Ananlysing the Effectiveness of Anime-like Virtual Influencer

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Abstract: As social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, continue to revolutionize the advertising industry, a new breed of influencer has emerged, incorporating three-dimensional technology to create anime-like personas. The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of anime-like virtual influencers on Kellogg's, a significant player in the cereal industry, by utilizing SWOT analysis.Additionally, the research examined the relationship between anime-like influencers, brand identity, endorser fitness, and customers' purchase intentions. The study ultimately found a positive relationship between anime-like influencers and their impact on advertising and branding. By using the SWOT method to analyze the impact of these digital animals, this paper demonstrated how animal virtual influencer can evoke a sense of sympathy and emotional connection with the audience, effectively capturing their attention in commercials and campaigns. The study also provided insights on how to leverage virtual influencers as a marketing strategy. The research highlighted the importance of creating a unique visual identity and emotional connection with the audience and provides guidance on selecting appropriate virtual influencer types for endorsements to maximize their effectiveness. The study also contributed to the existing literature on the efficacy of influencer endorsement and sponsorship disclosure by expanding the research to encompass the virtual influencer trend. The findings offered valuable insights into how virtual influencers, particularly anime-like virtual influencers, can be leveraged to create unique branding strategies and connect with consumers on a deeper emotional level.

Keywords: kellogg, animal virtual influencer, brand identity, purchase intention

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In recent years, social media has revolutionized the advertising industry, and with it, emerged a new type of influencer - the virtual influencer (VI). Balmain, a luxury fashion brand from France, introduced a campaign for their Fall 2018 collection that showcased three digital models, with two being exclusively associated with Balmain. The third model, Shudu Gram, is a well-known independent digital model who has gained fame as "The World's First Digital Supermodel" [1]. The campaign stirred up diverse reactions among consumers and journalists, with some praising the artistry involved in creating ultra-realistic virtual humans in high-fashion clothing [1]. Noonoouri, like Shudu, was created to be a prominent figure in the world of high fashion. She has collaborated with numerous high-profile brands such as Kim Kardashian, Tommy Hilfiger, Balenciaga, and Vogue

China, among others, and has appeared on multiple cover [1]. With the virtual endorsement market expanding rapidly across the world, it has become crucial to comprehend its efficiency [2]. Virtual influencers (VIs), also known as influencers, are digital entities created by computers to simulate human-like qualities, including traits, attributes, and personalities [3]. The influence of virtual influencers has become a significant player in the influencer marketing arena, gaining traction and attention from various companies [2].

The research will mainly focus on the brand Kellogg's. Kellogg's incorporates various anime-like virtual influencers to represent their cereal flavors. By featuring anime-like virtual influencers on their packaging, Kellogg's has created a unique visual identity that sets them apart from competitors. These figures act as memorable and recognizable symbols that help consumers differentiate between different flavors and product lines. The research will delve into the world of virtual endorsement and examine the role of anime-like virtual influencers in branding strategy.

Kim et al. carried out a study to address to address the limited research on the phenomenon of virtual influencers, which are gaining popularity for capturing social media users' attention [2]. By including the virtual influencer trend in its scope, this study contributes to the current body of research on the effectiveness of influencer endorsements and sponsorship disclosure [2]. Additionally, it provides insights on how to utilize virtual influencers as a marketing tactic.

1.2. Research Gap

Many brands' packaging or campaigns would involve anime-like virtual influencers as a part of their advertising tools. There are a few studies about human-like, anime-like research. Although earlier research has given insight into virtual advertising in general, few studies have examined the impact of animal representations in this setting. Given the increasing need for VIs to interact with brands, there is an urgent need for empirical study to get a full understanding of their advertising role [4]. Additionally, there is a need to examine the impact of the distinction between human-like and anime-like VIs on brand promotion. Therefore, this research aims to bridge this gap by examining whether anime-like virtual influencers have a significant impact on advertising campaigns. This study gap might be filled to provide a fuller knowledge of the role of anime-like virtual influencers in virtual endorsement and to add to the existing branding literature in this sector.

The rationale behind this study is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of anime-like virtual influencers in advertising and brand promotion. The research would focus on the brand Kellogg's because it uses different anime-like virtual influencers in its branding. In 2022, Kellogg's launched a plant-based campaign with its animals [5]. The research will be based on the celebrity endorsement theory to analyze the impact of anime-like VIs by using the SWOT method. By examining the SWOT associated with using anime-like VIs, this paper aims to demonstrate how these digital animals can evoke a sense of sympathy and emotional connection with the audience, thereby effectively capturing their attention in commercials and campaigns.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition

Some early influential works in the field of advertising and marketing that contributed to the development of the concept of celebrity endorsement [6, 7]. Fowles argued that celebrities could be utilized as a means to appeal to audiences by creating a link between the celebrity and the product or brand being advertised [6]. Eighmey and Carlson, on the other hand, studied the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in terms of enhancing brand recall and recognition [7]. Since then, many other researchers have contributed to the development of the concept of celebrity endorsement, including its effectiveness, potential drawbacks, and ethical implications.

Attractiveness was defined as the perception of similarity between the influencer and their followers in terms of physical appearance, values, and lifestyle [8]. According to the study, followers are more likely to interact with an influencer's content and follow their advice when they find them to be attractive [9]. The authors argue that this perception of attractiveness is important in the context of social media marketing because it can affect followers' intentions to like, comment, share, follow, and make purchase decisions based on the influencer's recommendations [8]. Attractiveness is not only related to physical appearance but also to other aspects such as shared values and lifestyle [8].

Attractiveness and trustworthiness are two important factors that can influence the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. Attractiveness refers to the degree to which the celebrity is perceived as physically attractive, likable, and similar to the target audience. This perception of attractiveness can lead to positive attitudes and behaviors towards the brand or product being endorsed [7]. trustworthiness pertains to the extent to which the celebrity is viewed as sincere, trustworthy, and well-informed. When the celebrity is regarded as trustworthy, their endorsement can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the message being communicated [9].

Apart from attractiveness and trustworthiness, several other factors can impact the efficiency of celebrity endorsements, such as the compatibility between the celebrity and the endorsed brand or product, the celebrity's proficiency or familiarity with the endorsed product, and the environment or medium in which the endorsement is displayed [10]. The combination of factors such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, fit, expertise, attentiveness, and context can influence the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in advertising.

2.2. Important Results

A celebrity endorser is perceived as physically attractive, this can lead to a transfer of positive affect from the endorser to the brand being endorsed [11]. This can result in the brand being perceived as more attractive and appealing to consumers. In addition, when a celebrity endorser is perceived as attractive, this can lead to a halo effect, whereby the endorser's positive qualities are attributed to the brand [12]. As a result, the brand can be perceived as more credible and trustworthy. However, it is important to note that the relationship between celebrity attractiveness and brand identity may be moderated by other factors, such as the fit between the celebrity and the brand [13].

A study by Jin and Phua found that when there was a high level of congruence between the celebrity and the brand, this resulted in a more favorable brand identity and higher purchase intention [14]. They also found that the level of celebrity endorsement fit had a significant impact on the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand identity, with a stronger effect observed when there was a higher level of fit [14]. Also, another study shows the perceived fitness of a celebrity endorser for a brand is a key factor that can impact the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement [15]. They found that when there was a perceived match between the endorser and the brand in terms of their values, personality traits, and image, this led to a more positive attitude toward the brand, greater brand trust, and higher purchase intentions. In addition, they found that the perceived expertise of the endorser also played a role in the effectiveness of the endorsement [15].

Brand experience, which refers to the consumer sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli, has emerged as a novel construct and has been linked to critical consumer outcomes such as loyalty, repurchase intention, satisfaction, and positive word of mouth. A study by Aaker proposes that brand identity can impact consumer behavior, particularly purchase intention. According to Aaker, a strong brand identity creates a unique and favorable image in the minds of consumers, which can result in higher levels of brand loyalty and purchase intention [16]. She suggests that brand identity is made up of five elements: brand as a product, brand as an organization, brand as a person, brand as a symbol, and brand as a set of values. These elements work

together to create a cohesive brand identity that resonates with consumers and leads to positive consumer behavior [16].

Also, another study applied consumers' willingness-to-pay (WTP) to reflect the positive relationship between brand identity and purchase intention [17]. Developing a more favorable brand experience can result in a greater probability of consumers paying a premium price, which is directly related to a company's profits. Although robust brand associations can demand a higher price, the direct connection between brand experience and consumers' inclination to pay a premium is still insufficiently researched [17]. Recent research has highlighted the importance of brand credibility and perceived uniqueness as mediating factors between brand experience and consumers' WTP (a price premium) and has shown that a positive brand experience can increase consumers' WTP (a price premium), leading to higher profit for firms [17].

2.3. Summary

The study observed a positive relationship between brand identity and celebrity attractiveness, celebrity endorsement fitness, and purchase intention, which may plausibly be extended to the context of anime-like virtual influencers in the Kellogg's brand. The utilization of anime-like virtual influencers, such as Tony the Tiger, to promote products has been gaining traction in recent years. As such, it is important to consider how consumers perceive and respond to such novel marketing strategies. The theoretical underpinning of the aforementioned relationship, as well as the empirical evidence supporting it, suggests that a strong brand identity and the perceived attractiveness and fitness of a virtual influencer may positively influence consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the application of anime-like virtual influencers in Kellogg's marketing campaigns may have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

A study applied SWOT analysis to determine the pros and cons of franchising. According to the study's table of SWOT analysis, researchers identified "low risk failure" and "easy setup" as the strengths of franchising [18]. SWOT analysis is a valuable tool that assists in making decisions and is widely employed to evaluate an organization's strategic situation by examining its internal and external environment [19].

By conducting a SWOT analysis of Kellogg's, this paper aims to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the brand's success and challenges in the cereal market. The study will utilize a SWOT analysis to explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Kellogg's brand identity. Additionally, the research will investigate how the exploitation of anime-like virtual influencers contributes to the brand's overall marketing strategy. The analysis will aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of Kellogg's current position in the market, its competitive advantages and disadvantages, and the potential opportunities and challenges it may face in the future.

3.2. Kellogg's

Kellogg's is an American food company, founded in 1906 by brothers Will Keith Kellogg, that specializes in breakfast cereals and snacks [20]. Kellogg's has increased the variety of cereals, snacks, and convenience foods in their product lineup throughout time [20]. In 1928, Kellogg's introduced Rice Krispies, which became one of the company's most popular cereal brands [20]. In 1930, Kellogg's introduced PEP, the first vitamin-fortified cereal [20]. In the 1960s, Kellogg's introduced

Pop-Tarts, which quickly became a popular breakfast pastry [20]. In 1974, Kellogg's introduced Special K, a low-fat cereal that became a popular choice for dieters [20].

Kellogg's has also been involved in various philanthropic activities [20]. In 1952, the company established the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which supports programs that promote education, health, and well-being for children [20].

3.3. SWOT Analysis

3.3.1. Strength

Kellogg's strength lies in its successful utilization of anime-like virtual influencers to promote its brand. By utilizing virtual influencers that embody the brand's messaging and values, Kellogg's could strengthen its brand identity and enhance its overall marketing efforts. Virtual influencers can be easily customized and applied across different marketing channels, including social media, websites, and mobile apps. By creating unique and engaging virtual characters, Kellogg's has been able to differentiate itself from its competitors, increase brand recognition, and appeal to younger demographics. For the past century, Kellogg's has held a prominent position as a manufacturer of cereal products. Known for its focus on health and nutrition, the company has offered consumers a diverse range of food items [21].

3.3.2. Weakness

AVI would have limited emotions and contain some ethical concerns. As VIs are not human, they may have a limited range of emotions and expressions, which could make it difficult for them to connect with some consumers. Virtual influencers, by their very nature, are not real people or animals, which could make it difficult for them to convey a sense of authenticity or credibility to some consumers, since AVIs in Kellogg's could not try actual [22]. There may be ethical concerns about using virtual influencers, particularly those that are designed to look like real animals like what Kellogg's does, as it may be seen as exploitative or disrespectful to the animals [22].

Therefore, although the AVI of Kellogg's is very attractive, it is difficult to establish a relationship with consumers in terms of expertise and trustworthiness because it is a VI. Therefore, it is difficult to maintain consumers' loyalty to the brand through VI endorsement.

3.3.3. Opportunity

As for the aspect of opportunity for Kellogg, using AVIs as a brand endorser has recently become a trend in the context of internet. With the advent of the Internet era, the rise of social networking service (SNS) celebrities in the online market has changed the way people get information and buy products. The change of information mode and information transmission rate gives brands more opportunities to be understood by consumers. Meanwhile, merchants take advantage of social network celebrities as brand ambassadors to guide potential customers to buy attractive shopping content [23]. This trend shows that Kellogg has an opportunity to continue incorporating Avis into its brand strategy with the transmission on different types of social interactive online media platforms.

3.3.4. Threaten

For threats, Kellogg's might face other real-life ambassadors as competitors with AVIs. A report notes that economic downturns and recessions can lead to a decline in demand for breakfast cereal products, as consumers may opt for cheaper breakfast options or skip breakfast altogether. This reveals a challenge for Kellogg's and other cereal manufacturers to maintain sales and profitability during times of economic uncertainty [24]. The utilization of AVIs by Kellogg's may face a potential

threat from the emergence of fitness coaches or super models as brand endorsers, who promote authentic healthy living [24]. These human endorsers may be perceived as more credible and effective by consumers as compared to anime-like virtual influencers.

4.   Results & Discussion

The SWOT analysis conducted in this study identified key factors that influence consumers' brand perception and purchase intention. Specifically, the strengths of utilizing anime-like virtual influencers were found to evoke sympathy and emotional connection with the audience, which effectively captured their attention in commercials and campaigns. This emotional connection leads to better advertising and branding. On the other hand, the weaknesses of using virtual influencers included limited emotions and expressions, which could make it difficult for them to connect with some consumers, and ethical concerns associated with using virtual influencers that resemble real animals. Overall, the SWOT analysis demonstrated the significant impact of utilizing anime-like virtual influencers to enhance brand recognition and appeal to younger demographics.

Based on the SWOT analysis, Kellogg's could consider the following recommendations to enhance its internal strengths and further increase consumers' purchase intentions: Firstly, Kellogg's should continue to invest in developing unique and engaging virtual characters that embody the brand's messaging and values. Secondly, it could improve its product line by offering more diverse and nutritious food items to cater to different consumer preferences. Thirdly, Kellogg's could enhance its social media presence by partnering with more influential virtual personalities and creating more interactive content to engage consumers. Finally, it should prioritize ethical considerations when designing and using virtual influencers, such as avoiding using anime-like virtual influencers that resemble real animals.

Compared to previous studies, the SWOT analysis conducted in this study identified similar factors that influence consumers' brand identification and purchase intention, such as emotional connection and differentiation from competitors. However, the unique contribution of this study is the focus on utilizing anime-like virtual influencers and their impact on advertising and branding. This study provides insights on how to leverage virtual influencers as a marketing strategy and highlights the importance of creating a unique visual identity and emotional connection with the audience.

5.   Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that anime-like virtual influencers promote advertising and branding, evoking a sense of sympathy and emotional connection with the audience. The SWOT analysis conducted in this research provides insights into how virtual influencers can be leveraged as a marketing strategy, highlighting the importance of creating a unique visual identity and emotional connection with the audience. By examining the relationship between anime-like influencers, brand identity, endorser fitness, and customers' purchase intention, this study contributes to the existing literature on the efficacy of influencer endorsement and sponsorship disclosure.

The contribution of this research lies in its exploration of the impact of anime-like virtual influencers on advertising and branding and the utilization of a SWOT analysis to examine their effectiveness in leveraging Kellogg's. By taking into account the development of virtual influencers, this study also broadens the body of knowledge on influencer endorsement and sponsorship disclosure. The implications of this research are that anime-like virtual influencers can effectively capture the attention of consumers and create an emotional connection with them, leading to increased purchase intention.

The emphasis of this study was on a single brand and product category, which may have limited how broadly the results may be applied. Although it provides some suggestions for brands and marketers, in the process of implementing strategies, it is still necessary to make some changes according to the differences of brands and their business strategies. Moreover, the study also did not look at how disclosure and transparency affected endorsements from virtual influencers.

Future studies can further explore the role of disclosure and transparency in virtual influencer endorsements and consider the impact of virtual influencers on different product categories and in different regions. It may also be beneficial to examine the long-term impact of virtual influencer endorsements on brand loyalty and customer retention. Overall, the findings demonstrate the potential of anime-like virtual influencers to create unique branding strategies and connect with consumers on a deeper emotional level, offering valuable insights for marketers and advertisers. Future studies should consider these factors while examining the impact of virtual influencers on advertising and branding.

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