

Introduction

In the ever-digitizing landscape of the 21st century, the interactions between humans and online systems are becoming increasingly important, with 89% of adults in the United Kingdom reportedly using the internet daily (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Given this usage, companies are attempting to seize this “attention” market by facilitating platform usage to increase market share and with advertising. Said platforms are becoming increasingly interested in platform anthropomorphization and personalization, as both directly increase user click-through rates and thus revenue potential (Mogaji et al., 2019). Similarly, the increasing proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), technologies defined by their capability of processing and generating realistic human-like speech (Gajjar 2023), is clear, with over 73% of the United Kingdom public reporting having used AI in 2026, with that number only increasing (AI Skills for Life and Work: General Public Survey Findings, 2026). Despite this, though, the psychological implications of AI's integration in online commerce and advertising have yet to be extensively studied.

Current Use of Artificial Intelligence in Commerce

In May 2026, Google announced the Universal Shopping Cart and Agent Payment Protocol (AP2), methods in which AI can be further integrated with their search engine and with online shopping (Srinivasan, 2026). The Universal Shopping Cart describes an AI-powered shopping assistant that can concurrently track items of displayed user interest to then recommend changes to one's shopping cart, suggest products to purchase, and track product prices. This agent can make purchases on the behalf of its users, according to Google's Agent Payment Protocol (AP2) (Parikh & Surapaneni, 2025).

According to this protocol, upon agreement, Google's Gemini can communicate user needs with merchants, who can then create custom offers for users; coordinate across multiple merchants to complete an overall purchase task, such as planning an entire vacation; and make purchases according to displayed user interest.

OpenAI's ChatGPT recently introduced advertising on its platform, allowing the marketing of products to users on its website and app (Advertise in ChatGPT | OpenAI Ads, 2026a). In particular, the advertisements are shown with relevance to what users are discussing with the LLM, particularly designated to fulfill user needs. OpenAI's current stance is that advertising will not interfere with ChatGPT-generated responses and will appear clearly labeled and visually distinct from responses (Ads in ChatGPT | OpenAI Help Center, 2026a).

The Likely Path of Artificial Intelligence (Fig.1.)

Despite OpenAI's current stance on advertising, it's unlikely that advertising will be kept separate from ChatGPT responses. ChatGPT's current advertising policy may cause friction for sponsorship, as the LLM has the potential to contradict the advertisements that are being shown (de Rosen, 2026).

This could lead to decreased investment in ChatGPT's current advertising model, as brands currently can't influence the organic responses of LLMs, thus putting brand coherence and perception at risk. In particular, this friction can be addressed by having advertisements skew the results of ChatGPT, and a more direct integration of advertisements into responses, similar to Google's change. Similarly, agents such as Google's Universal Shopping Cart will continue to be improved upon and further integrated with its platforms, thus granting Gemini larger access to personal information to suggest products and push personalized and contextually relevant advertising.

Speculative Implications (Fig. 1. Cont'd)

- Decreased decision-making and thus deterred individual autonomy among economically active adults, according to Self-Determination Theory
- Loss of autonomy and psychological degradation amongst children, and thus the overall populus
- Increased consulting of AI for life choices and increased susceptibility of individuals to economic manipulation by AI shopping agents
- Loss of intrinsic motivation, an overall shift to consumption rather than creation with leisure time, and a more easily replaceable workforce
- Declined critical thinking, degrading scientific research and the capacity to address world's greatest problems

A Different Path for Artificial Intelligence

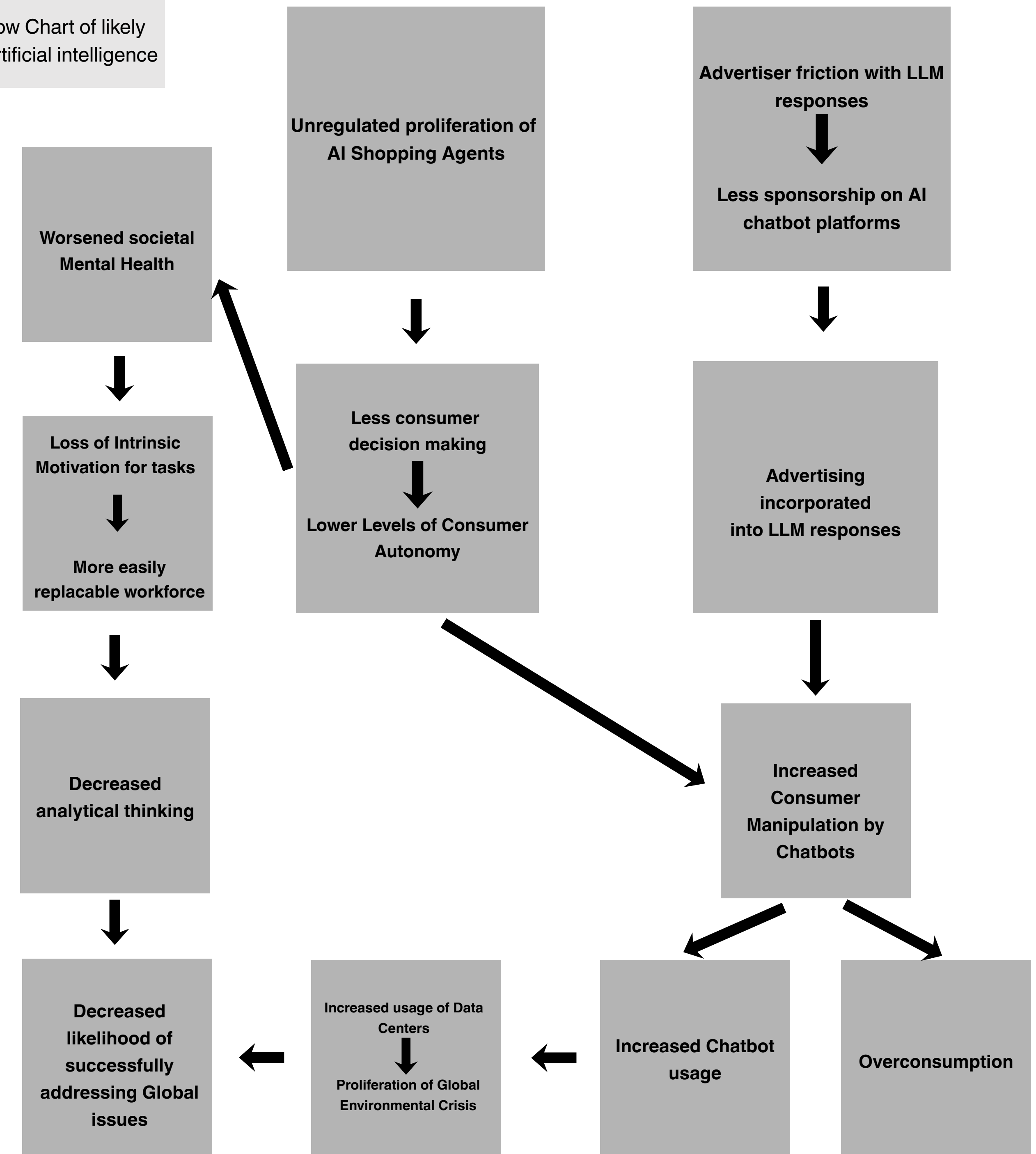
The expansion of commerce-centered laws on AI firms would directly prevent the proliferation of shopping agents making purchases on the behalf of consumers. Expanding consumer law to state that the proliferation of AI protocols that make purchases is detrimental to consumers would negate the loss of autonomy and potential for consumer manipulation caused by AI shopping agents. Similarly, strict regulations on AI platform advertising with the outright banning of advertiser integration with AI responses as a result of their emotionally manipulative nature would protect the validity of LLM responses and ensure that the safety of consumers.

Redesigning shopping agent responses from primarily recommending individual products and brands to primarily presenting information on a variety of different products, directly comparing their features, would aid in consumer decision-making.

Speculative Implications

- Increased societal autonomy
- Positive societal financial literacy
- Decreased overconsumption
- Increased access to simple information, increasing critical thinking, while advancing capacities for scientific research
- Leisure time spent constructively by the general population
- Increased capacity to address world's greatest problems
- Decreased energy spending and data center usage

Fig.1. Flow Chart of likely path for artificial intelligence



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