Who Made This? Moral Self-Image and Consumer Responses to AI-Generated Information and Misinformation

Generative AI has changed how information is created and encountered. Consumers routinely meet text, images, audio, and video that may have been machine-produced, from product descriptions and reviews to news summaries and health advice. Misinformation is the most visible part of this shift, but it sits inside a larger change in how information reaches consumers and how uncertain they are about its source. As provenance labeling and AI disclosure requirements expand, including under the European Union AI Act, consumers will increasingly know when content is AI-generated, making the consequences of that knowledge pressing for consumer researchers.

The central question for this track is: How do consumers judge, engage with, and pass along AI-generated information and misinformation, and how do these responses differ from their responses to human-generated information? This framing brings together consumer behavior, moral psychology, and information and misinformation behavior research to explore how consumers evaluate, engage with, share, and respond to AI-generated information, particularly when questions of accuracy, credibility, and deception are involved.

Moral self-image offers one productive starting point. Research on moral self-regulation suggests that changes in moral self-worth can influence subsequent prosocial behavior (Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009). Applied to AI-generated content, this raises the possibility that consumers hold themselves less accountable for what they endorse and pass along when they attribute agency to the system rather than to themselves. The stakes are clearest with misinformation: repeated exposure to false headlines makes them seem less unethical to share even when their falsity is known (Effron & Raj, 2020), and inattention to accuracy contributes to the gap between what people believe and what they share (Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

Consumer reactions to AI involvement are not straightforward. Work on the “AI-authorship effect” finds that emotional marketing communications attributed to AI rather than a human reduce positive word of mouth and loyalty, with perceived authenticity and moral disgust as mediators (Kirk & Givi, 2025). In a survey experiment with a representative sample of UK adults, few participants who watched a deceptive political deepfake were actually deceived, but significantly more were left unsure whether it was true, and those reporting uncertainty also reported lower trust in news on social media (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Together, this motivates a tension worth investigating: does knowing content is AI-generated make consumers more permissive about what they pass along, even as it makes them more distrustful of the information environment?

We invite collaborative exploration of questions including:

- How do consumers evaluate the credibility and authenticity of everyday AI-generated information, such as product descriptions, reviews, summaries, and recommendations?
- How does attributing content to an AI rather than a human affect consumers' moral judgment of those who create, believe, or share it?

- Do these effects differ across content type, including text, still images, video, and synthetic voice?
- Does diffuse responsibility for AI-generated content weaken the personal accountability consumers feel for what they pass along?
- What platform design, disclosure, or policy interventions reduce the spread of AI-generated misinformation without shifting moral responsibility away from consumers?

The track's goal is a research agenda centered not on whether consumers can detect AI-generated content, but on whether believing content is AI-generated changes the judgments they make about it, including the moral calculus they apply to tolerating, spreading, or acting on it. Through preparatory reading and in-person dialogue, participants will develop a shared framework and plan a co-authored manuscript addressing consumer protections, disclosures, and safeguards relevant to platforms, marketers, and regulators.

This track is open to relevant external stakeholders, and we encourage applications from professionals in platform trust and safety, provenance labeling, AI governance, journalism and fact-checking, and consumer advocacy. We welcome experimental, qualitative, interpretive, and computational approaches, and are especially interested in consumer culture theory scholars who can bring interpretive depth to how consumers live with uncertain authorship.

In keeping with TCR's spirit, we welcome final-stage doctoral students and faculty in the first three years post Ph.D. At least two places will be allocated to junior scholars where possible, including one reserved for an advanced doctoral candidate, and junior and senior participants will collaborate within subgroups on manuscript development.

References

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