

AI AND POLITICS: DO POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES INFLUENCE PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON AI?

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (AI), with its potential to disrupt several industries, including the art industry, has been a controversial subject of discussion in mainstream newspapers. To understand the impact of political ideologies on this controversy, this study compares concerns about AI-generated art between liberals and conservatives in the United Kingdom. Data comprised comments of readers of the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* on a news story about an award-winning AI artwork at the Colorado State Fair, a topic that has stirred up controversies over various AI-related issues. Keyword analysis was conducted to indicate the overall concerns and to identify similarities and differences in opinions between the readers of both newspapers. A thematic analysis was then performed, and the frequencies of each theme within the two data sets were also examined to highlight the perspectives of each group of readers. Overall, in contrast to much existing literature, the findings indicate that the similarities noticeably outweigh the differences, and the differences are not immediately relevant to AI. Instead, the readers used the topic of AI as a segue to talk about other concerns. This finding suggests that political beliefs about AI are not yet entrenched.

Keywords

generative AI, art, political beliefs, Midjourney, keyword analysis, thematic analysis

1 Introduction

The widespread availability of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, like ChatGPT for text and Midjourney for images, has led to increased interest in their potential impacts on society. The ability of AI to compute and execute projects with unparalleled accuracy and speed, often surpassing human capabilities, has significantly enhanced workplace efficiency and diminished costs, catalyzing transformative shifts across numerous industries. The rapid adoption of AI is noteworthy, and there are indications that it will continue to evolve, becoming faster, more sophisticated, and more deeply integrated into societal frameworks, akin to a 'digital revolution' (Gates, 2023; Makridakis, 2017).

Despite the commendable speed and efficiency of these tools, concerns have arisen, as they threaten to replace humans in occupations across various sectors (Mirbabaie et al., 2022). This apprehension extends even to traditionally secure positions in fields like journalism (Biswal & Gouda, 2020), medicine (Topol, 2019), and areas traditionally associated with human creativity, such as art

(Matthews et al., 2023). The transformative potential of AI, while promising, raises ethical considerations and prompts a reevaluation of the societal implications of its integration into various aspects of human life.

The emergence of deep neural networks capable of learning aesthetics from datasets of example images has given rise to text-to-image models like Midjourney and Stable Diffusion. These machine learning applications synthesize digital art using deep generative models trained on text-image pairs obtained from the internet. By utilizing natural language input, these programs can generate diverse images and artworks (Oppenlaender, 2022). Ongoing advancements in these models empower users to employ style modifiers to guide the output and incorporate metrics for assessing output quality (Lee et al., 2023). The iterative process involved in generating art through this medium poses a challenge for artists seeking to harness this tool for artistic expression (Oppenlaender, 2023). These developments mean that AI-generated images can be of high quality but raise the question of whether generative AI is a legitimate tool for artists to use.

The widespread accessibility of AI tools for generating art has sparked debate over their role in the art community. With the ability to produce high-quality images solely based on text prompts, ethical and philosophical questions arise. One such question is whether AI text-to-image output can be deemed creative. Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) systems model of creativity comprises three integral components: the idea, the domain (rooted in cultural context), and the field (encompassing gatekeepers). According to this model, social validation is a prerequisite for considering something as creative. Therefore, the assessment of AI-generated output within artistic circles and the ensuing debate about its position in the artistic realm are key to deciding whether AI-generated images should be considered art.

Traditionally, art philosophy delineates art as a human endeavor grounded in culture, context, and systematic processes, distinguishing it from mere imitation or spontaneous activity (Adajian, 2024). AI-generated images have demonstrated an ability to be virtually indistinguishable from those created by humans (Gangadharbatla, 2022; Köbis & Mossink, 2021), even by art experts (Gu & Li, 2022). Despite this, studies reveal a prevailing negative bias against art labeled as AI-generated, with preferences consistently leaning towards human-created art. Judgments favoring human-created art as more beautiful, profound, and valuable persist even when labels of 'human-created' and 'AI-created' are randomly assigned or reversed (Bellaiche et al., 2023; Gu & Li, 2022; Millet et al., 2023).

Millet et al. (2023) propose that this bias against AI-created art reflects a challenge to anthropocentric perspectives, suggesting that the production of

high-quality AI art challenges the notion that creativity is an exclusive domain of human endeavor. This argument contends that the success of AI in tasks traditionally considered quintessentially human, or those imbued with higher symbolic value, such as art, challenges the belief that human properties like soul, emotion, or suffering hold exclusive and meaningful value.

One significant concern over these tools on artists is the potential threat to creative professions, including graphic designers, illustrators, and artists, as clients increasingly turn to digital alternatives for faster and more cost-effective solutions (Jiang et al., 2023). Another pressing concern is that of plagiarism. Given that AI image generators are trained on existing examples of art, including copyrighted material, there exists the risk of copyright infringement. With their ability to access images in their databases, AI-image generators may risk unauthorized use and reproduction of copyrighted content. More importantly, and perhaps unfortunately, this opens the door to potential digital forgery or the misuse of image generators for illicit purposes, such as generating deep-fake images for political deception (Jiang et al., 2023; Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

Amidst ongoing public controversies surrounding the definitions of art, Joseph Allen's submission, *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial*, emerged victorious in the Colorado State Fair's art contest in August 2022. The noteworthy aspect of Allen's win lies in the utilization of Midjourney, an AI tool, to create the artwork, sparking considerable debate. The controversy surrounding the victory prompted organizers of the event to reevaluate their submission criteria for subsequent competitions (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/this-state-fair-changed-its-rules-after-a-piece-made-with-ai-won-last-year-180982867/>). The impact of Allen's win reverberated through major newspapers, including *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*, further fueling the public discourse on the implications of AI-generated art. This study centers on the public debate spurred by this victory.

2 Influences on artistic taste

While reactions to art are often viewed as personal and subjective, research has shown some common preferences in artistic taste and identified factors shaping individuals' aesthetic preferences. In an exploration employing twin dimensions of abstract versus representational art and curved versus angular visuals, Zenner (2020) found a widespread inclination toward representational and curved images.

Personality traits, aesthetic preferences and political affiliations have been shown to be interlinked. For example, a penchant for representational art tends to be associated with high conscientiousness and neuroticism (Chamorro-Premuzic et

al., 2009); openness tends to predict a left-wing alignment, while conscientiousness is associated with more conservative leanings (Ekstrom & Federico, 2019); and conservatives exhibit a preference for representational art (Wilson et al., 1973). These findings contribute to the understanding of potential connections between personality, artistic preferences and political inclinations.

Past research has shed light on the intricate relationship between artistic preference and political ideologies. Carl et al. (2019), investigating art preferences and support for Brexit, further support these associations. They observed that Brexit supporters, who lean conservative, were more inclined to prefer representational art. The link between conservatives' higher conscientiousness and neuroticism and their potential lower tolerance for ambiguity and greater need for closure may contribute to a diminished appreciation for abstract art. Aesthetics and judgments of taste in art, then, are cultivated and influenced by social pressures (Greenberg, 2000). The interplay between political leanings, cultural values, and individual perceptions of beauty and taste in art reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of how individuals engage with and interpret artistic expressions within broader societal contexts.

3 Investigating the influence of political beliefs

News media play a crucial role as conduits for political content and perspectives, and in the United Kingdom, this political divide is often exemplified by two prominent newspapers with opposing ideologies: *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*. *The Guardian*, a left-of-center broadsheet, espouses a liberal ideology and attracts a younger and more educated readership (Thurman & Fletcher, 2019). On the other hand, the *Daily Mail*, a right-leaning tabloid, is popular among middle to working-class readers and supports an anti-liberal stance. Both newspapers wield significant influence within their respective communities.

The political polarization of these two newspapers is evident in their divergent perspectives on issues such as populism, immigration, and Brexit (Demata et al., 2020; Delannoy, 2019). For instance, in the lead-up to the Brexit vote in 2016, the *Daily Mail* portrayed the EU as detrimental to British national interests, while *The Guardian* advocated for Remain. The differences in the political positions mean that the readership of these newspapers represents different political viewpoints. Comments by readers of each newspaper, then, should explicitly show the concerns of that political group. Collecting and analyzing the comments on an article about AI art in newspapers with different political standpoints is a promising approach for identifying how liberals and conservatives differ in their perspectives on this issue.

4 Methodology

This research originated in a competition to elicit research topics in applied linguistics from the general public (see Watson Todd, 2023). [The winning idea to investigate political attitudes to AI-generated art was submitted by Suttipong Phansomboon, an undergraduate student of engineering at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi.]. This paper investigates the similarities and differences in the concerns about AI art of liberals and conservatives. By examining the comments of readers of the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* on the topic of AI-generated art winning an art competition, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of liberals concerning AI-generated art?
2. What are the beliefs of conservatives concerning AI-generated art?
3. What are the similarities or differences between the beliefs of the two groups?

By linking attitudes to AI-generated art and political beliefs, the findings of the study may shed light on the likely roles of AI art generators in the future. For example, as governments come under increasing pressure to regulate AI, the concerns that political groups' politicians represent may influence such regulations.

4.1 Data collection

To investigate attitudes towards AI-generated art, we used reader comments on newspaper articles, one from *The Guardian* representing liberal attitudes (e.g., de Burgh, 2008), and one from the *Daily Mail* representing conservative attitudes (e.g., Delannoy, 2019). To facilitate a comparison, we looked for two articles providing similar coverage of a news story concerning AI art generation. In addition, both newspapers needed to allow readers to comment on the story, and there should be roughly the same number of comments. A news story fitting these criteria concerns the winning of the Colorado State Fair arts competition in 2022 by an AI-generated artwork submitted by Jason Allen. The award sparked controversy and was reported in popular media, including both newspapers (<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/sep/24/an-old-master-no-its-an-image-ai-just-knocked-up-and-it-cant-be-copyrighted> and <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-11169535/Human-creators-uproar-AI-generated-photo-wins-place-Colorado-art-competition.html>). A total of 410 comments were taken from the two online newspapers: 193 from the *Daily Mail*, and 217 from *The Guardian*. The *Daily Mail* corpus consisted of roughly 4,000 words, and *The Guardian* corpus of roughly 14,000 words.

4.2 Data analysis

To provide multiple perspectives on the data, we used mixed-methods data analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). To gain an overview of the concerns in each set of comments, we first treated the data as two corpora and conducted keyword analyses to identify salient concepts in each corpus. Selected keywords were then investigated in depth through concordance lines. To identify shared and disparate concerns across the comments within each corpus, we conducted a deductive thematic analysis manually and analyzed the frequencies of each theme in the two data sets and also what each set of readers had to say about each theme.

4.2.1 Keyword analysis

Keywords are words which are relatively more frequent in a target corpus when compared to a benchmark corpus. Keywords can be indicative of the main concerns of the target corpus since they provide information suggesting what the corpus is about (Scott & Tribble, 2006). Conducting a keyword analysis requires decisions to be made at several stages. First, the corpora to be compared need to be identified. In this case, we had two corpora, the *Daily Mail* corpus and *The Guardian* corpus. To see how concerns differ, we compared each corpus (the target corpus) against the other (the benchmark corpus) using AntConc (Anthony, 2019). Second, we need to choose a method for measuring the differences between the two corpora. Given that our corpora consisted of numerous very short texts, dispersion was not an appropriate measure. Instead, we used relative frequency, and, since we were interested in the aboutness of the corpora, we used probability statistics rather than an effect size statistic (see Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2018), namely, log likelihood (LL). Third, we need to set a cutoff threshold above which words are considered key. The higher the LL value, the more significant the word, but LL values are heavily influenced by corpus size. Given that our corpora were quite small, we decided to focus on only the top 10 keywords in each corpus as indicators of different attitudes, values and concerns. For similarities, we examined those words which appear at very similar proportional frequencies in the two corpora, in other words, those words whose LL value is very close to zero and whose overall frequency is at least three.

The keyword analyses produced three lists of keywords: words of particular concern in the *Daily Mail* comments, words of particular concern in *The Guardian* comments, and words which appear similarly in the two corpora. For each list, concordance lines were generated for each keyword, and those which appeared particularly insightful were presented for interpretation.

4.2.2 Thematic analysis

To gain insights into the patterns of the overall concerns of the readers of the two newspapers, we conducted a thematic analysis. To identify themes, we used a deductive approach, basing our themes on concerns we had identified in the literature review. This allows the findings to be more easily compared to other studies. From the literature, six themes were identified (quotations are taken from the literature review of this article):

- Quality of art: the quality of finished art, especially that produced by Midjourney (“AI-generated images can be of high quality”) and comparisons of AI-generated and traditional art.
- Nature of art: comments on what does and does not constitute art (“the assessment of AI-generated output within artistic circles”; “art philosophy delineates art as a human endeavor”).
- Technology and art: the role of technology (including AI) in art (“whether generative AI is a legitimate tool for artists to use”), and role of technological changes in the past.
- AI capabilities: what AI is and what it can and cannot do, including discussion of how AI works (“machine learning applications synthesize digital art using deep generative models”, “unauthorized use and reproduction of copyrighted content”).
- Role of the artist: what role does the artist play, especially in AI art (“the iterative process involved in generating art through this medium”).
- Social impact: what the implications of AI-generated art are for society and the future (“threat to creative professions”).

These six themes were applied to both sets of reader comments, with each comment considered a single data entry coded only once. This enabled the majority of the comments to be coded. Uncoded comments fell into two categories. First, there were some comments which were purely textual in that they evaluated previous comments with no mention of the content (e.g., “Exaggerate much”) or which included obscure references which the coders could not understand (e.g., “Not a surprising when we are celebrating men with no cucumbers”). Second, there were some comments which discussed the Colorado State Fair arts competition, leading to the creation of a seventh theme:

- Competition: comments relating to the competition itself, such as the competition rules or the fairness of the decision.

Having set up the themes, a selection of 40 random comments was coded by two coders as an inter-rater reliability check, producing a Cohen’s kappa of 0.76, an acceptable level of reliability.

To investigate whether there are differences between themes in the two corpora, the frequencies of themes were counted and compared using chi-square. To examine similarities and differences within the themes, an in-depth interpretive qualitative analysis of the comments coded with the same theme in the two corpora was conducted. In presenting extracts to illustrate this analysis, we have kept the original form for all quotations, including mistakes.

5 Results

5.1 Keyword analyses

Before we examine the differences in the concerns of the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* readers, we will first examine shared concerns. Keywords with an LL value close to zero appear at roughly the same relative frequency in the two corpora and thus can indicate issues that the readers of both newspapers share concerns about. These common keywords are shown in Table 1.

Keywords
any
always
come
create
difference
industry
much
really
used

Table 1: Common keywords in both newspapers

For the content words that are common keywords, three salient patterns emerge from Table 1. First, there is some skepticism that human-generated and AI-generated art can be distinguished: “would you know the *difference*? I have my doubts” (*Daily Mail*), and “If it is a machine doing the creating, how many could tell the *difference*?” (*The Guardian*). Second, there is concern about the impacts of new technologies, including AI, on the creative industries: “CGI killed stunts in the film *industry* too” (*Daily Mail*), and “There is not a shadow of a doubt that AI will kill creative *industry*” (*The Guardian*). Third, readers of

both newspapers argue that AI is not genuinely creating art: “A computer can’t *create* like humans” (*Daily Mail*), and “it doesn’t have the ability to *create* actual art” (*The Guardian*), although *The Guardian* commenters also argue that true creation is rare for people: “relatively few humans actually *create*, they merely consume what others have *created*” (*The Guardian*). Despite their very different political views, the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* readers share skeptical views of AI-generated art and concerns about potential damage to creative industries.

As might be expected, the corpus-specific keywords show that there are also clear differences in the concerns and beliefs of the two sets of readers. To identify the concerns specific to the *Daily Mail* commenters, we examined the top 10 keywords ranked by LL using the *Daily Mail* comments as the target corpus and *The Guardian* comments as the benchmark corpus. These are shown in Table 2.

Ranking	Keyword	Log-Likelihood
1	better	39.64
2	modern	24.90
3	artists	20.30
4	humans	18.86
5	bed	18.67
6	telling	18.67
7	unmade	15.56
8	artistry	12.45
9	equivalent	12.45
10	liberal	12.45

Table 2: Top 10 keywords in the *Daily Mail* corpus

The majority of the *Daily Mail* keywords show that the commenters are more concerned with criticizing the quality of modern art than they are with AI-generated art. This can be seen through the keywords “*better*” (e.g., “It looks *better* than most of the art produced by famous human artists of the 20th and 21st century”), *unmade* and *bed* (e.g., “I like it, a LOT better than Tracey Emin’s ‘*unmade bed*’ !!!”), and *modern* and *liberal* (e.g., “This just goes to show how crap *modern liberal* art is.”). They appear to attribute the poor quality of modern art to the demise of *artistry*: “*Artistry* died years ago.” and “The death of *artistry* came years ago.” *The Daily Mail* readers, then, take the article about AI-generated art winning a competition as an opportunity to vent their feelings about modern art.

The only keyword which is clearly linked to issues of AI-generated art is, somewhat paradoxically, *humans*. The *Daily Mail* readers see AI-generated art as largely dependent on humans: “Did not a human/*humans* write the program/s that created the AI?” and “It very much involves *humans*, even more so than photography does”. This perspective, in fact, highlights the broader reality of AI’s role in artistic creation, where AI art is not entirely autonomous given its reliance on datasets composed of human inputs (Garcia, 2024). The issues that distinguish the *Daily Mail* readers from *The Guardian* readers, then, mostly concern the quality and processes of art. Although these readers are not clearly impressed with the quality of AI-generated art, they see it as better than modern art and appear to imply that people would be better employed using AI tools than creating modern art.

The keywords generated from *The Guardian* comments (see Table 3) show a greater range of concerns, but some themes do emerge.

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Log-Likelihood</i>
1	creativity	22.80
2	we	18.60
3	doing	13.29
4	learning	11.87
5	intelligence	10.92
6	doesn’t	9.49
7	where	9.49
8	produce	8.92
9	or	8.81
10	making	8.54

Table 3: Top 10 keywords in *The Guardian* corpus

While the keywords from the *Daily Mail* apparently show the readers’ concerns about the quality of the products, those of *The Guardian* appear to reflect wide-ranging discussions on the processes of creating art. *Creativity*, the highest-ranked keyword, is what defines art (e.g., “I would argue that *creativity* is a human need”). Other keywords include *produce* and *making* (e.g., “Pieces of art involve feelings and emotions and so can AI ever *produce* a piece of art that evokes a emotional response from the images produced?” and “However accurate, amazing and representational AI images are they can never replicate or harness the actual personal human experience of *making* art”). It is clear that the main argument from *The Guardian* comments is that true creativity, and thus

art, is human, which requires experience and emotion, providing support for the belief that AI is not genuinely creating art, that we saw was common to both newspapers.

A second theme is concerned with the nature of AI. The keywords include *learning* (e.g., “It is only by means of imitation. I don’t it’s the tool, and I prefer machine *learning* to AI”) and *intelligence* (e.g., “What’s the difference between machine *intelligence* and human *intelligence*? Or machine *learning* and human *learning*? And what is *intelligence* anyway?”), showing an understanding of the lack of clarity in defining AI.

While the function keywords cannot be directly linked to issues of content, two of these keywords have suggestive patterns. First, *we* is most commonly used as a generic inclusive pronoun implying an assumption of shared experiences and beliefs: “*We* live in a highly individualistic culture that teaches us *we* consume therefore *we* are”. This, therefore, likely suggests a greater sense of collective identity or shared experiences among *The Guardian* readers compared to those of the *Daily Mail*. Second, *doing* frequently has technology, including AI, as the subject, suggesting that AI takes an active role: “AI doesn’t know why it’s *doing* what it’s *doing*”. Overall, from the keywords, *The Guardian* comments not only show their preference for human-made arts over AI-created art but also are more clearly focused on AI and its impacts than the *Daily Mail* comments.

5.2 Thematic analyses

The comments were categorized using seven thematic categories, six derived from our review of the literature and one induced from the data. In Table 4, comments from each of the six deductively-derived themes appeared in both the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*, while the inductive theme concerning the arts competition only appeared in the *Daily Mail*. To see if the proportional themes in the two data sources were similar, we conducted a chi square analysis and found a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 52.67$; $df = 6$; $p < .0001$) with a medium effect size (Cramer’s $V = 0.16$), suggesting that there are different patterns of thematic concerns in the comments of the two newspapers. From Table 4, the two deductive themes with the largest differences between the two sources are Quality of art (more frequent in the *Daily Mail*) and AI capabilities (more frequent in *The Guardian*). Midjourney is a tool combining art and technology, and from this difference, we can tentatively suggest that the *Daily Mail* commenters are more concerned with the art aspects of Midjourney and *The Guardian* commenters are more concerned with the technology aspects.

Theme	The Daily Mail		The Guardian	
	F	%	F	%
Quality of art	27	17.53	10	5.38
Nature of art	44	28.57	65	34.95
Technology and art	20	12.99	33	17.74
AI capabilities	8	5.19	31	16.67
Role of the artist	8	5.19	22	11.83
Social impact	27	17.53	25	13.44
Competition	20	12.99	0	0.00

Table 4 Frequencies of comments in the two data sources

To investigate this tentative conclusion more deeply, we examined the nature of the comments from the two sources within each theme to see if the concerns of the two sets of commenters differed, in addition to the overall difference in the proportional frequencies of the themes.

5.2.1 Quality of art

Comments categorized as Quality of art, referring to the quality of Midjourney output, are noticeably more frequent in the *Daily Mail* than in *The Guardian*. These comments could be further sub-categorized into straightforward evaluations of Midjourney output and comparisons between Midjourney output and modern art. The number of straightforward evaluations is fairly similar between the two sources and both show ambivalence. A few comments in both evaluate Midjourney positively: “It actually looks good” (*Daily Mail*) and “If the outcome is beautiful most welcome” (*The Guardian*), but these are outnumbered in both sources by negative evaluations. Midjourney art is seen as kitsch and formulaic: “So AI creates kitsch! Who knew?!” (*Daily Mail*), “It’s not art. I’d describe it as ‘AI kitsch’” (*The Guardian*), “Technically proficient but with zero charm or character” (*Daily Mail*), and “There is an indefinable mundanity about them” (*The Guardian*). When viewing Midjourney art in isolation, then, the two sets of commenters hold similar views.

The major difference in the Quality of art between the two sources are those comments which compare Midjourney output with modern art. Such comments dominate the *Daily Mail* but are very rare in *The Guardian*, and it is the frequency of these comparison comments that is the cause of the difference in proportional frequencies for this category. The *Daily Mail* commenters take the article on Midjourney art as an opportunity to disparage modern art and the “liberal” groups and values associated with it. These criticisms are so dominant in the *Daily Mail* that five of the top ten keywords (*better, modern, bad, unmade,*

liberal) pervade these comparative comments. The focus of these comments is not to praise Midjourney art, at best, AI-generated art is viewed neutrally, but to denigrate modern art. For example, “The AI generated art is better than 99% of the garbage art that is created today” and “this image is x1,000 better than the post modern pooooo people are putting out as art these days”. The article on Midjourney art is seen by the *Daily Mail* commenters as an opportunity to inveigh against a related bugbear rather than focus on the issue of AI-generated art itself.

5.2.2 Nature of art

Since the Midjourney artwork won first place in an art competition, comments naturally centered around whether it does constitute a piece of art, and were therefore categorized as Nature of Art. These comments attempted to define ‘art’, with some going on to use this definition to decide on whether AI output such as *Théâtre D’opéra Spatial* can be considered art. Readers of both newspapers offered a variety of definitions of art. While there is a wider range of possible definitions in *The Guardian*, the responses in the two corpora are comparable. For instance, readers in both corpora define art as invoking an emotional response: “It has to provoke an emotional reaction or trigger a memory, or capture a moment. Some dull uninspired generic design by a computer does neither of those” (*The Guardian*) and “what makes art art, the ‘soul’ of the artist” (*Daily Mail*). *The Guardian* readers also emphasize the need for creativity (the top-ranked keyword) in art: “there is no original creativity, just a constant repackaging of previous ideas”. Overall, however, the definitions proposed for the nature of art in the two newspapers are similar.

The main difference between the two sets of comments is the evaluation of the Midjourney output based on the proposed definition. Readers of the *Daily Mail* were more likely than those of *The Guardian* to evaluate AI output as ‘art’, albeit not necessarily of a high quality. As with the findings from the Quality of art theme showing that the *Daily Mail* readers’ critique of modern art led to favorable evaluations of Midjourney’s output, *Daily Mail* comments in this theme, too, were generally more favorable about the win: “You only know the “soul” of the artist if you know the artist, but knowing the artist is not required to appreciate art” (*Daily Mail*). By contrast, *The Guardian* readers used their definitions of art to decide that the AI production is not art: “I thought art was more about making you feel and think because the artist wanted to make you feel and think, perhaps some way in particular. These are just pretty, funny and strange pictures” (*The Guardian*). While the readers of both newspapers define art similarly, their judgments of whether a particular work should be considered art appear to be

based on different criteria, with the *Daily Mail* readers prioritizing aesthetic reactions and *The Guardian* readers expecting art to elicit deep personal effects.

5.2.3 Technology and art

Output from Midjourney relies on technological advances in the form of AI, which form the focus of comments in this theme. In both newspapers, comments compare the new technology of AI with previous technologies that were considered disruptive: “Painters cried when the camera was invented claiming it was the end of artists” (*Daily Mail*) and “When the first digital art programs became available, they told us that it was the death knell for illustrators and painters” (*The Guardian*). Having identified AI as a potential disrupter, commenters in both newspapers contemplate the implications. For instance, AI is posited to simply be a tool to be used by professional artists: “This is merely a new set of tools to create art, like artist brushes use a variety of different materials” (*Daily Mail*).

The main difference in the two data sets for this theme concerns the impacts of these technological advances. In *The Guardian*, the new technology is largely portrayed as leading to an improvement, whereas the commenters in the *Daily Mail* see these technological changes as problematic. *The Guardian* readers, for instance, highlight how technology may expand the range of artistic output: “Photography enabled a different approach to recording what was seen” (*The Guardian*), or might lead to improvements as a result of their speed and reliability: “Machines have been significantly better than humans at medical diagnosis for a couple of decades now” (*The Guardian*). In contrast, comments in the *Daily Mail* are not as optimistic about the technological changes: “CGI killed stunts in the film industry too. Kind of ruined action movies for me. And this is no different” (*Daily Mail*).

5.2.4 AI capabilities

Comments considering the nature of technology used by Midjourney or AI in general were themed as AI capabilities. Comments in *The Guardian* for this theme were not only much more frequent, but also much longer than those in the *Daily Mail*, with an average comment length of 105 words in *The Guardian*, and only 37 in the *Daily Mail*. Perhaps because of the different sizes of the corpora for themes, only one topic in this theme was common across both newspapers, that is, the derivative nature of AI. Commenters in both newspapers point out that AI output is restricted only to what is available for copying: “Computers aren’t really able to create art so seems more likely it’s borrowed with from various artists to piece this together” (*Daily Mail*) and “The AI is not creative at all; all

you can ask of it is to produce something in the style of an existing, human artist” (*The Guardian*).

Given the number and length of comments in *The Guardian* on this theme, it is no surprise that the readers in this newspaper gave a greater range of ideas about AI’s capabilities. The key feature of *The Guardian* comments in this theme, in comparison to those from the *Daily Mail*, is the extent to which commenters share technical expertise and insights. Two examples of this are worth highlighting. First, many readers appear to have had some experience with AI programs and were able to share these: “I ran an experiment training one of these diffusion models solely on good photography and i was surprised to find that the resulting compositions were impressive, and while not in the dataset i fed, the rudiments of image composition were drawn from the data”. A second example is with the distinction these commenters make about the difference between Machine Learning and AI: “Please stop calling this AI. It’s got nothing to do with intelligence, artificial or not. The correct term is Machine Learning though even that is over egging it. Pattern matching with basic maths on a huge scale”. The greater depth of comments in this theme suggests that *The Guardian* readers were responding to this topic with greater technical background knowledge and personal experience.

5.2.5 Role of the artist

Some readers present ideas about how the introduction of AI in art would affect artists, and these were categorized as Role of the artist. As with the previous theme, the number and length of responses in *The Guardian* were greater than the *Daily Mail*. Nevertheless, readers in both newspapers can be identified as either optimists or pessimists. Pessimists in both corpora take the view that AI will put artists under pressure, for example by demanding greater effort to compete, or by eliminating potential income streams: “It means artists are going to have to up their game” (*Daily Mail*) and “Jobs where artists could make some cash to support their work will be harder to find” (*The Guardian*). Optimists take the position that artists will adapt to the innovation and will maintain their current role: “I doubt the ai would have much success on its own with being fed good combos of prompts” (*Daily Mail*) and “Can this software decide which front to use, what size, bold or italic, later the kerning and leading and decide where the text will go on a page? If not, it is not replacing graphic designers yet” (*The Guardian*). According to these optimists, AI could never replace artists as the technology is necessarily dependent on human input. The proportion of commenters taking this optimistic view of artists adopting a new role in a post-AI art world is approximately 40 per cent of comments in both newspapers.

5.2.6 Social impact

In addition to comments on the impact of AI on artists, readers made predictions about the impact of AI on society as a whole, and these were categorized into the theme of Social impact. As may be expected, readers in both newspapers expressed concern over the possible negative ramifications of AI. Some extreme readers in the *Daily Mail* see AI as a harbinger of the fall of society: “We are watching the death of the human being as relevant – this is just the beginning”. The most upvoted post in this theme in *The Guardian* similarly ponders the long-term consequences: “do we end up in Star Trek where humans want for nothing and work to better themselves, Wall-E where we are all slobs, or Terminator”. Common to both corpora are concerns over the effects of AI on jobs and the entertainment industry, concerns also raised by the authors of the articles in the respective newspapers.

There are two differences in the comments that are worth highlighting. First, *The Guardian* readers express concerns over AI’s impact on society over a wider range of topics, such as copyright law, the economy, and the power hierarchy in society. In fact, these readers linked the news of a relatively minor win by an AI artist with much larger political debates. For example, in one comment, the introduction of AI is seen as part of much larger political and economic woes: “Is there a need for humans to be replaced by half baked ML algorithms in a sustainable world – what is the destination of endless cycles of job destruction combined with endless cycles of state destruction? It’s as if anglo business are using Marx and 1984 as a manual” (*The Guardian*). Second, there is a group of readers in both newspapers who express optimism for a future with AI. There is, however, a difference in the tone of these optimists. In the *Daily Mail*, readers’ optimism is linked to perceived current shortcomings in society, as we noted in the Quality theme: “Wait till Hollyweird figures out the AI can write better movies and create better CGI actors and that they aren’t needed anymore”. In *The Guardian*, however, readers are more cautious with the scope of their optimism: “I suspect the main use for this kind of thing in the longer run is not ‘art’ as such, but rather ‘content’ for games and films. It will be used I suppose to greatly reduce the effort in the creation of animated characters and so on”. These optimistic views aside, however, the majority of the posts in both corpora express alarm at the possible ramifications of AI and how it is likely to affect our lives, and the nature of art in society.

5.2.7 Competition

The final theme, the competition, was found only in comments from the *Daily Mail*. These comments focus away from the broader views taken by other readers and are much more neutral. There is an even split of posts in this theme between supporters of the competition rules for allowing the entry and those criticizing them. Of those supporting the competition, readers point out that the Midjourney picture appeared in a specific art category: “It was entered into the digital category. Who cares?” This was, however, clearly not common knowledge. Other readers suggest this artwork needed to be in a separate category in the competition: “Very nice. But they should make a new category because this is not fair to humans”. Also in this theme are comments critical of the news article reporting the results: “Perfectly legit entry won, someone else disagreed, made a comment, DM gives discontented a massive column piece”. That this theme is absent from *The Guardian* may indicate that those who commented tended to direct their consideration to the bigger issues related to AI.

6 Discussion

With the implications of AI likely to be far-reaching and controversial in the creative industries, this study compared the concerns about AI-generated art among readers with two contrasting political ideologies. Given that the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* readers are in clear political opposition to each other (Roe & Perkins, 2023), and that individual differences such as political stances can dictate how people perceive art (Childress & Friedkin, 2012), we initially expected that readers of the more conservative newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, would hold a more traditional view of AI-based technologies, and thus, AI-generated art, whereas *The Guardian* readers were anticipated to have a more progressive view of the issue. The findings, however, suggest that their actual views on AI are not noticeably dissimilar. Overall, there are more similarities than differences, and the majority of the differences that do exist are not relevant to AI per se. Rather, the readers were using the topic of AI as a vehicle for expressing their strong beliefs about other peripheral issues. For example, the readers of the *Daily Mail* largely discussed the quality of AI-generated art to articulate their dissatisfaction with the quality of modern art. *The Guardian* readers, meanwhile, defined the nature of art and the process of creating art to determine that AI-generated art is not art. These findings, thus, highlight that while readers of both outlets engage in discussions about the quality or nature of art in relation to AI-generated art, the differences in their views were not specifically tied to AI or AI art but rather reflected their broader perspectives on art and other related issues.

In other words, there are a lot of similarities in how readers of both groups viewed AI. These include, for example, the view that AI is not capable of producing particularly exceptional art (*Quality of art*), the doubt whether AI-generated art can be distinguished from human-made art (*Nature of art*), and the mixed feelings of optimism and pessimism regarding how AI will change the way people work (*Technology and art* and *Social impact*). Despite the tendency for conservatives to place a greater emphasis on social order and security than liberals (Wilson et al., 1973), both groups agree that the potential impacts of AI on society are worrying. This finding partially substantiates research findings in previous studies, such as those of Roe and Perkins (2023), which indicated that concerns about the impending dangers of AI were evident in newspapers of both political leanings.

These findings, then, challenge existing discussions on the extent to which political ideology influences people's perceptions of AI. Several studies have previously argued that conservatism is associated with resistance to change and stability, whereas liberalism represents a preference for innovation and reform (e.g., Feist & Brady, 2004). In line with previous studies, Castelo and Ward (2021), for example, found that a right-wing alignment could be a predictor of people's dislike for AI, since it is seen as likely to lead to disruptive changes. On the other hand, liberals' greater willingness to accept change could lead them to adopt AI technologies more quickly and easily than conservatives. While there is some evidence that *The Guardian* readers are more likely to use AI, there is little evidence that the two groups have clearly distinct attitudes toward AI. In terms of artistic preferences, right-wingers have been shown to prefer simple and representational art (Wilson et al., 1973), while leftists have a greater preference for abstract art (Feist & Brady, 2004), which is commonly considered modern and untraditional (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2009). Our findings show that readers of both newspapers judge AI-generated art to be adequate, but not of particularly high quality, irrespective of its style.

Overall, this study has shown that the similarities outweigh the differences in how people with different political orientations perceive AI-based technologies. This implies that people's beliefs about AI are not yet entrenched. AI is a relatively new technology, and as such, its implications, potential directions, and societal expectations are still unclear. Together with this uncertainty, this apparent lack of politicization surrounding attitudes and beliefs about AI suggests that there is still room for shifts in public opinion toward AI.

7 Conclusion

In our title, we asked whether political ideologies influence people's views on AI. To answer this, we explored the concerns liberals and conservatives express about AI-generated art. Our findings have shown that there are surprising similarities in the concerns expressed by both groups, and that on this issue, then, political standpoint does not influence opinion. This finding runs contrary to previous work on art and political leaning. We posit that opinions on AI, and particularly the question of AI-generated art, may not yet be well established enough to coalesce around political differences. It is also possible that the issue of AI-generated art may be too peripheral to constitute a focus for political leanings, and further investigation into the question of AI and ideological orientation might focus on more central concerns, such as AI's influence on job security. Even so, that commenters in our data used AI art as a platform for expressing opinions on other, more politicized topics, would indicate that a movement towards ideological division may already have begun.

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