

When AI Ads Backfire: Deconstructing Consumer Backlash to GenAI Advertising

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Abstract

Generative AI (GenAI) is moving into advertising's creative core, raising questions about consumer acceptance of GenAI content. Analyzing over 8,000 comments on Coca-Cola's 2024 GenAI Christmas campaign with large-scale data collection and LLM-assisted thematic analysis, we develop the PCS Framework to explain how GenAI backlash operates across three dimensions: Psychological reactions (authenticity, creativity, human connection), Content judgments (realism, execution, contextual fit), and Socio-ethical attributions (corporate motives, labor concerns). The framework reveals that these critiques converge to escalate backlash from content-level criticism to moral brand evaluation. For practitioners, the results highlight that using GenAI in emotionally meaningful, symbolically loaded brand contexts is risky unless it is accompanied by a clear narrative that emphasizes responsibility, transparency, and consumer benefit.

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications