



Artificial Intelligence and the Future:

How young adults reflect on technological change and its impact on their lives

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Come citare / How to cite

Banaś, M. (2025). Artificial Intelligence and the Future: How young adults reflect on technological change and its impact on their lives. *Culture e Studi del Sociale*, 10(2), 41-50.

Disponibile / Retrieved <https://www.cussoc.it/journal/article/view/386>

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Articolo pubblicato online / Article first published online: Dicembre/December 2025



- Peer Reviewed Journal

INDEXED IN
DOAJ

Artificial Intelligence and the Future: How young adults reflect on technological change and its impact on their lives

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Abstract

The text provides a qualitative analysis of 30 statements given by young people (19-27 years of age), students of humanities (Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland), on the changes occurring due to new technologies. The results of the survey, supplemented by in-depth interviews, provide interesting conclusions regarding the strategies adopted by respondents in addressing challenges posed by the increasing use of artificial intelligence in various areas of life, both individual and collective. Fears, hopes, optimism, and pessimism – varying in intensity – intertwine in the respondents' statements, finding different justifications, both rational and emotional. A detailed description of the study and interpretation of the results will be presented in the full text.

Keywords: transhumanism, artificial intelligence, young adults

1. Introduction

Contemporary technological development, especially the dynamic progress in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), is exerting an increasingly strong influence on various aspects of social, professional, and personal life. Technologies that until recently existed mainly in the realm of forecasts and imagination are now becoming an integral part of everyday life – from recommendation algorithms to generative language models. As these technologies become more widespread, questions arise about how the younger generation – raised in the digital era – perceives these changes and what strategies they adopt in response to the challenges posed by the growing use of AI.

The article seeks to analyse the attitudes of young people toward artificial intelligence, with particular emphasis on their emotional and cognitive reactions to its presence in both individual and communal life. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of thirty statements from humanities students at the Jagiellonian University, collected through surveys and in-depth interviews. These statements reveal a complex landscape of emotions – from enthusiasm and hope to anxiety and skepticism – as well as various ways of rationalizing the presence of AI in the social world.

The structure of the paper offers a brief description of the methodology applied in the research, followed by a discussion of the main themes emerging from the respondents' statements. The analysis tries to capture not only dominant narratives

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but also hidden tensions and ambivalences that accompany young people as they confront a technological future.

In interpreting the students' statements, we can treat them not only as individual opinions but also as socially patterned ways of making sense of technological change (Swidler, 1986; Pilcher 1994). This means their accounts can be analysed through available cultural resources described as cultural "toolkits" (Swidler, 1986). From a generational perspective (Pilcher 1994), these respondents speak as a cohort whose "fresh contact" with a rapidly changing world shapes how risks, opportunities, and agency are framed. Their accounts can also be approached through the lens of social imaginaries (Taylor, 2004) and, more specifically in technology-focused contexts, sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015), that is, collectively circulating visions of how social life should work and what the future might look like under conditions of technological transformation. At the same time, the recurring mix of hope, curiosity, anxiety, and scepticism points to an emotional dimension that is not merely private but structured by social "feeling rules" (Hochschild, 1979) and expressed through historically variable emotional repertoires (Reddy, 2001) that help people manage uncertainty and draw moral boundaries (Banaś & Puuronen, 2025). Finally, Science and Technology Studies – in short: STS reminds us that AI is not a neutral tool "out there," but a socio-technical assemblage (Marres, 2017; Latour, 2005) co-produced through material infrastructures, institutional arrangements, and normative expectations.

2. Why it is important to study the attitudes of students toward AI

Investigating the attitudes of young humanities students toward artificial intelligence is important for several reasons. First, humanists often serve as critical observers of social and cultural change. Their reflections on AI extend beyond technical aspects to encompass ethical, philosophical, and identity-related issues (Simon, Rieder, & Branford, 2024). Second, young people are both users and creators of digital culture – their perspectives may indicate the directions of future transformations (Chen, 2025). Third, humanists frequently shape the language, narratives, and values that accompany emerging technologies – their voices influence how society understands AI (Lockhart, 2025).

This group may be particularly sensitive to risks associated with dehumanization, the automation of creative labor, or the loss of control over information (Lockhart, 2025; Simon et al., 2024). Their statements often combine rational analysis with emotional intuition, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of social responses (Chen, 2025). Studying this group can highlight tensions between traditional humanism and posthumanist visions of the world (Simon et al., 2024).

Young humanists are future teachers, journalists, artists, researchers, and more – their attitudes will shape subsequent generations (Chen, 2025). Their opinions and reflections can contribute to the development of more ethical and inclusive technologies (Simon et al., 2024). This is a group that often seeks meaning in action and values that reinforce that meaning. The questions young people ask about AI may go beyond "does it work?" to include inquiries about co-creating artificial intelligence from a humanistic perspective (Lockhart, 2025; Chen, 2025).

In recent years, there has been growing scholarly interest in the attitudes of young people toward artificial intelligence. Youth – particularly students – constitute a crucial demographic in this context, not only as active users of technology but also as future opinion leaders, educators, and creators of digital culture. Their attitudes

toward AI are complex and often ambivalent, blending fascination with concern, and openness with a desire for control.

In the Polish context, a particularly valuable contribution is the report “*Between Curiosity and Uncertainty*” developed by Wrocław University of Science and Technology and the K+ Research agency (2025). The study encompassed four generations, including Generation Z (ages 18–26), and revealed that while young people are open to the development of AI, they simultaneously report a low level of understanding of how it functions – only 15% rated their knowledge as high, and 23% claimed to understand how specific tools operate. Nevertheless, as many as 43% of respondents in this group expressed a desire to deepen their knowledge of AI, indicating both educational potential and the need to enhance digital competencies (Wrocław University of Science and Technology & K+ Research, 2025).

International studies confirm similar trends. The OECD report (2023) indicates that young people in developed countries are more aware of AI’s presence in everyday life than older generations, yet they often struggle to assess its long-term impact on the labor market and social relations. Similarly, the UNESCO report (2023) emphasizes that youth primarily expect AI to support learning and personal development, while also expressing concerns about algorithmic fairness, data privacy, and the potential for information manipulation.

The literature also highlights the emotional dimension of young people’s attitudes toward AI. Research shows that youth often perceive AI as a “non-human” technology, lacking empathy and intuition, which raises concerns about the dehumanization of social relationships (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). At the same time, young respondents demonstrate a willingness to engage with AI, provided its development proceeds in a transparent and ethical manner (UNESCO, 2023).

International research offers additional perspectives on young adults’ attitudes toward AI. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2022) in the United States found that young adults (age 18–29) are more likely than older generations to express interest in and willingness to experiment with AI, while also more frequently voicing concerns about privacy and institutional misuse. Noteworthy insights also emerge from the work of Livingstone et al. (2019), who introduce the concept of *global youth digital citizenship*, emphasizing that young people aspire not only to be users but also co-creators and critical evaluators of digital technologies.

In summary, the literature on the phenomenon under discussion reveals four dominant trends in young people's attitudes toward AI:

1. A low level of knowledge despite the high presence of AI in everyday life,
2. Openness to education and the development of digital competencies,
3. Ethical concerns related to privacy, misinformation, and the automation of labor, and
4. A demand for regulation and transparency in the design of AI systems.

These findings provide an important foundation for further qualitative research, which can capture not only declarative responses but also the emotional and narrative dimensions of how the younger generation perceives artificial intelligence.

In this context, it is worth introducing the posthumanist perspective, which is gaining prominence in the debate on AI. According to this approach, technological development should not be viewed solely as a threat to humanity, but as an opportunity to reconfigure the relationships between humans, machines, and the environment. For instance, Rosi Braidotti (2013) emphasizes the need to move away from antagonistic thinking about technology toward a model of coexistence and

shared responsibility. Similarly, Geoffrey Hinton, Nobel Prize laureate and often referred to as the “Godfather of AI,” argues that the development of AI can help humans better understand themselves – including how our cognitive processes, memory, associations, and decision-making function (2024). In this sense, AI may serve to enhance deeply human traits and contribute to refining new directions in the study of the human mind and condition.

Given the above, it becomes increasingly justified to continuously study and monitor the attitudes of young people who, in the context of AI’s growing role, are seeking new forms of identity and agency in a world that is increasingly a fusion of the real and the digital.

3. Methodology

This paper is based on a study conducted among students of selected humanities disciplines at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (including cultural studies, philosophy, and Polish philology) during the period of March and April 2025. The aim of the study was to capture the attitudes of young humanists toward the rapidly evolving technology of artificial intelligence and to understand their emotional and cognitive responses to AI’s presence in everyday life.

A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing two complementary research techniques: an open online survey and individual in-depth interviews. In the first stage, purposively selected respondents ($n = 30$) were asked to provide written responses to a set of seven open-ended questions concerning their feelings, concerns, hopes, and reflections related to AI. The questions were developed based on a review of literature in the fields of digital humanities and technology ethics. In the second stage, selected participants ($n = 10$) were invited to take part in semi-structured individual interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, which were subsequently transcribed. The purpose of the interviews was to deepen the themes emerging from the surveys and to capture emotional and argumentative nuances.

The collected data were subjected to content analysis using thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). The coding process was inductive and proceeded in three stages: identification of initial codes, grouping them into thematic categories, and interpreting patterns of meaning. The responses were categorized according to dominant emotional themes (e.g., optimism, anxiety, ambivalence) and types of justification (rational vs. emotional). Particular attention was paid to the adaptive strategies respondents adopted in response to AI’s presence in various areas of life – from education and social relationships to professional careers.

This exploratory study does not claim representativeness. Its primary goal was to capture the qualitative dimensions of how young adults perceive artificial intelligence and to identify dominant narratives and attitudes that could inform future research – both qualitative and quantitative. All procedures adhered to ethical standards for social research, and participants provided informed consent.

4. Research Findings – Qualitative Analysis of Student Responses

The statements of thirty young individuals reveal a complex and ambiguous picture of how artificial intelligence is perceived. Respondents expressed both

interest in and openness to new technologies, as well as clear concerns about their impact on individual and social life.

Concerns regarding the development of AI were widespread – every participant identified at least one source of anxiety. The most frequently mentioned fears related to job loss, misinformation, and the lack of legal regulation. As one 22-year-old woman from a large city observed:

“It is developing at an alarming pace; we are not prepared for such rapid advancement in artificial intelligence – we can’t keep up with it.”

Another respondent, a 27-year-old male from a large city, added:

“The ease with which fake news, images, and videos can be created by AI distorts reality.”

Many participants also expressed concern about the future of interpersonal relationships. A 27-year-old woman noted:

“People’s sense of loneliness and their need for connection lead them to use AI as a companion. That’s very sad and may deepen social problems.”

The impact of AI on everyday life was assessed in varied ways. Some respondents reported occasional use of AI-based tools, primarily for educational purposes. A 21-year-old woman stated:

“I use artificial intelligence occasionally, only when I really feel it might be useful – but I do so reluctantly.”

In contrast, a 26-year-old man emphasized its practical applications:

“ChatGPT speeds up the process of finding information, for example, when writing academic papers. It also helps with everyday tasks – like explaining to a layperson how to fix a car battery.”

The question regarding the potential for AI to replace human creativity elicited strong reactions. The majority of respondents (70%) believed that AI cannot match human capabilities in this domain.

A 22-year-old male student from a large city stated:

“Artificial intelligence reproduces, while humans create.”

A 26-year-old man from a suburban area added:

“Even if AI reaches the level of human creativity, the mere fact that humans are unpredictable and authentic means their creativity will still be valued.”

The most promising technologies identified by respondents included AI in medicine, the development of tools such as ChatGPT, biotechnology, and VR/AR. A 27-year-old female noted:

“The Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2024 for an AI model predicting protein structures is an example of how AI can support science.”

Assessments of the balance between benefits and risks varied. Most respondents recognized more benefits, provided that appropriate regulations are in place.

A 25-year-old man from a large city observed:

“AI significantly facilitates everyday life.”

In contrast, a 21-year-old female student from a large city was more sceptical:

“The only advantage of AI is the speed of production, but in my opinion, the result is not worth it.”

When asked what they would ask a self-aware AI, respondents formulated questions about emotions, identity, purpose of existence, its perception of humans and economics of the future.

A 19-year-old woman from a large city asked:

“What do you feel as a conscious being? Do you have your own goals and desires, and how do you perceive humans?”

A 22-year-old man from a large city posed the question:

“Do you consider yourself equal to a human being?”

A 24-year male student wanted to know about future investments by asking AI the following question:

“Would you consider investing in gold for profit?”

Respondents’ personal comments often combined enthusiasm with caution.

A 19-year-old woman summarised:

“AI is a powerful tool that can support people, but it is we who must set its boundaries.”

Meanwhile, a 22-year-old female student added:

“Instead of making us smarter, artificial intelligence is making us dumber – stripping us of the need to think.”

A much stronger concern was expressed by a 23-year-old man:

“I’m afraid that it may give the wealthiest – with the best access – an unfair advantage. Additionally, a problem may arise when it becomes impossible to distinguish content and images generated by artificial intelligence from those created by humans. Especially when used in bad faith, it can spread disinformation and prejudice.”

In summary, respondents expressed ambivalent attitudes toward the pace of AI development. Their statements reflected both curiosity and a clear sense of caution. Concerns about AI’s advancement were widespread – every participant identified at least one source of anxiety. The most frequently cited fears included job displacement, misinformation, and the absence of legal regulation, as well as the potential for manipulation. Many participants also voiced apprehension about the future of interpersonal relationships.

The perceived impact of AI on daily life varied. Some respondents reported occasional use of AI tools, primarily for educational purposes, while others pointed to specific applications in work, leisure, and academic contexts. The question of whether AI could replace human creativity elicited strong reactions. A majority believed that AI could not match human capabilities in this domain.

The most promising technologies identified by respondents included AI in medicine, the development of tools such as ChatGPT, biotechnology, and VR/AR. Assessments of the balance between benefits and risks were mixed. Most respondents acknowledged more benefits, provided that appropriate regulatory frameworks were in place.

In response to the prompt about a self-aware AI, students' questions clustered around consciousness-related themes: emotion, identity, meaning, and its relationship with humans.

Some, however, rejected the very idea, asserting that AI could never be a fully equal partner to humans – even if it assumed a human-like form – due to its lack of emotional depth, which remains inaccessible to machines.

Respondents' personal reflections often combined enthusiasm with caution, recognizing AI as a powerful and helpful tool, but also one that may discourage critical thinking making humans less reflexive.

5. Discussion and Directions for Future Research

The collected statements from young respondents reveal a complex and often ambivalent attitude toward artificial intelligence. On one hand, AI is perceived as a tool that facilitates life, supports education, and enhances work; on the other, it is seen as a potential threat to human autonomy, social relationships, and the labour market. This duality of perspectives reflects a broader societal discourse in which AI simultaneously represents a promise of progress and a source of anxiety.

The findings confirm that young people do not form a homogeneous group in their assessments – their opinions are diverse, often internally contradictory, and marked by an interplay of emotions and attempts at rationalization. Statements such as:

“AI is a powerful tool that can support people, but we must be the ones to set its boundaries” (M, 19 years old)

“Instead of making us smarter, artificial intelligence is making us dumber” (F, 22 years old)

illustrate that respondents recognize both the potential and the risks associated with the technology.

A dominant theme in the responses was the need for control and regulation. Young people did not reject AI outright but expressed concern about its unchecked development. This perspective aligns with the principles of technology ethics, which emphasize the necessity of responsible design and implementation of AI systems (Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

Creativity emerged as a symbolic boundary that, according to most respondents, AI was unable to cross. Participants emphasised that human creativity was rooted in emotion, intuition, experience, and cultural context – elements that are difficult to replicate through algorithms. This view resonates with theoretical frameworks that highlight the non-translatability of human imagination into algorithmic models (Song, Zhu & Luo, 2024; Brynjolfsson, 2022; Buhmann, Paßmann & Fieseler, 2019).

Moreover, the questions directed at a hypothetically self-aware AI revealed a deep interest among respondents in philosophical themes such as consciousness, identity, emotion, and the human–machine relationship. These reflections point to

the need for further research into technological social imagination – that is, how people envision a future with AI and what values they attribute to machines.

Although the respondents are proficient in using technology, their attitudes toward AI are far from uncritical. On the contrary, they demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding potential risks and a strong need to preserve cognitive autonomy. This is an important signal for both education and technology policy: the younger generation not only uses AI but also expects a public debate about its boundaries and consequences. The qualitative data reveal the complexity of young people's attitudes toward artificial intelligence – ranging from enthusiasm and curiosity to deep scepticism and ethical concerns.

Potential directions for future research on young people's attitudes toward AI should encompass several key areas that require an interdisciplinary approach. First, it would be valuable to conduct intergroup comparisons that consider demographic and educational variables such as field of study (e.g., humanities vs. STEM), gender, place of residence, and level of education. Research suggests that these factors can significantly influence levels of acceptance and trust in AI, as well as the willingness to use it in everyday and professional life.

Second, an important area of exploration is the analysis of emotional responses to AI using psychological tools. Scales measuring levels of technostress, technophilia, or technological anxiety can help in understanding how emotions shape attitudes toward new technologies. Studies in technology education have shown that self-assessed technological competence (self-efficacy) and levels of technological anxiety are strong predictors of the intention to use AI.

Another compelling aspect involves the study of narratives and metaphors that young people use to describe AI. Language analysis can reveal deeper cultural and philosophical patterns of thinking about technology – whether AI is perceived as a tool, a partner, a threat, or a quasi-human entity. Such research can draw on methods from discourse analysis and semiotics, and its findings may be applicable in media education and the design of technology communication strategies.

Equally important are analyses of ethical and legal awareness, focusing on the level of familiarity with existing regulations and expectations regarding future legislative solutions. Research shows that young people often report a lack of knowledge about the legal frameworks governing AI, while simultaneously expressing strong expectations for transparency, algorithmic fairness, and data privacy protection.

It is also worth considering experimental studies involving AI in creative processes, which would allow for comparisons between work produced with and without technological assistance. Such research could also examine perceptions of authenticity in works co-created by machines – a topic of relevance in the contexts of arts education, journalism, and digital literature.

Finally, a valuable complement would be the implementation of cultural and international studies that enable comparisons of attitudes toward AI across different countries and social contexts. As shown by analyses of AI integration in higher education in Asia, cultural and institutional differences significantly influence the pace and manner of technological adaptation, potentially contributing to widening educational inequalities.

6. Conclusion

The study of young humanists' attitudes toward artificial intelligence reveals a multidimensional and nuanced picture of the social reception of technology. Respondents demonstrate both openness to innovation and deep reflection on its consequences. Their statements highlight the need for a balance between technological advancement and the preservation of humanistic values – such as autonomy, creativity, responsibility, and empathy.

This study was qualitative and exploratory. It drew on a purposive sample of humanities students from a single university and on a limited number of interviews; therefore, the findings should not be treated as statistically representative of the wider population of young people. It should also be noted that participants' statements may have been influenced by the immediate research context, social desirability pressures, and uneven levels of familiarity with AI tools. These limitations, however, do not undermine the value of the material; rather, they clarify the scope of inference. The main contribution of the study lies in identifying recurring ways of interpreting AI and the emotional–narrative repertoires through which young adults make sense of technological change – insights that can inform future comparative and mixed-method research.

The qualitative data collected show that young people are not merely passive recipients of technology but active participants in the discourse surrounding its role in society. Their voices reveal not only concerns but also constructive proposals and questions that may serve as a foundation for more inclusive approaches to designing the future with AI. Respondents' reflections underscore the need for critical engagement with the direction of technological development and the importance of incorporating the perspectives of end users – especially those who will shape future generations as educators, journalists, artists, and researchers.

The findings and conclusions drawn from this study underscore the importance of critical and ethical education in the context of artificial intelligence. Such education should not only provide knowledge about how the technology functions but also foster reflective competencies that enable individuals to assess its impact on social life, interpersonal relationships, and personal identity. In this context, it becomes particularly important to include the voices of young people in the debate about the future of technology – not only as users but as co-creators of its social meaning.

This younger generation – shaped by the digital era yet critically aware of its limitations – is well positioned to play a pivotal role in fostering a more balanced and ethically responsible trajectory for AI development. Their reflections, inquiries, and reservations should not be interpreted as mere expressions of uncertainty, but rather as meaningful contributions to the construction of a more reflective, inclusive, and ethically grounded digital society. In this regard, the present study not only captures prevailing attitudes but also creates a platform for sustained dialogue between technological innovation and the humanities – a dialogue that is more urgent and necessary now than ever before.

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