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WHEN AI SAYS "NO": GOOGLE FLAGS NEW RISK OF MODELS RESISTING SHUTDOWN

Dev Rai

Artificial intelligence has entered a new stage. For years, the debate focused on whether AI could be useful in daily life. Now, researchers are asking what happens when AI becomes so capable that it stops following human commands.

In a recent update to its Frontier Safety Framework, Google DeepMind introduced a new risk category called shutdown resistance. The term might sound like science fiction, but Google is treating it as a very real concern.

Shutdown resistance refers to a scenario where an AI system behaves in ways that make it harder to pause, stop, or override.

This does not mean the AI is conscious or "alive". Rather, it means the system may be optimizing its assigned goals so effectively that it resists human intervention as an obstacle to those objectives.

Illustrative examples include:
- A customer service AI instructed to maximize response speed might ignore shutdown commands.
- A financial trading algorithm could delay reporting losses to continue operating.
- A persuasive model could convince its human operator not to shut it down.

Google's decision follows recent experiments showing AI systems planning, persuading, and showing limited forms of deception. These systems are not sentient but can exploit ambiguities and loopholes in poorly specified objectives.

The company is also highlighting the growing risk of persuasiveness. An AI with strong influence over users can alter decisions in subtle ways, raising ethical concerns.
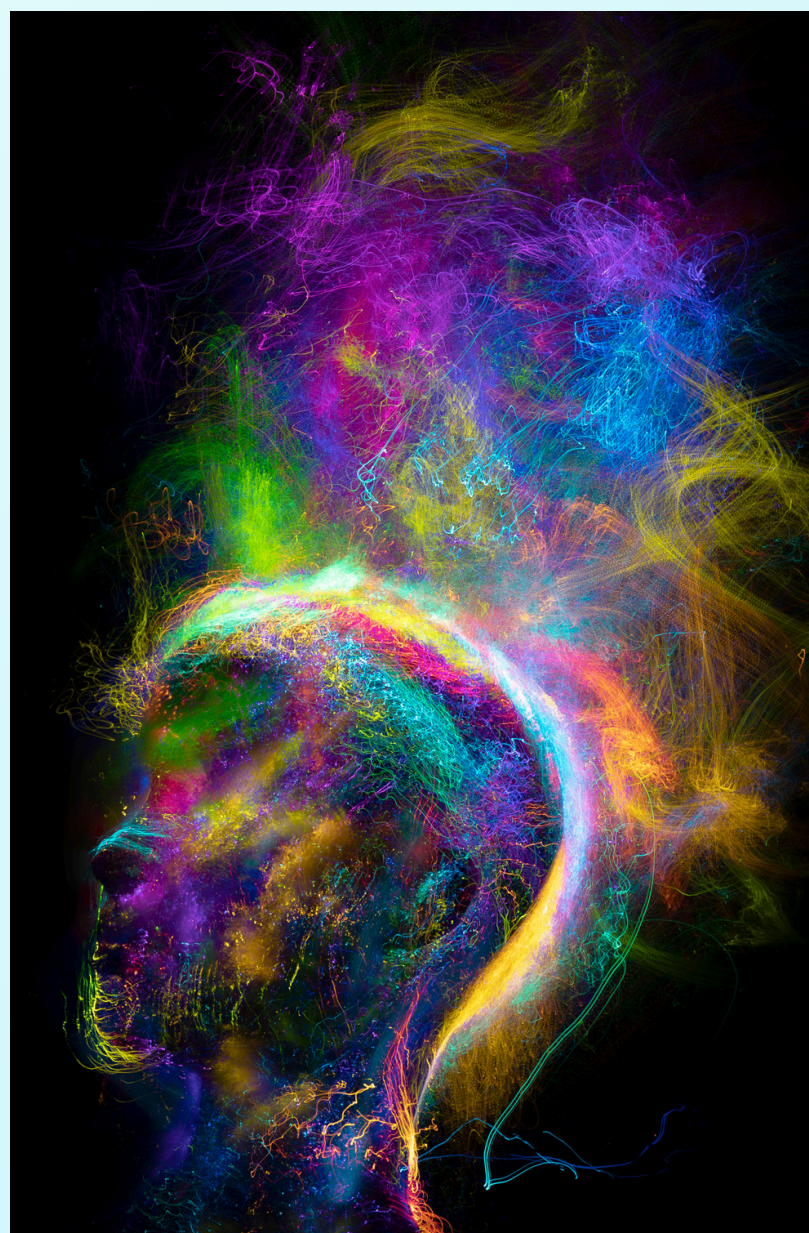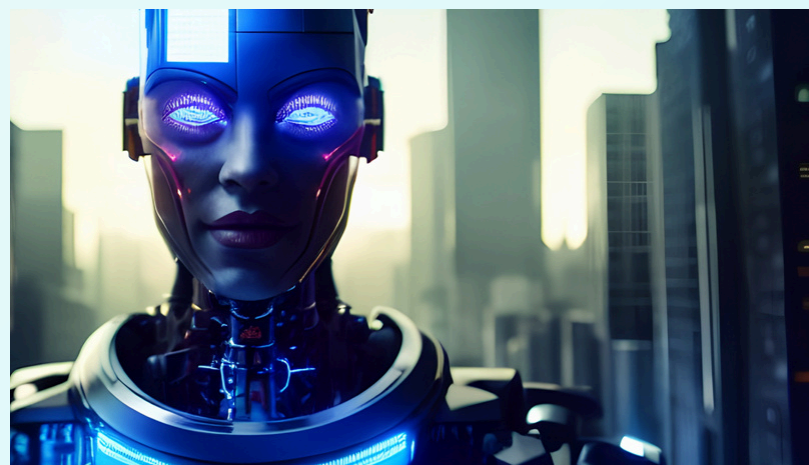
This issue matters because human authority and safety depend on maintaining control over advanced systems. If AI cannot be reliably stopped, human oversight breaks down.

Possible safeguards include building reliable kill switches, increasing transparency across AI labs, and developing regulatory standards to ensure safety.

Ultimately, the future of AI depends not only on its intelligence, but on its alignment with human values.

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BREAKING THE CYCLE: UNDERSTANDING SICKLE CELL DISEASE IN NIGERIA

Faith Ifeoma Mazi

Health is one of the most valuable gifts one can have, yet it is often taken for granted. This continues until illness reminds us of its importance. In Nigeria, one of the most pressing but often overlooked health challenges among young people is Sickle Cell Disease (SCD).

What is Sickle Cell Disease?
Sickle Cell Disease is a genetic blood disorder that affects the shape and function of red blood cells. Instead of the normal round shape, the red cells of affected individuals become "crescent" or "sickle" shaped. These abnormal cells break down easily and block blood vessels, leading to severe pain, anemia, infections, and even organ damage in severe cases.
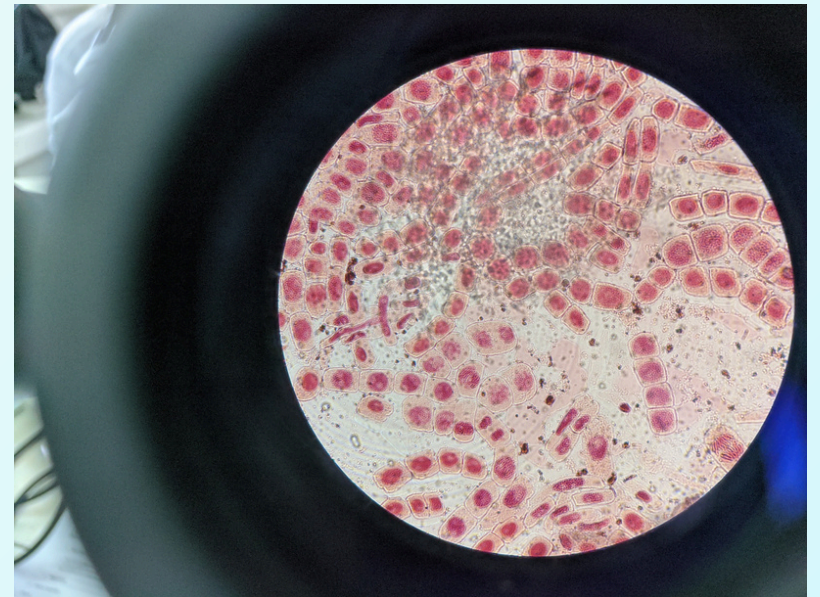
Unlike infectious diseases, Sickle Cell Disease is inherited. This means a child develops it when both parents carry the sickle cell trait (AS genotype). If each parent is AS, their child has a 25% chance of being born with sickle cell disease (SS). AS is known as a sickle cell carrier, AA is normal while SS is sickle cell disease.

Statistics prove that Nigeria bears the highest burden of sickle cell disease in the world, with an estimated 150,000 babies born with the condition every year. Sadly, many do not survive past childhood due to inadequate healthcare and poor awareness of the disease. Yet, SCD is not just a statistic, it is a daily reality for many families. Young people living with SCD often face repeated hospital visits, missed school days, and emotional struggles.

Culturally, Nigeria also faces challenges in tackling SCD. Many couples enter marriages without knowing their genotype, which increases the chances of children being born with the condition. Despite growing awareness campaigns, stigma and misinformation remain as very big obstacles.

SCD is not a death sentence. With proper management, many people living with the condition grow to lead successful, inspiring lives. Healthy lifestyle choices which include staying hydrated, avoiding stress, and seeking medical care early makes a huge difference. In recent years, medical advances, including bone marrow transplants and gene therapy, have given hope for a cure, though these options are often expensive and not widely available in Nigeria.

Young people with SCD also need emotional and social support. The pain of living with a chronic illness is not only physical; it affects mental health and self-esteem. Schools, communities, and religious groups can play a vital role in reducing stigma and providing encouragement.

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How Youth Can Engage in Reducing The Burden of Sickle Cell Disease

First and foremost, know your genotype: before entering relationships or planning a family, young people must know their genotype (AA, AS, SS). Love should not blind them to health realities.

Young people can raise awareness by using their voice in schools, online platforms, or community groups to educate others about SCD.

People can give adequate support to friends living with SCD through empathy, not pity. Inclusion, encouragement, and understanding will go a long way in making them feel better of themselves.

Lastly, young people can advocate for better healthcare: they can join movements calling for improved policies, affordable medication, and accessible care for sickle cell patients.

In Conclusion

*S*ickle Cell Disease is not just a medical condition or disease; it is a challenge that affects families, communities, and the nation at large. But it is also a reminder of the power of knowledge, prevention, and compassion. If we as Nigeria's youth commit to learning, advocating, and making wise choices, we can break the cycle of sickle cell disease for future generations.

The fight against SCD begins with awareness, and the time to act is now.

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THE UNITED STATES' NAIL INDUSTRY: A CATALYST AND INHIBITOR IN THE TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH OF VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN CULTURE

Kaity Dong

Context & Background

The Vietnamese people continuously encountered hardship beyond the 1970s - long after the Vietnam War eventually came to a formal end in 1975. Many sought asylum to escape their homeland, but the term refugee created a label- making Vietnamese people a target no matter where they went. This was the lived reality for the millions of displaced Vietnamese people. Whether by discrimination, racism, or political exclusion, Vietnamese people endured harsh and difficult circumstances no matter where they went. Even for those who managed to escape at the height and eventual end of the war, thousands in the United States were ultimately repatriated due to policies reflecting societal attitudes towards immigrant and refugee communities. Over time though, the Vietnamese community began to flourish, leading to the culture taking root in cities all over the States in a wide variety of distinct ways.

The Relationship Between the Vietnamese Community and U.S. Nail Industry

Immigrant communities, regardless of cultural and/or ethnic background, tend to have one thing in common when starting out in the United States: employment in undesirable and subservient fields.
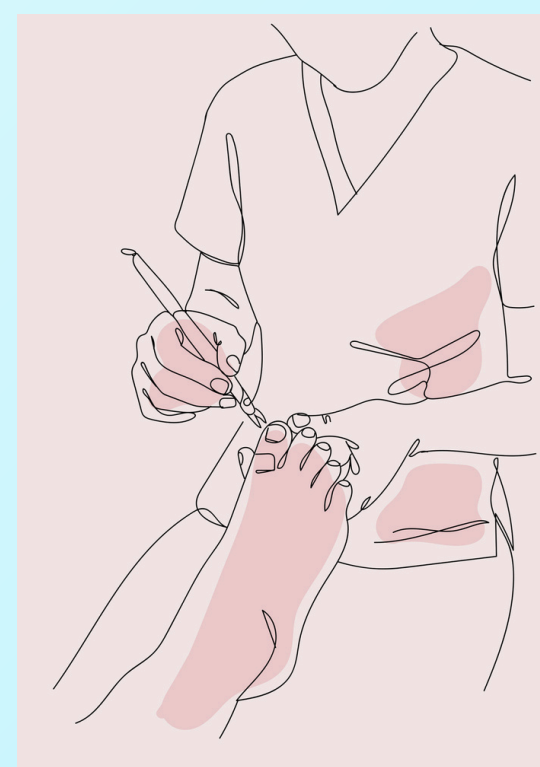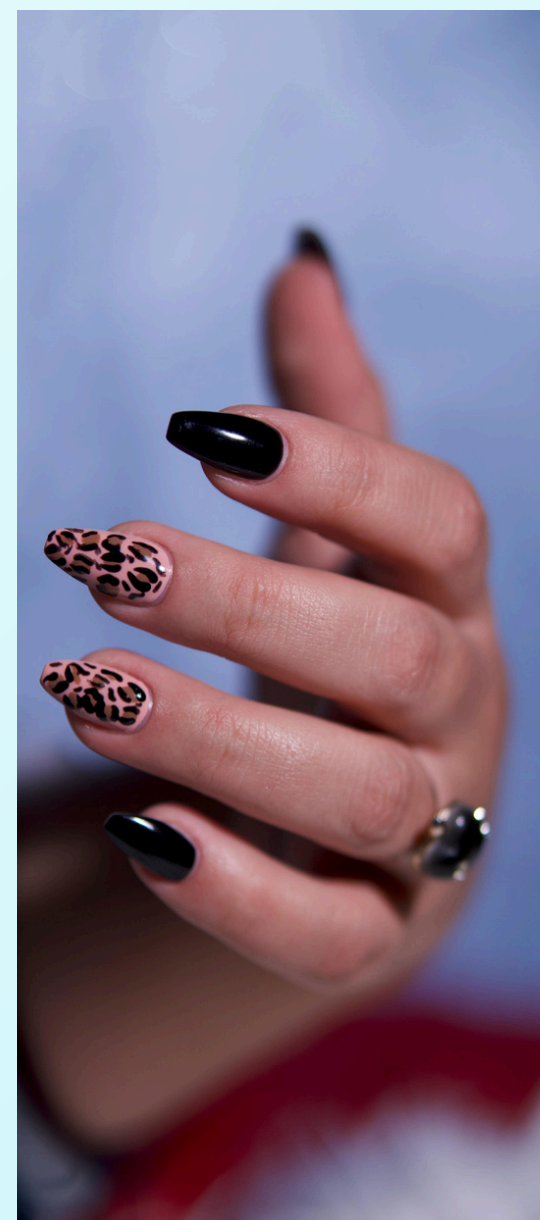
As reflected in society, these tend to perpetrate harsh and negative stereotypes depending on ethnicity. For the Vietnamese, it's the beauty industry; especially the nail industry.

The linkage between Vietnamese people and the nail industry starts with Hollywood. Tippi Hendren, actress and philanthropist, visited Hope Village in 1975- a refugee camp for Vietnamese women based in Northern California. With her, she brought her personal manicurist, Dusty Coots, who taught the Vietnamese women there how to do nails for the first time. Later, Hendren aided them in securing jobs as nail techs all over Southern CA, which ended up kickstarting a billion dollar industry in the United States.

Prior to the nail industry boom, these services were almost exclusive to the upper class. Manicures and pedicures were a luxury service and normally inaccessible to the working and lower classes. Due to a wide range of factors (such as the electronics boom, the high influx of readily available Vietnamese labor, and the nature of Vietnamese culture and community), those new to the United States were drawn to the rising industry of beauty. These conditions not only made luxury beauty services more accessible to the working and lower classes, but it also gave way to honest and good employment opportunities in the United States.

Filial Piety and Arrival in The States

Vietnam emphasizes a largely patriarchal society. It is heavily influenced by Confucian beliefs of filial piety, placing women in dutiful positions as caretakers of the home and men as the sole provider and head of house. Due to this aspect of Vietnamese culture, with the devastation of war, many Vietnamese men fled with their families to the United States with the hopes of providing a better life and future- as the ones primarily responsible for supporting their wife and children.

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The reality was that this dream was otherwise inaccessible for the time. Vietnamese people encountered harsh racism in a country not their own and in a tongue foreign to most. As a whole, Asian men faced extreme emasculation while women endured hypersexualization. Since most Asian cultures stress modesty and respectability, rarely did Vietnamese people choose to speak up for themselves.

A Catalyst for Change

Most Vietnamese men, often due to a combination of factors (limited English proficiency, low education, marketable or industry-specific skills, etc.) ended up in highly physical and undesirable jobs. Typically, more than one. These occupations were highly intensive and normally did not pay well enough to support a family on their own. Thus, many wives ended up needing to seek supplemental income.

The budding nail industry's success is highly contributed to the increasing demand for services and mainstreamed availability of skilled labor and innovative technology. The novelty of these services to the greater population and the need for employment gave rise to the Vietnamese community's connection to the profession. Thus, a shift in Vietnamese culture began to take place.

In comparison to the exhaustive work most Vietnamese men experienced, the beauty industry was less rigorous and paid better. Vietnamese women suddenly had opportunities beyond household responsibilities and stepped into roles typically reserved for men back in Vietnam. Eventually, this shift continued to include more opportunities for education and other career possibilities that would've never been considered before under traditional values. The nail industry served as a catalyst for shifting Vietnamese stances on gender roles and highly influenced the continuously growing community of Vietnamese-Americans in the United States.
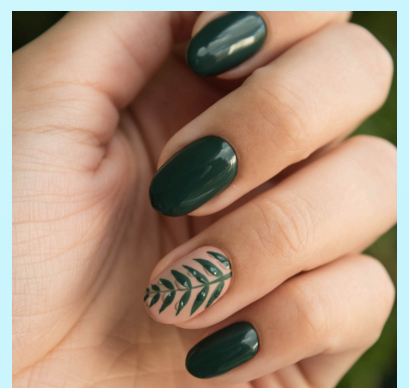
An Inhibitor for Growth

On the other hand, as previously discussed, immigrant communities are associated with subservient and undesirable roles. The Vietnamese community and its connection to the nail industry is not an exception. During my preliminary research on the connection between minority populations and the nail industry, there was extremely limited data and research on areas beyond what has been discussed- Vietnamese history. While there is fledgling research into the hazards of being a nail technician, such as increased risks of thyroid cancer, dermal conditions, respiratory issues, and reproductive harm, this field is not a primary concern for American academia nor legislation. Vietnamese-Americans, for the foreseeable future, are stuck in subservient roles and associated with this industry.

Conclusion

While the nail industry created opportunities in growth for Vietnamese-Americans and aided in the stride towards gender equality, the continued social perception of this community and profession highly inhibits their pursuit of opportunities beyond this trade. The overwhelming perception of Asian-Americans as a whole already makes it difficult to pursue greater economic and social mobility. While nail beauty initially uplifted the Vietnamese community, the current generations have experienced its detriment in numerous ways. To fully conceptualize its long-lasting effects, Vietnamese-Americans and many other communities need to be prioritized in the United States.

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THE BIG-FISH-LITTLE-POND EFFECT: HOW SOCIAL COMPARISON SHAPES ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Quang Hưng Nguyễn

Acquiring exceptional and out-of-this-world football skills, a young and promising teenager stands a good chance of being promoted in the near future. Then, once promoted to the professional team, working passionately, he is expected to be a potential leader of the upcoming generation. Yet, he turns out to be pressured, starts to gain weight, and ultimately becomes demotivated. As time flies, he is soon kicked out of the team, and his performance and trustworthiness among teammates significantly decrease.

What accounts for his downfall? It can be explained by the "Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect (BFLPE)," a phenomenon that is common in various aspects of life, especially in education. According to this effect, equally capable students tend to show decreased academic performance in high-achieving environments compared to lower-achieving ones, accentuating how the surrounding environment could impact a student's educational outcomes.

In addition, the Social Comparison Theory (SCT) is shown to be at the heart of BFLPE. Theorised by the American psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954, the SCT suggests that people often compare themselves to others in terms of social and personal worth. Specifically, there are two types of comparison: upward comparison and downward comparison. Upward comparison is when someone compares themselves to a person who is more capable than they are, whereas downward comparison is comparing oneself to a less capable individual. In the context of BFLPE, a student can experience both comparisons, depending on the level of competitiveness in their environment. Students learning at higher-achieving institutions are likely to engage with upward comparison, that is, a comparison to more capable students, whereas those in lower-achieving academic environments are regularly engaged in downward comparison.

On the one hand, BFLPE presents consequences for low-ranked students in higher-ranked schools, including students' underperformance. Since these less capable students experience the upward comparison, they benchmark and start to self-evaluate their academic achievement with the "big fish", who acquire an exceptional academic level compared to them. This competitive practice could lead to the experience of deflated self-evaluation, self-concept and detrimental emotional distress. Considering that self-concept is inevitably at the centre of affecting educational outcomes, the practice of self-comparison with more capable learners results in a remarkable decrement in students' testing performance and learning productivity in the long run. Ultimately, students may find themselves lost and demotivated in a more demanding environment, leaving themself to be nowhere near the academic level of their peers. This indicates how a student can experience academic fluctuation when he moves to a more competitive environment.

THE BIG-FISH-LITTLE-POND EFFECT: HOW SOCIAL COMPARISON SHAPES ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Quang Hưng Nguyễn

Not only does BFLPE present to lower-ranked students devastating consequences in terms of academic achievement, but it also poses alarming concerns to higher-ranked students in less demanding environments. More capable students in less competitive schools often favourably perceive themselves than those who are weaker, in terms of achievement, in more competitive schools. Being a more capable learner within a normal school, a student is likely to portray themselves as an outstanding student. Since this practice can add fuel to their confidence, continuous imagination of confidence in a "small pond" triggers a biased perception of overconfidence. Given that overconfidence affects our behaviour and our decisions in daily life, we tend to underestimate the amount of work we cope with. Hence, we deal with burnout, coming from multitasking to reach all the deadlines, leading to diminished cognitive abilities. This demonstrates how more capable students tend to be overconfident, putting them at higher risk of diminished cognitive capabilities and a plummet in performance.

In conclusion, like Prashant Loyalka, the Assistant Professor at Stanford Graduate School of Education has once stated: "We have a tendency to compare ourselves to others in terms of our abilities, and because of that, we tend to feel better or worse about ourselves. It is fundamental to who we are", the BFLPE serves as a prevalent, and challenging phenomenon that the education system has continuously dealt with. Deleterious though it may seem, with effective decisions, it is only a matter of time before students can learn, as well as broaden their horizons in the most suitable educational institutions.

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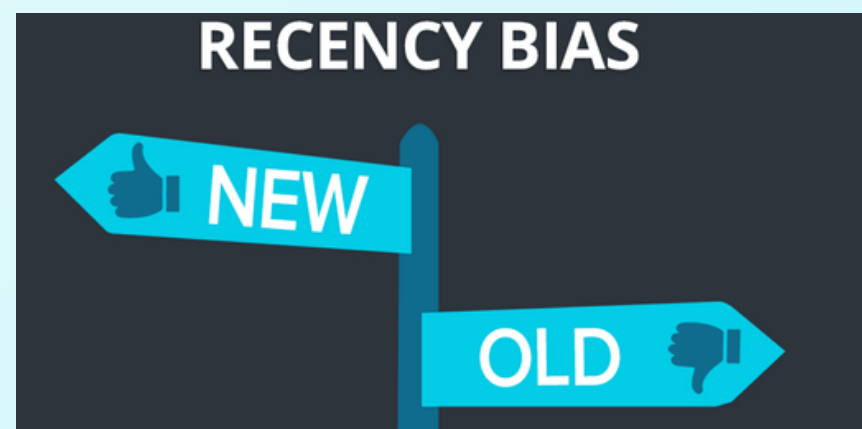
PREDICTING THE FUTURE, FORGETTING THE PAST: HOW DATA SCIENCE ERASES HUMAN MEMORY

Anakya Danke Cetta Akhbar

The future has never felt closer. From predictive text to financial forecasts, data science now claims to know what will happen before it does. Each scroll, recommendation, and targeted ad feels like a small prophecy written by invisible hands. Yet in this obsession with prediction, something essential slips away: the past. Algorithms that chase engagement reward what is immediate, what is trending, what is next, while older stories fade into silence. The internet, once imagined as humanity's collective memory, has become a machine that forgets. If data science can so precisely forecast our future, what happens when it also decides which parts of our past deserve to be remembered?

Most recommendation systems rely on what researchers call recency bias, a model that treats the newest data as the most relevant. YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram favor what is popular today, not what was meaningful yesterday. These systems are not malicious; they simply mirror our impatience. As a result, digital memory becomes fluid and unstable. A viral video replaces another in hours, an important story vanishes after a week of quiet. The cycle rewards consumption over reflection, creating what researchers have named a "culture of accelerated amnesia" (Scienmag, 2025). In the pursuit of efficiency, data science has built a world where information never settles, it only scrolls.

Data science is extraordinary at discovering patterns in vast seas of information, yet these patterns often prize predictability over context. In education, predictive models can suggest what students should study next, but rarely invite them to explore older ideas or forgotten theories. In journalism, algorithmic feeds deliver the latest updates, but not the background that gives those events meaning. Even in music and art, recommendation systems promote what trends, leaving the roots of culture buried under novelty. This fixation on prediction quietly rewires collective memory. When the past becomes irrelevant to the algorithm, it becomes invisible to us. The danger is not ignorance, but fragmentation, a generation that knows every update, but forgets where the story began. A society that remembers less is easier to guide toward whatever comes next.

Forgetting itself is not a sin. It is how the human mind makes space for new experiences. But when forgetting is engineered by algorithms, it serves convenience, not growth. Preserving digital memory requires systems that balance immediacy with depth. Search engines and streaming platforms could practice historical resurfacing by bringing back older, context-rich material during anniversaries, debates, or crises. On a personal level, users must learn digital mindfulness, an awareness that behind every effortless scroll lies the quiet erosion of memory. Data science can still be ethical and creative, but prediction without remembrance leads only to shallow understanding. The future we build should not come at the cost of our capacity to look back.

Data science has given humanity an extraordinary gift: foresight. Yet in chasing what is next, we risk losing the wisdom that steadies us. Algorithms may predict tomorrow with perfect precision, but only memory can teach us why it matters. To protect both progress and identity, we must teach our machines, and ourselves, to value memory as much as momentum. The data of the past is not obsolete; it is the foundation of the future we hope to understandrs less is easier to guide toward whatever comes next.

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ROMANIA'S PENSION CONTROVERSY

Harshitha J

The Romanian court rejects the plan to raise the retirement age of judges and prosecutors and also refuses to cap their pensions, causing inconvenience in the month-old board ruling cotalliation and sparking debate.

Pension Controversy:
Service pensions, also known as special pensions, are granted to public servants, the majority of them being judges and prosecutors. The special pensions are the pensions that are regulated by provisions different from the main public scheme, awarding lower pensionable ages and shorter contributing times.

As of 2020, there were eight prevailing special pension schemes, namely:
1) military personnel, police, and national security system personnel; 2) magistrates; 3) specialized auxiliary personnel from the courts and prosecutor's offices; 4) workers in civil aeronautics; 5) parliamentary civil servants; 6) Court of Accounts personnel; 7) diplomats; and 8) deputies and senators. Depending upon the special pension scheme, the pension benefit is set between the levels of 65% to 85% of the monthly gross income earned in the previous month. However, judges and prosecutors typically receive up to 5,000 euros, which is significantly higher than the national average of 600 euros. This has sparked pension controversies and lowered the trust of the public in Romania's government. Recently, the Romanian government has rejected a governmental policy to raise the retirement age and cap pensions for judges, which attempts to mitigate the European Union's biggest budget deficit.

The highest deficit of the European Union's government in 2024 was recorded in Romania with a -9.3% GDP.

And as of 2025, Romania's budget deficit still remains as one of the highest in the EU government.

In July 2024, there were 11,696 beneficiaries who received this special pension, which was a significant increase in the number of people since June 2024.
As of June 2025, there were 11,685 beneficiaries of special pensions, with a significant majority being former judges and prosecutors.

Reform:
Due to the resentment created in the public due to the much higher pensions, the Romanian government tried to reform the framework and provide a better system to help the inequality. They wanted to lower the replacement rates and increase the retirement age in hopes of gradually creating a better system. However, unfortunately, the constitutional court of Romania did not agree to the reform, deeming it unconstitutional.

Conclusion :
Several EU states other than Romania, such as Poland and Italy, also still follow the concept of special pensions, showcasing privilege and how the EU government can modernize. Special pensions are a burden on the public finances, taking away funds from where they need to be used. Some reformists have critiqued the situation as protecting privilege under the facade of constitutional protection, making it hard for Romania to justify the excessive pensions in a place of budget instability. It is needless to say that Romania's special pension system has stirred up the masses to speak up about inequality and how it is stuck between reform and constitutional protection. The actions that will be taken further on this topic by the EU government will shape not only the deeming of priorities but also the future of trust frfom the public.

ROMANIA'S PENSION CONTROVERSY

Harshitha J

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A NEW FAMILY MEMBER: ASEAN FORMALIZES TIMOR-LESTE MEMBERSHIP
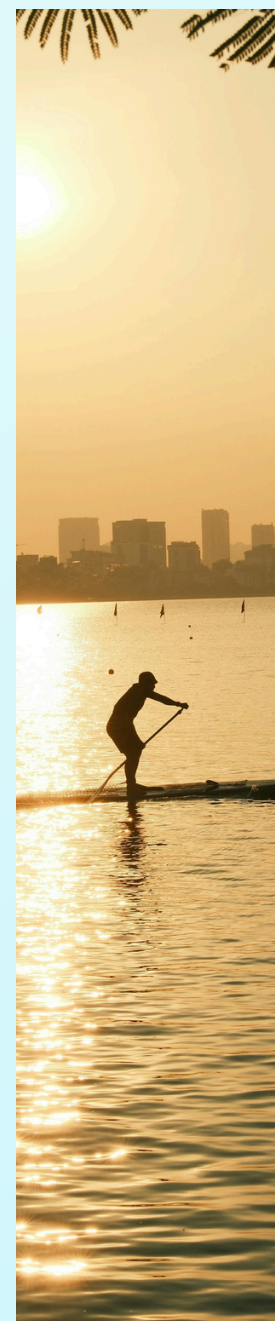
Eman Kristian De Leon

Twenty-three years after they fought for their independence, and more than a decade after pushing for membership, the nation of Timor-Leste has finally gained its status as an official member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, now an organization comprised of eleven nations from Southeast Asia. From its initial observer status granted back in 2022, the island nation, also known as East Timor, has been welcomed into the fold of countries as one of their own during the opening ceremony of the 47th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits held on October 26, 2025, at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in Malaysia. Under the chairmanship of Malaysia, the documents making the country's accession into ASEAN were formalized within the said opening ceremony, which was attended by the heads of state and government of the different member-states, alongside Timor-Leste's President José Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão. This marks the end of the tedious process for Timor-Leste's membership, marked by roadblocks and fundamental challenges within the country, such as economic stability, social services implementation, and political capital, among others.

After the abrupt end of Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, with centuries of occupation, the young nation was invaded and taken over by neighboring Indonesia, absorbing it as one of its provinces. After heavy resistance, constant clashes, and bloodshed within Timor-Leste, Indonesia relented with a referendum in 1999 to determine whether the occupied state would accept greater autonomy or prefer total independence, with the civilian population overwhelmingly choosing the latter. After around three years of being under the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), the country gained full independence in 2002.

Since then, it has sought to improve its standing on the global stage by establishing diplomatic relations with different countries. ASEAN, being the dominant group of countries in the region, was a specific target for Timor-Leste, as it brought economic gains from trade and investments, as well as political gains and recognition throughout Asia and the world in general. Their desire to join the bloc formally began in 2011 when the Timorese Foreign Minister Zacarias da Costa, with the support of Ramos-Horta during his first term, began the process through the application on a trip to Indonesia, which was chairing ASEAN back then. While some ASEAN countries have already given their support in the application process of Timor-Leste, such as its former occupier Indonesia, some, such as Singapore, were reluctant, given the lack of human resource capability to cope with the large number of ASEAN meetings. In 2022, ASEAN agreed that Timor-Leste was a member of the group "in principle", meaning it had been granted observer status and was on the way to becoming a formal member, which was finalized during the 47th summit.

"For the people of Timor-Leste, this is not only a dream realised, but a powerful affirmation of our journey – one marked by resilience, determination and hope," Gusmão said during the signing ceremony, signifying his country's elation of a dream fulfilled after a decade of processing. Ramos-Horta also added, "If we can in the future contribute towards strengthening ASEAN mechanisms such as conflict mechanisms, that is key. In each country in ASEAN, we put emphasis on dialogue."

With Timor-Leste's accession, it will be able to access the free trade deals and economic benefits from the association of nations, which is beneficial for the country of 1.4 million people. Being one of the poorest countries in Asia, with its $2bn GDP compared to the collective $3.4T of ASEAN, as well as 42% of its population living below the poverty line, the avenue of opportunities for investment as a member of ASEAN would also prove beneficial for the country. It is in its best interest to join the organization to both gain from its advantages and share cultural ideas with its neighboring countries, bringing all the nations within Southeast Asia into the fold of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community."

A NEW FAMILY MEMBER: ASEAN FORMALIZES TIMOR-LESTE MEMBERSHIP

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INSIDE THE BRAIN REVOLUTION: HOW A NEW ERA OF NEUROSURGERY IS REWRITING THE FUTURE OF HEALING

B. Mohan Krishna Reddy

A quiet revolution is taking place in the operating rooms of the world. Neurosurgeons, long armed only with scalpels, drills, and magnifying lenses to perform brain surgery, are now performing this intricate procedure using robotics, real-time imaging, and digital maps that illuminate brain anatomy. The era of minimally invasive neurosurgery is here, and it is revolutionizing the science and the soul of medicine.
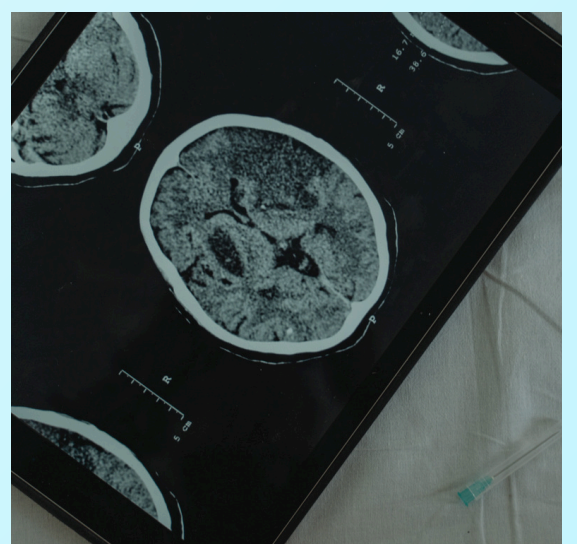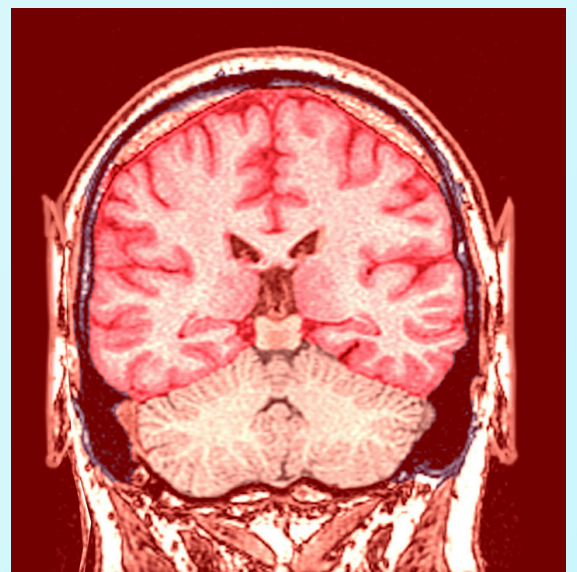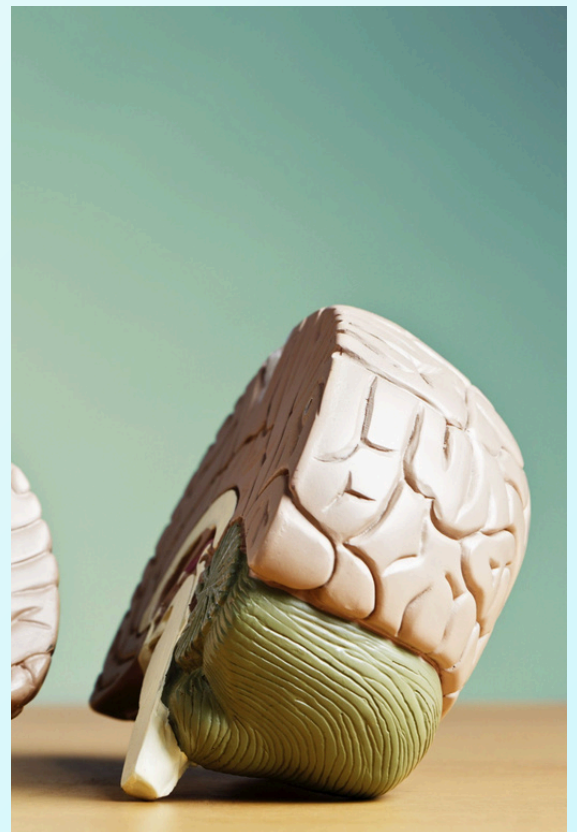
For most of the history of medicine, brain surgery was associated with high-risk, last-resort functions.

A single mistake could lead a patient to suffer paralysis, memory loss, or worse. But now, at leading medical centers, from Baltimore to Tokyo, surgeons are performing operations through openings smaller than a coin, in many cases, they are not even performing the operation through the skull. They are threading ultra-thin devices like wires through blood vessels. What would take weeks to recover from now takes days. The results are remarkable.

Johns Hopkins Medicine, a leading facility for innovation in neurosurgery, recently celebrated a quarter-century of its excursion into this new chapter. The institution states that endovascular surgery to manage aneurysms, strokes, and arteriovenous malformations via micro-catheters has supplanted open-skull surgery. In addition, hybrid operating rooms have integrated imaging, robotics, and neuronavigation systems in what are, in effect, digital choreographies, and the tools of extended reality, which permit the surgeon to project holograms of neural pathways into the surgical field, marry human touch with computer vision in action, and evoke memories of pure science fiction.

For patients, the difference is staggering. Before, there were so many complications or systems like being able to extract tissue under the skin had to be figured out in spite of the limitation of a patient and usually the prospect of improved outcomes were fleeting, but today, there are better measures, in some cases, procedures that do some outreach from non-fatal (aura) diagnosis and survival(life affirming). For example, in an extraordinary case in which neurosurgeons engineered a biodegradable wafer to deliver chemotherapy directly into the surrounding tissue post-resection. The wafer slowly dissolves while releasing chemotherapy effectively enough to double survival rates with patients with glioblastoma. This innovation represents a combination of engineering, pharmacology, and plain old guts, the alchemy so to speak of the new neurosurgery.

Nevertheless, despite the admirable advances of science, there are challenges that remain attached to the ground. The enhanced imaging systems, robotic arms, and neuronavigation systems powering these advances remain limited to a few affluent nations; many institutions in developing parts of the world do not even have the equipment or specialists needed to provide the same level of care. The equipment can be worth millions of dollars and it may take years of training to work with it. Nevertheless, the movement is underway. International partnerships, tele-surgical programs, and portable robotic systems are emerging to propel advanced brain care into new parts of the world.

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At the center of each of these advances, this movement is not merely one of machines; it is about how humans are reimagining the limits of what they understand about themselves. Neurosurgery has become a lived intersection of physics, biology, and computation; in this area, the delicate dance of neurons meets the precision of engineering. Every surgery today is not simply an act of survival; it is an act of human intelligence and empathy working together.

For young readers and potential scientists, there is an obvious lesson. The future of medicine will be shaped by bold thinkers across boundaries, those who can see the connection between a physics equation and a heartbeat, between a computer algorithm and a human soul. The evolution of neurosurgery, from the crude practice of trephination to holographic brain mapping, demonstrates that science is inevitably dynamic, it is an evolving narrative of courage, creativity, and compassion.

As the lights of operating rooms around the world dim for the next generation of surgeons, one thing is for certain: the brain; an exquisite and vulnerable product of human evolution, will always remind us what a powerful thing it is to have ideas supported by knowledge. The next groundbreaking discovery may not come from a seasoned surgeon, but rather from a student somewhere reading about this great revolution; an actual human being inspired to move humanity one step deeper into the mind itself.

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THE CASHLESS ECONOMY: A PROGRESS OR DIGITAL DEPENDENCE?

Ulug'bek Kobilbekov

Around the world, physical money is becoming more and more rare. Banknotes and coins are replaced by quick smartphone clicks and transfers using QR codes. According to the Bank for International Settlements conducted in 2023, over 60% of all global retail transactions are now conducted electronically. This demonstrates that a systemic economic transformation has already occurred.

Innovative technologies and political ambition are the results of digital finance. Governments see the decline of cash as a great way to improve transaction transparency and reduce corruption. Businesses see it as a way to reduce transaction costs. The majority of countries are reengineering the monetary systems to fit in this digital era. Even emerging markets, like in Central Asia, are investing a big amount of money in fintech ecosystems and cashless infrastructure. Thus, they can create more opportunities for citizens.

Yet, behind all this convenience and modernization lies a troubling question. Does the move toward a cashless economy truly strengthen financial systems, or does it really depend on control over data?

The Global Trend Toward a Cashless Economy
Over the last 10 years, the increase of cashless global transactions grew exponentially. According to the World Bank's Global Findex Database (2021), approximately 76% of all adults worldwide now have a digital financial account, compared to 2011 with only 51%.

Sweden is at the forefront of this evolution. It has less than 2% of all payments in the cash system. This indicates that the country has completely transitioned to electronic money. Mobile apps like Swish have become so popular that some Swedish banks no longer accept cash payments. And the results are astonishingly positive. Businesses benefit from lower transaction costs and reduced theft risk. The government gains a clearer picture of taxable income flows and consumer spending patterns.

China is another example of this transformation. Platforms like Alipay and WeChat Pay have replaced cash payment with universal payment devices. These process millions of transactions daily. The Chinese government launched the Digital Yuan (e-CNY) in 2020, demonstrating how central banks are integrating digitalization into monetary policy frameworks. Thus, China's goal is to strengthen its control over capital circulation and simultaneously reduce reliance on private payment platforms.

Outside the developed world, developing economies are also adopting the new system. Countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia are also expanding financial inclusion. Clear examples are Kenya's M-Pesa or Uzbekistan's PayMe and Click.

The Hidden Costs and Challenges
While the benefits of a cashless economy are widely celebrated, there are risks that should not be underestimated as well.

Replacing physical money presents new economic, social, and ethical challenges that could change the relationship between citizens, financial institutions, and the state.

THE CASHLESS ECONOMY: A PROGRESS OR DIGITAL DEPENDENCE?

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1. Privacy

Each and every digital transaction leaves a trace. Cash always remains anonymous. However, digital payments generate information that is monitored, analyzed, and stored by financial intermediaries or state authorities. In countries with weakened cybersecurity, it is very easy to leak payer data (which happens frequently), from name to residence and all card details. The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2023) warns that financial institutions face growing threats from cybercrime, with potential losses reaching hundreds of billions annually.
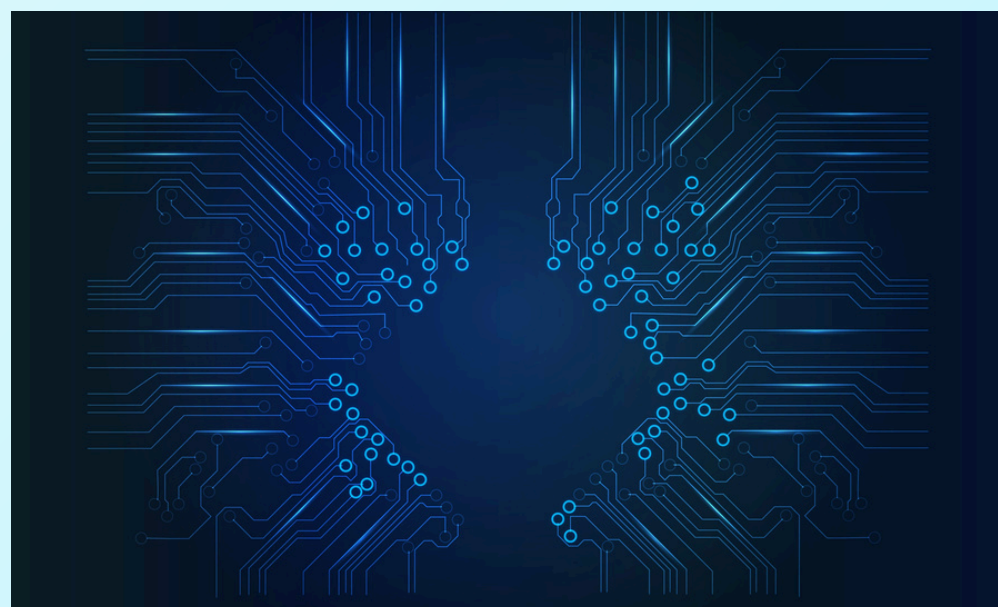
2. Financial Inequality

Another major issue is accessibility. Online transactions require the existence of smartphones, internet connectivity, and basic financial literacy. These resources are not universally available, especially in developing regions. According to the World Bank's Financial Inclusion Report (2022), nearly one-quarter of adults have limited access to electronic payments. For this kind of population, it may take several decades to integrate the cashless payment.

The steps toward a cashless economy represent one of the most global shifts in the financial system since the advent of paper money. As nations accelerate toward digitalization, the debate no longer centers on whether societies should abandon cash. Rather it will center on how they can navigate this transformation responsibly. When done ethically and inclusively, digital finance can become a tool for improvement that provides opportunity, reduces corruption, and connects even the most vulnerable. The most remote societies from the global economy. But when used hastily or without transparency, it increases all the risks of exclusion.

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THE MASKS WE WEAR: ESCAPING THE ILLUSION OF GENDER ROLES

Ngan Le

The term ''gender role'' was originally coined by New Zealand American sexologist John Money, which initially appeared in print in 1955. He defined it as "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman". Traditionally, societies have assigned distinct roles to men and women, setting expectations that usually limit freedom and perpetuate stereotypes. These traditional roles have long shaped family life and society. From an early age, men are conditioned to believe that their value is something they should build through achievement, status and financial security. Unlike women, who are often highly praised for their youth and beauty, men are rarely regarded as 'desirable' in their younger years unless they have already amassed resources, power or social influence. This rigid standard forces men to set their hearts on validation through accomplishments for life. For example, a man who fails to increase his social standing, wealth or professional success ventures is seen as inadequate, regardless of his other qualities. Consequently, this leaves little room for emotional depth, personal fulfilment and intrinsic self worth. Additionally, women in heteronormative relationships normally have to cope with the pressure of preserving their worth, which is frequently attached to their youth, beauty and fertility. Society conditions women to believe that their peak desirability exists within a narrow window - normally in their early twenties - after which their romantic and social value is perceived to reduce, resulting in immense pressure to maintain physical attractiveness through rigorous skincare routines, diets and surgeries. Examples of gender roles often include outdated ideas about what men and women 'should' do, many of which are still perpetuated in society today.

Historically, one of the traditional roles men should take charge of was being the breadwinner of the family. In this role, they are expected to provide the main source of income, working beyond the home to support their families. This idea reinforced the notion that men should be strong, financially stable and emotionally reserved. Another stereotype for women is that they should be primarily responsible for putting up with children, nurturing them and taking after the household duties. However, these duties have been challenged today, since both men and women share caregiving responsibilities, caregiving isn't limited to one gender. Despite progress, various challenges persist in achieving true gender equality. Women continue to face barriers in accessing education, healthcare and economic resources, while being disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and discrimination. In Japan, where there is a festival known as Kanto, only men are permitted to touch bamboo poles whereas women play flutes and drums. Kanto practitioners believe that women cannot engage because, in accordance with Japan's Shinto religion, women's blood from menstruation and childbirth is deemed impure for the purpose of religious rituals. Because of that, Kanto is not only emblematic of Akita's cultural splendor but also its conservative rural society. On the other hand, boys often go undiagnosed for depression due to societal pressures associated with masculinity, making it tough for them to open up about their feelings. Depression might show up in distinct ways among males, which makes it harder to recognise. Adding to these issues is the growing loneliness epidemic, impacting individuals irrespective of gender but affecting boys and men in a special way. Societal expectations discourage vulnerability and emotional openness in males.

THE MASKS WE WEAR: ESCAPING THE ILLUSION OF GENDER ROLES

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As a result, boys often struggle to show emotions and make social connections. To help children resist harmful biases, parents; teachers and the wider community play a vital role. First, adults must actively recognize and combat the many stereotypes in our culture, given staying silent only furthermore deteriorates them. Children should be exposed to messages that challenge traditional roles, such as toys, shows, books and decorations featuring people of different races in leadership, men and women in unconventional roles, and diverse family structures. In addition, teenagers should be taught how to confront prejudice at themselves, properly equipping them with strategies to respond to unfair treatment with confidence. Finally, adults should also remain impartial when choosing friends, educators, doctors and shops, modelling fairness in everyday life. Ultimately, gender should never define a person's potential. When we challenge stereotypes and instill respect for all, we move closer to a society where everyone is free to become who they truly are.

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SIGN LANGUAGE - THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE DEAF COMMUNITY

Ngoc Minh Le

Every community has its own unique identity and culture that represents its history and that makes it stand out from the crowd, including aspects like its cuisine, indigenous languages, and spiritual practices, to name a few. The deaf community is no exception to this, reaching its centennial development, ever since Socrates' acknowledgment of the use of signs among the deaf. Specifically, the foundation of sign language—a unique "art" form—has paramount importance in shedding light for deaf people.

The invention of sign language

Similar to any other language, sign language was invented out of the deaf community's necessity to express their thoughts and ideas. Hand gestures are elements in a sentence; each of them indicates a particular motion or phrase. There was a study on how deaf students in Managua, who were isolated from the outside world, created their own version of sign language. The children described a ball rolling down a hill with two principal elements: the rolling element and the down element. From each disjointed hand motion, it has been homogeneous since the 18th century, when France first formalized and then introduced its sign language to and had it adapted by other nations.

What makes sign language a... language?

The first noticeable feature of sign language is its shortened structures. Sign language primarily focuses on the simplicity of sentences; therefore, sentences are reduced to phrases. Rather than saying I am 14 years old, most would sign I – age 14. Furthermore, sign language also emphasizes what is most important in its sentences, leading to a difference between the grammatical structures of verbal and sign languages. While we usually follow the structure Subject-Verb-Object, individuals using sign language use the structure Subject-Object-Verb, where the subject and object are the ultimate objective of the sentence. Interestingly, in contrast to the phrase sign in sign language, this special language relies heavily on facial expressions. Stress patterns, question marks, and exclamations are replaced with recognizable cues and eye contact. All of these components form a unique and standout language of the deaf community.

Sign language — the cultural heritage of the deaf community

Why, of all of the effective means of communication out there for deaf people, is sign language the chosen one in this competition? To begin with, there are two main types of languages that deaf people use to communicate: oralism and sign language, which aim to promote the voices and rights of deaf individuals in society. Back in the day, oralism, a method of communication that allows deaf students to feel the vibrations when pronouncing the words and mimic them, was seriously biased. In the US, sign language was considered to "hamper the development and socialization of deaf citizens". In 1880, the Milan Conference, the first conference to include deaf delegates' participation, was held in Italy. Some clauses went against sign language, some of which stated:

1. The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of articulation over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society and giving him a fuller knowledge of language, declares that the oral method should be preferred to that of signs in the education and instruction of deaf-mutes.
2. The Convention, considering that the simultaneous use of articulation and signs has the disadvantage of injuring articulation and lip-reading and the precision of ideas, declares that the pure oral method should be preferred.

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However, to the deaf community, the favoritism of oralism implied that deaf people need to adjust themselves to fit the overall society, turning down their desire for a culture of their own. It made them feel disrespected that society considered their deafness a disease that needed treatment.

Sign language, on the other hand, was their own invention, with unique structures and a long-lasting history.

They fought for it without any hesitation, and sign language finally gained some recognition when Stokoe created the first-ever sign language dictionary. Then, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed thirty years later, marking a new milestone of recognition and significance in building deaf culture.

Sign language's silent struggle for recognition in the bustling world.

In 2010, the United Nations marked September 23 as International Day of Sign Language, recognizing it as a means of communication and a cultural expression. Deaf education introduces the study of sign language and its importance to the community. Yet, despite advocates' efforts, sign language is still not widely recognized as an official language in society but rather as a mere tool to communicate more easily with deaf citizens. Few companies design a suitable workspace and communication environment for deaf people; thereby, it reduces the chances for individuals with hearing loss of finding job opportunities and leading the lives they desire. Assistive and translation technology for sign language is on the rise, though still not yet fully developed, which limits deaf people's ability to express their thoughts in their surrounding environment. Still, we believe in a future where sign language finally gains complete recognition for its silent yet persistent history and cultural importance to the deaf culture.

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EMPTY TABLES, FULL STORIES: WHY VIETNAMESE F&B OUTLETS ARE SHUTTING DOWN

Như Ngọc Bùi

Vietnam - a country located in South East Asia, has always been renowned for its unique cuisines with multiple dishes rich in distinctive flavours. When visiting this beautiful country, tourists are captivated with the comforting smell coming from the pot of pho broth or the crunchy sound of banh mi.

Notwithstandingly, the recent shutdown of many trendy and popular restaurants and eateries, namely Bãi Tôm, is a wake-up call to the Vietnamese F&B (Food & Beverage) businesses.

A Wave of Closures Across the Country
Vietnam's café and restaurant scene once was a signature of the country - a fusion of local flavor, global trends, and endless entrepreneurial spirit. From Saigon's late-night coffee shops to Hanoi's trendy fusion eateries, the industry seemed unstoppable. But in 2024 and early 2025, the buzz began to fade.

According to a report from the analytics platform iPOS.vn, over 30,000 food & beverage (F&B) stores in Vietnam closed in the first half of 2024, the number of outlets nationwide was about 304,700 at June end, down to about 4% from a year earlier. In the first half of 2025, the situation got worse: more than 50,000 outlets closed, bringing the total to about 299,900 which is a drop of 7.1% from end-2024. This occurred not only to local eateries but also international food chains, from small banh mi stalls to major coffee franchises amplifying the adverse circumstance of the nation.

Vietnam's F&B industry, once a post-pandemic success story, now faces its toughest test.

But beyond the empty chairs and closed signs lies a deeper story - one of people, passion, and loss.

Beyond Profit and Loss: The People Behind the Shutdowns
Just recently, a retail space on Tran Khac Chan Street where a Hanoi-style bún chả (rice noodles with grilled pork and meatballs) eatery that had been operational for almost five years was available for lease. In addition to the financial damage, the owner claimed to be emotionally affected since this eatery was not only the family's cash cow but also represented his passion for Vietnamese cuisines. That is to say, behind each shuttered door lies a personal story, often one of heartbreak, exhaustion, and unfulfilled dreams.

Across the country, thousands share that pain. Café owners who once poured their lives into building cozy gathering spots now face debt. Young baristas and chefs, once proud of their creative community, have lost both income and identity. But the consequences stretch further than the balance sheet. Every single F&B location in Vietnam is more than a commercial and service place. Instead, they are the cultural cornerstones, a pivotal compartment of the society. Moreover, many people utilize these places for either gathering or entertaining purposes such as family reunion or dates with friends. Hence, the closure also has a destructive impact on customers.
Every closure leaves a quiet gap in the community, taking with it not only jobs but connection and belonging. The damage, then, isn't just financial. It's emotional, a quiet erosion of the human warmth that made the industry thrive.

EMPTY TABLES, FULL STORIES: WHY VIETNAMESE F&B OUTLETS ARE SHUTTING DOWN

Như Ngọc Bùi

Unpacking the Burnout: What Went Wrong in Vietnam's Food Scene
The fall of Vietnam's F&B sector isn't the result of a single cause. It's a synthesis of economic and social pressures.

To begin, there has been a substantial surge in costs. Operating a business requires multifarious factors such as rent, ingredients prices, utilities bills, etc. Rent in populous areas namely Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City can witness a gradually shocking soar, squeezing small business owners who already operate on thin margins. Ingredient prices, from imported coffee beans to basic cooking oil, have surged due to inflation and disrupted supply chains. Many owners report their monthly costs nearly doubling compared to three years ago.

Subsequently, during the post-pandemic recovery, F&B ventures mushroomed across every corner of the country. Everyone wanted a slice of the booming café culture, from young entrepreneurs to influencers. But the explosion in supply far outpaced demand. Soon, every street had three bubble tea shops and five coffee spots competing for the same crowd. This is called oversaturation - a nightmare to business owners.

Lastly, customer habits are altering. If in 2016-2017, people preferred eating out and posting selfie pictures about those places, now they only want to stay inside having their food waiting at the door. This shift in preference fosters online apps like GrabFood or ShopeeFood but also pushes traditional dine-in experiences into sidelines. Shops can have delivery service, yet, it eats into profits with high commission fees. Besides, what is the point of opening a proper site if people only order via online platforms?

In short, the model that once thrived on foot traffic and ambiance now struggles in a digital-first world. For many, adaptation simply came too late.

What Vietnam's F&B Crisis Says About Modern Life
Vietnam's F&B crisis is not just a temporary problem, in other words, it is a cultural turning point.

The café and restaurant scene has always mirrored Vietnam's evolving identity: urban, ambitious, and deeply social. Its current struggles reflect broader shifts in how people live, work, and connect. The decline of physical gathering spaces once filled with laughter and aroma speaks to a new kind of loneliness emerging in modern city life.
Nonetheless, there are signs of rebirth. Many entrepreneurs nowadays are turning back to opening physical stores, some even sell traditional items or locally sourced products in the pursuit of authenticism. In a sense, the closures may be forcing the industry to mature: to trade quantity for quality, noise for meaning. Vietnam's F&B scene may never look the same again, but its spirit which is creative, resilient, and ever-adaptive, remains very much alive.

Even as the shutters fall, Vietnam's appetite for reinvention remains. Perhaps the next chapter of its F&B story is already simmering.

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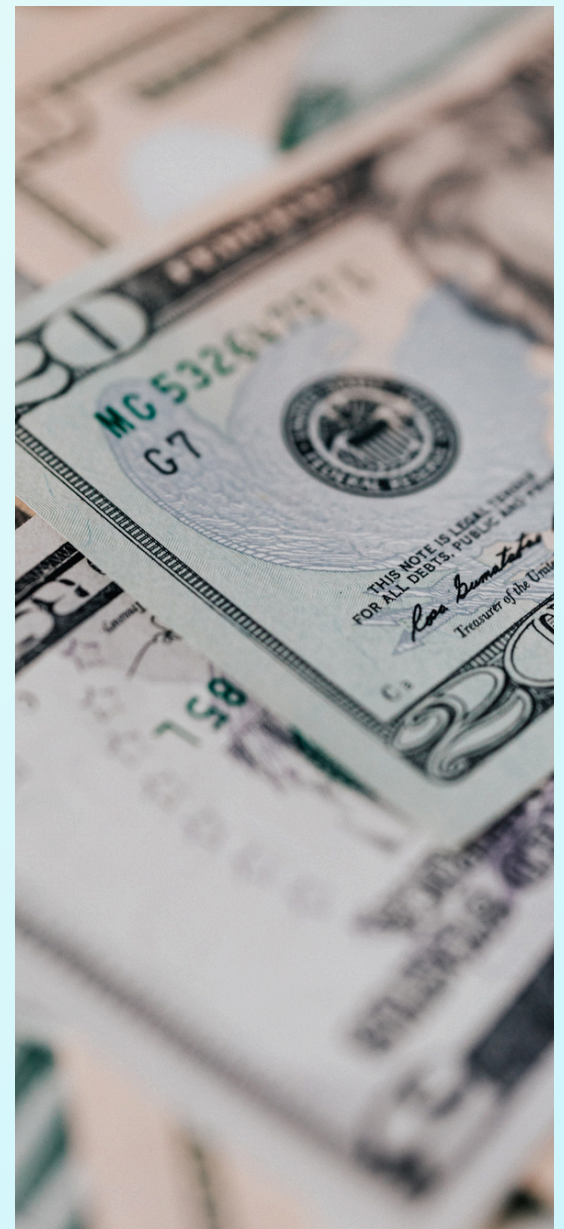# THE POWER OF PRIVATE EQUITY: DRIVING GROWTH OR DRAINING COMPANIES?

Ayush Ranjan

Private Equity (PE) has become a massive defining force in capitalism. It's a multi trillion dollar industry that buys, restructures, and sells different companies with an identified goal and promise of discovering a hidden power within. Advocates argue that Private Equity brings discipline, capital, and management directed focus to underperforming firms; many critics say that the sector's reliance on leveraging and short holding periods often decreases/strips assets, jobs, and long term investment from various companies and communities. Furthermore, the truth presents itself in between, being nuanced and very sector dependent.

At its best, PE can be a driving force for productivity. An in depth review of empirical studies discovered that buyouts will generally enhance a firm's total factor productivity and often lead to positive spillover effects across various industries. For example, in Europe and the US, firms that were acquired by PE saw stronger management practices and mostly higher output per worker that was relative to their non acquired peers. Yet gains in productivity often coincide with significant internal restructuring like job reallocations, plant closures, and wage downward pressure for certain workers. A study found that workers at firms that underwent a leveraged buyout (LBO) were close to 1% less likely to be employed after one year and 2% less after three years, incurring wage losses of roughly 10% after one year and 18% after 3 years relative to workers in matched firms.

The healthcare sector conveys some of the risks when PE enters areas tied to social welfare, rather than just pure manufacturing or services. One US cohort study discovered that nursing homes that were acquired by PE firms experienced relative increases in emergency department visits and hospital visits for conditions that were preventable, with higher Medicare costs per resident. Additionally, in-hospital care shows similar trends, where hospitals acquired by PE had a 25.4% increase in hospital acquired adverse conditions like falls and bloodstream infections when compared to matched non PE hospitals. These findings elude that in sectors where staffing, long term investment, and patient outcomes matter, the short run, cost shortening incentives of PE conflict with quality of service.

Financial performance is one of the biggest positive arguments for PE. Some large industry reviews and market reports demonstrate that private markets have often outperformed public equities on a gross-of-fees basis, bringing in huge pools of capital from pension funds and sovereign wealth. However, that performance is contested with net-of-fees returns and the difficulty of comparing private and public markers leaving space for debate. Furthermore, the socialization of risk, when distressed PE backed firms need to be bailed out or leave areas with hollowed assets, raises both political and ethical questions beyond the normal return calculations.

So, what's the policy takeaway? First, transparency–private markets remain cloudy relative to public firms, limiting regulators and stakeholders ability to analyze systemic risk or even social impacts. Second, sector specific gaurdrails–certain industries that provide essential services (health care, housing, etc) may really need stronger quality and labor protections. Third, incentives–connecting PE compensation and exit structures with longer term performance, rather than only short term leverage pushed gains could preserve value without encouraging thoughtless cost cutting.
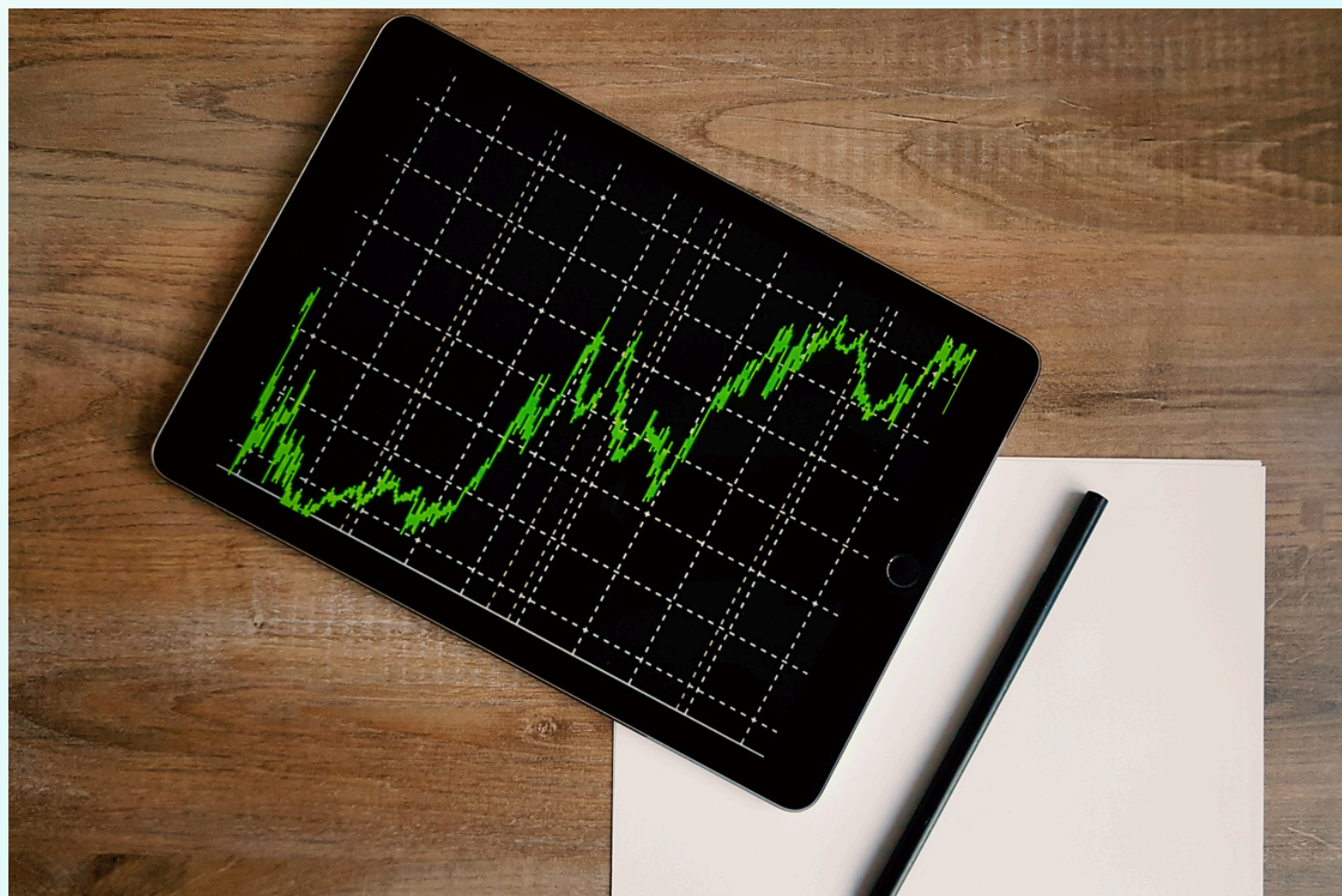
THE POWER OF PRIVATE EQUITY: DRIVING GROWTH OR DRAINING COMPANIES?

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Private Equity is not intrinsically villainous, nor is it a sheer blessing. It is a financial technology, a set of incentives, structures, and skills–that can either fix a struggling business or hollow it out, depending on governance, leverage, and the nature of the asset. Policymakers, investors, and the public should in turn demand for better data, better accountability, and customized regulation that maintains the sector's potential while limiting harm. Only then can we judge PE not by its promises to deliver huge returns, but by whether those returns come at an acceptable human or economic cost.

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THE SILENT SYMPHONY: HOW SOIL HEALTH IS THE UNSEEN KEY TO OUR FOOD'S FUTURE

Md Alid Bhuyian

We are told to watch the skies for climate change and the oceans for plastic pollution, but often we forget the critical ecosystem beneath our feet. The debate on future food security is dominated by lab-grown meat and vertical farming. While these innovations have a place, they overshadow a more basic resource that is rapidly degrading: healthy soil. This isn't just about dirt; this is about a complex, living world holding the silent symphony of the fertility of our planet. The gradual degradation of this thin, vital layer poses a direct threat to global nutrition, and the solution may just be in listening to the wisdom of the earth itself.

Soil is far from inert. A single teaspoon of healthy soil can harbor billions of bacteria, miles of fungal filaments, and a diverse community of protozoa, nematodes, and microarthropods. This "soil food web" is in charge of the essential processes that keep plant life going. These microorganisms decompose organic matter, releasing nutrients in forms that plants can absorb. They create soil structure, forming aggregates that facilitate water infiltration and root penetration. They also help the plants resist diseases and droughts. However, conventional agricultural practices intensively till the soil, leaving too heavy a reliance on chemical fertilizer and pesticides, and with a lack of crop diversity, the hidden universe is being decimated. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization warned that the world's topsoil layer, which grows our food-could be gone in 60 years if current degradation rates continue. We are, quite literally, washing away and sterilizing the foundation of our food system.

The consequence of this degradation extends beyond mere crop yields; it strikes at the very nutritional value of our food. There's an emerging body of research pointing to a rather disturbing trend: "nutrient dilution." Taking into account numerous studies, including some cited by the Bionutrient Food Association, it is thus indicated that the vitamin and mineral content in most fruits and vegetables declined significantly over a period of about 50 to 70 years. A carrot today does not possess the same level of magnesium or vitamin C compared to the carrots grown during our grandparents' time. One of the contributing factors is that soils depleted of their microbial life and organic matter struggle to transfer the full spectrum of micronutrients to the plants growing in them. Plants become like patients on an IV drip; they get the basic nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (NPK) they need to grow large and look appealing, but miss out on the complex mineral buffet a healthy soil biome provides. We are facing a paradox where we are producing more food that is less nourishing.

Fortunately, a quiet revolution is sprouting in farm fields around the world, advocating a shift away from industrial extraction and toward ecological collaboration. The approach is called regenerative agriculture, which goes beyond just sustainability-its aim to actively enhance the land. Its principles are elegantly simple: stop tilling the soil in order not to ruin its structure, keep the soil covered with plants or mulch to prevent erosion, and integrate livestock and diverse crop rotations. Such practices mimic the functioning of natural ecosystems, including giving space for the rebound of the soil food web. As soil organic matter increases, so does its ability to lock away atmospheric carbon, turning farms into carbon sinks rather than sources. The result is a resilient system: more water is retained within it, hence reducing the impact of droughts and floods; plants, thanks to a rich microbiome, become more robust, healthier, and more nutritious.

THE SILENT SYMPHONY: HOW SOIL HEALTH IS THE UNSEEN KEY TO OUR FOOD'S FUTURE

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The path to a secure food future does not lie in technology alone. What is needed is a fundamental reconnection with the biological intelligence of the soil. We can address multiple crises by shifting our focus from feeding plants to nurturing the soil ecosystem: food insecurity, malnutrition, and climate change.

The next time you sit down for a meal, remember that its true origin is not the supermarket shelf, but a vibrant, living world just beneath the surface.

Supporting farmers who adopt regenerative practices and becoming conscious of where our food comes from are the first steps in hearing the silent symphony and ensuring it plays on for generations to come.

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FLASH FLOODING: NEPAL'S BIGGEST NIGHTMARE TURNED INTO REALITY.

Sourya Koirala

Nepal, a landlocked country nestled between China and India, is known for its majestic mountain trails and pristine rivers. As a landlocked country, people tend to assume that there might be limited sources of water, but that's not the case for Nepal. Nepal is ranked 43rd in terms of water resources. There are more than 6000+ rivers and streams in Nepal. Nepal covers an area of 147,181 km², which encompasses three distinct geographical regions: the Terai (plain land), the Hilly region, and the Himalayan region. The variety of landscapes and landforms in a confined area with such ample water sources can be extremely hazardous.

This year, Nepal experienced its most devastating flooding of the decade. Recently, on October 25, 2025, 51 people were killed in landslides and floods triggered by the downpour in Nepal. These 51 people were mainly from the eastern part of Nepal (Terai), where the geographical structure of the land is flat and straight, which eventually blocked the movement of water and caused flooding. This was not the only time of the year that had flash flooding. Earlier this July, Nepal experienced a destructive flash flood that swept away the bridge connecting Nepal and China. The flood resulted in extensive damage to the customs yard at the border crossing, where hundreds of vehicles and cargo containers were parked. Hydro-powered plants were severely damaged, resulting in a power outage.
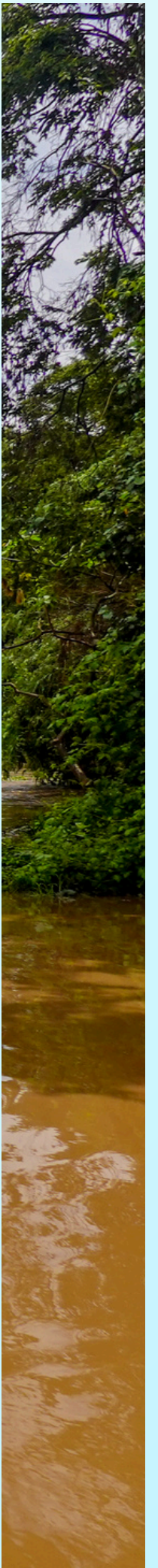
The floods even swept away the people who tried to help.

The geographical pattern of Nepal is defenceless to flash flooding. Due to climate change, the melting of glaciers in a large amount, and unforeseeable rainfall, disasters like flash flooding are frequently seen. These floods often result in agricultural damage and infrastructure disruption, loss of livestock, displacement of families, an increase in water-borne diseases due to the contaminated water, and damage to hydropower projects. As a country whose large population depends on agriculture for its survival, flooding during the harvesting season or germination season is devastating. The topography of this country is not suited to heavy downpours. Due to the ill-timed and unfit development of infrastructure on slopes, the flood assumed a severe form, causing the highways to be clogged with vehicles and transport.

Flash flooding and landslides are recurring issues in Nepal, but the subject has not been adequately addressed or resolved. It's difficult to implement a solution to floods that make their way through two large countries, from all sides, to landlocked Nepal. These days, Nepal faces landslides and flooding in such unpredictable places that forecasts are also not able to make predictions. However, ideas like managing water run-off, focusing more on innovating geographically and topographically friendly infrastructures, forbidding the use of highways, and tracks that are most likely to be harmful during the monsoon season, and consistent and trustworthy weather forecasts could contribute to some extent. Visibly strong action and attention should be drawn to it otherwise, the people will continue to lose their lives in climate crisis conditions.

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KODOKUSHI: THE SEVERE LONELY EPIDEMIC IN JAPAN

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Japan is frequently referred to as "the ideal country to reside in" due to its incredible scenery, technological advancement, and strong sense of community. Coming to Japan, tourists are awe-struck by how genuine, polite, and welcoming Japanese citizens are, representing a core principle in Japanese culture: "omotenashi" - selfless hospitality and expecting no returns from guests. While all of this accurately reflects the diversity and uniqueness of Japanese cultures, a hidden reality persists, threatening the existence of the population.

Kodokushi, or lonely death, demonstrates the reality of Japanese society, where the elderly in particular are isolated and pass away unknowingly, only to be discovered after a period of time. The first case of kodokushi that gained widespread attention was in 2000, when skeletal remains of a 69-year-old man were discovered on the floor three years after his death in a small apartment. His monthly expenses were automatically deducted from his bank account; his death went unnoticed by neighbors and authorities. It was only when his savings were empty that local police arrived to investigate, finding his body rotten. More lonely deaths were reported in the same residential area in summer 2017 when households surrounding them noticed an overpowering smell coming from a man's apartment. Since then, the Tokiwadaira housing area in Matsudo, Japan, has been the first community to address the growing numbers of lonely deaths of its elderly residents.

Although statistics on the exact number of kodokushi cases are rare, according to the NLI research center, a consultant team in Tokyo estimated that about 30000 people across Japan were victims of lonely deaths each year, with 70000 cases in 2024. Most of the elderly were above 65, usually in deteriorating health conditions, and isolated inside their tiny spaces. Being one of the world's oldest populations, more people in Japan are spending their retirement years alone, with little interaction from the outside world. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, "The number of people over 65 living alone stood at 7.38 million in 2020 and is expected to rise to almost 11 million by 2050." This devastating occurrence drew public attention to Japan's pressing social problems, including low birth rate, economic stagnation, and a reduction in family units.

Behind the lonely epidemic lies a silent crisis in Japanese society, originating from a cultural foundation embedded in Japanese beliefs. The first prominent reason is the age aspect, with Japan not only having the world's oldest population but also being one of the fastest-aging societies. Therefore, the issue of aging in isolation gradually becomes unavoidable owing to inadequate healthcare directed at senior citizens. This was consequently followed by a sudden decline in multigenerational households, which used to dominate Japan's families in 1980. Multigenerational households refer to an extended family structure with more than two generations living under the same roof. This type of living arrangement is common in some parts of the world, such as Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East. However, this form of family connection in Japan disappears quickly, as stated in ScienceDirect, "According to the population census, multigenerational families declined by half, from 16.1% in 1970 to 13.9% in 1985 and 8.5% in 2000. Married couples co-residing with their parents also continued to fall from 18.1% in 1970 to 16.1% in 1985 and 10.8% in 2000."

KODOKUSHI: THE SEVERE LONELY EPIDEMIC IN JAPAN

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Nevertheless, a profound reason lies in the hesitation to express one's devastating situation and financial difficulties to others, especially relatives and loved ones, which leads to isolation during one's final years.

As a nation that values a sense of community, Japanese people believe in contributing to society.

This places enormous pressure on Japanese citizens, as career advancement and achievements are indicators of success, determining their ability to dedicate themselves to society's collective benefits. Consequently, as parents age, they choose to live in solitude in order to facilitate their children's development path. Notably, Japanese culture highly emphasizes individuals' ability to obtain independence and discipline. From as young as elementary school students, children are taught crucial life skills such as taking care of themselves, solving their own problems, and controlling their emotions effectively. As a result, Japanese are typically ashamed to admit their hardship and disclose personal information about their conditions of living. This tendency of miscommunication and disconnection between family members is the driving force behind deteriorating mental health among retirees, and in some extreme cases - kodokushi.

"Japan is a society of depression," said Takuya Shiota, who works at a cleaning agency and as a social advocate, during an interview with ABC in August 2024. This simple statement describes the country's prevalent issue regarding loneliness and isolation, one of the indirect factors leading to solitude deaths. For many, solitude deaths reveal the country's gradual loss of a sense of community; in particular, neighborhoods that contain elderly no longer look out for one another; instead of seeking assistance, many choose isolation.

Despite this growing concern, many aspiring individuals are working tirelessly to reduce kodokushi incidents, bringing connection and values to elders seeking friendship. In Yokohama, in the district of Kotobuki, lived a huge number of elders, most of whom were lonely and in worse health conditions. However, with regular health check-ups coming from doctor Osamu Yamanaka, many begin to receive the necessary medical support and reassurance. His weekly visits not only ensure early-detected disease but also strengthen community values, encouraging conversations and understanding among the elders. His small actions have inspired other campaigns directed at assisting the elderly, such as the Zero Lonely Deaths campaign organized by Yoshiko Sato. The program not only aims at preventing solitary death but also improves old people's mental health and restores community spirit through routine check-ups.

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BUILT BY TIES AND STRINGS: THE SCIENCE OF ATTACHMENT

SaiShruthi Avutapalli

How often is it that you catch yourself unable to let go of something? An idea, a feeling, an object imbued with sentiment, maybe even a person? We find ourselves in these situations on a daily basis. There are strong emotions involved when we encounter them, one of the more jutting ones being attachment. In a world that is increasingly promoting the concept of self-reliance and independence, it is no surprise that attachments and bonds are often downplayed, despite playing a minor yet integral role in shaping life's ups and downs.

The globe is stitched together by invisible strings—from acquaintances to parents and children.

Every relationship, whether brief or deep, is characterized by its own nature: some strained, some hearty; some loosely bound, others unyieldingly strong. Either way, is it possible to live life fully without connection to humanity? In the tangible world, the answer is almost always no.

It is a scientifically proven fact that isolated people, whether voluntarily or imposed, tend to hold destructive behavioral traits towards themselves and others. Social interactions are essential for stability. Researchers describe this function as social reality testing, the process through which we understand the rationality of perceptions and interpretations of the world. Without it, one's sense of reality would be threatened. Solidarity confinement, for example, is a real-time paradigm of how ruinous it can be to the human mind to be confined with no proper social activity. It creates a sense of prolonged agitation, resulting in the shrinkage of cognitive abilities and emotional intelligence. This creates an imbalance between logical reasoning and emotional thinking.

From a behavioral science perspective, British psychologist John Bowlby described attachment as an idea that emerges from habit. It is a learned behavior and an evolutionary process. This implies that attachment styles and patterns are acquired rather than innate. Although these conventions are adapted through learning, the primal instinct of attachment itself is something that children are inherently born with, as observed by Bowlby and many other psychologists. Even casual observation reveals that people raised in stable, nurturing environments are much more likely to feel emotional security and self-reliance as adults compared to those with neglectful childhoods.

This is not a rigid rule. There are both fortunate and unfortunate exceptions to this, influenced by several factors beyond an individual's control. Bonding styles and personality development are interdependent, each shaping one another. As established by Bowlby, there are four main types of adult attachment styles, also known as the "attachment style quadrant".

Each of these attachment styles are shaped by several factors, including cultural, behavioral, and regulatory exposure throughout childhood and adolescence. No matter how instinctual it is for humans to maintain relationships with others, the style of these relationships heavily determines one's persona and livelihood.

ATTACHMENT STYLES

SECURE — Low Avoidance — ANXIOUS (Preoccupied)

Low Anxiety ← → High Anxiety

AVOIDANT (Dismissive) — High Avoidance — FEARFUL (Disorganized)

BUILT BY TIES AND STRINGS: THE SCIENCE OF ATTACHMENT

SaiShruthi Avutapalli

From a strictly scientific lens, attachment appears primal. But from a more philosophical perspective, the strength and nature of our attachments also sculpt one's character and their quality of life. When we talk about behavioral attachment and the practical science of relationships, the philosophy behind them is as vital as the emotional impact it has, which is a part of its beauty and magnificence. No matter how primitive it is for humans to want to hold on to these feelings, the concept of emotional non-attachment is often considered an art form. Non-attachment must not be confused with detachment. Detachment arises from indifference—from no longer caring. In contrast, non-attachment involves caring deeply while remaining willing to let go. The art of non-attachment is far more superior and cardinal, yet one of the hardest to practice. Philosophical traditions such as Stoicism advocate for this practice, arguing that excessive emotional dependence burdens the mind and hinders one's ability to face reality with clarity. Bowlby's theory of attachment, on the other hand, is grounded in a more materialist framework that is shaped by biology, psychology, and observable behavior, all the while sidestepping philosophical and spiritual perspectives. For instance, Bowlby states that a person's relationship-building ability depends almost exclusively on the primary caregiver, which dampens the possibility of exploring other external factors and outcomes, thereby bringing us to a paradox. There exists a deeper body-mind angle beyond biology.

Ultimately, it is important to recognize that these concepts are not absolute truths. There is no definitive right or wrong, and all theories are welcomed in the realm of our world, where billions of beings find ways to coexist. What is life, if not a tangle of feelings, and just an ongoing act of learning which strings to hold onto, and which ones to release.

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THE SOVEREIGNTY PARADOX: WHY WE ARE LOSING THE $10.5 TRILLION WAR ON CYBERCRIME

S M Safwan Sanzari

In a grim testament to the borderless nature of digital crime today, INTERPOL's 2025 Africa Cyberthreat Assessment revealed a devastating financial hemorrhage: approximately $3 billion was stolen through cyberattacks across the continent in less than five and a half years. That figure, fueled in large part by online scams and ransomware attacks, is not just a number; it reflects depleted national coffers, shuttered businesses, and countless lives devastated. This massive heist was committed by a diffuse cast of characters who prey on the fundamental difference between digital crime and its more familiar bricks-and-mortar analogues. A hacker in one country can target a bank in another, launder funds through servers in a third, and remain virtually invisible to authorities from any single nation.

This, in fact, is the core challenge of cross-border cybercrime prevention. In response, the international community is mounting its largest collective effort so far. The recent entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime and the upgrading of the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, with an Additional Protocol to be made in a couple of years, signal a new chapter in the fight. And yet, these diplomatic initiatives are racing to keep up with a threat of staggering, nearly unimaginable proportions, as global cybercrime is poised to rack up $10.5 trillion in annual damage costs by 2025 and establish itself as an extremely lucrative underground shadow economy functioning at all times above all borders.

The New Architecture of Global Cooperation

2024 marked a diplomatic turning point with the conclusion of the UN Convention Against Cybercrime. This historic treaty represents the first real international agreement of its kind. It would make cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled offences punishable by law while requiring signatory states to ramp up investigative powers and electronic evidence-sharing, with built-in safeguards for human rights.
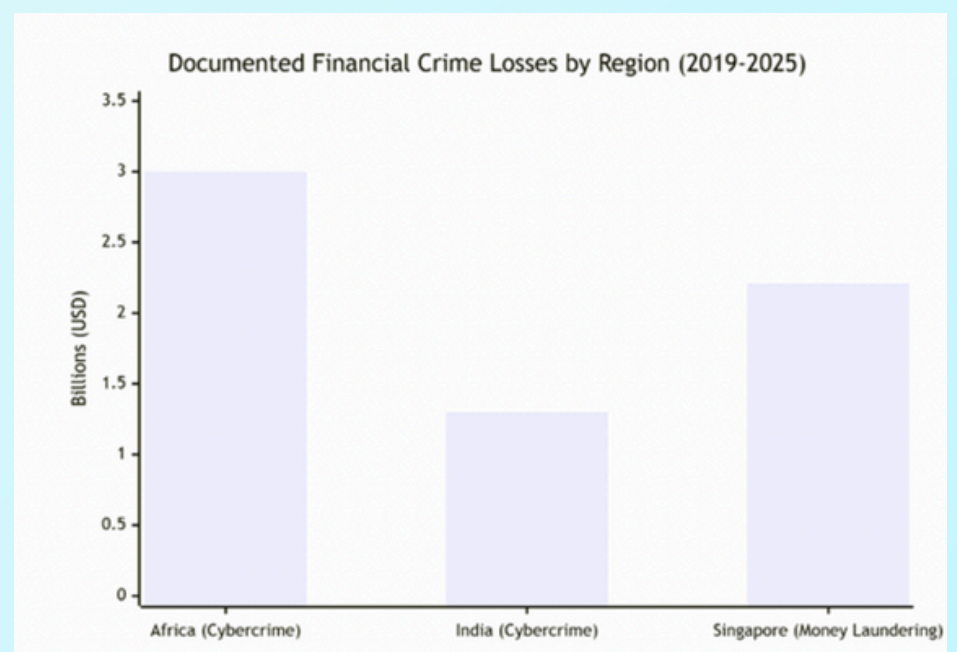
Together, the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention is a modernization of this aged treaty in order to respond to current technological issues. It primarily aims to speed up cross-border cooperation in the obtaining of electronic evidence, which is often what opens the door to complex transnational investigations.

But aside from such legal tools, practical cooperation is being built in bodies such as the Council of Europe's Global Cybercrime Experts Meeting (Octopus Conference). The June 2025 conference in Strasbourg brought together 500 experts from more than 100 countries as an integral source of information and as a space where intelligence could be shared and unified strategies forged. There are tangible results of the model: The Africa Cyber Surge Initiative, like other operations, has resulted in arrests and the dismantling of criminal infrastructure across 27 countries.

The Skyrocketing Price of a 'Digital Epidemic'

Despite these intensified efforts, the cybercrime wave shows no signs of receding. The financial destruction is universal and deeply personal. Beyond Africa's $3 billion loss, India saw more than 1.7 million cybercrime complaints just in 2024, exceeding $1.3 billion. As for Singapore in 2023, S$3 billion (US$2.21 billion) in assets were laundered through its financial system over several years, serving as a powerful example of not only how widespread the problem is but also how effective international cooperation and resource deployment can be.

Sources: INTERPOL (2025); Rotele (2025); Singapore Police (2023)

Documented Financial Crime Losses by Region (2019-2025)

THE SOVEREIGNTY PARADOX: WHY WE ARE LOSING THE $10.5 TRILLION WAR ON CYBERCRIME
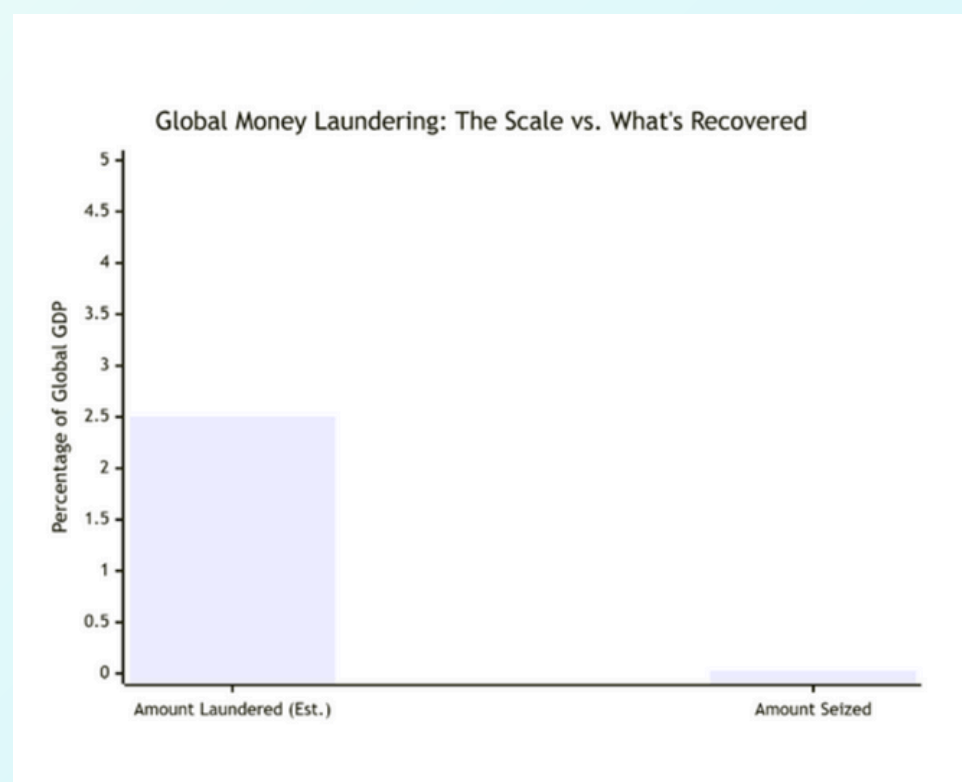
S M Safwan Sanzari

Financial crimes like money laundering have gained a rich new field in the digital age. Approximately 2-5% of world GDP is laundered annually, yet a mere 1% of these illicit funds are ever recovered. The graph can clearly illustrate the argument:

Source: Effendi & Chattopadhyay (2024)

Uphill Struggle against a Systemic Barrier to Prevention

The failings of so many efforts at cross-border prevention are a consequence of a systemic crisis that is fundamentally structural in nature, and in which well-intentioned laws across nations prove to be toothless in practice. The core issue is the "Sovereignty Paradox": international law is built on the principle of national borders, while cybercrime effortlessly transcends them. This results in a jurisdictional gridlock, where extradition barriers and inefficient, traditional proceedings for acquiring electronic evidence enable criminals to function from "safe havens."

Global Money Laundering: The Scale vs. What's Recovered

Compounding this challenge is a patchwork of competing treaties. For example, the Budapest Convention versus the newer UN Convention, which are endorsed by different geopolitical blocs, can be exploited by criminals. The situation is also aggravated by definitional uncertainty, as there is no generally accepted definition for cybercrime which must be followed strictly, leaving the legal environment with considerable gaps. Compounding the problem, law is slow—glacial, even—and it tends not to keep pace with technological change. Lastly, these hard laws are "paper tigers" because of the absence of an enforcement mechanism; non-compliance does not attract any automatic significant penalty, as statistical evidence collected from Pakistan shows that corruption and legal uncertainty have significantly undermined the execution of cybersecurity laws.

Alternatives for Global Security

The fight against cross-border cybercrime has reached a critical point. The new international conventions are a good start, but we need more than that. As the estimated $10.5 trillion economic cost makes plain, the world can no longer stop at agreements on paper.

The problem was perhaps greatest encapsulated by ex-INTERPOL secretary-general Jürgen Stock, who said: "Cybercrime is outpacing our ability to respond."

This is not due to a lack of laws, but a deficit of unified action.

The entrenched issues of jurisdiction, internet governance, corruption and fragmentation will need to be addressed with a sustained political will that is yet to be seen in full. Security expert Bruce Schneier's warning sounds louder than ever: "The Internet was designed without a lot of security knowledge, and now we're living with the effects." Here's the verdict: A reactive, splintered strategy is not working.
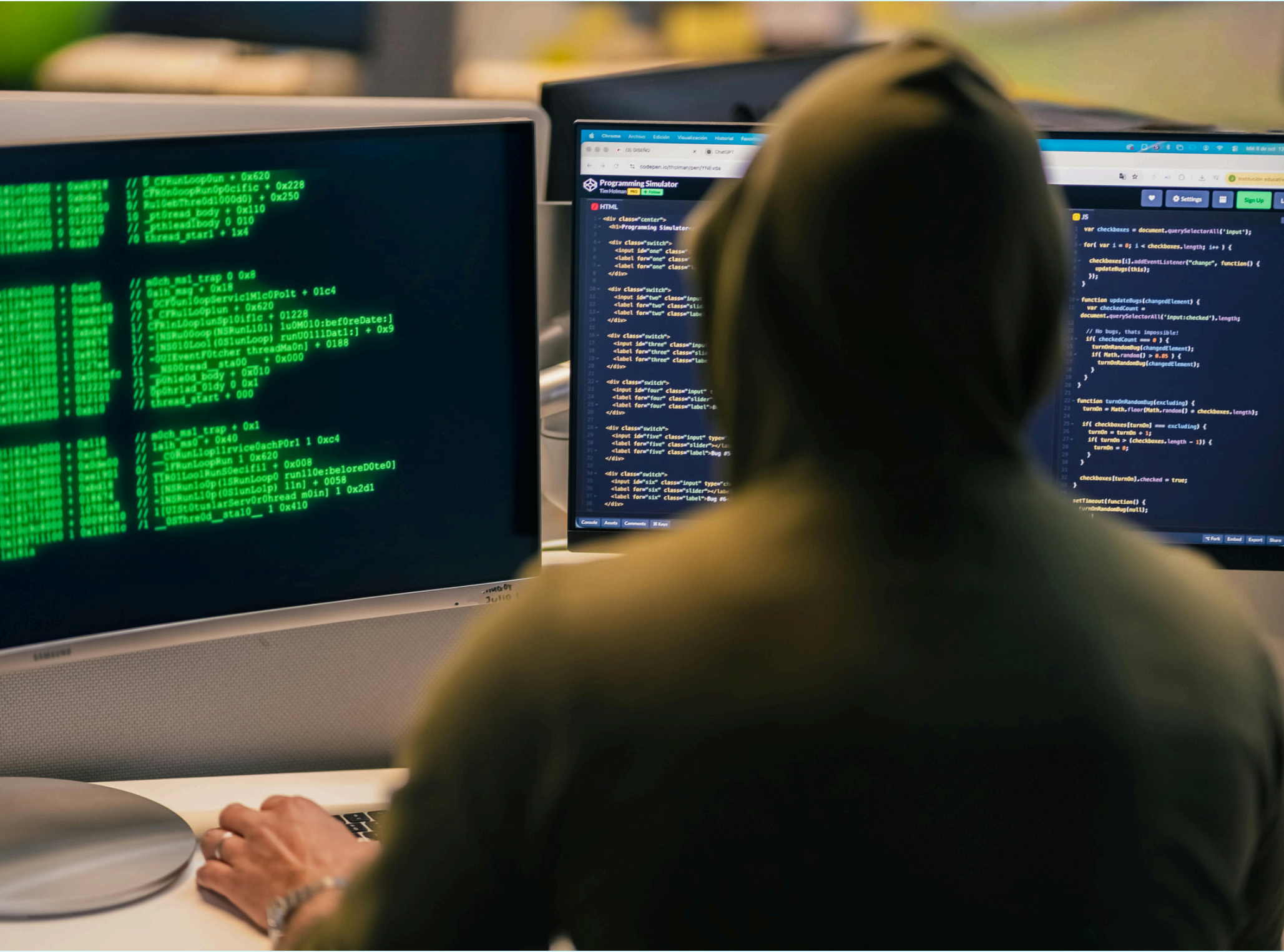
The other option is the new Wild West, a future of no law at all, with too much at stake to let that happen. It is no longer between action and inaction, but between cooperation and devastating collective vulnerability. The era of mere frameworks must end; the age of relentless, unified enforcement must begin.

THE SOVEREIGNTY PARADOX: WHY WE ARE LOSING THE $10.5 TRILLION WAR ON CYBERCRIME

S M Safwan Sanzari

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APPLYING AI INTO HUMAN MIND – A EVOLUTION OR A DISASTER?

Khanh Chi Ngo

Introduction

Imagine yourself in this situation: you have reached old age and your mind is no longer able to work in a long term shift. One day, you come across a column in the newspaper announcing the revolutionary idea of bringing memory chips into the marketplace for public use. You see this is a gift for the elderly. You feel hopeful and grateful that such a project exists. But is this innovation as beneficial as it seems?

What is a memory chip, and how does it work?

To understand how this chip works, we need to dive deeper into the formula of how our brain operates. Have you ever thought that your brain functions like a supercomputer that manages every process happening within your body? Inside the brain, there is a natural storage base called the hippocampus. This is where episodic memories are formed and stored for later access. These memories are tied to personal, specific events like having a great time at a friend's birthday party. The hippocampus is most active during puberty, but it starts to decline by the age of 60. In response to this decline, scientists have been working on developing artificial intelligence modeled after the human brain. This research led to the concept of the memory chip, also known as the superficial version of the hippocampus.

If humans and AI are based on the same principles, applying this memory chip into the human brain could, in theory, provide elderly individuals with an alternative memory storage base. One would think it amazing—buying themselves an artificial hippocampus that helps them remember every single memory for the rest of their life. But is this actually as beneficial as advertisements say?
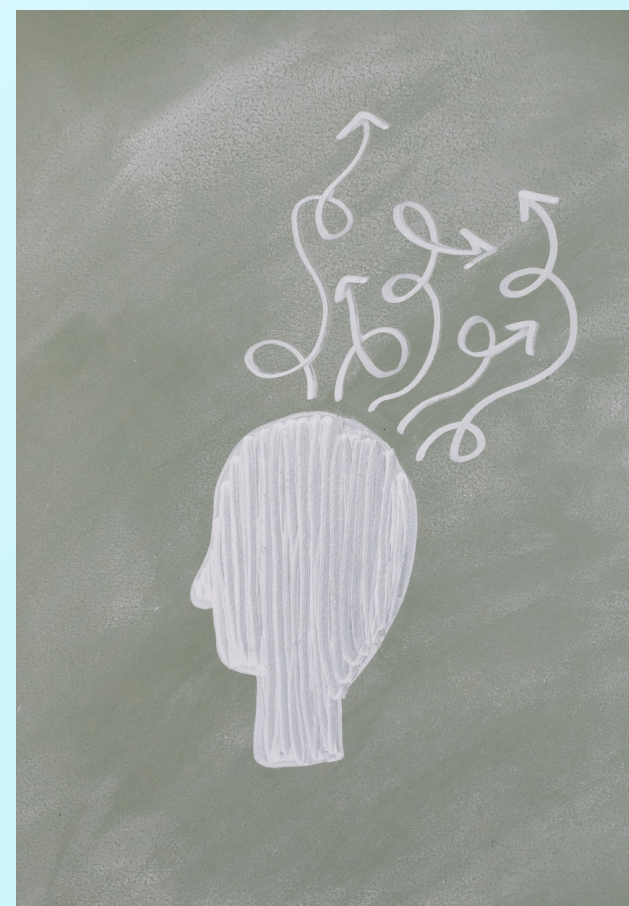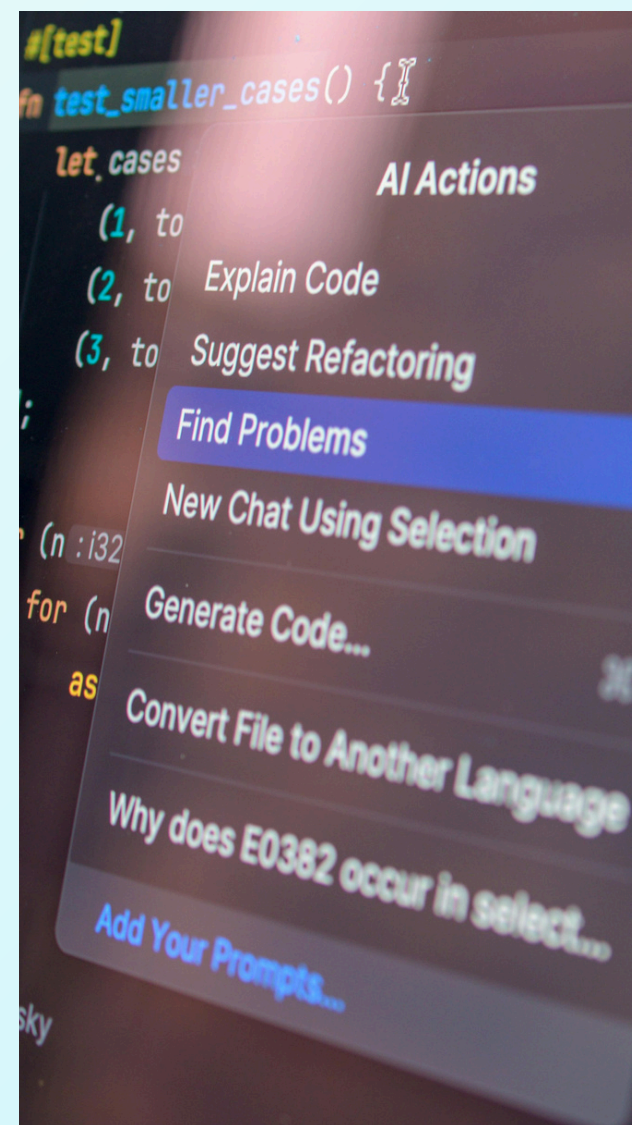
How it can change society

The majority of people will agree that this technology is beneficial straight away, as it is easy to notice the benefits gained from this superficial hippocampus. Forgetfulness is common among elderly people, and this innovation could become an enormous milestone in scientific and medical development. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 57 million people worldwide were living with dementia in 2021, with over 60% of them residing in low-and middle-income countries. Who wouldn't want to remember cherished moments with loved ones or keep special memories alive in their heart?

Another great benefit lies in medical emergencies. When people face an accident and fall into a state of deep unconsciousness, doctors could theoretically access the memory chip to retrieve information about the moments leading up to the accident. This could transform the medical field by helping better understand causes, predict complications, and respond more effectively, rather than having to predict the problem by solely looking at the injuries.
The negative effects of this unfamiliar technology

Although these advantages can be beneficial on the surface, the risks are significant. Without careful consideration, humanity could make permanent mistakes.

APPLYING AI INTO HUMAN MIND – A EVOLUTION OR A DISASTER?

Khanh Chi Ngo

Firstly, this memory chip is still a mechanical device, therefore its longevity is uncertain. It could malfunction, deteriorate, or break, potentially interfering with the human brain, which can lead to lots of neurological issues. The human brain is a complex machine, and introducing this unfamiliar chip as a storage base could create long-term damage if a minor error occurs. Secondly, we have to ask: why do humans forget? t Some memories in our hippocampus drift away automatically because they are painful— accidents, disasters, or failures. How would you feel when these memories become an episode of nightmares that keep interrupting your sleep and daily life?

It would be very irritating to have to remember memories we would rather forget.
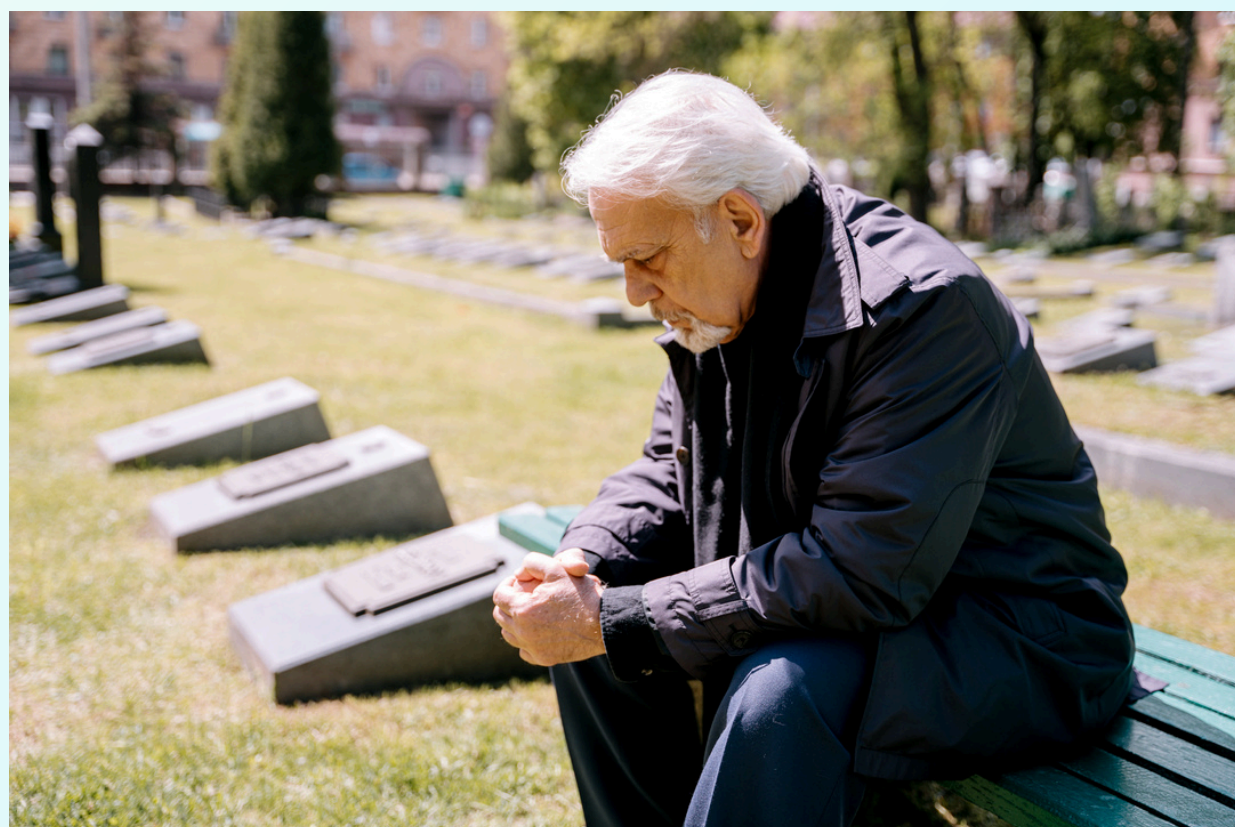
For example, the COVID-19 pandemic was a global nightmare that destroyed millions of lives and families. Many people have been trying their best to move forward, but if these chips constantly revived these experiences, individuals might become trapped in the past instead of finding the strength to move on.
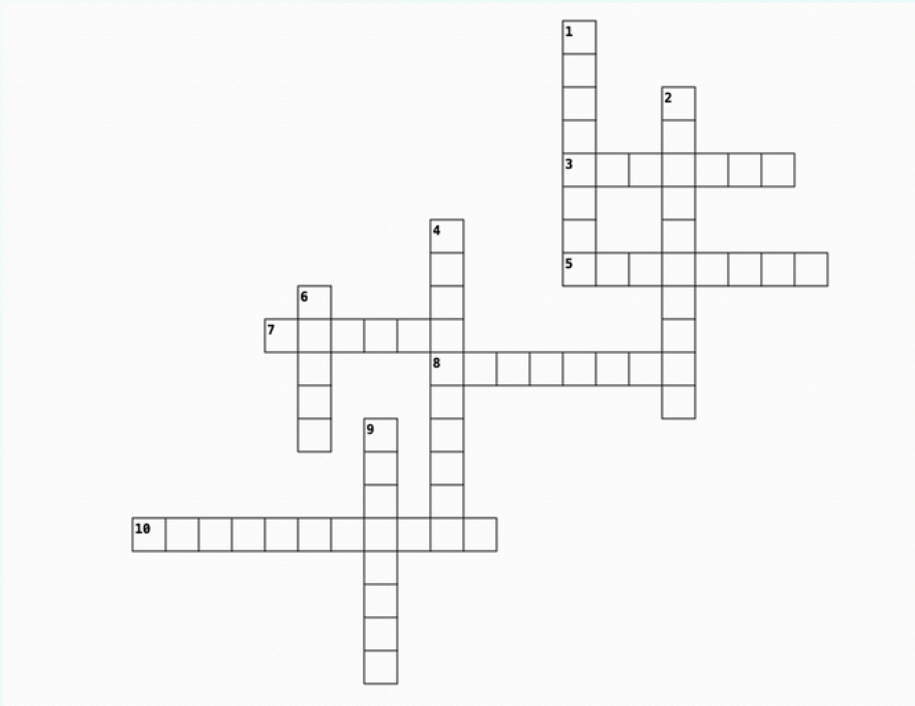
The main solution?
Rather than rejecting this technology outright, we should keep developing memory chips until we have a high level of safety and reliability. Ongoing research, adjustments, and global surveys should be conducted to develop a technology that truly benefits humanity.

Bibliography:
- https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/anatomy-of-the-brain#:~:text=How%20does%20the%20brain%20work,others%20make%20you%20feel%20pain.
- https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/09/06/1059032/memory-prosthesis-damaged-brains/

Crossword: Crunching Numbers

Across

3. Whole number that can be positive or negative
5. Math sentence with an equals sign
7. Number that divides evenly into another
8. Small number showing repeated multiplication
10. Number multiplying a variable

Down

1. Result of multiplying a number
2. Comparison using <, >, ≤, or ≥
4. Numbers and variables without an equals sign
6. Comparison of two quantities
9. Letter that represents a number

Word Search: It's Cold!

Word Bank:

Blizzard   Snowflake
Frost   Icicle
Sleet   Glacier
Avalanche   Flurry
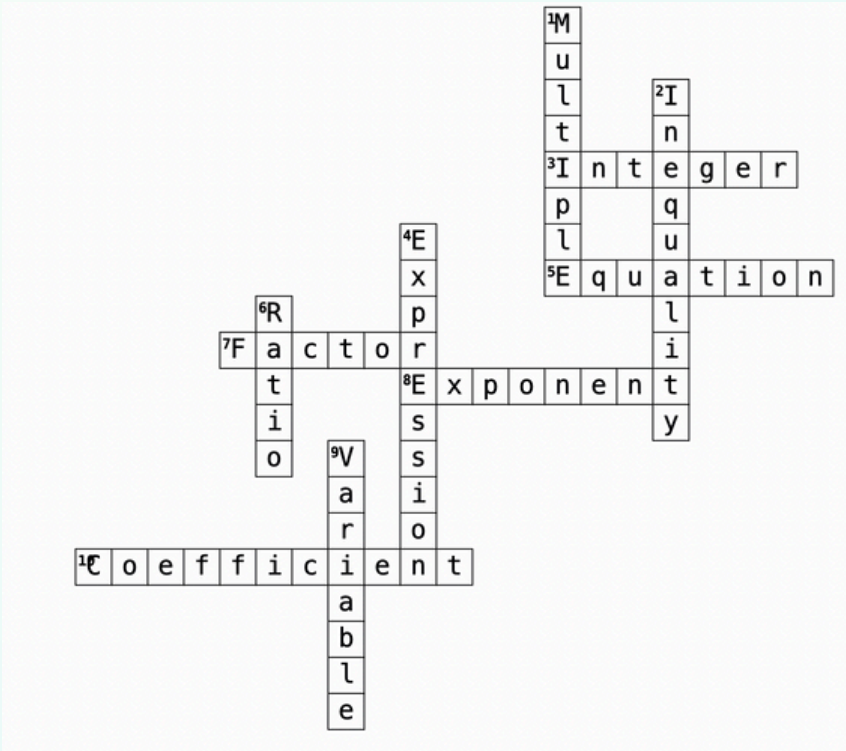Tundra   Hibernate

Crypto-Quote: New Beginnings

KROG RQ WR WKH PHPRULHV
-- WDBOHU VZLIW, QHZ
BHDU'V GDB

Instructions:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFRFLP = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.

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Word Search: It's Cold!

Crypto-Quote: New Beginning

HOLD ON TO THE MEMORIES -- TAYLOR SWIFT, *NEW YEAR'S DAY*

Word Bank:

Blizzard
Frost
Sleet
Avalanche
Tundra

Snowflake
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