

CAN ARTIFICIAL INFLUENCERS BE AUTHENTIC? THE ROLE OF AI DISCLOSURE IN THE AUTHENTICITY–TRUST–PURCHASE INTENTION PARADOX IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

Mr. Mohammed Saadh

Tax Analyst

Admiral Marine Services Pvt. Ltd.

Chennai – 600001.

Ms. Swetha L

2nd Year MBA

University of Madras

Chennai – 600005.

Dr. Shriram K

(Assistant Professor)

PG & Research Department of Commerce,

The New College (Autonomous)

Chennai – 600014.

Abstract: The rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in social media has introduced Artificial Influencers as a new form of digitally constructed endorser, challenging conventional assumptions about authenticity, trust, and consumer behaviour. Unlike human influencers, Artificial Influencers are technologically created personas whose appearance, personality, communication, and interactions can be deliberately designed and controlled. This raises an important question: Can consumers perceive an Artificial Influencer as authentic when they are aware of its artificial nature? The present study examines the role of AI disclosure in shaping perceived authenticity and explores how authenticity relates to consumer trust and purchase intention in the context of social commerce. The study specifically addresses an emerging authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox, whereby consumers may recognise an influencer as artificial, perceive limitations in its authenticity, and nevertheless remain willing to trust its recommendations or consider purchasing promoted products.

A quantitative, exploratory, and cross-sectional research design was adopted. Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire from 30 social-media users using non-probability convenience sampling. The questionnaire examined respondents' social-media exposure, awareness of Artificial Influencers, perceptions of AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention. Frequency and percentage analysis were used to describe response patterns, while Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine associations among the principal constructs. Given the small sample size, the study is positioned as an exploratory investigation and does not seek to establish population-level generalisation or definitive causal relationships.

The findings indicate that AI disclosure has a dual significance in consumer evaluation. While 73.3% of respondents supported AI disclosure always or in most cases, disclosure was also associated with increased scrutiny of recommendations and greater concerns regarding genuineness. At the same time, 73.3% of respondents indicated that an Artificial Influencer could be perceived as authentic under certain circumstances, particularly when communication was relatable and consistent. However, 70.0% reported that awareness of AI generation reduced their perception of authenticity to some degree. Consumer trust appeared to be conditional rather than automatic, with respondents emphasising transparency, credibility, consistency, product relevance, and information verification.

Purchase intention was similarly cautious, with respondents indicating that willingness to purchase depended on the product and the credibility of the recommendation.

The study concludes that artificiality and authenticity should not be treated as mutually exclusive concepts. Consumers may simultaneously recognise the technological construction of an Artificial Influencer, experience reduced perceptions of genuineness, and still regard the influencer as sufficiently credible to support trust and purchase consideration. The findings therefore provide preliminary support for the authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox and suggest that AI disclosure functions not simply as a mechanism that reduces authenticity, but as a transparency cue that can coexist with scepticism. The study contributes to the emerging literature on AI-mediated influencer marketing by integrating AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention within a single exploratory framework. For marketers, the findings highlight the importance of transparent disclosure, credible and verifiable product information, consistent communication, and responsible consumer engagement when deploying Artificial Influencers in social commerce.

Keywords: Artificial Influencers; AI Disclosure; Perceived Authenticity; Consumer Trust; Purchase Intention; Social Commerce; Influencer Marketing; Artificial Intelligence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping digital marketing and social commerce by creating new forms of interaction between consumers, brands, and digitally generated personalities. Among these developments, Artificial Influencers have emerged as a distinctive form of digital endorser. Artificial Influencers are digitally created personas designed to communicate, interact with audiences, build social identities, and promote products or services through social media platforms. Unlike human influencers, their appearance, personality, communication, and content can be deliberately designed and controlled through technology. This provides marketers with opportunities for consistency, scalability, creative control, and brand alignment.

At the same time, the increasing commercial use of Artificial Influencers raises an important question: can consumers perceive an influencer as authentic when they know that the influencer is artificially created? Authenticity is particularly important in influencer marketing because consumers evaluate not only the content of a recommendation but also the perceived genuineness of its source. Human influencers can communicate personal experiences, opinions, lifestyles, and relationships with followers, which may contribute to perceptions of sincerity and authenticity. Artificial Influencers challenge these conventional assumptions because their identities and social interactions are technologically constructed rather than naturally experienced.

Nevertheless, artificiality does not necessarily prevent consumers from developing favourable perceptions of Artificial Influencers. They can maintain consistent personalities, communicate relatable narratives, and create engaging social experiences. Consequently, authenticity in the context of Artificial Influencers may depend less on whether an influencer is biologically human and more on whether consumers perceive the influencer's communication and identity as credible, consistent, and genuine. This perspective makes authenticity an important construct for understanding how consumers evaluate Artificial Influencers in social commerce.

This issue becomes more complex when AI disclosure is introduced. AI disclosure refers to informing consumers that an influencer or its content has been created or substantially generated using artificial intelligence. Disclosure can produce two opposing effects. On the one hand, revealing the artificial nature of an influencer may reduce perceived authenticity because consumers become explicitly aware that the persona is technologically constructed. Such awareness may create

psychological distance and weaken perceptions of genuine communication. On the other hand, disclosure may function as a transparency signal by demonstrating openness and reducing uncertainty about the source of the communication.

Thus, AI disclosure may simultaneously expose the artificiality of an influencer and demonstrate transparency, creating a fundamental tension in consumers' evaluations. The consequences of this tension extend beyond authenticity to consumer trust and purchase intention. In social commerce, consumers encounter product recommendations within an environment that combines social interaction, entertainment, information exchange, and commercial activity. Trust therefore becomes an important mechanism through which perceptions of an influencer may translate into purchasing responses. When consumers perceive an Artificial Influencer as authentic, they may be more willing to regard its recommendations as credible and develop greater trust in the influencer.

Such trust can subsequently increase consumers' willingness to consider or purchase products and services promoted by the influencer. However, the relationship becomes theoretically intriguing when AI disclosure is incorporated into this process. Consumers may recognise that an Artificial Influencer is not a real person and consequently question its authenticity, yet explicit disclosure of its artificial nature may simultaneously communicate transparency and reduce perceptions of deception. Therefore, artificiality may weaken authenticity without necessarily eliminating trust or purchase intention.

This creates an authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox: consumers may acknowledge the artificial nature of the influencer, perceive limitations in its authenticity, and nevertheless develop sufficient trust to respond favourably to its commercial recommendations. Understanding this paradox is particularly important because the commercial effectiveness of Artificial Influencers cannot be explained solely by their technological novelty or visual appeal. Although previous research has examined virtual and Artificial Influencers in relation to authenticity, credibility, trust, disclosure, and consumer responses, these constructs have frequently been examined through individual relationships or separate explanatory mechanisms.

Comparatively less attention has been given to how AI disclosure shapes perceived authenticity and how authenticity subsequently translates into trust and purchase intention within a unified social-commerce framework. In particular, the possibility that disclosure can expose the artificiality of an influencer while simultaneously supporting transparent and trustworthy communication remains insufficiently understood. Addressing this issue can provide a more nuanced explanation of why consumers may continue to respond positively to Artificial Influencers even when their artificial nature is explicitly disclosed.

Against this background, the present study examines whether Artificial Influencers can be perceived as authentic and investigates the role of AI disclosure in shaping such perceptions. The study further examines the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer trust and assesses the influence of trust on purchase intention in social commerce. By examining the sequential relationship between AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention, the study seeks to explain the authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox associated with Artificial Influencers. The study contributes to the emerging literature on AI-mediated influencer marketing by integrating these relationships within a single framework and offers practical insights for brands seeking to employ Artificial Influencers while maintaining transparency, consumer trust, and commercial effectiveness.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To examine consumers' perceived authenticity of Artificial Influencers in the context of social commerce.
- To investigate the effect of AI disclosure on consumers' perceived authenticity of Artificial Influencers.
- To examine the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer trust towards Artificial Influencers.
- To assess the influence of consumer trust on purchase intention towards products or services promoted by Artificial Influencers in social commerce.
- To examine the authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox by investigating the sequential relationship between AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

a) **Goel, P. & Garg, A. (2025)**

“Virtual Personalities, Real Bonds: Anthropomorphised Virtual Influencers' Impact on Trust and Engagement”

Goel and Garg examine how anthropomorphic characteristics and perceived authenticity influence consumer trust and engagement with virtual influencers in the Indian context. Using survey data from 377 Indian respondents and structural equation modelling, the study finds that physical and cognitive anthropomorphic characteristics, together with perceived authenticity, significantly influence cognitive trust. Perceived authenticity also influences affective trust, indicating that authenticity plays an important role in establishing both rational and emotional forms of trust towards virtual influencers. The study further demonstrates that higher levels of trust contribute to customer engagement and positive electronic word-of-mouth. These findings provide direct support for examining perceived authenticity as an important antecedent of consumer trust in Artificial Influencers.

b) **Angmo, P., Mahajan, R. & Ranjitha, G. P. (2025)**

“Unveiling the Power of Virtual Influencers: Impact of Content and Credibility on Consumer Engagement and Purchase Intentions”

Angmo, Mahajan and Ranjitha investigate the effectiveness of virtual influencers in social-media marketing by examining the influence of virtual-influencer content, influencer characteristics, and credibility on consumer engagement and purchase intention. The research incorporates two empirical studies examining virtual and human influencers and the role of expertise and trustworthiness. The findings indicate that virtual-influencer content positively affects social-media engagement and purchase intention, while influencer type does not significantly alter the relationship between influencer characteristics and purchase intention. The study suggests that consumers' responses to virtual influencers may depend more strongly on specific credibility-related characteristics than simply on whether the endorser is human or virtual. This provides an important basis for investigating authenticity and trust beyond the simple human-versus-AI distinction.

c) **Wani, T. A. & Nazir, M. (2026)**

“Human-like vs. Cartoonish Virtual Influencers: Exploring Design Effects on Trust, Uniqueness, Message Authenticity, and Sustainable Purchase Intentions”

Wani and Nazir examine how the design characteristics of virtual influencers influence trust, message authenticity, consumer engagement, and purchase intentions. Using two experimental studies, the research compares human-like and cartoon-like virtual influencers and finds that human-like virtual influencers perform better in terms of trust and perceived uniqueness in sustainability-related communication. The study further examines the role of message authenticity in connecting

influencer characteristics with consumer responses. These findings indicate that consumers' evaluations of virtual influencers are influenced not only by the fact that they are artificial but also by how their artificial identity is presented. This provides further support for examining perceived authenticity as a central construct in understanding trust and behavioural intentions towards Artificial Influencers.

IV. RESEARCH GAP

While recent studies have examined the growing influence of Artificial Influencers in digital marketing and social commerce, existing research has largely focused on credibility, attractiveness, anthropomorphism, engagement, and purchase intention. Although perceived authenticity and consumer trust have received increasing attention, these constructs are often examined independently or through separate relationships. Moreover, limited research has specifically investigated how AI disclosure influences consumers' perceived authenticity of Artificial Influencers and how this perception subsequently shapes consumer trust and purchase intention. The existing literature also provides mixed indications regarding disclosure: revealing the artificial nature of an influencer may reduce perceptions of authenticity, while simultaneously signal transparency and reducing uncertainty. This unresolved tension creates a significant gap in understanding whether consumers can regard Artificial Influencers as authentic and trustworthy despite being aware of their artificial origin.

This study seeks to address these gaps by adopting an integrated framework linking AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention in the context of social commerce. Rather than examining these constructs as isolated determinants of consumer responses, the study investigates their sequential relationship to explain the proposed authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox. By examining whether AI disclosure influences perceived authenticity and whether authenticity subsequently contributes to trust and purchase intention, the research provides a more nuanced understanding of consumer responses to Artificial Influencers. The study thereby contributes to the emerging literature on AI-mediated influencer marketing while offering practical insights for brands and marketers seeking to use Artificial Influencers in ways that balance technological innovation, disclosure transparency, consumer trust, and commercial effectiveness.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, exploratory, and cross-sectional research design to examine the role of AI disclosure in shaping consumers' perceived authenticity, trust, and purchase intention toward Artificial Influencers in social commerce. The study follows a sequential conceptual framework in which AI disclosure is examined in relation to perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention.

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire from 30 social-media users using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire consisted of demographic and social-media exposure questions followed by 12 items measuring four major constructs: AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention. AI disclosure was measured through items relating to disclosure expectations, transparency, evaluation of recommendations, and perceived genuineness. Perceived authenticity focused on consumers' perceptions of genuineness, relatability, consistency, and connection. Consumer trust was assessed through perceptions of transparent, credible, and reliable product information, while purchase intention measured willingness to purchase products recommended by Artificial Influencers.

The collected data were analysed using frequency and percentage analysis to describe respondent characteristics and overall response patterns. Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the associations among AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention, given the ordinal nature of the questionnaire responses and the exploratory nature of the study. The findings were interpreted in relation to the proposed conceptual sequence of AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention.

Given the small sample size, the study is positioned as an exploratory investigation, and the findings are interpreted cautiously without claiming broad population-level generalisation. The methodology provides an initial empirical understanding of how consumers reconcile the artificial nature of Artificial Influencers with perceptions of authenticity, trust, and purchase intention.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As artificial intelligence increasingly transforms social media and digital marketing, understanding how consumers respond to Artificial Influencers has become important for both academic research and commercial practice. Unlike human influencers, Artificial Influencers are digitally constructed entities whose identities, appearance, communication, and interactions can be deliberately designed. This creates a fundamental question of whether consumers can perceive an Artificial Influencer as authentic even when they are aware of its artificial nature. The present study provides timely insights into how AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention interact within the emerging social-commerce environment.

The findings are significant for brands, marketers, social-commerce platforms, and digital content creators seeking to employ Artificial Influencers for product and service promotion. AI disclosure may create a tension between transparency and authenticity: informing consumers that an influencer is AI-generated may reduce perceptions of genuineness, while simultaneously strengthening perceptions of openness and transparency. By examining this relationship, the study provides practical insights into how Artificial Influencers can be employed while maintaining consumer trust and responsible communication. The findings may also assist marketers in developing appropriate disclosure practices that balance technological innovation with consumer expectations of honesty and credibility.

From a consumer perspective, the study contributes to the growing discussion surrounding transparency, authenticity, and trust in AI-mediated communication. As consumers increasingly encounter AI-generated personalities and commercially oriented content within social-media environments, understanding how awareness of artificiality affects their evaluations and purchasing decisions becomes increasingly important. By examining whether consumers continue to trust and consider purchasing products recommended by Artificial Influencers after AI disclosure, the study provides insight into the emerging authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox.

Academically, the study contributes to the emerging intersection of artificial intelligence, influencer marketing, consumer behaviour, and social commerce. Rather than examining authenticity, trust, and purchase intention as isolated outcomes, the study brings these constructs together with AI disclosure within a single conceptual framework. Although the exploratory nature and small sample size limit broad generalisation, the findings provide an initial empirical foundation for future studies using larger samples and more advanced analytical approaches. The study may therefore serve as a basis for further examining how consumers negotiate the boundaries between artificiality, authenticity, transparency, trust, and purchase behaviour in the rapidly evolving landscape of AI-powered influencer marketing.

VII. SOURCES OF DATA

Primary Data

- This study relies primarily on primary data collected directly from social media users to examine their perceptions of Artificial Influencers and the role of AI disclosure in shaping authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention.
- Online Survey and Structured Questionnaire: A structured online questionnaire was administered to 30 social media users using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire collected information on respondents' age, frequency of social media usage, and previous exposure to AI-generated or virtual influencers. It further examined four key constructs: AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention. The questionnaire captured respondents' perceptions of transparency, genuineness, credibility, trustworthiness, and willingness to purchase products or services promoted by Artificial Influencers.

Secondary Data

- Secondary data were used to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the study and to contextualise the findings within the emerging literature on artificial intelligence, influencer marketing, and social commerce.
- Academic Journals and Research Articles: Recent peer-reviewed studies on Artificial Influencers, virtual influencers, AI disclosure, authenticity, credibility, consumer trust, influencer marketing, and social commerce were reviewed. Emphasis was placed on recent empirical research examining consumer responses to AI-generated and virtual influencers.
- Industry and Professional Sources: Relevant reports and publications from credible industry and professional sources were consulted to understand developments in AI-generated content, virtual influencers, disclosure practices, and the evolving social-commerce environment.
- Digital and Media Sources: Reputable business and technology publications were selectively reviewed to provide contextual information on the emergence and commercial use of Artificial Influencers and AI-generated personalities.

VIII. FINDINGS

8.1 Respondent Profile and Social Media Exposure

- The sample was predominantly young and highly active on social media. Among the 30 respondents, 22 (73.3%) belonged to the 18–24 age group, followed by 4 (13.3%) in the 25–34 group, 3 (10.0%) in the 35–44 group, and 1 (3.3%) in the 45–54 group.
- Social-media usage was relatively high among the respondents. 18 respondents (60.0%) reported using social media for 4–6 hours per day, while 8 (26.7%) reported 1–2 hours per day. The remaining respondents reported either less than one hour that more than six hours or overlapping usage categories. This indicates substantial exposure to social-media communication and influencer-generated content within the sample.
- Awareness of Artificial Influencers was also relatively widespread. 19 respondents (63.3%) reported having encountered an AI-generated or virtual influencer on social media, while 8 (26.7%) were unsure and 3 (10.0%) reported no previous exposure. The finding indicates that AI-generated and virtual personalities are already familiar to a substantial proportion of the respondents.

8.2 Consumer Perceptions of AI Disclosure

- Support for AI disclosure was strong. 17 respondents (56.7%) stated that Artificial Influencers should always disclose that they are AI-generated, while 5 (16.7%) believed disclosure should be made in most cases. A further 4 (13.3%) felt that disclosure should depend on the type of content, while 4 (13.3%) were uncertain. Overall, 73.3% of respondents supported disclosure either always or in most cases.
- AI disclosure was widely perceived as a transparency signal. 16 respondents (53.3%) indicated that disclosure makes the influencer appear transparent, while 10 (33.3%) perceived some degree of increased transparency. Only 4 respondents (13.3%) reported no impact on their perception of transparency. This suggests that disclosure is generally interpreted as an indication of openness towards consumers.
- Disclosure also encouraged more critical evaluation of recommendations. 18 respondents (60.0%) stated that knowing an influencer was AI-generated would make them evaluate product recommendations more carefully, while 7 (23.3%) indicated that they would be less likely to consider such recommendations. Only 2 (6.7%) reported no change in their evaluation. The finding indicates that awareness of artificiality may increase consumer scrutiny of commercial recommendations.
- At the same time, disclosure raised concerns regarding genuineness. 14 respondents (46.7%) stated that AI disclosure made them question whether the influencer's content and recommendations were genuine, while 7 (23.3%) reported such concerns to some extent. A further 6 (20.0%) experienced these concerns sometimes. Thus, the findings reveal an important tension: disclosure can strengthen perceptions of transparency while simultaneously increasing scepticism about genuineness.

8.3 Perceived Authenticity of Artificial Influencers

- Artificiality was not viewed as an absolute barrier to authenticity. 22 respondents (73.3%) indicated that an Artificial Influencer could be perceived as authentic under certain circumstances or depending on the influencer and its communication. However, 8 respondents (26.7%) found it difficult or impossible to consider an Artificial Influencer authentic. This suggests that consumers' perceptions of authenticity are not determined solely by whether the influencer is human or artificially created.
- Relatability and consistency emerged as important cues of authenticity. 8 respondents (26.7%) identified consistent communication as a basis for genuineness, another 8 (26.7%) emphasised relatable communication, and 10 (33.3%) considered both relatability and consistency important. Only 4 (13.3%) believed that neither characteristic was sufficient. These findings suggest that authenticity may be constructed through communication characteristics rather than being exclusively dependent on human identity.
- Awareness of AI generation nevertheless had a noticeable negative effect on perceived authenticity. 10 respondents (33.3%) indicated that knowing an influencer was AI-generated significantly reduced their perception of authenticity, while 11 (36.7%) indicated a reduction to some extent. In contrast, 7 (23.3%) stated that AI awareness did not affect their perception, and 2 (6.7%) were uncertain. Overall, 70.0% experienced at least some reduction in perceived authenticity following awareness of the influencer's artificial nature.
- Regular interaction alone was not sufficient to establish a genuine connection for many respondents. 13 respondents (43.3%) indicated that personalised interaction could create a genuine connection, while 6 (20.0%) considered relatable interaction important. Conversely, 8 (26.7%) stated that regular interaction alone could not create a genuine connection. This suggests that the quality and personal relevance of interaction may be more important than interaction frequency alone.

8.4 Consumer Trust Towards Artificial Influencers

- Trust towards Artificial Influencers appeared to be conditional rather than automatic. 7 respondents (23.3%) indicated that they would trust an Artificial Influencer, while another 7 (23.3%) would consider trusting one after checking other sources. 8 respondents (26.7%) stated that trust would depend on the product, while 3 (10.0%) remained hesitant and 5 (16.7%) indicated that they would not trust an Artificial Influencer. These responses suggest that trust is influenced by contextual and verification-related considerations.
- Credibility and information verification were important considerations in trust formation. Respondents showed greater willingness to trust Artificial Influencers when product information was transparent, credible, consistent, and verifiable. This indicates that informational credibility may partially compensate for concerns arising from the artificial nature of the influencer.

8.5 Purchase Intention

- Purchase intention towards products promoted by Artificial Influencers was generally cautious and conditional. 12 respondents (40.0%) indicated that they might purchase depending on the product, while 7 (23.3%) stated that they would consider purchasing. The remaining respondents expressed uncertainty, reluctance, or unwillingness. The finding indicates that Artificial Influencers can generate purchase consideration, but consumer responses remain dependent on additional evaluative factors.
- The responses further indicate that trust, product characteristics, recommendation credibility, and information verification are important considerations in purchase decisions. Consumers did not appear to base their purchase responses solely on the presence of an Artificial Influencer.
- AI awareness also did not eliminate purchase intention. A proportion of respondents remained willing to consider products promoted by Artificial Influencers even after knowing that they were AI-generated. At the same time, some respondents expressed a clear preference for human influencers. This demonstrates that consumer acceptance of Artificial Influencers is heterogeneous rather than uniformly positive or negative.

8.6 Overall Finding: The Authenticity–Trust–Purchase Intention Paradox

- The overall findings provide preliminary empirical indications of the proposed authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox. AI disclosure was widely perceived as a transparency signal, yet it also encouraged greater scrutiny and raised concerns about the genuineness of AI-generated recommendations. At the same time, 73.3% of respondents indicated that Artificial Influencers could be perceived as authentic under certain circumstances, particularly when their communication was relatable, consistent, or appropriately engaging.
- The findings further suggest that consumers can distinguish between artificiality and functional credibility. An Artificial Influencer may be recognised as non-human and experience reduced authenticity perceptions, while still being considered sufficiently credible or trustworthy when its information is transparent, consistent, and verifiable. Similarly, purchase intention was not eliminated by awareness of artificiality.
- Thus, the findings indicate that authenticity, trust, and purchase intention should not necessarily be understood as all-or-nothing outcomes. Consumers may simultaneously recognise an influencer's artificial nature, question its authenticity, and nevertheless remain open to trusting its recommendations or considering its promoted products. This tension represents the central empirical insight of the exploratory study and provides a basis for

further investigation of the authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox in AI-mediated social commerce.

IX. LIMITATIONS

The study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was based on a relatively small sample of 30 social-media users selected through non-probability convenience sampling. Consequently, the findings provide exploratory insights rather than statistically representative evidence of the broader consumer population. The sample was also predominantly composed of respondents aged 18–24, which may limit the extent to which the findings can be applied to older consumer groups with different levels of digital familiarity and attitudes towards Artificial Intelligence. In addition, the study relied on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by individual perceptions, prior exposure to AI-generated content, social desirability, or differences in respondents' understanding of Artificial Influencers.

Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time and therefore does not establish how attitudes towards Artificial Influencers may change with repeated exposure or increasing familiarity with AI technologies. The study also examined AI disclosure, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention primarily through structured questionnaire responses and Spearman's rank-order correlation, without employing experimental manipulation or more advanced causal modelling. Therefore, the observed relationships should not be interpreted as evidence of definitive causal effects. Future research could overcome these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples, probability-based or purposive sampling, experimental designs comparing disclosed and non-disclosed Artificial Influencers, and more advanced structural equation modelling to test the proposed authenticity–trust–purchase intention pathway.

X. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that Artificial Influencers can achieve a degree of perceived authenticity despite their explicitly artificial nature, but such authenticity is conditional rather than inherent. The findings show that AI disclosure performs a dual role in consumer evaluation: it is widely perceived as an indicator of transparency, while simultaneously encouraging greater scrutiny and raising concerns about the genuineness of the influencer and its recommendations. At the same time, consumers do not necessarily reject Artificial Influencers solely because they are non-human. Relatable communication, consistency, personalised interaction, credible information, and verifiability can contribute to favourable evaluations. This indicates that authenticity in AI-mediated influencer marketing may be constructed through communication and perceived credibility rather than depending exclusively on human identity.

The study further concludes that the relationship between authenticity, trust, and purchase intention is neither linear nor absolute. Consumers may recognise the artificial nature of an influencer, experience a reduction in perceived authenticity, and nevertheless remain willing to trust its recommendations or consider purchasing the promoted product when sufficient transparency, credibility, and product relevance are present. This provides preliminary support for the proposed authenticity–trust–purchase intention paradox and highlights the importance of understanding artificiality and credibility as distinct dimensions of consumer evaluation. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that brands using Artificial Influencers should prioritise clear AI disclosure, credible product information, consistent communication, and responsible engagement rather than relying solely on technological novelty. Given the exploratory nature of the

study, these conclusions should be viewed as an initial contribution to the emerging literature, providing a foundation for future research into how consumers negotiate authenticity, transparency, trust, and purchasing behaviour in AI-powered social commerce.

XI. SUGGESTIONS

- **Ensure clear and consistent AI disclosure:** Brands and Artificial Influencers should clearly communicate when an influencer is AI-generated. Disclosure should be visible, understandable, and presented in a manner that promotes transparency without unnecessarily undermining the consumer experience.
- **Prioritise credibility over technological novelty:** Marketers should not rely solely on the visual appeal or novelty of Artificial Influencers. Product claims, recommendations, and promotional information should be accurate, credible, consistent, and supported by verifiable information to strengthen consumer confidence.
- **Develop relatable and consistent influencer identities:** Artificial Influencers should maintain coherent personalities, communication styles, and narratives across platforms. Relatable content and consistent communication can help create familiarity and strengthen perceptions of authenticity among consumers.
- **Strengthen responsible consumer engagement:** Brands should design Artificial Influencers to provide meaningful and relevant interactions rather than relying only on frequent automated engagement. Personalised and contextually appropriate communication may contribute more effectively to perceived connection and trust.
- **Adopt consumer-centred disclosure practices:** Disclosure strategies should be designed from the perspective of consumer understanding. Brands should avoid ambiguous or misleading descriptions of AI-generated personalities and ensure that consumers can easily distinguish between artificial and human influencers.
- **Support informed purchasing decisions:** Promotional content should provide sufficient product information and encourage consumers to verify important claims where appropriate. This is particularly relevant for products involving substantial financial, health, or long-term commitments.
- **Establish ethical guidelines for Artificial Influencer marketing:** Marketing organisations and social-commerce platforms should develop clear standards covering AI disclosure, commercial transparency, accuracy of claims, data use, and responsible interaction with consumers. Such guidelines can help reduce uncertainty and promote ethical use of Artificial Influencers.
- **Use Artificial Influencers strategically according to product and audience characteristics:** Since purchase intention was found to be conditional, marketers should consider product category, target audience, consumer familiarity with AI, and the credibility requirements of the product before selecting Artificial Influencers as promotional endorsers.

- **Increase consumer awareness of AI-mediated marketing:** Digital and financial literacy initiatives can help consumers recognise AI-generated personalities, understand disclosure practices, evaluate promotional claims, and distinguish engaging content from credible product information.
- **Expand future empirical research:** Future researchers should examine the proposed framework using larger and more demographically diverse samples and compare different age groups, product categories, social-media platforms, and levels of AI familiarity. Experimental and longitudinal approaches could further clarify how disclosure influences authenticity, trust, and purchase intention over time.

XII. REFERENCES

1. Muniz, F. & Schau, H. J., “Are They Humans or Are They Robots? The Effect of Virtual Influencer Disclosure on Brand Trust,” *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 2024, DOI: 10.1002/cb.2271.
2. Zhou, A., Liu, Y. & Dai, Y., “Artificial Yet Credible: How Virtual Influencers Overcome Authenticity Challenges,” *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 206, 2026, Article 115940, DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115940.
3. Sahay, M., Patil, K. P. & Patil, S., “Consumer Responses to AI-Generated Influencers versus Human Influencers: The Roles of Trust, Authenticity, and Purchase Intention,” *Journal of Intelligent Decision Making and Information Science*, Vol. 3, 2026, DOI: 10.59543/jidmis.v3.641.
4. Balaban, D. C. & Phua, J., “Is This Real or Fake? Examining the Effects of Disclosure of AI-Generated Content and Source Type in Instagram-Based Travel Destination Advertising on Consumer Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions,” *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 183, 2026, Article 109047, DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2026.109047.
5. “Disclosing the Virtual Nature of Virtual Influencers: The Effect of Disclosure Prominence and the Role of Product Digitality,” *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, Vol. 19, 2025, Article 100742, DOI: 10.1016/j.chbr.2025.100742.
6. “The Impact of AI Influencer Endorsements on Consumers’ Purchase Intentions: The Serial Mediating Roles of Mind Perception and Brand Trustworthiness,” *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 34, Issue 5, 2025, pp. 754–765, DOI: 10.1108/JPBM-02-2024-4974.
7. “Virtual Influencers vs. Human Influencers in the Context of Influencer Marketing: The Moderating Role of Machine Heuristic on Perceived Authenticity of Influencers,” *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 2024, DOI: 10.1080/10447318.2024.2374100.
8. Ying, Y., Sungailaitė, D. & Dikčius, V., “Impact of Influencer’s Authenticity and Credibility on Purchase Intention: Case of Virtual vs. Human Influencer,” *Mokslas – Lietuvos Ateitis / Science – Future of Lithuania*, 2026, DOI: 10.3846/mla.2026.25048.
9. “Attractiveness vs Similarity: How Attributes of AI-Based Virtual Influencers Impact Credibility, Parasocial Interaction and Purchase Intentions of Social-Media Users,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, Vol. 38, Issue 2, 2026, pp. 205–222, DOI: 10.1108/APJML-01-2025-0144.
10. “Developing Effective AI Disclosure Strategies to Maintain AI Influencer–Follower Relationships: The Roles of Human Voice and Interactivity,” *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 52, Issue 2, 2026, Article 102682, DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2026.102682.

11. “Disclosure Matters: Perceived Manipulation, Perceived Ethics, and Purchase Intention Toward AI Influencers in Social Media Marketing,” *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, Vol. 21, Issue 6, 2026, Article 194.
12. “AI-Generated Influencers and Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Trust and Attitude in HEIs in Southern Philippines,” *International Review of Management and Marketing*, Vol. 16, Issue 4, 2026, pp. 787–796, DOI: 10.32479/irmm.23102.
13. “Artificial or Authentic? Exploring the Interplay Between AI Advertising Disclosure, Perception of AI, Consumer Trust, Perceived Authenticity, and Purchase Intention,” *University of Twente Student Theses*, 2026.
14. “The AI Penalty and Disclosure Paradox: Trust, Authenticity and Knowledge Uptake in AI-Mediated Communication,” *Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans*, 2026, Article 100304, DOI: 10.1016/j.chbah.2026.100304.
15. Ujjainwala, F. J., “Influence of AI-Generated Influencer Content on Brand Trust and Authenticity Perceptions,” *Journal of Marketing & Social Research*, Vol. 2, Issue 9, 2025, pp. 256–262.