

Digital Pollution: Generative AI and Content Creation

By Daisy Filby

It is unlikely that anyone with access to digital content is unaware of the AI digital takeover throughout the last year. AI fruit videos have quickly replaced real-world comedians, AI news articles control someone's Facebook recommendations, and AI music originating from a machine-fed prompt silences music originating from the heart. It's impossible to ignore, AI features and assistants are currently force-fed to us all over the internet. There is rarely a switch which toggles it off; artificial intelligence and assistants are becoming tightly integrated with our day-to-day lives. Of course, this is nothing new. Many technological experts envisioned a future where humanity and technology existed together in harmony — a vision that has fuelled modern science-fiction. The idea of cyberpunk, cyborgs, and robot assistants are all common sci-fi archetypes, but if “artificial intelligence” was created to assist us, then why is it so controversial to create content using Generative AI?

Generative AI is AI software that stays true to its name: it generates rather than assists. These generated products are usually images, writing pieces, or songs. It tends to have an easily recognisable style. It is different from AI that could be used for researching issues such as climate change or medical advancements. Generative AI stays true to its name, generating a product from a prompt. This is what's quietly polluting our digital content.

Digital content is information presented on a digital platform. This includes short-form videos on TikTok, long-form videos on YouTube, films and TV shows on streaming services, music streaming platforms, news stations and websites, cable television, and platforms or websites that people share songs, artwork, or short stories on. Predictably, digital content is what's primarily affected by Generative AI.

Content is targeted towards humans, and in my opinion, if this content is directed towards humans, it should be created by humans. Just because an AI can mimic online human behaviour to an unsettling degree, that doesn't necessarily make it human. Even if it can trick other humans into believing its authenticity, that doesn't mean that there aren't mere lines of code behind an amusing comment on Instagram. Human error and wit should be valued. An AI can't accidentally send an email to their maths teacher instead of their grandfather, and an AI can't tell that story years later to a dozen people nearly as well as a human could. But if the humans scrolling prefer an artificial actress rather than actors who portray the rage, sorrow, and joy of being human, then little can be done. If more people prefer AI content, more AI content shall be shown.

As an aspiring writer, writing with Generative AI sickens me. Generative AI software (most notably, ChatGPT) writes in a distinct format that is easy to define. However, many Generative AI programs study works of public domain to perfect their work. The works they study are literary classics from centuries before or short stories published freely online by talented human authors. The same is also done to works of visual art. However, this raises an issue. When everything “perfect” is AI, how do we recognise or prove that someone is of true

talent? The internet labels any digital artist that is “too perfect” as AI, and states that a precise, well-researched paper must be a product of ChatGPT. Apparently, one cannot write insightfully without the aid of AI. If I write too formally, I’m scared that my teachers will accuse me of asking a built-in browser assistant to rewrite my test. The normalisation of AI creating art destroys the true objective of art: human expression. Perhaps that’s why AI art and writing feels so soulless; a computer doesn’t boast a human soul to express. Song, poetry, film and more are embedded deep within the history of mankind. Through these mediums we’ve passed down stories and developed a personal and communal sense of identity. When identity is so crucial, can one truly feel human with an identity aided by a computer?

Even so, it’s easy to encounter a person dependent on AI. Why look in a recipe book when you could ask a chatbot? Why source advice from someone who seeks to understand you when you could consult something programmed to deliver what you want to hear, not what you need? When people blindly believe what an AI tells them they forget to critically think. In a world where information varies by source, there is little effort done to research and formulate an individual opinion. On the contrary, when the real world is so overwhelming, some people might enjoy the routine distraction and escapism that AI chatbots offer them. However, there is a terror that comes with having so much information right at our fingertips. When there is an abundance of anything, its value tends to decrease. A popularised term, “brainrot,” is generally associated with an individual who engages largely with AI generated content to entertain themselves.

So, does Generative AI figuratively rot the human brain? Well, it’s attempting to replace our ability to think, interact, and express ourselves. We begin to distrust anything we encounter online and doubt our futures — for many jobs are said to be overrun by AI before I even graduate high school.

Ultimately, Generative AI is going to accompany us no matter what. There is no way to rid it when it is implemented everywhere. In an ideal world, AI software serves to assist, not replace, but that world is near impossible. Despite, I do believe that there are still people who prefer a human algorithm. A human-made video of bad quality triumphs over any saturated AI video. There is a beautiful authenticity within human error. So, I encourage you to support humans in the media industry, and I daresay, speak up against the ongoing tyranny of Generative AI. Sure, while those fruit videos are amusing, they silently erase the art of filmmaking. Generative AI can perfect perfection, but it can never steal the passion behind content made for humans, by humans.