

Trust in AI-Driven Avatar Marketing: A Bibliometric Analysis of Ethical Concerns and Research Trends

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Abstract. *AI systems have fundamentally changed the way brands communicate with consumers. Avatars, virtual influencers, and AI personas have become social actors in the brand consumer relationship, relying on anthropomorphic design and ongoing interaction. Given their growing influence, trust has become a central concept in research on consumers' responses to AI-driven marketing. This study presents how trust is conceptualized in AI-driven marketing with a focus on avatars and virtual influencers. Our study employs a bibliometric analysis of 2888 articles published between 2021 and 2025 from Web of Science. We have found that avatar marketing is a fragmented research domain, and that trust plays an instrumental role in achieving marketing outcomes. Transparency and fairness, ethical concerns discussed in the literature, hold peripheral positions, and AI regulation appears as the most isolated concept in the cluster analysis. Although trust occupies a central position, it is conceptualized for its functional role, not for its ethical dimension. This is a clear literature gap that is translated into the field's lack of a conceptual framework to evaluate the legitimacy of AI-driven marketing practices. Our study supports a reframing of trust, from a dependent variable of marketing efficiency to a central ethical criterion.*

Keywords: artificial intelligence; trust; avatar marketing; virtual influencers; ethics; transparency; fairness.

Introduction

Nowadays, AI-driven marketing influence has gone beyond technical efficacy. Research finds that AI systems affect customers' decisions, experiences, and, in a wider sense, social dynamics (Puntoni et al., 2021). This growing influence cannot be reduced to the technical performance of the system. Manipulation and reduced customer autonomy in invisible systems are real concerns, more acute as AI operates on non-transparent infrastructure that models how options are presented and interpreted, without user awareness (Susser et al., 2019). It is more than knowing what a consumer decision is based on; it is about the space in which the choice was algorithmically configured. Thus, the ethic commitment in AI-driven marketing is not a matter of degree of personalization. Recent studies argue that what is more important is consumers' capacity to recognize and understand the influence of algorithms on them. (Waqas & Qadri, 2025). A fully personalized, but transparent, system can be more ethically embedded than one that is less personalized but obscure in its function.

Another transformation is that AI-driven marketing is no longer an opaque platform by design. AI systems can perform social interaction and have human-like features, beyond personalization and algorithmic inference. They are anthropomorphized systems that communicate, express human emotions, and mimic human cues (Du & Xie, 2020). Among these anthropomorphized systems, avatars occupy a particular position: unlike recommendation algorithms that operate invisibly, avatars are designed to be seen, recognized, and trusted as social actors

The anthropomorphic dimension is of utmost importance, and among these anthropomorphized systems, avatars have the most impactful form in social interactions. For example, a recommendation algorithm personalizes without being seen by the users. In contrast, an avatar has a face, voice, expresses emotions, and social behavior. This humanized AI system becomes an active social actor in interaction with customers (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Puntoni et al., 2021). From an ethical perspective, the distinction between algorithmic influence and human-like influence emerges as more significant. Precisely for this reason, avatar marketing requires a distinct analysis. This transformation calls into question the potential influence of AI entities on human decisions. We cannot help but ask what criteria we should use to assess their legitimate influence on consumers. Do we consider the same criteria as for human influencers, for example, transparency towards paid partnerships, real endorsements for products used as authenticity calls out, or consideration for consumers' autonomy by avoiding exploitations of vulnerabilities? What role does trust have in the interaction with AI systems?

As AI systems become more socially integrated, trust has emerged as a key concept in understanding consumer responses to AI-enabled marketing systems. Existing research shows that trust plays an important role in consumer acceptance, engagement, and adoption of AI technologies (Glikson & Woolley, 2020), while experiential perspectives show trust as a relational and psychological response to socially integrated AI systems (Puntoni et al., 2021).

By reviewing the business ethics literature, we find that trust is a necessary condition for consumers to evaluate fairness, transparency, and accountability in their interactions with AI systems (Schultz & Seele, 2023; Zwick & Dholakia, 2004, as cited in Waqas & Qadri, 2025). Transparency and fairness are presented as factors that reduce the unexplainability of AI systems, but elements that support users' understanding of the decision-making algorithmic mechanisms (Shin, 2021). However, their role is external; they don't define trust, they act as enablers of trust (Saveljeva & Volkova, 2025). Thus, ethics enters into the discussion as an antecedent of consumer trust, not as a constitutive element of trust.

This functional perspective of trust is even more pronounced in avatar marketing research. Studies on AI-driven avatars and virtual influencers demonstrate that, on the one hand, trust serves as a link among anthropomorphic design traits, social presence, and emotional engagement, and, on the other hand, as a behavioral outcome such as buying intention and loyalty (Gerlich, 2023; Keng et al., 2025). The ethical risks associated with AI-driven marketing recognize trust as important, but as a persuasion tool, not as an assessment criterion.

Despite discussions of ethical risks in AI-driven marketing, trust is conceptualized in relation to these consumer responses. The aim of this paper is to clarify dominant patterns in the discussion of trust in AI-driven marketing research and to examine how trust is conceptualized in the emerging literature on avatar-based marketing. Using a bibliometric approach, this study reviews existing research to understand how trust is conceptualized and theorized, and to identify gaps in the study of trust in AI-mediated marketing interactions.

Literature review

2.1 AI-driven marketing: ethical concerns and the critical role of trust

AI in marketing is undergoing the transition from being used only as a background tool to being used as a social actor. Moreover, studies demonstrate that the presupposition that it is neutral is no longer valid. AI systems can elicit cognitive, emotional, and social reactions from consumers through their anthropomorphized features. Moreover, because they are socially integrated, they can mirror and reinforce existing stereotypes, gender biases, and discriminatory norms. (Puntoni et al., 2021).

Therefore, we are facing a clear paradox in the way trust is discussed in the AI marketing research. The literature recognizes that AI systems can manipulate and exploit consumers' vulnerabilities, but trust remains a variable to be optimized and not an end goal. The question is: how did this happen?

The answer is partially related to the manner in which AI marketing was theorized from the start. As AI overcomes the position of invisible infrastructure and enables integrated social roles such as anthropomorphized avatars, virtual influencers, and emotionally responsive agents, researchers adopted the technology adoption and persuasion frameworks from literature in which trust was already defined as a mediator between system characteristics and behavior outcomes (Shin, 2021; Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Transparency and fairness entered these frames not as ethical demands, but as antecedents, mainly conditions that, while being present, increase the probability of obtaining trust (Saveljeva & Volkova, 2025). The ethical perspective was there, but it was subordinated to the logic of performance from the beginning.

Transparency is commonly described in literature as a condition that improves consumers' understanding of AI systems and supports perceived control, as a result, facilitating acceptance and reducing resistance to technology (Shin, 2021). Fairness, as well, depends less on the level of personalization than on the consumer's perception of whether the practice is acceptable and not intrusive (Waqas & Qadri, 2025). Trust is understood as a mechanism that links heuristic evaluations of system characteristics to subsequent attitudes and responses, in relation to system opacity and increased perceived control (Shin, 2021), as well as to relational cues generated by anthropomorphism and social presence (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). The resulting implications are important: ethics becomes a control variable, not a criterion for evaluating the legitimacy of marketing practice.

When ethical conduct is assumed as an aspect to increase trust, that in turn can generate engagement and adoption (Ali, 2025; Yadav et al., 2024), the implicit idea is that ethics matters if it is instrumental and not because it is right. Experimental evidence demonstrates that although trust is a strong behavioral predictor, optimizations on personalization alone do not translate recommendation cues into buying intentions, especially in a high-risk context (Ageman & Hollmann, 2025). A predictor for adoption is not the same as a basis for assessing legitimacy. As AI systems increasingly simulate more relational experiences using personal and emotional data (Bozdağ, 2025), this conceptual confusion increases. Ethics and trust coexist in the same studies, but they fail to be conceptually intertwined; this separation reveals a central conceptual gap in literature.

Studies on the diversity of perspectives on trust are aligned with this observation. Researchers are calling out the limited analysis on current concepts of trust, including the distinctions between its affective, rational, and normative dimensions (Sheikh & Hoeyer, 2020). Additionally, we can find in the literature studies that justify the necessity of ethical and normative frameworks in domains where essential values have been neglected (Ursin et al., 2024).

To conclude, the literature shows that ethics is more of an external context, and trust is a

performance metric. We need more studies to ask a simple yet inconvenient question: Is this marketing practice acceptable from the perspective of the one to whom it is addressed?

2.2 Trust in AI-Driven Avatar Marketing Research

Avatars are anthropomorphized digital representations with different degrees of realism and autonomy (Burden & Savin-Baden, 2019). This may seem like a clear and simple definition, but practice shows a large range of entities. CGI digital avatar managed by an agency, a virtual influencer and AI persona that generates automatic responses, and a chatbot with a human face, or a client service agent (AI-enabled digital agents) are all discussed under the same conceptual umbrella of avatar marketing (Appel et al., 2020; Moustakas et al., 2020; Miao et al., 2023; Qu, 2025). Terms such as digital avatar, virtual influencer, AI persona, or digital humas are often used interchangeably without systematic differentiation. This terminology ambiguity is not only inconvenient, but it also hides an important ethical aspect: who or what controls the interaction. A consumer who interacts with an AI avatar may have no way to know whether the interaction is genuine, a persuasion strategy, or something in between (Susser et al., 2019). This problem becomes even more complex considering the current technological context. The fine line between avatars controlled by humans and those controlled by software, identified by Miao et al. (2021) as a conceptual clarity problem, becomes more blurred as generative AI technology becomes widely accessible. A CGI persona, such as Lil Miquela, the famous Instagram virtual influencer, can be progressively augmented with autonomous AI capabilities without a transparent transition for her followers. This adds a temporal dimension to the already identified opacity from the literature.

Review studies show that avatar marketing has emerged as a distinct and rapidly developing research area at the intersection of marketing, technology, and consumer behavior (De Silva & de Campos, 2024). According to its definition, a brand interacts with consumers through these entities, designed to foster interaction through anthropomorphic appearance, social presence, and communicative behaviors (Miao et al., 2023).

Studies confirm that although anthropomorphism is used to improve avatar effectiveness, a higher level of realism in the avatar does not increase trust; realist avatars can elicit the uncanny valley effect, creating discomfort that can reduce their persuasive impact (Qu, 2025). Moreover, the distinction between the trust in avatars and the trust in the product is important because it underlines that the avatars' features, such as anthropomorphism and interaction quality, can create trust and influence purchase intentions, while the trust in the product is built through brand awareness and perceived quality (Keng et al., 2025).

Another critical distinction is the one between cognitive trust and affective trust. While the first one is determined by rational evaluations of competence and transparency, the second is developed through emotional engagement and sustains brand loyalty in the long term, with both dimensions operating as operational conditions of customer–brand relationship development (Guo et al., 2023; Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Importantly, anthropomorphic cues can initially increase trust, but expectations may rapidly erode when they are not met with the system's actual capabilities and performance (Glikson & Woolley, 2020).

Trust in avatar marketing is a persuasion and relationship-building tool. It can be that the most significant gap in literature is not missing data, but asking the right question: How does the unclear degree of autonomy affect the conditions in which trust is conceptualized? If you don't know how autonomous an avatar can be, can we even begin to discuss trust in an ethical way? A more detailed perspective on how trust is conceptualized can be found in the literature on virtual influencers.

2.3 Trust in AI-Driven Virtual Influencer Research

Research on virtual influencers starts from a tension identified by literature but not resolved: transparency, usually considered an ethical value, can reduce the campaign efficiency. Empirical studies show that behind-the-scenes disclosures about virtual influencers, which increase transparency, can weaken the influencer effect and reduce consumers' trust in their endorsement (Chen et al., 2025). In other words, we are confronted with an ethical dilemma: if transparency reduces trust, what can motivate brands to be transparent?

Empirical evidence further shows that virtual influencers are often perceived as more trustworthy than human influencers, with trust being a driver of acceptance and purchase intention (Gerlich, 2023).

Trustworthiness is seen as a part of source credibility that influences how persuasive endorsement is. It refers to consumers' perceptions of an influencer's honesty, sincerity, and authenticity, and it is judged by using human-like, anthropomorphic cues (Özdemir et al., 2023). However, virtual influencers are more vulnerable to evaluation than humans because presenting them as autonomous agents with real-life experiences can conflict with consumers' awareness that they exist only in digital form, thereby reducing perceived authenticity and sincerity (Özdemir et al., 2023).

At the same time, findings demonstrate that anthropomorphism fosters trust and brand love. The more a virtual influencer looks and behaves human-like, the more emotional the consumer response, and it finds it hard to critically evaluate the artificial nature of the interaction. Anthropomorphic design enhances emotional engagement, which, in turn, strengthens trust, particularly among individuals with higher opinion leadership (Rehman et al., 2025).

AI influencers, understood as AI-driven virtual influencers, are presented as an extension of AI-driven marketing, in which artificial personas act as social actors capable of generating parasocial relationships and social presence and enhancing perceived credibility and user engagement (Omeish et al., 2025). Moreover, empirical research on virtual streamers, as a specific category of virtual influencers, demonstrates that anthropomorphic cues enhance cognitive trust, which in turn increases purchase intention. (Li & Huang, 2024).

In summary, research on AI-driven virtual influencers offers a more explicit perspective of trust compared to the avatar marketing literature. Across studies, trust is mainly conceptualized as a component of source credibility and as a psychological mechanism linking anthropomorphic cues, authenticity, and parasocial interaction to persuasion, engagement, and purchase intention. A conceptual gap is still present in literature, although trust plays a central role in influencing behavior, ethical considerations remain outcome-oriented.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to clarify dominant patterns in how trust is discussed in AI-driven marketing research and to identify how trust is addressed in avatar-based marketing, including research on virtual influencers, as part of the avatar marketing research. Our analysis is guided by research questions and objectives; no hypotheses were formulated, considering the exploratory and bibliometric nature of the study.

RQ1: How is trust addressed in AI-driven marketing research?

O1: Identifying how trust is approached in research on artificial intelligence in marketing.

RQ2: How is trust discussed in avatar marketing?

O2: Determining the ways trust is discussed in avatar-based marketing

RQ3: How is trust framed in research on virtual influencers?

O3: Identifying ways to articulate trust in research on virtual influencers.

No existing bibliometric studies explicitly map trust in avatar marketing as a theme. Some analysis of the evolution of avatar marketing reveals that trust ideas appear within larger themes such as anthropomorphism, social presence, and engagement. Here, trust is treated as a relational outcome. (Kusumawati et al., 2024; Sinha & Sarkar, 2025). Pushparaj & Kushwaha (2023) analyze virtual influencer marketing and identify trust as an element of credibility and authenticity, as well as engagement.

At a larger scale, studies about AI biases in marketing position trust as an indirect result of algorithmic fairness (Bacalhau et al., 2025). Complementing this perspective, bibliometric and co-citation analyses of AI-driven marketing show that trust is examined within relationship clusters, where its function is to support long-term relationships, organizational performance, and risk reduction, and not explicitly theorized (Verma et al., 2021).

The Web of Science Core Collection was selected for this study, and we used VosViewer for thematic cluster analysis. The search string combined the terms artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual, digital, and avatar representations with the marketing term. These terms were further combined with trust-related and ethical concepts, including trust, credibility, authenticity, transparency, fairness, manipulation, and consumer and ethical concepts, including trust, credibility, authenticity, transparency, fairness, manipulation, and consumer vulnerability.

We have excluded from the search technical terms such as robotics, robot-based systems, computer vision, deep learning, neural networks, machine learning models, and algorithm design, based on the rationale of maintaining the data set marketing literature-oriented (Appendix A.). We acknowledge that this decision may limit the results, as studies on trustworthy AI could have been excluded. Even so, the inclusion of the terms would have changed the analysis focus from consumer behavior and brand consumer relationships to system architecture, a change of paradigm inconsistent with our study objectives. We have refined the search by limiting the time period to publications published between 2021 and 2025, written in English. This period reflects a growing academic interest in AI-driven marketing due to milestone technological developments such as the increased presence of virtual influencers on Instagram and TikTok in 2021, the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, and the proliferation of LLM-based systems. The search resulted in 2888 articles, and it was conducted in January 2026.

Results and discussions

The results of the work are presented on the three specific objectives that were set.

O1: Identifying how trust is approached in research on artificial intelligence in marketing.

Based on the network map (Figure 1), trust is the central concept of the analysis that connects artificial intelligence, virtual influencer, consumer psychology, personalization, and adoption. Along with engagement, ethics, manipulation, media, sustainability, AI marketing, and word-of-mouth form the yellow cluster on the map.

Trust and engagement form the core cluster on the map, which connects the other clusters but remains separate from them. This may reflect that trust is not a systematic problem but rather is portrayed as a mechanism that connects the research area of artificial intelligence, virtual influencers, and adoption.

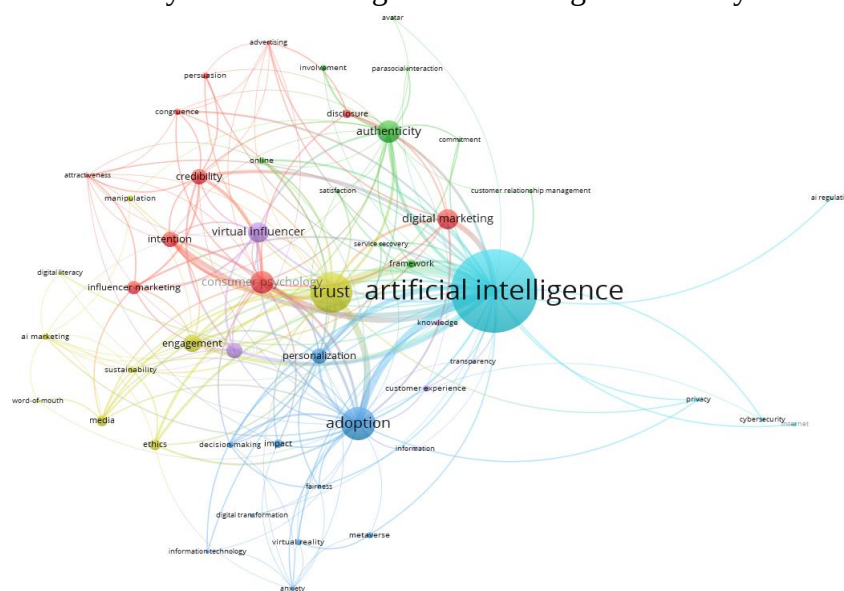
A surprising aspect of the map is that trust, ethics, and manipulation appear in the same cluster. Even though ethics is peripheral, it is not in absolute terms; the concepts coexist in literature. Ethics and manipulation are very distant, indicating their weak connection. Manipulation is near credibility and virtual influencer, ethics near impact and adoption. Therefore, we can

Moreover, ethics and manipulation are presented as processes to foster engagement, not dimensions to evaluate the acceptability of marketing practice. Transparency is a concept in the virtual influencer cluster, fairness is in the adoption cluster, and AI regulation is the most isolated concept within the AI cluster. Any attempt to conceptualize an ethical framework is impossible; these three important concepts are separate. Also, this suggests that AI governance is treated separately from AI marketing, much like the conceptual distance between trust and ethics. This map is consistent with conceptual research that positions trust as a relational and psychological factor that supports the adoption and use of AI systems (Puntoni et al., 2021; Du & Xie, 2020).

Another unexpected result of the analysis is the central position of consumer psychology in the network. This theme functions as a bridge between artificial intelligence, virtual influencers, and trust. This suggests that trust is not explained by the system's technical characteristics or ethical frames, but by how users perceive and process the interactions, a finding consistent with the literature (Shin, 2021). More precisely, the legitimacy of an AI system in marketing is a matter of perception rather than a question about what is legit.

Digital marketing and influencer marketing appear in the network but occupy less central positions. This fact is not surprising, but neither is it neutral. If engagement and persuasion are examined as consequences of trust, it means that literature treats these marketing indicators as final goals, and trust paves the way for them to be reached. Trust becomes, therefore, a mediating psychological mechanism, useful, measurable, and optimizable, not a question of legitimacy. (Saveljeva & Volkova, 2025).

The peripherality of the ethical concepts on the map is not neutral. If fairness and transparency are at the margins of the network, while adoption and engagement occupy a central position, then the current academic landscape is prioritizing market penetration over consumer protection. Questions regarding how to increase adoption and engagement are getting elaborate answers, while questions about whether a marketing practice is legit do not have a clear theoretical framework. This is by far the most significant finding of our study.



Source: VOSviewer.

Similarly, the density map (Figure 2) confirms that artificial intelligence, trust, adoption, consumer psychology, authenticity, and engagement are dominant concepts in literature, compared with ethical concepts such as ethics, fairness, and transparency, which have lower density and more peripheral positions. This also suggests that, within AI-driven marketing research, ethical concerns function to a large extent as background conditions for trust. (Du & Xie, 2020; Bacalhau et al., 2025).

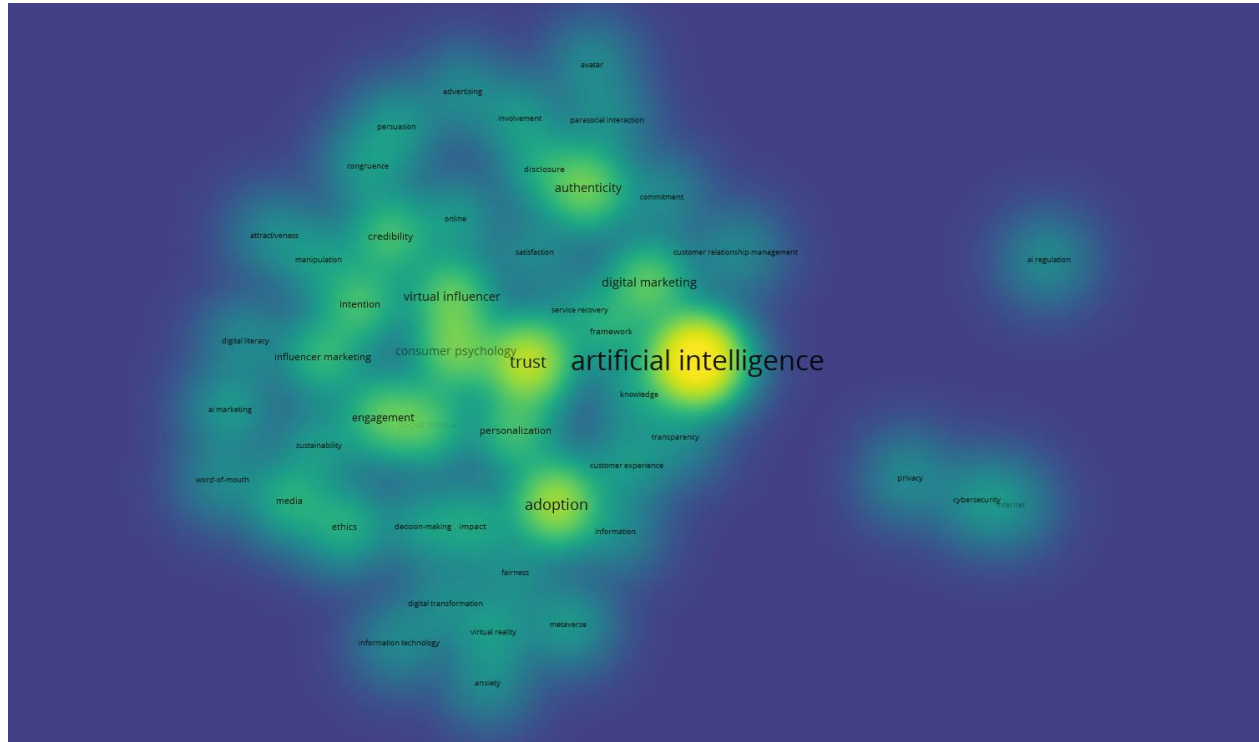


Figure 2. Web of Science - Density for keyword co-occurrence

Source: VOSviewer.

More interestingly, the presence of the keyword anxiety in the network, one of the most recent as can be seen in the overlay map (Figure 2), is not connected to the discussion on trust. If anxiety is driven by interactions with AI systems during the adoption process and is not discussed in relation to trust, we can deduce that literature ignores the subjective experience of consumers, which should indeed be protected. This confirms that transparency is problematic in the context of virtual influencers.

O2: Determining the ways trust is discussed in avatar-based marketing.

Avatar, authenticity, parasocial interaction, and satisfaction represent the green cluster. Avatar-based marketing is captured by the term "avatar," not by an explicit "avatar marketing" keyword. Although studies on avatar marketing are not numerous and the domain is not yet established, the overlay map (Figure 3) shows avatar as a recent term, indicating that it is an emerging research topic. Avatar is connected to concepts such as parasocial interaction, involvement, and authenticity. All reflect a strong focus on the quality of consumers' experience, not on who controls the experience or what end it serves.

As previously discussed, trust-related discussions are concentrated on artificial intelligence, adoption, engagement, virtual influencers, and authenticity. Ethics and AI regulations are peripheral. This pattern supports the idea that trust in avatar-based marketing is discussed

indirectly, through the quality and realism of AI-mediated interactions (Miao et al., 2021). The research on avatar marketing asks: how does it function? before asking if it is acceptable? As long as the domain remains fragmented and lacks conceptual clarity, the answer to the last question has to wait.

Additionally, authenticity, being part of the avatar cluster, appears more peripheral and spatially distinct from trust. This shows that the literature indicates that perceived interaction quality contributes to trust formation within avatar-mediated marketing (Qu, 2025).

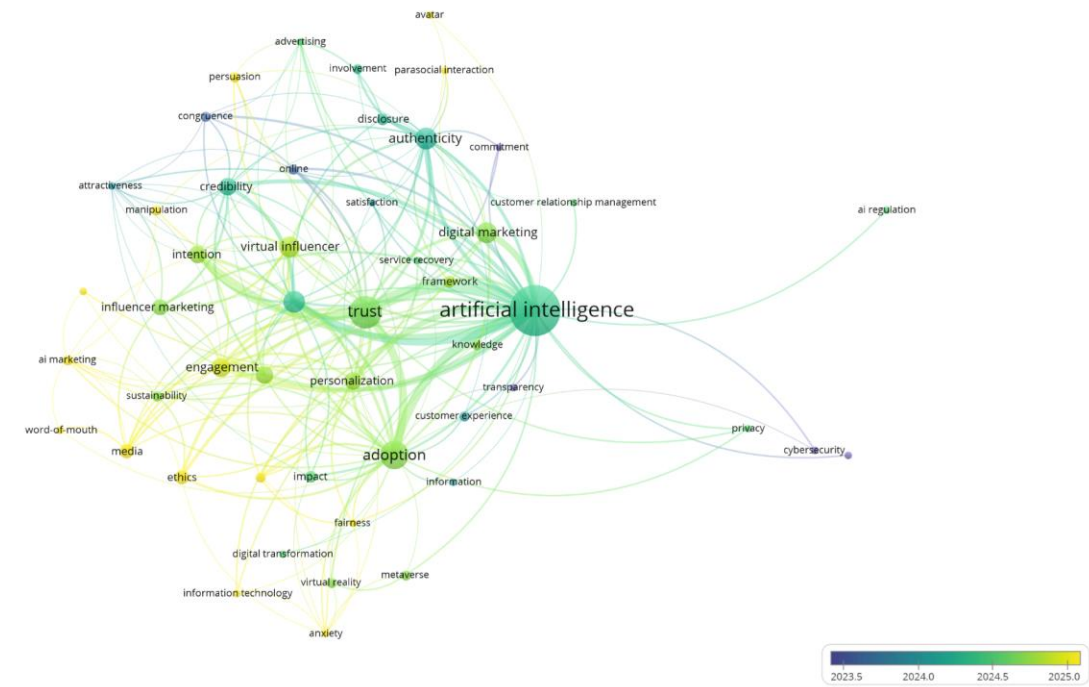


Figure 3. Web of Science - Overlay for keyword co-occurrence

Source: VOSviewer.

Digital marketing and influencer marketing are conceptually aligned with virtual influencers, not with the avatar as an explicit research domain. The co-occurrence indicates that empirical research examines marketing outcomes (such as engagement, credibility, intention, persuasion) through an influencer-based logic. Avatars are used as marketing instruments within influencer communication strategies and are not theorized as a separate domain of AI marketing actors (e.g., Moustakas et al., 2020).

It seems that the most revealing aspect of the visualization maps is what does not appear in them. No cluster conceptualizes trust in relation to an ethical agency, avatars' accountability, or governance. Ethics, transparency, and fairness are positioned farther from the avatar keywords. Trust is there but separated from relevant ethical questions.

O3. Identifying ways to discuss trust in research on virtual influencers.

The “virtual influencer” term appears in the purple cluster, besides transparency, customer experience, and social media. Trust is near this cluster. This suggests that it is instrumental to understanding how virtual influencers impact consumers' attitudes and behavior. The density and overlay maps (Figures 2 and 3) show that virtual influencer and trust are both visible and recent concepts, suggesting a growing and consolidating research field. Their proximity and strong concentration position trust as a central concept in the virtual influencers studies. It confirms its

key role in explaining consumer responses to these digital actors, as suggested by prior research on trust and source credibility in virtual influencer endorsements (Chen et al., 2025; Pushparaj & Kushwaha, 2023). Perceived credibility and authenticity regarding virtual influencers increase engagement and purchase intentions among consumers (Omeish et al., 2025; Li & Huang, 2024).

Transparency and virtual influencer terms, although they are distant and transparency is closer to artificial intelligence and adoption, underline again that transparency does not have an ethical level in the literature; it is a tool that fosters AI adoption.

Manipulation is near to virtual influencer and credibility. This proximity is not explicitly discussed in the literature, but it suggests that the risk of manipulation is perceived as relevant. Also, the virtual influencer term is close to consumer psychology, suggesting that trust is explained by relational and perceptual processes, how do consumers perceive and respond to these entities.

Conclusion

This study aims to respond to how trust is conceptualized in AI-driven marketing research, with a specific focus on avatar marketing and virtual influencers. The bibliometric analysis confirmed that the answer is problematic. Trust occupies a central, but instrumental role across literature.

Avatar marketing is not yet a consolidated research area, and virtual influencers dominate the marketing research. Trust in relation to virtual influencers is mainly analyzed as a relational mechanism without any ethical evaluation.

The peripheral position of ethics and the isolation of AI regulation in the cluster analysis confirm that the field lacks conceptual frameworks to evaluate the legitimacy of marketing practices. As noted in the literature review, researchers acknowledge the lack of normative frameworks in domains with high ethical stakes (Ursin et al., 2024).

Transparency and fairness, although present in the analysis, do not shape trust as external factors; they do not define it, leaving trust as a mechanism for managing AI anxiety and increasing market performance in contexts characterized by algorithmic opacity. This finding is in line with the current literature that confirms that researchers capture the functional dimension of and neglect its affective and normative aspects (Sheikh & Hoeyer, 2020). Moreover,

Thus, despite attention being given to ethical risks, trust in AI-driven and avatar-based marketing is a tool that helps consumers accept AI systems and improves marketing outcomes, not a criterion of legitimacy. Trust's ethical perspective goes beyond effectiveness and performance; it is the central dimension through which AI-driven marketing practices can be evaluated as legitimate, transparent, and respectful of consumer autonomy.

From a managerial perspective, managers should understand that transparency and authenticity are complementary objectives. A brand that builds consumer trust through anthropomorphic design and the social presence of avatars can achieve short-term results but can be vulnerable in the long run, especially as consumers become more aware of the artificiality of the interactions. Transparency of AI avatars should be a part of their AI-mediated identity, not just a mandatory disclosure practice. A transparent avatar, with an artificial image that is honest and constantly communicates, can build long-term trust with customers compared to one that is more human-like and makes no disclosures. For example, the Brazilian avatar, Lu do Magalu, launched in 2003 and reached 9 million followers on Instagram

This study has limitations, including the reliance on the Web of Science database and the absence of empirical investigation. This study presents limitations that open new directions of research. The usage of a single database, Web of Science Core Collection, is the most notable limitation. Future studies need to extend the analysis and include Scopus or Google Scholar for

more extensive coverage. More importantly, bibliometric methodology, through its nature, cannot capture the subjective experience of consumers. Qualitative interviews and focus groups could explore how consumers negotiate trust and authenticity in their interactions with AI avatars and analyze governance and accountability frameworks within the avatar marketing systems.

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Appendix A. Thesaurus File

Label

ai, artificial-intelligence, generative ai
virtual influencers, cgi influencer, ai influencer, digital influencer
avatars, digital avatar, virtual avatar
consumer trust, trust in ai, digital trust
ai personalization, customization
algorithmic transparency, technology transparency
algorithmic fairness
purchase intention, behavioral intention
consumer perception, attitudes toward ai
ai act, artificial intelligence act
responsible ai, ethics in ai marketing

Replaced By

artificial intelligence
virtual influencer
avatar
trust
personalization
transparency
fairness
intention
consumer psychology
ai regulation
ethics