Algorithmic Participation: A Netnographic Analysis of AI-Generated Trailers and Posters doi

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Abstract

The inclusion of artificial intelligence technologies in the realm of creativity is profoundly transforming film production and fan cultures, establishing a new cultural paradigm based on human–machine collaboration. This study adopts a netnographic approach to explore how AI-assisted cinematic content is produced, circulated and interpreted within fan cultures. Through the analysis of AI-generated trailers, alternative posters and character-transformation videos shared on Reddit and YouTube, the study examines fan communities' practices of production, interpretation and sharing from cultural and aesthetic perspectives. Drawing on Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory culture, Axel Bruns' notion of produsage and Jonathan Gray's theory of paratexts, the research reveals how algorithmic production processes intertwine with fan labor, thereby extending existing debates on participatory media by conceptualizing AI as an active agent within contemporary film culture. The findings indicate that artificial intelligence functions not merely as a technical tool but as a cultural co-creator. Communities evaluate AI-generated works as both a democratization of creativity and a form of authenticity erosion, generating a multi-layered negotiation space between production, ethical legitimacy and aesthetic value. The study shows that in this new era, where fan labor becomes algorithmic, aesthetic judgments, moral principles and creative subjectivity are being redefined, proposing a paradigm for the future of film culture grounded in human-machine community interaction.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Fan Culture, Participatory Culture, Paratext, Netnography, Cinema.

JEL Codes: Z11, L82, O33, L86

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1. Introduction

The rapidly evolving technological dynamics of the digital age are profoundly transforming the modes of film and media production. The widespread adoption of AI-based creative tools has revived fundamental questions about the nature of creativity: Who is the creator? Who produces? Human, algorithm or a partnership between those two? These questions lie not only at the heart of technological debates but also at the heart of aesthetic, ethical and cultural discussions. Generative forms of artificial intelligence represent a new paradigm of production across multiple domains, from cinema and music to literature and visual arts, shifting users from passive consumption toward creative participation in the process. This transformation highlights the renewed significance of Henry Jenkins' 2009 concept of participatory culture. In the early 2000s, Jenkins emphasized that fan communities were not merely passive recipients of media content but active creative agents who reinterpreted, transformed, and shared it. Today, this participation has become even more visible through AI-driven tools. Users no longer discuss a film; they produce alternative trailers, new character interpretations or entirely new narrative universes. In the digital age, a growing body of scholarly research has begun to examine the interactions between artificial intelligence and fan cultures. For instance, the study conducted by Li and Pang (2024) reconceptualizes the relationship between artificial intelligence and participatory culture by examining how fan communities shape human–machine interactions. The authors demonstrate that AI facilitates fan labor, transforms parasocial interactions and reconfigures perceptions of reality, thereby arguing that AI-assisted creative practices constitute a critical dimension in contemporary debates on participatory culture. In addition, an editorial work published by Black and Jacobs (2025) highlights how AI is reshaping creative and communal practices within fandom, offering a comprehensive discussion of its implications for ownership, creativity and presumptive fandom dynamics. Thus, cinema is evolving from a centralized, industrial practice into a collective, distributed mode of creation.

The aim of this study is to explore how artificial intelligence technologies are interpreted within fan communities, how production and circulation processes operate and how these new media forms challenge aesthetics and ethical boundaries. The primary motivation of this study is to understand how artificial intelligence intersects with fan labor beyond its function as a technical tool and instead as a cultural actor. AI-assisted productions enhance the creative potential of the film industry while simultaneously reshaping fan communities' practices of production, ownership and sharing. In this context, Jonathan Gray's 2010 concept of paratext, Andrew Hills's 2002 approach of affective investment and Axel Bruns's 2008 produsage model form the theoretical framework of this study. As Gray conceptualizes it, a film or television series derives meaning not solely from the text itself but through surrounding materials such as trailers, posters, interviews and social media content. Hills' notion of affective investment explains the intense emotional bonds that fans form with these paratexts. At the same time, Bruns's model of produsage, in which the boundaries between producer and consumer blur, introduces a new dimension to the interaction between fan labor and artificial intelligence. As a result, AI productions emerge as emotional, cultural and aesthetic processes of co-creation alongside their technological dimension. In recent years, social media platforms, particularly YouTube, Reddit and TikTok, have become spaces in which AI-generated content is rapidly disseminated, discussed and reinterpreted. Users, for example, under the label 'AI-generated trailer' share AI-generated trailers, character transformations or scene reconstructions. In the comment sections, they debate issues such as realism, creativity and ethical boundaries. These productions transform fan labor in the classical sense: fans are no longer merely expanding a narrative but technologically reproducing it. This situation adds an algorithmic aesthetic layer to the participatory culture described by Jenkins.

In this context, the study involves both a qualitative and a cultural inquiry. The research was conducted using netnography, a method that systematically analyzes the interactions, productions and interpretations of online communities in their natural settings. AI-generated film trailers, alternative posters and re-edited character videos shared on Reddit and YouTube were examined within this scope. The aim is not only to analyze the formal features of these contents but also to understand the fan discourses, emotional responses and aesthetic evaluations formed around them. This approach, as Kozinets noted in 2020, enables analysis of the role of community interactions in meaning-making within digital cultures. The originality of this study lies in its conceptualisation of fan labor as both a cultural phenomenon and a form of algorithmic collaboration.

2. Artificial Intelligence, Creativity and New Media Cultures

The integration of artificial intelligence technologies into creative production processes represents a multilayered transformation at the intersection of contemporary media theory, the philosophy of art and ethical debate. With the development of participatory culture, the boundaries between production and consumption have become increasingly blurred, positioning individuals as both producers

and receivers of content. This transformation should not be seen merely as a technical innovation but as a cultural, epistemological and aesthetic restructuring. Henry Jenkins (2009) defines participatory culture as a media ecosystem in which users are not just consumers of content but also producers and meaning-making agents (p. 8). This framework is crucial for understanding how AI-supported modes of production create a collective space of creativity through user-audience interaction. Jenkins' notion of spreadable media is also key in this regard; AI-generated content does not exist within a single medium but circulates across platforms, being continuously reinterpreted and recontextualized (Jenkins, 2009, p. 14). In this context, creative value in digital culture is no longer constructed solely at the moment of production but also through processes of circulation, reconfiguration and sharing.

Lev Manovich (2018) approaches this transformation through the concept of data aesthetics. He argues contemporary art and media production are increasingly shaped by algorithmic processes, data models and parametric structures. Aesthetic experience now depends not only on individual creativity but also on the field of possibilities offered by data (Manovich, 2018, p. 7). In this sense, artificial intelligence becomes a creative partner; the interaction between human intuition and machine computation lays the groundwork for new aesthetic forms. Manovich (2018) further suggests that algorithmic production creates a form of automated curatorship within visual culture and that art has become process-oriented rather than solely focused on outcomes (p. 12). This perspective explains why AI-assisted production has been rapidly embraced in cinema, design and visual storytelling: the act of creation has become a dynamic process shaped more by human–machine interaction than by individual human decisions.

Luciano Floridi (2021) evaluates this technological transformation within the framework of ethics and epistemology. He argues that the principle of trustworthy artificial intelligence must be grounded not only in technical accuracy but also in transparency, accountability and privacy (p. 262). Floridi emphasizes that the co-creative role of AI in artistic production requires clear ethical boundaries, as new forms of infringement are emerging across knowledge, representation and intellectual property (pp. 263–265). This is particularly relevant in cinematic contexts involving faces, consent, copyright and the limits of artificial representation. Therefore, artificial intelligence not only transforms creative production but also necessitates the redefinition of artistic and media ethics. Margaret Boden (1998) classifies creativity into three categories: combinational, exploratory and transformational creativity (p. 348). AI-based modes of production generally correspond to the first two. For instance, an AI model may generate different plot variations for a film script (com-

binational creativity) or explore the color palette, style or composition of an artwork within data patterns (exploratory creativity). However, transformational creativity, meaning the kind that changes the very rules of creation and redefines the artistic field, still largely depends on human intuition, cultural context and aesthetic awareness (Boden, 1998, pp. 350-351). Thus, while AI accelerates the creative process, it cannot gain meaning without the human consciousness that defines its ethical and aesthetic framework. When considered together, these international perspectives reveal that artificial intelligence is more than a production tool; it operates as a cultural actor. Jenkins' (2009) notion of participatory media, Manovich's (2018) approach to data aesthetics, Floridi's (2021) ethical infosphere model, and Boden's (1998) classification of creativity collectively demonstrate that an aesthetic and epistemological redistribution is taking place within the AI-based new media ecosystem. The creative process is no longer the product of a single subject, rather, it is the result of the interaction among humans, machines and communities.

Recent academic studies in Turkey have similarly shown that artificial intelligence is transforming the very concept of creativity, aligning with this global trend. Dilmaç (2024) argues that historically human-centered definitions of creative action must be re-evaluated in the context of AI. According to him, generative models should be regarded not as threats to human creativity but as collaborative systems that expand it (p. 240). He further contends that these systems create a new wave of aesthetic democratization, enabling individuals without technical expertise to participate in creative production (p. 241). Özdal (2023) identifies a dynamic tension between innovation, speed and imitation within AI-driven visual arts (p. 7). According to Özdal, while AI-assisted illustrations may yield visually striking results, their claim to originality weakens when they are produced independently of the artist's intention. Therefore, the use of AI in art raises the question of how to transfer creative intent. Similarly, Bulut and Özdal (2024) note that, in innovative design processes, artificial intelligence has evolved from a supportive tool to a co-decision-maker (p. 553). Their research shows that designers' methods of evaluating AI-generated formal alternatives reshape their perception of creative responsibility. The authors emphasize that logos produced without the designer's intuitive intervention, although functionally effective, often lack originality and emotional resonance (Bulut & Özdal, 2024, p. 555).

Artificial intelligence, rather than completely transforming artistic production, has triggered an epistemological rupture that compels a rethinking of human creativity itself. As creative processes are redefined through these systems, the core debate centers on authorship; on who the creative subject

truly is (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2024, p. 261). This question brings long-standing debates in the philosophy of art, such as intention, originality and the death of the author, into the digital context. The common ground among these studies is that artificial intelligence is approached as a tool that both democratizes and problematizes artistic production. Jenkins's (2009) framework of participatory culture explains this democratization in a cultural context: creation is now a collective practice. Manovich's (2018) data-aesthetics perspective shows how AI shapes this collective practice at the algorithmic level. Floridi (2021) delineates its ethical boundaries, while Boden (1998) reminds us that human intuition remains the source of transformational creativity. Studies conducted in Turkey reinforce these four theoretical axes with concrete examples, demonstrating that artificial intelligence represents not only a technical evolution but a profound cultural paradigm shift.

The inclusion of artificial intelligence in creative processes marks a technological rupture as well as a philosophical and cultural one. This rupture leads to the redefinition of concepts such as creative autonomy, originality, ethical legitimacy and posthumanist subjectivity. Artificial intelligence is no longer exclusively an assisting tool; it has become a collaborative actor that complements and, at times, reshapes human creative intention. Jenkins' (2009) concept of participatory culture provides a productive framework for understanding this co-agency at the community level. Participatory culture assumes that, at the center of production, it is no longer individual artists but user communities interacting with technological systems (p. 18). Within this framework, AI-assisted productions are positioned as forms of collective creation. Comments on AI-generated trailers on platforms such as YouTube or discussions about synthetic images within Reddit communities exemplify what Jenkins calls collective intelligence. The content produced by artificial intelligence gains meaning not in isolation but through collective negotiation. At this point, Manovich's (2018) conceptualization of software culture offers a valuable lens to explain the formal dimension of creative processes. Manovich argues that, in the digital age, aesthetics is embedded in the algorithmic structure of software (p. 10). Every image, sound, or scene is the outcome of a set of parametric decisions. Therefore, AI-generated content does not merely produce new images; it creates visual paradigms in which aesthetic rules are algorithmically rewritten. This dynamic has generated a new expressive domain oscillating between hyperrealism and hyperartificiality, particularly within cinematic aesthetics. The deepfake videos discussed on Reddit are typical examples of this hyperaesthetic condition. Viewers experience both fascination and skepticism simultaneously; the reproduction of reality becomes at once mesmerizing and unsettling. The design process is no longer linear but dialogical: the machine proposes, the human evaluates; the human corrects, and the machine regenerates. This interaction gives rise to an aesthetic of collective intelligence. The designer is no longer the absolute authority of the production process but instead assumes the role of a curator. This transformation aligns with the logic of software culture articulated by Manovich.

3. Fan Cultures, Participatory Media, and AI-Based Reproductions

The intensification of digital platforms has significantly increased the visibility and accessibility of creative tools, enabling users to encounter a growing volume of content and to engage with it as a stimulus for further production. In the digital age, fan practices transform media from a consumable product into a participatory field of production. Jenkins' (2006) conceptualization of participatory culture centers on the practices of audiences who produce, circulate, and negotiate meaning through media. The concepts of spreadability and co-creation define fan activities as continuous interactions with media industries. This perspective reframes media production as a multidirectional process, describing an ecosystem in which audiences become creative agents (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 57). Bruns's (2008) concept of produsage similarly explains how users operate in a continuum that transcends the traditional producer-consumer divide. According to him, production and use co-occur; the user becomes both a creative and transformative force acting upon content (Bruns, 2008, p. 21). This framework is valuable for understanding how fan labor is made visible and invisible within platform economies. Hills (2003) argues that fan communities produce not only cognitive but also emotional investments that generate identity and cultural belonging. In his view, fandom is not a form of consumption but a performance of identity constructed through emotional labor and community interaction (Hills, 2003, p. xi). Gray (2010) highlights, through his concept of paratext, how ancillary materials such as trailers, posters, interviews and social media posts frame the meaning of the main text (p. 12). Paratexts reshape the relationship between audiences and media works, enabling fans to play an active role in meaning-making. Manovich (2001) identifies digitization, modularity, and automation as the three fundamental principles of new media culture. These principles explain the fragmented, reconfigurable, and algorithmic nature of digital production. Floridi (2014) describes the transformation of digital environments into interconnected ecosystems of information through his concept of the infosphere. Within this framework, artificial intelligence accelerates the infosphere and establishes a new regime of production. Models, prompts, datasets and interfaces semi-automate fan

production, while forms such as style transfer, deep-fake videos and AI-generated posters normalize the proliferation of paratexts.

Within the Turkish academic literature, this transformation has emerged as a growing field of debate over participation, labor valuation and ethical boundaries. Subaşı (2021) discusses Jenkins' debates on participatory culture and free labor in the context of YouTube, explaining how user-generated content is commodified within platform economies. According to Subaşı, creators often have to settle for symbolic capital and visibility, leading to fan labor being integrated into platform capitalism through both visible (content creation, interaction, curation) and invisible (watching, ranking, commenting, sustaining notification cycles) forms (Subaşı, 2021, p. 2). The emotional and identity dimensions of digital fandom have also deepened. The study by Tepe, Özcan and Demir (2021) on K-pop fandom reveals that parasocial relationships and role-playing practices contribute to the flexible and performative construction of digital identities. Fans form intense one-way emotional bonds with idol figures, while micro-hierarchies and platform norms shape identity performance within communities (Tepe, Özcan & Demir, 2021, pp. 125). These findings align with Hills' affective investment perspective, in which emotional attachment serves as a foundational element of fan production. The economic and moral dimensions of fan labor become evident not only as the generation of surplus value for platforms but also through regimes of legitimacy and ethical debates (Zhai & Wang, 2023). In Subaşı's (2021, p. 20) analysis of YouTube's political economy, moderation, reporting, copyright and advertising mechanisms function as tools that regulate user labor. The critical branch of participatory culture, particularly the digital labor debates developed by Jenkins and Terranova, remains relevant in the Turkish context as well (Güler, 2019; Bulut & Bulur, 2023). When it comes to AI-based reproductions, issues of facial use, unauthorized resemblance, intellectual property and ethics further intensify the discussion. The scaling of paratexts blurs the boundaries of ownership and fair use, while the low-threshold accessibility of algorithmic tools normalizes rapid remixing practices. Practices strengthened through emotion, community and circulation expand their spreadability through collective archiving and curation mechanisms such as voting, tagging and playlist creation. This structure aligns with Bruns' produsage model, in which participatory creation operates as an ongoing and iterative process. The normative boundaries and ethical self-regulations of online communities are also noteworthy. Studies on fan and K-pop communities reveal that internal norms and consensus practices emerge around issues of identity, representation and privacy. At the same time, paratexts serve as guiding thresholds in intercommunity exchanges (Tepe, Özcan & Demir, 2021, pp. 139). Thus, fan culture appears not only as a site of content production but also as a space of ongoing negotiation over behavioral codes and legitimacy. Artificial intelligence amplifies this process; as production becomes easier, normative regulation is reestablished through moderation systems, reporting mechanisms, and community guidelines. At the same time, however, despite relying on algorithmic systems that structure and standardize the reproduction of knowledge, digital technological developments expand the range of creative alternatives available to individuals, enabling diverse modes of expression and participation.

AI-assisted cinematic content, such as trailers, alternative posters, or character transformation videos, functions not merely as technical products but as new paratexts that reshape modes of reproduction, perceptions of reality, and participation within fan cultures. Fan communities do not simply consume these materials; they transform, circulate and reinterpret them, adding new layers of meaning. In this context, Jenkins' (2018, p. 45) concept of fan labor provides a key analytical lens. According to Jenkins, fans are not only consumers but also producers and interpreters. This productive labor perspective gains new dimensions in the context of AI-enhanced fan content. An AI-generated trailer or character-transformation video becomes an object that the fan-viewer not only consumes but also participates in, through sharing, commentary and re-creation. In this way, fan labor extends beyond traditional forms such as fan fiction or fan art, evolving through algorithmic production, machine-assisted montage and network-based circulation practices.

Jonathan Gray's (2010) concept of the paratext offers a critical framework for understanding modes of production and participation. Gray argues that the ancillary materials surrounding a media text, such as trailers, posters, articles and social media posts, play a central role in meaning-making (Gray, 2010, p. 12). Paratexts do more than promote a work; they shape audience expectations, perceptions and interpretive frameworks. AI-generated alternative film posters or character videos operate within this same register. Fan communities share and comment on these paratextual contents and through such commentary, they reshape the meaning of the original text. For example, when an AI-generated trailer is uploaded to YouTube, the accompanying comments, Reddit discussions and subsequent poster redesigns raise the question of whether the trailer is a genuine cinematic product or a fan-made experiment. At the core of this process lies what Gray defines as the paratextual layer. What matters is not the trailer provided by the original producer but the version recoded, shared and transformed into discourse by the community.

Hills' (2003) theory of affective investment helps explain fans' emotional attachment to both media texts and the derivative creations surrounding them. Hills emphasizes the affective bond fans establish not only with the text itself but also with the community, the act of reproduction, and the collective sharing that surrounds it (Hills, 2003, p. xi). In the context of AI-generated cinematic content, this investment takes on new forms. Comments such as "*This AI trailer gave me chills,*" or *"It felt like watching a real film,"* exemplify the emotional reactions and communal engagement that accompany artificial production. Fans approach these contents not merely as technical innovations but as emotional and imaginative extensions of their own expectations and creative worlds. When considered together, these three concepts, fan labor, paratext and affective investment, reveal three key processes emerging within AI-assisted cinema and fan production: reproduction, perception of reality and participation.

The process of reproduction becomes evident when fans, after watching an AI-generated trailer, do more than comment; they redesign the poster, request similar character transformation videos or create their own AI-generated variations. This extends Jenkins' (2018) concept of fan labor into the realm of algorithmic production, where the fan becomes not only a viewer but also a co-producer collaborating with the machine. A comment posted under the Reddit thread titled *Robin Williams as the Joker "for the love of god someone make this an actual movie,"* illustrates both emotional investment and the expectation of production. The request for a poster design simultaneously serves as a concrete example of reproduction practices. The perception of reality can be analyzed through the lifelike scenes and characters produced by AI in cinematic content. Gray's (2010) paratextual framework becomes particularly relevant here. AI-generated trailers prompt viewers to question whether they are watching an official film or a fan created work. A Reddit comment stating, "This might turn out to be a documentary," demonstrates that viewers invest in AI-generated productions as potential realities, rather than just experiments. This reveals how AI-generated content reshapes both cinema's claim to authenticity and fans' expectations about what constitutes reality on screen.

Participation occurs through the sharing, commenting, and re-editing of such content on social media and video platforms. Jenkins' (2006) emphasis on participatory culture becomes evident in this process. Fans actively participate in production by commenting on content, creating alternative versions and sharing them within their networks. A YouTube comment reading, *"It is getting there, AI filmmaking is the revolution filmmakers of tomorrow have longed for, 10 out of 10,"* shows that the viewer is not just a consumer but recognizes their own creative potential. The user suggests that AI filmmaking represents a revolution and a new opportunity space for future filmmakers. This comment also aligns with the concepts of spreadable media and co-creation; fan participation entails not only the distribution of content but also direct intervention in the production process (Wei, 2023).

4. Methodology

This study aims to investigate how artificial intelligence–assisted cinematic productions are discussed, produced, circulated and evaluated within online fan communities. Focusing on AI-generated trailers, alternative film posters and character transformation videos, the research seeks to understand how fan labor intersects with algorithmic systems and how aesthetic, ethical and cultural meanings are negotiated in these digital environments. By examining these practices, the study contributes to ongoing debates on participatory culture, algorithmic creativity and human-machine collaboration in contemporary film culture. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to conceptualize fan labor as both a cultural and affective practice and as a form of algorithmically mediated collaboration. While previous studies on participatory culture have largely emphasized human-centered creative agency, this study foregrounds the role of artificial intelligence as a co-creative actor within fan communities. Methodologically, the research extends the application of netnography to AI-driven creative practices, offering a framework for analyzing emergent forms of digital participation shaped by platform algorithms and generative technologies.

This study employs netnography as its primary qualitative research method. Netnography, first introduced by Kozinets (2002), adapts classical ethnographic principles to online environments and is particularly suited for analyzing the cultural practices, discourses and interactions of digitally networked communities. Unlike traditional ethnography, netnography allows researchers to observe naturally occurring interactions without disrupting the social dynamics of online spaces (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography has been widely used in media and cultural studies to examine fan cultures, participatory media practices and online communities (Baym, 2015; Hine, 2020). Kozinets (2019) emphasizes that netnography is particularly effective for understanding meaning-making processes in digitally mediated cultures, as it enables the analysis of texts, visuals, comments and interactional patterns produced by users themselves. In the context of this study, netnography provides an appropriate methodological framework for capturing how AI-generated cinematic content is embedded within fan discourses and communal evaluations.

The research was conducted between May and November 2025, a period marked by an intense production and discussion of AI-based cinematic content,

particularly alternative trailers, deepfake character videos, re-edited scenes and AI-generated film posters across social media and video platforms. Accordingly, the data collection process was conducted across two leading platforms: Reddit and YouTube. Reddit was selected for its active communities in which AI-generated cinematic content is shared, and the technical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of such productions are debated. In particular, posts shared on the r/SFWdeepfakes subreddit were analyzed, as these threads demonstrated high engagement and rich discussions centered on themes such as realism, creativity, ethical boundaries and technological transformation. The second platform, YouTube, was chosen as a platform through which AI-generated cinematic content, including short films and trailers, elicits emotional and aesthetic reactions from viewers. Within this scope, videos tagged with AI-generated film, poster and design were examined. The comment sections of these videos provided rich qualitative data on how the interaction between AI and cinema is discussed globally.

The study relies exclusively on publicly available content, and all user identities were anonymized. No direct interaction with participants was conducted; instead, past user-generated content was systematically analyzed. Thus, the research was designed as an archival netnography. Reddit data were collected from high-engagement posts in the top and hot categories, while YouTube data were drawn from videos with high view counts and interaction rates. During the data analysis phase, Reddit and YouTube comments were analyzed using an open coding approach to identify how artificial intelligence is positioned in relation to cinematic storytelling, technical production, ethical debates, creativity and audience-producer relationships. The coding process revealed five key themes:

1. The competition between artificial aesthetics and cinematic realism,
2. The ambiguity of ethical boundaries,
3. The redefinition of creativity and originality,
4. The technical dimensions of cinematic atmosphere, and
5. The dual perception of AI as a creative collaborator or a technological threat.

These themes were interpreted within the frameworks of fan culture theory (Jenkins, 2006) and posthumanist cinema theory (Balsamo, 2011). All ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. In compliance with Reddit and YouTube's open data policies, only publicly accessible content was analyzed; no personal information, private messages or closed community materials were included. Visual and audio materials were used solely for analytical purposes and were not reproduced or republished in any form. The research process adhered to the principles of open data, anonymization and

non-participant observation widely accepted in online research ethics (Bruckman, 2002; Kozinets, 2015). Accordingly, the study was structured around the following five research questions:

RQ 1: How are AI-generated film trailers, posters and character videos perceived and interpreted by fan communities?

RQ 2: How do users in Reddit and YouTube communities redefine the concepts of creativity and originality in relation to AI-based productions?

RQ 3: How are ethical debates concerning the use of artificial intelligence articulated and legitimized within these communities?

RQ 4: Through which aesthetic values do users evaluate fan content produced with AI tools?

RQ 5: Do community members perceive the role of artificial intelligence in film production as a creative collaborator or as a technological threat?

Once these questions were formulated, it became necessary to identify the online communities to be examined in order to address them. Accordingly, the research was conducted within the framework of seven key concepts: artificial intelligence, cinema, fan production, deepfake, digital creativity, ethical debate and aesthetic perception. These concepts represent the cultural and technological context targeted by the study and served as the main criteria for selecting the community. In selecting the virtual communities, factors such as the number of active users, the intensity of interaction, the relevance of shared content to the research topic, and the diversity of comments were considered. Based on these criteria, Reddit and YouTube were chosen as the primary research environments.

Reddit, a forum-based platform where users discuss topics through text, images and video contents, had over 500 million active monthly users as of 2025. It hosts more than 100,000 subreddits, each focused on specific subjects. This study focused on r/SFWdeepfakes, one of the most active subcommunities where AI-generated cinematic productions are discussed in depth. YouTube, the world's largest video-sharing platform with over 2.5 billion active users, was selected for its broad producer-audience network, spanning from professional filmmakers to independent creators. AI-assisted short films, alternative trailers and poster interpretations are widely shared and debated on this platform. YouTube's comment sections provided valuable qualitative data, revealing viewers' emotional reactions, aesthetic evaluations and technological curiosity.

These two platforms were chosen for their global reach, diverse interactions and high engagement rates, making them ideal sources of cultural data. The collected materials were selected according to the research questions and analyzed using qua-

litative methods. Reddit data were gathered from posts in the top and hot categories, while YouTube data were drawn from videos with high view counts and substantial comment activity. Throughout the research process, only publicly accessible content was analyzed. Usernames were anonymized and the study adhered strictly to established research ethics for online environments (Kozinets, 2015; Bruckman, 2002).

4.1. Data Collection

In netnographic research, the materials analyzed are not limited to written texts; they may also include visual, auditory and graphical data. Kozinets (2002) identifies three primary forms of data collection in netnography: archival, elicited and fieldnote data.

Archival Data: This type refers to previously recorded posts and comments that are analyzed without any direct interaction between the researcher and the online community. In this study, publicly available content on Reddit and YouTube was collected without the researcher's participation and treated as archival data.

Elicited Data: Data obtained through direct communication between the researcher and community members. As this study did not involve direct interaction with users, elicited data were not collected. However, YouTube and Reddit comments, which are publicly accessible under open-data policies, are treated as indirectly elicited data, as they present publicly shared user expressions.

Fieldnote Data: These data consist of the researcher's observational notes on community discussions, the temporal dynamics of posts, and users' emotional responses to content. In this study, the researcher observed the chronological flow of comments and levels of engagement (e.g., likes, replies) on Reddit and YouTube, documenting these observations in the form of fieldnotes.

During data collection, Reddit and YouTube were chosen for their rich qualitative potential in addressing the research questions. On Reddit, posts from the r/SFWdeepfakes community were analyzed under the following threads: Robin Williams as the Joker in Batman (1989), De-aging Walter White in El Camino, Toy Buzz in Lightyear (2022), Lily James in The Imitation Game (2014), and Reacher in Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan. On YouTube, publicly available comments were examined under videos such as A Cosmic Odyssey, AI Movie Posters and Copernicus - AI Movie Trailer, shared by the AI Retro Vision and Particle Panic channels.

The data were collected exclusively through archival methods, without direct engagement with users, and solely from publicly accessible sources. The materials were analyzed in relation to the five main research questions; posts, comments, shares and viewer reactions were systematically coded. Reddit and YouTube users were conceptualized as active community participants, and discussions, themes and meaning patterns were examined to identify community-based perceptions of the relationship between artificial intelligence and cinema.

5. Findings

This section analyzes publicly available comments from the r/SFWdeepfakes and r/AITrailers subreddits on Reddit, as well as from relevant YouTube videos, to examine how AI-based cinematic content, trailers, short films, posters and character transformations are perceived and interpreted by fan communities. The findings are organized according to the research questions and all quotations have been anonymized for ethical compliance.

Question 1: How are AI-generated film trailers, posters, and character videos perceived and interpreted by fan communities?

Comments on Reddit and YouTube reveal that fan communities regard AI-generated film trailers and character videos as both a fascinating innovation and a phenomenon that destabilizes perceptions of authenticity. Most participants describe these creations with expressions such as "incredible" or "insanely good," while a smaller group expresses concerns that the technology threatens the sense of realism. User responses frequently include expressions of gratitude and recognition of the content's professional quality, indicating the emergence of a culture of appreciation within these communities. Fans often perceive AI-generated content not merely as technical experiments but as creative works with the potential to become actual films. These productions evoke a mix of curiosity and admiration toward the future of cinematic aesthetics. Some users interpret them as a turning point for the future of Hollywood, while others see them as reinforcing the belief that "nothing on screen can be entirely trusted anymore." Examples of anonymized user comments include:

"Incredible - nothing can be believed anymore."

"Wow, this is insanely good."

"This is amazing."

"This is a really good one, great job!"

"He looks so skinny lol. That head on Jim's body is hilarious."

"After watching Reacher, it definitely feels off lol."

"I really like this. I know how hard these can be to make. How did you get the prompting right?"

"I broke the script into detailed scene descriptions and used consistent visual references… once you get the structure right, it flows a lot better."

Figure 1. Copernicus (2024). AI Short Film.

As illustrated in Figure 1, these statements show that community members perceive AI-generated content as cinematic experiences that complement, rather than replace, human creativity. At the same time, remarks such as "nothing can be believed anymore" reflect an emerging ethical awareness and critical reflection on how AI-generated imagery reshapes perceptions of reality.

Question 2: How do users in r/SFWdeepfakes and YouTube communities redefine the concepts of creativity and originality in AI-based productions?

Discussions on Reddit and YouTube demonstrate that AI-based cinematic productions are transforming our understanding of creativity and redefining the notion of originality. Users perceive such works not merely as acts of copying or montage but as creative processes evaluated in terms of narrative construction, prompt engineering and aesthetic coherence. Comments under AI-generated film trailers and short films on YouTube indicate that viewers associate creativity more with storytelling and scene harmony than with technical mastery. On Reddit, creators describe creativity as the skill of guiding AI models and controlling the output scene by scene. These insights suggest that artificial intelligence is increasingly viewed as a collaborative creative partner rather than a mechanical tool. Examples of anonymized user comments include:

"I really like this. I know how hard these can be to make (I have to make a bunch of AI movies for TagTwists.com). How did you get the prompting right?"

"Thanks, I appreciate it! I broke the script into detailed scene descriptions and used consistent visual references to keep the characters' looks consistent. It's definitely a lot of trial and error, but once you get the structure right, it flows a lot better."

"I had a similar experience. When I tried just using only text prompts, the results were too random. But when I used images for each scene and then used text to have them move, it became really good."

"Made with? - DeepFaceLab."

"Damn."

"It's incredible how people can make this look so real with the right tools."

"After watching this, I feel AI is not copying but reimagining."

These comments illustrate that creativity is being reconceptualized as a process integrating human imagination with technological command, design and visual control. Community members interpret originality not as the creation of something entirely new, but as the reconfiguration of the existing, a fusion of artistic vision and technical mediation.

Question 3: How are ethical debates about the use of artificial intelligence expressed and legitimized within these communities?

Comments from Reddit and YouTube indicate that ethical concerns surrounding the use of artificial intelligence in film production are often expressed indirectly rather than explicitly. Users rarely discuss ethics in normative terms; instead they address related issues through reflections on authenticity, the value of labor and technological responsibility. Phrases such as "nothing can be believed anymore" reflect an awareness of the challenges AI poses to truth, trust and the perception of reality. At the same time, some creators legitimize their work ethically by being transparent, openly explaining their technical processes. Within the communities, detailed discussions about "which software was used," "how masking errors were fixed," or "how lighting consistency was achieved," reveal that technical openness functions as a form of ethical accountability. While some users perceive AI tools as entertaining and educational, others implicitly critique their impact on creative labor and copyright, expressed in comments like "We don't need Hollywood anymore." Examples of anonymized user comments include:

"Incredible - nothing can be believed anymore."

"DeepFaceLab won't typically result in so much flickering… I assume it's created with Roop or some similar new approach that is much faster but of lower quality?"

"Nope, it's DeepFaceLab, just the masking is a bit wonky since the learned mask wasn't accurate enough… I had to do one of the HEAD and WF results."

"He looks so skinny lol. That head on Jim's body is hilarious."

"After watching Reacher, it definitely feels off lol."

"This is insanely good."

"I think AI will replace actors soon. It's both amazing and scary."

These remarks demonstrate that, even without explicitly addressing ethics, community members engage with underlying concerns related to truth, trust, labor transformation and production transparency. For the community, AI-generated content represents both a space of creative freedom and a sign of the erosion of authenticity.

Question 4: Through which aesthetic values do users evaluate AI-generated fan content?

An analysis of Reddit and YouTube comments reveals that AI-generated cinematic content is evaluated along three main aesthetic dimensions: visual realism, narrative coherence and emotional atmosphere. Users perceive these works not as amateur experiments but as experimental art pieces evaluated according to cinematic criteria. AI-generated short films or trailers are praised not only for their technical sophistication but also for their ability to convey emotion and maintain narrative tone. For instance, the YouTube short film A Cosmic Odyssey was described by many viewers as film-quality, professionally crafted and atmospherically immersive. Users frequently compared AI-generated works to Hollywood standards, referencing Avatar-like visuals, bioluminescent color palettes and studio-level production quality. However, a smaller subset of users expressed that the extreme visual smoothness of some AI productions diminished their sense of realism, perceiving them as "too perfect." Examples of anonymized user comments include:

"Wow! Amazing effect and movie-level story!"

"This is the beginning of the end of Hollywood! This creation is phenomenal! Jaw-dropping."

"Awesome video, well done🖐"

"A beautiful homage to Pandora."

"WOW! Grüße aus Deutschland DE❤❤"

"Cudos from Hawaii. Audio 5 stars, video 4 stars, storyline 4 stars… audience retention must be stellar."

"I'm aiming for this level of professionalism in my videos. Outstanding work — truly top-notch!"

"Masterpiece."

"A stunning alien world of glowing rivers and bioluminescent jungles."

These comments demonstrate that users apply evaluative criteria including visual consistency, atmospheric depth, and emotional resonance, to AI creations. AI-generated works are perceived not only as technological achievements but as cinematic experiences in their own right. Consequently, fan communities position AI productions as part of a new visual-aesthetic sensibility, one that expands the boundaries of classical cinematic aesthetics through the convergence of human imagination and algorithmic design.

Question 5: Do community members view the role of artificial intelligence in film production as a creative collaborator or a technological threat?

An analysis of Reddit and YouTube comments reveals that community members perceive artificial intelligence in film production as both a creative collaborator and a potential threat. Two opposing tendencies emerge clearly within the discussions. The first group of users celebrates AI as a partner in a new artistic era. They emphasize that AI technology democratizes cinema by removing creative production from the monopoly of major studios and granting unprecedented opportunities to individual creators. According to this perspective, AI is not merely a tool but a creative ally. Users describe AI creators as visual artists and regard artificial intelligence as a force that amplifies human imagination rather than replacing it. In contrast, the second group expresses concern that AI devalues the labor of actors, directors and artists. These users argue that artificial intelligence "cannot replicate genuine emotion" and that cinema will remain confined to imitating the human experience rather than truly capturing it. A third, more moderate group positions itself between these poles, acknowledging AI as a supportive instrument in creative processes while rejecting its recognition as a fully autonomous artistic subject. Examples of anonymized user comments include:

"This is the beginning of the end of Hollywood! This creation is phenomenal! Jaw-dropping."

"I think AI will replace actors soon. It's both amazing and scary."

"I'm aiming for this level of professionalism in my videos. Outstanding work — truly top-notch!"

"AI is not copying, it's reimagining."

"He eventually agrees to marry both daughters… Please, develop this video more. You won't regret the effort."

"Still have a ways to go for coherence, but DAMN the future looks amazing."

"I guess people need to be reminded. There is no such thing as a free lunch."

"AI replaces cost, not creativity."

These statements demonstrate that artificial intelligence is simultaneously perceived as both a source of hope and anxiety within cinematic production. While fan communities express concern that AI may displace human labor, they also acknowledge its capacity to expand the boundaries of imagination and creative experimentation. Ultimately, AI occupies a hybrid identity in the eyes of these communities, neither a complete rival nor a mere tool, but rather a provocative co-creator that challenges and redefines the limits of human creativity in cinema.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The integration of artificial intelligence technologies into media production processes has fundamentally transformed the relationship between cinema and fan cultures. Traditionally, cinema operated under the control of professional studios and directors, and was shaped by high production costs; today, however, generative AI tools have transformed it into an accessible, experimental and collective ecosystem of creation. Especially on platforms such as Reddit and YouTube, user-generated AI-based trailers, re-edited scenes, posters and screenplay experiments function not merely as technical exercises but as *cultural texts,* constructing meaning within communities, redefining aesthetic norms and sparking ethical debates. Through a qualitative netnographic analysis of publicly available content on Reddit and YouTube, this study demonstrates that AI-driven cinematic production is not only a technological innovation but also a *cultural phenomenon* transforming fan communities' practices of production, circulation and meaning-making. The findings converge across three main dimensions that correspond to the study's research questions: reproduction, perception of reality, and participation.

AI-generated trailers, alternative posters, and character transformation videos make fan labor more visible while vastly expanding the paratextual layer, creating a participatory flow that draws the viewer-fan into the production process itself. This dynamic not only validates Jenkins' frameworks of *participatory culture* and s*preadable media* in practice but also shows how Bruns' logic of *produsage* has evolved into a genuine co-production economy. At the level of perception and interpretation, communities view AI creations as a *captivating expression of creativity* as well as a t*hreshold that challenges the perception of reality.* Expressions of admiration coexist with concerns such as "nothing can be fully trusted anymore," revealing the ambivalence with which AI expands cinematic experience while simultaneously destabilizing traditional truth regimes. In terms of creativity and originality, evaluations shift from a focus on static images to *a process-oriented approach that emphasizes* narrative construction, scene coherence and prompt engineering. Originality is

redefined as the reconfiguration of existing material through technical guidance and aesthetic synthesis, positioning the creative subject within the interplay between human intuition and algorithmic suggestion. Ethical discussions within these communities are mostly implicit. Transparency in production diaries, explanations of software use and descriptions of how visual errors are corrected become *de facto mechanisms of ethical legitimization*. While explicit statements about facial use, consent, and intellectual property are rare, the disclosure of production processes functions as a practical ethical language.

Aesthetic evaluations, on the other hand, center on three principal axes: *visual realism, narrative coherence and emotional atmosphere.* Communities assess technical achievement alongside cinematic experience, emphasizing elements such as *music, color palette, rhythm* and *world-building capacity.* Aesthetic judgment, therefore, is linked not only to model performance but also to the quality of *editing, immersion and affective transmission.* Within this framework, artificial intelligence is perceived simultaneously as *a creative collaborator* and *a potential threat.* Its democratizing effect empowers individual creators yet concerns regarding the erosion of artistic labor and authenticity endure. Within the collective imagination of fan communities, AI emerges as *a hybrid partner*—neither merely a tool nor an autonomous agent, but a provocative force that challenges, complements and redefines human creativity in the cinematic domain. At the theoretical level, the findings confirm and extend four intersecting frameworks. *Participatory culture* and *fan labor* have evolved into process-oriented *co-creation* through algorithmic production, in which the layers of production, circulation and interpretation merge into a single continuous flow. The *paratextual regime* expands through artificial intelligence—trailers, posters and short scene variations multiply the points of entry into a work's meaning, constantly reconstructing and reframing it. Within the framework of *software culture* and d*ata aesthetics,* aesthetic decisions are embedded in software parameters, and the production process becomes dialogical: the human edits, the machine suggests; the machine generates, the human curates. In terms of *creativity typologies,* combinational and exploratory creativity are strengthened through model steering and staging capabilities. In contrast, the threshold of transformational creativity still relies on human intuition and contextual awareness. From an applied and industrial perspective, three key insights emerge. First, prototyping and pre-visualization processes have become low-cost pre-production pipelines for independent creators using AI, accelerating *worldbuilding, concept design* and *trailer testing.* Second, community-based development practices create a dynamic feedback loop through comments, remixes and iterative sharing. This loop

enables micro A/B testing to refine narrative coherence and visual language. Third, capability profiling in the creative industries now extends beyond editing and cinematic literacy to include new competencies such as *prompt design, reference set construction* and *scene-anchor management.*

Ethical and policy recommendations complement this broader picture. *Consent and attribution transparency* must be standardized. Explicit consent and visible credit are required in the use of faces, voices, styles and distinctive artistic signatures. *Production logs* summarizing the model, dataset, prompt structure and points of human intervention strengthen both research ethics and community legitimacy. The *machine-readable labeling* of AI-assisted segments can facilitate traceability and reduce misattribution in circulation. For representations of living or recently deceased individuals, community guidelines should explicitly define ethical red lines and precautionary filters.

For future research, three directions stand out. First, interactional netnography, combined with semi-structured interviews, can uncover the hidden layers of negotiation between producers and fans. Second, comparative platform analyses, including TikTok, Instagram Reels and Discord, could map and contrast the rhythmic patterns of paratextual circulation. Third, quasi-experimental designs could measure how varying degrees of production transparency affect trust, appreciation, and participation. At the same time, interdisciplinary research could develop concrete policy scenarios for copyright, performance rights, and labor valuation within the evolving AI-cinema ecosystem.

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