

Can Machines Be Authentic? A Study of Consumer Evaluations of AI-generated Advertising

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This study explores consumer evaluations of AI-generated advertising, with a specific focus on perceived authenticity. Among the diverse typologies of AI advertising, particular attention is given to machine-dominant content, where AI independently generates the majority of creative elements with minimal human intervention. To highlight the distinct authenticity challenges of this approach, we compare it with human-driven AI advertisements. Using Topic Modeling based on Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and sentiment analysis, the study examines how consumer responses vary with perceived authenticity and identifies the key dimensions that shape authenticity perceptions. Findings reveal that consumer reactions are deeply rooted in concerns about authenticity, encompassing dimensions such as perceived effort and brand motives. Theoretically, this research extends authenticity scholarship into the domain of machine-generated content. From a managerial perspective, the results offer practical insights for marketers aiming to integrate AI technologies while preserving emotional resonance and trust in brand communications.

Keyword: AI, AI-generated Advertising, Authenticity, Topic Modeling, Sentiment Analysis

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1. Introduction

Rapid advancements in generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are fundamentally transforming the advertising landscape. With the emergence of sophisticated tools, both individuals and firms now have unprecedented access to powerful creative capabilities that were previously exclusive to professional con-

tent creators (Chintalapati and Pandey, 2022). This technological proliferation has prompted the advertising industry to actively adopt AI for content production (Yi and Kim, 2019), with some brands now releasing fully AI-generated campaigns (Huh et al., 2023). As AI integration in advertising continues to evolve, various approaches to AI utilization have emerged, resulting in distinct types of AI-generated advertising content. These range from machine-

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dominant productions, where AI systems autonomously generate most creative elements with minimal human intervention, to human-AI collaborative approaches, where human creative direction guides AI tools to produce specific outputs. A notable milestone in the machine-dominant category occurred in June 2024, when Toys “R” Us released the world’s first commercial advertisement fully generated with OpenAI’s video model Sora. The 66-second video depicted the childhood of founder Charles Lazarus and the origin of the brand. While some praised it as “a compelling glimpse into the future of film,” others criticized it as “creepy” and unsettling, highlighting the polarized nature of consumer responses to AI-generated advertising content. This divergence in reactions reveals a core debate surrounding the perceived loss of human touch in AI advertising. Consumer skepticism toward AI-generated advertising often stems from the perceived lack of authenticity and the artificial awkwardness of machine-generated narratives (Campbell et al., 2022; Kirk and Givi, 2025). The degree of human involvement in the creative process appears to influence consumer perceptions, as audiences may respond differently to content they perceive as entirely machine-generated versus content that maintains visible human creative input (Rodgers, 2021). Understanding these typological distinctions and their impact on consumer evaluation is crucial, as authenticity

emerges as a key criterion that consumers use to assess different forms of AI-generated advertising content. This concern reflects a deeper question: To what extent do consumers perceive AI-generated advertising as authentic?

Authenticity has long been recognized as a central emotional factor influencing message credibility, brand attitudes, and purchase intention in traditional advertising research (Becker et al., 2019). In the context of AI advertising, where human agency is absent or minimized, authenticity perception may serve as a critical emotional threshold that determines whether consumers accept or reject the message. However, existing studies on AI advertising primarily focus on cognitive variables such as technology acceptance, efficiency, and machine heuristics (Wu and Wen, 2021), while emotional dimensions, particularly authenticity perception, have received limited empirical attention. Furthermore, traditional notions of authenticity may not fully apply to AI-generated content. As AI becomes a primary agent in advertising creation, there is a growing need to redefine what constitutes authenticity when content is created without human emotion or direct agency. This raises fundamental questions about whether consumers can perceive non-human outputs as authentic, and what specific cues contribute to that perception. This research gap aligns with calls from Rodgers (2021), who highlighted the importance of understanding how

consumers process, perceive, and respond to AI-generated advertising content.

This study empirically investigates how consumers respond to AI-generated advertising, with a particular emphasis on perceived authenticity. The research first seeks to understand consumers' overall reactions to this new form of advertising, then examines how these reactions may differ depending on the authenticity they perceive, and finally aims to uncover the specific dimensions through which consumers evaluate authenticity in AI-generated advertising. Overall, this study seeks to provide an integrated understanding of how consumers perceive and evaluate authenticity in AI-generated advertising. To explore these objectives, the study employs Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling and sentiment analysis on YouTube comment data related to AI-generated commercials. Additionally, we incorporate a comparative analysis with human-AI collaborative advertisements to explore how these production differences influence consumer evaluations. This research contributes to the growing literature on AI in advertising by shifting the focus from cognitive acceptance to affective and authenticity-based reception. From a practical perspective, it offers actionable insights for marketers seeking to incorporate AI in ways that preserve emotional resonance and strengthen brand-consumer relationships in an increasingly automated advertising environment.

Chapter II of this study reviews existing literature on AI-generated advertising and consumer authenticity perceptions, leading to the development of research questions. Chapter III describes the research methodology, combining LDA topic modeling with sentiment analysis to examine consumer comments from YouTube advertising campaigns. Chapter IV presents the empirical findings, revealing key thematic patterns and emotional tendencies in consumer responses to AI-generated advertisements. Chapter V discusses the results, theoretical contributions, practical implications for marketers, and suggestions for future research.

II. Theoretical Background

2.1 AI-generated Advertising

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are fundamentally reshaping the advertising industry. Tools such as Midjourney, DALL·E 2, ChatGPT, and SORA have rapidly evolved from experimental novelties to practical solutions, significantly enhancing content creation processes for advertising agencies and brands (Chintalapati and Pandey, 2022; Fui-Hoon Nah et al., 2023; Wahid et al., 2023). Contemporary campaigns increasingly incorporate AI-generated elements across

various media formats, from visual assets and copywriting to fully AI-produced video advertisements. Major brands are now experimenting with end-to-end AI-generated campaigns, marking a significant shift from traditional, human-centered creative workflows (Huang and Rust, 2021; Huh et al., 2023). Notable cases include Levi Strauss & Co.'s controversial 2023 partnership with Lalaland.ai to create AI-generated models for product imagery and Samsung's deepfake technology that can animate static images using facial landmark mapping from celebrity databases for promotional content. Additionally, retail giants like Amazon have developed sophisticated AI-powered dynamic creative optimization systems that generate thousands of personalized ad variants based on individual shopping histories and behavioral patterns. The industry's growing reliance on generative AI is largely driven by its potential for cost efficiency, content scalability, and automation of creative tasks (Sjödín et al., 2021). However, this shift also introduces critical concerns, particularly regarding the perceived non-human nature of AI-generated ads and their impact on consumer trust and advertising effectiveness (Osadchaya et al., 2024).

2.2 Consumer Responses to AI-generated Advertising

Despite the growing adoption of generative

AI in advertising, existing research reveals a wide range of consumer responses, spanning from skepticism and discomfort to intrigue and acceptance. Negative perceptions often stem from the unique characteristics of AI-generated content. For example, hyper-realistic yet subtly distorted visuals may evoke a sense of uncanniness or eeriness, diminishing consumer acceptance (Wu and Wen, 2021). Some studies report that AI-generated ads are perceived as informational threats, triggering anxiety or moral resistance, which in turn leads to avoidance or backlash (Barari et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025). Moreover, a frequently cited concern is the perceived lack of emotional depth or sincerity in AI-created content, which undermines brand trust and reduces engagement (Kirk and Givi, 2025). In many cases, consumers evaluate AI-generated ads as less credible and persuasive than those produced by humans (Verma et al., 2021).

Conversely, research has also identified conditions under which AI advertising can be positively received. When consumers view the content as intelligent, creative, or original, their evaluations tend to be more favorable (Gu et al., 2024; Poushneh and Gearhart, 2025; Rodgers and Nguyen, 2022). Interestingly, perceptions of authenticity, traditionally seen as a barrier in AI contexts, can also enhance purchase intentions if consumers interpret the AI-generated content as sincere and meaningful (Lee and Kim, 2024). In some cases,

the perceived objectivity of machine-based advertising production activates a machine heuristic, whereby consumers regard machines as more trustworthy and impartial than humans, thereby increasing appreciation for the ad (Wu and Wen, 2021). Taken together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of AI-generated advertising is not determined by the technology itself, but by how consumers perceive its human-likeness, intention, and emotional resonance (Li and Ma, 2024). Among the various factors influencing these perceptions, this study focuses on perceived authenticity, a critical yet complex construct that may explain the divergent reactions to AI-driven content across contexts.

2.3 AI Advertising Type

Recent research suggests that consumer evaluations of AI-generated content are significantly influenced by the degree of human versus machine involvement in the creation process. Zhang and Gosline (2023) found evidence of strong human favoritism, demonstrating that when consumers are informed about a product's creation process, they consistently prefer human-generated content over both AI-generated and AI-human collaborative content. Similarly, Magni et al. (2024) identified effort as a key mechanism driving the effect of producer identity on creativity evaluation, finding that humans perceive AI-

driven production processes as requiring less effort than human-driven ones, consequently leading to lower creativity assessments for AI products. These findings suggest that consumer responses to AI advertising may vary significantly based on the level of machine versus human involvement in the creative process.

AI advertising can be understood through what Rodgers (2021) describes as "brand communication that uses a range of machine functions that learn to carry out tasks with the intent to persuade with input by humans, machines, or both" (p. 2). This definition emphasizes the communicative and collaborative nature of AI advertising, where human and machine elements are integrated throughout the creative process to varying degrees. Building on Campbell et al. (2022)'s framework of advertising manipulation, AI advertising corresponds to their third generation of "synthetic manipulation," where AI algorithms enable autonomous editing or generation of content, following the first generation of analog manipulation (using physical tools like makeup and lighting) and the second generation of digital manipulation (employing computer-aided tools like Photoshop and CGI). Building on Qin and Jiang's (2019) four-step advertising framework, consumer-insight discovery, ad creation, media planning and buying, and ad-impact evaluation, this study focuses on AI applications within the ad-creation stage. At this stage, consumers' recognition

of AI characteristics can vary according to how prominently human versus machine elements are integrated into the creative process. Even within this single phase, the degree of human involvement may differ considerably, yet systematic typological research that distinguishes such variations remains limited in the AI advertising literature.

However, recent research on Human-AI collaboration offers useful typologies that can inform the classification of AI involvement in advertising. For example, Maedche et al. (2019) describe collaboration types based on the extent to which AI substitutes for or augments human work, encompassing interaction modes such as substitution (AI replaces humans), augmentation (AI supports and extends human work), and assemblage (AI and humans operate together as an integrated unit). Similarly, Sowa et al. (2021) outline a continuum of human-AI interaction ranging from fully independent AI operations to deeply integrated cooperative models, highlighting different levels of role dominance between humans and machines. Building on these perspectives, Yue and Li (2023) distinguish between AI-dominant and AI-assisted collaboration modes to examine how responsibility attribution shapes consumer evaluation and adoption intentions. Likewise, Haupt et al. (2025) refine these distinctions by differentiating AI-supported human authorship and human-controlled AI authorship, emphasizing

how varying degrees of human input can influence consumer responses and reduce algorithm aversion. Lu et al. (2025) extend this perspective to text-based brand content, examining how variations in the relative dominance of human versus AI contributions shape consumer engagement. Applying these insights from other fields to the advertising context and drawing on Rodgers' (2021) insight that AI advertising has become increasingly complex and can involve input by humans, machines, or both, this study adopts an approach that examines the relative dominance of human versus machine elements in AI advertising. We recognize that AI advertising contains both human and machine components, but to varying degrees that may significantly influence consumer responses to perceived authenticity.

2.4 Authenticity Paradox in AI Advertising

2.4.1 Foundational Dimensions of Authenticity

Brand authenticity fundamentally encompasses truthfulness, originality, and uniqueness as core definitional elements (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Jeong and Choi, 2022; Lee and Min, 2016). This construct manifests through multidimensional consumer perceptions that include evaluations of product attributes, message content, and brand origin (Audrezet et al., 2020). The widely adopted

framework for measuring brand authenticity proposes a three-dimensional model comprising quality commitment, sincerity, and heritage (Napoli et al., 2014). Quality commitment reflects a brand's dedication to excellence and consistency in its offerings. Sincerity encompasses transparency and honesty in brand communications and actions. Heritage refers to the brand's historical continuity and connection to authentic origins and traditions. Traditional authenticity in advertising has been fundamentally grounded in human-centered elements, including craftsmanship, sincerity of the creator, and experience-based storytelling. Authenticity evaluation has historically relied on human-centric questions such as "Who made it?" and "How genuine is their intent?" (Becker et al., 2019). This framework assumes human agency as a prerequisite for authentic content creation. Marketing literature suggests that authenticity evaluation extends beyond this dimension to encompass various underlying factors.

Research indicates that consumers assess brand intentions, questioning whether actions stem from genuine concern or opportunistic objectives, and that creator motivations, particularly the presence of passionate individuals with intrinsic rather than purely commercial drives, influence authenticity perceptions (Audrezet et al., 2020; Moulard et al., 2014). Additionally, production-related factors such as perceived effort, craftsmanship, and human

involvement, as well as communication-related considerations regarding message genuineness, contribute to overall authenticity evaluations (Ilicic and Webster, 2014; Magni et al., 2024; Morhart et al., 2015). These various factors collectively suggest that authenticity is a complex, multifaceted construct encompassing motivational, procedural, and communicative elements.

2.4.2 AI Authenticity Challenge

Generative AI content presents a fundamental challenge to these established authenticity frameworks, as it is created by non-human entities lacking emotions, personal experiences, or genuine intentions (Kirk and Givi, 2025). This technological shift raises a critical question: Can AI-generated content be perceived as authentic? Emerging research shows that consumer reactions to AI-generated content are divided. Some consumers, reflecting a tendency toward human favoritism, perceive such content as inauthentic because it lacks a human creator (Brüns and Meißner, 2024; Dorigoni and Giardino, 2025), whereas others focus on factors such as content quality, message relevance, and brand-message fit rather than on who produced it (Gu et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025). This variation indicates that traditional authenticity criteria may be insufficient for the AI era. While existing research on AI and authenticity has

primarily focused on service contexts such as chatbot interactions (Glikson and Asscher, 2023; Kim et al., 2024), product design domains like fashion (Lee and Kim, 2024), and text-based brand communication contexts (Hayes et al., 2020), studies examining authenticity perceptions in AI-generated advertising remain limited. Recent research by Brüns and Meißner (2024) suggests that using generative AI for social media content creation diminishes perceived brand authenticity. However, limited scholarly attention has been paid to identifying the specific dimensions and psychological mechanisms that shape authenticity evaluations within AI advertising contexts. This research gap is particularly pronounced regarding the specific authenticity dimensions that consumers use to evaluate AI-generated advertising content, as well as how these dimensions vary across different types of AI integration approaches.

Given that AI-generated advertising represents a fundamentally different form of brand communication, characterized by reduced human-controlled authorship and perceived lack of emotional intent (Kirk and Givi, 2025), understanding its authenticity challenges requires context-specific empirical research. The emergence of AI-generated advertising, therefore, necessitates reconceptualizing authenticity itself: whether content created by emotionless entities can nonetheless elicit authentic emotional responses from consumers.

This paradigm shift challenges existing theoretical frameworks and demands empirical investigation into how consumers construct authenticity judgments when human creative involvement is limited. Within this theoretical context, this research addresses three fundamental questions:

- (RQ1) How do consumers respond to AI-generated advertising?
- (RQ2) How do consumer responses vary depending on perceived authenticity?
- (RQ3) What are the perceived dimensions of authenticity in AI-generated advertising?

Additionally, we incorporate a comparative analysis with human-led advertisements to explore how varying degrees of human versus machine involvement influence consumer perceptions and authenticity evaluations. By doing so, this study aims to emphasize the distinct consumer responses and authenticity challenges associated with machine-driven AI advertising, which remains the primary focus of our investigation.

III. Method

3.1 Topic Modeling and Sentiment Analysis

To address the research questions, this study

employed a mixed-method text analytics approach combining LDA-based topic modeling and lexicon-based sentiment analysis. Topic modeling, a widely used technique in natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, statistically uncovers latent thematic structures within large-scale unstructured text data. Specifically, LDA identifies co-occurrence patterns of words across documents and clusters them into distinct topics based on probabilistic distributions. Topic modeling is guided by two fundamental principles (Blei et al., 2003): (1) every topic is a mixture of words, for example, an authenticity-related topic might include words such as “genuine,” “fake,” and “real”; and (2) every document is a mixture of topics. For instance, one comment might be 70% about authenticity concerns and 30% about brand perception, while another comment might be 90% about technical quality and 10% about emotional response. As such, topic modeling categorizes words into different groups to form topics and calculates the probabilities of each topic within each comment. This method is especially suitable for detecting key themes underlying consumer discussions about AI-generated advertising, as it allows the data itself to reveal underlying topic structures. Sentiment analysis was conducted using AFINN and Bing Liu’s lexicon-based dictionaries, allowing us to classify consumer comments as positive or negative and quantify overall affective ten-

dencies within each identified topic. This dual approach enables both thematic and emotional interpretation of consumer responses.

3.2 Data Source

The data for this study were collected from YouTube user comments on two recent AI-generated advertising campaigns. The *Coca-Cola “The Holiday Magic is Coming”* Holiday Ad (published November 2024) represents a quintessential case of machine-driven AI advertising. This ad features *Coca-Cola’s* signature holiday icons, the classic Christmas truck and the polar bear, to convey a festive “Real Magic” narrative (Coca-Cola, 2024). The campaign was developed by the U.S.-based creative agency Pereira O’Dell in collaboration with the AI-focused production studio Silverside AI. They created a rough draft within three days by combining several generative AI platforms, Stable Diffusion, Pactto, DALL·E, and ChatGPT, along with their proprietary production tool Director Magic (TheWrap, 2024). This approach enabled an AI-driven creative process with only minimal human oversight, from concept development to final execution.

In contrast, the *Heinz “AI Ketchup”* Ad (published July 2022) exemplifies a human-driven advertising model. The ad playfully underscores *Heinz’s* category dominance with the concept “A.I. thinks ‘ketchup’ looks like *Heinz*,” presenting images of ketchup generated

through DALL·E 2 that consistently resemble *Heinz* products (Heinz, 2022). This campaign was developed by *Heinz's* global marketing team in partnership with the creative agency Rethink, maintaining human oversight for concept development and final editing (Muse by Clios, 2022). This approach was comparatively more human-driven than *Coca-Cola's* machine-driven advertisement, with humans guiding the creative direction and using AI primarily as a generative tool.

An initial dataset of consumer comments was collected from the publicly accessible YouTube pages of both ad campaigns, following ethical research guidelines that respect user anonymity and platform terms of service. To ensure the relevance and quality of the textual data, we conducted a series of data cleaning steps, including the removal of duplicate entries, spam, and extremely short comments that lacked substantive information (e.g., single-word responses or comments consisting only of emojis). After this preprocessing, the final sample included 4,961 comments for the *Coca-Cola* campaign and 244 comments for the *Heinz* campaign.

3.3 Brand and Ad Selection

We selected two AI advertising campaigns that differ primarily in their degree of AI involvement while remaining comparable across other brand-related dimensions. Prior research

shows that factors such as brand category, brand awareness, and overall branding strategy can shape how advertising influences consumer responses (Omoruyi and Chinomona, 2019; Zhang et al., 2014). Therefore, we sought to control for these variables by choosing brands that are closely aligned on these key dimensions, thereby minimizing potential confounding effects beyond the focal AI variable. *Coca-Cola* and *Heinz* satisfy this requirement. Both represent major fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) categories, beverages and condiments respectively, and are iconic brands (Kumar et al., 2017; Thain and Bradley, 2014) with long heritage spanning well over a century each. Despite dealing with utilitarian consumer staples (Chen et al., 2017), both employ emotional rather than rational branding strategies (Becheur et al., 2017; Kumar, 2014). They also run globally recognized campaigns, such as *Open Happiness* from *Coca-Cola* and *It Has to Be Heinz*, that reinforce an emotional brand image (Gehani, 2016). Both brands share high brand awareness among soft drink and condiment consumers, 97% and 93% respectively (Statista, 2024a, 2024b), ensuring comparability beyond the AI variable.

Both brands demonstrate similar levels of brand loyalty (*Coca-Cola* 53% vs. *Heinz* 54%; Statista, 2024a, 2024b), highlighting their common strength in consumer loyalty, while their emotional attachment may nonetheless differ. From the perspective of the focal ad-

vertisements, both place a strategic emphasis on emotional appeals over rational, information-driven messaging, yet they express this emotion in different ways: *Coca-Cola* employed expansive, sentimental holiday storytelling, whereas *Heinz* used concise, humorous creative executions. These stylistic nuances, while

secondary to their common emotional strategy, may shape how consumers respond. A more detailed discussion of these influences appears in the *Results* section. Table 1 offers a concise overview of the key brand and advertising characteristics that informed this case selection.

<Table 1> Coca-Cola vs. Heinz: Brand Comparison Summary

	Category	Coca-Cola	Heinz	Commonalities / Key Differences
Brand Aspects	Year Founded	1886	1869	Both have a long heritage and a strong brand legacy
	Brand Type	FMCG	FMCG	Both are iconic FMCG brands
	Branding Strategy	Emotional appeal (vs. rational; e.g., pleasure, memories, intimacy, dream)	Emotional appeal (vs. rational; e.g., visual, sensory, familiar, warm)	Both emphasize emotional connection
	Key Campaigns	<i>Open Happiness, Share a Coke</i>	<i>It Has to Be Heinz, Beans Meanz Heinz</i>	Both highlight core brand identity through memorable campaigns
	Brand Image	Heritage-rich, happy, empathetic, connected	Reliable, friendly, steady, trustworthy	Emotional associations are similar
	Brand Awareness	Very high - globally iconic	Very high - household staple worldwide	Both enjoy strong global recognition
Ad Aspects	AI Use in Advertising	AI-driven (machine-led)	Human-driven (Human-led)	Both experiment with AI in advertising; the key difference is the degree of human input
	Primary Appeal (Emotional vs. Rational)	Emotional-oriented	Emotional-oriented	Both rely more on emotional than rational appeals
	Advertising Style & Themes	Storytelling with emotional, humanistic, seasonal focus	Witty visuals with emotional, humorous, and experimental elements	Different creative styles, while both maintain strong brand messages

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded through three key analytical approaches, beginning with comprehensive data preprocessing. The collected YouTube comments were first cleaned by removing stop words (e.g., “a,” “the,” and “and”), punctuation marks, and special characters. Words were then stemmed to their root forms to ensure consistent treatment of variations (e.g., “authentic,” “authenticity,” “authentically” were reduced to “authent”). Additionally, extremely common and extremely rare words were filtered out to improve topic coherence. Topic modeling using LDA was applied separately to both datasets (*Coca-Cola* and *Heinz*) to identify consumer-generated topics of discussion, allowing us to extract recurring themes, including both general consumer reactions and authenticity-related evaluations. This approach allowed us to preserve the unique topic structures and conversational patterns within each campaign without risking topic dilution or bias caused by data size disparities. Topic labels were developed through a systematic examination of the most frequent and representative words within each topic cluster, with careful attention to ensuring that each label could effectively summarize the dominant themes and word patterns. To enhance validity, representative comments with the highest topic probability scores were reviewed to ensure that the assigned labels accurately cap-

tured the underlying semantic content. This iterative process involved multiple rounds of refinement where topic interpretability and distinctiveness were carefully examined. To further validate the topic labeling process, we recruited a group of 3 graduate researchers who were blind to our research questions. Following external validation approaches commonly used in topic modeling studies (e.g., Levy and Franklin, 2014; Maier et al., 2021), these evaluators independently reviewed the representative word clusters and a scrambled list of topic labels. They then matched each label to the most appropriate word cluster. The evaluators demonstrated a high level of agreement, confirming the interpretability and validity of our topic extraction results. Sentiment analysis was then conducted for each topic, with sentiment distributions (positive vs. negative) calculated using the AFINN and Bing lexicons to assess emotional valence within each topic. Finally, the authenticity dimension exploration involved special attention to identifying perceived dimensions of authenticity within the AI advertising context.

The primary analytical focus centers on the *Coca-Cola* advertisement. This decision was driven by the campaign’s direct alignment with machine-driven AI advertising, which represents the core focus of this study’s investigation into consumer responses toward AI-generated content with minimal human involvement. The *Coca-Cola* advertisement

serves as an exemplary case of the emerging paradigm where artificial intelligence assumes primary creative responsibility, making it particularly relevant for understanding perceptions of authenticity in the AI advertising era. Additionally, the *Coca-Cola* ad attracted a substantially larger volume of consumer responses, enabling more robust topic extraction and sentiment differentiation. Nevertheless, a comparative perspective was maintained by analyzing the *Heinz* comments during topic validation. This comparative approach enables the identification of unique consumer response patterns and authenticity challenges specifically associated with machine-driven AI advertising, thereby reinforcing our primary research focus on this emerging advertising paradigm.

IV. Results

4.1 Topic Analysis Results (Coca-Cola Ad)

The 5-topic solution was chosen based on its semantic coherence, ensuring that each topic captured a distinct and meaningful aspect of consumer discourse. The resulting topics revealed five clearly differentiated dimensions of consumer evaluation, each characterized by unique thematic coherence and distinct keyword patterns. Topic 1, *brand*

identity evaluation, was characterized by keywords such as “real,” “fake,” “Coca,” “Pepsi,” “billion,” and “product.” This topic centers on consumers’ fundamental assessment of *Coca-Cola*’s brand positioning and identity, with discourse frequently questioning whether the AI advertisement authentically represents the brand’s traditional values and heritage. Comments within this topic often involved comparative evaluations with competitor brands, particularly *Pepsi*, and expressed concerns about whether the use of AI technology aligns with or contradicts the brand’s established identity in the marketplace. Topic 2, *content quality assessment*, featured prominent terms like “slop,” “terrible,” “cheap,” “generated,” and “artist.” This topic captures widespread consumer dissatisfaction with the perceived visual quality, artistic merit, and overall production standards of the AI-generated content. The prevalence of strongly negative descriptors suggests that consumers view the AI-generated elements as substandard compared to traditional human-created advertising content, reflecting concerns about the technical and aesthetic capabilities of AI in creative production. Topic 3, *message and creative direction*, incorporated keywords such as “Christmas,” “magic,” “human,” “generated,” “marketing,” and “artists.” This topic reflects consumer discourse about the appropriateness and effectiveness of using AI-generated content to convey traditional holiday senti-

ments and emotional narratives. Comments in this category often questioned whether artificial intelligence can authentically capture and communicate the warmth and magic traditionally associated with Christmas advertising, highlighting tensions between technological efficiency and emotional authenticity. Topic 4, *corporate motives*, included prominent terms such as “soulless,” “money,” “billion,” “company,” “commercial,” and “dollar.” This topic captures consumer skepticism about the business rationale and strategic thinking behind *Coca-Cola’s* decision to use AI technology. Many comments suggested that the use of AI represents a cost-cutting measure rather than

a genuine creative innovation, reflecting broader concerns about prioritizing profit margins over authentic brand communication and consumer emotional connection. Topic 5, *production processes*, was characterized by words like “animators,” “lazy,” “hire,” “soulless,” “awful,” and “artists.” This topic centers on discussions about human resources, production methods, and creative processes involved in advertising creation, with particular focus on automation and the role of creative professionals. Comments within this category expressed mockery and distrust toward automated advertising production, reflecting a dominant perception that AI-generated content represents a “lazily made”

〈Table 2〉 Topic Solutions for Coca-Cola Advertisement

Topic	Topic Label	Explanation	Representative Words
1	Brand Identity Evaluation	Consumer assessment of <i>Coca-Cola’s</i> brand positioning and market identity, questioning whether the AI ad represents traditional brand values	real, fake, Coca, Pepsi, billion, product, commercial, better, drink, love
2	Content Quality Assessment	Consumer evaluation of visual quality and production standards of AI-generated ads	slop, terrible, cheap, generated, shit, artist, looks, made, pay, thing
3	Message and Creative Direction	Consumer discourse about the appropriateness of AI-generated ads for conveying traditional holiday sentiments and emotional narratives	Christmas, magic, human, generated, marketing, artists, money, job, way, stop
4	Corporate Motives	Consumer skepticism about the brand rationale behind AI technology use, viewing it as cost-cutting rather than creative innovation	soulless, money, billion, company, commercial, dollar, bad, crap, ads, hell
5	Production Processes	Consumer discussion centered around automation, the role of creative professionals, and diverse opinions on AI-driven content production	animators, lazy, hire, soulless, awful, artists, using, companies, instead, commercials

advertisement lacking effort and authenticity. The discourse reveals consumer preference for traditional human-driven creative processes and skepticism toward outsourced or automated production methods. Table 2 presents the five-topic solution, along with the associated representative keywords and descriptive labels for each topic.

4.2 Sentiment Analysis Results (Coca-Cola Ad)

The sentiment analysis revealed that consumer responses to the *Coca-Cola* AI advertisement were generally more negative than positive. Overall, 52.8% of sentiment-laden words across all comments were classified as negative, while 47.2% were positive. A chi-squared goodness-of-fit test confirmed that this distribution differs significantly from an equal 50:50 split ($\chi^2 = 20.78$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), indicating that negative sentiment was statistically more prevalent. This indicates a slight but consistent dominance of negative emotional tone in the audience reactions. When examining sentiment distribution by topic, the patterns were relatively consistent across all five topics, with negative sentiment proportions ranging from 51.7% to 62.0%. While Topic 1 (brand identity evaluation) showed the most balanced sentiment profile with 48.3% positive responses, and Topics 2 (Content Quality Assessment) and 4 (Corporate Motives) exhibited somewhat stronger negative senti-

ment at 60.3% and 62.0% respectively, the overall pattern demonstrates that negative reactions were present across all dimensions of consumer evaluation. This suggests that consumer dissatisfaction with machine-dominant AI advertising was not confined to specific aspects but rather reflected a broader skepticism toward the AI-generated content across multiple evaluative dimensions. We conducted individual chi-square tests on each topic to examine whether the distribution of sentiment significantly deviated from an even split. All topics showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$), suggesting that the emotional tone within each topic is not evenly balanced. Detailed test statistics for each topic are reported in Table 3.

The qualitative analysis of representative comments across topics further illuminates the specific nature of these dispersed reactions and underlying consumer concerns. Topic 1, *brand identity evaluation*, showed relatively balanced sentiment distribution with 51.7% negative and 48.3% positive responses, suggesting mixed consumer reactions to *Coca-Cola*'s brand positioning in the AI context. Negative responses frequently criticized the disconnect between the brand's traditional "Real Thing" slogan and AI-generated content: "Using the word 'Real' in connection with this ad in any way is a joke. Do better," highlighting the perceived contradiction between *Coca-Cola*'s previous branding and artificial

content creation. Other comments similarly noted this irony: “The irony of the ‘Real Magic’ tagline at the end of a fake commercial” and “Real magic..? No. This is just AI slop, nothing real about this.” However, positive responses acknowledged the brand’s innovative spirit: “Coca-Cola was bold enough to try something new and innovative, as always.” Topic 2, *content quality assessment*, demonstrated one of the highest negative sentiments at 60.3% negative versus 39.7% positive, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with the visual and creative standards of AI-generated content. Consumers harshly criticized the production quality, suggesting the advertisement appeared hastily created: “This looks like it was made by a free AI tool in 10 minutes,” with others questioning the approval process: “Visually horrendous. Who approved this?” The intensity of dissatisfaction was evident in comments like “Absolutely disgusting, you should be ashamed of this.” Despite this criticism, some positive responses recognized the technical achievement: “Really great proof of concept!” Topic 3, *message and creative direction*, showed strong negative sentiment with 57.6% negative and 42.4% positive responses, particularly regarding the appropriateness of AI for conveying Christmas emotions. Critical comments emphasized how artificial content contradicted traditional holiday warmth: “This is exactly the opposite of Christmas” and “Looks soulless and lacks warmth and life,”

with consumers viewing the AI-generated elements as undermining the intended emotional impact: “How to ruin the presentation of ‘Christmas spirit’ in 1 minute.” However, some positive responses acknowledged successful preservation of holiday appeal: “Although the AI is impressive, the fact that you managed to keep the Coca-Cola Christmas magic is really something.” Topic 4, *corporate motives*, exhibited the most negative sentiment at 62.0% negative versus 38.0% positive, revealing consumer skepticism about Coca-Cola’s business rationale for using AI technology. Many criticized what they perceived as cost-cutting measures from a profitable corporation: “One of the richest companies on earth, saving a few bucks. Shameful,” and “Imagine being so greedy that you make an AI-generated commercial to save money even though you unironically have infinite money.” Consumers viewed this as prioritizing profit over creative investment: “The only people excited for AI are disgusting execs looking to cut costs.” Some positive responses, however, accepted AI as inevitable technological progress: “Very great job! AI is the future, whether you like it or not.” Topic 5, *production processes*, showed slightly more negative than positive sentiment, with 55.7% negative and 44.3% positive responses, with consumers criticizing the exclusion of human creative professionals. Many questioned the company’s commitment to quality: “Really? A multi-billion dollar com-

pany is too lazy to hire real actors and artists?” while others expressed disappointment about the lack of creative effort: “There is no effort or creativity made in this ad. It’s depressing.” Some comments distinguished between AI technology and implementation quality: “Man, this lacks artistic integrity. Not because it’s AI, but because it’s lazy.” In

contrast, positive responses recognized the collaborative nature of AI-assisted production and acknowledged human involvement: “Well done to all the AI creators involved and the editors and the team at *Coca-Cola*.” These sentiment patterns reveal that consumer resistance to machine-driven AI advertising stems not merely from technological skepti-

〈Table 3〉 Sentiment Analysis for Coca-Cola Advertisement

Topic	Topic Label	Negative, Positive Ratio	Representative Comments
1	Brand Identity Evaluation	51.7%, 48.3%	Negative: “Using the word ‘Real’ in connection with this ad in any way is a joke. Do better.”; “I used to love the old and classic <i>Coca-Cola</i> Christmas ad. Thank you for ruining it!” Positive: “ <i>Coca-Cola</i> was bold enough to try something new and innovative, as always.”
2	Content Quality Assessment	60.3%, 39.7%	Negative: “This looks like it was made by a free AI tool in 10 minutes.”; “Visually horrendous. Who approved this?”; “Absolutely disgusting, you should be ashamed of this.” Positive: “Really great proof of concept!”
3	Message and Creative Direction	57.6%, 42.4%	Negative: “This is exactly the opposite of Christmas.”; “Looks soulless and lacks warmth and life.”; “How to ruin the presentation of ‘Christmas spirit’ in 1 minute.” Positive: “Although the AI is impressive, the fact that you managed to keep the <i>Coca-Cola</i> Christmas magic is really something.”
4	Corporate Motives	62.0%, 38.0%	Negative: “One of the richest companies on earth, saving a few bucks. Shameful.”; “Imagine being so greedy that you make an AI-generated commercial to save money.”; “The only people excited for AI are disgusting execs looking to cut costs.” Positive: “Very great job! AI is the future, whether you like it or not.”
5	Production Processes	55.7%, 44.3%	Negative: “Really? A multi-billion dollar company is too lazy to hire real actors and artists?”; “There is no effort or creativity made in this ad. It’s depressing.”; “Man, this lacks artistic integrity. Not because it’s AI, but because it’s lazy.” Positive: “Well done to all the AI creators involved and the editors and the team at <i>Coca-Cola</i> .”

Note. Chi-square tests (df = 1): Topic 1 $\chi^2 = 5.62$, $p = .0177$; Topic 2 $\chi^2 = 28.4$, $p < .001$; Topic 3 $\chi^2 = 67.9$, $p < .001$; Topic 4 $\chi^2 = 118.0$, $p < .001$; Topic 5 $\chi^2 = 98.7$, $p < .001$.

cism but from deeper concerns about authenticity, effort, and the preservation of human creative values in brand communication. Table 3 summarizes these findings by presenting the sentiment ratios and representative consumer comments for each of the five identified topics, demonstrating the specific nature of consumer response across different evaluation dimensions.

4.3 Extracted Authenticity-related Factors

The topic modeling results reveal that while consumer reactions to AI-generated advertising are diverse in surface expression, they can be largely understood through the lens of authenticity concerns. This aligns with prior advertising and branding literature, where authenticity has consistently emerged as a central evaluative criterion in consumer decision-making. Among the five topics identified in this study, Topic 4 (Corporate Motives) and Topic 5 (Production Process) most directly focused on the core dimensions of authenticity evaluation. First, Topic 4 captures consumer skepticism about *Coca-Cola's* motives for adopting AI technology. Many consumers questioned whether the company prioritized cost-cutting and profit over creativity and brand-consumer trust. This is consistent with studies on motivation-related aspects of brand authenticity that show consumers evaluate brand genuineness based on perceived under-

lying motivations, specifically on whether brand actions stem from authentic values or opportunistic commercial interests (Becker et al., 2019; Cinelli and LeBoeuf, 2020). As Nunes et al. (2021) emphasize, consumers perceive integrity when they believe a brand acts autonomously, consistently, and out of intrinsic motivation rather than financial gain. Prior research on brand activism and corporate social responsibility also underscores that perceived authenticity of brand motives significantly affects consumer trust and behavioral responses (Audrezet et al., 2020). Second, Topic 5 centers on concerns about the production process and perceived effort. Consumers explicitly questioned the level of human creativity and labor involved in creating the ad. Comments referencing a lack of artistry, craftsmanship, and emotional investment reflect what prior literature describes as production authenticity or effort-based authenticity cues. For example, De Kerviler et al. (2022) find that cues signaling significant human effort and care enhance perceptions of a product's authenticity and ethicality. In AI contexts, these concerns align with research showing that perceived human effort influences creativity attributions, which in turn affect authenticity evaluations. Magni et al. (2024) demonstrate that consumers attribute higher creativity to products when they perceive substantial human effort in the production process, and recent evidence indicates that

perceived creativity itself can heighten authenticity evaluations of digital content (Chu et al., 2024). Although Topics 1 through 3 were not directly focused on authenticity, they still indirectly reflect concerns about authenticity. Topic 1 relates to brand consistency over time, connecting with research that associates brand authenticity with safeguarding heritage and maintaining identity continuity (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Safeer et al., 2023). Topic 2 reflects perceived executive quality, which connects to performance-related authenticity judgments (Ilicic and Webster, 2014). Topic 3 addresses the emotional and narrative coherence of the advertising message, which is often used as a heuristic for assessing communicative authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015). In summary, the findings suggest that consumer resistance to machine-led AI advertising is not rooted in technology aversion alone, but in broader psychological evaluations, and whether the use of AI was seen as necessary or appropriate in the given advertising context.

4.4 Findings from the Heinz Case

To further contextualize consumer reactions to machine-dominant AI advertising, we conducted a parallel topic modeling and sentiment analysis on consumer comments related to *Heinz's* AI-themed advertisement. Unlike *Coca-Cola's* holiday campaign, which was per-

ceived as predominantly machine-driven with minimal human input, the *Heinz* advertisement was viewed as placing greater weight on human creative direction, with AI mainly providing supporting visual elements. The key distinction, therefore, lies in how consumers perceive the relative balance between human and machine contributions. Our analysis applied a five-topic solution based on coherence, which highlighted distinct patterns in consumer reactions and underscored how perceptions of human versus machine involvement shaped authenticity judgments.

For the *Heinz* advertisement, consumer responses were predominantly positive, with Bing-based sentiment analysis revealing that 71.4% of comments reflected positive sentiment, while 28.6% were negative. This overall favorable emotional reception contrasts sharply with the more negative sentiment profile observed for the *Coca-Cola* campaign. A chi-square test confirmed that this distribution differed significantly from an even 50:50 split ($\chi^2 = 33.43$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), underscoring the strong positive sentiment toward the *Heinz* campaign and its clear contrast with the more negative sentiment observed for *Coca-Cola*. We ran separate chi-square tests for each topic. Topics 1, 3, and 5 showed significant deviations from an even positive - negative split ($p < .05$), whereas Topics 2 and 4 exhibited no significant difference, indicating that positive and negative

evaluations were approximately balanced for these topics. Detailed statistics are reported in Table 4.

Topic 1, *algorithm-driven discovery*, revolved around algorithm-driven discovery, with prominent keywords such as “YouTube,” “recommended,” “algorithm,” “feed,” and “randomly.” Many viewers described how the ad appeared unexpectedly in their YouTube recommendations, often expressing amusement or delight: “I’m now one of those people that are randomly blessed by the YouTube algorithm.” This highlights the role of algorithmic exposure in driving reach and viewer engagement, with sentiment

leaning strongly positive in this topic (78.6% positive). Topic 2, labeled as *algorithmic timing curiosity*, reflected consumer curiosity and confusion regarding the timing of the ad’s appearance, with keywords like “years,” “later,” “old,” and “video.” Numerous comments questioned why the video resurfaced in their feed two years after its original release: “Why did I get recommended this 2 years later?” and “So, why now 2 years later?” Sentiment in this topic was relatively balanced (52.4% positive, 47.6% negative), suggesting that while some found the timing amusing, others perceived it as odd or irrelevant. Topics 1

〈Table 4〉 Topic Modeling and Sentiment Analysis Results for Heinz Advertisement

Topic	Topic Label	Sentiment Ratio (Pos/Neg)	Representative Words	Representative Comments
1	Algorithm-Driven Discovery	78.6% / 21.4%	YouTube, recommended, algorithm, feed, randomly	“I’m now one of those people who are randomly blessed by the YouTube algorithm.”
2	Algorithmic Timing Curiosity	52.4% / 47.6%	years, later, old, video	“Why did I get recommended this 2 years later?”
3	Brand Affection	71.2% / 28.8%	Heinz, ketchup, best, love, brand	“Proof <i>Heinz</i> is the best ketchup”; “The best ketchup, no competition.”
4	Inclusion of AI Content	49.3% / 50.7%	AI, art, algorithm, slop, weird	“Back when AI art was considered harmless fun.”; “This feels like AI slop marketing.”
5	Creative Execution	80.5% / 19.5%	genius, good, love, marketing, creative, commercial	“Shoutouts the marketing team for this.”; “Give the advertising firm an award”

Note. Chi-square tests (df = 1): Topic 1 $\chi^2 = 11.3$, $p = .00077$; Topic 2 $\chi^2 = 0.67$, $p = .414$; Topic 3 $\chi^2 = 5.54$, $p = .0186$; Topic 4 $\chi^2 = 0.13$, $p = .715$; Topic 5 $\chi^2 = 17.3$, $p < .001$.

and 2 reveal an interesting phenomenon related to the temporal dynamics of AI advertising exposure through algorithmic recommendation systems. While Topic 1 reflects consumers' reactions to the algorithmic exposure mechanism itself, it also reflects their responses to how and why content appears in their feeds. Topic 2 specifically addresses their reactions to the timing of this exposure. Many consumers discovered the *Heinz* advertisement not during its original release period, but through delayed algorithmic recommendations that surfaced the content in their feeds months or even years later. This pattern suggests that AI-generated advertising content may have extended lifecycles compared to traditional advertising, as recommendation

algorithms continue to surface and redistribute content based on relevance and engagement patterns rather than recency alone.

Topic 3, *brand affection*, centered on positive brand associations and loyalty toward *Heinz*, characterized by keywords such as "*Heinz*," "ketchup," "best," "love," and "brand." Comments often reaffirmed consumer affection for the brand: "Proof *Heinz* is the best ketchup," and "The best ketchup, no competition." This topic exhibited one of the highest positive sentiment ratios (71.2% positive), underscoring that *Heinz's* strong brand equity remained intact even within the context of AI-generated advertising. Topic 4, *inclusion of AI content*, captured mixed feelings and emerging skepticism toward AI-generated content, with top

〈Table 5〉 Authenticity Dimension of AI-generated Advertising

Authenticity Dimension	Coca-Cola (Machine-driven AI Ad)	Heinz (Human-driven AI Ad)	Key Difference
Perceived Motive	High skepticism about corporate motives (62.0% negative) - "Saving a few bucks. Shameful." - "Disgusting execs looking to cut costs."	Strong trust in brand intentions (71.2% positive) - "Proof <i>Heinz</i> is the best ketchup." - "The best ketchup, no competition."	Collaborative approach preserved trust in brand motives
Perceived Effort	Criticism of insufficient creative effort (55.7% negative) - "No effort or creativity made." - "Too lazy to hire real actors."	High creative appreciation (80.5% positive) - "Genius marketing." - "Love the creative commercial."	Human involvement enhanced perceived production quality
Perceived Necessity	Questioning the need for AI (57.6% negative) - "This is exactly the opposite of Christmas." - "'Real' magic. See, it's irony."	AI is framed as an essential part of the story (80.5% positive) - "Regardless of how accurate the claim is, genius advertising." - "I hate AI, but this is decently smart advertising."	Clear narrative use of AI increased authenticity when the technology felt necessary to the story

keywords like “AI,” “art,” “algorithm,” “slop,” and “weird.” Some comments nostalgically referenced the earlier, less controversial phase of AI art: “Back when AI art was considered harmless fun,” while others showed early-stage discomfort: “Coming from an artist by the way, this feels like AI slop marketing.” Sentiment was almost evenly split (49.3% positive, 50.7% negative), indicating that even in the *Heinz* case, early concerns about AI’s role in creative processes were beginning to surface. Topic 5, labeled as *creative execution*, stood out for its overwhelmingly positive sentiment toward the ad’s creative execution, with 80.5% positive responses, the highest among all topics. Keywords like “genius,” “good,” “love,” “marketing,” “creative,” and “commercial” dominated this topic. Comments frequently praised the marketing team and creative execution: “Shoutouts to the marketing team for this,” “Give the advertising firm an award,” and “Kudos to the creative team.” Table 4 presents the topic modeling and sentiment analysis results for the *Heinz* advertisement.

4.5 Extracted Authenticity Dimensions:

Comparative Findings

Building on the five-topic analysis of the *Coca-Cola* campaign and incorporating comparative insights from the *Heinz* case, three core authenticity dimensions emerge as particularly salient in consumer evaluations of

AI-generated advertising: *Perceived Motive*, *Perceived Effort*, and *Perceived Necessity*. Table 5 summarizes these key authenticity-related dimensions derived from the comparative analysis.

First, with respect to perceived motive, consumers evaluating the *Coca-Cola* advertisement expressed strong skepticism toward the brand’s underlying intentions for adopting AI technology. The machine-dominant approach triggered attributions of cost-cutting and profit maximization rather than genuine creative innovation or consumer benefit. In contrast, the *Heinz* advertisement benefited from a narrative strategy that positioned AI as a tool for brand reinforcement rather than cost reduction. The campaign’s creative concept, where AI independently drew ketchup that happened to resemble *Heinz* products, was interpreted by consumers as a clever branding exercise that demonstrated the brand’s iconic status. This narrative framing led consumers to perceive the use of AI as driven by brand-building motives rather than financial opportunism, as evidenced in comments expressing brand loyalty and affirmation. Second, regarding perceived effort, *Coca-Cola*’s machine-dominant production approach created perceptions of diminished creative investment and human craftsmanship. Consumers criticized what they perceived as a lazy substitution of AI for human creativity and artistic labor. Conversely, the *Heinz* campaign

was perceived as demonstrating high creative effort through its conceptual sophistication and execution quality. The human-dominant approach appeared to preserve perceptions of creative investment while leveraging AI capabilities, resulting in overwhelmingly positive evaluations of the campaign's creative merit. Third, regarding the perceived necessity of AI use, *Coca-Cola* faced authenticity challenges because the sentimental holiday narrative offered little intrinsic need for AI involvement. Many viewers experienced cognitive dissonance when machine-generated visuals were paired with the "Real Magic" tagline, questioning whether AI meaningfully contributed to the story. In such cases, when AI is not perceived as narratively essential or visually superior, audiences may interpret its use primarily as serving only a generative function, which could undermine perceptions of authenticity. In contrast, *Heinz*'s campaign incorporated AI as a central narrative device, "even AI recognizes *Heinz*", so the technology itself felt purposeful and natural within the ad's concept. Consumers responded especially positively when they perceived AI as important to the story, often describing the execution as clever or creative. Together, these patterns suggest that consumer judgments of authenticity in AI-generated advertising are shaped not only by technological factors but also by perceived motives, production effort, and the appropriateness of AI integration.

Importantly, the comparison of these two campaigns underscores that when the relative dominance of human versus machine elements differs, as in *Coca-Cola*'s more machine-driven approach versus *Heinz*'s more human-guided execution, strategic narrative framing can either heighten or mitigate authenticity risks.

4.6 Additional Insights

As an additional point of discussion, *Coca-Cola* and *Heinz* share key characteristics (both are iconic FMCG brands with long heritage and emotionally driven branding), yet the two ads differed in their creative style. While these differences may have provided context for consumer reactions, topic-modeling results and participant comments suggest that perceptions of AI involvement were a central lens through which many consumers evaluated the advertisements. For example, *Heinz* viewers explicitly recognized the human-driven nature of its campaign, noting that "the makers of the AI used pictures of the *Heinz* logo to train their AI to stand in for a representation of ketchup" and praising it as a "great advertising idea," reflecting awareness of strong human creative input. In contrast, comments on the *Coca-Cola* campaign included remarks such as "generate ads for 20 cents each instead of hiring actual CG animators or directors" and "It's AI-generated, you didn't make

it,” indicating perceptions of a more machine-driven approach with limited human artistry.

The topic structure captured these consumer responses. The analysis revealed brand-specific themes, *Message and Creative Direction* in the *Coca-Cola* dataset, and *Creative Execution* in the *Heinz* dataset, showing that consumers noticed differences in advertising style and narrative approach. Even so, much of the discourse concentrated on the extent of human versus machine input. Illustrative comments underscored this focus: for *Coca-Cola*, viewers remarked, “They didn’t even have the decency to remove the sled error at 00:25 in ‘post-production,’ if there is any production involved at all,” and “Even that Santa ‘ho ho ho’ at the end sounded very lifeless and without much effort in energy,” reflecting perceptions of a more machine-driven process with minimal human artistry. By contrast, *Heinz* viewers offered reactions like, “I like how they promoted a human product in the end. As in, it’s human-made, not AI-generated (although machines were definitely used in processing),” highlighting recognition of stronger human creative input. Taken together, these findings indicate that while ad-level stylistic differences added nuance to consumer conversations, the overall topics and discourse provide additional insights showing that evaluations of authenticity were largely framed around the human-versus-machine creative dimension.

V. Discussion

5.1 Summary of the Research

This study explored how consumers respond to AI-generated advertising, with particular attention to the role of perceived authenticity and the influence of varying levels of human versus machine involvement in the creative process. Addressing the first research question (RQ1), the analysis revealed that consumer reactions to AI-generated advertising are both diverse and emotionally charged. The *Coca-Cola* advertisement, which represents a machine-dominant AI advertising type with minimal human creative input, elicited generally dispersed responses across most topics, with negative reactions being more prevalent than positive ones. Consumers expressed disappointment in content quality, skepticism toward the brand’s motives, and concern over the lack of human effort behind the production. Comments frequently questioned whether the brand’s use of AI reflected genuine innovation or mere cost-cutting, with many viewers perceiving the ad as lazy, soulless, or incongruent with *Coca-Cola*’s historical brand values. In contrast, the *Heinz* campaign, which involved more evident human-dominant elements, received considerably more positive evaluations. Many comments reflected amusement, brand loyalty, and admiration for the ad’s creative

execution. Even when some skepticism toward AI was expressed, the overall tone remained playful and far less hostile than in the *Coca-Cola* case. This suggests that consumers may be more forgiving of AI use when the human creative contribution remains visible and the campaign tone is consistent with the ad's narrative.

Regarding the second research question (RQ2), the findings demonstrate that perceived authenticity plays a central role in shaping consumer responses. The *Coca-Cola* advertisement, especially in Topic 4 (corporate motives) and Topic 5 (production process), triggered sharp authenticity-related criticism. Consumers perceived the brand's use of AI as driven by financial motives rather than creative enhancement, and they questioned the sincerity and effort behind the campaign. Comments like "One of the richest companies on earth, saving a few bucks" and "There is no effort or creativity made in this ad" illustrate how corporate intentions and perceived production effort significantly influenced authenticity evaluations. In contrast, *Heinz's* corresponding topics, particularly Topic 5 (creative execution), elicited strong positive responses emphasizing creativity, humor, and effective use of AI as a tool rather than a full creative substitute. Consumers praised the production team, admired the clever concept, and viewed the ad as a fun and engaging piece of content. This comparative difference

highlights how visible human effort and perceived brand sincerity can mitigate consumer skepticism toward AI-generated content.

The third research question (RQ3) focused on identifying the perceived dimensions of authenticity in AI-generated advertising. The analysis revealed three interrelated dimensions: perceived motive, perceived effort, and perceived necessity. Among these, brand motives and production effort emerged as the most critical factors in the *Coca-Cola* case, aligning with prior research emphasizing the importance of consumer inferences about brand intention and perceived creative labor (De Kerviler et al., 2022; Magni et al., 2024). The comparison between *Coca-Cola* and *Heinz* further underscores that consumers are particularly sensitive to the perceived sincerity behind a brand's decision to use AI. When consumers sense that AI is employed merely to reduce costs or bypass human creativity, authenticity perceptions decline sharply, leading to negative emotional and behavioral reactions.

Additionally, the timing of each campaign appears to have shaped consumer responses. The *Heinz* ad, released during an earlier phase of public exposure to AI-generated content, was met with curiosity and humor, whereas *Coca-Cola's* ad, launched during a period of growing critical awareness about AI's role in creative industries, triggered stronger backlash and moral resistance. This suggests that not only the content and production process

but also the broader socio-technological context in which an AI advertisement is released may influence authenticity perceptions. Taken together, the findings highlight that consumer evaluations of AI-generated advertising are deeply rooted in authenticity concerns. More than simply reacting to the presence of AI, consumers assess the sincerity, effort, and motives behind its use. For brands considering AI-driven content, these results underscore the importance of clearly signaling human involvement, maintaining high production quality, and avoiding perceptions of opportunism or creative shortcuts.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings from this study offer several actionable insights for marketers considering the integration of AI-generated content in advertising campaigns.

First, brands must prioritize authenticity signaling when employing AI in creative processes. Consumers are not merely reacting to the presence of AI technology itself but are making nuanced judgments about the sincerity and effort behind the content. Among various authenticity cues, perceived effort emerged as a critical factor. When consumers perceive that the brand invested meaningful time, creativity, and human oversight, rather than fully outsourcing creative production to machines, they are more likely to evaluate the

ad favorably. Therefore, brands should actively highlight human involvement in concept development, storytelling, and post-production refinement, even when leveraging AI tools.

Second, while the first insight addresses *how* brands implement AI (through visible human effort), the *why*, the perceived motive behind AI adoption, plays an equally pivotal role. If consumers sense that a brand's primary motivation for using AI is cost-cutting, efficiency maximization, or avoidance of human labor, they are likely to perceive the content as inauthentic and commercially opportunistic. Marketers should carefully manage messaging to position AI usage as a tool for creative augmentation and consumer benefit, rather than as a corporate shortcut.

Third, the findings suggest that legacy brands with strong heritage and emotional consumer connections may face greater backlash when deploying machine-dominant AI advertising, especially for campaigns associated with high consumer expectation events, such as *Coca-Cola's* annual holiday ads. In such cases, brands must weigh the risk of consumer disappointment and erosion of brand trust, given that consumers expect continuity in emotional tone, production quality, and creative storytelling that reflects the brand's historical identity.

Fourth, brands must still adhere to fundamental advertising quality standards. AI-generated content, regardless of its novelty,

is still evaluated on traditional advertising dimensions such as visual quality, message clarity, and emotional resonance. Technical sloppiness, lack of artistic integrity, or poorly executed creative direction will trigger consumer dissatisfaction, regardless of the technology involved. Fifth, the temporal and cultural context of AI use should be considered. As public awareness and critical discourse around AI evolve, consumer tolerance for fully automated content may decrease over time. What was once perceived as playful experimentation with AI, as seen in the *Heinz* campaign, may now generate stronger resistance, as observed in *Coca-Cola's* case. Brands must stay attuned to shifting consumer sentiment and AI-related social narratives to avoid reputational risks.

Lastly, the study highlights the need for transparent communication strategies. Explicitly acknowledging the role of AI in the creative process while simultaneously emphasizing human oversight and brand storytelling continuity may help mitigate consumer skepticism. By framing AI as an enhancement rather than a replacement of human creativity, brands can better navigate the authenticity challenges associated with emerging AI advertising practices.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several meaningful con-

tributions to the emerging body of literature on AI-generated advertising and consumer authenticity perceptions.

First, the research extends current understanding of consumer responses to AI-generated advertising by focusing specifically on machine-dominant AI advertising, a relatively recent development in the advertising landscape (Rodgers, 2021). While prior studies have examined consumer reactions to AI-assisted content or human-AI collaborations (Ryoo et al., 2025; Zhang and Gosline, 2023), few have explored fully machine-generated advertising campaigns with minimal human intervention. Given the growing prevalence of such campaigns across industries (Chintalapati and Pandey, 2022; Fui-Hoon Nah et al., 2023; Huh et al., 2023), this study addresses a timely gap by providing empirical evidence on how consumers evaluate this latest evolution of AI-driven content creation.

Second, the study deepens theoretical understanding of the “Authenticity Paradox” in AI advertising (Becker et al., 2019). While AI promises efficiency and scalability, this research reveals that machine-dominant campaigns may face heightened authenticity challenges compared to human-AI collaborations, especially for legacy brands with strong emotional positioning like *Coca-Cola* (Napoli et al., 2014). The comparative analysis with *Heinz* highlights how the level of human involvement (Magni et al., 2024; Zhang and

Gosline, 2023) and brand-specific consumer expectations interact to shape authenticity judgments. This underscores the need for future research to investigate contextual and brand-related moderators in consumer responses to AI-generated content.

Third, the study contributes to the authenticity literature by focusing on perceived authenticity as a core determinant of consumer responses to AI advertising. Authenticity has long been recognized as a key driver of consumer-brand relationships and behavioral intentions (Audrezet et al., 2020; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Napoli et al., 2014). However, as generative AI fundamentally challenges traditional human-centric authenticity frameworks (Becker et al., 2019; Kirk and Givi, 2025), there is a clear need to examine how authenticity perceptions are reconstructed in non-human advertising contexts. By identifying authenticity-related factors such as perceived effort (Magni et al., 2024) and perceived brand motives (Audrezet et al., 2020), this study advances theoretical understanding of how authenticity is evaluated when human creators are absent.

Fourth, the study offers a methodological contribution by applying LDA-based topic modeling and sentiment analysis to analyze large-scale, naturally occurring consumer response data from YouTube comments. Whereas much of the existing research on AI advertising relies on experimental designs or

self-reported survey data, this study leverages unfiltered consumer discourse, allowing for richer insights into spontaneous emotional reactions and authenticity-related concerns. This approach also captures nuanced consumer discourse patterns that may not emerge in structured survey responses and complements prior experimental studies by capturing real-time consumer sentiment in natural contexts.

Finally, the study provides a theoretical contribution by extending Human-AI collaboration typologies (e.g., Haupt et al., 2025; Sowa et al., 2021; Yue and Li, 2023) to the advertising context. We adopted the terms “AI-driven” and “human-driven” to classify ads according to the relative dominance of machine versus human elements. This conceptual distinction is operationalized through a comparative design contrasting *Coca-Cola*’s AI-driven campaign with *Heinz*’s more human-driven campaign. In doing so, the study not only offers insights into how the relative balance of human and machine input shapes authenticity perceptions but also provides conceptual guidance for evolving terminology and theoretical approaches in AI advertising research.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study offers meaningful insights into consumer responses to AI-generated advertising and the perceived dimensions of au-

thenticity, several limitations warrant consideration and suggest avenues for future research. First, this study's focus on YouTube comments suggests several opportunities for future research. The analysis utilized user-generated comments on YouTube, and given the nature of online commenting behavior, the data may reflect consumers with stronger emotional reactions, either positive or negative. Future research could benefit from exploring additional data collection approaches to capture a broader spectrum of consumer reactions, including those from less vocal audience segments, as well as examining cross-platform variations in consumer responses to AI advertising, given the diverse user bases and cultural norms across social media environments.

Second, this study focused on two specific advertising cases, *Coca-Cola's* machine-driven AI-generated holiday ad and *Heinz's* human-driven ketchup campaign. This concentrated scope reflects the relatively recent emergence of fully machine-generated advertising, as campaigns like *Coca-Cola's* remain a nascent phenomenon with few comparable cases for analysis. These two cases were selected to highlight the contrast in AI advertising type, while holding other brand characteristics as similar as possible to minimize confounding factors. Nevertheless, brand-specific attributes and ad characteristics may also influence consumer perceptions. Future research could assess the robustness of our

framework by exploring additional brand categories and narrative styles to determine whether the identified patterns remain consistent or exhibit context-dependent variation in consumer perceptions of authenticity.

Third, because both focal brands belong to the FMCG and utilitarian product category, future research could extend the theoretical framework to hedonic, high-involvement, or luxury categories where symbolic or experiential value is more salient. Examining AI-generated advertising for products such as premium fashion, high-tech electronics, or experiential services would help determine whether the authenticity patterns observed here remain consistent when emotional or symbolic brand associations are stronger. Additionally, research could explore whether the underlying mechanisms shaping authenticity perceptions operate differently across these varied contexts.

Moreover, while this study successfully extracted key authenticity-related dimensions through topic modeling and sentiment analysis, future research could explore how these dimensions interact with specific consumer outcomes such as brand trust, purchase intention, or long-term brand loyalty. Finally, the temporal gap between the two advertising cases presents an opportunity for future research to examine how public sentiment toward AI evolves and how such changes shape dynamic patterns in consumer responses to AI advertising.

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