

Influencers' Use of Artificial Intelligence to Support Stress Reduction in Social Media: A Qualitative Study.

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Abstract

The growing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into social media practices has reshaped how influencers interact with their audiences, raising important questions about its implications for digital well-being. This study explores how influencers perceive and use AI tools to support audiences experiencing stress in social media environments. Adopting a qualitative and interpretivist approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten influencers selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that influencers perceive AI primarily as a supportive mechanism that enhances emotional availability, consistency, and responsiveness rather than as a therapeutic or clinical solution. AI-assisted practices are associated with perceived stress reduction through calm communication, reassurance, and emotional continuity, while ethical boundaries and transparency remain central concerns. Overall, the study concludes that AI contributes to stress reduction only when embedded within human-centered, ethically framed influencer practices, reinforcing emotional support without replacing human judgment or professional care. This research contributes to the literature on influencer communication and digital well-being by clarifying the non-clinical, relational role of AI in emotionally sensitive online interactions.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence; influencer communication; digital well-being; perceived stress reduction; emotional support; social media.*

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has profoundly transformed contemporary communication practices, while simultaneously intensifying concerns related to psychological well-being, stress, and emotional overload among users. Continuous connectivity, social comparison, and information saturation have contributed to the emergence of digital stress as a significant issue in online environments. In response to these dynamics, social media influencers have evolved beyond their original commercial role to become relational figures who shape emotions, attitudes, and everyday experiences through sustained and personalized interactions with their audiences. At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly integrated into social media ecosystems, supporting content creation, interaction management, and audience engagement. While prior research has largely examined AI in marketing automation or clinical mental health applications, limited attention has been paid to its role in non-clinical emotional support, particularly when embedded in influencer–audience relationships. This gap is notable, as influencer communication is fundamentally relational and may shape users’ emotional experiences through empathy, availability, and perceived care rather than therapeutic intervention.

This intersection raises a central research problem: how AI is perceived and mobilized by influencers as a tool for emotional support and stress reduction without assuming a clinical or professional function. Existing studies tend to focus either on user outcomes related to social media stress or on technological performance of AI systems, offering little insight into how content creators themselves understand and regulate AI use in emotionally sensitive contexts. Accordingly, the present study aims to explore how influencers perceive and use artificial intelligence tools to support audiences experiencing stress in social media environments. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach based on semi-structured interviews with ten influencers, the study seeks to uncover the meanings, practices, and ethical boundaries associated with AI-assisted emotional communication. By focusing on influencers’ perspectives, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of digital well-being, influencer communication, and the relational implications of AI in everyday online interactions.

Literature Review

Digital technologies have profoundly transformed social interaction and communication practices, while simultaneously raising growing concerns about emotional well-being in online environments. Understanding how emerging tools such as artificial intelligence are integrated

into everyday digital relationships is therefore essential for assessing their potential impact on stress and emotional experience in social media contexts.

Digital Stress and Depressive Feelings in Social Media

The growing ubiquity of social media has prompted extensive scholarly attention to its psychological consequences, particularly regarding stress and depressive feelings. Early empirical evidence demonstrated that increased use of social networking sites can reduce subjective well-being, as online interactions may displace meaningful offline social experiences. (Kross, 2013). Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies further suggest that frequent social media engagement is associated with elevated depressive symptoms, especially among young adults who are highly active online. (Lin, 2016). One important pathway linking social media use to emotional distress is perceived social isolation. Although platforms are designed to foster connection, users who engage intensively may paradoxically experience greater loneliness, which is strongly correlated with depressive affect. (Primack, 2017). This paradox highlights the difference between quantitative connectivity and qualitative social support in digital environments. (Primack, 2017).

Another widely documented mechanism is upward social comparison. Exposure to idealized self-presentations encourages users to compare themselves with others who appear more successful or happier, which can undermine self-esteem and increase depressive feelings. (Vogel, 2014). Such comparison processes are amplified by algorithmic curation, which repeatedly exposes users to highly engaging and socially rewarding content. (Vogel, 2014).

In parallel, fear of missing out (FoMO) has been identified as a significant psychological driver of stress in social media contexts. FoMO reflects anxiety about being excluded from rewarding experiences and is positively associated with lower mood and life satisfaction. (Przybylski, 2013). Persistent FoMO may foster compulsive checking behaviors, increasing emotional strain over time. (Przybylski, 2013). Repeated exposure and excessive engagement may also result in social media fatigue, a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and psychological overload. Empirical research shows that social media fatigue is positively related to anxiety and depressive feelings, particularly when users perceive high information overload. (Dhir, 2018). This phenomenon reflects the cumulative emotional cost of continuous digital stimulation. (Dhir, 2018).

From a broader perspective, digital stress aligns with the concept of technostress, defined as stress induced by information and communication technologies. Factors such as constant connectivity, multitasking demands, and pressure to respond quickly contribute to psychological strain. (Ragu-Nathan, 2008). Technostress has been empirically linked to

emotional exhaustion and reduced psychological well-being. (Ragu-Nathan, 2008). Experimental studies strengthen these correlational findings by demonstrating that reducing social media use can improve mental well-being. Limiting daily platform exposure has been shown to decrease loneliness and depressive symptoms, suggesting a causal relationship between intensive use and emotional distress. (Hunt, 2018). These results support the argument that unregulated social media consumption may function as a stressor rather than a resource. (Hunt, 2018).

Recent research also highlights the emotional impact of algorithmic pressure, where engagement-driven systems amplify emotionally charged content, increasing anxiety and psychological vulnerability among users. (Bucher, 2018). Such dynamics may intensify stress by reducing users' perceived control over their digital experiences. (Bucher, 2018).

Collectively, the literature indicates that social media environments can exacerbate stress and depressive feelings through social comparison, FoMO, emotional overload, and technostress. These findings underline the importance of exploring supportive digital mechanisms, including influencer-led and AI-assisted interventions, that may counterbalance these negative psychological effects. (Kross, 2013).

Influencers as Emotional and Social Support Agents

Influencers increasingly occupy a hybrid role that extends beyond persuasion and consumption toward emotional guidance and social reassurance in digital spaces. Early conceptual work positioned influencers as opinion leaders whose perceived relatability and accessibility distinguish them from traditional celebrities, enabling closer audience bonds. (Freberg, 2011). These bonds create conditions under which influencers can provide emotional cues, encouragement, and normalization of everyday struggles within their communities. (Freberg, 2011). A central mechanism underlying this supportive role is parasocial interaction, defined as the illusion of face-to-face relationships between media figures and audiences. Research shows that stronger parasocial bonds with influencers are associated with feelings of closeness, trust, and emotional comfort, which resemble elements of social support. (Horton, 1956). In social media environments, interactivity and perceived intimacy intensify these bonds, reinforcing influencers' capacity to act as emotional reference points. (Tukachinsky, 2011).

Perceived authenticity plays a crucial role in this process. Influencers who disclose personal experiences, including emotional challenges, are more likely to be perceived as genuine and trustworthy, strengthening followers' emotional engagement. (Audrezet, 2020). Authentic self-presentation reduces psychological distance and encourages audiences to interpret influencer messages as empathetic rather than strategic. (Audrezet, 2020). Trust further mediates the

emotional influence of influencers. Empirical studies demonstrate that trust in influencers enhances message acceptance and emotional reassurance, particularly when content addresses personal or sensitive topics. (Lou, 2019). Trust transforms influencer communication into a form of informal emotional support, even when no direct interaction occurs. (Lou, 2019).

Influencers also contribute to emotional normalization, especially around stress and vulnerability. By publicly discussing struggles, they help legitimize negative emotions and reduce stigma, which is known to alleviate emotional burden among followers. (Chung, 2021). This normalization function mirrors peer-based social support mechanisms observed in online communities. (Chung, 2021). The supportive role of influencers is reinforced by value congruence between influencers and audiences. When followers perceive alignment in values, beliefs, or lifestyles, emotional resonance increases, strengthening perceived understanding and psychological safety. (Ki, 2020). Value alignment enhances the likelihood that influencer messages will be interpreted as caring rather than performative. (Ki, 2020).

Recent research also highlights the importance of empathic communication styles. Influencers who use warm, compassionate language and acknowledge audience emotions are more effective in reducing negative affect and fostering emotional comfort. (Lee, 2022). Such communication contributes to perceptions of emotional availability, a key dimension of social support. (Lee, 2022). From a relational perspective, influencer communities often function as supportive micro-networks, where followers interact not only with the influencer but also with one another. These interactions can create a sense of belonging that buffers stress and emotional fatigue. (de Jans, 2020). Community-level engagement reinforces collective emotional regulation. (de Jans, 2020). However, scholars also caution against emotional over-reliance on influencers. Excessive dependence may blur boundaries between support and influence, raising ethical concerns regarding responsibility and emotional vulnerability. (Abidin, 2018). These concerns underscore the importance of transparency and ethical conduct in influencer-led emotional discourse. (Abidin, 2018).

Overall, the literature positions influencers as informal emotional support agents whose impact is rooted in parasocial closeness, authenticity, trust, and value alignment. This evolving role provides a conceptual foundation for examining how AI-assisted influencer practices may further enhance or regulate emotional support mechanisms in digital well-being contexts. (Freberg, 2011).

Artificial Intelligence and Digital Well-Being

Artificial intelligence (AI) has increasingly been positioned as a supportive technology for digital well-being, aiming to enhance psychological functioning rather than merely reduce

harm. Early conceptual work on positive computing emphasizes that technology can be deliberately designed to foster emotional resilience, self-regulation, and supportive interaction. (Calvo, 2014). Within this perspective, AI-driven systems, particularly conversational agents, have emerged as prominent tools for emotional support in digital contexts. Systematic reviews indicate that health-oriented chatbots are widely used for psychoeducation, stress management, and behavior support, highlighting their scalability and accessibility while underlining the need for careful design and evaluation. (Laranjo, 2018). Experimental studies further demonstrate that fully automated conversational agents can contribute to reductions in self-reported depressive and anxiety symptoms, especially when grounded in structured therapeutic principles. (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Real-world implementations confirm that empathic AI agents can provide perceived emotional comfort and psychological reassurance, particularly through constant availability and non-judgmental interaction. (Inkster, 2018).

Beyond conversational interfaces, AI-based well-being systems rely on relational agent principles, where perceived warmth, empathy, and social presence sustain long-term engagement. Research shows that relational agents can maintain user involvement over extended periods, which is essential for stress regulation and emotional support interventions that require repetition and continuity. (Bickmore, 2005). Longitudinal evidence supports the effectiveness of these agents in preserving engagement and adherence in extended interventions. (Bickmore, 2010). AI also enables personalized and adaptive interventions, such as just-in-time adaptive interventions, which tailor support to users' contextual and emotional states in real time, improving relevance and effectiveness. (Nahum-Shani, 2018). At the same time, machine learning approaches are increasingly applied to detect patterns of emotional distress and mental-health risk, offering opportunities for early support while raising concerns regarding validation and bias. (Shatte, 2019). These concerns are closely linked to issues of privacy, data governance, and transparency, which are critical for maintaining trust in AI-driven mental well-being tools. (Lustgarten, 2020). Scholars consistently emphasize that responsible innovation requires clear communication about AI capabilities and limits, ensuring that such systems complement rather than replace professional care. (Torous, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Social Support Theory, which posits that perceived emotional and informational support can buffer stress and enhance psychological well-being. (Cohen, 1985). In social media environments, support does not only originate from close interpersonal ties but can also emerge from mediated relationships where individuals perceive empathy, understanding, and reassurance. (Thoits, 2011). Influencers, through repeated exposure and

audience familiarity, are well positioned to function as informal support figures, particularly when addressing stress-related themes in everyday discourse. (Thoits, 2011). When influencers integrate artificial intelligence tools, such as automated responses, sentiment-aware moderation, or AI-assisted supportive content, these technologies may extend the availability and consistency of perceived support, potentially contributing to stress reduction at scale. (Calvo, 2014).

The framework also draws on Parasocial Interaction Theory, which explains how audiences develop emotionally meaningful, one-sided relationships with media figures. (Horton, 1956). Social media intensifies parasocial bonds through interactivity, self-disclosure, and perceived accessibility, making influencers emotionally salient figures in users' daily lives. (Tukachinsky, 2011). Strong parasocial relationships have been associated with feelings of closeness and emotional reassurance, particularly in contexts of vulnerability. (Tukachinsky, 2011). From this perspective, AI-assisted influencer practices may reinforce parasocial continuity by enabling faster, more frequent, or more personalized interactions, thereby sustaining emotional presence and perceived care. (Bickmore, 2005).

In addition, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a relevant lens for understanding how audiences respond to AI-mediated influencer interactions. TAM suggests that technology adoption is driven by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. (Davis, 1989). In stress-related contexts, AI tools are likely to be accepted when they are perceived as useful for emotional relief and easy to access during moments of tension or overload. (Venkatesh, 2003). Trust and transparency further shape acceptance, especially when AI is used in emotionally sensitive communication. (Torous, 2017). Together, these theoretical perspectives position AI not as a therapeutic agent, but as a supportive mediator that may enhance influencers' ability to deliver emotional reassurance and perceived stress relief.

Although prior research has extensively documented the relationship between social media use, stress, and emotional well-being, most studies focus on users' outcomes rather than on the strategies employed by content creators. (Kross, 2013). Influencer marketing research, in turn, has predominantly emphasized persuasion, branding, and engagement, with limited attention to influencers' well-being-oriented practices. (Freberg, 2011). At the same time, research on artificial intelligence in mental well-being has largely examined standalone AI applications, such as chatbots or digital interventions, rather than AI as a tool embedded within influencer–audience relationships. (Laranjo, 2018).

Moreover, existing studies rely heavily on quantitative surveys or experimental designs, offering limited insight into how influencers themselves perceive the role of AI in addressing

audience stress. (Inkster, 2018). Little is known about influencers' motivations, ethical reflections, and practical experiences when using AI tools for emotionally sensitive communication. This lack of qualitative, creator-centered evidence represents a significant gap in the literature, particularly in non-clinical contexts where stress reduction is framed as emotional support rather than medical intervention.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with influencers who use AI in their content or audience interactions. The guiding research question is formulated as follows: *How do influencers perceive and use artificial intelligence tools to help reduce audience stress in social media environments?*

To answer this research question, the following section presents the methodological approach adopted in this study, detailing the qualitative research design, the selection of ten influencers, the data collection process, and the thematic analysis procedures used to examine how AI is perceived as a tool for stress reduction in social media contexts.

Method

This study adopts an interpretivist epistemological stance, which assumes that social reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. Within this perspective, stress reduction and emotional support are not treated as objectively measurable clinical outcomes, but as subjective perceptions shaped by interactions, discourse, and contextual interpretation. (Lincoln, 1985). An interpretivist approach is particularly appropriate for exploring emerging practices, such as the use of artificial intelligence by influencers for emotionally sensitive communication, where meanings, intentions, and ethical reflections are central. (Schwandt, 1994).

Accordingly, the research follows a qualitative exploratory design, aiming to generate in-depth insights rather than statistical generalization. Qualitative inquiry allows for a nuanced understanding of influencers' perceptions, motivations, and lived experiences when integrating AI tools into their content and audience interactions. (Creswell, 2013). Given the limited prior research on AI-assisted influencer practices in the context of stress reduction, an exploratory qualitative approach is well suited to uncover underlying mechanisms and contextual dynamics. (Miles, 2014).

A semi-structured interview design was employed to capture influencers' narratives while ensuring comparability across interviews. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to probe individual experiences and reflections, while maintaining a coherent analytical framework aligned with the research question. (Kvale, 2009). This format is particularly

effective for discussing sensitive topics such as stress, emotional support, and ethical boundaries, as it allows participants to articulate their views in their own terms. (Guest, 2012). The study relied on purposive sampling, targeting influencers who actively use artificial intelligence tools in their content creation or audience management practices. (Patton, 2015).

Selection criteria included:

1. active presence on at least one major social media platform,
2. prior or current use of AI-based tools (e.g., content generation, automated responses, sentiment analysis),
3. engagement with audiences on topics related to lifestyle, well-being, or emotional experiences.

A total of twenty influencers were initially contacted via direct messages and professional email addresses. Out of these, ten influencers agreed to participate, resulting in a response rate of 50%. The final sample size was deemed sufficient as thematic saturation was reached, with no substantially new themes emerging in the final interviews. (Guest, 2006). This sample size is consistent with established qualitative research standards for in-depth interview studies. (Guest, 2006).

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, conducted online using video conferencing tools. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, allowing sufficient depth to explore participants' experiences and reflections. Interviews focused on influencers' motivations for using AI, perceived audience reactions, perceived effects on stress reduction, and ethical considerations. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and were audio-recorded for accuracy. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and identifying information was removed during transcription to protect privacy. (Orb, 2001).

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into a Python-based qualitative analysis pipeline executed in JupyterLab to support transparent, reproducible coding and theme development. (Kluyver, 2016). The analytical strategy combined human-led interpretation with computational text support, consistent with qualitative principles that treat software as an aid to organization and pattern detection rather than a substitute for interpretive judgment. (Braun, 2006). First, transcripts were cleaned and standardized (removal of interviewer prompts when necessary, normalization of punctuation, and anonymization of names and identifiers). (Miles, 2014). Text preprocessing included tokenization, lowercasing, stopword filtering, and lemmatization to reduce lexical noise and facilitate comparisons across participants. (Bird, 2009).

Next, the study applied a structured sequence of computational procedures to assist thematic analysis. Descriptive lexical analyses were conducted to identify high-frequency terms and salient expressions associated with AI usage and perceived stress reduction. (Grimmer, 2013). To explore co-occurring concepts and linguistic associations, co-occurrence matrices and network-based representations were generated from sliding-window token co-presence across transcripts, enabling the identification of recurring clusters of meaning (e.g., “support,” “calm,” “messages,” “availability”). (Newman, 2010). In addition, vector-space representations were created using TF-IDF to examine similarity patterns across interviews and to detect segments with overlapping semantic content, supporting iterative refinement of candidate themes. (Salton, 1988). Where relevant, unsupervised topic modeling was used as an exploratory aid to surface latent thematic structures, with the outputs treated as prompts for interpretive review rather than definitive themes. (Blei, 2003).

Throughout the process, interpretive validity was maintained by returning to the full transcripts to confirm that computationally suggested patterns corresponded to meaningful narrative evidence. (Nowell, 2017). Codes and themes were iteratively developed, reviewed, and consolidated through repeated comparison across cases, leading to a final thematic structure aligned with the research question. (Guest, 2012). To enhance auditability, the analysis scripts, parameter settings, and intermediate outputs (frequency tables, co-occurrence graphs, similarity matrices, and theme summaries) were preserved as part of the project documentation, enabling traceability from raw text to final themes. (Creswell, 2013).

The results of this analytical process are presented in the following section, which reports the main themes emerging from the interviews and illustrates how influencers perceive the role of artificial intelligence in reducing audience stress.

Result

This section presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the ten semi-structured interviews conducted with influencers who use artificial intelligence tools in their content creation and audience interaction practices. The analysis aimed to identify how influencers perceive the role of AI in supporting audiences experiencing stress and emotional strain in social media environments. Rather than assessing clinical outcomes, the results focus on perceived effects, meanings, and practices as articulated by the influencers themselves.

The findings are organized around a set of core themes that emerged consistently across interviews following iterative coding and cross-case comparison. These themes capture the ways in which AI is integrated into influencer practices, the perceived mechanisms through

which AI may contribute to stress reduction, and the ethical boundaries recognized by influencers when engaging with emotionally sensitive topics. Together, the results provide an in-depth understanding of influencers' perspectives on AI-supported emotional communication and set the foundation for the subsequent discussion of theoretical and practical implications. Following the thematic analysis of the interview data, four main themes emerged across the ten influencer interviews. These themes reflect recurrent patterns in how influencers describe their use of artificial intelligence in emotionally sensitive interactions and how they perceive its role in supporting audiences experiencing stress. The first theme highlights AI as a tool for enhancing emotional availability and responsiveness. The second theme focuses on influencers' perceptions of AI as a mechanism for reducing stress and emotional pressure among followers. The third theme captures audience emotional reactions and feedback, emphasizing feelings of reassurance, calm, and reduced emotional overload. Finally, the fourth theme addresses ethical boundaries and responsible AI use, underscoring influencers' awareness of limits, transparency, and the importance of not replacing professional or human support. Together, these four themes structure the presentation of results and provide a coherent framework for understanding influencers' perspectives on AI-assisted stress reduction in social media environments.

To complement the thematic analysis and enhance the lexical exploration of the interview data, word cloud visualizations were generated for each of the four identified themes. Word clouds provide an intuitive representation of the most frequently occurring and salient terms within qualitative corpora, allowing for a visual examination of dominant concepts and recurring emotional expressions. In this study, word clouds were used as a descriptive and exploratory tool, supporting the interpretation of influencers' discourse regarding artificial intelligence, emotional support, and perceived stress reduction. By generating a separate word cloud for each theme, the analysis highlights the lexical specificities associated with emotional availability, stress reduction, audience reactions, and ethical considerations, thereby reinforcing the robustness and coherence of the thematic structure derived from the interviews.

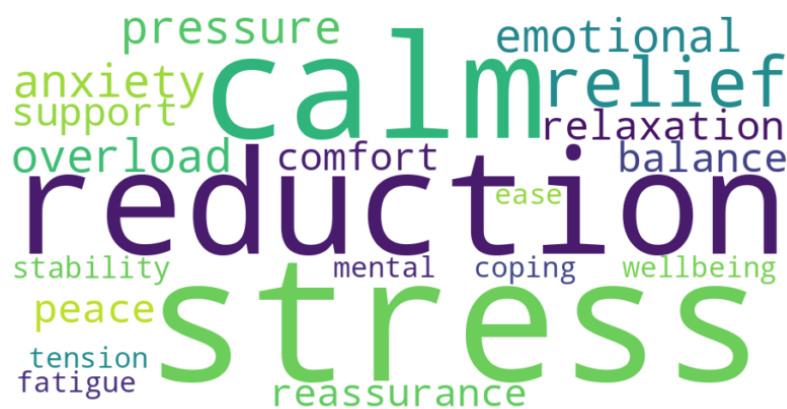
Figure N°1: Word Cloud: AI as a Tool for Emotional Availability



Source: JupyterLab

The word cloud for Theme 1 is dominated by terms such as availability, support, emotional, response, and messages, indicating that influencers strongly associate artificial intelligence with continuous emotional presence and responsiveness. The prominence of words like empathy, listening, care, and reassurance suggests that AI-supported interactions are primarily framed as tools for maintaining a supportive and attentive communication style. The frequent appearance of communication, connection, and accessibility reflects the role of AI in facilitating sustained interaction with audiences, while the visibility of consistency and engagement points to the perceived reliability of AI-assisted emotional availability.

Figure N°2: Word Cloud: Stress Reduction



Source: JupyterLab

The word cloud associated with Theme 2 highlights stress, reduction, calm, and relief as the most salient terms, indicating that influencers explicitly link AI-supported practices to emotional regulation and stress alleviation. The presence of words such as anxiety, pressure, overload, and fatigue reflects the emotional challenges perceived among audiences, while terms like relaxation, peace, balance, and stability suggest perceived outcomes of emotional soothing.

and mental ease. The recurrence of support, comfort, and reassurance reinforces the idea that AI is viewed as a mechanism for lowering emotional tension rather than intensifying it.

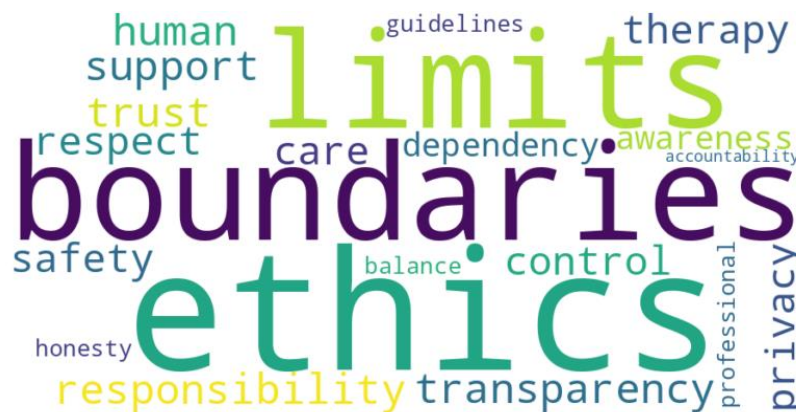
Figure N°3: Word Cloud: Audience Reactions



Source: JupyterLab

In Theme 3, the most prominent words include followers, feedback, feeling, calm, and comfort, illustrating the emotional nature of audience responses to AI-supported influencer interactions. The visibility of terms such as trust, supported, understood, and reassured indicates that followers express positive emotional reactions characterized by safety and emotional recognition. Words like connection, community, and engagement suggest that these reactions extend beyond individual emotions to collective interaction dynamics, while gratitude and positive reflect affirmative emotional feedback from audiences.

Figure N°4: Word Cloud: Ethical Boundaries



Source: JupyterLab

The word cloud for Theme 4 is structured around ethics, boundaries, and limits, emphasizing influencers' awareness of constraints when using AI in emotionally sensitive contexts. The presence of responsibility, transparency, trust, and accountability indicates a focus on ethical conduct and clear communication regarding AI use. Terms such as human, care, support, and

professional suggest a distinction between emotional reassurance and formal intervention, while words like privacy, control, and dependency highlight concerns related to audience protection and responsible engagement.

The findings presented in this section describe the main themes and lexical patterns emerging from influencers' narratives regarding the use of artificial intelligence in emotionally sensitive interactions. While these results provide a detailed account of perceived practices and meanings, they do not, in themselves, explain how these findings relate to existing theoretical frameworks or broader research on digital well-being and influencer communication. Accordingly, the following section discusses the results in light of relevant theories and prior studies, and examines their theoretical and practical implications.

Discussion

This study set out to explore how influencers perceive and use artificial intelligence (AI) as a supportive tool for reducing audience stress in social media environments. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with ten influencers, the findings reveal that AI is primarily understood not as a therapeutic solution, but as an emotional facilitation mechanism that enhances availability, consistency, and responsiveness in influencer–audience interactions. This section discusses these findings in relation to the study's theoretical framework and existing research, highlighting their contribution to the literature on influencer communication, digital well-being, and human–AI interaction.

AI as an Extension of Emotional Availability

The results suggest that influencers perceive AI as a means of scaling emotional presence rather than replacing human interaction. By enabling faster responses, organizing supportive language, and maintaining consistent communication, AI appears to extend influencers' emotional reach without increasing their cognitive or emotional exhaustion. This finding aligns with Social Support Theory, which emphasizes that perceived availability and responsiveness are critical components of emotional support. In this context, AI functions as a technological mediator that preserves emotional continuity even when direct human interaction is constrained by time or volume. Importantly, influencers do not frame AI as emotionally autonomous. Instead, they position it as a supportive layer that assists in delivering empathy, reassurance, and calm language. This interpretation reinforces the idea that emotional support in digital environments is not solely dependent on interpersonal depth, but also on timeliness, tone, and perceived care. AI, therefore, contributes indirectly to stress reduction by ensuring that emotional signals are consistently communicated.

Perceived Stress Reduction Through Consistency and Reassurance

A key contribution of this study lies in highlighting how stress reduction is understood by influencers as a perceptual and relational outcome, rather than a clinical one. Influencers repeatedly associated reduced stress with feelings of calm, reassurance, and emotional stability among followers. These effects were attributed less to the informational content of messages and more to their emotional framing and regularity. From a parasocial interaction perspective, AI-supported consistency strengthens perceived relational continuity. When followers receive predictable and supportive responses, even if partially automated, they interpret these interactions as signs of care and attention. This perception appears to mitigate emotional overload and reduce stress linked to neglect, uncertainty, or invisibility in crowded digital spaces. Thus, AI contributes to stress reduction not through intervention, but through emotional predictability and reassurance

Audience Emotional Responses and Relational Trust

The findings also reveal that influencers interpret audience feedback, expressions of calm, gratitude, trust, and comfort, as indicators of AI's positive emotional impact. These reactions suggest that followers do not necessarily reject AI-mediated communication when it aligns with the influencer's established tone and values. Instead, trust appears to be transferred from the influencer to the AI-assisted interaction, provided transparency and emotional coherence are maintained. This insight contributes to influencer marketing literature by extending trust beyond persuasion outcomes to emotional reassurance. Trust here is not linked to product credibility, but to emotional safety and relational reliability. AI-supported interactions, when perceived as authentic extensions of the influencer's voice, reinforce this trust and contribute to a sense of community and emotional inclusion.

Ethical Awareness and Boundary Management

A particularly important finding concerns influencers' strong awareness of ethical boundaries. Influencers consistently emphasized limits, responsibility, and transparency, indicating a clear distinction between emotional support and therapeutic intervention. This ethical reflexivity suggests that influencers recognize the risks of emotional dependency and the moral implications of using AI in vulnerable contexts. Rather than undermining the legitimacy of AI-supported practices, this boundary awareness strengthens their credibility. By explicitly rejecting clinical authority and positioning AI as a supportive, not diagnostic, tool, influencers contribute to a more responsible model of digital well-being communication. This finding addresses concerns in the broader AI and mental well-being literature regarding overreach, misuse, and misplaced trust.

The study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it extends Social Support Theory by demonstrating how technologically mediated availability can produce perceived emotional support in non-interpersonal relationships. Second, it enriches Parasocial Interaction Theory by showing how AI can reinforce relational continuity without eroding perceived authenticity. Third, it complements the Technology Acceptance Model by illustrating that perceived usefulness in emotionally sensitive contexts is tied to reassurance, calm, and ethical transparency rather than functional efficiency alone. Together, these insights reposition AI as a relational amplifier rather than a disruptive agent in influencer–audience dynamics.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that influencers can responsibly integrate AI to support audience well-being if they prioritize emotional tone, transparency, and ethical limits. AI tools appear most effective when used to enhance emotional availability and reduce communication gaps, rather than to automate emotional authority. This has implications for platforms, brands, and policymakers seeking to encourage healthier digital environments without medicalizing social media interactions.

Conclusion

This study examined how influencers perceive the use of artificial intelligence as a supportive tool for reducing audience stress in social media contexts. Based on qualitative interviews with ten influencers, the findings reveal that AI is primarily understood as an enabling and amplifying mechanism that enhances emotional availability, consistency, and responsiveness, rather than as a substitute for human connection or professional care. Influencers associate AI-supported practices with feelings of calm, reassurance, and emotional comfort among their audiences, emphasizing perceived stress reduction rather than clinical outcomes.

The results also highlight the relational nature of AI-supported influencer communication. Emotional reassurance appears to emerge from sustained interaction, empathetic tone, and perceived care, with AI contributing by maintaining continuity and managing communication volume. Importantly, influencers demonstrate strong ethical awareness, clearly articulating boundaries, transparency, and responsibility when using AI in emotionally sensitive contexts. This ethical positioning reinforces trust and mitigates risks related to emotional dependency or overreach.

Overall, the study contributes to emerging discussions on digital well-being by showing that AI can play a constructive role when embedded within human-centered and ethically grounded influencer practices. By shifting attention from technological performance to relational meaning, this research advances understanding of how AI may support emotional well-being in everyday digital life. Future research may build on these findings by incorporating audience perspectives, cross-cultural comparisons, or mixed-method designs to further explore the long-term implications of AI-assisted emotional communication in social media environments.

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