

#virtualinfluencer: A content analysis of virtual influencer disclosures

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Recent technological advancements, such as generative AI, have given rise to a new type of influencer: the virtual influencer. As virtual influencers are becoming increasingly more indistinguishable from humans, consumer-protectionists have called for regulations on virtual influencer disclosures. Currently, it is, however, unclear how virtual influencers disclose their nature on Instagram, and how these disclosures affect consumer responses. To examine this, we conducted a content analysis of Instagram posts ($N = 1,125$) by virtual influencers ($N = 45$). Using mixed-effects modelling, we found that only a third of virtual influencers' posts disclose the influencers' nature. No relationship was found between the visual realism of influencers and the number of likes they receive. However, posts with identity disclosures tend to receive less likes. Interestingly, these negative responses are more pronounced for less realistic, animated, virtual influencers, than for more realistic virtual influencers.

Keywords: virtual influencer, persuasion knowledge model, agent knowledge, identity disclosure