

When Does AI Feel Like “My Work”? Perceived Authorship, Academic Integrity, and Ways of AI Use in Student Assignments

Research overview

Generative AI is increasingly used in student assignments, but its ethical evaluation depends on the way of use. We examined whether AI use for content and form predicts academic integrity judgments through perceived authorship, distinguishing agency from result ownership. Data came from 152 Russian students who completed a short educational task.

Purpose of the study

Generative AI has become part of everyday academic practice, yet students do not evaluate its use simply as either legitimate assistance or misconduct. Prior research shows that students distinguish between direct content generation, idea support, editing, and technical assistance when judging academic integrity. However, less is known about the psychological mechanisms underlying these judgments.

We examined whether perceived authorship explains this mechanism. Drawing on sense of agency theory and psychological ownership theory, we distinguished two components of perceived authorship: agency, or perceived control and involvement in the task process, and result ownership, or the feeling that the final answer is “mine” and reflects one’s own ideas, decisions, and effort.

We stated a research question as how each way of AI use relates to perceived authorship, problematicity, inappropriateness, and disclosure needs.

Research Methods

Participants were 152 Russian students (109 women, 43 men; $M_{age} = 29.30$, $SD = 9.49$): 97 bachelor’s students, 32 master’s students, and 23 doctoral students. They completed a short educational task proposing an idea for increasing student engagement in learning. Participants were explicitly instructed to use AI in the same way they normally use it in academic work.

After the task, participants completed self-report measures assessing AI use for content, AI use for form, agency, result ownership, perceived problematicity of AI use, perceived inappropriateness of submitting the work, and perceived need to disclose AI use to the instructor. All items used 5-point Likert scales. Scale structure was examined using exploratory factor analysis; Cronbach’s alpha exceeded .70 for all subscales.

The main model was tested using path analysis in AMOS. Age and gender were included as covariates. Indirect effects were tested with bootstrapping procedures.

Results

AI use for content negatively predicted agency ($\beta = -.22, p < .01$) and result ownership ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$). It also negatively predicted perceived inappropriateness ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$). AI use for form positively predicted agency ($\beta = .35, p < .01$) and result ownership ($\beta = .47, p < .01$).

Agency positively predicted perceived problematicity of AI use ($\beta = .23, p < .05$) and need for disclosure ($\beta = .27, p < .05$). Result ownership negatively predicted perceived inappropriateness ($\beta = -.67, p < .01$).

Two significant indirect effects were found. AI use for content had a positive indirect effect on perceived inappropriateness through reduced result ownership ($\beta = .16, p < .01$). AI use for form had a negative indirect effect on perceived inappropriateness through increased result ownership ($\beta = -.20, p < .01$).

Unexpectedly, AI use for content had a direct negative effect on perceived inappropriateness, suggesting a normalization effect that operated independently of ownership.

Discussion

The findings show that students' academic integrity judgments depend not only on whether AI is used, but on how AI is incorporated into the task and whether the result still feels like one's own work. AI use for content appears to create a tension: students who use AI for ideas, arguments, and structure may see this practice as appropriate, yet this way of use also weakens result ownership, which in turn increases perceived inappropriateness.

The results are consistent with psychological ownership theory but extend it by showing that ownership over AI-assisted academic work shapes academic integrity judgments. AI use for form demonstrated the opposite pattern, supporting both agency and ownership, suggesting that editing and refinement may be experienced as helping students express their own ideas rather than replacing their intellectual contribution.

The study relied on self-reported AI use, which may differ from actual behavior. Future research should examine whether the same pattern emerges in high-stakes or personally meaningful assignments, where ownership may play an even stronger role.

Practically, instructors should distinguish between content generation (e.g., producing arguments) and form refinement (e.g., editing). Even when AI is used, tasks that require personal reflection, case application, or step-by-step reasoning are more likely to preserve students' sense of ownership and responsibility.

Keywords: Generative AI; perceived authorship; academic integrity; student assignments; AI disclosure