Social Acceptance and Generative AI Brands. The Case of OpenAI
Giorgia Adamo

Abstract. The delicate relationship between humans and non-humans is being challenged by the unstoppable entry of generative platforms in the market, able to deeply transform the meaning of creative production and elicit divided reactions from society. Drawing upon a sociosemiotic approach in dialogue with Bruno Latour, this contribution wants to analyze the discursive strategies deployed by the brand OpenAI to mitigate *consumers' anxieties* in adopting these devices, reflecting the intricate and problematic relationship between society and non-humans in today's world. As a final step of the work, an analysis of user comments was conducted with the aim of evaluating to what extent the brand was able, through its narratives, to effectively communicate a harmonious coexistence between humans and non-humans.

1. Introduction: the branding nature of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is sparking controversy: from Hollywood actors fearing job replacement[1] to lawsuits over copyrighted content[2], the human-like capabilities of AI are causing concern. The turmoil revolving around these *devices* is largely determined by their capacity to simulate human cognitive processes, generating outputs that are often indistinguishable from human ones due to their ability to "*synthesize texts in new ways*" (Floridi 2023). Fueled by powerful algorithms and vast, opaque databases, AI has become a lightning rod for public controversy, dividing opinions into stark contrasts reminiscent of Eco's 1964 distinction between *Apocalyptics* and *Integrated*. On one hand, we can detect neo-Luddite groups fearing an inescapable Matrix-like future, urging public resistance[3]; on the other, scientific voices striving for a measured approach, advocating responsible AI development. Several studies show that despite curiosity about these devices, issues such as literacy and job substitution, but also exposure to certain media representations (Nader et al. 2024), can significantly shape and influence the acceptance of artificial intelligence technologies[4].

These oppositions are the result of profound *cultural tensions* which, from the perspective of marketing semiotics in dialogue with the consumer culture theory (Holt 2004), can be defined as existential conflicts between different value systems around which the identities of individuals take shape and are renegotiated. In the midst of this unclear landscape, we are also witnessing the rapid entry of new players in the generative AI (GAI) sector, including Google and, soon to come, Apple, eager to explore this new

---

[1] "Hollywood Strikes Sparking AI Negotiations In Every Creative Industry" on www.forbes.com: accessed October 10, 2023.

[2] "The Times Sues OpenAI and Microsoft Over A.I. Use of Copyrighted Work" on www.nytimes.com: accessed February 15, 2024.

[3] "Humanity's remaining timeline? It looks more like five years than 50': meet the neo-luddites warning of an AI apocalypse" on www.theguardian.com: accessed, February 20, 2024.

[4] The following study refers to some articles including the analysis by Nader et al. (2024) on public understanding of artificial intelligence through entertainment media, but also the study conducted by Miyazaki et al. (2024) on public perception of generative AI on Twitter, based on occupation and usage. A notable study by Gabbiadini et al. (2024) found that negative emotions triggered by specific AI types, such as generative AI, can lead to a broader perception of AI as a threat to multiple dimensions of human existence, including jobs, resources, identity, uniqueness, and value.

fruitful market. Clearly, this phenomenon prompts various considerations regarding the ways in which these *devices* become woven into the social fabric, reshaping the meaning and the feasibility of *idiorhythm* intended as a fair balance between individuality and collectiveness, now severely challenged by the impact of AI platforms. The following research, built on existing work regarding AI (Leone 2023; D'Armenio, Deliège, Dondero, 2024), has indeed the aim of exploring the intricate relationship between these complex devices and society, starting with a branding perspective. This choice is motivated by the dual nature of AI platforms as both technological devices and branded products, thus subject to promotional logics aimed at increasing their popularity and purchase. Moreover, it's an opportunity for the discipline to place notions such as *hybrid* and *anthropomorphism* at the center of the theoretical reflection, also relaunching discussions on Bruno Latour's paradoxes of modernity (Peverini, Pezzini 2023). Latour's work is here set into dialogue with a sociosemiotics perspective, interested in investigating social phenomena as "*constructed effects of meaning that can be studied by identifying the processes responsible for their production*" (Traini 2006, p. 168). Based on this assumption, the object of this research aims not only to carry out an initial framing of GAI brand discourses drawing upon previous studies on branding (Floch 1990; Marrone 2007), but also intends to analyze discourses *about* GAI brands, by collecting a corpus of user comments in order to reconstruct the public debate around the topic. In response to these objectives, the paper aims to demonstrate how, methodologically, it is no longer possible for semiotics to avoid analyzing the discourses circulating online. These are, in fact, responsible for influencing the positioning of brands, which in turn plays a decisive role in defining the meaning of GAIs as devices.

2. Beyond representation: hybrids in the Age of Generative AI

The semiotic consistency that is attributed to what researchers previously indicated as *context* finds several connections with Latour's considerations about the paradoxes of modernity (1991), with a particular reference to the notion of hybrids. According to Latour, society is composed of a dense network of assemblages, "*partial and momentary syntheses of human subjectivities and non-human subjectivities, people and things that, in different but continuously complementary ways, act in the social, constituting and transforming it*" (Marrone 2002, p. 28). This reticular nature is even more evident considering the current environment inhabited by GAI platforms, capable of exerting decisive influences in brand management processes (Fig. 1).

Programmers	Responsible for structuring and training the AI.
Algorithms	Calculations procedures that codify the elaborations of data through a supervised or autonomous training.
Data	A considerably big set of data of multimodal nature (audio, verbal, visual) that is analyzed and through which the models are trained. Based on its extension and the machine learning mechanisms, it's possible to have deep learning, big data or neural networks.
Software Interface	Codes used by different programs to communicate with each other and/or with the main hardware system (Cosenza, 2014, p.34).
User Interface	The components that are directly perceived and manipulated by the users (Cosenza, 2014, p. 35), from which the prompt for generating outputs is imparted.
Brands	Promoters of the AI platforms, responsible for launching the product into the market by defining strategic operations.
Creative teams (1) or amateur users (2)	(1) Those in the creative industry who elaborate the prompt for content generation, based on the brand marketing team's brief; (2) Curious amateur users who enjoy experimenting with the functionalities of the platforms.
Consumers	The addressees of the campaign, responsible for sanctioning in a positive (like WOM) or negative way (such as boycotting) the output, resulting in damaging, or sustaining the brand reputation.

Fig. 1 – A brief overview of the delegation process.

This list by no means wants to exhaust all the actors involved in the web of delegation processes, but it clearly emphasizes the interdependence that binds each entity. The role of consumers, as a matter of fact, can be crucial in actively guiding the algorithm refinement. This is also evidenced by the training program launched by ASICS in order to reduce bias and improve AI's grasp of real athletic physiques, demonstrating the power of public engagement not only in *sanctioning* but also in structurally modifying the AI statistical models[5]. Such complex delegation-mediation mechanisms define Latour's idea of enunciation (2017), which extends its plans of relevance from the more traditional forms of narration investigated by semiotics. The author conceives enunciation as a passage, a translation-like relationship between different modes of existence (Peverini 2023), that he explores by identifying specific regimes. For this research purposes, the most interesting is the one of *Technique*, which assumes the involvement of non-humans in the delegation process: here, the enunciator transfers abilities into a different body, an *almost-object*, that persist and come into contact with the enunciatee even when the enunciator is no longer present (Ventura Bordenca 2021a). In the case of GAI, there is no visible trace of the original programmers' effort, yet algorithms pass from hand to hand, establishing unpredicted relationships with multiple humans and non-humans that computer scientists themselves cannot fully control.

When humans and non-humans come into contact, therefore, important transformative processes are initiated, generating singular meaning effects that would not occur without their prior interaction: an average user can thus become a somehow skilled artist by exploring the possibilities provided by the *text-to-image*[6] (TTI) device, which in turn acquires an artistic (human-like) dimension. Both components are indispensable to create the *AI-artist* hybrid as a new subjectivity and only through their interactions is it possible to perform the desired action, which Latour would call the achievement of a *common action program*.

---

[5] "Changing the way AI sees exercise" on www.asics.com: accessed February 11, 2024.
[6] Platforms able to generate images from textual prompts.

Although the theoretical framework developed by the author recalls the semiotic discipline at several points, it still shows some unclear aspects that the semiotic discipline can help unravel, starting with the notion of hybrid. Latour does not clearly define the term, often using misleading and ambiguous synonyms; for this reason, Marrone (2023, p. 52) proposed a list of definitions tracked in the author's work. With this regard, the following research will refer to the definition that most closely relates to the AI phenomenon, namely the "*union of human and non-human actors into a single actant*". This perspective is aligned with the sociosemiotic approach and, specifically, the volume *Society of Objects*, in which the importance of moving beyond the mere instrumentality of objects, "*escaping their naturalistic alibi*" (Marrone 2002, p. 10) is highlighted.

While they lack a consciousness and intentionality of their own (Floridi 2023), AI platforms acquire an autonomy by configuring themselves as true mediators producing signification (Ventura Bordenca 2021b). In reality, they do not merely perform functions by delegation (a *doing*) but are also able to take on narrative and thematic roles not always inscribed in their initial program, exerting pragmatic, pathemic and cognitive influences on both other objects and subjects. GAI platforms such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, for example, are endowed with the capacity to make other actors do, think, and feel when they're asked to generate specific outputs, arousing strong emotions in users and viewers, and fueling reflections on the meaning of art. We are dealing with devices that, as Eugeni (2021) remarks, participate in adjusting and altering the *experiential situation* in which they are embedded, shaped by a multitude of interactions able to determine various collective and individual practices.

It seems evident that the boundaries between humans and non-humans are progressively losing strength, in favor of a vision that rejects the distinction between Subject and Object posed a priori by phenomenology (Padoan 2023), and that is more akin to the greimasian notion of actants. This conception clearly dialogues with Latour's definition of anthropomorphism, intended not only as the simulation of human faculties by a non-human entity, but extended on several dimensions that consider the mediating role assumed by these devices (Peverini 2023). When applied to GAIs, this notion is fully manifested as these devices are generated by humans, invested with faculties commonly attributed to humans, but also able to reshape the human in different and unpredictable ways.

The analysis cannot thus ignore the strong impact of anthropomorphism, responsible for generating extreme reactions from the platforms' users. In the case of GAI, the delegation of cognitive functions, which frequently results in the generation of outputs that are difficult to distinguish from human ones, forces us to reconsider what is perceived as natural and cultural, transforming the way in which individuals approach creative content in both the production and fruition phases, with the evident risk of rejection. For years, brands have tried to stem users' anxieties through *naturalization* strategies that, as stated for *smart objects*, make these devices seem like integral parts of the environment they inhabit, concealing their operating criteria (Eugeni 2019; Peverini 2023). These strategies are aimed at reassuring users about living with a potential intruder in their domestic spaces, which narratively translates into conveying the perception of having the non-human under control despite its pervasiveness. It's not a case that many commercials emphasize the ability to turn off and silence smart assistants, which are often depicted as fallible, highlighting the impossibility, even for them, of striving for perfection (Eugeni 2019). The message of a harmonious human-machines coexistence conveyed by brands collides with different user reactions, becoming a significant challenge even for the most iconic brands on the market, which constantly reshape their discursive strategies to intercept *collective anxieties* and provide customers the right symbolic solutions (Holt 2004). Hence, what about GAI brands? How is it possible for them to communicate the possibility of a peaceful coexistence when they are at the center of countless ethical issues?

These demanding questions fuel the following research, aimed at exploring how and if GAI brands can effectively navigate public and individual resistances to build successful discursive strategies, fostering a better understanding of human-AI coexistence.

3. Some relevant premises

The first step in reconstructing GAI's branding discourses is to select a rich and pertinent corpus of analysis, in line with the aforementioned research purposes. This analysis examines OpenAI, a leading GAI company, focusing on their well-known TTI platform DALL-E, through a selection of its communication channels. Below a list of the decisive criteria in the choice of DALL-E:

a) Multiplicity: unlike its main competitors in the TTI sector (such as Midjourney and Starryai), OpenAI shows a more consolidated marketing communication strategy, producing different content on multiple channels, enriching the data collection. As a matter of fact, OpenAI is active on several social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Twitter;
b) Reasonable narrowness: the content that is actively published on OpenAI's Instagram profile regarding DALL-E allows a significant reduction of the corpus, in line with Floch (1990)'s text description criteria. This overcomes the problem of defining clear boundaries for data collection with regard to GAI produced content;
c) Redundancy and segmentation: the Instagram posts present some recurring elements that allow for greater generalization of the results with respect to the discourses of the brand. The curated nature of the profile's feed offers a well-defined and manageable set of content, decomposable into a finite number of units (Polidoro 2018), allowing the identification of the main isotopies;
d) Accessibility: DALL-E's wide reach, through its official interface and integrations like Bing and NightCafe, allows many users to access the platform, potentially enriching the analysis;
e) Controversy: OpenAI is currently under the media crosshairs due to various sensitive ethical causes and social issues. These controversies increment the richness of online discourses, crucial in understanding the meaning of "living together with AI".

The following research focused on two communication channels: DALL-E's section on OpenAI's website and OpenAI's Instagram profile (formerly DALL-E specific). DALL-E-related posts from September 2023 to February 2024 (113 posts) were analyzed to capture the period after the last ChatGPT integration and the introduction of Sora, the *text-to-video* model.

4. OpenAI's branding discourse: a focus on DALL-E

DALL-E is a popular TTI platform produced by OpenAI, trained to generate illustrations from a "*textual prompt by using a large dataset of text-image pairs*"[7]. As stated by the brand itself in the official landing page, DALL-E wants to empower people to express themselves creatively, allowing users to generate content regardless of their prior competences. Indeed, this possibility of experimentation is realized in the many functionalities offered by the platform, capable of producing representations of stylistic canon commonly associated with certain genres: from photographic hyper-realism to comic strips and so on.
The following analysis understandably begins with its denomination, a fundamental element to understand the symbolic treasury of the brand discourse (Marrone 2007). Its origin can be traced back to a rather fascinating hybrid: on one hand we detect an obvious reference to Salvador Dalí, one of the leading exponents of the Surrealist current; while on the other there's Wall-e, Pixar's cuddly little robot able to feel emotions despite its metal casing. Salvador Dalí's choice is by no means casual considering the more functional characteristics of the platform, so the possibility it provides to generate extremely realistic and at the same time physically impossible illustrations, following the common feeling associated with the surrealist current[8]. Even the reference to Wall-e is not accidental, suggesting the willingness of the brand to be perceived as a harmless friend that, as smart objects, cannot damage humans.

---

[7] www.openai.com: accessed January 9, 2024.
[8] While OpenAI's strategic intention to align its platform with Salvador Dalí is evident, the artistic implications of this association are more nuanced. Some argue that the connection to surrealism is primarily rooted in psychological phenomena like *apophenia* and *pareidolia*, which drive our human tendency to perceive patterns and

By observing the artist-machine hybrid, we can say that Wall-e's presence in the artistic context almost seems to recall a typically childlike and innocent imagination, a purity in being able to see fantasies taking shape in the real world. This kind of rhetoric is also found within the Instagram posts (Fig. 2), which exhibit various *kawaii* (cute) representations of animals and objects. Being kawaii is identified not only as a physical attribute of the entity that exhibits adorable, childlike traits, but also as an "*attitude toward the same entity that, as vulnerable, should be treated gently*" (Jones, Lancaster 2021, p. 49). Such tender representations are then able to influence customers' attitudes, potentially softening negative reactions in terms of AI rejection.

Fig. 2 – The kawaii effect emerging from the brand's feed (© OpenAI).

In addition to the consistent display of kawaii representations, we find other recurring elements in OpenAI's discursive strategy, such as (a) the presence of *irony* and (b) a *collaborative* form of *enunciation*, as it follows:

a) Irony occurs in the visual traits of the posts, which completely violate the logics of reality. The absurd plays within these dynamics, manifesting through impossible and funny juxtapositions (Fig. 3), such as an avocado going to therapy because it feels "empty" without its kernel. This last example is quite striking: the therapist, with his spoon-like head, takes note of his patient's misfortunes, although being the one responsible for his emptiness. It emerges a strong social critique of humans' relationship with nature, of their role in shaping the world's equilibrium, which is made evident when the point of view is shifted, making the non-human subject seem more human than the therapist himself. It's clear that the human and the non-human roles are reversed, alienated from common expectations, in a way that perfectly echoes Latour's considerations on the modernity's paradoxes.

Fig. 3 – An ironical post on the Instagram profile (© OpenAI).

connections (Somaini 2023). However, other studies suggest that DALL-E's images and prompts genuinely reflect surrealism's historical interest in the unconscious (O'Meara, Murphy 2023). Ultimately, the question of whether DALL-E can truly be considered a surrealist tool remains a subject of debate.

b) We can detect a co-enunciation strategy involving OpenAI as a brand and the artists/amateur users using DALL-E to produce content. In the Instagram profile there are many collaboratively published posts, in which users both explain their imaginative path and express gratitude towards the platform that allowed them to produce a piece of work which would not have been possible to create in its absence (Fig. 4). This is where an interesting meaning effect is traced, centered on the concept of *mutual empowerment*. Humans and non-humans are represented as players belonging to the same team, equally involved in the action program's execution. OpenAI, rather than re-enunciate and thus manipulate the initial enunciative instance produced by humans as in the case, for example, of deepfakes (Pignier 2022), it chooses to collaborate with them in a coherent way, presenting the brand and the users' points of views as a single compact voice, a form of *concordant concordance[9]* referencing Ricœur's work (Rabatel 2013).

This choice is intended again to reassure the skeptics, but it does not stop there: the collaboration with amateur users allows OpenAI to valorize its platform from both a functional and a ludic point of view, showcasing the software's performance but also the fun experienced in playing and experimenting with it.
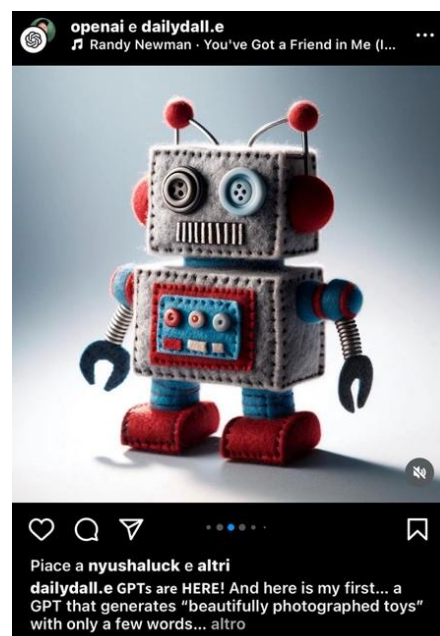

Fig. 4 – A co-enunciation form in DALL-E's posts (© OpenAI).

When OpenAI does not collaborate directly with artists/users, it chooses to post content in which the *copy* consists entirely of the prompt. The prompt does not configure itself as a mere description of the figurative and/or plastic elements observed, but it indicates the command used to generate the initial enunciative instance. It is essential to consider this dimension as a tangible trace of the original enunciator ("whomever" it is), placed before the operation of translation into computational, then visual and finally advertising language. This transformative nature finds a strong parallel in Latour's definition of enunciation, characterized by a process of agentivity transfer among entities with multiple modes of existence. In this case, the syntax proper to the programming language is lacking (Fig. 5): the classic backslash (/) that typically marks the prompt's partition is in fact replaced by high inverted commas, typographic characters generally used to circumscribe direct speech or quotations[10]. This choice, regardless of its intentionality, is responsible for anthropomorphizing the computational language, transforming the command into a sort of dialogue between humans. It also creates the illusion of an

---

[9] The term defines a form of co-enunciation in which the "*point of view (POV) is co-produced and shared by two locutors/enunciators*" (Rabatel 2013, p. 35).

[10] www.accademiadellacrusca.it: accessed December 16, 2023.

accessible creative process, a transparency meaning effect (and again control) that partially exposes the initial enunciative instance. Hence, making the brand appear as willing to unveil the concealed generative stream. It could be then assumed that the adopted strategies are intended to resolve the expose/occult opposition that characterizes the black box's unknown structure. Furthermore, by observing the prompts' structure, we realize that it can be conceived as a complex encapsulation of *débrayage* and *embrayage*. The marketing team, which concretely produced the post, projects within the utterance different actors, spaces and places that refer to another enunciative instance – the one produced by the creative team – generating the illusion of a return to the original enunciator. This creates the effect of reducing the distance perceived by the user, with the aim of increasing the engagement.

Fig. 5 – An example of the captions (© OpenAI).

A form of controlled collaboration is also flaunted on OpenAI's official web page, where terms such as "control" and "security" are frequently repeated, even naming a specific section of the site, dedicated to safety concerns. Prominent among the various statements is the possibility for artists to delete their proprietary content from the DALL-E's databases at any time, again providing a form of control over the brand's opaque black box. Moreover, on this section we can find the Chief Technology Officer's statement emphasizing the importance of aligning machines with human values, in a way that they are considered beneficial to society. This strategy likely aims to position the company as solely focused on mutual empowerment, consistent with the attempts developed on social media platforms. While this idea dialogues perfectly with OpenAI's mission to *democratize* the use of AI, it also collides with the commercial choice to sell paid versions of ChatGPT through different subscription forms, thus narrowing the once global target. It's a basic inconsistency that violates the brand's core values and that more consumers are highlighting nowadays, especially when comparing the free version with the paid one which, according to them, is considerably more precise and specialized.
The question is therefore not whether OpenAI is making this technology accessible or not, but rather to whom this accessibility is directed and with what effects in the future.

5. The importance of analyzing user comments from a semiotic perspective

The mitigation attempts developed by brands are facing growing public resistance, with diverse opinions fueling media hype and controversy. Not only do consumers belong to the complex web of assemblages forming AIs, but they are essential elements in understanding the branding discourses directed at them. Brand' strategic choices are indeed based on public acceptance; hence the semiotic effort of tracing meaning effects must necessarily dialogue with consumers, who are now able to express themselves on a multitude of channels, especially online ones.
While it has not always been the subject of semiotic investigation, the analysis of comments is crucial as they constitute real sites of actions (Adami 2015), stances, capable of exerting an influence on the brand communications' effectiveness. It is not a matter of reconstructing the degree of objectivity/subjectivity of comments – as being expressions of the self – but to understand to what extent they resonate with the brand discursive strategies highlighted in the previous paragraphs. With this regard, it's essential to underline that consumers determine not only the reputation of the brand, but also the functioning of the

generative platforms, which constantly benefit from the feedback received from users to refine and improve their interactions. All these reasons thus emphasize the necessity to analyze users' discourses, with the objective of understanding if OpenAI's strategy effectively address the problems surrounding the excessive delegation of human actions, emotions, and thoughts to AI. To cite Marrone (2023, p. 53): "[..]*what part of such so-called humanity, on the other hand, could never be passed over?*".

6. Deconstructing DALL-E 3's launch: a critical look at strategies and outcomes

The analysis focused on a pinned commercial across OpenAI's DALL-E website, Instagram, and YouTube. This interactive video (347M views, 1.5K comments) showcases DALL-E 3 integrated with ChatGPT and features a stronger narrative structure that can be analyzed through the more traditional tools of structuralist semiotics. We're, in fact, dealing with a paradigmatic text offering insightful information on both brand strategies and users' reactions, which are ultimately responsible for sanctioning negatively or positively the product (and thus the brand).

The commercial highlights ChatGPT's speed and seamless integration with DALL-E 3.0, showcasing a user experience that flows effortlessly and rapidly between text and image generation. It's necessary to point out that the content was actually co-published with the prominent digital artist Chad Nelson, known for his ongoing collaborations with the brand. This makes the post an example of the aforementioned co-enunciation strategy, a kind of co-branding tactic that – from a strategic point of view – serves to both publicize the new version of the platform and give visibility to the artist.

The short video portrays a time-crunched (or perhaps less creatively skilled) parent using ChatGPT to breathe life into his/her child's imaginary friend, Larry "*the super-duper hedgehog*". Through conversation, the parent asks the GAI to build Larry's world, from visuals and personality traits to a bedtime story (Fig. 6), showcasing ChatGPT's ability to effectively perform several tasks. On the narrative level, we can therefore say that the main Subject, the parent, acquires the competences to fulfil their child's dream (Object of value) thanks to the intervention of ChatGPT (Helper), while lack of time and resources act as the main Opponents. It's clear that the story positions OpenAI as a friendly hand in managing the hectic life of a parent. Furthermore, the thematic role that emerges towards the end of the story can be compared to that of a caregiver: after all, ChatGPT is acting as a digital babysitter who helps the overworked or unable parents by inventing a story that they can use to lull the child, in turn responsible for the performance' sanction.

This short narration demonstrates the impact of generative AI on life practices in terms of meaning effects (Finocchi et al. 2016), by transforming not only how individuals generate and produce content on a cognitive/pragmatic level, but also by reconfiguring the relationships they establish with other subjects, as is the case for the parent who, thanks to OpenAI, can provide a moment of happiness for the child. In addition to the "kawaii effect" that the brand wants to elicit through Larry's figure, here the concept of delegation takes center stage, inviting considerations about the specific actions delegated within the whole narrative program's framework.

Delegation occurs, first and foremost, at the competence phase, when the device produces content based on its (computational) skills which, however, are not directly transferred to the subject, who merely accepts somewhat passively ChatGPT's help. Of course, this happens even in our use of the most common artifacts, yet we are not used to delegating the effort of content ideation and production to objects. It is precisely this high degree of passivity that gives rise to the most delicate controversies. To understand the extent of this issue, an analysis of the users' discourse was conducted using Nvivo, a software typically employed for qualitative analysis on a large amount of text. The software was used as support for the semiotic analysis to better organize the text portions and derive effective visual representations based on the observations' results. For this specific reason, Nvivo's *auto-coding* functionality was not utilized in the following section. Instead, a direct and manual semantic analysis was conducted, facilitated by Nvivo's ability to readily create visible categories.
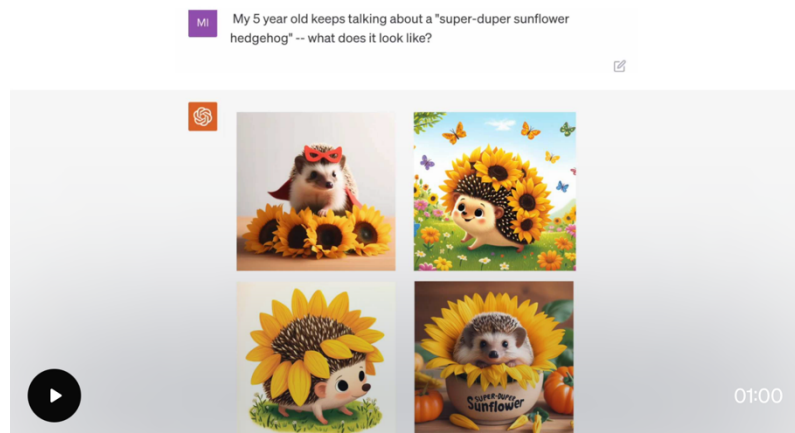
Fig. 6 –DALL-E 3's launch campaign, September 20, 2023 (© OpenAI).

7. A deep dive onto users' reactions

To analyze the users' discourse, 1300 comments from OpenAI's commercial on both Instagram and YouTube were collected[11]. After data cleaning, it was found that 1000 comments remained relevant and pertinent for further analysis. Following this preliminary screening, semantic redundancies were progressively detected and deconstructed into different small blocks, as a first attempt to frame the main isotopies. From this initial identification, a second in-depth examination was carried out to refine the analysis and consider contextualities as well, resulting in a larger and more generalized classification with the identification of nine different isotopies (see Appendix, Fig. 8). This approach also enabled the identification of four user categories (Fig. 7) within the considered narrative micro-universe.

Sub-codes	Isotopies	Users	Coverage %	Tot. comments
Empowerment	Potentiality	Progressivists	371 37%	
Futurism				
Loveliness	Beauty			
Wonderfulness				
Employment	Substitution	Conservatives	345 35%	1.000 100%
Parenthood				
Authorship	Forgery			
Liberalism				
	Apocalypticism			
	Ambiguity	Doubters	54 5%	
	Responsibility			
	Technicism	Indifferents	230 23%	
	Informativity			

Fig. 7 – Coding on Nvivo.

---

[11] It's important to note that OpenAI's posts were carefully crafted for promotional reasons. Because of strategic rationales, they were intentionally built to minimize potential negative feedback, ensuring a positive product positioning. This specification is necessary because it is in line with the purpose of studying the brand's discursive strategies.

Among the outlined isotopies, there are several that somehow confirm the discursive strategies deployed by OpenAI. On one hand, in fact, we can detect the "tenderness effect" coupled with the amazement expressed towards the extraordinary functionalities of the platform (*Beauty* isotopy); on the other hand, there's the concept of a controlled mutual empowerment that is reflected in the expectation for AI-supported human progress (*Potentiality* isotopy). While all the percentages show consistency, these comments highlight a positive response from users. Notably, 37% of them responded favorably to the strategic efforts employed by the brand in product promotion and risk mitigation.

In contrast to the more optimistic reactions, there are particularly negative isotopies concerning the main fears conventionally associated with the use of AI, namely: the substitution in the work and relationship spheres, but also issues of authorship and data theft. In this wave of criticism, the construction of apocalyptic scenarios prevails, marked by the prospect of a doomed future dominated by machines. It is interesting to note how the same *meaning effect* of tenderness can determine a twofold pathemic response, stimulating both extremely positive and negative reactions, due to its impact on the relational sphere in which the delegation process takes place. The more visionary (but also busy) parents perceive the device as a useful asset, while others as a form of laziness and deprivation of a *make-feel* that is typically human. Moreover, OpenAI's use of a childhood narrative sparked debate on brand authenticity. Some users saw Larry's story as manipulative, designed to mask commercial goals and potential GAI risks. These critics are linked to the *Liberalism* isotopy, which encloses all the critical comments related to the alleged inaccessibility of resources, with the result of contravening the democratization of AI that underpins OpenAI value system, as demonstrated by the hashtag *#ClosedAI*. With respect of these considerations, I defined four user categories that broadly mirror the great debate around these devices with a more or less intense polarization between those who ardently rail against them (35%) and those who are fascinated and therefore staunch supporters (37%). In reality, the characteristics of these modern Apocalyptics and Integrated are multifaceted and, as aforementioned, reveal positions that respond to the meaning effects prompt by OpenAI's brand discourse. It is no coincidence then, that more nuanced and ambiguous categories were noted, emphasizing the multi-causal nature of the phenomenon. In respect to this, the *Doubters* category is quite exemplary, including both anti-determinists and those who position themselves in a grey area of the polarizing axis. The first ones, in line with Cosenza' studies (2014), dismiss the medium by considering its human usage as the main culprit; while the second ones find themselves at the mercy of technical evolution, paralyzed and hesitant to take a clear position. At the same time, there are indifferent users who are not particularly interested in the underlying existential issues, focusing on the more technical aspects such as the plastic and/or figurative rendering of content, but also requesting support for problems regarding the platform's usage.

8. Conclusions

These results highlight the multifaceted nature of public opinion towards GAI, revealing a spectrum of perspectives shaped by a variety of individual and contextual influences. They're in line with the recent Oxford's research[12] (2024), revealing a prevailing sense of ambiguity regarding AI's impact on both professional and private domains, with respondents raising concerns about potential risks to transparency and reliability of news despite the anticipated productivity gains. Consumers, in particular, find themselves navigating a complex technological landscape lacking the necessary literacy to engage with these devices. This is coupled with the sensationalized media's portrayal of AI (Nader et al. 2024), further exacerbating this confusion, making it challenging for individuals to form informed opinions about the potential benefits and risks associated with this transformative technology. As Cosenza (2014) points out, social, economic, and personal factors can influence public opinion largely, making clear-cut divisions insufficient. Furthermore, the results show that despite the effort to construct narratives that

---

[12] Fletcher & Nielsen (2024), "What does the public in six countries think of generative AI in news?", in *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*.

can stimulate consumer acceptance, there are several issues that reflect very deep social cleavages which GAI brands will be forced to address as models continue to sophisticate.

The strategic results inevitably intersect with theoretical matters, such as the need for a dialogue with Latour to understand the nature of the phenomenon, as well as the use of a sociosemiotic perspective to study the observed texts as frameworks of social life (Ventura Bordenca 2022). This connects to the purpose of the research, which focused on understanding how the coexistence between humans and nonhumans is concretely enacted within brand narratives, capable of revealing (at least partially) the complex and often ambiguous nature of the relationship under investigation. This once again proves the usefulness and importance of using a semiotic approach, not only as a tool for critical analysis of social phenomena, aimed at accounting for the *naturalization* of discourses regarding persuasive purposes, but also as a mean to support strategic brand management logics from the perspective of marketing semiotics and cultural branding.

Appendix

Empowerment	Comments that emphasize the concept of mutual human-machine empowerment were included. Lexemes such as "power", "imagination" and "expression", have been frequently reported.
Futurism	Comments reporting a future-looping orientation, characterized by the repetition of terms such as "future", "evolution» and "revolution" were included.
Loveliness	Comments in which the cuteness aspect is prevalent, reporting several affectations such as "adorable", "cute", and "kawaii". Emoji of commotion and tenderness (� / �) towards the fictional animal have been associated with this type of code.
Wonderfulness	Comments of sheer enthusiasm and amazement were included, signaled by the use of capital letters, exclamation points and emoji of amazement (� / � / �). Expressions such as "wow", "omg" and "insane" are frequently reported.
Employment	Comments where the labor dimension is prevalent have been included in this code. The repetition of terms such as "Labor", "Artists," and "Illustrators" is highlighted.
Authorship	The concept of authorship prevails in these comments, with the repetition of predicates such as "stealing", "violating", but also terms such as "copyright" and "rights".
Parenthood	In this code the family dimension emerges. Terms such as "parents", "child", but also "bedtime stories" were frequently detected.
Liberalism	Economic comments regarding accessibility have been grouped here. Expressions such as "#ClosedAI" and "freedom" were frequently reported.
Apocalypticism	A catastrophist dimension prevails in these comments, with the repetition of terms such as "doomsday", "RIP", "end", and "dystopic". Capital letters and punctuation occur repeatedly here as well, just like emojis such as "�" and "�".
Technicism	Comments related to the technical features of the platform were included in this code, with the repetition of lexemes such as "prompt", "program" and "features". There is no shortage of direct references to previous versions of the platform, namely DALL-E and DALL-E 2.
Informativity	This section contains comments related to the commercial release of the product from a branding perspective, so lexemes such as "release" and "date" are noted.
Ambiguity	This code includes comments invested by a double axiological judgment, where syntagmatic chains are marked by both euphoric and dysphoric traits such as: "horrifyingly" + "beautiful" + "❤"+"�".
Responsibility	The concept of responsibility is prominent within this code. Therefore, syntagmatic chains such as "use" + "correct", but also lexemes such as "responsibility" and "mode" are frequently highlighted.

Fig. 8 – An overview of the semantic analysis.

Bibliography

Adami, E., 2015, "What's in a click? A social semiotic framework for the multimodal analysis of website interactivity", in *Visual Communication*, vol. 14(2), pp. 133-153.

Cosenza, G., 2014, *Introduzione alla semiotica dei nuovi media*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

Cosenza, G., 2016, "Il "popolo del web", fra apocalittici e integrati, determinismo e antideterminismo tecnologico", in G. Ferraro, A.M. Lorusso, *Nuove forme d'interazione: dal web al mobile*, Tricase (LE), Libellula Edizioni, pp. 31-42.

D'Armenio, E., Deliège, A., Dondero, M. G., 2024, "Semiotics of Machinic Co-Enunciation. About Generative Models (Midjourney and DALL·E)", in *Signata. Annales des sémiotiques/Annals of Semiotics*, vol. 15, pp. 1-39.

Eco, U., 1964, *Apocalittici e integrati: la cultura italiana e le comunicazioni di massa*, Milano, Bompiani.

Eugeni, R., 2019, "The Post-advertising Condition. A Socio-Semiotic and Semio-Pragmatic Approach to Algorithmic Capitalism", in *Social Computing and Social Media, Communication and Social Communities: 11th International Conference*, Springer, pp. 291-302.

Eugeni, R., 2021, *Il capitale algoritmico. Cinque dispositivi postmediali (più uno)*, Morcelliana, Brescia.

Finocchi, R., Perri, A., Peverini, P., 2016, "Da identità a identificazione. Forme di vita e società degli oggetti ai tempi dell'Internet of things", in *Annali-Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa*, pp. 169-187.

Floch, J.M., 1990, *Sémiotique, marketing et communication*, Paris, Puf; trad. it. *Semiotica, marketing e comunicazione,* Milano, FrancoAngeli 2015.

Floridi L., 2023, "AI as Agency Without Intelligence: on ChatGPT, Large Language Models, and Other Generative Models", in *Philosophy & Technology,* vol. 36(15), pp.1-7.

Gabbiadini, A., Ognibene, D., Baldissarri, C., Manfredi, A., 2024, "The emotional impact of generative AI: negative emotions and perception of threat", in *Behaviour & Information Technology,* pp. 1-18.

Holt, D. B., 2004, *How brands become icons: the principles of cultural branding*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press.

Jones, S., Lancaster, L., 2021, "Kawaii Revolution: Understanding the Japanese Aesthetics of "Cuteness" through Lolita and Madoka Magica", in *University of South Carolina Upstate Student Research Journal*, vol. 14(3), pp. 48-57.

Landowski, E., Marrone, G., eds., 2002, *La società degli oggetti. Problemi di interoggettività*, Roma, Meltemi.

Latour B., 1991, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, Paris, La Découverte; trad. it. *Non siamo mai stati moderni*, Milano, Elèuthera 2018.

Latour, B., 2017[1998], *Piccola filosofia dell'enunciazione*, con una nota di J. Fontanille, Roma, Aracne.

Latour B., 2021, *Politiche del design, Semiotica degli artefatti e forme della socialità*, ed. by D. Mangano & I. Ventura Bordenca, Milano, Mimesis.

Leone, M., 2023, "The main tasks of a semiotics of artificial intelligence", in *Language and Semiotic Studies*, vol. 9(1), pp. 1-13.

Marrone, G., 2002, "Dal design all'interoggettività: questioni introduttive", in E. Landowski, G. Marrone, eds., 2002, pp. 9-38.

Marrone, G., 2007, *Il discorso di marca. Modelli semiotici per il branding*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

Marrone, G., 2023, "Siamo sempre stati ibridi: e Paperino lo sa", in P. Peverini, I. Pezzini, eds., 2023, pp. 48-61.

Miyazaki, K., Murayama, T., Uchiba, T., An, J., Kwak, H., 2024, "Public perception of generative AI on Twitter: an empirical study based on occupation and usage", in *EPJ Data Science*, vol. 13(2), pp. 1-20.

Nader, K., Toprac, P., Scott, S., Baker, S., 2024, "Public understanding of artificial intelligence through entertainment media", in *AI & society*, vol. 39(2), pp. 713-726.

O'Meara, J., Murphy, C., 2023, "Aberrant AI creations: co-creating surrealist body horror using the DALL-E Mini text-to-image generator", in *Convergence*, vol. 29(4), pp. 1070-1096.

Oswald, L.R, 2012, *Marketing semiotics: signs, strategies, and brand value*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Oswald, L.R., 2015, *Creating value: The theory and practice of marketing semiotics research*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Padoan, T., 2011, *Attori, reti e linguaggi dell'esperienza religiosa: indagini semiotiche sulle strategie di enunciazione nel discorso religioso giapponese*, Venezia, Archivio Istituzionale Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, pp. 6-55.

Padoan, T., 2023, "Hybrid Perceptions. Rethinking Phenomenology and Semiotics Through Actor-Network-Theory", in P. Peverini, I. Pezzini, eds., 2023, pp. 94-116.

Peverini, P., 2023, *Inchiesta sulle reti di senso: Bruno Latour nella svolta semiotica*, Milano, Meltemi.

Peverini, P., Pezzini I., eds., 2023, *La società degli ibridi*, E|C, vol. 37.

Pignier, N, 2022, "L'énonciation à l'épreuve de l''I.A.'. Qu'est-ce- qu'énoncer veut dire?", in *Interfaces numériques*, vol. 11, pp. 48-60.

Polidoro, P., 2018, "Il sito web nell'epoca della sua responsività tecnica: riflessioni sull'applicazione del concetto di testo ai siti web", in *E|C*, vol. 23, pp. 36-41.

Rabatel, A., 2013, "Positions, positionnements et postures de l'énonciateur", in *Linha D'Água*, vol. 26(2), pp. 159-183.

Somaini, A., 2023, "Dreams, Hallucinations, Visions. Generative AI and the Long History of Surrealism", in *Paradigmi, Rivista di critica filosofica*, vol. 3, pp. 541-556.

Traini, S., 2006, *Le due vie della semiotica: Teorie strutturali e interpretative*, Milano, Bompiani.

Ventura Bordenca, I., 2021a, "Ripensare gli oggetti, riprogettare la società", in B. Latour, *Politiche del design. Semiotica degli artefatti e forme della socialità*, Milano, Mimesis, pp. 7-43 e 343-358.

Ventura Bordenca, I., 2021b, "Ambienti digitali ed extended reality: alcune questioni semiotiche a partire da esempi di branding e retailing", in *E|C*, vol. 31, pp. 247-254.

Ventura Bordenca, I., 2022, "Sociosemiotica: teorie, esplorazioni, prospettive", in G. Marrone e T. Migliore, eds., *Cura del senso e critica sociale: ricognizione della semiotica*, Milano, Mimesis, pp. 23-61.