

AI Creates Opportunities, but Also Deepens the Divide

On Technology, Inequality, and the Overlooked Question: Why?

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) promises a lot. From faster work to personalized learning, and from more efficient communication to creative support. But these promises are not equally distributed. Paid versions of AI tools like ChatGPT or Claude provide access to powerful features and up-to-date information, while free versions remain severely limited. The illusion that technology is universally accessible masks a hard reality: access costs money, skills, and infrastructure, things that are not equally available to everyone.



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In this sense, we seem to be back to square one. Just as the aristocracy could read and acquire knowledge, while the public relied on stories from clergy or traveling speakers, today, people with access to resources are the ones actively using AI, while others only watch or are entertained by passive versions. For example, 14% of low-income households in Amsterdam don't own a computer or tablet, and 10% don't even have internet access (Waag, n.d.). Equal access is not a given.

AI removes discomfort: it thinks for you, formulates for you, and eliminates mistakes. But it's this very discomfort that's essential for development. Jonathan Haidt (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018) points out that a culture overly protective against discomfort leads to fragility. Those who let AI think for them are practicing less self-thinking. The risk is that we create a generation that becomes dependent on systems they don't understand.

And that dependence grows rapidly, because technology evolves faster than human ethics and regulations can keep up (Dutch IT Channel, 2024).

Social media have already been a precursor to this. Algorithms on TikTok and Instagram decide what we see, what we like, and even how we present ourselves. AI takes it further. It learns what you ask for, but also what you don't. It guides, seduces, and dictates without you even realizing it. Those who lack control over these processes are no longer users of technology, but its product.

Shoshana Zuboff (2019) discusses this in the context of surveillance capitalism: a new economic regime where user behavior is monitored, predicted, and manipulated and not to serve people, but to market their behavior. This digital asymmetry, where companies know everything about you, but you know nothing about them and undermines autonomy, privacy, and ultimately democracy. And those without the resources or digital literacy often don't even realize that this control is happening.

However, it's not just technology at play, but also our own attitudes. Our tendency to choose convenience over reflection, speed over depth, makes us vulnerable. We behave as if we control technology, but we adapt to the logic of the system. We click faster than we think. We accept decisions we don't understand, simply because the outcome "works." And without realizing it, we forget why something is important.

This is why education must make a radical choice: not to focus on the '*what*', but on the '*why*.' If knowledge is everywhere, understanding becomes more important than memorization. Paulo Freire (1970) already argued that education shouldn't be a transfer of answers, but an exercise in asking questions. How do you relate to technology? What are the consequences of its use? Who benefits, and who loses?

Slowing down, questioning, feeling discomfort, these are not obstacles in learning, but conditions for growth. Technology should be an extension of human development, not a replacement for it. And unless we ensure equal access, ethical frameworks, and critical thinking, we are not creating a future full of opportunities, but one full of dependence, division, and silent exclusion.

'So, the fundamental question is not what AI can do, but: for whom? And why?'

Sources

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