

BEYOND ENTERTAINMENT: HOW TRUST CONVERTS AI-GENERATED CONTENT VALUE INTO GENERATION Z ENGAGEMENT

Aphiradee Saranrom^{1*}
Narubodee Wathanakom²

Received 20 July 2026
Revised 31 August 2026
Accepted 6 September 2026

Abstract

Although generative artificial intelligence enables brands and content creators to produce social media content rapidly and at scale, favorable evaluations of AI-generated content do not necessarily translate into user engagement because users may remain uncertain about its accuracy, authenticity, and credibility. Understanding how such evaluations are converted into engagement is therefore important for brands seeking to use AI-generated content effectively. Drawing on the advertising value perspective and research on trust in artificial intelligence, this study examines the relationships among perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, perceived informativeness, trust, and Generation Z engagement with AI-generated content. Using purposive eligibility screening with convenience-based online recruitment, survey data were collected from 385 Generation Z social media users in Thailand and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

The results showed that perceived informativeness had the strongest positive relationship with trust and was also directly related to engagement. Perceived creativity was related to engagement only indirectly through trust. Perceived entertainment was not significantly related to trust, and its indirect relationship with engagement through trust was not significant. Trust significantly predicted engagement and mediated the relationships between creativity and informativeness and engagement. The model explained 69.5% of the variance in trust and 74.1% of the variance in engagement. These findings demonstrate that creativity, entertainment, and informativeness follow different pathways to engagement. For AI-generated content, useful and relevant information supported by trust is more important for Generation Z engagement than entertainment appeal alone.

Keywords: AI-Generated Content, Trust, Content Value, Generation Z, Social Media Engagement

^{1 2} School of Management Science, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University
Email: ² narubodee.wat@stou.ac.th

* Corresponding author email: aphiradee.sar@stou.ac.th

Introduction

The rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence has transformed the production of social media content, enabling brands and content creators to develop text, images, videos, audio, and advertising messages with greater speed, scale, and variety. In this study, AI-generated content refers to digital material produced wholly or partly through artificial intelligence and presented to users on social media. However, the ability to produce content efficiently does not necessarily guarantee consumers' willingness to engage with it. AI-generated content may appear creative, entertaining, or informative while simultaneously creating uncertainty regarding its authenticity, accuracy, and credibility. Consumers may respond less favorably to marketing communications perceived as AI-authored because such communications can be viewed as less authentic (Kirk & Givi, 2025). Similarly, AI-generated content may receive lower engagement than human-generated or human-AI collaborative content even when its perceived quality is comparable (De Ciccio et al., 2025). These findings reveal a central tension in AI-mediated marketing communication: the attributes that make AI-generated content appealing may not necessarily make it trusted or worthy of engagement.

This tension is particularly relevant on social media, where users make rapid decisions about whether to continue viewing, liking, commenting on, sharing, saving, or ignoring content. Digital marketing research generally treats creativity, entertainment, and informativeness as desirable attributes that enhance content or advertising value and encourage favorable consumer responses (Ducoffe, 1996; Logan et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2007). However, AI-generated content introduces additional uncertainty that may change how these attributes translate into engagement. Attractive content attributes alone may therefore be insufficient to explain engagement with AI-generated content.

Trust may play an important role in converting users' evaluations of AI-generated content into engagement. In digital environments, trust helps reduce uncertainty about the reliability and credibility of online information (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). Such uncertainty may be more pronounced for AI-generated content because users may be unable to verify its source, production process, factual accuracy, or level of human oversight. Research on trust in artificial intelligence similarly emphasizes that users' responses depend not only on technological performance but also on whether they perceive AI outputs as dependable and appropriate (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Siau & Wang, 2018). From this perspective, trust is not simply another favorable evaluation of AI-generated content; it may function as a conversion mechanism through which perceived content value is translated into a willingness to engage.

Nevertheless, different attributes of AI-generated content may not depend on trust in the same way. Informativeness may directly encourage engagement while also strengthening trust by reducing uncertainty; creativity may require trust before favorable evaluations translate into interaction; and entertainment may create enjoyment without

providing a basis for judging reliability. Examining these distinct pathways offers a more precise explanation than assuming that all favorable content attributes uniformly produce engagement.

Generation Z offers a relevant context for examining these mechanisms. Its members have grown up with social media and algorithmically curated feeds and are frequently exposed to AI-mediated communication across entertainment, education, advertising, and brand content. Recent evidence suggests that Generation Z generally recognizes the usefulness of generative AI while remaining concerned about inaccurate, inappropriate, or misleading outputs (Chan & Lee, 2023). In social media marketing, Generation Z's responses also vary according to the perceived source and nature of the content. Human influencers, for example, may generate more favorable trust-related and behavioral outcomes than virtual influencers because the latter can create greater psychological distance (Kholkina et al., 2025). At the same time, AI-generated advertising can produce strong engagement among some Generation Z users, although such responses differ across individual psychological profiles (Jackson et al., 2025). These findings indicate that digital familiarity should not be equated with unconditional acceptance of AI-generated content. This study therefore examines how trust operates within a digitally experienced consumer group regularly exposed to such content, without assuming that Generation Z is inherently more trusting or more skeptical than other generations.

Although previous studies have examined consumer responses to AI-generated marketing communication, much of this literature has focused on comparisons between AI and human authorship, disclosure of AI use, perceived authenticity, and purchase-related outcomes (Kirk & Givi, 2025). These studies show that identifying content as AI-generated can influence consumer evaluations; however, they provide limited explanation of how users' evaluations of the content itself translate into social media engagement. This issue is important because users may perceive AI-generated content as creative, entertaining, or informative while remaining uncertain about its accuracy, authenticity, and credibility.

Existing advertising and social media research generally identifies creativity, entertainment, and informativeness as favorable content attributes associated with positive consumer responses. However, these attributes represent different forms of value and may not drive engagement through the same process in an AI-generated content context. Creativity provides novelty-based value, entertainment offers hedonic value, and informativeness provides instrumental value. Although each attribute may foster a favorable evaluation, such an evaluation may be insufficient to encourage users to like, share, save, or recommend AI-generated content when its reliability is uncertain. Trust may therefore serve as a conversion mechanism that translates perceived content value into engagement.

Despite the importance of trust, previous research has not sufficiently distinguished how creativity, entertainment, and informativeness operate through trust-dependent

pathways. In particular, it remains unclear whether these content attributes contribute to trust in the same way and whether their relationships with engagement occur directly, indirectly through trust, or through a combination of both pathways. The research gap therefore concerns not only whether content attributes and trust are associated with engagement, but also how different forms of perceived content value are converted into engagement amid the uncertainty surrounding AI-generated content.

To address this gap, the present study examines the relationships among perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, perceived informativeness, trust, and Generation Z engagement with AI-generated content on social media. The proposed model is tested using survey data collected from 385 Generation Z social media users in Thailand and analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

Research Objective

The objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the relationships of perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, and perceived informativeness with trust in AI-generated content; (2) to examine the direct relationships of perceived creativity, perceived informativeness, and trust with Generation Z engagement; and (3) to test the mediating role of trust in the relationships between these three perceived content attributes and Generation Z engagement.

This study makes two academic contributions and one practical contribution. First, it extends research on AI-generated marketing communication by positioning trust as a conversion mechanism through which users' evaluations of AI-generated content are translated into engagement. By examining direct and trust-mediated relationships within the same model, the study shifts attention from the identity of the content creator to the process through which users respond to AI-generated content. Second, it distinguishes creativity, entertainment, and informativeness as distinct forms of content value rather than treating them as uniform positive predictors, thereby offering a more nuanced explanation of their pathways to Generation Z engagement. Practically, the findings help brands, marketers, and content creators identify which content attributes are most relevant to building trust and engagement rather than relying solely on production efficiency or entertainment appeal.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

This study integrates the advertising value framework with research on online trust and trust in artificial intelligence to explain Generation Z's engagement with AI-generated content. The advertising value framework proposes that consumers evaluate content according to the value provided by its attributes, including novelty-based value from creativity, hedonic value from entertainment, and instrumental value from informativeness (Ducoffe,

1996; Smith et al., 2007). However, favorable content value may be insufficient to produce engagement when users remain uncertain about the authorship, accuracy, and credibility of AI-generated content. Online trust research explains how trust reduces perceived uncertainty and supports users' willingness to rely on information or digital entities (McKnight et al., 2002), while research on trust in artificial intelligence emphasizes the importance of reliability, performance, and transparency in shaping responses to AI systems and outputs (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Integrating these perspectives, this study proposes that perceived content attributes provide initial evaluative cues, whereas trust determines whether those favorable evaluations translate into engagement. This integrated theoretical foundation supports the examination of both direct and trust-mediated pathways in the conceptual model.

AI-Generated Content and Social Media Engagement

AI-generated content refers to digital material produced wholly or partly through artificial intelligence, including text, images, videos, audio, captions, and advertising messages. Unlike traditional applications of AI that primarily support data analysis, targeting, or recommendation, generative AI directly produces content that consumers encounter and evaluate, expanding the role of AI from a behind-the-scenes marketing technology to a visible participant in brand and social media communication (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Although AI-generated content offers advantages in production speed, scalability, and variation, these technological benefits do not necessarily determine how consumers respond to the resulting content.

Social media engagement refers to users' willingness to devote attention and enact interactive responses to content, such as viewing, liking, commenting, sharing, saving, or recommending it (Muntinga et al., 2011). Engagement with AI-generated content may involve a different evaluative process than engagement with conventional digital content because users consider not only whether the content is attractive or useful but also whether it is sufficiently credible to interact with or pass on to others. Existing research supports this distinction: consumers who believe that marketing communication has been generated by AI may perceive it as less authentic and respond less favorably (Kirk & Givi, 2025), and similar perceptions of content quality do not always produce similar levels of engagement across AI-generated, human-generated, and human-AI collaborative content (De Cicco et al., 2025). Evaluating content positively and deciding to engage with it are therefore related but distinct processes. Accordingly, this study examines engagement as the outcome of a differentiated evaluation process in which perceived content attributes may operate directly or through trust, rather than assuming that every favorable attribute leads to engagement in the same way.

Perceived Content Attributes: Creativity, Entertainment, and Informativeness

Consumers commonly evaluate digital content based on the value they perceive from its observable characteristics. In advertising and social media research, creativity, entertainment, and informativeness have been identified as central attributes that influence attention, content evaluation, and consumer response (Ducoffe, 1996; Logan et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2007). These attributes, however, represent different forms of content value – novelty-based, hedonic, and instrumental, respectively – and their effects should not be assumed to operate uniformly when users evaluate AI-generated content.

Perceived creativity refers to the extent to which users regard AI-generated content as novel, original, imaginative, or distinctive. Creative content can capture attention, differentiate a message from competing content, and enhance memorability in crowded media environments (Smith et al., 2007; Till & Baack, 2005). In the context of AI-generated content, an original or well-designed output may also serve as a favorable cue about the competence involved in its production. Nevertheless, creativity primarily indicates that content is distinctive; it does not establish that the content is accurate or dependable, and users may appreciate creative AI-generated content while remaining uncertain about whether it deserves active engagement.

Perceived entertainment refers to the extent to which AI-generated content is experienced as enjoyable, amusing, exciting, or emotionally appealing. Entertainment is a prominent motivation for social media use, providing hedonic value that helps content attract and retain attention (Muntinga et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013). However, enjoyment does not necessarily indicate the reliability of AI-generated content. Users can enjoy an AI-generated video, image, or message without considering it credible or appropriate to share, so entertainment may create a favorable experience while playing a limited role in resolving AI-related uncertainty.

Perceived informativeness refers to the extent to which AI-generated content provides useful, relevant, understandable, and meaningful information. Informativeness represents a more instrumental form of content value because it helps users acquire knowledge, understand an issue, or evaluate products, services, and ideas (Ducoffe, 1996; Logan et al., 2012). Unlike entertainment, which primarily creates enjoyment, informativeness gives users a substantive basis for both using the content and assessing its credibility. It may therefore contribute to engagement directly through perceived usefulness and indirectly through the development of trust. Treating these three attributes as distinct evaluative cues, rather than interchangeable indicators of overall quality, enables a more precise examination of how perceptions of AI-generated content are translated into trust and engagement.

Trust toward AI-Generated Content

Trust is particularly important in digital environments where users must evaluate information despite limited knowledge about its source, production process, or underlying intentions. In online research, trust commonly reflects a user's willingness to rely on an entity

or information under conditions of uncertainty (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). In this study, trust in AI-generated content refers to the extent to which users perceive such content as reliable, credible, and worthy of reliance. This content-specific trust differs from general trust in artificial intelligence as a technology: a user may view AI as useful while remaining uncertain about the credibility of a particular AI-generated message, image, or video.

The need for content-specific trust arises because AI-generated content can obscure conventional cues of authorship and accountability. Users may be unable to determine who created the content, how much human oversight was involved, or whether the information was verified, and generative AI can produce content that appears fluent and convincing without ensuring factual accuracy. Research on human trust in AI similarly shows that responses to artificial intelligence depend on perceived performance, reliability, and transparency (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Siau & Wang, 2018). These concerns become particularly salient on social media, where liking, sharing, saving, or recommending content involves publicly endorsing it, whereas merely viewing it requires limited commitment. Trust therefore connects content evaluation with behavioral willingness: favorable perceptions may provide reasons to attend to content, but trust helps determine whether those evaluations translate into engagement.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes trust as a conversion mechanism between perceived content attributes and engagement. The term does not imply that every favorable attribute must generate trust or that trust always leads to engagement; rather, it describes the theoretical function of trust in explaining whether positive content evaluations are carried forward into users' willingness to interact with AI-generated content. This perspective allows the study to examine both direct and trust-mediated pathways and to determine whether different content attributes operate through equivalent or distinct mechanisms.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Drawing on the advertising value framework and research on trust under uncertainty, this study conceptualizes perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, and perceived informativeness as distinct evaluative cues through which users assess AI-generated content. Trust in AI-generated content is positioned as a mechanism that can translate these evaluations into engagement. The framework proposes that all three content attributes are related to trust and that trust subsequently contributes to Generation Z engagement. Direct paths from perceived creativity and perceived informativeness to engagement are included because novelty-based value may immediately attract interaction, while instrumental value may provide users with practical reasons to save, share, or recommend content. In contrast, no direct path from perceived entertainment to engagement is specified because entertainment primarily provides hedonic enjoyment and attention but may not, by itself, offer a sufficient basis for endorsing or circulating content whose reliability is uncertain. Nevertheless, the specific indirect relationship between entertainment and engagement

through trust is examined because an indirect effect can be theoretically tested without requiring a direct path between the predictor and the outcome (Zhao et al., 2010). Accordingly, H8 evaluates only the proposed trust-mediated pathway and should not be interpreted as a test of the direct or total relationship between perceived entertainment and engagement. The proposed relationships are presented in Figure 1.

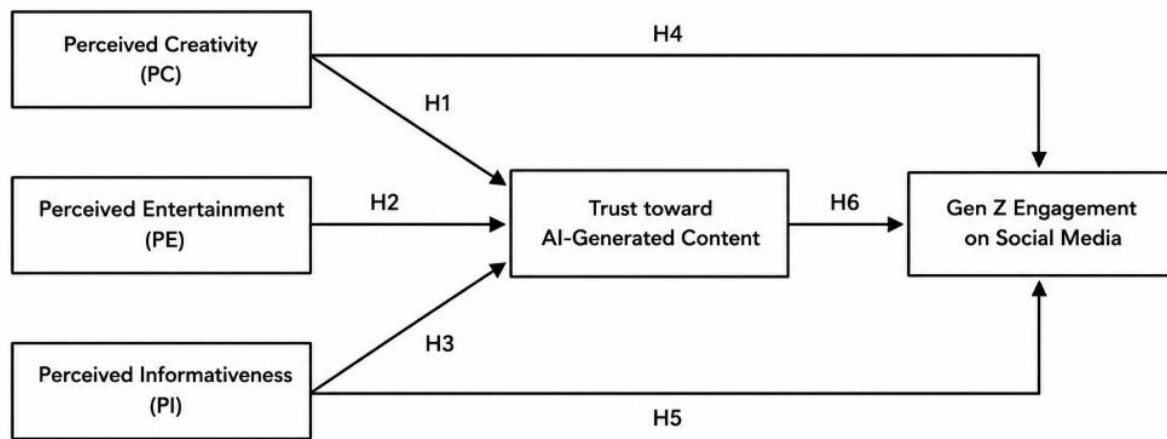


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the authors.

Creativity, entertainment, and informativeness provide distinct cues through which users evaluate AI-generated content. Creativity may signal originality and production competence, entertainment may create positive affect that encourages favorable evaluation, and informativeness may reduce uncertainty by providing useful and relevant knowledge (Ducoffe, 1996; Smith et al., 2007). Recent research confirms that creativity and entertainment remain relevant evaluative attributes in AI-generated advertising, while reliability, transparency, and knowledge accuracy contribute to trust formation in AIGC contexts (Hamouda & Aissaoui, 2026; Jung et al., 2025; Zhou & Lu, 2025). These differentiated cues may therefore strengthen users' confidence in AI-generated content, leading to the following hypotheses.

H1: Perceived creativity of AI-generated content has a positive effect on trust toward AI-generated content.

H2: Perceived entertainment of AI-generated content has a positive effect on trust toward AI-generated content.

H3: Perceived informativeness of AI-generated content has a positive effect on trust toward AI-generated content.

Creativity may directly encourage engagement by attracting attention and stimulating interest through novelty and originality (Smith et al., 2007; Till & Baack, 2005), while informativeness

may encourage engagement by providing content that users perceive as useful, relevant, and worth saving or sharing (Ducoffe, 1996; Logan et al., 2012). Accordingly:

H4: Perceived creativity of AI-generated content has a positive effect on Generation Z engagement on social media.

H5: Perceived informativeness of AI-generated content has a positive effect on Generation Z engagement on social media.

Trust reduces uncertainty and increases users' willingness to rely on and interact with online information (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). When AI-generated content is perceived as reliable and credible, users may be more inclined to view, like, share, save, or recommend it. Trust may also translate favorable content evaluations into engagement, converting perceptions of creativity, entertainment, and informativeness into interaction. Therefore:

H6: Trust toward AI-generated content has a positive effect on Generation Z engagement on social media.

H7: Trust mediates the relationship between perceived creativity and Generation Z engagement with AI-generated content on social media.

H8: Trust mediates the relationship between perceived entertainment and Generation Z engagement with AI-generated content on social media.

H9: Trust mediates the relationship between perceived informativeness and Generation Z engagement with AI-generated content on social media.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, perceived informativeness, trust in AI-generated content, and Generation Z engagement on social media. Data were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire completed by Generation Z social media users in Thailand who had encountered AI-generated content. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to assess the measurement model and test the direct and mediating relationships specified in the conceptual framework.

Population, Sample, and Data Collection

The target population comprised Generation Z social media users aged 18–29 years in Thailand who had encountered AI-generated content on social media. Following Pew Research Center's classification, individuals born in 1997 or later were considered members of Generation Z (Dimock, 2019). Only respondents aged 18 years or older were included to ensure that all participants were adults at the time of data collection.

Purposive eligibility screening combined with convenience-based online recruitment was employed. Eligible respondents were required to be 18–29 years old, use social media,

and have previously encountered AI-generated text, images, videos, audio, captions, or advertising messages. Screening questions were presented at the beginning of the questionnaire, and individuals who did not meet these criteria were unable to proceed.

Data were collected between January and February 2026 through Facebook, LINE, and university-related online channels. Because the questionnaire was distributed via an open online link, the total number of invitations and the response rate could not be determined. After screening and data cleaning, 385 valid responses were retained. Cochran's (1977) formula indicated a benchmark of approximately 385 respondents at a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and maximum population variability. In addition, an a priori power analysis with three predictors, a medium effect size of 0.15, $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power of 0.95 indicated a minimum required sample of 119, confirming that the final sample was adequate for the structural model (Faul et al., 2009).

Research Instrument and Measurement

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire with three sections. The first section contained screening questions about respondents' age, social media use, and previous exposure to AI-generated content. The second section collected demographic information and details about social media usage. The third section measured the five constructs included in the conceptual model: perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, perceived informativeness, trust in AI-generated content, and Generation Z engagement.

The measurement items were adapted from established scales and revised to refer specifically to AI-generated content. Perceived creativity was adapted from Smith et al. (2007), perceived entertainment and perceived informativeness from Ducoffe (1996), trust from McKnight et al. (2002), and Generation Z engagement from Muntinga et al. (2011). The questionnaire contained 19 items: five for perceived creativity (PC1–PC5), three for perceived entertainment (PE1–PE3), four for perceived informativeness (PI1–PI4), three for trust in AI-generated content (TR1–TR3), and four for Generation Z engagement (GE1–GE4). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Content validity was evaluated using the Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC). Three experts reviewed the questionnaire to assess the relevance, clarity, and consistency of the measurement items with their respective construct definitions. The questionnaire was revised based on the experts' comments before data collection. All 19 indicators were subsequently retained for the measurement model assessment.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2024). PLS-SEM was deemed appropriate because the study examined multiple direct and mediating relationships and aimed to assess both the explanatory and predictive performance of the proposed model. The analysis was conducted in two stages: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment.

First, the measurement model was evaluated using indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (ρ_C), reliability coefficient rho_A (ρ_A), and average variance extracted (AVE). Indicator loadings of 0.70 or above were considered satisfactory. Cronbach's alpha, ρ_A , and composite reliability values above 0.70 indicated acceptable internal consistency, while AVE values above 0.50 supported convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), with values below 0.90 generally considered acceptable for conceptually related constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

Second, the structural model was evaluated using collinearity statistics, path coefficients, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive performance. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined to assess potential collinearity among the predictor constructs. The significance of the direct and indirect effects was tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples, percentile confidence intervals, and a two-tailed significance level of 0.05. The model's out-of-sample predictive performance was assessed using PLSpredict, including Q^2 predict, root mean squared error (RMSE), and mean absolute error (MAE). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was also reported as additional evidence of model fit.

Research Findings

Profile of Respondents

A total of 385 valid responses were included in the analysis. All respondents were Generation Z social media users aged 18–29 years in Thailand who had previously encountered AI-generated content. Table 1 presents the respondents' gender characteristics and their exposure to AI-generated content across social media platforms and content formats.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics and Exposure to AI-Generated Content

Respondent Profile		Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	86 (22.3%)
	Female	272 (70.6%)
	LGBTQ	21 (5.5%)
	Prefer not to say	6 (1.6%)
Social Media Platforms Where Respondents	TikTok	358 (93%)
Most Frequently Encountered Ai-Generated Content*	Facebook	189 (49.1%)
	Instagram	106 (27.5%)
	YouTube	66 (17.1%)
	Other	1 (0.3%)

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics and Exposure to AI-Generated Content

Respondent Profile		Frequency (%)
Types of AI-generated content most frequently encountered	Image	25 (6.5%)
	Video/Animation	348 (90.4%)
	Text/Article	7 (1.8%)
	Music / Audio	5 (1.3%)

Note. *Multiple responses were allowed for social media platforms; therefore, the total frequency and percentage may exceed 385 and 100%. Source: Own Survey.

TikTok was the most frequently reported platform for encountering AI-generated content (93.0%), followed by Facebook (49.1%) and Instagram (27.5%). Video and animation were the dominant forms of AI-generated content encountered by respondents (90.4%). These results indicate that the respondents' exposure to AI-generated content was concentrated primarily on short-form, visually oriented social media content.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. Indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, reliability coefficient ρ_A (ρ_A), composite reliability (ρ_C), and average variance extracted (AVE) were assessed. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comprehensive Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	Indicators	Mean	S.D.	Loading	Alpha	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
Perceived Creativity	PC1-PC5	3.306-3.751	1.171-1.275	0.861-0.953	0.937	0.939	0.952	0.800
Perceived Entertainment	PE1-PE3	3.535-3.686	1.209-1.254	0.952-0.958	0.951	0.952	0.968	0.911
Perceived Informativeness	PI1-PI4	3.348-3.590	1.138-1.264	0.908-0.943	0.946	0.948	0.961	0.861
Trust	TR1-TR3	2.969-3.348	1.220-1.313	0.893-0.947	0.921	0.929	0.950	0.863
Engagement	GE1-GE4	2.631-3.218	1.285-1.452	0.887-0.942	0.937	0.939	0.955	0.842

Note. Alpha, Cronbach's alpha; AVE, average variance extracted. Source: Own Survey.

As shown in Table 2, all 19 indicators were retained, with loadings ranging from 0.861 to 0.958, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.921 to 0.951, ρ_A values ranged from 0.929 to 0.952, and composite reliability values ranged from 0.950 to 0.968. All values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability. The AVE values ranged from 0.800 to 0.911, exceeding the threshold of 0.50 and supporting convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Discriminant validity was subsequently assessed using the Heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). The HTMT criterion evaluates whether the constructs included in the model are empirically distinct from each other (Henseler et al., 2015). The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

	GE	PC	PE	PI	TR
Engagement (GE)	-				
Perceived Creativity (PC)	0.805	-			
Perceived Entertainment (PE)	0.832	0.905	-		
Perceived Informativeness (PI)	0.860	0.899	0.896	-	
Trust (TR)	0.884	0.842	0.785	0.871	-

Source: Own Survey.

As shown in Table 3, the HTMT values ranged from 0.785 to 0.905. Most construct pairs had values below the recommended threshold of 0.90, providing overall support for discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). However, the HTMT value between perceived creativity and perceived entertainment was 0.905, marginally exceeding the threshold. This result indicates some empirical overlaps between the two constructs and should be considered when interpreting their individual effects. Nevertheless, perceived creativity and perceived entertainment were retained as theoretically distinct constructs because they represent different forms of content value: creativity reflects novelty and originality, whereas entertainment reflects enjoyment and emotional appeal.

Evaluation of the Structural Model

After the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed, the structural model was evaluated. This assessment included collinearity statistics, coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), predictive performance, and the significance of the direct and indirect relationships. The model explained 69.5% of the variance in trust toward AI-generated content ($R^2 = 0.695$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.693$) and 74.1% of the variance in Generation Z engagement ($R^2 = 0.741$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.739$), indicating considerable explanatory power for both endogenous constructs. The SRMR value of 0.042 was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, providing additional evidence of acceptable model fit. The inner VIF values ranged from 3.282 to 4.702; although these values were below the conventional threshold of 5.00, some exceeded the more conservative threshold of 3.30, so the individual path coefficients were interpreted with awareness of the relatively high correlations among the perceived content attributes.

The effect size (f^2) was subsequently examined to assess the relative contribution of each predictor construct to the explained variance of the endogenous constructs. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. F2 Effect Sizes

Construct	Trust	Engagement
Perceived Creativity (PC)	0.078	0.008
Perceived Entertainment (PE)	0.000	-
Perceived Informativeness (PI)	0.209	0.111
Trust (TR)	-	0.253

Source: Own Survey.

As shown in Table 4, trust had a medium effect on Generation Z engagement ($f^2 = 0.253$), while perceived informativeness had a medium effect on trust ($f^2 = 0.209$). Perceived informativeness had a small effect on engagement ($f^2 = 0.111$), and perceived creativity had a small effect on trust ($f^2 = 0.078$). In contrast, perceived creativity had no meaningful effect on engagement ($f^2 = 0.008$), and perceived entertainment had no effect on trust ($f^2 = 0.000$). These results indicate that informativeness and trust made the most substantial individual contributions to the explained variance of the endogenous constructs.

Out-of-sample predictive performance was assessed using PLSpredict. The Q^2_{predict} values for trust (0.688) and engagement (0.672) were both greater than zero, indicating that the model had predictive relevance for both endogenous constructs (RMSE = 0.561 and 0.575; MAE = 0.440 and 0.465, respectively).

The direct relationships specified in the structural model were evaluated using standardized path coefficients and bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Structural Model Results: Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Direct Effect Testing	β	t -test	p Values	Results
H1	PC $\rightarrow$ TR	0.331***	4.566	0.000	Supported
H2	PE $\rightarrow$ TR	0.000	0.006	0.995	Not Supported
H3	PI $\rightarrow$ TR	0.535***	7.438	0.000	Supported
H4	PC $\rightarrow$ GE	0.088	1.561	0.119	Not Supported
H5	PI $\rightarrow$ GE	0.359***	5.542	0.000	Supported
H6	TR $\rightarrow$ GE	0.463***	7.743	0.000	Supported
H7	PC $\rightarrow$ TR $\rightarrow$ GE	0.154***	4.066	0.000	Supported
H8	PE $\rightarrow$ TR $\rightarrow$ GE	0.000	0.006	0.995	Not Supported
H9	PI $\rightarrow$ TR $\rightarrow$ GE	0.248***	5.439	0.000	Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$. Total effects on engagement: PC = 0.242***, PE = 0.000, PI = 0.607***, TR = 0.463***.

Source: Own Survey.

The direct and indirect relationships were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. Perceived creativity was positively related to trust ($\beta = 0.331$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1, whereas perceived entertainment showed no relationship with trust ($\beta = 0.000$, $p = 0.995$), rejecting H2. Perceived informativeness was positively related to both trust ($\beta = 0.535$, $p < 0.001$) and engagement ($\beta = 0.359$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3 and H5. Trust was positively related to engagement ($\beta = 0.463$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6, while the direct relationship between perceived creativity and engagement was not significant ($\beta = 0.088$, $p = 0.119$), rejecting H4. Trust significantly mediated the relationships of perceived creativity ($\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived informativeness ($\beta = 0.248$, $p < 0.001$) with engagement,

supporting H7 and H9, whereas the indirect effect of perceived entertainment was not significant, rejecting H8. Perceived creativity therefore influenced engagement only through trust, indicating indirect-only mediation, whereas perceived informativeness exhibited complementary mediation through both direct and trust-mediated effects, whereas perceived informativeness exhibited both direct and trust-mediated effects and showed the strongest total effect on engagement (0.607, $p < 0.001$).

Overall, the findings demonstrate distinct pathways from perceived content attributes to engagement: informativeness influences engagement through both direct and trust-mediated pathways, creativity influences engagement through trust despite the absence of a significant direct relationship, and entertainment does not translate into engagement through trust.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined how perceived creativity, perceived entertainment, and perceived informativeness relate to Generation Z engagement with AI-generated content on social media, with trust in AI-generated content serving as a mediating mechanism. Six of the nine hypotheses were supported, and the three content attributes did not operate uniformly: informativeness was related to engagement through both direct and trust-mediated pathways, creativity was related to engagement only indirectly through trust, and entertainment was not related to engagement through the specified trust pathway. These findings support a differentiated explanation of how perceived content value is translated into engagement under AI-related uncertainty.

Perceived informativeness had the strongest relationship with trust and a significant direct relationship with engagement, indicating complementary mediation. Informative AI-generated content thus provides two forms of value: useful, relevant information gives users an immediate reason to attend to, save, or share content, while also providing a substantive basis for judging whether the content is credible. This finding is consistent with advertising-value research identifying informativeness as an important source of positive consumer response (Ducoffe, 1996; Logan et al., 2012), but it extends this work by showing that, for AI-generated content, informativeness operates not only through instrumental value but also through the trust it helps establish.

Trust had a significant positive relationship with engagement and the largest effect size in the model, supporting the view that trust reduces uncertainty and increases users' willingness to rely on online information (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). Because users often cannot verify the authorship, accuracy, or human oversight of AI-generated content, engaging with it – particularly by sharing or recommending it – may require confidence in its reliability (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Trust therefore links favorable content evaluations to users' willingness to interact with it.

Perceived creativity was positively related to trust but had no significant direct relationship with engagement, indicating indirect-only mediation. Originality and novelty can contribute to favorable assessments and signal production quality (Smith et al., 2007; Till & Baack, 2005), but they do not independently provide a sufficient reason to engage; users appear to require confidence in reliability before interacting with creative AI-generated content. Creativity is therefore not unimportant – its relationship with engagement depends on trust.

Perceived entertainment was not significantly related to trust and showed no significant indirect relationship with engagement, which contrasts with research that identifies entertainment as a central motivation for social media use (Muntinga et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Enjoyment may offer limited evidence about the reliability of AI-generated content, and entertainment may be a baseline expectation on social media that does not differentiate content that deserves trust. This result should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously: perceived entertainment was highly correlated with the other attributes, particularly creativity, and the marginally elevated HTMT and VIF values indicate that their unique structural relationships are difficult to separate completely.

Taken together, the findings refine the content-value explanation of social media engagement. Informativeness offers instrumental value related to engagement both directly and through trust; creativity provides novelty-based value whose effect depends on trust; and entertainment provides hedonic value that was not converted into engagement through the trust mechanism specified here. Trust thus operates as a pathway-dependent conversion mechanism rather than a universal outcome of every favorable attribute – this differentiated pattern constitutes the central contribution of the study and helps explain why making AI-generated content appealing does not necessarily make it trusted or engaging.

Recommendations

Theoretical Implications

The study offers three theoretical implications. First, perceived creativity, entertainment, and informativeness should not be treated as uniform indicators of positive content value; each provides a distinct evaluative basis and follows a different pathway to engagement. Future conceptualizations should therefore distinguish among instrumental, novelty-based, and hedonic forms of content value. Second, trust functions as a pathway-dependent conversion mechanism: its mediating role varies with the type of content evaluation rather than transmitting every favorable evaluation equally, which refines existing accounts of online trust. Third, the nonsignificant role of entertainment identifies a potential boundary to the assumption that enjoyable social media content necessarily produces favorable responses; in AI-generated content contexts, hedonic value may attract attention without resolving credibility concerns.

Practical Recommendations

Brands and content creators should prioritize the informational value of AI-generated content, using AI tools to produce material that is useful, relevant, and understandable, and reviewing outputs for factual accuracy before publication – informativeness provides both an immediate reason for engagement and a basis for trust. Creativity should be combined with credibility-building elements such as accurate information, consistent brand communication, and appropriate human review, because novel execution alone may not encourage engagement. Finally, entertainment should not be the sole strategy for generating meaningful engagement: in this study, enjoyment did not translate into engagement through trust, so entertaining content should be paired with useful information and credible communication. These recommendations concern the trust-mediated pathway examined here and should not be read as evidence that entertainment has no direct relationship with engagement, as that path was not included in the model.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, purposive eligibility screening combined with convenience-based online recruitment was used with Generation Z social media users in Thailand, and female respondents represented 70.6% of the sample; together with the cross-sectional, self-reported design, the results represent associations at one point in time rather than causal evidence. Future research could use more balanced or probability-based samples, experimental manipulations of AI authorship or disclosure, and longitudinal designs. Second, respondents' exposure to AI-generated content was concentrated on TikTok and video formats, so the findings may reflect short-form visual content more strongly than text or audio; comparisons across platforms and formats are warranted. Third, perceived creativity and perceived entertainment showed empirical overlap, as reflected in the HTMT and VIF results, and their unique relationships should be interpreted cautiously; future research could refine their measurement or test whether their effects vary by platform or content purpose. Finally, the study examined AI-generated content broadly, did not compare it directly with human-generated or human–AI collaborative content, and did not include a direct path from entertainment to engagement; future studies could test these relationships.

References

- Chan, C. K. Y., & Lee, K. K. W. (2023). The AI generation gap: Are Gen Z students more interested in adopting generative AI such as ChatGPT in teaching and learning than their Gen X and millennial generation teachers?. *Smart Learning Environments*, 10, Article 60. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-023-00269-3>
- Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling techniques* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

- De Cicco, R., Francioni, B., Curina, I., & Cioppi, M. (2025). AI, human or a blend? How the educational content creator influences consumer engagement and brand-related outcomes. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 39(10), 54–72. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-10-2024-0539>
- Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>
- Ducoffe, R. H. (1996). Advertising value and advertising on the web. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36(5), 21–35.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Hughes, L., Ismagilova, E., Aarts, G., Coombs, C., Crick, T., Duan, Y., Dwivedi, R., Edwards, J. S., Eirug, A., Galanos, V., Ilavarasan, P. V., Janssen, M., Jones, P., Kar, A. K., Kizgin, H., Kronemann, B., Lal, B., Lucini, B., Medaglia, R., ... Williams, M. D. (2021). Artificial intelligence (AI): Multidisciplinary perspectives on emerging challenges, opportunities, and agenda for research, practice and policy. *International Journal of Information Management*, 57, 101994. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.08.002>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(4), 1149–1160. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.41.4.1149>
- Gefen, D., Karahanna, E., & Straub, D. W. (2003). Trust and TAM in online shopping: An integrated model. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(1), 51–90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30036519>
- Glikson, E., & Woolley, A. W. (2020). Human trust in artificial intelligence: Review of empirical research. *Academy of Management Annals*, 14(2), 627–660. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2018.0057>
- Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1), 2–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203>
- Hamouda, M., & Aissaoui, A. (2026). Cracking the code: How can AI-generated advertising be effective? Empirical evidence on the antecedents and consequences of advertising value. *European Business Review*, 38(2), 224–243. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-06-2025-0214>
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8>
- Jackson, K. M., Kiss, H., & Bergman, M. E. (2025). The power of personalization: Generation Z's emotional response to AI food marketing under the EU AI Act. *British Food Journal*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-05-2025-0727>
- Jung, T., Koghut, M., Lee, E., & Kwon, O. (2025). Artificial creativity in luxury advertising: How trust and perceived humanness drive consumer response to AI-generated content. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 87, 104403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2025.104403>

- Kholkina, V., Chesnokova, E., & Zelenskaya, E. (2025). Virtual or human? The impact of the influencer type on Gen Z consumer outcomes. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 34(1), 104–118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2023-4885>
- Kirk, C. P., & Givi, J. (2025). The AI-authorship effect: Understanding authenticity, moral disgust, and consumer responses to AI-generated marketing communications. *Journal of Business Research*, 186, 114984. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114984>
- Logan, K., Bright, L. F., & Gangadharbatla, H. (2012). Facebook versus television: Advertising value perceptions among females. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 6(3), 164–179. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17505931211274651>
- McKnight, D. H., Choudhury, V., & Kacmar, C. (2002). Developing and validating trust measures for e-commerce: An integrative typology. *Information Systems Research*, 13(3), 334–359. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.13.3.334.81>
- Muntinga, D. G., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. G. (2011). Introducing COBRAs: Exploring motivations for brand-related social media use. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 13–46. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-30-1-013-046>
- Ringle, C. M., Wende, S., & Becker, J. M. (2024). *SmartPLS 4* [Computer software]. SmartPLS GmbH. <https://www.smartpls.com>
- Siau, K., & Wang, W. (2018). Building trust in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotics. *Cutter Business Technology Journal*, 31(2), 47–53.
- Smith, R. E., MacKenzie, S. B., Yang, X., Buchholz, L. M., & Darley, W. K. (2007). Modeling the determinants and effects of creativity in advertising. *Marketing Science*, 26(6), 819–833. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.1070.0272>
- Till, B. D., & Baack, D. W. (2005). Recall and persuasion: Does creative advertising matter?. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(3), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2005.10639201>
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362–369. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2013-0041>
- Zhao, X., Lynch, J. G., Jr., & Chen, Q. (2010). Reconsidering Baron and Kenny: Myths and truths about mediation analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(2), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1086/651257>
- Zhou, T., & Lu, H. (2025). The effect of trust on user adoption of AI-generated content. *The Electronic Library*, 43(1), 61–76. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EL-08-2024-0244>