



AI and Authorship: Student Writing, Voice and Digital Communication Practices in Higher Education

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Abstract

The increasing use of generative artificial intelligence in higher education is reshaping how students engage with writing, communication and authorship. While institutional responses have largely framed AI as a challenge to academic integrity, less attention has been paid to how AI operates within students' broader digital communication practices. This paper examines how students understand and negotiate authorship in AI-assisted writing, situating AI use within communicative environments shaped by everyday digital communication practices. Adopting a practice-informed qualitative approach, the analysis combines existing research with insights from academic support contexts in UK higher education, where recurring patterns of uncertainty around AI use are observed. Rather than treating authorship as a fixed or stable category, the paper conceptualises it as a negotiated and context-dependent process shaped by evolving technologies and shifting expectations of originality, voice and ownership. Students are shown to move between generating, editing and re-authoring text, often questioning the boundaries between their own contribution and AI-assisted content. By framing AI within the context of digital communication, the paper contributes to discussions on authorship, identity and meaning-making in contemporary educational environments. It argues that AI should be understood not solely as a tool or a threat, but as part of an evolving communicative landscape that is reshaping how writing, authorship and responsibility are experienced and negotiated.

Keywords: authorship; digital communication; higher education; identity; artificial intelligence