



“God or Idol?” Research exploration of AI idolization awareness in poster design



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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore how poster design can be utilized as a medium for critical reflection on the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence (AI). Using the Research Through Design approach, the study developed and compared two poster concepts: a collaborative human-AI poster and a provocative AI-idolization poster. Began with poster creation, which conveys a message regarding the position of AI and humans. Poster with knowledge tree theme was chosen to represent harmony between organic and technological elements. This poster depicts humans and AI sitting side by side under a tree with circuit-shaped roots, symbolizing synergy and connectedness. However, despite its aesthetic and communicative value, this visual model has been widely used, resulting in a weak awareness effect; audiences are accustomed to similar metaphors. As an alternative, a second approach was taken, creating a quirky poster that combines a religious figure with robotic elements as an AI modern idol. This provocative visual creates shock awareness, forcing audiences to consider the position of AI, whether read as a colleague or excessively glorified. Using a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, results confirm that the AI goddess poster is more effective in raising critical awareness than the tree poster. Through visual rhetoric and semiotic analysis, findings suggest that unconventional visual metaphors have greater potential to stimulate critical reflection regarding AI's position in contemporary society.



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1. Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) in recent years has transformed nearly every aspect of production, communication, and creative expression [1], [2]. AI is no longer merely a tool, but is increasingly seen as a collaborator in the creative process, including poster design and visual communication [3], [4]. At the same time, ethical concerns have arisen, as the line between appreciating AI's capabilities and excessive idolization becomes blurred. Research in the fields of Human-AI Interaction (HAI) and Human-AI Collaboration (HAC) demonstrates that transparency, contextual awareness, and clear communication between humans and AI are crucial to maintaining AI's position as a partner, not a substitute or object of worship [5], [6]. For example, in the study An Exploratory Study on How AI Awareness Impacts Human AI Design Collaboration, the research team found that when AI is aware of the work context and human activities, collaboration becomes smoother and more communicative [7]. Similarly, in Human-AI collaboration in the higher education environment: opportunities and concerns, it was found that the use of AI in education brings significant benefits, but also raises questions about how humans position AI, whether as a threat or as a creative tool, including in processing images [8].

In the realm of visual communication, studies such as 'Images of Artificial Intelligence: a Blind Spot in AI Ethics' highlight that many visual representations of AI are repetitive and emphasize a cold, futuristic aesthetic, thus lacking critical reflection on humanity's position on AI. Representations such as androgynous faces, half-circuit brains, and blue ambient elements often appear without clear ethical context [9]. Recent studies on artificial intelligence in visual communication and design have predominantly positioned AI as a collaborative partner that enhances human creativity rather than as a cultural or symbolic phenomenon requiring critical examination [10], [11]. Generative AI can positively influence design creativity by providing diverse visual stimuli and supporting idea development, while Wen demonstrated that visual imagery and cultural codes play a significant role in shaping audience interpretation of poster messages [12], [13]. Similarly, Yang emphasized that the effectiveness of poster communication depends on the strategic use of symbolic imagery capable of generating emotional and cognitive responses [14]. Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of AI-assisted creativity and visual symbolism in communication design; however, they largely reinforce narratives of collaboration, innovation, and technological progress. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to visual representations that critically question the growing tendency of society to attribute excessive authority, trust, or even quasi-religious significance to AI systems. As a result, the possibility of AI functioning as a modern idol remains underexplored within visual communication research.

This study addresses this gap by examining how poster design can serve as a medium for critical reflection through the visual metaphor of AI idolization, shifting the discourse from AI as a creative partner toward AI as a symbolic object whose increasing influence warrants ethical and cultural scrutiny. Based on these findings, this paper focuses on comparing two visual approaches to poster design: one that uses the metaphor of human AI harmony (the tree poster), and another that uses the provocative metaphor of idolization (the goddess poster). The goal is to explore how visual design can create critical awareness about the position of humans and AI, beyond simply relying on aesthetics or the usual symbols of synergy. Although numerous studies have explored AI ethics, human-AI collaboration, and AI-assisted creativity, limited research has examined how poster design can critically represent the tendency of humans to idolize AI. Existing visual representations predominantly emphasize harmony, efficiency, and technological advancement, leaving the issue of AI idolization underexplored. This study addresses this gap by investigating how provocative poster design may function as a medium for critical reflection on the position of AI in society. This study contributes to visual communication design by introducing AI idolization as a visual rhetoric strategy for critical awareness. It further expands discussions on AI ethics through design practice and demonstrates how provocative visual narratives can encourage audiences to reconsider the position of AI in contemporary life.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The goal is to explain the creative process in designing a poster highlighting the interplay between artificial intelligence (AI) and humans. Qualitative research was chosen because it emphasizes understanding meaning, visual interpretation, and critical reflection rather than statistical measurement [15], [16]. The research team included a review of recent studies on ethical awareness of AI, human-machine collaboration, and the role of visual design in social communication. The literature served as a conceptual foundation for understanding how symbols, metaphors, and aesthetics can construct critical messages [17]. This study adopts a Research Through Design (RtD) approach, in which knowledge is generated through iterative design practice, experimentation, and critical reflection. The design process consisted of literature exploration, visual concept development, poster creation, and reflective evaluation of the resulting artifacts.

Research team also examined existing visual trends related to the relationship between humans and AI. It was discovered that the metaphor of a tree of knowledge with circuit shaped roots was overused, and while beautiful, its surprise effect and public awareness were limited.

This led to the reflection that other, more powerful visual strategies were needed to stimulate audience reflection [18]. The primary data consisted of academic literature, existing AI-related posters collected through visual observation, conceptual sketches, and final poster designs produced during the study. Visual rhetoric and semiotic interpretation were employed to analyze symbolic meanings, visual metaphors, and emotional impact. The study combines Research Through Design (RtD) with visual rhetoric analysis to examine how symbolic elements influence critical interpretation within poster design [19]. While RtD facilitates knowledge generation through iterative design practice and reflection, visual rhetoric analysis provides a framework for understanding how images persuade, communicate values, and construct meaning through symbolic representation [20].

By integrating these approaches, the study not only documents the creative process but also critically examines how visual metaphors may influence audience perception of artificial intelligence. To enhance methodological rigor, future studies may incorporate expert validation involving design practitioners and visual communication scholars, thereby strengthening interpretative reliability and reducing researcher subjectivity [21]. The research team then attempted to formulate a provocative alternative visual: depicting AI as a multi-armed goddess worshipped by humans [22]. This visualization was positioned as a form of shock awareness, challenging the audience to question whether AI has been treated as a working partner or as a modern idol [23], [24]. Using a combination of literature, observation, and creative intuition, this research method not only records the poster-making process but also emphasizes the role of visual communication design as a medium for ethical reflection in the era of AI development. As can be seen in Fig. 1.

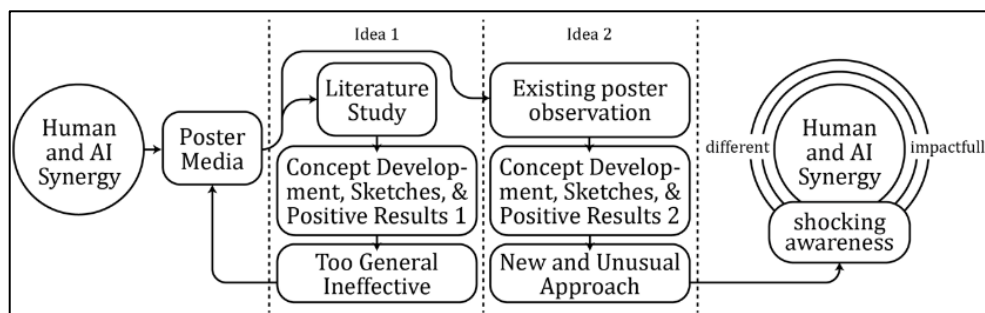


Fig. 1. Research Methods

Fig. 1 shows two stages of poster creation. The first poster creation stage began with a literature review, visual exploration, and creative reflection. This literature review was conducted to understand the issues of awareness regarding the use of AI in design, technology ethics, and visual communication practices through posters [25]. This literature served as the conceptual foundation for poster creation. This stage continued with the creation of the first poster version. The "Tree of Knowledge" poster was developed by combining organic and technological symbols as a metaphor for the harmony of humans and AI. However, reflection revealed that this representation was generic and repetitive, in line with the findings of design studies highlighting the declining effectiveness of clichéd visual symbols in raising awareness [26], [27]. The next stage was the creation of the second poster, which began with an observation of existing posters and an experiment to create a second poster.

Through a comparative study of similar posters, the authors discovered that a provocative visual approach was needed to generate new awareness. Thus, the "God or Idol?" poster was developed, combining religious figures with robotic elements. This approach aligns with the idea of critical semiotics, namely the use of shocking symbols to shake up audience perceptions [28]. The study describes the author's creative process in selecting visual strategies. The results demonstrate a shift from a harmonious conventional approach to a critical provocative approach, which is more effective and offers a stronger critical visual contrast in raising audience awareness that has the potential to stimulate critical reflection about the position of AI and humans in ideal collaboration.

3. Results and Discussion

Through literature review, the author successfully compiled five key visual ideas that frequently appear in human AI collaboration posters: (1) a human and a robot handshake; (2) a human brain and an AI chip merging; (3) a collaborative workbench; (4) a modern yin-yang symbol; (5) and a tree of knowledge. These ideas are not merely creative predictions, but are also inspired by recent visual literature and communication design studies [29]. However, of these five ideas, the first four were ultimately not selected for visualization in this study because the conceptual evaluation showed several weaknesses. The five initial poster concepts were evaluated based on four criteria: novelty, symbolic clarity, inclusivity, and awareness potential. These criteria were used to determine the suitability of each concept for encouraging critical reflection regarding human AI relationships. As can be shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Concept of Ideas from Literature Study Results

No	Conceptual Idea	Assessment and Considerations	Decision
1	Human and robot hands shaking.	Too cliché, predictable, and lacking sufficient provocative power.	Rejected
2	A visual fusion of an organic brain with digital chips.	It risks appearing too biological, thus lacking relevance to the synergy between humans and AI.	Rejected
3	A top view of a collaborative workbench showing manual and digital equipment.	It actually reinforces the impression that AI is a shortcut to creativity, rather than an equal partner.	Rejected
4	A modern yin-yang symbol depicting both human and AI.	It is too exclusive to Chinese culture and not inclusive of a more global (multicultural) audience.	Rejected
5	A tree of knowledge where humans and AI share their work.	It has a different perspective, a relatively universal metaphor, and is easily accepted by the audience.	Accepted and forwarded visuals

The explanation of the display in Table 1 is as follows: idea 1 (human and robot hands shaking hands); the writing team felt it was too cliché, predictable, and lacked the provocative power needed to arouse deep awareness. Idea 2 (organic brain digital chips); risks appearing too biological and difficult to convey the message that AI is also systemic and technological, making it less relevant to the theme of human and AI synergy that is being emphasized. Idea 3 (collaborative workbench); is expected to produce a “so-so” visual, instead it could reinforce the impression that AI is a “shortcut” in creating work, not an equal partner. Idea 4 (modern yin-yang symbol); the writing team also rejected due to concerns that the symbol could be considered exclusive to one culture and not inclusive to a global or cross-cultural audience (multi-cultural). Yin-yang is closely related to Chinese culture, so the visual may be difficult to accept inclusively. Finally, idea 5 (the tree of knowledge poster) was chosen as the basis for the first visualization because its approach is taken from a different perspective and has a relatively universal metaphor that is easily accepted by the audience. The acceptance and rejection of each visual concept were guided by principles of visual rhetoric and symbolic communication. Concepts perceived as overly familiar or culturally restrictive were excluded in favor of alternatives with stronger potential to generate reflection and memorability.

3.1. First Poster Exploration

In the first poster concept development stage, the author formulated the concept of humans and AI sitting together in a meditative position beneath a tree whose roots resemble electronic circuits. The meditative position was chosen as a symbol of balance, introspection, and serenity, not a hierarchy. The tree was chosen because it iconographically symbolizes growth, life, and a fundamental connection with nature. The circuit shaped roots represent that technology (AI) is the foundation that penetrates the “soil of human reality.” This concept aims to convey that although AI is born from a complex technological structure, it must ideally remain rooted in human values. In the initial sketch of the first poster (Fig. 2, Left), elements such as humans, AI figures, trees, circuit roots, leaves, and symbols of ideas (lamps, books, sketches) are arranged to maintain a balanced visual composition. The author attempted to maintain the visual center between humans and AI, with the tree as the central pillar. The circuit root elements are designed to spread downward and sideways to convey the impression that technology not only supports but also animates the human AI relationship. The leaves and idea symbols are spread

upward to represent ideas and creativity. The background is kept simple with light-dark contrasts to create a dramatic mood and focus attention on the central elements.

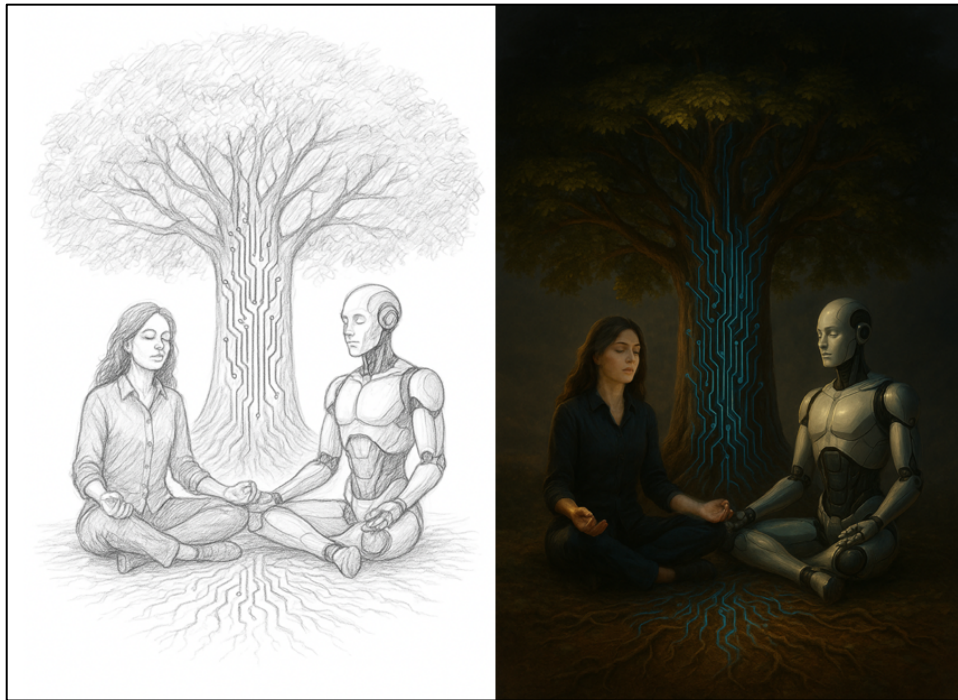


Fig. 2. First Poster Sketch (Left) and First Poster Result (Right)

During the visual rendering of the first poster (Fig. 2, Right), the team added dramatic lighting, overhead light effects, soft shadows, realistic textures on the leaves and roots, and contrasting warm and cool colors. These effects aim to make the poster not only visually pleasing but also evoke emotional sensations and a profound impression. For example, a soft light from above can suggest "enlightenment," while the slightly illuminated circuit roots reflect the energy of technology within the human ecosystem. Textures and color gradients are used to ensure that the organic and technological elements do not appear separate but rather blend together conceptually and visually. The use of dramatic lighting establishes a strong focal point and reinforces visual hierarchy [30]. Such lighting techniques are commonly employed in emotional design to direct viewer attention and enhance symbolic significance. After the first poster was completed, the author critically and reflectively evaluated its success. While the poster successfully presented elegant symbols and visual harmony, the author realized that this visual was already too common; the tree roots and circuits metaphor has been widely used in AI campaign materials, technology articles, and creative publications. Its awareness-raising effect on the audience was likely small, as observers had become "immune" to such provocative visualizations. Thus, the need arose for a more "quirky" visual approach, one that was not only pleasing to the eye, but could also provoke reflection and anxiety, thus demonstrating that worshipping AI as a shortcut to creative work, like worshipping idols, is dangerous and frightening.

3.2. Second Poster Exploration

In conceptualizing the second poster, "God or Idol?", the authors chose to depict AI as a goddess with eight arms floating and seated in a meditative literary pose. This choice was based on the idea that multi-armed religious figures already resonate in many cultures (for example, Hindu deities and sacred iconography), and therefore carry a strong symbolic weight. The number eight was chosen so that each hand could hold an object representing the various functions of AI in human life, and to create a majestic and complex visual impression. As can be seen in Fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Second Poster Sketch (Left) and Second Poster Result (Right)

The sketch for the second poster began with a focus on the half human, half robot (cyborg) form of the AI goddess. The authors then filled it with hands holding specific objects, each conveying its own concept. Hand 1 holds a paintbrush because AI is capable of producing realistic visuals; hand 2 holds a pencil because AI is capable of creating logical concepts; hand 3 holds a laptop because AI is capable of analyzing a problem; hand 4 holds a notepad because AI is capable of analyzing human notes in search of solutions; hand 5 holds a smartphone because AI has become integrated into all applications, marketplaces, and social media. Hand 6 holds a money bag because AI is capable of making things that make money for humans; Hand 7 holds lipstick because AI is capable of making humans more beautiful and deceiving others; and Hand 8 holds a young shoot because AI is capable of giving hope, analyzing stocks, and predicting other investment instruments.

The layout is positioned so that the body of the AI goddess is at the center, surrounded by the hands that radiate from the body like an aura. The sketch lines are designed to ensure each hand has sufficient visual space without overlapping, while the initial background is intentionally kept minimal to maintain focus on the central figure. In the visual rendering of the second poster, the author adds high contrast lighting (light source from behind or above), glow effects on the robotic elements and objects in the hands, soft shadows beneath the floating body, a dramatic color palette of metallic (silver, gold) and dark, and subtle shimmering effects on the cybers and technological elements. The visual effect is intended to appear sacred-futuristic: not only impressive, but also disturbing the viewer's sense of comfort. Visually, the composition is arranged so that the viewer's eye is drawn to the goddess's face, then moves to the hands and objects held, and then returns to the center. From a semiotic perspective, the meditative posture signifies contemplation and self awareness, while the symmetrical placement of the human and AI figures communicates equality rather than dominance [31]. The visual composition emphasizes coexistence and mutual growth. According to Barthes' semiotic framework, the image operates on three levels: (1) denotation (a robotic goddess); (2) connotation (technological power and influence); (3) and myth (the perception of AI as a near divine entity capable of solving human problems) [32]. The visual narrative therefore functions as a critique of excessive technological dependence rather than a celebration of AI supremacy.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that harmonious visualizations of humans and AI, such as the Tree of Knowledge poster, while beautiful and communicative, tend to fall into clichés that have been

repeatedly used across various media. This limits the message's impact and effectiveness, as audiences are already accustomed to similar symbols. In contrast, provocative approaches like the "God or Idol?" poster introduce a new dimension through surprising religious-robotic symbols, forcing audiences to critically reflect on their relationship with AI. Thus, bold, eccentric, and unconventional visual works have a greater potential to leave a lasting impression on the viewer. The findings indicate that provocative visual metaphors may provide stronger opportunities for critical engagement than conventional representations of human-AI collaboration. However, the study does not claim superiority of one approach, but rather highlights different communicative potentials within poster design. Therefore, it is crucial for designers to boldly push the boundaries of safe aesthetics and explore fresh visual language, even if it provokes controversy. Posters that shake consciousness become not only a medium of communication but also a space for social and ethical reflection, highlighting how technology impacts human life. By emphasizing courage in creating new symbols, designers can ensure that their work is not only seen, but also remembered, reflected upon, and impactful in changing society's perspective on AI. This study is limited to design exploration and reflective analysis. The findings are based on conceptual development and visual interpretation rather than empirical audience testing. Future studies may incorporate audience surveys, interviews, focus groups, or expert validation to examine how different viewers interpret representations of AI idolization and human-AI relationships.

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Declarations

- Author contribution** : A: research idea, data collection and analysis, and wrote the article.
S: data collection and analysis, and wrote the article.
K, E: data analysis and wrote the article.
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