Research Article

Automating Content Creation with Gen-AI: The Interplay Between Labor of Content Creators and Gen-AI in Marketing Campaigns

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INTRODUCTION

Generative AI (Gen-AI) has come to the center of attention in the advertisement industry worldwide. Marketers and influencers are key actors who celebrate the most up-to-date Gen-AI technologies. The reception of Gen-AI is mixed: it is heralded as a creative and liberating tool for generating innovative and captivating content ideas, yet there is a concurrent concern among advertising professionals about the potential for technology to replace human labor.

Our analysis centers the empirical cases from Xiaohongshu (RED), a prominent social media platform in China that merges social media functionalities with e-commerce. RED, known for its emphasis on text-, image-, and video-based content, mirrors the influencer marketing practices found on global platforms like Instagram [9] and earns over 80% of revenues through advertisement [1]. Among existing usage of Gen-AI for marketing purposes, we focus on a particular kind of content generation: the content generated by social media influencers. We specifically examine "Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs)"—ordinary platform users who carry advertorial content on RED. Given their authenticity and relatability to everyday consumers, they are popular advertisement agents for commercial brands. KOC marketing campaign on the RED platform is an established business model in the industry. Our previous work (under review) has pointed out that integrating KOCs into marketing campaigns requires labor from multiple actors, including KOC themselves, marketers, and talent brokers (i.e. multiple-channel-network agencies).

Within the KOC communities on RED, we have observed growing discussions on leveraging Gen-AI tools to empower content creation. Notably, tools powered by ChatGPT for crafting copy are hailed for their efficiency in producing appealing content at scale. Meanwhile, marketers and brands integrate Gen-AI generated content into their advertising strategies but also explore its potential to create digital influencer personas [2]. Furthermore, advertising agencies serving brands are increasingly relying on Gen-AI for generating compelling advertising copies. The RED platform itself is at the forefront of this innovation, developing embedded Gen-AI tools aimed at assisting users in creating text and visuals for their social media posts. For instance, "Cike" 此刻(*Ci Ke*) is designed to transform user-entered daily notes into AI-generated image for posting. On the RED platform, within its regulatory and censoring rules, Gen-AI-generated content and human-generated one are curated and moderated.

In this research, we investigate the potential involvement of Gen-AI in the content creation process of different actors for marketing campaigns. In particular, we turn to KOCs and marketers who use and engage with Gen-AI-generated content creation, we focus on these questions: *1. How KOCs and marketers use Gen-AI tools? 2. How certain human labor is automated through the use of Gen-AI? 3. How does Gen-AI-generated content empower or impede their content creation?*

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RELATED WORK

The integration of AI and Gen-AI in content creation for advertising purposes represents a burgeoning field of study within the marketing and consumer engagement literature. The relevant technologies span from ChatGPT-enabled copywriting in digital marketing (e.g., [8, 15]) and short ad video generation (e.g., [7]). A significant body of work has explored how these technologies reshape marketing strategies (e.g., [10, 14]), the personalization of advertisements (e.g., [12, 13]), and consumer engagement of AI-generated advertisement (e.g., [7]). The use of Gen-AI in advertisement content creation raises substantial concerns regarding misinformation and the authenticity of AI-generated content. Campbell [4, 5] and subsequent studies on deepfakes in advertising underscore the potential for AI to create and modify audiovisual content, thereby blurring the lines between reality and fabrication. These concerns are amplified in discussions on consumer perceptions and reactions to AI-generated content (e.g., [3, 6]). While existing research has thoroughly explored the use and impact of these technologies in advertising, less attention has been paid to indirect advertising on social media, despite its potential for automating content generation by social media influencers. In this study, we delve into the interplay between Gen-AI and content creators on social media platforms for marketing purposes and investigate the role of technologies in the content creation labor process.

METHODS

We use qualitative methods to engage with two types of actors involved in content generation for marketing purposes: KOCs and marketers.

First, we use walkthrough method [11] to systematically study the usage of Gen-AI tools for copywriting, image generation and editing, and video generation and editing. This method helps us understand the role of such technologies and the human labor required to integrate Gen-AI-generated content into content creation on the RED platform. By focusing on the specific labor processes, we gain insights into the roles these tools occupy within content creation process.

Second, we conduct semi-structured interviews with KOCs and marketers. In our previous work, we have shown diverse forms of labor undertaken in social media marketing campaigns. KOCs need to create and maintain certain personas through copywriting, strategically curate their content feed to appear vertical in certain areas. For marketers, a significant amount of bureaucratic effort is required to validate the inclusion of KOCs' content in marketing campaigns. As the content creation process cannot be reduced to a simplistic model of one-click output generation, such diverse forms of labor suggests the need for a more nuanced understanding of the utilization of Gen-AI tools. Through interviews with KOCs and marketers, we aim to uncover the types of creative labor emerging in the new Gen-AI-aided mode of content creation and the interaction between the tools and content creators. From there, we further explore effective ways of leveraging Gen-AI to expand opportunities for content creators.

POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Our research contributes to the marketing and advertising literature and the HCI field by offering insights into how Gen-AI integrates into social advertisement content creation. We specifically into labor practices from the perspective of content creators. This work advances the HCI literature by situating the application of Gen-AI at the nexus of technological mediation of labor production, platform dynamics, and content creation for monetary benefits.

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