Human, Virtual Human-Like, and Anime Influencers in the Fashion Industry: Examining the Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity and Parasocial Interactions in the Relationship Between Perceived Novelty, Purchase Intentions, and Word of Mouth Intentions

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ABSTRACT

As social media continues to transform the marketing landscape, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful and influential strategy across various industries, particularly within the fashion sector, changing the way brands connect with consumers and build trust in the digital age. The rise of virtual influencers has introduced new dynamics into this domain. These digitally fabricated figures are gaining increasing power in shaping consumer behavior. This study investigated how perceived novelty influences consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions, and whether these effects are mediated by perceived authenticity and parasocial interactions. Additionally, the study explored whether these relationships differ across three types of influencers, more specifically human, virtual human-like, and anime influencers. To determine this, a between-subjects online experiment ($n = 154$) was conducted, where participants were randomly exposed to one of three Instagram posts from a fictional fashion brand, each featuring a different type of influencer. The findings revealed that perceived novelty significantly and positively influences both purchase and word-of-mouth intentions. Moreover, perceived authenticity and parasocial interactions each partially mediate these relationships, indicating that psychological engagement plays a key role in shaping consumer responses. Importantly, the influence of perceived novelty on perceived authenticity was moderated by influencer type, being strongest for the anime influencer, followed by the human influencer, and weakest for the virtual human-like influencer. However, influencer type did not significantly moderate the direct effects of novelty on purchase or word-of-mouth intentions, nor on parasocial interactions. This research contributes to the growing literature on influencer marketing by offering a nuanced understanding of how various types of digital personas influence consumer behavioral intentions. Additionally, the insights from this study offer useful implications for brands and marketers seeking to design effective influencer campaigns, particularly by incorporating virtual influencers as a strategic tool in an increasingly fast paced, digitized and saturated media environment.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the rise of social media has fundamentally reshaped the way individuals communicate, consume information, and engage with brands (Zhao, 2023, p.49). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook have become central to everyday life for many individuals, offering users not only entertainment but also a space for self-expression and social interaction (Chen, 2023, p.1). As these platforms continue to evolve, they are constantly reshaping the digital marketing landscape particularly in consumer-facing industries such as beauty, entertainment, tourism, healthcare, and notably, fashion (Kumar, 2024, p.280).

As noted by Chetioui et al. (2020, p.361) the fashion industry has long been recognized for its innovative use of marketing strategies. Furthermore, it was also among the first to adopt influencer marketing, which in this context refers to the strategic collaboration with fashion influencers, who are online personalities with large followings and have the ability to shape their audience's views and buying behavior (Jin et al., 2021, p.666; Shin & Lee, 2023, p.2). In line with this tradition of innovation and in response to the rapidly evolving digital environment, the fashion industry is constantly striving to stay ahead of emerging trends and technological advancements (Casciani et al., 2022, pp.774-775). As a result, the industry focus is increasingly shifting from traditional human influencers towards a new generation of influencers known as virtual influencers (Oosterom et al., 2023, p.171; Shin & Lee, 2023, p.2).

These digital personas are anthropomorphized representations featuring human-like bodies and visually appealing characteristics (Byun & Ahn, 2023, p.293). They come in various forms, with two of the most common being virtual human-like influencers, who closely resemble real humans, and anime-inspired influencers, characterized by a stylized, animated aesthetic (Kim et al., 2024, p.5). They take on roles similar to human influencers and express nonverbal cues through facial expressions and gestures, enhancing their ability to engage and connect with audiences (Byun & Ahn, 2023, p.293). This phenomenon can be further explained through the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) framework which posits that individuals tend to apply social norms and human-like expectations to computers and media agents when they exhibit human characteristics (Yu et al., 2024, pp.2-3). In other words, the more a digital agent mirrors human behavior, the more likely users are to respond to it in socially and emotionally meaningful ways, as though they were engaging with an actual person (Yu et al., 2024, pp.2-3).

Nevertheless, despite these anthropomorphic qualities, a persistent debate remains over how authentic virtual influencers can truly be, especially when compared to their human counterparts. According to Moustakas et al. (2020, p.4) and Ren et al. (2023, p.1252), authenticity is widely recognized as a key factor in influencer effectiveness, particularly in shaping individuals' behavioral intentions such as purchase decisions and word-of-mouth intention. However, it becomes a far more complex issue in the context of virtual influencers, who are, by design, artificially created and managed (Lee et al., 2025, p.6029). As they are typically developed by companies and driven by

commercial interests, their motivations for promoting products are often seen as inherently profit-oriented (Lee et al., 2025, p.6031). Combined with their lack of real-world presence and emotional depth, this profit-driven purpose may lead to skepticism and concerns about their authenticity, while also raising questions about the extent to which virtual influencers can effectively persuade audiences to purchase endorsed products or inspire genuine, positive word-of-mouth engagement (Lee et al., 2025, p.6031).

Building on these insights, and the potential lack of authenticity often associated with virtual influencers, important questions arise about the nature and depth of the connections individuals form with these digital personas. As Stein et al. (2024, p.3437) explains, audiences in influencer marketing often develop one-sided, situational bonds with influencers, a phenomenon known as parasocial interactions. These interactions are typically triggered by cues that suggest human qualities, such as facial features or expressions (Giles, 2002, p.284; Stein et al., 2024, p.3437). While research demonstrates that people can form parasocial connections with non-human entities like animated characters, avatars, or virtual figures, there is ongoing debate about whether these connections can equal, or even exceed, the depth of those formed with human influencers (Sheldon et al., 2021, p.23; Stein et al., 2024, p.3446). This discussion carries important implications for consumer behavior, as stronger parasocial interactions are often linked to higher behavioral intentions, including purchase decisions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Lee & Kim, 2025, pp.3-4).

However, recent studies are beginning to challenge earlier assumptions by suggesting that virtual influencers are not only gaining broader acceptance but are also increasingly perceived as equally, if not more authentic than their human counterparts (Kim & Baek, 2024, pp.5051-5052; Lee et al., 2025, p.6040). According to Stein et al. (2024, p.3446), this evolving perception has also led to a rise in individuals forming parasocial interactions with virtual influencers.

A potential explanation proposed by Stein et al. (2024, p.3446) and Lee et al. (2025, p.6040) to explain this shift is the sense of perceived novelty these digital personas evoke. As noted by Kim et al. (2025a, p.458), the experience of encountering lifelike emotional expression in a non-human form captures attention, sparks curiosity, and creates a striking contrast between audience expectations and actual experience. This novelty, in turn, fosters a perception of uniqueness and innovation, which is proposed to enhance perceived authenticity and facilitate deeper parasocial connections, ultimately influencing behavioral intentions such as purchase decisions and word-of-mouth (Lee et al., 2025, p.6040; Lou et al., 2023, pp.13-14).

Nevertheless, this area remains largely underexplored, and only a limited number of studies have examined how perceived novelty, perceived authenticity, and parasocial interactions are interrelated, particularly across different influencer types, and how these factors jointly impact consumer behavioral outcomes such as purchase intentions and word-of-mouth.

To address these gaps and ongoing debates in current literature, this study will provide an answer to the following research question: *"To what extent do perceived authenticity and parasocial*

interactions mediate the impact of perceived novelty on consumer purchase intentions and word-of mouth-intentions, and how do these relationships differ across human, virtual human-like, and anime influencers in the fashion industry?"

1.1 Societal and Managerial Relevance

To begin with, this research carries strong societal relevance as it explores the dynamic and rapidly evolving realm of influencer marketing which is an area of growing interest that is reshaping consumer engagement, especially within the fashion industry (Gupta et al., 2024, p.126). More specifically, it addresses the growing presence of virtual influencers in today's digital landscape. As these artificially created personas remain a relatively new phenomenon, examining their digital nature is essential for helping audiences better understand how they differ from traditional human influencers. This understanding can guide audiences in how to effectively communicate with, connect to, and perceive these virtual figures, whose digital characteristics deviate from what is typically expected in traditional influencer marketing (Mouritzen et al., 2024, p.416).

Furthermore, as digital personas increasingly adopt human-like traits and emotional expressions, sometimes becoming nearly indistinguishable from real people, it becomes difficult for audiences to recognize that they are interacting with a fabricated entity (Knob et al., 2024, p.13). This blurring of boundaries raises important ethical concerns, particularly around transparency and potential deception (Hewapathirana & Pererap, 2024, p.17; Knob et al., 2024, p.13). When it is not made clear that an influencer is virtual, issues of misplaced trust and emotional attachment can arise, especially among vulnerable groups such as younger users or those less familiar with social media and the nature of virtual influencers (Hewapathirana & Pererap, 2024, p.17). Therefore, by critically examining how these digital figures are created, who controls them, and the intentions behind their use, individuals can develop a more informed and critical perspective (Kim & Wang, 2023, p.3; Lou et al., 2023, p.15). This awareness is crucial in helping audiences recognize the ethical implications and reducing susceptibility to manipulation (Kim & Wang, 2023, p.3).

Following, this research provides important managerial insights for fashion industry marketers seeking to strengthen their influencer marketing strategies by partnering with virtual influencers specifically through demonstrating how these figures can influence consumer behavioral intentions, particularly purchase intentions and word-of-mouth (Kim et al., 2025a, p.475). Moreover, the comparative insights this study offers into different types of influencers, namely human, virtual human-like, and anime, and how audiences respond to each can further support marketers in selecting the most suitable type of influencer based on their specific campaign goals and desired outcomes (Lee et al., 2025, p.6041).

1.2 Academic Relevance

According to Davlembayeva et al. (2024, p.203), while existing literature provides important insights into virtual influencer marketing, it misses a deeper exploration of certain key factors that shape their effectiveness. One particularly under-examined aspect is the role of perceived novelty and its relation to perceived authenticity and parasocial interactions, particularly within the context of virtual influencers (Stein et al., 2024, p.3448). As perceived novelty is a key feature of virtual influencers, examining how it interacts with authenticity and parasocial dynamics is crucial for understanding the impact of these relationships on consumer behavioral intentions (Lee et al., 2025, p.6040).

Additionally, influencer marketing and particularly the use of virtual influencers, is commonly examined in the context of young adults, who are often seen as the ideal target audience due to their familiarity with social media, openness to innovation, and willingness to engage with novel digital experiences (Kim & Wang, 2023, p.2). However, as noted by Lee et al. (2025, p. 6042), the effectiveness of virtual influencers among older adults, particularly those aged 44 and above, remains largely overlooked in current research despite indications that this demographic may in fact be especially receptive towards these digital personas. To address this gap, the present study incorporates a broader age range to examine whether virtual influencers can maintain their persuasive influence across a more demographically diverse population (Lee et al., 2025, p.6042).

Finally, research has given limited attention to distinguishing between the different types of virtual influencers, creating a gap in understanding their unique impact compared to traditional human influencers (Belanche et al., 2024, p.10). Arsenyan and Mirowska (2021, p.8) emphasize that exploring these distinctions offers deeper insights into their varying effects on behavioral intentions. Therefore, the present study not only compares virtual influencers with human influencers but also distinguishes between two specific types of virtual influencers, namely anime and virtual human-like, in order to further explore potential differences in how they are perceived and how they influence behavioral intentions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Influencer Marketing in The Fashion Industry

Influencer marketing is a strategic marketing practice which centers on identifying and partnering with influential individuals, known as influencers, who maintain a strong digital presence, primarily on social media platforms, to co-create and distribute branded content (Filali‑Boissy, et al., 2025, p.3). According to Ilieva et al. (2024, p.1) and Leung et al. (2022, p.93), these social media influencers, whether individuals, groups, or even virtual avatars, emerged in the early 21st century during the shift from Web 1.0 to the more interactive Web 2.0 environment. Unlike traditional celebrities, their influence stems not from institutional recognition but from the authentic and personal connections they build through consistent and relatable content creation (Leung et al., 2022, p.93). By authentically integrating brand endorsements into their everyday narratives, influencers can shape consumer attitudes, encourage engagement, and influence purchasing decisions in ways that feel relatable to their audiences (Leung et al., 2022, p.93; Nissa'et al., 2024, p.361). Additionally, they operate across a diverse range of sectors, including beauty, technology, travel, lifestyle, and fashion (Ingrassia et al., 2022, p.4).

In recent years, the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has fundamentally reshaped how fashion is both communicated and consumed (Gupta et al., 2024, p.126). Therefore, the fashion industry has emerged as one of the most active and innovative adopters of influencer marketing (Nissa'et al., 2024, p.361). Driven by ever-evolving consumer behavior and technological advancement, the fashion industry not only drives global economic growth but also plays a role in shaping cultural identities and setting trends worldwide (Yuan et al., 2024, p.8). Within this landscape, influencers, commonly known as fashion influencers, are granted visibility and the ability to connect meaningfully with both mass audiences and smaller, niche communities, enabling them to become powerful connectors between brands and consumers (Chetioui, et al., 2020, p.361; Gupta et al., 2024, p.126). They are not only trendsetters but also storytellers and brand ambassadors, who combine their personal expression with commercial partnerships to shape the aesthetics and values of fashion (Chetioui, et al., 2020, p.361). Their ability to engage audiences authentically, often through curated yet relatable content, allows them to influence purchasing decisions in ways that traditional advertising no longer can (Chetioui, et al., 2020, p.361).

2.2 The Rise of Virtual Influencers

With the rapid evolution of the digital landscape, traditional human influencers are now complemented, and sometimes even challenged by a new category of influencers known as virtual influencers (Lee et al., 2024, p.2). They are a relatively recent development that has attracted a growing fan base since 2018 (Jhawar et al., 2023, p.468). Created using advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, 3D modeling, and computer-generated imagery, these digital personas are

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designed to interact with audiences and influence consumer behavior on social media platforms (Jhawar et al., 2023, p.469). Virtual influencers engage in brand promotion, content creation, and audience interaction, often displaying high levels of form and behavioral realism (Jhawar et al., 2023, p.469). Unlike human influencers, VIs can be fully controlled by companies or individuals, allowing for consistent branding and messaging while avoiding potential controversies (Jhawar et al., 2023, p.469). As a result, they offer a level of reliability and creative flexibility that is highly attractive to brands, specifically in the fashion industry.

According to Shin and Lee (2023, p.2), numerous high-fashion brands have featured virtual influencers as models in their campaigns, while magazines have published articles spotlighting their rise. Additionally, virtual fashion shows increasingly showcase these influencers, reflecting high expectations for the future of fashion (Shin & Lee, 2023, p.2). These developments not only underscore the growing media attention surrounding VIs but also highlight their potential to enrich influencer marketing strategies, particularly within the context of the metaverse (Shin & Lee, 2023, p.2).

As the presence of virtual influencers expands, it becomes important to distinguish between the different types which fall under this broad category. Typically, virtual influencers are classified into three categories - human-like virtual influencers (HVIs), anime-like virtual influencers (AVIs), and non-human virtual influencers (NVIs) (Kim & Wang, 2024, p.2). Among these, human-like and anime-like virtual influencers are currently the most popular and widely recognized (Kim et al., 2024, p.5).

To begin with, virtual human-like influencers are digitally created personas designed to strongly resemble real people (Kim & Wang, 2024, p.2). They often display realistic behaviors, unique personalities, and rich fictional backgrounds (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021, p.4). With highly lifelike appearances, their physical features, such as body shape, skin tone, and facial structure, closely mirror those of actual humans, making it difficult to distinguish them from real individuals (Kim et al., 2025a, p.456).

On the other hand, anime influencers are a type of virtual influencer represented by animated or cartoon-like characters designed in the style of Japanese anime (Kim et al., 2025a, p.457). Characterized by features such as large eyes, colorful hair, and exaggerated expressions, anime influencers embrace a fictional and highly stylized aesthetic rather than aiming for realism (Kim et al., 2025a, p.456; Yang et al., 2020, p.386). While they are intended to resemble human beings, their digital nature is clearly recognizable (Kim et al., 2025a, p.456).

This intentional departure from realism is precisely what contributes to the growing success of anime influencers (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021, p.39). Their fictional and visually distinctive design offers a novel and engaging form of interaction with audiences, tapping into their desire for creativity, fantasy, and innovation, qualities that resonate strongly in digital entertainment spaces (Kim et al., 2025a, pp.455-458; Kim & Baek, 2024, p.5044). Another key factor that further distinguishes

anime influencers and contributes to their success is their high degree of customization (Liang & Yang, 2022, p.3). Unlike human influencers, AVIs are not constrained by real-world limitations (Kim et al., 2025a, p.454). Their personalities, voices, and stories can be crafted to align with specific brand campaigns or community values, making them flexible, scalable, and effective across diverse cultural markets (Kim et al., 2025a, p.454).

The use of virtual influencers is becoming increasingly common on visually driven and algorithm-powered social media platforms that dominate the digital lives of younger generations, more specifically Millennials and Generation Z (Angmo & Mahajan, 2024, p.283; Liu et al., 2023, p.34). According to Angmo and Mahajan (2024, p.283), these generations having grown up in highly connected online environments, are deeply immersed in digital culture and naturally drawn to innovation, creativity, and content that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Their comfort with technologies like artificial intelligence, virtual avatars, and immersive digital tools has shaped a mindset where the distinction between the real and the virtual is fluid (Kholkina et al., 2025, p.105). As a result, interacting and engaging with virtual personas feels natural and emotionally resonant for younger users, who accept them as part of their dynamic digital environments (Fan et al., 2024, p.332). In this context, the emergence and popularity of virtual influencers represent not a passing trend, but a logical extension of how digital interaction has developed in recent years.

2.3 CASA Framework

The Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm is a theoretical framework that explains how and why individuals interact with computers, media, and digital technologies including chatbots, voice assistants, social robots, and more recently, virtual influencers, as if they were social beings (Passi et al., 2024, p.69; Yu et al., 2024, p.2). It posits that when technologies display human-like attributes, such as interactivity, voice, or visual presence, users unconsciously apply social norms, rules, and behaviors from human-human communication to their interactions with these technologies (Kim & Wang, 2024, p.3; Passi et al., 2024, p.69). According to Xu et al. (2022, p.1), this response is driven by automatic processes like mindlessness, where individuals instinctively treat media agents as real people due to repeated exposure to social cues, and by anthropomorphism, the more reflective attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman entities. Even when users are aware that these technologies lack consciousness or emotion, the presence of minimal social cues can trigger these social responses.

Recently, the CASA framework has attracted increasing attention in research on virtual influencers, as their appearance and behavior trigger social responses from users, revealing how these digital agents and their anthropomorphic features shape consumer perceptions and behavior (De Cicco et al., 2024; Rehman et al., 2025, p.2-3; Yu et al., 2024, p.2). According to the principles of the CASA framework, when virtual influencers are designed with realistic traits, such as lifelike appearances, expressive facial features, and natural communication styles, they are more likely to trigger social and

emotional responses from users on social media (Rehman et al., 2025, p.2). Even when users are aware that the agent is artificial, the presence of human-like cues prompts them to respond as they would to a real person (Passi et al., 2024, p.69). These cues encourage users to perceive virtual influencers not merely as digital entities, but as social beings deserving of human-like interaction. Furthermore, as virtual influencers increasingly serve as brand endorsers, consumers often rely on simple social heuristics, mental shortcuts based on familiar social behaviors, to form judgments (Ham et al., 2024, p.356). One such heuristic is the assumption that humans are inherently social (Ham et al., 2024, p.356). When a virtual influencer is shown interacting with a real person, it activates this heuristic, reinforcing perceptions of the influencer's social presence (Ham et al., 2024b, p.356). This enhances trust and engagement, making consumers more likely to respond to virtual influencers similarly to how they would engage with human endorsers (Ham et al., 2024b, p.356).

2.4 Perceived Novelty

In an oversaturated digital environment, where consumers are continuously exposed to diverse content and have become desensitized to repetitive and predictable stimuli, novelty serves as a critical mechanism for capturing attention, stimulating interest, and distinguishing content from the continuous stream of information (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024, pp.628-629). According to Raymond et al. (2003, p.537), novel content grabs attention by triggering both cognitive and emotional responses, making messages more noticeable and encouraging people to engage more deeply. Moreover, it stands out by violating expectations or offering features that feel new, surprising, or creatively original.

However, the effectiveness of novelty does not solely depend on how objectively new or different content is. Rather, it is the perceived novelty that truly determines its impact. Perceived novelty refers to the degree to which an innovation is seen as new, exciting, original, and different from what a person has previously encountered (Frasquet et al., 2024, p.2; Wells et al., 2010, p.818). It reflects individuals' subjective assessment of how unfamiliar or innovative something appears to them, regardless of whether it is objectively new (Frasquet et al., 2024, p.2). This subjective perception is shaped by a variety of factors, including personal experiences, prior exposure to similar content, cultural background, and even current mood or context (Wells et al., 2010, p.818). As such, the same piece of content may appear highly novel to one person while seeming entirely familiar to another. According to Franke et al. (2023, p.526), perceived novelty plays a significant role in shaping attention, engagement, and behavioral intentions, as individuals are naturally drawn to stimuli that deviate from their prior experiences.

In the context of influencer marketing, perceived novelty often arises when audiences are exposed to unconventional influencer types, such as virtual human-like or anime influencers (Kim et al., 2025a, p.458). As traditional human influencers become increasingly common, these non-traditional figures stand out by offering a distinct presence that captures attention through their

unexpected and innovative nature (Kim et al., 2025a, p.458). Building on this, even when a virtual influencer is not objectively new, it can still be perceived as novel by consumers due to the stark contrast it presents against the familiar archetype of human influencers (Kholkina et al., 2025, p.107). Furthermore, perceived novelty can be triggered by a range of cues, including the visual appearance, communication patterns, and most notably, the form of existence of the influencer.

However, the novelty effect of virtual influencers is not only a product of surface-level visual uniqueness, but also taps into deeper cognitive and psychological layers (Kim et al., 2025a, p.472). These digital entities are not lacking in human traits, on the contrary, they are engineered to replicate them (Davlembayeva et al., 2025, p.2). Through features such as facial symmetry, lifelike expressions, and fluid gestures, virtual influencers mimic the very cues that humans are evolutionarily attuned to when forming trust, empathy, and social bonds (Ham et al., 2024a, p.2; Mrad et al., 2025, p.12). Therefore, what makes them be perceived as novel is the uncanny simulation of these signals by an entity that is knowingly artificial (Wang et al., 2015, p.400). This paradox, an influencer that appears and behaves like a human, yet is not, sparks intrigue and engagement. For many, particularly those who grew up in eras when such technological advancements were unimaginable, the encounter with a convincingly lifelike but artificial being challenges prior expectations of what is possible, heightening the sense of novelty.

2.5 The Influence of Perceived Novelty and Influencer Type on Consumer Purchase Intentions and Word-of-Mouth Intentions

From a consumer behavior perspective, the impact of perceived novelty extends beyond simply capturing attention. It significantly influences consumers' behavioral intentions, including their intention to make a purchase and their likelihood to engage in word-of-mouth communication (Chen et al., 2021, p.4; Pape & Toporowski, 2023, p.1071).

To begin with, purchase intention refers to a consumer's deliberate and subjective inclination to buy a particular product or service (Lin & Shen, 2023, p.3). It reflects both their personal attitudes toward the brand or product and the influence of external factors, serving as an important indicator of their likelihood or willingness to make a purchase in the future (Lin & Shen, 2023, p.3).

Following, word-of-mouth intention refers to individuals' willingness to share their personal experiences, opinions, or recommendations about a product or service with others, typically with the aim of shaping perceptions and influencing behavior (Verkijika & De Wet, 2019, p.218). Rooted in personal experience, word-of-mouth intention plays a crucial role in attracting new customers and retaining existing ones and is widely regarded as a powerful promotional tool for encouraging trial and adoption of new offerings (Verkijika & De Wet, 2019, p.218).

As noted by Chen et al. (2021, p.4), the growing diversity in consumer demand drives brands to continuously evolve, ensuring that their capacity for innovation and novelty remains evident to consumers. Furthermore, consumers perceive a brand's novelty strength through its products and

services, which plays a key role in shaping their willingness to purchase and talk about these brands with others (Chen et al., 2021, p.4). When a brand is perceived as highly novel, it greatly enhances consumers' readiness to engage with its offerings and invest in its products (Chen et al., 2021, p.4). This is one of the key reasons why many brands increasingly turn to influencer marketing.

Influencers can serve as carriers of novelty, particularly when they introduce a fresh, unconventional, or unexpected element to a brand (Kim et al., 2025a, p.458). The type of influencer, whether a traditional human influencer, a virtual human-like figure, or an anime-like persona, shapes how this sense of novelty is perceived.

As noted by Bhardwaj et al. (2024, p.2), human influencers can bring novelty through the uniqueness of their personal brand, creative expression, and their ability to challenge norms within their niche. Their distinct voice, storytelling approach, or visual aesthetic can help set a brand apart from competitors, which is an important factor in influencing consumer behavior.

In contrast, virtual and anime influencers offer a technology-driven form of novelty that resonates strongly with digitally native audiences (Lou et al., 2023, p.1). These influencer types allow brands to signal innovation and align themselves with current cultural and technological trends. As highlighted by Kim and Wang (2023, p.2), the perceived novelty introduced by these influencers enhances consumer interest and engagement, which in turn affects key behavioral intentions such as purchase decisions and word-of-mouth communication. By signaling that a brand is in tune with evolving trends, this novelty can increase the brand's appeal, making consumers more likely to try its products, feel satisfied with their experience, and share their positive impressions with others (Chen et al., 2021, p.4). Building on these insights, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H1: Perceived novelty of all types of influencers (human, virtual human-like, and anime), positively affects consumers' purchase intentions.

H2: Perceived novelty of all types of influencers (human, virtual human-like, and anime), positively affects consumers' word-of-mouth intentions.

Previous research has shown that the impact of novelty varies depending on the type of influencer, as consumers perceive and respond to novelty differently based on influencer characteristics (Franke & Groeppel-Klein, 2024, p.7; Kim et al., 2025a, p.474). For instance, human influencers often evoke lower perceptions of novelty due to their long-standing presence in the market. Their widespread use and familiarity, combined with their real-life identity, make it more challenging for them to be seen as novel. Moreover, human influencers represent the original form of influencer marketing, further reducing their uniqueness and novelty. As a result, this reduced sense of novelty can potentially lead to weaker purchase intentions and lower word-of-mouth engagement compared to more novel influencer types.

In contrast, virtual human-like and anime influencers tend to elicit higher levels of perceived novelty, as they challenge traditional expectations, are relatively recent developments compared to human influencers, and remain less familiar to most consumers (Kholkina et al., 2025, p.107). However, an interesting distinction emerges between these two groups.

While both virtual human-like and anime influencers elicit high levels of perceived novelty, anime influencers appear to evoke even greater novelty perceptions (Franke & Groeppel-Klein, 2024, p.7; Kim et al., 2025a, p.474). As highlighted by Kim et al. (2025a, p.474), this can be attributed to their stronger visual and conceptual detachment from real life. Animate influencers, due to their stylized and distinctive appearance, are perceived as more unconventional, memorable, and visually striking than human-like virtual influencers (Kim et al., 2025a, p.474). Their non-human design captures consumer attention and enhances perceptions of novelty, which in turn positively influences behavioral intentions such as purchase intentions and word-of-mouth (Pan et al., 2024, p.3230). Furthermore, anime influencers are still rarely featured in mainstream commercial campaigns, especially outside of niche or fandom-driven markets, which reinforces their novelty through limited exposure in everyday advertising (Choudhry et al., 2022, pp.12-13). Based on these insights, this study hypothesizes that:

H3: The type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions, such that the positive effect of perceived novelty is strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like influencers, and weakest for human influencers.

H4: The type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions, such that the positive effect of perceived novelty is strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like influencers, and weakest for human influencers.

2.6 The Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity in the Perceived Novelty- Behavioral Intention Relationship and the Moderating Role of Influencer Type on Perceived Novelty's Effect on Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity refers to individuals' belief that an entity, such as a person, brand, or message, is genuine, sincere, and true to its original character or intended identity (Youn et al., 2025, p.1). It is a subjective evaluation shaped by the consistency and transparency of how the entity presents itself across various contexts, as well as how well this presentation matches the audience's expectations and lived experiences (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p.825).

According to Lee et al. (2025, p. 6032) and Shoenberger and Kim (2023, p.372), in the context of influencer marketing, perceived authenticity is a critical factor influencing the persuasive impact of messages. Both human and virtual influencers actively seek to be perceived as authentic by

their audiences, highlighting authenticity as a key construct for understanding how these two types of influencers may align or differ (Lee et al., 2025, p.6032). In this context, perceived authenticity refers to the extent to which an influencer's communicative behavior is seen as genuine and sincere by their audience (Lee et al., 2025, p.6032; Shoenberger & Kim, 2023, p.372).

In the evolving landscape of influencer marketing, perceived authenticity remains a crucial factor in shaping behavioral intentions (Agnihotri et al., 2023, p.2388). As highlighted by Shoenberger and Kim (2023, p.369), the authenticity attributed to social media influencers significantly enhances their persuasive power, particularly in the context of product endorsements on platforms like Instagram. Therefore, consumers increasingly rely on perceived authenticity when deciding whether to engage with or purchase promoted products (Lee & Eastin, 2021, pp.824-825).

However, this perception is becoming more complex due to the expanding variety of influencer types, especially with the rise of novel formats such as virtual influencers (Lee et al., 2025, p.6032). While the novelty of these influencers may initially capture consumer interest and stimulate engagement, it is the perceived authenticity that emerges from this novelty which ultimately transforms curiosity into purchase intention (Kim et al., 2025a, p.460; Lee et al., 2025, p.6040). In this context, novelty functions as a hook that draws attention, whereas trust and credibility, grounded in authenticity, are essential to convert that attention into action (Kim et al., 2025a, p.454). According to Kim et al. (2025a, pp.458-459), novelty in influencer content can drive consumers' exploratory behaviors, such as following the influencer or seeking more information. However, purchasing an item based on an influencer's recommendation represents a higher level of consumer commitment, one that requires a trustworthy and credible source (Weismueller, et al., 2020, p.167). Therefore, a novel influencer who is also perceived as authentic can translate initial intrigue into persuasive power, thereby positively influencing purchase intentions (Lee et al., 2025, p.6040).

Following, perceived authenticity has been found to strengthen emotional bonds between influencers and their followers, which, in turn, increases consumers' willingness to share positive word-of-mouth (Lee & Eastin, 2021, p.824). According to Pape and Toporowski (2023, p.1071), consumers are naturally inclined to talk about things that are new or surprising, hence, novelty can generate initial word-of-mouth communication. However, while an influencer's novelty may spark initial attention and conversation, genuine advocacy and sustained word-of-mouth are more likely when the influencer is perceived as authentic (Wang & Weng, 2024, p.359). For instance, when an influencer is perceived as insincere or overly commercial, the resulting word-of-mouth may be superficial or even negative (Filieri et al., 2023, p.360). In contrast, if the influencer is viewed as genuine, trustworthy, and authentic, followers are more likely to share sincere endorsements and recommend the influencer, as well as the associated brand or product, to others (Zhang et al., 2024, pp.167-168). In such cases, authenticity serves as the filter through which novelty-driven interest is evaluated and translated into meaningful communication. Based on the discussed findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions for all types of influencers.

H6: Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word of mouth intentions for all types of influencers.

Perceived authenticity is increasingly becoming a key topic in the comparison between human and virtual influencers, as both types strive to be seen as authentic by their audiences (Byun & Ahn, 2023, p.299). However, the academic debate on this issue remains divided, as studies present varying perspectives on how these different types of influencers are perceived.

Some research suggests that virtual influencers are often seen as less authentic than their human counterparts, largely due to a perceived lack of transparency in disclosing commercial motives (Audrezet et al., 2020, pp.563-565; Choudhry et al., 2022, p.17). However, while traditional human influencers have long dominated this space, the rise of virtual influencers has introduced a new dimension to the perception of authenticity (Sorosrungruang et al., 2024, p.3125).

According to Byun and Ahn (2023, p.299) and Huang and Jung (2022, p.9), virtual influencers can be perceived as authentic, sometimes even more authentic than human influencers, especially when users mentally connect the virtual persona to a real-world counterpart it is designed to represent. Furthermore, drawing from the CASA framework, individuals tend to apply human-like social norms to digital agents, allowing virtual influencers to be seen as authentic, despite their digital origins, when they exhibit social cues that align with consumer expectations (Li & Ma, 2024, p.2). Moreover, as Abdelsattar et al. (2024, p.8) highlight, the perceived authenticity of virtual influencers often stems from their novelty. Consumers often associate novelty with originality and uniqueness so when an influencer presents something new, they stand out from conventional influencers (Lee et al., 2024, p. 12). This distinctiveness enhances perceptions of authenticity because audiences may see them as less fabricated and less commercialized by the mainstream influencer market (Franke et al., 2023, p.526).

In this context, anime influencers represent an even greater deviation from normative expectations than both virtual human-like and real human influencers. The heightened novelty they embody often leads audiences to view their presence as more creatively curated rather than commercially driven, thereby reinforcing a distinct form of perceived authenticity rooted in unique identity (Kim et al., 2025a, p.468; Shoenberger, H., & Kim, E., 2023, p.372). In light of these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: The type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the effect of perceived novelty on perceived authenticity, such that the positive effect is strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like influencers, and weakest for human influencers.

2.7 The Mediating Role of Parasocial Interaction in the Perceived Novelty-Behavioral Intention Relationship and the Moderating Role of Influencer Type on Perceived Novelty's Effect on Parasocial Interaction

Social media continues to reshape the way consumers interact, not just with each other, but also with influencers, celebrities, and public figures within the digital environment (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011, p.569). Consequently, this has significantly altered marketing dynamics, particularly influencer marketing, making it a dominant force shaped by the psychological bonds influencers establish with their followers (Ki et al., 2020, p.2). Central to understanding these connections is the concept of parasocial interactions (PSIs).

PSIs are one-sided psychological relationships in which individuals form emotional bonds and imagined interpersonal connections with media figures, whether real or fictional, despite no actual reciprocal interaction taking place (Jin et al., 2021, p.667). Additionally, the concept explains how audiences begin to perceive media personas, such as influencers, TV characters, or celebrities, as personally familiar and relatable, often feeling as though they know them (Jin et al., 2021, p.667). These interactions can evoke feelings of intimacy and social presence, making the media figure seem like a friend, which can influence attitudes and behaviors toward the figure or associated brands (Jin et al., 2021, p.667).

As recent research in influencer marketing increasingly focuses on parasocial interactions, scholars have begun to explore what triggers or strengthens these connections, particularly in the context of emerging types of influencers (Dondapati & Dehury, 2024, p.3; Lim & Lee, 2023, p.2; Stein et al., 2024, p.3437).

One such factor, which has received relatively limited attention but is gaining traction in recent studies, is perceived novelty and its connection to the development of parasocial interactions. According to Shin and Lee (2024, p.45), novel stimuli, such as virtual influencers like virtual human-like or anime influencers, naturally spark curiosity, prompting individuals to engage more deeply in an effort to understand them. This cognitive engagement strengthens emotional involvement, reinforcing parasocial interactions (Shin & Lee, 2024, p.45; Tokunaga, 2013, p.386). Following, an interesting perspective proposed by Castaño et al. (2008, p.321) suggests that novelty introduces a sense of uncertainty, which individuals naturally seek to resolve by developing familiarity. As audiences repeatedly engage with a novel influencer to establish this familiarity, their sense of comfort and connection deepens, further strengthening parasocial interactions (Shin & Lee, 2024, p.43).

In turn, when parasocial interactions are strengthened, they play an important role in shaping consumer behavioral intentions, increasing the likelihood of higher purchase intentions and word-of-mouth advocacy (Hwang & Zhang, 2018, p.159).

To begin with, beyond traditional credibility factors, parasocial interactions have emerged as a key driver of purchase intentions specifically in influencer marketing (Garg & Bakshi, 2024, p.2; Lin et al., 2021, p.61). Consumers often turn to influencers for advice and product recommendations, and these ongoing interactions can positively influence their attitudes toward brands and products (Garg & Bakshi, 2024, p.2). As this perceived friendship develops through consistent engagement, it creates a sense of trust and familiarity that marketers can effectively use to promote products and influence purchasing decisions (Garg & Bakshi, 2024, p.2).

In addition to their impact on purchase intentions, parasocial interactions also significantly contribute to consumers' willingness to engage in word-of-mouth communication (Hwang & Zhang, 2018, p.159-160; Saini & Bansal, 2025, p.343). When individuals feel emotionally connected to influencers, they are more likely to talk about and share their content with others, both online and offline (Aw & Chuah, 2021, p.147). This is because parasocial bonds often resemble real-life friendships, leading followers to treat the influencer's product recommendations as personal endorsements (Aw & Chuah, 2021, p.154). Such perceived closeness increases the likelihood that consumers will internalize the influencer's message and advocate for the brand as if it were their own discovery. Moreover, the social media environment reinforces this effect, as users are continuously encouraged to comment, share, and repost content which are all actions that serve as digital word-of-mouth. Building on this theoretical foundation, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions for all types of influencers.

H9: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word of mouth intentions for all types of influencers.

According to Kim et al. (2025a, p.474) and Stein et al. (2024, p.3446), the perception of novelty varies significantly across different types of influencers, influencing the strength and nature of parasocial interactions and audience connections. While all influencer types can evoke a sense of novelty, existing research demonstrates that certain influencers are perceived as more novel than others, which shapes how audiences engage with them (Kim et al., 2025a, p.474).

Specifically for human influencers, perceived novelty tends to have a weaker influence on parasocial interactions. Human influencers are generally not perceived as inherently novel because they closely resemble individuals encountered in everyday life. Furthermore, the saturated influencer marketing space means audiences frequently encounter similar human influencers across various platforms, increasing familiarity but simultaneously diminishing the impact of novelty on forming parasocial connections (Hamdan & Lee, 2022, p.312). Thus, for human influencers, audiences rely more heavily on other elements to develop and maintain parasocial interactions, rather than novelty.

In contrast, for virtual influencers, such as virtual human-like and anime ones, novelty plays a more prominent role in shaping parasocial interaction. According to Kim et al (2025a, p.378), these influencers challenge conventional expectations of what an influencer should be, primarily because they lack a physical presence. As a result, their appearances and communication styles often come across as artificial or unconventional (Lou et al., 2023, p.549). This break from social norms makes them appear novel, drawing attention and sparking curiosity. With continued engagement, this initial interest can evolve into more consistent interaction which is an essential foundation for the development of parasocial interactions.

Following, an interesting observation by Yan et al. (2024, p.4) highlights that the artificial or stylized nature of virtual influencers allows for greater audience interpretation. Because these influencers do not fully replicate human emotional expression or behavior, they evoke a sense of mystery or ambiguity (Moustakas et al., 2020, p.2). This, in turn, encourages audiences to fill in the emotional or personality gaps themselves which is known to be a psychological process that strengthens parasocial connections (Yan et al., 2024, p.4). Ultimately, it is this combination of novelty and interpretative space that enhances the potential for deep parasocial engagement with virtual influencers. Based on these findings in previous research the following hypothesis is proposed:

H10: The type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the effect of perceived novelty on parasocial interaction, such that the positive effect is strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like influencers, and weakest for human influencers.

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual model. This model illustrates the hypothesized relationships between perceived novelty and consumer responses, namely purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention, within the context of influencer marketing. The framework includes perceived authenticity and parasocial interaction as mediating variables, while the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) functions as a moderator across several pathways.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model
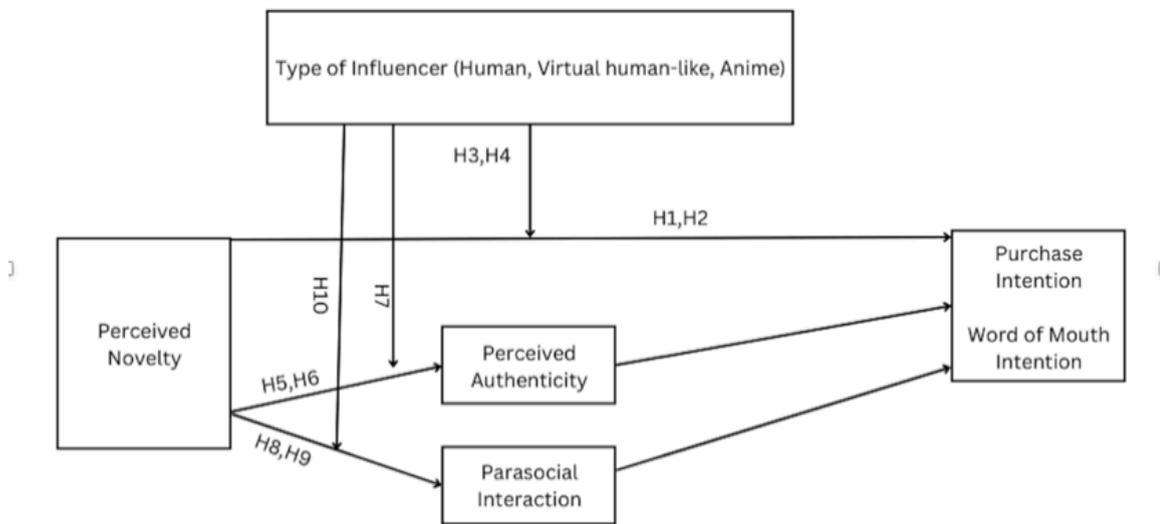
3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of Research Method

To answer the research question, this study employed a between-subjects research design using an online randomized experimental approach (Charness et al., 2012, p.1). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions each featuring a distinct type of influencer in a simulated Instagram post created for a fictional fashion brand. The first condition featured a post with a human fashion influencer, the second showcased a virtual human-like fashion influencer, and the third presented an anime fashion influencer.

To begin with, a quantitative research method, specifically an experimental design, was selected for this study as it aligns well with the objective of systematically investigating the relationships between key variables and drawing conclusions that can be generalized to a broader population (Polit & Beck, 2010, p.1452). Given the study's aim to explore potential cause-and-effect relationships and test causal hypotheses, an experimental approach provided the necessary structure to examine these relationships in a controlled setting (Ahmad et al., 2019, p.2829).

This method further enabled the collection of objective, numerical data, which could then be analyzed using statistical techniques, ensuring a systematic and unbiased identification of patterns and effects (Ahmad et al., 2019, p. 2829). According to Yilmaz (2013, p.313), the structured nature of quantitative research allows for standardized data collection and consistent procedures throughout the study. In the context of the present research, this was particularly beneficial, as it ensured uniformity across all participants and improved replicability. As a result, the findings can be more reliably compared across different settings or participant groups, thereby strengthening the credibility and reliability of the results (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020, p.2695).

Finally, by conducting the study in a controlled environment, any observed differences in consumer responses could be directly attributed to the experimental manipulation rather than to external factors (Kirk, 2009, p.24). The use of randomization strengthened the internal validity of the study by minimizing potential biases and individual differences that might have otherwise influenced the results (Cahit, 2015, p.117).

3.2 Stimulus Material

Three communication stimuli were developed for the purpose of this study to test the effects of different influencer types on consumer responses. These stimuli were designed as mock Instagram posts from a fictional fashion brand named Moda Fashion House, which was created exclusively for this experiment to eliminate any influence from participants' pre-existing perceptions or brand familiarity (De Cicco et al., 2024, p.4).

The stimuli were constructed using the graphic design platform Canva. To begin with, an Instagram post frame was selected to mirror the visual structure of the platform. This frame included

standard Instagram user interface elements such as a profile picture, the username handle (@moda_fashion_house), a like count (fixed at 999 likes), and interaction icons for liking, commenting, sharing, and saving the post. These interface details were included to make the posts feel realistic and to reflect the typical browsing experience of Instagram users. These consistent design features were applied across all three posts to ensure an identical layout. Additionally, an image was sourced from Pinterest and used as the logo of the brand, as it visually aligned with the aesthetic and branding style of a contemporary fashion label. Following, each post featured a standardized caption that read: "Winter glam. Shop this look:", followed by a list of four clothing items and their corresponding prices. This caption was intentionally crafted to communicate the promotional nature of the content and to clearly signal that the individual depicted in the image was acting as a fashion influencer endorsing products.

The central visual component of each post was a full-body image of a woman modeling the exact same outfit described in the caption. This image featured a real human fashion influencer selected from Instagram and was used in the human influencer condition of the experiment. To maintain experimental control and minimize potential confounding factors, the influencer was deliberately chosen to be someone not widely recognizable. Specifically, she was not a public figure or celebrity, but rather someone with an active yet moderately sized follower base who regularly posted fashion-related content.

Since the key manipulated element across the three stimuli was the type of influencer, the same base image was adapted to create two additional experimental conditions. Using AI tools powered by ChatGPT-4o, the original image of the human influencer was transformed into two alternative versions, one representing a virtual human-like influencer and the other an anime influencer (Kim & Wang, 2024, p.5). These AI-generated images were modeled with high fidelity to the original, preserving the influencer's pose, posture, facial expression, hairstyle, clothing, lighting, and background composition (Kim & Wang, 2024, p.5). In doing so, the study ensured that influencer type was the only factor that varied across conditions. This high level of control was a deliberate design choice to eliminate potential confounding variables and to enhance the internal validity of the experiment (Xie-Carson, 2023,p.7). By holding all other visual and contextual elements constant, the study was able to isolate and examine the specific impact of influencer type on consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. This approach strengthened the reliability of the findings and allowed for a more accurate interpretation of the role that different influencer types play in shaping consumer responses.

These three stimuli which can be seen in Figures 2, 3 and 4 served as the primary experimental materials presented to participants during the online survey.

Figure 2

Stimuli featuring human influencer

Figure 3

Stimuli featuring virtual human-like influencer

Figure 4

Stimuli featuring anime influencer

@moda_fashion_house

999 likes

moda_fashion_house Winter glam ❄️✨ Shop this look:
- Shearling maxi coat - €400
- Satin wrap blouse in mint – €60
- Two-tone wide leg trousers – €90
- Green pointed-toe heels – €120

3.3 Sampling

3.3.1 Sampling Strategy

The target population of this study consisted of individuals who use social media and are aware of the concept of virtual influencers. This criterion ensured that participants possess the necessary contextual understanding to engage meaningfully with the study, thereby contributing to more accurate and relevant findings. Furthermore, the study included adults aged 18 and older, extending beyond the young adult demographic that has typically been the focus of previous research in this area. This broader age range is particularly valuable, as the effectiveness of virtual influencers among individuals over the age of 44 remains largely underexplored (Lee et al., 2024, p.14). As noted by Lee et al. (2024, p.14), including a more diverse age group is essential to assessing whether virtual influencers can maintain their influence across a wider demographic spectrum.

Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, both of which are non-probability and non-random sampling methods (Emerson, 2015, p.166).

Convenience sampling involves selecting participants based on practical criteria such as accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate (Etikan et al, 2016, p.2). In the initial phase,

the survey was shared with family members, friends, and individuals within the researcher's personal network.

Subsequently, snowball sampling was used to expand the participant pool. This method relies on initial respondents referring the study to others within their own social or professional circles (Emerson, 2015, p.166). In this study, participants who completed the survey were encouraged to share the link with people they knew who might also be eligible and interested in participating. This referral process helped extend the reach of the study beyond the researcher's immediate contacts (Browne, 2005, p.48). To further increase visibility, the survey link was later posted on social media platforms, specifically LinkedIn and Instagram.

3.3.2 Sampling description

The study required a minimum of 90 participants distributed across three conditions, with at least 30 participants per condition.

In total, 211 individuals initially began the online survey. To ensure data quality and contextual relevance, several exclusion criteria were applied prior to analysis. To begin with, 6 participants were excluded for not completing the survey. Following, 22 participants were removed after indicating that they were unfamiliar with the concept of virtual influencers, as such familiarity was essential for understanding the experimental stimuli. 1 participant was excluded for not using social media at all, and 1 was removed for stating that social media was not part of their daily routine. To prevent bias related to prior exposure, participants who were already familiar with the specific influencer presented in the experiment were also excluded. This included individuals who reported being "somewhat familiar" ($n = 2$), "moderately familiar" ($n = 1$), "neither familiar nor unfamiliar" ($n = 4$), and "slightly familiar" ($n = 1$) with the influencer, totaling 8 exclusions. Further exclusions were based on manipulation check failures, where participants were asked to correctly identify the type of influencer shown. Specifically, 3 participants misidentified a human influencer as a virtual human-like influencer, 1 as an anime influencer, 4 misidentified a virtual human-like influencer as an anime influencer, 1 as human, 3 misclassified an anime influencer as a virtual human-like influencer, and 2 as human, resulting in the exclusion of 14 participants. Additionally, responses with abnormal completion times were excluded due to concerns regarding attention and response validity. Four participants completed the survey in under one minute (48, 50, 54, and 55 seconds), and one participant took over 10 hours to complete the survey.

After applying all exclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 154 participants. This exceeded the minimum required sample size, ensuring sufficient statistical power and a balanced distribution across the three experimental groups.

Additional information on participants' demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1 for each experimental condition.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics, Per Condition

Baseline characteristics	Condition 1 = Human Fashion Influencer		Condition 2 = Virtual Human-like Fashion Influencer		Condition 3 = Anime Fashion Influencer		Total	
	n=54		*n*=50		*n*=50		*n*=154	
	n or *M*	% or *SD*	*n* or *M*	% or *SD*	*n* or *M*	% or *SD*	*n* or *M*	% or *SD*
Age [age range 19-56]	31.81	9.74	31.38	9.43	29.32	7.96	30.86	9.10
Gender								
Male	25	46.3%	26	52.0%	18	36.0%	69	44.8%
Female	28	51.9%	23	46.0%	31	62.0%	82	53.2%
Non-binary/third gender	1	1.9%	1	2.0%	1	2.0%	3	1.9%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Highest educational level								
Primary education	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Secondary education	11	20.4%	7	14.0%	8	16.0%	26	16.9%
Bachelor's degree	22	40.7%	13	26.0%	26	52.0%	61	39.6%
Master's degree	21	38.9%	28	56.0%	15	30.0%	64	41.6%
Doctorate	0	0.0%	2	4.0%	1	2.0%	3	1.9%

Note. M = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *n* = Sample Size

3.4 Manipulation Check

In this study, a pre-test was conducted using an online survey administered via Qualtrics, with a total of 40 participants, of whom 60% (*n* = 24) identified as female and 40% (*n* = 16) as male. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 37 years, with a mean age of 23.98 years (*SD* = 3.80). Regarding educational background, 42.5% (*n* = 17) reported holding a Bachelor's degree, 37.5% (*n* = 15) indicated secondary education as their highest level, and 20% (*n* = 8) reported having obtained a Master's degree.

The pre-test was conducted to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the experimental stimuli and to identify any potential issues with the survey design prior to the main data collection (Kim et al., 2024, p.7; Wang & Yang, 2025, p.472). Specifically, it aimed to validate whether participants

accurately perceived, understood, and responded to the manipulation as intended, namely, their ability to distinguish between the three types of influencers: human, virtual human-like, and anime.

To achieve this, each participant was randomly assigned to one of the three conditions and was exposed to one of the influencer types accordingly. After viewing the assigned stimulus, participants completed the full version of the questionnaire intended for the main study. This decision was made to thoroughly evaluate the overall survey experience, including the flow, clarity of language, and technical functionality, thereby helping to identify and resolve any issues related to survey design, layout, or comprehension prior to launching the main study (Stantcheva, 2023, p.213). However, for the purposes of the pre-test analysis, only the manipulation check items were examined in detail, and statistical tests were conducted solely on those items, as the primary objective at this stage was to assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation.

The manipulation check consisted of two components. The first one was a question asking participants to indicate which type of influencer they had just seen, choosing from the three available categories: 1 = human, 2 = virtual human-like, or 3 = anime. The second component involved a set of three 7-point bipolar scale items, assessing participants' perceptions of the influencer's humanness (1 = *not at all human* to 7 = *very human*), realism (1 = *not at all realistic* to 7 = *very realistic*), and artificiality (1 = *not at all artificial/digital* to 7 = *very artificial/digital*).

To assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, a one-way ANOVA was conducted using data from both manipulation check questions. For the first question, namely participants' identification of the influencer type, the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference across the three experimental conditions, $F(2, 37) = 479.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .96$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test showed that all three conditions differed significantly from one another. Participants in the human condition ($M = 1.07$, $SD = 0.27$) identified the influencer type significantly differently from those in the virtual human-like ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.00$, $p < .001$ and anime conditions ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$), $p < .001$. Additionally, the virtual human-like and anime conditions also differed significantly from each other, $p < .001$.

To further validate the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, a second one-way ANOVA was conducted on responses to the second manipulation check question, which assessed participants' perceptions of the influencer types across the three semantic differential dimensions, namely humanness, realism, and artificiality.

For humanness, the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference across the three experimental conditions, $F(2, 37) = 116.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .86$. Post hoc analyses showed that participants in the human condition rated the influencer as significantly more human ($M = 6.79$, $SD = 0.80$) than those in the virtual human-like ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.49$), $p < .001$, and anime conditions ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.00$, $p < .001$, while the virtual human-like influencer was also rated as more human than the anime influencer, $p < .001$.

For realism, a statistically significant difference across the experimental conditions was again observed, $F(2, 37) = 146.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .89$. Participants perceived the human influencer as significantly more realistic ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 0.54$) than the virtual human-like ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.42$), $p < .001$, and anime influencers ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.00$), $p < .001$. The virtual human-like influencer was also rated as significantly more realistic than the anime influencer, $p < .001$.

For artificiality, the analysis once again revealed a statistically significant difference across the experimental conditions, $F(2, 37) = 321.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .95$. The anime influencer was perceived as significantly more artificial ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 0.00$) than both the virtual human-like ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 0.91$), $p < .001$ and human influencers ($M = 1.14$, $SD = 0.54$), $p < .001$. The virtual human-like influencer was also considered significantly more artificial than the human influencer, $p < .001$.

Overall, the findings provided strong evidence that the experimental manipulation was successful, as participants clearly distinguished between the three influencer types and evaluated them differently across the dimensions of humanness, realism, and artificiality. These distinct perceptions indicated that any effects observed in the main study can be attributed to the intended manipulation of influencer type. Additionally, these results supported the internal validity of the study and confirmed the suitability of the stimuli for the main analysis (Yi & Lee, 2024, p.5166).

3.5 Procedure

The online experimental survey was administered through Qualtrics, with data collection carried out over a two-week period, from April 23 to May 10, 2025.

Before beginning the survey, participants were presented with detailed information outlining the study's procedures, along with an informed consent form. They were required to read and provide their consent before proceeding with participation.

To ensure alignment with the study's objectives, respondents first answered a series of screening questions. These included a yes/no question assessing their prior knowledge of virtual influencers, followed by two questions evaluating their social media usage habits. The first asked whether participants generally use social media platforms, with examples provided for clarity. The second, adapted from Scott et al. (2017, p. 313), measured the frequency of their social media use. These questions were designed to identify and exclude individuals who did not meet the core eligibility criteria, specifically, those who indicated they were unfamiliar with the concept of virtual influencers or did not use social media at all. Respondents who met either of these exclusion criteria were automatically redirected to the end of the survey. This approach was essential for ensuring that participants had the contextual understanding needed to meaningfully engage with the study material, thereby contributing to the reliability and relevance of the findings (Kim et al., 2025b, p.382).

Following the screening process, respondents were randomly assigned by Qualtrics to one of the three experimental conditions. They were instructed to carefully review the Instagram post

corresponding to their assigned condition and were informed that they would not be able to return to the post once they moved forward. Additionally, to ensure clarity and reinforce the intended manipulation, participants were explicitly told which type of influencer was depicted in the post. They were asked to proceed with the questionnaire only after completing this step.

Immediately after exposure to the stimulus, participants were asked whether they were familiar with the influencer featured in the post. This served as a control measure to help identify potential bias, as familiarity with the influencer could influence participants' responses (Kim et al., 2024, p.8). Therefore, individuals who indicated that they were familiar with the influencer were excluded from the study to ensure that prior knowledge or existing attitudes did not affect the results.

Following this, respondents were asked to identify which influencer they believed they had just seen and to evaluate the influencer in terms of artificiality, realism, and humanness. Subsequently, they had to answer five sets of questions measuring the key variables of interest, namely perceived novelty, perceived authenticity, parasocial interaction, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth intention. Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information, including their age, gender, and educational background.

After completing the survey, participants were presented with a debriefing statement. This statement expressed gratitude for their time and participation, reminding of the study's objectives and main purpose, and clarified that any materials shown, such as pictures, were developed by the researcher for the purpose of the study. Additionally, the debriefing included the researcher's name and email address to allow participants to make contact with any questions or concerns.

The full questionnaire and the corresponding survey flow, as designed in Qualtrics, are included in Appendix B.

3.6 Operationalization and Measurements

3.6.1 Independent Variable

3.6.1.1 Perceived novelty. Perceived novelty was assessed using a four-item scale adapted from Kim et al. (2024, p. 11), originally developed by Koslow et al. (2003, p. 102). To ensure alignment with the topic and objectives of the present study, minor modifications were made, specifically, replacing references to a specific name in the original scale with the more general term "the influencer." Participants rated their agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The items used to measure perceived novelty included: "The post by the influencer is different from my expectations of a typical Instagram post.", "The post by the influencer is memorable.", "The post by the influencer is visually interesting.", "This post made me curious about the brand mentioned by the influencer."(Chronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$).

3.6.1.1.1 Factor Analysis of Perceived Novelty. To ensure that the items measuring perceived novelty reflected a reliable and valid underlying construct, a factor analysis was conducted on the relevant scale items. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00

was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .85, exceeding the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(6) = 533.902$, $p < .001$, confirming that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis revealed a one-factor solution, which accounted for 82.8% of the total variance. All four items loaded strongly onto this single factor, indicating that they measured a common underlying construct. As only one factor was extracted, no rotation was performed. The factor loadings and the Cronbach's alphas for the single extracted factor are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Factor loading, explained variance and reliability of the factor found for the perceived novelty scale

Items	Perceived Novelty
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - The post by the influencer is different from my expectations of a typical Instagram post.	.84
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - The post by the influencer is memorable.	.94
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - The post by the influencer is visually interesting.	.92
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - This post made me curious about the brand mentioned by the influencer.	.93
R^2	.82
Cronbach's α	.93

3.6.2 Mediating Variables

3.6.2.1 Perceived Authenticity. Perceived authenticity was assessed using a three-item scale adapted from Kim and Wang (2024, p.7), originally derived from Shoenberger and Kim (2023, p.375).

Participants rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) with the following statements: "The influencer that I just saw is: Trustful, Authentic, Real." (Cronbach's α = 0.88).

  3.6.2.1.1 Factor Analysis of Perceived Authenticity. To ensure that the items measuring perceived authenticity reflected a reliable and valid underlying construct, a factor analysis was conducted on the relevant scale items. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00 was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .65, exceeding the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 288.730$, $p < .001$, confirming that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis revealed a one-factor solution, which accounted for 81.0% of the total variance. All four items loaded strongly onto this single factor, indicating that they measured a common underlying construct. As only one factor was extracted, no rotation was performed. The factor loadings and the Cronbach's alphas for the single extracted factor are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Factor loading, explained variance and reliability of the factor found for the perceived authenticity scale

Items	Perceived Authenticity
The influencer I just saw is - Trustful	.95
The influencer I just saw is - Authentic	.89
The influencer I just saw is - Real	.86
R²	.80
Cronbach's α	.88

  3.6.2.2 Parasocial Interaction. Parasocial interaction was assessed using a three-item scale adapted from Ballester et al. (2025, p.5), originally derived from Reinikainen et al. (2020, p.287). Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants indicated their level of agreement with the following statements: "When I am watching the influencer, I feel as if I am part of her group.", "I think the influencer is like an old friend.", "The influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends."(Cronbach's α = .96).

3.6.2.2.1 Factor Analysis of Parasocial Interaction. To ensure that the items measuring parasocial interaction reflected a reliable and valid underlying construct, a factor analysis was conducted on the relevant scale items. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00 was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .78, exceeding the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 494.682$, *p < .001*, confirming that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis revealed a one-factor solution, which accounted for 92.2% of the total variance. All four items loaded strongly onto this single factor, indicating that they measured a common underlying construct. As only one factor was extracted, no rotation was performed. The factor loadings and the Cronbach's alphas for the single extracted factor are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Factor loading, explained variance and reliability of the factor found for the parasocial interaction scale

Items	Parasocial Interaction
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - When I am watching the influencer, I feel as if I am part of her group.	.96
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I think the influencer is like an old friend.	.96
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - The influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.	.96
R²	.92
Cronbach's α	.96

3.6.3 Dependent Variables

3.6.3.1 Purchase Intention. Purchase intention was assessed using a three-item scale adapted from Yoo et al. (2024, p.9), originally utilized in Gomes et al. (2022, p.192). Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree)*. Participants were asked to rate

their agreement with the following statements: "I would purchase products promoted by this influencer in the future.", "I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this influencer.", "I would follow brand recommendations from this influencer."(Cronbach's α = .96).

3.6.3.1.1 Factor Analysis of Purchase Intention. To ensure that the items measuring purchase intention reflected a reliable and valid underlying construct, a factor analysis was conducted on the relevant scale items. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00 was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .78, exceeding the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 484.705$, $p < .001$, confirming that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis revealed a one-factor solution, which accounted for 91.9% of the total variance. All four items loaded strongly onto this single factor, indicating that they measured a common underlying construct. As only one factor was extracted, no rotation was performed. The factor loadings and the Cronbach's alphas for the single extracted factor are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Factor loading, explained variance and reliability of the factor found for the purchase intention scale

Items	Purchase Intention
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I would purchase products promoted by this influencer in the future.	.95
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this influencer.	.96
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I would follow brand recommendations from that influencer.	.96
R^2	.91
Cronbach's α	.96

3.6.3.2 Word of Mouth Intention. Word-of-mouth intention was assessed using a four-item scale adapted from Wang and Weng (2024, p.365), originally derived from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006,

p.84). The items were slightly modified and reframed in the future tense to align with the objectives of the present study. The statements that were used to measure word-of-mouth intention were: "I will recommend this influencer to lots of people.", "I will promote this influencer to my friends.", "I will try to spread good things about this influencer.", "I will promote this influencer through positive word-of-mouth." (Cronbach's α = .97). Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree).*

   3.6.3.2.1 Factor Analysis of Word-of-Mouth Intention. To ensure that the items measuring perceived authenticity reflected a reliable and valid underlying construct, a factor analysis was conducted on the relevant scale items. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on eigenvalues greater than 1.00 was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .84, exceeding the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(6) = 842.636$, *p < .001,* confirming that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis revealed a one-factor solution, which accounted for 91.7% of the total variance. All four items loaded strongly onto this single factor, indicating that they measured a common underlying construct. As only one factor was extracted, no rotation was performed. The factor loadings and the Cronbach's alphas for the single extracted factor are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Factor loading, explained variance and reliability of the factor found for the word-of-mouth intention scale

Items	Word-of-Mouth Intention
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I will recommend this influencer to lots of people.	.95
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I will promote this influencer to my friends.	.96
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I will try to spread good things about this influencer.	.96
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? - I will promote this influencer through positive word-of-mouth.	.96
R^2	.91
Cronbach's α	.97

3.7 Data Analysis

Before conducting any statistical analyses, the dataset underwent a thorough examination to ensure completeness, accuracy, and suitability for analysis (Gong et al., 2023, p.4). Missing data were assessed, and cases with excessive missing values or extreme outliers were identified and removed to prevent biases stemming from incomplete or skewed data (Kwak & Kim, 2017, pp. 407-410).

All data analyses were conducted using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS, version 29). To begin, a demographic analysis was conducted to summarize participants' characteristics, including age, gender, and educational level. This provided a comprehensive overview of the sample and confirmed that participant characteristics were evenly distributed across experimental conditions. To test the success of the experimental manipulation, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. This manipulation check ensured that the conditions were

perceived as intended by participants. Following this, assumption testing was carried out prior to the main analyses. Specifically, sample size, outliers, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, pearson correlation, and multicollinearity were examined to ensure the appropriateness of subsequent parametric tests. Next, internal consistency reliability tests were performed for each multi-item scale. Cronbach's alpha values were calculated, and all constructs met or exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$, indicating satisfactory reliability (Taherdoost, 2016, p. 33). To examine the direct effects of perceived novelty on the outcome variables, simple linear regression analyses were conducted. These initial regressions provided insight into the unmediated relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Finally, to test the hypothesized mediation and moderation effects, Hayes' PROCESS macro was used. Model 4 was applied to test the mediation hypotheses involving perceived authenticity, parasocial interaction, and perceived novelty, while Model 1 was used to assess the moderation effect of influencer type.

4. Results

4.1 Manipulation Check of The Main Study

To validate the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on responses to the manipulation check question, which assessed participants' perceptions of the influencer types across the three semantic differential dimensions, namely humanness, realism, and artificiality.

For humanness, the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference across the three experimental conditions, $F(2, 151) = 808.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .92$. Post hoc analyses showed that participants in the human condition rated the influencer as significantly more human ($M = 6.78$, $SD = 0.54$) than those in the virtual human-like ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.79$), $p < .001$, and anime conditions ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 0.89$, $p < .001$, while the virtual human-like influencer was also rated as more human than the anime influencer, $p < .001$.

For realism, a statistically significant difference across the experimental conditions was again observed, $F(2, 151) = 435.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .90$. Participants perceived the human influencer as significantly more realistic ($M = 6.81$, $SD = 0.48$) than the virtual human-like ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.85$), $p < .001$, and anime influencers ($M = 1.22$, $SD = 0.95$), $p < .001$. The virtual human-like influencer was also rated as significantly more realistic than the anime influencer, $p < .001$.

For artificiality, the analysis once again revealed a statistically significant difference across the experimental conditions, $F(2, 151) = 460.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .86$. The anime influencer was perceived as significantly more artificial ($M = 6.72$, $SD = 1.01$) than both the virtual human-like ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 0.47$), $p = .001$ and human influencers ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 1.22$), $p < .001$. The virtual human-like influencer was also considered significantly more artificial than the human influencer, $p < .001$.

4.2 Assumption testing

To ensure the validity of the moderated mediation analysis, assumption testing was conducted prior to the main analysis to confirm that the key assumptions of multiple regression were appropriately satisfied (Hu & Plonsky, 2021, pp.172-173). As explained by Shatz (2024, p.827), assumption testing involves the formal evaluation of whether the underlying assumptions of statistical methods, such as linear regression, ANOVA, or t-tests, are met within a given dataset. This step is essential, as violations of these assumptions can lead to biased estimates, increased statistical errors, and ultimately invalid or misleading results (Shatz, 2024, p.827). By addressing these assumptions in advance, the analysis is grounded on a more reliable and accurate statistical foundation. The assumptions tested in this study included sample size, outliers, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, pearson correlation, and multicollinearity.

To begin with, the sample size of this study ($n = 154$) aligns with established guidelines for multiple linear regression and similar statistical models, which recommend a minimum of 15 to 20 observations per predictor variable to ensure robustness, reliability of the analysis, and accurate predictions in future cases (Austin & Steyerberg, 2015, p.628).

Following, to identify outliers, a casewise diagnostics test was conducted to detect any cases with standardized residuals exceeding ±3 (Chow et al., 2006, p.108; van der Vorm et al., 2016, p.996). The results showed that all standardized residuals were within acceptable limits, indicating the absence of extreme outliers in the dataset.

Linearity assumptions were assessed using scatterplots, which showed positive linear relationships between the relevant variables. Specifically, the scatterplots indicated clear positive linear relationships between perceived novelty and perceived authenticity, as well as between perceived novelty and parasocial interaction. Additionally, perceived novelty showed strong positive linear relationships with both purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. Similarly, perceived authenticity demonstrated positive linear relationships with both purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. Finally, parasocial interaction also displayed positive linear relationships with both purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. These visual inspections supported the assumption of linearity for all tested relationships.

The assumption of homoscedasticity was evaluated using the residual scatter plots that were previously examined for linearity assessment, an approach proposed by Clement and Bradley-Garcia (2022, p. 263). Through visual inspection of these plots, the residuals displayed a rectangular distribution pattern, indicating that the error variance remains constant across all values of the dependent variable (Clement & Bradley-Garcia, 2022, p. 263). This random scattering of residuals across different levels of the dependent variable confirmed that the homoscedasticity assumption had been satisfied in the current model (Clement & Bradley-Garcia, 2022, p. 263).

To assess the independence of residuals in the regression models, the Durbin-Watson statistic was examined for both dependent variables, namely purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. The Durbin-Watson value for the purchase intention model was 2.3, and for the word-of-mouth intention model, it was 2.4. Both values fall within the commonly accepted range of 1.5 to 2.5, indicating no significant autocorrelation among the residuals (Shah et al., 2020, p.101). Thus, the assumption of independent residuals was deemed to be met for both models.

Finally, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationships between perceived novelty, perceived authenticity, parasocial interaction, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth intention. Perceived novelty was significantly correlated with perceived authenticity ($r = .63$, $p < .001$), parasocial interaction ($r = .69$, $p < .001$), purchase intention ($r = .60$, $p < .001$), and word-of-mouth intention ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). Perceived authenticity was positively correlated with parasocial interaction ($r = .68$, $p < .001$), purchase intention ($r = .63$, $p < .001$), and word-of-mouth intention ($r = .66$, $p < .001$). Parasocial interaction showed strong positive correlations with purchase

intention (r = .75, p < .001) and word-of-mouth intention (r = .78, p < .001). Additionally, purchase intention was strongly correlated with word-of-mouth intention (r = .81, p < .001). No correlations exceeded .90 thus multicollinearity was not a concern for the main analyses. The results of this analysis are also visually presented in Table 7.

Overall, the regression assumptions were adequately satisfied, ensuring a reliable foundation for conducting the moderated mediation analysis.

Table 7

Pearson correlations between the key variables (N=154).

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Perceived Novelty	154	4.88	1.52	—				
2. Perceived Authenticity	154	4.85	1.59	.63***	—			
3. Parasocial Interactions	154	4.48	1.74	.69***	.68***	—		
4. Purchase Intention	154	4.48	1.80	.60***	.63***	.75***	—	
5.Word-of-Mouth Intention	154	4.64	1.78	.62***	.66***	.78***	.81***	—

Note. Significance level: *** p < .001 (2-tailed). All correlations were rounded to two-decimal position.

4.3 Simple Linear Regression

4.3.1 Direct Effect of Perceived Novelty on Purchase Intentions

To test H1, which posited that the perceived novelty of all types of influencers (human, virtual human-like, and anime) positively affects consumers' purchase intentions, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. This approach was considered the most appropriate since both the independent variable, in this case perceived novelty, and the dependent variable, purchase intention, were measured on continuous scales, fulfilling a key requirement for the use of linear regression (Su et al., 2012, pp.70-71). Additionally, simple linear regression enables the assessment of the predictive strength and direction of the relationship between these variables, making it a suitable method for determining whether higher levels of perceived novelty are associated with increased purchase intentions (Su et al., 2012, p.70).

Table 8 shows the impact of perceived novelty on purchase intention. The R^2 value of .36 revealed that the predictor variable explained .36% variance in the outcome variable with F(1, 152) =

85.96, $p < .001$. The findings revealed that perceived novelty positively predicted purchase intention ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$), offering strong empirical support for H1.

Table 8

Regression Coefficients of Perceived Novelty on Purchase Intention

Variable	*B*	β	*SE*
Constant	1.00		.39
Perceived Novelty	.71	.60***	.08
R²	.36		

Note. N = 154, Significance level: *** $p < .001$.

4.3.2 Direct Effect of Perceived Novelty on Word-of-Mouth Intentions

To test H2, which proposed that the perceived novelty of all types of influencers (human, virtual human-like, and anime) positively affects consumers' word-of-mouth intention, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Table 9 demonstrates the impact of perceived novelty on word-of-mouth intention. The *R²* value of .39 revealed that the predictor variable explained .39% variance in the outcome variable with $F(1, 152) = 97.14$, $p < .001$. The findings revealed that perceived novelty positively predicted word-of-mouth intention ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$), providing strong support for H2.

Table 9

Regression Coefficients of Perceived Novelty on Word-of-Mouth Intention

Variable	*B*	β	*SE*
Constant	1.08		.38
Perceived Novelty	.73	.62***	.07
R²	.39		

Note. N = 154, Significance level: *** $p < .001$.

4.4 Moderated Mediation Analysis

4.4.1 The Moderating Role of Influencer Type in the Effect of Perceived Novelty on Purchase
Intentions

H3 proposed that the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the
relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions, such that the positive
effect of perceived novelty would be strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like
influencers, and weakest for human influencers.

To test this, a moderation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro version 5.0
(Model 1) in SPSS. Perceived novelty was entered as the independent variable, purchase intention as
the dependent variable, and influencer type as the categorical moderator. Influencer type was coded as
a multicategorical variable with three levels, and the anime influencer (coded as 1) was automatically
used as the reference group by the PROCESS macro.

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 148) = 17.88$, $p < .001$, and accounted for
approximately 37.66% of the variance in purchase intentions, $R^2 = .38$. This indicated that the model
had a moderate to large explanatory effect. Perceived novelty significantly predicted purchase
intentions ($B = 0.73$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = 5.42$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.47, 1.00]), suggesting that, across all
influencer types, participants who perceived the influencer as more novel reported significantly
greater intentions to purchase the promoted product.

However, the categorical moderator, influencer type, did not yield statistically significant
main effects. Compared to anime influencers, human influencers did not significantly differ in terms
of their influence on purchase intentions ($B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.29$, $t = 0.67$, $p = .503$), and the difference
between virtual human-like influencers and anime influencers was also not significant ($B = 0.53$, SE =
0.31, $t = 1.75$, $p = .082$).

The interaction terms between perceived novelty and influencer type were also not
statistically significant. The interaction between perceived novelty and human influencers (relative to
anime) was not significant ($B = –0.42$, $SE = 0.20$, $t = –2.13$, $p = .675$, 95% CI [–0.47, 0.39]), nor was
the interaction between perceived novelty and virtual human-like influencers (relative to anime) ($B =$
0.14, $SE = 0.20$, $t = 0.70$, $p = .487$, 95% CI [–0.25, 0.53]). In addition, the test of the highest-order
unconditional interaction, the joint significance of the two interaction terms, was not statistically
significant, $F(2, 148) = 0.60$, $p = .548$, and explained only an additional 0.51% of the variance in
purchase intentions ($\Delta R^2 = .0051$).

Taken together, these results did not support H3. While perceived novelty significantly and
positively predicted purchase intentions, this effect did not differ significantly across the three types of
influencers. Thus, the proposed moderation effect was not observed, indicating that consumers
responded similarly to perceived novelty regardless of whether the influencer was human, virtual
human-like, or anime.

4.4.2 The Moderating Role of Influencer Type in the Effect of Perceived Novelty on Word-of-Mouth Intentions

H4 proposed that the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) would moderate the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions, such that the positive effect of perceived novelty would be strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like influencers, and weakest for human influencers.

The same moderation analysis procedure as described for H3 was applied to test this hypothesis, with the only difference being that word-of-mouth intention was used as the dependent variable.

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 148) = 20.75$, $p < .001$, and explained approximately 41.2% of the variance in word-of-mouth intentions, $R^2 = .41$. This indicated that the model had a strong explanatory effect. Perceived novelty significantly predicted word-of-mouth intentions ($B = 0.83$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 6.48$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.57, 1.86]), indicating that, across all influencer types, participants who perceived the influencer as more novel reported greater intentions to engage in word-of-mouth communication.

The main effects of influencer type were mixed. Compared to anime influencers, human influencers did not significantly differ in their influence on word-of-mouth intentions ($B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.28$, $t = 1.40$, $p = .163$), while virtual human-like influencers significantly differed from anime influencers ($B = 0.65$, $SE = 0.29$, $t = 2.23$, $p = .027$), suggesting that virtual human-like influencers were associated with significantly higher word-of-mouth intentions than anime influencers.

However, the interaction terms between perceived novelty and influencer type were not statistically significant. The interaction between perceived novelty and human influencers (relative to anime) was not significant ($B = -0.19$, $SE = 0.19$, $t = -0.99$, $p = .322$, 95% CI [-0.56, 0.18]), nor was the interaction between perceived novelty and virtual human-like influencers (relative to anime) ($B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.19$, $t = 0.07$, $p = .945$, 95% CI [-0.36, 0.39]). Additionally, the test of the highest-order unconditional interaction, which examined the joint significance of both interaction terms, was not statistically significant, $F(2, 148) = 0.68$, $p = .506$, and explained only an additional 0.54% of the variance in word-of-mouth intentions ($\Delta R^2 = .0054$).

In conclusion, these results did not support H4. While perceived novelty significantly and positively predicted word-of-mouth intentions, and the virtual human-like influencer differed significantly from anime influencer in terms of their main effect, the expected moderation effect was not found. That is, the strength of the relationship between perceived novelty and word-of-mouth intentions did not significantly differ across influencer types. These findings indicated that consumers' word-of-mouth responses to perceived novelty were similar regardless of whether the influencer was anime, virtual human-like, or human.

4.4.3 The Mediating Effect of Perceived Authenticity on Purchase Intentions

A mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 was conducted to examine whether perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions (H5). Perceived novelty was specified as the independent variable, perceived authenticity as the mediator, and purchase intention as the dependent variable.

A bootstrap procedure with 5,000 samples and 95% confidence intervals (CI) was employed to assess indirect effects. Perceived novelty significantly predicted perceived authenticity, $b = 0.65$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(152) = 9.90$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.78]. In turn, perceived authenticity significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(151) = 5.50$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.65].

The direct effect of perceived novelty on purchase intention remained significant after accounting for perceived authenticity, $b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(151) = 4.45$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.58], suggesting partial mediation.

The indirect effect of perceived novelty on purchase intention through perceived authenticity was statistically significant, $b = 0.31$, $BootSE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.43]. Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the mediation effect was considered statistically significant.

These findings support the proposed mediation pathway, indicating that perceived authenticity partially mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions.

4.4.4 The Mediating Effect of Perceived Authenticity on Word-of-Mouth Intentions

To test H6 which posited that perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions, the same mediation analysis procedure as described for H5 was applied. In this model, perceived novelty remained the independent variable, perceived authenticity the mediator, and word-of-mouth intentions served as the dependent variable.

As before, a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 samples and 95% confidence intervals (CI) was used to evaluate the significance of the indirect effects. Perceived novelty significantly predicted perceived authenticity, $b = 0.65$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(152) = 9.90$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.78]. In turn, perceived authenticity significantly predicted word-of-mouth intentions, $b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(151) = 6.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.34, 0.66].

However, the direct effect of perceived novelty on word-of-mouth intentions remained significant after accounting for perceived authenticity, $b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(151) = 4.73$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.24, 0.57], suggesting partial mediation. The indirect effect of perceived novelty on word-of-mouth intentions through perceived authenticity was statistically significant, $b = 0.33$, $BootSE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.44]. Because the confidence interval did not contain zero, the mediation effect was considered statistically significant.

These findings support the proposed mediation pathway, indicating that perceived authenticity partially mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and word-of-mouth intentions.

4.4.5 The Moderating Role of Influencer Type in the Effect of Perceived Novelty on Perceived Authenticity

H7 proposed that the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the relationship between perceived novelty and perceived authenticity.

To test this hypothesis, the same analytical procedure was followed as in the analyses for H3 and H4. However, in this case, perceived authenticity was used as the dependent variable, while perceived novelty remained the independent variable and influencer type continued to serve as the moderator. Once again, the moderator variable was treated as a three-level categorical variable, and anime influencer (coded as 1) was used as the reference category by default.

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 148) = 32.89$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 52.6% of the variance in perceived authenticity ($R^2 = .53$), indicating a large effect size. Perceived novelty was a significant positive predictor of perceived authenticity ($B = 0.91$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 8.72$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.71, 1.11]), suggesting that higher levels of perceived novelty were associated with greater perceived authenticity across influencer types.

Crucially, the interaction between perceived novelty and influencer type was statistically significant. The overall test of the highest-order interaction was significant, $F(2, 148) = 3.19$, $p = .044$, and explained an additional 2.04% of the variance in perceived authenticity ($\Delta R^2 = .0204$). Among the two interaction terms, the interaction between perceived novelty and virtual human-like influencers (relative to anime) was statistically significant ($B = -0.36$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -2.40$, $p = .018$, 95% CI [-0.66, -0.06]), while the interaction with human influencers (relative to anime) was not significant ($B = -0.07$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -0.43$, $p = .658$).

Conditional effects analysis further supported the presence of moderation. Perceived novelty significantly predicted perceived authenticity across all three influencer types, but the strength of the relationship varied: the effect was strongest for anime influencers ($B = 0.91$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$), slightly weaker for human influencers ($B = 0.89$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$), and significantly weaker for virtual human-like influencers ($B = 0.54$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$).

Taken together, these results partially support H7. The relationship between perceived novelty and perceived authenticity was significantly moderated by influencer type, indicating that the impact of perceived novelty on authenticity perceptions differed depending on the type of influencer. However, the pattern of the moderation did not fully align with the hypothesized direction. Specifically, while the effect was strongest for anime influencers as predicted, human influencers showed a stronger effect than virtual human-like influencers, which was contrary to expectations.

4.4.6 The Mediating Effect of Parasocial Interactions on Purchase Intention

To test H8 which examined whether parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions, the same analytical procedure was followed as in the analyses for H5 and H6.

Perceived novelty significantly predicted parasocial interaction, $b = 0.79$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(152) =$ 11.86, $p < .001$, *95% CI* [0.66, 0.93]. In turn, parasocial interaction significantly predicted purchase intentions while controlling for perceived novelty, $b = 0.67$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(151) = 8.84$, $p < .001$, *95% CI* [0.52, 0.82]. The direct effect of perceived novelty on purchase intentions remained statistically significant after including parasocial interaction in the model, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(151) = 2.08$, $p =$ .0395, *95% CI* [0.01, 0.35], indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of perceived novelty on purchase intentions via parasocial interaction was significant, $b = 0.53$, *BootSE* = 0.09, *95% CI* [0.38, 0.71], as the confidence interval did not contain zero.

These results support Hypothesis 8, suggesting that parasocial interaction partially mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions.

4.4.7 The Mediating Effect of Parasocial Interactions on Word-of-Mouth Intention

The same procedure used for testing H5, H6, and H8 was also applied to H9, which proposed that parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions.

Perceived novelty significantly predicted parasocial interaction, $b = 0.79$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(152) =$ 11.86, $p < .001$, *95% CI* [0.66, 0.93]. Parasocial interaction, in turn, significantly predicted word-of-mouth intention while controlling for perceived novelty, $b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(151) = 9.67$, p $< .001$, *95% CI* [0.54, 0.82]. The direct effect of perceived novelty on word-of-mouth intentions remained statistically significant after accounting for parasocial interaction, $b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(151) = 2.30$, $p = .0226$, *95% CI* [0.03, 0.35], indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of perceived novelty on word-of-mouth intentions through parasocial interaction was statistically significant, $b = 0.54$, BootSE = 0.09, *95% CI* [0.37, 0.72]. Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the mediation was considered significant.

These results provided support for H8, demonstrating that parasocial interaction partially mediates the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions.

4.4.8 The Moderating Role of Influencer Type in the Effect of Perceived Novelty on Parasocial Interaction

The same moderation analysis procedure used for testing H3, H4, and H7, was applied to H10 which proposed that the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) would moderate the relationship between perceived novelty and parasocial interaction.

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 148) = 28.51$, $p < .001$, and explained 49.6% of the variance in parasocial interaction ($R^2 = .50$), indicating a large effect size. Perceived novelty significantly predicted parasocial interaction ($B = 0.91$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 7.74$, $p < .001$, *95% CI* [0.68, 1.15]), suggesting that, across all influencer types, participants who perceived the influencer as more novel also reported higher levels of parasocial interaction.

However, the interaction terms between perceived novelty and influencer type were not statistically significant. The interaction between perceived novelty and human influencers (relative to

anime) was not significant ($B = -0.17$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -0.99$, $p = .324$, *95% CI* [–0.51, 0.17]), nor was the interaction between perceived novelty and virtual human-like influencers (relative to anime) ($B = -0.23$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -1.34$, $p = .183$, *95% CI* [–0.57, 0.11]). The overall test of the highest-order interaction was also not significant, $F(2, 148) = 0.98$, $p = .378$, and accounted for only an additional 0.67% of the variance in parasocial interaction ($\Delta R^2 = .0067$).

Conditional effects analysis indicated that perceived novelty significantly predicted parasocial interaction at all levels of influencer type. However, the strength of the effect did not differ significantly across the influencer types.

In conclusion, the results did not support H10. While perceived novelty positively and significantly influenced parasocial interaction, this relationship was not moderated by the type of influencer. That is, the strength of the association between perceived novelty and parasocial interaction remained consistent regardless of whether the influencer was anime, human, or virtual human-like.

5. Discussion

This study explored the influence of perceived novelty on consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions, with particular attention to the mediating roles of perceived authenticity and parasocial interactions. It also examined how these dynamics vary across three types of influencers, namely human, virtual human-like, and anime.

To begin with, supporting evidence was found indicating that perceived novelty of all types of influencers (human, virtual human-like, and anime), positively affects both consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions.

These findings align with prior research which suggest that perceived novelty is a significant driver for behavioral intentions (Chen et al., 2021, p.4; Pape & Toporowski, 2023, p.1071). According to Peng et al. (2021, p.2), in today's oversaturated digital landscape, consumers are continuously exposed to a constant stream with similar types of content, making it difficult for any single message to stand out. In this context, when an influencer is perceived as novel, whether due to being animated, AI-generated, or just presenting content in an unexpected or unconventional manner, it introduces a break from the norm that captures attention and sparks curiosity (Mo & Zhou, 2024, p.2270). As noted by Mo and Zhou (2024, p.2270), this heightened interest encourages deeper engagement with the content, increasing the likelihood that the message is not only noticed but also remembered (Mo & Zhou, 2024, p.2270).

Importantly, this sense of novelty becomes associated not just with the influencer, but also with the products or services they endorse (Sung et al., 2016, p.167). As a result, as noted by Sung et al. (2016, p.167), the promoted offerings may be perceived as more innovative, appealing, or worth exploring. Consequently, novelty-driven engagement can significantly boost purchase intention, as consumers are more inclined to try a product or service perceived as unique due to their association with an unconventional influencer (Kim et al., 2025a, p.472). In addition, this interest sparked by the novelty factor can lead individuals to share their experience, discussing not only the influencer but also the endorsed product, service, or brand, thereby strengthening word-of-mouth intentions (Pape & Toporowski, 2023, p.1067).

Following, no supporting evidence was found for the proposed moderation effect of influencer type (human, virtual human-like, or anime) on the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions. The expected pattern, that the positive effect of perceived novelty would be strongest for anime influencers, followed by virtual human-like influencers, and weakest for human influencers, did not emerge. Similarly, the influencer type did not moderate the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions in the anticipated way.

An explanation for these non-significant findings may lie in the subjective nature of perceived novelty. While the hypotheses assumed a hierarchical perception of novelty across influencer types, perceived novelty is not experienced uniformly across individuals (Sung et al., 2016, p.166). What one consumer perceives as highly novel, another may find familiar or unremarkable (Sung et al.,

2016, p.166). As such, these assumptions may not consistently hold in the minds of all participants. This variation suggests that perceived novelty is not uniform across consumers, which can weaken the intended moderating effect of influencer type on behavioral outcomes such as purchase and word-of-mouth intentions.

Moreover, prior exposure to different influencer types plays a significant role in shaping how novel a particular influencer is perceived (Franke & Groeppel-Klein, 2024, p.12). According to Franke and Groeppel-Klein (2024, p.12), with the increasing normalization and mainstream visibility of virtual influencers in recent years, especially on social media platforms, the novelty effect associated with these non-human formats may have diminished (Franke & Groeppel-Klein, 2024, p.12). For participants already familiar with anime or virtual human-like influencers, these formats may no longer have been seen as particularly novel. As a result, participants may not have meaningfully differentiated between influencer types in terms of novelty, thus reducing the likelihood of a moderating effect on purchase and word-of-mouth intentions.

In addition, existing research emphasizes the critical role of relational and emotional factors, specifically parasocial interactions and perceived authenticity, in influencing consumer behavioral responses (Agnihotri et al., 2023, p.2380). These variables may exert a stronger influence on purchase and word-of-mouth intentions than the categorical type of influencer (Lou et al., 2023, p.14). If participants perceived comparable levels of authenticity or developed similar parasocial bonds across all influencer types, this may have overshadowed any differences in perceived novelty attributed to influencer type. In this regard, it is likely that the perceived qualities of the influencer played a more decisive role in shaping consumer intentions than whether the influencer was human, virtual human-like, or anime.

Moving forward, perceived authenticity was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived novelty and both consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions across all influencer types.

Although perceived authenticity plays an important mediating role, the findings suggested that perceived novelty also exerts a direct effect on consumers' purchase and word-of-mouth intentions (Mo & Zhou, 2024, p.2273). This indicates that consumers may be influenced by novel influencers not solely because they are perceived as authentic, but also because their novelty captures attention and evokes emotional responses such as surprise, amusement, or curiosity (Cao et al., 2025, p.4; Mo & Zhou, 2024, p.2273). According to Mo and Zhou (2024, p.2273), these emotional reactions can directly enhance behavioral intentions, such as purchase and word-of-mouth intentions, independent of perceptions of authenticity. In other words, while authenticity partially explains why novelty is effective, it may not fully account for the diverse and immediate psychological responses that novel influencer types elicit.

Furthermore, the notion of authenticity itself may be interpreted differently across influencer types. Consumers are likely to apply different authenticity standards when evaluating human

influencers compared to virtual human-like or anime influencers (Choudhry et al., 2022, p.23; Lee et al., 2025, p.6029). For instance, audiences may not expect virtual influencers to be authentic in a traditional, human sense, which may reduce the overall strength of authenticity as a mediating mechanism (Lou et al., 2023, p.8). Particularly for virtual influencers, perceived authenticity might be ambiguous and highly context-dependent, further weakening its role as a full mediator (Kim & Baek, 2024, p.5045).

Following, the results indicated that the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the effect of perceived novelty on perceived authenticity. However, the observed pattern did not align with the hypothesized order. Contrary to expectations, the effect for human influencers was stronger than for virtual human-like influencers. This suggests that although the type of influencer does play a moderating role in the relationship between perceived novelty and perceived authenticity, the specific ranking of influencer types did not align with the anticipated pattern. Therefore, the findings indicate the presence of moderation, but not in the originally expected direction.

This finding aligns with previous research which suggests that audiences interpret novelty differently depending on the type of influencer (Kim et al., 2025a, p.459). For anime influencers, novelty appeared to be well-aligned with audience expectations, as their stylized and fictional nature creates a context in which creative or unconventional characteristics are interpreted as part of their authentic identity (Kim et al., 2025a, p.455). In this case, novelty likely enhanced perceptions of individuality and originality, thereby increasing perceived authenticity.

Following, while human influencers are generally more familiar and prevalent across social media platforms, novelty in their content stands out precisely because it contrasts with the expected norms of traditional influencer behavior. Rather than reducing authenticity, novelty helps human influencers appear more relatable or original, especially when their behavior feels unscripted, expressive, or personally driven. This supports the idea that even within familiar categories, novel expression can reinforce the sense that an influencer is authentic and not simply following a formula. This likely explains why, in the current study, perceived novelty had a strong and significant positive effect on perceived authenticity for human influencers, comparable to the effect observed for anime influencers.

In contrast, virtual human-like influencers may have elicited a sense of ambiguity due to their near-human appearance paired with their artificial origin (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021, p.39). According to Arsenyan and Mirowska (2021, p.41) and Gutuleac et al. (2024, p.1421), these influencers tend to occupy a space where their resemblance to real humans is close enough to evoke familiarity, yet distant enough to provoke discomfort or doubt, an effect which can also be attributed to the uncanny valley phenomenon. This blurred identity, too artificial to be fully human, yet too human to be viewed simply as avatars, can undermine perceptions of authenticity (Gutuleac et al., 2024, p.1422). As a result, while their novelty may be recognized as technologically impressive, it can

simultaneously disrupt the perception of genuineness by emphasizing their artificial nature (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021, p.41).

Moving further, partial mediation was observed for both relationships involving parasocial interaction. Specifically, parasocial interaction was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' purchase intentions across all influencer types. A similar partial mediating effect was found in the relationship between perceived novelty and consumers' word-of-mouth intentions. The findings indicated that although parasocial interactions contribute to translating novelty into behavioral outcomes, they do not fully account for this effect.

As noted by Kim et al. (2025a, p.459), one possible explanation is that novelty might stimulate cognitive and emotional responses, such as curiosity, arousal, or cognitive elaboration, independently of other social mechanisms such as parasocial interactions. Consumers may be drawn to a novel influencer because of their freshness or uniqueness and may act on that interest by expressing purchase or word-of-mouth intentions, even in the absence of a parasocial bond (Lou et al., 2023, p.553).

Moreover, parasocial interactions typically require time and repeated exposure to develop into more meaningful parasocial relationships (Dibble et al., 2016, p.24; Sheng et al., 2025, p.2). Given that this study relied on a single-exposure experimental design, participants may have been influenced by the novelty of the influencer without having sufficient time or engagement to form a strong relational bond.

Additionally, individual differences may have further contributed to the partial mediation effect. Prior research indicates that some individuals are more likely to form parasocial interactions than others, based on factors such as personality traits, media habits, or prior exposure to similar influencer types (Möri & Fahr, 2023, p.2). Given the heterogeneity in the sample, parasocial interactions strength likely varied across participants, thereby diminishing its overall mediating power in the path from novelty to behavioral intentions.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while parasocial interaction enhances the effect of novelty on consumer behavioral intentions, it does not fully drive this relationship. Instead, novelty itself may exert a direct influence on consumers' willingness to purchase or spread word-of-mouth, particularly in early or short-term encounters where relational bonds have not yet had time to form.

Finally, no supporting evidence was found to support the assumption that the type of influencer (human, virtual human-like, or anime) moderates the effect of perceived novelty on parasocial interaction.

As noted by Stein et al. (2024, p.3446), parasocial interactions often stem from a sense of intrigue, fascination, or emotional engagement. When individuals perceive an influencer as novel, this perceived uniqueness might be enough to spark attention and involvement regardless of their form. Whether an influencer is anime-styled, hyper-realistic virtual one, or human, novelty might activate similar cognitive and emotional processes that lead to parasocial bonding.

Furthermore, in digital spaces, the lines between human and non-human influencers are increasingly blurred (Xie-Carson et al., 2023, p.7). Virtual and anime influencers often mimic human-like behavior, emotions, and social cues (Ham et al., 2024a, p.2). As a result, the social scripts that enable parasocial interaction may apply equally across all types. This could explain why influencer type did not significantly alter the strength of the relationship between novelty and parasocial interaction.

Moreover, prior research shows that individual traits such as loneliness, need for belonging, or media dependency can drive parasocial interactions more than media characteristics (Wang et al., 2008, p.93). If participants already had a strong disposition toward forming such bonds, the novelty of the influencer, regardless of their type, may have uniformly triggered these responses.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study offered several key theoretical contributions to the growing body of research on virtual influencers, particularly within the fashion industry.

To begin with, it broadened existing literature by simultaneously examining and comparing three distinct influencer types, namely human, virtual human-like, and anime influencers. While prior studies have often limited their comparisons to just two categories, most commonly between human and virtual influencers or between different subtypes of virtual influencers, this study provided a more comprehensive analysis (De Cicco et al., 2024, p.2; Kim et al., 2025a, p.455; Lee et al., 2025, p.6034). In doing so, it offered a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how these different influencer types impacted consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions, while also improving the conceptual clarity and differentiation between these emerging categories.

Following, this study contributes to the growing body of research on perceived novelty by examining its influence on consumer behavioral intentions, specifically, purchase and word-of-mouth intentions, within the context of influencer marketing. While virtual influencers are frequently studied, the concept of perceived novelty and its role in shaping consumer responses remains largely underexplored. In particular, the relationship between novelty, perceived authenticity, and parasocial interaction has received limited attention, despite novelty being a defining feature of virtual influencers (Stein et al., 2024, p. 3448). As highlighted by Lee et al. (2024, p.2), understanding how novelty interacts with these constructs is crucial for explaining its impact on consumer behavior. Most existing studies mention perceived novelty only briefly or suggest its relevance as a direction for future research. By positioning perceived novelty as a central construct, this study advances the field by showing that it positively influences both purchase and word-of-mouth intentions. Moreover, it highlights the important mediating roles of perceived authenticity and parasocial interaction in this process.

In addition, the study addressed a significant gap in the literature concerning the underrepresentation of older audiences in influencer marketing research (Lee et al., 2024, p.6042).

While most prior studies focused on younger generations, typically viewed as digital natives, this research included a broader age range of adult participants. This more inclusive demographic approach aligned with the recommendations of scholars such Lee et al. (2024, p.6042), who highlight the lack of research on individuals aged 44 and above and emphasize the importance of understanding how various age groups engage with virtual influencers.

5.2 Societal and Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, this research offers valuable insights for brands and marketers looking to implement influencer marketing more effectively, particularly through the strategic use of virtual influencers.

To begin with, the findings demonstrate that perceived novelty significantly enhances both purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions. For brands and marketers in the fashion industry, this implies that introducing and collaborating with unconventional influencer types, such as virtual human-like or anime influencers, can be an effective strategy to capture consumer attention and stimulate engagement, particularly among digitally native audiences (Moustakas et al., 2020, p.7). However, since perceived novelty is highly subjective and does not solely rely on the influencer being new or unfamiliar, marketers can still choose to work with traditional human influencers, however should strive to make them appear different from what audiences expect in order to enhance their effectiveness in shaping behavioral intentions.

Moreover, the results revealed that anime-style influencers significantly strengthened the positive effect of perceived novelty on perceived authenticity (Kim et al., 2025a, p. 455). This finding offers important implications for brands aiming to position themselves as both innovative and authentic. It suggests that using anime influencers can be a strategic choice for achieving this dual positioning, as they are not only perceived as novel but also as capable of conveying authenticity, challenging the common assumption that authenticity is primarily associated with human influencers (Kim et al., 2025a, p.468; Shoenberger, H., & Kim, E., 2023, p.372). However, this finding also raises important ethical considerations. As virtual influencers become increasingly human-like, the risk of misleading consumers grows. While consumers may respond positively to novel influencer types when they are seen as authentic, it is critical for brands to clearly disclose the artificial nature of these influencers (Hewapathirana & Pererap, 2024, p.17). Transparent labelling and storytelling that openly acknowledges the digital or fictional origins of the influencer are essential to maintain consumer trust and avoid ethical backlash (Hewapathirana & Pererap, 2024, p.17).

Finally, the research highlights the partial mediating role of parasocial interaction and perceived authenticity in the relationship between perceived novelty and consumer responses. This suggests that while perceived novelty is the primary driver, marketers should also take into account an influencer's ability to foster emotional engagement and convey authenticity, as these factors still play a role in shaping how novelty translates into consumer behavioral intentions.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite offering several valuable insights, this study is not without limitations which should be carefully considered when designing future research.

To begin with, although the study met the minimal criteria for participant inclusion, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 154 individuals. A small sample size can compromise the reliability of the findings, reduce statistical power, and hinder the generalizability of the results (Button et al., 2013, p.367). It may also lead to less precise estimates, thereby raising concerns about both internal and external validity (Button et al., 2013, p.374). To address this, future studies should aim to include a larger sample size. As noted by (Polit & Beck, 2010, p.1457), larger and more diverse samples enhance the reliability and validity of quantitative research by providing a better representation of the broader population.

Following, the sampling method chosen for participant recruitment in this study, namely a combination between convenience and snowball sampling, comes with its own limitations.

When it comes to convenience sampling, a notable disadvantage of this type of sampling is its susceptibility to subjectivity and bias as researchers select participants who are easily accessible, potentially leading to unequal opportunities for all eligible individuals within the target population to participate (Etikan et al., 2016, p.4). Therefore, this approach may hinder the representativeness of the population and restrict the generalizability of the study's results to a wider context (Etikan et al., 2016, p.4).

Similarly, snowball sampling tends to further reduce sample heterogeneity (Shaghaghi et al., 2011, p.89). Since participants are asked to refer individuals within their own networks, the resulting sample often comprises individuals with similar characteristics, backgrounds, or social contexts. This can lead to a homogenous sample, which may not accurately reflect the diversity of the larger population (Shaghaghi et al., 2011, p.89). Therefore, future studies might benefit from considering the use of a random sampling method instead of a non-random approach for participant recruitment. Random sampling can help reduce selection bias and increase the representativeness of the sample by ensuring that every eligible individual in the target population has an equal chance of being selected for participation (Franco-Duran et al., 2019, p.3). According to Polit and Beck (2010, p.1457), this improves the generalizability of the findings and removes any bias in them.

In addition, this study measured word-of-mouth intentions and purchase intentions as outcome variables, both of which are considered behavioral intentions rather than actual behaviors. While these measures offer important insights into consumers' likely responses, they do not capture whether these intentions translate into real-world actions. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of virtual influencers and the psychological mechanisms involved, future research should include measures of actual behavioral change. Tracking observable behaviors over time, such as completed purchases, shared content, or engagement metrics, would provide

stronger evidence of the practical impact of influencer characteristics and their long-term effectiveness. This approach would help clarify whether constructs like perceived authenticity or parasocial interaction lead to meaningful consumer actions beyond stated intent.

A final limitation of this study is that it did not take into account cultural differences in the interpretation of the key constructs such as perceived novelty, perceived authenticity, and parasocial interactions. However, existing research indicates that cultural norms, including dimensions like individualism versus collectivism and societal attitudes toward emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, can significantly influence how consumers perceive and engage with influencers (Omeish et al., 2025, p.7). These cultural frameworks may shape not only the meaning assigned to authenticity or novelty but also the strength and nature of parasocial relationships. Therefore, future research should incorporate cross-cultural comparisons to explore how responses to virtual influencers differ across diverse sociocultural contexts. Doing so would provide a more nuanced and globally relevant understanding of influencer effectiveness and consumer psychology in digital environments.

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Appendix A
The Use of Generative AI

In this thesis, two of the three experimental stimuli, specifically those representing the virtual human-like influencer and the anime influencer, were created using the generative AI tool ChatGPT-4o. To develop the anime influencer stimulus, the following prompt was used: "Transform the human influencer in the image I provide into an anime influencer. Keep all other elements of the original image exactly the same, including the background, outfit, pose, etc. Only change the influencer's appearance to reflect an anime-like influencer."

Following, to create the virtual human-like influencer stimulus, an initial prompt was used: "Transform the human influencer in the image I provide into a virtual human-like influencer. Keep all other elements of the original image exactly the same, including the background, outfit, pose, etc. Only change the influencer's appearance to reflect a virtual human-like influencer. Also, it has to be clear that the influencer in the picture is digital and artificially created, so do not make it too realistic or indistinguishable from a real human." Since further refinement was needed, additional prompts were introduced. Images of existing virtual human-like influencers were provided as visual references to guide the generative process. The following prompt was used to clarify the desired outcome: "This is the effect I am looking for. Use these as inspiration for how virtual human-like influencers typically look like. Based on these, create my stimulus while maintaining all other aspects of the original image, including the background, outfit, pose, etc."

Additionally, generative AI, specifically ChatGPT-4o, was also used to assist with the installation and implementation of the PROCESS macro for SPSS. This support was necessary due to the occasionally unclear and unstructured nature of the instructions provided with the macro package, as well as differences between these instructions and the guidance available in most YouTube tutorials, which typically focused on earlier versions of SPSS. The following prompt was used: "How to download and install Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS version 29. Provide a step-by-step detailed guide."

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information
Name: Ivet Ivaylova Koleva
Student ID: 737979
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: Dr. Kyriakos Riskos

Date: 26.06.2025

Declaration:

As outlined in the Appendix section of this thesis, generative AI was used for two primary purposes.

The first purpose was the creation of two out of the three experimental stimuli. This involved transforming a human influencer image into two different influencer types, namely anime and virtual human-like. The prompts used included:

- "Transform the human influencer in the image I provide into an anime influencer. Keep all other elements of the original image exactly the same, including the background, outfit, pose, etc. Only change the influencer's appearance to reflect an anime-like influencer."

- "Transform the human influencer in the image I provide into a virtual human-like influencer. Keep all other elements of the original image exactly the same, including the background, outfit, pose, etc. Only change the influencer's appearance to reflect a virtual human-like influencer. Also, it has to be clear that the influencer in the picture is digital and artificially created, so do not make it too realistic or indistinguishable from a real human."

- "This is the effect I am looking for. Use these as inspiration for how virtual human-like influencers typically look like. Based on these, create my stimulus while maintaining all other aspects of the original image, including the background, outfit, pose, etc."

The second purpose was to assist with the installation and implementation process of the Hayes PROCESS macro for SPSS. The following prompt was used:

- "How to download and install Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS version 29. Provide a step-by-step detailed guide."

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Name of the AI Tool(s) or Framework(s) Used], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

Extent of AI Usage

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. <u>I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.</u>

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

Date of Signature: 26.06.2025

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Master Thesis Survey Ivet Koleva

Survey Flow

Block: Informed consent (2 Questions)

Branch: New Branch
 If
  If Hereby I, the participant, declare that I have read and understood the information about the research project and I voluntarily agree to participate. I know whom to contact in case I have questions and I have been informed about my rights. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason, until I have submitted the questionnaire. Is Not Selected

 EndSurvey: Advanced

Standard: Screening question 1 (1 Question)

Branch: New Branch
 If
  If Are you familiar with the concept of virtual influencers? No Is Selected

 EndSurvey: Advanced

Standard: Screening question 2 (1 Question)

Branch: New Branch
 If
  If Do you use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or others? No Is Selected

 EndSurvey: Advanced

Standard: Screening question 3 (1 Question)

Branch: New Branch
 If
  If Is using social media part of your daily routine? No, not at all Is Selected

 EndSurvey: Advanced

BlockRandomizer: 1 - Evenly Present Elements

 Group: Human condition 1

  EmbeddedData
   Human condition = 1

  Standard: Condition 1 (1 Question)

 Group: Virtual condition 2

  EmbeddedData
   Virtual condition = 2

Standard: Condition 2 (1 Question)

Group: Anime condition 3

EmbeddedData
    Anime condition = 3

Standard: Condition 3 (1 Question)

Standard: Familiarity with the influencer (1 Question)
Standard: Manipulation check 1 (1 Question)
Standard: Manipulation check 2 (1 Question)
Standard: Perceived novelty (1 Question)
Standard: Perceived authenticity (1 Question)
Standard: Parasocial interaction (1 Question)
Standard: Purchase intention (1 Question)
Standard: Word of mouth intention (1 Question)
Standard: Demographics (3 Questions)

EndSurvey: Advanced

Page Break ————————————————————————————

Why this research?
This study is part of a MA Thesis in Media & Business at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The study aims to explore how different types of influencers within the fashion industry are perceived by consumers and how these perceptions affect their behavioral intentions.

What is asked of you during the research?
In this questionnaire, you will be asked to view one Instagram-style post featuring a fashion influencer and answer several questions about your impressions of the post and the influencer. Filling out this questionnaire usually takes about 5 minutes.

What are the consequences of participation?
Given the nature of the topic (influencer marketing and the use of virtual characters), some participants may find that learning, thinking, or answering questions about it triggers negative emotions such as distress or concern about the authenticity of online content, manipulation in digital advertising, or the blurring boundaries between reality and digital fabrication.

How will your data be treated?
All data obtained from this survey will be processed and reported entirely anonymously. Research data that are published and/or made publicly available (for example in research reports or open repositories) are fully anonymous and cannot be traced back to any participants. Please be aware that your anonymous responses in this study may also be used for future research and learning purposes.

Do you have to participate in this study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you do not need to explain why, and there will be no negative consequences for you. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time but be aware that your research data Powered by Qualtrics cannot be removed after participation, since this data will be anonymous.

What else do you need to know?
You are encouraged to share any questions or comments you may have about the study. You may do so by emailing the author of the MA Thesis (Ivet Ivaylova Koleva, 737979ik@eur.nl).

Hereby I, the participant, declare that

☐ I have read and understood the information about the research project and I voluntarily agree to participate. I know whom to contact in case I have questions and I have been informed about my rights. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason, until I have submitted the questionnaire. (1)

X→

Q1 Are you familiar with the concept of virtual influencers?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

X→

Q2 Do you use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or others?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

X→

Q3 Is using social media part of your daily routine?

○ No, not at all (1)

○ Yes, some days (2)

○ Yes, almost every day (3)

○ Yes, every day (4)

Please take a moment to carefully review the Instagram post by the brand Moda Fashion House, featuring a human fashion influencer, before continuing with the next section of the questionnaire. Pay close attention to both the influencer in the picture and the description in the post, as you will not be able to go back and view them again.

Please take a moment to carefully review the Instagram post by the brand Moda Fashion House, featuring a virtual human-like fashion influencer, before continuing with the next section of the questionnaire. Pay close attention to both the influencer in the picture and the description in the post, as you will not be able to go back and view them again.

Please take a moment to carefully review the Instagram post by the brand Moda Fashion House, featuring an anime fashion influencer, before continuing with the next section of the questionnaire. Pay close attention to both the influencer in the picture and the description in the post, as you will not be able to go back and view them again.

X→

Q4 Are you familiar with the influencer you just saw?

○ Not at all familiar (1)

○ Slightly familiar (2)

○ Somewhat familiar (3)

○ Neither familiar nor unfamiliar (4)

○ Moderately familiar (5)

○ Very familiar (6)

○ Extremely familiar (7)

End of Block: Familiarity with the influencer

Start of Block: Manipulation check 1

X→

Q5 Based on the post you just saw, which of the following best describes the influencer?

○ Human influencer (1)

○ Virtual human-like influencer (2)

○ Anime influencer (3)

End of Block: Manipulation check 1

Start of Block: Manipulation check 2

X→

Q6 The influencer I just saw is

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Not at all human	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very human
Not at all realistic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very realistic
Not at all artificial/digital	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very artificial/digital

⤨ X→

Q7 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The post by the influencer is different from my expectations of a typical Instagram post. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post by the influencer is memorable. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The post by the influencer is visually interesting. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This post made me curious about the brand mentioned by the influencer. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Perceived novelty

Start of Block: Perceived authenticity

Q8 The influencer I just saw is

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Trustful (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Authentic (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Real (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Perceived authenticity

Start of Block: Parasocial interaction

Q9 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
When I am watching the influencer, I feel as if I am part of her group. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the influencer is like an old friend. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Parasocial interaction

Start of Block: Purchase intention

Q10 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I would purchase products promoted by this influencer in the future. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this influencer. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would follow brand recommendations from this influencer. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Purchase intention

Start of Block: Word of mouth intention

Q11 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Completely agree (7)
I will recommend this influencer to lots of people. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will promote this influencer to my friends. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will try to spread good things about this influencer. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will promote this influencer through positive word-of-mouth. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

✳

Q12 How old are you? (E.g. 22)

_____

X→

Q13 What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary / third gender (3)

○ Prefer not to say (4)

X→

Q14 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ No formal education (1)

○ Primary education (2)

○ Secondary education (3)

○ Bachelor's degree (4)

○ Master's degree (5)

○ Doctorate (6)

End of Block: Demographics