Regulating AI Art on Social Media

Kyle Chiem | April 9th, 2025

Credit: Adobe Firefly

Introduction

AI art generators catapulted into mainstream media within the last couple of years, covering a market of over $290 million in 2023.[1] Image generation with AI is used by many as a quick and easy way to produce precise and beautiful artwork. It has been so widely used that nearly 12.5 billion images have been produced using the Stable Diffusion model since its inception in 2022.[2] Even digital creative tool companies like Adobe have integrated variations of AI art generation models into their workflows; they report that a billion AI pictures have been created using their tools.[3] But because of its simplicity, AI-generated art has dominated many popular social media platforms, harming huge communities of artists and compromising the originality of their artwork. This issue brief underscores the need to regulate AI art on these platforms to protect artists' jobs and allow human-made and AI-generated artworks to coexist.

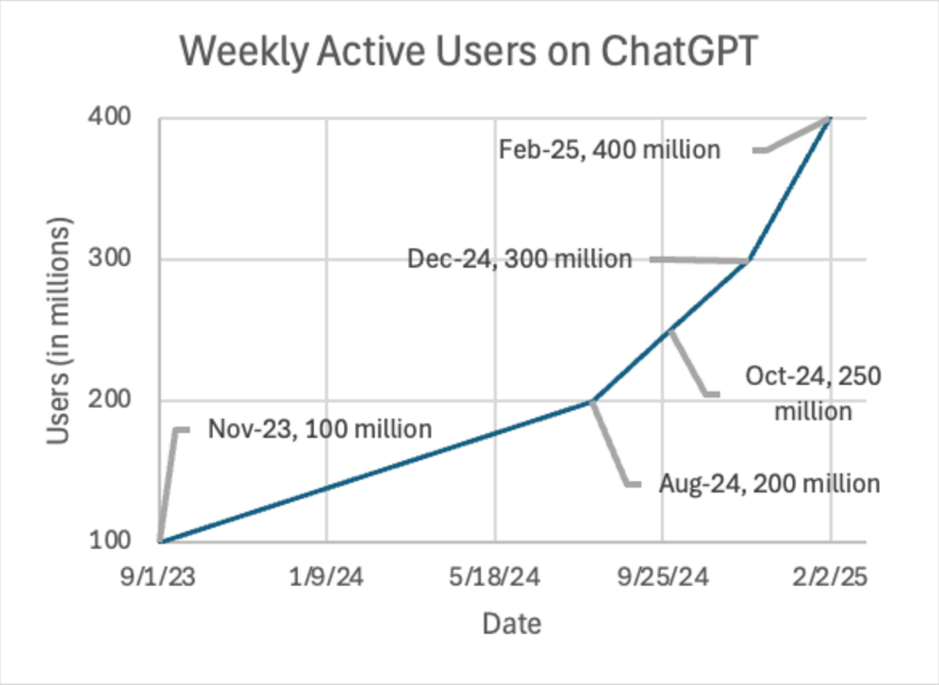
Promise & Pitfalls

Some artists find AI generation tools helpful in **imagining ideas to create**. An artist's creativity productivity, defined by Eric Zhou as "the number of artifacts a user posts in a month," increases **50% on average** after adopting these tools into their production process.[4] A steady increase in the chance for an onlooking user to "favorite" their posts is also reported, increasing from an "average of 2% to a steady 3% rate of earning a favorite per view."[5] Aside from using AI to produce artwork, AIPRM shows that "over a third (35.1%) of artists have used a text-to-image platform to explore and develop new ideas," much more common than the 11.2% that replace their production process fully.[6] Creating or not, artists have heavily benefited from this growing technology.

However, the upsides come with a wide range of downsides. With the blazing speed with which AI creates artwork, people can produce many high-quality artifacts for their social media platforms daily. The immense volumes of these posts hinder the reach of non-AI artwork from artists who spend hours—even days—creating. Furthermore, these models do not have the cognitive abilities to produce original works because they are restricted to recycling the art they have been trained on.[7] As non-AI artwork falls out of mainstream media, people will indefinitely be consuming unoriginal, soulless works—detrimental to the state of our society.

History of Generative AI

In the years following COVID-19, generative AI has proven itself to be a quick and reliable method of retrieving all sorts of data. **OpenAI's ChatGPT** was easily the most influential. It pioneered an elegant and simple home screen: the calming "What can I help with?" phrase in the middle with a sleek search bar that reads "Ask anything," reassuring users that ChatGPT has answers for everything, no matter the question.



Data: Backlinko | Credit: Kyle Chiem

Features like this use a form of machine learning called **natural language processing (NLP)**.[8] OpenAI and others power such processing with vastly complex deep learning models. Using an enormous amount of pre-trained data from the Internet, they absorb words and sentences, create associations between the user's input and its learned data, and output an answer based on it.[9] NLP is also used in translator apps, autocomplete suggestions, chatbots, email filters identifying spam mail, and many more.[10]

Credit: Digital Information World

However, OpenAI took NLP to unprecedented heights with **DALL-E 1** in 2021.[11] With a single sentence, DALL-E makes semi-realistic artwork of all types that rivals even the greatest artists in the world in mere seconds. Here is an oversimplified explanation of how it works: First, image-generation AIs are trained by aggregating millions of pictures with their corresponding labels and learning what pictures represent what labels.[12] Then, these models use NLP to associate user input with the labels and pictures that seem most similar.[13] Lastly, they blend all the images, prioritizing specific parts of each image that are relevant to the prompt and the desired artwork.[14]

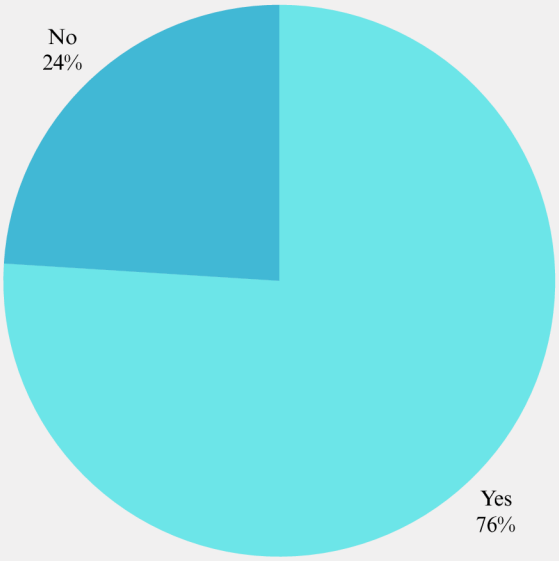
While DALL-E wasn't nearly perfect, it provided the basis (and inspiration) for improved models like Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and even **DALL-E 2**.[15] In just four years, AI image-generation (and video generation for that matter) has advanced to where most people can no longer distinguish between human-made and AI-generated artwork.

What's at Stake?

While technological advances in AI are crucial for societal progression, one group of people is significantly harmed: artists—more specifically, those who **do not use AI generative tools to aid the execution process** of an art piece.

Such artists will be named **"non-adopting" artists**, meaning they have not adopted AI tools to create artwork. Likewise, artists who produce their works using generative AI tools will be called **"adopting" artists.**

Should AI images be considered art?



Data: AIPRM | Credit: Kyle Chiem

Non-adopting artists' posts are being overshadowed by adopting artists' works. As mentioned, adopting artists can post on social media platforms extremely often by skipping the execution stage of producing artwork. In a growing age of attention span deficiency, many users demand **immediate content** that looks flashy, complex, and visually appealing. Sometimes, they neglect the hidden meanings and emotions behind artwork and instead favor AI's version of "fast fashion" for art. Non-adopting artists are disadvantaged in this ecosystem and will struggle to maintain their audience.

Original artwork is at risk due to image generation AI. AI creates art using existing artwork that it trains on from the internet. Therefore, its art **imitates** rather than **innovates**.[16] AI fails to create artwork with symbolism and deep narratives like non-adopting artists.[17] This is what distinguishes each piece from the other and gives it **ingenuity**. People's creative minds flourish when thoroughly investigating an artwork's complexity, and they become numb while endlessly scrolling through overstimulating AI-generated content.

Ted Chiang makes a brilliant point on this topic: "It is very easy to get ChatGPT to emit a series of words such as 'I am happy to see you.' … but one thing we can be sure of is that ChatGPT is not happy to see you."[17] His words reiterate how cold and empty AI artifacts are. It serves as a reminder of what people will be consuming if regulation on AI art isn't applied promptly.

With a declining audience , these artists will inevitably fall to the posting barrage of adopting artists, turning a respected and challenging career into a simple game of writing detailed text prompts.

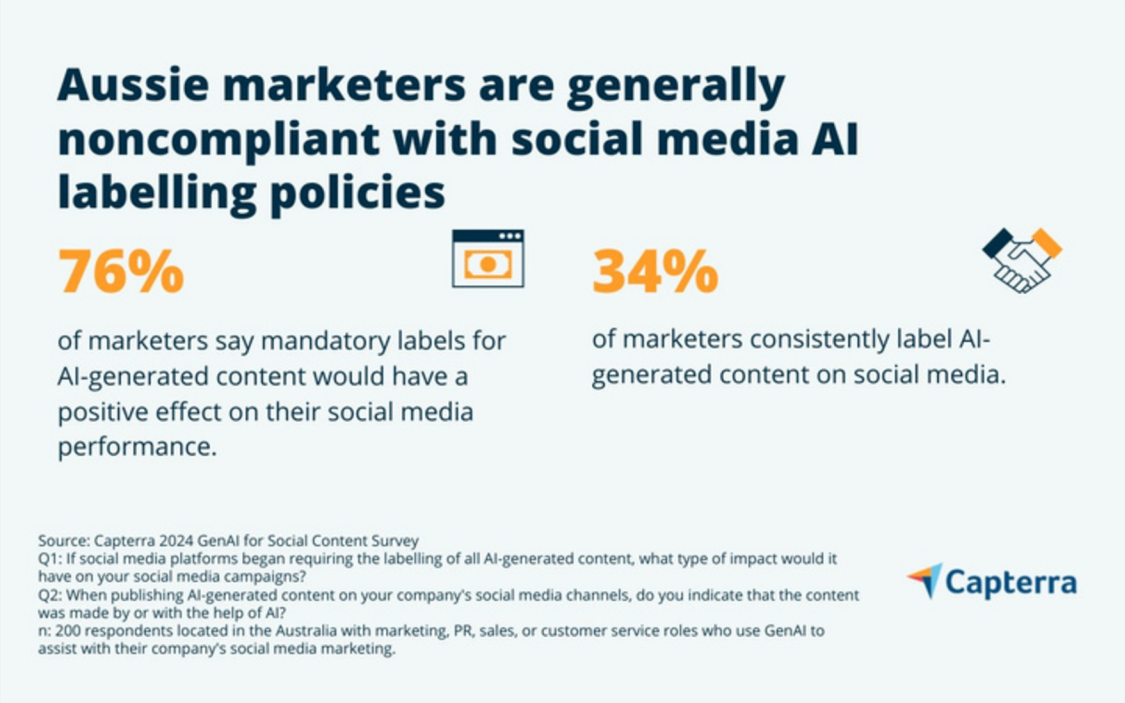
Policy Recommendation

With this impending crisis in mind, policies must be put in place to address them. For this, the following policy must be considered:

Enforce the tagging of social media art/media as AI-generated. With this, users can filter the amount of AI to non-AI artwork they see in their social media feeds. It nullifies the ability for adopting artists to overwhelm non-adopting artists by posting several art pieces daily. Chloe Wittenberg states in a study that AI "labeling decreased people's likelihood of believing and sharing AI-generated misinformation," a positive indicator for this policy's goals.[19] Social media **moderators** can even help suppress the barrage of AI art to promote more human-made work. Tagging AI posts respects the work of non-adopting artists and preserves artwork ingenuity.

The policy's goal is not to force people to stop adopting AI tools in their work but to take cautionary measures to prevent the destruction of non-adopting artists' place in society. AI art should not be seen as taboo; it is an influential advancement that the world should certainly take advantage of. However, the rapid evolution of generative AI introduced difficulties in facilitating the enforcement of ethical policies.[20] The misuse of AI image generation is of concern, not the images themselves. Both adopting and non-adopting artists hold valuable places in the creative world, and their work deserves equal respect.

A suggestion for its early implementation is to let social media users see a **50/50 split** of AI-generated and human-made artwork. This way, users can weigh their opinions equally on both forms and **adjust this split accordingly** (likely in the settings section of a social media website/app). Highlighting their content split as user use social media platforms is also beneficial to keep them aware of their consumption.



Credit: Capterra

Counterpoints

But what if some users **want to see only AI-generated or only human-created content,** or wish to see a **100/0 split** in their content feed? To maintain exposure for all pieces of artwork, social media platforms should **periodically recommend posts of both types**, no matter what the users set their split to be. This trade-off in user freedom is necessary for the policy to be effective and ensures the sustainability of all artists on social media.

If tagging AI artwork is possible, **why not extend the policy to AI-generated text?** It would be extremely difficult to implement and harmful to user retention. AI text detectors work better with more words, but most social media posts never cross a hundred, causing mislabeling.[21] Trying to detect AI-generated text in every social media post could waste computational resources and frustrate users due to frequent mislabeling.

Conclusion

Despite the benefits that AI art generation tools bring, action must be taken to mitigate their impact on non-adopting artists' careers. From the start, it was a groundbreaking concept that encouraged researchers to refine those tools. But today, AI models steal and repurpose original artwork to fit users' requests in a couple of seconds. Adopting artists use this to boost their productivity and post numerous artworks daily. Non-adopting artists cannot produce at nearly the same rate and will soon be overshadowed by AI, a troubling scenario that will render art a meaningless, unoriginal activity.

The suggested policy works to strike a balance between AI and human-made art. By containing the surge of AI art, non-adopting artists can create original artwork without the fear of losing their audience, and adopting artists can maintain equal exposure for their works. Generative AI is an invaluable tool that the world must learn to **coexist with**. In this evolving creative landscape, human ingenuity and machine productivity will establish a new era of art—a thriving ecosystem enriching the future of mankind.

Endnotes

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