



Perceived Authenticity and Consumer Response to AI-Generated Content: A Human–AI Co-Creation Perspective

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Abstrak

The growing use of generative artificial intelligence in marketing has transformed how content is produced and evaluated, raising critical concerns regarding how consumers perceive authenticity when authorship extends beyond human creators. While prior research has largely focused on technological adoption and trust, limited attention has been given to how consumers construct meaning and evaluate authenticity in AI-mediated environments. This study addresses this gap by developing a conceptual framework that positions perceived authenticity as a central mechanism linking AI involvement in content creation to consumer psychological and behavioral responses. Drawing on authenticity theory, consumer behavior, and artificial intelligence literature, the study adopts a theory integration approach to synthesize fragmented insights into a unified model. The proposed framework reconceptualizes authenticity as a hybrid construct emerging from the perceived interaction between human intention and algorithmic generation, and explains how this perception shapes trust, emotional engagement, and behavioral outcomes. By offering a multi-level and process-oriented perspective, the study contributes to extending authenticity theory and advancing AI marketing research toward meaning-based evaluation, while providing a foundation for future empirical investigation in human–AI collaborative contexts.

Keywords

AI-generated content; perceived authenticity; human–AI collaboration; consumer trust; consumer behavior; symbolic evaluation

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1. Introduction

The growing integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into digital ecosystems is reshaping how market-facing content is produced, distributed, and interpreted. Firms increasingly rely on AI not only to enhance efficiency but also to actively participate in creative processes such as copywriting, visual design, and personalized communication (Davenport *et al.*, 2020; Huang & Rust, 2021). This transformation reflects a broader shift from human-centered creativity toward hybrid production systems in which human and algorithmic intelligence jointly construct value. As a result, content creation is no longer solely defined by human intentionality, but by the dynamic interaction between human input and machine-generated outputs.

Within this evolving landscape, a critical yet underexplored issue concerns how consumers evaluate the authenticity of AI-generated and AI-assisted content. Authenticity has long been recognized as a fundamental determinant of consumer perception, influencing trust, emotional engagement, and behavioral responses (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014). Classical perspectives distinguish between indexical authenticity, rooted in origin and production processes, and iconic authenticity, based on symbolic resemblance to socially constructed meanings (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). However, these perspectives implicitly assume human authorship as the foundation of authenticity, thereby limiting their explanatory power in contexts where content is partially or fully generated by artificial intelligence.

At the same time, emerging empirical evidence suggests that AI involvement in content creation can significantly alter consumer evaluations. Studies indicate that AI-generated content may reduce perceived brand authenticity and emotional resonance, particularly in contexts where human creativity and expression are highly valued (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Lee *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, consumers may exhibit ambivalent reactions toward AI-generated outputs, simultaneously appreciating their efficiency while questioning their sincerity and credibility (Logg *et al.*, 2019; Dietvorst *et al.*, 2015). More recent findings further highlight that the disclosure of AI authorship can shape consumer responses in complex ways, potentially enhancing perceptions of transparency while undermining authenticity judgments (Luo *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2025).

Despite these advancements, the literature remains fragmented across three key domains. Research on authenticity continues to be grounded in human-centric assumptions, emphasizing craftsmanship, sincerity, and intentionality as core determinants (Arnould & Price, 2000; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). In parallel, studies on artificial intelligence in marketing have primarily focused on adoption, trust, and performance evaluation, often treating AI as a functional tool rather than a creative agent (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021; De Bruyn *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, consumer research highlights the importance of symbolic meaning and cultural interpretation in shaping evaluation processes, yet has not sufficiently examined how these processes operate in AI-mediated contexts (Holt, 2002; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). This disconnect reveals a critical theoretical gap in understanding how authenticity is constructed and interpreted when content is co-created by humans and artificial systems.

The emergence of human–AI collaboration (HAC) further intensifies this complexity. Rather than replacing human creativity, AI increasingly operates as a co-creative partner that contributes to ideation, generation, and refinement processes (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021; Haupt *et al.*, 2025). This collaborative paradigm introduces a new form of authorship in which creative outputs are jointly produced, blurring the boundary between human and machine agency. Consumers, in turn, are required to interpret not only the content itself but also the nature of its production, including the extent of human versus AI involvement. Such evaluation processes involve deeper judgments regarding intentionality, credibility, and meaning construction, which remain insufficiently theorized in current research.

Addressing this gap is particularly important in the context of the contemporary creative economy, where brands increasingly deploy generative AI to produce large volumes of content across digital platforms. As the distinction between human-created and machine-generated content becomes less visible, questions arise regarding the legitimacy of value creation, the preservation of authenticity, and the formation of consumer trust. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for advancing theory but also for guiding managerial decisions related to AI adoption, content strategy, and brand communication.

In response, this study develops a conceptual framework that positions perceived authenticity as a central mechanism linking AI involvement in content creation to consumer psychological and behavioral responses. Departing from traditional perspectives, this research conceptualizes AI as a co-creative actor within a human–AI collaboration system, rather than merely a technological tool. This perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of how authenticity is dynamically constructed through the interaction between human intention, algorithmic generation, and consumer interpretation.

The study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it extends authenticity theory by introducing the concept of hybrid-origin authenticity, where authenticity is evaluated based on the perceived interplay between human and artificial agents. Second, it advances AI marketing research by shifting the analytical focus from adoption and trust toward meaning construction and symbolic evaluation. Third, it proposes an integrative framework that links AI involvement, authenticity perception, psychological responses, and behavioral outcomes, thereby providing a comprehensive explanation of consumer responses to AI-generated content.

Overall, this research responds to the growing need for a more holistic understanding of value creation in AI-driven environments. By integrating insights from consumer behavior, marketing, and artificial intelligence, it offers a theoretically grounded and managerially relevant perspective on how authenticity is redefined in the age of human–AI collaboration.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Concept of Authenticity in Consumer Research

Authenticity has long been established as a central construct in consumer research, shaping how individuals evaluate products, brands, and experiences. Rather than being an inherent property of an object, authenticity is widely understood as a perceptual judgment constructed by consumers through interpretation and meaning-making processes (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Foundational perspectives distinguish between indexical authenticity, which is grounded in the verifiable origin and production process of an offering, and iconic authenticity, which is based on symbolic resemblance to socially shared meanings (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

Subsequent research has expanded this dichotomy by conceptualizing authenticity as a multidimensional construct encompassing sincerity, originality, and credibility (Napoli *et al.*, 2014; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). These dimensions highlight that authenticity operates simultaneously at cognitive and affective levels, influencing both rational evaluation and emotional resonance. Beverland (2005) further emphasizes that authenticity is not passively perceived but actively managed through organizational practices, storytelling, and symbolic cues, suggesting that authenticity is strategically constructed within market contexts.

From a broader consumer culture perspective, authenticity is deeply embedded in processes of identity construction and cultural negotiation. Consumers use authenticity cues to align products and experiences with their personal values, beliefs, and desired self-concepts (Holt, 2002; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). This perspective underscores that authenticity is not static but dynamically shaped through social discourse and contextual interpretation.

Importantly, existing literature consistently associates authenticity with human intentionality, craftsmanship, and emotional expression (Arnould & Price, 2000; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Human effort serves as a key signal of sincerity and credibility, reinforcing the perception that authentic offerings originate from genuine human agency. However, this human-centric assumption becomes increasingly problematic in digital environments where content production is mediated—or even dominated—by artificial intelligence. As AI-generated content lacks traditional markers of human authorship, it challenges the conventional foundations upon which authenticity judgments are formed.

2.2 Consumer Trust and Technology-Mediated Decision Making

Trust is a fundamental mechanism that reduces uncertainty in consumer decision-making, particularly in environments characterized by information asymmetry and technological mediation. In digital contexts, trust extends beyond interpersonal relationships to include trust in systems, algorithms, and technological infrastructures (McKnight *et al.*, 2002; Gefen *et al.*, 2003). This shift has led to the conceptualization of trust in technology as a function of perceived reliability, competence, and transparency (Lankton *et al.*, 2015).

Within AI-mediated environments, consumer trust is shaped by competing psychological tendencies. On one hand, individuals may exhibit algorithm aversion, especially when algorithms are perceived as lacking contextual judgment or when errors are observed (Dietvorst *et al.*, 2015; Castelo *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, research also demonstrates algorithm appreciation, where consumers prefer algorithmic decisions due to their perceived objectivity and consistency (Logg *et al.*, 2019). This duality indicates that trust in AI is not stable but contingent upon situational and perceptual factors.

The machine heuristic provides further insight into how consumers evaluate AI-generated outputs. Individuals often rely on cognitive shortcuts, attributing credibility to machine-generated information based on assumptions of computational superiority (Sundar & Kim, 2019). However, such heuristic processing may be disrupted when consumers become aware of AI involvement, particularly through disclosure mechanisms. Research shows that AI disclosure can produce mixed effects—enhancing perceptions of transparency and fairness while simultaneously triggering skepticism and reducing perceived authenticity (Luo *et al.*, 2019).

Recent studies extend this perspective by suggesting that trust in AI is not only functional but also relational, involving judgments about agency and intentionality (Yalcin *et al.*, 2022). Consumers may differentiate between outcomes driven by human values and those generated through algorithmic optimization, leading to nuanced evaluations of credibility and sincerity. This highlights that trust in AI-mediated environments is dynamically constructed through both cognitive evaluation and symbolic interpretation.

2.3 Artificial Intelligence in Marketing and Content Generation

The integration of artificial intelligence into marketing has fundamentally transformed how firms create, deliver, and optimize content. AI technologies enable large-scale personalization, automated content generation, and real-time adaptation of marketing communications, thereby enhancing both efficiency and effectiveness (Davenport *et al.*, 2020; Huang & Rust, 2021). This transformation reflects a broader shift toward data-driven marketing systems in which algorithmic processes play a central role in value creation.

Prior research conceptualizes AI in marketing along a continuum ranging from assistive tools to autonomous agents (De Bruyn *et al.*, 2020; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2018). At the assistive level, AI supports human decision-making by providing insights and recommendations, while at higher levels of autonomy, AI independently generates content and interacts with consumers. This evolution has significant implications for how creative outputs are perceived, particularly

when the boundary between human and machine contributions becomes increasingly blurred.

Recent empirical evidence suggests that AI-generated content influences consumer evaluations in complex ways. While AI can enhance perceptions of efficiency and innovation, it may simultaneously reduce perceived authenticity and emotional resonance (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Lee *et al.*, 2024). Additional studies show that consumer responses vary depending on context, such as product involvement, platform characteristics, and the nature of the content itself (Park *et al.*, 2024; Belanche *et al.*, 2025). These findings indicate that AI does not simply improve or diminish consumer perception but reshapes the evaluative criteria used by consumers.

Moreover, the increasing use of generative AI introduces a new dimension of artificial creativity, where content is produced through algorithmic recombination rather than human inspiration. This raises important questions regarding originality, authorship, and value creation, which are central to authenticity perception. Despite these implications, existing research has largely focused on performance and adoption outcomes, leaving the symbolic and experiential aspects of AI-generated content underexplored.

2.4 Human–AI Collaboration (HAC) as a Co-Creation System

Recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes human–AI collaboration (HAC) as a defining feature of contemporary creative processes. Rather than positioning AI as a substitute for human labor, this perspective conceptualizes AI as a co-creative agent that collaborates with humans in generating value (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021). This shift aligns with broader developments in service and marketing research that recognize the role of non-human actors in value co-creation (van Doorn *et al.*, 2017).

Human–AI collaboration is inherently iterative, involving continuous interaction between human intuition and algorithmic generation. Humans contribute contextual understanding, emotional intelligence, and evaluative judgment, while AI provides computational power, pattern recognition, and generative capabilities. This interplay produces hybrid creative outcomes that cannot be attributed solely to either human or machine agents.

Emerging empirical studies indicate that consumer responses to HAC differ from those toward purely human or purely AI-generated outputs. For example, collaborative content may enhance curiosity, engagement, and perceived innovativeness, while maintaining a degree of human touch (Haupt *et al.*, 2025; Kim *et al.*, 2026). At the same time, consumer expectations regarding the role of AI in creative processes continue to evolve, reflecting shifting norms around authorship and creativity (Ryoo *et al.*, 2025).

The perception of AI as a social or human-like entity further shapes this dynamic. Research on anthropomorphism suggests that attributing human-like characteristics to AI can increase trust and acceptance by reducing psychological distance (Epley *et al.*, 2007; Waytz *et al.*, 2014). In the context of co-created content, anthropomorphism may also influence how consumers interpret authenticity, particularly when AI is perceived as possessing intentionality or creativity.

2.5 Toward an Authenticity Perspective in Human–AI Collaboration

Integrating the above theoretical streams reveals a critical insight: authenticity in AI-mediated environments cannot be understood through traditional frameworks that assume purely human authorship. Instead, authenticity emerges as a relational and dynamic construct shaped by the interaction between human agency, algorithmic processes, and consumer interpretation.

Authenticity theory emphasizes symbolic meaning and human origin, while AI research highlights technological mediation, automation, and trust. Consumer research further

underscores the importance of interpretation and meaning construction in shaping evaluation processes. However, these perspectives remain insufficiently integrated, limiting their ability to explain how consumers evaluate AI-generated and AI-assisted content.

This synthesis points to the need for a reconceptualization of authenticity as a hybrid construct that reflects the interplay between human and artificial contributions. Such a perspective shifts the focus from static notions of origin to dynamic processes of meaning construction, where authenticity is evaluated based on perceived collaboration, intentionality, and coherence.

Building on this insight, the present study develops a conceptual framework that positions perceived authenticity as a central mechanism linking AI involvement in content creation to consumer psychological and behavioral responses. By bridging authenticity theory, AI research, and consumer behavior, this framework advances a more comprehensive understanding of how value is constructed and evaluated in human–AI collaborative environments.

3. Conceptual Gaps

3.1 Persistence of Human-Centric Assumptions in Authenticity Theory

Despite extensive development, authenticity theory remains fundamentally anchored in human-centric assumptions. Existing frameworks consistently conceptualize authenticity as emerging from human intentionality, craftsmanship, and historical continuity (Beverland, 2005; Arnould & Price, 2000; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Even multidimensional models that incorporate sincerity, originality, and credibility continue to implicitly rely on human agency as the underlying source of authenticity (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014).

While these perspectives have been highly influential, they are increasingly insufficient in contexts where content is generated or co-created by artificial intelligence. In AI-mediated environments, authorship becomes distributed across human and non-human agents, thereby challenging the foundational assumption that authenticity is inherently tied to human origin. Although consumer culture theory recognizes authenticity as socially constructed and negotiated (Holt, 2002; Thompson *et al.*, 2006), it has not adequately extended this perspective to account for algorithmic participation in creative processes.

As a result, authenticity theory lacks the conceptual tools necessary to explain how consumers evaluate content that does not fit neatly within traditional categories of human authorship. This limitation creates a theoretical blind spot in understanding authenticity in contemporary digital environments, where hybrid production systems are becoming the norm.

3.2 Functional Bias in AI Literature: Overemphasis on Adoption and Trust

Parallel to the limitations in authenticity theory, the literature on artificial intelligence in marketing and consumer behavior is characterized by a strong functional bias. Most studies focus on issues such as adoption, trust, accuracy, and performance, often examining how consumers respond to algorithmic decision-making (Dietvorst *et al.*, 2015; Castelo *et al.*, 2019; Logg *et al.*, 2019). These studies provide valuable insights into the acceptance of AI but largely treat AI as a utilitarian tool rather than a participant in symbolic and creative processes.

Even when trust is examined in AI contexts, it is typically conceptualized in terms of reliability, transparency, and competence (McKnight *et al.*, 2002; Gefen *et al.*, 2003; Lankton *et al.*, 2015). While these dimensions are important, they do not fully capture the deeper evaluative processes through which consumers interpret meaning, sincerity, and authenticity. Emerging research suggests that AI involvement can trigger complex psychological responses,

including ambivalence, curiosity, and skepticism, particularly in creative domains (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021; Kim *et al.*, 2026).

Moreover, recent studies on AI disclosure demonstrate that transparency can produce paradoxical effects, simultaneously enhancing trust while reducing perceived authenticity (Luo *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2025). However, these effects are often examined in isolation, without integrating broader constructs related to symbolic evaluation and meaning construction. Consequently, the AI literature lacks a comprehensive framework that explains how technological mediation interacts with deeper consumer perceptions.

3.3 Underdeveloped Understanding of Meaning Construction in AI-Generated Content

A critical gap in the literature lies in the limited attention to meaning construction in the context of AI-generated content. Traditional consumer research emphasizes that consumption is inherently symbolic, involving processes through which individuals interpret products and experiences in relation to identity, culture, and social context (Holt, 2002; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). Authenticity plays a central role in this process by signaling sincerity, originality, and alignment with consumer values (Napoli *et al.*, 2014; Morhart *et al.*, 2015).

However, the introduction of AI into content creation fundamentally alters this process. Consumers are no longer evaluating content solely based on its observable attributes but must also interpret the nature of its production, including the role of algorithms. This introduces an additional layer of evaluation, where consumers assess not only “what the content is” but also “how it was created.”

Recent studies indicate that AI involvement can influence perceptions of creativity, emotional depth, and credibility, suggesting that meaning construction becomes more complex in AI-mediated contexts (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Park *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, research on machine heuristics shows that consumers rely on cognitive shortcuts when evaluating AI-generated outputs, sometimes attributing greater objectivity to machines while simultaneously questioning their authenticity (Sundar & Kim, 2019).

Despite these insights, the literature has not sufficiently examined how these evaluative processes interact to shape authenticity perception. In particular, there is a lack of theoretical integration explaining how meaning construction evolves when content is co-created by human and artificial agents.

3.4 Disconnection Between Human–AI Collaboration and Consumer Evaluation

Another important gap concerns the limited integration between research on human–AI collaboration (HAC) and consumer evaluation frameworks. While recent studies conceptualize AI as a co-creative agent that collaborates with humans in generating value (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021), the implications of this collaboration for consumer perception remain underexplored.

Existing research on HAC primarily focuses on production-side dynamics, such as efficiency, creativity, and innovation. However, it provides limited insight into how consumers interpret and evaluate collaboratively generated content. Emerging evidence suggests that consumer responses to HAC differ from those toward purely human or purely AI-generated content, with collaborative outputs potentially enhancing engagement and perceived innovativeness (Haupt *et al.*, 2025; Madathil *et al.*, 2025). Nevertheless, the mechanisms underlying these responses remain insufficiently theorized.

In particular, it is unclear how varying levels of AI involvement—from human-created to AI-assisted and fully AI-generated content—affect perceptions of authenticity. Additionally, the role of anthropomorphism in shaping these perceptions has not been systematically

integrated into existing frameworks, despite evidence that human-like characteristics can influence trust and acceptance (Epley *et al.*, 2007; Waytz *et al.*, 2014).

This disconnection highlights the need for a framework that links production processes in human–AI collaboration with consumer-level evaluation mechanisms.

3.5 Absence of an Integrative Framework Linking AI Involvement, Authenticity, and Consumer Response

The most critical gap emerging from the preceding discussion is the absence of a unified conceptual framework that integrates AI involvement, perceived authenticity, and consumer response. Existing studies tend to examine isolated relationships—such as AI and trust, authenticity and brand perception, or technology and consumer behavior—without capturing their interdependencies.

Specifically, the literature lacks a comprehensive explanation of:

- 1) how varying levels of AI involvement influence perceived authenticity,
- 2) how authenticity functions as a mediating mechanism in shaping consumer responses, and
- 3) how contextual factors, such as AI disclosure, product type, and consumer characteristics, moderate these relationships.

Without such integration, current research remains fragmented and unable to fully explain the complex dynamics of consumer evaluation in AI-mediated environments. Given the increasing prevalence of generative AI in marketing and content creation, this limitation represents a significant theoretical and practical challenge.

Addressing this gap requires a multi-level, process-oriented perspective that captures the interplay between technological inputs, symbolic evaluation, psychological mechanisms, and behavioral outcomes.

3.6 Research Direction and Conceptual Positioning

Taken together, these gaps reveal a fundamental need to reconceptualize authenticity within the context of AI-generated and AI-assisted content. Specifically, the literature calls for:

- 1) an extension of authenticity theory beyond human-centric assumptions,
- 2) a shift in AI research from functional evaluation toward meaning construction,
- 3) a deeper understanding of how consumers interpret authenticity in AI-mediated contexts, and
- 4) an integrative framework linking human–AI collaboration with consumer responses.

In response, this study develops a conceptual model that positions perceived authenticity as a central mediating mechanism through which AI involvement influences consumer psychological and behavioral outcomes. By bridging authenticity theory, AI research, and consumer behavior, the proposed framework offers a more comprehensive explanation of how value is constructed and evaluated in human–AI collaborative environments.

4. Proposed Conceptual Framework

The conceptual gaps identified in the preceding section highlight the need for a more integrative framework capable of explaining how consumers evaluate AI-generated and AI-assisted content within contemporary digital environments. In response, this study proposes a Human–AI Authenticity Evaluation Framework, which positions perceived authenticity as a central mediating mechanism linking AI involvement in content creation to consumer psychological and behavioral outcomes.

This figure articulates the integrated conceptual architecture linking AI involvement in content creation to consumer behavioral outcomes through the mediating role of perceived authenticity. It synthesizes technological input, symbolic evaluation, psychological mechanisms, and behavioral consequences into a single analytical structure.

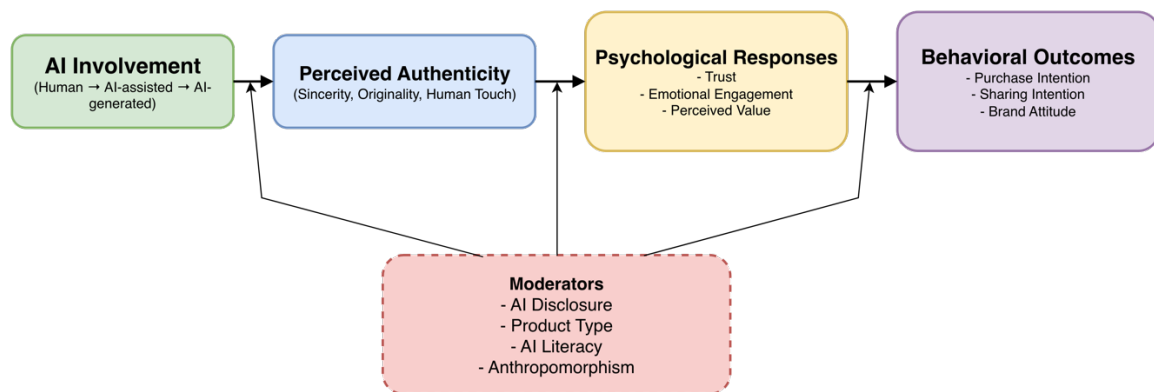


Figure 1. Integrated Human–AI Authenticity Evaluation Framework
Source: Author's conceptualization

The framework articulated in Figure 1 clarifies how AI involvement shapes consumer outcomes through a structured evaluative process. It demonstrates that perceived authenticity operates as the central mediating mechanism linking technological input to downstream psychological and behavioral responses, while moderating factors condition the strength and direction of these relationships. This integration reinforces the article's core argument that consumer evaluation in AI-mediated environments is fundamentally meaning-based rather than purely functional.

Departing from traditional perspectives that treat artificial intelligence as a passive tool, this framework conceptualizes AI as a co-creative agent embedded within a human–AI collaboration system. As such, content evaluation is no longer based solely on observable output characteristics but also on consumer perceptions of origin, process, and agency. This shift reflects the increasing importance of meaning construction in digitally mediated consumption, where consumers actively interpret not only what content communicates but also how it is produced (Holt, 2002; Thompson *et al.*, 2006).

4.1 AI Involvement in Content Creation

The first core component of the framework is AI involvement, defined as the extent to which artificial intelligence contributes to the creation of content. Building on prior research, AI involvement is conceptualized along a continuum ranging from fully human-created content to AI-assisted content and fully AI-generated content (Huang & Rust, 2021; De Bruyn *et al.*, 2020; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2018). This continuum reflects the evolving role of AI in marketing, where systems increasingly move from supporting human decision-making toward autonomous content generation.

This figure clarifies how increasing AI involvement changes the authenticity cues available to consumers. It highlights the trade-off between declining human-centered cues and potentially increasing perceptions of novelty or originality.

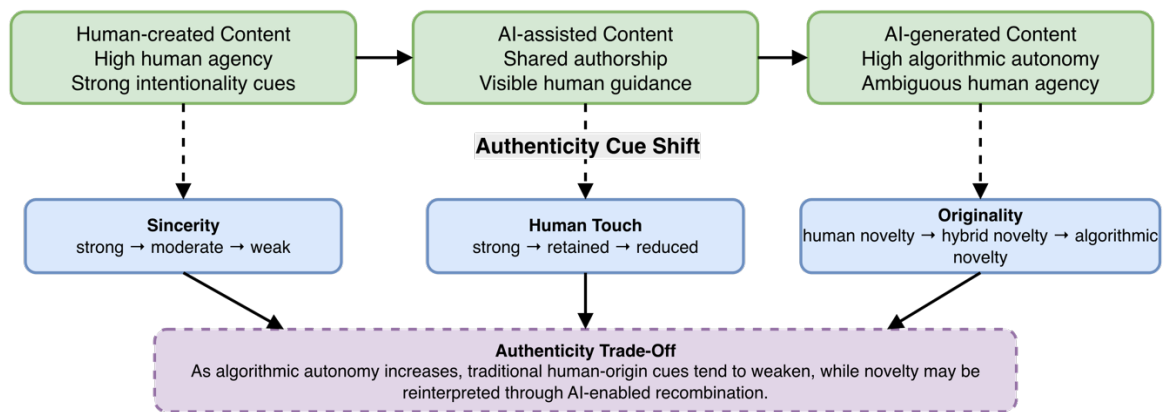


Figure 2. AI Involvement Continuum and Authenticity Trade-Off

Source: Developed by the author

Figure 2 shows how consumer authenticity judgments shift as content production moves from human-created to AI-assisted and fully AI-generated forms. The continuum clarifies that AI involvement does not simply eliminate authenticity; rather, it redistributes the cues through which sincerity, human touch, and originality are interpreted. This supports the article’s argument that authenticity in AI-mediated content is contingent on how consumers read the balance between human agency and algorithmic autonomy.

From a consumer perspective, variations in AI involvement introduce different evaluative cues that shape interpretation. When content is fully human-created, authenticity judgments are anchored in traditional signals of craftsmanship and intentionality. In contrast, AI-generated content introduces ambiguity regarding authorship, which may disrupt conventional authenticity heuristics. AI-assisted content occupies an intermediate position, where human input remains visible, potentially preserving elements of perceived sincerity while benefiting from algorithmic augmentation.

Empirical evidence suggests that consumers do not respond uniformly across these levels. While AI-generated content may be perceived as efficient and innovative, it can also reduce perceived authenticity and emotional resonance (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Lee *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, collaborative content may mitigate these effects by maintaining a perceived human presence, thereby highlighting the importance of examining AI involvement as a key antecedent in the evaluation process.

4.2 Perceived Authenticity as a Central Mediator

At the core of the framework lies perceived authenticity, which functions as the primary mechanism through which AI involvement influences consumer responses. Consistent with prior literature, authenticity is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing originality, sincerity, and perceived human touch (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014; Beverland, 2005). However, in the context of AI-generated content, these dimensions are subject to reinterpretation.

The introduction of AI into creative processes alters how consumers infer these dimensions. Sincerity, traditionally associated with human intention, may be questioned when content is generated algorithmically. Perceived human touch, often linked to emotional expression and effort, may diminish as AI involvement increases. At the same time, originality may be enhanced due to AI’s ability to recombine patterns and generate novel outputs. This creates a tension in authenticity evaluation, where different dimensions may move in opposing directions.

This study extends existing theory by introducing the concept of hybrid-origin authenticity, where authenticity is not derived solely from human authorship but from the perceived interplay between human and artificial contributions. In this view, authenticity becomes a

relational construct shaped by how coherently human intention and algorithmic generation are perceived to align. Rather than representing a binary condition, authenticity emerges as a dynamic outcome of interpretive processes in human–AI contexts.

This figure explicates the internal mechanism through which authenticity is constructed in human–AI collaborative contexts. It isolates the interaction between human intentionality and algorithmic generation, showing how their perceived alignment produces hybrid-origin authenticity.

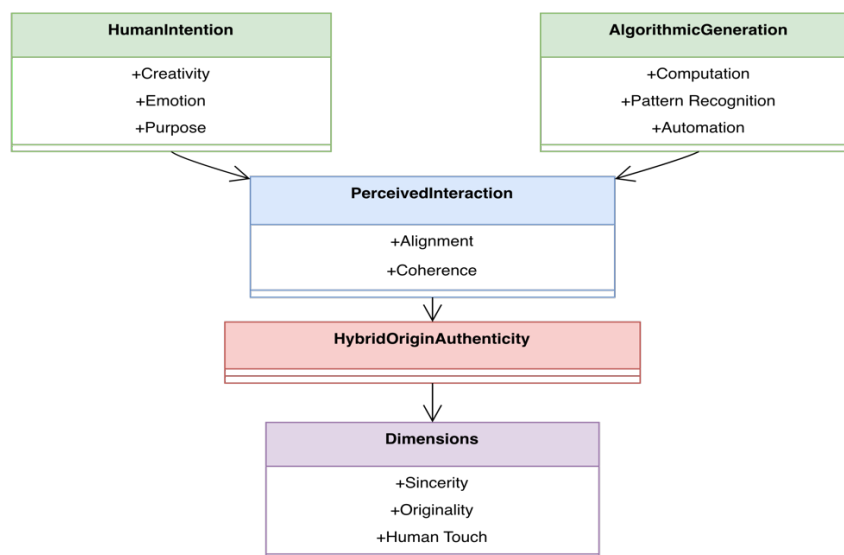


Figure 3. Hybrid-Origin Authenticity Formation Mechanism
Source: Developed by the author

As illustrated in Figure 3, authenticity emerges not from isolated human or algorithmic inputs, but from the perceived coherence between them. The figure shows that consumers interpret authenticity through an interactional lens, where alignment between human intention and AI generation produces hybrid-origin authenticity, which is then expressed through dimensions such as sincerity, originality, and human touch. This mechanism sharpens the article’s theoretical contribution by specifying how authenticity is actively constructed in human–AI collaborative environments.

4.3 Consumer Psychological Responses

Perceived authenticity is posited to influence a set of consumer psychological responses that represent immediate evaluative outcomes. These include trust, emotional engagement, and perceived value, each reflecting distinct but interrelated dimensions of consumer perception.

Trust operates as a central mechanism in reducing uncertainty, particularly in technology-mediated environments where consumers must rely on signals of credibility (McKnight *et al.*, 2002; Gefen *et al.*, 2003). Authenticity contributes to trust formation by signaling sincerity and consistency, thereby enabling consumers to evaluate content despite limited information about its origin. In AI-generated contexts, where opacity and algorithmic complexity may increase uncertainty, authenticity becomes an even more critical cue for trust.

Emotional engagement reflects the affective dimension of consumer response, capturing the extent to which content resonates on an emotional level. Authenticity has been consistently associated with stronger emotional connections, as consumers perceive authentic content as more meaningful and relatable (Arnould & Price, 2000). However, AI-generated content may face challenges in eliciting such engagement if it is perceived as lacking genuine human intention, unless mechanisms such as anthropomorphism or collaborative framing are present.

Perceived value integrates both cognitive and affective evaluations, reflecting the overall assessment of usefulness, relevance, and desirability (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Authenticity contributes to perceived value by enhancing the perceived meaningfulness of content, thereby influencing downstream behavioral responses. Together, these psychological responses represent the immediate consequences of authenticity evaluation within the framework.

4.4 Behavioral Outcomes

The framework further posits that consumer psychological responses translate into behavioral outcomes, including purchase intention, sharing intention, and brand attitude. These outcomes represent both transactional and relational dimensions of consumer behavior, capturing how evaluation processes influence actions in digital environments.

Trust plays a particularly important role in facilitating behavioral responses, as it reduces perceived risk and increases willingness to engage with content or brands (Aguirre *et al.*, 2015; Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015). Emotional engagement further amplifies these effects by strengthening attachment and increasing the likelihood of content sharing and brand advocacy. Perceived value, in turn, provides a cognitive justification for action, reinforcing the decision to purchase or interact with content.

Importantly, the framework emphasizes that the influence of authenticity on behavior is indirect, operating through these psychological mechanisms rather than exerting a direct effect. This highlights the importance of understanding the underlying evaluative processes that mediate the relationship between AI involvement and consumer action.

4.5 Moderating Factors

To capture the complexity of consumer evaluation in human–AI contexts, the framework incorporates several moderating variables that influence the strength and direction of relationships within the model.

AI disclosure plays a critical role in shaping consumer interpretation of content origin. Transparency regarding AI involvement can enhance perceptions of honesty and fairness, thereby strengthening trust, but may simultaneously reduce perceived authenticity by highlighting the absence of human authorship (Luo *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2025). This dual effect suggests that disclosure introduces a trade-off between transparency and perceived authenticity.

Product type also moderates the importance of authenticity in evaluation. In hedonic contexts, where consumption is driven by emotional and symbolic value, authenticity becomes a central determinant of perception and response. In contrast, for utilitarian products, functional performance may take precedence, reducing the relative importance of authenticity (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2013). As a result, the impact of AI involvement on authenticity is expected to vary across product categories.

Consumer AI literacy further shapes evaluation processes by influencing how individuals interpret AI-generated content. Consumers with greater familiarity and understanding of AI may exhibit lower aversion and more nuanced interpretations, potentially mitigating negative perceptions associated with algorithmic generation (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021). This suggests that individual differences play a critical role in shaping responses.

Finally, anthropomorphism influences how consumers perceive AI as an agent. When AI systems are perceived as human-like, they may be attributed with intention and creativity, thereby enhancing trust and potentially mitigating reductions in perceived authenticity (Epley *et al.*, 2007; Waytz *et al.*, 2014). This highlights the role of perceived humanness in shaping evaluation processes.

4.6 Integrative Perspective

Taken together, the proposed framework offers a multi-level explanation of how AI-generated and AI-assisted content is evaluated by consumers. It integrates technological inputs in the form of AI involvement, symbolic evaluation through perceived authenticity, psychological mechanisms including trust and engagement, and behavioral outcomes such as purchase and sharing.

This table consolidates the core constructs used in the framework by providing precise definitions, dimensional structure, and theoretical grounding. It ensures conceptual clarity and prevents ambiguity, which is critical given the integration of multiple literature streams.

Table 1. Construct Definitions and Theoretical Anchoring

Construct	Definition	Key Dimensions	Theoretical Anchoring
AI Involvement	The extent to which artificial intelligence contributes to content creation, ranging from human-created to fully AI-generated outputs	Continuum: Human-created; AI-assisted; AI-generated	AI in marketing; automation continuum; human–AI collaboration literature
Perceived Authenticity	A consumer’s evaluative judgment of the genuineness of content based on perceived origin, intention, and coherence between human and AI contributions	Sincerity; Originality; Human Touch	Authenticity theory; consumer culture theory; hybrid-origin authenticity
Human Intention	The perceived presence of human creativity, purpose, and emotional input in content creation	Creativity; Emotional expression; Purposefulness	Human-centered authenticity; symbolic consumption
Algorithmic Generation	The role of AI systems in producing content through data processing, pattern recognition, and automated generation	Computation; Pattern recombination; Automation	AI capability literature; machine agency
Perceived Human–AI Interaction	The extent to which consumers perceive alignment and coherence between human input and AI-generated output	Perceived alignment; Coherence; Complementarity	Human–AI collaboration; co-creation theory
Consumer Trust	The degree to which consumers perceive content as reliable, credible, and dependable in AI-mediated environments	Reliability; Credibility; Transparency	Trust in technology; information systems literature
Emotional Engagement	The extent to which content elicits affective responses and emotional resonance	Emotional connection; Relatability; Affective intensity	Consumer experience; emotional branding
Perceived Value	The overall assessment of the usefulness, relevance, and desirability of content	Functional value; Experiential value; Symbolic value	Value theory; customer experience literature
Behavioral Outcomes	Consumer actions resulting from evaluation processes in AI-mediated contexts	Purchase intention; Sharing intention; Brand attitude	Consumer behavior; digital marketing
AI Disclosure	The extent to which the involvement of AI in content	Transparency; Explicitness; Timing	AI transparency; disclosure literature

Construct	Definition	Key Dimensions	Theoretical Anchoring
	creation is communicated to consumers		
Product Type	The classification of products based on consumption motivation and evaluative criteria	Hedonic; Utilitarian	Consumer decision-making; product categorization
AI Literacy	The level of consumer knowledge and understanding regarding AI technologies and their functioning	Familiarity; Understanding; Experience	Technology readiness; AI adoption literature
Anthropomorphism	The attribution of human-like characteristics to AI systems or outputs	Perceived humanness; Intentionality; Social presence	Anthropomorphism theory; human-computer interaction

Source: Developed by the author

By systematically organizing constructs, Table 1 strengthens the conceptual rigor of the article and ensures consistent terminology across sections. Table 1 directly supports the analytical clarity of the framework by making explicit how each construct is defined, operationalized, and theoretically grounded, thereby reducing ambiguity and improving reviewer interpretability.

By positioning authenticity as the central mediating construct, the framework bridges previously disconnected research streams and provides a coherent explanation of consumer responses in human–AI collaborative environments. This integrative perspective reflects the complexity of contemporary digital consumption, where technological, psychological, and symbolic factors interact dynamically to shape evaluation processes.

4.7 Theoretical Advancement

The proposed framework advances existing literature in several important ways. First, it reconceptualizes authenticity as a hybrid construct that incorporates both human and artificial contributions, thereby extending traditional authenticity theory to contemporary digital contexts. Second, it shifts the focus of AI marketing research from functional evaluation toward meaning construction, highlighting the role of symbolic interpretation in consumer response. Third, it integrates multiple levels of analysis within a unified model, connecting technological processes with psychological and behavioral outcomes.

Through these contributions, the framework provides a theoretically grounded and empirically testable foundation for understanding how value is constructed and evaluated in the age of human–AI collaboration.

5. Propositions Development

Building on the proposed conceptual framework, this section develops a set of theoretically grounded propositions that articulate how AI involvement in content creation influences consumer responses through perceived authenticity and related psychological mechanisms. Rather than treating these relationships as isolated effects, the propositions are constructed to reflect a coherent causal chain linking technological input, symbolic evaluation, and behavioral outcomes.

5.1 AI Involvement and Perceived Authenticity

The degree of AI involvement in content creation is expected to play a critical role in shaping perceived authenticity. Authenticity theory consistently emphasizes human origin, intentionality, and craftsmanship as key signals through which consumers infer sincerity and credibility (Beverland, 2005; Arnould & Price, 2000; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). These signals function as heuristic cues that reduce uncertainty by indicating that content reflects genuine human effort and purpose.

As AI involvement increases, these cues become less visible or more ambiguous. When content is fully generated by artificial intelligence, the absence of identifiable human agency may weaken perceptions of sincerity and emotional depth. This aligns with research on algorithm aversion, which suggests that consumers may distrust machine-generated outputs when they perceive a lack of contextual understanding or human judgment (Dietvorst *et al.*, 2015; Castelo *et al.*, 2019). Empirical evidence further indicates that AI-generated content can reduce perceived brand authenticity, particularly in domains where human creativity is valued (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Lee *et al.*, 2024).

However, this relationship is not purely linear. In human–AI collaborative contexts, where AI assists rather than replaces human input, elements of human intentionality remain perceptible. This may preserve aspects of authenticity, even as algorithmic processes contribute to content generation. Such hybrid configurations suggest that authenticity judgments depend not only on the presence of AI but on how its role is interpreted relative to human contribution.

Proposition 1:

Higher levels of AI involvement in content creation are associated with lower perceived authenticity, with AI-assisted content generating higher authenticity perceptions than fully AI-generated content.

5.2 Perceived Authenticity and Consumer Trust

Perceived authenticity is expected to function as a key antecedent of consumer trust, particularly in digitally mediated environments characterized by uncertainty and information asymmetry. Authenticity signals sincerity, credibility, and alignment with consumer expectations, thereby reducing perceived risk in evaluation processes (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014).

In AI-generated content contexts, this role becomes even more critical. Consumers often face ambiguity regarding the intentions, reliability, and underlying processes of algorithmically generated outputs. Under such conditions, authenticity serves as a diagnostic cue that enables consumers to form trust judgments despite limited transparency. Research on trust in technology indicates that individuals rely on perceived credibility and consistency when evaluating digital content (McKnight *et al.*, 2002; Gefen *et al.*, 2003), while studies on machine heuristics show that such evaluations are often guided by simplified cognitive rules (Sundar & Kim, 2019).

When content is perceived as authentic, it may counteract skepticism toward AI by signaling coherence between message and intention, even if the production process involves algorithmic generation. Conversely, low authenticity may amplify distrust, particularly when consumers perceive content as artificial, manipulative, or lacking genuine purpose.

Proposition 2:

Perceived authenticity positively influences consumer trust in AI-generated or AI-assisted content.

5.3 Trust and Consumer Behavioral Responses

Trust is a central determinant of consumer behavior, particularly in environments where decisions involve uncertainty or perceived risk. In digital marketing contexts, trust facilitates action by reducing hesitation and increasing confidence in the credibility of content and associated offerings (Aguirre *et al.*, 2015; Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015).

Within the proposed framework, trust is expected to mediate the relationship between authenticity and behavioral outcomes. When consumers trust content, they are more likely to engage with it, whether through purchasing decisions, sharing behavior, or the formation of positive brand attitudes. This relationship is consistent with broader research demonstrating that trust enhances both transactional outcomes and relational engagement.

In the context of AI-generated content, trust plays a particularly important role because consumers may initially approach such content with skepticism. Authenticity-driven trust can therefore serve as a mechanism that transforms evaluative judgments into concrete actions. Without trust, even content perceived as novel or innovative may fail to generate meaningful behavioral responses.

Proposition 3:

Consumer trust mediates the relationship between perceived authenticity and behavioral outcomes, including purchase intention, sharing intention, and brand attitude.

5.4 Moderating Role of AI Disclosure

The disclosure of AI involvement introduces an important boundary condition in the evaluation process. Transparency regarding AI authorship can enhance perceptions of honesty and fairness, thereby strengthening trust (Luo *et al.*, 2019). However, such disclosure may simultaneously reduce perceived authenticity by emphasizing the absence of human authorship and intentionality.

This dual effect creates a paradoxical dynamic in which disclosure can have both positive and negative consequences. On one hand, consumers may appreciate openness and transparency, interpreting disclosure as a signal of ethical practice. On the other hand, explicit acknowledgment of AI involvement may activate concerns regarding artificiality, reducing emotional resonance and perceived sincerity (Zhang *et al.*, 2025).

The net effect of disclosure therefore depends on how consumers reconcile these competing interpretations. This suggests that disclosure does not simply increase or decrease evaluation outcomes, but moderates the relationship between AI involvement and perceived authenticity.

Proposition 4:

AI disclosure moderates the relationship between AI involvement and perceived authenticity such that disclosure reduces perceived authenticity while potentially enhancing trust.

5.5 Moderating Role of Product Type

The importance of authenticity in consumer evaluation varies across product categories, particularly between hedonic and utilitarian contexts. Hedonic products are associated with emotional, experiential, and symbolic value, making authenticity a critical determinant of consumer perception. In contrast, utilitarian products emphasize functional performance, where efficiency and reliability may take precedence over authenticity concerns (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2013).

In hedonic contexts, consumers are more sensitive to cues related to human expression, creativity, and emotional depth. As a result, AI-generated content may be perceived as less authentic when it lacks these qualities, leading to stronger negative effects on evaluation.

Conversely, in utilitarian contexts, consumers may prioritize functionality and effectiveness, reducing the impact of authenticity on decision-making.

This variation suggests that the relationship between AI involvement and authenticity is contingent upon the symbolic importance of the product category.

Proposition 5:

The negative relationship between AI involvement and perceived authenticity is stronger for hedonic products than for utilitarian products.

5.6 Human–AI Collaboration Effect

While increasing AI involvement may reduce perceived authenticity, collaborative configurations that integrate human and AI contributions may mitigate or even reverse this effect. Human–AI collaboration allows for the retention of human intentionality and emotional expression while leveraging the efficiency and generative capabilities of AI (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021).

Such collaboration may create a perception of balance, where consumers recognize both the creative input of humans and the augmentative role of AI. Emerging evidence suggests that consumers respond positively to collaborative outputs, perceiving them as both innovative and meaningful (Haupt *et al.*, 2025; Madathil *et al.*, 2025). This indicates that hybrid content may represent an optimal configuration that preserves authenticity while enhancing creativity.

This effect can be understood through the lens of complementarity, where human and machine capabilities are perceived as mutually reinforcing rather than substitutive. When this complementarity is salient, authenticity may be reconstructed rather than diminished.

Proposition 6:

Human–AI collaborative content generates higher perceived authenticity and more favorable consumer responses than purely AI-generated content.

5.7 Moderating Role of Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism plays a critical role in shaping how consumers perceive and evaluate AI systems. When AI is attributed human-like characteristics, such as intentionality, creativity, or emotional capacity, it becomes more relatable and easier to interpret within existing cognitive frameworks (Epley *et al.*, 2007; Waytz *et al.*, 2014).

In the context of AI-generated content, anthropomorphic cues may reduce the perceived gap between human and machine agents, thereby mitigating negative effects on authenticity. By simulating human-like qualities, AI systems may evoke perceptions of intention and creativity, which are central to authenticity judgments.

However, the effectiveness of anthropomorphism depends on its perceived credibility. When anthropomorphic cues are perceived as authentic, they may enhance both trust and authenticity. Conversely, when they are perceived as artificial or manipulative, they may produce adverse effects. This suggests that anthropomorphism moderates the relationship between AI involvement and authenticity in a nuanced manner.

Proposition 7:

Anthropomorphism positively moderates the relationship between AI involvement and perceived authenticity such that higher perceived humanness mitigates the negative impact of AI involvement.

5.8 Integrative Logic of the Model

Taken together, these propositions establish a coherent causal structure in which AI involvement influences perceived authenticity, authenticity shapes trust and psychological responses, and trust drives behavioral outcomes. This process is further conditioned by contextual and perceptual factors, including AI disclosure, product type, and anthropomorphism.

This table synthesizes the full set of propositions into a structured analytical map, clarifying the causal logic, directionality, and theoretical grounding of each relationship. It enables reviewers to quickly assess coherence between arguments and theoretical foundations.

Table 2. Propositions and Theoretical Logic Mapping

Proposition & Relationship	Direction	Core Logic	Theoretical Basis
P1 AI Involvement → Perceived Authenticity	Negative (overall); AI-assisted > AI-generated	Increasing AI involvement weakens human-origin cues, reducing perceived sincerity and emotional depth	Authenticity theory; algorithm aversion; AI content perception
P2 Perceived Authenticity → Consumer Trust	Positive	Authenticity signals sincerity and credibility, reducing uncertainty in AI-mediated environments	Authenticity theory; trust in technology
P3 Consumer Trust → Behavioral Outcomes	Positive (mediated effect)	Trust reduces perceived risk and enables action (purchase, sharing, attitude formation)	Consumer behavior; digital trust literature
P4 AI Disclosure × (AI Involvement → Authenticity)	Negative moderation (on authenticity); positive effect on trust	Disclosure increases transparency but highlights artificial origin, creating a trade-off between trust and authenticity	AI disclosure; transparency paradox
P5 Product Type × (AI Involvement → Authenticity)	Stronger negative effect for hedonic products	Authenticity is more central in symbolic and experiential consumption contexts than in functional ones	Consumer decision-making; hedonic vs utilitarian theory
P6 Human–AI Collaboration → Authenticity & Consumer Response	Positive (relative to fully AI-generated)	Hybrid creation preserves human intentionality while leveraging AI capabilities, enhancing perceived balance	Co-creation theory; human–AI collaboration
P7 Anthropomorphism × (AI Involvement → Authenticity)	Positive moderation	Human-like cues reduce perceived distance between human and AI, mitigating authenticity loss	Anthropomorphism theory; human–computer interaction

Source: Developed by the author

Table 2 consolidates the article’s causal structure into a concise and logically ordered format, making explicit how each proposition contributes to the overall framework. By aligning

relationships with their theoretical foundations, Table 2 strengthens the internal coherence of the model and facilitates empirical operationalization in future research.

This integrative logic moves beyond isolated relationships and provides a process-oriented explanation of consumer evaluation in human–AI collaborative environments. By articulating these relationships through theoretically grounded propositions, the study offers a robust foundation for future empirical validation and contributes to a deeper understanding of how authenticity is reconstructed in the age of artificial intelligence.

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study advances the literature at the intersection of authenticity, consumer behavior, and artificial intelligence by offering a multi-level conceptualization of how AI-generated and AI-assisted content is evaluated by consumers. Rather than treating authenticity as a static attribute tied to human origin, the findings reposition authenticity as a dynamic and relational construct that emerges through the interaction between human intention, algorithmic generation, and consumer interpretation.

First, this research reconceptualizes authenticity as a hybrid-origin construct. Traditional authenticity theory has largely been grounded in assumptions of human authorship, craftsmanship, and intentionality (Beverland, 2005; Arnould & Price, 2000; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). By introducing the notion that authenticity can emerge from the perceived interplay between human and artificial agents, this study extends existing frameworks to account for contemporary production systems in which authorship is distributed. This contribution directly addresses the human-centric bias identified in prior literature and provides a theoretical foundation for understanding authenticity in digitally mediated environments.

Second, the study contributes to the artificial intelligence and marketing literature by shifting the analytical focus from functional evaluation to meaning construction. While previous research has emphasized algorithmic performance, trust, and adoption (Dietvorst *et al.*, 2015; Logg *et al.*, 2019; Puntoni *et al.*, 2021), it has largely overlooked how consumers interpret and assign meaning to AI-generated outputs. By positioning perceived authenticity as a central mediating mechanism, this study integrates symbolic evaluation into AI research, demonstrating that consumer responses are shaped not only by what AI does but by how its outputs are perceived in relation to human values and intentions.

Third, this research offers an integrative framework that bridges previously fragmented streams of literature. Specifically, it connects AI involvement as a technological input, perceived authenticity as a symbolic evaluation mechanism, psychological responses such as trust and engagement, and behavioral outcomes including purchase and sharing. This multi-level integration responds to calls for more holistic approaches in AI-driven marketing research (Huang & Rust, 2021; Davenport *et al.*, 2020) and provides a structured explanation of how technological, psychological, and symbolic factors interact in shaping consumer evaluation.

Collectively, these contributions move beyond incremental extensions and provide a conceptual reorientation of how authenticity is understood in the age of artificial intelligence. By embedding authenticity within human–AI collaboration processes, this study expands both authenticity theory and AI marketing research toward a more integrated and contemporary perspective.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study carry significant implications for firms operating in increasingly AI-driven marketing environments. As organizations adopt generative AI to produce content at

scale, managing consumer perception becomes as critical as achieving operational efficiency.

First, firms should reconsider the strategic role of AI in content creation. The framework suggests that fully AI-generated content may undermine perceived authenticity, particularly in contexts where human expression and emotional resonance are central. Instead, human–AI collaboration emerges as a more effective approach, as it preserves signals of human intentionality while leveraging the efficiency of AI (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021; Haupt *et al.*, 2025). This implies that organizations should design creative workflows that emphasize augmentation rather than substitution.

Second, the management of AI disclosure requires careful strategic consideration. While transparency can enhance trust by signaling honesty and fairness, it may simultaneously reduce perceived authenticity by making the absence of human authorship more salient (Luo *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2025). Firms must therefore balance the benefits of transparency with the potential risks to authenticity, tailoring disclosure strategies to specific contexts, audiences, and content types.

Third, the importance of authenticity varies across product categories, highlighting the need for differentiated content strategies. In hedonic and experience-oriented industries, such as fashion, entertainment, and lifestyle branding, authenticity plays a central role in shaping consumer perception. In these contexts, excessive reliance on AI-generated content may weaken brand positioning by reducing emotional engagement and perceived sincerity (Brüns & Meißner, 2024; Lee *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, in utilitarian contexts, where functionality and efficiency are prioritized, AI-generated content may be more readily accepted.

Fourth, firms should consider the role of anthropomorphism in shaping consumer perception. Designing AI systems or content with human-like characteristics may enhance trust and reduce perceived distance between human and machine agents (Epley *et al.*, 2007; Waytz *et al.*, 2014). However, such strategies must be applied carefully, as overly artificial or exaggerated anthropomorphic cues may lead to perceptions of manipulation, thereby undermining authenticity.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of authenticity management as a strategic capability in AI-driven marketing. Rather than viewing AI solely as a tool for efficiency, firms must recognize its impact on symbolic value and consumer interpretation. Effective integration of human and artificial intelligence can enable organizations to maintain authenticity while benefiting from technological advancement.

6.3 Future Research Agenda

While this study provides a comprehensive conceptual framework, it also opens several avenues for future research that can further advance understanding in this domain.

First, empirical validation of the proposed model is necessary to establish the robustness of the relationships identified. Experimental studies that manipulate levels of AI involvement, disclosure, and anthropomorphic cues could provide causal evidence for the proposed mechanisms. Such research would be particularly valuable in testing the mediating role of perceived authenticity and the moderating effects identified in the framework.

Second, future research should explore cross-cultural variations in authenticity perception. Cultural differences in values related to tradition, craftsmanship, and technological acceptance may significantly influence how consumers interpret AI-generated content. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts could provide deeper insights into the generalizability of the framework.

Third, industry-specific investigations are needed to examine how the dynamics identified in this study manifest across different sectors. The role of authenticity may vary substantially in

industries such as luxury goods, digital media, education, and e-commerce, where the balance between symbolic and functional value differs.

Fourth, longitudinal research could examine how consumer perceptions evolve over time as familiarity with AI technologies increases. As generative AI becomes more pervasive, initial skepticism toward AI-generated content may diminish, potentially altering the role of authenticity in evaluation processes.

Fifth, future studies may incorporate additional individual-level variables, such as AI literacy, technological readiness, and personal innovativeness, which may shape how consumers interpret and respond to AI-generated content (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021). These variables could provide a more nuanced understanding of heterogeneity in consumer responses.

Finally, the integration of ethical and regulatory considerations represents an important direction for future research. Issues related to transparency, authorship, and intellectual property are likely to become increasingly salient as AI-generated content becomes more widespread, requiring further theoretical and empirical exploration.

6.4 Concluding Insight

The findings of this study highlight that the rise of AI-generated content represents not merely a technological shift but a fundamental transformation in how authenticity is constructed and evaluated. As content creation becomes increasingly shaped by human–AI collaboration, authenticity can no longer be understood solely in terms of human origin. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic outcome of how consumers interpret the relationship between human intention and algorithmic generation.

This transformation suggests that the future of the creative economy will not be defined by a dichotomy between human and machine, but by the quality of their integration. Within this evolving landscape, authenticity remains a central determinant of consumer value, serving as a critical lens through which individuals interpret, evaluate, and respond to content in AI-mediated environments.

7. Conclusion

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence into content creation raises a fundamental question regarding how consumers evaluate authenticity in environments where authorship is no longer exclusively human. This study set out to address this issue by developing a conceptual framework that explains how varying levels of AI involvement shape consumer responses through the mediating role of perceived authenticity. By positioning authenticity at the center of the evaluation process, the study responds to a critical gap in the literature, where prior research has largely examined AI from a functional perspective while overlooking its implications for meaning construction and symbolic interpretation.

The findings advance existing knowledge by demonstrating that authenticity remains a pivotal determinant of consumer evaluation even in AI-mediated contexts, yet its underlying logic has fundamentally shifted. Rather than being anchored solely in human origin, authenticity emerges as a hybrid construct shaped by the perceived interaction between human intention and algorithmic generation. This reconceptualization extends traditional authenticity theory, which has historically emphasized craftsmanship and human agency, and aligns it with contemporary production systems characterized by human–AI collaboration. In doing so, the study also contributes to AI and marketing literature by moving beyond adoption and trust toward a deeper understanding of how consumers interpret, evaluate, and assign meaning to AI-generated content.

The proposed framework further integrates technological, psychological, and behavioral dimensions into a unified explanatory model, demonstrating how AI involvement influences

authenticity perception, which in turn shapes trust, emotional engagement, perceived value, and ultimately consumer behavior. This multi-level integration offers a more comprehensive account of consumer response mechanisms and provides a theoretically grounded basis for future empirical research. From a managerial perspective, the study highlights that the strategic deployment of AI in content creation requires careful orchestration rather than substitution. Firms that balance human creativity with algorithmic capabilities are more likely to sustain authenticity and build consumer trust, whereas overreliance on fully AI-generated content may undermine symbolic value, particularly in contexts where emotional resonance is critical. These insights also carry broader policy implications, suggesting the need for thoughtful approaches to AI transparency and disclosure that consider not only ethical accountability but also consumer perception and trust dynamics.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. As a conceptual investigation, the proposed relationships have not yet been empirically tested, and therefore require validation through experimental and quantitative methods. In addition, the framework does not fully account for contextual variability across cultures, industries, and technological maturity levels, which may influence how authenticity is interpreted in AI-mediated environments. These limitations, however, do not diminish the value of the study; rather, they underscore the complexity of the phenomenon and highlight opportunities for further inquiry.

Future research should empirically examine the proposed model across diverse contexts, employing experimental designs to test causal relationships and longitudinal approaches to capture evolving consumer perceptions as familiarity with AI increases. Cross-cultural studies are particularly important to understand how differing cultural values shape authenticity judgments, while industry-specific analyses can provide more nuanced insights into sectoral dynamics. Further exploration of individual-level factors, such as AI literacy and technological readiness, may also enhance understanding of heterogeneity in consumer responses. Additionally, integrating ethical and regulatory dimensions, including issues of authorship, transparency, and accountability, represents a critical direction for advancing both theory and practice.

In conclusion, this study underscores that the rise of AI-generated content represents not merely a technological advancement but a paradigm shift in how authenticity is constructed, interpreted, and valued. The future of the creative economy will not be defined by a binary opposition between human and machine, but by the quality of their integration. Within this evolving landscape, authenticity remains a central lens through which consumers evaluate value, making it an indispensable construct for scholars and practitioners seeking to navigate the complexities of AI-driven environments.

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