ASCILITE 2026

The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Analyse, create, defend: Securing human judgement in marketing communications assessment under generative AI

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Generative AI has unsettled a long-standing assumption in higher education: that a written submission is evidence of the thinking behind it. This is a particular problem in marketing communications education, where the capabilities that matter most, reading persuasion critically and arguing for a stronger alternative, are those a language model can now imitate. This paper offers a reflective account of an assessment designed in response, currently running in a postgraduate marketing communications subject at an Australian university. Students work in self-selected groups to analyse a real advertisement, then propose and present an improved version as a Pecha Kucha, before defending their decisions in a live discussion with the class and tutor. Generative AI is permitted for producing slide visuals but not for the analysis or argument. The paper argues that a rule of this kind cannot secure an assessment on its own, since compliance cannot be verified, and that what secures the task is the oral defence: a student who has not done the thinking cannot reconstruct it under questioning. This reframing draws on recent work distinguishing discursive from structural assessment change.

Keywords: assessment design, generative AI, Pecha Kucha, interactive oral assessment, academic integrity, reflective practice

Introduction

Marketing communications education asks students to interpret persuasion and to construct it: to take an existing piece of work, explain how it operates on an audience, and make a defensible case for doing it better. Generative AI (GenAI) now produces a competent version of that written output on demand, which breaks the inference educators have long relied upon, that a competent submission reflects a competent author. The challenge is not only that students might cheat, but that written work no longer reliably distinguishes the student who can think from the one who has prompted effectively.

Sector responses have tended toward two positions, neither adequate. Prohibition assumes a level of detection that does not exist and, in the Australian context, has been judged a poor foundation for assessment reform; the national guidance notes that it is almost impossible to reliably detect GenAI use and that there is little value in blanket bans (Lodge et al., 2023). Unrestricted permission avoids that problem but risks certifying fluency with a tool rather than command of a discipline. The more useful question is narrower: within a single task, where does AI use extend a student's capability, and where does it substitute for it?

This paper is a reflective account of one answer to that question, an assessment currently running in a postgraduate marketing communications subject at an Australian university. The account is offered as practitioner scholarship rather than empirical study; it reports a design and the first cycle of its delivery, not a controlled evaluation. The argument is that the assessment holds together through the relationship between two components: an AI policy that reserves strategic reasoning for the student, and an oral defence that verifies the reserved reasoning was their own. The policy locates the capability the discipline exists to teach; the structure confirms it. This account develops that pairing in marketing communications, where the boundary between AI-assisted production and human strategic judgement is both well-defined and professionally current. In doing so, it speaks to the conference sub-theme of Human-Centred Learning Design, since it locates human judgement at the point where AI is excluded and verifies it through a live oral defence.

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Context and design rationale

The subject is a master's-level introduction to marketing communications. In the cohort discussed here, 79 students completed the assessment in self-selected groups of three to four students. The assessment has two linked parts: a written critical analysis submitted in week seven and a Pecha Kucha presentation with oral defence delivered in week eight tutorials. No feedback on the written analysis was provided before the presentation, so each group built its proposal on its own reading rather than on tutor corrections. Because the two components are linked, with the oral defence serving to verify the contents of the written report, withholding feedback beforehand keeps groups defending their own reading rather than revising on the tutor's, and preserves the verification the defence is designed to provide.

Groups were self-selected by design. The choice rests on self-determination theory, which holds that autonomy supports engagement and a sense of ownership over the work (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Across a multi-week collaborative task, allowing students to choose their collaborators reflects a practical judgement, formed over several years of teaching the subject, that students sustain engagement more readily when working with people they have chosen than when groupings are imposed. This is offered as a design rationale rather than a measured finding from this cohort.

The assessment

The design follows the principle of constructive alignment, in which the tasks, the intended learning, and the criteria are built to reinforce one another (Biggs, 2003), and it draws on the tradition of authentic assessment, where students apply knowledge to tasks that resemble professional practice (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). Authentic assessment is well established in marketing education specifically, where it is used to develop the employability-related capabilities that conventional written tasks tend to leave undeveloped (Montano et al., 2023).

Part A is a 1500-word critical analysis of a real advertisement or campaign, chosen from a curated list. Students are asked not to describe the campaign but to account for how it constructs meaning and attempts to persuade, drawing on at least two theoretical frameworks from the subject. The report closes with an evaluation that identifies where the execution is weak. That evaluation forms the basis for Part B, since a limited analysis leaves a group with little to develop.

Part B is a Pecha Kucha: twenty slides, twenty seconds each, advancing automatically, so the presentation runs for six minutes and 40 seconds without the option to slow down or pad. Within it, each group identifies a specific weakness in the campaign they analysed, proposes a revised execution, and explains the reasoning behind their choices. The format itself contributes to the learning. Liao et al. (2020) note that the fixed timing and slide count push students toward more deliberate decisions about what to include, because there is no room for material they cannot justify. To brief a tool to generate a usable visual, a student must already know what the image needs to argue, which makes the permitted AI use contingent on prior understanding rather than a substitute for it.

Each presentation is followed by roughly eight minutes of discussion with the class and tutor, within a 15-minute slot per group. Questions are not scripted or assigned to named students in advance; the tutor prepares lines of inquiry from a prior reading of each group's report and then puts them to the group on the spot, after hearing the pitch. Students are told in advance that everyone is expected to contribute and to share the questions between them, and where a student has not spoken, the tutor invites them in so that each has the opportunity to respond. The discussion is assessed against published criteria rather than treated as an informal debrief.

The policy on GenAI is deliberately divided. Students may use it to produce visuals for their slides; they may not use it for the analysis or the written argument. By the distinction Corbin et al. (2025) draw, this policy is on its own a *discursive* change, a rule whose effect depends on students choosing to follow it, and which the tutor cannot reliably verify. It is mapped against the AI Assessment Scale, which encourages educators to specify where AI use is appropriate within a task rather than permitting or banning it wholesale (Perkins et al., 2024).

The policy expresses an intent that mirrors professional practice, where visual production is increasingly AI-assisted while strategic judgement is not. It does not, by itself, secure the assessment.

Securing the assessment through individual defence

What secures the assessment is *structural*. Corbin et al. (2025) distinguish discursive changes from structural ones, which alter the mechanics of a task so that its validity no longer depends on student compliance, and they identify the live, interactive oral as a structural example. The oral defence in this design is that kind of change. A written AI policy may be disregarded; an eight-minute defence of a group's strategic decisions cannot be outsourced, because the reasoning has to be produced in real time and in response to unanticipated questions.

This places the assessment within the established tradition of interactive oral assessment, developed in Australian higher education as a means of preserving academic integrity while building professional capability; scaffolded tasks that culminate in an interactive oral have been shown to reduce misconduct, and students report themselves as least likely to engage in it when the task closely resembles real-world practice (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). The rationale has sharpened under GenAI. In business education specifically, verbal verification of written work is now argued to be a resilient response because gaps in understanding surface quickly when a student must explain their reasoning aloud (Perkins, 2026). The evidence that this is needed is direct: across two universities, experienced markers could not reliably tell GenAI-assisted writing from student writing, and the authors point to oral and performance-based assessment as the more resilient alternative (Kofinas et al., 2025).

The rubric makes the division of accountability explicit. Of seven criteria, five are assessed at the group level and concern the shared intellectual work: the quality of the analysis and rationale, the use of course concepts, the depth of research, the academic writing, and the strategic quality of the proposed redevelopment. Two are assessed individually: presentation and delivery, and oral defence and discussion. A peer evaluation, submitted by each student within 24 hours, contributes a third layer. Together these address the familiar problem that unequal contribution is the most common source of dissatisfaction with group work (Hall & Buzwell, 2013), and they do so at the point of live performance rather than through retrospective report alone. Marking the oral components individually is consistent with established interactive oral practice, in which students participate as a group but are assessed as individuals (Ward et al., 2024). The individual oral defence and the peer evaluation together moderate the group written mark: the defence tests whether each student can reconstruct the reasoning behind the written analysis, so its securing function extends across the task rather than being confined to the marks nominally assessed at the individual level.

Reflections from the first implementation

The observations below are the outcome of an autoethnographic reflection on the first implementation of this assessment. Autoethnography treats the practitioner's own experience as a site of disciplined inquiry, drawing on teaching artefacts and recursive reflection to develop interpretive insight positioned within its professional context (Adams et al., 2015). The account draws on the educator's marking records, tutorial notes, and reflective notes from the week-eight tutorials across the cohort of 79 students. The patterns reported are interpretive observations from a single teaching cycle rather than measured findings and are offered to inform the design of the formal study described below.

The clearest pattern was that the defence separated students whom the written submission had grouped together. Within a group sharing one mark for the written analysis, individual marks for presentation and defence often diverged, sometimes considerably. This was expected rather than a flaw: students articulate and reason differently, and it is the reason those two criteria are assessed individually rather than collectively.

A related pattern was more telling for the question of integrity. In several cases, the written analysis was strong while the live defence was noticeably weaker. If undisclosed AI use were compensating for weak understanding, performance would be expected to hold across both the written submission and the defence. A strong written submission paired with a hesitant defence is the divergence the oral component is designed

to expose. Its appearance offered some reassurance that the written marks reflected understanding the students could demonstrate.

Discussion

This design contributes a model in which a differentiated AI policy and an individual oral defence operate as interdependent components of a single assessment logic in marketing communications. The policy reserves strategic reasoning for the student and permits AI only for visual production, while the defence verifies that the reserved reasoning is the student's own. Authorising AI use by function within a task, rather than by quantity, follows the distinction Tregloan and Song (2024) draw between where a tool assists and where a student must lead; the oral defence then supplies what a function-based policy alone cannot, since real-time questioning provides evidence of understanding that a written submission cannot, particularly when the task resembles professional practice (Sotiriadou et al., 2020; Tan, 2025). The policy specifies where human judgement must be exercised, and the defence confirms that it was. The capability this protects is the one that defines the discipline. In marketing communications, the strategic argument that justifies an execution for a given audience and competitive position is what distinguishes a practitioner from a competent user of a tool, and it is the capability the profession is reserving for human judgement as visual production becomes AI-assisted. Situating the assessment at this point gives the model relevance to marketing communications educators facing the same question. These four elements form a single logic rather than separate features: the policy identifies where human judgement must be exercised, the permitted AI use is limited to visual production, the oral defence provides the evidence of that judgement, and together they secure the validity of the task. This connects the design to the conference sub-theme of Human-Centred Learning Design, in which human reasoning and connection remain central even as AI can imitate their written traces.

The same pattern appears in recent work at this conference across other disciplines. In graduate teacher education, interactive oral assessment strengthened the validity of assessors' judgements and gave students fuller opportunity for critical reflection (Tan, 2025). In a pilot comparing secured formats, preliminary findings indicate that oral presentations were perceived as more authentic than invigilated examinations and carried lower administrative demands than expected (Jonathan & Walsh, 2025). Live assessment therefore holds value across disciplines, and the present account extends that pattern to marketing communications.

The wider implication concerns how AI policy is framed. A debate conducted in terms of permission and prohibition mistakes the problem, since neither a rule that permits nor a rule that bans can be enforced where use cannot be detected. The more productive move is to ask which parts of a task are validated by structure rather than by instruction, and to let the structure provide the assurance that a rule cannot. In this assessment, the AI policy states an intent, and the oral defence is what gives that intent effect.

Several limitations bound these claims. The account rests on a single cohort taught and marked by one educator, who is also the designer of the assessment, so there is no inter-rater reliability on the defence marks and no comparison group. The reflections describe patterns observed in teaching. The next iteration will address these constraints directly: a second tutor will join the teaching team, allowing inter-rater reliability on the defence marks, and the team intends to seek ethics approval to gather student reflections. A fuller study, comparing performance across the group and individual criteria and tracking defence marks against written marks, would test whether the design achieves what the teaching experience suggests. The present account draws only on the educator's own teaching artefacts and professional reflection; no student data was collected for research purposes, and formal ethics approval will be sought for the planned study.

Conclusion

This paper has described an assessment that treats design, rather than detection or prohibition, as the means of maintaining integrity under GenAI. A written analysis feeds a constrained creative presentation and an individual oral defence; AI is permitted for production and withheld from reasoning. The policy on its own is a rule students could disregard. What secures the assessment is the defence, where strategic reasoning has to be reconstructed in real time and cannot be delegated to a tool. The design is offered as one transferable response, and its next test is a fuller study of how students and tutors experience it across a complete cycle.

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