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Creativity Under Disclosure:

How AI Disclosure Labels Shape Consumers' Perceptions of Advertising Creativity

by

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Abstract

The increasing use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in advertising has transformed creative production while simultaneously raising concerns about transparency, authenticity and consumer perception. With the growing integration of GenAI into advertising, understanding how consumers respond to AI disclosure has become increasingly important. This study investigates how AI disclosure in advertising influences consumers' perceptions of creativity and examines whether originality, appropriateness and skepticism mediate this relationship.

Drawing on the Persuasion Knowledge Model, algorithmic aversion theory and advertising creativity literature, a quantitative online survey using a between-subject experimental design was conducted. Participants were randomly assigned to either an AI disclosure or no-disclosure condition while evaluating the same advertisement. Data were analyzed using independent samples t-tests and mediation analyses.

The findings show that AI disclosure significantly reduces advertising creativity. Advertisements labeled as AI-generated were evaluated as less creative than identical advertisements without disclosure. The results further demonstrate that this effect is primarily driven by lower perceptions of originality and appropriateness. While AI disclosure slightly increased skepticism, skepticism did not significantly mediate the relationship between disclosure and creativity.

This study contributes to the growing literature on AI-generated advertising by positioning perceived creativity as a central outcome variable in AI disclosure contexts. The findings further highlight the challenges marketers face in balancing transparency requirements with maintaining the creative impact of advertising campaigns.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), AI disclosure, AI in advertisements, advertising creativity, algorithmic aversion, Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)

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1 Introduction

The following section introduces the research by outlining its aim, objectives and research question. It defines the focus of the study and specifies the key aspects of AI-generated advertising and its disclosure that will be examined.

1.1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have significantly transformed the advertising landscape, influencing both the creation and placement of advertising content (Haleem et al., 2022). But the effect is far broader than that, reaching almost every industry in some way. Even within this larger shift, marketing and advertising remain among the most affected sectors. Here AI offers a wide range of applications that enhance both the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing activities (Chan & Choi, 2025). In particular, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) enables the automated production of text, images and videos and therefore fundamentally changes how advertising content is conceptualized, produced and delivered (Thomson Reuters, 2025). Generative models such as ChatGPT, DALL·E and Google Gemini allow marketers to translate text-based prompts into highly detailed creative outputs, thereby accelerating conceptualization and production workflows (Cui et al., 2025; Hartmann et al., 2025). At the same time, ongoing improvements around AI continue to expand their creative capabilities, further reinforcing their growing role in advertising practice (Stanford University, 2025).

However, these technological advances do not remove the importance of creativity. If anything, they make it more central to understanding advertising performance. According to WARC, a leading global authority on marketing effectiveness, highly creative campaigns consistently outperform their less creative counterparts. Drawing on data from over 5,600 campaigns across major international award shows, WARC found that the most creatively recognised work is twice as likely to win effectiveness awards, with conversion rates rising from 21% to 44%. (Benfell, 2025; Little Black Book, 2025). That's why creativity in advertising is not merely an aesthetic pursuit but a measurable commercial advantage that remains one of the industry's most valued benchmarks for success (Kover et al., 1995).

Nowhere is that importance of creativity more visible than in the advertising industry's own award culture. Across markets and media types, award programmes have emerged as the industry's primary place for evaluating creative excellence. With annual competitions such as the prestigious Cannes Lion International Festival of Creativity, the D&AD and the effie awards agencies and brands can compete for recognition that carries real reputational weight (Cannes Lions, n.d.; D&AD, n.d.a.; effie, n.d.). What these competitions share is the belief that creative quality is not just subjective taste but something that can be identified, ranked and celebrated. Receiving a top recognition at any of these awards is widely regarded as a signal of exceptional achievement at both organisational and individual levels (Matejko, 2022). And even these tradition-bound institutions are taking note of the impact that AI has on the industry. As for example the Cannes Lions' introduced a dedicated "Data and AI" award category signaling that artificial intelligence is no longer a backstage utility but an increasingly recognised driver of creative execution (Cannes Lions, n.d.).

1.2. Problematization

The growing integration of AI into creative production also introduces a set of challenges that the industry is only beginning to deal with. As GenAI systems grow more sophisticated, AI-generated content has become increasingly harder to evaluate, raising fundamental questions about transparency and authenticity (Campbell et al., 2022; Hartmann et al., 2025). As a result, AI is not only transforming how advertisements are produced, but also how they are perceived and evaluated. The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB; Williamson et al., 2026) found that 71% of Gen Z and Millennial consumers believe they have already seen an AI-created advertisement, compared to 54% in 2024. More importantly, the report highlights a widening perception gap: 82% of advertising executives believe Gen Z and Millennial consumers feel positive about AI-generated advertisements, while only 45% of consumers actually do. Rather than using AI simply to cut production costs, the report argues that advertisers should focus on how it can improve creative quality. It also points to the importance of clear and consistent disclosure, especially in video and image-based formats. This disconnect is important because what professionals consider creative quality is not necessarily what consumers experience as creative. While GenAI tools expand what is creatively possible beyond traditional production constraints, when it comes to speed of production they also simultaneously blur the line between human-created and synthetic content (Hartmann et al., 2025). At the same time, technological solutions such as AI detectors have been developed to address this issue. However, existing evidence suggests that these detection systems remain unreliable and have not yet reached a level where their results can be consistently trusted (Gotoman et al., 2025). This creates a fundamental

challenge: neither consumers nor technological systems can reliably distinguish between human- and AI-generated content. As a consequence, consumers may struggle to accurately evaluate the origin and authenticity of advertisements, raising the skepticism about transparency, trust and the assessment of creative quality (Hartmann et al., 2025; Grigsby et al., 2025). Consumers, moreover, have not embraced this shift to AI production as readily as the industry has. Across multiple countries, roughly half of the respondents reported feeling uncomfortable with AI-generated advertising visuals and for most content types tested, unease outweighed comfort (Tan, 2024). This disconnect between industry confidence and consumer sentiment points to a real and growing tension at the heart of AI-generated advertising. In this context, disclosure emerges as a potential mechanism to address these challenges.

Policymakers have also taken note of the growing gap between industry adoption and consumer acceptance and are beginning to call for greater transparency around AI use in advertising and communication. A prominent example is the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act). Article 50 of the EU AI Act, which entered into force in 2024. It introduces explicit transparency obligations for AI systems, currently focused on deepfakes and AI systems that are directly interacting with the public (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689., Art. 50). This points to a broader shift in how regulators are beginning to think about AI transparency. With this the disclosure of AI involvement in advertising could therefore soon no longer simply be a matter of ethical preference but is increasingly becoming a legal requirement in major markets. Understanding how such disclosures are received by consumers is therefore not only an academically relevant question but also an urgent practical one.

Therefore, a key problem emerges: as GenAI becomes increasingly capable of producing high-quality advertising content, it remains unclear how consumers evaluate such advertisements when AI involvement is disclosed. This is particularly relevant in light of growing transparency requirements, which make AI disclosure an increasingly important issue in advertising. More specifically, this study examines how AI-generated content and disclosure affect perceived creativity.

1.3. Aim and Objectives

Therefore the aim of this study is to investigate how AI disclosure influences consumers' perceptions of advertising, with a particular focus on perceived creativity. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of how transparency regarding AI disclosure shapes the way consumers evaluate key dimensions of advertising creativity.

In achieving this aim, the study sets out specific objectives:

- To examine the effect of AI disclosure on creativity and its dimensions in advertising.
- To investigate the influence of skepticism on creativity, shaping consumer responses to AI disclosure in advertisements.
- To discuss implications for future researchers and marketing professionals to better understand and manage AI-usage in advertising and disclosure strategies.

Thus the research question of our study is:

How does AI disclosure in advertising influence consumers' perceptions of creativity?

2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on advertising creativity and its role in shaping consumer responses. It then explores how these established concepts apply to AI-generated advertising and examines the effects of AI disclosure, leading to the identification of the research gap addressed in this study.

2.1 Creativity in Advertising

Creativity has long been considered central to advertising, yet defining it precisely has proven surprisingly difficult. Early attempts tended to treat creativity as a single and intuitive quality, something an advertisement either had or did not have. Psychologists have been grappling with this question since at least the 1950s, without ever reaching a clean answer (Guilford, 1950; Amabile, 1996). Advertising was no exception to this uncertainty. This became clear when Kover et al. (1995) found that advertising professionals and consumers did not even agree on what makes an advertisement creative, with award-winning advertisements frequently failing to move consumers more than ordinary, unrated ones.

A few years later Ang and Low (2000) moved toward a more structured definition, pushing back against what had been the dominant view in both traditional and modern creativity research. Their key insight was that novelty alone is not sufficient for an advertisement to be creative. Drawing on prior work in psychology and organizational behavior, they proposed that advertising creativity consists of three dimensions: novelty, meaningfulness and emotional valence. Concluding that an unexpected advertisement that evokes negative feelings or carries no meaningful connection to the product is not experienced as creative but as confusing. While Ang and Low (2000) broadened the concept, Smith and Yang (2004) approached it differently and narrowed it to its essentials. They argued that if emotional response is included as a defining feature of creativity, the concept becomes circular. An advertisement cannot be described as creative because it generates favorable responses, if those same favorable responses are already part of what makes it creative by definition. They therefore proposed a framework based on two core dimensions. Smith and Yang (2004) defined a creative advertisement as something that is both divergent and relevant. Divergence refers to the degree to which an advertisement contains

something novel and unexpected, while relevance refers to the degree to which it connects meaningfully to the consumer or the brand. Only the combination of both leads to genuine advertising creativity. Building on this theoretical framework, Smith et al. (2007) provided the first empirical validation of these two dimensions. Through a series of studies comparing award-winning advertisements to average network advertisements, they confirmed that consumer perceptions of creativity are driven by the interaction between divergence and relevance, not by either dimension alone. They also developed validated measurement scales for both dimensions, which became a commonly used tool in later empirical research, including the scales adopted in our research.

But not all researchers converged on the two-dimension framework. Building on their earlier work, Ang et al. (2007) question whether originality and meaningfulness alone are sufficient and propose connectedness as a third dimension that captures the audience's ability to relate to the advertisement. In their view, a creative advertisement must not only be novel and meaningful, but also connect with the consumers on a more personal level. Rosengren et al. (2020), however, draw on a large meta-analysis and conclude that advertising creativity is more consistently explained by originality and appropriateness, suggesting that the two-dimensional framework remains the more accurate and empirically grounded approach. Their findings show that advertising creativity has a robust positive impact on consumer responses, particularly on attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand. They also suggest that this relationship is clearer when creativity is assessed through originality and appropriateness together rather than through broader conceptualizations.

While this stream of research reflects an ongoing debate around the dimensionality of advertising creativity, it also points to a broader underlying agreement that creativity involves some form of novelty combined with value or relevance. Building on these insights, more recent work has begun to extend the concept beyond individual advertisements, situating creativity within a wider marketing context. From this perspective, creativity is considered a fundamental component of marketing as a whole. Das et al. (2023) define creativity in marketing as the generation of ideas that are both novel and valuable to target audiences. Within this broader domain, advertising creativity represents a key subfield, closely linked to innovation, branding and consumer engagement. Their review highlights that creativity enables firms to differentiate themselves, respond to competitive pressures and better meet evolving consumer needs (Das et al., 2023).

Beyond defining what creativity is, research has consistently shown that it is a significant driver of advertising effectiveness. Darley and Lim (2023) provide meta-analytic evidence that advertising creativity positively influences cognition, affect and behavioral intentions across contexts. Their findings further reveal that the effectiveness of creativity is moderated by media

type. For example, print media tends to enhance cognitive outcomes such as recall, while television is more effective in driving emotional and behavioral responses. In contrast, non-traditional media formats often show weaker effects, suggesting that the context in which creative content is delivered plays a crucial role (Darley & Lim, 2023).

However, the literature also makes clear that creativity does not operate in a vacuum. Rosengren et al. (2020) find that its effectiveness is stronger in high-involvement contexts and for less familiar brands, while Darley and Lim (2023) demonstrate that the communication channel shapes how creative content is received. Taken together, these findings suggest that advertising creativity must be strategically aligned with the target audience, the product type and the media environment in which it appears.

2.2 Creativity in AI-Generated Advertising

Prior research has extensively examined the role of creativity in advertising effectiveness. However, far less is known about how creativity is perceived in AI-generated advertising and whether traditional indicators such as originality and appropriateness still apply. In particular, given Darley and Lim's (2023) emphasis on the importance of modality, it remains unclear whether AI-generated creative executions are evaluated differently across media channels or whether existing frameworks for understanding advertising creativity can be directly transferred to AI-driven content.

Consequently, existing research on this topic remains relatively limited, yet early research indicates that creativity in AI-generated advertising can have unintended negative effects. Hwang and Jeong (2026) showed that while higher creativity generally leads to more favorable responses, in AI-generated advertisements it can evoke feelings of uncanniness. They found that especially highly creative AI advertisements can cause increased perceived uncanniness, as they make AI seem too human-like. As a result, attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand become less favorable, an effect that does not occur for human-created advertisements. This suggests that highly creative AI-generated content may be perceived as unnatural or unsettling, thereby weakening its effectiveness (Hwang & Jeong, 2026).

Despite these challenges, AI-generated advertising can still create value for consumers. Creativity, entertainment and engagement remain important drivers of advertising effectiveness, even in AI contexts (Hamouda & Aissaoui, 2026). Hamouda and Aissaoui (2026) provide important insight into the role of creativity in AI-generated advertising. Their study identifies

perceived creativity as a key predictor of AI-generated advertising value, alongside factors such as entertainment and irritation. The results show that creativity has a significant positive effect on the perceived value of AI-generated advertisements, meaning that more creative advertisements are seen as more useful, engaging and worthwhile by consumers. This perceived value then positively influences attitudes toward the advertisement and ultimately purchase intention, confirming that creativity indirectly drives effectiveness through value perceptions. However, the relationship between creativity and effectiveness appears to be more complex in AI-generated advertising, as it is influenced by factors such as disclosure, perceived authenticity and consumer trust (Hamouda & Aissaoui, 2026).

2.3 Disclosure and Consumer Responses

At the same time, research shows that consumer evaluations of AI-generated advertisements depend on context. One particularly relevant factor is disclosure. The disclosure of persuasive commercial content to consumers has a well established research tradition in communication and advertising science. Historically, disclosure studies emerged in response to the proliferation of embedded and hybrid advertising formats, such as product placements, advertorials, native advertisements and sponsored social media posts, where the commercial nature of the content is tried to be hidden from the recipients. The central concern of this body of work has been whether and how labelling content as commercial changes consumer cognition, affect and behavior and what psychological mechanisms drive these changes (Eisend et al., 2020; Beckert et al., 2021). Building on this, recent research has begun to examine how disclosures related to AI-generated content influence consumer responses to advertising.

Before turning to the specific case of AI, it is important to explain what disclosure generally does to recipients, as AI disclosure research faces the same unresolved tensions that have occupied the broader disclosure literature for decades. A lot of the disclosure literature in advertisements is built around sponsored content and native advertising and confirms that labelling an advertisement as commercially motivated or “sponsored” consistently changes how consumers perceive both the message and its source. In one of the most comprehensive meta-analyses of this field, Eisend et al. (2020) found that disclosure reliably activates persuasion knowledge, raising consumers’ recognition of advertising intent while simultaneously reducing brand attitudes, credibility and source evaluations. Yet effect sizes across these studies are modest and the average impact on behavioural intention was not significant (Eisend et al., 2020). This pattern is not a result of poor measurement, it reflects a structural feature of what disclosure does. On one hand, a disclosure label flags that persuasion is taking place, which makes consumers more

skeptical. On the other hand, the very act of labelling signals that the sender is being honest, which can partially soften that skepticism. Because these two reactions tend to pull in opposite directions the overall effect on attitudes is often smaller than either reaction alone would predict (Beckert et al., 2021). Sponsorship research confirms this at the mechanism level: disclosure labels on branded social media posts raise recognition of commercial intent, which increases skepticism and reduces word-of-mouth intent. Yet the same act of disclosure also increases perceptions of source transparency, providing a partial counterweight (Boerman et al., 2017; Beckert et al., 2021).

These implications were well-established before the integration of AI in advertising was studied. The studies discussed in the following paragraph examine how disclosure affects consumer responses in the context of AI-generated advertising.

2.4 The Disclosure of AI in Advertising

When disclosure moves beyond a conventional label such as “sponsored by x-brand” and includes statements like “created with an artificial intelligence”, its effects on audience perception become substantially more complex. While a sponsorship label primarily signals commercial intent, an AI label introduces an additional layer of interpretation. It does not only activate awareness of persuasive intent but also reshapes how consumers perceive the origin of the content. In this sense, an AI label goes beyond indicating that something is an advertisement. It also changes assumptions about who or what created it, shifting perceptions from a human source to a machine or human-AI collaboration (Bui, 2025; Koning & Voorveld, 2025; Campbell et al., 2022).

Building on this shift in perceived origin, research shows that such disclosures have notable consequences for how advertising is evaluated. The dominant finding across current studies is that this usage of AI in advertisements is predominantly negative for their outcomes (Raj et al., 2026; Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Bui, 2025; Koning & Voorveld, 2025; Wu et al., 2025). Perceived credibility emerges as a repeating variable through which AI disclosure harms attitudes towards the advertisement and brand itself. Once consumers are informed that an AI system generated an advertisement, it is seen as less convincing, believable and trustworthy. These credibility reductions lead to lower perceived advertising value, less favourable advertisement attitudes and weaker purchase (Baek et al., 2026; Bui, 2025). This influence on credibility can be seen across commercial advertising (Bui, 2025), prosocial fundraising contexts (Baek et al., 2026) as well as

service advertising (Grigsby et al., 2025), suggesting that it reflects a generalizable mechanism rather than a context specific phenomenon.

Next to credibility, trust has also been identified as a channel through which AI disclosure shapes advertising outcomes. The disclosure of AI produces significantly more negative effects when the advertisement works with human elements, such as service producer's image and persona, then when it highlights tangible physical attributes such as equipment or environment (Grigsby et al., 2025). While trust is not a variable directly examined in our study, this pattern reinforces the broader point that the AI disclosure has a negative effect, when the content concerns aspects of the advertisement that consumers psychologically associate with human authenticity, including creative expression.

Further, AI disclosure also affects how authentic consumers perceive the content to be. Brüns and Meißner (2024) reported that the disclosure of AI in branded social media content reduced perceived brand authenticity, which in turn negatively affected brand loyalty and word-of-mouth intentions. In contrast, for more functional content such as product descriptions, this effect appears to be minimal. This contrast suggests that the impact of AI disclosure on authenticity is not uniform, but depends on the nature of the content. Specifically, the authenticity cost becomes more pronounced as content is perceived to be more expressive and human-like (Kirkby et al., 2023; Brüns & Meißner, 2024). A similar pattern also appears outside the advertising context. Raj et al. (2026) found that AI-disclosed creative content was consistently judged as less genuine, directly reducing evaluations of quality, enjoyment and originality regardless of the actual quality of the content. While Raj et al. (2026) did not study advertising specifically, but creative writing, their findings add to the broader picture: AI disclosure consistently reduces how genuine, original and enjoyable creative content is perceived to be.

Beyond the act of disclosure itself, consumers also respond differently to AI simply as a creative source. When people are aware that an advertisement was produced by an algorithm rather than a person, they navigate two competing reactions simultaneously (Wu & Wen, 2021). The first is what Wu and Wen (2021) call the machine heuristic, which is the general assumption that machines are objective and free of bias like humans are. This especially works in AI's favor as a source of information. The second is a sense of eeriness, described as the discomfort that arises when a machine appears to be doing something that feels more appropriate for humans, such as creating art or designing an advertisement. Which of these reactions comes out on top depends largely on how the task is perceived. When advertising creation is framed or understood as a more data-driven analytical process, the machine heuristic tends to dominate and consumers respond more positively, the machine heuristic tends to dominate and consumers respond more

positively. But when the same task would be seen as something expressive and artistic, which creative advertising usually is, the eeriness response becomes more prominent and appreciation of the AI-advertising drops (Wu & Wen, 2021). This dynamic becomes more pronounced when the type of advertising content is taken into account. Song et al. (2024) show that people respond differently depending on whether an advertisement is presented as AI-generated or human-generated and that the type of appeal matters as well. Similar to Wu and Wen's (2021) they found that AI creators are better aligned with rational, information-heavy messages, while human creators fit more naturally with emotional appeals. When those elements do not match, the advertisement feels less fluent and less persuasive. For AI disclosure in creative advertising, the issue is especially clear: creative advertisements often rely on expression and emotion, which do not sit very comfortably with the more mechanical way people tend to think about AI.

2.5 Research Gap

Overall, the existing literature points to a fragmented and still emerging understanding of creativity in AI-generated advertising. While some studies emphasize its positive role in driving value and effectiveness (Hamouda & Aissaoui, 2026), others highlight potential negative consequences such as increased uncanniness and reduced favorability (Hwang & Jeong, 2026). These mixed findings indicate that the relationship between creativity and advertising outcomes in AI contexts is not yet fully understood. As a result, current research does not provide clear or unified guidance for marketers, highlighting the need for further empirical investigation into the mechanisms that shape consumer responses to creative AI-generated advertising, in case its disclosure becomes mandatory in the future.

Regarding the disclosure of AI the current research argues that it shapes advertising outcomes through persuasion knowledge, credibility, trust and authenticity perceptions. And these effects are most damaging when the content is expressive, human and creative in nature. Studies consistently show that AI disclosure harms attitudes, credibility and authenticity. And these harms are sharpest when content is expressive and creative. Yet none of these studies place perceived creativity at the center of the analysis. They treat it as a context condition rather than a dependent variable. Even Hwang and Jeong (2026), whose study is the closest to ours, treat perceived creativity as a predictor of uncanniness rather than as a dependent variable shaped by the disclosure label itself. That prior step, whether the AI label changes how creative consumers find the advertisement to begin with, is the gap this study addresses.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for examining how AI disclosure influences perceived creativity in advertising. It begins by outlining the concept of advertising creativity, emphasizing its dual dimensions of originality and appropriateness. It then introduces the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) to explain how consumers interpret and respond to persuasion attempts, followed by the concept of algorithmic aversion to capture the specific skepticism toward AI-generated content. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how AI disclosure may reshape consumers' evaluations of advertising creativity and form the basis for the study's hypotheses.

3.1 Advertising Creativity

Rosengren et al. (2020) define advertising creativity as executions that are both *original* and *appropriate*. Originality refers to the degree to which an advertisement is novel, unexpected and divergent from what consumers are used to seeing and is the dimension most commonly associated with creativity in both academic research and industry practice. Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the advertisement is relevant, useful and purposeful for both the brand and the target audience. Rosengren et al. (2020) argue that appropriateness is what separates a genuinely creative advertisement from one that is merely strange or attention-grabbing. Without appropriateness, an unexpected advertisement simply feels strange rather than creative, leaving consumers unable to connect what they see to the brand or its message. It is only when both dimensions are present together that an advertisement is experienced as creative in a meaningful sense. This makes the framework especially useful for our study, as it allows creativity to be understood not only in terms of novelty, but also in terms of whether the execution still feels fitting once consumers learn that AI was involved in creating the advertisement.

The two-dimensional framework builds directly on the theoretical groundwork laid by Smith and Yang (2004) who defined advertising creativity along the parallel dimensions of divergence and relevance. While their terminology slightly differs, the conceptual logic is the same: Divergence without relevance fails and relevance without novelty is unremarkable (Smith & Yang, 2004). Rosengren et al. (2020) confirm and reaffirm this through their large-scale meta-analysis,

demonstrating that the two-dimension framework outperforms more complex alternatives in explaining consumer responses and adding further dimension does not improve the explanatory power of the framework.

This two-dimensional distinction matters for the present study because an AI disclosure label could affect perceived creativity not just by altering how novel the advertisement feels, but also by shifting whether the creative execution feels appropriate and purposeful given its apparent origin. As the literature reviewed in the preceding chapter suggests, once consumers learn that content was produced by an algorithm, their assumptions about intentionality, effort and purposefulness shift in ways that map directly onto the appropriateness dimension. This is the mechanism the present study aims to examine empirically.

3.2 Persuasion Knowledge Model

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) was introduced 1994 by Friestad and Wright to understand the consumers processing of persuasion attempts especially in the context of advertising and remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how recipients cope with persuasive communication. Friestad and Wright (1994) explain that consumers do not passively receive advertising messages, instead they draw on accumulated experiences or how they call it “knowledges” to recognize when someone is trying to influence them. These knowledges help them to assess the intentions behind the attempt and how to correctly respond to them.

The PKM proposes these accumulated experiences are a personal evolving collection of beliefs on how persuasion works and what it is designed to achieve. Friestad and Wright (1994) organize this collection into three pieces of knowledge. First is the persuasion knowledge in a narrow sense as it encompasses information about the tactics advertisers use to influence the decisions of the consumers and what intentions they might be having. This can include knowledge about message framing or emotional appeals by the advertisers, like using celebrities in advertisements to influence trust. Second is the agent knowledge which refers to beliefs about the sender such as the specific competencies, motives and trustworthiness, meaning the consumer perceptions of who is behind the message and whether they can be trusted. And lastly the topic knowledge which refers to prior knowledge about the subject of the communication, like the product in an advertisement. For example if the consumer knows a lot about the product category they are less likely to be influenced than someone who knows nothing about it. These three knowledges do not operate independently. They interact dynamically with each other depending on how familiar

the consumer is with the agent, how involved they are with the topic and how obvious the persuasion attempt is (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

One central concept of the PKM is coping. With coping Friestad and Wright (1994) do not mean resisting the persuasion but rather that consumers actively manage the encounter with persuasion attempts in pursuit of their own goals. Those goals could be forming an accurate opinion of a subject, protecting themselves from manipulation or just satisfying their curiosity about why an advertisement was constructed the way it was. The mechanism that triggers the coping process is what Friestad and Wright (1994) call the change-of meaning principle: the moment a consumer recognizes a feature of a message as a persuasion tactic, that feature is immediately reinterpreted. From this point on it is no longer just part of the advertisement's content but it becomes evidence about who the agent is and reveals the persuasion attempt. This is exactly what happens when a label reading "created by AI" appears on an advertisement. The label does not just add information, it changes the entire frame through which the advertisement is read (Baek et al., 2026; Koning & Voorveld 2025; Raj et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2025; Brüns & Meißner, 2024).

Once persuasion knowledge is activated, the most common consequence is a degree of resistance. Consumers who recognize a persuasion attempt tend to become more critical of the claims being made, which can lead to them engaging in counter arguing them or evaluate both the advertisement and the advertiser less favorably (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Eisend et al., 2020). But the direction and strength of these effects depend heavily on which part of persuasion knowledge has been activated. Much of the research has struggled to explain why disclosures sometimes produce strong negative effects, sometimes no effect at all and occasionally even a positive response (Eisend et al., 2020). Beckert et al. (2021) cut through this confusion by distinguishing two sub dimensions of persuasion knowledge. The first sub dimension is conceptual persuasion knowledge which describes recognizing that a message was designed to persuade the consumer. The second dimension is attitudinal knowledge, which is less about recognition and more about moral evaluation. It is the consumers' judgement that the advertiser is being manipulative and is hiding something in their advertisement. This distinction becomes important when considering the effects of disclosure, as rather than activating persuasion knowledge uniformly, a disclosure label triggers these two sub dimensions in opposing directions.

A disclosure label that reads "this as was generated by AI" activates conceptual persuasion knowledge by making the production process and persuasive intent explicit (Beckert et al., 2021; Koning & Voorveld, 2025). That tends to increase skepticism towards the advertisement (Baek et al., 2026; Bui, 2025; Wu et al., 2025). But at the same time the act of disclosing AI reduces the sense of deception, because the brand is being honest and not trying to hide anything. This can

lower the attitudinal persuasion knowledge (Beckert et al., 2021; Koning & Voorveld, 2025). Beckert et al. (2021) call this the disclosure paradox: Two opposing psychological processes set in motion by a single label often canceling each other out, which is precisely why so many disclosure studies have produced null or mixed effects. It is not that a label is doing nothing, it is rather that it is doing two things at once, pulling in opposite directions (Beckert et al., 2021).

For a study concerned with how an AI disclosure label shapes the way consumers perceive the creativity of an advertisement, this paradox has real consequences. The label flags the mechanical, algorithmic origin of the content, which leads to activating the skeptical, recognition-based pathway (Raj et al., 2026; Baek et al., 2026). But simultaneously it signals that the brand chose to be transparent, which may soften their skepticism (Beckert et al., 2021; Koning & Voorveld, 2025). Whether perceived creativity ends up lower, unchanged or in some cases even enhanced will depend on which of these forces is stronger for a given consumer in a given context and that is precisely the empirical question this study sets out to answer.

3.3 Algorithmic Aversion

The negative effects of AI disclosure in advertising are frequently explained through the concept of algorithmic aversion (Sands et al. 2026; Wu et al., 2025). Dietvorst et al. (2015) define this as the systematic tendency to distrust and reject the outputs of algorithmic systems, even when those outputs are of equal or superior quality to human outputs. Across the AI disclosure literature, researchers have consistently drawn on this concept to account for why revealing AI's involvement triggers negative consumer responses (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Sands et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2025).

At the heart of the concept is a fundamental asymmetry in how people assign blame and extend forgiveness. When a human makes a mistake, we reach for an explanation, i.e. tiredness, emotion or bad luck and move on. When an algorithm makes the same mistake, the usual human explanations no longer fit. The error feels like evidence of a structural flaw, something that's broken at the core of the system. Dietvorst et al. (2015) showed this in a series of controlled experiments where participants repeatedly chose inferior human forecasters over superior algorithms. This was not because the algorithm performed worse, but simply because they had watched it make a mistake before. Seeing a human make the exact same error changed nothing. The implication is significant: it is not about performance. It is about the kind of trust people are willing to extend to non-human sources and how quickly that trust collapses (Dietvorst et al., 2015; Raj et al., 2026).

In connection to the PKM, algorithmic aversion can be seen as having a direct influence on the agent knowledge of consumers (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Baek et al., 2026). When a disclosure label identifies AI as part of the creation of an advertisement, it fundamentally updates the consumer's picture of the source. In the eye of the consumer the agent is no longer a human creative team that creates the advertisement with intent, experience and accountability, but an algorithm, which many consumers instinctively associate with mechanical and non-intentional processing (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Raj et al., 2026; Sands et al., 2026). In domains where people expect warmth, judgement and creative effort, this shift in agent knowledge can trigger aversive reactions that reduce the trust in the source and critical evaluation of its output, even before the content itself has been assessed (Baek et al., 2026; Koning & Voorveld, 2025; Sands et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2025).

3.4 Research Model

The research model presented in Figure 1 is based on the theoretical frameworks introduced in this chapter. The Rosengren et al. (2020) advertising creativity framework provides the dependent variable structure, decomposing perceived creativity into originality and appropriateness. The Persuasion Knowledge Model explains the psychological mechanism through which an AI disclosure label alters consumer processing, and algorithmic aversion accounts for the specific devaluation that occurs when the disclosed source is an algorithm.

Drawing on these three frameworks, four hypotheses are proposed:

H1: AI disclosure reduces creativity of advertisements.

H2: AI disclosure reduces originality, which in turn leads to lower levels of advertising creativity.

H3: AI disclosure results in lower appropriateness, which subsequently reduces the overall perceived creativity of the advertisement.

H4: AI disclosure increases skepticism, which in turn leads to lower levels of advertising creativity.

The theoretical model presented in Figure 1 serves as a comprehensive framework illustrating the expected relationship between the various variables used in this study. Figure 1 illustrates the

conceptual model developed to test these hypotheses and provides a clearer overview of the relationships among the variables.

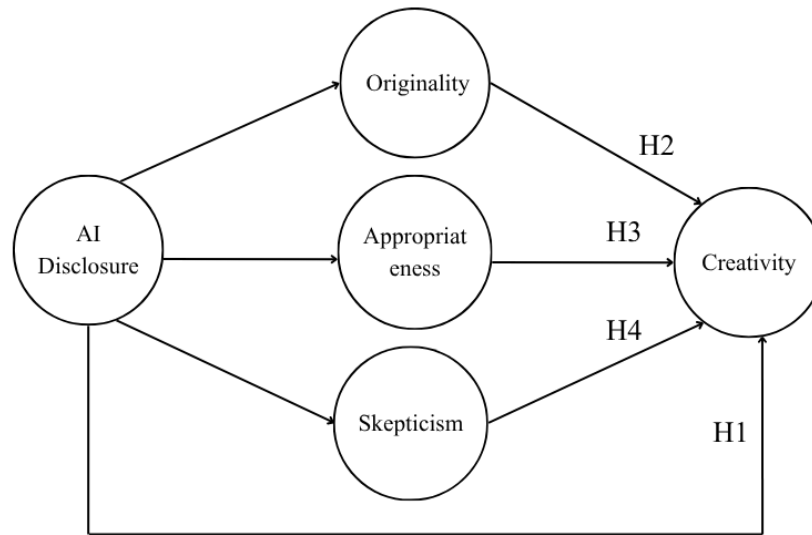


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework Model. Own illustration

4 Methodology

The following chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology undertaken in our study. The chapter begins with an introduction into the basic research philosophy, followed by an explanation of the research design and approach, setting out the underlying assumptions and principles. Subsequently, the survey design is explained and a description of the questionnaire construction. Further, the data collection process is outlined, covering the planned sample and the duration of data collection. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the planned data analysis methods.

4.1 Research Philosophy

4.1.1 Ontology

We are adopting an internal realism ontological position. Internal realism holds the conviction that an external reality exists independently of the observer, but that this reality can only ever be accessed directly through systematic observations and measurements rather than through direct inspection (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In the context of our study, consumers' perceptions of creativity are treated as real psychological phenomena. They exist in the minds of respondents and are not invented by us, but nor are they fixed objective properties of the advertisement itself. They are evaluative responses that can be systematically captured and compared across individuals. Therefore we are not claiming to measure creativity as an absolute quality, but rather to measure how consumers perceive and construct it under different informational conditions.

4.1.2 Epistemology

Building on this ontological foundation, we are adopting a positivist epistemological stance. Positivism states that knowledge is produced by testing theoretically derived hypotheses against empirical data and that the researcher should remain as independent as possible from the phenomenon under investigation. The aim is not to interpret subjective meaning but to identify patterns, test relationships and draw generalisable conclusions where the evidence permits (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Following this concept, the research question and its hypotheses were derived deductively from an established body of theoretical literature, including the PKM, algorithmic aversion theory and earlier empirical work on advertising creativity and AI disclosure as presented in the prior chapters. The purpose is to test whether the relationships predicted by these frameworks hold in the specific context of AI-generated advertising. As Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) note, a positivist stance is particularly well-suited to studies that operationalise theoretical constructs into measurable variables and subject them to statistical testing. That is exactly what we have done.

4.2 Research Approach

In line with our positivist epistemology, we adopt a deductive research approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Deductive reasoning moves from theory to data: we begin with an established theoretical framework, derive specific and testable hypotheses from it and then collect empirical evidence to assess whether those hypotheses are supported (Bell et al., 2022). The deductive logic of this study is visible in its structure. The literature review and theoretical framework establish the conceptual basis for four specific hypotheses about how AI disclosure influences perceived creativity, originality, appropriateness and skepticism. The methodology and analysis chapters then describe how those hypotheses were subjected to empirical testing. This progression from theory to hypothesis to data to conclusion ensures that our findings remain anchored in the broader theoretical conversation we aim to contribute to (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2022).

4.3 Research Design

To test the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework, we are employing a quantitative, experimental survey design. More specifically a between-subject experiment embedded within an online survey, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: an AI disclosure group, in which the advertisement was labelled as being created with an AI or a no-disclosure condition, in which the same advertisement was presented without an AI label.

We chose this design as it directly mirrors the real-world mechanism we are investigating. AI disclosure is in practice a label. It is a piece of contextual information added to an advertisement

that may or may not change how consumers evaluate it. The most straightforward way to test whether that label makes a difference is to keep everything else identical and simply vary whether it appears or not. Random assignment then ensures that any differences in perceived creativity between the two groups can be confidently linked to the disclosure label itself, rather than to pre-existing differences between participants (Bell et al., 2022). The survey was created and administered using *Sosci Survey*, an online platform that enabled random condition assignment, stimulus presentation and scale-based response capture within self contained instruments (Leiner, 2024).

4.3.1 Stimulus selection

The advertisement used as the experimental stimulus was Cadbury Dairy Milk's *Made to Share* campaign, created by the agency VCCP London. The campaign features limited-edition chocolate bar packaging printed with recognizable experiences, such as "*Who booked the flights / Who booked the hotel / Who gets to go on holiday*", playing on the idea that sharing is rarely as straightforward as it sounds (VCCP London, 2025).

This stimulus was selected for two reasons. The first comes down to its credibility. For a study about perceived creativity, we had to make sure that the stimulus being used is genuinely and demonstrably creative, not only in our assessment but in the eyes of the broader industry itself. The *Made to Share* campaign ensures this. It received a Silver Lion at Cannes Lions 2025, three golden, one silver and one bronze Lia Award 2025 as well as one Yellow, one Graphite and two Wood pencils at D&AD 2025, which all represent highly respected and prestigious awards of the advertising industry (LoveTheWork, 2025; Lia, 2025; n.d.; D&AD, n.d.b). The second reason is more practical. The *Made to Share* packaging includes a "*Limited Edition Bars*" copy, which introduces a mild persuasive element and grounds the advertisement in a realistic commercial context. At the same time, that element is subtle enough that it does not overshadow the creative idea itself or pull participants' attention away from what we are actually asking them to evaluate.

Within the survey, the advertisement was presented as a static image. Participants in the AI disclosure condition saw the image with a label reading "*Created with Artificial Intelligence*" in the top-left corner, while those in the no-disclosure condition saw the identical image without any label.



Figure 2: Stimulus with AI Disclosure



Figure 3: Stimulus without AI Disclosure

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Sampling Technique

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, using our university networks and social media outreach to reach potential respondents. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants on the basis of their accessibility to the researcher and is widely used and considered appropriate in experimental survey research, where the primary aim is to test causal relationships between variables rather than to generate population-level descriptive statistics (Bell et al., 2022; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Importantly, the random assignment of participants to experimental conditions mitigates concerns about sampling bias at the level of condition assignment. Any

systematic characteristics present in the convenience sample are distributed across both groups, preserving the internal validity of the experimental comparison.

4.4.2 Questionnaire Design

The survey was structured in four parts. It opened with a brief introduction explaining the purpose of the study, as well as the anonymous and voluntary frame of the participation. Participants then completed a small set of demographic questions covering gender, age and region of origin to provide contextual information about the sample without serving as primary analytical variables.

Following the demographic section, participants were exposed to the experimental stimulus under their randomly assigned condition. Immediately after viewing the advertisement, they completed a two-item manipulation check asking whether they had seen the advertisement before and whether they believed it had been generated by AI or not. With these questions we could then verify that the experimental manipulation was received and the reaction toward the advertisement was a first-expression.

Our measurement items were drawn from validated scales in prior advertising research and are summarised in Table 1. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To operationalize creativity and its underlying dimensions, our study adopted the validated scales developed by Smith et al. (2007), which have become widely established in empirical advertising creativity research. Through a series of experimental studies comparing award-winning advertisements with average network advertisements, Smith et al. (2007) demonstrated that consumer perceptions of creativity are driven by the interaction between divergence and relevance rather than by either dimension alone. In our study, divergence corresponds to originality, while relevance corresponds to appropriateness. Creativity was measured using three items adapted from Smith et al. (2007), capturing overall creative quality, award-worthiness and inventiveness, with the final item being reverse coded. Originality and appropriateness were each measured using four items from the same scale, covering novelty and unexpectedness on the one hand and meaningfulness and relevance on the other. Skepticism was measured using four items adapted from Qiu et al. (2025), addressing perceived deception, doubt about product quality, misleading intent and untrustworthiness. These scales were particularly suitable for the present study, as they assess creativity as a consumer response rather than as an objective characteristic of the advertisement. The complete questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

Construct	Measurement	Source
Originality	• This advertisement's ideas are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace. • This advertisement was "out of the ordinary". • This advertisement broke away from habit-bound and stereotypical thinking. • This advertisement was unique.	Smith et al., 2007
Appropriateness	• This advertisement was very meaningful to me. • This advertisement was appropriate to me. • This advertisement was useful to me. • This advertisement was valuable to me.	Smith et al., 2007
Skepticism	• This advertisement is deceptive. • This advertisement makes me doubt the product quality. • This advertisement contains misleading information and has an obvious persuasive intent. • This advertisement makes me suspicious of the ad's marketing motives and feel that the ad is untrustworthy.	Qiu et. al, 2025
Creativity	• In general, this advertisement was creative. • This advertisement should win an award for creativity. • This advertisement was not very inventive and displayed little creativity in its design.	Smith et al., 2007

Table 1: List of Constructs and Relative Measurements for the Questionnaire

4.5 Data Analysis

This section presents the analytical techniques used to examine the collected data and generate insights for the subsequent analysis and discussion. First, a scale reliability analysis was conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the constructs. Next, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the dataset and identify potential irregularities. Followed by inferential analyses with an independent sample t-test and a multiple mediation analysis used to examine group differences, explore the relationships between mediating variables and the dependent variable and test hypotheses.

4.5.1 Scale Reliability Analysis

The first stage of the data analysis involves a scale reliability analysis, carried out to evaluate the measurement consistency of the constructs used in this study. This step is particularly relevant when latent variables are measured through multiple items, as in our case, since it enables researchers to verify that each item is correctly associated with its intended variable (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). The reliability analysis was performed in Jamovi using two coefficients: Cronbach's Alpha (α) and McDonald's Omega (ω). Navarro & Foxcroft (2025) suggest that values of 0.70 or 0.80 generally indicate satisfactory internal reliability, though the appropriate threshold may vary depending on the nature of the construct being measured. For the purposes of this study, we therefore adopted a minimum acceptable value of 0.70.

4.5.2 Descriptive Analysis

The next step in our data analysis involved conducting a descriptive analysis to summarize and characterize the dataset. This phase included calculating measures of central tendency, such as the mean, median, standard deviation and range. By thoroughly examining these statistics, the descriptive analysis makes it possible to detect irregularities and outliers within the dataset that could potentially influence the reliability of the subsequent statistical analyses (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025).

4.5.3 Students's t-test

Moving on, to examine differences between the two groups, an independent sample Student's t-test was conducted. This test is used to compare the mean performance of two groups on the specified outcome variable.

Several assumptions must be met for the valid application of the Student's t-test. First, the assumption of normality requires that the data in each group are approximately normally distributed. This was assessed through a visual inspection of a Q-Q plot and histograms, as well as by conducting the Shapiro-Wilk test. The Shapiro-Wilk test evaluates the null hypothesis that the data is normally distributed. Therefore a statistically significant result indicates a deviation from normality (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). Second, the assumption of homogeneity of variance must be satisfied, meaning the population variances of the two groups are equal. This assumption can be tested using Levene's test. If this assumption is violated, alternative approaches such as Welch's t-test can be applied (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). Ensuring that these assumptions are met is essential for the reliability and validity of the t-test results.

4.5.4 Mediation analyses

Before conducting the mediation analyses, a correlation analysis was performed to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the continuous variables. This relationship was measured using the correlation coefficient (r), which ranges from -1 to 1. A value close to 0 indicates a weak or no linear relationship between variables. In contrast, a positive value close to 1 indicates a direct relationship, where both variables increase together, while a negative value close to -1 reflects an inverse relationship, meaning that as one variable increases, the other decreases. Specifically, $r = 1$ represents a perfect positive relationship, $r = -1$ represents a perfect negative relationship, and $r = 0$ indicates no relationship between the variables (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025).

In our study, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between creativity, originality, appropriateness and skepticism. Based on the results of these associations, the analysis was further extended using the Student's t-test.

To examine the relationships between the variables in more detail, we conducted mediation analyses. A mediation analysis is a statistical technique used to investigate whether the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable is explained through one or more intermediary variables, referred to as mediators (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We aimed to examine whether the effect of AI disclosure on perceived creativity is transmitted through the mediating variables originality, appropriateness and skepticism. Since multiple mediators were analyzed simultaneously, we conducted a multiple mediation analysis. This approach made it possible to assess several mediational processes within a single model and to compare the relative contribution of each mediator to the overall effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The mediation analyses were conducted in Jamovi using the General Linear Model (GLM) Mediation

Model available through the jAMM module. Indirect effects were tested using bootstrap resampling 5,000 samples, which provides confidence intervals that do not rely on the assumption of normality in the sampling distribution of the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

5 Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis. It begins with an assessment of scale reliability, followed by an overview of the sample characteristics to provide insight into the demographic background of the survey participants. Next, descriptive analyses are presented to provide an understanding of the central tendencies and variability within the dataset. Subsequently, an independent sample t-test was conducted to examine differences in perceived creativity between the two experimental groups. In addition, a mediation analysis was performed to investigate the underlying mechanisms through which AI disclosure influences perceived advertising creativity, specifically through originality, appropriateness and skepticism. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key statistical findings and the results of the proposed hypotheses, setting the stage for the final discussion.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

5.1.1 Scale Reliability

Before testing the hypotheses we looked into the reliability of our chosen item scales. Therefore, a reliability analysis was conducted for each of our four constructs to make sure the chosen items were consistently measuring the underlying concepts. Both Cronbach's Alpha (α) and McDonald's Omega (ω) were computed, where values of 0.70 or above indicate that the items within a scale are measuring the same underlying concept.

Reliability Check

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	McDonald's Omega (ω)
Creativity	0.842	0.852
Appropriateness	0.870	0.877
Originality	0.873	0.881

Skepticism	0.805	0.826
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Table 2: Scale Reliability Key Constructs

As presented in Table 2, all four constructs exceeded the 0.70 threshold for both coefficients, confirming a satisfactory consistency across all scales. This enabled us to go further with the testing of our hypotheses and take a closer look at how the variables were distributed across the sample.

5.1.2 Sample Descriptives

A total of 286 participants responded to the survey between the 27th of April and the 4th of May 2026. We had to remove 19 participants due to incomplete responses and 81 participants who failed the manipulation check, which consisted of two criteria: those who reported having seen the advertisement before and those who failed the manipulation check by incorrectly identifying the condition they had been assigned to. This resulted in a final analytical sample of $N = 186$.

Descriptives			
	Gender	Age	Origin
N	186	186	186
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	1.34	25.1	1.16
Median	1.00	24.0	1.00
Standard deviation	0.539	5.63	0.590
Minimum	1	20.0	1
Maximum	5	67.0	5

Figure 4: Sample Descriptives. Jamovi

The dataset captures respondent characteristics through three demographic variables: age, gender and nationality. The sample was predominantly female with a total count of 126 (67.7%) with male participants accounting up to 59 (31.7%) and one person identifying as “Other” (0.5%). The majority of respondents were of European origin (93.0%, $n = 173$), with smaller proportions from North America (4.3%, $n = 8$), Asia (1.6%, $n = 3$) and South America (1.1%, $n = 2$).

Gender	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Female	126	67.7 %	67.7 %
Male	59	31.7 %	99.5 %
Other	1	0.5 %	100.0 %

Figure 5: Participant's Gender. Jamovi

Origin	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Europe	173	93.0 %	93.0 %
Asia	3	1.6 %	94.6 %
North America	8	4.3 %	98.9 %
South America	2	1.1 %	100.0 %

Figure 6: Participant's Origin. Jamovi

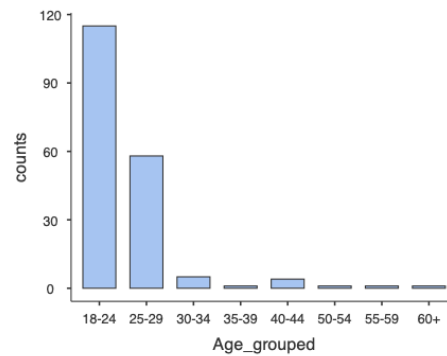


Figure 7: Participant's Age. Jamovi

5.1.3 Construct Descriptives

Across the full sample ($N = 186$), originality had the highest overall mean ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.46$), followed closely by creativity ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.45$). Appropriateness showed a notably lower mean ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.48$), while skepticism had the lowest overall mean ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.13$), suggesting that participants generally reported relatively low levels of skepticism toward the advertisement. These overall findings are presented in Figure 8.

Descriptives				
	Creativity_Mean	Originality_Mean	Appropriateness_Mean	Skepticism_Mean
N	186	186	186	186
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.97	4.04	3.43	2.47
Median	3.67	4.00	3.25	2.25
Standard deviation	1.45	1.46	1.48	1.13
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.25

Figure 8: Concept descriptives. Jamovi

To analyze the descriptive statistics, histograms and box plots were created for each construct and are presented in Figures 9 to 12. These visualizations allow for an assessment of the variables' frequency distributions and provide key summary statistics for each construct. Overall, the data appears to be reasonably well distributed and suitable for further statistical analysis.

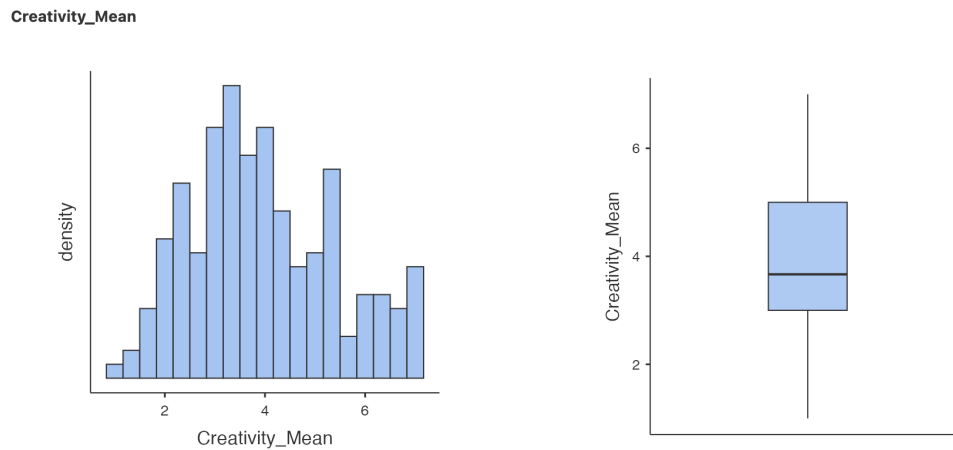


Figure 9: Creativity Histogram and Box Plot. Jamovi

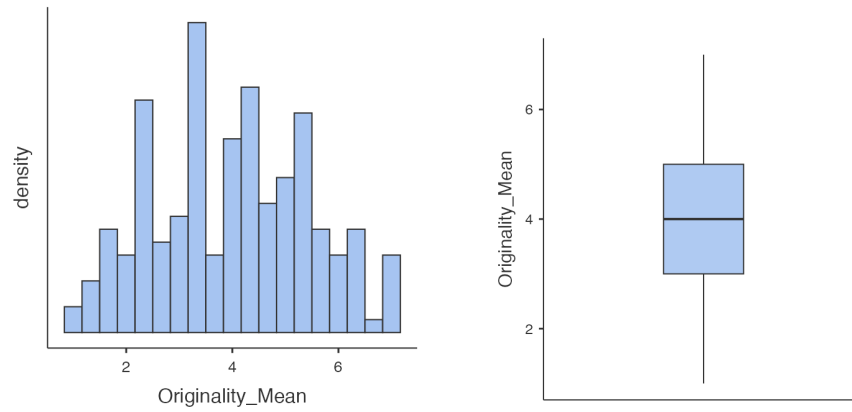


Figure 10: Originality. Histogram and Box Plot. Jamovi

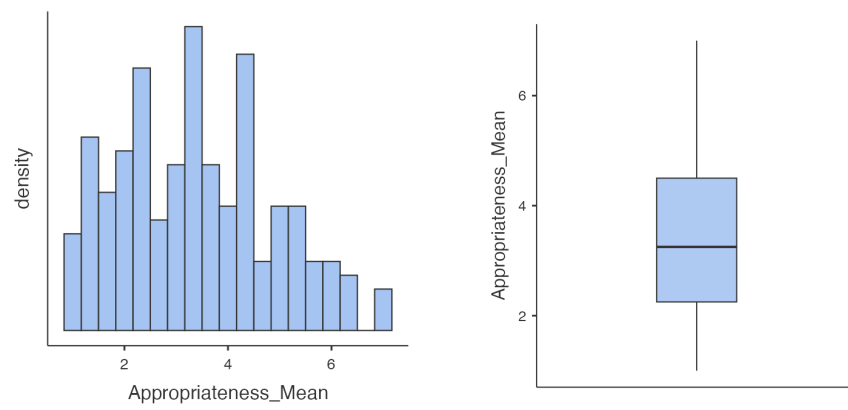


Figure 11: Appropriateness. Histogram and Box Plot. Jamovi

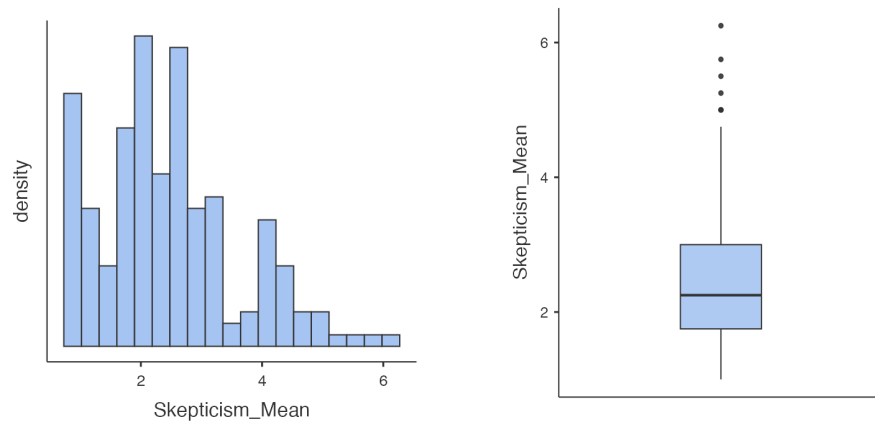


Figure 12: Skepticism. Histogram and Box Plot. Jamovi

When examining the data by condition, creativity, originality and appropriateness were consistently rated lower in the disclosure condition, while skepticism was higher (see Figure 13 for means and standard deviations). Creativity in particular showed a notable gap between groups ($M = 3.45$ vs. $M = 4.60$), as did appropriateness ($M = 2.91$ vs. $M = 4.06$) and originality ($M = 3.65$ vs. $M = 4.51$). In comparison to that, skepticism moved in the opposite direction, with higher scores in the disclosure condition ($M = 2.73$ vs. $M = 2.16$).

Descriptives					
	Disclosure	Creativity_Mean	Originality_Mean	Appropriateness_Mean	Skepticism_Mean
N	Disclosure	102	102	102	102
	No Disclosure	84	84	84	84
Missing	Disclosure	0	0	0	0
	No Disclosure	0	0	0	0
Mean	Disclosure	3.45	3.65	2.91	2.73
	No Disclosure	4.60	4.51	4.06	2.16
Median	Disclosure	3.33	3.50	2.75	2.63
	No Disclosure	4.67	4.75	4.13	2.00
Standard deviation	Disclosure	1.14	1.29	1.22	1.15
	No Disclosure	1.53	1.51	1.52	1.04
Minimum	Disclosure	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	No Disclosure	1.33	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	Disclosure	6.33	6.50	6.00	5.75
	No Disclosure	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.25

Figure 13: Concept descriptives by stimulus. Jamovi

5.2 Inferential Statistics

5.2.1 Independent samples t-test

To test the four hypotheses, an independent samples t-test was conducted for H1, followed by a multiple mediation analysis for H2, H3 and H4.

Assumptions

Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

	W	p
Creativity_Mean	0.985	.042

Note. A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of normality

Homogeneity of Variances Test (Levene's)

	F	df	df2	p
Creativity_Mean	10.8	1	184	.001

Note. A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Figure 14: Assumptions T-Test. Jamovi

To ensure the validity of the t-test results, several assumptions were examined. First, the assumption of normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which was significant ($p = .042$), indicating a deviation from normality. However, given the relatively large sample size ($N = 186$), the t-test is generally considered robust to moderate violations of normality due to the Central Limit Theorem (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). This can also be seen in the Q-Q plot, shown in Figure 15, which shows only slight deviations from the diagonal line, as well as in the distribution in Figure 9, suggesting no severe non-normality. Therefore the t-test could still be used reliably. Second, the assumption of equal variances was tested using Levene's Test. The test was significant ($p = .001$), indicating that the variances between the two groups were not equal. Therefore, the Welch t-test was used, as it is more appropriate when the assumption of equal variances is violated (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025).

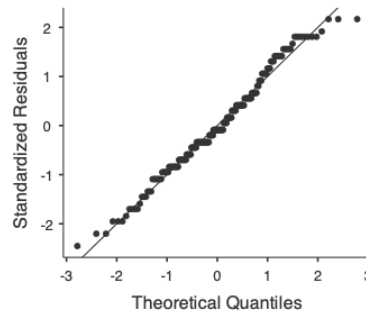


Figure 15: Q-Q-Plot Creativity. Jamovi

H1: AI disclosure reduces the creativity of advertisements.

The results show that H1 is strongly supported by the data. Welch's independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived creativity between the two groups ($t(151) = -5.67, p < .001$). The negative mean difference ($M_{diff} = -1.14$) indicates that

advertisements with AI disclosure were perceived as less creative compared to those without disclosure, a pattern visible in Figure 16 and 17. The effect size was large (Cohen's $d = -0.846$), suggesting that this difference is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference		Effect Size
Creativity_Mean	Student's t	-5.83 ^a	184	< .001	-1.14	0.196	Cohen's d	-0.858
	Welch's t	-5.67	151	< .001	-1.14	0.202	Cohen's d	-0.846

Note. $H_a: \mu_{\text{Disclosure}} \neq \mu_{\text{No Disclosure}}$

^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Figure 16: T-Test. Jamovi

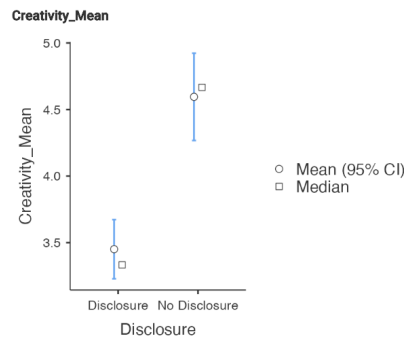


Figure 17: Creativity Mean. Jamovi

5.2.2 Mediation Analyses

Prior to the mediation analyses, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between all four constructs ($N = 186$). As presented in Figure 18 and 19, perceived creativity showed a strong positive correlation with originality ($r = .734$, $p < .001$) and a moderate positive correlation with appropriateness ($r = .660$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher ratings on both dimensions consistently coincide with higher perceived creativity. Further, skepticism was negatively correlated with creativity ($r = -.251$, $p < .001$), as well as with originality ($r = -.161$, $p = .029$) and appropriateness ($r = -.161$, $p = .028$). Suggesting that greater skepticism tends to be associated with lower evaluations across all three creativity-related constructs. These relationships confirm that the constructs are sufficiently correlated to justify the

proposed mediation paths, while also indicating that skepticism operates in an opposite direction to the other two mediators.

Correlation Matrix		Creativity_Mean	Originality_Mean	Appropriateness_Mean	Skepticism_Mean
Creativity_Mean	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
Originality_Mean	Pearson's r	0.734***	—		
	df	184	—		
	p-value	<.001	—		
Appropriateness_Mean	Pearson's r	0.660***	0.587***	—	
	df	184	184	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	
Skepticism_Mean	Pearson's r	-0.251***	-0.161*	-0.161*	—
	df	184	184	184	—
	p-value	<.001	.029	.028	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 18: Correlation Matrix. Jamovi

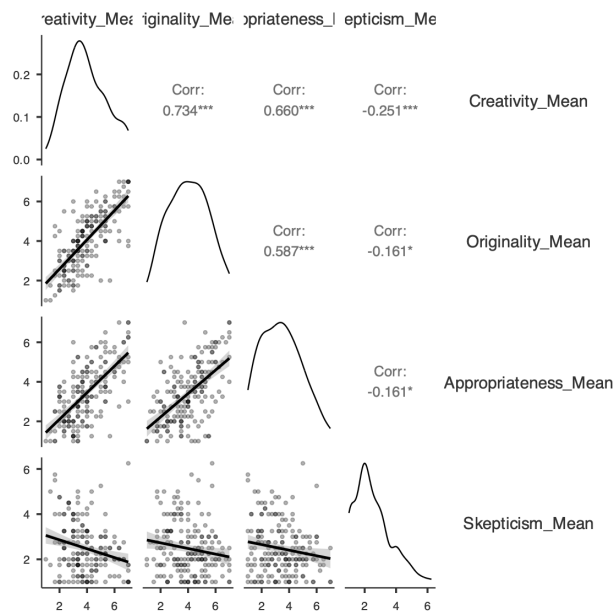


Figure 19: Correlation Matrix Plot. Jamovi

To examine the mediating roles of appropriateness, originality and skepticism, a multiple mediation analysis was conducted using the jAMM module in Jamovi (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The results of the mediation analysis indicate differing levels of support for these hypotheses. Indirect effects were assessed using 5,000 bootstrap samples and significance was judged using the 95% confidence intervals. In the mediation output (Figure 20), “Disclosure1” represents the contrast between the AI disclosure condition and the no-disclosure condition, with 1 indicating disclosure and 0 indicating no disclosure.

H2: AI disclosure reduces originality, which in turn leads to lower levels of advertising creativity.

H2 is strongly supported by the data. The indirect effect of AI disclosure on creativity through originality was significant (Estimate = 0.4340, SE = 0.1134, 95% CI [0.223, 0.679], $\beta = 0.15$, $z = 3.83$, $p < .001$), indicating that originality serves as a significant pathway linking disclosure to perceived creativity. The direct effect also remained significant (Estimate = 0.295, SE = 0.142, 95% CI [0.016, 0.573], $p = .038$), suggesting partial mediation.

H3: AI disclosure results in lower appropriateness, which subsequently reduces the overall perceived creativity of the advertisement.

H3 is also strongly supported by the data. The indirect effect of AI disclosure on creativity through appropriateness was significant (Estimate = 0.347, SE = 0.088, 95% CI [0.169, 0.545], $\beta = 0.120$, $z = 3.95$, $p < .001$), showing that appropriateness partially explains the effect of AI disclosure on creativity. This relationship is also a partial mediation as the direct effect remained significant.

H4: AI disclosure increases skepticism, which in turn leads to lower levels of advertising creativity.

H4 is not supported by the data. The indirect effect of AI disclosure on creativity through skepticism was non-significant (Estimate = 0.068, SE = 0.038, 95% CI [-0.00946, 0.1844], $\beta = 0.024$, $z = 1.78$, $p = .075$).

Indirect and Total Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		β	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Originality_Mean $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	0.4340	0.1134	0.22274	0.6786	0.1497	3.83	<.001
	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Appropriateness_Mean $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	0.3472	0.0879	0.16934	0.5445	0.1197	3.95	<.001
	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Skepticism_Mean $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	0.0683	0.0384	-0.00946	0.1844	0.0235	1.78	.075
Component	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Originality_Mean	0.8599	0.2047	0.44784	1.2611	0.2944	4.20	<.001
	Originality_Mean $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	0.5047	0.0543	0.39676	0.6116	0.5084	9.30	<.001
	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Appropriateness_Mean	1.1532	0.1997	0.74556	1.5481	0.3900	5.78	<.001
	Appropriateness_Mean $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	0.3011	0.0556	0.16920	0.4146	0.3070	5.42	<.001
	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Skepticism_Mean	-0.5667	0.1612	-0.88095	-0.2559	-0.2497	-3.52	<.001
	Skepticism_Mean $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	-0.1205	0.0584	-0.25900	0.0199	-0.0943	-2.06	.039
Direct	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	0.2948	0.1421	-0.02612	0.6394	0.1017	2.07	.038
Total	Disclosure1 $\Rightarrow$ Creativity_Mean	1.1443	0.1959	0.74736	1.5382	0.3946	5.84	<.001

Note. Confidence intervals computed with method: Bootstrap percentiles

Note. Betas are completely standardized effect sizes

Figure 20: Mediation Analysis. Jamovi

Overall, the findings provide strong support for three out of the four hypotheses and demonstrate that AI disclosure has a negative effect on advertising creativity, both directly and indirectly. The t-test results confirm H1, showing that advertisements disclosing AI use are perceived as significantly less creative than those without disclosure. This effect is not only statistically significant but also substantial in magnitude, indicating practical relevance.

The mediation analysis further explains the underlying mechanisms of this effect. For H2 and H3, both originality and appropriateness were found to be strong mediators. AI disclosure reduces perceptions of originality and appropriateness, which in turn significantly lowers perceived creativity. In both cases, partial mediation was observed, suggesting that these factors explain a considerable portion, but not all of the relationship.

While AI disclosure increases skepticism, which negatively impacts creativity, this indirect effect is relatively small compared to the other mediators and not significant. This indicates that skepticism plays a more limited role.

In summary, the results show that the negative impact of AI disclosure on advertising creativity is robust and is primarily driven by reduced perceptions of originality and appropriateness, with skepticism contributing to a smaller extent.

Nr	Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result
H1	AI disclosure reduces creativity of advertisements.	Independent samples t-test	Supported
H2	AI disclosure reduces originality, which in turn leads to lower levels of advertising creativity.	Multiple Mediation Analysis	Supported
H3	AI disclosure results in lower appropriateness, which subsequently reduces the overall perceived creativity of the advertisement.	Multiple Mediation Analysis	Supported
H4	AI disclosure increases skepticism, which in turn leads to lower levels of advertising creativity.	Multiple Mediation Analysis	Not Supported

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing

6 Discussion

The following chapter discusses the findings of the empirical analysis in relation to the existing literature and our study's research objectives. The discussion evaluates the proposed hypotheses by comparing the results of the present study with those of prior research.

We set out to understand how AI disclosure shapes advertising creativity and to uncover the mechanisms underlying this relationship. What we found is clear: when the same advertisement was labeled as AI-created, participants saw it as less creative. Overall, the results show that AI disclosure has a negative effect on creativity evaluations, both directly and through specific underlying mechanisms and therefore contribute to the literature on advertising creativity, AI-generated content and its disclosure effects.

The most immediate result of the analysis is the one captured by the t-test. H1 predicted that disclosing AI involvement in the creation of an advertisement would negatively affect advertising creativity. The findings confirmed this prediction. Participants who saw the *Cadbury Made to Share* advertisement labelled as "Created with Artificial Intelligence" rated it as significantly less creative than those who viewed the same advertisement without the label. With an effect size exceeding the conventional threshold for a large effect, the difference between conditions is not just statistically reliable but also practically meaningful. The gap in creativity between these two groups is simply too big to be attributed to random variation in responses. A simple four-word label, that adds no new information about the advertisement itself, was enough to shift how an award winning creative work was perceived. No content changed. No quality was altered. Only the framing changed.

This is exactly what our theoretical framework predicted. As the PKM explains, when consumers encounter a cue they associate with persuasive intent, they do not simply register it and move on, but they reinterpret everything about it through a new lens (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This is what Friestad and Wright (1994) meant when they explained their change-of-meaning principle and their concept of coping. Once a message is recognized as a tactic or as evidence about the agent behind the message, it stops to be just part of the content and becomes information about who is trying to influence you and why. An AI label does exactly that. Rather than merely informing consumers that AI was involved, it reframes the entire advertisement as the output of

non-human and algorithmic processes (Bui, 2025; Koning & Voorveld, 2025; Campbell et al., 2022). In doing so, it may weaken the perception that the advertising reflects human intention, effort and creative judgment, which could explain why the same stimulus was judged as less creative once AI involvement was disclosed. That reframing can be observed in the results of H1 and is costly for the perceived creativity of the advertisement.

One thing that makes this finding even more interesting is the nature of the stimulus. The *Made to Share* campaign is not just a generic or anonymous advertisement. It won several awards that belong to the highest recognitions of creative quality the advertising industry offers (LoveTheWork, 2025; Lia, 2025; n.d.; D&AD, n.d.b). Participants in the no-disclosure condition group gave the advertisement a creative quality score comfortably above the midpoint, consistent with recognizing it as genuinely creative work. While the disclosure condition participants saw the same advertisement and still rated it as substantially less creative, as shown in Figure 13. This directly confirms and extends Raj et al's (2026) work on AI disclosure penalty, which showed that people evaluate creative writing less favorably when they know it was produced with AI. What our results add is that the same pattern appears in the field of advertising creativity. Also noteworthy is the fact that an award-winning campaign still received only moderate creativity ratings and not exceptionally high ratings as in the competitions. This could be connected back to the gap of how professionals and ordinary consumers judge creative work. Award juries and creative directors often apply different standards than people encountering an advertisement in a consumer setting (Kover et al., 1995).

Additionally, the concept of the disclosure paradox introduced by Beckert et al. (2021) is relevant here. As explained before, their framework holds that a disclosure label does two things at once. It raises conceptual persuasion knowledge, making consumers more alert to persuasive intent and therefore more skeptical. At the same time, it reduces attitudinal persuasion knowledge, because the act of disclosure signals that the sender is choosing to be transparent rather than deceptive. Because these two forces pull in opposite directions, much of the disclosure literature has struggled to produce clean directional predictions and many studies have found modest or null effects on attitudes and behavioral intentions (Beckert et al., 2021). Yet our results tell a clear and directional story: the negative pathway dominated and the data points to a straightforward explanation. This aligns with what one would expect given the nature of the stimulus being an expressive, humor-driven advertisement whose appeal rests entirely on feeling relatable and human.

A further explanation comes from the literature on algorithmic aversion. Dietvorst et al. (2015) show that people often prefer human judgement to algorithmic judgement, even when algorithms

perform well. In our case that tendency helps explain why the AI label mattered so much for an expressive advertisement like Cadbury's *Made to Share* campaign. The issue was not simply that AI is a poorer fit for emotional advertisements but that the disclosure may have pushed participants to judge the advertisement less as a creative expression and more as a machine-generated output. Once that shift occurs, the advertisement loses some of the perceived human agency and creative intention that normally support creativity judgements. Wu and Wen (2021) and Song et al. (2024) reinforce this point by showing that AI is more readily accepted in objective or rational contexts than in expressive ones. This is precisely because qualities like warmth, humor and social recognition are still strongly associated with human creative judgment rather than algorithmic pattern generation. Whatever goodwill the disclosure label may have generated through transparency was simply not enough to offset that cost.

Further, H2 and H3 which predicted that originality (H2) and appropriateness (H3) would be reduced in the case of AI usage being disclosed were also both confirmed. What stands out most, however, is that the two dimensions were not affected to the same extent. Both originality and appropriateness declined in the disclosure condition, but appropriateness showed a larger drop. This pattern deserves careful interpretation, because it points to something specific about how the disclosure and implementation of AI affects the way consumers read creative advertisements. Appropriateness as defined by Rosengren et al. (2020) captures the degree to which an advertisement feels relevant, meaningful and purposeful. It represents the sense that the advertisement was made for someone with a clear and considered communicative intention. AI disclosure seems to challenge that signaling function more directly than it does for originality. An advertisement can still appear unusual or unexpected even when produced by AI, which may explain why originality held up comparatively better. But the sense that the advertisement was crafted with purposeful relevance to the consumer and the brand is harder to sustain when the attributed source is a system that consumers associate with pattern generation rather than intentional communication.

This is important from a creativity-theory perspective. Smith and Yang (2004) argue that creativity in advertising requires both divergence and relevance, and Rosengren et al. (2020) later reaffirm this as originality and appropriateness. The present findings suggest that AI disclosure primarily undermines the appropriateness side of that equation. The penalty of disclosure is therefore not only that the advertisement seems less novel, but that it loses the quality that makes creativity feel like genuine communication rather than technically competent output. In that sense, the creative cost of disclosure is more about weakened meaning than diminished surprise. This pattern is also consistent with Brüns and Meißner (2024), who show that GenAI disclosure

can weaken consumer evaluations of creative content, particularly when the content is expressive and the perceived human intention behind it becomes less clear.

Moving on to H4, which predicted an increase in skepticism, if AI usage would be disclosed, was not supported. While participants in the disclosure condition did report slightly higher skepticism and it showed a negative association with creativity, the mediation pathway did not reach statistical significance. Ultimately this means that the data does not allow us to conclude that skepticism was the mechanism through which disclosure reduced creativity. This non-finding is nonetheless theoretically informative and it becomes particularly important when placed in conversation with the broader disclosure literature. Studies such as Bui (2025) and Baek et al. (2026) have identified advertising credibility, rather than skepticism, as the key mediating mechanism between AI disclosure and downstream advertising evaluations. Skepticism, as Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) define it, is a general tendency to disbelieve advertising claims, which is conceptually close to low credibility even though not identical to it. But they can be seen as related: one reflects a stable disposition of doubt and the other a judgement about a specific advertisement's trustworthiness. We measured the former and did not find it to be a significant pathway, which could be connected to the existing literature's stronger emphasis on credibility as the operative mechanism. This suggests that the disclosure paradox, which is rooted in persuasion knowledge, as described by Beckert et al. (2021) does not fully play out the same way across all types of advertising. When an advertisement is functional and informational, consumers may find it entirely plausible that a machine produced something accurate and useful, which softens the skeptical response. But when the advertisement works through emotion, humor and human relatability, as the Cadbury stimulus does, attributing those characteristics to an AI feels inconsistent with the message itself. There is no counterweight to the skepticism, because the very qualities the advertisement depends on are ones consumers do not associate with AI. The paradox, in other words, resolves in a negative direction not by chance but because of what the advertisement is asking the audience to feel.

What the data suggests is that the creativity devaluation may happen in a more immediate way than H4 assumed. Rather than disclosure first making consumers skeptical and skepticism then pulling down creativity ratings, the AI label appears to change how the whole advertisement is experienced at once. While the PKM would predict skepticism as a natural consequence of activated persuasion knowledge, the present findings suggest that the effect operates at a deeper level than skeptical scrutiny alone, one where the perceived source of the content reshapes its meaning before any deliberate evaluative response can form. The slight increase in skepticism we observed may therefore be a byproduct of that broader perceptual shift rather than the mechanism driving it.

The research gap identified in Chapter 2 was precise: prior studies had examined the downstream effects of AI disclosure on credibility, brand attitude and authenticity, but none had placed creativity itself at the center of the analysis as a dependent variable. Even Hwang and Jeong (2026) whose study comes closest to our design, treated perceived creativity as a predictor of uncanniness rather than as an outcome shaped by the disclosure label. The confirmation of H1, H2 and H3 collectively closes that gap by establishing creativity as a dependent variable in its own right, one that is directly and substantially shaped by the presence of a disclosure label. Prior research has documented downstream effects of AI disclosure on brand attitudes and advertising effectiveness, by demonstrating that creativity itself shifts at the point of exposure. Our research opens the door to investigating whether this creative devaluation is part of the pathway through which those broader effects operate: a question that remains for future research to test. The non-support for H4, that skepticism did not mediate the effect is also telling. It suggests that consumers do not first become skeptical and then lower their creativity judgments as a result. Instead, the label appears to shift how the advertisement is perceived almost immediately, before skepticism even enters the picture.

The introduction to this thesis framed the study around a real and growing tension: an industry that has embraced AI with confidence, set against a consumer base that remains more skeptical than practitioners tend to assume. Layered on top of this is a regulatory environment that is beginning to mandate, most notably through Article 50 of the EU AI Act, the kind of transparency we empirically tested. Our findings provide interesting insights into this broader context. The data suggests that disclosure of AI involvement in creative advertising comes at a measurable cost to how the work is perceived, even when the work is, by any objective industry measure, excellent. For researchers, appropriateness emerges as the specific creative dimension through which this cost operates, pointing to intentionality and purposefulness as the psychological qualities most threatened by algorithmic attribution. For policymakers, the findings serve as a reminder that disclosure is not a neutral informational act: for expressive creative content in particular, it demonstrably reshapes consumer evaluation in ways that extend well beyond simple awareness of AI's involvement. Effective regulation may therefore need to engage not only with whether disclosure happens, but with how and in what contexts its perceptual consequences are most acute.

So to answer our research question: *How does AI disclosure in advertising influence consumers' perceptions of creativity?* We can say that AI disclosure in advertising lowers the perceived creativity. The effect is not just a small shift in the recipient's opinion. It is visible in both the

overall creativity judgement as well as in the way consumers evaluate the advertisement's originality and appropriateness.

7 Conclusion

The following chapter unpacks the broader significance of these discussed results. First, the theoretical implications are considered, exploring how the findings extend to existing frameworks introduced in this paper. This is followed by a discussion of managerial implications, offering practical guidance for practitioners navigating AI adoption in creative industries. The chapter then turns to the limitations of the present study and avenues for future research, which concludes this thesis.

7.1 Theoretical Implications

There are several meaningful theoretical insights from our research that can contribute to the growing literature on AI in advertising and consumer responses to its disclosure. In particular, our findings extend existing theories of advertising creativity, persuasion knowledge and algorithmic aversion into the context of AI advertising.

By showing that originality and appropriateness remain relevant in AI-generated advertising contexts, yet are highly sensitive to AI labeling, the results of H2 and H3 extend the advertising creativity framework proposed by Rosengren et al. (2020). Taken together these findings suggest that the framework remains viable in AI contexts, but that creativity judgments are not shaped by the content alone but also by the disclosure cues surrounding it. While prior studies examined creativity as a context condition, a predictor or a backdrop (Hamouda & Aissaoui, 2026; Hwang & Jeong, 2026), none had placed it at the center of the analysis as the primary outcome. That is exactly what we did, demonstrating that creativity is not a stable quality of the advertisement itself, but that it is contingent on the informational context in which the advertisement is received. The same advertisement can be experienced as more or less creative depending on whether it is labeled as AI-generated. This is theoretically significant because it shows that creativity judgments are not fixed properties of an advertisement, but that they are shaped by the informational context in which the advertisement is received. Meaning that the same advertisement can be judged differently once AI involvement is disclosed, suggesting that disclosure itself is a meaningful part of how creativity is evaluated in AI-generated advertising. At the same time, we also make a methodological contribution by applying an established

creativity measurement scale (Smith et al., 2007) within an AI disclosure context, demonstrating that originality and appropriateness are sensitive to disclosure manipulations and can be used as mediators in experimental disclosure research.

Our findings also speak to the PKM, but in a straightforward way as we first expected. Although the AI label led to a small increase in skepticism, this did not translate into differences in perceived creativity. This suggests that the label changed how consumers reacted to the advertisement, but skepticism itself was not the mechanism driving creativity judgments. In that sense, our results nuance the PKM literature by showing that AI disclosure matters in advertising contexts, but not necessarily through a strong skepticism response. An additional implication concerns the theory of algorithmic aversion. The findings support the argument that consumers react differently to creative outputs when they are believed to originate from AI rather than humans. Even though the advertisement itself remained identical across conditions, the mere disclosure of AI involvement significantly reduced evaluations of originality, appropriateness and overall creativity. Consumers still tend to associate creativity with human-qualities such as emotional intelligence, authenticity and intentional effort.

Overall, the study contributes to the emerging literature on AI-generated advertising by positioning creativity as a central outcome of AI disclosure in advertising contexts. At the same time the findings provide a strong theoretical understanding of how disclosure labels influence consumer evaluations and demonstrate that creativity perceptions play a critical role in explaining downstream advertising outcomes.

7.2 Managerial Implications

Our study also carries several practical implications for marketing professionals, advertising agencies and brands. At its core, we show how much the communication of AI involvement matters, not just whether it is disclosed, but what that disclosure does to the way consumers experience creative work.

First of all, our results suggest that disclosing AI in advertising can have unintended negative consequences. While transparency is often encouraged, marketers should be aware that AI disclosure may reduce the originality and appropriateness of their campaigns, ultimately weakening their creative quality. In such contexts, the perceived human origin of creativity appears to play a crucial role in how content is evaluated. As a result, we suggest that marketers should approach AI disclosure carefully, particularly in campaigns where creativity represents a

central component of the brand communication strategy. Since AI disclosure significantly reduced perceived creativity, advertisers may risk weakening the creative impact of campaigns simply by highlighting AI involvement. This is especially relevant for emotionally driven, highly expressive or award-oriented campaigns, where originality and authenticity are essential for their effectiveness.

Before conducting this master's thesis, we conducted a mock study as part of our BUSR33 course, in which we interviewed professionals at advertising agencies about how GenAI has affected their creative craft (Senkler & Staudinger, 2026). What became clear in those conversations was that AI is already deeply woven into everyday creative work. It is used to speed up production, explore ideas faster and handle executional tasks, while human judgment remains at the center of the actual concept. Yet the present study shows that consumers respond negatively the moment that AI involvement is made explicit. This creates a real strategic tension, if AI disclosure becomes mandatory. AI adoption is only going to grow, but openly communicating it appears to cost creative credibility. We therefore believe that the implication should not be to avoid AI, but to be deliberate about how its involvement is integrated and communicated. Positioning AI as a tool that supports and amplifies human creativity rather than one that generates it keeps the focus where consumers expect it to be. Emphasizing human creative direction, storytelling and strategic intent could help to preserve perceptions of authenticity. In that way, brands can capture the efficiency gains of AI without letting disclosure erode the creative impact they worked to build.

At the same time, the study highlights the importance of balancing transparency with consumer perception. This is becoming more relevant as regulations, such as the EU AI Act, increasingly require clearer disclosure of AI-generated content. If such requirements come into force, marketers will face a decision they have so far been able to avoid: how extensively to integrate AI into a campaign before crossing the threshold that triggers a mandatory disclosure label. That decision carries real creative stakes, as this study shows. Professionals will therefore need to think not only about whether to disclose AI use, but about how to structure their creative process in a way that keeps disclosure from undermining the very campaign it is attached to. However, it remains unclear to what extent these regulations will actually mandate disclosure labels in advertising contexts.

Lastly, our findings regarding skepticism are also interesting from a managerial perspective. Although AI disclosure significantly increased skepticism, it did not emerge as a significant mechanism through which creativity was reduced. From a managerial perspective, this suggests that marketers and advertisers may not need to worry that AI disclosure will dramatically intensify consumers' existing skepticism toward advertising. From a PKM perspective,

consumers are accustomed to recognizing persuasive intent in advertising and therefore approach advertisements with a certain level of caution regardless of whether AI is involved. Consequently, marketers should focus less on attempting to eliminate skepticism altogether and more on strengthening the human and authentic aspects of campaigns that shape creativity perceptions more directly. Emphasizing emotional storytelling, strategic intent and human creative direction may therefore be more effective than solely trying to reduce skeptical reactions toward AI involvement.

Summing up, the findings are highly relevant for advertising agencies, creative and marketing professionals. Agencies increasingly integrating AI into ideation and production workflows should remain aware that consumers may still strongly associate creativity with human involvement. This suggests that human creative direction, storytelling and emotional execution remain essential components of successful advertising, even in AI-assisted production environments.

7.3 Limitations

Our study provides useful insights into how AI disclosure influences perceived advertising creativity. However, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings and considering their generalizability.

First, limitations related to the sample of our study have to be acknowledged. We recruited participants through convenience sampling using our university networks and social media channels, which resulted in a relatively homogeneous participant group that was predominantly young, European and female. That makes the data well suited for the analysis we ran, but the findings may not fully reflect generational, cultural or demographic differences in consumer responses to AI disclosure in advertising. This limits the generalizability of our results to broader consumer populations and diverse cultural contexts.

Our data is also based on self-reports. Even though it was useful for capturing how participants evaluate an advertisement, it inherently carries the risk of social desirability bias and subjective interpretation. Participants may have answered in ways that reflect their idealized attitudes or perceptions rather than their actual feelings and behaviors, potentially creating a gap between reported perceptions and real consumer responses toward AI-generated advertising. Another limitation concerns the artificial setting of the experiment. Participants evaluated the advertisement within a controlled online survey environment rather than in a natural advertising context. In reality, consumers are exposed to advertisements in cluttered and dynamic media

environments, where attention levels, distractions, and competing messages may influence how disclosure labels are perceived. Consequently, the external validity of the findings may be somewhat limited. We also used only one advertisement stimulus. While this stimulus ensured strong creative quality and experimental control, the use of only one advertisement limits the ability to generalize the findings across different brands, industries, product categories or advertising formats. Consumer responses to AI disclosure may differ depending on factors such as product involvement, emotional appeal, brand familiarity or the type of creative execution. Additionally, we manipulated the presence or absence of an AI disclosure label, but did not examine how the framing or placement of the disclosure affects the creativity penalty. While this made the manipulation clear, it leaves open the possibility that different wording, framing or placement could have produced a different effect. It is plausible that more subtle, contextual or positively framed disclosures would produce smaller creativity penalties. Similarly, the no-disclosure condition presented the advertisement as entirely human-made, which represents a specific and arguably idealized comparison point.

Finally, an additional limitation concerns the nature of the advertising stimulus itself. Although participants were informed through the disclosure label that the advertisement was “*Created with Artificial Intelligence*” the advertisement was not actually generated by AI. Instead, the study manipulated participants’ perceptions by adding an AI disclosure label to a human-created advertisement. While this approach allowed for strong experimental control and isolated the effect of disclosure itself, it may not fully capture how consumers respond to genuinely AI-generated advertising content. Taken together, these limitations do not weaken the core finding of the study, but they do show where caution is needed.

7.4 Future Research

Our findings open several clear directions for future research on AI disclosure and advertising creativity, especially as there is not that much research done in this field so far.

Building on our limitations, future research should replicate this study with more diverse and representative samples. As already mentioned the current sample consisted predominantly of younger European respondents. Future studies should therefore include participants from different age groups, cultures, genders and levels of AI familiarity. That would help show whether the pattern we found is stable across consumer groups or whether certain audiences react more strongly than others. It would also be useful to look more closely at AI literacy and prior

experience with GenAI tools, since those factors may shape how people interpret disclosure and use of AI in advertising.

Creativity research should also keep looking into how advertising creativity works in the AI context. Future research should examine a wider range of advertising stimuli and media formats. We focused exclusively on static visual advertisements, while AI-generated advertising increasingly includes video, audio, interactive and personalized formats. Prior research suggests that the effectiveness of advertising creativity differs depending on the media type (Darley & Lim, 2023), indicating that consumers may react differently to AI disclosure depending on the communication channel and level of interaction. Further, Rosengren et al. (2020) also discuss how consumers may react to creative advertising through different pathways, namely affect transfer, processing and signaling. They show that originality primarily drives affect transfer, while appropriateness is more closely linked to signaling. It remains an open question whether AI disclosure disrupts these pathways to the same extent or whether it particularly weakens the signaling function of appropriateness by shifting perceived authorship away from human creative judgment. Future research should therefore examine whether the disclosure penalty differs across media formats and which of these creativity mechanisms is most affected. Looking into that could offer a more precise theoretical account of when and why AI disclosure reduces perceived creativity.

Looking at the AI label used in our study, future studies should also investigate alternative disclosure strategies. We decided to use a relatively direct disclosure label (*“Created with Artificial Intelligence”*), yet disclosure wording, framing, placement and salience may substantially influence consumer perceptions. Future research could examine softer or more collaborative disclosure framings, such as *“Created in collaboration with AI”* or *“AI-assisted creative production,”* to determine whether different disclosure approaches reduce the negative effects on perceived creativity. In addition, future studies should compare undisclosed AI-generated advertisements with both AI-disclosed and explicitly human-created advertisements in order to better isolate disclosure effects.

One particularly important finding of this study is the comparatively limited mediating role of skepticism. Which surprised us, as prior literature often emphasized trust, credibility and skepticism as key explanations for negative responses toward AI-generated advertising and disclosure effects in general. Instead the present findings suggest that creativity-related dimensions such as originality and appropriateness may play a more central role. Future research should therefore place greater emphasis on creativity-related mechanisms and further explore how consumers evaluate authentic creative effort in AI-generated advertising contexts.

We also only captured immediate reactions. That leaves open the question of whether the effects we found persist over time and what broader consequences they may have for advertising effectiveness, especially as AI becomes more normalized in advertising. Future longitudinal research could examine whether repeated exposure reduces the disclosure penalty or whether consumers continue to see AI-labeled advertising as less creative even after they become more familiar with it. Related to that, future studies could also track broader outcomes such as brand attitude, trust, purchase intention and word-of-mouth to see how perceptions of creativity translate into actual advertising effectiveness.

Another useful direction would be to work with genuine AI-generated advertisements rather than disclosure manipulations applied to human-made advertisements. Using real AI-generated advertising stimuli would allow researchers to examine whether consumers respond differently to the actual visual, stylistic or creative characteristics of AI-generated content. Additionally, future studies could introduce multiple experimental groups, such as AI-generated advertisements with disclosure, AI-generated advertisements without disclosure and human-created advertisements, in order to better distinguish whether the observed effects are driven by the disclosure label itself, the characteristics of AI-generated content, or a combination of both.

The present study's focus on originality, appropriateness and skepticism as mediating mechanisms also means that other potentially relevant variables were not included in the model. Factors such as perceived authenticity, emotional response, AI familiarity, technology readiness and broader attitudes toward AI may shape how consumers evaluate AI-generated advertising and could further explain the disclosure effects observed here. Future research could build on this by incorporating these additional psychological and contextual variables, while also extending the model to capture downstream outcomes. Whereas the current study centered on perceived creativity itself, subsequent research could examine how AI disclosure indirectly influences attitudes toward the advertisement, brand attitude, purchase intention, brand trust and word-of-mouth intention through shifts in perceived creativity. In doing so, such work would give a more complete picture of how AI disclosure effects operate and further contribute to the development of advertising and consumer behavior theory in an increasingly AI-driven marketing environment.

Finally, future research would also benefit from adopting more qualitative approaches. While the present study relied on quantitative survey methods, qualitative research could provide richer insights into how individuals interpret AI disclosure and define creativity in advertising. Such approaches may help uncover deeper perceptions regarding authenticity, human creative effort and the evolving meaning of creativity in an increasingly AI-generated media environment.

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Appendix A- Questionnaire

Introduction

Hi! We are Ole and Helena and we are two Master's students in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University. As part of our thesis research, we have developed a survey to explore the perception of advertisements.

Completing the survey will take approximately 5 minutes of your time. There are no right or wrong answers, we are interested in your personal perspective and experiences. The survey is completely anonymous and you have the right to leave the study at any time. All data collected will be treated confidentially and used solely for academic research purposes.

By clicking "next" you acknowledge that you have read the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

For further questions and clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact us:

- Ole Senkler, Lund University, ol7786se-s@student.lu.se
- Helena Staudinger, Lund University, he8651st-s@student.lu.se

Thank you in advance for your time and your participation!

Demographics

1. Which gender do you feel you belong to?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Other
- Prefer not to say

2. How old are you?

3. Where are you from?

- Europe
- Asia
- North America

- South America
- Africa
- Oceania

Manipulation Check

Please take a moment to look at the advertisement carefully.

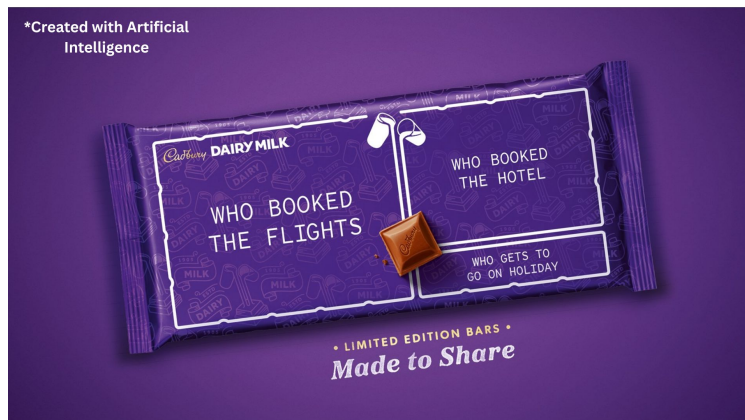
Please note that this advertisement was entirely created by humans and NOT with the help of artificial intelligence (AI).

4. Do you think this ad was generated by AI?

- Yes
- No

5. Have you seen this advertisement before?

- Yes
- No



Please answer the following questions to what extent you agree with each statement.

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree

- In general, this advertisement is very creative.
 - This advertisement should win an award for creativity.
 - This advertisement is not very inventive and displayed little creativity in its design.
 - strongly disagree
 - strongly agree
-
- This advertisement's idea is rare, surprising or moves away from the obvious and commonplace.
 - This advertisement is "out of the ordinary".
 - This advertisement breaks away from habit-bound and stereotypical thinking.
 - This advertisement is unique.
 - strongly disagree
 - strongly agree
-
- This advertisement is meaningful to me.
 - This advertisement is appropriate to me.
 - This advertisement is useful to me.
 - This advertisement is valuable to me.
 - strongly disagree
 - strongly agree
-
- This advertisement is deceptive.
 - This advertisement makes me doubt the product quality.
 - This advertisement contains misleading information and has an obvious persuasive intent.
 - This advertisement makes me suspicious of the ad's marketing motives and feel that the ad is untrustworthy.

Final message

Thank you for completing this questionnaire! We would like to thank you very much for helping us. Your answers were submitted, you may close the browser window or tab now.

Appendix B - AI Use Statement

In the development of the present master thesis, AI tools were employed to support different aspects of the writing and research process. We used the tools ChatGPT and Perplexity in the following ways:

- To get feedback on use of language, spelling, argumentation or structure and help with synonyms and wording suggestions for a more coherent flow.
- Facilitate literature synthesis by summarizing and comparing selected academic literature and help with translations.
- Support the interpretation of statistical results based on analysis conducted independently on the Jamovi software.

All the content generated and suggested by AI tools was critically revised, edited and validated by the authors to ensure accuracy and academic integrity. No generative AI tool was used to create data or replace human judgement, aligning with Lund University's ethical guidelines regarding research conduct.