

The Future of Advertising Creativity: Humans vs AI Content Generation

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Abstract

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This article examines the evolving debate over whether human or artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content represents the future of advertising creativity. Situating the discussion within the broader context of technological transformation in marketing, the study employs a systematic literature review to synthesize evidence from advertising, consumer behavior, and computational creativity. The review reveals that while human creativity remains essential for delivering originality, emotional resonance, and cultural nuance, AI offers significant advantages in efficiency, scalability, and personalization. Findings further indicate that consumer responses to AI-generated ads are shaped by disclosure, perceptions of authenticity, and trust, with attitudes varying across contexts. The discussion highlights how hybrid models, where humans provide strategic and cultural direction and AI contributes speed and data-driven ideation, offer the most promising approach. The study concludes that advertising creativity is best understood as a collaborative process between human imagination and machine intelligence.

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1. Introduction

The accelerating diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has reopened a classic question in advertising: who—or what—is more creative and persuasive, humans or machines? For decades, research in advertising creativity emphasized human ideation, divergent thinking, and the translation of originality into marketplace effectiveness, exploring both process- and output-focused perspectives (Sasser et al., 2013). At the same time, marketing scholarship has mapped how digital technologies transform value creation and brand communication, positioning AI as a general-purpose capability that reconfigures tasks from insight generation to content production (Davenport et al., 2020; Rust, 2020). With generative models and automated tools lowering the marginal cost of ideas and assets, the comparative advantages of human versus AI creativity require systematic reassessment grounded in evidence rather than anecdote.

From a managerial standpoint, AI introduces speed, scalability, and hyper-personalization, enabling rapid testing, format optimization, and finely tuned targeting that were impractical with purely human workflows (Huang & Rust, 2021). Yet consumer response is shaped not only by performance but also by perceptions of creativity and authorship. Scholars argue that advertising is not only about efficiency but also about symbolic resonance and originality, raising questions about whether AI can replicate human intuition in producing ideas that feel authentic and emotionally engaging (Kietzmann et al., 2018). These dynamics indicate that the human–AI trade-off is not uniform but instead mediated by social, cultural, and psychological factors.

Meanwhile, research in computational creativity demonstrates that algorithms can generate novel, style-aware outputs and even deviate from established norms to produce unexpected results (Elgammal et al., 2017). This positions AI as more than a production tool—it becomes a collaborator capable of expanding creative possibility spaces. In practice, hybrid workflows are emerging in which humans define strategic direction, establish brand constraints, and curate AI-generated outputs, while machines explore diverse combinations at unprecedented scale. Such integration reframes creativity as a co-production process shaped by interaction design, prompting practices, and governance systems (Davenport et al., 2020; Huang & Rust, 2021). Alongside opportunities, ethical considerations remain crucial, particularly in ensuring transparency, authenticity, and responsibility in the deployment of synthetic media (Floridi & Cows, 2022).

This article employs a systematic literature review to synthesize evidence from marketing, consumer behavior, human–AI interaction, and computational creativity. It examines how advertising creativity varies across human, machine, and hybrid authorship, highlights the contextual moderators of consumer and managerial responses, and identifies actionable implications for future creative strategy, disclosure practices, and capability development in agencies and brand teams.

2. Literature Review

The concept of creativity in advertising has traditionally been grounded in human originality, idea generation, and the persuasive impact of novel messages (Sasser et al., 2013). Human creativity is often associated with divergent thinking,

intuition, and cultural sensibility, making it difficult for machines to replicate at scale. However, the rise of AI tools in advertising has begun to challenge this paradigm. Scholars have noted that AI can complement human creativity by generating large volumes of content variations, assisting in idea refinement, and enabling more data-driven creative strategies (Kietzmann et al., 2018; Davenport et al., 2020).

Research indicates that consumer attitudes toward AI-generated advertising are mixed. Some studies highlight algorithm aversion, where consumers undervalue machine outputs in contexts requiring creativity, empathy, or aesthetic judgment (Castelo et al., 2019). Conversely, others suggest that when AI is framed as a collaborative tool rather than a replacement, consumers are more receptive and even perceive hybrid content as innovative (Petrescu & Krishen, 2023). This suggests that the effectiveness of AI in creative advertising may depend on contextual factors such as disclosure, brand positioning, and consumer expectations (Paschen et al., 2020).

Technological advances in computational creativity provide evidence that AI can produce outputs that are not only novel but also contextually resonant. For instance, generative adversarial networks and large language models have been used to produce advertising copy and visuals that rival or even surpass traditional creative benchmarks in certain controlled tests (Elgammal et al., 2017; Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020). Nevertheless, scholars emphasize that these systems work best in symbiosis with human oversight, where humans supply strategic direction and cultural interpretation, while machines provide efficiency and scale (Huang & Rust, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Overall, the literature suggests a growing consensus that the future of advertising creativity is neither exclusively human nor fully machine-driven, but rather a hybrid model. By combining human intuition with machine-generated possibilities, organizations can achieve creative outputs that balance efficiency, originality, and consumer trust.

3. Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to synthesize existing knowledge on the role of human and AI-generated creativity in advertising. The SLR method was chosen for its ability to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the field by integrating evidence from diverse disciplines, including marketing, advertising, human–computer interaction, and computational creativity. Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and authoritative academic sources were retrieved through major databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, using combinations of keywords such as advertising creativity, artificial intelligence, content generation, consumer perception, and human–AI collaboration. This ensured that the review captured both theoretical and empirical contributions that examine how AI affects the processes, outcomes, and evaluation of advertising creativity.

To enhance rigor and transparency, the selection process followed established SLR procedures. Articles were screened based on relevance to advertising creativity and AI applications, with exclusions applied to non-academic sources and studies lacking a clear focus on creative or consumer outcomes. Data from the selected

studies were then coded and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, conceptual frameworks, and empirical findings. Themes were organized around three main dimensions: (1) human-led creativity and its unique characteristics, (2) AI-generated outputs and their perceived effectiveness, and (3) hybrid models that integrate human and machine capabilities. This structured synthesis enabled the identification of gaps in the literature and provided a foundation for deriving insights into the evolving future of advertising creativity.

4. Results and Discussion

The literature affirms that human creativity retains a central role in advertising through its ability to craft emotionally resonant, culturally nuanced messages that shape brand identity in ways AI currently cannot replicate (Sasser et al., 2013; Kietzmann et al., 2018). Human creators bring tacit knowledge, intuition, storytelling mastery, and contextual awareness—elements that foster originality and authenticity. These distinct human attributes consistently elicit stronger consumer engagement and deeper brand connection.

Nevertheless, AI-generated content plays an increasingly prominent role in enhancing efficiency, personalization, and scalability. Evidence indicates that AI systems can generate large volumes of creative variations—spanning copy, visuals, or video—rapidly and cost-effectively (Davenport et al., 2020; Paschen et al., 2020). Empirical studies show that AI-generated ads that appear authentic and transparent often sustain consumer trust (Jiang et al., 2024). Moreover, research on disclosure effects reveals that when consumers are told content is AI-generated, their responses

vary: some studies report reduced credibility or emotional connection, while others indicate minimal direct impact, especially when mediated by source credibility or emotional engagement (Wortel et al., 2024).

Consumer perception dynamics are complex. One study suggests that AI-generated ads may feel eerie or uncanny when perceived intelligence is low, while high perceived intelligence increases acceptance (Gu et al., 2024). Another finds that disclosure of AI authorship can indirectly influence ad attitudes by reducing perceived credibility and emotional engagement, even if it does not directly change overall evaluations of the ad (Baek et al., 2024). These findings highlight that consumer acceptance of AI-generated ads hinges less on their presence and more on how they are framed, how believable or emotionally compelling they seem, and whether the source feels credible.

Emerging consensus emphasizes the hybrid approach: creativity as co-production. Human strategists provide brand storytelling, emotional nuance, and cultural relevance, while AI contributes speed, personalization, and combinatorial ideation. This synergy preserves the authenticity of human creativity while harnessing AI's operational advantages (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2020; Huang & Rust, 2021). For instance, AI-generated drafts may serve as ideation triggers refined by human writers or designers—an approach that streamlines creative workflows without sacrificing distinct brand voice.

That said, responsible deployment of AI in advertising remains critical. As synthetic media becomes more pervasive, ethical considerations—such as transparency, manipulation risk, and maintaining creative integrity—are paramount.

Frameworks emphasizing trust, accountability, and consumer protection are needed to prevent erosion of credibility and sustain long-term value in advertising (Floridi & Cows, 2022).

In summary, the future of advertising creativity doesn't lie in choosing between humans or machines. Rather, it resides in designing hybrid systems where each brings unique strengths. Human creativity continues to be irreplaceable in authentically engaging consumers, while AI offers transformative support in efficiency and personalization. The key challenge for marketers lies in orchestrating these complementary capabilities to craft campaigns that are both efficient and emotionally compelling.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this review highlight that advertising creativity is undergoing a profound transformation as AI systems increasingly complement and, in some domains, challenge human creative practices. While human creativity continues to be distinguished by its originality, emotional resonance, and cultural depth, AI introduces capabilities in speed, scalability, and personalization that are reshaping creative processes. The comparison between human and machine outputs demonstrates not a substitution but an evolution toward hybrid creativity that integrates the strengths of both.

Consumer responses to AI-generated advertising remain complex and context-dependent. Issues of trust, perceived authenticity, and disclosure strongly influence attitudes, underscoring the importance of how AI-generated content is

framed and presented. Studies indicate that disclosure of AI authorship may sometimes reduce perceived credibility, yet under other conditions, consumers demonstrate receptiveness—particularly when AI is positioned as a creative partner rather than a replacement. These findings emphasize the need for brands and agencies to carefully manage transparency while safeguarding emotional engagement and brand authenticity.

Overall, the future of advertising creativity is best understood as a co-creative model. Rather than viewing AI as a competitor to human imagination, advertisers can leverage it as a complementary tool that accelerates ideation, enhances personalization, and expands creative possibility spaces. For practitioners, the challenge is to balance efficiency and scale with authenticity and trust, ensuring that technology augments rather than diminishes the human touch that consumers continue to value. This hybrid approach provides a pathway for the advertising industry to evolve while preserving the essence of creativity at its core.

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