MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Creative Work in the Age of Gen AI: A Netnographic Analysis on Adoption, Perception, and Integration in Creative Workflows

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 066 915
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Betriebswirtschaft
Betreut von | Supervisor:	Univ.-Prof. Christoph Fuchs PhD
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Abstract

The creative sector is undergoing a rapid transformation with the rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), a technology that is reshaping creative workflows, artistic production, and industry dynamics. While existing research primarily focuses on Gen AI's functional abilities, particularly in idea generation and evaluation, as well as in customization, collaboration, and automation, little is known about how creative professionals integrate Gen AI into their daily workflows and how their perceptions influence its adoption. This thesis addresses these gaps by investigating the following research question: How is Gen AI used in the creative process? To explore this question, the study employs a qualitative netnographic approach, analyzing insights shared by creative professionals from various fields on industry-relevant online platforms. The findings suggest that while Gen AI assists in various stages of the creative process, it is not yet perceived as an independent creative force. It is primarily used for developing initial prototypes and mockups, as well as in supporting the implementation of creative ideas by automating repetitive tasks, generating variations, and streamlining workflows. Moreover, perceptions of Gen AI vary: while some creatives see it as a productivity- and creativity-enhancing tool, others express concerns about its potential to increase job displacement and creative stratification. The study highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of Gen AI's role in creativity, recognizing both its potential and its challenges. The research contributes to the academic discourse by enriching existing empirical studies with real-world examples and identifying key areas for further empirical investigation.

Keywords: Generative AI, creative industries, netnography, AI adoption, creative process transformation

Künstliche Intelligenz (KI) hält ihren Einzug in die Kreativbranche, welche Aufgrund der neuen Technologie aktuell eine rasante Transformation durchläuft – von kreativen Workflows, über künstlerische Produktion bis hin zur Branchendynamik, alles befindet sich in einem Veränderungsprozess. Die wissenschaftliche Literatur konzentriert sich bisher hauptsächlich auf die leistungssteigernden Eigenschaften der KI in Bezug auf Ideenfindung und -bewertung sowie Personalisierung, Automatisierung und Kollaboration. Jedoch ist wenig darüber bekannt, wie Kreativschaffende KI in ihrem täglichen Arbeitsalltag einsetzen und wahrnehmen. Diese Arbeit untersucht daher die zentrale Frage: Wie wird KI im kreativen Prozess genutzt? Zur Beantwortung dieser Frage setzt diese Arbeit auf eine qualitativen, netnografischen Ansatz. Die Ergebnisse legen nahe, dass KI zwar in vielen Phasen des kreativen Prozesses unterstützt, jedoch nicht als eigenständige kreative Kraft wahrgenommen wird. Sie wird vor allem zur Erstellung erster Prototypen und Mockups sowie zur Unterstützung in der Umsetzung kreativer Ideen genutzt – beispielsweise durch Automatisierung repetitiver Aufgaben, Generierung von Variationen und Optimierung von Arbeitsabläufen. Allerdings gehen die Wahrnehmungen der Technologie auseinander: Während einige Kreativschaffende KI als ein effizienz- und kreativitätssteigerndes Werkzeug sehen, äußern andere Bedenken hinsichtlich eines möglichen Arbeitsplatzabbaus und einer zunehmenden kreativen Stratifizierung. Diese Studie hebt die Notwendigkeit eines differenzierten Verständnisses der Rolle von KI in kreativen Prozessen hervor, welches sowohl ihr Potenzial als auch mögliche Herausforderungen berücksichtigt. Sie leistet einen Beitrag zur wissenschaftlichen Diskussion, indem sie theoretische Erkenntnisse mit praxisnahen Beispielen verbindet und zentrale Bereiche identifiziert, die weiterer empirischer Forschung bedürfen.

Schlagwörter: KI, Kreativbranche, Netnografie, KI-Integration, Transformation kreativer Prozesse

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List of Abbreviations

AI…Artificial Intelligence

AGI…Artificial General Intelligence

Gen AI…Generative Artificial Intelligence

LLM…Large Language Model

1 Introduction

The introduction of the advanced Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022 marked a technological milestone comparable to the invention of the smartphone or even the internet (Ul Haque et al., 2022). Trained on large datasets encompassing knowledge from many different domains, and through the application of deep learning techniques (Brown et al., 2020), Gen AI can generate text, images, music, and devise complex problem-solving strategies that rival – and sometimes even surpass – human capabilities (Brown et al., 2020; Colarossi, 2024; Shin et al., 2023). These impressive skills have opened new possibilities across various fields, promising to increase efficiency while lowering costs (Noy and Zhang, 2023; Verganti et al., 2020). Many industries have started to explore the potential applications of this technology, which has sparked both excitement and debate regarding its implications for work, creativity, and society at large. The gradual integration of Gen AI tools into various industries has fueled discussions regarding their potential impact on the workforce (Hatzius et al., 2023).

Despite the initial belief that jobs and tasks that require innovation and creative thinking would be safe from AI-driven automation for the foreseeable future, Gen AI tools have started to expand into the creative sector, leveraging their rapidly improving abilities to generate novel output – and they have come to stay (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2021). The public discourse around Gen AI's application in creative fields widely focuses on AI-generated art. For instance, the technology made headlines when an AI-generated artwork auctioned off at Christie's was sold for a record-breaking 432,500 US dollars, more than 400 times the initial estimate (Cohn, 2018). This event, among others, challenges the long-standing notion that creativity is an inherently human trait (Sueur et al., 2024), raising questions about what it truly means to be an artist and whether AI-generated

works should be considered of equal quality to those created by humans (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024; Brandt, 2023).

However, the debate goes deeper. Beyond AI-generated art, Gen AI is also transforming the traditional, human-centered creative process. Traditionally, creativity has been understood as a cognitive process requiring human intuition, problem-solving, and the ability to make connections between distant topics to generate novel ideas and concepts (Crawford and Di Benedetto, 2021; Mednick, 1962). However, Gen AI's capacity to analyze vast datasets and produce innovative outputs challenges the paradigm that the creativity requires human ingenuity. As creative professionals are starting to incorporate the emerging technology into their workflows, Gen AI has the potential to significantly reshape established processes, gradually moving from a supporting tool to an active collaborator, facilitating idea generation, implementation, and experimentation (Verganti et al., 2020; O'Toole and Horvát, 2024; Wu et al., 2021).

As Gen AI reshapes creative workflows, it is proving to be a disruptive force in the industry (Verganti et al., 2020). One of its defining features is its ability to adapt to user inputs and generate highly customized content. Gen AI models can produce a vast range of outputs, from text and music to visual designs, based on specific stylistic or thematic preferences (Brown et al. 2020). This flexibility allows creatives to push the boundaries of their work, explore new artistic directions, and iterate on ideas faster than ever before (Noy and Zhang, 2023; O'Toole and Horvát, 2024).

At the same time, the widespread adoption of Gen AI in creative industries raises fundamental ethical and philosophical considerations. One of the most pressing concerns is ownership and copyright. AI-generated content is often trained on existing works, raising concerns about whether it constitutes an original creation or a derivative product that borrows too heavily from human-made works. Existing intellectual property laws were not

designed for non-human creators, leading to legal uncertainty and potential conflicts between AI developers, users, and creative professionals (Jütte, 2023).

Furthermore, the automation of creative processes has significant implications for the workforce. While some argue that Gen AI will enhance human creativity by serving as a powerful assistant, others fear that it could replace jobs in industries that have historically relied on human artistic and intellectual labor. Prominent strikes and lawsuits filed by creative professionals over the last few years have shown that they do not only see Gen AI as a helpful tool that enhances creativity and efficiency, but also as a threat and competitor, causing debates about the future of creative professions and the value placed on human-made content versus AI-generated alternatives (Faughnder et al., 2023; Brittain, 2024).

This thesis does not focus on a single domain of creativity but instead seeks to provide a broader understanding of how Gen AI is being incorporated into various creative processes through netnographic research based on the framework by Bartl et al. (2009). By examining the ways in which artists, writers, designers, and other creatives interact with Gen AI, this study aims to understand in which contexts and in which steps of the creative process the disruptive technology is currently employed. Special attention will be given to whether Gen AI primarily serves as a supporting tool throughout the creative process or if it is increasingly taking on an autonomous role requiring little to no human intervention. Another central theme of this research is to shed light on how creatives' perspectives on Gen AI influence the degree to which the technology is adopted. This includes investigating how practitioners perceive the role of Gen AI in their work and the creative industry as a whole, and how it relates to their professional identity and artistic values. Lastly, the goal is to identify emerging opportunities and challenges for the creative industry in the context of Gen AI. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for anticipating shifts in market structures, creative workflows, and the evolving role of human expertise in an AI-driven environment.

Therefore, the study also considers the broader implications of Gen AI integration, such as shifts in creative labor dynamics and the changing expectations for human-AI collaboration. By analyzing real-world examples and theoretical perspectives, this thesis contributes to the ongoing discourse on Gen AI's impact on creative industries and offers insights into how professionals, as well as companies and creative agencies, can navigate this rapidly evolving landscape.

Ultimately, as Gen AI becomes increasingly embedded in creative workflows, it is crucial not only to assess its functional capabilities from a theoretical standpoint but also to understand how professionals engaging with the technology on a daily basis perceive its impact. By exploring these dimensions, this thesis contributes to the ongoing discourse on Gen AI's role in creative industries and offers insights into how practitioners are navigating this rapidly evolving landscape. Understanding these developments is essential for ensuring that the integration of Gen AI in creative fields is both innovative and ethically sustainable.

2 Theoretical Background and Current State of Research

2.1 Understanding Creativity

Creativity is a multifaceted concept with varying definitions across history and society. Its complexity and differing perceptions make it challenging to define clearly (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010; Mueller et al., 2012). The societal understanding of creativity often reflects long-held beliefs that coexist with, and sometimes contradict, contemporary scientific findings. To understand the impact of the introduction of Generative AI into creative processes, it must first be clarified what creativity means to humans. Therefore, this chapter will explore the concept of creativity and introduce a perspective on the topic that will guide the discussion throughout the rest of the thesis. It will furthermore introduce a structured model of the creative process, outlining key stages. Additionally, this chapter will explore how Generative AI fundamentally works and discuss whether it is a creative force in its own right.

2.1.1 A Brief History and Cognitive Foundations of Creativity

Historically, creativity was regarded as a divine gift, bestowed upon select individuals through messengers sent directly from the gods, such as the Muses of ancient mythology. The notion that innovative minds are guided by some external power was quickly coupled with mania and madness (Weisberg, 1994), a stereotype still prevalent in today's popular culture, as exemplified by media portrayals of figures like Kanye West (Dey, 2016). This enduring image of the mad genius reflects a deep-rooted societal belief that links exceptional creativity with psychological instability.

However, research evidence suggests that creativity is, at least to some extent, a learned process (Kaufman and Baer, 2016; Beghetto, 2014). It involves "the development of a novel product, idea, or problem solution that is of value to the individual and/or the larger social group" (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Furthermore, the widespread consensus is that creativity requires both *divergent* and *convergent thinking* (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Divergent thinking, widely viewed in research as a key component of creativity, is particularly effective in generating novel ideas, as it allows individuals to break away from established patterns of thought and explore new possibilities (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Convergent thinking, on the other hand, is "focused on narrowing possibilities to a workable solution" (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010).

Creativity has also been frequently cited as a defining trait of humanity, setting humans apart from other species, an idea that has been challenged over the past decades (Sueur et al., 2024). Nonetheless, for many, creative expression is deeply personal, serving as a means of conveying emotions and experiences (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024). Furthermore, according to Madjar et al. (2011), creativity is fundamentally a sensemaking activity, wherein the brain seeks to limit uncertainty by generating novel solutions to ambiguous challenges. However, creativity can also introduce uncertainty, particularly in the context of incremental ideas and innovations, often triggering subconscious resistance, as the novelty associated with creative ideas can evoke discomfort (Mueller et al., 2012).

Cognitive research has further revealed a strong connection between memory and creativity. Studies by Madore, Addis and Schacter (2015) suggest that enhanced memory functions can significantly improve creative thinking. Their experimental studies reveal that exercise aimed at strengthening episodic memory also led to superior performance in divergent-thinking tasks. This effect is attributed to the cognitive exercise, which "affects a

process tapped by both remembering and imagining" (Madore et al., 2015), two processes which are rooted in similar regions of the hippocampus (Madore et al., 2015).

This connection between memory and creativity implies that individuals with extensive domain-specific knowledge may find it easier to generate creative ideas related to their field of expertise. However, the relationship between expertise and creativity remains debated. Acar and van den Ende (2016) note that there is no definitive consensus on whether proximity to or distance from a particular field is more advantageous for solving creative tasks within that domain. They conclude that the level of creativity and novelty evident in the final output is determined by the effort invested in exploring knowledge domains to form new associations (Acar and van Ende, 2016).

In essence, creativity can be understood as a decision-making process. wherein novel ideas are generated and evaluated based on specific criteria, and ultimately, the optimal solution is selected (Haefner et al., 2021). The next chapter will delve deeper into this process by examining the key stages that define the creative process. The aim is to provide a structured understanding of how creative work is traditionally conceived, developed, and ultimately realized.

2.1.2 The Creative Process: From Idea to Implementation

Traditionally, creative output is produced through an iterative, human-centred process (Crawford and Di Benedetto, 2021; Mednick, 1962). This section aims at understanding which stages are usually part of this process, as having a concept of how creative content is made is fundamental to understanding how Gen AI can be used throughout it. In the literature, no framework is used cohesively, possibly due to the often rather unstructured and ad hoc nature of creative doing. Between the many attempts to model the creative process,

some frameworks are concise and focus on a handful of discrete steps, whereas others paint a more dynamic picture that tries to capture all possible subprocesses that might occur separately or even simultaneously (Lubart, 2001).

As mentioned above, the creative process is iterative in nature and does not always follow the same exact number and sequence of steps. Additionally, creativity occurs in various contexts, with different stages of the process potentially involving different agents.

For the sake of simplicity, this thesis looks at the creative process as a handful of steps that follow a rough sequence but might as well occur in a different order and over several iterations. While many models solely focus on the path to finding an idea or solution (Lubart 2001), such as Wallas' *Four-Stage Model* (1931), this thesis also regards the later steps, such as the execution of the idea, as important stages of the creative process.

Therefore, the steps chosen to describe the core parts of the creative process will be taken from Perry-Smith and Mannucci's *Idea Journey* (2017). Their model defines four distinct stages: idea generation, idea elaboration, idea championing, and idea implementation (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). The two middle stages – idea elaboration, which constitutes the refinement of the generated ideas, and idea championing, which describes the process of advocating for ideas within an organization – will be combined into a single step: *idea evaluation*. Therefore, the final model of the creative process used in this thesis contains the following three steps: Idea Generation – Idea Evaluation – Idea Implementation.

With the advent of new technologies, such as Generative AI, the nature of ideation and idea evaluation is undergoing a significant transformation. AI-powered tools can assist in generating and assessing creative concepts, potentially altering the role of human creativity in various domains and subsequently reshaping the traditional, human-centred creative process (Verganti et al., 2020). The following sections will explore how Gen AI as an

emerging technology influences the creative process and examine its implications for the creative industry as a whole.

2.1.3 Generative AI and Creativity

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) has become a major topic of discussion over the past two years. Since the launch of ChatGPT, a Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (GPT) language model, in November 2022, global interest in AI has increased tremendously (Marr, 2023). While AI as a concept goes back to the 1950s, with Alan Turing famously asking, "Can machines think?" (Lewis, 2021), the recent hype can be attributed to the significant advancements in AI capabilities, marked by the release of OpenAI's Large Language Model (LLM). Shortly after ChatGPT became widely available, OpenAI made the underlying technology accessible, hence allowing other companies and developers to integrate it into their own product and service offerings. This led to rapid advancements in AI-powered applications across the globe. Moreover, the big success of OpenAI's LLM prompted tech giants to accelerate their own AI initiatives, resulting in the release of advanced Gen AI models such as Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude or Microsoft's Copilot (Marr, 2023).

But what exactly is Generative Artificial Intelligence? For starters, Generative AI can be seen as a subcategory of AI. As opposed to discriminative models, whose purpose it is to classify data and predict outcomes based on statistical methods, generative models set themselves apart through their ability to rearrange input data to create novel outputs (Drummond et al., 2006). Behind the scenes, Generative AI, and especially ChatGPT, operates on enormous amounts of data encompassing an endless variety of fields and topics. Based on the training data to which weights and other parameters are applied, models derive patterns and learn how to transform the data into new output (Brown et al., 2020). The

models' architecture mimics that of a brain, featuring many layers and interconnections between so-called neurons (Schrimpf et al., 2021). Based on the desired outcomes, such as image generation or natural language processing, the models' architecture can further be specified: LLMs such as ChatGPT are a type of artificial intelligence designed to understand, generate, and process natural language (Teubner et al., 2023). Diffusion Models, such as Stability AI's Stable Diffusion, enable users to generate high-quality images (Dhariwal and Nichol, 2021).

It is noteworthy that so far, AI is a black box. Even though the general architecture and learning process can be influenced, it is difficult to undestand exactly how input is received and transformed to eventually create an output. The many complicated mathematical functions that these models are composed of are currently too difficult even for the most sophisticated mathematicians to retrace (Hassija et al., 2023).

So far, it is only possible to train and adjust the algorithms in a way that they align their mathematical functions to produce the desired output (Hassija et al., 2023). To be able to process natural language in the form of prompts, algorithms need to, on the one hand, receive lots of data dealing with a variety of topics. On the other hand, they are also extensively trained on specific topics such as coding, medicine or law, or on specific styles so that they can subsequently output accurate responses for prompts regarding these topics. However, when it comes to fields or styles that these models received very little information about or when their training was not targeted towards them, their output is often inaccurate. They will hallucinate, or in the case of image generation, the image will lack in quality and accuracy. Consequently, it takes a combination of data from many different sources as well as extensive training in specific knowledge fields for a Gen AI algorithm to provide accurate information to users (Brown et al., 2020).

When the training set for the model, which contains the data that forms the basis for the algorithm's output, is composed, it is split into different subsets. Those subsets cover different areas of knowledge, such as marketing, mathematics or history. However, once training is complete, the model does not maintain a direct link between specific subsets and particular domains when generating responses. Instead, it draws on a merged representation of all its training data. Because of its generative capabilities, the model can then transfer knowledge across domains and produce novel, creative outputs (Brown et al., 2020). This ability to be innovative by combining data into new concepts might be interpreted as creativity.

Creativity – the ability to produce innovative and original ideas – is often considered a uniquely human trait (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). However, the rise of advanced Gen AI tools has challenged this notion, suggesting that AI can support and even generate creative output (Wu et al., 2021). While these models cannot derive knowledge and ideas from experiencing the real world in the way that humans can, they can still learn complex patterns from vast datasets and recombine them in novel ways (Brown et al., 2020). This raises an important question: Does this process constitute creativity, or is it merely an advanced form of pattern recognition and the ability to recombine information contained in large data sets?

Most researchers argue that Gen AI can simulate creativity but does not truly exhibit it. Genuine creativity is often linked to consciousness, intentionality, and the ability to think beyond existing data. Since current AI models are confined to the datasets they were trained on and lack independent thought, their output, however innovative it may seem, is ultimately derivative (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024; Brandt, 2023). Nonetheless, as AI technology continues to evolve, some speculate that future advancements, particularly in Artificial

General Intelligence (AGI), may blur the line between human and machine creativity (Almeida et al., 2024).

Despite these debates, Gen AI is already proving to be a powerful tool for supporting human creativity. Unlike humans, who often seek certainty and feasibility in their ideas (Mueller et al., 2012), AI-generated outputs are unconstrained by practical limitations. This makes Gen AI an effective source of inspiration, helping creatives generate novel concepts by suggesting unexpected connections and making new associations. By integrating Gen AI into creative workflows, humans can profit from its ability to combine knowledge from diverse domains, and discover new possibilities in fields such as art, design, and problem-solving (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024).

While Gen AI may not yet be capable of replicating all aspects of human creativity, there is a lot of potential in integrating it into creative processes. The following chapter will explore how Gen AI is being incorporated into creative processes and how its adoption is reshaping traditional approaches to innovation.

2.2 Generative AI in Creative Processes

In the age of globalization and social media, creativity has become an increasingly important factor in companies' success and longevity (Madjar et al., 2011). Continuously increasing product appeal, features and quality to stay ahead of the competition has become indispensable, even for industries that traditionally rely heavily on engineering and have a deterministic approach towards product design, such as the mobile computing industry. Having effective innovation processes in place is therefore increasingly important for any company seeking long-term success in a fast-paced environment. Equally, for independent

artists, such as painters or writers, it is important to continuously develop new ideas to keep the quantity and quality of their work high (Wareham et al., 2009).

Recent research underscores the growing impact of Gen AI on creative processes. Noy and Zhang (2023) demonstrate that employing AI tools in creative fields can significantly boost both productivity and the quality of output within a given time frame. Additionally, Shin et al. (2023) find that AI's ability to challenge conventional rules and frameworks positively influences decision-making.

The rise of Generative AI has sparked an ongoing debate about the future of entire industries in the wake of the emerging technology. The widespread belief that jobs and tasks that require innovation and creative thinking would be safe from AI-driven automation for the foreseeable future has been challenged by the advent of online platforms such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and Notion AI, which have made advanced AI tools accessible to the public. These versatile technologies now enable users to generate stories, write songs, and even generate detailed visual images quickly and with minimal input. As Gen AI continues to improve its ability to make creative decisions, it may fundamentally reshape and redefine creative processes across various fields (Verganti et al., 2020; O'Toole and Horvát, 2024).

Creativity and innovation are domains that traditionally rely almost exclusively on human input. As a result, creative processes have been designed to maximize human potential in these areas. However, with the advent of Generative AI, humans are no longer the sole entity capable of contributing to high-quality creative and innovative outcomes. This shift has led to the gradual restructuring of traditional processes to incorporate new technologies, which ultimately improve quality and efficiency while reducing costs and the risks associated with innovation (Verganti et al., 2020; Haefner et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the process of integrating AI into the creative industries and innovation will face some challenges along the way. For instance, current regulations for Generative AI in Europe still

place limits on the degree to which the technology can be applied in creative tasks (Tarafder and Vadlamani, 2025).

Nonetheless, the disruptive potential of the emerging technology suggests that it will become increasingly interesting for organizations to incorporate Gen AI into their innovation process (KPMG U.S., 2023). The following chapters will explore how Gen AI can be integrated into creative tasks and processes and how its utilization can substantially reshape them, according to research. It is important to mention that, even though the model of the creative process used in this thesis consists of three steps, this chapter only discusses idea generation and idea evaluation. This is because current literature mostly focuses on those two areas, while the implementation phase is discussed only briefly. In the third part of this chapter, further use cases of Gen AI, such as customization, will be discussed.

2.2.1 Idea Generation

Idea generation, which lies at the beginning of the innovation process, consists mainly of employing techniques such as brainstorming to gather a variety of ideas. Coming up with novel concepts involves taking known concepts and associating them with something new. As mentioned previously, Gen AI tools excel in rapidly processing information and transforming it into new output. They can establish associations between distant topics and, therefore, effectively encourage divergent thinking in humans (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024).

Due to their ability to process enormous amounts of data at once, Gen AI tools can furthermore generate ideas significantly faster than humans. The speed at which these models evaluate and produce information is especially advantageous when it comes to optimization and exhaustive search tasks (Haefner et al., 2021). For instance, in June 2018, the first AI-generated painting ever presented in an auction was sold for a record-breaking

432,500 US dollars, more than 400 times the initial estimate (Cohen, 2018). While the success of the painting might be partly attributed to the hype around Gen AI, it also shows that AI tools do have the capacity to produce art that rivals that created by humans while often taking much less time to do so.

Gen AI can further facilitate ideation in scenarios where the innovation process still requires human involvement. The ability of Gen AI tools to quickly generate visual images can help artists visualize their thoughts in an earlier stage of a creative project than previously. Visualizing ideas is important in two ways: It helps the creative understand the concept on a deeper level, and it facilitates the communication of one's inner thoughts and ideas to others, which can be practical when, for instance, discussing a project with clients. Normally, even preparing a first draft completely from scratch can be quite time-consuming. With the help of Gen AI tools, however, the raw concept of the idea is quickly visualized and can then be touched up and refined by the creative. Gen AI can furthermore help creatives take their designs in new directions by generating interesting combinations that they have not previously thought of. In other words, Gen AI can fuel divergent thinking as it helps creatives break out of their usual thought patterns (Shin et al., 2023; O'Toole and Horvát, 2024).

Because Gen AI is highly efficient at processing information and generating novel concepts from it, it is much more time- and cost-efficient to involve Gen AI tools into idea generation rather than solely relying on human effort (Noy and Zhang, 2023). Research conducted by Joosten et al. (2024) on the quality of AI-generated ideas further found that ideas that were generated by an Artificial Intelligence did not score any lower on feasibility than ideas produced by humans. Doshi and Hauser (2024), however, find that while using Gen AI tools to support creativity improves individual creativity, it lowers the diversity between different ideas and subsequently decreases collective creativity.

However, it is important to remark that AI can suffer from bias. The reason for this is that algorithms are fed big amounts of human-generated data, which can contain biased information (Brown et al., 2020). Furthermore, models can develop bias during the training process due to an unequal distribution of input data (Fabuyi, 2024). Additionally, when it comes to text-to-image models, the algorithm needs to fill in some blanks by itself, visual information that was not specified in the user's request, to depict the prompt it received. As researchers point out through many examples, visualizing poverty often leads Gen AI tools to generate people with darker skin tones, whereas images portraying people in reputable professions, such as doctors or lawyers, mostly feature light-skinned individuals. Therefore, output from Gen AI models should always be looked at from a critical perspective since it can propagate harmful stereotypes (Ananya, 2024).

These findings suggest that while Gen AI can enhance efficiency and individual creativity in the ideation phase, its impact on collective creativity is complex. The potential downside of reduced idea diversity highlights the need for careful integration of Gen AI into creative processes. The following chapter explores this topic further with regards to Gen AI's role in idea evaluation.

2.2.2 Idea Evaluation

Due to the variety of Gen AI tools available to support idea generation, it is becoming increasingly easy to be creative and to innovate. Since the introduction of advanced Gen AI, it does not take much more than a quick thought and a prompt, and technology takes care of the rest. Consequently, ideas are more available than ever. However, the easy accessibility of Gen AI tools as well as the speed at which ideas are generated, poses a new problem for

creatives: How to effectively weed through the vast amount of content and evaluate which idea is the best? (Freisinger et al., 2023).

Evaluating ideas and assessing their quality often requires expertise as well as the minimization of biased thinking. For companies and independent artists seeking to save time and resources, incorporating Gen AI into idea evaluation is an attractive opportunity to overcome the limitations of humans and to make the process more reliable and efficient (Freisinger et al., 2023). However, it is important to note that AI can also suffer from bias, an issue discussed in detail in Chapter 2.2.1. Therefore, using Gen AI in idea evaluation can help minimize the influence of personal bias on thinking processes but not necessarily societal or cultural bias.

The line between generating innovative ideas and concepts in collaboration with Gen AI and simply evaluating the generated output is very thin. For instance, when Noy and Zhang (2023) told the participants of their study to use ChatGPT to complete their assigned writing tasks, most of the time, people were simply evaluating the generated output and making very minimal changes – if any. The participants told the Gen AI tool through a simple prompt what they wanted the content to be about and then received the wording of their text from ChatGPT. After a short evaluation, the phrasing was usually deemed good enough to be used as one's own. Through employing an intelligent tool, the whole writing process was shortened significantly, with experts rating the quality of the texts higher than when they were written by the participants themselves, without any additional aid (Noy and Zhang, 2023).

Since Gen AI already excels at generating ideas with very little to no human intervention, some researchers suggest that the role of creatives in innovation will increasingly focus on evaluating ideas rather than generating them (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Haefner et al., 2021). However, this prediction raises the question of whether Gen

AI's capabilities might also improve in this domain and consequently outperform humans in decision-making and evaluating the quality of new ideas and concepts. As discussed in Chapter 2.1.3, Gen AI is designed to make decisions by determining the most appropriate response to a given prompt. This decision-making capability suggests that Gen AI is not only proficient in generating ideas but can also effectively evaluate them. Advanced neural networks allow Gen AI to process vast amounts of information and assess ideas at a much faster rate (Haefner et al., 2021) and, as Verganti et al. (2020) suggest, also in a more structured and precise manner than humans. Moreover, many modern algorithms, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, can provide reasoned justifications for why one idea might be superior to another (Almeida et al., 2024; Freisinger et al., 2023). This makes Gen AI particularly useful for tasks that require technical optimization and objective evaluation. For instance, an intelligent robot developed by Boston University was able to invent the world's best shock absorbers by going through all possible designs and materials and after three years of iterations landing on the best solution, which is an endeavor that would have most likely taken humans much longer to complete (Colarossi, 2024).

Even though current Gen AI tools can give feedback on feasibility, novelty, impact, and even workability of an idea, Bell et al. (2024) show that human judgment still cannot fully be removed from idea evaluation. As mentioned previously, idea generation has become much easier. However, as previously mentioned, such an approach results in a large volume of ideas, the evaluation of which is time-consuming and experts who can appropriately evaluate all inputs can be hard to come by. Employing a Gen AI tool to do the work can therefore reduce the amount of time, money and resources spent (Freisinger et al., 2023; Bell et al., 2024). As Bell et al. (2024) find, Gen AI proves itself capable of weeding out bad ideas. It is, however, not as successful as humans at picking out the best idea amongst the ones that were deemed to be promising. Therefore, in the current state of technology,

integrating Gen AI into idea evaluation tasks can be beneficial. Nonetheless, according to Bell et al. (2024) it should not solely be relied upon since human judgement is still more precise.

To take things one step further, Gen AI's ability to evaluate ideas along different dimensions can be used to not only evaluate each idea by itself but to also identify promising ideas and merge them into one cohesive, well-rounded concept (Rago et al., 2025). Combining initial thoughts and ideas to form a complete picture can be a time-consuming endeavor. With Gen AI, the time spent on the process can be shortened significantly, saving time and resources (Brown et al., 2020). Even for topics that require expertise, organizations, as well as individuals, can train their own Gen AI to provide them with careful evaluations of niche topics. Tech companies such as Microsoft have recognized the need for specialized models and provide the tools to make programming and machine learning accessible (Microsoft, 2024). For independent artists, the possibility to refine and combine their concepts into one common theme might be especially interesting since it could open new directions for their work (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024).

In both cases, in idea evaluation and in merging different ideas into new concepts, the quality of the Gen AI tool's assessment depends on how much relevant domain knowledge it can draw from (Brown et al., 2020). As Gen AI tools improve their evaluation skills, Verganti et al. (2020), for instance, see the future role of humans in leadership positions, developing "problem-solving loops" (Verganti et al., 2020), supervising, and coordinating processes of all kinds rather than executing them.

For now, however, many creative processes still require a human in the loop, to initialize idea generation, guide and supervise the process from start to finish, and finally evaluate whether an idea makes sense and is feasible. The next chapter is going to explore

further possibilities to use Gen AI to one's advantage without taking the human out of the loop.

2.2.3 Customization, Collaboration, and Communication

The previous chapters have demonstrated that Gen AI surpasses human capabilities in several aspects of the creative process. While the disruptive qualities of the technology may initially appear to threaten human involvement in creativity, the integration of Gen AI into innovation also presents significant opportunities. Broadly speaking, Gen AI can facilitate enhanced collaboration, customization, and communication within creative industries (Allen et al., 2018; Grech et al., 2023; McDowell, 2024; Spanjol et al., 2024; Verganti et al., 2020).

For example, Gen AI can enable communication between team members across countries and cultures, making it possible to get much broader input, which can fuel creation. Especially when paired with Visual Reality (VR), Gen AI can help express thoughts and ideas across distances, as VR can create a common space, and Gen AI can help with overcoming language barriers by translating human speech in real time and taking minutes to capture valuable insights (Grech et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Gen AI can make it possible for companies to let their consumers play a part in designing product features or even come up with entirely novel concepts for products. Gen AI makes it much easier for customers to participate in improving the product offerings of their favorite brands and is a great way for companies to get insights into their customers' wants and needs. Instead of hiring expensive experts to design a product, companies can ask their customers directly to visualize their own versions of their products (Allen et al., 2018; McDowell, 2024). Many software companies already employ Gen AI algorithms to show users customized interfaces and suggest content that they might like based on observed

preferences (Verganti et al., 2020; Spanjol et al., 2024). Spanjol et al. (2024) call this new innovation logic *liquid innovation*, which describes momentary products "that can be easily modified by their creators and users both before and after release" (Spanjol et al., 2024).

Finally, Gen AI can facilitate collaboration and aid in brainstorming. For instance, it can merge ideas into new concepts by drawing connections and finding common ground, or create mind maps from verbal communications to keep track of different team members' input (Grech et al., 2023). Gen AI tools can do the same in the context of brands seeking to work together. For instance, it can propose ideas for how to combine the logos of two brands into one or the features and design of two different products into a new one, which is reminiscent of both brands (Kara et al., 2025).

The arguments presented in this chapter show that Gen AI has the potential to lead to disruptive change within the creative industry. Instead of centering ideation processes around humans, the future of innovation will increasingly focus on AI. Companies and artists alike will be led to rethink their creative processes in the wake of the emerging technology. Creatives themselves will increasingly take on the task of sensemaking – of supervising and leading creative processes run by Gen AI (Verganti et al., 2020). But are creatives ready for this big change? How open are they towards Gen AI, and how does incorporating the technology into their ideation processes change their perspective on ownership and creative contribution?

2.3 Perceptions of Gen AI in Creative Processes

Research on the advantages and limitations of Generative AI provides clear insights into the circumstances under which integrating this technology is beneficial and when human expertise remains superior. However, studies show that the subjective perceptions of Gen AI

may not always align with objective evaluations, meaning that tangible benefits from its use do not necessarily translate into widespread adoption. Individual differences in perception, as well as skepticism toward the technology, can contribute to resistance and reluctance to adopt it (Castelo et al., 2019; Freisinger et al., 2023; Mahmud et al., 2022).

The previous chapter has shown that Gen AI can be used in and even improve many creative tasks that require reasoning and decision-making. However, many implications of Generative AI's integration into various industries remain underexplored (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024). Specifically, how creatives' perceptions of the technology influence its integration into creative processes and innovation has been left for speculation.

Nonetheless, Gen AI will only be successfully implemented into the industry, if the people working in it are accepting of the technology's employment. Handing these tasks over to technology or even taking the human out of the loop entirely means relinquishing agency and influence on the creative outcome. This chapter will explore the different attitudes that people who work in the creative industry exhibit towards Gen AI.

2.3.1 Embracing Gen AI

New technologies can be exciting. They can open doors to greater efficiency and expand opportunities through facilitating tasks, communication, and self-expression (O'Toole and Horvát, 2024). When ChatGPT 3.5 was first launched in November 2022, the world was intrigued. OpenAI was struggling with the overwhelming number of interested people signing up to try the intelligent chatbot themselves, which, to this day, sometimes leads to server overload (EnrgTech, 2024). AI has since become a buzzword (Marr, 2023). The question of whether Gen AI is going to lead to disruptive change is heavily discussed in virtually every industry (Verganti et al., 2020).

Research on early adopters of ChatGPT 3.5 has shown an overwhelmingly positive reception on the new technology, particularly regarding its creative potential (Ul Haque et al., 2022). However, it is important to note that these findings reflect the perspectives of early adopters, who are often more enthusiastic about testing new technologies.

Nonetheless, extensively incorporating Gen AI into innovation processes can be an attractive strategy for companies to cut down on costs and uncertainty while simultaneously improving output quality, as discussed in previous chapters. If companies can effectively communicate the benefits of the new technology to their employees, they could see big improvements when it comes to time and resources spent on projects. A survey by KPMG amongst US executives shows that most of them are optimistic about Gen AI adoption, particularly regarding its potential to increase efficiency (KPMG U.S., 2023).

While some researchers highlight the possibility of Gen AI's abilities leading to human labor being substituted by technology and subsequently threatening to drive widespread job displacement across various industries (Memmert and Tavanapour, 2023; Haefner et al., 2021), others are venturing towards a more optimistic approach. Even though it is undeniable that by replacing humans with technology, certain roles could be rendered obsolete, this group of researchers sees a chance that this trend could give humans more agency. By taking over the more repetitive and tedious tasks, humans could focus on the parts of their jobs that are more fulfilling or require expertise and critical thinking (Wu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, new technologies have the potential to enable new forms of artistic expression. Artists who are open towards adapting new technologies have already created new forms of art that build on algorithms. For example, Generative Art is a relatively new art form where the artist creates a process, a model, which then generates unique pieces of art based on the rules and parameters the artist specified (Boucher, 2023).

2.3.2 Algorithm Aversion

The previous chapter has focused on the positive attitude that many people exhibit towards the relatively new technology of Generative AI. However, there is also a group that views the latest developments in technology with skepticism (Faughnder et al., 2023; Brittain, 2024). Many people are skeptical towards new technologies, which could slow down the integration of Gen AI into the creative industry (Freisinger et al., 2023). If companies and artists want to reap the benefits of the technology, this negative attitude around AI needs to be addressed. This chapter aims to delve deeper into this issue by looking at where aversiveness towards Gen AI comes from and how it could be ameliorated.

Skepticism towards Generative AI can stem from a variety of reasons: Gen AI is a black box, aligning complicated mathematical functions to process input data and transform it into novel output (Hassija et al., 2023), which is fundamentally different to how humans approach problem-solving (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Awareness of this discrepancy might influence how people perceive their interactions with generative AI and evaluate its contributions.

Freisinger, Unfried and Schneider (2023) measured an initial aversiveness towards using AI among crowdvoters, whose task is to evaluate the quality of ideas. This phenomenon is called *algorithm aversion.* People show distrust towards algorithms for a variety of reasons, the main reason being that the basis for the output of an AI algorithm is independent of any human interference. Aversiveness can lead to the dismissal of AI's recommendations in favor of one's own or somebody else's opinion, or even to the complete avoidance of Gen AI altogether (Mahmud et al., 2022). Algorithm aversion is expressed the strongest for tasks which are perceived to require a subjective – as opposed to an objective – approach (Castelo et al., 2019). Giving up part of one's own role in a task by handing it

over to Gen AI means relinquishing agency to a machine: “When employing an AI-enabled system in idea evaluation, the original human evaluator delegates agency to the system, allowing it to autonomously make evaluations” (Freisinger et al., 2023). Freisinger, Unfried and Schneider (2023) were, however, able to show that the skepticism towards the technology was decreasing over time, when participants became more familiar with Gen AI (Freisinger et al., 2023).

Tubadji, Huang and Webber (2021) came to similar results when conducting a quasi-experiment on the influence of cultural human bias towards an AI-generated product. Especially in domains that traditionally heavily rely on human traits such as emotional intelligence and creativity, AI-generated outcomes tend to be rejected in favor of the work of humans, even if their quality is superior (Tubadji et al., 2021). Tubadji, Huang and Webber (2021) therefore conclude that the successful integration of Gen AI into creative processes not only depends on the technology’s performance and cost-effectiveness but that support from the people working in and exerting influence on the industry is equally important.

Research around technology acceptance shows that Gen AI platforms like ChatGPT can provide a reasonable explanation for why they arrived at a certain decision, making it more likely that people will accept their answer (Mahmud et al., 2022). Likewise, personalized conversation similar to a human-to-human dialogue, can improve trust and feeling comfortable with using the technology (Bergner et al., 2023).

For people for whom self-expression is important in their creative process as well as in the artefacts that they create, falling back on a Gen AI tool might feel like their ideas are not truly coming from within, and those individuals might subsequently develop an aversion towards incorporating the technology into tasks that require creative thinking. O’Toole and Horvát (2024) therefore encourage the development of Gen AI tools that are aligned with

existing creative processes and take on a supportive role to facilitate self-expression rather than taking the human out of the loop completely.

Finally, the novelty of Generative AI as a technology and its utilization in creative fields raises regulatory questions and can sometimes lead to uncertainty about the future of creative processes. For instance, it has given rise to an ongoing debate around intellectual property ownership (Jütte, 2023; Brittain, 2024). Researchers at the University of Chicago have recognized this concern and have developed a series of products such as Glaze, which distorts the technical properties of artists' creative work, making it unsuitable for the training of Gen AI models (Shan et al., 2023).

Figure 1: Generative AI as a threat to art and creatives. Illustration by Paul Blow, represented by Handsome Frank.

In addition to concerns over Gen AI imitating individual artists' styles, there is a risk that the technology will take over creative tasks at some point in the future, meaning that the human role in innovation processes is almost completely replaced by Artificial Intelligence, which is a realistic scenario given that Gen AI already outperforms humans in many creative

tasks (Memmert and Tavanapour, 2023; Haefner et al., 2021). Prior research has predominantly focused on the objective outcomes of using Gen AI tools, such as efficiency and quality improvements, leaving a gap in understanding how creatives feel about integrating these tools into their work. However, the fear of being completely substituted by the emerging technology might lead to creatives being hesitant about adopting Gen AI into their creative process.

Since Gen AI in its current abilities is available for only a little over two years now, there is not a lot of research measuring its impact on the creative industry yet. Nonetheless, first studies have shown that the emerging technology will most likely have a significant impact on the value of creative work. Hui et al. (2023) observed the online labor market Upwork and found that freelancers' monthly earnings had dropped by 5,2% since ChatGPT was introduced in November 2022. The finding corroborates the creatives' predictions for the future of human-produced creative work.

Despite ample research highlighting the benefits of integrating Generative AI into creative processes, so far there is still very little known about how and to which degree AI is adopted by the creative industry. Even less is known about how creatives feel about implementing Gen AI tools into their creation process (Freisinger et al., 2024).

3 Methodology & Research Questions

As discussed in the previous chapter, most research focuses on Gen AI in idea generation and evaluation, as well as on the concept of Gen AI as a facilitator of customization, collaboration, and communication in creative processes. Creative processes, however, are complex. They can consist of several stages and multiple iterations. Additionally, projects can be handled in a collaborative manner and subsequently involve several contributors.

Previous research further indicates that using Gen AI tools can enhance the quality of creative content and increase productivity. However, how creative professionals apply Gen AI on a daily basis and how their perceptions of the technology impact its integration into creative processes remains largely unexplored. This research therefore aims to address these two research gaps by asking the following question: How is Gen AI used in the creative process?

This main research question is followed up by three sub-questions:

1. In which stages of the creative process, such as idea generation and evaluation, is Gen AI used?
2. How do creatives' perceptions influence Gen AI adoption?
3. How do creatives see their industry changing under the influence of Gen AI?

3.1 The Netnography Approach

The research will adopt a qualitative approach to capture insights on how creatives integrate Gen AI into their ideation process and how they perceive and experience the technology. Statements and opinions from creative professionals and industry experts will be collected through *netnography*. Netnography can be described as qualitative field research on the internet. It was first developed by Robert Kozinets, who in 1998 presented a framework for conducting consumer research on the internet (Kozinets, 1998). Netnography aims to explore the opinions of a specific social group about a product or service offering. The research method was further optimized by Bartl, Hück and Ruppert (2009). Their updated approach will be used as the research methodology in this thesis. The framework follows the five steps listed below (Bartl et al., 2009):

1. Definition of the research field
2. Identification and selection of online communities
3. Community observation and data collection
4. Data analysis and aggregation of consumer insights
5. Translation of community insights into product and service solutions

Netnography was selected as the research methodology because there is very little research on how Gen AI is currently integrated into creative processes and how this technology impacts the creative industry. Gaining insight into the different ways the emerging technology is currently implemented into creative processes and understanding how creatives' perspectives on Gen AI impact its adoption can enrich the academic discourse and reveal areas for further research. Netnography research is an unobtrusive approach to capturing real-world practices and attitudes and is, subsequently, a robust method for gaining insights on Gen AI adoption by practitioners in various creative fields (Bartl et al., 2009).

Furthermore, from a practical standpoint, understanding potential use cases, consumers' perceptions of a product, and where the creative industry as a whole is heading can help marketers, product developers, and agencies to adapt their communication strategy to address creatives' requirements and consequently increase technology acceptance and adoption throughout the industry.

3.2 Selection of Online Communities and Data Collection

As described in the previous section, this research approach aims to gain insight from people working in different corners of the creative industry. More specifically, creatives are defined in this thesis as individuals engaged in creative work that generates original ideas, concepts,

or artefacts. Creatives typically work in fields such as art, design, writing, filmmaking, music, advertising, and other areas where innovation and imagination are key.

The internet offers a wide range of forums and media outlets for creative professionals to discuss the latest industry trends and share their opinions. Based on short preliminary research, it became clear that postings in forums such as Reddit are typically very short. Furthermore, it is difficult to verify whether the author of the comment indeed falls into the definition of creatives that is used in this thesis. Online magazines and blog posts, on the other hand, give more details about the individuals whose opinions are featured in the articles. They also usually provide more insightful and in-depth arguments.

The following magazines and blogs form the main selection:

- Creative Boom
- It's Nice That
- On Looking
- Dezeen

The outlets were chosen due to the contents of their articles, which discuss new developments in the art world, including Gen AI, and share creatives' opinions on these topics. Apart from the above-mentioned platforms containing the majority of articles selected for the research, other magazines and blogs such as the following were found through references in the already-selected outlets: Medium, Vulture, The Intrinsic Perspective, MIT Technology Review, Frontify, AIGA Eye on Design, and Waxy. These media outlets mostly focus on other topics but have also published some articles on the topic of interest. The articles that made it into the final selection are almost exclusively from the last three years, apart from a handful which is slightly older but was still selected due to

references in other, more recent articles. The comments taken from the articles and blog posts included in the final selection had to show clear signs that they were expressing the opinions of a creative professional, as opposed to, for instance, simply advertising a product towards the creative community. Furthermore, they had to explicitly mention AI.

3.3 Data Analysis and Aggregation

In total, 112 articles were selected that fit the criteria, most of them including several important statements that address the research questions. The comments were subsequently evaluated through the *Gioia Methodology* (Gioia et al., 2013). The Gioia Methodology aims to find meaning in the collected statements of the "knowledge agents" (Gioia et al., 2013). It is important to emphasize that the goal of this procedure is to extract the informants' interpretation of things rather than tying the statements back to the theoretical insights obtained in the first part of this thesis. While prior research can inform about the topic and the current state of knowledge, it should never influence or even bias how new information is received (Gioia et al., 2013).

The analysis follows three coding stages. To deduct patterns from the perspectives presented in the selected articles and blog posts, in the *first-order analysis* the content is first summarized into categories, short statements that capture the shared essence of the informants' interpretations. In the *second-order analysis*, these categories are evaluated for commonalities and, according to the emerging patterns, they are grouped into overarching themes. In the last step, the *third-order analysis*, the categories' common themes are then further abstracted into "aggregate dimensions" (Gioia et al., 2013). These aggregate dimensions offer an abstract, high-level view of the research results. (Gioia et al., 2013).

4 Results

The following sections present and discuss the main insights of the research. Each of them focuses on one of the three sub-questions introduced previously to answer the main research question of 'How is Gen AI used in the creative process?'. The beginning of each of the sections features a table which summarizes all the obtained insights according to the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). Following the design of Bartl et al. (2009), the insights presented in this chapter are then translated into product and service solutions, which will be summarized in a small discussion in Chapter 5.

4.1 Gen AI in the Creative Process

As discussed previously, the creative process is iterative and consists of multiple phases. The first sub-question – 'In which stages of the creative process, such as idea generation and evaluation, is Gen AI utilized?' – aims to provide a clearer understanding of how creatives currently incorporate this disruptive technology into their work. The table below organizes statements from creatives about their use of Gen AI, gathered throughout the research, into different task categories:

Table 1: Gen AI Implementation - Overview of the Data Structure

1st order Categories	*2nd order* Themes	*3rd order* Aggregate dimensions
Translation Taking notes in real time	Transcription	Briefing
Extraction of most valuable points Meeting summary	Value Extraction	
Project strategy Time plan	Strategy	
Summarizing articles Devising research strategy Analysis of results	Research	Idea Generation
Mockups to communicate vision Gen AI instead of stock images Generating mockups for inspiration	Mockups/Prototypes	
Generative fill Save time and resources	Touchups	Idea Implementation
Augmenting features Experimentation	Special Effects	
Machine learning as art Gen AI vs real world Gen AI vs craftsmanship	AI as part of the final product	Other use cases
Communication across distance Gen AI and VR combined Features encouraging brainstorming	Communication and Collaboration	

The main takeaway from the table is that currently, Gen AI is primarily used as a supporting tool throughout various stages of the creative process rather than as a direct collaborator. While it is predominantly used to aid in research, ideation, and prototyping, it remains largely absent in the evaluation stage, and creatives remain hesitant to directly incorporate its output into final products without adapting it first.

Furthermore, an extra step has been added to the creative process which precedes idea generation: the creative briefing. Since many of the creatives featured in the selected articles work on a commission basis or are employed with agencies, their creative process often starts with talking to their clients to discuss the project's requirements. Regarding the adoption of Gen AI as a supporting tool in the traditional creative process, a handful of articles illustrate that Gen AI can be a handy tool in the initial phase of projects commissioned by clients. In the briefing phase, Gen AI tools can be employed to structure initial project requirements. They can be used to record and translate planning meetings, extract value from the discussions, store information about clients and projects in an easily accessible way and set up a timeframe and strategy for running projects. In this stage, Gen AI is mostly used to save time and costs by streamlining administrative tasks and reducing time spent on documentation and planning. "Advertising agency Creature London has been quick to adopt AI in its processes already, having launched two bespoke AI tools for its teams to use. One, Impala, speaks to this initial step in any creative project. It's a strategy-focused tool, as Meg Egan, a senior creative at the agency, explains" (Bourton, 2023b).

For initial inspiration purposes, Gen AI is not yet a go-to tool for creatives. Many creatives, such as the experimental animator Dom Harwood, argue that "stepping away from the digital world" (Bourton, 2023a) to seek inspiration is preferable, as it allows designers and artists to create work that is "augmented by AI, rather than being dreamt up by it" (Bourton, 2023a). The independent designer and art director Elizabeth Goodspeed has a similar perspective: "AI, on the other hand, only further alienates the work of actual human talent at any point in the process, thereby pushing the industry towards an even greater reliance on digital creations without tangible origin" (Goodspeed, 2024b).

However, once the basic ideas and concepts are established, many creatives resort to Gen AI for research purposes and to generate first mockups and prototypes. In terms of

research, creatives express that Gen AI tools such as ChatGPT help them devise a strategy for collecting and analyzing data, which can be particularly helpful for projects requiring extensive background work and a skillset that is not part of the everyday repertoire of a creative. However, AI is not yet advanced enough to conduct research at the level of human professionals. Instead, it is used to provide guidance, offering suggestions that creatives then refine. An UX/IU designer under the name Thalion writes about his perceived benefits of tools like Figma: “After discussing potential challenges with a synthetic user (…) you form hypotheses for testing. (…) The tool handles user recruitment, moderates the tests, and summarizes the insights. You can now iterate or finalize the solution with confidence” (Thalion, 2024). Many agencies furthermore like to use AI tools to summarize industry reports, as chief innovation officer James Welch explains: “We use AI to pre-filter industry news: to get rid of duplicates, puff pieces and listicles. We then use AI to read articles for us, giving us a detailed synopsis so that we know whether to spend time reading the full article or not“ (May, 2024h).

Regarding the generation of mockups and prototypes, Gen AI is considered helpful for two reasons: Firstly, it speeds up the sketching process, for example, by eliminating the need to search for suitable stock images and instead generating the required content directly, ultimately saving both time and money. Paul Woodvine, Executive Creative Director at Dragon Rouge, summarizes: “It's an efficient way to develop concepts quickly at the beginning stage of any project. Using AI reduces the time and costs invested in ideas.” (Williams, 2024d). Additionally, the tools can help visualize clients’ ideas, which is particularly useful when “a client is struggling to articulate exactly what they want“, as the senior creative Meg Eagan explains (Bourton, 2023b). In idea generation, Gen AI is, therefore, not just used as a supporting tool but as a means for experimentation. For instance, the visual artist Rollinos has been experimenting with “glitch art and AI” (Jones, 2022) to

develop “new processes to transform and repurpose footage“ (Jones, 2022). Nevertheless, many creative professionals, such as the head of design at ustwo London, Greig Robinson, emphasize that they prefer to maintain control over the core creative process, using AI-generated outputs as references rather than final solutions: “Ultimately, AI should be used as a springboard rather than a final deliverable“ (May, 2024h). Two design studios that, nonetheless, rely on Gen AI tools in the early stages of a project are the design studios Ohio and Space10. However, they both note that “it is an imperfect process and that the biases fed into AI models are often carried over into the final product“ (Gorny, 2023b).

In the implementation phase, which happens once the final concept crystalizes, creatives rely on Gen AI again as more of a support tool. Bringing a creative idea to life is an iterative process that involves a series of tasks, many of which can be completed through a simple workflow but are time- or resource-consuming. Gen AI assists by automating repetitive tasks, such as adjusting color palettes, generating variations of images, or enhancing resolution. Natalie Schwartz, head of brand marketing at Canva, believes applying Gen AI tools in this way holds great potential for creative professionals: “Any tasks that are automated by AI will free up brain space for deep thinking, digesting other creative work that’s out in the world, and developing ideas, which is why we get into creative work in the first place” (Williams, 2024c). Furthermore, Gen AI can help creatives broaden their artistic expression by enabling them to explore new techniques and mediums that typically demand advanced technical skills and specialized knowledge. By automating many technical aspects of the creative process, Gen AI allows artists to elevate the quality of their work in ways that would have previously required significant time, effort, and resources. Photographer Salomé Gomis-Trezise, for instance, uses Gen AI to enhance her images (Hingley, 2023):

> "Primarily, for Salomé, the process enabled her to experiment with her work without the limits of geography, cost or logistics. (…) The series is one that has provided Salomé with a means of experimenting she previously didn't know was possible. 'It's been so fun to see my ideas come to life in AI form, and I've kept experimenting and testing the limits of where I could take them,' she details. 'I love learning new ways of bringing my ideas to life.'"

The many iterations of the design process require constant decision-making on which elements of a design should be kept and which ones require further refinement. The task of curation is taking up more time than previously due to the sheer volume of drafts and prototypes that can be created with the help of Gen AI. As the magazine It's Nice That concludes from their many conversations with creatives "the weight on the creative director's shoulders may increase if there are even more avenues to choose from. Their references will need to be more vast than ever, and their inputs more impactful than the countless other creatives using these tools for the same reasons" (Bourton, 2023c). As discussed in Chapter 3, Gen AI can be employed in this process to separate the bad mockups from the drafts that have potential and can be worked with (Bell et al., 2024). However, most creatives do not see any benefits in employing the technology in this context. In the creative director Pali Palavathanan's opinion the "critical and key decision-making moments in a project tend to be instinctive, gut feelings that are rooted in lived experiences or awareness of cultural nuances" (Bourton, 2023c).

Beyond content creation, Gen AI tools can facilitate communication and collaboration between teams and even with clients in unprecedented ways. Platforms like Figma provide AI-enhanced collaborative features, facilitating real-time brainstorming and dynamic, well-structured workflows across geographically dispersed teams. According to the interaction designer Aosheng Ran, Figma essentially provides a whiteboard function featuring collaborative modules that, for example, "motivates unexpected routes by suggesting

adjacent topics“ (Bourton, 2023b) to keep teams in a “flow state” (Bourton, 2023b) and encourage brainstorming and other creative processes. By integrating Gen AI-powered project management and collaboration tools, creatives can, therefore, streamline workflows and improve efficiency.

Moreover, Gen AI tools allow for a quicker customization of creative work. One such example is a campaign by the agency Trouble Maker (May, 2024h). Their chief creative officer Andy Taylor explains that Gen AI enables them to make their campaigns more exclusive: “AI allowed us to create content that could instantly react to every possible fixture and result. Even down to changing the ethnic makeup of the crowd to reflect the local market“ (May, 2024h).

As new technologies emerge, they not only support traditional creative processes but also introduce new possibilities for artistic expression. Many creatives are now experimenting with the technology by making it a part of the final product. One notable example is Carolina Melis’ Kubikino, a generative art project, which allows users to generate colorful “geometric portraits” (Carter, 2023) with just the press of a button (Carter, 2023). During the research, it became evident that an increasing number of artists train their own models employing machine learning and neural networks to explore diverse themes. For instance, some train Gen AI algorithms to simulate natural environments (Brewer, 2024) or replicate birdsong as a commentary on climate change (Aouf, 2023a). Others juxtapose the technology with traditional craftsmanship or older tools such as the typewriter (Gorny, 2023a), taking those who use it on an “emotional journey through paper and ink“ (Gorny, 2023a) and creating a dialogue between the past and present. Through installations like this, the act of creation itself becomes a form of art – in the spirit of Marshall McLuhan’s idea that *the medium is the message* (McLuhan, 1964).

The insights obtained from the netnographic research show that the use cases of Gen AI are far more diverse than what current studies capture. Even though the emerging technology enhances efficiency and expands possibilities, in the current state of things, key aspects of the creative process, such as decision-making, remain in the hands of humans, making Gen AI a supporting tool rather than a replacement for human creativity.

4.2 The Impact of Creatives' Perceptions on Gen AI Adoption

The second part of the research looks at how creatives' perceptions of Gen AI influence the degree to which they incorporate the emerging technology into their creative process. Therefore, it aims to answer the research question of 'How do creatives' perceptions influence Gen AI adoption?'. The findings from the netnography research are summarized in the table below:

Table 2: Gen AI Perceptions - Overview of the Data Structure

1st order Categories	*2nd order* Themes	*3rd order* Aggregate dimensions
Training datasets Processing of user input	Transparency	Ethics
Compensation for art used for training Protection of input data and style	Ownership	
Cultural bias Lack of diverse training data Developing models to mitigate bias	Bias	
Resource consumption Sustainable, ethical art Addressing climate change with AI	Sustainability	
No seamless product experience Vast range of available products	Integration	Functional aspects
Imperfection increases artistic value Human touch Tech companies aim for perfection	Artistic appeal	
Gen AI tools do not produce novel art Everything will look the same Real-world inspiration	Lack of novelty	
Quality and efficiency concerns AI cost leadership Market saturation	Technological advancements	Job loss
Higher reliance on AI Changing client expectations Limitations of AI unclear to clients Importance of networking	Attitudes of clients and agencies	
Experimentation and exploration Curiosity	Early adopters	Curiosity
New possibilities of expression Generative art Exploring new mediums and fields	Pushing creative limits	

The findings show that most creatives are optimistic about integrating Gen AI tools into their projects, recognizing their potential to enhance efficiency and unlock new creative possibilities. Many express curiosity and excitement about the technology, eager to explore its capabilities. Early adopters in the industry acknowledge both the competitive edge these tools provide as well as their disruptive potential. According to Jennifer Kidd, director at the stop motion studio Scale Model Studios, "embracing new technologies is crucial; it opens up a world of possibilities and keeps us ahead of the curve" (Gosling, 2024). Additionally, those who already have some experience with the technology often find that it inspires them in new ways and opens doors to explore new mediums that were previously inaccessible to them due to their high costs or the technical skills they required. The illustrator Seba Cestaro enjoys “the search for something unusual” (Bourton, 2024) the most when working with Gen AI: “AI empowers me to extend the visual narrative of my artworks” (Bourton, 2024).

However, not all creatives view Gen AI as an appropriate tool in every context. Some argue that while technology companies strive for perfection, artists often value imperfections, as they contribute to the uniqueness and authenticity of a creative work. The motion designer Arthur Dubois and his team, for instance, chose to work with DALL-E because it “provided the best results in terms of its weirdness and imperfect generation” (Bourton, 2023a).

Additionally, some creatives criticize Gen AI for perpetuating existing styles rather than fostering originality. Since Gen AI is fundamentally trained to replicate and recombine existing data, there is concern that it lacks the ability to generate truly novel artistic expressions. The example of Space10 and Partner & Tourron’s design journey of creating the *Couch in an Envelope* illustrates that Gen AI by itself struggles to generate novel content unless the human-generated prompt challenges it to think outside the box by choosing the right words and images that incite the algorithm to output novel results (Aouf, 2023b).

> "At first, they found the AI to be annoyingly restrictive – any use of the word 'couch' would always return the same archetypical shapes they were trying to avoid. But by switching to alternative prompts such as 'platform', 'lightweight', 'sustainable', 'easy to move' and 'conversation pit', the results began to change" (Aouf, 2023b).

Another influencing factor in technology adoption is the bias that current Gen AI models exhibit towards certain styles and cultural expressions. For instance, artist Linda Dounia Rebeiz criticizes that popular Gen AI tools are mostly trained on data produced by Western societies, whereas the Global South and East are underrepresented (Rebeiz, 2023). Therefore, many artists, including Linda Dounia Rebeiz, advocate for experimenting with the technology and developing custom Gen AI algorithms to address inherent biases in popular Gen AI tools and foster a more inclusive representation of reality. They see it as a collective responsibility to by provide existing data sets with a larger variety of styles and cultural expressions and ultimately improve the performance of widely available Gen AI tools (Rebeiz, 2023). Rebeiz writes (Rebeiz, 2023):

> "These shortcomings are what initially drew me to AI. (…) What we don't include in training today contributes to a much hazier and incomplete understanding of our world (…) Against the vastness and richness of the world's artistic expressions, they [AI tools] were criminally limited. (…) I continue to incorporate AI in my practice because I am afraid that if I don't, everything about me and where I come from will be erased from the digital memory of the world."

When it comes to expected effort, an aspect that might hold creatives back from integrating the technology into their daily workflows more extensively is the fragmented nature of the

Gen AI market, which forces creatives to use multiple tools within a single project, making adoption more complex. This is illustrated by the creative process of experimental animator Dom Harwood. “Infinite Vibes’ music video for Jessy Lanza, *I Hate Myself,* [was] created entirely by Dom and 15 separate AI tools” (Bourton, 2023a). The absence of a seamless product experience can lead to hesitation in integrating Gen AI into workflows, as creatives may feel overwhelmed by the learning curve and tool fragmentation. The designer Nishat Akhtar, for instance, recalls that it took her “a year or two to figure out how to fold machine learning and generative AI into her process“ (Adobe, 2024). As the technology matures and creatives are becoming more familiar with it, this hesitation, caused by a lack of experience with Gen AI tools, will most likely subside.

Social and environmental aspects can be considered the biggest factors influencing creatives’ attitudes towards Gen AI adoption. As shown in the table, many creative professionals express ethical concerns about the transparency of Gen AI products. Big tech companies currently refrain from disclosing their data sets based on which they train their models. Creatives criticize this and demand disclosure and compensation for cases in which intellectual property rights were violated (Barker, 2023a). There are currently no clear guidelines on the scraping of data from the internet to be used in the training of models (Studio Legal LLP and Harper James solicitors, 2024). This can lead creatives to be cautious about using these tools due to concerns over violating client confidentiality. For instance, following an update of the terms and conditions of Adobe, one former customer, who works as a designer and toy creator, writes: “If you are a professional, if you are under NDA with your clients, if you are a creative, a lawyer, a doctor or anyone who works with proprietary files – it is time to cancel Adobe, delete all the apps and programs” (May, 2024g). Nevertheless, some tools already exist to address these concerns by altering the parameters

of creative works, making them unusable for model training, as mentioned in Chapter 2.3.2 (Shan et al., 2023).

Questions around fairness and ownership furthermore come up with regards to creative work that is produced with the help of Gen AI. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gen AI tools are rarely used in a project's final stages. This is partially because many creatives feel that humans are still better than machines at creating content that is both meaningful and tasteful, one of them being Meg Egan, a senior creative at the agency Creature London: “If you’re not using unique inputs and just relying on the AI to figure it out, you can quickly become part of a big homogeneous blob“ (Bourton, 2023b). Moreover, concerns about authorship and legal recognition further complicate the integration of AI-generated work. Previous instances of copyright revocation after it was discovered that an artwork was generated by an algorithm demonstrate that this concern is valid (Barker, 2023a).

Additional ethical concerns regarding Gen AI usage are raised by the environmental harm these models cause through their high consumption of resources. A study by Li et al. from 2023 showed that Artificial Intelligence uses about “a 500ml bottle of water for roughly 10 – 50 medium-length responses” (Li et al., 2023). However, in a new statement released by the research team, they concluded that, based on new reports released by Microsoft in September 2024, AI uses around four times their initial estimate (Sellman and Vaughan, 2024). The high usage of resources is a concern that can potentially keep creatives from using Gen AI to its full extent and instead limit its usage to simple tasks. For instance, the graphic designer Marie Otsuka and the developer Nic Schumann considered this issue when training a model to recognize letterforms: “We’re not trying to get to the level of it being perfectly correct, or of it giving you perfect predictions (…) We just need to run it long enough so it can be something designers can work from“ (Kafka, 2020).

Still, creative professionals across different disciplines agree that the technology has the potential to disrupt and subsequently lead to a restructuring of the industry. This notion is often accompanied by a fear of not being compensated fairly or even losing one's job due to this development, one of the main points of Hollywood's Writers Guild of America strike in 2023 (Faughnder et al., 2023). Many creatives see this happening as a result of further technological advancements, which means that eventually, technology surpasses humans in all aspects of creativity. When it comes to architecture, a survey from 2023 amongst engineers, architects, and contractors reveals that 20% of the respondents are "very concerned that AI could replace human architects in the future" (BIMstack, 2023). The architect Sebastian Errazuriz shares this sentiment. In 2019, he claimed on his Instagram channel that 90% of architects would eventually be replaced by AI (Fairs, 2019). "Architecture as an artistic practice is the only one that will survive and it will be developed by a tiny elite. We're talking five per cent, one per cent of architects max. The rest, they're done" (Fairs, 2019). Four years later, in an interview with Dezeen, he claims that his stance has not changed (Barker, 2023b). A 2023 study by Hatzius et al. for Goldman Sachs research supports this concern to a degree as they classify architecture as a discipline with a high risk of automation. When it comes to the total labor market, the study predicts that in the US, around seven per cent of the workforce will be completely replaced by AI and another 63 per cent of jobs will be at least supported by AI. The remaining thirty per cent will be largely unaffected by the technology. The study furthermore concedes that past labor market disruptions caused by emerging technologies have also led to the creation of new jobs. More precisely, sixty per cent of jobs that exist in the US today did not exist in 1940. Goldman Sachs therefore expects a similar change in the labor market to happen with the integration of Gen AI tools which means that many of the people replaced by the technology will find reemployment in those newly created positions (Hatzius et al., 2023).

However, technological advancements are not the only reason why creatives are worried about the future of their jobs. There is a growing concern about a shift in the attitudes of clients and agencies as they will start to see Gen AI as a cost-effective and good-enough alternative to employing or commissioning creatives. Creative director Ky Allport acknowledges that it can be a challenge to "contend with a general public—or worse, clients—who think their prompts and the spit-up results are a replacement for literacy, creativity and humanity" (May, 2024e). The illustration agent James Hughes has a mixed perspective on this topic (Hughes, 2024):

> "There are clients out there who, with little or no budget, will cobble together images using AI and be satisfied with the results. Others may not value human creativity highly and simply want visuals for their website or product without much thought to quality or originality (…) However, the picture changes when you consider clients and industries that value human creativity. Many clients don't want AI-generated imagery to be part of what they create."

In summary, the adoption of Gen AI among creatives is influenced by perceived benefits, usability challenges, ethical concerns, and social pressures. While some embrace it as a powerful tool for creative exploration, others remain cautious about its long-term implications for artistic integrity and employment stability.

4.3 A Disruptive Force in the Creative Industry

Considering the disruptive nature of Gen AI as well as the impact it has already had on the creative industry in the last two years since its introduction, it is worth asking what the future of the creative sector might look like: 'How do creatives see their industry changing under the influence of Gen AI?' It is often the people working within the industries confronted

with new and potentially disruptive technologies who can best judge the impact of such a development. The table below summarizes creatives' opinions on this topic into various categories:

Table 3: Gen AI Influence on the Industry - Overview of the Data Structure

1st order Categories	*2nd order* Themes	*3rd order* Aggregate dimensions
Lower demand Niche product Premium price	Human creative work as a luxury offer	Market shift
Mass-production of content Increase in efficiency Clients can make creative decisions	Gen AI as the cost-effective choice	
Brand authenticity Human touch	Combining AI and craftsmanship	Hybrid approach
Relatability Personal connection	Personalized experiences	
Translating the vision Sparking interest, attention	Storytelling	Differentiation
Standing out from the masses Differentiation from AI content	Unique perspectives	
Gen AI copying artists AI-generated content	Copyright infringement	Ethics
Company policy Government guidelines Tech company code of conduct	Regulations	
Coding Machine Learning Data analysis and visualization	IT skills	Skills
Knowing different mediums Flexibility	Multimedia	
Coaching Integrating business perspectives	Business know-how	

The most poignant prediction is that Gen AI is going to cause a market shift. While the middle segment slowly fades, Gen AI becomes the quick and affordable solution, whereas creative work produced by humans turns into a luxury good. According to the CCO David Lee, this indicates a development similar to the fashion industry, which is increasingly divided into fast fashion and premium or luxury brands (Alagiah, 2024). “I actually believe all these AI tools will be for the masses (…) People in the future will pay a premium for handmade craft and creativity, because there’s a story attached to it. People who can craft things with their hands, that will be the new luxury in the future” (Alagiah, 2024).

As technological advancements will possibly lead to a level of quality in AI-produced content that makes humans dispensable in many aspects of the creative process, brands that are too reliant on technology risk appearing detached and unapproachable to customers. The global head of creative at Beggars Group, Alison Fielding, details that in many cases where Gen AI is used heavily “the process creates these soulless and highly polished images which, to me, look very flat and lifeless (…) The audience is not as connected or engaged. It’s formulaic in a way, and not as fresh nor exciting as it was” (Bourton, 2024a). To counteract this development, branding and advertisement will opt for a hybrid approach, according to creative professionals’ predictions. In-real-life encounters with brands, for example, at sports events or festivals, as well as personalized offerings and experiences, will be one way for brands to present themselves as relatable. Ben Mottershead, strategy director at the agency Never Dull, predicts: “In-real-life is on the rise. More people are looking for that human touch“ (May, 2024b). Another way for brands to promote authenticity will be to include craftsmanship and other human elements in their offerings. Creative director Luigi Carnovale predicts the following trend (May, 2024c):

> "Consumers want unique, handmade items with personal meaning, moving away from mass-produced products. The second is sustainability. This focus on eco-friendly and ethical consumption aligns with the craft's slow, intentional production. Thirdly, advances in technology will blend with traditional craftsmanship, creating innovative yet authentic designs."

While Gen AI might not democratize design to the extent that everyone can become a successful artist, it will give smaller companies the chance to compete with the big players, subsequently increasing competition. This is especially true for the film industry, where smaller enterprises are much faster to adopt new technologies than the big studios (May, 2024d). Alberto Méndez Rojas used the tool Reallusion to create animation films on a limited budget (May, 2024d):

> "Due to the lack of a large team, we couldn't afford to create people and animations from scratch (…) Just a couple of years back, you needed an entire crew to produce a film, and very often, your ideas would have been thrown into the trash can (…) Now, you do not depend on anyone. You just need to be yourself and create."

Because of the ease of creating content with Gen AI, creative professionals predict an unprecedented level of market saturation. One such creative is the visual storyteller Fiifi Dzansi, who argues that "creative people are going to have a tough time in the coming years. Tech, especially AI, is disrupting things. These tools are also making many disciplines in the creative field look easy, thereby bringing in myriads of people to saturate the space." (May, 2024k). This development will increase the need for creatives to differentiate themselves, to have a means of expression informed by a unique perspective that cannot be so easily replicated by Gen AI.

To capture attention in an oversaturated market, the art itself, however, will oftentimes not be enough. Knowing how to market a product or style through storytelling will become essential. Erik Wankerl, Managing Director of Creation and Innovation at redpepper, predicts the following trend: “Creativity is shifting even more towards storytelling. Concept is more important than execution” (Williams, 2024a). Based on this projection, creative director Andy Cooke argues that people with unusual career paths who can bring a unique perspective will be valuable employees for agencies in the future. “While some foundational understanding is necessary, he believes the truly valuable skills are the ability to think differently, tell compelling stories, and connect with human experiences that resonate across backgrounds” (May, 2024f).

In general, the skill requirements for creatives will change significantly if Gen AI becomes an integral part of the creative industry. Technical skills will not be as sought after as before since creative output can be generated at the push of a button. Creatives will require skills that cannot so easily be substituted by Gen AI. The valuable contribution that humans can make is, as mentioned previously, their taste and their ability to evaluate the quality of ideas and concepts in a real-world context. The illustrator Julien Posture discusses this matter in his blog On Looking (Posture, 2024):

> “In taking the relationship between words and images as a simple 1:1 ratio, machine learning models sacrifice much of what illustration is really about, i.e. the space between text and image. This is not to say they do a bad job, they just do a very different one than illustrators do. (…) The division between words and images is not the only one that is being flattened in most discussions of generative AI, another crucial one is that between images and people.”

Moreover, IT skills will be beneficial. For example, basic knowledge of how models work, how they can be trained, and the necessary coding skills to build an algorithm. Furthermore,

the ability to collect, analyze, and visualize data is becoming increasingly important, a trend reflected in a new Creative Computing class offered at the University of the Arts London. (May, 2024i).

When it comes to working with clients, creative professionals will increasingly be expected to go beyond just designing visually appealing artwork or campaigns. They must also grasp the business aspects and create their work within this broader context. Some even believe that agencies and freelancers will generally see a shift from creating work for clients to coaching them on marketing and branding strategies. According to Sunny Bonnell, author and co-founder of the agency Motto, the "ask isn't just 'make us look good', it's 'help us matter.' And it matters not just to their customers but also to their employees and investors" (May, 2024j).

Additionally, instead of becoming an expert in one specific discipline, the creatives that are going to have the most success are going to be the ones familiar with several different disciplines and mediums. Architect Reem Mosleh predicts that creatives "who decide not to go beyond their normal practice will definitely be at risk" of being replaced by Gen AI (Barker, 2023b). Creative director Asa Roger benefited from staying flexible and offering a variety of services in a time of shifting working conditions: "Projects are coming in across a real variety of work: photography, brand, packaging, website design and creative direction. Even a little consultancy day-rate work, which was welcome. Without that range, though, it'd be pretty quiet in any of those fields" (May, 2024a). Moreover, it is becoming increasingly important for creatives to foster "strong client relationships" (Goodspeed, 2024a), as commercial artist and letterer Jen Mussari notes. Elizabeth Goodspeed, independent designer and art director, summarizes: "As designers adapt to their styles being co-opted, they increasingly turn to their 'soft' skills – such as client relationships, unique

conceptual thinking and adaptability – to distinguish their offerings in a crowded market" (Goodspeed, 2024a).

Finally, as Gen AI becomes a mature technology, there are going to be regulations set around it. The extent to which these regulations are going to be applied will have a strong influence on how Gen AI will be integrated into the creative process. As of now, some creative agencies are restricting the extent to which the tools can be used due to concerns about how client confidentiality and copyrighted materials are handled. Sinch's global marketing and creative direction leader Gwen Lafage reports: "I've experimented with image generation tools or writing tools like Jesper; I've looked into meeting assistant tools as well, as I think they can really make meetings more efficient and actionable. But, I haven't been able to integrate them into my workflow yet due to our current IT policies" (Williams, 2024b).

In conclusion, Gen AI is transforming the creative industry by facilitating creative production, which in turn increases competition, and shifts market dynamics, where AI-generated content becomes the standard while human-made work is seen as a luxury. As a result, creatives must adapt by focusing on storytelling, cross-disciplinary skills and strategic thinking, while also navigating concerns around confidentiality, regulation, and the changing value of their work.

5 Discussion

The findings from the netnographic research indicate that while Gen AI assists in various stages of the creative process, it is not yet seen as an independent creative force. It is primarily used for developing initial prototypes and mockups, as well as in supporting the implementation of creative ideas by automating repetitive tasks, generating variations, and

streamlining workflows. Moreover, many creatives recognize that Gen AI can increase efficiency, enable new creative possibilities, and provide a competitive advantage. On the other hand, many practitioners also worry about transparency in Gen AI model training, the unauthorized use of their work, and the bias inherent to such models. There is widespread concern that the improving skillset of Gen AI algorithms, as well as the changing attitudes of companies and agencies, will lead to many creative professionals losing their jobs.

Indeed, according to creatives, the disruptive potential of Gen AI will likely lead to a market shift, making human creativity a luxury good, while most creative output will be mass-produced by technology. As detailed in Chapter 2.3.2, early data indeed suggests that such a trend exists (Hui et al., 2023). However, for brands to maintain relatability, incorporating a human touch into their campaigns, such as pairing technology with craftsmanship or offering in-real-life experiences will become essential. Unique perspectives and storytelling will be valued much higher due to increasing market saturation, which will make differentiation a key factor for success. How fast this change is going to happen also depends on the regulatory guidelines around Gen AI.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The insights from the netnographic research broaden the understanding of how Gen AI is used in creative processes, enriching academic literature by grounding theoretical insights in real-world examples. Furthermore, the results suggest that creatives experiment with Gen AI in more ways than what current research, which primarily focuses on the stages of idea generation and evaluation, captures. The ways that Gen AI is adopted, could provide further insights into the patterns of technology acceptance in creative fields.

Furthermore, existing models of the creative process might need to be updated to integrate Gen AI-assisted creativity as the technology is likely to significantly reshape traditional workflows, and perhaps even the nature of human creativity itself, shifting towards curation, refinement, and storytelling. While Gen AI democratizes access to creative production, the insights gained from the netnographic research reinforce theories that the technology could increase creative stratification – where mass-produced AI-generated content dominates the lower tier of the market, while human-made creativity is positioned as a luxury good. This shift has broader implications for the economics of creative labor, raising questions about how value, authorship, and artistic authenticity will be redefined in an AI-driven creative landscape.

5.2 Practical Implications

To foster wider adoption and trust, a more seamless user experience and a shift from concern to confidence in the technology are essential. Establishing clear regulations can help address ethical concerns and promote transparency in Gen AI products. Marketing strategies should differentiate between target audiences and position Gen AI as a supportive tool for creatives while emphasizing its efficiency and cost-saving potential for agencies and companies. However, rather than presenting these tools as one-size-fits-all solutions, it is crucial to engage with creatives and consider their insights on how Gen AI can best support specific tasks across different sectors of the creative industry.

For creative professionals, differentiation will become increasingly important in an AI-driven market. Instead of trying to keep up with the latest design trends, they should focus on developing a distinct personal style that cannot be easily replicated by an algorithm. Furthermore, they should acquire IT skills to be able to harness the benefits of Gen AI and

stay up to date on changing industry demands. Additionally, given the rapid pace of technological advancement, continuous learning and adaptability will be critical skills for staying competitive.

At the organizational level, companies and creative agencies should consider hiring individuals with unique perspectives and unconventional career paths. Furthermore, both agencies and freelancers should refine their coaching abilities and integrate business decision-making into creative processes. As future commission work is likely to require a more holistic approach, creatives will need to align design choices with broader business strategies to deliver meaningful, results-driven solutions.

Client education and transparency will also play a central role in Gen AI adoption. Many clients may have misconceptions about AI-generated work, so agencies should actively communicate how Gen AI is used, ensuring clarity around its role in the creative process.

Lastly, ethical considerations, including sustainability and responsible Gen AI use, should not be overlooked. Companies and agencies that adopt the technology responsibly, by prioritizing ethical design practices, ensuring fair compensation for human creatives, and addressing environmental concerns, will likely build stronger trust with both clients, consumers, and creative professionals.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

The creative sector is currently at the beginning of significant disruption, driven by the rapid adoption of Gen AI. However, as a relatively young technology, Gen AI is still evolving, and its capabilities may look very different once it reaches maturity. This makes it challenging to predict its long-term effects on the industry with certainty.

Furthermore, the netnographic research focused on Western, English-language media outlets, which may not fully capture the global diversity in AI adoption. Access to technology and regulatory guidelines can vary significantly across diverse regions, leading to different adoption patterns and industry impacts worldwide. Future studies should explore how regional variations in regulation, infrastructure, and cultural attitudes shape Gen AI's role in creative industries globally.

Another major limitation is the lack of long-term empirical data measuring Gen AI's impact on the creative sector. Since this technology has only been widely available for a short time, clear trends in employment, earnings, and creative output are still emerging. Moreover, while creative professionals' perspectives provide valuable insights, their predictions may not fully reflect how the industry will evolve. As Gen AI technology advances and becomes more integrated into workflows, industry perceptions and adoption strategies are likely to shift.

Further qualitative research could strengthen the insights gained in this thesis by capturing evolving industry attitudes, ethical concerns, and creative strategies. Additionally, while this research provides a broad evaluation of Gen AI's impact, more targeted studies are needed. For instance, in-depth analyses of regulatory developments, examining how agencies and companies govern Gen AI use, could offer a more detailed understanding of its implications for creative work.

6 Conclusion

The creative industry is at the beginning of a profound transformation driven by the rapid advancement of Generative AI. This thesis explored to which extent Gen AI is currently implemented into creative workflows and how creative professionals' perceptions of the technology influence its adoption. Furthermore, it was discussed how Gen AI might transform the creative industry, assessing potential opportunities and challenges. While the emerging technology democratizes access to creative production, enabling efficiency and introducing new opportunities for creative expression, it also raises concerns regarding job displacement, market saturation, and the commodification of creative work. From a theoretical perspective, this research enriches the academic discourse by grounding theoretical insights in real-world examples and pointing towards new areas for research. The insights gained in this thesis further suggest that existing models of creativity and creative production may need to be revised to accommodate AI-assisted workflows. Practically, this research highlights the need for creatives to develop skills that complement Gen AI rather than compete with it. Agencies and companies must strategically integrate the technology and find ethical and sustainable solutions that improve efficiency while maintaining quality and human authenticity. Additionally, clear regulations and ethical frameworks will be crucial in shaping the responsible adoption of Gen AI in the creative sector. Ultimately, while Gen AI is reshaping the creative landscape, human creativity remains irreplaceable. The challenge moving forward will not be about choosing between Gen AI and human creativity, but rather about finding ways for the two to complement each other, and drive innovation. By embracing change, fostering ethical AI use, and focusing on uniquely human strengths, creatives and companies alike can successfully navigate this evolving landscape.

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