

Exploring the Role of Personal Innovativeness on Consumer Perception of Virtual Influencers and Brand Image

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Abstract

Influencer marketing is evolving beyond human endorsements to embrace human-like virtual influencers. They are an alternative option and offer potential advantages, including mitigating human influencers' fatigue, enhancing agent control to minimize mistakes, and being ageless. While virtual influencers have been introduced across various countries, including the U.S., Korea, and Thailand, studies suggest that consumer engagement remains relatively low, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of consumer perceptions of virtual influencers and endorsed brands. This study investigates how personal innovativeness influences brand image, mediated by the virtual influencer authenticity and interactivity. Data collected from 230 Instagram users were analyzed using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CBSEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. Convergent and discriminant validity and model fit were achieved. The results revealed a weak direct relationship between personal innovativeness and brand image ($\gamma = 0.221$, $p < 0.05$). The direct effect of personal innovativeness on perceived interactivity ($\beta = 0.430$, $p < 0.01$) is stronger than on perceived authenticity ($\beta = 0.327$, $p < 0.01$). It was found that the relationship between personal innovativeness and brand image is partially mediated by both perceived interactivity ($B = 0.155$, $CI = 0.064$ to 0.293 , $p < 0.01$) and authenticity ($B = 0.161$, $CI = 0.068$ to 0.304 , $p < 0.01$). The implications of this study offer marketers and artificial intelligence agents to design and select virtual influencers that are perceived to be original and interact regularly with Instagram users.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, authenticity, consumer perceptions, influencer marketing, interactivity