

When Virtual Influencers Advocate for CSR: The Roles of Appearance and Message Framing

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Abstract

This research investigates how virtual influencer (VI) appearance and message framing shape consumer responses to brand-sponsored CSR communication. Across two experiments, we compare human-like and animal-like VIs delivering personal versus impersonal messages. Results show that human-like VIs elicit more eeriness than animal-like VIs, which lowers credibility and subsequently reduces CSR engagement and brand advocacy. Although message framing did not significantly moderate this effect, exploratory analyses reveal that impersonal framing reduces the eerie reactions to animal-like VIs, whereas personal framing increases them. The findings advance understanding of VI design in CSR communication and offer guidance on aligning VI appearance with message tone to enhance VI credibility, consumer engagement and brand advocacy.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media