

Creator–Default Congruence in Earned Media Communication

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Cite as:

Antoschin Roman, Schlereth Christian (2026), Creator–Default Congruence in Earned Media Communication. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133558)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



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Abstract

Organizations increasingly provide communication defaults to guide creators in the tone and identity of earned media. Yet, creators often purposely deviate from these defaults, which may help or hurt message effectiveness. We propose the Creator–Default Congruence (CDC) Model to explain how such deviations influence outcomes. Drawing on affective communication theory, we conceptualize emotional congruence along valence and arousal. Using image-based emotion analysis and fixed-effects regressions on more than 84,000 peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns, we find an inverted U-shaped relationship between emotional deviation and financial success—driven primarily by arousal and strengthened when organizational defaults remain stable.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media