

Beyond SENS(E)ation: Exploring Sensory Language Effectiveness in Virtual Influencers' Product Endorsements

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Abstract

Although managers increasingly shift their resources from human to virtual influencers, the factors driving the success of their product endorsements still need to be explored. Here, sensory language is known to elicit positive consumer behaviour. Yet, what if the influencer cannot sense? This paper investigates human-likeness and product depiction that may impact the effectiveness of sensory cues in virtual influencers' posts. The authors develop a conceptual framework grounded in mental imagery theory and employ a multimethod approach, analysing both social media and lab experiment data to test their hypotheses. Contrary to prior belief, the usage of sensory language by virtual influencers exerts a reverse (negative) effect on engagement and purchase intent. Based on our findings, marketers can guide high human-like virtual influencers to use low sensory language to mitigate the uncanny valley effect. Therefore, this paper complements past research on the effectiveness of social media content in (virtual) influencer marketing.

Subject Areas: *Advertising, Consumer Behaviour*

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media