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Generative AI in Digital Marketing

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Research Article

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Abstract

How generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) influences digital marketing is studied based on a secondary-data review of peer-reviewed research and an official industry survey. Three research questions frame the literature review: research on GenAI implications for consumer engagement and perception; and findings on trust, authenticity, disclosure, and purchase intention. An integrative study design using descriptive-analytical procedures is adopted. Publication year 2018-October 2026 was selected for relevance, credibility, transparent methodology, and bibliographic traceability. Results are thematically compared; numerical data are reported only as explicitly published by the original source. No original survey, interview, experiment, or statistical test was conducted. Findings show that on the organizational level, 71% of respondents to McKinsey's 2025 survey report that their organizations regularly employ GenAI in at least one aspect of their business. On the consumer level, evidencedattenuatespositiveimpactssuggestoflargerpotentialconsumer response. AI increases perceptions of novelty, is viewed as more creative, and improved creativity increases responses. Responses are reduced by perceptions of diminished authenticity and effort, with diminutions worsening with algorithm aversion. Recent research shows that disclosure impacts response depending on the specific disclosure mechanism, context, and signal that accompanies the disclosure. To conclude, GenAI is not us for simply tool that replaces the human touch; it must be incorporated with human-guided principles that guard against reliance on trust, precepts of diminished authenticity, and diminished novelty. Consistent with the effort-diminishing aspect of AI and with disclosure-driven response differences, human review, transparency, second signals, and outcome-oriented measures are advocated.

1. Introduction

Generative AI is a kind of artificial intelligence that creates new text, image, sound, video, code, or other content, based on a prompt and physical or digital context. For digital marketing teams, generated content can be used to generate ideas for marketing campaigns, descriptions of products, advertisements, posts on social media platforms, interactions in customer-service exchanges, and highly customized communications. Generative AI is part of the larger evolution of marketing AI, which has been used to automate repetitive functions, analyze data, and support decision making. Huang and Rust (2021) differentiate mechanical, thinking, and feeling varieties of AI, which can be a useful framework for marketers to separate automating tasks from analysing data and supporting human-like interactions.

And for most, the allure is pragmatic: teams can generate more content, experiment with more creative alternatives, and tailor messaging across channels. In a 2025 survey, McKinsey found that 71% of respondents had used generative AI regularly in at least one business function, up from 65% in early 2024, with marketing and sales among the most frequently cited functions (McKinsey & Company, 2025). Adoption is not the same as evidence of marketing impact; efficiency, engagement, brand perception, and purchase intent are different metrics.

This research distinguishes between engagement (consisting of various expressed behaviours such as likes, comments, shares, clicks, time and repeat engagement, as well as an array of psychological engagement with a brand or creator), brand perception (consist of consumers' attitudes, opinions and beliefs about a brand such as credibility, authenticity, warmth, innovativeness and trustworthiness) and purchase intention (an expressed or implied willingness to purchase; is not identical to actual purchase behaviour). These outcomes might be affected by one another but have the potential to evoke a different response to AI-enabled communication.

The issue for research therefore, is not just whether AI makes marketing more productive, but whether its help in content, builds or breaks consumer relationships. AI may enhance relevance and novelty, but such content can also seem homogenous, false, impersonal, and not authentic enough. Disclosing in some situations creates openness, yet in others diminishes the social bond of creator content. Reviewing existing evidence is helpful here as this field is emerging fast, and findings vary by platform, content, method, and consumer setting.

This paper has an international and cross industry scope, with a focus on digital ads and social-media content. It integrates work on GenAI with pertinent research on marketing AI and consumers' responses to algorithms. It does not attempt to estimate a single effect size, nor does it report India-specific consumer estimates where no adequate evidence was found.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Marketing capability, personalisation, and scale

Huang and Rust (2021) present a strategic lens in which AI is used to replace mechanical tasks, do information processing, and facilitate interaction-based tasks. The strategy comes before the adoption of the dominant GenAI tools, but its logic applies because it explains where the value of AI resides in terms of task fit: it is easier to automate production-based tasks than those requiring sophisticated judgement, sensitivity and managing relationships. Kietzmann et al. (2018) also show how AI could be used along the customer journey to help marketers understand signals from consumers and thus give more relevant and personalized content through advertising. These works provide the strategic foundation for the use of AI but should not be over-interpreted as evidence that generative content, in particular, has a causal impact on purchase intention.

Prasanna and Kushwaha (2026) provide a review of 104 peer-reviewed papers on GenAI in marketing with TCCM (theory-context-characteristics-methodology). Their synthesis traces the growth of research from a psychological perspective and from research traditions including communication, innovation-adoption, and human-computer interaction. Its relevance to this project is the suggestion that the effects of GenAI marketing are not another intervention but depend on theory, context of use, system characteristics, and research methods. The wide range of technologies and variable dependent variables precludes a straightforward pooled conclusion.

2.2 Consumer experience, algorithm aversion, and authenticity

Puntoni et al (2021): "AI experiences, then, are not always about efficiency and accuracy. AI can also influence consumers' experiences of control, identity, social interaction, and the relationship with a provider". Importance for brand perception because consumers assess not just the content of a marketing message but what its production and delivery suggest about the brand. An accurate chatbot or ad may seem anything but when the context requires more human touch.

Castelo et al. (2019) studied algorithm aversion in four online lab studies with 1,414 + people and two online field studies with 56,753 + people. They found that algorithms were less trusted and less used for perceived subjective tasks than for perceived objective ones; perceived task objectivity was malleable and influenced trust and use. While not directly addressing all types of GenAI advertising, this research aligns with the following principal takeaway: Consumers' negative responses may hinge on whether the task is perceived as calculative or as requiring human taste, empathy or imagination.

Doshi and Hauser (2024) ran a web-based short-story writing experiment and found that having GenAI ideas betterated individual stories on creativity, writing quality, and enjoyment, especially for less-creative writers. Nonetheless, the AI-assisted stories were more similar than stories written without AI assistance. If we extrapolate this finding to marketing, we arrive at two opposite implications: While GenAI may enhance the quality of one piece of creative work, it also diminishes the diversity of creative products. When deciding on branding, efficiency gains are likely to come at the expense of distinctive branding and original human input.

2.3 Disclosure, social engagement, and purchase intention

Carney et al. (2026) manipulated AI-generated-content disclosure using behavioural data collected from Tik Tok, and a series of pre-registered experimental studies. The final archival dataset comprised n = 1,135,817 posts from n = 8,650 creators. Posts with AI disclosures received lower engagement; on the basis of the experimental studies, the authors attributed this to lower perceived effort from creators, and weaker parasocial connections. While the archival part is correlational, it can only be used to test a mediating factor; experiments can provide additional evidence for this. Further, the findings pertain to social-media, and should not be generalised to all forms of advertising.

Shi and Jiang (2026) examined consumer reactions to the disclosure labels in three online experiments. Their results revealed a contradictory nature: the disclosure labels were capable of enhancing advertising attitude, product attitude, and purchase intention via a perceived increase in novelty, and simultaneously degrading the outcomes via a perceived decrease in authenticity. This directly negates the reason to assume disclosure does no harm or always does harm, and the total response comprises competing mechanisms.

Do et al. (2026) studied AI-generated ads and transparency cues in a scenario-based study of 300 digital consumers. They show disclosure and credibility cues can enhance the perception of trustworthiness and advertising credibility: third-party certification/guarantee seals had a small positive effect on trustworthiness and purchase intentions, while QR-code signals had a small positive effect on trustworthiness, but no effect on purchase intentions. The study is exploratory in specific context, and the above association does not imply that cues would have the same effect on the different products and in other countries. However, it demonstrates that gains in trustworthiness do not necessarily translate directly into purchase intentions.

2.4 Organisational adoption and implementation risk

McKinsey & Company (2025) polled 1,491 across 101 countries on 16 to 31 July 2024. The McKinsey report highlights how many organisations are accelerating the adoption of GenAI, but are also experimenting with and adopting poorly-optimised workflows, output oversight, and risk controls. It shows, for example, that 27% of respondents from organisations that use GenAI said that employees review all GenAI produced content before using it; and that 47% of respondents said that their organisations had experienced at least one negative outcome arising from the use of GenAI. The same study shows that greater than 80% of respondents had not yet observed any significant impact on enterprise earnings before interest and taxes that was attributable to GenAI.

3. Research Gap

The literature reviewed provides frameworks for AI-enabled marketing, accounts of consumer experience more generally, and increasingly direct tests of disclosure and AI-generated advertising. There are three remaining limitations. First, measures of organisational adoption are generally reported in addition, rather than in lieu of, metrics of consumer engagement or purchase. Second, the consumer studies investigate different outcome measures, stimuli, platforms and treatments of disclosure and results are not directly comparable and should not be combined into a single estimated effect. Third, the most recent evidence suggests a tension between mechanisms, with novelty and productivity perhaps facilitating response, while perceived inauthenticity, lower perceived human effort, or algorithm aversion to the task may hinder it. This paper fills that gap through a brief, prescriptive synthesis of evidence of adoption and of the consumer response, with a clear focus on when the outcome varies. This should not be interpreted as indicating that no review has previously been undertaken; it merely adopts this integrated focus with respect to the evidence identified up to and including October 2023.

4. Research Objectives

Objective 1: To examine the potential opportunities and threats of GenAI-enabled digital marketing for consumer engagement and brand perception through published research and industry evidence.

Objective 2. To combine secondary evidence on the association of cues of trust, authenticity, disclosure and verification with purchase intention and to draw evidence based implications to the marketing

practice.

5. Research Questions

RQ1: Which opportunities and challenges for consumer engagement and brand attitudes are suggested by published evidence?

RQ2: What impact do authenticity, trust, disclosure, and verification cues have on consumers' report on behavior and purchase intention for marketing texts created by AI?

6. Hypotheses

Formal hypotheses are not being tested in this review. This paper combines results from studies with diverse samples, experimental design, outcome measures, and contexts. It does not have a harmonised raw dataset to which a valid pooled statistical test could be applied. Generating a single null and alternative hypothesis would amount to an empirical test that this second order review does not perform. The research questions are thus addressed by systematic comparison and thematic synthesis.

7. Conceptual Framework

Our synthesis framework, therefore, connects the effect of GenAI capabilities on consumer behavior via intermediate perceptions rather than an assumed direct, all-encompassing effect.

GenAI features (including content creation, personalisation, conversational responses, creative variation) ranking of relevance and novelty / perceived human effort / transparency and verification consumer interaction and brand perception (genuineness, believability, confidence) purchase decision.

The effects could also be moderated by subjectivity of the task, product category, platform format, consumer perceptions of AI, creator-audience connections, quality of human review, and nature of the disclosure/verification cue. The framework is a literature-derived model of organising, not a causal model tested with new data.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 The research design

Method This is an integrative secondary-data review with descriptive and analytical parts. An integrative study is used instead of a full systematic review or meta-analyses because there was no record of a protocol, a full database export or harmonised effect-size database constructed. It is suitable for a 'fast moving' subject that consists of theoretical research, experiments, platform data and surveys of industry adoption.

8.2 Nature and sources of data

We only used current existing sources; peer-reviewed journal articles, and an official survey report by an industry association. Sources were obtained from publisher pages and official report pages; Springer Nature, SAGE, Oxford Academic, Wiley, Science Advances/its open archive, and McKinsey & Company. There was no questionnaire, interview, focus group, experiment, or other primary collection of data for this paper.

8.3 Source identification and selection

A focused search with combinations of terms such as generative AI marketing; AI-generated advertising; consumer engagement; brand authenticity; trust; disclosure; and purchase intention. Sources were selected based on date traceability, proximity of connection to the research questions, and enough detail within them to make sense of the findings. The exclusion of non-peer reviewed sources for consumer responses, although the McKinsey report was used for organisational adoption and implementation indicators. Foundational papers that explained mechanisms that are relevant to contemporary GenAI application were retained.

8.4 Period and scope

The review includes the relevant work published between 2018-20 October 2026. The scope is international, covering social-media content and digital advertising plus additional conceptual generalizations for AI in marketing. Since the studies differ in terms of the national and the platform context, these are treated as limitations instead of one general consumer sample.

8.5 Data analysis techniques

Published percentages and sample sizes were used for reporting where possible using a descriptive synthesis. Where it was not possible, thematic content analysis was used to organize the results into the categories of adoption and implementation, creative opportunity, consumer engagement, brand authenticity and trust and purchase intention. Comparative analysis was used for identifying whether and how the results intersected or diverged. No new correlation, regression, p-value or pooled effect estimate was computed because the sources do not provide a common, comparable dataset or identical measures.

8.6 Reliability, limitations and ethics

We examine reliability by giving precedence to publisher-hosted peer-reviewed articles and government reports, and verifying bibliographic details with source web pages. Limitations: alternative operational definitions, self-report survey data, contextual-only experiments, publication or reporting bias. To minimise the risk of overgeneralisation, we differentiate between observational associations and experimental evidence, and do not generalise beyond source material (where relevant) without specification. We attribute all source ideas and findings using author-date citation and an APA 7 style reference list.

9. Secondary Data Analysis and Interpretation

9.1 Objective 1: Opportunities and risks for engagement and brand attitude

This pattern relates to the gap between what is adopted and the value delivered. Table 1 lists the metrics that McKinsey & Company (2025) has published as examples. The percentages refer to the proportions that survey respondents report, not to audited figure for all organisations globally; the denominators also vary for different figures, as shown in the table.

Published indicator	Reported value	Interpretation
Regular GenAI use in at least one business function	71%	Respondents reported regular use; up from 65% in early 2024. Indicates diffusion, not consumer impact.
Use of AI in at least one business function	78%	Respondents reported use of AI (including analytical AI); up from 72% in early 2024.
GenAI used to create text outputs	63%	Among respondents whose organisations used GenAI; text was the most common content/output type.
Fundamentally redesigned at least some workflows	21%	Among respondents reporting organisational GenAI use; implementation redesign remained limited.
Employees review all GenAI-created content before use	27%	Among respondents whose organisations used GenAI; signals uneven human oversight.
At least one negative consequence from GenAI	47%	Respondents reported at least one consequence, compared with 44% in early 2024.
No tangible enterprise-level EBIT impact attributable to GenAI	More than 80%	Shows that broad adoption had not yet translated into a reported enterprise-level earnings impact for most respondents.

Sources: McKinsey & Company (2025), the survey was conducted 16–31 July 2024 (N = 1,491 respondents in 101 countries). All values are reproduced from the report; the qualifications about the denominator are included where mentioned.

Insights: GenAI is already being used in marketing-related workflows (for generating text) but very few respondents indicated fundamental workflow rework and only a quarter checked every GenAI output. It presents a practical brand risk: unverified claims, wrong product details, and off-brand messaging will grow just as fast as good content. The fact that there is little readout of tangible enterprise-level EBIT impact at this stage should serve as a warning that adoption does not necessarily mean the business has already seen tangible results. For consumer-facing marketing, performance should be measured against audience reaction and trust, qualified traffic, conversion, and repeat purchase and customer complaints – not asset count alone.

Creative evidence is an additional criterion. Doshi and Hauser (2024) document improving ratings of individual AI-supported stories with falling diversity between stories. In marketing speak, variation techniques might enable a small group to produce a strong initial draft or modify it for segments, but selecting the same few prompts repeatedly risks creating campaigns that feel interchangeable. The likely brand-side result is not that GenAI erodes distinctiveness, but that human creativity and brand-specific content continue to serve as precious filters.

Similarly, consumer research warns about equating more content with more engagement. Carney et al (2026) test whether more disclosure in Tik Tok resulted in lower engagement in a 12m large behavioural dataset and investigate the role of perceived creator effort, as proxied by parasocial interaction. Carney et al's results provide evidence about disclose creator content; a.k.a. not all paid content. But it may also show that some content engagement is normative: the audience cares about the human presence. Therefore, social content using AI should retain a genuine human creator voice and presence.

9.2 Goal 2: Trust, genuineness, disclosure and purchase intention

Table 2

shows the results of selected consumer studies for comparison. Their results are reported side by side as opposed to a meta-analysis, because they investigate different constructs and contexts.

Source	Design / evidence base	Published pattern	Implication for the present topic
Castelo et al. (2019)	Four online lab studies (> 1,400 participants) and two field studies (> 56,000 participants)	Algorithm use and trust were lower for tasks viewed as subjective than for objective tasks.	Consumers may scrutinise AI more when marketing requires taste, empathy, or value judgement.
Shi and Jiang (2026)	Three online experiments	Disclosure had a double-edged effect: perceived novelty could improve responses, while reduced perceived authenticity could weaken them; regulatory focus moderated effects.	Disclosure effects depend on consumer interpretation, not merely label presence.
Carney et al. (2026)	1,135,817 TikTok posts from 8,650 creators plus preregistered experiments (total experimental N = 3,396)	AI disclosures were associated with lower engagement; experiments implicated perceived creator effort and parasocial connection.	Engagement may be relational and platform-specific; the observational component alone is not causal.
Do et al. (2026)	Scenario-based study of 300 digitally active consumers	Verification seals modestly increased trust and purchase intention; QR codes increased trust but did not yield a corresponding lift in purchase intention.	Trust signals may help, but trust does not automatically become purchase intention.
McKinsey & Company (2025)	Survey of 1,491 respondents in 101 countries	Adoption was broad, but output oversight and reported business impact were uneven.	Governance and measurement should be part of deployment, not an afterthought.

Sources: Castelo et al. (2019); Carney et al. (2026); Do et al. (2026); McKinsey & Company (2025); Shi and Jiang (2026). Sample sizes and outcomes are presented as per the source publication.

Interpretation: the evidence is variable but not conflicted once meaning and mechanism are in place. Being new can catch the eye but a identity and work will form an equation for how attention is translated into evaluation of brand. Transparency helps build credibility but it relies on supporting signals and needs to be context relevant to product appeals, a blanket designation, for example, alters consumer interpretation of the creator's input. It seems some combination of proportionate disclose, reviewable product claims, traceability and accountability paired with verifiable supporting evidence is most effective.

By comparison, avoid purchase intention: Do et al. (2026) find stronger verification cues help intention (slightly in their context), but a QR code increases trust without any direct benefit to purchase intention.

There is doubtless a relationship, but we do not know what intervening factors bridge the gap. What else, beyond immediate trust, affects the intention to buy: price, fit, perceived risk, stock, brand familiarity and the immediacy of the offer? Separate metrics should be collected.

10. Findings

The above findings are consistent with the two research objectives, but are restricted to the evidence available.

The widespread usage of GenAI is evident in published industry data, where text creation is the leading application. However, adoption for workflow optimisation, holistic review, and in the enterprise is variable. Adopting does not represent a step towards deeper engagement or a more positive brand image.

Finding 2 (Objective 1): While GenAI can enable creative quality and content tailoring for each individual person, heavy reliance on it to generate similar outputs may make campaigns less distinctive. Human creative oversight and brand context are still valuable.

Finding 3 (Objective 1): Social context of content impacts engagement. Data on Tik Tok disclosures show perceived effort by creator and parasocial interaction may have been factors in the content, in addition to quality; findings should not be applied rigidly to other marketing channels.

Finding 4 (Objective 2): Disclosing AI use can be a trigger of both positive and negative paths from use to consumer response (trust is the mechanism between the former and the latter).

Finding 5 (Objective 2): Verification and accountability cues may boost trust, but using trust to predict purchase intention does not necessarily lead to more conversions. Conversion should be tracked directly, not through proxies such as engagement or trust.

11. Suggestions and Implications

1. Employ GenAI as a sounding board, with responsibility carefully delegated to humans. Responsible marketing teams could designate humans as accountable for factual accuracy, product claims, tone, cultural relevance and sensitivities, and the final sign-off. Claims with significant potential for negative impact, including prices, performance claims, health or financial claims, guarantees, and comparative claims, could be cross-checked with approved sources prior to publication. This follows from McKinsey's corroboration of inconsistent review of output, and the adverse consequences reported.
2. Protection of brand uniqueness. Develop sanctioned prompt instructions for brand posture, audience language, rules for visuals, and examples of varied messaging. Have teams audit campaigns on all channels for meshing and catchphrases and use GenAI to produce options and variations instead of accepting the initial output. This addresses the revelation by Doshi and Hauser

that while GenAI was more successful at producing individual creative outputs, it drove down the diversity of results within their experiment.

3. This highlights that matching consumers' needs and task can help determine where to use GenAI (e.g., first draft, translation, summarisation, content-versioning, lower-stake FAQs). Use more human bandwidth for communications requiring empathy, emotionally triggering service failure, salient decision, or compellingly subjective brand promise. This aligns with research on task-dependent algorithm aversion and consumer experience (Castelo et al., 2019; Puntoni et al., 2021).
4. Be transparent about the use of AI. Do not rely on disclosure to be a superficial label, or to have the same impact across platforms. As appropriate or desired, combine disclosure with a transparent rationale for human responsibility and review. To not mislead the viewer that the work was entirely machine-produced or entirely human-produced, respectively, do not suggest that work produced by humans is entirely produced by a machine or vice versa. Disclosure has differential impacts on perceptions of novelty, authenticity, effort, and social connection (Carney et al., 2026; Shi & Jiang, 2026).
5. Guarantee your trust promises (signs) can be validated. For product and performance statements include a link to the source, characteristics of the product, demonstration, traceable credentials, or third-party verification, as appropriate. Do et al. (2026) suggests that not all verification indicators lead to the same outcomes, so brands should assess their effectiveness without adding badges or QR codes that doesn't benefit consumers.
6. Set a complete KPI set that includes total outcome. Monitor time and cost of producing content but also qualified reach, engagement rate, sentiment, brand trust, authenticity, click-through rate, conversion rate, repeat purchase rate, complaints, and returns. Make an apples-to-apples comparison of all content whether AI-assisted or not and consider differences in audiences, placements, ad spend, and number of impressions. Establish success criteria, and 'kill' or adapt campaigns that generate attention but no business.
7. Define privacy and governance limits. Use data within your organisation or approved vendors, not confidential customer data, personal data or commercial secrets. Audit resources, prompts, approvals and revisions for more sensitive results. Educate marketers to spot hallucinations, bias, copyright risk and misleading or toxic synthetic visuals. Have governance in proportion to risk, with a way to rapidly correct or deprecate harmful output.

12. Conclusion

This article investigates whether and how GenAI-supporting digital marketing affects consumer engagement, brand image, and purchase intention, based solely on secondary evidence. The primary research question is addressed in that GenAI increases content creation and creative experimentation, yet the number of consumers affected and content produced does not signify improved consumer results. Evidence of incongruences in human supervision, inconsistent workflow modification, and ambiguous organizational benefit point to the need for intentional adoption.

This is addressed by the second objective in as much as trust and authenticity are contingent mechanisms and not superficial outcomes of GenAI. While disclosure can enhance novelty or credibility in some contexts, it can detract from perceived authenticity or engagement in other cases. Verification cues can enhance trust but purchase intention is contingent on other factors. The overall conclusion of this paper is to employ GenAI as a supportive capability to marketers and not as a replacement for human accountability or unique brand meaning. Organisations need to test consumer outcomes, disclose responsibly, verify claims and measure conversion and long-term trust, not adoption.

13. Limitations of the Study

Limitations include the scope of the published sources and targeted, but not comprehensive search. The literature is evolving rapidly, and studies that are currently unpublished or in progress may not have been identified. Source studies varied in the use of different countries, platforms, sample frames, categories of products, stimuli, and outcome measures, so their results cannot be integrated into a common effect estimate. Some industry surveys are self-reported and may be affected by how respondents understand adoption and value. Several of the consumer experiments were conducted in highly controlled or narrowly defined contexts, while platform data were based on observational usage that may be driven by platform algorithms or characteristics of the content creators. This paper provides an evidence-based synthesis, rather than a causal estimate, of Indian consumers.

14. Future Scope of Research

Extant work should compare GenAI-marketing effects using larger, more diverse samples and genuine purchase or repeat-engagement behaviors. Cross-cultural comparisons in India may also explore the role of language, culture, digital literacy, category involvement, and prior AI familiarity in responses. Research should distinguish fully AI-generated versus human-generated content, which is then AI-assisted, and variations in disclosure wording, location, and verification logic. A lagged, longitudinal design would help separate novelty effects from lasting increases in brand trust or an ending to fatigue. Finally, direct comparisons of low- and high-risk or meaningful categories should be conducted, and reproducible effect sizes and stimuli should be reported to facilitate future meta-analyses.

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