

From Human to Virtual Influencers – The Role of a Parasocial Preference in Predicting Switching Intention

Lara Fröbel

Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf

Cite as:

Fröbel Lara (2026), From Human to Virtual Influencers – The Role of a Parasocial Preference in Predicting Switching Intention. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133830)

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



From Human to Virtual Influencers – The Role of a Parasocial Preference in Predicting Switching Intention

Abstract

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence have paved the way for the emergence of virtual influencers. They have become increasingly popular due to their ability to interact with followers in a similar way to human influencers. Given their rapid growth, the question arises as to what factors motivate people to switch from human to virtual influencers. While marketing research still lacks empirical evidence to answer this question, our study aims to explain people's intention to switch to virtual influencers using the push-pull-mooring framework (PPM). By extending the model by the construct of a parasocial preference, we aim to increase the variance explanation. Our results show that dissatisfaction, distrust, inertia, alternative attractiveness, and subjective norm influence the development of a parasocial preference, which precedes and predicts people's intention to switch to a virtual influencer.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media