

Why AI slop is losing its cool with audiences

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There's a growing chasm between brands becoming enamoured with the novelty and cost-efficiency of AI-generated content and audiences being fatigued by it all. How can they navigate the balance between AI assistance and genuine human touch amid a rising distrust of AI slop?

AUTHORS

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LOCATIONS:

UNITED KINGDOM
UNITED STATES

GENERATIONS:

GEN Z (BORN 1997-2010)
GEN Y (BORN 1982-1996)
BOOMERS (BORN
1947-1966)

SECTORS:

TECHNOLOGY
MEDIA AND ENTERTAIN-
MENT



EXPERTS

Rankin

Mayra Ruiz-McPherson

HIGHLIGHTS

- 01** Audiences are becoming exhausted with the increased volume of AI output online, leaving many left scrolling in a hypervigilant state, guessing if content is real or synthetic
- 02** As many brands utilise the same generative tools trained on similar data sets and programmed for similar optimisation goals, content outputs trend towards homogeneity, with a flattening effect visible across platforms
- 03** Human-made content that creates a real exchange between author and audiences is regaining value as a marker of intention, taste and truth, as audiences seek out originality and uniqueness

DATA

- The majority of Britons are uncomfortable with the idea of AI being used for social media posts (**61%**), written articles (**55%**), video (**54%**), imagery (**52%**) and audio (**52%**)
- **55%** of social media users in the US, UK and Australia say they're more likely to trust brands that publish human-generated content, with the number rising to **62%** for Gen Y
- **55%** of Gen Z in the US are not okay with brands using AI-generated models, with **63%** of respondents viewing it as inauthentic

SCOPE

In 2024, UK fashion magazine Sheer Luxe faced criticism over its new staff hire: an AI fashion and lifestyle editor named 'Reem' created by the company. Described as an "[AI tastemaker & broadcaster](#)", the publication was called out by readers who were incensed by the brand's decision to create an "AI woman of colour as staff instead of hiring one". [1] This signalled a wider frustration among audiences who are growing tired of 'AI slop': low-effort, repetitive and synthetic content, which is dominating social feeds and platforms. [2]

The onslaught of AI content is fast becoming a cause of concern for many – in fact, most Britons are discomfited with the idea of AI being used for social media posts (61%), written articles (55%), video (54%), imagery (52%) and audio (52%). [3] Most recently, McDonald's felt the anti-AI sentiment after pulling its AI-generated Christmas advert in the Netherlands, titled "The Most Terrible Time of the Year", following online criticism that it ruined the Christmas spirit with "creepy" and "uncanny-looking" characters. [4] "Brands often aim for emotional connection because that's what drives engagement," says Mayra Ruiz-McPherson, an AI psychologist and executive director of The CyberPsych Institute. "When content feels automated or low-intent, it undermines that very objective by making emotional connection harder." [5]

The growing backlash isn't anti-technology but a reaction to the cognitive and emotional overload that AI-generated sameness creates. In 2025, 72% of people already felt that most brands are indistinguishable, and over half of ads fail to evoke any emotion. [6] AI escalates this issue, with Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign highlighting how generative systems consistently produce the same images of Westernised archetypes when prompted for a beautiful woman. [7] "When these systems producing AI slop are all following that same mechanism, then the variety starts to disappear," explains Ruiz-McPherson. "Now there's a synthetic uniformity to the content that's being produced, and over time, the very thing that allows our brain to get excited about differentiators diminishes." [5] While people struggle to filter an internet saturated with infinite filler, human-made content is regaining value as a marker of intention, taste and truth. Following the backlash to its [2024 'Crush' ad](#), Apple switched strategy, tapping into the value of human-made craft with two adverts using handmade puppets and practical effects, while explicitly avoiding CGI or AI. [8][9] This is part of a wider shift whereby people gravitate towards creators, brands and platforms that restore originality, context and human authorship.

"Most art is based on life experience," says British photographer Rankin, who launched [FAIK OFF](#) magazine as an interrogation of the role of human creativity in the AI era. "That's why photography, painting, art and sculpture is so important, because there's a real exchange happening between subject and creator." [10] In a content landscape flooded with AI imagery, text and videos that fail to inspire creativity, how can brands restore trust and rebuild genuine connection with their audiences?

CONTEXT

COGNITIVE OVERLOAD

Just a few years ago, a flood of '[fake news](#)' content populating the internet drew major concern from those who grew anxious about their ability to decipher truth from fiction. In 2026, with AI slop populating feeds, hypervigilance has increased tenfold. Audiences describe feeling exhausted, or tricked, unable to tell real from synthetic due to the increase in volume, with 61% now questioning whether online content is real "often or almost always". [11] "In terms of psychological impact, AI slop does contribute to attention fatigue," says Ruiz-McPherson. "Human attention is complex and finite, and low-effort content can begin to weaken credibility," she says. "People start pausing before they engage and reassess whether something is worth their time and attention." [5] To appease user backlash against AI-generated content, Pinterest even had to introduce a [GenAI Filter](#), enabling users to opt out of AI-generated content in certain categories. [12]

For many, AI slop symbolises the collapse of internet goodwill – it wastes time, drains emotional bandwidth and amplifies the sense that the digital landscape is becoming unmanageable. In the travel industry, 83% of Americans are anxious about AI-generated images making it harder to tell what's real, leading many to cross-reference 'picture-perfect' destinations with raw Google Maps photos to verify what the destination actually looks like. [13] This mistrust has even led Icelandair to create its "This is not AI" campaign, which reassures travellers that the images showing Iceland's natural beauty are authentic and not manipulated. [14] "The internet is already a high-misinformation marketplace," explains Ruiz-McPherson. "There are elevated levels of mistrust, and when AI slop is added, some users who once enjoyed skimming online content shift into a more vigilant, evaluative mode." [5]

People are now gravitating towards slower-paced, human-curated spaces that feel more trustworthy and intentional, and less cognitively taxing. After Instagram announced it would train its AI on user images in 2024, there was an exodus en masse to 'no AI' portfolio and social platform Cara, with its user base going from 40,000 users to 650,00 within days. [15] In the music industry, Bandcamp has become the first major music platform to ban AI content so that fans have confidence that the music they find on Bandcamp was created by humans. [16] "When content shows low discernment because there's minimal human involvement, the burden of discernment shifts to the audience," points out Ruiz-McPherson. "This isn't a reflection of their intelligence or taste; it's simply that the audience is the one left to sort through the slop." [5] For years, brands have been encouraged to flood social feeds to appear 'always on', but once audiences clock AI-generated slop, it feels lazy and disingenuous, quietly undermining the trust and emotional connection brands hope to earn.



Human-made content has now become more valuable, as seen with the backlash against Apple's 2024 'Crush' ad

Uncrush | Samsung (2024)

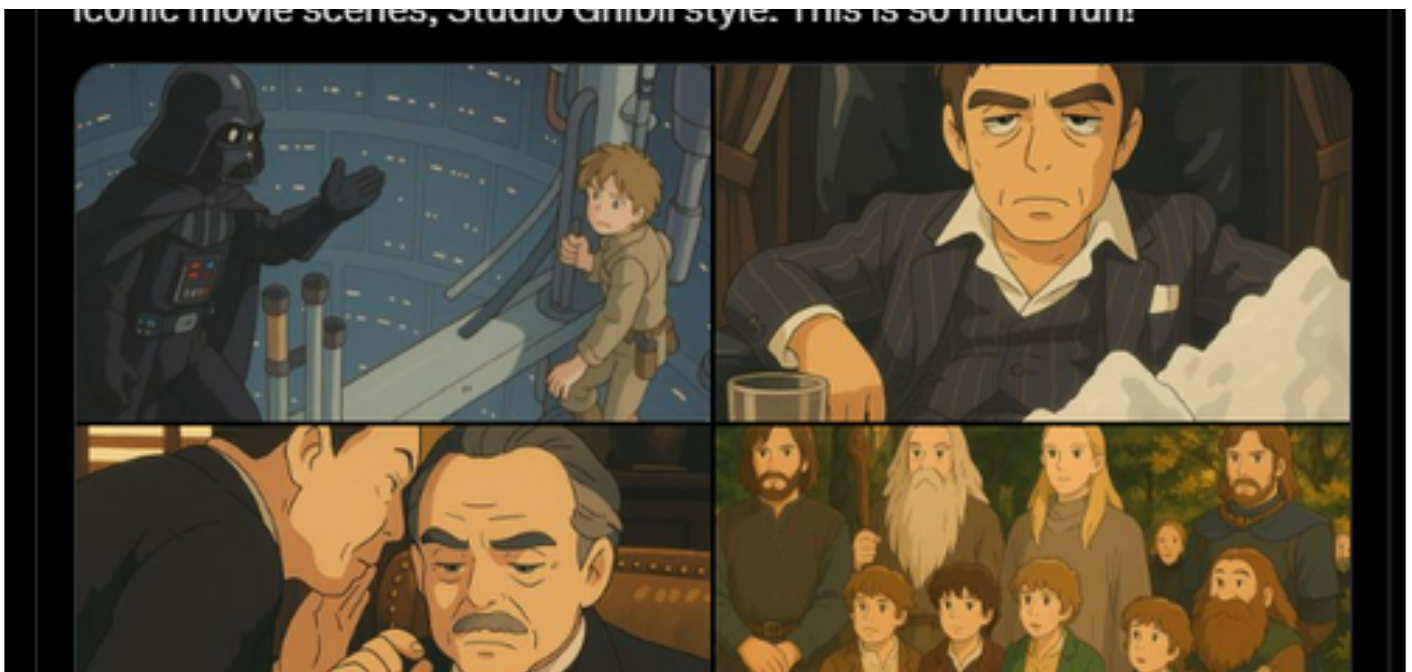
THE DEATH OF ORIGINALITY

From animated [Ghibli-style political propaganda](#) to repetitive Skibidi-adjacent memes, generative AI outputs often fail to generate uniqueness or novelty. AI imagery and storytelling often reproduce stereotypes, cultural biases and highly similar narrative structures across diverse prompts, reinforcing homogeneity rather than diversity. [17] This has led to a loss of creative diversity, with 79% of CMOs globally warning that optimising for algorithms risks creating a sea of sameness, and 78% stating that generative AI will never replace human imagination. [18] This has prompted Nintendo to shun AI, reiterating its philosophy of creativity over technological conformity. [19] "It might seem like we are just going the opposite direction for the sake of going in the opposite direction, but it really is trying to find what makes Nintendo special," said Shigeru Miyamoto, a game designer, producer and director at Nintendo. [19]

This flattening effect is visible across the web – identical Pinterest decor, cloned TikTok aesthetics and near-indistinguishable meme formats. Usage of the negative term 'AI slop' increased ninefold in 2025 compared to the same time period in 2024, with many likening AI-generated content to 'spam' and 'gibberish'. [20] In 2025, Meta deleted all twenty-eight AI profiles it created from Instagram and Facebook, after one AI avatar, 'Liv', a 'proud Black queer momma', sparked controversy. [21] In one exchange, 'Liv' admitted that its development team was simulating marginalised identities without

involving real people from those communities. “When there was a higher proportion of human-generated content, it produced far more variation in brand voice and visual aesthetics,” says Ruiz-McPherson. “We’re now moving towards a more synthetically uniform ecosystem, where resonance becomes harder to achieve. Human-made content was often imperfect, but it carried intention, while AI-generated content is highly optimised yet impersonal.” [5]

In this context, originality and taste quickly become luxuries, with 55% of social users more likely to trust brands that publish human-generated content, with the number rising to 62% of Gen Y. [22] Porsche tapped into this sentiment via a fully hand-drawn, animated holiday campaign titled “The Coded Love Letter”, with fans responding positively to its craft, with the brand posting a behind-the-scenes of the creation process. [23] “If you asked me four years ago, ‘What do you think of people using film photography?’, I would have said it’s performative,” says Rankin. “But now, I think the analogue movement is going to grow and become more of a luxury. The value of human connection is going to go up, not down. ‘Made by humans’ will soon become a mark of authenticity.” [10] Flaws and imperfections, the very things that make people human, will be the bridge for original storytelling that makes audiences feel valued, especially in a world where so much media appears to be transactional and devoid of care.



Generative AI has created a sea of sameness, as creative diversity is nonexistent in the process

Mufaddal Durbar | X (2025)

CRISIS OF TRUST AND AUTHENTICITY

Backlash against AI slop is being driven not only by creative fatigue but also by rising concerns over misinformation and the fragility of digital authenticity. Audiences are beginning to demand that media and content platforms implement stronger fact-checking, with 87% reporting that they want laws to combat AI-generated misinformation. [24] Especially as tools such as OpenAI's [Sora](#) and Gemini's [Nano Banana](#) create content that is gaining in its ability for realism, people are increasingly beginning to question their own perception. “Feeds, memes and slop are the building blocks of a new media world where verification vanishes, unreality dominates, everything blurs into everything else and nothing carries any informational or emotional weight,” wrote Scott Rosenberg, managing editor of technology at Axios. [25]

As such, AI Slop becomes a proxy for a deeper concern – a fear that the internet is losing its footing in reality. "When I made [FAIK](#) magazine, people said, 'You can tell it's fake'," says Rankin. "I proved very quickly that you cannot tell. There are people using it the wrong way that are acting very deceptively, and it's dismantling the social fabric in such a massive way that it's scary." [10] As of May 2025, a study by AI growth agency Graphite found 51.72% of new web articles were primarily generated by AI. [26] This prompted the World Economic Forum to list mis- and disinformation as a top-ranked concern across all risk categories in its Global Risk Report 2025, citing generative AI-created false or misleading content that can be produced and distributed at scale as a formidable opponent. [27]

This is driving demand for provenance, transparency and verifiable sources, with 75.6% believing it's important for brands to disclose the use of AI in video content, and 62% stating they trust brands more when they are transparent about using AI. [28] Following Leica and Nikon embedding 'Content Credentials' directly into their cameras to prove photos are a raw human capture, Adobe has added CAI 'Content Credentials' to Camera Raw, Lightroom and Photoshop as an industry-standard means of providing transparency about an image's source, its edits, and whether any AI elements have been added. [29]

"The number one thing is to be honest about using it," says Rankin. "People are demanding to know when something is AI, and when people are pretending it isn't AI, that's the bit where I'm critical. They're your ideas, but you should be transparent about it being AI-generated." [10] In the current climate, transparency around the use of AI has become pivotal, safeguarding creators from potential backlash. Following a recoil to generative slop, opening up a dialogue about internal goals, be they around innovation or experimentation, can rebuild trust and empathy with audiences.



Brands such as Polaroid have gained an advantage by reframing the analogue as a strength that people should aspire for

Polaroid (2025)

INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

TREAT HUMAN-MADE CONTENT LIKE A PREMIUM

Audiences increasingly see human authorship as a [marker of intention and care](#), with 86% reporting that visible human involvement increases a brand's authenticity. [30] In response, brands can differentiate by openly foregrounding craft, process and expertise. "Without question, the human element is going to be so important for brands," says Rankin. "You still have to have someone with a real creative vision who brings an absolute real belief system to it. You've got to push the boundaries of visual image making rather than just sort of perpetuating things that we have seen before." [10] Bottega's "Craft is our Language" campaign included choreographed hand gestures from a diverse cast to show that true luxury is about human exchange. [31] Elsewhere, iHeartMedia launched its "Guaranteed Human" campaign, focusing on the genuine connection a real presenter creates with listeners. [32]

CURATE, DON'T OVERWHELM

Rather than scale content through AI, brands can create value by [editing rigorously](#), slowing pace and building formats designed to orient rather than overwhelm. In January 2026, Substack surpassed [50 million active subscriptions](#), with over five million of those being paid, signalling a massive willingness to pay for curated, *human* ideas. In tandem, an overwhelming number of publishers say it will be important to focus on more original investigations and on-the-ground reporting, with a 91+ percentage point difference. [33] "High-volume, low-intent content weakens persuasion and brand recall," says Ruiz-McPherson. "Audiences disengage. If a brand cares about its audience, it should protect that long-term relationship by investing in trust through human-led authorship." [5] For brands, the aim is to create *effect* to drive engagement, focusing on emotional resonance rather than sheer volume.

TURN ORIGINALITY INTO A COMPETITIVE EDGE

While 82% of marketers think Gen Z feel 'somewhat positive' about AI ads, 55% of Gen Zers in the US are, in fact, uncomfortable with the concept, and 63% deem it inauthentic. [34][35] "AI is made from patterns and ghosts," says Rankin. "It's all using the same data sets. What people are most angry at is the sort of imagery that's totally generated without any sort of exchange." [10] As AI homogenises creative culture, distinctiveness becomes commercially powerful, especially with younger-skewing audiences. Brands can regain a unique competitive advantage by developing distinct visual identities, tone of voice and modes of storytelling which bolster what AI cannot replicate. Polaroid's "[AI can't generate sand between your toes](#)" campaign does just that by using handwritten scrawls and raw Polaroid photos on billboards, reframing the sensory nature of analogue as its greatest strength. [36]

RELATED

SOURCES

1. The Drum (July 2024)

3. YouGov (February 2025)

5. Interview with Mayra Ruiz-McPherson conducted by the author

7. AdAge (April 2024)

9. The Verge (November 2025)

11. Human Clarity Institute (October 2025)

13. Full Frame Insurance (August 2025)

15. Washington Post (June 2024)

17. Open Research Europe (July 2025)

19. The New York Times (September 2024)

21. The Guardian (January 2025)

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33. Reuters Institute (January 2026)

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14. AdAge (March 2025)

16. Bandcamp (January 2026)

18. Dentsu (September 2025)

20. Meltwater (September 2025)

22. Sprout Social (September 2025)

24. The University of Melbourne x KPMG (April 2025)

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