

***Genuine or Generated? The Impact of AI-Generated versus Human Created
Social Media Content on Brands***

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Abstract

This study explores the effects of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) adoption in creating social media content on brand authenticity and brand outcomes, including trust, loyalty, and attitudes. While GenAI offers benefits such as increased productivity and cost savings, concerns arise about its impact on creative tasks like Instagram posts' generation. The research investigates how customers perceive AI-generated versus human-created posts, focusing on the moderating roles of brand authenticity and brand fondness. A scenario-based online experiment will be conducted, randomly assigning participants to view either AI-generated or human-created posts for the brand Dove. A structural equation modeling approach is used to analyze the data. The study hypothesizes that GenAI adoption may negatively affect brand authenticity and brand outcomes, but higher levels of brand fondness and authenticity could mitigate these effects, making customers more willing to accept AI-generated content. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for marketers on the role of AI in content strategies and its potential impact on customer-brand relationships.

Keywords

GenAI; Social Media; Digital Marketing; Brand Authenticity; Brand Trust; Brand Fondness

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) algorithms, such as ChatGPT or Google Gemini, are reshaping marketing activities by enhancing productivity and automating routine tasks, allowing humans to focus on more creative and less repetitive work (Dwivedi et al., 2023). GenAI are large language model-based artificial intelligence algorithms that can generate a variety of text, images, audio. Moreover, GenAI appears to positively impact customer engagement through personalization (Kumar et al., 2019), improve customer satisfaction by employing chatbots and virtual assistants (Chung et al., 2020), and boost revenues as companies can charge a premium price for AI-powered service interfaces (Ooi et al., 2023). However, what happens when GenAI is applied to creative tasks, such as creating social media content like an Instagram post's copy? Although around 73% of U.S. marketers already incorporate GenAI into their marketing strategies (Statista, 2023), are they confident that these practices will not negatively impact customers' perceptions of the brands themselves?

To answer these questions, some empirical studies on the linkages between GenAI usage in creative tasks and brand perceptions have been realized but mixed results have emerged. A pivotal study by Brüns and Meißner (2024) highlighted that the adoption of GenAI in "*creative tasks*", such as the generation of social media content, leads to negative attitudinal and behavioral reactions, with brand authenticity serving as a moderating factor. Conversely, Chaisatitkul et al., (2023) found that customers prefer AI-generated visual content over human-created counterpart. Additionally, among younger generations, AI-generated brand personalities turn out to have a stronger impact on purchase intentions than traditional ones (Park & Ahn, 2024). Nevertheless,

comprehensive studies are still needed also to investigate possible moderating and mediating effects of branding variables, such as brand fondness and authenticity, on the relationship between GenAI adoption and customers' brand-related outcomes. This research aims to investigate how the use of GenAI to generate social media content, Instagram posts in particular, affects brand perceptions and outcomes, including brand authenticity, loyalty, and trust, and whether brand fondness and authenticity may moderate costumers' reactions to AI-generated content. Dove has been chosen as the brand for this research to not distract the respondents from the post itself. Indeed, the authors considered Dove as a well-known brand among the general audience and representative of fast-moving consumer goods, which are simple and familiar to most people. By understanding the perceptions of customers of GenAI contents, this study will further previous studies by providing a better comprehension of the linkage between brands and AI's applications as well as supporting marketing practitioners with useful insight on the utility of such algorithms for marketing initiatives.

Theoretical Background & Research Hypothesis

For much of its history, AI has primarily focused on tasks involving “*thinking and reasoning*”; in recent years, with advancements in neural networks, deep learning, and large language models, the focus has begun to shift toward tasks related to “*creating*” (Berthon et al., 2024). GenAI, in particular, has emerged as a key driver of innovation in marketing strategies, with companies struggling to integrate it into content personalization (Pearson, 2019), customer services' chatbots (Huang et al., 2023), and other support activities such as idea generation and divergent thinking (Cillo & Rubera, 2024). Nevertheless, the efficiency gains obtained thanks to the GenAI adoption come with downsides, such as creativity flattening and research obstruction (Osadchaya et al., 2024).

This research aims to explore how customers perceive the adoption of GenAI for generating social media content, with a particular focus on brand authenticity. Brand authenticity refers to the degree of coherence between a brand's identity and its image (Schallehn et al., 2014), essentially reflecting the extent to which a brand is perceived as genuine by its customers (Alexander, 2009). As Brüns and Meißner (2024) point out, the use of GenAI in social media strategies may lead to a reduction of the perceived authenticity, as well as negatively impact brand trust, loyalty, and attitudes, as it can diminish the credibility of a post. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1. GenAI adoption negatively affects brand authenticity.

H3. GenAI Adoption negatively affects brand outcomes, including brand trust, loyalty and attitudes.

Considering that brands perceived as authentic are able to pursue organizational goals in alignment with their core values (Eggers et al., 2013), a higher level of brand authenticity is often linked to higher brand trust (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; Eggers et al., 2013), more positive brand attitudes, and greater brand loyalty (Brüns & Meißner, 2024). Thus, a higher perceived authenticity may mitigate the negative

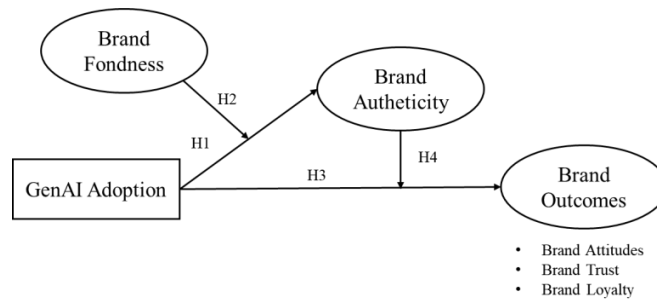
reactions of followers to the adoption of GenAI in content creation, as it strengthens the bond between the company and its customers. Consequently, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H4. Brand authenticity moderates the relationship between GenAI adoption and brand outcomes.

In recent literature, brand fondness, which represents customers' feelings "*associated with the act of liking*", has been investigated as one of the elements that shape customers' brand perceptions (Foroudi et al., 2018). Indeed, as brand fondness can positively influence customers' perceptions of brand quality (Foroudi et al., 2018), it may serve as a moderator factor, potentially shaping how GenAI adoption in social media content generation impacts brand authenticity. Passionate customers may exhibit a higher willingness to accept the use of automated content creation through GenAI, without compromising their perception of the brand's authenticity. Consequently:

H2. Brand fondness moderates the relationship between GenAI adoption and brand authenticity.

Figure 1 Conceptual Model



Methodology

This study aims to test the effects of GenAI adoption in writing Instagram posts on brand authenticity, brand attitudes, trust, and loyalty while considering brand fondness and brand authenticity as moderating factors. To achieve this aim, data will be collected through an online questionnaire performed by using a scenario-based online experiment in Qualtrics, wherein participants will be assigned randomly into two experimental groups (AI-Generated versus Human-Created Social media Content).

More in detail, in the first scenario, participants will be asked to read an Instagram post verified to be human-created using the AI-detection software "*GPTZero*" while in the second scenario, participants will be asked to read a post written by ChatGPT 4.0. The respondents will remain unaware of whether the post is human-created or AI-generated. The brand selected for the experiment is Dove, as it is well-known and generalist enough to avoid distracting respondents from the research objectives.

Expected results and Conclusions

This study investigates the impact of AI-generated versus human-created Instagram content on brand perceptions and outcomes. According to the extant literature, expected results suggest that while GenAI offers significant benefits in terms of productivity and cost savings, its use in producing creative social media content could undermine brand authenticity and, consequently, negatively affect brand attitudes, loyalty, and trust. However, brand fondness may mitigate these negative impacts, suggesting that highly loyal customers might be more willing to accept AI-generated content from a company they are passionate about. Additionally, brand authenticity may moderate this negative effect, as it is often associated with stronger brand outcomes in the literature. These insights provide important theoretical and practical implications that can help marketers in evaluating the adoption of GenAI in their content strategies due to the role played by considering their brand's authenticity and customer brand fondness in enhancing consistency, continuity, and individuality of the brand promise.

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