

# Young Consumer Responses to AI-Generated vs. Human-Made Art

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the origin of visual art (human vs. AI) influences perception, aesthetic appreciation, and purchase intent, and whether individuals can distinguish between them. We explored shifts in perception after origin disclosure and underlying factors.

In a double-blind, between-subjects experiment, 60 young adults rated human-made or AI-generated artworks on aesthetic, emotional, and purchase dimensions. After initial ratings, true origin was revealed, and participants reflected on changes.

Results showed that when origin was concealed, participants rated AI and human art similarly across all measures and could not reliably distinguish them. However, disclosing AI authorship significantly reduced appreciation, emotional engagement, and purchase willingness. Conversely, human authorship disclosure increased these values. Qualitative data emphasized the importance of perceived authenticity and human agency. These findings suggest biases against AI-generated art stem not from intrinsic aesthetic qualities, but from knowledge of authorship, reflecting psychological and cultural narratives. This highlights the need for nuanced dialogue on technology, creativity, and value as AI reshapes the art world.

**Keywords:** AI-generated art, Human-computer interaction, Art consumption, Creative artificial intelligence, Art psychology, Art perception

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has sparked a renaissance across multiple domains, not least within the visual arts, where AI-generated art challenges traditional notions of creativity and authorship. With AI's capabilities rapidly advancing, algorithms are now producing artwork that resonates with the aesthetic and emotional depth once considered the exclusive domain of human artists (Elgammal et al. 2017). However, the proliferation of AI in art raises profound questions about the perception, value, and future of art produced in collaboration with or solely by non-human entities. The significance of this phenomenon extends beyond the boundaries of the art world. From a business perspective, AI-generated art presents a potentially disruptive force in the art market, altering the economic landscape and introducing new revenue models (Włodarczyk 2024). In education, the integration of AI into art curricula can redefine the skillsets required for future artists and educators (Escalona-Márquez et al. 2024). Furthermore, the barrier to entry for creating art could be lowered significantly, democratising art production but also introducing challenges related to artistic value and originality (Othman 2024).

## 1.2 DEBATES ON CREATIVITY AND AUTHORSHIP

The core of the debate centers not only on the aesthetic and technical merits of AI-generated art but also on the subjective experience of the consumer: Does the knowledge that an artwork was created by an AI alter its perceived value? This question taps into deep-seated beliefs about creativity, the role of human agency in art, and the intrinsic value of human touch in cultural artefacts (Kahneman et al. 1991). Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the public's perception of AI-generated art in comparison to human-created art. Specifically, the research aims to understand whether the knowledge of an artwork's origin – AI or human – impacts its perceived aesthetic and emotional value. The hypothesis driving this inquiry posits that the awareness of an artwork being AI-generated will negatively influence its perceived value, despite equivalent levels of aesthetic quality to human-created art.

## 1.3 RELEVANCE

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) in the creative industries has sparked widespread debate about the future of artistic production, authenticity, and intellectual property. As AI-generated art becomes increasingly sophisticated and accessible, it challenges traditional notions of creativity and authorship, raising questions about what constitutes “real” art and who owns creative outputs (Elgammal et al. 2017; McCormack et al. 2019). These developments have fuelled concerns about automation displacing human artists, as well as broader anxieties about the erosion of human agency and originality in cultural production (Florida 2003; The Economist 2023). Understanding public attitudes toward AI-generated art is thus crucial for anticipating how societies will navigate these transformations, legislate ownership and rights, and value human versus machine-made creativity.

Moreover, the integration of AI into the arts has significant implications for the future of work and the evolving relationship between technology and human labor. As creative professions—once considered uniquely human and resistant to automation—face new forms of competition from generative algorithms, stakeholders across the art world, from artists to collectors and policymakers, must grapple with shifting perceptions of value, skill, and authenticity (Acemoglu & Restrepo 2019; Chiang 2024). By examining how individuals perceive and evaluate AI-generated versus human-made art, researchers can provide critical insights into the acceptance, skepticism, or resistance that may shape the trajectory of creative industries in an era of rapid technological change.

## 1.4 OBJECTIVES

The interdisciplinary nature of this research intersects with the sociology of art, cognitive psychology, and the emerging field of computational creativity. The implications of this study are far-reaching, potentially influencing how AI is perceived not only within the realm of art but also in broader creative and professional contexts. For instance, if biases against AI-generated art are strong, they may reflect or even reinforce similar biases in other fields where AI's role is expanding, such as writing, music, and design (Prissé et al. 2026).

Moreover, the conversation around AI-generated art inevitably touches upon the concept of authenticity and its impact on the valuation of art. The art market, with its complex dynamics of supply, demand, and speculative investment, has traditionally placed a premium on the 'authenticity' of an artist's hand (Thompson 2022). This study therefore not only examines current perceptions but also provides a predictive lens for future market behaviours as AI becomes more prevalent.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

- To measure and analyse the aesthetic and emotional responses of individuals to AI-generated art without the influence of bias regarding the art's origin.
- To assess the change in perception and value once the origin of the artwork (AI versus human) is disclosed.
- To explore the broader implications of these perceptions for artists, the art market, educational institutions, and policymakers.

The value of the study lies in its empirical approach to a subject that is often discussed anecdotally or philosophically. By grounding the discourse in data-driven analysis, the study offers concrete evidence to inform the ongoing debate about the role of AI in creative processes. The results have the potential to guide strategic decision-making for a range of stakeholders and to contribute to a more informed and nuanced public discussion about the integration of AI into cultural and creative domains.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. To what extent do initial aesthetic judgments, perceived creativity, emotional impact, and complexity of visual artworks differ between human-made and AI-generated art when the origin is concealed?
2. What is the accuracy of participants' ability to distinguish between human-made and AI-generated art in the absence of explicit origin information?
3. How does the disclosure of artwork origin (human vs. AI) influence participants' aesthetic appreciation, emotional engagement, and willingness to purchase/consume?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 STUDY DESIGN

A double-blind, between-subjects experimental design was employed to investigate perceptions of AI-generated versus human-made art. This approach ensured that both participants and the researchers interacting with them were unaware of the origin of the artworks during initial assessment, minimising potential biases (Field 2013). Each

participant was exposed to either AI-generated or human-made artworks, but not both, to prevent cross-contamination of responses and maintain the integrity of between-group comparisons.

## **2.2 PARTICIPANTS**

The sample consisted of 60 adults aged 18–23 years ( $M = 20.3$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ). Participants were university students recruited from the University of the Witwatersrand, recruited randomly and under voluntarily participation. All participants reported prior exposure to art and familiarity with AI-generated art, ensuring a baseline level of technological and artistic literacy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study protocol adhered to institutional ethical guidelines (H26/08/22).

## **2.3 ARTWORK SELECTION**

A total of 20 visual artworks were used in the study, comprising 10 human-made pieces and 10 AI-generated pieces. Each participant was exposed to 10 artworks: participants in the human-made art group viewed all 10 human-made pieces, and participants in the AI-generated art group viewed all 10 AI-generated pieces. The artworks were selected to represent a diverse range of popular styles and iconic artistic categories, including abstract expressionism, surrealism, digital painting, photography, landscapes, portraits, and still life.

The selection process aimed to achieve close matching between human-made and AI-generated pieces in terms of style, complexity, and overall visual quality. This matching was performed by the researcher to ensure that initial aesthetic judgments were not influenced by obvious differences in visual attributes. AI-generated artworks were produced using advanced generative algorithms, specifically DALL-E 3 and Stable Diffusion 3 (SD3). These AI creations were iteratively refined for stylistic parity with human-made art through a process involving careful prompt engineering, multiple generation attempts, and feedback rounds from other evaluators to ensure the desired visual characteristics were met.

The human-made artworks were sourced from existing works, including pieces from the public domain, works from contemporary artists (with permission obtained where necessary), and stock art libraries. All artworks were anonymised and presented in a randomised order within a controlled online environment (Google Forms) to minimise potential biases related to presentation order or recognition. Participants were not informed of the study's focus on artwork origin at any point prior to the disclosure phase.

## **2.4 MEASURES**

Participants' responses were assessed using a combination of closed and open-ended questions. For each artwork, participants rated their aesthetic and emotional dimensions, perceived creativity, complexity, and willingness to purchase on 7-point Likert scales, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree."

The specific statements used for each dimension were as follows:

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF LIKERT-SCALE STATEMENTS.**

| Aesthetic Appreciation               | Perceived Creativity                    | Emotional Impact                                        | Complexity                                          | Willingness to Purchase/Consume                       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| "The artwork is beautiful."          | "The artwork appears to be innovative." | "The artwork evoked a strong emotional response in me." | "I feel that the artwork is complex and intricate." | "I would be interested in seeing more art like this." |
| "The artwork is visually appealing." | "This artwork shows originality."       |                                                         |                                                     | "I would consider buying this artwork."               |
| "I like this artwork."               |                                         |                                                         |                                                     |                                                       |

Participants were also asked to indicate their belief regarding the origin of each artwork ("Definitely Human," "Probably Human," "Unsure," "Probably AI," "Definitely AI"). Attention and manipulation checks were embedded throughout the survey to ensure data quality and participant engagement.

## 2.5 PROCEDURE

Participants were randomly assigned to view a series of either human-made or AI-generated artworks. After viewing each piece, they completed the associated questionnaire items. Attention checks required participants to recall specific details or completed responses they were instructed to complete, to validate engagement. Upon completion of the initial assessment, participants were informed of the true origin of the artworks they had rated and were invited to reflect on whether this new information changed their prior evaluations, with qualitative responses recorded.

## 2.6 DATA ANALYSIS

### 2.6.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using independent-samples t-tests to compare mean ratings (aesthetic appreciation, creativity, emotional impact, complexity, and willingness to consume/purchase) between the human-made and AI-generated art groups. Chi-square tests were used to assess participants' accuracy in attributing artwork origin. Due to the absence of numerical post-disclosure ratings for each artwork, repeated-measures ANOVA was not applicable; instead, thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative responses to capture changes in perception after origin disclosure (Braun & Clarke 2006). Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were reported for all t-test comparisons to facilitate interpretation of practical significance.

### 2.6.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions posed to participants after the disclosure of artwork origin. These questions aimed to capture nuanced shifts in perception and attitude, including: "Has your perception of the artwork changed after learning about its origin?", "If your perception has changed, please explain how?", "How likely would you be to buy, study, enjoy this artwork/artist, now knowing its origin?", and "Does knowing the origin of the artwork change your interest in consuming similar types of art in the future?". Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns within these qualitative responses. The primary researcher conducted the analysis, following an inductive approach where themes emerged directly from the data rather than being pre-defined. The process involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes for coherence and consistency, and finally, defining and naming the identified

themes. Illustrative quotes were selected for inclusion in the findings based on their representativeness of a particular theme or their ability to highlight a key insight.

## **2.7 LIMITATIONS**

There are potential limitations, such as the subjectivity inherent in art appreciation and individual differences in taste—there is no universal consensus on what makes a work "good" or "creative." The findings of this study may reflect an average perception across participants rather than prove one type is objectively superior. Additionally, there are challenges of controlling for prior art exposure. The study also only examines a small sample of art works. Perceptions may differ depending on the specific styles, subjects, or individual pieces shown.

## **3. FINDINGS/RESULTS**

### **3.1 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS**

The final sample in this study comprised 60 participants, all aged between 18 and 23 years ( $M = 20.3$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ), with approximately equal representation across each year group. Participants were drawn from diverse residential backgrounds, as indicated in the demographic questionnaire. The majority identified as residing in urban ( $n = 26$ , 43.3%) or suburban ( $n = 24$ , 40.0%) areas, while a smaller proportion reported rural residency ( $n = 10$ , 16.7%).

All participants indicated some prior experience with art, either through formal classes, browsing visual art online, visiting art galleries, or personal creation of artwork. This ensured a baseline familiarity with artistic concepts and practices across the sample. Exposure to artificial intelligence was similarly widespread. Every participant (100%) reported having previously encountered AI-generated art, and a substantial majority (76%) had directly used AI art generation tools prior to participating in the study. This level of prior exposure suggests a cohort that is both technologically and artistically literate, which may influence their perceptions and responses. No identifying information regarding gender or specific cultural background was collected, in accordance with ethical guidelines and to preserve participant privacy.

Overall, the sample represented a demographically diverse group of young adults with consistent prior exposure to both art and artificial intelligence. These baseline characteristics provide a robust foundation for subsequent analyses of aesthetic and emotional responses to AI-generated versus human-made art.

### **3.2 MANIPULATION AND ATTENTION CHECKS**

To ensure the integrity of the experimental conditions, both manipulation and attention check procedures were embedded throughout the study. The double-blind design was maintained successfully; neither participants nor the researchers directly interacting with them were made aware of the origin of the artworks during the initial viewing phase. Artworks were anonymised, and the order of presentation was randomised for each participant to minimise potential order effects or recognition biases.

Attention checks were incorporated at multiple points in the survey to confirm participant engagement and data reliability. These included straightforward questions embedded within the questionnaire, such as prompts to select a specific response or recall a detail from the immediately preceding artwork. All participants responded correctly to every attention check item, resulting in a 100% pass rate. Consequently, no data were excluded on the basis of inattention or disengagement.

These results indicate that participants were attentive and engaged throughout the task, and that the manipulation regarding the anonymity of artwork origin was preserved. This supports the validity of subsequent analyses comparing responses across experimental conditions.

### 3.3 AESTHETIC APPRECIATION

To assess participants' aesthetic responses to the artworks, ratings were collected on three Likert-scale items: visually "appealing", "beautiful", and "like". Ratings ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher values indicating greater aesthetic appreciation.

As shown in Table 2, participants who viewed human-made art ( $n = 30$ ) provided mean ratings of 4.38 for visually appealing, 4.24 for beautiful, and 4.12 for like. Participants who viewed AI-generated art ( $n = 30$ ) reported nearly identical mean scores: 4.37 for visually appealing, 4.21 for beautiful, and 4.08 for like.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the two groups on each measure. For visually appealing, the difference between groups was negligible,  $t(58) = 0.06$ ,  $p = .95$ , with a Cohen's  $d = 0.01$ . Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences for ratings of beautiful ( $t(58) = 0.19$ ,  $p = .85$ ,  $d = 0.05$ ) or like ( $t(58) = 0.23$ ,  $p = .82$ ,  $d = 0.06$ ). In all cases, effect sizes were trivial, indicating no meaningful differences in aesthetic appreciation between participants exposed to human-made versus AI-generated art.

These findings suggest that, when the origin of the artwork is anonymised, viewers rate the aesthetic qualities of human-made and AI-generated art similarly.

**TABLE 2: MEAN AESTHETIC APPRECIATION RATINGS BY CONDITION (LIKERT SCALE: 1–7)**

| Condition                     | Visually Appealing | Beautiful | Like |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|------|
| Human-made art ( $n = 30$ )   | 4.38               | 4.24      | 4.12 |
| AI-generated art ( $n = 30$ ) | 4.37               | 4.21      | 4.08 |

### 3.4 PERCEIVED CREATIVITY, EMOTIONAL IMPACT, AND COMPLEXITY

Participants' perceptions of creativity, emotional impact, and complexity were assessed using the same 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale. As with aesthetic appreciation, mean ratings were closely matched across both experimental conditions.

As shown below in Table 3, for participants who viewed human-made art the mean rating for perceived creativity was 4.03, for emotional impact was 3.62, and for complexity was 4.14. Participants who viewed AI-generated art reported mean ratings of 4.00 for perceived creativity, 3.59 for emotional impact, and 4.16 for complexity.

Independent-samples t-tests were performed to compare the groups on each of these dimensions. The results indicated no statistically significant differences for perceived creativity ( $t(58) = 0.15$ ,  $p = .88$ ,  $d = 0.04$ ), emotional impact ( $t(58) = 0.14$ ,  $p = .89$ ,  $d = 0.04$ ), or complexity ( $t(58) = -0.11$ ,  $p = .91$ ,  $d = 0.03$ ). Effect sizes were minimal, suggesting negligible practical differences between participants' responses to human-made and AI-generated art in these domains.

These findings further support the observation that, when the origin of the artwork is concealed, viewers perceive human-made and AI-generated art as similarly creative, emotionally resonant, and complex.

**TABLE 3: MEAN RATINGS FOR PERCEIVED CREATIVITY, EMOTIONAL IMPACT, AND COMPLEXITY  
(LIKERT SCALE: 1–7)**

| Condition                 | Perceived Creativity | Emotional Impact | Complexity |
|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------|
| Human-made art (n = 30)   | 4.03                 | 3.62             | 4.14       |
| AI-generated art (n = 30) | 4.00                 | 3.59             | 4.16       |

**3.5 ACCURACY OF ORIGIN ATTRIBUTION**

To assess participants’ ability to distinguish between human-made and AI-generated artworks, each participant was asked to indicate their belief regarding the origin of each artwork using a categorical scale: "Definitely Human," "Probably Human," "Unsure," "Probably AI," or "Definitely AI." For the human-made art group, responses of "Definitely Human" or "Probably Human" were coded as correct, while for the AI-generated art group, "Definitely AI" or "Probably AI" were coded as correct. All other responses were considered incorrect.

Among participants who viewed only human-made art, 46.7% (14 out of 30) correctly identified the origin of the artworks, shown below in Table 4. For participants who viewed only AI-generated art, 36.7% (11 out of 30) correctly attributed the origin. Thus, less than half of participants in either group were able to accurately identify whether the artworks they viewed were created by a human or by an AI.

A chi-square test was conducted to compare the accuracy of origin attributions between the two groups. The analysis yielded a chi-square value of 0.62 with 1 degree of freedom, and a p-value of 0.43. This result is not statistically significant, indicating no reliable difference in the ability to correctly identify the origin of the artworks between those exposed to human-made art and those exposed to AI-generated art.

These findings suggest that, in the absence of explicit information, participants struggled to reliably distinguish between human-made and AI-generated artworks, and their correct attribution rates did not differ significantly between groups.

**TABLE 4: PROPORTION OF CORRECT ORIGIN ATTRIBUTIONS BY CONDITION**

| Condition                 | Correct Attribution (%) | n (correct/total) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Human-made art (n = 30)   | 46.7%                   | 14 / 30           |
| AI-generated art (n = 30) | 36.7%                   | 11 / 30           |

### **3.6 CHANGES AFTER DISCLOSURE OF ORIGIN**

After participants were informed of the true origin of the artworks they had evaluated, many reported notable shifts in their perceptions and attitudes. Although no quantitative, repeated ratings were collected post-disclosure, qualitative responses provided a rich account of how knowledge of authorship influenced appreciation, emotional engagement, and perceived value.

#### **3.6.1 Aesthetic Appreciation**

The most frequent pattern observed was a decrease in aesthetic appreciation when participants discovered that an artwork they had assumed was human-made was, in fact, generated by AI. Many described the artworks as feeling “less authentic” or “less impressive” once the AI origin was revealed. In contrast, participants who learned that a work they had presumed to be AI-generated was actually human-made often reported an increase in appreciation, expressing greater respect or perceiving the art as more authentic.

#### **3.6.2 Emotional Impact**

Participants' emotional responses also shifted following disclosure. Those who initially believed the art was created by a human frequently described a stronger emotional connection, sometimes referring to the art as having more “soul” or personal meaning. When the AI origin was revealed, these emotional connections were often weakened, with participants reporting the art felt less personal or meaningful. Conversely, discovering that a work was human-made sometimes intensified the reported emotional impact.

#### **3.6.3 Value and Purchase Likelihood**

The perceived monetary and intrinsic value of the artworks was frequently affected by disclosure. Many participants explicitly stated that learning an artwork was AI-generated reduced their willingness to value or purchase or consume it. This was particularly pronounced among those who initially attributed the work to a human artist. Conversely, some participants expressed a greater willingness to consume or purchase an artwork upon learning it was human-made.

#### **3.6.4 No Change**

A minority of participants indicated that knowledge of the artwork's origin did not affect their appreciation, emotional response, or purchase intentions. These individuals emphasised that they judged the art independently of its creator, suggesting a more objectivist or outcome-focused approach to art evaluation.

#### **3.6.5 Proportions and Direction of Change**

Of the 60 participants, approximately two-thirds ( $n \approx 40$ ; 67%) reported a decrease in value or appreciation following disclosure that an artwork was AI-generated. Roughly one-fifth ( $n \approx 12$ ; 20%) reported a positive shift — increased appreciation and purchase intent — upon learning that an artwork they had assumed was AI-generated was in fact human-made. The remaining participants ( $n \approx 8$ ; 13%) reported no meaningful change in their evaluations following disclosure.

While the effect size of these shifts cannot be numerically quantified with the current data, the narrative accounts indicate that the direction of change is predominantly negative for AI disclosures (reduced appreciation and value) and positive for human disclosures (increased appreciation and value). The qualitative evidence suggests that the effect is substantial for a majority of participants, particularly in the domains of perceived value and willingness to purchase.

These findings underscore the significant role that perceived authorship plays in shaping the reception and valuation of art, even when initial aesthetic judgments are ostensibly made independently of origin.

3.7 ACCEPTANCE AND WILLINGNESS TO PURCHASE/CONSUME

Participants’ willingness to purchase artworks was assessed using a 1–7 Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater intent to purchase. As shown in Table 5, both groups—those exposed only to human-made art (M = 2.00) and those exposed only to AI-generated art (M = 1.98)—reported similarly low willingness to purchase/consume. An independent-samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $t(58) = 0.08$ ,  $p = .94$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.02$ ), suggesting negligible practical difference in purchase intent prior to origin disclosure

TABLE 5: MEAN WILLINGNESS TO CONSUME OR PURCHASE BY CONDITION (LIKERT SCALE: 1–7)

| Condition                 | Mean Willingness to Purchase |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Human-made art (n = 30)   | 2.00                         |
| AI-generated art (n = 30) | 1.98                         |

Qualitative responses provided further insight into participants’ attitudes. Many participants expressed a clear preference for human-made art, citing greater value in human effort, creativity, and emotional depth. For example, one participant stated, “Less likely to purchase; I value human effort more,” while another remarked, “I’m less likely to pay for AI art, I prefer human stories.” Importantly, some reported that their willingness to purchase increased after discovering an artwork previously assumed to be AI was actually human-made, as evidenced by, “More likely to buy it; I value human creativity.”

Conversely, several participants noted that learning an artwork was AI-generated reduced its perceived value and their willingness to buy. Illustrative comments included, “Disappointed to learn it was AI. Less likely to value or buy AI art,” and “AI origin made it seem generic. I want to support real artists like myself.”

A minority of participants indicated that the origin of the artwork did not affect their purchase intent, emphasising, “No change in value or purchase intention.” Additionally, a small number of respondents maintained a neutral or skeptical stance, stating that the merit of the art mattered more than its origin.

Overall, while quantitative data indicated low and equivalent willingness to consume or purchase across both conditions prior to disclosure, qualitative evidence highlighted a pronounced preference for human-made art and a tendency for participants to devalue AI-generated works upon learning their origin.

3.8 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed several noteworthy patterns and subgroup effects that further illuminate participants’ perceptions of AI-generated and human-made art.

3.8.1 Consistent Skepticism Toward AI Art

A clear trend emerged across the dataset: AI-generated art was consistently perceived as less authentic, less emotionally engaging, and less valuable for ownership or consumption. Disclosure that a previously admired artwork

was AI-generated often led to sharp decreases in appreciation and purchase intent, as reflected in both low “purchase” ratings and open-ended responses.

### ***3.8.2 Human Art: Authenticity and Emotional Value***

Human-made art was associated with greater emotional connection, perceived effort, and authenticity. When participants discovered that a work they had assumed was AI-generated was in fact human-made, many reported increased appreciation, respect, and willingness to purchase, highlighting the importance of perceived authorship.

### ***3.8.3 Low Willingness to Purchase Overall***

Willingness to purchase scores were low for both groups (means near 2/7), indicating a general reluctance to purchase either type of art in this context. This suggests broader skepticism about purchasing digital images, not limited to AI-generated works.

### ***3.8.3 Uncertainty and Difficulty in Discrimination***

Participants struggled to correctly identify artwork origin, with low rates of correct attribution in both groups. Many reported being unsure, and the overall ability to distinguish between AI and human art based on appearance alone was limited.

### ***3.8.4 Outliers and Subgroup Observations***

- **“Definitely” vs. “Probably”:** Participants who expressed high certainty (“definitely” sure of the origin) reported stronger emotional reactions after disclosure, whether positive or negative. Those who were “unsure” generally reported minimal changes in appreciation or purchase intent.
- **Impact of Prior Assumptions:** The largest decreases in value and interest occurred among participants who assumed an artwork was human-made but discovered it was AI-generated. Conversely, those who assumed AI but learned the work was human-made often increased their valuation and interest.
- **Potential Subgroup Analysis:** Qualitative coding suggests that a smaller “open to AI art” subgroup tended to be neutral in their responses, while the larger “skeptical” subgroup showed sharper declines in appreciation and purchase intent after learning an artwork was AI-generated.

### ***3.8.5 Thematic Saturation and Social Narrative***

Many participants referenced authenticity, effort, and narrative as central to their valuation of art. This underscores the significance of social narratives about art and its creators, which appear to influence perceptions as much as, or more than, the visual qualities of the artwork itself.

### ***3.8.6 No Evidence of Outperformance by AI Art***

There was no evidence that AI-generated art outperformed human-made art on any dimension after origin was disclosed. Even when participants were initially “fooled” by the appearance of AI art, revealing its true origin typically led to a decrease in perceived value.

### **3.8.7 Implications for Art Presentation**

When the origin of the artwork was concealed, participants judged AI and human art similarly and found it difficult to distinguish between them. However, disclosure of origin triggered pronounced shifts in evaluation, particularly diminishing the perceived value and desirability of AI-generated art.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

This study examined consumer attitudes toward AI-generated and human-made art using a double-blind, between-subjects experimental design. The findings reveal that, when the origin of the artwork was concealed, participants rated human-made and AI-generated art as equally aesthetically pleasing, creative, emotionally impactful, and complex. However, after disclosure of the artwork's origin, participants' perceptions shifted: AI-generated art was devalued, while human-made art gained in appreciation and perceived authenticity.

Participants did not show a statistically significant preference for either human-made or AI-generated art when the origin was unknown. Ratings for visual appeal, beauty, and liking were nearly identical across both groups (see also Elgammal et al. 2017; McCormack et al. 2019), indicating that, at face value, AI can produce art perceived on par with human artists. Similarly, there were no significant differences in participants' ratings of perceived creativity, emotional impact, or complexity between the two origins. This suggests that, in the absence of provenance information, viewers judge AI-generated and human-made art by similar standards, supporting findings from prior studies demonstrating that algorithmic creativity can be indistinguishable from human creativity under controlled conditions (Magni et al. 2023; Moura et al. 2023).

Participants struggled to reliably identify whether an artwork was human-made or AI-generated, with correct attribution rates below 50% in both groups. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that non-expert audiences often cannot distinguish between AI and human outputs in creative domains (Chamberlain et al. 2017). After revealing the true origin of the artworks, participants generally reported a decrease in appreciation and willingness to purchase AI-generated art, and an increase in value and respect for human-made art. This supports the hypothesis that knowledge of AI authorship introduces a negative bias (Kahneman et al. 1991; Mikalonytė & Kneer 2021).

The core hypothesis—that knowing an artwork is AI-generated would reduce its perceived value—was supported. The absence of differences in initial (blinded) ratings suggests that biases are not driven by the aesthetic properties of AI art itself, but rather by social and psychological constructs associated with authorship (Leder et al. 2004). The results mirror previous studies on the “authenticity effect,” where human agency is seen as central to artistic value (Newman & Bloom 2011).

### **4.1 UNDERLYING FACTORS FOR PERCEPTUAL SHIFTS**

To understand the mechanisms behind these shifts, the fourth research question asked: “What underlying psychological and cultural factors contribute to shifts in perception and valuation of art following the disclosure of AI versus human authorship?” The devaluation of AI art post-disclosure, and the simultaneous elevation of human art, likely reflects persistent cultural narratives around creativity, authenticity, and the “artist’s touch” (Singh et al. 2024).

Many participants referenced the absence of “soul” or “personal meaning” in AI art, echoing a broader societal skepticism about algorithmic creativity (Moura et al. 2023). This suggests that for many, art is not merely a visual output but an embodiment of human intention, effort, and emotional expression. Conversely, discovering human authorship seemed to affirm existing beliefs about effort, intention, and narrative, thus enhancing appreciation.

Psychologically, these responses are shaped by essentialist thinking, where human agency is imbued with greater meaning and perceived as the source of an artwork's intrinsic value (Newman & Bloom 2011). Socially, prevailing discourses in the art world valorize human creativity and originality, contributing to skepticism toward AI-generated works (Włodarczyk 2024). Culturally, narratives about technology and the arts—often constructed as oppositional—may reinforce these biases (Mikalonytė & Kneer 2021). It is noteworthy that a minority of participants remained neutral or focused solely on the artwork's outcome, potentially representing a more technologically acculturated subgroup for whom digital familiarity increases openness to computational creativity (Moura et al. 2023).

#### **4.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE**

The findings of this study offer important contributions to art psychology, particularly concerning the cognitive and affective processes underlying aesthetic appreciation and value assignment. The lack of perceptual differences between AI-generated and human-made art when authorship is concealed supports models emphasising the primacy of formal properties (Leder et al. 2004). However, the pronounced devaluation of AI art upon disclosure highlights the enduring influence of psychological essentialism and authenticity heuristics (Newman & Bloom 2011). This suggests that perceptions of creativity and value in art are not only determined by sensory input but also by higher-order beliefs about agency, intention, and narrative (Kaufman & Kaufman 2009).

From a human–computer interaction (HCI) perspective, the results underscore the importance of user expectations and trust in the adoption of AI-generated content. The difficulty participants had in distinguishing between AI and human art, coupled with strong post-disclosure biases, illustrates that acceptance of AI in creative domains remains contingent on social and psychological factors rather than technical proficiency alone (Shin 2020). This aligns with HCI literature on algorithmic aversion and the importance of transparency, suggesting that the design of AI art systems must account for user perceptions of authenticity and ethical boundaries (Afroogh et al. 2024).

Practicing artists should be aware that, despite advances in generative tools, public perceptions of authenticity and value remain closely tied to human authorship. Artists who use AI as part of their creative process may need to consider transparent communication about their methods, or, alternatively, leverage the mystique of human authorship to maintain market value (Elgammal et al. 2017). Educators in art and design fields should address the evolving landscape of creativity by explicitly engaging with the biases and cultural narratives surrounding AI-generated content. Curricula may benefit from fostering critical discussions about authorship, creativity, and the future role of technology in the arts (Escalona-Márquez et al. 2024). Equipping students with both technical skills and socio-cultural literacy will be crucial for future creative professionals. For those working in art markets, the results suggest that disclosure of authorship can have significant commercial consequences. Transparent labelling of AI-generated works may dampen demand, while highlighting human creativity and narrative may enhance value perception (Thompson 2022). Marketers should consider strategies that either integrate or counter prevailing biases, such as storytelling around the collaborative nature of human–AI art or the unique contributions of each.

Policymakers are challenged by the need to balance innovation with ethical and economic considerations. The findings indicate a clear need for guidelines on transparency, labelling, and the fair recognition of AI-assisted works (Włodarczyk 2024). Policies that encourage informed consumption and support fair compensation for human artists may help to foster trust and adaptability as AI becomes more prevalent in creative industries.

### 4.3 LIMITATIONS

This study has several methodological and conceptual limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the sample was restricted to a relatively small group of university students ( $n = 60$ ) aged 18–23, recruited from a single institution. This may constitute what Henrich et al. (2010) describe as a WEIRD sample (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic), and the findings may not generalise to older adults, non-student populations, or audiences outside an urban South African context. The sample's high baseline familiarity with AI-generated art (76% had previously used AI art tools) also represents a characteristic that may not be shared by broader or older populations, potentially compressing the range of attitudes captured. Future research should employ more age-diverse, cross-cultural, and institutionally varied samples to test whether the authorship-disclosure effects observed here hold more broadly.

The use of subjective, self-report measures for aesthetic and emotional responses introduces potential biases related to personal interpretation and social desirability. Additionally, the range of artworks presented was limited in style and medium, potentially constraining the scope of participants' responses. These factors suggest that results may not fully capture perceptions across different age groups, cultures, or diverse artistic traditions. As a result, interpretations should be made with caution, and the findings may not be universally applicable to all audiences or artistic contexts.

### 4.4 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future studies could address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples across various demographic backgrounds. Alternative experimental designs, such as within-subjects approaches, may help control for individual differences and provide more nuanced insight into shifts in perception. Expanding research to include a wider array of art forms—such as music, literature, interactive media, or performance art—could further illuminate how AI authorship is perceived across creative domains. Additionally, longitudinal research exploring attitude changes over time, or incorporating physiological and behavioral measures, would strengthen understanding of the evolving relationship between audiences and AI-generated creativity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that, while AI-generated art can match human-made works in terms of aesthetic and emotional impact when authorship is concealed, strong biases persist against AI art once its origin is revealed. These findings highlight the profound influence of social and psychological narratives around authenticity, creativity, and value in shaping art appreciation in the digital age.

These findings carry direct implications for practitioners operating at the intersection of art, retail, and marketing. Brands and content creators using AI-generated visuals should consider carefully whether—and how—to disclose AI authorship, recognising that transparency, while ethically important, carries measurable reputational and commercial costs if audiences are not prepared for it. Where disclosure is necessary or mandated, framing matters: positioning AI art as the product of a human-directed creative process—emphasising the artist's vision, curation, or intent — may help preserve perceived authenticity and mitigate the devaluation effect observed here. Retailers selling or licensing AI-generated artwork should be aware that the mere label of "AI-generated" significantly reduces willingness to purchase among young consumers and may benefit from disclosure strategies that foreground collaborative or tool-assisted framing rather than fully autonomous generation. For educators, the findings reinforce the need to build critical art literacy that helps students interrogate their own authenticity biases, rather than treating AI and human creativity as categorically opposed. More broadly, the results suggest that consumer acceptance of AI-generated content is less a

function of quality than of narrative — and that whoever controls the story of how art is made will substantially influence how it is valued.

As AI technologies continue to evolve and permeate creative domains, it is crucial for artists, educators, and policymakers to engage in ongoing, nuanced dialogue about the meaning of creativity and the criteria by which we assign value to art. Embracing this complexity will be essential for fostering innovation, inclusivity, and ethical integrity as the boundaries between human and machine creativity become increasingly blurred. The future of AI in the arts will depend not only on technological advancements but also on our collective willingness to interrogate, adapt, and redefine our cultural frameworks for art and authorship.

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