138

Transforming Student's Experience through GenAI: Insights from Nottingham Business School

Sahar Bakr, David Cook, Scott Mills
Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, United Kingdom

Research Domains

Digital University and new learning technologies (DU)

Abstract

The Nottingham Business School AI project explores the use of generative AI in Higher Education, focusing on undergraduate marketing students at Nottingham Business School. To understand students' experiences with AI, the study examines their awareness of GenAI software, usage patterns, perceptions and concerns, and the potential challenges and opportunities GenAI presents. Using a mixed-method approach, including focus groups and surveys, it is intended that the study's outcomes will inform the design of a specialised AI tool integrated into the university's online platform, promoting responsible AI use and improving the academic and well-being support offered to students.

Full paper

The uptake of generative AI (GenAI) technology across industries and sectors is rapidly spreading (ONS, 2023; Deloitte, 2024), including Higher Education, where students and staff are becoming more familiar and accepting of the usage of AI tools in university (Shea, 2024) with some institutions developing their own bots or utilising publicly available GenAI tools in the classroom (e.g., University of Sydney; Weber, 2024). However, a range of ethical, experiential and privacy complexities are emerging in relation to aspects such as academic integrity (e.g., the development of critical reasoning skills), data security (e.g., implications for data protection), and student experience (e.g., balancing technology with human guidance; QAA, 2024).

The NBS AI project is an initiative designed to explore the use of GenAI in Higher Education. Focused on Nottingham Business School (NBS) marketing students, the project seeks to understand current GenAI usage patterns, challenges, and opportunities to improve the student experience. Given the significant influence of student experience on learning outcomes (Goh et al., 2017), findings from this research will guide the creation of a GenAI support tool tailored to enhance student engagement and well-being within NBS.

The ultimate vision is to develop an AI-powered assistant integrated into the university's online platform, "NOW", to provide efficient access to academic resources, course information, and student services. Rather than replacing existing support systems, the assistant will act as a 'more-knowledgeable-other' to help students navigate available online and in-person resources (Stojanov, 2023). A key feature of this tool will be proactive support addressing academic and well-being concerns. For example, it will direct students struggling with referencing to library support and those expressing stress to mental health resources, providing personalised, confidential, and inclusive help.

The project is innovative in its co-creative, collaborative approach, leveraging marketing methods and theories in its design (Dollinger et al., 2018). By combining customer journey mapping, consumer behaviour theory, and competitive analysis, the project positions itself as a forward-thinking response to the growing use of GenAI in education (ONS, 2023). It also caters to Generation Z students, who are reportedly more comfortable with chat-based technologies than traditional in-person methods (Janssen & Carradini, 2021).

The objectives are to understand students' current use of GenAI tools, identify the most helpful features, and explore how GenAI can enhance academic outcomes. The project aims to promote GenAI's ethical and responsible use among higher education students, rather than caution against it. A mixed-method approach will be used, starting with a pilot focus group of NBS marketing students to gather qualitative insights on students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges with GenAI. The findings will help inform any adaptations/modifications which may need to be made to the discussion guide for the main study focus groups (approximately 15 groups of 10-15 level 4 students, to ascertain the views of early-stage university students who may be more likely to require a wider range of support during their first few months at university) A large-scale survey will then be distributed to the broader NBS marketing cohort (levels 4, 5, and 6) to capture wider student experiences. The data will help compare and contrast diverse student perspectives, uncovering any level-specific opportunities or challenges for GenAI deployment.

The anticipated benefits of the project are significant. For students, the tool may reduce stress by simplifying access to university services, promoting responsible AI use, and supporting personalised well-being interventions. For staff, the assistant could alleviate administrative tasks, allowing more time for teaching and pastoral care. The project will also position NBS as a leader in AI innovation in higher education, pioneering responsible and user-centred AI tool design. The long-term goal is to create a scalable blueprint for AI-driven student support systems, shaping the future of GenAI in education with a focus on innovation, ethics, and user-centric design.