

AI-Free Signalling and the Emergence of Brand Psychē in Consumer Judgement

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Abstract

This paper examines how AI-related cues in brand positioning (AI-Free vs. AI-Crafted) shape consumer responses and whether they alter perceptions of a brand's inner "life". We introduce brand psychē as a novel construct, defined as the inference that a brand possesses an inner es-sence or "soul" that carries humanlike intentionality. In a between-subjects experiment ($N = 446$), AI-Free positioning increased brand outcomes through a pathway from brand psychē to perceived authenticity. AI-Crafted, in contrast, lowered perceived psychē, authenticity, brand attitude, and purchase intention relative to both AI-Free and control. AI-Free did not significant-ly differ from the control, suggesting it preserves, rather than amplifies, an assumed human es-sence. These findings highlight that, in the age of AI, origin labels shape whether brands are seen as "alive" or merely assembled, offering deeper insight into how AI cues influence percep-tions of inner brand essence.

Track: Product and Brand Management