

AI Adoption Rising. So Why Is Gen Z Trust Declining?

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Despite widespread integration of AI tools, Gen Z's sentiment toward AI is becoming more negative. Concerns about job displacement, fewer entry-level opportunities, and even long-term cognitive effects are shaping their skepticism.

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As AI [becomes more embedded](#) in the workplace, Gen Z isn't becoming more confident in it, they're becoming more skeptical.

Despite widespread integration of AI tools, Gen Z's sentiment toward AI is becoming more negative, and not without reason. Concerns about job displacement, fewer entry-level

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This raises a critical question: in an AI-driven world, can Gen Z afford to stay on the sidelines?

Gen Z Sentiment Is Shifting

A [recent survey](#) from the Walton Family Foundation, GSV Ventures, and Gallup, which gathered over 1,500 responses from Gen Z-ers, highlights a mixture of emotions around AI.

Nearly half (49%) of respondents reported feeling curious about AI, but that curiosity is closely followed by anxiety (42%) and anger (31%). Fewer expressed excitement (22%) or hope (18%).

Compared to last year, sentiment has shifted in a more negative direction. Excitement dropped 14 percentage points and hopefulness fell nine points, while anger increased by nine points.

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Frequency of use plays a clear role in shaping these views. Those who use AI regularly report more positive emotions such as curiosity, excitement, or hopefulness. Those who never used AI reported more feelings of anxiety or anger. However, even among frequent users, enthusiasm is declining. Since 2025, excitement is down 18 points and hopefulness has fallen by 11 points.

Avoidance Isn't A Strategy

Avoiding AI isn't the solution to any of these shifting points of view.

AI will continue to shape the world of work, and opting out won't stop that. If anything, it risks leaving individuals less prepared to navigate a changing job market and employer expectations.

For Gen Z, preparing for an AI-shaped workforce isn't just about whether to use these tools, but how to use them effectively.

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That starts with practical fluency. This doesn't require understanding how models are built, but it does require knowing how to work them, writing effective prompts, iterating on outputs, using AI to support tasks like summarizing, brainstorming, and editing, and recognizing where these tools fall short.

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But AI use is only part of it, there also needs to be intention. Two habits make that possible: critical thinking and a growth mindset. Using AI effectively requires questioning outputs, recognizing limitations, and making informed decisions about what to trust.

Not every task should be offloaded. AI can assist, but it [should not replace](#) the thinking behind the work. Taking an initial pass at work, critically evaluating AI outputs, and collaborating with others remain essential. It also requires a willingness to adapt, learning new tools, refining how you use them, and staying open as the technology evolves.

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[value](#), whether through stronger judgement, creativity, or the ability to interpret nuance that AI may miss.

Preparation also extends beyond using AI tools. [Building relationships through networking, finding mentors, and seeking career guidance](#) remain essential. AI can't replace the value of human connection or the opportunities that can come from it. Strengthening those areas not only helps you to navigate AI-driven changes, but also prepares you for the aspects of building a career that aren't going away.

Growing Concern Around Work And Society

This shift in sentiment appears related to broader concerns about AI's impact on society and the workforce.

Gen Z [remains divided](#) on how helpful AI actually is. Compared to last year's Walton Family Foundation and Gallup [poll](#), fewer believe AI meaningfully improves tasks like searching for information or generating ideas. Confidence in AI's ability to improve efficiency has also declined, alongside a more negative outlook on its role in the workplace. Increasingly more Gen Z respondents believe the risks of AI outweigh its benefits on the job.

Recent developments in the labor market help to explain some of this skepticism. At the start of 2026, several [tech companies](#) downsized their workforce while citing AI investments as a factor, aiming to do more with fewer employees. At the same time, [entry level jobs](#) in the US have seen a decline, limiting access to the very positions that traditionally serve as pathways to long-term career growth.

While the long-term economic impact of AI remains uncertain, these shifts point to meaningful disruption, and growing public attention around what comes next. Efforts like Renaissance Philanthropy's [Labor Automation Forecasting Hub](#) reflect a broader push to better understand how AI may reshape the workforce.

At the same time, AI is not just changing the job market, it is changing how work gets done.

An [eight month study by UC Berkeley](#) examining the use of generative AI at a U.S. tech company found that while employees worked faster, their work also intensified. Workers took on more tasks, often relying on AI to fill gaps or manage specific tasks while working on other assignments.

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While this can lead to increased productivity, it also [introduces](#) risks of fatigue, stress, and burnout.

There are also concerns about how reliance on AI tools may affect cognitive processes. As more tasks are offloaded, the less someone may critically think, deeply process information, or learn, raising the possibility of accepting inaccurate information without scrutiny and [more](#).

This Is The Beginning

Adapting to AI may not fully resolve the challenges Gen Z faces.

Navigating this shift may also require more strategic career decisions, a willingness to adapt, and continued learning over time. It may also depend on whether organizations create opportunities for early career workers to gain experience in an evolving landscape.

But one thing is clear: AI is not going away.

Gen Z doesn't necessarily need to fully trust AI to engage with it. But choosing not to understand it may ultimately be more limiting than the risks they are trying to avoid.

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