

# Generative AI in Media: Disruptive or Sustaining Innovation? A Case Study-Based Evaluation Using Christensen's Framework

Xiaohuan Tang

Loyola Marymount University, Guangzhou, Guangdong

melodytxh@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is quickly transforming creative industries, with AI able to generate music, video, and other media assets with just a few prompts. This paper discusses whether these tools are either sustaining or disruptive innovations as outlined by Clayton Christensen. Using case studies of Suno (AI music), Runway (AI video editing and VFX), and OpenAI Sora (AI video generation) as examples, the essay explores how such tools are altering media industry workflows, access, and production models. Guided by the concept of disruptive technologies articulated by Christensen, the paper explains how, though not yet entirely disruptive, the generative AI tools display evident disruption patterns, including democratizing the creation process, targeting underserved users, and evolving fast. At the same time, they can be positioned as sustaining innovations within high-end media production environments. This dual purpose indicates that generative AI is in the early-to-middle phase of disruption, and its potential effect would depend on the subsequent advances in technology and regulation. The results are relevant to the literature on technology change, media economics, and changing the place of creative labor.

**Keywords:** Disruptive innovation, generative AI, Media industry, AI music, AI video generation.

## 1. Introduction

The media industry is experiencing a revolutionary wave with the help of generative artificial intelligence (AI), especially in a world where technology is rapidly evolving. These AI applications can generate original material in the form of images, audio, text, and video based on input by the user, thus significantly changing the creative processes and broadening the accessibility of media production. These changes have made it even faster to grant access to various AI tools that cater to the needs of both businesses and consumers [1]. The artificial intelligence market is reported to be US\$244.22 billion in the year 2025, which illustrates massive investment in the tools in this market, directly influencing other sectors like entertainment and gaming [2]. The rise of chat platforms such as Suno, Runway, and Sora by OpenAI has raised an essential question in innovation theory and media economics. Despite current research, several limitations exist: the absence of systematic and innovative approaches to examining generative AI implications in the media industry and the deficiency of empirical research studies on the influence of generative AI on how an innovation pattern is shaped. However, as generative AI develops rapidly, empirical studies of its transformative effect are still lacking. This paper aims to investigate whether these tools sustain or disrupt innovation.

This research is guided by Clayton Christensen's theory of disruptive innovation. As Christensen explained, sustaining innovation occurs when a firm produces superior performing products to generate higher profits to be sold to the best customers [3]. Generally, firms established within well-established industries exercise the strategy of sustaining innovation. On the contrary, disruptive innovations always begin by serving underserved markets or the low end of the scale before developing to replace the powerful technologies and business models [3]. This essay's center is whether generative AI extends current media technologies (sustaining) or provides a paradigm shift (disruptive). The paper examines how generative AI fits into the spectrum of innovation. It states that the generative AI tools now act as sustaining and disruptive innovation. Large studios are beginning to adopt these technologies to streamline their workflows and cut expenses (sustaining). In contrast, small teams and independent creators are already skipping the traditional production process (disruptive). With generative AI still growing and becoming more advanced, it is undergoing a completely disruptive path that will transform the creation and consumption of media content.

## 2. Theoretical Lens: Disruptive vs. Sustaining Innovation

The theory proposed by Christensen assists in understanding the influence of media AI. Sustaining innovations such as Adobe Premiere or DaVinci Resolve AI enhances the quality and speed of editing among professionals without altering who creates content. Disruptive innovations begin as a simple and cheap tool to serve new consumers and then quickly advance and compete with incumbents. The journalism of early YouTube and other forms of social media reveals how the low-cost medium may reinvent a market. Generative AI is pursuing a similar direction, allowing non-professionals to generate and distribute content cheaply and developing toward professional implementation [4]. In media, disruption happens when an outward benefit improves workflow and alters the structure of a market and who is permitted to engage in it. The shift is exemplified in Suno, Runway, and Sora.

### 2.1 Sustaining Innovation

Therefore, sustaining innovation refers to technological advances that assist incumbent companies in enhancing their products and services. For example, HD video cameras, 4K resolution sensors, Adobe Premiere Pro, and AI-powered tools in DaVinci Resolve have enabled media producers to achieve improved quality and efficiency without essentially changing the essence of content creation. Adobe Premiere Pro is a popular video editing program, with almost 30 million users in 2024, indicating its domination in the professional sector [5]. Adobe's software generates 20-30% of its Digital Media sector sales, with a projected revenue of \$4.25 billion in 2023. Similarly, when more digital displays enable 4K, this resolution will become the new standard, providing a visual experience beyond Full HD. 8K, or Super Hi-Vision, improves on this experience by giving an incredible  $7680 \times 4320$  pixels [6]. This resolution leap is more than a numerical gain; it represents an evolution in how users collect and perceive video material.

### 2.2 Disruptive Innovation

The disruptive innovation is revolutionary as the creation of cheaper and easier solutions serves new or underserved groups and ultimately surpasses existing products [7]. This tendency can be observed in the case of media, YouTube, Netflix, and social media journalism. The 2.5 billion viewers on YouTube in 2024 demonstrate that people outside of the industry can reach around the world without huge monetary investments [8]. Since 2007, Netflix has been mailing DVDs and has not yet become a streaming giant. The company has had approximately 283 million subscribers and more than \$30 billion in revenues [9], with North America contributing an estimated \$17 per sub per Q3 2024. Through platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok, 97% of American Gen Z now receive news, moving journalism back to its roots in decentralized modes [10]. This growth is visualized in Figure 1, according to the model of Christensen [3].

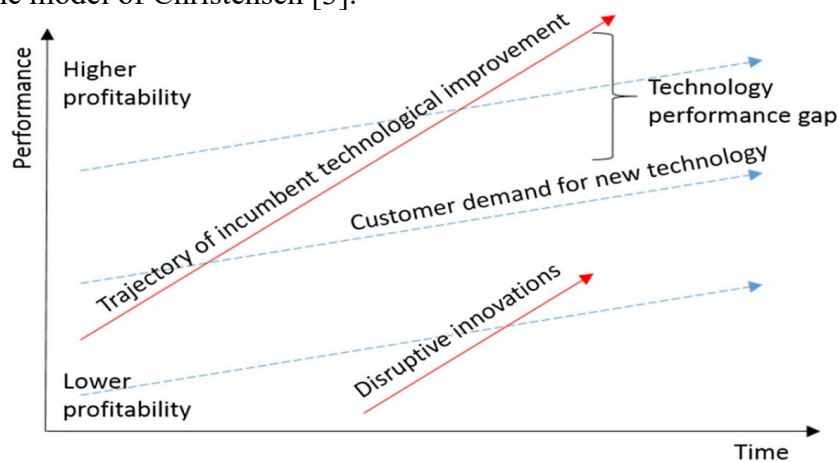


Figure 1: Christensen's Disruption Trajectory Model [3].

Figure 1 describes how disruptive innovations start below the performance demands of the mainstream users but conflict with and later exceed the current technology as demand changes in

favor of customers. Whereas incumbent technologies think about maximizing profitability by making things more technologically savvy, disruptors redesign value itself, emphasizing accessibility, ease, and the new market creation.

Therefore, when a disruptive innovation takes such an action, it is transformative. It is opposed to introducing new technology as it redefines markets, reduces participation barriers, and changes revenue streams. Generative AI tools are gearing towards this trend. The generative AI tools are starting to display this trend, as illustrated in Table 1, which summarizes the main differences between sustaining and disruptive innovation within the discussion of media AI.

Table 1: Comparison of Sustaining vs. Disruptive Innovation in Media AI

| Features                     | Sustaining Innovation         | Disruptive Innovation                      |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Primary Aim                  | Profit maximization           | Market redefinition and inclusion          |
| Target User                  | High end professionals        | Low end users or non-consumers             |
| Accessibility                | Requires expertise or funding | Easy to use and low cost                   |
| Impact on Industry Structure | Enhances existing workflows   | Replaces or bypasses traditional workflows |
| Product performance          | High                          | Initially lower, improving rapidly         |
| Christensen Alignment        | Incremental upgrade           | Market redefinition                        |

### 3. Case Studies: Disruptive in Action

#### 3.1 Suno (AI Music)

Suno is an AI-based music creator tool that uses basic text prompts to make complete songs with lyrics, vocals, and instrumentation. Suno leverages two internal proprietary AIs: Bark is dedicated to vocal generation, and Chirp generates instrumental accompaniments [11]. Combining these models converts the user's input to coherent, studio-quality music. Also, Suno has caught a wave in less than a year. With over 12 million users worldwide, it has raised \$125 million during its Series B funding, valuing it \$500 million [12]. This has been the skyrocketing expansion that denotes the disruptive capability of Suno's offering. In the past, music used to be written and recorded by accessing instruments, talented singers, studio sound engineers, and recording studios. This model is disrupted by Suno with the democratization of music production access, so that producers without any formal musical training can create polished music on a laptop or a smartphone.

Suno also qualifies as the definition of disruptive innovation by Christensen, as it began as a tool to be used by amateurs but was rapidly transformed into a tool used by professionals. First, it reduced the entry barriers because anyone, including non-musicians, could write text that could be converted into a song. Suno.ai now provides top-notch audio processing, AI-based noise cancellation, and smooth integration with the workflow, which appeals to sound engineers and audio producers who want to save time. Its multichannel support and real-time editing toolsets make it worthwhile for professional studios. Nevertheless, this development poses serious issues: copyright and authorship ownership are becoming obsolete in AI-produced music [13]. The platform challenges the conventional concept of human creativity and disrupts legal structures of intellectual property. Suno has not yet taken the place of high-production houses. Still, it is shifting the beginning of music production and obliging the industry to reconsider the roles, rights, and revenue models. Both the implications of empowering amateurs and destabilizing professional conventions point to a changing state of music production.

#### 3.2 Runway (AI Video Editing & VFX)

Runway is a big step towards democratizing professional-level video editing and visual effects (VFX). Its AI-based package provides video inpainting, background removal, and motion tracking capabilities, all of which are available intuitively. The most recent generation of runway models

enables users to edit videos using text instructions, images, or existing videos, thus removing the classic learning curve that drag-and-drop editing software like After Effects has become so well known to users [14]. This technology disrupts traditional post-production workflows that previously demanded specialized expertise, powerful hardware, and massive staffing levels. Instead, Runway provides creators with little technical background with the ability to create powerful visuals that can be made within a fraction of the time and cost [15]. It is already a relatively common app among filmmakers, content marketers, and digital storytellers, demonstrating its penetration into creator markets that have not been served as well.

Through the lenses of disruptive innovation, Runway displays the attributes of a new-market disruption. Aimed initially at creators who could not afford traditional editing software or VFX studios, it now includes tools that compete with those used by industry professionals, at a tiny fraction of the complexity and cost. It brings new definitions to those who can engage in video production by eliminating barriers based on finances and technicalities [16]. Further evolution of Runway indicates a firm grip on performance acceleration, a characteristic feature of the Christensen model. The platform even starts attracting high-end clients that have ignored it in the past as primitive, as its supporting models become more complex. With this, Runway not only makes the workflow in media more efficient, but it also changes the foundation of visual narrative. This transition represents how generative AI can become a mainstream tool [17]. Just as Suno takes on music, Runway has become not just an assistant to the creative coming up but an agent, provoking the rethinking of the production pipeline itself.

### **3.3 OpenAI Sora (AI Video Generation)**

Sora, developed by OpenAI, marks a radical advancement in video generation by utilizing deep learning models such as diffusion models and transformer structures to produce high-quality, contextualized video content based solely on a text prompt [18]. Although it is still in the early stages of development, Sora presents a glimpse into how, in the future, content production may no longer be so closely linked to all the traditional means of content creation, such as cameras, green screens, or even people-as-actors [18]. Sora applications are already spreading in entertainment, education, and simulation. With Sora, filmmakers can create visual sequences for storyboard, make previsualizations, or even final renders without costly CGI or live action shooting [19]. It allows independent creators to visualize intricate scenes based on simple written instructions, allowing them to evade any common bottlenecks of filmmaking, such as casting, set design, and motion capture.

Sora offers highly effective video generation capabilities coupled with the high adaptability of editing features, providing one of the most versatile tools in AI media production by OpenAI. Its high-quality diffusion model generates text-based video outputs lasting up to 60 seconds, offering several resolutions, styles, and character consistency across scenes [20]. The tools that help creators refine results are Remix, Re-cut, Loop, Blend, Storyboard, and Style Presets. These characteristics enable Sora to accommodate low-budget producers or professional studios alike, in that it can be used to plan a storyboard, market content, and educational illustrations without needing a camera or a crew. Nevertheless, a lack of consistency in complex scenes and the learning curve of new users are limitations of Sora. The watermarking and including metadata can go some way towards meeting authenticity concerns, but problems of authorship and labor implications are unanswered. Today, Sora maintains high-end workflows based on pre-visualization but upsets conventional production within small groups. With its technology maturing, Sora is set to redefine the producer of high-quality video content.

## **4. Synthesis: Innovation Typology of Generative AI Tools**

Analyzing the similarities and differences in synthesizing the three Suno, Runway, and Sora clarifies the generative AI operations in Christensen's context. The three tools all started by attracting non-consumers with low-cost solutions. Suno can be used to create songs by amateurs without studio

resources; Runway can be used to develop cinematic-style effects by those with low budgets, and Sora provides a preview of future video creation capabilities. The statistics on the adoption confirm this disruptive trend, with the low-end users taking up more in the market [21]. At the same time, these tools present sustaining traits. Major studios employ Runway and Suno to optimize existing workflows rather than supplant them, and Sora remains confined to use in pre-production, rather than being deployed for final production. This dynamic demonstrates that generative AI sits at a turning point, sustaining incumbents while disrupting newcomers.

The overall potential of generative AI, identified by the analysis of Suno, Runway, and Sora, reflects sustaining and disruptive dynamics. Suno achieved 12 million users and a half-billion-dollar valuation within a short period, demonstrating how low-cost, accessible, and usable AI can seize new markets and disrupt the traditional music production [12]. Runway, once a tool that appealed only to amateurs, is now used by professionals, demonstrating how disruptive tools ascend the performance curve. Sora is at a relatively low maturity level, but can transform whole film production pipelines as soon as it becomes technologically comparable.

From a sustaining standpoint, these tools benefit incumbents by streamlining workflows, lowering costs, and improving quality. For example, numerous large studios report that AI-powered platforms speed up their editing cycles by 45% [22]. Nonetheless, their disruptive impact lies in lowering the barriers to entry: indie creators leverage the Suno account to release new tracks on Spotify for instance, Mercy On My Grave, Aventus' most-streamed Spotify track passed the 2.4-million listen point is 65.9% Riffusion-generated, with Suno accounting for the remaining 26.5% [23], while small agencies employing Sora witness quicker production times and reduced outsourcing expenses.

Future outcomes will depend on three pivotal factors. The three drivers are the most important to future outcomes. Advancements in technology, like Sora, can create longer, coherent videos, and Suno, capable of producing human-like vocals, will be the key to competitiveness with the professional ones. The market will accept the use of AI, considering user trust, innovative adoption, and the desire to accommodate the AI outputs in the major streams. The policy and regulations on copyright, rights to ethical use, and payment will either speed or stall disruption. Therefore, Suno compares the cases and explains how generative AI can quickly take over a creative industry and democratize production. Runway roles in sustaining and disrupting serve to multiply professionals' output and avenge the threat to the traditional post-production houses. The path of Sora implies change in the industry in the future. Collectively, these tools provide a mixed picture of a hybrid state, where generative AI supports and leads processes. At the same time, the media is being guided toward a different paradigm, with the impact of disruption probably increasing as technology and regulation evolve.

## 5. Challenges, Critiques, and Limitations

The emergence of Generative AI is softened by several interconnected issues that define its disruptive trajectory. The widespread backlash against creative labor is still intense, and the 2023 WGA strike shows the industry-wide concerns about AI that threaten the authorship status of humans [24]. This tension is enhanced by regulatory uncertainty, and different parts of the world with inconsistent laws about IP ownership, attribution, and copyright remain unresolved. Ethical disputes, notably the unconsented replication of voices by AI tools, also highlight the dangers of misuse. Technical limitations also hinder adoption. Existing AI algorithms tend not only to be mixed up in storytelling, lack actual feeling or touch on culture, but are also less reliably used on high-end productions.

Meanwhile, a battle between the production of synthetic media and detection is ongoing. According to Christensen, disruptive technologies usually face such barriers. They can hamper development, but also encourage developers to work better. Problems such as worker pushback, lack of clarity, moral concerns, and technical incompetence do not halt the road of disruption; they are the bumps in the long road that generative AI must pass to achieve success.

## 6. Conclusion

Generative AI is reshaping media similarly to the digitalization of production, except that it has not been disruptive to its full extent. All three companies, Suno, Runway, and Sora, demonstrate early disruption patterns: they reduce barriers, expose creation to new users, and disrupt old business models. Simultaneously, they sustain innovations in large studios, where tools are not applied to replace an existing workflow but enhance it. Among smaller teams and individual producers, such applications are already replacing standard software and cutting down on expenses. The potential future relies on the rate of technology enhancement, policymaking devoted to the idea of copyright and ethical concerns, and the overall acceptance of media created through AI by audiences and professionals. These variables will determine whether generative AI remains an assistant or a complete disruption that changes what people can produce media and who gets paid.

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