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Adapting to generative AI in creative work: a technological frames perspective on creative advertising

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ABSTRACT

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is transforming creative work, yet creatives do not respond uniformly. To explain this variation, we draw on the concept of technological frames, three years of netnographic research in online advertising communities, and interviews with advertising creatives. Our analysis identifies competing interpretations of GenAI—regarding its level of agency in the creative process, its impact on jobs, and its role in shifting how value is created in outputs—that converge in distinct narratives about its implications for creative work. These narratives, in turn, drive distinct adaptive responses among creatives: AI skilling, reskilling, and deep skilling—the latter involving deliberate cultivation of human capabilities that GenAI cannot readily replicate. The findings inform both research on GenAI in creative work and managers navigating its adoption.

1. Introduction

Years after the launch of ChatGPT, academics, citizens, and practitioners continue to grapple with the implications of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Two areas in which the arrival of GenAI has sparked especially controversial debates are the domains of creativity (e.g., Edgell, 2024) and work (e.g., Hui et al., 2024). This article focuses on the intersection of these two domains: creative work. Creative work refers to a process in which ideas are produced, refined, evaluated, discarded, or implemented in order to develop something novel and useful (Rouse and Harrison, 2022). While creative work takes place in all organizations, it is particularly linked to creative fields (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024). Accordingly, scholars conducted empirical research on the implications of GenAI in creative fields such as advertising (Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025), architecture, software development, and design (Inie et al., 2023; Palani & Ramos, 2024; Takaffoli et al., 2024).

While research has documented creatives' initial hopes and concerns about GenAI (Inie et al., 2023) and their lived experiences of working with it (Palani & Ramos, 2024; Takaffoli et al., 2024), it has yet to explain how creatives' distinct interpretations of GenAI shape their various responses. This could help explain, for example, why some creatives embrace and others resist the technology (Cui et al., 2025; Inie et al., 2023). Existing research has paid limited attention to creatives' responses to GenAI and to their adaptation strategies in particular. This gap matters because understanding how creatives proactively respond to GenAI is central to explaining how creative industries adapt to this technological change (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024).

To address this gap, we draw on the concept of technological frames as an enabling lens to study how creatives interpret and adapt to GenAI. Technological frames refer to the shared assumptions, expectations, and understandings of a technology held by a particular group (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994), which shape how users adopt and respond to new technologies (Davidson, 2002; Leonardi, 2011). Accordingly, examining how creatives frame GenAI can provide insight into the adaptation strategies they pursue. We therefore ask: *How do technological frames shape creatives' adaptation strategies to GenAI?* To address this question, we conducted an in-depth investigation in the context of creative advertising.

Creative advertising constitutes an especially suitable context to explore the implications of GenAI for creative work (Cui et al., 2025). First, creativity and creative work are central to advertising (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017; West et al., 2019), with creative excellence celebrated annually at festivals such as the *Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity* (Demsar et al., 2025). Second, advertising tends to be an early adopter of new technologies. From the rise of mass media to the computer, internet, social media, big data, and more recently GenAI, the industry has undergone several technological shifts, with GenAI now

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reshaping creative workflows (Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025). Due to its early adoption of GenAI, advertising therefore offers other industries "a taste of what is to come" (The Economist, 2025). Third, creative advertising is especially exposed to GenAI (Huh et al., 2023). Studies indicate that occupations such as copywriting and graphic design, which represent key roles in creative advertising, are among the jobs most exposed to automation (Felten et al., 2023; Hui et al., 2024). Relatedly, experimental research indicates that GenAI models are able to match or outperform human creatives on producing marketing copy and visuals (Heitmann et al., 2025; Wen & Laporte, 2025). Reflecting this optimism, technology leaders such as Sam Altman and Mark Zuckerberg have predicted that AI will soon replace much of the work currently done by advertising agencies (O'Reilley, 2025; Patel, 2025). While leaders of technology firms herald GenAI's disruptive creative potential, advertising creatives have fostered their own discourse within online communities, sharing experiences that reveal a more complex reality, which we will reflect in this article.

To explore our research question, we used netnography and interviews. Netnography is particularly appropriate for studying how people make sense of emerging technologies such as GenAI because it captures naturally occurring peer-to-peer discussions in settings where meanings are negotiated and contested in real time (Kozinets, 2020). Our netnographic work involved us immersing ourselves between 2022 and 2025 in two online advertising communities in which advertising creatives share their views on current matters related to their profession. We supplemented our netnography with interviews with advertising creatives in order to deepen and triangulate our insights.

Drawing on the lens of technological frames, our study shows how creatives' competing interpretations of GenAI shape their differing responses. Our analysis reveals three frame domains that characterize advertising creatives' interpretations of GenAI: GenAI's impact on creative processes, outputs, and jobs, each of which is associated with several technological frames (sections 4.1 to 4.3). We further find that creatives consider three distinct adaptation strategies in response to GenAI: AI skilling, reskilling, and deep skilling (section 4.4). Finally, we show how technological frames are narratively interrelated (section 4.5.1), how creatives' adaptation strategies are informed by their technological frames (section 4.5.2), and identify contextual factors that shape both creatives' technological frames and their adaptation strategies (section 4.5.3).

Our study offers three contributions to the conversations on GenAI in creative work in general and creative advertising in particular. First, we extend research on creatives' adaptation to GenAI (e.g., Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Cui et al., 2025) by explaining how creatives' specific interpretations of GenAI lead to three distinct adaptation strategies. Second, we advance understanding of creatives' interpretations of GenAI by unpacking how distinct frame domains interrelate and shape broader narratives about GenAI. This integrated perspective builds on and expands prior studies that have viewed such domains in isolation (e.g., Demsar et al., 2025; Heitmann et al., 2025). Third, our findings contribute to research on how collective interpretations of technology unfold in creative work communities (e.g., Inie et al., 2023; Palani & Ramos, 2024). We show that advertising creatives form a dynamic, multi-faceted interpretive community where incongruent frames of GenAI coexist, evolve, and are continuously negotiated. These findings have implications for managerial practice where they can inform managerial messaging, the redesign of workflows, and capability development initiatives.

This article is organized as follows. We start by reviewing the literature on GenAI, creativity, creative work, and advertising. We then describe our data and method, detail the findings, and discuss their implications for research and practice.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. GenAI and creativity

AI refers to "the use of computational machinery to emulate capabilities inherent in humans" (Huang & Rust, 2021, p. 31). Hermann and Puntoni (2024) differentiate two major development stages in the past 15 years: predictive and generative AI. Predictive AI involves using algorithms and data inputs (e.g., consumers' purchasing behavior) to predict outcomes (e.g., consumers' preferences or choices). In contrast, generative AI refers to "computational techniques that are capable of generating seemingly new, meaningful content … from training data" (Feuerriegel et al., 2023, p. 111). One way to distinguish GenAI models is based on their data output. Feuerriegel et al. (2024) differentiate between X-to-text, −image/video, −music/speech, and −code models. In this study, X-to-text models and X-to-image/video models are especially relevant. For instance, creatives can access X-to-text models using interfaces such as Google Gemini and ChatGPT to search information, brainstorm ideas, write drafts, and proof work (Retkowsky et al., 2024). Similarly, creatives can use X-to-image models such as Midjourney to generate mood boards, images, and videos (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Cui et al., 2025).

Due to these capabilities, the advent of GenAI has sparked a controversial debate on its intersection with creativity (Edgell, 2024). Emerging research can be organized into two types. The first type uses experiments to compare the creative performance of humans with GenAI (e.g., Haase & Hanel, 2023) or of humans who collaborate with GenAI with humans who work without GenAI assistance (e.g., Doshi et al., 2024). A recent meta-analysis found (1) no significant difference in creative performance between GenAI and humans, (2) that humans who collaborate with GenAI slightly yet significantly outperform those who work without it, and (3) that collaborating with GenAI leads to a decrease in idea diversity (Holzner et al., 2025). In addition, they found these effects to depend on specific boundary conditions: GenAI performs better on standardized creativity tests than on more complex tasks (e.g., creative writing) and laypeople benefit more than professionals from collaborating with GenAI. These findings imply that GenAI's impact on creativity is highly context-dependent.

The second type of studies tends to be conceptual and reflect on the nature of creativity in light of GenAI. Creativity is commonly defined as producing something new and useful (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Creativity researchers have discussed updating this definition to distinguish artificial and human creativity (e.g., Runco, 2023), as well as highlighted the importance of differentiating between various levels of creativity when considering whether GenAI can be creative (Ivcevic & Grandinetti, 2024). For instance, creativity researchers differentiate between little-c creativity (which involves coming up with novel and useful ideas in the context of everyday life) and pro-c creativity (which requires expertise acquired through many years of work in a creative domain). Ivcevic and Grandinetti (2024) explain that most studies have focused on the impact of AI on little-c creativity, while more research is needed on the implications of GenAI for pro-c creativity. Exploring such implications entails studying the adoption of GenAI in creative work, which we will turn to next.

2.2. GenAI and creative work

Scholarship on GenAI and creative work can be organized into two streams. One focuses on the micro-level and examines changes in creatives' roles and workflows. For instance, studies have identified benefits of creating with GenAI, which involve using it to conduct research and summarize content more quickly and effortlessly, to brainstorm ideas to accelerate the generation of alternatives, to write drafts to overcome writer's block, and to quickly visualize and iterate through ideas (Demsar et al., 2025; Palani & Ramos, 2024; Takaffoli et al., 2024). However, creatives also experience challenges working with GenAI,

which include articulating the creative goal, the lack of memory across workflows, and aligning GenAI output with creative goals (Palani & Ramos, 2024; Takaffoli et al., 2024). Moreover, creatives mention risks, for instance, that an overreliance on GenAI could negatively impact their skills and the creative outcome (Takaffoli et al., 2024).

The second stream takes a macro view and considers GenAI's impact on an occupational level, both in the present and the future. The launch of GenAI applications such as ChatGPT and Midjourney has sparked a vibrant debate on the future of creative work and revived long-standing debates about the future of work (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Dries et al., 2024; Hsu & Bechky, 2024; Vinchon et al., 2023). In 2023, a team of creativity scholars wrote that GenAI "is impressive and questions certain professional practices related to "creative" jobs that were previously considered untouchable" (Vinchon et al., 2023, p. 473). In light of this threat, scholars have developed different scenarios for the future of creative jobs (de Cremer et al., 2023; Vinchon et al., 2023). These scenarios matter because they can stabilize expectations about the future, which can create commitments to act and shape actors' behaviors in the present (Beckert & Bronk, 2019)—such as creatives' adaptation to GenAI. Three scenarios have been repeatedly described.

First, the optimistic scenario assumes that GenAI will be leveraged to augment creative work and that humans will collaborate with it to produce better results than they could without it (de Cremer et al., 2023; Vinchon et al., 2023). The augmentation of creative work could be quantitative and/or qualitative in nature (Celis Bueno et al., 2025). Augmenting creative work in a quantitative sense could imply that GenAI is used to facilitate mundane tasks (e.g., using GenAI to search information), which could allow creatives to spend more time on tasks that involve creative thinking. Augmenting creative work in a qualitative sense could involve profound changes to the creative process (Celis Bueno et al., 2025). Garcia (2025, p. 2) explains how GenAI reduces the need for continuous human guidance, so that human creatives assume "a role akin to that of a guide or mentor" who defines "the initial parameters or creative boundaries" and then "takes a step back."

Second, the more dystopian scenario assumes that machines will take over creative work, either because people will feel that they cannot compete with GenAI and/or because there will be not enough attention for human-generated content as AI systems flood the digital space (de Cremer et al., 2023; Vinchon et al., 2023). To date, there is limited evidence that AI is displacing a large number of creative workers (e.g., Gimbel et al., 2025). However, a study found that gig workers offering creative services (e.g., copywriting and graphic design) experienced a negative financial impact after the launch of GenAI tools (Hui et al., 2024).

The third scenario fuses the previous two scenarios. It envisions a backlash against AI content and that human creativity will become a mark of value for which consumers will be willing to pay a premium (de Cremer et al., 2023; Vinchon et al., 2023). Drawing an analogy to the industrial revolution, Vinchon et al. (2023, p. 476) argue that "AI will replace a large portion of the jobs that can be automated. However, as with traditional craftsmanship, this might increase the perceived product quality, uniqueness, and authenticity of non-AI-supported creative output, which might become more attractive." It is worth emphasizing that the three scenarios mirror broader scenarios for the future of work (Dries et al., 2024) and are not mutually exclusive (de Cremer et al., 2023).

In summary, prior research has examined benefits and challenges of using GenAI in creative work and proposed scenarios for the future of creative work. However, we still lack a clear and deep understanding of how creative professionals interpret GenAI, both in terms of its role in creative work and their assumption about its future impact, and how these interpretations influence how they adapt to it. Gaining such insights requires an in-depth examination of these interpretations within a professional context. Here, we focus on the field of advertising and review prior literature on GenAI and advertising next.

2.3. GenAI and advertising

Scholarship on GenAI in advertising can be divided into two streams (Huh et al., 2023). The first focuses on consumers' responses to advertisements that were created by or with the help of GenAI (Heitmann et al., 2025; Kirk & Givi, 2025; Wen & Laporte, 2025). These studies adopted experimental designs to explore either consumers' reception of AI-generated images or of AI-generated text. For instance, a study found that GenAI can generate visual campaign content that matches and even exceeds conventionally produced advertising content in associated performance metrics (Heitmann et al., 2025). Similarly, another study indicated that GenAI is capable of generating marketing narratives that resonate with consumers and influence purchase intent (Wen & Laporte, 2025). However, there are also studies which indicate negative effects of using GenAI in advertising. For instance, Kirk and Givi (2025) showed that when consumers believe emotional marketing communications are written by AI, positive word of mouth and customer loyalty are reduced.

Studies in the second stream have adopted primarily qualitative research designs and focused on the implementation of GenAI in the advertising industry and its impact on advertising professionals and their practice (Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025; Osadchaya et al., 2024). For instance, Osadchaya et al. (2024) found that advertising professionals experienced ChatGPT as contradictory in its effects on their work and specifically on their research, creativity, and efficiency. Closer to our study, Demsar et al. (2025) interviewed advertising executives to explore the intersection of GenAI and creativity within advertising. Their findings indicate that the role of humans in the creative process has evolved as GenAI is increasingly used to handle routine tasks, while humans focus more on brand strategy and emotional connections. They further identify a threat associated with the increasing homogenization of creative outputs as well as ethical risks such as copyright infringements. Similarly, Cui et al. (2025) highlight the potential of GenAI to both enhance and disrupt creative workflows in advertising agencies—and the associated risk that creatives could resist its integration. The authors propose an empirically grounded process model for effectively integrating AI into the advertising creative process, which involves four stages: readiness, co-creativity, validation, and effective execution. Table 1 provides an overview of selected empirical studies on GenAI in advertising.

In sum, prior studies found that advertising professionals experience GenAI as contradictory in its effects (Osadchaya et al., 2024) and that its adoption in creative advertising reshapes creative work processes (Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025). Given how GenAI's capabilities uniquely challenge existing notions of creativity (Edgell, 2024), we need to expand our understanding of how *advertising professionals* more broadly interpret GenAI (Demsar et al., 2025; Osadchaya et al., 2024) to the interpretation of *advertising creatives* specifically. By exploring this, we address calls to examine more closely the nuances of GenAI perceptions and the interaction between GenAI and creatives (Demsar et al., 2025; Palani & Ramos, 2024). Such an exploration also sheds light on how advertising creatives can adapt to GenAI (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024), moving beyond current organizational perspectives on how advertising agencies navigate its adoption (Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025). A technological frames perspective can help explain how advertising creatives adapt to GenAI, as it unpacks underlying interpretations of technology and their impact on worker responses.

2.4. A technological frames perspective on GenAI in creative advertising

When advertising creatives respond to new technologies such as GenAI, they do so based on individual or shared assumptions about the technology. Following Orlikowski and Gash (1994, p. 31), such assumptions can be conceptualized as "technological frames," defined as "the core set of assumptions, expectations, and knowledge of technology collectively held by a group or community." Understanding these underlying, often taken-for-granted interpretations of a technology by key

Table 1
Selected empirical studies on GenAI in advertising.

Study	Empirical approach	Unit of analysis	GenAI model studied	Key contribution
Osadchaya et al. (2024)	Qualitative (interviews)	Advertising industry	X-to-text (ChatGPT)	Advertising professionals experience GenAI as paradoxical in its effects; coping strategies to navigate paradoxes
Cui et al. (2025)	Qualitative (interviews, observations, documents)	Creative process, AI adoption process	X-to-image (DALL·E, Midjourney)	Effectively integrating AI into advertising creative process involves four stages: readiness, co-creativity, validation, and effective execution
Demsar et al. (2025)	Qualitative (interviews)	Advertising creativity	X-to-text (ChatGPT) and X-to-image (Midjourney)	GenAI leads to changes in the creative process (e.g., GenAI handling routine tasks) and raises new concerns (e.g., the convergence of advertising creativity)
Hartmann et al. (2025)	Quantitative (experiments)	Consumers	X-to-image (DALL-E 3, Midjourney v6, Firefly 2, Imagen 2, Imagine, Stable Diffusion XL Turbo, and Realistic Vision)	GenAI can match and even surpass human creators in consumer perceptions of images and overall marketing effectiveness Excessive saturation in AI images is negatively associated with perceived quality, realism, and aesthetics Producing AI-generated images is more cost-efficient than hiring freelancers or using professional stock photos
Heitmann et al. (2025)	Quantitative (experiments)	Consumers	X-to-image (Stable Diffusion)	Fine-tuned GenAI X-to-image models can match and even exceed conventionally produced advertising content GenAI can be fine-tuned on multiple communication objectives simultaneously and adapted to specific target audiences
Kirk & Givi (2025)	Quantitative (experiments)	Consumers	X-to-text	Evidence of an AI-Authorship effect: When consumers believe emotional marketing communications are written by AI (vs. a human), positive word of mouth and customer loyalty are reduced Several moderators attenuate the effect (e.g., when the communication is factual rather than emotional)
Wen & Laporte (2025)	Quantitative (experiments)	Consumers	X-to-text (ChatGPT)	GenAI's strengths lie in presenting positive emotions and influencing purchase intent while limitations lie in embodied cognition and lexical diversity compared to human-authored content

actors allows scholars to explain and predict their actions. Applying this concept to creatives' responses to GenAI allows us to explore the "interpretive grounds" for creatives' responses and explain varying or even contradictory responses based on their collective interpretations of GenAI (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994). While frames themselves are often highly context-specific, Davidson (2006) identified common categories of frames, or "frame domains," across the literature, such as frames relating to features of the technology, reasons for its development or implementation, or its impact on work practices.

The notion of (in)congruence plays a central role in the technology frames literature. Incongruence describes "the nature and extent of differences among frames" (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994, p. 2). For example, managers or technology developers may interpret a technology vastly different from the way workers do. Therefore, one stream of the frames literature explores why actors differ in the frames they hold. For example, frames can be influenced by personal attitude (Spieth et al., 2021), hierarchical level of the individual (Schneider & Sting, 2020), or by industry, whereby workers interpret technology based on their occupational identity (Nelson & Irwin, 2014). A study of AI chatbots indicated that the type of technology plays a role, too: highly personalized technologies, such as AI, can lead to more incongruent frames (Gkinko & Elbanna, 2023).

Another stream of literature explores the consequences of competing frames. When groups within an organization hold incongruent frames, it can lead to incompatible action and complicate the technology implementation process (Davidson, 2002; Leonardi, 2011; Orlikowski & Gash, 1994). However, users in the same occupational group can also "agree to differ" in their technology use, thus successfully adopting a technology

despite incongruent frames around its use (Gkinko & Elbanna, 2023; Mazmanian, 2013).

Exploring GenAI in creative advertising through the lens of technology frames allows us to explain how creatives' interpretations shape their various responses to this technological change. In doing so, we address calls to extend frame research beyond organizational boundaries to the field level (Davidson, 2006) and to examine how such frames shape interpretations and responses to AI technologies (Bankins et al., 2024). Qualitative data are especially suited for this purpose, as frames are revealed through language, e.g., "through analysis of metaphors, imagery, symbols, and vocabularies" (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994, p. 36). Building on this premise, the following section outlines our data and methodological approach.

3. Method and data

The launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 enabled workers to experiment with GenAI in their work practices (Retkowsky et al., 2024) and share their experiences online. These shared experiences, captured in conversations and comments, provide a rich source of qualitative data that we can harness using netnography. Netnography refers to "a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 14). We began our netnographic work in December 2022 and continued through September 2025, closely following the procedures outlined by Kozinets (2020). In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews to deepen and triangulate the insights derived from our netnographic analysis.

3.1. Netnography

Netnographic data collection followed the operation practices of simplifying, searching, scouting, selecting, and saving (Kozinets, 2020). *Simplifying* involves translating the research question into searchable terms. Initially, we combined search terms related to the technology (e.g., artificial intelligence, generative AI, and AI) and specific GenAI applications (e.g., ChatGPT, Jasper, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion) with search terms such as advertising, creativity, and copywriting. The second practice involves *searching* for relevant discussions on the topic. We used Google as a more general search engine as well as more specific social media sites such as LinkedIn and Reddit. The third practice, *scouting*, involved clicking on links and reading through conversations that seemed relevant to our research question. In this stage, we eventually discovered active and dedicated Reddit communities (referred to as subreddits), such as r/advertising and r/copywriting, featuring discussion of all sorts of matters related to advertising, including the adoption of GenAI tools such as ChatGPT and Midjourney. The next step involved *selecting* the data site(s) as well as specific conversations using the criteria of relevance, activity, interactivity, and richness (Kozinets, 2020). Two subreddits—r/advertising and r/copywriting—were selected as data sites; conversations on these data sites turned out to be rich, relevant, active, and interactive. We also used the same criteria to select specific conversations. Reddit was chosen not only for meeting these criteria but also for being a publicly accessible platform, allowing us to examine posts from subreddits that do not require a login to view and do not contain sensitive information.

In netnographic research, the unit of analysis is the utterance, not the person (Kozinets, 2020, p. 202). Accordingly, we were more concerned with the content of discussions about GenAI and creativity in online advertising communities than the identities of those contributing to them. Nevertheless, as we sampled and read through posts, we focused on identifying discursive characteristics suggesting that the discussions were authored by practicing advertising creatives. These discussions took place within occupationally bounded online communities—specifically, the subreddits r/advertising and r/copywriting—rather than general AI or technology forums such as r/ChatGPT. Both subreddits explicitly define themselves as professional spaces: r/advertising is "for ad creators, students, copywriters, and anyone else who is finely honing their reverse banner blindness for professional reasons" (r/advertising, n.d.), while r/copywriting is a "subreddit for learning, discussing, critiquing, and sharing resources about advertising copy" (r/copywriting, n.d.).

Within these communities, many contributors directly referenced their professional roles, describing themselves, for instance, as "a senior art director at an advertising agency," "a copywriter at a global ad agency," or "an art director using Midjourney." Others, however, demonstrated professional expertise through their discursive practices—for example, the use of industry-specific terminology, reasoning, and contextual knowledge that characterize creative advertising work. During sampling, we prioritized posts that displayed such discursive and contextual markers of professional practice, including references to agency workflows, client dynamics, or campaign processes, and excluded superficial or commercial posts, such as brief remarks offering no substantive reflection (e.g., "Yes, it will eat many jobs") or posts promoting AI tools and services through external links.

We further focused on threads explicitly discussing GenAI in creative advertising (e.g., "How can creatives future-proof themselves in an AI-driven world?"). Taken together, the professional focus of these communities, the discursive indicators of occupational expertise, and the strong convergence between the Reddit discussions and our interviews with verified advertising professionals (used as a supplementary method, as discussed below) give us confidence that the data largely reflect the perspectives of advertising creatives.

The final step involved *saving* the selected data by copying posts into a text file. In total, we closely examined over 4,200 forum posts. We reached theoretical saturation—when further data no longer added new insights—yet continued to observe discussions to remain aware of emerging discussions in the field.

3.2. Interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews to supplement and triangulate our netnographic data (Belk et al., 2013; Kozinets, 2020). Adopting a purposive sampling approach, we focused on advertising professionals in creative roles. We recruited participants through our personal networks and via LinkedIn. Our final sample consists of 12 participants, who worked as art directors, creative directors, and copywriters in boutique or full-service advertising agencies of varying sizes. Their industry experience ranged from 6 to 26 years. Table 2 provides more details on our participants.

Interviews were conducted between December 2023 and November 2025, following established guidelines for qualitative interviews (Arsel, 2017; Belk et al, 2013). This implies that we combined grand tour questions with probes that allowed us to dig deeper into emerging themes (Arsel, 2017). Initially, we asked participants about their agency, their current role, and typical assignments. We then explored

Table 2
Profiles of interview participants.

No.	Position	Years of experience	Agency type	Agency size
1	Creative Director	26	Full-Service	Large
2	Creative Director	22	Full-Service	Large
3	Creative Director	7	Full-Service	Medium
4	Creative Director	21	Full-Service	Medium
5	Art Director	8	Full-Service	Medium
6	Copywriter	6	Boutique	Small
7	Art Director	20	Boutique	Small
8	Creative Director	15	Full-Service	Large
9	Art Director	24	Boutique	Small
10	Creative Director	23	Boutique	Small
11	Creative Director	15	Full-Service	Small
12	Creative Director	26	Full-Service	Medium

Agency size: Small = Under 50; Medium = 50 to 200; Large = 200 + .

how they use GenAI in the creative process, their perceptions of its impacts on their work and agency, and their responses to the technology. We concluded our interviews by asking participants if they had anything else on their mind regarding GenAI and its impacts on advertising. Table 3 provides details on our interview protocol. The interviews lasted 52 min on average, were conducted via Zoom, taped, and transcribed verbatim.

The majority of interviews were conducted after the initial coding of the netnographic data. This sequencing enabled us to use the interviews to elaborate on, challenge, and refine emerging netnographic interpretations. Thus, the interviews were conducted both as part of the main analysis and as part of an effort to triangulate the netnographic insights. Based on our analysis, we find no salient discrepancies between the netnographic and the interview data.

3.3. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation followed a range of iterative steps typical for netnographic and qualitative research (Belk et al., 2013; Kozinets, 2020). At the beginning of our research project, we were broadly interested in creatives' perspectives on GenAI. Therefore, we first examined all forum conversations to identify key issues that creatives discuss regarding GenAI, iteratively grouping these into more abstract categories as we iterated back and forth between our data and the academic literature. Four main themes emerged from our analysis: (1) GenAI's role in creative processes, (2) its influence on creative jobs, (3) its impact on creative outputs, and (4) possible adaptation strategies. In some cases, the themes emerged directly from conversation titles. For example, some conversations were explicitly devoted to (1) GenAI's role in creative processes ("I'm curious, are any of you actually using ChatGPT, and how?"), (2) its influence on jobs ("Anyone here worried about things like ChatGPT putting copywriters out of jobs?"), (3) its impact on creative outputs ("Will the increasing use of AI result in a standardization of brand messaging and visuals, making it harder for companies to stand out?"), and (4) creatives' adaptation strategies ("How can creatives future-proof themselves in an AI-driven world?"). In other cases, the topics emerged from the conversations. For instance, in a discussion on using GenAI in creative processes, forum members also discussed its impact on creatives' jobs.

In the second step, we analyzed posts relating to these key topics. After several rounds of coding, reflection, and discussion of emerging interpretations, we recognized certain arguments repeatedly coming up beyond the idiosyncrasies of each individual comment, such as the argument that GenAI's creative capabilities are still limited so it cannot replace creatives or that GenAI is merely a tool for creatives. We noted that these statements could be mapped onto a limited number of perspectives, with creatives often drawing on different perspectives within a single forum post. We therefore conducted several additional rounds of data analysis and interpretation to identify the key perspectives associated with each key topic. We conceptualized these perspectives in a way that reduced overlap between them, again iterating between our data and the prior literature. For instance, statements such as GenAI "has the potential to replace humans altogether; especially in advertising and marketing" were coded as disrupted creative jobs (section 4.2.1) whereas statements such as that creative jobs "will shift and mold but I am sure you will need a human at the helm" were interpreted as evolved creative jobs (section 4.2.2).

During the review process, we recognized that the identified perspectives could, following Orlikowski and Gash (1994), be conceptualized as *technological frames* through which creatives interpret GenAI (section 2.4). We reanalyzed the data using this concept as an analytical lens, treating the overall discussion topics (e.g., GenAI and creative processes) as *frame domains* and the perspectives as *technological frames* (e.g., GenAI as a tool). This lens suggests that frames shape and explain actions of organizational actors. Similarly, the goal of our analysis was not to merely identify frames, but to mobilize them to explain the adaptation strategies of creatives. Hence, we began exploring interrelations between the frames as well as interrelations between frames and the adaptation strategies. We went back into the data and explored which frames were frequently linked by creatives. For example, we found that creatives who interpreted GenAI as an agent in the creative process that autonomously performs creative tasks repeatedly also drew on the interpretation that GenAI disrupts and displaces creative jobs. Our analysis of the interrelations between frames ultimately resulted in three distinct narratives (section 4.5.1). We then analyzed how frames related to adaptation strategies. Here, we uncovered, for example, that a reskilling strategy was often grounded in the assumption that GenAI is an agent in the creative process and could displace creative jobs. We continued this process until we could link all adaptation strategies to specific frames (section 4.5.2). Finally, we identified contextual factors that shape the impact of GenAI on creative work (section 4.5.3). We present the findings of this analysis in the following section. To safeguard user identity all usernames were altered (e.g., R1 for Redditor 1).

Table 3
Interview protocol.

Themes	Illustrative questions
Professional background and career context	Please describe your professional background and career in the advertising industry. Can you tell me more about your agency and current role as [creative role]? What does a typical creative assignment look like?
GenAI use in creative advertising	How do you use GenAI in your work? Can you elaborate on GenAI's role in various tasks and/or stages of your work process? What are the benefits and limitations of using GenAI for creative work?
GenAI's impact on creative advertising	How has GenAI impacted your work (and that of your colleagues)? How has GenAI impacted advertising creativity? If applicable: How do you/your colleagues cope with the risk that GenAI poses to your jobs?
Conclusion	How do you think GenAI—and its further development—will impact your work as [role] in the long term? Are there any other aspects regarding GenAI, its use and impacts on creative advertising that you would like to share?

4. Findings

This study explores how technological frames shape adaptation strategies to GenAI in creative advertising. We identify three frame domains that characterize advertising creatives' interpretations of GenAI: GenAI's impact on creative processes, outputs, and jobs. Within these domains, advertising creatives adopt various interpretations, or frames, of GenAI that converge in distinct narratives and subsequently shape their adaptation strategies. In addition, creatives discuss several career-related factors that influence the impact of GenAI and their adaptation strategies. We first outline each frame domain (sections 4.1 to 4.3), then elaborate on creatives' adaptation strategies (section 4.4), and finally examine how these frames interrelate and shape creatives' interpretations and responses to GenAI (section 4.5).

4.1. GenAI and creative processes: Tool, collaborator, or agent?

Our analysis indicates that GenAI's role in the creative process is a central concern for advertising creatives. Three technological frames emerge from the discussions, which portray GenAI as a tool, a collaborator, and an agent in the creative process. These frames extend beyond rhetoric, reflecting different ways creatives experience and engage with the technology and how they conceptualize its agency within the creative process.

4.1.1. GenAI as a tool

According to the first frame, GenAI constitutes yet another tool supporting the creative process (Ivcevic & Grandinetti, 2024). It is seen as a means to achieve specific ends, implying little agency and a command-and-response form of interaction (Celis Bueno et al., 2025). One creative explains that they use ChatGPT as "a tool for us writers to help brainstorm headlines, taglines, campaign names, manifestos etc." (R1) while another frames GenAI "as a quick way to learn about something I don't know much about" (R2). The *GenAI as a tool* perspective is evident in the comparisons creatives make and the metaphors that they use. Many creatives draw comparisons between GenAI and other tools, especially with search engines, with one creative professing that they "fell in love with it as a better version of Google" (R3). Creatives have also framed GenAI as a "calculator for writing" (R4), whereas others argue that "AI is to copywriting what Canva is to design" (R5) to highlight that ChatGPT reduces the effort involved in writing copy. Among creatives who frame GenAI as tool, we find a range of stances, from those who see it as a game changer—"We're lumberjacks and someone just introduced a chainsaw" (R6)—to those who think about it as a powerful thesaurus or better version of Google only suitable for supporting mundane tasks.

However, there are limitations to the use of GenAI as a tool. Despite all it can do, GenAI is not predictable in terms of its process and output (Schulz-Schaeffer, 2025). According to an art director, using image generators is comparable to using a "slot machine" where one never knows what one will get (I9). Similarly, a creative director compared it to "shooting in the dark … and it was kind of surprising for me that it's still this unreliable" (I11). Relatedly, creatives explained how challenging it is to edit AI images upon the request of clients (I5). Another limitation of the GenAI as a tool frame relates to the nature of tasks GenAI is applied for with creatives frequently using it for open-ended, interpretative work, not just simple commands. This leads us to the second perspective.

4.1.2. GenAI as a collaborator

The second frame conceives GenAI as a collaborator in the creative process (Garcia, 2025). Creatives that approach GenAI as a collaborator tend to engage with it in an iterative and dialog-based way, so that GenAI's role conceptually transgresses that of a tool and mirrors a form of collaboration that approaches a state of "co-creativity" (Cui et al., 2025). Accordingly, the agency in the creative process is shared between humans and AI. One interviewee described his approach to GenAI as a "dialogical way of working with myself" (I3). This interpretation is evident in the metaphors that creatives use, framing it variously as a colleague, assistant, or even a partner in the creative process. According to an art director, GenAI "is a buddy, it is a partner that you use in ping pong, but nevertheless, the authority to interpret is always mine" (I9). Similarly, a creative director expressed that it is like "having a junior on crack" because it "never sleeps" and "constantly comes up with new ideas" (I1). Consider the following post for details on how creatives use GenAI as a collaborator:

> I view it as a fellow colleague to bounce ideas off of, or to enhance the copy I've already written. Lots of times I don't like the result it gives, but other times it will be better, or choose a better word that I didn't think of. Or sometimes it'll send me down a new direction I can expand upon. (R7)

This post illustrates that the copywriter assigns agency to GenAI ("it'll send me down a new direction") and that they interact with GenAI in a similar way to how they would interact with a colleague: asking for ideas and inspiration, then modifying these ideas further until a solution is reached.

As with the first perspective, using GenAI as a collaborator has limitations, both regarding GenAI's creative idea-generating capabilities and the collaboration's value. For instance, one creative shares that they have "been struggling to get anything with humor, or a twist, or lateral thinking out of it" and that "it almost takes more time to creative direct the AI, than it would take a junior to do it" (R8). In some cases, creatives may start out using GenAI as a collaborator but, after experiencing the technology's limitations, downgrade and reframe it as a tool: "It absolutely sterilizes everything, which is a terrible place to jump off of. However, … it's useful to give me alternate wordings for ideas I ALREADY have. Sort of like a leveled-up thesaurus" (R9). These accounts reveal divided views on the value of using GenAI as a collaborator. Conversely, some envision it as capable of replacing the human in the creative process altogether, a frame explored in the next section.

4.1.3. GenAI as an agent

Framing GenAI as an agent assumes that agency in the creative process shifts from humans to AI, so that the main role of humans is to direct AI (i.e., set the goal) and potentially control its output. This GenAI-as-agent frame is relatively rare with earlier discussions focusing mainly on programmatic advertising rather than creative work. However, this frame seems to appear more frequently in recent discussions, as agencies have started to leverage GenAI to develop agentic workflows. For instance, one creative director described how his agency has developed a product for its clients that combines several AI agents in different roles to automate entire creative processes:

> The client submits a briefing and then an AI agent pops up and comes up with a strategy, an AI agent then reviews the concept, which essentially plays the role of creative director, filling my position … And so, the whole system goes through to production. And this entire workflow spits out, at the end, finished assets. (I8)

As the interview quote indicates, agencies are increasingly trying to create agentic workflows for creative processes and go beyond the role of the collaborator or tool.

Now that we have discussed how creatives interpret and engage with GenAI in the creative process, we turn to how they interpret its impact on their jobs.

4.2. GenAI and creative jobs: Disrupted or evolved?

A second domain that characterizes advertising creatives' interpretations of GenAI is its impact on creative jobs. While creatives express a wide range of arguments, two broad frames can be distinguished based on their assumptions about the nature of change: one views GenAI as a disruptive force, while the other envisions that it will trigger a more gradual evolution of creative jobs.

4.2.1. Disrupted creative jobs

Many creatives interpret GenAI as a disruptive force reshaping the future of creative work—provoking both fear of replacement and optimism about new possibilities. For instance, an art director expressed that GenAI constitutes "a new industrial revolution" (I5). The pessimistic interpretation of this disruption dominates many discussions, reflecting broader narratives about AI-related job destruction (Dries et al., 2024), and the monopolization of creativity through machines (de Cremer et al., 2023). In this view, GenAI is seen as a means that agencies and clients will use to replace human creatives. According to one forum member, "the boom of the AI industry where ChatGPT is only the [tip of the] iceberg, I sense that the wind is blowing in the direction of wiping a lot of jobs in the next 5–10 years" (R10). Similarly, a creative director argued that AI poses "a long-term threat to all white-collar jobs" and that "copywriters are at the forefront of this change" (I3). In his view, AI does not only threaten specific creative jobs, but agencies' entire business model:

> Much of what we do follows the same pattern: we generate attention that ultimately leads to a landing page, where you can … buy something … If Siri with GPT support is in my AirPods, then I no

> longer need a website. And that will fundamentally call into question everything we do. What client will still spend a lot of money on a website that is ultimately read by bots? (I3)

Creatives taking this perspective often mock other more optimistic accounts aligned with the enhancement or transformation perspective as "naive" and the creatives sharing them as "people whistling in the dark" who are blinded by their occupation: "So much denial in the replies. ChatGPT is coming for your jobs. It will reduce the copywriting workforce by half (at least) in the next 4–8 years" (R11). Along the same lines, a forum member argues that the widespread adoption of AI will mean fewer jobs with worse working conditions: "AI is a tool to make what we do faster and cheaper. This will mean less jobs and those jobs will be worse in pay and benefits because of the sea of unemployed people AI will create." (R12). Another argument supporting this perspective is that while AI may currently be unable to replace copywriters, this will change over time: "I don't know if that will be in 5 or 25 years, but it will probably be able to mimic the best copywriters" (R13).

A more optimistic scenario within this frame focuses on GenAI's opportunities rather than risks (e.g., expected leaps in productivity and creativity), draws on the narrative that AI will augment (creative) work (de Cremer et al., 2023; Dries et al., 2024), and relates to recent discussions on the democratization of creative work (Wahid et al., 2025). According to one creative, GenAI will further "empower small teams to get shit done" so that "you can have a few uber-creative, resourceful people shipping things every week" (R14). Only a few weeks after the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022, somebody posted a new conversation to the r/advertising forum with the title "ChatGPT will turn us all into Creative Directors", advocating for the value that ChatGPT brings to creative jobs:

> It frees up people from doing detailed work in professions where through text a lot of context and meaning is created in our brain … The outcome will just be the amplification of the premise and to have the right premise (or ask the right questions) will be what creativity is about. (R15)

The title of the post is indicative of the notion of enhancement—technology compensates human shortcomings, enabling people to do things they may not be able to do without it, such as becoming a creative director.

4.2.2. Evolved creative jobs

The second frame assumes that GenAI will lead to a more gradual evolution of creative advertising jobs—neither replacing creatives nor radically transforming their job in a positive or negative way. According to one creative, the "jobs will shift and mold but I am sure you will need a human at the helm" (R16). Some creatives believe that the jobs of creatives might change "from being a creator to a curator, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's just a change" (I7). Similarly, creatives on Reddit have argued that the role of copywriters will shift from "content-creating" towards a "content-editing" (R17).

Several arguments support the idea that GenAI will change rather than displace the jobs of creatives. Most importantly, creatives find that GenAI still requires a human to direct the technology as well as to edit and control its output, so that the overall disruptiveness may not be what it seems. One creative puts GenAI's meaning into perspective by comparing the change associated with it to the change that search engines brought to the creative process:

> It's a cool [technology] to use to get some copy quicker. But it's not cars putting people out of the horseshoe making business. It's more like Google saved us all from having to constantly go to the library. ChatGPT similarly will save us from having to go back and forth with creatives to get a few lines written. But those lines will still need editing. (R18)

The altered nature of creative jobs is further evident when considering the diverse range of tasks that currently remain beyond GenAI's capabilities: "creativity is much, much broader than simply production. It's strategy, it's concepting, it's planning etc." (R19).

Last, the alteration of creative jobs is also shaped by established industry dynamics between agencies and clients. While AI becomes increasingly integrated into creative work, client relationships continue to demand human expertise: "AI is going to be one of the major tools of the next phase of commercial creativity, but … they (clients, agency executives) will still want experts on the hook to wrangle the copy and make recommendations" (R20). This suggests creative roles evolve to bridge AI capabilities with client expectations.

4.3. GenAI and creative outputs: Homogenizing force or catalyst for differentiation?

The third frame domain relates to GenAI's impact on creative outputs—the advertisements that are launched by agencies and brands and delivered to consumers via digital and traditional channels. Two frames emerge from the discussions that diverge in where they see the main source of value creation once AI becomes widely adopted in the industry. The first assumes that agencies and clients will focus primarily on leveraging GenAI for efficiency and to cut costs, so that GenAI will become a homogenizing force. The second builds on the first frame and assumes that the homogeneous nature of AI-generated advertisements will make room for a distinct market in which value creation shifts towards originality and authenticity.

4.3.1. GenAI as a homogenizing force

Advertising creatives' frame that GenAI will lead to an increasing homogenization of creative outputs (Demsar et al., 2025; Osadchaya et al., 2024) mirrors broader debates on AI and creativity (Hsu & Bechky, 2024). According to one creative, the widespread adoption of GenAI "might mean brands all start sounding and looking similar, as they rely on the same AI-driven insights" (R21). This trend may be exacerbated by the dynamic nature of GenAI models, which continue to learn from existing data and increasingly train on AI-generated content:

> Another aspect regarding the future of AI itself, is that it eventually is going to start cannibalizing itself. Since AI relies on searching the web for "inspiration" to imitate, and since the internet is rapidly becoming saturated with AI content, the AI engines will look up an AI produced image … and it will think this is a good real-life image. (R22)

Market demands appear to be another driver of homogenization, as GenAI's efficiency creates an irresistible pull toward standardized content. However, this efficiency extracts a personal cost from creatives, who can feel increasingly alienated from their work. The emotional toll of this shift is captured in the following forum post:

> It's inauthentic, impersonal, and hollow. I've been using it since August and it has left me depressed with and dissociated from my work. But now, I can't stop. None of us can. It's blisteringly efficient and instantly spews out the milquetoast marketing mush most clients dream about. (R23)

The quote indicates that the expectation that GenAI will contribute to a homogenization of advertising creativity is based on the notion that clients do not understand creativity, which reflects the widely held assumption among advertising creatives that they understand creativity better than consumers, clients, and executives (Hackley & Kover, 2007).

There are numerous posts pointing in this direction and the associated concern that "the vast majority of small businesses will adopt AI copy once it becomes mainstream," because "it will be cheaper" (R24), because they "can't tell whether copy is good or bad" (R25) and because they "don't care about copy being amazing" (R26). One interviewee shared that about half of their customers "are genuinely satisfied with the results" that GenAI provides them (I3). Similarly, another creative

director argued that "it's so cheap that many of the brands don't care … I think we will go through a phase where many brands will [use GenAI to] cut costs." (I11). Collectively, such assumptions stabilize the notion that GenAI will contribute to an increasing homogenization of creative advertising.

4.3.2. GenAI as a catalyst for differentiation

Some creatives have started to reframe the risk that GenAI will lead to a homogenization of advertising content as an opportunity for creatives and the industry as whole, as it may represent a chance for brands to differentiate themselves through authenticity and originality. For instance, one creative argues that as "AI generated content floods the internet with articles and infographs, I expect to see a rise in video content featuring real people as a way of distinguishing between low-effort AI blog posts and genuine experts" (R27). Similarly, one of our interviewees argued that "there is already a major trend towards craftsmanship and authenticity" and that "this human need for authenticity, for truthfulness, for genuineness is there, and it will only increase" (I1). "Human content … is becoming somewhat of a luxury good now," adds another creative director in an interview (I10). A related argument that creatives make is that if "almost everyone starts using AI, copy will become universally uniform and 'boring'. Which will make creative types even more important. Companies who stand out will reap outsize benefits" (R28). Along the same lines, a creative director argued that AI will lead to the production of more content so that "ultimately, you have to stand out from the crowd … be disruptive … break through the mainstream. And for me, AI can only be mainstream at the moment" (I4). According to some creatives, human-generated content will become so valuable to consumers that agencies can charge a premium for it (R29).

While an underlying assumption of the first frame is that clients, consumers, and agency executives do not value and recognize creativity, this frame assumes that there are in fact people who will recognize AI-generated copy as such and prefer human-generated content—at least in certain markets and advertising categories. Despite their differences, both frames share the assumption that it may matter less whether AI can match or outperform human creatives, but how agency executives, clients, and consumers will evaluate AI-generated content, as the following brief exchange indicates:

> It doesn't matter what it can actually do, it matters what budget-holders and managers think it can do. (R30)
> You're spot-on here. It really comes down to how effective AI copy is. Can it engage a human consumer? (R31)

4.4. Creatives' adaptation strategies: AI skilling, reskilling, or deep skilling?

In response to their interpretations of GenAI's impact on creative processes, jobs, and outputs, advertising creatives debate strategies for adapting to these developments, with entire forum threads devoted to questions such as "How can creatives future-proof themselves in an AI-driven world?" Three distinct adaptation strategies emerge from the data: AI skilling, reskilling, and deep skilling. AI skilling and deep skilling both constitute forms of upskilling, as each aims to advance creatives' effectiveness in their current role (Morandini et al., 2023). However, the strategies differ in their approach to future-proofing creatives against the impact of GenAI. AI skilling focuses on development of capabilities to effectively use GenAI in the creative process, whereas deep skilling emphasizes the cultivation of distinctively human creative capabilities. In contrast, reskilling involves becoming AI-proof by learning new skills to transition to other advertising roles less exposed to GenAI (Morandini et al., 2023).

4.4.1. AI skilling

AI skilling entails becoming AI-proof by learning to use GenAI effectively in the creative process. Consider the following forum exchange in response to the question "How can creatives future-proof themselves in an AI-driven world?":

> If you don't want to get replaced by AI tools, then the best thing you can do is learn to use them. (R32)
> This is so much the answer. I started just before computers began taking over the industry. … I watch artisan photo retouchers get replaced by Photoshop jockeys who could do twice as much work, twice as good in half the time. … The people who embraced change and dove into the new technology as another tool in their arsenal thrived. Those who insisted on doing it the old way were run over. (R33)

We find that AI skilling involves an array of activities that range from more formal and individual ways of learning (e.g., taking an online AI course), to more informal and collaborative ways of learning (e.g., exchanging experiences with colleagues). Here we will briefly highlight some of these activities without aiming for completeness.

One creative director that we interviewed in December 2023 described how initially "no one knew how to use" GenAI so that he "watched all the tutorials and learned how to use it that way" (I1). Similarly, an art director shared how she follows a YouTube channel "which reports on this topic from a video perspective" to stay informed on recent developments (I7). There is also a wealth of social media posts that creatives can draw on to learn how to use AI to become more effective in their current jobs. The following post illustrates how Redditors share reflections on their GenAI use and encourage others to do the same:

> There's obviously a lot of talk about AI lately, so *maybe we can share some of the ways we use it to help our creativity and productivity*. I personally use Midjourney as an art director. It's great at developing TV keyframes, mood boards, and helping with mockups. … How do y'all use it? (R34, italics added)

In addition to exchanging knowledge online, creatives also learn collaboratively with colleagues in their agencies. For instance, we learned that several interviewees had joined their agency's newly formed AI taskforces or teams, to make sure that they are on top of new developments and among the first who can experiment with AI tools. Arguably the most salient way how creatives engage in AI skilling is through learning by doing: "I use it daily for topic curation and wording … Learn how to use it creatively and start beating other copywriters' outputs." (R35).

However, some creatives are skeptical about AI skilling as an adaptation strategy:

> While everyone here is talking about adapting to AI tech … it makes me sad because I enjoy writing. I don't enjoy cleaning up whatever generic passable nonsense that ChatGPT comes up with. I'd rather move over to account management. (R36)

As the post indicates, some creatives prefer moving to other roles over using GenAI to become more efficient in their current role. We discuss this adaptation strategy next.

4.4.2. Reskilling

Reskilling is about learning new skills with the aim of moving to another occupation or industry (Morandini et al., 2023). We observed how creatives consider transitioning to roles within the advertising industry that are more resistant to automation. One copywriter argues that AI will reduce their role to editors of AI-copy so they "will grudgingly move on to doing strategy work simply because copywriting just wouldn't be fun anymore" and because "AI can't replace client interaction (as yet)" (R26).

Moving to other roles within the advertising industry requires a different skill set, which is why creatives share ideas about what skills to acquire to make a transition possible. One recommends that creatives

"learn other skills (SEO and team management are mine)." Another creative shares that they are "just making sure I have lots of different marketing skills. I can't foresee the future but I'm damn sure not gonna sit by now when I could be preparing" (R37).

Note that reskilling does not necessarily have to mean that creatives move to another role entirely. Creatives can also take on additional tasks from other roles. For instance, one creative argues that there will be no "pure copywriter who 'just' writes things" in the future, because in their view there is "no point from a value perspective" (R25). Therefore, they suggest "to adapt quickly with something complimentary to your existing skill set, such as community management, campaign auditing/management, media buying etc." (R25). We also interviewed a copywriter who, when asked how he responds to the risks that he sees in AI for his job as a copywriter, describes that he considers to shift towards a role in HR:

> I noticed, even before I became Head of Content, that I was moving a bit in the direction of HR. … And I realize that I actually enjoy this work ... Working with real people and employees. And then, when it comes to AI and developments in general, I think to myself: "Maybe this is also the job of the future, because you still have to interact with people even if AI is still around." (I6)

The quote illustrates how some creatives, in light of the threat that AI poses to their jobs, consider moving to other occupations which they see as more immune to automation.

4.4.3. Deep skilling

A third adaptation strategy that emerged from our data analysis involves becoming AI-proof by cultivating distinctively human creative capabilities. In advertising creativity, deep skilling can involve, for instance, learning about the conceptual aspects of advertising and honing creative skills such as copywriting: "If you want to be a copywriter who earns a decent crust, you're better off learning the fundamentals of marketing and how to connect with an audience through writing rather than trying to edit the slop that LLMs produce." (R38). Similarly, a creative director emphasized the importance of being able to create without AI: "I would actually advise that to everyone. Because by doing things yourself and developing things yourself, you naturally train your eye, your mind, and your judgment" (I12), which will potentially become more important as the role of creatives shifts from creator to curator (Garcia, 2025). Another creative director explained how AI produces predictable outputs and therefore recommends "bringing human creativity back to the forefront" (I10). They continue that they hope for "a comeback of Dadaism … doing more unexpected things again that AI cannot easily replicate."

Deep skilling can further involve that creatives cultivate their cultural sensitivity, for instance, by immersing themselves in different (sub-)cultures:

> Re:future proofing, I'd say continue to think outside the box. Exhaustively study your audience and their subculture(s). Continue to think holistically; advertising isn't just about the words … but the creative use of media, the unexpected attention-getter, the conversations people are having about your brand. (R4)

Another creative argues that the "essential part of the job as a professional copywriter" is about understanding the audience, which involves "empathize … [and] put yourself in the shoes of your audience" (R39). From this perspective, creatives should consider developing their ability to empathize with different audiences.

As the above quotes illustrate, deep skilling involves not focusing on AI, but on honing a creative craft (e.g., design and writing), creative thinking and human skills (e.g., thinking outside the box, empathy), as well as immersing oneself in popular culture which then becomes the resource that creatives can draw on to produce advertisements that differ from the homogenized outputs that AI may produce (section 4.2).

4.5. Interrelations and contextual influences

This section explains the interrelations between the frame domains discussed in sections 4.1 to 4.3., their impact on creatives' adaptation strategies (section 4.4), and the contextual factors shaping GenAI's impact and creatives' responses to it.

4.5.1. Narratives emerging from interrelated technological frames

The three frame domains—GenAI and creative processes, creative outputs, and creative jobs—are not related in a mechanistic way. However, we find that creatives link certain frames repeatedly in their discussions, which converge in distinct narratives. In this section, we will describe three of the most salient narratives that emerged from our analysis.

The first narrative links the expectation that GenAI will be used as an agent in the creative process that autonomously performs creative tasks (section 4.1.3) to the notion that GenAI will displace creative jobs (section 4.2.1). The underlying argument is that if GenAI is capable of autonomously performing creative tasks so that the role of humans is reduced to providing the prompt and controlling the output, there will be substantially less demand for human creatives. This narrative is salient in statements such as "ChatGPT is coming for your jobs" (section 4.2.1), which suggests that GenAI tools such as ChatGPT will be capable of taking over much of the work currently performed by human creatives. It is worth highlighting that the notion that GenAI constitutes a threat to creative jobs does not necessarily draw on the assumption that AI will be used as an agent in the creative process. For instance, there is a quote in section 4.2.1 in which a forum member explicitly argues: "AI is a tool to make what we do faster and cheaper. This will mean less jobs and those jobs will be worse in pay and benefits" (R12).

Nonetheless, our analysis indicates that the assumption that GenAI constitutes a tool in the creative process tends to be linked to the expectations that GenAI will trigger a gradual evolution of creative jobs (section 4.2.2). This constitutes the second emerging narrative. For instance, creatives who argue that AI will transform their jobs frequently draw analogies between applications such ChatGPT and Google and tend to emphasize its limitations, even as a collaborator in the creative process (section 4.2.2). The following forum post illustrates how the people who argue that AI will evolve creative advertising frequently draw on the notion that AI constitutes just another tool:

> AI has also been a useful tool to help with concept decks, script springboards, storyboarding, etc. So even if AI takes away some deliverables, it'll help speed up others. There's a lot of potential. And a lot of change. But it's just another tool. (R40)

The third narrative that emerges from our analysis links the frame that GenAI constitutes a collaborator in the creative process (section 4.1.2) to the frame that GenAI will enhance creative work (section 4.2.1). Several creative directors we interviewed explained to us how having GenAI as a collaborator enhances their jobs in a qualitative sense: "What's fun about it is that you can be so creative and do it so quickly. Now you can try things out relatively quickly, mix and match, play around creatively, and see the first results" (I1). Similarly, another creative director describes how working with GenAI is "actually like having a junior sitting next to you. … It makes my work easier. It also makes me faster in certain things" (I4). Collectively, such quotes indicate that there is a narrative emerging that having a collaborator that never grows tired and creates and visualizes results within seconds will enhance their creativity, productivity, and enjoyment in the creative process.

4.5.2. Creatives' adaptation strategies as responses to technological frames

In this section, we will elaborate how technological frames inform the adaptation strategies that creatives consider in response to GenAI. The three strategies—AI skilling, reskilling, and deep skilling—reflect distinct assumptions about GenAI's role and impact on creative work.

AI skilling is grounded in the assumption that GenAI is a tool that creatives can and should learn to use in the creative process (section 4.1.1). According to one creative, "not learning how to use AI tools now are like creatives in the 80s who refused to learn how to use computers," adding that the consequence of failing to do is that "your career will be fucked, maybe not immediately, but inevitably and irrevocably" (R41). Creatives that favor an AI skilling strategy tend to promote adopting a positive mindset to the technology: "Don't think of it as a hurdle you need to ride out, think of AI as a tool that will make your work better, lower your workload, etc." (R42) AI skilling is also based on the belief that GenAI will lead to evolved rather than replaced creative jobs. Consider the following response to a discussion on how creatives can future-proof themselves:

> The industry is always changing and evolving, you just change and evolve with it. … The internet may have killed some print jobs but it also created whole new categories that needed creativity. Computers are tools, they don't replace people, always be learning and you'll always be relevant. (R43)

In the quote, the redditor draws on several assumptions, from framing GenAI as a tool (section 4.1.1) to the idea that it will lead to an evolution of creative jobs (section 4.2.2).

Reskilling involves acquiring new skills to transition to other advertising roles or industries. The strategy draws on several interrelated technology frames. Specifically, it is informed by the assumptions that GenAI could be used as an agent in the creative process that autonomously performs certain creative tasks (section 4.1.3), that many clients consider AI-generated advertising sufficient (section 4.3.1), and the notion that GenAI will disrupt and displace creative jobs (section 4.2.1). Consider the following post:

> Multiple marketers have noticed that AI-generated copy with human tweaks gets decent results. Yes, not amazing, but most companies don't want amazing if they can get good enough for a lot less money. … Copywriting isn't dead, but it's not as safe and untouched as most here want to make it out to be either. ... I'm diversifying my skills as much as possible. I still like writing but openly trying to pivot into more strategic aspects, as well. (R44)

The quote thus establishes a link between various assumptions and expectations regarding GenAI, its creative output, and anticipated impact on creative jobs, and their response—to diversify their skill set, for instance, in the strategy domain. It is further worth noting that even from the perspective of those who expect that GenAI will not eliminate but transform creative jobs, a reskilling strategy can resonate if they expect that creative jobs will be devalued, as indicated by the quote of a forum member in section 4.4.2, who considers moving to strategy work as they believe that copywriting will no longer be enjoyable.

Deep skilling as a strategy involves becoming AI-proof by cultivating distinctively human creative capabilities. It draws on the assumption that GenAI could disrupt the jobs of creatives (section 4.2.1)—at least those of mediocre creatives who are not able to outperform AI (see section 4.5.3). Therefore, creatives should focus on honing their craft and develop creative judgment:

> The best way to become AI proof is to write copy that humans will like better than copy produced by an AI, and the only way to become that kind of writer is to be a writer. … [A]t the core of all of this needs to be the act of writing. ... Writing often, for many audiences and in many ways and for many reasons, is the best way to expose yourself to the widest possible variety of human tastes. (R45)

In an interview, a creative director drew a connection between disrupted creative jobs and deep skilling, while also suggesting that those who do not manage to deep skill and develop ideas that creatively outperform those that are AI-generated, should consider reskilling:

> That you develop a counterweight to these AI ideas … this "everything looks the same" … As a creative, that may be the only advantage you still have. … Or, if you do not have that, then I think you should look for another job, become a teacher ... or a pipe fitter. ... But I see creative jobs themselves as being highly endangered in the next ten years. (I10)

More importantly, deep skilling draws on the expectations that the increasing reliance on GenAI will lead to the homogenization of advertising and relatedly to a desire for human-generated advertisements (section 4.3). Consider the following forum post:

> IKEA writers are the people who churn out basic sales copy, social media posts, press releases and whatnot. They do it very fast and very cheap. … Instead, I am the carpenter writer; the person who has spent many years honing a skill on top of having an innate ear for language, as well as having a good idea what sells, persuades, informs and (when necessary) moves. ... IKEA has been selling Billys since 1979 but carpenters are still a thing. Because there are markets for both. (R46)

According to the creative, there will be a market for human-generated copy, just as there is still demand for carpenters in the age of IKEA. Similarly, an interview participant argued that "image generation is becoming a mass product" so that "the focus will shift … on emphasizing quality" (I9). However, the forum quote above also suggests that becoming a "carpenter writer" may require years of experience combined with a certain talent (e.g., a feel for language and marketing), which indicates that deep skilling may not be suitable for all types of creatives and points to the influence of contextual career factors.

4.5.3. Contextual factors shaping the impact of and responses to GenAI

In this section, we will describe several contextual factors that—according to our data—will shape the impact of GenAI on creative work and require consideration when adapting to GenAI. Specifically, it emerges from the analysis that GenAI's impact will depend on several career-related factors, namely, creatives' specialization, seniority, skill level, and their agency and clients.

While many creatives are skeptical of GenAI's ability to take over their work in the near future, they expect that certain types of work are more likely to be replaced than others. One common claim is that GenAI can be used to replace less-creative forms of copywriting: "For more below the line work—possibly. [For] simple, straightforward messages it could work. For more complex messaging, harder assignments—probably not" (R47). For instance, GenAI could be used to replace copywriters who are mainly responsible for writing content for social media, websites, and product descriptions:

> I'd probably be worried if I were a digital marketing/SEO copywriter or a product description copywriter or something. … But if you are a traditional ad/campaign copywriter, or you do brand building work of any kind, no AI is going to be able to replace the kind of ideation and thinking that make you a valuable creative. (R48)

Along the same lines, a creative director expressed that GenAI "can do about 80% of the work immediately at super speed, and to be fair, 80% is enough for many tasks" (I2). Similarly, another creative director and copywriter expressed that he considers himself "lucky" to "work conceptually. If I didn't, I think I would be much more afraid" (I3).

Relatedly, creatives express that AI's impact on creatives will depend on their level of skill—how well they understand their craft and how original their work is. The following quote is illustrative of this view: "Good writers likely will [be] able to stay ahead of AI, at least for a while still. The best writers will recognize it as a tool and will figure out how to leverage it for themselves (and their clients) effectively." (R49) Similarly, creatives argue that seniority will play a key role in that junior copywriters will be the ones most affected by GenAI. Viewpoints range

from those who believe that GenAI will replace junior copywriters to some extent ("It will kill off a lot of junior roles", R50) to those who believe that juniors will gravitate towards different tasks but have a more difficult time learning the craft: "the age for newbies writers learning from scratch, spending months and years is over" (R51). The claim that less experienced and capable copywriters may be most impacted is mirrored by advertising creatives at the beginning of their careers who question the forum about the promises and perils of entering a field that appears to be in a state of disruption.

Lastly, creatives also draw distinctions between different agencies and clients:

> The low-level crap will be affected. … But if you're a good writer and/or at a good agency, AI won't be affecting much anytime soon. In-house it will totally depend on the company. … There are companies who believe branding and advertising is just a cost with no ROI. They will likely move to AI for copy, since they don't value it in the first place and can't actually discern good copy from bad. (R52)

The rationale is that there still are and will be agencies and companies that recognize and value creativity and hence hire creative professionals capable of producing high-quality work.

5. Discussion

Drawing on an analysis of advertising forum conversations and interviews with advertising creatives, we explain how creatives' interpretations, or frames, of GenAI shape the ways they adapt to this technological change. We reveal how frames within three interrelated domains (creative processes, jobs, and outputs) converge in distinct narratives that shape three adaptation strategies of creatives (AI skilling, reskilling, deep skilling). We further show contextual career factors that influence the impact of and creatives' responses to GenAI. Fig. 1 visualizes these relationships in an integrative framework.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our study makes several contributions to the emerging literature at the intersection of GenAI, creative work, and advertising. First, we advance understanding of creatives' adaptive responses to GenAI (e.g., Cui et al., 2025). Addressing recent calls to explore how creative professionals prepare for the AI-driven transformation of creative industries (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024), our findings explain how creatives' interpretations of GenAI are consequential—shaping how creatives act, learn, and plan for the future. More specifically, we outline three distinct adaptation strategies (i.e., AI skilling, reskilling, and deep skilling) that result from different underlying frames. Our findings empirically extend conceptual scenarios of AI's impact on the future of creative work (de Cremer et al., 2023; Vinchon et al., 2023) and highlights how such scenarios are socially constructed through creatives' interpretations and experiences with the technology rather than dictated by technological capability. This perspective also helps explain why advertising professionals in similar roles might respond differently to GenAI implementation, e.g., why some embrace the technology, while others resist its adoption (Cui et al., 2025; Inie et al., 2023). As our technological frames' perspective suggests, advertising creatives respond to GenAI differently because they act on varying "interpretive grounds," i.e., frames (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994). These findings expand existing research on how advertising agencies navigate GenAI adoption at the organizational level (Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025) in an important way, adding interpretations held at the individual level as a key determinant of outcomes of GenAI adoption.

In this light, deep skilling emerges as a distinct adaptation pathway that redefines what it means to remain valuable in an AI-mediated industry. Unlike AI skilling, which emphasizes technological fluency (e.g., Cui et al., 2025), deep skilling foregrounds human craft, creative judgment, and empathy as enduring sources of differentiation. This reframing contributes to theory by positioning creative adaptation not merely as a technical challenge but as a process of reaffirming the human dimensions of expertise.

Second, we contribute to research on creatives' interpretations of GenAI (e.g., Inie et al., 2023; Palani & Ramos, 2024). Informed by the lens of technology frames (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994), our study explains how creatives' interpretations of GenAI converge in distinct narratives. Existing research has begun to explore creatives' interpretations, yet has often viewed them in isolation. For example, the advertising literature has explored consumer perceptions of GenAI-generated outputs (Heitmann et al., 2025; Kirk & Givi, 2025; Wen & Laporte, 2025), while the creative work literature has explored the impact of GenAI on creative workflows (Demsar et al., 2025; Palani & Ramos, 2024; Takaffoli et al., 2024). Expanding this work, we delineate three frame domains (i.e., creative processes, jobs, and outputs) and specific frames within those domains; unpack how each domain is distinct and how frames within those domains differ (e.g., for the domain of creative process, we show that creatives attribute various levels of agency to GenAI in each

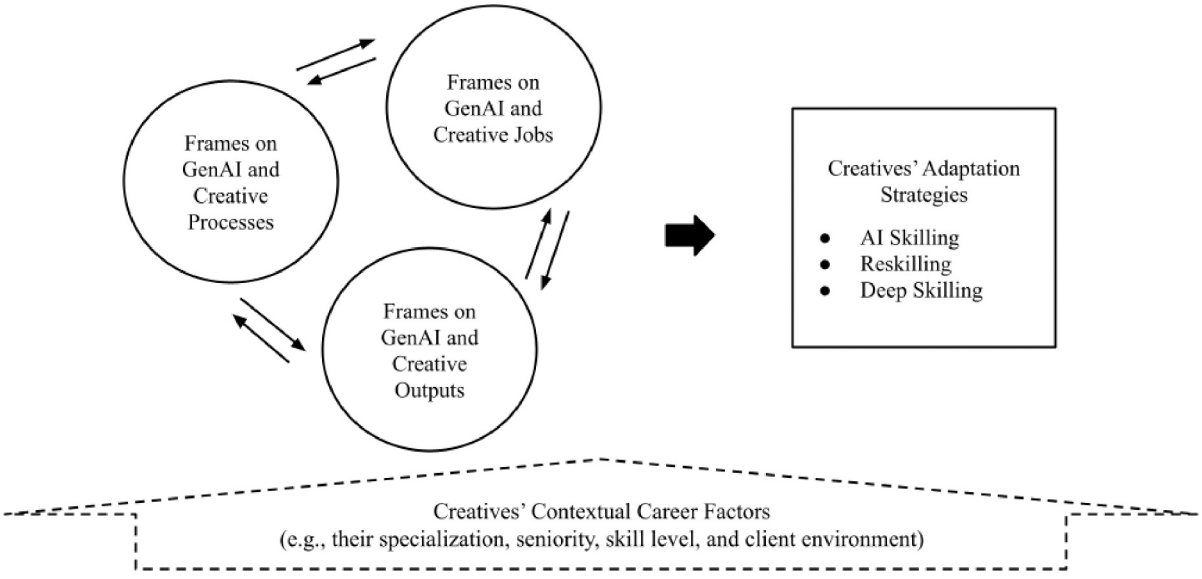

Fig. 1. Framework of how creatives' interpretation of GenAI shape their adaptation strategies.

frame); and highlight how these frame domains are interrelated, shaping broader narratives about how GenAI transforms creative practice (e.g., GenAI as an agent in the creative process will autonomously perform creative tasks and displace creative jobs). We thereby complement existing research on the impact of GenAI on the micro level, e.g., executing creative tasks (Palani & Ramos, 2024; Takaffoli et al., 2024) and on the macro level, e.g., employment in creative industries (de Cremer et al., 2023; Vinchon et al., 2023). By explaining how diverse perspectives interconnect within the creative advertising community, we offer a holistic and integrated understanding of how creatives conceptualize GenAI's role and implications across multiple facets of their work.

Third, we advance our understanding of collective interpretations of technology in creative work communities. Focusing on advertising creatives—a distinct group of creatives that is already heavily impacted by GenAI (e.g., Cui et al., 2025; Demsar et al., 2025)—we reveal that they do not form a homogeneous user category but rather a multi-faceted interpretive community engaged in ongoing negotiations about the meanings of emerging technologies. As technological innovations like GenAI are inherently equivocal, their meanings are plural and contested (Scarbrough et al., 2024). While prior research has identified paradoxical views on GenAI (Osadchaya et al., 2024), our analysis reveals a richer spectrum of interpretations that moves beyond binary distinctions of acceptance versus resistance, or enthusiasm versus apprehension. Within the advertising community, the competing interpretations, or incongruent frames (Orlikowski & Gash, 1994), coexist, evolve, and interact. Importantly, these interpretations are shaped not only by individual experiences with the technology, but also by broader discourse within online communities. Some views reflect popular narratives that diverge from empirical evidence. For example, although empirical evidence shows limited AI-related job displacement (Gimbel et al., 2025), concerns about it continue to influence how professionals view GenAI (Dries et al., 2024). Overall, our study shows that creatives' relationships with GenAI are dynamic, multilayered, and shaped by ongoing collective interpretations.

Finally, our findings point to a more contextualized understanding of technological adaptation in creative industries. We show that creatives' interpretations of GenAI and the strategies they adopt in response are patterned by their specialization (Wahid et al., 2025), seniority (Mayer et al., 2025), skill level, and client environment. This speaks to findings from Holzner et al. (2025) on the high context dependence of the impact of GenAI on creativity as well as findings on hierarchical level (Schneider & Sting, 2020) and industry (Nelson & Irwin, 2014) as important factors shaping individually held frames. These contextual dynamics further explain why professionals in comparable roles may diverge in their engagement with GenAI. Echoing Huh et al. (2023), participants widely expected GenAI to affect routine, executional work such as social media and product copy, while strategic and client-facing roles were seen as comparatively resilient. The interpretations of GenAI's impact are thus embedded in professional hierarchies, career trajectories, and a broader environment, highlighting that technological adaptation is a socially situated process shaped by creatives' positions within evolving professional and market structures.

5.2. Managerial implications

GenAI is seen as a transformative force to creative work in general and creative advertising in particular (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Huh et al., 2023). Navigating the evolving and potentially transformative impact of AI on advertising requires considerable dexterity from managers (Campbell et al., 2022)—particularly given the resistance that some creatives have expressed toward GenAI (Cui et al., 2025). Our study can help advertising managers better understand the issues that creatives care about in relation to GenAI and the diversity of perspectives that shape their responses. Recognizing these technological frames and corresponding adaptation strategies enables managers to (1) communicate and manage change more effectively, (2) redesign work processes and roles, and (3) develop more differentiated, context-sensitive capability-building initiatives.

First, our frame domains (i.e., creative processes, jobs, and outputs) provide advertising managers with a structured way to understand creatives' interpretations of GenAI and anticipate how views in one domain may shape perceptions in another. Through discussions with creatives, managers can identify the dominant frames within their agency and use this information to adjust messaging accordingly. If concerns about job-displacement are widespread (i.e., the disrupted creative jobs frame), managers should address these transparently by outlining current limitations and emphasizing where human creativity remains essential while acknowledging that some roles may be threatened by GenAI. Managers can then translate disruption concerns into job evolution by clarifying what is likely to change first (often more routine, executional tasks), what responsibilities remain distinctly human, and what adaptation pathways are available (e.g., AI skilling, reskilling, and deep-skilling routes, as discussed below). Surfacing, acknowledging, and where possible aligning these differing understandings of GenAI among organizational actors is crucial for its effective adoption (Davidson, 2002; Leonardi, 2011).

Second, our findings provide an opportunity to redesign workflows and roles to leverage GenAI's potential in the creative process in a reflexive way. Where creatives frame and use GenAI currently primarily as a tool, managers could encourage and educate creatives to expand their use of GenAI and experiment with using GenAI as a collaborator in the creative process, for instance, to generate and evaluate ideas. Where creatives experience GenAI as a collaborator, agencies can adopt hybrid workflows in which GenAI supports repetitive tasks while high-value ideation and strategy remain human-led. More broadly, managers can use the tool–collaborator–agent distinction to guide where GenAI is deployed: tool use for well-defined support work, collaborator use for iterative co-creation under human direction, and more autonomous use for delegating parts of work to GenAI. Where agentic capability is pursued, this should prompt careful consideration of appropriate controls and accountability. Advertising agencies may, for example, introduce additional review checkpoints prior to client delivery, strengthen quality assurance (e.g., accuracy, brand voice, and IP compliance), and clarify accountability (e.g., who owns the creative decision and who signs off). Taken together, this role-based view can help managers make explicit, task-level choices about what to automate, what to augment, and what to keep human-led.

Third, capability development should reflect the diversity of adaptation strategies observed (i.e., AI skilling, reskilling, and deep skilling) as well as the contextual factors influencing them. AI skilling initiatives can equip creatives to integrate GenAI tools into their craft, while reskilling programs can support transitions into strategic, client-facing, or cross-functional roles that are less exposed to automation. Deep-skilling initiatives, in turn, should focus on strengthening human capabilities such as cultural insight, empathy, and narrative judgment—qualities that seem to be associated with authentic, differentiated creative work. These initiatives may also help managers respond to concerns about homogenization versus differentiation of outputs. Creatives' accounts indicate that homogenization risks are perceived to be higher in efficiency-driven client environments and high-volume deliverables (e.g., routine social media content), whereas differentiation is perceived to be more prominent in categories and brand contexts where distinctive creative expression is especially valued and rewarded (e.g., campaigns for building premium or luxury brands). Recognizing that creatives' responses vary by career stage, specialization, and client environment, managers should tailor these initiatives to individual circumstances rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Our study provides several promising directions for future research,

most of which arise from the limitations of our study. One limitation of this study relates to the qualitative nature of our netnographic and interview data. Notably, our data set did not allow us to show how dominant the various frames that we identified are. A promising avenue for future research would be to use large-scale, survey-based methods to assess the relative prevalence of these diverse interpretations. Managers could then leverage these insights to inform their decisions, for example on necessary change management efforts. Relatedly, our data set did not allow us to test the interrelations between creatives' frame domains, creatives' technological frames and their response to GenAI, and the contextual influences that we identified in section 4.5. In Table 4, we derived several propositions from our findings that can be tested in future quantitative research.

A second limitation of our study relates to the scope of our data. While focusing on creative professionals allowed us to trace in-depth how frames shaped their responses to GenAI, the technology frames literature suggests that the frames of workers, leaders, and technology developers are often incongruent and complicate implementation of new technology (Leonardi, 2011; Orlikowski & Gash, 1994). Thus, expanding the scope of future studies to explore and compare frames of various actors could be a fruitful avenue to better understand and anticipate challenges in the implementation of GenAI in advertising agencies. Future research could also differentiate between the frames of creatives of different levels of hierarchy and specializations to examine how frame (mis)alignment shapes creative practice and performance.

Finally, we offer only limited insight into how technological frames of creatives on GenAI evolved over time. It is conceivable that creatives start out by seeing GenAI as a tool and over time begin to see it as a collaborator in the creative process (Retkowsky et al., 2024). While we have noticed that certain frames—such as the notion that GenAI will be adopted as an agent in the creative process or the perception that GenAI leads to a homogenization of advertising output—became more relevant over time, substantiating such trends would require a different methodological approach. Future research could engage in longitudinal research to trace how the perception of GenAI in creative work has changed over time.

A further promising avenue for future research is to assess which of the adaptation strategies that creatives engage in (i.e., AI skilling, reskilling, deep skilling) is most effective, depending on creatives' specialization and skill level. Is a deep skilling strategy, for example, more effective for creatives that have already developed a skill such as copywriting than for junior creatives at the beginning of their careers? Answering this and related questions would offer creatives the guidance they need to navigate the transition towards the future of creative work.

Table 4
Propositions for future research.

Relationships identified in the present study	Propositions to be tested in future quantitative research
Relationship between frame domains	Proposition 1a: Creatives who frame GenAI as an agent are more inclined to see GenAI as a disruptive force that will displace creative jobs Proposition 1b: Creatives who frame GenAI as a tool are more inclined to assume that GenAI will evolve creative jobs Proposition 1c: Creatives who frame GenAI as a collaborator are more inclined to see GenAI as a disruptive force that will enhance creative jobs
Relationship between creatives' technological frames and their responses (i.e., adaptation strategies)	Proposition 2a: Creatives who see GenAI as a tool and believe that it will trigger an evolution of creative jobs are more inclined to pursue an AI skilling adaptation strategy Proposition 2b: Creatives who see GenAI as an agent and believe that GenAI will displace them are more inclined to pursue a reskilling adaptation strategy Proposition 2c: Creatives who believe that GenAI will lead to the homogenization of advertising and relatedly to an increased desire for human-generated content are more inclined to pursue a deep skilling adaptation strategy
Relationship between creatives' career context and their exposure to GenAI	Proposition 3a: Creatives executing less complex and conceptual creative tasks (e.g., product descriptions) will be more affected by GenAI than those executing complex and craft-based creative tasks Proposition 3b: GenAI poses a larger threat to less skilled creatives in general and juniors in particular than to highly skilled or senior creatives Proposition 3c: Creatives who work in agencies and for clients who do not value creativity will be more impacted by GenAI than those working in contexts that place a high value on creativity

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Georg von Richthofen: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sonja Köhne:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Maja Golf-Papez:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2026.116483.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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