

Why Some Virtual Influencer Stories Stick: Verisimilitude, Narrative Transportation, and Follow Intention

Michael Schade

University of Bremen

Franziska Frese

markstones Institute of Marketing, Branding & Technology, University of Bremen

CHRISTOPHER KORNTNER-KANITZ

Rafael Tietze

University of Bremen

Christoph Burmann

University of Bremen

Jonas Küpker

University of Bremen

Cite as:

Schade Michael, Frese Franziska, KORNTNER-KANITZ CHRISTOPHER, Tietze Rafael, Burmann Christoph, Küpker Jonas (2026), Why Some Virtual Influencer Stories Stick: Verisimilitude, Narrative Transportation, and Follow Intention. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (132603)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



Why Some Virtual Influencer Stories Stick: Verisimilitude, Narrative Transportation, and Follow Intention

Abstract

Virtual influencers (VIs) are becoming increasingly relevant in influencer marketing, yet their success depends on building a strong follower base. This study examines how different storytelling approaches (high vs. low verisimilitude) affect users' intention to follow a human-like VI. The degree of verisimilitude refers to the impression that the story events could actually occur. The results of an online experiment (n=440) indicate that high verisimilitude enhances narrative transportation, which in turn increases the intention to follow. Low verisimilitude increases perceived post novelty, though this does not significantly affect the intention to follow. A significant negative direct effect of verisimilitude on the intention to follow suggests competitive mediation. The study contributes to the literature on VI effectiveness by examining content characteristics as drivers of the intention to follow. In addition, the role of narrative transportation is validated in a novel context.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media