

# **Between Prompts and People, the Future(s) of Creative Agencies in the Netherlands**

A study on AI's potential impact on job roles, teams, and internal norms in Dutch creative agencies

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## BETWEEN PROMPTS AND PEOPLE, THE FUTURE(S) OF CREATIVE AGENCIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

### ABSTRACT

*The integration of artificial intelligence is prompting a sudden and fundamental shift and raising key questions about the value and organization of the creative industry. Nowhere is this transformation more evident than in creative agencies; organizations positioned at the intersection of creativity and innovation. The rapid pace of AI advancement offers enhanced productivity and creative augmentation. However, that rapidity challenges traditional job roles, team structures, collaboration, and normative practices within these agencies. This thesis explores how AI adoption is reshaping internal norms, job functions, team dynamics, and structures within creative agencies in the Netherlands, a country known for its globally influential design and culture. The central research question guiding this study is: How could AI adoption reshape normative institutional frameworks in the creative agencies in the Netherlands in the year 2035? Through scenario planning, a qualitative futures studies methodology, this study answered the explorative research question and constructed four potential scenarios for creative agencies to plan for the uncertain future and operate in a market that is rapidly evolving due to AI. Drawing from institutional theory, especially the lens of normative institutions, this study investigates both the micro-level changes inside agencies and macro-level pressures driving them. Thirteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted across agency founders, creative strategists, innovation consultants, and in-house creative professionals to gain a comprehensive understanding of the core problem and served as the primary source of data. Through the thematic analysis of the interviews, key stakeholders, uncertainties, and trends were identified regarding the future of AI adoption in creative agencies. Findings suggest that AI adoption is accelerating the transformation of job roles - from traditional design and writing profiles to hybrid roles requiring more technical knowledge and strategic oversight. Internal norms within the industry are evolving toward increased speed and data-informed creativity, while teams are becoming either more collaborative or fragmented based on the organizational strategy. While the contrasting nature of scenarios revealed that the agencies will have different normative functions, the core insight remained that the agencies' adaptability to constant change due to AI will be key in their survival in the Dutch creative market. Concerns around role displacement, unresolved ethical problems, and diminishing junior talent pipelines remain. In contrast, AI is a catalyst for institutional transformation within creative agencies. The study contributes to a more grounded understanding of how technology reshapes agency, workplace norms, and organizational resilience in the face of rapid innovation, particularly in the creative industries.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Artificial Intelligence, Creative Agencies, Job Roles, Normative Practices, Team Dynamics, Creative Industries, Scenario Planning*

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## PREFACE

For my favorite person, my brother, who I know would have been the loudest cheer in any room I walk into.

For my parents who let me chase horizons and roam the seven seas — thank you for believing in my choices.

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The inspiration for this research came from my long-standing fascination with creativity, technology, and media in general. When I moved to the Netherlands, the intersection of AI and creativity caught my attention—through conversations and lectures. Creative agencies, thus, intrigued me, for their work and for their people navigating constant change. This thesis gave me the opportunity to study a world where art and innovation intersect, and I'm deeply grateful for the experience.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into creative industries is transforming the nature of institutional structures that govern work processes and creative decision-making (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024b, p. 2; Dwivedi et al., 2019, p. 24). Creative industries, spanning film, music, architecture, fashion, gaming, design, and new media (European Commission, n.d., para. 3), are increasingly incorporating AI into their workflows, challenging the traditional human-centric nature of creative production, through task automation and content generation (Erikson, 2024, p. 3; Dwivedi et al., 2019, p. 3). This shift is particularly evident in creative agencies, which can serve as key intermediaries between clients, culture, and market (Cohen, 2019, pp. 485-486). AI adoption in creative agencies necessitates examining their normative transformations, as norms and rules are still being established (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024b, p. 6).

At the core of this shift are the normative institutions within creative agencies, the guiding structures of norms, rules, and values that have traditionally shaped creative work. As AI adoption is still emerging within these agencies, the normative structures that guide them, such as norms, internal rules, and shared values, are in a state of flux (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024b, p. 6). Fundamental concepts like creativity, value, and intellectual property are being actively re-evaluated and redefined (Inie et al., 2023, p. 2). Existing job roles are expected to get automated, with the future relationship in the industry being predicted as human-AI collaboration (Inie et al., 2023, pp. 1-3). The human role is evolving towards selection and modification of AI content, rather than solely creating material from scratch (Atkinson & Barker, 2023, p. 1055). These developments are not merely technical or operational but pose significant implications for the social dimensions of creative work and challenge the traditional notions of collaboration and discourse within the creative teams (Öztaş & Arda, 2025b, section 4.3). As human-AI collaboration gets more prominent, the criteria for what is creativity in relation to generative AI is also shifting (Inie et al., 2023, p. 1), while ethical dilemmas like copyright and privacy, remain unresolved (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024b, p. 6; Inie et al., 2023, p. 3). Creative agencies, thus, are not only navigating a rapidly developing technology, but also a redefinition of their foundational norms and identities.

This study, in collaboration with the Dutch Digital Design Foundation, a leading network in design and digital innovation in the Netherlands with over 30 partner agencies (Dutch Digital Design, n.d.), employs scenario planning to examine normative-institutional transformations by exploring shifts in job roles, team dynamics and structures, and internal norms in Dutch creative agencies by 2035. As the technology continues to evolve, more research is imperative to understand the specific impacts of AI on creative industries (Erikson, 2024, p. 2; Dwivedi et al., 2024, p. 12). By analyzing AI's role in reshaping creative labour and organizational culture, this study will incorporate expert

interviews with industry professionals to construct plausible future scenarios and identify strategic approaches for AI integration in creative agencies.

### **1.1. SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE**

There is limited research on the effects of AI due to the rapid pace of its development (Erikson, 2024, p. 2). Disruptions and transformations caused by AI in creative industries can significantly impact economies and societies, requiring further research (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024b, p. 1; Grynspan, 2022; p. 1). This research contributes to the academic discourse by offering a framework on how AI-driven transformations reshape creative agencies and institutional norms within the industry. AI integration is predicted to generate millions of advanced-skill jobs (Dwivedi et al., 2019, p. 3), with the emergence of new occupations promoting a long-run employment growth (Briggs & Kodnani, 2023, p. 1). For creative labor, two key challenges arise: AI replacing or substituting professional creators (Dornis, 2019, p. 42; Erikson, 2024, p. 2) or displacing human labor by supplementing tasks (Grimmelmann, 2015, p. 407). While AI's impact on creative labor is widely acknowledged (Erikson, 2024, p. 2), there is insufficient exploration of creative teams' adaptability to AI. This study, thus, offers practical insights to help creative agencies integrate AI by anticipating future scenarios and navigating uncertainties.

Therefore, to fill the research gap, the following questions have been derived from the theoretical framework section (see Chapter 2) and focus on the role of AI on the normative institutions within Dutch creative agencies:

**RQ:** How could AI adoption reshape normative institutional frameworks in the creative agencies in the Netherlands in the year 2035?

SQ1: How could AI adoption reshape job roles in the creative agencies in the Netherlands in the year 2035?

SQ2: How could AI adoption reshape internal norms within creative agencies in the Netherlands in the year 2035?

SQ3: How could AI adoption reshape creative team dynamics and structures within creative agencies in the Netherlands in the year 2035?

To fulfil the goal of scenario planning, the nature of the research question(s) is presumptive to answer the question of 'what can happen?', to enable the creation of scenarios around a phenomenon that is unknown, such as in times of rapid changes where the "mechanism" leading to the possible change are uncertain (Börjeson et al., 2006, p. 727).

## **1.2. SOCIETAL RELEVANCE**

AI adoption could automate up to 50% of tasks by 2055 (Manyika et al., 2017, p. 4), yet only 8% of firms integrate AI effectively due to organizational challenges (Fountaine et al., 2019, para. 2). There remains a critical gap in research as well as understanding on how AI will impact future job roles and employment (George et al. 2023, p.1). In the Dutch context, this is particularly urgent. Potential job losses in the Dutch creative industry, that employs over 300,000 professionals (Europa Regina, 2025, para. 8), might impact the society negatively and thus, reinforces the need to develop plausible strategies to educate individuals to ensure the displacement due to AI remains minimal (Dwivedi et al., 2019, p. 38). At the same time, the Netherlands—widely recognized for its design and digital innovation—holds a strategic opportunity to lead in ethical AI integration within creative industries, which contribute approximately €7 billion annually to the Dutch economy (Europa Regina, 2025, para. 8). Using scenario planning, this study explores AI-driven organizational shifts beyond mere ‘predictions’ (Schoemaker, 1995, pp. 27-30; Van der Heijden, 2005, p. 291), providing insights for industry stakeholders in the creative industries. As the Netherlands positions itself as one of the leaders in creative industries (Campaign Asia, 2017, para. 2), understanding how creative agencies will adapt to such shifts is also crucial for fostering innovative and inclusive workspaces.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

This section introduces institutional theory as a broad analytical lens to understand how norms, values, and legitimacy shape organizational behavior. It sets the foundation for examining how creative agencies respond to pressures from both their internal structures and the wider industry. Institutions can also be defined as “a set of norms, rules and values operating in a given environment that help generate a regularity of behavior among actors affected by that environment” (Lin, 2016, p. 23). The Institutional Theory is considered as a popular theory to explore a variety of topics in organizational domains and is related to how organizations or employees gain ‘legitimacy’ by blending with the rules and norms of the institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, pp. 340-343; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, pp. 154-155). The theory categorizes institutions into three main types, namely, regulative, normative, and cognitive (Scott, 2008, p. 70). While regulative institutions constrain and regularize organizational behavior through formal rules, laws, and regulations (Scott, 2008, p.52), normative institutions refer to shared values and norms within organizations that contribute to the goals and objectives of the organization and also outlines the appropriate means to apply them (Napoli, 2014, p. 342). Cultural-cognitive institutions can be defined by mechanisms through which shared beliefs and conceptions of reality within an institution (Napoli, 2014, p. 342). Costa Climent and Haftor (2021) explore the role of institutions and how technological changes lead to efficient institutional changes with respect to their business models (p. 357).

On the other hand, Napoli (2014, p. 341) argues that established traditional institutional norms may slow the adoption of new technologies and formulation of new values. Inertia plays an essential role for an institution to keep persisting (Matthews, 1986, p. 913), implying that even if institutions do not conform to the conditions of an environment, they may keep persisting nevertheless as the transaction costs of institutional changes outweigh the benefits of those changes (Faundez, 2016, p. 377; Matthews, 1986, p. 914). This is particularly relevant in contexts like AI adoption, where norms and rules are still being established. It also highlights the importance of legitimacy in organizational survival, arguing that organizations must align with societal expectations to gain and maintain legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 155). Institutional economics positions itself as an ideal framework since the theory assumes that institutions impact content and its flows and thus, it is highly relevant for understanding the transformative role of AI on creative agencies, as institutions must evolve to adapt the rapid advancements in automation and machine learning. In the context of this study, creative agencies would be studied on the basis of normative institutions. Before the elaboration on the reasoning, let’s first dive into the elements of normative institutions.

### 2.1.1. Normative Institutions

This section zooms into the normative pillar of institutional theory, focusing on how shared organizational values and expectations regulate behavior. It introduces the normative lens that underpins the study's analysis of internal organizational culture, dynamic, and roles within creative agencies. As established before, normative institutions refer to shared values and norms within organizations that contribute to the goals and objectives of the organization and also outlines the appropriate means to apply them (Napoli, 2014, p. 342). For the development of creative companies and their consequent output, the workforce has needs outside of networking, namely independence, individual culture, and autonomy that are part of normative institutions (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 456). A "prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension" is introduced into the social life of institutions due to the compliance of normative rules (Scott, 2001, p. 37). This implies that creative agencies, through their practices and output, operate within and contribute to shaping what is considered acceptable and desirable within the creative field. Normative institutions provide the framework for how work is conducted within an organization, since they provide structure and order by aligning an individual's actions and expectations and help coordinate actions between different actors within a society (Friel, 2016, p. 213-214; Powell, 1983, p. 153). Also referred to as norms and values that shape and structure choices, they emphasize how tasks should be completed, define legitimate ways to conduct them, help formulate workflows, and determine what constitutes acceptable and "legitimate" practices (Friel, 2016, pp. 213-214; MacCormick, 1998, p. 329). Legitimacy can be defined as a status attached to social actors, with a legitimate organization referring to one whose "values and actions are consistent with that social actor's values and expectations for action" (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 177).

There seems to be a relationship between workflow and normative institutions, wherein the work done impacts how people perceive acceptable manners of working, and these perceptions then tend to become a norm (MacCormick, 1998, pp. 305-309). Commonly, norms are used to describe the expected behavior within open societies since they need different mechanisms to defend and recommend 'right' and 'wrong' behaviors, in order to inspire agents to join them (Dignum et al., 2005b, section 1). Scott (2008, p. 15) broadens the normative pillar by relating norms, i.e., how things are to be done, with values, i.e., what is considered to be proper or the preferred way to do a deed. Both of these elements serve as ground rules and institutions tend to believe that they will be considered as morally and socially unacceptable if they do not conform to them, thereby making it a social obligation and a necessity of the firm to follow the rules (March & Olsen, 2005, pp. 948-961; Lin, 2016, p. 24). This idea is reinforced by Björkman, Fey, & Park (2007) who state that 'appropriate' organizational patterns are disseminated by professional organizations,

followed by consequent adoption by other organizations (p. 431). This study explores the impact of AI on organizational structures in Dutch creative agencies through the level of the employer and the level of industry itself. To understand how organizational norms in Dutch creative agencies evolve, it is crucial to consider the interconnectedness of employer, organizational, and industry-level dynamics. The concept of normative network orientation, introduced by Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2011), highlights how practitioners shift the normative focus of their organizational environment by strategically redefining whose norms and expectations matter most in a given context (p. 893). In the case of creative agencies, these 'preferred' audiences can be creative leads or clients. Rather than appealing to broad, field-level authorities, this concept helps justify emergent practices, while backgrounding others. In creative agencies, normative reorientation shows how employer-level changes—like AI roles, hybrid teams, and shifting norms—both reflect and shape industry standards. Practices such as data-driven creativity gain legitimacy by preferring key stakeholders (e.g. clients demanding efficiency). By focusing on certain referent audiences, teams legitimize new norms in real time (Smets et al., 2012, pp. 893-894). This shows how employer, organizational, and industry levels are deeply connected. They evolve together rather than in isolation.

This understanding of normative institutions helps conceptualize creative agencies not just as businesses, but as environments governed by social obligations and expectations. With this said, this theoretical framing helps clarify how AI influences the agency of creative professionals and teams.

## **2.2. CREATIVE AGENCIES**

This section defines the characteristics of creative agencies and introduces the concept of AI into the creative landscape. It links institutional theory to the real-world context of the study and. It brings together prior theoretical and contextual insights to show how creative agencies are embedded in broader normative structures. It transitions from general theory to a sector-specific application, highlighting the bidirectional influence between agencies and industry norms and provides the foundation for discussing job roles, norms, and team structures. This industry-level view complements the earlier focus on internal organizational norms. Together, they show how creative agencies both respond to and help create normative pressures within their field, justifying the dual-level focus of this framework.

### **2.2.1. AI and Agency**

Russel and Norvig (2019, Chapter 1) describe artificial intelligence (AI) as systems that mimic cognitive functions that are related to human functions such as learning, speech, and problem-

solving. It can also be defined as the technology that enables machines to imitate intelligence intrinsic in humans (Sheikh et al., 2023, p. 15). The rapid advancements in AI has largely been a result of the introduction of Generative AI, also known as GenAI (Sengar et al., 2024, section 1). Generative artificial intelligence (AI) refers to algorithms that can be utilized for the creation of new content, including images, text, audio, and videos (McKinsey & Company, 2024, para. 2-3). The algorithm consists of various types and can be trained for a specific task or a type of media generation (Sengar et al., 2024, section 2). Text, considered to be the most advanced domains, is the stone of various GenAI models (Nvidia, n.d.). One such language-based generative AI model, ChatGPT, has had an impact on how journalists and copywriters perceive their job roles, with the former emphasizing human oversight and the latter more open to integrating AI to their tasks (Vicsek et al., 2024, section 5).

Anderson & Rainie (2023, para. 9-10) argue that digital technology tools, like AI, will increasingly become an essential part of the decision-making process of individuals. The study comprised of expert interviews that suggested that the future of these tools will have both negative and positive consequences for human agency. It is important to conceptualize an individual's creative agency to understand the agency of creative agencies. As a concept, agency is a capacity or quality that stems from resources, rights, and obligations connected to the roles and positions that social actors hold, which are engineered by institutions (Abdelnour et al., 2017, p. 1777). Constrained and enabled by institutions, agency emerges from the interaction among various actors within an individual setting (Abdelnour et al., 2017, p. 1778). It involves the capacity of individuals or communities to exert influence, make choices, and take stances regarding their work and professional identities (Eteläpelto et al., 2013b, p. 61). Professional agency, especially, is intertwined with the work-related identities of the subjects, consisting of professional and ethical commitments, ideals, motivations, and goals (Eteläpelto et al., 2013b, p. 62).

Watkins and Barak-Medina (2024, p. 4) note that AI systems significantly can influence human creative agency, but the impact depends on whether AI is perceived as a competitor or a complementary tool. If the perception leans more towards the former, it may diminish creative agency on an individual or an employee level, whereas viewing it as a complementary tool would enhance it. The existence of AI systems alone can influence a person's motivation, sense of ownership, responsibility, and accountability to utilize their human creative agency (Watkins & Barak-Medina, 2024, pp. 3-5). An individual's capacity to act or (creative) agency is shaped by institutional factors and enabled and constrained by a loose combination of different institutions they are involved with (Kristiansen, 2014, p. 3).

Lynch and West (2017, p. 68) describe creativity of agencies as a product of team efforts wherein teams interact for knowledge, skills, and expertise sharing in order to produce creative campaigns. The research further argues that the resources required to achieve creative work are more important than the perceived creativity of their campaigns (p. 69). Valuable, rare, and inimitable resources enhance organizational performance (Barney, 1991, pp. 101-103; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Ensor, Cottam, & Band (2000) state that in advertising agencies, particularly, such resources include the knowledge and expertise of multidisciplinary teams (pp. 150-151). While these teams draw on diverse skill sets, their formation is often fluid or even chaotic (p. 151). Agencies rely on both project oversight and team adaptability to meet client needs. Despite this, research on advertising creativity has mostly centered on individuals (e.g., copywriters), overlooking that creativity often emerges at the team and agency level (Woodman et al., 1993, p. 302).

In a report from 2024, 64% of creative agencies believe that GenAI will boost their productivity levels over the next 12 months (Balara, 2024, para. 8). This suggests that the integration of AI has had a positive impact on creative agencies strictly from an employer and industry point of view, in contrast to the potential negative impact on individual agency discussed before. Forrester's 2024 report, specific to the USA, stated that more than three-quarters of professionals from the American creative agencies stated that AI is a "disruption" for their agencies, and that increased productivity is the key value derived from AI integration into creative processes (Devo, 2024, para. 4). With this said, it is apparent that the integration of AI will reshape traditional work practices and trigger cultural shifts within organizations (Murire, 2024, pp. 1-2) and the current trends within creative industries hint the same for creative agencies as well.

By outlining the landscape in which creative agencies operate, this section situates the analysis in a rapidly evolving field. It sets the stage for a closer examination of how normative institutions interact with technologies like AI and for exploring specific manifestations of change in job roles and team structures.

### **2.3. CREATIVE AGENCIES THROUGH THE LENS OF NORMATIVE INSTITUTIONS**

As mentioned before, creative agencies are embedded within and actively participate in shaping the shared norms, values, and expectations that guide behaviors, practices, and what is considered legitimate within the creative industries and broader societal context. They function in a society that comes with its own social norms and values, which can encourage or deter creative work (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 466). Additionally, prevailing practices within the creative industries can become 'sanctioned by social convention' due to a habitual course, and thus, become what is considered as 'right and proper' (Peacock, 2010, section 1). Therefore, it can be understood that

creative agencies contribute to the normative standards within the field, by adhering to or deviating from these set ways of working and thinking, consequently taking part in the evolution of these standards within the industry.

Florida (2002, Chapter 14) differentiates creative workforce from traditional workforce. The former is highly impacted by normative institutions and tends to group where normative institutions provide large diversity of people, high life quality, and the opportunity to have more independence in terms of careers (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 456; Florida, 2002, Chapter 14). The workforce is considered as one of the most influential components within the creative industry and firms within the industries are also considered as 'unique' since they provide creative services to other firms (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 456; Moultrie and Young, 2009, p. 299) and their values may influence the agency culture. For instance, a workplace with an individualistic approach may encourage employees to push boundaries, while a more collectivist culture may lead to a more collaborative environment (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 461). Social engagement within organizations is an important element in normative institutions, which may also influence a strategic decision in an organization (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 454). Thus, in the context of the study, this suggests that creative agencies' engagement with society and their own social values can impact their internal decisions, demonstrating how new internal norms and role expectations reverberate through organizational structures.

### **2.3.1. Internal Norms Within Creative Agencies**

Narrowing the focus to internal organizational norms, this section illustrates how the adoption of AI is reshaping workflows, values, and expectations within creative agencies. It clarifies how change happens from within. Normative institutions, including internal organizational norms, provide stability to an agency through a stable pattern of behavior. However, these norms can and do change due to newer ideas and changing environments (Diogo et al., 2015, p. 123) Additionally, societal culture, encompassing values and social norms, permeates the corporate environment, with corporate culture guiding employee behavior and interactions (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2015, pp. 397-399; Guiso et al., 2015, p. 338).

As AI is integrated, changes in internal norms could reflect broader societal shifts. Generative AI, particularly ChatGPT, has had an impact on how journalists and copywriters perceive their job roles, with the former emphasizing human oversight and the latter more open to integrating AI to their tasks (Vicsek et al., 2024, section 5). This shift signifies changing perceptions of internal norms around the role of AI, especially in the fields of journalism and copywriting. For advertising agencies, AI has prompted a re-evaluation and streamlining of traditional workflows, with an anticipation of a simplified workflow within creative strategy and production due to the

integration of AI tools (Lin, 2024, pp. 108-109). Furthermore, AI's ability to analyze vast data sets and generate insights has fostered a more data-driven approach to creativity within agencies as the technology being used to target audiences and identify effective messaging and visual elements, thereby informing creative decisions (Chan-Olmsted, 2019, p. 194, Campbell et al., 2022, pp. 246-247). This represents a shift from purely intuition-based creative approach in agencies to one highly augmented by data capabilities.

Various literature highlights the key point of increased productivity through AI adoption in the creative industries. That is a significant internal change since AI has been repeatedly associated with enhanced efficiency and productivity through task automation and lower production times as agencies seek to maximise their output and resource utilization in reduced labor costs (Haleem et al., 2022, pp. 141-143). By automating routine tasks, advertising teams have started focusing more time and resources to enhancing client relationships by developing more well-informed AI-driven client proposals and the focus is internally shifting towards activities that require unique human skills, such as understanding client needs and building stronger relationships (Chan-Olmsted, 2019, pp. 209-210) In relation to the 'rapid' output initiated by AI, Erickson (2024) adds that firms are increasingly adopting an experimental and iterative approach to their work as they integrate the technological tool and that it allows creative producers to explore new forms of creative expressions rapidly, forgoing the traditional methods of ideation (p. 3). This suggests that there is a willingness to test and learn from AI tools, adapting internal processes within the agencies wherever necessary.

In essence, AI is driving a normative shift within agencies, with the practices turning more data-informed, technologically integrated, and efficiency-focused. The internal norm is becoming one of adaptation, experimentation, and collaboration with AI as a key tool in the creative process. When the shared practices within an agency change, it directly impacts the social actors associated with the said practices, leading to an emergency of new roles and the outflow of the traditional ones (Abdelnour et al., 2017, p. 1786).

### **2.3.2. Job Roles**

This section analyzes how AI transforms the structure, function, and meaning of job roles within creative agencies. Based on the idea of MacCormick (1998), job roles within a creative agency can be defined by a set of responsibilities, powers, and expectations and these roles act as institutional frameworks that tend to guide individual behavior (p. 323). When an "agent" applies and is accepted for a job role, they enter into social contracts, committing to the role's goals and constraints (Dignum et al., 2005, section 1). Job roles are structured in a hierarchy and the distribution of objectives differ across roles and the ranking in the hierarchy. Job roles can also be

looked at in a sense of “groups”, wherein each group collectively refers to a cluster of roles, such as an advertising team comprising of copywriters, account managers, and graphic designers, with the group’s norms needing to align with the norms of the roles within the group (Dignum et al., 2005, section 4.2). As AI is integrated into these roles, the traditional distribution of responsibilities could change and newer roles might develop in the creative industries that complement human output (Erikson, 2024, p. 3).

Generative AI can potentially automate 26% of tasks in a multitude of sectors, including arts, design, entertainment, media, and sports (Briggs & Kodnani, 2023, p. 7), with a general consensus that AI will significantly impact creative work (Erikson, 2024, p. 2). A study conducted by Huang & Rust in 2021 mentioned that AI can and is automating many repetitive and technical tasks in advertising agencies, including but not limited to, generation of ad copies, optimizing ad placements, speech recognition, and data processing (pp. 219-220). Since then, in addition to content and image generation, AI is being used to personalize advertising strategies, manage social media via automated content scheduling, posting, and performance tracking, and even in media buying processes (Forbes Agency Council, 2024, para. 9-15). A notable decline in transaction volumes for text-based freelance jobs has also been observed on a digital labor platform, attributing this trend to ChatGPT’s capacity to undertake the simpler creative tasks (Liu et al., 2023, p. 33).

The complete elimination of creative jobs is debated extensively in existing literature, but the consensus is that traditional roles will undergo a significant transformation rather than complete elimination (Erikson, 2024, p. 2). There seems to be a growing shift in responsibilities associated with job roles within the creative industries and a demand to develop adaptability and a readiness to learn new AI technologies (Öztaş & Arda, 2025b, section 4.3). For professionals, this necessitates acquiring computational expertise along with traditional skills (Erikson, 2024, p. 6), with a growing recognition that professionals need to become adept at critical reviewing and prompting of AI (Vicsek et al., 2024, p. 9). For instance, the designer role may evolve into a curator role, focusing on the selection and integration of AI-produced content (Öztaş & Arda, 2025b, section 4.3).

Due to the increasing proficiency of AI systems, Watkins & Barak-Medina (2024) contend that they inevitably influence human creative agency in immediate and extended ways (p. 7). Overall, the responsibilities within creative job roles are shifting towards strategically guiding and curating AI’s output, ensuring it aligns with creative vision and goals (Öztaş & Arda, 2025b, section 4), which further signals towards an evolution in how these social actors in job roles together will change in how teams function and collaboration.

Changing job roles illustrate how internal norms are operationalized in everyday work (Koelble, 1995, pp. 232-233). These transformations also create ripple effects in the composition of teams and coordination of work, as explored in the next section.

### **2.3.3. Team Structures and Dynamics**

Team efforts are an invaluable resource in creative agencies, with the ability to form and reform teams in order to meet client demands becoming vital assets of agency management (Lynch & West, 2017, p. 72). Significant changes in the responsibilities associated with job roles inevitably will lead to an impact on the respective team and collaborative dynamics. Groups in an organization, including those formed by human and non-human agents (i.e., “synthetic groups”) are characterized by stability, though efficiency may vary in changing environments (Demir et al., 2019, section 5).

Existing research notes that teams that integrate generative AI into their work tasks exhibit a high overall performance. AI-assisted teams with more internal resources, hold an advantage to teams that use single AI-units or are human-involved completely (Lebovitz et al., 2022, pp. 14-15; Li et al. 2024, p. 7). It is increasingly being involved in team interactions and being seen as a collaborative team member rather than a tool, with AI as a teammate being linked to the highest job meaningfulness (Sadeghian et al., 2024, p. 1). Existing literature view working with AI as a co-creation process, and interestingly, have compared the collaboration with ‘improvisational jazz’ where participants feed off each other’s cues in a ‘creative feedback loop’ (Lim, 2019, p. 832; Erikson, 2024, p. 4). However, integration of AI systems as a ‘teammate’ has had detrimental effects on the coordination and communication amongst human members, which are crucial for the overall performance of a team and leads to a less effective interaction or a working dynamic (Schmutz et al., 2024, p. 1). In addition to the structure of the team, AI integration can shift team dynamics, reducing the dominance of high-status employees or making AI seem more authoritative than humans, thereby reshaping power structures within teams (Reitz & Higgins, 2024, para. 25-26). Oham & Ejike (2024, pp. 188-190) elaborate on the potential new areas of conflict regarding AI’s role and contributions, be it conflicts over creative direction or the division of labor, that consequently will impact the creative team’s ability to produce innovative output. Furthermore, since the responsibilities with respect to jobs, and thereby, teams, are evolving, the lack of role clarity can be considered as a challenge in the creative industries, wherein roles are often fluid and team members tend to have overlapping responsibilities. This further increases the risk of accountability issues, which can lead to project derailment and frustration among team members (Oham & Ejike, 2024, p. 189).

Within teams, specific internal norms emerge that can shape how team members interact and perform. Team norms can be promoted through team accountability and team standards, as

well as influenced by the density of the teams (Manata, 2019, pp. 311-313). Sasser and Koslow (2012, p. 8) note that, within advertising agencies, individual attributes like passion, expertise, and knowledge affect management support and organizational politics. They further observe that agency organizational dynamics tend to change when political gamesmanship occurs between different roles within the agency, such as creatives and account executives.

AI adoption may alter these norms and has the potential to change team dynamics and structures. If AI is perceived as competing and highly effective in performing the same creative functions as humans, it could negatively impact human creative agency (Watkins & Barak-Medina, 2024, pp. 7-8). In addition to this, AI-integrated creative teams have been associated with the acceleration of a decline of workplace sociality, due to increasing sufficiency of AI in completion of tasks or assuming leadership roles in creative projects which reduces the need for interpersonal interactions (Öztaş & Arda, 2025b, section 4.3). From this observation, it seems that team norms within the creative industries might shift, altering collaboration dynamics and potentially diminishing the traditional notions of collaboration and discourse within the creative teams. Therefore, AI integration is not only changing individual tasks but also redefining how teams function as cohesive units. These evolving dynamics demonstrate how new internal norms and expectations through organizational structures. All in all, the concepts and current developments within the creative sector described above reinforce the need to examine creative agencies in the Netherlands, a global hub for design and creativity, through the lens of normative institutions. This approach provides a deeper understanding of how AI might evolve, or reshape, the creative workforce and work environments, in terms of shared practices, jobs, and teams.

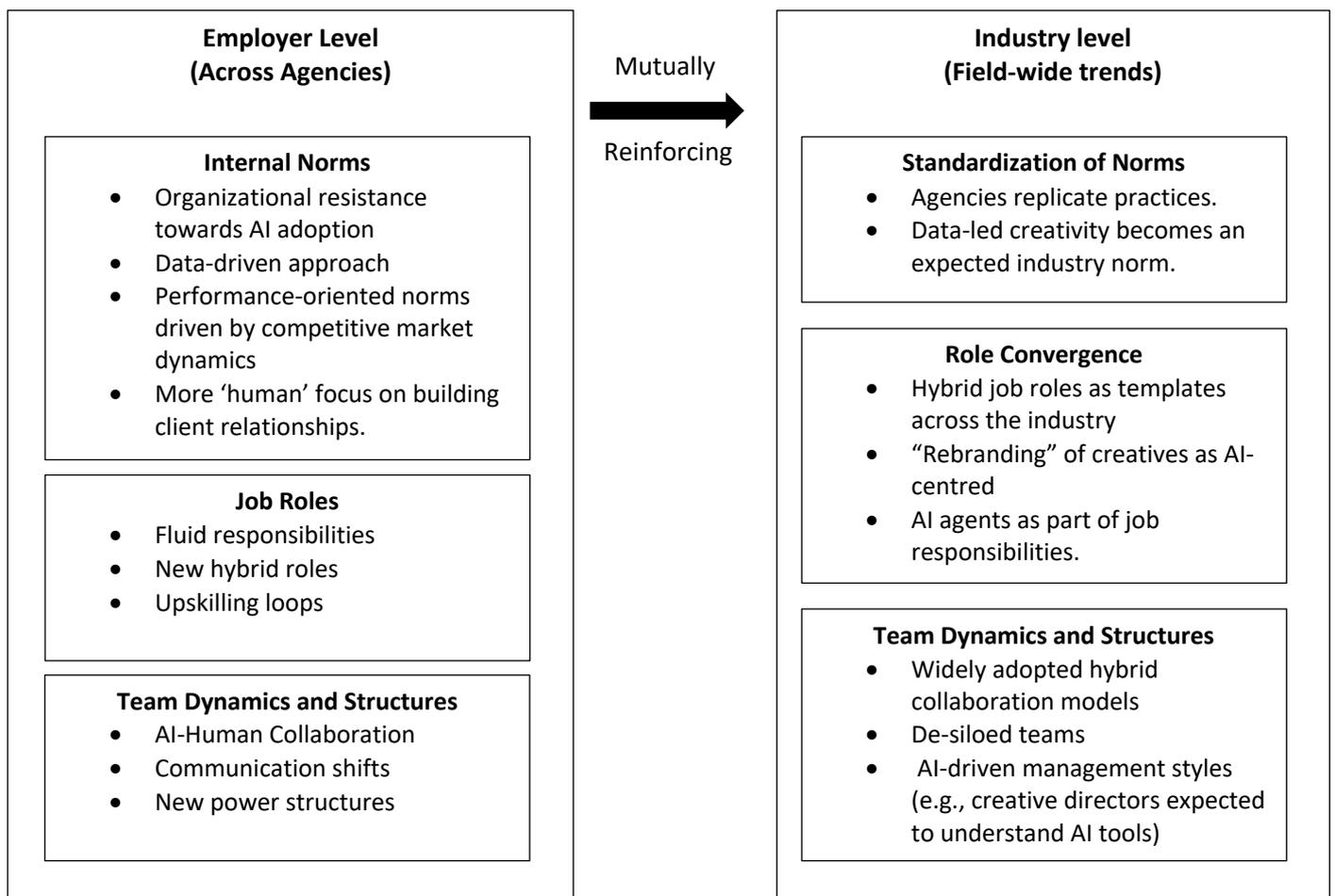
The next and final section synthesizes the employer-level and industry-level insights to propose a conceptual model. It explains how normative shifts emerge through processes of job roles, teams, and internal norms and solidify into industry standards. Once a set of organizations emerge as a field, rational actors tend to make their organizations similar as they try to change them, leading to a homogenous structure, culture, and output (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, pp. 147-149). This process is captured by institutional isomorphism, where organizations resemble each other due to socio-cultural pressures, which provide a source of legitimacy (p. 149). In the context of this study, changes in one agency's internal logic and practices can diffuse across the sector, reinforcing industry-wide transformations.

## **2.4. CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

This conceptual model (see Figure 1) captures how norms around job roles, team dynamics, and internal organizational culture are shaped within creative agencies in the Netherlands. It

distinguishes between influences at the employer level and the industry level, while recognizing that these levels are deeply interwoven and mutually reinforcing. At the employer level, agencies respond in real time to technological shifts, particularly AI, by reconfiguring roles, expectations, and collaborative practices. For instance, the emergence of fluid job profiles and accelerated upskilling loops reflect internal strategies to maintain creative competitiveness. At the industry level, broader patterns emerge across agencies: standardization of AI-human collaboration, a shift toward data-driven ideation, and sector-wide role transformations. These patterns are shaped by shared norms, client demands, and reputational competition, creating a field-wide logic of practice. Crucially, these levels are not distinct. Instead, they operate along a continuum, where agency-specific practices feed into, and are influenced by, wider industry trends. For example, an individual agency’s internal norm of data-driven approach to ideation of campaigns may reflect and reinforce a broader cultural expectation within the creative sector. Likewise, cross-functional teamwork shaped within one firm may inspire similar models across others.

**Figure 1.**



A conceptual model of organizational and industry-level norm changes in Dutch creative agencies.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter will discuss the chosen method for the research. Starting with the research design, the chapter will outline the rationale, sampling method, a sample description and the operationalization.

#### **3.1. SCENARIO PLANNING**

##### **3.1.1. Rationale**

The thesis employs the qualitative method of scenario planning since the main research question investigates how AI adoption could reshape normative institutional workflows within creative agencies by 2035 – a futures-oriented inquiry that requires an in-depth exploration of expert perspectives from the Dutch creative industries. Considering this study does not focus on answering any hypothesis nor aims at finding results that may be generalized for an entire population, qualitative method was chosen as a better approach for this research. Qualitative research allows for the interpretation of data to highlight hidden meanings or knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 105). As Yin (2011, p. 8) notes, it captures the meanings people attach to real-life events, rather than reflecting the researchers' meanings and preconceptions. Dworkin (2012, p. 1319) adds that qualitative methods are often centered on “how” and “why” of a particular issue or process. Thus, due to the exploratory nature of this study, scenario planning is adopted as a key method to answer the main research question.

Scenario planning is especially useful in contexts of uncertainty and rapid change, as it facilitates the development of plausible future scenarios based on critical uncertainties and key drivers (Schoemaker, 1995, pp. 26-27; Van der Heijden, 2005, p. 291). It helps organizations anticipate multiple possible futures, fostering agility by allowing leaders to adapt strategies to rapidly changing environments (Chermack, 2011, pp. 15-16). The method is based on the idea that while the future remains uncertain and open, it is not uncontrollable (Elsawah et al., 2020, p. 1). It is a crucial method for developing long-term strategies in dynamic markets, effectively addressing uncertainty (Harty et al., 2007, p.1; Schoemaker, 1995, pp. 26-27). As a long-term strategic tool, scenario planning is well-suited to dynamic sectors like the Dutch creative industries, where AI adoption introduces heightened uncertainty (Harty et al., 2007, p. 1; Erikson, 2024, p. 2). Given the literature's emphasis on more research into AI's impact in the media industries due to the rapid pace of its development (Erikson, 2024, p. 2), scenario planning positions itself as a suitable methodology for exploring such complex and highly uncertain topics (Peterson et al., 2003, p. 360).

##### **3.1.2. Research Design**

Scenario planning, as discussed before, is a valuable and suitable method for the exploration of complex and uncertain circumstances in the future (Peterson et al., 2003, p. 360). The final output of this method, termed as “scenarios”, can be understood as narratives from the future that explore how certain phenomenon might develop based on the intensity or weakness of specific trends (Stojanovic et al., 2014, p. 83). By constructing scenarios, the research can identify potential normative institutional transformations and help in navigating AI adoption in creative agencies. The study will apply the well-established scenario planning steps formulated by Schoemaker (1995, pp. 28-30), including (a) defining the scope, (b) identifying relevant stakeholders, (c) identifying key trends and uncertainties, (d) developing preliminary scenarios, and (e) developing final scenarios.

The scope of this study, i.e., step (a), is defined through a review of the literature and construction of a theoretical framework grounded in Institutional Theory, with a focus on normative institutions and the impact of AI in creative organizations. The study is confined to creative agencies operating within the Netherlands, a leading region in digital design (Campaign Asia, 2017, para. 2). The timeframe for the study is set until 2035, as per Sivan’s (2016, p. 10) observation that a significant technological change occurs every 10-20 years. In terms of product dimension, as this study focuses on creative agencies, all core activities of creative agencies will be considered, while the geographic scope is limited to the Netherlands.

The nature of the study relates to the normative institutions of creative agencies and the best method to approach the phenomenon would be through the qualitative analysis of expert interviews. Due to the multifaceted nature of the topic, essential answers from the experts necessitate a strategic and structured approach, follow-up questions, and thorough discussions. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 15), with regards to the qualitative interviews specifically, observe that through these interviews, the research can grasp and reconstruct specific experiences and processes in which they not participate themselves. Therefore, to complete steps (b) and (c), a thematic analysis of expert interviews was conducted, following Schoemaker (1995, p. 28)’s definition that states that the planning may make use of the participation of diverse people, including academics, key suppliers, and/or consultants. In his work, Schoemaker (1995, p. 28) discusses the determination of stakeholders by exploring “who will be affected by the issues?”, “who has an interest in them”, and/or “who could influence them?”. The repetitive mention of particular groups of individuals provided the basis of ‘who’ is included as a stakeholder in this research.

In terms of the identification of key trends and uncertainties, Schoemaker (1995, p. 28) elaborated on the necessity of considering contemporary phenomenon concerning the technological, social, political, or regulatory aspects. The interview guide included these elements (see Appendix A) for a thorough identification. For the exploration of uncertainties, the literature

highlights that an uncertainty can be determined by considering “What events, whose outcomes are uncertain, will significantly affect the issues you are concerned with?” (Schoemaker, 1995, p. 28). The transition from interview themes to identification of key trends and uncertainties was guided by a structured thematic analysis comprising open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding generated a wide array of insights, which were grouped under broader thematic categories into via axial coding. These categories, such as shifting client demands and unfeasible business models, were mapped onto Schoemaker (1995, p. 28)’s scenario planning elements of key trends and uncertainties. Selective coding was used to identify cross-cutting themes with the highest potential to influence futures, paying attention to tensions and contradictions across expert accounts. The final uncertainties—AI’s creative potential and agencies’ strategic adaptability—used in the scenario matrix were chosen through an iterative process based on their frequency across expert insights and their potential to drive fundamental change. These were not surface-level trends, but deeply contested and value-laden domains that experts attached crucial importance to.

To complete step (d), the key uncertainties that emerged from the thematic analysis were used to create preliminary scenarios. A matrix was developed by examining “plausible polar extremes of possible future outcomes of the uncertainties” (Burt et al., 2006, p. 66). The most extreme forms of the uncertainties were defined within the “limits of possibility” to ensure the scenario remained plausible and credible (Burt et al., 2006, p. 66). Dividing the uncertainties in this manner assisted in the creation of starkly different “extreme worlds”, with each scenario distinct from one another (Schoemaker, 1995, p. 29). Each preliminary scenario was named and a short description of the ‘occurrences’ was added in the scenario. An additional literature review was conducted to further refine each scenario and based on the preliminary scenarios, literature review, and results from the thematic analysis, step (e), i.e., developing final scenarios, was completed. Each scenario was refined through iterative comparison with the data and theoretical literature. The back-and-forth process between data, literature, and emerging narratives helped maintain both empirical grounding and exploratory breadth. Each scenario was embedded in the year 2035 and referred to the three main elements of this study (job roles, team dynamics and structures, internal norms). A combination of uncertainties was embedded in each scenario to allow the development of stable or consistent narratives to capture the potential advancements or impact of AI on Dutch creative agencies, and industry, as a whole.

It is to be noted that the steps of the scenario planning method are referred to as ‘Stage 1’, ‘Stage 2’, and so on, in the results section. This has been done to maintain clarity and a consistent flow in the chapter. Furthermore, the identification of key uncertainties and trends is regarded as one step (Stage 3) in the scenario planning method—referred to as step (b) and (c) here—and thus,

in the following chapter, these are categorized as ‘Stage 3’ and sub-divided into ‘Stage 3 (a)’ and ‘Stage 3 (b)’ respectively.

### **3.1.3. Reliability and validity of the method**

The standardized and acknowledged stages of scenario planning method formulated by Schoemaker (1992) were adopted to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. Expert interviews were the primary source of data for the development of scenarios since experts function as “informants” who provide knowledge about the actual objects getting investigated in research (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 49). To maintain the quality of the scenarios, all participants in the research were qualified experts with diverse backgrounds in the creative industries and had a deep understanding of their specific field, with each of those being highly relevant to the study. Each input, thereby, served as a “legitimate input to forecasts” (Börjeson et al., 2006, p. 731). Each interview was undertaken based on a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the theoretical framework, consisting of a standard set of questions and leaving room for follow-up questions. Thematic analysis for the identification of key stakeholders, trends, and uncertainties would further ensure the reliability of the study, with the approach allowing the investigation of repeated patterns in the testimonies of various experts. Lastly, since it is difficult to explore “surprises” in the future (Elsawah et al., 2020, p. 9), the development of four contrasting scenarios provides an outline of potential futures of the normative transformations in creative industries due to AI, without providing concrete conclusions. The study followed the guidelines noted by Schoemaker (1995, p.38) that note the creation of divergent scenarios based on “extreme worlds” to imagine different pathways for the potential future and challenged “tunnel vision”.

## **3.2. EXPERT INTERVIEWS**

### **3.2.1. Rationale**

Expert interviews were used as the source of data for developing the scenarios. A person can be considered as an expert if they have a “privileged access to information” about groups or processes (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019, p. 181) or is “at home in a system of relevances” and thus, familiar with problems that are established within their field (Schutz, 1964a, p. 130). A total of thirteen experts were recruited via a non-probability purposive sampling method and semi-structured exploratory experts’ interviews will be conducted. An exploratory expert interview is considered as a widely acknowledged method in the future studies landscape (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019, p. 185), with semi-structured interviews playing an essential part in the scenario-planning process (Ratcliffe, 2002, p. 21). A semi-structured can be described as a “halfway house”

wherein the interview has a general framework, a standard set of questions, and a pre-set procedure, but the interviewer has the freedom to modify the order of questions and format as per their judgement (Ratcliffe, 2002, p. 21). Experts have the ability to provide a “specific knowledge” (Van Audenhove, 2007, p. 5) and are perceived as “crystallization points for practical insider knowledge” (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 2). To achieve a “depth” of understanding of that knowledge, the interview design can be flexible and the interviewer should be prepared to adapt their questionnaire (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35). Thus, as Ratcliffe (2002) suggested expert interviews can be an essential source of data for theorizing about potential futures, by illustrating an evidence-driven process. Particularly in future studies, expert interviews are an established method of data collection and are positioned as an invaluable component of foresight methods (pp. 29-30).

### **3.2.2. Sampling criteria and technique**

It was critical to recruit relevant experts since the approach of the data collection has a significant impact on the quality of the research (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 118). Since the study focuses on the transformations in creative agencies, the professional experience in the fields of creative industries was considered a criterion to recruit the experts. The selected experts were professionals working in copywriting, branding, advertising, customer experience (CX), user experience (UX), and graphic design, creative direction, and innovation consultancy to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Moreover, the nature of employment of the expert was also kept diverse to ensure a broad range of point of views. While most of the experts are associated with Dutch creative agencies directly, two senior members of in-house teams of established organizations were also included to deepen the understanding of the internal dynamics within the creative industry in the Netherlands. Since the interview data will be the primary base of the scenario planning process, recruiting relevant experts with diverse backgrounds was crucial to maintain the reliability of the study and served as a “legitimate input to forecasts” (Börjeson et al., 2006, p. 731). Due to the newer character of the topic, i.e., integration of AI into creative agencies, the years of experience were not considered an attesting factor during the expert recruitment. Through non-probability purposive sampling, thirteen experts were recruited by following the methodological guidelines provided by Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication (ESHCC). Since this study is in collaboration with Dutch Digital Design, a networking foundation of Dutch creative agencies, the experts were sourced through their expansive network and by utilizing the professional social media platform, LinkedIn. In the results section, each expert has been given pseudonyms (for e.g., Expert A, Expert B, etc.) to maintain confidentiality. However, the list of the experts, along with

the institution or organization they are currently working or used to work at, their position and years of experience, are reported in the following table.

**Table 1.**  
*Expert list.*

Name and Organization	Description
<p>Bert Hagendoorn (Dutch Digital Design &amp; Agency Engines)</p>	<p>Founder and board member of Dutch Digital Design, a leading community advancing the best agencies in Dutch digital creativity and co-founder of Agency Engines, a business consulting firm for creative agencies. With over 20 years of experience in the creative industries, Bert is a specialist in positioning and growth strategy and helps agencies accelerate their growth through new business and partnership strategies, and communication planning.</p>
<p>Wesley ter Haar (Monks)</p>	<p>Co-founder of Monks, one of the leading digital marketing agencies globally, Wesley has over 30 years of experience in the fields of creative and digital production. At Monks, he also serves as the Chief AI and Revenue Officer and is the Executive Director at S4 Capital Group, a tech-led digital advertising and marketing services company based in the UK.</p>
<p>Martina Giurastante (Monks)</p>	<p>Currently working as the Lead Graphic Designer at Monks, Martina has five years of experience in creating brand experiences across the web, 3D, and emerging technologies. She also is an AI integration specialist and helps brands integrate AI tools into their design workflows.</p>
<p>Michiel de Nijs (Freelance – VodafoneZiggo)</p>	<p>With over 20 years of experience in the digital design industry, Michiel is a freelancer across UX, service design, and research roles. He is currently working as an Innovation Consultant</p>

	<p>in the GenAI department at VodafoneZiggo, applying customer-centric methodologies rooted in UX and customer experience (CX) to the development of AI-powered products and services. He started off as an interaction designer and expanded his expertise into UX design and research, and later went into service and CX design.</p>
<p>Jop Quirindongo (Lowres Creative Studio)</p>	<p>Founder of Lowres Creative Studio, Jop is an Amsterdam-based visual identity designer and the head of curators and an art director at Dutch Digital Design. With more than 15 years of experience, he has worked at various advertising, retail, and design agencies in the Netherlands. Previously, he was a partner and the design director at Dog and Pony Amsterdam, a branding and design studio focused on identity solutions.</p>
<p>Suzanne Visser (Dutch Digital Design)</p>	<p>Suzanne is the chairwoman of Dutch Digital Design and for the past five years, she has been dedicated to promoting Dutch digital creativity nationally and internationally, helping agencies gain visibility, attract talent, and grow their business through collective representation. She began her career as a museologist, creating interactive exhibitions for science centres, which sparked her passion for digital experiences and has since worked as a project manager and client director, most recently, with Bravoure.</p>
<p>Rory de Graaf (Resoluut)</p>	<p>Currently the managing partner at Resoluut, a strategic design agency based in Amsterdam, Rory has over 20 years of experience in the creative industry and has worked in creative</p>

	<p>direction and strategist roles in various Dutch organizations. He is a member of the Dutch Digital Design and Dutch Digital Agencies community and a partner at Soda Studio NL, a UX and product design studio based out of Amsterdam.</p>
<p>Niels de Keizer (Faraday Digital Agency)</p>	<p>Founder of Faraday Digital Agency, Niels is a seasoned digital entrepreneur and creative technologist with over 20 years of experience at the intersection of design, development, and strategy. He has co-founded over 15 companies and launched more than 100 digital products. His background includes founding the Adobe User Group Holland, building a creative community of 8,000+ members, and serving as a long-time judge for The Webby Awards.</p>
<p>Christopher Groelle (DEPT)</p>	<p>Currently Senior Creative at DEPT, one of the leading digital (creative) production agencies worldwide, Christopher has over 7 years of experience in copywriting and art direction. Previously, he has worked in copywriting roles at several agencies, including DDB Unlimited, VaynerMedia, and BBDO Worldwide.</p>
<p>Nicole Pickett-Groen (Dutch Digital Design)</p>	<p>With over 20 years of experience in digital marketing and communications across the Netherlands and the UK, Nicole is currently the lead editor and copywriter at Dutch Digital Design. She crafts brand stories, develops content strategies and drives digital visibility for Dutch creative agencies. Alongside freelance work for brands like Google, Ajax, and Maxi-Cosi, Nicole has served as a jury member for the European Design Awards and a contributor to The Drum.</p>

<p>Constantine Gavrykov (Decathlon)</p>	<p>Currently the Senior Director of Digital Product Design at Decathlon. Originally from Kyiv, Ukraine, Constantine has over 20 years of experience in user experience, product design, and innovation. Throughout his career, he has specialized in digital design direction for major brands like Adidas and Wargaming, and led initiatives for brands like Tommy Hilfiger. Previously, he ran Malcom, a design studio that focused on helping clients in integrating technology into their business models and customer interaction.</p>
<p>Regina Behyl (Philips)</p>	<p>Currently the Director of CX Design at Philips. With over 20 years of experience as a creative across enterprises and agencies, Regina leads the CX design approach and team within the global customer experience division of Philips. Previously, she held positions as a brand designer in several agencies in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands and also founded her own design innovation consulting agency based in Amsterdam.</p>
<p>Alexandra Schott (Independent Brand Strategist)</p>	<p>Independent strategic brand designer and strategist based in the Netherlands. Alexandra holds over a decade of experience across branding and marketing and was the former vice president of marketing at JamesEdition, the world's largest luxury marketplace for real estate, watches, yachts, and more. She has also served as the Chief Marketing Officer at Youseum, a Dutch immersive art museum and Fundsup, a capital community of founders, investors, and syndicates.</p>

### 3.2.3. Data collection

The thirteen interviews were semi-structured and conducted over a period of three weeks. Semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer with greater flexibility to ask follow-up questions and probe deeper based on the interviewee's responses. This approach allows the researcher to gather more detailed information and verify what the interviewee is expressing (Adams, 2015, p. 494). According to existing literature on expert and responsive interviews, successful qualitative research using this method requires an open and adaptable set of questions (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 29). The role of the interviewer is crucial, especially in knowing when to probe and encourage open dialogue, which helps elicit more information and build a deeper understanding of the research topic (Meuser & Nagel, 2009, p. 245).

While the interviews were largely flexible, a set of predetermined core questions was prepared, based on the theoretical framework discussed earlier. The section on operationalization explains the themes guiding the interview questions. As per Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 171), good interviews comprise of an efficient balance between main questions, follow-ups, and probes. An interview guide was prepared highlighting the specific topics were meant to be explored. Comprising of an outline of planned questions or topics meant to be addressed, an interview guide can be tailored to different participants depending on the situation and context and is essential for an interview process (Adams, 2015, pp. 495-497). The exploratory and future-oriented nature of the study led to the development of open-ended and future-focused questions that enabled the experts to surmise the potential impact of AI in the creative agencies in the Netherlands. The questions, further, explored the technological and economic factors associated with the future developments to deepen the understanding of the internal management and practices within these agencies.

All interviews were 45 to 60 minutes long and were conducted face-to-face or via Microsoft Teams, depending on the experts' preference. A total of five interviews were taken in-person in different settings in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, while eight interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. The in-person interviews were recorded with the voice memos application available on Apple iPhones and the online interviews were recorded using the audio recording feature of Microsoft Team. Turboscribe.ai, a transcription software, was utilized to transcribe all interviews verbatim and then, transcripts were checked for irregularities and mistakes. Each expert was sent a consent form standardized by the ESHCC by email. The form stated the purpose of the research, procedures, confidentiality, and the rights of the participant involved in the study. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked for permission to record the interview and each expert expressed their consent orally for the same.

### **3.2.4. Operationalization**

The interview consisted of questions based on the theoretical framework for the study. Based on the conceptual model of the study, the questions were divided into three main categories: job roles, internal norms, and team dynamics and structures. A table of operationalization, characterized by main themes and main questions, is reported in Appendix B.

### **3.3. DATA ANALYSIS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

A thematic analysis of the transcripts from the expert interviews was conducted to analyze common patterns and further the scenario-planning process. Thematic analysis is considered as a popular qualitative method to analyze a large amount of descriptive data (Naeem et al., 2023, section 1). It is a method that involves analysing, identifying, and reporting themes or patterns within the data and positions itself as an ideal method to organize interview data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 808). The thematic analysis for coding the expert interviews was conducted to bifurcate between key uncertainties and identify trends through inductive analysis. Three stages of thematic analysis, namely open, axial, and selective coding, was conducted to code the insights inductively from the expert interviews to further the scenario planning process (Naeem et al., 2023, section 3). Open coding entails categorizing broader concepts of the transcription of the interviews into open codes. During the open coding, an inductive analysis of the collected data was conducted since this approach allows the construction of theory from the data and the analysis is done with the “goal of explaining research findings” (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 51). Under axial coding, the open codes were further broadly categorized, creating distinct thematic categories (Williams & Moser, 2019, pp. 48-49). These categories included themes such as unfeasible business models, AI agents in the creative workflow, and rapid shift towards hybrid roles. In the third step, selective coding, the researcher sifted through the axial codes and identify themes that emerge from the process, moving onto constructing meaning from the data (Williams & Moser, 2019, pp. 49-53). As discussed before (see section 3.1.2), the axial codes were assembled into the scenario planning elements of key stakeholders, key uncertainties, and key trends (Schoemaker, 1995, p. 29). The coding tree can be found in the Appendix C.

### **3.4. POSITIONALITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Savin-Baden and Major (2013, p. 71) define a researcher’s positionality by referring to a place where the researcher comes from in relation the participants of their research. Characteristics, such as age, gender, personal experiences, and values, play key roles in shaping researchers’ positionality (Yip, 2023, section 2). In qualitative research, the influence of a researcher’s

positionality is widely established and discussed, with general consensus on its influence on all elements of the research process, such as study design, research questions, and data collection and analysis (Yip, 2023, section 1).

I approach this study with a curiosity that is academically driven as well as sparked to get an insider's understanding of creative processes. Since I have been utilizing AI tools in my work since the past few years, I recognize that my orientation towards technology as a potential enabler of change may shape how I interpret participant responses. My positionality reflects a power balance and an insider-outsider dynamic since I'm a student-researcher interviewing several senior professionals. My relative inexperience in creative and management roles required me to rely on participants' framing of industry dynamics. Throughout the interview process, I ask open-ended and simple questions related to the topic for a better understanding of the answers in general. Nevertheless, my primary aim has been to create a space for open and critical dialogue and I have strived to maintain transparency, neutrality, and authenticity through the research process.

The study is designed with ethical integrity at its core. All participants are fully informed about the research objectives and procedures, and were sent a consent form based on the guidelines set up by the ESHCC. The consent form can be found in Appendix A. Oral consent is obtained before any data collection. Participants were informed that the interview was entirely voluntary and interviewees have the right to withdraw or skip questions at any time without consequence. All responses are anonymized and confidential and recordings are solely stored for research purposes. Due consent has been taken before revealing the names and backgrounds of interviewees in the expert list outlined above. The study also respects the intellectual contributions of experts by ensuring they can, if desired, receive a summary of the research findings. Special care is taken when discussing potentially sensitive topics, such as fear of job displacement or organization attitude towards AI, to avoid any harm or discomfort.

## **4. RESULTS**

The thematic analysis of expert interviews provided an analytical and structured foundation to understand the multi-faceted impact of AI on creative agencies. Step 1 of the scenario planning process has been laid out in Chapter 3 (see section 3.1.2.). The overarching themes from the analysis became the basis for furthering the scenario planning process, where each step was informed by the thematic coding.

### **4.1. STAGE 2: IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

Five groups of stakeholders were identified by the experts. It was revealed that AI adoption in Dutch creative agencies is not a purely internal decision, but is shaped by a dynamic stakeholder ecosystem, where influence flows from top-down and bottom-up. This dynamic brought forth a layered push-pull mechanism that affects the strategic intent of AI integration. Thus, these groups could be vital in shaping the future of AI adoption in Dutch creative agencies and the industry, as a whole.

#### **4.1.1. Management of creative agencies**

The top management within creative agencies were found to be the most frequently mentioned stakeholders by the experts. This is due to the management's pivotal role in making key decisions impacting the internal practices within agencies. Expert G highlighted that the level of AI adoption within agency workflows depends on the management's attitude towards change, particularly brought on by technology. Expert C also echoed that since the management is the one "making the calls and decisions." Some agency heads were described as cautious in implementing AI in isolated pilot projects and were "waiting the wave out," while others are pushing for full-scale adoption in the future. Expert D concluded that if the management were keen on implementing AI due to its supposed potential and return on investment (ROI), then the employees would be pushed to use it. Expert F concluded the thought by adding that ideally the management would play a key role in leading the AI adoption in their agencies to understand the impact the technology would have on their organization, teams, and respective job roles that get impacted due to it eventually. This illustrates a core finding: management's attitude doesn't just influence adoption speed, it shapes the tone of change, team readiness, and the agency's ability to strategically reposition itself in an AI-driven landscape.

#### **4.1.2. Clients**

The importance of clients' attitudes towards AI usage within agencies was pinpointed by most experts, since client retention remains one of the most significant challenges for the agencies. Clients were described as increasingly curious yet inconsistent in their demands regarding AI, suggesting that their overall demands and attitudes would influence how rapidly or cautiously AI tools are adopted within the agency environment. Expert B observed the clients' perspectives as a "spectrum", with clients being extremely careful due to legal reasons and/or communicating that AI use does not "ethically align with their brand(s)". Expert I noted that client expectations also depend on their industry. The clients from industries such as finance tend to be more "traditional" in their ways of working, thus discouraging the usage of AI for their campaigns. On the other hand, Expert E pointed out that clients have started using AI themselves, elaborating by saying that—"We do now have that, actually a bit of an issue that we have to put our briefings from clients into ChatGPT because we know our clients are doing that, so we need to know what they're saying because they're comparing our work to what the bots come up with." This changing client behavior not only alters the creative process but also influences their workflow logic and ideation process to anticipate AI-influenced comparisons and feedback. However, regardless of the industry their clients belonged to, experts noted that clients were generally "excited" about the technology, with a significant number having developed their own or working on developing their own AI agent.

Thus, clients do not just react to agency capabilities; they actively shape them. Rather than reacting to agency innovation, many clients are actively reshaping expectations around speed, cost, and quality; forcing agencies into a more reactive and competitive stance. This dynamic positions clients in a dual role: as both collaborators and challengers, simultaneously influencing and being influenced by AI's growing role in the creative process.

#### **4.1.3. Creative professionals**

Creative professionals, including designers, strategists, illustrators, etc., were often described as the most impacted and the most adaptive group by most of the experts. Interviewees frequently mentioned a shift in roles from creatives to curators or strategists, with Expert L stating: "A good prompt is like writing a good creative brief". This further suggests the nature of some job roles will change drastically. The creative space would require "hybrid profiles" with both technical and creative fluency. As suggested by most of the experts, creatives are in state of professional evolution, moving from pure creation to curating, prompting, and strategizing. They face the highest pressure to reskill and reposition themselves between human creativity and machine logic. What emerges here is a transitional phase: creatives are navigating a space between opportunity and

uncertainty, between legacy skillsets and future demands, with the professional identity of the “creative” under reconstruction.

#### **4.1.4. Tech firms**

Across all interviews, tech firms, namely OpenAI, Google, and Adobe, were consistently identified as critical drivers in AI adoption within creative agencies, and the entire Dutch creative industry. Expert E noted that since the infrastructure that these processes rely on is owned by a few companies, tech firms are now full-fledged stakeholders in how the technology gets integrated. The agencies with lesser budgets rely on the tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and more. Interviewees pinpointed that if, for instance, OpenAI would “change its terms tomorrow, the agency workflows would collapse”, given that the AI adoption was high on all levels. This centrality of Big Tech stems from their control over the platforms and algorithms that agencies now integrate into their daily processes. This dependency, further, creates a power balance in the industry, where innovation is increasingly dictated by the tech sector rather than the creative industry itself. Smaller agencies, in particular, rely heavily on mainstream tools like ChatGPT and Gemini due to budget limitations, making them more vulnerable to shifts in pricing and access. Thereby, this raises concerns about the autonomy of creative agencies. As creative process become increasingly interwoven with external AI tools or platforms, the centrality of innovation shifts from within the industry to outside of it.

#### **4.1.5. Audience**

Although not directly involved in agency operations, consumers were described as passive yet powerful stakeholders. Expert E highlight that shifts in consumer expectations drives campaign expectations from clients, which ultimately drives AI adoption in agencies. If consumers have a negative or indifferent response to a client’s AI-augmented/generated advertising campaign, the creative brief received by the agencies would change accordingly. However, if the audience reception is positive to AI-generated campaigns, this could reinforce client confidence using AI and increase demand for such content from agencies. While passive in the process, consumer reception serves as a feedback loop. This dynamic stance positions consumers as indirect but influential stakeholders in shaping creative processes, steering both client strategy and agency adaptation through market response.

## **4.2. STAGE 3 (A): IDENTIFYING KEY UNCERTAINTIES**

The analysis of all interviews pointed to two major uncertainties towards adoption of AI in the Dutch creative agencies and industry generally. While other uncertainties exist, the following were

consistently highlighted by various experts due to their impact and recurring mention across interviews:

**AI's creative potential:** with extremes ranging from (a) high potential, wherein AI agents take over all levels of creative processes and agencies restructure around automation, to (b) low potential wherein AI remains a supportive tool and human creativity and strategy remain central within agencies.

**Agency's strategic adaptability:** with extremes of (a) successful adaptation through clear value redefinition and structural agility, and (b) agency struggling to adapt or failing due to resistance or lack of clear strategy.

Each of these key uncertainties contain sub-themes that reflect more granular but still critical unknowns shaping the overall uncertainty landscape.

#### **4.2.1. Key uncertainty 1: AI's creative potential**

Across all interviews, a central underlying uncertainty concerned the evolving capabilities of AI within creative workflows. The question whether AI systems be capable of performing core creative, strategic, and client-facing tasks that have traditionally defined agency value was addressed by all experts. They remained divided on its potential; while some of them viewed it as a tool, others viewed it as an assistant. Some, like Expert H, described AI as a valuable addition to their “toolset”, but not a replacement: “Within our context, I don't see (AI) replacing anyone”. Others expressed skepticism about AI's capacity to replicate human contact. Expert F noted that attempts to automate personal communication still “end up feeling forced”. In contrast, others like Expert B challenged the belief that creativity is uniquely human. Drawing on research and industry examples, they argued that “machines tend to outperform people in all of the typical use cases.”

The creative potential of AI is acting as a forcing function for agencies by reconfiguring internal roles, leading to internal team tension and norm changes. Clients' capacity to create and execute creative work also threatens a major revenue stream for a lot of agencies. Thus, this uncertainty contains the following sub-themes:

##### *4.2.1.1. Shift towards hybrid and agentic roles due to AI advancement*

Almost all experts highlighted that job roles within the creative agencies, and the Dutch creative industry generally is currently witnessing a demand for ‘hybrid’ roles, which comprises of professionals who are adept at AI and are inherently creative. Expert D emphasized that roles will be “more technical” with diminishing space for pure creatives. Two experts described the rise of “full-stack creatives” or “hybrid creative-technologist” profiles capable of managing the entire creative

pipeline with minimal external input. Expert B posed a provocative question: “...how far away are we from just being an agentic job that supports a creative in real time and no longer need a person as part of the workflow?”

Several experts echoed that there was a decreasing demand for junior creatives as well as for profiles like illustrators and copywriters. And that, these profiles can be ‘agentic’ jobs and easily automated by AI tools, if trained on adequate data. While some experts viewed the shift to a hybrid profile and/or agentic profile negatively, others had a contrasting perspective. Speaking about a past project, Expert F shared that bringing in technically-minded professionals can “completely change the mindset”, calling it “incredibly empowering”. However, there was a palpable sense of uncertainty. Eleven experts shared feelings of uncertainty and intimidation, questioning how different their jobs might look in the near future. Some spoke of the necessity to “rebrand” themselves to stay relevant. Expert C talked about having a moment of panic due to the emerging trends in the industry and the possibility of their current skillset becoming “obsolete”. Expert B equated the shift to becoming an “AI native”, similar to the earlier generation shift towards digital media. Furthermore, there was also skepticism towards claims that AI would create more jobs than it replaces (McKendrick, 2024, para.7-18). As Expert B put it, many mid-level creative roles are likely to decline and the early offset of such jobs would be “very low cost and very low pay”.

The insights from the experts point to a structural evolution from specialized roles to polymathic ones. It also reflects a broader trend in the creative labour market, where more importance is placed on adaptability and cross-functional fluency. Moreover, it complicates the notion of reskilling or upskilling, suggesting that the future survival will depend on tool proficiency as well as on flexibility and ability to switch between creative, computational, and strategic profiles.

#### *4.2.1.2. Team friction and norm shifts due to AI adoption*

Another obstacle faced by the creative agencies due to AI’s adoption and its rapid development has been the impact it has had on existing teams and established norms. Many experts referenced growing or anticipated friction between team members who quickly adopt AI tools and those who resist to do so. Expert B directly linked this to professional identity and role erosion: “ (AI) also drives sort of friction within teams, right? If you built a career on doing a thing, and suddenly that thing is a button, it becomes very difficult for people to embrace that.” This aspect was also found to be related to why agencies, and creatives more broadly, resist the technology. Drawing from personal experiences, Expert A observed a growing tension between team members who are proficient in leveraging AI in their workflows and those who lack the necessary knowledge or skills to do so. Adding on to this, Expert F and Expert M emphasized the urgency to be communicative within teams about technology development to mitigate the internal friction. In a similar vein, Expert C

noted that since their organization began hosting workshops and initiating conversations around the integration and potential of AI into creative practices, the sense of panic has reduced, but is still prevalent. Experts, moreover, predicted a shift in team structure. Expert C also highlighted that the current structure of the creative teams will not sustain, which is driving this friction, since the technology is advancing rapidly, leading to the emergence of hybrid teams. As per Expert F, the collaboration patterns, which usually involved a creative-to-creative dynamic, will evolve into hybrid team structures, where creative and technical professionals work alongside AI systems in a more integrated manner. Elaborating on this, Expert F stressed on the necessity of a mutual understanding between creative and technical professionals, as the new(er) collaboration will be challenging itself, particularly as the AI systems reshape the existing workflows. With a slightly different, but related take, Expert B highlighted that the restructuring of teams due to AI has led to larger agencies getting “de-siloed”, driving more team interaction for, otherwise, individualistic tasks. However, they did note that as the AI systems advance, the team interaction will reduce and become “more valued”.

Interrelated to the team workflows, the shift in workplace and industry norms emerges as another critical dimension shaped by the accelerating pace of AI advancement. Expert D noted that working with AI has become the new norm in the creative industry. The creatives are “expected” to integrate AI into their projects, especially in agencies that are positioning themselves in the industry to be highly proficient with AI. Interestingly, Expert A pointed out that whenever they are onboarded with a new team, they have to “declare” the AI tools they use for work practices—which would have been an unimaginable practice before. They added: “And if I talk to an organization that is not embracing this technology and they're asking me for my expertise, then this assignment is not for me.” Most of the experts echoed that while the situation differs from agency to agency, but all of the creative agencies are lagging behind in formulating guidelines for AI usage and adoption in their organizations. Additionally, there were mixed views on how AI is affecting client expectations. While Expert F and M observed a sharp increase in demand for quicker and cheaper output, Expert I argued that expectations were more conservative and sector-specific. The consistent observation, however, was a heightened sense of performativity and the practice of agencies adopting similar practices, hinting at a standardization of normative practices within the industry. Agencies are expecting or expected to watch how quickly and efficiently they deliver the output with AI assistance.

The observed team frictions and continuous norm shifts reflect a deeper confusion of professional legitimacy and challenges the social hierarchies embedded in creative teams; between “digital natives” and analogue creatives or early adopters and late adopters. As AI tools become

embedded in everyday practice, a new practice of collaboration, disclosure, and skill evaluation seems to be emerging that is actively shaped by agencies, rather than passively inherited.

#### *4.2.1.3. Competition with in-house departments*

The growing competition with in-house departments was a recurring concern raised by experts across all interviews, highlighting clients are increasingly turning to in-house teams for routine or smaller scale creative work, a shift accelerated by AI tools. Talking about the greater financial capacity of in-house departments to invest in such technologies, Expert J expressed that the larger organizations, housing the internal creative departments, had “more funds to develop those AI systems, in comparison to agencies, who are already tight on budgets”. Expert B provided a practical framing of this shift, describing it as a move away from agencies for “last mile” production (e.g., social content, email templates, etc.), which can be generated internally or via basic AI tools. Offering a more behavioral interpretation, Expert E noted that clients are not necessarily looking to “stand out”, but merely stay relevant and visible in the market. They added that agencies will not be able to match the clients’ price of creative work since “(agencies) can never do it as cheap”. This insight suggests that the value proposition of the agencies is under pressure from automation on the low-cost side and client independence on the strategic side.

The threat from in-house creative teams signals a loss of exclusivity in creative authorship and execution. In an AI-driven environment, clients can produce, test, and iterate internally, reducing the need to outsource. This shift challenges agencies to redefine themselves as partners, not merely as service providers, capable of elevating, and not just executing, the creative output.

#### **4.2.2. Key uncertainty 2: Agency’s strategic adaptability**

Agency’s strategic adaptability emerged as a second major uncertainty across twelve expert interviews. As noted by Expert C, the pace of technological change has made it difficult for agencies to formulate clear roadmaps, even though they appear to be experimenting with AI. However, Expert F highlighted that while experimenting with AI is a financial risk, it is a necessity as well, to maintain the competitive edge in a limited market. Expert B termed creative agencies as “relevancy machines”, and highlighted that agencies were rushing to communicate that they are at the forefront of AI integration, while they did not have a pre-set strategy for it. The challenge is the innovation curve of AI is steeper and faster than most agencies are used to navigating. This, therefore, is resulting in a strategic flux as well as superficial adoption of AI within agencies. Expert M and D stressed that as humans, the AI technology is difficult to “keep track of” at the same pace as the AI development and that, AI is difficult “to strategize as an organization”. The concerns stated

by the experts raise an important consideration for the agencies, with adaptability potentially becoming a condition for survival in the Dutch market. Agencies that are unable to shift their mindset, structure, and offerings in time risk falling behind in a rapidly evolving market. Thus, this uncertainty includes the following sub-uncertainties:

#### *4.2.2.1. Resistant attitude towards AI*

Almost all experts agreed that the agencies that are resistant to the adoption of AI are unlikely to “survive” in the long term, making it a crucial dimension to the second major uncertainty of the scenario planning process. To illustrate, Expert M said: “(Willingness to change for AI) is, I think, the main factor which divides the one who will survive and the ones who don't.... This is something the old school agencies or the management that doesn't want to change, they will die.” Expert B reframed the issue as a “change management challenge” more than a technical one, suggesting that the willingness to restructure around the technology is lagging. In some cases, resistance stemmed from fear of diminished creative identity or loss of control over creative processes. Expert F noted that while some agencies are going to “wait out the AI wave”, others are at the forefront of repositioning themselves as agencies that are “AI-first”.

Resistance to AI reveals deeper identity tensions among agencies. It, further, is dividing the Dutch creative industry. Agencies that embrace AI are positioning themselves at the forefront of change, while the resistant organizations may risk becoming irrelevant. This points to a potential future where the divide between the two sides could deepen, creating structural fragmentation in the industry.

#### *4.2.2.2. Need to define clear(er) value proposition*

Another key dimension influencing the future survival of creative agencies is their evolving approach to their value proposition. Across all interviews, experts communicated that agencies must redefine and clearly communicate their value proposition to thrive in a potential AI-driven market. As automation lowers production costs, it was revealed that clients are questioning the costs attached to the value. Expert G articulated this tension by stating: “As soon as the value is clearer, the client will not bother so much about the costs.” This observation leads to the emergence of a new requirement for creative agencies; justification for the (high) cost for output that is produced using AI. Multiple experts also highlighted that there, already, is a surplus of creative agencies in a relatively limited market and this particular challenge is more pressing for smaller agencies as they tend to have a “less complex” client base and unclear value proposition, especially the organizations that did not proactively position themselves in the market. Expert H explained that copywriting

agencies, in particular, have struggled to justify their relevance in light of clients' ability to generate "good enough" copy through AI. They added, "The only ones that will survive are the ones that can rise above mediocrity and are also able to explain why they are above mediocrity and why it's important that they should be." Lastly, the following quote by Expert B can attest to the significance of value delivery to survive in the industry: "What is the future value proposition of a creative services company? I think that's a really interesting question to ask. And I'm not quite sure yet."

The need for a strong value proposition is amplified in a landscape where clients themselves are increasingly becoming executors of creative work. This theme reflected a central paradox of AI in the Dutch creative industry. The expert observations suggested that agencies, in the near future, need to clearly differentiate themselves from others and articulate a unique advantage.

#### *4.2.2.3. Unfeasible business models*

Most of the experts described the business model of Dutch creative agencies, especially the hourly-rate model, as fundamentally "broken", citing outdated revenue practices and undervaluation of creative work. The reliance on time-based billing is being eroded by AI's ability to accelerate output. As Expert H noted, agencies are "incentivized to be slow". Tracing this problem back to the traditional pricing logic of the Dutch industry, Expert G expressed that concept and strategy work was undercharged because agencies earned revenue on the production pipeline. But with production getting automated, the revenue is decreasing. Several alternative models were discussed during the interviews, including value-based, project-based, subscription-based, and outcome-based pricing. However, no consensus emerged. Some experts saw the positive side to this transformation. Expert B argued that a new "AI business model" oriented around faster value delivery could ultimately benefit both agencies and clients. Expert E, on the other hand, spoke about a "project-focused model" based more on the clients' experience of the creative process. The current situation was also seen as a moment of a necessary "shakeout", as termed by Expert H, where the most differentiated and self-aware agencies survive. Five experts seemed to be concerned by the "mediocrity" or the "good enough work" in the Dutch creative industry and positively viewed the possibility of the industry becoming smaller to harbor "only best in class people in their fields". Another related pattern that emerged from the interviews was the tendency of creative agencies to imitate each other, even in terms of AI strategies, often without clear rationale. Expert I termed it as "peer pressure" and suggests that agencies look laterally for cues on how to respond to changes, with emerging technologies being the change in this case. It, further, explains the reason for why most creative agencies in the Netherlands operate on an hourly business model, even though it has been deemed as unsustainable across all interviews.

The insights from the expert interviews reflect the dire economic logic of the Dutch creative industry. AI seems to be forcing agencies to ask a long-avoided question of their unfeasible business models, with the “shakeout” leading to either innovation or consolidation within the market.

### **4.3. STAGE 3 (B): IDENTIFYING KEY TRENDS**

The thematic analysis revealed four categories of trends that were repeatedly mentioned by the experts, namely, technological and economic, socio-cultural, ethical, and industry trends. Each of these categories consist of an amalgamation of several sub-trends.

#### **4.3.1. Technological and economic trends**

Two trends were unearthed in the thematic analysis of interviews that were combined together in the overarching theme of ‘technological and economic trends’.

##### *4.3.1.1. AI agents in the creative workflow*

Five experts mentioned the potential development of proprietary AI tools or agents in agencies that could be a vital factor shaping future technological trends in the industry. This transition implies a more autonomous and proactive role for AI in creative workflows. Expert B and C independently emphasized the emergence of a process in which AI will be evolving from a tool to being an assistant through agents, hinting at a shift from tool-based enhancement to agent-based transformation in the Dutch creative industry. Expert B said, “I think you'll sort of see a process where it goes from AI being an assistant, which is really the predominant space now, to people orchestrating agents, which is what we're moving into.” Adding on to this stance, Expert C envisioned agentic teams capable of operating autonomously, suggesting a fundamental redefinition of collaboration within creative agencies. Supporting the perspectives of other experts, Expert A noted that most of the work could be conducted by an AI agent, with a human supervisory role for quality control and “new creative output”. Talking about proprietary AI tools, Expert E expressed that large agencies have already developed their own GPTs, so that the client and company data stays within the agency’s “own ecosystem”. They also discussed a plausible future in which agencies offer their proprietary AI tools to clients on a subscription basis, suggesting the emergence of a new service offering within the industry. Lastly, Expert D noted that the rapid pace of technological advancement could lead to “diverse realities”, with one of them being a future where a distinct AI platform or agent exists for each service (e.g., copywriting) offered by a creative agency.

This agent-based evolution points toward not only new forms of task distribution but also new commercial offerings. It also positions creative agencies closer to technological development in

terms of product innovation. Furthermore, it restructures the role of creative labor, with the human role recast as one of orchestration, judgement, and value alignment.

#### *4.3.1.2. Budgetary limitations*

Three experts pointed at the differences in budgets that creative agencies have in the industry, depending on their business size. It was mentioned as a limiting factor in how agencies can engage with AI innovation. Expert A and E noted that smaller and mid-sized agencies were disproportionately reliant on publicly available AI tools due to the high costs of developing or maintaining proprietary systems. Expert K noted the expense of developing and managing AI agents, emphasizing that “not everyone can afford” such investments.

This disparity creates a bifurcated landscape in which larger agencies gain a structure advantage through in-house AI systems, while smaller agencies are confined to open-access tools. Expert A, further, noted that developing fine-tuned models requires talent, in addition to capital, which smaller agencies struggle to retain or attract. Thus, economy asymmetry is not a secondary effect of AI adoption, but a core structural feature. As budgets determine access to experimentation and innovation, the risk of both elements becoming centralized among a few large players seems to emerge. This could accelerate consolidation in the industry and erode the diversity of agencies in the Dutch creative market.

#### **4.3.2. Socio-cultural trends**

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed two trends under the theme of “socio-cultural trends”, namely the attitude towards human creativity and the societal impact of AI on the creative industry.

##### *4.3.2.1. Shifting definitions of (human) creativity*

The evolving nature of what constitutes as human creativity was repeatedly mentioned across most of the interviews, highlighting a fundamental cultural shift within the Dutch creative industry. As AI systems increasingly contribute to ideation, execution, and to some extent, decision-making, experts remained divided on the boundaries between human and machine agency. Rather than seeing creativity as an exclusive human trait, Expert I noted that if the human behind the AI prompts the tool and the output turns out to be excellent, that is also creativity. Echoing this stance, Expert J highlighted that creativity is “not just human-oriented”, and as long as the collaborative work of AI and human is “not copied, it is also authentic”. However, multiple experts had a different perspective regarding the shifting nature of creativity. Expert A, for instance, said: “Design is about

solving problems with creativity. AI lacks creativity and that will stay our main differentiator as humans.” Similarly, Expert E and N expressed how AI lacked the skills of storytelling, an aspect central to the creative industry. The varying perceptions of creativity are intriguing and are in line with McCormack et al. (2019) who argue that cultural and social factors play a larger role in whether technical methods constitute a new kind of art or not (p.14). Thus, the evolving definition of creativity in the context of AI is not merely a functional or technical development, but a cultural one. The work experiences of each of the experts might be a key factor in influencing their stance on the idea.

#### *4.3.2.2. Social impact*

Multiple experts pointed to the societal impact that AI’s impact might be reinforcing in the Dutch creative industry, with the professionals providing a diverse stance on the idea. Expert H observed that AI has democratized creative tools for everyone to experiment with and has broadened the accessibility to creativity generally. They said: “People who previously lacked the tools or skills to express themselves now can.” Talking about AI-driven changes in the industry, Expert M highlighted how such changes have deepened societal inequality due to the displacement of creatives in more traditional job roles. They also said: “So, there's a top line of people who are really able to front run this development. A group that is following there and a group that is not being able to make it. So, the division already in a divided society, as we have worldwide, this is even increasing it. That is worrisome on itself, I think.” On the other hand, discussing the gender inequality in the creative industry, Expert L highlighted that the advent of “tech people” in the industry will deepen the gender divide, since the field of technology is largely “male dominated”.

The contrasting narratives of AI as democratizer and AI as divider highlight a key tension in the societal dynamics of the creative industry, not limited only to the Dutch market. The interviews suggest that AI adoption is not unfolding in a socially neutral way and the responsibility for the latter lie in the institutional and structural decisions that mediate the usage of AI tools.

#### **4.3.3. Ethical trends**

The thematic analysis revealed two trends, namely ‘data use and privacy’ and ‘copyright’, that were compiled together in the overarching theme of ‘ethical trends’.

##### *4.3.3.1. Data use and privacy*

Five experts expressed their concerns about privacy and AI’s usage of data due to its “black-box” nature. Expert F, D, and L criticized the uncritical data practices within agencies, remarking that many professionals feed sensitive material into ChatGPT without the understanding how the data

might be used. She added, “We have no idea yet how big the implications will be”. Citing concerns about the “black box” nature of AI models, Expert E reflected on a broader industry-wide need for transparency and talked about the necessity to develop proprietary GPTs to ensure client and agency data remains protected.

However, speaking from an in-house perspective, Expert C stressed that it is easier for agencies to adopt AI since they are “more open” and “need to stay competitive, in terms of their offering(s)”, while large corporations have stricter restrictions to adhere to, and thus, are moving slower in comparison to the agencies. The opacity of AI systems presents a dual challenge: epistemic and ethical. It reinforces the need for agencies to build internal accountability mechanisms and AI guidelines to avoid reputational and legal risks, especially as clients grow more concerned about data and privacy.

#### *4.3.3.2. Copyright*

Copyright concerns emerged as a key ethical trend highlighted by the experts, particularly in relation to the use of generative AI tools and the ambiguity around ownership and the reuse of creative assets. However, experts remained divided on how important the issue of copyright is at this stage of AI development. For instance, Expert A noted that if the asset is “ad-related”, it is not a significant concern since “everything gets ripped apart anyway”. In contrast, Expert E expressed significant obstacles that the agency faced from the clients’ perspectives, primarily related to ownership of the creative output and potential PR backlash. Expert L, while speaking about large corporations, expressed that such corporates are not allowed to use AI tools due to the risk of copyright infringements. Regulations regarding copyright, with regards to output from AI applications, need additional clarity. When the output generated from AI systems is adoption and reused, there lays an underlying possibility of copyright infringement, without the awareness of the user (KPMG, 2024, para. 8). In a similar vein, Expert M observed that “regulations are always behind on practice” and that the formulation of clear regulations “will take too long since AI is going so fast”. The legalities behind the usage of AI tools in the creation of creative assets was also stressed by Expert B. Considering the clients tied to their own agency, they said: “Eight out of 10 of those very careful clients are careful because of the legalities of it... You also have a smaller percentage of clients that, if they're worried, it's from the ethics and they just don't find it ethically aligned with their brand.”

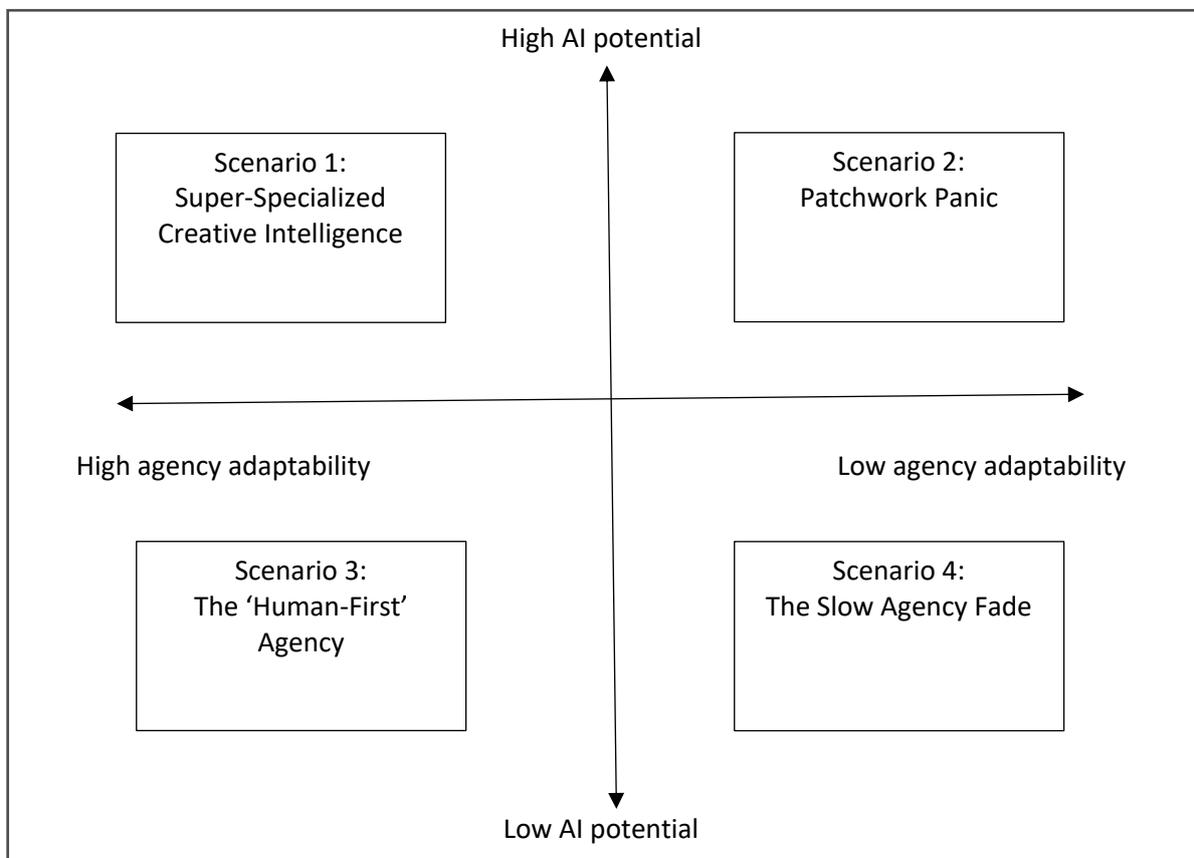
As discussed, copyright concerns reveal the lag between technological affordability and legal infrastructure. For creative agencies, this gap affects contracts, client confidence, and deliverables.

Agencies that engage with legal discussions and proactively emphasize transparency in client conversations may gain a competitive advantage over other organizations.

#### 4.4. STAGE 4: CONSTRUCTING PRELIMINARY SCENARIOS

The insights from the expert interviews served as a foundation for developing a 2x2 matrix to assist in the construction of preliminary scenarios. The matrix is presented in the Figure 2 below. The creation of preliminary scenarios, further, provided basis for creating the final scenarios.

Figure 2.



2x2 matrix for preliminary scenarios.

#### 4.5. STAGE 5: BUILDING FINAL SCENARIOS

Four final scenarios were built in the last stage of the scenario planning process. The narratives of all scenarios are set in the year 2035 and represent the experiences of the same client—Dilley Motors, a multinational manufacturer of vehicles, looking to hire a creative agency for an advertising campaign for their brand-new launch.

##### 4.5.1. Scenario 1 (High AI Potential, High Agency Adaptability)

### *Super-Specialized Creative Intelligence*

Dilley Motors is preparing to launch their latest electric vehicle and began scouting for agencies, with the internal shortlist including a few legacy players and design studios. The integration of AI into the creative industries has not replaced creative agencies, but has instead reconfigured them. The existing agencies have successfully reorganized their workflows, business models, and internal cultures. What ultimately caught the attention of Dilley Motors was NeuraCreative, a compact AI-first agency that had fully restructured itself around AI, not merely as a tool, but as a partner in every layer of the creative process. The agency had earned a reputation within a growing market of super-specialized studios, all with small, agile teams focused on deep expertise. Its specialization lay in brand storytelling for particularly the automotive industry. At the pitch meeting, the NeuraCreative team introduced 'Arlo', an AI agent or an 'agent-in-the-loop', as they termed its role. Based on the creative brief shared with the agency, Arlo outputted a tailored storyline around the campaign and updated the 'advertising story' based on the conversations in the pitch meeting in real-time. The internal structure of the agency reflected a deep integration of hybrid intelligence. There was no traditional account manager or creative director. Instead, the agency comprised of a fluid team of human-AI pairings operating as strategic pods. Every creative deliverable was the result of 'synthetic co-creation'. Despite initial reservations around data transparency and the key role of AI in managing brand-sensitive information, Dilley Motors was reassured by NeuraCreative's emphasis on secure environment and zero-leak ecosystem for client and agency data. Internal dynamics at NeuraCreative functioned differently from the agencies Dilley Motors had previously worked with. Meetings were minimal. Instead, communication happened via the client-facing dashboard where Arlo tracked progress and queued campaign iterations for approval. The value proposition was equally non-traditional. NeuraCreative offered a value-linked pricing model, where compensation was tied to real-time campaign impact metrics across touchpoints measured through a separate evaluation agent. Within a week, Dilley Motors launched a full-fledged advertising campaign across the Netherlands. The hyper-adaptability stood out. The messaging resonated environmental mobility and tech-driven convenience and lifestyle, themes that resonated well with the consumers. The success of the campaign, evident from the pre-bookings and media traction, validated their gamble in choosing NeuraCreative.

#### **4.5.2. Scenario 2 (High AI Potential, Low Agency Adaptability)**

##### *Patchwork Panic*

In 2035, while AI technologies have advanced rapidly, many creative agencies has struggled to adapt to the demands of the AI-enhanced creative economy. During the agency search for their

nationwide vehicle launch campaign, Dildey Motors came across Voxen Collective, a large creative agency known for its legacy clients and full-service brand campaign capabilities. The agency positioned itself to be at the midst of AI and creativity. While the pitch meeting promised an innovative campaign and adaptive media design, Voxen's team showed signs of strategic unclarity and internal friction as the project progressed. In project meetings, the team at Dildey could sense the uncertainty; the agency could not articulate a clear AI vision or roadmap for the campaign launch. Each stage of the creative process heavily relied on trial-and-error AI experimentation, leading to inconsistent quality and delays. Furthermore, while Dildey Motors agreed upon the value-based model of the agency, the latter was unable to justify the high cost for the deliverables, granted the output seemed to be largely generic and mediocre. The conversations about adjusting costs became frustrating for the Dildey team, since the promised AI-driven efficiencies were not getting delivered and the campaign required extra oversight from the client's side. While the mission of the agency revolved around becoming a collaborator with AI, the internal culture seemed to be marked by anxiety and reluctance around changing practices and a lack of training amongst the team to operate the AI agents to their full potential. The ethical standards of the agency were unclear and the output did not stand out. Eventually, the campaign launched late, missed key marketing windows, and did not gain targeted engagement metrics. After the campaign wrapped, Dildey Motors conducted a review. The verdict was to expand the in-house creative department, which was undertaking minor or 'last mile' work through AI, into a full-service department. Till then, Dildey Motors shortlisted a handful of studios and AI-native agencies that were at the forefront of the creative agency market. However, the situation was reflective of the unfortunate state of the industry—creative agencies were fading and had become a bottleneck of innovation.

#### **4.5.3. Scenario 3 (Low AI Potential, Low Agency Adaptability)**

##### *The Slow Agency Fade*

The anticipated breakthrough of AI in the creative industry has slowed by 2035 due to ethical concerns and technological plateauing. The implementation of AI in agency workflows remains fragmented and limited. The internal marketing team at Dildey Motors was under mounting pressure to deliver a campaign that would mark a shift in not just the new vehicle launch, but in brand positioning. Over the past few years, Dildey Motors had invested heavily in building a comprehensive in-house creative division composed of strategists, UX designers, and data leads; many of whom had been from established creative agencies. The reliance on external partners for creative execution had shifted into a deliberate effort to internalize creative leadership. The pivot was a response to a growing dissatisfaction with agency outputs. After multiple partnerships were

marked by inconsistent quality and unclear working processes, Dildey concluded that the traditional agency model was not a fit for long-term. However due to tight deadlines, Dildey Motors decided on hiring Loom&Co for external support. The decision was less about creative synergy and more about Loom&Co's familiarity with the brand since they had worked on past campaigns. However, Dildey Motors put forth that the collaboration model will no longer be equal. The in-house team will set the agenda, develop the core brand narrative, and produce initial storyboard prototypes using internal AI visual tools and the agency would play a supporting role. The role of Loom&Co revolved around executing the launch at scale, and not conceptual leadership. Yet, Loom&Co was struggling with this shift. The primary reason for Dildey motors to expand the in-house creative team was due to the unstructured and outdated practices and output of creative agencies during several partnerships. The move was more out of necessity. The creative decisions within the agency flowed from top-down and the process remained slow, dependent on outdated workflows. The core problem of the agency market was that they could not manage change efficiently and that, had led to a huge shakeout within the market. In contrast, the in-house team at Dildey Motors was working dynamically. AI was used to track real-time consumer sentiment, map cultural trends, and A/B test early concepts. As campaign production began, the internal team increasingly found themselves reformatting deliverables produced by Loom. The latter also pushed back when suggestions were discussed. What Dildey's team could produce in shorter periods of time, Loom took a week due to lack of efficient AI use and outdated practices. The agency had failed to evolve with the industry. Its team had plateaued; rarely upskilled, rarely reimaged their creative approach. The final campaign went live, but not with impact. In internal reviews, Dildey's team noted that although they strategized the campaign, the execution had been inflexible and lacked quality. The contract with Loom was not renewed. Dildey Motors started exploring hybrid models by assembling freelance creative technologists or contracting smaller creative studios for expanding their internal capabilities further.

#### **4.5.4. Scenario 4 (Low AI Potential, High Agency Adaptability)**

##### *'Human-First' Agency*

In a creative landscape where AI advancement has slowed due to ethical concerns and technological limitations, a significant number of agencies have chosen to integrate AI cautiously, aligning its use with human-centered values and creative integrity. Studio Glint, a mid-sized creative agency, was opted by Dildey Motors for their emotionally intelligent storytelling for the national launch of Dildey's latest electric vehicle. In the flood of AI-first agencies that cost too much for generic output, Glint positioned itself as a human-first creative collective. The pitch itself was a well-

crafted narrative delivered in person by a core team of strategists, designers, and writers. The campaign concept was rooted in human behavior and societal trends. While Studio Glint integrated AI tools, their use was pragmatic. Scheduling, time-tracking, initial research, and basic project management were automated through light-weight agents. Resource allocation was AI-assisted, allowing the studio to operate efficiently without needing human intervention for administrative tasks. The studio's idea was to give the creatives enough space for actual creativity. The core of the agency centred around ideation, design, storytelling, and strategy, was left untouched by AI. This was intentional. The agency had concluded early on that while AI could accelerate content generation and could generate in bulk, it could not replicate the emotional, cultural, and societal intelligence that clients, like Dildey Motors, sought for their advertising campaign. However, the agency had evolved. All job profiles within the agency were AI-trained and new employees were laterally mentored to bring in fresh ideas into the workplace. As a client, Dildey Motors experienced this difference in tempo through richer collaboration and feedback meetings with more dialogue and shared understanding, rather than just bots and dashboards. The campaign launch across the Netherlands reflected the brand story of Dildey Motors, starting off from a small office to launching a next-generation electric vehicle tackling climate change responsibly, inviting interpretation rather than predictive behavior. The campaign resonated in a market saturated with generic campaigns, thus, becoming a competitive advantage. Choosing Studio Glint, for Dildey Motors, meant the beginning of a long-term client-agency relationship.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter concludes the thesis by addressing the main research question and its sub-questions, based on the empirical findings and theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters. The study aimed to answer the overarching research question: How could AI adoption reshape normative institutional frameworks in the creative agencies in the Netherlands in the year 2035?

The four final scenarios are regarded as a conclusive answer to the main research question. Understanding each of them in depth is essential to understand the core objective of this study. This study employed a scenario planning approach to explore how creative agencies may evolve under conditions of rapid technological development of AI. Drawing on institutional theory, the research focused on the normative pillar of the theory and analyzed the potential transformations of job roles, team dynamics and structures, and internal norms within Dutch creative agencies. Through semi-structured expert interviews and thematic analysis, the study pinned down five key stakeholder groups, two key uncertainties, and a range of ethical, technological, and socio-cultural trends. These insights laid the foundation for the construction of four divergent scenarios, each set in the year 2035, and viewed from the perspective of a shared client named Dildey Motors. The two key uncertainties, namely AI's creative potential and agency's strategic adaptability, were found to strongly influence how normative frameworks within agencies are reshaped. Depending on how these uncertainties unfold, creative agencies may face either decline, marginalization, hybridization, or strategic renewal.

The scenarios illustrate that institutional transformation is not linear, but reliant on the dynamics of human actors, organizational culture, and technological development (Björkman, Fey, & Park, 2007, p. 431; Smets et al., 2012, pp. 893-894). They also outline the legitimate ways to conduct tasks and determine what constitutes as acceptable and legitimate practices (Friel, 2016, pp. 213-214; McCormick, 1998, p. 329). Across all scenarios, it becomes clear that AI adoption challenges long-standing normative frameworks in creative agencies, about who performs creative work, and how value is delivered and how the capabilities of AI are embedded into roles, rules, and routines (Bianchi et al., 2015, p. 466; Napoli, 2014, p. 342). For instance, in Scenario 1, legitimacy is derived from "synthetic co-creation", since AI agents hold a strategic position in the agency. In Scenario 4, however, legitimacy is found in a human-first positioning, where AI enhances, but does not replace, human creative agency. The divergent scenarios depict the evolving context over what is seen as appropriate creative conduct. AI adoption does not lead to single outcome; rather, it might mean competing normative structures for each agency, influenced leadership decisions, client expectations, and market conditions. This confirms that normative views and behavior have the

tendency to differ with time across situations (Greif, 2008, p. 6). Norms around originality, authorship, feedback, and creative iteration are shifting across scenarios. In Scenario 1, communication gets streamlined through AI dashboards and agents, reducing meetings and remains largely non-personal. In Scenario 4, human collaborative dialogue and interpretation remains central, reflecting a deliberate personal commitment to client relationships. The contrasting approaches reflect that AI adoption does not automatically homogenize internal norms and support the Diogo et al. (2015, p. 123)'s idea that norms can change due to newer ideas and changing environments.

Furthermore, the adoption of AI compels a transformation of job roles from fixed, specialized roles toward flexible, hybrid, and technical profiles. As seen in Scenario 1, traditional roles like creative director are replaced by pods composed of human-AI pairings. Role ambiguity and lack of AI knowledge and skills leads to internal friction and incompetent delivery in Scenario 2. In contrast, Scenario 4, while retaining traditional creative roles, does integrate AI into administrative support functions, highlighting the importance of prior knowledge of AI. This aligns with the idea of MacCormick (1998, p. 323) who emphasized on roles as carriers of normative expectations. Roles are increasingly defined by AI literacy, adaptability, and collaborative fluidity. This is reinforced in existing literature and Chapter 4, where experts described a growing demand for full-stack creatives and creative-technologist profiles who can operate across teams and specializations and a willingness to learn new skills since it was in their "DNA" (Erikson, 2024, p. 3). Having established this, by 2035, roles that cannot integrate with AI, to some extent, may become obsolete. The scenarios suggested that team structure and dynamics in 2035 will depend more on the ability to operate across domains, human-machine, and organizational boundaries and less on hierarchy. When AI is integrated in team structures, it can either displace or enhance collaboration depending on how it is embedded. These shifts confirm that specific internal norms emerge, shaping how team members interact (Manata, 2019, pp. 311-313). The interviews, unexpectedly, revealed the centrality of unsustainable business models, especially the hourly model, of creative agencies as a critical threat to their survival, an insight reflecting a major change in the agency revenue structures. At an industry level, these changes are driving a divide between the agencies that are reorienting around AI models and others that are reclaiming the traditional models. Larger structural pressures, such as client demands, in-house competition, and unfeasible business models, are accelerating the divide. Therefore, it can be concluded that creative agencies in the Netherlands will operate in highly divergent realities depending on how they respond to the affordances of AI and contribute to the dynamics of the Dutch creative industry irrespective of the state of the adoption of AI. The future of

the agencies lies in negotiating change, rather than resisting it, thereby reinforcing the need to redefine their creative value, norms, and roles in an evolving industry.

This research demonstrates the value of applying normative institutional lens to AI-driven industry and organizational change. It contributes to the work of Erikson (2024, p. 2) by exploring the exploration of the adaptability of creative teams and organizations to AI and contributes to the limited research on the effects of AI on creative industries due to its rapid development (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024b, p. 1; Grynspar, 2022; p. 1). While prior research has focused on the impact of AI on creative tasks and job roles, this study extends the discussion to include how agencies are re-evaluating their revenue structures. It reflects a broader institutional alignment and reconceptualization of value proposition, thereby offering a critical perspective on the evolving business practices within creative industries.

### **5.1. SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS**

The next years will bring significant transformations in the creative industries, driven by rapid development of technologies, evolving client expectations, and shifting value propositions. These changes will inevitably challenge the traditional structures and practices within creative agencies, compelling them to rethink their models and the values they provide. Both of these elements were also reinforced in the findings of this study. As noted by Cordova-Pozo and Rouwette (2023), scenarios are used to “create awareness and prepare for an uncertain future” (p. 2). The future scenarios developed in this research offer a structured lens to navigate this uncertainty, acting as a tool for reflection for creative agencies and could assist in planning future strategies. The future, while not pre-determined, is influenced by the choices made today (Pérez-Soba & Maas, 2015). This research could help inform those choices by outlining plausible directions that creative agencies may take in adapting to the technological advancements and the subsequent need for repositioning and refinement of existing business models, practices, and workforce. Furthermore, the findings speak to broader societal questions surrounding the future of employment and inclusion. Understanding the socio-cultural shifts accompanying AI integration can help both professionals and policymakers ensure that the transition is inclusive and equitable. By offering actionable foresight, this research can support creative professionals, agency leaders, and educators in preparing for multiple potential futures, since this study did not aim to ‘predict’, but rather, wanted to enable early preparations that could be carried out for various changes until 2035 (Sardesai et al., 2021, p. 56), in an industry that is central to economic activity as well as cultural expression in the digital age.

## 5.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides qualitative insights into how AI technologies will reshape the internal norms, team dynamics and structures, and job roles within creative agencies in the Netherlands. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the most striking limitation of this study is that this research is future-oriented. The future is difficult to predict and uncertain at its core (Elsawah et al., 2020, p. 20). However, to maintain the subjectivity and mitigate potential bias, the development of the four scenarios was largely based on the data from expert interviews from different fields. However, that brings forth another limitation that should be addressed. The researcher ensured to include a diverse group of experts from different agencies and fields, so as to avoid a biased perspective that could arise by talking to a similar group of professionals who may share a “collective view” (Bogner & Menz, 2018, p. 259). Even so, this research primarily relies on self-reported perceptions and experiences of experts, which brings forth the possibility of individual or organizational bias into the interviews. Future research could complement this approach using a mixed methodology study by including different methods, such as case studies of agencies or ethnographic methods. Furthermore, the study is based on a limited number of expert interviews, primarily with experienced creative professionals based in the Netherlands. Further research could benefit by broadening the scope by incorporating a more international perspective, which could help increase the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, this study has been conducted during a period of rapid technological change and thus, the insights reflect the perceptions made at a specific point of time. Given the pace of AI advancement, these perspectives may also change quickly. Continuous studies are, therefore, required to track how creative agencies and the industry continue to adapt their structures in the upcoming years. Lastly, further research could also explore the perspectives of clients, tech professionals that are actively entering the creative industry, and other stakeholders. Examining the demand side of creative production could add depth to the understanding of how value is being redefined in the AI-influenced creative industry and also help provide some insights into how creative agencies might reposition themselves in the coming years.

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## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

#### FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Sanya Gupta  
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#### DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a master thesis research study about how creative agencies in the Netherlands are adapting to AI-driven changes in job roles, team dynamics, and internal norms. This study aims to explore the emerging organizational and industry-level shifts in response to AI adoption within the creative sector.

The study has two main goals. First, it seeks to understand how employers are responding to AI by restructuring teams, redefining roles, and navigating cultural norms. Second, it aims to analyze how these changes reflect and contribute to broader industry transformations and institutional expectations.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means you agree to be interviewed. In general, the interview questions will focus on your experiences with AI integration, changes in team structures, evolving workplace norms, and how these dynamics influence your organization's creative processes.

Unless you request otherwise, the interview will be audio recorded. You are always free to skip any question and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

#### RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information (such as your position in the organisation) not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym or more general identification, only mentioning age and gender, etc.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work.

#### TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 45 to 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

#### PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

#### DATA COLLECTION AND RETENTION

During the interview, the following personal data will be collected from you: audio recordings, occupation, professional background, and opinions about AI involvement in creative agencies and industry in the Netherlands.

I also need your email address to send the results of the study to you by email.

Your data will be retained for a minimum of 5 years. I retain the data so that other researchers have the opportunity to verify that the research was conducted correctly.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish– the thesis supervisor, Matthijs Leendertse via [leendertse@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:leendertse@eshcc.eur.nl).

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email Sanya Gupta at [725496sg@student.eur.nl](mailto:725496sg@student.eur.nl), or visit [www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl](http://www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl). (T: 088 - 1805250)

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be recorded during this study:

**Name Signature Date**

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

**Name Signature Date**

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Briefly introduce yourself and your research.</li><li>• Explain the purpose of the interview, relate it to scenario planning, and its relevance to AI's role in creative agencies.</li><li>• Assure the interviewee that their responses will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.</li><li>• Consent for recording &amp; usage for analysis.</li></ul>
Icebreakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Could you tell me about your background and expertise in the creative industries?</li><li>• When did you first encounter AI tools in your work? What was your initial impression?</li><li>• How do you currently use AI in your work?</li></ul>
Key trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What key trends are you observing right now that you think will shape the future of AI in creative industries?</li></ul> <p><b>Probes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technological aspects? (e.g., tool development, automation)</li><li>• Economic aspects? (e.g., budgets, cost-effectiveness)</li><li>• Socio-cultural aspects? (e.g., attitudes toward human creativity, authenticity)</li><li>• Regulatory or ethical aspects? (e.g., copyright, authorship, data use)</li></ul>

Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who do you think will be the key stakeholders shaping how AI is used in creative agencies?</li> <li>• How will clients, creative teams, tech developers, or regulators influence this space?</li> <li>• Do you think creatives themselves will have more or less say in shaping these changes?</li> </ul>
Job Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have AI tools changed the nature of job roles in your field? If so, how?</li> <li>• Do you feel your role or skillset has become more or less valuable due to AI? Have you noticed a shift in the demand for certain skills within your industry?</li> <li>• How do you think AI-generated content will impact creative labor markets and job security in 10 years?</li> </ul> <p><b>Probes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are creative professionals expected to adapt to new AI-related skills?</li> <li>• Is AI creating new job roles, or mainly reducing existing ones?</li> </ul>
Internal Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some of the shared expectations or informal rules that shape how creative work is done in your team or agency?</li> <li>• Have these internal norms changed with the introduction of AI tools? If so, how?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there new expectations around output quality, speed, or originality due to AI?</li> <li>• How is the use of AI discussed or perceived in your workplace (e.g., encouraged, resisted, neutral)?</li> </ul> <p><b>Probes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has AI changed the speed at which creative work is expected to be completed?</li> <li>• Do you feel pressure to use AI tools in your work?</li> <li>• Are there evolving views on what counts as “authentic” or “original” creative output?</li> </ul>
Team Dynamics and Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has AI changed the way team members collaborate or communicate during projects?</li> <li>• Have you observed changes in your team’s structure or roles since the introduction of AI tools?</li> <li>• Has AI influenced the hierarchy, leadership, or decision-making processes within your team?</li> </ul> <p><b>Probes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced or increased team interaction?</li> <li>• Thoughts on AI + human collaboration?</li> <li>• AI agent as a team member?</li> </ul>
Final Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the major uncertainties that may impact the future of creative agencies in terms of AI adoption?</li> </ul>

Final Remarks

- Do you have any final thoughts or questions?
- Anything that you would like to mention that might add onto the project?
- Offer to share key findings from the research.

**APPENDIX C**

CODING TREE

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Ecosystem of influence around AI in agencies	Top management are the main decision-makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top management in agencies are stakeholders</li> <li>• Management's willingness to adapt to AI determines agency survival</li> <li>• If AI is profitable, the management will adopt it.</li> </ul>
	Creative professionals influence the bottom-up adoption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creatives will have an important role to play since they are the ones who ultimately make the agency workflow.</li> </ul>
	Clients demands are central to AI adoption and output.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients' willingness to accept AI work would be influential in adoption of AI.</li> <li>• AI is faster for clients and cheaper so they prefer it</li> </ul>
	Tech firms will have a greater control in the creative industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big Tech will be a stakeholder since they control a large share of technology.</li> </ul>
	Audience/Consumers as a key player in AI adoption in agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumers' attitudes towards AI campaigns would shape the future of AI adoption in agencies.</li> <li>• After the market is filled with AI content, consumers might want newer creative content without AI</li> <li>• Consumers derive demand indirectly.</li> </ul>

AI's Creative Potential (Major uncertainty)	Rapid shift towards hybrid and agentic roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreasing demand for junior creatives.</li> <li>• Adaptability to change determines future job security</li> <li>• Attraction of top-tier talent as the future challenge for both brands and agencies</li> <li>• Hybrid creative-technologist profiles are valuable.</li> <li>• Emotive role of creatives in the AI-work.</li> <li>• Less need for illustrators and junior employees.</li> <li>• Emergence of "full-stack" creative roles.</li> <li>• Research, marketing, and creative roles can be 'agentic' jobs.</li> <li>• Prompt engineering as a vital skill for a creative now and in the future.</li> <li>• Creatives must upskill to stay relevant in AI-driven agencies.</li> <li>• Creatives changing into strategy-oriented roles.</li> <li>• Jobs within agencies will be increasingly technical.</li> <li>• Agencies have stopped hiring juniors and interns due to automation – No influx of young talent.</li> <li>• Creatives need to act as AI natives as they are digital natives.</li> <li>• No huge offset for new jobs; the new(er) roles that develop will be very low cost and very low pay.</li> <li>• AI reducing more jobs than it is creating.</li> </ul>
	Team friction and norm shifts due to AI adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with AI is a new norm itself.</li> <li>• No AI guideline issued within agencies.</li> <li>• Declaring use of AI tools when joining a new team is a new norm.</li> <li>• Hourly rate for all creative projects “will” be low.</li> <li>• Friction within the team due to AI adoption.</li> <li>• Tension between colleagues who use AI properly and who lack knowledge.</li> <li>• Urgency to be communicative within teams due to the technology development</li> <li>• Larger agencies are getting de-siloed due to AI, driving more team interaction than before. It will reduce as the AI advances and team reduces.</li> <li>• Human interaction more valued.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friction within teams increased due to AI adoption and subsequent panic.</li> <li>• Current structure of creative teams will not sustain</li> <li>• Hybrid teams emerging</li> <li>• Mutual understanding between creatives and tech roles is crucial for collaboration as it will be challenging.</li> <li>• AI + human collaboration reduces human interaction.</li> </ul>
	<p>Competition with in-house departments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients will shift to in-house teams more for smaller level work.</li> <li>• In-house teams have more funds for AI technology.</li> <li>• Clients might turn to agencies for “ground-breaking” campaigns only.</li> <li>• In-house teams will hire more (senior) professionals from creative agencies for better and more output.</li> </ul>
<p>Agency’s strategic adaptability (Major uncertainty)</p>	<p>Agency survival threatened due to resistant attitude</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agencies that resist will not survive.</li> <li>• More open conversation about AI might counter resistance.</li> <li>• Neutrality towards AI is also resistance.</li> <li>• Superficial implementation of AI is of no use.</li> <li>• Less of a technology challenge, more of a change management challenge - making agencies resistant.</li> <li>• Resistance from illustrators and writers due to fear of replacement.</li> <li>• Working without a strategy for AI is dangerous for agencies’ survival</li> <li>• Too many agencies in a limited market.</li> <li>• Creative industry is filled with mediocrity which will be replaced by AI.</li> </ul>
	<p>Need to define clear(er) value proposition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agencies must redefine and clearly communicate their value proposition in an AI-driven market.</li> <li>• Justification for the (high) cost for AI work.</li> <li>• Small to mid-sized agencies facing a negative impact due to smaller and less complex client base and unclear value proposition.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huge amount of client work will be done in-house (first mile) and last mile work gets done by an agency but the agencies lose a lot of revenue</li> <li>• Future value proposition of the agencies is uncertain and unclear.</li> </ul>
	Unfeasible business models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business models of creative agencies are broken.</li> <li>• Hourly business model will not work with AI.</li> <li>• Shift to a value-based/project-based/subscription-based/outcome-based model.</li> <li>• If agencies don't have a strategy for AI, then it is dangerous for their survival.</li> <li>• Mix of different models might work for specific services.</li> <li>• Potential rise of specialized, smaller agencies focusing on niche markets.</li> <li>• The new AI business model would eventually be good for the agency and clients.</li> <li>• Agencies are relevancy machines.</li> <li>• Agencies copy each other in their business models and practices.</li> </ul>
Technology infrastructure and access (Technological and Economic Trends)	AI agents in the creative workflow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The shift from tool-based enhancement to agent-based transformation</li> <li>• Proprietary AI model for the whole agency</li> <li>• Most (creative) work will be done with an AI agent.</li> <li>• More creative company-owned AI tools.</li> </ul>
	Budgetary limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most creative agencies don't have enough budget to train AI models and often use open source models.</li> <li>• Big budget or large agencies have developed their own "GPTs".</li> </ul>

Socio-cultural trends	Shifting definitions of human creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the human prompts the AI well and the output is excellent, that is also creativity.</li> <li>• Creativity is no longer just human-oriented.</li> <li>• AI + human work is also “authentic” as long as it is not copied.</li> </ul>
	Societal impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AI-driven change risks deepening societal inequality due to “displacement” of people.</li> <li>• AI has democratized creative tools for everyone to use and experiment.</li> <li>• More tech involvement might make the industry (more) male-dominated.</li> </ul>
Ethical concerns	Data use and privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AI can help with data filtering but clients do not give decent data to creative agencies due to security concerns.</li> <li>• Data use and privacy of briefings given by clients is critical and currently, lacking in agencies</li> <li>• Legal foundations of data use are very less.</li> <li>• Agencies do not take enough ethical responsibility for their AI use.</li> <li>• Need for transparency about data use for AI models.</li> </ul>
	Copyright	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns over fairness and copyright lag behind rapid AI development</li> <li>• Agencies question the ownership of the generated content since they do not (fully) own the IP.</li> <li>• Clients don't think AI use aligns with their brand due to the copyright concerns for image and video generation.</li> <li>• Policy on copyright is far behind the pace of technological development.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX D

### Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

#### Student Information

Name: Sanya Gupta

Student ID: 725496

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Matthijs Leendertse

Date: 25.06.2025

Declaration:

#### Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [ChatGPT, Grammarly], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]

Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

#### Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

#### Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: Sanya Gupta

Date of Signature: 25.06.2025

The following prompts were used for AI usage:

- Suggest synonyms for “...”
- Correct the grammar for this sentence “...”
- Can you provide a short summary of this research paper?