UNIVERSITÀ POLITECNICA DELLE MARCHE

FACOLTÀ DI ECONOMIA "GIORGIO FUÀ"

Bachelor's degree in

Digital Economics and Business (Inter-class: L-33, L-18)

THE IMPACT OF AI ON CREATIVE INDUSTRIES BUSINESS MODELS

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Academic Year 2025/2026

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION……..Pag. 1

2. CHAPTER 1.1 - Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas……Pag. 2

3. CHAPTER 1.2 - Generative Artificial Intelligence……..…Pag. 6

4. CHAPTER 1.3 - Creative industries……Pag. 10

5. CHAPTER 2.1 - The value proposition is ceasing to be a value……Pag. 12

6. CHAPTER 2.2 - The Buzzfeed case……..Pag. 17

7. CONCLUSION……..…….Pag. 20

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY……...…Pag. 22

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, starting in the 2010s, technological progress has opened the door to what has unquestionably been one of the greatest innovations in the history of electronic development: the Artificial Intelligence. This rapid evolution, which is already reaching heights never climbed by man, has profoundly reshaped the global economic landscape. Capable of generating text, images, audio, and code in mere seconds, AI has transitioned from a niche computational experiment to an active collaborator in everyday workflows. While its potential to optimize processes and democratize content creation is undeniable, its rapid integration into the market has raised critical questions regarding ethics, authenticity, quality and value. This is particularly evident in the Creative Industries, a sector historically founded on the exclusivity, effort, and intellectual uniqueness of human creativity.

This thesis is aimed at analyzing the economic impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence on the creative sector, passing through Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas and its related tools, and observing how the covert or unethical use of automated tools by professionals and agencies is destroying the perceived value of creative products. The purpose is to examine the ways in which Generative Artificial Intelligence is used by companies operating in the creative industries, with particular attention to issues of transparency and perceived value.

Accordingly, the following research question guides the analysis: How does the non-transparent use of generative AI affect the value proposition and customer relationships of firms operating in the creative industries?

Chapter 1 will analyze and illustrate Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas, focusing on the 9 blocks that compose it and the purpose of this tool in the corporate field. Subsequently, the definitions of generative artificial intelligence, with its historical framework, and creative industries will be presented. Chapter 2 will then discuss the core of the thesis: the Business Model Canvas mentioned above will be used to highlight the impact of artificial intelligence on two of the main blocks of the canvas, in particular the "Value proposition" and the "Customer relationship". The latter will be the focus of the Buzzfeed case: an American company that, already facing its own crisis, in the first half of the 2020s decided to integrate artificial intelligence into its services in order to revive its economy, resulting in a failure in terms of customer relationships, and bringing the company close to bankruptcy. The ethical and moral values of companies will therefore be discussed when they integrate AI into their products and services or into the production chain, the related regulations aimed at protecting consumers, as well as the loss of product and service value, particularly in the artistic field, when no longer managed by humans but entirely by machines to reduce production costs.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 OSTERWALDER'S BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS

In 2004, the thirty-year-old Alexander Osterwalder designed an operating instrument to visualize the idea of a business and transform the vision into reality. Osterwalder called this scheme "Business Model Canvas", because, just like a canvas painted on, it was meant not only to describe and challenge existing models, but also to invent new ones and make them tangible.

According to the definition given by Osterwalder himself, "A business model describes the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value". [Strategyzer, *Business model generation*] The diagram designed by Osterwalder consists of nine elements, also called building blocks, divided in two main areas: the "value creation" on the right side, containing five blocks, will ensure that a company delivers the value to the customers who are willing to pay for its product or service; the "efficiency" on the left side, containing the remaining four blocks, will guide the company towards the correct way to scale the business efficiently. A successful business model must balance both sides effectively.

Let's start analyzing the right side. Entering the path, the first block that appears is the *Customer Segments*. This element helps the company to focus on the needs of existing and potential customers, so as to lead its products or services to the

market segment that will be able to value them more than others. Here, the business model asks “to whom should we offer our value?”. And this is where we move towards the second block: the *Value Proposition*, or what makes our company different from others. Here is the core of the competitive advantage, the reason why the consumer chooses us rather than the product of competitors. The model is asking “what is the value that you are delivering to customers?”. Following this, it is therefore the moment to move towards the third block, the *Channels,* where the company identifies the communication channels in which to navigate to deliver its products or services. Considerations about which channels work best and how the selected channels interact best together play an essential role. And here comes our third question: “How are we going to distribute such value?”.

Once these three main questions are addressed, it is time for the company to understand, through the fourth block, which is the *Customer Relationship*: how connections are built, maintained, and what efforts are made to retain customers and prevent them from leaving. Customer loyalty is as crucial as value proposition if we want to stand out among competitors. The last piece on the right side of the Canvas is the *Revenue Streams*, the block that allows the company to manage the flow of money generated by each customer segment.

Looking instead at the left side of our Business Model Canvas, the first blocks we come across are those relative to the "infrastructure": the *Key Resources*, *Key Activities* and *Key Partners*. It is necessary for the company to identify the most important activities and processes needed to implement the business model, including critical tasks and timelines, the people and skills required, and the company's core processes. Moreover, it is crucial to understand how to integrate third parties and suppliers in both the offering and the processes.

The last block, *Cost Structure*, provides an overview of which expenses and costs are relevant to the business model, helping the company to identify which resources or activities are particularly cost-intensive.

One of the main strengths of the Business Model Canvas is that it shows not just separate business elements, but also the relationships between them. Each block affects the others, and a change in one block can have a ripple effect across the entire model. For startups, it is a tool for designing an initial business model, for existing companies, the Canvas serves as a tool for analyzing the current plan. It is a great tool for brainstorming, allowing both teams and stakeholders to track business activities, experiment with new scenarios, open up to different opportunities in a market of competitors, through shared language and an easy-to-understand visual format. That's why the Canvas should constantly evolve as the business develops, market feedback is received, and conditions change.

1.2 GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In recent years, artificial intelligence has become one of the most discussed themes both by supporters and detractors of it. We can define AI as the capability of computational systems to perform tasks typically associated with human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making. Even though it seems to be a recent topic, AI first appeared in the middle of the 20th century, in the form of a first version of chat bots capable of performing small tasks. However, only the form taken in the latest years by AI is worthy of recognition as revolutionary and, in many cases, threatening.

We talk about generative artificial intelligence as that tool capable of creating original content, such as text, images, video, audio or software code, in response to a prompt or request from a user.

Generative AI starts with a foundation model, a deep learning model that serves as the basis for various types of AI applications. Practitioners train a deep learning algorithm on massive volumes of raw, unstructured, and unlabeled data, making the algorithm run several exercises in order to reach a neural network of "parameters" (encoded representations of entities, patterns, and relationships in the data) that can autonomously generate content in response to input or prompts. Needless to say, this process is extremely complex and wasteful. But it allows

users to complete tasks in a very short time that would take hours, or even days, independently. Wonderful. Or maybe not.

It's clear that the advent of generative artificial intelligence has given anyone the opportunity to wander in content creation, even at a professional level and in any field: from healthcare to graphic design; thus representing undoubtedly one of the most powerful and useful technological tools in history, if not the best.

Artificial Intelligence in general has so far proven to be helpful for oncologists to analyze patient data from sources like text, images and genomic information with the goal of giving cancer patients personalized and precise treatments faster.

It has the potential to make teaching, learning and job training more personalized and effective. Moreover, researchers are using AI models to monitor deforestation and protect biodiversity, identifying patterns faster, and so being able to act quicker.

When several generative AI apps became available for customers in 2022, it was immediately clear that generative AI had the potential to change the way businesses, employers, and employees functioned together. In a 2023 report, McKinsey estimated that generative AI could contribute $2.6 to $4.4 trillion annually to the economy. The Oliver Wyman Forum estimates that the total contribution to the economy that generative AI will make will total $20 trillion in GDP by 2030 and save human workers a total of 300 billion work hours per year.

This economic potential spurred private equity and venture capital firms to invest more than $35.3 billion in 2025.

In the Oliver Wyman Forum Generative AI Survey of 2024, the organization asked respondents in 16 countries how often they use generative AI in their current jobs. 46% of United States respondents reported using it at least once a week, and 11% reported using it daily. The organization reported that a global average of 55% of employees use generative AI at least once weekly [Coursera, *Generative AI impact on Business*].

Yet, when we talk about Generative Artificial Intelligence, it almost seems to be more the concerns than the benefits. Because a tool capable of returning a ready-to-use product to the user in record time, and sometimes for free, could clearly test the professions that deal precisely with images, sounds, but also writing. One major concern is the potential for generating fake or misleading content. For example, generative AI can be used to create realistic-looking but entirely fabricated images or videos, which can be used to spread disinformation or deceive people. Not to mention the misuse of millions of pieces of information that should be protected by intellectual property, or even the tremendous and disproportionate consumption of natural resources and the consequent significant ecological footprint.

However, the most serious fact is professional, human and ethical. Generative AI is likely to transform labour markets and jobs, but exactly how is still uncertain and being debated among experts. It could automate tasks traditionally performed by humans, leading to job displacement in some industries and professions. And if, on the one hand, this leads to a natural change in the world of work with regard to human skills and duties, on the other it calls into question the value of art and creativity in a market like today's. The adoption of such tools is redefining production costs, the automation of creative processes, the importance of human contribution in such an unautomatic and artificial environment, but, more than anything else, the value perceived by the end consumer.

1.3 CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The term *Creative industries* refers, according to UNESCO, to sectors that focus on the production and distribution of cultural, artistic, and innovative content [UNESCO, *Creative Industries*]. There are thirteen sub-sectors under this term: advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer games, and television and radio.

The creative economy is growing fast, with creative services leading the charge. According to UN Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Creative Economy Outlook 2024, creative services now represent 19% of all global service exports, up from 12% a decade ago. Meanwhile, creative goods exports have remained steady at 3% of total goods trade. While developing countries primarily export creative goods, their share of global creative services exports has grown significantly, from 10% in 2010 to 20% in 2022 [UN trade & development, *Creative economy booms*].

All these numbers prove one thing: market changes have led, to date, to make the creative industries even more influential within the global economy, resulting in the shift of resources to this large slice of productivity. Throughout human history, creative work has always been present, but this recent increase requires greater attention, especially when it comes to technological models that affect it firsthand,

such as the generative artificial intelligence mentioned above. Artificial Intelligence is no longer just a tool; rather, it has become an active collaborator in the creative process. It is a key driver of this transformation, generating everything from scripts, movies and music to virtual reality content, while also improving post-production workflows and analyzing user data. Its presence is growing in newsrooms, for example, where 41% of teams use it to create illustrative art, 39% for social media content and 38% for writing and generating articles [UN trade & development, *Creative economy booms*]. It's clear that consumers faced with such a crossroads — on the one hand, an often very expensive product made by a professional, and on the other, an immense network of artificial intelligences that provide at least an acceptable result free of charge — are usually reluctant to opt for the former. But what happens when AI takes on such a cumbersome role that it becomes the true architect of creativity? And is it not just the threat by this technological tool to replace workers that is being discussed, as mentioned earlier; but the incorrect use by the suppliers themselves, before consumers.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 THE VALUE PROPOSITION IS CEASING TO BE A VALUE

As previously discussed, the value proposition represents the promise of value that the company, or professional, makes to its consumers. It can be defined as the set of benefits that the company promises to provide to customers and from which the latter can derive a satisfaction that justifies the payment of the related cost.

It is natural to understand how the price of a final product always depends on the labor and resource costs involved in making it. When it comes to creative industries, it is common to deal with products that are less affordable than those from other sectors. The reason lies in one fundamental resource: intellectual value.

Recent studies show how the use of generative systems significantly increases the amount of creative output produced by individuals, reducing experimentation time and costs. However, the same studies suggest that the quantitative increase does not automatically translate into greater originality and consequently quality.

Works generated largely by algorithms can circulate, be sold and consumed, but struggle to find stable recognition as “works of art” in the traditional sense. AI is not simply expanding the field of art, but redefining the relationship between creativity, work, and value in a context dominated by logics of scale, automation, and attention. Ease of production guarantees neither quality nor meaning.

In a context of mass algorithmic production, human creativity could take on a new status: that of “rare good”, in other words “luxury”. Some artists are already beginning to claim works “of pure human generation”, devoid of AI intervention, as a distinctive mark. Authenticity becomes value, but also a factor of exclusion. This opens up a new polarization, even though it has actually already been seen and present in other sectors: on the one hand, standardized and scalable production, on the other, human work as a luxury exception.

Generative AI tools are used by many agencies to create animations, proof-of-concepts, and actual content. Iteration has become the name of the game, but the resources required are much lower. AI tools could create near-endless variations of creative work 24/7 without needing human intervention, undercutting the agency model as it stands today. Ultimately, AI is forcing agencies to confront a simple set of questions. What value are they providing, and what are they really charging for? And then the real issue comes into play: on the consumer's part, opting for a product developed in record time by any artificial intelligence that anyone can use is allowed and, however questionable, understandable. But when it comes to products delivered by professionals, it becomes ethically mandatory to ensure transparency, consistency between price and actual use of resources, and the return of a product that, as already anticipated, respects the promised value.

In the near future AI will revolutionize how agencies deliver value to clients. When creating is no longer a manual and human process, agencies must pivot to drive pricing decisions based on value and outcomes instead.

The lack of transparency and ethics, with the consequent collapse of the value perceived by the end user, recalls the concept of the "Market for lemons".

The *Market for Lemons* is a classic model of asymmetric information first studied by Nobel Prize economist George Akerlof, which shows that information asymmetry between the seller and buyer may result in market collapse or some sellers leaving the market. In American parlance, a *lemon* is a used car that turns out to be defective or of poor quality after purchase. This expression perfectly captures the idea when it's a subpar product made with incorrect use of artificial intelligence, distributed to consumers without transparency by the supplier, but instead sold as authentic and high-quality, resulting in an overestimation of the price.

A recent scientific paper (Erlei et al., 2026) empirically analyzed the AI market, demonstrating that complex AI systems can appear highly accurate while making costly errors or embedding hidden defects. From a human-computer interaction perspective, this opacity creates significant challenges for trust calibration, appropriate reliance, and user agency. Users often lack the ability to verify system

quality either before or after use, which can lead to misaligned mental models and poor decision-making.

The European Artificial Intelligence Regulation (AI Act) 2024/1689, entered into force in the European Union on 1 August 2024. This is the first global regulatory act to organically regulate the development, sale and use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems. The AI ACT (Artificial Intelligence Act), or Regulation Al, aims to ensure the safe, ethical, and transparent use of AI, protecting the rights of European citizens and reducing the risk associated with the use of artificial intelligence [Vega Formazione, *AI Act*]. For generative AI systems, such as large language models or those that create images, the AI Act provides specific transparency requirements, such as the need to declare that content was generated by AI, design the model to prevent the generation of illegal content, and publish summaries of copyrighted data used for training.

As technology progresses exponentially, copyright laws, privacy regulations, and AI governance frameworks require longer deliberative processes to develop and implement. During this interval, new technologies operate in a “gray area”, with unclear rules regarding authorship, fair use of training data, and liability for malicious or illicit outputs. This uncertainty can, on the one hand, hold back innovation for those who fear legal repercussions and, on the other, allow some

actors to exploit regulatory gaps, potentially to the detriment of original creators or society at large.

2.2 THE BUZZFEED CASE

Buzzfeed is a popular digital media and entertainment company founded in 2006 in New York. It became famous worldwide for its personality quizzes, trending articles, and content designed to be easily shared on social networks.

In January 2023, the CEO Jonah Peretti announced Buzzfeed would be using the GenAI software ChatGPT to enhance the company's quizzes by generating personalized responses, promising the tech would be held to a high standard.

However, Buzzfeed quietly started publishing fully AI-generated articles that are produced by non-editorial staff, sounding like the content that Peretti had promised to avoid. Users began to notice in articles a decidedly automated repetition of the same expressions and sentence constructions, resulting in poor and low-quality publications. This led to the question of whether the CEO's initial purpose — to use AI as a tool for creating content "more personalized, more creative, more dynamic" — was derailing towards the scenario Peretti said should be avoided: using AI to reduce the time and costs behind each piece of content, regardless of the value proposition.

Over the course of just a few years, from the CEO's announcement in 2023, the company's use of AI became obvious: the AI quizzes were underwhelming, and the site was soon caught publishing entire AI-generated articles that were sloppy and repetitive. Thus, as of March 2026, its shares were hovering around 70 cents.

Three years after its AI pivot, the company reported a net loss of $57.3 million in 2025 in an earnings report released in the same month.

On May 5, 2023, Jonah Peretti announced the closure of “Buzzfeed News”, the company's news department, due to an unsustainable crisis. This showed that the business model based on "premium and human" content was no longer supported, in favor of machine-generated clickbait.

Buzzfeed, to be clear, was already struggling before its AI pivot, but embracing GenAI was fatal for the company, rather than helping it recover. One of the many reasons lies in the Business Model Canvas concept mentioned above. Despite the disastrous decline in the value proposition of the service provided by the company, as already discussed, it is important to consider another block of the canvas: *customer relationship*.

This block was previously defined as the one related to “how connections are built, maintained, and what efforts are made to retain customers and prevent them from leaving”, which is one of the most crucial and delicate strategies of the company: the customer is the actor that allows the purpose of the company to be accomplished. In Buzzfeed's case, the use of artificial intelligence, evidently chosen at this point to reduce the company's already difficult costs, represented, from the user's point of view, the abandonment of human management of the platform. The poor quality of the service provided led to an ever-increasing

distancing among customers over the course of those three years. From their perspective, they found themselves faced with a machine-run website (and even called the author of the articles comically "buzzy the robot"), which, moreover, reported the facts in an inaccurate, fabricated, and unprofessional manner. If on the one hand Buzzfeed automation increased more and more, on the other hand users decreased dramatically.

In May 2026, the media entrepreneur Byron Allen became the new CEO of Buzzfeed, resulting in the retirement of co-founder and previous CEO Jonah Peretti, who, ironically, left his position to take over a new area related to the company's artificial intelligence.

As part of a plan to reduce losses at the company, which used $12.5 million of its revenue to plug debt, Allen announced its decision to lay off 180 employees of the U.S. news site, about 35 percent of the total. The company's leadership justified such layoffs as “necessary to return the company to a profitable and sustainable growth path”.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence is not killing art. However, it is clearly profoundly redefining what we mean by creativity, value and cultural work. The promised democratization is above all about access to tools and the production of content, not artistic recognition or the redistribution of value.

The real challenge therefore shifts to the terrain of governance, political and cultural: who controls the creative infrastructures, who decides what is worth and according to what criteria. Without critical reflection and new forms of governance, the risk is that art will lose its symbolic and critical function, becoming a “byproduct” of the attention economy.

The core issue identified in this research is the unethical application of this technology by suppliers, which generates a dangerous information asymmetry. When creative agencies and professionals covertly replace human ingenuity with AI-generated outputs, maintaining premium pricing while their marginal costs approach zero, they actively devalue the final product delivered to the consumer. In such an environment, the *Value Proposition* ceases to be a genuine promise of quality and originality; instead, it becomes a deceptive arbitrage that exploits the consumer's lack of awareness, ultimately degrading trust across the entire industry. This dynamic transforms the creative sector into a "Market for Lemons”.

The empirical evidence, illustrated by the BuzzFeed case study, confirms that attempting to fix a business model by exclusively using AI to cut production costs (and so remodeling the *Cost Structure* without safeguarding the *Value Proposition*) is a fatal strategy. Flooding the market with low-quality, automated content inevitably severs the *Customer Relationship*, erodes brand credibility, and ultimately destroys *Revenue Streams*. AI can infinitely accelerate production, but it cannot artificially generate the empathy, trust, and cultural resonance that consumers inherently seek, as in the case of the users of the newsletter of the site mentioned.

It is imperative that the development and adoption of generative AI be guided by sound ethical principles, clear and adaptive regulatory frameworks, such as the EU AI Act, and an ongoing dialogue between technologists, creators, companies, legislators and civil society. All this is necessary to maintain professional ethics, value proposition, and consumer protection, but also to ensure the dignity of workers and to avoid tragic events like those analyzed in the Buzzfeed case.

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