

THE MIC SHIFTED — FIELD GUIDE

They told us to stop talking to computers. Then the computers started talking back.

The central claim: Digital networks and conversational AI have reduced some barriers to making and distributing creative and technical work. But access to production is not equivalent to audience, expertise, trust, or economic return.

1980s — Personal computing

Home computers brought programming and computing into households and small businesses, though affordability and access remained uneven.

1990s — The networked world

The World Wide Web and internet communities made publishing and connection possible across geographic distances.

2000s — Participatory media

Blogs, wikis, social sites and open-source tools expanded participation. Their openness varied by language, connectivity, skill and infrastructure.

2010s — Platform power

Creator tools simplified publishing while algorithms and platforms increasingly influenced discoverability and income.

2020s — Conversational tools

Generative AI helps some people draft, code and prototype faster, but results still need testing, fact-checking, security review and contextual judgment.

Five distinctions worth keeping

- Creation is not distribution.

- Distribution is not attention.
- Attention is not trust.
- Trust is not necessarily revenue.
- A working prototype is not evidence of beneficial impact.

Questions for reflection

Who gains access to creation tools? Who is excluded by price, language, connectivity or disability? Who owns the distribution channels? What would count as evidence that a creation helped someone?

Suggested starting points

Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web* (1999); Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (2006); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (2006); UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring* reports; Stanford HAI, *AI Index* reports. These are further-reading suggestions, not direct citations for every historical claim.

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