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Ethical Responsibility of AI-generated Content in Digital Advertising: Transparency, Trust and Platform Accountability

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence is profoundly reshaping the production and dissemination of digital advertising. Although the content generated by AI has improved the efficiency of creation, it has also caused ethical problems such as false endorsements, hidden advertisements, and algorithm amplification. Based on the ethics of obligation theory, social responsibility theory and utilitarian ethics, this article uses case analysis to critically analyze the phenomenon of ethical misconduct in AI digital advertising. The study found that the platform failed to fully fulfill its public responsibility as a digital communication gater in the process of pursuing commercial interests. This article proposes that the platform should assume the responsibility of algorithm ethics, governance transparency and collaborative governance to rebuild public trust in digital communication.

Keywords: digital communication ethics; AI-generated content; platform responsibility; transparency; social trust

I. INTRODUCTION

Generative artificial intelligence is profoundly changing the production and dissemination of digital advertising. AI tools have significantly reduced the threshold of advertising creation, enabling brands to generate images, videos, copywriting and voice at a lower cost and higher efficiency, and even produce multilingual short videos and virtual spokespersons. However, the popularization of technology is far faster than the iterative update of ethical norms and regulatory frameworks. Recent studies have shown that consumers' evaluation of AI-generated advertisements will be significantly affected by the disclosure method and brand type, and the excessive use of AI technology will even have the opposite effect and damage brand trust [1]. At the same time, the global AI advertising market is still growing rapidly, and more and more brands have integrated AIGC into their own marketing systems. Against this background, the academic community and the public have raised many questions: how should the responsible subject be defined when AI generates advertisements are highly simulated, and even fake celebrity endorsements? Can the platform be exempted from relevant responsibilities in the name of "technology neutrality"? The above questions constitute the research questions of this article, pointing to the issue of public responsibility in the scenario of digital communication.

In September 2025, China's "Artificial Intelligence Generation Synthetic Content Identification Measures" was officially implemented, which clearly requires that explicit or implicit identification must be added to the content generated by AI, and the platform has the obligation to verify [2]. The Malaysian government is also actively studying the implementation of a mandatory labeling system for AI-generated content through the Online Security Act 2025 to curb the spread of false information [3]. These regulatory trends show that the ethical governance of AI-generated content has become a global issue.

This article focuses on the ethical responsibility of AI-generated content in digital advertising, and puts forward the core argument: digital platforms cannot evade their public responsibility on the grounds of "technology neutrality", and must assume the obligation of AI content transparency and algorithm ethics. This article adopts the case analysis method, combines the ethics of obligation theory, the theory of social responsibility and the ethics of utilitarianism, critically analyzes the phenomenon of ethical misconduct in AI digital advertising, and puts forward suggestions for responsible communication practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The impact of AI-generated content on digital communication ecology*

Generative artificial intelligence is reshaping all aspects of digital communication. Kim [4] proposed that autonomous intelligent tools deeply intervene in the advertising creation process and reconstruct the existing advertising communication pattern, resulting in potential hidden dangers in audience trust and information transparency. Such potential hidden dangers are also projected into the field of commercial advertising. In the field of advertising, AI can not only generate text and images, but also create highly realistic virtual spokespersons, blurring the boundary between reality and fiction. Recent studies further show that consumers' evaluation of AI-generated advertisements will be significantly affected by the disclosure method, advertising type and task situation [5], [6].

B. *The ethical dilemma of platform governance*

The digital platform is an important infrastructure in the contemporary information dissemination system, which assumes the function of a new media checkpoint. Su and Chan [7] pointed out that the platform is the main body of private rule-making and has great power in the relatively weakly regulated digital ecology, resulting in hidden dangers of moral legitimacy. The platform relies on the recommendation algorithm and content review mechanism to delineate the visible boundaries of the content and perform the media checkpoint function. Even so, there is still a deep tension between the platform's business goals and public responsibility. As a boundary resource, generative artificial intelligence further reshapes the original governance pattern of the digital platform [7], [8].

C. *Research context and research gap*

The existing research is mainly carried out along three paths. The first path focuses on the effect of AI advertising and explores the impact of AI disclosure on consumer trust, purchase willingness and advertising evaluation [5], [6]. The second path focuses on platform governance and analyzes the changes brought about by generative artificial intelligence to platform governance rights and responsibilities [7], [8]. The third path explores the moral boundaries of AI communication from the perspective of ethics, relying on the theory of obligation, utilitarianism and media social responsibility [9], [10], [11], [12]. However, most of these three paths are separate, and there is a lack of research on integrating "AI advertising effect", "platform governance" and "ethical responsibility" into the same analysis framework. This article tries to fill this integrity gap.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *Deontological Ethics*

Deontological ethics emphasizes the moral rightness of an action itself, rather than the consequences it produces. Under the context of media ethics, Deontological ethics posits that the communicator has an absolute obligation not to deceive the audience. [9]. If the platform knows that the content is generated by artificial intelligence but does not make corresponding annotations, the behavior violates the obligation of integrity. It does not respect the audience as a rational subject with the right to know, but puts the audience in a passive position of induction. Adding logos to the content generated by AI is not only a technical operation, but also to recognize and maintain the audience's right to know from an ethical level [10].

B. *Social Responsibility Theory*

Social responsibility theory posits that media and communication institutions must bear corresponding social obligations while exercising freedom of communication [11]. Entering the era of digital communication, this set of theories is also applicable to new types of communication intermediaries such as platforms. The platform does not belong to traditional media, but with its core position in information distribution, it bears the responsibility of maintaining a healthy public information environment and protecting users' rights and interests from infringement. Studies have pointed out that operators who obtain commercial benefits from platform business need to implement corresponding social responsibility governance measures [13]. From this extension, the

platform relies on AI to generate advertisements to make profits, and should fulfill the obligations of corresponding content review and AI logo disclosure.

C. Utilitarian ethics

Utilitarian ethics posits that the moral evaluation of an action should be based on its consequences, aiming to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number [12]. This theory can provide an important analytical perspective for AI digital advertising issues. If the platform and advertisers unilaterally pursue short-term traffic and commercial profits and allow the spread of misleading AI advertisements, although it can improve the level of user participation in the short term, it will weaken the public's overall trust in digital advertising in the long term, thereby damaging the overall well-being of society. Based on the judgment of utilitarianism, the platform's self-restraint and ethical governance is not only a moral obligation, but also a rational choice that takes into account long-term commercial benefits and public interests.

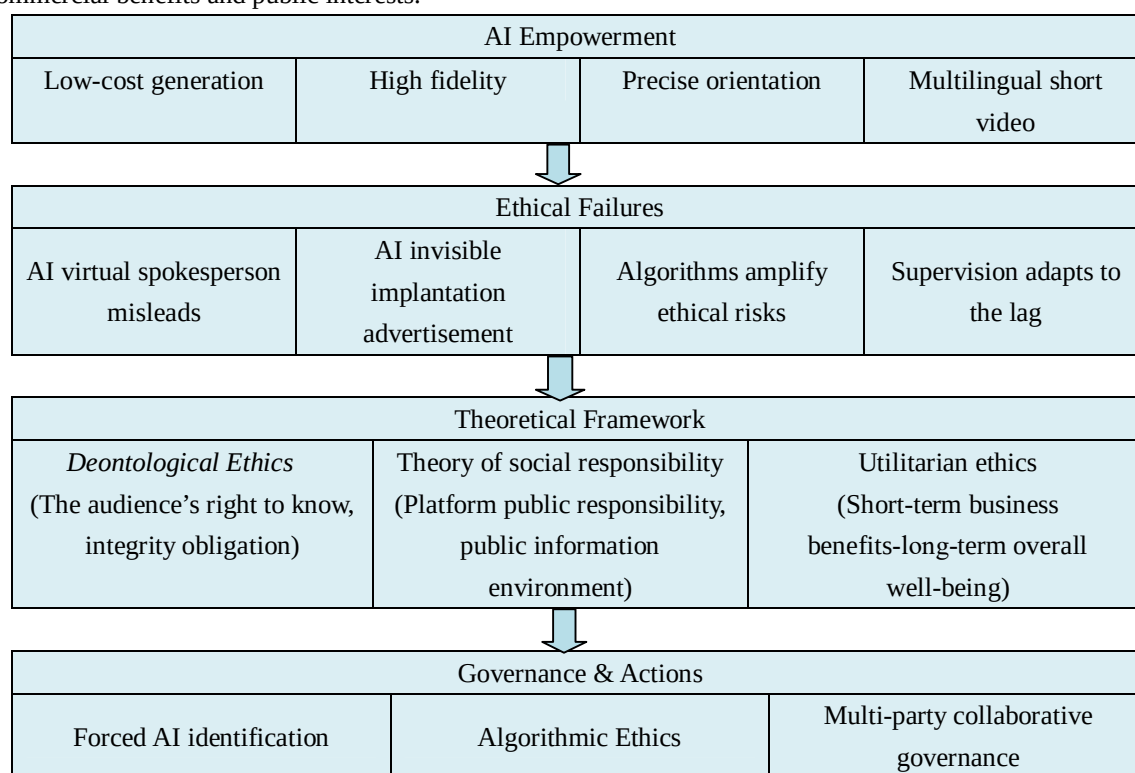


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of AI digital advertising ethical challenges and governance paths.

IV. CRITICAL ETHICAL ANALYSIS

A. The conflict between algorithm amplification and public responsibility

The platform business model is highly dependent on user activity, and the algorithm distribution logic will amplify the transmission potential of emotional content. This feature further amplifies the platform's power and responsibility problem under the generative AI environment [7]. In the field of AI digital advertising, the algorithm amplification mechanism may make false or misleading advertisements spread rapidly. For example, false endorsements generated by AI may gain a lot of exposure due to the "celebrity effect", which has caused a wide impact before the platform audit intervenes. From the ethical point of view of obligation theory, the platform cannot shirk responsibility on the grounds of "algorithm automatic operation", because the algorithm design itself is the result of value selection [10].

B. The harm of lack of transparency

When the content generated by AI is not marked, consumers cannot judge the authenticity of the advertisement and may make wrong purchasing decisions. From the perspective of utilitarian ethics, although information transparency may maintain the click rate of advertisements in the short term, it will lead to consumers' doubts about all digital advertisements in the long run, ultimately damaging the platform's own business ecology and the trust base of the whole society. Existing empirical studies on specific types of advertisements show that AI content disclosure will change consumers' trust and authentic perception of advertising in the short term [5], [6]. From this further inference, it is difficult to fully guarantee the audience's right to know by only setting up hidden and vague logos. Effective AI disclosure should be clear and eye-catching, and support the corresponding implementation mechanism.

C. Specific case: AI face-changing endorsement and consumer misdirection

In recent years, many incidents of using AI face-changing technology to fake celebrity endorsements have attracted public attention. For example, many mainstream media have reported too many false endorsements of AI face change. Some brands have used AI technology to generate virtual images of well-known artists as product recommenders without authorization, and placed large-scale advertisements on social media. Consumers make purchase decisions based on their trust in the artist, and only later find that the endorsement is not true. From the point of view of the ethics of obligation theory, this behavior obviously violates the obligation of integrity and regards consumers as manipulated objects; from the point of view of utilitarian ethics, although the conversion rate has been improved in the short term, it will lead to consumers' general doubts about all advertisements in the long run, which will damage the trust base of the entire digital advertising ecology; from the perspective of social responsibility theory, The failure of the platform to effectively identify and intercept such synthetic content in the advertising review link also bears an inescapable responsibility.

D. Responsibility sharing and collaborative governance

The ethical governance of AI digital advertising cannot rely on the platform alone. Advertisers, AI technology companies, regulators and users are all responsible. Recent platform governance research points out that generative AI is reshaping the responsibility boundaries of the platform, and the platform needs to work with multiple stakeholders to formulate governance rules [8]. Regulatory authorities need to formulate a clear legal framework. Deduced from the principle of utilitarianism to pursue the overall well-being of society, only by building a pluralistic collaborative governance system can we effectively respond to the ethical challenges brought about by AI digital advertising.

TABLE 1

ETHICAL ISSUES AND RESPONSIBILITY DISTRIBUTION IN AI DIGITAL ADVERTISING

Ethical issues	Specific performance	The main responsible party	Theoretical correspondence
AI virtual spokesperson misleads	Use AI to change faces to fake stars' recommended products and mislead consumers	Content creators, AI companies, platforms	Deontology (violation of the obligation of good faith);Utilitarianism (damaging long-term trust)
AI invisible implantation advertisement	Internet celebrities use AI to generate image marketing without disclosure,obscuring the nature of advertising	Internet celebrity, advertiser, platform	Deontology (concealment of the nature of advertising, infringement of the right to know); Social responsibility(the platform has not fulfilled its obligation to review and disclose)

Algorithms amplify ethical risks	The recommendation system prioritizes traffic to push inflammatory AI advertisements to accelerate the spread of false information	Platform(algorithm designer)	Social responsibility(balance between interests and public welfare); Utilitarianism(short-term traffic vs.long-term social welfare)
Supervision adapts to the lag	Multinational platforms evade the responsibility of advertising disclosure,and different countries have different standards	Regulatory agencies, platforms	Utilitarianism(The inconsistent standards lead to an increase in the overall cost of trust); Deontology (platform disclosure obligations are not exempted by transnational borders)

Note: This table is developed by the author based on a comprehensive analysis of deontological ethics, social responsibility theory, and utilitarian ethics.

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

First, it is mandatory to implement AI content identification. The platform should require all commercial advertisements generated by AI to add clear and visible logos to clearly explain the specific role of AI in content generation (such as scripts, images, voice or editing). Specifically, the AI content identification should meet the following operating standards: the identification position must be prominent and cannot only be hidden in the corner of the advertising details page; the identification content must clearly distinguish the specific role of AI in scripts, images, voice, translation or editing, and cannot only write "AI assistance"; the platform should advance in the advertising release. Compulsory testing will be carried out, and unlabeled AI advertisements will be returned or removed from the shelves; for advertisers who repeatedly violate the law, a credit disciplinary mechanism should be established to restrict their advertising authority. Only by changing the logo from "recommendation" to "mandatory" and from "form" to "substantial" can transparency be truly implemented and the integrity obligation of the platform for the audience [10].

Second, Algorithmic Ethics. The platform should embed ethical principles into the recommendation algorithm to reduce the recommendation weight of false advertisements generated by AI and improve the diversity of information. This helps to balance business interests and public responsibility [7].

Third, establish a quick response mechanism. The platform should establish a special AI false advertising reporting and processing channel to intervene before the content spreads. In view of the rapid spread of AI-generated content on social media, the platform governance mechanism must be pre-ordered to avoid the spread of harm [13].

Fourth, strengthen multi-party collaborative governance. The platform should work with regulators, advertising industry associations, AI technology companies and academia to formulate unified AI advertising disclosure standards and best practices [8].

Fifth, improve the public's AI literacy. The government, educational institutions and civil society should jointly promote AI media literacy education to help users identify and respond to false advertising content generated by AI.

VI. CONCLUSION

The widespread adoption of artificial intelligence technology is comprehensively reshaping the production, distribution, and dissemination logic of digital advertising, while simultaneously giving rise to new types of ethical risks in communication. Based on a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing deontological ethics, social responsibility theory, and utilitarian ethics, this paper systematically dissects the ethical misconduct phenomena present in the current AI digital advertising domain. The study reveals that the emotional amplification mechanism of platform algorithms, the lack of transparency in AI content disclosure, and

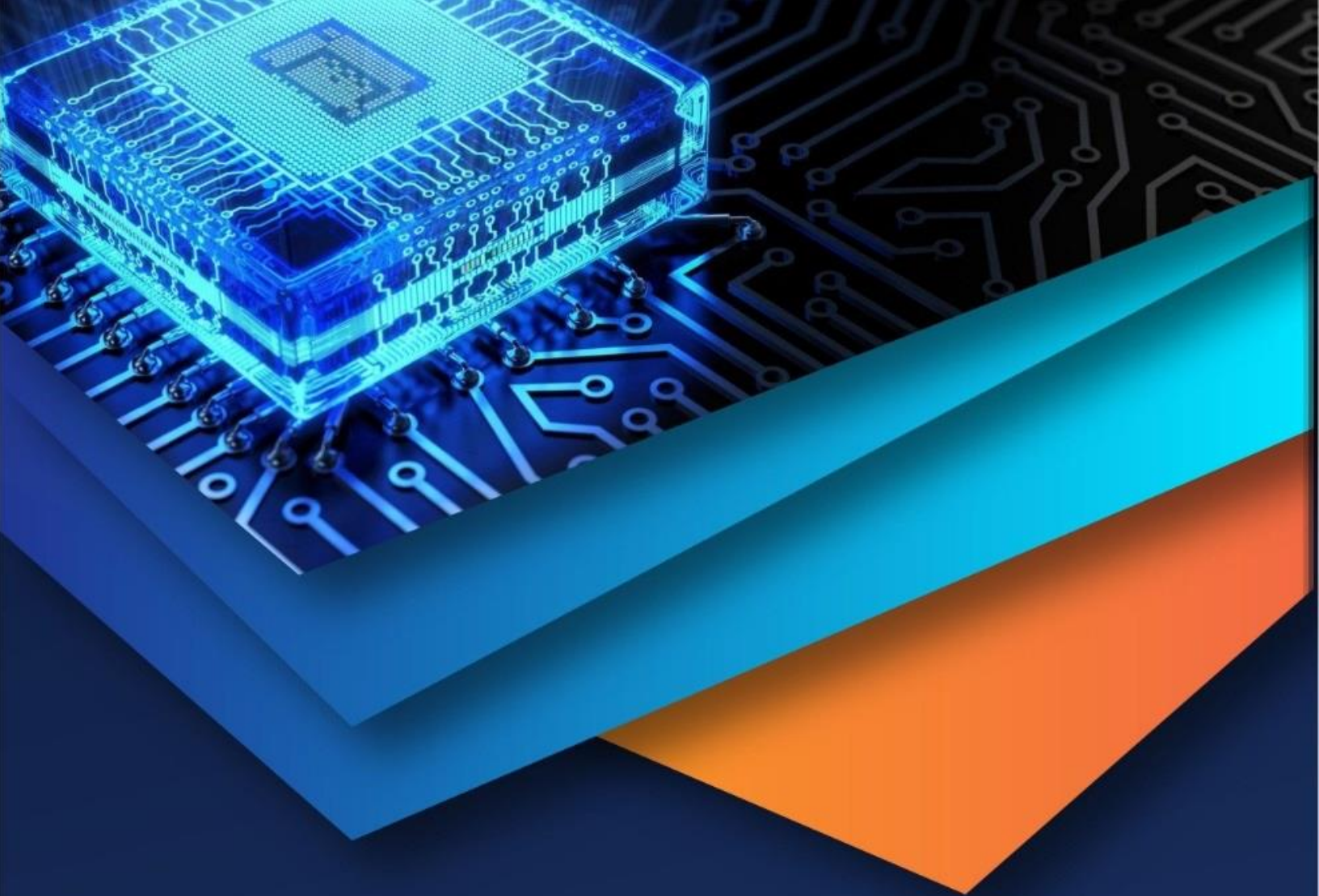
the ambiguity in defining the responsibilities of multiple stakeholders collectively contribute to communication chaos, such as false celebrity endorsements, invisible AI integration, and the spread of misleading information

Given that existing research mostly explores AI advertising effectiveness, platform governance, or communication ethics in isolation, lacking an integrated analytical framework, this paper constructs a systematic analysis model of AI digital advertising ethical risks and governance paths. The study confirms that digital platforms cannot rely on "technological neutrality" to avoid public responsibility, and must establish a balanced mechanism between commercial interests and public welfare.

To regulate the order of intelligent advertising dissemination and rebuild public trust, this article proposes a multi-dimensional governance approach, including implementing mandatory AI content labeling, promoting ethical algorithm transformation, establishing a proactive risk response mechanism, building a multi-party collaborative governance system, and enhancing public AI media literacy. Through systematic ethical governance and institutional improvement, we can effectively reduce the ethical misconduct issues of AI digital advertising and build a transparent, trustworthy, and responsible intelligent dissemination ecosystem.

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