ChatGPT Helped You Brainstorm Ideas. Should You Give It Credit?

By Demetria Gallegos

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Are you looking for a product idea? A marketing slogan? A company name? Increasingly, such tasks may be kick-started with the help of some generative artificial intelligence.

But how should the finished products that emerge from that brainstorming be credited? Whose idea was it, really? Is AI an author or a tool in such cases? This is one of many new ethical dilemmas posed by improvements in quality and expanded access to artificial intelligence.

But rather than ask ChatGPT about this thorny question, we turned to Wall Street Journal readers.

We asked: Is it all right for AI to brainstorm ideas for projects or products that you later claim as your own? Would it change your answer if you came up with the original question? What if you fine-tuned some of the ideas? What if you give the AI some credit for helping you?

Wall Street Journal readers provided a range of responses.

It's only fair

Plenty of people have taken credit for my ideas. Why shouldn't I be able to take credit for an AI's ideas?

- Clint Eubanks, *Houston*

It's a machine

Do you give credit to landscapes or paintings when they give you inspiration? If we are unable to distinguish between man and machine in the coming days, there will be much confusion. But if we say emphatically, "This is just a machine," then there is no need for you or me to thank it or give credit to it.

That isn't to say you can't. For example, you could say, "My car brought me to work today, and I need to give it credit for helping me to get the job done." But I think this sort of thing is drastically different than a situation when a human gives us an idea or question. You can give it credit, but there is no obligation.

- Brad Grizenko, *Wake Forest, N.C.*

Partial credit

As a published author I am always sensitive to this issue, especially as a publisher once rejected some of my work and allowed the reviewer they used to publish it verbatim as his own. Ethically, if AI is part of the creation of intellectual property it at least deserves part credit. It is sadly becoming somewhat acceptable for creators to be denied credit or remuneration for their work. That's the center of concern with the writers, actors and others currently striking.

- Peter Goulet, *Lee's Summit, Mo.*

It's just a tool

At this point, AI is a tool and, as such, it is the user of the tool that has the responsibility and should receive credit for the work contributed by the tool. At this point, AI doesn't create the idea, it just reports on the state of the art.

Disclosures like the following are ridiculous: "I used a calculator in this analysis." "I did a search on the internet for more information." "I read this book to learn about this subject." "I used AI to understand some of the issues involved."

It is up to the user to shape the AI-supplied information (whether true or false) into a new creation. This usually requires an iteration of dialogue between the user and the chatbot. No credit needs be stated—unless the AI did all of the work.

- Jay Weyermann, *Aurora, Colo.*

AI is like a spell checker

This is a conversation our civilization needs to have. AI deserves no credit, no patent nor copyright protection. Nothing. It's a tool. Nothing more. Do you give your spell checker credit for its help with the novel you wrote? Do you give credit or profits to the thousands of book and journal pages you've read over time for an idea you just had? Let's not be silly.

- Hans Kueck, *Orlando, Fla.*

The ethics are clear

No, it isn't all right to claim someone else's work (even a chatbot's) as your own. Do we still have the concept of ethical behavior anywhere?

- Susan Alexander, *Luxembourg*

Human judgment is still needed

If, for example, I consulted a topical book for ideas, I would have no trouble claiming the result as my own idea, and AI, as a similar resource, should be no different. Additionally, there is always a need for using judgment to evaluate the viability of a potential solution that can be as important as the solution itself, and AI is probably not yet ready to do that effectively.

- Rob Norton, *Sammamish, Wash.*

Be transparent

Using AI to brainstorm ideas and claiming them as your own is ethically questionable. Your involvement in formulating questions doesn't alter this perspective. Fine-tuning AI-generated ideas can be seen as more acceptable, especially if you actively contribute to the process. Giving credit to the AI for its role is imperative to maintain transparency and honesty in intellectual-property matters.

- Jerome Scott, *Jamestown, R.I.*

Better brainstorming

Brainstorming works best when ideas are generated without immediate feedback from others, while ideas are still being presented. I have experience in process improvement and team facilitation. An unguided brainstorming session is likely to have people blurting out "that's a stupid idea," at which point your session is ruined, or, even worse, people completely shut down.

So, AI with human involvement should produce better results. Just as with humans, the AI source should be credited. Not necessarily for legal reasons (although proper due diligence would recommend such) but for traceability as results are published or used.

- Clay Parcels, *Belleville, Ill.*

Dishonest to claim credit for AI's ideas

AI is a very powerful tool that, used appropriately and responsibly, can significantly boost our performance and productivity. We do, however, need to guard against sacrificing our own thought processes and creativity at the altar of expediency.

It's good to use AI for brainstorming, or to help in one's personal and professional life. At this stage of AI evolution, human oversight is still a necessity. But it's dishonest to pass off AI's ideas as one's own. Giving credit to AI depends on the context, along the same lines as the debate about the line between plagiarism and research.

- Kaleem Ahmad, *Ankara, Turkey*

Some credit is due

I think you should give the AI some credit for helping you. It's likely inevitable that our future projects/products will be based somewhat on AI input.

- Dawn Taggblom, *DeLand, Fla.*

Future impact

To analyze these questions, one must look at the full picture. Who benefits? Who is harmed? And what future ramifications exist? So here, assuming that with use of AI, the brainstorming is improved and as result what is created is greater societal benefit. This could provide some ethical positive points.

But say also that if the person didn't give AI credit and as result, this person was given more control or power to do such work in the future, replacing more capable persons, then ethical and practical harm is done.

With disclosure about the AI assistance, at least there would be honesty, and a company could make better decisions about allocating such assignments in the future.

- Wendelin Comen, *Raleigh, N.C.*

Another arrow in the quiver

AI is just another in a long line of tools man has created to manifest control over his environment. It follows the printing press and typewriter created to master the power of knowledge and words, the calculator to better harness math and the computer and software created to maximize data management. None of those receive credit for the creation or printing of a book, the birth of nuclear power, or a moon landing. AI is just another tool to further maximize control, it will not be the last arrow in the quiver.

- Wister Smith, *Scottsboro, Ala.*

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