

Digital Systems for Humans Graduate School

2025-2026 PhD Subject Proposition

Proposition de Sujet de Thèse 2025-2026

Provisional title: AI-Driven Work Transformations in Creative and Cultural Industries

Doctoral School: Doctoral School in Law, Political Science, Economics and Management (ED DESPEG)

Thesis supervisors: Lise Arena and Sophia Galière

Host laboratory: GREDEG

Subject description:

Ph.D. thesis' main objective – The aim of this Ph.D. thesis is to explore how generative AI technologies are reshaping creative work in Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs). In particular, the Ph.D. project consists of investigating the conditions of a potential empowering integration of generative AI in creative work. To address this question, the project adopts a multi-level perspective—micro (individual perceptions and practices), meso (organizational processes and managerial roles), and macro (sectoral skill transformations and employability). The objective is to produce a nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of how creative professionals perceive, appropriate, and shape AI technologies in their daily work, and under what conditions these technologies enhance rather than constrain autonomy, meaning, and creativity.

Background and research gap - Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs)—encompassing sectors such as audiovisual production, music, visual arts, video games, fashion, and publishing—have been at the forefront of digital transformation due to their intangible outputs and reliance on innovation. With a contribution of 2.3% to French GDP in 2019 and an average growth rate of 6.7% (EY, 2019), CCIs are also symbolic engines of identity, diversity, and soft power (Busson & Evrard, 2013; CCI Paris, 2022).

Today, the accelerated diffusion of generative AI models such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and Sora is triggering a new wave of digital disruption. AI is no longer limited to automating routine or mechanical tasks—it is encroaching on core functions of creative labor: ideation, design, execution, and curation. This raises profound questions about authorship, identity, job quality, and the value of human creativity. As AI systems increasingly co-produce cultural goods, creative professionals must question shifting boundaries between tool and creator, assistance and automation (Kulesz & Dutoit, 2020; Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024).

While speculative debates abound, there is still a lack of empirical studies on how generative AI is concretely integrated into creative workflows, how it is perceived and actualized by creative workers, and how organizational conditions shape its diffusion. Moreover, existing research tends to adopt either a macro-economic view (impact on employment, market concentration) or a technological perspective (AI capabilities), often neglecting the situated experiences of workers and the organizational microdynamics of AI appropriation. This Ph.D. project aims to respond to this gap by

proposing a sociomaterial and worker-centered investigation of AI’s integration into creative work—focusing on affordance actualization, job crafting, and the creation of empowering environments.

Theoretical framework – In line with its main objective and the identified research gap, the Ph.D. thesis will be grounded in the sociomateriality tradition (Orlikowski, 1992; Leonardi, 2013), which emphasizes the mutual constitution of technology and work practices. Rather than viewing AI as a deterministic force, the project adopts the notion of affordances—that is, the action possibilities a technology offers, which are shaped by its material properties and interpreted by users in context (Hutchby, 2001; Strong et al., 2014; Arena et al., 2024).

The interdisciplinary nature of the Ph.D. thesis invites the selected Ph.D. candidate to draw on research in organizational behavior, human resource management, and information systems, particularly concepts of technology acceptability vs. acceptance (Bobillier-Chaumont & Dubois, 2009), job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and empowering environments (Fernagu-Oudet, 2012; Galière, 2021 ; Bankins & Formosa, 2023). These approaches allow us to examine not only the material integration of AI but also its symbolic and psychological dimensions—how it is interpreted, adapted, or resisted. The macro-level dimension builds on the literature on creative competences and employability (Saint-Germes, 2021; Loufrani-Fedida & Saint-Germes, 2013), considering how AI transforms what is valued, taught, and recognized as “creative work” in a professional setting.

Methodology - The PhD research will adopt a longitudinal, multi-method qualitative design to investigate how generative AI is reshaping creative work in the CCI. The empirical approach will combine Q methodology, ethnographic case studies, and participatory formats to capture diverse representations, practices, and skill transformations associated with AI integration.

The study will begin by exploring how creative professionals perceive and evaluate generative AI, using Q methodology to identify shared and divergent attitudes across subsectors. It will then involve immersive fieldwork in multiple creative organizations, drawing on participant observation and semi-structured interviews to understand how AI is embedded into daily work routines. Particular attention will be paid to how workers adapt their tasks (job crafting) and how managers respond to these bottom-up adjustments. The final phase will focus on how generative AI reshapes professional roles and skill requirements, incorporating interviews with both professionals and amateur creators (“pro-ams”), and facilitating structured discussion spaces where stakeholders collectively reflect on evolving competences and training priorities.

Across all phases, qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic coding supported by NVivo software, following a process that alternates between empirical insights and theoretical refinement. This methodological triangulation will enable a comprehensive understanding of AI's impact on creative work from multiple perspectives.

Provisional Ph.D. work plan

Year 1	Literature review, development of theoretical framework; exploratory interviews; Q Methodology study; initial conference paper
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Year 2	Field access; ethnographic immersion; interviews and observations in case organizations; participation in international conferences
Year 3	Data analysis; complementary interviews; article submissions and final writing and submission of dissertation

References:

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