

How is AI impacting the livelihood of graphic designers within esports?

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Abstract

Generative AI is a software that is growing day by day in the modern world and impacting many different fields and lines of work. This project looks to research the impact of Generative AI (GenAI) on graphic designers. This will be done by looking through the lens of the digital medium of esports with considerations of both the benefits and the risks of its use to this space. Within this paper, research will look to be done to cover how GenAI is used within graphic design and breakdown key themes surrounding its use. This research contains both primary and secondary research with the primary research coming in the form of qualitative interviews done with graphic designers within esports to help support the secondary research found in the literature review.

The goal of this project is to look to the future of design due to how rapidly GenAI is developing and look at how the impacts its having relate to the livelihoods of the designers of today. The main result from this was that while there is potential for GenAI to some good for this group, there is predominantly risks to its usage from a variety of impacts with the main ones realised being the threat it poses to human creativity, the legality of its training data and the environmental damage it causes through its data centres and the power consumption of its image generation.

Introduction

It's no secret that in the world of modern technology, the usage of Artificial Intelligence is rising day by day (Maphosa, 2024). This rise has impacted a variety of different sectors however; the focus of this paper is to highlight its usage within graphic design sectors which has recently grown more prevalent with developments in Generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI). For the purpose of this paper its important to be able to define precisely what Gen AI is to be able to properly assess its benefits and drawbacks. For this project Gen AI will be defined as follows: The usage of any prompt-based software to generate new image outputs based upon the data the system has been provided with (Stryker and Scapicchio, 2024). This definition was chosen for its clarity on the data provided into the system which is a key aspect of a lot of the controversy surrounding the usage of AI for design. Applying this definition to its usage within graphic design, this will include anything generated across the entire design process of a project whether that falls under just concept work or media that has been generated for the public eye. One of the main topics of this discussion will centre around the concepts surrounding human creativity within artistic spaces like graphic design. This concept can be traced back to the dawn of humanity (Pringle, 2013) and has remained a key part of it for its existence due to creativity leading a lot of humanities early development one could see the usage of GenAI as a tool for designers to be creative and push art to a new level. While defining creativity is difficult, for the purpose of this paper it will look focus on the artistic viewpoint of creativity which can be defined as: work that is both novel and expressive, or something that can evoke a reaction out of potential observers (Sternberg and Kaufman, 2018).

Using these definitions, this project will look to answer the question of "How is AI impacting the livelihood of graphic designers within esports?". The research goals of this paper are looking to critically assess its usage of Gen AI through a holistic lens, looking at the benefits and drawbacks associated with its use within the field as a whole with a key focus on the following aspects: Cost, Environmental, Legal, Ethical and Efficiency. These concepts will be explored by looking through the scope of how it impacts esports in comparison to traditional graphics design due to its inherent need for visuals to be used to convey various aspects of events across a variety of levels (Hölzle et al., 2022). This is important to address as while there is plenty of discourse of AI within traditional media, this paper looks to fill the gap noticed between them at the moment and add a differing viewpoint to that of other research surrounding the developments of AI across the globe. In addition to this, this research aims to look at the future of GenAI within graphic design based upon whether it is deemed as a positive or negative for designers to use for their work and look at potential ways to either limit or grow its use depending on how it responds to the factors mentioned previously.

This research on the development of Gen AI and its impact on graphic design is driven by immense personal interest in both graphic design and esports as well as aiming for a future within the space. This could lead to potential bias from a writing perspective but by looking at

both the benefits and risks of the use of AI this aspect will look to be as minimised as possible. The research conducted has aided in developing skills surrounding this line of work and has helped garner an increased perceived value of the scope of some of the topics within this research. In particular how people value human creativity in comparison to others has been crucial in developing personal skills involving design principles.

Methodology

The research goals of this project are to assess the usage of generative AI through a holistic lens, looking at the benefits and drawbacks of the software and what its impact has been on designers within esports graphics. For this paper, the main questions the research conducted will look to answer will fall under the following questions based on the surrounding literature of generative AI:

How is the usage of AI impacting design spaces?

What is the value of human creativity in a design space?

Where does the usage of AI sit within an esports landscape?

To gather the research necessary for this project, the primary research for it has been conducted using qualitative methods (Aspers and Corte, 2019). To do this, interviews have taken place speaking to various participants with backgrounds within graphic design and esports to ensure that the research gathered is well informed (Dahal et al., 2024). This also helps to support the validity of the research gathered as using professionals within industry allows for more informed discussion as well as them being more aware of the usage of GenAI and having valid experience in esports (Lindheim, 2022). These participants are situated at a variety of different levels of professionalism from students to people who are more established within the space to look at the consistent themes seen across differing professionals to get a full picture of the impact GenAI is having on design. All participants were above the age of eighteen and fully consented to taking part in and being recorded for this project. Participants were gathered initially using convenience sampling (Edgar and Manz, 2017) with the aim being to utilise a snowballing approach to gather additional participants for the project to help expand the pool of research. Snowballing was appropriate due to the nature of the sample size looking for only 5 responses, it was not necessary to reach out to forums such as broadcast.gg (Broadcast.gg, 2025) however if this project were to be expanded upon, methods like these would be able to greatly expand the potential pool of participants and allow for even more in-depth research.

The data for this project comes in the form of recorded and transcribed qualitative interviews were chosen as it allows for more in-depth discussion of the research topic that would have been more difficult to expand upon if quantitative methods were used instead. These interviews were primarily unstructured however; there was a set of questions used to help probe initial thoughts from the participants to help ensure that the conversation was relevant and guided as to not cover things that may induce stress in the participant (Kelly, 2010). Interviews were recorded over Microsoft Teams and organised through Discord, with all participants agreeing to be recorded for research purposes in a signed consent form. The choice to do virtual interviews allows for the participant to schedule interviews for when is most

convenient for them and allowed for interviews to be conducted without the hinderance of being in separate locations getting in the way. For these interviews, the transcripts and recordings were all stored securely and electronically in my university one drive as to ensure that participants remained anonymous as to not breach the ethics of this research. The length of these interviews looked to be about thirty minutes however, some of them went on for as long as forty-five minutes. This increased length of time allowed for more in-depth discussion and did not take away from the quality of it.

To analyse my results, this project will use thematic analysis based on the data provided through the transcripts of the interviews (Ahmed et al., 2025). This was done by gathering different responses and building an initial understanding of the data provided. The data was then broken down into a variety of codes and labels based on how different points relate to both the research goals and knowledge based on the literature review. These codes were then categorized into themes and then further refined to ensure that the themes are appropriate. These steps were taken as to ensure that the data was able to be appropriately applied to the research questions presented and was able to provide valid answers for them based upon the criteria provided. Narrative analysis (Albudaiwi, 2018) also would have been valid for this project due to the nature of the questions looking at the experiences of the participants with AI within their fields. Thematic analysis was preferred for this project though due to the multiple goals of the research and being able to highlight and categorise themes allowed for improved analysis of them.

Initially this project looked to gather information from 5 participants however due to the limitations of finding graphics professionals within esports, only 3 were able to be conducted. While this will not greatly harm the project, additional interviews would have helped to form a stronger narrative and help to support the themes already seen in these interviews. another aspect of this project that felt limiting was that the research gathered had to apply back to esports. This resulted in limits of both topics discussed and participants gathered. This project would likely have benefitted from being focused entirely on the scope of design as a whole and the narrow lens of esports limited some of what was able to be discussed due to the size of this paper.

Literature review

What is GenAI typically used for in design?

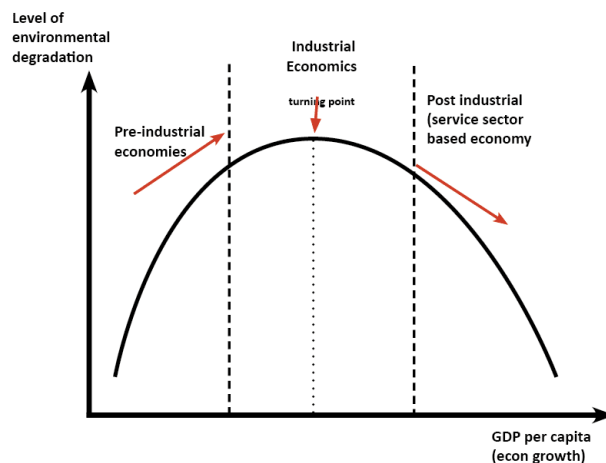
To understand the influence of Gen AI on graphic design it's important to get a grasp on what its used for and how that differs from traditional methods of its use. The key framework of this will be based around the literature of *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Graphic Design Industry* (Mustafa, 2023) due to its comprehensive understanding of what it is used for and how that impacts the industry as well as specific case studies on some of the different means of using Gen AI within graphic design. Referring to this literature one of the main points raised is the automation of design tasks that would otherwise be menial to the designer. This has both benefits and drawbacks however research suggests that there are often more negatives to this than positives. This is because on one hand, the increase in efficiency does allow for a shift of focus since designers are able to focus much more on the final product that working on concepts for their projects, decreasing the time taken to generate ideas. However, on the other hand, the nature of Gen AI being based around data and user preferences (Bhupathi and Solutions Architect, 2025) leads to inauthentic designs or designs that may look very similar to each other due to them all being pulled from the same database. As well as speeding up the menial tasks of design like image manipulation or layout, GenAI tools can be used throughout the process of designing a product by helping to speed up the conceptualisation of ideas and freeing up designers of time creating these concepts in the first place. For example, creating a logo for a company can take numerous different designers many different concepts and iterations before reaching a final product that matches the brief given, GenAI can just be given the brief and generate hundreds of ideas in a few minutes. The benefits of this are clear, the increase in speed allows for designers to focus more on thinking of creative ideas rather than spending a lot of time creating concept designs. However, concerns have been made about the quality of these concepts as well as significant public backlash when a company uses AI concepts as actual pieces of media. This combined with the nature of GenAI's database taking inspiration from existing artwork with no proper control on copying existing brands led to litigation concerns.

To expand upon the point on the data-based generation of ideas, one of the main ways this is done is to generate user interfaces using AI based design tools (Rosario, 2025) as they are able to understand what increases user satisfaction and loyalty that previously would have taken significantly more resources to create. This is done by looking at large data sources surrounding colours and layout as well as purchasing and browsing history to target specific audiences. While designing for specific target audiences is one of the key principles of designing user interfaces, GenAI's ability to analyse such large data sets in such a short amount of time allows for a much deeper understanding of this data that just would not be possible for regular humans.

As well as this, the usage of AI for efficiency is the fact that it can act as a leveller for text-based prompts into the chat box of an AI is much easier than learning the numerous industry standard skills and software involved with much of modern design. This does have the potential to produce skill atrophy (Macnamara et al., 2024) though where people either are not learning the skills involved with graphic design principles (Dabner and Swann, 2005) or it could also impact those who have these skills by dropping the value of them due to the ease of use of Gen AI (McNaughton Nicholls et al., 2025). This is an important distinction to make as one of the main ways people perceive the value of creativity within art is the notion that while the tools are there for everyone, you have to have the skills to use them properly and the value of the time of learning these skills cannot be replaced by AI (Mead, 2025). Unlike traditional art though an argument can be made that the tools for Gen AI here that the industry standard tools for graphic design are significantly more expensive and difficult to access than traditional art with software like the adobe suite costing roughly £20 per month for each program (Adobe, 2016) as well as the requirement of having some sort of computer.

How is the usage of GenAI impacting humanity?

Now that the methods of the usage of GenAI have been explained its crucial to look at the impact this is having on the whole world. This aspect can be broken down in many ways but to begin, it's important to highlight the impact its having on the environment which is due to the vast amounts of energy needed to be used for prompt-based AI to function (Heikkilä, 2023). To best showcase its impact, an Environmental Kuznets Curve (Pettinger, 2019) can be applied to the usage of AI.



This framework suggests a link between economic development and environmental damage where there is a larger initial rise that eventually is able to be tapered as economic structure is developed around the technology. Looking at the work of “Artificial Intelligence and Environmental Sustainability: Investigating the AI-EKC Nexus for SDG 7 and SDG 13” (Wang, Liu and Li, 2025) they suggest that AI is currently on this course where there is a large initial spike in its developing stage that will eventually fall off as AI is used for the good of the environment (UNEP, 2024). While this framework does have the potential to apply to AI it is not without its drawbacks. Critics of this theory suggest that for AI to have a positive impact on the environment, actions and policy need to be put into place now rather than later to help guide it on this path before irreversible damage has been caused to the environment (Prasad, 2024). The main cause of this is due to the greenhouse gas emissions of AI datacentres being comparable to that of cars (Nishant, Kennedy and Corbett, 2020) and the training of these AI models having a massive carbon footprint (Cowls et al., 2021). The data around these points heavily suggests that while there is good that AI can do for the environment, the use of AI alone cannot be expected to be sustainable or lead to sustainability (Zechiel et al., 2024).

On top of environmental concerns, there are also ethical concerns surrounding the usage of GenAI on how it could be potentially replacing humans as well as the perceived value of human creativity in comparison to the efficiency aspects covered previously. Creativity has been within our society for centuries and its value to society can never be understated (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2019) and without it, we would not have the diverse cultures seen across the whole globe like we do today. This aspect is one of the driving critiques against GenAI due to the value of art and design within society today and the threat that GenAI poses to that. The article "Is AI a Threat to Human Creativity?" (Wade, 2024) raises 2 different threats to human creativity, direct and instrumental raising the points that AI can be used without harming the ideas surrounding creativity it's the manner in which these software's are doing so that is the problem. This idea is very sound because as a whole, GenAI can only really be as creative as the prompts given to it which in the hands of a trained designer is relatively safe, however the tools of its usage with many new and developing image generation software techniques there is a real threat to the skill involved with traditional graphic design methods.

As well as this though, there is ethical considerations surrounding the usage of GenAI due to it replacing potential jobs for designers with those GenAI replacing human designers (Alderson, 2025). While this perspective can be seen as quite pessimistic, there has been an innate rise in the amount of people concerned for their future within design roles in company's (Cullinane, 2025). This could be due to the cost cutting nature of using AI in compared to graphic design teams (Durusoy, 2025) leading to the viewpoint that that the role of designers is being slowly made obsolete due to this developing technology. There has been a recent case study developing over the past month with a new trend sweeping social media recently where people are putting in a specific prompt to generate football announcement posts (@Tegadesigns, 2026). While this is a very recent development, its impact on graphic design has been felt due to the fact that this can develop further into more sophisticated graphics due to the nature of how GenAI operates on its data driven generations. This relates back to the ethical concerns seen surrounding the instrumental threats to human creativity as it is a direct threat in the modern world to design work due to the professional looking nature of what has been generated by these models.

Who owns AI generated media?

In terms of intellectual property (IP), typical design work is either made by one person or a team of people under a company or firm who are defined as “the creator” that has the rights to their work (Gov.uk, 2021). Applying these laws to the generation of AI media, who is defined as the creator? If an individual was to generate a piece of media for personal use then were to publish that online there are four main places that media could be traced back to: the person generating it as mentioned, the AI model used to generate it, the owner of that AI model and finally the artist who original data was used to generate the image. The work showcased in “AI-Generated Content is Taking over the World. But Who Owns it?” (Chesterman, 2023) raises a few crucial points in this regard namely after asking ChatGPT itself who owns the media generated. This resulted in the AI stating “The text generated is not the intellectual property of the model itself. Instead, the intellectual property rights belong to the person or entity who has commissioned the model to generate the text” after being informed of OpenAI’s policy’s surrounding IP (OpenAI, 2026) this is interesting as it means that in the definition of OpenAI, the media generated does not fall under the IP laws mentioned however, the viewpoint they have is also wrong as further addressed in Chesterman’s paper where he highlighted US Ip law stating that “It will not register works “produced by a machine or mere mechanical process that operates randomly or automatically without any creative input or intervention from a human author.” (U.S. Copyright Office, 2014).

The case study of Italian Brain rot (Singer, 2025) is probably the most notorious example of this concept as the characters involved are all AI generated and then added into the game Fortnite to a predominantly negative player response. (Hernandez, 2026) This is due to their nature being defined as AI slop (Madsen and Puyt, 2025) whose definition relates back to the other issues discussed earlier in this paper with the crux of it being that they are low effort quickly generated characters that have had minimal thought put into it in comparison to traditional art works. From a legal perspective though, this collaboration differs drastically from other Fortnite collaborations due to the fact that a lot of them are with popular brands with the biggest example being their partnership with Disney (Disney, 2025) are private domains, so the financial benefits were split in some way between the 2 companies. Italian Brain rot and the AI slop characters fall under public domain and are currently sat in a legal grey area until they are tracked down to be claimed by someone with numerous companies fighting for the rights associated to make money from them. This case study highlights how important the legal definition of automation-based media is in comparison to human authors or designers.

How does this relate back to Esports?

In the modern world esports is a digital industry (WIPO Magazine, 2023) spanning across the globe due to the nature of its competitions (Statista, 2026). Within this, one of the most important roles within the space is the graphics. Without the visuals surrounding these events they would not be able to exist at the scale they would today because of the digital nature of esports requiring graphics designers for their visuals (Bryony-Hope, 2022). This relates back to all of the points raised earlier however there are some key differences between the work of esports graphics professionals and traditional graphics design principles. The biggest difference at the moment is the live editing you are able to do on software like vMix and GT Title Designer (Citra Devi Murdaningtyas, Astin and M Julias Fachri, 2024) to expand your broadcasts to include graphics driven by in game data. The creation of these graphics is different from traditional graphics as they need to be edited live rather than ahead of time in pre-production stages of events (MEM Team, 2024). This difference is key as it helps to prevent AI from being able to generate these graphics on the fly at the moment resulting in the ethical factors surrounding its use being reduced as well as issues surrounding its quality due to all the graphics having to be human made and tailored to the event. This combined with the motion aspect of esports graphics (Krasner, 2004), which many AI models struggle to do properly at the moment, helps to keep esports graphic designers safe for the time being. Similarities can be drawn to traditional design though and there are still examples of esports teams or organisations using AI though namely for social media posts (Team Stallions, 2025) and branding commonly seeing use to generate team logos across lower tier events in a variety of esports titles (Brand AI, 2026), as well as potential conceptualisation of ideas for broadcast graphics. However, the perception of these images is profoundly negative and communities within gaming as a whole seem to be majorly against the usage of GenAI for graphics within these spaces due to similar concerns as raised before (Yee, 2025). It's not all positives though, Esports already has a massively negative impact on the environment due to the amount of power consumption within the events and general practice of esports (Mills et al., 2019). This combined with the footprint of AI already discussed leads to significant damage caused to the environment due to the power consumption of these which is a common criticism of esports and computing sectors as a whole. This combined with the already negative backlash against AI seen within esports helps to solidify that its addition to the space is primarily negative.

Research Findings

Participant Context

For the research conducted in this project its important to understand who the participants were and why they were chosen for this project. This will also help to put the findings into context by helping to support their statements and viewpoints through their line of work. As part of the interviews for this project, each participant was asked to briefly introduce themselves and their experience levels in graphic design and they are seen in the table below. These participants were selected through convenience sampling due to their knowledge of both graphic design and esports so were able to provide valuable knowledge when linking the 2 together. This link did limit the number of potential participants and due to time constraints, additional responses were unable to be gathered and would have aided this section further as mentioned above. With that in mind though, the responses gathered have plenty of key information to break down and all were very knowledgeable on the topic presented.

Participant (anonymised)	Response
Participant 1 – Established Freelancer	“I am a freelance technical director and graphics specialist specialising in esports. I want to say I've been working in graphics for four years now. ...spent majority of the time in esports. I have worked in other like sectors that are mainly like... I would say like live events is what I'd classify under and also sports”.
Participant 2 – Company Employee	“I am currently working as an e-sports graphics operator for COMPANY 1, and we're assigned to COMPANY 2. So, they were kind of like assigned to COMPANY 2, but I work under the umbrella of COMPANY 1. I have no prior experience to the world of esports outside of working for COMPANY 1, but I've been working in the LOCATION offices now for 2 1/2 years”.
Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer	“I'm an esports production freelancer and basically one of my things, roles that I'm like able to do, I do graphics operating, but I also used to be an illustrator, like a graphic design illustrator. In terms of like traditional graphic design, we're probably getting on about 8 years now. In terms of e-sports,

	it's about five years".
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Thematic analysis of responses and presentation

As mentioned in the methodology of this project, responses will be analysed based on themes presented across the three interviews. This method was chosen due to the unstructured nature of the interviews resulting in no direct link between the three sets of responses so grouping together themes within them led to more conclusive results. The findings were presented in this way for the same reason as to why thematic analysis was chosen, direct quotes will be taken from these transcripts to help showcase different themes were seen in responses to help provide a narrative for discussion later in the report. Full transcripts of these interviews will be placed in the appendix of this report with responses anonymised for the sake of the participants.

Theme 1: Usage within industry and participants opinions on its use

Participant (anonymised)	Response
Participant 1 – Established Freelancer	<p>"I haven't used any AI for my graphic design work, no"</p> <p>In terms of within the graphic design industry, I know that there are people, it kind of ranges how people are using it. There's people ranging from using it for like basic ideation processes. So, at the beginning of any like project, especially like early talks with clients, they'll use it to help like create mood boards and stuff like that. I know some people are using it that way and I know other people are using it all the way to creating graphics specifically for use with AI image generation.</p>
Participant 2 – Company Employee	<p>"No, I actually don't. And honestly, it's not really, obviously I know all the buzzwords like AI and ChatGPT and all the kind of the mainstream stuff. But when it comes down to like specific softwares for specific industries, it's not something that I have much knowledge about, even though it probably is something I should research upon"</p> <p>"like it's not as if my manager or managers within the company have come forward to kind of raise awareness for these sorts of products or softwares"</p>
Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer	<p>"So obviously one of the things that really comes to mind that I have kind of been aware of is I'm sure you probably know about the original like, here's Will Smith eating spaghetti. It looks terrible. This was made by AI in 2020 or like 2019. It was like around that time and then it's Yeah, obviously, and then you look at like what it's capable of"</p>

	<p>doing now of like that same sort of video as a benchmark of like, hey, this is what you can generate in under 30 seconds.”</p> <p>“I'm more clued up on it in like the sense of the video generative AI than I am on... ...Just, yeah, image generation, yeah.”</p>
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Theme 2: Specific examples of its use

Participant (anonymised)	Response
Participant 1 – Established Freelancer	<p>“So yeah, the team specifically is, it's like a, rather well-known like tier 2 team called Go Next. And it isn't even like something that they... like try to keep under wraps. Like the designer very publicly on social media said, I was commissioned to make these graphics to go designed to go over AI backgrounds and when you look at go next social media, they're still using that ...like you can actually go and like check it and be like, oh yeah, they're still, they're doing this.”</p> <p>“There's been a couple of other things that I've seen, especially within like the poster realm, like it tends to be more confined to poster design and social media design than it is to say the broadcast space because... It's much harder to be able to use AI output within broadcast design, unless I guess maybe if you're using it for like a background or something, or like very specific like elements, because like they are just more complex and they have so many moving parts.”</p> <p>“That's the main areas where I've seen it being used, mainly in like the social media graphics. Because for them, a lot of the time they'll have, you know, social media teams that don't necessarily have designers within them. So rather than outsource to do it, the social media people will just prompt and then make something and then it's good enough for them. So yeah, that's what I've been seeing at least.”</p>
Participant 2 – Company Employee	<p>“Yeah, so again, mainly for like social media posts and like YouTube videos, I haven't really seen it in like a professional setting, especially like in my job, and you know, COMPANY 2, because we're so heavily, COMPANY 2 have such a big hand in their broadcast, they, you know, like we're not. they don't really kind of let it go out to third parties or like students. So everything, any graphics we use, or we see on a day-to-day basis have been like designed and QC'd by COMPANY 2 themselves. So it's very rare that I'd encounter kind of something like some sort of AI generated graphic because COMPANY 2 already, before they send us over the graphics package, they design it, QC it and then send it to us for us to use on their shows. So, and very rarely we'd be asked to kind of generate our own graphics.”</p> <p>“Now, there's been a few times, obviously, like in-house when maybe COMPANY 2 have forgotten to give us a certain asset we've had to kind of come up with solutions on the fly ourselves and there's been a few times where people have tried to use AI to kind of make a quick fix and it's been flagged as a no go like straight away like COMPANY 2 are heavily against it. So yeah.”</p>

<p>Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer</p>	<p>“Sure, sure. Okay. I mean, so recently an example of it, I saw Team Heretics, esports team. They did a Marvel Rivals like team announcement post, which was like meant to be one of their really like big titles for the year. They're just like, We have designers in house. Let's make this with AI. No, no will notice. No will notice, guys. And like, it's like characters with like multiple fingers where fingers shouldn't be and things like that, which are real. I know they're real telltale signs of like AI graphics. But yeah, that's one of them that I've seen. “</p> <p>“Obviously, in Call of Duty, this year, Call of Duty, like Black Ops 7, where they had, I think it was player cards that were, yeah, the player cards that were made with AI.”</p> <p>“I'm not sure how familiar you are with Italian Brain Rot, like those characters, they've basically been made with Gen AI and they're in, they've been added to Fortnite because of how like the Fortnite Multiverse thing works and they went. Fortnite thought a big idea to put that in. No one really understands. who actually owns these AI characters or like what it is about them, but they've been put into Fortnite and they're just there, which is crazy because it's like, there's characters in Fortnite that have been created by humans and like decades upon decades of humans and then it's like, Okay, here's AI slop to go alongside that in your lobby”</p>
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Theme 3: Risks and benefits

Participant (anonymised)	Response
<p>Participant 1 – Established Freelancer</p>	<p>I think there's definitely benefits, especially not necessarily from the graphic designer point of view, but from the client point of view. So if you are approaching graphic designers a lot of time, well, as a graphic designer, whenever you have clients approach you, a lot of time they don't know how to show you what they want or describe what they want. So I think there's uses in terms of having clients be able to say, here are some sample images that I've generated with AI to kind of get my thoughts into an image to be able to give some sort of reference.”</p> <p>“And then following on from that, I think there's some useful parts to it, again, for making references if you're someone who does a lot of 3D design work. I think there is some potential for using it for generating reference frames. to then be able to model over or even like if you're just a traditional like more like graphic artist, I think there is some use cases for that. Like reference work is something that's been used for a long time for people who are character artists and all those kinds of things. I think the AI can be used in that way. I think there's some usefulness in that regard. I don't think there's very much use beyond that, other than that, if I'm honest. The rest of it, I think, is just inherent risks.”</p> <p>“I mean, Obviously, they're built on models that... have stolen large</p>

	<p>amounts of art to create their training data, right? and the graphic design space is something that is so, it's so tight knit and it's like large but small at the same time, right? And there's a lot of already criticism about like when one artist like copies another, right? Or a designer copies someone else's design and you run into this risk of, with AI, it just generating and spitting out the same thing over and over again. So you end up with, you know, a lot of potential, like, I guess, copyright issues is the best way to describe it. So I think there's a lot of inherent risks around that, especially if you're not paying very much attention to what you're doing and you're just saying, yeah, I'll just do this, blah, blah, blah. I think that's like the biggest risk to it. I mean, besides like the environmental factors and like all that kind of ****."</p>
Participant 2 – Company Employee	<p>"a few broke college students trying to organise an e-sports broadcast further for their games and then, you know, that's fair enough. But like if you're going to use big multinational companies that are just trying to cut corners and save on the budget, I feel like that's where there's a bigger problem and you kind of have to look at like, what are we trying to do here?"</p>
Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer	<p>there's like this crunch pressure that was put on the artists who were drawing the illustrations for these like digital pokémon cards. Before, so famously, there's these cards then had artwork missing for a few weeks.</p> <p>when players would pull them in the game out of the packs. But for the first day that set released, it was AI art in the place of these two really high illustration pieces, so that the company was able to push the set out as early as they wanted to be able to ...It was, yes, yes. But yeah, that set basically, obviously, it's the one that famously had the artwork missing for ages after they'd immediately got caught out for using AI in replacement for obviously the actual art that goes into the cards.</p> <p>and obviously pokémon cards have been something that have had like illustrations created by multiple different artists since the 90s. It's been such a huge thing of getting different artists and their different art styles and putting their own creative spin on the characters that people love</p> <p>into these cards, like card illustrations and obviously there was a lot of people who were quite disheartened by the fact that...</p> <p>One of the one of the companies obviously pushing out these. designs like this set early, obviously decided to not like wait for the designers to finish and just kind of went, well we can just put AI in for now, normal notice</p>

Theme 4: Thoughts on the value of human creativity

Participant (anonymised)	Response
Participant 1 – Established Freelancer	<p>"I think for me, the inherent thing with graphic design is a lot of people misunderstand graphic design, right? Like a lot of sometimes people will say, oh, can you make this for me and they're like, can you draw this kind of thing for me? But that's not what graphic design is. Graphic</p>

	<p>design is making something accessible and usable. It's closer to UX design than it is to like artistry, right? It's about making things that are functional but that look nice at the same time. That's what graphic design really is. It's about conveying information in graphic ways.</p> <p>As opposed to, if you're an artist, it's about, you know, telling stories for images, so I think you can't rely on AI and I think a lot of people feel that. Graphic design by itself really can only be done with human input, because you need someone to be able to... you know, if you don't have someone checking over how the information is being presented, then you don't know if it really will land with people, if it's actually accessible, if it's actually usable, especially within the esports space where you have, we have heads up displays over games which have so much information that we're trying to cram into such small areas to be able to keep the game visible. I just don't think it's something that AI can realistically do to be able to design something like that and keeping it accessible and clean at the same time.</p> <p>So yeah, I think that there's a lot of value on human creativity when it comes to graphic design specifically because it's something that's intentional. It's not something that can really just like... Be done by prompting."</p>
<p>Participant 2 – Company Employee</p>	<p>"Yeah, well, I mean, it does sound kind of like, I guess, cliché or cringe, but like art is supposed to be like a representation of like us as a society. So like, I feel like the beauty of art, at least for me, is that like someone actually made this, like there was time, effort, ability, humanity like our, and I feel like if, you know, I allow, even if something doesn't look good or I think it could be done nicer, I still appreciate the time and effort someone put into it and I can kind of like. understand the person a bit like, oh, they use this font, this imagery. Like it kind of tells you something about the person or the company or the tournament or the broadcast just in something as simple as a graphic. Whereas I feel like if you're taking the human element out of it and you're just thrown in like, into a chat bot a prompt of like, you know, this like a winning graphic for X team and it just amalgamates some sort of graphic. I feel like it kind of loses its personal torch and I think a lot of people in the esports and like gaming space tend to just in general really appreciate authenticity. You know, esports aren't as big as traditional broadcasts. It's kind of niche and I guess the people working in this industry always kind of have that passion and that camaraderie that we're kind of the underdog. and if you take that element of like teamwork and creativity out of it and go kind of corporate and for profit, I feel like it kind of defeats the purpose of how this industry kind of came to be."</p>
<p>Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer</p>	<p>"I so in my like entire being. I am such an incredibly creative person. My mum went to art school. My mum's been a creative person. I come from like generations of like creatives. We were I I'm so deeply rooted, a creative person and I've seen so many incredible things over my years of just things that humans have created solely and. It's always been so fascinating to me how the process of human creativity is and as a construct, it's something that takes so much time and dedication and like passion and talent to really like nail down whatever it is they're creating. And I think something that obviously, like I said, I mean, I see benefits in AI, not in the generative sense. I see benefits for it in the sense of for things like coding, for things like medical stuff, because I know that AI has been able to help. in like the medical field and things like that to help make like, you know, breakthroughs. But I don't think it should be within the creative</p>

	<p>industries. There is nothing, there is nothing in me that thinks it will do good for creative industries. There's no way that I can physically see it. being good for creative industries, especially since art has been a thing. There's been a part of human history since like the dawn of time, you know, like cavemen made drawings in caves with sticks and like mud and stuff, you know, like if, if, if it's such, if art is such like a deeply rooted part of like, you know, humans as we are. I just don't see why we should really be trying to sway away from it so easily, because I feel like there's so many people who are just like sidelining what has been for so many years and it's like, oh, but like I can make a funny picture of me and my dog on the phone. like in 5 minutes and look at that. That's amazing. I didn't have to pay someone to make that and my phone made it for me. And it just feels really like lazy and sloppy and it feels really just like disheartening, especially because I can't imagine how awful it must feel to be like... like a kid at the moment whose like dream is to become an artist or like to do something creative and they're just seeing everything around them slowly be churned out by AI instead of humans. Like, I don't know how disheartened they must feel, but it must be heartbreaking.”</p>
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Theme 5: Thoughts on AI in esports graphics and public reception of it

Participant (anonymised)	Response
Participant 1 – Established Freelancer	<p>“I On social media, obviously, there is a very big, you're kind of 1 camp or the other. There is no, there's no such thing as like the grey space anymore online. Like everything is very polarized. It's either black or white. You're either on this side or you're on that side. You're not allowed to be on the fence anymore. So as a result of that, you get people who are very, very firm pro-AI and very, very firm anti-AI and there's no real in-between. There's no one who's saying, well, you know, I can kind of see both sides. Like, if you're not on one side or the other, then you're not in the conversation. As a result of that polarization, it has a much bigger impact on you know, a team or a graphic designer's credibility or reputation, because if everything's... 100% black or white, then you're going to alienate roughly 50% of your potential audience by using it. Like without a doubt, you know, if you're caught using AI, you are alienating around 50% of your audience because of just the fact that everything is so polarised online. Like you're not going to get some people who are like, well, you know, I think I can forgive it. Most people will say, I'm either fine with this or I'm really, really against this and I'm going to boycott you. And you see this with a lot of esports orgs with people saying in the comments saying, you know, this isn't right, you shouldn't be doing this, you know, this isn't right. And even worse when it gets like the company level. like people, like again, like this Blizzard thing. You know, people are willing to boycott all Blizzard games as a result of stuff like this, right? Which obviously has an impact on their bottom line to some extent. Obviously, there's a certain point where I guess as a company, you're too big to fail. But it's still something that isn't great in the long run. So I think there's a lot of potential harm to be done to, you know, people's reputations and</p>

	<p>teams' reputations as a result of the use of it because we just live in a time where everyone is so polarised and we can't have a discussion to be able to get to a middle ground.”</p>
<p>Participant 2 – Company Employee</p>	<p>“Yeah, like I think is, I think again, like I only know COMPANY 2 and my own situation. I don't know how it is for other companies, but because you know, esports for COMPANY 2 for them, it's kind of like a PR movement stunt, if you get me. Like, they're heavily invested in their esports scene because it's a way to get players onto the games and involved in their community. So as I feel like the general public consensus is at the moment, people are heavily against AI, especially in like creative industries. So, you know, COMPANY 2 wouldn't want to be seen to use AI in any of their kind of creative outlets because it would probably 90%, 90%, 99% come back as bad PR, bad branding, public backlash and stuff. So it's just something they're just really against. That's not to say if the people's perception of AI changes that they won't. You know, a lot of companies have kind of came out and been like, you know, we don't really care what If this is like unethical, we don't really care. It's profitable to use AI and that, but at the moment, COMPANY 2 are heavily against it. And whether that's just because public consensus is anti-AI or not, I don't know. But for now, I don't think.”</p>
<p>Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer</p>	<p>“I mean, the only thing that comes to my mind right now, and it's just really funny to me because I love it so much. It gives me the sense of just real good community, like rallying against the companies using AI. It's just that like picture of that like child sitting amongst the throne of Pepsi of just the your AI slop bores me. I love, I love opening the comment section and just seeing that image about 100 times as I scroll down of just people just like your AI slop bores me. I'm like, this is good. Wonderful.</p> <p>I mean In terms of like, like the audience like reaction to obviously like things, I know for certain, obviously Coca-Cola are quite prominent on the sense of using AI and they, they in their Christmas like advert, which they've been famous for God knows how long.</p> <p>This year, openly, proudly, loudly, were like...</p> <p>Made with AI at the corner of the video and let the opening shot as such. I can't even say opening shot because it's not really, but it is, I guess. But like... Uh, but it, like, in the sense of, like... That's something that's been like a like tradition, not only for like just them as a company, but like where they were at in such a like... stance over the Christmas like beverage market, you know, it was like, you'd go to family houses and they'd have Cooke at Christmas. Like last year, I actively saw even like people in their 80s, like my grandparents, like my grandparents in their 80s, openly went... But this is just like ridiculous. They've like ruined Christmas, essentially, is how they worded it and was like, well, we're going to buy Pepsi instead because they didn't do an AI advert. Because even though obviously they're like 80, they don't know what an AI is. I mean, yeah, in terms of e-sports, I'm not really sure, like, where I've seen it, other than obviously just like people online. I love, I love... how many people online just rally against AI. That makes me, it gives me hope. It gives me hope in the sake of human creativity.”</p>

Theme 6: Future of GenAI in graphics

Participant (anonymised)	Response
Participant 1 – Established Freelancer	<p>“My thoughts on this are a little bit complicated because I... On one hand, I think, you know, especially in like tier 2 and stuff like this, like it's only become, it's only going to become more of an issue. Like more and more teams will end up using AI because tier 2 is so inherently like broken and mismanaged and there's not enough funding in it, even from like the highest levels. You know, that, like, look at, look at like the riot leagues, for example, like whether it's Valorant or League of Legends. There's so many of these regional leagues like in tier 2 that are struggling, whether it be from mismanagement from companies, or because there's just not enough funding in it or all sorts of issues. When you have issues like that with even products from companies like Riot, like you can't expect it to be, okay, well, if Riot's products can't even function because there's not enough money being pumped in, how do you expect the teams that are trying to compete in that to like make the next step forward to becoming a tier one like player or organization, how can you expect them to even have the money to try and do it properly? Right? There's just no way.”</p> <p>“And if they do get graphic designers, it's always going to be through, you know, volunteer work. So you kind of see this, this, there's this cycle that's constantly happening that's only getting worse and worse that I think will lead to more and more rampant usage of AI within like the tier 2 spaces. And I think it's going to become more used, not just within the organizations, but I think the leagues will start using it as well, where that's going to become even more of an issue because as soon as that starts happening, that reflects on the parent companies, right? So if, you know, if like the NLC tomorrow starts using AI graphics, that doesn't reflect on the NLC, that reflects on Riot. which is where it becomes an even bigger issue, right? And it's going to become like a very, very slippery slope. So on one hand, I think it's going to become more and more rampant because of that.”</p> <p>“On the other hand, I think AI right now, from like an economic standpoint, is a bubble waiting to burst. It doesn't make revenue at all. In fact, every company that is making these AI models are spending so, so much money that they're just not seeing back in a hope that eventually they can claw it back somehow. I don't know what they're thinking, but I think it's a bubble waiting to burst. and if it's a bubble waiting to burst, then eventually that means AI usage will have to go down because if companies are going bust, these AI won't exist anymore. So I think we're kind of at this point where It's kind of a race against time, where... If we're racing towards a bubble burst, eventually things will just fall off a cliff because they have to. There will be no more AI to use, at least like at the widespread scale that we have now. You're going to get people who are obviously like self-hosting of large language models and all these kinds of things are becoming more and more prevalent. But for image generation specifically, you'd need such a beefy computer to be able to do it all the time that I don't think it's going to be as, it's going to be very, very minute compared to what we have now. But at the same time, like if the bubble can keep holding, then you're just going to see this like usage of AI increase and increase and increase over time.”</p>

<p>Participant 2 – Company Employee</p>	<p>Yeah, I think like, I think my biggest thing is like, it's all like fun and games, laughing at like AI generated TikToks or like kind of, you know, and like people's day-to-day lives. It's kind of like I said, it's a buzzword. It's kind of a funny back and forth. But I feel like people need to kind of dig a little deeper and reflect in words about like, what are we trying to achieve here? Like humans have like and in a sense to like produce art, whether it's like music, image, like music, art, song, dance, like we've all since the beginning of the time, we've always done stuff like that. So you know, we don't look, would we look at the Mona Lisa the same way if it was the AI generated? No, probably not. We appreciate it because we know how much time and effort and like honing of the craft went into it. So I feel like people really need to like take a step back and be like, okay, like it's not, it's not all just funny memes and buzzwords.</p> <p>Like there is actually a human element to this. Like not only is it going to do people out of jobs, it's going to like stunt us as a species because we're just going to stop creating. You know, I'm sure most people remember like art class and school. It was like everyone's favourite time of day was to like draw or paint or dance or like that kind of stuff. So is this something like going forward in 10, 20 years time, kids won't have art class. They'll just sit with an iPad and throw prompts into like ChatGPT and come home and show their parents a picture that they auto-generated of like the dog and the house. Like inwardly, they're kind of just like, oh, this is so funny or this is such a controversy or like, oh, this will save me money. They're not really thinking of like the systemic issues it will cause. If like going forward, we just don't have artists or photographers or filmmakers. We just have a browser or software that does it all for us.</p>
<p>Participant 3 – University Student and aspiring freelancer</p>	<p>I think, because I believe there was US law debated on this, I'm not entirely sure if it was passed, but I know they debated on it, about who actually owns AI art. And I think that is really interesting. I mean, especially like, I...I would definitely say, like, having regulations in place of... If, because AI is obviously incredibly smart, I can't deny that. If the AI was able to then source where it pulled the like, you know, inspiration or whatever it would be described as, it gained obviously the stuff to create whatever It's just spewed out based on the prompt and it says to the user who's just generated it, this is like, this design was created with assets from and credits where it was taken from, like sources it, you know? You know how like obviously most websites and things like that, if they take information or take assets or take things from other places, they source where the asset came from. I think if AI was able to do that and the people were able to see, wait, hang on, this is where this has come from, It would probably make people think a bit more about it, I reckon because if obviously, you're generating and then you see like five or six like human creatives, like being source, being references, like this is where this has come from. It really, I feel like it would really make people think about it. Because I know.</p> <p>especially one of the things that makes people sort of stop and think about AI is obviously when people talk about the water usage from like the data centres and like, oh yeah, your prompt is like essentially a bottle of water. Now imagine if we were just, you know, Taking a bottle of water from the ocean every single time someone wanted to, you know, create an AI prompt and.</p> <p>Putting things like that into it, where it kind of like makes people think about the morality of it.”</p>

"I really like how it makes people second guess whether they should be doing that and whether they should be generating that and that's quite nice to me in the sense of It provides like... It provides a way of making like the user have to make that active choice and then they can kind of see, okay, This is who I'm essentially stealing work from. In the sense of if it was to like source. like the artists that would be, you know, within that generated piece. And it's like, yeah, here is essentially who I have just stolen income and work and credit from. And I think it would really like, as I said, it would make people think it would give them like a way of like questioning their morality on it."

"I think starting out in this current point where you are literally like battling against AI overlords as much and having to, you know, like try and apply for these jobs and try and like get attention from companies to want to hire you as a designer, but Well, I have a pool of like 50 different applicants of real human beings, or I could spend 30 seconds typing into a prompt box and get exactly what I want. And that's the thing. I think it is so, so detrimental to careers."

Research Discussion

Initial lines of questioning were probing the usage of AI with graphic design industries with participants having key knowledge on certain aspects of its use across all 3 responses. The theme seen across this tended to be that none of the participants have had personal experience in using software like ChatGPT, but all are aware of what it could be used for within their fields. However, participant 1 held the most idea on how it was used with participant 3 having great knowledge on video generation and participant 2 having limited knowledge on the specific methods of its use stating that it's something they should probably know more about however due to company policies, they have seen very little in terms of its usage. These points raised are key themes for this research as it sets up a good basis for their future points and allows for context to be established for the piece. Its interesting to showcase participant 2 and their companies policies against the usage of GenAI. For additional context while the company will not be named for the anonymity of the participant its important to note that this company is very prevalent within esports so policies like this set a positive precedent for the industry. Linking back to the literature review policies like this help to minimise the impact of the harmful usage of GenAI through limiting its usage which also would have a link to public reception which will be expanded upon later in this analysis. The opinions on its usage though were predominantly negative as each of the 3 participants were very against its use seen within their quotes on the matter in theme 1 giving that impression through their wording used.

Looking at theme 2, participant 3 had a plethora of examples showcasing a strong knowledge of GenAI's application in a public lens with a specific comment linking back to the case study around Italian brain rot and its addition to Fortnite. Both participants 1 and 3 commented on its usage in social media with participant 1 in particular holding great knowledge on how it could be used for posters and the lack of visibility seen within broadcast graphics. This backs up the research earlier that due to the motion needed for esports graphics, GenAI is still a while away from catching up in that regard. On the back of the policies mentioned though, participant 2 was unable to think of many examples commenting specifically on their lack of knowledge in this regard and expanding further on the point that the quality control seen by COMPANY 2 was crucial in routing out AI graphics from their socials and concepts. The mentioning of specific examples where this company may have forgotten assets and employees would try and generate them only for these graphics to be wiped helps to bolster that this is something they very clearly care about as a company.

Moving to theme 3, participant 1 was able to have the most prevalent knowledge on this section due to an extensive background and knowledge of freelance graphics, being able to see many examples and work with many clients who were on the side of using AI, they were able to provide extensive responses supporting some of the benefits of GenAI in spite of not agreeing with its use themselves. One of their main points was the fact that for clients, its an easier way for them to visualise potential graphic ideas and concepts for designers in a freelance setting.

As well as this, the creation 3D references for designers were an idea raised due to reference work being so important for that space. The main risk put forward by participant 1 was the data behind GenAI's responses being essentially stolen artwork and how that could damage how tight knit the graphics design community is. Participant 2 was able to identify the cost aspect of it looking into grassroots esports to drive an example of this to back up the point that from a cost perspective, it sometimes isn't always a bad thing and the main risk of that comes from the point of those who can afford designers opting against choosing them for profit. Participant 3 was very much that GenAI was all risks highlighting the example of artists being forced to crunch out Pokémon card art for TCG Pocket leading to the card being AI generated for a time whilst this issue was resolved.

Theme 4 contains the most passionate discussion of any questions asked within the interviews conducted. While there may have been gaps in knowledge for some of the other themes, here there is a clear and obvious point being driven across all 3 responses: human creativity is imperative for art and is a massive part of how society exists today and the development of GenAI in recent years is a direct threat to this way of life. Participants 2 and 3 were the most devout in this point bringing up historical art examples like the Mona Lisa and how they have influenced society as today as well as linking back to the community aspect of esports and camaraderie with participant 2 using the words "underdog" in relation to that point. Participant 1 while still being just as passionate in their answers looked more at the practical application of GenAI in design and how you need the human input to be able to understand the information needed to be displayed through design describing "Graphic design is making something accessible and usable. It's closer to UX design than it is to like artistry, right?". This distinction is important as it allows for deeper meaning to be gained from the human input on design as opposed to the point raised earlier in the literature review of how useful GenAI can be in designing UX for different people based on the data its provided with.

On the back of this, the responses seen in theme 5 were regarding thoughts on public reception both in and out of esports. The discussion around both was important as it enabled a comparison to be made between different forms of media. All participants were able to comment on how in general, the public response to GenAI graphics was predominantly negative with differing reasons and perspectives presented from each participant all driving similar points.

Participant 1 discussed the idea that on social media these days, there is not really a grey area seen in many different and often volatile discussions about AI, either you are for or against it with no real room for people on the fence or appealing points for both sides. One of the other points raised was the concept that boycotts because of GenAI don't really work due to some companies just being "too large to fail" and provides an interesting idea that there needs to be much more done for these companies to be impacted rather than just taking chips off their bottom line. Participant 2 was able to expand upon their experience with COMPANY 2 and the potential that their policies only really exist to stop public backlash against them. Raising the

point that some companies do things like this to boost pr and morale links back to concepts of morality within companies and whether stunts like these are necessarily a bad thing if the impact of them is still good. In spite of these claims though participant 2 was able to define their opinion that COMPANY 2 at least for now are doing this because they are backing the movement against AI rather than just doing it for PR sake. Participant 3 was able to provide the example of twitter discourse around AI generally being that people will make fun of “AI slop” using memes and other means to demean the value of these graphics. One of the most intriguing points raised in their discussion of this though was the opinion of their grandparents on the coca cola advert from Christmas 2025. Usually, there is a pattern of AI discussion that the younger you are, the less likely you are to back the usage of it so what is interesting here is it is an example of the older generations being against AI.

Theme 6 relates to the future of GenAI in graphic design and where the participants see it going in the future. All participants were of the opinion that the future of AI is currently hard to decide however if it were to continue as it currently is, it will be incredibly harmful to not just graphic design but the world. Participant 1 was conflicted due to there being other systemic issues (namely tier 2 funding) resulting in the usage of GenAI for graphics and wide sweeping changes need to be made to the industry before being able to move onto a healthier position. On the other hand, their point was that eventually, something has to give for GenAI, describing it as “a bubble waiting to burst” from an economic standpoint due to it primarily being a cash sink at the moment with very little profit generated. Participants 2 and 3 were a lot more on the side that they hope GenAI does not have a place in this industry with the opinion that there needs to be accountability from somewhere for these AI models to exist and something has to be changed for them to continue to exist. Participant 3 in particular raised the opinion of future job prospects being harmed for designers due to the cost cutting nature of GenAI whilst both participants 2 and 3 were of the opinion that AI will only cause damage to the future of art before it does something good.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, from evidence provided by both primary and secondary research, there is change that needs to be made to how GenAI operates before it should develop further. While there are definitely benefits surrounding its use which are important to mention as through this research its clear that sometimes, GenAI can help in art and design with the main one being lowering the barrier for entry in both a cost and skill requirement. However, these benefits are difficult to notice due to the scale of the risks in using GenAI from numerous perspectives from the immense environmental damage it is doing to the world through its data centres and the power consumption of generating images being far too high (Dhanani, 2024). On top of this there are the huge concerns surrounding the legality of its data driven processes, using the example of Hayao Miyazaki the cofounder of Studio Ghibli as the most obvious example of GenAI stealing art styles and work this has a ripple effect on the whole industry (Silberling, 2025). If work that you create can be taken and used by these AI models without your consent there are serious issues legally that have yet to be addressed and this is where the source of most recommendations comes from. For GenAI to continue or to be used in a way that is actually healthy for creative scenes, there is an awful lot of sweeping regulation needed to limit its damage to both the environment and to art within our society (Kleppe et al., 2026). To limit its damage to the environment there needs to be global change to laws surrounding data centres and how they are managed however, this is a very farfetched goal as it requires global change which is very difficult to push. In addition to this though there needs to be changes to IP laws to account for AI generated graphics as with examples like Italian Brain rot sitting in legal grey areas as of writing this paper should not be the case. There should be protection against artists who do not want their work to be taken as training data for models who are positioning themselves to take the jobs of these designers in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Proposal

[LINK TO RESEARCH PROPOSAL DOCUMENT](#)

RESEARCH ETHICS*Proportionate Review Form*

The Proportionate Review process may be used where the proposed research raises only minimal ethical risk. This research must: focus on minimally sensitive topics; entail minimal intrusion or disruption to others; and involve participants who would not be considered vulnerable in the context of the research.

PART A: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE RESEARCHER

Name of Researcher:	Joshua Wilson
School:	University of Staffordshire

Student/Course Details (If Applicable)		
Student ID Number:	22036894m	
Name of Supervisor(s)/Module Tutor:	Phillip Cooke	
PhD/MPhil project: <input type="checkbox"/>		
Taught Postgraduate <input type="checkbox"/>	Award Title:	
Project/Assignment:		
Undergraduate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Module Title:	Esports Final Year Project (ESPO60014)
Project/Assignment		

Project Title:	How is AI impacting the livelihood of graphic designers within esports?
Project Outline:	This project will take a holistic view of the usage of AI within graphic design and highlight the potential benefits and risks of using such technology within the space with the goal being to determine whether it is helping or harming the industry using esports specific examples and experts to help determine this impact on the scene. I am defining the usage of AI as the generation of any images or graphics used for any public work in addition to creating design ideas or mock ups to iterate on during the design process.
Give a brief description of participants and procedure (methods, tests etc.)	Will be doing up to 5 qualitative interviews each looking to be 15 to 30 minutes long with various graphic designers above the age of 18 within the esports sector with consent being gathered through consent forms and information sheets of which these participants can drop out at any given point. They will also be able to withdraw any data they wish before it is processed if they chose to.

	<p>I will begin via convenience sampling for initial interviews and then looking to snowball those people into more participants who are 18 and over based on who they know. I will initially reach out to my participants via online messaging over Discord using graphic design servers (such as broadcast.gg discord server) and X (using my personal account) with the interviews also being conducted online through Microsoft Teams as it has the functionality to auto transcribe them with responses collected to be stored securely on my university OneDrive.</p> <p>I will use these responses to help inform my research on whether ai is benefiting those within the space or whether it is a risk to those either using the technology or a risk to the people who aren't and potentially impacting those people. The opinion of these industry professionals will help me to be able to get views from people at a variety of points in their respective careers and how they feel about AI within graphics.</p>		
Expected Start Date:	25/11/25	Expected End Date:	8/5/26

Relevant professional body ethical guidelines should be consulted when completing this form.

Please seek guidance from the School Ethics Coordinator if you are uncertain about any ethical issues arising from this application.

There is an obligation on the researcher and supervisor (where applicable) to bring to the attention of the School Ethics Coordinator any issues with ethical implications not identified by this form.

Researcher Declaration

I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications requiring full ethical review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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I confirm that:		
1.	The research will NOT involve members of vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups include but are not limited to: children and young people (under 18 years of age), those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, patients, people in custody, people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking), or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.	This research will NOT involve sensitive topics. Sensitive topics include, but are not limited to: participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, their gender or ethnic status. The research must not involve groups where permission of a gatekeeper is normally required for initial access to members, for example, ethnic or cultural groups, native peoples or indigenous communities.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.	The research will NOT deliberately mislead participants in any way.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4.	The research will NOT involve access to records of personal or confidential information, including genetic or other biological information, concerning identifiable individuals.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.	The research with NOT induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation, cause more than	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<p>minimal pain, or involve intrusive interventions.</p> <p>This includes, but is not limited to: the administration of drugs or other substances, vigorous physical exercise, or techniques such as hypnotherapy which may cause participants to reveal information which could cause concern, in the course of their everyday life.</p>	
6.	<p>The research WILL be conducted with Participants' full and informed consent at the time the study is carried out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main procedure will be explained to the participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> • Participants will be told their involvement in the research is voluntary. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> • Written consent will be obtained from participants. <i>(This is not required for self-completion questionnaires as submission of the completed questionnaire implies consent to participate).</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> • Participants will be informed about how they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> • For questionnaires and interviews: Participants will be given the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> • Participants will be told that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, every effort will be made to ensure it will not be identifiable as theirs. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> • Participants will be given the opportunity to be debriefed i.e. to find out more about the study and its results. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 	<p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>N/A <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.	A risk assessment has been completed for this research project	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>

If you are unable to confirm any of the above statements, please complete a **Full Ethical Review Form**.
If the research will include participants that are **patients**, please complete the Independent Peer Review process.

<p>8. Information and Data</p> <p>Please provide answers to the following questions regarding the handling and storage of information and data:</p> <p>a) How will research data be stored (manually or electronically)?</p> <p>Data will all be stored electronically and transcripts of the interviews will be kept as word documents and stored electronically in my secure university one drive</p>
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b) How is protection given to the participants (e.g. by being made anonymous through coding and with a participant identifier code being kept separately and securely)?
The participants will be given coded names so they can remain anonymous as well as other revealing information will be removed from the interviews with all participants being informed that their data is secured in my university one drive
c) What assurance will be given to the participant about the confidentiality of this data and the security of its storage?
Stored in my university OneDrive so people will have restricted access to it as well as potentially sensitive information would be omitted from the recordings of the interviews, and I will reassure the participant prior to the interview, in the consent form and information sheet that this would be the case. They will also be allowed to withdraw at any point before data is processed for the study which they will be informed of on the information sheet provided.
d) Is assurance given to the participant that they cannot be identified from any publication or dissemination of the results of the project?
Assurance will be given to any participants that they will not be identified and in publicised work their names will be coded so it's not possible to identify them or be traced back to them for any potentially negative repercussions which they will be informed of within the information sheet.
e) Who will have access to this data, and for what purposes?
I will have access to this data for research purposes and analysis where it will be stored in my university OneDrive, I should be the sole person who can access this other than module staff for marking purposes
f) How will the data be stored, for how long, and how will it be discarded?
The data will be stored for the duration of the project on my OneDrive before being terminated with my university account once I graduate

Supporting Documentation

All key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview schedule are appended to this application.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Signature of Researcher:	Joshua J Wilson	Date:	21/11/25
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NB: If the research departs from the protocol which provides the basis for this proportionate review, then further review will be required and the applicant and supervisor(s) should consider whether or not the proportionate review remains appropriate. If it is no longer appropriate a full ethical review form **MUST** be submitted for consideration by the School Ethics Coordinator.

Next Step: STUDENTS: Please submit this form (and supporting documentation) for consideration by your Supervisor/Module Tutor.
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STAFF: Please submit this form to your Head of Department or a Senior Researcher in your School. Once they have reviewed the form, this should be forwarded to the Research Administration in RIIS (ethics@staffs.ac.uk) who will arrange for it to be considered by an independent member of the School's College of Reviewers.

PART B: TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR/MODULE TUTOR (if student) or HEAD OF DEPARTMENT/SENIOR RESEARCHER (if staff)

I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications requiring full ethical review by the School Research Ethics Committee.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Signature of Supervisor/ Head of Department/ Senior Researcher:	Philip Cooke (PC45) Senior Lecturer – Esports	Date:	21/11/25
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Next Step: Please forward this form to the Research Administrators in RIIS (ethics@staffs.ac.uk) who will arrange for it to be considered by an independent member of the School's College of Ethical Reviewers, having no direct connection with the researcher or his/her programme of study.

PART C: TO BE COMPLETED BY A MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL'S COLLEGE OF ETHICAL REVIEWERS

This research proposal has been considered using agreed University Procedures and is now approved.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Or	<input type="checkbox"/>
This research proposal has not been approved due to the reasons given below.	
Recommendation (delete as appropriate): Approve / Amendments required / Reject	


Name of Reviewer:		Date:	
Signature:			


Signed (School Ethical Coordinator)		Date:	
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 **Final Mark**
 Last attempt with a mark 100 / 100


ATTEMPT 4/4 (SUBMITTED 17/02/2026, 11:38) LATE 100 / 100
RECEIPT: 630287C87DA9D10647076344CB1008

Instructions **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FYP.docx** ETHICS FORM.docx INFORMATION SHEET ETHICS.docx CONSENT FORM ETHICS.docx

 Attempt feedback

 Approved

 Page 1 / 1



Reflective Diary – Dissertation

Idea conceptualisation – Weeks 1-3

To begin this project, I began by looking at different options for research. The initial plans for this research were to look at the impact of microtransactions within esports and talk about they have affected different titles through quantitative surveys. However, after doing some initial research into this topic I decided to pivot away from it as while I felt passionate about it, I wanted something more relevant to my future career prospects that I could research. This led me to look into artificial intelligence and its impact on graphics designers through qualitative research via interviews with professionals in the space.

Initial Research – Weeks 4-6

After deciding on my topic, I began to research into different avenues of how AI is used within graphics, looking at the techniques of its use and how I can link that with my own knowledge on the topic due to my experience in graphics already. As well as looking at the techniques I wanted to look into the importance of human creativity within art and how that could potentially be harmed by the usage of artificial intelligence. The combination of this research gave me a solid foundation to be able to structure this project and begin to work my way through ethics.

Research Proposal 14/11/25

After finding my initial literature I began to write up my initial proposal to see whether my topic would work as a dissertation. While I wasn't able to get this submitted for the deadline provided, I was able to get it written which helped me to be able to structure my ethics later and gave me a good direction on where to go next. This also helped me to gather all my initial thoughts and research in one place.

Supervisor Meeting – 21/11/25

After being assigned my supervisor, Phillip Cooke, for this project I scheduled a meeting with him to discuss my ethics forms. In this meeting, we went over my current attempt at ethics forms and what could be improved upon before the next submission point in late December as well as next steps within my project and how would be best to tackle interviews and how to structure my questions to get the best responses before I submitted this attempt later in the day.

Ethics Submission 2 – 19/12/25

Upon receiving my ethics forms back and falling into revise and resubmit I looked at the feedback provided and adapted my attempt at ethics to match what was given to me. Most of what I had written was correct and just needed some adjustments for clarity as well as expansion on some points I had made within the project outline. As well as this I changes to my consent form and questions to ensure that I was not probing too much and causing distress to my interviewees and making sure that the form was clear enough for them to sign.

Poster Creation And Presentation – 26/01/26, 23-27/02/2026

As semester 2 began we had to create the research poster to present our projects to a small panel of people to prove we knew what we were talking about. I found the creation of this poster difficult as due to the high word count and limited space I found it difficult to be able to make something that I thought looked presentable and hit the word count needed for the assignment. However, I got it sorted and printed onto an a2 board and was able to successfully present my poster and answer questions surrounding it and my research to the satisfaction of those I was presenting to and was able to get a 68 on my poster which sets me up well for the future of this project.

Ethics Submission 3/4 - 05/02/2026

After receiving very minor amendments after my last submission I was able to change the comments made on my last submission and get it turned around within a couple of days. I then had to wait until the end of the month to be able to finally get my ethics approved and begin to move on to thinking about starting interviews looking into march. The deadline for sorting these was April 1st being the date I proposed for when people could pull out of my project.

Interviews - 01/03/26 - 01/04/26

For my interviews, I was looking to get up to 5 with them being relatively unstructured with questions adapting to the topics being mentioned within the interview. The interviews were all able to be conducted online through Microsoft teams and I was able to get 3 successful interviews. While that is lower than what I initially looked for all 3 interviews provided incredibly valuable and diverse information and was able to get all of the transcriptions ready for analysis later which I wanted some advice from my supervisor on the best method of doing so.

Supervisor Meeting 2 – 19/03/26

As mentioned before, I used this time to get advice on both the future writing of my project as well as to better understand how to analyse the data I gathered in the interviews. To do this I looked to use thematic analysis of each of the transcripts to look at the themes in their answers and apply that to the knowledge I have based on all the research I have already done up to this point. As for the advice on the writing, I wanted to be able to ensure that I was structuring my project properly and Phil was able to help me understand how best to do so leaving me in a good position for the future.

Project Writing – 01/04/26 – 30/04/26

Using all the research I have gathered up to this point as well as analysing the transcripts of the interviews so far, I have been able to begin the process of writing my dissertation using the advice I have received to take it one section at a time and have been able to make good process so far as of writing this diary. If I were to reflect upon the project as a whole, I think things have gone well apart from the hold up with ethics restricting the time I have to do interviews and while this didn't impact the project too much, I would have liked to have been able to have closer to 5 interviews instead.

Appendix D: Interview Consent Forms

RESEARCH PROJECT CONSENT FORM

Research Title: How is AI impacting the livelihood of graphic designers within esports?

Researcher: Joshua Joseph Wilson

I have read and understood the information sheet.	YES	NO
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions surrounding the project and any questions I have asked have been answered satisfactorily.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation in this study is fully voluntary and I can withdraw at any point without explanation, this will have no effect on you in the future.	YES	NO
I understand that the interview I participate in will be recorded and transcribed for usage within the project	YES	NO
I consent to the data collected being able to be used for publication in a scientific journal or could be presented to scientific forums.	YES	NO
I agree that the data will only be used for this project although the data may potentially be audited for quality control purposes	YES	NO
All data will be stored safely on a password protected computer or drive for electronic data and hard copies of data will be securely locked away until the project is complete	YES	NO
I understand that I can withdraw from any of my data from the project up to the 1 st of April without having to give any form of explanation	YES	NO
I hereby consent to partake in this study	YES	NO

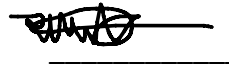
Name Participant (Print)

Date

Signature

Joshua Joseph Wilson
Name Researcher (Print)

___3/3/26___
Date


Signature

Information Sheet for participants

Project reference number:

Title of study:

How is AI Impacting the livelihood of graphic designers within esports?

Invitation Paragraph

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project, before you decide on whether to partake or not it is important to understand what the purpose of this project is. Please take the time to read through the information on this sheet carefully and thoroughly and feel free to discuss the topic with others if you feel like it before participating. If there is anything that you feel is not in the sheet or requires further information, then do not hesitate to ask me.

What is the purpose of this study?

This study aims to tackle the relationship between the developing technology that is Artificial Intelligence and its impacts on graphic design as a whole and where that situates itself within esports. I plan to wholistically research the usage of AI within graphic design, considering both the potential positives and negatives of using such technologies in the space and based on my research deduce which way that leans with the aim to see how this could affect the industry looking into the future.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited as I am looking to gather the opinions of individuals who work with in graphic design at a variety of levels and are above the age of 18 whether that be a more entry level role or an industry expert, you fall into this category.

What will happen if I partake?

You will be invited to partake in an interview held on Microsoft Teams with the questions relating to the usage of AI within graphic design in general as well as questions regarding human creativity before looking at examples of this within esports and how it could potentially apply to your work. The interview will take approximately 15 – 30

minutes. Your responses will be used as data for my research however, your responses shall be made anonymous through coding so nothing you say can be tracked back to you once you are done. You can also withdraw your data from the project at any point before April 1st if you do not feel comfortable.

Do I have to take part?

The interview is completely voluntary, and you should only take part if you want to and not participating will not hinder you in any way. Once you have read this sheet, ask any questions you like that may influence your decision about being involved. If you do wish to be involved, you shall have to read and sign a consent form of which you will be given a copy to keep you will also be able to withdraw from this project at any point before April 1st.

What are potential risks in taking part?

There may be potential risks involved when talking about the usage of AI within graphics as it can be quite a controversial topic within graphic design, to minimize this I will ensure that any responses are properly and securely anonymised with no revealing information being published. This will ensure that your views are confidential and you face no negative repercussions for speaking out against AI in your line of work.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Taking part allows you to be more informed on the future of your job if you aren't fully aware of the impacts of AI already and once published it could potentially open a new dialogue into the impacts of AI in the future and help to protect those working in the space.

Data Handling

Your data will be stored and processed in compliance with the data protection law and will not breach the General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR.

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be The University of Staffordshire who will process personal data for the purposes of this project. As for the legal basis for the processing of your personal data for any research purposes under data protection laws is a 'task in the public interest' you can give your consent for the use of your personal data in the project with the consent form provided.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right to access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. You also have other rights such as, correction, erasure, objection and data portability. Questions comments and requests for your data can be directed to the University of Staffordshire data protection officer and if you do wish to lodge a complaint with the Information commissioner officer, you can do so at: www.ico.org.uk

What happens if I change my mind on participating?

You are free to withdraw at any time without the need for any reason or explanation for it, this will not have any effect on you. You can pull any data out from the study up until April 1st after which the withdrawal of your data won't be possible as it will be being processed during this period.

How is this project being funded?

N/A

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or need any more information, then please contact me using the following email address or message me on discord using the following tag

w036894m@student.staffs.ac.uk

What If I have further questions or something went wrong?

If you have been impacted by this study in any way you can make a complaint in the conduct of the study, you can contact the study supervisor or the chair of the University of Staffordshire's ethics committee for any further information or advice.

Study supervisor email:

phil.cooke@staffs.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your time reading through this sheet and your consideration of participation in this research project, it is much appreciated.

Thanks,

Josh Wilson

Appendix F: Research Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FYP

- Would you be able to quickly introduce yourself and what you do for a living?
- How long have you been working in graphics for and how much of that time has been spent with in esports?
- What area of graphics do you specialize in? (e.g. broadcast graphics, socials graphics etc)
- Do you have any knowledge on the usage of AI for graphics like potential software used or methodologies involving AI?
- Have you used any of this software yourself for any graphic design work?
- Do you know any potential benefits or risks of using AI?
- To what extent do you believe in the effectiveness of human creativity, and do you think the usage of AI is impacting that?
- In general, do you think the use of AI is helping professionals within the space or do you think it could be limiting them?
- Have you seen any examples of AI being used for graphics within your line of work up to this point?
- What were your thoughts on these examples?
- To what extent do you think AI graphics could be harming the reputation of esports?
- Where do you see the use of AI for graphic design leading to in the future?
- Do you believe there should be regulations around AI in graphic design and if so, what would that look like to you?
- In the future, do you think AI will be commonplace within graphic design?

Appendix G: Interview transcripts

[PARTICIPANT 1 TRANSCRIPT LINK](#)

[PARTICIPANT 2 TRANSCRIPT LINK](#)

[PARTICIPANT 3 TRANSCRIPT LINK](#)

Appendix H: Gaant Chart

[GAANT CHART LINK](#)