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The Impact of Virtual Influencer's Social Role Endorsement Effectiveness: a Chain Mediation Effect of Psychological Distance and Trust

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Abstract

In the current virtual influencer (VI) marketing era, VI-related interactions are expected to become more pervasive. This research examines the effect of VI's social role (friend vs. mentor) on brand attitude towards virtual influencer endorsement, and how psychological distance and trust serially mediates this effect. We recruited participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk to conduct two experiments were conducted using an online survey and to test a sequential mediation model using SPSS PROCESS macro-models for analysis. The results show that VI's social role is like a mentor for participants with a higher brand attitude towards VI endorsement than a role as a friend, and psychological distance and trust serially mediates this effect. This paper advances the social role literature and also provides direction to research on facilitating human–virtual influencer interaction. This paper proposes novel and social role tactics to enhance consumers' trust in and brand endorsement attitudes toward VI. Lastly, theoretical and managerial implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Brand Attitude, Psychological Distance, Virtual Influencers Marketing, Virtual Influencers's Trust, Social Role, Spss Process Model