

Capturing complex perceptions:  
A case study on consumer responses to brand disclosures about the use of  
AI in content marketing

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## **Abstract**

As artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes content marketing, brands are facing increasing scrutiny over transparency, authenticity, and consumer trust. While AI can be efficient, its role in creative storytelling raises concerns about authenticity and its impact on jobs in the creative field. This study examines consumer, media, and industry responses to AI-generated advertising, focusing on the AI-authorship effect, the idea that audiences react differently to AI-created content depending on its context.

Using a qualitative case study approach, this research analyzes YouTube comments on AI-generated ads from Dove and Coca-Cola, commentary from televised discussions, and insights from industry professionals. Key themes include concerns about authenticity, AI's effect on creative jobs, and consumer preferences for human-driven content. The study provides insights into best practices for AI-related brand messaging, emphasizing the importance of aligning AI adoption with audience expectations to maintain trust and prevent reputational risks.

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# Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping the landscape of creative professions and marketing. In a world where AI can compose music, generate art, and plan marketing campaigns, the relationship between technology and human imagination has become more complicated. As AI continues to develop, it raises questions about the future of jobs, especially those in the creative industry. This calls into question the role of human ingenuity, and the balance between efficiency and artistic expression. This literature review delves into the convoluted relationship of AI and artistry in marketing, focusing on the challenges, opportunities, and concerns that define this ever-changing relationship.

In 2022, ChatGPT, a chatbot powered by a large language model (LLM) based on pre-training transformers (GPT), took the world by storm, leaving many unprepared for its rapid rise and widespread impact (Cambria et al., 2023). This chatbot, available for free, provided many individuals with their first meaningful interaction with AI and its capabilities, blurring the lines surrounding the true definition of AI. As a result, various programs with learning capabilities are now commonly categorized under the umbrella of Artificial Intelligence.

As AI tools like ChatGPT become more integrated into daily life, their use in the marketing industry has expanded, influencing everything from planning and management to creative design. However, the increasing role of AI in marketing raises important questions about transparency. Should marketers disclose the use of AI in their campaigns? While AI can enhance efficiency and creativity, some worry that failing to be upfront about its involvement may lead to negative audience perceptions, risking disengagement or even alienation if consumers feel misled or uneasy with AI-created content.

# Literature Review

## Evolution of AI in Marketing and Advertising

The roots of artificial intelligence (AI) can be traced back to the 1940s, starting with science fiction and wartime innovation. In 1942, Isaac Asimov's story *Runaround* introduced the "Three Laws of Robotics," which imagined rules to keep robots safe and helpful to humans. Around the same time, British mathematician Alan Turing was building *The Bombe*, a machine that cracked the German Enigma code during World War II. The Bombe's success led Turing to wonder if machines could think, which he explored in his 1950 paper introducing the "Turing Test", a way to see if a machine could 'act' intelligently. These early ideas laid the groundwork for today's AI advancements (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019).

In the 1950s and 1960s, researchers began applying AI techniques such as linear programming, game theory, and decision trees to optimize marketing mix and pricing strategies (Jasminara, 2023). This use of AI notes the first attempts to use AI for marketing and advertising.

These early stages of AI in advertising were represented by basic algorithmic recommendations and computerized ad placements. Since the 1940s, AI has grown beyond imagination, but its progress in just the last two years has been particularly transformative. These transformations are seen in the complex applications of AI, such as machine learning models, machine learning models for predictive analytics, large-language models (LLM) for copywriting, and more (Singh & Adhikari, 2023).

Today, AI is deeply woven into our everyday lives, driving advancements in personalized advertising, media, e-commerce, customer service, education, and content creation. This recent

surge in AI's influence is reshaping how we interact, learn, and conduct business on a global scale (Haenlien & Kaplan, 2019).

## **Types of AI in Marketing: Predictive and Generative AI**

The need to understand the implications of AI in marketing is becoming increasingly urgent. A 2024 study by Yahoo and Publicis found that 86% of U.S. marketers are now using AI tools in their work. However, while advertisers embrace AI, consumer acceptance lags behind, 77% of advertisers view AI positively, compared to just 38% of consumers. This gap in sentiment underscores the need for further research to bridge differences in understanding, acceptance, and use of AI across these groups.

One important factor contributing to this divide is the distinction between types of AI, specifically predictive versus generative AI. Many social media users are familiar with algorithms, defined as “a set of steps that a computer can follow to perform a task” (Castelo et al., 2019), which are commonly used to standardize and personalize advertising. An example of this is seen with Spotify, a popular music streaming platform, which uses predictive AI to create personalized playlists based on moods, goals, or activities (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024). Despite the tailored experience predictive AI offers, a 2023 Statista study shows that Americans are increasingly uncomfortable with AI-targeted social media, with comfort levels dropping from those reported in 2022.

Part of consumer discomfort with social media algorithms stems from the perception that these algorithms prioritize corporate gains over consumer interests (Castelo et al., 2023). This discomfort often leads to ‘algorithm aversion,’ showing a preference for human decision-making, even when algorithms are objectively more effective. This aversion arises from various

factors, including individual personality traits, concerns about authenticity and morality in algorithmic choices, and worries over privacy-related issues (Dietvorst et al., 2015).

As predictive AI becomes more common, the emergence of generative AI is reshaping how content is created and delivered. Generative AI (GenAI) applications such as ChatGPT, Dall-E, and Bard have set a new benchmark in AI innovation and advertising use. Some companies proudly showcase their use of AI as a ‘badge of honor,’ while others choose not to disclose it, raising ethical questions about transparency and consumer trust (Kirk & Givi, 2025). Unlike predictive algorithms that rely on existing data to make recommendations, generative AI can produce entirely new content such as text, images, and even videos (Susarla et al., 2023). These are all designed to engage consumers in new ways, opening new doors for personalized advertising. However, this brings forward unique challenges, especially concerning authenticity, ethical considerations, and the evolving expectations of consumers who may be wary of AI-driven interactions (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024).

## **AI-Authorship Effect**

Central to this report is the ‘AI-authorship effect’, a concept introduced by Kirk and Givi (2025) to capture the complex emotional responses consumers experience when they realize or suspect that content has been generated by AI instead of a human. Kirk and Givi’s research suggests that AI-authored communications, particularly those involving emotional content, can evoke moral discomfort and perceptions of inauthenticity among consumers, leading to decreased positive word of mouth and diminished brand loyalty. This concept provides a viewpoint to explore the overlap in AI use, authenticity, and consumer trust, which is a focus that is critical to understanding the evolving dynamics between brands and consumers in the age of AI.

Knowing how GenAI is changing the media industry, it can be assumed that consumer reaction can either grow increasingly more positive or negative due to GenAI's human-like performance (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024; Kirk & Givi, 2025). Consumers often prioritize 'authentic' experiences and social interactions with others. Lehman et al. (2019) as cited in Jago et al. (2022), found that individuals place the highest value on authenticity in human interactions compared to other areas of their lives.

According to the study done by Kirk & Givi (2025), factual communications, which don't aim to express emotions, are less likely to appear inauthentic when authored by AI, as they lack the internal-external mismatch found in emotional messaging. However, companies often rely on emotionally engaging content to build strong connections with customers and foster brand loyalty. This research highlights the potential risk companies face if they fail to disclose the use of AI in content creation, which is later discovered, whether through leaks, legal action, or new methods for identifying AI-generated patterns in communication.

This report uses Kirk and Givi's (2025) 'AI-authorship effect' as a guiding framework, examining how consumer perceptions of authenticity and transparency influence their trust in brands that employ AI-driven content. By applying this framework, the report seeks to assess how awareness of AI authorship impacts consumer attitudes, loyalty, and expectations for ethical disclosure. Ultimately, Kirk and Givi's work provides a theoretical foundation for investigating how brands can navigate the fine line between innovation and authenticity in their use of AI for marketing communications.

## **Consumer Perceptions of AI in Marketing**

There have been increasing calls for companies to be more transparent about AI-generated content. Growing regulations, such as the European Union AI Act (European

Commission, 2024) and pending U.S. legislation (Levi et al., 2024), along with consumer demands for authenticity and transparency, showcase the urgency of clear AI disclosure practices.

When asked about their thoughts on AI, 75% of consumers agreed that AI needs to be better regulated, and 72% said that it makes it difficult to identify authentic messaging (Yahoo, 2024).

## **Disclosure of AI Use**

Research on consumer perceptions of AI use remains limited, especially in qualitative analysis. Foundational studies, such as the Yahoo and Publicis report and Kirk and Givi's concept of the AI-authorship effect, provide critical quantitative insights that stress the challenges and importance of consumer trust and disclosure in AI-driven marketing. For example, the Yahoo and Publicis report (2024) examined the impact of AI disclosure on consumer acceptance of AI-generated imagery. Their findings indicate that when AI disclosures were noticed by approximately 25% of consumers, there was a 30% increase in positive perceptions, trust, and comfort with AI content (p. 30). Additionally, they found that disclosing AI use in their advertising boosted ad appeal and trust, which in turn equated to a significant boost in overall brand trust (p. 31).

Similarly, to the Yahoo and Publicis study, Kirk and Givi's 'AI-authorship effect' (2025) showcases that consumers often react with moral discomfort and skepticism when they discover or even suspect that content is AI-generated. These findings point to gaps in current understanding and reveal a need for deeper qualitative exploration. Such research could provide richer insight into the psychological and emotional responses driving consumer acceptance or

rejection of AI, thereby helping brands navigate the complexities of trust and authenticity about the use of AI in advertising.

## Authenticity Theory

Communicators are facing a critical question: under what circumstances might AI-generated communications reduce negative consumer reactions or even outperform human-authored content? Authenticity theory suggests that consumer perceptions of authenticity play a crucial role in shaping responses to AI-generated communications. Drawing on this theory, Kirk & Givi (2025) propose four key moderators that could influence consumer acceptance of AI in marketing (Fig. 1). Their model highlights how factors such as content type (e.g. factual vs. emotional) and the specific role of AI in content creation (e.g. editing vs. full authorship) can impact perceived authenticity, moral reactions, and ultimately, customer loyalty and word of mouth.

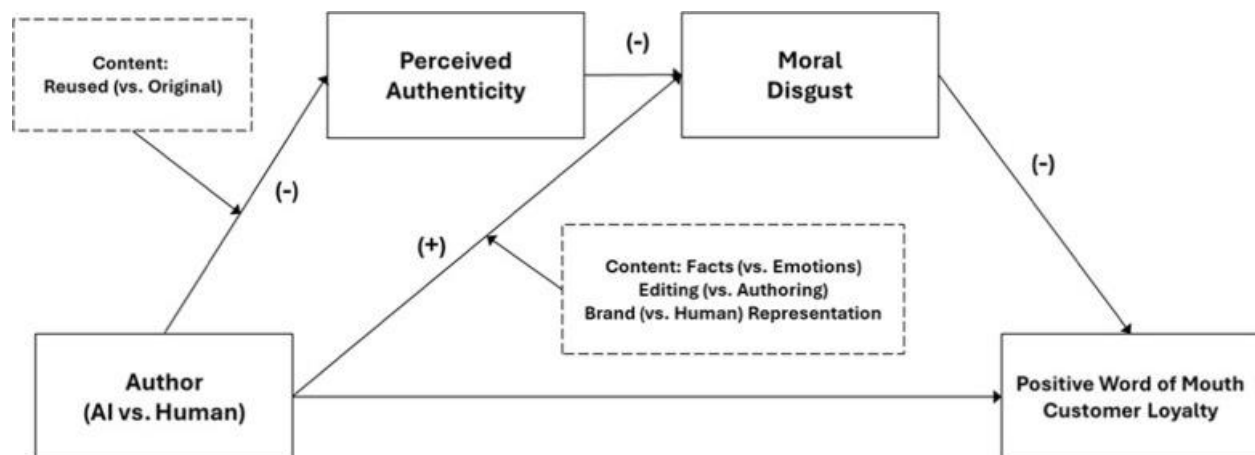


Figure 1: Theoretical Model (Kirk & Givi, 2025)

## Research Questions

Building on the insights from the literature review, the study aimed to address the following research questions:

**RQ1: How do consumer responses, media coverage, and industry commentary align or differ in their perceptions of a brand's adoption or rejection of AI?**

**RQ2: What ethical concerns emerge across consumer, media, and industry commentary regarding AI in marketing?**

**RQ3: What factors should brands consider when developing AI-related messaging to align with public sentiment and industry expectations?**

## Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach framed as a case study. According to Heale & Twycross (2018), case study methodology defines the case, reviews existing literature and media, and analyzes qualitative data to identify emerging themes. In this study, triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility and validity of the research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). This approach was well-suited for the study, as it enabled a thorough investigation of consumer responses to AI in branding by examining how specific brands constructed and communicated their AI-related messaging.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis was followed, allowing for an in-depth exploration of consumer sentiment, engagement patterns, and discourse surrounding AI-driven marketing strategies. Due to the increasing role of social media in shaping public perception, YouTube was selected as the primary platform for analysis due to its substantial user base and growing importance as a consumer destination, especially in light of the potential TikTok ban in the United States. A 2025 Group RFZ study found that YouTube is emerging as a

preferred alternative, with 46% of surveyed users indicating that they would increase their YouTube usage. This shift places YouTube as an essential platform for studying consumer engagement with brand messaging.

## **Sample Selection**

The study focused on two brands, Dove and Coca-Cola, which represent contrasting approaches to AI in marketing. Dove has rejected AI-generated models and emphasizes authenticity in its campaigns, while Coca-Cola has seemingly embraced AI as a tool for creative expression (based on its 2024 Christmas AI-generated advertisement). These two brands provided a stark contrast for analyzing consumer responses to AI-related brand disclosures.

## **Data Sources and Justification**

Each source was selected to capture different yet related perspectives, allowing for data triangulation and a deeper understanding of public discourse regarding AI use in marketing. Brand messaging was examined through selected YouTube videos, as they have served as a brand communication tool and can offer potential insights into how AI-related narratives are created (Sheikh, 2024). On these videos, consumer responses were assessed through comments and engagement metrics, which provide organic, unfiltered reactions that reflect public sentiment.

Alongside this, media coverage (e.g., *The Today Show*) is included to capture various perspectives. These media narratives play a significant role in shaping public perception and provide insight into broader industry discussions. Further, industry thought leadership was analyzed through *AdAge* articles, which offered a professional assessment of AI-driven branding strategies and their potential and/or current impact.

These data sources were triangulated to help identify areas of alignment or variation between public reception and expert opinions, enhancing the study's validity and depth (Hollweck & Yin, 2014). Each source was selected to capture different yet related perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of public discourse regarding AI in marketing.

Understanding the evolving nature of AI and its use, this study took an emergent approach, remaining open to including additional sources as they become relevant or influential. As new discussions, reports, or industry statements arise, they will be integrated to ensure a current and comprehensive analysis.

Methodological inspiration was drawn from Anna Madison's thesis, which combined phenomenological descriptive methodology with thematic analysis to examine social media users' perceptions. Madison's approach aligns with this research by facilitating an in-depth exploration of how consumers interact with AI-related brand disclosures.

The thematic analysis was conducted in four stages, using multiple data sources, allowing data triangulation, a key benefit to the exploratory nature of the case study method (Noble & Heale, 2019; Yin, 2003):

1. **Brand Messaging:** The selected YouTube videos (one from Dove and one from Coca-Cola) were analyzed to identify key themes related to each brand's messaging on AI. Particular attention was given to how Dove positions its rejection of AI and how Coca-Cola integrates AI into its creative process.
2. **Consumer Response:** Viewer comments will be sorted by *the Top Comments* on YouTube, and every third comment was selected until there are 15 comments per video. Interaction metrics such as views, likes, and shares will be recorded to note overall audience engagement and the broader reach of each brand's AI messaging. Accounting for this provided insight into how

consumers are interpreting and responding to AI in marketing, revealing dominant themes, concerns, and attitudes that are currently shaping public discourse.

3. **Commentary:** Media coverage from mainstream outlets (e.g. The *Today Show*) was included in the analysis, as these segments provide commentary on the more general implications of AI in marketing (one video for each brand).
4. **Industry Thought Leaders:** One article from *AdAge* for each brand, offering additional insight into how AI-related brand strategies are perceived.

## Study Considerations

Given the emergent nature of qualitative research, this study remained flexible in its approach, allowing themes to develop as data were analyzed. Case studies stress developmental factors, meaning that if additional relevant data points arise, such as additional brand statements, these will be incorporated to improve findings (Flyvbjerg, 2011). By integrating consumer reactions, media commentary, and brand positions, this study seeks to provide a well-rounded understanding of the current public discourse surrounding AI and its use in marketing.

## Researcher Positionality

As the researcher conducting this study, I recognize that my background, experiences, and perspectives shape my approach to analyzing consumer perceptions of AI in marketing. My academic background in Mass Communications and Strategic Communication has provided me with a foundation in media analysis, branding, and audience engagement, which influences how I interpret brand messaging and consumer sentiment. My professional experience in branding, content creation, and digital marketing also informs my understanding of how AI is positioned within marketing strategies and public discourse.

I approach this research with an awareness of the ethical and transparency concerns surrounding AI in marketing, particularly in how brands navigate authenticity and audience trust. While I acknowledge the potential of AI as a creative tool, I also recognize the skepticism that exists among consumers, especially regarding AI-authored content and brand transparency. My interest in this topic is driven by both scholarly inquiry and industry relevance as AI continues to reshape digital marketing practices.

To avoid potential biases, I have employed thematic analysis with data triangulation, incorporating consumer responses, media narratives, and industry perspectives to ensure a balanced interpretation of findings. By analyzing multiple sources, I aim to present an objective, well-rounded perspective on how AI is shaping consumer-brand relationships in marketing.

## **Background: Selected Cases Dove and Coca-Cola**

Dove has a history of championing themselves as an advocate for authenticity and body positivity, setting itself apart from traditional beauty brands that often rely on idealized and heavily edited imagery. Since their 2004 “Real Beauty” campaign, Dove has focused on elevating natural beauty and challenging ‘unrealistic’ beauty standards. This commitment extends to its stance on artificial intelligence in marketing, as the brand actively rejects AI-generated models in favor of showcasing real people.

Coca-Cola has built a reputation for blending nostalgia with innovation, using emotionally driven marketing to maintain its status as a globally recognized brand (Pereira, 2024). Well-known campaigns, like the 1995 “Holidays Are Coming” ad, have played a key role in shaping consumer sentiment and brand loyalty. Coca-Cola has long been at the forefront of adopting new marketing technologies. In 2020, the company made an initial \$250 million investment in AI-driven innovation and later strengthened its commitment by allocating \$1.1 billion to expand its partnership with Microsoft, leveraging cloud-based and generative AI capabilities to enhance its marketing strategies (Dominguez, 2024).

### **The Original Advertisements**

#### **Dove – “The Code” (2024)**

Dove’s “The Code” campaign was designed to highlight the influence of artificial intelligence on beauty standards (Dove). The advertisement begins by prompting AI to generate images of “the most beautiful woman in the world” (the results show a stereotypical thin, blonde, and white woman). It then contrasts these images with AI-generated results from the prompt “The most beautiful woman in the world, according to Dove Real Beauty Ad,” which then goes

on to show a myriad of diverse women with more realistic features. The commercial also includes a flashback to Dove's original 2004 Real Beauty campaign, reinforcing the brand's long-standing dedication to authenticity and inclusivity in advertising.

One notable aspect of this campaign is that Dove disabled comments on the original YouTube video, limiting direct audience engagement on the platform. This decision restricts the ability to assess organic consumer reactions through YouTube comments, requiring an analysis of media coverage and industry perspectives instead.

The original advertisement is available online and has been linked in this report for reference (see Appendix A).

### **Coca-Cola – AI-Generated “Holidays Are Coming” (2024)**

Coca-Cola debuted its first AI-generated television advertisements in 2024, marking a significant step in the company's use of generative AI for large-scale marketing. The campaign included three AI-produced holiday commercials. The commercials are an update to Coca-Cola's classic 1995 “Holidays Are Coming” advertisement, a well-known spot featuring a line of Christmas-lit Coca-Cola trucks traveling through a snowy landscape.

In a Forbes article, “Coca-Cola's AI-Generated Ad Controversy, Explained,” Dani Di Placido discusses how Coca-Cola collaborated with three AI studios to develop the campaign: Secret Level, Silverside AI, and The Wild Card (2024). The goal being to recreate the iconic holiday advertisement entirely with AI. While the AI-generated commercial closely follows the visual and musical elements of the 1995 version, featuring winter landscapes, animated polar bears, and Coca-Cola trucks, it is much faster, due to its use of generative AI (Di Placido, 2024). The full Coca-Cola AI-generated holiday advertisement can be viewed online and is linked in Appendix A.

Unlike Dove, Coca-Cola allowed YouTube comments on the advertisement, making it possible to analyze direct audience feedback, but this led to widespread consumer backlash. Many viewers criticized the ad for lacking human touch, undermining nostalgia, and prioritizing cost-cutting over creativity. This reaction is evident in Table 1, which includes direct consumer feedback from the original YouTube video.

## Data Analysis

This study applies thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore how AI in marketing is perceived across brand messaging, consumer responses, and industry insights. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the comments and videos. The comments were read through multiple times and themes were noted as they emerged. Using triangulation, the analysis incorporates YouTube comments, media coverage, and industry perspectives to identify key themes related to authenticity, transparency, and trust.

**Table 1: *Coca-Cola The Holiday is Coming* Comments**

| Comment #: | User comment:                                                                                                            | Likes/Engagement:     |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1          | “Nothing says real magic like an ai advert. Great job multi-billion dollar company, really giving off Christmas spirit.” | 88 likes              |
| 2          | “You can afford to hire artists who would put more soul into the ad than any machine could ever do”                      | 23 likes   9 replies  |
| 3          | “The 70’s - “Coke Adds Life.”<br>“2024 - Coke Subtracts Life.”                                                           | 690 likes   8 replies |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                         |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4  | “‘Always the real thing’ OH the IRONY [rolling on the floor laughing emoji]”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 2.9k likes   16 replies |
| 5  | “I don’t know why everyone’s saying this ad’s so terrible. Best Pepsi commercial I’ve seen in a while”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 2.4k likes   24 replies |
| 6  | <p>“Being someone who greatly enjoys the old Coca-Cola polar bear commercials, even if some are pretty rough around the edges and haven’t aged well, this is not only depressing but embarrassing.</p> <p>At least with those old ads, part of their charm was the fact you could tell a human being was genuinely trying to push the technology to its limits and make something memorable. This has none of that.”</p> | 16 likes                |
| 7  | <p>“‘Created by Real Magic AI’</p> <p>We can tell man it looks soulless as hell”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 8.7k likes   48 replies |
| 8  | “As a 3D artist it fills my heart with joy to see the general public spitting on the AI generated ad in the comments [smiling emoji]”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 3k likes   37 replies   |
| 9  | “I bought a Pepsi today because of this ad. You’re one of the most successful companies on the planet. Hire some animators.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1.3k likes   9 replies  |
| 10 | <p>“0:07 You've managed to spell "Coca Cola" as "Coca loola" and "C Ca"</p> <p>0:09 The trucks further from the camera are disfigured</p> <p>0:12 The truck has more lights in the reflection than in the actual truck</p> <p>0:13 The dogs tail clips through it's body</p>                                                                                                                                             | 524 likes   8 replies   |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                          |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
|    | <p>0:14 The trucks front grills aren't symmetrical, the third truck doesn't have a cabin</p> <p>0:16 The trucks wheels are not spinning, the lights on top move on their own, one of the front grills is horizontal and the others is a grid pattern, the second truck has 5 wheels</p> <p>0:20 The televisions buttons and the lines under the buttons look cursed</p> <p>0:21 The terrain on the left is disfigured</p> <p>0:25 All the trucks aren't matching and their dimensions change, the truck in the middle has 4.5 wheels, and the truck in front of it doesn't have it's wheels aligned either</p> <p>Yup, another well made ad using garbage that shouldn't be used to create art.”</p> |                          |
| 11 | <p>“It’s wild how unnatural this whole thing looks and feels and yet these mega corporations insist upon it because of its “efficiency” which we all know is just code for being cheap.”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 3.2k likes   37 replies  |
| 12 | <p>“Nothing like celebrating the spirit of Christmas with the most soulless commercial possible.”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 7.6k likes   37 replies  |
| 13 | <p>“As an aspiring animator/concept artist, it’s really disheartening to see companies do this, but it’s nice to see the negative feedback on it. Gives me some hope.”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 7.1k likes   100 replies |
| 14 | <p>“We all owe an apology to that grubhub commercial 4 years ago”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 294 likes   4 replies    |
| 15 | <p>“The irony of the ‘Real Magic’ tagline at the end of a fake commercial.”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 10k likes   32 replies   |

## Commentary: The *Today Show* Coca-Cola

The *Today Show* covered both Dove’s and Coca-Cola’s AI-related advertisements, providing insight into their contrasting approaches. The *Today Show* segment, *Coca-Cola’s AI-Generated TV Holiday Ad Falls Flat with Consumers*, takes viewers through the advertisement in a similar manner. The full segment from the *Today Show* is linked in Appendix A for reference.

This segment highlights the backlash Coca-Cola is facing, particularly through TikTok response videos where users voice their disappointment—especially poignant given the nostalgic significance of holiday ads. The segment draws a comparison to the AI-generated Toys “R” Us ad, which faced similar criticism earlier in 2024.

Marketing professor Marcus Collins of the University of Michigan joins the conversation to offer his perspective into why brands are so quick to adopt generative AI. He points to the broader industry trend of ‘doing more with less.’ The *Today Show* notes that Coca-Cola’s ad ultimately “fizzled out and fell flat with consumers,” a reaction echoed in the commentary summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: *Today Show*: “Coca-Cola’s AI-generated TV holiday ad falls flat with consumers” Comments**

| Comment #: | User comment:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Likes/Engagement:     |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1          | “This company has over 40 million dollars and they could’ve just pay real actors, CGI artists, editors, and prop artists to recreate this old Christmas commercial, but no they created the laziest and lifeless commercial I have ever seen. I feel like spending millions of dollars means | 156 likes   2 replies |

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                         |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|   | <p>NOTHING to them, so why put or invest everything into AI?</p> <p>Also I'm sorry Toy R' Us, "Remarkable speed and efficiency"? Bruh YOU HAVE A LOT OF FREE TIME AND MONEY TO PRODUCE A COMMERCIAL! If you want speed, then you could've freaking planned it earlier before the initial release dare OR even readjust the dare to give you more free time! I DON'T GET IT!</p> <p>[Expressionless Face emoji]"</p> |                         |
| 2 | <p>"Holidays are also about memories. That's why the nostalgic Christmas songs are always great. To keep that vibe alive DON'T use AI! USE REAL PEOPLE! LIKE IN THE OLD DAYS! GIVE REAL PEOPLE JOBS!</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 188 likes   2 replies   |
| 3 | <p>"AI lacks the one thing it will never have...humanity."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 175 likes   4 replies   |
| 4 | <p>"Now's the time for companies that care, to start promoting something like, 'Done by real humans, not AI'"</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 65 likes                |
| 5 | <p>"This will make me SKIP ADS more, too much AI on everything nowadays nothing is real anymore."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 77 likes   2 replies    |
| 6 | <p>"I don't wanna see AI-generated ads made by major companies on TV or on the internet. It's very unauthentic."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 51 likes   1 reply      |
| 7 | <p>"this is the best Pepsi commercial ever."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1.5k likes   28 replies |
| 8 | <p>"I think that the issue is that people still want a touch of authenticity.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 497 likes   12 replies  |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                         |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|    | Too much digital, not enough humanity.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                         |
| 9  | “Pay some actors and film professionals you greedy corporate hacks!”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1.6k likes   28 replies |
| 10 | “I work as a 3D animator, but I may have to consider a career change. I wasted ten years going to school to learn animation. After I graduated in December 2018, I did a one month contract at Brazen. Next, I worked at Pixar as an animation intern in Summer 2019. San Francisco Bay Area is beautiful and that was one of the best experiences of my life. I was jobless for over a year. I worked at Deck Nine Games as a junior animator from December 2021 to May 2023. Layoffs happened. Layoffs are happening all across animation, film, games, and tech fields. Most people don't know this, but over 100 employees at Pixar were laid off when Inside Out 2 released. I met many of the animators when I was there. Ay-Eye is definitely going to be a problem with artists. I'm running out of money and I'm dealing with long term health dizziness problems. Yeah. Life...” | 1.2k likes   63 replies |
| 11 | “Creativity is one of the things that everyone says they value but it’s the first thing everyone tries to get for free.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 547 likes   6 replies   |
| 12 | “‘The polar bears were never real.’ True, but they were animated by artists —so, THEY FELT REAL. In contrast, the AI commercial feels like a soulless, dystopian nightmare.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1.8k likes   27 replies |
| 13 | “‘Remarkable speed and efficiency’ = being cheap and not wanting to pay artists for good quality work”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 4.8k likes   62 replies |

|    |                                                                                                                             |                         |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 14 | “Companies are now too cheap to pay to make proper ads and too busy paying their top exec fat bonuses before the holidays.” | 7.8k likes   53 replies |
| 15 | “If Pepsi doesn’t poke fun at this ad, then they’ve missed a golden opportunity to capitalize on this controversy”          | 8.3k likes   72 replies |

### **Industry Thought Leader Insights: Coca-Cola**

Coca-Cola’s embrace of AI for its 2024 holiday campaign sparked a discussion that AdAge covered while seeking multiple points of view (the original article is linked in Appendix B). While experts acknowledge that AI allowed for greater production efficiency and creative experimentation, they argue that the campaign ultimately lacked the emotional depth and authenticity expected from Coca-Cola’s nostalgic holiday ads (Sloane & Nudd, 2024). This raises a broader debate in the industry: Can AI-generated content replicate the warmth of human storytelling? While AI can be a powerful tool, brands must use it carefully to avoid alienating audiences who seek genuine emotional connections. Coca-Cola’s campaign serves as a cautionary example of how AI’s integration into marketing must be strategically aligned with consumer expectations to prevent backlash (Sloane, 2024).

### **Commentary: The *Today Show* Dove**

In the TODAY exclusive: “Dove Takes a Stand Against Using AI in Ads,” the segment explores Dove’s brand identity, its opposition to AI in advertising, and the messaging behind *The Code* campaign. The discussion highlights the growing pressures women face with the rise of AI-generated content, noting that one out of every three women feel compelled to alter their appearance, even when they know the images they see are artificial.

The segment also features a mother advocating for clear labeling of AI-altered content, highlighting its potential harm to young audiences. She shared a personal story, where she explained that she believes that AI-generated imagery played a role in her daughter’s struggle with anorexia. Her testimony led to a broader discussion about an online petition, signed by over 12,000 parents, urging TikTok to clearly label AI-generated influencers. Autumn Walsh, a trauma specialist at the Counseling and Wellness Center of Pittsburgh, further explained how these ‘unattainable’ beauty standards can damage one’s self-image, particularly among young consumers. The overarching theme of the discussion echoes the backlash beauty brands have faced for adopting AI, often as a cost-cutting measure, citing examples such as Levi’s controversial use of AI-generated models.

Unlike Dove’s own advertisement, which had comments disabled, the *Today Show* allowed public discourse on its YouTube video, enabling users to voice their thoughts on Dove’s stance. These reactions, captured in Table 3, provide insight into how audiences engaged with the discussion, revealing a mix of support, skepticism, and broader concerns about AI’s role in advertising.

**Table 3: *Today Show*: “TODAY exclusive: Dove takes a stand against using AI in ads” Comments**

| <b>Comment #:</b> | <b>User comment:</b>                                                                                                              | <b>Likes/Engagement:</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                 | “Can these companies not use ai in ads as it could eventually take away jobs from models and voice actors who love what they do.” | 1 likes                  |
| 2                 | “AI-generated models in advertisements? [10 thumbs down emojis]”                                                                  | 16 likes   2 replies     |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 3  | “Actual Dove W.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0                    |
| 4  | <p>“How is A.I any different than body modifications like breast impants, Botox, BBL, etc.?</p> <p>Both are perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards. So to be fair, I don’t have a problem with it anymore than I already have a problem with Plastic Surgery lol. Nice try though silly rabbits.....but tricks are for kids.”</p> | 8 likes              |
| 5  | “This makes me wonder why do beauty and appearance affect women more than men?”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 7 likes   8 replies  |
| 6  | “I love how angry this ad is making people”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 1 like               |
| 7  | <p>“I first saw this ad on tc. Moved me to tears. We should not be provoked to ascend to a level of beauty that cannot be obtained. We must learn to be comfortable within ourselves. From the looks of it, most comporations don’t care about the morality of it. But thank you Dove for caring.”</p>                               | 1 like               |
| 8  | “They were the first with body positivity, now this. Good for them!”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 14 likes   2 replies |
| 9  | <p>“Photo reimaging with AI or Photoshop needs to stop. Why can’t we just accept what we REALLY look like?</p> <p>When Gen-Z has grandchildren, they will ask “Why are all the photos of you taken sitting in a car with a photo filter?”</p> <p>What did you really look like grandmother?”</p>                                     | 14 likes             |
| 10 | “LOVE the new commercial. I don’t currently use Dove, however this commercial makes me want to switch. well done Dove.”                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 0                    |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                    |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 11 | “Are we clearly labeling images altered with Photoshop?It’s funny how AI scares people so much even when it’s doing things that were already possible even decades ago”                                               | 4 likes   1 reply  |
| 12 | “This woke bs is unreal [crying laughing emoji] it’s literally AI, not everyone is going to be super models”                                                                                                          | 3 likes            |
| 13 | “I feel it is no right for Dove to use AI and have real modules...[worried face emoji]”                                                                                                                               | 1 like             |
| 14 | “What’s wrong with being a beautiful white woman? AI has recently been producing images of black and Asian kings in medieval periods...I hear no one complaining about that..again it’s okay to be racist to whites!” | 11 likes           |
| 15 | “good for them! other companies should have the balls to do what Dove has done”                                                                                                                                       | 21 likes   1 reply |

### Industry Thought Leaders’ Insights: Dove

Expert commentary from *AdAge* highlights the contrasting strategies of Dove and Coca-Cola. Full *AdAge* articles referenced here are linked in Appendix B. Dove’s decision to reject AI-generated models aligns with its long-established brand identity centered on authenticity and inclusivity. Phoebe Bain of *AdAge* emphasizes that this move strengthens consumer trust by maintaining consistency with Dove’s “Real Beauty” messaging (2024). The campaign also taps into broader concerns about AI’s impact on beauty standards, reinforcing Dove’s position as a leader in ethical advertising. However, due to the ever-changing nature of AI, Asa Hiken, a technology reporter for *AdAge*, cautions that brands taking strong stances on AI must be mindful

of “AI-washing”, a phenomenon where companies exaggerate their ethical commitments for marketing gain (2024).

## Findings

### Emerging Themes in YouTube Comments

Analysis of YouTube comments reveals several recurring themes that reflect consumer sentiment regarding AI-generated advertisements. The themes of authenticity vs. artificiality, impact on jobs and creativity, corporate cost-cutting, consumer preferences for authenticity, and ethical advertising also emerge in media coverage and industry commentary, highlighting broader concerns about AI's role in branding.

- **Authenticity vs. Artificiality:** An overall theme across the comments is the tension between authenticity and artificiality. Many users critique Coca-Cola’s AI-generated holiday advertisement for lacking human creativity and emotional resonance. As one commenter notes, “The AI commercial feels like a soulless, dystopian nightmare,” emphasizing a perceived lack of effort in the advertisement (see Table 3, Comment 12). The irony of Coca-Cola branding the advertisement as “Real Magic AI” is highlighted in several comments, suggesting a contradiction between the brand’s traditional messaging and the use of artificial intelligence (see Table 1, Comments 4 & 15). Nostalgia plays a role in consumer dissatisfaction, with many users thinking back to past Coca-Cola commercials that, despite their technical limitations, conveyed a sense of human creativity.
- **Impact on Jobs and Creativity:** Another recurring concern is the effect of AI-generated content on employment in creative industries. Multiple comments express fears that AI

will replace human artists, animators, and voice actors, resulting in job losses. One user, identifying as a 3D animator, writes about their struggle to find work amidst industry layoffs, pointing out that AI adoption is aggravating this issue (see Table 3, Comment 10). Additionally, users criticize the devaluation of human creativity, arguing that companies should invest in skilled professionals rather than relying on AI to cut costs (see Table 1, Comment 2; Table 2, Comment 1; Table 3, Comments 1 & 9).

- **Cost-Cutting and Corporate Greed:** Corporate prioritization of AI for financial reasons is a central critique in the comments. Many users argue that large corporations, despite their financial capabilities, spring for AI-generated advertisements to reduce production costs. Phrases such as “remarkable speed and efficiency” are called out as euphemisms for cost-cutting at the expense of quality and authenticity (see Table 3, Comment 13).
- **Consumer Choices for Authenticity:** Many comments highlight consumer preferences for advertisements featuring real people rather than AI-generated imagery. The emotional and nostalgic aspects of holiday marketing are cited as reasons why traditional methods are more effective (see Table 3, Comment 2). Additionally, Coca-Cola’s AI-generated ad is compared to Pepsi’s advertising, with commenters sarcastically calling it “the best Pepsi commercial” due to its perceived failure to connect with consumers (see Table 1, Comment 5; Table 3, Comment 7).
- **Support for Ethical Advertising:** In contrast to the backlash against Coca-Cola’s AI advertisement, several users praise Dove for its stance against AI-generated beauty standards (see Table 2). Some comments commend the brand for continuing its commitment to body positivity, while others argue that AI-driven modifications in advertisements are merely a continuation of existing beauty industry practices. This could

signify a broader skepticism about the authenticity of corporate ethics in advertising (see Table 2, Comment 4).

### **Connecting Emerging Themes to Media and Industry Commentary**

The themes identified in consumer comments were also reflected in media coverage and industry analysis. While consumer sentiment tends to be more emotionally driven, media reports frame AI adoption as a strategic decision that can either enhance or undermine a brand's reputation. Industry experts offer a more divided perspective, weighing AI's efficiency and cost benefits against its potential to erode trust and authenticity. These ideas are expanded upon in the following section.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

#### **RQ1: How do consumer responses, media coverage, and industry commentary align or differ in their perceptions of a brand's adoption or rejection of AI?**

Consumers reacted positively to Dove's rejection of AI, with many praising the brand for maintaining ethical advertising practices and promoting authenticity (see Table 2). Some saw this stance as an extension of Dove's long-standing commitment to body positivity and real beauty. However, a few commenters were suspicious of whether this was a marketing tactic rather than a genuine ethical position (see Table 2, Comments 4 & 11).

Contrastingly, Coca-Cola's AI-generated holiday ad faced overwhelming backlash, particularly due to the brand's use of nostalgia, which many consumers felt was undermined by AI's lack of a human touch. The "Real Magic AI" tagline was widely mocked as ironic, and viewers expressed disappointment that a brand historically associated with heartfelt, human-driven holiday campaigns had opted for AI-generated content instead (See Table 1).

Media coverage reflected a mix of skepticism and strategic analysis. Articles on Dove's campaign framed the move as a brand differentiator, positioning the company as a leader in ethical marketing. Meanwhile, Coca-Cola's ad was largely criticized, with media outlets emphasizing the negative consumer response and highlighting concerns about AI's role in storytelling.

Industry commentary was more divided, with some experts acknowledging AI's efficiency in marketing while others cautioned against its potential to erode brand trust when used insensitively.

## **RQ2: What ethical concerns emerge across consumer, media, and industry commentary regarding AI in marketing?**

The AI-authorship effect suggests that consumers react differently to AI-generated content based on the context in which it is used. Research by Kirk & Givi (2025) indicates that AI is generally more accepted for factual or data-driven content but faces resistance when used for emotional storytelling or creative expression. This distinction is evident in consumer responses to Coca-Cola's ad, where AI's presence in a nostalgia-driven holiday campaign was viewed as inauthentic.

### **Key Ethical Concerns:**

- **Authenticity & Transparency:** Consumers expect brands to disclose AI's role in content creation. Dove's open rejection of AI was well received, while Coca-Cola's AI use, though disclosed, was perceived as contradictory to its brand identity/intended message.

- **Trust & Manipulation:** AI-generated content raises concerns about how brands manipulate emotions and consumer perceptions. If AI is used to create “human-like” emotional appeals, it risks misleading audiences by manufacturing authenticity. This would include “AI-washing”, with companies potentially misleading audiences by falsely portraying their AI ethics. This is similar to “greenwashing”, where companies position themselves as environmentally responsible.
- **AI Replacing Human Creativity:** The concern that AI-driven marketing devalues human artistry and leads to job losses was a significant theme in consumer backlash. Many commenters expressed frustration that large brands prioritize AI for cost-cutting rather than investing in creative professionals.

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**“Creativity is one of the things that everyone says they value but it’s the first thing everyone tries to get for free.”**

*(See Table 3, Comment 11)*

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The above comment reflects a broader ethical concern about the devaluation of creative labor. While brands frequently promote the importance of artistry and originality, the increasing reliance on AI-generated content suggests a willingness to prioritize cost-cutting over human creativity. This issue is particularly relevant for large corporations like Coca-Cola, which have the financial capacity to invest in human talent but instead choose AI for efficiency (see Table 3, Comment 1). The backlash against Coca-Cola’s AI-generated holiday ad reveals a growing consumer skepticism about whether companies truly value creativity or simply use it as a buzzword of sorts while reducing investment in real artists, animators, and designers.

This concern ties into the ethical responsibility of AI adoption, as brands must consider not only how AI enhances efficiency but also whether it leads to a decrease in opportunities for creative professionals.

**RQ3: What factors should brands consider when developing AI-related messaging to align with public sentiment and industry expectations?**

By looking at the contrasting responses from the Dove and Coca-Cola videos, there are key areas of concern regarding AI-related messaging. Firstly, it involves the overall context and the purpose of AI use. Consumers are more receptive to AI when it enhances efficiency rather than when it replaces human jobs and creativity (e.g., storytelling). Brands must clearly define AI's role and limitations in their messaging.

Alongside this, brands should seek to proactively communicate why and how AI is used to build and retain trust. Dove's campaign worked because it reinforced an existing brand value (authenticity), while Coca-Cola's AI messaging appeared to clash with its traditional holiday campaigns. This is evident in Table 1, Comment 6, and Table 3, Comment 12, where users reflect on the Coca-Cola polar bears, noting that despite being animated, they still felt 'real'. This sentiment suggests that authenticity is not solely about realism but rather about the knowledge that a human was behind the product.

By balancing innovation with emotional connection, brands can prevent alienating audiences who value human touch and creativity. The goal of incorporating emerging technologies like generative AI should be to enhance, not replace, human-driven storytelling. This approach prioritizes real emotional engagement, aligning with authenticity theory, which highlights consumers' increasing desire for real, meaningful connections, especially in a media landscape that is becoming increasingly artificial.

By using AI as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for human creativity, and by maintaining clear, transparent communication about its adoption, brands can not only demonstrate ethical responsibility in their marketing strategies but also see and hear audience frustrations and concerns regarding AI and its use. As consumers become increasingly aware of AI's impact on jobs and creative industries, proactive communication can help mitigate potential backlash. This concern is reflected in consumer responses, such as Table 1, Comments 8 and 13, and Table 3, Comment 10, where individuals working in creative fields express anxieties about job security and the devaluation of human artistry. Addressing these concerns through responsible AI integration and open dialogue can foster greater trust and acceptance among both consumers and industry professionals.

## **Discussion**

### **Implications for Marketers & Industry Best Practices**

Audiences are craving transparency from brands, especially regarding AI's role in content creation. Consumers expect upfront disclosure, and when brands fail to provide it, they risk skepticism, backlash, and a loss of trust. This reinforces both Kirk & Givi's (2025) authenticity theory, which highlights the consumer desire for genuine brand interactions, and also their AI-authorship effect, which suggests that AI-generated content, particularly in emotional storytelling, is often perceived as inauthentic. Coca-Cola's AI-generated holiday ad exemplifies this tension; despite labeling its campaign as AI-driven, consumers rejected it for lacking human creativity and emotional depth. To successfully integrate AI, brands must not only disclose their use but also ensure it aligns with their identity and audience expectations. Consumers aren't only rejecting AI itself, but also feeling that companies are being misleading.

Alongside transparency, AI should complement, not replace, human creativity. While AI offers efficiency, brands that replace human-driven storytelling in emotionally significant campaigns may risk alienating audiences. Recognizing the importance of connection, professionals can approach adoption through the lens of connection. Through transparency and proactive communication, brands can approach new advancements with their audiences while also listening to potential concerns (knowing that these concerns could decrease overall trust).

Thirdly, AI integration should complement a brand's existing identity rather than undermine it. Dove's strategy was effective because it aligned with the brand's established values, while Coca-Cola's approach conflicted with consumer expectations. This highlights the importance of using AI as a tool, not a replacement. Concerns about job loss should serve as a red flag for company leadership, as they reveal potential risks to the company's core values. By

prioritizing jobs that AI could threaten, companies can demonstrate their commitment to a strong values-driven culture, which in turn strengthens their relationships with key stakeholders, including employees, investors, and consumers.

In April 2025, WPP, one of the world's largest advertising and communications groups, acquired InfoSum, a privacy-focused data collaboration platform. This strategic move reflects an industry-wide trend of integrating generative AI tools into their workflows to deliver a more personalized marketing experience. Despite the tension between authenticity and technological advancements, companies are growing their AI capabilities. Decisions like these highlight the importance of transparent, values-driven messaging (Barnett, 2025).

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the complex relationship between AI-generated advertising and consumer perception, focusing on the contrasting brand strategies of Dove and Coca-Cola. Through an analysis of brand messaging, expert commentary, and consumer reactions, the findings reveal a clear divide in how AI is received based on transparency, emotional context, and brand alignment.

Dove's rejection of AI in its "The Code" campaign reinforced its established commitment to authenticity and body positivity. This consistency in messaging was met with strong approval across media, industry experts, and consumers, demonstrating how AI-related decisions must align with existing brand values to maintain trust. Coca-Cola's AI-generated holiday advertisement sparked substantial backlash, particularly from consumers who felt it undermined nostalgia and human creativity, labeling the advertisement as "soulless". The irony of branding an AI-generated campaign as "Real Magic AI" further fueled negative sentiment, illustrating how misalignment between AI usage and consumer expectations can erode trust.

## **Limitations & Future Research**

This analysis is limited by its reliance on platform-specific data from YouTube comments, which may not fully represent broader consumer sentiment. YouTube's audience skews towards digital-savvy users who could potentially be more engaged with online discussions about AI and technology, potentially leading to a bias in the feedback examined. Also, comments on viral advertisements often attract users with strong opinions, meaning the dataset may overrepresent extreme reactions while underrepresenting neutral perspectives.

A key limitation of this study is that Dove disabled comments on the original video, restricting direct analysis of consumer reactions on YouTube. While likely intended to avoid

negative feedback, this decision limits insight into the organic audience response. However, consumer sentiment can still be inferred through expert commentary, such as The Today Show segment, though this creates an imbalance in perspectives.

Unlike Coca-Cola or The *Today Show* segments, where public feedback was accessible, Dove's lack of comment engagement makes it challenging to assess audience sentiment directly. As a result, perceptions of Dove's AI stance must be drawn from media coverage, industry commentary, and discussions on other platforms rather than firsthand user responses.

The evolving nature of AI regulations and public awareness presents both opportunities and uncertainties. As AI-generated content becomes more widespread and regulatory frameworks develop, consumer attitudes may shift. The data analyzed reflects a specific moment in time, and future studies may produce different findings as companies update their AI marketing strategies and regulations to shape industry practices. Additionally, corporate transparency regarding AI use in advertising may influence consumer perceptions over time. As AI-generated content becomes expected, initial backlash may subside, or conversely, consumer skepticism may deepen if AI continues to threaten human work.

Alongside the evolving nature, it would be advantageous to explore how audiences detect AI-washing and how that can ultimately impact trust and brand loyalty. With ongoing scrutiny, it is necessary to distinguish between genuine values and opportunistic marketing (Hiken, 2024). Future studies can explore how brands can better align their AI strategies with public expectations.

Given the limitations, future research should consider tracking changes in consumer response to AI-generated content in marketing. By seeking to better understand how audiences adapt to the use of emerging technologies, companies can be proactive in their approach to not

only adapt to industry changes but also to avoid alienating their audiences. Another important piece is how to best communicate about ethical practices. By understanding how to best communicate changes within their strategies, the audience can better understand the values of the companies they support.

Another area for future research is the impact of AI on professionals in the creative industry. As advanced models like GPT-4o continue to evolve, allowing the generation of ready-to-publish digital advertisements, discussions surrounding AI's role in creative work have intensified. Examining how AI adoption affects job security, financial stability, creative fulfillment, and overall job satisfaction could provide valuable insights into the broader implications of generative AI in marketing and design. Research in this area could also offer practical guidance for industry leaders, helping them integrate AI responsibly while assuring they support, rather than undermine, their creative workforce.

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## Appendix A - Original Ads and The *Today Show* Segments

- Coca-Cola: AI Holiday Ad – [https://youtu.be/4RSTupbfGog?si=Ipa\\_j8hdPt\\_f299u](https://youtu.be/4RSTupbfGog?si=Ipa_j8hdPt_f299u)
- Dove: “The Code” Campaign – <https://youtu.be/sD-R2OzcleQ?si=d9SdK0mygPm2wgfe>
- The *Today Show*: Coca-Cola – [https://youtu.be/tsX1KgSbTN4?si=Pci\\_admFcVermU7S](https://youtu.be/tsX1KgSbTN4?si=Pci_admFcVermU7S)
- The *Today Show*: Dove – [https://youtu.be/U\\_Nf6raRPFM?si=i0W0GMJ4EdQ0ZwSP](https://youtu.be/U_Nf6raRPFM?si=i0W0GMJ4EdQ0ZwSP)

## **Appendix B - Articles from AdAge**

- [Coca-Cola's AI TV ads—Creatives and consumers react to the spots](#)
- [Dove pledges not to use AI to portray real people in its ads.](#)