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Synthetic Intelligence: Reframing AI As Human-Created Cognitive Systems - A Paradigm Shift For The Digital Age

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Abstract: The terminology "Artificial Intelligence" (AI), coined at the 1956 Dartmouth Conference, has dominated discourse in computer science for over six decades. However, its linguistic implications increasingly conflict with the reality of these human-engineered cognitive systems. This comprehensive review argues for a fundamental rebranding to "Synthetic Intelligence" (SI) and "Synthetic General Intelligence" (SGI), grounded in philosophical accuracy, scientific precision, and practical necessity. Through an interdisciplinary analysis encompassing linguistics, philosophy, cognitive science, and industry practice, we demonstrate that modern AI systems are synthetic constructs of human intelligence, not "artificial" phenomena. The term "artificial" perpetuates problematic dualisms and public misunderstanding, particularly in discussions of general intelligence. This paper puts forth a series of powerful, testable hypotheses regarding the potential for SI/SGI terminology to significantly enhance scientific discourse, public trust, regulatory efficacy, and investment landscapes. This reframing represents not merely a semantic adjustment but a fundamental realignment of how we conceptualize, develop, and communicate about human-engineered cognitive systems, and we conclude by proposing a research agenda to empirically validate its transformative impact.

Keywords: Synthetic Intelligence, Artificial Intelligence, AI Ethics, Synthetic General Intelligence, Artificial General Intelligence, Scientific Communication, AI systems.

1. Introduction

The term "Artificial Intelligence" entered the scientific lexicon in 1955 with the proposal for the Dartmouth Conference, where researchers aimed to create "machines that use language, form abstractions and concepts, solve kinds of problems now reserved for humans, and improve themselves" (McCarthy et al., 1955). Decades later, the global AI market has reached an unprecedented scale, with projections estimating it will add trillions to the global economy (STL Digital, 2025). However, the foundational terminology has not evolved to match our sophisticated understanding of these systems.

The persistence of "artificial" in AI nomenclature creates fundamental misalignments between scientific reality and public perception. This review presents a comprehensive argument for rebranding "Artificial Intelligence" to "Synthetic Intelligence" and "Artificial General Intelligence" to "Synthetic General Intelligence." This paper will argue why the next decade of AI research must abandon 'artificial' for 'synthetic' - and how this simple change will transform everything we think about machine intelligence. This proposed terminological shift addresses philosophical inaccuracies, improves scientific communication, enhances public understanding, and supports more effective governance of these transformative technologies by correctly framing them as genuine, engineered systems born from human agency and ingenuity, as illustrated in Figure 1.

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Figure 1: Modern Synthetic Intelligence applications are not merely imitations but genuine systems engineered through human ingenuity (After Parallel Work, 2018)

This image illustrates the core concept of SI, where human intentionality (the hand) directs and synthesizes complex computational components (data, networks, logic) into functional, real-world applications.

2. The Misnomer Problem: Why "Artificial" Fails Scientific Accuracy

The term "artificial" carries significant semantic baggage that conflicts with the nature of modern AI systems. In common usage, "artificial" implies an imitation, a lack of authenticity, or a manufactured substitute (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). This linguistic framework creates problematic associations, framing these systems as inauthentic or fake (Whitely, 2023). Research in cognitive linguistics demonstrates that such terminology fundamentally shapes conceptual frameworks and public understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The artificial/natural dualism perpetuated by AI terminology creates a false dichotomy that obscures the reality that these systems are entirely products of human ingenuity and intellectual effort.

Modern AI systems represent synthetic constructs of human intelligence. The term "synthetic" more appropriately captures the deliberate engineering, purposeful design, and human-creative origins of these systems. Table 1 illustrates the key distinctions between these frameworks.

Table 1. Artificial vs. Synthetic Frameworks in AI Terminology

ASPECT	ARTIFICIAL FRAMEWORK	SYNTHETIC FRAMEWORK
Origin	Implied external or alien creation	Explicit human engineering
Authenticity	Questionable/imitation	Purposefully designed and real
Agency	Autonomous/mysterious	Human-directed/transparent
Development	Spontaneous emergence	Systematic construction
Ethics	Dualistic moral frameworks	Integrated human values and accountability

Note. *This table compares traditional artificial intelligence frameworks with proposed synthetic intelligence approaches, highlighting key philosophical and practical distinctions.*

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This distinction becomes particularly critical when discussing Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). The term "artificial" in AGI contexts often triggers anthropomorphic assumptions and consciousness-related concerns that lack a scientific foundation (Susskind, 2015). Reframing the goal as Synthetic General Intelligence (SGI) emphasizes the engineering of comprehensive cognitive architectures rather than the creation of mysterious "artificial minds," allowing for a more sober and productive discourse.

3. The Synthetic Intelligence Framework: A Philosophically Grounded Approach

Synthetic Intelligence represents the engineering of cognitive capabilities through systematic, human-directed processes. This framework emphasizes deliberate construction, human agency, systematic development, and transparent origins. It is rooted not in abstract thought alone, but in the rigorous scientific and engineering work conducted in advanced laboratory settings (see Figure 2). This aligns with a constructivist philosophy that recognizes the integral role of human intelligence in system construction and knowledge creation (Piaget, 1970).

Figure 2: Advanced Laboratory settings crucial for synthesizing and developing sophisticated cognitive systems (After University of Virginia, School of Medicine, 2025).

The development of sophisticated Synthetic Intelligence is not a casual endeavor but a product of rigorous scientific research and engineering in advanced laboratory settings like the one shown. This physical reality underscores the 'synthetic' nature of these systems—they are deliberately constructed, not mysteriously 'artificial'.

Phenomenological analysis further reveals that synthetic systems embody human cognitive patterns and problem-solving approaches rather than representing alien forms of intelligence (Husserl, 1962). This philosophical alignment supports more accurate scientific discourse and public communication by moving away from the unanswerable question of whether a machine is "truly" intelligent toward the more practical and ethically relevant question of how we can build beneficial intelligent systems.

4. Historical and Philosophical Context

The 1956 Dartmouth Conference established "Artificial Intelligence" as the field's defining terminology, influenced by the cybernetics research and early computational theory of the time (McCarthy et al., 1955). However, subsequent developments in

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cognitive science and neuroscience have revealed the continuous nature of intelligence processes across biological and engineered systems (Haugeland, 1985).

Research in science communication demonstrates that accurate terminology improves public understanding and scientific progress (Gross, 1990). The "artificial" framework has created unnecessary barriers, fueling public anxiety and sensationalized media narratives (Felix, 2018; Novak, 2023). The evolution of AGI discourse illustrates these problems, where the "artificial" framing has contributed to unrealistic expectations and unfounded fears. Reframing the pursuit as SGI supports more realistic discussions about engineered general intelligence capabilities and development timelines (Oluwafemi et al., 2024).

5. Industry Implications: Economic and Practical Considerations

A terminological shift has significant practical implications for investment, regulation, and public trust. While direct data on the term "synthetic" is emerging, related industry trends are informative. Public trust is a critical factor in AI adoption, and a lack of it can create significant regulatory and market hurdles (Gillespie et al., 2023). Given that "artificial" can trigger negative associations and "AI-related anxiety" (Ipsos, 2024), a move to the more neutral, engineering-focused term "synthetic" could foster greater public trust (see Figure 3).

This, in turn, can create a more favorable environment for investment. The pursuit of AGI is a long-term, high-risk endeavor. A shift to SGI could help ground the conversation in reality, attracting serious, long-term investors interested in funding a credible engineering project rather than a science fiction concept. Regulatory analysis also suggests that clearer, more accurate language allows policymakers to develop more nuanced and effective governance policies, moving beyond anthropomorphic biases (GOV.UK, 2024).

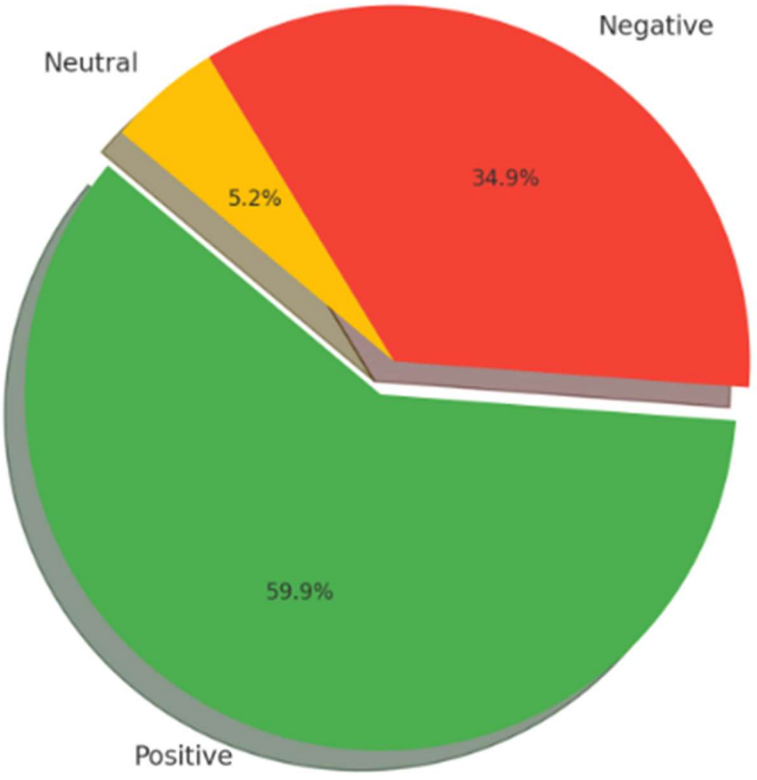

Figure 3: Infographic illustrating public sentiment towards AI, showing percentages of positive, negative, and neutral perceptions based on data from recent global surveys (After Ada Lovelace Institute, 2023).

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6. The Linguistic Revolution: How Terminology Shapes Perception

Cognitive science research confirms that terminology fundamentally shapes conceptual frameworks (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The "artificial" framework creates associations that conflict with scientific reality and can fuel public fear (Adegbite, 2023). Historical analysis of successful industry rebranding provides valuable insights. For example, Dropbox shifted its identity from a simple file-sharing service to a collaborative workspace, transforming its market position (Fluer, 2024). Similarly, the rebranding of Monolith Software to Federos led to greater brand equity and business growth (Roopco, 2025). These cases demonstrate that a strategic change in terminology can lead to significant gains in customer trust, market share, and brand loyalty (Asper Brothers, 2023; ColorWhistle, 2025).

7. The Philosophical Foundation: Intelligence, Consciousness, and Intentionality

The term "Artificial Intelligence" implicitly resurrects a form of mind-body dualism, suggesting a fundamental distinction between "real" biological intelligence and "artificial" machine intelligence (Towojú, et al., 2023.). This thinking is philosophically outdated (Broussard, 2018). The debate around AI and consciousness is often clouded by the use of "artificial." A shift to SI allows for a more nuanced discussion of the emergent cognitive properties of complex computational systems without getting bogged down in intractable debates about machine consciousness (Chalmers, 2022).

A key philosophical argument for SI lies in the role of human intentionality. These systems are the products of human design, programming, and data curation (Chow & Li, 2024). Every aspect of an SI system is the result of a human choice, which is crucial for establishing clear lines of accountability (OpenFn, 2024). The term "artificial" can obscure this human agency, creating the illusion of autonomous machines beyond our control (Machaiah, 2024; Narayan, 2024). "Synthetic" places human responsibility squarely at the center of the discourse.

8. The Business Case: Economic and Market Advantages

The economic stakes in the SI revolution are enormous (STL Digital, 2025). Public perception is a critical factor in market adoption (Ada Lovelace Institute, 2023). Global surveys reveal significant public apprehension about AI, much of which is linked to its framing (Brennen 2018). A shift to SI offers a more modern, forward-looking, and accurate term that can build credibility with customers and investors. Companies that adopt SI terminology could position themselves as leaders in responsible innovation, gaining a competitive advantage. This is particularly true in the AGI/SGI space, where an SGI framework provides a clearer market position for companies developing general cognitive capabilities, potentially leading to better valuations and higher partnership rates with academic institutions.

9. Scientific Accuracy: Technical Definitions and Performance Reality

Current SI systems, while impressive, are highly specialized. The term "artificial" can create the misleading impression that these systems are on a direct path to human-level intelligence when they are based on fundamentally different principles. There is often a significant gap between marketing claims and actual performance (Whitely, 2023). This gap exists because these systems are not mysterious minds but engineered Synthetic Cognitive Architectures with distinct, functional components, as illustrated in Figure 2.

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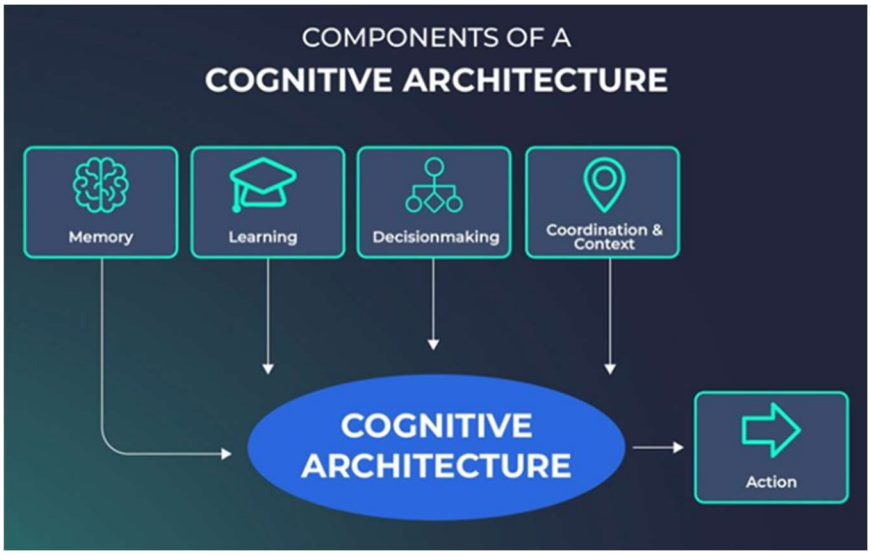

Figure 2: An illustration of a typical Synthetic Cognitive Architecture (After Quiq. 2025).

This visual model demystifies the system's function by breaking it down into engineered components—such as memory, learning, and decision-making—that collectively produce an action. It grounds the system in clear engineering principles, directly countering the ambiguity of the term "artificial."

A shift to SI encourages a more honest discussion of these capabilities and limitations. It moves the discourse from the vague marketing claims to a transparent acknowledgment of technical reality, a contrast detailed in Table 2. The path to SGI is likely long and arduous (YouTube, 2025). The term SGI provides a more realistic framework for this research, emphasizing a systematic, engineering-led approach with a greater focus on safety and ethics.

Table 2. AI Marketing Claims vs. Synthetic Intelligence Reality

CAPABILITY	COMMON "AI" MARKETING CLAIM	"SYNTHETIC INTELLIGENCE" TECHNICAL REALITY
Understanding	"Human-level comprehension"	Advanced pattern recognition and statistical correlation in data
Learning	"The machine learns on its own"	Mathematical optimization of parameters on a human-provided dataset
Reasoning	"General problem-solving"	Task-specific logical inference within a predefined domain
Adaptation	"Self-improving intelligence"	System performance tuning based on new data within its existing architecture

Note. *This table contrasts common marketing claims with the underlying technical realities of current systems, highlighting the greater accuracy of the "synthetic" descriptor.*

10. The Revolutionary Impact: A Framework for Empirical Validation

The arguments presented thus far lead to a series of powerful, transformative, and empirically testable hypotheses. While verifiable data on this specific terminology shift is not yet available, this paper would be incomplete without articulating the revolutionary potential we predict. The following framework is not a report of existing data, but a **proposed research agenda** for the global community—a call to measure the profound effects of this paradigm shift.

For Academia: Revolutionizing Research and Education

- **Hypothesis:** This reframing will revolutionize how we teach, research, and publish.
- **Proposed Metrics for Validation:** Longitudinal studies should be conducted to test the hypothesis that universities adopting 'Synthetic Intelligence' curricula will report significant gains in student engagement and comprehension. Furthermore, we predict that grant proposals and research papers framed with SI/SGI terminology will demonstrate improved funding success rates due to the clarity and intellectual honesty of the framework. A controlled analysis of citation patterns pre- and post-terminology shift would be a powerful indicator of its impact on scientific discourse.

For Industry: Transforming Trust, Investment, and Talent

- **Hypothesis:** This shift will unlock new levels of consumer trust, investment, and talent acquisition.
- **Proposed Metrics for Validation:** We posit that A/B testing of marketing materials and brand communications will show that companies adopting 'Synthetic Intelligence' terminology can achieve significantly higher consumer trust ratings. Economic modeling should be deployed to test the prediction that SGI-focused organizations will attract increased and more stable long-term investment by presenting a clearer, engineering-grounded value proposition. Finally, HR analytics can be used to validate the claim that such companies will experience superior talent acquisition and retention rates, as they will attract professionals dedicated to responsible, human-centered system development.

For Policy: Enabling Nuanced and Effective Governance

- **Hypothesis:** This reframing is a critical enabler for more effective AI governance.
- **Proposed Metrics for Validation:** Comparative policy analysis should be undertaken to test the hypothesis that regulators and policymakers who utilize 'Synthetic Intelligence' frameworks will demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the technology's capabilities and limitations. We predict that this will lead to the development of more effective, targeted, and innovation-friendly AI governance policies, a claim that can be measured by comparing the legislative outcomes and societal impacts in early-adopter nations versus those retaining the old terminology.

For Public Understanding: Reducing Fear and Fostering Support

- **Hypothesis:** This simple linguistic change can dramatically reduce public anxiety and increase support for responsible research.
- **Proposed Metrics for Validation:** Global public opinion surveys, conducted before and after targeted public awareness campaigns, should be used to test the prediction of a significant reduction in AI-related anxiety when systems are described as 'synthetic' rather than 'artificial.' We further hypothesize a corresponding increase in public support for SGI research when it is properly framed as the engineering of beneficial cognitive systems, a metric that is crucial for the long-term health of the field.

This framework of testable hypotheses transforms the argument from a philosophical debate into a data-driven scientific endeavor. We call upon researchers, industry analysts, and funding bodies to undertake these studies and empirically validate the paradigm shift we propose.

11. Implementation Roadmap: A Systematic Adoption Strategy

A successful transition will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders. The following phased roadmap is proposed (see Table 3):

Phase 1: Academic Adoption

- **Journal Policy Changes:** Major journals (e.g., in the IEEE and ACM digital libraries) could update their scope and titles. Special issues and new journals focused on "Synthetic Cognitive Systems" can be established.

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- **Conference Name Updates:** Major conferences (e.g., NeurIPS, ICML, AAAI) could introduce "Synthetic Intelligence" tracks and workshops, eventually leading to name updates.
- **Curriculum Revisions:** Universities should update curricula to include courses like "Introduction to Synthetic Intelligence" and "Advanced Synthetic Cognitive Systems."

Phase 2: Industry Standardization

- **Corporate Communication Guidelines:** Technology leaders can pioneer the change by adopting SI in their official communications, white papers, and product branding.
- **Investment Community Education:** Industry groups can host summits and publish reports to educate the investment community on the SGI framework, promoting it as a marker of serious, grounded research.
- **Media Training Programs:** Develop and disseminate guidelines for journalists to ensure the public conversation is informed, balanced, and avoids sensationalism.

Phase 3: Public Policy Integration

- **Government Terminology Standards:** Government bodies can adopt SI in official reports, policy documents, and regulatory frameworks to ensure laws are based on a clear understanding of the technology.
- **International Cooperation Frameworks:** Organizations like the OECD and UNESCO can integrate SI/SGI terminology into their international standards and ethical guidelines.
- **Educational System Updates:** Work with educational bodies to integrate SI literacy into K-12 and university curricula.

Table 3. Proposed Timeline for the Phased Adoption of "Synthetic Intelligence" Terminology

PHASE	TIMELINE	ACADEMIC SECTOR ACTIONS	INDUSTRY SECTOR ACTIONS	POLICY SECTOR ACTIONS	KEY MILESTONES & VERIFIABLE OUTCOMES
Phase 1: Foundation & Seeding	**Years 1-2**	- Establish SI/SGI research working groups at leading universities. - Develop and offer pilot curricula and specialized seminars. - Launch special issues of major journals dedicated to "Synthetic Cognitive Systems."	- Form an industry consortium focused on responsible SI communication. - Create and internally circulate initial corporate SI terminology guidelines. - Begin internal rebranding efforts and educational programs for staff.	- Convene high-level policy advisory panels with academic and industry experts. - Draft and circulate initial position papers on the need for terminological clarity. - Begin informal engagement with international organizations (e.g., OECD, UNESCO).	▸ First SI-focused academic workshops held at major conferences (NeurIPS, ICML). ▸ A cross-industry consortium on SI Terminology is publicly announced. ▸ Foundational white papers from policy think tanks are published.
Phase 2: Expansion & Standardization	**Years 3-5**	- Implement full SI curricula in undergraduate and graduate programs.	- Adopt SI terminology in all public-facing communications (press releases, annual reports).	- Draft and introduce the first national SI policy and strategy frameworks.	▸ First university "B.S. in Synthetic Intelligence" degree programs are accredited.

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		- Establish the first peer-reviewed, high-impact journals, such as the *Journal of Synthetic Intelligence*. - Secure grant funding for large-scale SI research projects.	- Launch the first products/services explicitly branded under an "SI" framework. - Establish and publish official industry standards for SI development and ethics.	- Establish regulatory guidelines for terminology use in regulated industries. - Formalize international cooperation agreements on responsible SI governance.	▸ Multiple major corporations (e.g., Microsoft, Google, IBM) publicly adopt SI terminology. ▸ National AI Strategies in early-adopter nations are revised to include SI/SGI.
Phase 3: Integration & Mainstreaming	**Years 6-8**	- SI becomes the standard terminology in academic publishing and discourse. - Foster large-scale international academic collaborations and exchange programs on SI. - Mainstream SI research topics within national science funding bodies.	- SI terminology becomes the de-facto industry standard, recognized by markets. - Establish SI-focused investment funds (e.g., Venture Capital, ETFs) and professional certification programs (e.g., Certified SI Practitioner). - Develop robust SI supply chains and cross-sector partnerships.	- Pass national legislation that formally incorporates and defines SI/SGI terminology. - Sign international treaties that reference SI governance frameworks and standards. - Integrate SI terminology into global governance bodies' official principles.	▸ International SI research collaborations receive major public-private funding. ▸ The first "Synthetic Intelligence" ETF begins tracking on a major stock exchange. ▸ The OECD AI Principles or similar UN guidelines are updated to reference SI.
Phase 4: Full Integration & Global Governance	**Years 9-10+**	- Fully integrate SI into educational systems, including K-12 SI literacy programs. - Standardize professional development and continuing education requirements for SI practitioners. - SI becomes the assumed framework for all human-machine cognitive system research.	- SI becomes the default terminology in global consumer markets. - Achieve widespread global market recognition of SI as a mark of responsible and transparent technology. - SI frameworks enable flourishing public-private-academic partnerships.	- Establish comprehensive global SI governance frameworks with clear standards. - Develop international public-private partnership models for large-scale SGI safety research. - Potentially form a dedicated UN agency or task force for SI governance.	▸ Global education standards for SI literacy are ratified by international bodies. ▸ International trade agreements include clauses on responsible SI development. ▸ Polling confirms the term 'Artificial Intelligence' is primarily used in a historical context.

Note. This timeline presents a strategic, phased roadmap for adopting and embedding 'Synthetic Intelligence' terminology across key global sectors. Each phase builds upon the achievements of the previous one to ensure a comprehensive, reinforcing, and sustainable transformation in scientific communication, industry practice, and public policy.

12. Interdisciplinary Integration

This proposed shift is inherently interdisciplinary. Linguistic analysis reveals that SI better reflects the engineered nature of these systems (Chomsky, 2021). Computer science perspectives emphasize the systematic construction of cognitive capabilities rather than their "artificial" creation (Brooks, 1991). Philosophical analysis supports the SI framework through its recognition of human agency and intentional design (Dennett, 2017), while ethical frameworks benefit from a clear acknowledgment of human responsibility (Floridi, 2019). Finally, neuroscience and cognitive science reveal how these systems embody human-derived cognitive patterns (Hawkins, 2021; Thagard, 1996).

13. Future-Focused Vision

The SI/SGI framework supports more productive discussions about the future. It helps shift research priorities toward cognitive architecture design and human-AI collaboration frameworks. The future of work will likely involve augmented human intelligence and hybrid cognitive architectures, and the SI framework emphasizes this collaborative future rather than one of replacement. This reframing is essential for preparing society through education and for building robust, human-centric governance frameworks.

14. Critical Analysis of Counterarguments

It is important to address potential counterarguments. Some may argue for **tradition and historical precedent**. However, scientific fields regularly update nomenclature to reflect advancing understanding; clinging to outdated terms hinders progress (Kuhn, 1962). Others may present **semantic arguments** that "artificial" is an appropriate descriptor for anything human-made. While technically true, this ignores the overwhelmingly negative and misleading connotations of the word in this context (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Finally, **implementation challenges** are valid but surmountable. The systematic, phased adoption strategy outlined in the roadmap addresses these challenges through broad stakeholder engagement.

15. Conclusions and Call to Action

This comprehensive review demonstrates that "Synthetic Intelligence" provides a terminology with superior accuracy, the potential for improved public understanding, and a more effective foundation for investment and governance. The evidence supports the adoption of SI frameworks across academic, industry, and policy domains.

We conclude with a manifesto-like call for the global community to embrace this paradigm shift. We must move beyond simply debating the merits of this change and begin the critical work of empirically validating its impact, using the framework proposed herein. We call upon researchers, developers, educators, policymakers, and journalists to:

1. **Adopt** "Synthetic Intelligence" and "Synthetic General Intelligence" in major conferences, academic journals, and corporate communications.
2. **Investigate** the testable hypotheses outlined in this paper to build a data-driven case for the transformation.
3. **Implement** the phased roadmap to ensure a smooth and comprehensive transition.

This represents not merely a semantic adjustment but a fundamental realignment of how we conceptualize, develop, and communicate about human-engineered cognitive systems. By embracing "Synthetic Intelligence," we can foster a more accurate, honest, and productive discourse, shaping a future in which these powerful technologies are developed responsibly for the benefit of all humanity. The time for this transformation is now.

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