Creative Potential in the Age of AI: Can Innovative Writing Strategies Ease Author Anxiety?

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Abstract

This article examines the role of generative AI in creative writing, arguing that rather than threatening the author's role, AI can enhance human creativity. Drawing on psychological concepts of creativity and experimentation, the article explores recent experimental projects and analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of using AI for creative tasks. The author contends that AI should be viewed as a tool that encourages divergent thinking, helping authors push beyond their comfort zones and explore new creative possibilities. Through a research project involving AI-collaborative tasks in creative writing, the article illustrates how transparency, experimentation, and human autonomy can be prioritized to ensure that AI enhances, rather than displaces, the author's creative process. The article concludes by calling for a more nuanced approach to AI in the arts, emphasizing the potential for symbiotic collaboration between authors and AI to inspire unique, unpredictable, and diverse creative outcomes.

Biography

Jasmine Aldridge is soon to be an MA Publishing graduate from The University of Exeter. Her MA dissertation research focuses on the creative use of generative AI in short stories, culminating in an edited short story anthology titled *Crossroads* that experimentally reflects this research. She volunteers as the Communications Officer for the Society of Young Publishers South West and as an Editorial Assistant for *Africa in Words*.

This article explores the nuances to generative AI, drawing on psychological concepts of creativity and experimentation to argue that, rather than being a force that threatens to overpower the role of the author, when viewed from another perspective, it in fact has the potential to enhance human creativity. Focusing primarily on the use of generative AI for creative writing, recent experimental projects are considered alongside an analysis of AI's advantages and disadvantages when used creatively. The article concludes that with the right approach, generative AI can be used to broaden creative thought and push author's writing beyond the comfort zone; moving forward in this new era of AI content creation it is essential to prioritise transparency, experimentation, and human autonomy.

The arts have long been seen as a stronghold for human intellect and creativity, reflecting our 'higher abilities' for thought and expression that sets us apart from animals, or more recently, machines. Indeed, "traditionally, creativity has been viewed as a realm exclusively belonging to human intelligence and artistic endeavour"[1] but as technology develops these boundaries have begun to blur. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has escalated in the last couple of years with the sophistication of AI datasets and its presence is being strengthened still by the democratisation of this technology through open-access platforms, such as Open AI's Chat GPT. As Figure 1[2] shows, the prevalence of AI is only set to grow exponentially and is here to stay.
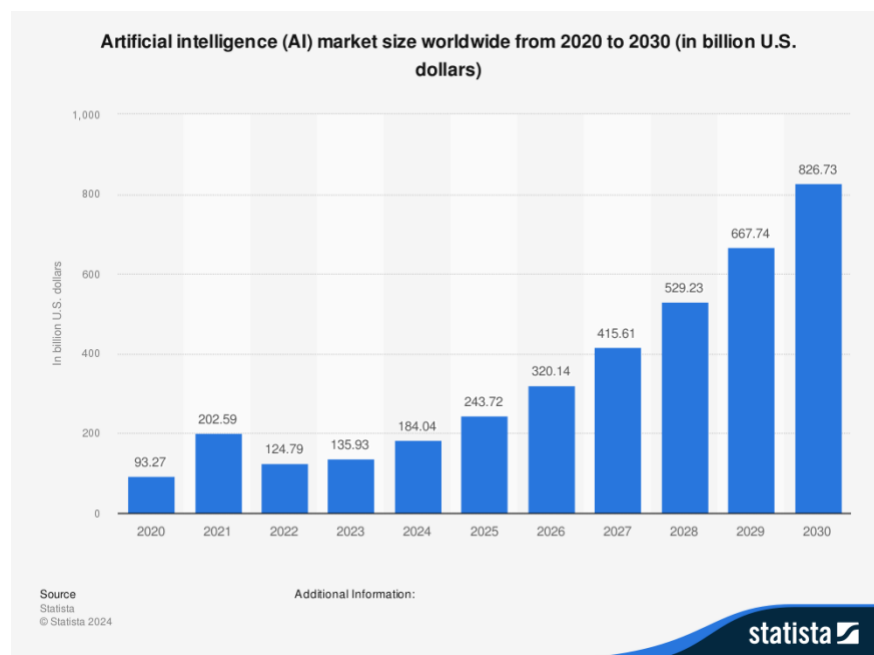

Figure 1: Market growth of AI from 2020 to 2030.

[1] Sæbø, Solve and Helge Brovold, 'On the Stochastics of Human and Artificial Creativity', arXiv.Org, 2024 https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2403.06996.

[2] Statista, 'Artificial Intelligence (Ai) Market Size Worldwide from 2020 to 2030 (in Billion U.S. Dollars).' Statista Inc., 6 (2024), https://www-statista-com.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/forecasts/1474143/global-ai-market-size

It has become a rapidly evolving entity across various sectors, but one of the biggest points of contention is emerging from the creative industries. In particular, using generative AI for creative writing has become increasingly popular and with "close to three-hundred books written or co-written by Chat GPT"[3] being uploaded to Amazon's Kindle self-publishing platform on a single day in 2023, it is understandable that author anxiety is on the rise. Alongside a host of concerns regarding plagiarism, misinformation, an over-saturation of the market, and cliched writing, the biggest anxiety remains the "potential for worker displacement"[4]. A valid fear, this narrative that increasingly sophisticated AI content creation will overwhelm the value of the author now goes hand in hand with any mention of 'AI-Generated' or 'AI-Assisted'. But is there a more productive way forward when considering the creative use of AI?

Now, this is not an article designed to undermine the anxiety associated with AI and its creative abilities, nor is this to suggest that these perspectives are unfounded. Instead, this is a very brief exploration into the creative potential of AI when it is used meaningfully, and the relationship is viewed as symbiotic rather than parasitic. Indeed, many people view AI as a one-hit wonder that is an easy way to produce sub-par creative content, and this has quickly become the precedent for AI use. However, once these narratives are challenged there is the potential to engage more productively with generative AI and use its abilities with meaningful intention so as to not displace the role of the author, but rather enhance it. "Associative thinking strategies have been found to effectively help humans boost creativity"[5] and engaging with divergent thought during the "pre-writing stages"[6] allows a greater scope for potential creative outcomes. The stages leading up to the final piece in writing are often the moments of key inspiration and rather than AI being a tool to simplify these stages it can "support divergent thinking by making associations among remote concepts" and effectively "augment human creativity"[7].

Thus, the focus on how well AI can replicate human writing should not be the only focal point when moving forward in a world where AI-generated content is inextricably present. Many research projects have been conducted that explore how useful AI-generated content is in either mimicking human writing or supplementing it, yet more scope needs to be given to researching how authors can instead imitate different AI processes and implement instances of randomness, selection, re-writing into the thought construction of their pieces to push themselves beyond their comfort zone.

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[3] Cuthbertson, Anthony, "Hundreds of Ai-Written Books Flood Amazon." The Independent, Independent Digital News and Media, 2 (2023), www.independent.co.uk/tech/ai-author-books-amazon-chatgpt-b2287111.html.

[4] Lawton, George, 'Generative AI Ethics: 8 Biggest Concerns and Risks.' Enterprise AI, TechTarget, 7 (2024), www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/tip/Generative-AI-ethics-8-biggest-concerns.

[5] Mehrotra, Pronita, Aishni Parab and Sumit Gulwani, 'Enhancing Creativity in Large Language Models through Associative Thinking Strategies', arXiv.Org, 2024 https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2405.06715

[6] Wan, Qian, Siying Hu, Yu Zhang, Piaohong Wang, Bo Wen and Zhicong Lu, '"It Felt Like Having a Second Mind": Investigating Human-AI Co-Creativity in Prewriting with Large Language Models', Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 8 (2024), 1–26 https://doi.org/10.1145/3637361

[7] Eapen, Tojin, et al, "Generative AI: The Insights You Need from Harvard Business Review", Harvard Business Review Press, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/exeter/detail.action?docID=7263944.

In a recent experimental writing project that I conducted, falling in tread with another study from this year by UCL and the University of Exeter which found that "generative AI enhances individual creativity but reduces the collective diversity of novel content"[8], I researched the creative potential of AI to be used as an intelligent writing tool. For the project, five authors were tasked with incorporating various AI-collaborative tasks completed over a three-week period into a final short story. This involved three stages evolving from experimental ideation, to unpredictable re-writing, to shifting perspectives. Crucially, the project prioritised transparency and the anthology is published with these writing tasks clearly leading to the final short story. Although a small research project, this presents the potential for critically engaging with generative AI use whilst prioritising human creativity and autonomy. The scope for further research in this area, both for creative writing and publishing studies, is expansive and embracing these advancements rather than diminishing them is essential for a productive future between authors and AI. Although the consensus is that "artistic work seems to be a type of work that seemingly cannot or should not be formalized, algorithmized, and automatized,"[9] by experimenting with how generative AI approaches and transforms text, new "sparks of inspiration"[10] can be gleaned from an otherwise "norm-generating" machine[11]. Exercises that used to be completed using paper in creative writing classes, such as chopping up a text and reconfiguring it in a different order, can now be completed using generative AI and the vast possibilities held in its dataset. Indeed, using AI as a "springboard for the human mind"[12] and incorporating it as a tool for exploration in the early writing stages could improve familiarity with how it works. In this way, using AI could encourage viewing "uncertainty as a source of creativity"[13] and by familiarising oneself with how something works it becomes less of a source of anxiety.

As such, there is space for a more nuanced discourse to emerge when considering AI for creative means. Whilst many choose to take advantage of AI's ability to generate vast amounts of content quickly, this is not tapping into the true advantages present in AI 'creativity'. Instead, there is potential in viewing the relationship between the author and AI as a symbiotic one, creating fragments of thought construction to randomly generated rules or perspectives and using these conversations to formulate unique ideas,

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[8] Doshi, Anil R and Oliver P Hauser, 'Generative AI Enhances Individual Creativity but Reduces the Collective Diversity of Novel Content', Science Advances, 10 (2024), eadn5290 https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adn5290

[9] Schröter, Jens, 'AI, Automation, Creativity, Cognitive Labor', in *Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Art?*(Germany: transcript Verlag, 2024) https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839469224-002

[10] Wan, Qian, Siying Hu, Yu Zhang, Piaohong Wang, Bo Wen and Zhicong Lu, '"It Felt Like Having a Second Mind": Investigating Human-AI Co-Creativity in Prewriting with Large Language Models', Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 8 (2024), 1–26 https://doi.org/10.1145/3637361

[11] Brandt, Anthony K, 'Amplifying the Anomaly: How Humans Choose Unproven Options and Large Language Models Avoid Them', Creativity Research Journal, 2024, 1–22 https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2024.2361217

[12] Doshi, Anil R and Oliver P Hauser, 'Generative AI Enhances Individual Creativity but Reduces the Collective Diversity of Novel Content', Science Advances, 10 (2024), eadn5290- https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adn5290

[13] Wan, Qian, Siying Hu, Yu Zhang, Piaohong Wang, Bo Wen and Zhicong Lu, '"It Felt Like Having a Second Mind": Investigating Human-AI Co-Creativity in Prewriting with Large Language Models', Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 8 (2024), 1-26 https://doi.org/10.1145/3637361

unexpected outcomes, and varied approaches to writing. Indeed, pubishing as an industry should be ready to embrace these technological shifts and implement means to educate authors and editors alike in how to approach the prospect of AI creativity and incorporate this into their strategies. There is no need to input full manuscripts or large chunks of text that will 'feed' the algorithm just as there is no demand that authors use AI to generate sections of their work, but there is more to generative AI than most expect. It can be nuanced, witty, unpredictable, absurd, and creative all at once, and with the right human input and intention behind it, these traits can supplement written creativity, not replace it.