

Text D

Google Wants to Turn You into a Cyborg

Google is no longer, at its core, a search engine. It's now foremost an artificial intelligence engine. And its goal is not to help you find information, but to become an extension of your very self.

That might sound alarmist or far-fetched. But the recent launch of the Google Assistant — think Alexa, but smarter — has displaced Google search as the company's central product, the one that binds all the others. Its scary-ambitious goal: To blur the line between human and machine to the point where they become literally indistinguishable.

The company isn't trying to turn you into a cyborg in any kind of physical respect. Presumably, it learned a lesson from Google Glass, the augmented-reality glasses that flopped when they were widely deemed dorky and “douche.” Rather, Google is now beckoning you to accept its software as part of your extended mind, in all kinds of new ways. It promises to think for you, speak for you, and carry out actions in the real world on your behalf.

The demo in which the Google Assistant placed a call to a hairdresser, carried on a humanlike conversation with the receptionist, and navigated multiple scheduling conflicts to book an appointment for 10 a.m. on Wednesday is jaw-dropping.

The uncannily humanlike “uhs” and “mm-hmms” that punctuated the Assistant's dialogue drew appreciative laughs from the crowd. Yet on reflection, the demo was as unnerving as it was dazzling. Google has built probably the world's most potent A.I., and now it's busy devising clever ways to pass it off as human. As if we needed more fakes in the tech world.

That new feature that humanizes Assistant's speech with all-too-real tics is called Duplex. Google sure made it seem like Duplex's intelligence was the real deal — that is, the artificial deal. More importantly, Duplex is not a one-off gimmick. It's the leading edge of Google's full-scale thrust into artificially intelligent agents.

The product's debut came shortly after Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced a new Gmail feature called “smart compose”. Building on the “smart reply” function pioneered in Google's Inbox mobile app, Gmail will now help you write full emails from scratch. It will predict what you might want to type, based on both its knowledge of you and situational cues, such as the day of the week. The company's demo showed its A.I. typing almost an entire email with the subject line “taco Tuesday,” right down to suggesting that the recipient bring the chips and salsa.

Already “smart reply” — which suggests brief email responses such as “I'll be there” and “Looking forward to it” — has proved hugely popular with power users, accounting for 12 percent of all replies in Inbox. Now, with “smart compose,” more and more emails will be software-generated, and it's easy to imagine a time in the near future when you can't tell if you're holding a conversation with your friend or with Google. Maybe you won't care, because Google is handling your side of the conversation too.

When it's not posing as you in interactions with others, Google Assistant will be working to interact with you in ever more “natural” and human ways.

There is a dystopian way to view all of this. It's that Google is simply trying to automate the basic capabilities of a human personal assistant, as the name Google Assistant implies. This may

not be entirely reassuring, especially to those who hold jobs as personal assistants. But it's in keeping with Silicon Valley's longstanding project of automating various forms of labor, starting with low-skill jobs and working its way up the value chain. Besides, impressive as the technology seems, it's not at all clear that the Assistant will prove as deceptive a human in practice as it was in Google's carefully cherry-picked demos. It's not like Google has suddenly solved the Turing test.

Still, it's noteworthy that building machines that can pass for human now seems to be one of Google's explicit goals. And there are real differences between granting intimate access to your life to a person you trust and granting the same access to one of the most powerful corporations the world has ever seen. For one thing, if a human assistant started using your personal data to sell advertisers access to your time in unguarded moments, you'd probably fire them.

Just because Google wants us to accept its Assistant as an integral part of us doesn't mean it will happen. Maybe Duplex, smart compose, and the rest will catch on with early adopters and then falter, like Glass before them. BuzzFeed's Charlie Warzel suggested users may shy away because the technology is both invasive and infantilizing. Maybe people won't sacrifice their privacy and the humanity of their basic interactions at the altar of time-saving and convenience. But the history of Google says they will — provided only that it really works.

I. Choose the correct answers.

1. Which of the following can't be done by Google assistant, according to the passage?
 - A. to extend your mind and execute your command
 - B. to make complicated conversations with humans with strong execution
 - C. to trick humans by imitating humans' tone**
 - D. to solve the clashes in a tight schedule
2. In the third paragraph, the word "flop" is closest in meaning to _____.
 - A. to be condemned
 - B. disappeared
 - C. to be withdrawn
 - D. to fail utterly**
3. In the author's opinion, Duplex is _____.
 - A. a superfluous product
 - B. a pioneering innovation**
 - C. an epoch-making breakthrough
 - D. a clever device
4. What's the common point of "smart compose" and "smart reply"?
 - A. Both of them are generated by A.I..**
 - B. Both of the are popular with computer users.
 - C. Both of them could type a private reply.
 - D. Both of them are new Gmail features.
5. According to the passage, which of the following imaginary danger might be posed by Google Assistant?
 - A. It might be rejected by first adopters, which leads to a waste of investment.
 - B. It might collect your private information and automatically tamper with it.
 - C. Hackers might invade into PCs to commit crimes by hijacking GA.
 - D. the reduction of real human interaction might damage their psychological health.**

II. Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage? Are they true, false or not given?

1. Google Glass tried to enhance humans' physical power.
2. Google is targeting its market on A.I. service.
3. The Google Assistant is the application of Duplex, a trial for A.I. products.
4. With the preset pattern and collected personal tracks, the "smart compose" could help type a full email.
5. Safety concern limits the A.I. product popularization.

Keys:

I. 1. C 2. D 3. B 4. A 5. D

II.

1. Not given
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True

Text E

Tech Firms Can't Keep Our Data Forever: We Need a Digital Expiry Date

It's taken a long time, but people have finally discovered how much information companies like Google and Facebook have on them. We cannot keep sacrificing our privacy and dignity to continue using the internet. However, at the same time, new digital innovations that millions love and enjoy require our data. So, what are we to do?

[A] The industry simply does not believe in a delete button. For instance, Google has records of all my locations for the last six years, and Facebook has my deleted messages from nearly 10 years ago.

This kind of long-term data storage may seem innocuous to some. To others, it may even be useful to know what exactly they were doing on a specific day many years ago, or recover messages from a loved one, or see how much their searching and browsing habits have changed over time.

However, as the surveillance is emerging as a growing concern — especially in surveillance states — the long-term data storage enacted by all of the top tech companies is a dream come true for any current or future authoritarian state.

Even if western political power is not enacting any Nineteen-Eighty-Four-style policies of tracking your every word and executing you for any rebellious statements, the knowledge of potential surveillance can lead to self-censorship. You are not a threat and you may not have an FBI agent dedicated to you, but even the knowledge that they may look into you can lead to society operating with a subconscious fear of expressing views on the internet.

A 2013 study surveying US writers found that after they learned of the NSA's mass surveillance programs, one in six avoided writing on a topic they thought that would subject them to any kind of surveillance, and a further one in six seriously considered avoiding controversial topics.

[B] As Edward Snowden has put it: "Ask yourself: at every point in history, who suffers the most from unjustified surveillance? It is not the privileged, but the vulnerable. Surveillance is not about safety. It is about power. It's about control."

There also isn't strong business case for internet companies storing decades-old data. Old information is virtually worthless to advertisers and therefore not profitable for the companies to store. [C] You may not live in the same location; you may not have the same friend, interests, hobbies, career, weight or even income as in that period. Yet they just keep hoarding it.

Therefore, I propose legislation to allow companies to harvest as much information as they like, but with one caveat: they must delete the information from their servers in quarterly blocks.[D]

They can then offer you an option to download all the data they have on you, if you would like to keep your images or statuses or messages or emails. However, this must be an opt-outs option.

[E] It may be too difficult or even impossible to stop entities like the NSA and CIA from monitoring your internet activity, but we can at least take a first step and put a roadblock in place for any potential or future surveillance. They will not have access to your life's diary at the click of a button, or see everywhere you have been for 10 years, or use searching or browsing history from when you were a teenager to question your character.

This Digital Expiry Date offers companies the benefits of getting your data, personalizing results and still making profits while putting some control in the user's hands. You will not have to worry about companies in the future mishandling years' worth of information — which would limit the damage they could do. A Digital Expiry Date would maintain online innovation and profitability, while helping to prevent any future privacy disasters.

It is not a perfect solution, but it is a start.

I. Choose the correct answers.

1. What's the contradiction that consumers' online privacy faces?
 - A. Data collection is automatic even if they refuse to upload.
 - B. The span of data is controlled by companies while they have no access to download.
 - C. They have to upload their information to enjoy the high tech.
 - D. Some data are too ancient to be deleted.

2. The word "innocuous" is the closest in meaning to _____.
 - A. inoffensive
 - B. innocent
 - C. insensitive
 - D. inadequate

3. According to the passage, the internet companies might use consumers' long-term data _____.
 - A. to check your life trajectory
 - B. to evaluate your characters
 - C. to guess your personal preference
 - D. to enhance product experience

4. What is the author's suggestion on data privacy?
 - A. To hoard data after the verification by consumers' consent.
 - B. To clean up consumers' data at regular intervals.
 - C. To allow consumers to download their old data.
 - D. To forbid companies to store consumer's data for a long time.

5. By mentioning consumers' "opt-out" option on their data, the author means that _____.
 - A. a user could undo a confirmation
 - B. a user could make their decision by checking a marked box
 - C. a user could offer their consent
 - D. a user could confirm their preference

II. Where could the following sentences be added to the passage? (The possible positions have been marked in the passage.)

1. This would allow us to keep using the services we like in the exact fashion that we do now.
2. The world is constantly changing.
3. This is why we need online privacy: we have the right to be curious or conduct digital actions without constantly being tracked.

4. Why would Google need your location from six years ago, or Facebook to store you message from 10 years ago, to target advertising?
5. The biggest issue with the software industry's data collection is the span of time for which it hoards information.

Keys:

I. 1. C 2. A 3. D 4. B 5. A

II. 1. D 2. E 3. B 4. C 5. A