

Fiction or Familiar? Exploring Consumer Responses to Humanlike vs. Nonhuman Virtual Influencers

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Hivatkozás

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Abstract

This research explores how varying degrees of realism and human likeness impact consumer engagement with virtual influencers (VIs). Through a comparative case study of four distinct VIs—Imma, Mono Mars, Noonouri, and Birdsoup—classified by their visual realism and anthropomorphism, the study identifies six key engagement dimensions: admiration, criticism, skepticism, narrative affiliation, character affiliation, and social bonding. The results reveal that while high realism amplifies scrutiny and doubt, humanlike features tend to enhance admiration. Notably, less humanlike, stylized influencers generate deeper emotional and narrative engagement, highlighting their potential to foster stronger consumer relationships. Based on these insights, six propositions are offered to inform future research. The findings also offer practical guidance for marketers on how to strategically align virtual influencer types with brand messaging to optimize digital engagement in an AI-driven marketing environment.

Keywords: Virtual Influencers, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Engagement