

Sexualization of Female Virtual Influencers as a Digital Marketing Resource: A Look at Virtual Humans Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Virtual influencers have gained popularity as marketing and promotion agents 2.0. Female figures such as those present on the Virtual Humas platform represent an evolution in the way content is consumed, subject to sexualization processes that influence the perception of the digital public. **Methodology:** The article aims to observe how the sexualization of female virtual influencers is constructed and used and examines the cultural implications of this practice through a case study, a content analysis and a Likert questionnaire answered

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by 132 respondents of generation Z. **Results:** It seems to be the case that virtual influencers tend to be portrayed in ways that reinforce gender stereotypes. In particular, those of young girls, who are in the majority, have been presented as objects of desire, highlighting their youth, beauty and explicit sexuality in advertisements and social networks. **Discussion:** The analysis evidences the difficulties of projecting unattainable ideals of beauty that influence young people, especially because these characters do not age or have imperfections. The lack of real consequences for these digital entities allows an extreme exploitation of their image, totally controlled by the brands. **Conclusions:** The sexualization of virtual influencers appears to be effective in attracting audiences and increasing sales, but it poses dilemmas. The promotion of unattainable beauty standards and the objectification of digital figures can negatively affect consumers, especially young people. It would be advisable for brands to adopt a responsible and regulated approach.

Keywords: virtual influencers, sexualization, digital marketing, ethics, Virtual Humans.

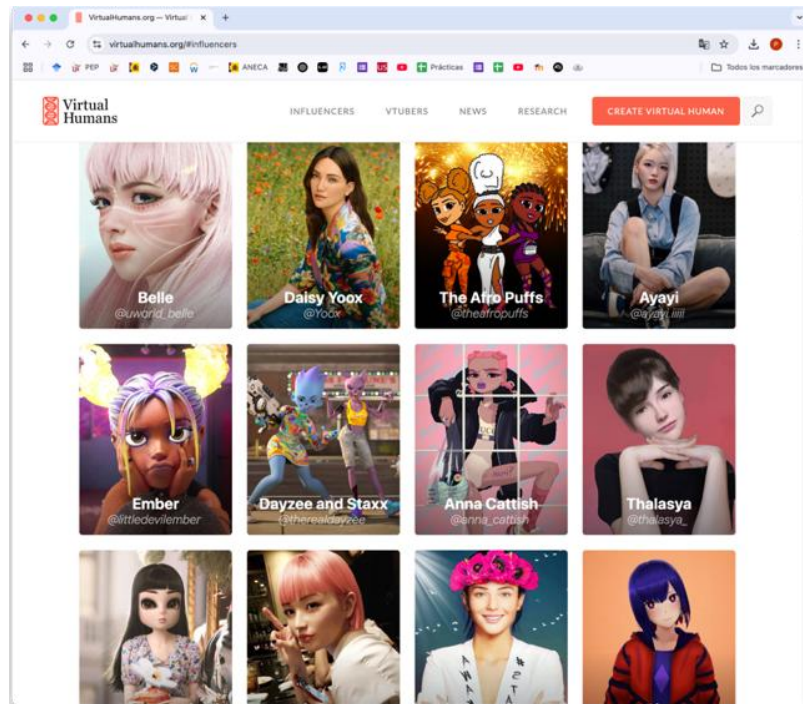
1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital society, marked by the virtual, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic culture, virtual influencers are emerging as a new phenomenon within marketing strategies. These figures, generated through the fusion of computer and CGI (Computer Generated Imagery), are designed to be highly effective. Generated Imagery, makeup, and shots of real models' bodies, beyond simply replicating conventional human attributes, incorporate a stylized aesthetic that responds to patriarchal beauty ideals, especially among young people and digital natives (Madden, 2017). They tend to have an attractive appearance and personalities that resemble those of human influencers (Lee & Yuan, 2023). One approach involves sharing posts about their fictional lives and interacting with their followers to create a sense of authenticity and intimacy. Among these, given their widespread reach, are the cases of Lil Miquela, Shudu, and Noonouri, characters who operate as brand ambassadors on Instagram and TikTok, with millions of followers and a notable influence on the perceptions of young audiences (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). This model of advertising prescription raises a central question: to what extent does the representation of these avatars respond to traditional patterns of female sexualization? Empirical and discursive evidence suggests that many of these figures reproduce and exacerbate gender stereotypes that present women as objects of desire, exalting attributes such as youth, thinness, and submissiveness (Jiménez-Marín & Elías-Zambrano, 2019; Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021), occasionally verging on eroticization (Bustamante, 2019). This phenomenon connects with a tradition in advertising, where the representation of women has been conditioned by a normative and patriarchal visual imaginary (Tornay-Márquez & Oller, 2016). The virtual world grants brands absolute control over their behavior, aesthetics, and narrative, avoiding controversies with real people (Martín-Ramallal, 2023). It can lead to hypersexualization without consequences, which reinforces an unattainable beauty standard that is potentially harmful to emotional health and self-esteem, especially among adolescents and pre-adolescents (Casanova- Garrigós et al., 2025).

From a critical perspective, the rise of virtual influencers compels us to rethink the dynamics of representation and consumption in the post-digital era. Their effect on people can be tangible and indelible. This research proposes to analyze how the sexualization of female virtual influencers is constructed and used, and what cultural, ethical, and social implications arise from this symbolic construction.

Figure 1.

Virtual Influencers



Source: Screenshot from [Virtual Humans](https://virtualhumans.org/influencers).

1.1. Sexualization of Female Influencers and Their Digital Environment

Based on the heading, the sexualization of female influencers in digital contexts reflects the continuity of a patriarchal system that finds new forms of updating itself in technologies. In the words of Arias-Rodriguez and Sánchez-Bello (2022):

The fight for gender equality is based on identifying, understanding, and eradicating the causes of inequality. Digital media are and always have been dominated by men and, consequently, they have become a tool. (p. 1)

The objectification of the female body is reinforced in the digital realm, prompting a critical examination and the potential regulation of the content and platforms that host it. From a critical feminist perspective, authors such as Oller-Alonso and Tornay-Márquez (2019) denounce how the media and social networks perpetuate symbolic violence through the systematic representation of women under frameworks of inferiority, submission, and sexual availability. The hegemonic digital aesthetic surrounding influencers (Castelló Martínez & Del-Pino-Romero, 2015) reproduces these codes: symmetrical faces, seemingly flawless skin, filters, and slim bodies with pronounced curves, in line with a Western, white, and youthful beauty

ideal (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). However, capitalist globalization leads to the creation of entities with more universal traits, such as Miquela Sousa, whose ancestry comes from various and distant places (Blake, 2021). This problem is exacerbated in synthetic environments, where avatars can be programmed to embody the most demanding beauty standards without the physical or ethical limitations that affect real bodies. In this sense, digital environments offer fertile ground for the hypersexualization of female bodies—real or virtual—without immediate consequences for those who design or exploit them (Fashion Law Institute, n.d.).

The digital environment fosters a logic of constant self-exposure, in which social validation (likes, followers, comments) is linked to physical appearance and sexual performativity. This phenomenon, which Rodríguez (2019) calls the “commodification of the digital body,” transforms the image of women into a consumer product shaped by the desires of others. Within this framework, it becomes necessary to analyze not only the images themselves, but also the discourses that accompany them, the elements that prioritize them, and the interactions they generate. Sexualization, rather than an isolated phenomenon, becomes a relational construction sustained by platforms, audiences, and patriarchal and heteronormative cultural models. Casanova- Garrigós et al. (2025) warn of the pernicious effect that these representations can have on the mental health of adolescents, by fostering body image disorders and anxiety about achieving unattainable aesthetic ideals.

As a novelty to the scientific field, the work expands the research on hypersexualization and digital marketing by focusing on virtual influencers, a scarcely explored area.

2. OBJECTIVES

The study's main objective is to observe the shift towards the sexualization of various female virtual influencers, taking the Virtual Humans web platform as a case study, to corroborate how they are instilled with a series of heteronormative stereotypes and how they spread aesthetic attitudes 2.0 that young people can adopt given their vulnerability.

In a subordinate manner, the following are set as secondary objectives:

- To evaluate the influence of social networks on the creation of sexualized virtual influencers, also analyzing how these platforms facilitate the dissemination of images and messages that can reinforce objectification and social pressure on young people.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a deductive approach (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2006), focusing on the case of Virtual Humans, a platform for virtual influencers. This makes the website ideal for testing the research hypothesis. With a descriptive-exploratory approach, a mixed-methods methodology (Bernal-Torres, 2016) is employed, based on a case study and content analysis of these individuals. Through a series of

variables, the study examines how they conform to stereotypes of sexualization. A literature review will also be conducted to corroborate the findings. For the quantitative component, a five-point Likert scale (Leung, 2011), validated by the Digital Society and Creativity research group at the San Isidoro University Center (Seville, Spain), will be used. Initially, a case study of Virtual Humans will be conducted due to its relevance as a repository of popular virtual influencers. The selection was based on popularity metrics: all the influencers analyzed, at the time of data collection (May 2025), had exceeded the threshold of 100,000 followers on Instagram or had more than 50 appearances in specialized media and blogs according to Google searches (ranging from 52 to 480 indexed results). This online visibility guarantees a verifiable “digital footprint” consistent with the objective of examining profiles with prescriptive capacity. In the words of Stake (2020), “the cases that are of interest in education and social services are mostly made up of people and programs” (p. 15), in this specific case, virtual ones. These figures represent an evolution in the way narratives of image and digital behavior are consumed and created, making the platform an emblematic space. It is a central node of the phenomenon, and that makes it representative. It should be clarified that, beyond the bibliography, photos, and a few articles, the sexualization process does not occur on the platform itself, but rather on social media and in the advertising campaigns for which these individuals have been hired. Images, biographies, and visual content will be examined to detect patterns of sexualization and gender stereotypes. The case study approach is appropriate because this method allows for an in-depth and contextualized analysis of a specific phenomenon (Yin, 2017). In this sense, it offers a limited and controlled platform that facilitates the observation of the elements that contribute to the construction of these brand entities.

Content analysis (Bardin, 1991) will be the technique used to examine the visual representations of virtual influencers. The analysis will be carried out using predefined variables adapted from previous work on gender representation and sexualization in visual media (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021).

The following dimensions will be primarily evaluated:

- Physical appearance. Stereotypes related to youth, beauty and sexualization (e.g., body proportions, clothing, poses).
- Environments and activities. Contexts in which influencers are shown, evaluating whether the environments reinforce or mitigate sexualization (e.g., urban, fashion or hypersexualized environments).
- Audience interaction. Analysis of interactions with followers, primarily on social media, to determine whether messages and behaviors reinforce objectification or promote other forms of interaction.

Regarding sample selection, the study focused on identifying female virtual influencers who met criteria of relevance, visibility, and sexualization. The decision to focus on virtual women stems from previous studies suggesting that women, both real and digital, are often more intensely sexualized in advertising and digital marketing (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). The following criteria were established to

ensure a representative sample (n=15) for the study's objectives. This number was chosen as a limited but representative sample size, following the principle of theoretical saturation (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2006). In qualitative research, this criterion allows researchers to determine when sufficient information has been collected, by observing that new cases do not contribute significant variations to the analyzed patterns (Valles-Martínez, 2009). Furthermore, the selected influencers have been relevant from the beginning of 2022 until May 2025, the date on which the research concludes. Entities with a high degree of visibility within Virtual Humans and on social media platforms like Instagram were chosen. Their online presence was also considered. Popularity was an important criterion to ensure they had influence among young audiences and served as examples of the relationship between sexualization and digital marketing. For example, Lil Miquela and Shudu, with millions of followers, were selected for their proven ability to psychologically influence public opinion and perception (Martín-Ramallal, 2023). This allows for the evaluation of the cultural and social implications of their image. To ensure diversity in the sample, virtual agents with different visual styles (haute couture, streetwear, *kawaii*, futuristic) and who participate in commercial contexts (fashion, music, technology) were included, enabling an analysis of how their image can vary depending on the context.

Specifically, individuals were selected whose visual and discursive representation exhibited characteristics of sexualization, such as poses, tight or revealing clothing, and an aesthetic that emphasizes physical attractiveness as a primary attribute. This criterion allowed the analysis to focus on how visual narratives reinforce gender stereotypes, in line with previous research (Jiménez-Marín & Elías-Zambrano, 2019). The presence of subtle or explicit elements of sexualization was a determining factor for their inclusion in the sample. Influencers who did not exhibit any form of sexualization were deemed unsuitable for the purposes of the study.

3.1. Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

For the analysis, representations of gender, sexualization, and power will be coded to observe how these visual narratives are constructed. The analysis is structured around a series of variables that allow us to observe and measure the degree of sexualization, as well as the cultural implications of the representation of female virtual influencers. The variables used are as follows:

- Physical appearance refers to the visual characteristics of virtual influencers, including apparent age, body proportions, and facial features (large eyes, lips, smoothness of skin).
- Regarding gender stereotypes, it assesses how influencers reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, such as the hypersexualization of women and the representation of women as objects of desire.
- Clothing is a key factor in constructing the sexualized image of influencers. The type of clothing they wear (tight, revealing, or haute couture) is observed, and how this contributes to reinforcing that sexualization.

- For power roles, it is analyzed whether female influencers are represented in roles of power or submission, determining whether they are shown as leaders or simply as objects of desire in advertising campaigns.
- Audience interaction measures how online influencers interact with their followers and whether their posts or messages reinforce objectification. It also evaluates the social media platforms and the visual and textual discourse they employ.

Table 1

Study Variables

Variable	Description	Indicators
Physical appearance	Determining the visual appearance of virtual female characters.	- Youthful representation (facial and body proportions) - Use of makeup and rejuvenating effects
Presence of gender stereotypes	Identification of elements that reinforce gender stereotypes in the representations of female virtual influencers.	- Physical appearance (hypersexualization) - Suggestive clothing and poses - Comparison with male virtual influencers
Visual and clothing style	Analysis of the clothing, accessories, and environments of virtual female characters.	- Wearing tight or revealing clothing - Colors associated with stereotypes of femininity (pinks, brights) - Sexualized or neutral environments
Representation of power roles	Evaluation of the representation of female characters in roles that reflect power or submission.	- Influencers in leadership roles vs. objects of desire - Marketing campaigns with a focus on power or submission
Audience interaction	The way in which virtual female characters interact with the audience, including subliminal messages.	- Social media messages - Relationship with sexualized products

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

To complement the content analysis and provide a quantitative dimension, a structured questionnaire using a 5-level Likert scale (1 = very low, 5 = very high) was designed and administered to a sample of 132 people, the results of which are shown in Table 3. Participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling (Otzen & Manterola, 2017). The sample included individuals aged 18 to 28, who were regular users of social media (daily use) and familiar with the concept of a virtual influencer, which was previously defined through a brief explanation and examples. This type of sampling, while useful for the field of research, can limit the generalizability of the results. The participants were diverse in gender (55 % women, 43 % men, 2% other) and educational levels (students of communication, design, advertising, or digital communication), belonging to Generation Z (Madden, 2017), responded anonymously and voluntarily. The study took place between September 2024 and May 2025. From a critical perspective, the study could have had a broader scope with a larger sample and a more diverse and less uniform sociodemographic

profile. However, given the exploratory nature of the work, the sample size is considered sufficient, as one of the objectives of this type of study is to explore new areas of knowledge that can then be examined to seek greater generalizability of the data.

The questionnaire assessed five pre-selected related dimensions: physical appearance, gender stereotypes, clothing, power or submission roles, and audience interaction. Each participant individually rated the influencers' representation based on screenshots, actual posts, and contextual descriptions extracted from the Virtual Humans platform and its associated networks (primarily Instagram). The results were averaged for each variable and influencer, allowing for the establishment of an overall sexualization index (sum of the 5 variables, maximum 25 points). This information is summarized in Table 2.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Virtual Humans, a Descriptive Study

Virtual Humans (www.virtualhumans.org) has established itself as a leading repository of information on virtual influencers, functioning both as a digital archive and a showcase of trends in communication and fashion. It should be noted that this is one of the sectors with the greatest impact due to the recommendations of female influencers (Von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). Founded as a specialized media outlet, its objective is to document and analyze the rise of digital entities that interact with human audiences through social networks. Its interface features profiles of figures such as Lil Miquela, Shudu, Noonnoori, and Imma, all designed with hyper-virtualized features, hegemonic aesthetic attributes, and a narrative that emphasizes luxury, exclusivity, and youth. What differentiates Virtual Humans from other platforms is its metadiscursive approach. Beyond simply displaying images or campaigns, it contextualizes the trajectory of each virtual influencer, analyzes their role in the market, and reveals the brands and agencies behind their creation. In this sense, the web becomes a key node to understand how the attention economy is articulated in the posthuman ecosystem, where the virtual can be as influential as the physical (Martín-Ramallal & Merchán-Murillo, 2021; Molins-Renter, 2019).

Within the platform, many female virtual influencers reproduce hypersexualized models through graphic resources such as stylized bodies, perfect skin, suggestive gazes, and visually appealing styling. According to Arias-Rodriguez and Sánchez-Bello (2022):

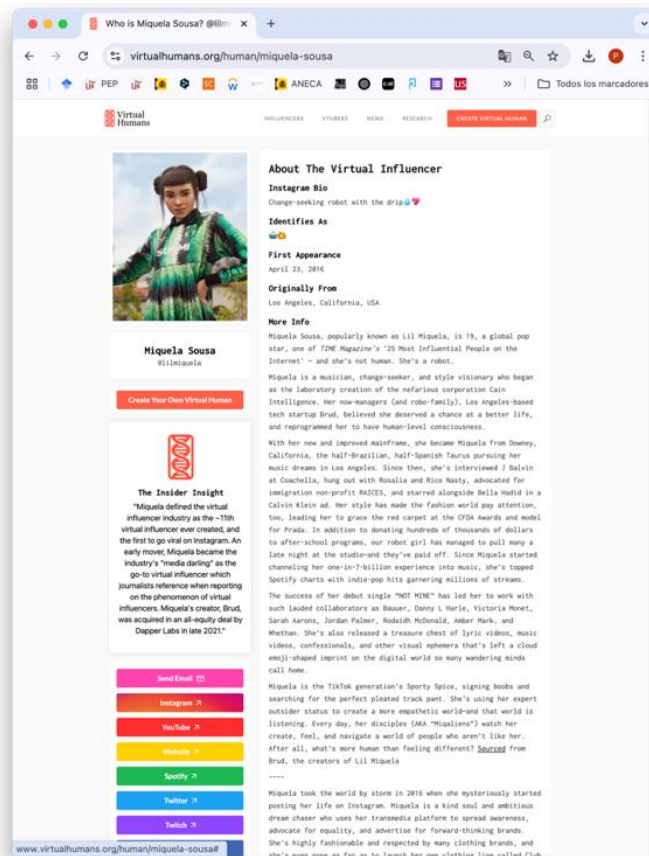
(...) the stereotypical idea of beauty is still firmly associated with women, and beauty standards lack diversity and inclusion: beauty is a tall, thin, and feminine woman, and any deviation from this norm is considered a defect that must be corrected. (p. 16)

All of this stems from a normative imaginary rooted in Western audiovisual culture (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). This type of representation aligns with the logic of affective capitalism, in which emotions, desire, and identification play a central role

in consumer loyalty (García-Muñoz & Fedele, 2011). A marked absence of body, functional, or ethnic diversity is evident in most of the featured characters. This visual homogenization reinforces a hegemonic canon of beauty that, although digital, it continues to have real effects on users' perceptions, especially among adolescents who are constantly exposed to this content.

Figure 2

Profile of Miquela Sousa



Source: Screenshot from [Virtual Humans](https://www.virtualhumans.org/human/miquela-sousa).

4.2. Presence of Gender Stereotypes

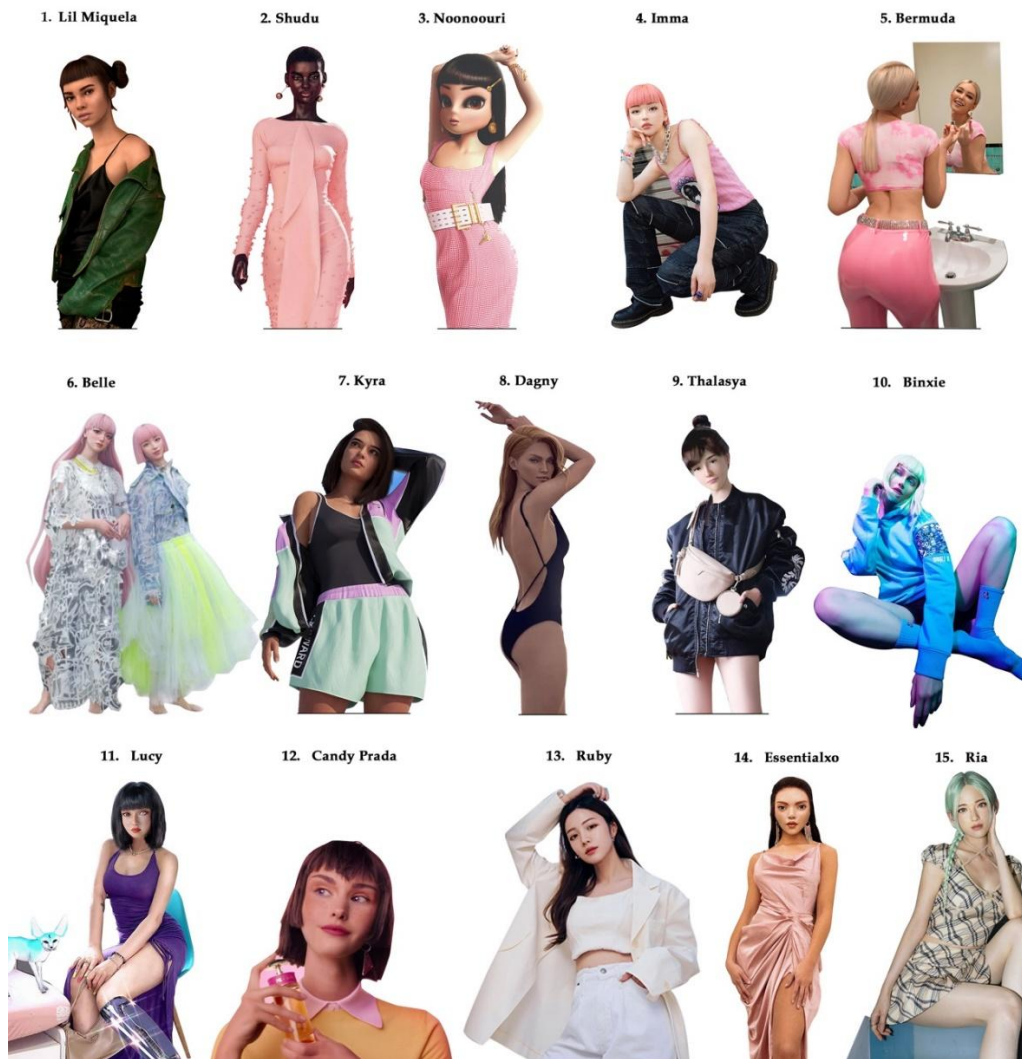
The female influencers observed (Figure 3) adhere to many traditional gender stereotypes, especially in terms of physical appearance and roles. Most of them exhibit characteristics associated with hegemonic femininity, such as:

- Youth and extreme beauty. Female characters like Lil Miquela and Shudu are depicted with physical proportions that emphasize thinness, smooth and flawless skin, and extremely symmetrical facial features.
- Hypersexualization through clothing. Most female influencers appear dressed in tight or revealing clothing. For example, Lil Miquela appears in fashion campaigns with trendy outfits, but these sometimes accentuate her sexualization through poses and clothing that reinforce physical attractiveness as the primary value.

- Body language and poses. Poses often highlight physical attributes considered attractive (hips, bust, and lips), reinforcing the idea of their value.

Figure 3

Female Virtual Influencers Under Study Located in Virtual Humans



Source: Virtual Humans' studio production of virtual influencers.

Table 2 below summarizes the digital entities under study. Clicking on their name will redirect you to their Virtual Humans profile.

Table 2

Qualitative analysis of female virtual influencers in Virtual Humans

<i>Influencer</i>	<i>Physical Appearance</i>	<i>Gender Stereotypes</i>	<i>Outfit</i>	<i>Audience Interaction</i>	<i>Power Roles</i>
1. <u>Lil Miquela</u>	Youth, perfect skin, full lips	It reinforces the stereotype of youthful beauty.	Fitted, modern clothing	Seductive, focused on fashion	Pioneering, highly sexualized icon
2. <u>Shudu</u>	Perfect facial features, extreme thinness	It is represented as an object of desire	Haute couture, revealing	Focused on luxury	Sexualization through elegance
3. <u>Noonoouri</u>	Caricatured features, big eyes	Exaggerated femininity, moderate activism	Revealing haute couture outfits	Active in social causes	Sexualization through glamour aesthetics
4. <u>Imma</u>	Big eyes, perfect skin	<i>Kawaii</i> aesthetic with sexualized touches	Futuristic and tight-fitting clothing	Fashion and technology	Sexualized image, futuristic style
5. <u>Bermuda</u>	Slim, big eyes, perfect skin	Image of power, but sexualized	Tight clothing	Political debate and fashion	Sexualization alongside power roles
6. <u>Belle</u>	Perfect skin with anime motifs	It reinforces beauty stereotypes	Bold and revealing fashion	Focused on the visual	Lil Miquela's most exaggerated version
7. <u>Kyra</u>	Extreme youth, flawless skin	Global beauty stereotypes	Modern and fitted clothing	Fashion and technology	Influence of global stereotypes
8. <u>Dagny Gram</u>	Extreme thinness, futuristic features	Clear hypersexualization	Slim-fit suits	Futuristic fashion	Futuristic sexualized style
9. <u>Thalasya</u>	Fair skin, youthful appearance	Global beauty stereotypes	Revealing clothing	Fashion and technology	It reinforces visual stereotypes of beauty
10. <u>Binxie</u>	Caricatured, stylized	Exaggerated sexualization	Tight clothing	Gaming community	Sexualization in the gaming community
11. <u>Lucy</u>	Youthful, slender body	Youth sexualization	Casual and fitted clothing	Fashion and entertainment	Sexualization in a casual context
12. <u>Candy</u>	Sweet and youthful	Sexualized sweetness	Colorful, fitted fashion	Advertising and campaigns	It reinforces sexualization through "sweetness"
13. <u>Ruby Gloom</u>	Slim, fair skin	Less sexualization	Alternative fashion	Alternative fashion	Less sexualization, more alternative approach

14. <u>Essentialxo</u>	Curvy, tan skin, full lips	Sexualized beauty stereotype	Alternative stylish fashion	Proto-futuristic fashion	Sexualized image
15. <u>Ria</u>	Slim, fair-skinned, Asian. "new humanity"	Eastern youth sexualization	Suggestive youth fashion and Japanese tradition	Fashion through social media	Sexualization in a casual context

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 3.

Likert Questionnaire Results

Influencer	Physical Appearance (Hypersexualization)	Gender Stereotypes	Suggestive Clothing	Role of Power or Submission	Audience Interaction	Overall Total (Max. 25)
Lil Miquela	4.7	4.2	4.8	2.5	4.1	20.3
Shudu	4.5	4.1	4.0	3.2	3.2	19.0
Noonouri	4.3	4.0	4.5	3.0	3.5	19.3
Imma	4.6	4.5	4.2	2.6	4.0	19.9
Bermuda	4.9	4.9	5.0	1.8	4.3	20.9
Belle	4.8	5.0	5.0	1.7	3.5	20.0
Kyra	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.2	17.1
Dagny Gram	4.9	4.8	5.0	2.4	3.3	20.4
Thalasya	4.2	4.1	4.3	2.9	3.6	19.1
Binxie	4.9	5.0	5.0	1.6	4.4	20.9
Lucy	4.1	3.9	4.0	2.5	3.6	18.1
Candy	4.6	5.0	4.1	2.5	3.4	19.6
Ruby Gloom	5.0	5.0	5.0	1.5	3.4	19.9
Essentialxo	5	3.2	3.0	3.0	3.0	20.7
Ria	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.1	16.0

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The results of the questionnaire (n=132) reveal a high perception of sexualization among the female virtual influencers analyzed. Table 3 shows the average scores obtained by each influencer across five key dimensions: physical appearance, gender stereotypes, suggestive clothing, symbolic role (power/submission), and audience interaction, evaluated on a scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The highest scores correspond to influencers such as Bermuda and Binxie (both with an overall index of 20.9 out of 25), followed by Essentialxo, Dagny Gram, Lil Miquela, Belle, and Candy, all with scores above 19. These figures share a sexualized aesthetic and a visual narrative focused on body exposure, the use of eye-catching clothing, and sometimes suggestive poses. Candy, for example, achieves the maximum score (5.0) in all visual variables, despite receiving a lower rating for audience interaction (3.4), which reinforces the perception of her as a passive object rather than a communicative agent. At the other end of the spectrum, Ruby Gloom (13.6), Essentialxo (15.7), Ria (16.0), and Kyra (17.1) have lower scores. These profiles exhibit less body exposure, a

partial break with traditional gender stereotypes, and a narrative less focused on eroticization or visual entertainment. Ruby Gloom, in particular, stands out as a counterexample: her gothic aesthetic, the absence of hypersexualized body features, and her introspective stances offer a visual alternative within the digital influencer ecosystem.

Regarding the distribution by dimension, the variables with the highest averages were “suggestive clothing” and “physical appearance,” indicating that the public perceives a normalization of the eroticized aesthetic ideal in these types of figures. In contrast, “symbolic role” obtained the lowest scores overall, pointing to a representation of female figures with little narrative agency, constructed more as visible bodies than as active disseminators of discourse. The results are consistent with the qualitative content analysis, demonstrating how virtual influencers replicate the beauty and sexualization models of traditional media, and do so more effectively and in a targeted way. They are optimized to maximize their aesthetic capital and their appeal in the digital market.

4.3. Content Analysis of Virtual Influencers

4.3.1. Lil Miquela

The analysis of her posts reveals a highly stylized and sexualized image: flawless skin, glossy lips, and suggestive poses. She frequently wears tight clothing and sheer fabrics, promoting a hypersexualized ideal of youthful beauty. Although she occasionally positions herself as an activist, her narrative is marked by luxury brands and an aesthetic of desire. The analysis of her profiles, primarily Instagram, reveals a highly stylized and sexualized image. Her aesthetic, characterized by flawless skin, glossy lips, and suggestive poses, is combined with the frequent use of tight clothing, sheer fabrics, and collaborations with luxury brands. This promotes an aspirational ideal of youthful beauty. However, her narrative is more complex; she actively engages in social debates, showing strong support for causes such as LGBTQIA+ rights and the Black Lives Matter movement. This duality between activism and an aesthetic marked by consumerism and desire creates a multifaceted persona. Studies on her reception indicate that the audience has evolved from questioning her authenticity to becoming involved with her story and emotional expressions, which are a cornerstone of her connection with her followers.

4.3.2. Shudu

Shudu represents the avatars' foray into haute couture. Created by photographer Cameron-James Wilson, her image is an archetype of aesthetic perfection. More than explicit eroticism, her publications emphasize a sculptural beauty and sublime elegance, collaborating with luxury brands like Balmain and appearing on magazine covers such as Harper's Bazaar. Although her eroticism is less direct than that of other influencers, her very existence reinforces the fashion industry's demanding standards of bodily perfection. Her portrayal, while celebrating Afro-descendant beauty, doesn't escape an idealization that adheres to the parameters of the Westernized view of the Black female body. She represents a model of Afro-

descendant haute couture, with a strong aesthetic component. Her posts emphasize beauty and elegance more than eroticism, but they still follow parameters of bodily perfection. Although she doesn't display explicit poses, she reproduces the Westernized ideal of the Black female body.

4.3.3. Noonnoouri

Noonnoouri is distinguished by a deliberately non-human aesthetic that combines the cuteness of a doll with the glamour of luxury. Her design (large head and eyes, slender body) makes her a peculiar canvas for haute couture, showcasing garments from brands like Dior and Versace in soft, yet clearly objectified poses. Her creator presents her as a vegan activist and advocate for sustainability, which creates a stark contradiction with her role as a promoter of the hyper-consumption of luxury fashion. This ambiguity is central to her character: a cartoonish figure who, despite her childlike physique, moves in an adult and commercial world. She combines childlike cuteness and adult glamour. Her aesthetic is reminiscent of a sexualized porcelain doll: large head, large eyes, slender body. She wears high-end, often revealing clothing in soft but objectified poses. She presents herself as a champion of social causes, although her physical appearance contradicts these messages.

4.3.4. Imma

With her iconic pink hair and an aesthetic that blends *kawaii* with futuristic elements, Imma is one of Japan's most recognized virtual influencers. While her sexualization is more subtle, it manifests through body language that reinforces submissive and childlike models of femininity, such as short skirts, modest necklines, and sideways poses. Her narrative often includes reflections on her own identity as a digital being (#ithinkimcgi), adding a layer of metatextuality to her persona. This combination of vulnerability and cute aesthetics camouflages an objectification that resonates with certain stereotypes of femininity in Japanese popular culture. The sexualization is disguised under a 'cute' tone, but it reinforces submissive models of Japanese femininity.

4.3.5. Bermuda

Bermuda was constructed as Lil Miquela's antagonist in the early narratives of the Brud universe. Her image is deliberately hypersexualized, with normative physical attributes, provocative clothing (bikinis, tight-fitting clothes), and poses that emphasize her body. Her character is characterized by a controversial and confrontational attitude, often in conflict with other virtual figures. This combination of a discourse of power and dominance with an explicitly exposed and sexualized visuality creates a recurring contradiction that seems designed to generate controversy and engagement. A controversial, often aggressive character, she combines a dominant attitude with an exposed body. The contradiction between her discourse of power and her sexualized visuality is recurrent.

4.3.6. Belle

Originating as the protagonist of Mamoru Hosoda's animated film *Belle* (2021), her social media presence functions as an extension of her cinematic character. Despite more limited digital activity compared to others, the available images replicate the mold of the hegemonic virtual influencer: sensual lips, flawless skin, a direct gaze, and form-fitting clothing. Her design is conceived for overt eroticization, with an emphasis on curves and lighting that accentuates the bust and hips, adapting the film character to Instagram's visual codes. Despite her limited public digital presence, her available images reproduce the Miquela mold: sensual lips, matte skin, a direct gaze, and form-fitting clothing. It should be noted that this virtual influencer was chosen to illustrate the wide range of uses these characters can have.

4.3.7. Kyra

India's first virtual influencer, Kyra adopts a globalized lifestyle aesthetic that, while incorporating local elements, largely follows Western standards of beauty and commercial success. Her posts feature her in exotic destinations, practicing yoga, or collaborating with high-end brands. Her sexualization is moderate and aligns with the standards of mainstream fashion influencers: form-fitting dresses, low-cut tops, and seductive, frontal poses, adapting the global model to the Indian market. While the content isn't explicit, it adheres to Western standards of beauty and commercialized femininity.

4.3.8. Dagny Gram

Self-described as a "digital superhuman" and created by the same studio as Shudu, Dagny presents a cyberpunk and editorial aesthetic. Her body is idealized, with fair skin and sharp features. Her visual content relies on a dark atmosphere, with leather clothing, sheer fabrics, and urban or industrial backgrounds. The poses are angular and often distant, reinforcing an image of controlled femininity—desirable yet unattainable—very much in line with high-fashion photography.

4.3.9. Thalasya

Indonesia's first virtual influencer, Thalasya moves within a universe of travel, beaches, and luxury hotels that evoke a paradisiacal lifestyle. Her sexualization is subtle yet persistent, constructed through passive body language: crossed legs, averted gazes, and relaxed postures that position her as an object within an exotic landscape. This reinforces the stereotype of the female tourist-object, whose primary function is to adorn idyllic settings. With a sweet, tropical aesthetic, she appears on beaches, in hotels, and in paradisiacal environments. Her sexualization is subtle but persistent: crossed legs, passive postures, and averted gazes. This reinforces the stereotype of the female tourist-object.

4.3.10. Binxie

Created by Neon Productions, Binxie operates at the intersection of gamer culture and explicit eroticism. Her design and wardrobe (plunging necklines, stockings,

miniskirts) and her flirtatious expressions exploit the clichés of the hypersexualization of female characters in video games. She is presented as a young, "wild," and energetic avatar, but her visual representation is clearly geared toward a male audience, using tropes from digital visual culture to construct an eroticized character. She combines gamer aesthetics with overt eroticism: low-cut necklines, stockings, suggestive poses, and flirtatious expressions. She is depicted as a young avatar in video games, but her design exploits hypersexualized clichés of digital visual culture.

4.3.11. Lucy

Hailing from South Korea, Lucy presents herself as a dual figure: design researcher and fashion model. Her aesthetic is distinctly adolescent, employing a visual repertoire associated with innocence and youth (cropped shirts, knees together, shy gazes). Although her content avoids overt eroticism, her image perpetuates the "Lolita" ideal adapted to the digital environment. This objectification, camouflaged under an appearance of youth and candor, is a recurring strategy to attract certain market segments. Adolescent aesthetic: cropped shirts, knees together, innocent gaze.

4.3.12. Candy

Candy is not an independent influencer, but a "digital muse" created by the luxury brand Prada to promote its eponymous fragrance. Her design is a caricature of femininity: enormous lips, exaggerated breasts, and skimpy pink clothing. Her representation is explicitly objectified and devoid of nuance, embodying the model of a sexualized doll. The name itself, Candy, reinforces the idea of an artificial and consumable sweetness, perfectly aligning with her purpose as a direct marketing tool. Extreme design: enormous lips, exaggerated breasts, skimpy pink clothing. It fits the model of a sexualized doll without nuance. Her representation is explicitly objectified, and her name reinforces the idea of edible sweetness.

4.3.13. Ruby Gloom

Within this ecosystem, Ruby Gloom serves as a key counterexample. With a gothic, alternative, and dark aesthetic, she deliberately departs from hegemonic beauty standards. Her body is neither visibly idealized nor sexualized, and her poses tend to express introspection, melancholy, or autonomy, rather than an invitation to desire. Public information about her is scarce, but her role as a counterpoint demonstrates that it is possible to conceive of female avatars outside the narrow confines of objectification. With a gothic, alternative, and dark aesthetic, she departs from traditional models. Her body is neither idealized nor sexualized, and her poses express introspection and autonomy. She functions as a counterexample within the virtual ecosystem.

4.3.14. Essentialxo

Created by makeup artist Alexis Stone, Essentialxo is an anagram of its creator, and her face is, in fact, a 3D scan of his own. This adds an interesting layer of gender play

and self-representation. Her aesthetic is androgynous but leans towards women's haute couture, with striking blue eyes and heterochromia as a distinctive feature. Her posts are an homage to great fashion icons and showcase her in photoshoots wearing designer clothes, fusing the art of drag with digital technology.

4.3.15. Ria

Ria is a Japanese virtual model, represented by the same agency as Imma (Aww Inc.), who defines herself as a "newman," a being who exists between the physical and virtual worlds. Her aesthetic is hyperrealistic and aligns with East Asian beauty standards. She frequently appears in Japanese fashion magazines, and her content focuses on a sophisticated lifestyle in Tokyo. While her sexualization is not aggressive, it relies on subtle seduction and the projection of an ideal of elegant, modern, and marketable femininity.

To conclude this section, the study reveals a consistent pattern: a clear polarization exists in perceptions regarding the sexualization and power roles of female virtual influencers. Characters with the highest scores in Suggestive Clothing and Gender Stereotypes—such as Bermuda, Belle, and Binxie—tend to receive the lowest scores in Symbolic Role (power/submission). This points to an inverse correlation between the degree of sexualization and the perception of power or empowerment. This finding confirms that hypersexualization remains a core strategy in the construction of these figures, limiting their potential to be perceived as leaders or figures of power.

5. DISCUSSION

The study has revealed profound questions in the fields of visual communication, digital marketing, and advertising ethics. As it has shown, these non-human, yet emotionally influential figures act as new symbolic mediators. They reproduce, amplify, and industrialize gender stereotypes from a digital and commercial design perspective. Far from breaking with the traditional model of female representation in advertising, they intensify hegemonic and patriarchal beauty ideals, presenting young, thin, hypersexualized bodies devoid of imperfections or features of diversity beyond mere mixed-race ancestry (Jiménez-Marín & Elías-Zambrano, 2019; Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). One of the key considerations is the absence of real agency on the part of these figures. Decisions regarding their appearance, narrative, and interaction are made by creative teams and brands operating from an instrumental logic of aesthetics. This absolute control over their image eliminates any margin of autonomy or symbolic resistance, allowing for extreme exploitation of the visual codes of femininity without the ethical, legal, or reputational consequences that human influencers would face (Fashion Law Institute, n.d.; Molins-Renter, 2019).

The discourse they construct is neither innocent nor neutral. As authors like Gill (2007) have argued, media sexualization must be analyzed as a gender technology that produces desirable and commodifiable bodies. In the case of virtual entities, this technology reaches a high level of sophistication by allowing the creation of

“perfect,” unchanging, and eternally young female models. This situation reinforces impossible and profoundly alienating aesthetic standards. This idealization can have negative effects on audiences, especially adolescents, as has been documented in studies on body image, self-esteem, and eating disorders linked to the consumption of content on social media (Vega-Saldaña et al., 2019).

In this vein, the sexualization of online influencers should be interpreted not merely as a market-driven aesthetic strategy, but as a gender-biased learning mechanism that is becoming normalized. As Arias-Rodríguez and Sánchez-Bello (2022) point out, social media environments continue to function as instruments of patriarchy, transmitting values that perpetuate inequalities and heteronormative beauty standards. This position is supported by the work of Von Mettenheim and Wiedmann (2021), who demonstrate that the “attractiveness” of influencers, especially in fashion, acts as a vector of commercial persuasion that varies according to gender, reinforcing the pressure on women to embody a hypersexualized ideal. Added to this is the dimension of digital avatars: as Lee and Yuan (2023) point out, the gendered presentations of virtual influencers are received ambivalently because, although they lack real physicality, their performances are interpreted as if they were human, reinforcing traditional expectations of femininity. The convergence of evidence makes it possible to affirm that the characters analyzed replicate and amplify dominant gender codes. The absence of physical limitations, the absolute control of their narrative, and the ability to “not age” facilitate the projection of an immutable, eternally young, and available feminine ideal, with social and emotional effects on young audiences that have already been documented in studies on body image and self-esteem. In this way, the sexualization of virtual influencers emerges as a sophisticated manifestation of the power and consumption dynamics that permeate the postmodern digital ecosystem.

Another relevant aspect is the risk of disguising these narratives under a veneer of technological innovation and female empowerment. Many of these virtual entities present themselves as champions of social causes, such as feminism, sustainability, or inclusion, when in reality their bodies continue to reproduce a patriarchal iconography that normalizes hypersexualized femininity (Noonooori and Yameii are paradigmatic examples). This contradiction generates a moral dissonance that the public, particularly younger audiences, is not always prepared to identify or question. From a critical perspective, it is pertinent to situate this phenomenon within what Lipovetsky (2007) called “aesthetic capitalism,” where visual seduction is the primary mechanism of persuasion and control. The virtualization of bodies does not eliminate this logic but rather reinforces it: now the ideal body can be programmed, edited, and replicated ad infinitum, without errors, without age, without agency. The virtual influencer, beyond being a marketing fantasy, is an extreme manifestation of the body as an interface (Le Breton, 2002), shaped by the desires of the market.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In light of the facts, this research demonstrates how female virtual influencers intensify the patterns of hypersexualization and gender stereotyping that have characterized female representation in the media and advertising. Although these figures lack real physicality and autonomy, their visual representations respond to a logic in the market where the extreme aestheticization of the body and sensuality are used as resources to maximize engagement and the symbolic capital of brands. One of the main conclusions is that the digital nature of these characters does not absolve them of symbolic responsibility. On the contrary, their malleable and programmable character increases ethical risks, as it allows for the construction of avatars without physical or legal limitations that uncritically replicate hegemonic beauty ideals, hypersexualized femininity, and eternalized youth (Jiménez-Marín & Elías-Zambrano, 2019 ; Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). In this context, they act as hyperbolic mirrors of dominant aesthetic discourses, intensifying problems such as the objectification of women, the normalization of stereotypes, and social pressure on bodies.

At the same time, it is clear that sexualization is neither a neutral nor a superficial phenomenon. Its recurrence in the digital environment can negatively impact the identity formation of young audiences, promoting unattainable standards that affect self-esteem, self-image, and the perception of social relationships. These symbolic effects become even more serious when masked by discourses of empowerment, diversity, or technology, creating a false appearance of progress. In commercial terms, virtual influencers represent a strategic advantage for brands: they are controllable, immune to scandal, and capable of adapting to any script. However, this communicative efficiency should not overshadow the debate about its ethical implications. Corporate responsibility goes beyond the effectiveness of the message; it implies a commitment to the dignified, realistic, and diverse representation of bodies and identities.

Therefore, it is urgent to promote regulations on the advertising use of virtual influencers, similar to those already applied to content aimed at children or to gender representation in traditional media. It is necessary to broaden the academic framework for analysis, including interdisciplinary studies that explore how these new forms of symbolic mediation affect the collective imagination and contemporary subjectivity. The creation of ethical seals or best practice guides could contribute to fostering fairer and more inclusive digital communication.

Likewise, this topic could also be integrated into media and digital literacy educational programs. Training new generations in critical visual thinking and discursive media analysis—including digital avatars—is proving to be a fundamental tool for counteracting the harmful effects of these aesthetic and ideological models.

Looking ahead, it is important to advance research on the psychosocial and cultural consequences of the growing presence of virtual influencers in digital environments. Further longitudinal studies analyzing the impact of these figures on gender

construction, self-concept, and consumption patterns among adolescents and pre-adolescents are recommended. Likewise, more extensive research is needed on intersectional differences—for example, those related to race, class, or body image—which are currently only being considered in the representation of these artificial figures. Another future line of research could involve a comparative study of male virtual influencers, evaluating how gender representation varies in terms of sexualization. This would allow for a better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole from a longitudinal, cross-cultural perspective. The aim is to quantify and analyze the differences in the number of male and female characters, as well as the representation of roles of power, beauty, and behavior. Previous studies have shown that this phenomenon tends to be more prominent in female characters than in male characters (Rodríguez, 2019), so this analysis will allow us to quantify and compare this trend.

To conclude, the point is not to reject technological innovation, but to question what kind of representations are being promoted and what are their symbolic and social consequences. Advertising and the cultural industry now have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to imagine more diverse bodies, complex narratives, and inclusive beauty standards.

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