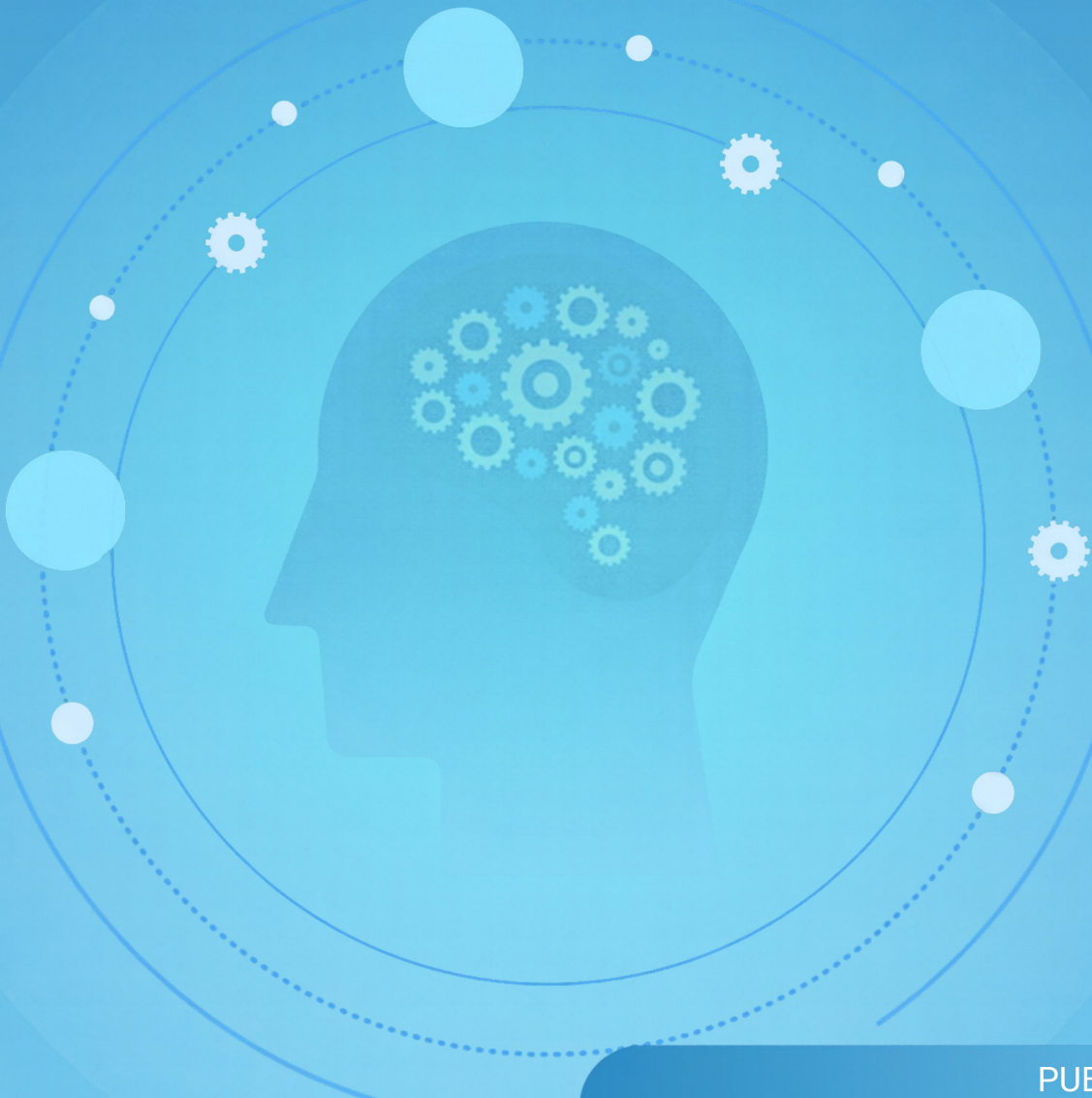




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Professional Identity of Graphic Designers in the Age of Generative AI: Threats, Adaptation, and a Conceptual Typology

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ABSTRACT

Generative AI tools such as Midjourney, Adobe Firefly, and DALL-E are changing how graphic designers work and putting pressure on how they see themselves professionally. Prior research has looked at GenAI's technical capabilities, its effects on creative industries broadly, copyright questions, and design pedagogy, usually one at a time; few studies connect these threads to ask what GenAI means for graphic designers' professional identity specifically, and that is the gap this review addresses. The review draws on 33 peer reviewed sources published between 2021 and 2026, from design studies, human computer interaction, organizational psychology, and legal scholarship, located through keyword searches of Consensus, Semantic Scholar, Google Scholar, and the ACM Digital Library. Sources were grouped around three areas, authorship and creative ownership, skill acquisition, and career prospects, and read against functional identity theory, professional role identity research, and work on human AI collaboration. Out of this comes a typology of three ways designers respond to GenAI: Resisters, Adapters, and Integrators, running from human centered to AI centered practice. GenAI unsettles familiar ideas about authorship, expertise, and creative ownership, and speeds up changes already underway in design workflows. Early career designers appear to face a higher risk of skill loss than experienced ones, who tend to treat GenAI as a complement to their existing competencies rather than a replacement for them. The typology extends functional identity and professional role identity theory into the creative professions, giving other researchers something concrete to test. It should also help in practice: design educators can use it to build GenAI literacy and skill retention into curricula, and designers and professional associations can use it to think through positioning, ethical concerns, and copyright as generative AI becomes part of everyday practice.

INTRODUCTION

The professional identity of graphic designers has traditionally been based on one single principle: they could solve visual communication problems that uneducated people couldn't. Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) casts doubts on this principle because systems such as Midjourney, DALL-E, Adobe Firefly, and Stable Diffusion can create photographs, identities of brands, typography, and visual narratives on the basis of textual prompts. Five years have been enough for GenAI to progress from the interesting laboratory curiosities into the tool used routinely in the industry (Alotaibi, 2025; Indrawati *et al.*, 2025). The discussion is no longer whether GenAI will affect the profession, but how the designers should think about themselves now.

Professional identity is a set of conceptions about oneself regarding one's profession, skills and perceptions of oneself (Selenko *et al.*, 2022; Strich *et al.*, 2021). As regards graphic designers, the professional identity is based on skills and uniqueness of the products they create. The moment the software has started to produce the output produced previously by professionally trained people, the psychological structure of the professional identity has become shaken. This issue is discussed in the present paper (Matthews & Lester, 2023; Hafez, 2025).

There are not many studies on the matter so far. There are lots of works dealing with the technical capabilities

of GenAI (Casteleiro-Pitrez, 2024; Erlyana *et al.*, 2026), disruption of creative industries in general (Amankwah-Amoah *et al.*, 2024), copyright issues (Singh, 2025; Cunningham, 2025), pedagogical challenges (Kharadi *et al.*, 2025). However, there has been no attempt to provide a systematic overview of how GenAI affects the professional identity of graphic designers.

This paper aims to do so. This paper includes a critical review of the peer-reviewed literature about the effect of GenAI on the professional identity of graphic designers from 2021 to 2026 according to the following three dimensions: creative agency/authorship, skills and employment security, and adaptive responses. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background of the paper. Chapter 3 summarizes the results of literature synthesis. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide the analysis of the literature in terms of the above-mentioned dimensions of professional identity. Chapter 7 provides a typology of adaptive strategies used by graphic designers. Chapter 8 discusses the typology comparatively. Chapter 9 contains the conclusions and implications for education and practice along with the limitations of the paper. Chapter 10 gives directions for further research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

These sources have been found through systematic searches of various database like Consensus, Semantic

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Table 1: Summary of Key Studies Included in the Literature Review

Author(s)	Year	Method	Sample	Key Finding re: Designer Identity	Theme
Selenko <i>et al.</i>	2022	Conceptual	—	Functional-identity framework: AI deployment mode (complement/replace/generate) determines identity enhancement or threat	Theory
Strich <i>et al.</i>	2021	Qualitative case study	60+ interviews	Employees actively reconstruct identity through role redefinition when AI substitutes core tasks	Theory
Goto	2021	Textual analysis + interviews	42 auditors	Collective professional identity is actively rebuilt via new human-value narratives; AI reframed as tool	Theory
Mirbabaie <i>et al.</i>	2021	Quantitative survey	—	AI identity threat predicted by changes to work, loss of status, and prior AI identity constructs	Theory
Matthews & Lester	2023	Literature review	—	Graphic design has uncertain future; shift from aesthetic/technical skills to negotiation and facilitation	Threat
Jiang <i>et al.</i>	2026	Survey	378 artists	Majority strongly oppose GenAI; report job losses, added stress, and active workplace refusal strategies	Threat
Xu <i>et al.</i>	2024	Mixed methods	34 artists	'Aesthetic loss of control': artists struggle to distinguish own choices from AI outputs over time	Threat
Cunningham	2025	Legal analysis	—	Current copyright structures have failed to tackle AI-augmented creations as evident from current litigations.	Threat
Singh	2025	Quantitative	238 practitioners	There are differing opinions regarding who owns the rights to AI-created work between artists and creators of such AI technology.	Threat
Indrawati <i>et al.</i>	2025	Qualitative	Designers & educators	While GenAI creates room for more experimentation, it might also encourage deskilling, and it is therefore crucial that GenAI is used critically as a creative technology and not as a replacement for skills.	Adaptation
Li <i>et al.</i>	2023	Interviews	20 UX designers	Experienced designers perceive GenAI as an augmentative technology while young designers are prone to deskilling.	Threat/ Adaptation
Hafez	2025	Systematic review	—	In the hybrid intelligence model, AI carries out the production process while the professionals carry out the creative processes.	Adaptation
Gamez-Djokic <i>et al.</i>	2025	9 experiments	2,320 participants	Fear of automation forces the workforce to value creativity; remains true even when reminded of the creative capabilities of AI.	Adaptation
Zhou <i>et al.</i>	2024	Large-scale data	50,000+ users	'Generative synesthesia': creators utilizing AI 50% more positively rated; 25% faster task completion.	Opportunity
Inie <i>et al.</i>	2023	Qualitative survey	23 creatives	The creative workforce identifies itself as a curator and editor; GenAI prompts them to reflect upon creativity.	Adaptation
Fang <i>et al.</i>	2025	Systematic review	—	Co-design enabled by GenAI: designers redefined as 'co-creative orchestrators'.	Adaptation
Alsswey	2025	Experimental	112 students	Learning benefits from structure in integrating AI; tension with fundamental skill training unsolved.	Education
Kharadi <i>et al.</i>	2025	Conceptual + review	—	Design pedagogy is transformed through AI tools; GenAI literacy as essential professional skill.	Education

Scholar, Google Scholar, and ACM Digital Library. Keywords searched for sources include: 'generative AI AND graphic design AND professional identity', 'AI AND creative workers AND identity disruption', 'Midjourney OR DALL-E OR Adobe Firefly AND designer perceptions', 'AI AND authorship AND copyright AND visual art', and 'graphic design education AND AI tools'. These sources have been retrieved from journals and conferences publications from the year 2021 up to 2026 related to issues of graphic/visual design practices, disruption of professional identity by AI, and Human-AI collaboration. However, if none of the sources is contemporary in nature to the problem then those sources will be retrieved which are predated to 2021 on the issue (Goto, 2021; Strich *et al.*, 2021). In total, there were 33 sources identified as part of the corpus and related to areas of design studies, human computer interaction, organizational psychology, legal literature, and graphic design education. The most important sources have been listed in Table 1 below.

Theoretical Frameworks: Professional Identity Under Technological Disruption

Three bodies of theory inform the analysis: functional-identity theory, professional role identity research, and the human-AI collaboration literature.

Functional-Identity Theory

According to Selenko *et al.* (2022), the impact of AI on laborers would be contingent upon the context in which it was utilized with respect to their current tasks. If it acts as a complement to their tasks, then the implication would generally be that it will enhance professional identity by giving laborers more challenging work. On the other hand, if AI replaces their tasks, then it is likely to harm professional identity by taking away from the tasks that lend meaning and legitimacy to the profession. With GenAI, graphic designers have experienced all three impacts at once because it both supplements, helps ideate, and creates new roles.

Professional Role Identity and AI Substitution

In their research Strich *et al.* (2021) analyzed the way loan consultants reacted to the substitution of artificial intelligence for their professional decision making activities. Instead of experiencing a loss of their professional self, employees actively tried to recreate it through the redefinition of roles, skills and collective professional identity. Similarly, Goto (2021) observed such behavior among Japanese auditors, whose professional organizations came up with a new narrative about the importance of humans and their value and thereby changed their perception of AI from replacement to tool. Both groups did not take the rules set by the technology but acted actively.

Human-AI Collaboration and the Identity-Technology Nexus

The study of human-AI cooperation provides evidence

of anxiety caused by automation along with productive results (Bulut *et al.*, 2026; Kadenhe *et al.*, 2025). Margondai *et al.* (2025) have introduced the concept of Human Identity and Autonomy Gap (HIAG) which characterizes the psychological discomfort experienced by people when the task performed by AI becomes part of their identity. In the context of creativity, it is even more complicated because of the issue of homogeneity: if all people use the same technologies for generating content based on the same dataset, the uniqueness of each creator will be compromised.

Generative Ai and the Redefinition of Creative Agency

In the most immediate way, GenAI creates an issue of authorship: Who did make the image, and what does this mean for the professionalism of whoever started it?

Authorship, Originality, and the Distributed Creative Self

As found out by Chen *et al.* (2026) through the analysis of legal literature and empirical data from six different jurisdictions, the issue of authorship related to art made with the help of artificial intelligence was perceived as distributed to a higher degree. The role of the algorithmic device used is recognized in addition to the human actors who are credited as the primary creators due to their use of the prompt, selection, and revision of the result. This conclusion may have practical applications, because, as noted by Chen *et al.*, images produced via the same prompts and algorithms receive significantly lower ratings from participants when labeled as artificial.

Identity effects of such distributed authorship differ depending on the population. Mohamed *et al.* (2024) analyzed 40 undergraduate design students from Ajman University and discovered that their use of AI-based image generators led to higher levels of confidence and professional identity, especially during the ideation phase of the project. However, Jiang *et al.* (2026) surveyed 378 professional visual artists and reached entirely different results: majority were against GenAI, experienced loss of employment because of the clients adopting the technology and suffered additional workplace stress. It should be noted that the populations under consideration are different. Graphic designers and visual artists represent two different professions, which are connected by the specifics of professional identity but diverge by the level of commercial pressure on their activity (Mirbabaie *et al.*, 2021). Commercial graphic designer typically works in a relationship with the client within a brief; artist is free from any limitations in creation process and has wider mandate in his/her creative efforts. Therefore, professional identity structures of these two populations have the same core features originality, intentionality and craft. Nevertheless, the evidence about the effect of AI technology on professional identity of visual artists is partially applicable to the graphic designers. In this case, career stage becomes the mediator of all the processes. 'Consolidated professional identity', as defined

here, represents a stable identity structure based on accumulated experience and institutionalization (Strich *et al.*, 2021). Students simply lack it yet.

Aesthetic Loss of Control and Copyright Grievance

In the study conducted by Xu *et al.* (2024), the phenomenon of “aesthetic loss of control” occurred over a period of six months through the use of 34 artists working with AI software. Gradually, they started confusing whether what they were doing was the result of their will or just an AI suggestion; whether what they were choosing visually was unique or not. It seems like the issue is rather practical in nature. Designers’ expertise presupposes educated judgment is better than uneducated one. If designers fail to understand what they did, then the expertise in question is questionable.

It could also be linked to copyright issues. According to Cunningham (2025), in many countries today there is no regulation that allows one to receive copyright for any design or object except if it is made by a human author; however, nothing is stated about how to copyright AI-generated designs. Conflicts of designers with several platforms, including Midjourney, are largely because developers used images designed by professionals for training AI without their consent. Singh’s (2025) study of designers and developers of AI in India showed that the two parties have conflicting views on the issue of copyrighting AI-generated images, since the former supports limited copyright and cheap markets, and the latter copyright protection. These copyright tensions are not unique to graphic design. Ben-Daniel (2025) shows that generative AI is raising comparable, still unresolved questions about copyright ownership in the entertainment industry more broadly, suggesting that the dilemma facing graphic designers is part of a wider disruption of intellectual property norms across the creative industries.

Where GenAI Does Help

It is not all about losses. According to Zhou *et al.* (2024), in their analysis of over four million artworks created by over 50,000 users, works created with the help of AI tools proved to be 50% more likely to get good reviews from peers and completed 25% faster. The best results described by the authors were called ‘generative synesthesia’, that is productive interaction between human ideation and machine generation, where each complements the other’s weaknesses. Analogous results were found in qualitative research carried out by Inie *et al.* (2023) among creative professionals; designers in this study used sophisticated tactics to position themselves as curators and editors of AI-created works, but not its authors. This expansion of AI-assisted creative work is not confined to visual design alone: Chanthati (2024) documents how AI-driven analysis is increasingly used to measure and refine branding quality itself, indicating that generative and analytical AI tools are reshaping creative industry practice well beyond individual design tasks.

Threats to Professional Competence and Labor Security

Beyond authorship, GenAI poses two concrete threats to practicing designers: gradual erosion of the skills that professional judgment requires, and direct displacement from the labor market.

Skill Degradation and the Deskilling Problem

Indrawati *et al.* (2025) have carried out an interview study among professional designers and educators in Indonesia and found an unambiguous answer: GenAI helps to speed up the experimentation and idea generation; however, those designers who use it extensively may become deficient in their foundational skills. The same conclusions were drawn by Li *et al.* (2023) in the course of an interview study involving 20 UX designers. Experienced participants used GenAI as an additional tool, relying on their abilities to execute all the functions that cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence such as empathy, cultural literacy, and systemic thinking. In turn, junior designers emphasized that skill degradation and exhaustion of creativity may be the challenges that will occur.

The difference is crucial from the theoretical point of view since experienced designers can entrust routine production to GenAI while it takes a lot of time but does not develop any skills in them. As for junior designers, it gives them an opportunity to gain needed experience since the routine production is what they need in their early careers. By entrusting it to GenAI, they produce acceptable output for a while but deprive themselves of the basis of their expert knowledge (Matthews & Lester, 2023). According to Romeo *et al.*’s (2025) systematic review of automation bias, the deterioration of the key skills occurs even faster among less experienced users. Graphic design students undoubtedly belong to them.

Labor Displacement and Market Restructuring

A study of 378 professional visual artists carried out by Jiang *et al.* (2026) shows concrete job losses due to clients’ uptake of GenAI tools. The logic here is simple GenAI makes it easy to have enough visually appealing materials to require less professional design at the bottom of the spectrum. In turn, Lazaroiu *et al.* (2023) and Amankwah-Amoah *et al.* (2024) see it as part of a larger trend of industry disruption through automation of repetitive tasks and creative outputs which previously required trained judgement.

The labor market reaction to this disruption, paradoxically, becomes a greater emphasis on creativity as a professional attribute. Gamez-Djokic *et al.* (2025) conducted nine experiments among which was one with professional graphic designers and saw how perceived threat of automation consistently caused people to focus more on developing their creativity than technical skills. Even when participants knew that GenAI could produce creative content as well, their professional development

strategies changed. Human creativity, in other words, becomes an anchoring point for professional identity under threat of automation, irrespective of its objective existence.

Alacovska *et al.* (2025) investigated identity formation of 53 remote gig workers, among which were graphic designers. They found that in case of competition due to automation, the process of identity formation becomes more complex and multimodal. Designers don't simply claim professional status, they construct it visually and position themselves as such in contrast to machine-made graphics.

Ethical Pressure and the Value of Professional Work

Dedijer *et al.* (2025) state that there are many ethical spheres connected with the application of AI technology in graphic design: the bias of algorithms, data consent for training, intellectual property, and homogenization of visual culture. Visual culture homogenization should be mentioned separately since the creation of visuals with the help of the AI design tool, which looks similarly to traditional industry visuals, diminishes the economic value of the unique language of visuals created by the designer through years of work.

Adaptive Strategies: How Designers are Responding

Designers have not taken these developments lying down. There are several examples from the literature that outline adaptive strategies employed by designers to reframe the design process.

From Producer to Director

Perhaps the most common adaptive response from designers has been to reframe the position that designers hold in the process. Rather than producing visual artifacts themselves, the designer now directs AI systems in producing them. As Hafez (2025) describes, 'hybrid intelligence' can be thought of as a framework where AI systems undertake production functions and people undertake the roles of creativity, cultural interpretation, and contextual judgment. Indrawati *et al.* (2025) identified that this reframing was actively taking place among Indonesian professional designers and educators, with descriptions indicating a tendency to regard the output of GenAI tools as material for further human transformation, rather than the product itself. The reframing is true in some respects, as AI systems are unable to understand the history of an institution, gauge a room, or recognize why a particular visual solution will not work for a particular audience.

Repositioning Toward Skills AI Cannot Replicate

In a similar vein, another approach involves investing in skills that seem resistant to automation: empathy, cultural awareness, storytelling, ethics, and communication. Matthews and Lester (2023) believe this approach is both not defensive and proper since being an expert designer always required these skills and technical production skills were never the most crucial ones. Experienced UX designers share the same opinion as found by Li *et*

al. (2023). Prompt engineering appears as a new type of skills in this context. As proved by Erlyana *et al.* (2026), prompt specificity was the only factor that had 42% of predicting power among other factors in creative quality of AI-assisted design work. Creating an efficient prompt for a visual task requires the same amount of visual literacy and professional skills as completing a task manually.

Collective Advocacy and Professional Boundaries

Professional design communities are also responding collectively, through copyright advocacy, ethical standard-setting, and explicit boundary-drawing around what counts as design work. Goto's (2021) research on audit professionals showed that collective professional identity can be actively reconstructed through new institutional narratives rather than simply eroded. Analogous processes appear to be developing in design, with professional associations producing ethical guidelines for GenAI use and advocating for training data consent requirements (Kharadi *et al.*, 2025).

Curriculum Change in Design Education

Design curricula have started changing, although it appears from the literature that they are doing so at a slow pace compared to technological developments. Kharadi *et al.* (2025) outline the efforts of reorganizing the curricula at design institutions through the use of GenAI tools in an effort to retain skill development. A controlled experiment carried out by Alsswey (2025) involving 112 graphic design students at Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan has revealed that using structured AI tools positively affects their learning experiences. However, the important point about the study is whether this positive influence on learning experience comes at the cost of skill development.

Conceptual Typology of Graphic Designer Professional Identity Responses to Generative AI

From the patterns observed from literature review, three types of graphic designer responses to GenAI disturbances can be discerned: Resisters, Adapters, and Integrators. These are descriptive categories that have been developed through empirical observations, and not a predictive model. When and how the designer transitions across different categories and what variables determine the first categorization would need to be examined in empirical research in the future. Career stage, institutional context, geographical location, and the degree of GenAI disturbance felt by the designer in his or her local business environment could perhaps act as some of the potential predictors. Role-redesigning is a behavior characteristic of Adapters, whereas collective lobbying and skill repositioning are behaviors found in both Adapters and Resisters, while deep collaboration is a category of behavior of Integrators. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the three categories form a continuum from human-centric (Resisters) to AI-centric (Integrators), with Adapters occupying an intermediary position.

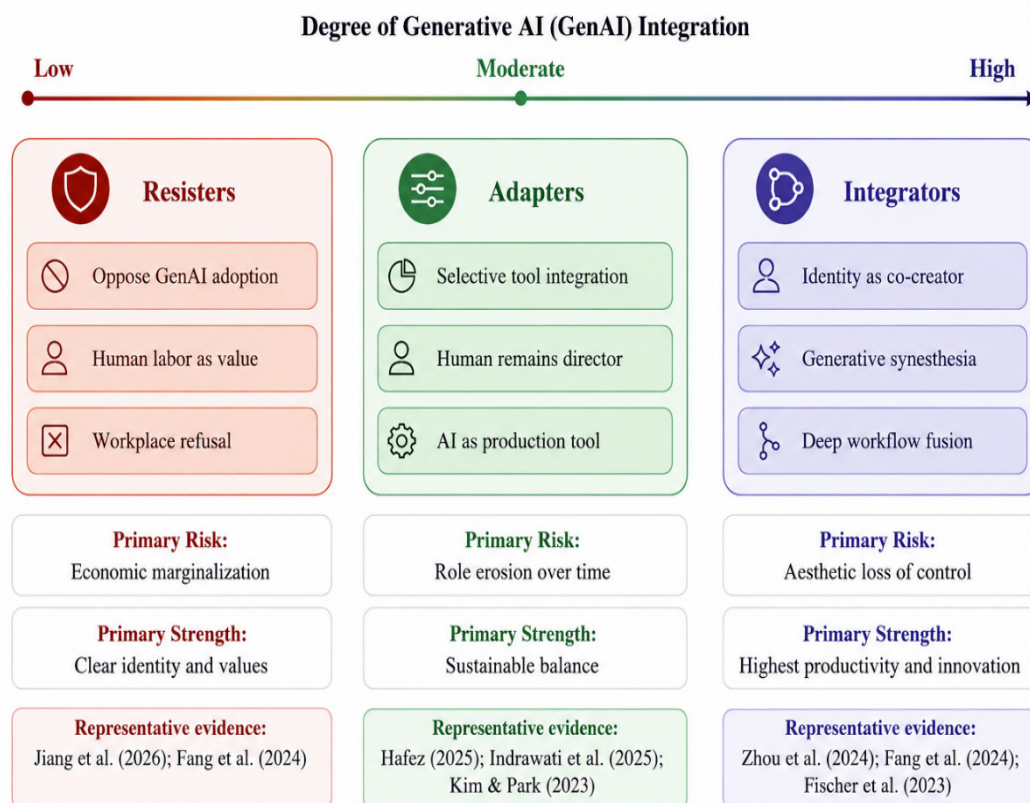


Figure 1: Conceptual Typology of Graphic Designers' Professional Identity Responses to Generative AI (GenAI).
Source: Prepared by the author from the literature review conducted.

Resisters

The Resister category opposes GenAI implementation based on issues of professional ethics, artistic legitimacy, and proper labor relations. The survey results presented by Jiang *et al.* (2026) demonstrate that these reasons dominate among professional visual artists, as the majority of the respondents was opposed to the use of GenAI and stated the presence of workplace opposition strategies. The members of the Resisters group base their professional identity on the concept of the value of human creative labor and perceive the implementation of GenAI technology as a process of robbing and exploiting what took many years of hard work.

Adapters

Adapters utilize GenAI technology in their current operations while acknowledging that innovation and judgment will forever remain human activities. This fits well within the idea of role re-definition presented in section five, which is more common among seasoned individuals having a clear professional identity (Hafez, 2025; Indrawati *et al.*, 2025). Adapters draw parallels between their current circumstances and past transitions towards digitization: Photoshop and Illustrator revolutionized the work of designers without abolishing their profession, and now it is time for GenAI to advance them one step further. Such reasoning seems to fit the designers whose expertise revolves around the higher-order elements of design. Not so much for the ones whose value resided in productivity.

Integrators

Integrators treat GenAI as transformative enough to require restructuring professional identity around human-AI co-creation rather than simply adjusting existing practice. Fang *et al.* (2025) documented a cohort of designers in collaborative design contexts who reconceptualized their role as ‘co-creative orchestrators’ directing generative workflows, with professional expertise located in the quality of that orchestration rather than in any individual output. Inie *et al.* (2023) identified similar figures in qualitative research with creative professionals who built sophisticated identities as AI curators and critical directors of machine outputs. Zhou *et al.* (2024) found that this approach is associated with higher creative productivity and better peer evaluation. The risks are also the highest. Xu *et al.*’s (2024) ‘aesthetic loss of control’ phenomenon was most acute among those most deeply integrated with AI systems. And if GenAI outputs increasingly converge on statistical means of the training data, the distinctive creative voice that Integrators invest in co-developing may become harder to sustain.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The three categories proposed in this paper resisters, adapters, and Integrators are not just ways of sorting designers by their attitude toward a new tool. They reflect a question the design profession has never quite resolved: what is it, exactly, that a graphic designer does that a non-designer cannot? GenAI makes that question harder

to sidestep. Earlier digital tools changed how designers worked. GenAI challenges whether the work itself requires a trained professional at all. That is a different kind of pressure, and the three identity positions are different ways of answering it.

The Adapter Majority and Why It Makes Sense

Adapter seems to be the most common response to GenAI among practicing designers, especially experienced ones (Hafez, 2025; Indrawati *et al.*, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2023). The trend is explained by the fact that one should consider the functions performed by GenAI. The tool implements mechanical activities, such as generation of assets, development of different layouts, quick visual changes. However, for an experienced designer, these tasks are not at the heart of his/her work. It takes time to make decisions regarding the context of a client, to figure out what visual solutions cannot be used in relation to a particular audience. This remains the task for people. GenAI does not challenge the self-concept of an experienced designer as it was not built on such functions.

For a designer who is new to the industry, however, things are quite different. The process of production is not simply busywork that needs to be outsourced but rather how one acquires design skills through experience. Working on a particular logo for three days and figuring out what makes it work provides knowledge on balance and proportion that will never be gained when creating the same logo in thirty seconds using a text prompt. It is perhaps the single most practical insight that can be drawn from this review of the literature, and it should be at the heart of any discussion on design education and GenAI (Matthews & Lester, 2023; Li *et al.*, 2023).

Tensions Within and Between the Categories

In reality, the typology seems considerably more clear-cut in theory than in practice. A practicing designer might employ GenAI very heavily in the course of concept generation within the company but never show clients anything made by an AI tool without disclosing it. In addition, the same designer might be in favor of integrating GenAI into day-to-day workflow yet at the same time oppose using designers' work for training the software without permission (Cunningham, 2025; Singh, 2025). This behavior is not a contradiction but sensitivity to the specific situation, and thus the typology can be viewed as a set of orientations instead of positions which can change from one aspect of professional practice to another.

The relation between Resisters and Adapters is more complicated than it seems at first sight. At the initial point, Resisters could be perceived as the designers who have not yet accepted GenAI. However, according to the study conducted by Goto (2021) with regard to audit professionals, there is another possibility. Collective reconstruction of professional identity, which is what happens when Resisters try to prove the value of trained

visual judgment, creates the narrative that Adapters need to support their position with. It becomes hard for Adapters to prove the value of their work because professional visual judgment does not give any additional advantages over carefully written AI prompt.

Graphic Designers in Comparative Perspective

Graphic designers are far from the first creative professionals to experience this kind of disruption. Photographers experienced something quite similar when amateur digital editing tools rendered post-production skills the exclusive domain of the professionals. This did not spell the end of professional photography but its reinvention, in which the essence of professional photography came to lie in the areas of composition, storytelling, concept, and the unique relationship a working photographer develops with his or her subjects. The skill of technical execution no longer made the difference. Graphic design seems to be undergoing something along these lines, with GenAI only speeding up an existing deskilling process sparked by the desktop publishing revolution.

For musicians and writers, the challenge is even greater. A song melody or prose paragraphs created by AI are much more difficult to distinguish from the work of professionals than most AI-generated visuals are. Notably, even in the cases where they are not, the design output must be embedded in the specific cultural and client context (Amankwah-Amoah *et al.*, 2024), which a particular brand identity of a social enterprise in Amman would demand in terms of knowing Arab visual culture, the history of the client organization, and the visual language that would make sense to its audience. No existing GenAI can generate that from a prompt. This embeddedness is what protects the graphic design profession structurally and is what both Adapters and Integrators are absolutely right to stress in their arguments.

The Homogenization Problem

However, in fact, this typology seems to be much simpler in theory than in practice. A working designer can use GenAI in concept generation inside the company heavily but will never present clients anything created by the AI tool without informing about it. Furthermore, the same designer can be in favor of incorporating GenAI into routine work process but still reject the idea of using designers' work without permission to train software (Cunningham, 2025; Singh, 2025). Such actions cannot be called contradiction but rather sensitivity to the context, which is why this typology can be considered as a set of different orientations depending on different aspects of professional work.

The dynamic between Resisters and Adapters is more complicated than one might at first assume. One would think that Resisters are just designers that have not yet embraced generative AI technology. But Goto (2021), who studied audit professionals, offers another perspective. In addition to rejecting new technology, Resisters may

participate in the collective process of reconceptualizing professional identity by emphasizing the importance of professional judgment. Thus, the burden of proof is now on the shoulders of Adapters, who need to show not only that they can produce effective AI prompts but also that their expertise includes something more. Given that modern generative AI can generate great visual output based on proper prompts, it becomes increasingly challenging to do so.

Implications for Design Education and Professional Practice

Design Education

There is a genuine paradox in the design education sphere in regard to the use of AI. GenAI technology can help achieve better short-term results regarding the metrics of learning (Alsswey, 2025; Erlyana *et al.*, 2026); however, there is a possibility of depriving students of a chance to practice and hone their abilities. This problem is particularly significant for early career professionals because it is in the process of design education that early career professionals are trained (Indrawati *et al.*, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2023). In case the curricula implement AI assistance without training students how to create works independently, graduates will be unable to evaluate the work performed by the AI because they did not perform such work themselves.

Professional identity development has to be included among the goals of the curriculum, not left to chance. Students who have knowledge about the historical context of the profession, the ethical issues connected with GenAI usage, and different ways of adaptation to change will be better equipped to deal with the profession of today.

GenAI literacy has to be taught as a professional skill, including at least three aspects of it. First of all, it is the technical one, the ability to choose and implement specific software. Then comes the ethical aspect, meaning the ability to consider specific issues like authorship attribution, consent to training data, and copyright problems. Finally, it is the aesthetic aspect the trained ability to assess and transform AI output (Hafez, 2025; Kharadi *et al.*, 2025).

Professional Practice

For practicing designers, the typology developed in this paper gives an instrument of intentional positioning, rather than adaptive survival. Knowing what kind of positioner one is, either Resister, Adapter, or Integrator, and for what reasons, is more helpful than reacting on a case-by-case basis to every new technology. Professional organizations could help in this respect by offering ethical guidelines, defending copyrights, and building professional identity. What the research data tells us is that professional identity during this era is a creation of intent, not legacy.

Limitations

Several limitations of this paper should be clearly

mentioned. First of all, the sources cited in this review were written predominantly within Western and East Asian research traditions. There is virtually no literature written on professional identity development by designers in the Arab world or developing countries, even though the conditions of their labor markets are quite different. The work conducted by Alsswey (2025) in Jordan is an exception to this rule and shows the contribution of regional research. Secondly, a large share of the evidence base was gathered during research into visual artists and UX designers and not into graphic designers. Thirdly, the typology introduced in this work is based on the analysis of available literature, and not on the results of empirical research with graphic designers. Finally, the research participants recruited via HCI and CHI conferences may be disproportionately represented among academic and technology-involved designers

Future Research Agenda

There are clear holes in the literature reviewed above. Some are holes in what has been researched and others are holes in how the research was conducted. The following six research priorities are ranked loosely according to their transformative potential.

Priority 1: Longitudinal Studies of Identity Trajectories

Pretty much all the literature that is out there is a snapshot of some kind. Researchers ask designers what they think about GenAI in a given moment, or observe classrooms for a given semester, or conduct surveys on artists at a certain point of disruption in their industry. None of this tells us anything about how the Adapter position holds up over time, whether it is sustainable and whether designers that feel confident right now will start losing confidence as GenAI becomes more advanced.

Priority 2: Research Outside Western and East Asian Contexts

Evidence from the studies analyzed in this paper is mostly found in the USA, Indonesia, Western Europe, and Japan. Professional identity is not culture-neutral. Designers' perception of their competence, their expectations regarding payment for services, and their relationship with professional organizations differ by culture and will influence their response to the disruption caused by GenAI differently. The Arab world, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America have practically no literature on the matter. The Alsswey (2025) research conducted in Jordan is the only one of its kind; yet it does not provide any framework for further research.

Priority 3: Career-Stage Differentiation

The topic of career stage is mentioned several times in this review as a potential moderating variable, but there is no study that analyzes the three stages of career early, mid and senior designers in one design. The research question that emerges because of the above gap is whether the typological categories correspond to each career stage or

early career Resisters are expressing a different issue from senior Resisters. A young designer refusing the use of GenAI might be defending his/her skill-building while an older designer rejecting GenAI could be taking a stance on ethical grounds.

Priority 4: Empirical Testing of the Typology

The three categories proposed in this paper are grounded in existing literature, but they have not been tested against data. It is possible that when researchers actually survey graphic design practitioners with validated professional identity instruments, the distribution does not cluster into three recognizable groups, or that the categories need to be subdivided, or that the boundaries between them are too fluid to be analytically useful. Survey research with representative samples, combined with behavioral measures of actual GenAI use, would provide a test that this paper cannot.

Priority 5: Long-Term Outcomes of Different Pedagogical Approaches

Current design education research focuses on the results of implementing GenAI technology in curriculums, where positive outcomes are achieved in terms of increased satisfaction and learning metrics but fails to track students beyond the classroom to see if it matters. The key question here is if the students, who were exposed to AI throughout their training process, will be less competent in evaluating AI work due to skipping the process of building visual literacy. To answer this question, one needs to observe students from the point of AI exposure for at least three to five years of practice.

Priority 6: The Economics of Identity Positions

Psychological reactions to the disruption caused by GenAI have been covered extensively in literature, but the economic reactions are far less explored. There is no information on whether the Adapter professionals who feel the most psychologically secure are also securing their incomes over time, or if their flexibility is exploited by their customers for lowering payment levels. Any study that correlates professional identity surveys with income data, the prices set in freelance platforms, and the customer acquisition dynamics will reveal whether the professions listed above are economically viable or not.

CONCLUSION

Graphic designers are being called upon to address a problem that has been at the center of professional identity theory for many years: What happens when technology gets good enough to perform your job? The review above indicates that the answer is not always the same and cannot be. Instead, it changes depending on where you are in your career, what market you operate in, how you see the essence of your expertise and what you are willing to compromise in order to benefit from the efficiency provided by GenAI.

As described above, the three positions of Resisters,

Adapters, and Integrators are not the steps in the acceptance process but rather different, justified answers to a professional conundrum. Resisters defend something real - the value of human creative effort and the principle of data consent. Adapters make a reasonable choice for most experienced practitioners - GenAI takes care of those things that were never important anyway. Integrators opt for a risky but exciting idea of expanding the possibilities of design through cooperation with AI systems. All of these positions involve certain risks that have not been analyzed yet due to insufficient time that has passed since the development of GenAI.

That is why the six research priorities stated in Section 10 are meant to fill the knowledge gap before professional associations, schools and the whole labor market take irreversible decisions on curriculum and policy development based on insufficient evidence. The technology will continue to develop regardless of everything. The response to it from the professional community may depend on the ability of researchers to show what actually works.

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