Refining the conceptualization of audience-perceived influencer authenticity based on the entity-referent correspondence framework

Changyan Li
Ghent University
Liselot Hudders
Ghent University
Steffi De Jans
Ghent University
Julie Moulard
Louisiana Tech University

Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025

Refining the conceptualization of audience-perceived influencer authenticity based on the entity-referent correspondence framework

Abstract

Influencer authenticity is recognized as one of the underpinnings of influencer marketing, yet it lacks a consistent and comprehensive definition, which undermines research validity. This study refines its conceptualization by leveraging the Entity-Referent Correspondence framework, proposing that audience-perceived influencer authenticity is a multidimensional construct comprising three distinct dimensions: true-to-self, true-to-fact, and true-to-ideal authenticity. By incorporating two audience-influencer relationship types: 1) para-social relationships where influencers function as online "friends", and 2) the relationships between consumers and promotional professionals where influencers recommend products and services, this study presents a conceptual framework that offers a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of audience-perceived influencer authenticity.