EPISODE #271

The AI Paradox: Why Power Users Are the Most Skeptical

Published January 23, 2026 • Runtime: 27:14

https://myweirdprompts.com/episode/ai-skepticism-demographics-trends/

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode, Herman and Corn unpack the surprising reality of AI sentiment in 2026. While younger "digital natives" are the most frequent users, they are also the most skeptical about AI's impact on creativity and relationships. Meanwhile, older adults and blue-collar workers are finding unique, low-stress ways to integrate the technology into their lives. The hosts explore how profession, age, and gender shape our fears of "collaborating with our own obsolescence" and what it means for the future of work and human connection.

DANIEL'S PROMPT

Daniel

"I'd like to ask about AI skepticism and how responses to the rise of AI are stratified by demographics, particularly age. Are there any trends in what people do in life that might change their attitudes toward AI?"

TRANSCRIPT

Corn

Hey everyone, welcome back to My Weird Prompts. I am Corn, and I am sitting here in a very rainy Jerusalem afternoon with my brother.

Herman

Herman Poppleberry, here and ready to dive in. And you are right, Corn, the weather is perfect for a deep dive into the data. The rain on the Jerusalem stone has that specific earthy smell today, and it is making me feel very reflective about the digital landscape we are navigating this year.

Corn

It is definitely a stay-inside-and-think kind of day. Our housemate Daniel actually sent us a fascinating voice note this morning that has been rattling around in my brain all day. It was a great prompt. Daniel was talking about his own journey with artificial intelligence, specifically how he went from being a casual user to a total enthusiast once he saw it could help him with home automation. He mentioned writing Y-A-M-L code for our smart home setup. It is funny because I remember when he first got that working, he was so excited, and now it is just part of how our house functions. The lights dim when the rain starts, the heater kicks in, and it is all orchestrated by code he generated through a conversation.

Herman

Right, and he pointed out something really incisive. He has this massive enthusiasm for it as a lifelong learner, but he is noticing that not everyone shares that vibe. He was asking about A-I skepticism and how it is stratified by demographics, especially age. And he even mentioned this outlier, an eighty-year-old friend of his, let's call him Mr. Kaplan, who is more excited about A-I than he is.

Corn

It really challenges that stereotype of the grumpy luddite grandparent versus the tech-savvy teenager. Because when you actually look at the numbers from the last year, the reality is way more complicated and, honestly, a bit counterintuitive. We are sitting here in January of twenty twenty-six, and we finally have some really robust longitudinal data on this.

Herman

Oh, it is completely upside down compared to what most people assume. If you look at the most recent Pew Research Center reports from late twenty twenty-five, the headline is actually kind of startling. About fifty-one percent of Americans say they are more concerned than excited about the increased use of artificial intelligence in daily life. That is a solid majority now, and it has stayed high even as the tech has become more polished.

Corn

Wait, fifty-one percent are more concerned? That feels high given how much we hear about A-I being integrated into everything from our phones to our cars. What is the breakdown on the excitement side?

Herman

It is actually quite low. Only about eleven percent say they are more excited than concerned. The rest are either in the middle or just not sure. But here is the kicker, and this gets directly to what Daniel was asking about age. You would think the younger generation, the digital natives, would be the ones leading the charge with blind optimism, right?

Corn

That is the narrative. Gen Z grew up with a screen in their hand, so they should be the most comfortable with the next evolution of that screen.

Herman

Well, they are the most comfortable using it, but they are also the most skeptical about its impact. According to the Pew data from September twenty twenty-five, about sixty-two percent of adults under thirty say they have heard or read a lot about A-I, which is exactly double the awareness of the sixty-five-plus crowd. But sixty-one percent of those same young adults believe A-I is actually going to make people worse at thinking creatively. And fifty-eight percent think it is going to harm our ability to form meaningful relationships.

Corn

That is a massive paradox. They are the power users, but they are also the ones sounding the alarm on the human side of things. Why do you think that is? Is it because they are closer to the impact, like in the job market or in school?

Herman

Exactly. Think about where they are in life. If you are twenty-two and just entering the workforce, you are looking at entry-level tasks that are exactly what large language models are best at. Researching, summarizing, basic coding, drafting emails. They are seeing the replacement factor in real-time. In fact, a report from Indeed in April twenty twenty-five showed that nearly half of Gen Z job seekers feel A-I has made their college education irrelevant. That is a heavy realization to have right when you are starting your career.

Corn

That explains the generational realism you mentioned earlier. It is not just cynicism; it is an observation of their own shrinking professional territory.

Herman

Right. They see the hallucinations, they see the way it can flatten out creative expression into this kind of average of all data slurry. Meanwhile, the older generation, if they are using it at all, tends to use it in a much more transactional way. There was a great study out of the University of Oxford in late twenty twenty-five that looked at this. It found that older users often treat A-I like a hyper-advanced search engine. They ask a question, they get an answer, they move on. There is a transactional distance there that keeps the existential dread at bay.

Corn

Whereas younger users are integrating it into their actual thought process. Daniel mentioned using it for ideation and modeling perspectives in a debate. That is a much more intimate relationship with the technology. It is like having a co-pilot for your brain.

Herman

It is! And that intimacy breeds a different kind of concern. If you use it as a co-pilot, you start to worry about what happens to your brain when the co-pilot is doing all the heavy lifting. There is this self-teach paradox happening in schools too. A report from the Center for Democracy and Technology showed that while over eighty-five percent of students and teachers used A-I in the last school year, half of those students said it made them feel less connected to their teachers.

Corn

That is a really sad statistic, Herman. If the technology meant to personalize learning is actually making the human connection feel more distant, we are missing the mark. And the same report mentioned that one in five students even reported knowing someone who had a romantic relationship with an A-I. That is a level of social shift that we are just not prepared for.

Herman

It really is. But let's look at the other side. What about that eighty-year-old friend Daniel mentioned? Mr. Kaplan. Is he just a total anomaly, or is there a trend among older enthusiasts that we are overlooking?

Corn

It is less of an anomaly than you might think. When older adults do cross the chasm into A-I use, they often find it incredibly empowering in ways that younger people take for granted. Think about accessibility. If you have declining vision or mobility issues, a voice-activated A-I that can synthesize information, read documents aloud, or even just help you navigate a complex digital interface is a godsend.

Herman

Precisely. For a retiree, A-I is not a threat to their career because they are likely retired. It is not a threat to their creative identity in the same way because they have already established who they are. It is purely an additive tool. We actually saw a surge in silver-tech adoption in twenty twenty-five. There is this interesting trend where older users are using A-I to organize decades of family photos, identify people in old videos, and even write memoirs. For them, the hallucination risk is less of a deal-breaker because they are using it for things where they are the ultimate arbiter of truth anyway. They can correct the A-I when it gets a family fact wrong.

Corn

It is like they have the context to keep the A-I in check, whereas a student might just take the A-I's word for it. But let's talk about the stratification by what people do in life part of Daniel's question. Because it isn't just about how old you are; it is about what you do for a living.

Herman

This is where the divide gets really sharp. We used to talk about automation as a blue-collar problem. Robots in factories, self-driving trucks. But the A-I revolution of the last few years has flipped that. It is the white-collar workers, the knowledge workers, who are feeling the heat. Gallup reported in June twenty twenty-five that A-I adoption has nearly doubled in two years, but almost all of that growth is in white-collar roles. Twenty-seven percent of white-collar employees use it frequently, compared to only nine percent of production or front-line workers.

Corn

Right, we have covered similar themes in previous episodes about how this impacts different professions. Lawyers, paralegals, junior analysts. The stuff they spent years learning to do is suddenly being done in seconds. I remember reading about a case in mid-twenty twenty-five where an A-I-assisted legal team won a minor contract dispute, and instead of celebrating, the junior associates were terrified because they realized their billable hours were about to vanish.

Herman

And the data reflects that anxiety. There is a huge split in adoption between degree holders and non-degree holders. In the United Kingdom, a YouGov study from December twenty twenty-five found that degree holders are far more likely to use A-I in the workplace, by about thirty-four percent to thirteen percent. But interestingly, non-degree holders are actually more likely to use it in their personal lives.

Corn

Wait, why the personal life lead for non-degree holders? That seems backward.

Herman

The theory is that for people in manual or practical blue-collar roles, A-I isn't a threat to their workday. A plumber or an electrician isn't worried about a chatbot fixing a leak. So, they feel safer playing with it at home for things like budgeting, shopping, or entertainment. For them, it is a fun utility. But for the office worker, every time they use it, they are essentially training their potential replacement. It creates this underlying tension, this feeling that they are collaborating with their own obsolescence.

Corn

That is a fascinating distinction. The safe use versus the existential threat use. It also explains why we see so much pushback in the creative industries. I saw a report that said while eighty percent of students are using A-I for schoolwork, professional graphic designers are seeing it as a direct threat to their headcount and salaries.

Herman

And it is not just designers. It is the craft-based professions. If your value is built on a signature style or a bespoke process that took twenty years to master, and now someone can prompt a similar vibe in thirty seconds, your entire economic model is under fire. That is why the skepticism among creatives is so fierce. It is not that they don't think the tech is cool or useful; it is that they see it as an extractive force. They feel like the A-I was trained on their work without permission, and now it is being sold back to them as a tool to replace them.

Corn

Extractive is exactly the word. And that leads into the gender gap, which I found really surprising when I was looking at the data from Stanford and Berkeley.

Herman

The gender gap in A-I skepticism is quite significant. Women, as a demographic, tend to be more attuned to the risks of A-I, things like job displacement, data privacy, and the environmental impact of these massive data centers. A Berkeley study from late twenty twenty-four found that women were about twenty percent less likely than men to use tools like ChatGPT or Claude.

Corn

Twenty percent? That is a huge margin. What is driving that?

Herman

The researchers found that women reported lower familiarity and less confidence in their ability to use the tools, but they were also more likely to view A-I use as cheating and to worry about being penalized professionally for using it. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to see the utility and just jump in. It is a difference in risk perception. Men might see a shortcut, while women see a potential ethical compromise or a professional risk.

Corn

So it's a difference in how we calculate the cost of the technology. Men might be looking at the output, while women are looking at the second-order effects on society or the environment.

Herman

Right. And when you combine that with the age data, you get these really specific pockets of skepticism. For example, younger women are some of the most vocal critics of A-I in the creative and academic spaces because they are seeing the intersection of all these risks. They see the threat to their future careers, the ethical concerns about data, and the potential for A-I to reinforce old biases.

Corn

It is funny, because here in Jerusalem, we see a slightly different slice of this. I was looking at some local data, and Israeli adults under thirty-five are actually way more optimistic than the global average. About forty-six percent are more excited than concerned, compared to that eleven percent global median.

Herman

That is a huge outlier. Why do you think that is?

Corn

I think it is the start-up nation culture. We are so integrated into the tech sector here that people see A-I as the engine of the next economic boom rather than just a threat. There is this sense of we are the ones building it, so we can control it. But even here, once you cross that fifty-year-old threshold, the excitement drops to fifteen percent. So the age divide is still there; it is just shifted upward because of the local tech culture.

Herman

That is a great point. The what you do in life part isn't just your job; it is your cultural environment. If you live in a place where tech is seen as the primary solution to problems, you're going to be more of an enthusiast. But let's go back to something Daniel mentioned, the hallucination problem. He called it a vulnerability that people like to pick on. Is that a fair assessment? Is skepticism based on hallucinations just picking on a flaw, or is it a fundamental reason to be wary?

Herman

I think it is both. From a technical standpoint, we have made huge strides. If you compare the models from early twenty twenty-four to what we have now in twenty twenty-six, the grounding is much better. We have better retrieval-augmented generation and better reasoning. But for a skeptic, a hallucination isn't just a bug; it is a symptom of a deeper unreliability.

Corn

Right, it is the uncanny valley of information. If it is ninety-five percent right, the five percent it gets wrong is actually more dangerous because you have let your guard down.

Herman

Exactly! And that is a huge factor in why older professionals in high-stakes fields like medicine or law are so skeptical. If you are a doctor who has spent forty years relying on peer-reviewed journals and clinical experience, the idea of a probabilistic engine giving you a diagnosis is terrifying. You don't want probably right. You want definitively right.

Corn

This brings up an interesting point about how we trust different sources. Older generations grew up in an era of centralized authority. You trusted the encyclopedia, the evening news, the university professor. A-I is the ultimate decentralization of information. It is truth by committee or truth by most likely next token.

Herman

That is a profound way to put it. And for someone who values that centralized authority, A-I feels like a chaotic force. It is information synthesis without a clear pedigree. Younger people, on the other hand, grew up in the era of the messy internet. They are used to triangulating truth from a dozen different social media posts and websites. To them, A-I is just another tool in that triangulation process.

Corn

So, their skepticism isn't about the unreliability of the info, because they already assume the internet is unreliable. Their skepticism is about the impact of the tool on their lives and creativity. I want to dig into that creativity part for a second. Because that sixty-one percent of young people thinking A-I will make us worse at thinking creatively really bothers me. Is there any data on whether that is actually happening?

Herman

It is hard to measure creativity in a lab, but we are seeing some indicators. There was a study in twenty twenty-five that looked at student essays. It found that while the average quality of writing went up because the A-I was helping with grammar and structure, the variance in ideas went down. Everything started to sound the same. It is what researchers are calling semantic homogenization.

Corn

Semantic homogenization. That sounds like a nightmare for a writer or an artist. It is like the whole world is being edited by the same middle-manager.

Herman

It is! If everyone is using the same co-pilot, everyone starts flying to the same destination. And if you are a young person who values individuality and breaking the mold, that feels like a prison. That is why you see this human-made movement gaining so much steam in twenty twenty-six. People are starting to put No A-I used badges on their work like they are Organic or Fair Trade labels.

Corn

We have seen that on some of the artisan websites we browse. It is becoming a premium brand. This was made by a person who struggled with it.

Herman

And that struggle is what Daniel mentioned too. He talked about learning through conversation and how immersive it is. But he also acknowledged that learning is meant to involve struggle. That is how we build cognitive strength. If the A-I removes all the friction, do we still get the muscle?

Corn

It is like the difference between walking a trail and taking a helicopter to the summit. You get the same view, but your legs didn't get any stronger.

Herman

That is a perfect analogy. And if you are a Gen Z student who has taken the helicopter every day for four years of college, you might get to the top of the job market and realize you don't actually know how to walk the terrain when the helicopter isn't available. That is a very real, very grounded fear.

Corn

So, how do we bridge this gap? We have Daniel, the enthusiast housemate, and we have these broad demographic silos of skepticism. How do we get these groups to talk to each other without just shouting you are a luddite or you are a tech-bro?

Herman

I think it starts with acknowledging that both groups are right. The enthusiasts are right about the potential for leveling the playing field. Like Daniel said, knowing how to code is no longer an impediment to bringing software ideas to life. That is an incredible democratization of power.

Corn

And the skeptics?

Herman

They are right about the risks of homogenization, the loss of human connection, and the ethical issues of extraction. If we can move the conversation away from Is A-I good or bad? and toward How do we use this to enhance human agency rather than replace it?, we might actually get somewhere.

Corn

That human agency bit is key. I think that is what Daniel was getting at with his smart home. He didn't just let the A-I run the house; he used it to help him write the Y-A-M-L so he could build the system he wanted. He stayed in the driver's seat.

Herman

Exactly. He used it as a tool for augmentation, not automation. And I think that is the sweet spot that can win over some of the skeptics. If a graphic designer can use A-I to handle the grunt work like removing backgrounds or resizing files, so they have more time for the high-level conceptual thinking, that is a win.

Corn

But that only works if the client still values that high-level thinking. If the client just thinks Oh, the A-I did it, so it should be free, then the designer is still in trouble.

Herman

And that is the economic reckoning of twenty twenty-six. We are having to re-evaluate what value even means in a world of infinite, low-cost output. Is value the result, or is value the human intent behind the result?

Corn

I suspect the answer is going to be a bit of both, but we are definitely leaning toward intent becoming the more valuable commodity.

Herman

I agree. It is like how a hand-knit sweater is more expensive than a factory-made one, even if the factory one is perfect. The flaws and the story matter.

Corn

Okay, let's talk practical takeaways. If someone is listening to this and they are feeling that skepticism, or maybe they are the Daniel in their family trying to convince their skeptical parents to use A-I, what should they do?

Herman

For the enthusiasts, my advice is: stop talking about the magic and start talking about the utility. Don't try to convince your sixty-year-old dad that A-I is going to change the world. Show him how it can help him find that obscure part for his vintage car or how it can summarize a fifty-page medical report into three bullet points he can actually discuss with his doctor.

Corn

Specificity over hype.

Herman

Always. And for the skeptics, I would say: your concerns are valid, but don't let them turn into a blind spot. The tech is here, and it is moving fast. If you stay on the sidelines entirely, you lose the ability to shape how it is used. We need the skeptics inside the process, asking the hard questions about ethics and creativity.

Corn

I love that. Skepticism as a seat at the table, not a reason to leave the room.

Herman

Precisely. We need critical adoption. Use it, but keep your eyes open. Question the outputs, check the sources, and always ask: Is this making me more capable, or just more dependent?

Corn

More capable or more dependent. That is a great litmus test. I think I am going to use that next time I am tempted to let an A-I write a whole email for me. Am I saving time for something better, or am I just getting lazy with my own thoughts?

Herman

It is a fine line, Corn. We all walk it every day.

Corn

We really do. This has been such a deep dive, Herman. I feel like we have barely scratched the surface of the what people do in life part, but the professional divide between manual and cognitive labor is clearly the big story of the next few years.

Herman

It is the defining economic shift of our decade. And it is happening right here, right now.

Corn

Well, on that note, I think we should wrap this up before the rain turns into a flood. Daniel, thank you for the prompt. It really pushed us to look at the data in a new way.

Herman

Yeah, thanks Daniel. And to everyone listening, if you found this exploration helpful or if you have your own thoughts on the A-I divide, we would love to hear from you. You can find us at myweirdprompts.com – there is a contact form right there on the site.

Corn

And hey, if you have been enjoying the show, a quick review on your podcast app or a rating on Spotify really helps us reach new people. We are a small, independent operation here in Jerusalem, and every review genuinely makes a difference.

Herman

It really does. We appreciate all of you who have been with us for these two hundred and twenty-five episodes. It has been a wild ride.

Corn

You can find all our past episodes and our RSS feed at myweirdprompts.com. Thanks for listening to My Weird Prompts.

Herman

Until next time, stay curious and keep asking those weird questions.

Corn

See ya.