

The Psychological and Behavioral Impacts of Virtual Influencers: A Systematic Review

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Cite as:

Zhang Xue, DeFranza David, Claudy Marius (2026), The Psychological and Behavioral Impacts of Virtual Influencers: A Systematic Review. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133013)

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



The Psychological and Behavioral Impacts of Virtual Influencers: A Systematic Review

Abstract

This systematic review synthesizes 136 empirical studies on virtual influencers (VIs) to examine how they, relative to human influencers (HIs), shape consumer behavior and psychological well-being. Using PRISMA-guided searches across six databases, we propose an integrative framework in which VI effects operate primarily through user perceptions, psychological processes, and user engagement. Evidence shows VIs work best for functional, tech-oriented, and rationally framed products, while HIs retain advantages for experiential, hedonic, and high-involvement domains and more strongly trigger appearance-based comparison and anxiety. VI impact is highly contingent on design, product–endorser fit, language framing, culture, and audience traits, with calibrated realism, transparent artificiality, value congruence, and strategic HI–VI co-endorsement improving outcomes. We highlight priorities for future causal, longitudinal, and cross-cultural research, as well as ethical design and policy.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media