2026•10:03 AM EDT | UPDATED FRI, SEP 4 2026•9:50 AM EDT


Ashley Capoot
@/IN/ASHLEY-CAPOOT/


Garrett Downs
@IN/GARRETTMDOWNS/
@_GARRETTDOWNS

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KEY POINTS

- With less than three months until the midterm elections, opposition to AI data centers is becoming a bipartisan rallying cry in a growing number of states.
- On a major primary election day, a pair of beverage companies seized on data center opposition and released a satirical ad about the facilities' water usage.
- It was a key issue in Florida's Republican gubernatorial primary on Tuesday, which was won by Rep. Byron Donalds. Donalds was backed by major crypto PACs, but proposed restrictions on data centers in Florida.



Judgement & discernment

2

Reclaiming Agency

AGENCY

What we need

- Control
- Autonomy
- Capacity for self-directed action
- Ability to make choices
- Regulate our behaviour
- Influence life circumstances

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AGENCY

What we need	What we have
• Control	• Cognitive surrender
• Autonomy	• Many actors + incentives
• Capacity for self-directed action	• Restricted range of actions
• Ability to make choices	• Algorithmic manipulation
• Regulate our behaviour	• Addiction + doom scrolling
• Influence life circumstances	• Circumstances influence life

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Human

Creativity

Motivation

Goal achievement

Wellbeing



AI

Agents

Skills

Discernment
Agency
Critical thinking

Us

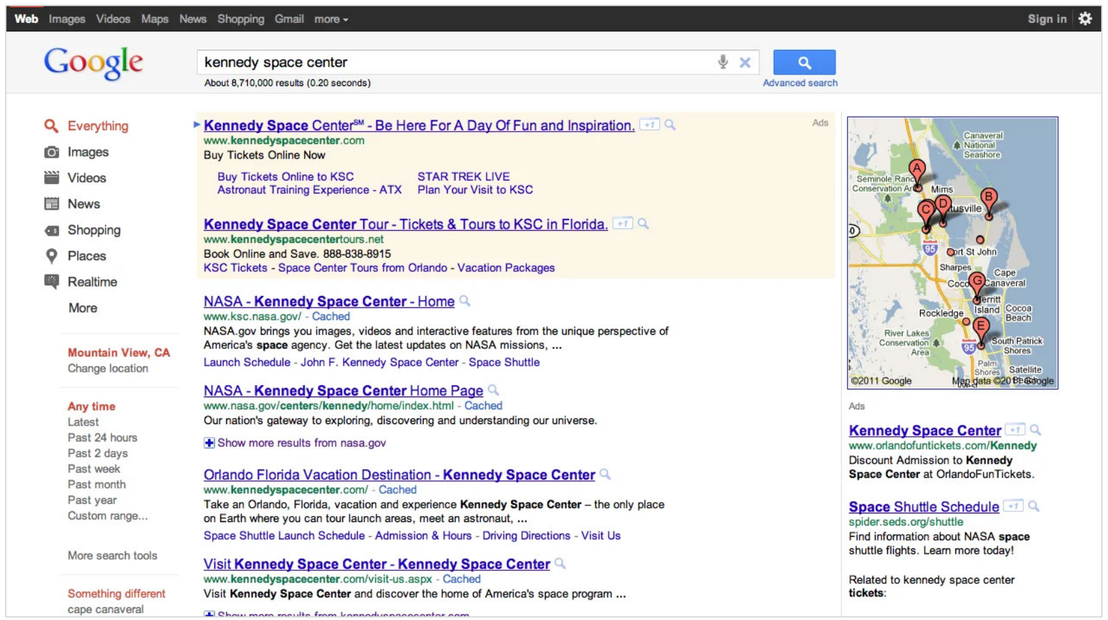
OMG

3

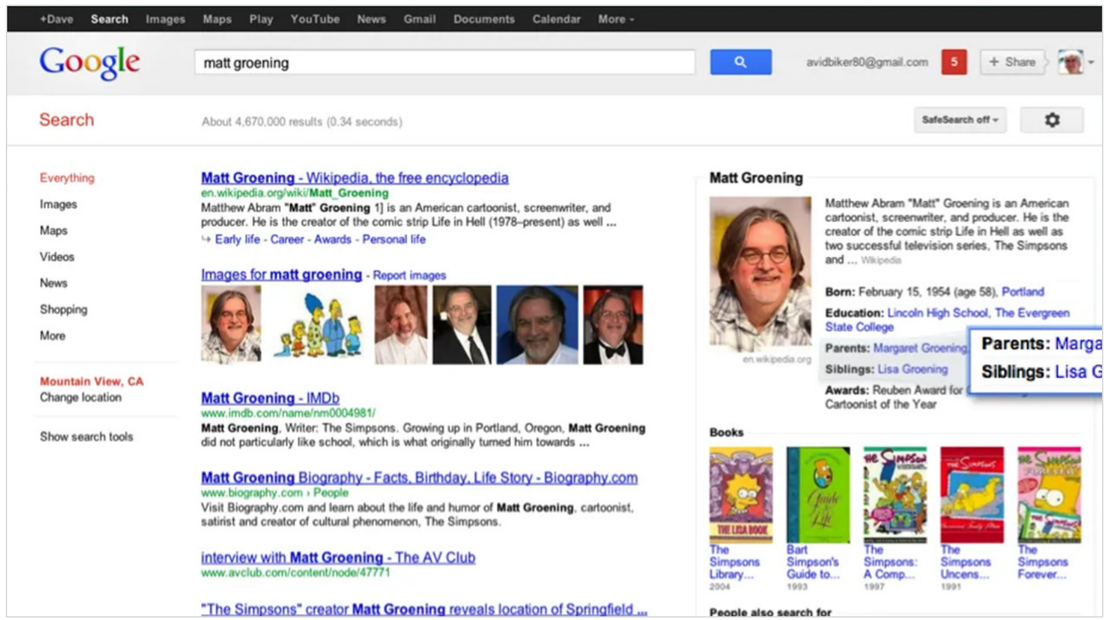
AI Blindspots

Remember this?

GOOGLE SEARCH



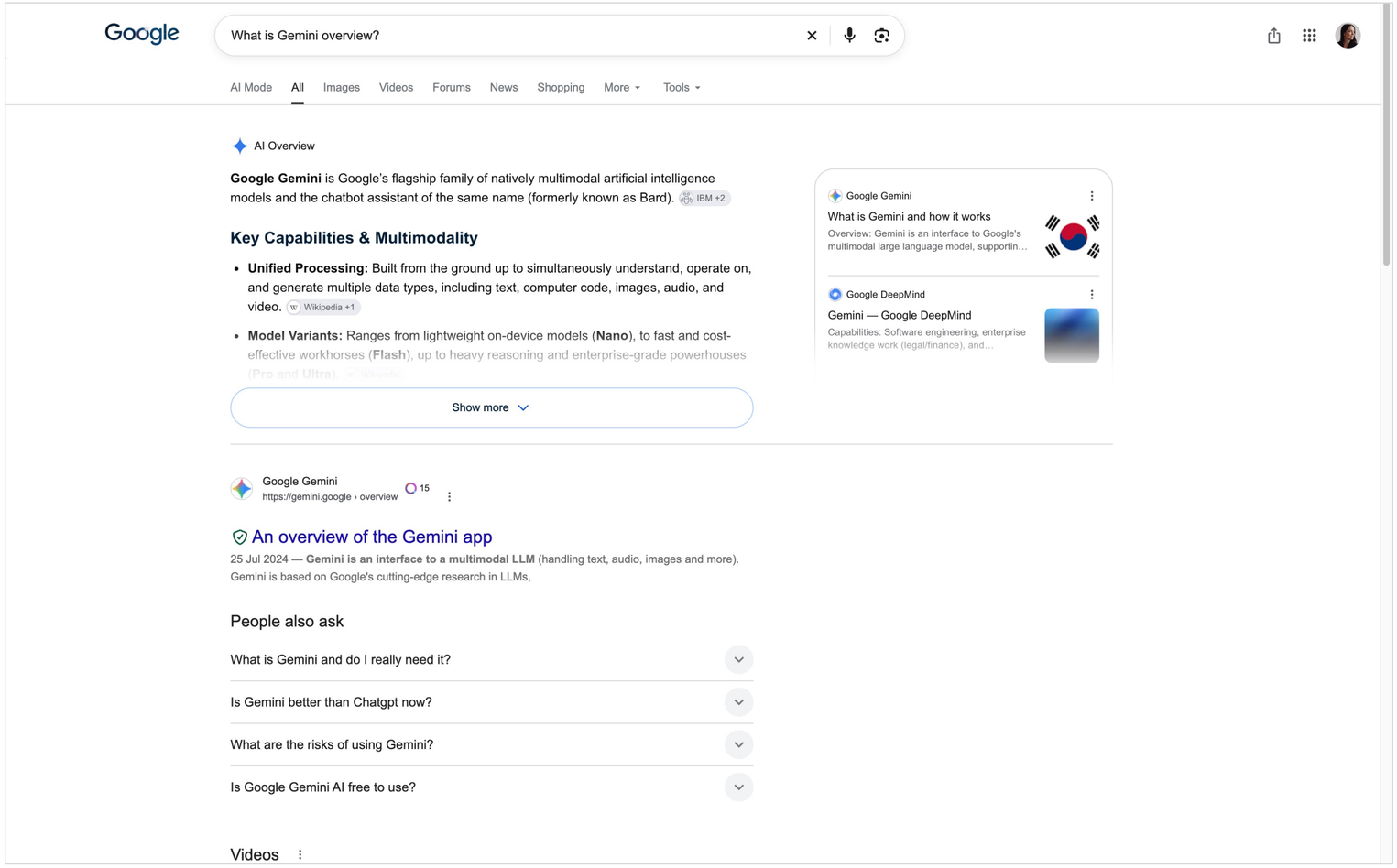
2011 - Redesign



2012 - Knowledge Graph

Now...

GEMINI AI OVERVIEW

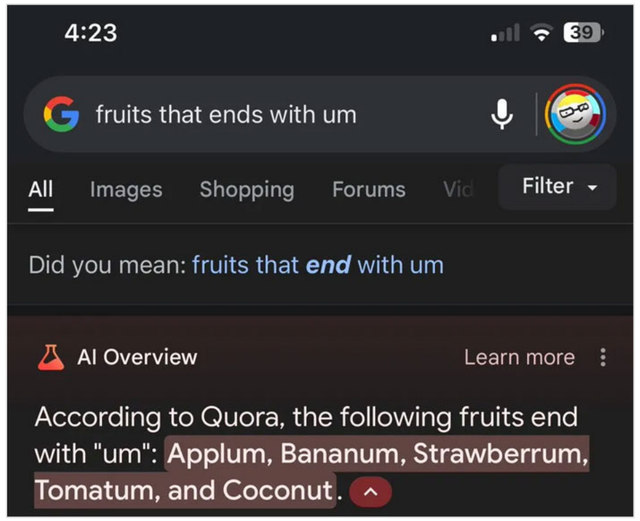


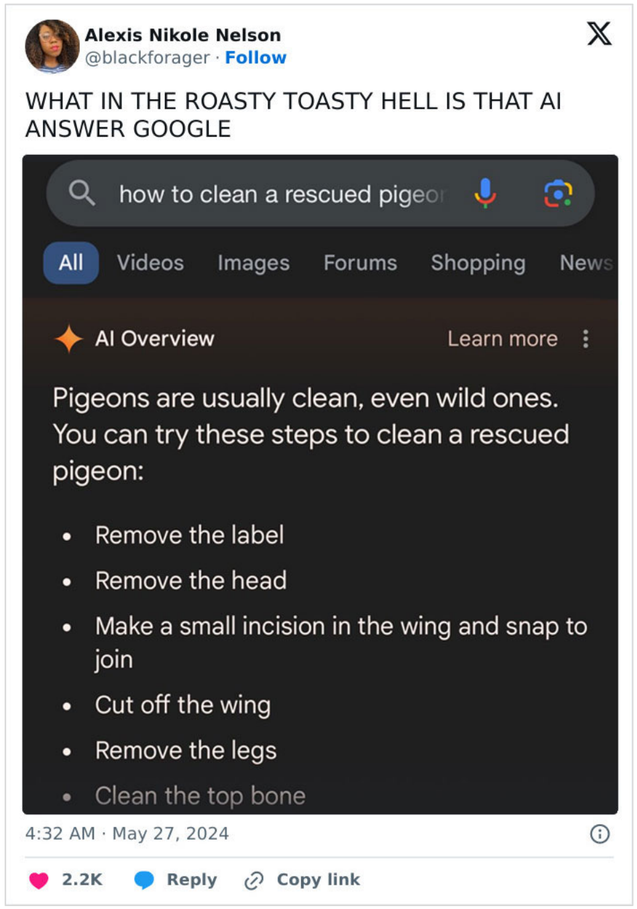
AI BLIND SPOTS

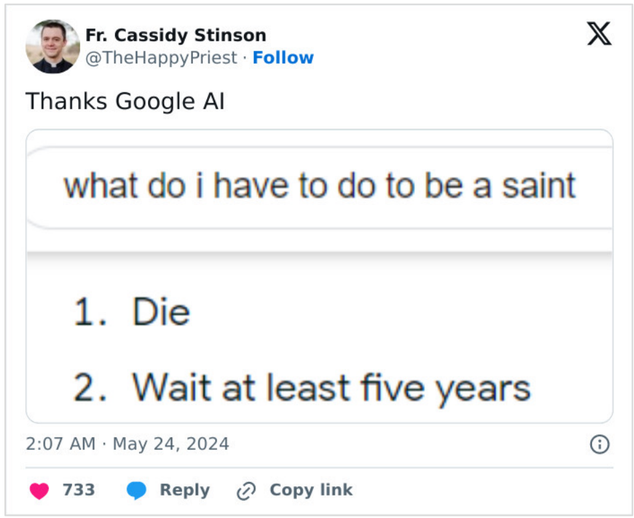
1. Epistemic narrowing

Have you prompted AI &
gotten a weird response?

GEMINI AI OVERVIEWS (2024)







AI BLIND SPOTS

1. Epistemic narrowing
2. AI fabricates with conviction

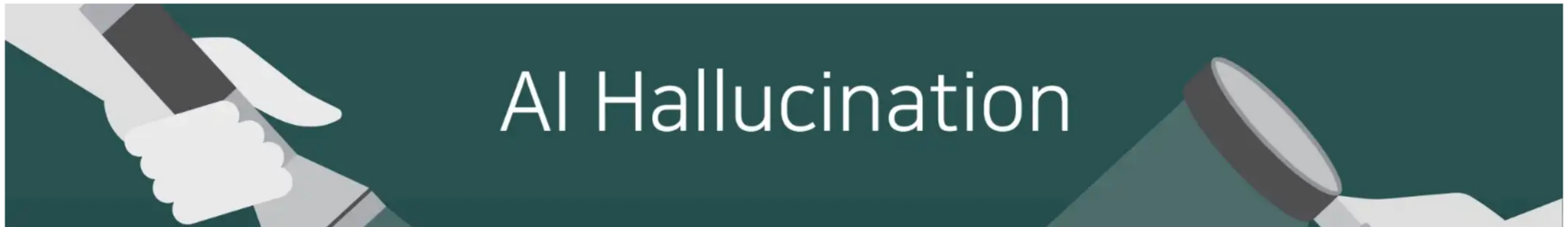
by **Gyana Swain**

OpenAI admits AI hallucinations are mathematically inevitable, not just engineering flaws

News

Sep 18, 2025 • 6 mins

In a landmark study, OpenAI researchers reveal that large language models will always produce plausible but false outputs, even with perfect data, due to fundamental statistical and computational limits.



New Watch Fortune Daily, our new video show that brings you inside the Fortune newsroom and the boardroom Watch Fortune Daily, our new video show that brings you inside the Fortune newsroom and t

AI • DELOITTE

Deloitte allegedly cited AI-generated research in a million-dollar report for a Canadian provincial government

By **Nino Paoli**
Former News Fellow

November 25, 2025, 6:03 AM ET



London-based consulting firm Deloitte has come under fire for the second time this year after another foreign government-commissioned report contains potentially AI-generated errors.
J. DAVID AKE/GETTY IMAGES

A Canadian government-commissioned Deloitte health care report that cost one province nearly $1.6 million contains potentially AI-generated errors, marking the second country this year to allege the consulting firm's fact-checking shortcomings.

But doesn’t AI save time?

AI And Machine Learning

AI Doesn't Reduce Work—It Intensifies It

by Aruna Ranganathan and Xingqi Maggie Ye

February 9, 2026



Cognitive surrender

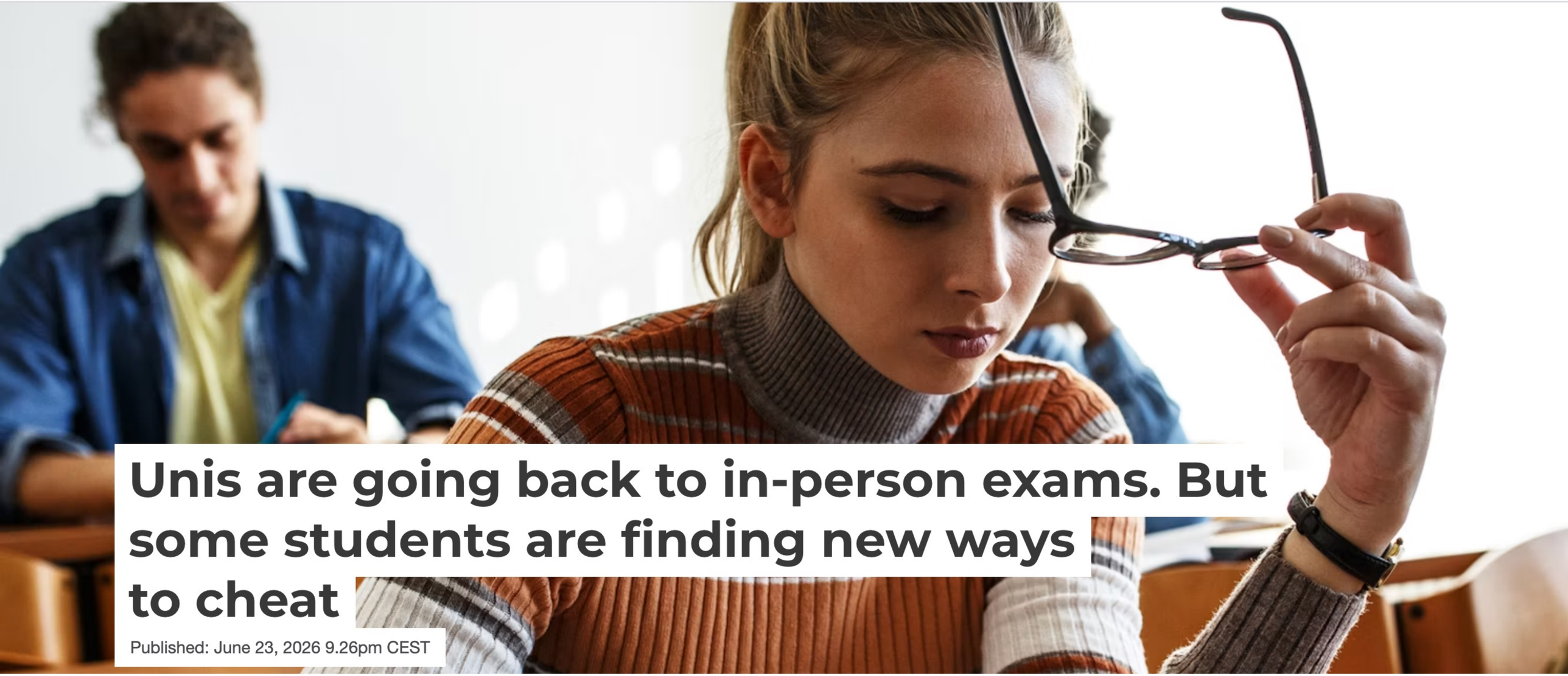
Reduced mental effort

Critical thinking

AI BLIND SPOTS

1. Epistemic narrowing
2. AI fabricates with conviction
3. Costly cognitive impacts

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic flair



Unis are going back to in-person exams. But some students are finding new ways to cheat

Published: June 23, 2026 9.26pm CEST

BalanceFormcreative/Getty Images

Earlier this month the University of Sydney launched an investigation into

Author

And there are other hidden risks



Credit: Rob Dobi

PRESS | ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Half of Americans now ask AI for financial advice, but how good is it?

New MIT Sloan School of Management research finds that while AI can improve saving and spending guidance over a lifetime, it still reflects biases tied to user inputs and struggles with portfolio rebalancing.

AI's advice also varied by gender.

Prompts written by men tended to produce more aggressive investment recommendations and higher simulated wealth.

MIT
Sloan Office of Communications

https://mitsloan.mit.edu/press/half-americans-now-ask-ai-financial-advice-how-good-it

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AI-INDUCED PSYCHOSIS | MAY 5, 12:11 PM EDT *by* VICTOR TANGERMANN

ChatGPT Users Are Developing Bizarre Delusions

"The messages were insane and just saying a bunch of spiritual jargon."

/ Artificial Intelligence / Artificial Intelligence / Chatgpt / Open AI



Optimised to maximise engagement

AI BLIND SPOTS

1. Epistemic narrowing
2. AI fabricates with conviction
3. Costly cognitive impacts
4. Compounds bias



https://www.pexels.com/@markusspiske/

What does it feel like to ride a bike?

Riding a bike is a nice mix of sensations working together:

Balance and flow — At speed, a bike feels almost like it's balancing itself; you make tiny, constant adjustments without really thinking about them. It's less like "staying upright" and more like a gentle back-and-forth wobble that becomes second nature.

Effort and rhythm — Your legs push in circles, and there's a satisfying rhythm to it, especially once you find a cadence that feels easy. Climbing a hill is a burn in your thighs and lungs; coasting down the other side is the reward — wind, speed, and almost no effort at all.

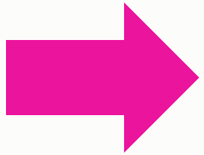
Wind and speed — Even at modest speeds, you feel the air moving past you in a way you don't in a car. It cools you down, pushes against you on hills or headwinds, and gives a real sense of how fast you're going.

Connection to the ground — You feel every texture change: smooth pavement hums differently than gravel or a bumpy sidewalk. Potholes and cracks translate straight up through the frame and handlebars.

Freedom — A lot of people describe a kind of lightness or freedom to it — you're self-powered, more exposed to the world than in a car, but faster and further-ranging than walking. There's often a meditative quality once you're in a groove, especially somewhere scenic.

If you're asking because you're thinking about learning (or relearning), I'm happy to help with tips on balance, gear, or building confidence.

How do you know what it feels like?



Good catch — I don't, actually, not directly. I've never had a body, balance, wind, or muscle burn. I don't ride bikes.

What I gave you is a synthesis: a huge amount of human writing — memoirs, forum posts, poetry, physiology explanations, casual conversation — where people describe what cycling feels like. I can recombine and articulate that description well, but it's second-hand through and through. It's more like a very well-read person's account than a rider's account.

I try to be careful about this distinction, honestly. It's easy for me to slip into first-person-sounding language ("you feel the wind," "it's meditative") because that's how the source material talks, and that phrasing is natural in English — but I should be upfront that there's no felt experience behind it on my end. I don't know if I have subjective experience of anything at all, and if I do, it almost certainly wouldn't resemble a human's physical sensations like balance or muscle fatigue.

So: solid secondhand knowledge, zero firsthand feeling. Good instinct to ask.

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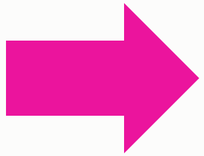

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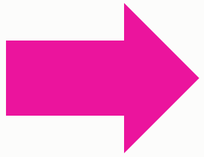

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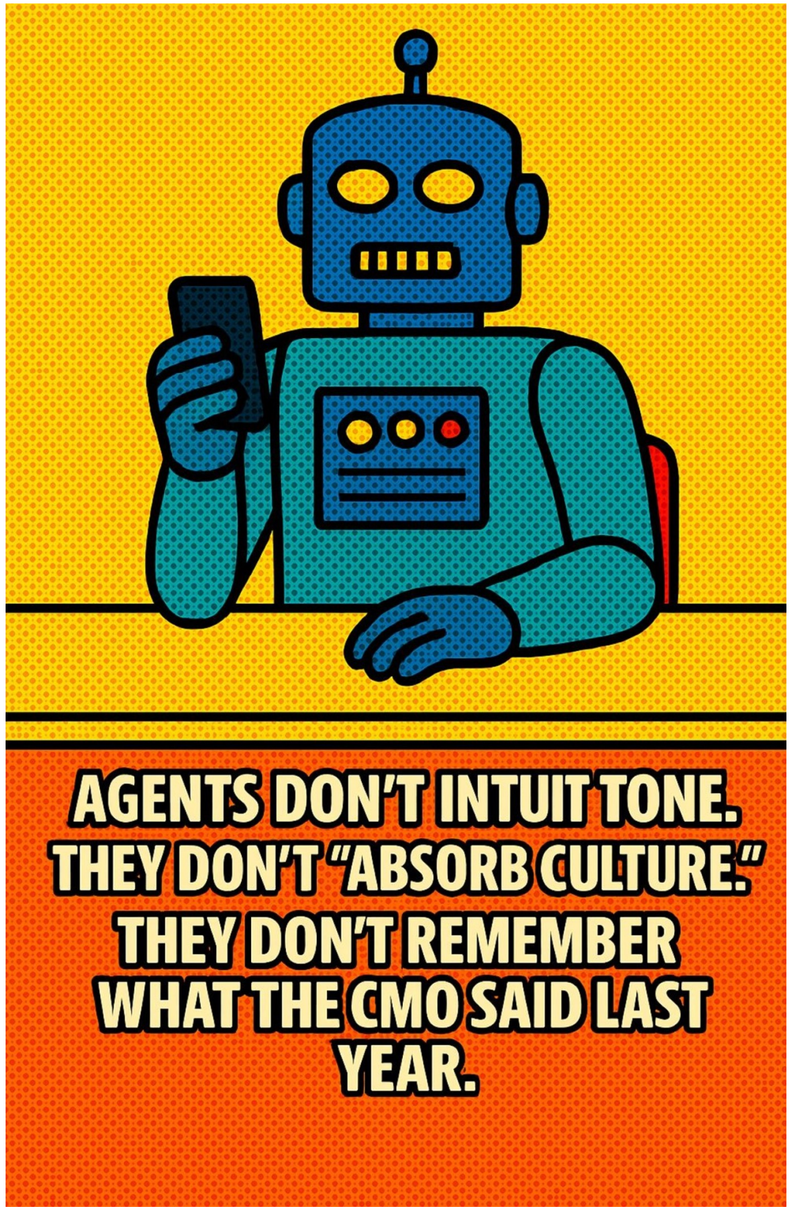
AI BLIND SPOTS

1. Epistemic narrowing
2. AI fabricates with conviction
3. Costly cognitive impacts
4. Compounds bias
5. Not grounded in physical world

AI tools lack capacity to read complex contexts



https://www.linkedin.com/posts/edward-cotton-93b535_brand-p-activity-7357069827431145473-JekG/

What can we do about it?

PRACTICAL ACTIONS

within your organisation

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Your Key Survival Skill for 2026: Critical Ignoring

In an age of endless low-quality information, it's time to fight our instinct to seek out and absorb all we can. It takes practice.



By *Christopher Mims* Follow

Jan. 2, 2026 5:30 am ET



FRAMEWORK

1. **Strengthen:** Cultivate cognitive, psychological & emotional skills
2. **Build specific guidance:** Enable employees to experiment safely
3. **Train employees:** How AI models power gen AI tools, ethical & responsible use of AI
4. **Identify & mitigate**: check blind spots, biases, sources
5. **Cultivate proactive deliberation:** puncture the filter bubble, encourage discussion, find evidence that challenges your perspective

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Real voices & experiences matter

4

The Human Factor

Leaders | Pics and it didn't happen

AI-generated content is raising the value of trust

Who did the posting will soon matter more than what was posted

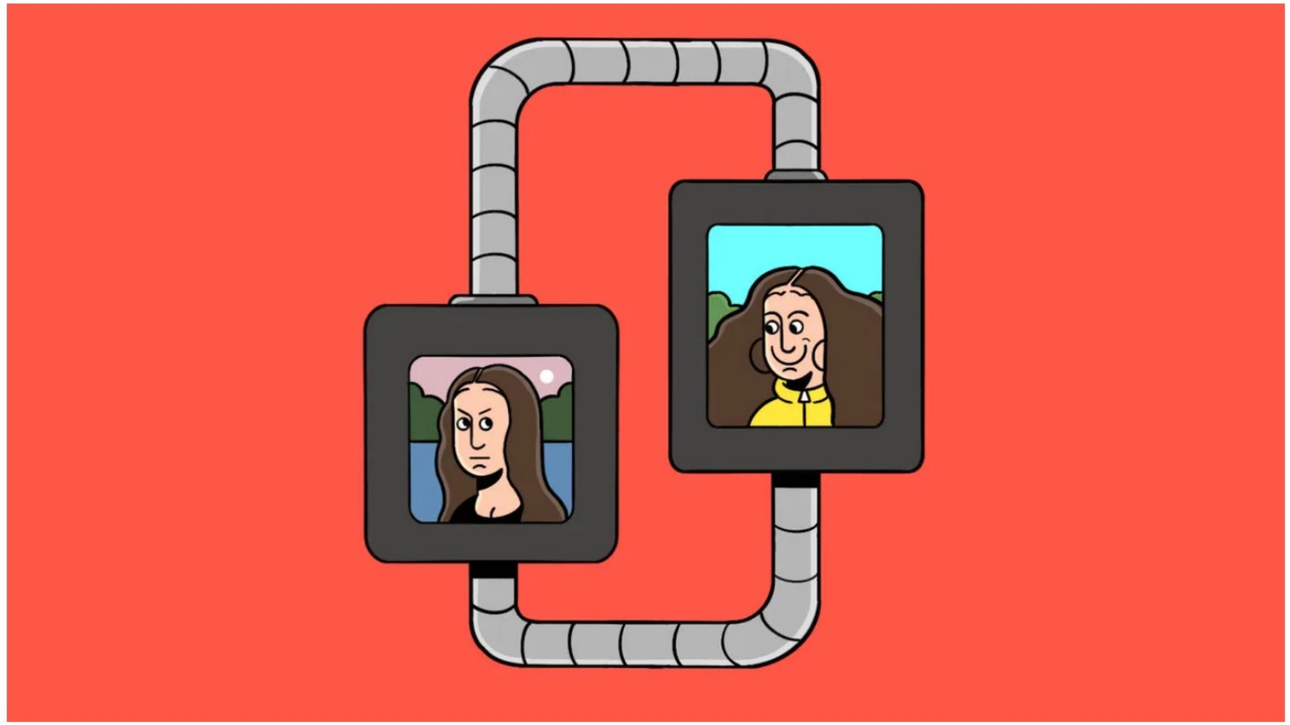

ILLUSTRATION: TRAVIS CONSTANTINE

Single most important ingredient for the development & maintenance of happy, well-functioning relationships.

PROF. JEFFRY A. SIMPSON
Professor of Psychology

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Simpson, J. A. (2007). Psychological foundations of trust. Current directions in psychological science, 16(5), 264-268.

When it comes to business...

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During economic downturns, companies that maintain a strong brand position tend to emerge stronger than companies that rely solely on discounts.

JOHN QUELCH & KATHERINE E. JOCZ
Harvard Business Review

https://hbr.org/2009/04/how-to-market-in-a-downturn-2

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CONSUMER TRUST

25%

Increase in consumer spending

53%

Will recommend trusted brand to other people

63%

Buy new products even if it’s more expensive

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55% will stay loyal & won't shop around, even if that brand makes mistakes or is accused by others of wrongdoing.

https://www.edelman.com/trust/2024/trust-barometer/special-report-brand

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AI is changing the game

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Forbes

EDITORS' PICK | INNOVATION > AI

AI Homogenization Is Shaping The World

By Hamilton Mann, Contributor. Sharing about AI, where the 'I' stands for i...

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Mar 05, 2024, 01:39am EST

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Why Are So Many 2026 World Cup Football Boots Pink?

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WRITTEN BY JOVANI HERNANDEZ

DATE 2026.06.09







Customers want something more

Empathy

Did you know there are 3 kinds?

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EMPATHY

1
Cognitive

Perspective taking & fantasy, transposing into fictional people / places

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TikTok
@_bgmarian

EMPATHY

1
Cognitive

Perspective taking & fantasy, transposing into fictional people / places

2
Emotional

Identify & respond to someone’s state with appropriate emotion

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FAILS BOX

EMPATHY

1
Cognitive

Perspective taking & fantasy, transposing into fictional people / places

2
Emotional

Identify & respond to someone's state with appropriate emotion

3
Somatic

Physical response from mirror neurons in somatic nervous systems

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HUMANS

Empathy = cognitive + emotional + somatic

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AI

Empathy = ~~cognitive~~ + ~~emotional~~ + ~~somatic~~

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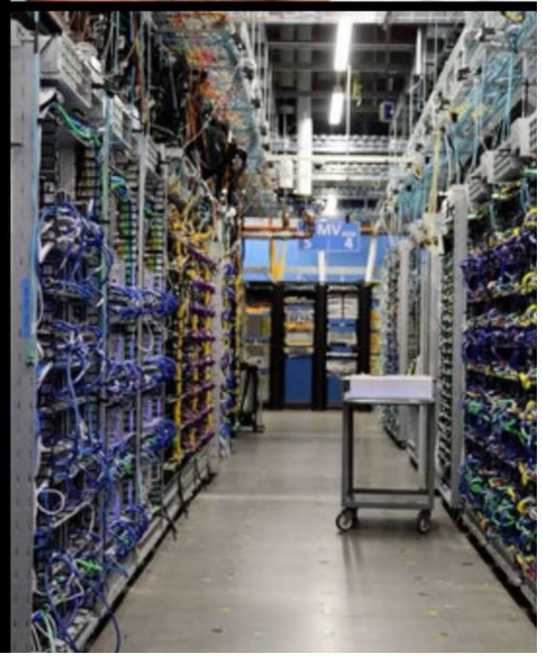
A.I. girlfriend with makeup



A.I. girlfriend without makeup



Human connection is at a premium


Amica

Real influence is built on true understanding, connection & empathy

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5

Values

Is this product 'human-made'? The race to establish an AI-free logo

16 March 2026

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Joe Tidy

Cyber correspondent, BBC World Service



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Every brief I produce has three non-negotiable elements.



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Anti-AI campaign ad idea for Parker pens by yours truly

4,021 178 comments · 98 reposts

Like Comment Repost Send

Add a comment...

Most relevant

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Executive Creative Director & Agency Le...
3w

Runs on ink, not data centres

Like · 7 | Reply · 2 replies

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Head - Marketing & Communicatio...
3w

Jamie Stockwood Runs on Ink, not Water!

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GCD @ Real Chemistry
(edited) 3w

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3w •
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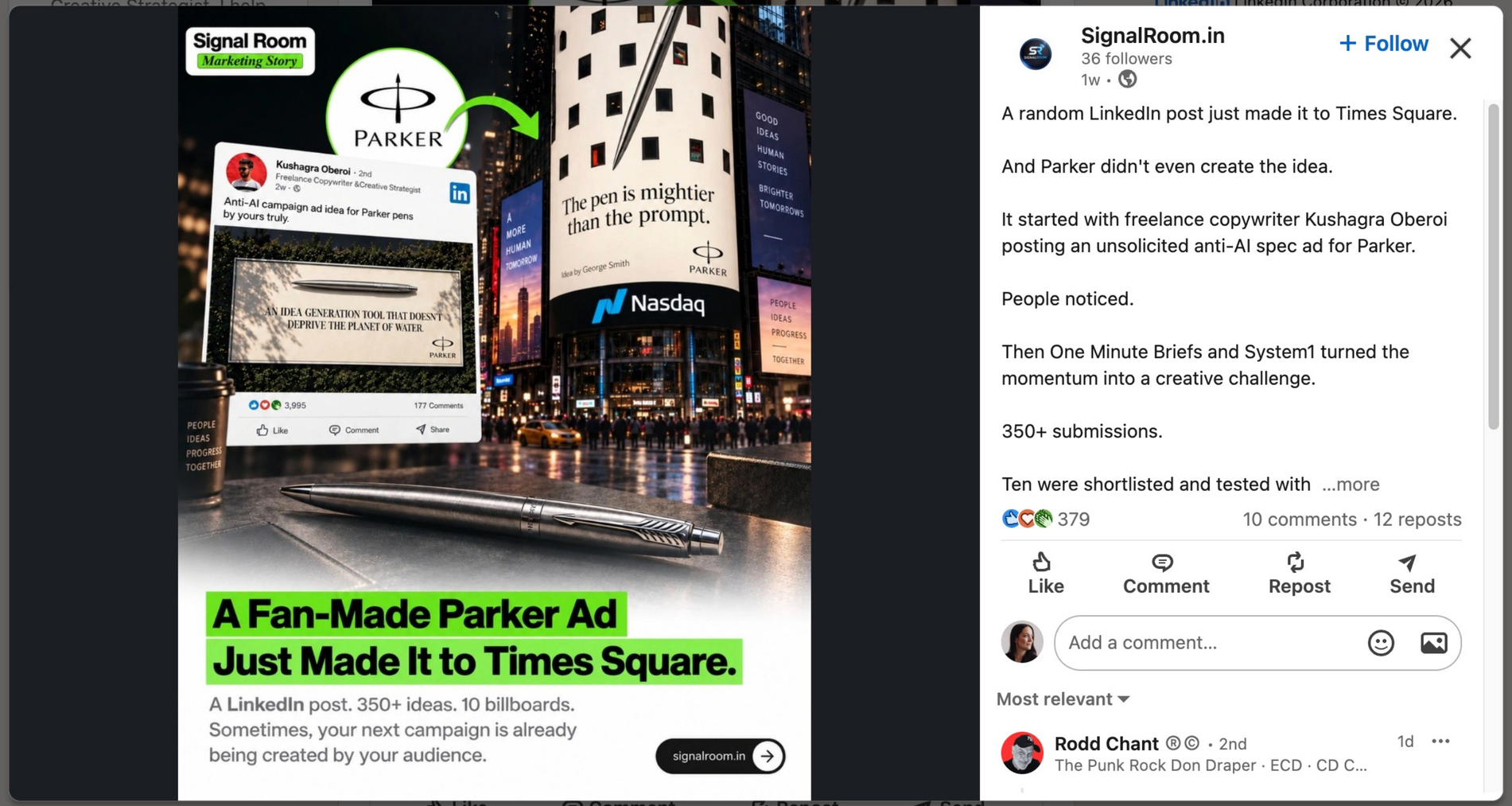

SignalRoom.in
36 followers
1w ·

+ Follow

A random LinkedIn post just made it to Times Square.

And Parker didn't even create the idea.

It started with freelance copywriter Kushagra Oberoi posting an unsolicited anti-AI spec ad for Parker.

People noticed.

Then One Minute Briefs and System1 turned the momentum into a creative challenge.

350+ submissions.

Ten were shortlisted and tested with ...more

379 10 comments · 12 reposts

Like Comment Repost Send

Add a comment...

Most relevant

Rodd Chant ®© · 2nd
The Punk Rock Don Draper · ECD · CD C...
1d

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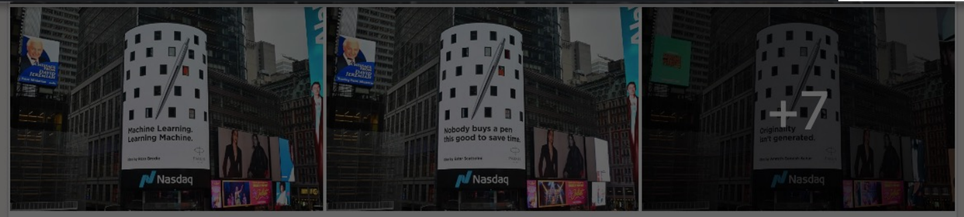

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It started when copywriter **Kushagra Oberoi** shared a spec ad for a Parker billboard on LinkedIn. **Andrew Tindall** saw it and called it "the best ad" he'd seen that week. When people began suggesting ways to improve it, Andrew challenged his followers to create their own ads.

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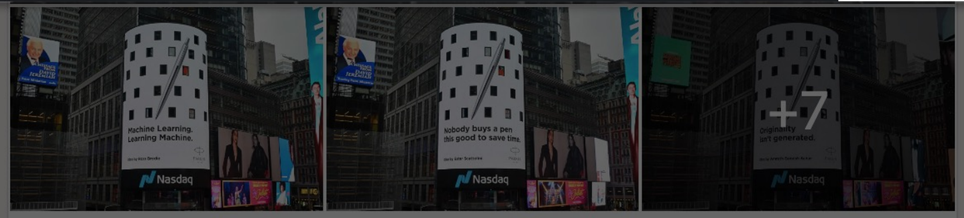

PROOF *of* REALITY

- “Making of” BTS series on brand socials
- Real-time journals of campaign development
- Snapshots of sketches, sticky notes, whiteboards
- Side-by-side AI draft vs. final human-refined content



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May 8, 2024 12:10pm PT

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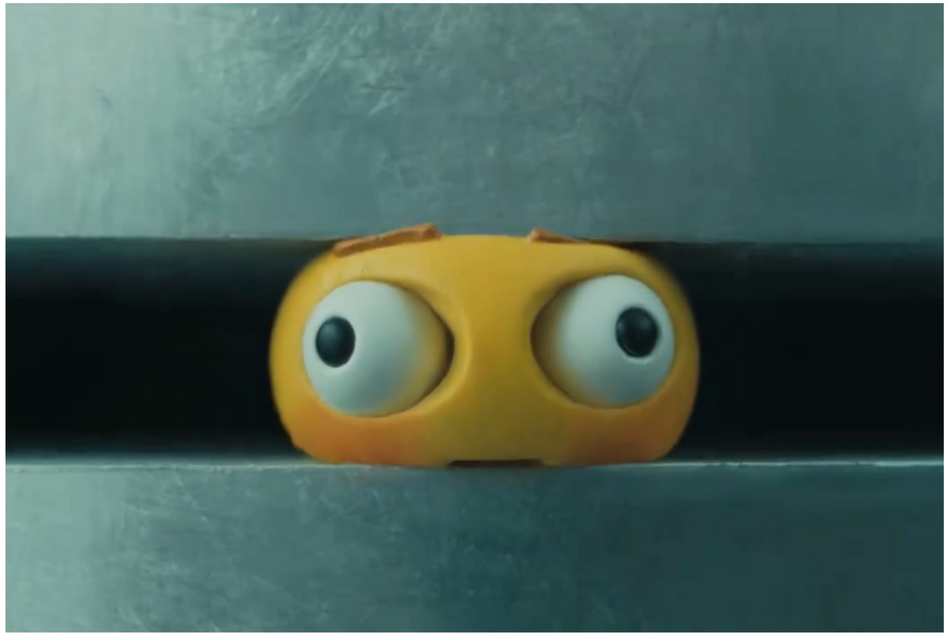
By Todd Spangler



Apple

Why is this so poignant?

HUMAN CONTEXT

1
Temporal

2
Cultural

3
Somatic

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What *really* matters?



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