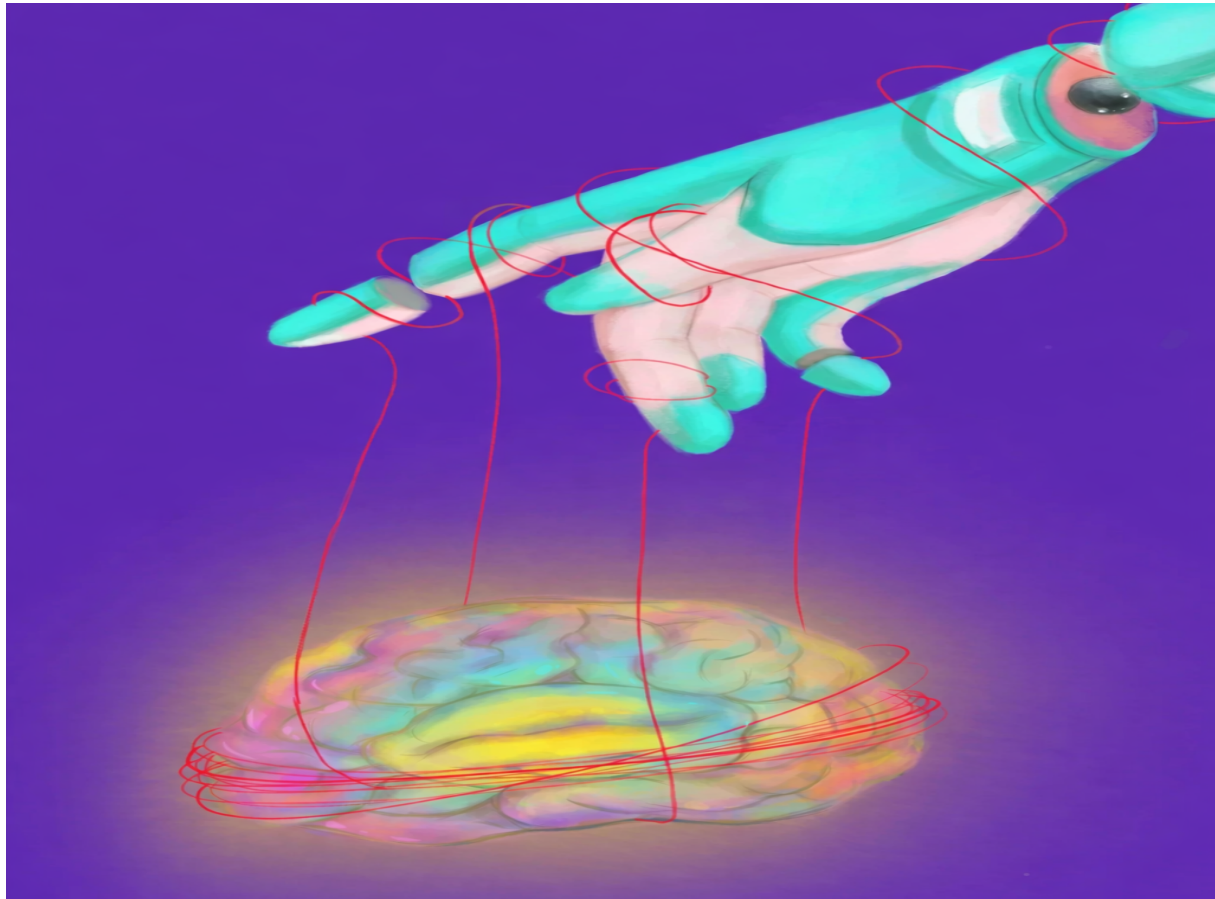


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The Dance of Neurons and AI



In the age of digital media, we often believe that we are actively searching for information, but in reality we are often just “responders” guided precisely by algorithms. Once algorithms detect our interests and preferences, platforms continue to push similar content, encouraging us to join discussions, keep searching, and even gradually shaping the topics we focus on and the direction of our thinking.

British journalist Mary Harrington points out in [Thinking Is Becoming a Luxury Good](#) that short-video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube compete for users’ attention and traffic. The core logic of their algorithms is not to prioritize the depth or value of content, but to maximize reach and viewing time. Under the logic of capitalism, platforms tend to promote emotional, fragmented, and even controversial content in order to increase interaction. In this process, media is no longer just a tool for spreading information; it gradually becomes a force that shapes cognition and even pushes political agendas. Over time, users’ judgment may be weakened, and their thinking patterns may be influenced without them realizing it.

As algorithmic systems gradually draw us into carefully designed platform models, human thinking can become more passive. Frequently switching video scenes and rapidly delivered information enter the brain in fragmented forms, constantly interrupting our cognitive rhythm. This poses a serious challenge to concentration. In such an environment, thinking becomes fragmented and may even turn into a “luxury.” At the same time, creators are also influenced by algorithms. Under the pressure of viral spread and click-based logic, creators have to cater to algorithmic preferences in order to gain exposure and traffic, which unconsciously limits their

creative space. Content becomes more similar, with less originality, and creative freedom is shaped by traffic mechanisms to some extent.

However, according to the survey conducted by my group (with participants mainly aged 18, along with a few from other age groups), most respondents believe that social media does have some negative impact on personal thinking and cognition, but that this impact depends on the type of content. Some participants also said they would verify information instead of accepting everything without question. This suggests that users are not completely passive or incapable of thinking. Even in an algorithm-driven information environment, individuals still retain a certain level of reflection and awareness. Therefore, in today's algorithm-dominated era, users should try to understand how to adjust algorithms appropriately, make platforms more inclusive, and attempt to take some control of algorithms at the individual level in order to regain their own rhythm.

When we discuss the negative effects of digital media, the conversation often quickly turns to whether children are becoming less intelligent because of electronic screens. However, this discussion often ignores a deeper dimension: the structural difference between poverty and wealth.

In *Thinking Is Becoming a Luxury Good*, Mary Harrington notes that there is a clear difference in how children from low-income families (with annual household incomes below \$35,000) and children from high-income families (with annual incomes above \$100,000) use electronic devices. Wealthier families tend to impose stricter limits on technology and value long-form reading, while children from low-income families are more likely to use electronic devices for

entertainment. She further suggests that long-form reading may gradually become an exclusive domain for the elite, religious groups, or conservative families. The data supporting the article is undeniable; long periods of screen use can indeed lead to vision problems, lack of sleep, and reduced attention. These effects are real and should not be ignored. However, directly attributing the differences in literacy, language ability, or attention among low-income children to screen time is too shallow.

Low-income families often face shortages of books, unstable housing, and limited parental education. According to a report by [Priya Menon from the Department of Psychology at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi](#), economic stress, parental education levels, and domestic violence are all closely related to children's cognitive development and emotional well-being. In such circumstances, even if the influence of screens were completely removed, cognitive gaps might still exist.

More importantly, these gaps did not begin with the rise of smartphones. Differences in language ability, reading habits, and career outcomes between social classes existed long before digital media became widespread. Focusing only on “screen time” shifts attention away from the unequal distribution of educational resources. If long-form reading is really becoming an “elite exclusive,” the problem is not that children from low-income families use electronic devices too much, but that high-quality educational resources have always been concentrated in the hands of a few. Therefore, we can see that the educational resources and cultural capital possessed by wealthy families are the lasting foundation of cognitive differences.

In today's era of technology, things have become more complex. Facing the negative side of technology mentioned by Harrington, we can also try to find a solution. In fact, with proper guidance, we can use the "boat" of AI as a great tool to find new ways of thinking. Training classes are expensive for poor families, so children from low-income backgrounds can use AI's problem-solving logic and personalized tutoring to improve their learning efficiency. Creators can earn income through short videos in a tough job market, and children who cannot afford hobby classes can browse YouTube to learn about programming, design, and the study methods of others.

At the same time, we can use the idea of "Thinking becoming a luxury Good " to imagine the arrival of AI. Some students will use AI's fast thinking and processing abilities to complete essays, which makes the independence of their work a source of worry. However, capitalism has already predicted this and prepared for it. Since then, many websites or software for "lowering AI scores" and "testing AI rates" have appeared, and students will choose to pay for them. This creates a closed loop under the logic of market capitalism, gaining huge profits and wealth for market capital.