**Under the AI-nfluence: How Knowledge & Exposure Shape Student AI Engagement**

**Abstract (100 words)**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping higher education by influencing academic engagement, career trajectories, and decision-making among young adults. This study examines how AI knowledge and exposure drive undergraduates’ willingness to engage with the technology and inform their vocational decisions. Drawing on a dataset of 1,000 students, we use a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and open-ended responses, analyzed via conventional statistics and a fine-tuned LLM. Preliminary results suggest while students expect AI to automate routine tasks, they feel insulated from long-term disruption. However, deeper AI familiarity correlates with heightened ethical and societal concerns, warranting further research on emerging generations’ adaptation.

**Abstract (250 words)**

The intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and higher education represents a critical area of inquiry as AI continues to reshape academic engagement, career trajectories, and the decision-making processes of young adults. Building on scholarship highlighting AI’s transformative potential, this research investigates how knowledge and exposure to AI shape undergraduate students’ willingness to engage with the technology and inform their vocational decisions.

Drawing on an original dataset of 1,000 post-secondary students, we employ a mixed-methods design that combines structured survey items with open-ended questions to capture both quantitative trends and underlying rationales. We utilize conventional statistical approaches to examine students’ Likert-scale responses about AI’s impact, while employing a fine-tuned, quantized open-source large language model (LLM) to interprets their written explanations—validated through human annotation.

Preliminary findings suggest that although students largely anticipate routine, entry-level responsibilities will be automated by AI, they believe their long-term career paths will remain relatively unaffected. Notably, those who rely more heavily on social media for AI-related information exhibit attitudes ranging from mild indifference to pronounced optimism, whereas deeper familiarity with AI correlates with heightened apprehension regarding ethical considerations and broader societal implications. These findings contribute a data-driven perspective to digital transformation discourse, highlighting how AI influences the attitudes and apprehensions of the next generation entering the workforce. Building on these insights, we advocate for further research into how emerging generations conceptualize, integrate, and adapt to AI, providing a deeper understanding of its role in shaping academic and professional trajectories.

**Introduction**

**Literature Review:**

Historical context importance of shift towards AI: 1) nature of the change (what AI can do, practical terms, current level of integration – different fields are projected/currently have); 2) pervasiveness (probably needs statistics), arguing it is as big/influential as industrial revolution, digital age, etc.; 3) relationship of media/information sources – quality of information/misinformation, ask Mike for PSY articles – and their dissemination (in regards to AI); 4) perceptions on AI affected by different fields/demographics (e.g., on school board, working in industry – depend on existing knowledge you can find).

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* **Muhammad:** 3) relationship of media/information sources – quality of information/misinformation, ask Mike for PSYC articles – and their dissemination (in regards to AI).
* **Kira:** 4) perceptions on AI affected by different fields/demographics (e.g., on school board, working in industry – depend on existing knowledge you can find).

**GAP:**

**RQ:** How does knowledge and exposure to AI affect undergraduate students' ability to envision and engage with its potential applications?

* Which sectors do students see it being used in most (envision), do students have an eagerness to learn/use it more or less (engage), do student's generally have a positive/optimistic outlook surrounding AI (envision/engage?)
* Relationship between information + what benefits they think will come out of AI (e.g., informed from Social Media vs. classes etc.)
  + How much of social media exposure = what you think about AI.
  + What jobs will be affected (admin writing emails).

**Hypothesis:**

*Muhammad:*

* **H1A:** Undergraduate students will think admin work/grunt work will be effected (but they will be aiming for higher end jobs so they feel like they won’t be effected).
  + It won’t affect me (not worried/not tied to career because I’m going to be a lawyer lol).
* **H1B:** What is the correlation between the level of AI understanding and students' optimism about its future role in their careers?
* **H1C:** The type of platform/variety will increase […] – optimism/outlook/apprehension.
* **H2:** Type of information will affect apprehension.
* **H3:** Enhanced understanding and practical engagement with artificial intelligence among undergraduate students will foster greater proficiency and confidence in its effective application throughout their future endeavors.
* **H4:** How do different levels of AI exposure (theoretical vs. hands-on) affect students' perceptions of AI's ethical implications?

**Methods**

**[Mike]**

* Logistic regression on yes/no
* OLS on Likert-scale questions
* LLM on opened-responses; validation through hand-coding (gold standard)

**Results**

**Discussion**