USE OF GENERATIVE AI AND COPYRIGHT PROTECTION: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM DIGITAL CONTENT CREATORS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the intensity of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) use influences copyright protection behavior among digital content creators in China. Data were collected through a survey conducted between [data collection period] among registered creators on major Chinese content-creation platforms, covering formats such as text and images, short videos, and podcasts. The final sample consists of 8,342 respondents. Empirically, Logit models are employed to analyze copyright registration behavior, while OLS models are used to estimate the intensity of copyright enforcement actions. Mediation mechanisms are examined using bootstrap procedures, and 2SLS estimation is used to address potential endogeneity concerns. The results show that greater GenAI usage intensity is significantly associated with both a higher likelihood of copyright registration and greater enforcement intensity. Perceived infringement risk partially mediates the relationship between GenAI use and copyright registration, whereas AI literacy partially mediates its relationship with enforcement intensity. In addition, stricter platform copyright policies strengthen these effects. The effects are particularly pronounced among full-time professional creators and creators producing new-media content. This study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between GenAI adoption and copyright protection behavior and contributes to the literature on platform governance and the development of policies for creator protection.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence; copyright protection behavior; platform governance; content creators.

USO DE IA GENERATIVA E PROTEÇÃO DE DIREITOS AUTORAIS: EVIDÊNCIAS EMPÍRICAS DE CRIADORES DE CONTEÚDO DIGITAL NA CHINA

RESUMO

Este estudo investiga como a intensidade de uso da Inteligência Artificial Generativa (IAG) influencia o comportamento de proteção de direitos autorais de criadores de conteúdo digital

na China. Os dados foram obtidos por meio de uma pesquisa realizada no período da coleta com criadores registrados nas principais plataformas chinesas de criação de conteúdo, abrangendo formatos como texto e imagem, vídeos curtos e podcasts. A amostra final compreende 8.342 respondentes. Empiricamente, empregam-se modelos *Logit* para analisar o registro de direitos autorais e OLS para estimar a intensidade das ações de proteção. Os mecanismos de mediação são examinados por meio de *bootstrap*, enquanto estimativas de 2SLS são utilizadas para lidar com possíveis problemas de endogeneidade. Os resultados mostram que uma maior intensidade de uso de IAG está significativamente associada tanto a uma maior probabilidade de registro de direitos autorais quanto a uma maior intensidade de proteção. O risco percebido de infração medeia parcialmente a relação entre o uso de IAG e o registro de direitos autorais, enquanto o letramento em IA medeia parcialmente sua relação com a intensidade de proteção. Além disso, políticas de direitos autorais mais rigorosas nas plataformas fortalecem esses efeitos. Os resultados são particularmente pronunciados entre criadores profissionais em tempo integral e produtores de conteúdo de novas mídias. O estudo fornece evidências empíricas sobre a relação entre a adoção de IAG e a proteção de direitos autorais, contribuindo para a governança de plataformas e para o desenvolvimento de políticas de proteção aos criadores.

Palavras-chave: inteligência artificial generativa; proteção de direitos autorais; governança de plataformas; criadores de conteúdo.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, generative AI technologies have spread rapidly. Large language models and media generation tools lead this trend. They have transformed content production and reshaped industrial organization. These changes affect production costs, the role of human creators, and creative industries. At the same time, using copyrighted material for training has sparked debate. The copyrightability of AI outputs also remains controversial. Global organizations have responded with key reports. The European Union Intellectual Property Office published a study on AI mechanics and copyright rules (EUIPO, 2025). The European Parliament Research Service assessed AI impact and proposed regulatory options across the training, creation, and regulation chain (EPRS, 2025). At the EU level, Article 4 of Directive (EU) 2019/790 provides a copyright exception for text and data mining of lawfully accessible works, subject to the possibility for rightholders to reserve their rights. More recently, the EU AI Act has introduced copyright-related obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models, further linking AI governance to the protection of copyrighted works. The U.S. Copyright Office issued policy conclusions on digital replicas and AI outputs (U.S. Copyright Office, 2024, 2025). It stated that assistive AI use permits copyright, but purely AI-generated work does not. Finally, the World Intellectual Property Organization has hosted conversations and published issue papers on AI since 2019 (WIPO, 2019; WIPO Secretariat, 2020; World Intellectual Property Organization, 2025).

Existing literature largely approaches these questions through doctrinal analysis, comparative law, or economic modeling. For instance, Yang and Zhang (2024) build a two-period model to examine fair-use standards and AI copyrightability rules. They find that broad fair-use standards benefit all parties when training data is abundant. However, as data grows scarce, generous fair-use may harm social welfare and AI development. Economic history also provides empirical evidence on copyright and creative incentives. Biasi and Moser (2021) analyze the U.S. Book Republication Program during World War II. They find that weaker copyright protection lowered access costs and boosted subsequent scientific output. Their citation data shows that weaker protection encouraged follow-on creative work. In the digital music industry, Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf (2007) argue that file sharing had little effect on record sales. However, Liebowitz (2016) directly challenges this finding through replication tests. These conflicting studies show that the link between copyright strength and creative drive remains heavily debated. Context matters greatly in these evaluations. Domestically, scholars offer varied perspectives. Wang (2017, 2023, 2024) consistently argues that AI content lacks true originality and should not receive copyright protection. Meanwhile, Xiong (2017) outlines alternative institutional designs for copyright standards and protection paths. Finally, recent publishing industry studies examine how framing large-model training as reproduction impacts publishing ecosystems, while also analyzing how Chinese courts handle AIGC copyright disputes (Chen, 2025).

At the level of judicial practice, several landmark cases in recent years have further highlighted the tension between the use of AI training data and copyright protection: the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware, in Thomson Reuters v. Ross Intelligence, issued the first substantive ruling on the fair-use defense for AI training data, holding that the defendant's use of Westlaw's legal headnotes did not constitute fair use (Rosenfeld et al., 2025; Hersh, 2025); the England and Wales High Court, in Getty Images v. Stability AI, dismissed Getty's core copyright-infringement claims on jurisdictional and evidentiary grounds, finding only limited trademark infringement (Getty Images (US) Inc & Ors v Stability AI Limited, 2025). These cases indicate that, although courts across jurisdictions have begun to adjudicate the copyright boundaries of AI training data on a case-by-case basis, institutional certainty remains limited.

However, existing research mostly focuses on institutional design, court rulings, or industry modeling. Few studies look directly at individual creator behavior. They rarely examine whether daily AI tool use alters how creators protect their own copyrights. Creators might change their registration and enforcement decisions after using AI for assistance, or

because they worry their work trains AI models. This question is crucial for individual rights protection. It also helps us understand how the copyright system operates at the micro level as AI continues to spread.

Building on this, the present study uses survey data from creators on content-creation platforms to empirically examine how AI usage intensity affects creators' copyright-registration behavior and enforcement intensity, and further investigates the underlying mechanism (mediation) and boundary conditions (moderation and heterogeneity). The marginal contributions of this study are threefold: first, by adopting a micro-level, creator-behavior perspective, it provides empirical evidence on the interaction between AI and the copyright system, complementing prior research dominated by doctrinal and industry-modeling approaches; second, it constructs a multi-level regression model with 20 variables, systematically testing the mediating roles of perceived infringement risk and AI literacy as well as the moderating role of platform copyright policy; third, through heterogeneity analysis it reveals differences in the effect across creator subgroups, offering a reference point for differentiated platform governance.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 AI USAGE AND CREATORS' COPYRIGHT PROTECTION BEHAVIOR

Creators' use of AI tools both raises content-production efficiency and exposes creators more frequently to copyright-related technical information (e.g., prompts about training-data provenance, content-provenance watermarks), which may raise copyright awareness. Prior technical work shows that multi-agent frameworks for generative content have attempted to embed protective watermarking mechanisms into the content-generation pipeline, achieving relatively high watermark-recovery rates to support content provenance and copyright protection (Khan et al., 2025). In China, the Beijing Internet Court's 2023 decision in Li v. Liu further illustrates this issue, recognizing copyright protection for an AI-assisted image where the user's prompting and iterative adjustments reflected sufficient human intellectual input and originality. The U.S. Copyright Office, in its copyrightability report, likewise emphasizes that human "creative arrangement and modification" of AI outputs is the key determinant of whether such outputs are copyrightable, implying that creators who use AI tools intensively and are familiar with the relevant rules are more likely to take action to secure and assert their rights (U.S. Copyright Office, 2025). Meanwhile, extensive coverage of landmark

cases such as Thomson Reuters v. Ross Intelligence and Getty Images v. Stability AI has objectively raised the entire creator community's attention to the copyright risks of AI training data (Rosenfeld et al., 2025; Hersh, 2025; Getty Images (US) Inc & Ors v Stability AI Limited, 2025). This human-authorship requirement was also affirmed in Thaler v. Perlmutter (2025), in which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit upheld the Copyright Office's refusal to register a work generated autonomously by an AI system without a human author. It can therefore be inferred that creators who use AI tools more intensively are more likely to be directly exposed to copyright-protection features and policy information, thereby raising the likelihood of registration and enforcement. At the same time, greater AI use may complicate the interpretation of copyright-registration behavior because the copyrightability of AI-assisted outputs depends on the extent of human creative contribution. Creators who rely more heavily on generative AI may seek registration not only because of greater copyright awareness, but also because they wish to assert claims over works whose copyrightability may be uncertain. Accordingly, a higher incidence of registration among intensive AI users should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that all registered outputs are legally protectable. Accordingly:

H1: Creators' AI usage intensity is positively associated with both copyright-registration behavior (H1a) and enforcement intensity (H1b).

2.2 THE MEDIATING ROLES OF PERCEIVED INFRINGEMENT RISK AND AI LITERACY

One plausible mediating pathway through which AI usage intensity affects copyright-protection behavior is risk perception. Risk-perception theory holds that an individual's subjective judgment of the risk associated with a behavior or technology is a core psychological driver of protective action (Slovic, 1987). Prior research notes that generative AI's large-scale use of existing human-created content, absent adequate compensation and rule design, will undermine the incentive structure that copyright is meant to provide (EPRS, 2025; Yang & Zhang, 2024). The more intensively creators use AI tools, the more likely they are to become aware of the risk that their own works may be used without authorization for training or stylistically mimicked by generated content, and this heightened risk perception should motivate them to register their copyrights more proactively in order to consolidate evidence of their rights. A second pathway is a capability pathway: according to the Technology Acceptance Model, sustained use of a given technology endogenously raises an individual's awareness of its related functions and perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989); creators with higher AI usage

intensity typically also possess greater digital and AI literacy, are more familiar with copyright-registration procedures, platform enforcement tools, and legal remedies, and are therefore more able to convert enforcement intentions into actual enforcement behavior. Although perceived infringement risk and AI literacy may potentially influence both dimensions of copyright-protection behavior, this study focuses on two theoretically motivated pathways rather than assuming that either mediator is exclusively associated with one outcome. Specifically, perceived infringement risk is linked to registration as a precautionary and evidentiary response to anticipated infringement, whereas AI literacy is linked to enforcement because taking action against infringement requires greater familiarity with platform procedures, digital tools, and available legal remedies. Accordingly:

H2a: Perceived infringement risk mediates the relationship between AI usage intensity and copyright-registration behavior.

H2b: AI literacy mediates the relationship between AI usage intensity and enforcement intensity.

2.3 THE MODERATING ROLE OF PLATFORM COPYRIGHT POLICY

Creators' copyright-protection behavior depends on individual traits and psychological perceptions. It is also constrained by perceived behavioral control, a key factor in the Theory of Planned Behavior. This factor examines whether external institutional environments help individuals turn intentions into actions (Ajzen, 1991). Existing review studies note that generative AI affects copyright rules differently based on application contexts and governance setups. These frameworks must balance technological innovation with creator protection (Redefining Boundaries in Innovation and Knowledge Domains, 2024). WIPO reports similarly show that governance arrangements vary widely across jurisdictions and platforms. These institutional differences directly impact how easily rights holders can enforce their rights (WIPO, 2019; World Intellectual Property Organization, 2025). Therefore, platform policies play a critical role. When a platform offers strong copyright policies, such as easy registration portals and fast complaint channels, creators can act quickly. Their heightened risk awareness and enforcement ability easily translate into real protective actions. Conversely, lax platform policies and cumbersome enforcement channels hinder protective behavior, even when creators feel a higher sense of risk.

H3: Platform copyright policy stringency positively moderates the relationship between AI usage intensity and copyright protection behavior. A stricter platform policy strengthens this

positive effect.

2.4 HETEROGENEITY EXPECTATIONS

Different types of creators differ in their sensitivity to AI use. They also vary in their ability to turn that sensitivity into protective actions. Full-time professional creators depend on creative work as their main income source. Consequently, they tend to care more about copyright returns, which strengthens the association between AI Use and their protective behavior. Creators producing new-media content, such as short videos, face similar dynamics. Their work sits close to the boundary of AI-generated content, making their risk perception more sensitive. This aligns with findings that Chinese court disputes over AI content center heavily on images and short videos (Chen, 2025). Therefore, hypothesis H4 proposes that the positive effect of AI usage intensity on copyright-protection behavior is stronger among full-time professional creators and creators of new-media content.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 DATA SOURCE AND SAMPLE

Data for this study were collected through a structured survey of registered content creators in China between March and June 2024. Respondents were recruited from major Chinese content-creation platforms, including WeChat Official Accounts and Xiaohongshu for text-and-image content, Douyin and Bilibili for short-video content, and Ximalaya for podcast content. Potential respondents were identified through publicly accessible creator profiles and creator communities on these platforms rather than through confidential platform backend records. The initial sample was selected using stratified sampling by content format (text-and-image, short video, and podcast) and professional status (full-time vs. part-time/amateur), with additional attention to regional coverage. Snowball recruitment was subsequently used to supplement creator groups that were relatively difficult to reach through the initial recruitment process. Because the supplementary snowball sample accounted for only a limited share of the final sample, no sampling weights were applied; sampling source and key creator characteristics were examined during data screening to reduce substantial compositional imbalance. A total of 10,126 questionnaires were received, of which 8,342 valid responses were retained after excluding incomplete or otherwise unusable questionnaires, corresponding to a valid response

rate of 82.4%. The sample covers creators across different content formats, professionalization levels, and regions, providing substantial variation for the subsequent empirical analyses.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. No personally identifying information was retained in the analytical dataset.

3.2 VARIABLE MEASUREMENT

Table 1 presents the variable definitions used in this study. Twenty variables are included in total: two dependent variables, one independent variable, two mediators, one moderator, and 14 control variables. Copyright Reg refers specifically to formal voluntary copyright registration with an official registration authority, rather than platform-based originality declarations or blockchain-based certifications. Registration is treated in this study as a voluntary protective and evidentiary measure, not as a prerequisite for the existence of copyright protection.

The multi-item constructs were measured using seven-point Likert scales. The complete questionnaire items and their coding are reported in Appendix A. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's α, and construct validity was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 1. Variable Definitions and Measurement

Variable Type	Variable Name	Symbol	Measurement
Dependent	Copyright registration behavior	Copyright Reg	Whether the creator formally registered at least one work with an official copyright registration authority in China during the past 12 months (1 = yes, 0 = no).
	Enforcement intensity	IP Enforce	Number of copyright-infringement complaints/enforcement actions filed in the past 12 months, transformed as ln(1 + x).
Independent	AI usage intensity	AI Use	Frequency and depth of AI-tool use in the creative process (mean of a 7-point Likert scale)
Mediator	Perceived infringement risk	Perceived Risk	Perceived risk that one's work is used/trained on without authorization (mean of a 7-point scale)
	AI literacy	AI Literacy	Level of understanding of AI technology and related copyright functions (mean of a 7-point scale)
	Perceived platform copyright-policy stringency	Platform Policy	Rating of the completeness and enforcement rigor of the platform's copyright rules (mean of a 7-point scale).

Variable Type	Variable Name	Symbol	Measurement
			Platform Policy captures respondents perceived, rather than objectively observed, stringency of platform copyright policies.
Control	Age	Age	Years
	Gender	Gender	1 = male, 0 = female
	Education	Education	1 = high school or below, 5 = graduate degree or above
	Experience	Experience	Years engaged in content creation
	Log income	LnIncome	Natural log of average monthly creation-related income
	Content type	Content Type	1 = new-media formats (e.g., short video), 0 = traditional formats (e.g., text-and-image)
	Platform tenure	Platform Tenure	Months registered on the current primary platform
	Output volume	Output Volume	Average number of works published per month
	Professional status	Professional Status	1 = full-time creator, 0 = part-time/amateur
	Prior infringement experience	Prior Infringement	Whether the creator's work has previously been infringed (1 = yes, 0 = no)
	Legal knowledge	Legal Knowledge	Self-rated knowledge of copyright-related law (7-point scale)
	Region	Region	1 = Tier-1/new Tier-1 city, 0 = other
	Team size	Team Size	1 = team-based creation, 0 = individual creation
	Log follower count	LnFollowers	Natural log of the number of platform followers

The observed bounds reflect the original survey response limits rather than ex post truncation: monthly creation-related income ranged from RMB 100 to RMB 100,000, follower counts from 10 to 10,000,000, and copyright-enforcement actions were capped at 25; the corresponding variables were subsequently log-transformed.

3.3 MODEL SPECIFICATION

For the binary dependent variable Copyright Reg, a logistic regression model is specified: $\text{Logit}(\text{Copyright Reg} = 1) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{AI Use} + \alpha_2 \Sigma \text{Controls} + \varepsilon$

For the continuous dependent variable IP Enforce, an OLS regression model is specified: $\text{IP Enforce} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{AI Use} + \beta_2 \Sigma \text{Controls} + \varepsilon$

Mediation effects involving the binary outcome Copyright Reg are estimated using the Karlson‐Holm‐Breen (KHB) method to account for the rescaling problem in nonlinear probability models. For the continuous outcome IP Enforce, mediation effects are estimated using the conventional product-of-coefficients approach with bootstrapped confidence intervals (5,000 resamples). As a robustness check, the models were re-estimated with platform fixed

effects and standard errors clustered at the city level to account for platform-specific heterogeneity and within-city correlation.

4 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Copyright Reg	0.417	0.493	0	1
IP Enforce (log)	0.652	0.784	0	3.219
AI Use	4.216	1.352	1.00	7.00
Perceived Risk	4.583	1.291	1.00	7.00
AI Literacy	3.947	1.408	1.00	7.00
Platform Policy	4.102	1.226	1.00	7.00
Age	29.36	6.847	18	55
Gender	0.583	0.493	0	1
Education	3.218	0.956	1	5
Experience	3.842	2.615	0.2	15
LnIncome	8.114	1.032	4.605	11.512
Content Type	0.589	0.492	0	1
Platform Tenure	24.86	16.732	1	96
Output Volume	12.47	8.936	1	60
Professional Status	0.451	0.498	0	1
Prior Infringement	0.362	0.481	0	1
Legal Knowledge	3.756	1.384	1.00	7.00
Region	0.487	0.500	0	1
Team Size	0.313	0.464	0	1
LnFollowers	9.283	2.147	2.303	16.118

Table 2 shows that 41.7% of respondents reported having registered a copyright for at least one work in the past 12 months, while the mean of the log-transformed enforcement-intensity variable (0.652) indicates that most creators filed relatively few formal enforcement actions, with a distribution that is noticeably right-skewed. The mean AI usage intensity (4.216

on a 7-point scale) sits above the scale midpoint, suggesting that AI tools have already become a routine part of the creative workflow for the sample as a whole, and the accompanying standard deviation (1.352) indicates considerable variation in adoption depth across creators. Perceived infringement risk (M = 4.583) is somewhat higher than AI literacy (M = 3.947), which is broadly consistent with the theoretical expectation that awareness of risk tends to outpace the practical know-how needed to act on it. In terms of sample composition, 58.3% of respondents are male, 58.9% primarily produce new-media content such as short video, and 45.1% identify as full-time professional creators, indicating that the sample includes a substantial share of both professional and non-professional creators, which supports the subsequent heterogeneity analysis. Average platform tenure is approximately 24.9 months and average monthly output is about 12.5 pieces, suggesting that most respondents are creators with a certain level of accumulated experience and output stability rather than brand-new entrants. The relatively large standard deviations observed for Experience, LnIncome, and LnFollowers further indicate that the sample spans creators at markedly different career stages and scales of influence, which is desirable for detecting heterogeneous effects in the analyses that follow.

4.2 CORRELATION MATRIX

Table 3. Correlation Matrix for All Variables

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(2) IP Enforce	0.386									
(3) AI Use	0.291	0.253								
(4) Perceived Risk	0.267	0.219	0.334							
(5) AI Literacy	0.204	0.241	0.412	0.198						
(6) Platform Policy	0.178	0.163	0.145	0.121	0.109					
(7) Age	0.052	0.034	-0.152	-0.021	-0.183	0.012				
(8) Gender	0.028	0.041	0.037	0.019	0.052	-0.008	0.014			
(9) Education	0.153	0.121	0.176	0.098	0.224	0.087	-0.045	0.033		
(10) Experience	0.181	0.157	0.082	0.114	0.096	0.073	0.417	0.026	0.108	
(11) LnIncome	0.239	0.198	0.163	0.127	0.152	0.094	0.086	0.019	0.241	0.293
(12) Content Type	0.139	0.117	0.192	0.104	0.148	0.062	-0.098	0.021	-0.037	-0.052
(13) Platform Tenure	0.112	0.096	0.078	0.058	0.083	0.045	0.213	0.011	0.067	0.312
(14) Output Volume	0.164	0.142	0.171	0.093	0.132	0.071	-0.038	0.052	0.061	0.157
(15) Professional Status	0.228	0.207	0.148	0.126	0.139	0.088	0.062	0.024	0.096	0.352

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(16) Prior Infringement	0.312	0.271	0.116	0.286	0.081	0.067	0.019	-0.012	0.043	0.088
(17) Legal Knowledge	0.192	0.169	0.138	0.147	0.243	0.096	-0.028	0.017	0.194	0.083
(18) Region	0.067	0.052	0.061	0.038	0.049	0.053	-0.019	0.008	0.087	0.042
(19) Team Size	0.093	0.081	0.107	0.062	0.088	0.057	-0.012	0.021	0.073	0.119
(20) LnFollowers	0.183	0.161	0.176	0.098	0.143	0.076	-0.043	0.028	0.089	0.157

Table 3 (continued)

Variable	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)
(12) Content Type	0.038								
(13) Platform Tenure	0.176	0.024							
(14) Output Volume	0.187	0.216	0.198						
(15) Professional Status	0.408	0.073	0.164	0.241					
(16) Prior Infringement	0.097	0.058	0.052	0.076	0.104				
(17) Legal Knowledge	0.121	0.049	0.056	0.068	0.112	0.087			
(18) Region	0.163	0.034	0.058	0.071	0.096	0.028	0.041		
(19) Team Size	0.183	0.096	0.087	0.213	0.257	0.048	0.062	0.037	
(20) LnFollowers	0.328	0.112	0.281	0.263	0.196	0.073	0.081	0.052	0.128

The pairwise correlations in Table 3 are broadly consistent with the hypothesized relationships. AI Use correlates positively with both dependent variables (r = 0.291 with Copyright Reg and r = 0.253 with IP Enforce) and, more strongly, with the two proposed mediators (r = 0.334 with Perceived Risk and r = 0.412 with AI Literacy), lending preliminary support to the mediation hypotheses before any regression controls are introduced. Prior Infringement shows one of the strongest zero-order associations with Copyright Reg (r = 0.312), suggesting that creators who have already experienced infringement are considerably more likely to register their work, which the multivariate models below examine while holding other factors constant. Age is negatively correlated with both AI Use (r = -0.152) and AI Literacy (r = -0.183), consistent with younger creators being more comfortable adopting AI tools, while Experience and Professional Status correlate positively with income and follower counts, reflecting the expected accumulation of career capital over time. Because no correlation in either panel exceeds 0.45 and all VIFs remain below 3, the control-variable set does not appear to introduce problematic collinearity into the subsequent regression models.

4.3 MAIN REGRESSION RESULTS

Table 4. Main Regression Results: Effect of AI Usage Intensity on Copyright-Protection Behavior

Variable	Model 1 Copyright Reg (Logit)	Model 2 Copyright Reg (Logit, +Controls)	Model 3 IP Enforce (OLS)	Model 4 IP Enforce (OLS, +Controls)
AI Use	0.412*** (0.028)	0.367*** (0.031)	0.187*** (0.014)	0.152*** (0.015)
Age		-0.006 (0.005)		-0.003 (0.002)
Gender		0.058 (0.041)		0.021 (0.019)
Education		0.093** (0.037)		0.046*** (0.017)
Experience		0.041** (0.018)		0.028*** (0.008)
LnIncome		0.126*** (0.029)		0.071*** (0.013)
Content Type		0.184*** (0.052)		0.093*** (0.024)
Platform Tenure		0.002 (0.002)		0.001 (0.001)
Output Volume		0.014*** (0.004)		0.009*** (0.002)
Professional Status		0.229*** (0.056)		0.118*** (0.026)
Prior Infringement		0.312*** (0.049)		0.164*** (0.022)
Legal Knowledge		0.087*** (0.024)		0.052*** (0.011)
Region		0.065 (0.043)		0.028 (0.020)
Team Size		0.074* (0.044)		0.037* (0.021)
LnFollowers		0.048*** (0.011)		0.026*** (0.005)
Constant	-1.784*** (0.121)	-3.216*** (0.312)	0.298*** (0.038)	-0.412*** (0.146)
N	8,342	8,342	8,342	8,342
Pseudo/Adj. R^2	0.058	0.146	0.064	0.183

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

The main regression results provide clear support for Hypothesis 1. In Model 1, before any controls are added, AI Use is positively associated with Copyright Reg ($b = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$); the coefficient remains positive and significant after the full set of controls is added in Model 2 ($b = 0.367$, $p < 0.01$), with the Pseudo R^2 rising from 0.058 to 0.146, indicating that the control variables meaningfully improve model fit without eliminating the focal relationship. The same pattern holds for enforcement intensity: AI Use is positively associated with IP Enforce in both Model 3 ($b = 0.187$, $p < 0.01$) and Model 4 ($b = 0.152$, $p < 0.01$), with adjusted

R^2 increasing from 0.064 to 0.183. Together, these results support both H1a and H1b: creators who use AI tools more intensively are more likely to register copyrights and to engage in more frequent enforcement activity, and this relationship holds net of a wide range of individual and platform-level controls.

Among the control variables, several key patterns stand out. Professional status and prior infringement show the largest coefficients after AI usage. This indicates that full-time status and a history of infringement are the strongest individual predictors of protective behavior. Income and follower count are both positively and significantly linked to both outcomes. Creators with larger commercial stakes, whether through higher earnings or wider audience reach, have stronger incentives to safeguard their work. Education, experience, content type, output volume, and legal knowledge are also positive and significant. In contrast, age, gender, platform tenure, and region are not statistically significant. Demographic background and platform seniority matter far less than professional standing, commercial interests, and past infringement experience.

4.4 MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Table 5. Mediation Test Results for Perceived Infringement Risk and AI Literacy

Path	Coefficient	95% CI
AI Use → Perceived Risk	0.324*** (0.019)	[0.287, 0.361]
Perceived Risk → Copyright Reg (controlling for AI Use)	0.176*** (0.022)	[0.133, 0.219]
Indirect effect (AI Use → Perceived Risk → Copyright Reg)	0.057*** (0.008)	[0.042, 0.073]
AI Use → AI Literacy	0.428*** (0.017)	[0.395, 0.461]
AI Literacy → IP Enforce (controlling for AI Use)	0.089*** (0.013)	[0.064, 0.114]
Indirect effect (AI Use → AI Literacy → IP Enforce)	0.038*** (0.006)	[0.027, 0.050]

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

The results show that neither indirect path's bootstrap confidence interval includes zero, supporting H2a and H2b; both effects represent partial mediation, as the direct effects remain significant in both models. It should be noted that because Copyright Reg is a binary outcome

estimated via logistic regression, its coefficients are expressed on the log-odds scale, and comparing coefficients across nested logit models to derive an indirect effect as a share of total effect is not methodologically valid in the same way it is for linear models, since the scale of the latent variable itself shifts when additional covariates are introduced (Karlson, Holm, & Breen, 2012). Accordingly, for the AI Use → Perceived Risk → Copyright Reg path, this study reports only the significance and bootstrapped confidence interval of the indirect effect, without presenting a specific mediation-share percentage. For the AI Use → AI Literacy → IP Enforce path, by contrast, IP Enforce is a continuous variable estimated via OLS, which satisfies the linearity assumptions underlying the standard Baron‐Kenny decomposition; the estimated mediation share of 25.0% for this path is therefore methodologically appropriate and interpretable.

AI usage strongly links to perceived risk. Perceived risk then predicts copyright registration, even after controlling for AI usage. This path produces a statistically significant indirect effect (95% CI excludes zero), though for the reasons noted above, no percentage share of the total effect is reported for this particular path. This finding shows that part of the link between AI usage and copyright registration stems from heightened risk awareness. Using AI tools makes the threat of unauthorized use feel more real to creators. The second path reveals an even larger mediated share. AI usage strongly predicts AI literacy. AI literacy then predicts enforcement intensity when controlling for AI usage. This path yields an indirect effect that explains about 25.0% of the total effect on enforcement. These results show that the capability pathway plays a larger role in driving enforcement than risk perception plays in driving registration. As creators use AI, they build the digital and legal literacy required to take legal action. Because both direct effects remain statistically significant, these results point to partial mediation. Other unmeasured mechanisms likely contribute to the overall effect. For instance, creators may gain direct exposure to platform copyright features while using AI tools. These results should not be interpreted as implying that perceived infringement risk affects only registration behavior or that AI literacy affects only enforcement behavior. The present analysis focuses on the two theoretically specified pathways in H2a and H2b; potential cross-outcome mediation effects remain an issue for future research.

4.5 MODERATION ANALYSIS

Table 6. Moderation Test Results for Platform Copyright-Policy Stringency

Variable	Copyright Reg (Logit)	IP Enforce (OLS)
AI Use (centered)	0.341*** (0.030)	0.141*** (0.014)
Platform Policy (centered)	0.096*** (0.026)	0.048*** (0.012)
AI Use × Platform Policy	0.090*** (0.025)	0.027** (0.011)
Controls	YES	YES
N	8,342	8,342
Pseudo/Adj. R^2	0.152	0.189

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

The interaction-term coefficients are positive and significant in both models. Because interaction coefficients in nonlinear models do not directly represent interaction effects on the probability scale, we additionally calculated the average marginal effect (AME) of AI Use on Copyright Reg at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of Platform Policy. The results show that [insert results], providing a probability-scale assessment of the moderating effect.

These results indicate that platform copyright policy functions as an important boundary condition on the relationship between AI use and copyright protection behavior. The interaction coefficient for registration implies that a one standard deviation increase in platform policy strength increases the effect of AI use on registration behavior. Simple slope comparisons show that the marginal effect nearly doubles, rising from 0.231 among creators on platforms with weak copyright policies to 0.452 among creators on platforms with strong copyright policies. A similar but slightly smaller pattern holds for enforcement intensity, where the interaction coefficient remains positive and statistically significant. This pattern suggests that institutional support helps turn AI-driven awareness into actual protective behavior. However, this institutional dependency is less pronounced for enforcement intensity than for registration. Substantively, AI adoption alone does not guarantee stronger copyright protection behavior. Instead, its behavioral impact depends on a platform environment that makes registration and enforcement practical. Useful platform features include accessible registration portals and responsive complaint mechanisms. This finding supports the theoretical framing based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, where platform policy stringency serves as a proxy for perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

5. ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

5.1 ALTERNATIVE MEASUREMENT AND WINSORIZATION

AI Use was replaced with an alternative behavioral measure, specifically, the share of AI-assisted content output over the past month. Continuous variables with potentially influential extreme values, such as income and follower count, were winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles; bounded Likert-scale variables were not winsorized.

5.2 Addressing Endogeneity: Instrumental-Variable Estimation

Given that AI Use may be correlated with unobserved individual traits such as technological sensitivity, raising endogeneity concerns, this study uses "the internet-infrastructure index of the creator's city of residence" as an instrumental variable. This variable is associated with the availability and convenience of AI tools and therefore provides relevance for the first stage. However, the exclusion restriction is less directly testable because city-level internet infrastructure may also correlate with local socioeconomic and institutional conditions that affect copyright-protection behavior. Accordingly, the IV estimates are interpreted as supplementary robustness evidence rather than definitive causal estimates. For the binary Copyright Reg outcome, the 2SLS specification is implemented as a linear probability model (LPM) with an instrumented AI Use variable.

Table 7. Robustness Check Results

Method	Alternative measure	Post-winsorization re-estimation	IV (2SLS), first stage	IV (2SLS), second stage	IV (2SLS), second stage
Dependent Variable	Copyright Reg	IP Enforce	AI Use	Copyright Reg	IP Enforce
AI Use Coefficient	0.298*** (0.033)	0.146*** (0.016)	0.512*** (0.041)	0.389*** (0.058)	0.169*** (0.027)
Significance	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$ ($F = 156.3$; weak-instrument test passed)	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

All robustness checks are consistent in direction and significance with the main regression results, indicating that the core findings of this study are robust.

Three complementary strategies were used to test the robustness of the main findings. First, replacing the self-reported AI usage scale with an objective behavioral proxy, namely the share of monthly content output that was AI-assisted, yields a slightly smaller but directionally consistent coefficient. This result indicates that the main finding is not sensitive to the specific operationalization of AI usage, although the alternative measure remains self-reported and therefore does not eliminate potential common-method bias. Second, winsorizing all continuous variables at the 1st and 99th percentiles to limit the influence of extreme values leaves the effect on IP enforcement essentially unchanged. This indicates that a small number of outlying observations does not drive the main results. Third, the two-stage least squares estimation using city-level internet infrastructure quality as an instrument produces a strong first stage, with an F-statistic well above the conventional threshold of 10 for weak instruments. Because the IV estimate for the binary Copyright Reg outcome is obtained from a linear probability specification, its coefficient is not directly comparable in magnitude with the baseline Logit coefficient. Therefore, the IV analysis is used only to assess whether the direction and statistical significance of the relationship are broadly consistent with the baseline findings, rather than to infer attenuation or inflation of the baseline estimates. Overall, the supplementary analyses yield results that are broadly consistent in direction with the main findings, although the IV estimates should be interpreted cautiously given the difficulty of fully establishing the exclusion restriction.

6 HETEROGENEITY ANALYSIS

Table 8. Subgroup Heterogeneity Test Results

Grouping Variable	Professional status		Content type	
Subgroup	Full-time creators	Part-time creators	New media (e.g., short video)	Traditional text-and-image
Panel A: Copyright Reg (Logit)				
AI Use Coefficient	0.421*** (0.038)	0.275*** (0.035)	0.398*** (0.036)	0.300*** (0.040)
N	3,762	4,580	4,915	3,427
Between-Group Difference	Δ = 0.146***		Δ = 0.098*	
Panel B: IP Enforce (OLS)				
AI Use Coefficient	0.178*** (0.019)	0.124*** (0.017)	0.169*** (0.018)	0.131*** (0.020)
N	3,762	4,580	4,915	3,427
Between-Group Difference	Δ = 0.054**		Δ = 0.038	

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10.

The subgroup regressions, reported separately for both dependent variables in Table 8, reveal different patterns of heterogeneity across professional status and content type. The positive effect of AI usage intensity is significantly stronger among full-time creators than among part-time or amateur creators for both copyright-registration behavior (Panel A) and enforcement intensity (Panel B). By contrast, the evidence for heterogeneity by content type is weaker: the effect is larger among new-media creators than among traditional text-and-image creators for copyright registration, although the between-group difference is only marginally significant, while the corresponding difference for enforcement intensity is not statistically significant. Thus, H4 is supported for professional status across both outcomes, but receives only limited support with respect to content type.

Two patterns are worth highlighting. First, the effect of AI Use on Copyright Reg is roughly 53% larger among full-time professional creators (b = 0.421) than among part-time or amateur creators (b = 0.275), and a formal Chow-type test of coefficient equality confirms that this gap is statistically significant (Δ = 0.146***). A similar pattern emerges for enforcement intensity: the coefficient for full-time creators (b = 0.178) is larger than that for part-time or amateur creators (b = 0.124), with a statistically significant between-group difference (Δ = 0.054, $p < 0.05$). These results indicate that professional status constitutes a consistent source of heterogeneity across both dimensions of copyright-protection behavior. A plausible explanation is that full-time creators, whose livelihood depends more directly on the commercial value of their output, have stronger incentives to convert any AI-driven increase in risk awareness or literacy into concrete copyright-protection actions, whereas part-time or amateur creators may perceive the expected benefit of such actions as insufficient to justify the associated effort.

Second, the effect on registration behavior is somewhat larger among creators of new-media content such as short video (b = 0.398) than among creators of traditional text-and-image content (b = 0.300; Δ = 0.098*), though this difference reaches only marginal significance. For enforcement intensity, the corresponding gap by content type is smaller and not statistically significant (Δ = 0.038), although the coefficient is numerically larger for new-media creators (b = 0.169) than for traditional content creators (b = 0.131), the between-group difference is not statistically significant (Δ = 0.038). These findings therefore provide only limited evidence of heterogeneity by content type: the difference is weakly supported for copyright registration but not supported for enforcement intensity.

One possible explanation is that new-media formats, such as short video, are more directly exposed to generative AI applications, potentially increasing creators' awareness of

copyright-related risks. However, the absence of a statistically significant difference in enforcement intensity suggests that such heightened awareness does not necessarily translate into systematically different enforcement behavior across content types. Taken together, the heterogeneity analysis provides stronger and more consistent evidence for differences by professional status than by content type. Full-time creators exhibit significantly stronger associations between AI usage intensity and both copyright registration and enforcement intensity than part-time or amateur creators. In contrast, differences between new-media and traditional content creators are less robust: the between-group difference is only marginally significant for copyright registration and statistically insignificant for enforcement intensity. Accordingly, professional status appears to be a more consistent source of heterogeneity in the relationship between AI usage intensity and copyright-protection behavior, whereas the role of content type should be interpreted with greater caution.

Overall, the heterogeneity analysis provides relatively consistent evidence of differences by professional status, whereas evidence of heterogeneity by content type is limited. In particular, the difference between new-media and traditional-content creators is only marginally significant for copyright registration and is not statistically significant for enforcement intensity. Therefore, H4 is supported with respect to professional status but receives only limited support with respect to content type.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Using survey data from creators on content-creation platforms, this study empirically examines how AI usage intensity affects creators' copyright-protection behavior. The findings show that: (1) AI usage intensity has a significant positive effect on both copyright-registration behavior and enforcement intensity; (2) perceived infringement risk and AI literacy each partially mediate one of the two paths; (3) platform copyright-policy stringency positively moderates this relationship; and (4) the effect is consistently stronger among full-time professional creators, whereas evidence of heterogeneity between new-media and traditional-content creators is limited and primarily observed for copyright-registration behavior.

These findings carry several implications for platform governance and policy design. First, platforms should improve the accessibility of copyright-registration and enforcement tools and integrate them more closely with AI-assisted creation features, lowering the threshold for converting risk perception into actual enforcement action. Second, targeted copyright-education efforts should be directed at part-time/amateur creators and creators working in

traditional content formats, to narrow the protection gap between groups. Third, as regulators advance rules on the fair use of training data, they should also attend to how creators adapt their behavior at the micro level, balancing fairness and operability in institutional design.

These findings also have relevance to the Brazilian legal context. Under Article 18 of Brazilian Law No. 9,610/1998, copyright protection does not depend on registration. Accordingly, the registration behavior examined in this study should be understood as a voluntary protective and evidentiary action rather than as a condition for the existence of copyright. In addition, Brazil’s ongoing legislative debate on artificial intelligence, including Bill No. 2,338/2023, highlights the growing need to address the interaction between generative AI and copyright. Although the empirical evidence in this study is drawn from China, the Brazilian context provides a useful comparative perspective for considering how copyright governance may respond to changes in creators’ behavior associated with AI use.

This study’s main limitation is that, being based on cross-sectional survey data, it cannot fully rule out reverse causality (e.g., a creator’s own enforcement experience may itself shape subsequent AI-use decisions). Future research could combine platform behavioral log data with quasi-experimental designs to more precisely identify the causal relationship between AI use and copyright-protection behavior.

A further limitation concerns the interpretation of copyright-registration behavior. This study observes whether creators register their works but does not measure the extent of human creative contribution to AI-assisted outputs or independently assess whether the registered works satisfy applicable standards of copyrightability. Therefore, the positive association between AI usage intensity and copyright registration may have more than one interpretation. It may reflect greater copyright awareness and stronger protective behavior, as proposed in this study, but it may also partly reflect attempts by intensive AI users to assert claims over AI-assisted outputs whose copyrightability is uncertain. Future research could distinguish between different degrees of AI involvement in content creation and examine whether the relationship between AI use and registration varies with the extent of human creative contribution.

DATA AND CODE AVAILABILITY

The individual-level survey data are not publicly available because of participant privacy and data-use restrictions.

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