Brands May Be Bankrolling the AI Misinformation Spreading About Them

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When AI assistants like ChatGPT and Google’s AI Overviews hallucinate, automated media buying tools, offered by ad tech startups, agencies, and incumbents like Meta and Google, can make the damage worse.

These systems detect the resulting surge in brand-related searches, interpret it as a demand signal and start bidding harder, often without a human signing off, according to Andrew Frank, vp, distinguished analyst, Gartner.

When a false narrative or misinformation about a brand starts circulating on AI answer engines, people naturally start searching for it more—typing things like ‘is [brand] a scam’ into Google or ChatGPT.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/media/brands-may-be-bankrolling-the-ai-misinformation-spreading-about-them/

Rewriting the Brand Discovery Playbook in the AI Era

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This post was created in partnership with Moloco

Key takeaways

- Brand discovery is increasingly happening through direct chats with AI agents, and marketers are trying to work around it.
- Strong customer relationships protect brands from AI's disruption of the customer journey.
- The changing world of AI could provide marketers with a renewed opportunity to tap into the human and community aspects of marketing.

Marketing leaders are grappling with how AI is reshaping traditional funnels, whether it's through generative AI summaries usurping consumer clicks, or being at the mercy of what AI agents say (or don't say) about their brands.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions group chat co-hosted with Moloco, industry executives shared how they are trying to reclaim discovery, strengthen direct customer relationships, and bolster their owned digital surfaces.

Moloco’s Paul D’Arcy

Shifting from SEO to GEO

Paul D’Arcy, CMO of Moloco, kicked off the conversation by sharing a key finding from Boston Consulting Group and Moloco’s research about AI’s impact on the customer journey.

“It showed that the best protection against disruption is longer-term, stickier customer relationships,” D’Arcy said. That includes finding ways to bring people onto your own digital surfaces, apps, and experiences so that your brand becomes the destination, he added.

With AI mediating so many consumer decisions, Jane Hendrick, managing VP of global integrated marketing at Marriott International, said it’s important that brands ask this

question: “How do you make sure you’re part of the consideration set before someone even goes into the platform?”

For Marriott Bonvoy, it means tapping into cultural moments and driving more relevance so that the brand is a natural part of the conversation. “You have to make sure you are leaning into the algorithm and the machine and all of that, but you also have to be top of mind for the consumer,” Hendrick said.

In fact, being part of the cultural conversation can pull double duty since it can also help brands from a generative engine optimization (GEO) perspective, shared Julie Foster, SVP and managing director of EA Experiences.

“What’s fascinating to me is, if we’re building beyond SEO into a GEO-type space, a lot of the things that it’s pulling from to figure out authority actually ends up being whether or not you’re part of culture,” Foster said. “They’re pulling from the conversations on Reddit, and so if you’re not top of mind, top of conversation, the GEO piece isn’t going to pull through.”

(L-R) EA Experiences’ Julie Foster, Codeword’s Kyle Monson

Rethinking brand discovery and consumer journeys

Brand discovery is increasingly happening through direct chats with AI agents, and marketers are trying to crack the code to earn their endorsements.

“You’ve got a brand ambassador sitting between yourself and the customer, which is the chatbot,” said Kyle Monson, founding partner of Codeword. “Word of mouth is powerful. Word of bot is going to become very powerful,” he added.

Third-party platforms like Pinterest are another avenue for brand discovery, where billions of searches take place monthly, said Stacy Malone, VP, global business of marketing at Pinterest.

“It’s literally turning into Gen Z’s search engine,” she said.

But what’s interesting, Malone noted, is that only about half of those searches have commercial intent.

“Many times, they’re not looking for the answer, which is what a lot of the AI platforms are giving people. They want to explore, discover, which is a great place for a brand to be,” she said. “We hear a lot of consumers say, ‘I don’t know what I want yet, but I’ll know it when I see it.’”

Richard Case, VP of growth marketing at GoodRx, acknowledged that while brand discovery acquisition is becoming more challenging, things do get easier for brands if they can win customers over during that first interaction.

“I still think that in-person or user product experience just becomes that much more tangible and creates a certain feeling to make you want to go back,” Case said.

(L-R) GoodRx’s Richard Case, Marriott International’s Jane Hendrick

Anticipating what comes next

Change is nothing new for media companies, with major platform shifts shaking things up every couple of years, said Dan Gardner, co-founder and executive chairman of Code and Theory. “It’s literally the same pattern since the Internet was started for media companies, but it’s usually mainly hurt them or disrupted them,” he explained.

This time around with AI, however, Gardner predicts that every industry will be affected. That said, he sees a silver lining. “Things are changing, and that is both a disruptive moment and a huge opportunity.”

(L-R) Code and Theory’s Dan Gardner, Pinterest’s Stacy Malone

Monson sees investment in top-of-funnel and middle-of-funnel marketing becoming even more crucial. “It’s expensive, and it takes a lot of time to build brand preference. But if you’re not building brand preference with a consumer, then you’re stuck with whatever the preference of the chatbots is going to be, and you don’t have as much control over that model,” he said.

Along those lines, getting consumers into the brand’s loyalty ecosystem is a top priority for Hendrick. “And of course, delivering on the experience, because you know all of that other stuff literally doesn’t matter if they have a bad experience with your product,” she said.

Ending on a hopeful note, D’Arcy said that a positive outcome

of this period of rapid change could be a renewed appreciation for the human and community aspects of marketing. “And hopefully a pride and a return to craft as everything becomes automated.”

Featured Conversation Leaders

- Richard Case, VP of Growth Marketing, GoodRx
- Paul D’Arcy, CMO, Moloco
- Julie Foster, SVP and Managing Director, EA Experiences
- Dan Gardner, Co-Founder and Executive Chairman, Code and Theory
- Jane Hendrick, Managing VP, Global Integrated Marketing, Marriott International
- Liz Kneebone, VP, Community Programs and Development, ADWEEK
- Stacy Malone, VP, Global Business Marketing, Pinterest
- Kyle Monson, Founding Partner, Codeword

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How Brands Can Build Creative Infrastructure for the AI Era

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> insights, and connections shaping what's next. **Get your ticket.**

This post was created in partnership with Empathy Lab

The campaign had a good run. One big idea launched everywhere, studied, repeated. Now? Not so much.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions panel co-hosted with Empathy Lab, industry leaders explored what replaces it: a connected creative infrastructure where engineers, creative talent, data, and AI production work together.

The infrastructure shift

When AI production tools reach everyone, the real competitive question comes into focus. What keeps one brand from sounding exactly like the next?

The answer is not necessarily more tech.

"I think the creative teams are the ones that now matter more than anything," said Roland Butler, head of product, content solutions at Zalando.

"What we are now building is a whole creative system around those teams, maintaining their agency and their creative freedom, and allowing them to respond faster and better," he added. Designers and engineers now work alongside one another on prompts, quality controls, editorial guidelines, and cultural trend signals.

Ben Hall, VP at Empathy Lab, sees this moment as a clarifying one. "The fundamentals are more important than ever," he noted. "The idea, the insight, the cultural relevance has become massively important. Teams are now surrounding themselves around this again."

None of that completely went away. What shifted is the strategic foundation. "You've got to have systems thinking,

you’ve got to have people who really understand how this idea can translate to composable systems across and outside of the Internet,” Hall continued.

Keeping speed from turning generic

During the Met Gala this past spring, the Zalando team used tooling to link trend signals, product relevance, visuals, and an editorial review, then published a campaign within 24 hours.

“The speed to react, I think, is something that you should track, and then the speed to insight,” Butler said. “If you’re just counting the volume of AI output, you’re adding to the problem of a world of blandness.”

Hall added that speed “can actually be an antidote to blandness, because you can read signals from culture and speed that roll in. You can create content really quickly, but it actually has meaning.”

The upstream role

Hall’s framework for where people fit is clear: “You need the empathy upstream, and the machines power the creative downstream.”

Hall and Butler agreed that strategic thinking has to be baked into the infrastructure, not applied at the end. Brands need the people responsible for taste, emotion, and cultural judgment to be involved in designing the operating models. AI can help teams move at the speed of culture, but creatives bring the empathy and storytelling instinct that make a brand memorable.

“Keep your teams curious, and focus on systems rather than projects,” Butler concluded.

Recommended videos

https://www.adweek.com/creativity/how-brands-can-build-creative-infrastructure-for-the-ai-era/

When AI Becomes the Gatekeeper of Brand Visibility

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This post was created in partnership with Adobe

Brand discovery has always happened in places companies don't fully control. What's different now is that the intermediary doesn't just surface options. It makes a judgment call.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions sunset series panel co-hosted with Adobe, marketing leaders explored how to earn credibility and trust when consumers first encounter brands through AI before reaching an owned channel.

Brand discovery becomes conversational

Brand voice has long lived in campaigns and creative. For Rachel Thornton, CMO of enterprise at Adobe, that's the part

that’s changing. Now it has to come through in an AI summary.

“Your brand matters now more than ever,” Thornton said. “You want to think through your brand visibility strategy and how you show up in places like ChatGPT, Claude, etc.”

This visibility question is tied to how consumers encounter your brand. They have conversations with AI models and often learn about your brand in those conversations. “You really have to think, ‘What’s my conversational brand?’” Thornton added.

Linda Ha, deputy CMO at IKEA Retail, IKEA, sees the change in how people behave. Fewer consumers are clicking through results to make up their own minds. Many simply read what an AI has already concluded. The way they ask questions has changed, too.

“Consumers are having conversations, instead of just searching for information,” Ha said.

Andy Kauffman, chief commercial officer for the U.S. and Canada at Marriott International, resisted the temptation to treat AI as a new game. “I think about AI as just another channel with its set of tactics,” he said.

The goal, in his view, hasn’t changed: understand what the traveler wants and deliver an experience worth coming back to. Marriott’s Ask Bonvoy beta runs on that same logic but uses a different interface. What used to be a “forms, filters, and fields experience” is giving way to intent-led, conversational planning.

Consistency still creates trust

As discovery spreads across AI agents, reviews, creator communities, and more, brands earn credibility through consistency.

Selina Sykes, VP of marketing transformation and social-first,

beauty and wellbeing, at Unilever, said AI systems look for reliable patterns across the places where brands appear.

“If the algorithm goes out there and you say something different on Walmart than a creator says on Reddit, the AI is going to go, ‘We don’t know if we believe this product benefit. We’re not going to recommend it,’” she noted.

When language, tone, claims, or experience feel off across channels, the relationship weakens. Trust softens and eventually breaks.

Sykes pointed to Vaseline as proof that the principle holds over time. The brand is winning Cannes Lions this year with a campaign built around consumer-discovered hacks for a product more than 150 years old. Relevance endures when a company keeps listening to what people actually do with its products, not just what the brand wants to tell them.

Staying attuned to people on the outside requires investing in the people on the inside. Sykes described the challenge as “the poetry and the plumbing.” Creative instinct alongside technical rigor.

Ha echoed that people-first view. “AI has opened up so much opportunity for us. We need to constantly invest in continuous learning and really double down on our creativity and craft,” she said.

Being found in an AI era is only the opening move. Successful brands will be clear and consistent enough for machines to surface, trustworthy enough for people to believe, and meaningful enough for customers to choose.

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The Future of Retail Marketing Is First-Party Data

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This post was created in partnership with Sam's Club

Retail media that looks beyond ROAS and leverages customer insights can unlock long-term value and customer loyalty.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions panel co-hosted with Sam's Club, Ryan Joe, editor-in-chief of ADWEEK, sat down with industry leaders to discuss how data and predictive modeling are helping brands build relationships that endure long after checkout.

How a membership model can transform brand-building

Being a warehouse club has data advantages—namely, that customers have to scan a membership ID every time they shop, said Harvey Ma, VP and general manager of Sam's Club Connect at Sam's Club. "It's not just a transaction; it's the start of a relationship."

Being able to track behavior over time helps Sam's Club and

its partners like P&G create better customer experiences and capitalize on what retail media does best, which is performance, he added.

Jacques Hagopian, SVP of North America brand operations at P&G, noted that the convergence of communication and commerce is one of the major shifts that the industry is experiencing right now, and it's creating a golden opportunity for brand marketers.

"We have retailers that are becoming media companies, and media companies that are becoming retailers," Hagopian said. "Every point of reach is now a point of sale. How exciting is that?"

The Sam's Club ecosystem, in particular, provides a rich environment for retail media because its members pay to shop in that model, added Hagopian. "That allows us to engage those members with experiences in different aspects of content to take a moment of inspiration and turn it into a moment where they put things in a cart," he said.

Hagopian then shared a use case of how Sam's Club's first-party data is helping P&G tap into consumer behavior to drive long-term business growth. For its Cascade Platinum Plus dishwasher detergent product, P&G wanted to reach the warehouse club members who hadn't used it before. Specifically, P&G aimed to attract consumers with related interests who might be more likely to love the product, such as cooking enthusiasts. The brand identified 800,000 households to target, and the experiment resulted in a 2X increase in marketing effectiveness.

Hagopian called it "a great example where the consumer behavior, a consumer insight, a product that meets that need, combined with the member data, created a perfect environment for that engagement."

Ma noted that the warehouse environment is also ideal for

unique consumer activations that can convert to sales, such as sampling, live demos, and parking lot events. “Retail media is so much more than just the ads. The ads are just a means to serve and sell products,” he said. “We don’t want to lose that creativity piece, and that human connection is so important.”

AI is powering transformative change in retail media

AI’s influence on retail media is in its infancy, but both panelists shared their excitement about the potential it can unlock.

“The power of AI to create personalized experiences changes the game for brand builders,” said Hagopian. “It’s no longer batch-based campaigns that you run one at a time. It really is a continuous flow of communication, content, ideas, sensing, listening, responding, adjusting, and optimizing in real time based on the signals that are available.”

Ma shared his hope that retail marketers will also use AI for more than just increasing conversion. “There have to be other ways that scale and automation through agentic can help us create better member experiences, because after all, we exist to serve customers and members.”

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Rethinking Audience Strategy

for an Unpredictable Consumer

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This post was created in partnership with GroundTruth

Younger consumers are changing retail by blending online viral trends with in-store shopping.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions panel co-hosted with GroundTruth, Will Lee, CEO of ADWEEK, sat down with Rosie O’Meara, CEO of GroundTruth, and Katie Comerford, president of commerce and transformation at Horizon Media, to discuss mapping the future path to purchase.

Managing sudden product virality

Brands adapt instantly when items go viral. For SharkNinja, which launches hundreds of items every year, the hurdle is securing shelf space in consumers’ kitchens.

When helping the brand launch a new slushy machine, Horizon Media looked to balance the product’s appeal across audiences. “It was about to be summer, so we went after the frosé sentiment—you know, everybody loves frosé. But what else could you do, knowing Gen Z are not huge drinkers, unlike millennials,” Comeford explained. “So, we went in both routes to make sure we were personalizing, but driving that virality to win that limited counter space.”

To navigate sudden spikes in popularity, marketers use real-time behavioral signals to guide shoppers. Comerford stated the goal is to “ride that virality and get the shopper to where they want to shop and not dictate where they’re going to get the product.”

This requires leveraging retail inventory feeds to avoid consumer frustration. As Comerford explained, tracking stock “allows us to direct the customer where the product’s available.”

The return to physical stores

Younger buyers frequently shop in physical spaces despite the growth of digital platforms like TikTok Shop. Malls and beauty retailers see large groups of teens wanting to test products in person. As Comerford explained, “I think there’s a demand to try products in-person and not just trust, ‘I’m gonna buy it online, and I’ll get it shipped to me.’”

GroundTruth tracks real-world movement because, as O’Meara stated, “where you go in the physical world, we have always believed, is who you really are as a consumer.”

Following its acquisition by ZeroToOne.AI, GroundTruth uses a large predictive behavioral model. O’Meara explained, “With 90% accuracy, we can understand what you are likely to do next, when you’re likely to do it, and also what you’re not likely to do next, which also eliminates waste.”

Physical retail continues to play an important role for younger shoppers. “We’re seeing that a majority of purchases still happen in store, and that includes Gen Z for sure,” O’Meara noted.

AI reshapes targeting and search strategy

Alongside a broader shift toward business outcomes, marketers are using AI models to dissect vague household CRM data to

“make household level data, user level data, or person level data, so that they can better target, reach, and engage with those customers,” O’Meara explained.

Concurrently, the rise of AI search requires new strategies. Comerford highlighted that “with Reddit being a huge source of that information, there’s limited control over what the answer engines are going to pick up and say about your brand,” shifting media focus toward answer engine optimization.

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NYT slams Microsoft for building copyright-infringing supercomputer for OpenAI

NYT targets Microsoft supercomputer

In 2023, the NYT became the first major publisher to sue OpenAI. The prominent newspaper alleged that ChatGPT was illegally trained on its articles, infringed on its copyrights by outputting articles verbatim, and caused market harms by positioning ChatGPT as a substitute for a NYT subscription, as well as reputational harms by falsely attributing claims to NYT reporting. Additionally, ChatGPT outputs summarizing Wirecutter reviews robbed writers of commissions from lost clicks on affiliate links, the NYT alleged.

In the initial complaint, the NYT discussed Microsoft's supercomputing systems as if they were providing generic cloud computing services. The updated complaint seeks to specify that the supercomputer was tailor-made to help OpenAI infringe and allege that it was built for the explicit purpose of training AI on copyrighted works without permission. And as the NYT alleged, its articles were more heavily weighted by this system, as both firms hoped to train models on the highest-quality journalism possible, so that level of writing could be confidently mimicked in outputs.

By building this "unusually complex" machine, Microsoft not only helped select the works that were infringed but also provided a means to seize copyrighted works without permission, the NYT alleged.

“Microsoft specifically designed it for the purpose of using essentially the whole Internet—curated to disproportionately feature Times Works—to train the most capable LLM in history,” the NYT alleged.

And now it’s allegedly unfairly profiting.

“Microsoft’s deployment of Times-trained LLMs throughout its product line helped boost its market capitalization by a trillion dollars in the past year alone,” the NYT alleged.

Model outputs show market harms, NYT alleged

For the NYT, outputs shared during discovery—including a huge chunk of users’ ChatGPT sessions—remain some of the strongest evidence that OpenAI and Microsoft built tools that allegedly replaced the NYT by producing near-verbatim excerpts of its copyrighted works.

In some cases, users told ChatGPT they were trying to skirt paywalls and were able to see significant chunks of articles by requesting to see the “next paragraph.” In other cases, “models simply spit out several paragraphs” without such finagling. To prove market harms caused by substitution, they shared examples in their complaints of side-by-side comparisons, as well as screenshots of allegedly infringing outputs:

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/06/microsoft-built-supercomputer-to-help-openai-infringe-copyrights-nyt-alleged/

Claude’s Super Bowl Campaign Mocking AI Ads Wins Cannes Lions Film Grand Prix

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AI platform Claude’s Super Bowl LX campaign that mocked AI advertising has won the Film Grand Prix at Cannes Lions 2026.

Two spots—“Can I Get a Six Pack Quickly?” and “How Can I Communicate Better With My Mom?”—took home the top prize in Cannes Lions’ oldest category. The work was created by Mother London and directed by Jeff Low through Biscuit Filmworks.

The campaign, which marked Claude owner Anthropic’s Super Bowl debut, was a favorite among creative leaders going into Cannes Lions, with some predicting it would win big at the festival. It also won Gold and Silver Lions in Film and a Silver Lion in Creative Strategy.

When they were released in February, just days before Super Bowl 60, Claude’s films drew attention for taking on larger competitors like ChatGPT, which had just announced it was bringing advertising to its platform. Claude used humor to criticize this move and argue there was “a time and a place” for advertising.

The campaign even prompted a public response from OpenAI CEO

Sam Altman, who lashed out at Anthropic on X and accused his rival of being “deceptive.”

“It’s an ad about where ads shouldn’t exist, it’s an AI making fun of AI, a challenger that took on the market leader,” said Pelle Sjoenell, Film Lions jury president and worldwide chief creative officer of NLS Corp. “With wicked nerve and craft in every frame, the risk was profound, the execution was immaculate, and it reshuffled the perceptions in the most consequential technology race of our age.”

Watch this year’s Film Grand Prix winner below.

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