



Research Article

Advertising Students' Attitudes Towards AI and Their Future in The Nigerian Advertising Industry

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the global advertising industry, altering creative processes, job roles, and workforce structures. While AI-driven tools such as ChatGPT and DALL-E enhance efficiency and campaign personalisation, concerns about job displacement and the ethical implications of AI-generated content persist. In Nigeria, the digital transformation of advertising is uneven, with small and medium enterprises relying on manual methods while a select few access advanced AI tools. Advertising students, as future industry professionals, are particularly impacted by these changes. Their career aspirations may be shaped by how they perceive AI's influence on advertising operations, creativity, and job security. This study explores Nigerian advertising students' attitudes toward AI in campaign development, its effect on job prospects, and whether AI is viewed as an opportunity or a threat. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews with 19 students across different educational levels, the research uncovers four key themes: concerns about job security, perceptions of AI's benefits and limitations, evolving industry skill demands, and AI's role in human creativity. Findings reveal a dual perspective—some students fear AI's impact on entry-level jobs, while others see AI as a tool for innovation and efficiency. Ethical concerns, such as AI-generated misinformation and cultural insensitivity, were also highlighted. The study contributes to debates on AI's role in advertising, emphasising the need for human-AI collaboration, regulatory oversight, and adaptive skill development. By addressing these concerns, the advertising industry can ensure AI serves as an enhancer rather than a disruptor of human creativity and career opportunities.

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1. Introduction

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly changed industries across the world, and advertising is no exception. Recent studies show that AI technologies, particularly generative tools such as ChatGPT and DALL-E, are transforming creative work, campaign design, and even workforce structures. For example, Osadchaya et al. [1] highlight how AI creates paradoxical effects in advertising by improving efficiency while at the same time challenging traditional ideas about creativity and professional identity. Similarly, Kumar and Suthar [2] describe AI as a double-edged tool that fuels innovation but also raises ethical concerns, including algorithmic bias and the risk of job loss. Globally, evidence shows that AI has automated routine advertising tasks and encouraged the creation of new specialised roles that demand data analysis and AI skills [3,4]. Industry data indicate that AI-powered advertising spending reached \$370 billion in 2022 and could rise to \$1.3 trillion within the next decade [5]. These shifts have pushed advertising professionals to develop flexible strategies that balance opposing demands, as noted by Tschang and Almirall [6] and supported by the dynamic capability framework [7].

In Nigeria, the advertising industry is also undergoing a rapid digital transformation. Although AI holds great promise for improving campaign personalisation and optimisation [8,9], many small and medium enterprises still depend on manual processes, limiting AI adoption [9]. This digital divide means that only a small portion of advertising professionals use advanced tools, and those who do often face problems such as data privacy risks, cultural mismatch, and ethical transparency [10,11]. Moreover, while global studies call for reskilling to adapt to AI-driven change [12,13], Nigerian practitioners face infrastructural challenges that make such adaptation harder [14].

Within this changing environment, advertising students represent a key group who will shape the industry's future. Their views and career decisions are likely influenced by the growing use of AI in advertising, from creative content generation to task automation. Although some research, such as Arakpogun et al. [15] and Ekanem and Nwagbara [10], has examined AI's wider effects on Nigerian media and communication, little is known about its influence on the career ambitions of advertising students.

Most existing studies focus on operational gains, ethical debates, and industry-level impacts of AI, but few explore how AI-generated content affects students' career decision-making in creative fields. This gap is important because AI's entry into advertising is changing not only current practice but also the skills needed for future roles. As AI takes over some creative functions, students may view it as a threat to traditional human creativity or, on the other hand, as a chance to enhance their creativity and open new career paths.

This study addresses this gap by examining how Nigerian advertising students perceive AI's role in shaping their future careers. It investigates their attitudes towards AI-generated content in campaigns, their sense of job security, their views on the skills required, and whether they see AI as a tool for empowerment or as a possible threat.

1.1. Research Aim

To explore how the advent of AI influences advertising students' career choices and their perceptions of AI's role in the industry.

1.2. Research Objectives

- (1) To explore advertising students' perceptions of AI-generated content in campaign development impacting career opportunities in the industry.
- (2) To explore students' attitudes toward AI-generated content and automation in advertising, including its influence on job security, required skill sets, and industry demand.

(3) To investigate whether advertising students view AI as a tool that enhances their career prospects or as a threat that limits human creative roles in the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1. AI, The Creative Process and Industry Demands

Creativity in advertising is often understood as a search process rather than a sudden spark of genius. Vakratsas and Wang [16] argue that creative ideas can be produced and tested in a structured way using AI. This challenges the traditional belief that creativity is an entirely human quality and instead suggests that it can be assessed by outcomes such as novelty and relevance. Ameen et al. [17] build on this by showing how digital technology has not only automated marketing tasks but also changed how creative work is conceived and executed. In this sense, creativity is measured by its ability to produce original and engaging messages that connect with audiences. AI contributes to this process by widening the pool of possible ideas and enabling a more systematic search for creative solutions.

AI is becoming a central part of creative work. For instance, tools such as Midjourney, described by Hanna [18], can turn simple text prompts into striking images within minutes, a process that would take human designers much longer and cost up to 80% more in resources. Matthews et al. [19] show similar progress with text-to-image systems such as DALL-E 2, which can generate visuals that match human quality standards. Yet, these tools raise concerns about the loss of human presence in creative work. Putri et al. [20] observe that while AI-driven creative optimisation can improve engagement and return on investment sometimes by as much as 30 percent it can also make creative outputs more uniform, reducing the surprise and originality often linked to human imagination.

The discussion around human and machine creativity remains complex. Supporters of AI believe machines can learn from large datasets and produce creative content that even experienced professionals might miss, thereby questioning long-held ideas about creative talent. On the other hand, critics argue that human creativity is tied to emotion, intent, and cultural understanding qualities that AI still finds difficult to replicate [5]. This disagreement is central to debates about whether AI-generated content can ever feel as authentic as human-created work. Although research shows that AI can achieve impressive results and sometimes surpass human ideas in speed and scale, human input is still essential for guiding creative direction and maintaining cultural meaning. In the end, the growing role of AI in advertising prompts a deeper reflection on what creativity truly means and how to balance machine capability with the subtle and irreplaceable qualities of human thought [21].

2.2. Benefits, Limitations and Ethical Considerations of AI-Generated Content in Campaign Development

AI-generated content has quickly changed the way campaigns are developed by improving efficiency, scale, and personalisation in both marketing and political communication. However, these innovations also raise several limitations and ethical concerns. Raut et al. [22] and Pardeshi et al. [23] note that AI helps simplify content creation, cutting costs and reducing manual work. In a case study, Winterstein et al. [24] showed that AI-powered influencers in a cancer awareness campaign gained almost 10,000 recognitions on Instagram with a budget of only €100, greatly reducing the cost per audience reached. This supports Malikireddy's [25] findings that AI-generated content improved campaign effectiveness by 30 percent for a retail grocery brand. Such results demonstrate AI's potential to reshape campaign development, especially for small businesses and nonprofit organisations.

Yet these advantages come with clear limitations. Ratta et al. [26] argue that while AI-generated advertising can boost engagement and sales, it often lacks the emotional connection found in human-created work. Matthews et al. [19] also found that creative professionals felt both impressed and uneasy about AI-generated

visuals, as the technology disrupted established creative processes. Soni [13] expands this critique, observing that although AI increases efficiency and personalisation, it also brings complexity, integration issues, and creative restrictions. AI systems rely on existing data and often struggle to capture current cultural relevance, particularly in countries such as Nigeria where authenticity and local context matter deeply [10].

Ethical issues surrounding AI-generated content are especially serious in the areas of misinformation and disinformation. Haq et al. [27] report that AI is increasingly used in political campaigns to replace absent politicians and manipulate public perception through deepfake videos. Menczer et al. [28] show that AI can mass-produce false yet convincing content, damaging public trust in digital media. This problem has been seen in Nigeria as well. Ekpang et al. [29] found that deepfakes were widely used during the 2023 general elections for propaganda and character attacks. Because Nigeria lacks strong regulations for digital media [30], AI-generated misinformation poses serious risks in an already fragile political environment.

Transparency is another major ethical challenge. Baek et al. [31] discovered that revealing AI involvement in prosocial advertising reduced consumer trust and willingness to donate because of perceived credibility problems. Similarly, Arango et al. [32] found that donors reacted negatively to AI-generated images in charity campaigns. However, Chaisatitkul et al. [33] observed that some consumers viewed AI-generated content in advertising as neutral and effective. These mixed findings suggest that AI's impact on consumer trust depends heavily on context, with transparency playing a decisive role.

In Nigeria, where culture and emotion are central to communication, AI-generated content can easily fall short if not properly localised. Ekanem and Nwagbara [10] found that Nigerian consumers were cautious about AI-driven advertisements, citing worries over authenticity and data privacy. This supports Reshmidilova et al. [34], who identified privacy concerns as a major barrier to AI acceptance in marketing. Odoh [35] further points out that AI adoption in Nigeria could deepen economic inequality and reduce traditional marketing jobs, worsening unemployment.

Despite these challenges, AI's role in campaign development is expected to expand. Applying Rogers' [36] Diffusion of Innovation theory, adoption will likely continue as businesses and political groups pursue efficiency and competitive advantage. However, ethical perspectives such as the Persuasion Knowledge Model [37] warn that as consumers become more aware of AI use, they may grow increasingly sceptical. This is especially important in Nigeria, where trust remains a central issue in digital marketing [10].

2.3. AI as a Complement or a Threat to Human Creativity

Research shows that artificial intelligence can both support and threaten human creativity, a debate that continues globally and within Nigeria. Rahmawati and Sikouonmeu [38] that generative AI tools such as Bard, Writesonic, DALL-E, and Magic Media are now widely used to create marketing content that is fast, efficient, and easily tailored to audience needs. Arslan and Ghazal [39] add that by using Big Data and machine learning, AI can uncover consumer behaviour patterns that inspire creative ideas. However, critics argue that while AI can automate many creative processes, it risks reducing space for genuine human imagination. Matthews et al. [19] found that although DALL-E 2 produces images comparable in quality to those made by humans, focus groups in New Zealand expressed discomfort about AI taking over traditional creative roles.

Raut et al. [22] observe that AI makes it possible to generate personalised and scalable content at incredible speed. For instance, Winterstein et al. [24] reported that AI-driven cancer prevention campaigns achieved about 10,000 recognitions on a €100 budget, costing only €0.006 per audience reached. Yet, Haq et al. [27] and Menczer et al. [28] warn that this efficiency may come with risks such as loss of authenticity, bias, and disinformation. Similarly, Pardeshi et al. [23] and Ratta et al. [26] show that AI-generated content can increase consumer engagement and sales, but Soni [13] and Du et al. (2023) argue that these gains often depend on human oversight and may lead to reduced originality in creative output.

In Nigeria, the situation is even more complex. Ebuka et al. [9] report that many small and medium enterprises still depend on manual processes despite AI's clear advantages. Mohammadi and Jafari [40] and

Baek et al. [31] caution that a lack of transparency in AI-generated content could damage consumer trust. Reshmidilova et al. [34] and Ekanem and Nwagbara [10] emphasise the need for cultural sensitivity and strong data protection to ensure that Nigerian audiences accept AI-based advertising. At the same time, Achuonye and Okwumabua [41] and Ojeih and Ogidi [42] highlight ethical and regulatory challenges that must be tackled to protect human creative work and maintain fairness in the evolving advertising landscape.

2.4. AI's impact on Career Opportunities in the Advertising Industry

AI is transforming career opportunities in advertising in ways that are both promising and challenging, with effects visible globally and in Nigeria. Studies show that generative AI, as described by Osadchaya et al. [1], creates a paradox by improving efficiency and creativity while also disrupting professional identities and traditional job roles. Around the world, AI tools have automated many routine tasks and created new specialised positions that demand skills in data analysis and AI literacy [3,4]. Industry reports show that AI-powered advertising spending reached \$370 billion in 2022 and is expected to rise to \$1.3 trillion within the next decade [5]. These rapid changes require advertising professionals to develop flexible strategies to handle competing demands, as suggested by Tschang and Almirall [6] and supported by the dynamic capability framework [7].

In Nigeria, however, the situation is more complicated. Although AI has the potential to transform campaign personalisation and optimisation [8,9], many small and medium enterprises still rely on manual methods, which limits AI adoption [9]. This digital divide means that only a small group of advertising professionals can access advanced tools, and even they often struggle with issues such as data privacy, cultural relevance, and ethical transparency [10,11]. Moreover, while global research stresses the importance of reskilling to keep up with AI-driven changes [12,13], Nigerian professionals face infrastructural barriers that make adaptation more difficult [14].

Scholars such as Yu and Huang [43] and Panda et al. [44] warn that although AI-generated content is efficient, it risks weakening the emotional and creative value of human input. In addition, ethical and legal issues such as algorithmic bias and lack of transparency in decision-making [2,45] heighten the conflict between technological progress and job stability. For this reason, integrating AI into advertising requires a careful balance that promotes innovation while protecting human creativity and ensuring that new career opportunities remain inclusive, culturally relevant, and ethically sound [46,11].

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Paradigm

This study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through participants' lived experiences [47]. The researcher adopted this stance because perceptions of AI's influence on advertising careers are subjective and depend on how individuals interpret technological change. An interpretivist approach allowed participants' voices to guide meaning rather than imposing fixed categories. As scholars such as Saunders et al. [48] note, interpretivism is particularly useful when studying human experiences shaped by personal, cultural, and contextual factors. By grounding the research in this paradigm, the study focused on understanding students' varied interpretations of opportunity, threat, and creativity rather than quantifying them.

3.2. Study Design

The study used a qualitative descriptive design, chosen for its flexibility and suitability for exploring perceptions without heavy theoretical abstraction [49]. The goal was to capture the depth of students' opinions about AI's role in advertising and to trace how those opinions differ by level of study and experience.

Qualitative inquiry made it possible to explore participants' expressions in their own words, revealing subtle meanings that might be lost in a survey. Semi-structured interviews were ideal for this purpose, as they balanced consistency across respondents with space for deeper probing [50]. This design also reflected the researcher's curiosity about how students negotiate between optimism and anxiety in a rapidly changing creative industry.

3.3. Sampling and Recruitment

The study employed purposive sampling, which is commonly used when participants possess specialised knowledge relevant to the research question [51]. Nineteen advertising students from Nigerian tertiary institutions, polytechnics, universities, and postgraduate schools were selected. The inclusion criteria were simple: participants had to be currently enrolled in advertising or related programmes and have at least basic awareness of AI tools or discussions. Recruitment occurred through academic WhatsApp groups and direct email invitations, reflecting the digital context in which most of these students operate. The sample size of 19 was adequate for thematic saturation, where no new insights were emerging [52]. While the sample was modest, it reflected diverse academic levels, gender, and age ranges, ensuring a balanced view of perceptions.

3.4. Setting

Because participants were dispersed across Nigeria, the study took place in an online setting. This choice reflected both accessibility and the digital literacy of advertising students. Interviews were conducted through Google Meet and WhatsApp video calls, platforms already familiar to participants. The online environment also allowed a degree of flexibility and comfort, encouraging more open and reflective conversations. Although virtual interviewing sometimes limits non-verbal cues, the researcher mitigated this by maintaining conversational tone, visual contact, and follow-up questions to deepen responses.

3.5. Data Collection

Data collection was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol developed from the study's objectives. Each session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The researcher began by establishing rapport, explaining confidentiality, and inviting participants to share freely. As the interviews progressed, the researcher adjusted questions in response to participants' tone and interest sometimes pausing to explore unexpected insights, such as emotional reactions to AI or comparisons with past technological shifts. Reflecting later, the researcher noted that while some respondents were initially cautious, most became animated once they realised that their personal opinions were genuinely valued. The conversations occasionally drifted into storytelling about career dreams and fears, which enriched the data. Field notes captured observations about mood and pauses, adding context beyond words. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's [53] six-step framework for thematic analysis: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing, defining, and writing. The researcher began by reading each transcript multiple times to grasp tone and nuance. Coding was inductive, meaning categories arose from the data rather than a pre-set list. Patterns were identified by clustering similar ideas such as fear of replacement, optimism about efficiency, or debates about creativity. These clusters became candidate themes, later refined through comparison across transcripts. The process was both systematic and reflective. The researcher found it surprisingly challenging to balance participants' optimism with their anxiety, as both co-existed in many interviews. What stood out most was the emotional intensity with which students described AI's "threat" to creativity, suggesting deeper issues of professional identity. Reflexive memos helped track these impressions,

ensuring that interpretation remained grounded in participants' voices rather than researcher bias. MaxQda was used to manage and visualise the coding process, aiding consistency and transparency.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection. Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form, explaining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time. Because interviews were virtual, verbal consent was recorded at the start of each session. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and any identifying information was removed from transcripts. Data were stored on a password-protected device and cloud backup accessible only to the researcher. Participants were also reassured that their views would not affect their academic standing. These steps align with best practices outlined by the British Psychological Society (2021), emphasising respect, autonomy, and data protection in qualitative research.

3.8. Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

The researcher approached the study as both an academic and a small business owner in Nigeria who regularly engages with digital marketing tools. This insider position offered several advantages: a shared cultural understanding, familiarity with the advertising ecosystem, and the ability to frame questions in language that resonated with students. As Finlay (2012) suggests, such proximity can build trust and elicit richer, more authentic responses. Participants often spoke more openly once they recognised the researcher as someone who understood their professional context. However, insider status also carried risks of assumed understanding and bias. The researcher remained alert to this by keeping reflexive notes and seeking to interpret participants' meanings rather than projecting personal experiences onto them. Occasionally, the researcher found it challenging to bracket personal enthusiasm for AI as a creative tool, especially when participants expressed strong fear or scepticism. To address this, deliberate pauses and clarifying prompts were used during interviews to ensure participants' voices remained primary.

4. Results

4.1. Demographics Summary of Respondents

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	Number of Respondents (N = 19)	Percentage (%)
Education Level	Polytechnic	5	26.3%
	Undergraduate	9	47.4%
	Postgraduate	5	26.3%
Age Group	18 – 22 years	7	36.8%
	23 – 27 years	8	42.1%
	28 years and above	4	21.1%
Gender	Male	10	52.6%
	Female	9	47.4%

This study examines how Nigerian advertising students at different academic levels perceive AI's impact on career opportunities in the industry. The sample consists of 19 respondents: 5 polytechnic students (26.3%), 9 undergraduates (47.4%), and 5 postgraduates (26.3%). The age distribution shows that 36.8% of the respondents are between 18–22 years, 42.1% fall within 23–27 years, and 21.1% are 28 years or older. Regarding gender, 52.6% are male, while 47.4% are female, ensuring a balanced perspective on AI's role in the advertising industry. The research explores students' perceptions of AI-generated content, its influence on job

security and required skill sets, and whether they see AI as an opportunity or a threat to creative roles. By understanding these diverse viewpoints, this study aims to provide insights into how AI is shaping the future of advertising careers among Nigerian students.

4.2. Themes

Theme 1: AI's Impact on Job Security and Industry Demand

The discussion surrounding AI's impact on job security and industry demand in advertising sparked a range of reactions among respondents, with many expressing concerns over their future in the field. While a majority saw AI as a disruptive force threatening traditional roles, a few viewed it as an opportunity rather than a danger.

Fear of Replacement and Career Uncertainty

For many respondents, AI represents a significant threat to job security, with concerns that it may reduce the demand for human creativity in advertising. *"If AI can generate ad copy, design layouts, and even analyse consumer behaviour better than we can, then what's left for us?"* Iniobong asked, reflecting a sentiment echoed by several others. Kufre agreed, pointing out that *"agencies might start hiring fewer creatives because AI tools can produce high-quality content instantly and at a lower cost."*

Belema, an undergraduate, further stressed that *"automation means fewer entry-level positions. Companies will rely on AI to handle repetitive tasks, which means fewer internships and junior roles for fresh graduates."* This concern was also raised by Edidiong, who noted, *"We're told to be innovative, but what happens when AI becomes more innovative than us? It's like competing with something that never gets tired."*

Others, like Ebiere, worried about long-term career stability: *"Even if AI doesn't take over completely, the industry will favour those who know how to use it, which might leave some of us struggling to stay relevant."*

Despite these concerns, some respondents believed that AI, while transformative, could not completely replace human input. Oyinye, a postgraduate, remarked, *"AI can generate ideas, but it lacks the human touch – the emotional intelligence, cultural nuance, and originality that make advertising truly compelling."*

Sotonye added that AI's capabilities are still limited: *"Yes, AI can write copy and create visuals, but can it truly understand human emotions or societal trends the way we do? Creativity isn't just about assembling words and images; it's about evoking feelings."*

Idara supported this perspective, arguing that AI should be seen as a tool rather than a competitor: *"The best advertising will come from humans who learn to work with AI, not those who fear it. If we integrate AI into our work rather than resist it, we can become even more effective."*

AI's Potential to Create New Opportunities

While a majority worried about job security, a few respondents saw AI's rise as an opportunity rather than a threat. Oghenekaro was optimistic, stating, *"AI is changing the industry, but that doesn't mean jobs will disappear—it just means they'll evolve. New roles will emerge, and those who adapt will thrive."*

Ekerette, another postgraduate, pointed out that AI might even lead to greater demand for advertising professionals: *"More businesses are using AI-driven marketing, but they still need people to oversee campaigns, interpret data, and inject creativity where AI falls short."*

A smaller but notable group of respondents questioned whether AI's impact on advertising jobs would be as dramatic as others feared. Bassey dismissed some of the concerns, stating, *"Technology has always changed industries, but people find ways to adjust. Advertising won't disappear just because AI is involved."*

Fubara similarly argued, *"There's a lot of panic about AI taking jobs, but let's be realistic—businesses still value human judgment, storytelling, and originality."* Tamuno added, *"AI is just another tool. People said the same thing about digital marketing killing traditional advertising, yet both coexist today."*

Esit took a more pragmatic approach, stating, *"I don't think AI will make creatives obsolete; it will just change how we work. We'll still be needed, just in different ways."*

While most respondents expressed significant concerns about AI's potential to replace human roles in advertising, a smaller group remained hopeful or unconvinced that the disruption would be as severe as others predicted. The general consensus was that the industry is shifting, and those who adapt to AI will have a better chance of securing their place in the future job market.

Theme 2: Perceived Benefits and Limitations of AI in Advertising

The discussion on AI's role in advertising revealed a mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism among respondents. While many highlighted its efficiency and creative potential, others raised concerns about originality, over-reliance, and ethical implications.

Enhancing Creativity, Efficiency, and Productivity

Several respondents saw AI as a game-changer in advertising, particularly in streamlining workflows and expanding creative possibilities. *"AI speeds up everything,"* Okiemute observed. *"Instead of spending hours brainstorming or editing, AI tools can generate multiple ad concepts in minutes... That kind of efficiency is invaluable."*

Sotonye agreed, arguing that AI allows advertisers to focus on strategy rather than execution: *"Creative professionals won't be stuck on tedious tasks like resizing images or A/B testing ad copies... AI takes care of that, so we can focus on bigger, more innovative ideas."*

Ekerette added that AI-driven personalisation is revolutionising digital marketing: *"AI doesn't just create content; it helps tailor it to specific audiences... From analysing consumer behaviour to predicting trends, AI enhances our ability to craft messages that truly resonate."*

Belema noted AI's ability to remove creative blocks: *"Sometimes, you just get stuck... AI can generate ideas we wouldn't have thought of, sparking new directions for campaigns."*

Edidiong extended this thought by arguing that AI doesn't replace creativity but enhances it: *"The misconception is that AI kills originality... In reality, it offers a foundation for us to build on. We still bring the final creative touch."*

Even those cautious about AI's rise acknowledged its utility. Bassey remarked, *"I'm not saying AI is perfect, but let's be honest—it cuts down workload significantly... A campaign that used to take weeks can now be executed in days."*

Limitations and Potential Drawbacks

However, not all respondents were fully convinced of AI's benefits, and many pointed out critical limitations. Kufre was sceptical of AI-generated content's quality: *"AI can generate words and images, sure... But can it create something truly unique? A lot of AI-produced ads feel formulaic."*

Ibiso expanded on this, arguing that AI's reliance on existing data could lead to unoriginality: *"AI can only remix what already exists... It can't have a 'eureka' moment the way a human can."*

For some, over-reliance on AI was a concern. Abiye warned, *"If agencies start depending too much on AI, we risk losing touch with authentic storytelling... Creativity isn't just about efficiency; it's about human experience."*

Tamuno was particularly critical of AI's limitations in cultural sensitivity: *"AI lacks the depth to understand cultural nuances properly... A joke that works in one country could be offensive in another, and AI doesn't always catch that."*

Ekpeyoung raised ethical concerns: *"There's also the issue of data privacy... AI relies on massive amounts of user data who's making sure that's handled ethically?"*

Fubara took a balanced stance, acknowledging AI's benefits but warning against its blind adoption: *"AI is a tool, not a replacement... It can assist, but it should never dictate creative decisions. We have to remember that."*

The discussion revealed that while many students see AI as an asset that improves efficiency and expands creative potential, concerns remain about originality, ethical use, and over-reliance. AI is shaping advertising, but its role remains complementary rather than a complete substitute for human creativity.

Theme 3: Evolving Skill Sets and Industry Requirements

The rise of AI in advertising has sparked a debate among students about how industry demands are shifting. While many acknowledged the need for new skills, others were sceptical about AI fundamentally changing the profession. The discussion centred on two key areas: the growing need for technical expertise alongside creativity and the debate over whether AI would significantly alter core industry requirements.

The Growing Need for Technical Expertise and Hybrid Skills

Many respondents stressed that AI is transforming the skill sets required in advertising, pushing professionals to combine creative abilities with technical proficiency. *"It's no longer enough to be just a great writer or designer,"* Edidiong stated. *"Employers now want people who understand AI tools, data analytics, and automation... Creativity alone won't cut it anymore."*

Sotonye expanded on this, arguing that the industry is shifting towards a hybrid model: *"The best advertisers will be those who can bridge the gap between human intuition and AI-driven insights... Understanding algorithms, machine learning, and AI-generated content will give us a competitive edge."*

Okiemute agreed, adding that *"AI isn't just assisting creativity; it's shaping how campaigns are built. If we don't learn how to use AI for audience targeting, performance tracking, and content personalisation, we'll be at a disadvantage."*

Others, like Belema, believed that AI literacy would soon become a basic requirement: *"Knowing how to work with AI won't be optional—it will be expected... Just like we had to adapt to digital marketing, we'll have to adapt to AI-driven advertising."*

Kufre suggested that AI would push advertising professionals to focus on higher-level strategy: *"Since AI can handle repetitive tasks like data processing and automated content generation, we'll need to develop skills that AI lacks—like emotional intelligence, brand storytelling, and complex problem-solving."*

Even those who expressed concerns about AI agreed on the importance of adapting. *"I don't love the idea of AI taking over certain aspects of advertising,"* Ibisso admitted, *"but we can't ignore it... The industry is evolving, and we have to evolve with it."*

Debating AI's Impact on Core Industry Requirements

Despite these perspectives, some respondents questioned whether AI would truly redefine advertising skills. Bassey was unconvinced, arguing, *"People keep saying we need to learn coding and data science, but do we really? Advertising is still about ideas, storytelling, and persuasion... AI can't replace that."*

Tamuno shared this scepticism: *"We're acting like AI will completely change the game, but will it? Agencies still need human creativity, originality, and cultural understanding... AI can assist, but it can't lead."*

Ekpeyoung was also doubtful about AI's long-term impact, saying, *"Every industry evolves, but it doesn't mean we have to change everything... AI will support advertising, not replace the fundamental skills we already use."*

Fubara took a balanced stance, acknowledging AI's usefulness while warning against overestimating its influence: *"Yes, AI will make certain tasks easier, but at the end of the day, clients still want human insight, emotional depth, and real-world experience... AI can't fully replicate that."*

While most students recognised the increasing importance of AI literacy and hybrid skill sets in advertising, others remained sceptical, believing that creativity, strategic thinking, and human insight would remain the industry's core requirements. The consensus was that AI is shaping advertising, but professionals who blend creative and technical skills will have the greatest advantage in the evolving job market.

Theme 4: Human Creativity vs. AI-Generated Content

As AI continues to play a growing role in advertising, students expressed a range of views on its impact on human creativity. While many argued that AI lacks the originality and emotional depth of human creativity, others saw it as a useful tool that could complement creative professionals rather than replace them. However, some questioned whether AI's involvement would truly reshape the industry's reliance on human talent.

The Irreplaceable Role of Human Creativity

Many respondents were firm in their belief that AI could never fully replace human creativity in advertising. *"AI can generate content, but can it generate ideas? Real, innovative, boundary-pushing ideas?"* Idara questioned. *"Creativity isn't just about putting words or images together, it's about context, emotion, and cultural relevance, things AI still struggles with."*

Sotonye expanded on this, stating, *"A campaign isn't just a collection of well-structured sentences and eye-catching visuals. It's about storytelling, evoking emotions, and understanding human experiences... AI can replicate patterns, but it can't truly connect with an audience the way a human can."*

Belema also emphasised the depth of human creativity, adding, *"AI relies on data from past works, but groundbreaking campaigns come from new, unpredictable ideas... AI can remix, but it can't create something entirely original."*

Okiemute saw AI as a tool rather than a creator: *"AI is useful for speeding up production, but it doesn't have creative instinct. A great idea comes from inspiration, intuition, and sometimes even random life experiences things AI doesn't have."*

Others argued that human creativity is what makes advertising unique. *"People don't connect with ads because they're efficient,"* Kufre said. *"They connect because they feel something joy, nostalgia, excitement. AI can structure a campaign, but it can't inject it with true emotion."*

Ebiere echoed this sentiment, saying, *"Brands want to stand out, not blend in. AI works within set patterns, but the best campaigns break the rules... That's something only human creativity can do."*

AI's Potential to Reshape Creative Roles

However, some students believed AI's impact on creativity should not be underestimated. Fubara argued that *"AI is already generating compelling content, and it's only going to get better... It might not replace human creatives, but it will definitely change how we work."*

Esit pointed out that AI is already performing tasks once thought to be exclusively human: *"AI-generated art, music, and copywriting are improving... We can't just dismiss it. It might not have emotions, but it learns from the best creative works and adapts."*

Ekpeyoung also believed AI would play a bigger role than many expected: *"We're focusing too much on what AI can't do instead of what it can... If AI keeps evolving, who's to say it won't reach a point where it's producing better content than humans?"*

Tamuno remained cautious but acknowledged AI's usefulness: *"It's not about AI replacing creatives, but about creatives needing to adapt... The best advertisers will be those who know how to work with AI, not against it."*

Most students agreed that AI lacks the emotional intelligence and originality required for true creativity, but some acknowledged its growing influence on advertising. While human creativity remains at the heart of advertising, the role of AI cannot be ignored, and its impact will depend on how the industry chooses to integrate it.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1. Comparing Results with Literature

One of the most striking areas of concern is job security, with many respondents expressing anxiety about AI reducing demand for human creatives. Iniobong's concern that AI can generate copy, design layouts, and even analyse consumer behaviour better than humans reflects a fear echoed by several scholars. Matthews et al. [19] argue that AI-generated content is not just an assistant but a potential replacement for human creativity in some areas, particularly in campaign production. Ford et al. [21] further highlight how AI-driven advertising spending is expected to reach \$1.3 trillion within a decade, underscoring the rapid shift towards automation. Belema and Edidiong's worries about AI reducing entry-level positions align with these projections, reinforcing the fear that junior roles in advertising may become obsolete.

However, other respondents challenge this assumption, believing that AI will create new opportunities rather than eliminate jobs. Oghenekaro's argument that jobs will evolve rather than disappear aligns with the views of Putri et al. [20], who suggest that while AI alters traditional workflows, it simultaneously increases demand for professionals who can interpret AI-driven insights. Similarly, Bassey's dismissal of AI-induced job losses resonates with Campbell et al. [56], who argue that technological change has historically transformed industries without eradicating them. This divergence in views suggests that students' anxieties may stem from uncertainty rather than inevitable displacement. It also reflects the broader divide in the literature, where some scholars emphasise AI's potential to enhance human capabilities while others warn of its disruptive consequences.

The debate over AI's role in creativity is another contested area. Some students, such as Sotonye and Idara, argue that AI lacks the human touch, emotional intelligence, and cultural nuance that define truly compelling advertising. This aligns with the concerns raised by Rodgers [36], who warns that AI-driven creativity may lead to homogenised brand communication. Similarly, Abou Shanab and Fayad [57] stress that while AI can optimise creative processes, it risks oversimplification and standardisation. The belief that AI lacks originality is reinforced by Ibisso's argument that AI merely remixes existing ideas rather than generating truly innovative concepts. This perspective echoes the views of Huh et al. [5], who caution that AI's reliance on historical data limits its ability to produce groundbreaking content.

However, other students challenge this scepticism, viewing AI as a tool that enhances rather than diminishes creativity. Edidiong's assertion that AI provides a foundation for human creatives to build upon is supported by Vakratsas and Wang [16], who argue that creativity is increasingly a data-driven search process rather than a mystical spark of genius. Similarly, Ekerette's enthusiasm for AI-driven personalisation aligns with the findings of Ameen et al. [17], who highlight AI's ability to craft targeted, engaging content. The optimism expressed by respondents like Esit and Tamuno, who see AI as a complement to human creativity rather than a replacement, suggests that attitudes toward AI's role in advertising depend on how one perceives creativity itself either as an entirely human endeavour or as a process that can be augmented by technology.

The divergence in perspectives is also evident in discussions on skill sets and industry demands. Many students recognise the growing need for AI literacy, with respondents such as Edidiong and Okiemute arguing that advertisers must combine creative skills with technical expertise. This aligns with the literature, where scholars like Sharma et al. [58] and Gao et al. [59] emphasise the importance of machine learning and data analytics in modern advertising. The belief that AI will push advertising professionals toward strategic and high-level creative roles, as suggested by Kufre, is consistent with the views of Nwachukwu and Affen [60], who highlight the evolving nature of creative work in an AI-driven industry.

However, some respondents remain sceptical about the extent to which AI will reshape industry requirements. Bassey's assertion that advertising will always be about ideas, storytelling, and persuasion contradicts the literature that emphasises AI's increasing influence. Tamuno's belief that AI will not fundamentally alter the industry echoes the views of scholars like Qin and Jiang [61], who argue that while AI optimises campaign management, traditional creative frameworks remain intact. This divergence highlights an important tension: while AI is undoubtedly changing advertising, the degree to which it will redefine industry roles remains a subject of debate.

Ethical concerns surrounding AI-generated content further complicate the discussion. Respondents like Ekpeyoung and Tamuno worry about AI's inability to understand cultural nuances, a concern mirrored in the literature by Promsombut et al. [62], who identify gaps in emotional depth and authenticity in AI-generated advertising. Similarly, Ekpang et al. [29] warn of AI's role in misinformation, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. The broader concern about AI's ethical implications, raised by scholars such as Odoh [35], aligns with the apprehensions expressed by students who fear AI-driven advertising may prioritise efficiency over integrity.

Despite these concerns, AI's role in career prospects is not entirely negative. Many students acknowledge that AI is creating new opportunities, particularly in data analysis, automation management, and AI-driven

marketing. This view is supported by scholars like Adeyinka et al. [63], who argue that AI is fostering the emergence of new specialisations. However, the challenge, as pointed out by respondents like Esit and Fubara, is whether these new roles will be accessible to all, or whether they will disproportionately benefit those with technical expertise. This aligns with the concerns of Ekanem and Nwagbara [10], who highlight infrastructural and educational barriers to AI adoption in Nigeria. The unequal distribution of AI-related opportunities suggests that the benefits of AI in advertising may not be universally experienced, further contributing to the mixed reactions among students.

5.2. Implication for Practice

The findings suggest that advertising professionals must strategically integrate AI into creative and strategic processes while preserving the human elements that make advertising compelling. The mixed perceptions among students highlight a tension between AI's efficiency and its perceived threat to human creativity and job security. Research suggests that AI-driven content generation has the potential to streamline workflows and improve personalisation [20], yet concerns over its lack of originality and cultural sensitivity remain valid [36]. This implies that agencies must prioritise AI literacy and data analytics training while maintaining human oversight to ensure content authenticity. Additionally, the fear of job displacement, as echoed in broader discussions on automation [19], suggests that organisations should focus on creating hybrid roles that blend AI expertise with human creativity. Furthermore, regulatory bodies must address ethical concerns, including AI's role in misinformation and biased content [29], reinforcing the need for transparent and responsible AI use in advertising.

5.3. Implication for Theory

The findings challenge traditional advertising theories that position creativity as an exclusively human domain. The debate over AI's capacity to generate original content aligns with Vakratsas and Wang's [16] argument that creativity is evolving into a systematic, data-driven process rather than an intuitive human skill. However, the students' concerns over AI's lack of emotional depth support Rodgers' [36] view that machine-generated content risks homogenising brand communication. This contradiction suggests that existing creativity theories must be expanded to incorporate AI-human collaboration rather than viewing AI as merely a supplementary tool. Additionally, the fear of job displacement contradicts adaptive labour models, which argue that industries evolve rather than shrink in response to technological change [56]. Instead, the findings align with research by Ameen et al. [17], which highlights the growing need for hybrid skill sets that merge creative intuition with AI-driven analytics. A revised theoretical framework must, therefore, account for AI's dual role as both an enabler and disruptor of advertising creativity and career trajectories.

6.0. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

The findings reveal a complex and often contradictory perception of AI's role in advertising careers, highlighting both its potential benefits and significant challenges. While AI is seen as a tool that enhances efficiency and expands creative possibilities, many students remain deeply concerned about job displacement, the erosion of human creativity, and ethical implications. This reflects broader academic debates on whether AI is an enabler of innovation or a disruptor of traditional advertising roles. The divide in perspectives suggests that AI's impact will depend on how the industry chooses to integrate and regulate it. Adaptability, AI literacy, and a balanced approach that combines technology with human insight will be critical in shaping future careers. The study underscores the need for advertising professionals to embrace AI while maintaining the originality,

emotional depth, and strategic thinking that machines cannot replicate. Ultimately, AI's influence in advertising is inevitable, but its success will hinge on how well human expertise and machine efficiency are integrated.

6.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

This study is limited by its small sample size of 19 respondents, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to a broader population of advertising students in Nigeria. Additionally, the study focuses only on students' perceptions, without incorporating insights from industry professionals or employers, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI's real-world impact. Further research should expand the sample size to include a wider demographic and explore perspectives from advertising practitioners, recruiters, and educators. Longitudinal studies could also examine how students' perceptions evolve as they transition into the workforce, offering deeper insights into AI's career impact.

Author's Contributions

Uka Uka Nwagbara designed the research framework and led data collection and analysis. He also drafted the initial manuscript and coordinated revisions. Chioma Martha Obidozie contributed to the literature review and supported data interpretation. Daramfon Ime Okon conceived the study, assisted with interview transcription, coding, and theme development. Precious Ihunanya Ukeje supported participant recruitment and helped review ethical procedures and findings. All authors contributed to refining the arguments, improving clarity, and revising the manuscript for readability. Each author reviewed and approved the final version of the article and agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

This study received ethical approval from the **University of Uyo Health Research Ethics Committee (UNIUYO-IHREC)** under the protocol number **UU/CHS/IHREC/VOL.1/107**. All research procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the relevant guidelines and regulations, specifically the **Declaration of Helsinki**. Participants' confidentiality was maintained, and informed consent was obtained from all individuals prior to their participation in the study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study. Each participant received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to decline or withdraw at any point without penalty. All participants provided written consent prior to participation. Where participants were under legal age or required additional authorization, informed consent was also obtained from their legal guardians. The consent process complied with the standards and protocol approved by the University of Uyo Health Research Ethics Committee (UNIUYO-IHREC).

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