

Exploring the Impact of Disclosing AI-Generated Influencers on their Perceived Credibility

Delia Cristina Balaban^{a*}, Michaela Forrai^b, and Desiree Schmuck^b

^a*Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising, Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

^b*Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria*

*Corresponding author: Delia Cristina Balaban, str. Traian Moşoiu 71, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, balaban@fspac.ro

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Social media influencers (SMIs) powered by artificial intelligence have become increasingly relevant for influencer marketing. Technological advances have made the recognition of AI-generated human-like SMIs based on their physical appearance difficult, if not impossible, necessitating disclosures of their origin. We examined if such disclosures affect consumers' recognition of AI-generated SMIs as artificial. Furthermore, we investigated if recognition lowers attribution of mental human-likeness and, as a result, influencer credibility. We tested these relationships by means of an online survey-based between-subjects experiment (no disclosure versus soft disclosure versus strong disclosure) with $N = 351$ participants. Results showed that only a strong disclosure including multiple cues significantly enhanced recognition. Moreover, for participants who recognized the influencer as AI-generated, mental human-likeness decreased, negatively affecting perceived credibility. The study has theoretical implications considering the application of the PK Model in the context of AI-generated SMIs. Our research has managerial implications for policymakers, brands, and educators.

Keywords: disclosure, generative AI, persuasion knowledge, social media influencers, AI influencers, online survey-based experiment