

Human Versus AI Design: Why Consumers See the “Human Touch” in Product Design as More Sustainable

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Abstract

Abstract As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into product design, questions arise about how consumers evaluate the sustainability of AI-designed versus human-designed products. Across a series of studies, we uncover a paradox: despite their potential for greater efficiency and environmental performance, AI-designed products are perceived by consumers as less sustainable than those designed by humans. We demonstrate that this effect is driven by a perceived lack of human touch, defined as the emotional care believed to go into a product’s design. Since sustainability is symbolically linked to values such as love and care, the absence of human involvement undermines perceptions of sustainability. Our findings contribute to research on AI perception, sustainability marketing, and the role of trust cues in product evaluation.

Track: Product and Brand Management