

# Redefining the Future of Digital Marketing With Virtual Influencers

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From Human to Posthuman: The Strategic Role of Virtual Influencers in Contemporary Marketing ..... 1

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This chapter explores the growing phenomenon of Virtual Influencers (VIs) in digital advertising and their transformative impact on brand communication. As artificial intelligence and computer-generated imagery enable the creation of lifelike digital personas, VIs offer marketers a new set of tools to engage consumers across global markets. The chapter examines the theoretical foundations of parasocial interaction and source credibility to understand how audiences respond to these non-human figures.

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Digital Disruption: Virtual Influencers Transforming Traditional Marketing ..... 25

*Ethelbert Garcia Galang, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines*  
*Marie Grace Avelino Gomez, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines*

Traditional marketing has been affected by the rise of virtual influencers (VIs). Traditionally, products were marketed by celebrities or human influencers. Influencer marketing has been a strategy for connecting with audiences through credible and engaging social media figures and celebrities. This chapter explores the rise of VIs as they reshape the marketing landscape. Unlike human influencers, VIs offer unparalleled consistency, innovative engagement methods, and cost efficiency, revolutionizing marketing strategies across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and virtual reality environments. This chapter also examines the rise of VIs, popular VIs, the cultural effects of VIs on Filipinos, popular VIs, and the ethical and operational implications of VIs. By integrating these insights, this chapter underscores how VIs exemplify digital disruption's transformative power, redefining traditional marketing practices while influencing the future of marketing and consumer engagement.

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Maharishi Markandeshwar University, India*

Virtual influencers, digitally created personas powered by artificial intelligence and computer graphics, have emerged as a transformative force in marketing. Unlike traditional influencers, virtual influencers are entirely controlled by their creators, enabling brands to design highly customized, consistent, and engaging narratives. This paper explores the impact of virtual influencers on contemporary marketing strategies, focusing on their unique advantages, such as cost efficiency, creative flexibility, and the ability to transcend physical limitations. It also examines their potential challenges, including authenticity concerns, audience trust, and ethical considerations. Through case studies and industry examples, this research highlights how brands leverage virtual influencers to enhance consumer engagement, build brand identity, and drive sales. By analyzing the interplay between technology and human-like branding, this study sheds light on how virtual influencers are reshaping the marketing landscape and paving the way for innovative digital campaigns.

### Chapter 4

Human vs. Virtual Influencers in the Context of Influencer Marketing: A  
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*Amal Kammoun, University of Sfax, Tunisia*

The advent of social media has ushered in a new age of communication, information sharing and marketing. The recent phenomenon of influencers, both human and virtual, on social media has transformed our modern society. Human influencers have led the way in using their power of influence on social platforms, providing brands with a powerful way to reach their target audience in a precise, authentic and engaging way. Virtual influencers, created digitally, are also gaining prominence on online platforms, mainly on Instagram. Created for brands, these characters generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) have the realistic characteristics, personalities, thoughts and feelings of real human beings. This chapter explores the similarities and differences between human influencers (HI) and virtual influencers (VI) in the context of influencer marketing, in order to understand the reasons for the success of these new imaginary characters. We will present the evolution and current context of marketing, including the appearance of human influencers and then that of virtual influencers,

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*Shiv Shankar Kumar Yadav, Bennett University, India*

With the advancement of digital marketing landscape, the discussions of influencer marketing has also taken a significant leap. As a result, the entity of virtual influencers has come to existence. These are the computer generated entities helping brands in achieving greater audience coverage while keeping their profitability interest at the center. While on one side, engagement of virtual influencers with brands is paying off well, the engagements of human influencers has come to scrutiny. cursory overview indicates presence of both perspectives i.e. in favor and against. Motivated from the same, this article, with the help of rigorous literature review, examines the role played by virtual and human influencers and whether both can coexist with the brands. Findings present significant inclination towards coexistence. The article also discusses some meaningful strategies which currently are in discussion. The article concludes with the ideology of coexistence of virtual and human influencers in a distinct harmony

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*Mohd Junaid Akhtar, New Delhi Institute of Management, India*  
*Sarita Nagvanshi, New Delhi Institute of Management, India*

In today's digitally driven world, human interaction has transformed significantly, particularly with the emergence of parasocial relationships and virtual influencers. This chapter applies Horton and Wohl (1956) parasocial interaction (PSI) framework to critically analyze how audiences connect with virtual influencers. It examines their appeal to younger demographics like Generation Z, who are more receptive to AI-driven figures, and explores how brands employ these influencers as marketing agents. Ethical concerns are highlighted, including transparency, manipulation, and the promotion of unrealistic standards. The chapter also questions the authenticity of virtual influencers, given their entirely orchestrated personas. Further, the chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of these developments, emphasizing the need for ethical responsibility as technology continues to blur the lines between the virtual and real worlds.

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The Use of Virtual Influencers in the Tourism Sector ..... 181

*Noelia Araújo Vila, University of Vigo, Spain*

*Almudena Otegui Carles, University of Vigo, Spain*

The emerging trend of using virtual influencers in tourism is transforming how companies engage with travelers, becoming a mass phenomenon among younger digital audiences. These characters, crafted using CGI (Computer-Generated Imagery) by digital marketing teams, are not only used to promote destinations but also serve as virtual guides, assisting users in planning their trips. Thanks to their ability to adapt and emphasize brand values, virtual influencers can produce unlimited, engaging content without geographic or temporal restrictions. This chapter analyzes the impact of using virtual influencers in the tourism sector, addressing both the benefits and the ethical challenges they present. To this end, a content analysis was conducted on seven virtual influencers, two of whom focus exclusively on tourism and travel. In conclusion, virtual influencers represent an innovative tool for tourism, with the potential to enhance engagement and sustainability in destination promotion, though challenges of authenticity and trust must be addressed to maximize their impact.

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*Khushbu Prajapat, Christ University, India*

This chapter explores the emergence and impact of Virtual Influencers (VIs) in the Indian digital marketing landscape, focusing on their ability to engage consumers and redefine brand interactions through AI-driven personas. By examining case studies of prominent Indian virtual influencers like Kyra and Naina Avtr, the chapter analyzes their roles in consumer engagement, cultural relevance, and brand partnerships. The discussion highlights the unique strengths of VIs, including their consistency, scalability, and ability to operate across diverse platforms, while also addressing challenges related to authenticity, emotional connection, and regional adaptation. Drawing on theories of social influence and digital marketing, the chapter provides insights into the opportunities and limitations of VIs in India's culturally diverse and technology-driven market. It concludes by exploring the future of virtual influencers as dynamic tools for brands aiming to balance technological innovation with human-like relatability in a competitive digital ecosystem.

## **Chapter 9**

**Practical Strategies for Brands Using Virtual Influencers: A Brand’s Guide to Success**..... 253

*Shikha Gupta, Indian Institute of Technology, Jodhpur, India*

*Amit Singh, Ahmedabad University, India*

*Anuj Pal Kapoor, Indian Institute of Technology, Jodhpur, India*

The rise of virtual influencers has introduced a new frontier for brands in the metaverse, offering unique opportunities for marketing and engagement. This chapter explores the virtual influencer phenomenon, examining how brands can strategically leverage digital creations in their campaigns. It begins by distinguishing between virtual and human influencers, followed by a discussion of the technologies that enable their creation. The chapter further explores the various content formats employed by virtual influencers across social media, highlighting their versatility. It also examines the application of virtual influencers across industries. Additionally, the chapter outlines the benefits and opportunities of using virtual influencers, as well as key considerations for brands in selecting and collaborating with them. Lastly, the chapter discusses how virtual influencer personalities can be built, emphasizing the importance of crafting relatable and engaging personas to drive successful brand collaborations.

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# Preface

## INTRODUCTION

The digital marketing landscape is undergoing a seismic transformation, and at the forefront of this evolution are Virtual Influencers (VIs). As editors of *Redefining the Future of Digital Marketing With Virtual Influencers*, we are excited to present this volume, which explores a dynamic and increasingly influential facet of modern marketing. Virtual Influencers, powered by artificial intelligence, computer-generated imagery, and carefully crafted human-like personas, are not only reshaping how brands connect with audiences but are also redefining what it means to be an “influencer” in the digital age.

This book represents a multidisciplinary collaboration, uniting insights from marketing, technology, communication, and ethics. We have curated chapters that investigate the technical processes behind VI creation, the psychological and social dimensions of their appeal, and the strategic advantages they offer to industries such as fashion, tourism, and consumer goods. At the same time, we recognize the inherent challenges of this emerging phenomenon—questions of authenticity, transparency, and ethical responsibility are woven throughout our discussions.

The goal of this book is not just to inform, but to provoke thoughtful dialogue and equip readers with a practical understanding of how VIs can be deployed effectively and responsibly. Whether it is through case studies of pioneering brands or theoretical discussions on parasocial interactions, our contributors have delivered insights that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

We envision this book as a critical resource for a diverse readership:

- For marketing professionals, it offers a forward-looking lens on a trend that is already shaping consumer engagement strategies.

- For academics and researchers, it provides a foundational framework for understanding the implications of VIs on digital communication and brand dynamics.
- For students, it delivers contemporary and accessible insights into a fast-evolving field.
- And for business leaders, it opens up new possibilities for innovation at the intersection of technology, creativity, and consumer psychology.

As Virtual Influencers continue to gain traction, their presence raises profound questions and opens exciting opportunities. We hope this book serves as a roadmap to navigating this complex and fascinating terrain, and that it inspires readers to explore the potential of VIs with both curiosity and critical thought.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

In *Redefining the Future of Digital Marketing With Virtual Influencers*, each chapter offers a unique lens on the evolving landscape of virtual influencer (VI) marketing, presenting both theoretical insights and practical applications to guide scholars, professionals, and students through this digital transformation.

**Chapter 1, *From Human to Posthuman: The Strategic Role of Virtual Influencers in Contemporary Marketing***, introduces readers to the theoretical underpinnings of Virtual Influencers. Drawing on parasocial interaction and source credibility theories, this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how lifelike digital personas are strategically employed in global marketing campaigns. The chapter outlines how brands use these AI-driven figures to reshape consumer engagement and redefine authenticity in digital branding.

**Chapter 2, *Digital Disruption: Virtual Influencers Transforming Traditional Marketing***, highlights the disruptive potential of virtual influencers in replacing or complementing traditional human influencers. With particular attention to platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and emerging virtual environments, this chapter explores how VIs provide consistent messaging, cost efficiency, and new creative formats. Cultural implications, including insights from the Filipino market, bring added depth to the analysis of how VIs are reshaping brand communication and influencing consumer behavior.

**Chapter 3, *Virtual Influencer Marketing and Its Impact on Marketing Strategies***, delves into how virtual influencers are fundamentally transforming digital marketing. Through real-world examples and industry case studies, the chapter illustrates how brands leverage VIs for enhanced storytelling, cost-effective

campaigns, and scalable content production. It also reflects on the ethical and trust-related challenges that emerge when audiences engage with digital rather than human personas.

**Chapter 4, *Human Versus Virtual Influencers in the Context of Influencer Marketing: A Comparative Analysis***, investigates the strengths and limitations of both human and virtual influencers. By exploring their evolution in the context of modern marketing, this chapter offers a comparative lens to assess how VIs mimic human characteristics and emotional appeal. It raises key questions about the authenticity of influence and how these synthetic figures compete—or collaborate—with their human counterparts.

**Chapter 5, *Virtual Influencers vs Human Influencers: Crossing the Roads or Going Together***, extends this comparative dialogue with a focus on coexistence. This chapter presents a compelling case for synergy between human and virtual influencers rather than competition. Drawing on extensive literature review, it outlines strategic pathways where both entities can align to enhance brand storytelling and market reach, advocating for a collaborative future in influencer marketing.

**Chapter 6, *Parasocial Interaction and Virtual Influencers: Building Connections in a Digital World***, returns to theory to examine how VIs establish emotionally resonant connections with followers. Using Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction framework, this chapter investigates the dynamics of audience attachment, particularly among Generation Z. It critically examines ethical concerns such as manipulation, unrealistic standards, and transparency, urging marketers to consider the psychological implications of deploying VIs in campaigns.

**Chapter 7, *The Use of Virtual Influencers in the Tourism Sector***, focuses on the tourism industry's adoption of virtual influencers as digital brand ambassadors and travel guides. By analyzing case studies of tourism-specific VIs, the chapter discusses how these digital personas offer immersive, scalable engagement. It also addresses challenges of trust and authenticity, ultimately framing VIs as sustainable marketing tools capable of transforming destination promotion.

**Chapter 8, *Virtual Influencers in India: Transforming Digital Marketing in the AI Era***, shifts the spotlight to India, a fast-evolving digital marketplace. With case studies of virtual personas like Kyra and Naina Avtr, this chapter explores how VIs resonate with culturally diverse Indian audiences. It highlights both opportunities and limitations, including technological adaptability and emotional resonance, offering a detailed view of how VIs are reshaping marketing in one of the world's largest consumer economies.

**Chapter 9**, *Practical Strategies for Brands Using Virtual Influencers: A Brand's Guide to Success*, serves as a pragmatic guide for marketers. It outlines actionable strategies for selecting, designing, and deploying virtual influencers across sectors. The chapter discusses how brands can build believable and engaging VI personalities, align them with campaign goals, and maximize their digital reach. It emphasizes the versatility of VIs and offers tools for effective brand integration in a competitive digital space.

Together, these chapters map the contours of an emerging marketing paradigm shaped by artificial intelligence, synthetic personas, and human-like storytelling. As editors, we believe this volume provides a critical and timely contribution to both marketing scholarship and practice, equipping readers with the theoretical depth, empirical evidence, and strategic guidance needed to navigate the virtual influencer revolution.

## CONCLUSION

As editors of this volume, we are pleased to present a compelling exploration into the rapidly evolving domain of virtual influencers—a phenomenon that not only reflects the future of digital marketing but actively shapes it. Across these diverse chapters, our contributors have dissected the strategic, psychological, technological, and ethical dimensions of virtual influencers, offering a nuanced and multidisciplinary perspective that addresses both their potential and their limitations.

From the theoretical foundations of parasocial interaction to practical strategies for brand implementation, this book demonstrates how virtual influencers are no longer a speculative trend but a legitimate and transformative force in global marketing practices. Whether examining their role in reshaping traditional marketing, enhancing tourism experiences, or breaking ground in culturally complex markets like India, the chapters collectively emphasize that virtual influencers are not replacing human touch—they are redefining how it is created, simulated, and perceived in the digital age.

We hope this volume equips academics, practitioners, and students alike with the insights necessary to navigate this new frontier. As artificial intelligence and immersive technologies continue to develop, virtual influencers will only grow in influence and sophistication. It is our hope that the work presented here will serve as a foundational reference for future research and innovation, while encouraging ethical reflection and creative thinking in the ever-evolving landscape of digital communication.