



Reel or real: An introduction to the world of meta influencers

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Abstract

Influencers are more appealing to brands given the fact that they have lower perceived value and there is a reduced of them being involved in a scandal. Influencers can craft their own persona and have the capability to appeal and influence brands as well as target audience like their human counterparts. Research on AI and machine learning provides potential positive effects that can be realised from meta influencers. Meta influencers can be very beneficial to the brands because of their perceived lower costs and drastically low chances of them being involved in a scandal. A meta influencer can look and behave like a human influencer, suggesting meta influencers – like human influencers – might have similar effects to traditional celebrity endorsers.

Keywords: metaverse, meta influencers, human influencer, like

Introduction

With the advancement of computer science innovations there has been a new dynamic shift in human interactions communications and social transactions the world has witnessed major technology innovation waves inter around the introduction of computers mobile devices and the internet however the fourth wave is slowly unravelling in the form of Augmented reality and virtual reality using immersive spatial technologies. This computing paradigm has the potential to revolutionize digitally accessible industries from education to entertainment tourism to remote work, hospitals to hospitality, fashion and retail etc. This new is wave of metaverse. Metaverse is made up of two words meta which in Greek means post or beyond and universe, hence we can say metaverse is post reality universe. It is a multi-user and perpetual environment which blurs the lines between physical reality and digital virtuality.

Metaverse literary origin

Metaverse was first heard in a science fiction show novel by Neal Stevenson called Snow Crash published in 1992. It was described as universe in parallel reality created using computer graphics accessible through goggles and headphones. It is supported using a protocol called Street where virtual neighborhoods and locations are linked together to form an analogous information highway. Users access these locations through digitally configured bodies called avatars. More recently, a reincarnation of metaverse is seen in Ernest Cline's novel Ready Player One as OASIS which is a huge multi user online virtual reality game which further developed into a predominant virtual destination for work and entertainment. OASIS also contains a free virtual public library containing all the books freely accessible to the users. In this world of virtual reality, Metaverse was conceived as an idea of web 3.0 or 3D Internet. It emerged as web of virtual worlds in its first iteration where users will be able explore virtual neighbourhoods and locations using customisable avatars. Metaverse is based on common principles of interconnection of software and user teleportation between the virtual worlds.

According to Bloomberg, Metaverse is projected to be a eight hundred billion dollar market opportunity. Through metaverse new opportunities can be created in a new virtual economy in which wealth can be generated and traded, albeit a different currency, yet connected and converted to Real world money. Metaverse proposes an opportunity to build office spaces, hold meetings for remote workers and even conduct job interviews.

What is meta-influence

From ongoing debates about effectiveness of influencers in advertisement a few years ago to the full-blown market at present, the renaissance of influencer marketing makes it a hot topic for academic interest as well for industries. Influencers strive to provide information and innovation through the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to their followers. Companies engaging in persuasive influencer communication have a wide-range influencers to go with in this competitive world. Social media influencers have been described as the new brand they are a dominant force in marketing.

What's interesting to know that is a new form of social media has grown – the virtual artificial intelligence influencers or meta influencers. World Health Organisation engaging the influencer Knox Frost which is an AI used during the COVID 19 pandemic has attested to the prominence of AI influencers in social media marketing perspective. Frost has over a million Instagram followers and was engaged to promote Public Service announcement which included the need to observe lock down restrictions and to maintain good hygiene practices. Big brands have been using AI influencers for some time now. Three virtual influencers namely Shudu, Margot, and Xhi have been associated with the French luxury brand Balmain after dropping the Kardashians in the capacity of their social media influencer. Balmain's release says that these influencers aligned more with the brands identity of promoting inclusivity. Not only this other Global brand such as Netflix, Samsung, Nike, KFC and LVMH have all worked with AI influencers before.

virtual influencer is a digital formed character, can be identified as a fictional person, an artificial person or “robot” crafted in such a manner to make it appear as realistic as one could, other words resemble as human as possible, having unique personality traits, distinct features and characteristics, their own quirky quirks and appearances. These computer generated characters are actual public figures allowed access to various media platforms and networks with their own first person view of world in order to influence the masses. Online social media networks are seeing a number of sleep computer generated characters presenting their views and generating new and diversified content to accumulate cultural capital and shape the views and behaviours of their larger audience. These influencers have been reported to have amassed huge following faster than average traditional influencers. Some influencers are regarded as “idols” and listed alongside actual influencers and celebrities. According to threshold model of Social influence proposed by Blascovich *et al.* (2002), the influence posed by real persons who are represented by avatars is always going to be high, on the other hand the social influence of any artificial entity depends on the realism it possess in its behaviour. Big brands like Walmart are aiming to open virtual retail stores, Adidas has already launched NFTs and invested in real estate property of a virtual estate firm Sandbox VR. Gucci, a luxury fashion brand partner with Roblox to sell its product in the metaverse. Balenciaga as collaborated with Elic Games yo open virtual boutiques. Nike is hiring virtual wear designers and have trademark on its virtual footwear an 18 year old sold virtual footwear worth \$3 million in less than seven minutes. Adding for the experience is in the metaverse, Roblox hosted Marshmello concert in Fortnite which proved to be a success with more than 60 million in attendance. Influencers are often described as people who have a certain reputation for their experience, experties and knowledge on specific topic. An influencer is a person who has the power to sway the purchasing decisions of a consumer either because of his/her authority and expertise or because of his her relationship with the audience. Another feature of an influencer is that he/she has a following in a distinctive niche, with active engagement from both sides. However, size of following is dependent on the niche.

Meta influencers, many a time described as virtual person or virtual model, our fictional characters generated by computers that can be put to use for variety of marketing and Advertising related purposes, at more specifically social media marketing in lieu of actual human influencers. They are a kind of computer-generated imagery having human like appearances characteristics, and reactions. They have the power to affect decisions and opinions of their audience through social media posts, blogs and tweets. Although meta influencers appear to be a novel trend; they have been present around us for many years. They are a result of “virtual idols” a concept first developed in 1980’s Japanese animations. Since then many virtual influencers have emerged as entertainers hosts and vocalists and now in commercial marketing and Advertising platforms as well.

Some virtual influencers around the world

1. **Lu do magalu:** Lu Do Magalu is a Brazilian meta influencer and content creator with over 6 million following. Lu Do Magalu Brazil’s largest retail brand

Magalu. She posts product reviews, unboxing video content along with software tips on her social media page on Instagram. Also promoted iBlogTV on behalf of Luixa magazine.

2. **Lil maquila:** with over 3 million following on Instagram, Lil Miquela is one of the most popular meta influencers from America. He has endorsements from big brands such as Calvin Klein, Prada, Nike and Samsung. With her debut in Milan design week 2018, she has taken over many fashion houses social media as well. She has made to the list of top 25 most influential people by Times magazine and have collaborated with international celebrities. She has her own lifestyle, own challenges and even personal feuds.
3. **Shudu gram:** Shudu is a South African meta influencer of colour who identifies as the world’s first digital supermodel. She walked the red-carpet of 2019 British Academy of film and Television arts awards. She has collaborated with big brands like Balmain, Samsung, Chanel, Bulgari cosmopolitan and Vogue to name a few.
4. **Imma:** Imma meta influencer from Tokyo. She loves talking about fashion, art, films and lifestyle. She has over 700 posts and 400k followers. He has partnered with brands such as Puma IKEA KFC Porsche Magnum Calvin Klein Dio Valentino Amazon et cetera.
5. **Kyra:** Kyra is India’s first meta influencer with a following of over 100k. She was launched in December 2021. She identified herself as 21-year-old dream chaser model and traveller.
6. Aliza Rex, Bixie, FN Meka, Ruby 9100 M are some other notable meta influencers who have worked with Amazon to promote their new season of Upload.

A meta influencer's raison d'etre

1. **High engagement rate:** A recent High Auditor reports that virtual influencers have around three times engagement rate of traditional influencers.
2. **Economical:** Although the initial expenses of meta influencers can be at par with traditional influencers or sometimes higher given the nascent technology, it is more economical in the long run. Spencers of marketing and content creation will not rise proportionately to the growing popularity and expanding fan base.
3. **No expirations:** Meta influencers are made of pixels. They are always attractive and in shape, always fresh and energetic. These can be used continuously but won’t wear out. Influencers don’t age like their human counter parts and our hands for perpetuity if need be.
4. **No geographical limitation:** meta influencers can produce better and exotic content anytime and anywhere. They have the ability to “journey” to any location in and around the universe.

5. **Novel Approach:** meta influencers are more attractive two people who are driven by their need for uniqueness. These influencers are a novel concept and are very few, thus giving them unique characteristic, which makes them appealing to the masses and stand out in crowd.
6. **Scandal proof:** Companies go through many challenges while selecting face of their brand, from finding a celebrity that aligns well with their brand and values to ensuring the star is not poached by rival brands. Top of that constantly hoping at their celebrity avoids any scandals or controversies. With meta influencers such risk is diminished to bare minimum.
7. **Customizable persona:** Lil Miquela was curated as a 20-year-old talented singer and as someone to aspire to. The other hand, Shufu Gram promotes itself as an editorial model curated as something to look at rather than someone to aspire to, bring it a distinct persona. When it comes to meta influencers, companies can create influencers that always align with their brand's interests.
8. **Absolute control over content:** While in traditional influencer marketing, brands have to depend on influencers for creative process and quality of content, in meta influencer marketing brands have full control over content, from conception to completion and from Idea to visualization.
9. **Unlimited Content:** meta influencers don't tire; they don't wear out. They have the capability to produce content round the clock the making them more efficient.
10. **Accessibility:** Meta influencers are in digital space and with rapid adoption of metaverse by younger generation, virtual influencers have easy access to young population. This provides brands with easy access to a new universe, creating brand awareness and establishing trust.

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