

## Let's talk about lifestyle inflation

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If there was a defining keyword for the current decade aside from pandemic, it would be inflation. In simple terms, inflation is why being able to afford eggs is more of a status symbol than having a brand-new iPhone. It's also why eating out is getting costlier, yet portion sizes are getting smaller. Ultimately, this phenomenon is a reflection of the current socio-economic and political state of the world, but that is an article for another time. Today, we'll talk about a less common but equally dangerous form of inflation that creeps up on you out of nowhere, aptly termed "lifestyle inflation".

When you're in school or college, you are usually on a tight budget, usually pocket money or earnings from tutoring gigs, which isn't much but enough to get a burger once in a while. However, from university onwards, the amount of money you earn usually increases. Be it part-time roles, internships, or eventually a full-time job, you are suddenly earning far more money than the 17-year-old version of you could even comprehend. Such an increase is an intrinsically good thing, as being in a good financial position is very important to a better quality of life, but this also slowly changes the decisions you make. You may have taken the bus to get somewhere before but decide to take an Uber now that you can afford it or buy the pricey gelato you've never had the courage to try before.

Generally, lifestyle inflation seems harmless; after all, don't we all deserve to treat ourselves once in a while? Yes, but having expensive coffee daily, even as a coping mechanism for your dreadful job, can add up in the long run. At the end of the month, you'll be surprised by the amount of money that funnels into eating out, impulsive purchases, and general unchecked spending.

While I don't intend to shame anyone for their decisions and personally have fallen into the lifestyle inflation trap, it is an unsustainable financial situation.

Although unpleasant to hear, we are all one rainy day or hospitalisation away from debt. The economy hasn't been great for quite a while, and



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

it does not seem to be getting better anytime soon. So how can I combat lifestyle inflation? There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution to this, but starting small, like logging down your expenses and seeing how much you are spending on non-essentials, is a start. Let's say, seeing that a 500 taka coffee per workday leads to around BDT 10,000 a month can usually provide the jolt needed to commit to better financial decisions.

If you find yourself with some extra disposable income that you don't want to blow on compulsively buying clothes online, it may be a good idea to actually open a savings or deposit scheme, as doing so is far more accessible now. And if it all fails, just give it to your mother to hold on to for you, but there's a chance you'll never see that money again.

Finances are a tricky part of growing up that no one ever prepares you for, and it's not uncommon to want to give yourself things that you may not have otherwise had growing up. But there is a difference between buying a plushie vs putting down a 12-month instalment plan on a new phone. The cost of living is barely affordable as is, and it is important to do some planning alongside treating yourself to make sure you can survive when artificial intelligence takes away all entry-level jobs in the next five years.

Taaseen's finances are in shambles send him financial advice at taaseen.2001@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

# THE TROUBLING ETHOS behind anti-AI rhetoric

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Over the past few years, a trend has emerged on social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram: online jokes referencing "anti-AI" pejoratives. There are videos going around in which creators berate robots and chatbots in fictional scenarios as if they're second class citizens, repackaging Jim Crow-era segregation in the context of an imagined cyberpunk future, and skits depicting scenarios along the lines of a man pretending to be a cop making fun of a robot lamenting, "My cooling fans won't work."

As the backlash against artificial intelligence (AI) continues to escalate, so does the popularity of fictional slurs. While

oversaturation of "slop".

This particular technological encroachment on daily life has led to frustration, prompting backlash as people seek to reclaim agency in various ways – one of which is the strategic weaponisation of language.

Finding its origin in a 1958 article by William Tenn, who used the word to describe robots from science fiction films, "clanker" entered the popular lexicon thanks to the Star Wars franchise, wherein clone troopers would use the term as a slur against enemy battle droids. Recently, it has been adopted by naysayers of AI. However, these derogatory terms mirror real-life racial rhetoric. Most of the words people use as anti-AI slurs are derived from and employed in the same ways as actual slurs against minorities. Regardless of its origins, "clanker" is now commonly used in lieu of the N-word; "wireback" is a riff on wetback, which is a slur against immigrants in the US; "Rosa Sparks" and "George Droid" parallel Rosa Parks and George Floyd, civil rights activist and victim of police brutality, respectively – members of existing groups of marginalised people.

By calling machines derogatory terms inspired by real-life slurs, users of such pejoratives normalise racist and ableist patterns of thought. It may be a form of protest done in jest, but jokes are rooted in real ideas, which are reinforced through repeated usage. Participating in the "palatable" version of racism and ableism equips individuals with the unsavoury knowledge of how to successfully marginalise a population, sentient or otherwise. According to linguist Adam Aleksic in an National Public Radio (NPR) piece published on August 6: "...the people saying clanker are assigning more personality to these robots than actually exist."

In other words, they simultaneously humanise AI and exhibit dehumanising behaviour by using the schema of actual racism. Not equating robots with people fails to justify this phenomenon, because calling someone a slur is dehumanising behaviour to begin with.

The emergence of slurs aimed at AI shows how quickly prejudiced language forms. Derogatory terms spread online, wrapped in humour but replicating the structure of real hate speech: defining a group through contempt, and building an in-group identity around shared hostility. Even though AI is not "alive", participating in such language trains people to normalise cruelty. Regularly repeating statements that "ironically" borrow from the language of bigotry alters the taboo surrounding the usage of discriminatory speech. In other words, using slur-like or slur-derived language makes us more likely to use actual slurs.

This phenomenon also reveals that edgy racist humour is no longer confined to niche far-right online spaces, but has seeped into and spread across the greater digital landscape. Hate speech and reactionary rhetoric on the internet have existed long enough that the line between parodic anti-AI language and actual racist dog whistle has blurred.

Despite these troubling patterns, acknowledging the existence of racism-adjacent behaviour toward AI doesn't necessarily require granting them the same moral status as humans. The key concern here is what this behaviour reveals about us. Disparaging attitudes toward AI may not cause them emotional harm, but they shape the social environment in which technology operates. If people grow comfortable demeaning things that talk and respond like humans, it may dull the reflexes that support empathy in general.

Ultimately, the proliferation of anti-AI slurs should force us to engage in critical self-examination and reckon with uncomfortable truths. The "othering" of AI isn't just a futuristic metaphor, it's a mirror. In making fun of machines using denigrating language, we may be revealing how much of our own bigotry we are willing to recycle.

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it reflects legitimate anxieties surrounding AI infestation in every aspect of our lives, this brand of humour is underpinned by real tension. When we direct contempt, abuse, and demeaning behaviour toward AI, what does it reveal about us?

AI has permeated every facet of our lives, inciting polarising reactions. There are a lot of aspects warranting legitimate concern regarding AI as both a product and an industry, such as its integration into production pipelines, customer service, internet browsers, search engines, and operating systems, and how it's making it easier to pump content of questionable quality out into online spaces that already have problems with an

# Loving films in the age of social media An intro to Letterboxd

FAIZA ADIL

If you're like me and have a million ever-changing interests, chances are your social media algorithm is not doing them all justice. Talk about the wrong thing too close to your phone, and the next day, it might be your worst nightmare on Instagram. You might follow a few amateur film critics, some TikTokers, and a handful of curators. But what you might not be doing is using Letterboxd.

Loved the last movie you watched, but don't want to be that guy on your Instagram stories? There's an app that's made just for that. From rating and reviewing your newest watch to curating watchlists to pick your next, this is a one-stop solution for any film enthusiast's needs. This guide will give you a rundown on how to best utilise the platform.

**Curating your feed**

The most important part is following the right people. This could be anyone – a

friend with honest takes or a random hilarious user, a try-hard with detailed analysis or even your objectively annoying cinephile friend who only watches obscure movies with no discernible plot – the world of Letterboxd is your oyster.

The people you follow make up the most interesting part of this app, its activity page. This is every film enthusiast's dream come true. Almost everything you do is logged for your followers to see. This means your friends know when you rate *Sinners* two stars (for the sake of being a contrarian), what movies you add to your watchlist, and whose reviews you've liked.

In retrospect, it might sound intrusive, but the whole point of using Letterboxd lies in its ability to make space for a community that enjoys the act of connecting through shared tastes. Instead of being a doomscrolling medium, your feed is meant to encourage the consumption of more art by allowing for a place to share your opinions and to



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

find others.

**Browsing lists and reviews**

There are thousands of rated reviews for just about any film left by Letterboxd users, ranging from one-liners, jokes, and quotes to full-fledged, detailed breakdowns. You can like your favourite reviews, read the reviews your friends have left, and even the ones they've liked. This turns out to be a great way to debrief when the end credits start rolling in, giving you a more unique chance to relive and react to your newest experience.

Letterboxd also houses hundreds of user-made lists that compile films of similar themes, genres, vibes, and just about any other factor. Find lists of people's favourite movies by genres, ranked lists of their favourite directors, top picks, tearjerkers, and even most hated; you name it and it exists.

Ever wanted a list of movies that feel like Hozier songs? There's probably a list out there with *Phantom Thread* on it.

**Compiling the ultimate watchlist**

It's time to delete the messy watchlists on your notes app and invest your time in adding to your Letterboxd watchlist instead. It's not just more fun to be able to scroll through all the posters and pick, but it's also significantly more efficient since you get to filter and sort your list in multiple different ways to find exactly what scratches your itch.

Just like most things on Letterboxd, you can view other people's watchlists, maybe steal a film or two, and even filter

your watchlists with your friends to save the hour you'd otherwise spend arguing on what to watch.

**Decking out your profile**

The more you use the app, the more it builds onto your profile, where your friends can see what you've watched recently, how many movies you've logged, and your top four favourite picks. And just like other medium that curates art, each year they send you an overview of your year in film, much like a Spotify Wrapped.

More than a social media profile, Letterboxd allows you to use it as a personal diary, a way in which you can revisit and remember your journey in film. In a world where we often consume more than we have the capacity to recall, Letterboxd allows you to be more intentional in your film consumption.

Faiza has an ungodly screentime on Letterboxd, indulge her hyperfixation with suggestions on IG @fzouls