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Will AI Value Human Creators? Now's the Time to Decide the Future of Our Culture (Guest Column)

By David Israelite and Mitch Glazier
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In 1994, at the dawn of the internet era, *Rolling Stone* asked Steve Jobs if he still had faith in technology. "It's not a faith in technology," he responded. "It's faith in people."

Today, at the dawn of the artificial intelligence era, we put our faith in people too.

It's hard to think of an issue that has exploded onto the public scene with the furor of the debate over AI, which went from obscure technology journals to national morning shows practically overnight. This week, Congress is convening the first two of what will surely be many hearings on the issue, including one with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and another with musician, voice actor and SAG-AFTRA National Board member Dan Navarro.

As members of the global **Human Artistry Campaign**, made up of more than 100 organizations that represent a united, worldwide coalition of the creative arts, we welcome this open and active debate. It's gratifying to see policymakers, industry, and our own creative community asking tough questions up front. It's a lot easier to chart a course in advance than to play catch up from afterward.

We don't have long to get this right, either. The internet is already awash in unlicensed and unethical "style" and "soundalike" tools that rip off the writing, voice, likeness and style of professional artists and songwriters without authorization or permission. Powerful new engines like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Jukebox, Google's MusicLM and Microsoft's AI-powered Bing have been trained on vast troves of musical compositions, lyrics, and sound recordings — as well as every other type of data and information available on the internet — without even the most basic transparency or disclosure, let alone consent from the creators whose work is being used. Songwriters, recording artists, and musicians today are literally being forced to compete against AI programs trained on copies of their own compositions and recordings.

We strongly support AI that can be used to enhance art and stretch the potential of human creativity even further. Technology has always pushed art forward, and AI will be no different.

At the same time, however, human artistry must and will always remain at the core of genuine creation. The basis of creative expression is the sharing of lived experiences — an artist-to-audience/audience-to-artist connection that forms our culture and identity.

Without a rich supply of human-created works, there would be nothing on which to train AI in the first place. And if we don't lay down a policy foundation now that respects, values and compensates the unique genius of human creators, we will end up in a cultural cul-de-sac, feeding AI-generated works back into the engines that produced them in a costly and ultimately empty race to the artistic bottom.

That policy foundation must start with the core value of consent. Use of copyrighted works to train or develop AI must be subject to free-market licensing and authorization from all rights holders. Creators and copyright owners must retain exclusive control over the ways their work is used. The moral invasion of AI engines that steal the core of a professional performer's identity — the product of a lifetime's hard work and dedication — without permission or pay cannot be tolerated.

This will require AI developers to ensure copyrighted training inputs are approved and licensed, including those used by pre-trained AIs they employ. It means they need to keep thorough and transparent records of the creative works and likenesses used to train AI systems and how they were exploited. These obligations are nothing new, though — anyone who uses another creator's work or a professional's voice, image or likeness must already ensure they have the necessary rights and maintain the records to prove it.

Congress is right to bring in AI developers like Sam Altman to hear the technology community's vision for the future of AI and explore the safeguards and guardrails the industry is relying on today. The issues around the rapid deployment of novel AI capabilities are numerous and profound: data privacy, deepfakes, bias and misinformation in training sets, job displacement and national security.

Creators will be watching and listening closely for concrete, meaningful commitments to the core principles of permission and fair market licensing that are necessary to sustain songwriters and recording artists and drive innovation.

We have already seen some of what AI can do. Now it falls to us to insist that it be done in ethical and lawful ways. Nothing short of our culture — and, over time, our very humanity — is at stake.

David Israelite is the President & CEO of the National Music Publishers' Association. NMPA is the trade association representing American music publishers and their songwriting partners.

Mitch Glazier is chairman/CEO of the RIAA, the trade organization that supports and promotes the creative and financial vitality of the major recorded-music companies.