

Virtual or Human Influencers: Who Matters More for Consumer Engagement?

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Abstract

Consumers increasingly follow Virtual Influencers (VIs) who are used as channels for conveying marketing messages. Although many brands, particularly luxury ones, have started using VIs in their marketing communication activities, little is known on the impact of VIs and Human Influencers (HIs) on consumer engagement across different sectors. To fill this gap, this study investigates how influencer traits and the richness of posts (e.g., text, images, video) contribute to fostering consumer engagement. Leveraging a dataset of around 300 Instagram posts, we analyse sponsored content from both VIs and HIs in the realms of fashion and beauty. Preliminary findings uncover distinct engagement patterns, highlighting the intricate dynamics between influencer types and factors shaping user responses. Despite its ongoing nature, the study offers a preliminary yet insightful glimpse into the evolving dynamics of influencer-consumer interactions. This research has theoretical and practical implications for influencer marketing strategies.

Subject Areas: *Advertising, Consumer Services, Marketing Strategy, Promotion*

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media