Authenticity in the Age of AI: A Netnographic Study of Consumer Responses to AI-Generated Advertising

Morteza Abolhasani[a]*, Zahra Golrokhi[b], Havva Abolhasani[c],

[a]Department for Strategy and Marketing, The Open University, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom; [b]School of Engineering and Innovation, The Open University, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom; [c]Cranfield School of Management, Cranfield University, Bedford, United Kingdom

Corresponding Author: Morteza Abolhasani – email: morteza.abolhasani@open.ac.uk

Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence is reshaping advertising production, yet consumer responses to AI-generated advertising remain mixed, particularly in emotionally charged brand contexts. This paper examines responses to two AI-generated Coca-Cola Christmas adverts through a netnographic analysis of YouTube comments. Drawing on authenticity theory, research on AI-generated marketing content, and work on brand heritage and nostalgia, the study shows that resistance to AI advertising is driven less by abstract hostility to AI itself than by perceptions that AI disrupts emotional warmth, creative legitimacy, and symbolic continuity. The findings reveal four dominant themes: authenticity collapse through symbolic irony, uncanny aesthetics and affective disturbance, moral judgement around labour displacement and corporate cheapness, and heritage rupture accompanied by retaliatory consumption talk. The paper contributes to advertising research by showing how evaluations of AI-generated advertising are shaped by the cultural and emotional expectations attached to specific brands and campaign traditions.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; advertising authenticity; netnography; brand heritage; nostalgia; Coca-Cola