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The Synthocene Era

Merging Human and Machine Intelligence

Contents

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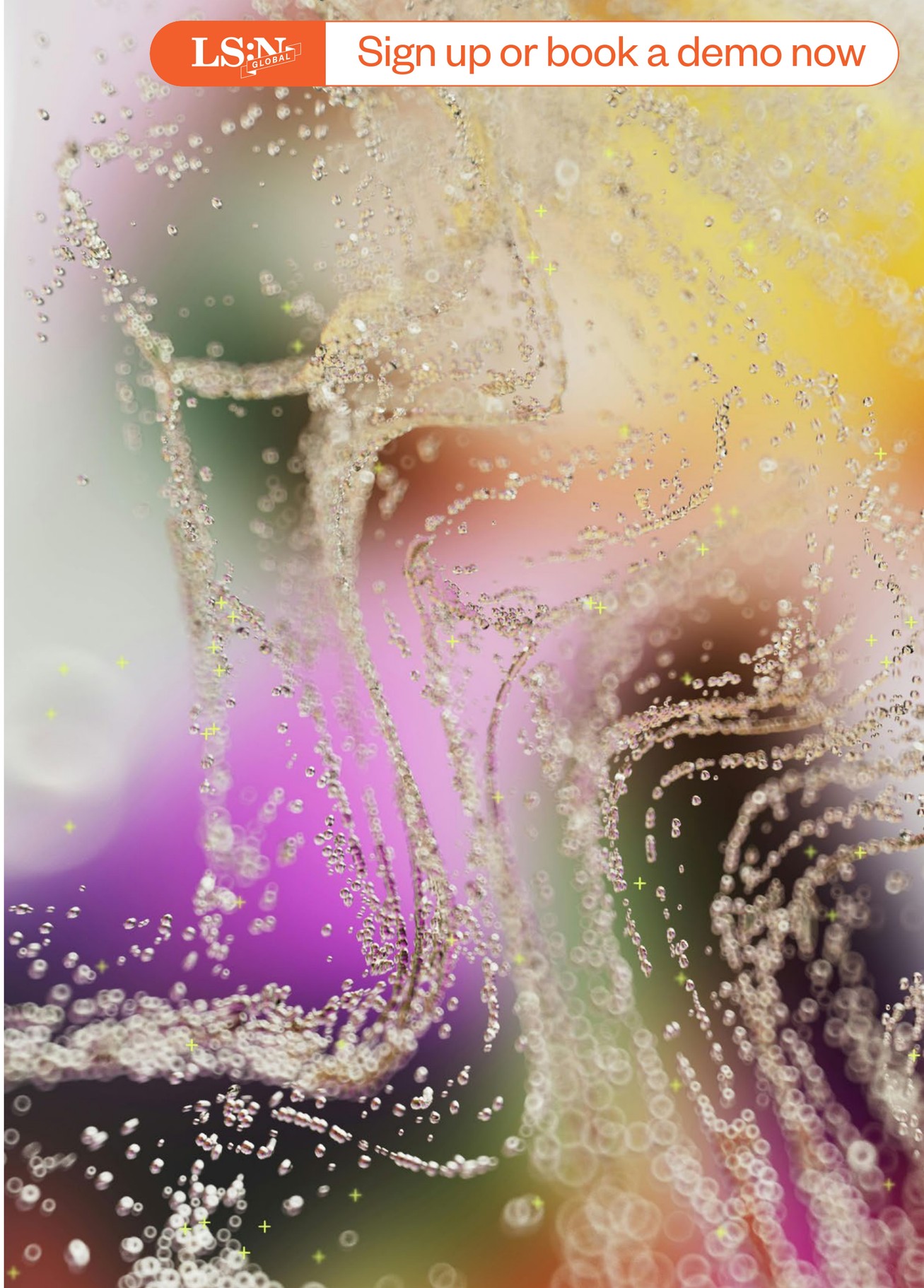
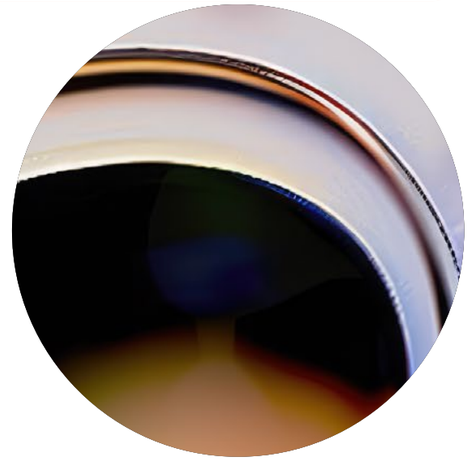


Introduction



As AI redefines our understanding of intelligence, we are entering The Synthocene Era in which the lines between what is natural and what is artificial are increasingly blurred – driving humanity into a future when technology will redefine what it means to be human

By 2030, our interactions with artificial intelligence, extended reality (XR) and biotech will propel us into a future when the boundaries between the real and the artificial, and between the natural and the synthetic, will blur irrevocably. This report delves into this transformative journey, not just to explore the technology itself, but also to question how these advances will reshape our psyche, our identity and our purpose.

The Synthocene Era is more than just a new chapter in the story of human progress; it represents a fundamental shift in our understanding of intelligence, agency and connection. The 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, with its theme of Intelligens. Natural. Artificial. Collective, captures the essence of this shift and pushes us to reconceptualise intelligence, not as a sole human trait but as a collective force shaped by both natural and artificial means.

But why should we care? Hasn't artificial intelligence (AI) been around for a while? The difference today is that we are on the cusp of a new reality in which AI and other advanced technologies are not just tools but active partners in our evolution.

'I see AI as the key component of our next generation of lifestyle that could be the synthetic lifestyle,' Julien Tauvel, co-founder and CEO of prospective design studio Imprudence, tells The Future Laboratory. 'When I say synthetic, that means the capacity to edit whatever we want. From our identity in the virtual space to where we could be living, AI would be able to better understand our environment and help us edit in real time, adapt and create new features, functions and materials that will basically change the way we live.'

This report serves as a roadmap for navigating this new era, highlighting the areas that will affect both brands and individuals. We live in a time when businesses, not governments, are seen as the most competent and ethical entities, with the Edelman Trust Barometer 2023 revealing a 54-point lead for businesses over governments in perceived competence. This puts the onus on your business to lead the way in shaping a future when technology will serve as a partner in our quest for fulfilment, understanding and interconnectedness.

'One or two people are not going to shape AI,' Faisal Hoque, an entrepreneur and author of the upcoming book, Transcend: Unlocking Humanity in the Age of AI, tells The Future Laboratory. 'It's a collective responsibility. Even the creators and people who have contributed greatly to AI are now holding back and saying 'What is enough? Are we pushing the boundaries too much?"

As we explore the intricacies of this new era – from AI's role in augmenting our cognitive abilities to humans merging with tech to become Human+ – we must recognise that the path forward is not just about harnessing the latest advances, it's about remembering what it truly means to be human in a rapidly evolving landscape. The answers will define The Synthocene Era and, ultimately, the future of humanity itself.

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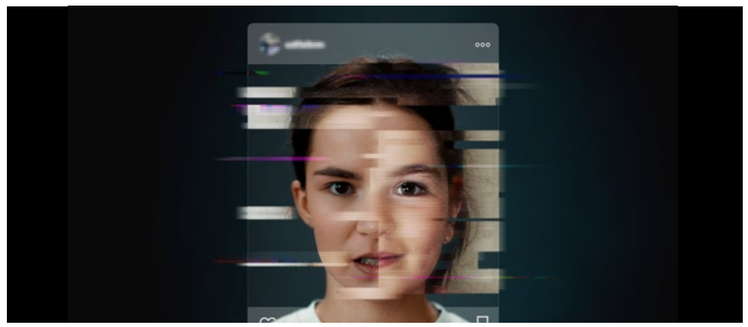
‘Our intelligence is variously embodied and distributed. It will become even more so as AI systems proliferate, making it increasingly hard to pretend that our achievements are individual or even solely human. Perhaps we should adopt a broader definition of ‘human’ to include this entire biotechnological package’

*Blaise Agüera y Arcas, AI researcher, Google (source: **The Guardian**)*

Topline Takeaways

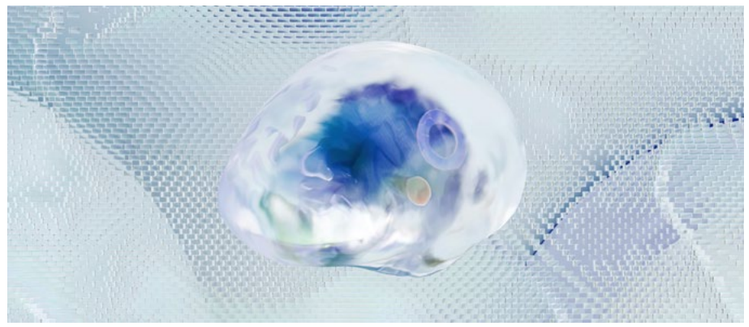
Tech Acceleration and Adoption

The rapid evolution and adoption of AI since the release of ChatGPT in 2022 have sparked a technological revolution, pushing AI from niche technology to mainstream adoption, with significant impacts on industry, culture and daily life.



Erosion of Trust and Social Impact

The rise of AI-driven technologies like deepfakes is exacerbating societal issues, eroding trust and challenging the integrity of democracies, with a lack of effective regulation posing significant risks.

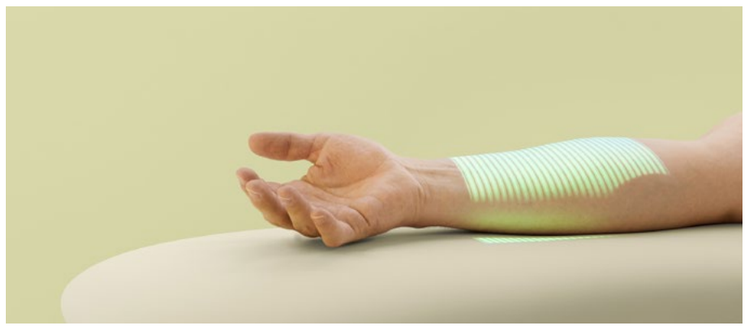


AI as Extended Mind

David Chalmers' and Andy Clark's theory of The Extended Mind posits that technology like the internet and AI acts as an external part of our cognitive process, allowing us to access and use vast amounts of information without internalising it, effectively expanding our mental capabilities.

Risks of Cognitive Stagnation

Despite the cognitive benefits, certain digital tools may limit intellectual growth by fostering cultural homogenisation and reducing exposure to diverse perspectives, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly immersed in algorithm-driven content.



The Rise of Human+

Advances in biotechnology and neural enhancement are pushing the boundaries of human evolution by merging biology with AI, raising ethical concerns while offering transformative potential in both medical and commercial applications.

Merging Human and AI Intelligence

In the future, human and AI-driven intelligence may merge, fostering new forms of learning, cultural preservation and even digital immortality platforms like Roblox and Fortnite.

Key Statistics

: The humanoid and animal-like healthcare companion robots market was valued at **£1.2bn** in 2022 and is expected to reach **£4.3bn** in 2030 at a CAGR of **17.8%** from 2023 to 2030 (source: **Grand View Research**)

: Within a **90%** consensus that technology is accelerating at speed, **60%** felt this was a positive thing (source: **Future:Poll**)

: The valuation of OpenAI surged to **£61bn** in under 10 months between January and October 2023 (source: **The New York Times**)

: The US AI market is predicted to expand from **£66.59bn** in 2023 to **£181.03bn** by 2030 (source: **Statista**)

: Across age groups the acceptance of AI as part of our future daily lives is greater in younger generations. Some **83%** of 18–34-year-olds are open to some form of AI assistance in their lives, compared to **57%** of 55+ (source: **Future:Poll**)

: Some **29%** of respondents cited 'loss of human qualities' as a key concern when thinking about the future of AI (source: **Future:Poll**)

: The value of the spatial computing market is expected to rise from **£126.2bn** in 2024 to more than **£473.6bn** in 2032 (sources: **Market.us, Statista**)

: Overall, a majority [**52%**] feel AI will be a positive force in the world over the next decade. But there is significant uncertainty here, with **26%** responding with I don't know, compared to **22%** believing the outlook is negative (source: **Future:Poll**)

: Two-thirds of the UK (and **59%** of respondents across 28 countries) believe the government does not understand emerging technologies – such as AI – enough to adequately regulate them (source: **2024 Edelman Trust Barometer**)

: The wearable medical device market is valued at **£32.61bn** in 2024 and is forecast to grow to **£128.43bn** by 2030 (source: **Grand View Research**)

: In 2022, **43%** of global consumers admitted they couldn't distinguish between a deepfake and a real video (sources: **iProov, Statista**)

: The global industrial extended reality (XR) market is expected to reach **£45.6bn** by 2030, with XR training and instruction as top use cases (source: **ABI Research Enterprise and Industrial XR Training report**)

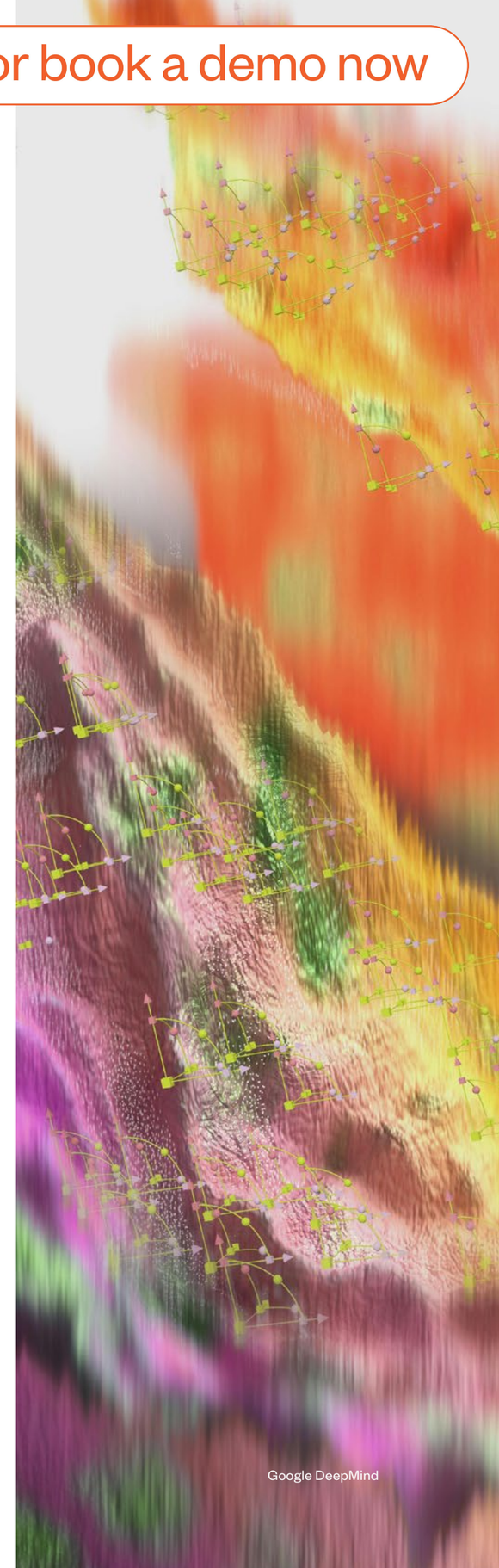
: In a UK and US survey, **86%** of Gen Z users said it is at least somewhat important that their avatar is able to express emotions in order to feel fully represented in the metaverse (source: **Roblox**)

: The global AI robots market was worth **£9.2bn** in 2022 and is expected to be valued at **£62.9bn** by 2032, expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **21.5%** from 2023 to 2032 (source: **Precedence Research**)

: Searches for ChatGPT soared more than **2,000%** in 2023 (source: **Google**)

Future:Poll, a next-generation quantitative research tool by The Future Laboratory.

Our polls, surveys and Futures 1000 expert panels connect you with the innovators and early adopters determining future commercial successes.



Drivers

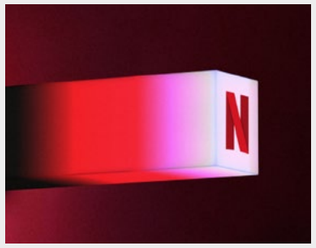
Although generative AI has been widely discussed thanks to the success of ChatGPT, its effects extend far beyond large language models. This new era of technology is disrupting democracies, culture, health and more

The Great Tech-celeration

From generative AI to spatial computing, rapid technological advances are transforming industries and everyday life on a global scale.

Blurred Realities

The rise of deepfakes and inadequate tech regulation are eroding trust and threatening democratic integrity like never before.

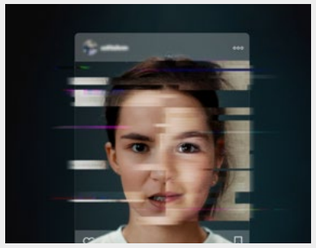


Algorithmic Echoes

Cultural homogenisation driven by hyper-personalisation and algorithms is stifling creativity and human connection.

Syntherventional Living

Advances in biohacking and wearables are blurring the line between human and machine, heralding a new era of augmented humanity.



Gen Quantum

AI and spatial computing will reshape Gen Alpha's reality, enhancing their cognitive and emotional experiences in ways that are unimaginable today.

The Great Tech-celeration

Since ChatGPT was released to the public in November 2022, we have witnessed a striking acceleration in technological development. At 2024's SXSW, experts claimed the AI revolution was initiated in 2023, but there will be substantial commercial implementation in 2024.

As a testament to the escalating interest and investment in AI technology, the valuation of OpenAI surged to £61bn ($80bn, €72.4bn) in under 10 months between January and October 2023 (source: The New York Times).

Regulatory actions, like the EU AI Act, and collaborations among tech rivals, including Apple and Meta, show that the technology is no longer on the fringes and is profoundly infiltrating consumer electronics.

Although the press has covered artificial intelligence for decades, such as in 2014 when Google acquired AI start-up DeepMind, the general public had never experienced the technology in the comfort of their own homes. According to Google, searches for ChatGPT surged more than 2,000% in 2023 – a testament to how fast consumers and businesses alike have adopted the generative tool.

Via Apple Intelligence (integrated AI developed by Apple and designed to 'help users write, express themselves and get things done effortlessly'), devices as mainstream as the iPhone and iPad will soon become vehicles for AI-powered lifestyles.

The fast progression of AI is often compared to human development stages, with current AI moving from 'pre-schooler' to 'high-schooler' level in just a few years, according to Leopold Aschenbrenner, an OpenAI alumnus in his online essay Situational Awareness: The Decade Ahead. Experts predict that by 2027, AI could reach a 'professor' level of intelligence, approaching what's known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). This new stage refers to AI systems that can understand, learn and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks, similar to human intelligence. The next step after AGI is Artificial Superintelligence (ASI), which refers to AI systems that surpass human intelligence in all aspects, potentially outperforming the best human minds in every field, including scientific creativity, general wisdom and social skills.

Another technology spurring new growth in Silicon Valley is spatial computing. This signals the fusion of digital and physical worlds, and is poised to revolutionise the way we live, learn and work; its market value is expected to grow from £126.2bn ($165.3bn, €149.7bn) in 2024 to more than £473.6bn ($620.2bn, €561.7bn) in 2032 (sources: Market.us, Statista).

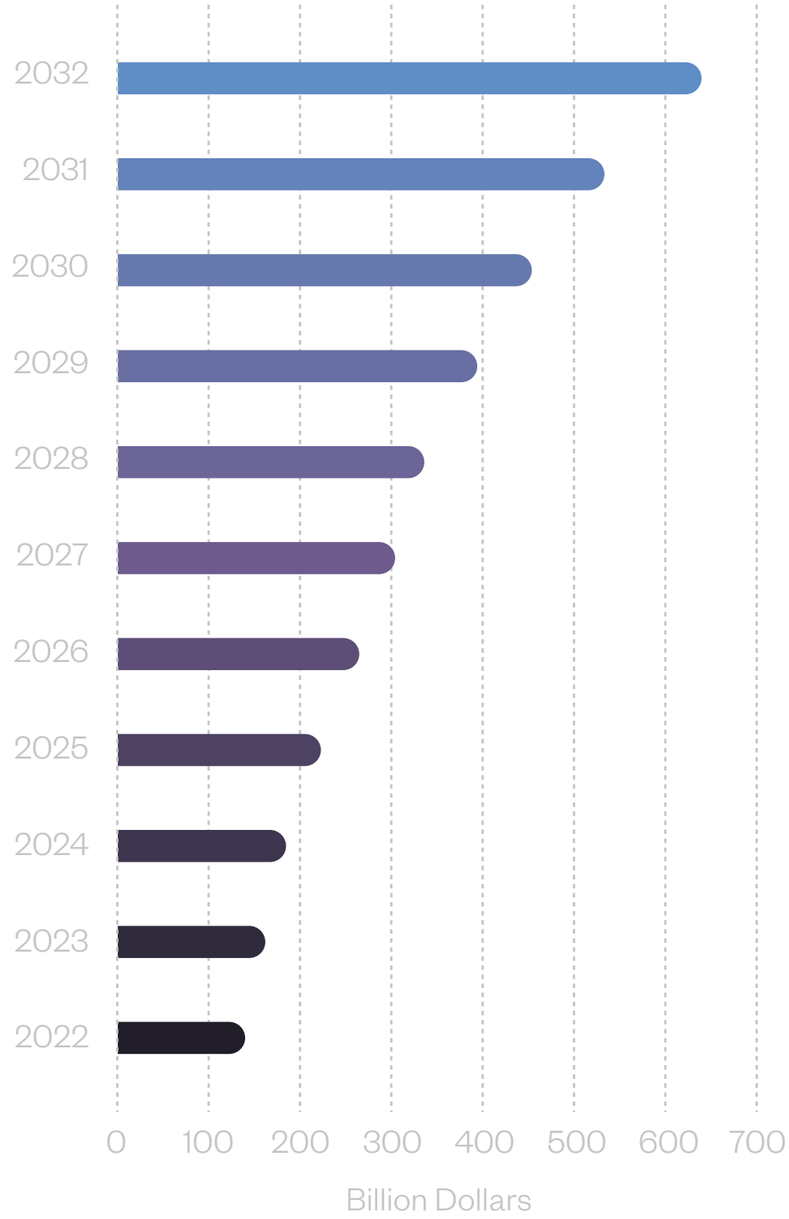
By delivering hyper-immersive, interactive experiences enriched with contextual depth, spatial computing will elevate memory retention, spatial awareness and emotional engagement, ultimately transforming sectors such as education, healthcare, industrial training, retail and urban planning.

Global Driver : Accelerating Technologies

The rapid adoption of AI has propelled the technology forward, potentially setting the stage for even greater advances in spatial computing, Artificial General Intelligence and quantum computing

Google DeepMind

Spatial Computing Market Revenue Worldwide (2022–2032)



Source: **Market.us, Statista**

The Synthocene Era

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