How is Generative AI Transforming Content Creation on Social Media? An Exploratory Perspective on Human-AI Interaction Processes, Potentials and Pitfalls

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Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) presents a paradigm shift in social media content creation due to its unique ability to enhance media creation and aid in creative tasks. Creators have already put this into practice, and AI-augmented as well as AI-generated content is prevalent across platforms. However, the creators' perspective on how GenAI impacts social media content creation and its implications for the role of humans in the creation process remains poorly understood. Through 26 in-depth interviews, we employ an exploratory lens on human-GenAI interaction and its benefits and drawbacks in content creation. The results of thematic analysis shed light on the cooperative nature of human-GenAI interaction for ideation and the varying dynamics in the creation process, where the role of human creators changes from an executing force to verifying and controlling the actual media creation performed by GenAI.

Keywords: Content Creation, ChatGPT, Influencer, User-Generated Content, Creativity

1. Introduction

Social media content is increasingly created with the help of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). Whether it is a post written by ChatGPT or pictures created by MidJourney, a plethora of content nowadays relies on GenAI. In contrast to traditional media, where the use of GenAI may be monitored, controlled, and reported, social media are characterized by the creation of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The work of content creators is a core element of the value creation of social media platforms and the resulting creator economy, which rewards regular and fresh content with reach and follower engagement (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023). As such, creators are facing growing pressure to produce content more effectively to compete in the flood of information (Dahm & Heydenreich, 2024), as visibility is essential, and irregular posting can have detrimental effects on their audience (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). However, creators must continuously create more content and meet specific quality standards to ensure their content is engaging (Agichtein et al., 2008). GenAI provides a seductive opportunity for creators in this tension between quality and quantity. Due to its unique capability to create seemingly new content (Feuerriegel et al., 2024), which appears of high quality in an extremely short time, it can readily assist in creating creative media (Doshi & Hauser, 2023). The missing regulation of its use for user-generated content further fuels its widespread adoption among content creators on social media.

While this phenomenon is unfolding rapidly in practice, it remains unclear how it will transform content creation on social media in the long run. Specifically, research has brought to attention that GenAI could change the role of the human creator in the content creation process (Kshetri et al., 2024). While important skills for content creation have traditionally involved creativity or artistic talent (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2020), GenAI might replace their human counterparts in actual media creation and transform the skills required for successful content creation. Previous works have primarily adopted a consumer perspective on the reception of GenAI content (Inie et al., 2023; J. Li et al., 2024) instead of considering how GenAI impacts content creation from a creator perspective. The accelerating adoption of GenAI by content creators contrasts with a lack of knowledge about what

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the human-GenAI interaction looks like and how it impacts the role of the human creator in the content creation process. Still, this perspective is invaluable to understand whether and how it helps creators navigate the tension between quality and quantity (Agichtein et al., 2008; Dahm & Heydenreich, 2024), what new skills and activities are required for content creation in the age of GenAI, and consequently, how it might impact social media content creation in the future.

To address this gap and illuminate the creator perspective on GenAI in social media content creation, we conducted 26 exploratory interviews with content creators on their use experiences with GenAI, as well as the benefits and drawbacks they see in its use. In this endeavor, we were guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How does GenAI impact social media content creation from the perspective of creators?

RQ2: What are the benefits and drawbacks of GenAI for social media content creation from the perspective of creators?

We reveal that GenAI presents a new material agent in content ideation and creation that indeed changes the role of human creators in the content creation process: from being the sole artistic creators to co-ideating with GenAI and controlling its created content. We summarize our findings in a new framework of human-GenAI interaction in social media content creation and discuss its implications for the future of content creation on social media.

2. GenAI and social media

GenAI refers to computational techniques which allow the creation of seemingly new content from training data (Feuerriegel et al., 2024). With it, even untrained users can create elaborate texts, images, and videos (Dang et al., 2022; Hua et al., 2024). These opportunities have heavily impacted social media and changed its user experience (Park et al., 2024). On some platforms, GenAI has strongly increased the amount of content (Wei & Tyson, 2024).

Yet, research has shown that GenAI content might not be as well-received as human-created content. Studies have demonstrated that consumers still prefer human-created content (Zhang & Gosline, 2023) and link the perception of quality with a human origin (Hitsuwari et al., 2023). Considering only this consumer-oriented perspective, the increasing diffusion of content created with GenAI, therefore, appears to be at odds with their needs and expectations.

However, we evidently see this phenomenon arise in practice, which might be attributed to the different perspectives of creators. For creative professionals in many fields, GenAI presents an entirely new form of creative assistance tool (Doshi & Hauser, 2023; J. Li et al., 2024; Pearson, 2023). Research taking the creator perspective has emphasized potentials and opportunities (Kshetri et al., 2024), with GenAI potentially enabling new modes and fields of work (Inie et al., 2023).

Despite these promises, GenAI often still constitutes a "shiny hammer in search of nails" (Vardi, 2021, p. 7). In this regard, it becomes inevitable to shift the focus from potentials to the actual behavior of content creators - both in terms of *why* they use (or do not use) GenAI for content creation and *how* it impacts the content creation process from their view (Hua et al., 2024; Lin & Ng, 2024). Only by understanding their perspective and the evolving ways in which humans interact with GenAI in social media content creation can we truly grasp how GenAI can be valuable to help creators navigate the pressure to produce high-quality content in short time, which new activities and skills are required for its successful utilization, and how it might impact social media content creation in the future.

3. Methodology

This paper is exploratory and investigates the experiences of individual creators. Therefore, it adopts a qualitative research approach, which allows a nuanced exploration of personal perspectives, capturing rich, contextualized insights that quantitative methods may overlook (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection to enable flexibility and elicit nuanced and extensive responses (Adams, 2015; Myers & Newman, 2007).

3.1. Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were conducted remotely and ranged from 30 minutes to about an hour. Participants were given the option to be interviewed in German or English; two chose English as it was their native language, while the rest chose German. The sessions were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. We decided on an inductive approach to data collection characterized by open questions, as it allowed us to gain an in-depth, novel understanding of the creators' perspectives on using GenAI for social media content creation instead of limiting our inquiry to predefined theoretical categories. Thus, following a brief personal introduction to understand the interviewee's background and content, the interviews focused on the creators' use experience with GenAI and their perceived benefits and drawbacks of GenAI for social media content creation.

3.2. Sample selection

The sample comprised 26 self-identifying content creators actively producing image and video content on social media platforms, recruited through purposeful sampling (Table 1). To qualify for participation, creators needed experience in using GenAI for their content creation to be able to reflect on the creation process and positive and negative experiences with the technology. Furthermore, we required participants to have more than 500 followers on their main platform to ensure a minimum of content creation experience. The creators were recruited through purposeful sampling and snowballing. Eight creators responded to calls on social media and searches for AI-generated content on various platforms, three were recommended to the researchers, and 15 were recruited by an external agency. After about 20 interviews, results became highly repetitive, and theoretical saturation was deemed reached after the 26th interview (Hennink et al., 2016).

3.3. Analysis procedure

We adopted an exploratory, inductive approach as we aimed to develop an entirely new understanding of how GenAI impacts social media content creation from the perspective of creators. Thus, to investigate patterns in individual experiences, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen due to its suitability for exploratory research designs and procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis followed the phases of data familiarization, generating codes, creating themes, revising and defining themes, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, the interviews were initially transcribed, relevant quotes within the data were identified, and inductively coded. The inductive coding was refined over three coding iterations, resulting in 644 initial codes. Subsequently, these initial codes were inductively clustered into 31 sub-clusters and 14 clusters and finally categorized into overarching themes. After discussion and revision in the author team, the thematic analysis resulted in five themes, with three themes describing the interaction between content creators and GenAI and two themes relating to the benefits and drawbacks of GenAI for social media content creation (Table 2).

4. Results

In terms of how GenAI impacts social media content creation from the perspective of creators, we discovered three main themes that align with different activities of the content creation process (Miguel et al., 2024): ideation, creation, and editing and verification.

Table 1. Interviewed content creators, their used platforms, followers and age

Name	Instagram	TikTok	Other	Age
C1	1200	300	-	24
C2	600	300	Artstation	23
C3	4000	-	YouTube	25
C4	1800	1200	YouTube	31
C5	700	-	-	22
C6	800	600	-	26
C7	1200	5600	LinkedIn	36
C8	2000	-	-	32
C9	5200	-	Threads	28
C10	31900	300	X, YT, FB	46
C11	9400	-	-	29
C12	3800	-	Blog	40
C13	900	-	-	31
C14	1100	-	-	22
C15	15600	-	Blog	27
C16	2700	-	Blog	45
C17	2800	-	Blog	39
C18	500	6000	-	20
C19	12000	1000	-	40
C20	2500	-	-	33
C21	6700	-	-	51
C22	2000	-	-	40
C23	26000	-	-	42
C24	14400	-	-	53
C25	1700	-	-	39
C26	1000	700	-	18

4.1. Theme 1: GenAI for ideation

Nearly all interviewees reported interaction with GenAI for ideation. When trying to find ideas for potential content, creators described using brainstorming or similar techniques with text-based GenAI, such as ChatGPT, to gain ideas. This ranged from highly specialized topics to ideas mirroring currently popular content. Creators also highlighted that through GenAI, they could receive additional ideas to their own: “So I think you can actually get a lot of new ideas from it. [. . .]. So you can also ask the GPT, yes, what is currently trending [...] And then you can orient yourself a little bit on that.” (C26).

With a rough idea for content, co-ideation with GenAI shifted to the creators aiming to gain more concrete ideas for content outlines, e.g., in the form of scripts and storyboards for videos or sketches for images. These outlines provided a base for actual content creation or aided in visualizing the further process. For example, C5 shared an example where they created sketches to visualize a storyboard for a video, while C15 generated a script outline for a travel video.

Additionally, some creators also reported using GenAI as an alternative information source for content instead of looking up and summarizing information themselves. All forms of ideation-related activities were described as co-creating ideas together with the GenAI,

yet they took place before any content was actually created. As C7 put it: "I think it's like an initial source of ideas, but you also have to be creative yourself." (C7). Thus, content production is still subject to change, and it is sometimes difficult to determine the contribution of GenAI to the final product based on this stage.

4.2. Theme 2: GenAI for creation

The second form of human-GenAI interaction concerns creating the actual content pieces. On the one hand, creators used GenAI to create additions or parts of their content. The most frequently reported activity was small graphics and isolated images in addition to the overall content. Several creators (C7, C11, C17) reported that these generations replaced stock content. However, it also allowed them to visualize otherwise challenging scenarios (C7). A second major use case was formulating captions, while two creators (C17, C19) also noted using GenAI to create voice-overs.

On the other hand, creators employed GenAI to change existing content. Mostly, creators would edit their content through GenAI. For example, by rewriting captions, generating background elements (C17), removing elements (C10), or extending a picture's resolution (C15). Additionally, several creators felt that they could eliminate time-consuming searches for content and instead create very personalized solutions that fit their purpose. Lastly, creators also translated their content with GenAI (C7, C12, C19, C22, C25) to reach a broader audience or to provide a better experience to their target group with less effort.

Additionally, many creators perceived GenAI as enabling. For a small subgroup (C8, C9, C24), it has even become their primary tool to create content. In their words, they would not be able to create their own content otherwise. The enabling role particularly covered creating image-based content, with the creators giving examples of producing digital art, sketches, photography, or performing photo editing with GenAI. As C8 reports: "I couldn't draw a decent stick figure if you asked. [...] it's a great way to get people with a creative mindset but lack the physical know-how to bring their thoughts to life." (C8).

4.3. Theme 3: Editing and verification

The described human-GenAI interactions also introduced entirely new activities to the creation process. While the previous themes covered additions to the existing process, this theme covers activities that are only required when GenAI is used. Nearly all GenAI users reported editing the final output to meet their standards. Regarding text-based informational content, they emphasized the importance of verifying the content before distributing it. Creators noted that they were introducing an information verification step into their workflow due to GenAI's frequent hallucinations. These hallucinations lead content creators to necessitate either comprehensive prior knowledge or additional research to verify the information and, therefore, create more work. As C7 puts it: "You also have to be careful with false information, so it's easy to be misled, for example, if someone isn't familiar with it." In this regard, some creators (C16-C19) emphasized that GenAI was not producing helpful output for niche knowledge.

A further activity arising among nearly all content creators was quality improvement. They commented that there were regular issues when the GenAI failed to produce output that met their standards. This flaw frequently required them to go through various iterations to improve said content. Even inspirational output often required more effort than initially expected, as creators had to prompt the GenAI iteratively to gain ideas of suitable quality (C4, C7, C10-13, C15-20, C23-26). For images, the quality issues primarily centered around realism, e.g., of hands and faces, but also included difficulties in portraying more abstract prompts, such as "strategy" (C7). For texts, the most frequently reported issue was a lack of depth, often described as "yapping" (C17). Additionally, many creators were fearful that the content would not only lack creativity but also reproduce biases, such as racial stereotypes (C1, C2, C5, C9, C11, C13). As a last point, the reproduction of a consistent style was described to require much more effort than it would by other means (C5, C7, C13).

Connected to these new activities, creators also had to acquire new skills (C5, C7, C9, C12-21, C23, C24). First and foremost, creators noted verbalization as an important skill in their creative work, i.e., finding the right ways to describe the desired output. Moreover, most creators explained that they tried to reduce the time for quality control and verification by improving their prompting skills to produce better results, mostly through discovering and reusing well-functioning prompts. Beyond that, creators reported learning about and applying specific prompt engineering techniques.

4.4. Theme 4: Creation facilitation as benefit

The benefits of GenAI that creators perceived centered around facilitating their content creation process, with convenience being the most prominently perceived benefit. GenAI allowed a lot of gruesome work, like searching for stock material, to be eliminated: "It just makes my work easier" (C24). Furthermore,

Table 2. Overview of the themes and clusters identified through inductive coding

Theme	Cluster	Subcluster	Creators
Theme 1: GenAI for ideation	Brainstorming		C3-7, 12, 14, 15, 17-20, 25, 26
	Outline	Script	C5, 7, 12, 14-17, 26
		Sketch	C1, 5, 7, 12-14, 26
	Information source		C7, 14, 16-18, 20
Theme 2: GenAI for creation	Content additions	Image	C2, 5, 7, 11-13, 16, 17, 19, 22, 26
		Captions	C7, 13-15, 17, 20, 24-26
		Audio	C17, 19
	Content changing	Editing	C10, 12-15, 17, 24, 26
		Personalization	C7, 12-14, 25
		Translation	C7, 12, 19, 22, 25
	Enabler		C2, 8, 9, 13-16, 19, 21, 23, 24
Theme 3: Editing and verification	Information verification	Hallucination	C7, 12-18, 20, 22
		Niche knowledge	C16-19
	Quality improvements	Unsatisfactory output	C4, 7, 10-13, 15-20, 23-26
		Realism	C4, 5, 7, 11-13, 16, 17, 22, 23, 26
		Yapping	C7, 14, 15, 17, 24
		Bias reproduction	C1, 2, 5, 9, 11, 13
		Reproducibility	C5, 7, 13
	New Skills	Verbalization	C7, 13, 14, 16-19, 21, 23, 24
		Prompting skills	C5, 7, 9, 12-14, 16
		Prompt engineering	C12, 13, 15-17, 20, 24
Theme 4: Benefits	Creation facilitation	Convenience	C3, 7, 9, 11-14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23-26
		Time saving	C7, 9, 12, 14-17, 22-25
		Sparring partner	C5, 7, 8, 15, 22, 24, 25
		Increased audience	C16, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25
		Quality improvement	C11, 14, 15, 24, 25
		Doing mode	C7, 26
Theme 5: Creative and competitive drawbacks	Generic content	Human creativity	C1-9, 12, 14-21
		Missing originality	C2, 3, 5-7, 16
	Legal repercussions	Copyright	C2, 7-9, 13-15, 21, 22
		Personal data	C12, 19, 24, 26
		Liability risk	C7, 16, 22
	Social media dynamics	Reality distortion	C3, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19-26
		Competition	C7, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21
		Labelling	C2-4, 13, 14, 20-23, 25, 26
	Rejection	Existing personal skills	C1-4, 10, 11, 21-23
		Ethical concerns	C1, 2, 4, 6, 21, 22
		Artistic claims	C2, 17, 21

information could be gathered and summarized more easily and become digestible. As a result, GenAI acted as a huge time saver (C7, C9, C12, C14-17, C22-25): "I would say the biggest thing is how much of a time saver it is. I am able to get out much more content and kind of get my ideas out there much quicker than I would be able to with traditional art." (C9)

For ideation specifically, creators reported GenAI as being especially helpful in starting the process when they struggled to find inspiration. Through the ease with which ideas can be generated, creators described more easily entering a "doing mode" (C7, C26). In this context, about half of the creators noted that, since working alone, using GenAI as a sparring partner was a huge benefit. It could provide them with additional perspectives that they would otherwise have missed, which, in turn, was perceived to enrich their overall content by making it more diverse.

Through all of these benefits, some creators also expected to increase their audience (C16, C18, C19, C22, C24, C25), for example, through higher quality, more perspectives, or further languages. Similarly, some creators (C11, C14, C15, C24, C25) hoped to improve their content quality through GenAI, as it opened new avenues for them, such as adding visualizations.

4.5. Theme 5: Creative and competitive drawbacks

However, our fifth theme also revealed several creative and competitive drawbacks content creators saw in using GenAI in social media content creation. Nearly all interviewees voiced concerns that prevalent GenAI use results in generic content. Based on their experiences, the content provided by GenAI is often too uncreative and lacks originality. Creators

attributed GenAI's unoriginality to the fact that GenAI's capabilities are based on the content it has been trained on, and thus, it cannot create something entirely new. Furthermore, they felt that GenAI often produced repetitive content and would thus amplify the trend of copying successful content while, in the long run, reducing individuality and creativity. Instead, creators identified human creativity as a deciding factor. The vast majority took pride in their creative skills and considered them to set them apart from purely GenAI-generated content. In this regard, some also expressed concerns that this human creativity might partially be lost in the long run if creators were to rely too heavily on technology (C15). They argued that not only are humans able to create superior content, but also that they expected consumers to prefer human-made content: "So I'm probably not the only one using AI, and in my opinion, the creativity is partly lost, and that's why I would maybe just test it [...], And I think that people are, as things stand now, even more creative than ChatGPT or something similar, so I would be afraid that all the content would all be the same, and become boring, and nobody would watch it." (C20)

Furthermore, creators were afraid that using GenAI might create legal repercussions for them. They voiced uncertainty about whether they truly hold the copyright of the content, e.g., images created using GenAI. For some creators, this uncertainty led them to restrict their usage to a minimum or to focus on ideation rather than actual content creation. In a similar vein, some creators were unsure of how their personal data would be used by their chosen GenAI, therefore opting to avoid using it for sensitive topics, cooperations, or sponsorships. For these reasons, C7, C16, and C22 feared that using GenAI would present a liability risk, which caused them to be especially careful and reinforced their verification and quality-checking behavior.

There was also some concern that GenAI might cause a change in social media dynamics. A major fear creators expressed was that extensive use might cause a reality distortion (C3, C10, C13, C14, C17, C19-26). With the already abundantly staged content on social media, they feared GenAI use would create an even more misconstrued image of reality. They were especially sensitive to this topic around political content, fearing easier distribution of fake news and misinformation. Furthermore, they lamented the perception that young people, particularly, might gain from the content consumed, for example, around their body images. C10 compared this to heavily edited content through Photoshop: "Well, the risk is that you can no longer be sure what is and isn't reality. [...] You already had that before with Photoshop. You could already change and do so much in Photoshop beforehand that you always have to keep an eye on whether what I'm seeing is reality." (C10). Additionally, some creators felt that through GenAI, unfair competition was created, as, depending on use, it would enable more people to create content while also allowing faster creation, which would disadvantage those not employing it. Therefore, many creators advocated for labeling GenAI content, providing more transparency, and involving consumers in the discussion around the drawbacks of GenAI.

Interestingly, some creators chose to limit their use or stopped using GenAI entirely. A major reason for this was the perceived lack of benefit due to existing personal skills (C1-4, C10, C11, C21-23). Creators reporting this drawback felt they could easily work without GenAI. While they acknowledged the benefits, they still felt that their skills outweighed the learning effort required to produce similar results with GenAI. In this context, C4 especially highlighted the pressure to create regular content rather than learning about GenAI. The boycott on ethical grounds (C1, C2, C4, C6, C21, C22), on the other hand, stemmed from two issues: the fact that data sourcing for model training relies on scraped data for which the original creators were not compensated and the fear that the widespread use of GenAI could lead to job loss in the future, endangering their own employment. C2 emphasized that these concerns also prevented creators from using GenAI that would otherwise be happy to employ it: "I would also love to do it (use GenAI) [...] If I knew that it was all ethically sourced, so to speak, then I would be very, very happy to do it." Lastly, three creators (C2, C17, C21) rejected GenAI based on artistic claims. Referring to originality and creativity, they felt that using GenAI did not satisfy this claim and thus refused to use it in their process.

5. Discussion

The results of our exploratory study adopting the creators' perspective on using GenAI in social media content creation indicate a shift in the way social media content is created. They shed light on how GenAI changes the role of the human creator in the content creation process (Kshetri et al., 2024) - and how it helps creators navigate the tension between the pressure to produce high-quality content (Agichtein et al., 2008) and the pressure to produce content quickly in an ever-increasing flood of information (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Dahm & Heydenreich, 2024). Synthesizing our findings, we identify three main observations regarding the interaction of human content

creators and GenAI in the content creation process that help us understand how GenAI can truly be valuable in helping creators produce high-quality content in a short time, which new activities and skills are required for its successful utilization, and how it might impact social media content creation in the future.

First, we see that the productive interaction between creators and GenAI mostly takes place early in the creation process, i.e., in planning and ideation (Miguel et al., 2024; Weber et al., 2021). Creators emphasize using GenAI for brainstorming, content outlines, and information search. Especially in the cases of sole creators using GenAI as sparring partners, we can observe a shift in the creative workflow from purely human-based creativity to co-ideation, where both humans and GenAI contribute to a co-creative idea. In this regard, it is enlightening to see that human-GenAI interaction in social media content creation has reached a significant step in human-computer co-creativity (Hoffmann, 2016).

Conversely, in actual content creation, considering the drawbacks of originality and potential legal repercussions for content created by GenAI that have also been voiced in other creative contexts (Inie et al., 2023; J. Li et al., 2024), GenAI mostly takes supporting jobs of content addition, personalization, translation or reformulation, which facilitates the content creation process on the human side by making it more convenient and less time-intense than before. This observation matches the perspectives of creative professionals in other fields (Inie et al., 2023) and indicates that GenAI can indeed aid content creators in navigating the increased pressure for efficient content creation (Dahm & Heydenreich, 2024), which does not necessarily come at the expense of quality. Moreover, while serious concerns regarding the originality, artistic claims, and ethical issues of GenAI remain, we find that GenAI can also enable content creation and fuel content creators' self-expression as an important driver of social media content creation (Matikainen, 2015; Shao, 2009). The more creators choose to employ GenAI, the more their act of self-expression might change from handcrafting, such as image drawing, to creating complex prompts (Epstein et al., 2023). As such, GenAI-assisted content creation may not necessarily be at odds with consumers' expectations - rather than replacing the human origin that consumers vastly prefer (Hitsuwari et al., 2023; Zhang & Gosline, 2023), responsible use by content creators can bring creative human ideas to life in new ways.

Finally, the more GenAI is utilized for creating actual content, the more the role of human creators changes toward a creative director of the social

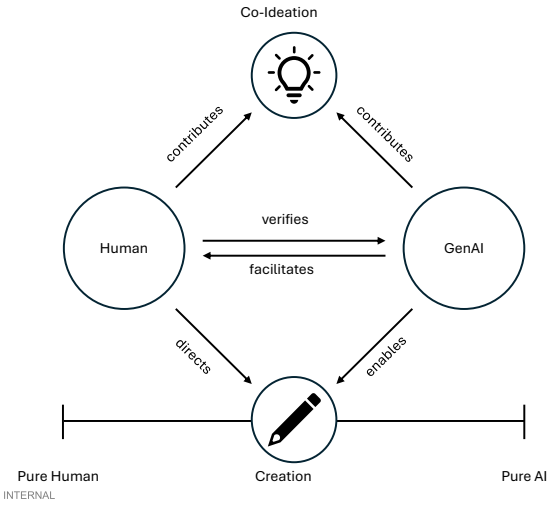

Figure 1. Human-GenAI Interaction in Social Media Content Creation from the Creators' Perspective

media content creation process, with the creator commissioning content from the AI. Given frequent hallucinations and concerns about reality distortion due to the inflation of GenAI-supported content, human creators are required to verify the content additions or changes suggested by their GenAI counterparts. Further, previously important creative and artistic skills (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2020) become less important than verbalization, prompting, and prompt engineering to control the content created by GenAI and avoid unsatisfactory outputs and quality issues.

From our main observations, we can derive a novel view of social media content creation that is shaped by ideation and creation triangles of human-GenAI interaction, where human creators and GenAI take different roles in the creation process (Figure 1). The ideation triangle that prevails at the beginning of the creation process is characterized by creative co-ideation with equal contributions from human creators and GenAI (observation 1). Conversely, the creation triangle, which becomes relevant in the actual media creation process, is shaped by different contributions of human creators and GenAI. While GenAI acts as a facilitator and enabler of content creation (observation 2), human creators primarily take on the role of a creative director who verifies and controls the created content (observation 3).

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

The insights gathered based on our interviews and the derived theoretical conceptualization of human-GenAI interaction in social media content

creation have important implications for both further research and practice. From a theoretical perspective, our findings underscore that content creation is not a solitary endeavor by creators or GenAI but a fluid, collaborative process with varying degrees of involvement from both. While previously, creators had to go through ideation (Miguel et al., 2024; Weber et al., 2021) all by themselves, GenAI can now take the role of an assistant that enables co-ideation processes. It can actively take over parts of inspiration, like searching social media for trends or similar impulses (Y. Li et al., 2022; Zhang & Capra, 2019). However, unlike previous tools used to support the creative process of creators, GenAI changes from a mere assistant to human creation to an active agent in the creative process. Consequently, the introduction of GenAI into content creation can shift the creators' role toward that of a controller, instead of being the sole creator.

This may have critical implications for the perception of content creation on social media at its core and whether it still constitutes a creative, artistic form of self-expression (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2020; Matikainen, 2015). In other contexts, such as art (Heikkilä, 2022), GenAI has already led to humans no longer being regarded as true "artists" or "creators". This is particularly relevant for creators relying heavily on GenAI in the creation process. While the enabling nature allows more people to become creators, there has also been evidence that "GenAI creators" aim to monetize their work more than "human creators"(Wei & Tyson, 2024). This underscores the fears we identified regarding ethical rejection of GenAI. Thus, especially in joint consideration of the critical consumer perspective towards GenAI creators (Hitsuwari et al., 2023; Zhang & Gosline, 2023), it remains to be understood how this novel content creation process changes the self-perception of content creators, as well as the conceptions of their fellow creators and consumers about what kind of activity content creation actually is.

These changing roles additionally bring new responsibilities. The more creators take the role of a controller, the more important editing and verification activities become. Studies indicate that creators tend to be hesitant in disclosing GenAI use, yet consumers are sometimes struggling to distinguish between real and artificially generated content (Park et al., 2024). This mismatch introduces an ethical responsibility into the content creation process (Hua et al., 2024; Park et al., 2024). While fact-checking as described by our participants is an obvious example, the ethical concerns surrounding questionable training datasets (Allred & Aragon, 2023) and the lack of diversity of GenAI content (Wei & Tyson, 2024) warrant a critical reflection of the input that GenAI provides in any part of the content creation process, from ideas to the final product. In order to understand how GenAI could transform social media content creation in a way that aligns with ethical norms, more research is needed to understand the skills and knowledge human creators need to navigate this ethical responsibility in the content creation process.

The shift we observe in the creation process also brings further practical implications. Through the more convenient and facilitated creation process, GenAI could alleviate some of the pressure creators face to rapidly create content (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). Conversely, through the enabling nature of GenAI, more people can become content creators on social media (Wei & Tyson, 2024). As creators already compete for visibility (Cotter, 2018), the introduction of further players might as well amplify competition. While for top-tier creators, this might not be an issue, smaller creators might struggle (Wei & Tyson, 2024) or find themselves forced to adopt GenAI themselves to keep up. Conversely, if they fail to build the skills necessary to benefit from the enabling and creative potential of GenAI while at the same time avoiding pitfalls related to originality, quality, and ethical concerns, this pressure might clash with consumers' preferences (J. Li et al., 2024; Zhang & Gosline, 2023). As such, creators will have to walk a fine line in employing GenAI to facilitate their process while concurrently not alienating their audience. A focus on quality control and originality through the mastery of the new required skills might represent the best path toward finding this balance.

6. Limitations and future research

We provide exploratory insights into how GenAI impacts social media content creation from the perspectives of different creators. While this offered a new foundational understanding of the shifting roles and creative expression of creators, our generalist approach is also a limiting factor that future studies could expand upon. Social media content creation is diverse, and GenAI could hold a different value depending on the context of the creator, e.g. political content creators might use GenAI differently than a beauty influencer. Future studies could thus expand upon this research by investigating how the interaction triangles differ between content categories. Similarly, we have shown that GenAI is particularly employed in areas where creators lack skills, such as image creation. Future research should thus look into the link between prior skills and GenAI use to further understand how these predispositions affect human-GenAI interaction. Lastly, 24 of our participants reside in Germany. Thus, our

results likely reflect its socio-cultural landscape, and further comparisons with other cultures could help prove cross-cultural generalizability of our findings.

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