A Trend of Influencer Marketing and Virtual Community

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Abstract

Today is the age of social media marketing, where customers need to consider many factors before choosing products and services. One of the most important factors is the influencer, which gives the consumer a crucial role in the process of making a purchase decision. According to the outbreak of COVID -19 has caused virtual marketing to quickly gain popularity. The academic article aims to 1) to explore the concept of influencer marketing, 2) to explore the concept of a virtual community, and 3) to explore the future trends of influencer marketing and virtual community through studies and documents. Literature research using the terms of "influencer," "influencer marketing," "influencer world," "social media," "virtual community," "virtual influencer," and "metaverse" via a search engine. Followed by analysis and discussion with influencer marketing and marketing technology specialists. Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that relies on the power of influencers, or people who have followers on social media, to influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Virtual community is a new type of community that communicates with each other through computers or information technology networks as a communication medium. There are a large number of group members who come together to exchange information and social relationships, have a similar interest in a subject, regardless of time and place. Technology is essential trends that impact digital marketing and real-time marketing, which significantly impact and change business. Going forward, influencer marketing is applied to a digital character created in computer graphics software, then given a personality defined by a first-person perspective on the world, and made available on media platforms to effectively influence and reach the desired target audience through their digital persona.

Virtual influencers allow a level of control and consistency that is impossible with human influencers. They do not age, they do not get sick, and they do not have the risk of scandalous personal behavior. In addition, virtual influencers can be programmed to have specific skills or talents that align with the brand's message, allowing them to promote products or services even more effectively. However, technological trends such as virtual marketing are of greater importance, especially in the era of the COVID -19 pandemic. The virtual influencer has become a driving force that is helping the influencer marketing industry grow and retain customers, encompassing virtual events, digital marketing and e-commerce.

Keywords: 1) Influencer Marketing 2) Virtual Trend 3) The Trend of Influencer Marketing and Virtual Community

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Introduction

In the age of social media marketing communication, people from all over the world can communicate with each other and emerged a large online society called "social network," a society that communicates through the internet, interacts with each other, and shares ideas with people on social through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Line, and others (Phongamorat, 2021, p. 536). As of January 2023, there were 5.16 billion Internet users worldwide, representing 64.4 percent of the world's population. Of these, 4.76 billion, or 59.4 percent of the world's population, were social media users. The penetration of social media into the lives of Internet users is increasing. It is expected that there will be 4.89 billion social media users worldwide in 2023, an increase of 6.5% year-on-year. At the beginning of 2023, there were 61.21 million Internet users in Thailand, with an Internet penetration rate of 85.3%. In January 2023, there were 52.25 million social media users in Thailand, accounting for 72.8% of the total population. As of early 2023, there were a total of 101.2 million active mobile connections in Thailand, accounting for 141.0% of the total population. (Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, 2023, p. 2). In terms of lifestyle, including what Internet users do and what Internet users are interested in, people's lifestyles are changing, and marketers need to develop new strategies to reach as many consumers as possible.

Nowadays, consumers pay more attention to the information they receive from trusted internet users before buying goods and services. Influencers have become a marketing tool in the online world and companies must try to use them as a medium to connect with consumers. One of the ways consumers can reach out to a brand and build credibility is by using spokespeople instead of brands. The group of people who communicate on behalf of the brand is called "influencer marketing" or "thought influencers," who play a more important role and have more influence on consumers. This is in line with the definition of influencer marketing, whose marketing goal is to persuade and motivate the target audience to be interested in different products or to create a trend to discuss and spread the product widely. Nielsen Company (2009) studied consumer attitudes and it found that word of mouth is the strongest motivator for consumers to make purchase decisions for goods and services, 53 percent faster when you receive information from trusted influencers.

In addition, people today rely more on information they receive from trusted individuals in the online world before deciding to purchase goods and services. The outbreak of COVID-19 has led to people of all genders and ages spending more than half of their day in virtual spaces or virtual communities. The virtual community on communication platforms such as social media is inevitably a space that brings like-minded people together, or common characteristics and interests come together as a community, such as a community with the same or similar lifestyle, food, tourism, or sports. This coincides with the statistical data of the Thai population on the use of the Internet, which has increased significantly

every year (Electronic Transactions Development Agency, 2021). People spend their lives in the virtual community to work, study and entertain themselves. In addition to organizing or carrying out various activities, it is necessary to operate mainly through virtual communities. Virtual communities not only help people avoid meeting each other, which increases the risk of spreading COVID-19, but also help people access and participate in activities more conveniently and quickly (Atherton, 2020). In Thailand, there is no study on the large virtual community yet. Nevertheless, there are several studies abroad on virtual communities, and there is a tendency for more studies to be conducted on virtual communities from the past to the present.

Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research strategy based on a comprehensive review of existing literature using the terms "influencer," "influencer marketing," "influencer world," "social media," "virtual community," "virtual influencer," and "metaverse" through a search engine based on data collection on Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia, Orvium and ScienceOpen. For data collection, the first 10 articles of each database were selected from the results. The researcher analyzed the results of the literature search and adjusted the definition of influencers. After all the data was analyzed, the study was discussed with influencer marketing and marketing technology specialists, and the results were summarized.

Table 1 A table with a comprehensive overview of the available literature

Authors	Method	Findings
Natalya S., ZimovaEgor V., FominElizaveta D. and Polyantseva (2022)	The findings of this article are based on the analysis of seven case studies conducted in virtual communities, and they address two main questions: what makes young people participate in virtual communities, and how is learning and social participation enhanced by virtual communities.	Virtual Communities as New Actors of Social Reality: The concept of a virtual community shows a relationship to real communities, and proposes a typology of modern virtual communities.
Wendy Bendoni and Faina Danielian (2019)	This study consists of an experimental design with 3 (influencer type: social media vs. human-virtual vs. animated-virtual) times 2 (sponsorship disclosure: disclosed vs. not disclosed) with six manipulated Instagram posts.	The future of Influencer Marketing in the digital age of Virtual Influencer

Authors	Method	Findings
Catherine M. Ridings and David Gefen (2017)	The open-ended question "Why did you join?" was categorized based on reasons cited in the literature.	Virtual Community Attraction: Why People Hang out Online: People join virtual communities to share information and/or social support. Theories of broader Internet use have cited both entertainment and the search for friendship as motivating factors.
Rong Zhang (2022)	An online survey was conducted with a questionnaire, and the subjects were augmented reality users (AR). Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software and AMOS to test the research model and research hypothesis.	The relation between players' motivation, virtual communities, and stickiness in augmented reality games: the relationship between player motivation in AR-based games and the virtual community had a significant positive impact.
Mauro Conti, Jenil Gathani and Pier Paolo Paolo Tricomi (2022)	Conduct a comprehensive study of the virtual influencer phenomenon. Through an extensive study of the literature, press articles, data from social platforms, blogs and interviews, we give a comprehensive reflection on virtual influencers.	Virtual Influencers in Online social media: This article provides a comprehensive overview of the virtual influencer phenomenon. Using an extensive study of the literature, press articles, data from social platforms, blogs, and interviews, we offer a comprehensive look at virtual influencers. Based on their development, we analyze the opportunities and threats of virtual influencer marketing
Shannon R. and Mingkwan S. (2022)	The 14 selected stakeholders were surveyed with open-ended questions. The results showed that respondents from both groups made different statements about virtual influencers in Thailand	An Exploration study of virtual influencers in Thailand: The study provides the potential recommendations that the creator and marketer can apply when they bring virtual influencers into the Thai market which could be beneficial for them from a consumer's perspective.
Zhong L. (2022)	To enrich relevant content, 20 respondents aged 18 to 29 were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to discuss their perceptions of customer brand engagement on social media.	Analyses of the Relationship between Virtual Influencers' Endorsements and Customer Brand Engagement in Social Media: Consumers' participation in social media brand activities has both internal and external motivation, that is, the internal needs of the audience and social network recommendation.

Authors	Method	Findings
Stefan Zak S. and Hasprova M. (2020)	The comparison of results from global research studies and the online quantitative research study conducted by the authors.	The role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process: The findings of the survey showed that the promotion of some products through influencers may be more advantageous than others. Influencers will have the greatest impact when buying clothes, shoes, cosmetics and, surprisingly, services. Meanwhile, people rely heavily on other factors to buy food, jewelry and electronics, but it is not excluded that influencer marketing could affect them as well.
Molin V. and Nordgren S. (2019)	This case study was conducted in conjunction with structured interviews with Swedish consumers collected through two virtual fashion influencers	Robot or Human? The Marketing Phenomenon of Virtual Influencers: A Case Study About Virtual Influencers' Parasocial Interaction on Instagram. : It was shown that consumers responded better to interaction with humanlike virtual influencers regarding their appearance and lifelike activities. Although, consumers also perceive their appearance and behavior as unpleasant and unrealistic when being too close to reality.
Philipp Stein J. , Linda Breves P. , and Anders N. (2022)	We conducted an experiment (N = 179) comparing viewers' parasocial interactions (PSI) with a human or a virtual influencer. Based on natural stimuli, we find that viewers' parasocial responses do not differ significantly between the two groups. However, when we focus on several theoretically relevant mediating variables, we find two contrasting effects.	Parasocial interactions with real and virtual influencers: The role of perceived similarity and human-likeness : find that viewers' parasocial response does not differ significantly between the two groups. However, by focusing on several theoretically relevant mediator variables, we uncover two opposing effects at play: While a significant direct effect signifies stronger PSIs with the virtual influencer, participants also attribute this persona with less mental human-likeness and similarity to themselves—which ultimately suppresses the observed advantage. Potential explanations for our results are discussed.

The above literature reviews show the direction and importance of a fascinating overview of influencer marketing, an important marketing tool in the wake of the advancement of the Internet, computers, and communication tools. The cause of the new social innovation is a social network known as influencer marketing and virtual communities. The academic article shows 1) the concept of influencers and influencer marketing, 2) the concept of the virtual community, and 3) the future trend of influencer marketing and virtual community.

The concept of Influencer and Influencer Marketing

Shiffman and Kanuk (2004, pp. 76-81) explain that an influencer is a person or group of people who relate to consumer information and determine values, attitudes, and behaviors. Thanthira Apikunwarasit (2021, p. 15) says that "influencer" means influence or persuasion. In marketing circles, this term refers to a career that uses influence to persuade in social media. Whether it is persuasion, purchases or even lifestyle, followers or people in the network. Sara McCorquodale and Irisa Chansiri (2021, pp. 50-55) say that an influencer is a person who builds a digital audience by sharing curated content about their own life. People are interested in the content of these people or groups of people and follow them in large numbers through social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and blogs.

1) Influencers can be classified in many ways. Types of influencers are divided by the number of followers. It can be divided into 3 major groups depending on the size of the network or the number of followers (Apikunwarasit, 2021, pp. 20-25).

1.1) A celebrity or mega-influencer is a group of influencers with millions of followers (Geyser, 2022). The people who have many followers are usually celebrities or famous people. Therefore, this group is popularly called celebrities. The trick of a celebrity influencer is to create brand awareness to improve the excellent image and credibility of the brand. It is cheaper than TV advertising, measurable by social analytics, suitable to reach a large audience (mass market), and risky. However, the chance of return on investment is high. If there are a lot of followers, there is also a lot of diversity in terms of gender, age, and preferences. The marketing goals for influencers in this group often focus on building a brand or brand awareness to be heard by people. Brands have the most staying power when they focus on marketing to a broad audience (Barker, 2021).

1.2) Macro-influencers are social media influencers with hundreds of thousands of followers. (This group is referred to as experts), such as cooking sites, travel sites, and beauty bloggers (Kay, Mulcahy and Parkinson, 2020, pp. 248-278). Macro-influencers can reach a wide range of customers in different market segments, making them the best choice for large-scale, comprehensive, and fully integrated marketing campaigns across a variety of channels to increase awareness among other users and raise a brand's status among social media users (Ngan, 2020).

1.3) Micro-Influencer is a group of people who do not need many followers. However, most marketers look for individuals with thousands or more followers on social media (Gaëlle-Sy, 2021). Today, micro-influencers are becoming increasingly popular since advertising campaigns should reach target customers through different channels; there are more restrictions and conditions for advertising (Guest, 2020).

2) Types of influencers based on social media used; the types of influencers classified by social media do not define how many types they have. However, it depends on the platform you want to use (Morrison, 2022).

2.1) Facebook Influencer has a wide user base with its simple functionality and excellent, colorful design. It is also the most used social media by Thai people (Statista, 2022). Facebook also supports the creation of various pages and meets the needs of business category. Therefore, Facebook Influencer is suitable for almost all marketing groups, whether celebrities, or macro and micro-influencers, the advantage of Facebook Influencer is that there is a wide variety of age groups, genders, professions, and interests. It is also suitable for all businesses, organizations, and public figures (Geyser, 2021).

2.2) Instagram Influencer is a popular application that allows users to easily take photos/videos with captions or text by simply tapping, snapping, sharing, and quickly publishing their works to their followers and people. It also has camera features and gimmicks and has become a tool for celebrities to promote their work or sell products, and it also can comment on who is famous, trending, and able to update their lifestyle (Schaffer, 2022). The advantages of Instagram influencers are that celebrities are trendy and suitable for creating lifestyle content. It also focused on photography and short videos suitable for beauty, fashion, travel, and lifestyle companies (Keenan, 2021).

2.3) Twitter Influencer is therefore suitable for brands or companies that want to create trends on Twitter quickly; for example, when launching new products or promotions, stands out by creating trends from hashtags, suitable for media-related businesses, including marketing, that wants to create trending and viral content (Ozuem and Willis, 2022, pp. 209-242).

2.4) YouTuber Influencers and Virtual Youtubers Influencers have the same meaning: they are producers or hosts of YouTube channels but differ only in the feeling and perception that YouTubers are real people, and VTubers are fictional characters or cartoon characters. The advantage of influencers in this group is that they are fun to watch, even if viewers know they are promoting their products, but precisely because of their proximity and knowing what the audience likes more fun to watch the content.

2.5) TikTok is a video-based social media platform that uses short-form content. The rise of TikTok is due in large part to its format. Users can create custom videos with existing audio, filters, and song and dance routines, making it easy for virtually anyone to create interesting videos that match current trends and preferences. Unlike other social

media, TikTok has profiles and a feed that appears when the user opens the application to keep up with other accounts and interact with other users in the app. Since TikTok is designed for sharing extremely short videos, clips are limited to 15 seconds in length, although clips can be stitched together to create longer videos. While this may seem extremely limiting, it is this extremely short length that makes TikTok so popular: both users and creators can consume truly enormous amounts of content in an extremely short amount of time (Schaffer, 2022). Influencer marketing on TikTok has gained traction since its inception, but really skyrocketed in 2020. The platform started as an app for music and dance videos for teens, but recently many adults, brands, and businesses have joined the application. Content includes many articles, images, and videos, which are considered essential factors for influencer marketing success. Therefore, many marketers select influencers based on the type of content they create to combine with other marketing methods to achieve better results. Influencers' classification based on their content can be divided as follows (Chaffey and Smith, 2022).

2.6) Social media: in this group, influencers use social media as a promotional tool and use more than one social media channel for promotion, e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. As a result, the content created spans all genres, including short captions, text posts, images, videos, and live streaming. Hiring social media influencers is popular because they can be distributed or narrated in many ways and promoted on different platforms such as Facebook and Instagram linked to the same account, and posted content can be shared or retweeted on the same platform or across platforms. Create all types of content, including posts, texts, images, videos, and live content, and then easily measure post performance based on follower engagement, such as likes, shares, and comments (Köhler and Gründer, 2016, pp. 105-130).

2.7) Blogger Influencer: A blogger is an online article writer with a blog or website and has a collection of articles on any page or website. However, not every blogger is a Blogger Influencer, but blogs or websites must have a click, follow, or subscribe feature. If not, they can use other social media, and it is possible to become an influencer or have enough followers in the online world to make a difference (Agarwal, et al., 2011, pp. 139-162).

2.8) Vlogger Influencer: Vlog stands for video + log, where the word log means to record events in any period, combined with the term video as Vlog, it means content like a diary recording. Nevertheless, instead of saving it as an article called a blog, it has shifted to interest and appeal to the audience in this era by recording a video instead. Vlog content is viral on YouTube, but that does not mean vloggers only have to use YouTube or be YouTubers because nowadays, almost all social media platforms have the same video and live features as YouTube IGTV, another channel that vloggers use for promotion (Lee and Watkins, 2016, pp. 5753-5760)

3) The classification of influencer marketing can be divided as follows:

3.1) Celebrity Influencer: this group uses the celebrity marketing strategy that focuses on celebrities (Hung, 2020, pp. 323-340).

3.2) KOL (Key Opinion Leader) is a type of influencer that uses an even more unique marketing strategy. They focus on using experts or influential people to think, planning, and creating content for brands. For this marketing strategy to be effective, it requires collaboration over a more extended period than general influencer marketing. KOL marketing strategies can increase brand awareness and drive sales by linking marketing on your website, blog, or online store with select influencers who play a role in each channel (Song, Zhang and Lin, 2021, pp. 938-945).

3.3) Product Influencers/Reviewers is a group that focuses on marketing strategies to promote products and services. Most marketers use micro-influencers because it allows them to save their budget and distribute content to more groups of people than investing money to recruit a single celebrity. The benefits of product influencers/reviewers are rapidly increasing ratings or review scores for products and services. They can also increase sales (Kieu, 2022, pp. 1-2).

4) Types of influencers by business category or product category, such as the beauty category: beauty influencers, travel influencers, and fashion influencers (Miranda, Antunes and Gama, 2022, pp. 130-136). While Somkid Anektaweephon and Phatphicha Rerksirinukul (2009, pp. 124-129) say that an influencer is a person or a group of people in general, they can be divided into 3 types:

4.1) People who have a particular interest and then share or pass on their interests until it affects others.

4.2) A group of people who have experience with the same product or service often use a forum. Alternatively, they may create a Facebook group that serves as a space for opinions. The trend of these masses has also influenced other readers, such as the BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke AG) Society forums.

The Importance of Influencer through Marketing Strategy

According to the research findings of Duangjai Sae-Chue and Bu-nga Chaisuwan (2020, pp. 1-23) who conducted a study on the process of planning communication strategies for marketing campaigns through influencers in social media. In-depth interviews were conducted with informants on the factors involved in planning a successful communication strategy for a successful social media influencer marketing campaign. For planning a successful communication strategy for marketing campaigns through thought influencers in social media, there are the following points as below:

1. The importance of online media is increasing nowadays (Chaffey, 2023). Social media is not only a social trend nowadays, but it is caused by various factors that are changing in society. Whether it is the technology that has been developing including the media users who are now changing their behavior. Nowadays, consumers have communication tools, tablets, or smartphones at their fingertips. Nasir and Kurtuluş (2017, pp. 1508-1529) said

that technology allows consumers to get information and make contacts more efficiently in different situations, and online media reach consumers. They are widely used and play an increasingly important role in people's lives. Brands and marketers need to keep up with the media changes and understand consumers' media usage behavior in order to use media properly and reach consumers.

2. Influencers have a greater role and influence on consumers. Studies have shown that influencers are one of the most important marketing tools in marketing's communication with consumers. Influencers play a role and have more influence on consumers because influencers create an incentive that leads to the purchase of goods or services and helps content to reach the right consumers faster (Zak and Hasprova, 2020, p. 7).

3. Influencers communicate through emotion, which leads to empathy, the motivation that leads to a change in behavior or thinking; communication through an influencer in a person-to-person emotional conversation. Consumers will choose to hear and believe their favorite thoughts. In this way, they become persuaders and unleash the power of word of mouth by communicating influential thoughts with emotion, evoking different feelings or opinions and leading to a collective sentiment. Incentives that cause a change in behavior or thinking are better than general advertising (Garnès, 2016).

4. Consumers are more willing to accept influencer advertising than traditional brand advertising. Consumers are more willing to follow influencers from the start. Consum-

ers who are interested in or like the influencer follow them through various online channels and eventually become followers. Therefore, consumers are more willing to accept advertising from influencers than a form of marketing that uses offline media to reach an audience, such as traditional advertising (Jarrar, Awobamise and Aderibigbe, 2020, pp. 40-54).

5. By communicating through influencers, you can target specific consumer groups. Each influencer's lifestyle, preferences, and expertise are different, so their following is relatively niche. For example, a group of people with similar likes or connections and differs from communication through traditional advertising, such as television commercials, where the recipient base is broad (Schwarz, 2021).

The Concept of Virtual Community

The first phase of the virtual community attracted attention. Some scholars discuss that participation in groups over the Internet is similar to group interaction and influences their psychological and social motivation (Chan and Li, 2010, pp. 1099-1100). In the past, communication between people in the community was often limited by geographical boundaries, time, and location. Even if the community has a precise location, some activities lead to interactions between community members but communication problems to share information and opinions and help each other. However, this seems to be over since computers and the Internet allow communication between friends, community members, or groups of people with similar interests (Rheingold and

Douglas, 1996a, pp. 44-46). Afterwards, when virtual communities gained much attention. There are many scholars have defined virtual communities that can be summarized in two ways: 1) focus on geographic advantages and 2) rapid communication compared to traditional communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002, pp. 2-21; Ridings, Gefen and Arinze, 2002, pp. 271-295; Rheingold and Douglas, 1996b, pp. 44-46). A virtual community is defined as a gathering of members of a community to exchange information and mutual support via computers and the Internet, where members express their opinions on a variety of topics, without time and place constraints, to develop relationships among members privately and collaboratively. At the same time, a virtual community is emerging that relies on the communication capabilities of computers to bring members together and systematically focuses on content and communication among members (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997, pp. 55-65). This is a new form of communication. Regardless of age, gender, race, social class, and education, communication between people in the virtual community is still fast, convenient, and unlimited. A virtual community is a group of members who have similar interests. Therefore, they join together to participate in the various activities that take place in the virtual community.

Moreover, members can freely enter and leave the virtual community. It is also said that a virtual community is a group of many people who come together to interact with each other. When people exchange ideas on a particular topic, a technology-mediated communication system supports the adoption of rules. The norm is created collectively, but this is the nature of the virtual community, and various scholars conclude that the virtual community can be divided as follows (Goodwin, 2017, pp. 103-109; Baym, 2000, pp. 23-24; Delanty, 2003, p. 22; Thiraphattra, 2010, pp. 25-30).

1. Members are diverse regardless of gender, age, race, education, or social status.

2. Members are distributed in different areas and can join or leave the community anytime.

3. Members communicate through computer networks and various information technology networks.

4. Members have common interests and feel a sense of belonging to the community.

From the above meaning and characteristics of a virtual community, it can be concluded that a virtual community is a new type of community that communicates with each other through computers or information technology networks. A variety of ideas of group members come together to exchange information, has a social relationship has a similar interest in any subject, regardless of time and place; members can join and leave the community at any time. Virtual communities are an idea developed by Howard Rheingold in 1993 (Rheingold, 1993, pp. 1-2).

Many scholars have divided virtual communities into different types, e.g., virtual communities can be divided into 2 dimensions, depending on the members' interests and the social structure of virtual communities (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 61-72). It places more

emphasis on the virtual community's social structure than on its members' interests. This is because the social structure focuses on the social interactions between the community members. In contrast, the members' interests are only about exchanging information between members, while members' interests are only about exchanging information between members. Catherine Ridings and David Gefen have classified virtual communities based on the nature of computer-generated technology: Listserv, Chat Rooms, Multi-User Dimensions, Fantasy, and Adventure Games: MUDs), and Bulletin Boards (Ridings, Gefen and Arinze, 2002, pp. 271-295). In addition, John Hagel and Arthur Armstrong have divided virtual communities into categories based on the members' needs: 1) Interests: It is an association of members as a group or divided according to the interests and expertise of the members of the group 2) Relationship building: a group of members with similar experiences can build a good relationship 3) Transactional aspect: Groups of members to exchange trading information 4) Fantasies: groups that allow members to share their fantasies and entertainment (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997, pp. 55-65).

From the above theory of academics, the nature of virtual communities can be summarized as follows: Virtual communities can be categorized by their needs - by the nature of the computer technology and the nature of the social structures of the virtual community. Furthermore, since the virtual community has many ideas, it can also be used for various purposes, and the advantage of virtual com-munities are discussed as follows (Gupta and Kim, 2004, p. 320).

1) Technology: virtual communities that can communicate without location restriction. It is cheap and communicates quickly. They can exchange files with each other and access public services that help members use voice chat, video, and audio conferencing for a virtual experience 2) Enterprise: virtual communities can help promote a company's brand to reach a wider audience, for example, by helping to connect with potential customers—getting familiar with users' needs by studying their product needs through this channel and using it to analyze the competition. 3) E-commerce: trust is essential in virtual communities because if members trust each other, they can continuously communicate in a trustworthy manner 4) Marketing: virtual communities reduce the cost of customers searching for information that comes from a vast database and turn the valuable information into customers for your business 5) Social: Knowledge sharing is an essential benefit of virtual communities, where members can provide information by posting messages to group members or obtaining information through a search 6) Economical: Virtual communities can add value by charging user fees, content fees, transaction fees, and advertising fees in collaboration with other sectors of the economy 7) Learning: the virtual community contributes to learning by encouraging continuous learning. Indeed, there are differences from the traditional classroom, but a virtual classroom can enhance the learning process by providing better access to knowledge bases and experts

and can be used as a learning tool.

The trend of Virtual Influencers and Virtual Community

Virtual influencers are the new avatars appearing on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter and in the advertising campaigns of various brands, and it is an evolution of advertising communication in the future (Moustakas, 2022, pp. 1-6). In recent years, virtual influencers have been a growing reality of Internet interaction, and their influence is so significant that some have collaborated with major companies (Mosley, 2022). Although they are not real people, virtual influencers (digitally created avatars) try to build a community on social networks and show a lifestyle like everyone else. Due to their continuous growth and high engagement, large companies choose them for advertising collaborations. Virtual influencers may be less controversial than human influencers. These avatars are less prone to negative comments, as are the brands that use these influencers. However, we live in a rubber stamp culture; anything an influencer says or does can significantly impact the public perception of an influential personality. Therefore, working with an influencer who aligns with the brand's values is critical (A samy collection company, 2022).

A virtual community comprises a group bonded by a shared interest or motivation. They meet in a dedicated digital space, where they can form connections and tap into each other's stories and experiences to fuel progress and build meaningful relationships. These communities are usually led by a creator or Host who structures why and how their members build relationships with each other to master something interesting together (Botticello, 2021).

In the past, influencer marketing consisted of real people, and young consumers trusted the word of influencers. In the reason that they are more willing to accept advertising through influencer marketing. In addition, as the virtual community opens up, virtual influencers may become more attractive to consumers and they will buy items via virtual shopping; they may be more encouraged to buy virtual fashion worn by virtual influencers from the virtual community. Virtual reality will also provide more opportunities for a human influencer's followers to interact and engage in a shared, immersive space (Conti, Gathani and Tricomi, 2022, pp. 1-13).

These are the top 7 virtual influencer tables showing new virtual influencers from over the world:

Table 2 The Top 7 Virtual Influencers

Name	Instragram Profile	Followers	Engagement Rate	Origin Country	Birth date	Creator	Estimate earnings per post (EEP)	Brand Collaborations
Lu do Magalu	@magazineluiza	5M	0.08%	Brazil	2009	Magazine Luiza	$10,128- $16,880	Magazine Luiza
Lil Miquela	@lilmiquela	3M	1.85%	USA	2016	Brud	$6,056-$10,093	Calvin Klein, Prada
Knox Frost	@knoxfrost	800K	1.02%	USA	2019	-	$2,386-$3,977	WHO
Thalasya Pov	@thalasya_	495K	0.95%	Indonesia	2018	Madnavem Studio	$1,474-$2,457	Chocolatos ID
Imma	@imma.gram	331K	1.61%	Japan	2018	Aww, Inc.	$987-$1,646	Porsche, IKEA
Bermuda	@bermudaisbae	203K	7.29%	USA	2016	Brud	$881-$1468	Chanel
Shudu	@shudu.gram	215K	3.12%	England	2017	The Digitals Agency	$645-1,074	Balmain
Ailynn	@ai_ailynn	31.2K	-	Thailand	2021	Sia Bangkok	-	AIS
Bangkoknaughtyboo	@bda.world.service	4K	-	Thailand	2021	bda. world. Service	-	-

Source: Mauro Conti, Jenil Gathani and Pier Paolo Paolo Paolo Tricomi (2022) : Virtual Influencers in Online Social Media / Thai PBS World (2021).

Discussion

The concept of influencer marketing theory is one of the marketing strategies that brands should consider. It has helped brands realise their marketing strategies and take their business to the next level. Influencer marketing theory states that an influencer must get his followers to buy the products of a particular brand. There are theories about influencer marketing that brands should understand before implementing a marketing strategy. These theories help brands understand what they are getting into when they choose this marketing strategy. They influence consumers and their desire to buy something in a different way than traditional marketing.

The concept of a virtual community are social aggregates that emerge on the web when enough people hold these public discussions long enough and with enough human emotion to form a web of personal relationships in cyberspace. A virtual community is a social network of people who interact through specific social media to pursue common interests or goals. It is also the platform where people come together in the online space, meet, communicate, connect, and get to know each other through common interests. The virtual community is very important in our lives. Even though it is important, we need to know how to manage our time when we go online and chat with our virtual community.

The future trends of influencer marketing and virtual communities. In recent years, the influencer marketing industry has really exploded. More and more brands are turning to influencers to promote their products and services. Artificial intelligence (AI) is already being used in influencer marketing in a variety of ways. For example, AI-powered tools can analyze an influencer's social media activity and determine their reach, engagement, and overall influence. The metaverse, or virtual community, is a virtual world created and maintained by users over the Internet. It is a shared space where people can interact with each other and with virtual objects and environments in real time. In recent years, the metaverse has gained popularity as a platform for marketing and advertising. The rise of new digital payment methods has greatly influenced the influencer marketing industry.

Future research, influencer marketing is an effective and increasingly popular way for brands to reach and engage with their target audience. Looking ahead to 2023, it is clear that the role of influencers in marketing will evolve and change with new technologies such as AI, the metaverse, and the emergence of new digital platforms.

Conclusion

Influencer marketing is a type of marketing on an online platform that uses influencers to promote, advertise, and communicate their products or services to consumers and motivate them. However, technological trends are impacting the digital marketing industry, showing that AI for marketing and real-time marketing is playing an increasingly important role and having a more significant impact including a virtual world especially in the period of COVID-19 pandemic. In the future, influencer marketing with virtual influencers can do al-

most everything like real people. Not only can they promote products, but they can also post pictures of their activities as if they were real influencers. The future trend, the virtual influencer has become a driving force that helps the influencer marketing industry grow and attract.

Application of virtual influencers through brands

Marketers today use influencers to promote their brands and achieve business success in new and innovative ways. By keeping up with the latest trends and technologies in influencer marketing, you can stay ahead of the curve and use influencers to reach and engage your target audience effectively. To increase competitiveness, companies should be aware of the future trend in technology by knowing how to reach and understand the target audience, using data science, incorporating the art of branding and storytelling, and using technology to make communication more efficient and effective.

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