

WRITERS VS. AI: THE STRIKE THAT DETERMINED THE FUTURE OF HOLLYWOOD

Mansi Javiya*

There had been protests and discussions as Hollywood completely froze, it took five months of a totally inhospitable environment for the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the organization that represents the studios and streamers, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), to finally come to a tentative deal and bring the historic strike to an end¹. The said victory has been hard-fought and ascribed by WIRE² as this is the deal “will rewrite history” a very crucial development in the AI and artistry debates still continuing.

However, The 2023 Writers’ Strike is unlike any in history, not only because of the economic consequences but also because of greater concerns about technology and its impact on the creative process. It diminishes the value of things that the human spirit has hitherto achieved. At the heart of this movement was the increasing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the creative process, and the fear that it could eventually replace human writers, diminishing the value of original, human-driven content.

The Historical 2007-2008 Writers’ Strike and Its Economic Implications

The last time writers’ went on strike was between 2007-2008 and the impact was devastating, its brutal impact which left production dreaming of embarking again. Since the writers' strike lasted approximately 100 days, it managed to completely halt production throughout Hollywood business sectors and inflict an alarming \$2.1 billion loss to the economy of California. In addition to the state into a recession, the strike resulted in the loss of 37,700 jobs, according to a report published at the time by the Milken Institute³. The main concern at the time was how much writers would be compensated for their labor, this issue still exists in the industry now, especially in the era of AI with the rise of multi-streaming.

While the 2007-2008 strike took an immediate and severe economic hit, the 2023 strike marked another major turning point in the entertainment world when writers, actors, and other creatives

*LLB, THIRD YEAR, JITENDRA CHAUHAN COLLEGE OF LAW, MUMBAI UNIVERSITY.

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2023-05-01/writers-strike-what-to-know-wga-guild-hollywood-productions>

² <https://www.wired.com/story/us-writers-strike-ai-provisions-precedents/>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/entertainment-screenwriters-strike-cost-idCAN0628755420080606/>

tackled questions that fundamentally challenge how creative work is valued in the digital age. How much of a writer's job can be replaced by AI? Will writers be paid for content generated by these technologies? How can labor agreements adjust to the ever-evolving landscape of digital entertainment? The current strike may not have the same immediate financial toll, but it has set the stage for another major shift in the entertainment world, as the issues around AI and fair compensation for writers remain at the forefront of the discussion.

Highlights behind the 2023 Hollywood Writers' Strike

According to an article published by Forbes⁴ on August 9, 2023, the main reasons for the Hollywood writers' strike came from several key issues the Writers Guild of America was fighting for. These include demands for increased compensation, better residuals, staffing requirements, and protections against the potential interference of artificial intelligence in writers' jobs. The WGA has expressed concerns that AI could replace human writers, significantly reducing opportunities in the industry. Additionally, the rise of streaming platforms and their business models, which often feature shorter seasons and lower pay for writers, has worsened working conditions.

The strike highlights the need for fair compensation and protections that ensure writers and actors are not sidelined by AI and are fairly remunerated for their work. The strike, lasted for 148 days and has severely impacted Hollywood's economy and culture, already costing California billions of dollars in losses.

Exploring the future of AI in the creative industries

According to a BBC⁵ report published on December 19, 2023, some producers in the Indian film industry, such as director Shekhar Kapoor, have begun to explore the potential of AI in filmmaking. Shekhar Kapoor is known for his filmmaking first acclaimed Masoom (1983) experimented with AI tools like ChatGPT for scripting a sequel to his emotional film etc. He was amazed at how quickly the AI produced a script that captured the moral conflicts and complexities of the plot. He said that machine learning can complete tasks in seconds that might take human writers weeks, leading him to predict a "chaotic" future where AI plays a larger role in filmmaking.

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/antoniopequenoi/2023/08/09/hollywood-writers-strike-heres-a-timeline-of-what-led-to-the-100-day-mark/>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-67657873>

From the writer's perspective, these changes raise serious concerns about job security and the future of the creative industries. While AI tools can certainly help writers brainstorm or provide written feedback, there are fears that these technologies could eventually replace human writers entirely. Writing isn't just about putting words together, it's about capturing human emotions, experiences, and nuances something that AI, no matter how advanced, can't replicate. The writers pour their own thoughts, ideas and creativity into their work, giving the stories depth and authenticity. When AI takes hold, it threatens to destroy this richness, reducing storytelling to machine derivatives without the human touch that makes them meaningful.

For many writers, the idea that machines could so effectively replace their work is daunting. AI-generated texts may lack the emotional depth, cultural relevance, and empathy that human writers bring. The actual risk right here isn't simply that AI can carry out the process faster but that it may eventually replace writers, leading to the loss of jobs and the erasure of human focused storytelling. The future of film and television shouldn't just be about efficiency it's about preserving the heart and soul of creative work, and that can only be achieved by human writers, not machines.

Adapting to AI Technology in the Creative Industry

Actor Aamir Khan, during the ABP⁶ Ideas of India Summit three.0, shared his thoughts on the role of technology in the creative industries. He mentioned that with advancements in technology, there is no turning back.. According to Aamir Khan, whether in any profession or industry, the emergence of new technology cannot be curtailed. Instead of resisting it, he emphasized the importance of evolving alongside it. He stated, "You cannot curb a new technology. There's no need to stop it either, you have to learn to evolve with it." This highlights a common perspective inside the industry instead of preventing technological progress, the focal point must be on adapting to it in a manner that ensures a balance between innovation and preserving the human element that makes creative works significant.

Kiran Rao, Aamir Khan's spouse, also shared her thoughts, stating, " I don't know what all can actually happen through AI. ChatGPT can help school kids. We know that it can help in writing, and editing." She similarly emphasised that AI cannot be stopped, as "we all are using some form of technology to improve," however the significance is how to use it efficiently. "It relies

⁶ https://www.republicworld.com/entertainment/bollywood/aamir-khan-shares-his-views-on-ai-no-turning-back-with-technology-you-can-t-curb-it#google_vignette

upon on how properly we can use it," she added, suggesting that the focal point need to be on locating the right balance between technological innovation and human creativity.

AI can help with information, but it can't replace the deeply personal, emotionally sensitive, and morally complex art of storytelling. That's why it's important that the creative work doesn't obscure the importance of human storytellers breathing life into their stories, even though AI is a tool.

How the 2023 WGA Deal Tackles AI's Role in Writing

On September 25, 2023, the Writers Guild of America (WGA) signed a Memorandum of Agreement with major studios, known as the 2023 WGA Theatrical and Television Basic Agreement⁷, which brought forward various important changes aimed at improving conditions for writers in the entertainment industry. The agreement, which runs from September 25, 2023, to May 1, 2026, includes wage increases of 5% in the first year, followed by 4% in 2024 and 3.5% in 2025. Health and pension contributions were also boosted, including specific increases for writing teams, where each writer will now receive contributions as if they were a single writer, ensuring better benefits.

A major highlight is the introduction of strict regulations around the use of artificial intelligence (AI). AI cannot write or rewrite literary material, and AI-generated content cannot be used to undermine writers' credits or rights. Writers may voluntarily use AI with the company's consent but cannot be forced to do so. Companies must also disclose if any material given to the writer includes AI-generated content. While the Memorandum of Agreement has addressed some concerns about AI, questions remain about how writers will be compensated for AI-generated content and the potential impact AI could have on future employment opportunities.

The agreement also improves terms for screenwriters, including guaranteed second-step payments for first-draft screenplays and an accelerated payment structure for flat deal contracts. For streaming features, significant increases in compensation were negotiated, with a \$100,000 minimum for story and teleplay on high-budget streaming projects. Foreign streaming residuals saw a 76% increase, and a new viewership-based streaming bonus was introduced, rewarding writers based on how many domestic subscribers view their work.

⁷ <https://www.wgacontract2023.org/wgacontract/files/memorandum-of-agreement-for-the-2023-wga-theatrical-and-television-basic-agreement.pdf>

For high-budget streaming services, minimum staffing and duration requirements were established for writers' rooms, ensuring a fair number of writers are employed and guaranteeing 20 weeks of work for development rooms. Additionally, the agreement improves options, exclusivity protections, and span protections for writers.

The Agreement also includes provisions for the Showrunner Training Program, additional arbitrators for claims, and renewed funding for auditing residual payments. Other changes include provisions for promotional runs, limits on theatre exhibitions for streaming projects, and adjustments in crediting and residual structures. These changes represent a significant step in enhancing writers' compensation, job security, and creative involvement in an evolving industry.

While this agreement is a major step toward fairer treatment for writers, it's not over yet. Actors represented by SAG-AFTRA remain on strike, highlighting just how many issues are still unresolved. The WGA's win may close one chapter, but the conversation around the future of creative work is only just beginning.

The Evolving Role of AI in the Creative Industry

A survey conducted by Engine Creative⁸ in early 2023, which gathered insights from 113 industry creatives, revealed diverse perspectives on AI's role in the creative sector. While a significant portion of respondents (37.2%) had never used AI, those who did often highlighted its ability to enhance productivity and creativity. The most popular AI tool was ChatGPT, with 40.7% of respondents using it for various tasks.

The research underscores a cautious optimism within the creative community about the future of AI. Most respondents (75.3%) did not view AI as a threat to job security, with many believing that AI could enhance human creativity by sparking new ideas and streamlining processes. However, there remains a clear divide, with some fearing that AI could dilute the quality of creative output by mimicking rather than innovating.

Ethics and Copyright Challenges in AI

The rapid advancement of AI technology poses substantial challenges to the writing profession. Writers are worried approximately activity displacement, the devaluation of their

⁸ <https://www.enginecreative.co.uk/blog/artificial-intelligence-in-the-creative-industry/>

work, and the moral implications of AI-generated content material. AI thrives on data, analyzing patterns and producing outputs based on what it has learned from existing work. But where AI excels in replication, it lacks the ability to generate truly novel ideas. Humans, on the other hand, are the creators of innovation able to think out of the box, breaking obstacles, and generating unique thoughts that push tradition and society ahead.

If AI becomes the dominant force in the creative industry, we risk losing the spark of originality that only human minds can ignite. AI may be able to assist, but it can never replace the fresh, imaginative ideas that arise from human experience, emotion, and intuition. The demands for fair compensation and protections against AI job interference are not just about wages they reflect a deeper desire to preserve the cultural integrity of storytelling and ensure that human authorship remains central to creative industries.

A study conducted by Harvard Business Review⁹ posted on April 7, 2023, by authors Gil Appel, Juliana Neelbauer, and David A. Schweidel, explains how generative AI tools like Stable Diffusion and Midjourney can create impressive content, but also pose legal challenges. These AI systems are trained on large datasets, which may include copyrighted material. This brings up concerns about potential violations of copyright laws. The study highlights that businesses using AI tools could face legal risks if they don't ensure that the data used to train these models is properly licensed.

Many countries have begun banning or restricting AI tools due to privacy concerns, as these systems often rely on massive amounts of data that may include sensitive personal information collected without permission. Italy recently became the first Western nation to block the advanced chatbot ChatGPT, citing privacy concerns with the technology. The country's data protection authority announced an immediate ban on ChatGPT and launched an investigation into OpenAI. In response, OpenAI informed the BBC that it adheres to privacy regulations.

AI-generated content can cause copyright troubles due to the fact the technology is dependent on vast databases to study patterns and create new material. These datasets frequently include copyrighted works, such as images, text, and music, without compensating the original creators. This raises questions about the ownership of AI-generated content. Who owns the rights to AI-created work? The creator of the algorithm, the developer of the AI program, or

⁹ <https://hbr.org/2023/04/generative-ai-has-an-intellectual-property-problem>

the person who provides the input? These questions remain unresolved, leaving both creators and industry leaders uncertain about the legal landscape ahead.

In a significant recent case, U.S. District Judge William Orrick upheld artists' copyright claims against AI companies utilizing generative models, allowing the lawsuit to advance. This development, reported by *The Hollywood Reporter* on August 13, 2024¹⁰, marks a major victory for artists challenging the unauthorized use of their work in AI training. The lawsuit involves Stable Diffusion, an AI model accused of utilizing billions of images without permission to generate new artworks. This decision could set a precedent, impacting other companies that rely on similar datasets and raising critical questions about intellectual property rights in AI-driven creativity.

The Road Ahead for Writers and AI

The 2023 WGA strike stands as a testament to the power of collective movement in the face of emerging technological threats. As AI continues to shape industries worldwide, the entertainment sector must determine how to adapt to this new reality. The writers' victory in the strike signals that even as AI may be a tool, it has to be used responsibly and ethically, with clear guidelines and safeguards to defend human creativity. Writers are not just employees they may be the architects of tradition and culture. As the industry moves ahead, it's vital that the human element in storytelling stays at the forefront.

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As Hollywood adapts to the digital age, the message is apparent writers will continue to play an essential role in shaping the future of the entertainment industry, even as AI becomes a more prominent tool in the creative process. The future lies in finding a balance where technology complements human creativity rather than replaces it, ensuring that the heart of storytelling remains human.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, it's crucial to recognize that decisions about how AI is used are ultimately made by humans, not the machines themselves. This means that we, as individuals and society, must have a role in these decisions. It's not just up to corporate executives; workers, creatives, and the public should all be part of the conversation. In industries like entertainment, where

¹⁰ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/artists-score-major-win-copyright-case-against-ai-art-generators-1235973601/>

creativity and human expression are at the core, we risk losing the true essence of what makes these industries special if we don't approach AI thoughtfully.

