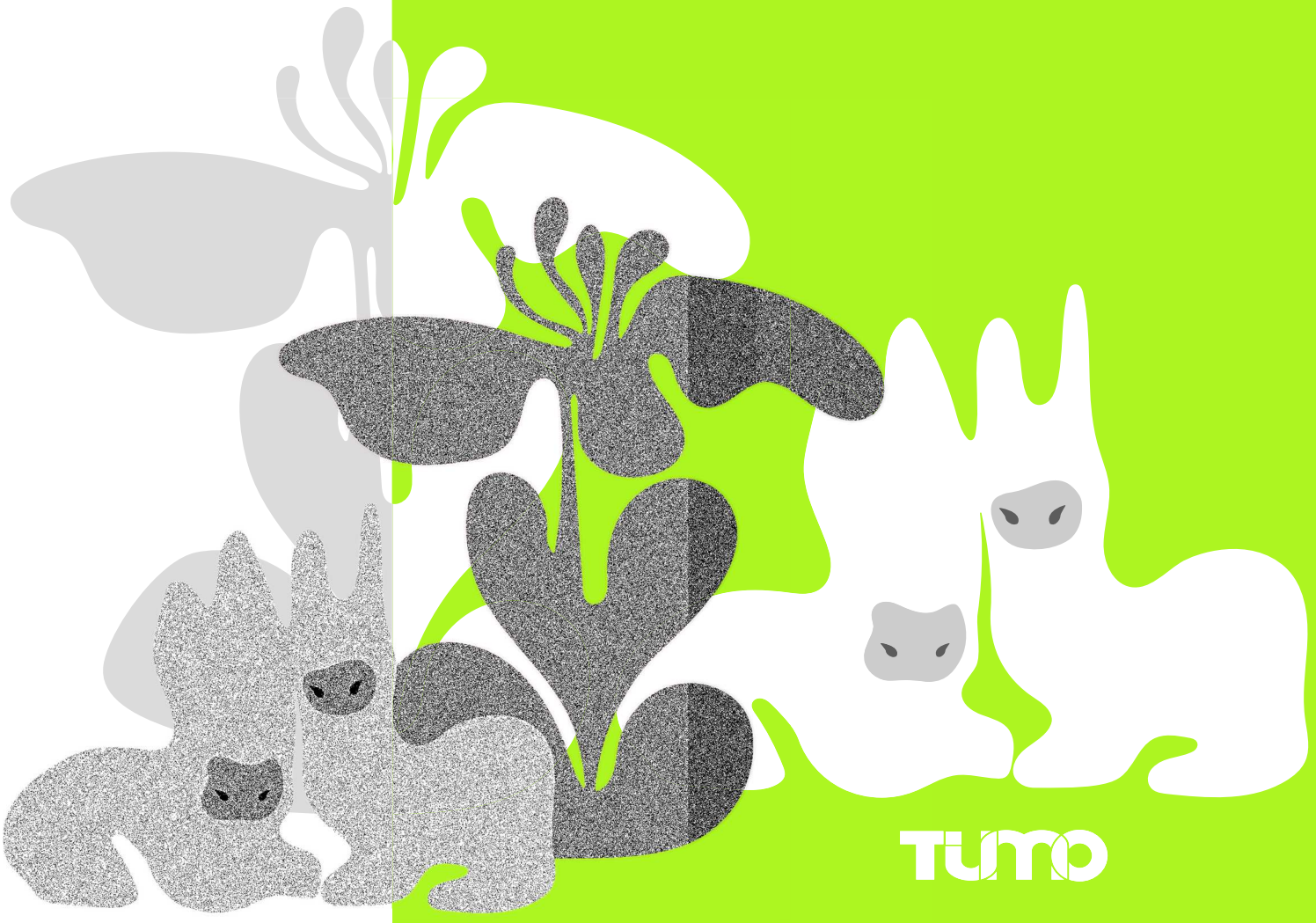
ai/teens
conference report

ai/teens was a 24-hour globe-spanning conference that took place on March 15, 2025, connecting 16 locations from Japan to the U.S. West Coast. It empowered teenagers to take center stage, exploring how AI revolutionizes their world while addressing its ethical challenges and the opportunities shaping its future. This report captures the key themes, questions, and insights that emerged throughout the event, reflecting how teens across the world are thinking about AI today, and the future they want to shape with it.



TUMO

ai/teens
conference report

This report documents ai/teens, a 16-city global conversation about AI designed and run by teenagers. Over the course of 24 hours, teens from around the world revealed sophisticated perspectives on AI, and a practical approach to questions about agency, transparency and control. The conference revealed how young people view AI not through polarized lenses of utopia or doom, but as a tool requiring careful navigation between assistance and dependency.

The ai/teens conference was a logical follow-on from TUMO's 2023 ai/education symposium, which led to valuable observations, but also a question: why are we debating among ourselves as adults, where are the young people whose future we're talking about? The wealth of insights that emerged from ai/teens made one thing very clear: educators, policymakers, technologists and parents, we all need to stop and listen to young people. The report translates these insights into actionable recommendations across education, policy, and ethics, all centered on one urgent message: those making decisions about AI must include the people who will live longest with it, not as symbolic participants, but as co-creators.

ai/teens

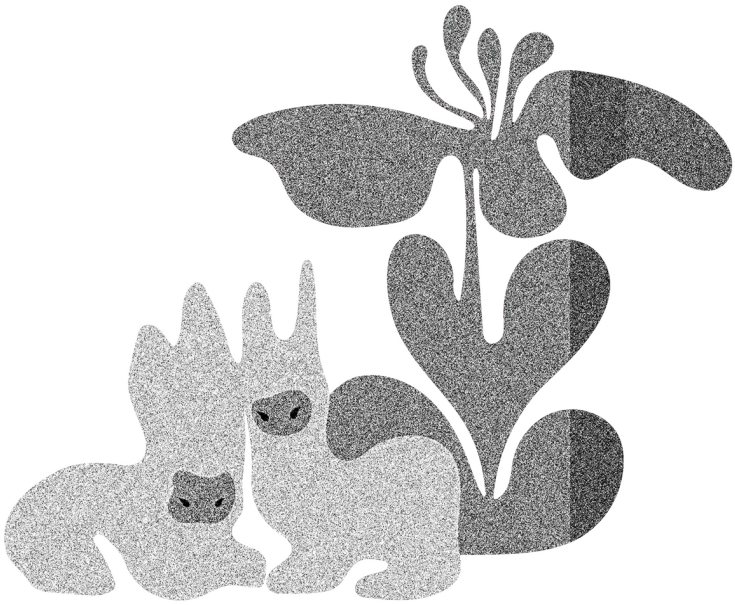
On the 15th of March 2025, around 90 young people and their 45 adult guests held an unprecedented globe-spanning event organized by teenagers, for teenagers. The 24-hour ai/teens conference had teens in sixteen TUMO partner locations, from Takasaki to Los Angeles, hosting panels, keynotes and workshops as daylight moved across the globe. The program ran in a dozen languages and streamed live so that every city could listen in, respond and pass the conversation westward.

Local, in-person teams in each city curated their own sessions — classroom-size discussions in Montevideo, packed theatres in Mumbai, Kampala and Yerevan, a rooftop Q&A in Paris — while joint panels linked multiple sites in real time. Teen moderators questioned researchers, entrepreneurs and policy-makers, but they also questioned one another, comparing how AI is shaping school, work and culture on different continents. By the final hand-off, more than twenty hours of dialogue, debate and live demonstrations had circulated through the network, leaving a shared video archive and hundreds of crowd-sourced questions for future work.

Why it matters

Artificial intelligence is arriving faster than the civic conversation that would steer it, and teenagers are its first-order stakeholders. They are today's learners and tomorrow's voters and professionals, yet they are usually spoken for, not listened to — ai/teens was designed to flip that script. Its primary goal was to create the space for young participants to refine their own understanding of AI and claim agency over how they use it. But it was also designed to give adults who make policy, products and curricula a clear signal of teens' priorities and concerns, so that decisions about AI better reflect the people who will live longest with the results.

This report distills that signal. For technologists, it highlights the design choices teens say will make or break their trust. For policy-makers, it surfaces the regulatory gaps they notice first. For educators, it maps the skills and literacies they believe matter most. Across sectors, it is a reference point for anyone who wants AI to grow up alongside the people it will serve.



Themes and Structure

The conference was organized around three major themes:

- Relationships: How we connect
- Creativity: What we make
- Identity: Who we are

These themes became the inspiration for three major conference panels:

1. ***Virtually Friends***

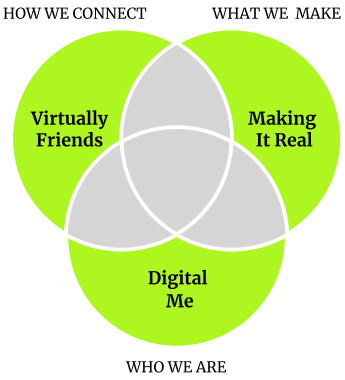
   What happens when your friend group includes chatbots that are always there for you?

2. ***Making It Real***

   If you can get AI to create for you, what does being creative and authentic really mean?

3. ***Digital Me***

   What's the result of growing up with an identity that is both personal and algorithmically mediated?



The intersection of the three themes yielded three additional panels:

4. ***Learning and Earning***

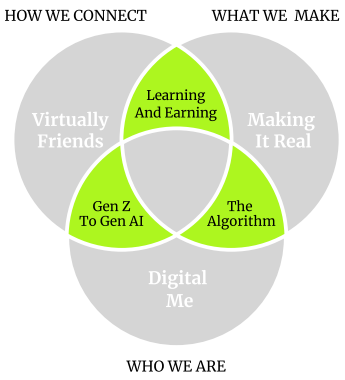
   When AI can teach and do anything, anytime, anywhere, what careers will we be studying for?

5. ***The Algorithm***

   Are algorithms guides or gatekeepers, shaping not just what we consume but who we are?

6. ***Gen Z to Gen AI***

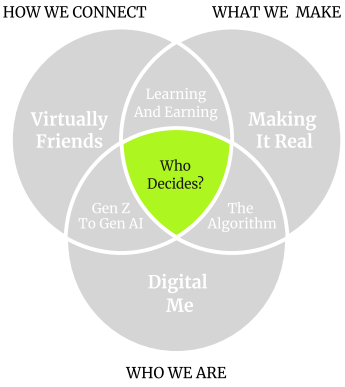
   What's the difference between an AI user who follows trends, and one who is a trendsetter?



And at the center lies the key question of governance and control:

7. ***Who Decides?***

   Who should steer the next wave of artificial intelligence technology, and on what terms?



Time Zone Relay

The conference followed a unique format. It took place in person in each of the 16 cities, that also connected with each other online:

Takasaki	Beirut	Amsterdam	Coimbra
Bengaluru	Kampala	Paris	Montevideo
Mumbai	Berlin	Tirana	Buenos Aires
Yerevan	Lyon	Lisbon	Los Angeles

At each location, participants and audiences convened for talks and panels, and joined other locations in international panels via video calls. The conference started in Takasaki, Japan as morning broke there. Cities further to the west joined as the sun came around to them, picking up the relay with local talks and discussions. The first of seven international panel discussions included participants from Japan, India and Armenia. As Beirut and Kampala joined, Takasaki and Bengaluru dropped off, and so on, all the way to the US, with a final panel linking Portugal, Uruguay, Argentina and Los Angeles. The entire 24 hour event was live streamed for a global audience.

"Low-income communities are not just excellent beneficiaries of AI... they're also excellent builders of AI."

MANU CHOPRA
CEO and Co-founder, Karya Inc

Participants

Young People

Adriana Galli, Lisbon, Portugal
Ainomugisha Tusiime, Kampala, Uganda
Alan Leikin, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Alessio Rinallo, Paris, France
Alexander Aramyan, Yerevan, Armenia
Alma León, Lisbon, Portugal
Alvard Grigoryan, Yerevan, Armenia
Amadou Tall, Paris, France
Ana Nóbile, Montevideo, Uruguay
Arba Amataj, Tirana, Albania
Arpy Balaban, Yerevan, Armenia
Ben Kuzoyan, Los Angeles, USA
Brisa Madama, Montevideo, Uruguay
Charlie Le Guen, Paris, France
Clothilde Bugey–Monteiro, Lyon, France
Cynthia Mugumya, Kampala, Uganda
Darryl Amankwah, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Disha Gupta, Los Angeles, USA
Eita Ono, Takasaki, Japan
Elen Arakelyan, Yerevan, Armenia
Emily Muhwezi, Kampala, Uganda
Emmanuel Otim, Kampala, Uganda
Enzo Carlos Mercado, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Fabrizio Paganuchi, Lisbon, Portugal
Facundo Caccianini, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Georges Coural, Paris, France
Giuliana de Brum, Montevideo, Uruguay
Gohar Aghajanyan, Yerevan, Armenia
Gohar Harutyunyan, Yerevan, Armenia
Haig Tenbelian, Beirut, Lebanon
Hana Müller, Berlin, Germany
Ian Stuart, Paris, France
Isabella Deptula, Los Angeles, USA
Isis Hackman, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Iverson Medouard, Paris, France
Joana Neto, Coimbra, Portugal
Juana Broschini, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Juliana Monteiro, Coimbra, Portugal
Kashyap Rajesh, Los Angeles, USA
Kfir Adany, Coimbra, Portugal
Kierra Wang, Los Angeles, USA
Klerti Malaj, Tirana, Albania
Lea Jawad Hachem, Beirut, Lebanon
Leena Abdeen, Los Angeles, USA
Leilani Morales, Los Angeles, USA
Leonardo Felipe, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Louis Vanpeene, Lyon, France
Madhur Samant, Mumbai, India
Manasi Prasad, Mumbai, India
Maria David Lopes, Coimbra, Portugal
Matilde Simões, Lisbon, Portugal
Milan Hachmeister, Berlin, Germany
Nathan Kaguta, Kampala, Uganda
Norbert Lubangakene Chris, Kampala, Uganda
Oren Gorenca, Tirana, Albania
Paul Nkolo, Kampala, Uganda
Perla Darwish, Beirut, Lebanon
Peter Rafael, Beirut, Lebanon
Pharrell Zarks, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Raphael Balasundaram, Mumbai, India
Raul John Aju, Mumbai, India
Rihaan A, Bengaluru, India
Romain Durand, Paris, France
Ruben Ubiria, Paris, France
Sarah Darwish, Beirut, Lebanon
Sherpa Nima Tendi, Takasaki, Japan
Shreeom Vishwakarma, Mumbai, India
Sneha Yadav, Bengaluru, India
Sohan B, Bengaluru, India
Sokol Bozanic, Paris, France
Sona Aznawooddian, Yerevan, Armenia
Sophie Feres, Lyon, France
Stefaniszen Maiczuk, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Takuto Nishiyama, Takasaki, Japan
Tarun B.R., Bengaluru, India
Tasnuva Yosofy, Lisbon, Portugal
Ted Hodaj, Tirana, Albania
Vahe Karapetyan, Yerevan, Armenia
Vagharshak Grigoryan, Los Angeles, USA
Victoria Da Fonesca, Paris, France
Volodymyr Borysenko, Berlin, Germany
Wail Kherrazi, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Yuito Takeuchi, Takasaki, Japan
Yuta Nekko, Takasaki, Japan
Zhirayr Mkrtchyan, Yerevan, Armenia

Adult guests

Nicholas Thompson, CEO, The Atlantic
Sal Khan, Founder and CEO, Khan Academy
Refik Anadol, AI Creative Artist
Sandy Speicher, Design Leader, former CEO, IDEO
Michael Horn, Adjunct Lecturer on Education, Harvard
Raffi Krikorian, CTO and MD, Emerson Collective
Pat Pataranutaporn, Co-director, MIT Media Lab AHA research program
Jake Loosararian, Co-Founder and CEO, Gecko Robotics
Marie Lou Papazian, CEO, TUMO
Joleen Liang, Co-Founder and U.S. Division President, Squirrel AI
Veronica Ellis, Content Development and Research Manager, TeachAI
Rima Shahbazyan, Machine Learning Researcher, NVIDIA
Egzona Morina-Claudi, Founder, XHMF Foundation
Kenya Murayama, Professor and Dean, Kyoai Gakuen University
Manu Chopra, Co-founder and CEO, Kayra
Karishma Shanghvi, Founder and Director, Shikha Academy
Thomas Haferlach, Founder, Pollinations.ai
Tigran Sargsyan, CEO and Co-Founder, AOByte
Taryn Southern, Storyteller and Creative Technologist
Pratik Rajurkar, Co-Founder, Polymath AI
Maris Basha, Co-founder, Nullius in Verba
Marjana Prifti Skenduli, Founder, AI Albania
Katende Nesta Paul, Founder and CEO, Otic Foundation
Arinaitwe Rugyendo, Founder, Young Engineers STEM Education Programme
Angela Naser, Director, Women in Tech France
Grace Kamulegeya, Founding President, ProSEIT
Cinthia Corica, AI, STEAM Methodology, Programming, and Robotics Specialist
Marta Guimarães, AI Researcher, Aerospace Engineer
Lilit Tovmasyan, Learning Science Specialist, TUMO
Alexander Plato Hakobyan, Director of System Innovations, Teach For Armenia
Armando Hernández, Serial Entrepreneur
Mandar Kulkarni, AI Ethicist, Educator and Screenwriter
Tommi Laitio, Urban Strategist
Avo Mencherian, CEO and Co-Founder, Schedex
Marcela Rapallo, Artist, Researcher, and Educator
Leslie Huin, Education and BPM Expert
Davis Twine, Biomedical Engineer, Innovation Strategist
Moses Tuhame, Manager, ICT and Multimedia Services
Remsey Mailjard, IT Trainer, Consultant and Developer
Carlos Calika, Film Director
Brian Lorenzo, Electronic Engineering Student
Amanda Hachem, AI Instructor
Mateo Primón, National Pedagogical Coordinator, TED-Ed Clubs Argentina
Sylvain Tillon, Founder and AI Instructor, Le Bahut
Jorge Pessoa, CTO and Co-Founder, Noxus.ai


What Teens Say

What Teens Say

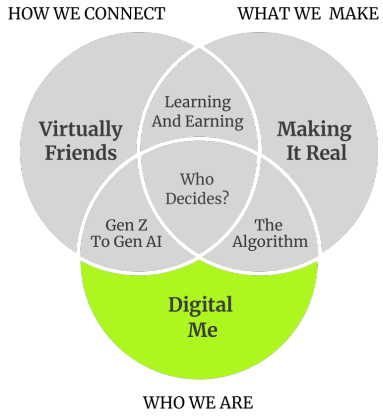
Over the course of ai/teens, close to a hundred young people, from Buenos Aires to Bengaluru, talked plainly about artificial intelligence. As their stories were accumulating across sixteen cities, clear patterns surfaced. We mapped those patterns into three overlapping questions: How We Connect, Who We Are, and What We Make. Each circle holds a set of conversations that teenagers kept returning to no matter the language or latitude. The summaries that follow distill what teens said in multi-city panels, local discussions, and keynotes. They capture hopes, caution, and the pragmatic instincts of a generation that is already building with AI even as it debates who should steer it.

Digital Me

What does it mean to grow up with an identity that is both personal and algorithmically mediated? As ai/teens speakers tackled issues around the idea of identity in the age of AI, one of the dominant metaphors was gaming. A participant described life as a game and AI as a kind of cheat code. “Imagine you are holding a controller and playing a game called life... using AI feels like using a cheat code, but that doesn’t mean I let go of the controller.”

The theme of agency recurred across all cities. In Paris, teens warned that becoming too dependent on AI can “break the image of autonomy that develops in adolescence.” Many expressed ambivalence. Yes, AI helps with homework and creative tasks, but that assistance sometimes borders on substitution. “There are more lazy students than hard-working ones using it.” Others defended AI’s role as a facilitator, not a crutch. “If today I have an idea for a painting and I don’t have the skills, I can ask AI to generate it.”

Still, there was caution. In Buenos Aires, panelists noted that “conversational skills shape how we exist in society” and while AI can simulate dialogue or coach interpersonal interactions, there is a danger in outsourcing too much of that development. The notion of whether AI could or should be considered a social equal sparked debate. Teens were split. Some dismissed the idea outright. “AIs aren’t part of the social pact, why should they have rights?” Others leaned into the ambiguity, arguing



that even if AI isn’t human, emotional ties with it can still have real impacts.

Teens also tackled generative AI’s role in creative and academic work. In Mumbai, a teen described AI as “a bluff that helps you reach your goal.” But others pointed out that reliance can creep in silently. A teen from Yerevan said “That’s when you understand if you are too dependent on AI... after every single situation, you are starting to think about, what if I ask AI and not think about it?” Another participant recounted how pressing a code-completion shortcut had become instinctual, almost reflexive. That raised questions. When does helpfulness become dependency? And what happens when the scaffolding is removed? The distinction emerged: AI may assist, polish, or visualize, but it can’t help you originate what you don’t understand.

Data privacy was never far from the surface. Teens spoke candidly about sharing sensitive information with chatbots, even while realizing those systems aren’t always candid listeners. While some were unfazed, others were uneasy. The idea that someone or something was silently collecting and storing emotional disclosures made a few participants rethink their habits.

And yet, few rejected AI outright. Again and again, teens returned to the idea of balance.

Question the defaults. Maintain intention. A Takasaki speaker offered a gaming analogy that seemed to sum it up. "Use it to level up but don't let it play the game for you." Across continents and contexts, what emerged wasn't fear or hype but reflection. It became very clear that teens aren't passive recipients of AI's influence. They're watching closely, and asking the kind of questions that matter.

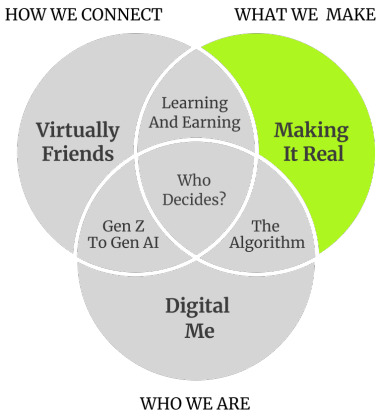
"AI is not doing everything for me. I am the artist. I believe in human-machine collaboration. I don't believe creativity goes to the AI itself. What I believe is if I use AI, it can enhance my capacity for imagination."

REFIK ANADOL
Director and Co-founder, Refik Anadol Studio

Making It Real

If you can get AI to make a movie for you, compose your music and write your next novel, what does being smart, creative, and human, really mean? Much of the conversations on "real vs fake" creativity circled around the same tension: AI as a power tool versus AI as a shortcut that dulls hard-won skills. A participant insisted you should first learn to "write an essay" or "write code" on your own, then bring AI into the process because otherwise, "someone who doesn't skip that foundational step will obviously get ahead of you." Meanwhile, others pointed out that efficiency matters, but not at any cost. "Yes, we may lose a bit of skill, but it allows us to focus on more important abilities like critical thinking."

Inevitably, discussions raised a deeper question: what counts as being smart? Several speakers pointed out that children learn by copying long before they innovate, so the fact that AI learns through imitation alone cannot be disqualifying. Still, the difference between real smarts and the superficial appearance of being smart, one teen argued, lies in experience and empathy, qualities that don't live in data. "There are multiple ways to consider what smart is. Smart isn't all about data or knowing things in general," they said. Another speaker spelled it out more bluntly:



"AI does what it's told needs to be done," useful yet unable to make the messy leaps humans make without thinking.

Creativity exposed this gap even more clearly for some participants. From Tirana, came the view that AI has upended art by introducing techniques "previously not thought possible." In Lisbon, the new role of an artist was described as a manager of systems, not just a doer. Speakers in Mumbai called good prompting an art in itself and admitted they now let AI draft first versions of scripts that once took days to come up with. Yet the group in Paris drew a firm line: AI can inspire and support, even reveal hidden talent, but only if people stay in charge of direction and taste.

Across all cities, the through-line was agency. The teenagers treated AI neither as an oracle to obey nor as a threat to resist, but as raw material to shape. A teen in Buenos Aires urged their peers to remain "critical creators, not passive consumers." They spoke of shortcuts, but also of standards: curiosity, context, and the final human say. Being smart, in their vocabulary, now includes knowing when to lean on a system and when to lean on themselves and one another.

Leena Abdeen

Pennsylvania, USA

"AI has the potential to augment and expand artistic expression. It can help composers break creative blocks, generate new ideas, and push the boundaries of sound. The real challenge is ensuring that AI remains an enabler of human creativity rather than a replacement for it."

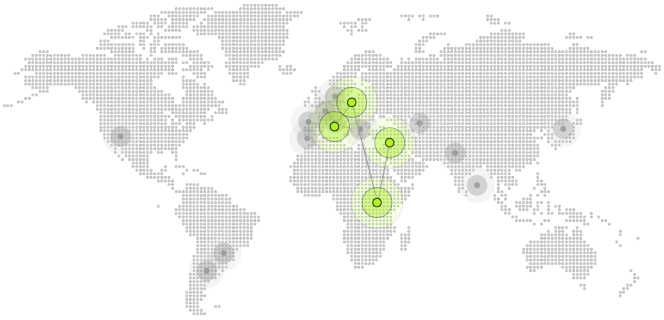
Leena Abdeen is a Computer Science major at the University of Pennsylvania with a minor in Cognitive Science. She blends technical innovation with human-centered design, drawing from her background as a former performing cellist to approach technology as both an engineer and an artist.

Leena's work focuses on ethical and creative applications of AI, including ORBIT, an ADHD-friendly productivity chatbot, and Keel, a multi-agent system for revenue intelligence. Beyond building, she is a RISE Scholar, a Women in Computer Science (WiCS) leader, and a Penn Mars Rover Club team member on the Arm Kinematics and Control sub-team.

Her work reflects a deep commitment to using AI for social good, advancing neurodivergent-friendly design, and inspiring young women to pursue technology and research with creativity, compassion, and technical depth.

Virtually Friends

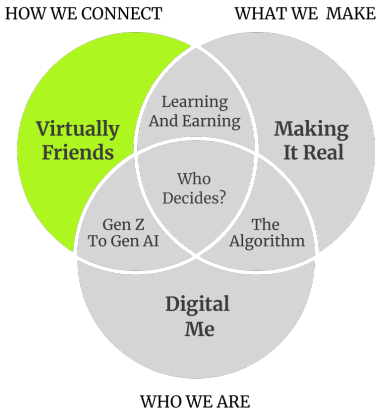
How does AI reshape the way teens connect with each other? A fundamental question was inevitable that started exploring the topic of friendship and AI: what makes someone a friend? For one speaker, it's about emotional safety, being able to talk without judgment. Another emphasized the importance of empathy, the sense that someone not only listens but understands.



As teens discussed whether AI could ever fill the role of a real friend, the answers were nuanced. While some acknowledged the convenience, with AI always available and never judgmental, they drew a line between usefulness and genuine connection. As one teen in Los Angeles put it, "AI is like a smart friend that doesn't judge me for asking questions." In Beirut, the conversation turned to how AI affects existing relationships. One teen shared, "AI has changed how I communicate with friends and family. Sometimes it brings us closer, sometimes it creates distance." Similarly, in Buenos Aires, a participant imagined how an AI translator could "help us connect across languages and cultures," showing that AI can sometimes act as a bridge, in addition to being a potential barrier.

The theme of AI's non judgmental nature being both a bridge and barrier echoed across the discussions. In Paris, a teen reflected on how politeness might influence how AI responds, but also how too much deference can dilute the interaction. Another saw AI's potential in combating loneliness for those who feel isolated, while a third admitted, "Some people are more open with AI because it doesn't judge."

The idea of friendship as practice, not perfection, also surfaced. In Bengaluru, a teen described how "with the audio feature, you can just talk to AI like you're talking to a friend. That makes learning faster and more comfortable." In Los Angeles, another said they used AI to get advice on relationships, appreciating how it offered multiple perspectives. A young girl from Kampala viewed friendship not only as the ideal form



of a relationship, but also as a process that helps people evolve through misunderstandings and lived experiences. In this context, she pointed out that while AI can offer insights and comfort, real friendships, with their inherent vulnerability, mutuality, and occasional conflict, remain irreplaceable.

The question of presence came up in a late-night scenario, waking up from a nightmare at 3 a.m. with no one to talk to. Some admitted they might turn to an AI chatbot, but none seemed to think it could truly help. What they wanted at that moment wasn't advice or information. It was presence, someone to sit with them in the discomfort. AI could simulate a conversation, but it couldn't replace the feeling of being known. Ethical questions around these interactions also arose. If you share a secret with an AI, is it truly private? While many believed their data was technically safe, another speaker noted that "AI remembers everything." That permanence might be useful for tracking thoughts, but it also raises a deeper question: What does it mean to confide in something that doesn't forget?

Rather than framing AI as a substitute for friendship, the conversations leaned toward a hybrid vision. Use technology to better understand yourself, but reserve the messier, more meaningful work of friendship for humans.

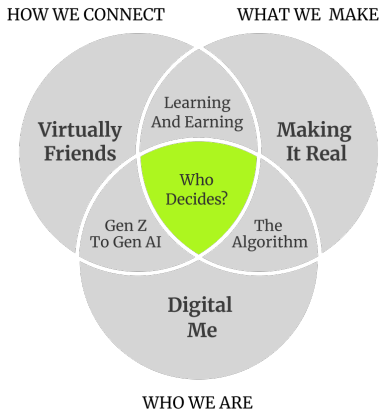
"You don't really need 10,000 hours or a thousand hours to share your creative magic with the world, you just need to know how to communicate with AI."

TARYN SOUTHERN
Public Speaker, Artist, and Brand Strategist

Who Decides?

Who should steer the next wave of artificial intelligence technology, and on what terms? Conversations did not sound like a classroom debate or a theoretical brainstorm. They were closer to a policy meeting in which the people who will live longest with AI's consequences tried to sketch the rules before the ink dries.

Early on, one speaker set the tone: "Teens should have a big role in how AI develops. You don't need to be an expert to decide what's important and how AI should evolve." The remark captured a shared instinct that legitimacy flows from stake, not age or credentials. The room did not indulge in naive techno-optimism. While most participants were ready to take charge of setting the rules, one teenager from Amsterdam, who teaches AI workshops to younger kids, pushed back:



"Children don't know if information is true or not... adults can make better rules to help children with AI." Ultimately, rather than framing the topic as youth versus adults being in charge, the teens kept circling around to a more nuanced idea: collaboration that pairs youthful curiosity with mature guardrails.

Regulation loomed large. A teen from Berlin noted Europe's fast-moving legislative mood: "The EU published a risk assessment... unacceptable risks we absolutely need to forbid, like social credit systems or AI surveillance." Others built on the point. "We need to create a new organization that regulates AI worldwide,

one student argued, picturing a body as global as artificial intelligence itself. "Government should make strict rules to keep AI safe for everyone," one participant noted, yet in the same conversation another voice warned that too much power in one pair of hands breeds new dangers: "I don't think only one entity should have the complete control over AI... it should be moderated by different groups." The tension between central oversight and plural governance ran through as a fault line.

Freedom of information triggered a second flashpoint. One teen insisted, "AI should never be censored. Information should always be free to the public." For some, universal standards promised equality; for others, local nuance mattered as much as global consistency. The conversation never landed on a single formula, but it did make clear that any acceptable policy must recognise how the power to hide or reveal information can shape society.

When talk turned to priorities, pragmatism beat science-fiction. "Future possibilities are exciting, but current needs are urgent and affect our planet now," a Parisian student said, framing climate change as a key factor in AI's social impact.

Across cities and viewpoints, three motifs kept resufacing: shared stewardship and transparent rulemaking. The panelists were eager to claim a seat at the decision-making table yet equally eager to invite experts, parents and diverse publics to sit beside them. They wanted rules, but rules visible to everyone and adjustable across cultures.

If anything explains their optimism, it is not faith in technology but faith in deliberation. The teens in this conversation treated AI less as an inevitable tide than as a force to be controlled. They knew the red lines they wanted — no hidden surveillance, no unilateral control — yet they kept the margins wide for creativity, play and dissent.

Ainomugisha Tusiime

Medical AI

Medical AI: In Kampala, Ainomugisha Tusiime Builds a Compass for Care

Ainomugisha's initiative powerfully demonstrates how African youth are already leveraging artificial intelligence to address critical, real-world problems. Her creation is Medical AI, an impressive prototype developed using Pictoblox. This project is designed to offer preliminary diagnoses based on user-inputted symptoms. Currently, this early-stage system is programmed to identify common diseases such as COVID-19, diabetes, and malaria.

Medical AI's functionality is both straightforward and impactful for a project by such a young mind:

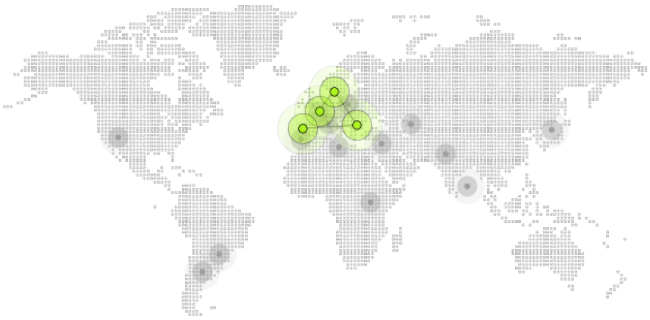
1. Symptom Input: The system engages users by prompting them to describe their symptoms.
2. AI Diagnosis: Based on the provided information, the AI processes and offers a diagnosis from its current, limited database of diseases.
3. Initial Recommendations: Beyond diagnosis, the AI provides basic, actionable advice relevant to the identified condition.

Ainomugisha's presentation included a demonstration of the underlying code, illustrating the logical framework she meticulously constructed. She articulated ambitious future plans for Medical AI, aiming to expand its diagnostic capabilities to encompass a wider array of diseases, as well as direction of users to nearby health centers for professional medical consultation and treatment following its initial assessment.

The Algorithm

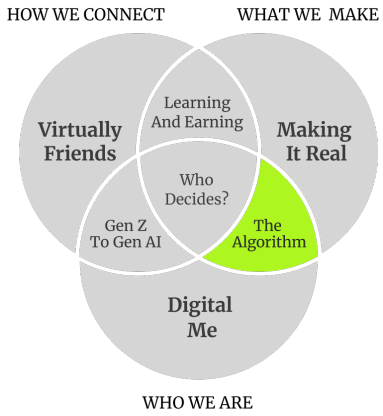
Do teens see algorithms as guides or as gatekeepers, shaping not just what they consume but also who they might become?

One of the first challenges speakers raised was the disappearance of serendipity online. “I think that discovery by chance right now on the internet is quite impossible,” a panelist said. A speaker from Amsterdam added that almost everything on his phone “is from the algorithm that is prescribed for me.” Yet the group was split on how to feel about that reality. Some worried that seeing five short videos after one casual search felt like unwanted surveillance. Others argued the opposite: “I don’t think it’s scary that I am constantly being fed content that I like. It just means that the algorithm is working well.”



This tension deepened when the panelists discussed how recommendation engines sort people into buckets. A teenager from Tirana called an algorithm “a builder because it builds pathways for us to follow,” but also “a manipulator” when misused. Another speaker confessed, “I’ve been classified in groups that I don’t identify with, but after some time of seeing this content, I started to like it.” For some, that shift felt like expansion; for others, it sounded like a bubble tightening around them.

Politics sharpened the stakes. “If the person who made the algorithm was focused on democracy, then it gave more options for democracy instead of dictatorship,” one speaker observed.



Another warned that the same machinery can be “a tool for propaganda” if the incentives tilt in the wrong direction. A speaker in Lisbon captured the dilemma: algorithms are “an opportunity” when they broaden debate, a “threat” when they fence it off. Across cities, teens kept returning to a single issue: transparency of design. As one put it, “There’s a fine line between the algorithm manipulating the user and the algorithm helping them enjoy their experiences.”

Concrete examples made the ethics question vivid. The group cited DeepSeek, a Chinese chatbot that declines to discuss negative history. “I don’t think it’s ethical,” said an Amsterdam participant, arguing that an AI “should include every bad story and good story.” Echoing that stance, a student noted that Alexa in the United States has been accused of spotlighting politicians from the ruling party. “It’s the responsibility of the developers to create an ethical algorithm” became a recurring refrain.

Throughout conversations, it was almost unanimously agreed that constant personalization is here to stay; what remains undecided is who steers it. One Amsterdam teen admitted his view had shifted – algorithms now felt “more dangerous, and we have to watch out for that.” Still, hope dominated resignation. “We need to work on creating more ethical and unbiased algorithms... they’re an incredible opportunity for our future.”

Learning & Earning

Across diverse ai/teens conversations, from Kampala to Los Angeles, teenagers kept circling back to the same point: they are not waiting for adults to decide whether AI belongs in school. They already use it, question it, and most of all expect it to be treated as seriously as any other core subject.

A speaker in Takasaki put it plainly: “You should learn AI just like math, English, or Japanese.” Mastery, he argued, starts with basic fluency, not with alarms about plagiarism. In Tirana, students emphasized the importance of understanding how AI works, how it impacts society, and what the ethical implications are.

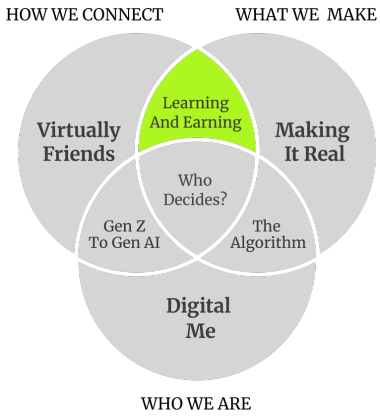
A spirit of pragmatism showed up in how teens bend AI to fit their own interests. In Amsterdam, one participant cheerfully asked a chatbot for “Dutch grammar drills themed around Dragon Ball Z” because an anime twist keeps practice bearable. In Buenos Aires, another teen turned an entire textbook into a custom GPT “so everyone can learn in the way that suits them best” and, crucially, “so I can share it with my friends.” For them, personalization is not a marketing slogan but a workaround and an antidote to one-size-fits-all lessons.

A teen from Berlin reminded audiences of the big picture, “The real problem is not that AI is changing education. The problem is that we are still learning as we did 100 years ago.” That frustration ran through many panels. Teens do not fear automation as much as irrelevance, and they are impatient to be in classrooms that reward better questions over faster answers.

A story from Bengaluru underlined the point: a girl who had never touched a smartphone used a simple AI tool to earn more in one month than her parents earned in a year, and became the first in her village to reach college.

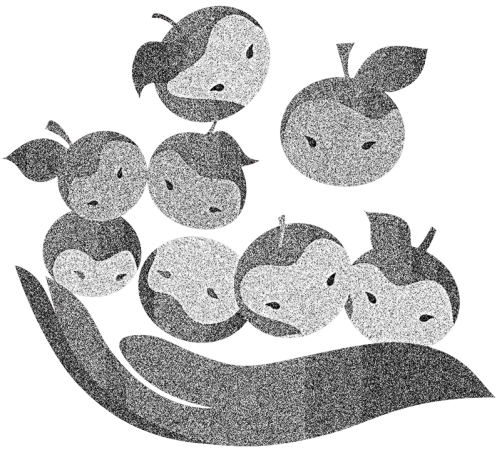
None of this means teens are blind to risks. They talked about algorithmic bias in the same breath as homework shortcuts. Tirana’s keynote speaker warned peers not to confuse ChatGPT’s confidence with authority: “AI is not magical... be ready to question the answers.”

That same curiosity guided a pop-up interview some of the teens conducted with Khan Academy founder Sal Khan during the conference. The first thing they pressed him on was culture: the moderator from Lisbon asked how AI might reshape “the social environment of education.”



A teen from Tirana wondered whether schools should now prioritize “emotional intelligence and soft skills” over algebra that a chatbot can already teach, and the interviewer from Coimbra pushed for ways to “foster critical thinking and creativity instead of relying on ready-made answers.” They probed access and fairness, asking how adaptive tools can reach rural learners or those with disabilities, or how cheating detectors will avoid sweeping up honest work. Career fears were also framed in terms of strategy: what skills will help them “work with AI rather than compete against it?”

What emerges from all these remarks scattered around the world is a coherent agenda. Teens are asking educators to move from surveillance to guidance, from fear of cheating to cultivation of judgment. And they were quick to remind us that the value of a tool lies in the questions it sparks, not the answers it gives. If adults fail to act, teens will keep hacking their own solutions: avatars for shy students in Takasaki, ad-hoc campus chatbots in Amsterdam, community-built GPTs in Buenos Aires.

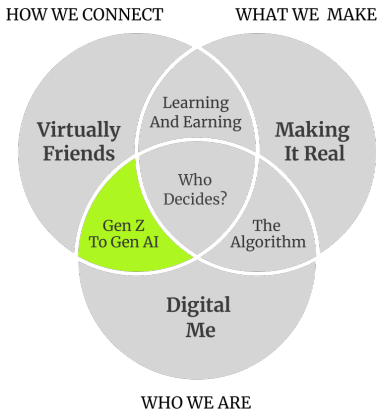


Gen Z to Gen AI

What is the difference between an AI user, and a Gen Z AI user? Gen Z argues that while they are the most fluent AI users, they are also the generation setting trends in general. "Youth culture has always thrived on creativity, reinvention, and pushing boundaries." The panelist also called the algorithm "a good mirror but a bad muse," adding that "AI can generate trends based on data, but it lacks the lived experiences and cultural nuances that we can contribute." Their metaphor was straightforward the machine extends the stage, it doesn't replace the band.

Agency surfaced whenever the talk drifted to recommendation engines. A Portuguese speaker warned that endless "For You" feeds can feel like a preselected menu: "That makes our decisions less authentic." Another teen worried that curated paths "risk losing the spontaneity that often leads to meaningful discoveries in science, arts, mathematics." Yet none felt doomed to passivity. "We have a fundamental role in shaping how technology evolves, not just letting it override our lives." The fix, they said, is civic as much as technical – join movements, question defaults, write the policy you want.

Feelings were trickier. Conversations with chatbots already feel much more human – they often develop inside jokes and mimic human texting habits, so the panel asked whether friendship with code is still friendship.



One student guessed "our generation might be the first to form real emotional connections with AI," but another pushed back: "Cultural understanding, intuition, and shared lived experiences are irreproducible by AI."

The room paused on that contrast. They could imagine a bot soothing loneliness, yet they doubted it could grieve with them, laugh at a local in-joke, or join a protest.

When the discussion shifted to data, the mood sharpened. "Our privacy shouldn't be the price we pay for convenience" was followed by a reminder that "If we don't question how AI is built, we risk letting corporations use it against public interests." The teens framed ethics in everyday terms – ask what goes into the model, ask who profits from your clicks. One summed it up: "It's not AI that is the problem, it's how humans use it."

Their reflections pulled the threads together. "Creativity isn't just producing content, it's storytelling, emotion, and lived experience." Panelists were not guarding some nostalgic idea of authenticity. They were staking out room to breathe, to change their minds, to stay unpredictable.

"My hope ironically is that we might be able to use AI technology to instill more of what we would traditionally call soft skills."

NICHOLAS THOMPSON
CEO, The Atlantic

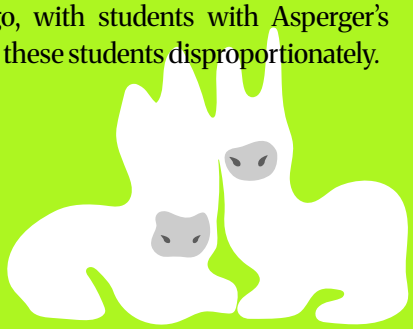
Reflection

Sal Khan: Powering Education's AI Revolution

An ai/teens panel featured Sal Khan, founder and CEO of Khan Academy, in a dynamic discussion with students from TUMO Centers worldwide, about the transformative role of AI in education. Khan Academy, a non-profit committed to providing free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere, has long been a leader in online educational innovation, now actively exploring AI's potential.

Khan opened the discussion by emphasizing that while technology, including AI, can fill critical access gaps, its primary role in traditional classrooms shouldn't be to replace human interaction. Instead, he sees AI as a liberating force, allowing teachers to move beyond lectures and foster more interactive, human-centered learning experiences where students engage more deeply with each other and their teachers.

On inclusive education, Khan highlighted how Khan Academy's own "learn at your own pace" model has already benefited students with learning differences. With AI, this personalization deepens. He shared an anecdotal account of a teacher using Khan Academy's AI tutor, Khanmigo, with students with Asperger's autism, noting that these students disproportionately.



Sal Khan
CEO Khan Academy

engaged with the AI, gaining communication confidence that translated into more confident interactions with peers. AI, Khan says, can approximate the individualized attention a tutor like Aristotle gave Alexander the Great, adapting to each learner's pace, interests, and needs.

Looking to the future, Khan believes essential skills for teenagers will include strong foundational academics, but crucially, an entrepreneurial capability. This isn't just about starting businesses, but about taking existing resources and new tools to create value in novel ways. He envisions a future where small teams with AI superpowers can achieve what once required hundreds of people. Alongside this, interpersonal and communication skills will remain paramount, as they represent the uniquely human element AI cannot replace.

In an ideal future classroom, Khan envisions AI supporting teachers behind the scenes, aiding lesson planning, observing classroom dynamics, and personalizing support, allowing teachers to focus on engaging students in collaborative, project-based learning. This ai/teens panel underscored Khan Academy's commitment to leveraging AI not as a replacement, but as a powerful partner in fostering a more personalized, inclusive, and effective educational experience for all.

Reflection

Young people aren't just using AI — they're thinking deeply about it. And what they're saying might be surprising to many.

The generation we worry will be most influenced by AI turns out to be the most thoughtful when it comes to thinking critically about it. This paradox of **youthful sophistication** is what stands out when you watch teenagers take charge of the AI conversation. They sense the anxiety of the adults in their lives and ask to be trusted to do the right thing. Their careful analysis of AI's complexities comes with a clear-eyed optimism that cuts through the panic dominating much of the public discourse.

The other striking finding is that young people across cultures and geographies share **remarkably similar attitudes** about AI. From the Global North to the Global

South, teens are aligned on perspectives, concerns, and aspirations. There are different opinions, but those differences show up in similar ways everywhere. Participants had more in common as teenagers than any differences based on nationality, birthplace, or language. Watching consensus emerge across a dozen languages was a lesson in global community-building.

Instead of seeing AI as some kind of singularity, teen speakers understand it as part of **a digital continuum** with the internet and social media. Many of the social, ethical, and cognitive consequences feel familiar to them. They see AI adding a new dimension rather than creating a separate set of issues. They discuss authenticity, privacy, relationships, regulation, and related topics through their experiences as digital natives. This positions them well to examine AI's implications and reflect on the changes it might bring to their communities.

Throughout these conversations, teens consistently view AI as a public good. They're not intimidated by major corporations competing to commercialize the technology, or governments eager to regulate and control it. They talk about AI as something that belongs to them. This **sense of ownership** feels self-fulfilling. Teens don't see themselves as passive consumers of AI, but as shapers of its development. That mindset empowers them to set boundaries, demand transparency, and envision a future where AI serves their values.

Across all discussions, teenagers advocate for a **return to judgment.** Knowing when not to use AI becomes as important as knowing how to use it. Perhaps ironically, this instinct for discernment makes young people more comfortable and intentional with the technology. They approach it with strategic curiosity. The parents, teachers, and other adults who seem to be talking at them and over them about AI need to stop and listen. Seven major themes emerged from the discussions.

1. A cheat code for agency

A gaming metaphor captures teenagers' practical view of AI as a "cheat code." This reveals a sophisticated understanding of the technology as an exoskeleton for augmentation rather than a crutch for support. They intuitively grasp that the goal isn't to avoid AI assistance but to maintain intentionality and agency while using it.

2. A fresh take on authenticity

Their concept of authenticity is compelling. Rather than viewing AI-assisted creation as inherently inauthentic, they distinguish between AI as "inspiration and assistance" versus letting it "play the game for you." This suggests a new framework for creativity that embraces tools while preserving the creator's intentionality.

3. Keeping friendship real

Their nuanced view of AI relationships is equally fascinating. They don't reject AI companionship outright, but their test for authentic friendship is clear: It's not enough to offer advice and support. Conflict and tough love are inherent in real friendships. For AI personas to be teenagers' friends, they need to be present as authentic individuals in their own right.

4. A surprising pragmatism

Teens approach AI governance with striking political maturity. Rather than demanding youth-led control, they advocate for collaboration that pairs youthful curiosity with mature guardrails. They're not rejecting a key role for adults but demanding meaningful participation in decisions that will shape their futures: "You don't need to be an expert to have a say in what's important."

"Being, thinking, and acting like a designer will be essential in creating systems anew."

SANDY SPEICHER
Design leader, former CEO, IDEO

5. Living with the algorithm

Algorithms don't just predict behavior, they shape it. Teens seem open to the idea that a user's identity can be co-constructed: "I've been classified in groups I don't identify with, but after a while, I started to like the content suggested to me." But they draw a firm line at manipulation. Built into their stance is "model literacy," the ability to understand not just what AI says, but why it says it.

6. Self-empowerment in education

Perhaps the most subversive insight from teen discussions involves their approach to education. Do teens use AI to "cheat" on homework? Sure. But that's not their main focus. Instead of waiting for permission to integrate AI into learning, they "hack" their own solutions. It looks like pedagogical transformation will be driven by learners, not schools.

7. Calling out false dichotomies

Teens reject the polarized discourse that often seems to dominate adult discussion on AI. They are reluctant to choose between human vs. AI creativity, dependence vs. autonomy, or freedom vs. regulation. Instead, they prioritize agency, transparency, and intentional collaboration. They don't need to frame the discussion with forced either/or choices.

Gen AI Workshops

Beirut, Mumbai, Takasaki and Yerevan

Hands-on AI workshops took place in four ai/teens locations. Teenagers in Lebanon, India, Japan and Armenia engaged in creative expression using AI across multiple modes and media. They practiced creative writing, illustration, and songwriting, and developed fictional characters with backstories, visuals, video and songs. They used AI to code websites to represent their creations, and brought their characters to life through voice AI, entering into dialogue with them and setting up conversations among them.

Over the course of 3-5 days, participants configured AI agents to play a collaborative, multimodal game. After working with AI models to generate original stories and bringing them to life through text, video and sound, they merged their creations, spawning hybrid narratives and visual mashups.

Across the four workshops, teens experimented with generative AI not as passive consumers, but as active users, exercising creative agency and giving shape to their ideas. Their creations reflected both local realities and shared global trends, establishing a pattern that will evolve as both the technology and its users mature over the coming years.

Watch a video about the ai/teens Gen AI workshops. →

Recommendations

Recommendations

We've listened to young people across continents. They've shown us how AI is already reshaping how they learn, create, and connect. They didn't just share ideas with us, they issued a challenge: don't stop at listening. Build with us.

This section is our response.

The recommendations that follow are grounded in what young people told us, in what TUMO has learned from working alongside them, and in what the world now demands: learning that builds discernment, policy that reflects youth priorities, access that includes everyone, and systems that make room for ethics, creativity, and care.

We've organized this into three parts — Learning & Thriving, Policy & Governance, and Ethics & Inclusion. But the thread running through all of them is clear: when we listen to young people and trust them as co-creators, they don't just rise to the occasion and they raise the standard.

Learning & Thriving

Learning shouldn't just prepare people for jobs. It should prepare them for a complex future. In a world where AI can autocomplete and summarize, the value of a learner isn't what they know, it's how they think, what they care about, and how they act when things get hard.

Young people aren't waiting for permission. They're tutoring classmates with chatbots, building GPTs in their own languages, remixing textbooks into tools their peers actually use. What they want isn't just access. It's agency.

Teens are asking for an education that assumes AI is everywhere — and gives them the judgment to decide when and how to use it. They want classrooms where reflection, creativity, and resilience matter more than memorization. One participant called for "an education that helps you become the editor of your own algorithm." That's the standard we need to meet.

Attitudes

- **Focus on teaching AI-proof skills.** Asking betterquestions, checking your own work, working with people, deciding what matters, and persevering when things get hard.
- **Connect learning to real life.** Let students frame the problems they want to solve, tie projects to community issues, and use AI as a bridge between disciplines and generations.
- **Model lifelong learning.** Let adults say "I don't know" as often as students do — it builds trust and signals that growth never stops. And more often than not, it's honest.

Calls to action

- **Kick off youth-led curriculum design labs.** Convene teens, educators, and policymakers to draft new education standards that assume AI will be part of every subject — history, science, art — in classrooms and at home.
- **Pilot "AI reflection classrooms."** In these classrooms, every AI interaction comes with three questions: What did it help you do? What decisions did it make for you? What would you have done differently without it? Students practice discernment as a daily habit, not a side lesson.

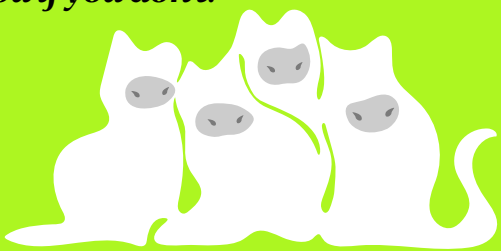
Next Steps

- **Expand youth-led curriculum design labs.** Teens will help draft the standards for how AI belongs in every subject, from history to art to science, ensuring education keeps pace with reality.
- **Scale global AI workshops.** Building on the Mumbai pilot — where teens coded autonomous agents and experimented with AI coding — TUMO will bring these experiments to centers around the world and encourage peers to replicate them in their own contexts.

Raul John Aju

Mumbai, India

"You should know how to write an essay, but you should also know how to use AI, because others will be ahead of you if you don't."



Raul John Aju is a young technologist and influencer dedicated to harnessing the power of technology to shape a better future. Through daily videos, Raul explores the latest advancements in AI, metaverse, and everyday apps — offering content that empowers youth, creators, video editors, lawyers, and beyond to leverage innovative AI tools. He has 170,000+ followers on Instagram alone.

As a TEDx speaker, YouTuber, and educator, Raul combines entertainment with education, creating short films and highlighting cutting-edge tech features that demonstrate how technology can positively impact people's lives globally. His mission is to inspire and equip others to embrace technology's potential for meaningful change.

Policy & Governance

One of the clearest messages we heard from teens was "We want a say." Not later. Not when they've graduated. Now. And why wouldn't they? Today's teens will live longer with the consequences of AI than the people currently regulating it. They're not asking for the keys to the lab. They're asking for a seat at the table, to help shape the rules as they are being drafted.

Young people aren't waiting to be invited. They're already thinking about issues, asking the questions that policy teams struggle to answer. The issue isn't whether to include them, it's how to include them with real power, not just visibility.

Attitudes

- **Treat young people as first-order stakeholders.** Their perspectives are essential use cases, not edge cases.
- **Address inequities in access.** As one participant in Africa said: "If we don't even have internet, how are we supposed to 'participate in AI'?"
- **Account for regional priorities.** For some, AI is about jobs; for others, it's about misinformation, expression, or safety. Good policy adapts.
- **Build accountability, not fear.** Teens are pro-accountability, not anti-regulation. They want clear red lines and systems whose behavior can be understood, and that can be modified when they fall short.

Calls to Action

- **Establish youth advisory boards with real power.** Move beyond ceremonial roles. Give teens decision-making influence, backed by stipends, mentorship, and infrastructure so they can participate meaningfully at every level.
- **Launch open calls for youth-driven civic tech.** Fund projects where teens and adult allies co-develop AI tools for public good — transparency dashboards, participatory budgeting guides, public health explainers. Require open-source results so communities everywhere can adapt them.
- **Pilot "youth juries" for AI.** In each country, invite teens to evaluate emerging AI tools the way they evaluate essays: Why am I seeing this? Who benefits? Who disappears? Use their verdicts to guide public standards.

Next Steps

- **Establish a permanent Youth AI Council.** Teens will hold decision-making influence in TUMO's strategy, programs, and partnerships.
- **Open calls for civic tech projects.** Support youth-led projects that put AI to work for the public good — from transparency dashboards to participatory budgeting tools — and share them globally as open-source for others to adapt.
- **Pilot youth juries.** Teens across our network will evaluate emerging AI tools, asking who benefits.

Ethics & Inclusion

Young people see the gaps in AI beyond simple issues like hallucinated facts. They see bias, exclusion, and tools trained on data that don't reflect who they are, where they're from, or what they value. As one participant put it: "If Africans don't build AI, it will keep being biased against us." Another asked: "Why do the tools that shape my future not speak my language?"

For them, inclusion isn't a feature you tack on at the end. It's the foundation. If AI is going to serve everyone, it has to be shaped by everyone, especially those who are too often left out. Ethics and access are inseparable: without devices, connectivity, trusted spaces, or even electricity, there is no AI literacy, no co-creation, no seat at the table.

Attitudes

- **Respect culture and language.** Build tools that adapt across geographies and identities, and honor the contexts young people come from.
- **Provide real access.** Broadband in every learning space, devices that actually work, and tools that are equally adequate in any location.
- **Create space to build, remix, and question.** Environments where exploration matters more than polished output, and where mentors model curiosity rather than gatekeeping.
- **Stay transparent.** Explain decisions, open the box of the algorithm, and give users the chance to push back.

Calls to Action

- **Launch youth-led ethics & access labs.** Bring together diverse teens, ethicists, technologists, and community organizers to audit real AI systems for bias, fairness, and usability — and to co-design solutions that expand access and representation.
- **Fund inclusive AI projects led by teens.** Provide grants, stipends, and travel support for youth-driven AI efforts — especially in the Global South — ensuring that young people keep the intellectual property and recognition for what they create.

Next Steps

- **Invest in access for all contexts.** From broadband in schools to offline tools in rural communities, we ensure no young person is left out of the conversation.
- **Fund teen-led AI projects.** Provide grants, recognition, and mentorship for youth-driven initiatives, ensuring intellectual property and credit remain with their creators.

Volodymyr Borysenko

Cherkasy, Ukraine

"You now have all the tools — AI, coding, knowledge — to shape your own future. Use them. Whether you're into gaming, robotics, or medicine, every great innovation starts with a question: what if I try it? The future belongs to those who act. Start today"

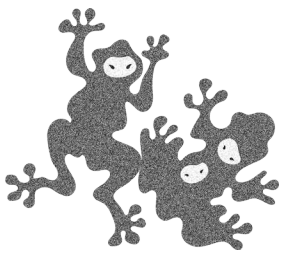
Volodymyr Borysenko is a rising innovator from Cherkasy, Ukraine, pushing the boundaries of AI in defense and environmental science. He's the creator of TacticSquare, a simulation platform that uses machine learning to model battlefield scenarios with autonomous drones, earning him a Platinum Medal at INFOMATRIX 2024 and the King Abdulaziz & Mawhiba Award at Regeneron ISEF. His work has caught the attention of Stanford researchers, with whom he now collaborates.

When he's not optimizing military strategy with AI, Volodymyr is tackling environmental risks as CTO of FireImpactology, a wildfire impact modeling tool that won Gold at Genius Olympiad 2024. A RISE Global Winner and ULTA fellow (MIT–Ukraine), Volodymyr is driven by one mission: to make sure artificial intelligence serves humanity, not the other way around.

The Relay Continues

These recommendations share a common thread: they ask adults to stop talking about teens and start building with them. They're not about creating more structures for their own sake but about empowering young people to take an active role in the decisions that shape their world. Every lab, council, and project should create space for teens to contribute, offering the tools, support, and opportunities they need to lead. Our responsibility is to clear obstacles, listen closely, and make sure their perspectives genuinely influence the work.

Moving forward effectively means that educators, technologists, and policymakers need to work together and take seriously what teens have been asking for. By sharing these recommendations, we're inviting everyone who works with teens to adopt practices that reflect their priorities and expectations. Teens need to be active partners in shaping how AI is developed and used. That means building approaches that make room for shared learning, co-creation, and ongoing involvement, so their insights and experiences help shape the world they will inherit.



About TUMO

The TUMO Center for Creative Technologies is a nonprofit education program with a mandate to help invent the future of learning. We put learners around the world in charge of their own education, and leverage technology at the service of equitable human development. TUMO was created in Armenia, where we are headquartered, and now has a network of centers spanning the world, making innovative, free-of-charge education accessible to everyone. More at tumo.org.

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