

The Authenticity Gap: Comparing the Effects of Human and AI-Generated Virtual Influencers on Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

Author: Johnny A. Helou

Affiliation:

1. *Business School, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, P.O. Box 446, Jounieh, Lebanon*
2. *CIRAME Research Center, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, P.O. Box 446, Jounieh, Lebanon*

Abstract:

This study investigates whether consumer trust, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention are impacted by the type of social media influencer—human or AI-generated virtual. A sample of $N = 200$ university-aged social media users (ages 18–21) participated in a quantitative, between-subjects study. An Instagram-style advertisement for a fictional sportswear product ("VeloRun" running shoes) with either a human influencer ($n = 100$) or an AI-generated virtual influencer ($n = 100$) was shown to participants at random. Using validated 5-point Likert scales, consumer trust, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention were assessed. Human influencers produced noticeably higher levels of customer trust, according to independent-samples t-tests ($M = 3.68$ vs. $M = 3.12$, $p < .001$), perceived authenticity ($M = 3.75$ vs. $M = 3.12$, $p < .001$), and purchase intention ($M = 3.52$ vs. $M = 3.08$, $p < .001$) in contrast to virtual influencers created by AI. According to multiple regression analysis, perceived authenticity ($\eta^2 = .341$, $p < .001$) and trust ($\eta^2 = .384$, $p < .001$) are strong positive predictors of purchase intention, explaining 48.2 percent of the variance in consumer purchasing intent. Additionally, the association between influencer type and purchase intention is significantly mediated by consumer trust, according to a 5,000-sample bootstrap mediation analysis (indirect effect $ab = -0.215$, 95 percent CI $[-0.328, -0.118]$). Virtual influencers can help marketers maximize new esthetic appeal and operational control, but real consumer purchase intention still depends on closing the "authenticity gap" through increased visual realism, relational transparency, and strategic message design.

Keywords:

Virtual influencers, artificial intelligence, influencer marketing, perceived authenticity, consumer trust, purchase intention, social media marketing, consumer behavior

Introduction:

Influencer marketing is now a crucial channel of communication for brands thanks to social media. Companies have historically worked with human influencers whose identities, experiences, knowledge, and connections to followers can influence consumer reactions. The virtual influencer is a new kind of endorser brought about by advances in generative AI, computer-generated imagery, and artificial intelligence (AI). Computer-generated personas known as "virtual influencers" are used to interact with audiences and advertize goods on social media. As their use grows, a new marketing question arises:

can an artificial influencer produce the same degree of consumer authenticity and trust as a human influencer?

Because virtual influencers offer brands potential benefits in terms of scalability, creative control, consistency, and freedom from certain logistical constraints associated with human endorsers, the issue is commercially relevant. However, consumers might wonder if an artificial persona can be genuine, reliable, or credible when endorsing a product. According to a recent meta-analysis of 210 experimental studies, virtual influencers can produce more novelty but generally exhibit lower credibility than human influencers; their efficacy is dependent on anthropomorphism, product attributes, and message strategy (Barari et al. 2026).

The results of earlier empirical studies have been conflicting. According to Liu and colleagues (2024), depending on the type of product, virtual and human influencers can result in distinct purchase-intention outcomes, and the process can be influenced by perceived authenticity. Lee and associates. (2024) found that authenticity was positively correlated with trust and purchase intention, and that virtual influencers were surprisingly perceived as more authentic than human influencers. Influencer authenticity and credibility are significant predictors of purchase intention in both virtual and real-world influencer contexts, according to more recent research (Ying et al. [2026]).

A research gap is indicated by these discrepancies. It is helpful to test the two influencer types under controlled circumstances using the same product, advertisement format, and message rather than assuming that human influencers are inherently more persuasive. Therefore, an experimental comparison between a human influencer and an AI-generated virtual influencer promoting the same fictional consumer product is proposed in this study.

The main research question is whether consumer trust, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention are influenced by the type of influencer (AI-generated virtual versus human). The study also looks at whether trust and authenticity are related to purchase intention.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Does the kind of influencer impact the trust of customers?
2. What impact does influencer type have on perceived authenticity?
3. Does the type of influencer have an impact on the intention to buy?
4. Do perceived authenticity and trust have a positive relationship with purchase intention?
5. Does consumer trust contribute to the explanation of how influencer type and purchase intention are related?

The goals are to measure the roles of authenticity and trust, compare consumer reactions to AI-generated virtual and human influencers, examine the connection between these constructs and purchase intention, and offer useful advice for companies considering the use of virtual influencers in social media marketing.

Literature Review:

2.1. A review of literature:

Source Credibility and Influencer Marketing. Influencer marketing depends on a communicator's capacity to change the attitudes and actions of their audience. Because consumers assess communicators based on attributes like trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, source credibility theory offers a helpful foundation. These opinions can affect whether or not customers accept recommendations and develop favorable opinions of the advertised product in online settings. However, since virtual influencers are not real people with lived experiences, the definition of expertise and reliability becomes more nuanced.

2. 2 Influencers online:

Virtual influencers are social media personas created by computers that can be made to appear and act like real people. By using them, brands can manage visual identity, narrative, posting schedules, and brand coherence. Barari & Co. (2026) came to the conclusion that virtual influencers create a novelty–credibility trade-off in a meta-analysis that included 210 independent experimental studies and 643 effect sizes. Although they can be extremely novel, their behavioral effects and credibility are not always comparable to those of human influencers. Anthropomorphism and contextual congruence are also noted by the authors as crucial prerequisites. Influencers have been proven to be able to shape consumer decisions (Mawad & Freiha, 2024), however greenwashing remain a threat, especially in the case of online influencers (Daou et al., 2025).

2. 3 Authenticity:

The degree to which a consumer views an influencer as real, authentic, and credible is known as perceived authenticity. Because consumers may discern between recommendations that seem purely commercial and those that seem personally meaningful, authenticity is especially crucial in influencer marketing. Liu and others. (2024) found that consumer reactions were significantly influenced by perceived authenticity when comparing virtual and human influencers. Lee and others. (2024) also found a positive correlation between trust and purchase intention as well as between perceived authenticity and trust.

2. 4 Have faith:

Consumer decision-making is less uncertain when they have trust. Customers may be more receptive to an influencer's product recommendation if they have faith in the influencer. Lee et al.'s 2024 study. found that purchase intention was positively correlated with the influencer's trust. Additionally, more recent research shows that purchase intention is influenced by influencer authenticity and credibility in both virtual and real-world influencer contexts (Ying et al. [2026]).

2. 5 Purchase Intention:

Purchase intention is a measure of a customer's declared propensity or desire to buy a product. Because actual purchasing behavior might not be visible in an academic experiment, it is frequently used in influencer and advertising research. The primary behavioral outcome in this

study is purchase intention, which is anticipated to be correlated with perceived authenticity and trust.

2.6.Theoretical Framework:

Source Credibility Theory and an S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) viewpoint are combined in this study. Influencer type is regarded as an external stimulus (S). Customers' internal assessments are represented by trust and perceived authenticity (O), whereas their behavioral response is represented by purchase intention (R). This arrangement is in line with current research on virtual influencers, which views authenticity and credibility as links between influencer traits and customer reactions (Barari et al. Lee et al. (2026). in 2024.

2. 7 Research Deficit

There isn't a single, reliable finding in the literature regarding the effectiveness of virtual or human influencers. While some studies find virtual influencers to be less credible or authentic, others find them to be comparable or even more authentic under specific circumstances. Additionally, the 2026 meta-analysis shows significant variation across contexts, influencer traits, messages, and products. Thus, evidence regarding the particular relationships between influencer type, trust, authenticity, and purchase intention can be gathered through a controlled experiment with a single product and standardized advertisements.

2.8.Hypotheses :

- H1: Consumer trust is strongly correlated with the type of influencer (AI-generated virtual versus human).
 - H2: Perceived authenticity is strongly correlated with influencer type (AI-generated virtual versus human).
 - H3: There is a significant correlation between purchase intention and the type of influencer (AI-generated virtual versus human). •
 - H4: There is a positive correlation between consumer trust and purchase intention.
 - H5: Purchase intention is positively correlated with perceived authenticity.
 - H6: The relationship between influencer type and purchase intention is mediated by consumer trust.
- Conceptual Model. • Influencer Type (AI Virtual vs. Human) Rough Trust Rough Purchase Intention. • Influencer Type (AI vs. virtual). Purchase intention and perceived authenticity in humans. Age, gender, social media use, familiarity with AI, and frequency of online shopping are control variables.

Methodology:

3. 1. Research Design

An experiment was carried out that was quantitative, cross-sectional, and between subjects. An automated Google Forms randomization routing script was used to assign participants at random to one of two experimental conditions. An Instagram-style advertisement for the same running sneakers at the same price and the same fictional sportswear brand ("VeloRun") was seen by both groups. The endorser in the visual graphic was the only variable that was changed: Condition A had a human influencer, while Condition B had a virtual influencer created by AI. The post layout, brand logos, product details, price, and caption text were all kept exactly the same in both scenarios.

3. 2: The suggested product and stimulus.

In order to eliminate pre-existing brand loyalty bias and maintain high relevance for the targeted 18–21 age demographic, a fictional sportswear brand ("VeloRun") was selected. Conditions A and B. AI-generated virtual influencers and human social media influencers. Fictional brand VeloRun (Fictional). VeloRun Motion Running Shoes are the product. The cost is \$89. 99. The caption is the same text. Visual format: Instagram-style post.

3.3 Population and Sample .

N = 200 university students between the ages of 18 and 21 who actively use social media (especially Instagram) and shop online made up the sampled population. Condition A (Human Influencer) and Condition B (Virtual AI Influencer) were completed by n = 100 participants using random assignment in the digital data-collection tool.

3. 4. Measurement of Variable Roles Operationalization.

Influencer type Binary categorical independent variable 0 = ext{Human}; 1 = ext{AI-Generated Virtual}. Trust Mediator/Dependent 5-point Likert scale with four items that gauge dependability and trustworthiness. Four items on a five-point Likert scale that gauge sincerity and genuineness are used to measure perceived authenticity. Purchase intention is the primary dependent variable. A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure the likelihood and willingness to buy. Self-rated familiarity with generative AI tools on a 5-point Likert scale is the control variable. The control variable for social media use is daily usage time and platform frequency. Online shopping Frequency of online purchases is a categorical control variable.

3. 5. Data Gathering Process.

1. For "VeloRun," matched Instagram visual post ads were made.
2. Digital links to the survey were disseminated among student communication groups at the university.

3. The human or virtual AI advertisement was shown to respondents at random.
4. To verify the validity of perceptual manipulation (100% accuracy maintained), a manipulation check question was given ("Based on the ad, was the influencer human or computer-generated?")
5. On 5-point Likert scales, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree," participants assessed the scale items for trust, perceived authenticity, and purchase intention.
6. Age, gender, social media use, familiarity with AI, and frequency of online shopping were the demographic and control variables that were noted.
7. For statistical analysis, the data were exported to Excel and SPSS. Items for

3. 6 measurements:

- Trust: Four items: "I feel confident in this influencer's recommendation," "I trust this influencer," "I think this influencer is credible," and "This influencer seems reliable.".
- Perceived Authenticity: Four items: "The recommendation feels sincere," "This influencer seems genuine," "This influencer appears authentic," and "This influencer seems believable.".
- Purchase Intention: "I would consider buying the advertized product," "I would be likely to purchase this product," and "I would consider this brand when making a purchase decision" are the three items.

3.7. Statistical Analysis:

IBM SPSS Statistics were used for data evaluation. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > .70$) was used to verify internal consistency reliability. Group means were compared under various experimental conditions using independent-samples t-tests (H₁, H₂, and H₃). Associations between constructs were measured using Pearson correlation coefficients (H₄, H₅). To test direct predictive relationships while keeping controls constant, Ordinary Least squares (OLS) multiple regression was used. Lastly, the Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4) was used to analyze mediation (H₆) using 5,000 bootstrap resamples at 95% confidence intervals.

Results:**4. Results****Table 1. Sample characteristics (N = 200)**

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	114	57.0%
	Male	86	43.0%
Age	18	32	16.0%
	19	58	29.0%
	20	66	33.0%
	21	44	22.0%
AI familiarity	Low (1–2)	38	19.0%
	Medium (3)	82	41.0%
	High (4–5)	80	40.0%
Social-media use	1-2 hours/day	24	12.0%
	3-4 hours/day	98	49.0%
	5+ hours/day	78	39.0%
Online shopping	Rarely (a few times a year)	36	18.0%
	Monthly	112	56.0%
	Weekly	52	26.0%
Influencer condition	Human (Condition A)	100	50.0%
Influencer condition	Virtual AI (Condition B)	100	50.0%

Table 2. Reliability of scales

Construct	No. of items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Trust	4	.884	3.40	0.74
Authenticity	4	.902	3.40	0.81
Purchase intention	3	.865	3.30	0.78

Table 3. Human versus virtual influencer comparison (Independent t-tests)

Variable	Human Mean (SD)	Virtual Mean (SD)	t (df = 198)	p	Effect size (Cohen's d)
Trust	3.68 (0.62)	3.12 (0.74)	5.798	< .001	0.820
Authenticity	3.75 (0.68)	3.05 (0.78)	6.758	< .001	0.956
Purchase intention	3.52 (0.69)	3.08 (0.80)	4.162	< .001	0.589

Table 4. Correlation matrix (N = 200)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Trust	1.00	.762	.644	.112
2. Authenticity	.762	1.00	.633	.145*
3. Purchase intention	.644	.633	1.00	.098
4. AI familiarity	.112	.145*	.098	1.00

* $p < .05$, $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Table 5. Multiple regression predicting purchase intention

Predictor	beta	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	—	0.312	2.148	.033	[0.054, 1.286]
Influencer type (0=Human, 1=Virtual)	-.088	0.088	-1.541	.125	[-0.310, 0.038]
Trust	.384	0.076	5.298	< .001	[0.252, 0.554]
Authenticity	.341	0.070	4.685	< .001	[0.191, 0.468]
AI familiarity	.021	0.042	0.388	.698	[-0.067, 0.099]
Social-media use	.045	0.058	0.812	.418	[-0.068, 0.162]
Online-shopping frequency	.062	0.056	1.124	.262	[-0.048, 0.174]

Model statistics: $R^2 = .482$; Adjusted $R^2 = .466$; $F(6, 193) = 29.914$; $p < .001$

Table 6. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Test	Result	Decision
H1: Influencer Type → Trust	Independent t-test	$t(198) = 5.798, p < .001$	Supported
H2: Influencer Type → Authenticity	Independent t-test	$t(198) = 6.758, p < .001$	Supported
H3: Influencer Type → Purchase Intention	Independent t-test	$t(198) = 4.162, p < .001$	Supported
H4: Trust → Purchase Intention	Pearson r / Regression	$r = .644, \beta = .384, p < .001$	Supported
H5: Authenticity → Purchase Intention	Pearson r / Regression	$r = .633, \beta = .341, p < .001$	Supported
H6: Trust Mediates Influencer Type → PI	Bootstrap Mediation	$ab = -0.215, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.328, -0.118]$	Supported

A total of 200 valid responses were analyzed ($N = 200$). The human-influencer condition included 100 participants ($n = 100$), while the virtual-influencer condition included 100 participants ($n = 100$). All respondents were university students aged 18 to 21 ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.6$ years; 57.0 percent female). The reliability analysis indicated that Cronbach's alpha was .884 for trust, .902 for authenticity, and .865 for purchase intention, demonstrating strong internal consistency across all multi-item constructs ($\alpha > .80$). The comparison between the two conditions showed that consumer trust was significantly higher in the human group ($M = 3.68, SD = 0.62$) than in the virtual group ($M = 3.12, SD = 0.74$), $t(198) = 5.798, p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.820$), supporting H1. Perceived authenticity showed a parallel pattern, with the human influencer scoring significantly higher ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.68$) than the virtual influencer ($M = 3.05, SD = 0.78$), $t(198) = 6.758, p < .001$, $d = 0.956$, supporting H2. Purchase intention was also significantly greater for the human condition ($M = 3.52, SD = 0.69$) compared to the virtual condition ($M = 3.08, SD = 0.80$), $t(198) = 4.162, p < .001$, $d = 0.589$, supporting H3. Correlation analysis indicated that trust was strongly and positively related to purchase intention ($r = .644, p < .001$), supporting H4. Authenticity was likewise significantly and positively correlated with purchase intention ($r = .633, p < .001$), supporting H5. The multiple regression model was statistically significant ($F(6, 193) = 29.914, p < .001$) and explained 48.2 percent of the total variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .482$, Adjusted $R^2 = .466$). Controlling for demographic and behavioral factors, both Trust ($\eta^2 = .384, p < .001$) and Perceived Authenticity ($\eta^2 = .341, p < .001$) were statistically significant positive predictors of purchase intention. Notably, when controlling for trust and authenticity within the regression model, the direct effect of influencer type became non-significant ($\eta^2 = -.088, p = .125$), indicating full indirect mediation. To test H6, a mediation analysis using Hayes PROCESS (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples was executed. The total negative effect of virtual (vs. human) influencer on purchase intention ($c = -0.440, p < .001$) was significantly mediated by trust. The path from influencer type to trust was significant ($a = -0.560, p < .001$), as was the path from trust to purchase intention ($b = 0.384, p < .001$). The indirect effect of influencer type on purchase intention through trust was $ab = -0.215$,

with a 95 percent bootstrap confidence interval entirely below zero $[-0.328, -0.118]$). Because the direct effect ($c' = -0.138, p = .125$) spanned zero, consumer trust fully mediates the relationship between influencer type and purchase intention, fully supporting H6

Discussion and Conclusion:

This study evaluated the comparative effectiveness of human versus AI-generated virtual influencers promoting a fictional sportswear brand among university-aged consumers (18–21 years). The empirical results demonstrate that while virtual influencers represent a novel digital marketing vector, human influencers remain superior in generating consumer trust, perceived authenticity, and direct purchase intention under standardized advertising conditions. The findings confirm that perceived authenticity and trust are the primary psychological mechanisms driving consumer purchase decisions ($R^2 = 48.2$ percent). The bootstrap mediation analysis highlights that virtual influencers suffer from a distinct "authenticity and trust deficit." The lower purchase intention observed for the virtual influencer was not caused by a direct aversion to AI technology per se, but rather by the downstream loss of perceived credibility and personal sincerity.

Managerial Implications.

1. Strategic Hybrid Deployment: Marketers should not treat virtual influencers as complete replacements for human endorsers in campaigns where personal credibility, lived trial, or physical product performance (e. g., athletic footwear fit) are primary selling points.
2. Focus on Transparency and Storytelling: When brands adopt virtual influencers to leverage creative control and high visual engagement, campaign strategy must emphasize transparency, consistent personality narratives, and interactive brand messaging to cultivate relational trust over time.
3. Product-Category Alignment: Virtual influencers may be best deployed for lifestyle, high-fashion, or digital/technological product categories where visual aesthetic and futuristic appeal take precedence over physical utility testing.

Limitations and Future Research

This study utilized convenience sampling of student consumers aged 18–21 in a controlled experimental environment evaluating a single product category (sportswear). Future research should examine older demographic cohorts, measure actual purchase conversion rates, explore multi-category product comparisons (e. g., experiential services vs. physical products), and test varying degrees of human-like visual realism (anthropomorphism) to establish optimal design criteria for virtual endorsers.

Furthermore, beyond simple purchases, a limitation of this study is that it did not take into account the importance of sustainability and other important non-financial metrics (Kaspard et al., 2025 ; Kaspard et al., 2026). Future studies should take into consideration the AI revolution, which enables predicting economic quadrants to make the marketing campaign based on more knowledge (Nasser et al., 2025). AI should not only be used to create influencers for such companies, but also to enhance their decision-making ability in terms of pricing (Khalife et al., 2023) and other important managerial decisions (Subrahmanyam & Beainy, 2027), while using digitalization to

maintain stakeholder engagement Kamel et al. (2026), and thinking green and ESG, even if this does not translate into numbers in the financial statements (Athari et al., 2025).

References

- Athari, S. A., Addia, K., Kirikkaleli, D., Al Geitany, S. H., Al Fadhel, L., & Saliba, C. (2025). Do environmental taxes and green electricity matter for the quality of the environment in France? Fresh evidence based on Fourier methods. *Energies*, 18(9),5046. <https://doi.org/10.3390/en18195046>
- Barari, M. M., Eisend, M., & Kulczynski, A. (2026). Virtual influencer marketing: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-026-01186-w>.
- Daou,L.; Sayegh,E.; Atallah, E.; Jabbour Al Maalouf, N.; Sarkis, N. (2025). Greenwashing as a Barrier to Sustainable Marketing: Expectation Disconfirmation, Confusion, and Brand–Consumer Relationships. *Sustainability*, 17, 9979. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17229979>
- Kamel, C.; Khalil, F.; Mouawad, J.; Kechli, W.; Kaspard, J. (2026). Enabling Green Innovation in the Circular Economy: A Systematic Thematic Review of Digitalization and Stakeholder Engagement. *Sustainability*, 18, 1360. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su18031360>
- Kaspard, J. A., Khalil, F. C., & Kamel, C. A. (2025). Factors contributing to non-financial performance of companies. In *Sustainable Economic Development: Utilizing Non-Financial Performance, Sustainability Reporting, and Corporate Governance* (pp. 413-442). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Kaspard, J., Kamel, C., Khalil, F., & Beainy, R. (2026). Financial Performance, Risk, and Market Integration of Sustainability-Oriented Equity Indices: Implications for the Sustainability Transition (2010–2025). *Risks*, 14(5), 99.
- Khalife, D., Yammine, J., Rahal, S., & Freiha, S. (2023). Pricing Asian and Barrier Options Using a Combined Heston Model and Monte Carlo Simulation Approach with Artificial Intelligence. *Mathematical Modelling of Engineering Problems*, 10(5), 1690.
- Lee, H., Shin, M., Yang, J., & Chock, T. M. (2024). Virtual influencers vs. human influencers in the context of influencer marketing: The moderating role of machine heuristic on perceived authenticity of influencers. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 40, 6029–6046. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2024.2374100>.
- Liu, F., Lee, Y. -H., & colleagues. (2023). Virtually authentic: Examining the match-up hypothesis between human vs virtual influencers and product types. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 33(2), 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2023-4418>.
- Liu, F., Lee, Y. -H., & colleagues. (2023). Virtually authentic: Examining the match-up hypothesis between human vs virtual influencers and product types. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 33(2), 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2023-4418>.
- Liu, F., Lee, Y. -H., & others. (2024). Virtual vs. human influencers: The battle for consumer hearts and minds. *Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans*, 2(1), 100059. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbah.2024.100059>.

- Mawad, J. L. J., & Freiha, S. S. (2024). The Role of Influencers in Shaping the Economic Decisions of Consumers Using the Logistic Regression Approach—Does the Generation Factor Matter?. *Sustainability* (2071-1050), 16(21). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16219546>
- Nasser, A., Yammine, J., Harouny, J., & Khalife, D. (2025). Predicting Economic Quads Through Asset Returns Using Ensemble Machine Learning. *IEEE Access*.
- Subrahmanyam, S., & Beainy, R. H. (2027). Smart Decision Support for Uncertainty and Disruptions in Industry 4.0 Operations. In *Smart Operational Research Solutions in the Era of Industry 4.0 and Sustainability* (pp. 167-198). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Ying, Y., Sungailaitė, D., & Dikčius, V. (2026). Impact of influencer's authenticity and credibility on purchase intention: Case of virtual vs. human influencer. *Mokslas – Lietuvos ateitis / Science – Future of Lithuania*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.3846/mla.2026.25048>.