Is Using AI Greedy? Consumer Perceptions of GenAI Use by Underdog- and Top Dog- Brands

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is reshaping advertising production, yet consumer backlash against GenAI campaigns remains poorly understood. Field evidence suggests that backlash is partly motivated by moral evaluation: consumers interpret GenAI adoption as a signal of corporate greed. This study examines whether perceived greed mediates the effect of GenAI use on negative word of mouth (NWOM), and whether this pathway depends on who is doing the advertising. A pre-registered between-subjects experiment tests a moderated mediation model in which company size moderates the greed attribution process. Results support all hypotheses: GenAI use increases perceived greed and NWOM, greed mediates this relationship, and the pathway is significantly stronger for top dog than for underdog brands. The findings extend AI aversion theory by establishing perceived greed as a moral attribution mechanism and identifying firm size as a boundary condition that determines whether GenAI adoption is read as cost-cutting greed or pragmatic necessity.