

**Equalizer or Enabler:
Investigating Generative AI in Professional Networking
By Reeya Wadhvani**

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has quickly become a transformative tool in professional communications and networking. As AI-powered writing assistance becomes more accessible, these tools are reshaping how individuals can present themselves professionally. The present research addresses this gap by investigating whether generative AI can reduce SES- and gender-based disparities in professional networking communications. 910 participants from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds were asked to identify a professional they hoped to connect with and to write a networking email to that individual. Participants were randomly assigned to either write the email independently or with the assistance of a generative AI tool. Emails were then evaluated on a 7 point scale across multiple dimensions. Across all outcome measures, AI use showed a large statistically significant effect. The models revealed a negative interaction between education level and AI use, meaning that the benefit of AI is greater for participants with lower education levels. Broader literature raises concerns that the benefits of AI may not be evenly distributed. AI alone is insufficient to produce equitable outcomes as individuals must also possess the skills and confidence necessary to convert AI usage into meaningful benefits. Research also highlights gender disparities in AI engagement and how generative AI frequently reflects dominant cultural norms, which encourages standardized forms of professional communication that mirror the styles of already advantaged groups.