

# Aesthetic Value and Service Ecosystems in the Age of Generative AI

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## ABSTRACT

This study neutrally examined the previous literature of generative AI (GenAI) adoption in the advertising sector of services, focusing on consumer perception of AI-generated images and the implications for corporate communication strategies. Drawing on a review of prior literature, the study synthesizes evidence that the perceptual gap between AI- and human-produced visual content is narrowing, that transparency about AI use and the reasons for its deployment significantly shape consumer attitudes, and that expectation management remains a pivotal factor in shaping reception. The analysis further highlighted how a corporate presentation of AI-generated assets can influence broader societal norms and value judgments, potentially redefining aesthetic standards within the service industry. By integrating these findings, the paper offers both theoretical contributions—advancing understanding of AI's impact on aesthetic perception—and practical recommendations for firms seeking to responsibly incorporate GenAI into their marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic value, Generative AI, Service ecosystem, Customer perceptions

## INTRODUCTION

Adoption of AI-generated models by H&M, the world-leading fashion company, has sent shockwaves beyond the fashion industry (Arrigo, 2025; Bain, 2025). The company created “digital twins” that closely resemble real models, both in beauty. These rights belong to the models themselves, who are free to use them as they wish and receive compensation for their use; thus, the models retain ownership of their own digital twins. Reactions from industry stakeholders vary. Some argue that this development benefits models by providing earning and exposure opportunities, while others express concern about potential job losses among fashion-related workers (Arrigo 2025; Bain, 2025).

This trend affects not only the industry framework but also customer perceptions, because fast fashion, exemplified by brands like H&M, has become widespread among customers. Thus, this situation illustrates how generative AI (GenAI) is increasingly influencing perceptions of beauty across both industrial and everyday settings (Amed and D'Auria, 2025). GenAI's social perception, including attractiveness and aesthetics, has replicated and influenced human evaluation structures (Gürkan et al., 2025).

The current study investigates how people perceive and experience aesthetic value in the age of GenAI, including customers and industry perspectives in service marketing research. Building on a review of previous studies, we neutrally presented the research trends that in change of perceptions among customers, thereby exploring the perception change toward aesthetic value and its effects.

We examined prior literature across three dimensions: 1) research on customer perceptions that include aesthetic value within marketing and service theory; 2) industry-specific studies, specifically in service sectors of tourism and fashion, where image is a pivotal and highly critical determinant; and 3) relationship between humans from the perspective of AI ethics. The dimensions emerged from the benefits and barriers of adopting GenAI, as shown by Han et al. (2025). This study investigates how society perceives “beauty” generated by AI, rather than focusing on the elements of aesthetic value or the mechanisms by which AI produces such value. This approach explores the impact of AI-generated beauty on society, aligning with Kornberger et al. (2025), who noted that “productive work is not to judge but to evaluate the influence of the decision.” We pursued responses to the question “How is the aesthetics value generated by AI perceived in society, and how does it impact society?” A literature review was performed to address it.

The results of the analysis of previous studies (e.g., Hartmann et al., 2025; Rizzi and Bertola, 2025) indicated that AI-generated aesthetic value is not merely a technological add-on but a force capable of profoundly restructuring the entire service system. The review showed that the difference between AI and human-generated images in advertising is decreasing; while customer perceptions vary with a company’s “presentation” which is a key factor for corporate marketing promotion strategies and responsibilities. Additionally, other studies suggested that the widespread adoption of GenAI could modify subjective norms of customer perceptions that may become standards (Huang et al., 2025; Takeda, 2026). Considering all these findings from previous studies, we found that companies can influence societal value standards. The current study contributed to offering a comprehensive perspective by reviewing and providing implications.

## **MARKETING THEORIES FOR PERCEPTIONS OF AI CONTENTS**

From a marketing and service research perspective (Spohrer et al., 2013), the H&M case encompasses “projected image.” This term denotes how management wants the organization to be perceived by others (Cian and Cervai, 2014). The projected image is a supply-side image (Song and Kim, 2016), aligns with pull strategy (Martins, 2015), and is conveyed through marketing communication tools in both text-base and visual media, such as advertisements, social media, television, and newspapers (Govers et al., 2007). Crucially, “projected image” functions as a communicative instrument for both external stakeholders and interactions between management and internal stakeholders (Cian and Cervai, 2014). Consequently, the concept of projected image provides a robust explanatory framework for the H&M

case, which is implementing them. These activities are input for branding, thereby influencing company branding strategy (Brüns and Meißner, 2024; To et al., 2025).

Other marketing concepts that have been employed to examine customer perception influenced by AI-generated content include personalization (Lee et al., 2024). Personalization is frequently cited as a primary use case for GenAI in marketing, as effective marketing must align with customer needs (Kshetri et al., 2024). Although personalization has long been a subject of marketing research, the process of detecting and examining relevant customer data is typically time-consuming; specifically, advertising content. In this area, achieving both extensive reach and personalized messaging have posed significant challenges. For this issue, GenAI has begun to facilitate large scale personalized marketing by offering a means to streamline this effort. (Kshetri et al., 2024).

Additionally, from the perspective that technology shapes human behavior, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been adopted alongside the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Zhang and Hur, 2025). TAM explicates the mechanism by which individuals adopt technology, focusing on “perceived usefulness” and “perceived ease of use” (Davis, 1989). TPB accounts for individual behavior by introducing three antecedents, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that influence users’ decisionmaking processes (Ajzen, 2020).

Accordingly, TPB posits that behavior is determined by behavioral intentions, which in turn are shaped by these three factors. Attitude represents a subjective judgment of behavior; subjective norms denote the perceived social pressure to engage in the behavior; and perceived behavioral control reflects the individual’s realistic belief in their capacity to perform the action, considering abilities and conditions such as time, money, and surroundings (Ajzen, 2020). For instance, when an action is perceived as beneficial, endorsed by others, and practicable, an individual is likely to form the corresponding behavioral intention.

The perspective of subjective norms may explain the evolution of standards for behavior and perception in society, as GenAI becomes increasingly pervasive. However, research addressing this aspect remains limited.

## **PERCEPTIONS’ RESEARCH OF CONTENTS MADE BY AI**

Customer perception plays a pivotal role in fostering brand awareness and engagement within advertising. Recent marketing research has begun to examine the perceptions elicited by images produced by GenAI compared to those created by human designers. Notable investigations include assessments of the effectiveness of AI-generated advertising imagery (Hartmann et al., 2025; Zhang and Hur, 2025) and analyses of the broader impact of AI-generated content (Arango et al., 2023). These experimental studies have yielded mixed findings, presenting both supportive and cautious perspectives.

Hartmann et al. (2025) compared AI-generated and human-created marketing images using marketing metrics. AI images outperformed human ones in quality and aesthetics criteria, were produced faster and cheaper, and

achieved comparable or superior effectiveness. The results are contingent upon the selection and quality of the human images used for comparison and on the variability among AI products.

Arango et al. (2023) argued that, given the anticipated rapid transformation of advertising and marketing through AI, understanding customer perceptions of generative-AI content is essential before its totally widespread societal diffusion, thereby underscoring the necessity for research. The experiments with charity ads by Arango et al. (2023) showed that disclosing an image as AI-generated lowers donation intent, whereas explaining an ethical motivation (e.g., protecting model privacy) can encourage donations. In disaster contexts, AI images are accepted and perform similarly to real photographs as donors recognize the potential unavailability of authentic images (Arango et al., 2023). Because the adoption of synthetic content depends on contextual conditions, Arango et al. (2023) recommend a cautious approach to the deployment of GenAI.

Zhang and Hur (2025) compared AI-generated and human-created images to investigate customer reactions and effects with three conditions; 1) non-disclosure of the source (AI vs. human), 2) disclosure, and 3) disclosure of the motivation. Three experiments revealed: 1) Evaluations varied across advertising categories; 2) customers preferred to human-created images than AI-generated ones; 3) the negative customer reactions to AI-generated images observed in 2) could potentially be mitigated by specific motivations (e.g., privacy protection), supported Arango et al. (2023). Experiment 1 demonstrated that AI-generated and human-made images are often indistinguishable. Experiment 2 indicated that although social acceptance and recognition of AI technology are increasing, customers may still doubt the intrinsic artificiality of AI-generated images, even when those images appear photorealistic. Moreover, focusing on cost efficiency risks leading customers to perceive potential quality compromises.

Collectively, these studies illustrate that technological advances have narrowed the gap between AI- and human-generated images within the advertising context. As companies are required to disclose when images are AI-generated, the method of disclosure and the explanatory of motivation regarding AI use are likely to become salient considerations in corporate promotional strategies. The manner in which AI-generated content is presented to customers significantly impacts their perception, making corporate responsibility critical. Companies must develop marketing strategies and establish ethical considerations along with supporting mechanisms, and H&M's case showed such an example.

## **DESTINATION IMAGE RESEARCH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Tourism depends on destination image to stimulate revisits and recommendations, thereby forming a service ecosystem (Prayag et al., 2015). Emotional experiences and authenticity at destinations are primary determinants of tourist satisfaction (Ferreira et al., 2025; Prayag et al., 2015). Therefore, to attract potential visitors, promoting the destination image and shaping travelers' expectations regarding anticipated experiences and

cultural authenticity are critical. Therefore, research must examine GenAI impact on potential tourist perceptions.

Zhu et al. (2025) found that GenAI often produces oversimplified, stereotyped images of tourist destinations because of the preexisting representations in its training data. While cost-effective for tourism marketing, these images fail to capture the full social-cultural diversity of destinations, resulting in a homogenized aesthetic value derived from the data (Zhu et al., 2025).

Prior research mentioned that GenAI influences destination expectations (Miao and Yang, 2023; Yu and Meng, 2025). Citing earlier work (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010; Scarles, 2010), Miao and Yang (2023) reported that repeated image exposure triggers a feeling of anticipation in the destination, which in turn boosts engagement and the desire to visit; similarly, anticipation can permeate the tourism experience itself. However, when prior expectations become unrealistically high, they may diverge from reality and cause dissatisfaction according to expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), highlighting the importance of remaining aware of this risk. From an aesthetic standpoint, the research implies the risk of an idealized view of scenic beauty formed by GenAI which exceeds the actual experience.

A comprehensive review of GenAI in tourism research was offered by Yu and Meng (2025). The review introduced a new domain, “programmed image,” for AI-generated visuals, expanded existing categories, such as perceived image by users, professionally curated projected image, and identified the need for additional research in this area. The concept proposal demonstrated that AI-generated images are fundamentally different from those examined in prior research in the field, indicating that research focusing on these images is necessary.

Further, the growing body of personalization research to recommend suitable destinations through GenAI’s dialogue with prospective tourists. This marks a novel, all-encompassing promotional strategy in tourism (Ilieva et al., 2024). As noted earlier, GenAI profoundly influences the industry, underscoring the need for further research to confront the present circumstances.

## **FASHION INDUSTRY AND GENERATIVE AI**

The growing integration of GenAI within the fashion industry is redefining the production, distribution, and consumption of aesthetic value. Visual generation tools, synthetic avatars, and AI-enhanced “digital twins” introduce new modes of representing and perceiving beauty, influencing both creative dynamics and customer experience (Amed and D’Auria, 2025). In this context, understanding the practical implications associated with the nature of AI-generated aesthetic value is a crucial step for analyzing the evolution of the sector. The analysis of the literature shows that the adoption of GenAI produces a multi-level transformation of aesthetic value within the fashion system.

GenAI reshapes visual identity, ownership, and professional roles (Arrigo, 2025; Bain, 2025). Employing synthetic models and digital twins broadens

the notion of a model's visual identity, creating new forms of image ownership and licensing while redefining collaboration among brands, talent, and creators.

AI enables the rapid creation of aesthetic content, collection concepts, and virtual prototypes, cutting the time and cost of production and enhancing responsiveness to market trends (Argyrou et al., 2025), alongside AI-human collaboration processes (Rizzi and Bertola, 2025).

Moreover, aesthetic standards are evolving. Exposure to artificially optimized images alters customer perception, establishing new aesthetic canons and raising risks associated with the gap between representation and reality (Huang et al., 2025). Technological progress alters customer experience through hybridization (Bassano et al., 2020). Fashion moves into virtual and augmented spaces, producing new visual engagement forms—avatars, digital fittings, and virtual runways—that distribute aesthetic value across multiple dimensions (Sanguigni et al., 2025). Many scholars argue for ethical and regulatory oversight. The increasing production of synthetic content demands transparent policies on image rights, disclosure of AI use, bias mitigation, and customer psychological protection (Niyompatama and Lapatour, 2025).

Articles defending H&M's position contend that the company has adopted a strategy that balances innovation and ethical considerations while recognizing the need for transparency and consent in the use of AI-generated images (Arrigo, 2025). According to Kornberger et al. (2025), H&M acknowledges that formal procedures of AI ethics have limitations in addressing the current situation. In today's world, the use of AI in industry is an unstoppable trend, and companies that fail to ride this wave cannot win in competition. Consequently, H&M's position is to lead the industry in advancing AI use based on realistic ethics as one of the world's top apparel companies. H&M has identified three key elements for building an AI ethics culture to achieve realistic solutions, and has implemented them: 1) promoting discussions on AI ethics regarding specific business use cases set within contexts relevant to employees; 2) focusing on rules as tools and moving from judgment toward evaluation, that is, discussing the impact on society; and 3) designing the discussion space to shape an ethical culture. H&M's approach could set a precedent for AI use in creative industries and transform fashion marketing.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND AI IN SOCIETY**

When considering perceived value in society, here it examines how humans change from the perspective of the relationship between humans and AI evolves amid the shift toward widespread AI adoption in society (Barile et al., 2021), drawing on prior research in technology ethics.

Regarding the relationship between humans and technology (AI), Verbeek (2008) developed and expanded Ihde's typology (Ihde 1990), proposing "cyborg relations" and "composite intentional relations." Cyborg relations can be understood as an extension of "embodied relations," in which humans and technology become integrated and act in society as unified entities. For example, much like wearing glasses to see objects, this form involves

“assistant AI” aiding human thought and acting within society. Of course, this stage is not reached in one leap; diverse AI functions, initially existing as bodily aids, will gradually integrate little by little (Takeda, 2026).

The composite intentional relations express a world where AI exists as an equal interacting counterpart of humans. When we perceive the world, the intentionality of technological artifacts plays a central role alongside human intentionality. This relation becomes most critical when AI is introduced into society, particularly within the service industry. As services become AI-driven, the primary agents of our interactions may become AI as intentional technology (Takeda, 2026). This means that AI’s intentions join human intentions to fulfill roles within society. The difference from cyborg relations lies in the fact that it is not an entity integrated with humans that act in society, but the intentions themselves that act. That is, AI exists independently within society, and society itself becomes a network composed of intentional technology, that is AI (Takeda, 2026).

Intentionality in AI can be explicitly designed by developers or users, or it can be formed indirectly through such AI agents. The service industry should recognize that introducing AI interposes AI intentionality between customers and products.

Human and AI intentionality should not be independent inherently. However, applying the concept of composite intentional relations makes them appear independent, with long-term mutual influence. Human intentionality may change its object due to AI intentionality. In such cases, AI developers/users may modify the AI to align with the changed human intentionality. Intentionality will likely evolve over time, mutually influencing through technological advancement.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the influence of GenAI on aesthetic value in society. The academic contribution of this research presents phenomena currently unfolding in society or highly likely to occur in the future by offering a synthesized view of independent studies, which serves as a proposal for future research topics.

The literature review of the three angles, service and marketing theory, industry situation, and AI ethics, indicated that adopting GenAI triggers a multi-level shift in aesthetic value across the social system. It has accelerated creative processes (Argyrou et al., 2025), enabling the rapid generation of aesthetic content, and virtual prototypes, thereby cutting production time and costs and enhancing responsiveness to market trends. GenAI co-creates with humans (Rizzi and Bertola, 2025), and its output increasingly matches or even replicates humanmade (Hartmann et al., 2025; Zhang and Hur, 2025), which in turn alters people’s roles and work practices. Under the circumstances, companies have the responsibility to disclose that they are using AI and to explain the reasons for the use. The disclosures and explanations have impacted people’s perceptions of the images, and the companies which made them (Arango et al., 2023; Zhang and Hur, 2025).

GenAI has begun to reshape perceptions and societal aesthetic standards (Huang et al., 2025); exposure to artificially optimized images affects customer perception, introduces new aesthetic canons, and poses risks linked to the gap between representation and reality (Miao and Yang, 2023). This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2020), where subjective norms—perceived social pressure—are a key determinant of behavioral intent. Because the use of GenAI has begun to permeate society, people's perceptions have been influenced broadly. The findings suggest that AI-generated aesthetic value is a force capable of profoundly restructuring the entire service system and society.

In summary, AI-generated content is nearing human-level quality, and society is increasingly accepting products created by GenAI. Arango et al. (2023) and Zhang and Hur (2025) show that customer perceptions depend on how firms present these creations. As societal aesthetic norms are being reshaped (Zhang and Hur, 2025), customer perception is affected by the way companies “present” and “communicate” these products. Accordingly, corporate marketing strategies and responsibilities become even more important. Therefore, many scholars have highlighted the need for ethical and regulatory governance (e.g., Niyompatama and Lapatour, 2025): the growing production of synthetic content demands transparent policies on image rights, disclosure of AI use, bias control, and customer psychological protection.

In the service ecosystem examined, the practical implications show that AI-generated aesthetic value reshapes the whole ecosystem of creative works which are in customer interaction for personalization (Ilieva et al., 2024), communication practices, and competitive dynamics among firms (Amed and D'Auria, 2025; Kornberger et al., 2025). Understanding these implications is therefore essential for developing strategies and policies that leverage technological innovation while acknowledging the ethical, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions of aesthetic value (Kornberger et al., 2025; Niyompatama and Lapatour, 2025). Thus, managerial implications are as follows:

- First, professional roles need to be redefined; the use of synthetic models and digital twins expands the concept of a model's visual identity, introduces new forms of image ownership and licensing, and redefines collaboration among brands, talent, and creators, necessitating the reorganization of skills and processes and the creation of roles focused on managing digital identity and supervising outputs.
- Second, companies must build creative strategies for co-creation and personalization that leverage AI's advantages while preserving brand distinctiveness (Lee et al., 2024; Soni, 2023). Currently, GenAI enables large-scale personalized marketing (Kshetri et al., 2024), demanding effective cocreation strategies with customers.
- Third, adopting responsible communication practices is essential to avoid misleading perceptions and maintain trust. Prior research has warned that the failure of disclosure methods and explanations of AI motivation can erode customer trust (Arango et al., 2023;

Zhang and Hur, 2025), making promotional strategies urgent. Further, GenAI can create idealized perceptions when divergent from reality, damage credibility (Huang et al., 2025), and high expectations risk discomfort when confronted with reality gaps (Miao and Yang, 2023; Yu and Meng, 2025).

- Fourth, governance frameworks that ensure legal compliance, algorithmic fairness, and aesthetic transparency are required (Huang et al., 2025; Niyompatama and Lapatour, 2025). The use of GenAI can drive competitive differentiation: brands that employ AI as both a creative and cultural tool, in addition to a productive one, have the possibility to generate new tangible and symbolic value, but this potential requires a conscious balance between technological innovation and aesthetic-social responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated how adopting GenAI in service sectors influences perceived aesthetic value. The area is still emerging, and research is limited, leaving a significant gap in understanding. The findings highlight the necessity of addressing the practical integration of GenAI, a phenomenon increasingly embedded in society, as it reshapes human perceptions and consequently possible changes in social norms. Regarding aesthetic value and the deployment of GenAI within ecosystems, no relevant studies were identified, indicating a promising direction for future research.

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