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"An insult to life itself": Ghibli AI trend produces 514.3% more negative than positive social media posts despite widespread interest and amusement

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Abstract

A study from Montclair State University faculty in the Joetta Di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication in the School of Communication analyzed social media discourse around the "Ghibli AI" online trend. The use of AI to "Ghibli-fy" pictures to appear similar to the work of the renowned animation took off in late March of 2025 and produced significant online discussion. Results identified 129,000 social media posts discussing "Ghibli AI" in the period studied resulting in hundreds of millions of views. This represented a 900% increase in search activity for "Ghibli AI" after the OpenAI image generator update. Posts studied showed 514.3% more negative than positive social media posts mentioning "Ghibli AI." The dominant discussion themes included concerns about authenticity and ethical implications on art. "Anger," "Fear,"

and "Disgust" were sentiments defined in these discussions, yet "Joy" was the most consistent emotion identified in social media posts on "Ghibli AI." Results suggest serious concern about this AI trend, but with a corresponding level of interest/amusement associated with "Ghibli AI."

Background and Context

Studio Ghibli is renowned for over four decades of excellence in the medium of animation. Director and honorary studio chairman Hayao Miyazaki is widely considered a visionary filmmaker and one of the most influential artists of the 20th Century. The term Ghibli originates from a Libyan Arabic word for hot desert wind. This distinct animation style is famous for its intricate depiction of human figures along with soft pastel, understated color palettes. The themes of Ghibli stories are varied but consistently contain themes related to concerns about industrialization, an overreliance on technology, and the importance of the human spirit as a part of nature (Napier, 2023).

Particularly relevant, Miyazaki has expressed concern about the increasing societal emphasis of AI. He states, "Whoever creates this stuff has no idea what pain is whatsoever. I am utterly disgusted… I would never wish to incorporate this technology into my work at all. I strongly feel that this is an insult to life itself" (Murthi, 2016).

Miyazaki's disgust for AI and his belief that AI represents a subversion of human creativity and identity was challenged in March of 2025 as the "Ghibli AI" trend took off online. The trend emerged from an OpenAI update that allowed for the creation of images that appear to have come from popular animation:

After OpenAI released a new image generator, users quickly realized that it could deliver high quality images with relatively unrestricted copyright filters. Users experimented with different cartoon styles, such as South Park, Rick and Morty and The Simpsons, but Studio Ghibli proved the most popular, trending on X (Di Placido, 2025).

Resulting images ranged from comedic to grotesque to patently offensive. The juxtaposition of these images with the cozy and "handmade" style of Studio Ghibli appears to have facilitated significant online spread. Several examples include the following:

The trend became a discourse flashpoint with online discussions of plagiarism, appropriation, the role of the artist, and the challenges of an AI future. It became further politicized when the Office of President Donald Trump shared the following image which

used Ghibli style AI to generate an image of an undocumented migrant being detained (Desk, 2025).

The prevalence of the trend and the corresponding online discourse generated by the trend merits additional investigation. To that end, this research evaluates the following exploratory questions:

RQ1: How prevalent was online discussion of Ghibli AI?

RQ2: What was the dominant sentiment of online discussion of Ghibli AI?
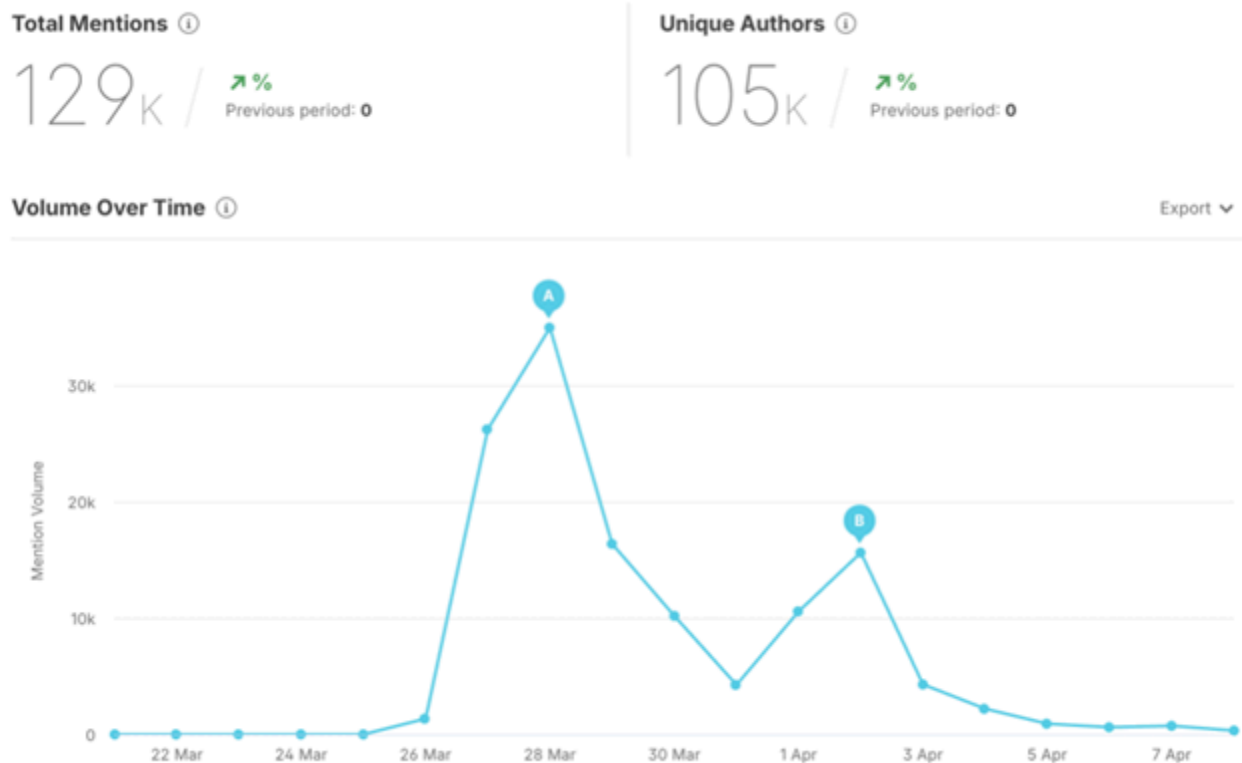
RQ3: What were the emergent themes of online discussion of Ghibli AI?

To answer these questions, this research employed the artificial intelligence (AI)-driven social media analytics tool, Brandwatch, to collect data in the forms of social conversations. Brandwatch is a leading analytics tool to derive social intelligence regarding consumer insights, influencer marketing, competitor analysis, reputation monitoring, and benchmark studies. Essentially, Brandwatch was utilized as a social listening tool to understand the sentiment, perceptions, trends, and reactions of social media users' conversations pertaining to Ghibli AI. Data was collected from March 21 - April 8.

A Google Trend Analysis was also conducted to assess if online search activity for Ghibli AI increased in the period studied. A key feature of Google Trends analysis is that it allows for identification of items of interest for internet users (Nghiem et al., 2016). These analyses are "normalized to the highest volume of searches for that term over the time period being studied. This index ranges from 0 to 100, with 100 recorded on the date that saw the highest relative search volume activity for that term" (Arora et al., 2019, p. 338). Search interest in a specific topic has reliably forecast social media posts and actions related to that topic (McCarthy, 2010).

Results

Results related to RQ1 suggest that prevalence of online discussion of Ghibli AI was extensive. In the sample studied for this report, over 100,000 posts with hundreds of millions of impressions were identified.

Total Mentions ⓘ

129k / ↗% Previous period: **0**

Unique Authors ⓘ

105k / ↗% Previous period: **0**

**Volume Over Time** ⓘ   Export ⌄

This is consistent with Trends Analysis which shows search activity spiked to its highest frequency in the time frame studied, with a 900% increase in searches in the period immediately after OpenAI released the new image generator.
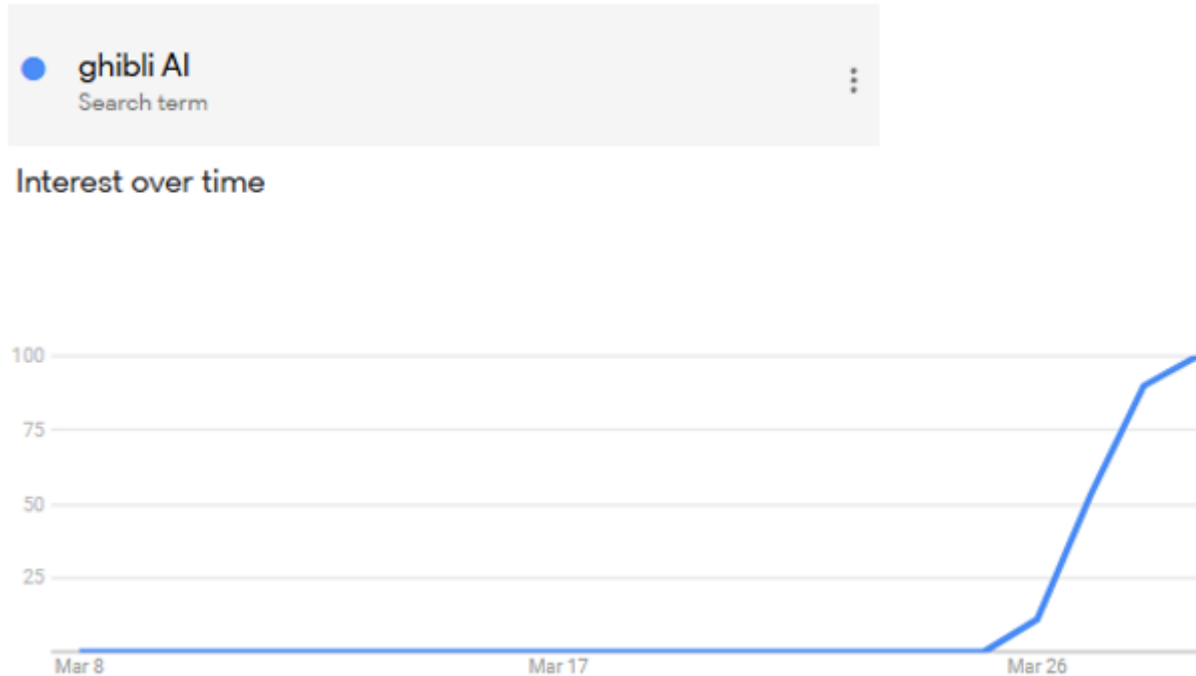
Cumulatively, results suggest that the Ghibli AI trend was widely seen and discussed in the online space.

In regard to RQ2, sentiment suggests that there was widespread negative sentiment about the trend. There were 514.3% more negative than positive posts mentioning Ghibli AI. Posts expressing negativity outnumbered posts that were positive by seven to one.

Social Media Sentiment on "Ghibli AI"
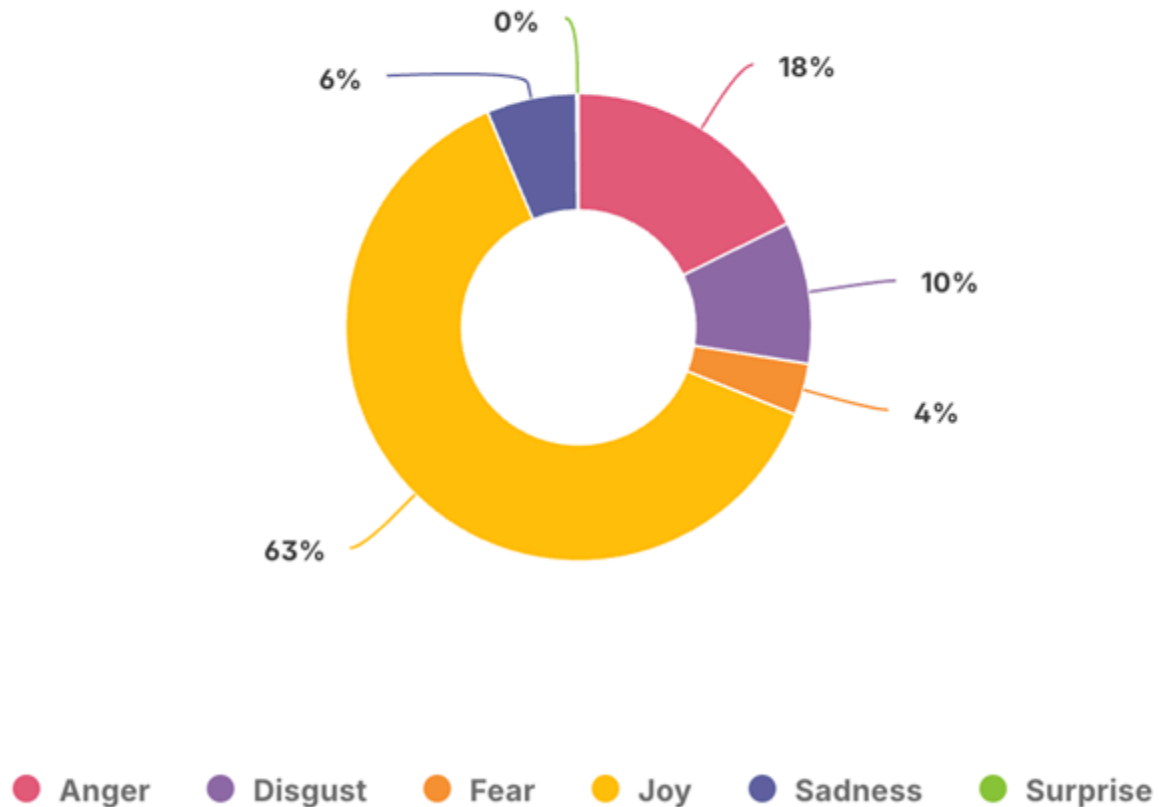
- Negative Sentiment   - Positive Sentiment
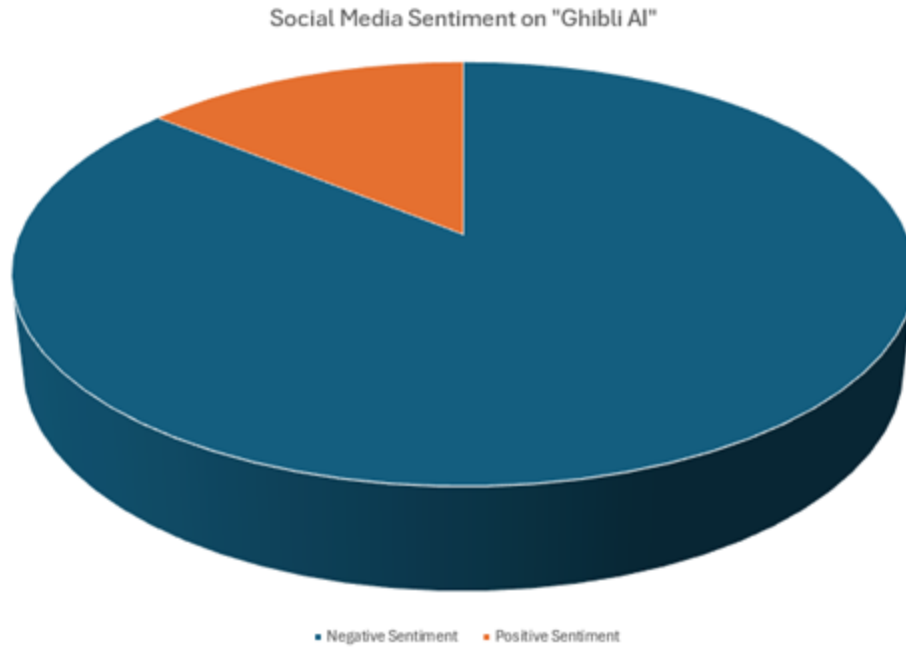
Sentiment over time ⓘ

Ironically, evaluation of the emotions expressed in posted social media content suggests that the negativity towards Ghibli AI content may be at odds with the emotions the

content inspired. The most identified emotion using the analytics tools employed for this study was "joy."

While anger, fear, sadness, and disgust were all notably identified, the consistency of posts suggesting joy potentially represents a paradox of the trend. People may, perhaps, be uncomfortable with Ghibli AI content, but may also be amused by the content consumed (particularly humor-based memes).

Looking at RQ3, emergent themes in the studied social media content were also identified. Specifically, concerns related to AI were notable. Themes included the following:

·   "AI art controversy"

·   "Ethical implications"

·   "OpenAI's response"

·   "Cultural impact - 'AI slop'"

· "Artists' critique - trivialization of art"

This is reflected in some of the most liked and shared posts studied in this research. Significant conversation driving content included the following:

pelz
@pelziee

AI wont make your photos Ghibli. Ghibli is hand drawn and each character has insane emotional depth. As scary it is to admit the result looks decent, it's nothing like Ghibli and will never be. Big fuck you to AI. This is terrible advancement of technology.

8:22 AM · Mar 26, 2025 · **410.7K** Views

zeldawilliams ✔ 22h
From Create Mode >

People are gleefully sharing 'Studio Ghibli style' AI memes and photos, as though the man himself wouldn't absolutely despise the technological piracy and negative effects on our environment.

Anyway, go watch Princess Mononoke in theaters tonight, and fuck AI. ❤️

gregor samsung ö @slimjosa · Mar 26

The whole Studio **Ghibli AI** trend honestly gives me second-hand embarrassment knowing how hard Hayao Miyazaki has fought to retain the identity of his films and how many of you are this willing to make a farce out of decades of artistry because you don't actually value it

> **Grant Slatton** @GrantSlatton · Mar 25
>
> tremendous alpha right now in sending your wife photos of yall converted to studio ghibli anime
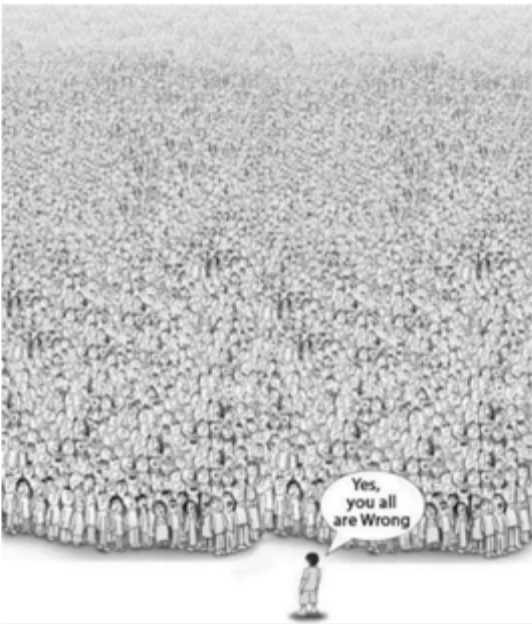

O 2.1K   ♻ 42K   ♡ 273K   � 12M   ☐ ⬆

Rehat @R3H8T · Mar 26

Every single person posting **Ghibli AI** has miserably failed to understand **Ghibli** as an art form

O 155   ♻ 7.1K   ♡ 42K   ᴸᴵᴵ 657K   ☐ ⬆

dwimwitted @not8oo · Mar 27
your **ai ghibli** filter pictures are ugly as shit but youre too souless to see it

kati ♡ **comms open** @insankitty · Mar 25
What opinion would you defend like this?

Yes, you all are Wrong

○ 586   � 29K   ♡ 238K   � 4.2M   🔖 ↑

COSMIC 🐙 SLOP @afrocosmist · Mar 27
do people not feel a deep viscous sense of shame using **AI** to generate Studio **Ghibli** art. how does that not make you feel bad & empty inside

○ 316   ↔ 2.1K   ♡ 19K   ᜶ 402K   🔖 ↑

Ed Newton-Rex ✔ @ednewtonrex · Mar 27
The entire **AI** Studio **Ghibli** thing is awful. But by far the worst part is the people *actively celebrating* that this would sadden/anger Miyazaki, Studio **Ghibli**'s creator.

Silicon Valley has never been in a worse place. It's sickening to watch the artist-hate spread.

○ 253   ↔ 2.7K   ♡ 20K   ᜶ 453K   🔖 ↑

It is important to note, however, that despite widespread negativity towards Ghibli AI, there are also numerous images (typically humorous images) widely shared and liked. The dynamic spectacle of distinct (and potentially contradictory) reactions to this trend are indicative of a phenomenon that merits continued scrutiny. Further illustrating this

tension, a word cloud was generated showing the various terms associated with the Ghibli AI trend this study identified in social media posts:

Discussion/Conclusion

The Ghibli AI trend created an online sensation sparking conversations about the meaning of art, the power of AI, and the uncertain future of human creation in a period of tension and change. The unique aesthetic of Ghibli coupled with the memetic function of the internet along with the increasing power of AI appears to have created this flashpoint. While the fad nature of such a trend suggests that it will likely not be enduring, the issues explored around this trend will linger as AI continues to advance and find greater placement in the dynamic of social media. Future scholarship should further investigate such flashpoints as the discourse around AI may reveal a greater exploration of the meaning of humanity and its relationship with technology. This theme, ironically, has regularly been a focus of the Studio Ghibli films themselves.

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