

Raising the 'shortcut' generation

We're shaping a generation that relies too heavily on AI. Here's where it could go wrong

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FOR most of human history, danger announced itself loudly. Wars were visible. Polluted rivers smelled. Unsafe cities felt unsafe. When something threatened our future, we could usually see it coming.

Artificial intelligence (AI), on the other hand, arrives in a different way. It speaks politely. It answers questions patiently. It helps our children finish their homework before dinner. It feels helpful, neutral, even kind.

And that is precisely why its most serious dangers remain largely unspoken. AI has woven itself into daily life so seamlessly that questioning it can feel unnecessary, even ungrateful.

Governments embrace it for efficiency. Companies rely on it for productivity. Parents welcome it as an educational support. The shift has been quiet, comfortable and fast.

But beneath that convenience lies a deeper question that society has yet to confront honestly: What happens to our future and our children's future, if AI grows faster than our ability to control how it shapes trust, privacy and human thinking?

The speed at which AI has been adopted is unprecedented. Generative AI tools reached hundreds of millions of users within a few years, far faster than social media or smartphones did in their early days.

At the same time, research in cognitive science has long shown that when tools remove friction from thinking, humans often adapt by thinking less, not more.

"AI doesn't just help people work or learn faster; it also enables attackers to move faster," said Izzmier Izzuddin, head of the Security Operations Centre at Bank Simpanan Nasional.

"My concern is not the technology itself, but how rapidly people begin to trust it without question," Izzmier noted from his experience with real-world cyber incidents.

AI lowers barriers across the board. Tasks that once required skill, effort or technical expertise can now be completed instantly. While this accelerates learning, it also accelerates manipulation.

"Almost anyone can now do things that used to require language skills, persuasion or technical ability with the right prompt. That changes the risk landscape completely," he explained. But beyond crime and security, there is a subtler cost. When answers arrive instantly, the habit of wrestling with uncertainty weakens. When explanations are always available, curiosity becomes optional.

"Before AI, people had to struggle a bit more. You had to search, think, doubt and sometimes fail. Now the answer is immediate. Over time, that changes how comfortable we are with not knowing," said Izzmier.

That discomfort, psychologists note, is essential to learning. Without it, critical thinking does not develop fully. What looks like efficiency today may quietly erode resilience tomorrow.

The illusion of privacy in the AI world

One of the most dangerous misconceptions surrounding AI is the belief that conversations with it are private.

"There is a huge misunderstanding here. People treat AI chats like personal conversations, when in reality they are external systems," Izzmier said.

Users paste screenshots, documents, school assignments and personal details into AI tools with little hesitation. From a cybersecurity standpoint, every piece of information shared expands the attack surface.

"When users upload sensitive documents or internal information, they unintentionally expose more than they realise. From a defender's point of view, this is not a future risk. It is already happening," he added.

Research on data security consistently shows that no platform is immune. Over the past decade, even the world's largest and most trusted technology companies have suffered breaches, leaks or miscon-figurations.

"Even trusted third-party providers cannot guarantee zero risk. Systems can be breached, misconfigured or accessed in ways that were never intended," Izzmier emphasised.

Once data is shared, control is lost. Information may be stored, reused or resurfaced years later, often beyond the user's awareness. For adults, this is concerning. For children, it is profound.

"That's why I always say AI assistants should be treated like public systems. If you wouldn't share something openly, you shouldn't share it with AI either. Convenience should never replace caution when it comes to personal data" he explained.

The cost to our future children

Nowhere is this risk more quietly embedded than in childhood.

AI has entered children's lives not as a warning, but as a helper. It explains homework patiently. It offers instant feedback. It never criticises or tires. For parents juggling time, work and expectations, it feels like support.

But support without guidance can become dependent.

"Many parents focus on the immediate benefits but may not realise how much personal data children are sharing in the process," Izzmier warned.

Children often treat AI as a companion rather than a tool. They share emotions, frustrations and personal thoughts without understanding permanence or privacy. Unlike human conversations, these interactions do not simply disappear.

"Children don't understand that data doesn't forget. To them, it feels like talking to a friend," he explained.

In Malaysia, where academic performance and digital literacy are increasingly prioritised, AI adoption among children has accelerated quietly. Schools encourage digital learning. Parents see AI as an advantage. But the long-term effects are rarely discussed.

This trend points toward increasing hyper-dependence on AI. Children are turning to AI before attempting independent thought or seeking guidance from parents or teachers.

Rather than forming their own conclusions, they increasingly seek instant validation, which over time may weaken confidence in independent judgment and reduce tolerance for uncertainty.

"When thinking becomes effortless, the habit of critical thinking slowly weakens," Izzmier said.

This is particularly concerning for a country striving to build a resilient, knowledge-based future. A generation that relies too heavily on AI for answers may struggle with ambiguity, problem-solving and decision-making when answers are no longer clear.

"What's missing is control," Izzmier added.

"Parents don't need to ban AI. But they do need to set boundaries. What can be shared? How long has it been used for? For what purpose?"

Just as screen time is guided, AI usage requires involvement.

"With the right controls, AI can be beneficial," he said.

"Without them, children's data and digital habits are shaped long before they're mature enough to understand the consequences."

Awareness as the last defence

Globally, cybersecurity research shows that most AI-assisted scams succeed not because systems are hacked, but because people are rushed. Attackers exploit urgency, trust and familiarity.

"Speed is the weapon. Not technology," Izzmier emphasised.

That same principle applies to everyday AI use.

He outlined three habits that need to stop becoming normal. First, treating AI chats as private spaces for sensitive information. Identification details, financial data, passwords and deeply personal matters should never be shared casually.

"Once data is shared, you lose control. You don't decide how long it exists or where it might appear again," he said.

Second, acting immediately on AI-generated advice without verification. Whether financial decisions or urgent requests, pressure should always trigger caution.

"Pause and verify. Always go through official or trusted channels," he said.

Third, assuming convenience equals safety.

"Just because something is popular or easy doesn't mean it's risk-free. Strong passwords, multi-factor authentication, updates and scepticism still matter," he explained.

AI should support judgment, not replace it.

"In cybersecurity, the strongest defence is often not technology, but awareness," Izzmier concluded.

AI's greatest danger is not that it will suddenly turn against humanity. It is that, quietly and comfortably, we may stop questioning, stop protecting and stop practising how to think.

Science fiction imagines futures where machines dominate humans. Reality is more subtle. The real risk is dependence disguised as convenience, trust given too easily and habits formed too early.

By the time we realise what has changed, the generation most affected may already be growing up inside it. And the future they inherit will reflect not what AI became, but what we chose to surrender along the way.

