

Engagement or social glue? An investigation of influential characteristics of virtual influencers in Metaverse

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to identify the most influential attributes of metaverse influencers' and examine their impact on customer engagement and social glue. Three studies (one qualitative and two quantitative studies) were conducted to understand the phenomenon better. The qualitative study was conducted to identify the antecedents of the theoretical model, which was tested in study 2 using the covariance-based structural equation modelling technique. Study 3 then divided the respondents based on the virtual influencer attribute preferences. Results of study 1 revealed the six most influential characteristics of metaverse influencers which are physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, perceived credibility, influencer-metaverse fit, intimacy and attitude homophily. Further, study 2 validated that attractiveness and perceived credibility enhance engagement. Further, intimacy, perceived credibility and homophily enhance social glue. Parasocial relationships and self-discrepancy are found to be significant mediator and moderator, respectively. Finally, study 3 used latent class analysis to reveal different clusters of metaverse users. The findings of this research enhance understanding regarding virtual influencers in the metaverse context, thereby contributing to the influencer marketing literature. Based on the findings, we suggest some insightful implications for marketers.

Subject Areas: *Advertising, Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Services, Entertainment Marketing*

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media