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AI Writing Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Il saggio sottolinea l'importanza di affrontare la scrittura con gli strumenti di IA generativa da un punto di vista etico, proponendo l'etica della scrittura IA come un sottocampo dell'etica dell'intelligenza artificiale. I testi generati dall'intelligenza artificiale stanno diventando sempre più diffusi e hanno il potenziale di plasmare in modo significativo l'immaginario, il discorso pubblico e persino la nostra comprensione del linguaggio. Il saggio affronta diverse questioni cruciali, come i rischi di omogeneizzazione linguistica e il potenziale di manipolazione attraverso i contenuti generati dall'intelligenza artificiale. Esplora inoltre la sfida del contesto, sottolineando come l'IA spesso fatichi a comprendere le sfumature della comunicazione umana. Inoltre, viene esaminata la distinzione tra fatto e discorso, dal momento che l'IA spesso fallisce su questo punto, portando a inesattezze. Un'altra questione chiave è la creatività, campo nel quale l'IA mostra una capacità limitata di generare la stratificazione semantica tipica dei testi letterari. Tuttavia, si notano risultati positivi nella scrittura creativa quando il testo è frutto di un processo di interazione tra essere umano e macchina. In conclusione, il saggio sostiene la necessità di operazionalizzare l'etica della scrittura dell'IA, proponendo che le considerazioni etiche sollevate attraverso l'analisi critica della scrittura dell'IA siano integrate nella progettazione e nell'implementazione dei modelli. Questo approccio garantirebbe che gli strumenti di IA siano utilizzati in modo responsabile e in linea con gli standard etici sia nella loro creazione che nella loro applicazione.

Keywords

Generative AI, LLM, Writing, Ethics, Language, Communication, Creativity, Operationalizing

Introduction

AI writing is becoming more e more widespread, especially – but not only – in the online environment. In recent years, advances in Large Language Models (LLMs) and their release to the general public through conversational interfaces have enabled a large number of people to automatically generate text from

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natural language prompts. This development makes it essential to pay close attention to the impact of AI-generated texts on society, education, language, communication and creativity. In the coming years, AI-generated texts are expected to constitute most of the online content, becoming the primary source of information and language samples for future generations (Thompson et alii 2024; Sun et alii 2024; Liang et alii 2025). Various studies, in fact, demonstrate the link between cognitive development of the subject and language (Carruthers 2003; Deák 2014). The texts that we read and that circulate in the cultural and media landscape influence our ideas and perceptions of the world, through both the language and the content they convey. This highlights the importance of analyzing the ethical implications of this practice from different points of view, that include linguistics, communication, and creativity.

The inclusion of AI-generated texts in our communicative and cultural environment raises ethical questions both from a social perspective and in relation to the domains involved. It is therefore necessary to carve out a space within the broader discussion on AI ethics, specifically focused on the ethics of AI writing. The scope of AI ethics is to study the cultural, social, and economic implications of using AI systems, and AI writing encompasses all these aspects. From a cultural perspective, it can influence the way artistic products are generated and circulated; from a social point of view, it can influence cognitive processes and power relations; from an economic perspective, it can impact on the publishing industry and jobs related to writing. In addition to this, other implications may arise from a more detailed analysis of the phenomenon, in relation for example to cognitive studies, politics or human rights. Referring to AI ethics paradigms, the analysis of AI writing considers questions of human well-being, inclusivity, and cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2021).

In the field of AI writing, it is also important to consider the differences between textual types. If we look at the distinction made by Werlich (1976), which classifies texts according to linguistic and functional criteria (descriptive, narrative, informative, argumentative, prescriptive), we can understand how different text typologies may raise distinct ethical issues. In the case of informative texts, for example, trustworthiness will be a central factor; whereas in descriptive texts, fairness plays a key role; and in argumentative texts, the possibility of manipulation must be considered. An important distinction, finally, is to be traced between texts that constitute mere content and those that aspire to enter the realm of literature, hence creative writing[1]. In the following sections, we will refer to both content and literary texts, providing an analysis of the mayor issues arising around the ethics of AI writing.

Homologation and Manipulation

To analyze how the use of generative AI influences text, the first level to explore is the purely linguistic one, aiming to understand what kind of language the current models are producing[2]. Several studies have demonstrated that LLMs continue to exhibit less linguistic diversity than humans (Giulianelli et al., 2023; Shaib et al., 2024; Martinez et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2024). AI systems tend to reinforce dominant linguistic patterns while marginalizing fewer common ones (Kandpal et al., 2023). This process threatens to flatten expressive diversity, making communication more predictable. Also significant is the phenomenon of declining linguistic diversity in LLMs trained on AI-generated texts, which creates a vicious cycle: LLM-generated texts are uploaded to the web, reducing linguistic diversity online, and training new LLMs through web scraping further exacerbates the problem (Guo et al., 2024).

Diversification is an intrinsic feature of human languages and has been crucial to their evolution over centuries (Swadesh 2006). The increased circulation of standardized content may contribute to a decline in human language skills. This situation is particularly concerning for individuals who are still undergoing

[1] We will use the term 'content' in the sense it has in the context of social media communication, i.e., as a text containing information or a message, shared on platforms to engage an audience. In this regard, it can include informative, argumentative, and even some narrative texts, without literary intent. The distinction is important from an ethical standpoint, because, as we will argue in the last paragraph, a literary text has a different relationship to ethics than a non-literary text and involves different issues.
[2] In this regard, it should be clarified that the evaluations in this paragraph concern the current state of available language models. Improvements in this field are happening at an increasingly rapid pace. However, it is believed that to guide these improvements, the integration of an ethical approach is necessary, regardless of the systems' performance.

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linguistic and cognitive development. While there are virtuous uses of AI in education (Onyebuchi et alii 2024), there is also an uncontrolled and unaware use by students for completing assignments (Venter 2024). The extensive use of Generative AI for content production could alter users' perceptions, leading them to fail to recognize texts currently identifiable as AI-generated and to adopt AI's language as the norm. The degradation of linguistic and expressive skills represents an impoverishment of the ability to make critical judgments and evaluate situations, thereby making it easier to control individuals[3].

Additionally, AI can be used to produce persuasive texts. Manipulation is closely linked to the linguistic sphere, as it is carried out through techniques and rhetorical figures associated with persuasion, which can make false content appear believable. Studies have shown that AI writing tools can generate texts that influence and manipulate the reader (Yoo 2024; Carrasco-Farre 2024). It is important to remember that behind manipulation lies the malicious intent of humans. Technology itself is neither good nor evil; it is human use that determines its potential for harm.

To summarize, we can say that from a linguistic perspective the use of AI raises two critical ethical issues: the first is the impoverishment of linguistic diversity, potentially leading to the decay of human cognitive capacities; the second is the use of these tools to generate large quantities of manipulative texts. These issues interact and exacerbate each other, as the degradation of human critical capacities increases the likelihood of manipulation. The problem of control and manipulation, resulting from the impoverishment of human skills due to AI-generated texts or intentional malicious use, is a key issue in defining the ethical dimension of AI writing, as we will explore in the following sections.

The problem of context

Shifting from the linguistic to the communication level, it is important to analyze the reasons why the output provided by LLMs often turn out to be inaccurate and untrustworthy. In this regard, an important issue is the models' difficulty understanding context, which affects their ability to produce effective texts. Human language is shaped within a context of use, rooted in the real-life situations that individuals are continually part of. In contrast, LLMs treat language as an abstract model. While this approach may be successful in producing coherent linguistic sequences, it falls short of capturing the complexity of human communication.

The problem is also reflected at the ethical level, as McKee and Porter (2020) pointed out, by placing AI ethics in dialogue with communication theory. They argue that «many AI writing systems are built on an information transfer model of communication that assumes text production is a simple matter of converting raw data into sentences and paragraphs» (110). Such a model does not consider the role of the audience, context, and ethical norms that influence human text production. In short, they claim that AI writing systems use a different communication system from human communication, which excludes many contextual factors that are essential in some cases for meeting ethical standards. In fact, both shared ethical values and daily micro-ethical issues primarily lie within the rhetorical context.

According to McKee and Porter, in the case of human-machine communication, some form of mediation is necessary: «With humans talking to humans or humans talking with machines that unpredictability and complexity cannot be so easily programmed in, requiring more flexibility for both human and machine about communication patterns and processes» (111). They propose considering an alternative communication model, advocating for a shift in AI writing from the information transfer model (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) to a social context model. The information transfer model considers information as passing from an encoder to a decoder within a closed message, with no interaction with the external context. A social context model, on the other hand, «forefronts the co-creation of meaning by

[3] We are aware that, at the time of writing this article, there is already an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the use of generative AI to evaluate its positive and negative effects on humans, in terms of the development or impoverishment of cognitive faculties. In the context of ethical reflection, we believe it is necessary to primarily emphasize the potential risks.

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rhetor/writer and audience and the context shaping their interaction» (112). Although many systems today demonstrate improved efficiency regarding the understanding of different contexts, the language modeling principle underlying LLMs makes the problem of context ever-present and not easy to solve definitively. In agreement with McKee and Porter, we believe that paying attention to a social context model in AI writing is crucial for designing ethically consistent systems. In order to do so, it is necessary to implement specific measures during the model design phase, as will be discussed in the final paragraph.

Facts and discourses

One of the most relevant problems in current text generation, particularly with LLMs, is related to the concept of context. These systems often fail to understand the difference between a fact, which is a specific information related to objective reality, and a discourse, which is a general communicative act that is not strictly linked to a real reference and is usually expressed from a subjective point of view. For example, the date of birth of a writer is a fact, while the interpretation of a poem is a discourse. This difference, which may seem obvious to humans, is often misunderstood by LLMs. Many of the so-called hallucinations arise from a misunderstanding of the distinction between fact and discourse. Issues of accuracy arise from this malfunction, causing LLMs to provide information that is not true, but merely constructed based on the abstract model of language, without any reference to reality. Some AI companies have addressed this problem by integrating online research into the model, but the systems still struggle to effectively discern from the context when a fact is needed and, consequently, when source research is required.

The failure to distinguish between fact and discourse means that these systems often provide incorrect information, proving to be inaccurate and untrustworthy. On a deeper level, this tendency could exacerbate the problem of information disorder, which is already widespread in communication and amplified by the rise of social media (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017). Indeed, we live in a society where the accuracy of information and the truth itself are constantly questioned. The flood of propaganda and fake news in public discourse makes truth increasingly irrelevant; something becomes true not because it is a verifiable fact, but because it is stated in a convincing discourse. This practice is linked to the concept of post-truth, a term used by Ralph Keyes in 2004 to describe a phenomenon typical of the contemporary era, in which what is perceived as true is a discourse based on emotional factors and personal beliefs, rather than on objective truth. The latter becomes an increasingly marginal element, no longer available for reference in the overloaded media flow.

Colin Crouch connected the concept of post-truth to post-democracy, highlighting how the decline of objective truth has become a widely used tool in politics, undermining the very concept of democratic representation. A malicious use of AI writing systems can worsen an already severely damaged situation. In fact, studies have shown how AI-based writing can exacerbate the manipulative processes typical of the post-truth and post-democracy era through the input of a large amount of persuasion-oriented content (Hanley and Durumeric 2024; Chen et al. 2025; Muzumdar et al. 2025). In this context, we can understand why users today find it difficult to recognize the need to verify the accuracy of information from LLMs and to acknowledge the risk that these models can fail to distinguish between facts and discourse. The flaw in the model, in this case, becomes a sounding board for an already widespread and extremely dangerous social and political problem.

Literary writing and imaginary

The last aspect to address concerns the relationship between AI writing and literary writing. In a 2023 article, Michele Elam reflects on the relationship between AI and creativity, starting with the importance of art in the formation of collective imagination, shared ethical values, and worldview. Stories influence our way of thinking and acting, and this is where the ethical value of narration lies, along with the responsibility of those who write and publish stories. If we consider the imaginary as a fundamental force in the construction of society, the automation of literary production processes could pose the same

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security and reliability risks as in other fields, or perhaps even more so. This perspective aligns with the need for an ethical approach to AI writing. The focus on narrative leads us to consider both the structural and content aspects of a generated text and their alignment with literary tradition. The key question, in short, is whether an AI system can produce what humans understand as narrative: not only the more superficial aspects, but also the deeper implications that precede and follow the act of narration, particularly in terms of conformity with the ethics of narration.

The question is to understand how a human and an AI system differ in approaching the act of narrating. In this regard, Elam makes a fundamental distinction between the purpose of art and that of AI systems: «Should the principles of efficiency, speed, and so-called blessings of scale apply so unequivocally to creative process? After all, poetry does not optimize. Fiction is not frictionless» (Elam, 2023: 12). This statement encourages us to reflect on the fact that using AI in creative fields means applying a tool not designed for creative purposes. The current efforts of AI system developers aim at creating precise and reliable systems; however, creativity does not require exactness. In most of its fields of application, AI systems must prove their reliability by offering valid and accurate results; creativity, on the other hand, does not demand precision. In fact, it is within uncertainty that creativity finds one of its most distinctive ingredients: polysemy. This is an issue widely discussed by literary theorists and writers, which Italo Calvino, in a 1967 article, links specifically to the idea of the writing machine. He argues that the real challenge of writing through automatic systems would be to achieve a layering of meanings that resonates with human sensibility (Calvino 1967).

The problem, therefore, lies in recreating the polysemy typical of literary texts. The lack of semantic richness in AI-generated texts has significant implications, not only for creative sensibility but also from an ethical perspective, as it weakens critical thinking and the ability to interpret. It also limits the use of registers such as satire, parody, and metaphorical language – tools often employed to circumvent censorship or challenge dominant ideologies. In short, diminishing the polysemy of texts erodes our ability to exercise free thought and shifts language and interpretation toward unambiguous reading, which is likely to reflect dominant structures of power, reinforcing hierarchies and linguistic and narrative biases.

When it comes to whether an AI system can create narratives on par with human ones, capable of generating new cultural imaginaries, the answer is, in principle, no. There are numerous examples of narrative texts, often self-published on online platforms, where the writing is entirely generated by AI systems based on a generic prompt (Cabezas-Clavijo, 2024). These texts usually do not offer a true literary perspective, and are often just stereotypical narratives, sometimes with obvious errors in coherence and recurring problems of repetition. This practice contaminates the landscape of literary production with texts that do not contribute to any real advancement, instead proposing static and low-quality models, which leads to a decline in standards within a publishing industry already suffering from overproduction. The lack of elements such as linguistic richness, polysemy and context understanding undermines not only the possibility of creating effective narratives but also their sustainability from an ethical standpoint. However, the scenario changes if we consider narratives in which a human interacts with an AI system in a creative way, defining a generative process where human-machine interaction enables the creation of literary products characterized by polysemy, or even brings to light elements that would not have emerged without the interaction with the AI. It is not the same as simply prompting an LLM to write a narrative on a specific topic, nor is it the same as designing an interactive process between one or more AI systems and the human artist.

We can highlight cases of AI being used beneficially in literary production, when a complex interaction is designed by the human artist. One example is the novel *1 the Road*, created by Ross Goodwin. In this case, the artist attached a series of sensors (GPS, camera, microphones, etc.) connected to a writing system in a car and embarked on a journey retracing the steps of Kerouac's *On the Road*. The resulting narrative is highly evocative and polysemous, offering a new way of looking at the world, detached from human experience. Another example of creative use of AI in writing is *Non siamo mai stati sulla Terra*, written by Italian author Rocco Tanica in collaboration with a GPT system. In this case, the author exploits the mimetic capabilities and hallucinatory aspects of the system to create short stories that reflect literary

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genres and writing styles (Raffini 2025). In both cases, interaction with AI opened unexpected paths and conferred different meanings to the text, achieving a literary effect through the construction of polysemy and the dialogue with tradition and literary genre. These narratives demonstrate that human-machine interaction in text generation can indeed produce literary texts and help shape new imaginaries. However, they also show that human intervention is crucial in this process, and that the best results come from designing innovative interaction processes with Generative AI, which can overcome the tendency for exactness inherent in AI models, but not in creativity.

Operationalizing the Ethics of AI Writing

The analysis carried out thus far has emphasized the importance of considering the ethical implications of using generative AI systems for writing. It is also clear that human involvement and control are essential. The ethical issues raised regarding language, communication and creativity suggest that the complete automation of the writing process using LLMs at this moment is not sustainable. At this stage, we need to consider how specific problems can be addressed, and how the principles of AI writing ethics can be put into practice. In recent years, scholars of AI ethics have been bringing attention to the issue of operationalizing ethical principles (Cansu 2020, Zhu et alii 2022, Krijger 2022, Kumar et alii 2025). Operationalizing AI ethics refers to the process of implementing ethical principles and guidelines into the design, development, deployment, and monitoring of AI systems in a practical and actionable way. This means translating abstract ethical concepts (like fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy, etc.) into real practices, policies, and frameworks that can guide AI development and ensure its responsible use. Operationalizing AI ethics involves several actions, such as outlining ethical guidelines, defining clear standards that AI systems must meet, embedding ethics into AI design, continuously evaluating AI systems to ensure they adhere to ethical standards and adjusting when necessary, establishing accountability mechanisms and metrics, and educating developers, stakeholders, and users.

In the case of AI writing, it seems useful to focus primarily on defining some fundamental values. McKee and Porter (2020) highlight the importance of transparency regarding AI presence, making it clear to the reader if and how AI tools were used in the writing process. They also emphasize the value of a critical approach, which involves constantly questioning both the tool and the output, avoiding over-reliance on a data-driven approach, and ensuring human control over various aspects of textuality. A critical approach is fundamental to ensuring accountability, which involves verifying the truthfulness of information in AI-generated texts, considering contextual issues, and distinguishing between facts and discourse. It also includes fairness, which encompasses various aspects, such as respecting cultural and linguistic diversity, ensuring the non-manipulative use of AI writing, and controlling bias.

The first level of intervention directly involves implementing generative AI systems. Addressing issues related to linguistic standardization and the challenges of managing communicative contexts from the design and training phases onward can help improve systems in relation to the shortcomings currently observed. In this regard, it may be beneficial to integrate knowledge from the fields of linguistics and narratology directly into the models, both through targeted learning processes, such as Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), and the integration of symbolic components, such as ontologies. These strategies could improve LLMs' performance in writing by helping to enhance problematic tasks, such as semantic disambiguation and managing relationships between concepts.

On the other hand, it is important to raise awareness among users to promote a better understanding of how AI systems work and the potential risks of using AI for writing. This can be achieved through the definition of best practices, designed to address ethical issues and put fundamental values into practice. Education about LLMs is a fundamental step in disseminating awareness and knowledge about these writing tools, ensuring that users are aware of the associated ethical issues and know how to intervene effectively. To achieve this goal, a basic technical understanding of the systems and practical knowledge are both required. In addition, close attention must be paid by the user at different stages of interaction.

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Before using an AI tool to write a text, the user should define the process of human-machine collaboration. After the texts are generated, the user should focus on the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of AI language to prevent the homogenization of language and identify errors. In fact, homogenization can be prevented by incorporating linguistic richness and diversity into the systems, as well as by intervening in the generated texts, with the human assuming the role of an attentive editor rather than a passive copy-and-paste agent. Additionally, deconstructing the rhetorical tools of AI communication can help assess whether a text is trustworthy.

This brings us to the importance of evaluating texts generated by AI, which must be done using the tools of the respective disciplines – namely, linguistics, communication, and literary studies. In this context, achieving quantitative metrics is challenging; instead, one must rely on the qualitative methods typical of the humanities, which combine critical approaches with the judgment of experts in the field, both of which hold equal importance to the measurable objectivity found in STEM disciplines. To evaluate AI-generated texts, it is essential to analyze AI writing processes in order to understand how the systems function, the flaws in discourse production, and the role of human agency in the process. This approach is particularly relevant when studying AI-generated texts presented as literary works, but it can also be useful when evaluating textual content with no artistic purpose. Human mediation should aim to mitigate the ethical risks associated with AI writing by intervening both in the design phase of the interaction and in the output.

Conclusion

The framework presented here does not claim to be exhaustive in terms of issues relating to AI writing, but is intended as a starting point, especially in its focus on operationalization. As an emerging area of study, the ethics of AI writing needs to refine its tools. However, what seemed important at this stage is to emphasize the need for an ethical approach to AI writing, starting with real-world problematic cases, such as those discussed in the analysis. The issues described span various fields, including linguistics, creativity, media, and, in some cases, specific approaches to AI models. Research on ethical issues could be expanded further, for example, by analyzing the impact of AI on writing jobs or copyright (Flick and Worrall 2022). All these aspects are interconnected through their common reference to textuality and share similar ethical concerns, particularly regarding issues of control, manipulation, and the impoverishment of human capabilities. Further work is also needed to develop a concrete operational plan for the ethics of AI writing. This is why it is crucial to continue the debate and build a shared ethical framework within the broader field of AI ethics, one that can address the challenges posed by the proliferation of AI-generated texts and guide us toward a responsible and beneficial use of these technologies.

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