Are Teens Ready *for AI's Impact?*

Today's teenagers are surprisingly wary of artificial intelligence—and many are actively worried about its impact on their futures

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The Start of an Uneasy Relationship

Being born into a world of smartphones doesn't automatically translate into embracing artificial intelligence. In a survey of 2,004 teenagers ages 13 to 18, we discovered something surprising: digital natives are approaching AI with skepticism. Their hesitation reveals that, like older generations, their comfort with technology has boundaries. It also shows a sophisticated understanding that AI isn't just another app or social platform—it's something much more powerful. "The presence of AI definitely makes me wonder if maybe we'll rely on it a little too much," says an 18-year-old mixed race female from Colorado. "Humans may lose their touch, their ability to think critically about problems and how to solve them."

What Is Generative AI?

Generative AI is a technology that creates new content—like text, images, and videos—based on what it learns from existing examples. Think of ChatGPT writing essays or DALL-E turning text descriptions into artwork. Unlike older AI that analyzes data, these new tools can actually create original content that looks and feels human-made.

Limited Exposure, Deep Concerns

Despite the rapid rise of AI, most teens have only limited exposure to these technologies. ChatGPT is the only AI tool that's seen significant teen adoption, with 41% reporting using it. Other prominent platforms like Midjourney, DALL-E, and Google's Gemini remain largely unknown, with over half of teens saying they've never even heard of these tools.

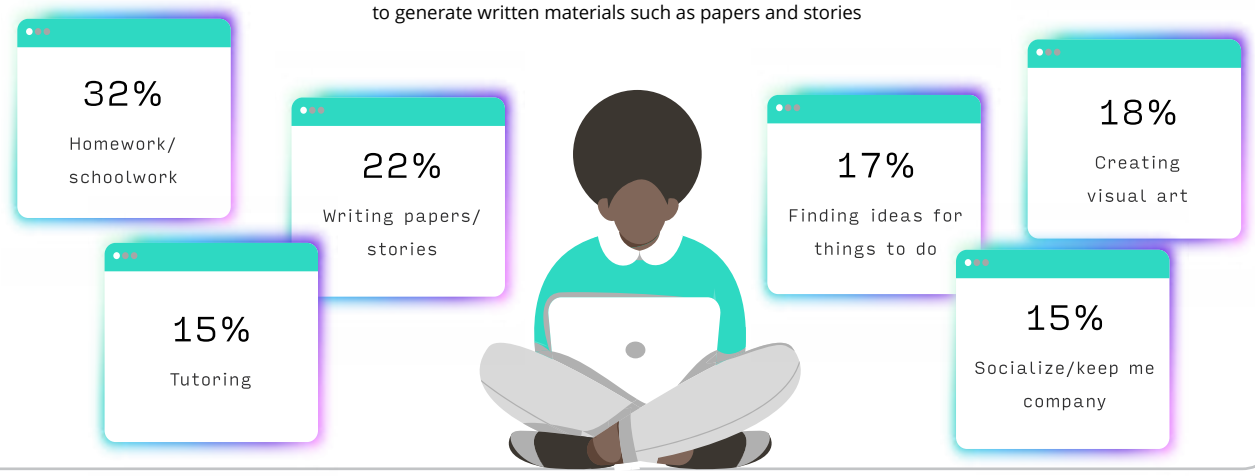
Use and Familiarity with AI Tools

	Have used it	Have heard of it	Neither
ChatGPT	41%	40%	19%
Gemini	17%	28%	54%
Copilot	16%	23%	61%
DALL-E	16%	20%	64%
Midjourney	14%	18%	68%
Perplexity	13%	16%	71%

When teens do engage with AI, it's primarily for school—about one-third use it for homework or to generate ideas, while only 22% use it for writing papers or stories. Creative applications lag behind, with just 18% using AI for generating art and 17% for brainstorming activities.

What Teens Have Used Generative AI Tools To Do, Top 6

Of those teens who use generative AI, the majority use it for homework and to generate written materials such as papers and stories



The Persistent STEM Gender Gap

Perhaps most revealing is who's actually experimenting with AI. Males are significantly more likely to use AI tools across all demographics, reflecting a broader pattern in technology engagement.

This disparity extends into computer science education, where the traditional STEM divide remains evident: 35% of male students give their computer science courses top marks, compared to just 21% of female students. These numbers suggest that despite decades of efforts to close the gender gap in technology, significant barriers remain.

Anxiety About an AI Future

An overwhelming 84% of teens express worry about at least one AI-related issue. Their concerns are notably practical: 44% worry about job displacement, while 43% fear the spread of misinformation. These aren't abstract fears—they reflect teens' growing awareness of AI's potential to reshape their future and society at large.

As one 17-year-old White nonbinary person from Pennsylvania put it, "I think that AI will continue to make people less creative, which will be really sad." This sentiment echoes throughout the survey responses: teens worry that the rise of AI will mean a loss of something fundamentally human.

Teen Concerns About AI

AI may not be the first thing on teens' minds, but when they think about AI most have at least some worries about how it may impact their lives

Replace jobs, leaving people unemployed	44%	Make human-generated content unnecessary	37%
Accidentally spread incorrect information	43%	Be used to cheat at school or elsewhere	35%
Imitate people with deep fakes	42%	Could become sentient and harm humans	30%
Intentionally spread misinformation	40%		

Future Careers in an AI World

The impact of AI on career choices is already evident. While 38% of teens believe AI will be part of their future jobs, only 34% think its benefits will outweigh its risks. More telling, 40% expect AI to have an overall negative impact on their generation.

Some teens are actively adjusting their career plans in response. "Gen AI will be used in a lot of design and data analysis jobs," says a 17-year-old White male from California. "It can completely take over some jobs in those areas... Its presence has made me search for careers that are safe from AI takeover."

Despite these concerns, few teens use AI to explore potential careers or develop professional skills. Only 20% report using AI for future-focused tasks like resume writing or career research, suggesting a significant gap between teens' concerns about AI's impact and their preparation for an AI-influenced job market.

Key Takeaways

1

Approach with Caution: Teens approach AI with thoughtful skepticism rather than blind enthusiasm.

2

Disparities in Tech Engagement: A significant gender gap persists in both AI usage and computer science education.

3

Fear for the Future: Most teens worry about AI's impact on jobs and society, with concerns focused on practical rather than theoretical threats.

4

Limited Preparation: There's a notable gap between teens' awareness of AI's importance and their actual preparation for an AI-influenced future.

Methodology

TeenVoice has developed an innovative approach to understanding today's youth, setting us apart from companies that rely on traditional surveys and outdated techniques. We've crafted unique methods to reach, engage, and communicate with teens in their preferred environments, encouraging more authentic interactions. Our approach allows us to capture deeper insights into their thoughts, mental health, and overall well-being. The studies we produce reflect the digital landscape teens inhabit and highlight important demographic nuances across age, gender, race, ethnicity, and geography. This special report on teens and technology is excerpted from one of three robust studies conducted in March and April of 2024 involving over 6,000 7th through 12th graders throughout the U.S.

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We asked American teens from all 50 states and Washington, DC in grades 7 through 12 about a wide range of topics about teen life today over three surveys. Over 2,000 teens responded to each survey (N=2,003; N=2,004; N=2,011) in March and April of 2024. Final survey sample sizes were each nationally-representative on gender, age, race, ethnicity, and region of the US.