

2nd Conference on
Influencer Marketing & Digital Regulation

Rethinking Influence in the Age of AI:

The Evolving Role of Human and Virtual Influencers in Digital Persuasion

CALL FOR PAPERS

AULA MAGNA

Università degli Studi Internazionali di Roma - UNINT

FRIDAY

DECEMBER 11
2026

PROGRAM

14.30 – 15.15 / Aula Magna

Plenary Session

Keynote speaker

Alice Audrezet

Institut Français de la Mode (France)



15.30 – 16.45

Parallel sessions

Chairs

Giada Mainolfi - University of International Studies of Rome (UNINT)

Anna Carla Nazzaro - University of International Studies of Rome (UNINT)

Letizia Lo Presti - LUMSA University of Rome

Donata Tania Vergura – University of Parma

17.00

Closing session

Under the patronage of:



CONFERENCE THEME

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become central actors in contemporary digital ecosystems, **reshaping how brands communicate with consumers, build relationships, and generate engagement**. By combining commercial communication with personal narratives, entertainment, and expertise, influencers have blurred the boundaries between advertising, content creation, electronic word-of-mouth, and interpersonal communication (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). As influencer marketing becomes increasingly professionalised, the proliferation of sponsored content and rising consumer awareness of persuasive intent challenge established assumptions about credibility, authenticity, trust, and parasocial relationships. Commercial collaborations may clash with followers' expectations of authenticity, requiring influencers to actively manage their perceived authenticity (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020). The integration of commercial and non-commercial content also raises questions about transparency, advertising disclosure, consumer protection, and the legal status of influencer-generated content (Mainolfi, Nazzaro, Vergura & Lo Presti, 2026).

This transformation is accelerated by **Artificial Intelligence and the emergence of virtual influencers** (Audrezet et al., 2025). Unlike human influencers, AI-driven influencers can be designed, controlled, and continuously adapted by brands, agencies, or developers. Their artificial nature raises new questions about perceived humanness, authenticity, credibility, empathy, and consumers' ability to recognise persuasive intent, requiring a reconsideration of how source characteristics affect consumer responses (Thomas & Fowler, 2021), as well as greater conceptual clarity on the distinctions among human influencers, virtual influencers, AI-assisted creators, and fully AI-generated entities.

These forms of influence also **generate novel legal challenges**. Open questions concern the disclosure of commercial communication, responsibility for AI-generated content, misleading practices, intellectual property, personality rights, data protection, platform responsibility, and the transparency obligations of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689). In Europe, influencers engaging in commercial activities may qualify as traders and are subject to consumer protection rules, including the transparent disclosure of advertising. Virtual influencers further strain existing legal categories by making it less clear who communicates, who exercises control, who benefits, and who should be held accountable.

The convergence of influencer marketing and Artificial Intelligence therefore calls for dialogue beyond disciplinary boundaries. **Marketing research** can shed light on how consumers perceive and respond to human and artificial sources of influence, including effects on authenticity, trust, engagement, and brand outcomes. **Legal scholarship** can examine whether existing frameworks adequately address AI-generated content and allocate responsibility among influencers, brands, agencies, platforms, and technology providers. The conference provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, legal experts, policymakers, and industry actors to advance theoretical, empirical, and regulatory perspectives on social media influence, virtual identities, Artificial Intelligence, and transparency.

Call for contributions

Scholars, doctoral students, and practitioners are invited to submit papers addressing **social media influencers, virtual influencers, and AI-driven forms of digital influence**, primarily from **marketing or legal perspectives**. Interdisciplinary contributions bridging these two core areas with related fields are also encouraged. We welcome:

- empirical research employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.
- conceptual and theoretical papers.
- legal and regulatory analyses.
- comparative and cross-country studies.
- interdisciplinary perspectives.

Suggested topics

- Social media influencers and consumer behaviour including credibility, authenticity, trust, engagement, and persuasion
- Influencer-brand relationships, endorsement effectiveness, and brand outcomes
- Sponsored content, advertising recognition, transparency, disclosure, and consumer responses
- Parasocial relationships, identification, and influencer-follower interactions
- Influencer strategies, creator economy, emerging business models, and performance measurement
- Human versus virtual influencers: perceived authenticity, credibility, trust, and persuasive effectiveness
- Anthropomorphism, perceived humanness, empathy, social presence, and the uncanny valley
- AI-generated and AI-driven influencers, generative AI, synthetic identities, and AI-assisted content creation
- Transparency and disclosure of virtual and AI-generated identities
- Human-AI collaboration in influencer content creation and management
- Legal and regulatory frameworks for social media, virtual, and AI-driven influencers
- Consumer protection, misleading commercial practices, responsibility, and liability
- Intellectual property, image and personality rights, privacy, and data protection
- Platform governance, algorithmic transparency, and accountability
- Protection of minors and vulnerable consumers
- Ethical and societal implications of influencer marketing and AI-mediated influence
- National, European, and international regulation, self-regulation, and industry standards

Publication opportunities

Accepted contributions will be included in the **Conference Book of Abstracts**, which will collect the abstracts of studies presented during the conference. For the **best contributions**, agreements with international publishers are currently being explored to provide potential opportunities for subsequent publication.

Submission guidelines

Authors are invited to submit a **short paper of 5 pages** (approximately **20,000 characters, including spaces**). The five-page limit applies to the **main body of the paper** and does not include the **cover page, tables, figures, references, and appendices**. The short paper should clearly present:

- Research objectives and/or research questions.
- Originality and contribution of the study.
- Theoretical or legal background.
- Methodology or research approach, where applicable.
- Main findings.
- Theoretical, managerial, legal, and/or policy implications.
- Conclusions.

Keywords: up to 6

Language: English

File format: Word (.doc/.docx)

Font: Times New Roman, 12 pt

Line spacing: 1.5

Margins: 2.5 cm on all sides

Referencing style: APA

Deadlines

Deadline for paper submission: November 5, 2026

Notification of acceptance: November 20, 2026

Submission e-mails: Papers should be sent to:

giada.mainolfi@unint.eu and annacarla.nazzaro@unint.eu

Scientific Committee

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