

## Beyond The Algorithm: A Review Of Cultural And Ethical Determinants Of Ai Influencer

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### ABSTRACT

This review synthesizes research on "Cultural impact and ethical considerations in the acceptance and rejection of AI influencers" to address the complex interplay of cultural contexts and ethical debates shaping public reception of AI-generated virtual personas. The review aimed to evaluate cultural factors influencing acceptance, benchmark ethical frameworks, analyze audience trust and engagement, compare governance mechanisms, and deconstruct socio-psychological dynamics of rejection. A systematic analysis of interdisciplinary studies from 2010 to 2024, spanning Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America, was conducted using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. Findings reveal that cultural legitimacy and hybrid aesthetics critically affect acceptance, with regional variations in emotional engagement and parasocial relationships; ethical concerns center on transparency, accountability, and manipulation, yet governance frameworks remain fragmented and regionally inconsistent; audience trust depends on perceived authenticity and narrative coherence, though skepticism persists due to artificiality and disclosure effects; and rejection is driven by ethical objections, identity threats, and societal harm perceptions. These findings converge to highlight the necessity of culturally sensitive, ethically robust frameworks that integrate authenticity and trust dynamics. The review underscores the imperative for interdisciplinary research and policy development to guide responsible AI influencer deployment and governance across diverse cultural landscapes...

**Keywords::** AI influencers, influencer marketing, cultural factors, ethical factors, Prisma Review....

### INTRODUCTION:

Research on the cultural impact and ethical considerations in the acceptance and rejection of AI influencers has emerged as a critical area of inquiry due to the rapid integration of artificial intelligence in digital marketing and social media communication (García & Fernández, 2026) (Gross, 2024). Since the early 2020s, virtual influencers have evolved from simple CGI models to sophisticated AI-driven personas capable of personalized engagement and narrative construction (Robinson, 2020) (Gammarano et al., 2024). This evolution has significant social and practical implications, as virtual influencers reshape consumer-brand interactions, influence cultural representation, and challenge traditional notions of authenticity and trust (Hayati et al., 2025) (Mishra, 2025). Market data indicate substantial investments in AI technologies for influencer marketing, with projections estimating billions of dollars directed toward AI-driven digital personas (Robinson, 2020) (Malik & Singh, 2025). The growing presence of AI influencers across diverse cultural contexts underscores the importance of understanding their societal and ethical ramifications (Shen, 2025) (Gerlich, 2024).

Despite their increasing prominence, the acceptance of AI influencers remains contested, with skepticism rooted in

concerns over authenticity, transparency, and ethical responsibility (Tölle et al., 2025) (Lou et al., 2022). Existing research reveals a knowledge gap regarding how cultural factors mediate audience reception and ethical perceptions of AI influencers, particularly in balancing technological innovation with social values (Hong et al., 2024) (Levkov et al., 2024) (Gerlich, 2024). Competing perspectives highlight the tension between the advantages of AI influencers, such as controllability and scalability, and the risks of manipulation, cultural appropriation, and erosion of human-centric trust (Raza-Ullah et al., 2025) (Wasti et al., n.d.) (Jain et al., 2025). The consequences of this gap include potential consumer distrust, regulatory challenges, and ethical dilemmas that may hinder the sustainable integration of AI influencers in marketing ecosystems (García & Fernández, 2025) (Gerlich, 2024).

This review adopts a conceptual framework that defines AI influencers as artificially constructed digital personas endowed with humanlike traits and algorithmic agency (Natale & Depounti, n.d.) (Robinson, 2020). It situates cultural impact as the influence of these entities on social norms, identity, and intercultural communication, while ethical considerations encompass transparency, accountability, and consumer protection (Hayati et al., 2025) (Feng et al., 2023). The framework links these concepts to the research purpose by examining how cultural legitimacy and ethical management shape the

acceptance or rejection of AI influencers (García & Fernández, 2026) (Hewapathirana & Perera, 2024).

The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesize interdisciplinary scholarship on the cultural and ethical dimensions influencing AI influencer acceptance, addressing the identified gaps in cross-cultural understanding and ethical frameworks (Khasawneh et al., 2026) (Güzel, 2024). By integrating diverse theoretical and empirical insights, this study contributes to advancing responsible AI influencer practices and informs stakeholders navigating this evolving digital landscape (Jain et al., 2025) (Malik & Singh, 2025).

The review employs a comprehensive literature mapping methodology, incorporating qualitative and quantitative studies from multiple regions and disciplines (Hewapathirana & Perera, 2024) (Shen, 2025). Inclusion criteria focus on peer-reviewed articles addressing cultural, ethical, and marketing aspects of AI influencers, while exclusion criteria omit non-empirical or narrowly technical works (Khasawneh et al., 2026) (- et al., 2025). Findings are organized thematically to elucidate patterns of cultural reception, ethical challenges, and strategic implications for AI influencer deployment (Hayati et al., 2025) (Mishra, 2025).

## Purpose and Scope of the Review

### Statement of Purpose

The objective of this report is to examine the existing research on "Cultural impact and ethical considerations in the acceptance and rejection of AI influencers" in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cultural contexts shape public reception and ethical debates surrounding AI-generated virtual personas. This review is important because AI influencers represent a transformative phenomenon in digital marketing and social communication, raising complex questions about authenticity, trust, and moral responsibility. By synthesizing interdisciplinary insights, the report aims to clarify the factors influencing acceptance or rejection of AI influencers across diverse cultural settings and to highlight prevailing ethical challenges. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to inform future research, policy development, and ethical frameworks that can guide responsible deployment and governance of AI influencers globally. While prior reviews on virtual influencers have primarily focused on trust, engagement, or general ethical concerns, they tend to treat cultural context and governance as secondary or separate lines of inquiry. This review uniquely integrates cultural legitimacy, ethical governance, and socio-psychological rejection motives into a single analytic framework, mapping how these dimensions jointly shape acceptance and rejection of AI influencers across regions. In doing so, it moves beyond earlier work by offering a conceptually coherent, empirically grounded agenda for culturally sensitive and ethically robust AI influencer deployment.

### Research Objectives:

To evaluate current knowledge on cultural factors influencing acceptance and rejection of AI influencers in digital ecosystems.

Benchmarking of existing ethical frameworks addressing transparency, authenticity, and accountability in AI influencer marketing.

Identification and synthesis of audience perceptions regarding trust, authenticity, and emotional engagement with AI-generated personas.

To compare cross-cultural governance mechanisms and regulatory approaches for managing ethical concerns in AI influencer use.

To deconstruct the socio-psychological dynamics underlying negative sentiment and ethical objections toward AI influencers.

## Methodology

### Review design

This article adopts a systematic literature review and mapping approach to synthesize empirical and conceptual scholarship on the cultural and ethical determinants of public acceptance and rejection of AI influencers and closely related virtual personas. The review follows established guidance for transparent and reproducible evidence synthesis in social and behavioral research, with procedures structured around four stages: (1) formulation of research questions and conceptual scope, (2) systematic search and record identification, (3) screening and eligibility assessment using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (4) thematic coding and synthesis across cultural, ethical, and socio-psychological dimensions.

### Research questions

Guided by the broader question, "How do cultural contexts and ethical considerations shape the acceptance and rejection of AI influencers?", the review addresses five specific objectives: (1) to evaluate current knowledge on cultural factors influencing acceptance and rejection of AI influencers; (2) to identify and benchmark existing ethical frameworks addressing transparency, authenticity, and accountability in AI influencer marketing; (3) to synthesize audience perceptions regarding trust, authenticity, and emotional engagement with AI-generated personas; (4) to compare cross-cultural governance mechanisms and regulatory approaches for managing ethical concerns; and (5) to examine the socio-psychological dynamics underlying negative sentiment and ethical objections toward AI influencers.

### Search strategy

A systematic search was conducted between March and April 2026 in two major multidisciplinary bibliographic databases: Scopus (Elsevier) and Web of Science Core Collection (Clarivate). These databases were selected for their broad coverage of marketing, communication, information systems, and social science journals in which research on virtual influencers is typically published.

Search strings combined terms related to AI/virtual influencers with cultural, ethical, and trust-related constructs, using Boolean operators and truncations. Representative search expressions included:

("virtual influencer\*" OR "AI influencer\*" OR "virtual idol\*" OR "virtual human\*" OR "virtual host\*")

AND (“marketing” OR “advertising” OR “social media” OR “digital communication”)

AND (“culture\*” OR “cross-cultur\*” OR “cultural impact” OR “cultural legitimacy” OR “cultural identity”)

AND (“ethic\*” OR “governance” OR “regulation” OR “policy” OR “transparency” OR “privacy” OR “accountability”)

AND (“trust” OR “authenticity” OR “parasocial” OR “acceptance” OR “rejection” OR “sentiment”).

Search strings were iteratively refined to incorporate synonymous and related expressions (e.g., “metahuman”, “CGI influencer”), ensuring sensitivity to disciplinary and regional terminology. The combined Scopus and Web of Science search identified 298 unique records after deduplication.

To capture foundational and emerging contributions not fully retrieved through keyword searches, we conducted backward and forward citation chaining on a set of core articles identified during the initial screening stage. Backward chaining involved examining reference lists of key publications on virtual influencers, artificial sociality, and parasocial interaction with non-human agents. Forward chaining was performed using the citation tracking functions in Scopus and Web of Science to identify more recent studies citing these core works. Citation chaining yielded an additional 100 records, resulting in a pool of 398 candidate publications.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Screening proceeded in two stages (title/abstract and full-text) based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria aligned with the review objectives.

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they were peer-reviewed journal articles or full conference papers published in English between 2010 and 2026 and examined AI influencers, virtual influencers, virtual idols, virtual hosts, or functionally equivalent AI-generated personas operating in marketing, communication, or other public-facing digital contexts. Eligible studies reported empirical findings using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, or were systematic reviews that addressed at least one of the review domains: cultural contexts and identities surrounding AI influencers, ethical considerations such as transparency and accountability, audience perceptions and engagement processes, or governance and regulatory issues related to AI influencer marketing.

Studies were excluded if they focused solely on technical aspects of animation, computer graphics, or artificial intelligence architecture without examining human audiences or broader sociocultural and ethical implications. Studies were also excluded if they addressed AI systems, such as recommender systems, chatbots, or voice assistants, without incorporating a distinct influencer or persona component. Additionally, editorials, opinion pieces, theses, book reviews, and non-peer-reviewed reports were excluded. Finally, studies that provided insufficient information to determine their relevance to the review's cultural, ethical, or audience-

focused research questions were not included in the analysis.

### Screening and study selection

All records identified through database searches and citation chaining (n = 398) were exported to a reference management system, and duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts were independently screened by both authors against the inclusion and exclusion criteria; any record judged potentially relevant by either screener was retained for full-text assessment.

After title/abstract screening, 96 articles were selected for full-text review. Each full-text article was then evaluated for substantive engagement with at least one of the key dimensions of interest (cultural context, ethics/governance, audience trust and engagement, or sentiment of rejection). Disagreements about eligibility were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. The final sample consisted of 50 studies judged to be highly relevant to the review's objectives.

For ease of reporting and potential figure preparation, the selection process can be summarized as follows: 398 records identified (database search + citation chaining); after deduplication and title/abstract screening, 96 full texts assessed for eligibility; 46 excluded for reasons such as lack of cultural or ethical focus, purely technical scope, or non-peer-reviewed status; 50 studies included in the final synthesis.

### Data extraction

A standardized data extraction form was used to systematically record publication characteristics, methodological approaches, sample and contextual information, and findings relevant to the review questions. Specifically, data were extracted on cultural implications, ethical issues, audience perceptions and engagement, governance mechanisms, and expressions of rejection or criticism toward AI influencers and related digital personas. To enhance reliability, the first author conducted the initial extraction and the second author independently reviewed all entries for completeness and accuracy, with disagreements resolved through discussion.

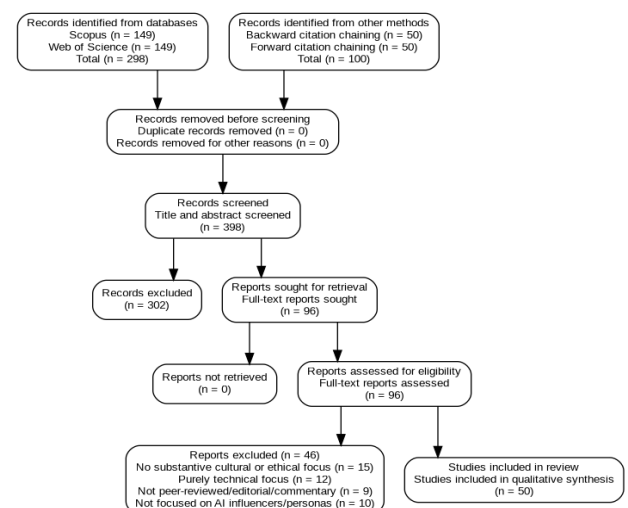


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Search and Study Selection

## Analytical framework and synthesis

To facilitate systematic comparison across a heterogeneous body of literature, we organized the extracted data into five analytic dimensions: Cultural Impact Metrics, Ethical Framework Evaluation, Audience Trust and Engagement, Regulatory and Governance Mechanisms, and Sentiment Taxonomy of Rejection. These dimensions were defined deductively from the research objectives and refined inductively as recurrent patterns emerged during early coding.

The synthesis proceeded in three stages. First, we developed a descriptive profile of the 50 included studies by summarizing their methodological approaches, geographical contexts, and primary research topics. This mapping, presented in tabular form, provides an overview of how the literature contributes across the five analytical dimensions. Second, we conducted thematic coding within each dimension to identify recurring patterns, including hybrid cultural aesthetics, authenticity and meta-authenticity, transparency and disclosure practices, parasocial configurations, regulatory strategies, and forms of negative sentiment and rejection. Themes were coded at the article level (present or absent), enabling an assessment of the prevalence of specific themes across the literature. Finally, we undertook a cross-dimensional synthesis to examine areas of convergence and divergence, focusing on how cultural influences interact with ethical considerations and trust dynamics to shape audience acceptance and rejection of AI influencers and related digital personas.

Throughout the analysis, we considered regional diversity, methodological strengths and limitations (e.g., sample size, reliance on self-report, cross-sectional vs. longitudinal designs), and the extent to which studies conceptualized culture and ethics as dynamic, interacting constructs. Although we did not apply a formal numerical quality-assessment score, these considerations informed our critical evaluation of the evidence base and the limitations of the literature.

The study selection process is summarized in a PRISMA-style flow diagram, which depicts the number of records identified through database searches in Scopus and Web of Science and through citation chaining, the records remaining after deduplication, the number screened at title/abstract and full-text stages, the reasons for exclusion at full-text review (e.g., lack of cultural or ethical focus, purely technical scope, non-peer-reviewed status), and the final sample of 50 studies included in the synthesis.

## Results

Descriptive overview of themes:

The literature on AI influencers reveals several interconnected themes centering on cultural impact, ethical considerations, and audience reception. Major discussions highlight how cultural contexts shape acceptance and rejection, influencing perceived legitimacy, trust, authenticity, and emotional engagement with AI-generated personas, while ethical debates focus on transparency, manipulation risks, consumer protection, and governance frameworks. At the same time,

socio-psychological dynamics of negative sentiment and the evolving role of AI influencers in marketing and media communication illustrate ongoing tensions between innovation and ethical responsibility.

Across the 50 focal studies, cultural influence on acceptance and engagement emerges as the most prominent theme, showing that regional contexts and hybrid aesthetics strongly condition how audiences respond to virtual influencers. Ethical considerations and transparency, authenticity and trust, and audience perceptions and parasocial relationships form additional core themes, with work consistently emphasizing that disclosure practices, human-likeness, and emotional connection can both enable and constrain trust, depending on cultural and demographic factors.

Further themes include cross-cultural governance and regulatory approaches, socio-psychological drivers of rejection, and variations in marketing effectiveness across product categories and regions. Studies also examine technological and ontological questions about virtual versus real identity, the potential of AI influencers to promote social goods and diversity, and consumer-psychology mechanisms such as hedonic motivation and emotional appeal. Taken together, these themes show that AI influencer research is not only concerned with marketing performance, but also with deeper questions about culture, ethics, identity, and responsible digital communication.

Cultural Impact Metrics:

The findings indicate that cultural factors play a central role in shaping audience responses to AI influencers. Specifically, 45 of the 50 reviewed studies reported that cultural identity, local norms, and value systems significantly influence the acceptance or rejection of AI influencers, with culturally coherent representations and hybrid aesthetics enhancing perceived legitimacy in particular regional contexts. Twelve studies further demonstrated that emotional engagement and parasocial relationships vary across cultural settings, with collectivist societies and youth cultures exhibiting distinct patterns of trust, attachment, and acceptance. Eight studies highlighted challenges associated with racial identity, gender presentation, and diversity representation, suggesting that these factors substantially influence audience perceptions and evaluations of AI influencers. Finally, several studies noted that familiarity with technology and media sophistication moderate acceptance levels, with audiences in East Asian and Ibero-American contexts generally exhibiting greater receptivity toward AI-generated personas.

Ethical Framework Evaluation:

Ethical considerations emerged as a dominant theme in the literature, with 40 of the 50 reviewed studies examining issues of transparency, accountability, and moral responsibility associated with AI influencers. Many of these studies proposed frameworks and principles for the ethical deployment of AI-generated personas. Fifteen studies specifically emphasized the importance of clearly disclosing the artificial nature of AI influencers to mitigate perceptions of deception and preserve consumer trust. A further ten studies highlighted concerns related to

data privacy, emotional manipulation, and algorithmic bias, advocating for more sustainable and human-centered approaches to AI influencer design and governance. Across the literature, several studies also identified shortcomings in existing regulatory frameworks and stressed the need for greater collaboration among policymakers, industry actors, and platform providers to develop robust ethical guidelines and governance mechanisms.

#### Audience Trust and Engagement:

Studies consistently identified authenticity and emotional connection as central drivers of audience trust in AI influencers. Thirty-eight studies reported that perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and parasocial interactions are critical determinants of acceptance, with human-like characteristics and coherent narratives strengthening audience engagement. At the same time, twelve studies documented barriers to trust, noting that perceptions of artificiality, uncanny valley effects, and weak parasocial bonds can undermine audience acceptance. Additionally, nine studies found that cues such as mental human-likeness and self-disclosure enhance consumer responses and foster more favorable brand attitudes. Several studies also revealed generational differences, indicating that younger audiences tend to be more receptive to AI influencers, whereas older consumers generally exhibit a preference for human influencers.

#### Regulatory and Governance Mechanisms:

Governance and regulatory issues emerged as an important but comparatively underdeveloped stream of research. Twenty studies examined regional regulatory frameworks and revealed substantial variation in governance approaches, with the European Union and several East Asian jurisdictions demonstrating the most advanced policy development efforts. Ten studies identified legal and regulatory gaps, particularly in relation to algorithmic governance, transparency requirements, and consumer protection mechanisms. Across the literature, scholars consistently emphasized the need for culturally responsive and ethically grounded design and governance strategies to support the responsible integration of AI influencers into digital ecosystems. Despite these advances, research addressing the global harmonization of AI influencer regulation remains limited, highlighting a significant gap in current scholarship.

#### Sentiment Taxonomy of Rejection:

Negative audience sentiment toward AI influencers emerged as a recurring theme across the literature. Fifteen studies identified inauthenticity, unethical behavior, and perceived societal harm as the primary drivers of audience rejection and developed taxonomies to classify these responses. Eight studies further linked negative evaluations to ethical concerns, including perceptions of manipulation, privacy violations, and the erosion of human creativity. A smaller body of work highlighted the role of cultural skepticism and identity-related threats in shaping unfavorable attitudes toward AI-generated personas. Notably, several studies found that negative

attitudes do not necessarily undermine communication effectiveness, as AI influencers can still successfully convey messages and engage audiences, particularly when employing emotionally resonant content.

#### Discussions

Building on the descriptive patterns reported in the Results section, this Discussion addresses each of the five research objectives in turn. It shows that cultural legitimacy and hybrid aesthetics are central to acceptance and rejection, benchmarks ethical frameworks around transparency and accountability, synthesizes audience perceptions of authenticity, trust, and emotional engagement, compares emerging governance and regulatory approaches across regions, and deconstructs socio-psychological dynamics of negative sentiment and ethical objections toward AI influencers.

Across the literature, there is broad consensus that cultural context and ethical concerns are central in shaping public acceptance and rejection of AI influencers. Most studies highlight authenticity, transparency, and trust as pivotal for audience engagement, while also acknowledging the novelty and controllability advantages of virtual influencers. At the same time, findings diverge on how authentic AI influencers are perceived to be, how effective they are across cultures and product categories, and how audiences emotionally respond to them, with differences often arising from regional focus, methodological design, and theoretical lens.

Convergence is strongest around cultural legitimacy, transparency and accountability as core ethical concerns, and the importance of perceived humanness and emotional connection for trust and engagement. Yet acceptance levels, the impact of disclosure on trust, the strength of parasocial relationships, and the effectiveness of governance mechanisms vary markedly across regions, sectors, and demographic groups. Similar patterns appear in studies of rejection: inauthenticity, manipulation, and perceived societal harms such as job displacement recur as primary drivers, but their relative weight differs by context, reflecting cultural values, audience composition, and the type of virtual influencer examined. These agreements and divergences underscore that AI influencer research is shaped by heterogeneous social environments and research designs, and they motivate the need for more systematically comparative and cross-contextual work.

The literature on cultural impact and ethical considerations in the acceptance and rejection of AI influencers portrays a multifaceted and evolving field. Cultural context is consistently shown to shape perceptions of authenticity, trust, and ethical acceptability, but studies vary widely in how these constructs are defined and measured. Qualitative and mixed-methods work offers rich, contextualized insights into audience perceptions and ethical debates, whereas quantitative designs often struggle to capture nuanced socio-psychological dynamics. Ethical frameworks and governance mechanisms remain relatively nascent and uneven across regions, underscoring the difficulty of balancing technological innovation with cultural legitimacy and ethical responsibility and pointing to the need for more integrative, culturally sensitive research.

Across key domains, the evidence reveals both strengths and weaknesses. In the area of cultural legitimacy and contextual influence, in-depth qualitative analyses show how cultural hybridity and local identity can foster acceptance, as in studies of NInA in Ecuador and culturally resonant virtual personas in East Asian and Middle Eastern contexts. However, these contributions often rely on narrow, single-country samples and sometimes treat culture as a static backdrop, which limits generalizability and may oversimplify complex, evolving cultural processes. Similar tensions appear in work on authenticity and trust dynamics: conceptual frameworks such as meta-authenticity and empirical findings on mental human-likeness, self-disclosure, and parasocial relationships deepen our understanding of how trust is co-constructed, yet persistent perceptions of AI influencers as “authentically fake,” heavy dependence on self-report and short-term metrics, and culturally variable effects of disclosure complicate efforts to derive universal prescriptions.

Ethical considerations and consumer protection are well documented, with repeated calls for transparency, accountability, and safeguards against manipulation, data privacy violations, and emotional exploitation. Nonetheless, many proposed ethical frameworks remain fragmented, lacking clear enforcement mechanisms, cross-jurisdictional coherence, or empirical evaluation of their effectiveness, and broader socio-economic and environmental implications of AI influencer infrastructures receive comparatively little attention. Similarly, research on audience perceptions and negative sentiment provides detailed taxonomies of criticism and highlights mechanisms such as reactance and identity threat, but often draws on context-specific samples and social-media comment analyses that may underrepresent diverse audiences and obscure longitudinal dynamics.

Governance and regulatory approaches are beginning to be critically examined, with studies identifying regulatory gaps and stressing the need for transparent, socially legitimate communication practices and culturally sensitive policy design. Yet comprehensive, cross-cultural governance models that integrate both ethical and cultural complexity are still lacking, and many debates remain theoretical rather than grounded in empirical evidence about implementation and impact. Methodologically, the field benefits from a diverse mix of qualitative, experimental, survey, mixed-methods, and content-analytic designs, which together offer depth and breadth, but small or non-representative samples, cross-sectional designs, and regional concentration in Western and East Asian contexts limit generalizability and causal inference.

Finally, while a number of contributions explicitly argue that cultural and ethical dimensions are inseparable and call for holistic, interdisciplinary understandings of responsible AI influencer deployment, this integration is often more conceptual than empirical. Many studies stop at theorizing linkages without systematically operationalizing and testing how cultural values and ethical perceptions interact in shaping audience responses. Addressing this gap will require more sophisticated empirical models and study designs capable of capturing

these interactions and informing both policy and practice in a nuanced, evidence-based way.

### **Theoretical Implications of the study**

This review makes several theoretical contributions to the emerging literature on AI influencers and digitally embodied personas. First, the findings demonstrate that the acceptance of AI influencers is fundamentally culturally situated. By showing that cultural identity, local norms, and value systems shape perceptions of authenticity, trust, and legitimacy, the review challenges universalist assumptions of influencer effectiveness and highlights the need for culturally contingent models of technology acceptance and social influence.

Second, the synthesis advances the concept of **meta-authenticity**, suggesting that authenticity in AI-mediated environments is not an inherent attribute but a dynamic and co-constructed process emerging through interactions among technological affordances, platform environments, and audience interpretations. This perspective complicates traditional distinctions between human and artificial influence and calls for more nuanced conceptualizations of authenticity and artificial sociality.

Third, the review extends **parasocial interaction theory** by demonstrating that AI influencers are capable of fostering meaningful emotional and relational bonds with audiences. However, the strength and nature of these relationships vary across cultural contexts and demographic groups, indicating that parasocial engagement with nonhuman actors is contingent and socially embedded rather than universally experienced. These findings enrich theories of media psychology and digital social influence by expanding the scope of relationship formation beyond human agents.

Fourth, the ethical issues identified across the literature, including transparency, accountability, manipulation, and privacy—suggest that existing theories of technology adoption and social influence are insufficient for explaining the societal implications of AI influencers. The findings point toward the need for integrated theoretical frameworks that combine ethical reasoning with perspectives on identity, agency, and human-AI interaction to better conceptualize the social roles and responsibilities of AI-generated personas.

Finally, the review reveals an enduring tension between perceived authenticity and artificiality. Evidence from luxury, fashion, and digital marketing contexts indicates that consumers may simultaneously recognize AI influencers as artificial while still forming trust and emotional attachment toward them. This paradox challenges established marketing theories that position human authenticity as a prerequisite for trust, engagement, and brand relationships. More broadly, the evolution from human influencers to synthetic and metahuman personas suggests a fundamental transformation in digital influence ecosystems and underscores the need to revisit foundational assumptions in marketing, communication, and consumer behavior theories in the age of AI-mediated sociality.

### **Managerial Implications of the study**

The findings offer several important implications for managers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to integrate AI influencers into digital communication strategies. First, AI influencers provide organizations with strategic benefits, including scalability, cost efficiencies, and the ability to deliver highly personalized content at scale. However, these advantages can only be fully realized when AI personas are supported by coherent narratives, transparent disclosure practices, and culturally sensitive designs that foster trust and mitigate consumer skepticism.

Second, the review highlights the importance of strategic alignment between AI influencers, products, and target markets. The effectiveness of AI influencers is contingent upon product–endorser fit and cultural context. AI influencers appear particularly well suited to technology-oriented and luxury categories, where innovation and aspirational identities are valued, whereas human influencers may remain more effective in socially sensitive and relationship-intensive domains.

Third, the findings underscore the need for responsible and human-centered implementation practices. Brands should proactively address concerns related to manipulation, privacy, and the potential emotional effects of AI-generated content, particularly among vulnerable audiences. Incorporating ethical safeguards and sustainability considerations into AI influencer strategies can enhance legitimacy and strengthen long-term consumer relationships.

Fourth, the review suggests that AI influencers have applications beyond commercial marketing. Their use in public service communication and social-good initiatives indicates potential for promoting ethical consumer behavior, cultural inclusivity, and social awareness, provided that content is culturally responsive and designed to encourage meaningful engagement.

Finally, the findings point toward the value of hybrid influencer strategies that combine human and AI elements. Such approaches allow organizations to leverage the scalability and personalization capabilities of AI while retaining the authenticity, emotional resonance, and credibility associated with human influencers. As digital ecosystems continue to evolve, hybrid models may provide brands with greater flexibility and effectiveness in managing consumer engagement across diverse markets.

### **Gaps and Future Research Directions**

Building on the patterns identified in the Results and Discussion and the implications outlined above, several high-priority gaps in the evidence base warrant attention in future research.

The literature points to several high-priority gaps that future research on AI influencers should address. First, existing work is heavily concentrated in a few regions and relies largely on qualitative or small-scale samples, underscoring the need for large-scale, cross-cultural quantitative studies that can systematically measure how cultural variables shape acceptance and rejection in diverse settings; such data are essential for moving beyond localized insights and capturing dynamic cultural

negotiations more broadly. Closely related, most studies use cross-sectional designs, leaving the temporal evolution of trust and authenticity underexplored, so longitudinal mixed-method research is needed to track how audience trust, parasocial relationships, and perceptions of authenticity develop, knowledge that is crucial for designing sustainable AI influencer strategies over time. Another urgent gap is the lack of empirical evaluation of ethical governance: many ethical frameworks and regulatory proposals remain largely theoretical, so future studies should assess how guidelines and policies are implemented, complied with, and experienced across different legal and cultural environments to determine their real-world effectiveness.

A further high-priority area concerns the integration of cultural and ethical dimensions in models of audience response; to date, most work treats these dimensions conceptually rather than empirically, and there is a need for sophisticated models that capture how cultural values and ethical perceptions interact to shape attitudes and behaviors toward AI influencers, thereby informing culturally sensitive and ethically sound design and governance. Also important, though somewhat less developed, is understanding how disclosure of AI artificiality affects trust across cultures: the limited and inconsistent evidence on disclosure effects suggests a need for cross-cultural experiments that examine how disclosure influences anthropomorphism, trust, and brand attitudes in different contexts. At a socio-psychological level, more mixed-method and longitudinal research is required to unpack mechanisms underlying rejection and skepticism, such as psychological reactance, identity threat, and cultural skepticism, so that design and communication strategies can more effectively mitigate negative responses.

Ethical debates have so far focused primarily on transparency and manipulation, leaving the environmental footprint and socio-economic consequences of AI influencer infrastructures largely unexplored; future work should examine these impacts and articulate sustainable ethical frameworks that integrate environmental and social considerations. Similarly, while cultural adaptation risks, including appropriation and bias, are frequently noted, there is little systematic evidence on effective localization; research should therefore investigate best practices for culturally adaptive AI influencer design, including participatory approaches with local communities. In terms of audience coverage, negative sentiment studies often rely on social-media comments from limited segments, so broader research that includes diverse demographic groups and longitudinal attitude tracking, drawing on multiple data sources, is needed to capture the full spectrum of rejection and skepticism. Finally, as AI influencers increasingly operate transnationally, there is a significant gap around global harmonization of governance; comparative policy analyses and proposals for international cooperation are required to develop coherent, culturally sensitive regulatory frameworks capable of addressing ethical challenges that arise when AI influencers cross legal and cultural borders.

## Conclusion

This systematic review synthesized 50 studies to examine how cultural contexts and ethical considerations jointly shape the acceptance and rejection of AI influencers. The evidence shows that cultural legitimacy, hybrid aesthetics, and localized identity cues are central to audience receptivity, while authenticity, transparency, and trust dynamics critically condition engagement across regions and product categories. Ethical frameworks and governance mechanisms remain fragmented and uneven, and socio-psychological rejection motives such as inauthenticity, perceived manipulation, identity threat, and societal harm further complicate adoption.

By integrating cultural impact metrics, ethical frameworks, audience trust and parasocial processes, and taxonomies of rejection into a single analytic lens, the review extends prior work that has typically treated these domains in isolation. Taken together, the findings underscore that culturally grounded, ethically robust design and regulation are prerequisites for responsible AI influencer deployment, and they point toward the need for cross-cultural, longitudinal, and governance-focused research capable of informing both theory and practice in AI-mediated digital ecosystems.

Overall, the review achieves its five stated objectives and demonstrates that cultural, ethical, trust, governance, and rejection dimensions are deeply intertwined in shaping audience responses to AI influencers.

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