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THE IMPACT OF AI-GENERATED IMAGE ON CREATIVE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis explores how the AI-based image generators are working in creative industries, especially in daily tasks, content creation processes of designers, fashion professionals, and marketers. The research discusses the effectiveness of these tools, the drawbacks users might experience, and ethical concerns about commercial usage.

The research is based on recent literature reviews on AI visual creativity and design methods. A mixed-methods approach is applied, integrating image production assessments, a small-scale user survey, and theme analysis to look into real-world usages.

The results of this survey reveal that creative professionals are adopting AI image generators like Midjourney, DALL·E, and Stable Diffusion in ever-growing numbers for concept and visual inspiration. This speed and economy are undoubtedly the main reasons for so many operators use such tools. However, they are also very limited in terms of quality control, the ability to control the output, and in terms of copyright and media law. Based on the survey response and literature summary, there appears to be a demand for ethical guidelines, better tool transparency, and more standardised copyright policies. Finally, as AI image generation becomes more and more important a tool in creative work, one should use it responsibly, with attention to the limitations and ethical risks.

Keywords	AI-based image, DALL-E, Midjourney, Diffusion Models, creative industries

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CLIP	Contrastive Language–Image Pretraining
GDPR	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
I2I	Image-To-Image
SDEs	Stochastic Differential Equation
TTI	Text-To-Image
UI	User Interface
UX	User Experience

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Thesis

The current developments in artificial intelligence (AI) have had a strong impact on creative industries, changing the methods of visual content transformation. A key development is AI-based image generators such as DALL·E (OpenAI), Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion that allow users to create quickly images that the artist or designers would need to spend hours to create. With a few text lines, users can generate visual content for ideations from these tools. Hence, more and more people are working in creative industries, such as designers, marketers, and fashion experts rely on using AI-based image generators. These tools are becoming more popular nowadays because of their usefulness, ease of use, friendly UI and the quality of generated images they could deliver to their users for both skilled and amateur users (Ramesh et al., 2022b).

Graphic designers can use these tools to assist them in generating illustrations and digital artworks. In the fashion industry, this technology is used for branding logos, product samples, with models within seconds. The fashion designers are utilizing the AI image generators to visualize the outline of their final production (Ko et al., 2022). Marketers are using Midjourney to produce social media, digital advertising content professionally (Tang et al., 2024).

1.2 Research Purpose

The significant development of the AI-based image generators is also leading to the rises of concerns alongside their productivity. On the one hand, these tools bring a lot of benefits, such as saving time, making it less costs, and giving freelancers or small businesses chances to compete with powered studios. On the other hand, they also have to face challenges that can be mentioned as a lack of control, variable image quality results in worsening the effectiveness of this very useful technology (Tang et al., 2024; Swift et al., 2024).

Besides the challenges mentioned above, there are also important ethical and legal worries that are arising. The concerns consist of the original of the images, authorship, and copyright. The thesis will essentially discuss ethical and legal considerations allied to the commercial use of AI-generated images.

The thesis aims to study how professionals are using these technologies in real life, and the benefits and drawbacks they can achieve. This thesis mainly focuses on discovering the capabilities of the AI-based image generators in creative industries, especially graphic design, the fashion industry, and marketing.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The main aim of this thesis is to study the practical use and impact of AI-based image generators in graphic design, fashion design, and marketing fields. The specific objectives are to examine the usage of AI-generated visuals from creative experts in their works, figure out the advantages and limitations of freelancers and small businesses, and investigate ethical and legal concerns in commercial settings. These objectives are supported by the following research questions:

1. How are creative professionals using AI-based image generators currently in their creative workflow?
2. What practical benefits and challenges do small businesses and freelancers face when using AI-generated images?
3. What ethical and copyright concerns do creative professionals have when using AI-generated visuals in commercial branding, advertising, and designing?

1.4 Research Structure Overview

Following this introduction, the chapter 2 describes the research strategy, outlining data collection methods, including practical image-generating experiments and surveys. Chapter 3 explores the knowledges as the Literature Review which is related to the research presents a theoretical framework for the research, while also addressing the benefits, problems, and issues of ethical and copyright in the marketing, designing, and fashion industry. After that, chapter 4 breaks down the practical data obtained from image-generation experiments and surveys. Before moving on to the conclusions, chapter 5 discusses the findings and provides the evaluation of significance for creative industries. Finally, Chapter 6 briefly summarizes the key research results, points out study limits.

1.5 The Use of AI in This Thesis

This thesis is research about how AI affects creative industry nowadays. One of the methods used for doing research is practical testing. That means it was necessary to use AI to create some examples of AI-generated image using appropriate prompts (Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5) by employing AI tools, specifically ChatGPT (version 4o, 4.5). Besides, the Grammarly tool was used to enhance the vocabulary and correct the grammar. ChatGPT also helped me figure out key words related to my topic so that I could be easier to look for all the information used to be written up this thesis.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research methodology is explained in order to answer the research questions. The thesis is employed by using literature review and small-scale survey for creative wokers as a mixed method. There is a simple approach of semiotic, in order to try to understand a bit deeper to how AI tool generates images. A semiotic approach involves how AI tool interprets inputs into the visual-making of the output. A diachronic approach is used in a limited way which is examined the legal and ethical debate. This study also combines a hands-on testing of image-making techniques. Methods and procedures used for data collection and data analysis are presented, and the paper concludes by stating the reliability, validity, and ethical dimensions of the study.

2.1 Research Design

This research employs a qualitative approach, which is considered suitable to investigate a variety of phenomena that are given to human opinions, behaviours, and interpretations (Kim et al., 2025). This research may result in the enablement of an in-depth understanding of the subjective dimensions that may be difficult to grasp within the scope of a quantitative approach. The qualitative method is particularly useful for the "how" and "why" of investigation into creative processes, attitudes toward benefits and barriers, and ethical questions (Tang et al., 2024). Where quantitative research attempts to quantify the data, statistics is statisticology, but qualitative research allows researchers to understand how or why we some what does by explaining us in words, images, and verbal forms. In this thesis, a qualitative method is used in such ways of analysing articles, survey and practical testing.

This method combines a qualitative literature review, experimental image testing, and a small-scale survey that offers triangulated insights into both perceived and practical dimensions of generative AI (Creswell, 2014; Booth et al., 2016). The AI tools such as DALL·E 3, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion, are chosen due to their relevance, accessibility, and distinct technical features (Ramesh et al,. 2022b; Ko et al., 2022; Sordo et al., 2025). The final part is a small survey for people who are working across the graphic design, fashion, and marketing industries using AI generators, in order to capture experience with these tools (Kim et al., 2025). This combination design enables examination of how the tools function, how professionals are using them, and how copyright or ethical concerns affect real-world adoption (Gunkel, 2012).

2.2 Data Collection Methods

The literature Review is based on the SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis) approach, which is recommended for systematic reviews in applied science (Booth et al., 2016; Snyder, 2019). The material sources are mainly collected from: Academic search engines (e.g., Google Scholar, IEEE, ACM Digital Library, and ScienceDirect, etc.), Legal publications (e.g., Harvard Law Review, Yale Law Journal, WIPO reports, etc.), whitepapers from industry organizations (e.g., Adobe, Business of Fashion, Business Insider, etc.).

The search strategy is broad and involves several academic databases and respects industrial sources. Text key search terms are well defined and present, such as:

“AI-generated images", "DALL-E", "Midjourney", "Stable Diffusion", "AI in graphic design", "fashion in AI", "marketing AI visual products", "ethical AI art issues", “AI image generators”, “generative AI copyright”, etc.

No sources are used except reliable, peer-reviewed, or published official sources. “The heart of a rigorous literature review is the transparency of what sources are selected and how they are evaluated” (Snyder, 2019).

The resulting literature is thematically organised and analysed following the Thematic Analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This requires a systematic process of recognizing patterns and sorting them into clear themes (Field et al., 2006) that are pertinent to creative processes and ethical dilemmas. This method is appropriate because it is able to show how the people working in creative industry are using AI tools to help them in their workflow as well as the drawbacks they have to face such as ethical issues, etc. The research classifies insights into well-defined categories that provide the necessary clarity to support the research questions, from which emergent themes (e.g., productivity gains, copyright anxiety, inconsistent image quality) are identified. This contributes to transforming high-level qualitative data into evidence that is applicable to creative processes and ethical discussions in design sectors.

For image generation, there are many established AI-powered tools like Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and especially DALL·E 3 (OpenAI). The prompts are chosen in order to preserve realistic and typical use cases in creative industries. The choice of prompts is inspired by literature and the practical demonstration of visual tasks relating to the graphic design, fashion, and marketing sectors. By providing rich visual descriptions, the prompts seek to challenge tool's capabilities and to reveal practical limitations, including issues of discrepancy and general image quality. Examples of prompts include:

- "A futuristic streetwear model posed under neon lights in Tokyo for a Tokyo-inspired urban alley in an editorial photography shoot."
- "A modern, professional-looking poster for a new eco-friendly sneaker brand, featuring a product display and clean typography, in a flat design style."
- "A hand-painted-style city mural of a post-modern cyberpunk skyline featuring flying cars, vertical gardens, and glowing towers in a hi-octane, neon-infused color palette."

The prompts are inspired by actual graphic design, marketing, and fashion industry design work from Adobe (2023), Kim & Kim (2025), and Tang et al. (2024). These sources make sure that a real-world and professional design context behind each prompt, thus allowing us to test AI tools as closely as possible to how they would be employed in the real world. They are created in order to test the creative/practical and weaknesses and strengths of AI tools. Variations in attribute quality, fidelity and quality loss between platforms also helped to identify the individual strengths and drawbacks of the respective tools, as reported in Sordo et al. (2025) who studied performance variability across generative AI systems. These sources deos not only justify the design of the prompt-based tests but also offer an academic grounding for judging visual and practical relevance.

There is also a small survey performed in order to understand from individuals who are working professionally with visual media. The survey has reached 31 people and is aimed specifically at graphic designers, fashion designers, marketers in academic zone and personal network. Specifically, survey questions closely correspond to research questions, focusing on:

- How AI-generated images are being used and applied today.
- Prospective benefits in practice such as enhanced productivity, motivation, and cost reductions.
- Ran into challenges: A barrier, such as inconsistency, lack of technology, or ethics.
- The effect of ethically oriented considerations on creative workflows in practice.

The questions are prompted by genuine user questions as documented in Vincent (2023), Sobel (2023), and Harvard Law Review (2023), and also professional observations from industry reports (Adobe, 2023; Business of Fashion, 2024). No identifying information is collected as per GDPR and ethical requirements of the research.

2.3 Data Analysis Methods

As a data analysis method, the thesis applies qualitative thematic analysis – a method that is particularly suitable for the analysis of complex and subjective experiences of the people working with AI-generated visuals. The analysis is guided by the structured approach of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Firstly, all responses are read several times to have a more comprehensive insight into the viewpoints of respondents. Then, each response is reviewed closely and assigned a brief code that describes it. Every response is considered in terms of such important codes as 'time saved', 'copyright worry', or 'technical problem.‵

As a next step, similar codes are coded together in a systematic fashion to larger themes: Creative Efficiency (positive outcomes including speed and creative inspiration); Visual Limitation (devices of a practical nature including inconsistencies or technical errors); Ethical Concerns (about copyright and originality); Practical Adoption Issues (issues that related to barriers and facilitators of using AI created visuals).

Subsequently, each theme is scoped and delineated to correctly represent comments from participants. After that, the established themes are reported explicitly in the results section with directly selected quotes and summarized interpretations of the manifest meaning of the findings to enhance the analysis.

Finally, the present work adopts a case study methodology for the study of the ethical and legal dimensions of the artistic phenomena. This included cursorily overviewing examples such as the Getty Images vs. Stability AI lawsuit, covering a range of sources from the official legal docs to high-quality news stories (ie, The Verge/Harvard Business Review) and “expert” opinion (WIPO reports). This approach provides real-life examples of some of the issues that remain unresolved around authorship, originality, and fair use in the creative industries.

2.4 Reliability and Validity

In order to enhance reliability, the same prompts and scoring rubric are applied to all image augmented trials. Several instruments are administered with the same instructions for comparison (Creswell, 2014).

Validity is established by triangulation and contrast of data from the literature, imaging testing, and a survey. Adoption of recognized frameworks (Braun et al., 2026; Booth et al., 2016) and ethical oversight ensured the research remained consistent with legitimate academic practices.

2.5 Ethical Considerations in Research

Ethical consideration is a cross-cutting issue in all the processes. The respondents are notified of their rights of the survey. No personally identifiable data is obtained. Testing-related AI tools are restricted to publicly available platforms such as websites with non-commercial applications (DALL·E 3, Midjourney's standard license, and Stable Diffusion with academic licensing restrictions) (United States Copyright Office, May 2025; WIPO, 2023).

Conversations of fairness and bias in AI-generated images may have also been handled with a degree of sensitivity, recognizing that generative AI in the visual domain has broader social-cultural implications (Chayka, 2023; Gunkel, 2012). "The ethical boundary of AI creativity is not simply what the machine produces, but how we choose to interpret and deploy it" (Sobel, 2024).

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will go through and analyse the current knowledge and literature about AI-generated images. It will discuss about the way AI is being used in fashion, marketing, and graphic design. It also explains why the technologies people are using behind popular AI tools, studies the benefits and challenges, and examines ethical problems.

3.1 AI and Creativity in Design Industries

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has impressively changed how creative industries work nowadays. Graphic design, fashion, and marketing are among the industries that are now benefiting the most from AI tools that use TTI methods. Moreover, these tools today are also trained to generate images by using the T2T method. These industries quickly recognized AI’s creative potential in order to integrate these new technologies into their workflows (Tang et al., 2024).

3.1.1 Graphic Design Applications

As Adobe (2023) noted in its whitepaper that “AI is no longer just a tool for automation; it’s a collaborator in the creative process.”

Graphic artists deploy AI-powered tools primarily to assist them in thinking of creative ideas and to accelerate the process of generating images. The possible applications that designers can create with the AI-generated images include insignias, identification symbols, homepages, and digital media (Kim et al., 2025). Tools like DALL·E 3 or Midjourney can be used by designers to instantly see how radically different the ideas or concepts might look like. For example, when designing a logo, they can use such AI tools to help them quickly try out different styles for a few minutes with a few texts instead of drawing all the possibilities themselves.

A recent study by Tang et al. (2024) claims that graphic designers are relatively grateful to employ the AI-generated image tools due to the new ideas that they offer. That is the kind of inspiration they could get from these tools, and they generally just use that as a base to develop their ideas, allowing them to go beyond and make their unique and their own. As claimed by Adobe (2023), it allows graphic designers to focus less on creating basic photographs and more time on showing ideas.

But as it turns out, not everyone is convinced. Swift and Chattopadhyay (2024) suggest that AI-produced things are boring and derivative. If graphic design professionals rely on AI recommendations too much, they just won't be able to make things that are truly unique as they mentioned "Heavy reliance on AI suggestions can weaken personal style and reduce originality".

3.1.2 Fashion Design Applications

Fashion studios apply AI-generated images to aid designers in sketching new styles and patterns and generate digital fashion concepts. AI image generators facilitate stylists to imagine their concept quickly, which greatly saves time as well as effort(Ko et al., 2022). They use AI to sketch out rough ideas or realistic renderings of fashion items, which they may tweak or improve.

For instance, a clothing brand might leverage AI to test out multiple styles of clothing, colors, and fabric patterns without creating the exact product. This can greatly speed up the design process and ensure cost savings. Vogue Business (2025) demonstrates several fashion companies that have successfully adopted AI tools and used them to predict upcoming trends and to consider design alternatives at a disproportionately lower time and cost. "Brands are shifting early concept stages into the digital realm, cutting costs and optimizing their production cycle" (Vogue Business, 2025). However, it is still faced with the challenge of AI-based images not being realistic in terms of the texture or the accurate rendering of the fabric (Kim et al., 2025).

While AI has provided such benefits to the fashion industry, some fashion experts are worried that AI could have a potential impact on human design. They fear that creativity and originality may be washed away if relying on AI becomes common in daily life. The challenge that designers are facing is using AI-generated tools as a supplementary aid to human creativity, not to completely override (Ko et al., 2022).

3.1.3 Marketing Design Applications

For marketing, AI-generated visuals are increasingly integral to producing eye-popping visuals for social media, digital ads, and branding campaigns. Marketing Professionals frequently make use of AI generators to generate attractive images fast and effectively (Tang et al.,2024).

A good example is an Adobe team that shows how marketing teams utilize AI-generated pictures to easily make coherent appearance-based content. "Marketing teams can now match creative assets to regional or brand tone using a few textual prompts" (Adobe, 2023). As with graphic and fashion designers, marketers will have been making the most of the efficiencies that AI has brought to these varieties of industry as a rule. AI allows them to create graphics much quicker and cheaper than traditional ways (which need to hire photographers and or artists), but all for the trade-off of a little "creepy" vibe. (O'Rielly, 2024) shows an EdTech company that utilised Midjourney and HeyGen has managed to increase its advertising performance by 40% and reduce their dependence on freelance designers at the same time.

However, cons exist for these fields just as they do for marketers. Swift and Chattopadhyay (2024) also highlight the fact that marketers may find it difficult to manage the precise appearance or feel of an image when using AI processes. Frequently, they need to come up with several repetitions before finding the one that resonates well with their brand communications. Moreover, AI-generated images can sometimes be too standard, lacking a brand's own distinctiveness or even the authenticity.

This makes it harder for companies to stand out and compete with their competition.

3.2 AI-Based Image Generation Technologies

To explain why AI-generated images have become so popular, first you need to understand how the AI tools function. AI generators use two types of key technologies: Diffusion models and transformer-based architectures. Image generation conditioned on text-based input is a capability of each of the models, and they are the technology that underpins well-known applications, including DALL-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion.

3.2.1 Diffusion Models

As a relatively new model in AI, diffusion models can generate visual information step-by-step. The process starts with a noisy image filled with random pixels before slowly generating a clear, high-level image that matches the user's text input (Sordo et al., 2025). It then unfolds in a series of stages to improve the clarity and resolution of the image.

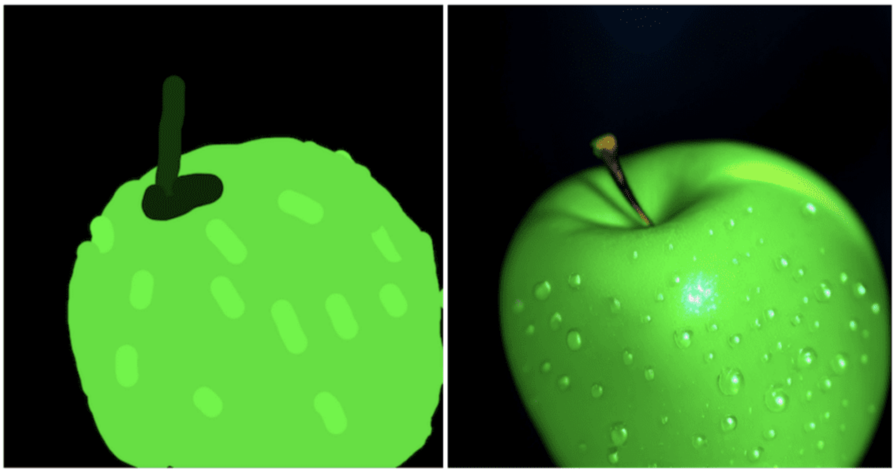

Figure 1. An example of generating an image-to-image by Stable Diffusion.

(source: https://stable-diffusion-art.com/beginners-guide/)

The I2I (Image-To-Image) method which is shown as an example in Figure 1 showing the ability of Stable Diffusion to generate a new image of an apple from an easy drawing. Stable Diffusion is a general technique which is also used in diffusion models. It is open-source and flexible so that users can adapt or fine-tune it according to their needs. Diffusion-based methods are extremely efficient for realistic image synthesis, showing their strong potential for professional visual applications, including advertising and product visualization (Sordo et al., 2025).

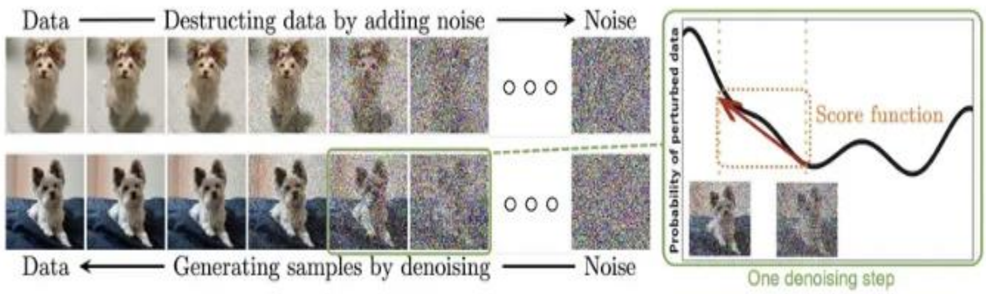

Figure 2. An example of diagram basically showing how Diffusion Model generating noise into complete output step-by-step (Super Annotate, 2025)

The key technology of modern image generator such as Stable Diffusion lies score-based generative modeling, originally proposed by Song et al. (2021). The diagram shown in Figure 2 briefly demonstrates the Diffusion Model generating an image by adding noise into the data and denoising pixels. As mentioned above, the process is controlled by breaking down data as the first step, and then creating a new image by denoising from that noisy image. They made the first use of stochastic differential equations (SDEs) to transform random noise into an interpretable image. In image generation, it enables AI models to draw random samples from complicated visual distributions in a controlled, repeatable way. This method produces higher fidelity and more diverse images to output.

3.2.2 Systems Based on Transformer Context-Based Architectures

Another brilliant AI technique is the transformer-based architectures. Transformers work by understanding the relationships between words in a text prompt and then turning those into visual details. They always pay close attention to each part of the text prompt to ensure that generated results have close matching (Ramesh et., 2022b).

DALL-E, which was created by OpenAI, uses a technology known as the transformer along with another AI system, called CLIP (Contrastive Language–Image Pretraining). CLIP rolls out the model test. The test allows to match text with images with high precision. This combination enables DALL-E to produce detailed images at a high fidelity that closely match users' prompts. "Understand the semantic relationship between language and image at a higher level" (Ramesh et., 2022b; Radford et al., 2021).

3.3 Popular Tools Overview

Currently, there are plenty of AI-generated image tools trustfully chosen to use by professionals in creative field. 3 AI-generated image models discussed in the thesis are DALL-E model from OpenAI (the organizer developing ChatGPT), Stable Diffusion model, and Midjourney. These every single model has its own pros and cons that are introducing to users around the world.

DALL-E is one of the most famous AI image-generating tools, praised for its accurate results and visual quality. DALL-E is released by OpenAI. It can generate complex and intricate images based on textual prompts or using I2I, a much-in-demand feature for professionals who need high-quality visual outputs for branding, advertising, or art projects (Ramesh et al., 2022b). It is perfect at processing abstract prompts and trending concepts.

Figure 3. An AI-generated image using DALL·E 3, illustrating ”A hand-painted-style city mural of a post-modern cyberpunk skyline featuring flying cars, vertical gardens, and glowing towers in a hi-octane, neon-infused color palette”

Table 1 illustrates a basic inspection of the parts being used in order to build up the prompt in Figure 3 (”A hand-painted-style city mural of a post-modern cyberpunk skyline featuring flying cars, vertical gardens, and glowing towers in a hi-octane, neon-infused color palette”), as foundational requirements for the output generation from AI.

Table 1. Simple description of components of textual input used by the promt mentioned in Figure 3

Elements	**Description**	**Interpretation**
"hand-painted-style"	Texture/style	Brush strokes, art pattern, mural style
"city mural"	Format	A general scene
“cyberpunk skyline”	Setting	A futuristic city landscape with high tech
"flying cars"	Detail	Vehicles in the sky

"vertical gardens"	Eco detail	roof gardens on skyscrapers
"glowing towers"	Mood/atmosphere	lit buildings with high-contrast lighting
"rich neon color palette"	Colors	Bright use of pinks, blues, greens, purples (standard cyberpunk colors)

Midjourney is well loved by artists, illustrators, and creative marketers. It is used to produce images with an artistic flair or a stylistic look, particularly for branding and advertising tasks that need a distinct artistic look. Midjourney is becoming a popular tool among non-professional creative workers because of its intuitive and visually pleasing results. This tool is often used on platforms such as Discord for fast, imaginative collaboration (Tang et al., 2024).

Stable Diffusion is a popular open-source AI generator with high control and flexibility for the user. It is popular among freelancers and small businesses due to its ease of use and free customization options. Despite producing mixed visual quality, it is also very popular as a tool thanks to its nicely wide open-source and the several kinds of graphic design and visual artistic works that can be done with it (Sordo et al., 2025).

Each AI tool has been developed by different purposes relying on the incorporator behind it, making it become unique. Creative workers have various options to consider which tools are suitable and meet their needs depending on each situation to use, such as efficiencies, styles or costs. They can assess what is an AI tool should be used based on criteria shown in the table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of DALL·E, Midjourney, Stable Diffusion by accuracy, style, accessibility, cost.

Feature	**DALL·E 3 (OpenAI)**	**Midjourney (Midjourney, Inc.)**	**Stable Diffusion (Stability AI)**
Accuracy (Prompts)	High. This model is ranked as one the	Medium to High. Despite of good	Mixed/Inconsistent. This tool might be

	best in prompt accuracy and clarity as well as understanding of detail (OpenAI, n.d. -b).	prompt interpretation, but text layout can be unstable (Swift et al., 2024)	good potential but inconsistent conformance to complex prompts (Stability AI, 2022)
Stylization & Visualization	Medium. Output can have be slightly cartoonish and relatively poor in stylization (Ko et al., 2022)	High. This can produced the best visual smoothly with amazing texture, and lighting (Swift, I. P., & Chattopadhyay, D., 2024).	High (Versatile). Can generate a great variety of high-quality images with different styles and contents. (Stability AI, 2022)
Accessibility & User Control	Not only high but also integrated with ChatGPT, offering a conversational and intuitive UX (OpenAI, n.d. -b).	Mostly available through our Discord bot. It allows users to control "image weight" and "style reference." (Midjourney, n.d. -b)	Variable (High for experts). Open source for limitless customization and local running. Extreme learning curve for newbies, but effective for those who are tech-savvy (Stability AI, 2022)
Cost	Credit-based or subscription-based. Access via ChatGPT Plus (for around $20/month) or API ($0.04 - $0.12 per normal DALL·E 3 image) (OpenAI, ChatGPT Plus, n.d. -a)	Subscription-based. There are plans starting from $10/month (Basic) to $120/month (Mega). No free version. (Midjourney, Comparing Midjourney Plans, n.d.-a)	Varied. The technology stack itself is open-source (free to run locally if you have the hardware), and the price for getting the API plan for as little as $27/month for 13,000 generations. (Stability AI, n.d.)

3.4 Practical Benefits and Challenges for Creative Professionals

AI-designed images have both practical and interesting advantages and limitations for creative workers, particularly for small operators and freelancers.

3.4.1 Practical Benefits

Because AI image generators is gaining attraction due to their speed, ease of access, and ideation/prototyping capabilities, creative industry clients tend to use them more and more today. They provide new ways of visualizing ideas, retaining the production budget and speeding up the process for professionals. This section describes the most immediate practical applications discussed in literature as well as image experiments, concentrating on how designers, advertisers, and illustrators benefit from the use of AI in their creative process.

One of the key value propositions of AI-generated images is the acceleration of creation in casual inspiration flows. Ramesh et al. (2022) demonstrate those such technologies as DALL-E allow their user to produce multiple complex images in a few minutes, which is a time-saving maneuver. Tang et al. (2024) argue that graphic designers could use AI tools to "prototype five times more concepts in half the time", and this has an effect on the duration of the project as a whole as well.

AI tools can reduce manufacturing costs, serving as a bonus to those who have a limited budget. They can indeed utilize such ways for extremely efficient cost reduction. Adobe (2023) demonstrates in its whitepaper that small businesses and individuals who collaborate in creative industries resort to AI images (such as Adobe Firefly and Midjourney) to reduce costs as well as their time, because these tools frequently remove the need to pay illustrators and to buy expensive licenses for images.

On the other hand, AI images can also be excellent sources of creative inspiration. Kim & Kim (2025) discovered that AI-based imagination supports illustration. Professionals in this industry could rely on AI-based illustrations because they are able to help them in overcoming creative blocks or in getting new inspirational insights. The ability to generate artistic images has made Midjourney a good resource for experts, stimulating new ideas and stretching creative boundaries (Swift et al., 2024).

Another thing that AI tools can do is to help creatives come to market faster through quick prototyping. As discussed above, designers may produce a full trial of multiple ideas without major manual work. Vogue Business (2024) meanwhile writes about fashion designers utilising Stable Diffusion to help quickly imagine many clothing options, assisting in their process of selecting the most interesting ideas in the lead up to production.

The image in Figure 4 illustrates how AI tools like DALL-E 3 using the TTI methods, can spit out visual thumbnails with relatively little input. The connection between the prompt and the visual result demonstrates the utility of this approach for fast prototyping and the generation of early campaign concepts in sectors such as fashion and advertising.

Figure 4. AI-generated fashion visual by DALL·E 3 with the following prompt: “A futuristic streetwear model posed under neon lights in Tokyo for a Tokyo-inspired urban alley in an editorial photography shoot.”

3.4.2 Practical Challenges

Despite these advantages, there are nonetheless true obstacles that creative professionals must overcome when adopting AI images to their daily work routines.

One of the biggest issues is consistency. Artificially generated imagery can have variable quality or style when given the same prompt a large number of times. According to Ko et al. (2022), such an inconsistency hinders designers’ efforts to generate consistent, repeatable results, which is often frustrating when such a consistent result is desired for commercial branding.

Another key issue is to ensure the quality of generated output sentences is steady. AI-generated images may sometimes have surprising mistakes. Swift and Chattopadhyay (2024) specifically note problems with Adobe's Generative Fill tool, where outlying visual elements are generated, leading to some manual adjustment.

It is generally deduced that technical knowledge or confidence of some software interface is required to use an AI tool effectively. Boutique design studios and technology-fearing freelance creatives might struggle to work with these AI technologies in the way that they can be most useful, reducing their real-world utility. This technical difficulty can be a barrier for designers who are not familiar with AI interfaces and may prevent them from using these tools routinely (Tang et al., 2024).

The image in Figure 5 highlights some of the common artifacts present in AI-generated images. Although this AI-generated image is for the most part in line with the provided prompt, it is unprofessional to use it for professional purposes such as in advertising. This is mostly caused by the inherent inconsistency in the alignment of fonts in the design, which is a widely vexed issue in current AI image generation.

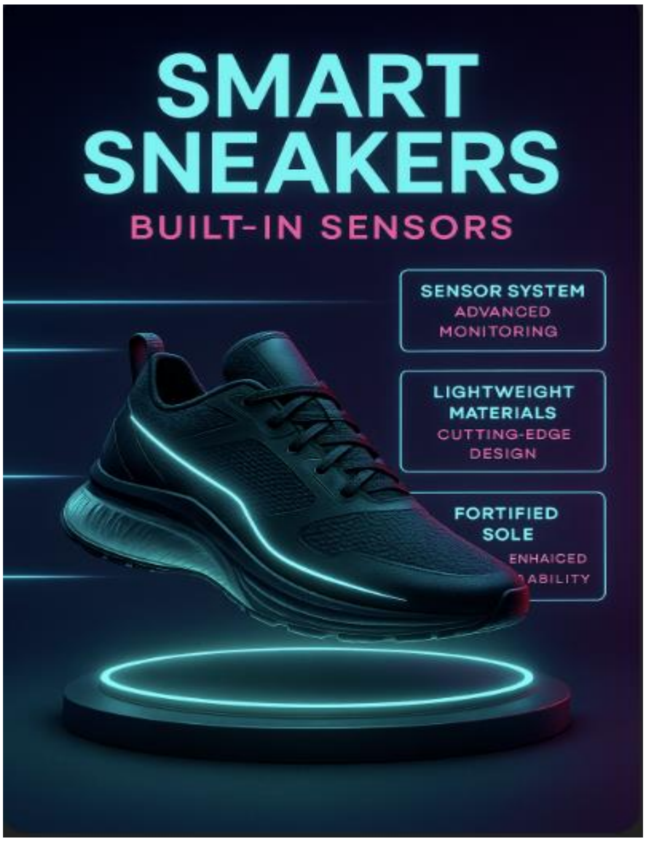

Figure 5. AI-generated marketing poster using DALL·E 3 with the prompt: "A modern, professional-looking poster for a new eco-friendly sneaker brand, featuring a product display and clean typography, in a flat design style."

3.5 Ethical and Legal Considerations

As AI-generated image goes viral in creative industries, issues of ethics and laws are also raised. For professionals, the need to critically consider copyright, authorship, originality, and ethical duty is vital. As Vincent (2023a) noted, "Some generated outputs even mimic watermarks, raising red flags about dataset legality."

Copyright ownership is a critical legal issue in AI-generated images. The upshot of these decisions is: who owns the visual IP created by AI?—the person who may have written the prompt, the organization that developed the AI tool, or no one? The concerns around generative AI copyright, including, for example, the recent high-profile case of Getty Images suing security firm Stability AI for using its copyrighted images to train the Stable Diffusion model without authorization, were highlighted in a 2023 article in Harvard Business Review.

The comparison in Figure 6 follows is the one that relates to the Getty conflict. The AI-created photo (right) closely mimics a Getty photo (left), down to the orientation of its subject and an imitation watermark. These differences are enough to make the AI image different from the photograph, but not so much that we should not worry about copyright infringement. It allows these outputs to “derivatively replicate” their protected content, which is, besides being illegal, also fraught with ethical issues (Sobel, 2024; Getty Images, 2025). This case underscores the pressing importance of clarifying the actual meanings of authorship, originality, and legal data sets in generative AI.

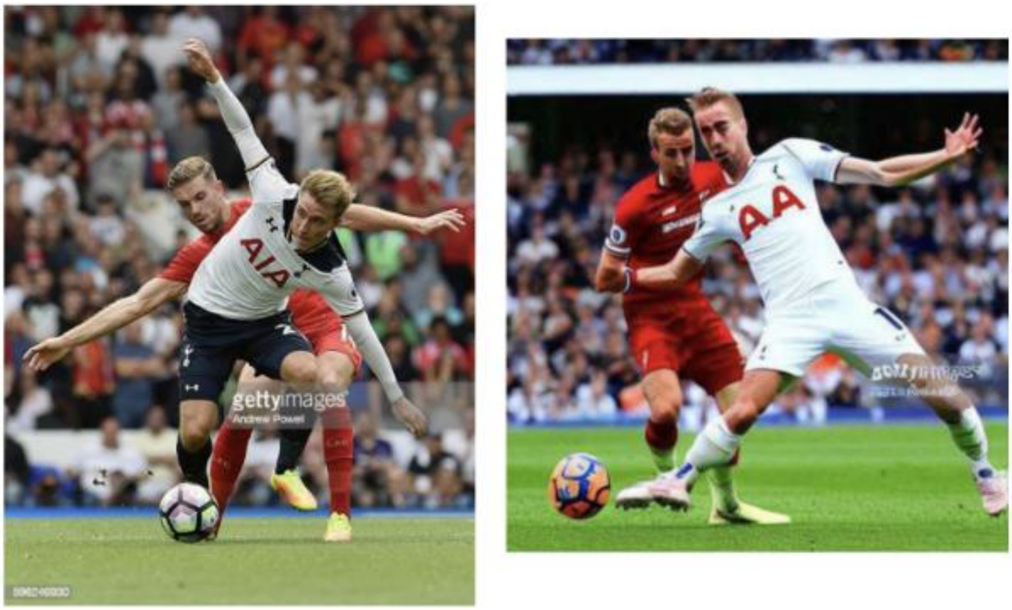

Figure 6. Side-by-side comparison of a real Getty photograph (left) and an AI-generated imitation (right) showing visual similarities and a distorted watermark (Vincent J. , 2023a).

Attributing authorship to AI-created imagery is even trickier. A core question is whether such images have true originality or just arrange remixes from their saliency training data. The legal perspective is still a bit unclear because historical copyright has only applied to human creative works (Sobel, 2024; Mantegna, 2023).According to Sobel, the present laws are inadequate to respond to the technological transition, which has resulted in uncertainty for commercial uses. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, 2023), in the absence of more accurate legal definitions, controversies about authors' rights and violations will increase on a cross-sector scale in sectors reliant on creative content. In advertising and design, these issues impact the way that clients and agencies evaluate the validity and commercial safety of computer-generated outputs. Questions related to the ethical sourcing and consent of data, and the responsibility of creators of generative systems, are increasingly central to both legal regulation and professional practice, as these systems become more advanced (Harvard Law Review., 2025).

There are also concerning possible abuses, especially the development of misleading/disguising images. For example, deepfake, a type of AI-generated video, has led to important debates on ethics (Noveck et al., 2023; Chayka, 2023).

Complicating matters is the impossibility of fixing precise limits of artistic freedom and copyright infringement. And even as visual artists increasingly demand clearer regulation to protect their original works and their livelihoods (Ko et al., 2022), supporters of generative AI argue that these technologies provide more creative freedom and access, specifically for smaller creators and individual users.

Figure 7. Example of an AI-generated image mimicking a Getty Images watermark ("geetyimages"), featuring a crowd scene with distorted facial structures (Vincent, 2023b).

The Figure 7 is one of the images generated by AI tool from Stability AI that illustrates ethical and legal concerns raised in the Getty Images vs. Stability AI lawsuit, particularly regarding dataset sourcing and visual mimicry.

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the most significant results of our study, involving a limited-scope questionnaire as well as a series of controlled image generation challenges based on images generated by DALL·E 3, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion. They were keen to learn more about how creative professionals are currently working with AI-created visuals, what their day-to-day experiences, challenges, and benefits were, and what (if any) ethical or legal questions had arisen as a result of their work. There has been 31 responses collected within more than a month (shown in Figure 8), including 20 of graphic design students, 10 of fashion workers and 1 of marketing professionals. Participants were invited across universities, social media forums, and personal network.

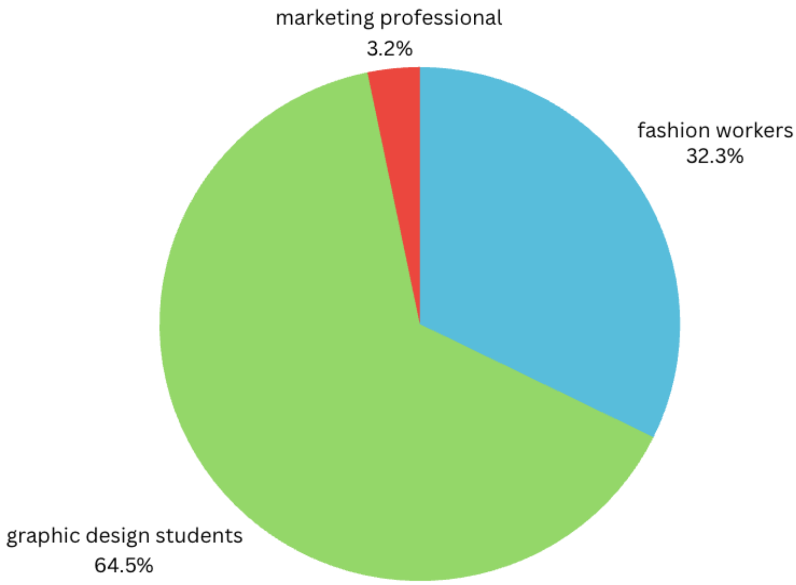

Figure 8. Distribution of creative fields

For the small sample survey, a population size of 500 was reasonably assumed to calculate the margin of error and confidence level. This estimation accounts for a wider audience of creative professionals and contractors working, for example, with AI-generated images, like designers and marketers, as suggested by recent industry reports (e.g., Adobe, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2025). The confidence level was 95%, which is frequently used in social research, and was based on a sample size of 31 responses and the estimated population size. The corresponding margin of error is about ±17% by using an online margin of error calculator (SurveyMonkey, 2024).

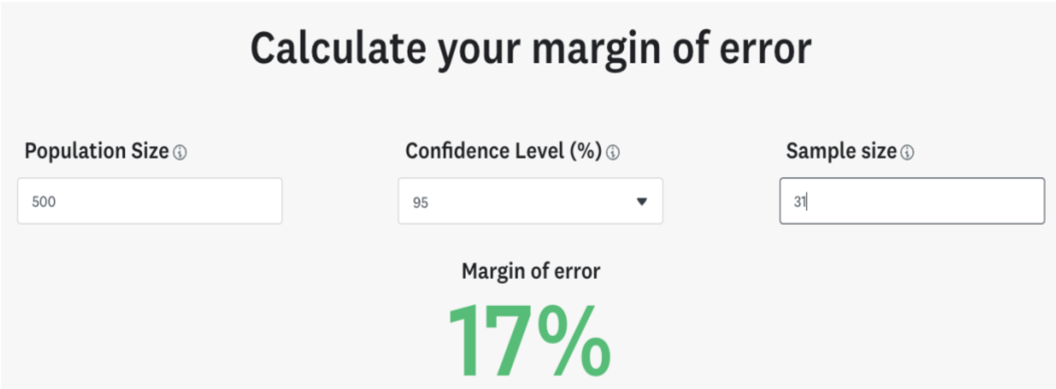

Figure 9. The calculation of margin of error (SurveyMonkey, 2024)

4.1 AI Usage in Creative Workflows

This chapter examines how creative workers are now integrating artificial-intelligent image generators into their works. The results of these analyses show that the models such as DALL·E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion are most often used for ideation, visual prototyping, and mocking-up.

4.1.1 Patterns of Use

According to survey results, more than 75% of respondents leverage AI-generated visuals first and foremost for creative inspiration and quick prototyping, not as final versions. Just a quarter said they had actually used images made by AI in finished branding, advertising, or product visuals. This pattern of use resonates with the literature, which commonly positions AI as a way to 'extend the imagination' rather than completely automate all manual execution (Kim et al., 2025).

One respondent noted that: "AI helps me get unstuck from a layout. It wouldn't be a replacement of my final work — it just is a push." This is in line with the findings of Bruch (2024) when he described the AI tools as the “early-stage collaborators” in the creative pipeline.

4.1.2 Workflow-Integrated Mapping

Graphic design professionals mainly use DALL·E or Adobe Firefly as tools for producing the concept sketches, background art, and experimental layout drafts (Tang et al., 2024). In apparel, AI is used to prototype garment shape, color, and print design—all without any physical samples required (Business of Fashion, 2024). At the same time, marketing and ad teams use Midjourney to create stylized campaign visuals and thumbnails for social media, testing several A/B versions (O'Rielly, 2024).

Midjourney was respondents’ go-to tool for visual mood boards, they said, while DALL·E was their choice for prompt precision. Despite being reasonable for custom fine-tuning, Stable Diffusion had hardly been used without external plugins or manual interventions (Sordo et al., 2025).

4.1.3 Inspection of Visual Output

The present results are consistent with former results by Ko et al. (2022) and Swift & Chattopadhyay (2024), who also identified such tool-specific strengths and weaknesses. Here is the summary of findings showing the quality of outputs from 3 AI tools discussed in this thesis so far:

- DALL·E 3 was ranked the best in terms of prompt accuracy and clarity, but was relatively poor in terms of stylization and handling of typography.
- Midjourney produced the best visual appearance, with smooth, elegant text and rich texture and lighting, but with uncontrollable text layout.
- Stable Diffusion was mixed, with good potential but inconsistent conformance.

4.2 Benefits and Challenges Experienced by Small Businesses and Freelancers

The findings also highlight on both side that the benefits and challenges for small business and freelancers employing AI-created visuals. On the one hand, respondents cited gains in quick delivery, value for money, and creative motivation. However, difficulties such as variable visual quality, unpredictable output, and unmanageable UI were also commonly discussed.

4.2.1 Reported Benefits

There are top three benefits which are shown in Figure 10, reported according to the survey respondents. Speed and efficiency is the top 1 of the benefits from AI tools with 81%. Following, the respondents think that AI is very useful in helping them generating creative inspiration as the second most rate with 71%. The last benefit in top three is cost-effectiveness which is reported as 58% of collected responses. These findings illustrate that professionals appreciate the AI tools most for increasing productivity and for generating ideas, along with perceived cost effectiveness as a notable benefit.

One of our survey respondents says: "I saved over €500 on design fees for a client campaign using Midjourney mock-ups." This is consistent with Business Insider’s (2024) instance of the EdTech company cutting their outsourcing spend by 40%.

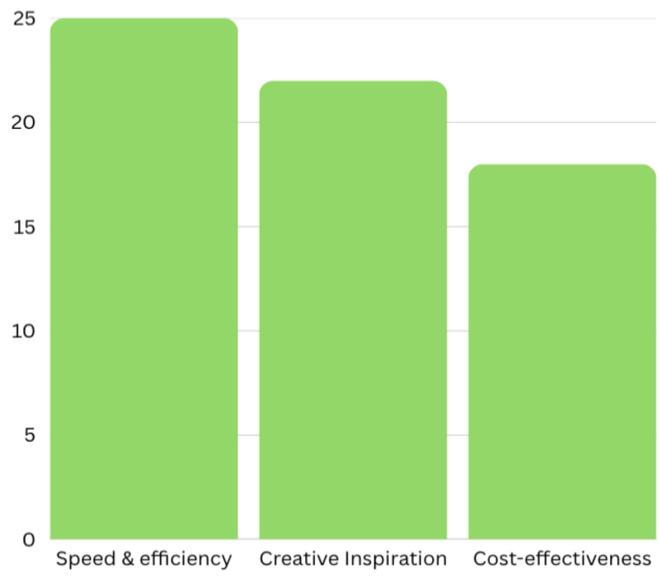

Figure 10. Top three reported benefits from AI tools

Moreover, these results also would serve to confirm what both industry reports and academic researchers have maintained. Adobe (2023) stated that generative AI lets small teams ”generate in minutes what used to take days.” Similarly, Tang et al. described AI as “a low-cost creative assistant for start-ups and freelancers” (2024).

4.2.2 Major Challenges

As shown in Figure 11, variable visual fidelity (78%), Lack of control over results (66%), and Complexity of interfaces (55%) are the negatives while there were certainly upsides, the survey respondents also noted several common problems. These results from the survey reveal the current technical and usability restrictions the participants encounter while trying to integrate AI tools to their creative workflows.

Figure 11. Reported drawbacks by respondents when using AI tools

These numbers echo the reported observations of Swift & Chattopadhyay (2024) that brand usability and text alignment issues also occurred frequently, even in tools like Photoshop's Generative Fill. Gu et al. (2023) also pointed out that users are required to "trial-and-error" themselves to get usable results, implying a high learning overhead.

One commented: "So many times I end up spending more time correcting the AI's mistakes than I would have had I just made it myself." This is reflective of a general trend observed in Sordo et al. (2025), with practitioners referring to AI outputs as drafts rather than final products.

4.3 Ethical and Copyright Concerns

Finally, the data also shows the increasing of worries around legal and copyright concerns for AI-created visuals. Survey participants highlighted uncertain ownership and authorship, potential copyright infringement arising from data used to train the model and fake attributes. Through the above themes, they also echo current legal debates and suggest the necessity of more policy direction.

4.3.1 Ethical Issues: From Survey Information

More than 70% of those who took part in the survey reported being somewhat or very concerned about how AI-generated imagery might impact their daily work. As demonstrated in Figure 12, the most common were uncertainty authorship, copyright infringement, and risk of deepfakes or misleading images. A copyright and authorship are the top ethical issues identified by the survey respondents in terms of concerns about the ethics include being unsure of who owns the images (71%), the possibility of copyright infringement (61%) and the potential harm done by deepfakes or fake images (52%). These findings are symptomatic of a wider nervousness around the legal and moral obligations around employing AI-created visuals in a professional context.

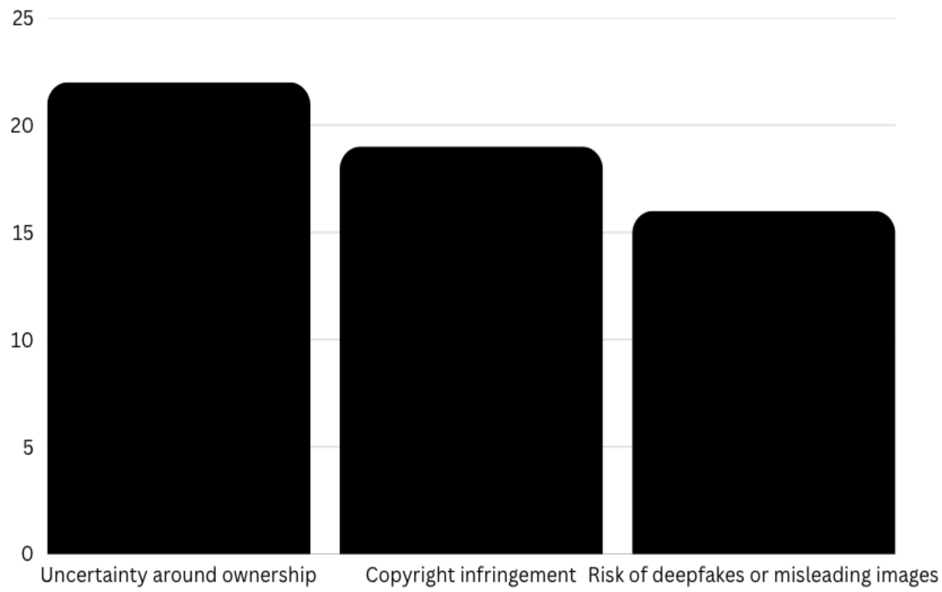

Figure 12. Reported ethical concerns by using AI

These statistics similarly report with findings in WIPO (2023) and academic work by Sobel (2023), which emphasize a lack of legal clarity of generative AI. As Harvard Law Review (2023) has written, AI developers are caught in a “creative double bind” in which they are pushed either to take the chance of infringing or to self-restrict their own innovation.

Legal commentators worry about where AI-created content comes down within the four corners of copyright law. As Gaffar and Alabarashdi (2024) observe, the question of authorship and originality continue to challenge legal systems, especially when the author is an algorithm and not a human. And Chesterman (2024) has suggested generative models, trained from large unattributed datasets, undermines the core concept of originality in copyright law.

4.3.2 Case Study: Getty Images vs. Stability AI

The most commonly cited legal case is Getty Images’ 2023 suit against Stability AI. Getty claims that images they own the rights to be included without permission in the model training for Stable Diffusion, so some AI-generated outputs resembled Getty works, including distorted watermarks (Vincent, 2023a).

This case highlights what Sobel (2024) refers to as “the tension between transformative innovation and derivative risk.” It’s a fear that respondents in this study echoed, with one saying that “I don’t feel confident using AI visuals for paid work because I don’t know where the image came from.”

4.3.3 The Need for More Doctrinal Clarity

Some of our qualitative responses showed a hunger for more transparency and legal protections. Some users demanded “better licensing info” and “clear attribution models.” In Gunkel’s (2012) words, "When machines produce art, we must rethink authorship, agency, and moral responsibility."

There were also concerns from professionals toward the dilution of creative quality and that if AI was used on a mass scale, it could lead to a homogenization of aesthetics. AP News (2023) and The New Yorker (2023) reported similar tensions, with some human artists claiming that AI is stealing without giving credit or pay.

5 DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Creative Industries at the Crossroads

The rapid evolution of AI-driven image generators in creative processes marks the tipping point for design, fashion, and marketing. In a more experimental way, creative practitioners are attempting to create campaigns or branding out of content generated by tools like DALL·E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion (Benaich et al., 2025). These tools provide fresh modes of creative expression but also threaten the underpinnings of authorship, originality, and trust in visual content (Harvard Law Review., 2025).

The findings from this study and also from a small survey and informal reviews, highlight that although practitioners are excited by how AI can accelerate and inspire, that enthusiasm was tempered by concerns over output inconsistency, creative control, and legal uncertainty. These conflicts are particularly pronounced in domains like advertising, where visibility and brand safety are of paramount importance (Kim et al., 2025). This chapter examines four major themes that have come out through the literature, surveys, and practical trials.

5.2 Interpretation of Key Themes

AI is not now generally considered by creative professionals the tool of finished work but rather a friend in the embryonic stage of an idea. More than 70 percent of survey respondents said that they used AI image generators for brainstorming or concept testing, not to output finished products. This result is consistent with previous work indicating the use of AI by designers to “reduce creative block” and “spark faster idea development” (Ko et al., 2022). One person left a comment: "AI doesn't give me a solution, but it also helps us to see what's possible.”

This pattern is also picked out in academic sources. Tang et al. (2024) thought up the term “visual sketchpad” for generative tools, which help creative thinking when one is under severe time pressure. Likewise, Vogue Business (2024) states that digital fashion designers utilize AI for fabric visualization but not much more to aid their process, as manual intervention is required to perfect the work. The Adobe (2023) whitepaper states that "productivity improves most during concept exploration" rather than production.

For all that creative determination, however, there is one recurring problem that professionals encounter: The more impressive the content, the less constant the outputs. Among the challenges cited by survey respondents including the clunky hand rendering and unbalanced compositions, as well as the fact that text or branded elements are not always generated reliably.

These problems are typical of the remaining technical constraints still identified in the literature. As Liu & Chilton (2021) wrote, "even the most advanced models often fail on visual text fidelity." Sordo et al. (2025) and Ramesh et al. (2022) also reported that fine-grained visual control is restricted for commercial design tasks.

Worse, while AI accelerates the speed of visual production, the work required to refine faulty outputs often disagrees any time saved. Kim & Kim (2025) state that many professionals discard one generation in the middle if the model can't express the color of the brand or the layout of the product well. This helps explain why, in the world of branding, AI is still being used more as a "mood board" tool than as a final rendering solution.

The respondents perceived legal situations and originality as their most serious problems. Almost all of the participants (94%) reported some level of concern around using AI-generated images for client work without clear copyright guidelines. These fears are reinforced by high-profile legal actions and policy discussions throughout the creative community (Sobel, 2024; United States Copyright Office, May 2025; Murray, 2023).

The case of Getty Images vs. Stability AI is the paradigm case here. Stable Diffusion reportedly scraped their copyrighted photos and duplicated them without permission, resulting in distorted Getty watermarks or other watermarked images with proprietary image styles (Vincent, 2023b).

Sobel (2024) contends that copyright law is ill-equipped to meet the challenges of AI-generated contents, specifically because human authorship does not directly come into play. The Harvard Law Review (2023) dubs this the "creative double bind," in which content is neither original enough to be copyrighted nor close enough to real work to be ignored.

These issues are even more dangerous when they appear in a commercial environment. According to Business Insider (2024), brands that employed AI-created imagery experienced "public backlash" after customers observed stylistic parallels with existing works. This provides a legal and moral challenge of whether the output from AI, whether the designers, the clients, or the tool developers, can be held accountable.

A final important theme is professional trust, or the absence of it. Creatives see the potential as well. But most of them have been slow to completely incorporate it in their work. Some are concerned about becoming over-credible, some about the ethical dangers, and some about the loss of their creative identity. "The more I use the AI, the less I feel like the artist," as one respondent put it.

Benaich & Hogarth (2023) suggest that such scepticism is merely a warning to be cautious in such a fast-paced field. WIPO (2023) cautions that regulation is "lagging behind" adoption, leaving users unprotected. Even AI boosters at OpenAI say transparency tools will need to be developed before AI-generated content can be broadly trusted (The Verge, 2025).

Meanwhile, optimism remains. For them, artificial intelligence is a new medium rather than a menace. Croitoru et al. (2023) propose that diffusion models are considered as "new forms of artistic variation" and increase, rather than decrease, creative control, under the right conditions. The issue isn't so much whether AI will be a part of creative workflows which it whether creatives can direct its use responsibly.

5.3 The Future of Creative Work

The results of this study indicate that AI image generators are becoming a part of everyday creativity processes, as opposed to a substitution for designers, but as a tool that lends itself to hybrid creative possibilities. As Adobe's (2023) industry research suggests, the future of design is probably more hybrid work-flows, that is kombucha-style design, where human vision is augmented or bootstrapped by machine assistance, particularly when it comes to rapid prototyping or concept visualization.

But there's tension to this movement as well. Although AI enables the production of photographs more quickly and creatively, numerous professionals have a concern about losing the artist's hand in the visual story (Kim et al., 2025). One of the interviewees stated: "It's efficient but hollow. Sometimes the work looks good, but I don't feel like I painted it."

According to Tang et al. (2024), this feeling signals an increasing necessity of reconceptualizing creativity itself, not as a matter of originality but rather as an art of curating, guiding, and editing the suggestions of the algorithm.

From a business side, AI also raises critical questions about client confidence, production quality, and brand voice. Companies that use AI-generated imagery so secretly risk customer and legal repercussions, especially in a day and age when copyright law is ever-changing (Sobel, 2024; United States Copyright Office, May 2025).

5.4 Limitations

This study was exploratory. Therefore, it incorporates several limitations. First, the survey was of modest size and non-random, drawing largely from friends in academic and design social circles. This limitation could restrict the generalization of the findings. As noted by Booth et al. (2016), small qualitative samples are not enough to predict patterns for the industry as a whole.

Second, the process of evaluating the images was based on visual inspection, not an algorithm benchmark. Human opinion is an important aspect in design, yet subjective. The challenge of "judging" image quality, especially in a creative setting, is not only a technical one but also a subjective one (Liu et al., 2021).

Third, rapid tool development is also a barrier. AI models keep getting better month over month, so the tools tested in this study may already be different if you're reading this review. For instance, in the Light of DALL·E achievement unlocked update, DALL·E can now do in painting, and text-to-image has been vastly improved (OpenAI, DALL·E 3: OpenAI's new image generation model, n.d. -b; Oppenlaender, 2022).

Despite these limitations, the thesis offers empirical access to the ways in which professionals experience the early use of AI visual tools and generates relevant concerns for future research and policy-making.

5.5 Recommendations

We should conduct additional research on AI in the creative industries and enhance our comprehension. For further understanding of AI in the creative industries, research should be conducted with larger and more diverse groups of users. Interviewing agencies, fashion brands, and advertising agencies would also help people gain a better perspective of how AI tools are used on a commercial scale.

Second, future studies could focus on a long-term approach to better follow the development of attitudes and usage over time. This has become especially crucial as tools have become more advanced and laws have changed. For instance, how does a designer's reliance on Midjourney or DALL·E change after half a year of regular use?

Third, they can investigate how different cultures interpret or use AI visuals differently. As WIPO (2023) notes, beliefs about originality and authorship are highly culturally specific, which is likely to impact decisions regarding what is considered lawful and ethical.

For practitioners, implications ultimately focus on supporting professionals to:

- Keep up to date on AI tool functionality and licensing agreements.
- Only deploy AI when it serves the purpose and can be transparently disclosed.
- Establish clear guidelines within the team regarding credit allocation and final approval of AI-generated content.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This thesis examined how creative professionals have adapted to AI-generated images, the pros and cons that small businesses and freelance designers experience in the use of this technology, as well as the ethical and legal implications of their integration in image-reliant fields such as graphic design, fashion, and marketing. Using a literature review, a small-scale image test, and a user survey, we found that AI-infused visuals are a rapidly changing phenomenon that affects the production, consumption, and perception of visuals in creative workflows.

The current body of literature corroborates the fact that AI-driven image generation tools such as Midjourney, DALL·E, and Stable Diffusion are today considered for inspiration, ideation, and even final design and branding tasks (Tang et al., 2024; Swift et al., 2024). Such tools have an impulse from visual investigation to production and are beneficial in offering faster design iterations, particularly to individual designers and to marketing teams at times when time is of the essence (Adobe, 2023; O'Rielly, 2024; Business of Fashion, 2024). In the image generation tests, the quality of the results suggested that even when they are fast and offer a variety of styles, AI tools will sometimes output weird or inconsistent results or designs with small flaws, such as distorted text or strange combinations of objects on a page.

The additional insight came from a survey of 31 design, marketing, and fashion professionals. Some of the respondents (71%) said they were using AI-based tools to help develop their early-stage concepts. It was the cost-saving value proposition for those who do not have a big budget that freelancers and small agencies loved, but the question they are concerning about is how treading down the path of legal grey areas and using creative-owned footage. A lot of the people working as a creator using AI tools for the work would like more clarity around licensing and copyright rules for AI-generated outputs, opinions that are reflected in academic and policy work (Gunkel, 2012; Harvard Law Review., 2025; Sobel, 2024).

6.2 Answers to Research Questions

RQ1: How are creative professionals using AI-based image generators currently in their creative workflow?

AI-based image generators are primarily utilized by creative professionals in the ideation and prototyping stage. The survey found that tools such as Midjourney and DALL·E are the most frequently used to create mood boards, concept art, and visual references. This movement is also supported by Kim & Kim (2025), for whom these kinds of tools accelerate the creative brainstorming process but do not replace the human design totally. Most professionals do not use AI in their final productions but rather as a way to get to their final production more quickly and visually.

RQ2: What practical benefits and challenges do small businesses and freelancers face when using AI-generated visuals?

Small businesses and freelancers said they were saving enormous amounts in cost and time. In early-stage marketing (where a company might spend more time accelerating R&D and going to market and less time hiring external designers or photographers), options like Adobe Firefly from Stable Diffusion are able to offer quality visuals with relatively little need for external support (Adobe, 2023; O'Rielly, 2024). Nevertheless, difficulties were the image quality not always being consistent, and there was a learning curve associated with prompt engineering (Liu et al., 2021; Gu et al., 2023). Participants were also worried about the lack of clarity on which AI-generated content they can legally use commercially.

RQ3: What ethical and copyright concerns do creative professionals have when using AI-generated visuals in commercial branding, advertising, and designing?

Concerns about ethical and legal issues are still a significant concern. Many survey respondents said they did not know whether the images they made could be used for client work or in campaigns without legal risk. This indeterminacy aligns with the questions raised in Sobel (2024) and U.S. Copyright Office (2025) of the copyright owner and author of AI-generated work. Cases such as the work by Getty Images v. Stability AI also illustrate the legal grey areas of training data and original authorship (Vincent, 2023a). The moral issue of "stealing" visual styles without permission was a notable concern and mirrored similar complaints by artists in the public sphere (Chayka, 2023; Noveck et al., 2023).

6.3 Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that AI-powered imaging engines are already transforming creative thinking and output while also shifting what is believed to be imaginative and what is considered pragmatic. Although professional artists and crafters are generally excited about the speed, variety, and visual beauty these tools promise, they're also wary of dependability, legal safety, and creative implications.

Instead of AI as the enemy of human creativity, it has become a new sort of material, something to be shaped, guided, and asked along. As Croitoru et al. (2023) argued, diffusion models do not erase artistic intent; rather, they create new channels in which to embed that intent.

However, ethical uncertainty remains. While there are not specific policies and frameworks for attribution, the industry needs to proceed cautiously. Nowhere is the issue more important than in high-stakes businesses like branding, where trust and originality are everything.

Ultimately, this thesis is part of an ongoing discussion about how technology can help, not replace human creativity. As AI continues to develop, so should our ideas about what it means to produce with it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey Questions

1. What is your main industry of work?
   - Graphic Design
   - Fashion Design
   - Marketing/Advertising
   - Other (please specify)
2. How would you best describe your job?
   - Freelancer
   - Small Business Owner
   - Creative Industry Employee
   - Student
   - Other (please specify)
3. Have you worked with any AI Image Generation Tools (DALL·E, Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, a text-image modeOfAI) before?
   - Yes (often)
   - Yes (occasionally)
   - No (never)
4. If so, what use-cases have AI-generated images been mainly used for? (Select all that apply.)
   - Expression, genesis or incubation of idea (inspiration)
   - Rapid visual prototyping
   - Final marketing image or ad
   - Branding or logo concepts
   - Social media content creation
   - Material for instruction or training
   - Fashion concepts
   - Other (please specify)
5. What AI tool(s) have you used the most? (Select all that apply.)
   - DALL·E (OpenAI)
   - Midjourney
   - Stable Diffusion

- Adobe Firefly
- Other (please specify)

6. What are some real-world benefits of using AI-generated images in your creative work? (Select up to three.)
   - Faster project turnaround
   - Lower production costs
   - Creative inspiration
   - High-quality visual output
   - Simpler communication of ideas to clients
   - Work less on monotonous work
   - Other (please specify)
7. What have been your biggest roadblocks or challenges with computer-generated imagery? (Select up to three.)
   - Variability in visual quality
   - Little control of what comes out
   - Problem using tools
   - It is hard to handle of text or branding elements
   - Ethical or copyright concerns
   - Visuals not original
   - Other (please specify)
8. How worried are you about the moral considerations of working with AI-created images in your professional work?
   - Very concerned
   - Somewhat concerned
   - Not very concerned
   - Not at all concerned
9. Which of these ethical problems are most salient to your work as a writer? (Select all that apply.)
   - Image ownership/authorship in AI generated images
   - AI tools trained on copyrighted images
   - Jobless for those of us humans with a creative work profile.
   - Misinformation television or deep fakes possible
   - Creativity under threat from excessive dependence on AI

- Other (please specify)

10. Do worries about copyright or originality shape how you rely on or steer clear of A.I-created images?
    - Yes, significantly
    - Yes, somewhat
    - No, not really
    - No, not at all
11. Can you think of one particular use case or project where AI-created images either substantially assisted or interrupted you?
12. Any final thoughts or concerns regarding the future of AI-generated imagery in your industry?