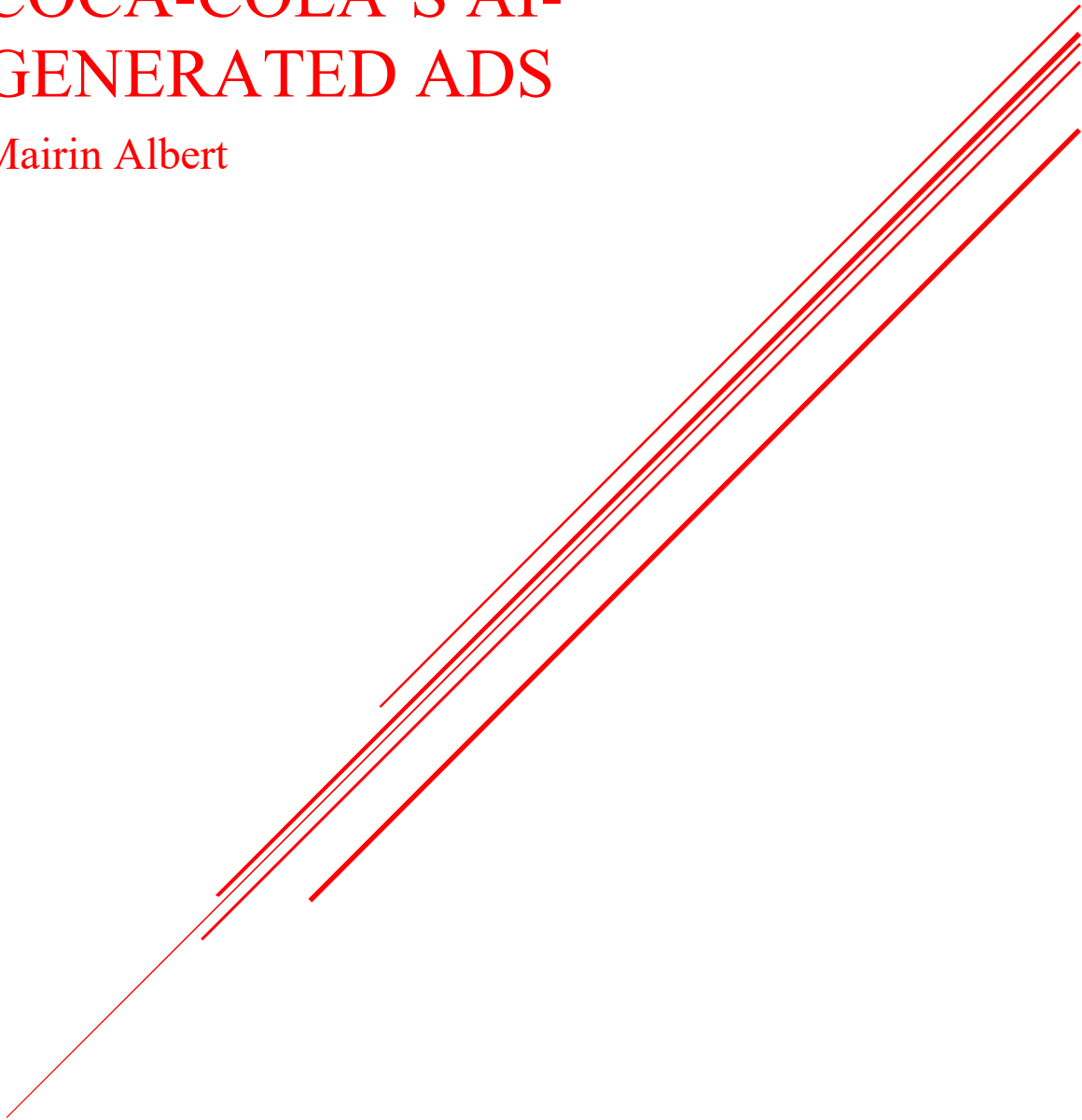


EXPLAINED: NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF COCA-COLA'S AI- GENERATED ADS

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Introduction

Coca-Cola has been marketing for over 125 years, utilizing real people and artists. Their strategies have worked, as Coca-Cola has grown into a multi-billion-dollar beverage company, raking in billions of dollars every year. For the most part, their public relations has been positive, especially with their marketing. One example is their “I’d Like To Buy The World a Coke” ad from 1971, and their iconic Christmas ads, which introduced the Santa the general public knows today.

However, Coca-Cola received a heavy backlash for their 2024 Holiday Campaign when they decided to use generative AI studios to create their ads, instead of their own artists. The ads produced did not look great, and Coca-Cola was drowned in hateful comments on multiple social media platforms. In fact, the problem became so large that multiple news studios wrote stories about the backlash.

It is already an established fact that the general public received the ads poorly, so this case study intends to find out *why* people perceived the ads so negatively. What are the top reasons for hating the ads so much?

To find the answer to this question, I scrolled through hundreds of comments across three social media platforms — YouTube, X, and Reddit. I collected 242 relevant comments with criticisms and compiled them into categories to share my findings.

Background

Coca-Cola

The birth of Coca-Cola's long and storied history begins on May 8, 1886, when Dr. John Stith Pemberton, a local pharmacist, had produced the syrup to mix with carbonated water and placed it on sale for "five cents a glass as a soda fountain drink" (Coca-Cola, n.d.-b). This new drink is what we know as Coca-Cola today.

Before the 1900s, the brand was just picking up, with minimal advertising and the rights to bottle the drink only appearing in 1899. However, popularity was growing exponentially. In 1904, annual sales hit the 1 million mark (Coca-Cola, n.d.-b) and the advertising budget cost more than 1 million by 1911.

In 1931, Coca-Cola began their famous Christmas advertising campaigns with their debut of jolly St. Nicholas. Prior to this illustration, Santa had been depicted in many ways. Coca-Cola is often credited for Santa's current depiction of big, jolly, with a red suit, as that is the version they used for many years that became popular with the general public (Coca-Cola, n.d.-b).

During World War 2, Coca-Cola adjusted marketing strategies to support the troops and supply drinks to those overseas. During that time, more than 5 billion bottles were distributed (Coca-Cola, n.d.-b). The first TV commercial appeared in 1950 on Thanksgiving Day, and by 1959, was distributed by a network of 1,700 bottlers operating in over 100 countries.

Coca-Cola introduced a new ad in 1971, "I'd Like To Buy The World a Coke," which became an international hit and remains one of their most popular ads to this day. The 1980s were about international expansion, particularly in Asia and Russia. Coca-Cola also celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1986. International expansion continued into the 90s, with a focus on the Olympics and sponsorship (Coca-Cola, n.d.-b). Coca-Cola gave back in the 2000s by sponsoring

others and donating money to charities or relief funds, and in 2011, Coca-Cola celebrated its 125th year.

Since then, Coca-Cola continued to cement their title as a beverage company by launching Lemon-Dou, Coca-Cola's first ready-to-drink alcoholic beverage, in Japan in 2018 (Coca-Cola, n.d.-a). Additionally, they have released updated environmental goals to improve water security in high-risk locations, reduce packaging waste and decrease emissions (Coca-Cola, n.d.-c).

Coca-Cola continues to move forward with the help of advertising and its long list of products. In 2024 alone, the company made \$47.1 billion, with revenues beating expectations (Simply Wallstreet, 2025). Coca-Cola is a large company with plenty of revenue to be able to pay its employees a livable wage. However, for their most recent Holiday Campaign ads, Coca-Cola decided to utilize artificial intelligence (AI) instead of their own employees.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The term itself, artificial intelligence (AI), is quite broad to those who do not know what it is referring to — and it can be referring to quite a bit. Originally, it simply refers to a machine that can “think,” which is an idea that dates back to the 1950s, to Alan Turing. Since then, however, the definition has evolved quite a bit.

According to IBM, artificial intelligence (AI) is technology that enables computers/machines to “simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy.” In simple terms, human intelligence that is exhibited by machines. Now, when we think of AI, most of the time, the general public is thinking of generative AI.

Generative AI is a technology that can mimic human creativity, creating original text, images, videos, and other content (Stryker, 2024). The technology is built on machine learning and deep learning, which are both concepts built from the basic artificial intelligence (AI) concept. Machine learning is a subsection of artificial intelligence (AI) that trains machines to “replicate human thinking by inputting large quantities of data” (Bozard, 2023). Tests are run repeatedly using base data from a series of algorithms to form the machine’s learning, and all of this builds up the machine’s understanding. As for generative AI, this technology is trained by going through large data sets of existing artworks or samples. Once the generative AI understands the data set, it can begin creating its own art pieces that are similar but not quite (Bozard, 2023). Basically, feed the program hundreds of pictures of dogs, and it can create a picture of a new dog.

It is fascinating —and amazing — technology. However, society has not come to a consensus on whether generative AI is good or bad for humanity. Opinion depends on the person.

Positives of AI

- Artificial intelligence (AI) streamlines routine and mundane activities, significantly reduces manual workload, and accelerates processing times, improving efficiency (Christian et al., 2025).
- This technology enables companies to “understand customer preferences, purchasing patterns, and needs in a more detailed manner” (Juriah & Susilastuty, 2024).
- It enhances consistency and accuracy, and standardizes text formatting (Christian et al., 2025).

- Programs can facilitate sustainable solutions, including energy optimization, renewable energy integration and carbon reduction (Pimenow et al., 2024).
- Generative AI allows regular people to “bypass the skill and time requirements” for art, allowing users to complete pieces in mere minutes that would normally take the human artist hours to create (Bozard, 2023).
- The use of generative AI has created effortless works of art, conveying that human imagination is limitless and art is accessible to everyone (Gross, 2024).
- If artificial intelligence (AI) has been used for nefarious reasons (cheating, copyright, plagiarism), AI itself can detect an author’s unethical use of AI (Christian et al., 2025).
- Biases against AI-generated art enhances perceptions of human creativity (Horton Jr et al., 2023).

Negatives of AI

- Artificial intelligence (AI) threatens to replace or eliminate certain jobs, such as artists and other creatives (Horvath, 2024).
- The training and operation of artificial intelligence (AI) models entail significant energy consumption, contributing to CO2 emissions (Pimenow et al., 2024).
- Some think that artistic is more than a technological process — it requires a human touch and AI-generated art lacks this (Gross, 2024).
- Legal battles have been brewing, since it is unclear who has ownership of the output of generative AI artwork (Bozard, 2023).

- Since AI takes in so much data, one challenge is data privacy and security, as well as surveillance (Latifian, 2024).
- Artificial intelligence (AI) could potentially deal with digital bias and discrimination, replicating human bias (Ren, 2024.).
- Creative professions argue that generative AI may have been trained on artists' work without proper compensation or credit (Horvath, 2024).
- According to a study, simply believing art was generated by AI negatively impacts appraisal and brings down the monetary value (Horton Jr et al., 2023).
- With generative AI comes the creation of deepfakes — videos, audio, images that seem real but have been manipulated with AI, usually used for negative purposes (Office, 2024)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Marketing

In the past few years, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerhouse in many areas, with marketing in particular benefiting greatly. Within social media, tools based in artificial intelligence (AI) have completely changed engagement tracking and analytics, offering companies new consumer insights and ensuring marketing campaigns are updated to suit audience needs (Ziakos & Vlachopoulou, 2023). This is done by conducting in-depth analyses of consumer behavior by “rapidly and accurately collecting and processing large amounts of data” (Juriah & Susilastuty, 2024).

Additionally, market trends can be predicted by analyzing historical data and old shifts in consumer behavior. This allows companies to make strategic decisions quicker, and adapt

products to meet the market needs (Juriah & Susilastuty, 2024). Artificial intelligence (AI) has also supported the marketing industry through optimizing user experiences and creating copywriting.

Most of artificial intelligence (AI)'s application in marketing has been based in data collection and analysis, or pattern recognition. There is the occasional creation of copywriting and graphic design, but it has not been until recently that AI has gotten into video making. Creating video content often requires time, skill, and plenty of money. Generative AI platforms like Lumen5 offer a solution and enable business owners to create quickly and easily (Juriah & Susilastuty, 2024). Coca-Cola is not the first large corporation to use generative AI to create a campaign. However, the campaign is just another example of advertising being taken over by generative AI — it is no longer “solely a product of human creativity and knowledge” (Ziakos & Vlachopoulou, 2023).

2024 Holiday Campaign

In November of 2024, Coca-Cola released a series of Holiday and Christmas commercials that were announced to be AI-generated. These ads were received poorly: they sparked backlash and quickly gained mockery from social media users.

To release these ads, Coca-Cola commissioned 3 AI studios — Secret Level, Silverside AI, and Wild Card — to work together and create them. The studios used the generative AI models Leonardo, Luma, and Runway, with a “new model, Kling, brought in near the end of production” (Placido, n.d.). Additionally, one of the commercials was created by Real Magic AI, Coca Cola's AI platform powered by OpenAI.

The AI-generated ads are all meant to pay homage to the iconic Coca-Cola Christmas ads from 1995, “Holidays are Coming,” featuring red delivery trucks decked out with holiday lights and featuring polar bears (Horvath, 2024).

The commercials were not received well, including drawing criticism from artists and other creatives who argue it is distasteful of Coca-Cola to use AI instead of artists. As for the general public, the 1,300 comments on the YouTube “video largely display aversion” (Cross, n.d.).

This was not the first time Coca-Cola produced a commercial based in AI, and it most likely will not be the last. However, the 2024 Holiday Campaign marks an important point in Coca-Cola’s marketing. This campaign has been written about by NBC News, USA Today, Forbes, the New York Post, Adweek, New York Times, and endless personal social media posts.

Because of the sheer amount of negativity, this study aims to explain the reasoning consumers have behind their negativity for Coca-Cola’s 2024 Holiday Campaign. To achieve that goal, comments from social media will be examined and any criticisms found will be noted and organized into five categories.

Methodology

A total of 242 comments with relevant criticisms were collected over three social media platforms (YouTube, X, Reddit) and all criticisms were sorted into categories. These categories were based on the criticisms in the comments, which were narrowed down, combined, and synthesized into these five specific categories:

1. Quality (ugly, bad art, low quality, unnatural)
2. Jobs (losing jobs, not hiring artists, AI taking jobs)

3. Money (Coca Cola is a billion-dollar company, being cheap, greed)
4. Soul (being soulless, lacking human element, being fake)
5. Environment (global warming, melting ice, dying polar bears)

To keep the study simple, there will only be one criticism per comment. If a comment has more than one criticism, whichever criticism has the higher word or character count, that is the one that will be chosen. If it is difficult to tell, or if the comment does not fit the study, the comment will be excluded in order to keep the methodology accurate.

Findings

Out of 242 comments, 138 of them came from YouTube for [*The Holiday Magic is coming*](#) commercial, sorted by top comments. 83 comments came from X, formerly known as Twitter, across three separate posts [1] [2] [3]. Finally, the remaining 21 comments came from Reddit, under the [subreddit OpenAI](#).

YouTube (138 total)

1. Quality (24 criticisms, 17%)
2. Jobs (21 criticisms, 15%)
3. Money (50 criticisms, 37%)
4. Soul (31 criticisms, 22%)
5. Environment (12 criticisms, 9%)

X (83 total)

1. Quality (31 criticisms, 37%)
2. Jobs (12 criticisms, 15%)

3. Money (7 criticisms, 8%)
4. Soul (28 criticisms, 34%)
5. Environment (5 criticisms, 6%)

Reddit (21 total)

1. Quality (7 criticisms, 33%)
2. Jobs (6 criticisms, 28%)
3. Money (2 criticisms, 10%)
4. Soul (4 criticisms, 19%)
5. Environment (2 criticisms, 10%)

Discussion

In this section, this case study dives further into the five categories and the findings that correspond with each one. Additionally, background information about the category is given, as well as helpful examples to aid in giving the findings context.

Quality

Art created from generative AI is still relatively new and has plenty of kinks to work out. Oftentimes, end products can look ugly or even produce inaccurate artwork, such as humans with disfigured hands. Additionally, when AI creates art with humans, it can produce the phenomenon of the Uncanny Valley. This is when “likeness to humans is almost complete, but not perfect, it triggers feelings of unease or eeriness” (Cappelletti, n.d.). Many comments mention the Uncanny Valley either directly or indirectly with the usage of synonyms such as unnatural or unnerving.

Out of the five categories, Quality was reliably one of the most important across the three social media platforms. On both X and Reddit, it was the most common criticism, with a percentage of 37% and 33% respectively. As for YouTube, it drops to the third most common, only reaching 17%.

Most comments were short and mentioned the ads looking ugly, but several wrote down areas in the commercial that were inaccurate or strange. One comment by @jtpjtg9189 tore the YouTube video, *The Holiday Magic is coming*, apart.



@jtpjtg9189 3 months ago (edited)

0:07 You've managed to spell "Coca Cola" as "Coca loola" and "C Ca"

0:09 The trucks further from the camera are disfigured

0:12 The truck has more lights in the reflection than in the actual truck

0:13 The dogs tail clips through it's body

0:14 The trucks front grills aren't symmetrical, the third truck doesn't have a cabin

0:16 The trucks wheels are not spinning, the lights on top move on their own, one of the front grills is horizontal and the others is a grid pattern, the second truck has 5 wheels

0:20 The televisions buttons and the lines under the buttons look cursed

0:21 The terrain on the left is disfigured

0:25 All the trucks aren't matching and their dimensions change, the truck in the middle has 4.5 wheels, and the truck in front of it doesn't have it's wheels aligned either

Yup, another well made ad using garbage that shouldn't be used to create art.

Show less

On the X posts, where the ads featured people, a few replies made fun of the hands holding the Coca-Cola bottles. As mentioned above, other comments mentioned how unnatural the ad felt, referring to the Uncanny Valley phenomenon.

Quality being the most common criticism is not surprising, as generative AI is still finding its way in the world. When something is created that is low quality and it is treated like it is high quality, there will be backlash. This is especially true when it looks far different than when a human creates something. Once generative AI learns more and produces higher quality video, Quality as a category will be less of a criticism.

Jobs

The replacement of human labor by machines has been a fear for the working-class people for hundreds of years. Even back in the middle of the Industrial Revolution, there were the luddites who protested the new textile machinery. In recent years, layoffs in cities like Baltimore and Detroit have been occurring due to replacement by automation (Lynch, 2015). The most recent case is the fear of artificial intelligence (AI) causing job displacement (Soueidan & Shoghari, 2024). The fear is a common one, which is evident by the amount of comments it received to become a category. It was the second most common criticism on Reddit, and the third most common on both X and YouTube. Additionally, this particular criticism got extra spotlight when the creator of the Disney show *Gravity Falls*, Alex Hirsch, responded to one of the ads, “Coca Cola is red because it’s made from the blood of out-of-work artists.”



Alex Hirsch
@_AlexHirsch



FUN FACT: @CocaCola is “red” because it’s made from the blood of out-of-work artists! #HolidayFactz

12:05 PM · Nov 16, 2024 · **660.9K** Views

Many of the criticisms are tied in with other criticisms, which is perhaps why this complaint is not higher on the list. In several instances, this criticism was mixed with money, along the lines of “Coca-Cola has so much money, you think they would be able to hire artists.” However, those types of comments fell mostly under the other category.

Money

Coca-Cola is a multi-billion-dollar company, raking in billions of dollars a year from its products. In 2024 alone, Coca-Cola made \$47.1 billion (Simply Wallstreet, 2025). As one of the

largest beverage companies with a huge income, they are able to pay their employees a living wage. However, this case proved differently, when they took the shortcut and used artificial intelligence (AI) to create ads instead of hiring artists and marketers.

Many consumers viewed this as a bad decision, with many criticisms about being able to hire artists, or bitterness about the top 1% becoming richer. One example can be seen below.



Hobbert - Rambunctious Nugget
@EeveeHobbert



Why does one of the richest companies in the world need to cut costs by employing AI for their advertising?... Are you kidding me? Shareholders need their third yacht, I guess.

On top of everything else, this is one of the most uncomfortably uncanny things I've ever seen.

8:00 AM · Nov 16, 2024 · **1,949** Views

Money, as a category, was a common criticism, and was often paired with other criticism. On YouTube, it ranked most common with 37%, a comparatively high margin compared to the other percentages (22%, 17%, 15%, 9%). The category's rank drastically fell for the other two social media platforms, being 2nd to last with 8% on X and tied for last on Reddit with 10%.

The category's importance depends on the social media platform, but it was mentioned enough times to be catalogued. Additionally, there could be a few more criticisms added to this category, as it was often paired with other criticisms, but the comment was added to a different category to comply with the methodology.

Soul

There is no agreed definition on art, and with the introduction of generative AI, there is no distinction that a human must create it for something to be “art.” However, a common view is that art requires a deep understanding of human emotion; therefore AI-generated art lacks this nuance (Gross, 2024). This can tie back into the Uncanny Valley, where AI-generated art is missing... something.

Additionally, a study has found that images labeled as AI-generated were “often less liked and less likely to be considered ‘art’” (Horton Jr et al., 2023). This suggests that humans gravitate more towards art that is made by humans, not by machines. Does this mean art has a “soul”? Who knows.

This category, while labelled soul, is mostly about lacking the human element, or the ad just feeling fake. When conducting the study, a word that came up a lot was “soulless,” so this category felt accurate. In fact, the majority of the comments that fell into this category had some version of the word “soulless.”

Soul was quite common across the board. For both YouTube and X, it ranked second most common category, and for Reddit, it ranked third. Since the ads are considered art, most people want art that makes them feel something. But when art is made by a machine, it lacks the human element, which is why so many people felt the need to comment “soulless.”



@ScorpDK 5 months ago

Nothing like celebrating the spirit of Christmas with the most soulless commercial possible.



7.8K



Reply

Environment

Artificial intelligence (AI), and generative AI in particular, are still finding its place in society, so it is no surprise that consequences and effects are still being discovered and studied. With how artificial intelligence (AI) thinks, it could potentially aid in creating sustainable solutions for the environment (Pimenow et al., 2024). While that is a great positive, the consequences to the environment have recently started coming to light.

The computational power essential to train and power generative AI program models demand endless amounts of electricity — leading to “increased carbon dioxide emissions and pressures on the electric grid” (Zewe, 2025). Besides electricity causing CO₂, water consumption is another issue. A ton of water is needed to cool the actual hardware that is used for these generative AI models. Often, this consumption strains water supplies and disrupts local ecosystems (Zewe, 2025).

Even though these heavy-duty consequences are relatively new, people outside of scientists actually talk about them. This leads to the last category: Environment.

Though there were enough comments mentioning the environment (including ice melting, global warming, death of polar bears, etc.) to become a category, it ranked last across all three social media platforms. It received 6% from X, 9% from YouTube, and 10% from Reddit.

Clearly, it is not a commonly discussed negative of artificial intelligence (AI), despite it having the biggest repercussions. One example mentions the irony of using generative AI to create snow.



Can't Behave 🍌 🍅
@lolnochilly



Using planet-scorching AI to generate videos of polar bears and snow is one of those painful ironies of late stage capitalism that will drive you absolutely insane if you let it

Conclusion

Coca-Cola has been successfully marketing for over 125 years without a huge blight on their record — until recently. Their 2024 Holiday Campaign, which garnered extensive news coverage and general public speculation, changed that. The decision to create their ads using generative AI from studios instead of utilizing artists is what made the difference. The backlash was almost unanimous, with hundreds of people leaving negative comments on multiple social media platforms under the various commercials.

A lot of the comments were just generally negative, making fun of the ads, insulting them, or simply “this sucks.” However, there were enough valid criticisms to gather helpful information on why people hated Coca-Cola’s use of generative AI. After gathering 242 comments over three social media platforms and various posts, five categories began to form: Quality, Jobs, Money, Soul, and Environment.

Out of all five categories, the one that seemed the most common and reliably mentioned across all the social media platforms was Quality. This was partly due to several of the comments simply insulting the ads by calling them ugly, but the point still stands. Quality being the most common criticism for a marketing campaign commercial does make sense, however. Consumers expect high-quality marketing materials, especially from a multi-billion-dollar company like Coca-Cola. This ties in with the Money category — Coca-Cola clearly has the money to make

high-quality marketing materials, so when they release something of a lower caliber, of course consumers will complain. This is because customers become more devoted to a brand when they perceive the brand as high-quality (Khan et al., 2022). It could be understood, then, that one becomes less devoted if the brand releases something low-quality.

On the other end of the spectrum, Environment was mentioned as the least of the five categories. Which is understandable, as artificial intelligence (AI)'s "environmental impacts often remain hidden from public view" (Ren, 2024). Not everyone knows the consequences of generative AI on the environment, both negative or positive. It is comforting, however, to know that this is the most important criticism to at least a few consumers.

The Soul and Jobs category, while separate in the findings, can technically be combined. The entire point of both categories is removing the "human element" of the art. Since the ads can be considered art, it is safe to say that people want the commercials to make them feel something. But when art is created by a machine, taking the job away from a human artist, it lacks the human element. It creates the Uncanny Valley phenomenon, lacking human nuance, and feels like it is missing something. That is why so many people felt the need to comment that it is "soulless" — because it is. No artist put their soul into the ads. When the human is taken away, so is the human element, because machines cannot replicate the human element no matter how smart they are.

No matter what the reason is, it is valid to feel negatively about Coca-Cola's generative AI ad campaign. The quality was not as high as its previous campaigns, jobs were lost, something was missing, and the environment was hurt in the process. All of these reasons are true. However, the most popular criticism seemed to be the quality of the ads. Since the 2024

Holiday Campaign was a marketing campaign, it is relevant and accurate that Quality be the most common category.

Coca-Cola must take the reaction and the backlash to their campaign and understand why they received such negativity. Once they do, they must adjust and return to releasing only high-quality marketing materials. If they continue to release artificial intelligence generated ads that are low quality, it may start to affect their bottom line. Even this one slip up changed a lot of people's minds about how they viewed Coca-Cola. For example, this was a popular joke on the YouTube commercial:



@retired_channel528 5 months ago

I don't know why everyone's saying this ad's so terrible. Best Pepsi commercial I've seen in a while



2.4K



Reply

Many people admitted to stopping drinking Coke or to switch over to Pepsi. That was just the reaction to this one campaign. If Coca-Cola continues down this path, they may lose their competitiveness in the industry.

The only possible recommendation is to return to using real, human artists for the ads and to continue using real people for marketers. Do not use AI studios for any further campaigns. With this recommendation, Coca-Cola can return to their positive image and keep marching forward until 150 years.

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