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More Than Saying "It's AI": How Role Disclosure Transparency in AI-Generated Ads Influences Persuasion

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how AI role disclosure transparency—the consumers' subjective perception of how clearly and informatively an advertisement communicates the role that AI played in the ad creation process—influences consumer evaluation of AI-generated ads via ad creation process credibility. A high level of perceived transparency enhances ad creation process credibility, which, in turn, leads to a more favorable attitude toward the ad (Study 1 and 2). In addition, the effectiveness of AI role disclosure transparency is also amplified under two conditions: when the disclosure motive is framed as reactive rather than proactive (Study 3) and the presence of a regulatory compliance signal (Study 4). This research advances current understanding of strategic disclosure in AI-assisted advertising and provides actionable insights for optimizing consumer response to AI-generated content. From a managerial perspective, it offers a decision-making framework grounded in empirical findings to guide marketers on how best to communicate AI involvement in ad creation.

1 | Introduction

As the business environments become increasingly technology-driven, companies are seeking new ways to engage consumers in the digital realm (Li et al. 2021). The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to enhance business operations by automating routine tasks and enabling more personalized experiences (Le et al. 2023, 2025). The integration of AI in advertising is evidenced by the projected surge in global spending, from $370 billion in 2022 to a forecast of $1.3 trillion USD by 2032 (Dencheva 2023). In creative industries, especially advertising, brands are already deploying generative AI (GenAI) to produce campaign materials. Nestlé and Mondelez, for instance, have used DALL-E to develop ad visuals (David 2023). GenAI systems compress ad production timelines with lower costs (Le and Kunz 2026; Mariani and Dwivedi 2024). They act as an essential catalyst for a structural transformation of content-creation workflows across the sector (Kietzmann et al. 2018; Le et al. 2026; Huh et al. 2023). As AI-generated advertising content becomes widespread, the necessity for transparency of its involvement in the ad creation process intensifies (Ford et al. 2023). A recent YouGov survey found that roughly 67% of respondents believe brands should disclose when product images are generated by AI (Tan 2024). Not transparently disclosing the use of AI carries reputational risk and may be perceived as a deceptive omission. For example, HelloFresh withdrew an AI-generated advertisement after failing to acknowledge its origin, triggering social media backlash (Anthony 2024). Hence, the central question for advertisers is no longer whether to disclose AI involvement, but how clearly the specific role of AI in the ad production process should be communicated.

TABLE 1 | An Overview of Research on AI in Advertising.

Author(s)	Theoretical focus	AI role disclosure transparency as the IV		Focuses of boundary conditions	Dependent variables	Main findings
		Yes	No			
Arango et al. (2023)	Empathy		✗	Ethical versus instrumental motives, disaster context	Donation intention, Attitude toward the charity	Awareness of the falsity of AI-generated faces reduces donation intention via reduced empathy, guilt, and emotion perception. Ethical motive framing and emergency contexts can reduce the negative effect.
Aljarah et al. (2024)	Cognitive dissonance		✗	CSR authenticity, Brand familiarity	Online brand engagement	Awareness of falsity in AI-generated CSR ads reduces online brand engagement. CSR authenticity and brand familiarity moderate the impact; sincerity matters more for unfamiliar brands.
Baek et al. (2024)	Persuasion Knowledge			Perceived AI human-likeness	Ad credibility, Attitude toward ad, Donation intention	AI disclosure reduces perceived ad credibility, ad attitude, and donation intention. These negative effects are weaker when AI is perceived as more human-like rather than machine-like.
Bakpayev et al. (2022)	Cognition vs emotion-oriented tasks		✗	Ad appeal (rational vs. emotional), Product type, AI human-likeness	Ad attitude, Purchase intention	Consumers prefer humans for emotional ads. Human-like AI improves ad attitudes and purchase intention for hedonic appeals.
Chen et al. (2024)	Mind perception theory		✗	Ad appeal	Consumer attitudes, purchase intention	Agentic appeal is more effective for AI-generated ads (via task self-efficacy); communal appeal is more effective for human-generated ads (via social self-efficacy).
Grigsby et al. (2025)	Source Credibility		✗	Ad focus (intangible vs. tangible); Intangible attribute creation source	Attitude toward ad	AI disclosure reduces trust and ad attitudes, especially when the ad focuses on intangible attributes (e.g., human provider). This negative effect is mitigated if AI is used only for tangible aspects and disclosed transparently.
Jin and Tao (2025)	Framing processing		✗	Artwork style; Human-AI collaboration level	Willingness to pay	Framing AI visuals as created increases willingness to pay through savoring. This effect is weakened for concrete imagery and high Human-AI collaboration.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Author(s)	Theoretical focus	AI role disclosure transparency as the IV		Focuses of boundary conditions	Dependent variables	Main findings
		Yes	No			
Kirk and Givi (2025)	Perceived authenticity; Moral disgust		✗	Content types; brand representations	WOM intention; Loyalty	Using AI instead of humans to craft emotional messages reduces word of mouth and loyalty, driven by lower authenticity and moral disgust. The effect disappears for factual or edited communications and even reverses when content is copied from other sources.
To et al. (2025)	Ad authenticity		✗	Creativity of the ad	Ad and brand evaluations	AI-generated ads reduce luxury brand attitudes and purchase intention due to lower perceived authenticity. This effect can be mitigated when the AI-generated imagery is perceived as highly creative rather than standard.
Song et al. (2024)	Spreading activation		✗	Tourist involvement	Visit intention	Rational appeals work better for AI ads, while emotional appeals work better for human ads. This effect depends on involvement and is mediated by processing fluency.
Sun et al. (2024)	Interactive media effects			Message interactivity, Ad type, Bot profile	Ad attitude, Behavioral intention	Highly interactive and narrative ads increase ad effectiveness by reducing expectancy violation and increasing transportation.
Ryoo et al. (2026)	Expectation discrepancy		✗	Ad quality	Attitude toward the AI-generated ad	Higher expectations for Human-AI collaboration can negatively influence customers' evaluations when the outcome falls short of those expectations.
Wu et al. (2025)	Task objectivity		✗	Belief in AI's capacity (high-complexity tasks vs. low-complexity tasks)	WOM intention	Disclosure of AI's involvement in ad placement (vs. ad creation) increases WOM intent when consumers believe AI can handle high-complexity tasks.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Author(s)	Theoretical focus	AI role disclosure transparency as the IV		Focuses of boundary conditions	Dependent variables	Main findings
		Yes	No			
Wu and Jing Wen (2021)	Social Identity; Uncanny Valley		✗	Perceived objectivity, AI human-likeness, and uneasiness with robots	Appreciation of AI-generated ads	Perceived objectivity increases appreciation via machine heuristics and reduces eeriness. Uneasiness with robots increases both machine heuristic and eeriness. AI human-likeness has no significant effect.
This research	Heuristic cue processing	✗		Regulatory compliance and disclosure motive signals	Attitude toward ad; Ad click-through decision	A high level of perceived AI role disclosure transparency leads to a better attitude toward the ad and ad click-through decisions due to increased creator credibility. This effect is intensified with the presence of regulatory compliance or a reactive disclosure motive signal.

Table 1 summarizes the expanding literature on AI involvement in advertising. Although these studies operate across diverse theoretical perspectives, ranging from empathy (Arango et al. 2023) and cognitive dissonance (Aljarah et al. 2024) to persuasion knowledge (Baek et al. 2026), mind perception (Chen et al. 2024), authenticity (Kirk and Givi 2025), and framing (Jin and Tao 2025), much of this work tends to treat disclosing AI as a binary identity-based cue. These studies typically contrast disclosure cues as "AI-generated" versus "human-created" or "AI-only" versus "Human-AI collaboration" (Baek et al. 2026; Kirk and Givi 2025; Ryoo et al. 2026), which signal who produced the advertisement. While such categorical disclosures identify the creator, they offer limited insight into how consumers interpret differences in the clarity with which the role of AI in the ad creation process is communicated. In practice, advertisers may vary substantially in how explicitly they describe AI's functional contributions to ad production. This variation highlights the need to move beyond binary disclosure toward understanding how consumers perceived different levels of AI role disclosure transparency—that is, how clearly the specific role of AI in the creative process is communicated to consumers. Moreover, although several studies have examined how consumers respond to AI-generated content (e.g., To et al. 2025), much less is known about how firms can strategically shape these responses through the disclosure itself. While repeated exposure may increase acceptance (Bakpayev et al. 2022), emerging evidence suggests that disclosing AI involvement often provokes adverse reactions due to concerns over authenticity, creativity, and emotional resonance (Baek et al. 2026; Brüns and Meißner 2024; Grigsby et al. 2025). Further, consumers attribute emotional resonance to human creators, whereas AI is perceived as deficient in emotional depth (Wu et al. 2025), and when the disclosed source of an ad conflicts with its tone, it can reduce persuasive impact (Song et al. 2024). Nonetheless, little guidance exists on under what conditions AI role disclosure transparency helps consumer response.

This research advances two objectives. First, we conceptualize the notion of AI role disclosure transparency as the consumers' perception of clarity and informativeness regarding the functional role of AI in the advertising production process and examine its effect on ad creation process credibility, a key heuristic in low-elaboration judgments. Second, it identifies contextual disclosure signals that condition transparency's effectiveness. Together, these objectives clarify how AI disclosure intensity shapes consumer responses and provide actionable guidance for communicating AI involvement in advertising.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, building on recent calls for greater transparency of AI involvement in ad creation (Ford et al. 2023), this research introduces the concept of AI role disclosure transparency as a distinct strategic communication practice. Prior research has largely examined AI disclosure as a categorical identity cue, indicating whether an advertisement is created by AI, humans, or a combination of both (Baek et al. 2026; Kirk and Givi 2025; Ryoo et al. 2026). While such disclosures identify the source of the advertisement, they provide limited insight into how clearly the functional role of AI in the ad production process is communicated. By shifting

attention from who created the advertisement to how clearly AI's role in the creation process is explained, this study conceptualizes AI role disclosure transparency as a distinct communication practice. Drawing on communication theory (Dillard 2014; Karpinska-Krakowiak and Eisend 2024), we propose that the clarity of AI role disclosure shapes consumers' evaluations of AI-generated advertising through ad creation process credibility as a heuristic source cue (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Second, this research extends the literature on AI in advertising (Campbell 2023) by identifying contextual cues that shape the effectiveness of AI role disclosure transparency. From a signaling perspective (Yoganathan et al. 2025), we demonstrate that framing regulatory compliance and clarifying disclosure motives each function as signals that reinforce the intent to be transparent about AI use in ad production. These cues shape how consumers interpret the firm's intent, accountability, and trustworthiness in AI-assisted advertising. By identifying these boundary conditions of AI role disclosure transparency, we advance understanding of how audiences evaluate AI-generated advertising (Baek et al. 2026; Jin and Tao 2025; Koning and Voorveld 2025; Ryoo et al. 2026; Wu and Jing Wen 2021).

Third, the findings translate into actionable managerial guidance on how firms should communicate AI involvement in advertising. Rather than treating disclosure as a simple compliance requirement, our results show that the clarity with which AI's role is communicated can be strategically calibrated to shape consumer perceptions. To operationalize these insights, we provide a decision-tree framework that guides managers on how and when to disclose AI involvement in the ad creation process. Our recommendations help advertisers proactively manage AI attribution when communicating this matter to consumers, thereby mitigating downstream effects on trustworthiness. This transforms AI disclosure practice from a risk-mitigation task into a deliberate element of persuasion design and strategic brand communication.

2 | Theoretical Background

2.1 | AI Role Disclosure Transparency in Advertising

Newer AI generations are now capable of producing digital content traditionally created by humans (Le and Cayrat 2025; Plangger et al. 2022). It is emerging as a disruptive force across industries (Huh et al. 2023). Its ubiquity in content generation has raised concerns, as consumers often struggle to distinguish AI-generated from human-created content (Kreps et al. 2022). This challenge makes disclosure practices increasingly critical, and in some regions, legally required (e.g., EU AI Act Article 50). As illustrated in Figure 1, AI disclosure transparency can range from subtle tags such as Coca-Cola's 'Created by Real Magic AI' to detailed statements like MANGO's LinkedIn post. This variation underscores that firms face strategic choices not only about whether to disclose AI involvement, but also about how clearly the role of AI is communicated in the production process.

Recent research highlights the critical role that transparency plays in disclosing AI involvement in ad creation (Ford et al. 2023). Minimal acknowledgment of AI involvement may be considered inadequate, whereas more explicit disclosure of the AI role in the creation process is likely to become

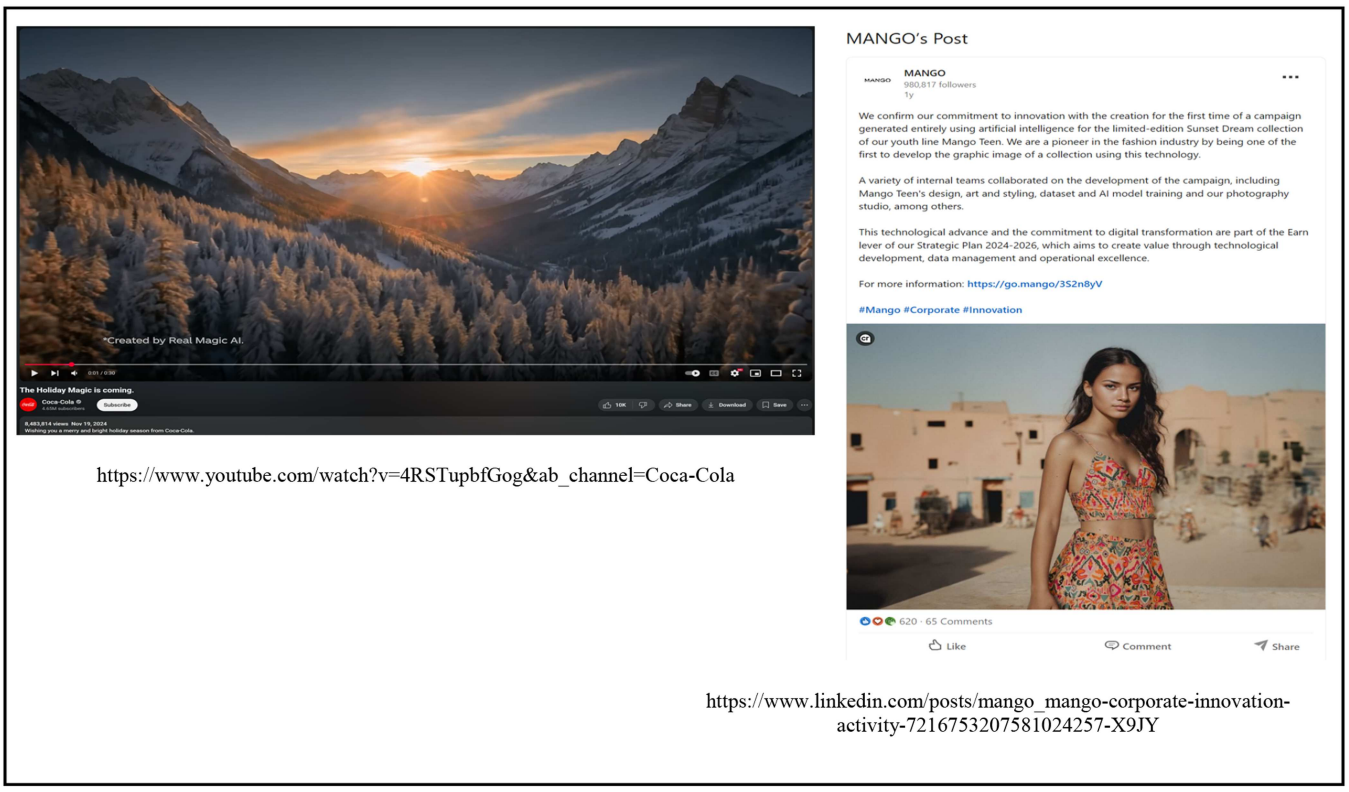

FIGURE 1 | Examples of different levels of AI role disclosure transparency.

increasingly expected by regulators and consumers alike. Drawing on the conclusion-based approach to persuasion, explicitly stating an argument's conclusion enhances persuasiveness by clarifying the sender's intent (Dillard 2014). Building on this perspective, we conceptualize AI role disclosure transparency as *the consumers' subjective perception of how clearly and informatively an advertisement communicates the role that AI played in the ad creation process*. This conceptualization emphasizes that AI disclosure transparency is not merely the presence of disclosure, but the degree of clarity and specificity with which consumers perceive an advertisement communicates the nature, purpose, and scope of AI involvement in the ad creation process (Wang and Qiu 2024; Shin 2021). A high level of AI role disclosure transparency can be induced when an advertisement explicitly acknowledges how AI contributed to the development of the ad (e.g., generating visual elements, assisting with copywriting, or optimizing content), whereas a low level of subjective AI role disclosure transparency could be operated through vague or generic labels. Clear and detailed disclosures can reduce uncertainty and support more favorable evaluations (Lee et al. 2023). In contrast, minimal or ambiguous labels may elicit skepticism about the creator's intentions, especially given beliefs that AI lacks emotional depth or contextual understanding (Wu and Jing Wen 2021).

Importantly, we discern AI role disclosure transparency from identity-based disclosure of the ad creator (e.g., Baek et al. 2024). Identity-based disclosure (i.e., AI identity disclosure) is a statement that acknowledges the apparent source (e.g., "This advertisement is AI-generated"). Conceptually, the object of such a disclosure is the ontological status of the presenting entity. Prior research on AI disclosure has often focused on whether content is labeled as AI-generated, human-generated, or the product of human-AI collaboration (e.g., Baek et al. 2024; Ryoo et al. 2025; To et al. 2025). Such identity-based disclosures signal who produced the content. However, they provide limited information about how AI contributed to the production process. In many real-world advertising contexts, AI may perform multiple roles, such as generating text, assisting with visual design, or supporting campaign optimization, yet these roles are not always clearly communicated to consumers.

Conversely, AI role disclosure transparency focuses on the clarity with which the functional role of AI in the creative process is communicated, rather than merely identifying whether AI was involved. Two advertisements may both disclose AI involvement, yet differ substantially in the clarity and specificity with which the role of AI is explained (cf. Figure 1). To highlight these differences between these concepts, Table 2 summarizes the key distinctions between identity-based disclosure and AI role disclosure transparency.

Rather than merely labeling AI as present, AI role disclosure transparency captures the perceived clarity and specificity with which the disclosure explains AI's functional role in creating the ad. This makes it a process transparency cue rather than an identity cue. Its focus is not simple source identification, but the extent to which consumers believe the disclosure meaningfully explains AI's specific contributions to the production process. Accordingly, AI role disclosure transparency could be considered as a graded construct, varying in the level of informational richness and clarity conveyed about the production process. Consumer inference under this framework is therefore not limited to who produced the content, but extends to how clearly the role of AI in the ad creation process is explained.

This distinction matters because a binary disclosure logic assumes that merely signaling AI involvement is sufficient to shape consumer response. Our perspective argues instead that disclosures differ in their persuasive value depending on how transparently they communicate AI's functional role. In other words, simply revealing the presence of AI is not theoretically equivalent to providing a clear and specific explanation of what AI actually did.

2.2 | Ad Creation Process Credibility

To explain how AI role disclosure transparency shapes consumer responses to AI-generated ads, we draw on the Elaboration

TABLE 2 | Distinctions between AI identity disclosure and AI role disclosure transparency.

Comparative aspects of disclosure	AI identity disclosure	AI role disclosure transparency (this research)
Conceptual focus	Identification of the creator (e.g., Baek et al. 2024)	Clarity and specificity regarding the functional role of AI in the ad production process
Operationalization of disclosure cue	Simple categorical label (e.g., "AI-generated," "Created by AI," "Human-AI collaboration") (e.g., To et al. 2025)	Explanation of AI's specific contributions in the ad creation process
Level of variation	Binary or categorical (e.g., Grigsby et al. 2025)	Continuous or graded (low vs. high perceived transparency in communicating AI's role)
Primary informational signal	Identity cue (e.g., Baek et al. 2026)	Process transparency cue
Consumer inference	Who produced the content	Subjective evaluation of how clearly the role of AI in the ad production process is explained

Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). ELM posits that persuasion occurs through two pathways—the central route, which involves scrutiny of message content, and the peripheral route, which relies on heuristic cues (Areni 2003; Herr et al. 1991). ELM provides a clear and parsimonious foundation for this research because AI role disclosure transparency operates not as an argument about the product, but as a cue about how the ad was produced. Specifically, it signals the "behind-the-scenes" involvement of AI in the ad creation process. Consumers typically lack the motivation to evaluate the technical details of ad production. Thus, they form heuristic judgments based on what the disclosure implies about the role of the creator in the process (Thompson and Malaviya 2013). Greater transparency enhances the interpretability of the disclosure, thereby increasing its diagnosticity as a cue for evaluating the ad production process. Under low elaboration, consumers preferentially rely on cues that provide low-effort signals of reliability, making the ad creation process credibility more influential in shaping evaluations. Prior research similarly finds that AI disclosure effects arise primarily through the peripheral route, where judgments depend on simple signals about the creator rather than detailed evaluation of message content (Ryoo et al. 2025). Thus, ELM provides a suitable theoretical lens for understanding why variations in AI role disclosure transparency influence consumer evaluations through differential reliance on process-based heuristic cues.

Building on this heuristic processing logic, we denote ad creation process credibility as consumers' subjective evaluation of the extent to which the process used to generate the advertisement is reliable and trustworthy (Ohanian 1990). This shifts the focus away from source identity (who created the ad) and message evaluation (the ad content) toward the production process (how the ad was created). In the context of AI role disclosure transparency, ad creation process credibility reflects the extent to which consumers infer that the disclosed AI involvement signals a credible approach to ad production. These aspects parallel traditional credibility components (i.e., expertise and trustworthiness) (Ohanian 1990; Pornpitakpan 2004), but are anchored at the level of the production process rather than the creator.

3 | Hypothesis Development

As AI technologies become increasingly embedded in advertising production, understanding how consumers respond to the disclosure of AI involvement becomes essential (Ford et al. 2023). Building on the conceptual distinction between identity-based disclosure and AI role disclosure transparency, we propose the research framework depicted in Figure 2 to investigate how variations in the clarity of AI role disclosure influence consumer evaluations of AI-generated advertising.

3.1 | The Impact of AI Role Disclosure Transparency

We posit that disclosure transparency plays a crucial role as a deliberate strategy that enhances ad outcomes (i.e., attitude toward the ad and behavioral response) by improving the subjective evaluation of ad creation process credibility. Prior research considers transparency as a signal that shapes how consumers interpret others' intentions by making them more diagnostic (Reinhard et al. 2006; Yang and Battocchio 2021). It is a deliberate communication strategy to reduce the perceived uncertainty of messages (Eisend et al. 2020). In the context of AI-generated ads, explaining how AI is involved in content production mitigates the "black-box" problem and makes AI-driven outputs appear more rational and understandable (Liu 2021). Thus, transparency could also be leveraged as a trust-building tactic (Bock and Kolbjørnsrud 2024).

A low level of disclosure transparency provides surface-level information about how the AI contributed to the ad production process (Baek et al. 2024), which could induce an impression of ambiguity and prompt intensified systematic processing and critical judgment (Weary and Jacobson 1997). Without information about the system's scope of involvement, general consumers would not be able to determine how much the AI agent was used in content generation. Thus, it might reduce the perceived credibility of the agent creating the ad. Conversely, a high level of disclosure transparency counteracts these dynamics. By offering clear, specific information about the functions AI performs, a transparent disclosure could

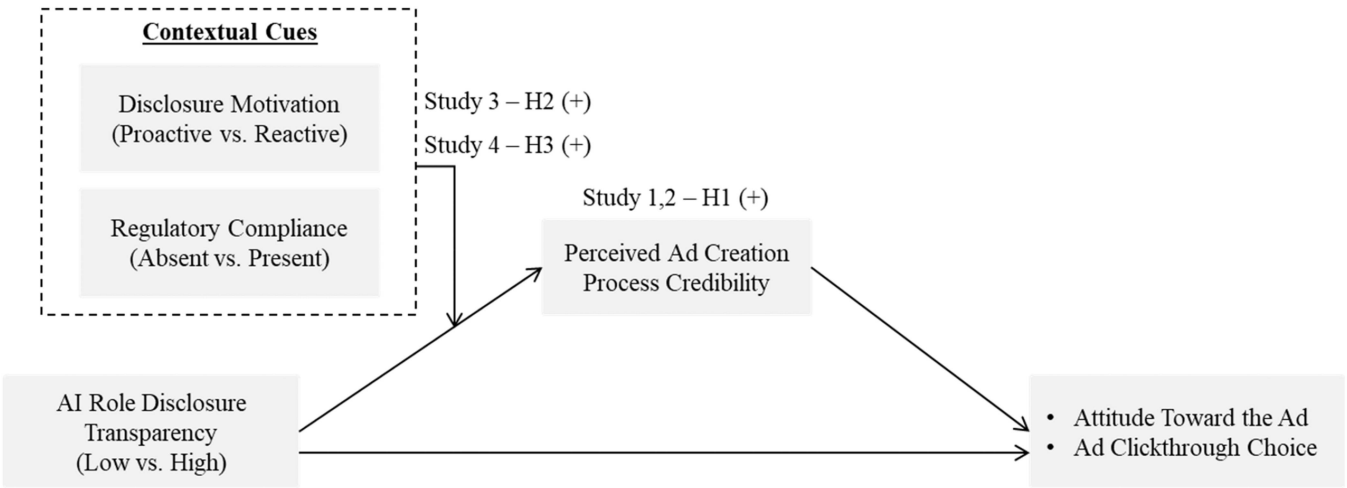

FIGURE 2 | Main research framework.

make the ad production process more credible. This specificity helps mitigate potential negative impressions by reducing uncertainty and positioning the AI creator as forthcoming rather than evasive. Subsequently, improved credibility would likely facilitate more favorable attitudes toward the AI-generated ad and increase behavioral engagement.

Hypothesis 1. *Consumer perception of a high (vs low) level of AI role disclosure transparency positively influences the attitude toward the AI-generated ad via heightened perception of ad creation process credibility.*

3.2 | The Moderating Role of Disclosure Signals

Given heightened scrutiny of AI disclosure practices (Ford et al. 2023), it is necessary to expand the examination of AI disclosure transparency to investigate whether, under certain conditions, it can enhance or diminish its effectiveness, thereby offering meaningful managerial implications. Signaling theory provides a foundation for boundary conditions of AI disclosure transparency by emphasizing that, under conditions of information asymmetry, observable cues allow receivers to infer unobservable qualities of the sender (Connelly et al. 2011). In AI-generated advertising, consumers cannot directly observe the firm's actual use, oversight, or intentions regarding AI involvement in ad production. Consequently, contextual disclosure signals could facilitate the efficacy of transparency. Building on this logic, the next set of hypotheses considers how two forms of contextual disclosure signals—the motive implied by the disclosure and regulatory compliance—shape the perceived diagnostic value of perceived AI role disclosure transparency in the ad creation process.

3.3 | Disclosure Motive Signal

Drawing on corporate social responsibility (CSR) signaling practice (Groza et al. 2011), we define a disclosure motive signal as a cue indicating why the company is disclosing the AI's role in the ad-creation process (i.e., the intention behind the disclosure). This signal distinguishes proactive from reactive motives. A proactive motive signal implies that an organization's own commitments drive an initiative. In contrast, a reactive motive suggests that the disclosure is in response to external factors, such as new regulations or public scrutiny (Groza et al. 2011; Torugsa et al. 2013). Consumers typically respond favorably to proactive signals because they are perceived as altruistic and value-driven (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). The current research does not focus on the direct influence of motive framing alone, but rather on how motive framing conditions the effectiveness of AI role disclosure transparency. We draw on persuasion knowledge and cue-diagnosticity logic to explain this boundary condition.

When the disclosure motive is perceived as proactive, consumers are more likely to infer that the firm is acting out of principled openness rather than external pressure. This favorable attribution provides a positive interpretive frame that partially substitutes for a detailed evaluation of the disclosure itself. Drawing on the cue-diagnosticity perspective, when one available cue (i.e., proactive motive) already supports a favorable judgment, the incremental diagnostic value of another cue (i.e., AI role disclosure transparency) is reduced (Purohit and Srivastava 2001). Consequently, although a higher level of transparency still enhances consumer perceptions, its marginal influence on perceived ad creation process credibility is weakened under proactive motive framing.

Conversely, when a disclosure is perceived as reactive, the firm's persuasive or self-protective intent becomes more salient, leading consumers to adopt a more skeptical and evaluative stance. Under such conditions, consumers are less likely to accept the disclosure at face value and instead rely more heavily on the substance and completeness of the disclosed information. From the persuasion knowledge perspective, it posits that consumers actively infer the motives behind firm communications and use these inferences to evaluate the credibility of the communication (Friestad and Wright 1994; Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Hence, a reactive motive creates a credibility deficit by signaling that the disclosure may be driven by compliance or reputational defense rather than genuine transparency. Attribution research shows that externally driven actions are more likely to be interpreted as less sincere (Ellen 2006; Groza et al. 2011). This suspicion raises the evidentiary standard required for the firm to be perceived as forthright (Yu et al. 2022). Hence, as a reactive motive cue triggers skepticism and reduces the credibility of motive-based inferences, consumers rely more on the substantive content of the disclosure. Under these conditions, AI role disclosure transparency becomes the salient diagnostic cue, amplifying its effect on perceived ad-creation process credibility. Additionally, emerging research indicates that AI disclosures can activate trust concerns (Grigsby et al. 2025), often reducing consumer trust unless the communication is perceived as sufficiently credible and informative. As a result, when a disclosure is framed as reactive, these concerns are amplified, and the adequacy of the disclosure becomes critical for restoring confidence in the ad-creation process. In turn, enhanced perceptions of ad-creation process credibility lead to more favorable attitudes toward the ad.

Hypothesis 2. *The positive effect of AI role disclosure transparency on the attitude toward the AI-generated ad via ad creation process credibility is stronger when the disclosure motive is reactive (vs. proactive).*

3.4 | Regulatory Compliance Signal

Prior research on signaling cues suggests that consumers interpret firm-led signals as intrinsic commitments and regulatory signals as baseline assurances of trust (Yoganathan et al. 2025). These findings indicate that such a cue on complying with governance frameworks can enhance the effectiveness of persuasion messages. In the context of AI-generated ads, we define a regulatory compliance signal as an explicit indication that a company is adhering to legal or regulatory standards in its AI use. For example, the EU provides a compliance checker to guide organizations when they need to disclose the use of AI (https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/assessment/eu-ai-act-compliance-checker/). Recent research

suggests that consumers perceive government-imposed AI regulations as a credible and authoritative form of regulatory signaling (Blösser and Weihrauch 2024). Because these standards are developed and enforced by bodies perceived as authoritative, compliance references carry interpretive weight—that is, they connect the disclosure to rules that are externally defined and monitored. From the cue-diagnosticity perspective, the influence of any piece of information depends on its perceived usefulness for evaluating the object of judgment relative to other available cues (Purohit and Srivastava 2001). When a regulatory compliance signal is present, it provides an externally validated interpretive frame that increases confidence in the integrity of the disclosure. As a result, the detailed content of the disclosure becomes more diagnostic because consumers interpret it as information that has been produced under oversight and is less likely to be selectively presented or distorted.

Additionally, as disclosure of AI involvement becomes compulsory in some market regions, a compliance signal could be a useful lever to enhance perceived legitimacy and reduce uncertainty in evaluative contexts. Compliance signals indicate that the firm is operating within a system of accountability, where deviations from standards may have negative consequences. A regulatory compliance signal strengthens the persuasive value of AI role disclosure transparency by indicating that the disclosure is not merely a firm-originated message, but one aligned with externally enforced standards. In the context of AI-generated advertising, such a signal may take the form of a label or statement indicating that the ad's AI use has been disclosed in accordance with applicable regulations, such as the European Union's AI Act, which requires clear labeling of AI-generated content (e.g., Yoganathan et al. 2025) to promote transparency and trust. By linking the disclosure to an authoritative regulatory framework, the firm borrows institutional credibility from the body overseeing the practice. This institutional backing increases confidence that the disclosed information reflects a more complete, standardized, and less selectively framed account of AI's role. As a result, high disclosure transparency carries greater evidentiary weight because it is interpreted as both substantively informative and institutionally validated. In contrast, when no regulatory compliance signal is present, AI role disclosure transparency is evaluated solely as a firm-originated communication. Under these conditions, consumers may view the disclosure more skeptically, questioning whether the information is strategically framed or incomplete. This weakens the perceived diagnosticity of the disclosure and, in turn, attenuates the positive effect of high transparency on consumer responses.

Drawing on the above reasoning, we expect the effect of AI rol disclosure transparency on ad creation process credibility to be substantially greater when a regulatory compliance signal is present than when it is absent. A regulatory compliance cue strengthens that effect because it positions the AI role disclosure transparency within an externally defined standard that is viewed as more objective than the firm's own assurances, and audiences treat such cues as more rigorous than firm-controlled claims (Yoganathan et al. 2025). Elevated ad creation process credibility, in turn, is projected to enhance consumers' willingness to act, such as by increasing click-through rates.

Hypothesis 3. *The positive effect of AI role disclosure transparency on click-through decisions via ad creation process credibility is stronger when a regulatory compliance cue is present* (*vs. absent*).

4 | Empirical Program

4.1 | Studies Overview

We test our proposed hypotheses in a series of four experimental studies. Study 1 examined the main effect of AI role disclosure transparency to establish evidence on the influence of our key constructs. Study 2 validates the results from Study 1. Studies 3 and 4 then focused on the boundary condition of disclosure motivation and regulatory compliance cues. Across studies, participants were recruited through the Cloud Research Connect platform and compensated for their time. To enhance ecological validity, we further varied the advertising contexts in all studies. Table 3 summarizes the sample characteristics. See Web Appendix E and F for overall measurement checks.

4.2 | Alternative Causal Mechanisms

Growing interest in how AI is reshaping advertising makes it essential to identify and isolate the psychological mechanisms uniquely activated by AI role disclosure transparency. As disclosure transparency conveys information about how AI is involved in the ad's creation process rather than altering what the ad communicates (i.e., content-based diagnostic cues), it functions as a source clarity diagnostic cue. Accordingly, its influence should operate primarily through subjective evaluations of the creation process (e.g., Baek et al. 2024; Jin and Tao 2025; Ryoo et al. 2025) rather than through mechanisms tied to changes in the ad's expressive content. To reinforce the theoretical basis for ad creation process credibility as the central causal pathway of AI role disclosure transparency, we test its impacts on the focal outcome via content-oriented processes identified in the literature, which are perceived ad authenticity, emotional resonance, ad creativity, ad quality and information richness, Additionally, we also test its impact via tactic typicality, which is potential alternative source-based mechanisms (Barone and Jewell 2014).

Perceived ad authenticity concerns whether an advertisement reflects genuine brand-related expression in the ad, and a driver of this judgment is the perceived effort embedded in the ad's creation (To et al. 2025). In contrast, the sponsorship disclosure literature shows that disclosure practices primarily function as cues about the communicator's honesty, which influence perceived source credibility (Evans et al. 2017) rather than altering deeper beliefs about brand identity or value alignment. Recent research on AI-generated advertising further indicates that transparency about AI involvement primarily affects how audiences evaluate the production process (Ryoo et al. 2025). Because ad authenticity judgments rely on perceived effort as their core input, and AI-involvement disclosures activate honesty-based credibility assessments (e.g., Baek et al. 2024), the downstream impact of disclosure transparency may be carried more prominently through ad creation process credibility rather than through ad authenticity.

TABLE 3 | An overview of demographic characteristics across studies.

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4
Gender				
Male	165 (50.6%)	132 (49.1%)	170 (49.7%)	119 (50%)
Female	160 (49.1%)	135 (50.2%)	171 (50.2%)	119 (50%)
Gender diverse	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Prefer not to disclose	0 (0%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.30%)	0 (0%)
No response	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total sample size	326	269	342	238
Age group				
18–24	26 (8%)	31 (11.5%)	35 (10.2%)	28 (11.7%)
25–30	56 (17.2%)	43 (16%)	63 (18.4%)	32 (13.4%)
31–35	70 (21.5%)	40 (14.9%)	49 (14.3%)	46 (19.3%)
36–40	55 (16.9%)	31 (11.5%)	55 (16.1%)	36 (15.1%)
40–55	98 (30.1%)	79 (29.4%)	88 (25.7%)	60 (25.2%)
Over 55	21 (6.4%)	45 (16.7%)	55 (15.2%)	36 (15.1%)
No response	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total sample size	326	269	342	238

Further, emotional resonance refers to affective responses generated by the narrative and sensory elements of an ad and has been shown to mediate the impact of message content on consumer attitudes (Holbrook and Batra 1987). On the one hand, these emotional processes emerge from how viewers engage with the ad content (Bakpayev et al. 2022), rather than from heuristic cues that do not alter the ad's expressive structure. On the other hand, disclosure transparency is operationalized as textual additions, such as a disclaimer appended to an otherwise unchanged message (e.g., Yoganathan et al. 2025). Hence, while disclosures may prompt evaluative reactions toward the communicator, they do not directly reshape the affective response toward AI-generated ads. Accordingly, emotional resonance may not be a strong pathway through which disclosure transparency exerts its influence.

Additionally, ad creativity reflects perceived novelty and originality in an ad's content, execution, and visual-conceptual form (Rosengren et al. 2020). These judgments are derived from the ad's expressive features such as its concept, visuals, structure, and style. The disclosure transparency does not modify these features, as they introduce a cue about the ad's production process rather than shaping impressions on the generated content. Consequently, ad creativity is unlikely to serve as an alternative mechanism for explaining the influence of disclosure transparency.

Moreover, ad quality reflects consumers' subjective evaluation of non-source-related elements, such as its visual craftsmanship, message organization or overall professional presentation. These judgments are derived from the expressive and compositional properties of the advertisement itself. In other words, ad quality is fundamentally a content-based mechanism grounded in the observable attributes of the stimulus (i.e., the ad). In contrast, since we posit that perceived AI role disclosure transparency operates as a source-based diagnostic cue, we expect it to be more sensitive to source-based mechanism—ad creation process credibility—because it provides information about how the advertisement was produced rather than altering the expressive features of the advertisement's content. Accordingly, ad quality is unlikely to serve as the primary mechanism through which AI role disclosure transparency shapes ad evaluations. Likewise, information richness refers to the extent to which a message enhances individuals' understanding or facilitates cognitive processing (Panteli 2002). In advertising contexts, perceived information richness captures how much useful, decision-relevant information is provided to users for them to make an informed decision (Zhang and Ruan 2024). Because the disclosure cue about AI involvement does not alter product-related information contained in the ad, it should not influence ad evaluation through perceived informational richness.

Finally, tactical typicality reflects perceived frequent usage of a specific ad tactic within a category (Barone and Jewell 2014). When AI involvement is disclosed, transparency may create the perception that the tactic is atypical. Nevertheless, we propose that perceived tactic typicality does not constitute a valid causal mechanism. This might be due to the market prevalence of AI-generated creative, which reduces perceived novelty (Xia et al. 2025). Further, policy normalization reframes AI use as standard operating procedure rather than a gimmick (e.g., EU AI Act Article 50). When disclosure of AI involvement in the ad creation process is no longer considered a novel strategy but as an expected element of the ad's affordances, the typicality pathway contributes less to explaining the influence of disclosure transparency.

4.3 | Study 1

4.3.1 | *Overview, Design and Procedure*

This study employed a single-factor, between-subjects design to establish the influence of disclosure transparency. Participants

were recruited through Cloud Research Connect and exposed to a promotional advertisement for TrailMate, a fictitious brand introducing a new backpack series—"Summit" (See Web Appendix A). Before viewing the advertisement, participants were informed of a disclosure statement about AI involvement. We manipulated disclosure transparency by varying the degree of details about how AI was involved in the process. In the low transparency statement, participants only read that the advertisement was created entirely by AI with no further information, specifically the disclosure statement read "The ad you're about to see was created entirely by Generative AI." Conversely, in the high-transparency statement, additional information about the AI role in the ad creation process was added. Specifically, participants read the following disclosure statement: "The ad you're about to see was created entirely by Generative AI. Idea & Message Planning—GenAI was used to analyze market reports to extract insights to develop the ad's concept. Copywriting—GenAI was used to generate textual content. Visual & Design Creation—GenAI was used to generate and refine image content."

Perceived AI role disclosure transparency was measured with four self-composed items on bipolar scale—the disclosure statement provided an insufficient explanation of the ad creation process/provided a comprehensive explanation of the ad creation process; did not explain the specific responsibilities of those involved in the ad creation process/explained the specific responsibilities of those involved in the ad creation process; provided a vague explanation of how the advertisement was created/provided a transparent explanation of how the advertisement was created; was ambiguous about the ad creation process/was unambiguous about the ad creation process (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$). The dependent variable of interest was attitude toward the advertisement, which was assessed using four items on a seven-point semantic differential scale (unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, dislike/like; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.98$). Perceived ad creation process credibility was measured by asking the participants to evaluate the way in which the ad was created with four items—unreliable/reliable, not credible/credible, untrustworthy/trustworthy, unprofessional/professional, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.97$ (Ohanian 1990). Other measurements for ad authenticity, emotional resonance, and ad creativity were documented in the Web Appendix.

4.3.2 | *Manipulation Check*

We performed a one-way ANOVA to verify the manipulation of disclosure transparency. Participants perceived a higher level of AI role transparency in the high transparency statement ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.79$, $N = 162$) than in the low transparency statement ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.80$, $N = 164$), $F(1, 324) = 12.80$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.038$. The result confirmed the manipulation.

5 | Results

5.1 | Attitude Toward the Ad

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the direct effect of perceived AI role disclosure transparency on attitude toward the ad. The analysis revealed an insignificant effect of AI role disclosure transparency on attitude toward the ad. ($M_{low} = 4.37$, $SD = 1.78$, $N = 164$; $M_{high} = 4.74$, $SD = 1.89$, $N = 162$), $F(1, 324) = 3.35$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$.

5.2 | Mediation Analysis

We conducted mediation analyses (PROCESS model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples) to test Hypothesis 1, which indicates that the effect of perceived AI role transparency on ad attitude is mediated through ad creation process credibility. Using perceived AI role disclosure transparency as an independent continuous variable, perceived ad creation process credibility as the mediator, and attitude toward the ad as the dependent variable, the results showed that ad creation process credibility significantly and positively mediated the effect of perceived AI role disclosure transparency on attitude toward the ad (Effect = 0.10, BootSE = 0.03, $CI_{95\%} = [0.03 \text{ to } 0.17]$). The results confirmed Hypothesis 1.

Additionally, we test for alternative mechanisms by specifying a parallel mediation model that included emotional resonance, ad creativity, and ad authenticity alongside ad creation process credibility. The result showed that the mediation roles of emotional resonance (Indirect effect = 0.0002, BootSE = 0.003, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.01 \text{ to } 0.01]$); perceived ad creativity (Indirect effect = 0.02, BootSE = 0.02, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.01 \text{ to } 0.05]$) were insignificant, indicating that both mechanisms are not prominent mediators.

Notably, the mediation role of perceived ad authenticity was significant (Indirect effect = 0.02, BootSE = 0.009, $CI_{95\%} = [0.001 \text{ to } 0.04]$). Thus, we conducted a contrastive analysis of the indirect effects of perceived ad creation process credibility on ad authenticity mechanisms. The result indicated that the impact of disclosure transparency is dominantly transmitted through ad creation process credibility ($\Delta_{\text{Indirect effect}} = 0.09$, BootSE = 0.03, $CI_{95\%} = [0.02 \text{ to } 0.16]$).

6 | Discussion

This study provides initial evidence that AI role disclosure transparency may function as a heuristic cue shaping consumer responses to AI-generated advertising. Increasing the clarity with which AI's role in ad production is described is associated with higher perceptions of ad creation process credibility, which, in turn, relates to more favorable attitudes toward the ad. This extends prior research on AI-generated content (Arango et al. 2023; Baek et al. 2026) by demonstrating that the role specificity of the disclosure cue, rather than the mere presence of AI, plays a major role in shaping credibility impressions. Further, although we examined several alternative mechanisms commonly linked to advertising responses, including perceived authenticity, emotional resonance, and creativity, these constructs did not account for the observed relationship in this study. Instead, the findings isolate the ad creation process credibility as the operative pathway through which AI role disclosure transparency shapes consumer judgments. In doing so, the research clarifies that AI-involvement disclosures in advertising should be understood not as modifiers

of message content, but as signals that guide source-based evaluations. In sum, this study clarifies that AI role disclosure transparency should be understood not as modifiers of message content, but as signals that guide ad evaluations via a source-based mechanism (i.e., ad creation process credibility).

6.1 | Study 2

6.1.1 | *Overview, Design and Procedure*

This study seeks to replicate the findings of our previous study while strengthening the ecological validity of AI role disclosure transparency. In Study 1, we employed a two-level between-subjects design to test the influence of high vs low AI role disclosure transparency by manipulating the disclosure statement. To better reflect real-world advertising environments, where AI involvement could be undisclosed, we introduce a baseline condition in which no disclosure statement is provided. Accordingly, Study 2 adopts a single-factor, three-level between-subjects design (AI role disclosure transparency: no disclosure statement vs. low transparency vs. high transparency). The procedure and advertising stimuli mirror those used in Study 1.

Additionally, we implemented a more conservative manipulation design to strengthen construct validity. The disclosure statements in the low and high transparency conditions were matched in word count (33 words) to control for content length (See Web Appendix). In the low transparency statement, it acknowledged AI involvement in the ad production process but did not specify the nature of AI's role. In contrast, the high transparency statement explicitly delineated AI's functional contributions across stages of ad development, consistent with our conceptualization of transparency as clarity and specificity of role communication. We measured perceived information richness and ad quality in this study as potential alternative mechanisms.

Participants were recruited from Cloud Research Connect. We reused the measurements from the previous study for perceived AI role disclosure transparency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$), attitude toward the ad (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.98$), and perceived ad creation process credibility (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.97$). Information richness was measured with three items adapted from Zhang and Ruan (2024) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$). Ad quality was measured using four self-composed items, capturing evaluations of both visual presentation and message quality (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$) (See Web Appendix B).

6.1.2 | *Manipulation Check*

We performed a one-way ANOVA to verify the manipulation of AI role disclosure transparency. Participants reported a higher AI role clarity in the high disclosure transparency statement ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 2.21$, $N = 90$) than in the low transparency statement ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.91$; $N = 89$) and no disclosure statement ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.41$; $N = 90$), $F(2, 266) = 31.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.191$. Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc comparisons confirmed that all pairwise differences were statistically significant. Participants in the low transparency statement reported higher perceived AI role clarity than those in the no disclosure statement ($\Delta_{\text{Mean Score}} = 1.45$, $p < 0.001$), and participants in the high transparency statement reported a higher perceived AI role clarity than those in the low transparency statement ($\Delta_{\text{Mean Score}} = 0.73$, $p = 0.029$). The reported AI role clarity in the high-transparency statement also differed significantly from that in the no disclosure statement ($\Delta_{\text{Mean Score}} = 2.18$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate successful manipulation.

Additionally, we performed a one-way ANOVA to test for the potential implication of perceived information richness in the disclosure statement. The analysis revealed an insignificant difference in terms of information richness across conditions ($M_{\text{no disclosure statement}} = 4.40$, $SD = 1.52$, $N = 90$; $M_{\text{low transparency statement}} = 4.17$, $SD = 1.69$, $N = 89$; $M_{\text{high transparency statement}} = 4.50$, $SD = 1.37$, $N = 90$; $F(2, 266) = 1.11$, $p = 0.33$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

7 | Results

7.1 | Attitude Toward the Ad

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether AI role disclosure transparency directly influenced attitude toward the ad. The analysis revealed an insignificant direct effect of disclosure transparency on attitude toward the ad ($M_{\text{no disclosure}} = 4.33$, $SD = 1.80$, $N = 90$; $M_{\text{low transparency}} = 4.34$, $SD = 1.92$, $N = 89$; $M_{\text{high transparency}} = 4.44$, $SD = 1.79$, $N = 90$), $F(2, 266) = 0.10$, $p = 0.91$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$.

7.2 | Mediation Analysis

We implemented a two-stage analytical strategy to accommodate the inclusion of a baseline (no disclosure statement) condition while preserving alignment with our theoretical focus on the degree of perceived AI role disclosure transparency. First, we examined the impact of the experimentally assigned disclosure statement (no disclosure statement vs. low transparency statement vs. high transparency statement) on ad attitude through perceived AI role transparency and ad creation process credibility, while simultaneously including ad quality and information richness as alternative mechanisms. This step preserves and distinguishes structural manipulation (i.e., the statement) from psychological realization (i.e., subjective perception, which is the focus of our research). Consistent with persuasion research that differentiates experimentally manipulated features from their subjective interpretations (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989), we posit perceived AI role disclosure transparency as the intervening psychological mechanism linking the effects of disclosure statements to downstream evaluations.

In the second stage, because our Hypothesis 1 centers on *perceived* AI role disclosure transparency as the focal construct, we refined the analysis to examine variation in perceived transparency within the disclosed advertisement conditions. While the experimental condition establishes structural differences in disclosure statement design, our theoretical predictions concern the psychological perception of AI role clarity in the disclosure statement, specifically whether greater perceived AI role clarity enhances downstream evaluation through ad creation process credibility. Accordingly, we created a subsample that included only the disclosed statements (i.e., high vs. low transparency) to

isolate variation in perceived AI role disclosure transparency independent of disclosure absence. This approach allows consistency with the perceptual-based disclosure transparency focus of Study 1 to reconfirm the hypothesis.

7.3 | Disclosure Statement

We conducted mediation analyses (PROCESS model 81 with 5000 bootstrap samples) to test the influence of disclosure statements. Disclosure statement was entered as a multicategorical variable with no disclosure statement as the baseline—coded 0; low AI role transparency statement was coded 1, and high AI role transparency statement was coded 2. Perceived AI role disclosure transparency was entered as the linking psychological component. Subsequently, ad creation process credibility, ad quality, and perceived information richness were entered as the mediators, and ad attitude was entered as the dependent variable. The results showed a gradient effect of disclosure statements. Compared to the baseline condition (no disclosure statement), a low-transparent disclosure statement enhances attitude toward the ad by enhancing perceived AI role disclosure transparency and, subsequently, ad creation process credibility (Effect = 0.23, BootSE = 0.07, $CI_{95\%}$ = [0.11 to 0.38]). More importantly, compared to the no disclosure statement, a high transparent disclosure statement further enhances attitude toward the ad by influencing perceived AI role disclosure transparency, and subsequently ad creation process credibility, and this effect is greater than that of the low-transparent statement (Effect = 0.36, BootSE = 0.10, $CI_{95\%}$ = [0.18 to 0.56]). The indirect effects of disclosure statements (compared to the no disclosure statement condition) on ad attitude that transmitted through ad quality ($Effect_{Low\ Transparent\ Statement}$ = 0.06, BootSE = 0.04, $CI_{95\%}$ = [−0.001 to 0.14]; $Effect_{High\ Transparent\ Statement}$ = 0.10, BootSE = 0.05, $CI_{95\%}$ = [−0.003 to 0.21]) and through information richness ($Effect_{Low\ Transparent\ Statement}$ = −0.02, BootSE = 0.01, $CI_{95\%}$ = [−0.05 to 0.005]; $Effect_{High\ Transparent\ Statement}$ = −0.03, BootSE = 0.02, $CI_{95\%}$ = [−0.07 to 0.01]) were insignificant.

7.4 | Percieved AI Role Disclosure Transparency

We created a subset of the sample that contains only the low and high disclosure statement conditions from the original dataset (N = 179) to isolate the variation of perceived AI role disclosure transparency to align with the operationalization of this concept in Study 1. We then conducted a mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples). The results showed that the ad creation process credibility mediated the effect of AI role disclosure transparency on attitude toward the ad (Effect = 0.17, BootSE = 0.05, $CI_{95\%}$ = [0.09 to 0.28]). The results reconfirmed Hypothesis 1.

8 | Discussion

Study 2 strengthens and extends the findings of Study 1 in two important ways. First, by incorporating a no-disclosure baseline, this study enhances the ecological validity of AI role disclosure transparency. The results demonstrate a clear gradient pattern, indicating that increasing role specificity in disclosure statements systematically enhances ad evaluations through perceived AI role clarity and ad creation process credibility. Second, by simultaneously modeling ad quality and information richness as alternative mechanisms, we further reinforce that AI role clarity operates through the source-oriented mechanism (i.e., ad creation process credibility) rather than the content-oriented mechanisms.

8.1 | Study 3

8.1.1 | Overview, Design, and Procedure

In markets where AI disclosure remains discretionary, we hypothesize that the effect of AI role disclosure transparency may depend on how consumers interpret the firm's disclosure motive. When the disclosure motive is framed as proactive, high transparency largely resolves consumers' uncertainty, rendering proactive motive cues less influential. By contrast, reactive framing heightens judgment, increasing the diagnostic value of high disclosure transparency and thus strengthening the effect. We also test ad tactic typicality as an alternative mechanism.

We employed a 2 (AI role disclosure transparency: low vs. high) × 2 (disclosure motive: proactive vs. reactive) between-subjects design. Procedures mirrored those in our prior studies. We created a new AI-generated advertisement for a fictitious fast-food restaurant brand, "Koopi," introducing new menu options (see Web Appendix C). The AI role disclosure transparency manipulation replicated our previous procedure. For the disclosure motive manipulation, participants in the proactive condition read "Recognizing the importance of transparency in the use of GenAI for creative works, we hereby issue this statement on our own initiative to inform you of its role in producing advertising materials." In the reactive condition, participants read "Recognizing the ongoing debate about the use of GenAI in creative works, we hereby issue this statement in response to public concerns regarding its role in producing advertising materials."

We reused scales from our previous study for disclosure transparency (Cronbach's α = 0.91) and ad creation process credibility (Cronbach's α = 0.96). We measured the disclosure motive with four self-composed bipolar items (1-7) (Cronbach's α = 0.85) gauging participants' awareness of whether the disclosure statement was made in response to public concern/on the organization's own initiative; was issued reactively/proactively; was triggered by public pressure/internal commitment. We measured tactical typicality with four items, in which participants rated the disclosure as common/uncommon, typical/atypical, usual/unusual, and used/not used by a majority of brands (Cronbach's α = 0.96) (Barone and Jewell 2014).

8.1.2 | Manipulation Check

We performed a one-way ANOVA to verify AI role disclosure transparency and disclosure motive signal manipulations. For disclosure transparency, participants reported a higher AI role disclosure transparency in the high condition (M = 5.75, SD = 1.49, N = 172) than in the low condition (M = 4.88, SD = 1.89, N = 170), F (1, 340) = 22.02, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.061$. For the disclosure motive signal, participants reported an awareness of

proactive motive when it is proactive (M = 4.72, SD = 1.70, $N = 174$) than when the motive is reactive (M = 4.04, SD = 1.67, $N = 168$), F (1, 340) = 13.79, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.039$.

9 | Results

9.1 | Attitude Toward the Ad

A two-way ANOVA was conducted on attitude toward the ad. The analysis revealed no significant main effect of AI role disclosure transparency, F (1, 338) = 1.70, $p = 0.194$, and no significant main effect of disclosure motive, F (1, 338) = 0.07, $p = 0.787$. However, the interaction between AI role disclosure transparency and disclosure motive was significant, F (1, 338) = 4.25, $p = 0.040$. Figure 3 provides a visualization of this effect.

9.2 | Moderated Mediation Analysis

We conducted a moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 7 with 5000 bootstrap samples) to test Hypothesis 2, which posits that the effect of AI role disclosure transparency on attitude toward the ad through ad creation process credibility is moderated by the disclosure motive signal. There was a significant interaction effect between disclosure transparency and disclosure motive on ad creation process credibility (Effect = 0.24, SE = 0.11, $p = 0.03$). Conditional effect analysis further indicated that when the disclosure motive was proactive, the effect of disclosure transparency on credibility was insignificant (Effect = 0.08, SE = 0.08, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.07 to 0.24]). However, when the motive signal was reactive, the effect became substantially stronger (Effect = 0.32, SE = 0.08, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.17 to 0.47]). Additional analysis revealed a significant conditional indirect effect on attitude toward the ad (Index of moderated mediation = 0.18, BootSE = 0.08, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.02 to 0.34]). Further, the conditional indirect effect through ad tactic typicality was insignificant (Index of moderated mediation = 0.003, BootSE = 0.01, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.01 to 0.02]). The findings support Hypothesis 2.

10 | Discussion

This study advances framing research (Jin and Tao 2025; Ryoo et al. 2025; Karpinska-Krakowiak and Eisend 2024) by identifying disclosure motive framing as a novel boundary condition. We show that AI role disclosure transparency's persuasive value depends on why it is framed as occurring. Transparency presented with a reactive motive enhanced creator credibility and click-through, whereas a proactive motive attenuated credibility. These findings caution that transparency about AI involvement should be context-dependent, offering advertisers a nuanced lever for effective disclosure design.

As we argued, when a disclosure is framed as proactive, consumers are more likely to attribute the firm's behavior to intrinsic, value-driven intentions. This favorable attribution functions as a positive heuristic cue that already supports judgments of honesty and openness. From a cue-diagnosticity perspective, when such a cue is present, the incremental value of additional diagnostic information diminishes. Hence, the difference in attitude toward the ad between low versus high AI role disclosure transparency under the proactive disclosure motive is insignificant. In contrast, reactive motive framing signals externally driven intent (e.g., reputational management), which activates skepticism. Under these conditions, consumers are less willing to rely on motive-based inferences and instead shift their evaluation toward the substance of the disclosure. This increases the diagnostic weight of AI role

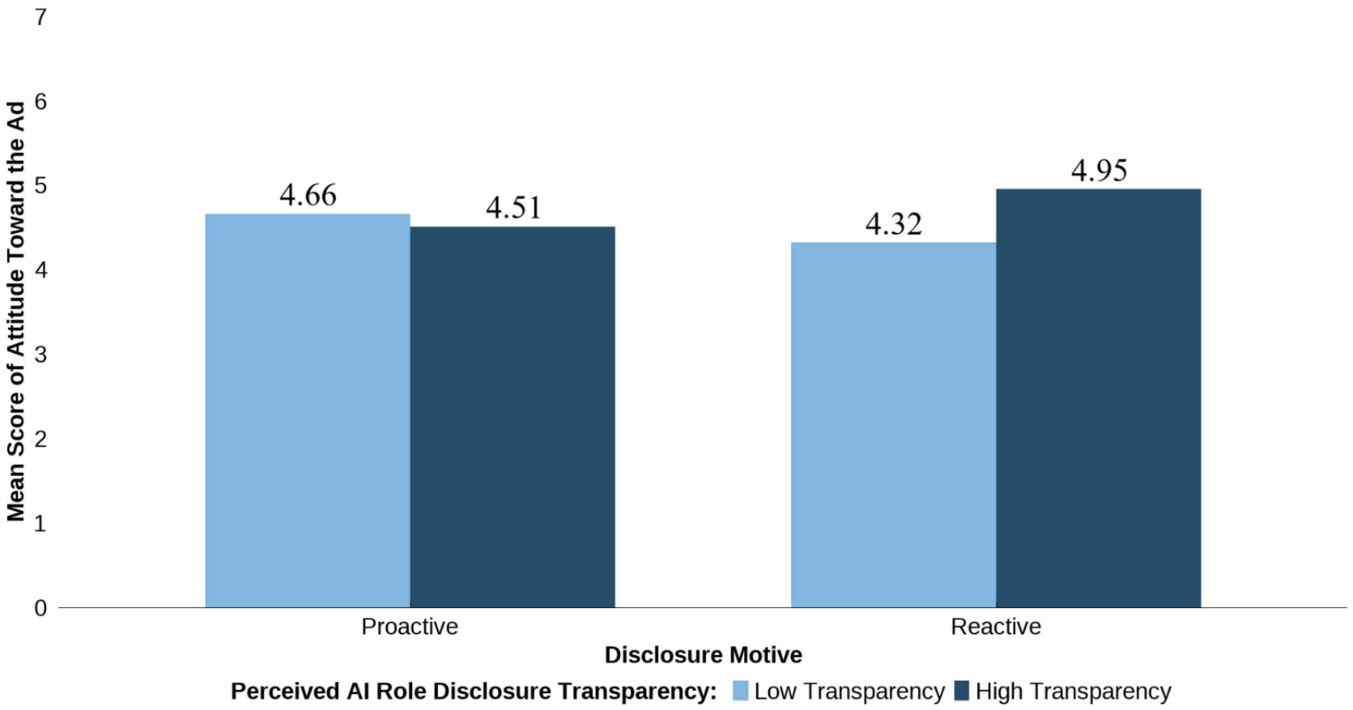

FIGURE 3 | The moderation effects of disclosure motive signal.

disclosure transparency. Thus, the divergence between proactive and reactive conditions reflects a systematic shift in cue utilization.

10.1 | Study 4

10.1.1 | Overview, Design and Procedure

Given the rapid diffusion of AI in creative production and the emergence of disclosure mandates in some countries (e.g., the EU), managers need practical guidance on how to disclose in such markets. We test Hypothesis 3, which posits that AI role disclosure transparency increases engagement responses through ad creation process credibility (e.g., ad click-through) and that the presence of a regulatory compliance signal amplifies this effect. The underlying logic is that compliance signals invoke the credibility of authoritative external institutions, framing AI disclosure transparency as objectively monitored rather than firm-controlled. This institutional backing enhances the ad creation process credibility, which in turn could drive stronger consumer engagement. We employed a 2 (AI role disclosure transparency: low vs. high) × 2 (regulatory compliance signal: absent vs. present) between-subjects design. Procedures mirrored those in our prior studies (see "Web Appendix").

The AI role disclosure transparency manipulation replicated our previous procedure. For the compliance signal manipulation, participants in the present condition read "As of the time of publication, the use of generative systems in the creation of this advertisement has been assessed for compliance with the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (Article 50)." We reinforced this signal with a mockup certification-style badge (Yoganathan et al. 2025). In the absent condition, participants read that the advertisement had not been assessed for compliance, and no badge appeared (see Web Appendix D). We measured perceived regulatory compliance with three items (Yoganathan et al. 2025): whether the ad was certified, complied with the regulation, and had been assessed for compliance under the EU AI Act (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$). We used the EU AI Act as our reference point because it constitutes the first comprehensive legal framework for AI and is widely regarded as a well-known regulation of AI deployment to date (European Parliament 2023).

Our key dependent variable in this study is the clickthrough behavioral decision. This was measured by asking participants, "Imagine you are scrolling through your Facebook feed, and you see an ad for this new Hot & Crispy Boneless Bucket product. Just below the ad, there is a button labeled 'Learn More'. Would you click the button?" Participants decided either to click "Yes" or "No". We reused scales from our previous study for AI role disclosure transparency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$), ad creation process credibility (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$) and ad tactic typicality (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$).

10.1.2 | Manipulation Check

We performed a one-way ANOVA to verify the manipulations of AI role disclosure transparency and regulatory compliance signals. For AI role disclosure transparency, participants reported a higher AI role clarity in the high transparency statement ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.72$, $N = 119$) than in the low transparency statement ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.85$, $N = 119$), $F(1, 236) = 13.21$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.053$. For the regulatory compliance signal, participants reported a higher degree of awareness of regulatory compliance when it is present ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.40$, $N = 118$) than when it is absent ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.82$, $N = 120$), $F(1, 236) = 250.12$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.515$. The result confirmed the manipulations.

11 | Results

11.1 | Ad Click-Through Decision

A logistic regression using PROCESS Model 1 examined whether compliance cue moderates the effect of AI role transparency on Clickthrough action (0 = no, 1 = yes). The overall model was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 11.07$, $p = 0.01$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.06$. The interaction between AI role disclosure transparency and compliance signal was significant ($B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.02$). Figure 4 visualizes this effect.

11.2 | Moderated Mediation Analysis

Finally, we conducted moderated mediation analyses (PROCESS Model 7 with 5000 bootstrap samples) to test Hypothesis 3, which posits that the effect of AI role disclosure transparency on ad attitude and ad clickthrough is transmitted through ad creation process credibility and is moderated by the regulatory compliance signal. Using ad clickthrough as the dependent variable, the results revealed a significant interaction effect between disclosure transparency and regulatory compliance signal on ad creation process credibility (Effect = 0.26, $SE = 0.12$, $p = 0.03$). Conditional effect analysis further indicated that when the regulatory compliance signal was absent, the effect of disclosure transparency on credibility was weak but significant (Effect = 0.17, $SE = 0.08$, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.02 to 0.32]). When the regulatory compliance signal was present, the effect became substantially stronger (Effect = 0.43, $SE = 0.09$, $CI_{95\%} = [0.26$ to $0.60]$). An additional analysis demonstrated a significant conditional indirect effect on the clickthrough decision (Index of moderated mediation = 0.25, BootSE = 0.13, $CI_{95\%} = [0.03$ to $0.52]$). Further, the conditional indirect effect via ad tactic typicality was insignificant (Index of moderated mediation = 0.01, BootSE = 0.03, $CI_{95\%} = [-0.02$ to $0.08]$). These findings support Hypothesis 3.

12 | Discussion

The present study offers new insight into how disclosure transparency shapes consumers' responses to AI-generated advertising. The analyses show that ad creation process credibility, and not tactic typicality or advertising skepticism, mediates the relationship between disclosure transparency and ad click-through. Building on prior research (Yoganathan et al. 2025), we show that an explicit regulatory compliance signal can strengthen the efficacy of disclosure transparency. This result complements prior work (Baek et al. 2025; Jin and Tao 2025; Karpinska-Krakowiak and Eisend 2024) by

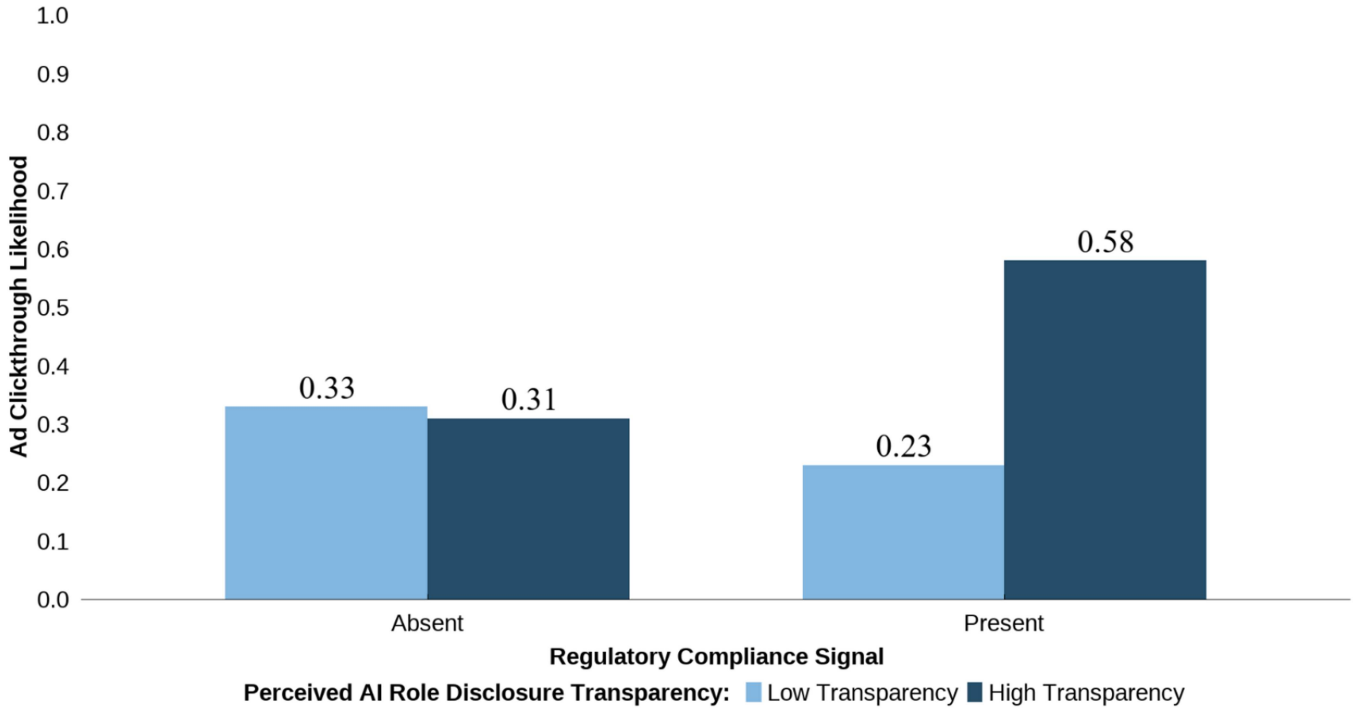

FIGURE 4 | The moderation effects of regulatory compliance signal.

demonstrating that a regulatory compliance signal—an external cue not from the advertiser could reduce information asymmetry in the AI-generated ad context. This result further solidifies the regulation compliance leverage as a strategic decision to increase the effectiveness of framing disclosure statements about AI involvement in ad production.

13 | General Discussion

13.1 | Theoretical Implications

While recent research has called for greater transparency about AI involvement in ad creation (Campbell 2023; Ford et al. 2023), existing studies largely treat disclosure as a binary choice (Bakpayev et al. 2022; Hanson et al. 2025). Yet simply labeling content as AI-generated often triggers negative impressions (Baek et al. 2024). We advanced a concept of AI role disclosure transparency, which emphasizes the degree to which brands specify how AI contributed to the creative process and demonstrate its unique role as a determinant of AI-generated ad efficacy as perceived by consumers. Accordingly, as disclosure of AI involvement in creative processes becomes mandatory, we provide empirical evidence that AI role disclosure transparency can serve as a strategic lever for managing consumer perceptions of synthetic content (Campbell 2023). Thus, we respond to recent calls to consider more complex configurations in disclosing AI involvement to strengthen the effectiveness of AI-generated ads (Ford et al. 2023). Additionally, recent research has focused on contextual framing to improve the efficacy of AI-generated content (Bakpayev et al. 2022; Jin and Tao 2025; Kim et al. 2021). We extend the implications of contextual framing by showing that transparency about AI involvement serves as a complex credibility cue contingent on disclosure signals (Yoganathan et al. 2025). Specifically, transparency boosts ad creation credibility when paired with a regulatory compliance cue or reactive motive. These findings highlight that the interpretation of disclosure transparency is highly context-sensitive and needs to be strategically managed rather than assumed to be universally beneficial. Regulatory compliance cues anchor transparency in externally validated standards, increasing its perceived legitimacy, while reactive motives heighten consumers' persuasion knowledge, prompting closer scrutiny and amplifying the diagnostic value of detailed disclosure. In contrast, when such contextual signals are absent or misaligned, transparency may lack interpretive clarity and fail to translate into credibility gains. This perspective advances the literature by shifting the focus from transparency as a static attribute to transparency as an interactional signal embedded within a broader disclosure design system. It also contributes to emerging research on AI governance and communication (Yoganathan et al. 2025) by demonstrating that the effectiveness of AI role disclosure transparency depends not only on how much is disclosed, but also on why and under what institutional framing the disclosure occurs. As such, transparency should be conceptualized as part of a coordinated signaling strategy, where multiple cues jointly shape consumer inferences about the use of AI in the ad creation process.

13.2 | Managerial Implications

Rather than relying on a single uniform strategy, firms should make context-specific choices along two dimensions: (1) using disclosure transparency effectively and (2) deploying cues that reinforce the transparency signal. The decision tree in Figure 5 integrates our findings into an empirically grounded decision process.

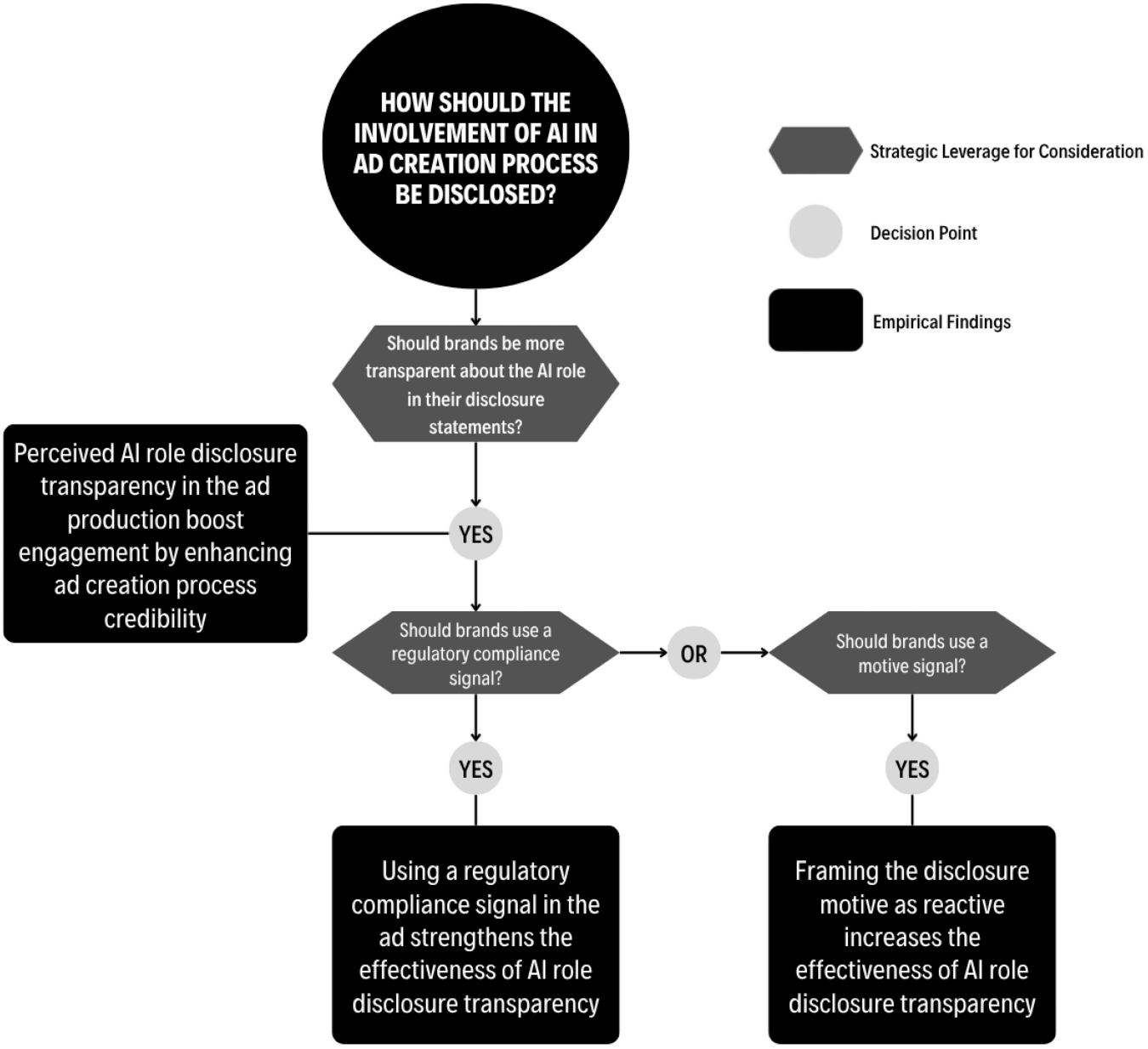

FIGURE 5 | Managerial decision tree for implementing disclosure design in AI-generated ads.

Our results consistently show that being transparent about AI involvement in the ad production process is beneficial. Firms should therefore specify how AI contributes to ad creation rather than offering a minimal acknowledgment. Subsequently, the next decision revolves around the context in which the advertisement will be deployed. Disclosure requirements may vary—some markets, such as the European Union, mandate transparency, while others do not. Thus, firms need to assess legal obligations before proceeding. In regulated markets, we recommend incorporating a compliance signal to enhance the legitimacy of the disclosure. This signal can serve as a strategic cue that aligns with evolving AI regulatory norms. In unregulated markets, voluntary disclosure should be approached cautiously, as a proactively framed disclosure motive may reduce the efficacy of disclosure transparency. Through this framework, marketers could make informed, nuanced decisions about when and how to disclose AI involvement, turning transparency into a source of competitive advantage.

13.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations warrant consideration and point toward directions for future inquiry. First, the reliance on online panel samples may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Field experiments in more naturalistic settings could help validate the results and enhance external validity, particularly regarding the impact of disclosure transparency. Additionally, a limitation of the present research is the lack of an empirical examination of the potential synergistic effects of multiple disclosure signals. Specifically, disclosure signals were investigated across separate studies rather than being fully crossed within a single

experimental design. This design choice was made to isolate the role of each disclosure cue in the theoretical model. Future research would benefit from employing factorial designs that integrate multiple disclosure cues within a single study, enabling a more precise assessment of whether and how different disclosure signals jointly shape consumer responses to AI-generated advertising.

Second, the research measured responses to a single exposure. While this approach is useful for capturing immediate reactions, it does not account for how attitudes may evolve with repeated exposure or growing familiarity. As AI-generated content becomes increasingly prevalent, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine whether persuasive effects persist, diminish, or amplify over time. Further, two methodological considerations should be taken into account. The manipulation check assessing perceived AI role disclosure transparency was administered prior to the mediator, and dependent measures and the focal mechanisms (ad creation process credibility) were measured before other mechanisms. Although this approach confirmed that the manipulation was successful, measuring it earlier in the sequence may have made the disclosure cue more salient.

Third, the current research focused exclusively on AI-generated images. As real-world advertising campaigns typically integrate diverse media formats, including text, audio, and video, future investigations should also examine how disclosure transparency operates across these modalities to better reflect contemporary marketing practices. Additionally, contextual factors, such as commercial versus non-commercial settings and cultural differences in the use of AI, were not considered. Incorporating contextual variation would deepen our understanding of how to employ AI disclosure strategies effectively.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the supporting material of this article.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.
Supporting File: mar70175-sup-0001-Web_Appendix_Final_R3.docx.