

**Beyond Passive Consumption:
Early Observations on Generative Language Models and Non-Delegative Cognitive
Practices**

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Abstract

This paper presents an early, exploratory analysis of emerging patterns of interaction with large language models (LLMs). Rather than examining stabilized social effects or generalized user behavior, the analysis focuses on possibilities of use enabled by generative systems and on observable deviations from passive consumption models. Drawing on early aggregate usage data and qualitative observation of interaction affordances, the paper argues that under certain non-guided practices, some users engage with LLMs in ways incompatible with passive consumption of generated outputs. These practices may give rise to localized and contingent forms of cognitive circulation, without implying universal empowerment, democratization, or stable learning outcomes. The contribution is deliberately non-normative and non-prescriptive. It does not claim that such practices are widespread, scalable, or desirable, but suggests that they are legible phenomena worthy of attention prior to the consolidation of regulatory or institutional frameworks.

Keywords: Large Language Models (LLMs), Generative AI, Passive Consumption, Cognitive Circulation, Non-Delegative Practices, User Interaction, Early-Stage Analysis, Epistemic Practices, Information Mediation, AI Use Patterns

Introduction

Since the public deployment of large language models, discussions around artificial intelligence have been dominated by two parallel narratives: automation and displacement on the one hand, and governance, risk, and control on the other. While both narratives address important concerns, they tend to frame users either as consumers of outputs or as subjects exposed to harm. As a result, little conceptual space remains for alternative modes of interaction that do not fit neatly into either category.

This paper proposes a narrow and early intervention: to examine whether certain interactions with LLMs exhibit characteristics incompatible with a purely passive consumption model, and to explore the epistemic implications of such interactions. Importantly, this work does not analyze users as a population, nor does it attempt to infer intentions, motivations, or psychological states. Instead, it examines interactional possibilities opened by LLMs and the kinds of cognitive practices they make conceivable, even if such practices remain marginal, unevenly distributed, or temporally unstable.

Scope and Delimitations

This analysis is explicitly constrained in scope. It does not describe general user behavior, claim representative adoption patterns, evaluate learning outcomes, propose design interventions, or advance regulatory recommendations. Rather, it analyzes early affordances of LLM interaction, draws on aggregate usage categories reported by platform providers and secondary analyses, and identifies interactional patterns that resist classification as passive content consumption.

The paper adopts an early-stage exploratory stance, treating its claims as provisional and reversible.

Early Usage Patterns and an Empirical Entry Point

Aggregate reports on generative AI usage between 2024 and 2025 indicate that early adoption was not dominated by specialized technical or knowledge-production tasks. Instead, prominent categories included emotional support, life organization, reflection, and conversational use (OpenAI, 2025). More recent summaries of generative AI use cases show a marked increase in categories related to enhanced learning, suggesting that a growing subset of interactions involves users engaging models as aids for understanding, explanation, and conceptual clarification rather than as mere generators of finished outputs (Harvard Business Review, 2025).

This observation is not treated here as evidence of learning efficacy or user transformation. Rather, it serves as an empirical anchor indicating that generative systems are being used in ways that do not inherently enforce passive reception, thereby leaving open the possibility of interactional practices that diverge from consumption-oriented models.

Passive Consumption as a Baseline Model

Much of the existing discourse implicitly assumes a baseline interaction model in which the system produces content, the user consumes it, and value is extracted at the level of output. This model aligns with concerns about automation, plagiarism, and dependency. However, it becomes insufficient when users interrogate outputs, iteratively reformulate questions, reject or correct responses, or transfer information outside the immediate interaction context.

Such behaviors do not negate the presence of power asymmetries or epistemic risk, but they do disrupt the symmetry of passive consumption and call for alternative analytical descriptions.

Behaviors Incompatible with Passive Consumption

The core analytical move of this paper is negative rather than affirmative. Instead of defining agency positively, it identifies behaviors that are incompatible with a purely passive model. These include sustained reformulation of questions, explicit contradiction or correction of model outputs, cross-domain transfer of concepts, and the use of the system as a provisional interlocutor rather than an authoritative source.

These behaviors are neither guaranteed nor designed. They may appear intermittently, disappear entirely, or coexist with highly passive usage patterns.

Cognitive Circulation as a Contingent Effect

The concept of *cognitive circulation* is introduced in this paper as a provisional analytical descriptor intended to capture a specific interactional phenomenon observed in early engagements with large language models. Much of the discourse surrounding generative AI treats information as either newly produced or mechanically retrieved, with models generating content that users consume and evaluate primarily at the level of artifacts.

LLMs, however, often operate as mechanisms for surfacing, reorganizing, and reinterpreting dispersed information that previously remained latent within large-scale information environments. This includes explanations scattered across multiple sources, conceptual distinctions embedded in technical or academic repositories, and contextual knowledge that requires synthesis rather than direct retrieval.

Cognitive circulation begins when this rearticulated information does not terminate at the output, but enters into a human interpretive process. When users interrogate, contextualize, apply, or reuse the information provided—rather than merely consume it—the informational content becomes integrated into their own reasoning processes. It is at this point, when rearticulated information is evaluated and used, that circulation acquires cognitive significance.

This process does not occur for all users, nor does it occur consistently for the same user across interactions. It is localized, partial, and dependent on practice rather than design. Cognitive circulation cannot be universally assumed; it materializes only in specific interactions, for specific users, under conditions in which information is both usable and actively engaged.

The term *circulation* is chosen deliberately to avoid stronger claims such as transmission, accumulation, or democratization. Circulation does not imply correctness, stability, or permanence. It refers instead to a movement of ideas through an interactional loop in which information may be presented, interrogated, reformulated, accepted, rejected, or transformed without resolving into authoritative knowledge.

Power, Imperceptibility, and the Limits of Observation

This analysis does not deny the presence of power embedded in LLM infrastructures. On the contrary, it assumes that at this level power often operates imperceptibly, through defaults, fluency, and convenience rather than explicit constraint. The perspective adopted here, focused on possibilities of use rather than institutional design, cannot fully observe these power dynamics. This limitation is acknowledged as structural rather than methodological.

Non-Claims

For clarity, this paper does not claim that most users exhibit non-passive practices, that such practices are beneficial or harmful, that LLMs inherently promote learning, or that cognitive circulation offsets economic or cultural displacement. Its sole claim is that some observable interactional patterns cannot be adequately described as passive consumption, and that these patterns warrant conceptual attention before being absorbed into normative or regulatory frameworks.

Conclusion

At an early stage of technological diffusion, conceptual restraint may be as important as conceptual innovation. By resisting premature generalization, this paper seeks to preserve a narrow analytical space in which emergent cognitive practices can be observed without being immediately moralized, regulated, or instrumentalized. Whether these practices persist, expand, or vanish remains an open question. What matters, at this stage, is recognizing that they exist as possibilities, not as guarantees.

References

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Author's note

This manuscript was written with the assistance of a large language model (GPT 5.2) and subsequently reviewed, edited, and substantively revised by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the content.