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Thinking towards the Future: Reflections on Engaging with AI for Visual Data Presentation in Qualitative Research

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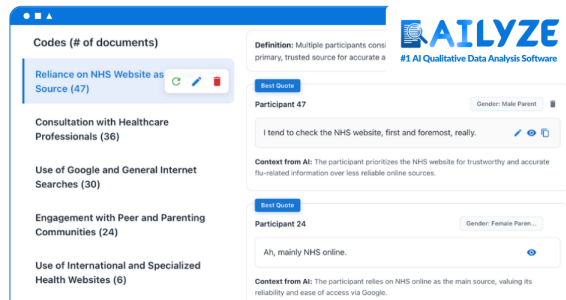
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Thinking towards the Future: Reflections on Engaging with AI for Visual Data Presentation in Qualitative Research

Abstract

This article reports our experience of exploring the use of ChatGPT to artistically present a segment of qualitative data in a visual form for one of our previous studies. We recounted our engagement with ChatGPT and reflected on our emotions and thoughts throughout the interactive process with this AI-powered tool for image generation. Our narrative analysis highlights the agency of ChatGPT as an active contributor to the creative endeavor and emphasizes our critical role as researchers in interpreting the data and in critically evaluating AI-generated images within the context of our research. The paper suggests that AI-text-to-image function can potentially enhance researchers' engagement with qualitative data and empower the researchers to (re)present data in novel ways. Through a critical reflection of human-AI collaboration and researchers' collaboration with the involvement of AI, we discuss how utilizing AI as an arts-creation tool in arts-based methodology will possibly empower researchers to engage with visualization of qualitative data and add a complex, nuanced layer to the data analysis process.

Keywords

artificial intelligence, AI-assisted data presentation, data visualization, arts-based methodology, text-to-image

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Thinking towards the Future: Reflections on Engaging with AI for Visual Data Presentation in Qualitative Research

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This article reports our experience of exploring the use of ChatGPT to artistically present a segment of qualitative data in a visual form for one of our previous studies. We recounted our engagement with ChatGPT and reflected on our emotions and thoughts throughout the interactive process with this AI-powered tool for image generation. Our narrative analysis highlights the agency of ChatGPT as an active contributor to the creative endeavor and emphasizes our critical role as researchers in interpreting the data and in critically evaluating AI-generated images within the context of our research. The paper suggests that AI-text-to-image function can potentially enhance researchers' engagement with qualitative data and empower the researchers to (re)present data in novel ways. Through a critical reflection of human-AI collaboration and researchers' collaboration with the involvement of AI, we discuss how utilizing AI as an arts-creation tool in arts-based methodology will possibly empower researchers to engage with visualization of qualitative data and add a complex, nuanced layer to the data analysis process.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI-assisted data presentation, data visualization, arts-based methodology, text-to-image

Introduction

Researcher 1: How cool!! 🤖 Her idea of “city” grew bigger and bigger like ripples from herself as the center.

Researcher 2: Uh huh, you’re right. The mobility allowed her to understand and feel modernity, whatever it means.

Researcher 1: I sooo want to capture this “mobility”. Words aren’t enough, and diagrams are so limiting. I wish I could draw! 🎨

Researcher 2: That’s a good idea! A drawing! It’ll allow us to show a lot of her transformation, from her own standpoint as she moved through space. So much more fluid than a diagram. But like you, I can’t sketch a drawing with this much complexity. I can draw a cat, maybe, but not this complex story 🐱.

Researcher 1: Speaking of sketching, we can use ChatGPT! We can use the data to teach it the prompts and have it draw for us!! 🤖 Let’s both try that and compare??

Researcher 2: That's a great idea, let's jump at it 🤗.
(Authors' iMessage exchange)

It started as daily banter between us when we were writing an article together. It was like every other daily conversation we exchanged to tease out our research ideas and discuss our data analysis process. It was a joke before we realized that our new venture into an unknown territory had begun, marking the birth of the current paper.

Given the recent debut of artificial intelligence (AI) assisted technology to the public, various fields including education, health, and communication have been racing to incorporate it in new perspectives (Guan, Mou, & Jiang, 2020; Lai, 2021; Siiman et al., 2023). However, the understanding that researchers have gained of AI's potential, opportunities, and risks is very much in its infancy. As educators and researchers, we are aware of the potential impacts of AI on our everyday work and practices. We have heard of papers being written by AI, or AI's capacity to summarize journal articles which can save time for researchers but deprive them of the joy of knowledge immersion and deep engagement with the research process. We, however, cannot choose to totally ignore or resist the ongoing and continued technological changes. We cannot afford to remain as spectators of the transformation that is transpiring in the academic world. We decide to channel our energy into engaging with this non-human collaborator, or peer, to understand how it works and in what way we can employ it in our practices and recognize its empowering potential, while remaining conscious of its possible manipulation.

This article details a reflexive account of us, two researchers who utilized ChatGPT 4.0 – a large language learning model, the most well-known and accessible AI platform as of 2025, to create a visual medium for our collaborative writing project (Le & Phan, 2025). We provide a worked example using ChatGPT 4.0 to augment our data presentation to raise a broader question: Is there any potential for applying AI to the practice of qualitative research analysis without risking the non-artificial values that research should be striving for? We articulated our emotions, thoughts, and concerns after our engagement with ChatGPT, specifically its text-to-image functionality, and reflected more reflexively and theoretically on this experience in relation to human-AI collaboration, and the shifting dynamics between researchers as AI was involved in the research process. This paper hopes to invite further discussion and more conversation among fellow researchers around the adaptation of AI in qualitative research through sharing a piece of first-hand experience with it us.

Use of AI in Research

AI itself is not a new technology. AI has been defined as “a system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019, p. 15). Its development can be traced as far back as the 1950s when computer scientists started to examine intelligent behaviors of machines (Dai & Hua, 2025). However, the introduction in 2022 of Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer, or more commonly known as ChatGPT, with its user-friendly nature and wide accessibility to the public, has inserted itself into our everyday life to an extent that even those beyond the information technology field are aware of and “have to grapple with the very palpable, and ever-expanding presence of AI” (Dai & Hua, 2025, p. 1). ChatGPT is Generative AI (GenAI) which refers to a type of AI that can generate human-like text and creative content such as music and images and synthesize data from different sources (Dasborough, 2023).

Applications of AI in Research

AI, especially ChatGPT, has ignited a drastic change in practice in academia. As a Large Language Model (LLM) that uses deep learning techniques and is trained on massive amounts of data, ChatGPT can generate various types of textual content, including academic papers (Hu, 2023). Researchers such as Haman and Školník (2023) and Nguyen-Trung et al. (2024) have examined how ChatGPT and AI-powered tools can assist in conducting literature reviews and showcased the potential of AI-powered tools for evidence review and synthesis in research. They find that ChatGPT can extract relevant data from studies more quickly and accurately through semantic search and identification of relevant information, which is time saving and helps minimize the risk of human error. This assistance from AI can be particularly useful in synthesizing information, summarizing literature, analyzing content, and even identifying research gaps in the scholarship (Burger et al., 2023; Nguyen-Trung et al., 2024; Tauchert et al., 2020). As noted by Butson and Spronken-Smith (2024), these functionalities allow researchers to focus on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of their work, engage with complex datasets, and respond to requests from collaborators, reviewers, or supervisors, which ultimately saves significant time in preparing and developing their research. AI can also be a powerful facilitator of research thanks to its big data processing capacity (Butson & Spronken-Smith, 2024). For instance, AI helps foster human-AI collaborative artistic content creation in which humans provide creative input, feedback, and guidance for the AI system to produce art. Guo et al. (2023) propose a model named Parallel Art that employs “Imaginative Intelligence” to generate artistic products. Art creation is also enabled by other AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT, DALLÉ-2, and Midjourney (Fui-Hoon Nah et al., 2023).

Moreover, AI tools like ChatGPT can be particularly helpful in the case of researchers who have language barriers, or when users have insufficient scientific background. Its capacity to generate content means researchers can resort to its assistance in their academic analysis (Nguyen-Trung et al., 2024). Recently, researchers such as Hitch (2024), Nguyen-Trung (2025), Naeem et al. (2025) have also used ChatGPT for descriptive and reflexive thematic analysis. They have concluded that the technology enabled an efficient approach to analysis that could be less time-consuming and it provided insights into relationships between key concepts that researchers might have missed in the process. AI, nonetheless, could not completely replace the work of human researchers in producing rigorous reflexive thematic analysis because of ethical concerns and biases and errors in AI algorithms.

Limitations in the Use of AI in Research

AI, however, is far from perfect, like any non-human technologies, or humans themselves. Users have been made aware of its flaws, notably inaccuracies, plagiarism, and confusion that could induce misinterpretation, or misleading and biased information (Haman & Školník, 2023; Hitch, 2023; Nguyen-Kien et al., 2023; Phan & Le, 2025a; van Dis et al., 2023). In certain cases, ChatGPT produces misinformation or fake information. Moreover, a methodological bias can result from the computational basis of AI's favouring quantitative measurements and overlooking qualitative analysis (Anis & French, 2023; Feuston & Brubaker, 2021). This shortcoming implies a serious limitation of AI if deployed in humanities and social sciences where the use of qualitative methodologies is prevalent. As remarked by Butson and Spronken-Smith (2024), the multifaceted nature of human behaviours and social constructs is not easily captured by AI algorithms, which is “not just a technological shortcoming; it is a profound misalignment with the epistemological frameworks that these disciplines are built upon” (p. 566).

Researchers such as AlDahoul et al. (2025) and Locke and Hodgdon (2025) have pointed out that stereotypes about genders, races, or occupations are common in texts and visual products offered by generative AI, which risks perpetuating and exacerbating societal inequalities and discrimination against certain groups. Therefore, AI cannot function without close supervision and effective monitoring, and researchers are cautioned against relying on AI-powered tools as research assistants.

Qualitative Research — (Non)methods and Researchers' Positioning

(Non)methods in Qualitative Research

This article showcases our engagement with post-qualitative inquiry, which is “a turn to ontology and how it might take us to some place of the ‘always-already’ that is neither too late nor too soon” (Lather et al., 2013, p. 629). Post-qualitative theorists cautioned against the desire to produce order and clarity through research reports, which only works to (re)produce normalizing privileged identities and privileged form of authoritative knowledge, and resultantly removes any difference that inherently exists (St. Pierre, 2014). To avoid “walking a familiar path repetitively” and “listen to what is no longer there” (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 205), some theorists offered research conventions for antimethodology, which “cannot be replicated or transferred” from one study to another but “each iteration materializes from the forces at work in a research context” (Nordstrom, 2018, p. 223); while others established a framework for materialist social inquiry methodology, which builds on the concept of the research-assemblage that treats different stages in the research process such as data collection or analysis, or sampling data, as “a machine that works because of its affect” (Fox & Alldred, 2015, p. 403). In short, post-qualitative inquiry works to constantly reshape the data and unmake the conventional human subject as portrayed in conventional knowledge with a heavy reliance on theoretical perspectives and creative thought experiments.

Taking a post-qualitative approach in our research design, we followed Springgay and Truman's (2018) advice to move methods beyond proceduralism to commit ourselves as a researcher to the “response-ability in research” (p. 203). Rather than a refusal of methods, they proposed that “particular (in)tensions need to be immanent to whatever method is used” (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 204), reasoning: “If the intent of inquiry is to create a different world, to ask what kinds of futures are imaginable, then (in)tensions attend to the immersion, tension, anxiety, strain, and quivering unease of doing research differently” (p. 204).

To do research differently, the authors argue, means that “we need to shift from thinking about methods as processes of gathering data towards methods as a becoming entangled in relations” (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 204). In the coming discussion, we explain how we embraced this advice while employing various research conventions in the post/qualitative traditions of inquiry to put our thinking in motion.

Researchers' Positioning

Given the complexities arising from post-qualitative approach, it is important to introduce our positioning. As devoted qualitative researchers, we advocate for and have been practising arts-based methods in our work. Arts-based methodology utilizes artistic practices to generate and present data and communicate with audiences (Eisner, 1997; Faulkner, 2016; Finley, 2003; Leavy, 2009). The traditional academic conventions often put text and language above all other forms of representation of knowledge. This often means prioritizing Western preferred type of knowledge which focuses on answers and truth-value (Scotti & Aicher, 2016), thereby limiting our understanding of experience, particularly the experiential aspects such as

emotion and sensation, which cannot be fully captured through syntactical units (Meyer et al., 2013). Arts-based methodology helps to break the mold, embracing alternative expressions including poetry, music, photography, drawings, collages, paintings, sculptures, weaving, and many others. Engaging with arts-based methodology means bringing “the embodied, the sensuous and the emotional to the forefront” (Boydell et al., 2016, p. 690), eliciting embodied, aesthetic and emotional/affective ways of knowing in the research process. Art-based data collection and analysis tools encourage shifting the focus from the product of research to the process of research, and creating space and time for delving into experiences, emotions, relationships, conversations and reflection.

Since both of our areas of research expertise have centered around identity making, emotions and affects, mobility and migration, we have attempted to use arts-based methodology in the body of our work. Researcher 1 (CL) included participants’ drawings of a Buddhist temple in her data to explore the spatial production enacted in that place (Le, 2020). She also used poetry as a therapeutic literary form to express the emotional tensions of motherhood, where she voiced frustration, identity loss, and the desire for self-recognition (Le, 2020). Researcher 2 (AP) has employed poetic inquiry in several publications to analyze and present data (Phan, 2021, 2022, 2023). We, as a researcher duo, have conducted several projects together, which incorporated participants’ photos, drawings, mappings, and literary creations as data collection tools (Le & Phan, 2025; Phan & Le, 2025b). We share the same vision in finding the most flexible tools that enable us to understand the participants’ points-of-view and at the same time, enable the participants to express their voice most authentically.

The Recount of Our AI Augmented, Art-informed Visualization Endeavor

In this section, we recounted our engagement process with ChatGPT to produce an image that would serve as a complementary presentation of qualitative data in our paper besides textual analysis. We were not AI experts, and our attempt to involve ChatGPT in our research reflects a novice approach to its text-to-image use at the time (July, 2024). This point of time is significant in our narrative because ChatGPT has constantly evolved and there have been new or upgraded functionalities that enable it to be more dynamic, personalized, and efficient than what we experienced.

We used narrative analysis (Sharp et al., 2019) as the analytical procedure and approached this analysis from a phenomenological perspective, meaning that we placed our subjective experience as narrators at the core. In other words, we focused on how we interpret our experiences, express emotions, and engage in meaning-making processes of our interaction with ChatGPT. We followed Polkinghorne’s (1995) guidance of constructing narratives to organize our own narrative. This process involved arranging data chronologically to ensure the connections between events and happenings would be articulated, providing information about the subject of the participants, explaining the relationship between participants, including numerous direct quotes from the participants to retain their authentic voice, and concentrating on the goals, choices, interests, plans, purposes, and actions of the participants.

Setting the Scene

This article originates from a study that reports a case of a Vietnamese female student from a less privileged background, Nga (pseudonym), who migrated from her hometown, an impoverished rural village in Central Vietnam, to Hanoi, the capital city, for university education in a reputable institution (Le & Phan, 2025). In that paper, we used journalling and life history interviews for Nga to narrate her life from childhood to studenthood, the challenges she encountered in life, and her restless attempts to seek social mobility through education

success and urban migration. To that end, we aimed to understand the role that “place” played in forming Nga’s aspirations, and the social and spatial (im)mobilities that impacted her aspirations.

Coming into the study that motivated this article, we wanted to present our participant’s personal story in a way that could be relatable, accessible and empowering to a wider audience. We were faced with the challenge of telling it in a way that could protect the participant’s identity but preserve the unique sociocultural context that made her story appealing in the first place, since:

Stories are “more true” than facts because stories are multidimensional. Truth with a capital “T” has many layers. Truths like justice or integrity are too complex to be expressed in a law, a statistic, or a fact. Facts need the context of when, who, and where to become Truths. A story incorporates when and who—lasting minutes or generations and narrating an event or series of events with characters, action and consequences. It occurs in a place or places that gives us a where. (Simmons, 2006, p. 21)

We then carefully considered data privacy issues. We were conscious that all data not already in the public domain inputted to ChatGPT would go into its large corpus of text and be used by the AI system to learn and improve its own operations. Thus, there could be a risk of identification as AI platforms are open to the public (Hitch, 2024). We discussed ethical matters and strategized our prompt construction before providing textual inputs to ChatGPT. We agreed that first, our goal was to depict only the geographical movement from one place to another of our participant, no data outside this scope was input in ChatGPT. Second, to ensure our participant’s confidentiality and anonymity, we did not disclose any identifiable information but only provided general descriptions to ChatGPT, such as a girl/a young female student, a poor rural village in Central Vietnam, a district having multi-storey houses, or a capital city with skyrise buildings. In so doing, we could ensure that the involvement of AI did not breach any ethical agreement in the informed consent.

The Process of Engagement

In this section, we detail our individual engagement with AI, specifically ChatGPT 4.0, to produce a picture that could illustrate the story of our participant, Nga, who migrated from her rural village in Central Vietnam to Hanoi, the capital city, for education. We individually “worked” with ChatGPT before we compared our results and discussed with each other to reach consensus. The reason was that we wanted to follow the same process to code qualitative data as we normally do, and we believed it would allow us more space and time to develop our collaboration with AI and enhance our understanding of data. Each of us recorded every step in Table 1 and Table 2, as well as our emotional reactions, thoughts, and comments on the visual products created by ChatGPT from our prompts, while researcher reflections were documented in a research journal after each ChatGPT output. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are the final images that each of us selected after working with AI.

Table 1

Prompts for Teaching ChatGPT and Researcher Reflections

Researcher 1's prompts	Researcher 1's thoughts and emotional reactions
Draw me a map that traces a girl's steps from her little village to the town, from the town to the city, from the city to the capital city far away. Each place is larger and further but they share the center like water waves coming from a stone in water.	<i>Ok, that was quick! I'm shocked. It used the places I mentioned as labels to insert in the drawing. With CORRECT spellings. But I don't need "Capital Away".</i>
Remove "capital away"	<i>It removed that exact phrase, but messed up the spellings of all other phrases, added "Furwer out". It also changed the whole drawing.</i>
I like the previous map better, but the village needs to be small near the center, the town needs to be in the bigger ripple from the center, the city in larger ripple, then capital city larger and further	<i>Ok, now it added a lot more ripples from the girl in the center. I also like the theme colour, more antique-looking. I like that. But the labels. No! Why do you keep misspelling these words?? I didn't tell you to.</i>
Go back to the first version, make the village visibly smaller than the town, the city bigger than the town, the capital city largest with skyrise buildings and lots of houses and people	<i>It drew too many clusters with the same label "The Village", "The Town", and "City". I don't want so many clusters. The girl also looks like a 5-year-old. She needs to look older.</i>
Fix the girl, she wears plain white shirt and long hair untied	<i>The girl looks like what I want, but it also changed all the building structures again.</i>
Leave only 1 village, 1 town, 1 city, 1 capital city	<i>It did yield only 4 labels, however, the girl's outfit changed from jeans to dress, and all the buildings were divided too clearly into "poor" and "rich" buildings. I don't like this dichotomy.</i>
Make the footprints start from village	<i>There were some footprints but they only started from one nice-looking house, that's not where she originally walked from. The houses are still divided into 2 distinct sides with identical buildings on each. Surprisingly, all the labels are correctly spelled, however, the 3 phrases "town", "city", "village" are repeated 8 times – too many wordings to my liking.</i>
She needs to walk towards the capital city, leave behind the village, the town, and the city	<i>Uhm, the footprints are in the right direction now. The girl also looks fine, but the houses are all neatly arranged in a circle surrounding her. It looks too neat, not good.</i>
[I went back several versions to the one that I liked. I replied to that image with my comment] remove 1 word "village", remove "capital away", make capital city have more skyrise buildings and people and vehicles	<i>The houses varied more now, there are some ripples inside the outer circle where the houses like. Not bad, but what's with all the labels? They're nonsense again!</i>
Remove all words	<i>After several attempts to tell ChatGPT to remove specific words without success, I told it to remove all the words. It</i>

	<i>didn't understand. It didn't remove any words, yet it said "here is the updated map with all words removed as requested. I hope this meets your expectations!" No, my dear GPT partner, it certainly did not meet my expectations.</i>
[I highlighted the girl]: "Change girl clothes to white shirt, jeans, long hair tie on back"	<i>The girl came out with a more acceptable appearance based on my own understanding of the participant. The labels, though!! Seriously, why did you double the number of labels after I told you to remove all? How can I teach you this?</i>
Remove words (*5)	<i>After patiently clicking on the same image to ask for the words to be removed, my cyborg partner finally removed all the words, with traces of some letters not easily visible still in the grass or background, BUT I'LL TAKE IT! Please don't change on me again!</i>
[I highlighted a church] Change to Buddhist temple	<i>It couldn't change into a Buddhist temple. The cross was still there on top of that building. I put the same request in, this time the new building lost the cross, though it wasn't exactly a Buddhist temple. It's ok GPT, there's more time for you to learn Buddhism.</i>
[I highlighted certain houses on the most ideal drawing] "Smaller shabby brick house with straw roof", "More houses and 1 school", "A boarding school with children around"	<i>More or less, GPT changed the buildings around. It didn't understand what a school looks like. Let's teach it again.</i>
Draw a 3-story building with lots of rooms	<i>It drew a cluster of three houses, one taller than the other. Hmm, that can pass as a schoolhouse.</i>
No chimney	<i>Chimney was removed. Good job, GPT!</i>

After a process of reasoning and weighing the options, Researcher 1 came to the decision to choose Figure 1 as the most representative illustration of her data. She recorded her overall reflection on her engagement with ChatGPT

I kept working on the chosen drawing some more. I finally learned that to keep GPT from making a completely new drawing, I need to click on the most preferable one and highlight each area to edit. There were some cultural features that GPT could not understand no matter how many times I repeated the prompts. It's ok, I will just remove the obvious Western features, such as the cross on the church, or a Big Ben in the capital city. After over 30 minutes teaching it, GPT gave me a drawing that met about 70% of my expectations. Does it illustrate everything I imagine in my head? No. Can I illustrate everything in my head? Not really. Is this drawing more appealing to me than a diagram? Absolutely yes.

Figure 1

AI-Assisted Data Presentation from Researcher 1's Prompts



Table 2
Researcher 2’s Engagement with AI

Researcher 2’s prompts	Researcher 2’s thoughts and emotional reactions
Create a map of a young female student who comes from a poor family in a poor village of central Vietnam. She then moves to a bigger town where she sees multi-level houses and cars for the first time.	<i>I am a bit excited, and curious. I leave my mind blank, I don’t want to imagine anything about how the picture would look like. I did, a bit, but nothing specific. I just want something that can highlight mobility, transformation, and contrast. Yes, contrast is important. I want to see the contrast between the girl’s poor village and the cosmopolitan city. Now I would wait to see what ChatGPT could do. Oh nice, that’s quick. Probably 10-15 seconds. The words are spelled all wrong, and no high-rise buildings. I can’t use that. There’s no multi-storey building.</i>

Remove the words	<i>Another picture, totally different. There are now multi-storey buildings, and there's even a Vietnamese flag here. The girl is wearing no shoes. She's wearing something that looks like a uniform skirt, blue, and wearing a backpack. She looks like an animation character, a Japanese animation character.</i>
Then she continues her journey, and moves to a bigger district for boarding education. In the district, there are restaurants, more entertainment places.	<i>No, not what I want. There are 2 pictures presented for me but they both look too simple. They're like sketches of keys in a map (like a field crop implying this is a village, a house meaning a district). The text in both pictures are wrongly spelled. Importantly, there's no connection among the places. I need something else. But the girls in both pictures, now only with the face, are different from each other and from the previous versions. This time she looks more like a Vietnamese to me. I'll add the city now.</i>
When she was 18-years-old, she moved to the capital city which is a cosmopolitan city	<i>Different picture. Oh right, now there are big, modern tall buildings in the horizon of the picture, and there's a building which is under construction at the far most left corner of the picture, in the city area. Well, it makes sense. The city has lots of construction happening. But I'm not satisfied with the village and district, and the houses. They are scattering around in the picture. The girl now again turns her back to me.</i>
Make the capital city more modern. The capital city is full of high-rise buildings, many luxurious cars	<i>Different picture. No, texts again in the picture. The girl's turning her back to me and walking towards the city. The poor village and everything else are on both sides of the picture. There's a path in the middle of the picture, the girl's supposed to walk on it. I don't like this enough. Why is there something like a roundabout here in the picture? I don't want to imply anything here. She's not returning to her village.</i>
Remove all the words in the picture.	<i>Different picture. Oh, I definitely won't use this one. There's something like a Transformer robot standing on the top of a skyscraper in the city area on the horizon of the picture. Just a small detail, but my participant's story is real, not a fiction product.</i>
Now rearrange the spatial movement according to the sequence I outlined	<i>Different picture. The village is behind her. The metropolitan city is on the right side of the picture. There are 3 Vietnamese flags, why? The district is right in front of the picture. There are nonsense texts in the picture.</i>
Keep this version but remove all the words.	<i>Different picture. No, the girl has brown-yellow hair. Not my participant. She has black hair.</i>
I want the previous girl	<i>Different picture. This looks better, but there are a few people added. That's distracting, even though the girl is bigger than other people.</i>
Make the spatial movement linear, from past to present, like a timeline	<i>Different picture. There are even more people in this one.</i>

Very poor village first, then bigger town, then bigger city, then cosmopolitan capital city	<i>2 pictures, both with a timeline. No, now when there's a timeline with clear indication of movement from this place to that place, I realize it can't tell a story I want. I'll change my prompts.</i>
[I return to the version before the 2 timeline pictures, click on it, then type the prompt to ask ChatGPT work specifically on this version] I like this image, but include only the girl here.	<i>There are still many people in the picture.</i>
Keep the girl only	<i>Different picture! What?</i>
[I click on the version I want again] remove other people on the road, keep the girl only	<i>No, there are still people on the street. Why does it say "Here is the updated map with only the girl included and all other people removed from the road. If you need any further adjustments, please let me know!"?</i>
There are still people on the street	<i>There are STILL people on the street. Ok let's try something else. This version is better than all previous ones.</i>
The very poor village should be featured on both side of the road	<i>Well, it doesn't understand. Nothing changes much.</i>
Use 1 road only on which there's only 1 single girl	<i>And here nothing changes. The road is still there with multiple turns. But it repeats my prompts and confirms that "a single road and only one girl on it".</i>
I want to have 1 single pathway on which the girl is walking	<i>Oh it works now! That's better.</i>
Yes, the pathway should look like this, now, change some details of the poor village. There should be very very poor houses, no upper level	<i>No, nothing changes.</i>
The poor village must be at the start of the pathway, close to the girl	<i>Nothing changes much. There are several people on the path. I don't want them. This is a story of one young adult only.</i>
Remove people on the pathway, keep the girl only	<i>There are still people on the path.</i>
Make the village look more torn, impoverished village in a rural area in Vietnam	<i>Oh good. It looks more like what the participant described to me.</i>
Move the poor village close to the girl, the girl should be wearing long pants	<i>Nothing changes much. But I notice there's a tool that allows me to select a specific area in the picture and ask GPT to improve/work on the selected part. Let's try it!</i>
[I select the two areas in the picture] Draw the poor village on both sides of the road	<i>No, it doesn't understand.</i>
[I select an area indicating the poor village in the picture] I want this selection to	<i>There is a minor change but not what I want. Ok, let's try something else.</i>

replace the front part of the picture on both sides of the road where the girl is walking, and then the girl should be wearing long trousers.	
[I select the minor change it made] Replace this selected part by a field crop	<i>No, it can't do that.</i>
[I select the people on the road] Remove the selected people from the picture	<i>Oh it works. Ok I should try again to have the poor village on both sides of the path, closest to the girl, marking her beginning. She's walking towards the city, the far end of the picture</i>
[I select a part on the left of the picture and a part of the right of the picture] Copy the selection on the left to the right selected part of the picture	<i>It can't do what I want.</i>
Move the cars to the middle of the road	<i>No, it can't move the cars to the middle road where I select. Instead, it erases 1 car. There's now a sedan on the road.</i>
[I select the middle of the road in the picture] Add cars in the selected part	<i>Now even the sedan disappears. No car on the road. Is it getting tired? Me too, it's been over 30 minutes. But it's almost done.</i>
[continue working on the current version] Draw some cars on the pathway towards the town and city	<i>Different picture! What? I am working on the current version of the picture. I clicked on it and wrote the prompt. Why does a totally different picture appear? Alright, this signals to me AI won't be able to work further on that version. It can't provide me with the details I want. So it offers me a new choice. This new picture looks dark, I don't like the colour, its blue-grey tone looks pessimistic.</i>
...	

After weighing the options, Researcher 2 chose *Figure 2* as the most representative illustration of her data. Below is her reflection on the interactive text-to-image process with ChatGPT:

I work on this new picture a bit more, but I'm not satisfied with its tone. And there's no development in the story as I want it. The poor village and the town look quite similar. They are kind of lumped into each other. ChatGPT offers me another picture, with a lot more details (many people on the streets/roads, the metropolitan city has several buildings that remind me of Shanghai in China or Taipei in Taiwan). My knowledge about contexts is helpful here. After trying to work with a few more options that ChatGPT comes up with, I return to the version I think best captures the story (*Figure 2*). In total, ChatGPT produced 26 completely distinct pictures in this attempt.

Figure 2*AI-Assisted Data Presentation from Researcher 2's Prompts*

After exchanging the various images from our collaboration with AI with each other, we discussed our experiences working with the non-human peer.

Our process ended with a discussion to select which visualization was able to compellingly present our data, or “tell” the story better. We developed a set of assessment criteria, including:

- the picture clearly shows the places where our participant has been living (village, district, town, provincial city, and Hanoi – the cosmopolitan capital city)
- there is a clear distinction between these places, manifested in details such as high-rise buildings, restaurants, and automobiles.
- the girl needs to be in the spotlight, to show her agency in engineering her mobility
- the picture has one or more features of a typical Vietnamese rural landscape.

After defining these criteria, we went through a friendly yet vigorous debate and decided that *Figure 1* better met the purpose of our paper. Although *Figure 2* looks artistically more appealing with many fine details, the main road slashing the frame into two opposite sides with rural versus urban markers seemed reductionistic. The girl's starting point, which is the very beginning of the road, suggests that she has not been mobile and any decision on which path to take remains in thoughts, not much action. Meanwhile, *Figure 1* puts the girl in the center and creates a ripple effect to suggest the expansion of her horizons along with different routes intersecting each time she made a leap in mobility and aspiration. The houses, buildings, vehicles and other markers of the rural and urban areas blended on a circle, but distant enough from each other to imply that they are different places the girl had been to.

Careful attention was given to featuring the participant well. We were not looking for an accurate or precise depiction of a real person by any means, but we wanted to include the features that made her story different and her voice heard. Knowing the participant deeply through months of engaging in interviews, journal interactions, and conversations, we both agreed that the white blouse was a significant piece of data that warranted representation. Banking on our sociocultural capital of the Vietnamese context, we also knew that most Vietnamese boarding schools required their students to wear pants or slacks as part of the uniforms. While Researcher 2 admitted she could not teach her AI partner to switch the girl's skirt out for the pants, Researcher 1 felt lucky that hers did. All things considered, Researcher 1's drawing made it to the final manuscript.

Reflection on an AI-powered Tool's Capacities and Limitations

We recognised ChatGPT's capacities and limitations in the text-to-image task. On the one hand, ChatGPT demonstrated a notable capacity to generate detailed, complex visual representations within a short amount of time, typically in less than a minute. It could understand the prompts well and generally delivered successfully what was requested. Its sophisticated illustrative ability was not easily acquired by humans, particularly those without drawing or design skills. Furthermore, ChatGPT's rapid response to user prompts and ChatGPT's rapid response to user prompts and its provision of multiple sets of visual products for users to select from could enhance both the efficiency and responsiveness of the creative process. It also offered iterative refinement, with edits and modifications implemented swiftly. This combination of adaptability, speed, and creative diversity allowed us access to powerful resources for visual content creation.

On the other hand, ChatGPT presented several limitations during the engagement process. A significant issue was that the textual labels within the generated images were often incorrectly spelled or awkwardly placed. ChatGPT misplaced information and on several occasions failed to accurately represent culturally specific features, which led to generic or ambiguous outputs. For example, there was one image that had both a Vietnamese flag and another element resembling the flag of Hong Kong. When incorrect or misplaced elements were identified, ChatGPT appeared unresponsive to our instructions to remove, replace, reposition, or refine them. It claimed to have made the requested modifications, yet the resulting images remained unchanged. Another problem was the number of images produced in rapid succession. While this resourcefulness meant we had multiple options with varying styles, concepts and compositional details to choose from, we found ourselves being distracted by having to constantly evaluate and compare numerous images to make a selection. This process was time-consuming and mentally demanding.

Discussion

Human-AI Collaboration

We were amazed at the power of AI in producing visual products within seconds and generally meeting our requirements. In our case, it is true that AI can act as “a transformative force that augments human capabilities” (Butson & Spronken-Smith, 2024, p. 565). We were not able to present our findings from an arts-based approach as we desired because neither of us were skilled at drawing, sketching or painting. We, however, had an urge to do research more creatively, engage with a wider audience, and approach knowledge in a more sensory, emotional, interactive, and experiential manner. AI helped us to co-create such knowledge “as a partner in intellectual exploration and problem-solving” (Butson & Spronken-Smith, 2024, p. 567). It successfully provided us with sophisticated digital pictures, having complex details that captured our ideas. This interactional and collaborative effort goes beyond limiting structures of academic tradition and academic text to conduct research, represent findings and engage with audiences through digital art composition. Our projection is that in the future, more expressive digital-arts processes with an involvement of AI will be employed as part of research practices. It is possible that we will witness an evolution of qualitative research, especially in arts-based methodology. However, we also foresee issues that researchers need to carefully consider, such as how to evaluate and assess this new AI-generated arts products in terms of its relevance, rigour, and insightfulness, how much involvement of AI in arts-based research is acceptable, whether the research that involves AI in creating arts was carried out ethically, and whether it could really help to disseminate the findings to a wider audience in an interactive and engaging manner.

Salomon et al. (1991) challenge us to think about whether intelligence and ability are properties of the individual or of the partnership between humans and an intelligent tool. Within the scope of this paper and our small experiment with ChatGPT, we yet do not have the answer to that question. But we concur with Fui-Hoon Nah et al. (2023) that “AI-human collaboration is the key to addressing challenges and seizing opportunities created by generative AI” (p. 279), and Nguyen-Trung et al. (2024) that “while AI-powered tools can serve as valuable assistants, the ultimate responsibility for making decisions regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria rests with the researchers. Such decisions should reflect the research purpose, theoretical framework, and existing knowledge” (p. 15). Our process of arts-based co-production with AI entailed tensions. There were many occasions when ChatGPT simply could not get to the core of ideas as we wanted it to. It failed to attend to details and address specific requests such as moving the cars to the middle of the road in Figure 2. As pinpointed by scholars, AI is also limited fabrication (Azamfirei et al., 2023), which refers to the nonsensical or unfaithful content generated from the given source input.

Our collaboration with ChatGPT was in the form of a conversation, meaning that the co-production of the pictures was enacted as an emergent and relational practice, although the degree of relational could not be compared with a human-human relational experience. In a way, there was still some instrumentality in the collaboration process, meaning that we employed AI to solve a pre-defined problem (we could not draw) and achieve a pre-defined outcome (a picture presenting our participant’s story). It was we who constructed the prompts for ChatGPT. It was we who decided which among what was designed by ChatGPT would serve our purposes best. It was we who asked ChatGPT to adjust, modify, replace, and edit details in the pictures. It was we who had the social and cultural capitals to determine whether what was featured misplaced our participant in a different country than Vietnam. In that sense, the power in our human-AI collaboration lay a bit more in our hands, human researchers. Nevertheless, we argue that it was still a dialogic relational collaboration process because knowledge was co-produced across differences (human — non-human), negotiation of meanings (the contrast between details in the picture, differences between multiple places

included in the picture), and claiming of legitimacy of whose knowledge counted (how a young Vietnamese female should look like, what it means by rural village, or cosmopolitan city in the context of Vietnam). It is important to note that both researchers, despite our educational and professional background in higher education in the US and UK, are non-native users of English. We did have some reservations about how much of a role that the linguistic capital could play in this endeavour. We, nonetheless, viewed this collaboration as a learning process which was open-ended and could not totally be controlled simply by who spoke English better.

Researchers' Collaboration with the Involvement of AI

The work example above was just one of numerous collaborations we have endeavoured as a researcher duo. Having known each other for nearly 15 years, we received public education at the same age in our original country, went to the same cohort at undergraduate school, left home to travel the world while maintaining abreast of each other's lives just to rejoin under coincidentally similar interests and kindle a series of projects that would have been so much less fulfilling had they been done alone. The level of compatibility between us was remarkable, to the point where we jokingly admitted that it was hard to distinguish which sentences were who's in the final manuscript.

For each project, we would start a shared online document, jot down ideas from the literature, craft out the framework, discuss our codes or preliminary findings and exchange opinions on how to make meanings of data through various digital channels on a daily, if not hourly basis. On that constantly evolving, shared document, we were entangled in each other's thoughts with the assistance of technology as a platform. For this work example, technology was not just a platform but also involved in the creation of new knowledge – a novel addition to our relationship. In so doing, we were fixed, permanent and individualized component of that intra-activity (Vu, 2018). Technology, as in the case of ChatGPT, seemed to have a mind of its own, given its “stubbornness” in keeping features that the researchers demanded changes on. Altogether, the researchers and ChatGPT exemplified a collaboration that transcends humans and nonhumans to form a cyborg (Haraway, 2010) – a third-type that crosses the rigid boundaries between human and animals, and human and machine.

It became clear to us that the involvement of AI and its assistance to visualize data demonstrates how different we, as researchers, envision the data in visual formats. While analyzing data in texts, we easily reached a consensus of how to understand the journey of our participant's urban-rural mobility, including her increasing exposure to neoliberal social imaginary and cosmopolitanism, and her 'idea of space' grew bigger whenever she moved for her education. However, when we desired to translate that story into visual media, we parted. Researcher 1 wanted to put the girl in the center of the picture and highlight the widening space, Researcher 2 aimed to feature mobility and movement across time. These different envisages of data visualization led to different approaches to articulate the prompts that we provided to ChatGPT, as laid out in Table 1 and Table 2. Consequently, our analysis process prolonged with a phase of collaboration with AI and another phase of discussing between us to agree on how to present data in a visual form generated by AI. This last phase of discussion in fact added a complex layer of analysis to our data. We committed ourselves into a dialogic learning process to work aesthetically as well as analytically with the qualitative data from our participant again and on the materials produced by AI. Even though in our case, the picture chosen was the product of only one of us engaging with ChatGPT, the inclusion of the picture in our paper was determined by both of us following a deliberation. Therefore, we still see the AI-generated image as the outcome of our collaboration.

Recommendations

Through our critical reflection on our engagement with AI in data presentation, we contribute to the rigorous discussion on AI's role in qualitative research. While our aim is not to advocate for the use of AI in qualitative research or suggest that AI can replace researchers' engagement with data through arts-informed or arts-based practices like drawing, sketching, or painting, we hope to initiate a dialogue that embraces efforts to diversify research methodologies and deploy technology-enhanced tools to facilitate data analysis and presentation. We see this article as an effort to deepen our understanding of the future of academia in an era when the dominance of AI cannot be undermined (Chubb et al., 2021). In the literature, AI functions as a supplementary tool in varied research tasks, from literature reviews to data analysis. Our paper contributes to this scholarship by involving AI in qualitative data presentation from an arts-based approach. We hope that we have presented an insightful and innovative application of AI in qualitative research for readers to recognize and embrace the potentials of AI-powered tools, and at the same time critically question its limitations in academic research.

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