



AI Influencers and their impact on brand reputation: a three-case study

Influencers con IA para la estrategia y reputación organizacional:
un estudio de tres casos

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the impact of hyper-realistic virtual influencers (HVIs) on organisational reputation management using a mixed methodology exploratory approach. The qualitative analysis focuses on the comments generated by the audience on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, while for the quantitative component, HypeAuditor metrics were used to assess the performance of the accounts. The sample was intentional, based on the prominence and cultural diversity of the selected influencers. The study examined three cases to assess their effectiveness in transmitting messages, building community, and generating emotional bonds that help reduce the risks associated with human influencers. The results indicate a growing phenomenon of affective and emotional bonding with artificial intelligence, and related ethical issues. It is concluded that virtual influencers may become key strategic allies for maintaining positive brand reputation, provided they are managed responsibly and ethically.

Keywords: influencers, artificial intelligence, corporate reputation, digital ethics, reputational management

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Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es analizar el impacto de los influencers virtuales hiperrealistas (HVI) en la gestión de la reputación organizacional utilizando un enfoque exploratorio de metodología mixta. El análisis cualitativo se centra en los comentarios generados por la audiencia en Instagram, TikTok y YouTube, mientras que para el componente cuantitativo se utilizaron métricas de HypeAuditor para evaluar el desempeño de las cuentas. La muestra fue intencional, basada en la prominencia y diversidad cultural de los influencers seleccionados. El estudio examinó tres casos para evaluar su eficacia en la transmisión de mensajes, construcción de comunidad y generación de vínculos emocionales que ayudan a reducir los riesgos asociados con los influencers humanos. Los resultados indican un fenómeno creciente de vinculación afectiva y emocional con la inteligencia artificial, y cuestiones éticas relacionadas. Se concluye que los influencers virtuales pueden convertirse en aliados estratégicos clave para mantener una reputación positiva de marca, siempre que se gestionen de manera responsable y ética.

Palabras clave: influencers virtuales, inteligencia artificial, reputación corporativa, ética digital, gestión reputacional

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an undeniable presence of social networks in today's society, which motivates their analysis (Aguilar et al., 2014). In this context, the figure of the influencer emerges, the subject of numerous studies that indicate interest in new market dynamics for corporate strategy (Sanz et al., 2024).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the impact of IVH on organizational reputation management.

In addition, the following research question is posed: How does the use of IVH impact the reputation of organizations compared to human influencers?

This study is justified given that the academic literature on HVI and its potential as a reputational management tool controlled by organizations is still limited. This is especially relevant given the risks associated with public exposure and crises stemming from the behavior of human influencers.

Another reality is that companies are being monitored globally in their actions (Álvarez y Murillo, 2018). This oversight has led to cases of organizational reputation crises, resulting from negative opinions from certain stakeholders that impact its profitability and credibility. These crises could arise from its human influencers, over whom there is no total control, but could be avoided with a new role: the hyperrealistic virtual

influencer (HVI), over whom the organization would have greater control (Rodrigo et al., 2021).

In short, the importance of studying reputation for the success of companies becomes evident, since a good corporate reputation increases business benefits, helps growth and minimizes risks in crisis situations (Foro de Reputación Corporativa, 2005).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Following the popularization of social media, the power of product and/or service and brand recommendations and the role of opinion leaders have gained relevance (Castelló y del Pino, 2015a; Carricajo, 2015).

Influencer marketing has been glorified as one of the most successful strategies within the contemporary marketing landscape, but there is still much to be studied, as there are challenges within the influencer marketing space based on emerging technologies and changes in consumption patterns (Aw y Agnihotri, 2023).

2.1 *Influencer marketing*

Influencer marketing is defined as a strategy that helps improve organizational results through recommendations –WOM (Word of Mouth Marketing)– whether through previous experiences or direct promotion on social networks (Albuquerque, 2023; Delgado, 2023). In this sense, influencer marketing showed considerable growth for the year 2020 (Campbell y Farrell, 2020) and is a key tool for planning an effective brand strategy (Jin et al., 2019).

2.1.1 *From influence to influencer*

The evolution of the concept of influence in communication dates back to the theories of the 1920s, which occurred in the interwar period, and was known as a direct and powerful influence (Busquet y Medina, 2014, as cited in Arias y Márquez, 2017). Later, various models emerged such as: the hypodermic needle explained by Vallejos (2023, p. 7) the Lasswell model (Herrera et al., 2021) and Paul Lazarsfeld's dual-flow model presented by Meyer (2010, p. 41) enriched the analysis by showing the role of intermediaries in the transmission of the message. Here the first forms of influencers defined by Sanmiguel emerge (2020, "Introduction" section, para. 4) as individuals who make their voices stand out from the rest and are opinion leaders

2.1.2 *Importance of influencer marketing in corporate strategy*

Various authors agree that influencer marketing has the ability to expand the reach of brands to generate and establish relationships with the community, thanks to the credibility and emotional connection generated by these profiles (Álvarez, 2024).

Besides, Gomez (2019, p. 12) recognizes influencers as a fundamental element that integrates the overall marketing strategy, and this is challenging brands to establish a presence on social media and seek better market positioning to achieve their commercial objectives.

In addition, Sanmiguel (2020, "Introduction" section, para. 1) mentions that the influence of these actors contributes to humanizing the brand and, at the same time, impacts consumer perception and behavior.

2.2 Corporate reputation

"Corporate reputation is an intangible resource of the company that materializes in its behavior and that requires a certain time for its configuration, which is recognized by its public as a generator of value" Ferruz states literally. (2016, p. 135).

Although it is common to hear the use of this term to refer generally to the public or external image of an organization, it is a concept that also involves all stakeholders and online channels with the corporate information displayed on the web (Martínez et al., 2010).

However, several authors express that there is no consensus on the definition of corporate reputation (CR) that is accepted by the majority of experts (De Castro, 2008; Hernández, 2016; y Davies et al., 2001).

In this sense, and taking into account Rivero (2018, p. 16) It is crucial to understand that organizations that strive to develop programs to manage their online reputation are disregarding other media and audiences outside the web, ignoring the fact that reputation is neither offline nor online, it is simply reputation, and it is only one that should be reflected regardless of the channel.

2.2.1 Relevance of corporate reputation for marketing strategy

CR has always been the beacon that keeps the brand or organization current in the minds of consumers (Gómez et al., 2022).

Besides, López (2010, p. 13) It is argued that, by understanding people's opinions, we can understand the company's corporate reputation and the competition, which is key to identifying opportunities for improvement in communication and customer satisfaction, which translates into recommendations and competitive advantages. According to the Corporate Reputation Forum (2005) CR increases business profits, boosts growth and minimizes risks in crisis situations.

In the current digital context, building a corporate image becomes vital to strengthen reputation in the market, since both concepts go hand in hand (Euroinnova, s.f., para. 1).

2.2.2 Factors influencing corporate reputation

As a starting point, we consider what Hernández said verbatim (2016, p. 45) On the pillars of general corporate reputation: "It is built on two pillars: first, the social construct, which provides the relational and conversational component; and second, which corresponds to the perception aspect, which provides the evaluative element, allowing it to establish value judgments to approve or disapprove the behavior of others, which ultimately define the clear concept of reputation."

In addition, various external factors, such as risk, loss of trust in companies due to scandals, the existence of more informed consumers, heightened competition, the Internet, and social expectations, directly influence the development of reputation.

Carrió (2019, "Introduction" section, para. 12) He goes into more detail, stating that CR is determined by the perceptions generated by organizational decisions and actions, as well as their communication, covering dimensions such as: 1. Quality: in general, not only of products and services, but also of collaborators, managers, etc.; 2. Performance: economic-financial results, growth capacity, innovation, etc.; 3. Responsibility: in social and environmental terms, also including values such as respect, legality, transparency, etc.; and 4. Attractiveness: in terms of authenticity, innovation, differentiation, and ability to create trust.

2.2.3 Risks and benefits of influencers for corporate reputation

Corporate reputation management and communication strategies have evolved with the emergence of new players such as influencers, YouTubers and bloggers, who have changed the rules of the game in this field (Bellido, 2024; Castelló et al. 2015b).

Digital influencers have become a phenomenon, and are approached by companies to gain the trust of their consumers, capable of influencing so that their recommendations can be transformed into sales (Mogrovejo et al., 2024; Kifler et al., 2024). However, it is extremely important that organizations ensure that they do not overstep the boundaries set by legality and ethics to avoid reputational risks (Castelló et al. 2015b). Furthermore, the incorporation of digital figures avoids the controversies that often arise with human influencers, who can find themselves embroiled in trouble or face criticism for their opinions or behavior. Therefore, having the supervision of communications professionals helps reduce risks and ensures better management of the organization's reputation (Gómez, 2020, para. 5).

2.2.4 Reputation crisis for companies linked to influencers

The growing importance of influencers in brand communication has brought with it new reputational risks, especially when unethical practices such as "pump and dump" occur, in which some influencers manipulate their followers for their own benefit (BBC, 2021, para. 1).

These bad practices can also have an impact on the business sector, although the recommendation has always had power, the panorama has been changing for some years, as Terrasa indicates (2019, para. 18) Consumers are tired and increasingly less trusting, and in many cases, they prefer recommendations from other customers to those of influencers. Furthermore, an influencer is a person who makes their own decisions and leads a life that can sometimes contradict the advertising narrative they maintain in their business (Rodrigo et al., 2021).

Given this scenario, it becomes clear that companies need to detect the slightest possibility of a reputation crisis in order to control the situation and intervene at the right time, for example, in the information provided by themselves or by third parties – influencers– (Ramos, 2024, para. 2).

However, the risk can be mitigated by establishing clear guidelines and pre-approving content published by influencers, according to Díaz –CEO of the influencer agency humantohuman– in (El Publicista, 2024, para. 13). However, it is still essential to avoid the spread of negative messages, as these can directly impact the reputation of the organization (Nieto, 2018, p. 153).

2.3 Virtual influencers (IV) developed with artificial intelligence

The evolution of artificial intelligence and the growth of social media have allowed the emergence of virtual influencers with human appearance (hyperrealistic), especially on Instagram (Carrillo et al., 2024; Rodrigo et al., 2021). These human-like figures, such as Lil Miquela, considered the most influential of the animation influencers, are capable of connecting with global audiences and also allow brands to develop their own digital ambassadors (Terrasa, 2019, parra. 22).

Likewise, virtual influencers work with artificial intelligence, which makes them a tool with many possibilities to adapt to the trends and preferences of their followers, in addition to offering advantages such as permanent availability and the absence of controversy, since they do not impose conditions or generate problems for companies, explains Miranda (2021, p. 40).

At the same time, for Osuna (2024, p. 83) Their potential for development and growth is enormous; it's so broad that one might think they'll soon be able to appear in hologram form at in-person events, conduct interviews on television, or even greet their followers physically using virtual reality glasses and haptic gloves.

In short, Abendroth (2024, “summary” section) It points out that virtual influencers are taking on an increasingly prominent role in the field of influencer marketing, challenging traditional concepts of celebrity and identity and establishing themselves as an alternative strategy for brands.

2.3.1 Impact of virtual influencers on corporate reputation

Virtual influencers have become a strategic tool capable of promoting brands and, most interestingly, generating trends (Rodrigo et al., 2021). In addition, the possibility for companies to create their own virtual characters allows them to better connect with their audience and obtain optimal results, as long as they pay attention to the expectations and preferences of their audience (Porteles, 2023, p. 143).

A practical example of this impact is the "Summer Match" campaign promoted by the fictional influencer Nacho el Tacho, which proved to be a success. As a result of the strategy, 130,000 tons of waste were collected, a figure higher than that of campaigns in previous years. This improved the MERCO ranking—an evaluation system that measures the reputation of companies in Latin America—and demonstrates the direct influence of these strategies on organizational reputation. The company climbed 27 places, from 90th to 63rd (Padilla y Morales, 2024).

In short, virtual influencers have a significantly greater ability to connect with younger audiences than other traditional advertising and marketing formulas, which also suggests that these influencers will become a characteristic element of advertising in the coming years (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021).

2.3.2 Ethics in building corporate reputation with virtual influencers

Ethical use of hyper-realistic virtual influencers is key to building an organizational reputation. These figures must represent the organization's values and goals, and there must be consistency between their discourse and the audience they are targeting (Kitler et al., 2024). In the same vein, a peaceful coexistence between human and virtual influencers is predicted, since, up to now, virtual influencers need human control of AI to be able to act, that is, they cannot generate content on their own (Carillo et al., 2024).

On the other hand, Abendroth (2024, "summary" section) raises a central question of her project entitled "Is it real or artificial intelligence? Virtual influencers and the confusion surrounding their identity" about how virtual influencers' abilities influence human behavior and emotions. For example, body images of IVHs are dominated by thin, slightly extreme bodies, which promotes a body that is difficult to achieve. However, the features that appear in the sexualized profiles are intended to capture the attention of a certain audience, some IVHs, linked to the fashion world, and who repeat this set of standards, as is the case with Imma Gram or Shudu (Villén y Mata., 2025; Shin y Lee, 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative) and is exploratory, focusing on the analysis of three hyperrealistic virtual influencers (HVI) between

October and December 2024. The relevance of this quarter is due to its coincidence with important commercial and marketing events such as Halloween, Black Friday, and Christmas.

For quantitative data, HypeAuditor was used, which allowed us to evaluate the performance of three IVH accounts. The analysis focuses on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, as according to HubSpot (2025), They are the platforms with the greatest growth potential for brands.

The qualitative component was essential for understanding audience perceptions, opinions, and reactions. All comments from the period were processed using Atlas.ti, applying sentiment analysis through manual categorization into positive, negative, and neutral emotions. Coding criteria included keywords, affective expressions, and the use of emojis, following methodological recommendations for social media analysis.

Table 1 presents the number of comments collected by each account across the different platforms and months of the quarter analyzed. The “–” symbol indicates that the profile is not present on the platform, while the “X” indicates that there were no posts during the corresponding period, therefore, there are no associated comments.

Table 1. Number of comments per quarter by platform (source: prepared by the authors using data taken directly from the accounts)

Account/Platform	October			November			December		
									
Miquela	424	X	X	145	X	X	371	X	X
Imma	142	X	-	78	X	-	116	23	-
Shudu	62	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-
Total comments to analyze: 1361									

For this study, the three influencers selected are Lil Miquela, Imma and Shudu.

The sample was intentionally chosen. Lil Miquela, Imma, and Shudu account for much of the global digital conversation about hyperrealistic virtual influencers, and they also represent different cultural and market contexts: Lil Miquela in the United States and Latin America, Imma in Asia (especially Japan), and Shudu in Europe and Africa. This diversity allows for nuanced observations in the impact of virtual influencers based on the context of their audiences.

To collect the information, the process was divided into three stages:

1. Topic review. A review of the topic was conducted to understand the current state of the art, considering different authors who discuss influencer marketing, virtual influencers, and digital reputation.
2. Quantitative data collection. The HypeAuditor tool was used to extract performance metrics. These metrics include the number of followers, engagement, audience, etc. This

tool was selected because it provides the necessary metrics for the purposes of this research.

3. Content and sentiment analysis. Comments were analyzed, identifying the general tone of the interactions and the sentiments expressed by the audience.

This analysis seeks to identify trends in audience performance and perception to evaluate the effectiveness of virtual influencers in digital reputation. The results help contextualize their role in digital strategy and the advantages they offer compared to traditional human influencers.

Metrics depend on the tool used for their extraction, and for qualitative analysis, a semantic tool is used to reduce subjective bias.

4. RESULTS

For this section, and responding to the methodological design, we begin by characterizing the IVH accounts (see Table 2).

Table 2. Account characterization (source: prepared by the authors with data from HypeAuditor, 2025)

Name	Presence	Location	Total audience
Miquela	 lilmiquela, 2.4M  lilmiquela, 3.4M  lilmiquela, 274.5K	USA	6.2M
Imma	 imma.tokyo, 466.7K  imma.gram, 394.4K  Imma Channel, 337	JAPAN	394.4K
Shudu	 shudu.gram, 237.7K	UK	237.7K

Likewise, this characterization is extended, but by IVH (see Table 3, 4 and 5):

Table 3. Miquela's comprehensive evaluation matrix (source: prepared by the author with data from HypeAuditor, 2025)

Category	Description	Plataforma		
				
		Instagram	TikTok	YouTube
General	User	Lilmiquela	Lilmiquela	Lilmiquela
	Content niche	Fashion – Fashion Trends – Modeling		
	Description in the account	21-year-old robot living in Los Angeles On all his accounts, he says, “Be your own robot.”		
Audience	Followers	2.4M	3.4M	274.5K
	Audience quality	61%	93.8% Real people	Does not report
	Demography	Male 39.4% Female 60.6%	Male 28.2% Female 71.8%	Male 36.2% Female 63.8%
	Geography	USA (16.9%)	USA (48.9%)	USA (41.6%)

		Brazil (13.5%) India (6.4%) Mexico (4.9%) Indonesia (4.5%) Other (53.8%)	Other (13.5%) UK (6.7%) Rusia (3.2%) Canada (2.8%) Philippines (2.7%)	Other (33.4%) Brazil (9.1%) UK (6.7%) Philippines (5.6%) Indonesia (3.6%)
	Interests	Fashion. Film and Television. Cosplay. Entertainment. Beauty. Models. Dance. Travel. Theater.	Does not report	Does not report
	Type of audience	Real people 1.4M (57.9%) Suspicious accounts 546.9K (21.9%) Mass followers 415.7K (16.6%) Influencers 89.5K (3.6%)	Generated 1.9M (54.9%) Consumers 1.3K (36.6%) Suspicious accounts 211.7K (6.2%) Influencers 77.2K (2.3%)	Does not report
Engagement	Engagement rate	<0.01% Average level, compared to other accounts with 1M+ followers	0.94% Low level. Similar accounts	Videos: 1,47% By video: 3.7K
	Comment rate	< 0.01% Very good commentary activity	Have an ER of 5.0-6.7 %	Shorts: 5.05% By Short: 4.2K
Commercials	Mentions	@diesel @stevemadden @luar @lisasaysgah	She did not mention other accounts or brands.	She did not mention other accounts or brands.

For Lil Miquela, when it comes to followers, TikTok takes the lead with 3.4 million, followed by Instagram with 2.4 million, and YouTube in third place with 274,500 subscribers. However, when it comes to the quality of TikTok's audience, its superiority is notable, reaching 93.8%, which shows that this platform is concentrating a real community.

In terms of engagement, Instagram has a significant comment rate. This indicates a higher level of interaction compared to the other platforms analyzed. Furthermore, on this platform, IVH has mentioned brands such as Diesel and Steve Madden. Regarding audience interests, these are generally related to fashion, which corresponds to Lil Miquela's focus.

Tabla 4. Imma comprehensive evaluation matrix (source: prepared by the authors with data from HypeAuditor, 2025)

Category	Description	Platform	
			
		Instagram	TikTok
General	User	Imma.gram	Imma.tokyo
	Content niche	Fashion – Fashion Trends – Children's and Women's Fashion	
	Description in the account	Virtual girl in Japan	
Audience	Followers	394.4K	466.7K
	Audience quality	75%	93.7% Real people
	Demography	Male 45.5% Female 54.5%	Male 29.8% Female 70.2%
	Geography	Other (47.9%) Brazil (17.2%) Japan (12.7%) India (10.1%) USA (8.3%) South Korea (3.9%)	Other (41.6%) Philippines (21.8%) Brazil (17.5%) Japan (9.6%) Thailand (6.1%) Mexico (3.3%)
	Interests	Cosplay. Film and television. Comics, manga, and anime. Beauty. Video games. Entertainment. Models. Makeup.	Does not report
	Type of audience	Real people 283.5K (71.9%) Suspicious accounts 51.8K (13.1%) Mass followers 43.1K (10.9%) Influencers 16K (4.1%)	Generated 220.3K (47.2%) Consumers 202.4K (43.8%) Suspicious accounts 29.4K (43.8%) Influencers 12.6K (2.7%)
	Engagement rate	<0.01% Low level, better than 3% of influencers from similarly sized accounts	6.65% Average level. Similar accounts receive 6.0% engagement.
Engagement	Comment rate	<0.01% Average comment activity	
	Some mentions	@jiyongkim_official @ted @nubian_tokyo_womens @aww.tokyo @skoot_apparel	She did not mention other accounts or brands.

As for Imma, and in terms of number of followers, TikTok is ahead with 466,700, surpassing Instagram, which has 394,400. However, the audience quality on TikTok is better at 93.7% compared to Instagram (75%), showing that TikTok attracts a wider

and more real audience, and has 6.65% engagement, which is within the expected average for similar accounts.

From a demographic perspective, Instagram has a similar audience by gender, while TikTok's audience is predominantly female (70.2%). Geographically, TikTok has a greater impact in the Philippines and Brazil, while Instagram predominates in Japan and Brazil.

Regarding audience interests, she's interested in cosplay, manga, beauty, and more, all of which align with Asian culture and IVH content.

On the commercial front, she's mentioned various brands on her Instagram profile, which could imply a commercial strategy.

Table 5. Shudu Comprehensive Evaluation Matrix (source: prepared by the authors with data from HypeAuditor, 2025)

Category	Description	Platform
		
		Instagram
General	User	Shudu.gram
	Content niche	Fashion – Fashion Trends – Children's and Women's Fashion
	Description in the account	First digital supermodel in the world
Audience	Followers	237.7K
	Audience quality	56%
	Demography	Male 33.4% Female 66.6%
	Geography	Other (49.0%) USA (26.9%) Brazil (9.9%) UK (6.6%) France (4.1%) Nigeria (3.5%)
	Interests	Theater, Entertainment, Fashion, Photography. Models. Film and Television. Beauty. Crafts. Dance.
	Type of audience	Real people 118.1K (49.7%) Mass followers 70.1K (29.5%) Suspicious accounts 32.6K (13.7%) Influencers 16.9K (7.1%)
Engagement	Engagement rate	1.98% Good level, better than 76% of influencers from similarly sized accounts
	Comment rate	0.03% Average comment activity

Commercials	Some mentions	@apple @afraidmovie @xaxandco @richardquinn @vamuseum
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Finally, regarding Shudu, which is present only on Instagram, we can see 237,700 followers, with an audience quality of 56%. Furthermore, 66.6% of the audience is female, and 33.4% is male. This reflects a clear alignment with its focus on fashion and beauty, which tend to appeal more to this segment.

In terms of audience location, it is the United States, followed by Brazil, and in third place, the United Kingdom.

In terms of engagement, and despite having a low audience quality, the account maintains an interaction rate of 1.98%, which places it above 76% of influencers with a similar number of followers.

From a business perspective, Shudu has mentioned well-known brands such as Apple, Afraid Movie, Richard Quinn, among others.

4.1 Findings in the comments

Once the accounts have been characterized, the comments are analyzed in the months of October, November, and December 2024, using Atlas.ti as explained in the methodology.

Patterns identified

There is a persistent pattern, and it is one of direct affection toward these AIs. Phrases like "I love you," "you're my favorite," etc., and the widespread use of the "heart" emoji, are expressions that are not directed toward aesthetic taste; on the contrary, they clearly demonstrate a symbolic act of emotional connection. In a considerable number of cases, knowing that they are AIs does not eliminate affection; on the contrary, it makes it more complex, making it clear that love is felt "despite" (...) being an artificial intelligence.

Discovery of IVH as an AI

Although the general tone is positive, there are comments that are reflective, with a certain astonishment or even critical, when they realize that they are AI, as comments such as: "damn AI", accompanied by a broken heart and, "this social experiment is driving me crazy" are evident.

Humanization for a social and environmental approach

Especially regarding Lil Miquela, comments associate her with ethical values, social causes, and human affection, as if she were a person with ethics and morals. Comments such as "stay strong," "you're cleaning up the oceans," and "thank you for continuing your environmental efforts" are evident.

Authenticity

For some users, a digital identity crisis emerges, creating confusion between the human and the artificial, and raising existential questions about authenticity, affection, and representation.

4.1.1 Analysis of the comments

Sentiment analysis of the 1,361 comments showed that most interactions expressed positive emotions and a certain emotional connection with the IVH. A clear example of this is the case of Lil Miquela, where comments such as "I love you" and "you're amazing, I wish you were real" predominate, demonstrating an emotional connection despite users' recognition that she is an artificial figure.

These results are consistent with the cited literature (Abendroth, 2024, p. 4) on the emotional duality generated by IVH and open a line of analysis regarding the ethical and psychological challenges for brands that use them.

In general, audiences accept the presence of virtual influencers, and in many cases project feelings and expectations similar to those of human influencers, although it cannot be ignored that there is a small group that questions their authenticity and expresses rejection.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows that the selected hyperrealistic virtual influencers (HVIs) have a representative follower base and engagement rates that, in some cases, match or even exceed those of human influencers. For example, Imma achieved 6.65% engagement on TikTok, within the expected average for similar accounts according to HypeAuditor. These results demonstrate the potential of HVIs to build community and generate connections with digital audiences.

This study provides empirical and comparative evidence on the real impact of influencers on organizational reputation management, indicating that their presence can generate positive emotional responses and offer greater control for brands, reducing exposure to reputational risks. Thus, it enriches the literature on influencer marketing and digital reputation by providing comparative data from three international cases, while underscoring the importance of ethical and responsible management.

The analysis of the comments reveals a complex emotional relationship with artificiality. Beyond irony or sarcasm, mixed feelings emerge, ranging from fascination to discomfort.

This duality poses new challenges for brands in building trust and credibility in their digital communication strategies.

The main limitation is that the sample was purposive and focused on a specific period of analysis. Future research could broaden the scope, including other contexts, sectors, and platforms, to strengthen and contrast these findings.

The results obtained partially coincide with those reported in previous studies by confirming the ability of IVH to generate engagement and emotional bonds (Rodrigo et al., 2021; Carrillo et al., 2024). However, this study brings as a novelty the finding of emotional acceptance even knowing that these are artificial figures, a phenomenon not clearly described in the consulted literature.

On a practical level, these findings suggest that brands that integrate IVH into their digital strategy can benefit from greater creative flexibility, reputation management, and global reach. However, it is essential to define clear transparency and ethics policies in the management of these profiles, ensuring consistency with the organization's values.

Hyperrealistic virtual influencers represent an innovative and strategic tool for organizations, capable of strengthening reputations and connecting emotionally with audiences. However, it's essential to remember that behind every HVI, there is a team of people responsible for its management, who must always act according to ethical principles and values aligned with the brand's identity. Only in this way will a positive and lasting influence be guaranteed.

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