Student use and perceptions of Generative AI in their career development Stella Ho and Lydia Shi, LSE Change Makers 2023-24

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Background

Al is rapidly transforming the world of work. As students who are preparing to enter an evolving job market, we believe it is essential to understand the potential benefits and risks associated with using AI in our current career development and future professional lives. We investigated student perceptions and use of this cutting-edge technology in hopes of developing informed strategies for the LSE Careers team to better support students' career development. The core topics of our research include understanding (1) how students are using generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and others in different stages of their career development and (2) what students perceive to be the advantages or disadvantages of AI. The current public discourse on AI is divisive, so by carrying out this research from an objective and exploratory lens, we uncovered new insights informed by student experiences and perspectives.

Literature review

AI technology has been widely applied in workplace and recruitment processes, e.g., automating the extraction of candidates' information on CVs, assessing employee management through social media analytics and natural language processing (Ooi et al., 2023). AI has also been put into use to support disabled people in the labor market (Touzet, 2023). Moreover, suggestions have been made that not only the implementation of new technologies but also a profound cultural shift is necessary in the workforce (Brecheisen, 2024). At the heart of this debate lies striking a balance between control and trust: We should be cautious facing the unknown and its potential risks, but at the same time, not allow rules-heavy strategies to inadvertently stifle innovation.

Previous studies have found that factors predicting increased interest in using AI for job applications include beliefs about AI's effectiveness and enjoyability, higher networking anxiety, and being a first-generation college student; there is also evidence that many negative perceptions are due to AI tools being difficult to navigate, inaccurate, and impersonal (Moran & Ackerman, 2023). Equipped with extensive prior knowledge, our research contributes to existing literature by situating the debate in an LSE-specific context.

Methodology

We adopted a mixed methodology – survey and focus group data. The survey was conducted using Qualtrics, which covered multiple-choice and free response questions. The focus group served as an opportunity to further elaborate on those answers. Our recruitment method was convenience and snowball sampling. We made a poster to distribute across campus, sent out our survey on social media (e.g., to different LSE WhatsApp groups, friends, and classmates), recruited through Change Makers' official "call for participants"

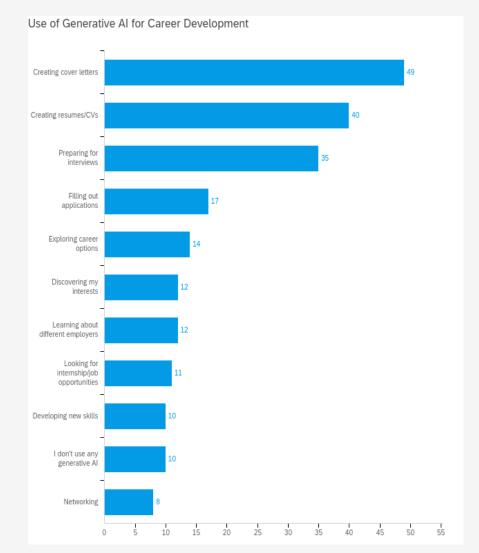
page, our departmental newsletter, the LSE Careers newsletter, spread the word through professors in relevant courses (e.g., "Ethics of Data and Algorithms"), and reached out to relevant student societies (LSESU AI Society) and Student Education Panel staff.

There were 70 responses to the survey and 9 participants in the focus group (7 postgraduates and 2 undergraduates), who were from a diverse range of departments. In terms of survey demographics, we had mostly postgraduates (59%), mostly females (62%), and mostly Asian/Asian British (43%) and white (32%) participants.

Findings

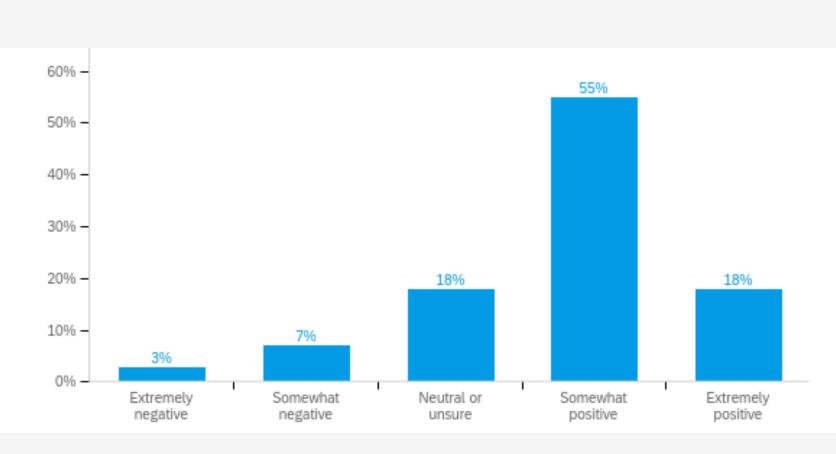
Use of Generative AI

Students varied in how frequently they used generative AI for their career development. 20% said they never use it, 21% said they use it a few times a month, and 6% said they use it every day. Students were also divided in reporting their familiarity with using generative AI. 19% said they weren't familiar with it at all, 36% were moderately familiar, and only 3% considered themselves to be extremely familiar.



The main reasons students used generative AI were to create cover letters, create resumes/CVs, and prepare for interviews. The most common generative AI tools used were ChatGPT, Grammarly, and CareerSet. 14% said they didn't use any AI tools.





Perceptions of Generative AI for Career Development

On average, students perceived generative AI positively but had some concerns. Focus group participants discussed how it helped them save time on applications. They would copy and paste a job description into ChatGPT, ask it to create a cover letter, then edit the output. However, they acknowledged that AI-generated cover letters are often generic and uninteresting. They expressed a concern that if everyone were to use generative AI to craft job applications, it would become more difficult to stand out from other applicants.

"I'm very wary, and I change the AI-obvious sentences to put a bit of human personality into it because I know that's really important."

Other concerns include data security/privacy, increasing the digital divide, bias and discrimination from employers using AI, and overreliance on AI leading to limited critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills as well as the ability to learn things on their own. Students believed AI will play a big role in the job market and be increasingly used by applicants and employers alike, so it is important to harness new technology for their career development.

Key conclusions

More and more students are using generative AI for their career development. They find it useful in some ways (saves time and effort) but limited in other ways (generic output, data security risk, bias/discrimination from employers, overreliance).

Students are generally in favour of generative AI and would appreciate more guidance and support for understanding how to use it in their career development.

Suggestions from research participants

References

Brecheisen, J. (2024) Research: What companies don't know about how workers use AI, Harvard Business Review. Available at: https://hbr.org/2024/05/research-what-companies-dont-know-about-how-workers-use-ai (Accessed: 03 June 2024). Moran, N. and Ackerman, D. (2023) "Can AI really help me land a job?" Student reactions to the use of artificial intelligence in career preparation', Journal of Education for Business, 99(2), pp. 103–112. doi:10.1080/08832323.2023.2275205. Ooi, K.B. et al. (2023) 'The Potential of Generative Artificial Intelligence Across Disciplines: Perspectives and Future Directions', Journal of Computer Information Systems, pp. 1–32. doi:10.1080/08874417.2023.2261010. Touzet, C. (2023) 'Using AI to support people with disability in the labour market', OECD Artificial Intelligence *Papers*[Preprint]. doi:10.1787/008b32b7-en.



 Workshops that introduce students to different generative AI tools and how to use them efficiently for career development purposes, e.g. "what prompts to write in ChatGPT" or "how to edit a ChatGPT-generated cover letter".

 Provide insight from the employer's point of view, including information about what they are looking for in applicants and how they are currently implementing AI in the application process.

 Offer tailored support for students from different departments. Some departments are more

conservative about new technology than others or less willing to provide career support. It would be helpful for LSE Careers to set up more events and provide career information to them so they won't feel as neglected or lost.

 Provide information on how AI tools are using people's data to assuage their data

security/privacy concerns. E.g., what does

CareerSet do with students' personal data when they upload their CVs?

 Include an AI section in Careers newsletters with tips on how to use AI to engage students and help them understand the technology better.