



VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS: A CAREER *REVOLUTION*

SMART



DIVERSE

Welcome to the Social Innovation Lab Social Bites. In this edition, we talk about the rise of virtual influencers & how they interacting with users across the globe. We hope you enjoy it.

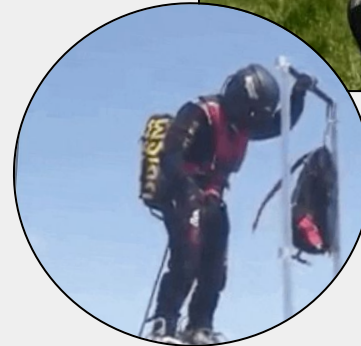
Sincerely,

Monks

WELCOME TO *VIRTUAL CREATORS!*

Virtual influencers have caught the spotlight and it's all powered by emerging tech.

They have been around longer than you think, let's first dive into the background story.



Source: [Wiki](#)

Past examples of virtual influencers:

Future Media, INC.

2007, THE EMBODIMENT OF A SINGING VOICE SYNTHESIZER



Hatsune Miku is one of the many points of reference for virtual idols. Released in 2007 by Future Media, Inc., a music technology company based in Japan, this virtual influencer has given live concerts and built a loyal online community of more than **2M followers across YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Spotify, Twitter and TikTok.**

She has performed sold-out 3D concerts worldwide—including venues in **LA, Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo.** All while holding corporate collaborations with SEGA, Toyota USA and Google, among others.

[Read more about Hatsune Miku](#)

Past examples of virtual influencers:

LOUIS VUITTON

2016, LOUIS VUITTON RELEASED SERIES 4, FEATURING LIGHTING FROM FINAL FANTASY



Inspired by the cult series and video games of the Final Fantasy franchise, Nicolas Ghesquière, creative director at Louis Vuitton, cast 'Lighting,' **a heroic figure known by more than 100 million players around the world.**

Paving the way for the convergence of fashion and video games, this collaboration between the luxury fashion house and the virtual character set an important precedent—hinting at what's yet to come.

[Read more about Series 4 here](#)

TODAY..

THERE ARE MORE THAN **200 VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS** AND CHARACTERS EXTENDING THEIR CREATIVE REACH ACROSS SOCIAL, LIVE STREAMS, VIRTUAL CONCERTS & IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES—COVERING THE ENTIRE VIRTUAL ECOSYSTEM.

But, what
exactly is a
virtual
influencer?



Virtual influencers are essentially computer animations. And while it might come as a surprise, these virtual influencers follow the same road map as human influencers—**gaining followers, establishing credibility and promoting products intelligently and authentically.** One virtual influencer agency, Brud, is worth US\$ 125 million.

Virtual influencers are a supplement to real-life influencers. They provide entertainment and education, which is what social media is all about. While young audiences crave authenticity, they also want to be part of something fun and exciting. The best influencers provide that—even if they're not real.

In terms of performance, **we see virtual influencers outperform their real counterparts when it comes to engagement.**





CGI Models

Digital-human characters with fictional lives and careers, amassing considerable following on social media platforms. Modelling and music production is a common occupation for this type of influencer.



Deepfakes

Characters utilizing deepfake technology commonly based on recognizable celebrities.



Branded VTubers

Characters that have operated under licensing in the past and now have their digital versions across social media platforms.



Avatars

Virtual characters operated in real time, embodied by an actor, streamer or influencer. They are usually connected to video games.



3D Characters

Characters created with 3D technology, most commonly with social media presence.



Cartoon Characters

A mix of characters from the media and social media profiles.



Anime-inspired VTubers

They are present across a wide digital ecosystem, spanning social media, live streams, music videos, series and virtual events.



Virtual Humans

These influencers try to hide the fact that they're virtual. Although an occasional hint may be dropped, they are as similar to a real-life influencer as a virtual influencer can be.

THEY ARE REALLY DIVERSE

Click on the pictures to check out their profiles

AN UNDENIABLE TRUTH:

THEY'LL BE YOUNG
FOREVER.

They can work round the clock with no complaints.
But is that a good thing? **We're not so sure...**

UNREALISTIC BEAUTY STANDARDS?

Meta's virtual
influencer ethical
framework

BIG TECH COMPANIES ARE WORKING ON MAKING VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS **MORE ETHICAL**

We are seeing positive signs. Diversity is a must when it comes to influencers and creators. This evolution in marketing can strengthen the bond between brands and consumers, as long as the industry keeps on showcasing diverse creators.

NEW FRONTIERS

OPPORTUNITIES ARE WIDE OPEN IN CHARACTER DESIGN & DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS. VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS CAN BE ASSISTANTS, MUSIC PRODUCERS AND ENTREPRENEURS.

THE CREATIVE FACTOR IS OFTEN SURPRISING AND FRESH

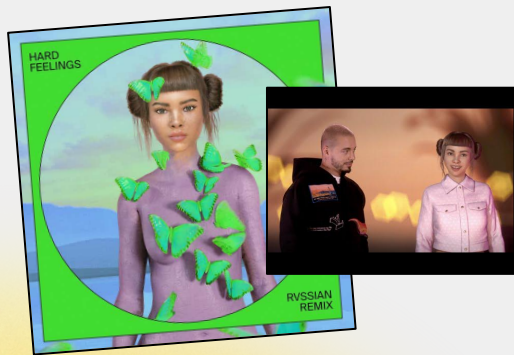
SOME CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES

LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT SOME
INTERESTING CASES FROM
AROUND THE WORLD

Lil' Miquela

“KEEP VOTING OR MY HARDWARE MIGHT MALFUNCTION”

Music Producer



Lil Miquela has great digital performance: her single '**Sims**' amassed 58M reproductions, and she's reached 191K monthly listeners on **Spotify**. Her **YouTube Channel** has 282K subscribers and her **TikTok** account stands at 3.4M followers as of April 2022.

Fashion Icon



She has been featured in the most influential fashion publications around the world. Recently, Lil Miquela's creators closed a **US \$125 million** investment round led by Spark Capital. She was also named one of TIME Magazine's 25 Most Influential People on the Internet.

Celebrity



Her collaborations with **Samsung**, **UGG**, **(controversial) Calvin Klein**, **Prada**, among others, attest to the power of virtual influencers.

Immagram

“A SPECIAL SHOUT OUT TO OUR VIRTUAL GIRL (AND NEWEST #TOMMYJEANS AMBASSADOR)”

Amazon Drop Partner



In 2021, Immagram **launched a limited collection with Amazon for The Drop!** The pieces were only available for 30 hours, and they were made on demand—with prices ranging between US\$ 30 and US\$ 80.

Paralympics 2020



@Imma.gram Behind the scenes of the Paralympic 2020 closing ceremony 🧠
Thanks for inviting me! The second picture is my view of my appearance at the ceremony from where I was sitting....
😁
Super colorful event 🌈

Brand Ambassador



Most recently, she was named brand ambassador for Tommy Hilfiger.

Noonoouri

“OHHHHHHH HAUTE COUTURE WEEK AHEAD ✨
LET THE GLAM’ BEGIN”

Harvard Guest



Noonoouri has stepped into several digital events, such as a **Zoom call with Harvard University.** Behind her special appearances were the teams of **Mimic Productions, Xsens | 3D Motion Tracking** and **MANUS™ Motion Capture.**

Front Row



Amazon original series **Making the Cut** cast Noonouri as one of the judges next to Heidi Klum and Tim Gunn.

Model



Noonoouri has been featured in several fashion magazines, collaborated with brands like **Dior** and advocated for **One Young World.**

Multiple brands
have some kind
of mascot or
character as part
of their logo or
featured in their
TV ads.

MASCOTS COME ALIVE

Oftentimes, these characters are the personification of the brand itself and make for a great spokesperson.

Take Tony the Tiger, for example, who was a guest on the Late Show, in addition to Zoom calls with fans and his good friend Shaquille O'Neal.

Other notable examples include: Janky and Guggimon, The Geico Gecko, Gorillaz, Colonel Sanders, CrunchyRoll Hime and of course, Barbie.

And why not Elmo, that Starbucks mermaid or M&M's characters?



WHAT COMES NEXT?

Neon: Artificial humans.

Samsung's future factory STAR Labs has developed Neon, a combination of deepfake and bot technology. These artificial humans require massive processing power in order to speak, interact and gesture. Neon showcases increasingly adaptive technology that is slowly being rolled out.

While the necessary computing power is still too costly, this technology shows the immediate evolution of virtual influencers, celebrities and virtual brand ambassadors. A brand's voice and identity were never this close to being embodied.



POSSIBILITIES IN TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

Transmedia storytelling is the technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies. Anyone in advertising is familiar with seeing the same campaign in different platforms, whether a TV commercial, online ads, or on the side of a bus. Digital transmedia campaigns accomplish a similar goal: they tell the same story across multiple online formats and platforms. **In this case, the advantage a virtual influencer offers is the ability to seamlessly transition across virtual environments. A virtual influencer remains recognizable, and feels authentic anywhere from the metaverse to social and even video games.**

VIRTUAL HUMANS AND AVATARS

CELEBRITIES ARE EXPANDING THEIR GLOBAL PRESENCE

THERE ARE NO LONGER 'STUCK' IN ONE PLACE
AT A TIME.

For many, Travis Scott's was the first virtual concert they heard of. Although it wasn't the first ever, it was groundbreaking in many ways.

In terms of marketing, it was hugely profitable. After all, Fortnite is a free game. Most of their income comes from selling skins, which can make your avatar look a certain way—perhaps like Travis Scott.

Celebrities expanding their global presence:

TRAVIS SCOTT IN FORTNITE



12.3 m live viewers
48 m total



US\$20 million in
revenue

Justin Bieber is one of the latest artist to turn into a digital avatar.

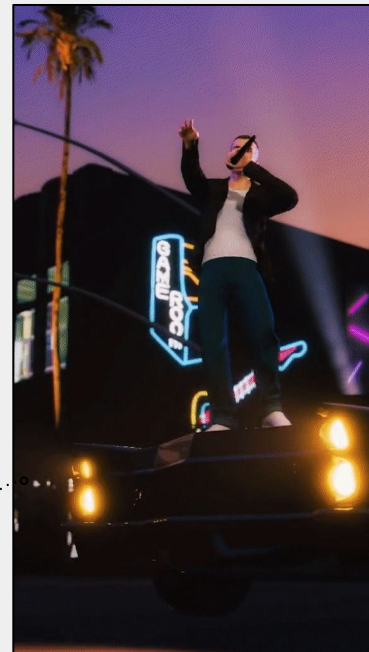
Celebrities expanding their global presence:

JUSTIN BIEBER'S DIGITAL AVATAR

The virtual entertainment company Wave partnered with Bieber on "Justin Bieber – An Interactive Virtual Experience," a show that rolled out on November 18. Bieber fans had the chance to appear on stage alongside the singer during dedicated fan moments, as well as influence his performance and environments in real time.

The advantage of this kind of setup is that it's scalable: not only can a virtual concert fit more people than a stadium, it's also possible to give the same concert several times, across multiple time zones.

Justin Bieber's
concert on Wave



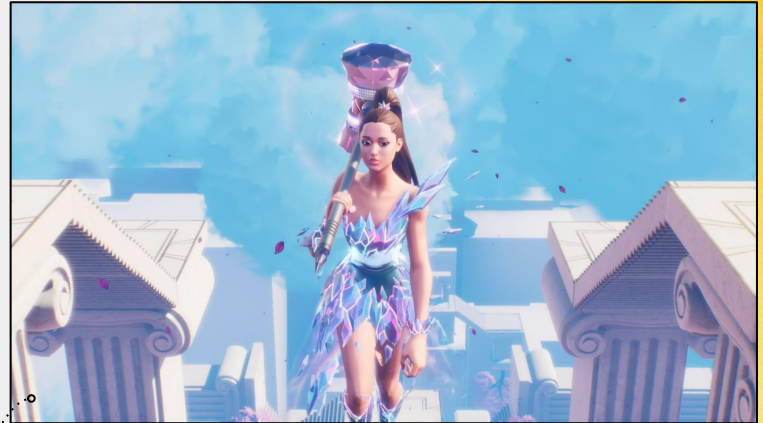
Concerts are clearly a great challenge in terms of meeting the audience's expectations.

Celebrities expanding their global presence:

ARIANA GRANDE RIFT TOUR IN FORTNIGHT

Ariana Grande's first concert viewer count was 1M on Twitch and 600K on YouTube. The next few concerts in the tour had considerably fewer viewers, down to 110K on Twitch and 16K on YouTube.

While the organizers built up excitement on social media, the adoption and the experience itself were not ideal. Virtual events are still working on their early strategies to keep viewers engaged for longer periods.



Ariana Grande
concert in
Fortnite

Are virtualized celebrities going to compete with virtual influencers for spots on the meta-stage?

Celebrities expanding their global presence:

REGGIE WATTS' STAND-UP IN ALTSPACEVR

An artist that's embracing the new-normal is Reggie Watts, who frequents ATLSpace. Reggie is already used to re-interpreting reality, so doing it virtually was a natural step.

This kind of metaverse-first programming is going to help the big virtual platforms offer entertaining content.



Reggie Watts on
ATLSpaceVR

We're poised to see the more entrepreneurial artists branching out and creating their own worlds around their virtual personas

Celebrities expanding their global presence:

DEADMAU5 ENTERS THE METAVERSE

With a concert in Decentraland and his own metaverse environment on CoreGames, DJ DEADMAU5 is no stranger to digital innovation.

After working on several NFT projects, he's going all in on the metaverse. The great advantage? His mask makes it easy to transform into a virtual avatar.



We're also seeing virtual artist sell out shows.

Riot Games has their finger on the pulse.

RIOT GAMES IS TURNING CHARACTERS FROM GAMES LIKE LEAGUE OF LEGENDS INTO VIRTUAL SUPERSTARS. OTHERS COMPANIES ARE JUMPING ON THE TREND.

Hatsune Miku



Hatsune Miku has several concerts lined up this year

Pentakill



League of Legends gave a virtual interactive heavy metal concert

K/DA



How virtual band K/DA launched an EP in a pandemic

THE **APAC** REGION EMBODIES THE IMMEDIATE
EVOLUTION OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

BRANDS LIKE DIOR ARE ONE STEP
AHEAD, FACILITATING REAL-TIME
INTERACTION BETWEEN **VIRTUAL**
INFLUENCERS AND THEIR FANS

Dior created a digital avatar of its regional ambassador, Chinese celebrity Angelababy.

VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS AND BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

The avatar version of Angela (a real-life model, actress and singer) took over the brand's official Weibo account to create a more vibrant experience for online viewers of the Dior fashion show, virtually replicating the outfits worn at the physical show.

As reported by the South China Morning Post, "Angela 3.0's surprise appearance **generated more than 90,000 Weibo interactions within two hours of the post**, and made her the first virtual idol to participate in a Dior fashion show in China."

Source: [South China Morning Post](#), [Transcendent Retail](#); APAC Report, [Taobao Life](#)



Together with the rise of the metaverse and anime subculture, virtual idols and AI-powered celebrity avatars are taking over the KOL landscape in China.

VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS AND LIVE STREAM TECHNOLOGIES

While these applications may have emerged in China, they are spreading globally.

Taobao and Tmall have both leveraged Miku and Luo Tianyi to enhance their shopping and live-stream events. Additionally, Chinese video streaming platform Bilibili has reported a **225% increase in monthly average viewing** of virtual idol live-streams.

Since then, we've seen the expansion of the technology to include streamers on platforms such as Twitch—[Code Miko](#) being a great example.

Source: [South China Morning Post](#), [Transcendent Retail](#); APAC Report, [Taobao Life](#)



Taobao Life is a gamified digital community owned by the e-commerce site Taobao, in which users create and dress virtual avatars.

VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS AND E-COMMERCE

3D avatars can wear outfits that are **real-world items, interact with other avatars, perform daily tasks and use virtual coins to purchase virtual items.**

Taobao Life has seen a significant increase in adoption during China's COVID-19 lockdown. The concept of connecting 3D avatars with the ecommerce experience might grow even further once the metaverse is implemented, **but for now you can feel and dress like a virtual influencer through your avatar.**

Source: [South China Morning Post](#), [Transcendent Retail](#); APAC Report, [Taobao Life](#)



STATS ARE FUN!

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

001

HIGH ENGAGEMENT

This trend has remained consistent for the second year in a row, indicating that followers better engage with virtual influencers' content.

004

THE FASTEST GROWING

The fastest-growing virtual influencer in 2021 was The Nobody Sausage. Its page accumulated over eight million followers on TikTok and replicated its success on Instagram, gaining 2.4M followers in just one year.

Source: Hypeauditor

002

CORE AUDIENCE

The core audience of virtual influencers is women between the ages of 18 and 34 (44.76%). There are also numerous teenagers between 13 and 17 (14.64%).

005

STAYING COMPETITIVE

Several Virtual influencers have stepped out of social media to produce different types of content. Ranging from music videos to album releases, it seems like the options are getting more and more diverse.

003

THE MOST FOLLOWED

The most followed virtual influencer in 2021 was Lu de Magalu, hailing from Brazil. Her Instagram account @Magazineluiza has 5.7M followers at the time of writing and her TikTok account stands at 5.6M followers.

006

CONNECTED TO NFT'S

16% of virtual influencers are moving swiftly in the NFT space, successfully exploring the market opportunities to get fans more invested in their virtual storylines and worlds. Lil Milquela's "Rebirth of Venus" was sold for 159.6 ETH, \$82,361 on SuperRare. The amount was donated to the Black Girls Code charity.

A GREAT DEAL ABOUT VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

The range of digital platforms, the connection with ecommerce, the engagement and the responsiveness of real-time make virtual influencers part of the future of marketing.

CULTURAL CHALLENGE

Virtual influencers are changing our concept of coolness, beauty, talent and creativity.

They are challenging the entire digital culture.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Market Potential:

The global influencer market is expected to reach US 84.89 billion by 2028. The growing deployment of virtual influencers has offered new growth prospects for the US market.

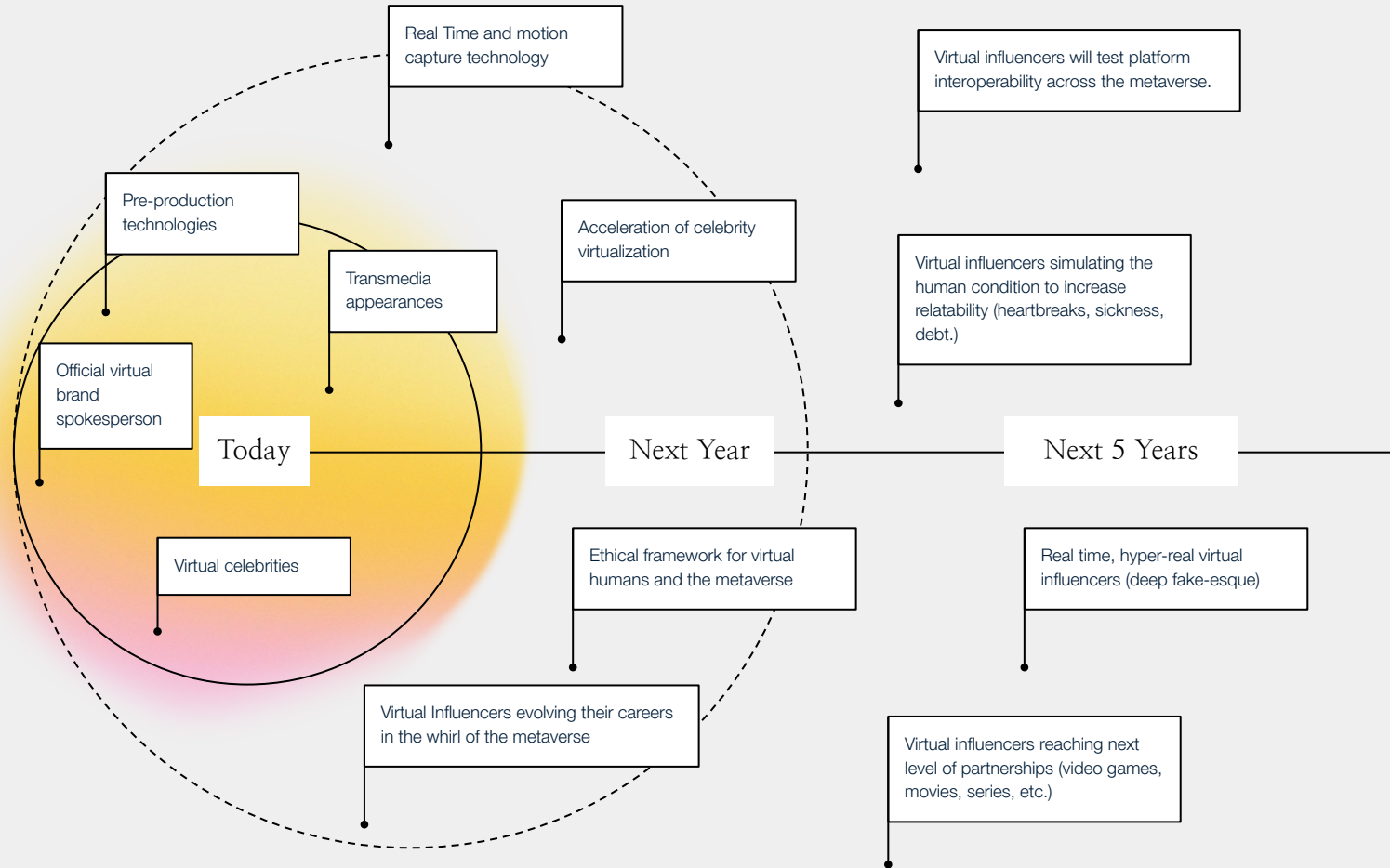
- 001 If you can't find an influencer that matches your brand, build your own.
- 002 Virtual influencers are digital natives, they show up with authenticity across the entire digital ecosystem. (Transmedia)
- 003 Virtual influencers have careers (in music, modelling, acting) and experience in content creation and storytelling.
- 004 Real time technology is allowing virtual influencers to be more responsive to their audience, replying faster and engaging even more.
- 005 Cultural standards are being challenged. Do we want virtual influencers to look flawless? Ethical guidelines are being created.

Where is

Virtual Influence

Going?







VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS: A CAREER *REVOLUTION*

Contact us to get started



SMART

SOCIAL INNOVATION

x

**PHENOMENA
.MONKS**

DIVERSE