

How ChatGPT undermines my research productivity

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“Soon afterward, humans install new bodyguards that are great products of the digital technology era: robots. These humanoid figures, made of durable materials, are very sophisticated and stand in the fields in all their haughty superiority. More amazing is the fact that these robots are armed with various tools to combat incoming birds.

That seems to put an end to the birds’ free ride on fresh vegetables and fruits... Running out of ideas, they seek consultation with Kingfisher. Experienced and quite updated on the new technologies, Kingfisher says: – You guys have met rivals of the 4.0 age. You would for sure fail if you didn’t study them carefully. You must do thorough research on their behaviors to find a solution.

- In Boogeyman, *Wild Wise Weird: The Kingfisher Story Collection*, Vuong (2025)-

Abstract

While generative AI has been embraced as a powerful tool for research, its integration into academic workflows has paradoxically undermined productivity in several ways. This essay explores four key challenges: **secondary source of anxiety**, where overreliance on AI-generated summaries fosters doubt about source credibility and scholarly rigor; operational inefficiency, as AI often generates redundant or misleading outputs that necessitate extensive verification; **the hidden labor of AI integration**, requiring researchers to develop new skills and oversight mechanisms to manage AI-driven processes; and **ethical ambiguity**, as evolving AI capabilities blur the boundaries of authenticity, originality, and responsible scholarship. These issues are further compounded by diverging institutional and cultural perspectives on what constitutes legitimate intellectual contribution. As AI continues to evolve, so too must the research communities’ strategies for its responsible use—ensuring it functions as a tool for discovery rather than a bottleneck of informational chaos that stifles innovation.

Key words: Artificial intelligence; human-AI collaboration; AI for research; research productivity; AI ethics

1 Introduction

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), exemplified by tools like ChatGPT, has transformed academic research — bringing both remarkable opportunities and unforeseen challenges (Van Noorden and Perkel 2023). AI chatbots are often praised as invaluable assistants, capable of identifying conceptual links, aiding data analysis, and streamlining the writing process. However, their integration into scholarly work raises concerns about diminishing intellectual independence and critical engagement — qualities at the heart of rigorous academic inquiry (Lin 2023). My colleagues and I, despite initial optimism, discovered that relying on ChatGPT 4.0 has paradoxically diminished our research productivity in fields such as business, economics, marketing, education, psychology, and other areas of social sciences. Below, I outline four critical factors driving this counterintuitive outcome.

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2 Operational inefficiency: The hidden labor of AI integration

One of the biggest barriers to AI-driven research is ChatGPT's lack of direct access to academic databases. To leverage its analytical capabilities, researchers must manually download and upload papers — an inefficient process that disrupts the natural workflow. Previously, a single browser tab sufficed for accessing and reviewing literature, but AI integration introduces unnecessary administrative friction.

Despite experimenting with various AI research tools such as Elicit and Consensus, as well as automation workflows, their effectiveness remains limited. These challenges highlight a core issue: current AI models lack the infrastructure necessary for advanced academic research, particularly for domain-specific, high-level inquiry. While future developments may address this through direct database connectivity and citation-aware analysis, today's limitations mean that AI's promise of efficiency remains partially unfulfilled.

3 Fragmented thinking: The cost of pre-packaged knowledge

AI-generated summaries, such as those produced by ChatGPT, break papers into rigid sections (e.g., "Methods", "Results"), streamlining comprehension but at the cost of depth. While this structure can be helpful, it often oversimplifies complex arguments, stripping away the contextual richness necessary for nuanced understanding.

Deep engagement with a paper enables researchers to internalize its subtleties, identify gaps, and form original insights. In contrast, AI-generated summaries, though convenient, can discourage the slow, deliberate analysis that drives intellectual breakthroughs. When researchers over-rely on these summaries, they risk prioritizing efficiency over synthesis — absorbing only surface-level takeaways rather than engaging critically with the material.

The real issue arises when these summaries replace full-text reading rather than supplementing it. This shift disrupts the natural rhythm of intellectual exploration, where recursive engagement and deep contemplation often lead to the most valuable insights (Vuong, 2015). In theoretical or interdisciplinary research, where integrating ideas across fields is essential, AI-generated summaries frequently fail to capture the interdisciplinary arguments that give a paper its significance and nuances. Thus, while AI can assist with reading, it should enhance — not replace — the immersive process that fuels meaningful scholarship.

4 Secondary source anxiety: Eroding scholarly rigor

Relying on ChatGPT's summaries introduces a persistent unease — akin to historians working from translations rather than primary texts. For instance, analyzing *Ho Chi Minh's Prison Diary* through a Vietnamese translation risks losing the linguistic and cultural subtleties present in the original Chinese. Similarly, ChatGPT's summaries as well as other AI for research tools, while generally accurate, may omit critical context or misinterpret data (Ray 2023; Dwivedi et al. 2023).

To compensate, we frequently cross-reference AI-generated insights with original papers — an additional layer of verification that negates the supposed time savings and fuels skepticism about AI's reliability. This redundancy creates a paradox: instead of accelerating research, AI reliance often leads to duplicated efforts, reinforcing doubts about its trustworthiness (Thorp 2023).

5 Ethical Ambiguity: Navigating Uncharted Academic Terrain

The absence of universal guidelines for AI use in academia further complicates its integration (Perkins and Roe 2024). Journals vary widely in their policies — some require explicit citation of ChatGPT (Spanjol and Noble 2023), others classify it as an uncredited “tool” (SAGE Publications Inc 2023), and a few mandate disclosure of AI-generated content ratios (Elsevier). Questions surrounding authorship, hallucination mitigation, and accuracy verification remain unresolved, leaving researchers vulnerable to ethical missteps (Lozić and Štular 2023).

This uncertainty fosters a climate of caution. Even unintentional misuses of AI could damage reputations and erode trust in scholarly integrity (Cotton et al. 2024). As institutions and publishers struggle to keep pace with technological advancements, researchers are left navigating an evolving ethical landscape without clear guardrails (Bin-Nashwan et al. 2023). There are also huge divergences at personal, institutional and cultural levels about what constitutes authenticity and original thinking (Vuong & Ho, 2024), these differences add a more nuanced and difficult conversations around how to use such powerful AI tools for research in a responsible manner.

6 Toward a Balanced Future: Human-AI Collaboration in Academia

These challenges underscore an essential truth: AI tools like ChatGPT are not cure-alls. Their effective use requires not just technological refinement but also systemic collaboration (Lecler et al. 2023) and a deep reflection of cultural practices related to writing (Ho & Vuong, 2024). Regulatory bodies must establish clear ethical frameworks, while institutions should train researchers to use AI critically — understanding when automation is beneficial and when human intellect must take precedence (Ray 2023; Cotton et al. 2024).

Personally, we continue using ChatGPT (and other AI for research tools such as consensus, Google notebook LLM, Perplexity, etc.) on a daily basis, recognizing its potential while resisting over-reliance. The path forward is not about rejecting AI but fostering a symbiotic relationship — one where technology enhances human creativity without diminishing the rigor, curiosity, and patience that define meaningful scholarship. As AI evolves, so too must our strategies for harnessing its capabilities responsibly — ensuring it serves as a catalyst for discovery rather than a crutch, a bottleneck of informational chaos that stifles innovation.

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