

## **Help—just a little? Generative AI, academic integrity and the unspeakable**

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### **Research Domains**

Digital University and new learning technologies (DU)

### **Abstract**

In the diverse arenas of academic discourse, few topics are as widely debated today as Generative AI. The emerging literature reveals that we are facing a powerful yet atypical and, at times, troubling educational technology. GenAI, while representing a source of admiration and innovation (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Zhai, 2021), also introduces complex ethical challenges that span environmental, academic, and political dimensions (Williams, 2024; Holmes & Porayska-Pomsta, 2023). In response, numerous universities are revising their guidelines to better guide staff and students on the ethical use of GenAI. However, there remains a gap in research regarding the “unsaid,” emotional, and ambivalent aspects of this technology in higher education. Drawing on preliminary findings from a recent workshop, we will discuss the emotional tensions and contradictions that GenAI creates in contemporary academia, discussing them through the Social Fictions produced and collectively analysed by student and staff participants.

### **Full paper**

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### **Background**

The rapid advancement of GenAI capabilities is driving a keen interest in incorporating and experimenting with these technologies in educational settings (Grassini, 2023). Recently, Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT or DeepSeek and other creative computational tools such as DALL-E, Whisper, Tome, DeviantArt, and various online AI-checker and assessment tools have begun to make a significant impact, offering innovative solutions for a range of academic tasks and learning assessments (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Zhai, 2021). On the other hand, increasing numbers of scholars are expressing concerns about these technologies, especially regarding ethical implications of using GenAI for academic tasks (Williams, 2024). Both growing enthusiasm and concerns surrounding the uses of AI in

educational settings are evident in the expanding literature on GenAI (Holmes & Porayska-Pomsta, 2023; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2023). AI's reliance on existing metrics and Big Data raises further concerns, as these technologies are claimed to reproduce and amplify existing inequalities and colonial "data relations" (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 337) in knowledge production and distribution (Mau, 2019). Others worry that over-reliance on AI could compromise the depth and diversity of students' learning and skills (Treviranus, 2023). In response to these pressing issues, many universities worldwide are updating their guidelines to better advise students on 'acceptable' and responsible ways to use GenAI. And yet, there is little research into the users' lived experience with GenAI, of the "unsaid", emotional dimensions of the debate in higher education. This will be the focus of our presentation. How do staff and students experience the contemporary HE setting with a focus on interacting with or resisting to AI and how they perceive the related ethical concerns?

### **Research approach**

In view of the urgency of the use of AI in HE and our belief that we need to include the voices of those affected by and benefitting from the drastic technological advances, we designed a research approach that is both exploratory and empowering by introducing Social Fiction writing.

Social Fiction is a speculative form of research method that allows the writer to select recognisable details, defamiliarize them through combination and reconnection to then unveil truth (Iser, 1990, 1997). Social Fiction writers therefore not merely create or bring into existence a new story, they purposefully craft experiences by drafting, revising, and editing (Harper and Kroll, 2020) with the intention to mould multiple realities so that there is a meaningful message for the reader. The role of Social Fiction is not merely to entertain and offer possibilities, but to make visible and explicit what may otherwise be forgotten or ignored, and to raise its readers', and writers', attention to their own views and opinions.

We organised a workshop for 20 participants, who were offered some guidance on how to write fiction before they were asked to write their own Social Fiction flash about the role and effects of GenAI.

The analysis was conducted in several stages. After developing a prompt on uses of AI in academia, participants independently crafted their fictions. They subsequently presented their fictions along with their insights regarding the issues they addressed. Following the framework of double hermeneutics (Smith et al. 2012), the writers then engaged in a reflective process not only on their own fictions, but also on those of the others.

### **Preliminary findings**

This project is still ongoing, but we have developed the following themes in preliminary findings: (1) balancing academic integrity and student engagement, (2) erosion of

traditional roles, and (3) catalysing emotion in the mundane. This clearly illustrates the contradiction between GenAI's potential to facilitate academic dishonesty and its ability to enhance learners' engagement. Through fictionalising experiences, observations, and opinions, the Social Fiction writer has the opportunity to remove themselves from the immediate multitude of identities and selves they inhabit (see Giddens, 1991, Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Watson, 2008; Tajfel, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

Whilst fictionalizing is often viewed as distorting facts, it is precisely the fictionalisation that enables the retelling of difficult experiences in an ethical way, the wider 'truth' in mind. We believe that such arts-based approaches can effectively illuminate the complex, messy, and often unspeakable dimensions of AI phenomena, helping to transcend the narrow perspectives shaped by the pervasive presence of GenAI in contemporary higher education.