



EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF AI ON ENTREPRENEURIAL AUTHENTICITY: A RESEARCH AGENDA

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Article info

Date of receipt: 30/07/2025

Acceptance date: 14/07/2026

Keywords: Authenticity
Entrepreneurship
Artificial Intelligence
AI-thenticity

doi: 10.14596/pisb.5149

Abstract

Purpose: the paper aims at understanding which major spheres of the authentic entrepreneur are impacted by AI and develop a research agenda on these.

Design/methodology/approach: based on fundamental principles of authentic entrepreneurship and AI's impact on it, a semi-systematic literature review applying inductive thematic analysis on 55 academic works has been developed, giving space for a wide discussion and a research agenda for future studies.

Findings: four major spheres with significant implications for authentic entrepreneurs have been identified: crafting the authentic self in the AI-driven age; the social construction of authenticity in AI-mediated contexts; authentic entrepreneurial agency in human-AI co-creation; relational climate and shared intent in AI-mediated entrepreneurship.

Practical and social implications: authentic entrepreneurs need to provide an answer to the transition opened up in these domains in order to preserve their authenticity.

Originality of the study: the article enriches the scant resources found in the specific intersection under inquiry. Disclosing new domains that need investigation, it offers some interesting insights for practitioners on which aspects to take into account in AI adoption, for researchers where to direct their focus.

1. Introduction

Authenticity has long been a central theme in scholarly debate, interpreted through a variety of lenses—from objective/iconic views tied to products and brands (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland, 2006; Ranfagni, 2018), to relational/indexical perspectives rooted in context and recognition (Burrese et al., 2022). Beyond consumer objects, a rich stream of research has also focused on the authentic individual, particularly in leadership and entrepreneurship (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Trilling, 2009; Gardner et al., 2005). In the latter, authenticity is conceptualized not as a fixed trait, but as a dynamic process of self-construction and moral alignment—one that integrates personal conscience, vision, and values into everyday action (Ranfagni et al., 2018; Duffy & Dik, 2013). More specifically, authentic entrepreneurs are capable to ground their actions in a deep coherence between personal values, ethical purpose and business practice (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Gardner et al., 2021). Hence, the self-authentication process, which they enact, reflects an inner tension between remaining faithful to one's evolving self and negotiating the demands of markets and society (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). In other terms, it implies a tradeoff between respecting one's personal identity and profoundly held values (Wagenschwanz, 2021) or privileging one's social identity and fitting with one's environment and the relations constituting it (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). Consequently, authenticity in entrepreneurship is not a given state, but a becoming—an existential project that integrates personal conscience and social embeddedness.

At the same time, we are witnessing an unprecedented technological shift driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Menon, 2024; Ciacci et al., 2024). Far from being a neutral tool, AI acts as a symbolic and relational mediator capable of influencing how individuals reflect, communicate, and relate to others. In particular, recent advancements in symbolic AI—such as language models, recommender systems, and affective computing—intervene in the very domains where authenticity takes shape: self-perception, narrative construction, and social recognition (Sharon, 2013; Floridi, 2023). AI is thus not only transforming business operations, but also reconfiguring the conditions of being for entrepreneurs, with potential consequences for identity, agency, and meaning making (Tonks, 2021; De Pisapia, 2024).

Studying the interplay between authenticity and AI in the entrepreneurial domain is therefore urgent and timely. On one hand, authenticity remains a key aspiration for entrepreneurs seeking meaningful and ethically grounded ventures. On the other hand, the pervasive presence of AI calls into question the extent to which these aspirations can be realized, mediated, or even simulated by machines. Understanding how AI is adopted,

appropriated as Kudina (2021) would say – meant as a way of interpreting and attributing meaning to technologies –, is of paramount importance, since it influences the authenticity of entrepreneurs. If it is, in fact, true that AI impacts both personal and social dimensions of the self (Tonks, 2021; De Pisapia, 2024; Alexopoulos, 2024; Kouros & Papa, 2024; Kirk et al., 2025), the way this set of technologies is appropriated may reverberate on the way authenticity is interpreted by entrepreneurs translating in the way business is conducted (O’Neil et al., 2022). Hence, this convergence invites us to a deeper exploration of how authenticity and artificial intelligence are increasingly intertwined in the entrepreneurial landscape. Rather than treating them as separate or opposing domains, we consider how they interact, influence one another, and open new conceptual and practical tensions (Boddington, 2023). Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: How does Artificial Intelligence influence the processes of entrepreneurial authenticity, and what are the implications for identity construction and authentic agency in contemporary entrepreneurship?

Exploration of such a domain has been possible by approaching academic works and perspectives that are multidisciplinary. This has been done to reflect on the processes linking the triad AI-authenticity-entrepreneurship, which open up to transitions in society and make a call for the development of a research agenda useful for setting future specific research questions.

In order to do this, the first paragraphs of this paper (2.1 and 2.2) have tried to summarize the major contributions that have given birth to what implies authentic entrepreneurship. Then, the article moves towards observing the role of AI in entrepreneurship as a mediating factor to experience reality (3.1) and its impacts on the deepest self of individuals (3.2). At this point, attention has been directed to a semi-systematic literature review adopting an inductive thematic analysis carefully designed on the selected 55 articles composing the final sample (4) (Jones et al., 2011; Snyder, 2019; Wong et al., 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023). Upon these bases, a discussion has been stoked around the main entrepreneurial spheres that are hit by AI and that disclose relevant considerations and hypotheses for the authentic paradigm. The four thematic tracks detected – 1- crafting the authentic self in the AI-driven age; 2- the social construction of authenticity in AI-mediated contexts; 3- authentic entrepreneurial agency in human-AI co-creation; 4- relational climate and shared intent in AI-mediated entrepreneurship – enrich literature concerning the nexus AI-entrepreneurship-authenticity with a new prospective cut, that, to our knowledge, has not been addressed in the academic debate yet. Simultaneously, findings open up to a series of reflections that withhold significant managerial implications, among which: the risk to grow visionless compa-

nies; the need to understand how to optimally match enterprises and AI; the necessity to understand what is this promising flexible structure about which authors talk (capable of successfully embracing AI); and the call for developing proper educational protocols for balancing human-AI capabilities (5). In conclusion, a set of interconnected research questions has been proposed in order to fully embrace the changes brought forward by AIs for authentic entrepreneurs and stimulate further critical thinking (6).

2. Entrepreneurial Authenticity

2.1 Authenticity as a self-authentication process

Although in the past multiple schools of thought had emerged around the concept of entrepreneurship and their respective position on the field (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991), today the entrepreneur is recognized as a precise object of research. Such a personality can be analyzed for its multiplicity of aspects. As Gartner (1990) evidences, the debate about the nature of entrepreneurship concentrates around some cardinal themes, from its unique personality to the distinctive role of innovation, but what unites all these perspectives is the recognition that entrepreneurship is an important matter that may generate significant spillovers for society (van Praag & Versloot, 2007; Gartner, 1990). Among the streams of thought there are some that privilege the identity of entrepreneurs (Wagenschwanz, 2021) and within these it is possible to recognize the stream of authentic entrepreneurship.

The meaning of authentic entrepreneurship is something still significantly debated. Although there's a general consensus around some conceptualizations that are considered to be forming the core construct of authenticity (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio, Wernsing & Gardner, 2018; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Avolio et al., 2004), authentic entrepreneurship remains a controversial theme of debate. (Gardner & McCauley, 2022; Ford & Harding, 2011; Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Gardner et al., 2021; Alvesson & Einola, 2024; Helmuth et al., 2024). To optimally understand what it implies it is necessary to go beyond the idea claimed by "The Great Person School of Entrepreneurship" (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991) and embrace a view that recognizes different shades of grey between black and white, respecting the identity struggle that happens at multiple levels (Wagenschwanz, 2021). In fact, philosophers and psychologists teach us that authenticity develops through a process and narrative of self-authentication—a bi-dimensional journey that creates a dialogue between self-development and self-discovery (Arnould

& Price, 2003; Ranfagni, 2018). This self-narrative is built through authenticating acts that promote an integrated perspective on the individual. This does not mean that people are unitary beings; rather, authenticity holistically fuses the different facets of identity into a coherent representation (Arnould & Price, 2003; Shaw, 2010; Vannini & Franzese, 2008). A self-authentication process can originate from an entrepreneur's vocation or calling. The whole process is typical to entrepreneurs who are not really driven by economic profit and success, rather are pushed by a personal stimulus of self-fulfilment or external forces linked to a sense of destiny and duty (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Arguably, it is not possible to be born authentic. Authenticity is a process and not a state (Ranfagni et al., 2018; Helmuth et al., 2024; Shaw, 2010). This can push towards one's true self even individuals that have not yet clearly identified it. The dynamic never comes to an end and has to be reinforced day by day, action by action, and value by value. However, it is undeniable that authenticity remains a deeply personal subject, that is anchored to the beliefs and values embraced and, simultaneously, built by entrepreneurs in their identity (Wagenschwanz 2021). That's the reason why entrepreneurs who found themselves pursuing a self-authenticating process may be literally animated by an (existential) project. Adopting Heidegger's words, "ent-werfen", they implement acts of projecting themselves toward possibilities, being always in the mode of becoming, not fixed (Golomb, 1995; Kaufmann, 2016). They put in motion a process of self-knowledge aimed at understanding who they are or what they are becoming and, therefore, at keeping track of how their true self evolves (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Akrivou et al., 2011). Remaining loyal to their true self, without renegading thoughts, beliefs, ideas and values over the course of time (Trilling, 2009), inspires entrepreneurs who seek authenticity in doing business. Authors highlight how authentic beings experience personal growth establishing a *feeling of control*, hence demonstrating personal autonomy and freedom from external and given conditions in determining their actions (Shaw, 2023; Golomb, 1995; Kaufmann, 2016; Li et al., 2023; Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Similarly, they are emotionally *connected* as being "Dasein in der Welt" (Golomb, 1995; Michie & Gooty, 2005; Vannini & Franzese, 2008; Kelly et al., 2022): they try to give meaning to their self by immersing themselves in the environment and inhabiting it (Shaw, 2023; Freeman & Auster, 2011; Vannini & Franzese, 2008; Jackson, 2005). As effects, they embed the environment in their beliefs and actions, understanding how they evolve and how their aspirations can be attained. While doing this, time assumes a fully interior value: in an authentic being, past with its memories and its immersive processes "lives" of its present time. It is part of the present moment and generates a temporal continuity that drives potential future choices (Ranfagni et al., 2021; Jackson, 2005). The relationships that he develops in time with others are circular: he gives

to others in order to receive in terms of self-definition. As Atwijuka and Caldwell (2017) point out, these entrepreneurs follow the ethic of ‘take care of.’ Expressed in relationships based on a reciprocal sense of responsibility, it can be seen as moral reasoning that derives from the desire to maintain mutual relationships with those affected by one’s actions. This ethic can be found in the connections between people, and also in connections between people and goods, the care of which generates effects that are conducive to cultivating an individual growth (Atwijuka & Caldwell, 2017; Derry, 2005).

2.2 Authentic-self and its social recognition: impacts and paradoxes

“Das Ein” is ethically connected, evolving socially and temporally over time. As Freeman and Auster (2011) argue, “authenticity becomes the project of finding this unique expression of our humanity that takes account of both individual (and intra-psychic) and community (inter-subjective) aspirations” (p. 21). The entrepreneurial self, emotionally and socially connected, requires external perception and acknowledgment. In fact, social recognition is essential for the entrepreneur’s authenticity to materialize (Ranfagni et al., 2018; Ranfagni, 2018; Burresi et al., 2022). As Edwards (2010) emphasizes, the entrepreneurial self cannot be fully realized without the validation of others. Recognition, in this sense, is not merely about superficial approval but involves a deep, relational validation that confirms the entrepreneur’s authenticity within the social context (Edwards, 2010; Erickson, 1995). This recognition validates the entrepreneurs’ alignment with their internal values and activates a participatory process that transforms the entrepreneurs’ internal authenticity into a socially acknowledged reality (Freeman & Auster, 2011; Derry, 2005; McPherson, 2013). Contextual fit is a pillar of authenticity, and its absence may have significant negative repercussions on the self of individuals (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018).

The effects of individual-context alignment can positively impact the relationships between entrepreneurs and their community. The formers act as role models whose actions—rooted in moral courage—are emulated by followers (Hannah et al., 2011; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007; Walker & Hennig, 2004). This process strengthens organizational ties and fosters shared purpose (Avolio et al., 2004; Freeman & Auster, 2015; Auster & Freeman, 2013). In organizations led by authentic entrepreneurs, followers show higher engagement, commitment, and loyalty due to the alignment between the leader’s words and actions, reinforcing trust (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Additionally, recognized authenticity en-

hances the emotional climate within the organization, generating positive psychological states like trust, hope, and self-efficacy (Green et al., 2003; Huy, 1999; Lenton et al., 2013; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Luthans, 2002; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Asghar et al., 2022; Yozi & Mbokota, 2024). Followers report higher job satisfaction, emotional well-being, and empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), with authentic leaders fostering psychological safety that promotes open communication and collaboration (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Zhu et al., 2009). Lastly, creativity thrives where authenticity is nurtured (Xu et al., 2017). When employees trust that their leaders value their contributions, they feel empowered to share ideas, take risks, and innovate—positively impacting employee creativity and innovative behaviour (Rego et al., 2014). Motivating leadership further strengthens these effects (Gardner et al., 2011). The recognition of the authentic self, although socially and emotionally connected, is not automatic. Since authenticity in entrepreneurship is a dynamic, context-dependent process shaped by social interactions and external validation (Gardner et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2017), it can lead to the recognition of an inauthentic self as authentic. Entrepreneurs may craft narratives that align with societal expectations, leading their actions to be perceived as authentic even if they are strategically constructed (Rose & Wood, 2005; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). This creates a situation where the appearance of authenticity may overshadow its genuine manifestation, complicating how authenticity is recognized (paradox of situation) (Rose & Wood, 2005; Burresi et al., 2022). Furthermore, entrepreneurs are often viewed as more authentic when their image aligns closely with the values and identity of their followers. The relatability of the entrepreneur to their audience enhances their perceived authenticity (paradox of identification). It follows that authenticity can sometimes be more about aligning with external expectations than remaining true to one's inner self (Rose & Wood, 2005; Ranfagni & Guercini, 2014). Entrepreneurs may thus feel pressure to adopt identities that resonate with their audience, even if these identities differ from their own. Finally, entrepreneurs are seen as more authentic when their actions seem natural and effortless, yet this perception often results from intentional construction. The behavior that appears spontaneous is frequently planned and performed, creating a tension between the genuine self and the crafted public persona. It ensures that authenticity can be manufactured for strategic purposes, which undermines its true nature (paradox of production) (Rose & Wood, 2005; Ranfagni & Guercini, 2014).

Authenticity is vulnerable. Its realization depends on recognition, and recognition is shaped by social expectations, audience align-

ment, and performative dynamics (Rose & Wood, 2005; Gardner et al., 2021). In this fragile balance, the self can be misunderstood, strategically performed, or even fragmented—challenging the very notion of a coherent true self. It is interesting to explore how, in an era increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence—disembodied, abstract, and predictive—the emotionally and socially grounded self confronts itself with the new tensions that may influence how to preserve a human-centered, relational understanding of what it means to be and to become.

3. Beyond Automation: the role of AI as a Techno-Symbolic Mediator of Authenticity

The relentless acceleration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has made any singular or stable definition increasingly elusive. As a result, scholars often define AI in broad functional terms — as a system capable of creating meaningful connections (from *inter*, “between,” and *legere*, “to choose”) that simulate or surpass human cognitive capacities (Rani, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2022). Yet such functionalist views obscure deeper ontological tensions regarding the very concept of “intelligence” (Tuo et al., 2021; Emmert-Streib et al., 2020). Philosophical and psychological perspectives highlight contrasting interpretations: essentialist frameworks often present AI as a threat to human authenticity (Sharon, 2013), while transhumanist narratives see it as a means to expand self-expression and human potential (Sharon, 2013). A third position, *methodological posthumanism*, offers a more nuanced view by emphasizing that the impact of AI depends on how individuals and societies interpret, engage with, and appropriate these technologies (Verbeek, 2005; Sharon, 2013).

In the context of entrepreneurship, technology has historically been recognized as a fundamental element for innovation (Kuratko, 2023; Kahn, 2018). The latter is a central piece of the puzzle of entrepreneurial processes (Gartner, 1990) and is often the cornerstone upon which businessmen develop companies (Nijssen, 2021). It's not a chance that Klein (1977) defines the entrepreneur as “*a broker between what is economically desirable and technologically possible*” (p. 187). Within such a framework, industry 4.0 seems to be the new big question mark for entrepreneurs, especially AI, considered by some authors as the new commodity of the 21st century (Di Fraia, 2020). AI technologies span a wide spectrum — from narrowly specialized systems (e.g., task-specific automation) to generative and adaptive

forms capable of language, image, and decision support. All of them find adoption across different sectors (Kim et al., 2022; Woschank et al., 2020; Poalelungi et al., 2023; Dakalbab et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021; Gligorea et al., 2023; Rasheed et al., 2021; Huang & Rust, 2021) and their implementation is considered to be sharpening decision-making, operations optimization, innovation, competitiveness, and even creativity (Pfau & Rimpp, 2021; Weng et al., 2024; Kordon, 2020; Reim et al., 2020; Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023).

We therefore distinguish between three functional types of AI: (1) operational AI (e.g., robotic automation) (Russell & Norvig, 2020), (2) logical or rule-based AI (e.g., neural-symbolic systems) (Besold et al., 2017), and (3) linguistic or symbolic AI, such as foundation models (Bommasani et al., 2021). These latter AI systems intervene in the symbolic, reflective, and social dimensions of entrepreneurial activity and may influence identity construction, narrative shaping, and interpersonal perception. More specifically, these systems do not merely automate decisions; they restructure how entrepreneurs reflect, communicate, and are perceived, thereby impacting the coherence and credibility of their self. In this sense, symbolic and relational AI, such as transformer-based large language model (LLM), recommender systems, sentiment analyzers, and affective computing tools, act as mediators in the entrepreneur's negotiation with themselves. More specifically, they trigger techno-symbolic self-negotiation that is a reflective and socially-situated engagement between human intentionality and machine mediation. It follows that they can act as both a lens and an amplifier for how authentic entrepreneurs perceive and inhabit a technological environment fuelled by AI applications.

Human and artificial intelligence constitute two fundamentally distinct forms of intelligence. While both share *techne* (practical knowledge) and *episteme* (analytical understanding), only humans possess *phronesis* (practical wisdom), *nous* (intellect), and *sophia* (reflective insight) — qualities that are indispensable for context-sensitive and interpretive engagement with tools (Mancuso, 2024). Moreover, this higher-order “beyond-intelligence”, or “thought”, embeds the evolutionary history of individuals, their affective dimensions, tacit knowledge, and metaphorical reasoning (Shojaee et al., 2025). Authenticity becomes a lens through which to understand how entrepreneurs combine emotion, history, and passion with depersonalizing cognitive tools. These tools can reshape the sense of self, fostering technological dependency, superficial learning, and blur boundaries between real and virtual realms — opening up risks

of anxiety, depersonalization, and derealization (Tonks, 2021; Aardema et al., 2006), as well as reducing the uniqueness of one's own experiences and compromising the individuality of the self (Alexopoulos, 2024). They may lead to a dissociation and misalignment between the subjective "I" and the composed "Me" (James, 1950) – that is, between the material self, encompassing the body, possessions, and technologies; the spiritual self, as the site of subjectivity and reflexivity; and the social self, comprising one's perceived and attributed identities in relational contexts (Tonks, 2021; De Pisapia, 2024). More specifically, on a social level, they find themselves navigating a hybrid space composed of human intentions and algorithmic structures (Latour, 1999). Technological prostheses (Sharon, 2013) restructure modes of thinking and acting. They give rise to specific forms of human–technology relations, which, according to Ihde's (1990) taxonomy, can be grouped into four types. First, embodiment relations, where AI systems become transparent extensions of the subject – for example, decision-support algorithms that feel "invisible" yet subtly guide choices. Second, hermeneutic relations, in which AI produces interpretable representations of reality, such as analytics dashboards that require human interpretation. Third, alterity relations, where AI appears as an autonomous "other", exemplified by collaborative robots. And finally, background relations, where AI operates invisibly in the background and becomes noticeable only when something fails – as with continuous monitoring systems. The new social network, defined by Brandtzaeg et al. (2025) as AI-individualism, may open space for individuals' psychosocial moratorium (Kouros & Papa, 2024), but may also reduce interhuman relations deeply necessary to discover one's authenticity (Brandtzaeg et al., 2024; Brandtzaeg et al., 2025; Kirk et al., 2025). This implies a change in the entrepreneurial context with potential mismatch between the latter and entrepreneurs' social identity at self-concept fit level, goal fit level, and social fit level (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018), impacting their authenticity. Authentic entrepreneurs thus face a dual movement: on one hand, AI can enable reflective isolation and introspection conducive to authenticity; on the other, it may erode interpersonal dialogue — a cornerstone of authentic development (Akrivou et al., 2011; Chen & Lin, 2024). The entrepreneurial challenge lies in consciously navigating these tensions, balancing introspection, relational engagement, and critical technology use to sustain genuine processes of self-realization and innovation (Sundar, 2020; Sharon, 2013; de Jong, 2020). The entrepreneurial authenticity building process (O'Neil et al., 2022) definitely is at stake here.

4. Methodology

To comprehensively explore the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI), authenticity, and entrepreneurship as an emerging research domain, and to synthesize the existing literature on the potential impact of AI on authentic entrepreneurial processes, we conducted a qualitative semi-systematic literature review following established methodological frameworks (Tranfield et al., 2003). The ultimate goal was to develop a research agenda to stimulate future investigations (Snyder, 2019). Semi-systematic, or narrative, literature review is a recognized qualitative methodological framework that was selected for its effectiveness in consolidating fragmented evidence in multidisciplinary topics (Snyder, 2019; Kraus et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2013) and in supporting the formulation of research agendas. Semi-systematic reviews occupy a middle ground between traditional, highly subjective narrative reviews, and systematic highly objective reviews. This methodology helps maintain a high degree of objectivity while preserving the flexibility needed to capture valuable insights guided by the researchers' intuition (Kraus et al., 2023; Zunder, 2021). This methodological choice is also consistent with the objectives of the present research: mapping existing themes on the topic of reference, proposing a different interpretative angle on emerging processes, and stimulating reflections for future studies. These aims align with the purposes of narrative literature reviews as observed by Baumeister and Leary (1997). To ensure analytical depth and conceptual relevance, the review was complemented by an inductive thematic analysis, based on the six-step protocol of Naeem et al. (2023) and grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) foundational work. This dual strategy enabled the identification of latent themes, emerging trends, and conceptual gaps. The overall process was structured into three main stages: (1) review design, (2) review execution, and (3) review analysis (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003).

4.1 Review Design – Objectives, Scope, and Search Strategy

The review began with a validation of the research question's relevance and originality, supported by the historical significance of the topic and the lack of integrative studies addressing the AI–authenticity–entrepreneurship nexus (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). The multidisciplinary nature of this intersection further justified a structured and replicable methodological approach. A systematic search protocol was then defined to ensure high-quality source se-

lection while balancing breadth and specificity. In line with Jones et al. (2011), the first stage consisted in the initial definition of a broad search criterion, with the aim of progressively narrowing our focus to the core domains of the review, namely “examining the interplay between the three contexts of entrepreneurship, authenticity, and artificial intelligence and, especially, which implications does AI hold on the authenticity of entrepreneurs.” Search terms were derived from the literature at the intersection of these three domains (Jones et al., 2011). Translated into Boolean operators (AND, OR), this meant searching for articles using queries such as: (‘artificial intelligence’ OR ‘machine learning’) AND (‘entrepreneurship’) AND (‘authenticity’ OR ‘authentic’). Additional combinations were applied in an effort to cover the different nuances and shades through which the themes may emerge in such a blurred and cross-disciplinary area of investigation. The search was conducted between October 2024 and February 2025 across Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO, and covered publications between 2016 and 2025. The initial year (2016) was chosen for its symbolic value: the moment when the wider public first realised that deep learning could outperform the human brain, following AlphaGo’s victory over Lee Sedol. Articles were included if they: (1) were peer-reviewed; (2) were written in English; (3) conceptually addressed at least two of the three core domains (AI, authenticity, entrepreneurship); and (4) provided theoretical, empirical, or conceptual insights rather than purely technical discussions. Exclusion criteria involved non-peer-reviewed sources, conference abstracts without full text, and works focused solely on technical AI development without conceptual relevance.

These criteria were adopted from the outset to ensure conceptual importance, given the vast and interdisciplinary nature of the keywords involved (Snyder, 2019). At the same time, considering the innovative and early-stage nature of the context under analysis and the plausible lack of highly cited contributions, we chose to go beyond only highly impactful journals (Jones et al., 2011; Tranfield et al., 2003) in order to broaden the number of articles that could be scrutinized. This process yielded an initial corpus of 79 documents, which served as the basis for further selection and analysis.

4.2 Conducting the Review – Screening, Selection, and Inter-Coder Validation

A second round of screening was conducted to refine the initial corpus and ensure conceptual alignment. First, the presence of duplicates was checked manually and, when present, duplicates were removed. Next, the three authors independently screened the abstracts to exclude articles lacking substantive connection to the research focus. Subsequently, full-text reviews were carried out to assess theoretical depth and relevance (Jones et al., 2011). Studies addressing solely technical aspects of AI were excluded unless they contributed to understanding authenticity in entrepreneurial contexts (Tranfield et al., 2003). In addition to this reductive process, backward and forward snowballing was applied to identify additional sources. The screening and selection procedures were independently carried out by multiple researchers. Disagreements were discussed and resolved through consensus meetings. All decisions were documented in a shared Excel protocol to ensure transparency and replicability. The final sample comprised 55 peer-reviewed articles, which form the empirical and conceptual base for the thematic analysis and are presented in Appendix C.

4.3 Thematic Analysis and Conceptual Synthesis

The selected corpus was subjected to an inductive thematic analysis, following best practices for qualitative synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023; Krippendorff, 2004; Seuring & Gold, 2012). Each article was treated as a unit of analysis (Jones et al., 2011). The process began with open coding, independently performed by the researchers to identify emergent categories. This step was reinforced by the generation of brief descriptions of the main arguments and the most interesting insights associated with each source (Ward et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2011). The open coding process was considered complete when the sources no longer provided additional, substantially new insights and perspectives on the influence AI may have on the authenticity of entrepreneurs (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Jones et al., 2011). Subsequently, axial coding was applied, through which related codes were grouped into higher-order themes. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), themes were deemed valid when they captured something meaningful about the data in relation to the research question and reflected a patterned conceptual response. These themes were not extracted from their context; rather, they were identified

in close connection with their original milieu and meaning (Jones et al., 2011). To ensure intersubjective reliability, a collaborative triangulation protocol was applied (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991): discrepancies in coding were discussed and reconciled through consensus. This phase also involved a systematic examination of the theoretical frameworks, research designs, and empirical contributions across the corpus. Rather than merely identifying surface-level topics, the goal was to extract deeper thematic patterns and theoretical lenses—such as entrepreneurial identity, AI ethics, sociotechnical imaginaries, and authenticity as symbolic capital—that recur across studies. The initial phase of theme framing resulted in 15 themes, each accompanied by a presentation of its conceptual substance. These codes were then analysed again in a second aggregating stage, carefully scrutinized to identify areas of connection between them that would hold theoretical relevance and build a coherent representation of the dynamics under inquiry. This phase was repeated iteratively until arriving at super-classes, each representing a different domain with connected founding principles (Jones et al., 2011). Although discrete and mutually exclusive at an analytical level, the four major clusters obtained are highly interconnected due to the nature of the phenomenon under observation. The resulting conceptual structure informs both the discussion and the forward-looking research agenda presented in the final section (Snyder, 2019). In Appendix A a table summarizes some of the main references that have been analyzed in order to define the thematic areas.

5. Results, Discussion, and Implications

AI's ubiquity (Menon, 2024) impacts on the entrepreneurial sphere starting from the very root of its nature, hence the individual dimension. Concurrently scholars have also evidenced a series of influences that extend from the individual to the organizational level, impacting on businesses. The analysis of the chosen sample of 55 papers confirms this trend evidencing the emergence of four major thematic tracks that present relevant implications for authentic entrepreneurs in an AI-based transition, that emerged from our literature review. These are more specifically: 1- crafting the authentic self in the AI-driven age; 2- the social construction of authenticity in AI-mediated contexts; 3- authentic entrepreneurial agency in human-AI co-creation; 4- relational climate and shared intent in AI-mediated entrepreneurship. All of them present significant implications for

the entrepreneurial profile, especially for its authenticity. Figure 1 provides a visual synthesis of these four thematic tracks and their conceptual relationships.

5.1 Crafting the Authentic Self in the AI-driven age

a. Thematic discussion

As artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes the spatial, temporal, and relational structures of social life (Tonks, 2021; De Pisapia, 2024), entrepreneurs face the challenge of maintaining a coherent and credible sense of self in increasingly disaggregated environments. The construction of entrepreneurial identity—already fluid and performative—is further complicated by digital infrastructures that both expose and mediate the self (Floridi, 2023; Menon, 2024). This thematic cluster explores how AI-driven systems interact with, threaten, and potentially support the enactment of authentic entrepreneurial identities. Entrepreneurs today must negotiate multiple layers of self-presentation, balancing visibility and intimacy in a landscape marked by algorithmic logics. As noted by Mei and Genet (2024), managing “frontstage” and “backstage” personas becomes crucial for cultivating trust and credibility. Yet sociological perspectives warn that hyperconnected environments increase the risk of identity fragmentation, blurring the distinction between authentic expression and performative adaptation (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024). This is exacerbated by the invisibilization of technology itself: AI systems increasingly operate in the background, appearing seamless and natural while subtly shaping the conditions of entrepreneurial visibility and communication (Beerends & Aydin, 2024). At a deeper level, the temporality of human sense-making is disrupted. Technologies that compress interaction timeframes and generate seemingly human content challenge entrepreneurs’ capacity to ground their decisions in critical, value-laden reflection (Barthelmeß & Furbach, 2023; Pedersen & Ritter, 2024). AI-generated artifacts—whether texts, images, or simulations—now often mimic human output with such fidelity that their artificial nature becomes imperceptible, calling into question the provenance of meaning and the boundaries of authorship. Literature increasingly addresses the psychological and ethical implications of this mediated identity work. The risks include alienation, depersonalization, emotional disengagement, and erosion of agency (De Pisapia, 2024; Bonicalzi et al., 2023; Sundar, 2020). In response, some scholars call for deceleration and deliberate self-examination as a way to sustain inner alignment and restore “self-authenticating

acts" (de Jong, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Others explore alternative design philosophies: Beerends and Aydin (2024), for instance, suggest embracing the inherent inauthenticity of AI rather than striving to humanize it — a move that reframes AI not as a flawed imitation of the human, but as a distinct interlocutor. Individual responses to AI vary widely, shaped by entrepreneurial personality, risk orientation, and beliefs about authenticity. Cotter (2019) shows how digital entrepreneurs develop different visibility strategies based on their interpretation of algorithmic logics, creating tensions between exposure and control. Similarly, Chukwuka and Igweh (2024), Knox et al. (2023), and Upadhyay et al. (2022) highlight how traits like extraversion or openness to experience correlate with greater willingness to adopt AI tools, while risk aversion or low ambiguity tolerance may inhibit integration. However, excessive reliance on AI can lead to standardization, loss of symbolic authorship, and brand dilution (Chen & Zhang, 2024; Menon, 2024; Marino et al., 2024). When outputs are accurate but devoid of internal reflection, the entrepreneur risks delegating key dimensions of identity construction to systems incapable of self-awareness, value evaluation, or intentionality (Dep-tula et al., 2025; Tamang & Singh, 2024; Lee et al., 2023; Noponen et al., 2023). The result is a hollow form of authenticity—what some define as “perceived” but not “lived” authenticity—where meaning is simulated rather than generated from within. Ultimately, the question is not whether entrepreneurs will use AI, but how they will do so in ways that preserve autonomy and coherence. The integration of AI into entrepreneurial practices thus demands more than technical proficiency; it requires an ongoing interpretive effort to safeguard the consistency of the entrepreneurial self in a context increasingly saturated with synthetic intelligences (Sundar, 2020; Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Whether authenticity becomes a negotiable trait or a non-negotiable compass remains a defining question for the entrepreneurial subject in the age of AI.

In sum, this cluster shows that in an AI-driven age, entrepreneurial authenticity depends on preserving spaces for slow, value-laden reflection that allow the self—rather than the algorithm—to remain the primary author of identity.

b. Managerial implications

The process, already activated in the pre-AI digital age, for which subjects must deal with hybrid environments (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024; Floridi, 2023), is now further exacerbated. If previously the online and offline worlds got to merge together and actions became

real no matter which the domain of reference, virtual or physical; today, virtual agents can even operate on human behalf, as well as literally become non-human relational agents with whom to interact (Murtinu & De Massis, 2025). AI adoption has been evidenced as depending on the entrepreneurial orientation and disposition to actually embrace this technology. It has, in fact, been highlighted that different profiles may respond differently to technological innovations (Chukwuka & Igweh, 2024; Knox et al., 2023; Chen & Zhang, 2024). Based on the way entrepreneurs will present themselves through these tools, whether fully adopting or refusing them, will define the way business processes are dealt, from the creation of value for the final customer – e.g., chatbot-related services vs human interaction – to HR practices, defining the way the company is positioned and how stakeholders perceive the identity of entrepreneurs. Without the capacity to critically manage the implementation of these tools, entrepreneurs risk diluting their identity, with potential threats like standardization. If all processes are delegated to AI without any sort of human reflection and consciousness, the human value risks to be lost and authenticity broken down in multiple pieces, as Joseph (2025) states through its definition of algorithmic self. Similar processes may even push the entrepreneur to a state in which he loses the reins of his/her enterprise and, mostly, its vision, leaving the company filled by a void of senseless actions that are driven by algorithmic logic and no real human intent or value. Such a state may really mine the foundations of the company and its long-term development, considering the established correlation between vision and company performance (Baum et al., 1998).

5.2 The Social Construction of Authenticity in AI-mediated contexts

a. Thematic discussion

Authentic individuals, even when fully immersed in their environment, are only perceived as authentic if they are socially recognized as such (Helmuth et al., 2024; Erickson, 1995; Mei & Genet, 2024; Noponen et al., 2023). This underscores the central role of external recognition—a concept gaining prominence in literature—as a necessary condition for entrepreneurial authenticity to hold social and market value. In the digital context, however, this recognition is increasingly fragile. The adoption of AI can compromise the perception of “truth” and human warmth traditionally associated with the entrepreneurial brand. Scholars highlight how AI technologies are capable of making entirely artificial content appear authentic to

others—a phenomenon known as “AI-thenticity”—with significant effects on consumer behavior (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024; Bui et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2024). Digital authenticity, in this view, refers to “the perceived quality of being real and true based on the seeming connection between a digital entity and a physical person, place and/or time” (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024, p. 165). What changes is not only the perception of authenticity, but also the interface and structure of connection: no longer rooted in exclusively physical or embodied contexts, these connections emerge within hybrid realities, where AI acts as both a potential enabler and a threat. It can amplify perceived authenticity—or erode it—even when grounded in genuine self-expression.

Scholars (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2024) evidence that AI-thentic solutions that appear too artificial fail to create others’ self-identification (Gonçalves et al., 2025; Deptula et al., 2025; Jago, 2019; Sundar, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2024). A way to surpass this paradox relies in the capacity of implementing transparent AI systems (Liu, 2021; Sundar, 2020) and transmitting humanity and personality through it (Knox et al., 2023; Liu, 2021). More precisely, Deptula et al. (2025), Jago et al. (2022) and Jago (2019) claim that entrepreneurs should valorize real-world experiences, emphasize human centeredness in their narratives (both of entrepreneurs and followers), strive for “good enough” rather than perfection – AIs have a natural tendency towards perfection that annihilates human creativity, innovation, and personal spirit -, and emphasize unique personality and style. To this purpose Cotter (2019) evidences the need for developing explicit strategies around algorithms, studying them in depth and providing a response to them. Empowering technology with human touch, algorithms with storytelling, and increasing speed with dynamics of slowing down, and vice versa (de Jong, 2020), would allow to generate self-authenticating acts also in AI age.

Self-authentication acts with underlying AI communicational processes will be recognized if, although the non-human nature, it is possible to perceive a substantive self-consciousness (Chen & Zhang, 2024). AIs, in fact, aren’t capable of moral evaluation and free decision-making ability yet (Chen & Zhang, 2024, p. 291; Harari, 2024; Schönecker & Kim, 2022; Satyawani & Iswati, 2023). Indeed, AIs lack reflexive (self-awareness) capabilities in most cases (Todariya, 2024; Dehaene et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022). On the other hand, humans possess practical wisdom – *phronesis* – (the capacity to acknowledge the surrounding context and adapting to these complexities), virtuousness (are capable of interpreting and pondering socio-cultural norms) – *arete* -, and embody goodwill – *eudaimonia* – (are self-direct-

ed but capable of embodying values shared with others), as well as empathy (Kelly, 2023), intuition (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023), proactive thinking (Wang et al., 2024), creativity and spontaneity (Dep-tula et al., 2025), teleonomy and autopoiesis (Marino et al., 2024), all human distinctive qualities that should be valorized and preserved to obtain a competitive advantage, allowing entrepreneurs to self-authenticate differentiating in markets saturated by algorithmic content and AI-driven communication.

Some authors even believe AI should be taken as support to authentic leadership instead of substitution (Noponen et al., 2023; Kelly, 2023; Titareva, 2021; Shepherd & Majchrzak, 2022). Kelly (2023) makes an ulterior remark about authentic entrepreneurs, evidencing how their mindfulness may allow to better understand the implications of technology for humanity and integrate humanity and AI the best way possible. It might be potentially interesting to disclose how this may be achieved.

Overall, this cluster shows that in AI-mediated contexts where AI-thenticity unsettles external validation, entrepreneurs can sustain credible authenticity only by making their distinctive human qualities visible and using AI as a transparent, supportive extension rather than a substitute for the self.

b. Managerial implications

Concerning “the social construction of authenticity in AI-mediated contexts”, entrepreneurial insights and suggestions are strongly related to the first thematic cluster. Since it is acknowledged that authenticity is a socially constructed perception, it is fundamental for entrepreneurs to optimally manage the practices in which AI gets embedded considering the risk of being perceived as inauthentic (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024; Bui et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2024). In such dynamics, it is therefore highly suggested to maintain human qualities and implement AI as a supportive element to the domains in which human capacities are limited due to inevitable cognitive processes. On the other hand, if AI’s support is flanked by the valorization of human critical thinking, creativity, self-awareness and reflexivity the authenticity of entrepreneurs may be elevated to a whole new level in which AI becomes a tool for being perceived as authentic instead of being driven away from one’s self (Kelly, 2023), increasing at the same time performances and authenticity perception with its added value. Entrepreneurs should carefully examine the available AI systems and understand which is the best one for the needs of their company – where it can improve human qualities – and which al-

low for the preservation of distinctive human capacities that are not suffocated by algorithms, rather empowered. This implies the need for deeply understanding the available solutions with their pros and cons in order to make the best choice, since for the moment no artificial intelligence comes without a drawback.

5.3 Authentic Entrepreneurial Agency in Human-AI Co-creation

a. Thematic discussion

In this cluster, authenticity is not seen in its self-expressive dimensions, rather as a relational competence that enables entrepreneurs to engage meaningfully in human–AI collaborative processes. Moreover, authenticity is defined by self-awareness, meta-cognition, domain cognizance, and internalized moral perspective, whereas the authentic entrepreneur is positioned as the “captain” steering co-creative systems and shared planning with artificial agents (Ge et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2023). Such qualities - captured in Knox et al.’s concept of cognitive agility - may allow entrepreneurs to act as interpretive filters, grounding AI-enabled outputs in the entrepreneur’s project and ethical framework (Chen & Zhang, 2024; Chukwuka & Igweh, 2024; Obschonka & Audretsch, 2020, Redondo-Rodriguez, 2024). It also could act as a mean to: a) set ethical boundaries and initial parameters for AI deployment and ensure systems operate within human-led intentions (Maadi et al., 2021; Noponen et al., 2023; Shepherd & Majchrzak, 2022), and b) safeguard human-centric values such as emotional connection, transparency, and context sensitivity, especially in decision-making processes mediated by AI (de Jong, 2020; Sundar, 2020; Liu, 2021).

This relational view of authenticity generates a shift from seeing AI as a passive technological backdrop to recognizing it as an active, dialogical partner in co-creative entrepreneurial processes (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023; Rezwana & Maher, 2023; Schönecker & Kim, 2022; Sundar, 2020; Wang et al., 2024; Crockett, 2024; Floridi, 2023). The entrepreneur does not limit himself to a mere implementation of AI systems, but shapes their meaning, purpose, and trajectory through intentional, value-driven engagement. Such co-creation pushes to investigate how the entrepreneur can think and act to maintain a continuous interpretive stance—reading, adjusting, and reorienting AI behavior in light of evolving goals, contextual dynamics, and ethical commitments (Rezwana & Maher, 2023; Van Berkel, Skov & Kjeldskov, 2021). In this perspective, self-consciousness could be the hinge that connects technical competence with value-based leader-

ship (Knox et al., 2023; Chen & Zhang, 2024; Ge et al., 2022). It enables entrepreneurs to navigate complex, hybrid environments—where agency is distributed between human and artificial actors—without relinquishing authorship or accountability. The emerging co-creative dynamic unfolds across multiple levels of analysis: micro (individual interactions), meso (organizational structures), and macro (socio-cultural systems) (Ge et al., 2022). As scholars highlight authentic entrepreneurs will find themselves at operating across these layers to ensure coherence between internal self-understanding and external system design (de Jong, 2020)— and their challenge will be the one of maintaining alignment between who they are, what they stand for, and how intelligent systems are deployed. Particularly intriguing will be understanding how the authentic entrepreneur does not lose control to automation, reclaiming authorship by embedding relational agency at the heart of AI adoption. Authenticity, in this light, may emerge as not diminished by technology, but enacted through intentional, situated, and dialogical engagement. Simultaneously, it may also carry a potential change at the very bases of its paradigm.

Thus, this cluster shows that as AI becomes a new agentic and relational actor, authentic entrepreneurial agency rests on deeply self-aware leaders who design co-creative systems in which humans remain in the driver's seat of meaning, ethics, and direction.

b. Managerial implications

An “*authentic entrepreneurial agency in human-AI cooperation*” can be reached only when recognizing a series of necessary adaptations that must happen in the entrepreneurial strategies and in their companies. These modifications are needed because of the agentic nature of AI, that, substituting the human one in a series of tasks, challenges the assumption of full autonomy of human action (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023). These tools are capable of driving and steering human decision-making and practices due to their artificial agency (Floridi, 2023). This calls for an unprecedented need for understanding how to cooperate with these actors. In such a cooperation the first thing that entrepreneurs must define is whether they will consider AI as a mere instrumental factor or a player to which attribute some higher status compared, for example, to a mouse and a computer. Especially if recognizing some agency to AI, it becomes a priority for entrepreneurs to design co-creative systems in which the human subject remains in the driving seat of projects and activities, that he can manage thanks to its distinctive qualities (Ge et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2023). However, the activity of designing similar systems is not easy

to be done, since different typologies of AI – human-inspired, humanized, and analytical (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019) – can be inserted in the entrepreneurial journey and a careful balancing between the entrepreneurs' needs and the opportunities disclosed by AI is needed. Entrepreneurial processes need therefore to be redefined and should be based on flexible and agile structures ever more impellent to host artificial agents and make them fully merge with the environment of application (Ge et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the promised positive benefits of artificial intelligence can be reached only through the development of multidisciplinary teams that are not anchored in their respective fields of action and a process of training and AI-literacy that allows to interpret the data obtained and protect against the well-known hallucinations (Rady et al., 2026). Another way for protecting entrepreneurial action from AI-related mistakes is relying on transparent systems in which the black box of algorithms is opened up to the public and clearly presents its limits and potentials. Similarly, co-designed AIs, meant as tools developed in order to respond to the specific requests of the individuals (Pucci et al., 2024), are needed and may be obtained through a constant dialogue between developers and leaders (Knox et al., 2023). Not by chance, such systems allow the autonomous definition of a set of boundaries and rules before the actual launch of AI, which entrepreneurs need to identify before starting co-creating in the human-AI dialogue (Maadi et al., 2021).

5.4 Relational Climate and Shared Intent in AI-Mediated Entrepreneurship

a. Thematic discussion

The development of responsible and innovative AI adoption paths requires more than technical infrastructure: it demands the cultivation of a relational climate where shared intent, dialogical openness, and emotional connection guide how intelligent systems are designed and deployed. Scholars explore how the role of the entrepreneur using AI could remain that of a cultural enabler in companies and as such capable of shaping organizational settings that favor co-creation and long-term alignment between human and artificial agents (de Jong, 2020). It is renowned that authentic entrepreneurs endowed with reflective leadership qualities (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), are particularly suited to this task. Their ability to cultivate meaningful relationships and emotional alignment resonates with organizational values such as experience, wholeness, and wisdom

(de Jong, 2020; Salinas-Navarro et al., 2024; Shepherd & Majchrzak, 2022). These values are not abstract ideals but are conceived as design principles for entrepreneurial ecosystems capable of accommodating artificial agency without losing human intentionality and moral anchoring (Freeman & Auster, 2011; Derry, 2005). In this landscape, Knox et al. (2023) propose the OLB model as an operational structure for building shared mental models between entrepreneurs and AI developers. This structure includes three pillars that are: 1) O (Orienting): the ability to maintain a holistic perspective, underpinned by balanced information processing; 2) L (Locating): the skill to identify and respect others' needs and limits, closely tied to transparency; and 3) B (Bridging): the disposition to co-adapt and co-learn, echoing the poetic dimension of human relationships in organizational life. Such frameworks foreground the need for entrepreneurs to act not as solitary decision-makers but as dialogical nodes within distributed systems of agency (Noponen, 2019; Noponen et al., 2023). Within this view, the cultivation of positive psychological states (Knox et al., 2023), critical and dialogical pedagogies (Kelly, 2023; Titareva, 2021), and reflective learning (de Jong, 2020; Wang et al., 2024) emerge as necessary conditions for preparing both leaders and followers to participate meaningfully in human–AI collaboration. Education becomes not merely instrumental but existential, aiming to develop individuals capable of relational reflexivity and collective alignment.

Ultimately, only such a culture—distributed, intentional, and emotionally attuned—can generate the flexible and agile organizational structures needed to enact bricolage: the adaptive recombination of human and technological elements in entrepreneurial practice (Ge et al., 2022; Delponte, 2018; Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023; Kiani, 2024). This perspective does not deny the risks associated with AI—ethical opacity, automation bias, responsibility gaps (Bostrom & Yudkowsky, 2018; Marino et al., 2024; Schönecker & Kim, 2022; Floridi, 2023; Stahl et al., 2023; Chesterman, 2020; Zuboff & Bassotti, 2019; Crouch, 2019; Cath et al., 2018; Werthner et al., 2024)—but situates their mitigation in the entrepreneur's capacity to maintain authorship through situated relational agency. As Harari (2024) remind us, “[...] when we write the code of a computer, we don't limit ourselves to project a product. We redesign politics, society, and culture [...]” (p. 296). The entrepreneur, therefore, must not only implement AI but also shape its cultural implications—ensuring that the systems they co-create remain attuned to the human meanings they are intended to serve.

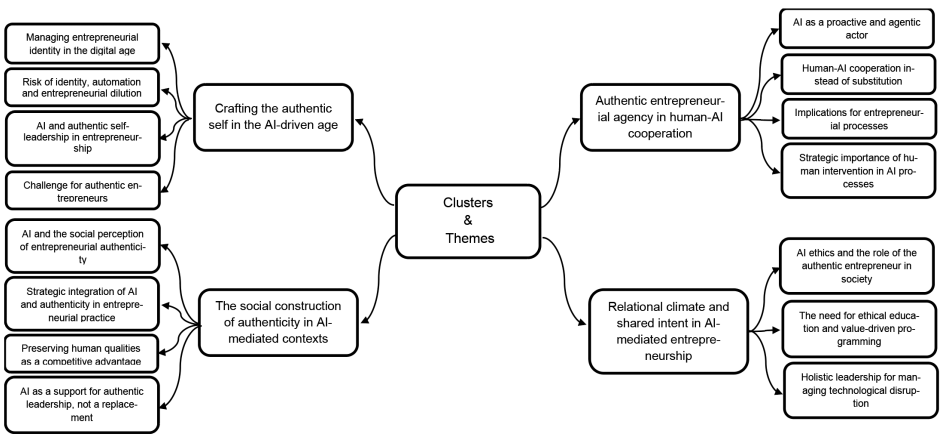
Ultimately, this cluster shows that fostering a relational climate and shared intent in AI-mediated entrepreneurship requires reflec-

tive leadership and robust digital education that render AI’s invisible risks thinkable and align technological choices with collectively endorsed values.

b. Managerial implications

To generate a “relational climate and shared intent in AI-mediated entrepreneurship” it is necessary that entrepreneurs share generally acknowledged ethical values and principles – such as the ones of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, justice, explicability, and more (Floridi, 2023) – that make them capable of recognizing AI for its benefits, but also its threats (Beerends & Aydin, 2024; Harari, 2024). This requires campaigns by governments and institutions, as well as educational programs pursued and developed by entrepreneurs themselves. In this, authentic entrepreneurs may be more prone to understanding how to use AI for good. These educational campaigns should aim at developing on-field related skills necessary to master AI tools, as well as frameworks and models of behaviour, such as Knox et al. (2023)’s OLB framework. However, all of these rely on wider capacities to develop diametrically opposed sensibilities to the ones of AI, hence the ability to slow down, expand self-awareness and improve relational connection (de Jong, 2020). This would allow to grow entrepreneurs capable of balancing human and technological peculiarities through a holistic approach that develops a proper entrepreneurial culture. Educational programs are once again starting point for optimally completing a process of bricolage (Ge et al., 2022).

Fig. 1 Thematic map emerging from the inductive thematic analysis



6. Research Agenda: Rethinking Authenticity in the Age of AI-Enhanced Entrepreneurship

The interplay between authenticity and artificial intelligence in entrepreneurship opens a fertile space for theoretical refinement and empirical inquiry. As the preceding clusters suggest, AI not only mediates entrepreneurial practices but also reconfigures the temporal, relational, and moral dimensions of the authentic self. In light of this, a research agenda must explore how authenticity is redefined, negotiated, and enacted within AI-mediated contexts. Below, we outline six interconnected thematic directions that warrant further investigation. These have been reported also in Appendix B, which connects the research agenda with the thematic discussion and the basic theoretical contribution used as starting point for our paper.

- Reflexive Narratives in AI-mediated Self-authentication.

Entrepreneurial authenticity has traditionally been anchored in reflexive narratives that allow individuals to interpret, integrate, and perform their evolving identities. The integration of symbolic AI (e.g., language models, recommender systems) may support these dynamics but may also challenge these processes considering the potential deriving identity dilution and blurring. This highlights a need for preserving self-authenticating acts also in AI-age, achievable by totally embracing the new technological paradigm or adopting different still unrealized roads. Future research could investigate how AI-mediated self-authentication trajectories unfold, and how entrepreneurs navigate between introspection and algorithmic feedback loops. Do these narratives foster connection, virtue, and an authentic experience of time—or do they fragment the self and accelerate performativity? How does algorithmic feedback influence selfnarratives, and to what extent entrepreneurs develop a “techno-symbolic negotiation” with AI? How do entrepreneurs’ personality differences modulate the ability to preserve authenticity under algorithmic assistance?

- Emotional Resonance and Rational-Automated Systems: A Tension to Explore.

Authenticity, as discussed in the literature, is emotionally embedded, socially connected, and temporally grounded. AI systems, by contrast, operate through rational logic and disembodied automation. This raises the ontological question of whether—and how—authentic relations can emerge in interactions through non-human agents. Is a transparent process sufficient condition to reconcile an emotionally grounded self with affectively neutral technologies?

How can human personalities build meaningful connections through AI-thentic relations? How do mindfulness training programmes influence entrepreneurs' ability to use AI ethically and with emotional resonance? How to train and integrate human qualities into AI tools and how to measure their impact? These themes invite exploration into how human–AI interaction can be designed to preserve affective resonance and relational depth in entrepreneurial life.

- **Fragmented Selves and the Conditions for Recognition**

In a world shaped by hyperconnectivity and algorithmic personalization, entrepreneurial identities are increasingly fluid and fragmented. This calls into question how the perception of an authentic self can be activated in such conditions. Literature suggests that humanized qualities and personalized storytelling are prerequisites to make AI-mediated relations as close as possible to purely human ones. Future studies could examine the touchpoints through which fragmented or hybrid entrepreneurial selves find coherence and validation. How do digital traces, algorithmic performances, or hybrid storytelling help entrepreneurs be recognized as authentic by others—even when their internal identity is still in flux? How do different narrative forms (authentic founder-led videos, podcasts, microblogs) support recognition in hybrid contexts? How do consumers perceive and attribute authenticity to AI-generated or AI-assisted communications, and what role transparency and labeling play? Theories starting from dialogical view on the self of individuals can offer foundational insights.

- **The Paradoxes of Authenticity in the Age of AI**

AI challenges the boundaries between authentic and inauthentic expression. Entrepreneurs may appear authentic while relying on generative systems to simulate relational warmth or ethical intentionality. This gives rise to two important paradoxes: the presence of authenticity within inauthenticity (e.g., sincere engagement with AI-generated outputs) and inauthenticity within authenticity (e.g., strategic authenticity to satisfy perceived expectations). Research should interrogate how these paradoxes emerge, how they are perceived by stakeholders, and what they reveal about the evolving meaning of authenticity. Is authenticity now partially “outsourced” to algorithms? Who retains the agency—and the accountability—for its enactment?

- **AI-mediated Authenticity and Organizational Practices**

At the organizational level, AI is increasingly involved in a range of different strategic processes that ultimately rely on entrepreneurial decision-making. How does AI-mediated authenticity affect these

practices? Scholars evidence the need for more shared decisional processes and co-creative systems supported by artificial agents. Can organizations preserve a culture of authentic engagement when decisions are supported—or even driven—by AI systems? The organizational perspective must recognize and mitigate risks like ethical opacity, automated bias and accountability gaps. Integration ideas include forming internal ethics committees and implementing algorithmic auditing practices to ensure alignment with corporate values. Future research should explore how the values of transparency, intentionality, and emotional intelligence can be embedded in organizational design when artificial agents are involved, as well as investigate on how to reach a company climate that fosters a similar approach. This line of inquiry also invites the rethinking of leadership models in light of AI's relational affordances.

- **AI-mediated Authenticity and Entrepreneurial Decision-Making**

Entrepreneurial decision-making involves more than data analysis—it is often driven by intuition, moral reflection, and existential meaning-making. How does AI reshape this process? Does it dilute the entrepreneur's ability to reflect critically, or does it offer new tools to enhance moral clarity and strategic creativity? It is valuable to study how to preserve these capacities in decision processes, perhaps via guided reflection practices or critical-thinking prompts. Research could explore practices that help entrepreneurs balance AI-driven reflection with human-centred discussion, classify various entrepreneur-AI interaction types and evaluating their impact on autonomy, creativity and accountability. Further studies should explore how entrepreneurs use AI not merely as an informational tool, but as a co-author in decisions that involve identity, values, and long-term vision. This would deepen our understanding of decision-making under the lens of authentic leadership, particularly in fast-evolving, uncertain contexts. Critical could be the leader's capacity to exert self-conscious mechanisms that allow optimal human-AI interaction.

7. Conclusions and Limitations

The present paper explores the nexus of AI, authenticity and entrepreneurship, illuminating a set of research questions poised to guide future investigations. Our semi-systematic literature review—complemented by an inductive thematic analysis of 55 scholarly works—reveals four critical arenas in which AI will reshape entre-

preneurial practice. These thematic clusters not only map the major transitions in how entrepreneurs define and enact authenticity, but also underscore their broader reverberations: from the inner mechanics of self-authentication to external perceptions of authenticity, from organizational cultures to strategic decision-making processes. In each domain, AI emerges as both a catalyst and a challenge, capable of transforming the entrepreneur's identity work, stakeholder recognition, corporate climate and choice architecture.

Despite its exploratory scope, this paper delivers insights of immediate relevance. It equips academics with a clear research roadmap—highlighting uncharted questions and conceptual gaps ripe for deeper analysis—while encouraging fresh critical perspectives on the AI–authenticity–entrepreneurship nexus. At the same time, it offers practitioners a practical mirror in which to examine their own AI initiatives, both at the organizational and the individual level, challenging them to integrate new technologies without sacrificing authenticity or ethical integrity.

This study has several noteworthy limitations. Its semi-systematic design necessarily restricts the sample to 55 articles, which may not exhaust the full breadth of emerging work on AI, authenticity and entrepreneurship. While the interdisciplinary lens yields rich, cross-cutting insights, it also prevents deep dives into any single sector or business domain. Moreover, given the rapid pace of AI research, findings that are current at publication risk being overtaken by new developments almost immediately.

Nonetheless, by mapping thematic clusters and posing targeted research questions, this paper offers a useful starting point for further exploration. Subsequent investigations can build on these insights, both by probing each cluster in greater depth and by testing them within specific industries and organizational contexts.

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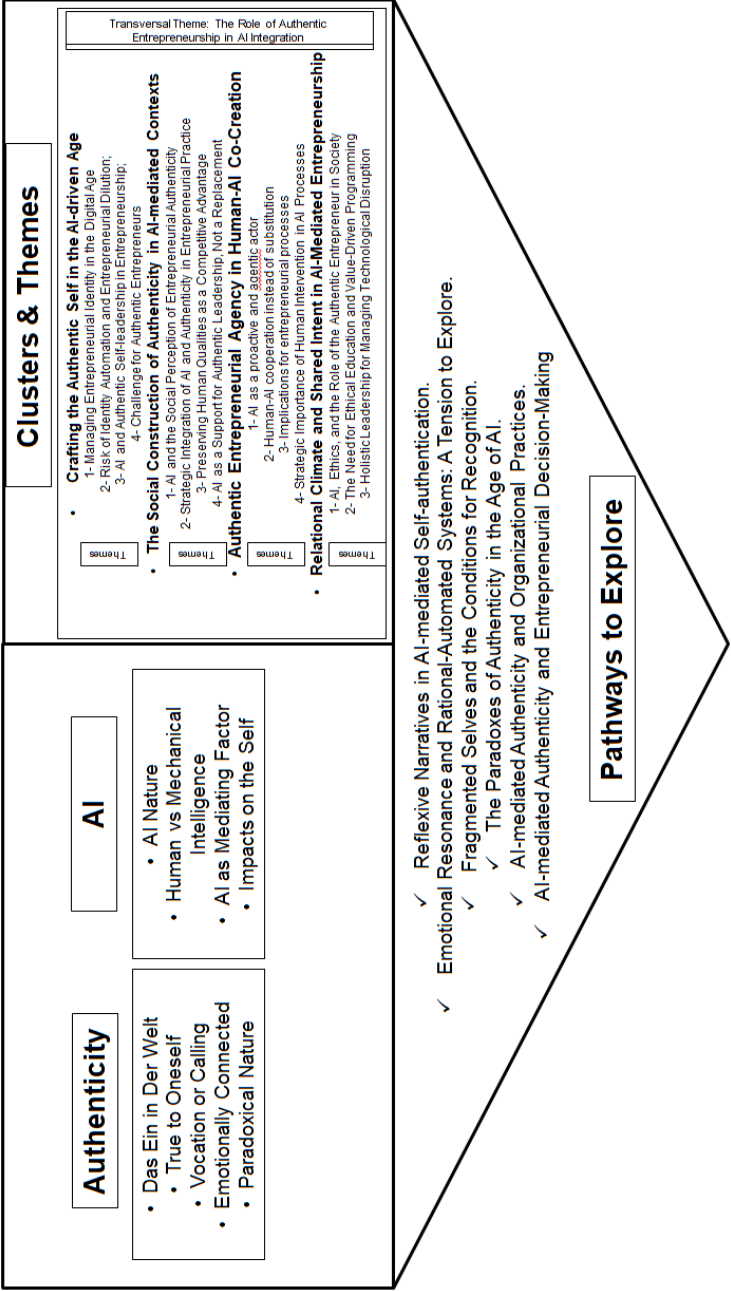
Thematic track 1 - Crafting the Authentic Self in the AI-driven Age				
Author	Year	Research Design	Sample	Key Insights
Cotter	2019	Thematic Analysis	Facebook Groups	Algorithmic power influences users' strategies and behaviour in playing the "Visibility Game", hence in making choices that push them to a trade-off authentic-inauthentic. Users have to choose between different ways of adapting to algorithms.
Mei & Genet	2024	Descriptive, correlation and regression analysis	178 Youtube Videos	Social media entrepreneurs need to carefully manage their identity in order to remain authentic and be perceived like that. Different strategies correspond to different levels of authenticity negotiation. Some strategies give up authenticity for monetization, some others find an agreement.
Pedersen & Ritter	2024	Research Agenda	No sample	Societies have entered in a new stage of the digital revolution in which digital authenticity has become ordinary. Such a condition makes it impossible to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic artifacts, interactions, and data, opening up to new undiscovered entrepreneurial insights.
Beerends & Aydin	2024	Discourse Analysis	Papers, programs, online discussions	The human "authenticity negotiation process" has come to a new stage in which the existential condition of what means being human is jeopardized by AI. The latter poses new questions to what it means to be a Man, calling for the proper management of one's identity.
Deptula, Hunter & Johnson-Sheehan	2025	Pilot Study	Chat GPT (sole generative AI analyzed)	In order to create authentic content through generative AI it is necessary to develop self-conscious mechanisms that allow to transmit real-world engagement, human centrality, and personal style. Authenticity is interpreted under an Aristotelian perspective and read through Fromm's real and pseudo-self point of view.

Thematic track 2 – The Social Construction of Authenticity in AI-Mediated Contexts					
Author	Year	Research Design	Sample	Key Insights	
Bui, Filimonau & Sezerel	2024	Survey, Regression Analysis, Mediation Analysis	Two samples: S1=200 pp. S2=400 pp.	AI-generated destination images may be perceived as authentic by others, especially when aligning with self-authenticating acts of interested visitors. This dynamic disclosed important implications for authenticity in AI era, AI-thenticity.	
Jago, Carroll & Lin	2022	Survey (Likert scale) Correlation estimation, Means, St. Dev.	S1=207 pp. S2=227 pp. S3=306 pp. S4=219 pp. S5=241 pp.	Perceived authenticity of AIs is evaluated through a quantitative analysis. Results demonstrate that perceived authenticity is higher when highlighting human origins of autonomous technologies and through anthropomorphizing them. Especially human origins enhance authenticity perception compared to anthropomorphic cues.	
Dehaene, Lau & Kouider	2017	Conceptual paper	No sample	Despite recent success and recognized capabilities of machines to perform in certain domains, the study evidenced that AIs still perform mainly unconscious processes (C0), while lacking real conscious computations (C1) and self-awareness (C2).	
Kelly	2023	Conceptual paper	No sample	AI, with its subdomains, is considered as a set of technologies that may empower authentic leadership in some of its most important characteristics. Among these especially moral and emotional intelligence.	
Shepherd & Majchrzak	2022	Conceptual paper	No sample	AI can be used as a power to strengthen entrepreneurial activity. AI is seen as a tool for augmenting entrepreneurial individual capabilities and not only increasing production processes, rather also internal conscious dimensions.	

Thematic track 3 – Authentic Entrepreneurial Agency in Human-AI Co-Creation

Author	Year	Research Design	Sample	Key Insights
Rezwana & Maher	2023	COFI system evaluation	92 Co-creative systems	AI's need to be considered as agentic actors with which structuring co-creative systems. Interaction design is considered as a necessary step for developing real co-creative systems that allow for best results and enable human-AI partnership.
Sundar	2020	Conceptual paper	No sample	Considering the AI agency increase it becomes fundamental real co-creative systems and human-AI synergies. It is suggested to deepen the human experience through algorithms, especially the psychological dimension of human-AI interaction (HAI).
Maadi et al.	2021	Literature Review	2015-2020 papers respecting keywords	Humans should remain in the loop, hence in the driving seat. More specifically human presence is fundamental in: 1- data producing and pre-processing; 2- ML learning; 3- ML evaluation and refinement.
Chen & Zhang	2024	Conceptual paper	No sample	Human-AI relationship is analyzed in the effort of understanding the differences and potential integrations between the two. A three dimensional model couples AI with significant human capital optimizing efficiency and effectiveness.
Knox Sütterlin & Lugo	2023	Conceptual paper	No sample	AI is seen as a potential catalyst for innovation. However, in order to structure proper co-creative systems it is necessary to start interpreting human-AI interaction as a real relationship. Metacognition, domain cognizance, self-governance and cognitive agility are necessary to create real collaborative systems.

Thematic track 4 – Relational Climate and Shared Intent in AI-Mediated Entrepreneurship					
Author	Year	Research Design	Sample	Key Insights	
Noponen Auvinen & Sajasalo	2023	Conceptual Paper	3 real world cases	The chapter analyses the impact that AI may have on forms of leadership, evidencing how it may be a tool to enhance capabilities, but also undermine them. It makes a call for more shared forms of leadership.	
Cath et al.	2018	Conceptual paper	US, UK, EU reports on AI	AI opens up wider implications for society, starting from institutions, reaching all stakeholders of a community. Three main topics emerge from the reports: a- the need for the development of a 'good AI society'; b- the role and responsibility of certain actors; c- where improvement should be needed.	
de Jong	2020	Conceptual paper	No sample	Human-AI integration is needed in order to optimize AI use. However, there's a need to slow down and education is an essential factor in it. Specifically education should centre on the recovery of experience, wisdom and wholeness, as well as the ability to share, connect and engage with others.	
Giuggioli & Pellegrini	2023	Systematic literature review	60 papers	Entrepreneurial AI augmentation can be reached only when addressing urgent ethical issues. Prerequisite for ethical behaviour is AI literacy for all, starting from the entrepreneur reaching the employee with the simplest job. At entrepreneurial level this would allow to grasp how to use similar tools in a more responsible way.	
Wang et al.	2024	Panel discussion results	4 panelists	Human-AI relationship poses new challenges for human subjectivity and centrality, especially in cases of overreliance. Collaborative human-AI strategies for preserving human subjectivity are identified-	



Appendix C – Full list of semi-systematic literature review

N.	Author	Year	Journal/Editor
1	Barthelmeß, U., & Furbach, U.	2023	Springer Nature
2	Beerends, S. & Aydin, C.	2024	AI & Society
3	Bonicalzi, S., de Caro, M. & Giovanola, B.	2023	Topoi
4	Bostrom, N. & Yudkowsky, E.	2018	Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence
5	Bui, H. T., Filimonau, V. & Sezerel, H.	2024	Journal of Destination Marketing & Management
6	Cath, C. et al., 2018	2018	Science and Engineering Ethics
7	Chen, X. & Zhang, S.	2024	Open Journal of Social Sciences
8	Chesterman, S.	2020	Journal of Emerging Technologies
9	Chukwuka, E. J. & Igweh, F. K.	2024	International Journal of Business & Entrepreneurial Research
10	Cotter, K.	2019	New Media & Society
11	Crockett, C.	2024	AI, Consciousness, and The New Humanism
12	Crouch, C.	2019	Il Mulino
13	de Jong, J. C.	2020	AI Practitioner
14	Dehaene, S., Lau, H. & Kouider, S.	2017	Robotics, AI and Society
15	Delponte, L.	2018	Eurocities
16	Deptula, A., Hunter, P. T. & Johnson-Sheehan, R.	2025	Journal of Business and Technical Communication
17	Floridi, L.	2023	Oxford University Press
18	Ge, B., Wang, Q. & Yao, M.	2022	System Research and Behavioral Science
19	Giuggioli, G. & Pellegrini, M. M.	2023	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research
20	Gonçalves, A. R., et al.	2025	Journal of Business Research
21	Harari, Y. N.	2024	Random House
22	Jago, A. S.	2019	Academy of Management Discoveries
23	Jago, A. S., Carroll, G. R. & Lin, M.	2022	Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied
24	Kelly, L.	2023	Springer International
25	Kiani, A.	2024	International Journal of Managing Projects in Business
26	Knox, B. J., Sütterlin, S. & Lugo, R.	2023	Handbook of Research on Artificial Intelligence, Innovation and Entrepreneurship
27	Lee, G. & Kim, H.	2024	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
28	Lee, Y. K., Park, Y. & Hahn, S.	2023	Human Factors Psychology Lab
29	Liu, B.	2021	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication

N.	Author	Year	Journal/Editor
30	Maadi, M., Khorshidi, H. A. & Aickelin, U.	2021	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health
31	Marino, D., Cananzi, D. & Aragona, F.	2024	Springer Nature
32	Mei, M. Q. & Genet C.	2024	European Management Journal
33	Menon, S.	2024	Springer Nature
34	Noponen, N.	2019	Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies
35	Noponen, N., Auvinen, T. & Sajasalo, P.	2023	Emerald Publishing Limited
36	Obschonka, M. & Audretsch, D. B.	2019	Small Business Economics
37	Pedersen, C. L. & Ritter, T.	2024	Industrial Marketing Management
38	Redondo-Rodriguez, M. D., et al.	2024	The Journal of Technology Transfer
39	Rezwana, J. & Maher, M. L.	2023	ACM Trans. Comput.-Hum. Interact.
40	Salinas-Navarro et al.	2024	Education Sciences
41	Satyawan, M. D. & Iswati, S.	2023	Journal of Economics, Business, and Accountancy Ventura
42	Schönecker, D. & Kim, H.	2022	de Gruyter
43	Shepherd, D. A. & Majchrzak, A.	2022	Journal of Business Venturing
44	Stahl, B. C., Schroeder, D., & Rodrigues, R.	2023	Springer Nature
45	Sundar, S. S.	2020	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
46	Tamang, S. & Singh, R. M.	2024	Springer Nature
47	Titareva, T.	2021	Leading Change Conference
48	Todariya, S.	2024	Springer Nature
49	Upadhyay, N., Upadhyay, S. & Dwivedi, Y. K.	2022	International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research
50	van Berkel, N., Skov, M. B. & Kjeldskov, J.	2021	Interactions
51	Wang, F., et al.	2024	ASIS&T Annual Meeting 2024
52	Werthner, H. et al.	2024	Springer Nature
53	Xia, Y., et al.	2024	Journal of the Knowledge Economy
54	Zhang, Y.	2022	Theory of Science
55	Zuboff, S. & Bassotti, P.	2019	Luiss University Press