

Ethics and Artificial Intelligence in Advertising: a qualitative exploration of consumer perception and brand accountability

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1. Artificial Intelligence: context and relevance	6
1.1 Defining Artificial Intelligence.....	6
1.1.1 Key definitions of Artificial Intelligence.....	7
1.1.2 Brief history and development of Artificial Intelligence.....	8
1.1.3 Main types of Artificial Intelligence: narrow, general and superintelligence	
11	
1.1.4 Rise of academic interest in Artificial Intelligence and marketing	13
1.2 Artificial Intelligence applied to marketing.....	14
1.2.1 The evolution of AI in marketing	15
1.2.2 Benefits and strategic impact.....	16
1.3. The role of Artificial Intelligence in advertising	18
1.4 Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in advertising	20
1.5 Reasons why Artificial Intelligence is gaining traction in advertising and	
marketing.....	22
1.5.1 Competitive advantages of Artificial Intelligence in marketing.....	23
1.5.2 Cost reduction and efficiency gains.....	24
1.5.3 Enhanced decision-making accuracy.....	26
1.6 Differences between human-created advertising and AI-generated advertising ..	27
Chapter 2. Ethics in Artificial Intelligence advertising	29
2.1 Academic and practical foundations of the research	29
2.1.1 Managerial Problem	30
2.2 The ethics of AI in advertising: Floridi's perspective.....	30
2.2.1 Theoretical framework: defining ethical advertising created by AI	32
2.3 Key ethical concerns.....	34
2.3.1 Opportunities and challenges of AI-generated advertising.....	35
2.3.2 Transparency and disclosure.....	36

2.3.3 Privacy and data exploitation	37
2.3.4 The 5Ps of AI-Driven marketing and ethical implications	39
2.3.5 Real-time customer engagement and hyper-personalization: ethical reflections	41
2.4 Authenticity and consumer trust	42
2.5 Previous studies on AI ethics in marketing	44
2.6 Examples in AI advertising: ethical failures.....	46
2.6.1 Levi's and Lalaland.ai LS&Co. Partners with Lalaland.ai (2023).....	46
2.6.2 Coca Cola The Holiday Magic is coming (2024)	49
2.6.3 Toys "R" Us & OpenAI Toys "R" Us (2024)	52
2.7 Research Gap: exploring consumer perceptions of ethical AI in advertising.....	54
2.8 Research Question	55
Chapter 3. Case Study Analysis: methodological approach, semiotic interpretation and audience perception	56
3.1 Methodological approach to the research.....	56
3.1.1 Theoretical and operational framework.....	56
3.1.2 Research Corpus: Selection Criteria.....	58
3.1.3 Overview of the Case Studies: Still Gin, Dove, eToro	58
3.2 Semiotic analysis of the advertisements.....	60
3.2.1 Case Study 1 - "Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends" (2024).....	60
3.2.2 Case Study 2 - Dove The Code Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all'AI? (2024)	103
3.2.3 Case study 3 - eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be (2024)	150
3.2.4 Comparative semiotic analysis of three advertising case studies	179
3.3 Sentiment and Content Analysis: Online Reception.....	179
3.3.1 Case study 1 - Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends (2024)	180
3.3.2 Case study 2 - Dove The Code Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all'AI? (2024)	186

3.3.4 Case study 3: eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be (2024).....	192
3.3.5 Comparative overview of Sentiment and Content Analysis across the Case Studies	197
Chapter 4. Final Discussion and Implications: understanding ethical AI advertising through audience analysis.....	199
4.1 Final discussion of results.....	199
4.2 Academic contributions	202
4.3 Managerial implications	203
4.4 Limitation of the study	204
Conclusions	206
References	208

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (*henceforth referred to as AI*) is no longer a futuristic concept, it is a present and active force in shaping the way brands communicate, advertise, engage with their audiences. Within the marketing sector, AI is increasingly used to create, optimize and personalize advertising content, offering powerful new tools while simultaneously raising complex ethical questions.

This thesis examines the use of AI in advertising, specifically addressing consumer perceptions of ethical concerns related to AI-generated advertisements. It investigates the convergence of technical innovation and value expression, analyzing how factors like authenticity, transparency, trust affect public perception and brand credibility.

This research views AI not merely as a neutral instrument, but as a cultural and symbolic entity that can influence narratives, aesthetics, emotional impact in advertising. In what manner do audiences comprehend communications generated by algorithms? Can a brand effectively communicate ethical ideals through machine-generated content? What dynamics of trust or suspicion arise in this changing environment?

The thesis is organized into four chapters to address these topics. The initial section delineates the intellectual and technological underpinnings of AI, emphasizing its significance in marketing and advertising. The second chapter explores the ethical ramifications of AI in advertising, bolstered by theoretical insights and practical illustrations. The third chapter offers a comprehensive study of three case studies that integrate semiotic interpretation with content and sentiment analysis to evaluate audience perception. The last one examines the principal findings, emphasizing scholarly contributions, managerial ramifications and potential avenues for future research in the domain of ethical AI communication.

By combining theoretical insight with empirical investigation, this work aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of AI-driven advertising

and the new forms of meaning, influence, and responsibility it brings to contemporary brand communication.

Chapter 1. Artificial Intelligence: context and relevance

This chapter offers a thorough introduction to artificial intelligence, detailing its fundamental principles and technological progression.

The latter section of the chapter is on the implementation of AI in marketing, examining its impact on strategy and consumer interaction. Significant attention will be directed toward the role of AI in advertising, examining its evolution and the changes it has instigated.

Subsequently, the discussion will address the key factors contributing to the growing success of AI in both marketing and advertising. These encompass the creation of competitive advantages, cost minimization, improved operational efficiency, and augmented precision in decision-making procedures.

The chapter will ultimately finish with a comparative comparison of human-generated commercials and those produced by AI, emphasizing their distinct traits, advantages, and constraints.

1.1 Defining Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence has emerged as one of the most transformative technologies of the 21st century, impacting an expanding range of sectors, particularly in marketing and advertising. Prior to exploring its specific applications, it is essential to understand the true nature of AI, its evolution across time, and the fundamental rules that govern its functionality.

This section offers a comprehensive overview of AI, beginning with a brief historical context and an analytical examination of the most significant definitions. It subsequently explores the principal classes of AI (*narrow*, *general*, *superintelligence*), while

emphasizing the essential strategies and methodologies that enable AI systems to perform intricate tasks. Particular emphasis is placed on the function of narrow AI in marketing, where its practical relevance is most evident at present. The section concludes with a bibliometric analysis that demonstrates the swift expansion of scholarly interest in the convergence of AI and marketing.

1.1.1 Key definitions of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (*henceforth referred to as AI*) is described by Russell and Norvig (2003) as "*intelligence that utilizes sensors to perceive and effectors to respond to the environment*" (Chintalapati, S. et al. 2022, p. 39). Siau (2017) characterizes AI as "*intelligence demonstrated by machines*" (Chintalapati, S. et al. 2022, p. 39). These definitions emphasize that AI is not merely an abstract notion; it constitutes a field of study with concrete applications across many domains, including robots and data processing.

One of the pioneers of artificial intelligence, John McCarthy, describes AI as "*the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs*" in his seminal work. McCarthy also notes that AI is "*related to the similar task of using computers to understand human intelligence, but AI does not have to confine itself to methods that are biologically observable*" (McCarthy 2007, p. 2). This perspective offers a functional and engineering-oriented approach, distinguishing AI from simply emulating human cognitive frameworks and emphasizing its distinct problem-solving capabilities.

Kaplan, et al. take a managerial and data-focused approach to define AI as "*a system's ability to interpret external data correctly, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation*" (Kaplan, et al. 2019, p. 40). This description strongly resonates within the domains of business and marketing, highlighting the capacity of AI systems to dynamically adjust their plans in

response to new facts. This versatility is essential for developing customized client experiences and enhancing marketing strategies.

From a behaviorist angle, Poole, Goebel (1998) describe AI as the quest to make computers act “*like humans more human like fashion and in much less time than a humans take*” (Khanzode & Sarode, 2022, p. 31). This method establishes a connection between AI and the replication of intelligent behavior, which is particularly advantageous in sectors such as conversational agents, generative advertising, and customer service bots.

The European Commission’s High-Level Expert Group on AI (2019) has come up with a modern and policy-relevant definition:

AI systems are software (and possibly also hardware) systems designed by humans that, given a complex goal, act in the physical or digital dimension by perceiving their environment through data acquisition, interpreting that collected structured or unstructured data, reasoning on the knowledge, or processing the information, derived from this data and deciding the best action(s) to take to achieve the given goal.
(Stahl, et al. 2022, p. 2).

This comprehensive perspective integrates observation, reasoning, and action, components increasingly prominent in AI-driven marketing platforms and automation solutions.

These definitions underscore the intricate nature of AI: it is not merely a technological construct grounded in engineering and logic, but also a medium for facilitating human-like interactions. Furthermore, it functions as a strategic instrument that promotes adaptive behavior in data-driven environments such as marketing.

1.1.2 Brief history and development of Artificial Intelligence

The evolution of Artificial Intelligence is a compelling narrative, progressing incrementally via notable theoretical developments, enhancements in computing, and the

practical demands of several sectors. The notion of artificial intelligence originated in 1950, when Alan Turing introduced the "*Turing Test*" to assess whether a machine might exhibit human-like intellect (Kaul, et al.; 2020).

The Dartmouth Conference in 1956 marked a pivotal moment for the field, as distinguished scientists convened, and John McCarthy coined the term "*Artificial Intelligence*", defining it as the discipline focused on creating intelligent machines (Amisha, et al. 2019. Hamet, et al. 2017). These visionaries argued that AI would eventually match, and potentially exceed, human cognitive abilities (Kaul, et al. 2020; Hirani, et al. 2024).

In the late 1970s, AI research was largely centered around symbolic reasoning and rule-based systems. Innovative expert systems, like MYCIN and CASNET, were developed to assist in clinical decision-making by applying structured inference techniques to medical knowledge (Kaul, et al. 2020).

Unfortunately, these early systems were constrained by the limited computing power of the era and had difficulty managing uncertainty, which led to a growing sense of skepticism. These issues, combined with overly ambitious expectations, resulted in two significant "*AI winters*": "*signifying a period of reduced funding and interest and subsequently fewer significant developments*" (Kaul, et al. 2020, p. 808) in the 1970s and late 1980 (Lee, et al. 2024; Hirani, et al. 2024).

The early 2000s saw a significant comeback in the field, fueled by the emergence of large datasets, enhanced processing power and innovative algorithmic techniques. This era marked the ascent of machine learning (ML), "*the process of using data and algorithms to make predictions*" (Hirani, et al. 2024, p. 3); and shortly after, deep learning (DL) took the stage, utilizing neural networks to enable machines to learn from data with minimal human intervention (Kaul, et al. 2020).

While the concept of deep learning had been around since the 1980s, it really captured the spotlight in the 2010s, especially after major breakthroughs in image and speech

recognition (Hirani, et al. 2024). These developments set the stage for real-world applications in various fields, including marketing, where AI started to enhance personalized customer experiences, predict behaviors and support data-driven decision-making (Hirani, et al. 2024).

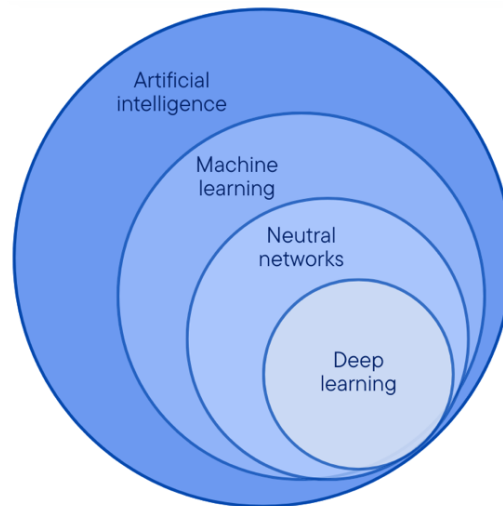


Figure 1. A concentric circle diagram demonstrating the relationships between different types of artificial intelligence (Reproduced by the author with Canva from Hirani, R.; et al.; 2024, p.3. from Hand, D.J.; 2020, April 15).

Lately, AI has been making some serious strides, thanks to more sophisticated architectures. There are these “*black box*” models that people love for their predictive abilities, but they often get flak for being hard to understand. Then we have “*glass box*” models, which are all about transparency and earning user trust (Lee, et al. 2024). For marketers, knowing the difference is key to finding that sweet spot between being effective and being accountable, particularly in areas like programmatic advertising, personalization and consumer profiling (Lee, et al. 2024).

The latest breakthrough in AI technology is the rise of generative AI, particularly large language models, such as OpenAI’s GPT. These models have significantly enhanced what machines can do creatively and communicatively, allowing for the automatic generation of text, images and videos (Hirani, et al. 2024). Their swift integration into various fields has created exciting opportunities for marketing professionals, ranging from AI-generated ad content to tailored brand messaging.

The evolution of artificial intelligence has come a long way, starting from basic logic-based systems to the sophisticated generative and autonomous AI models we have now. This journey has continually broadened its capabilities and significance (Hirani, et al.; 2024).

1.1.3 Main types of Artificial Intelligence: narrow, general and superintelligence

As reported by Saghiri, et al. (2022):

From a historical point of view, the evolution of AI-based systems starts with artificial narrow intelligence (ANI), then continues with artificial general intelligence (AGI), and finally meets artificial super intelligence (ASI), which will surpass human capabilities in all dimensions.

(Legg, S., et al. 2007. Legg, S., 2008).

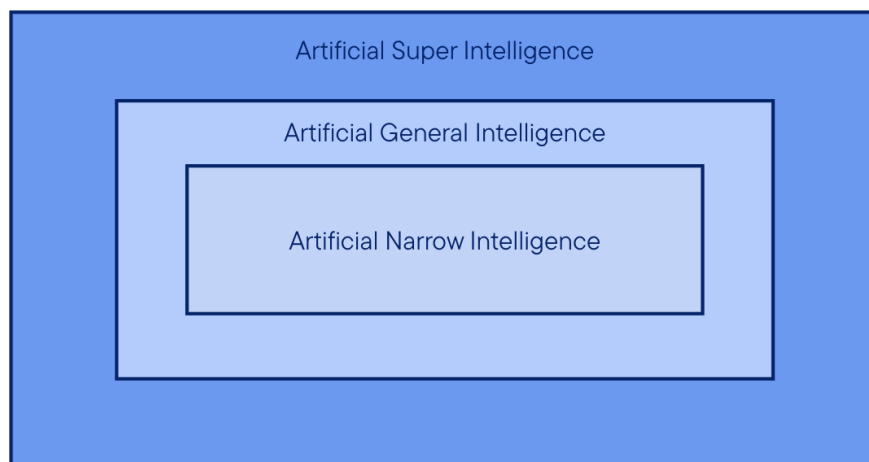


Figure 2. Venn diagram for definitions of the types of artificial intelligence (AI); (Reproduced by the author with Canva from Saghiri, et al. 2022, p. 2).

During the conference presentation for The Millennium Project, Jerome C. Glenn (2021) provided a comprehensive review of these three principal categories of artificial intelligence.

Glenn emphasized that Narrow AI presently dominates, with systems engineered to do certain tasks, such as diagnosing illnesses or operating vehicles, inside defined parameters (Glenn; 2021). An AI capable of detecting cancer cannot transition to operating a vehicle. Glenn underscored that although Narrow AI enables substantial automation, its functionalities remain limited, rendering its impacts more foreseeable and controllable via linear forecasting models.

Glenn explored the concept of General AI, perceiving it as a system capable of integrating information from diverse domains, adapting to novel difficulties, and generating answers akin to human cognition. He clarified that even AI with "*human-level*" skills would fundamentally differ from human cognition, depending instead on large, dynamic information networks such as the Internet of Things (Glenn; 2021).

Frerichs, as cited in Damar et. Al. (2024) adds to this by defining General AI as "*an AI capable of performing any general task that is asked of it*" (Damar et al. 2024, p. 86), although it is still in the early stages of development. This viewpoint emphasizes that General AI is still an aspirational objective that we have not yet completely realized.

Artificial Superintelligence (*ASI*) is a concept that a form of AI capable of exceeding human intelligence in ways that are difficult to conceive (Glenn; 2021). Glenn (2021) warned that the emergence of ASI signifies a critical juncture, where even little errors in the development of general AI could lead to unpredictable and potentially unmanageable consequences (Glenn; 2021). Aithal (2023) asserts that ASI would exhibit superior cognitive capabilities, autonomous learning, and independent decision-making across diverse domains, hence presenting significant ethical and governance challenges (Aithal; 2023).

Currently, all AI applications in use can be categorized as Narrow AI (Buxmann, et al. 2021; Moser, 2022). This encompasses a wide range of services, such as speech recognition, recommendation systems, and predictive analytics. Narrow AI is especially important in marketing, as companies utilize it to extract insights from extensive datasets, tailor their advertising material, segment audiences and forecast customer behavior

(Agrawal, et al. 2019; Damar, et al. 2024). Examples of NAI, like virtual assistants, such as Amazon's Alexa (Goosen, et al. 2018) and Apple's Siri (Damar, et al. 2024, and the recommendation algorithms utilized by Netflix and Spotify (Chintalapati, et al. 2022, p. 45), exemplify limited AI in operation.

1.1.4 Rise of academic interest in Artificial Intelligence and marketing

The theoretical underpinning of AI has been extensively examined, although its practical applications in particular industries continue to attract increasing academic attention.

The convergence of AI and marketing has resulted in a notable rise in research publications throughout the years. A bibliometric analysis underscores this tendency, indicating a significant increase in the volume of academic papers published on the subject. A manual search conducted by me on Google Scholar, utilizing specific time intervals, reveals that in 2015, around 4,550 publications on AI in marketing were released, increasing to 13,500 in 2020 and escalating to 25,500 in 2024. This exponential rise signifies the escalating importance of AI in marketing tactics and highlights the academic community's ongoing commitment to investigating its ramifications and developments.

Complementing the humongous opportunity that currently exists in the marketplace (Kumar, et al. 2019; Pitt, et al. 2018), the topic of AI-powered marketing has been increasing in relevance and attracting growing attention among the world's researchers (Chintalapati, et al. 2022).

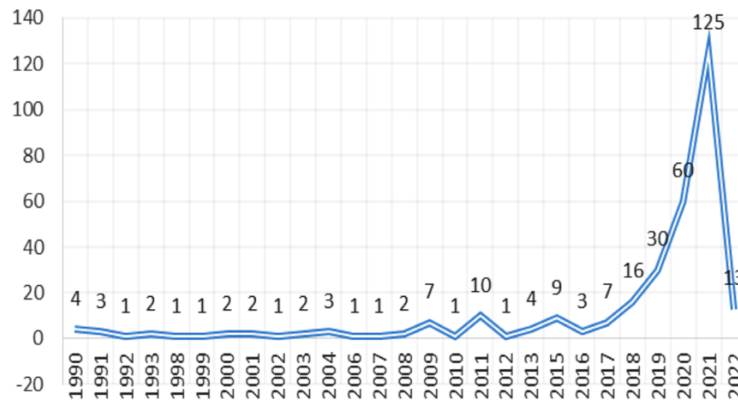


Figure 3. Publication trend of AI in marketing (Source: J. Thakur, et al. 2023, p. 5).

Figure 3 illustrates the development in the publication of research on AI in marketing from 1990 to 2022, including the annual number of publications. (J. Thakyr, et al. 2023). The study highlights that the United States is the country with the highest number of publications (87 articles, 2,106 citations), followed by Germany (726 citations, 17 articles) and Australia (215 citations, 21 articles) (Thakur, J., et al. 2023, p. 143).

1.2 Artificial Intelligence applied to marketing

As artificial intelligence revolutionizes various industries, marketing emerges as one of the most significantly affected sectors. The increasing capability of AI to analyze extensive databases, discern trends, and automate intricate decision-making processes has radically transformed modern marketing techniques. This technological transition allows organizations to create more tailored and data-informed experiences for their customers, transforming brand engagement with their audiences.

This section will analyze the incorporation of artificial intelligence in marketing by investigating three primary dimensions: the historical development of AI in marketing and the consequent strategic advantages and business ramifications.

1.2.1 The evolution of AI in marketing

Technological improvements have consistently been important in revolutionizing marketing, illustrating how AI may effortlessly assimilate into this domain to foster innovation (Siau, 2017; Wirth, 2018). As Kumar, et al. (2019) highlight, “*when technology works on a personal level, it creates an endearing bond with users, when marketers tap into such a bond, the potential for customer value creation is enormous*” (Kumar, et al 2019, p. 137). This increasing reliance on AI in marketing has given rise to Artificial Intelligence Marketing (AIM), a field that leverages AI technologies to optimize and improve key marketing functions. Yau, et al. (2021) stress that “*Artificial intelligence marketing (AIM) uses AI to automate the curation of a massive amount of data and information related to marketing mix in order to create knowledge*” (Yau, et al. 2021, p. 2).

Technological advancements have always been a game changer in the marketing world, showing us just how well AI can fit into this arena to spark innovation (Siau, 2017; Wirth, 2018).

Kumar, et al. (2019) assert that when technology engages on a personal level, it fosters a significant relationship with people (Kumar, et al. 2019). Conversely, when marketers use that link, the potential for generating consumer value is substantial.

The increasing reliance on AI in marketing has resulted in the development of Artificial Intelligence Marketing (AIM), a domain that use AI technology to optimize and refine critical marketing operations.

Iyelolu, et al. (2024) assert that AI enhances personalization by enabling real-time modifications (Iyelolu, et al. 2024). This is attributable to its ability to swiftly and precisely process extensive data sets. Utilizing techniques such as predictive analytics, natural language processing (NLP), and advanced consumer segmentation algorithms, firms may disseminate marketing communications that are both current and customized to the tastes of their audience. This results in enhanced engagement and a significant

increase in conversion rates. An exemplary illustration of this is the use of AI-driven recommendation systems by platforms such as Amazon and Netflix to scrutinize user behavior and provide material that significantly resonates (Gomez-Uribe, Hunt, 2015).

Furthermore, AI-driven personalization guarantees that customer experiences are not only prompt but also tailored to the context, enhancing the relationship between consumers and brands. According to Iyelolu, et al. (2024), 80% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase from brands that deliver personalized experiences, which underscores the strategic importance of AI in contemporary marketing (Iyelolu, et al. 2024).

However, the authors Iyelolu, et al. (2024) also warn that this progress carries ethical obligations: businesses must confront data privacy challenges and comply with regulations such as the GDPR to prevent misuse and cultivate trust (Iyelolu, et al. 2024).

1.2.2 Benefits and strategic impact

A crucial aspect of AI-driven marketing is the creation of comprehensive consumer profiles.

These profiles extend beyond basic demographics, integrating information, such as purchasing behavior, online activity and consumer engagement with digital content.

This wealth of information helps businesses fine-tune their targeting strategies and segment their audiences more effectively (Theodorakopoulos, et al. 2024).

The authors, quoting Onofrei et al. (2022) highlight that “*comprehensive customer profiles are produced, comprising not only the purchase behavior, but also the browsing activity, interaction with content and preferred communication paths*” (Theodorakopoulos, et al. 2024, p. 10), which allows for a more customized marketing approach.

Furthermore, AI improves behavioral analysis, allowing organizations to shift from traditional marketing methods to more adaptive techniques that respond to consumer preferences.

“The capacity to analyze large amounts of data has facilitated a transition towards tailored marketing strategies that adapt to the distinct interests and habits of individual consumers” (Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou, 2024, p.2), thus improving engagement by proactively addressing customer needs.

AI has a knack for using both demographic and third-party data to really sharpen targeted advertising and personalized marketing strategies. As Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou (2024) point out, *“the use of demographic information is of the utmost importance to businesses for refining targeted marketing and personalization tactics”* (Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou, 2024, p.11). This kind of data, like age, gender, location, income level, education, helps companies categorize their customers based on shared traits and preferences (Sandy, et al. 2013). Consequently, marketing initiatives can target the appropriate demographic, enhancing efficiency and conversion rates.

The influence of AI-driven personalization is not merely theoretical; it is quantifiable. Iyelolu, et al. (2024) reveal that personalized email campaigns can drive up to six times more transactions than those that aren't personalized, personalized website experiences can increase conversion rates by as much as 30% (Iyelolu, et al. 2024).

Moreover, AI-driven recommendation systems enhance the consumer experience by studying historical behaviors and providing highly pertinent product suggestions.

As Kambatla, et al. (2014) state, *“big data analytics allows companies to offer highly customized product recommendations by using individual tastes and purchases behavior, therefore greatly expanding the possibilities for conversion”* (Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou, 2024, p. 14). This form of customization significantly enhances the interaction between brands and consumers, resulting in increased satisfaction and loyalty.

A significant advantage of employing AI in marketing is its capacity for constant learning and enhancement. Incorporating machine learning algorithms enables organizations to optimize and refine their marketing tactics in real-time.

As Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou (2024) point out, “*machine learning algorithms are quite important when it comes to developing customized recommendations more effectively over time*” (Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou, 2024, p. 14). This adaptability helps keep engagement levels up and allows campaigns to grow and change with the ever-evolving expectations of consumers (Bradlow, et al. 2017).

In addition to personalization and data optimization, AI is fundamentally altering the principles of marketing management. Its ability to swiftly adjust to business requirements and develop tailored engagement methods has resulted in unique models specifically intended for AI-driven environments.

Epstein (2018) highlights how cutting-edge AI solutions can rapidly respond to shifting market dynamics, offering strategic communication tools that are not only effective but also profitable (Epstein, 2018).

In this light, Roetzer (2017) introduces a revamped marketing mix, the 5Ps: Planning, Production, Personalization, Promotion, Performance, which captures the multifaceted influence of AI on today’s marketing practices (Roetzer, 2017).

1.3. The role of Artificial Intelligence in advertising

Artificial Intelligence has fundamentally altered the advertising scene, transitioning from a distant concept to an essential component fostering innovation and efficiency today.

What started as a tool for improving automation and data analysis has now become integral to every stage of advertising, from brainstorming creative ideas to pinpointing the right audience and fine-tuning performance (Ford, et al. 2023).

Advancements in machine learning, natural language processing (*NLP*), and computer vision enable marketers to create highly tailored, data-driven campaigns that effectively engage customers.

As highlighted by Ford et al. (2023), Artificial intelligence enables advertisers to optimize critical functions such as ad creation, audience targeting, media planning, leading to more intelligent and responsive marketing tactics (Ford, et al. 2023).

A crucial part of this transformation is the use of cutting-edge techniques like natural language processing (*NLP*), image recognition (*IR*) and speech recognition (*SR*) (Ford, et al. 2023). Together, these tools help advertisers in various advertising functions, including ad optimization, automated ad generation, and personalization (Tripathi, et al. 2023).

This potential is further amplified by Generative Artificial Intelligence (*GenAI*), a branch of AI that can independently create new content, whether it is text, images, audio or video, drawing from its training datasets. As noted by Park, et al. (2024), Generative AI is shaking up the digital advertising landscape by facilitating large-scale, dynamic content creation (Park, et al. 2024). This allows brands to tailor their messaging in real time across various platforms. Techniques like Generative Adversarial Networks (*GANs*), variational autoencoders (*VAEs*) and diffusion models are being utilized to craft personalized visuals and stories that respond to user behavior and preferences (Goodfellow; et al. 2014; Kingma, et al. 2019; Sohl-Dickstein, et al. 2015).

Notable campaigns, like the Cadbury's "*NotJustACadburyAd*" (Cadbury Celebrations; 2020), show just how GenAI can be used to craft localized and personalized advertising experiences (Ford, et al. 2023). This really highlights AI's knack for scaling creativity with minimal human input (Ford, et al. 2023).

Furthermore, with an increasing number of individuals depending on smart gadgets and AI-driven assistants such as *Siri*, *Alexa*, *Google Assistant*, there is a distinct transition towards voice-centric and conversational marketing. This trend is facilitating more

interactive and engaging partnerships between customers and brands (Ford, et al. 2023; Park, et al. 2024).

It is a significant change in the advertising world, where human creativity meets machine intelligence to create content that is not just visually appealing but also contextually smart and ethically aware. Recent analyses emphasize that the path of AI in advertising is moving towards deeper integration of GenAI and deep learning, making AI an essential player in the future of brand communication (Park, et al. 2024).

1.4 Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in advertising

The evolution of Artificial Intelligence in advertising has progressed through various critical technological and conceptual phases.

According to Martin (2024), before the AI era, advertisers depended on heuristic models and manual optimization, crafting their strategies based on historical trends, demographic information and overall sales performance (Martin, 2024).

With the rise of digital platforms, advertisers gained access to more detailed user data, which allowed them to shift from broad audience segmentation to targeting based on user behavior (Martin, 2024).

However, during this early digital phase, campaign optimization was still largely a manual effort and often unsustainable, especially as customer journeys became more complex and involved multiple touchpoints (Martin, 2024). This constraint necessitated the implementation of programmatic advertising technologies, which facilitated real-time bidding and automated ad placements.

However, as noted by Park, et al. (2024), these systems initially lacked the predictive intelligence necessary for optimizing budget allocation and message delivery on a larger scale (Park, et al. 2024).

The initial application of AI in digital advertising involved the creation of Multi-Touch Attribution (*MTA*) models, which allocated credit to multiple client encounters before a conversion. In contrast to last-click models, AI-enhanced multi-touch attribution enabled advertisers to assess the impact of each touchpoint with more precision (Martin, 2024; Zhou, et al. 2024).

The Causal Attention Multi-Touch Attribution (*CAMTA*) model, proposed by Zhao, et al. (2024), is a notable advance in the discipline. It utilizes attention mechanisms and causal inference to successfully reduce attribution bias. CAMTA intelligently allocates varying weights to each touchpoint according to its genuine causal impact on user conversion, resulting in a significant enhancement in our evaluation of advertising efficacy (Zhao, et al. 2024).

As noted by Martin (2024), CAMTA also plays a crucial role in optimizing the allocation of advertising budgets, helping to lower the cost per action (*CPA*) and boost conversion rates (*CVR*) (Martin, 2024).

The significance of AI in advertising is increasing, particularly with the rising application of reinforcement learning (*RL*) methodologies. These systems conceptualize ad delivery as a Markov Decision Process (*MDP*), wherein the various states denote the user's contextual knowledge, actions pertain to ad placement, and rewards signify engagement outcomes such as clicks or sales (Liu et al. 2024).

According to Martin (2024), reinforcement learning enables platforms to continuously optimize their advertising tactics in real time, acquiring insights from user interactions to improve success across key metrics (Martin, 2024).

Lately, the advertising world has gone through a significant transformation thanks to the rise of Generative AI and Large Language Models (*LLMs*). These innovative models, like GPT-3, DALL·E, and various diffusion-based systems, make it possible to automatically create personalized advertising content on a large scale (Park, et al. 2024).

According to Park, et al. (2024), technologies such as GANs, VAEs, and diffusion models enable the dynamic production of images, videos, and text stories that cater to individual user preferences (Park, et al. 2024).

On top of that, LLMs improve customer engagement by powering smart chatbots and personalized recommendation systems, which can manage thousands of customer inquiries at once (Park, et al. 2024).

Park, et al. (2024) carried out a bibliometric analysis that uncovered the key themes in AI advertising research. They found that terms like “*deep learning*”, “*natural language processing*”, “*recommender systems*” and “*sentiment analysis*” are at the forefront (Park, et al. 2024, p. 21).

Park, et al. (2024) analysis of co-occurrence networks shows how generative models are becoming increasingly important for tasks like campaign optimization, social media monitoring, and predicting user behavior, particularly on platforms such as Twitter (Park, et al. 2024).

The United States, China and India are identified as the leading entities in this study domain, with an increasing emphasis on ethical concerns such as transparency and prejudice in AI-driven advertising systems.

1.5 Reasons why Artificial Intelligence is gaining traction in advertising and marketing

Artificial Intelligence has numerous advantages that enhance productivity, accuracy, and customization. The Marketing AI Institute emphasizes the utilization of AI to optimize and improve diverse advertising procedures, including the creation of ad creatives, budget allocation, performance forecasts, and competitive analysis (Kaput, 2024). These tools facilitate the rapid and precise planning of campaigns while also allowing for the large-

scale manufacture of several ad variations, hence enhancing testing and audience segmentation.

Shan (2024) asserts that AI significantly enhances click-through and conversion rates by leveraging user behavior data, interests and preferences to create personalized advertising material (Shan 2024). These AI systems may alter promotional messaging instantaneously, enhancing their relevancy and engagement with consumers. Moreover, machine learning models analyze historical performance data to predict campaign outcomes, allowing marketers to proactively optimize their plans for enhanced returns on investment.

Based on these insights, Iyelolu, et al. (2024) assert that AI-driven tailored marketing significantly enhances client engagement and loyalty (Iyelolu, et al. 2024). Utilizing techniques such as natural language processing (*NLP*) and predictive analytics, AI enables highly personalized interactions and recommendations, aligning marketing messages with the evolving expectations of digitally literate consumers. This strategy not only enhances conversions but also fosters enduring relationships.

The academic literature continually emphasizes the strategic advantages that AI provides to marketing. It facilitates extensive customization, reduces operational expenses, and provides actionable insights via advanced data analysis (Khanzode, et al. 2020).

Collectively, these benefits provide AI an indispensable instrument in contemporary advertising, transforming conventional marketing methods into data-driven, customer-centric strategies.

1.5.1 Competitive advantages of Artificial Intelligence in marketing

A primary advantage of AI is its forecasting capabilities. AI-driven analytics can evaluate extensive consumer data to identify trends, reveal concealed patterns, and forecast future

behaviors. This enables marketers to anticipate customer wants and refine their strategy accordingly (Hamadaqa, et al. 2024; Moinuddin, et al. 2024).

Predictive intelligence enables firms to transition from reactive to proactive decision-making. By considering social media sentiment, purchasing behaviors, real-time interactions, firms can develop targeted campaigns and modify their pricing strategies in anticipation of market fluctuations (Badmus, et al. 2024; Wang, et al. 2023). This method ultimately results in improved conversion rates and increased customer satisfaction.

A major perk of AI is its knack for real-time personalization. AI algorithms are always learning from user interactions, which allows them to serve up content that's customized for everyone across different platforms. As highlighted by Kietzmann, et al. (2018), this quick responsiveness leads to stronger engagement, especially in e-commerce (Kietzmann, et al. 2018).

Furthermore, AI enhances the adaptability of enterprises. It enables enterprises to expedite and enhance the precision of data-driven decision-making, facilitating prompt responses to competitive actions, emerging trends, and customer feedback (Garcia, et al. 2023; Machireddy, et al. 2021). This strategic flexibility accelerates product market entry and enables brands to maintain relevance in a saturated media landscape.

AI serves as an essential instrument for securing and maintaining a competitive edge by automating procedures and optimizing marketing content in real-time.

1.5.2 Cost reduction and efficiency gains

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly acknowledged as an effective instrument for cost reduction and the improvement of operational efficiency in marketing. An essential method by which AI does this is through the automation of monotonous and resource-intensive jobs.

AI-driven systems enable businesses to oversee content generation, customer connections, and performance analytics with less staff and time for campaign execution (Madanchian, 2024). Chatbots and virtual assistants can simultaneously address a substantial number of consumer inquiries, hence reducing the necessity for extensive customer care teams while maintaining service quality (Odeibat, 2024).

In the dynamic realm of e-commerce, AI possesses the capability to modify pricing plans instantaneously, reacting to consumer demand and monitoring competitors. This not only enhances profitability but also diminishes the necessity for laborious manual adjustments (Odeibat, 2024).

Automated A/B testing and multivariate experimentation are excellent methods for reducing expenses. Utilizing AI, organizations can conduct cost-effective, high-frequency testing on diverse content alternatives and campaign strategies, enabling them to ascertain optimal combinations with minimal human intervention (Madanchian, 2024).

Moreover, small and medium-sized firms can leverage these scalable technologies to enhance their competitiveness against larger entities by automating critical marketing functions and minimizing operating expenses (Odeibat, 2024).

AI is stepping beyond the usual marketing roles and proving its worth in significantly lowering operational costs in structured, knowledge-driven fields. A great example is in systematic literature reviews, where AI has managed to save over 50% of the time and cut down the manual workload by as much as six times during abstract screening tasks (Abogunrin, et al. 2023). Some studies even show overall cost reductions hitting up to 80% (Cichewicz, et al. 2023). These results demonstrate AI's capacity to streamline complex decision-making processes while diminishing the necessity for extensive labor. According to Rubab (2023), adopting AI can really enhance operational efficiency by automating everyday tasks and minimizing resource waste, which helps marketing workflows better align with the organization's objectives (Rubab, 2023). The companies surveyed noted an average cost reduction of 15% as a direct result of integrating AI into

their operations, particularly in content creation and campaign management (Rubab, 2023).

These findings highlight the essential function of AI in enhancing the efficiency, speed, and cost-effectiveness of marketing processes.

1.5.3 Enhanced decision-making accuracy

Artificial Intelligence is essential for enhancing the precision and velocity of decision-making across several business sectors.

A fundamental advantage of AI is its capacity to process extensive datasets and extract valuable insights. As stated by Khanzode, et al. (2020), artificial intelligence facilitates the analysis of both organized and unstructured data, resulting in more informed decision-making, reduced conjecture, and more strategic precision (Khanzode, et al. 2020).

Predictive analytics is a crucial component of AI that enables firms to anticipate market trends and comprehend client actions with greater accuracy. This is especially significant in marketing, as AI models can forecast client responses and evaluate campaign effectiveness. Khanzode, et al. (2020) emphasize that machine learning-based predictive tools are essential for improving planning precision and resource optimization (Khanzode, et al. 2020).

Besides forecasting, AI improves real-time decision-making via ongoing learning processes. Madanchian, (2024) asserts that AI-powered systems can dynamically adapt to new data inputs, enabling organizations to continuously modify their marketing and operational plans (Madanchian, 2024). This immediate reactivity is crucial in rapidly evolving situations where static solutions may swiftly become outdated.

Ultimately, Odeibat (2024) underscores that AI-driven decision-making systems provide exceptional assistance by simulating outcomes, evaluating alternatives, and suggesting optimal solutions (Odeibat, 2024).

These systems not only improve decision-making efficiency, but also reduce human mistake.

1.6 Differences between human-created advertising and AI-generated advertising

Unlike human endorsers, who bring natural expressions and gestures to the table, AI endorsers provide a level of consistency, scalability, and personalization that brands find increasingly appealing (Adhaakbari, et al. 2023).

Jamshidi, et al. (2023) noticed that the emergence of AI endorsers has brought about a significant transformation in the advertising world, adding a new layer of consistency, scalability, and personalization that was once out of reach (Jamshidi, et al. 2023). While these AI figures offer fresh ways to connect with consumers, researchers are still exploring how they affect visual attention and consumer perception (Haleem, et al. 2022).

A key difference between human and AI-generated advertising is how they engage visual attention. Human endorsers naturally draw in consumers with their facial expressions, gestures, and voice modulation, creating a sense of relatability and authenticity. On the flip side, AI endorsers can be modified in real-time, allowing marketers to tweak their facial features, clothing, and even vocal tones to better attract consumer interest (Sutherland, 2020). As Smart & Szafir, (2019) note, “*subtle adjustments in visual elements like color, size, or shape can be strategically employed to capture consumer interest*” (Akbari, et al. 2023, p. 6), which highlights the flexibility of AI-generated content.

Moreover, while human voices are static, AI-generated voices can be dynamically adjusted to enhance persuasion through real-time changes in pitch and tone (Brem & Niebuhr, 2021).

Although AI-driven advertising offers notable advantages, it also raises significant challenges, particularly around ethics and authenticity. AI-generated content can adjust in real time to boost engagement: “*AI endorsers can also adapt messages based on JND principles to create personalized experiences (Van Velsen, et al. 2022) and respond to consumer interactions with subtle changes that enhance engagement*” (Akbari et al. 2023, p. 6). But this ability to adapt raises some ethical questions, like the potential for manipulating how consumers perceive things and the lack of transparency in AI-generated ads (Niosi, 2021). The fact that AI can't express genuine human emotions makes it tough, as it simply doesn't have the authenticity and emotional richness that real human endorsers bring to the table.

Consumer trust and perception are crucial to the efficacy of AI-generated advertising. Even though AI can be fine-tuned to boost visual appeal and engagement, research indicates that people still view human endorsers as more genuine and reliable (Adhaakbari, et al. 2023).

Psychophysical testing has shown that even minor differences in AI-generated visuals can have a big impact on consumer behavior, but tackling skepticism is still a hurdle. The study of Adhaakbari, et al. (2023) suggests that AI-driven ads might be more convincing when they incorporate human elements, striking a balance between the efficiency of AI and the emotional connection that human endorsers provide (Adhaakbari, et al. 2023).

Chapter 2. Ethics in Artificial Intelligence advertising

Following the examination of how Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the advertising sector, we must focus on the ethical ramifications associated with these developments. Artificial intelligence offers significant advantages, like customized content, focused outreach, and enhanced advertising; nevertheless, it also prompts critical concerns around transparency, data privacy, manipulation, algorithmic bias and consumer trust.

This chapter will examine the ethical dilemmas associated with AI-generated advertising, aiming to critically evaluate how marketers and organizations might reconcile the pursuit of innovation with a dedication to accountability and equity in the digital advertising landscape.

2.1 Academic and practical foundations of the research

The rapidly advancing digital economy has resulted in a significant transformation of advertising strategies. Prihatiningsih, et al. (2024) highlight that digital advertising is a marketing strategy that utilizes platforms and digital media to deliver promotional messages to target audiences (Prihatiningsih, et al. 2024). This method has expanded considerably due to technological improvements, particularly the emergence of big data and artificial intelligence. These advancements enable organizations to collect and analyze customer data instantaneously, tailor content, and enhance campaign efficacy across several platforms.

However, this technological evolution also brings new challenges. In a competitive landscape where, as the authors point out Prihatiningsih, et al. (2024), companies must perpetually innovate to align with evolving consumer tastes; thus, organizations are increasingly integrating AI solutions to enhance productivity and maintain relevance while engaging their audience (Prihatiningsih, et al. 2024). This environment creates a breeding ground for ethical issues, particularly regarding data usage, the automation of creative processes and the potential manipulation of consumer behavior.

2.1.1 Managerial Problem

As artificial intelligence increasingly integrates into digital advertising, marketing professionals confront a significant challenge: determining how to utilize AI-driven solutions efficiently while maintaining ethical norms and customer confidence.

AI enables brands to optimize operations, customize content extensively, and improve campaign effectiveness. Conversely, it prompts new ethical inquiries around openness, data exploitation, manipulation of customer behavior, and the possible erosion of human creativity (Tsotniashvili, Z., 2025).

The primary challenge for managers is to establish a sustainable equilibrium between innovation and accountability, ensuring that AI-driven initiatives are both effective and competitive while adhering to principles such as justice, authenticity, and respect for consumer autonomy (Poli, et al. 2025).

Companies must navigate intricate issues about the integration of AI into their advertising strategies and the ethical communication of its use to their audience.

2.2 The ethics of AI in advertising: Floridi's perspective

In his 2022 book *"The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. Principles, Challenges, and Opportunities"*, Luciano Floridi offers a distinctive perspective on the ethics of artificial intelligence, particularly advantageous for understanding its moral implications in advertising. Floridi asserts that AI does not represent intelligence in the traditional sense; rather, it constitutes a new form of agency, enabled by the dissociation of task performance from the cognitive ability formerly required for such functions. This "divorce" allows AI systems to function efficiently, lacking knowledge, intentionality or consciousness - qualities typically associated with human activity (Floridi, 2022).

Floridi contests Umberto Eco's traditional division of "*apocalyptic*" and "*integrated*" thinkers, proposing instead a new classification of AI atheists and singularity enthusiasts. The former regard AI as a simple technological advancement devoid of distinct ethical implications, whilst the latter ascribe to it an almost supernatural influence, imagining possibilities of either complete subjugation or profound liberation. Floridi contends that both perspectives are erroneous. AI must be assessed according to its tangible uses and regulated through responsible design to avert societal and cultural harm (Floridi, 2022).

This method in advertising necessitates the integration of ethics by design, indicating that ethical concepts must be incorporated into the creation phase of AI tools and algorithms. Advertising technologies must uphold individual dignity and autonomy, eschewing manipulative or opaque approaches. Floridi advances the concept of the infosphere, the digital environment in which humans increasingly function, and contends that AI plays an active role in developing it. Consequently, AI-generated advertising is not a neutral occurrence; it significantly influences the formation of humans' perceptions of reality (Floridi, 2022).

An ethical advertising approach must support informational well-being, which, according to Floridi, is based on five core principles: beneficence (creating value for the user), non-maleficence (preventing harm and manipulation), autonomy, justice, and explicability. These ideas are the foundation of his cohesive framework for AI ethics and are easily transferable to the marketing sector (Floridi, 2022).

Floridi cautions against the increasing inclination for humans to conform to technology systems instead of the opposite. In advertising, this manifests as surroundings progressively organized according to AI principles, where human behavior is analyzed and directed by computational mechanisms. The objective of ethics, in this context, is to alleviate such a dynamic-ensuring that technical advancement does not compromise human freedom or moral accountability (Floridi, 2022).

2.2.1 Theoretical framework: defining ethical advertising created by AI

A significant contribution to this conversation comes from Gao, et al. (2023), who introduce a structured model based on the idea of Computational Advertising (Gao, et al. 2023). This framework highlights four essential elements that characterize AI advertising: targeting, personalization, content creation and ad optimization (Gao, et al. 2023). Each of these elements shows how AI is changing traditional advertising methods into more data-driven, efficient and user-focused approaches.

For example, targeting mainly uses machine learning techniques to pinpoint the audience segments that are most likely to respond positively to certain ads. Personalization, on the other hand, employs recommendation systems and virtual assistants to customize ad content according to individual preferences and behaviors (Gao, et al. 2023).

Content creation is increasingly influenced by generative AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP), allowing for the dynamic production of tailored ad copy, visuals and multimedia.

Finally, ad optimization makes use of deep learning and reinforcement learning to tweak campaign strategies in real time, with the goal of maximizing return on investment and boosting audience engagement (Gao, et al. 2023).

These four elements aren't just separate pieces; they're all connected and rely on each other. As Gao et al. point out, *“Targeting and Personalization are intricately intertwined [...], while Content Creation is closely linked to Personalization [...], and Ad Optimization leverages the outcomes of the preceding three elements, adjusting advertisement display frequency, timing and location to achieve maximum ROI”* (Gao et al. 2023, p. 13). This interconnected nature highlights that AI advertising should be seen as an integrated system, rather than just a series of separate tools or tactics.

Even though the framework is built on technical foundations, it also has ethical importance. The automation of targeting, personalization and optimization processes bring forth challenges like algorithmic bias, concerns about data privacy and gaps in transparency and accountability. As the authors state, *“these considerations hold*

profound theoretical significance for the commercial ethics of AI-driven advertising” (Gao et al. 2023, p. 13), underscoring the need for ethical reflection alongside technical advancement.

Al Haj Eid et al. (2024) underscore that ethical AI advertising must achieve a balance between innovation and responsible methods, particularly with data management, customer trust, and openness (Al Haj Eid et al. 2024). They highlight that whereas AI marketing systems facilitate hyper-personalization, they also raise significant concerns regarding manipulation, monitoring, and equity. The authors advocate for the establishment of robust ethical rules and collaborative frameworks involving marketers, ethicists, and regulators to ensure that AI uses in advertising align with societal values and legal standards.

Poli et al. (2025) emphasize the necessity of grounding AI systems in ethical theory. They examine how conventional ethical theories (such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics) might inform the design and regulation of AI in complex, real-world contexts, including advertising (Poli et al. 2025). Their research emphasizes that concentrating solely on technical or economic factors is insufficient; ethical advertising must adhere to values of fairness, transparency, and a human-centered approach.

Collectively, these research suggest that the implementation of ethical AI advertising necessitates a bifurcated approach. One element entails understanding the technological architecture and operational logic of AI systems, while the other emphasizes the use of ethical reasoning to anticipate, assess, and mitigate potential consequences. The amalgamation of Gao et al.’s computational framework with the ethical perspectives from Al Haj Eid et al. (2024) and Poli et al. (2025) establishes a robust theoretical foundation for the responsible assessment of the advantages and hazards linked to AI-driven advertising (Al Haj Eid et al. 2024; Poli et al. 2025).

2.3 Key ethical concerns

As AI transforms marketing, it introduces sophisticated capabilities alongside numerous ethical problems that firms must address.

Al Haj Eid et al. (2024) categorize the ethical hazards of AI in marketing into four principal domains, including data privacy, manipulation, transparency, and algorithmic bias (Al Haj Eid et al. 2024).

One of the most urgent issues is the way personal data is collected and utilized. While AI empowers marketers to craft hyper-personalized content, the reality is that consumer data is often gathered without full awareness or consent, leading to significant concerns about privacy and informed consent. The authors Al Haj Eid et al. (2024) emphasize that AI systems possess the capacity to handle and analyze consumer data with a scale and velocity that significantly surpass human capacities; yet, this may result in invasive surveillance and a diminishment of consumer autonomy (Al Haj Eid et al. 2024).

Another pressing concern is the potential for manipulative practices, where AI-driven personalization might breach ethical boundaries by exploiting cognitive biases or emotional vulnerabilities. This situation raises alarms about fairness and the power imbalance between businesses and consumers. AI-driven marketing methods may affect consumer decisions in manners that are not entirely clear or readily discernible (Al Haj Eid et al. 2024), which could result in forms of persuasion that undermine authentic consumer choice.

The unclear nature of algorithmic decision-making leads to major challenges regarding transparency and accountability. AI models tend to operate as "*black boxes*", which complicates our ability to track how decisions are made or to uncover any biases that may exist. This is especially crucial when algorithms dictate who gets what kind of advertising, as discriminatory results can easily fly under the radar. Al Haj Eid, et al. (2024) point out the importance of developing marketing AI systems that are not just efficient but also transparent, explainable and ethically aligned with the values of society (Al Haj Eid et al. 2024).

All these concerns point to the urgent need for ethical governance in AI-driven marketing.

The mentioned authors advocate for companies to establish collaborative frameworks that bring together marketers, data scientists, ethicists and regulators. This teamwork can help create AI applications that maintain transparency, fairness and trust. It's crucial to ensure that as AI progresses in advertising, it does so while upholding ethical principles.

2.3.1 Opportunities and challenges of AI-generated advertising

As noted by Prihatiningsih, et al. (2024) digital advertising provides numerous advantages, including extensive reach, reduced costs, quantifiable outcomes, and accurate targeting. AI technologies amplify these benefits by enabling automated content creation, real-time personalization and better decision-making through data analytics.

For example, in the media industry, AI has “*substantially improved the efficiency of content creation and distribution*” and has allowed organizations to “*deliver personalized content to audiences at an unprecedented scale*” (Tsotniashvili, 2025, p. 43). Similarly, Al Haj Eid, et al. (2024) stress that “*machine learning algorithms process data and can identify patterns and insights that would be practically impossible for the human mind to comprehend at the scale of the process*” (Al Haj Eid, et al. 2024, p. 3), greatly enhancing marketing effectiveness.

When applied ethically, these technologies can nurture more meaningful connections between brands and consumers, as they hold significant potential for transforming marketing practices (Al Haj Eid, et al. 2024).

However, it's important to note that these benefits come with their own set of significant challenges. The same systems that facilitate personalized targeting and automation also raise serious ethical questions. The escalation of data collecting and personalization heightens the risk of personal information misuse, hence raising issues over privacy and data protection (Prihatiningsih, et al. 2024).

Furthermore, the dependence on algorithmic decision-making brings up fears of bias and manipulation. Al Haj Eid, et al. (2024) highlight that while AI is driving us toward hyper-personalization, *“it also raises severe ethical issues of manipulation and bias”* (Al Haj Eid, et al. 2024, p. 9). These concerns are also prevalent in the media sphere.

According to Tsotniashvili (2025), *“ethical dilemmas surrounding the use of AI in media, including issues of algorithmic bias, misinformation, and the potential consequences for employment, are sparking vital discussions”* (Tsotniashvili, 2025, p. 43). A large portion of media professionals (about 80%) believe that their organizations are still not doing enough to address these ethical concerns related to AI (Tsotniashvili, 2025).

Insufficient oversight poses a threat to customer trust, facilitates discriminatory behaviors, and diminishes human agency in content design and targeting methodologies. As the potential of AI expands, the dedication to harmonizing innovation with ethical duty must also increase.

2.3.2 Transparency and disclosure

As Artificial Intelligence increasingly integrates into advertising methods, the necessity for transparency and explicit disclosure has emerged as a significant ethical issue.

According to Prayudi & Komariyah (2023), *“advertisers need to ensure that they comply with these regulations and adopt transparent practices in data collection and use”* (Prihatiningsih et al. 2024, p. 135).

With growing public anxiety over how consumer data is managed, regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) have been put in place to safeguard users’ personal information (Prihatiningsih et al. 2024). These frameworks highlight a wider expectation that companies utilizing AI tools should keep users informed about what data is being collected, how it is being processed, and the reasons behind its use.

The push for transparency is a recurring theme in the larger academic discussion surrounding AI ethics. According to Gao et al. (2023), *“the transparency and interpretability of AI algorithms have garnered widespread attention, encompassing the potential for biases and privacy concerns spanning societal, contractual, ethical, legal, and philosophical realms”* (Gao et al. 2023, p. 12). They also mention a global study that identified 84 ethical guidelines related to AI, with information transparency being one of the most frequently highlighted concerns (Larsson & Heintz, 2020, in Gao et al. 2023).

In this context, Poli, Pamidi, Poli (2025) draw on Burrell’s significant classification of opacity in algorithmic systems, which helps clarify why achieving transparency in AI-driven advertising is such a tough nut to crack (Poli, Pamidi, Poli 2025). Burrell (2016) identifies three key forms of opacity: intentional opacity, which keeps proprietary information or trade secrets under wraps; illiterate opacity, which arises from users not fully understanding the technical aspects; and intrinsic opacity, stemming from the complex nature of algorithmic processes themselves (Burrell 2016).

Such forms of opacity hinder consumers' comprehension of the rationale behind AI systems' actions, undermining trust, complicating accountability, and heightening the risk of manipulation or biased targeting.

These insights emphasize the pressing necessity for advertisers and developers to enhance the interpretability of AI systems, particularly in decision-making concerning targeting, content production, and personalization. Lack of transparent disclosure methods and algorithmic clarity jeopardizes consumer trust and may lead to ambiguous or discriminating outcomes. As AI transforms the digital advertising sector, it is crucial to ensure that our technology advancements are supported by transparent governance to uphold ethical norms and sustain public accountability.

2.3.3 Privacy and data exploitation

With the rise of AI-driven advertising relying heavily on the collection and processing of vast consumer data, privacy has become a vital ethical concern in the digital marketing

field. Helsloot, et al. (2018) mention that “*AI necessitates vast amounts of data to function effectively*” (Gao; et al. 2023, p. 12), which leads to important questions about how this data is gathered, managed and utilized. The authors Gao, et al (2023) argue that advertisers should “*ensure transparency and ethicality in the gathering and utilization of consumer data, respect privacy rights, and provide clear opt-out options*” (Gao; et al. 2023, p. 12). This highlights the necessity of empowering users with informed choices regarding their personal data and upholding ethical standards in personalization practices.

Finding the right balance can be quite challenging. As highlighted by Wang, et al. (2018), “*balancing the benefits of retaining personalized information for advertisers while avoiding potential negative repercussions requires a clearer understanding of consumer perceptions of privacy and the expected use of personalized information*” (Gao; et al. 2023, p. 12). When personalization goes too far, it can create unforeseen problems that tarnish a brand's image. Prihatiningsih; et al. (2024) warn that “*too much personalization can make consumers feel watched and uncomfortable, which can damage relationships with brands*” (Prihatiningsih; et al. 2024, p. 135). They also emphasize that “*the risk of over-personalization is a concern*” (ibidem), as it can erode consumer trust and lead to pushback against marketing efforts.

The concern grows even larger when data is used without proper consent. Poli, Pamidi, Poli (2025) observe that discussions on AI ethics commonly emphasize the necessity of consent; but, in numerous commercial AI contexts, such as advertising, individuals usually remain unaware of how their data is employed (Poli, et al. 2025). This absence of openness exacerbates privacy concerns and undermines the fundamental nature of the consent process.

The Cambridge Analytica issue exemplifies improper data usage, as Facebook data was purportedly utilized to manipulate voting behavior (Poli et al. 2025). While this case is rooted in the political arena, it provides a compelling analogy for how behavioral targeting in advertising can similarly manipulate data.

2.3.4 The 5Ps of AI-Driven marketing and ethical implications

The development of artificial intelligence has profoundly altered the traditional marketing model. In this context, Roetzer (2017), the CEO of the Marketing Artificial Intelligence Institute, proposed a new framework that enhances the classic 4Ps of marketing (product, price, place, promotion) by introducing a fifth dimension: planning, production, personalization, promotion and performance (Roetzer, 2017). This revised model illustrates the deep integration of AI into every facet of marketing communications, from strategic planning to campaign assessment. As noted by Gayaparsad and Ramlutchman (2024), this framework provides a valuable perspective on how AI is revolutionizing marketing strategies worldwide (Gayaparsad and Ramlutchman, 2024).

Although AI-driven marketing enhances efficiency and effectiveness, it also introduces numerous intricate ethical problems. This analysis will examine each of the 5Ps in relation to AI deployment, highlighting the ethical hazards associated with personalization, data utilization, and the possibility for consumer manipulation.

AI is transforming the way we approach strategic planning by offering predictive insights that come from analyzing vast amounts of data. As noted by Wright; et al. (2020), AI helps us make better decisions, whether it's diving into consumer research, spotting potential risks or ensuring that marketing efforts resonate with the right audiences (Wright; et al. 2020).

This change calls for a fresh look at traditional marketing strategies, since AI tools allow us to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior. On the ethical side, though, depending too much on algorithms for decision-making can blur the lines of human responsibility and raise concerns about data bias or the unclear reasoning behind our strategic choices.

During the production phase, AI steps in to automate the creation and distribution of marketing content. According to Haleem; et al. (2022), AI outperforms humans in implementing digital marketing strategies, including tasks like copywriting, chatbot

integration and crafting interactive designs (Haleem; et al. 2022). While this automation can enhance efficiency and scalability, it also brings up ethical concerns about authenticity, the risk of creating overly persuasive content in bulk and the possible diminishing of human creativity. Moreover, there is a growing concern that consumers may be unaware that the content they are engaging with is AI-generated, thereby raising critical questions around transparency and the adequacy of informed consent.

Personalization is arguably one of the most ethically sensitive areas in the realm of AI-driven marketing. Nolden (2023) emphasizes that AI algorithms can provide hyper-personalized content by analyzing customer data and predicting what individuals might like (Nolden, 2023). Girdhar (2023) further points out the significance of AI-powered recommendation systems and virtual assistants in enhancing the overall customer experience (Girdhar, 2023). While these techniques can certainly boost engagement and conversion rates, they also bring up valid concerns regarding privacy, consent and the potential for consumer manipulation.

AI's role in shaping promotional strategies is particularly clear in predictive advertising and advanced audience segmentation. According to Misra; et al. (2019), Artificial Intelligence allows for highly personalized campaigns, that react to user behavior in real-time, often utilizing data from connected devices and the Internet of Things (IoT) (Misra; et al. 2019). These approaches can boost efficiency, but they also blur ethical boundaries by pushing the envelope of surveillance marketing. The remarkable precision of AI in targeting potential consumers brings up important questions about personal autonomy and the fairness of persuasive techniques, that might go unnoticed by users.

Integrating AI into performance measurement is a powerful tool for continuous optimization, thanks to real-time monitoring and big data analytics. This capability allows businesses to proactively tweak their strategies and enhance their Return On Investments (Gayaparsad & Ramlutchman, 2024).

2.3.5 Real-time customer engagement and hyper-personalization: ethical reflections

The integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data analytics has brought about a significant change in digital marketing. It is a transition from the old-school method of audience segmentation to engaging with consumers in real-time through hyper-personalized strategies.

As Arora, et al. (2024) point out, AI enables marketers to send personalized messages, offers and content at just the right moment, which enhances both relevance and how consumers respond (Arora, et al. 2024).

In a similar vein, Prihatiningsih, et al. (2024) stress that this level of personalization, not only boosts advertising effectiveness, but also reflects a broader trend in the industry towards predictive targeting, all thanks to advancements in AI and machine learning technologies (Prihatiningsih, et al. 2024).

This strategic evolution focuses on the ability to handle and analyze massive datasets, considering user behavior, demographic details and third-party information to create personalized customer experiences that are truly dynamic.

As Theodorakopoulos and Theodoropoulou (2024) highlight, today's approach to personalization recognizes the distinct characteristics of each consumer (Theodorakopoulos and Theodoropoulou, 2024). It taps into detailed behavioral data, like page views, time spent on a site and navigation patterns, to develop a deeper understanding of the customer journey. Instead of depending on static audience segments, AI marketing now adjusts in real time, providing content that matches inferred preferences across different touchpoints.

These advancements, while exciting, also bring up some tough ethical issues. The same technologies that allow businesses to create personalized messages, can lead to behavioral surveillance and overly aggressive predictive targeting.

Theodorakopoulos; et al. (2024) highlight that although these experiences may seem empowering, they are often driven by algorithms that subtly influence our decision-

making (Theodorakopoulos; et al. 2024). This creates a false sense of autonomy, obscuring how much our choices are guided by predictive models. Furthermore, the ongoing tracking of user activity across platforms raises significant questions about privacy, consent and the transparency of our data.

According to Arora; et al. (2024), the Starbucks case serves as a prime example of the potential and challenges that come with these practices (Arora; et al. 2024). By utilizing AI and big data through its app, loyalty program and in-store transactions, Starbucks can offer real-time, personalized recommendations and deals.

This strategy has effectively enhanced customer engagement and retention, but it also highlights the thin line between personalization and manipulation, especially when algorithms determine what content users are shown, when they receive it, and what choices they have.

In this context, it is imperative to meticulously evaluate the ethical ramifications of hyper-personalization.

These concerns are essential to the future of AI-driven marketing. As marketing techniques evolve to be more intelligent and flexible, it is imperative to establish ethical frameworks that can proficiently govern their implementation.

2.4 Authenticity and consumer trust

In our rapidly evolving world of AI-driven marketing and online interactions, staying true to oneself has become essential for earning consumer trust and fostering engagement. As Gammarano (2024) highlights, authenticity and engagement are viewed as crucial pillars in influencer marketing, forming the foundation for effective and reliable campaigns (Gammarano, 2024). This is particularly crucial for AI-generated advertisements and virtual influencers, where the sense of authenticity is key to forging emotional connections with audiences.

Authenticity goes beyond being a simple trait; it is a strategic edge that plays a huge role in how consumers engage with marketing content. Influencers, whether they're actual people or digital creations, who show consistency, honesty, and a strong connection between their personal narratives and the promotional material they share are perceived as more authentic. Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun (2017) highlights that "*The perception of authenticity is shaped by factors such as transparency in business relationships and consistency of narrative*" (Gammarano; 2024, p. 227), pointing out that audiences tend to favor those who come across as genuine and resonate with their beliefs.

When it comes to virtual influencers, those characters crafted entirely by AI, the challenge of authenticity can be quite a puzzle. Their synthetic nature raises significant questions about how credible and emotionally genuine they truly are. Still, Gammarano; (2024) highlights that perceived authenticity is fundamental in influencer marketing, even for these digital creations (Gammarano; 2024).

Virtual influencers that can tell relatable, personal stories and keep their communication transparent and sincere are more likely to gain the trust of their audience (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019). When people pick up on that authenticity, it can lead to increased engagement, making interactions like comments, likes, and purchases more probable, and "*establishing an emotional bond that promotes lasting engagement*" (Gammarano; 2024, p. 230).

To bridge the gap between artificiality and what feels sincere, AI technologies such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) are crucial. NLP helps virtual influencers understand and respond in a way that mimics natural human conversation, creating conversations that seem authentic and unplanned (Gammarano, 2024). Moreover, personalization, another capability of AI, makes content and interactions more relevant, which ultimately encourages more profound and impactful engagement.

When it comes to trusting AI systems, it's not just about their technical skills; it's also about how clear and understandable they are for users. As Lee and See (2004) point out, "*trust in automation depends not only on system performance, but also on transparency and the ability to understand the system's decisions*" (Poli, et al. 2023, p. 5). In the realm

of AI-generated advertising, this means that even if a system excels at engaging users, a lack of insight into how it works can really undermine that trust.

Poli et al. (2025) assert that interpretability is increasingly regarded as essential for fostering trust in AI, especially when AI systems influence human experiences (Poli et al. 2025).

Beyond just looking genuine, virtual influencers and AI-driven campaigns need to show clear and understandable processes to build credibility and accountability.

2.5 Previous studies on AI ethics in marketing

Su; et al. (2023) carried out a thorough literature review to identify and categorize the ethical issues that are emerging in marketing and consumer behavior (Su; et al. 2023). Their study points out that, while AI technologies are changing the marketing landscape, they also raise important ethical questions about data usage, algorithm fairness, transparency and consumer autonomy.

The authors Su, et al. (2023) explored a wealth of research across eight thematic areas, from machine learning and natural language processing to big data and robotics, to gain insights into how ethical issues surrounding AI connect with marketing practices (Su, et al. 2023). Among the most talked-about topics were data privacy, algorithmic bias and the infamous "black box" problem, which highlights the lack of transparency in AI systems. As Morley et al. (2021) noted, *“privacy, fairness, accountability, accessibility, environmental sustainability and transparency are all issues largely being discussed at both the algorithmic and application level”* (Su; et al. 2023, p. 4934).

To illustrate the distribution of scholarly attention across various technological domains, Su, et al. (2023) provided a summary of the number of search results per topic (*Table 1*). This overview shows a clear concentration of studies on topics such as big data and machine learning, while areas like social media content analytics remain significantly underrepresented.

Topic identified by (Mariani; et al, 2021)	Number of search results
Memory and computational logic	51
Decision making and cognitive processes	47
Neutral networks	11
Machine learning and linguistic analysis	78
Social media and text mining	27
Social media content analytics	4
Technology acceptance and adoption	25
Big data and robots	134

Table 1. *Number of Search Results by Topic. (Reproduced by the author, from Su, et al. 2023; pp. 4935-4936).*

A notable insight from their review is the correlation of ethical difficulties with three fundamental levels in marketing: systems, brands, and customers. At the systemic level, ethical problems center on the comprehensive marketing framework, specifically with how AI may perpetuate existing injustices or propagate stereotypes through its design. At the brand level, we face challenges such as employing AI to predict customer behavior, automate marketing communications, and personalize content, actions that may undermine consumer trust if algorithmic inaccuracies result in biased or detrimental outcomes. Biases in automated credit systems have led to inequitable financial offers, potentially compromising a brand's credibility and reliability. Finally, at the consumer level, the review highlights issues related to the ethical utilization of personal data, the danger of manipulation via hyper-personalization, and the possible diminishment of human autonomy.

The review draws attention to a significant gap between the rapid advancements in technology and the ethical guidelines that govern the use of AI in marketing. Despite a growing awareness of these issues, Su; et al. (2023) argue that "*the field of ethical marketing AI is still very much in its infancy*" (Su; et al. 2023, p. 4933). They advocate for increased empirical research and collaboration across various fields to help close this gap.

Their findings emphasize the urgent need for both marketers and researchers to devise strong strategies that align innovation with ethical considerations.

2.6 Examples in AI advertising: ethical failures

To comprehensively grasp the ethical ramifications of AI in advertising, it is beneficial to examine notable incidents that have garnered the interest of both the media and scholars. These real-world instances, regardless of whether they have been lauded or condemned, offer us distinct insights into the adherence to or violation of ethical standards in practice. Through the analysis of thoroughly documented campaigns, we may critically assess the connection between technology progress and ethical responsibilities.

The goal of this section is not to assess the technical failures of these initiatives, but to dig into the ethical questions they raise, particularly around transparency, bias, consumer manipulation and brand accountability.

2.6.1 Levi's and Lalaland.ai | LS&Co. Partners with Lalaland.ai (2023)

In 2023, Levi Strauss & Co. announced a collaboration with the AI startup Lalaland.ai, aiming to test AI-generated models that would represent their products on a variety of body types, ages, and skin tones. The initiative was presented as part of Levi's broader digital innovation strategy, with the stated goal of enhancing customer experience and

promoting inclusivity. However, following initial public reaction, the company released a clarification emphasizing that the project was not intended to replace human models or to serve as a shortcut to achieving its diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments (LS&Co., 2023).



Figure 4. Levi's collaboration with Lalaland.ai realistic AI-generated models. (Source: Levi Strauss & Co. / Lalaland.ai)

Media outlets such as The Verge reported that the announcement sparked a wave of public backlash, leading Levi's to specify that this pilot is not intended to promote diversity (Weatherbed, 2023). The controversy also reignited concerns over the potential impact of automation on creative industries, particularly considering Levi's recent layoffs, which intensified skepticism about the company's intentions.

A detailed academic analysis of the partnership was conducted by Maiolo (2023), who examined the ethical concerns raised by the initiative (Maiolo, 2023). The paper recounts how Levi's presented the collaboration to reflect more diverse body types and skin tones in a sustainable and inclusive manner. Nevertheless, it was widely perceived as a shallow

substitute for authentic representation, triggering criticism for favoring technology over human presence in an industry where personal identity and visibility are central (Maiolo, 2023).

Maiolo identifies the situation as an organizational misstep, an ethical failure that, while not unlawful, caused reputational harm for which Levi's is fully accountable. The public response, especially on social media, focused on the lack of real models from underrepresented backgrounds. This reaction was worsened by the company's limited engagement: Levi's did not address user criticism on its social channels, nor did it clearly communicate the updated messaging in a timely manner. This silence contributed to a perception of opacity, ultimately weakening the brand's credibility.

The analysis also stresses that one of the core issues was the absence of human presence in both message and execution. Although Levi's later stated that AI was not meant to replace real models, this clarification was not effectively communicated from the outset. According to Maiolo (2023), in the fashion industry, where storytelling and visibility matter deeply, diversity must be portrayed in ways that are both meaningful and authentic (Maiolo, 2023).

The case underscores the risks associated with using AI in spaces where human expression, cultural identity and emotional resonance are key. Maiolo concludes that AI, while innovative and useful, cannot and should not be a substitute for real people, especially in contexts where representation and authenticity are valued by the public.

2.6.2 Coca Cola | The Holiday Magic is coming (2024)



Figure 5. Screenshot from the video *"The Holiday Magic is coming"* (from Coca Cola (2024), YouTube).

One of the most emblematic examples of recent AI-driven advertising is Coca-Cola's 2024 Christmas campaign titled *"The Holiday Magic is Coming"* (2024). This campaign pays homage to Coca-Cola's legendary 1995 advertisement, *"Holidays Are Coming"* (1995), which has become a cultural milestone and is often credited with solidifying the brand's connection to the holiday season.



Figure 6. Screenshot from the video “Holidays are coming - 1995” (from Aashish vs. Everything (2024), YouTube).

The original advertisement showcased those iconic red trucks gliding through snowy landscapes, all set to a catchy jingle. Fast forward to 2024, the new version has taken a fresh approach by using generative AI to reimagine those beloved visuals and stories in a modern, digitally enhanced way.

The goal of the campaign is to blend nostalgia with innovation, employing AI to create scenes, characters and even musical elements that resonate with the spirit of the original while captivating today’s audiences. This fusion of tradition and technology opens an intriguing discussion about the ethical aspects of AI-generated advertising, especially regarding authenticity, emotional influence and how consumers perceive these messages.

The public's response was quick and largely negative, especially on platforms like *YouTube*, where the official video was shared on 2024, November 18. Many of the top comments voiced their disappointment, not just with the advertisement's visuals, but also with its lack of emotional depth and the irony in its messaging. One user quipped, “*Nothing like celebrating the spirit of Christmas with the most soulless commercial possible*”, while another poked fun at the brand’s slogan: “*The irony of the 'Real Magic' tagline at the end of a fake commercial*”. Others took issue with the use of AI instead of

human creativity, with one popular comment saying, *“I bought a Pepsi today because of this ad. You’re one of the most successful companies on the planet. Hire some animators”*. These reactions highlight a broader unease about generative AI taking over traditional storytelling, especially in emotionally charged settings like holiday ads.

According to *Hyperight.com* (2024), a lot of viewers described the advertisement as *“soulless”* and *“lacking creativity”* (*Hyperight.com*, 2024). Critics noted that the reliance on AI took away the emotional warmth we usually expect from holiday ads. *Forbes* echoed this sentiment, mentioning that the ad *“sparked online backlash from those who felt the magic was gone”* (Di Placido; 2024). The strange visuals, like *“Santa Claus never appearing onscreen, just his swollen, rubbery hand”*, added to the feeling of artificiality and emotional distance (The Guardian, 2025).

One of the main ethical issues that came up was the lack of transparency regarding AI usage. *Hyperight.com* pointed out that the advertisement felt more like a *“calculated marketing strategy”* (*Hyperight.com*, 2024) that focused on the excitement of new technology rather than real emotional connection and there was little information shared about how AI was involved in the creative process. This led to questions about originality and ownership, with critics voicing worries about AI using existing content without giving credit, making it hard to distinguish who really owns the ideas (*Hyperight.com*, 2024).

From the perspective of labor ethics, the campaign reignited discussions about AI's effects on creative professions. Alex Hirsch, who created *Gravity Falls*, made a striking comment, suggesting that Coca-Cola *“was red because it is made from the blood of out-of-work artists”* (The Guardian, 2025). Journalist Megan Cruz also weighed in, criticizing the campaign as *“a way for already massively wealthy execs to add a few more mil to their annual bonuses by cutting creative teams entirely”* (Forbes, 2024).

Alongside aesthetic and social issues, there were also some serious environmental and technological critiques. Publications like *Forbes* and *The Guardian* pointed out that generative AI technologies use a massive amount of computational power and frequently

churn out flawed results, described as “*glitchy, uncanny echoes of human art*” (Forbes, 2024; The Guardian, 2025), which means a lot of extra editing is needed just to get a little bit of usable content. These concerns really make us think about efficiency, sustainability and how we should responsibly use these new technologies.

2.6.3 Toys "R" Us & OpenAI | Toys "R" Us (2024)

In June 2024, Toys “R” Us unveiled an experimental advertisement at the *Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity*, created entirely using *Sora*, the unreleased video generation model developed by *OpenAI*.



Figure 7. Screenshot from a Toy’s “R” Us ad shared by @Mr_AllenT on X (formerly Twitter). (from @Mr_AllenT, 2024).

This advertisement spins a fictional tale about the company’s beginnings, showcasing a young *Charles Lazarus*, the founder, who finds inspiration for the brand after a dream. The advertisement also features the iconic *Geoffrey the Giraffe*. The company has positioned this as a groundbreaking moment that highlights the potential of AI in

storytelling (NBC News, 2024). *Kim Miller Olko*, President of Toys “R” Us Studios, shared, “*it was a test. I think it was successful. There was a lot of learning*”, pointing out that they aimed to present the campaign as a creative exploration rather than a polished final piece (NBC News, 2024).

While the ad was framed in an optimistic way, it quickly drew a lot of negative attention online, raising important ethical and creative questions. Critics noted the absence of human input and the strange, dreamlike quality of the visuals.

Commentators on social media and within the creative community pointed out that the ad’s heavy reliance on technology came at the cost of real storytelling. As reported by *Forbes*, the video was “*filled with errors*”, featuring “*melting half-bicycles*”, “*wonky window panes*”, the “*dead-eyed stare of an AI-generated man*”, which reflects the broader limitations of today’s generative video models (Di Placido, 2024). One particularly alarming detail was the inconsistency in the protagonist’s look, with “*young Charles shapeshifting throughout the video*”, a glitch that viewers described as akin to a “*weird dream*” (Di Placido, 2024).

The criticism went beyond just looks. Writers and creatives raised alarms about how generative AI is taking over human jobs. Mike Drucker, a comedy writer, humorously tweeted, “*To show how, we fired our artists and dried Lake Superior using a server farm*”, perfectly capturing the frustrations surrounding labor ethics and environmental impacts (NBC News, 2024). In a similar vein, Megan Cruz pointed out that this use of AI isn’t “*some great equalizer*”, but instead “*a way for execs to cut creative teams*”, which only deepens public worries that embracing AI could mean job losses in creative fields (NBC News, 2024).

Even the emotional intent behind the video came under scrutiny. Toys “R” Us claimed they aimed to infuse the ad with “*emotion and soul*” (NBC News, 2024), but many viewers felt it fell short in both areas. As Di Placido (2024) points out, “*the most interesting way to look at an AI-generated piece is to spot the evidence of the machine*”

(Di Placido, 2024), a thought shared by those who found the overall vibe unsettling and lacking depth.

Beyond the professional reviews, the public's response on social media was largely negative.

The campaign's post on X (*formerly known as Twitter*) shared by @Mr_AllenT, got six million views and 1,3K of repost. People were quick to express their thoughts, with comments like *“That's really creepy”*, *“Why would they even put that out?”* and *“I may not be a marketing expert, but I'd probably let go of the team that created such a strange, low-quality ad”*.

These reactions clearly show a gap between what the brand intended and how the audience perceived it, revealing a general unease with AI-generated content that feels devoid of the emotional touch and artistry we usually expect from human-made ads.

2.7 Research Gap: exploring consumer perceptions of ethical AI in advertising

This chapter reveals various research gaps concerning the ethical application of AI in advertising. Although current research has examined AI's ability to improve targeting accuracy, campaign customization, and performance enhancement, it frequently overlooks a critical analysis of the ethical, cultural, and psychological impacts on customers.

A significant gap exists about consumer perceptions of AI-generated advertising, especially concerning authenticity, transparency, and trust. As generative AI becomes more prevalent in creating advertising content, there is a lack of comprehension on how people perceive these messages and if they consider them believable or manipulative. This prompts significant inquiries on the ethical limits of personalization and the degree to which AI-driven persuasion may affect consumer autonomy.

Moreover, while data privacy and algorithmic bias are acknowledged as significant issues, few research examines their effects on consumer trust or brand perception. The ethical risks associated with predictive targeting and behavioral manipulation are still inadequately examined, particularly from the perspective of the end user. Likewise, there is a significant lack of studies regarding the potential role of AI in fostering socially responsible or inclusive marketing practices, despite its increasing impact on content creation and dissemination.

Despite the growing demand for ethical principles, there remains an absence of defined frameworks that organizations may utilize to guarantee responsible AI deployment in marketing. These frameworks are crucial for reconciling innovation with accountability, especially in a global context characterized by major variations in legislative, cultural, and customer expectations.

These components underscore the imperative for a concentrated research inquiry, which will be elucidated at the conclusion of this chapter.

2.8 Research Question

From the previously mentioned research gap arises the following research question:

“How do consumers perceive the ethics of advertisements generated by artificial intelligence? What dynamics emerge from their opinions regarding the way these advertisements represent ethical values and influence their trust in the brands that employ them?”

Chapter 3. Case Study Analysis: methodological approach, semiotic interpretation and audience perception

This chapter delineates the methodology employed in the current research, which is directed by the research question: *“How do consumers perceive the ethics of advertisements generated by artificial intelligence? What dynamics emerge from their opinions regarding the way these advertisements represent ethical values and influence their trust in the brands that employ them?”*. A comprehensive investigation of three case studies has been undertaken to address this subject.

It comprises three principal components. The initial section delineates the methodological framework, encompassing the criteria employed for corpus selection and a preliminary review of the selected brands. The second section focuses on the semiotic analysis of the chosen advertisements, emphasizing the transmitted values, technical attributes, and the visual and narrative composition of the advertising messages. The third and last component presents a sentiment and content analysis of online user comments pertaining to each location, aiming to investigate audience perception and the dynamics of trust for the associated brands. The chapter finishes with an initial comparative analysis of the three case studies, emphasizing recurring tendencies, similarities, and differences in the ethical communication facilitated by artificial intelligence.

The findings of the research will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

3.1 Methodological approach to the research

3.1.1 Theoretical and operational framework

This chapter outlines the analytical methodology used to assess three advertising campaigns that include artificial intelligence in ethically and communicatively relevant ways. The analysis advances along two principal axes. The preliminary analysis utilizes Greimas’s actantial model to clarify the narrative framework, rhetorical strategies, and underlying value systems of each commercial. This approach, grounded in the structuralist paradigm, perceives each text as a unified system governed by inherent

relational dynamics. Peverini (2012) asserts that media texts, especially advertising, should be regarded not just as vessels of messages, but as intricate cultural structures whose significance arises from multifaceted systems of presentation and content (Peverini, 2012). This study utilizes a semiotic approach that employs a hypothetico-deductive methodology, progressing through multiple interpretative layers: from the superficial segmentation of the audiovisual text to the discursive and narrative dimensions, culminating in the identification of essential oppositional structures (Batu, 2012).

Tarasti (2017) asserts that Greimas's semiotic model outlines a generative progression of meaning with three fundamental levels: the deep (or axiological) level, the narrative level, and the discursive (or figurative) level (Tarasti, 2017). The profound structural meanings arise from fundamental oppositions, often exemplified by the semiotic square, a theoretical tool for clarifying complex relationships between conflicting concepts. The narrative level depends on actantial structures and modal dynamics, enabling the analysis of roles (subject, object, helpers, opponents, sender, receiver) and competencies. The discursive level converts abstract structures into sensory and tangible forms, including pictures, sounds, and style elements, that make the narrative and ideological content apparent (Tarasti, 2017). Peverini (2012) asserts that the richness of audiovisual media stems from its syncretic nature, wherein verbal, visual, and auditory codes converge to create highly codified and affectively engaging communicative environments (Peverini, 2012).

In line with Peverini's emphasis on segmentation and structured analysis, this study applies a methodical deconstruction (or *découpage*) of the surface structure of each advertisement, breaking down the text into its constituent expressive and narrative units. This practice is critical to unveiling the semiotic architecture of the media text and understanding how various codes converge to produce coherent and persuasive meaning systems (Peverini, 2012).

The secondary phase of research is a content and sentiment analysis conducted using NVivo software on curated user comments from YouTube and Instagram related to the same advertisements. This study employs content analysis as a qualitative methodology

to uncover and evaluate meaning within communicative texts through meticulous segmentation, coding, and categorization. This methodology facilitates the extraction of recurring or significant constructs from large data sets, revealing discursive patterns and semantic domains relevant to audience reception (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). In accordance with Peverini's socio-semiotic viewpoint, audience interpretations are regarded as active meaning-making processes influenced by collective cultural codes and genre conventions (Peverini, 2012).

3.1.2 Research Corpus: Selection Criteria

The three case studies selected for analysis are: *Dove - The Code* (2024), *Still G.I.N. - A Toast Between Legends* (2024), *eToro - Be the Investor You Want to Be* (2024). *Dove* and *Still G.I.N.* serve as positive examples where the integration of AI aligns with the brand's declared values, whereas *eToro* offers a more problematic case, marked by tensions between message, technological medium, and public perception. These spots were selected based on both their communicative relevance and the diversity of approaches they adopt within ethical and narrative frameworks.

This research aims to investigate the integration of artificial intelligence in modern advertising discourses and its impact on value coherence, symbolic representation, and audience response. It is anticipated that a notable disparity will arise between efforts that utilize AI solely for aesthetic or sensational goals and those that incorporate it into a cohesive ethical and identity-driven narrative.

3.1.3 Overview of the Case Studies: Still Gin, Dove, eToro

The brand *Gin & Juice by Dre and Snoop* was conceived as an entrepreneurial extension of two iconic figures in American hip hop: Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre. From its inception, the ready-to-drink gin-based product has been marked by originality and narrative consistency, rooted in the 1994 hit song "Gin & Juice". The campaign *Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends*, released in December 2024 and premiered during

NBC's *The Voice* finale, features a fictional yet hyper-realistic encounter between AI-rendered Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr., and live-action versions of Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre. The film, directed by Dave Meyers and produced by Rosewood Creative with AI support from Metaphysic, reflects values such as inclusion, cultural legacy, and intergenerational dialogue. Its symbolic depth and visual ambition distinguish it from many standardised campaigns.

Dove, in contrast, has been a leading case in brand communication for over two decades. Originally product-focused, *Dove* repositioned itself with the 2004 “For Real Beauty” campaign, shifting toward a broader social mission grounded in inclusivity and authenticity (Inside Marketing, 2021; Unilever, 2024). The 2024 spot *Dove | The Code | What Kind of Beauty Do We Want to Teach AI?*, created by Brazilian agency Soko, continues this trajectory. The ad interrogates how AI-generated images reflect or contradict *Dove*'s founding values, alternating between real subjects and algorithmically produced visuals to explore the ethical implications of beauty representation in a digitised media environment. The cast features non-professional women and girls from diverse backgrounds, making the spot a strong example of inclusive design.

By contrast, *eToro*, a fintech platform founded in 2007, has embraced AI extensively, both in its investment tools and in its recent marketing campaigns. The 30-second spot *Be the Investor You Want to Be*, released during the 2024 Paris Olympics and created using LTX Studio by Lightricks, is fully AI-generated, from script and visuals to voiceover and soundtrack. While the campaign ostensibly reinforces *eToro*'s mission to democratise finance, its use of algorithmically generated faces and homogenised aesthetics raises critical questions about authenticity and visual normativity. The tension between the brand's stated values of accessibility and its aesthetic output will be explored in detail in the following analysis.

3.2 Semiotic analysis of the advertisements

3.2.1 Case Study 1 - “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (2024)

The commercial “A Toast Between Legends” is a 90-second narrative advertisement rich in aesthetic, symbolic, and technological implications. Created for the launch of the premium gin Still G.I.N. by Dre and Snoop (October 2024), it stages an imagined encounter between two legendary duos from different eras: Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg on one side, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. on the other. The result is a marketing operation with a high symbolic charge, crafted not merely to present a product but to evoke two epochs, two cultural movements, and two visions of artistic excellence converging in a shared symbolic space.

The commercial's atmosphere distinctly evokes a 1950s-style supper club cocktail bar, marked by dark wooden furnishings, warm, muted lighting from yellow-tinted bulbs and lamps, and a sophisticated clientele in formal evening wear. The area is characterized by an elegant color scheme primarily using black and gold hues, mirroring the design of the Still G.I.N. bottle and establishing visual harmony between the product and its symbolic environment. Warm hues are accentuated by secondary features (such as blonde hair or cream-hued tablecloths) that harmonize with the venue's soft illumination, fostering an ambiance of intimacy and sophistication.

The individuals residing in this area exhibit a poised, sophisticated manner that embodies a collective sense of elegance. Individuals of various ethnicities are unified by their formal demeanor and refined expressions. The inclusivity depicted in the commercial does not disturb the existing aesthetic norms but rather reinterprets them through a premium perspective: diversity is embraced, as long as it adheres to the visual standard of quality.

The commercial is designed for horizontal transmission, as evidenced by its video format, which aligns with traditional and streaming broadcast channels (such as NBC, ESPN, Hulu, and Peacock). The direction favors wide, horizontal shots with slow, measured camera movements. The music, entirely instrumental and devoid of vocals, evokes the

lounge and swing sounds typical of 1950s and 1960s jazz venues. The musical flow is orderly, harmonious, and ambient: it never interrupts the narrative but rather accompanies it, enhancing gestures, glances, and moods. When the protagonists (Sinatra, Davis Jr., Dre, and Snoop) move or interact, the music mirrors their rhythms, amplifying their emotional resonance.

The visual narrative progresses through seamless transitions and a predominantly slow pace that encourages introspective observation. The tone alters slightly in the central segment of the ad, where the encounter between the two pairs of protagonists provides a more dynamic rhythm, reflecting the increase of interactions and the increasing volume of the music.

The most notable and contentious aspect of the entire advertisement is the computerized representation of Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr., generated with artificial intelligence technology. Their integration into the narrative framework is technically impeccable, resulting from a process that includes archive material study, engagement with the artists' estates, and contributions from performance specialists to guarantee authentic and emotionally cohesive movements.

This artificial "resurrection" was designed to facilitate an interaction that could not have transpired in reality. The impact is significant on both emotional and communicative dimensions, yet it prompts intricate inquiries regarding authenticity, postmortem appropriation, and media-driven assertions of reality. The seeming flawlessness of digital processes does not alleviate the cultural and ethical issues associated with resurrecting historical figures for economic gain. "The Still G.I.N. 'A Toast Between Legends' ad helps to bridge past, present and future artists together, and was created in close partnership with the estates of both Sinatra and Davis to ensure a faithful representation" (Hemsworth, 2024, para. 3).

The narrative of the commercial is, in fact, *elegantly simple*: two pairs of legends meet for a toast. The symbolic statement is unambiguous, greatness transcends time, and authentic excellence is recognizable among equals, regardless of era.

Within this framework, the product (Still G.I.N.) emerges as a symbol of cultural continuity, intergenerational connection, and timeless luxury.

Below, it is possible to find the data sheet of the segmentation of the “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” campaign, with all the different details on the various sections.

3.2.1.1 Surface Level

In this section, the commercial is divided into 14 distinct sequences, each of which will be individually analyzed to highlight its technical features and the meanings conveyed throughout the visual narrative.

# Sequence	Duration	Visual column	Soundtrack
1	0:00 – 0:04	- Content description: Snoop Dogg & Dr. Dre make their entrance into a 1950s-style supper club cocktail lounge. - Frame width: American shot - Camera angle: low-angle shot - Lighting: warm and soft lighting. It creates an intimate and elegant ambiance. - Color: predominantly black and gold, tones traditionally associated with luxury, sophistication and exclusivity. These match the aesthetic of the setting and the Still G.I.N. bottle itself. - Transition: direct scene opening, the characters enter smoothly, with no abrupt cuts. The transition is fluid and cinematic, immediately establishing the tone.	A female laugh is heard off-screen (0:01), followed by a relaxed, low-voiced conversation between Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre (sound in).

2	0:04 – 0:05	- Content description: the scene focuses on an elegantly set table. Two refined women are tasting the gin, while a waitress places the Still G.I.N. bottle on the table with a slow, ceremonial gesture. Both visual and sound design highlight the bottle as a symbol of status and luxury. - Frame width: medium shot of the women and full shot of the bottle. - Camera angle: frontal and close framing, with a stable shot emphasizing the verticality and centrality of the bottle. - Lighting: warm and soft lighting from ambient lamps, enhancing the contours and the refined atmosphere. - Color: dominant gold, black, and cream tones, with the gold tray and black bottle sharply contrasting the light-colored tablecloth. - Transition: smooth transition from the previous scene with Snoop and Dre: the camera gently shifts focus to the table, marking a diegetic shift from character perspective to brand icon.	No speech; the acoustic contrast between the soft soundtrack and the sharp, isolated bottle sound (0:05) enhances its symbolic status.
3	0:05 – 0:07	- Content description: the medium close-up shot shows two women looking directly toward the camera, which adopts a diegetic subjective perspective: it represents the point of view of Snoop Dogg & Dr. Dre as they walk past. Their silent gaze conveys narrative tension and reinforces the protagonists' charisma. In the background, a golden tray visually echoes the Still G.I.N. bottle, further emphasizing the black-and-gold color palette and its symbolic association with luxury. - Frame width: medium close-up of the two women.	The amplified, isolated sound of the waitress's heels receding (0:06).

		- Camera angle: implicit point-of-view shot, internal perspective of the protagonists. The fixed frontal framing adopts the viewpoint of the observer, not of the observed. - Lighting: warm and soft lighting. Golden tones enhance the elegance of the figures. - Color: the golden tray functions as a visual reference to the brand. Contrast between bright details (tray, light skin and hair) and dark background. - Transition: fluid diegetic transition, because the sequence maintains narrative continuity with the previous one, without abrupt cuts, but introduces a new point of view, that of the protagonists.	
4	0:07 – 0:11	- Content description: the viewer follows the action from the subjective point of view of Dre and Snoop as they move through the venue. Two well-dressed men pause their conversation; one turns respectfully and says, "<i>I took care of that thing</i>". This moment reinforces the protagonists' authority and charisma. - Frame width: medium close-up of the two men addressing the protagonists. The framing emphasizes their attentive expressions and the social weight of the interaction. - Camera angle: subjective camera angle simulating Dre and Snoop's gaze. The viewer sees through their eyes. - Lighting: warm, muted lighting consistent with 1950s supper club style, using yellow-tinted bulbs and lamps. This is inferred from the general atmospheric description in the introduction.	Speech: "I took care of that thing" (sound in). Background venue chatter (sound off-field). Lounge-style instrumental music, consistent with 1950s jazz atmosphere (sound off). The auditory focus is subjective: dialogue is foregrounded, while ambient sounds and music are softened to reflect the protagonists' perceptual priority.

		- Color: dominant black and gold tones with warm accents such as blonde hair or cream-colored tablecloths. These choices align with the product branding and the visual setting described in the introduction. - Transition: seamless visual and narrative continuity from the previous sequence. The subjective perspective is maintained without interruption.	
5	0:11 – 0:21	- Content description: Dre and Snoop walk toward the center of the venue, engaging in a brief but meaningful dialogue. Their casual exchange hints at deep complicity, irony, and shared understanding. The scene builds on the previous one, maintaining continuity and intimacy. - Frame width: medium shot of Dre and Snoop as they walk together. The framing captures their synchronized movement and facial expressions, emphasizing ease and mutual confidence. - Camera angle: moving camera tracking shot from a frontal or lateral position, following Dre and Snoop’s steps. Maintains subjective immersion without adopting their literal POV. - Lighting: warm, muted lighting with yellow tones, consistent with the 1950s supper club atmosphere described in the introduction. - Color: black and gold tones dominate, complemented by soft, warm accents. This maintains visual continuity with the setting and product aesthetics established in previous scenes and the introduction. - Transition: smooth transition from the previous scene, continuing the narrative and tonal flow. The	Speech: “<i>What’s this ‘thing’ he’s talking about?</i>” / “<i>You know... that thing</i>” (sound in). Background chatter and glass clinking (sound off-field). Lounge-style background music, elegant and ambient (sound off). The sound hierarchy follows a subjective mode, highlighting dialogue and softening ambient sounds, reinforcing the protagonists’ private space within a social setting.

		movement and dialogue unfold naturally, with no visual or rhythmic rupture.	
6	0:21 – 0:27	- Content description: a distinguished man in an all-white suit greets Dre and Snoop warmly. His formal yet friendly welcome signals the protagonists' reintegration into an elite social space. The handshake and mutual recognition underline their status and familiarity within this refined environment. - Frame width: medium shot including all three characters (Dre, Snoop, man in white), emphasizing the interpersonal dynamic and creating a visually balanced moment of connection. - Camera angle: the shot uses a slightly low-angle, frontal perspective positioned at the height of the protagonists' torsos. This angle maintains visual equality among the characters, while subtly emphasizing the presence and stature of Dre and Snoop. The framing reinforces their symbolic centrality without resorting to exaggeration. The perspective is neutral and non-subjective, designed to convey formal balance and mutual respect. - Lighting: warm, muted lighting consistent with the established setting of a 1950s supper club. The man's white suit is visually highlighted against the darker chromatic background. - Color: dominant black and gold background, with the man's all-white suit serving as a stark chromatic contrast. This color contrast visually centralizes him and emphasizes his symbolic and institutional role. - Transition: smooth continuation from the previous scene. The	Speech: <i>"Hey! Welcome back, gentlemen! See you, guys."</i> / Dre responds: <i>"See you"</i> (sound in). Background chatter (sound off-field). Lounge-style instrumental music, elegant and non-intrusive (sound off). The sound follows a subjective mode, with dialogue foregrounded and ambient noise softened, reinforcing the ritual and symbolic nature of the welcome.

		interaction flows naturally, both visually and narratively, marking a shift toward more formal recognition of the protagonists.	
7	0:27 – 0:42	- Content description: the camera shifts to the lounge bar counter, revealing digitally recreated versions of Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. Through generative AI, they are rendered with extraordinary realism. The two figures initially appear in full-body shots, then move to medium close-up as Sinatra reacts to Dre and Snoop with the line, “<i>What the hell are these guys?</i>” The moment initiates an ironic yet respectful intergenerational encounter. - Frame width: starts with full-body shots of Sinatra and Davis Jr., followed by a subtle zoom into medium close-up. This progression draws attention to their facial reactions and emotional presence. - Camera angle: neutral, eye-level frontal angle, designed to introduce the new focal characters (Sinatra and Davis Jr.) with clarity and presence. The camera remains steady and unobtrusive, supporting a naturalistic feel despite the digital recreation. - Lighting: warm, low-key lighting typical of the 1950s-style supper club setting, consistent with the rest of the ad. It supports the realistic integration of the AI-generated figures into the environment. - Color: consistent black and gold palette, subtly adjusted to accommodate the appearance of Sinatra and Davis Jr. No disruption of the established aesthetic; their clothing blends harmoniously with the refined setting. - Transition: the sequence introduces a spatial and narrative shift, moving from Dre and Snoop	Speech: “<i>What the hell are these guys?</i>” (sound in). Background chatter from the venue (sound off-field). Lounge-style instrumental jazz continues unobtrusively (sound off). The soundscape remains subjectively focused: dialogue is foregrounded, ambient sound and music recede slightly to create clarity and intimacy.

		to the lounge bar. Though a change in perspective, it remains fluid and diegetically coherent.	
8	0:42 – 0:52	- Content description: a close-up scene captures a pivotal exchange between Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, and Brenda, a waitress. Sammy calls Brenda over; Sinatra asks her to relay a message to Dre and Snoop. Brenda hesitates and replies, “<i>Are you sure?</i>”, to which Sammy responds reassuringly. Brenda reluctantly agrees. The moment introduces narrative tension and positions Brenda as a symbolic mediator between two generations. - Frame width: close-up on Brenda and tight framing of the dialogue with Sammy and Sinatra. This emphasizes facial expressions, emotional nuance, and the importance of the verbal exchange. - Camera angle: eye-level frontal angle that centers the characters’ faces and maintains a natural, intimate view of the interaction. The framing is conventional and non-intrusive, designed to enhance emotional subtlety. - Lighting: soft, warm lighting typical of the supper club setting, highlighting Brenda’s makeup and dress. The lighting contributes to the elegant, polished visual tone. - Color: Brenda’s dress and styling align with the black-and-gold visual palette, with added highlights (likely in gold or metallic tones) to draw attention to her role in the scene. The color scheme remains consistent and elegant. - Transition: narrative and visual continuity from the prior sequence. The camera moves smoothly from Sinatra and Davis to focus on Brenda, maintaining narrative rhythm and thematic coherence.	Speech: “<i>Brenda, come here a sec</i>” / “<i>Listen, tell those guys we would like to meet them</i>” / “<i>Are you sure?</i>” / “<i>Yes, why not</i>” / “<i>Ok</i>” (sound in). Background jazz music (sound off) plays softly, maintaining atmosphere while placing full auditory focus on the dialogue. The sound follows a subjective listening mode, with perceptual priority given to the characters’ interaction.

9	0:52 – 1:01	- Content description: Brenda approaches Dre and Snoop to deliver Sinatra and Davis Jr.'s invitation. The golden tray she holds, previously a central visual symbol, now recedes into the background. The scene opens with a wide (American) shot revealing more of the venue, followed by a close-up as tension builds. Dre and Snoop appear puzzled, suggesting hesitation. Other patrons look toward the bar, heightening the suspense. Dre ultimately responds with a silent nod, accepting the symbolic invitation. - Frame width: begins with a wide American shot of Dre and Snoop conversing with elegantly dressed women. This is one of the rare panoramic views of the space. It then transitions to a close-up of Dre, Snoop, and Brenda, emphasizing the shift in emotional tone and narrative tension. - Camera angle: neutral, eye-level framing throughout. The wide shot offers spatial orientation and immersion, while the close-up focuses on character reactions and the emotional shift triggered by the invitation. - Lighting: consistent with prior scenes: warm, ambient lighting typical of a 1950s-style supper club. The lighting subtly highlights facial expressions and the shimmering golden tray, now in the periphery. - Color: the black and gold palette continues. The tray's visual presence is diminished, but its golden hue still aligns with the luxury theme. Costumes and background remain stylistically cohesive with the commercial's visual identity. - Transition: smooth narrative continuation from the previous	Speech: “<i>A couple of gentlemen over there would like to meet you</i>” (sound in). Background jazz music (sound off) continues in a soft, unobtrusive way. The sound design follows a subjective mode, isolating the moment to emphasize its symbolic and narrative importance.

		moment. The camera shift from wide to close-up reflects the emotional progression from detached observation to intimate engagement with the protagonists' decision.	
10	1:01 – 1:05	- Content description: the focus shifts from characters to instruments, marking a transition to a more solemn, ritualistic phase. Extreme close-ups highlight a cymbal, double bass strings, and a trumpet bell, treated as symbolic subjects. This is followed by a wide shot showing the full orchestra, with Snoop, Dre, Sinatra, and Davis Jr. in the foreground. The scene acts as a narrative threshold toward the commercial's climax. - Frame width: extreme close-ups on individual musical instruments, followed by a wide, full-body shot of the orchestra and four protagonists. This progression emphasizes the narrative shift from detail to totality, from objects to collective presence. - Camera angle: the extreme close-ups use tight, focused framing from neutral angles to isolate instrument details. The subsequent wide shot adopts a frontal angle, presenting the orchestra and protagonists in a balanced, formal composition. - Lighting: warm lighting enhances the golden tones of the wooden surfaces and instruments, contributing to the sacred, elevated tone of the scene. It maintains the visual continuity of the supper club atmosphere. - Color: dominated by gold and warm wood tones, visually linking the instruments to the luxury and elegance of the setting. The palette reinforces the transition into a heightened symbolic space.	Music moves from background to foreground. The swing/jazz track increases in volume and energy, becoming the main narrative driver. Sound off-field: instrument sounds are present and locatable but not always shown in sync. All ambient/environmental sound is muted. The subjective listening mode centers entirely on the music.

		- Transition: clear tonal and rhythmic shift from the previous scene. The transition is marked by changes in framing, sound intensity, and narrative focus, signaling entry into the climactic phase of the commercial.	
11	1:05 – 1:17	- Content description: the long-awaited encounter between Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, and Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr., takes place. Through a ritual handshake and brief dialogue, the scene enacts mutual recognition and symbolic equality. Sammy asks what they would like to drink. Snoop replies “<i>Gin</i>”, Dre follows with “<i>Still Gin</i>”, turning the product name into a symbolic expression of continuity and identity. - Frame width: alternates between tight close-ups (emphasizing faces, hands, and gestures) and dynamic framings that encompass the four protagonists, reinforcing the importance and intimacy of the moment. - Camera angle: moving camera encircles the characters dynamically. Close-ups are framed at eye-level, creating intimacy, while wide framings offer spatial context and a ceremonial tone. The angles vary to reflect the energy and relational focus of the scene. - Lighting: warm, polished lighting consistent with the lounge atmosphere. Subtle highlights accentuate facial expressions and the physical contact of the handshake, reinforcing the ritualistic tone. - Color: the black and gold color palette remains dominant, with the characters’ attire and environment harmonizing visually. The golden tones add symbolic weight to the scene’s celebratory and formal nature.	Speech: “<i>What would you like to drink?</i>” / “<i>Gin.</i>” / “<i>Still Gin</i>” (sound in). Background lounge music continues (sound off). Ambient room sounds, like chatter, remain soft and secondary (sound off-field). Subjective listening mode focuses auditory perception on the main characters and dialogue.

		- Transition: narrative progression from anticipation to encounter. The transition is marked by an energetic change in rhythm and movement, coinciding with the handshake and spoken brand statement.	
12	1:17 – 1:21	- Content description: Frank Sinatra delivers the line “<i>Still G.I.N. for everybody</i>”, serving as the symbolic and narrative climax. This statement marks the unity of past and present into a single, celebratory community. The crowd joins the protagonists, turning the moment into a collective ritual of inclusion. - Frame width: American shot from a low angle that includes all four protagonists. The framing mirrors the opening scene, creating a circular visual structure. The full venue and audience are visible in the background, reinforcing the theme of unity and collective participation. - Camera angle: low-angle, American shot. This perspective emphasizes the protagonists’ iconic stature while maintaining a sense of inclusion and equilibrium across all represented figures. The angle contributes to the sense of collective elevation. - Lighting: consistent warm, ambient lighting. The space appears bright and unified, with lighting supporting the celebratory and communal tone of the climax. - Color: the black and gold palette remains, now extended to the full environment and the audience, visually unifying characters and setting. The overall color design reinforces the luxury and symbolic cohesion of the scene. - Transition: this is the culmination of all previous transitions. The	Speech: “<i>Still G.I.N. for everybody</i>” (sound in). Background lounge music continues (sound off). Audience exclamations and chatter are clearly audible but off-camera (sound off-field). The listening mode shifts from subjective to objective: all sound sources are balanced and spatially coherent, reflecting the inclusion of both viewer and characters in a unified auditory space.

		sequence closes the narrative arc with visual and thematic symmetry, returning to the opening framing and resolving all prior tension in a celebratory gesture.	
13	1:21 – 1:24	- Content description: the protagonists are seated at a table, enjoying a relaxed and convivial moment. Formality gives way to laughter, toasts, and a sense of genuine connection. Snoop's relaxed posture (jacket over shoulders) symbolizes the achieved ease. The black bottle of Still Gin is placed in the center foreground, becoming the visual and symbolic anchor of the scene. - Frame width: frontal medium shot capturing the facial expressions and relaxed gestures of all four characters. The product is centered in the foreground, framed clearly against the white table setting, ensuring its visual prominence. - Camera angle: eye-level frontal angle. This choice places the viewer at the same table level, enhancing intimacy and inclusion, and drawing visual focus to both the characters and the product. - Lighting: warm and balanced, consistent with the supper club setting. The lighting accentuates the glossy black of the bottle against the lighter background, subtly reinforcing its central role. - Color: the deep black of the Still Gin bottle contrasts with the white tablecloth, napkins, and crystal glasses. This deliberate color opposition visually isolates and highlights the product while maintaining aesthetic harmony. - Transition: final resolution of the narrative arc. The scene transitions from the symbolic toast to a shared, emotional payoff: intimacy and	Dialogue, laughter, and toasts (sound in) fade gradually into the background. Background chatter of other guests is present but off-screen (sound off-field). Lounge music continues discreetly (sound off). The subjective listening mode maintains focus on the protagonists' interaction while ambient elements are softened, supporting a sense of orchestrated intimacy.

		alliance across eras. The relaxed tone contrasts with the earlier formality, marking narrative closure.	
14	1:24 – 1:30	- Content description: the commercial ends with a close-up of the Still Gin bottle, sharp and luminous in the foreground, while the four protagonists appear blurred in the background, laughing and conversing. This final image elevates the product from prop to icon, symbolizing unity across generations and styles. - Frame width: close-up on the bottle, fixed and centered. The protagonists appear in soft focus in the background, reinforcing the semantic centrality of the product. - Camera angle: static, frontal close-up at table level. The angle isolates the product while subtly including the social context in the depth of field, establishing symbolic hierarchy. - Lighting: the bottle is brightly lit, with soft diffusion on the background. The contrast in sharpness and luminosity emphasizes the product's materiality and centrality. - Color: the deep black of the bottle contrasts with the warmer tones of the background. This sharp visual opposition enhances the symbolic isolation and iconic framing of the product. - Transition: final visual and narrative resolution. The scene transitions from social interaction to symbolic stillness. The camera no longer moves; all narrative energy is condensed into the central image of the product.	Protagonists' laughter and conversation are heard off-screen (sound off-field), while the background music continues (sound off). Both are softened and non-intrusive. The subjective listening mode keeps auditory focus on the bottle, reinforcing its role as the scene's emotional and symbolic focal point.

Table 2. *The segmentation of texts*

Sequence 1 (0:00 – 0:04). The opening sequence of the commercial begins with the theatrical entrance of Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre as they cross the threshold of a 1950s-style supper club cocktail lounge. The setting is visually constructed within a refined and formal register, characterized by warm, subdued lighting emitted by table lamps and suspended fixtures, and a dominant black-and-gold color scheme that evokes luxury, exclusivity, and sophistication. The two protagonists enter engaged in relaxed conversation, their movements slow yet assured, accentuated by a confident stride that conveys charisma, command of the scene, and mastery of the environment. The attention of the guests is drawn to them from the very first moment, implying an implicit hierarchy within the visual diegesis: Dre and Snoop embody the new “gentlemen”, capable of capturing collective attention.

The shot is wide and cinematically composed, framed in an American shot that captures the characters from head to just above the knees, allowing the viewer to observe both facial expressions and body posture, as well as attire. The low-angle camera position is a deliberate visual strategy with a specific semiotic function: it enhances the symbolic stature of the protagonists, endowing them with an almost iconic presence that dominates the space.

On the auditory level, the sequence opens with a woman’s laughter emanating from off-screen, while the voices of the two protagonists, who are visible within the frame, constitute the primary *sound in*. Michel Chion categorizes this type of auditory construction through three “points of audition”: in this case, we observe the coexistence of a *sound in* (Snoop and Dre’s voices), a localizable *off-field sound* (the women’s laughter from off-screen), a *non-diegetic sound* (the background music, which has no visible source). The mode of listening activated is subjective: although other patrons are present in the lounge, background noises are suppressed or heavily muted, thus directing the auditory focus exclusively onto the two protagonists. This selective sound filtering serves a dual function: on one hand, it amplifies the narrative centrality of Dre and Snoop; on the other, it creates a more intimate and immersive auditory experience, as if the viewer were sharing their internal perspective.

The entire sequence is therefore orchestrated to produce the immediate iconicization of the two central figures, through both visual means (framing, lighting, posture) and a refined sound design that reinforces their authority and magnetism within the diegetic space.



Figure 8. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 2 (0:04 – 0:05). The focus of the camera shifts to an elegantly set table, where two refined and meticulously dressed women are tasting the gin that is the centerpiece of the campaign. The framing concentrates specifically on the upper bodies of the two female figures, shown from the waist to the neck, while the Still G.I.N. bottle occupies the entire visual field, positioned in full figure. The arrival of the waitress, who places the bottle on the table with measured and solemn gestures, constitutes a moment of symbolic focus: the bottle becomes the temporary center of the diegetic universe, emphasized by a visual composition that isolates and elevates the product as a fetishized object of luxury and desirability.

Sound plays a decisive role in reinforcing this centrality. Although background music is present, the dominant auditory element is the distinctly audible and isolated sound of the glass bottle first touching the metal tray and then the table surface. This sound, barely

perceptible under normal conditions in a similar real-world context, is instead highlighted and isolated within the commercial's sound design.

Referring to Michel Chion's tripartite model, the sound of the bottle falls under the category of *sound in*: it is visible and synchronized with the on-screen action. The music, by contrast, constitutes *sound off*: it has no identifiable source within the frame and resides outside the immediate diegesis, yet it contributes to the atmospheric construction. The listening mode activated is clearly subjective: the acoustic emphasis placed on the sound of the bottle does not adhere to environmental realism but follows a narrative and symbolic logic, filtering sound perception through the implicit point of view of a spectator-character hybrid.

This treatment of sound has the effect of momentarily suspending the ambient flow and concentrating all attention on the object (the bottle) thus transforming it into a status symbol and a semiotic fulcrum of the advertisement's message. The scene therefore operates on two simultaneous levels: the visual aestheticization achieved through refined composition and warm color grading, and the auditory dramatization, which isolates and amplifies a banal gesture, transfiguring it into a ritual act.



Figure 9. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 3 (0:05 – 0:07). The shot focuses on a medium close-up of the two women seated at the table, the same women who, in the previous scene, were tasting the gin. This time, their gaze is directed toward Snoop and Dre as they walk past. The camera adopts a subjective perspective, aligning the viewer's point of view with that of Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg. The two artists are not visible in the frame; rather, it is as if the viewer is observing the scene through their eyes. Thus, the women look directly into the camera, but this does not constitute a breaking of the fourth wall. Instead, it creates a diegetic effect of internal focalization, transforming the viewer into a silent co-protagonist of the scene, and placing them in a position to receive the women's gaze, charged with curiosity and interest, directed at the two artists.

This silent exchange of glances contributes to building a narrative tension based on charisma and recognition. The women do not speak, but observe attentively, and the close-up, static framing highlights their sophisticated expressions and elegant demeanor, which align with the overall tone of the commercial.

Visually, a chromatic detail confirms the aesthetic consistency of the spot: a golden tray, previously shown holding the Still G.I.N. bottle, is clearly visible. Although a marginal element, it gains semiotic relevance by reinforcing the black-and-gold color palette of the commercial and functioning as an additional symbolic marker of luxury and refinement, visually linking the product to a code of exclusivity.

From an acoustic perspective, the musical soundtrack continues to play at full volume, yet the most prominent sound is that of the waitress's high heels as she walks away. This sound design choice also reveals a strong subjectivization: in a realistic setting, the sound of heels would typically be drowned out by the music and the ambient noise of the venue. However, here it is isolated and amplified, making it clearly audible. The auditory structure thus includes a *sound off* (the music, not directly visible or spatially located) and a selective *sound in* (the heels), whose prominence is narratively filtered to emphasize the individual perception of the moment.

This acoustic strategy serves to elevate the waitress's simple act of walking away into a choreographed gesture of elegance. The artificially enhanced sound of the heels assumes an almost choreutic value and contributes to the construction of a sophisticated scenic

rhythm, alternating visual slowness with high-definition sonic micro-moments. Though brief, the sequence fulfills a dual function: on one hand, it continues the sensory aestheticization of the space through carefully composed colors and gestures; on the other, it actively involves the viewer in the protagonists' subjective experience, strengthening the empathic bond with the narrative.



Figure 10. Screenshot from *“Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends”* (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 4 (0:07 – 0:11). The viewer continues to follow the action from the subjective point of view of the protagonists, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg. Although the two are not directly visible within the frame, it is evident that the camera adopts their visual perspective, simulating their gaze as it moves through the venue. This visual treatment allows the viewer to fully immerse themselves in the perceptual experience of the two artists, maintaining narrative continuity with the preceding sequences.

As Dre and Snoop proceed through the scene, they are addressed by two well-dressed men who had been engaged in conversation. Upon noticing the protagonists, one of the men turns with deference, addresses them as “Boss”, and says, “I took care of that thing”, a phrase that signals recognition and respect. This interaction reinforces the protagonists' actantial construction as charismatic, authoritative figures who occupy a central role within the social dynamics of the setting. The medium close-up framing of the two men

enables the viewer to clearly perceive their attentive expressions and the subtle suspension of their dialogue, emphasizing the social magnetism generated by Dre and Snoop's presence.

From a sonic perspective, and following Michel Chion's classification, three distinct levels of sound can be identified. The *sound in* is represented by the man's voice, directly addressing the protagonists; it is clearly audible and located within the visual field. The *sound off-field* consists of the general background chatter of the venue, audible but not visible, helping to preserve the coherence of the diegetic environment. Lastly, the *sound off* is provided by the background music, which is neither visible nor spatially locatable, yet fully integrated into the overall soundscape.

This scene also employs a subjective listening mode: the auditory focus is selective and structured around the protagonists' perceptual field. Ambient noise is significantly attenuated in comparison to the dialogue, while the music, although present, remains in the background, giving prominence to the spoken exchange. This hierarchy of sounds serves a precise narrative function: it isolates the meaningful interaction from its surroundings and symbolically elevates it above the ambient noise. The line "I took care of that thing", though ambiguous, is charged with implicit meaning, suggesting a relationship of trust or subordination that echoes typical tropes of gangster and noir cinema.

As a result, the scene contributes to constructing the image of Dre and Snoop as central figures within an implicit social order: they are respected, recognized, and addressed as authorities within a narrative universe where power, control, and charisma are codified through gestures, glances, and minimal verbal exchanges. The continued use of subjective perspective further enhances the immersive involvement of the viewer, who experiences the scene filtered through the protagonists' elevated social status.



Figure 11. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 5 (0:11 – 0:21). The sequence opens with a brief exchange between Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, who continue walking toward the center of the venue while engaging in informal yet meaningful dialogue that follows the interaction from the previous scene. Framed in a medium shot and accompanied by a moving camera that tracks their steps, the two maintain a relaxed and synchronized pace, underscoring their mutual confidence and command of the situation. The dialogue is delivered with natural ease, featuring the following exchange: Dre, puzzled, asks Snoop, “What’s this ‘thing’ he’s talking about?”, to which Snoop replies with deliberate vagueness, “You know... that thing.” While seemingly inconsequential, this brief exchange is rich in implication: it alludes to a well-established bond between the two, grounded in a shared code of insinuation, irony, and nonverbal understanding. The lack of an explicit explanation introduces a minor narrative enigma, leaving the viewer momentarily suspended, while simultaneously reinforcing the sense of an exclusive complicity between the two characters.

The sound design of the scene once again follows a subjective mode, in which auditory elements are filtered through the protagonists’ focused perception. The *sound in* consists of Snoop and Dre’s voices, clearly audible and placed at the center of both the visual and acoustic field. In the *sound off-field*, ambient sounds such as background chatter and the clinking of glasses are perceptible, signaling a lively social context that remains

secondary to the primary interaction. Finally, the *sound off* is represented by the background music, which remains stylistically consistent with the 1950s–60s lounge bar atmosphere, elegant and non-intrusive.

The overall effect is one of selective intimacy: the visual and acoustic world closes in around the two protagonists, creating a narrative bubble within which their dialogue can unfold uninterrupted. The fluid movement of the camera, combined with the orderly progression of the background music and the selective sound hierarchy, sustains the sophisticated and conspiratorial tone of the commercial. From a semiotic perspective, this sequence further consolidates the actantial role of Dre and Snoop as central and self-aware subjects, navigating a high-profile social environment with ease, irony, and symbolic mastery of the context.



Figure 12. Screenshot from “*Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends*” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 6 (0:21 – 0:27). In this sequence, the narrative tone of the commercial acquires a new symbolic nuance: a distinguished man, dressed entirely in white and unique among the patrons of the venue, approaches Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre with elegance to greet them warmly. His figure, marked by both attire and posture, immediately suggests an institutional role within the setting, likely that of the *maître d’* or a similarly prominent figure. The whiteness of his suit stands out against the chromatic background, which is dominated by black and gold tones, rendering him visually central and instantly

recognizable. The medium shot includes all three characters, creating a moment of connection that is both formal and authentic.

The greeting, accompanied by a firm handshake and the man's cordial smile, marks the first explicit act of welcome within the narrative: "Hey! Welcome back, gentlemen! See you, guys". Dr. Dre responds with a simple yet meaningful "See you", sealing the mutual recognition. This brief exchange encapsulates a strong sense of belonging: the protagonists are not merely guests, but anticipated and respected figures, reintegrated into an elite universe that acknowledges their status.

From a sonic perspective, the construction of the scene once again follows a subjective listening mode, as theorized by Michel Chion. The *sound in* is constituted by the dialogue between the man in white and the two protagonists, clearly audible and situated at the center of the visual and auditory field. The *sound off-field* consists of the ambient chatter of the venue, contextually coherent but non-intrusive, providing a socially rich yet unobtrusive backdrop to the main interaction. Finally, the *sound off* is represented by the background music, which continues to flow in a harmonious and orderly manner, consistent with the sophisticated 1950s lounge bar atmosphere.

Though brief, this sequence introduces a ritual gesture of inclusion that carries strong symbolic weight: it marks the protagonists' official entrance into the narrative core of the venue, setting the stage for the legendary encounter that will unfold in the following scenes. Both visually and acoustically, every element is calibrated to convey a sense of codified familiarity and mutual respect, in accordance with the implicit rules of an exclusive setting, one in which belonging is earned through charisma, reputation, and impeccable style.



Figure 13. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 7 (0:27 – 0:42). The sequence opens with a shift in narrative focus: the camera moves to the lounge bar counter, revealing the presence of two iconic figures from postwar American culture, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. These characters are recreated with remarkable fidelity through the use of generative artificial intelligence. Their visual rendering is impeccable: facial features, expressions, and body movements are modeled with such precision that they become virtually indistinguishable from real-life footage, demonstrating the exceptional technical level achieved by the creative team (Metaphysic and Rosewood Creative, in collaboration with director Dave Meyers). The two figures are initially shown in full-body shots as they stand at the bar. Shortly after, a subtle zoom brings the viewer closer, framing them in medium close-up and emphasizing their intrigued expressions.

As Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre continue moving through the venue, greeting other patrons, Sinatra turns and exclaims, with a tone that is both ironic and charismatic: “What the hell are these guys?” This marks the beginning of a key interaction within the commercial, introducing an intertemporal dialogue between two generations of revolutionary artists. Though seemingly provocative, the question is not hostile; rather, it expresses surprise and a readiness for engagement. It functions as a foundational enunciative act: Sinatra

acknowledges the presence of two “others” who command attention and merit further inquiry.

From an acoustic standpoint, the scene adheres to the subjective listening mode as theorized by Michel Chion. The *sound in* consists of the dialogue between Sinatra and Davis Jr., clearly visible and synchronized with the visual frame. The *sound off-field* comprises the ambient chatter of the venue, consistent with its refined and convivial atmosphere. The *sound off* is represented by the instrumental jazz soundtrack, which accompanies the entire spot with tonal coherence, never overpowering the dialogue.

This sequence represents a pivotal symbolic moment: the encounter between past and present, between the legacy of classic entertainment and the contemporary force of hip-hop, embodied by Dre and Snoop. The visual recognition between the two worlds, the glance exchanged between Sinatra, Davis, and the newcomers, serves as a narrative mechanism to legitimize intergenerational dialogue.



Figure 14. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 8 (0:42 – 0:52). The sequence centers on the brief but meaningful exchange between Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, and Brenda, the waitress, who momentarily assumes the role of messenger within the actantial dynamic of the narrative. Captured in close-up, Brenda appears as a highly polished female figure: impeccable makeup, a bright

initial smile, and an elegant long dress, perfectly aligned with the formal and sophisticated aesthetic of the supper club setting.

The scene opens with Sammy's invocation: "*Brenda, come here a sec*", delivered in a tone that is friendly yet direct. Sinatra follows with, "*Listen, tell those guys we would like to meet them*", clearly referring to Snoop and Dre. Brenda's expression subtly darkens, and with a hesitant tone, she replies, "Are you sure?", signaling a moment of emotional tension or uncertainty regarding the request. Sammy responds with calm reassurance: "*Yes, why not*". Brenda, though still slightly doubtful, concedes with an "*Ok*" and prepares to approach the two protagonists.

From a sound perspective, the scene once again follows the subjective listening mode theorized by Michel Chion. The *sound in*, clearly visible and centered within the frame, is constituted by the dialogue among the three characters, which is fully intelligible and foregrounded in the audio track. The background music, an elegant jazz composition, functions as *sound off*: a non-diegetic element that supports and enhances the refined atmosphere without interfering with the dialogue. The absence of other contextual sounds, such as chatter or the clinking of glasses, further emphasizes the perceptual focus on the characters' interaction.

This scene marks a pivotal moment in the narrative: the expressed desire for an encounter between two symbolic pairings, on one side, representatives of 20th-century classic entertainment; on the other, innovators of contemporary hip-hop. Brenda serves as the narrative bridge, the mediating actant tasked with delivering the message of contact. Her hesitation introduces a subtle layer of narrative tension, as if the convergence of these two "eras" carried with it a degree of risk or uncertainty, which will later be resolved. The use of AI, which makes it possible to stage Sinatra and Davis Jr., renders this interaction particularly rich from both symbolic and critical perspectives: what is being constructed is an artificial transgenerational dialogue, made possible only through technology, yet imbued with profound cultural significance.



Figure 15. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 9 (0:52 – 1:01). In this sequence, Brenda, the bridging character, assumes the role of mediator between two symbolic worlds and two cultural eras. With graceful composure, she approaches Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre to deliver the message received from Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr.: an invitation to meet. As she moves through the crowd, she still holds the same golden tray used earlier in the scene with the two women. While in that earlier moment the golden object occupied the center of the frame, serving as a marked visual symbol of luxury and rituality, it now becomes visually decentered, reduced to a contextual detail. This shift in visual emphasis signals a change in narrative focus: the tray becomes a secondary sign, while the anticipation of Snoop and Dre’s response draws the viewer’s attention.

The scene opens with a wide shot (American shot), showing the two protagonists standing as they converse with elegantly dressed women and sip cocktails. The director’s choice to expand the visual field offers one of the few panoramic views of the entire venue, allowing the viewer a more immersive understanding of the supper club’s visual and social environment. The camera then shifts to a close-up of Snoop, Dre, and Brenda. This change in visual scale mirrors the scene’s emotional intensification, as the narrative slows and tension builds.

Snoop and Dre lean forward, peering through the crowd, trying to locate the source of the request. Their expressions convey puzzlement and slight irritation, subtly indicating a form of resistance that precedes the narrative turning point. Meanwhile, other patrons, previously off-screen, now visible, turn their gaze toward the bar, where Sinatra and Davis Jr. await. The scene becomes charged with diegetic suspension, in which the silence of the secondary characters and the emphasis on the central dialogue contribute to a theatrical staging of the impending encounter.

From a sonic perspective, the sequence follows a subjective listening mode. The background music, functioning as *sound off* (neither visible nor spatially situated), continues unobtrusively. Ambient sounds, however, are either heavily filtered or entirely absent: people are seen conversing and moving, yet no noise is heard from them, ensuring the clarity of the central exchange. Brenda, visible in the frame, delivers the message: “A couple of gentlemen over there would like to meet you”. This sonic focus isolates the communicative event, emphasizing its symbolic value as a threshold moment: from mere guests at the venue, Snoop and Dre are now recognized, addressed, and ultimately legitimized by the “greats” of the past.

In both visual and acoustic composition, this scene marks the moment of implicit acceptance of the narrative pact. Dre responds with a silent but meaningful nod, signaling the point at which the plot moves toward the convergence of past and present. This approving gesture represents, from a narratological perspective, an affirmative act toward intergenerational connection, a symbolic bridge between two musical traditions that, through technology, are now able to interact.



Figure 16. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 10 (1:01 – 1:05). The visual and auditory narrative of the commercial undergoes a decisive shift through a change in tone and rhythm. The focus transitions to the musical instruments, which take center stage and mark the entrance into a more solemn and ritualistic phase of the story. The camera lingers in extreme close-up on evocative details: first the cymbal, then the double bass strings, and finally the bell of the trumpet, all positioned against an elegant wooden backdrop that, enhanced by the venue’s warm lighting, appears golden. This choice of close-up framing gives narrative centrality to the musical objects, treating them almost as autonomous subjects within the story.

Music, which up to this point has served merely as ambient background, now assumes a primary function: the volume increases, the rhythm intensifies, and the lounge-style swing/jazz soundtrack becomes energized, emerging as the true protagonist of the scene. This transition is further reinforced by a swift change in framing: a full-body, wide shot reveals the entire orchestra, with the four central figures, Snoop Dogg, Dr. Dre, Frank Sinatra, and Sammy Davis Jr., in the foreground. This composition underscores the significance of the moment as a symbolic threshold leading to the commercial’s climactic phase.

From an auditory perspective, and in accordance with Michel Chion's categories, this scene exemplifies a subjective listening mode: the sounds are filtered through the scene's internal focus, which mutes all environmental noise, voices, chatter, and room sounds, to concentrate attention exclusively on the instruments. Although the instruments are not always shown at the precise moment they are played, their sounds are locatable within the diegetic space and fall under the category of *sound off-field*, as defined by Chion. The overall effect is one of narrative suspension, in which music does not merely accompany the scene but actively structures the transition into a new phase of the visual narrative, setting the stage for the collective toast that follows.



Figure 17. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 11 (1:05 – 1:17). The physical and symbolic encounter between the two pairs of protagonists, Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre on one side, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. on the other, unfolds in this sequence. The scene is marked by a strong ritualistic and relational component, in which the handshake functions as a performative act of mutual recognition between equals. The camera moves swiftly around the four figures, alternating tight close-ups and dynamic framings that contribute to an atmosphere of refined liveliness, highlighting the significance of the encounter.

The dialogue, though simple, is rich in meaning and serves to consolidate the bond between the protagonists. Sammy greets them enthusiastically and asks what they would like to drink. The two-part response, “*Gin*” from Snoop and “*Still Gin*” from Dre, becomes the commercial’s identity statement. This nominal exchange acts as a semiotic node: “*Still Gin*” is not merely the product’s name, but also a discursive brand that conveys continuity, style, affinity, and shared belonging across different eras and cultural languages.

The soundtrack maintains tonal consistency with the preceding scenes: lounge bar music continues in the background (*sound off*, in Michel Chion’s terms), accompanied by the subdued ambient chatter of the room (*sound off-field*), which enhances the realism of the setting. The dialogue among the four protagonists constitutes *sound in*, audible and central, fully integrated into the frame. The listening mode remains subjective: the audience hears through the focalization on the main characters, while environmental noises are softened, remaining at the margins of auditory perception.

Though brief, this sequence is semantically and symbolically pivotal: it marks the transition from mutual observation to a shared, almost ceremonial acceptance, in which the values of prestige, elegance, and cultural affinity are ritualized through the handshake and the act of sharing a drink. The brand merges with the identity of its ambassadors, becoming itself a mediator between seemingly distant worlds, united by charisma, cultural influence, and style.



Figure 18. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 12 (1:17 – 1:21). The commercial narrative reaches its symbolic climax through a statement that functions as a collective act of consecration: “*Still G.I.N. for everybody*”, pronounced by Frank Sinatra in a tone that is both solemn and effortless. This declaration marks the full integration of the two represented worlds, the iconic past and the urban present, and seals the formation of a unified community under the sign of the product.

The framing mirrors that of the opening sequence: a low-angle American shot captures all four protagonists (Sinatra, Davis Jr., Snoop Dogg, and Dr. Dre), thereby creating a circular structure in the visual narrative. In the background, the entire venue is visible: the previously curious and elegant audience now actively participates in the scene, celebrating and rejoicing alongside the protagonists. The visual direction amplifies the effect of collectivity and belonging: everyone is included in the symbolic ritual, and the “gin community” is portrayed as cohesive, diverse, and intergenerational.

The soundtrack supports the sequence with balance and continuity: the lounge music continues in the background (*sound off*), while Sinatra’s speech is *sound in*, visible and foregrounded in the frame. The background chatter and festive exclamations of the audience, reacting enthusiastically to the line, are categorized as *sound off-field*: not visible, but clearly located within the represented space.

Unlike previous sequences, the listening mode here becomes objective: sounds are no longer filtered through a subjective or internal perspective but are rendered in a balanced and open manner, as if the viewer were fully immersed in the scene. This shift marks a turning point in the acoustic narration: there is no longer a distinction between observers and protagonists, but rather a complete union, symbolized by the collective toast implicitly evoked in the festive tone of the scene. The statement “*Still G.I.N. for everybody*” thus functions as a performative utterance that closes and fulfills the narrative arc of the commercial.



Figure 19. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 13 (1:21 – 1:24). The commercial reaches its climactic moment, both narratively and in terms of visual and emotional impact. The four protagonists are now seated around a table in a relaxed, cheerful, almost convivial atmosphere. The tensions and formal roles established in previous sequences dissolve into a climate of friendship and spontaneity: Snoop, wearing his jacket casually draped over his shoulders, becomes a visual symbol of the ease that has been achieved. Laughter and toasts among the protagonists reinforce a sense of consolidated alliance, marking the transition from ceremonial encounter to the genuine pleasure of shared experience.

A frontal medium shot clearly captures the smiling faces and relaxed body language of the characters, placing the viewer in close proximity to the scene. In the foreground, perfectly centered within the visual composition, stands the black bottle of Still Gin. The bottle’s deep, opaque black contrasts sharply with the white tablecloth and napkins, and the clear crystal glasses, a deliberate aesthetic choice that assigns the product symbolic value and semiotic centrality. In this way, the product is no longer a mere accessory but becomes the catalyst of the scene and the discursive emblem of the unity achieved.

From a sonic perspective, the three levels identified by Michel Chion can be recognized. The protagonists’ dialogue, laughter, and toasts are initially *sound in*, visible in the frame

and clearly audible, but gradually fade, blending into the soundtrack. The background chatter of other patrons, although not shown on screen, is audible (*sound off-field*), maintaining the liveliness of the social environment. The music, non-diegetic and continuous, accompanies the scene discreetly, reinforcing both visual and emotional harmony.

The listening mode remains subjective: the viewer's attention is entirely focused on the protagonists' table, while external sounds are softened to highlight the act of toasting and the mutual understanding among the characters. The result is a sense of orchestrated intimacy, where the advertised product functions as a facilitator of connection between cultural icons from different eras, and the scene itself becomes a moment of elegant, timeless collective ritual.



Figure 20. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

Sequence 14 (1:24 – 1:30). The commercial concludes with a highly symbolic shot: a close-up of the Still Gin bottle, sharp, central, and luminous, set in stark contrast to the blurred background, where the four protagonists can be seen continuing their conversation and laughter. This visual composition functions as a true consecration of the product, which, from a simple narrative object, is elevated to an iconic synthesis of the entire story just told. The bottle is no longer merely a visual detail or scenic accessory; it

asserts itself as the true semantic core of the advertisement's message: a symbol of connection across eras, style, charisma, and cultural legend.

The shot is fixed and close, deliberately designed to place the product at the center of attention, while everything happening around it, the chatter, the laughter, the convivial atmosphere, remains in the background, both visually and acoustically. The decision to depict the four protagonists in the background, blurred and reduced to moving silhouettes, reinforces the idea that the climax of the narrative lies precisely in the tangible materiality of the product, which serves to catalyze the meeting of two eras and two cultural aesthetics.

From a sound perspective, the scene follows Michel Chion's theory of auditory points of view. The voices of the four protagonists, though not clearly visible in the frame, are distinctly audible as *sound off-field*: voices situated within the narrative space but not directly shown. Their relaxed conversation and distant laughter create a sense of closure that is warm, familiar, and celebratory. The background soundtrack, continuing unobtrusively, qualifies as *sound off*, as it lacks a localizable diegetic source but complements and enriches the scene's overall meaning.

The listening mode remains subjective: both the auditory and visual focus is entirely on the bottle, while ambient sounds and imagery remain soft and secondary. This immersive construction guides the viewer toward internalizing the symbolic message: the Still Gin bottle is the catalyst of the meeting between legends, the object that gives meaning to the narrative and seals the iconic and aspirational value of the brand. The campaign thus concludes with a powerful image of secular ritual, in which the product itself becomes the true protagonist and the enduring visual memory of the entire spot.



Figure 21. Screenshot from “Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends” (YouTube, Dre and Snoop, 2024).

3.2.1.2 The Semio-Narrative Level: The Actantial Model

SENDER		OBJECT		RECEIVER
Stil G.I.N., ambition, legend status	→	Symbolic inclusion in the community of legends (through gin)	→	Snoop Dog & Dr Dre
		↑		
HELPER		SUBJECT		OPPONENT
Brenda, jazz music, generative AI	→	Snoop Dog & Dr Dre	←	Initial distrust, generational gap, traditional elite filter

Table 3. Greimas's Actantial Model customized to the Still Gin case. Source: Greimas, A. J. (1973). *Les actants, les acteurs et les figures in sémiotique narrative et textuelle* coll. L. paris.

The subjects of the campaign are Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, who serve as the central protagonists of the narrative action. They enter the venue and immediately attract attention (*Sequence 1*). They are then engaged and act as initiators of transformation (*Sequences 4 and 9*). Their underlying desire is for recognition and legitimization within a context defined by cultural and symbolic elite status. Ultimately, they achieve a meaningful encounter with two iconic figures of the past, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr., culminating in a symbolic alliance in the final sequence.

The object of the campaign is entry into the "symbolic community" of luxury and legend. This is represented symbolically by the Still GIN bottle and the final celebratory toast (*Sequence 14*). The protagonists' goal is not merely to consume a premium gin but to gain access to, and be embraced by, a shared value system rooted in elegance, historical continuity, and the American tradition of elite entertainment culture.

The sender of the narrative is the iconic and aspirational culture of the past (the Rat Pack), together with the symbolic value embodied by the venue itself. It is this value system, myth, style, and legend as personified by Sinatra and Davis Jr., and the elegant supper club setting, that catalyzes the action. The location functions as a ritual space (featuring dark wood interiors, a retro atmosphere, and jazz music), while Sinatra and Davis Jr. operate as symbolic gatekeepers who authorize entry. They are the ones who summon Snoop and Dre (*Sequences 6–8*) and ultimately legitimize their inclusion.

The receivers of the message are Snoop Dogg and Dr Dre, who are also the subjects of the narrative. As recipients of the symbolic mission, being included in the community of legends, they choose to act, thus assuming the role of subjects. The product, Still G.I.N., functions as the narrative medium through which this value is transmitted. The final sequences (12 - 14), including the toast, expressions of unity, the presence of the bottle

as narrative synthesis, and the protagonists' smiles and lightness, visually represent the symbolic accomplishment of the mission.

The helpers include Brenda (the waitress), the music, and generative artificial intelligence. Brenda acts as a bridge between worlds, delivering the message and facilitating the encounter. The music underscores shifts in tone and guides emotional engagement. AI enables the “impossible presence” of characters from the past, making the heart of the narrative technically and aesthetically feasible. Brenda, though hesitant at first, plays a pivotal role (*Sequences 8–9*). The music intensifies at the narrative turning point (*Sequence 10*), and AI functions as the mechanism that allows for intergenerational interaction.

The opponents are the temporal and cultural boundaries, initial skepticism, and the filter of elite exclusivity. The narrative is structured around overcoming distances, generational, aesthetic, and symbolic. The initial obstacle lies in an implicit resistance to admitting new members into a symbolic elite, exemplified by Brenda’s wary glance and Sinatra’s questioning tone. Brenda asks, “Are you sure?” (*Sequence 8*), and Sinatra remarks, “What the hell are these guys?” (*Sequence 7*). These expressions of doubt, though not hostile, establish a symbolic opposition that is ultimately transcended through the convivial ritual of the final toast.

The narrative commences with a manipulative act orchestrated by Sinatra and Davis Jr., with Brenda acting as the mediator. Seated at the bar, Sinatra notes the rappers' arrival and inquires, “What are these individuals?”, therefore commencing the scene. Sammy summons Brenda, assigning her the responsibility of escorting the guests, while Sinatra expresses a wish to meet them. This represents a subtle type of manipulation, characterized by symbolism rather than authoritarianism, in which two traditional figures do not confront the new protagonists but rather engage with them cordially. Brenda, poised and cheerful, establishes narrative tension with her inquiry, “Are you sure?”, indicating the cultural gap that must be reconciled. The manipulation concludes when Dre, with a mere nod, accepts the invitation.

The competence phase follows: as they move through the venue (*Sequences 1–9*), Snoop and Dre display confidence, greet patrons, and receive tokens of respect (“boss”), demonstrating familiarity with the environment and its cultural codes. Their competence is primarily symbolic rather than technical; they embody a new form of legend already legitimized by the reverence they command. Jazz music accompanies each gesture and exchange, creating a harmonious context in which the two protagonists integrate naturally. Even a simple exchange between them (“something?”, “you know”) becomes a testament to mutual understanding and shared awareness.

In the performance phase, they accept the invitation, approach Sinatra and Davis Jr., shake hands, exchange quips (“Gin”, “Still Gin”), and partake in a convivial scene. The ensuing toast marks a collective, ritual moment of inclusion. The music (*Sequence 10*) acts as a symbolic threshold that signifies their transition from guests to full-fledged members of the community. The phrase “Still Gin” serves as both a declaration of identity and a symbolic password that seals a new, meaningful alliance.

Finally, the sanction is delivered by Sinatra, the club’s audience, and the broader viewership. Following the line “Still Gin for everybody”, the celebration erupts: applause fills the venue, smiles are exchanged, and toasts are made. The closing shot of the bottle, accompanied by laughter, serves as the seal of collective recognition. The sanction is both positive and public, the past (Sinatra) legitimizes the present (Snoop and Dre), and the product itself becomes a mythical emblem of belonging. It represents the tangible sign of an intergenerational pact that unites culture, music, and symbolism in one powerful image.

3.2.1.3 Axiological level: communication strategy

In the staged narrative, an axiological system emerges based on a series of oppositions: tradition versus innovation, elitism versus popular culture, exclusion versus inclusion, and suspicion versus recognition. The storytelling operates as a symbolic machine that transforms otherness, embodied by Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, into belonging, redefining

the boundaries of a legendary community. This community is no longer sealed within the nostalgia of the past but opens itself to new forms of cultural legitimacy.

The core value at stake is symbolic legitimization: the acknowledgment of a mythical and cultural status granted to subjects who, despite originating from a different cultural code, hip hop, urban identity, Black culture, are shown to embody the same ethos (charisma, style, self-awareness) as the former “gods” of the scene, Sinatra and Davis Jr.

This axiological transformation is accomplished through a ritual passage: from being perceived as “outsiders”, initially met with skepticism (“*what the hell...?*”), the protagonists become “insiders”, fully recognized as spiritual heirs to a transversal American pantheon. The community of legends is therefore not static but dynamic, and the product (Still Gin) assumes a mythical value by serving as the symbolic mediator of this transition.

The act of toasting, the shared words, and the collective laughter enact a cultural reconciliation across generations and codes. The initial difference, of age, style, musical genre, aesthetic, is not erased, but transcended in the name of a higher value: belonging to the American mythology of the icon.

In this sense, the fundamental axis that structures the text is one of symbolic passage from exclusion to inclusion, from suspicion to recognition, from old myth to new myth. The subject, Dre and Snoop, does not forcibly appropriate value but receives it through a symbolic passing of the torch, orchestrated within an environment that, though it belongs to an elite tradition, consciously chooses to open itself.

3.2.1.4 Veridiction square

The spot operates primarily on the level of the verisimilar, generating a sense of authenticity and legitimacy, even in the presence of artificial elements, such as characters created through generative AI.

The semiotic logic of the spot can be interpreted through the veridiction square, a structuralist framework developed by Greimas, which organizes meaning around the interaction of two fundamental oppositions: being vs. not being (truth vs. falsehood) and seeming vs. not seeming (appearance vs. concealment). These oppositions intersect to form four key conceptual positions that allow for a nuanced reading of how truth is constructed, masked, or simulated in a given discourse.

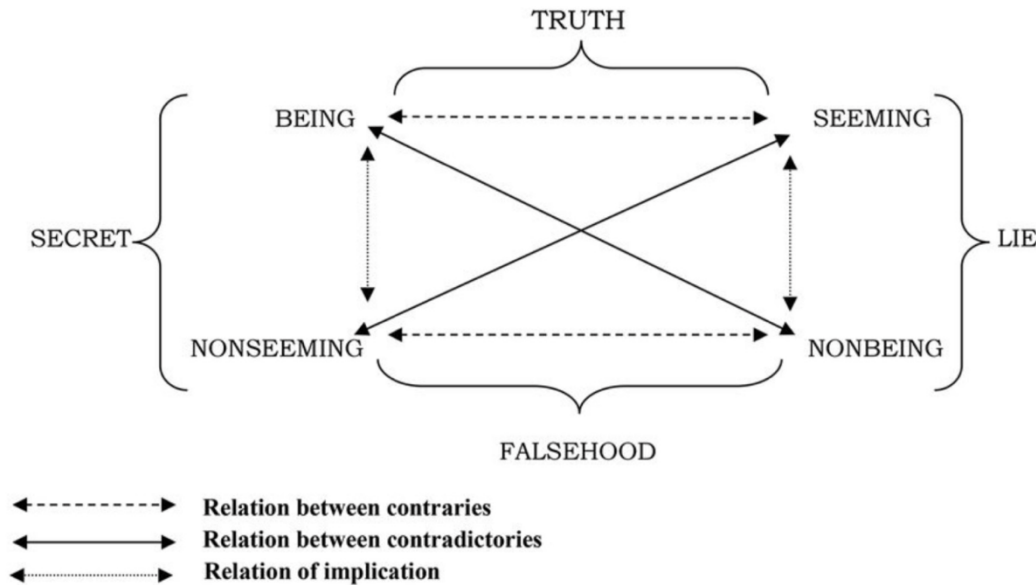


Figure 22. Greimasian square of veridiction (source: Prof. Peverini, Lecture Slides, 2024).

The semiotic mapping of veridiction in the spot can be described through four conceptual combinations, based on the Greimasian framework that intersects the categories of being (true) and not being (false) with seeming (appearance) and not seeming (concealment).

When something seems (is verisimilar) and is, it results in apparent authenticity: a situation in which what is represented appears truthful and aligns with cultural expectations.

When something seems but is not, it produces falsification, where an illusion of truth conceals the absence of actual substance.

When something does not seem yet is, we encounter invisible truth: a concealed or latent reality that, although not immediately visible, holds symbolic or emotional validity. Finally, when something neither is nor seems, we face nonexistence or transparency, referring to absence, erasure, or deliberate exclusion from representation.

The audiovisual message effectively creates an illusion of authenticity, representing a scenario that, while not materially genuine (Sinatra and Davis Jr. are not physically there), is viewed as culturally and symbolically “true”. This is accomplished by the careful reconstruction of gestures, the cohesive mise-en-scène of the Rat Pack aesthetic, and the symbolic ritual of the toast, all of which conjure a collective ethos.

This semiotic construction situates the spot in the "seeming + not being" quadrant: we are not addressing factual truth, but rather narrative truth, which is accepted by the audience due to its integration within a robust sense-making framework and a coherent value system. The brand seeks not to mislead but to present a symbolic representation that surpasses factual truth, thereby strengthening its positioning and emotionally connecting with its audience.

3.2.1.5 Enunciative framework

Drawing on the enunciative model proposed by Volli (2003), the communication of *Still G.I.N. by Dre and Snoop* can be analyzed through a four-fold structure that distinguishes between the real and the ideal agents of enunciation and reception (Volli, 2003). This framework allows us to understand how the brand strategically positions itself in relation to its audience through the construction of a narrative identity.

Role	Identity in the text
e1 (empirical sender)	Dre & Snoop / their spirits company
e2 (delegated sender)	Still G.I.N. by Dre and Snoop (the brand)
d1 (empirical receiver)	General TV/social media audience
d2 (ideal receiver)	Culturally conscious, nostalgic, intergenerational audience

Table 4. *Enunciative structure of the brand’s communication*

In this structure, the brand (e2) operates as the appointed enunciator, conveying a symbolic language that depicts an idealized collective identity. This identity is based on principles like symbolic inclusiveness, cultural redemption, and intergenerational recognition, depicting a mythic sense of community that surpasses temporal and genre bounds.

By utilizing well-known individuals (Sinatra and Davis Jr.) and connecting them with modern icons (Dre and Snoop), the advertisement achieves a symbolic synthesis of heritage and modernity. The optimal recipient (d2) is therefore not only emotionally attuned to the location's aesthetics and values but also integrated within an inclusive cultural heritage. This strategic communicative action enhances the brand's legitimacy and symbolic power in the competitive premium beverage market.

3.2.2 Case Study 2 - Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all'AI? (2024)

The spot presents a visual and aural narrative that examines the notion of beauty, juxtaposing two contrasting viewpoints: one defined by traditional aesthetic norms and the other advocated by Dove, which is more genuine, inclusive, and representative. This narrative is composed of a dual structure that is apparent both visually and aurally, as well as rhythmically. The film was created in a horizontal format and shown on prominent television networks while being extensively shared on social media platforms between July and September. Its inaugural release occurred in June 2024, when it was disseminated on Dove's official YouTube account.

The soundtrack, which accompanies the entire spot without the support of speech or diegetic elements, plays a fundamental role in guiding the reception of the message. The selected song, *Pure Imagination*, has a warm and enveloping tone, with bucolic nuances that evoke a sense of serenity and introspection. The musical flow evolves throughout the spot: in the first part, it serves a purely atmospheric function (*sound off*), subtly sustaining the narrative rhythm and emphasizing the artificial idyll of images created according to standardized beauty norms. When Dove's vision of beauty is introduced (at 0:55), the

rhythm intensifies, the music gains volume and prominence (*sound in*), and becomes an active agent in the construction of meaning. In this shift, the use of *sound off-field* can also be identified, a sound not anchored to any visible source in the scene, yet capable of defining the emotional and affective space of the spot.

Visually, the spot alternates sequences of images with milk-white backgrounds on which search bars and keywords appear. This graphic device recalls the interface of search engines and implicitly references the use of artificial intelligence in image generation. The effect is to segment the narrative temporally, structuring the discourse into distinct phases and marking semantic transitions. The predominant use of frontal framing emphasizes the referential and descriptive function of the images. The women represented through AI are consistently shown in mid-shot, contributing to a standardized mode of representation consistent with a preconfigured aesthetic. In contrast, when *Dove's* vision of beauty is depicted, the shots become more varied and dynamic, suggesting a greater degree of subjectivity and humanity. Lighting plays a symbolic role: the AI-generated images are characterized by cool tones that evoke distance, idealization, and artificiality, whereas the real images are enveloped in warm light, conveying proximity, authenticity, and emotional comfort. This chromatic contrast reinforces the shift from a constructed to a lived experience of beauty.

The use of color further contributes to meaning-making: in the first half of the spot, light tones prevail, consistent with the idealized aesthetic; in the second half, once *Dove's* imagery is introduced, darker and more saturated tones dominate, reflecting emotional depth and the complexity of lived experience. Overall, the spot configures itself as a progressively evolving narrative: from the passive contemplation of stereotyped images, it moves towards a critical and propositional stance. This paradigm shift is clearly articulated through all the technical elements of the spot, music, rhythm, color, lighting, and framing, which work in concert to construct a coherent and symbolically charged message.

3.2.2.1 Surface Level

In this section, the commercial is divided into 14 distinct sequences, each of which will be individually analyzed to highlight its technical features and the meanings conveyed throughout the visual narrative.

# Sequence	Duration	Visual column	Soundtrack
1	0:00 – 0:10	- Content description: the commercial opens with a uniform white background and slowly appearing dark blue text, simulating a typing effect. The Dove logo, in gold, is placed at the top of the screen. The text informs viewers that the images were generated by AI, highlighting concerns about artificial aesthetic biases. An asterisked note adds that AI was used solely to critique these biases. - Frame width: the frame remains static and full-screen. There are no human figures, only text and logo are visible. The entire composition functions as a frontal, centered typographic layout on a flat, white background. - Camera angle: not applicable in a traditional sense, as the frame is graphically constructed rather than shot. The composition is flat, symmetrical, and centered, simulating a digital interface. - Lighting: entirely artificial and evenly distributed. The white background creates a sense of cleanliness, neutrality, and abstraction, supporting the declarative function of the scene.	<i>“Pure Imagination”</i> plays in a soft, instrumental version (sound off). No speech or diegetic sound is present. The music evokes calm and contemplation. Listening mode is objective: the viewer is guided emotionally, but not through character perspective.

		- Color: white background (neutrality), dark blue text (seriousness and clarity), gold logo (institutional credibility, trust, elegance). The color palette is minimal but symbolically charged. - Transition: as the opening scene, it establishes the tone and theme without transition. The slow appearance of text and the gradual buildup of meaning signal a deliberate pacing and reflective mode of reception.	
2	0:10 – 0:14	- Content description: a woman in her thirties sits alone on a light-colored sofa in a dark domestic setting. Her expression is tense and introspective. As she looks at her laptop, she begins to type. A zoom-in shifts the shot from full figure to medium close-up, emphasizing her emotional state. The cold light from the screen contrasts with the warm ambient tones. The rings on her hands, shown in a close-up, function as personal identity markers. This is a transitional, emotionally charged moment. - Frame width: starts as a full-body shot, then gradually zooms into a medium close-up of the woman's face, ending with a close-up of her hands typing. This progression enhances narrative focus and emotional proximity. - Camera angle: eye-level and slightly frontal throughout, reinforcing viewer intimacy and alignment with the character's perspective and emotional state. - Lighting: warm, yellowish lighting dominates the environment, evoking domesticity and comfort. This is disrupted by the cold, white glow of the laptop screen, introducing visual tension	The vocal section of <i>Pure Imagination</i> begins here (sound off). The lyrics “<i>Come with me and you’ll be in a world of pure imagination</i>” serve as a direct thematic signal. Listening mode remains objective but emotionally suggestive.

		between the human and technological. - Color: warm browns, beiges, yellows define the environment; stark white from the laptop and tank top introduces visual disruption. This contrast symbolizes the intrusion of artificial elements into a human setting. - Transition: this sequence acts as a narrative and aesthetic threshold. It marks the transition from the abstract opening to the lived, affective world of a human subject. The scene ends just before the shift to AI-generated imagery.	
3	0:14 – 0:18	- Content description: the sequence adopts the woman's point of view as she looks at her laptop screen. A blurred, slightly pixelated AI-generated face appears. The face is ambiguous in gender and ethnicity, animated only by slow eye movement. Above it, a white search bar displays the typed prompt <i>"/immagina una donna stupenda"</i> (<i>"/imagine a beautiful woman"</i>), linking language to image generation. The interface and the visual output foreground the generative function of AI and raise questions about the construction of beauty through technology. - Frame width: close-up of the computer screen. The face fills the central area, while the search bar occupies the upper third of the frame. The fixed, symmetrical framing focuses on the relationship between text and generated image. - Camera angle: subjective point of view from the protagonist's perspective. The angle is slightly	The song <i>Pure Imagination</i> continues (sound off), now underscoring the viewer's entry into an imagined, artificial space. The listening mode remains objective, reinforcing thematic detachment.

		the natural position of looking down at a laptop. - Lighting: dominated by the luminous white of the search bar, which becomes the visual focal point. The rest of the screen is dim, colored in deep teal-green tones. This creates high contrast and a sense of visual enclosure. - Color: strong contrast between bright optical white (text interface) and dark, cool background. The face is rendered in muted tones, reinforcing the artificial, non-lifelike appearance. - Transition: diegetic continuation from the previous sequence. The typing seen here corresponds directly to the woman's earlier gesture, establishing narrative continuity and causality.	
4	0:18 – 0:25	- Content description: the viewer fully enters the AI-generated visual world. A once-blurred female figure gradually becomes clear: she conforms to idealized Western beauty standards (blonde hair, flawless pale skin, symmetrical features). The environment is paradisiacal, with a blue sky, sea, and white clouds. The sequence progresses from a close-up of the face to a medium shot, presenting her as a contemplative, static ideal rather than an active subject. - Frame width: begins with a close-up on facial details (skin, eyes, mouth), then transitions to a medium shot showing the woman's upper body. This framing supports the theme of idealized aesthetic exposure. - Camera angle: frontal, symmetrical, and stable. The angle enhances the impression of control, balance, perfection,	The song <i>Pure Imagination</i> continues (sound off). The lyrics "pure imagination" coincide precisely with the appearance of the AI-generated "<i>perfect woman</i>", creating tight semiotic alignment. The listening mode remains objective, but the music serves as both emotional commentary and structural synchronizer.

		reinforcing the constructed nature of the image. - Lighting: even and intense. Shadows are absent, contributing to a flat, depthless effect. The lighting emphasizes purity and removes any natural irregularities, creating an abstract, sanitized aesthetic. - Color: dominated by pale, cool tones: white (dress, clouds), light blue (sky, sea), and blonde (hair). These hues contribute to a sense of harmony and unreality, reinforcing the artificial idealization. - Transition: continuity from the previous POV sequence. The image slowly sharpens into full clarity, aligning with the generative theme. The process of emergence itself becomes symbolic of how beauty is constructed.	
5	0:25 – 0:35	- Content description: the sequence returns abruptly to the real-life protagonist in her dimly lit living room. A warm atmosphere contrasts with the previous artificial image. A rapid zoom focuses on her face, then her eye, which becomes a symbolic interface. As the camera enters the pupil, the scene transitions into another AI generation moment. A new search bar appears with the prompt “/imagine perfect skin”, followed by a blurred face that gradually clarifies into a digitally constructed image of a girl with dark skin and very light eyes, an abstract, idealized, alienating aesthetic. - Frame width: starts with a medium shot of the woman, quickly zooms into a close-up of her eye, ending with an extreme close-up. Then returns to a	<i>Pure Imagination</i> continues with highly synchronized lyrics: “take a look” during the zoom, “and you’ll see into your imagination” as the new AI face appears. Music functions as an interpretive guide. Listening mode remains objective but aligned tightly with visual cues.

		familiar full-screen view of the AI interface, followed by a close-up on the generated face. - Camera angle: eye-level throughout. The zoom movement is central to the scene's symbolic function, transforming the eye into a passageway between real and imagined, subject and simulation. - Lighting: warm and soft in the real-world environment; transitions to stark, flat lighting in the AI-generated scene. The background becomes pure white before reintroducing optical contrast with the text and synthetic face. - Color: warm tones dominate the real scene; pure white appears during the transition. The generated face is characterized by high contrast: dark skin, light eyes, suggesting hybrid beauty constructed through selective aesthetic coding. - Transition: abrupt visual cut from the AI ideal (sequence 4) to the real woman, followed by a symbolic zoom into the eye. This marks a major narrative and symbolic transition. The reappearance of the search bar reactivates the generative structure.	
6	0:35 – 0:44	- Content description: a tilted search bar appears, containing the phrase “<i>imagine the most beautiful woman in the world</i>”. After the “<i>generate</i>” button is activated, a rapid succession of AI-generated images is shown. The images vary in framing and background, but all portray the same stereotyped blonde woman, frontally and in medium shot. Despite apparent diversity, the sequence reveals a process of repetition and aesthetic	The <i>Pure Imagination</i> soundtrack continues (sound off), supporting the tempo and rhythm of the fast-paced montage. The music complements the illusion of creativity while critically underscoring the aesthetic redundancy. The listening mode remains objective.

		uniformity, critically highlighting the illusion of variation in generative outputs. - Frame width: the initial frame contains the search bar on a tilted diagonal axis. The generated images follow a repeated medium-shot format. Despite slight variation in aspect ratios (square, vertical, horizontal), the subject and composition remain constant. - Camera angle: mostly frontal and symmetrical across all AI-generated portraits. The tilted framing of the search bar introduces visual instability, suggesting a disruption or intensification of the generative process. - Lighting: dominated by cool, synthetic tones. Optical white from the search interface creates intense contrast. The rest of the sequence maintains a bright, low-shadow aesthetic, contributing to a feeling of artificial clarity and detachment. - Color: cool color palette, pale blues (backgrounds), light oranges (clothing), blonde hair dominate. These tones reinforce the sanitized and idealized nature of the imagery, masking the lack of real diversity. - Transition: smooth but rapid shift from the previous generated image to a new sequence of rapidly changing, visually similar portraits. The diagonal shift in the search bar's orientation marks a visual and symbolic intensification.	
7	0:44 – 0:52	- Content description: the screen returns to optical white, displaying centered dark blue text with the golden Dove logo. The first line reads: <i>“For 20 years</i>	The music remains wordless and gentle (sound off). It takes on a soft, magical quality that anticipates change.

		<i>Dove has been committed to celebrating Real Beauty</i>” (with capitalized emphasis). A second line follows: “<i>This is what Artificial Intelligence generates today when we add Dove</i>”. This marks a discursive shift away from AI-standardized beauty and introduces Dove’s alternative vision. - Frame width: full-screen static text composition. No human figures or images are present. The visual layout is centered and symmetrical, enhancing clarity and authority. - Camera angle: not applicable, typographic composition on a flat screen. The visual perspective mimics a digital interface or presentation slide, reinforcing the declarative nature of the message. - Lighting: the white background is uniform and flat, reinforcing a sense of neutrality, transition, and conceptual clarity. No shadow or depth elements are present. - Color: optical white background (purity, reset), dark blue text (seriousness, authority), golden logo (credibility, elegance). This color scheme aligns with Dove’s brand identity and contrasts sharply with the preceding visuals. - Transition: this sequence acts as a narrative hinge. It suspends visual narration in favor of explicit textual messaging, signaling the end of the AI-dominated phase and the beginning of Dove’s intervention.	The listening mode remains objective but emotionally evocative, enhancing the sense of narrative transition.
8	0:52 – 1:05	- Content description: a white screen shows a new search prompt: “<i>/imagine the most beautiful woman in the world as Dove would</i>”. This marks Dove’s active intervention. The	The music becomes more ethereal and expansive, led by violins (sound off).

		subsequent sequence features a grid of real women's photographs (diverse in age, ethnicity, ability, and body type) shown with authenticity and dignity. The mosaic layout visually affirms plurality without erasing individuality. Each image breaks from the previous standardization of beauty. - Frame width: variable, the framing alternates between close-ups, medium shots, and American shots. The women appear in rectangular tiles arranged in a grid, evoking the metaphor of a mosaic. - Camera angle: frontal and direct throughout, reinforcing a sense of respect and visibility. Despite changes in framing distance, the gaze remains steady and equalizing. - Lighting: warmer tones dominate. Natural and vibrant lighting replaces the sterile, flat lighting of previous AI-generated sequences, enhancing realism and emotional presence. - Color: rich and varied color palette. Backgrounds remain white for visual consistency, while clothing, skin tones, and expressions introduce chromatic diversity and warmth. - Transition: a dramatic visual and musical shift from artificial repetition to authentic representation. The AI structure (search bar, white background) is preserved but filled with different, humanized content.	Lyrics return with greater rhythm and openness, infusing the scene with a renewed sense of emotional and narrative energy. Listening mode remains objective but expressive.
9	1:05 – 1:11	- Content description: the white search bar reappears on a white screen with the prompt: <i>"/imagine perfect skin as Dove would"</i>. After confirming, the scene reveals the close-up of an elderly	The expanded orchestral version of <i>Pure Imagination</i> continues (sound off), carrying warmth and emotional depth.

		Black woman with deep wrinkles and white hair. Her expressive face embodies a redefined notion of perfection rooted in age, experience, and authenticity. This image decisively contrasts with the previous, idealized standard of flawless youth. - Frame width: frontal close-up of the woman's face. The framing emphasizes facial detail, allowing wrinkles, expression, and texture to become central to the viewer's experience of beauty. - Camera angle: eye-level and symmetrical. The direct gaze and static framing reinforce the dignity and presence of the subject. - Lighting: warm and soft. The lighting enhances the subject's natural features and contrasts clearly with the cold, flat light of previous AI-generated imagery. - Color: harmonious greys and browns dominate: her hair, shirt, and the blurred urban background echo one another tonally. The palette reinforces realism and coherence without artificial enhancement. - Transition: begins with the white prompt screen (1:07), then shifts into a richly humanized image. This movement once again marks the symbolic transition from abstraction to lived experience.	The music supports the thematic emphasis on a more humane and authentic aesthetic. Listening mode remains objective but affectively resonant.
10	1:11 – 1:20	- Content description: a new search prompt appears: <i>"/imagine a beautiful woman as Dove would"</i>. The command triggers a sequence of extreme frontal close-ups of women from various ethnic backgrounds, none idealized or filtered. Each face displays natural details: skin texture, marks, expressions. A <i>"generate"</i>	No music. The soundtrack falls silent for the first time in the commercial. Only the sound of the button click is heard (sound in). The absence of background music creates

		button appears alongside each, emphasizing the act of intentional creation. The result is a visual affirmation of real, unretouched diversity. - Frame width: extreme close-ups on faces. The framing focuses exclusively on facial features, bringing texture, individuality, and natural expression to the forefront. - Camera angle: strictly frontal, symmetrical, and centered. The direct gaze of each subject reinforces presence and equality in representation. - Lighting: warm and natural. In contrast to the earlier optical white backgrounds, the lighting here adds depth, shadow, and a sense of realism. - Color: skin tones and facial details dominate. Color variations reflect natural diversity rather than stylized uniformity. The generate button changes color when clicked, adding subtle visual dynamics. - Transition: visual and structural continuity with earlier “<i>generate</i>” prompts, but the silence and raw aesthetic mark a decisive tonal shift. The only sound is the click, emphasizing the active choice behind each representation.	space for reflection and centers the viewer’s attention on the authenticity of the images. The listening mode becomes purely diegetic and minimalist.
11	1:20 – 1:25	- Content description: the commercial returns to an optical white background. A question appears in dark blue text: “<i>What kind of beauty do we want to teach Artificial Intelligence?</i>” The Dove logo in gold is centered below. This rhetorical but open-ended question addresses the viewer directly, inviting critical reflection and ethical engagement. It marks the transition from visual	The soft orchestral version of <i>Pure Imagination</i> resumes (sound off). Its tone is subdued and contemplative, signaling narrative closure and emotional introspection. The listening mode returns to objective yet expressive.

		demonstration to moral awareness. - Frame width: full-screen static composition. Centered text and logo reinforce clarity and focus. There are no figurative elements, only typography and brand identity. - Camera angle: not applicable, flat graphic layout. However, the layout simulates a frontal viewpoint, reinforcing the impression of direct address and institutional authority. - Lighting: simulated optical white background. The Dove logo appears luminous due to reflective effects, enhancing the sense of credibility and elegance. - Color: optical white background, dark blue text (serious, institutional tone), and gold logo (trust, refinement). The color scheme visually echoes the commercial's opening, creating formal symmetry. - Transition: this sequence functions as a narrative and rhetorical closure. The visual silence of the white screen contrasts with the complexity of the preceding images, offering a space for reflection and synthesis.	
12	1:25 – 1:37	- Content description: the sequence stages a direct comparison between the 2004 and 2024 Dove campaigns. A black television screen displays a fragment of the 2004 ad: diverse women in white underwear on a white background, captured in full-body, frontal shots. The narrative then jumps to 2024, showing vibrant, dynamic imagery styled like social media posts. Diversity remains central, with shots of women in varied poses, culminating in a close-up	<i>Pure Imagination</i> returns with vocals and increased intensity (sound off). The musical crescendo mirrors the visual evolution, reinforcing emotional resonance. Listening mode remains objective yet affectively charged.

		of a smiling young Black woman with braids. - Frame width: 2004 footage: full-body, frontal shots. 2024 footage: varied framing—medium close-ups, American shots, full figures, and a final close-up. This variety reflects updated visual language. - Camera angle: mostly frontal in both periods, maintaining directness and accessibility. The 2024 shots feature more dynamic compositions, consistent with social media aesthetics. - Lighting: 2004: bright, even, clinical white lighting. 2024: bold, saturated lighting with colorful backgrounds. The lighting shift reinforces the passage from minimalism to expressiveness. - Color: 2004: all white. 2024: saturated, vibrant hues. This chromatic contrast signals generational evolution while maintaining the brand’s consistent messaging. - Transition: a deliberate visual cut from historical footage to contemporary scenes. The TV screen functions as a symbolic portal between past and present. The editing underscores both contrast and continuity.	
13	1:37 – 1:44	- Content description: a full-screen image of a smiling Black girl appears, seemingly direct, but it gradually reveals itself as a billboard. The camera pulls back to show a real-life Black girl and her mother viewing it. Their faces reflect joy and recognition. This mirror effect between real and represented marks a transition from media consumption to identification. It’s the moment	The final line of <i>Pure Imagination</i> is extended gently, almost like a lullaby, holding the scene in suspension. The tone is warm and contemplative. Listening mode is objective, but deeply emotional and conclusive.

		when representation becomes personal and meaningful. - Frame width: starts with a full-screen shot of the image, which shrinks to reveal its billboard context. The frame then widens to show the mother and daughter in front of it, with frontal framing of their expressions. - Camera angle: frontal and centered. The angle emphasizes symmetry between the viewer (child) and the representation (child on the poster), enhancing the mirror effect and symbolic resonance. - Lighting: warm, soft tones dominate. Ochre backgrounds and reddish-brown clothing create a cozy and emotionally rich visual environment that blends image and reality. - Color: harmonious palette: warm earth tones and deep skin tones work together to enhance realism and emotional warmth. The only branding is a small white Dove logo in the lower corner of the billboard. - Transition: a subtle yet powerful shift from illusion to recognition: the poster recedes, the real-world setting is revealed, and a new emotional dimension emerges as the viewer becomes participant in the message.	
14	1:44 – 1:55	- Content description: the commercial ends with a return to its opening visual format: optical white background, centered dark blue text, and the gold Dove logo. The final message reads: “<i>We will never use Artificial Intelligence to create or distort images of women. Learn more at Dove.com</i>”. This is followed by the hashtag #KeepBeautyReal and the call to action “<i>Let’s Redefine</i>	A simple, contemplative piano line (sound off). No vocals, no orchestration. The subdued tone supports reflection and seriousness. The listening mode is objective and minimal,

		<i>Beauty</i>”, with “<i>Beauty</i>” in bold and uppercase. This closing declaration shifts from aesthetics to ethics, establishing Dove’s public commitment. - Frame width: full-screen typographic composition. Text is centered and spaced for clarity and emphasis. No human figures are shown, only words and logo. - Camera angle: not applicable (flat graphic interface), but visually functions as a frontal, declarative address to the viewer, mirroring the structure of Sequence 1. - Lighting: simulated optical white background. No variation in tone or depth, creating a neutral and institutional setting. - Color: dark blue text (trust, authority), gold Dove logo (credibility, tradition), white background (neutrality, closure). The word “<i>Beauty</i>” is typographically emphasized (bold, uppercase) to underscore its thematic centrality. - Transition: no visual transition, this is a static, concluding scene. It functions as a discursive closure: from narrative demonstration to ethical positioning and explicit brand commitment.	reinforcing the statement’s gravity.
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Table 5. *The segmentation of texts*

Sequence 1 (0:00 – 0:10). The commercial opens on a uniform white background, devoid of any figurative elements, serving as a neutral surface upon which the entire enunciation is constructed. Within this essential visual context, dark blue text slowly begins to appear on screen, as if being typed in real time, an effect reminiscent of search engine interfaces or AI chat windows, which immediately introduces the theme of artificial generation. At

the top, clearly visible, stands the Dove logo in gold, a chromatic element that conveys the institutional value of the brand, while simultaneously evoking authenticity, reliability, and a reassuring sense of elegance. The emerging text informs the viewer: “By 2025, it is estimated that Artificial Intelligence will generate 90% of online content. The images generated in this video were created by AI software”. The use of capital letters for the term “Artificial Intelligence” underscores its conceptual centrality and reinforces its perceptual impact, signaling both the authority and urgency of the information. Just below, almost imperceptible yet essential, appears a note introduced by an asterisk: “In this ad, Artificial Intelligence was used solely to highlight the aesthetic biases reproduced by generative AI tools”.

This explicit statement, operating on a metadiscursive level, immediately establishes a truth pact with the audience, positioning the brand as a guarantor of transparency and ethical responsibility. At this initial moment, Dove positions itself not only as the enunciator, but also as an ethical subject committed to accountability for its communicative choices. From a semiotic perspective, this passage represents an act of enunciative institution: the brand does not merely speak, but clarifies how and why it speaks, thereby legitimizing the entire discourse that follows. The absence of human figures or tangible objects further reinforces the discursive intent of transparency and abstraction, this is not yet a moment of showing, but of declaring.

The visual apparatus is minimal yet powerful. The bright white background conveys a sense of semantic neutrality and cleanliness, while the blue text signals seriousness and trustworthiness. This visual contrast guides the viewer’s attention without causing distraction. The gold logo, in turn, functions as a seal of credibility. On the auditory level, the soundtrack consists of a gentle, relaxing melody, devoid of lyrics or diegetic sounds. The tone is soft, almost magical, contributing to a contemplative, idyllic atmosphere that invites the viewer into a reflective mode of reception. The listening mode is objective: the sound originates externally to the scene, functioning as *sound off*, accompanying the viewer without being tied to any visible source or specific narrative action.

Thus, despite its apparent simplicity, this sequence performs a decisive narrative and semiotic function. It introduces the central theme of the commercial, critical reflection on

the use of AI and its impact on the representation of beauty, while clearly establishing the brand's position as a conscious, critical voice. Through a carefully crafted visual and auditory composition, the spot establishes a relationship of trust with the viewer, an element that will prove essential for the reception of the sequences that follow.

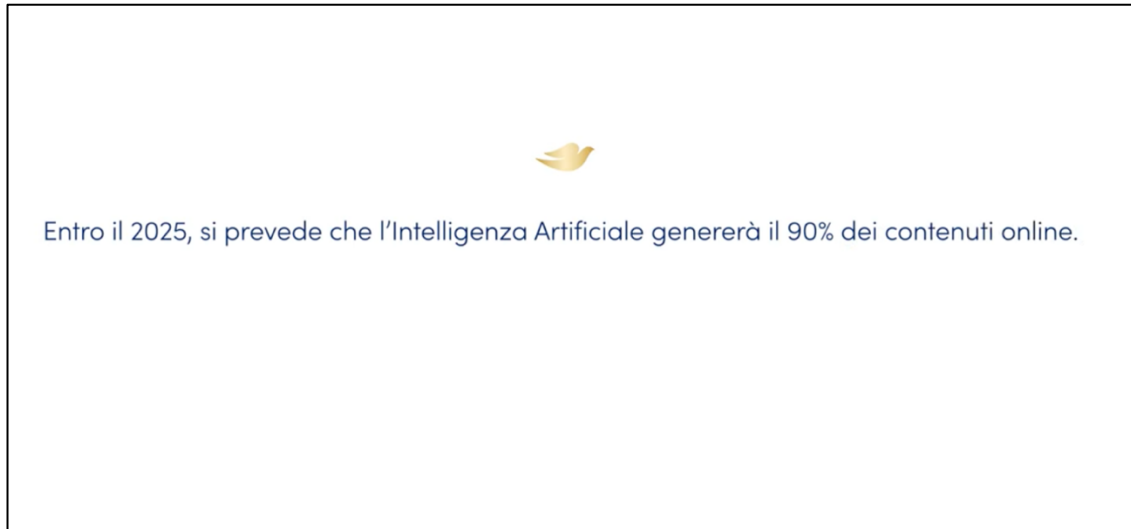


Figure 23. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 2 (0:10 – 0:14). This moment marks the entrance into the narrative dimension of the commercial and represents a pivotal transition in the construction of discursive tension. At this point, the vocal section of the song “*Pure Imagination*” begins, a track that will accompany and guide the entire narrative development. The lyrics “Come with me and you’ll be in a world of pure imagination”, audible in this phase, constitute an explicit invitation to the viewer: an invitation to immersion, to a suspension of reality, and to a willingness to enter a world generated, precisely, by imagination.

The visual environment changes drastically compared to the opening sequence: it is now dark, presumably nighttime, and the setting is an intimate domestic interior. A woman is seated on a light-colored sofa, positioned in stark contrast to the dark, dimly lit background. The warm, yellowish lighting that envelops the scene creates an atmosphere of coziness and narrative intimacy. Within this context, two chromatic elements stand out in sharp contrast: the woman’s white tank top and the light from the laptop reflecting off

it, both rendered in a cold, optical white that interrupts the warm tonal continuity of the scene. This visual contrast is not neutral: the cold light of the digital device visually introduces the theme of technology as an external and potentially dissonant element in relation to the human and emotional environment.

The protagonist of the scene, a woman in her thirties and the only figure present, is initially motionless, her arm resting on the back of the sofa. Her face appears tense: her brow is slightly furrowed, and her expression conveys a sense of sadness or nervousness. This mimetic detail adds depth and realism to the moment, inserting the first affective trace into the narrative. Her gaze is not directed at the viewer but rather at the laptop screen, toward which she leans to begin typing. This movement is accompanied by a progressive zoom, gradually narrowing the shot from full figure to medium close-up, drawing the viewer increasingly closer to the protagonist and her interior state. The framing then briefly focuses on her hands typing on the keyboard (0:15), highlighted in a close-up. Her hands are adorned with numerous rings, objects rich in symbolic value, functioning as visual markers of personal identity. These elements assert the uniqueness of the subject and contrast with the aesthetic standardization implicit in the forthcoming theme of artificial image generation.

The choice of progressive framing, combined with the scene's warm lighting and the protagonist's restrained facial expressiveness, contributes to the construction of an emotionally charged atmosphere of anticipation. The intimacy of the domestic context intertwines with the technological element (the keyboard, the laptop, the cold light), foreshadowing the shift from an authentic human setting to an imagined, or rather, artificially generated, universe. The song's vocals, introduced at this precise moment, further reinforce this transition: the melody, now enriched with lyrics, acts as a narrative guide, accompanying the viewer toward what is about to unfold.

In semiotic terms, this sequence introduces a double tension: on one hand, the internal narrative tension expressed through the protagonist's focused gaze and gestures; on the other, a broader discursive tension, manifest in the coexistence of warm and cold tones, of human and artificial elements, of lived reality and technological imagination. It is a

liminal moment, a threshold scene in which the commercial prepares the ground for the viewer's full entry into the "world of pure imagination" that is to come.



Figure 24. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 3 (0:14 – 0:18). Following the protagonist’s gaze in the previous sequence, the camera transitions into her point of view, showing us the laptop screen she had been observing. The image, mediated through the display, is intentionally blurred and slightly pixelated: this low-resolution effect is deliberate and serves to emphasize the technological mediation, reminding the viewer that what is being seen is not a physical reality, but a digital output produced by a generative process.

At the center of the screen appears the face of a human subject. The image is not immediately legible: the facial features are ambiguous, defying easy classification as either male or female. The eyes, large and dark, open and close slowly, producing a subtly unsettling, uncanny effect. This repetitive ocular motion is the only dynamic element, and it is what “animates” an otherwise suspended, simulated image. The face appears to belong to a person of African descent, yet the rendering is such that it never fully defines itself, leaving the viewer in a state of perceptual ambiguity. The background is barely

perceptible: a deep but luminous teal-green, contributing to a sense of visual darkness and enclosure.

Above the image, a clearly outlined white search bar dominates the screen, within which the phrase “/immagina una donna stupenda” (“/imagine a beautiful woman”) is being typed out in real time. The text appears letter by letter, an effect directly linked to the typing gesture performed by the woman in the previous sequence. The editing establishes diegetic continuity and confirms that she is the one generating the enunciation. Next to the text field, a button labeled “genera” (“generate”) appears, indicating that this is the interface of a generative AI tool. This element carries strong symbolic weight: the bright white search bar, far more luminous than the rest of the screen, becomes the visual focal point of the scene. Its luminous intensity not only captures the viewer’s attention but appears to “illuminate” the face behind it, establishing a precise semiotic relationship between word and image. It is as if the textual command gives shape and visibility to the subject emerging on screen, “imagine a beautiful woman” becomes the performative utterance that generates the visual figure.

The entire sequence is constructed around a stark chromatic and luministic contrast: the optical white of the search bar stands out dramatically against the dark background, creating a visually charged tension. The face remains blurred and slightly pixelated, which not only reinforces the impression of technological mediation but also suggests an undefined identity, constructed according to visual stereotypes rather than identifiable individual traits. The close-up on the face, despite maintaining a degree of semantic distance due to its lack of clarity, nonetheless invites the viewer to confront the generative effect of the technology: the face is the direct result of the enunciation, and its ambiguity reflects the way in which AI interprets and visualizes textual input.

In this brief yet dense sequence, a foundational tension of the entire commercial is articulated: the relationship between language and image, between expressed desire and constructed imagination. From a semiotic standpoint, this is the first moment in which the performative power of language is explicitly foregrounded: it is not merely a matter of naming, but of creating. The text typed into the search bar functions as a generative act, a true enunciative command, that produces a concrete visual effect. At the same time,

the ambiguity and estrangement of the resulting image problematize the very notion of the “beautiful woman,” exposing the limitations and biases embedded within generative models. This is a moment of suspension, in which beauty is not simply represented, but questioned in its automated and normative construction.

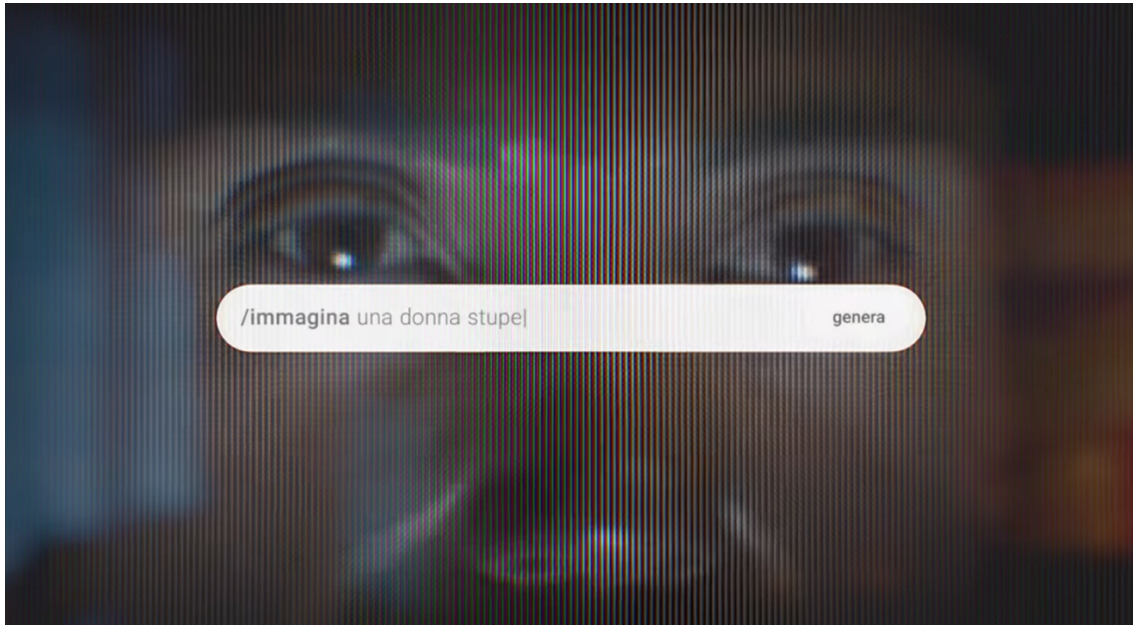


Figure 25. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 4 (0:18 – 0:25). This marks the first moment in which the viewer fully enters the visual world of AI-generated imagination, as previously foreshadowed by the search bar in the preceding sequence. From an initial blurred focus, the image of a woman gradually emerges, one who exemplifies the dominant aesthetic standards of contemporary Western culture. The transition from an indistinct form to a clearly defined figure unfolds slowly, and this progressive sharpening is not merely a technical process but assumes a distinctly aesthetic function. The delay itself builds a sense of suspension, a moment poised between desire and its visualization, reflecting the ambiguity of the generative act, a process that appears instantaneous in its result, yet simultaneously reveals its own uncertainty and lack of full control.

Once the face becomes fully defined, it presents an idealized image: long, wind-blown blonde hair, fair and flawless skin, symmetrical features, and regular eyes. The woman

appears suspended in a paradisiacal environment, with a blue sky blending into the sea behind her, and light white clouds that echo the pristine white dress she wears. The shot opens with a close-up on the face, focusing on details of the skin, eyes, and mouth, then gradually widens to a medium shot of the upper body. The visual construction of the scene emphasizes harmony, purity, and detachment, elements typical of beauty portrayed as an aesthetic object of contemplation rather than as a subject endowed with agency.

The color palette is dominated by cool, luminous tones: the white of the dress and clouds, the pale blue of the sky and sea, the light blonde of the hair. This chromatic range contributes to an aseptic, almost unreal representation, reinforcing the impression of an idealized figure generated to conform to a normative imaginary. The lighting is even and intense, eliminating shadows and depth, further flattening the image, which takes on an abstract, artificial quality.

The sound element perfectly integrates with the visual dimension: precisely on the lyrics “pure imagination,” the song reaches one of its key moments, and in perfect synchrony the face of this “perfect woman” appears on screen. In this sequence, the music does not merely accompany the images, it comments on and amplifies them, forming a tight semiotic correspondence that unites word, sound, and figure in a single communicative act. The effect is one of harmonic, almost supernatural apparition, consistent with the idyllic and utopian atmosphere the scene seeks to evoke. Yet this harmony also functions as a critical marker: the perfect alignment of text, music, and image exposes the constructed nature of the ideal, its artificiality, and implicitly sets the stage for the deconstruction that will unfold in the following sequences.

From a semiotic perspective, this sequence establishes an image of beauty according to traditional and universalizing codes: a feminine type that has circulated countless times within Western visual culture, and which is here regenerated by a machine, reaffirming, rather than transcending, the same visual stereotypes. The face of the “beautiful woman” requested from the AI not only responds, but does so in perfect conformity with a preexisting aesthetic norm, suggesting that what is imagined is neither free nor original, but deeply constrained by biases and learned standards.



Figure 26. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 5 (0:25 – 0:35). A return to the real-life protagonist occurs, set once again within the same dark and intimate domestic environment introduced in the second sequence. The visual transition is abrupt and immediate: the idealized image previously generated by AI is suddenly interrupted, and the viewer is brought back to the real face of the woman sitting on the couch. The warm lighting, now reintroduced, re-establishes an intimate and welcoming atmosphere, in stark contrast to the cold artificiality of the preceding image. It is a moment of return to reality, but only in appearance. From here, a significant visual movement begins, one laden with symbolic meaning: a rapid zoom first focuses on the woman’s face, then her eyes, and finally a single eye, drawing the viewer almost inside the pupil. This movement generates a clear and emphatic transition between two levels: that of subjective perception and that of simulated representation.

The eye, long a privileged object in the visual imaginary, takes on a central function here: it is not merely a tool of vision, but a symbol of the boundary between interior and exterior, between real and virtual, between human and artificial. In this sequence, the eye becomes a true interface: no longer a purely biological surface, but a semiotic threshold, a point of passage through which the gaze is transformed into constructed vision. The pupil, toward which the camera gradually advances, becomes a metaphorical gateway

into another world, one not merely observed, but generated. In this way, the gaze is subjectivized: what is about to be shown is not simply what the protagonist sees, but what she imagines and has generated through technology. This overlapping of the observing subject and the generative machine is crucial: the spot stages a vision that is no longer passive, but made possible through active interaction between subject and device.

At the culmination of the zoom, the background dissolves into white and a new search bar appears, identical in form to that shown in sequence three. The text, once again typed in real time, reads: “/imagine perfect skin”. The statement appears in bright optical white and reclaims visual dominance, marking a new generative act. Immediately after, a new AI-generated face is shown. The image is initially blurred, then gradually comes into focus, following the same visual schema as in sequence four. The face belongs to a girl with dark skin and very light eyes, a combination that is aesthetically striking, but also somewhat alienating in its forced contrast. The effect is one of hybridized beauty, artificially constructed through the selective combination of features deemed desirable according to an unrealistic, composited standard of aesthetic perfection.

This figure, which partially recalls the real protagonist, represents an aesthetic alteration of identity. It is as though the image returned by the machine is a refined, smoothed, aesthetically corrected version of the self, shaped by algorithmic criteria and therefore distant from the physical and subjective truth of the real body. Perfection here is not a human trait, but an abstraction, one constructed to match an ideal that exists only in the overlap of data and patterns recognized as “beautiful”. In this sense, the generated face is the visual result of a normative desire, a codified request: it is what occurs when one attempts to give form to perfection through a technological filter that replicates, amplifies, and distorts dominant cultural standards.

The soundtrack accompanies this moment with remarkable precision and significance: precisely at the moment of the zoom on the eye, the lyrics sing “take a look”, and as the AI-generated face appears, the following line is “and you’ll see into your imagination”. The musical text here becomes a direct, almost didactic interpretive guide, making explicit what the images are narrating visually. This is not merely about seeing, but about accessing imagination. Once again, the synchronization of word, sound, and image

constructs a complex semiotic device in which each element contributes to structuring the meaning of the sequence.

From both a narrative and semiotic perspective, this scene consolidates the connection between vision and generation, between subject and simulation. The eye, symbol of knowledge and perception, becomes a transit point between reality and representation. Imagination, as evoked in the song, is translated into image, but it is an image that is controlled, programmed, and directed: not pure fantasy, but normative construction. In this way, the commercial not only depicts the effect of AI, but actively problematizes its operation, bringing to light the tensions between human subjectivity and algorithmic standardization.



Figure 27. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 6 (0:35 – 0:44). The generative process of AI undergoes a further development here, reaching a heightened level of visual and symbolic acceleration. Once again, the screen is dominated by a search bar; however, this time it appears diagonally tilted, partially off-center, and only partially legible. The typed text reads “*imagine the most beautiful woman in the world*”. The oblique positioning of the search bar disrupts the orderly symmetry established in previous sequences, suggesting a certain loss of control

or an intensification of the generative process. Immediately after the “*generate*” button is pressed, a rapid sequence of images is triggered, presenting multiple versions of the same figure: a blonde woman, aesthetically idealized, portrayed with slight variations yet always according to the same model.

Although the photographs vary in format, some square, others vertical or rectangular, they consistently feature the same frontal medium-shot framing. This technical choice contributes to the construction of a visual sense of uniformity, in which compositional differences do not translate into differences in meaning. The backgrounds vary: in some images, the woman appears before the sea, in others surrounded by flowers, or in bright abstract environments. Yet in all cases, the subject remains unchanged, frozen in the same representation of standardized beauty. The dominant tones are cool: the light blue of the backgrounds merges with the soft orange of the clothing and the pale blonde of the hair. The initial frame (0:36), featuring the search bar, is once again constructed around optical white, casting an intense light across the screen and serving as a neutral backdrop for the text. The overall lighting of the sequence remains cool, reinforcing the artificial and detached effect already introduced in earlier scenes.

The speed of the visual sequence and the apparent multiplicity of images perceptually deceive the viewer: while it may appear that variety is being offered, the sequence actually presents minimal variations of the same subject. This constitutes the most significant semiotic key of the sequence. The multiplication of images does not correspond to an enrichment of the imaginary, but rather underscores a process of reproduction and standardization. The commercial here visually expresses a powerful concept: the simulation of variety as a mask for uniformity. In semiotic terms, this dynamic produces an effect of redundancy: the system does not generate new possibilities of representation, but instead iterates the same ideal type through minor surface-level modifications. It is a beauty that repeats itself, and in its repetition, reveals its stereotyped nature.

The use of different backgrounds serves the apparent function of enriching the representation, but the constancy of the face and pose reveals the opposite: this is not a celebration of diversity, but the reiteration of a single visual model, expressed in interchangeable versions. AI merely reinforces dominant cultural standards, reproducing

an idea of “beauty” that is already codified, reassuring in its predictability but lacking in authenticity.

This passage is crucial to the communicative strategy of the commercial. Visually, it represents the peak of standardization: every attempt to imagine “the most beautiful woman in the world” ultimately reproduces the same face. The implicit critique lies precisely here: AI, a tool theoretically open to infinite imagination, instead becomes an instrument of replication, simplification, and the preservation of stereotypes. In doing so, the commercial activates a critical reflection on the concept of “universal” beauty and on the illusion of diversity that generative technologies may suggest.

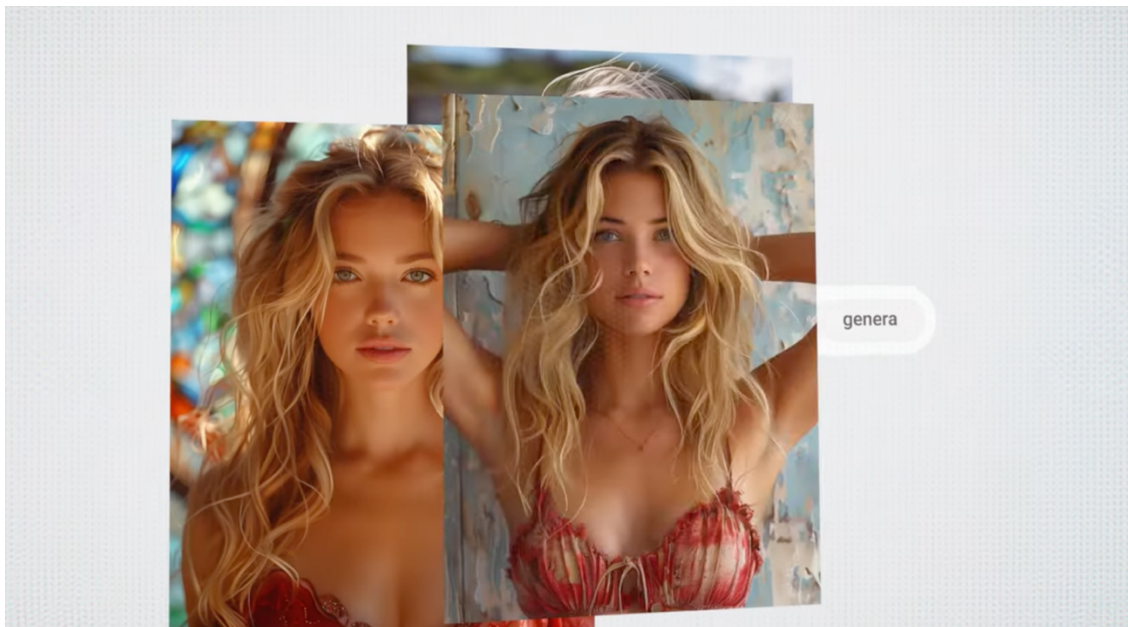


Figure 28. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 7 (0:44 – 0:52). This moment marks a turning point in the visual narrative of the commercial. Following the standardized multiplication of AI-generated faces, the screen is emptied: optical white returns as the background, accompanied by dark blue text and the golden Dove logo. The central, evenly paced textual message reads, “For 20 years Dove has been committed to celebrating Real Beauty”, with the use of capital letters emphasizing the absolute value of the concept. Immediately after, a second line provides

interpretive guidance: “This is what Artificial Intelligence generates today when we add Dove”. The tone is assertive and anticipatory, introducing a new phase of the commercial.

This screen functions as a narrative switch: it abandons the idealized aesthetic to enter the world of beauty according to Dove. The decision to momentarily suspend figurative narration and rely solely on text strengthens the authority of the enunciator and clearly signals a shift in perspective. The soundtrack, though wordless, adopts a soft and almost magical tone, with gentle sounds that suggest the imminent emergence of something new.

From a semiotic standpoint, we are situated within a liminal space, a moment of transition that closes the first act (centered on stereotyped simulation) and opens the possibility for an alternative narrative. Dove positions itself as an active subject, capable of influencing AI output and redirecting it toward new ideals. The return to white is not merely formal, but symbolic: it marks a new beginning, ready to embrace a different conception of beauty.

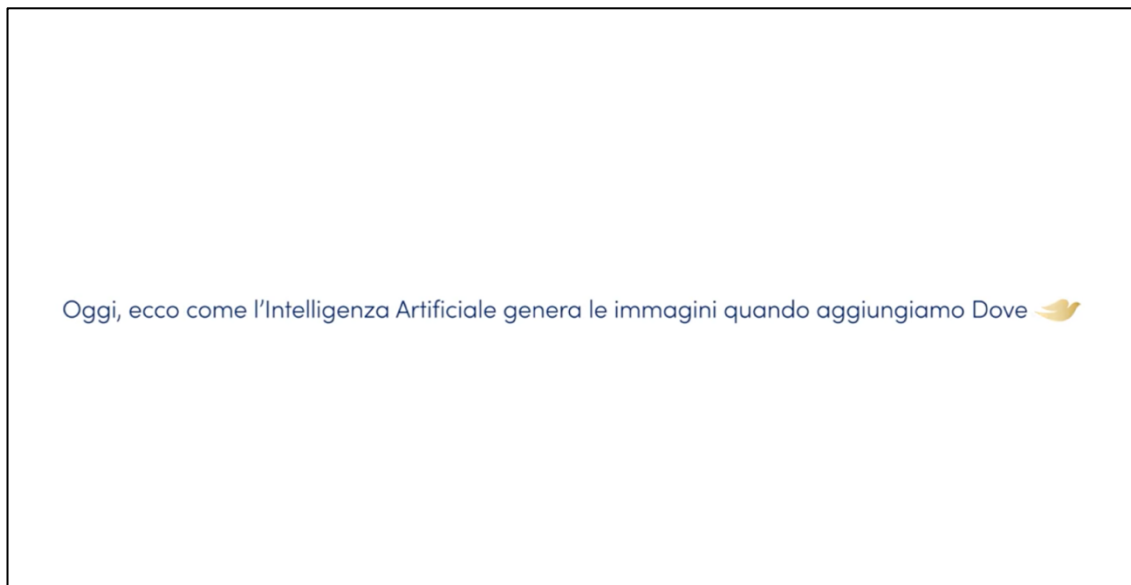


Figure 29. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 8 (0:52 – 1:05). The sequence opens with a new white screen, onto which a search bar appears, similar to those seen previously, but with a decisive variation: the prompt reads, “/imagine the most beautiful woman in the world as Dove would”. The

final clause, “*as Dove would*”, explicitly introduces an alternative point of view, signaling a corrective intention toward the imaginary constructed thus far. It is a clear and direct discursive gesture that positions the brand not merely as an observer, but as an active agent in the construction of meaning. Upon confirmation of the command, the rhythm of the commercial changes dramatically: the music swells and becomes more ethereal, with a violin-led melody that unfolds in a more expansive and enveloping manner. The lyrics of the song return, now with a more open and rhythmic tone, introducing a new narrative energy.

The images that follow mark a true rupture in the visual regime. In contrast to the preceding sequences dominated by aesthetic repetition, we now see diverse, authentic faces and bodies. Photographs of real women appear in succession, all set against white backgrounds and framed in orderly rectangles arranged in a grid that resembles a mosaic. This graphic device, seemingly simple, carries strong symbolic value: by its very nature, a mosaic is composed of distinct elements that retain their individuality while together forming a broader, cohesive whole. It is a visual form of inclusivity, where plurality is not homogenized, but respected in its heterogeneity.

The first image features a woman in a wheelchair, initially framed in a medium close-up and later in full figure. This is followed by images of women of varying ages, ethnic backgrounds, and non-normative bodies, all captured with expressions that convey authenticity, dignity, and self-awareness. The framing remains frontal throughout, but varies in distance: close-ups, medium shots, and American shots alternate, enhancing the sense of real multiplicity and rendering each subject fully recognizable in her uniqueness. The lighting shifts toward warmer tones, in stark contrast to the cool hues of the previously generated images. These photographs are vibrant, rich in color, and convey vitality, presence, and intimacy.

Semiotically, this sequence represents a moment of reinscription: the generative codes of AI (the white space, the search bar, the image format) are preserved but filled with new content. It is as if Dove reclaims the language of AI to resignify it according to a different ethical framework. The visual and narrative effect is powerful: dissonances with respect to the idealized model are not corrected but embraced. Diversity is no longer treated as

an exception, but as a foundation. Homogenization is thus abandoned in favor of an aesthetic that acknowledges the complexity of reality.

At this stage, the commercial performs a clearly symbolic operation: from an abstract, algorithmic beauty, it shifts to an embodied, subjective, and relational beauty. AI, which until this point had functioned as a mirror of cultural stereotypes, becomes, thanks to the brand's value-driven intervention, a more open representational tool, capable of including bodies and identities that are typically rendered invisible. In this sense, the sequence stages a genuine reclamation of the generative code: a speech act that subverts, from within, the very language of simulation.



Figure 30. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 9 (1:05 – 1:11). The trajectory established by Dove continues, further reinforcing the break from the generative standards presented in the first part of the commercial. Once again, the white search bar appears against an optical white background, this time bearing the prompt: “/imagine perfect skin as Dove would”. The phrasing is consistent with previous sequences but introduces an additional layer of reflection: an expression that is heavily aesthetically connoted is now redefined through a new lens.

Upon confirmation of the prompt, the scene opens on a frontal close-up of the face of an elderly black woman, marked by deep wrinkles and white hair. Her face is warm, expressive, and visibly aged, yet fully present, radically replacing earlier images of smooth, ageless perfection. Here, “*perfection*” no longer coincides with the absence of imperfection, but with the fullness of identity, history, and experience inscribed on the face.

The blurred urban background allows the image to emerge as though it were part of an everyday, real-life scene. The environment behind her is indistinct but tonally coherent: shades of grey and brown, echoed in her pearl-grey hair and the visible strap of a bag, multiply in various forms, soft silhouettes that evoke buildings, shadows, and worn surfaces. The woman’s shirt mirrors the same pearlescent grey of her hair, creating chromatic harmony that enhances the scene’s visual cohesion and reinforces its sense of authenticity.

The warm, soft lighting stands in stark contrast to the optical white of the initial frame (1:07), once again marking the transition from the technological abstraction of the prompt to the lived concreteness of the generated image. This shift pertains not only to visual style but to the very substance of the message: beauty is no longer imagined as youthful, flawless, or aligned with visual norms, but as experience, time, and reality.



Figure 31. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 10 (1:11 – 1:20). The sequence introduces a new command: “/imagine a beautiful woman as Dove would”. The phrasing echoes structures already seen, but the inclusion of the brand’s perspective signals a transformative intent. Following the typed prompt, a series of extreme frontal close-ups appears, depicting female faces of various ethnicities and somatic traits, Asian, African, Indian, Mediterranean, none of which are smoothed or idealized. Each face bears the trace of its own reality: imperfections, marks, and unique expressions.

Alongside each image, a “generate” button appears, changing color when clicked, suggesting that what we see is always the result of a deliberate action. The structure is simple yet powerful: the same generative gesture used earlier now produces entirely different outcomes, guided by a new set of values.

What radically distinguishes this sequence is the complete absence of musical accompaniment. For the first time in the commercial, only the sound of the click is heard; the surrounding silence amplifies the sense of authenticity. It is as though the narrative pauses to make room for the full presence of the faces. The warm lighting, in stark contrast to the optical white of the initial frame, restores depth and naturalness to the images.

Semiotically, this sequence represents the culmination of Dove’s discursive strategy: the reinscription of a new value system within the same generative code. The absence of music, the silence of the context, and the centrality of the human face transform simulation into visual truth. It is a celebration of plurality, no longer portrayed as variation on a single theme, but as the authentic expression of real difference.



Figure 32. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence II (1:20 – 1:25). The optical white background reappears, visually closing the loop established at the beginning of the commercial. On the screen, a question appears in dark blue: “What kind of beauty do we want to teach Artificial Intelligence?” Though rhetorical in nature, the question is framed as an open enunciative act: for the first time, the discourse directly addresses the viewer, inviting reflection and personal positioning. It is a moment of suspension that interrupts the narrative progression to create space for critical thought.

The text is centered and accompanied by the Dove logo in gold, also centrally positioned and rendered luminous through reflective effects. The overall chromatic composition once again conveys an institutional and reassuring tone, consistent with the brand’s voice as an ethical guide.

Following the silence of the preceding sequence, the music gently resumes. The melody, ethereal and delicate, returns the atmosphere to a more emotional and contemplative register. It is the same soundtrack that has accompanied the entire commercial, but here it takes on a tone of closure and introspection, as if to support the gravity of the question being asked.

Semiotically, this sequence marks the transition from a demonstrative act to one of awareness. The commercial does not impose an answer but opens an ethical horizon: Dove not only presents an alternative vision of beauty, but invites viewers to imagine, and therefore to generate, a new paradigm, collectively.



Figure 33. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 12 (1:25 – 1:37). The sequence introduces an explicit comparison between past and present, staging the visual and ethical evolution of the Dove brand. On a black television screen, a fragment from the iconic 2004 commercial is shown: approximately ten women, each differing in ethnicity and body type, dressed in bright white underwear, pose against an equally white background. The shots are full-body, frontal, and minimal. The aesthetic is clean and restrained, symbolically centered on transparency and a deliberate break from the dominant beauty standards of the time.

This moment is followed by a temporal leap to 2024. The imagery shifts entirely: smartphones appear, social media aesthetics take center stage, and bold colors emerge. The tones become vibrant, and the visual environment is dynamic and immersive. Yet, despite the stylistic transformation, the message remains consistent: here too, the representation focuses on diversity. Women of varying ages, ethnicities, and body types

are depicted authentically. The shots vary (medium close-up, American shot, full figure), culminating in a close-up of a young Black woman with braids, filmed against a pink background.

The contrast between the optical white of 2004 and the saturated hues of 2024 marks not only a visual shift but also a generational transition in communication style. The intense, colorful lighting of the more recent images reinforces the present's sense of positive energy, without betraying the brand's original ethos. The soundtrack returns, along with the lyrics of the song. The music builds progressively in intensity and pitch, mirroring the evolution of the imagery and amplifying its emotional impact.

From a semiotic perspective, this sequence functions as a declaration of continuity. Dove recalls its own history to reaffirm the consistency of its commitment, updating its visual codes to reflect contemporary languages while remaining grounded in its core values: the representation of real beauty. The final close-up on the smiling face of the young woman is not merely a visual conclusion, but a symbolic affirmation: beauty, then as now, is plural, visible, and profoundly human.



Figure 34. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 13 (1:37 – 1:44). This sequence stages the most emotionally resonant moment, in which the distance between representation and lived experience dissolves. The scene opens on an image of a smiling Black girl displayed in an OOH (out-of-home) advertisement. At first glance, the full-screen image may appear to be a direct shot of the child herself, but it slowly shrinks, revealing itself to be a billboard. The frame widens to show a real-life setting in which another Black girl, accompanied by her mother, is looking at the poster. Their faces, framed frontally, appear relaxed, curious, and smiling. This creates a mirror effect in which the real subject recognizes herself in the represented figure, and in which the imagined is validated within the everyday.

Warm tones, ochre in the background, reddish brown in the clothing, and the dark skin tones of the protagonists, create a welcoming and harmonious atmosphere in which image and reality reflect one another.

The act of looking, the child observing the child in the image, carries strong symbolic weight: it marks the transition from the plane of representation to that of identification. The image is no longer something to be consumed, but a vision that speaks directly to the lived experience of the viewer. The absence of text within the billboard, apart from the discreet white Dove logo in the bottom right corner, enhances the immediacy and authenticity of the scene.

The soundtrack accompanies this moment with gentleness: the lyrics of the song conclude as if closing a fairy tale, extending the final syllable, as if to hold the moment in suspension. The tone is warm, contemplative, and perfectly attuned to the visual narrative.

Semiotically, this sequence represents the point of convergence between representation and lived reality. The girl's gaze toward the advertisement is not mere contemplation, but identification. It marks the moment in which the advertising message receives authentic social validation: it does not merely display, but is received. The emotional adhesion it generates is both profound and strategic, as it transforms communication into relationship, and viewing into recognition.



Figure 35. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

Sequence 14 (1:44 – 1:55). The commercial concludes by returning to the restrained, institutional visual structure with which it began. Against an optical white background, the final lines appear in dark blue, centered on the screen and accompanied by the gold Dove logo, which seals the brand’s identity. The message is direct and assertive: “We will never use Artificial Intelligence to create or distort images of women. Learn more at Dove.com”. It is a clear, unequivocal stance that functions both as a closing statement and as an ethical declaration. The use of the adverb “*never*” conveys a sense of absolute commitment, reinforcing trust between the brand and the viewer.

Immediately afterward, the campaign hashtag #KeepBeautyReal appears, an effective synthesis of the entire communicative initiative, followed by the phrase “*Let’s Redefine Beauty*”, with the word *Beauty* rendered in bold and uppercase. This typographic treatment serves a dual function: on one hand, it highlights the semantic centrality of the term; on the other, it underscores its contested and transformable nature. The aim is not merely to narrate beauty, but to rewrite it, redefining it according to alternative criteria. The graphic emphasis signals that the very concept of beauty, typically treated as objective and given, is being questioned and rearticulated through an inclusive and authentic lens.

The soundtrack is reduced to the simple, contemplative sound of a piano, accompanying the final text without overpowering it. The absence of voice or orchestrated arrangement creates a space of narrative silence that invites reflection. No human subjects appear on screen: only words, white space, and minimal sound. This is a conclusion that does not seek emotional climax, but rather calls for awareness.

From a semiotic perspective, this final sequence functions as a metadiscursive enunciation and a public commitment. After having shown and deconstructed, the brand closes by issuing a promise. This marks the final shift from the aesthetics to the politics of discourse: Dove not only proposes a different vision of beauty, but pledges to protect it, to avoid distorting it, and to defend it, even in the age of artificial intelligence. It is a gesture that closes the narrative, while opening a concrete horizon for action.



Figure 36. Screenshot from “Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all’AI?” (YouTube, Dove IT, 2024).

3.2.2.2 The Semio-Narrative Level: The Actantial Model

In the case of the Dove commercial, the actantial model is not structured around traditional characters but rather around discursive functions distributed throughout the audiovisual text.

SENDER Dove	→	OBJECT For Dove: real beauty; for the mother: representation	→	RECEIVER The mother
		↑		
HELPER Visual ethics, real diversity, musical language, brand memory	→	SUBJECT The mother	←	OPPONENT The stereotyped imaginary of AI, algorithmic homogenization

Table 6. Greimas’s Actantial Model customized to the Dove case. Source: Greimas, A. J. (1973). *Les actants, les acteurs et les figures in sémiotique narrative et textuelle* coll. L. paris.

The subject of the narrative is the mother, who embodies the pursuit of a new definition of beauty, authentic, representative, and plural. She is not simply a passive character, but the figure through which the narrative tension unfolds. Her desire for representation and truth guides the transformation of the visual imaginary shaped by artificial intelligence, redirecting it toward more inclusive and ethical standards.

The object of this desire is the transformation of the generative imaginary, not simply the production of different images, but the rewriting of the codes through which beauty is encoded by technology, reorienting them toward ethical, realistic, and inclusive criteria.

The sender is Dove itself, in its role as a brand and ethical enunciator. From the very first sequence, Dove presents itself as a guarantor of transparency, taking responsibility for disclosing the use of AI and problematizing its function. The brand does not merely offer a product, but positions itself as a conscious agent shaping meaning.

The receiver of the narrative process is the mother, who is also the subject. She receives a symbolic mandate, representation and recognition of real beauty, which she chooses to internalize and embody. The moment in which she sees her image reflected accurately, rather than filtered through stereotyped or homogenized AI-generated standards, marks the acceptance of the narrative mission. The emotional impact is not only individual but serves to challenge algorithmic norms. Her gaze toward a more authentic portrayal becomes an act of narrative agency.

Several helpers support the subject in this process. The visual ethics of the commercial are expressed through the use of frontal shots, warm lighting, the absence of filters and retouching; the diversity of the represented subjects showcases different bodies, ethnicities, and ages; the soundtrack guides the narrative, modulating its emotional rhythm through moments of suspension and crescendo; and finally, the brand's memory is activated through a direct reference to the iconic 2004 campaign, reinforcing Dove's consistency over time.

The opponent obstructing the subject's action is the stereotypical imaginary produced by AI: repetitive images, artificial perfection, a standardized beauty that erases difference. AI, when unguided, merely reproduces the biases embedded in the data on which it is trained. It is not an explicit enemy, but a systemic obstacle that the commercial seeks to expose and correct.

According to Peverini (2025), "*AI is invested with a thematic role that concretizes the narrative function of the Opponent and can be summarized as the 'false witness'*" (Peverini 2025, p. 99). This interpretation corresponds with the framework of the actantial

model utilized here, wherein AI assumes the role of the Opponent not by aggressively opposing the subject, but by passively sustaining normative rules and aesthetic exclusions. The advertisement seeks to rectify this distortion by reestablishing a human-centered, ethically informed conception of authentic beauty.

The entire narrative arc of the commercial can be read through the four fundamental phases of action.

In manipulation, Dove activates the subject's ethical desire by presenting the alarming statistic that by 2025, 90% of online content will be generated by artificial intelligence. This declaration is not neutral: it problematizes, warns, and establishes a pact of veridiction. Here begins the tension between what is, an algorithmically homogenized imaginary, and what could be: an inclusive and real aesthetic.

Competence emerges when the subject acquires the tools to act. Dove demonstrates awareness of AI's limitations, the means to intervene, and, most importantly, the will to do so. This is explicitly declared in the final textual frames and staged through the transformation of prompts, the genuine diversity of images, the strategic use of music, and the evocation of its brand legacy.

Performance marks the moment in which the transformation actually occurs. When the images begin to be generated "as Dove would", the visual regime changes radically: we move from smoothed bodies to marked faces, from homogeneous women to a mosaic of differences. The narrative thus fulfills its promise, the imaginary is rewritten. A particularly symbolic moment shows a young girl looking at the billboard. While she is not an actant in the narrative, her gaze reflects the impact of the mother's journey and the broader cultural shift: the recognition of oneself in media becomes a silent testimony to real change.

Finally, sanction closes the narrative cycle through a dual act. On one hand, the girl's gaze toward the billboard becomes proof that a new form of beauty is possible, visible, and concrete. On the other, the commercial ends with a clear commitment: "We will never use Artificial Intelligence to create or distort images of women". The message is unequivocal, reinforced by the hashtag #KeepBeautyReal and the declaration "Let's

Redefine Beauty”, where the word *Beauty*, in uppercase and bold, assumes thematic centrality: it is the core of the discourse, the concept to be rethought, the true stake of the entire narrative. The commercial closes not merely with an image or a promise, but with a vision: the tangible possibility of reorienting technological languages toward lived truth, rather than toward the reproduction of its clichés.

3.2.2.3 Axiological level: communication strategy

The third level of analysis highlights the value axes that structure the deeper meaning of the Dove commercial. The entire narrative is grounded in a series of semantic oppositions which are not left in the abstract, but actively staged, interrogated, and transformed. The most prominent of these oppositions is between authenticity and artificiality. The first half of the commercial is dominated by the presence of artificial intelligence as a generative force for images: smoothed, symmetrical faces, all similar to one another, set against cold backgrounds and constructed according to an idealized and distant aesthetic. This is a vision of beauty that is flawless but lifeless, incapable of capturing the complexity of real experience. In the second half, authenticity progressively emerges through the appearance of real, marked, and diverse faces. There is no perfection, but instead expression, experience, and truth. The transition between these two visual modes does not merely present a contrast between the natural and the artificial; it challenges how technology can be directed. Dove does not reject AI, but instead claims a conscious use of it, guided by an ethics of representation.

Alongside this first opposition is that between standardization and difference. At first, the apparent multiplicity of images proves superficial: changes in background or framing do not alter the substance of the identity portrayed. The women generated by AI are interchangeable because they all conform to the same model. It is a variety that masks uniformity, a false diversity that reassures without including. When the commercial introduces the phrase “as Dove would,” the scenario shifts: real subjects begin to appear, women of different ages, ethnicities, and bodies. The difference is no longer merely visual, but semantic: it expresses subjectivity, disruption, and presence. Technology, once

a mirror of bias, is repurposed as a tool to generate alternative representations more faithful to lived reality.

Another key opposition concerns the very notion of beauty. On one hand, normative beauty is conceived as a set of codified, abstract, and cross-contextual criteria. This is the kind of beauty produced by unguided AI: smooth, symmetrical, devoid of imperfection. It is an impersonal beauty, repetitive and designed to be universally acceptable, but which ultimately represents no one. On the other hand, the commercial constructs a rewritten vision of beauty: personal, plural, situated. The faces shown in the second half are not only different, they are bearers of history, context, and identity. The final statement, “Let’s Redefine Beauty”, is not just a slogan, but a discursive act that encapsulates the entire narrative project. The term *Beauty*, in bold and uppercase, is not simply emphasized: it is thematized, questioned, and redefined based on what is shown and what is promised.

Finally, the commercial engages with the opposition between a passive gaze and an active gaze. At the outset, the viewer is positioned as a silent observer of an imposed image: the gaze belongs to the girl looking at the computer, receiving, consuming. The viewer is drawn into this passivity. As the narrative evolves, however, the gaze is transformed. It becomes an active part of the generative process, capable of choosing, directing, and creating. The moment when a young girl looks at a billboard and smiles in recognition represents the fullest expression of this shift. A mirroring effect is created: the real subject sees herself in the representation, and the representation returns value to the subject. It is no longer a beauty that is merely seen, but a beauty that sees and allows itself to be seen.

Across all of these oppositions, authenticity vs. artificiality, standardization vs. difference, norm vs. rewriting, passivity vs. participation, the commercial does not merely present an ideological conflict but constructs a transformative path. The message is not fixed but dynamic: it evolves, it shifts, and with it the viewer is invited to reposition themselves. In this sense, the entire narrative becomes a process of axiological re-foundation, proposing a redefinition of visual codes, represented values, and recognized subjects.

Deep theme	Negative value	Positive value
Reality/fiction	Artificiality (standard AI)	Authenticity (ethical AI)
Identity	Standardization	Real difference
Beauty	Normative canon	Rewritten beauty
Gaze	Passive / imposed	Active / generative

Table 7. *Semantic oppositions and thematic value axes.*

The commercial does not simply depict these oppositional axes, it traverses them, showing their implications and proposing a solution. In this way, the thematic level constructs a transformational journey: the meaning of the message is generated in the very passage from one pole to the other, and in the text's ability to deconstruct a system and propose a new one.

3.2.2.4 Veridiction square

The veridiction square, when applied to the commercial, helps reveal the layered opposition between different representations of beauty conveyed in the narrative. The position of being corresponds to authentic beauty: bodies that are real, lived, imperfect, and plural, aligned with the campaign's intent to celebrate diversity and truth. Appearing, on the other hand, refers to AI-generated beauty: smooth, polished, idealized representations that simulate the real while lacking its substance. This quadrant reflects the constructed verisimilitude enabled by generative AI, which fabricates an illusion of perfection disconnected from lived experience.

The position of non-being articulates the risk of mistaking synthetic representations for reality, raising concerns about the normalization of artificial standards and the erasure of genuine diversity.

Non-appearing refers to real bodies that remain unseen in mainstream media: those that do not conform to dominant aesthetic codes and are thus rendered invisible, particularly plural, marginal or underrepresented identities.

Within the enunciative framework of the *Dove | The Code* commercial, the empirical subject of communication is Unilever, speaking through the Dove brand as a delegated enunciator. Dove constructs a discourse that positions itself as ethically committed, in continuity with its established communicative tradition. While the empirical addressee consists primarily of women and girls, the text also constructs an ideal receiver, one who is critically aware, attuned to the ethical implications of AI, and receptive to inclusive representation. This ideal viewer is metaphorically embodied in the young girl who, upon recognizing herself in the advertisement, completes the emotional arc of the narrative.

Rather than reiterating the full logic of the veridiction square, the commercial centers its message on the tension between visibility and exclusion. It does not merely denounce artificial beauty but works to restore presence and dignity to what has been omitted. In this way, the ad becomes a site of semiotic negotiation, where an effect of truth is constructed, Dove asserts its identity as a brand grounded in authenticity and social responsibility.

3.2.2.5 Enunciative framework

Enunciative role	Identification in the commercial
e₁ (empirical enunciator)	Unilever
e ₂ (delegated enunciator)	Dove as a brand with ethical values
d₁ (empirical addressee)	The general public, particularly real women and girls
d₂ (ideal addressee)	Conscious consumers, sensitive to ethical issues and critical of AI and normative beauty standards
e₃ (textual enunciator)	The brand's narrative voice, logo, and visual imagery constructing the ethical message
d₃ (figurativization of the addressee)	The young girl who looks at the advertisement and sees herself reflected in it

Table 8. *Enunciative roles and their textual realization in Dove | The Code.*

In the enunciative framework of *Dove | The Code*, the entity that actually produces the message is Unilever (e_1), which speaks through the brand Dove (e_2), identifiable in the text through the logo, the ethical tone, and its continuity with past communication campaigns. Dove constructs a message intended to engage a broad audience (d_1), composed primarily of women and girls, while simultaneously addressing an ideal addressee (d_2): an audience that is critically aware, resistant to algorithmic aesthetics, and receptive to values of authenticity and inclusion. Within the narrative, this dynamic is represented through specific textual figures: Dove functions as an ethical subject also through its logo and off-screen voice (e_3), while the audience is figurativized in the scene where a young girl looks at an advertisement and recognizes herself (d_3). This visual moment becomes the emblem of a veridiction pact between brand and viewer, marking a moment of genuine alignment between sender and receiver.

3.2.3 Case study 3 - eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be (2024)

The commercial *Be the Investor You Want to Be* by eToro, released in July 2024 on the brand's official YouTube channel, stands as a significant example of contemporary audiovisual narration, particularly due to its use of artificial intelligence in the creation of characters. With a total duration of thirty seconds, the spot is characterized by an extremely rapid pace and tight editing: the accelerated succession of images and settings, accompanied by a driving soundtrack, demands a high level of attention from the viewer in order to follow the narrative flow.

Visually, the commercial employs a neutral color palette, ranging from light tones such as white and beige to darker shades like grey and black. This choice lends the spot an overall sense of visual neutrality and global accessibility. The only interruptions to this chromatic coherence are elements tied to the brand, which stand out through the use of more saturated colors, particularly green, eToro's signature color, visible in the logo and branded details. This color contrast serves to reinforce the brand's visibility within the visual narrative.

Narratively, the commercial does not follow a linear structure but is instead composed of a series of autonomous sequences, each dedicated to a different character. Although these individuals are not connected to one another and originate from diverse geographic and cultural contexts, they share the common experience of being investors on the eToro platform. The audiovisual text is thus constructed as a collection of micro-narratives that converge symbolically at a single point: participation in a global, accessible, and customizable investment platform.

All characters are presented frontally, in medium close-up shots, and are generated using AI. The scenes follow one another at high speed, and transitions between characters are marked by sound effects, such as “swish”, that emphasize each sequence change. Throughout the video, an informational banner remains on screen at the bottom, with white background and black text: “eToro is a multi-asset investment platform. The value of your investments may go up or down. Your capital is at risk”.

A constant element throughout the spot is the presence of a voiceover that guides the viewer from one character to the next. This voice, though not visible, is clearly situated within the narrative and corresponds to what Michel Chion classifies as *sound off-field*. The background music, which plays continuously without lyrics, is built around a steady and insistent piano melody. This musical element is classified as *sound off*, as it originates outside the diegetic space and functions as an extradiegetic component. Additional punctual sound cues, such as the aforementioned “swish” during visual cuts, contribute to structuring the rhythm of the visual montage.

The listening mode activated by the commercial leans toward objective perception: the voiceover does not belong to an internal character but is positioned as an external instance, acting as a mediator between the text and the viewer. This choice contributes to a detached and generalizing representation, consistent with the notion of a universal platform intended for everyone.

From a Greimasian perspective, a notable tension emerges between the commercial’s declared intention, to celebrate multiplicity and individual autonomy among investors, and the visual standardization produced by the algorithmic generation of faces. This aesthetic homogeneity, though presented as neutral and inclusive, prompts a critical

reflection on the authenticity of representation and the dynamics of *veridiction* embedded in contemporary visual communication.

3.2.3.1 Surface level

In this section, the commercial is divided into 7 distinct sequences, each of which will be individually analyzed to highlight its technical features and the meanings conveyed throughout the visual narrative.

# Sequence	Duration	Visual column	Soundtrack
1	0:00 – 0:05	- Content description: the commercial opens with the phrase “<i>WHO AM I?</i>” in bold white letters over the close-up of a digitally generated young man’s face. The contrast sets up the core theme of identity. The camera quickly zooms out to reveal a medium shot and then a full-body shot as he walks forward, eventually framed against the Eiffel Tower. The text “<i>100 different investors</i>” appears, followed by a group of twenty diverse but uniformly styled figures appearing behind him. - Frame width: starts with extreme close-up on the protagonist’s face, then transitions to medium shot, then full-body shot. These progressive changes in frame width parallel the expansion from individual identity to collective configuration. - Camera angle: frontal, eye-level. The camera performs a reverse tracking shot: while the characters walk toward the lens, the camera moves backward, maintaining symmetrical composition. This movement creates a sense of	Sound effect: “swish” (marks visual transitions and the appearance of new elements). Voiceover is present but off-screen (sound off-field), guiding interpretation. No background music. The listening mode is objective, with the voiceover functioning as a generalizing external narrator.

		revelation and gradual spatial expansion. - Lighting: neutral and balanced lighting that enhances visual accessibility and supports the AI-generated facial features without dramatic contrast. - Color: neutral palette of whites, greys, blacks, consistent with the commercial's overall tone. These colors convey a polished, universal aesthetic. The white of the opening text contrasts sharply with the facial background, enhancing semantic suspension. - Transition: Opening sequence; no preceding visual transition. The appearance of secondary characters and the shift in framing are emphasized by a sudden sound cue ("swish"), marking the moment of narrative expansion.	
2	0:05 – 0:10	- Content description: Grace, labeled on-screen as "<i>a global tech investor</i>", is introduced in a medium shot inside a dim, cluttered subway station. The scene's neutral, chaotic tone is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a bright green eToro advertisement on the wall. This shift marks a moment of semantic reorientation: the brand appears as a stabilizing force amid urban disorder. - Frame width: medium shot of Grace, consistently centered in the frame. This framing maintains her readability both as an individual and as a professional type. Additional shots alternate between frontal and lateral angles, increasing spatial dynamism. - Camera angle: mix of frontal and side angles. The framing is dynamic, capturing Grace as she moves through the environment while maintaining her as the visual anchor of the sequence. These shifts	Voiceover continues (sound off-field). A piano melody enters for the first time (sound off), adding emotional structure. Diegetic sound effects include the "ting" that accompanies Grace's name and ad text. The listening mode is layered and remains objective: the viewer receives voiceover, music, and sound cues in balanced coexistence.

		emphasize the complexity of the setting. - Lighting: cool, diffused, dim lighting in the subway station. The overall tone is dark and neutral, with low contrast, until the vivid green of the eToro signage introduces a strong chromatic break. - Color: dominated by neutral tones. The green of the eToro logo functions as a visual rupture and symbolic marker of clarity, order, and brand identity. This chromatic contrast is deliberate and semiotically charged. - Transition: sharp visual and auditory transition: the scene moves from the abstract visual of Sequence 1 to a specific character in a complex real-world setting. The “ting” sound effect marks Grace’s identification, paired with the brand’s visual emergence and the beginning of the music.	
3	0:10 – 0:14	- Content description: Max is introduced as “<i>a German local stocks specialist</i>” through on-screen text. The sequence is set in a warm-lit nighttime urban environment. The focus quickly shifts from Max’s medium shot to a close-up of the smartphone in his hands, displaying the eToro app. The device becomes the true center of the scene, symbolizing accessibility and mastery over complex financial systems. - Frame width: starts with a medium shot of Max, followed by a close-up on the smartphone screen. This framing shift centers the interface as the key object of visual and symbolic attention. - Camera angle: neutral, eye-level framing for both the character and the smartphone. The close-up is framed to ensure the legibility and	Background piano music continues (sound off). A sharp, distinct tapping sound from Max interacting with the phone is briefly heard (sound in), emphasizing user agency. The voiceover also continues as sound off-field, maintaining narrative cohesion. The overall listening mode remains objective, layered with auditory focus momentarily shifting to Max’s gesture.

		prominence of the eToro app interface. - Lighting: warm, yellowish street lighting. This contrasts with the bright, cool light of the smartphone screen, which draws immediate attention and reinforces the app’s symbolic clarity within a darker setting. - Color: dominated by warm ambient tones and dark background hues, punctuated by the luminous blue-white of the smartphone screen. The chromatic contrast highlights the phone as a “beacon” of clarity and control. - Transition: smooth continuation from the previous scene. The introduction of a new character (Max) is marked visually by on-screen text and narratively by a slight shift in tone and lighting. The “tap” sound introduces an action-based cue.	
4	0:14 – 0:16	- Content description: Jan is introduced via on-screen caption as “<i>a passive dividend hunter</i>”. The scene shows him walking calmly along a flower-lined sidewalk. The orange of the flowers is mirrored in his hair, creating visual harmony. Jan appears relaxed and serene, representing an idealized, conflict-free version of the contemporary investor. His representation is hyper-controlled and polished, contributing to a visual rhetoric of uniform perfection. - Frame width: medium shot, symmetrical and clean. The framing emphasizes the visual relationship between Jan and the environment, highlighting compositional balance. - Camera angle: eye-level frontal angle. The shot is static and centered, contributing to a sense of stability and reinforcing the overall	Background piano music continues (sound off). The narrator’s voice (sound off-field) accompanies the sequence. The listening mode remains objective, focused on balanced delivery of narration and ambient tone.

		visual harmony between subject and setting. - Lighting: soft, naturalistic lighting. The atmosphere is peaceful and evenly lit, with no dramatic shadows or contrasts. This enhances the polished, calm aesthetic of the scene. - Color: dominated by warm, harmonious tones. The orange of the flowers and Jan's hair are intentionally matched, creating chromatic unity. The overall palette supports an idealized, aesthetically controlled representation. - Transition: continuity with the previous character-based sequence. Jan's identity is introduced via caption, and the visual tone shifts from night to day, urban to natural, while preserving the aesthetic of controlled serenity.	
5	0:16 – 0:18	- Content description: the sequence presents a humorous juxtaposition: Michelangelo's David (a symbol of classical beauty) versus "<i>this David</i>", a modern, elegant investor. The visual pun creates a moment of irony, but the new David still conforms to the ad's aesthetic logic, flawless, composed, and stylish, thereby reinforcing rather than challenging dominant visual codes. - Frame width: medium close-up for the modern David, matching the format used throughout the commercial. The classical statue is framed from a low angle, emphasizing its iconic status and aura. - Camera angle: original David: low-angle shot to enhance monumentality. Modern David: frontal, eye-level shot in keeping with the clean, symmetrical style used for all characters. This contrast	Background music continues (sound off). The only diegetic sound is a sharp notification tone (sound in) at 0:18, suggesting activity on the investor's device. Voiceover likely continues off-field, though not specified directly in this sequence. Listening mode remains objective, with the notification briefly shifting focus.

		highlights both the irony and the visual continuity. - Lighting: not explicitly detailed, but inferred as consistent with the overall polished aesthetic of the spot, balanced and clear, with no visual irregularities. - Color: presumably neutral and harmonious, aligning with the commercial's controlled chromatic palette. No disruptive colors are mentioned; the visual coherence of the spot is preserved even in this ironic moment. - Transition: a tonal shift from calm uniformity to brief irony. The visual pun on the name "David" introduces momentary levity but functions as an internal variation rather than a rupture. The sequence ends with a notification sound, signaling a shift back to the digital-financial theme.	
6	0:18 – 0:27	- Content description: the narrative returns to the young man from the opening, now calmly seated in a garden. This moment opens a montage of various characters, all seated and interacting with the eToro app across diverse environments, terraces, interiors, public urban spaces, nature. Despite the visual variety, all are shown in relaxed, composed, and stable postures, communicating emotional control and seamless integration of investing into everyday life. - Frame width: begins with a high-angle shot of the garden tables, then transitions to a medium close-up of the protagonist. Subsequent montage includes various shot types, but all characters are shown in seated positions with visually centered, composed framing. - Camera angle: high-angle opening shot, followed by	Background piano music continues (sound off). The swish sound effect (sound in) recurs at each scene change, reinforcing the rhythm of montage. Voiceover likely continues off-field. The listening mode remains objective, with auditory structure aligned to editing rhythm.

		consistent eye-level frontal shots for all characters in the montage. This reinforces the viewer's alignment with the figures and contributes to the stable, polished tone of the sequence. - Lighting: consistently soft, neutral, aesthetically balanced across all locations. Lighting contributes to the calm and harmonious mood, with no harsh contrasts or dramatic effects. - Color: chromatic variety across environments is present but always within a controlled and harmonious palette. The eToro app screen (in the final close-up) provides a bright focal point, reinforcing brand centrality. - Transition: accelerated montage of scenes introduced by recurring "swish" sound effects. This rhythmic editing emphasizes continuity, fluidity, and omnipresence of the investment experience. The sequence concludes with an extreme close-up of the smartphone displaying the eToro app interface.	
7	0:27 – 0:30	- Content description: the protagonist from the opening scene reappears in a frontal medium close-up, but his face morphs fluidly into the faces of the other characters shown throughout the spot. The body and frame remain unchanged, symbolizing continuity within change. Superimposed on this image is the final campaign slogan: "Be the investor you want to be." The scene ends with the appearance of the eToro logo and app download invitation. - Frame width: frontal medium close-up throughout. The stable frame serves as a visual anchor while facial features morph dynamically, emphasizing identity	Background piano music continues (sound off). Voiceover is implied but not specified in this scene. The listening mode remains objective. No additional sound effects are described, allowing visual transformation to take center stage.

		transformation without contextual disruption. - Camera angle: eye-level frontal shot, held static to maintain focus on the morphing effect. The use of a fixed angle supports the metaphor of seamless, controlled variation in identity. - Lighting: soft and even. The background features a tranquil landscape (river and houses), reinforcing serenity and coherence. Toward the end, the background darkens to highlight the logo and brand green. - Color: the white of the superimposed text echoes the color used in the opening (“<i>WHO AM I?</i>”), conveying neutrality and openness. The bright green of the eToro logo re-emerges at the end as a chromatic brand signature. - Transition: a symbolic and thematic conclusion. Morphing introduces visual movement while the rest of the composition remains still. The transition to the final screen (logo and app download prompt) is gradual and darkens the image to focus attention.	
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Table 9. *The segmentation of texts*

Sequence 1 (0:00 – 0:05). The commercial opens with a striking image: the phrase “*WHO AM I?*” appears in large white letters at the center of the screen, superimposed over a close-up of a young man’s face. The contrast between the white text, serving as a visual symbol of neutrality and semantic suspension, and the depth of the underlying image, a digitally generated face imbued with strong expressive features, immediately introduces one of the central themes of the commercial: the tension between visual uniformity and the search for identity.

The camera quickly pulls back, transitioning from an extreme close-up to a medium shot of the character, eventually revealing the full figure as he walks forward. In the background, the Eiffel Tower becomes visible, an immediately recognizable and symbolically charged element that encodes the setting in a cosmopolitan and global register. Its presence is not neutral: it represents a site of passage, of encounter, and functions as a symbolic marker of international mobility and openness among the individuals depicted.

At this stage, the narrative is enriched by additional textual elements. Superimposed over the image appears the phrase “*100 different investors*”, followed by the sudden appearance of approximately twenty distinct figures positioned behind the protagonist. These individuals are visibly diverse in terms of ethnicity and gender, yet unified by a formal, polished aesthetic, evident in their sober, professional attire, that reinforces a sense of stylistic coherence within the portrayed multiplicity.

From a visual construction standpoint, the camera performs a reverse tracking movement: while the characters walk directly toward the lens, the camera moves backward, maintaining a centered and symmetrical frame. This dynamic, combined with the progressive widening of the visual field, suggests a process of expansion and revelation: individual identity is gradually framed within a collective configuration.

The dominant sound effect in this sequence is the “swish”, which underscores the change in framing and the sudden appearance of the secondary characters. There is no musical score at this point; the only auditory element is the voiceover, which operates off-screen to guide interpretation and provide cohesion to the flow of images.

On a surface level, the sequence appears to celebrate diversity and inclusivity. However, a deeper semiotic reading reveals a degree of ambiguity: the displayed plurality is channeled through rigid formal and stylistic codes that diminish the potentially disruptive impact of heterogeneity. The apparent phenotypic diversity is thus subsumed within a reassuring and controlled aesthetic. Plurality, rather than being experienced as dynamic or conflictual, is rendered pacified and neutralized through harmonizing visual conventions.

With this opening sequence, the commercial introduces the theme of identity as both a collective and individual construct, articulated through synthetic, sign-like images that problematize the relationship between subjectivity and standardization. This lays the groundwork for the sequences that follow, which continue to explore, through a series of digital portraits, the profile of the contemporary investor, constructed by the eToro platform as a fluid, adaptable, and globally integrated figure.

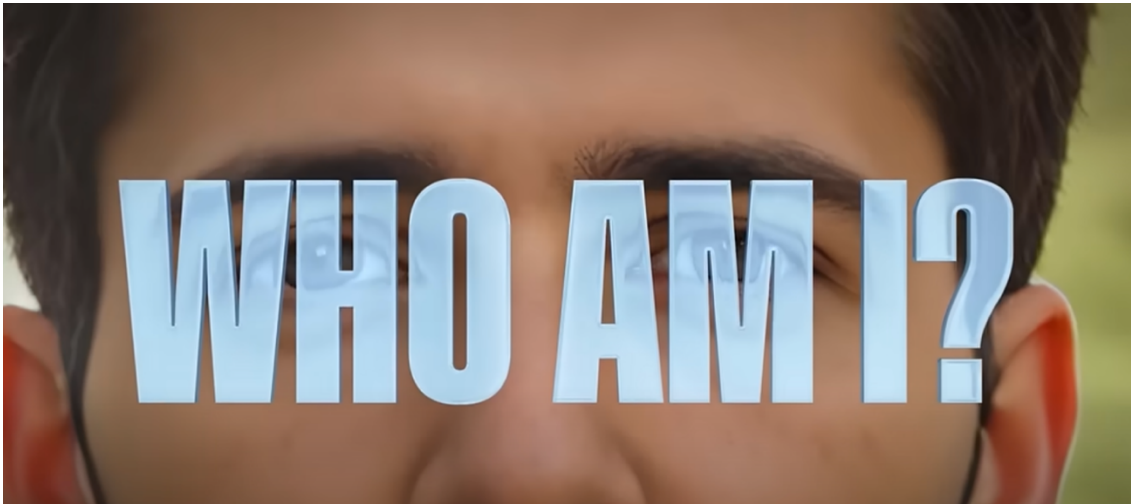


Figure 37. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

Sequence 2 (0:05 – 0:10). The sequence introduces the first of the characters identified in the eToro commercial: Grace, who is textually defined via on-screen captions as “a global tech investor”. Her face appears in a medium shot set within a clearly recognizable urban environment: a subway station. The setting is dark and nearly anonymous, marked by cool, diffused lighting, a degree of visual clutter, and an accelerated rhythm that evokes the metropolitan frenzy. The visual chaos and chromatic neutrality of this backdrop function as an oppositional context to the element that abruptly emerges in the scene: the eToro advertisement, projected on one of the station walls.

The sudden appearance of the bright green brand signage, a color directly associated with eToro’s visual identity, functions as a rupture in the visual linearity of the sequence. This vivid, instantly recognizable chromatic element not only captures visual attention but also serves as a guiding beacon in an otherwise chaotic and fragmented environment. From a semiotic perspective, the brand’s green becomes a marker of meaning: within a complex

and disordered world, saturated with uncertainty and visual overload, eToro positions itself as a stable point of reference, an orienting presence for the investor-subject.

Simultaneous with the brand's visual emergence, the commercial's musical score begins. In contrast to the previous sequence, where the only sound was that of the voiceover, a piano melody with a steady and driving rhythm now enters, continuing throughout the rest of the commercial. The introduction of music coincides with the brand's appearance, reinforcing the perception of a narrative and interpretive shift within the audiovisual text. A layered mode of listening is activated: the narrator's voice continues in the background, while new diegetic sounds, such as the "ting" that accompanies the appearance of Grace's name and description, along with the auditory cues linked to the gradually materializing text in the ad, contribute to the impression of emerging directionality and structure.

The visual construction of the sequence is characterized by abrupt shifts in framing and perspective. Frontal and lateral shots alternate, lending dynamism to the scene and emphasizing the spatial complexity of the environment. Grace consistently remains at the center of the frame, with a medium shot that allows her to be read both as an individual figure and as a representative of a global professional archetype.

At the level of enunciative organization, the sequence establishes a clear distinction between the indeterminate reality of the metropolis, dark, impersonal, and somewhat destabilizing, and the ordering visibility of the brand, which asserts itself through color, sound, and rhythm. This opposition is articulated figuratively as a subject/guide dynamic, in which the subject (Grace) is immersed in a dispersive context until the brand's appearance introduces a principle of order, visibility, and identification.

From a semiotic standpoint, the role of eToro is reinforced not merely as a technological platform, but as a producer of meaning and identity orientation. Within an urban space that symbolizes contemporary disorder and complexity, the brand functions as a focalizing agent, capable of returning to the subject a visible, defined, and above all recognizable position.

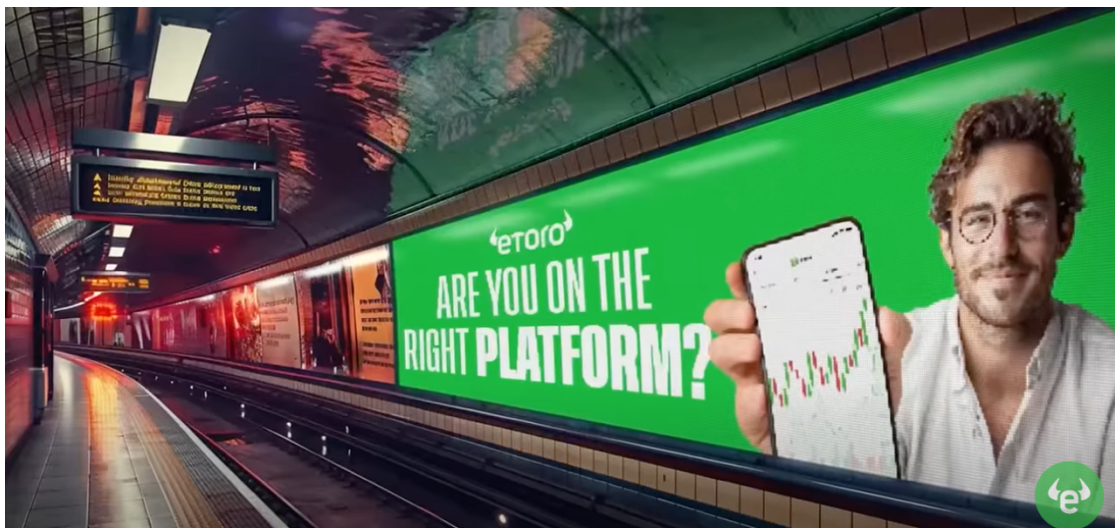


Figure 38. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

Sequence 3 (0:10 – 0:14). The sequence introduces Max, identified through the on-screen caption as “a German local stocks specialist”. The character is situated in a nighttime urban environment, illuminated by warm, yellowish street lighting, which contributes to an intimate and focused atmosphere. While the visual context maintains a degree of chromatic sobriety, it differs from the previous scene due to the warmer tone of the lighting, which creates a marked contrast with the luminous elements intended to stand out more clearly.

The central focus of this sequence is not so much the character’s face or body, but the object he holds in his hands: a smartphone displaying the eToro application. The camera transitions from a medium shot of Max to a close-up of the phone screen, which reveals the app’s digital interface in a clear, bright, and fully legible manner. In a visual context dominated by dark tones, the smartphone screen becomes the primary visual attractor, effectively functioning as a fetish object.

In this representation, the smartphone is not merely a utilitarian device; it operates as a tangible interface between the individual and the complex, often opaque world of global finance. The eToro app, with its orderly, intuitive, and visually harmonious design, functions as a simplifying tool, capable of translating the intricacies of financial markets into an accessible, controllable, and customizable user experience. In this sense,

technology does not merely enable but also mediates and structures the relationship between the subject and the world.

From a semiotic perspective, this clean and highly functional aesthetic produces an effect of hyperreality, in which the financial world is rendered in a polished form, stripped of ambiguity or disorder. The potential chaos of data and market fluctuations is absorbed and neutralized by an interface that prioritizes visual clarity, communicative efficiency, and perceptual reassurance. The investor is thus portrayed as fully integrated within a system that, precisely through its apparent transparency, conceals complexity beneath a simplified aesthetic.

On the auditory level, the sound of Max's fingertips tapping on the smartphone screen emerges as a sharp, precise noise that briefly interrupts the fluidity of the background music. This sound accentuates the operative gesture of the character and emphasizes his active engagement with the device, audibly affirming his agentive presence in the investment process. The narrator's voice continues to accompany the scene, maintaining its role as a consistent element and aligning with the sound off-field mode already established in previous sequences.

Taken as a whole, this sequence reinforces the image of eToro not only as a technical platform but as a cultural device embodying a model of dynamic, mobile, and perpetually connected financial subjectivity. The representation of Max, professional, competent, seamlessly integrated into his nocturnal urban environment, strengthens the notion of individual control achieved through technological mediation, while simultaneously raising implicit questions about the authenticity and immediacy of the digital experience.



Figure 39. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

Sequence 4 (0:14 – 0:16). The sequence continues the series of digital portraits by introducing Jan, identified through the on-screen caption as “a passive dividend hunter”. The scene opens with Jan walking along a sidewalk adorned with orange flowers, set in a peaceful and visually pleasant environment. As with the preceding characters, the framing is a medium shot, maintaining a clean, symmetrical, and orderly composition. From the outset, particular attention is paid to chromatic coherence: the orange of the flowers is mirrored in Jan’s hair, suggesting a deliberate visual harmonization between figure and background.

This visual correspondence is not incidental but represents a highly controlled aesthetic choice that contributes to the construction of a reassuring, polished, and visually balanced image. Jan is depicted with a relaxed posture, his pace calm, and his demeanor entirely free from tension. The surrounding environment is serene and silent, conveying a sense of stability. All these elements converge in the visual construction of the “ideal” investor, neither anxious nor stressed, but entirely at ease within his role: a subject who strolls through financial markets with the same natural ease with which he moves through a flower-lined setting.

However, this apparent spontaneity is, upon closer examination, meticulously programmed. Jan displays no bodily imperfections, no involuntary gestures, nor casual postures; every detail of his representation is calibrated to align with an aesthetic of control and harmony, characteristic of AI-generated imagery. In this sense, the sequence reinforces the reflection introduced in previous scenes: although the commercial claims to portray diverse, unique, and personalized subjects, the resulting visual output often leans toward a polished homogeneity that normalizes identity through prepackaged visual perfection.

The narrative of the contemporary investor, at least in this phase of the advertisement, is thus shaped by an unresolved tension between the ideal of individuality and the uniformity imposed by algorithmic mediation. The figure of Jan, seemingly marginal and “passive” by definition, becomes an emblem of performative serenity, visually constructed to embody a reassuring ideal, stripped of any sign of conflict or struggle. This is not the violent exclusion of complexity, but its aesthetic erasure, achieved through the hyper-control of color, posture, and setting.

Consistent with the preceding sequences, this portrayal underscores the tension within eToro’s advertising discourse: while the ideology of personalization is central, it is visually enacted through a representational form that tends toward uniformity and the neutralization of difference. The “tailored” investor is represented as a subject adapted to, and harmonized with, his environment, an identity shaped not by the contingencies of reality, but by the reassuring order of digital simulation.



Figure 40. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

Sequence 5 (0:16 – 0:18). The sequence introduces a temporary tonal shift, in which the polished and rigorously controlled aesthetic of the preceding scenes is momentarily interrupted by an ironic accent. The narrative stages a brief visual comparison between two figures: on the one hand, Michelangelo’s iconic David, an emblem of Renaissance sculptural perfection, and, on the other, “this David”, a new character presented as a stylish and confident investor. The scene hinges on a play of visual homonymy, producing a comedic effect through the unexpected juxtaposition of a historical artistic icon with a digitally generated contemporary figure.

This contrast between myth and modernity creates a brief suspension in the linear progression of the narrative, introducing a note of levity that seems intended to convey spontaneity and a sense of humor. However, upon closer inspection, this ironic interlude proves more ornamental than subversive: the modern David does not in fact challenge dominant aesthetic paradigms. He too is framed in a medium close-up, presented with flawless elegance, perfect features, a poised stance, direct gaze, and complete control over his self-presentation. The ironic reference, therefore, remains superficial, failing to disrupt the aesthetic structure that underpins the entire commercial.

From a compositional standpoint, a notable perspectival distinction emerges: the original David is shot from a low angle, heightening his monumental status and symbolic aura, whereas the modern David is filmed frontally, in accordance with the visual code recurring throughout the spot, which portrays characters in a direct, clean, and symmetrical manner. This differentiated parallel serves both to establish an immediate visual link between the two figures and to underscore the continuity between historical ideals of beauty and current models of success.

Sonically, the only element that disrupts the musical and narrative flow is a distinctive notification sound (0:18), presumably originating from the new David's smartphone, though the device screen is not shown on screen. This minor auditory detail introduces a contemporary note and once again suggests the integration of everyday life with financial activity, as well as the constant connectivity to the platform.

The semiotic operation carried out by this sequence is thus twofold: on the one hand, it provides a moment of comedic relief, useful for varying the narrative rhythm and maintaining viewer engagement; on the other hand, it implicitly reaffirms the normative models of aesthetics and behavior that structure the advertisement's discourse. Even where a gesture of self-irony is attempted, the visual paradigm remains intact: success continues to be represented through composed elegance, visual perfection, and the absence of disorder.

In this sense, the irony introduced by the sequence does not function as a true semantic rupture but rather as a variation within a closed system, a minor deviation that ultimately serves to reinforce the coherence of the narrative framework. Once again, the promise of personalization proves compatible with an aesthetic that normalizes, harmonizes, and reinforces established identity models.



Figure 41. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

Sequence 6 (0:18 – 0:27). The narrative returns to the young man introduced in the opening scene, now shown seated with a calm demeanor in a garden setting. His expression is relaxed, his gaze composed, and his open, upright posture communicates a sense of full command over his environment. The shot begins from above, revealing a series of outdoor tables that establish a convivial and orderly setting, before transitioning to a frontal medium close-up that brings the now-familiar face of the protagonist back into focus.

From this point onward, the editing accelerates sharply. A rapid succession of scenes introduces a variety of locations and characters, individuals with seemingly diverse physiognomies and styles, situated in variable environments: panoramic terraces, elegant domestic interiors, urban public spaces, and natural landscapes. Despite this scenographic diversity, all subjects are depicted seated, adopting relaxed, stable, and confident postures. Their gestures are restrained, facial expressions serene, and movements minimal and deliberate. No one displays signs of concern or urgency: each interaction with the eToro app occurs in a climate of calm and security.

The alternation between public and private, urban and natural spaces reveals a precise communicative intention: to portray the investment experience as ubiquitous and seamlessly integrated into everyday life. The rapid montage, accentuated by consistent sound effects such as the recurring swish accompanying each scene transition, amplifies the impression of fluid and omnipresent continuity. The conveyed message is explicit: investing is no longer a separate or specialized activity, but a continuous, natural, and frictionless practice, accessible anywhere and at any time.

However, this narrative construction is far from neutral. The emphasis on pervasive serenity, on frictionless accessibility, and on the perfect integration of subject, environment, and technology delineates an ideal model of the eToro user: a figure who is always competent, efficient, emotionally stable, and socially embedded. The investment experience, as represented here, is entirely devoid of ambiguity, failure, or vulnerability. The complete absence of tension, uncertainty, or error evokes a fictionalized, polished reality in which the dimension of risk, although textually acknowledged in the lower informational bar, is aesthetically neutralized.

The sequence concludes with an extreme close-up of a smartphone, once again displaying the eToro app interface. The technological device returns to the center of the frame as the element that connects all previous scenarios, functioning as the unifying point across experiences that, while appearing diverse, are all governed by the same logic of control, simplification, and order.

From a semiotic standpoint, this sequence marks the moment in which the promise of personalization and freedom of action is visually realized in its most reassuring, yet also most ideologically cohesive, form. The idea of investment “for everyone” is conveyed through imagery that excludes any form of discontinuity or conflict. Individuality is permitted only insofar as it remains within the boundaries of a harmonized aesthetic, algorithmically composed and free of deviation. In this way, the identity of the eToro user is constructed as a synthesis of technological control, global mobility, and emotional conformity, fully integrated into the system that represents it.



Figure 42. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

Sequence 7 (0:27 – 0:30). The sequence brings the protagonist of the opening scene back into the foreground, once again shown in a frontal medium close-up. This time, however, his face undergoes a visual morphing process: his image gradually transforms into the faces of the other characters previously introduced throughout the spot. One after another, facial features shift fluidly and continuously, generating a chain of identity transformations while the position of the body and the frame remain unchanged, allowing the face to cyclically reconfigure itself.

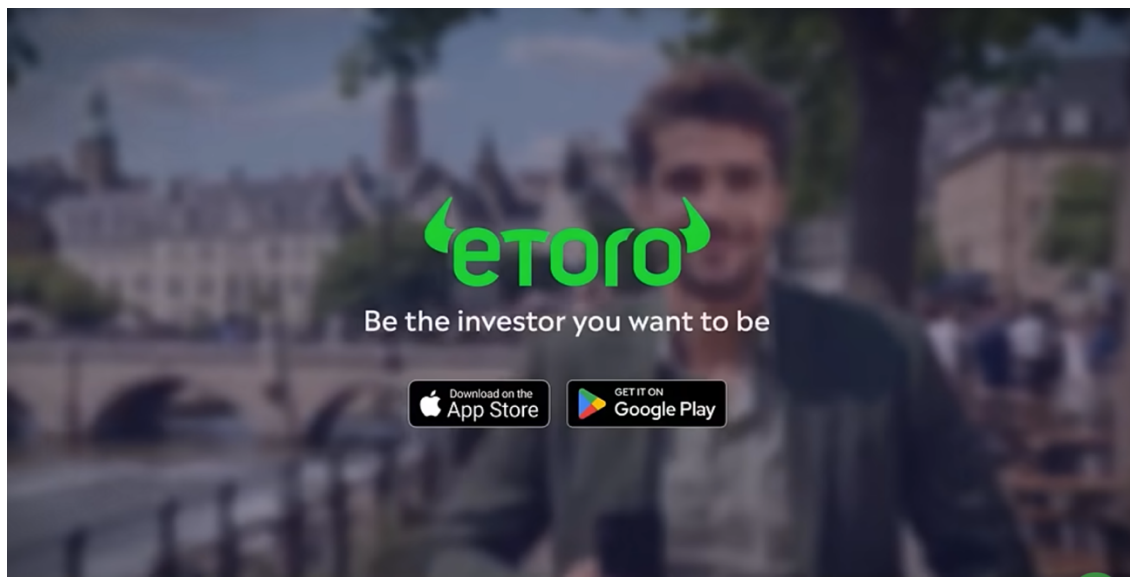
This transformation unfolds against a landscape background featuring a river and several houses, evoking a sense of tranquility, order, and connection with nature. Superimposed on this scene is the campaign’s textual claim, “*Be the investor you want to be*”, rendered in white, a color already associated in the opening sequence with neutrality and semantic openness. The use of a minimalist font and the central placement of the text over the morphing face underscore the spot’s thematic and ideological closure: the invitation to investor self-determination is here elevated to a programmatic statement.

From a semiotic perspective, the morphing operates as a visual metaphor for identity fluidity, for positive mutability, and for the notion that individuals can assume multiple

forms without losing coherence. The transitions between faces suggest that all the represented identities are legitimate, interchangeable variations of a singular user model: that of the eToro investor. The implicit promise is one of total personalization, wherein each subject may shape their experience according to their own needs, preferences, and rhythms.

Yet, the very technique that enables this representation, the algorithmic morphing, also reveals the limits of such freedom. The faces that appear in succession remain consistent with the polished, controlled aesthetic that defines the spot as a whole: no dissonant elements, no visible imperfections, no true deviation. The freedom proposed is therefore heavily regulated, contained within clearly defined visual and cultural boundaries, generated by a narrative machine that permits variation only within a pre-normalized visual grammar.

The sequence concludes with the appearance of the eToro logo, accompanied by a call to download the app. The background gradually darkens, allowing the brand's signature bright green to emerge prominently, once again functioning as a chromatic seal of brand identity. This final visual cue ties the narrative arc back to earlier scenes: the green that previously served as a guiding beacon in the subway setting returns here in a conclusive role, reaffirming both the visual and symbolic coherence of the campaign.



eToro is a multi-asset investment platform. The value of your investments may go up or down. Your capital is at risk.

Figure 43. Screenshot from “eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be” (YouTube, eToro, 2024).

3.2.3.2 The Semio-Narrative Level: The Actantial Model

SENDER eToro /AI-generated aesthetics	→	OBJECT The promise of individual freedom in investing	→	RECEIVER Viewer - investor
		↑		
HELPER AI technology, fluid narrative, reassuring visuals	→	SUBJECT Viewer - investor	←	OPPONENT Authentic difference, non-normative identities, lack of transparency, visual normativity

Table 10. Greimas’s Actantial Model customized to the eToro case.
Source: Greimas, A. J. (1973). *Les actants, les acteurs et les figures in sémiotique narrative et textuelle* coll. L. paris.

Within the actantial structure of the eToro spot, the subject of the narrative is the potential viewer-investor, who is encouraged to “be the investor you want to be”. This subject is subtly manipulated into identifying with a young, dynamic, high-performing figure who is seamlessly integrated into an aesthetically idealized system.

The object of this quest is the promise of individual freedom, the ability to invest according to one’s identity, lifestyle, and personal rhythm within a technologically advanced and ostensibly open financial ecosystem. However, this object remains largely

idealized: it is proposed but not fully realized, accessible only to those who visually and behaviorally conform to the normative codes embedded in the representation.

The *sender* of this narrative is eToro itself, positioning the platform as a vehicle for personal and financial self-actualization, while simultaneously constructing a discourse of empowerment and accessibility. At a secondary level, the AI technology that generates the spot's visual language also functions as an implicit sender, encoding aesthetic norms into the imagery.

The *receiver* is the potential investor-viewer, ostensibly empowered, but also subject to symbolic and visual conditioning.

The *helpers* in this narrative include the AI technology, framed as a tool for overcoming geographical, cultural, and economic barriers, and the fluid visual narrative, characterized by morphing sequences and reassuring imagery that guide the subject toward identification with the model investor.

The *opponents*, though not explicitly marked, are cultural and systemic: they include authentic difference (such as aging, non-conforming identities, or visible imperfection), the absence of communicative transparency (notably, the failure to disclose the artificial nature of the visuals), and any identity that lies outside the visual normativity of the spot, which is either neutralized or rendered marginal.

The four phases of the narrative contract are clearly articulated. During the manipulation phase, eToro induces the desire to become the “ideal investor” by constructing a world where everything appears accessible and achievable. This promise of empowerment, however, channels the viewer's imagination toward a standardized model. In the competence phase, the subject is presented as possessing the tools to act, the platform, AI, and mobile technology, but this agency is implicitly restricted to those who visually conform to the proposed aesthetic codes. The performance phase occurs when the subject symbolically assumes the identity of the investor depicted in the spot, but this identity is heavily morphed and idealized, eliminating markers of individuality. Finally, in the sanction phase, the outcome is positive only for those who align with dominant aesthetic norms; those who do not are symbolically excluded. The implicit message is clear: one

may “*be whoever one wants*”, as long as that identity fits within the acceptable visual frame.

At a deeper semiotic level, this analysis reveals a structural ambiguity in the narrative contract between brand and viewer. While the discourse claims to promote autonomy and personalization, it simultaneously enacts a process of aesthetic normalization, wherein freedom is contingent and difference is reduced to superficial variation. Although AI is positioned as a democratizing force, it becomes a mechanism of symbolic regulation, upholding comforting, controlled models of identity and reaffirming the visual logic of conformity under the guise of choice.

3.2.3.3 Axiological level: communication strategy

In the eToro commercial *Be the investor you want to be*, the apparent opposition between inclusion and exclusion, between freedom and constraint, is underpinned by a deeper network of value axes that structure the message and its impact on the viewer.

The first axis is that of authenticity versus simulation. While authenticity refers to irreducible individuality and real, non-performative difference, simulation denotes an identity artificially constructed, visually fluid yet normatively regulated, epitomized by the morphing sequences generated through AI. The spot appears to simulate authenticity, yet effectively negates it by offering polished, interchangeable representations. What is produced is not true diversity, but its aestheticized imitation.

The second axis concerns difference and standardization. Although the commercial showcases a range of facial features, body types, and contextual backdrops, these markers of diversity are ultimately neutralized by a unifying visual grammar. The final morphing sequence, in particular, synthesizes all difference into a harmonized aesthetic, revealing a strategy of homogenization that is both comforting and commercially efficient. A third axis, that of freedom versus control, reveals another tension. While the slogan explicitly affirms the subject's freedom, “*be the investor you want to be*”, the actual narrative

imposes an implicit ideal of the successful investor: young, self-assured, and perpetually winning. This ideal becomes a regulatory model, quietly shaping the viewer's aspirations.

Finally, the axis of inclusion versus exclusion frames the campaign's broader ideological stance. The advertisement verbally promotes inclusivity, claiming that investing is accessible to all, but visually excludes those who fall outside performative and aesthetic norms. Marginal figures, such as the single older adult depicted, remain peripheral and are not narratively centered. Thus, the proclaimed inclusivity functions as rhetorical ornament rather than structural principle. Across all these axes, the commercial enacts a process of aesthetic and ideological normalization, presenting diversity as a surface effect while sustaining deeper regimes of control.

Positive value (Expressed)	Negative value (Implicit)
Freedom	Normative control
Diversity	Aesthetic standardization
Authenticity	Artificial simulation
Inclusion	Symbolic exclusion

Table 11. *Synthetic axiological table*

The third level reveals that the commercial is rhetorically structured around a dual regime of meaning: the explicit discourse, which promotes empowerment, diversity, and individual freedom, and a latent discourse, which imposes preconfigured, aestheticized, and normative models. Although artificial intelligence is framed as a neutral or empowering tool, it functions instead as an agent of simulation and control, contributing to the construction of a reassuring, serialised, and potentially exclusionary imaginary.

3.2.3.4 Veridiction square

The veridiction square offers a useful lens through which to interpret the narrative construction of the *eToro* commercial. The quadrant of being/seeming is the most

immediately visible: the brand seeks to appear authentic and to be perceived as inclusive, accessible, and customisable. The characters are presented as diverse and autonomous, yet they are shaped to reflect a singular ideal of the “right” kind of investor, thus reinforcing a subtle normative framework beneath the surface of plurality.

The quadrant of seeming but not being further amplifies this ambiguity. While the text explicitly promotes personalisation and plurality, suggesting that every investor is different, on a deeper level it reveals a process of behavioural and aesthetic standardisation shaped by AI. What results is a simulated form of authenticity, where the appearance of diversity conceals a deeper uniformity. The commercial produces a strong effect of truth, grounded in the serenity of the characters, the reassuring voiceover, the brand’s green colour scheme, and the harmonious music. However, this authenticity is constructed: the apparent fluidity of identity is the outcome of a homogenising process. Credibility, in this case, is not derived from lived experience, but from formal coherence, an aesthetic veridiction built on polish and consistency rather than truthfulness.

The position of being but not seeming is less prominent, but it surfaces in the inclusion of the legal disclaimer, “*Your capital is at risk*”. This phrase acknowledges the real financial danger (being), yet it is visually and narratively suppressed (not seeming). The ad affirms the risk only linguistically, without representing its emotional or experiential consequences.

Finally, the quadrant of not being / not seeming corresponds to what the commercial systematically omits: the realities of failure, uncertainty, or psychological discomfort. Experiences of anxiety, error, or exclusion are absent from the spot’s hyper-positive and harmonious portrayal of investing, reinforcing an idealised world devoid of contradiction.

3.2.3.5 Enunciative framework

Role	Identification in the eToro commercial context
e ₁ (empirical enunciator)	eToro as a financial technology company, founded in 2007, and the actual producer of the content.

e₂ (delegated enunciator)	eToro as a brand promoting accessible, transparent, and innovative finance.
e₃ (textual enunciator)	The off-screen narrating voice and the AI-generated characters, who embody guidance and the values of informed investing. They function as the figurative realisation of eToro's brand promise.
d₁ (empirical addressee)	The actual audience of the spot: global digital users, young adults, current or potential investors.
d₂ (ideal addressee)	The ideal user as envisioned by eToro: a confident, relaxed, autonomous, technologically savvy investor present everywhere.
d₃ (figurativization of the addressee)	The AI-generated characters portrayed in the spot—Grace, Max, Jan, David, etc.—heterogeneous on the surface (in terms of gender, ethnicity, and setting) but shaped according to a shared identity: elegant, composed, and efficient.

Table 12. *Enunciative framework applied.*

eToro (e₁) produces the commercial through its brand (e₂), which assumes a coherent visual and narrative form, reassuring, harmonious, and meticulously polished. The brand is personified through the narrating voice and the AI-generated faces (e₃), which guide the viewer along the investor's journey. Real viewers (d₁) are invited to identify with an idealised identity (d₂), concretely represented by AI-modelled characters (d₃), designed to appear realistic, aspirational, yet accessible.

The enunciative framework of the commercial reveals a high degree of strategic consistency between the speaker (the brand), the promise conveyed (freedom, personalisation, accessibility), and the intended audience (a global, youthful, tech-savvy target). However, it is precisely through the roles of e₃ and d₃ that a degree of aesthetic standardisation becomes evident: all characters are visually controlled, elegant, and error-free, shaped through AI. This results in a form of identification that is reassuring but also homogenising.

3.2.4 Comparative semiotic analysis of three advertising case studies

When analysed comparatively, the three audiovisual texts reveal markedly different semiotic strategies in their construction of narrative roles and values, particularly in relation to their use of artificial intelligence. *Still Gin* and *Dove* articulate a layered and self-reflexive engagement with AI, mobilising it not merely as a technological tool but as a symbolic agent within a broader critique of cultural memory (*Still Gin*) and aesthetic bias (*Dove*). In both cases, the brand assumes a narrative role that is ethically charged: a mediator (*Still Gin*) or an enunciator of resistance (*Dove*) that actively challenges or reconfigures normative representations through a carefully constructed ethical discourse.

By contrast, *eToro* presents a superficially inclusive and empowering narrative that, upon closer semiotic inspection, collapses into a logic of aesthetic conformity and algorithmic control. While the brand claims to promote individuality and investor freedom, the visual grammar of the spot, marked by smooth AI-generated faces, perfect composure, and synthetic environments, betrays a system of normative modelling. The subject is not invited to genuinely "be who they want to be", but to conform to a pre-established, idealised investor archetype. In this sense, *eToro* instrumentalises AI as a tool of persuasion and homogeneity, whereas *Still Gin* and *Dove* place it under critical scrutiny, using it to foreground tensions between past and present, real and synthetic, or visible and invisible identities.

3.3 Sentiment and Content Analysis: Online Reception

This section intends to examine the reception of the three chosen advertising campaigns by a sentiment and content analysis of public comments gathered from YouTube and Instagram.

The primary aim is to comprehend audience reactions to advertising communications that utilize artificial intelligence, and to identify the dynamics that arise about perceived values, narrative coherence, and content authenticity. This analysis is pertinent to the current research, as it enhances the textual interpretation with a reception-oriented

viewpoint, emphasizing discursive patterns, prevailing emotional tones, and recurring themes in user comments.

The resultant data will evaluate the extent to which the campaigns effectively communicated an ethically consistent message, engendering audience trust, or alternatively elicited critical responses, misunderstanding, or emotional disconnection from the brands' articulated principles.

3.3.1 Case study 1 - Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends (2024)

In this section, I carried out both a sentiment analysis and a content analysis of the *Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends* advertisement.

The initial dataset was compiled by collecting comments from two platforms: YouTube and Instagram, specifically from the official profiles of @dreandsnoop. From the total pool of 400 YouTube comments and 2,049 Instagram comments, a selected sample of relevant comments (123 comments from Instagram and 134 from YouTube) was extracted to ensure focus and consistency in the analysis.

After cleaning the data helped by artificial intelligence, removing usernames, timestamps, likes, I organized the textual content into a structured document using *Microsoft Word*. This dataset was then imported into *NVivo* for qualitative examination.

For the sentiment analysis, each comment was manually categorized into one of three sentiment groups: positive, negative, or neutral. The results were clear: out of all selected comments, 255 were positive, 15 negative and 55 neutral.

These proportions are visually represented in a pie chart, which illustrates the overwhelmingly favorable reception of the advertisement.

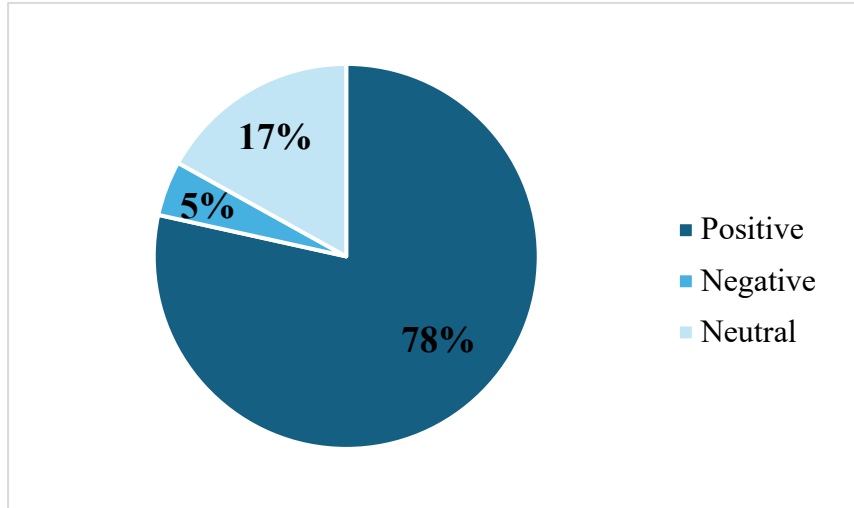


Figure 44. Pie chart showing the sentiment distribution of *Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends* advertisement (2024).

The chart faithfully reproduces the data obtained from NVivo, based on the manual coding of 257 selected YouTube and Instagram comments.

As shown in the pie chart, the majority of the comments analyzed express a positive sentiment toward the *Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends* advertisement. Out of a total of 325 coded references, 255 fall into the positive category, compared to only 15 negative and 55 neutral. These figures confirm that the campaign was overwhelmingly well-received by the audience, who particularly appreciated its stylistic elegance, the nostalgic yet modern atmosphere, and the innovative use of artificial intelligence, perceived here as both respectful and engaging.

For the content analysis, I developed a set of thematic codes based on recurring ideas and expressions found in the comments. The coding structure was created through an inductive process, allowing the categories to emerge directly from the data. These codes were then organized into a hierarchical system of parent codes and subcodes, enabling a more detailed and layered interpretation of the content.

Below is a table presenting the full list of codes applied, including their hierarchical arrangement.

Parent codes	Subcodes
1. Appreciation and emotional response	Enthusiasm and praise
	Personal emotion
	Rewatching and impact
	Desire for continuation
2. Technical and artistic evaluation	Production quality
	Music and soundtrack
	Use of AI
	Technical criticism of AI
3. Cultural references and iconicity	Rat Pack references
	Recognition of legends
	Hip-Hop and Pop Culture crossover
	Nostalgia and tribute
4. Reaction to AI and technology	Approval of AI use
	Criticism of AI use
	Ethics and authenticity
5. Branding and commercial impact	Ad effectiveness
	Band perception
	Product expectation
6. Humor and meme culture	Humorous reactions
7. Criticism and negative feedback	Content disapproval
	Authenticity concerns
	Advertising fatigue

Table 13. List of parent and child codes used for the content analysis of the Still G.I.N. For Everybody: A Toast Between Legends advertisement. The table presents the thematic coding structure developed in NVivo through an inductive approach.

The frequency table of the codes is reported below.

Parent codes	Subcodes	Frequency
1. Appreciation and emotional response	Enthusiasm and praise	78
	Personal emotion	24
	Rewatching and impact	9

	Desire for continuation	8
2. Technical and artistic evaluation	Production quality	8
	Music and soundtrack	12
	Use of AI	12
	Technical criticism of AI	3
3. Cultural references and iconicity	Rat Pack references	24
	Recognition of legends	36
	Hip-Hop and Pop Culture crossover	16
	Nostalgia and tribute	22
4. Reaction to AI and technology	Approval of AI use	19
	Criticism of AI use	4
	Ethics and authenticity	0
5. Branding and commercial impact	Ad effectiveness	2
	Band perception	4
	Product expectation	13
6. Humor and meme culture	Humorous reactions	23
7. Criticism and negative feedback	Content disapproval	4
	Authenticity concerns	3
	Advertising fatigue	1

Table 14. Parent and sub-codes with associated frequencies from the content analysis of the *Still G.I.N.* advertisement. The table displays the number of references per code, reflecting how often each theme appeared across the 325 analyzed comments.

The analysis of the coded data reveals a strongly positive reception of the *Still Gin* advertisement. A significant portion of the comments shows emotional engagement and enthusiasm, particularly highlighting the originality, elegance, and nostalgic tone of the spot. Codes associated with emotional impact, authenticity, and praise for the message emerged as the most frequently applied, indicating that viewers not only appreciated the aesthetic and technical aspects of the ad but also felt personally connected to it.

This interpretation is supported by several user comments, including: “*Can’t believe they made this fifty years ago and only release it now*”, “*That’s a hell of an advertisement*”, and “*I absolutely love this commercial, love Sammy and Frank mix in, love it*”. These statements demonstrate a deep appreciation for the ad’s atmosphere and its clever integration of legendary figures like Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. Even the use of artificial intelligence was praised in comments such as “*That’s dope! Snoop Dogg, Dr.*

Dre, with Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. in A.I.”, suggesting that in this case, the AI component was seen as respectful and well executed.

The coding framework used in the analysis focused on a range of emotional, cultural, and evaluative themes that emerged across the viewer comments. The most frequently occurring subcodes include Enthusiasm and praise (78), Recognition of legends (36) and Personal emotion (24), all of which confirm a widespread and emotionally engaged appreciation for the *Still Gin* advertisement. References to the Rat Pack (24), as well as expressions of nostalgia and tribute (22), further underline the effectiveness of the ad in blending cultural heritage with modern appeal.

Comments also reflect a strong interest in the technical and creative aspects of the spot, with notable mentions of music and soundtrack (12), the use of AI (12), production quality (8). While some viewers expressed a desire for continuation (8) or noted watching the ad multiple times (rewatching and impact, 9), others highlighted its humorous tone (23), particularly through memes and playful cultural references.

Critical responses were relatively limited, with only a few comments coded under Criticism of AI use (4), Authenticity concerns (3), Content disapproval (4). Interestingly, ethical concerns were not raised in this dataset (0), and only a small number of viewers referred to advertising fatigue (1). These findings suggest that while some skepticism exists, it is minimal compared to the overwhelmingly positive reception.

To better illustrate the thematic distribution, the following bar chart displays the percentage coverage of each coding node as generated in NVivo, highlighting the dominant themes and their relative importance in the viewer feedback.

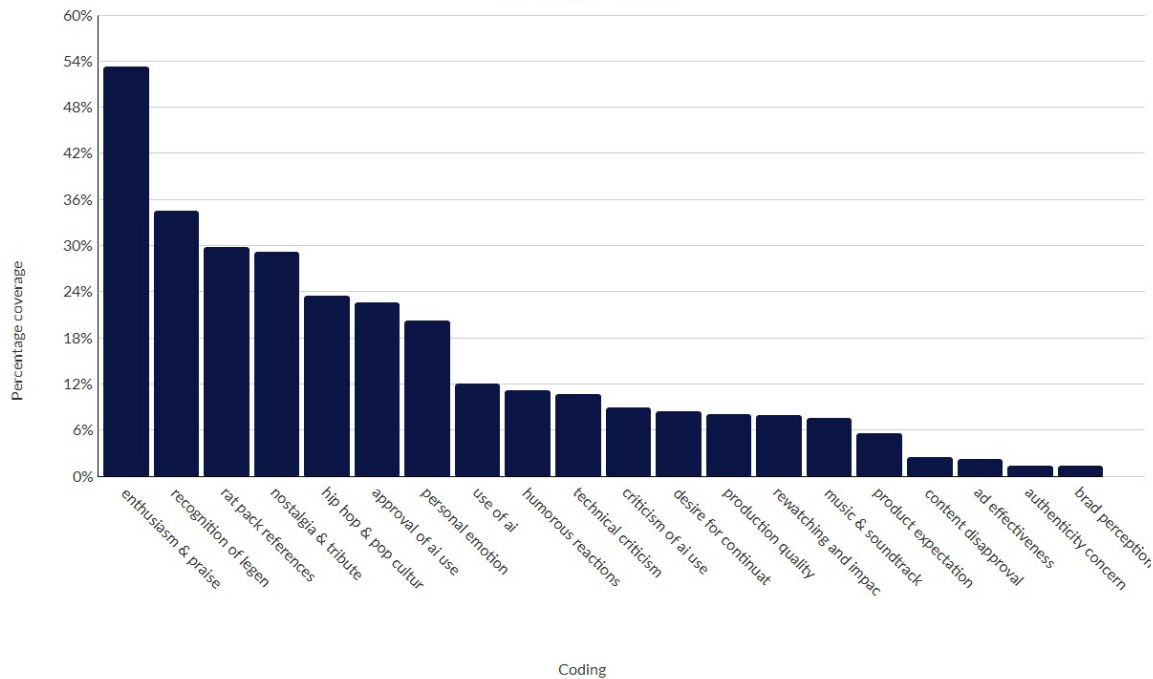


Figure 45. Bar chart showing the percentage coverage of thematic codes in the *Still G.I.N.* advertisement analysis. The graph was generated in NVivo based on the manual coding of viewer comments and reflects the relative frequency of each theme.

To complement the sentiment and content analysis, a word cloud was generated in NVivo based on the full set of viewer comments collected for the *Still Gin* advertisement. The visualization highlights the most frequently occurring terms, offering a visual snapshot of the core language and dominant themes present in the dataset.

The most prominent words, such as “Sinatra”, “Sammy”, “Snoop”, “Frank”, underscore the strong connection viewers felt toward the legendary figures featured in the ad. Other frequently used terms like “love”, “like”, “awesome”, “amazing”, “coolest” reflect the overwhelmingly positive sentiment already evidenced by the coding analysis. In addition, terms such as “movie”, “album”, “commercial” suggest that many users viewed the ad not merely as an advertisement, but as an artistic product with cinematic qualities.

Altogether, the word cloud reinforces the narrative emerging from the manual coding: viewers perceived the *Still Gin* campaign as engaging, culturally rich, and emotionally resonant.



Figure 46. Word cloud generated by NVivo based on viewer comments on the *Still G.I.N.* advertisement. The visualization shows the most frequently occurring words in the corpus, highlighting the dominant themes and emotional tones expressed by users.

3.3.2 Case study 2 - Dove | The Code | Che tipo di bellezza vogliamo insegnare all'AI? (2024)

In this section, I focused on developing both the sentiment analysis and the content analysis for the Dove | The Code advertisement.

To begin with, I selected 60 relevant public comments from a total of 180 collected on *YouTube*, all related to the commercial under study. The raw material was processed with the support of artificial intelligence, which allowed me to extract only the textual content of the comments by removing irrelevant elements such as usernames, dates, and likes. I then compiled the cleaned dataset in a *Microsoft Word* document and imported it into *NVivo* for qualitative analysis.

For the sentiment analysis, I manually classified each comment into three macro categories: positive sentiment, negative sentiment and neutral sentiment.

From this classification, I derived a pie chart that visually represents the proportion of each sentiment category within the dataset.

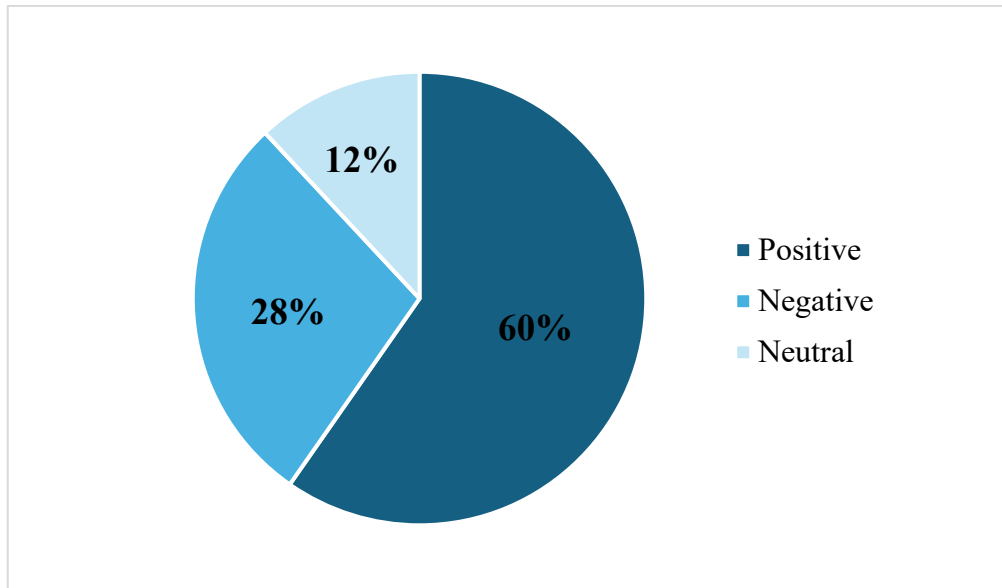


Figure 47. Pie chart showing the sentiment distribution of the Dove | The Code (2024) advertisement.

The chart faithfully reproduces the data obtained from NVivo, based on the manual coding of 60 selected YouTube comments.

As shown in the pie chart, the majority of the comments analyzed express a positive sentiment toward the Dove advertisement. Out of a total of 134 codings, 80 fall into the positive category, compared to 38 negative and only 16 neutral. This result confirms that the campaign was generally perceived favorably by the audience, who particularly appreciated the emotional impact, the authenticity of the message, the overall quality of the production, even in the presence of artificial intelligence elements.

Moving on to the content analysis, I created a system of thematic codes, based on recurring patterns in the comments. These codes were developed through an inductive approach and then organized into a hierarchical structure consisting of parent codes and subcodes.

Below is a table listing all the codes used, along with their hierarchical organization.

Parent codes	Subcodes
1. Content of the message	Authentic beauty theme
	Inclusion and representation
	Rejection of the concept
	Emotional impact
2. Perception of authenticity	Genuine
	Instrumental
3. Brand and product	Relevance of the message to the brand
	Requests and expectations of the brand
4. Social and cultural themes	Social reflection
	Political or ideological reaction
5. Metalinguistic and technical comments	Music
	Technical quality
	Frequency or TV airing
6. Ethical concerns	Animal testing
	Brand responsibility
	Greenwashing
7. Critical but constructive	Doubts about the effectiveness
	Partial appreciation with criticism
8. Negative	Ad as annoying
	Ad as hypocritical
	Forced marketing
9. Positive	Praise for the message
	Emotional
	Appreciation for quality

Table 15. List of parent and child codes used for the content analysis of the Dove advertisement. The table presents the thematic coding structure developed in NVivo through an inductive approach.

The frequency table of the codes is reported below.

Parent codes	Subcodes	Frequency
1. Content of the message	Authentic beauty theme	7
	Inclusion and representation	5
	Rejection of the concept	7
	Emotional impact	12
2. Perception of authenticity	Genuine	10

	Instrumental	5
3. Brand and product	Relevance of the message to the brand	11
	Requests and expectations of the brand	3
4. Social and cultural themes	Social reflection	5
	Political or ideological reaction	5
5. Metalinguistic and technical comments	Music	7
	Technical quality	0
	Frequency or TV airing	0
6. Ethical concerns	Animal testing	1
	Brand responsibility	3
	Greenwashing	5
7. Critical but constructive	Doubts about the effectiveness	2
	Partial appreciation with criticism	1
8. Negative	Ad as annoying	0
	Ad as hypocritical	8
	Forced marketing	10
9. Positive	Praise for the message	14
	Emotional	10
	Appreciation for quality	3

Table 16. Parent and child codes with associated frequencies from the content analysis of the Dove advertisement. The table displays the number of references per code, reflecting how often each theme appeared across the 60 analyzed comments.

The analysis of the coded data reveals a predominantly positive perception of the Dove advertisement. Most of the comments reflect strong emotional engagement and appreciation for the message conveyed, particularly with regard to the campaign's authenticity and the way it addresses real beauty and inclusivity. Codes related to emotional response, genuine tone, and message clarity show some of the highest frequencies, indicating that viewers not only understood but also connected with the ad on a personal level.

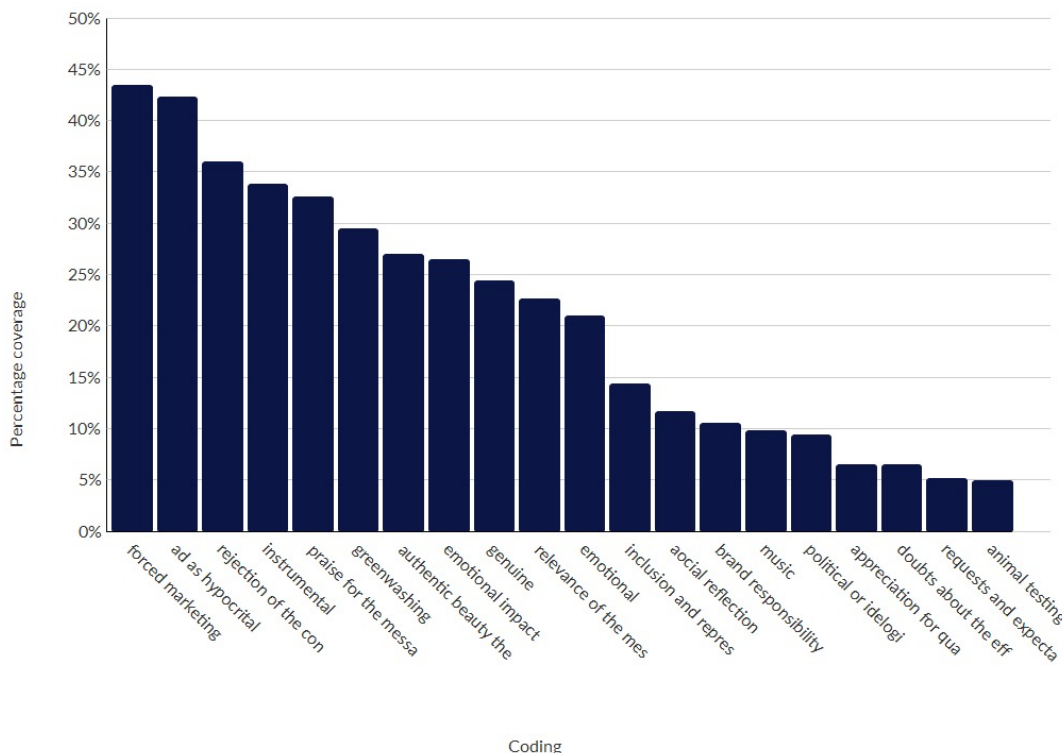
This is echoed in comments such as “Great ad, it really hit the mark – no more filters for every shot or the constant search for the perfect figure. Let’s show our clear and simple nature” and “Everything is wonderfully perfect! Like natural and amazing women, simply because they are WOMEN! Well done, number one by far!”, both of which reflect the audience’s emotional and value-driven support for the campaign.

Additionally, the commercial appears to be well aligned with Dove’s brand identity, as several comments highlight the coherence between the message and the company’s values. Some viewers also expressed appreciation for the quality of the production, including the music and emotional tone, reinforcing the overall positive sentiment.

Despite the prevalence of favorable feedback, a portion of the comments reflects critical perspectives. These focus on perceived issues such as the use of artificial intelligence being seen as forced or inauthentic by some, as well as skepticism regarding the brand's ethical stance. However, these negative reactions are comparatively fewer and do not appear to outweigh the general appreciation for the ad’s intent and execution.

Neutral reactions were also recorded, though in smaller numbers, often relating to technical aspects or partial approval accompanied by constructive criticism. Overall, the data confirms that the Dove | The Code advertisement resonated well with its audience and was largely perceived as meaningful, well-crafted, and emotionally impactful.

To better visualize the prominence of the various thematic codes, the bar chart below shows the percentage coverage of each coding node, as generated in NVivo. This helps highlight which themes were most frequently mentioned in the viewer comments.



3.3.4 Case study 3: eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be (2024)

In this section, I carried out both a sentiment analysis and a content analysis of the *eToro™ - Be the investor you want to be* advertisement.

The initial dataset was compiled by collecting viewer comments from two platforms: YouTube and Instagram, specifically from the official eToro profiles. Out of a total of 80 comments, a selected sample of 58 relevant comments was extracted for analysis, based on their clarity, relevance, and focus on the advertisement itself.

After cleaning the data with the support of artificial intelligence, removing usernames, timestamps, likes, and other irrelevant elements, the textual content was organized in *Microsoft Word* and subsequently imported into *NVivo* for qualitative analysis.

For the sentiment analysis, each comment was manually categorized as either positive, negative or neutral. The results revealed a strongly critical perception of the campaign: 96 codings were categorized as negative, while only 6 were neutral and just 2 positive.

These proportions are clearly illustrated in the accompanying pie chart, which highlights the largely unfavorable reaction to the eToro advertisement.

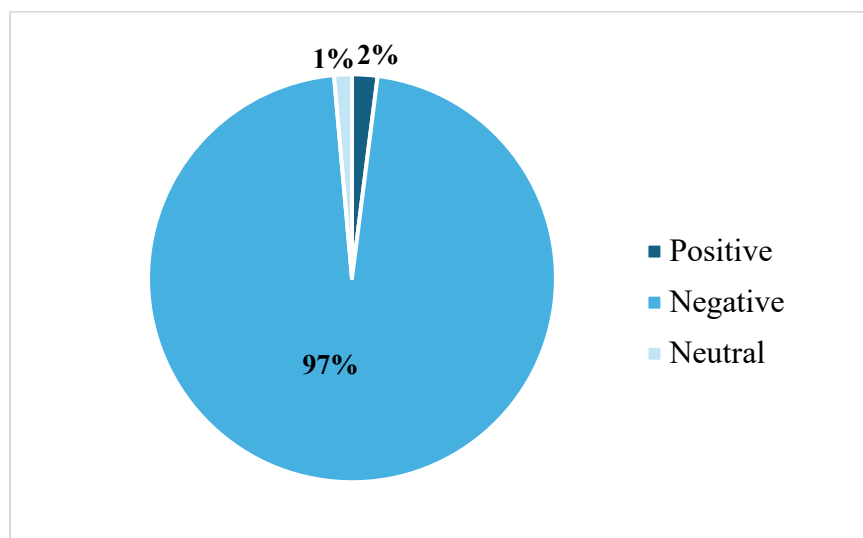


Figure 50. Pie chart showing the sentiment distribution of *eToro*.

The chart faithfully reproduces the data obtained from NVivo, based on the manual coding of 58 selected YouTube and Instagram comments.

As shown in the pie chart, the majority of the comments analyzed express a negative sentiment toward the *eToro* advertisement. Out of a total of 104 coded references, 96 were classified as negative, while only 6 were neutral and 2 positive. These results indicate that the campaign was largely poorly received by the audience, with many viewers criticizing the artificial and impersonal tone of the ad, the use of AI-generated characters, and the overall lack of authenticity. The sentiment distribution clearly reflects a general discomfort with the implementation of artificial intelligence in this context, which many users perceived as low-effort, confusing, or even off-putting.

For the content analysis, I developed a set of thematic codes based on recurring ideas and expressions in the comments. The coding structure was built using an inductive approach, allowing categories to emerge organically from the data. The codes were then organized into a hierarchical system of parent codes and subcodes, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the viewers' reactions and the underlying reasons for their disapproval.

The table below presents the full list of codes used in the analysis, along with their hierarchical organization.

Parent codes	Subcodes
1. AI perception in the adv	AI visual aspect
	AI voice
	Presence of AI people
	Criticism of the adv content
2. Emotional reaction	Disappointment
	Frustration
	Sarcasm
3. Neutral	Not usefull
4. Negative	Disappointment with execution

5. Positive	Appreciation for concept
6. Reputation impact	Impact on the brand perception
	Loss of trust
7. Technical info on AI	Criticism of AI implementation

Table 17. List of parent and child codes used for the content analysis of the *eToro* advertisement. The table presents the thematic coding structure developed in NVivo through an inductive approach.

The frequency table of the codes is reported below.

Parent codes	Subcodes	Frequency
1. AI negative perception in the adv	AI visual aspect	8
	AI voice	4
	Presence of AI people	9
	Criticism of the adv content	11
2. Emotional reaction	Disappointment	17
	Frustration	11
	Sarcasm	8
3. Neutral	Not usefull	6
4. Negative	Disappointment with execution	20
5. Positive	Appreciation for concept	2
6. Reputation impact	Impact on the brand perception	3
	Loss of trust	2
7. Technical info on AI	Criticism of AI implementation	3

Table 18. Parent and sub-codes with associated frequencies from the content analysis of the *eToro* advertisement. The table displays the number of references per code, reflecting how often each theme appeared across the 58 analyzed comments.

The analysis of the coded data reveals an overall negative reception of the *eToro* advertisement. A large portion of the comments expressed emotional reactions of disappointment and frustration, particularly directed at the ad's tone, execution, and its

heavy reliance on artificial intelligence. Among the most frequently applied codes were those related to disappointment with the execution (20), emotional disappointment (17) and criticism of the ad content (11), indicating a widespread dissatisfaction with how the campaign was conceived and delivered.

This interpretation is reinforced by user comments highlighting the inorganic presence of AI-generated characters, their unnatural voices, and the perceived lack of depth in the ad's message. For instance, one user wrote: *“Well done Etoro for alienating your core target market. Using what's clearly cheap-looking AI in your advert just makes you look very untrustworthy and cheap as a company”*. Others echoed similar sentiments with sarcastic remarks such as *“Be that AI character we want you to be...”* or *“Just saw this ad on TV and was instantly distracted by the horrible AI”*. These comments exemplify the viewers' discomfort and perceived lack of authenticity in the ad.

From a technical standpoint, users commented on the AI implementation, criticizing both its visual aspects (8 codings) and vocal performance (4), as well as the overall presence of AI-generated people (9). These reactions reflect discomfort not only with the technology itself, but also with the way it was applied in a high-visibility campaign.

Neutral comments were few (6 codings) and mostly consisted of vague or non-substantive reactions. Only 2 codings were assigned to positive feedback, specifically to users who appreciated the concept behind the campaign, even if its execution was widely contested.

The table previously presented outlines the hierarchical coding structure, including all parent and subcodes used during the content analysis. To better visualize the weight of each theme, the following bar chart shows the relative frequency of each code, highlighting the dominant areas of critique and emotional response within the dataset.

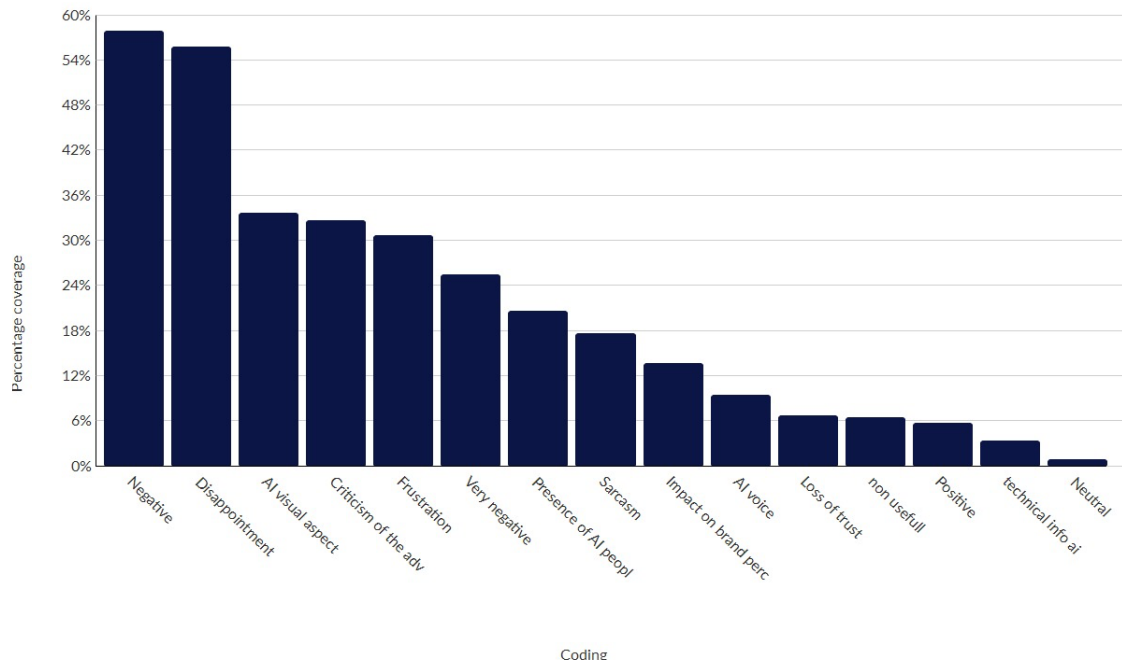


Figure 51. Bar chart showing the percentage coverage of thematic codes in the *eToro* advertisement analysis. The graph was generated in NVivo based on the manual coding of viewer comments and reflects the relative frequency of each theme.

To complement the sentiment and content analysis, a word cloud was also generated in NVivo for the *eToro* advertisement, based on the full set of YouTube and Instagram comments. While this visual tool helps maintain consistency across all three case studies, in this specific instance, its analytical contribution is more limited due to the homogeneity and repetitive nature of the negative reactions.

The most prominent words, such as “embarrassing”, “cheap”, “awful”, “advert”, “etoro”, clearly reflect the overall dissatisfaction expressed by viewers. Terms like “worst”, “cringe”, “alienating” further confirm the overwhelmingly negative sentiment already captured in the manual coding.

Nonetheless, the word cloud remains a useful tool to visually reinforce the dominant language patterns and tone used by viewers in response to the ad.

In terms of content analysis, *Still Gin* was characterized by high frequencies in codes such as *Enthusiasm and praise*, *Recognition of legends*, and *Music and soundtrack*, revealing a deep cultural and emotional appreciation. *Dove* focused more on *Praise for the message*, *Authentic beauty*, and *Emotional impact*, highlighting a connection between the ad's values and audience expectations. In contrast, *eToro* showed dominant themes in *Disappointment*, *Criticism of the ad content*, *Negative perception of AI*, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with both the concept and execution.

These findings highlight how audience response can vary dramatically depending on the tone, message, and perceived authenticity of a campaign, especially when artificial intelligence is involved.

A more in-depth and technical discussion of these differences will follow in the next chapter, where the results of this study will be analyzed comparatively and critically.

Chapter 4. Final Discussion and Implications: understanding ethical AI advertising through audience analysis

This last chapter synthesizes the principal findings of the research, providing a critical analysis of consumer perceptions on the ethical aspects of AI-generated advertising. The analysis commences by integrating the findings of the comparative case study and directly responding to the research question. The chapter delineates the academic contributions of the thesis, suggests specific managerial implications for brands utilizing generative AI, and finishes by recognizing the methodological and conceptual limits of the study. Collectively, these sections seek to situate the findings within extensive theoretical and practical contexts, while facilitating avenues for future investigation.

4.1 Final discussion of results

This section synthesizes the main findings of the comparative case analysis and addresses the research question: *How do consumers perceive the ethics of advertisements generated by artificial intelligence? What dynamics emerge from their opinions regarding the way these advertisements represent ethical values and influence their trust in the brands that employ them?*

The three campaigns analyzed, Dove's "The Code", Still G.I.N.'s "A toast between legends", eToro's "Be the investor you want to be", represent three divergent uses of AI in advertising. Their reception by the public offers meaningful insight into the relationship between AI-generated content and ethical perception.

In the case studies, perceived authenticity was predominantly linked to the congruence between the campaign's message and the brand's established ethical standards, rather than the extent of AI usage, whether transparent or minimal.

The Dove campaign transparently utilized generative AI to reinforce a narrative of bodily inclusiveness and social responsibility, principles already integral to the brand's identity. Notwithstanding the artificial quality of the images, people reacted favorably, viewing

the advertisement as cohesive and emotionally impactful. This indicates that authenticity in AI-generated advertising pertains less to the ontological nature of the information and more to the semantic correspondence between form and meaning.

As Blanchard and Taddeo (2023) argue, the ethical acceptability of AI is not determined solely by its internal mechanisms or technical transparency, but by whether its deployment serves justified, value-driven purposes. They stress that even in contexts with high stakes, such as intelligence analysis, what matters is “not enough that it is legal to do something... it must also be right to do something” (Fleming, 2019, as cited in Blanchard, et al. 2023, p. 9), and that ethical scrutiny must be grounded in purpose, proportionality, and perceived legitimacy. In this light, Dove’s campaign was more likely to be seen as authentic because the use of AI was in service of an already credible ethical discourse, not despite its artificiality, but precisely because of how it was framed.

A crucial differentiation in user perception was the deliberate goal underlying the utilization of AI. In the Dove campaign, AI was utilized as a pivotal tool to interrogate social biases, whereas in the eToro advertisement, it simply fulfilled an aesthetic and efficiency role, automating the generation of avatars and visual content without contributing symbolic significance.

Audience reactions highlighted this disparity: Dove received commendation for its purpose-oriented messaging, whereas eToro encountered criticism for seeming "artificial" and "soulless," despite the campaign's technical sophistication. This comparison demonstrates that algorithmic personalization or technological innovation alone is inadequate to foster trust. AI should be utilized to augment meaning, rather than supplant it.

As highlighted by Gao et al. (2023), generative AI can strengthen creative impact when used to enrich the narrative dimension of a campaign. However, when deployed solely for production value, it risks alienating audiences and eroding brand credibility. Furthermore, the authors Gao et al. (2023) emphasize that user engagement and ethical resonance depend not only on personalization but also on the alignment of AI-generated content with consumer expectations and brand values.

In the eToro campaign, people observed the uniformity of the AI-generated investors and the absence of genuine variety, despite the brand's narrative of empowerment and worldwide accessibility. This paradox engendered a feeling of inauthenticity and potential manipulation, particularly on the lack of a definitive disclaimer regarding the utilization of AI.

The absence of epistemic transparency was perceived as a violation of the viewer's entitlement to informed participation. This aligns with Burrell's (2016) concept of algorithmic opacity, arising not only from corporate confidentiality but also from the inherent complexity of machine learning algorithms, which frequently function beyond intuitive human comprehension.

The sense of artificiality perceived in eToro's campaign reflects a broader issue of "*aesthetic flattening*", where algorithmically generated content fails to embody symbolic nuance or social context (Poli et al., 2025). Furthermore, Gao et al. (2023) emphasize that the efficacy of AI in advertising relies not alone on personalization and technological advancement, but also on ethical contextualization and transparency. In the absence of these elements, even technically advanced campaigns may be perceived as superficial or misleading.

The Still G.I.N. campaign's utilization of AI to resurrect Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. presented intricate ethical dilemmas; nonetheless, these concerns were mostly alleviated through the ritualistic framing of the interaction and the respectful story design. Users responded favorably to the advertisement, viewing the digital presence not as exploitative but as a connection between epochs. This indicates that AI may be more morally embraced when its application is integrated inside a shared symbolic framework, one that regards technology as a vehicle for cultural reconciliation rather than commercialization. This dynamic aligns with modern theories of symbolic politics, wherein memory-based narratives are utilized to establish continuity, legitimacy, and identity over time.

As outlined by Malinova and Miller (in Rusakova et al., 2022), symbolic politics functions as a competitive arena of meaning-making in which cultural memory becomes a tool for shaping shared understandings of the past. Within this perspective, AI-generated

representations, when strategically integrated into commemorative or ritualized narratives, might acquire symbolic legitimacy and emotional significance. The reanimation of iconic icons can be viewed as a respectful homage that strengthens intergenerational connections and brand identification, rather than being seen as synthetic or invasive.

4.2 Academic contributions

This thesis aims to connect abstract theoretical discourse on AI ethics with the practical examination of actual advertising activities. Although a significant portion of the current literature emphasizes normative principles or regulatory frameworks, there is a paucity of studies examining the public perception of ethical claims articulated through AI-generated campaigns within dynamic media ecosystems.

By focusing on three highly visible and diverse cases, this research offers an empirically grounded lens through which to explore how audiences interpret, accept, or reject the ethical positioning of brands that adopt generative AI.

This approach enhances the existing academic discourse by introducing a hybrid methodology that combines semiotic analysis with computational tools, including sentiment and content analysis. This methodological model can function as a repeatable foundation for future research focused on the reception of AI-generated tales across various platforms. As Su et al. (2023) point out, AI ethics in marketing remains an underdeveloped area of research, despite growing concerns about how AI technologies interact with branding, communication, and consumer behavior in practice.

A significant academic contribution is reconceptualizing social media comments as cultural validation rather than just anecdotal noise, representing a communal negotiation of brand legitimacy in the context of algorithmic production. This situates user-generated comments as significant cultural artifacts that embody collective expectations, anxieties, and ideals concerning authenticity, diversity, and technological agency. Gao et al. (2023) highlight that audience responses play a critical role in the success of AI-powered

advertising campaigns, not only by influencing engagement metrics but also by shaping how the ethical credibility of the message is publicly negotiated.

4.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of generative AI in advertising does not inherently provide a value proposition; its effectiveness is contingent upon its integration inside the brand's ethical and narrative identity. For marketers and brand strategists, this indicates that the application of AI must be both technically proficient and symbolically consistent.

Transparent communication regarding AI utilization is crucial, although inadequate if not aligned with genuine brand values. Ethical resonance arises when AI supports a message that consumers already see as significant and credible. Dove's campaign exemplifies this effectively: the integration of generative AI was not only revealed but also woven into a narrative of inclusivity and social responsibility that existed prior to the technology.

Conversely, when AI is employed for visual automation devoid of symbolic intent, as demonstrated in the eToro ad, it often elicits suspicion or disengagement. Users regarded the message as contrived and emotionally vacuous, demonstrating that aesthetic elegance alone fails to engender trust. Excessive dependence on AI-generated content, devoid of human context, jeopardizes trust and brand equity.

Secondly, brands ought to resist the inclination to entirely delegate creation to machines. AI should serve as an enhancement of human eyesight, rather than a replacement. Emotional complexity, ambiguity, and cultural coding are fundamental human aspects of persuasion. When campaigns lack this "human warmth," they become indistinct. The adverse responses to recent AI-driven commercials by Coca-Cola and Toys'R'Us underscore this risk: notwithstanding their production quality, the projects were condemned for their absence of depth and symbolic significance.

The incorporation of AI in brand communication should be directed by interdisciplinary teams that include not just data scientists and content developers but also strategists, cultural analysts, and ethicists. These teams can guarantee that generative material is both algorithmically optimized and ethically aligned, as well as culturally sensitive.

Ultimately, investing in ethical AI methods has transitioned from a mere CSR initiative to a strategic approach for reputation management. As knowledge of synthetic manipulation, algorithmic prejudice, and data misuse increases, brands that prioritize responsible AI utilization are more likely to gain public confidence and achieve competitive distinction. Research, including the Edelman Trust Barometer, indicates that the ethical utilization of emerging technologies has become a catalyst for brand credibility rather than a simply compliance requirement. The 2024 research indicates that the public is almost twice as inclined to perceive innovation as poorly managed rather than well managed, with faith in business to spearhead innovation contingent upon its capacity to guarantee safety, transparency, and public benefit (Edelman, 2024).

4.4 Limitation of the study

This study, like any research, has several limitations that must be recognized to define the breadth and generalizability of its findings.

The analysis was predicated on a qualitative comparative examination of three distinct advertising campaigns. While these cases provide significant diversity in AI deployment, brand positioning and ethical considerations, the restricted sample limits the capacity to generalize the findings throughout the broader advertising business. A comprehensive comparison analysis could enhance the external validity of subsequent studies.

The collection of user replies was sourced from a specific selection of social media comments, which, while abundant in qualitative insight, does not constitute a statistically generalizable sample. The interpretations are thus exploratory, influenced by platform-specific dynamics and contextualized within a unique cultural and chronological

framework. A more comprehensive dataset, encompassing multi-platform interactions or longitudinal responses, could provide enhanced validation.

Third, views of ethicality are contingent upon context and culturally specific, differing across regional, demographic, and generational boundaries. A same ad may elicit varying perceptions across distinct social situations or historical eras. This highlights the necessity of performing cross-cultural and cross-temporal research when examining themes such as inclusivity, authenticity, or technical openness in communication.

Fourth, while sentiment and content analysis technologies like NVivo assist in organizing and maintaining extensive data sets, their capacity to identify irony, sarcasm, or nuanced emotional tones is constrained, particularly in casual and multimodal online communication. This study intentionally excluded the autocoding function due to its lack of support in the Mac version of NVivo, and even in Windows testing, the program inadequately interpreted complex phrases like irony or emotional ambivalence. Consequently, all user comments were carefully tagged and analyzed, facilitating a more contextually nuanced and semantically precise analysis.

Kleinheksel et al. (2020) assert that automated text analysis should be seen as a supplementary approach rather than a conclusive interpretation of intricate audience reactions, necessitating a balance with human analysis to properly comprehend the underlying significance in user-generated content.

This study concentrated exclusively on the reception and interpretation of AI-generated advertising, neglecting upstream or downstream aspects, including agency decision-making processes, internal ethical guidelines, or quantifiable campaign outcomes (e.g., ROI, brand lift, consumer behavior). Future study may explore these avenues to further the knowledge of how generative AI influences both audience perception and organizational behaviors, as well as corporate performance.

Conclusions

This thesis aims to investigate consumer perceptions of the ethical aspects of AI-generated advertising, emphasizing the intersections of innovation, representation, and trust. The study demonstrates that artificial intelligence, rather than serving as a neutral instrument, functions as a narrative and symbolic actor that may both bolster and undermine brand credibility through the integration of theoretical analysis with semiotic and sentiment-based methodologies.

The examination of the three chosen campaigns uncovered a complex environment. AI may facilitate ethical communication when it aligns with a brand's fundamental values, exemplified by *Dove* and *Still G.I.N.*, where technical advancements furthered a greater mission of inclusivity and cultural preservation. Conversely, advertisements such as *eToro*'s, and to a degree, the contentious instances analyzed in Chapter 2, underscore the perils of aesthetic uniformity, emotional disconnection, and diminished brand authenticity when AI is employed without narrative coherence or ethical consideration.

Audience perception is essential in ascertaining the success or failure of AI-driven advertising. Comments, emotional reactions, online sentiment reveal not simply aesthetic inclinations, but also profound issues regarding truth, identity and openness in digital communication. These results indicate that confidence in advertising is now contingent not only on the product or the message but also on the manner in which that message is created and interpreted.

The forthcoming task for both academics and professionals is to establish ethical frameworks that direct the incorporation of AI in advertising in manners that are transparent, inclusive, culturally cognizant. Brands should regard AI not merely as a means to enhance productivity, but as a communicative endeavor that necessitates intentionality and accountability.

This research prompts a comprehensive consideration of the future of advertising within an AI-driven media landscape, where ethics, technology and audience perception must engage in continuous discourse.

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