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Consumer engagement with AI-generated advertising: Visual appeal, transparency, and anthropomorphism

Putu Laksmita Dewi Rahmayanti[1], Cokorda Gede Govinda Partha[2], Fikrul Hakim[3], Estanislau de Sousa Saldanha[4], Leonie Nesselhauf[5]
[1,2,3]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Udayana, Bali, Indonesia
[4]School of Business and Management, Dili Institute of Technology, Dili, Timor-Leste
[5]Worms University of Applied Sciences, Worms, Germany

ABSTRACT

Background: The growing use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in advertising has revolutionized marketing communications and highlighted challenges regarding consumer responses to AI-generated advertising. While previous research has explored particular technology or advertising attributes, few studies have merged AI transparency, AI anthropomorphism, and perceived visual appeal to explain consumer engagement via advertising attitude and brand trust. **Purpose:** The objective of this study is to examine the effects of AI transparency, AI anthropomorphism, and perceived visual appeal on attitude toward AI advertising, brand trust, and consumer engagement, as well as the effects of attitude and trust on consumer engagement. **Methods:** An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted. The quantitative data were collected from 220 Indonesian social media users who had been exposed to AI-generated advertisements on platforms including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X, WhatsApp, and Facebook **Results:** Quantitatively, visual appeal significantly influenced all three outcomes, transparency influenced Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement, and anthropomorphism had no significant effects. Attitude and Brand Trust also enhanced engagement. Qualitatively, visual appeal attracted attention, transparency reinforced trust, and anthropomorphism elicited mixed responses depending on naturalness and relatability. **Conclusion:** Visual appeal and trust-related brand trust play more important roles in consumer engagement with AI-generated advertising than anthropomorphic features alone, highlighting the importance of attractive visuals and credible brand communication assessments are more closely related to consumer engagement than anthropomorphic features alone. **Implications:** This study adds to the AI advertising literature by merging technological, visual, attitudinal and relational elements and indicates the benefit of integrating PLS-SEM and QNA. The practical implications for marketers are to concentrate on the visual attractiveness and transparency of the advertising on the use of content produced by AI and to ensure organic and believable human-like aspects.

Keywords: AI-generated advertising; consumer engagement; AI transparency; brand trust; visual appeal

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Correspondence: Dr. Putu Laksmita Dewi Rahmayanti, S.E., M.M. Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Udayana. Jalan Raya Kampus Jimbaran, Badung, Bali, Indonesia. *Email*: dewirahmayanti@unud.ac.id.

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing digital marketing with growing speed, allowing companies to automate and personalize content creation, including the generation of advertising texts, photos, videos and other visual communications. The rise of generative AI has transformed AI from an analytical and decision-support technology into a creative tool capable of generating advertising material at scale (Yang et al., 2026). The shift opens up new avenues for marketers to enhance efficiency and content diversity but also raises significant challenges about how consumers will perceive ads knowing the material is AI-generated or AI-assisted (Chaisatitkul et al., 2024). Therefore, the recent research has started to explore AI-generated advertising from the viewpoint of consumers' attitudes, trust, persuasion and engagement (Ayertey et al., 2026; Chen et al., 2024; Du et al., 2023). The growing usage of AI in brand communication further emphasizes the importance of understanding consumers' reactions, as technological effectiveness does not necessarily mean good marketing communication.

In Indonesia, social media has become an important environment for brand communication, with 180 million social media user identities recorded in 2025 and 37.3% of users discovering brands through social media advertisements (We Are Social, 2025). Regarding AI-generated advertising, the Ipsos AI Monitor 2025 reported that 72% of Indonesian respondents would trust brands more if they used AI-generated images or videos in advertising, while 11% would trust them less (Ipsos, 2025). Although these findings indicate generally positive perceptions, public responses to specific AI-generated advertisements can differ. For example, Ratnasari and Sumartias (2025) documented criticism of an AI-generated government advertisement, illustrating that acceptance of AI in advertising may depend on how the content is perceived. These contrasting responses highlight the need to understand which characteristics of AI-generated advertising are associated with favorable consumer evaluations. In Indonesia, the growing use of social media as an advertising environment makes AI-generated advertising increasingly relevant to consumer research (Nurfaizal et al., 2026). Social media users encounter visually intensive and interactive advertising content in which AI-generated images, videos, and virtual characters can be incorporated into brand communication. This context makes Indonesian social media users a relevant population for examining how consumers interpret AI-generated advertising and subsequently develop advertising attitudes, brand trust, and engagement.

The situation is more complex because consumers are exposed to AI generated advertising in the highly visual and participatory environments of social media (Miskolczi, 2026). Previous research on social media communication indicates that message characteristics and visual presentation can influence audience attention and engagement, with fresh and appealing visual elements helping to attract audience attention and reduce disengagement (Destrity & Wardasari, 2025). AI has the potential to impact advertising not only in terms of transparency of its use, but also in terms of how its outputs are presented to consumers. Three features are particularly relevant: AI Transparency refers to the degree to which consumers see the application of AI in advertising as clear and comprehensible (Le et al., 2026). AI Anthropomorphism is the degree to which consumers see AI-generated communication as having human-like qualities (Wang et al., 2025); and Perceived Visual Appeal is consumers' perceptions of the attractiveness and aesthetic quality of advertising content (Tiwari & Kumari, 2024). These features may have varying effects on the consumers. Transparency may give information to lessen ambiguity, anthropomorphism can make artificial intelligence (AI) technology seem more familiar or socially important, and visual appeal can immediately draw attention and influence consumers' perceptions of advertising.

The relationships among these variables can be understood through complementary theoretical perspectives. Signaling Theory, originally proposed by Spence (1974) explains how observable signals can reduce information asymmetry and help individuals evaluate otherwise difficult-to-observe qualities. Its relevance to contemporary AI-mediated communication is supported by recent research. Park and Yoon (2025) demonstrated that AI algorithm transparency signaling is associated with greater user trust, while a recent study on AI-generated advertising found that verification signals, including QR codes and third-party assurance seals, can help reduce information asymmetry and strengthen consumer trust. The relationships among these variables can be understood through complementary theoretical perspectives. Meanwhile, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) explains how external stimuli influence individuals' internal evaluations and subsequent responses. Recent studies have continued to apply this framework to AI-based marketing. Gan et al. (2025) found that visual appeal and interactivity in AI virtual influencer marketing influenced consumers' emotional and cognitive responses, which were associated with their

willingness to buy. Similarly, Babu et al. (2026) demonstrated that characteristics of AI-driven advertising, including personalization, interactivity, and transparency, influenced consumers' internal evaluations and engagement

Previous research lends credence to the examination of these dimensions but also suggests that the impact of these dimensions is not necessarily uniform. The opinions of consumers regarding AI-generated commercials are linked to their attributes (Chen et al., 2024). Similarly, research on AI anthropomorphism has found that perceptions as human-like can influence consumer responses to AI-enabled technologies but that the size and direction of these effects may depend on the technological and interaction context (Greilich et al., 2025; Nikhashemi & Altinay, 2026). Meanwhile, visual esthetics studies suggest that the perceived visual quality can affect user evaluation and consumer experience (Silvennoinen et al., 2026). These factors are more relevant when the outcome of interest is the Consumer Engagement because engagement is not only liking an advertisement, but also includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses including attention, interest, interaction, and information searching (Akarsu & Sever, 2023; Filieri et al., 2026).

In spite of these progressions, a crucial research deficiency endures. To begin with, previous investigations have largely analyzed separate facets of AI-facilitated communication rather than synthesizing AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism, and Perceived Visual Appeal into a cohesive model for customer engagement (Ahn et al., 2026; Filieri et al., 2026; Park & Yoon, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, attention has been very minimal on the concurrent associations of these advertising features with consumers' Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement.

This study addresses the research gap by developing an integrated framework of consumer engagement with AI-generated advertising that combines AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism, and Perceived Visual Appeal with Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement. The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it integrates three distinct characteristics of AI-generated advertising within a single framework rather than examining them in isolation. Second, it examines their relationships with three consumer outcomes, namely attitude toward AI advertising, brand trust, and consumer engagement, providing a broader understanding of consumer responses beyond technology adoption or purchase intention. Third, it empirically distinguishes the roles of these characteristics by examining which

are significantly associated with consumer responses, rather than assuming that all AI-related features generate favorable evaluations. By placing consumer engagement at the center of the framework, this study extends research on AI in marketing toward a more comprehensive understanding of how advertising characteristics relate to consumers' attitudes, trust, and engagement with AI-generated advertising.

This is an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study to provide empirical and contextual evidence. In the quantitative phase, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is used to test the hypothesized relationships, while in the qualitative phase, thematic connections are identified to explain the quantitative findings, using Focus Group Discussion and Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA). This incorporation allows the study to not only test if the predicted links are statistically supported but also to analyze how consumers interpret transparency, visual appeal, and human traits in AI-generated advertising.

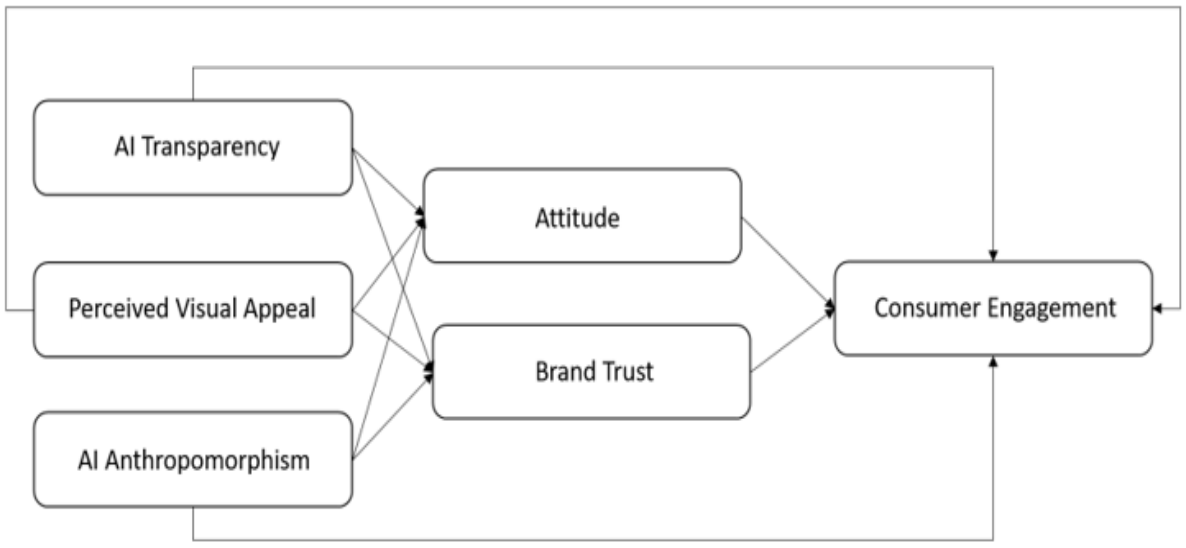
The purpose of the present study is to examine the direct effects of AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism and Perceived Visual Appeal on Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement and the effects of Attitude toward AI Advertising and Brand Trust on Consumer Engagement. The project also aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how consumers interpret these characteristics of AI-generated advertising and their association with attitudes, trust, and engagement. The research attempts to respond: (1) Does AI Transparency affect Attitude toward AI Advertising? (2) Does AI Transparency affect Brand Trust? (3) Does AI Transparency affect Consumer Engagement? (4) Does AI Anthropomorphism affect Attitude toward AI Advertising? (5) Does AI Anthropomorphism affect Brand Trust? (6) Does AI Anthropomorphism affect Consumer Engagement? (7) Does Perceived Visual Appeal affect Attitude toward AI Advertising? (8) Does Perceived Visual Appeal affect Brand Trust? (9) Does Perceived Visual Appeal affect Consumer Engagement? (10) Does Attitude toward AI Advertising affect Consumer Engagement? and (11) Does Brand Trust affect Consumer Engagement? This formulation corresponds to the final direct-effect model examined in the study.

The proposed research model is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Signaling Theory, introduced by Spence (1974), and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Signaling Theory explains how AI Transparency can serve as a signal that helps consumers evaluate advertising credibility and

brand reliability under conditions of information asymmetry. Meanwhile, the S-O-R framework explains how advertising characteristics, particularly Perceived Visual Appeal and AI Anthropomorphism, may shape consumers' internal evaluations, including Attitude toward AI Advertising and Brand Trust, and their subsequent Consumer Engagement. Building on these theoretical foundations and the relationships proposed in the conceptual model, this study formulates the following hypotheses:

H1: AI Transparency positively affects Attitude toward AI Advertising.
H2: AI Transparency positively affects Brand Trust.
H3: AI Transparency positively affects Consumer Engagement.
H4: AI Anthropomorphism positively affects Attitude toward AI Advertising.
H5: AI Anthropomorphism positively affects Brand Trust.
H6: AI Anthropomorphism positively affects Consumer Engagement.
H7: Perceived Visual Appeal positively affects Attitude toward AI Advertising.
H8: Perceived Visual Appeal positively affects Brand Trust.
H9: Perceived Visual Appeal positively affects Consumer Engagement.
H10: Attitude toward AI Advertising positively affects Consumer Engagement.
H11: Brand Trust positively affects Consumer Engagement.

The model integrates the proposed direct relationships based on the theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies discussed in the preceding sections. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model examined in this study.



Source: Developed by the authors, 2026

Figure 1 Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods strategy to study client responses to AI-generated advertising. The quantitative phase was conducted first to empirically test the hypothesised relationships between AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism, Perceived Visual Appeal, Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement. The quantitative data were evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (PLS-SEM) (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Then, a qualitative phase was completed using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to provide more thorough interpretations of the quantitative data, specifically the statistically significant and non-significant associations. This sequence is consistent with explanatory sequential mixed-methods designs, in which qualitative findings help explain and contextualize results obtained during the initial quantitative phase (Draucker et al., 2020). The current methodology enables the study to combine empirical testing of the proposed model with the contextual understanding of how consumers view AI generated advertising.

The quantitative population comprised active social media users in Indonesia who had been exposed to AI-generated advertising. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research context. The study targeted a minimum of 220 respondents, which was considered appropriate for testing the structural model using PLS-SEM. The qualitative phase involved two groups of FGD participants: 4 academics with expertise in marketing or digital marketing and 6 active digital media users. The two groups were included to provide complementary perspectives on AI-generated advertising. The academic group contributed an expert perspective on marketing and digital communication, while the user group represented consumer experiences and perceptions. This combination was part of the research design intended to provide a broader interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Quantitative data were acquired by a standardized questionnaire, employing a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of six constructs: AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism, Perceived Visual Appeal, Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement. Before the major survey, a pilot test was carried out to assess the clarity and applicability of the measurement device. FGDs were conducted after the quantitative analysis utilizing a semi-structured discussion guide based on the research variables and the

main quantitative results. The conversations focused on the perceptions and experiences of the participants about transparency in AI-generated advertising, human-likeness, visual appeal, attitudes toward AI advertising, brand trust and consumer engagement. The qualitative phase was aimed at explaining the meanings and contextual circumstances on which the statistical associations that were shown in the quantitative phase were based.

Quantitative data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The investigation involved the evaluation of the measurement model and the structural model. Convergent validity, discriminant validity, Cronbach's alpha. and Composite Reliability were employed to analyze the measurement model. The structural model was tested by computing path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, coefficient of determination (R2), effect size (f2), and predictive relevance (Q2) where suitable. The bootstrapping approach was employed for the hypothesis testing. The association was statistically significant if the t-statistic was more than 1.96 and the p-value was less than 0.05 (5% significance level). The structural model examined 11 direct effects of AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism, Perceived Visual Appeal, Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust, and Consumer Engagement.

The qualitative phase was done by means of focus group discussions (FGDs) by way of a structured question and answer (Q&A) technique. FGD data were analyzed thematically and transcribed. The procedures were familiarization, coding, grouping of similar codes, identification of themes and subthemes and interpretation. These procedures follow the general principles of reflexive thematic analysis described by Braun et al. (2022). The identified themes were subsequently organized into a Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA) map to visualize thematic connections and co-occurrence patterns. VOSviewer was used to construct the visualization. VOSviewer supports the construction and visualization of networks and relationships among identified items (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). In the resulting map, nodes represented identified themes and their relative prominence, while links represented thematic connections identified from the FGD data.

Finally, QNA was employed to complement and explain the quantitative results. The FGD findings in particular sought qualitative explanations for the statistically significant and non-significant relationships from the PLS-SEM study. The two sets of findings were then combined by interpreting the quantitative results and qualitative themes simultaneously. This enabled the study to explain not only whether relationships between the constructs

were statistically supported but also how the participants perceived and interpreted the role of AI-generated advertising characteristics in attitude, brand trust, and consumer engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sample had 220 respondents with no missing replies on the respondent characteristics. The sample was mostly female (74.1%) with male responders comprising 25.9%. Majority of the respondents were in the age category of 17-20 years (43.6%), followed by 21-25 years (31.4%), 26-30 years (14.1%), and above 30 years (10.9%). Although younger consumers made up the most proportion of the sample, older age groups were also represented by respondents. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

In terms of educational attainment, the majority of participants were senior high school or vocational school graduates (60.0%), followed by bachelor's degree (25.5%) and

Table 1 Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	57	25.9
	Female	163	74.1
Age	17–20 years	96	43.6
	21–25 years	69	31.4
	26–30 years	31	14.1
	>30 years	24	10.9
Educational Attainment	Senior High School/ Vocational School	132	60.0
	Diploma (D3/D4)	5	2.3
	Bachelor's degree (S1)	56	25.5
	Master's/Doctoral degree (S2/S3)	27	12.3
Occupation	Student	156	70.9
	Private-sector employee	27	12.3
	Entrepreneur	21	9.5
	Civil servant/ State-owned enterprise employee	12	5.5
	Other	4	1.8
Monthly Income	< IDR 2,000,000	116	52.7
	IDR 2,000,000–5,000,000	70	31.8
	IDR 5,000,001–10,000,000	25	11.4
	> IDR 10,000,000	9	4.1
Social Media Usage	<1 hour/day	8	3.6
	1–3 hours/day	28	12.7
	3–5 hours/day	57	25.9
	>5 hours/day	127	57.7
AI-based Advertising Exposure	Yes	216	98.2
	No	4	1.8

Source: Research Result, 2026

master's or doctoral degree (12.3%). Diploma graduates comprised 2.3 percent of the sample. In terms of occupation, the largest category was students (70.9%), followed by private-sector employees (12.3%), entrepreneurs (9.5%), civil servants/state-owned company employees (5.5%), and others (1.8%).

The income distribution shows that 52.7% of respondents had a monthly income below IDR 2 million, and 31.8% of respondents had income between IDR 2 and 5 million. 11.4% respondents have a monthly income of IDR 5.001-10 million and 4.1% respondents have a monthly income of more than IDR 10 million. On the usage of social media, the majority of the respondents (57.7%) spent more than 5 hours per day on social media, followed by 25.9% of the respondents who used social media for 3–5 hours per day. Importantly, 98.2% of the respondents said they have encountered AI-based advertising. This means that virtually all respondents knew about the phenomena under examination in this research.

Respondents were able to select several platforms for platform usage and results should be reported independently and not as mutually exclusive categories. Instagram and TikTok were the most common platforms within the available frequency combinations. This tendency is consistent with the study's focus on consumers who actively participate in advertising content social media platforms.

Outer loadings, internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were used to test the measurement model. The results reveal that the indicators well represent their respective conceptions. The measurement model results are presented in Table 2.

All indicator loadings exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, while Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are above 0.70. The AVE values also exceed 0.50 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency. The discriminant validity assessment further indicates that each construct is empirically distinguishable from the others. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs. For example, the square root of AVE was 0.812 for AI Transparency, 0.879 for AI Anthropomorphism, 0.902 for Perceived Visual Appeal, 0.945 for Attitude toward AI Advertising, 0.966 for Brand Trust, and 0.915 for Consumer Engagement. The structural model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2) and bootstrapping. The results show substantial explanatory power, particularly for Consumer Engagement. The model accounts for 55.8% of the variance in Attitude toward AI Advertising and 42.9% of the variance in Brand Trust.

Notably, the model accounts for 82.6%

Table 2 Measurement Model Results

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
AI Transparency (X1)	X1.1	0.775	0.829	0.885	0.660
	X1.2	0.898			
	X1.3	0.724			
	X1.4	0.841			
AI Anthropomorphism (X2)	X2.1	0.806	0.901	0.931	0.772
	X2.2	0.900			
	X2.3	0.913			
	X2.4	0.890			
Perceived Visual Appeal (X3)	X3.1	0.880	0.924	0.946	0.814
	X3.2	0.935			
	X3.3	0.903			
	X3.4	0.890			
Attitude toward AI Advertising (Y1)	Y1.1	0.939	0.940	0.962	0.894
	Y1.2	0.965			
	Y1.3	0.932			
Brand Trust (Y2)	Y2.1	0.959	0.964	0.977	0.933
	Y2.2	0.974			
	Y2.3	0.965			
Consumer Engagement (Y3)	Y3.1	0.887	0.935	0.954	0.838
	Y3.2	0.942			
	Y3.3	0.914			
	Y3.4	0.918			

Source: Research Result, 2026

of the variance in Consumer Engagement, suggesting that the interplay of advertising features and consumer psychological reactions possesses substantial explanatory power for engagement.

The R2 for Consumer Engagement is theoretically important and substantially larger. It demonstrates that the engagement is not dependent on a single feature of AI-generated advertising but on the whole impact of transparency, visual attractiveness, advertising attitude and brand trust. In contrast, the comparatively lower R2 for Brand Trust implies that trust building is more complicated and may entail other elements not included in the present model.

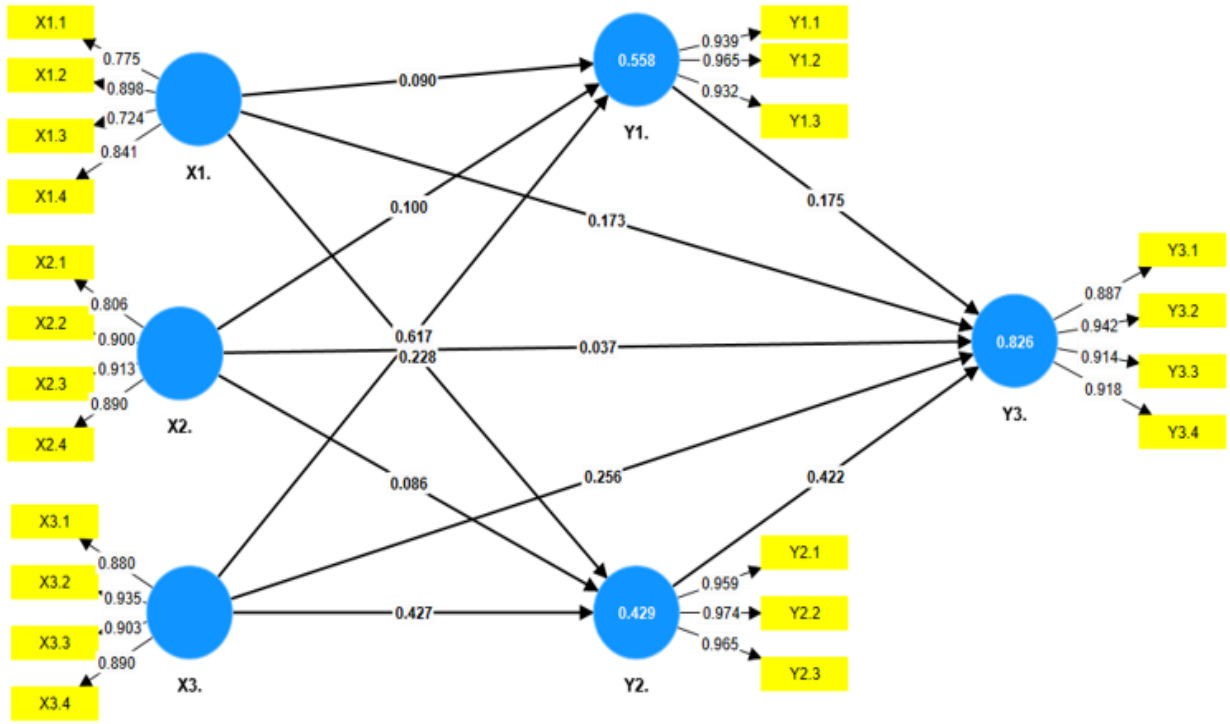
The hypotheses were tested at the 5% level of significance by utilizing the bootstrapping process. Association was regarded to be significant if the t-statistic was above 1.96 and the p value below 0.05. Eleven direct relations were investigated, are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Overall, 7 of the 11 hypotheses were supported, while 4 were rejected. The strongest relationship was found between

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	AI Transparency → Attitude toward AI Advertising	0.090	1.118	0.264	Rejected
H2	AI Transparency → Brand Trust	0.228	3.003	0.003	Supported
H3	AI Transparency → Consumer Engagement	0.173	3.427	0.001	Supported
H4	AI Anthropomorphism → Attitude toward AI Advertising	0.100	1.169	0.242	Rejected
H5	AI Anthropomorphism → Brand Trust	0.086	0.871	0.384	Rejected
H6	AI Anthropomorphism → Consumer Engagement	0.037	0.694	0.488	Rejected
H7	Perceived Visual Appeal → Attitude toward AI Advertising	0.617	9.661	<0.001	Supported
H8	Perceived Visual Appeal → Brand Trust	0.427	6.496	<0.001	Supported
H9	Perceived Visual Appeal → Consumer Engagement	0.256	4.495	<0.001	Supported
H10	Attitude toward AI Advertising → Brand Trust	0.175	3.323	0.001	Supported
H11	Brand Trust → Consumer Engagement	0.422	8.812	<0.001	Supported

Source: Research Result, 2026



Source: Research result, 2026

Figure 2 Structural Model

Perceived Visual Appeal and Attitude toward AI Advertising (β = 0.617), whereas Brand Trust showed the strongest relationship with Consumer Engagement (β = 0.422). AI Anthropomorphism was not significant in any of the three hypothesized relationships.

H1 was not supported. AI Transparency had a positive but non-significant effect on Attitude toward AI Advertising (β = 0.090; *t* = 1.118; *p* = 0.264). This finding suggests that transparency regarding AI usage is not sufficient to make consumers evaluate an AI-generated advertisement more positively. Consumers may recognize and appreciate disclosure about AI involvement, but their overall attitude toward the advertisement appears to depend more strongly on the quality, attractiveness, informativeness, and realism of the advertising content.

This finding is consistent with previous research showing that AI disclosure does not necessarily generate more favorable advertising attitudes. Wortel et al. (2024) found that disclosure of AI use in Instagram advertising could result in less favorable consumer attitudes, indicating that transparency alone does not guarantee a positive advertising response. Similarly, Kirkby et al. (2023) and Yang et al. (2026) demonstrated that the attitudinal effects of AI-generation disclosure vary according to how AI involvement is incorporated into advertising creative, with disclosure producing less favorable advertising and brand attitudes under certain conditions.

The results suggest that AI Transparency has to be distinct than the examination of ads. Transparency largely gives information about the production process, whereas Attitude toward AI Advertising measures the total affective response of consumers to the advertisement. So, telling them that an ad was developed by AI doesn't mean it's going to be more appealing, fun or compelling. These qualitative results further support this interpretation, as participants were more likely to link transparency with honesty, credibility, and brand trust, whereas their evaluation of the advertisement itself was more likely to be linked to visual appeal, creativity, informativeness, realism, and content quality. Therefore, it appears that AI transparency is a more powerful communication cue associated with trust than a direct generator of positive advertising attitude.

H2 was supported, with AI Transparency positively affecting Brand Trust (β = 0.228; t = 3.003; p = 0.003). The contrast between H1 and H2 is particularly noteworthy. Although transparency does not significantly improve consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement itself, it does contribute to their trust in the brand. This suggests that consumers may interpret transparent AI disclosure as a signal of openness and integrity.

The finding is consistent with Wang et al. (2025), who examine transparency and anthropomorphism in generative-AI marketing communication, as well as Qadri and Moustafa (2026), who emphasize the role of AI transparency in shaping consumer responses. Thus, transparency appears to have a more important role in building confidence in the communication source than in directly improving advertising attitude.

H3 was supported. AI Transparency had a positive and significant effect on Consumer Engagement ($\beta = 0.173$; $t = 3.427$; $p = 0.001$). This result indicates that transparency can encourage consumers to pay attention to and interact with AI-generated advertising even though it does not significantly improve their overall attitude toward the advertisement. Consumers may become more curious or motivated to explore content when they understand how AI has been used in its production.

The finding reinforces the multidimensional nature of Consumer Engagement. Engagement is not simply a consequence of liking an advertisement; it may involve attention, emotional interest, interaction, and information seeking. This interpretation is consistent with Hollebeek et al. (2023) and Ma et al. (2022), who conceptualize engagement as encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

The three hypotheses concerning AI Anthropomorphism were not supported. AI Anthropomorphism did not significantly affect Attitude toward AI Advertising ($\beta = 0.100$; $t = 1.169$; $p = 0.242$), Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.086$; $t = 0.871$; $p = 0.384$), or Consumer Engagement ($\beta = 0.037$; $t = 0.694$; $p = 0.488$).

This finding differs from previous studies emphasizing the importance of anthropomorphism in AI interactions. Research by Blut et al. (2021), Cheng et al. (2022), and Li and Suh (2022) for example, demonstrate that human-like perceptions can shape consumer responses to AI-enabled services and technologies.

However, the current result suggests that the influence of anthropomorphism may be context-dependent. When consumers directly interact with an AI agent, human-like characteristics may make the technology feel more familiar or socially present (Chae & Kim, 2026). In AI-generated advertising, however, AI may function primarily as a content-production mechanism rather than as a social actor. Consequently, consumers may focus more on the final advertising output than on whether the technology behind it appears human-like. This provides an important theoretical contribution by demonstrating that anthropomorphism should not be assumed to have a universal positive effect across all AI contexts.

The model most strongly supported H7, with Perceived Visual Appeal having a positive and significant effect on Attitude toward AI Advertising. The size of the association indicated that visual appeal is the most influential antecedent of consumers' sentiments regarding AI-generated advertising. This research indicates that consumers' initial opinion of AI-generated advertising is greatly influenced by what they can quickly notice from the advertisement, particularly its attractiveness, aesthetics, creativity, visual coherence, and overall presentation quality.

In highly competitive social media contexts, consumers are regularly exposed to vast amounts of visual content. The visual qualities of an advertisement can thus constitute an important basis for generating an initial favorable or unfavorable impression.

This was in line with Fang et al. (2026) its application in public art—particularly in urban sculpture—raises fundamental questions regarding aesthetic cognition, emotional engagement, and artistic acceptance. This study proposes and empirically tests a conceptual model to explain how general audiences perceive and evaluate AIGC-generated urban sculptures. Drawing upon Leder et al.'s aesthetic appreciation framework and theories of human–AI trust, we develop a structural equation model (SEM who investigated the role of perceived visual aesthetics of the user and Kumar and Thankachan (2025) who highlighted the significance of visual aesthetics in consumer experience. Riswanto et al. (2024) also emphasizes the importance of visual attractiveness in advertising related customer responses. The present findings, taken together, strengthen the thesis that visual qualities are not only decorative elements but are an integral part of consumers' evaluation processes.

This finding can also be further interpreted when considering AI-generated advertising, as AI allows advertisers to offer highly personalized, creative, and visually sophisticated content. However, the deployment of AI does not automatically lead to a positive consumer reaction. Rather, the value of the technology is the generation of visual material that customers find beautiful, cohesive, relevant and skillfully produced. This interpretation is supported by the FGD data, as participants emphasized that creative and visually beautiful pictures might make them stop scrolling and pay attention to an ad. However, the visual appeal must be complemented by clear information and relation to the advertised goods. So, AI is an enabler of visual inventiveness and the perceived visual quality impacts how consumers rate the finished advertisement.

H8 was supported indicating Perceived Visual Appeal has a positive and significant

effect on Brand Trust. This research expands on the function of visual appeal beyond immediate advertising evaluation, implying that the visual presentation of AI-generated advertising can also impact consumers' impressions about the brand behind the commercial. A visually attractive, consistent and professionally designed advertisement can give indirect signals to consumers about the brand's expertise, quality and capacity to communicate.

This result is consistent with Sufyan Ramish et al. (2023) and Sugunapriya and Ramya (2026) which emphasize the relationship between visual appeal, advertising evaluation, and brand-related responses. The present finding indicates that consumers may use advertising quality as a cue when forming broader judgments about the brand. In other words, the advertisement does not operate independently from the brand; the characteristics of the advertising execution can spill over into consumers' perceptions of the organization responsible for the communication.

However, visual appeal alone must not be understood as adequate to build strong and sustainable brand trust. The qualitative findings give an important qualifier of the quantitative outcome. If the visual depiction was realistic and matched the genuine product, participants stated that appealing AI-generated graphics might raise positive opinions. However, an overdone or unrealistic representation may decrease the credibility and raise doubts about the brand. Therefore, visual appeal creates trust where the attractiveness is coupled with authenticity, correctness and responsible communication.

The distinction is particularly salient for advertising created by AI because generative AI is able to create highly polished graphics that can be better looking than the real attributes of the product. Thus, the strategic worth of visual appeal depends on its ability to grab attention, but also on whether the visual message is perceived as credible by customers. Therefore, the finding suggests that brands should strive for credible visual attractiveness, not attractiveness at the expense of authenticity.

H9 was supported, thus Perceived Visual Appeal positively influences Consumer Engagement. This research shows that visual attractiveness can go beyond consumers' passive judgment of advertising and can inspire more active interaction with the content. If an AI-generated ad is visually appealing, consumers may be more inclined to stop scrolling, pay attention, be inquisitive, seek extra information, or interact with the ad. The result is consistent with Yang et al. (2026) that points out the significance of visual attributes in consumer engagement with short-video marketing, and Ma et al. (2022) that frames engagement as comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions. In this

sense, visual attractiveness can be seen as an initial trigger to move from exposure to attention and further to engagement. Interestingly, the effect of Perceived Visual Appeal on Consumer Engagement is less than on Attitude toward AI Advertising. This is now a potentially significant difference. It suggests that visual beauty is particularly relevant in the initial assessment of advertising by consumers, but engagement is a more complicated response that cannot be defined only by visual appeal. Consumers may view an ad and like it visually but not like it, share it, comment on it, or want to know more about it (Hanaysha & Alhyasat, 2025).

This assumption is validated by the FGD data. Visual beauty was ranked as a significant element encouraging scrolling to halt and initial attention by participants, but they also observed that continuous engagement was based on other aspects, such as message relevancy, helpful information, natural presentation and correct description of the product. The visual appeal function then seems to be simply a mechanism to catch attention, and further involvement depends on whether the advertisement gives sufficient cognitive or emotional value to promote sustained involvement.

H10 was supported, demonstrating that Attitude toward AI Advertising has a favorable and significant effect on Consumer Engagement. This finding implies that consumers who form positive attitudes toward AI-generated advertising are more likely to interact with the advertising content. Consumers may have a positive attitude because they like the advertisement, they are interested in it, they accept it or they think it is good. This can lead them to pay more attention to the advertisement and interact with it more. The conclusion is in line with the wider understanding of consumer involvement as comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions (Ma et al., 2022). A positive advertising attitude can be a crucial psychological step between advertising stimuli exposure and active consumer interaction (Tsiotsou et al., 2024). If consumers consider an advertisement creative, informative, relevant, and correctly performed, their favorable appraisal can boost their propensity to pay greater attention or interact with the content (Jayaprakash, 2025).

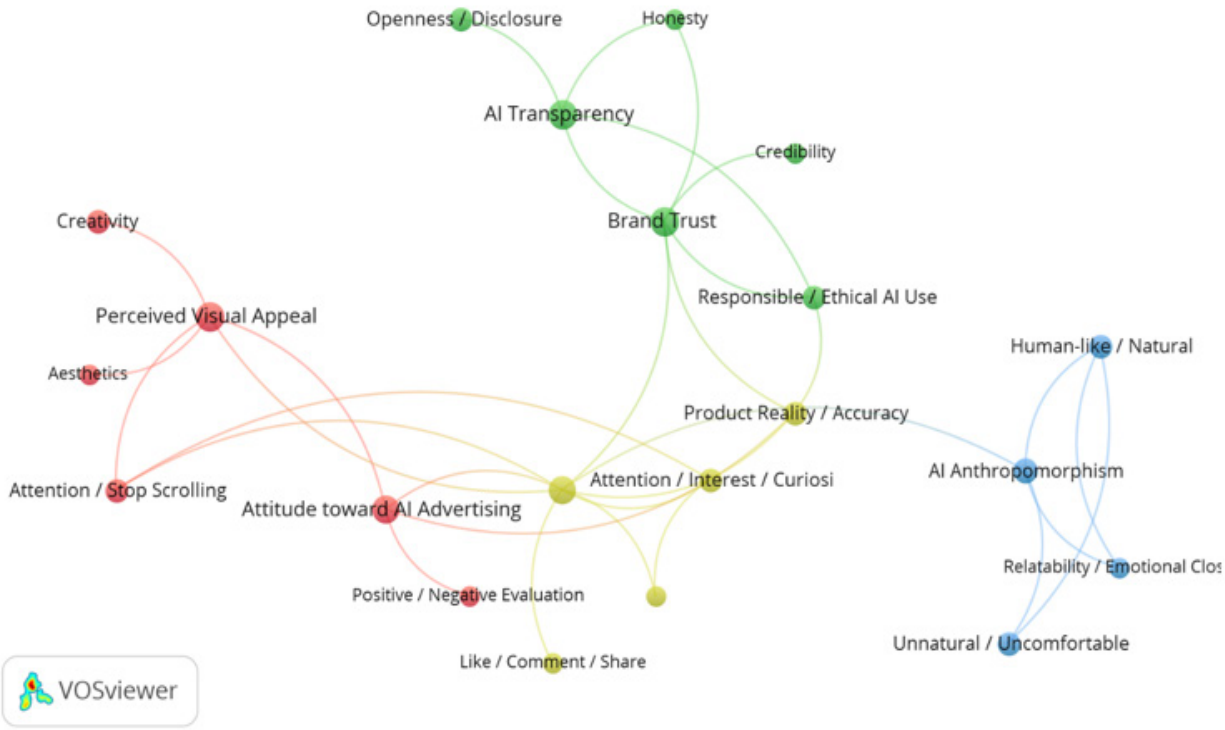
Further explanation of this association is provided by the qualitative findings. Participants reported that their attitude to AI-generated advertising was not just a function of whether AI was utilized or not, but how it was employed. Positive assessments were elicited by creative and informative uses of AI, while negative evaluations could be elicited by content that was seen as unnatural, unrealistic, excessive or deceptive. This means that positive sentiments

occur when AI-generated advertising creates real customer value rather than simply showing technological novelty.

H11 was supported and is one of the strongest correlations in the model. Brand Trust had a substantial effect on Consumer Engagement ($\beta = 0.422$; $t = 8.812$; $p < 0.001$). This finding shows that trust is an important basis for customer involvement with AI-generated advertising. Consumers are more likely to pay attention, show interest, engage with content and want to know more about the business when they view it as trustworthy, reputable and having integrity.

The conclusion is congruent with Arghashi and Arsun Yuksel (2023) who stress the role of cognitive values, motivations and consumer-brand interactions in explaining customer brand engagement. It also aligns with Hollebeek et al. (2023) and Ma et al. (2022) who define engagement as a multi-dimensional customer response.

The comparatively strong coefficient ($\beta = 0.422$) also suggests that brand trust is more relevant than attitude toward AI advertising in explaining Consumer Engagement. This is a very important conclusion, for it shows that although consumers may appreciate an advertisement, faith in the brand behind the advertisement is required for continued involvement.



Source: Research result, 2026

Figure 3 Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA) Map

The Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA) of the focus group conversation, showing the theme linkages that emerged from participants' opinions of AI-generated advertising, is presented in Figure 3. The network is composed of four theme clusters: visual appeal and advertising attitude, AI transparency and brand trust, AI anthropomorphism, and consumer involvement. The nodes represent the major themes and sub-themes extracted from the FGD and the connecting lines illustrate the conceptual relationships between themes.

The first cluster is Perceived Visual Appeal, which is most highly correlated with inventiveness, esthetics and the capacity to attract attention (or stop scrolling). This pattern suggests that visual quality is an important factor in attracting consumer attention. Participants noted that innovative, esthetic, original and well-designed adverts, generated by AI, are more likely to cut through screen scrolling activity and grab customer attention. Perceived Visual Attractiveness has a strong influence on the Attitude toward AI Advertising. This means that AI-generated advertising that are visually attractive will be evaluated more positively. These results support the participants' statements that visual appeal is one of the initial factors to grab attention and that innovative and esthetic images encourage customers to look at the ad more closely.

The second cluster talked about the association between AI Transparency and Brand Trust. AI transparency is about openness/ disclosure of information and honesty and Brand Trust is about credibility and responsible and ethical usage of AI. These patterns imply that transparency is seen not only as disclosure of usage of AI but also as a cue of honesty and responsible communication. Participants responded that open communication regarding the utilization of artificial intelligence can boost impressions that the organization isn't seeking to trick consumers. "But in contrast, if AI is used to make a product look better than it is, it could hurt faith in the brand.

AI Anthropomorphism cluster poles tend to be more nuanced. Anthropomorphized AI has both human/natural-like features and the potential for emotional connection, but also weird or unpleasant feelings. So, humanlike traits are not necessarily well received. Anthropomorphism used in a natural and suitable approach can boost the attractiveness, memorability and emotional engagement of the commercial. However, unnatural or exaggerated expressions, such as those created by persons, may give an uncomfortable impression and detract from the naturalness of the commercials. The heart of this network is the Consumer Engagement Cluster that is connected to attention/interest/curiosity, information

seeking and product reality/accuracy. The trend suggests that engagement is the result of a mix of attention, curiosity, relevant information and perception of product validity. Participants agreed that a fantastic graphic and a message that resonates with the audience can catch instant attention, but an ad is more likely to drive interaction if it also provides genuine, important information. These can include like, commenting or sharing an advert or requesting for further information about the product. A fundamental characteristic of this network is the presence of interlinkages between the distinct clusters. Attention, engagement and AI transparency were associated with brand trust and responsible AI use. Perceptions of visual attractiveness were associated with Similarly, a sequential conceptual pattern was identified in participants' evaluation of an integrated response, where the visual appeal captures initial attention, anthropomorphic elements may provide a sense of familiarity or emotional connection, and transparency helps to establish customer trust.

The quantitative results of PLS-SEM analysis were triangulated with the qualitative results of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) using mixed-method explanatory sequential design. The quantitative analysis supported 7 hypotheses and did not support 4 hypotheses. The FGD then helped to contextualize the results of the quantitative study to understand what the relationships meant. Furthermore, qualitative research on the network shows the thematic relationships between AI transparency, AI anthropomorphism, perceived visual appeal, attitude toward AI-based advertising, brand trust, and consumer engagement. To conclude, the results suggest that the effectiveness of AI-generated advertising is not a function of the sheer existence of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, but of the display and regulation of technology in the advertising communication. In general, the data reveal a pattern where visual appeal attracts initial attention and informs ad evaluation, but transparency, honesty, product correctness, and ethical use of AI develop brand trust and sustained willingness to engage. This is reinforced by the integrative response of the FGD, which distinguishes the functional and temporal functions of the three features connected to AI. Participants reported that visual attractiveness was very important for attracting initial attention, while AI openness was more important for maintaining trust over time. Anthropomorphized traits can make the character more relatable, if they are portrayed in a natural and fitting way. However, the effect is conditional since too much human-likeness might make one uncomfortable.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated customer involvement with AI-generated advertising by combining AI Transparency, AI Anthropomorphism, and Perceived Visual Appeal with Attitude toward AI Advertising and Brand Trust. The results show that customer responses are not consistently driven by the technological aspects of AI generated advertisements. Perceived Visual Appeal was strongly related to Attitude toward AI Advertising, Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement whereas AI Transparency was significantly related to Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement but not to advertising attitude. AI Anthropomorphism, however, was not significantly connected with any of the three outcomes. Consumer Engagement was more strongly related to Brand Trust than to Attitude toward AI Advertising; both variables were significantly correlated with Consumer Engagement. Qualitative data complementing these results suggest that visual appeal first attracts attention, transparency promotes perceptions of openness and credibility, and anthropomorphism elicits mixed reactions depending on its naturalness and relatability.

These findings have practical and societal implications. Businesses should focus on offering AI-generated advertising that is esthetically pleasing, transparent, and real, and that offers relevant information, rather than just possessing human-like AI characteristics. These tactics can help consumers critically evaluate advertising material, make educated decisions, and develop trust in brand communications, while also encouraging more ethical use of AI in advertising. Future study could extend this paradigm to a wider variety of demographic groupings, product categories, social media platforms and cultural situations. Other variables, such as AI literacy, privacy concerns, perceptions of intrusiveness, and cynical attitudes toward advertising, could also be integrated to analyze consumer participation in greater depth. Additionally, researchers might use longitudinal or experimental research methodologies to investigate how customer responses change over time and with repeated encounters with AI generated advertising.

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AI declaration: During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely to assist with language refinement, grammatical correction, and improvement of the clarity and organization of the manuscript. AI tools were not used in the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or development of the scientific conclusions. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript. The use of AI tools was conducted in accordance with the applicable journal policies and ethical standards

Ethical clearance: This study was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki guidelines. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection and before the Focus Group Discussion. The participants were informed about the goal of the study, voluntary participation and confidentiality of the information given. The results were presented without personal identities.

Data availability statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Access to the data is subject to appropriate privacy and confidentiality considerations to protect the identity and information of the research participants.

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