

The future of virtual influencers and their potential for brands

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As technology advances, the chances of improving the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies increase. It has already happened with the emergence of email marketing software, social network managers, CMS, bots. And now, it looks like it will happen again with the birth of virtual influencers.

This role is not played only by celebrities, but by “ordinary” people who started posting content from home.

This space is increasingly disputed, with influencers earning more than many celebrities. However, virtual influencers are coming to take a slice of this cake. But who will win this race?

Although some data has already been published on this, it is better to be cautious and see how virtual and traditional influencers will coexist to have an accurate answer.

What is clear is that both are part of a very effective strategy for acquiring customers through social media. So, for you to analyze if it is a good strategy for your business or not, we will see:

1. What are virtual influencers?
2. How they differ from traditional influencers?
3. What advantages do they bring to the brands that work with them?
4. What will happen in the future, and how will it affect your digital marketing strategy?

• What are virtual influencers?

If you already know the figure of traditional influencers, you are closer to understanding what virtual influencers are. They fulfill the same function, but there are big points of difference between these two categories.

These influencers play a vital role in helping brands to generate engagement with their audience, attract the attention of new followers, build loyalty, and win new customers.

The formula is easy to understand: Companies look for profiles with thousands of followers to advertise their products or services.

► Virtual Influencers: Definition

Unlike traditional influencers (ordinary people), they are fictional characters, or human-looking robots, created from artificial intelligence and used to advertise major brands.

They received their own personality, and, in their configuration, the values and tastes of the segment were added to which they were directed to better connect with their audience. Therefore, in addition to running campaigns to promote products and services for companies, they are used to disseminate issues of social interest.

Undoubtedly, virtual influencers have become the most influential “people” on the Internet.

Some of them have up to 1.5 million followers on Instagram, like Miquela Sousa, one of the virtual influencers who has worked with brands like Prada and Calvin Klein.

But do you know why they attract so many followers? Well, because behind each one of these characters, there are significant studies on the archetypes and stereotypes that most attract the market segment that they will reach. We could say that they are “**custom made people.**“

This is done by robotics companies, which offer services to brands that want to work with influencers relevant to their niche market, without having to deal with the problems arising from partnerships with traditional influencers.

► Influencers vs. Virtual Influencers

In the introduction, we said that everyone will have to coexist in the same market and will have to adapt not to lose space. The influencers we are calling “traditional” will now have to accept that they will have new competitors.

But and which option will be better? Let’s see the differences:

◆ **Customization.**

Human beings already have their own personality, built throughout our lives and which can't be easily modified.

However, a virtual influencer is totally manipulable so that it could be adapted to the tastes and values required by the target audience of a brand. This generates more connections.

◆ **Exclusivity.**

Traditional influencers often work with several brands at the same time and are not just recognized or associated with one of them.

However, virtual influencers can be created exclusively for a brand and "live" linked to it forever.

◆ **Measurable results.**

The fact that the administrator will be able to manage and control how they act, what they do, when and where, will facilitate the control of the results generated by the virtual influencers.

That is because the robot in question belongs to the company, whereas a real person doesn't.

◆ **Idealization.**

Although the world of social media is a little bit idealized, you must be careful when presenting unrealistic or very perfect characters.

Instead of attracting your target audience, this is likely to drive them away. This can happen with both types of influencers, but it would be especially problematic for virtual influencers.

◆ **Ease of work.**

Of course, people have productivity limits; we can only work a limited number of hours a day. But a machine doesn't have these limits, it is never tired nor can it refuse to perform any type of activity.

◆ **Engagement.**

Despite the success of virtual influencers, traditional ones still generate more engagement.

However, trends indicate that this gap will be reduced and that, in the future, these robots will play an even more critical role in digital marketing strategies.

◆ Trust.

The technology used to create these robots may raise concerns about their use.

That is, there may be doubt about whether they are manipulating us through subtle suggestions or whether they are being used ethically. If something goes wrong, the brands associated with the influencer in question will be negatively affected.

• Virtual influencers and their business potential

The use of virtual influencers is not yet widespread.

It is true that some of them became famous, and were vital as part of a branding strategy, or participate as fashion models. But this is still not a common practice among companies (especially in the Latin American market).

However, its commercial potential is quite remarkable. In fact, more and more companies are creating virtual characters to interact with their followers.

Let's see some advantages of this strategy.

► Custom-designed

As we were explaining, brands can order a customized virtual character, incorporating the values and characteristics of the company.

These values and characteristics will be defined based on advanced studies, as the primary objective of these characters is to create empathy with followers to encourage engagement and sales.

In this sense, the characteristics of a virtual influencer for a children's clothing brand will not be the same as those created to advertise food brands (for example).

In each case, it will be necessary to study and analyze the target audience of a company's commercial actions to adjust the configuration to the details. In this way, marketing campaigns will provide better results.

► More control and advantages

These types of new influencers are under the control of the company that paid for them. Therefore, their control over the robot is complete.

In other words, the company will be able to do with the virtual influencer whatever they want. And that can translate into several advantages.

Furthermore, since they are not real people, you would not need to pay a salary to the influencer, which means that the cost will be much lower than when working with

a traditional influencer (not to mention that these robots have no food, accommodation, or vacation expenses).

On the other hand, the risk of making a mistake that can affect the brand image is lower. This can happen with real people, but with robots, it is more complicated because you have absolute control over every step you take.

► **Positive impact**

The trend of using these characters is increasing. Instagram accounts, like those of the robots Lil Miquela, Noonnoouri or Imma.gram, accumulate thousands of followers (highlighting the first with 1.8 million).

The numbers are growing and are expected to continue improving in the coming years.

Can you imagine the potential of having an almost human robot working for your brand 24 hours a day? How many followers does your company's account have? I hope you have more than them, but if that is not the case, using this technology may be an option to bring your brand closer to consumers.

► **Realistic appearance**

The designers who create these robots usually prefer to create an "avatar." that looks like a human being, which facilitates contact with these characters and it will be much easier to connect and interact with them.

However, you should always be honest with the public and explain from the beginning that they are talking to a character created with artificial intelligence (and not with a real person).

Transparency and honesty add points in favor of any brand. Don't try to deceive your customers.

► **Attract quality traffic**

These influencers are created with a user profile in mind, which means that they will attract only people potentially interested in the brand that the robot is promoting.

When these virtual influencers send traffic to your website, you receive visits with a high probability of ending up buying or hiring your services. This will improve ranking metrics, such as:

1. The average time spent on your site.
2. The number of pages visited.
3. Bounce rates

► Branding

Due to the number of millions of followers that virtual influencers accumulate, it is easier for brands that work with them to spread the word about what they are doing.

When the virtual influencer posts something, it will generate traffic, engagement, and conversions.

But for that to happen, it is necessary that whoever is behind these profiles. That is, whoever has control over these robots, be prepared to make the right decisions, act in coherence with the public and the brand, and convey confidence.

Because, despite everything, the machine must be operated by a human being. Without forgetting ethics and professionalism.

► Very positive ROI

This could be the advantage that sums up all the options above because having a custom-made influencer (will generate engagement, build trust, branding, connect to the target audience, attract quality traffic and encourage conversion.), but the return of the investment will be essential to make this strategy profitable.

This calculation is vital to determine whether the investment will be positive. The more profit you can make from the capital invested, the higher your ROI will be.

If we take into account all the options above, and the trends planned for these fictional characters, everything indicates that the return on investment will be extremely positive.

• Reflection on the future of virtual influencers

The trend indicates that digital marketing strategies in the coming years will be led, in large part, by influencers created from artificial intelligence.

It is true that there is a lack of regulation on this subject, especially on the obligation, or not, to inform the user if he is dealing with a human being or a robot. However, it is something that, when the technology is more advanced, will undoubtedly have to be discussed again.

It seems that the big brands are already betting on virtual influencers, and probably many others are working silently on this type of strategy. Due to its high cost, we will not know if this technology will be available to everyone, but probably new, more affordable systems will be created in the future.

What do you think?



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