

Research Paper

How AI Affects Creativity Among Young Adults: A Qualitative Exploration

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how artificial intelligence (AI) influences creativity among young adults. Using semi-structured interviews with individuals engaged in creative fields, the research investigates the impact of AI tools such as ChatGPT and Midjourney on originality, idea generation, emotional engagement, and problem-solving. Participants describe AI as both a creative collaborator and a challenge to personal authenticity. Thematic analysis reveals that while AI enhances creative confidence and reduces mental blocks, it also leads to concerns about ownership, homogenization, and over-reliance. Findings suggest that AI alters the definition of creativity, shaping not only outputs but also self-perception and emotional connection to creative work. The study emphasizes the need for critical engagement with AI in creative practices and calls for ethical awareness, education, and policy intervention to support human-centered innovation in an AI-augmented world. The results provide insights for psychologists, educators, and designers aiming to balance efficiency and originality in creative domains.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Creativity, Young Adults, Qualitative Research, Creative Thinking, Divergent Thinking, Emotional Engagement, Human–AI Interaction*

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved beyond its roots in automation and analytics to become a transformative force in creative domains. With generative tools such as ChatGPT, DALL·E, and Midjourney, AI can now write poetry, generate digital art, compose music, and assist in storytelling—challenging long-held assumptions about human originality. These developments have sparked global conversations around whether AI serves merely as an extension of human creativity or if it has become a creative agent in its own right (Boden, 2004; Russell & Norvig, 2016).

Creativity, broadly defined as the ability to produce ideas or products that are both novel and useful (Runco & Jaeger, 2012), plays a vital role across fields—from the arts and design to education, business, and scientific innovation. It involves divergent thinking, problem-solving, and emotional engagement, making it not only a cognitive process but also a deeply personal and expressive act (Guilford, 1950; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). With AI now

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embedded in many creative workflows, there is an urgent need to examine how these technologies affect the essence of creativity—especially among digital natives.

Young adults aged 18 to 30 have grown up in an environment shaped by rapid technological innovation and algorithmic systems. As both consumers and creators, they interact with AI tools in academic, professional, and recreational contexts. Their creative expressions are often mediated or influenced by AI-based platforms, making their perspectives particularly relevant to understanding how creativity is evolving in the 21st century (Arnett, 2000; Miller, 2019).

While AI tools can inspire new ideas and streamline the creative process, they also raise questions about originality, ownership, and emotional authenticity. Several studies have shown that AI enhances ideation and reduces creative blocks, especially for novices (Doshi & Hauser, 2024; Hwang & Wu, 2025). However, concerns remain about homogenization, over-reliance, and the dilution of personal voice (Rubin, 2025; Sparrow et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the role of AI in redefining aesthetic standards and creative norms cannot be overlooked. As more creators use similar models trained on shared datasets, outputs risk becoming stylistically repetitive (Crimaldi & Leonelli, 2023). At the same time, users' emotional experiences range from excitement to alienation—highlighting the complexity of this human–AI dynamic.

In this context, the present study explores how young adults perceive and experience the influence of AI on their creative processes. By focusing on subjective narratives through qualitative interviews, the research seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which AI impacts originality, problem-solving, emotional engagement, and creative identity.

Recent studies have highlighted the complex and evolving relationship between artificial intelligence and human creativity. Doshi and Hauser (2024) found that AI-generated prompts enhanced the creativity and quality of written outputs, particularly among individuals with lower baseline creativity, although they cautioned against potential reductions in collective originality. Similarly, Hwang and Wu (2025) observed that generative AI tools improved ideation fluency and reduced anxiety among design students, especially those with initially low creative confidence. However, these benefits were accompanied by concerns about stylistic convergence and emotional detachment, echoing findings by Zhou et al. (2021), who noted that AI-assisted creators reported diminished intrinsic motivation and satisfaction with their work. Complementing these perspectives, Crimaldi and Leonelli (2023) emphasized that while AI expands creative possibilities in art and literature, it also raises pressing questions about authorship, authenticity, and aesthetic homogenization. Together, these studies reveal a paradox: AI enhances access to creativity but may simultaneously dilute its depth and individuality.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore how AI tools influence the creative processes of young adults. Specific objectives include:

1. To understand how young adults perceive the role of AI in their creative work.
2. To explore the emotional and psychological experiences associated with AI-assisted creativity.

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3. To identify shifts in originality and problem-solving approaches since the integration of AI tools.
4. To examine the effects of AI usage on divergent thinking.

Hypotheses

As a qualitative exploratory study, this research does not test formal hypotheses. However, it is guided by the assumption that AI plays a significant role in reshaping both the process and experience of creativity among young adults.

Participants

Fifteen participants aged between 18 and 30 were selected using purposive sampling. All participants were actively involved in creative fields such as writing, design, music, education, or visual arts, and had experience using AI tools like ChatGPT, Midjourney, or DALL·E. Individuals with no exposure to AI in creative contexts or outside the age range were excluded.

Materials

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore participant experiences. Key questions included:

- Has AI affected your creative process? If yes, how so?
- What are your perceptions of the originality of your work compared to AI-generated outputs?
- How would you describe your emotional experience while using AI in creative work?
- Have you noticed any changes in your thinking or problem-solving style?

Additional probing questions were used as needed during the interviews.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed individually via video conferencing or in person, depending on availability. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with informed consent. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participants' identities were anonymized through pseudonyms and the removal of identifiable details.

Scoring

As this was a qualitative study, responses were not scored numerically. Instead, narrative content was analyzed for recurring phrases, emotional tone, and conceptual associations to generate initial codes and identify patterns.

Variables

The following psychological variables were considered:

- **Creative expression** (e.g., originality, fluency, flexibility)
- **Emotional engagement** (e.g., confidence, detachment, doubt)
- **Cognitive effort** (e.g., divergent thinking, reliance on AI prompts)
- **Creative identity** (e.g., perceptions of authorship and ownership)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of fifteen semi-structured interviews revealed four major themes reflecting young adults' experiences of AI's influence on creativity. These themes illustrate both the benefits and tensions of integrating AI tools into creative work.

1. Redefining Creativity in the AI Age

Participants described a shift in how they conceptualize originality. Many acknowledged that AI's role has expanded from a mere tool to a creative collaborator. This shift challenged traditional ideas of internal inspiration.

"It doesn't always feel like it's 100% mine, but it's something new from something existing. Maybe that's what originality is now." — P6

AI's contributions were viewed not only as functional but aesthetic. Participants noted that their work began to mirror the "look" or "style" of AI-generated outputs, suggesting a form of algorithmic influence on taste.

"You can kind of tell when something was made with Midjourney—it has that look. And now I think my stuff is starting to have it too." — P9

This aligns with existing literature warning of stylistic convergence and diminished diversity due to model training on common datasets (Crimaldi & Leonelli, 2023; University of Exeter, 2024).

2. Emotional and Psychological Engagement with AI

AI tools generated both creative confidence and emotional distance. Participants shared that seeing AI respond effectively to prompts gave them a sense of validation and competence.

"It helped me get started when I had nothing. Just seeing something work from my prompt made me feel I had potential." — P4

However, these moments were often accompanied by feelings of inauthenticity and doubt.

"It looks cool, but is it me? I don't know. That doubt kind of stays with you." — P10

These findings echo Miller (2019) and Zhou et al. (2021), who noted that while AI can stimulate productivity, it may reduce emotional satisfaction and connection to the final product.

3. AI as a Double-Edged Sword in Creative Practice

Participants widely appreciated AI's ability to reduce creative blocks and accelerate idea generation.

"It's like I no longer have to wait for inspiration. I can just ask for it." — P15

Yet, concerns about creative homogenization were common. Many noticed that outputs from AI tools, though efficient, often led to repetition or predictable ideas.

"Even if I try to make it unique, the output starts to feel repetitive—like it's drawing from the same well." — P7

This duality supports Doshi and Hauser's (2024) claim that AI increases idea fluency but may reduce novelty over time. Participants also discussed cognitive offloading, noting a decline in their own effort to ideate independently.

"Now I wait to see what AI gives me, then I just tweak that." — P11

This aligns with Sparrow et al.'s (2011) findings on reduced mental effort in the presence of easy digital access.

4. Future Trajectories and Ethical Concerns

Participants expressed unease regarding the authorship of AI-generated or AI-assisted work.

"It's a grey area. If I prompt it, but it pulls style from someone else—am I the creator?" — P2

For some, this led to a redefinition of their creative role—from that of a maker to a director.

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“I feel like a director now, not a creator. I tell it what I want, it makes it.” — P14

There was also widespread concern that education systems are not preparing students to critically or ethically engage with AI tools. Participants feared that reliance on AI could erode foundational creative skills.

“If we skip the hard parts of creativity in school, what happens when we don’t have the AI?” — P8

These insights reflect ongoing calls for integrating AI literacy into creative education (Patston et al., 2022; Hwang & Wu, 2025).

Summary Table of Themes and Key Quotes

Theme	Sub-theme	Participant Quote
Redefining Creativity	Collaboration	“It’s teamwork.” — P13
Emotional Engagement	Alienation	“It looks cool, but is it me?” — P10
Cognitive Offloading	Reduced effort	“Now I wait to see what AI gives me.” — P11
Ethical Concerns	Ownership ambiguity	“It’s a grey area.” — P2

SUMMARY

The findings underscore a fundamental shift in how creativity is experienced and defined in the age of AI. Participants view AI not just as a productivity booster but as a cognitive and emotional partner. However, this partnership comes with costs—particularly in areas of authenticity, ownership, and skill development.

Consistent with Boden’s (2004) notion of “combinatorial creativity,” AI is enabling new forms of creative expression. Yet, as O’Gieblyn (2024) cautions, the emotional and ethical layers of creation remain uniquely human—and must not be overlooked.

CONCLUSIONS

AI reshapes how young adults define and experience creativity. It becomes more than a tool—it acts as a cognitive and emotional collaborator. Participants report that AI fosters creative confidence, but also alters ownership and self-expression. Emotional detachment and reliance on algorithmic input emerge as key concerns. The study shows that AI changes not only outputs but also creative identity. These findings highlight the need for ethical awareness, critical engagement, and human-centered guidance in creative education and practice.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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