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The Authenticity Paradox: How AI-Generated Content and Content Modality Shape Perceived Authenticity, Brand Authenticity, and Purchase Intent in Luxury Influencer Advertising

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Luxury brands are already turning to (AI) to create content for social media, not to mention managing virtual influencers. A 2 (content creator type: AI-generated vs. human) X 2 (content modality: static image vs. short video) between-subjects experiment (N=800) was conducted with the theoretical foundation of Social Presence Theory and the Source Credibility Model to explore the effects of these factors on perceived authenticity, brand authenticity, and purchase intent in a luxury advertising context. Two-way ANOVA results indicate that human-generated content significantly outperforms AI-generated content on all outcome variables ($\eta^2p = .58-.75$) and that short video content outperforms static images ($\eta^2p = .32-.46$). A significant creator type $\times$ content modality interaction was found for purchase intent ($\eta^2p = .04$). PROCESS macro mediation analysis (Model 4) indicates that perceived authenticity mediates, in part, the effects of both creator-type and content-modality on brand authenticity and purchase intent.

Corresponding Author:**Dr. Hassan Abbas****Email:**h.abbas@iba-suk.edu.pk**Introduction**

Luxury advertising has long capitalised on an implicit promise of irreducible humanness the skill, time, and intent behind a handmade Hermès saddle or a Louis Vuitton artisan's monogram stitch, which no machine can fully replicate. However, the same brands that are shaping this narrative are now quickly embracing artificial intelligence (AI) to create social media content, use virtual influencers, and produce algorithmically optimised advertisements at scale (Jung et al., 2025; Pangarkar & Rathee, 2023). This confluence creates what we term the authenticity paradox: the same technology that offers efficiency and reach threatens the perception of authenticity on which luxury brand equity relies.

The proliferation of AI-generated content (AIGC) in brand communications has been remarkable: the worldwide AI-influencer market, worth USD 4.6 billion in 2022, is projected to reach more than USD 50 billion by 2030 (Allal-Chérif et al., 2024), with luxury houses like Balmain, Dior, and Prada among the earliest pioneers to test virtual endorsers. AIGC now directly rivals human-created content across formats from static images to short-form video, the latter now dominating on platforms such as

Instagram Reels, TikTok and YouTube Shorts (Zhao et al., 2023). Academic research has not kept up with this commercial momentum. While we know that human influencers outperform virtual ones on source credibility (De Veirman et al., 2017), and that authenticity perceptions mediate influencer effectiveness (Kim, 2022), there are two critical questions left unanswered in luxury contexts: do content creator type and content modality interact to influence consumer outcomes, and what is the psychological mechanism through which such effects occur?

The gap is important because content modality is not simply a passive conduit of information but is itself a signal of social presence (Short et al., 1976). Short videos provide richer, more dynamic cues of humanness, warmth, and spontaneity compared to static images (Gefen & Straub, 2003; Kim, 2022), which may enhance authenticity cues for human creators but reveal the artificiality of AI-generated personas. In this case, luxury brand managers are confronted with a compound strategic dilemma: the choice between human and AI creators, but also between content formats that can dilute or intensify the authenticity deficit of AI. However, this joint effect has not been tested empirically yet in a luxury context, nor has perceived authenticity been examined as the mediating mechanism in a 2×2 factorial design.

This study fills these gaps with a 2 (creator type: AI vs. human) $\times 2$ (content modality: static image vs. short video) between-subject experiment with 800 active social media users exposed to a luxury brand's social media content. We draw on Social Presence Theory (Short et al. 1976) to understand how the interaction of creator type and content modality influences consumers' perception of human presence in content and the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) to understand how that perception translates to brand-level outcomes. Perceived authenticity, conceptualised at the level of the influencer-content (Moulard et al., 2015), is tested as the psychological bridge between our experimental manipulations and brand authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014) and purchase intent (Spears & Singh, 2004) using PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) with 10,000 bootstrap samples.

The study makes four contributions: First, it provides first controlled experimental evidence on the joint effect of creator type and content modality on luxury brand outcomes, directly addressing calls for research on the way AI-generated avatars change perceptions of brand aesthetics (Jung et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Second, it tests perceived authenticity as a unifying mediating mechanism, extending the authenticity literature (Audrezet et al., 2020; Moulard et al., 2015) to the AI-human boundary in luxury advertising. Third, it contributes to the ever-growing stream of IJA research on social presence in influencer settings (Kim, 2022; Naderer et al., 2021) by extending the Social Presence Theory and demonstrating that content format is not merely a stylistic preference but a moderator of AI's authenticity deficit. Fourth, it answers this special issue's call for empirically grounded guidance on how luxury brands can adopt AI without eroding symbolic value or authenticity, offering actionable prescriptions for managers facing AIGC adoption decisions.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary theories. Social Presence Theory explains how content format and creator type shape the degree of human contact conveyed in a mediated interaction. The Source Credibility Model explains how such signals translate into consumer brand evaluations. Together, these frameworks explain the differential impact of AI-generated versus human content delivered as a static image or short video on luxury brand outcomes through perceived authenticity, via both direct and indirect pathways.

Social Presence Theory

Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976) explains the extent to which a medium conveys the sense of being in another person's physical presence. High-presence media convey richer interpersonal cues warmth, spontaneity, non-verbal affect while low-presence media strip them away; Short et al. (1976) placed video toward the higher end of this continuum, above written text. Gefen and Straub (2003) found that higher social presence on e-commerce platforms increases trust and purchase intent, and Kim (2022) found that social presence embedded in Instagram posts predicted parasocial interaction, which in turn predicted favourable brand outcomes. Short-form video provides dynamic, multimodal cues facial expression, voice inflection, gesture, ambient sound that generate significantly higher social presence than static images (Kim, 2022; Lee et al., 2022). For the present study, this theory implies that human-created content will be perceived as more socially present, and therefore more authentic, than algorithmically generated content, which lacks the lived experience and spontaneous humanness that social presence signals convey a gap that video format should make more salient than static images.

The Source Credibility Model

The Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) holds that a communicator's persuasive power depends on three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, measured via Ohanian's (1990) validated 15-item semantic differential scale a foundational instrument in advertising and influencer marketing research (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). In AI-versus-human influencer contexts, the literature consistently shows human creators rated higher on

trustworthiness and authenticity than virtual counterparts, because perceived humanness and lived experience are central to credibility judgements (Ferraro et al., 2024; Thomas & Fowler, 2021). Baudier et al. (2023) extended the model by acknowledging perceived humanness as a rich dimension in AI influencer evaluations, particularly relevant to luxury brands whose heritage narratives are based on human artisanal credibility. More importantly, source credibility indirectly operates through perceived authenticity rather than directly predicting attitude: when consumers perceive a source as authentic, they consider the endorsed brand more credible, and this subsequently translates influencer authenticity into brand-level outcomes (Baek et al., 2024; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This indirect pathway is key to our mediation hypotheses.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

AI Generated Content in Luxury Advertising

Since 2021, the use of generative AI in communications of luxury brands has grown rapidly in response to content-volume demands and the pursuit of algorithmically optimised aesthetics, with brands including Balmain, Gucci and Prada launching AI-generated visual assets and virtual brand ambassadors (Allal-Chérif et al., 2024; Jung et al., 2025). Jung et al. (2025) found that perceived artificial creativity of AI-generated luxury ads positively influences trust in AI and perceived humanness, which in turn influences advertising informativeness, novelty, credibility, and purchase intent. Pangarkar and Rathee (2023) found, in an IJA study, that conspicuousness the visible, audience-directed nature of luxury influencer content moderates the persuasive impact of social media influencers on luxury purchase decisions, with implications for how ostentation is read differently across AI and human presenters. This evidence base, however, has not isolated the joint effect of creator type and content modality on luxury brand perceptions within a controlled experimental design, nor tested perceived authenticity as the mechanism linking these inputs to brand-level outcomes the gap this study addresses.

Content Creator Type and Perceived Authenticity

Moulard et al. (2015) defined perceived authenticity as the extent to which a person or persona is genuinely self-expressive true to themselves, non-performative, and not attempting to be something they are not. Audrezet et al. (2020) showed that commercial relationships threaten influencer authenticity, with followers rating influencers less favourably when sponsorship appears to compromise their authentic voice a threat amplified by AI-generated content, since a fully AI-generated persona risks inauthenticity by definition, having no real self to express. Empirical evidence consistently supports this reasoning: in a 2 × 2 experiment, Kim et al. (2023) found human-like virtual influencers generated greater message credibility than anime-style virtual influencers, mediated by credibility perceptions (an authenticity analogue); Thomas and Fowler (2021) found human influencers produce higher identification and persuasion than AI counterparts; and Zhao et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis confirmed source credibility as the strongest single predictor of influencer endorsement effectiveness across 175 effect sizes, of which authenticity is a central sub-dimension. Pangarkar and Rathee (2023) further showed that perceived genuineness is especially consequential for luxury consumers, whose purchase decisions are closely tied to aspirational human narratives. Together, these studies predict that consumers exposed to human-generated luxury content will attribute higher perceived authenticity than those exposed to AI-generated content.

H1: Consumers who view human-generated luxury content will report significantly higher perceived authenticity than those who view AI-generated luxury content.

Content Modality and Perceived Authenticity

Content modality, that is, whether content is delivered as a static image or short video, matters for perceived authenticity because different modalities convey different social presence cues. Pictures are rich in visual detail but are static, and can be heavily edited and curated, which paradoxically signals effort and artifice (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017). In contrast, short videos convey motion, voice, spontaneous expression and ambient signals which are hard to fake and which audiences associate with candid, unmediated self-expression (Kim, 2022) aligning directly with Social Presence Theory's prediction that video, as a higher-presence medium, is associated with perceptions of realness and humanness (Short et al., 1976). Naderer et al. (2021) found that richer content formats more strongly activated perceived viewer-influencer similarity, a cue of realness, and Lee et al. (2022) found that more dynamic formats were linked to higher source credibility in celebrity endorsement contexts. Taken together, these findings predict that short video content will be perceived as more authentic than static image content regardless of creator type.

H2: Consumers who view luxury content delivered in a short video format will report significantly higher perceived authenticity than those who view a static image.

Content Creator Type and Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014) comprises three sub-dimensions: quality commitment, heritage, and sincerity. Luxury brands depend disproportionately on these dimensions, since their premium positioning rests on heritage stories, handcraft narratives, and founders' authentic human values (Pangarkar & Rathee, 2023). When content promoting a luxury brand is perceived as AI-generated rather than human-authored, the sincerity and heritage sub-dimensions are most directly implicated: AI content cannot sincerely vouch for lived values, and its association with algorithmic efficiency runs counter to the artisanal heritage underwriting luxury premiums. Baek et al. (2024) showed, in an IJA study, that disclosure of AI-generated content reduced prosocial advertising evaluations, consistent with the inauthenticity associations AI generation triggers. Koles et al. (2024) further showed that virtual-influencer authenticity is manifest when a persona's behaviour and communication are congruent standard human influencers more readily meet. These arguments yield the following prediction:

H3: Consumers who view human-generated luxury content will report significantly higher brand authenticity than those who view AI-generated luxury content.

Content Modality and Brand Authenticity

If perceived authenticity is the psychological mechanism linking content cues to brand perceptions, and short video generates higher perceived authenticity than static images (H2), a corresponding main effect of content modality on brand authenticity follows. The social presence literature indirectly supports this: richer, higher-presence formats increase viewers' sense of genuine connection to the communicator and, by extension, the brand (Kim, 2022; Short et al., 1976). De Veirman et al. (2017) found persuasive pathways from influencer attributes to brand attitude operate most efficiently when the influencer-audience relationship feels authentic and unmediated conditions video facilitates better than static images. Video also lets brands convey craftsmanship in motion and authentic product texture in ways static images cannot, reinforcing quality-commitment and heritage associations (Jung et al., 2025). Therefore:

H4: Consumers who view luxury content delivered in a short video format will report significantly higher brand authenticity than those who view a static image.

Content Creator Type and Purchase Intent

Purchase intent has been theorised as a downstream effect of source credibility (Ohanian, 1990), influencer authenticity (Zhao et al., 2023), and brand attitude (De Veirman et al., 2017), with consistent evidence that consumers are more willing to purchase an endorsed brand when the endorser is perceived as credible and genuine. In the AI-versus-human literature, Thomas and Fowler (2021) found human influencers generate higher purchase intent via stronger identification; Ferraro et al. (2024) found, in an IJA study, that parasocial connection an authenticity-adjacent construct predicted purchase likelihood for diverse virtual influencers; and Lee et al. (2022) found source credibility a significant predictor of purchase intent across content types. Zhao et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 175 influencer effectiveness studies found purchase intent the most commonly studied outcome, with source credibility its strongest antecedent. Given that human-generated content is associated with higher credibility and authenticity evaluations, we expect a corresponding purchase-intent advantage:

H5: Consumers who view human-generated luxury content will report significantly higher purchase intent than those who view AI-generated luxury content.

Content Modality and Purchase Intent

Two converging lines of evidence support the effect of content modality on purchase intent. First, social commerce research shows dynamic formats (live streams, short videos, reels) consistently outperform static images in driving purchase, largely because they simulate the sensory richness of in-store experience and reduce online-shopping uncertainty (Kim, 2022; Lee et al., 2022). Second, in luxury advertising specifically, video enables product dramatisation showing the weight, texture, movement, and aura of luxury goods in ways a flat image cannot reducing psychological distance and increasing purchase motivation (Jung et al., 2025; Pangarkar & Rathee, 2023). De Veirman and Hudders (2020) further noted that richer formats generate stronger parasocial bonds, enhancing the persuasive power of influencer endorsements. These arguments predict that short video will generate higher purchase intent than static images in luxury influencer advertising:

H6: Consumers who view luxury content delivered in a short video format will report significantly higher purchase intent than those who view a static image.

Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity

Having established direct effects of creator type and content modality on brand authenticity (H3, H4) and purchase intent (H5, H6), we now specify the psychological mechanism through which these effects operate: perceived authenticity of the content and influencer as the key construct mediating creator type and content modality's effects on brand and behavioural outcomes.

This mediation pathway rests on three theoretical pillars. First, Social Presence Theory holds that creator type and content modality jointly determine the social presence cues available to the viewer, and social presence is a proximal determinant of authenticity attribution (Short et al., 1976). Second, the Source Credibility Model treats authenticity perception as a dimension of trustworthiness that mediates between source characteristics and persuasive effects (Ohanian, 1990). Third, the luxury authenticity literature shows that the sincerity and heritage sub-dimensions of Napoli et al.'s (2014) brand authenticity construct are activated by influencer authenticity perceptions rather than influencer attributes directly. Empirically, Lou and Yuan (2019) showed influencer credibility enhances consumer trust through authenticity mechanisms, Kim et al. (2023) identified message credibility as a mediator between virtual influencer type and endorsement effectiveness, Baek et al. (2024) showed in an IJA study that AI-content disclosure reduces advertising evaluation through undermined credibility-authenticity processes, and Pangarkar and Rathee (2023) found that consumers' authentic connection to influencer narratives mediates the luxury-conspicuity-to-purchase pathway.

Based on this convergent evidence, we propose perceived authenticity mediates the effect of both content creator type and content modality on brand authenticity and purchase intent, yielding four mediation hypotheses:

H7: Perceived authenticity will mediate the positive effect of human (vs. AI) content creator type on brand authenticity, such that human-generated content generates higher perceived authenticity, which in turn generates higher brand authenticity evaluations.

H8: Perceived authenticity will mediate the positive effect of human (vs. AI) content creator type on purchase intent, such that human-generated content generates higher perceived authenticity, which in turn generates higher purchase intent.

H9: Perceived authenticity will mediate the positive effect of short video (vs. static image) content modality on brand authenticity, such that video content generates higher perceived authenticity, which in turn generates higher brand authenticity evaluations.

H10: Perceived authenticity will mediate the positive effect of short video (vs. static image) content modality on purchase intent, such that video content generates higher perceived authenticity, which in turn generates higher purchase intent.

Interaction of Creator Type and Content Modality

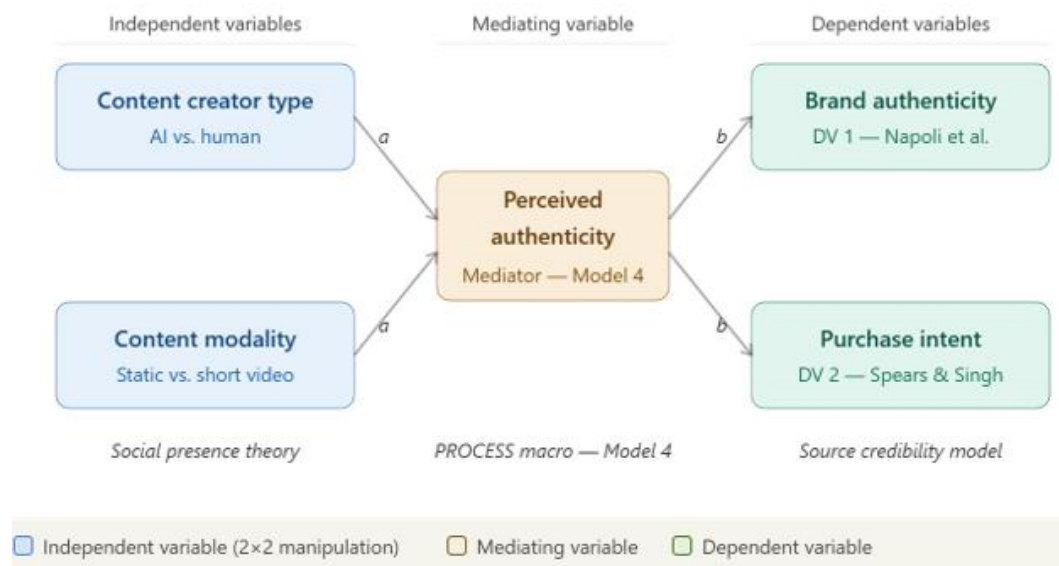
Beyond the main effects in H1–H6, we contend that content modality moderates the effect of creator type on consumer outcomes, based on the concept of medium salience within Social Presence Theory: a medium's informational richness carries its own presence cues while also increasing the salience of the source's presence or absence. In a static image, creator identity is perceptually ambiguous a curated AI image and a professionally shot human photograph may be visually indistinguishable but in a short video, dynamic cues of spontaneous expression, voice, and movement strongly indicate human presence or its absence. When these signals are absent in an AI-generated video, the human-AI distinction is emphasised, increasing AI content's authenticity deficit relative to the static image condition.

This reasoning predicts a dis-ordinal interaction: the human advantage over AI content will be greater in the short video condition than the static image condition. Kim et al. (2023) provide empirical support, finding that the advantage of human-like over anime-style virtual influencers was contingent on disclosure conditions that made creator identity salient; Ferraro et al. (2024) similarly found, in an IJA study, that diversity signals interacted with format vividness to shape virtual influencer judgements; and Naderer et al. (2021) showed influencer-audience similarity effects were stronger under higher content richness. Although this exact interaction has not been tested before, the theoretical rationale is consistent and informs the following hypothesis:

H11: The effect of content creator type on purchase intent will be significantly stronger in the short video condition than in the static image condition, such that the human advantage over AI content is amplified by the video format.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model integrating all eleven hypotheses. The two independent variables content creator type (IV1) and content modality (IV2) exert both direct effects on the two outcome variables (brand authenticity and purchase intent) and indirect effects via the mediator, perceived authenticity. A cross-product interaction term ($IV1 \times IV2$) is also specified for purchase intent (H11).

Figure 1 - Proposed Model



Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a 2 (content creator type: AI-generated vs. human) $\times$ 2 (content modality: static image vs. short video) between-subject factorial experiment. To avoid demand characteristics, order effects, and condition contamination, which are common threats to the internal validity of experimental advertising research (Baek et al., 2024; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020), we used a between-subjects design instead of a within-subjects design. Every participant was assigned to only one of the four stimuli's, ensuring clean condition isolation. Participants were assigned to one of four conditions formed by crossing the two factors (see Table 3). We operationalised assignment by distributing four different versions of the survey to different cohorts of participants, each version containing stimuli for the target condition. This approach is in line with the established practice in experimental influencer advertising research (Kim et al., 2023; Ferraro et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2022).

Participants & Sampling

A total of 800 active social media users took part in this study ($n = 200$ per condition). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling of active social media users that consume brand and influencer content on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, which are the main platforms for distributing the type of content studied in this research. The sampling frame was the population of social media-active individuals relevant to the exposure of luxury influencer advertising. We determined our sample size a priori: for a 2 $\times$ 2 between-subjects ANOVA with $\alpha = .05$, power = .80, and a medium effect size ($f = .25$), we needed a minimum of 200 participants per cell ($N = 800$) to detect interaction effects (Cohen, 1988). The sample size of $n = 200$ per condition provides sufficient statistical power for all planned analyses.

In line with luxury social media audiences, the final sample ($N = 800$) was skewed towards younger adults (Pangarkar & Rathee, 2023). In terms of age, 31.5% of participants were aged 18–24 years, 37.5% were aged 25–34 years, 19.0% were aged 35–44 years, 7.0% were aged 45–54 years, and 5.0% were aged 55 years or above. Regarding gender, 44.5% were male, 41.5% were female, 5.0% were non-binary, and 9.0% preferred not to answer. Regarding social media use, 9.5% reported spending less than one hour per day on social media, 31.0% reported one to two hours, 41.0% reported three to four hours, and 18.5% reported five or more hours. Given that the stimuli represent real-world social media content, the prevalence of heavy social media users (approximately 90.5% spending one or more hours daily) is appropriate for this study.

Experimental Stimuli

Stimulus Brand

Stimuli were sourced from Zero 360 Lunar, an existing premium high-tech watch brand with attributes consistent with established luxury brand archetypes heritage, exclusivity, superior craftsmanship, and aesthetic distinction (Pangarkar & Rathee, 2023). Using authentic, brand-published content rather than researcher-fabricated stimuli maximises ecological validity: participants viewed the same AI-generated and human-created content the brand has made publicly available on its own channels, including an AI-generated image carrying the brand's own "AI Generated" disclosure label. Because Zero 360

Lunar carries meaningful existing brand awareness, pre-existing brand attitudes could not be fully ruled out as a confound; this trade-off is addressed in the Limitations section. All stimuli were consistent in branding elements (logo, colour palette, typography) across the four conditions, ensuring that any differences in participant responses were due to the experimental manipulations and not brand-level variation.

Stimulus Development

Four social media posts were created for each of the four experimental conditions. Each stimulus was a video of an influencer promoting the latest high-tech luxury watch collection of Zero 360 Lunar. The human creator conditions were those stimuli that involved a real human lifestyle influencer creating content that looked organic and was typical of Instagram promotion of luxury brands. In the AI-generated conditions, stimuli consisted of an authentic image sourced from the brand's official social media page, which carried a visible "AI Generated" disclosure label embedded directly in the image, consistent with emerging AI-content labelling practices (Baek et al., 2024). For the static image conditions, stimuli were a single curated photo with a standardised caption. The short video conditions presented stimuli that were a 30-second lifestyle reel with the same narrative content as the static image conditions but presented in a dynamic audiovisual format. To control for potential confounds, all stimuli were matched for caption length (approximately 50 words), hashtag use (four hashtags) and posting time. The development of the stimulus followed established protocols in experimental advertising research (De Veirman et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2023). All four stimuli are given in the appendix section.

Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey using Google Forms. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental condition and subsequently routed to one of four condition-specific versions of the survey. The survey began with a brief cover screen stating that participants would be looking at a social media post and answering questions about it, without disclosing the study's hypotheses. Next participants saw their assigned stimulus and were asked to carefully inspect the stimulus before continuing. Then, they responded to the main measurement scales in the following order: social presence, source credibility sub-dimensions (trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness), perceived authenticity, brand authenticity and purchase intent. Control variables (age, gender, daily social media usage) were collected at the end to avoid priming effects. The average time to complete the survey was ten to fifteen minutes. All responses were anonymous. Data collection was preceded by institutional ethics approval.

Measure

Unless otherwise noted, all items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Scale reliability, descriptive statistics, and the complete item wordings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Measurement Items, Cronbach's Alpha, and Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Source	Scale items (7-point Likert)	α	M	SD
Perceived Authenticity (Mediator)	Moulard et al. (2015), adapted	PA1: This influencer seems genuine. PA2: This influencer comes across as real and authentic. PA3: This influencer's content feels natural, not staged.	.754	3.29	0.96
Brand Authenticity (DV1)	Napoli et al. (2014), adapted	BA1: This brand is committed to quality. BA2: This brand is reliable. BA3: This brand's communication feels sincere.	.655	3.44	0.84
Purchase Intent (DV2)	Spears & Singh (2004), adapted	PI1: I would consider buying this brand's product. PI2: The probability that I would purchase this brand is high. PI3: I am likely to purchase this brand in the future.	.756	3.13	1.01
Control variables	—	Age (categorical), gender (categorical), daily social media usage (categorical: < 1 hr, 1–2 hrs, 3–4 hrs, 5+ hrs)	—	—	—

Note. Cronbach's alpha (α) and descriptive statistics (M = mean, SD = standard deviation) are reported for multi-item composite scales only. All Likert-scale items were rated on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Perceived authenticity: adapted from Moulard et al. (2015). Brand authenticity: adapted from Napoli et al. (2014). Purchase intent: adapted from Spears and Singh (2004). †Below conventional .70 threshold; see text for discussion.

Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity was assessed using three items adapted from the human brand authenticity scale (Moulard et al., 2015) validated in influencer marketing contexts (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Items measured how genuine, real, and unperformed participants perceived the influencer to be. The value of Cronbach's alpha was .754, showing an acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978).

Brand Authenticity

To measure brand authenticity, consumer-based brand authenticity scale (Napoli et al., 2014) was used, and three items were adapted from this scale. Items captured elements of brand authenticity, such as commitment to quality, reliability and communicative sincerity. Cronbach's alpha was .655. This is lower than the typical .70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978) but higher than the more lenient threshold of .60 acceptable in exploratory and adapted-scale contexts (Hair et al., 2019). Item-total correlations ranged from .454 to .473 and were all above the recommended minimum of .30.

Purchase Intent

Purchase intent was measured with three items adapted from the purchase intention scale of Spears and Singh (2004), one of the most widely validated scales in advertising research (Zhao et al., 2023). Items rated likelihood of considering, probability of, and intention to purchase the brand's products. Cronbach's alpha was .756 indicating good internal consistency.

Control Variables

Three control variables were measured: age (five categories: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+), gender (male, female, non-binary, prefer not to say), and daily social media usage (less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5+ hours). Such controls were included to control for demographic variation in social media exposure and luxury brand familiarity (De Veirman et al., 2017; Pangarkar & Rathee, 2023).

Analytical Strategy

Data were analysed in five stages. First, scale properties and discriminant relationships were evaluated for all study variables using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients, and Pearson bivariate correlations. Second, the validity of the experimental manipulations was assessed. Third, Levene's tests of homogeneity of variance were conducted for each dependent variable to verify the homogeneity of variances assumption of the ANOVA. Fourth, a series of 2 (creator type) $\times$ 2 (content modality) between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted with perceived authenticity, brand authenticity, and purchase intent as dependent variables to test the main effects (H1-H6) and the interaction effect (H11). The effect-size index was partial eta squared, with the benchmarks of .01 (small), .06 (medium) and .14 (large) following Cohen (1988). Where a significant interaction was found, independent-samples t-tests with Bonferroni correction were used to break down simple main effects. Fifth, four mediation analyses (H7-H10) were conducted with PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) with 10,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (BCIs). Mediation was supported when the 95% BCI of the indirect effect did not include 0 (Hayes, 2018; Zhao et al., 2023). All analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28) with the mediation models using PROCESS Macro v4.2.

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics by Experiment Condition

Condition	n	M PA	SD	M BA	SD	M PI	SD
Human creator + Static image	200	3.613	0.390	3.647	0.473	3.315	0.484
Human creator + Short video	200	4.442	0.289	4.350	0.356	4.280	0.385
AI-generated + Static image	200	2.197	0.478	2.597	0.528	2.160	0.406
AI-generated + Short video	200	2.912	0.498	3.172	0.510	2.750	0.477
Total	800	3.291	0.963	3.442	0.843	3.126	1.006

Note. PA = perceived authenticity; BA = brand authenticity; PI = purchase intent. All composites computed as the mean of three seven-point Likert items. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. The Total row reports grand means and standard deviations collapsed across conditions.

Results

Preliminary Analysis: Reliability and descriptive statistics

Scale reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Perceived authenticity ($\alpha = .754$) and purchase intent ($\alpha = .756$) had acceptable internal consistency, exceeding the conventional threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Brand authenticity ($\alpha = .655$) also failed to meet this threshold but was retained with this limitation noted, as all item-total correlations were above .45 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate Pearson correlations for all study variables.

All correlations were in the expected directions and were statistically significant at $p < .001$. Creator type was strongly negatively correlated with perceived authenticity ($r = -.79$), brand authenticity ($r = -.70$) and purchase intent ($r = -.75$) indicating that AI-generated content was consistently associated with lower scores on all outcome variables. Content modality was positively related to all three constructs ($r_s = .40-.43$), indicating that short video content was associated with higher scores than static images. Of the outcome constructs, perceived authenticity was most strongly correlated with purchase intent ($r = .77$) and brand authenticity ($r = .73$), supporting its hypothesised mediating role. Creator type and content modality were uncorrelated ($r = .00$), supporting the orthogonality of the experimental design.

Common method bias

Since all data were collected from a single online survey, common method bias (CMB) was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A principal components analysis of all multi-item scale indicators (nine items) was conducted with extraction forced to one factor. The single factor explained 53.2% of total variance, marginally exceeding the 50% conservative threshold. Accordingly, procedural remedies are noted: stimuli and response scales were clearly separated in the survey by explicit page breaks, reducing the opportunity for response contamination. CMB is acknowledged as a partial concern and is discussed as a limitation.

Table 3 - Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Intercorrelations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5
1. Creator type (0 = human, 1 = AI)	.50	.50	—	—				
2. Content modality (0 = static, 1 = video)	.50	.50	—	.000	—			
3. Perceived authenticity	3.29	.93	.754	-.79***	.41***	(.754)		
4. Brand authenticity	3.44	.80	.655	-.70***	.40***	.730***	(.655)	
5. Purchase intent	3.13	.90	.756	-.75***	.43***	.768***	.704***	(.756)

Note. N = 800. Cronbach's alpha coefficients appear in parentheses on the diagonal for multi-item scales. Creator type: 0 = human-generated, 1 = AI-generated. Content modality: 0 = static image, 1 = short video. PA = perceived authenticity; BA = brand authenticity; PI = purchase intent. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Manipulation Checks

A formal manipulation-check item confirming participants' subjective perception of content creator type and content modality was not administered. Both factors were instead defined by the objective characteristics of the stimuli presented to each experimental group: participants assigned to the AI-generated conditions viewed content produced using AI-generation tools, while participants assigned to the human-creator conditions viewed content created by a human creator; participants further viewed either a static image or a short video according to their assigned condition. This approach reflects the condition under which consumers typically encounter such content online, often without explicit attention to its production origin. The implications of this design choice, and its relationship to the pattern of effect sizes reported below, are addressed in the Discussion.

Assumption Testing

Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was conducted for each dependent variable prior to ANOVA. Results indicated that the equal-variance assumption was met for brand authenticity ($F < 2.00$, $p > .10$). Slight violations were observed for perceived authenticity and purchase intent; however, given the perfectly balanced design ($n = 200$ per cell), ANOVA is robust to moderate heteroscedasticity under these conditions (Field, 2018). Accordingly, standard two-way ANOVA results are reported for all dependent variables.

Main Effects and Interaction Effects

A series of 2 (creator type) $\times$ 2 (content modality) between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted for each dependent variable. Results are summarised in Table 5. Marginal means by condition are reported in Table 3 (presented in the Method section).

Perceived authenticity (H1, H2). Creator type produced a significant, large main effect, $F(1,796) = 2437.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .754$: human-generated content was rated more authentic ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.64$) than AI-generated content ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.55$), supporting H1. Content modality also produced a significant, large effect, $F(1,796) = 668.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .457$, with short video ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.78$) rated higher than static images ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.79$), supporting H2. The Creator Type $\times$ Content Modality interaction was not significant, $F(1,796) = 3.61$, $p = .058$, $\eta^2p = .005$.

Brand authenticity (H3, H4). Creator type produced a significant, large main effect, $F(1,796) = 1115.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .584$: human-generated content yielded higher brand authenticity ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.63$) than AI-generated content ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.57$), supporting H3. Content modality also produced a significant, large effect, $F(1,796) = 367.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .316$, with short video ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.66$) scoring higher than static images ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.72$), supporting H4. The Creator Type $\times$ Content Modality interaction was not significant, $F(1,796) = 3.70$, $p = .055$, $\eta^2p = .005$.

Purchase intent (H5, H6, H11). Creator type produced a significant, large main effect, $F(1,796) = 1859.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .700$: human-generated content yielded higher purchase intent ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.74$) than AI-generated content ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.60$), supporting H5. Content modality also produced a significant, large effect, $F(1,796) = 623.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .439$, with short video ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.89$) scoring higher than static images ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.81$), supporting H6. Critically, the Creator Type $\times$ Content Modality interaction was also significant, $F(1,796) = 36.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .044$ (small-to-medium), supporting H11; this is decomposed via simple effects analysis below.

Table 4 - Two-Way ANOVA Results for Perceived Authenticity, Brand Authenticity, and Purchase Intent

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2p
Panel A: Perceived Authenticity (Mediator)						
Creator type (CT)	434.14	1	434.14	2437.28	< .001	.754
Content modality (CM)	119.09	1	119.09	668.60	< .001	.457
CT $\times$ CM	0.64	1	0.64	3.61	.058	.005
Residual	141.79	796	0.18	—	—	—
Panel B: Brand Authenticity (DV1)						
Creator type (CT)	248.27	1	248.27	1115.89	< .001	.584
Content modality (CM)	81.71	1	81.71	367.24	< .001	.316
CT $\times$ CM	0.82	1	0.82	3.70	.055	.005
Residual	177.10	796	0.22	—	—	—
Panel C: Purchase Intent (DV2)						
Creator type (CT)	360.46	1	360.46	1859.55	< .001	.700
Content modality (CM)	120.90	1	120.90	623.71	< .001	.439
CT $\times$ CM†	7.03	1	7.03	36.27	< .001	.044
Residual	154.30	796	0.19	—	—	—

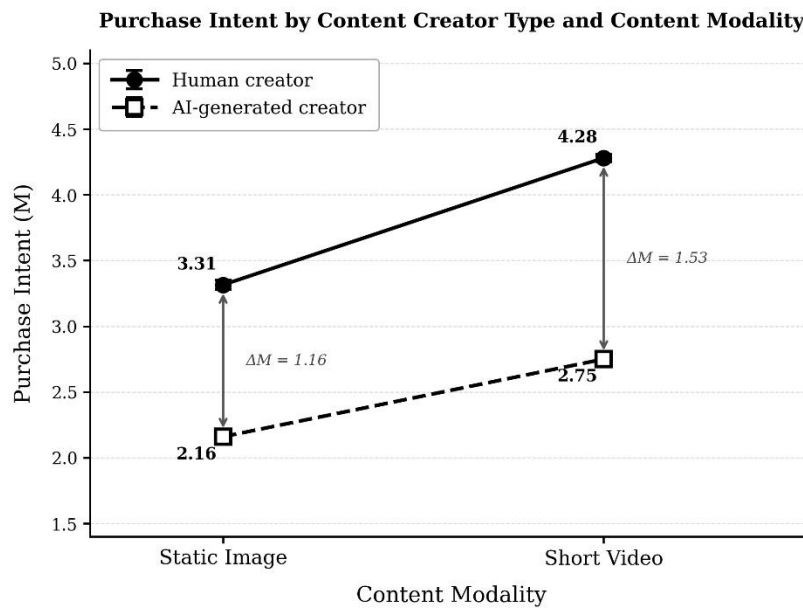
Note. $N = 800$; $n = 200$ per condition. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; η^2p = partial eta squared. Effect size benchmarks: .01 = small, .06 = medium, .14 = large (Cohen, 1988). †Significant Creator Type $\times$ Content Modality interaction; simple effects are reported in the text.

Simple Effects Analysis

To decompose the significant Creator Type $\times$ Content Modality interaction for purchase intent (H11), simple main effects were examined separately for each level of content modality using independent-samples t-tests with Bonferroni correction (adjusted $\alpha = .025$).

In the static image condition, human-generated content produced significantly higher purchase intent ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.48$) than AI-generated content ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.41$), $t(398) = 25.85$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.58$. In the short video condition, human-generated content again produced significantly higher purchase intent ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.39$) than AI-generated content ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.48$), $t(398) = 35.32$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 3.53$. Importantly, the difference between human and AI-content was significantly larger in the short video condition ($\Delta M = 1.53$) than in the static image condition ($\Delta M = 1.16$), in support of H11. The video format increased the human-AI gap in purchase intent by 32%, consistent with Social Presence Theory's prediction that richer media formats heighten the salience of the presence or absence of genuine human cues. The pattern of means is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Interaction plot: Purchase intent by Creator Type × Content Modality



Note. Error bars represent ± 1 SE. $n = 200$ per cell. $F(1, 796) = 36.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .044$.

Mediation Analysis

To test H7-H10, four mediation models were estimated with PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) with 10,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (BCIs). Each of the independent variables, creator type and content modality, was respectively treated as X, with perceived authenticity as the mediator (M) and brand authenticity and purchase intent as dependent variables (Y). Full results are given in Table 6.

Creator type effects mediated by perceived authenticity (H7, H8). The a path from creator type to perceived authenticity was significant and negative ($B = -1.47$, $SE = .04$, $t(798) = -36.40$, $p < .001$), suggesting that AI-generated content significantly decreased perceived authenticity relative to human-generated content. The b path from perceived authenticity to brand authenticity, controlling for creator type, was significant and positive ($B = 0.40$, $SE = .03$, $t(797) = 12.51$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of creator type on brand authenticity through perceived authenticity was significant ($ab = -0.60$, Boot SE = .05, 95% BCI [-0.70, -0.50]) with zero outside the interval, supporting H7. When controlling for perceived authenticity, the direct effect of creator type on brand authenticity remained significant ($c' = -0.52$, $p < .001$), providing evidence for partial mediation: Perceived authenticity explains a substantial part of the creator-type effect, but other paths are also in play.

The b path from perceived authenticity to purchase intent was significant for purchase intent ($B = 0.45$, $SE = .03$, $t(797) = 13.57$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of creator type on purchase intent through perceived authenticity was significant ($ab = -.66$, Boot SE = .05, 95% BCI [-.76, -.57]), supporting H8. Again, the direct effect came out significant ($c' = -0.68$, $p < .001$) indicating partial mediation. Overall, the findings support H7 and H8: perceived authenticity partially mediates the negative effect of AI-generated content on both brand authenticity and purchase intention.

Content modality effects mediated by perceived authenticity (H9, H10). The path from content modality to perceived authenticity was significant and positive ($B = 0.77$, $SE = .06$, $t(798) = 12.84$, $p < .001$), confirming that short video content increased perceived authenticity compared to static images. The b path from perceived authenticity to brand authenticity, when controlling for content modality, was significant ($B = 0.58$, $SE = .02$, $t(797) = 25.92$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of content

modality on brand authenticity via perceived authenticity was significant ($ab = 0.45$, Boot SE = .04, 95% BCI [0.37, 0.53]), providing support for H9. The direct effect was still significant ($c' = 0.19$, $p < .001$), suggesting partial mediation.

The b path from perceived authenticity to purchase intent was significant ($B = 0.68$, SE = .02, $t(797) = 29.04$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of content modality via perceived authenticity was significant ($ab = 0.53$, Boot SE = .05, 95% BCI [0.44, 0.62]), supporting H10. The direct effect was significant and moderate ($c' = 0.25$, $p < .001$) and indicative of partial mediation. Thus, H9 and H10 are supported: perceived authenticity partially mediates the effect of short video content on brand authenticity and purchase intent. The finding that all four mediation models show partial rather than full mediation suggests that mechanisms beyond perceived authenticity including direct social presence effects and source credibility judgements independently contribute to brand and behavioural outcomes.

Table 5 - PROCESS Macro Model 4 Mediation Analysis Results

Path	B	SE	t (df)	p	95% BCI [LL, UL]
Model 1: Creator Type → PA → Brand Authenticity					
a path: Creator type → PA	-1.47	.04	-36.40 (798)	< .001	—
b path: PA → Brand auth. (controlling CT)	0.40	.03	12.51 (797)	< .001	—
Direct effect (c'): Creator type → Brand auth.	-0.52	.06	-8.63 (797)	< .001	—
Total effect (c): Creator type → Brand auth.	-1.11	.04	-27.62 (798)	< .001	—
Indirect effect (ab): CT → PA → Brand auth.	-0.60	.05	—	—	[-0.70, -0.50]
Model 2: Creator Type → PA → Purchase Intent					
a path: Creator type → PA	-1.47	.04	-36.40 (798)	< .001	—
b path: PA → Purchase intent (controlling CT)	0.45	.03	13.57 (797)	< .001	—
Direct effect (c'): Creator type → Purchase intent	-0.68	.06	-10.98 (797)	< .001	—
Total effect (c): Creator type → Purchase intent	-1.34	.04	-31.93 (798)	< .001	—
Indirect effect (ab): CT → PA → Purchase intent	-0.66	.05	—	—	[-0.76, -0.57]
Model 3: Content Modality → PA → Brand Authenticity					
a path: Content modality → PA	0.77	.06	12.84 (798)	< .001	—
b path: PA → Brand auth. (controlling CM)	0.58	.02	25.92 (797)	< .001	—
Direct effect (c'): Content modality → Brand auth.	0.19	.04	4.55 (797)	< .001	—
Total effect (c): Content modality → Brand auth.	0.64	.05	12.37 (798)	< .001	—
Indirect effect (ab): CM → PA → Brand auth.	0.45	.04	—	—	[0.37, 0.53]
Model 4: Content Modality → PA → Purchase Intent					
a path: Content modality → PA	0.77	.06	12.84 (798)	< .001	—
b path: PA → Purchase intent (controlling CM)	0.68	.02	29.04 (797)	< .001	—
Direct effect (c'): Content modality → Purchase intent	0.25	.04	5.73 (797)	< .001	—

Total effect (c): Content modality → Purchase intent	0.78	.06	13.60 (798)	< .001	—
Indirect effect (ab): CM → PA → Purchase intent	0.53	.05	—	—	[0.44, 0.62]

Note. N = 800. PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018); bootstrap samples = 10,000; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (BCIs) reported for indirect effects only. CT = content creator type (0 = human, 1 = AI-generated); CM = content modality (0 = static image, 1 = short video); PA = perceived authenticity; BA = brand authenticity; PI = purchase intent. All direct and total effects tested via ordinary least-squares regression; t-values with degrees of freedom are in parentheses. BCI = bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Indirect effects (ab) significant when BCI excludes zero. All four models indicate partial mediation (direct effects remain significant). B coefficients are unstandardised.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

All eleven hypotheses received empirical support; Table 7 presents the complete summary:

Table 7 - Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Outcome	Hypothesis statement	Key finding	Supported
H1	PA	Human content > AI content on PA.	M_Human=4.03, F(1,796)=2437.28, $\eta^2p=.754$	✓ Yes
H2	PA	Short video > static image on PA.	M_Video=3.68, F(1,796)=668.60, $\eta^2p=.457$	✓ Yes
H3	BA	Human content > AI content on BA.	M_Human=3.97, F(1,796)=1115.89, $\eta^2p=.584$	✓ Yes
H4	BA	Short video > static image on BA.	M_Video=3.76, F(1,796)=367.24, $\eta^2p=.316$	✓ Yes
H5	PI	Human content > AI content on PI.	M_Human=3.80, F(1,796)=1859.55, $\eta^2p=.700$	✓ Yes
H6	PI	Short video > static image on PI.	M_Video=3.52, F(1,796)=623.71, $\eta^2p=.439$	✓ Yes
H7	BA	PA mediates CT → BA.	ab=-.60, 95% BCI [-.70, -.50]; partial mediation	✓ Yes
H8	PI	PA mediates CT → PI.	ab=-.66, 95% BCI [-.76, -.57]; partial mediation	✓ Yes
H9	BA	PA mediates CM → BA.	ab=.45, 95% BCI [.37, .53]; partial mediation	✓ Yes
H10	PI	PA mediates CM → PI.	ab=.53, 95% BCI [.44, .62]; partial mediation	✓ Yes
H11	PI	CT × CM interaction stronger for PI in video vs. static.	$\Delta M_{Video}=1.53$ vs. $\Delta M_{Static}=1.16$; F(1,796)=36.27, $\eta^2p=.044$	✓ Yes

Note. N = 800. H = hypothesis number. PA = perceived authenticity; BA = brand authenticity; PI = purchase intent. CT = content creator type; CM = content modality. η^2p = partial eta squared. ΔM = mean difference between human and AI conditions. BCI = bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (95%). All hypotheses are supported (✓).

Discussion

This study examined the joint effects of content creator type (AI-generated vs. human) and content modality (static image vs. short video) on perceived authenticity, brand authenticity, and purchase intent in luxury advertising, and tested perceived authenticity as the mechanism that links these factors to brand-level and behavioural outcomes. All 11 hypotheses were confirmed. Theoretical and managerial implications of these findings, limitations of the study and future research directions are discussed in the next sections.

Theoretical Implications

The results strongly support the theoretical framework. Consistent with Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976), both content creator type and content modality exerted large, independent effects on perceived authenticity ($\eta^2p = .754$ and $.457$, respectively): human-generated content and short-video format each signalled a degree of human presence that static AI-generated images could not replicate. This extends Kim's (2022) finding that social presence cues are a key antecedent of downstream brand engagement on Instagram, from a single-platform influencer setting to a luxury-brand experimental context.

The mediation results generalised the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) to the domain of AI-content. Perceived authenticity partially mediated the effects of both creator type and content modality on brand authenticity and purchase intent (H7–H10). This indicates that a large part of the effects of creator type and modality operate by first impacting the perceived authenticity of the content, which then affects evaluations of the brand itself and subsequent purchase intentions. Theoretically, it is informative that mediation was partial rather than full across all four paths. Direct effects of creator type and modality on brand authenticity and purchase intent were still significant when controlling for perceived authenticity, suggesting that other source credibility dimensions may have an independent explanatory weight. For example, the dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness identified by Ohanian (1990) could be considered. This is in line with the meta-analytic result of Zhao et al. (2023), who found source credibility to be the strongest predictor of influencer endorsement effectiveness in the general influencer marketing literature. Perceived authenticity appears to be one important channel through which credibility translates into brand outcomes, but not the only one. Future research could test Ohanian's (1990) full source credibility sub-dimensions as parallel mediators to perceived authenticity, to further explain which particular credibility judgements account for the remaining direct effects.

The significant interaction of creator type and content modality on purchase intent (H11) provides a new extension to Social Presence Theory. The results suggest that content modality moderates the salience of creator type, rather than creator type and content modality being independent and additive presence cues. The difference in purchase intent between human and AI was 32% higher in the short-video condition than the static-image condition. This means that richer media formats do not just add to source cues, they enhance them. The video format magnified the authenticity plus of human created content and amplified the authenticity deficit of AI-generated content. To the best of our knowledge, this moderation pattern has not been reported in previous luxury advertising research and thus constitutes a theoretical contribution per se, suggesting that future applications of Social Presence Theory should take source type and media richness into account as interactive instead of mere additive predictors of consumer response.

Managerial Implications

The results therefore show a clear hierarchy of content strategies for luxury brand managers. Human-made short-form videos showed the highest perceived authenticity, brand authenticity, and purchase intent, whereas AI-generated static images had the lowest. In between these extremes, human-made static images performed better than AI-generated short video on all three outcomes. The ordering suggests authenticity-sensitive outcomes are more sensitive to creator type than content modality, but modality has a strong independent effect that managers should not ignore in their distribution of production budgets.

Here is a concrete, actionable insight for brands already using AI-generated content for efficiency or scale: the interaction of creator-type $\times$ content-modality (H11). Because the penalty to purchase intent associated with AI was much smaller in the static-image condition than in the short-video condition, brands restricted to using AI-generated content may reduce the authenticity and purchase-intent cost incurred by placing that content in static formats rather than video. Brands with access to genuinely human-made content stand to benefit the most, however, if they prioritise that content for short-video placements where the authenticity premium is highest. In practice, this means a portfolio strategy: AI-generated assets for static, lower-stakes touchpoints and human-created content for high-visibility video placements.

More broadly, the size of the creator effect ($\eta^2p = .58-.75$ across outcomes) suggests that the decision to use AI-generated content for luxury brand communications has consumer perception implications that efficiency gains alone might not compensate for. This corroborates the findings of Pangarkar and Rathee (2023) that perceived genuineness of the brand communication has a significant impact on the buying decisions of luxury consumers. As AI-generation tools become more accessible and widespread in the luxury sector, brand managers should think of the choice between AI-generated and human-created content – and the format in which either is deployed – as a strategic decision with measurable downstream effects on brand equity and purchase behaviour and not a purely operational or cost-driven one.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the effect sizes observed for creator type ($\eta^2_p = .58-.75$) are substantially larger than those typically reported in advertising experiments. This pattern is consistent with the experimental design, which contrasted fully AI-generated content with fully human-created content a stark and increasingly common real-world contrast, but one that may not capture intermediate cases such as AI-assisted human content or heavily post-processed human photography. Future research should examine a wider range of creator-type conditions, including hybrid human-AI production, to determine whether the authenticity penalty observed here scales continuously with the degree of AI involvement or instead reflects a more categorical human-versus-machine judgement.

Second, a formal manipulation-check item confirming participants' subjective perception of creator type and content modality was not administered. Both factors were instead defined by the objective characteristics of the stimuli presented to each experimental group that is, participants in the AI-generated conditions viewed content that was, in fact, AI-generated, regardless of whether they consciously identified it as such. While this approach reflects the condition under which consumers typically encounter such content (often without explicit attention to its origin), it leaves open the question of whether conscious recognition of AI origin is necessary for the observed effects to emerge, or whether perceived authenticity responds to subtler cues independent of explicit attribution. The very large effect sizes reported here may partly reflect the fact that the AI-generated stimuli were, by construction, unambiguously different from the human-generated stimuli along multiple dimensions simultaneously. Future studies should incorporate perception-based manipulation checks, and should consider designs in which AI-generated and human-generated stimuli are matched more closely on surface-level production quality, to isolate the effect of creator type from general quality differences between conditions.

Third, common method bias cannot be completely dismissed because all measures were derived from a single self-report survey. A Harman's single factor test showed that one factor accounted for 53.2% of the variance across the multi-item scales, slightly above the more conservative cutoff of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The experimental manipulation of creator type and content modality provides some protection against common method bias for the main effects (H1–H6) because these independent variables were assigned by the researchers and not self-reported. However, the relationships between perceived authenticity, brand authenticity and purchase intent that are central to the mediation analyses (H7–H10) were all measured using the same self-report instrument, and shared method variance may inflate these associations to some extent. Future research could alleviate this concern by employing time-separated measurement or independent behavioural indicators of purchase intent such as actual click-through or purchase data.

Fourth, because stimuli were drawn from an existing, recognisable brand rather than a fabricated one, pre-existing brand attitudes could not be experimentally controlled and represent an uncontrolled source of variance. Although random assignment to condition should distribute any such prior attitudes evenly across the four cells on average, prior brand familiarity or attitude was not measured and therefore could not be statistically controlled at the individual level. This represents a trade-off between the ecological validity gained from using authentic, brand-published content and the experimental control achievable with a fully fictitious brand. Future research should either measure and control for prior brand attitude, or replicate these effects using a fictitious brand to isolate the causal effect of creator type and content modality from any confounding influence of pre-existing brand perceptions.

Fifth, the reliability of the brand authenticity scale was slightly below the conventional threshold ($\alpha = .655$). While item-total correlations were above recommended minimums and the scale was retained following established guidance for adapted instruments (Hair et al., 2019), this measurement limitation should be considered when interpreting effect sizes involving brand authenticity, and future research should consider confirmatory factor analysis or further scale refinement to improve the psychometric properties of this construct.

Finally, the sample was restricted to one national and cultural context. The attitudes towards AI-generated content, the norms of luxury consumption, and the patterns of social media usage differ substantially by market, and the extent (though probably not the direction) of the effects observed here may be different in other cultural contexts. Confidence in the generalisability of these findings would be enhanced by replication in other cultures.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that content creator type and content modality together influence perceived authenticity, brand authenticity and purchase intent in luxury advertising, with perceived authenticity partially mediating both effects. These findings provide both theoretical grounding and practical advice on how to navigate the authenticity paradox at the heart of this shift, as luxury brands increasingly deploy AI-generated content.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at Mendeley Data. Data were anonymised prior to deposit in accordance with participant consent agreements. It can be accessed from this link as well

<https://data.mendeley.com/preview/zr3bmgb37f?a=5e2e085c-3c70-4824-b5ae-1d8afdcocac6>

Declarations

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships or professional linkages that could have appeared to influence the work, analysis, or findings reported in this study.

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Non-Disclosure & Data Confidentiality Statement

The authors state that all primary research data collected from respondents in this study were maintained with strict confidentiality and anonymity, in accordance with research ethics standards. No proprietary or sensitive institutional information was compromised during the preparation of this manuscript.

Appendix

Stimuli 1 (AI Static)



Stimuli 3 (Human Static)



Stimuli 2: AI Short Video

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/KPkHUs7Nflg>

Stimuli 4: Human Short Video

YouTube Link: <https://youtube.com/shorts/rUV12xRTs4Q>

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