

Travel Behavior and Virtual Influencers: Investigating the Effects of Congruence and Anthropomorphism

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Abstract

Virtual influencers (VIs), known as non-human avatars, are an increasingly important marketing tool for tourism marketers. However, consumer responses to VI marketing are underexplored in tourism literature. Drawing on self-congruence theory, our study develops and tests a research framework of social media users' (SMUs) travel intention towards VI-promoted places by exploring the roles of self-congruence (both actual and ideal self) on parasocial interaction and travel intention and also examining the moderating role of anthropomorphism. Our survey data (n=419) from active SMUs through Prolific was analyzed by applying the PLS-SEM approach. Our findings reveal the positive and direct impact of congruence factors on parasocial and indirect impact on travel intention while reporting the moderating role of anthropomorphism on the link between parasocial interaction and travel intention, indicating that higher perceived anthropomorphism of VIs strengthens the link between these concepts.

Keywords: Travel Intention, Virtual Influencers, Self-congruence

Track: Tourism Marketing