



AI and Social Science: Applications and Implications of Multimodal Large Language Models

a presentation

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The rapid proliferation of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, exemplified by the widespread adoption of systems like ChatGPT, has precipitated significant disruption across numerous sectors. The academic community, in particular, has faced an immediate need for critical reassessment of pedagogical practices, research methodologies, and the very nature of scholarly inquiry. This presentation explores the multifaceted implications of these emerging AI technologies. We begin by understanding what these tools really are, how they work, and what all this means for their usage. We explore the implications for knowledge work, society, and research. A central focus is the responsible and effective integration of AI into social inquiry, social science research, and teaching. This includes addressing potential biases, mitigating risks associated with inaccurate outputs (e.g., "hallucinations"), and ensuring ethical applications. Furthermore, the presentation will examine the broader societal consequences of the ongoing and potentially transformative advancements in AI. While the precise trajectory remains subject to debate, current projections suggest that these technologies may soon rival or exceed the performance of PhD-level experts across a range of general and specialized tasks. AI, on many levels, is both an academic and a broad societal existential threat. At the same time, it is also an opportunity to improve many people's lives at an unprecedented rate. We explore practical use cases and propose frameworks for incorporating AI tools into both classroom instruction and the research process. The overarching goal is to foster a nuanced understanding of AI's capabilities and limitations, promoting a proactive and informed approach to its integration within the social sciences and society in general.