

ARTICLE

Human-AI Co-Creativity in Advertising: Authorship, Authenticity, and Creative Legitimacy in the Age of Generative Media

Vincenzo De Masi^{1,*}

¹*School of Journalism and Communication, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China*

*Corresponding author. Email: vdemas@gmail.com; ORCID: 0009-0003-2391-370X

Received: Apr 16 2026, Revised: Apr 27 2026, Accepted: Apr 30 2026, Published: May 12 2026

Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence has moved advertising from largely invisible automation to a regime in which machine systems increasingly participate in the visible composition of persuasive messages. This article offers an interdisciplinary review of that shift by synthesizing verified scholarship, recent 2024-2026 studies, and documented campaign examples from the AI advertising literature. Rather than treating AI mainly as a managerial tool for efficiency or optimization, the article argues that AI-generated advertising should also be understood as a cultural and aesthetic problem. The central claim is that audience response depends not only on whether machine systems are used, but on how their participation is framed, disclosed, and symbolically integrated into the communicative act. Drawing on research on disclosure, trust, perceived humanness, appeal structure, personalization, and category context, the article advances the concept of creative legitimacy to explain why some forms of human-AI collaboration are culturally acceptable while others appear hollow, impersonal, or strategically suspect. Creative legitimacy is not treated here as a synonym for source credibility or authenticity. It refers instead to a higher-order judgment about whether the distribution of human and machine agency fits the symbolic demands of the brand, the category, and the persuasive situation. The review shows that disclosure works as a cultural cue, creative role framing redistributes perceived authorship, humanness functions as a judgment about expressive fit rather than simple realism, and category expectations strongly shape tolerance for machine-made creativity. High-trust domains such as prosocial and political persuasion are especially fragile because AI use can weaken sincerity, accountability, or truthfulness even when technical quality is high. By repositioning AI advertising as a problem of authorship, authenticity, and symbolic value, the article offers a framework suited to literary, cultural, and artistic studies while remaining grounded in the advertising literature.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; advertising culture; authorship; authenticity; generative media

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence now shapes advertising across planning, targeting, production, personalization, and evaluation [1,2]. Recent reviews describe a field spanning programmatic advertising and automation, planning and engagement, message effectiveness in AI-mediated environments, and growing concerns about trust and transparency [1-3]. This development matters not only because the operational infrastructure of advertising has changed, but also because AI increasingly contributes to the expressive surface of persuasive communication itself. Through copy generation, image synthesis, creative variation, and hyper-personalized execution, machine systems are no longer

merely optimizing delivery behind the scenes. They are participating in the production of form, tone, rhythm, and visual style.

Once AI enters the visible construction of the advertisement, the central scholarly question changes. The issue is no longer only whether AI improves efficiency or relevance. It becomes a question of how authorship is distributed, how authenticity is inferred, and under what conditions audiences still perceive a persuasive message as culturally credible. Advertising has always been a hybrid practice in which commercial intention, aesthetic styling, and technological mediation intersect. Yet generative AI intensifies that hybridity by making the production process itself more visible, more discussable, and more symbolically charged. A headline, image, or voiceover that is partly machine-generated may still communicate value, affect, and brand identity, but it also invites judgments about delegation, effort, originality, and legitimacy.

This shift is especially important because advertising is not reducible to information transfer. It is a system of symbolic production that circulates images of taste, desire, lifestyle, expertise, aspiration, and social belonging. When a brand uses AI to produce the visible content of a campaign, the technology enters the cultural scene of persuasion. It becomes part of what audiences are responding to, not merely part of the hidden apparatus that delivered the message. In practical terms, this means that questions often treated as ethical or procedural, disclosure, human oversight, creative role allocation, authenticity, and transparency, become inseparable from questions of cultural meaning and communicative force [1,2,8].

The recent literature has already made this visible. Experimental work on AI-generated ads links audience response to appeal type, self-efficacy, and the social role assigned to AI [5]. Research on luxury advertising highlights the importance of trust and perceived humanness when machine-generated content is used in symbolically loaded categories [7]. Studies of hedonic and high-involvement services show that AI-generated images are not evaluated as neutral substitutes for real images, but as cues that alter judgments of experiential credibility and appropriateness [6]. Work on hyper-personalized advertising among Generation Z similarly demonstrates that increased relevance does not automatically secure positive response: emotional resonance and brand experience remain central [11]. Meanwhile, studies on disclosure show that explicit reference to generative AI can influence evaluation because it changes the interpretive conditions of the message [8].

Taken together, this body of scholarship suggests that AI in advertising has become more than an issue of technical capability. It is now part of the symbolic architecture through which advertisements are produced, interpreted, and culturally judged. Yet much of the literature remains organized around marketing outcomes, consumer response variables, or managerial implications. Those concerns are important, but they do not exhaust what is at stake. A humanities-oriented review can ask a different question: what happens to the cultural status of advertising when the ad is experienced as the product of distributed authorship rather than singular human craft? This question does not replace concerns about effectiveness; it reframes them. If audiences care whether an advertisement appears caring, effortful, original, or artistically appropriate, then the cultural interpretation of machine participation becomes one of the conditions under which persuasion succeeds or fails.

This article therefore offers an interdisciplinary review for scholars of literature, culture, and the arts. Its purpose is not to test a new dataset, but to synthesize verified work on AI-generated advertising and reinterpret that literature through the linked ideas of authorship, authenticity, and creative legitimacy. I use creative legitimacy to refer to the perceived appropriateness of an advertisement's mode of production relative to the symbolic demands of the category, the values of the brand, and the audience's expectations of human expression. The concept is related to, but distinct from, source credibility and persuasion knowledge. Source credibility asks whether a message source appears expert and trustworthy [10], while persuasion knowledge explains how audiences infer tactics and cope with persuasion attempts [9]. Creative legitimacy addresses a different level of judgment: whether the distribution of human and machine agency itself seems culturally fitting, aesthetically coherent, and

normatively appropriate. This distinction helps explain cases in which a message may remain intelligible or even credible in a narrow sense, yet still feel culturally thin, emotionally misplaced, or symbolically inappropriate because of how it was made. The article proceeds by reviewing the literature as an interpretive corpus, identifying the dimensions most relevant to cultural judgment, and proposing a framework in which disclosure, creative role framing, perceived humanness, and contextual expectations jointly shape the acceptability of human-AI co-creativity.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review uses a targeted interpretive method organized to support transparency and partial reproducibility. The corpus began with the verified sources already assembled in the original manuscript and was updated in March-April 2026 through targeted searches in Google Scholar, publisher databases, and journal websites. Search terms included "generative AI advertising," "AI disclosure advertising," "deepfake advertising," "brand authenticity AI," "human-AI co-creation advertising," and "political advertising AI." The goal was not to build an exhaustive systematic sample, but to identify studies most relevant to authorship, authenticity, disclosure, and evaluative responses to publicly visible AI-generated advertising.

Sources were included when they met at least one of three criteria: (1) direct empirical analysis of AI-generated or AI-disclosed advertising; (2) conceptual or empirical discussion of human-AI co-creation within advertising practice; or (3) evidence from adjacent high-stakes persuasive contexts, such as prosocial or political communication, when those studies clarified how trust, sincerity, or accountability shape audience response. Purely technical papers on model architecture or back-end optimization were excluded unless they directly illuminated audience interpretation.

The reviewed material therefore includes broad overview articles and literature reviews on AI advertising [1-3], experimental or empirical studies on disclosure, appeal type, self-efficacy, humanness, trust, category effects, and personalization [5-8,11,15,21-23,25-29], qualitative work on advertising professionals' experience of human-AI value co-creation [24], and selected industry or campaign materials that clarify visible forms of machine participation in advertising [12,14,16-19]. Research on source credibility and persuasion knowledge is retained because it helps explain how audiences process cues about authorship, expertise, and tactic use [9,10]. The resulting corpus does not claim to be exhaustive. It is a bounded interpretive archive designed to clarify recurrent tensions, concepts, and cultural problems.

The analytical procedure followed three steps. First, the literature was reread with close attention to the shift from AI as invisible infrastructure to AI as visible message source. This distinction proved important because many studies treat AI as a technical system, whereas the cultural problem becomes most acute when AI participates in the perceivable ad itself. Second, the studies were compared to identify recurring audience-facing dimensions. Across the corpus, four core dimensions appeared repeatedly: disclosure, creative role framing, perceived humanness, and contextual script, including category type, appeal structure, and audience capability [5-8,11,15,21-29]. Trust, authenticity, and credibility recur mainly as evaluative consequences or mediating judgments rather than as independent dimensions. Third, the literature was reorganized into a broader interpretive framework focused on creative legitimacy. This final step is synthetic rather than statistical. It does not generate causal estimates, but it does provide a more explicit vocabulary for reading AI-generated advertising as a cultural object.

In keeping with the organizational structure conventionally adopted in research and review articles, the following section is presented as Results and Discussion. In the present study, however, the term *results* does not denote findings derived from new primary data collection; rather, it refers to the conceptual insights that emerge from a comparative and interpretive analysis of the selected literature. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the review relies predominantly on recent English-

language scholarship within a field that remains uneven in its development across topics and contexts. Second, a substantial portion of the more recent evidence is based on short-term experimental designs, platform-specific stimuli, and a relatively narrow range of markets and product categories. Political and prosocial communication, for example, remain less extensively examined than commercial branding, despite the fact that these contexts appear to involve especially demanding thresholds of legitimacy [25,28,29]. In addition, the corpus includes not only peer-reviewed academic studies but also industry reports and campaign materials. These non-academic sources are therefore treated as illustrative evidence of public visibility, discursive framing, and representational practice, rather than as equivalent to controlled empirical research. Notwithstanding these limitations, the selected corpus provides a sufficiently robust basis for clarifying how AI-generated advertising is emerging not only as a matter of managerial technique, but also as a question of cultural legitimacy.

2.1. AI as Infrastructure and Visible Message Source

The broadest reviews of AI advertising describe the field as one in which infrastructural and communicative transformation occur simultaneously [1,2]. AI is now involved in targeting, planning, placement, optimization, performance assessment, and fraud prevention [1-4,13]. In these functions, the technology often remains in the background. It improves the efficiency of distribution, audience matching, and campaign performance while remaining largely invisible to the viewer. From a cultural standpoint, this kind of application matters because it reshapes the media environment of advertising, but it does not necessarily disturb the perceived authorship of the message itself.

The situation changes when AI contributes directly to the form of the advertisement. Once the technology participates in headline generation, image synthesis, voice production, scene construction, or creative variation, it enters the message as an inferable actor [1,2,5]. At that point, the audience is no longer responding only to the brand's claim or aesthetic execution. The audience is also responding to what the ad implies about its own mode of production. A machine-generated visual may be admired for speed or novelty, but it may also be experienced as generic, overly smooth, uncanny, or emotionally detached. The advertising object begins to carry signs of computational production, and those signs can support or weaken the message depending on context.

This distinction is crucial because it explains why AI cannot be treated as a single variable. Programmatic optimization, ad fraud detection, generative imaging, and hyper-personalized creative assembly are not the same phenomenon even if they are all described as AI [1-4,13]. They differ in visibility, audience salience, ethical exposure, and interpretive consequence. Work on ad fraud prevention, for example, suggests that AI can improve campaign quality by protecting media environments and reducing waste [4]. That matters to advertising as an institution because it supports trust in delivery conditions, but it does not necessarily provoke judgments about artistry or human expression. By contrast, when AI-generated images are used in advertising for experiential services or symbolic goods, audience response can turn on whether the resulting content still appears authentic, human, and culturally appropriate [6,7,15].

The shift from invisible infrastructure to visible creative agent also changes how responsibility is read. When a brand uses automation only to allocate impressions more efficiently, the public may still imagine the creative message as fundamentally human-made. But when the brand foregrounds or is discovered to have used generative tools in the ad's expressive surface, responsibility becomes more distributed and more contestable. Viewers may ask whether the brand chose expedience over care, whether artistic labor has been displaced, or whether the resulting content still deserves the status of creative expression. These are not merely moral questions added from outside. They are part of how the advertisement is culturally interpreted. In this sense, the practical and the symbolic are intertwined: operational decisions about AI use become meaningful because they shape what kind of persuasive object the advertisement appears to be.

Recent empirical work supports this layered view. Research on AI-generated ads does not show a single stable effect of machine production. Instead, it suggests that audience response varies according to how machine involvement is made legible, what kind of appeal is used, how much human presence remains perceptible, and what category expectations the ad must satisfy [5-8,11,15]. The literature therefore points away from a simple pro- or anti-AI conclusion and toward a more differentiated account. AI matters not only because it can produce content, but because it changes the social interpretation of that content. This is the premise on which the remainder of the discussion builds.

2.2. Illustrative Advertising Contexts and the Visibility of Machine Creativity

The reviewed literature becomes easier to interpret when concrete advertising contexts are considered. Industry-facing and case-based materials are not methodologically equivalent to experiments, but they help clarify how different configurations of human-AI collaboration are staged in public culture [12,14,16-19, 30]. One recurrent pattern is the use of AI as a co-creative tool within controlled human workflows. Han and Tiu's discussion of generative AI in digital advertisement creation shows how agencies are integrating systems such as Midjourney into creative development without fully displacing human decision-making [12]. In this configuration, AI expands ideation, variation, and speed, but human teams continue to direct selection, refinement, and brand fit.

A second pattern is the use of AI to intensify personalization or variation at scale. Nutella Unica is a frequently cited example because algorithmic generation produced millions of distinct jar labels and transformed variation itself into a brand experience [17]. What is important here is not simply the novelty of computational design. It is the way algorithmic generation is folded into a cultural narrative of collectability, uniqueness, and playful participation. The machine does not appear as an autonomous artist; it appears as a system that enables a brand to dramatize difference within an organized aesthetic concept. Human authorship is not erased, but redistributed across system design, curatorial intention, and branded storytelling.

A third pattern is the public staging of AI as a creative collaborator. Coca-Cola's "Create Real Magic" initiative invited digital artists to remix iconic brand assets through an AI-supported platform [16]. The campaign is significant because it did not merely use AI internally. It made co-creativity itself into the theme of the project. Human participants remained visible, the brand's visual archive remained central, and the platform was presented as a way of expanding creative access rather than replacing artistic imagination. This is a relatively strong example of how AI can be symbolically domesticated: the technology is framed as assisting or amplifying cultural play, not as claiming independent artistic authority.

A fourth pattern presents greater tension. The Espace Aubade campaign described by Nextage.ai was promoted as one of the first fully AI-generated television commercials broadcast on major French channels [18]. Here, machine production moves closer to public authorship. The campaign presents AI not simply as a background tool or ideation aid, but as the primary engine of image, motion, and voice generation. Human creators remain present as prompt designers and curators, yet the cultural emphasis shifts toward the spectacle of technological production itself. Analytically, this kind of campaign helps identify the threshold at which audiences begin to question not only whether an advertisement is effective, but whether its mode of creation fits values associated with craft, originality, and brand stewardship. Recent experimental work on deepfake advertising sharpens the point: high-quality synthetic ads can sometimes be appraised similarly to their original counterparts, but disclosure format still changes emotion, perceived value, and downstream ad outcomes [26].

A fifth pattern involves AI being used to stage impossible or temporally dislocated events, as in examples that simulate encounters between different versions of an athlete or construct scenes that never occurred [19]. These executions can be emotionally powerful because they mobilize nostalgia, myth, and technical wonder. At the same time, they raise acute questions about authenticity, embodiment, and the legitimacy of synthetic performance. The audience may admire the ingenuity

while remaining uncertain about whether the resulting spectacle feels respectful, uncanny, or overly engineered. From a cultural perspective, these examples show that the persuasive meaning of AI-generated advertising depends not only on visual plausibility but on how the synthetic act is narratively and ethically framed.

These contexts suggest that visibility matters as much as use. A campaign can employ AI extensively and yet encounter little resistance if the technology remains infrastructural or is symbolically subordinated to human intention. Conversely, even limited use of AI can become culturally salient if it is foregrounded in a category where audiences expect craft, intimacy, or artistic integrity. This is why case materials are helpful: they show how brands actively script the role of AI for public interpretation. They also show that the question is rarely "AI or not AI." The question is what kind of participation the brand asks audiences to accept.

Table 1 summarizes the principal dimensions that recur across the literature and the interpretive questions they raise.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of human-AI co-creativity in advertising.

Advertising context	How AI is positioned	Main evaluative concern	Indicative sources
Programmatic placement and ad fraud prevention	Invisible or background infrastructure	Efficiency, quality of media environment, trust in delivery conditions	[1-4,13]
Agency workflow and visual ideation	AI as assisted creator inside human supervision	Human oversight, curation, and brand-fit judgment	[12,16,24]
Highly visible AI-led campaigns	AI as primary creative engine	Authorship, legitimacy, spectacle, and fit with brand meaning	[14,18,19,26]
Luxury, experiential, and image-sensitive categories	Generative content as public-facing execution	Humanness, authenticity, experiential credibility, symbolic consistency	[6,7,15,22,23]
Hyper-personalized and youth-oriented advertising	Adaptive assembly of relevant messages	Emotional resonance, trust, and the limits of calculated intimacy	[5,11]
Prosocial, public-service, and political persuasion	AI as public-facing creator, spokesperson, or message helper	Sincerity, accountability, truthfulness, and institutional trust	[25,28,29]

2.3. Disclosure as a Cultural Cue Rather Than a Mere Informational Label

One of the clearest findings in the recent literature is that disclosure matters, although its effects are not uniform [8,21,25-27]. When audiences are told that generative AI contributed to an advertisement, the message is no longer judged solely by its visible content. It is also judged through the lens of its production history. Disclosure functions as a cue that can activate novelty, curiosity, skepticism, concerns about effort, or broader reflections on why a brand chose to delegate creative work to a machine. That is why disclosure should not be treated as a neutral note appended to the advertisement. It is part of the rhetoric of the ad itself.

Maurer and Buchbauer's work on food advertising is especially useful because it shows that disclosure can alter evaluation by changing how consumers interpret effort [8]. Food imagery often relies on assumptions about sensory care, craft, and attention to detail. When a generative process is disclosed, the question is not only whether the image looks appetizing. It is whether the image now seems less effortful, less crafted, or less anchored in embodied human preparation. This point extends

beyond food. Any category that depends on signals of taste, expertise, or artisanal attention may be affected when disclosure implies that machine production substituted for human creative investment.

The literature on persuasion knowledge helps explain why disclosure has such force [9]. Consumers do not simply decode advertising messages; they use cues about persuasive agents and tactics to infer intention, cope with influence attempts, and evaluate the fairness or sincerity of communication. AI disclosure becomes one of those cues. It tells audiences something about process, but in doing so it also changes the scene of interpretation. The ad is no longer just "an ad"; it becomes "an ad made with AI," and that added phrase can redirect attention toward labor, motive, competence, or opportunism. Task type matters here. Consumers respond more favorably when AI is disclosed as handling ad placement rather than ad creation, because creation is read as a more socially and culturally charged task [21].

The significance of disclosure also lies in its wording. A sparse label such as "AI-generated" foregrounds machine authorship in stark terms. A more elaborated statement such as "created with AI tools under the direction of our creative team" frames the same technological fact differently. In the second case, human intention remains legible, and the disclosure presents AI as mediated rather than autonomous. The choice between these formulations is not merely semantic. It is a choice about how authorship is publicly allocated. The reviewed literature suggests that such allocation matters because audiences respond not only to novelty but also to the legitimacy of the production arrangement [7,8,14].

Market-oriented evidence points in the same direction. Kantar reports that audience reaction to AI-generated advertising is shaped by authenticity, irritation, and branded cut-through rather than by novelty alone [14]. This suggests that disclosure does more than satisfy transparency norms; it also interacts with brand meaning and category expectation. A technologically adventurous brand may benefit from foregrounding experimentation, whereas a brand positioned around intimacy, care, or craftsmanship may need to stage AI more cautiously. The same disclosure practice can therefore signal innovation in one setting and a reduction of care in another. Recent disclosure-label experiments suggest a similar double movement: labels can increase perceived novelty while simultaneously reducing perceived authenticity, with the balance varying by product type and audience orientation [27].

This is why disclosure belongs at the center of any cultural analysis of AI advertising. It is an interpretive threshold. By naming the production process, it transforms a background technology into a visible participant in meaning. And because disclosure brings the process of making into the space of reception, it ties together ethics, aesthetics, and persuasion. The audience is asked not only to consume a message, but to judge whether the message was made in a way that deserves trust.

2.4. Creative Role Framing and the Redistribution of Authorship

Disclosure is closely linked to a second dimension: creative role framing. Even when AI use is acknowledged, the meaning of that acknowledgment depends on whether AI is positioned as assistant, collaborator, or primary creator [5,24]. Role framing is important because audiences do not respond to AI involvement in a socially neutral way. They interpret machine participation through human categories of agency, responsibility, expertise, and authorship. A tool-like role implies human control. A collaborator role suggests shared participation. A creator role implies that the machine is being granted a status closer to symbolic authority.

Chen et al. show that the social role assigned to AI influences attitudes toward AI-generated ads [5]. This finding is theoretically important because it suggests that audiences are not simply reacting to content attributes. They are reacting to the social position that machine systems occupy within the persuasive episode. The same visual execution may be interpreted differently depending on whether viewers understand it as human-led with AI assistance or as machine-led with minimal human input. In the former case, the technology can appear as an extension of creative experimentation. In the latter, it may be read as displacement of artistic judgment.

This difference is especially visible in public campaign discourse. Coca-Cola's "Create Real Magic" kept human artists at the center of the narrative even while providing AI-enabled generative possibilities [16]. The platform framed AI as a partner in playful recombination, not as an independent author of brand meaning. By contrast, the Espace Aubade campaign circulated precisely because it foregrounded the extremity of machine generation [18]. The attraction of the campaign was partly the claim that it was fully AI-made. That framing increases technological spectacle, but it also risks weakening the sense that human taste, care, and accountability remain in command of the branded message.

Role framing matters because authorship in advertising has always been both collaborative and asymmetrical. Campaigns are produced by teams, agencies, platforms, and clients, yet audiences often still read the resulting message as an intentional expression of the brand. AI complicates that settlement. It inserts another layer of agency that is difficult to classify. The machine does not possess intention in the same sense as a human creator, but it is more than a passive instrument because its output can surprise, extend, or redirect the creative process. The question therefore becomes less "who authored this?" and more "what kind of authorship is being asked of us here?" Creative role framing supplies one answer by scripting the machine's social position.

This is also where the concept of creative legitimacy becomes useful. A role arrangement is legitimate when the audience perceives the distribution of authorship as appropriate to the category and to the message's claims. Human-AI collaboration can seem legitimate when the machine expands variation, visualization, or exploratory play while humans remain accountable for fit, tone, and final selection. It becomes less legitimate when an ad appears to offload expressive responsibility onto automation while still asking to be received as intimate, artisanal, or culturally sensitive. Recent interview-based research with advertising professionals reinforces this point: practitioners describe generative AI as valuable when it augments human ideation and analysis, yet risky when it weakens oversight, ethical judgment, or brand stewardship [24]. The legitimacy question is therefore not binary. It is a culturally situated judgment about whether the mode of making matches the values performed by the advertisement.

2.5. Humanness, Trust, and the Aesthetics of Authenticity

The reviewed literature repeatedly returns to humanness as a central mechanism of response [6,7]. Humanness is not reducible to photorealism, technical polish, or surface likeness. An AI-generated image can be visually impressive and still feel emotionally vacant, stylistically generic, or strangely uninhabited. What is being judged under the label of humanness is better understood as expressive fit: the sense that the message bears traces of situated judgment, embodied sensibility, and relational intelligence.

This is why research in luxury communication is so revealing. Jung et al. find that trust and perceived humanness drive consumer response to AI-generated luxury advertising [7]. Luxury advertising often depends on codes of rarity, craft, taste, and mythic brand aura. In such settings, the ad is not just presenting a product; it is staging a world of symbolic distinction. If machine-generated content appears too frictionless, too generic, or insufficiently authored, it may disrupt the very cultural cues that make the category persuasive. Humanness becomes a proxy for whether the ad still feels worthy of the symbolic claims it is making.

Evidence from high-involvement and hedonic services reinforces this point [6]. Service advertising carries a heavy burden of expectation formation because the ad often functions as a sensory and emotional proxy for an experience the consumer has not yet had. Images in hospitality, wellness, or medical aesthetics do not merely illustrate the offer; they help constitute it. A generative image may therefore be judged not only for visual attractiveness but for whether it can sustain confidence in the anticipated experience. If the image seems too detached from lived reality, the ad may weaken trust even while appearing visually sophisticated.

The importance of trust connects this literature to older work on source credibility [10]. Trustworthiness and expertise remain central dimensions of how audiences assess persuasive communication. In AI advertising, however, these judgments are filtered through imagined production conditions. The question is not simply "is this claim believable?" but "does the way this message was made deserve belief and respect?" That is why humanness and trust reinforce one another. When an ad preserves signs of care, judgment, and expressive fit, trust can survive machine assistance. When it appears to collapse creative labor into effortless generation, trust may erode even if the output is technically competent. Recent brand and service research sharpens this distinction: disclosed GenAI use can diminish perceived brand authenticity and trust, but the penalty is weaker when AI is framed as assisting humans or is confined to more tangible, background elements rather than replacing people or expressive cues outright [22,23].

Authenticity is the broader cultural term that links these reactions. Authenticity should not be understood as the opposite of mediation. Advertising is always mediated, staged, and strategic. Rather, authenticity names the perception that the relation among message, brand, process, and context feels coherent. AI-generated advertising can therefore be authentic in some cases and inauthentic in others. The decisive issue is whether machine participation appears aligned with the values the ad is performing. A brand that openly experiments with synthetic aesthetics may remain authentic if experimentation is part of its cultural persona. A brand that trades on craft, intimacy, or warmth may encounter resistance if the same technology appears to hollow out those values.

Broader digital media research also suggests that trust and entertainment value remain vital to mediated engagement [20]. Technological sophistication does not replace the need for affective ease, relational accessibility, or experiential pleasure. This matters for AI advertising because there is a temptation to imagine that generative novelty itself will carry the persuasive burden. The literature suggests otherwise. Novelty may attract attention, but durable acceptance depends on whether the ad feels intelligible within the audience's cultural expectations of human expression.

2.6. Category Scripts, Appeal Structure, and Audience Capability

The literature also makes clear that AI-generated advertising cannot be evaluated in a category-neutral way [5-7,11,15,23,25,28,29]. Categories carry different symbolic expectations, and those expectations alter what counts as persuasive, tasteful, or legitimate. In categories with strong symbolic or experiential content, advertisements must often do more than communicate information. They must enact atmosphere, craft, aspiration, sensuality, or emotional warmth. Under those conditions, visible machine participation may be scrutinized more closely because the ad's job is inseparable from its ability to seem humanly attuned.

Luxury is one obvious example, but not the only one [7]. High-involvement and hedonic services also impose stricter conditions because they invite consumers to imagine not just utility but feeling, texture, and experience [6]. The same logic appears even more strongly in prosocial, public-service, and political persuasion. In prosocial advertising, disclosure of AI-generated content can reduce ad attitudes and donation intentions because audiences infer lower credibility, empathy, and moral seriousness [25]. Political advertising is more fragile still because the relevant norm is not merely brand fit but democratic accountability. Recent evidence shows that political messages disclosed as AI-generated are evaluated less favorably when source credibility is weak, and that AI-assisted messages perform better than fully AI-created ones because accountability remains more legible [28]. Related research on political AI chatbots shows that artificiality can increase social presence while still depressing authenticity and trust [29]. Category, then, is not a background descriptor. It is a boundary condition that shapes how disclosure, humanness, and role framing are likely to be received.

Appeal type introduces a further layer of differentiation. Chen et al. show that audience attitudes toward AI-generated ads vary across communal and agentic appeals and in relation to AI's social role [5]. This matters because appeal types structure the moral and emotional relationship that the ad offers to the viewer. A message centered on performance, capability, or innovation may harmonize more

readily with visible machine participation. A message centered on care, warmth, empathy, or relational closeness may place greater pressure on the ad to retain signs of human sensibility. In effect, the rhetorical mode of the ad changes what AI seems to mean.

Audience capability variables also matter. Chen et al. identify self-efficacy as relevant to how people interpret AI-generated ads [5]. Consumers who are more comfortable with digital technologies may read AI disclosure as evidence of experimentation or competence, while those with lower confidence may experience the same cue as a signal of distance or reduced authenticity. These responses are not merely technical. They reflect broader orientations toward mediation, novelty, and control. People do not encounter AI in advertising in a vacuum; they encounter it against the background of wider cultural narratives about technology, labor, and creativity.

This point is important because it prevents simplistic claims about acceptance. It is not enough to say that audiences like or dislike AI. Different audiences will grant or withhold creative legitimacy according to how the ad's production arrangement aligns with their expectations of relevance, warmth, sophistication, or control. Category scripts, appeal structure, and audience capability together create the conditions under which machine participation seems either appropriate or out of place. The same disclosure statement or the same image style can therefore produce different meanings in different reception contexts.

Research on hyper-personalized advertising among Generation Z makes this especially clear [11]. AI may improve targeting precision and message fit, but those technical gains do not eliminate the need for emotional response and positive brand experience. Younger audiences accustomed to algorithmic mediation may still resist communications that feel too calculated, emotionally flat, or insufficiently sincere. Personalization works only when it is accompanied by tone, relevance, and symbolic appropriateness. Again, the issue is not technology alone. It is the cultural form that technology takes in communication.

2.7. Personalization, Platform Mediation, and the Cultural Politics of Efficiency

One of the strongest promises attached to AI advertising is personalization. Machine systems can assemble, test, and adapt messages at a granularity that was previously difficult to achieve [1,2,11,13]. From a managerial perspective, this capability is attractive because it appears to reduce waste and increase relevance. From a cultural perspective, however, personalization is ambivalent. It can make communication feel responsive and tailored, but it can also expose the ad as highly calculated, over-optimized, or strategically intimate.

The literature suggests that relevance is not enough [11]. AI-enabled personalization can improve fit, yet persuasive success still depends on whether the recipient experiences the communication as meaningful, emotionally resonant, and trustworthy. This is particularly important because personalization intensifies the sense that the brand knows the viewer. If the creative execution feels generic or machine-like while simultaneously claiming personal relevance, the result may be discomfort rather than affinity. The problem is not only privacy or data use. It is the mismatch between the rhetoric of intimacy and the perceived mechanism of production.

Campaign examples help illustrate this. Nutella Unica turned algorithmic differentiation into a playful narrative of uniqueness [17]. In that case, personalization or variation became part of the brand's cultural performance rather than an invisible targeting practice. The machine-generated multiplicity was accepted because it produced a collectible visual event. By contrast, hyper-personalized advertising that merely inserts consumer-specific cues without aesthetic or emotional intelligence risks appearing mechanized and thin [11]. Human-AI co-creativity is culturally stronger when precision is balanced by judgment about tone, timing, and symbolic fit.

This tension also reveals the cultural politics of efficiency. AI promises faster production, lower cost, and more scalable experimentation [1,12,13]. Those gains are real, but they do not settle the question of value. In many cultural domains, effort is itself meaningful. People often infer sincerity,

care, and seriousness from the visible or imagined investment of human labor. When AI compresses or obscures that labor, the resulting message may appear efficient yet less worthy of trust or admiration. Maurer and Buchbauer's emphasis on perceived effort in food advertising is an especially clear instance of this broader logic [8]. Efficiency can support advertising, but it can also undercut the symbolic performance of care.

Market evidence reinforces this ambivalence. Kantar's discussion of authenticity, irritation, and branded cut-through indicates that audiences are not evaluating AI-generated advertising on speed or novelty alone [14]. They are asking whether the communication still feels distinctively branded and emotionally coherent. In other words, platform-mediated efficiency does not replace the need for expressive differentiation. A fast and flexible generative system becomes persuasive only when the output still bears enough cultural specificity to be read as intentional rather than merely computed.

Seen this way, personalization and efficiency are not simply technical advantages. They are cultural claims about how much intimacy, relevance, and creative labor can be automated without damaging the social meaning of communication. The answer emerging from the literature is cautious. Automation can scale variation and relevance, but the legitimacy of that variation depends on whether human judgment remains legible in the result.

2.8. Toward an Operational Framework of Creative Legitimacy

Across the reviewed literature, one pattern recurs: audience response to AI-generated advertising depends less on the mere presence of AI than on the perceived legitimacy of the creative arrangement. This pattern can be organized around four interdependent dimensions: disclosure, creative role framing, perceived humanness, and contextual script. Disclosure determines whether and how machine participation becomes visible [8,14,21-27]. Creative role framing defines whether AI appears as assistant, co-creator, or primary creator [5,16,18,24,28]. Perceived humanness captures whether the final ad preserves signs of care, judgment, and expressive fit [6,7,22,23]. Contextual script includes category expectations, appeal structure, audience capability, and the stakes attached to sincerity or accountability [5-7,11,15,25,28,29]. Figure 1 renders these relations as an operational pathway from production cues to audience judgment.

Creative legitimacy should be distinguished from adjacent constructs. Unlike source credibility, which evaluates whether a communicator appears expert and trustworthy [10,28], creative legitimacy evaluates whether the arrangement of human and machine authorship itself seems appropriate. Unlike persuasion knowledge, which explains how disclosure activates inferences about tactic and motive [9,25], creative legitimacy explains why the same recognition can yield curiosity in one context and rejection in another. Unlike authenticity, which names coherence between a brand, its message, and its values [22], creative legitimacy includes the social allocation of agency and the category-specific norms that make some production arrangements acceptable and others suspect.

Operationally, creative legitimacy is highest when four conditions align: AI involvement is disclosed in a way that preserves human accountability; AI is framed as assistant or collaborator rather than sovereign creator; the output retains sufficient humanness to appear cared for and expressively fitting; and the category script tolerates experimentation. It is moderate when one of these conditions weakens but the others remain supportive. It is lowest when AI is presented as the primary creative authority in categories that depend on sincerity, sacrifice, intimacy, or truthfulness, such as prosocial, public-service, or political persuasion [23,25,28,29].

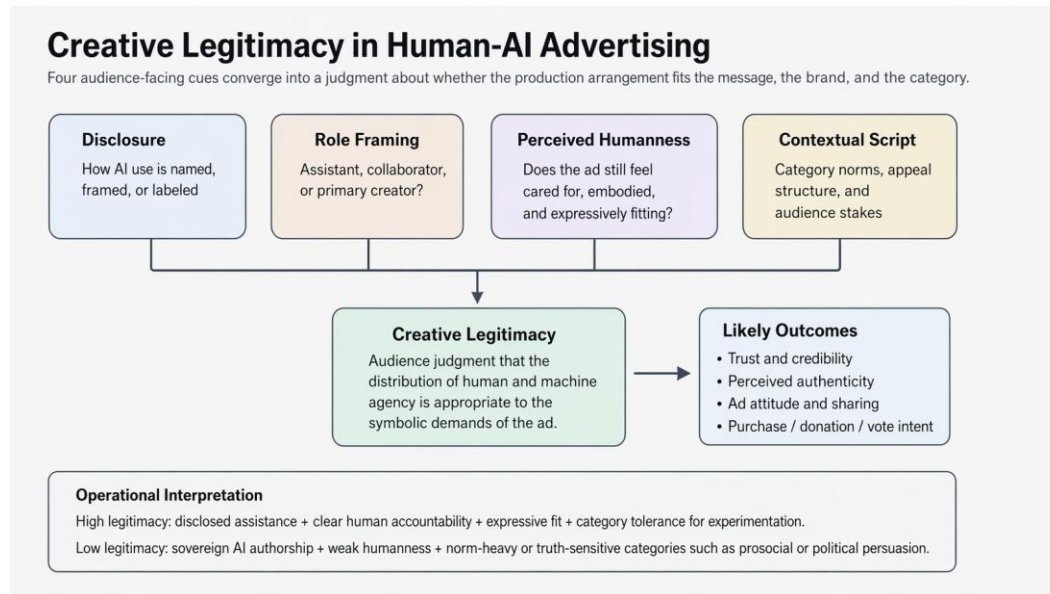


Figure 1. Operational pathway of creative legitimacy in human-AI advertising. The four audience-facing cues jointly shape judgments of appropriateness, which then condition trust, authenticity, and downstream audience response.

This framework helps explain why visible AI use can succeed when it is staged as augmentation rather than replacement. When disclosure preserves human oversight, when AI is framed as a partner rather than a sovereign creator, when the output retains humanness, and when the category tolerates or even values technological experimentation, creative legitimacy can be high. Under those conditions, AI may enhance innovation without dissolving trust. By contrast, when disclosure implies distance from labor, when role framing grants the machine primary symbolic authority, when humanness is low, and when the category depends heavily on craft, emotional authenticity, or civic accountability, legitimacy becomes fragile. The concept also clarifies why debates about AI advertising so often swing between celebration and rejection. AI can expand experimentation, variation, and access [12,16,24]. It can also generate skepticism, irritation, or a sense of creative depletion [7,8,14,22,25]. The difference lies in how the production process is culturally organized and made legible to audiences.

2.9. Implications for Literary, Cultural, and Artistic Studies

Reading AI advertising through creative legitimacy opens several lines of inquiry for literary, cultural, and artistic studies. First, it shifts attention from the simple existence of machine-generated content to the cultural scripts through which that content is authorized. Advertisements become sites where authorship is publicly negotiated. Brands, agencies, platforms, and audiences all participate in defining whether machine-assisted production counts as innovation, collaboration, imitation, or loss. This makes advertising a productive object for understanding contemporary debates about creativity beyond the art world narrowly understood.

Second, the literature highlights the cultural politics of labor in a particularly visible form. AI advertising does not eliminate human work; it redistributes it. Prompting, selection, refinement, compliance review, aesthetic adjustment, and disclosure design all become part of the new labor arrangement [12,16,18]. But this redistributed labor is not always equally visible. One task for cultural analysis is to examine how institutions narrate or conceal this redistribution. Which forms of labor are highlighted as creative, and which are naturalized as technical maintenance? Which are presented as democratizing access, and which are framed as replacing expertise? These questions matter because

public judgments of authenticity often depend on imagined labor even when consumers never see the production process directly.

Third, AI advertising reveals how commercial media mediate broader anxieties about human expression. The concerns associated with AI-generated ads, including effort, originality, trust, simulation, and emotional thinness, are not unique to advertising. Rather, they echo debates unfolding across publishing, design, cinema, music, and other cultural fields. Advertising is distinctive because it stages these tensions under conditions of overt persuasion and brand management. It therefore offers a particularly clear arena in which to observe how societies determine what forms of machine-made culture remain acceptable.

Fourth, the reviewed literature suggests the need for cross-cultural work. The existing evidence includes research and reporting from multiple markets, including India and Pakistan, but the field remains unevenly developed [2,20]. Expectations about disclosure, humanness, personhood, labor, and technological legitimacy may vary significantly across cultural settings. Comparative research would therefore be valuable not only for marketing practice but for cultural theory. It could show whether creative legitimacy is organized around similar criteria globally or whether distinct media histories produce different thresholds of acceptance.

Finally, this line of work matters for artistic studies because it troubles inherited distinctions between originality and reproducibility, authorship and assemblage, craft and automation. AI-generated advertising is rarely treated as high art, yet it is one of the most socially pervasive forms in which machine-made imagery now circulates. If we want to understand how ordinary publics learn to read, accept, resist, or normalize machine creativity, advertising is one of the most consequential places to look.

3. CONCLUSION

Generative AI has altered advertising not only by changing how campaigns are optimized and produced, but also by changing how persuasive messages are culturally interpreted. The reviewed literature shows that machine participation becomes especially significant when it is visible in the ad's expressive surface and when it must be judged against expectations of care, craft, authenticity, and human relevance. Disclosure, creative role framing, perceived humanness, and contextual script jointly shape whether audiences grant or withhold creative legitimacy.

This perspective helps reconcile several findings in the literature. Creative legitimacy is not a rebranding of source credibility or authenticity. Source credibility explains whether a communicator seems expert or trustworthy; authenticity explains whether expression feels coherent with brand values; creative legitimacy explains whether the production arrangement itself feels appropriate to the symbolic and normative demands of the message. AI can signal innovation, speed, experimentation, and accessibility. It can also signal distance from labor, reduced sincerity, or weakened accountability, especially in prosocial and political persuasion. What determines the difference is not the technology alone, but the cultural organization of its use.

For interdisciplinary scholarship, the significance of AI advertising lies precisely in this instability. Advertising is one of the most visible domains in which machine systems are entering routine cultural production. As a result, it provides a rich site for examining how contemporary publics interpret distributed authorship, evaluate the meaning of creative labor, and renegotiate the boundaries of authentic expression. Future work should continue to study AI-generated advertising not only as a marketing technique, but as a cultural formation in which persuasion, aesthetics, and technological mediation are being reorganized in real time. Longitudinal, cross-cultural, and high-stakes category research would be especially valuable.

Supplementary Data: Not applicable.

Acknowledgement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions: Vincenzo De Masi: conceptualization, literature review, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing.

Funding Statement: This research received no external funding.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ford, J., Jain, V., Wadhvani, K., & Gupta, D. G. (2023). AI advertising: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, *166*, 114124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114124>
- [2] Devi, A. (2025). Artificial intelligence and advertising: A systematic literature review and future research direction in India. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, *10*, 1483-1496. <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2025.v10i05.001>
- [3] Argan, M., Dinc, H., Kaya, S., & Argan, M. T. (2022). Artificial intelligence in advertising: Understanding and schematizing the behaviors of social media users. *Advances in Distributed Computing and Artificial Intelligence Journal*, *11*, 331-348. <https://doi.org/10.14201/adcaij.28331>
- [4] Agrawal, S., & Nadakuditi, S. (2023). AI-based strategies in combating ad fraud in digital advertising: Implementations and expected outcomes. *International Journal of Information and Cybersecurity*, *7*, 1-19.
- [5] Chen, Y., Wang, H., Rao Hill, S., & Li, B. (2024). Consumer attitudes toward AI-generated ads: Appeal types, self-efficacy and AI's social role. *Journal of Business Research*, *185*, 114867. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114867>
- [6] Belanche, D., Ibáñez-Sánchez, S., Jordán, P., & Matas, S. (2025). Customer reactions to generative AI vs. real images in high-involvement and hedonic services. *International Journal of Information Management*, *85*, 102954. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2025.102954>
- [7] Jung, T., Koghut, M., Lee, E., & Kwon, O. (2025). Artificial creativity in luxury advertising: How trust and perceived humanness drive consumer response to AI-generated content. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *87*, 104403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2025.104403>
- [8] Maurer, H., & Buchbauer, T. (2025). The taste of effort: Consumer response to the disclosure of generative artificial intelligence content in food advertising. In *Proceedings of the 54th European Marketing Academy Conference* (Article 126370).
- [9] Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*, 1-31. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209380>
- [10] Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, *19*, 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1990.10673191>
- [11] Peter, R., Roshith, V., Lawrence, S., Mona, A. E., Narayanan, K. B., & Yusaira, F. (2025). Gen AI-Gen Z: Understanding Gen Z's emotional responses and brand experiences with Gen AI-driven, hyper-personalized advertising. *Frontiers in Communication*, *10*, 1554551. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1554551>
- [12] Han, J., & Tiu, J. (2025, June 2). Exploring generative AI's role in digital advertisement creation. *California Management Review Insight*. <https://cmr.berkeley.edu/2025/06/exploring-generative-ai-s-role-in-digital-advertisement-creation/>

- [13] Rakhi, M. R., Rao, C. S., & Gupta, J. (2025). The integration of artificial intelligence in advertising: An empirical analysis of its impact on marketing strategies. *International Journal of Research Trends and Innovation*, *10*, a571-a577.
- [14] Erdem, E., & Šídlová, V. (2025, November 4). Rethinking AI-generated advertising: How real people really react. Kantar. <https://www.kantar.com/inspiration/advertising-media/rethinking-ai-generated-advertising>
- [15] Zhang, L., & Hur, C. (2025). The impact of generative AI images on consumer attitudes in advertising. *Administrative Sciences*, *15*(10), 395. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15100395>
- [16] The Coca-Cola Company. (2023, March 20). Coca-Cola invites digital artists to "Create Real Magic" using new AI platform. <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/media-center/coca-cola-invites-digital-artists-to-create-real-magic-using-new-ai-platform>
- [17] Aouf, R. S. (2017, June 1). Algorithm designs seven million different jars of Nutella. *Dezeen*. <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/06/01/algorithm-seven-million-different-jars-nutella-packaging-design/>
- [18] [Nextage.ai](https://nextage.ai/en_en/works/espace-aubade-2/). (2025). Espace Aubade. https://nextage.ai/en_en/works/espace-aubade-2/
- [19] Kumar, R. (2025, October 9). 10 best AI advertising examples of 2025: Game-changing campaigns that redefined marketing. *Nyra AI Blog*. <https://www.getnyra.ai/blog/ai-marketing-101/10-best-ai-advertising-examples-of-2025>
- [20] Naqvi, M. H. A., Jiang, Y., Miao, M., & Naqvi, M. H. (2020). The effect of social influence, trust, and entertainment value on social media use: Evidence from Pakistan. *Cogent Business & Management*, *7*, 1723825. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1723825>
- [21] Wu, L., Dodoo, N. A., & Wen, T. J. (2025). Disclosing AI's involvement in advertising to consumers: A task-dependent perspective. *Journal of Advertising*, *54*(1), 20-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2024.2309929>
- [22] Brüns, J. D., & Meißner, M. (2024). Do you create your content yourself? Using generative artificial intelligence for social media content creation diminishes perceived brand authenticity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *79*, 103790. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103790>
- [23] Grigsby, J. L., Michelsen, M., & Zamudio, C. (2025). Service ads in the era of generative AI: Disclosures, trust, and intangibility. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *84*, 104231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2025.104231>
- [24] Yang, J., Dong, C., Chu, S.-C., & Rheu, M. (2026). Transforming advertising in the age of generative AI: Exploring advertising professionals' perceptions of human-AI value co-creation. *International Journal of Advertising*, *45*(1), 139-170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2025.2604910>
- [25] Baek, T. H., Kim, J., & Kim, J. H. (2026). Effect of disclosing AI-generated content on prosocial advertising evaluation. *International Journal of Advertising*, *45*(1), 171-192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2024.2401319>
- [26] Whittaker, L., Mulcahy, R., Russell-Bennett, R., Letheren, K., & Kietzmann, J. (2026). Examining consumer appraisals of deepfake advertising and disclosure: Show deepfakes as "real life" or say they're "just fantasy"? *Journal of Advertising Research*, *66*(1), 113-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00218499.2025.2498830>
- [27] Shi, Y., & Jiang, Z. (2026). Consumer responses to AI disclosure labels: The role of novelty and authenticity. *SAGE Open*, *16*(1), 21582440261417793. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440261417793>
- [28] Nobel, S. K., Lim, R. E., & Kim, S. (2026). AI as a creator or a helper: How disclosure and source credibility shape public perception of political advertising messaging. *International Journal of Advertising*, *45*(1), 27-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2026.2634490>

- [29] Lee, Y.-H., & Yuan, C. W. T. (2025). The authenticity paradox of political AI chatbots: Effects on candidate credibility, social presence, and voting intentions. *Telematics and Informatics*, *103*, 102339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2025.102339>
- [30] De Masi, V., Li, S., & Serafin, F. P. (2025). Revolutionizing cinema: How AI is democratizing production and deepening creative content. *Connessioni Remote*, *9*(Miscellanea II). <https://doi.org/10.54103/connessioni/28718>