

Driving Social Change: Leveraging Virtual Influencers and Narrative Messaging for Prosocial Campaigns

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Abstract

This research addresses the rising prominence of virtual influencers (VIs) by asking a crucial question: “How can we effectively use virtual influencers to not only reach audiences but also deeply resonate with them, particularly in promoting socially responsible behaviors?” To address this challenge, we propose employing narrative messaging to enhance virtual influencers’ effectiveness in delivering prosocial messages. In a 2 (VI appearance: human-like vs. anime-like) x2 (message style: narrative vs. non-narrative) between-subjects design, 320 Gen-Z and younger Millennials were exposed to simulated Instagram posts by a VI discussing cyberbullying. Results indicated that human-like virtual influencers led to higher supporting intent and message credibility, especially in the non-narrative condition. However, in the narrative message condition, the advantage of human-like appearance diminished. These insights are valuable for those using VIs in social marketing.

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