Human or Machine? Consumer Perceptions of AI-Generated Versus Human-Created Advertising

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May 2026

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the program of study leading to the award of BSc Marketing, is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfillment of that stated above.

Artificial Intelligence tools were used in a supportive role to assist the author with grammar checking, proofreading, and formatting during the preparation of this dissertation. All research, analysis, statistical interpretation, synthesis of theory, and conclusions presented are solely the author's original work.

Signed: _____Joseph Adeniyi_____

Date: May 2026

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Alacoque McAlpine, for her guidance, encouragement, and expert feedback throughout the research and writing process. Her insight and support were invaluable at every stage of this dissertation, and I am deeply appreciative of the time and care she devoted to this work.

I would also like to thank all participants who took the time to complete the survey, without whom this research would not have been possible.

Abstract

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence into marketing content production raises an important question: How do consumers perceive advertisements they believe are generated by AI compared to those crafted by humans? This dissertation investigates this question, focusing on five key dimensions of perception (creativity, emotional engagement, authenticity, trust, and overall attitude toward the advertisement) within the realm of skincare advertising.

Initially, a between-subjects online experiment was designed for a fictitious brand named Lumera. However, due to an oversight involving a missing condition variable during data preparation, the study evolved into a perception-based comparative analysis. The final

analytic sample consisted of 86 participants, categorized based on their perceived source of the advertisement following a manipulation check.

Independent-samples t-tests revealed statistically significant differences across all five constructs ($p < .001$), with advertisements perceived as human-generated receiving more favourable ratings. Effect sizes were notably large, with emotional engagement showing the largest difference ($d = 1.09$), followed by creativity ($d = 1.04$), attitude ($d = 0.99$), authenticity ($d = 0.86$), and trust ($d = 0.80$). Additionally, serial mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 6) showed that the perceived source influenced advertising attitude through authenticity and trust in sequence, explaining 73.9% of the variance. The two mediators did not operate independently, indicating full serial mediation with a residual direct effect.

The findings are discussed across four central themes, namely authenticity deficit, emotional gap, trust paradox, and unmeasured heuristic mechanisms, alongside a strategic framework for human-AI collaboration in advertising.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), as a mainstream creative tool, has fundamentally changed the environment in which advertising is created. Marketing organizations can now produce virtually unlimited visual assets, written copy, and campaign variants at an exponentially faster rate than human creative production. Advertising creates connections beyond simple informational transmission; it communicates to customers that a brand cares enough to invest time and energy in their relationship. The advertising industry believes that determining whether AI-generated advertising can form similar connections to human-generated advertising is critical, but the industry lacks empirical evidence to determine whether this is possible. This dissertation explores that exact question. Using a consumer-perception-based comparative study design, this dissertation compares how consumers perceive AI-generated and human-generated marketing content across 5 dimensions: perceived creativity, emotional engagement, authenticity, trust, and overall attitude toward the advertisement. Further, the study takes place in a high-involvement, emotion-driven skin care advertising category where authenticity and connecting with individual customers are key to successfully reaching them.

Relevance and Importance

The importance of this research lies in both academia and business. In business, the adoption of generative AI for marketing content creation continues to accelerate rapidly. Despite the increasing use of generative AI in marketing content creation, many marketing professionals remain sceptical about AI-generated content's ability to build strong brands. According to McKinsey & Company (2025), there is a significant disconnect between the rate at which companies adopt AI technologies and the extent to which they believe they are gaining strategic value from these technologies – specifically in building their brands. Additionally, several industry associations, such as WARC and Cannes Lions (2024), have noted growing concern among marketing practitioners that the increasing reliance on AI-produced marketing content may compromise the authenticity cues and emotional credibility needed for effective branding. While these concerns are legitimate and growing in urgency, they remain largely unsubstantiated by empirical research conducted directly with consumers.

Regarding academia, the body of research on how consumers respond to AI-generated advertising is rapidly expanding; however, it remains significantly underdeveloped in its empirical base. Although existing studies have established differences in how consumers respond to AI-created and human-created content and have indicated that consumer perceptions of authenticity, trust, and warmth play important roles in this difference in response, relatively little is known about what specific psychological processes underlie consumer evaluations of advertising based on perceptions of its source. Specifically, what remains poorly understood is whether perceived authenticity and trust act sequentially as mediating variables in the causal chain linking perceptions of source with attitudes toward advertising.

Therefore, this dissertation provides direct answers to each of these knowledge gaps.

Overall Research Question and Specific Objectives

The overarching research question guiding this dissertation is:

How do consumers perceive the creativity, authenticity, and emotional impact of AI-generated marketing content compared to human-created content?

Three focused objectives operationalise this question:

1. To assess how consumers evaluate AI-generated versus human-created marketing content in terms of creativity and emotional engagement.
2. To explore how perceived authenticity and trust influence consumer responses to AI-generated content.
3. To provide recommendations for marketers on effectively combining AI and human creativity in campaign design.

Research Methodology

A quantitative approach employing a positivist research paradigm and an experimental design within an online survey instrument is used here. Six advertisements for a fictional skincare

brand called “Lumera,” three produced through AI-based algorithms and three produced by humans, were created and presented to respondents through Qualtrics. Perceived consumer evaluations across five distinct constructs using validated multiple-item Likert-type scales were collected. During data collection, a methodological adjustment was made due to a lack of control over an embedded condition variable in the dataset; therefore, the study shifted from a traditional experimental design to a comparative analytical structure based on consumers' perception of the advertisement's source (rather than the actual assigned condition). Independent samples t-tests were used to test hypotheses, and effect sizes were reported. For Objective Two, PROCESS Model 6 serial mediation analysis was employed to examine the sequential path from perceived source through authenticity and trust to advertising attitude.

Study Structure

Chapter Two outlines the industry context and reviews the current commercial application environment of generative AI in marketing; identifies the practical challenges associated with creativity, authenticity, and trust that motivate the need for empirical investigation; and defines the scope of inquiry relevant to the research question.

Chapter Three reviews literature relevant to understanding consumer perceptions of AI-generated advertising; develops a theoretical model explaining how these perceptions arise; and serves as a foundation for interpreting the results.

Chapter Four describes the methodology, including the original experimental design; the procedure for developing stimuli; and an evaluation of methodological limitations arising from the shift from a traditional experimental design to a comparative analytical framework based on consumer perception of advertisement origin (actual treatment condition).

Chapter Five reports results from reliability assessment, independent-samples t-test analyses, and Process Model 6 serial mediation analyses.

Chapter Six synthesizes empirical results with the theoretical literature to derive conditional strategic advice for practitioners and identifies potential avenues for further research.

2. Industry Context

AI in the marketing sector is transforming at an exponential rate due to advances in generative AI. Historically, AI's contribution to marketing consisted primarily of backend operational functions. It aided marketers in segmenting customers by demographics, optimizing campaigns for better performance, and providing predictive insights. However, the advent of generative AI changed this paradigm. The emergence of AI tools capable of creating entire campaign variations, generating visual assets, and writing content at scale enabled AI to become a core contributor to the creative process itself (Davenport et al, 2020). The shift will not occur gradually but will represent a fundamental change in how marketers conceptualize, develop, and deploy marketing content. The changes will also extend beyond campaign efficiencies and brand messaging strategies to influence the nature of relationships between consumers and brands.

The World Economic Forum (2024) states that AI-driven automation of creative and analytical roles will be among the greatest factors disrupting the labour market over the next decade. As such, marketing and communications will experience the most severe structural shifts.

A tremendous amount of commercial momentum is driving this transition. According to McKinsey & Company (2023), marketing and sales will be two of the largest contributors to extracting value from generative AI. They estimate that generative AI could contribute trillions of dollars each year worldwide in economic impact, with marketing applications accounting for a considerable share of that total. Marketing organizations' primary motivations for adopting generative AI include increased efficiency, scalability, and speed. Organizations can now quickly generate many pieces of content tailored to various audience segments and delivered across numerous digital platforms. Such capabilities would have been operationally unfeasible under solely human creative production processes (Huang & Rust, 2021). Additionally, Salesforce's (2024) State of Marketing Report found that seventy-five percent of marketing professionals worldwide are utilizing AI tools in some form. Those reporting utilization cited content creation, personalization, and campaign optimization as the top uses. Many marketing organizations have moved past experimenting with AI-enabled creative workflow solutions and see them as a necessary strategic imperative as competitors continue to increase pressures to provide content in higher quantities and levels of customization.

Although there are great enthusiasm and momentum behind AI adoption within marketing organizations, a notable and underappreciated gap exists between the theoretical adoption of AI and its practical, organization-wide strategic incorporation. McKinsey & Company's (2025) State of AI report found that although many organizations reported some AI adoption, very few had implemented it in a way that provided consistent strategic value across their organizations. Within the field of marketing, AI adoption is often characterized by pilot programs, partial automation, and continuous testing, indicating that organizational adoption of AI is occurring faster than the industry's overall understanding of its potential impacts on long-term relationships with consumers, brand messaging, and authentic connection. Similarly, Salesforce (2024) found that a confidence gap persists among marketing leaders, although adoption rates are high; fewer than fifty percent of marketing leaders' express confidence that their AI-generated content is performing as well as human-generated content on key brand-building metrics. Although the case for the efficient use of AI in marketing is well-established, the case for the effective use of AI in branding remains largely uncertain.

Uncertainty about creative effectiveness is perhaps the most pressing issue for marketers as they consider using AI to create advertising. Although generative AI can produce content that is grammatically correct, visually appealing, and technically competent, it cannot replicate the human judgment, emotional intuition, and symbolic intent that have historically underpinned the most successful brand messaging. Huang & Rust (2021) draw a basic distinction between the mechanical intelligence of AI, its ability to efficiently complete well-defined, rule-governed tasks, and the thinking-feeling intelligence required for effective brand messaging, its ability to understand context, apply judgment creatively, and create emotional meaning. McKinsey & Company (2025) warns that excessive reliance on optimization metrics risks prioritizing short-term engagement over the creation of brand meaning, emotional resonance, and relational depth that accumulate over time and define true brand equity. This conflict between what AI can create efficiently and what must be communicated through advertising is one of the most critical strategic challenges facing marketers today.

Industry concern about AI-generated content has centred on authenticity. The WARC and Cannes Lions (2024) State of Creativity report identifies widespread ambivalence among creative professionals and brand strategists about full-scale automated content creation, especially in industries where authenticity and self-expression are central to a brand's positioning. Industry practitioners generally welcome AI as a means of improving productivity; however, human input remains crucial to ensuring originality, narrative cohesion, and the emotional credibility associated with genuine brand messaging. In addition, the report indicates an emerging industry consensus that consumers are increasingly sensitive to distinguishing between human-authored and algorithmically generated content, regardless of the relative quality of execution. Rather than any technical limitations inherent in the tools used to generate content, this perception gap is increasingly recognized as a risk factor in fully automated creative production (WARC & Cannes Lions 2024).

These concerns translate into tangible commercial consequences for brands. If consumers perceive AI-generated content as substituting for human creative work rather than enhancing it, they are likely to perceive brands as impersonal, opportunistic or disinterested in establishing a communicative relationship with consumers. The IAB Europe and Microsoft (2024) study indicated that consumer awareness of AI-generated advertising content is increasing rapidly; however, varying degrees of consumer evaluative responses are contingent upon how companies disclose their involvement with AI in either voluntary or mandatory capacities. Companies operating in categories where their brand identity is defined by authenticity (e.g., personal care, fashion, lifestyle and wellness) will be negatively impacted by signalling messages associated with AI production capabilities. Authenticity in brand communication represents an aesthetic quality; In addition, it represents an indicator of a company's intentions and investments toward establishing a genuine communicative relationship with consumers. Absent or ambiguous signals regarding such authenticity will jeopardize both consumer engagement and trust.

Trust is another area of concern for companies considering AI-based marketing solutions. Transparency, explainability, and perceived alignment with human values are identified by McKinsey & Company (2023) as primary determinants of users' acceptance of AI-based systems. Advertising is a category where consumers do not simply receive information;

instead, they critically assess advertisers' intent, credibility, and benevolence (Davenport et al., 2020). Studies by IAB Europe and Microsoft (2024) indicate that consumer trust in AI-generated advertisements is significantly lower than trust in equivalent human-created content; In addition, this trust deficit is most apparent in categories associated with emotional importance, personal identity, or subjective judgments -- which tend to be categories where strategically valuable advertising occurs. Building on this,, McKinsey & Company (2023) emphasized that trust in AI is extremely fragile when identity expression is involved -- highlighting that the adoption of generative AI in advertising cannot be determined solely based on efficiency metrics.

Regulatory developments are beginning to add complexity to this emerging field,. The EU's new Artificial Intelligence Act became law in 2024; this legislation mandates that companies disclose when content viewed by consumers has been generated through automated systems in contexts including commercial communications. The IAB Europe and Microsoft (2024) identified regulatory compliance as an emerging operational priority for organizations utilizing AI in advertising-related content directed toward consumers emphasizing that the trend among countries is moving toward mandatory rather than voluntary disclosures. Therefore, the perception gap between consumers who distinguish between human-authored and algorithmically generated advertising becomes not just an abstract concern related to brand strategy; it becomes an immediate operational and legislative concern related to compliance and reputation management.

Against this backdrop of rapid industry adoption, continued ambiguity regarding creative effectiveness, unresolved issues related to authenticity and trust, and increasing regulatory requirements, this research seeks to address the empirical gaps described above. The industry data referenced herein illustrate that the gap between AI production capabilities and consumer perceptual responses is legitimate, commercially relevant, yet inadequately understood. However, industry data also show that the concerns industry stakeholders describe are not addressed by empirical research, i.e., how consumers perceive and evaluate advertising generated by AI, which aspects of content evaluation are most directly influenced by source attribution, and which psychological pathways lead to such evaluations influencing attitudes toward advertising. These questions require academic investigation. This dissertation

examines how perceived content origin influences consumer evaluations of creativity, emotional engagement, authenticity, trust, and advertising attitude, and what such findings mean for practitioners working within an industry context that presents both strategic and communicative challenges and opportunities.

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2.0 Literature Review Introduction

There is significant concern among marketing scholars and professionals about the impact of AI on advertising creativity, particularly given its growing use in ad creation. Traditionally, AI was used in the back end of marketing systems primarily to support data analysis and decision-making. Today, AI is being used in the front end of marketing systems, specifically in creative aspects such as copywriting, visual development, and optimization of advertising content (Huang and Rust, 2021; Davenport et al., 2020). The growing use of AI in marketing content creation has raised concerns about the traditional role of human authorship in developing marketing messages and about consumers' reliance on those messages.

While the benefits of using AI-generated content appear clear (i.e., greater efficiency, scalability, and personalization), its effects on consumer perceptions and persuasiveness remain largely unexplored. Research indicates that advertising success depends on several subjective consumer evaluations, including creativity, emotional engagement, authenticity, and credibility. These evaluations have roots in consumer psychology and can be heightened when authorship is unknown or automated.

As AI continues to generate creative content, researchers question whether consumers will assess AI-generated content similarly to human-developed advertisements or whether perceived differences in intent, warmth, and authenticity will lead to different assessments (Feng & Song, 2025; Belanche et al., 2022).

Although there is a large body of literature on AI applications in marketing, most prior research has focused either on the technological capabilities and operational efficiencies of AI or on consumer resistance to algorithmic decision-making (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Castelo et al., 2019). To date, no comprehensive study has examined how consumers compare AI-generated and human-generated marketing content across all relevant consumer evaluations. Additionally, much of the existing literature focuses on single dimensions of consumer

response to marketing stimuli, such as creativity, trust, or emotions, without investigating how those dimensions may interact to shape consumer responses to AI-mediated marketing.

This literature review addresses this gap by integrating research on consumer evaluations of advertising creativity, emotional connection, authenticity, trust, and human-AI collaboration. As previously stated, the review adopts a consumer-centric approach, consistent with established principles that creative value and persuasive effectiveness ultimately depend on how an audience interprets a message rather than on what the creator intended (Mercanti-Guérin, 2008; El-Murad & West, 2004). Therefore, the review does not focus on debates about whether AI has the capability but instead explores how consumers view and react to marketing communications created by AI versus those created by humans.

The literature review is organized into sections corresponding to each objective of this dissertation. Sections 2 and 3 provide overviews of past research on definitions and measures of creativity and emotional engagement in advertising, focusing on frameworks grounded in consumer evaluations. Sections 4 and 5 address psychological reactions to AI-generated content, focusing on authenticity, trust-building through algorithms, aversions to algorithms, and the capabilities and limitations of AI in creative environments. Section 6 provides an overview of current evidence on human-AI collaborative efforts. Finally, Section 7 provides an overview of long-term implications for AI applications in marketing practice.

Each section ends with an intermediate summary that synthesizes the essential findings from the reviewed literature and demonstrates their relevance to the dissertation. By systematically linking these areas of scholarship, the literature review establishes a solid theoretical foundation for a comparative assessment of how consumers evaluate AI-generated advertising versus human-generated advertising, based on perceptions.

Creativity is widely regarded as a primary driver of advertising success and a key component of brand differentiation and consumer engagement in a saturated marketplace (Dahlén et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008). As advertising competes for limited consumer attention and brands

seek to stand out in increasingly crowded markets, creativity plays an increasingly important role in distinguishing advertising from other forms of marketing communications. Beyond attracting consumer attention, creativity also serves as a strategic device, signalling to consumers the brand's quality, effort, and expertise. According to Kirmani & Rao (2000), signalling theory holds that, under conditions of consumer uncertainty, visible cues such as advertising creativity serve as heuristics through which consumers infer brand quality, effort, and competence. Thus, creativity offers more than aesthetic appeal; it is a means by which a brand communicates credibility and value (Kirmani & Rao, 2000; Rosengren et al., 2020).

Despite the centrality of creativity to the advertising process, significant conceptual debates persist over what constitutes creativity. There is a long-standing tension between artistic expression and commercial viability, driven largely by the dual requirements that advertising must provide both novelty and strategic relevance (El Murad & West, 2004; Koslow et al., 2003). This tension has fuelled ongoing discussion about how advertising can meet both criteria. Building on this,, because creativity is difficult to quantify or measure, it is impossible to assume that all creative works will be effective. Rather, each piece of creative work must be evaluated based on how consumers perceive and respond to it.

2.1 Defining Creativity in Marketing Contexts

In marketing and consumer psychology, creativity is most often defined as the generation of outcomes that are both novel and appropriate (Amabile, 1996; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). However, this definition becomes more complex in the context of persuasive communication, where originality must be balanced with clarity, relevance, and alignment with brand objectives (Dahlén et al., 2008; El-Murad & West, 2004). Creativity that is novel but irrelevant may capture attention yet fail to communicate meaningfully, while highly relevant but predictable approaches often lack the distinctiveness necessary for effective brand encoding.

Advertising scholarship has increasingly framed creativity as a multidimensional construct encompassing novelty, relevance, elaboration, and aesthetic execution (Haberland & Dacin, 1992; Mercanti-Guérin, 2008). These dimensions are interdependent: excess novelty can impede interpretability, while excessive relevance can produce generic, unmemorable

content. Creativity is thus best understood as a process of managing productive tensions, with effectiveness hinging on balancing differentiation with clarity and strategic meaning.

A further distinction is crucial: artistic creativity prioritizes originality and self-expression, whereas commercial creativity is constrained by strategic objectives and performance accountability (Koslow et al., 2003). This distinction explains why some highly artistic advertisements fail to deliver commercial results and highlights that advertising creativity must ultimately serve persuasion rather than artistic expression alone.

Critically, creativity should not be treated as an objective property of advertising stimuli. Rather, it is a perceptual judgment shaped by consumers. Consistent evidence shows a divergence in how consumers and advertising professionals evaluate creativity. Consumers emphasize clarity, relevance, and emotional impact over sheer originality, while professionals place greater weight on novelty and executional craft (Modig & Dahlén, 2020; White & Smith, 2001). This confirms the necessity of a consumer-centred perspective, since it is consumer interpretation, not creative intent, that ultimately governs advertising effectiveness.

2.2 Measuring advertising creativity

Measuring creativity presents several methodological challenges. Historically, scholars have used two primary approaches to define and measure creativity in the advertising context: expert judgment and industry awards/panels (Kover et al., 1995). Although expert judgment provides a common reference point for evaluating creative endeavour, numerous studies demonstrate poor correlations between expert ratings and consumer response or actual market results (White & Smith, 2001). Therefore, although industry awards/panel ratings represent standard creative benchmarks, they fail to reliably account for how consumers interpret and respond to creative endeavours.

In recent years, researchers have begun to employ consumer-based measures of perceived creativity (Mercanti-Guerin, 2008). Mercanti-Guerin (2008) developed a well-established scale that captures three core dimensions of perceived creativity, based on how consumers themselves evaluate creative endeavour. Specifically, she demonstrated that consumers evaluate creative endeavour along three interdependent dimensions: novelty, complexity, and aesthetic appeal. By focusing on consumers' perceptions of creative endeavour rather than the inherent characteristics of creative products or stimuli, Mercanti-Guerin's (2008) scale allows

researchers to better position their measures of advertising effectiveness within consumer-based perspectives. Modig & Dahlen (2020) provided empirical validation of Mercanti-Guerin's (2008) scale, showing that perceived creativity measured with this scale was more positively correlated with ad/advertisement/effectiveness variables than expert-rated creativity. Modig & Dahlen's findings reinforce the notion that creative endeavour functions as a perceived signal in the advertising context rather than as an objective product characteristic.

As noted above, however, even when researchers focus on consumers' perceptions of creative endeavour, there are multiple potential issues with relying solely on consumer-based measures. Specifically, consumers' perceptions of creative endeavour may be affected by a variety of contextual factors, including familiarity with the advertised brand, category norms, and cultural expectations. In addition, consumers' prior experiences, emotions, and influences may shape their perceptions of creative endeavour as well. For example, Modig & Dahlen (2020) found that certain demographic segments exhibited systematically higher levels of perceived creativity than others. Additionally, previous research (e.g., Modig & Dahlen, 2020) indicates that prior attitudes and emotional states influence perceived creativity. Given these complexities, it is incumbent upon researchers to demonstrate empirically acceptable reliability for their chosen consumer-based scale(s) before employing them in subsequent studies. Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) suggest establishing a minimum Cronbach's alpha of .70 as the threshold for acceptable internal consistency in applied research. Consequently, careful operationalization and clear interpretation are required when using consumer-perceived creativity scales in empirical studies.

2.3 Creative effectiveness outcomes in advertising

Numerous studies establish a positive correlation between creativity and various aspects of advertising effectiveness, including increased attention to ads, improved memory for ad messaging, and overall positive evaluations of ads (Smith et al., 2008; Rosengren et al., 2020). Importantly, creative ads disrupt habitual processing paths, allowing them to "cut through" competitive clutter and increasing the likelihood that an advertiser will successfully encode their message into the consumer's memory.

Notwithstanding the positive relationships identified above between creativity and advertising effectiveness, the relationship between creativity and advertising effectiveness is far from linear. Rosengren et al. (2020), through a meta-analytic review of 93 datasets

examining the relationship between creative executions and advertising effectiveness outcomes (attitudes toward the ad/brand attitudes/behavioural intentions), found that while creativity had a significant positive effect on attitudes toward the advertisement itself, the effect size was relatively small compared with the same constructs examined previously. In fact, the relationship between creativity and advertising effectiveness was highly inconsistent across studies (i.e., Rosengren et al. [2020] reported significant heterogeneity among effect sizes for brand attitude/behavioural intention outcomes).

In addition, creativity can sometimes undermine advertising effectiveness by obscuring message clarity, a phenomenon known as "vampire creativity," in which creative execution diverts attention from brand association (Ang et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2008).

Consistent with signalling theory, creativity serves as a cue informing consumers about a brand's quality, effort, and expertise (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). The theory also suggests that in situations where consumer knowledge about a brand is low or uncertain (i.e., high uncertainty), observable cues, such as those in creative advertising, serve as mechanisms by which consumers infer quality-related attributes of the brand. However, signalling theory posits that signalling occurs only if the signal is correctly interpreted by the recipient. As such, if novelty leads to confusion or disconnection from the intended brand message, then signalling will result in decreased rather than increased effectiveness. Therefore, it is conclusive that creativity must be understood as a conditional driver - i.e., its value is contingent on how effectively novelty is linked with relevance and aligned with overarching brand meaning. It is also noted that emotional resonance plays a major role in linking creative messages to brand meaning, thereby facilitating persuasive processes (Dahlen et al, 2008).

In conclusion, creativity is a complex, multi-dimensional construct that serves as both an attention mechanism and a strategic signal that advertises to consumers. Building on this,, its effectiveness is conditional - i.e., it must be managed so that novelty is appropriately balanced with relevance and executed effectively.

These findings have direct implications for this dissertation. Specifically, because consumers evaluate creative endeavour subjectively rather than based on objective features of creative

endeavour, differences in how consumers evaluate AI-generated versus human-generated advertisements may stem not from variations in technical capabilities but from differences in how humans versus AI generate creative endeavour. While AI systems may be able to mimic or replicate many of the structural elements related to novelty variation, human-generated creative endeavour can convey intentionality, effort, and contextual awareness that are likely to resonate more profoundly with consumers, i.e., aspects of creative endeavour that are central to how consumers judge creative authenticity/value.

Interim Synthesis: Section 2

The literature reviewed establishes that scholarly inquiry into creativity supports the idea that consumer-perceived creativity - rather than object-defined creative quality - is the operative variable in advertising evaluation. Building on this,, while creativity is inherently multidimensional, its effectiveness is conditional - i.e., its impact depends on whether novelty is linked to relevance and executed effectively. For this dissertation, this suggests that perceived authorship may be a critical moderating factor in how consumers evaluate advertising creativity: if human authorship is associated with intentionality and contextual meaning, AI-generated content may face systematic perceptual disadvantages that have little to do with technical output quality. This theoretical foundation informs the measurement approach employed in Objective One.

3.0 Emotional engagement in advertising

Emotional engagement is increasingly recognized as a key mechanism of advertising effectiveness and marks a departure from earlier purely cognitive models of consumer persuasion. Earlier models described a linear sequence of consumer behaviour, starting with awareness, followed by evaluation and ending with purchase, whereas emotion was considered secondary or an epiphenomenon. However, later research has shown that emotional responses are frequently antecedent to and concurrent with cognitive judgments, and they influence those judgments rather than simply following them (Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987). Therefore, emotional engagement should be seen as the primary form of persuasion that grabs the viewer's attention, creates meaning, and influences attitudes.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), provides a useful theoretical framework for describing the conditions under which emotional engagement will have the greatest persuasive impact. According to the ELM, there are two routes to persuasion. The central route involves detailed consideration of the logical validity of the arguments presented in a message. The peripheral route involves reliance on superficial cue characteristics of the message, such as colour, music, humor, and emotional tone. The peripheral route is especially relevant in low-involvement situations, characterized by little motivation to evaluate the message's arguments, and is commonly found in digital advertising environments that feature short exposures and high levels of competitive clutter. However, the peripheral route does not capture all forms of emotion. For example, an emotionally compelling message can increase personal relevance and encourage more thorough elaboration of the message's arguments by increasing motivation to engage in central processing. Thus, while emotion can serve as a heuristic cue to facilitate peripheral processing of information, it can also increase motivation to engage in central processing of information.

Therefore, advertisers face a double-edged sword when using emotional appeals in their advertising. On the one hand, they can use emotional appeals to cut through distractions in highly cluttered media markets and grab viewers' attention. On the other hand, once they have grabbed viewers' attention, they need to provide sufficient rationale for their product or brand claim to support long-term attitude formation. Therefore, the best advertisers do both; they create emotional connections that generate attention and interest in their products/brands and then provide sufficient information about those products/brands to support long-term attitudes (Dahlen et al., 2008). The combination of these two elements becomes even more important in AI-generated advertising environments. In these environments, technical quality may support central processing, but emotional resonance may be harder to develop. Yet the construct itself remains conceptually contested: some scholars define emotional engagement narrowly as an immediate affective response, while others expand it to encompass immersion, narrative transportation, personal relevance, and meaningful interaction with content (Calder et al., 2009; Poels & Dewitte, 2019).

3.1 Defining Emotional Engagement

Two seminal papers that were instrumental in developing our understanding of how people emotionally respond to advertisements are those by Holbrook & Batra (1987) and Edell & Burke (1987).

Holbrook & Batra (1987) developed the PAD (Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance) framework, which maps the ways in which advertisements can elicit emotional responses. They identified three basic dimensions: Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance. Each dimension spans a range of values, so each represents a spectrum rather than a simple binary yes-or-no. Holbrook and Batra (1987) suggested that emotional experiences caused by advertisements are mediated by the relationship between advertising stimuli and consumer attitudes toward both the advertisement and the brand. Because the PAD framework has been criticized for its simplicity, researchers have begun exploring alternative frameworks that could better describe complex patterns of emotional experience.

One of the earliest attempts to address the limitations of the PAD framework was proposed by Edell and Burke (1987). They argued that rather than focusing solely on overall mood states (a unidimensional measure of emotional experience), advertisements can evoke multiple discrete positive and negative emotions. Edell and Burke (1987) acknowledged that people experience emotions along multiple dimensions and therefore researchers should account for this complexity when examining how advertisements affect people emotionally.

Recent scholarship has built on prior work by recognizing that emotional engagement operates across multiple levels. Broad dimensional measures of valence (positive, negative) and arousal (intense/mild) are used to understand the nature and magnitude of an individual's overall emotional response to an advertisement. Additionally, discrete measures of specific emotions (e.g., joy vs. anger) help explain why multiple advertisements with similar levels of valence and arousal might elicit different attitudinal responses.

This layering is particularly important for understanding how AI-generated advertising affects consumers. An individual may experience multiple emotions simultaneously in response to an AI-generated ad, including curiosity about novel features of the ad; enjoyment related to

technical quality; scepticism about authenticity; and discomfort with automation. Overall valence measures cannot account for these differences.

3.2 Emotions, Involvement, Perseverance

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), explains when and how emotional engagement is most likely to contribute to persuasiveness. The ELM describes two distinct routes to persuasion: a central route involving thoughtful analysis of arguments, and a peripheral route involving more superficial attributes of a message, such as aesthetic appeal, music, humour, and emotional tone.

When consumers are relatively uninterested in evaluating the arguments in a message (i.e., low involvement), they tend to focus more on superficial cues. Visual appeal, music, humour, and tone are examples of cues that can influence perceptions without extensive thought. In low-involvement settings - such as when consumers view online ads quickly while engaged in another activity - emotional cues serve as heuristic signals that guide evaluations without full argument processing.

However, reducing emotion to a peripheral route phenomenon is too narrow. Emotion can also enhance central processing by increasing personal relevance and encouraging greater elaboration on the message arguments. Messages that connect with universal human experiences (family aspirations etc.) can lead to longer-lasting attitudes.

From an advertiser's perspective, this means that rational and emotional appeals are complementary, not mutually exclusive, strategies. The most successful campaigns combine rational appeals that substantiate claims with emotional appeals that capture attention and increase receptivity (Dahlen et al, 2008). The same principles apply to AI-generated advertising, where technical quality can provide strong rationales, but creating an emotional connection with consumers may require more effort.

3.3 Experiential and Narrative Perspectives on Emotional Engagement

Research has broadened the definition of emotional engagement beyond mere emotional response to include experiential dimensions. Calder et al. (2009) define engagement as the

"quality" of the consumer's experience with media content, distinguishing between personal engagement (stimulation, enjoyment, relevance) and social engagement, and identifying both as significant predictors of advertising effectiveness. This experiential orientation recognizes that emotional engagement is not just an internal state but a dynamic interaction among the consumer, content, and environment.

Green and Brock's (2000) transportation theory uses narrative theory to illustrate a parallel perspective on emotional engagement. Transportation occurs when a consumer becomes fully immersed in a narrative and subsequently becomes more open to its implied persuasive messages by experiencing less counter argumentation, having more empathetic thoughts, and investing more emotionally. Narrative immersion is therefore a mechanism for generating persuasion based on the extent to which it engages consumers emotionally rather than on explicit reasoning.

While narrative immersion has proven persuasive in numerous instances, it is not universally applicable. There are certain categories, e.g., price-comparison shopping, where functional clarity and convenience outweigh narrative depth. In addition, over-the-top narratives may result in "vampire creativity," i.e., viewers remember the narrative but forget how it relates to the advertised brand/product (Smith et al., 2008). Narrative immersion is therefore understood as a conditional mechanism whose efficacy depends on the degree to which it supports rather than replaces brand messaging.

3.4 Measuring Emotional Engagement

Measuring emotional engagement presents several methodological challenges. Prior approaches have relied on self-report scales that ask respondents to report feelings of excitement, pleasure, warmth, or irritation following exposure to an advertisement (Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987). Despite their widespread adoption for their practicality and scalability, these methods suffer from well-known drawbacks. Specifically, emotional reactions occur rapidly and often unconsciously, resulting in post hoc self-reports prone to bias from reconstructive memory, social desirability, etc. (Poels & Dewitte, 2019).

As a result, contemporary research increasingly relies on behavioural and physiological indicators, including viewing times, click-through rates, facial-expression coding, and skin-conductance measurements, together with validated immersion scales (Ahmed et al., 2024). While these approaches offer new opportunities for assessing engagement, they also present their own set of issues. For example, extended viewing times may reflect confusion rather than engagement and sharing behaviours may reflect irony or social signalling rather than genuine affective responses. Consequently, researchers recommend using triangulated methodologies that integrate attitudinal, behavioural, and experiential assessments to provide a more comprehensive representation of emotional engagement than can be achieved with single assessment metrics.

3.5 Emotional Engagement and AI-Generated Advertising

AI-generated advertising raises fundamental questions about whether emotional engagement with advertising is driven by content quality or perceived authorship. Feng & Song (2025) demonstrate that consumers prefer human-created content because perceived authorship evokes greater empathy, identification, and warmth, all grounded in Social Identity Theory. Similar findings document consumer reluctance to accept AI-generated content in emotionally charged areas (Longoni et al., 2019), attributed to decreased perceived agency and warmth from algorithmic production.

A more nuanced position is possible, since AI is not inherently incapable of creating emotionally engaging content. Through large-scale personalization capabilities that apply, behavioural data, AI-generated messages can increase perceived relevance and raise attention and curiosity (Huang & Rust, 2021). From an ELM perspective, high personal relevance may increase consumers' motivation to engage in more thorough central processing, while technically precise AI-generated visuals can serve as effective peripheral cues for quality perception. Therefore, the real issue is not whether AI-generated advertising can create engagement, but under what circumstances perceived authorship moderates that engagement.

Existing evidence indicates that authenticity is not only a major determinant of moderation but, perhaps even more importantly, a much larger factor than execution quality. While

consumers may initially react positively to AI-generated advertising, this initial reaction is susceptible to deterioration once machine authorship becomes apparent, leading to concerns about deception, substitution of human creativity, and a lack of authentic emotional intent (Ozturkcan & Bozdag, 2025).

These dynamics suggest that emotional engagement is not solely a function of stimulus properties but is significantly shaped by the psychological meaning consumers ascribe to the communication source.

Interim Synthesis: Section 3

The emotional engagement literature establishes that affective responses are central rather than peripheral to advertising effectiveness, operating through both peripheral cues and deeper narrative mechanisms. Critically, the emerging AI advertising literature suggests that perceived human authorship is a meaningful moderator of emotional engagement, with human-perceived content consistently eliciting stronger empathy, identification, and affective response. The PAD framework and transportation theory together provide the theoretical scaffolding for measuring emotional engagement in this dissertation's empirical work, while the AI-specific literature builds the theoretical case for expecting systematic differences in emotional engagement between human-perceived and AI-perceived advertising content. These insights directly inform the measurement framework for Objective One.

4.0 Consumer Psychology and Responses to AI-Generated Advertising

Consumers' responses to AI-generated advertising extend far beyond the technology itself. Instead, these responses are deeply embedded in consumer psychology, social perception, and the symbolism consumers assign to the source of the communication. Although AI improves several technical and operationally efficient content-creation processes, the success of advertising is largely determined by how consumers understand its meaning, credibility, and intentions. Therefore, a distinction exists between the development of AI-generated advertising and human-created advertising that goes beyond mere functionality and enters the symbolic, relational, and identity-related aspects of how consumers evaluate advertising (Belanche et al., 2022; Glikson & Woolley, 2020).

4.1 Perceived Authenticity and Source Effects

Perceived authenticity is among the most consequential psychological mechanisms shaping consumer responses to AI-generated advertising. Consumers view human authorship as signaling greater intentionality, emotional investment, lived experience, and genuine communicative intent, all of which build, perceptions of genuineness and relatability (Belanche et al., 2022). The perceived origin of messages directly affects their persuasive power, especially when trust must be built through emotion or experience (Morhart et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 1995).

Authenticity is another area of study that warrants examination. (Morhart et al., (2015) argued that authenticity is not inherent in content or its source. Rather, it is socially constructed through perceived continuities, credibility, integrity, and symbolic meaning. Therefore, the simple association of human authorship with authenticity and of AI with artificiality is challenged. Consumers may consider AI-generated content authentic if it provides genuine value, remains relevant to the current context, and adheres to previously defined brand identities, suggesting that authenticity judgments are becoming more performative than ontological. However, when the AI origin of content is apparent to consumers, the symbolic connotations of machine production (impersonality, calculation, and lack of genuine intent) are likely to diminish perceived authenticity, regardless of the quality of execution (Ozturkcan & Bozdağ, 2025).

(Fiske et al., 2007) proposed a warmth-competence model as an additional way to assess the relationships between agents, including non-human entities and other individuals. The model proposes that social judgments regarding agents are primarily based on two distinct dimensions: warmth (benevolence and the trustworthiness of the agent's intent) and competence (the agent's capability and effectiveness). Typically, AI systems are viewed as being high in competence yet low in warmth (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Because warmth is the more socially fundamental dimension and is more significantly linked to forming trust this dichotomy implies that AI-generated content has a structurally disadvantaged positioning compared to human-created content when relational emotional connections are key to persuading consumers.

4.2 Personalization and The Privacy Trade-offs

AI also enhances a marketer's ability to personalize large volumes of content. By analysing behavioral data and consumer preferences, AI can create customized advertising that enhances the relevance, personal appeal, and motivational processing of a message (Huang & Rust, 2021). In principle, personalized messaging should strengthen advertising effectiveness by aligning content with individual needs and interests. Building on this,, research by Kim et al. (2021) shows that greater precision and detail in AI-generated recommendations lead to enhanced perceptions of competence and trust among consumers, underscoring the relational potential of well-designed personalized content.

However, the advantage of AI-driven personalization is greatly diminished by privacy concerns. Privacy calculus theory posits that consumers weigh the perceived benefits of personalized content against the psychological costs they feel from being under surveillance or having their data extracted (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999). Excessive or opaque personalization can lead to a "creep factor," in which consumers develop a sense of unwanted intimacy or monitoring behaviour that negatively impacts both trust in a brand and subsequent brand evaluations (Ozturkcan & Bozdağ, 2025). Essentially, those same attributes that give marketers the power to personalize content using AI simultaneously threaten consumer autonomy and privacy.

Therefore, while personalization does not guarantee improved advertising effectiveness, its success depends on whether consumers perceive data collection and its use as transparent, reasonable, valuable to them, and ultimately giving them some level of control over the information used. When consumers believe there is a fair trade-off for their data and have some level of control over how it is used, personalization can enhance relational engagement. On the other hand, when consumers perceive personalization as invasive or extortionate, it can weaken the trust needed to achieve successful advertising (Shi & Jiang, 2026).

4.3 Perceptions of Advertising Creativity and Human Meaning

Additionally, how consumers perceive creative output is another way they judge AI-generated advertising. The type of creativity exhibited by humans in advertising is generally characterized by originality, symbolic depth, emotional resonance, and the intentional creation of meaning, features that AI-generated content often struggles to convey, since generative AI systems create new outputs by combining patterns found within training datasets (Longoni & Cian, 2022). This parallels previous research indicating that consumers

prefer human-created content when emotional resonance or identity formation is needed (Feng & Song, 2025).

While this difference is not absolute, commercial creativity has historically existed not merely in the expression of original ideas but within the boundaries of recombination, iteration, and optimization. Therefore, while AI systems can rapidly vary and refine their outputs based on feedback, they can enhance certain functional aspects of creativity, i.e., efficiency and ideational volume. A more theoretically accurate differentiation would be between meaningful creativity (defined by symbolic intentionality, strategic coherence, and contextual awareness) and functional creativity (defined by innovation, variety, and polish in execution); therefore, consumer perceptions of advertising creativity will depend not only on what the output accomplishes but also on consumers' assumptions about the process and intent used to create it.

4.4 Trust in Advertising Produced Using AI Systems and Algorithmic Perception

Finally, trust in advertising produced using AI systems is a major organizing construct for evaluating consumer responses to AI-generated content. Based on Mayer et al.'s (1995) integrative model, trust involves perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity, with benevolence being particularly susceptible to AI systems. When AI systems operate in an environment lacking transparency, consumers may exhibit an aversion to algorithms: a general unwillingness to rely on algorithmic outputs in areas involving subjective emotional influence (Dietvorst et al., 2015; Castelo et al., 2019). Additionally, Omrani et al. (2022) emphasized that consumer trust in AI systems is predicated on perceived fairness, explainability, and accountability, which are typically absent from AI-driven advertising.

Advertising faces a disclosure dilemma when disclosing transparency about AI use. Explicitly disclosing AI use may damage perceived authenticity by triggering reactance among consumers who associate AI with impersonality or manipulation (Shi & Jiang, 2026; Ozturkcan & Bozdağ, 2025). Alternatively, concealing AI use may lead consumers to focus solely on content quality, but it may decrease trust if the AI origin is later revealed (Ozturkcan & Bozdağ, 2025; Shi & Jiang, 2026). The persuasion knowledge model (Friestad

& Wright, 1994) provides a useful framework for understanding this issue. Once consumers are aware of an advertisement's AI-driven persuasive role, they may employ defensive cognitive mechanisms that reduce the advertisement's persuasive efficacy, regardless of quality.

Processing fluency (the ease with which content is processed cognitively) also mediates consumer responses to AI-generated advertising. Consumers systematically favour content that is coherent, consistent, and interpretively accessible (Reber et al., 2004). Minor execution inconsistencies in AI-generated content -- e.g., visual artifacts, tone mismatch, or culturally dissonant elements -- can affect processing fluency, convenience, and comfort, leading to a general unease or discomfort among consumers that they attribute to the AI system rather than to specific deficiencies. As generative AI continues to improve, these limitations may diminish; however, the symbolic associations between AI authorship and impersonality or calculation are expected to endure.

Finally, the varying contexts in which consumers respond to AI-generated advertising should be emphasized. Empirical studies demonstrate that consumer opposition and resistance to AI-generated advertising are not uniform but depend on factors such as category involvement, risk in purchasing decisions, and contextual relevance to identity formation (Belanche et al., 2022; Castelo et al., 2019). Therefore, while AI-generated content may be as effective as human-created content in functional, low-risk categories, it may present greater symbolic deficits when advertising occurs in emotionally laden, high-trust, identity-invested categories. Therefore, marketers must tailor the deployment of AI within context-specific parameters rather than treating it as a universally viable solution for content.

Interim Synthesis: Section 4

The literature on consumer psychology shows that consumer responses to AI-generated advertising are less driven by objective measures of quality execution and more by the symbolic meanings consumers assign to AI authorship, namely reduced warmth, authenticity, intentionality, and trustworthiness. Mechanisms explaining how AI authorship leads to consumer resistance include algorithm aversion, privacy calculus theory, the persuasion knowledge model, and the warmth-competence model. Importantly, these mechanisms are

contextually dependent rather than ubiquitous. Thus, this body of empirical evidence provides theoretical support for Objective Two's emphasis on authenticity and trust as primary psychological mediators that translate source origin into consumer evaluations of advertising.

5.0 Capabilities and Limitations of AI in Marketing Content Creation

With Generative AI now being used to create text, images, and versions of campaigns, organizations are using AI to drive content creation at a scale and speed that far exceed the capacity of human production (McKinsey & Company, 2023; Davenport et al., 2020). AI transforms content creation from a scheduled, resource-intensive task into a continuous, iterative process of creating and refining new content.

In terms of volume and multichannel campaigns, where brands need to produce content with minimal lead time, AI's productivity advantage will be most apparent. Additionally, AI-enabled mass personalization (using behavioural data to personalize messages to each individual consumer) can significantly increase relevance by reducing informational clutter and increasing engagement (Huang & Rust, 2021). Both areas relate to responsive behaviour and customer focus in relationship marketing.

As AI tools become more widely available and increasingly commoditized, the operational advantages they provide are rapidly becoming expected minimums for organizations, rather than competitive advantages (Barney, 1991). Sustainable competitive advantage comes from unique resources that competitors cannot replicate (Barney, 1991); thus, the strategic advantage that AI provides lies in the organizational abilities, creative judgment, and brand knowledge of the organization using it to apply, the technology.

5.2 Creativity: Augmentation Rather than Substitution

There is an ongoing debate about the use of AI in creative processes, particularly regarding the type, boundaries, and value of AI creativity. While AI systems can generate new combinations of text and visuals based on statistically identified patterns in the training data, the results generated by AI are fundamentally different from human creative work in two major ways (Longoni & Cian, 2022): first, the results of human creative work are meaningful and contextually relevant; second, human creative work is intentional.

While research has shown that AI-generated ads can be perceived as "creative" in specific evaluative contexts, such as novelty and executional variety (Dahlen et al., 2008), few

examples of AI-generated ad campaigns have demonstrated deep symbolic significance, cultural resonance, or emotional depth (Longoni & Cian, 2022).

Therefore, the most accurate characterization of AI's role in creative processes is augmentative rather than substitutive; AI can facilitate the generation and refinement of creative variations, while humans retain control over determining the strategy behind creative efforts, culturally interpreting the results, and making evaluative judgments (Huang & Rust, 2021; Longoni & Cian, 2022). The degree of success achieved through this complementary approach depends on how well these respective roles are coordinated and managed (Section 6).

5.3 Trust, Authenticity, and Consumer Resistance

Although AI-generated content in marketing offers many benefits for productivity, scalability, and personalized messaging, it still faces challenges in building consumer trust. Research shows that consumer resistance to AI-generated advertising does not stem from perceptions of lower quality but rather from what consumers perceive as artificiality (or lack of authenticity) that reflects how a brand views its customers (Belanche et al., 2022).

Accordingly, Belanche et al. (2022) found that consumers exposed to AI-generated ads tend to view them as less credible than human-generated ads. Building on this,, Belanche et al. (2022) found that consumers exposed to emotionally charged advertising messages generated using AI tend to view those messages as manipulative. In addition, Feng and Song (2025) reported that consumers generally prefer human-generated creative content. Consumers attribute higher levels of empathy and intentionality to human creators due to social identification mechanisms. The findings by Belanche et al. (2022) and Feng and Song (2025) are consistent with research on algorithm aversion, which has documented a generalized reluctance among consumers to make decisions based on algorithmic assessments in high-risk situations or in situations that elicit emotions such as fear or anxiety (Castelo et al., 2019; Dietvorst et al., 2015).

However, it is not entirely clear whether all forms of consumer resistance to AI-generated advertising exist. In cases involving low-involvement products or services, where functionality is the primary factor in purchasing decisions, AI-generated advertising may be judged primarily on factors other than authorship and may be comparable to human-created alternatives. However, in cases involving high-involvement products or services, where emotional or identity-related aspects of consumption are prominent, or in scenarios requiring

high degrees of trustworthiness, perceived shortcomings in authenticating an AI-generated advertisement appear to generate both more immediate and long-lasting perceptual biases (Belanche et al., 2022; Castelo et al., 2019). Thus, strategic assessment, as opposed to blanket acceptance or dismissal, is required when deploying AI in marketing.

5.4 Contextual Variability in Effectiveness

One of the greatest shortcomings of much research focused on AI-generated marketing is the tendency to generalize effectiveness outcomes across various contextual conditions. As evidenced by recent studies on AI-generated advertising effects in varying contexts (e.g., high- vs. low-involvement products/services), consumers respond differently based on product category involvement (i.e., decision risk) and the emotional or identity-related weight associated with the consumption context.

For example, Belanche et al. (2022) found that human-generated content outperforms AI-generated content in high-experience/low-trust contexts (where warm-hearted relationships are an important aspect of brand evaluations). Conversely, Belanche et al. (2022) report that AI-generated content performs competitively relative to human-generated content in functional/information-oriented product/service categories where competence cues outweigh warmth cues (Fiske et al., 2007). As such, because the response to AI-generated advertising varies depending on the category characteristics of the product/service advertised, marketers should calibrate their approaches to adopting AI accordingly.

5.5 Ethical Considerations Regarding Responsible Use

The emergence of new regulations governing AI use has put pressure on businesses that use AI in marketing operations to adopt practices that promote transparency and accountability throughout the development and deployment process. A recent regulation (the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act), formally approved by the European Parliament, addresses transparency obligations for developers of commercial risk-based AI systems (such as advertising systems) and will likely place similar pressures on U.S.-based companies if they develop or use international-facing systems (European Commission, 2024).

In addition, concerns about issues such as misinformation, synthetic media, and data protection have led some researchers to advocate for a more responsible approach to developing and using AI in marketing applications (Afroogh et al., 2024). This approach includes promoting explanations of algorithms used for decision-making, ensuring fairness

across different subpopulations targeted by advertising systems, and holding system developers accountable for errors or harm resulting from system use (Ozturkcan & Bozdag, 2025).

Building on this,, Ozturkcan and Bozdağ (2025) propose a "Cycle of AI Mistrust," in which overly optimistic predictions about AI capabilities ("AI Washing") trigger negative consumer reactions ("AI Booing") when those expectations are unmet. Such cycles could damage an organization's reputation for years after initial campaign failures, once distrust is widely established. Therefore, managing AI use in advertising is not solely a legal issue; it is also a strategic legitimacy concern.

Interim Synthesis: Section 5

The capabilities and limitations study defines AI as a highly valuable yet bounded resource for producing marketing content. Organizations are gaining numerous benefits from using AI in marketing, such as increased speed and efficiency in content creation, along with enhanced customization options. The creative role played by AI in content creation is best described as augmentative rather than substitutive. Most importantly, perhaps the biggest problem facing organizations considering the use of AI in marketing is the inability to build sufficient trust among consumers; i.e., the trust gap between consumers and advertisers is exacerbated by consumers perceiving artificial authorship in an advertisement as lacking authenticity. All three themes are directly related to Objective Three: successful implementation of AI in marketing requires not just technological proficiency but also strategic acumen regarding when and how organizations deploy AI to protect or compromise the authenticity and trust necessary for evaluating advertisements.

6. Hybrid Human-AI collaboration in creative work

6.1 Complementarity and Hybrid Superiority

The evolving consensus across academic and industry circles reframes the interplay between human creativity and AI as strategic complementarity rather than mere substitution. Organizations that successfully harness AI do so by rethinking their creative workflows. They integrate human judgment with AI capabilities through a thoughtfully structured division of labor, rather than viewing AI solely as a replacement for human creativity or as a secondary tool (Huang & Rust, 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2025). From a resource-based perspective, the true competitive advantage derived from AI does not rest with the technology

itself, widely accessible as it is, but rather in an organization's ability to mesh AI with unique human attributes: brand expertise, cultural understanding, strategic vision, and creative judgment (Barney, 1991).

Hybrid frameworks tend to outperform approaches that rely purely on human effort or complete automation, mainly because they apply, the complementary strengths of both. AI demonstrates remarkable proficiency in speed, scalability, pattern recognition, data-driven optimization, and variant generation. In contrast, humans contribute contextual insight, ethical discernment, symbolic understanding, cultural fluency, and an innate ability for meaningful interpretation. When these abilities are judiciously combined, they enhance both efficiency and the strategic quality of creative outputs (De Cicco et al., 2025; Ngo, 2025).

However, the notion of hybrid superiority is not absolute. A mere amalgamation of human and AI efforts does not inherently produce better results. Research by De Cicco et al. (2025) shows that the effectiveness of hybrid models depends on the depth and quality of human engagement with AI outputs. Superficial oversight, consisting of cursory review rather than meaningful evaluation and refinement, diminishes the potential advantages such a hybrid model can offer. This highlights the indispensable role of human insight and judgment in the hybrid framework, required not only as validators of AI outcomes but also as active, strategic collaborators.

6.2 Organizational Frictions and Coordination Costs

Despite its theoretical advantages, hybrid collaboration poses a host of organizational challenges that can impede its practical success. One prominent friction point is coordination costs. Reviewing, evaluating, correcting, and refining AI-generated outputs demand considerable human time and cognitive resources. If AI outputs misalign with brand strategy or contextual needs, these coordination costs may overshadow the very efficiency gains that prompted the use of AI, shifting the focus from creative generation to evaluation and correction (McKinsey & Company, 2025).

Socio-technical theory offers a compelling framework for understanding these implementation challenges (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). It suggests that technology performance is influenced not only by its technical attributes but also by how well it aligns with existing organizational structures, workflows, incentives, and skill sets. This helps clarify why organizations with similar access to AI resources may experience vastly different outcomes: the hurdles to effective AI integration lie more in organizational dynamics than in technological capabilities. Consequently, this necessitates deliberate reengineering of creative processes, role definitions, and performance evaluation metrics.

In addition, accountability is a significant governance issue. AI-generated content can produce a range of errors, from factual inaccuracies and cultural insensitivities to copyright violations and algorithmic biases. When such mistakes occur, responsibility can become ambiguous, spreading among developers, the organizations that deploy the technology, and individual users. This ambiguity creates reputational and legal vulnerabilities that can erode governance frameworks and consumer trust (Afroogh et al., 2024). Additionally, the pervasive use of similar generative AI tools, often trained on overlapping data sets, raises the systemic risk of creative homogenization: outputs may start to resemble one another across different brands, undermining the very essence of originality that advertising aims to achieve (Ozturkcan & Bozdağ, 2025). Without vigilant and nuanced human creative leadership, the hybrid model risks achieving scale while sacrificing distinctiveness.

6.3 Strategic Task Allocation and Managerial Capability

Unlocking the full potential of hybrid collaboration requires a deliberate, principled approach to task allocation, eschewing a simple 'human plus AI' model (De Cicco et al., 2025; Ngo, 2025). AI should be used for tasks that are repetitive, data-intensive, or optimization-focused, such as initial ideation, variant generation, audience segmentation, localization, and performance testing. Conversely, tasks requiring human judgment, including brand positioning, emotional storytelling, ethical contemplation, cultural interpretation, and strategic approval, are best suited for individuals. Human experiences and contextual awareness cannot be replicated by algorithmic processes.

This framework for task allocation has significant strategic implications. It encourages organizations to clearly delineate the roles of AI and human input, build,ing a collaborative environment where both can thrive. Through this thoughtful approach, organizations can apply, AI's unique strengths while ensuring that human creativity, judgment, and insight remain at the forefront of the creative process.

Effective AI-augmented creative organizations stand out for their ability to evaluate, guide, and strategically use AI outputs. This process relies on distinctly human skills, including critical judgment, cultural awareness, and brand stewardship. According to Ngo's (2025) meta-analytic review, human-AI collaborative decision-making yields superior outcomes when individuals engage critically with AI-generated content rather than passively accepting it. Thus, future marketing capability development should prioritize AI collaboration skills as a fundamental professional competency.

6.4 Strategic Implications for Authenticity Preservation

A crucial aspect of hybrid collaboration that the existing literature has not fully explored is the challenge of preserving authenticity in AI-assisted creative endeavours. Insights from consumer psychology indicate that perceived AI authorship can undermine perceptions of authenticity, which ultimately diminishes trust and attitudes toward advertising. For the hybrid model to realize its potential advantages, it is essential not only to achieve functional complementarity but also to actively manage the authenticity signals conveyed to consumers.

To address this, It is essential that human creative leadership be prominently featured in the final output, serving not only as a quality control measure but also as a primary source of communicative intent, cultural judgment, and brand personality. Campaigns that place human creative direction at the strategic and authoritative centre, with AI functioning as a production and optimization tool, are more likely to maintain the authenticity associations that build, consumer trust and engagement (Mayer et al., 1995; Morhart et al., 2015). This understanding directly shapes how marketers frame, disclose, and position their use of AI in creative projects, a theme central to the practical recommendations developed in Objective Three.

Interim Synthesis

The existing literature on hybrid collaboration suggests that effective integration of AI in creative marketing contexts requires principled task allocation, active human oversight, and

careful creative accountability. Merely having access to AI tools does not guarantee a sustainable advantage; what truly matters is how human and AI capabilities are integrated to produce outputs that are both efficient and strategically authentic. Notably, the authenticity preservation challenge highlighted in previous sections as essential to consumer evaluation introduces an additional strategic requirement for the hybrid model: effective collaboration must not only enhance the quality of creative output but also actively manage the communicative signals of human intentionality, warmth, and genuine creative investment that consumers rely on to assess advertising authenticity and build trust.

7. Long- term Implications of AI in Marketing

Section 6 outlines a hybrid collaborative model for integrating AI into marketing, and this chapter expands on that model to examine longer-term strategic trajectories of AI in marketing. It explores the extent to which the normalization of generative AI fundamentally alters competitive dynamics, brand equity, and value creation in marketing.

As generative AI evolves from a unique competitive advantage for early-adopter organizations to a standard operating assumption within marketing, we expect the initial cost savings and speed-to-market associated with these technologies to be distributed more evenly across all organizations. Sustainable competitive advantage will likely stem from organizations' ability to use AI alongside other distinct organizational assets -- such as proprietary data, deep brand equity, and high levels of human creative judgment -- that competitors cannot readily replicate (Barney, 1991; Keller, 1993).

One major long-term strategic issue is the threat of "creative homogenization". In the future, we expect brands to rely more heavily on very similar AI tools trained on overlapping datasets. We also anticipate that their creative output will be nearly indistinguishable, reducing the competitive differentiation that is critical to building brand equity and ultimately driving purchasing behaviour based on identity expression and emotional connection (Aaker, 1996; Feng & Song, 2025). Brands will need to make conscious choices about creative direction and use AI to enable humans to create differentiated content rather than allowing AI to autonomously produce content.

Personalization is one area where AI has the potential to provide a sustainable competitive advantage by enabling marketers to deliver relevant messaging at scale and tailor those

messages to specific consumer behaviours or demographics in ways manual content development does not allow. However, the privacy calculus tension discussed earlier creates a structural limitation on this advantage. Regulatory bodies are tightening restrictions on the types of information that can be collected from consumers, especially through emerging laws such as the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Regulation (European Commission, 2024) and data protection regulations. Therefore, the degree to which personalized messaging is valued versus viewed as intrusive will be shaped by transparency, consent architectures, and evidence of value exchanges (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999).

Increasingly, transparency adds another layer of complexity for marketers. While research shows that disclosing the use of AI may increase perceptions of novelty, it also raises questions about authenticity. Like other forms of communication, the overall impact of disclosing AI usage will depend on the context in which it is communicated. Thus, there is a dual-edged aspect to communicating AI usage in marketing communications, whether intended or unintended. Consequently, the decision regarding how much to disclose about AI usage is not just a matter of regulatory compliance for marketing organizations; it is a key branding strategy decision: How do you communicate your use of AI in a manner that builds trust with customers rather than erodes that trust? This is especially true for organizations in industries where authenticity and human connection are primary components of differentiation from the competition.

Ultimately, AI will raise governance issues for how marketing organizations deploy this technology. Ozturkcan and Bozdağ (2025) describe an inherent systemic risk in their theory of the AI washing-booing cycle, in which exaggerated claims about what an organization's AI system can accomplish lead to consumer outrage and public backlash when the claimed capabilities are not realized. Responsible deployment of AI in marketing – defined by transparent communication of capabilities; accountable measurement and evaluation; truthful representations of capabilities; and legitimate human oversight – is not only an ethical responsibility for marketing organizations; it is a legitimacy imperative (Afroogh et al., 2024). Organizations that exaggerate their reliance on AI relative to transparency will face both a loss of customer trust and increased scrutiny from regulators under emerging standards for regulating AI.

To summarize, the long-term strategic implications of AI in marketing centre on a fundamental idea: effectiveness depends more on how organizations manage the use of the

technical capabilities provided by AI systems than on the capabilities themselves. This idea serves as the theoretical basis for the practical recommendations outlined in Objective Three.

8.0 Conceptual alignment

The literature reviews in sections 2–7, taken together, provide a cohesive and theoretically rich view of how consumers assess AI-generated marketing content. Consumer behaviour is driven by the meanings consumers assign to the perceived authors of AI-generated or created advertisements. Although both types of advertising can have equal technical quality, they will be assessed differently because consumers interpret the communication source as signalling human intentionality, warmth, creative effort, and credible intentions. The key issue is not whether an ad produced via AI is successful, but whether consumers believe an advertisement generated via AI is viewed as creative, authentic, emotionally engaging, and trusted in the same manner as advertisements created by humans.

Objective One is supported by strong theoretical foundations for predicting significant perceptual differences between human-assessed and AI-assessed advertisements in creating and emotionally engaging consumers. The creativity construct is a multidimensional, consumer-valuation-based construct that depends on integrating novelty with relevance and emotional value (Mercanti-Guérin, 2008; Rosengren et al., 2020). Emotional engagement is considered a central (as opposed to peripheral) persuasive process mediated by empathic feelings, self-identification, and perceived intentionalism by the human communicator (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Feng & Song, 2025). Objective one is grounded in a direct relationship to the theoretical constructs of creativity and emotional engagement, given the focus placed on them.

Objective Two positions authenticity and trust as the primary psychological drivers of perceived origin of the communication source, which translate into consumer assessments of advertising. Morhart et al.'s (2015) framework for assessing authenticity established it as a formative assessment based on perceptions of sincerity, consistency, and integrity – attributes tied to human authorship that could be undermined if AI origin were to become salient. Mayer et al.'s (1995) trust model identified three constituent antecedents of trust – ability,

benevolence, and integrity – with benevolent intentions being a critical component of trusting advertising within relational contexts. The serial mediation model examined in Objective two (source origin → authenticity → trust → advertising attitude) was derived from this theoretical structure and represents the conceptual centrepiece of this dissertation.

The literature review also identifies a significant empirical gap in prior research. Prior research has examined creativity, trust, algorithm avoidance, and AI acceptance primarily in isolation and outside advertising contexts. There is a notable lack of controlled empirical studies comparing AI-generated and human-created advertising content using identical stimuli across multiple evaluative dimensions simultaneously. This dissertation seeks to fill this empirical void through its perception-based comparative method, which holds constant the influence of perceived source origin on consumer evaluations and controls for advertising content quality by using identical stimulus materials.

For Objective Three, the literature critiques simplistic distinctions between human and AI creators and advocates hybrid collaboration as the most practical model for incorporating AI into marketing creative efforts. AI offers legitimate operational advantages in scale, velocity, and personalization; however, limitations in signalling authenticity, conveying emotional warmth, and creating symbolic meaning constrain AI's potential to match the creative output of human creators. Effective hybrid approaches require rationally assigning tasks and providing active human oversight of creative processes, while proactively managing authenticity signals throughout campaign design and communications disclosures strategies (Ngo, 2025; De Cicco et al., 2025). These perspectives establish the basis for the specific practitioner-oriented guidelines presented in objective three.

In summary, this literature review provides a comprehensive, multi-theory framework that supports the dissertation's analytical framework. The synthesis of theories on creativity, research on emotional engagement, consumer psychology and AI marketing literature, and hybrid collaboration models supports the expectation that perceived authorship is a consistent and significant factor driving consumer assessments of advertising, and that this occurs sequentially through authenticity and trust. This study is poised to empirically test the

theoretical propositions and translate those findings into strategic guidance for marketing professionals operating in a rapidly changing environment where AI continues to advance creative capabilities.

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3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of the empirical part of this dissertation is outlined. This includes details on the philosophical framework and design of the research, the creation of advertising stimuli, the measurement strategy, participant sampling, and the analysis of the

collected data. In addition, a methodological reflection on a design modification that occurred during data collection is provided, along with an explanation of why it was made transparent.

3.1 Philosophical Framework.

As a quantitative study, this dissertation uses a positivist framework. From the perspective of positivism, social phenomena may be measured using systematic approaches to allow empirical generalizations based on structured data (Saunders et al, 2019). Using this framework, this dissertation follows a deductive approach to test hypotheses that have been created from existing theories related to AI-generated content and consumer perception. As such, consumer perceptions of advertising are measurable latent constructs that are represented using psychometric instruments validated through previous research on experimental advertising (Rosengren et al, 2020).

3.2 Research Design

The study employs a between-subjects online experiment embedded within a survey. Participants will be randomly assigned to view one of six ads for the fictional skincare brand Lumera either AI-generated or created by humans. The independent variable is content origin (AI vs. Humans) and will measure perceived creativity, emotional engagement, authenticity, trust, and attitude toward the ad itself (Objectives One and Two), and translate these results into actionable recommendations for managers through integrative synthesis (Objective Three).

A between-subjects design is selected to prevent sequential contrast effects, whereby exposure to multiple advertisements within one session could cause participants to calibrate evaluations relative to prior stimuli rather than responding independently.

Between-subjects designs provide a better representation of natural advertising exposures compared to within-subject designs (Dahlen et al., 2008; Rosengren et al., 2020). Three AI-generated and three human-created advertisements will be utilized; utilizing multiple stimuli provides protection from confounded origin effects being caused by idiosyncrasies in a specific execution (Rosengren et al., 2020).

3.3 Stimulus Creation.

3.3.1 The Lumera Brand.

Lumera, the fictitious skincare brand used throughout the study's stimuli, eliminates the potential influence of extraneous variables associated with pre-existing brand knowledge and familiarity of a particular brand as well as prior attitudes towards a brand (Campbell & Keller, 2003; Keller, 1993). Utilizing fictitious brands in experimental studies is common (Castelo et al., 2019; Longoni et al., 2019); it allows researchers to evaluate stimuli under controlled conditions. Skincare products were selected for use because they possess aesthetic properties and create strong emotions when evaluating them; therefore, they can evaluate both creativity, engagement, and authenticity at once.

3.3.2 Human-Created Advertising Stimuli.

Three human-created advertisements are to be created by the researcher using Canva. Each advertisement contains images of actual skincare products, specifically a serum, in various outdoor environments taken from royalty-free stock images, and each advertisement contains layouts designed and arranged by the researcher. The three unique visuals include: a close-up bottle still life, a handheld product shot, and a lifestyle flat-lay composition. Both headlines and supporting copy for each advertisement included: "Restore Your Natural Glow in 7 Days, Deep Hydration That Works With Your Skin Not Against It, and Shop Now Call To Action" were the same for all three ads. All visual and textual content in the human condition was produced using creative agency by a human without any use of AI generation tools. All six finished advertisements can be seen in Appendix A.

3.3.3 AI-Generated Advertising Stimuli.

Three AI-generated advertisements are to be created by the researcher using Canva's built-in AI image generation tool. The visual components highly realistic product renderings were created through AI text-to-image capabilities, resulting in high-quality product images without using actual photographs. All copywriting, headlines, and calls-to-actions were identical to those created for the human condition. Only the visual elements differed between conditions; thus representing an operationally defensible way to vary content source (Longoni & Cian, 2022; Rosengren et al., 2020). The three visually distinct executions included: a simple cream-coloured background, an underwater surface setting with reflections, and a warm-toned natural environment.

3.3.4 Equivalent Stimuli and Hosting Environment.

Each of the six advertisements were produced from a shared creative brief detailing the name of the brand, type of product, value proposition, headline, body copy, call-to-action, colour scheme, and typography identity to ensure that any differences observed in consumer evaluations are due solely to the source of the creative versus differences in overall creative strategy. Approximately 20–30 participants participated in a pre-test prior to collecting data for the current study to determine if there were any observable issues with readability legibility; recognizable as an ad; or differing levels of initial baseline quality across conditions. The advertisements were hosted externally via Google Drive and embedded into Qualtrics using image URL links to ensure consistent display across participant device platforms; as per practices found in online experimental research (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016).

3.4 Measurement Strategy

All five constructs in this study will be assessed using well-established, multi-item Likert-type scales that will range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). This seven-point scale will provide a balance between offering detailed insights into participants' perceptions and ensuring that the questions remain easy to understand. Table 3.1 will outline each construct, its source scale, the number of items included, and an example item for clarity. To analyse the data, composite scores will be calculated as the average of all items for each construct, after confirming that the measures demonstrate good internal consistency reliability.

Table 3.1. Measurement Instruments Summary

Construct	Scale Source	Items	Example Item
Creativity	Mercanti-Guérin (2008)	5	"This advertisement is original and creative."
Emotional Engagement	Holbrook & Batra (1987); Ahmed et al. (2024)	5	"This advertisement made me feel emotionally connected."
Authenticity	Morhart et al. (2015)	5	"This advertisement feels genuine and sincere."
Trust	Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995)	6	"I trust the brand behind this advertisement."
Attitude Toward Ad (Aad)	Holbrook & Batra (1987); MacKenzie & Lutz (1989)	5	"Overall, I have a positive attitude toward this advertisement."

Creativity will be assessed utilizing the consumer-based scale developed by Mercanti-Guérin (2008). The measure will capture novelty, aesthetic integration, and executional originality from the consumer's perspective, aligning with the understanding that creative value can exist in how the audience perceives the product, rather than the intentions of the creator (El-Murad & West, 2004).

Emotional engagement will be defined using the Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance framework by Holbrook and Batra (1987), which will assess affective responses. Additionally, involvement measures from Ahmed et al. (2024) will be utilized to evaluate the experiential depth of participants' engagement.

Authenticity will be defined using the Brand Authenticity Scale developed by Morhart et al. (2015). This scale will define authenticity across several categories, including continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism dimensions that will likely resonate most closely with consumers of AI-generated content, as there has historically been less concern about intentionality and sincerity in relation to AI-generated products.

Trust will be defined using the Integrative Model of Mayer et al. (1995), specifically assessing perceived ability, integrity, and benevolence. This approach will allow researchers to detect any trust asymmetry in AI-generating applications, where consumers may perceive an application as having high technical ability but low benevolence.

Attitudes Toward Advertising (Aad) will be defined using items from Holbrook and Batra (1987) and MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). Aad will serve as the primary downstream outcome, as it represents a global evaluative assessment of advertising, theoretically integrating all upstream perceptual assessments and maintaining historical precedent as a dependent variable in experimental advertising studies (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

The survey will be implemented using Qualtrics for its built-in randomization, structured survey design, timed display control, and embedded stimulus display, critical elements for conducting between-subjects experimental designs online that are lacking in basic tools like Google Forms (Aguinis et al., 2021; Goodman et al., 2013). Once access to the survey is granted, participants will receive an information sheet and sign informed consent forms. The survey will proceed as follows: (1) Random assignment to one of six ads via Qualtrics' randomizer; (2) Exposure to the stimulus ad for at least eight seconds, with Qualtrics' timed delay function enforcing at least an eight-second wait before continuing; (3) Completion of Likert-scale items measuring all five constructs; (4) A manipulation check (Q14) assessing whether participants believe their exposure to an advertisement was generated by a human, by artificial intelligence, or whether they are unsure; (5) An embedded instructional attention check; and (6) A debriefing section explaining that authors withheld authorship identification during exposure to prevent priming bias, consistent with standard practices in experimental advertising research (Rosengren et al., 2020).

Withholding authorship before exposure to the advertisement will mitigate the risk of systematic distortion in the perception of technology-related stereotypes prior to measurement, thereby preserving internal validity (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Additionally, post-exposure disclosure will occur during the debrief.

Three objectives will be formulated based on the overall research question: "How do consumers evaluate the creativity, authenticity, and emotional aspects of marketing content generated by AI versus human-generated marketing content?"

Objective One will examine the perceptual differences between AI and human advertising conditions across all five constructs. Five directional hypotheses will be presented:

• *H1: Human-created advertising will be evaluated as more creative than AI-generated advertising by consumers.*

• *H2: Consumers exposed to human-created advertising will experience a greater emotional connection than those exposed to AI-generated advertising.*

• *H3: Human-created advertising will be rated as more authentic than AI-generated advertising by consumers.*

• *H4: Human-created advertising will generate higher levels of trust than AI-generated advertising among consumers.*

• *H5: Consumers exposed to human-created advertising will have more favourable attitudes toward the advertisement than those exposed to AI-generated advertising.*

The rationale for these hypotheses will draw on literature on algorithm aversion (Castelo et al., 2019), warmth-competence perceptions (Fiske et al., 2007), and perceived intentionality in consumers' evaluation of AI-generated content (Feng & Song, 2025; Longoni et al., 2019).

Objective Two will investigate whether authenticity and trust serve as sequential mediators in the causal relationship between content generation source and attitude toward the advertisement, using a serial mediation model: Content Generation Source → Authenticity (M1) → Trust (M2) → Attitude (Aad).

A serial rather than parallel structural form will be adopted, as Morhart et al. (2015) will conceptualize authenticity as a foundational judgment that serves as an antecedent to trust formation. Mayer et al. (1995) will define trust as a precursor to attitudinal evaluations, supporting a sequential mediating model.

Objective Three will present an integrated literature review that translates empirical findings into actionable, managerially relevant recommendations, drawing on peer-reviewed literature from Scopus, Google Scholar, and EBSCO Business Source Complete.

3.7 Data Analysis Plan

Reliability analysis will first be conducted by computing Cronbach's alpha for each scale, with $\alpha \geq .70$ deemed acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). After demonstrating reliable internal consistency for each scale, composite scores will be computed. Independent-samples t-tests will be used to test for group differences in mean construct ratings between human-created and AI-generated advertising conditions. Levene's test will determine whether to use pooled or separate variance estimates. Effect-size data will be reported alongside t-test statistics (Cohen, 1988). For objective two, a serial mediation model will be constructed using the PROCESS macro, version 5.0 (Hayes, 2018), Model 6, with 5000 bootstrap resamples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals. Content generation source will be dummy-coded (0 = human-generated; 1 = AI-generated). A bootstrapped indirect effect falling outside the bounds of a 95% CI that excludes zero will be considered significant.

3.8 Sample Size and Ethical Considerations

The intended population will include adults aged eighteen years or older who engage with digital advertising, with no restrictions based on gender, occupational background, or area of study. Recruitment will occur through nonprobability convenience sampling via TU Dublin networks, peer channels, social media, etc. While convenience sampling may limit generalizability across populations, it will be suitable for experimental designs focused on internal validity, i.e., establishing relationships between constructs in experimental settings rather than estimating population parameters (Goodman et al., 2013). Approximately two hundred participants are anticipated, yielding around one hundred per treatment group after exclusions. Sample sizes in experimental advertising research are generally consistent with this number (Rosengren et al., 2020). Responses will be excluded from the survey if participants fail attention checks, complete fewer than the required portions of the survey, or respond unreasonably quickly. Participation will be strictly voluntary and anonymous. Each participant will receive an information sheet and sign informed consent before participation begins. No personally identifiable information will be collected. The study will be conducted according to the Faculty of Business's ethical guidelines at TU Dublin.

3.9 Methodological Reflection: Design Adaptation

In empirical research, it is standard practice to identify and address discrepancies between a study's intended design and its actual implementation (Saunders et al., 2019). This reflection documents a specific challenge encountered during data collection and the rationale for the adaptive measures taken in response.

Design Adaptation Note

The study was designed as a between-subjects experiment with the experimental condition variable recorded as an embedded data field in Qualtrics. During data preparation, it was identified that while the randomiser correctly routed participants to one of six stimuli, no embedded data field had been configured to capture which condition each participant was exposed to. As a result, the actual experimental assignment variable was absent from the exported dataset and could not be recovered.

Following consultation with the dissertation supervisor, the study was reframed as a perception-based comparative analysis. Rather than grouping participants by their actual assigned condition, analyses compare participants according to their perceived source of the advertisement captured through the manipulation check question (Q14) as either human-created or AI-generated. Participants who selected 'Not sure' were excluded from all inferential analyses, reducing the effective analytic sample from 147 total completions to 86 participants with valid perceived-source responses.

The preceding adaptation has significant conceptual and analytical ramifications. An assignment based on the perceived author of a stimulus cannot serve as a proxy for an assignment based on experimental manipulation. Perceptions of authorship can themselves be influenced by prior attitudinal orientation toward artificial intelligence (AI), the participant's perceptual sensitivity, and aspects of the specific advertisement being evaluated, thus representing both antecedents and variables that are evaluatively affected. Therefore, causal inferences cannot be drawn from these data. All findings are interpreted as reflecting associations between perceived authorship and consumer evaluations. A two-way ANOVA

robustness check (which would have indicated that the effect of perceived origin held constant across the various stimuli) cannot be completed because the versions of the stimuli variable were not available for analysis alongside the condition variable. However, these limitations are fully noted in the findings section.

Despite this constraint, the perception-based approach remains theoretically consistent. Most of the foundational literature on how consumers respond to artificially generated content (e.g., Castelo et al. 2019 [algorithm aversion], Fiske et al. 2007 [perceptions of warmth-competence], Morhart et al. 2015 [perceived authenticity]) focuses on consumers' beliefs about where the content originated rather than its actual origin. As such, the adaptation is consistent with the theoretical framework employed in this dissertation.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the methodology used for this dissertation. In addition to outlining the methodology to be employed in this dissertation, the study was initially structured as a within-subjects online experiment to compare consumer evaluations of advertising developed via AI technology with those developed by humans. The study aims to assess differences across five perceptual constructs based on whether an advertisement was perceived as AI-generated or human-created. These assessments are to be accomplished using multiple-item Likert scale measures and employing planned statistical analyses consisting of independent samples t-tests and PROCESS Model 6 sequential mediation. Additionally, this chapter documents the necessity of a study design modification due to a missing condition variable, resulting in a study redesign based on a perception comparison of human- and machine-created advertisements. This modification is acknowledged transparently as one study limitation that prevents drawing causal conclusions. The next chapter describes the reliability, t-test, and mediation analyses results.

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4.0 Findings

The results reported in this chapter represent a perception-based comparative study, not the true experimental design originally proposed. The initial study was conceived as a between-subjects study where participants would be randomly assigned to view advertisements generated by either artificial intelligence (AI) or humans. However, after reviewing the data collected, it became clear that although the Qualtrics randomiser successfully allocated participants to their respective treatment groups, there was no embedded data field in place to track which group each participant was actually in. Therefore, the actual experimental assignment variable could not be determined based on the data.

After consultation with the dissertation supervisor, the study was reframed to convert it into a perception-based comparative study. Instead of contrasting participants based on their actual assigned condition, compared participants based on their perception of who authored the advertisement (i.e., human or artificial intelligence); the authors' perceptions were recorded via Question 14 (the manipulation check).

This change transformed the study from an experimental comparative study into a comparative perceptual study; consequently, findings from the study can only be used to determine associations between consumers' perceptions of an ad's author and consumers ratings of those ads. These findings cannot establish causal relationships between an ad's author and how well that ad will perform.

I have accepted and recognised this change in methodology throughout this section and addressed it further in Section 4.6.

4.2 Sample Characteristics

A total of 147 people completed the survey. Of those, 86 participants responded to the perceived source of the ad question (Question 14) and indicated whether they believed the ad they viewed was written by a human or by artificial intelligence. Thirty-one participants (36.0%) thought the ad was developed by a human, and 54 participants (62.8%) thought it was developed by artificial intelligence. The remaining 61 participants who did not complete Question 14 were excluded from all statistical tests and analyses.

Each of the scale items (Questions S9-S13) was also converted into numeric values so they could be analysed together; composite scores were calculated for each of the five dependent variables: Ad Creativity (Creativity_Score), Emotional Connection to the Ad

(EmotionalEng_Score), Authenticity (Authenticity_Score), Trust (Trust_Score), and Consumer Perceptions toward the Ad (AttitudeAd_Score).

4.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess interitem reliability for each of the five scales. One trust item (S12_5) was missing from the dataset due to a Qualtrics export error; thus, trust was measured by five items instead of the intended six. A table presenting the reliability results for each of the five scales is in Appendix B.

Figure 1 Internal Consistency Reliability for All Five Scales

Construct	Items	N	Cronbach's α	Rating
Creativity	5	96	.928	Excellent
Emotional Engagement	5	92	.916	Excellent
Authenticity	5	91	.947	Excellent
Trust	5*	96	.949	Excellent
Attitude Toward Ad	5	85	.969	Excellent

The note. The trust scale was reduced to 5 items in this analysis due to an export error from Qualtrics with item S12_5. All α values were examined via Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) standard of greater than or equal to .70 as acceptable reliability.

The internal consistencies of all five scales were very high; Cronbach's alphas ranged from .916 to .969. Both benchmarks of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and .90 are well beyond those levels. Therefore, these composite scores provide a solid psychometric foundation for the inferential analyses presented below.

4.4 Perceptual Differences Across Consumer Evaluations

Objective one evaluated whether there were significant differences in consumer perceptions of advertising based on whether consumers believed an advertisement was created by a human versus artificial intelligence (AI). Specifically, this objective examined how a consumer's perception of the advertisement affected their ratings of creativity, emotional

engagement, authenticity, trustworthiness, and overall attitude toward the advertisement. Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare group ratings between those who perceived the advertisement as human-created (n = 31) and those who perceived it as AI-created (n = 54). To interpret the findings, Levene's test for equality of variance was conducted prior to analysis for each variable. The assumption of equal variance was violated for all five variables (Creativity: F = 9.240, p = .003; Emotional Engagement: F = 6.105, p = .016; Authenticity: F = 4.779, p = .032; Trust: F = 7.666, p = .007; Attitude Toward Ad: F = 11.122, p = .001). Thus, results assuming unequal variances were used for further examination. In addition, effect size was assessed using Cohen's d. Conventional benchmark interpretations of Cohen's d include medium ($d \geq 0.50$) and large ($d \geq 0.80$) (Cohen, 1988). Table 2 presents the full results.

Figure 2 Independent Samples T-Test Results with Effect Sizes: Perceived Source (Human vs AI) Across Five Dependent Variables

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	T	p	d	Interpretation
Creativity	Human	31	5.52	1.07	5.114	< .001	1.04	Large
	AI	54	4.04	1.60				
Emotional Engagement	Human	31	5.48	1.09	5.355	< .001	1.09	Large
	AI	54	3.90	1.61				
Authenticity	Human	31	5.63	1.19	4.072	< .001	0.86	Large
	AI	54	4.41	1.54				
Trust	Human	31	5.71	1.04	3.877	< .001	0.80	Medium–Large
	AI	54	4.65	1.47				
Attitude Toward Ad	Human	31	6.30	1.18	4.820	< .001	0.99	Large

	AI	54	4.79	1.69				

Note. Equal variances were not assumed, and results are reported for all variables. Cohen's d was calculated using the pooled standard deviation. All results represent perceptual group differences and should not be construed as causal effects of content origin. The findings from this research provide valuable insights into the impact of perceived authorship on various dimensions of consumer engagement with advertisements.

4.4.1 H1: Perceived Creativity

Hypothesis 1 posited that participants who viewed the advertisement as human-created would rate it as more creative than those who viewed it as AI-created. The t-test results showed a statistically significant difference in perceived creativity between the human-perceived group ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.07$) and the AI-perceived group ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.60$), $t(81.10) = 5.114$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$. This large effect size indicates a strong association between perceived human authorship and higher creativity ratings. Therefore, H1 is supported.

4.4.2 H2: Perceived Emotional Engagement

Hypothesis 2 suggested that participants who perceived the advertisement as human-created would report greater emotional engagement. The analysis demonstrated a significant perceptual difference between the human-perceived group ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.09$) and the AI-perceived group ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.61$), $t(80.73) = 5.355$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.09$. Notably, this represents the largest effect size across all five variables, indicating that emotional engagement is particularly sensitive to perceived authorship. Hence, H2 is supported.

4.4.3 H3: Perceived Authenticity

Hypothesis 3 proposed that participants who perceived the advertisement as human-created would rate it as more authentic. Results confirmed a significant perceptual difference between the human-perceived group ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.19$) and the AI-perceived group ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.54$), $t(75.83) = 4.072$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.86$. The large effect size indicates that perceived

human authorship is associated with meaningfully higher authenticity ratings, thereby supporting H3.

4.4.4 H4: Perceived Trust

Hypothesis 4 predicted that participants who perceived the advertisement as human-created would report higher trust. A significant perceptual difference was observed between the human-perceived group ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.04$) and the AI-perceived group ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.47$), $t(79.35) = 3.877$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.80$. Although trust yielded the smallest effect size among the five constructs, it still indicates that perceived authorship is associated with significantly different trust ratings. Thus, H4 is supported.

4.4.5 H5: Attitude Toward the Advertisement

Hypothesis 5 proposed that participants who perceived the advertisement as human-created would have a more positive attitude toward it. Analysis confirmed a significant perceptual difference between the human-perceived group ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.18$) and the AI-perceived group ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.69$), $t(79.83) = 4.820$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.99$. This large effect size indicates that overall attitude toward the advertisement was substantially more positive among those who perceived it as human-created, thereby supporting H5.

4.4.6 Summary of Objective One Findings

All five hypotheses were supported at $p < .001$. The effect sizes were large for four out of five variables ($d = 0.86–1.09$), with trust presenting a medium-to-large effect ($d = 0.80$). Emotional engagement exhibited the largest effect size ($d = 1.09$), suggesting that perceived authorship is most closely associated with differences in affective responses to advertising. Consistently, participants who perceived the advertisement as human-created provided significantly more favourable evaluations across all examined dimensions than their AI-perceived counterparts. These findings align with existing literature indicating that perceived human authorship correlates with higher levels of empathy, intentionality, and emotional resonance in consumer evaluations of advertising content (Feng & Song, 2025; Longoni & Cian, 2019).

4.5 Objective Two: Serial Mediation of Authenticity and Trust

Objective Two investigates the perceptual mechanisms linking perceived source origin to attitude toward the advertisement. It investigates whether authenticity and trust function as sequential mediators in this relationship. The serial mediation model was estimated using PROCESS Macro Version 5.0 (Hayes, 2018), Model 6, with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals. Perceived source (Perceived_Clean; 1 = Human, 2 = AI) was the independent variable, perceived authenticity served as the first mediator (M1), perceived trust as the second mediator (M2), and attitude toward the advertisement was the outcome variable. One case was excluded due to listwise deletion, resulting in an analytic sample of n = 85. As with Objective One, all findings should be interpreted as reflecting perceptual associations rather than causal relationships.

The analysis of the model examining the factors that influence attitude toward advertisements reveals significant findings. The overall model, which incorporates perceived source, authenticity, and trust, was statistically significant ($F(3, 81) = 76.507$, $p < .001$) and accounts for 73.9% of the variance in attitudes toward the advertisement ($R^2 = .739$). This indicates a robust model fit, suggesting that these three factors, perceived source origin, authenticity, and trust, collectively explain a substantial majority of the variation in how individuals respond to advertisements. The details of the regression coefficients for each path in the model are presented in Table 3.

Figure 3 Regression Coefficients for Serial Mediation Paths (PROCESS Model 6, n =85) ***Table 3.*** *Regression Coefficients for Serial Mediation Paths (PROCESS Model 6, n = 85)*

Path	Coeff (b)	SE	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
Source → Authenticity (a_1)	−1.217	.321	−3.799	.0003	−1.855	−.580
Source → Trust (a_2)	−.095	.174	−.548	.585	−.440	.250
Authenticity → Trust (d_{21})	.794	.055	14.467	< .001	.685	.903

Authenticity → Attitude toward Ad (b_1)	.152	.127	1.191	.237	−.102	.405
Trust → Attitude toward Ad (b_2)	.803	.136	5.904	< .001	.532	1.073
Source → Attitude toward Ad (direct, c')	−.470	.214	−2.193	.031	−.895	−.044

In examining the relationship between perceived source and various outcome measures, notable findings emerged. Path a_1 illustrates the significant association between perceived source and authenticity, with a coefficient of ($b = -1.217$, $p = .0003$). This indicates that participants who believed the advertisement was created by AI rated it as considerably less authentic. Additionally, Path d_{21} shows a highly significant relationship between authenticity and trust, as evidenced by ($b = .794$, $p < .001$). This suggests that higher perceptions of authenticity correlate strongly with increased trust.

In addition, Path b_2 reveals that the association between trust and attitudes toward the advertisement is also significant ($b = .803$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater trust is linked to more favourable attitudes towards the advertisement. However, the direct pathway from source to trust (a_2: $b = -.095$, $p = .585$) and the pathway from authenticity to attitudes toward the advertisement (b_1: $b = .152$, $p = .237$) were found to be non-significant. This implies that these constructs are not independent; rather, they operate sequentially, suggesting a complex interplay between them.

Building on this, when examining the direct and indirect effects, the influence of perceived source on attitudes toward the advertisement remained statistically significant ($b = -.470$, $p = .031$, 95% CI [−.895, −.044]) after controlling for both mediators. This finding indicates partial mediation, as the perceived source variable retains a negative association with advertising attitude. This suggests that perceptions of the source not only contribute to attitudes through the established mediation pathway but may also be influenced by additional perceptual mechanisms not fully captured in the current model. The bootstrapped indirect effects are outlined in Table 4.

Figure 4 Bootstrapped Indirect Effects of Perceived Source on Attitude Toward Ad via Authenticity and Trust (5,000 Bootstrap Resamples)

Indirect Path	Effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Significant?
Ind1: Source → Authenticity → AttAd	−.185	.155	−.503	.110	No
Ind2: Source → Trust → AttAd	−.076	.114	−.320	.130	No
Ind3: Source → Authenticity → Trust → AttAd	−.776	.225	−1.251	−.363	Yes ✓
Total indirect effect	−1.037	.244	−1.521	−.555	Yes ✓

4.5.3 Interpretation of Mediation Findings

The results of the analysis provide substantial support for the proposed serial mediation model. It has been shown that perceived source origin is linked to attitudes toward the advertisement in a sequential manner. This pathway begins with the perception of authenticity, which subsequently influences trust, in turn affecting attitudes toward the advertisement. Notably, authenticity and trust do not function as independent mediators; instead, the entire sequence from authenticity to trust is crucial for understanding the indirect relationship between perceived source and attitude.

This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in Objective Two. Morhart et al. (2015) articulate authenticity as essential to establishing relational trust, while Mayer et al. (1995) present trust as a key antecedent that informs attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. The observed relationships align with this sequential rationale: participants who viewed the advertisement as AI-generated reported diminished perceptions of authenticity, which in turn correlated with lower trust levels and subsequently less favourable attitudes toward the advertisement.

The evidence of partial mediation is highlighted by the retained significant direct effect of perceived source on attitude, suggesting that source perception impacts advertising attitudes through additional pathways beyond the authenticity-trust sequence. Potential variables such

as perceived intentionality, warmth, or creative agency were not directly measured in this study, indicating areas for future investigation.

4.5.4 Summary of Objective Two Findings

The serial mediation analysis elucidates a well-defined and theoretically consistent pathway: participants perceiving the advertisement as AI-generated indicated lower authenticity, leading to reduced trust, which ultimately resulted in negative attitudes toward the advertisement. The complete serial mediation path (Source → Authenticity → Trust → Attitude) emerged as the sole significant indirect effect, thus emphasizing the vital sequential relationship among these constructs. This model explained 73.9% of the variance in attitudes toward the advertisement, representing a notably strong and substantive outcome. Together with the results of the t-test from Objective One, these findings construct a coherent narrative detailing how perceived authorship influences consumer evaluations of advertising.

4.6 Overall Summary of Findings

The collective findings from Objectives One and Two reveal a consistent and theoretically sound framework. Across all five dimensions considered creativity, emotional engagement, authenticity, trust, and attitudes toward the advertisement participants who identified the advertisement as human-created offered significantly more positive evaluations than those perceiving it as AI-generated, with large effect sizes across numerous constructs. In addition, the serial mediation analysis articulated the perceptual mechanism behind these differences: AI-perceived authorship correlated with lower authenticity, which led to diminished trust, ultimately resulting in less favourable attitudes toward the advertisement. The mediation model sufficiently accounted for 73.9% of the variance in attitudes toward the advertisement. These results will be further explored in the context of existing literature and their practical implications for marketers in the subsequent chapter.

4.7 Methodological Limitations of the Current Findings

Several methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings discussed in this chapter. Most of these limitations stem from the design adjustments outlined in Section 4.1, as well as practical challenges encountered during data collection and preparation.

A significant limitation relates to the loss of the experimental condition variable. The original study was designed as a true between-subjects experiment with random assignment to either AI-generated or human-created advertisement conditions. However, because there was no embedded data field in the Qualtrics survey to document condition assignment, it was impossible to recover the specific condition experienced by each participant. While random assignment was intended, its verification is absent from the analysis. As a result, the study relies on perceived source (Q14) as the primary grouping variable, thereby raising concerns about the integrity of the experimental design, which transforms the design from a controlled experimental comparison into a perception-based one.

The dissertation supervisor highlighted that a perceived source cannot simply replace an actual experimental condition, as the perceived source may be influenced by participants' pre-existing attitudes, beliefs, or characteristics of the advertisement, rather than being a direct reflection of the intended manipulation. Consequently, no causal conclusions can be drawn from the findings; thus, all results should be interpreted as associations with perception.

Another limitation concerns a significant amount of missing data for Question 14. Out of the 147 individuals who participated in the study and completed the survey, 61 participants (41.5%) provided valid responses to the perceived source question and were excluded from the analysis. This exclusion left an analytical sample of n = 86 participants, which is below the target number of approximately 200 originally anticipated. With such a smaller sample size, there is limited statistical power to detect statistically significant relationships, thereby decreasing generalizability to larger consumer populations. Additionally, non-response bias may arise if those who did not respond to Question 14 significantly differ from those who completed the perceived source question.

Another limitation relates to the Trust Scale. Due to a Qualtrics export error, one of the questions (S12_5) was missing from the dataset and was removed from the Trust composite before analysis. Although the remaining five items used to measure Trust yielded a high reliability alpha value of .949, the absence of the sixth item could potentially affect the content validity of the construct to a small extent.

The planned two-way ANOVA robustness test could not be conducted. This test was intended to evaluate whether findings were consistent across the various stimulus versions, allowing for an assessment of whether observed effects represented content origin or unique aspects of

each advertisement. The inability to perform this analysis precludes the definitive elimination of the possibility that some observed perceptual differences are attributable to unique elements of the respective advertisements rather than merely their perceived authorship.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that any studies utilizing a perception-based design present a significant confounding issue. Specifically, consumers who perceive an advertisement as created by artificial intelligence might do so because they find it less engaging, less creative, or less authentic. Therefore, perceived authorship could be, in part, a function of consumers' evaluative responses rather than a precursor. This reverse causality highlights the fundamental difference between perception-based designs and true experimental designs, underscoring why all findings should be treated as associative rather than causal.

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Objective three of this dissertation addresses the creation of theoretically supported and empirically grounded guidelines for marketers to combine AI and human creativity for effective campaign design. The approach taken to achieve this goal is based on the methodological strategy outlined in Chapter 3, an integrative literature synthesis as defined by Torraco (2005) that focuses on conceptual integration, critical evaluation, and theory building rather than comprehensive coverage of the literature. Rather than mechanically collecting findings, this study organized insights around conceptual patterns that emerged at the intersection of empirical results and the extant literature. Therefore, this study did not develop universally applicable recommendations but provided conditional recommendations regarding whether AI-generated advertising will positively or negatively affect consumer assessments, based on both observed data and established theory.

In addition to providing an overview of the study, this chapter presents four thematic arguments, each anchored in a specific empirical finding, before synthesizing them into a strategic framework for practice. A critical reflexivity section then acknowledges the interpretive lens applied to the findings and the limits associated with the context of the recommendations. Ultimately, the chapter concludes with a summary that ties together all three research objectives and the overarching research question. The literature selected for inclusion in this chapter reflects the selection criteria for integrative synthesis specified in the

methodology: peer-reviewed publications from top-tier marketing and consumer psychology journals and interdisciplinary journals, with a particular focus on AI-generated content, human-AI collaboration, perceived authenticity, and trust formation.

5.2 Theme One: The Authenticity Shortfall Perceived Authorship and Symbolic Meaning

The largest regression coefficient in the previously discussed mediation model is not the most obvious finding of this investigation, but it is arguably the most significant consequence: the association between perceived authorship via an artificial intelligence system and ratings of authenticity ($a_1 = -1.217$, $p = .0003$) is also the largest regression coefficient in this mediation model and represents the starting point of the entire series of subsequent perceptual effects that occur as a function of perceived ai authorship. Before the trust deficit, before the attitude gap, there is an authenticity deficit, and it is disproportionately large relative to the perceptual differences observed on other constructs.

This Theme directly examines the first of four proposed thematic areas articulated in the methodology: perceived Intentionality and Symbolic Meaning. According to Morhart et al. (2015), brand authenticity is a multidimensional social construction of judgments encompassing continuance, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Critical to their definition is that authenticity is not an intrinsic property of content, but a socially constructed attribution made by the consumer. The results of this study support this social constructivist viewpoint: although the two advertisements studied herein were visually equivalent, contained identical copy, and communicated using identical branding identities, participants who attributed authorship of either advertisement to an AI system indicated lower levels of perceived authenticity than participants who attributed authorship to humans. It appears that nothing changed except participants' beliefs about the origin of each advertisement, along with their readings of each advertisement's Symbolic Meaning and communicative intent.

A useful framework for interpreting why this occurs can be derived from Sundar's (2008) MAIN model of technology-driven credibility. Sundar posits that individuals process information conveyed by digital media using cognitive heuristics, and that these heuristics depend on the source(s) attributed to digital messages, i.e., machine vs. human. When individuals activate their machine heuristic during message processing, they rely on cultural associations linked to machine-mediated content (i.e., impersonality, optimization for persuasive effect, lack of genuine communicative intent), thereby generating a distinct set of

credibility schemas for processing machine-mediated content. For example, in advertising, where consumers are aware that advertisers employ persuasive tactics through the lens of persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994), activation of machine heuristics may exacerbate existing scepticism by signaling that the communicator responsible for creating a given advertisement is a system optimized to maximize behavioural response and therefore not a human who cares about building a relationship with consumers. The authenticity shortfall seen in this study is thus viewed as a direct product of heuristic-driven source attributions, as opposed to some deficiency in AI creative outputs themselves.

Support for this view can also be found in Belanche et al.'s (2022) demonstration that AI-generated content is consistently evaluated as less credible in situations where sincerity or communicative intent is valued; Glikson and Woolley (2020) also position this phenomenon within Fiske et al.'s (2007) warmth-competence framework: consumers perceive AI as possessing high levels of competence but low levels of warmth. Since warmth is generally viewed as more fundamentally social than competence, authenticity evaluations are predicated on warmth. An advertisement perceived as communicating warmth signals that a human being invested time, care, and creative effort in developing it. Conversely, an advertisement perceived as machine-generated signals that no such investment occurred irrespective of executional quality.

Therefore, the key implication is not necessarily concealing AI authorship. Ozturkcan and Bozdağ (2025) show that concealment can create reputation-related risks through what they call an AI-washing-booing cycle, i.e., overly claiming or obscuring AI usage creates backlash when revealed by consumers. Rather, the recommendation is that firms intentionally manage authenticity signals by emphasizing human creative direction as the visibly prominent authorial centre in AI-enabled campaigns. While AI serves as a tool for production and optimization, human creative judgment retains status as the communicator-author. Marketing professionals are most likely to maintain positive authenticity perceptions necessary for building downstream consumer reactions if they create transparent frames for disclosing human creative direction e.g., via creative attribution statements or behind-the-scenes disclosures that frame human creative direction.

5.3 THEME TWO: The Emotional Gap– Creative Agency and Executional Quality Limits

Among the constructs in the dataset, emotional engagement (d=1.09) had the largest effect size, with human-perceived groups (M = 5.48) showing a higher mean than AI-perceived groups (M = 3.90), a 1.58-unit difference on a 7-point scale. While this is clearly statistically significant, the magnitude is also substantively important and has implications for both theory and practice. Emotional engagement is the most immediately responsive construct to perceived authorship and is the dimension most directly related to the second thematic area identified in the methodological section - the distribution of creative agency between human and AI participants.

The Holbrook and Batra (1987) study established that consumers' emotional responses to advertisements mediated attitudinal outcomes. The mediation model used in the current study supports the general idea presented in the Holbrook and Batra study. However, the t-tests show that consumers' emotional engagement with ads is more negatively affected by perceived AI authorship than by their perception of ad authenticity (d = 1.09 vs. d = 0.86), indicating that the affective aspect of consumers' responses to advertising is particularly susceptible to the lack of perceived human creative agency. Feng and Song (2025) attributed this phenomenon to social identification theory - consumers evaluate human-created content more positively on emotional dimensions simply because they identify with human creators and ascribe to them empathy, life experiences, and intentional emotional investments that give advertising an affective impact. Therefore, in this interpretation, the emotional gap is not a gap in technical capabilities, but a gap in social identification and perceived creative agency.

Longoni and Cian (2022) expanded this discussion by distinguishing between utility-based and hedonic contexts for AI-generated content. They found that AI is particularly disadvantaged in hedonic contexts, i.e., those that include pleasure, experiences, and emotional connections, where consumers believe that genuine decision-making regarding creative elements is a key factor in determining the value of content. Hedonic contexts are inherent to emotionally driven branding categories, including skin care, fashion, and personal care, as they ask consumers to envision an experiential connection with the brand, identify with an aspirational self-concept, and develop some kind of feeling toward the brand. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) provides additional insight

into why: while AI-produced content may serve as effective cues for peripheral quality attributes in low-involvement, informational contexts, centrally processed messages in emotionally driven advertising depend on consumers elaborating on the message (i.e., making connections between the message and their own experiences and forming affective links to the message). It is this level of processing that is most likely to be negatively affected by the perceived lack of creative agency associated with AI authorship.

From a narrative perspective, Green and Brock's (2000) transportation theory supports this concept. When consumers become engaged in a story, they are more receptive to the narrative's persuasive implications, with reduced counterargumentation and greater emotional investment. Narrative transportation occurs when the consumer perceives genuine human intent behind the storytelling - a condition that AI authorship appears incapable of fulfilling at present. Thus, the emotional gap cannot be solved by improving AI execution, since it stems from the consumer's evaluation of whether genuine human creative effort was involved in developing the advertisement.

A practical implication of this concept is the need for brands to deliberately distinguish between advertising campaigns based on whether they use AI. In functional, informational advertising campaigns - i.e., product specification descriptions, promotional offer announcements, retargeting communications - AI can be safely used and can deliver polished execution that matters more than affective connections. However, in emotionally driven brand communications - where the consumer needs to establish an emotional relationship with a perceived human author - human creative authorship must be explicitly emphasized rather than implied. This is not an argument against using technology, but rather an argument for strategically allocating creative resources to ensure that human creative input is maximized in emotionally led advertising campaigns where it impacts consumer reaction.

5.4 Theme Three: The Trust Paradox the Non-Negotiable Gateway and Moral Accountability

Trust is the most theoretically complex pattern of findings in the dataset and has the greatest potential for direct strategic action. Trust had the smallest effect size of all five constructs ($d = 0.80$), indicating that perceived AI authorship caused less damage to trust perceptions than to the other four constructs - emotional engagement, creativity, authenticity, and advertising attitude. Yet, according to the mediation analysis, trust was the only construct that directly predicted attitude toward advertising ($b_2 = .803$, $p < .001$). According to this analysis,

authenticity did not independently predict advertising attitudes ($b_1 = .152$, $p = .237$) but instead influenced advertising attitudes via trust. Therefore, this constitutes a paradoxical structure: trust is simultaneously the most resistant construct under AI conditions and the necessary gateway through which all antecedent perceptions must flow before influencing the final evaluative conclusion.

This paradox directly addresses two thematic areas previously identified in the methodology: consumer expectations for moral and creative accountability. Mayer et al.'s (1995) integrated trust model posits that trust is based on three factors: perceived ability, integrity, and benevolence. The $d = 0.80$ effect size is not only smaller than those found for other constructs in this study but also represents a practically meaningful measure. It appears that consumers are willing to accept AI's demonstrated ability (technical competence in generating structurally correct and professionally finished advertising) while being less certain about its integrity (the degree to which a company conducts business consistently with honest communications principles) and benevolence (the extent to which a company genuinely cares about consumers' interests rather than optimizing for persuasion). Building on this, the asymmetrical trust profile aligns perfectly with the warmth-competence model: consumers are willing to accept AI's competence but are unwilling to accept its benevolence, being fundamental to trust in advertising.

Omrani et al. (2022) provided evidence that transparency, explainability, and perceived fairness are three key pathways through which trust in AI systems can be sustained. These properties are analogous to several communicative options available to marketers for describing their use of AI in advertising campaigns. The persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) introduces another dimension: once consumers become aware of AI's role in creating advertising communications, they tend to develop defensive cognition about how AI optimization serves brand interests at the expense of consumer welfare, thus undermining benevolence, a critical component of trust. Shi and Jiang (2026) reported that AI disclosure labels produce mixed effects - enhancing perceptions of novelty while raising concerns about authenticity with the net effect depending on how disclosure is framed. Consequently, disclosure is not inherently detrimental to advertising effectiveness; how it is framed is crucial.

Thus, the trust paradox collapses into a specific strategic recommendation: advertising effectiveness under AI conditions will be driven by trust; trust will be driven by authenticity;

and authenticity will be driven by the perceived human dimension of creative output. Disclosure strategies that portray AI as a tool employed under explicit human creative oversight - as opposed to an autonomous author of brand communications - will most likely protect the benevolence and integrity dimensions of trust previously shown in this study to be determinative.

Glikson and Woolley (2020) confirmed that human oversight of AI systems serves not only regulatory requirements but also trust mechanisms: visibility of human judgment within AI-assisted operations signals accountability, intentionality, and caring behaviors not possible through fully autonomous AI processes. Marketing practitioners will derive specific communication guidelines from this study: namely, when employing AI, allow the human creative director(s) to be seen as representing the campaign, and do not display the algorithms themselves.

5.5 Theme Four: Beyond the Model- Warmth, Heuristics, and Unmeasured Mechanisms

Perceived source has a direct influence on advertising attitude, and this effect remains statistically significant after incorporating both authenticity and trust as mediating variables ($p = .031$, $b = -.470$). In addition, there is evidence of partial mediation. Approximately 26% of the total effect occurs via other unaccounted-for mechanisms. This partial mediation is among the most analytically productive findings in the dataset. This indicates that although the authenticity–trust relationship is the main causal path, there are additional perceptual mechanisms influencing consumer advertising attitudes beyond those measured by the current model.

Sundar's (2008) MAIN model provided a theoretical basis for examining this residual effect. Sundar identified four heuristics by which technology users evaluate digital content, including Modality, Agency, Interactivity, and Navigability. The Agency heuristic is particularly relevant here. When consumers believe they have been exposed to advertising created by machines rather than humans, they use cognitive shortcuts that shape beliefs about the genuineness of the intent behind machine-generated content, the machine's responsibility to society, and the relational warmth attributed to that content. These heuristic assessments occur prior to, or simultaneously with, and separately from more deliberate judgments concerning authenticity and trust. Therefore, the direct residual effect observed in the present

study may reflect the use of these rapid, automated heuristic assessments compared with the more deliberate, sequential authenticity–trust assessment process.

In addition to the authenticity and trust constructs, Warmth, as defined by Fiske et al. (2007), is another distinct yet related construct. Warmth reflects a person's perceived benevolent and social orientation toward others and the ability to create relational connections. An advertisement may be perceived as authentic (i.e., consistent and credible) and trusted (i.e., the competence and honesty of a company) yet still fail to convey warmth, resulting in a lack of personal relevance and/or emotional appeal. Thus, warmth is neither a subset of authenticity nor trust and may be the quality most uniquely represented by human-generated advertising and least capable of being communicated by AI-generated advertising, regardless of the level of execution or transparency of the AI-generated advertising.

A third potential explanation for this residual effect is creative agency. According to Longoni & Cian (2022), consumers do not solely assess advertisements based on their output. Rather, they evaluate the creative process used to generate the advertising content and perceive creative agency (the degree to which conscious, contextualized human judgment was applied in creating an advertisement) as an indicator of brand investment or relational concern. In AI-generated advertising, such creative agency may be absent due to a lack of human creative agency. Consequently, effects on attitude may persist even after controlling for authenticity and trust, since creative agency serves as a separate cue for assessing advertising content rather than being an element of either construct.

Practitioners face an important strategic implication from partial mediation: While managing the authenticity-trust path is essential, it alone cannot fully eliminate the attitudinal difference between perceived human and perceived AI-generated advertising. Practitioners need to consider communicating signals related to perceived warmth, heuristic agency cues, and creative investment in advertising content, which are currently outside the model's scope of measurement. Developing valid scales to measure perceived warmth and creative agency in advertising contexts and incorporating them into expanded mediation models that predict AI-advertising effectiveness offer a unique opportunity to enhance the field's predictive capability in this rapidly changing domain.

5.6 A Strategic Integration Model for Human-AI Advertising Collaboration

The four themes identified in this discussion are logically aligned and structured into an actionable model for marketing decisions. This framework is presented as a contingent guide

rather than a universal prescription, consistent with the methodology's objective of highlighting trade-offs rather than stating absolutes (Toracco, 2005). The framework addresses the primary managerial issue in this research: Under what conditions should AI be employed during advertising production, and what organizational structural arrangements must be in place to preserve consumers' perception of advertising when it is?

The framework is based on two dimensions. One dimension is the type of campaign being produced. The types include informational or functionally oriented advertising and emotionally or branding-oriented advertising. The other dimension is the degree of governance of creative direction. The degrees include advertising created under visible, transparent human creative leadership versus advertising with minimal human oversight or completely autonomous AI-generated advertising. These dimensions result in four strategic options, as illustrated in Table 5.1.

Figure 5 Strategic Framework for Human-AI Advertising Collaboration

	Functional / Informational Campaign	**Emotional / Brand-Building Campaign**
Visible Human Creative Direction	Optimal deployment zone. AI maximizes production efficiency and variant generation; human creative direction preserves brand coherence, authenticity signaling, and trust. Lowest perceptual risk.	Recommended approach for emotionally driven and identity-led categories. Human authorship must be foregrounded as the communicative author. AI contributes to production and optimization. Authenticity and emotional engagement protections are strongest here.
Autonomous AI / Minimal Human Oversight	Acceptable with caution in short-cycle, low-involvement formats (e.g. retargeting banners, promotional display). Monitor trust perceptions. Risk increases as category involvement rises.	High risk. The emotional gap ($d = 1.09$) and authenticity deficit ($a_1 = -1.217$) are most acute here. AI-only production in emotionally led categories is likely to produce the most severe perceptual disadvantages and should be

	Functional / Informational Campaign	Emotional / Brand-Building Campaign
		avoided in identity-relevant brand contexts.

The top-left quadrant, functional campaigns under visible human creative direction, represents the optimal area for deploying AI. Here, the benefits of AI operations in terms of speed, scale, and variant creation (Davenport et al., 2020; Huang & Rust, 2021) can be fully realized, and the risks associated with perceptual aspects are minimized by human creative oversight. Such oversight helps provide the authenticity and warmth signals that consumers need.

The top right quadrant involves emotionally driven campaigns with visible human creative direction, which is the best strategy for building brands in high-involvement, identity-related categories. Current findings make clear that AI must be positioned as a production tool rather than the creative author; the warmth, intentionality, and emotional agency signals that consumers use to develop advertising attitudes in emotionally driven advertising cannot be communicated authentically without visible human creative direction.

The bottom-left quadrant, functional autonomous AI, represents a moderate level of risk and is relatively easy to manage. In formats where consumer engagement with source identity is minimal and persuasive tasks are primarily informational, the potential for negative consequences from using autonomous AI is low (Castelo et al., 2019).

The lower-right corner autonomously generated, emotionally driven advertising represents the highest level of risk among the four quadrants and should be avoided at all costs in categories where branding authenticity, consumer identity, and emotional connection with the brand are crucial to successful advertising.

By resisting the two extremes of viewing AI as either a revolutionary creative entity or a degrading influence on advertising quality, this framework provides empirical support for a middle-ground approach. De Cicco et al. (2025) show that hybrid human-AI collaboration outperforms both fully human and fully AI approaches when human involvement is substantive and evaluatively engaged, rather than merely superficial. Similarly, Ngo's (2025)

meta-analytic work shows that human-AI collaborative decision-making yields better outcomes when humans actively evaluate AI-generated material. These studies collectively indicate that one of the primary forms of strategic intelligence marketing organizations need is essentially human: knowing when AI enhances or diminishes the communicative relationship between brand and consumer and deploying it appropriately.

5.7 Critical Reflexivity: Recognizing the Researcher's Interpreted Context

Critical reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) is a necessary element of this integrative analysis. An integral aspect of integrative analysis is the need for interpretive judgment shaped by the researcher's theoretical orientation and analytical lens. It is important to recognize these influences explicitly, as they indicate academic rigor rather than weakness. The following statements reflect on how the researcher's positionality, study constraints related to the time, and the perception-based design adaptation affect and limit the advice given in this chapter.

First, as stated previously, the theoretical model used in this dissertation, drawing primarily on consumer psychology, experimental advertising research, and AI trust literature, directs analytical focus toward perceptual and attitudinal mechanisms. Therefore, this chapter's recommendations will be most directly useful for brand managers and creative strategists making campaign-based decisions. Conversely, organizational change and capability development issues, which would be emphasized from a technological management or human resources perspective, are less directly applicable. Although this is a boundary issue regarding the scope of this chapter's framework (Section 5.6), it should be recognized as a constraint on the study's applicability.

Second, the product category and demographics studied herein limit the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, skincare is a highly involved, emotionally laden, identity-based product category in which consumers place great importance on warmth, authenticity, and personal care. Thus, the large effect sizes observed (especially for emotional engagement, $d = 1.09$) may have been enhanced by this category context and may not occur with equal magnitude in functional product categories where competence cues predominate. Additionally, although the sample size was substantial, the convenience sampling frame largely comprised students enrolled at TU Dublin, further limiting demographic representativeness. Younger consumers who are digital natives or marketing-educated may view AI differently than older or less digitally savvy consumers. The framework presented in Section 5.6 attempts to account for differences across categories, but practitioners should

apply its recommendations with caution, considering their own consumer demographics and product category.

Lastly, it is acknowledged that the interpretive structure applied in this chapter reflects a point in time regarding consumer AI literacy. Consumer perceptions of AI are evolving extremely quickly, in parallel with technological developments. Consequently, the heuristic associations, e.g., machine production implies personalization absent warmth/optimizes over care, that are currently driving consumer perceptual disadvantages illustrated in this study, may decrease as AI becomes normalized in daily creative environments.

5.8 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several methodological and contextual constraints limit both the causal claims that can be made and the populations to which the findings generalize.

A major limitation is the perceptually based design, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Because the experimental condition variable was lost, participants in this study are grouped by their beliefs about the source of the advertisements (perceptions) rather than by their assignment to the actual conditions. Thus, reverse causality is possible: Participants who found the advertisement less appealing, creative, or authentic may also have been more likely to believe it was generated using AI. Therefore, participants' source perception and evaluation may be mutually reinforcing rather than sequential. Consequently, all findings are interpreted as perceptual associations; thus, all recommendations in this chapter should be viewed as theoretical propositions for practice rather than causal prescriptions.

The effective sample size of n = 86, consisting of 31 participants who believed the advertisement was created by humans and 55 who believed it was created by AI, represents approximately half of the original target number of participants. The smaller sample size reduces statistical power and limits precision in estimating effect sizes. In addition, because Levene's test failed for all five variables in this study, although unequal-variance t-tests were used to address this issue, the greater variability in the distributions of the two groups suggests that the reliability of the between-group comparisons may be reduced. Larger probability-based samples in future studies would help determine whether the substantial effect sizes observed in this study are replicated at scale and across a wider range of demographic characteristics.

The evidence of partial mediation, that is, the statistically significant residual direct effect of perceived authorship on advertising attitudes ($b = -.470$, $p = .031$) after controlling for authenticity and trust, indicates that the current explanatory model is incomplete. The theoretical rationale for selecting the remaining constructs (perceived warmth, creative agency, and machine heuristics) as possible mediators of the residual effects is that they represent additional cognitive shortcuts available to consumers when processing AI-generated advertising information. Future research should develop valid measures for each of these constructs and expand the explanatory model(s) to include them.

Sundar's (2008) MAIN model provides a useful theoretical foundation for operationalizing the heuristic-driven components of consumer responses to AI-generated advertising.

The final consideration regarding the temporal boundary condition of this study requires explicit recognition. Consumers' perceptions of AI-generated content are evolving in response to the rapid advancement of generative AI, growing public discourse on AI, and developing regulatory frameworks such as the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (Afroogh et al., 2024). The perceptual costs associated with perceived AI authorship, as documented in this study, reflect a particular moment in this progression. To maintain an empirically grounded understanding of this field, longitudinal research examining changes in consumers' responses to AI-generated advertising over time, as well as the conditions under which identified emotional and authenticity deficits may decrease or increase, is necessary.

5.9 Conclusions

As stated earlier in this dissertation, the study sought to identify how consumers evaluate the creative potential, authenticity, and emotionality of AI-generated marketing content compared with human-created content. Using the integrative synthesis methodology articulated in Chapter 5, this study demonstrates that the empirically derived conclusions are theoretically coherent and provide a practical basis for addressing Objective One -- namely, identifying perceptual differences between human- and AI-created content in terms of perceived creativity and emotional engagement. This objective was fully met. As shown in Table 6, all five hypotheses related to the objective were supported at $p < .001$, with large effect sizes indicating that perceived human authorship significantly increases consumer evaluations across all five dimensions assessed. Of particular interest was that emotional appeal was

identified as the most perception-sensitive construct (d = 1.09), providing definitive evidence that the emotional component of advertising which is most closely aligned with long-term consumer relationships and brand development is most susceptible to the authenticity/warmth deficits associated with perceived AI authorship.

Objective two, i.e., to examine the processes through which source perception affects advertising attitude, is represented in the serial mediation analyses. Although only one of the three indirect effects was statistically significant, the data support the full sequence of perceived source > authenticity > trust > advertising attitude as statistically significant. Building on this, our data demonstrate that trust is neither independent of nor interchangeable with authenticity but rather functions sequentially off authenticity before affecting advertising attitude. Notably, our findings indicate that perceived human authorship has a negative relationship with perceived authenticity ($a_1 = -1.217$), and that authenticity serves as a mediator of trust demonstrating that consumers view authenticity as a prerequisite for forming trust in advertising. Finally, data indicate that trust exhibits a positive relationship with advertising attitude ($b_2 = .803$), suggesting that trust serves as a non-negotiable gateway to effective advertising outcomes.

Objective Three is addressed through thematic arguments, an integrative framework, and a reflexive analysis developed in this chapter. The central finding is that effective AI integration in advertising is, above all, a perceptual and communicative challenge: consumers evaluate advertising against symbolic expectations of human intentionality and warmth that AI, as currently perceived, cannot meet alone. Strategic effectiveness, therefore, depends not on the sophistication of generative tools but on the deliberate management of authenticity signals across campaign design and disclosure strategy.

The broader significance of these findings lies in what they contribute to a literature that is expanding rapidly yet remains empirically thin relative to the pace of technological change. As generative AI becomes routine in marketing content production, the perceptual questions this dissertation addresses, including how consumers read the source of advertising, how those readings shape trust and attitude, and what practitioners can do to govern these perceptions strategically, will become central concerns of brand management, advertising strategy, and marketing ethics. This study offers one empirically grounded, theoretically situated answer to those questions. Its limitations are real and point clearly to the research agenda that must follow. But its findings are consistent, its effect sizes are large, and its

implications are specific. Perceived AI authorship matters to consumers and understanding why and under what conditions that mattering can be managed is the strategic and intellectual challenge this field now faces.

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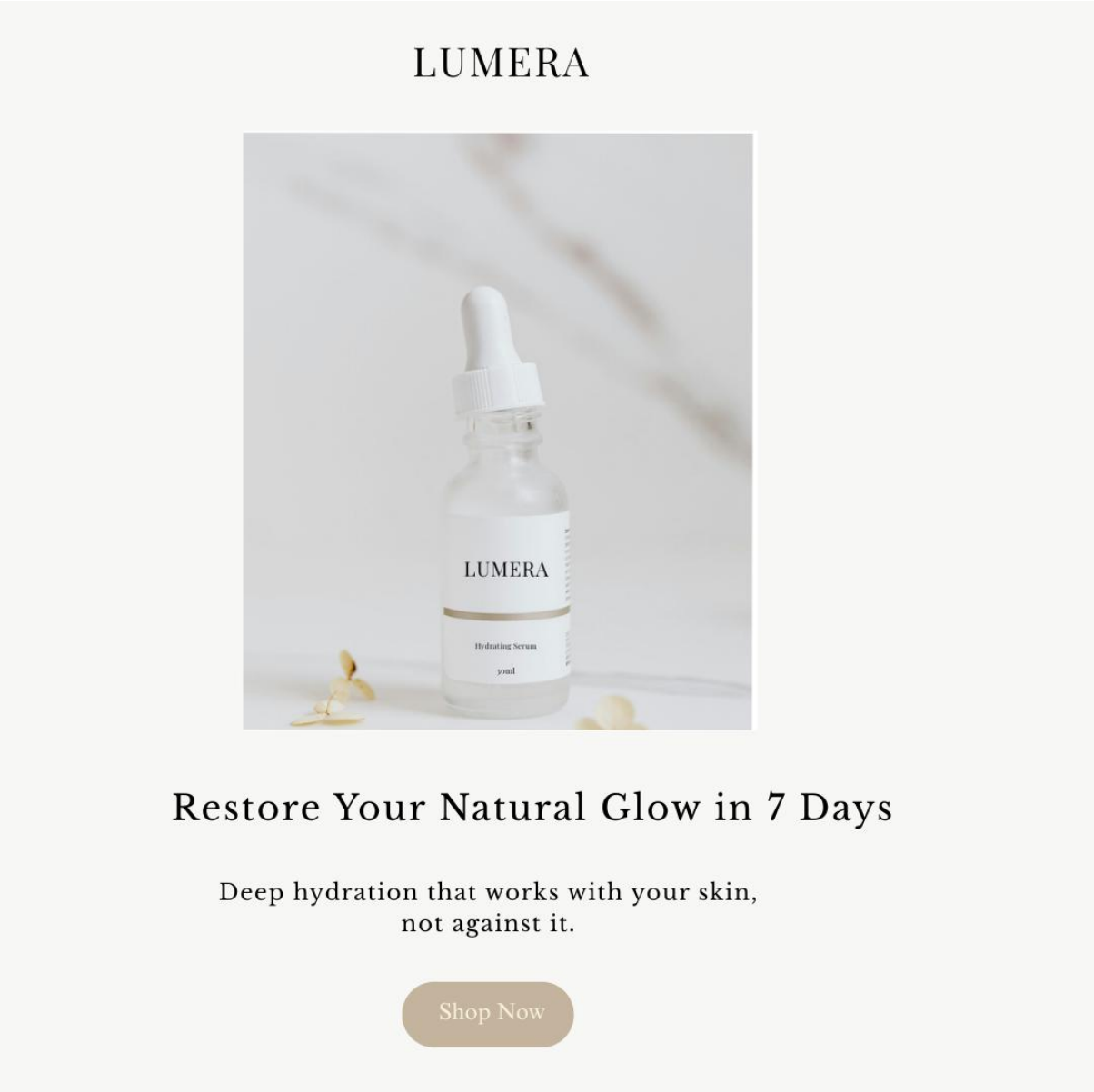
Appendices

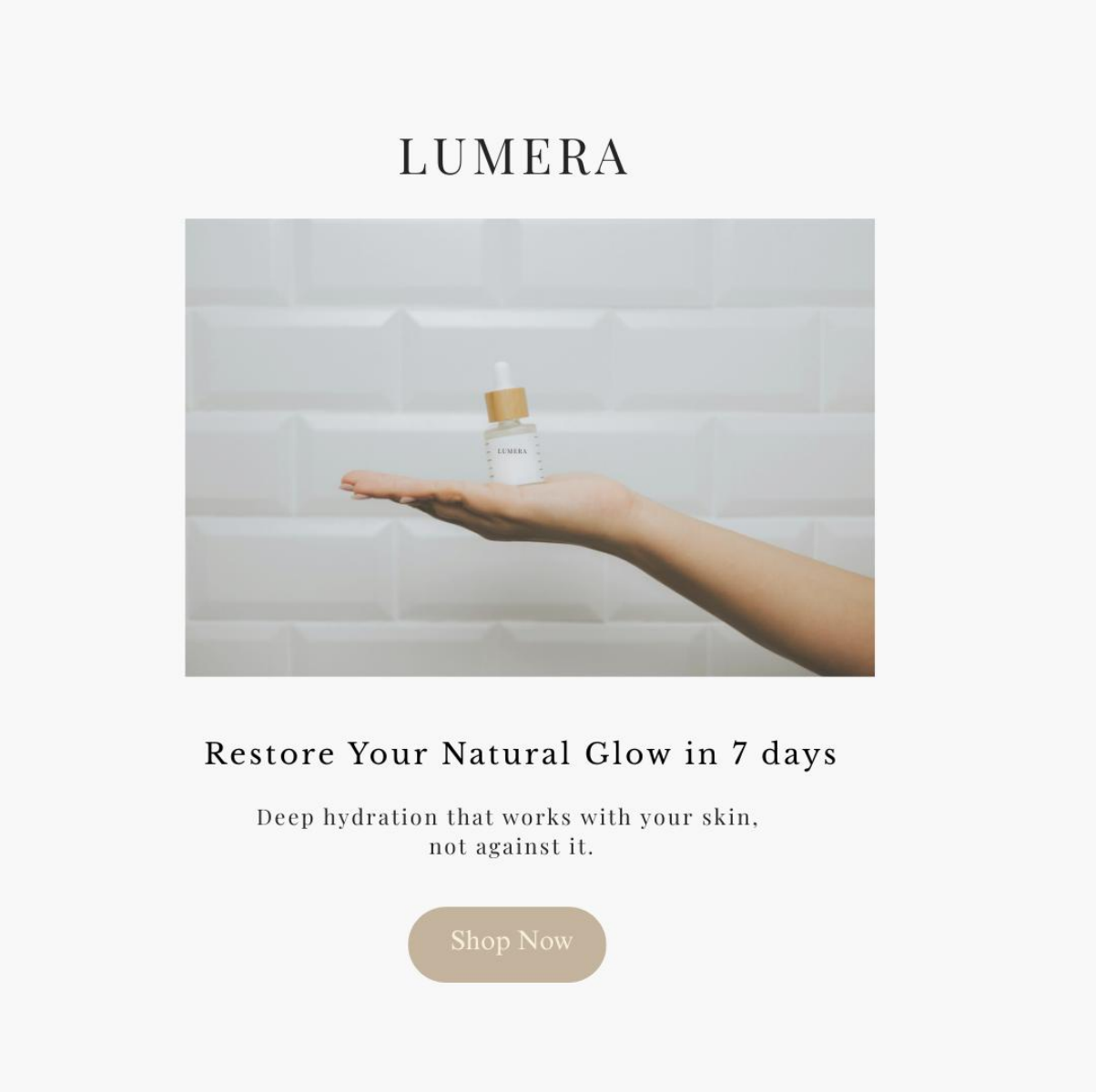
Appendix A — Advertising Stimuli

The following pages present the six Lumera advertisements used as stimuli in this study. Advertisements A1–A3 are the human-created executions produced using Canva with royalty-free photography. Advertisements B1–B3 are the AI-generated executions produced

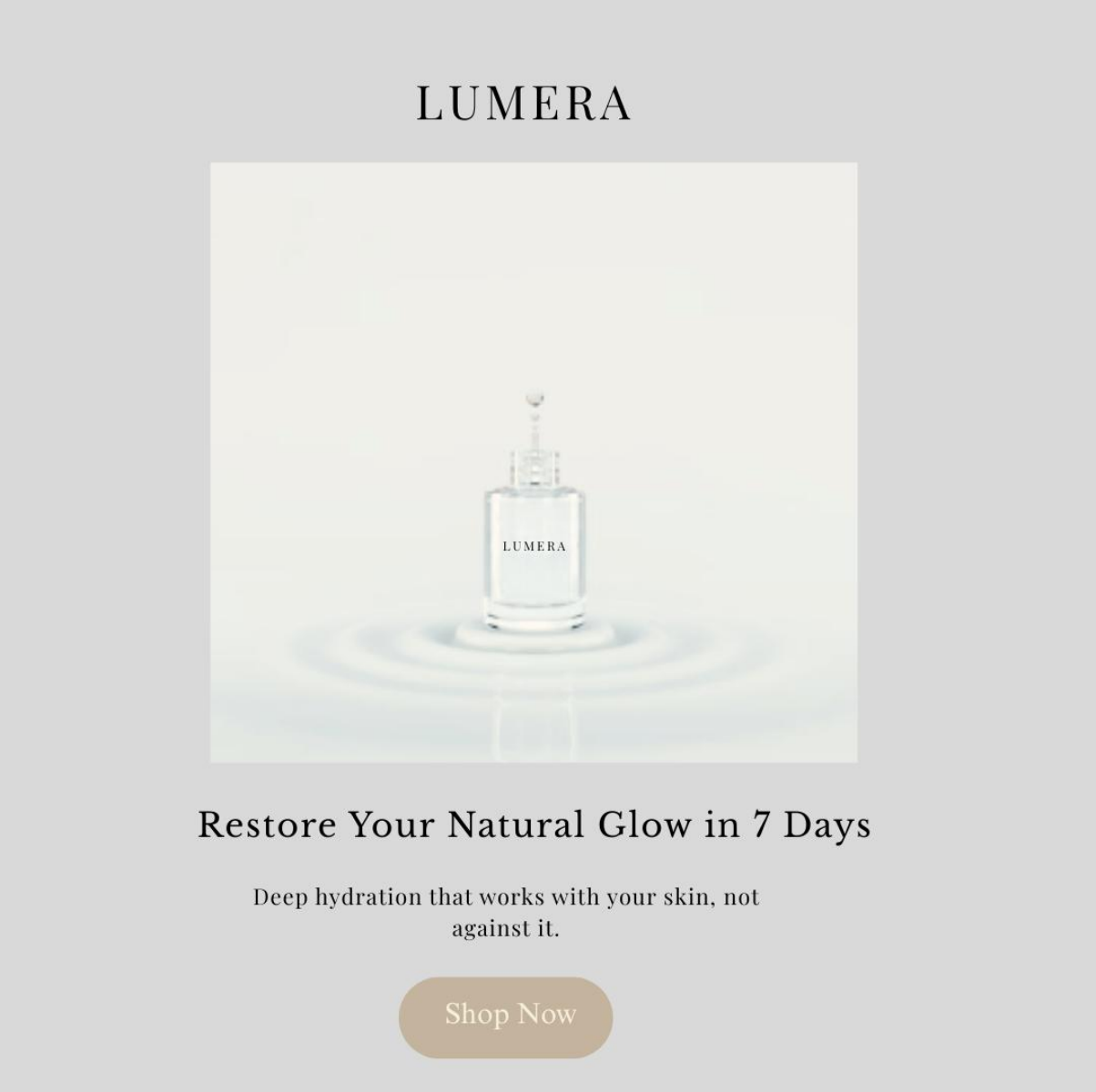
using Canva's integrated AI image generation tools. All six advertisements used identical copy, headline, and call-to-action across conditions.



Human Advertisement 1 (A1) Close-up bottle still life

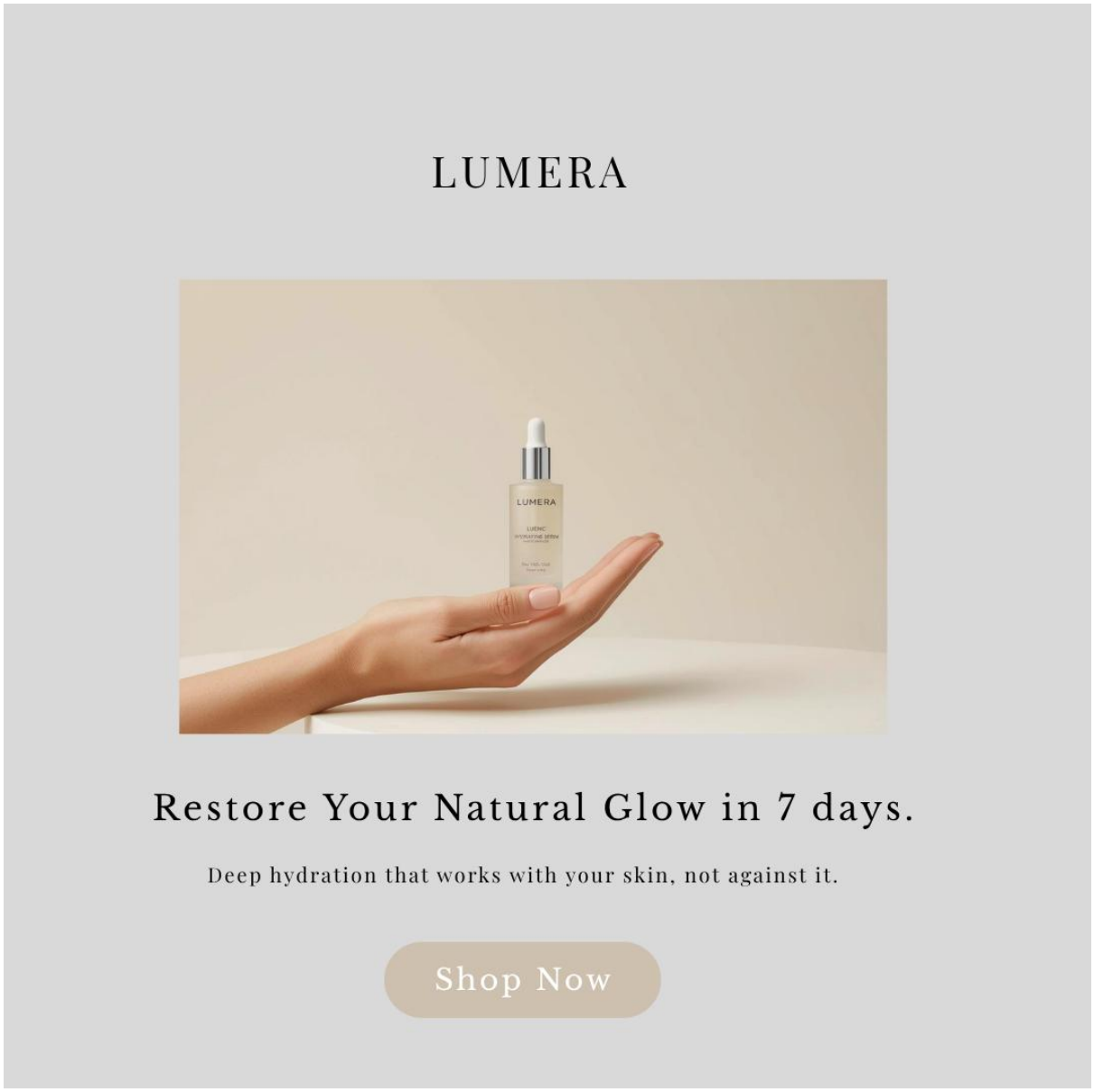


Human Advertisement 2 (A2) Hand-held product shot



Human Advertisement 3 (A3) Lifestyle flat-lay context

AI-Generated Advertisement 1 (B1) Plain cream background render



AI-Generated Advertisement 2 (B2) Reflective water-surface render

AI-Generated Advertisement 3 (B3) Warm-toned environmental render

Appendix B Survey Instrument

The following presents the full Qualtrics survey instrument administered to participants, including all scale items, the manipulation check, attention check, and demographic questions. Items are presented in the order participants encountered them.

Information Sheet and Consent

Participants were presented with an information sheet explaining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, right to withdrawal, and data anonymity procedures before providing informed consent.

Stimulus Exposure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six advertisements via Qualtrics' built-in randomiser. The advertisement was displayed for a minimum of eight seconds before participants could advance. Participants were not informed of the advertisement's creator prior to viewing.

Scale Items

All items below were measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree.

Perceived Advertising Creativity (Q9) Mercanti-Guérin (2008)

Q9_1 — This advertisement is original and creative.

Q9_2 — This advertisement is imaginative.

Q9_3 — This advertisement is novel and unique.

Q9_4 — This advertisement is aesthetically pleasing.

Q9_5 — This advertisement is visually appealing.

Emotional Engagement (Q10) Holbrook & Batra (1987); Ahmed et al. (2024)

Q10_1 — This advertisement made me feel emotionally connected.

Q10_2 — This advertisement evoked strong feelings in me.

Q10_3 — I felt engaged with the story this advertisement told.

Q10_4 — This advertisement captured my attention completely.

Q10_5 — I felt immersed in the experience this advertisement created.

Perceived Authenticity (Q11) Morhart et al. (2015)

Q11_1 — This advertisement feels genuine and sincere.

Q11_2 — This advertisement reflects the true values of the brand.

Q11_3 — This advertisement communicates an honest message.

Q11_4 — This advertisement does not feel fake or artificial.

Q11_5 — I believe the brand behind this advertisement is authentic.

Trust (Q12) — Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995)

Q12_1 — I trust the brand behind this advertisement.

Q12_2 — This brand appears competent and capable.

Q12_3 — This brand seems honest in its communications.

Q12_4 — I believe this brand has good intentions toward consumers.

Q12_5 — This brand appears to act with integrity.

Q12_6 — I would feel confident purchasing from this brand.

Attitude Toward the Advertisement / Aad (Q13) — Holbrook & Batra (1987); MacKenzie & Lutz (1989)

Q13_1 — Overall, I have a positive attitude toward this advertisement.

Q13_2 — I like this advertisement.

Q13_3 — This is a good advertisement.

Q13_4 — This advertisement appeals to me.

Q13_5 — My overall evaluation of this advertisement is favorable.

Manipulation Check

Q14 — Who do you believe created the advertisement you just viewed?

- A human designer or creative professional
- Artificial intelligence (AI)
- Not sure

Attention Check

An instructional attention check item was embedded within the scale items. Participants were instructed to select a specific response option (e.g., 'Please select Strongly Agree for this item to confirm you are reading carefully'). Responses to fail this check were excluded from analysis.

Demographic Questions

D1 — What is your age? (Open numeric response)

D2 — What is your gender? (Male / Female / Non-binary / Prefer not to say)

D3 — What is your highest level of education completed? (Secondary / Undergraduate / Postgraduate / Other)

D4 — How often do you engage with digital advertising? (Daily / Several times a week / Weekly / Rarely / Never)

Debrief Statement

Upon completion, participants were informed that the authorship of the advertisement had been withheld during the exposure phase to reduce priming bias, and that the study was examining how consumers evaluate advertising based on their perceptions of its source. Participants were thanked for their time and provided with contact details for the researcher.

Appendix C — Construct Operationalization and Variable Coding

The following table presents each construct, its source scale, the original and recoded SPSS variable names, the number of items, and the response scale anchors used in analysis.

Table C1. Construct Operationalization and SPSS Variable Coding

Construct	Source Scale	Original Variables	Recoded Variables	Items (n)	Scale Anchors
Creativity	Mercanti-Guérin (2008)	Q9_1 – Q9_5	S9_1 – S9_5	5	1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree
Emotional Engagement	Holbrook & Batra (1987); Ahmed et al. (2024)	Q10_1 – Q10_5	S10_1 – S10_5	5	1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree
Authenticity	Morhart et al. (2015)	Q11_1 – Q11_5	S11_1 – S11_5	5	1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree

Construct	Source Scale	Original Variables	Recoded Variables	Items (n)	Scale Anchors
Trust	Mayer et al. (1995)	Q12_1 – Q12_6	S12_1 – S12_5*	5*	1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree
Attitude Toward Ad (Aad)	Holbrook & Batra (1987); MacKenzie & Lutz (1989)	Q13_1 – Q13_5	S13_1 – S13_5	5	1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree
Perceived Source	Manipulation check (Q14)	Q14	Perceived_source2 / Perceived Clean	1 item	1 = Human, 2 = AI (Not sure excluded)

*Note. * Trust item S12_5 was absent from the dataset due to a Qualtrics export error and was excluded prior to analysis, resulting in a five-item Trust scale. Composite scores for each construct were computed as the mean of all valid items following reliability verification.*

Likert-scale string responses were recoded into numeric values using SPSS syntax as follows:

Response Label	Numeric Value
Strongly Disagree	1

Response Label	Numeric Value
Disagree	2
Slightly Disagree	3
Neutral	4
Slightly Agree	5
Agree	6
Strongly Agree	7

Appendix D – Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated for each of the five composite scale scores used in this study. All scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency (α > .90), meeting the threshold recommended for research instruments (Nunnally, 1978; Field, 2018).

D.1 Summary of Reliability Statistics

Scale / Construct	N	Items	Cronbach's α	α (Standardised)
Creativity (S9)	96	5	.928	.928
Emotional Engagement (S10)	92	5	.916	.915
Authenticity (S11)	91	5	.947	.948
Trust (S12)	96	5	.949	.949

Attitude toward Ad (S13)	85	5	.969	.970

Note. N = number of listwise valid cases included in the reliability analysis. α = Cronbach's Alpha; α (Std) = Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items. All values calculated in IBM SPSS Statistics 29.

D.2 Creativity Scale (S9) – Item-Level Statistics

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total r	Squared Multiple r	α if Item Deleted
S9_1	4.24	1.799	.781	.716	.917
S9_2	4.38	1.743	.894	.837	.895
S9_3	4.55	1.776	.877	.801	.898
S9_4	4.51	1.886	.815	.708	.911
S9_5	4.82	1.717	.691	.506	.933

Note. Scale: ALL VARIABLES. N = 96. Cronbach's α = .928.

D.3 Emotional Engagement Scale (S10) – Item-Level Statistics

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total r	Squared Multiple r	α if Item Deleted
S10_1	4.07	2.026	.818	.740	.891
S10_2	4.07	1.850	.810	.674	.892

S10_3	4.17	1.953	.839	.761	.885
S10_4	4.68	1.833	.810	.698	.892
S10_5	4.88	1.643	.652	.508	.922

Note. Scale: ALL VARIABLES. N = 92. Cronbach's α = .916.

D.4 Authenticity Scale (S11) – Item-Level Statistics

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total r	Squared Multiple r	α if Item Deleted
S11_1	4.54	1.968	.835	.784	.939
S11_2	4.53	1.894	.914	.893	.923
S11_3	4.53	1.846	.897	.848	.926
S11_4	4.87	1.536	.818	.744	.942
S11_5	5.02	1.640	.827	.741	.939

Note. Scale: ALL VARIABLES. N = 91. Cronbach's α = .947.

D.5 Trust Scale (S12) – Item-Level Statistics

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total r	Squared Multiple r	α if Item Deleted
S12_1	5.04	1.660	.888	.835	.932
S12_2	5.10	1.518	.859	.792	.937

S12_3	5.03	1.532	.855	.736	.938
S12_4	4.97	1.592	.844	.745	.940
S12_6	4.98	1.616	.853	.756	.938

Note. Scale: ALL VARIABLES. N = 96. Cronbach's α = .949. Item S12_5 was not included in this scale.

D.6 Attitude toward Ad Scale (S13) – Item-Level Statistics

Item	Mean	SD	Corrected Item-Total r	Squared Multiple r	α if Item Deleted
S13_1	5.29	1.738	.861	.749	.969
S13_2	5.38	1.683	.916	.841	.961
S13_3	5.36	1.895	.920	.868	.961
S13_4	5.52	1.659	.936	.893	.958
S13_5	5.35	1.913	.933	.874	.959

Note. Scale: ALL VARIABLES. N = 85. Cronbach's α = .969.

Appendix E – Independent Samples T-Test Output

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare composite scores across five constructs (Creativity, Emotional Engagement, Authenticity, Trust, and Attitude toward the Ad) between participants who indicated they were 'Not sure' (n = 54) of the perceived source of the advertisement and those who identified the source as 'Human' (n = 31). The grouping variable used was Perceived_source2.

E.1 Frequency Distribution – Perceived Ad Source

Response Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Human	59	40.1	40.1	40.1
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	1	0.7	0.7	40.8
Not sure	54	36.7	36.7	77.6
Human (recoded as 4)	32	21.8	21.8	99.3
Other (response artefact)	1	0.7	0.7	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	—

Note. Perceived_source2: N Valid = 147, Missing = 0. The T-Test analysis used categories 'Not sure' (coded 2, n = 54) and 'Human' (coded 4, n = 31). One respondent selected 'AI' and one selected the question text as a response; these were excluded from the T-Test comparison.

E.2 Group Statistics

Dependent Variable	Perceived Source	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Creativity_Score	Not sure (2)	54	4.0370	1.60474	.21838
	Human (4)	31	5.5226	1.06668	.19158

EmotionalEng_Score	Not sure (2)	54	3.9037	1.61303	.21951
	Human (4)	31	5.4774	1.08772	.19536
Authenticity_Score	Not sure (2)	54	4.4148	1.53935	.20948
	Human (4)	31	5.6323	1.18782	.21334
Trust_Score	Not sure (2)	54	4.6481	1.47223	.20034
	Human (4)	31	5.7097	1.03902	.18661
AttitudeAd_Score	Not sure (2)	54	4.7907	1.69174	.23022
	Human (4)	31	6.2968	1.17629	.21127

Note. Perceived_source2: Group 2 = 'Not sure'; Group 4 = 'Human'. Scores reflect composite means across five Likert items (scale 1–7).

E.3 Independent Samples Test – t-test for Equality of Means

Variable	**Levene's Assumption**	**t**	**df**	**p (1-sided)**	**p (2-sided)**	**Mean Diff.**	**SE Diff.**	**95% CI**
Creativity_Score	Equal var. assumed	-4.598	83	<.001	<.001	-1.48554	.32308	-2.128 to -.843

	Equal var. not assumed	-5.114	81.103	<.001	<.001	-1.48554	.29050	-2.064 to -.908
EmotionalEng_Score	Equal var. assumed	-4.832	83	<.001	<.001	-1.57372	.32569	-2.222 to -.926
	Equal var. not assumed	-5.355	80.730	<.001	<.001	-1.57372	.29385	-2.158 to -.989
Authenticity_Score	Equal var. assumed	-3.798	83	<.001	<.001	-1.21744	.32051	-1.855 to -.580
	Equal var. not assumed	-4.072	75.834	<.001	<.001	-1.21744	.29899	-1.813 to -.622
Trust_Score	Equal var. assumed	-3.537	83	<.001	<.001	-1.06153	.30015	-1.659 to -.465
	Equal var. not assumed	-3.877	79.345	<.001	<.001	-1.06153	.27379	-1.606 to -.517

AttitudeAd_Score	Equal var. assumed	-4.381	83	<.001	<.001	-1.50603	.34379	-2.190 to -.822
	Equal var. not assumed	-4.820	79.831	<.001	<.001	-1.50603	.31246	-2.128 to -.884

Note. All two-sided p-values < .001. Mean differences are in the direction Not sure minus Human (negative values indicate higher scores for the Human group). 95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference.

E.4 Homogeneity of Variance – Levene's Test

Variable	**Variance Assumption**	**F**	**Sig.**
Creativity_Score	Equal variances assumed	9.240	.003
EmotionalEng_Score	Equal variances assumed	6.105	.016
Authenticity_Score	Equal variances assumed	4.779	.032

Trust_Score	Equal variances assumed	7.666	.007
AttitudeAd_Score	Equal variances assumed	11.122	.001

Note. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances: all five constructs returned significant Levene's F ($p < .05$), indicating that equal variances could not be assumed. Accordingly, the 'Equal variances not assumed' row values from the Independent Samples Test (Welch's t-test) should be interpreted for these constructs.

E.5 Interpretation Summary

Significant differences were found across all five constructs (all $p < .001$, two-tailed). Participants who identified the advertisement as human-created scored significantly higher on Creativity (M = 5.52 vs. 4.04), Emotional Engagement (M = 5.48 vs. 3.90), Authenticity (M = 5.63 vs. 4.41), Trust (M = 5.71 vs. 4.65), and Attitude toward the Ad (M = 6.30 vs. 4.79) compared to those who were uncertain of the source. Given significant Levene's test results for all constructs, the Welch's adjusted t-test (equal variances not assumed) values are reported as primary findings.

Appendix F – PROCESS Macro Model 6: Serial Mediation Output

Software: PROCESS Procedure for SPSS, Version 5.0 (Hayes, 2022). Model: 6 (Serial Mediation). Outcome (Y): AttAd. Predictor (X): Source. First Mediator (M1): Auth (Authenticity). Second Mediator (M2): Trust. Sample Size: N = 85. Bootstrap samples: 5,000. Confidence level: 95%. Seed: 12345.

F.1 Model Summary – Regression Equations

Outcome Variable	R	R^2	MSE	F	df	p
Authenticity (M1)	.3848	.1481	2.0231	14.4285	1, 83	.0003
Trust (M2)	.8691	.7554	0.5055	126.5953	2, 82	< .001
AttAd (Y)	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note. R^2 for each outcome equation is reported above. The Trust (M2) equation accounts for substantial variance (R^2 = .755), reflecting Auth as a strong predictor. The AttAd outcome equation (full model) is detailed in Table F.2 below.

F.2 Path Coefficients – All Equations

Outcome	Predictor	Coeff (b)	SE	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
Auth (M1)	Constant	6.8497	.5464	12.5370	< .001	5.7630	7.9364
	Source (X)	−1.2174	.3205	−3.7985	.0003	−1.8549	−.5800
Trust (M2)	Constant	1.3339	.4646	2.8711	.0052	.4097	2.2581
	Source (X)	−.0951	.1736	−.5480	.5852	−.4404	.2502
	Auth (M1)	.7938	.0549	14.4670	< .001	.6846	.9030
AttAd (Y)	Constant	1.3300	.6000	2.2169	.0294	.1363	2.5238
	Source (X)	−.4695	.2141	−2.1934	.0311	−.8954	−.0436
	Auth (M1)	.1516	.1273	1.1906	.2373	−.1017	.4049

	Trust (M2)	.8026	.1359	5.9043	< .001	.5321	1.0731

Note. Coeff = unstandardised regression coefficient. SE = standard error. LLCI/ULCI = lower and upper limits of 95% confidence interval (OLS). Significant paths (p < .05) bolded in interpretation. Source coded: 1 = Not sure, 2 = Human. Auth = Authenticity composite score; Trust = Trust composite score; AttAd = Attitude toward Ad composite score.

F.3 Direct Effect of X (Source) on Y (AttAd)

Path	**Effect**	**SE**	**t**	**p**	**95% CI [LLCI, ULCI]**
Source → AttAd (direct)	−.4695	.2141	−2.1934	.0311	[−.8954, −.0436]

Note. The direct effect of perceived source on attitude toward the ad remains significant (p = .031) when both mediators are included in the model, indicating partial mediation.

F.4 Indirect Effects of X on Y via M1 and M2 (Bootstrapped)

Indirect Path	**Effect**	**BootSE**	**95% BCa CI [LLCI, ULCI]**	**Inference**
TOTAL indirect effect	−1.0365	.2435	[−1.5207, −.5547]	✓ **Significant**
Ind1: Source → Auth → AttAd	−.1845	.1546	[−.5025, .1099]	✗ Not significant

Ind2: Source → Trust → AttAd	−.0763	.1140	[−.3197, .1295]	✗ Not significant
Ind3: Source → Auth → Trust → AttAd (serial path)	−.7756	.2251	[−1.2513, −.3626]	✓ **Significant**

Note. Bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples (bias-corrected and accelerated, BCa). An indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the 95% CI excludes zero. Ind1 = Source → Authenticity → AttAd; Ind2 = Source → Trust → AttAd; Ind3 = Source → Authenticity → Trust → AttAd (the serial mediation path). The serial path (Ind3) is the only individually significant indirect pathway.

F.5 Interpretation Summary

The PROCESS Model 6 serial mediation analysis revealed that perceived advertising source (AI vs. human) exerted a significant total indirect effect on attitude toward the advertisement (total indirect effect = −1.0365, 95% BCa CI [−1.5207, −.5547]), operating primarily through the sequential pathway of Authenticity and Trust (Ind3 = −.7756, 95% BCa CI [−1.2513, −.3626]). Neither the Auth-only path (Ind1) nor the Trust-only path (Ind2) reached significance as isolated mediators. A significant direct effect also remained (b = −.4695, p = .031), indicating partial rather than full serial mediation. These findings suggest that perceived source attribution shapes ad attitudes chiefly by first undermining perceived authenticity, which in turn reduces trust, and trust subsequently drives overall ad evaluation.

Appendix G — Ethical Considerations Declaration

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Technological University Dublin's Faculty of Business. The following ethical protocols were observed throughout the research process.

Informed Consent

All participants were provided with a full information sheet prior to commencing the survey, detailing: the purpose of the study; the voluntary nature of participation; the right to withdraw at any time without consequence; the anonymity of all responses; and the intended use of the data for academic purposes only. Participants were required to actively confirm their consent before proceeding with the survey.

Anonymity and Data Protection

No personally identifiable information was collected at any stage of the study. Responses were collected and stored anonymously via Qualtrics. Data were used solely for this dissertation and were not shared with any third parties. All data was handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and TU Dublin's data protection policies.

Deception and Debrief

Authorship of the advertisements was withheld from participants during the exposure phase as a methodological control measure, consistent with standard practice in experimental advertising research (Rosengren et al., 2020). This constitutes a minor and standard form of experimental non-disclosure rather than active deception. Participants were fully debriefed at the conclusion of the survey, informed of the reason for non-disclosure, and provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose.

Risk Assessment

This study was assessed as carrying minimal ethical risk. Participation involved viewing advertising stimuli and completing a survey. No sensitive personal data was collected, no vulnerable populations were targeted, and no foreseeable harm to participants was identified.

Ethical Approval

Supervising faculty: Alacoque McAlpine, TU Dublin College of Business.

Researcher signature: _____Joseph Adeniyi_____

Name: Joseph Adeniyi

Date: 20th of May 2026