Does AI Really Work in Advertising?
Research Shows Emotion Is What Matters

Executive Summary

In recent months, the number of advertising campaigns created using generative AI has been rapidly increasing. In our research, we analyzed **9 AI-generated campaigns across multiple categories** and examined:

- Whether people recognized the use of AI

- The emotional response the campaign triggered

- Its impact on key brand metrics (positivity, memorability, understanding, trust)

The results lead to one clear conclusion:

> **There is no direct correlation between whether a campaign is AI-generated, openly AI-made, or undisclosed — and its effectiveness.**
>
> What truly determines success is **emotional performance (and branding).**

Context: The Myth of the "AI Effect"

Public debate around AI advertising often swings between two extremes:

- *"AI campaigns are cold, generic, and people dislike them."*

- *"AI campaigns are exciting by default and automatically stand out."*

Our data shows that **neither assumption holds true universally.**

AI is neither a shortcut to success nor a guaranteed problem. It acts primarily as a **multiplier of creative quality**, amplifying both strong and weak ideas.

Methodology (Brief)

- 9 AI-generated advertising campaigns

- Multiple categories (FMCG, finance, services, telco, etc.)

- Key metrics measured:

    - AI recognition

    - Emotional response ("love it / it bothers me / I don't care")

    - Positivity

    - Distinctiveness

    - Understanding

    - Distrust

Based on the combination of these metrics, the campaigns naturally clustered into **four distinct groups.**

The Four Types of AI Campaigns

1. Openly AI + Emotionally Effective

(Coca-Cola, Liquid Death)

- People recognized the use of AI

- **Strong positive emotional response**

- High memorability and distinctiveness

- Low levels of distrust

Here, AI becomes part of the **creative idea or narrative**, not just a production shortcut.

Key insight: When a campaign works emotionally, AI stops being an issue and can even become an advantage.

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2. Openly AI + Emotionally Ineffective

(ePojisteni, Heinz)

- AI use was clearly recognized

- Weak or negative emotional response

- Higher irritation ("this annoys me")

- AI becomes the **focus of criticism**

The problem is not AI itself. The problem is that **when emotion fails, people look for a reason, and AI is an easy target.**

Key insight: Transparency about AI does not compensate for weak creativity. It can actually amplify its shortcomings.

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3. Undisclosed AI + Emotionally Effective

(Amaysim, Invia)

- Most people did **not recognize** the use of AI

- Strong emotional performance

- High positivity and understanding

- Minimal distrust

From the audience's perspective, **the production method is irrelevant.** The campaign works because it feels human, clear, and emotionally resonant.

Key insight: When advertising works, nobody cares how it was made.

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4. Undisclosed AI + Emotionally Ineffective

(Motorola, eToro, Orea, etc.)

- AI largely went unnoticed

- Emotional response was weak or indifferent
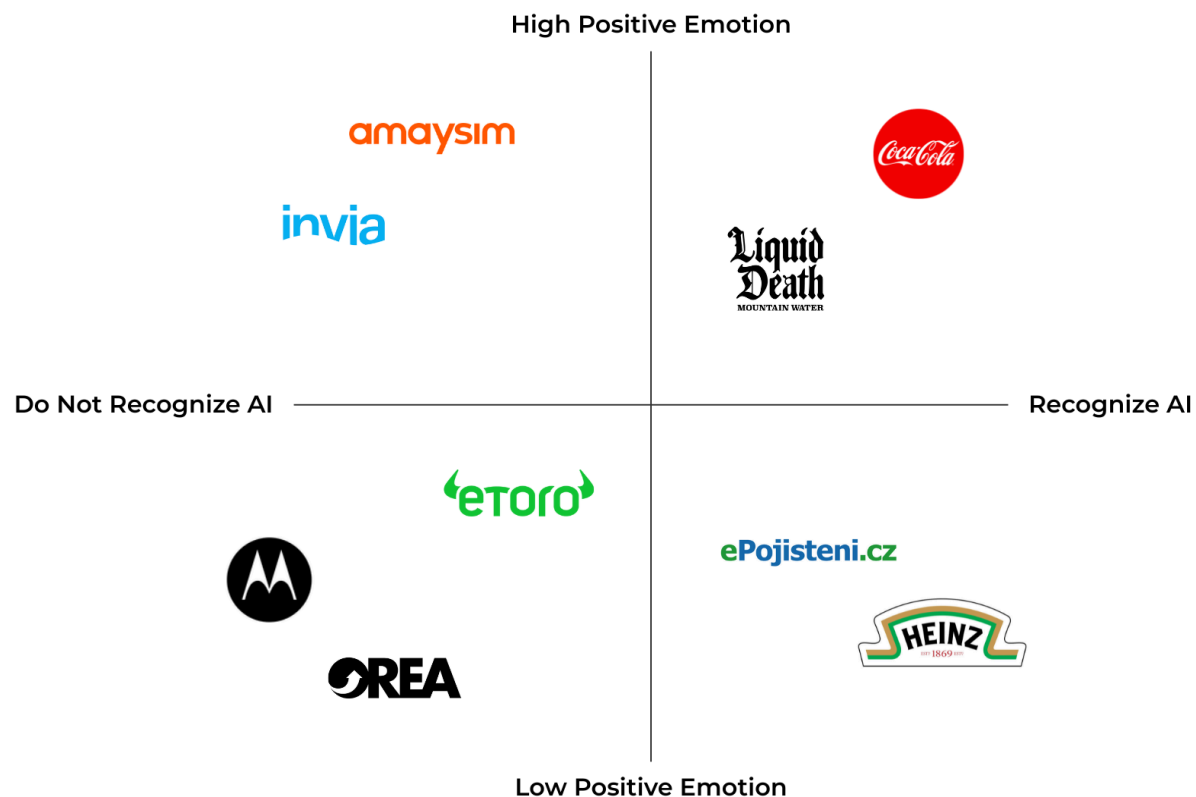
- Low distinctiveness

- Average to poor brand impact

This is the classic "grey average" scenario. AI neither helped nor was the core issue.

Key insight: AI does not save campaigns that lack a strong emotional foundation.

The Core Conclusion

The key question is not: *"Is this AI?"*

The real question is: *"Does it work emotionally?"*

Our data shows that:

- AI disclosure vs. non-disclosure **does not determine success**

- AI recognition **does not directly correlate** with positive or negative reactions

- Emotion is the primary driver:

  - Strong emotion → AI does not matter (or helps)

  - Weak emotion → AI becomes a problem (but only because something else failed)

Practical Implications for Marketers

1. Don't start with AI. Start with emotion.
 AI is a production tool, not a strategy.

2. If you disclose AI, the idea must justify its use creatively.
 "Made with AI" is not a value proposition on its own.

3. Test emotion before debating technology or ethics.
 Emotional pre-testing is more critical than ever.

4. AI amplifies outcomes — good and bad.
 Just like cheaper production, it can scale a strong idea, but never fix a weak one.

About Behavio

Behavio is a technology company that helps marketers create and measure effective brand marketing using behavioral science. Its brand tracking, market tracking, and ad testing tools are trusted by over 400 global and challenger brands worldwide, including T-Mobile, LEGO, and Publicis.