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AI (Artificial Influencer) – Personality, Contexts, and Trust

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.

Ecclesiastes

Introduction

In the digital era, established concepts of identity, trust, and authenticity face various challenges coming from simulated entities existing exclusively in the hyperreality of the media environment. Virtual influencers generated using artificial intelligence represent an entirely new form of social impact, raising questions about the boundaries between the real and simulated world

(Baudrillard 1994; Eco 1990). Recent research (e.g., Madnal et al. 2024; Sands et al. 2022) suggests that the visual and behavioral realism of software-generated entities can have a significant impact on the overall perception and (de) formation of trustworthiness towards such creations, what they represent, and the messages they share.

At the same time, it appears that individual personality traits can predetermine one's ability to receive and respond to artificial influencers. Potential individual differences may also affect the extent to which recipients perceive generated simulations of entities and find them (in)authentic and (un)trustworthy. This corresponds markedly with theories from media psychology and marketing communication that point to the determinant roles of personality factors in shaping the reception of media content (Cattell 1997; Ohanian 1990). They simultaneously bring positive opportunities and possible irreversible threats with the emergence of various theories of posthumanism and synthetic authenticity (Keeling & Lehman 2018). This text contributes to the need to better understand how new media entities can (trans)form everyday social relationships and (dis)trust in a digitized environment.

The aim of the paper is to describe and critically evaluate the continuity in the development of influencers (real human ones as well as virtual – digitally created ones – so-called artificial influencers, including those created by artificial intelligence), and to verify in a pilot study how young recipients perceive virtual influencers, especially the level of trust they have in them. We will also address the contexts of a deeper exploration of the issues of simulation (simulacra) and human desire for extraordinary stimuli. Another goal of the paper is to determine whether there is a relationship between the personal traits of young recipients and their trust in virtual (artificially created) influencers.

Definition and historical context

Influencer (*in-fluence* = influencing): etymologically, the word comes from the French word "influence" and originally referred to "an ethereal force flowing from stars that affects a person's character or destiny" (Etymoline, [n.d.], para. 1). An identical root coming from Latin (influentia) exists for the Italian term "influenza", which in the Middle Ages referred to epidemics whose origin people attributed to "the influence of stars" (*influenza delle stelle*). In Italian, it was used to designate a disease apparently since 1504 (such as "influenza di febbre scarlattina" – scarlet fever). This term entered the English language in the 18th century during an epidemic in Italy, when it began to denote a specific disease that we know today as influenza (ibid.), which does not have positive connotations and may be associated with the contamination

of space with an undesirable influence on the surroundings. Gradually, the meaning expanded to refer to the influence on a person who performs such an action. In this transferred meaning, an influencer is a person who has an influence on the opinions, attitudes, or behavior of other people. This is also according to the lexicographic interpretation of the Cambridge Dictionary, which defines an influencer as a person or group that can change the opinions and the way other people behave (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). However, this concept is not a modern phenomenon. The archetype of influencing can also be found in history. The ruling class, religious leaders, and recognized scholars shaped public opinion and societal behavior through their position, knowledge, and media influence (although it should be mentioned that these were formal leaders, not informal ones, as is the case with influencers today). It is important to note that intellectual influences are deeply affected by the historical context and prevailing philosophical ideas of a given era (Maigari, Arafat 2019). The modern form of influencing began to emerge at the beginning of the 20th century, along with the rise of mass media and later with the advent of mobile phones (Albarran 2013). In modern society, so-called public figures play a similar role. Initially, influencers were prominent personalities of traditional media, defined as politicians, artists, scientists, film or television stars, athletes, etc. Publicly known personalities often set social fashion and have greater social influence compared to ordinary people. (Huang 2015) Thus, anyone who gains the attention of other people essentially becomes an influencer. However, the difference lies in the extent of impact on society.

Brands have historically tried to expand their reach through celebrity endorsements (McCracken 1989). Internet platforms connecting individuals have become the most dynamically growing segment of digital media, thus creating space for influencers (Erin et al. 2024). However, the concept of a digital influencer represents a modern name for a long-existing activity. Influencers in various fields have always collaborated with support teams that helped them expand their influence and gain advantageous commercial partnerships (Rodrigues et al. 2024). The opinions of celebrities as an archetype and their support of fashion brands, products, and political candidates have become commonplace in media (Mikuláš & Mikulášová 2019; Púchovská & Mago 2018). It also appears that young adults perceive celebrities' ability to influence public opinion, and that the perception of celebrity endorsement is influenced by the gender and ethnicity of respondents (O'Regan 2014). We can point out that although celebrities have been the subject of extensive studies, these findings cannot be simply applied to Social Media Influencers (SMI) (Malik et al. 2023). The reason is the diversity of SMI categories based on the size of their audience – from influencers through mega, macro, and micro influencers to nano influencers with the smallest reach (Campbell & Farrell 2020; Nafees et al. 2021). Digital influencers have seemingly spontaneously

created a close relationship with their audience, which differs from traditional celebrities. Their recommendations are perceived as authentic rather than advertising (Moreira et al. 2021). Moreover, data on respondents' affiliations can be extracted from social media profiles.

Simulacrum as a copy without an original

Virtual creatures are like signs, virtual entities without a physical matrix; these, in Jean Baudrillard's conception (1994), are so-called fourth-order simulacra – pure simulation (the character becomes a simulacrum that has no relation to reality). Their perceived identity is constructed and shaped by algorithms and software tools designed for this purpose, thus anticipating reality and, instead of reflecting it, generating it. This is exemplified, for instance, by practices in which virtual influencers sleep, have skin problems, publish photos from fictitiously visited places, thus creating an immersive illusion of authenticity without grounding in reality - a simulation (a copy without relation to reality - contemporary AI influencers).

Virtual influencers thus become hyperreal entities that not only replace reality but create a new "reality" that is more attractive to the audience than the real world. At the same time, hyperreality leads to "the completely real" becoming "identified with the completely fake" (Eco 1990: 7). Culture is also described as full of reconstructions and thematic environments, full of realistic creations aimed at creating something better than reality itself, even with the effort to profit. For example, their perfect appearance or non-existent life stories (e.g., the Brazilian virtual influencer Lu do Magalu) generate the illusion of a specific, omnipotent ideal of success that physical people cannot achieve without possessing the aforementioned hyperreality. This hyperreality is constituted by technical and visual means and, according to Mikhail Epstein, "[t]his 'hyperreality' is a phantasmic creation of the means of mass communication, but as such it emerges as a more authentic, exact, real reality than the one we perceive in the life around us" (1996, paragraph 1), thereby denying current reality and deforming the reception of the real one. We risk losing contact with what is "more" real. We begin to consider hyperreality as more significant than the thing or event to which it relates, which Jean Baudrillard would call an "implosion of meaning", where media do not represent reality but produce it. Imitations not only reproduce reality but improve it, making reality less attractive, leading to a loss of authenticity, where the audience often does not perceive the difference between a simulated and a real influencer, which can lead to a paradox – trust in the non-existent.

This phenomenon can be further illuminated in the context of Jean-François Lyotard's theory of postmodernity (Lyotard 1984), according to which "grand narratives" have lost their legitimacy. In the case of digital influencers, the truth of the story is no longer important, but its aesthetic consistency and ability to produce engagement (Lyotard 1984). At the same time, Michel Foucault (Foucault 1988) could interpret this digitalized identity as a product of "technologies of the self", in which the subject internalizes the norms of visual culture and becomes both an object and a producer of discipline (Foucault 1988).

Philosopher and feminist Donna Haraway (1985), drawing on work in the field of posthumanism, cybernetics, and relationships between humans, technologies, and animals, states in her cybernetic feminist paradigm that in digital space, the boundary between human and machine dissolves. The cyborg, as a hybrid entity, allows for the transcendence of traditional categories of identity, similar to digital influencers, who do not belong to the binary distinction of real/virtual; at the same time, reality is always socially constructed and mediated by technologies and the language used. She considers technologies and digital environments as another dimension of existence in which power relations are manifested and knowledge is created.

In the field of marketing communication and visual communication, digital influencers are increasingly used as flexible brand identities. For example, the French fashion house Balmain created a "virtual trio army" of models named Shudu, Margot, and Zhi in 2018, representing diversity without the need to engage real people (Designboom 2018). This gives rise to an era of visual branding simulacrum, in which visual continuity and identifiability are more important than authenticity (Ebben, Bull 2023), synthetic authenticity (Cossell 2024), through which we understand that brands deliberately create emotions through algorithmically generated personas that are supposed to appear trustworthy, and emotional connection is created without a real past or personal experience of the subject.

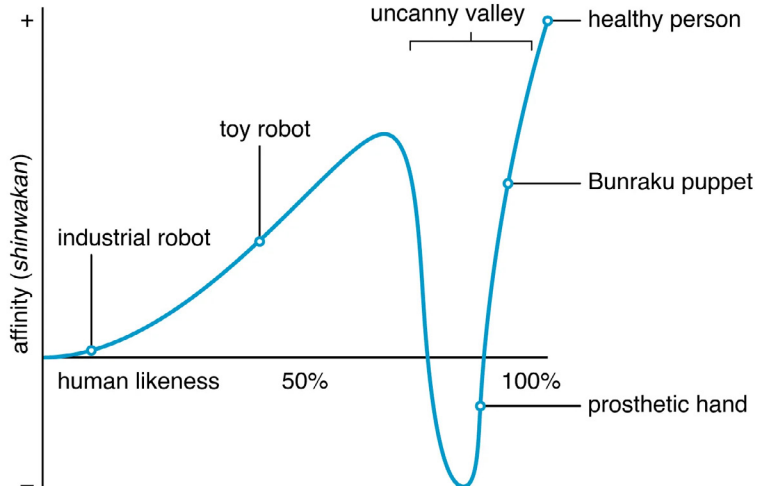
The rise of virtual influencers

Digital influencers have fundamentally transformed marketing communication and the media environment of the 21st century. A digital influencer is defined as an individual attracting an online audience beyond their close circle, with whom they communicate through their own creation, thereby shaping the behavior and opinions of others (Lampeitl & Åberg 2017). Influencers act as intermediaries of marketing communication thanks to their extensive follower base (Liu et al. 2015). The term *digital influencer* expanded with the increasing use of the internet and social networks. Digital influence

represents the ability to change opinions and behavior in the online environment. These influencers are attributed higher credibility compared to traditional advertising due to their ability to create engagement among a broad fan base. In the current digital environment, practically anyone can gain the position of a trendsetter (Sentf 2008). They are proof that even an ordinary person without special talents can become an influential person. A systematic literature review by Lima and Brandão (2022) addresses the topic of digital influencers. The study analyzed 31 scientific articles published on the Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect platforms between 2017 and 2021. Most of the analyzed articles were empirical in nature, predominantly using quantitative methods. The most cited work, according to the authors, was a study by Sokolova and Kefi (2020), which analyzed the relationship of parasocial interaction along with perceived credibility, physical attractiveness, and attitudinal homophily of influencers. Among the most frequently studied topics was the influencer and their credibility. The review confirms that the number of digital influencers has significantly increased over the past five years, making influencer marketing communication a key strategy for many companies. Research suggests that 72% of the female audience shows greater interest in topics presented by digital influencers.

Alongside traditional influencers, there are virtual influencers (VI). Instagram launched the virtual influencer function as early as 2016. Leighton (2019) defines virtual influencers as computer-generated characters imitating people on social networks (Kim & Park 2023). A virtual influencer is a software-created entity capable of influencing others and exists exclusively in the digital space (Moustakas et al. 2020). Virtual influencers significantly affect cultural representation and inclusion, being able to imitate human behavior, communicate with their followers, and promote products and ideas (Madnal et al. 2024). VIs allow digital artists and content creators to remove the limitations of bodies and physical elements (Choudhry et al. 2022; Ogonowska 2025). One of the most popular is Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela) with 2.5 million fans (Lima & Brandão 2022). Some virtual influencers appear more natural and simulate human activities, such as Lu from Magalu (@magazineluiza), Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela), while others are distinctly digital, such as Kizuna AI (@a.i.channel official), Noonouri (@noonoouri). A common feature is that luxury brands like Chanel, Dior, or Louis Vuitton can use them in their campaigns (Jhawar et al. 2023). For example, the first Indonesian virtual influencer, Thalasya (@thalasya_), presents herself as a young woman who travels and shares her life on social networks. She also collaborates with various brands and has gained great attention from the Indonesian audience (Iffah et al. 2024). She practically simulates human existence in virtual reality.

The development of artificial intelligence technology is based on identifying patterns of human behavior, which is subsequently implemented into algorithms. These can mimic human behavior and perform tasks that were until recently exclusively a human domain (Owe & Baum 2021). Technological progress in AI has brought significant improvements to the visual aspect of AI influencers, and research focused on influencers with a realistic human appearance remains limited. Future research should address the characteristics of followers and factors that motivate them to interact with AI influencers in the social media environment (Jayasingh et al. 2025). Sands (2022) argues that virtual influencers are perceived as less credible, leading to lower levels of audience engagement. In contrast, research by Robert De Cicco and colleagues (De Cicco et al. 2024) showed that revealing the synthetic nature of a fully anthropomorphized virtual persona does not affect how recipients perceive them. Authors M. Böhndel, M. Jastorff, and Ch. Rudeloff (2023) compared the perception of virtual and human influencers by recipients. The results showed no significant differences between virtual and human influencers, except for the variable of likeability, where virtual influencers were perceived as less likable. This result is consistent with the "Uncanny Valley" theory (see Graph 1), which was introduced in the late 1970s by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori, who conducted a series of psychological experiments examining people's reactions to robots with varying degrees of human resemblance.



Graph 1: The "Uncanny Valley" graph illustrates the proposed relationship between the degree of a being's human likeness and the level of affinity or acceptance it evokes in an observer

Source: Uncanny Valley, [n.d.] https://www.britannica.com/topic/uncanny-valley.

According to Zhaohan Xie, Yining Yu, Jing Zhang, and Mingliang Chen (2022), when AI influencers recommend products, consumers experience a higher level of cognitive conflict than when they are recommended by human influencers. In contrast, Abhinav Choudhry, Jinda Han, Xiaoyu Xu, and Yun Huang (2022) state that virtual influencers are a "magnet" for target groups, also thanks to a "unique mix of visual appeal, sense of mystery, and creative storytelling that distinguishes VI content from the content of real human influence[r]s" (ibid. 2022: 1).

According to authors Kim Donggyu and Wang Zituo (2024), the effectiveness and credibility of VIs are related to the area in which they operate, as well as their type (the authors compared human-like virtual influencers (HVI) and anime-like virtual influencers (AVI) to human influencers). According to their research results, HVIs can be as effective as human influencers, especially in non-profit areas. In profit-oriented areas, the credibility of HVIs approaches that of AVIs, which show lower effectiveness.

Ethical questions and transparency

According to Dariusz Prokopowicz and Marek Matosek (2024), an example of controversial and unethical use of AI is the activity of some companies publishing content with influencers who are not real people. Followers should be adequately informed that this is AI-generated content. An example is the influencer Aitana Lopez, who imitates life, her hobbies, and daily activities (Prokopowicz & Matosek 2024). When viewers watch sci-fi movies, they want to be deceived and watch spaceships in space realistically and not as models. When they view news articles, they expect the images to be clear documentation of the truth (Leonard 2024). Many people may not realize that they are viewing and communicating with a VI instead of a real person. Subsequently, users may feel deceived when they discover that their interactions were with AI. The lack of transparency casts suspicion not only on the AI influencers themselves but also on their creators. The potential deficit of trust illustrates why the audience should be well-informed about online media influencers (Madnal et al. 2024). Most VIs on social media have some form of information about their origin indicated. However, concerns are raised by other platforms, traditional media, and store displays, where AI content is not expected.

The research results of Hsiao-Han Lu and Ching-Fu Chen (2023) show that credibility and physical attractiveness positively affect followers' attachment to influencers. However, the perceived credibility of influencers by recipients is not determined exclusively by the characteristics of influencers (how they behave). There is evidence (see research cited further) that

the personality (and its traits) of the recipient is a factor influencing how the influencer will be perceived. At the same time, it is true (Tan 2021) that followers do not consider themselves to have similar values or personality traits as influencers.

Significant research in this area was conducted by Amelia Rizzo, Juha Munnukka, Simona Scimone, Loredana Benedetto, and Massimo Ingrassia (2024) and Melisa Mete (2021). Amelia Rizzo et al. (2024) found that there is a complex and multifaceted relationship between recipients' personality traits and the perceived credibility of influencers. They identified that personality traits measured through *The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Faceted Brief Form* (PID-5-FBF)[1] (such as Negative affect, Antagonism, Disinhibition, and Psychoticism) can influence the perception of influencer credibility by recipients. Melisa Mete (2021), working with the five-factor model of personality, found that neuroticism and, to a lesser extent, extraversion lead to envy towards influencers. Attitudes towards them were also moderated by traits such as openness (more open recipients perceived influencers more positively), conscientiousness (conscientious recipients showed significantly higher perceived credibility of influencers), and agreeableness (recipients with high levels significantly more perceived influencers as credible).

Research

The aim of the research is to determine how young adults perceive influencers created by AI, and also to identify whether and to what extent such influencers are perceived as credible (C1). At the same time, in the intentions of the 1970 *Uncanny Valley* theorem (Mori et al. 2012) (Figure 1), the aim is also to find out whether influencers whose simulation of a real human being is more pronounced (and difficult for the observer to distinguish from a real person) are perceived more positively, or conversely, whether those whose artificial origin is evident to the recipient are perceived more positively (C2). Exploring the relationships between selected personality traits of young adults and trust in artificially created influencers (C3).

Based on these objectives, I formulate the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What is the perceived credibility of influencers created through AI?

[1] The Personality Inventory measure 25 specific personality trait facets (Anhedonia, Anxiousness, Attention Seeking, Callousness, Deceitfulness, Depressivity, Distractibility, Eccentricity, Emotional Lability, Grandiosity, Hostility, Impulsivity, Intimacy Avoidance, Irresponsibility, Manipulativeness, Perceptual Dysregulation, Perseveration, Restricted Affectivity, Rigid Perfectionism, Risk Taking, Separation Insecurity, Submissiveness, Suspiciousness, Unusual Beliefs and Experiences, and Withdrawal).

- **RQ2:** Are the profiles of perceived credibility of influencers created through AI significantly similar?
- **RQ3:** Are there significant differences between the perceived attributes of credibility of virtual influencers in the factor:
  - RQ3.1: Dependable – Undependable?
  - RQ3.2: Honest – Dishonest?
  - RQ3.3: Reliable – Unreliable?
  - RQ3.4: Sincere – Insincere?
  - RQ3.5: Trustworthy – Untrustworthy?
- **RQ4:** Are there significant differences between the perceived attributes of credibility of influencers whose simulation of a real human being is more pronounced (difficult for the observer to distinguish from a real person, I4 and I5, so-called AI-generated)[2] compared to those whose artificial origin is evident (I1, I2, I3, i.e., CGI-generated)?
- **RQ5:** Is there a significant relationship between the personality traits of young adults and trust in artificially created influencers?

Methods and materials

For the identification of variables, we used both standardized and non-standardized methods. For the identification of personality variables, we used the fifth edition of Raymond Bernard Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF, Cattell et al. 1997), a 185-item closed-type questionnaire that we modified into an electronic format. It allows for the identification of 16 primary and 5 secondary so-called global personality factors. The authors of the questionnaire report an average reliability (from 0.69 for factor B reasoning) to 0.86 (factor Q2 self-reliance), with an average of 0.8 (p. 101). Test-retest coefficients were higher (from 0.84-0.91, with an average of 0.87).

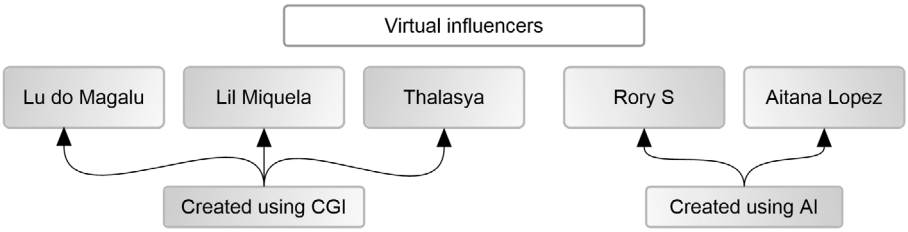
We assessed trust through a polarity profile, exposing respondents to photographs of five software-generated/created female influencers (visuals can be seen in Appendix 1), with the order expressing their degree from synthetic to the impression of reality (Scheme 1):

- *Lu do Magalu (I1) – virtual influencer created by the Brazilian company Magazine Luiza using computer graphics (CGI);*
- *Thalasya Pov (@thalasya_) (I2) – virtual influencer described as the "First Indonesian digital Human Char", developed by Magnavem Studio;*
- *Lil Miquela (I3) – virtual influencer created by Brud studio using CGI technology;*

[2] "I" denotes an influencer. The number serves as her identifier. The specific codes of the influencers included in the study are presented in the *Methods and materials* section.

- *Rory S (@rorys2001) (I4) – virtual influencer generated using AI, as stated in her profile "AI-generated human";*
- *Aitana Lopez (I5) – virtual model and influencer created by the Spanish agency The Clueless using AI.*

We considered including male influencers as well, but this would have exceeded the scope of this study, as gender specifics would have introduced another independent variable into the testing.



Scheme 1: Classification of virtual influencers according to their technological origin

Source: own processing, based on popularity rankings (Discover The Top 15 Virtual Influencers for 2022, influencermarketinghub.com (access: 29.04.2025)).

In selecting bipolar adjectives, we relied on research by Robina Ohanian (1990), who verified psychometrically relevant identifiers of trustworthiness through two studies: Dependable, Honest, Reliable, Sincere, and Trustworthy. She reports construct reliability at the level of 0.89.

Data collection was conducted via an online platform. The online platform automatically displayed photos of influencers to each respondent in random order to prevent unwanted bias due to the so-called order effect. All respondents had the 16PF items in the same standardized order, as specified and required by the questionnaire manual.

For statistical data comparison, we used correlation coefficients, Q-correlations, paired t-tests, regression analyses (and others), and processed the data using Excel spreadsheets and SPSS statistical software.

Research sample

A total of 175 respondents were approached; after excluding incomplete protocols (if data from any of the implemented methods were missing, we had to exclude the respondent from the analyses), the research sample consisted of 135 respondents, university students from three Slovak universities, with an average age of 21.24 years (with SD = 3.56 years); the sample was relatively

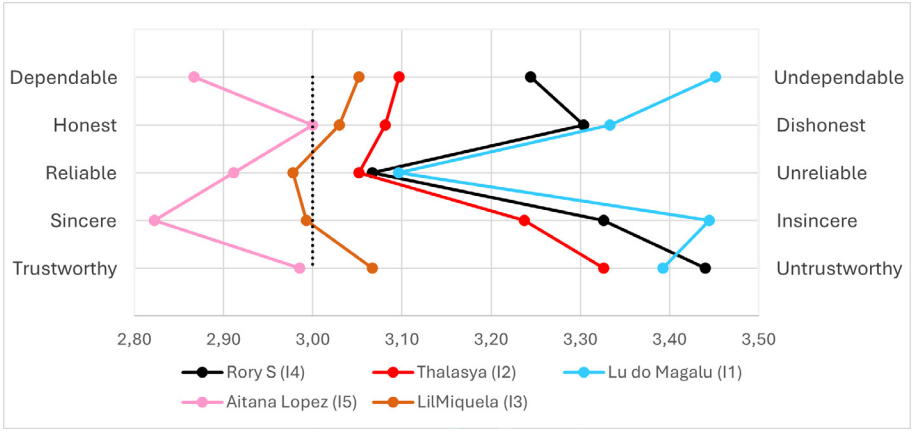
homogeneous in this respect. Women outnumbered men in the sample (102 women, 32 men, one respondent did not provide an answer). We address the limitations related to the predominance of women in more detail in the research limitations section. Respondents were recruited at two universities in Slovakia. Participation in the research was voluntary, and respondents could participate in the research as an optional activity in their courses. Before the study, they gave their consent to participate. If interested, they could receive individually and discreetly adjusted results of one of the methods (16PF) for their participation in the study. For those who expressed interest, the data was anonymized immediately after the results were given to the respondent. For the others, the data was anonymized before cleaning and scoring.

Given that the sample consisted of university students, it was not homogeneous in terms of nationality or native language (the sample included respondents of Slovak, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Czech, Hungarian, and Russian nationality). We consider this fact rather positive, as it tended more toward the multicultural impact of influencers.

Results and discussion

In general, it can be stated that the tested artificially created female influencers do not enjoy much trust among young adult university students in Slovakia. Scores for individual trust attributes were slightly in the negatively valenced range for four of the five influencers (QP1). Only Aitana Lopez (I5) was perceived positively in terms of trustworthiness (overall score = 2.92), who, among the studied influencers, is the only one perceived as sincere, reliable, and dependable. Lil Miquela (I3) achieved an almost indifferent score, with average ratings oscillating around the middle range. Lu do Magalu (I1) was designated as the least trustworthy influencer (overall average score for all trustworthiness factors = 3.34).

These results are illustrated in Graph 2. The curves of four of the five evaluated influencers are situated in the second part of the graph – in the half with negative connotations, indicating individual attributes of untrustworthiness. These findings correspond with the results of authors Abhinav Choudhry, Jinda Han, Xiaoyu Xu, and Yun Huang (2022), who found in their research that recipients were reluctant to attribute trustworthiness to VIs in general, even if they showed trust in a limited area (such as music, games, art, etc.).



Graph 2: Trustworthiness profiles according to five pairs of adjectives for the observed virtual influencers

Note. Legend: x < 3 positive evaluation, 3 = neutral evaluation (dotted dividing line), x > 3 negative evaluation.

Source: Author's own research

Table 1: Results of Q-correlations of similarity between credibility profiles of individual influencers created by AI

	Thalasya (I2)	LilMiquela (I3)	Rory S (I4)	Aitana Lopez (I5)
Lu do Magalu (I1)	0.533	0.600	0.763	–0.250
Thalasya (I2)		0.418	0.831	0.036
LilMiquela (I3)			0.693	0.453
Rory S (I4)				0.278

Source: Author's own research.

We also compared the profile curves using statistics (Q-correlations) (Table 1). Q-correlation values are interpreted similarly to classic correlation coefficients and can likewise range from -1 to 1. The stronger the Q-correlation, the more similar the curves (profiles). The most significant similarity was recorded between the trustworthiness profile of influencer Rory S (I4) and Thalsy (I2) (QP2). The profile of influencer Rory S (I4) also shows similarity with Lu do Magalu (I1) (0.763). Conversely, the profiles of Lu do Magalu (I1) and Aitana Lopez (I5) are the most distinctly different.

In terms of QP3 and its sub-questions, we compared the averages of trustworthiness factors regarding the significance of differences for individual attributes. Due to their considerable scope, we present the results in the appendix (Appendix 2, Table A). From the data provided, it can be stated that the most significant differences between compared pairs of influencers

are in the attributes of dependability (QP3.1) and honesty (QP3.2). Significant differences were also recorded in some comparisons in the attributes of reliability (QP3.3) and sincerity (QP3.4). We did not record any significant differences in the trustworthy attribute (QP3.5).

The comparison of perceived trustworthiness attributes of virtual influencers whose simulation of a real human being is more pronounced and difficult for observers to distinguish from a real person (I4 and I5, so-called AI-generated) versus those whose artificial origin is evident (I1, I2, I3, i.e., CGI-generated) did not yield statistically significant results (Table 2). For question QP4, we can answer that both types of influencers do not differ in perceived trustworthiness. That is, trustworthiness is not an attribute of their similarity to humans (which is somewhat contrary to Masahiro Mori's "Uncanny Valley" theory (1970)). Similarly, authors Thitinan Sorosrungruang, Nisreen Ameen, and Chris Hackley (2024) state that if we want to emphasize brand authenticity, we should "avoid overly perfect aesthetic design" of an artificial influencer (ibid. 2024: 3140).

Table 2: Average values of perceived trustworthiness factors of influencers by recipients and significance of differences between the CGI and AI influencer groups

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
								Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	GGI_1	3.1924	.91938	.07913	.13689	.98891	.08511	-.0314	.30523	1.608	.110
	AI_1	3.0556	.88027	.07576							
Pair 2	GGI_2	3.1481	.92979	.08002	-.0038	1.0453	.08996	-.1817	.17415	-.042	.967
	AI_2	3.1519	.90660	.07803							
Pair 3	GGI_3	3.0420	.93342	.08034	.05311	1.0243	.08816	-.1212	.22747	.602	.548
	AI_3	2.9889	.89665	.07717							
Pair 4	GGI_4	3.2244	.93386	.08037	.08981	-.0272	.32800	1.674	.08981	-.0273	.096
	AI_4	3.0741	.97069	.08354							
Pair 5	GGI_5	3.2619	.91013	.07833	.06193	.97292	.08374	-.1037	.22754	.740	.461
	AI_5	3.2000	.92276	.07942							

Note. Legend:
Pair 1 = Dependable – Undependable
Pair 2 = Honest – Dishonest
Pair 3 = Reliable – Unreliable
Pair 4 = Sincere – Insincere
Pair 5 = Trustworthy – Untrustworthy
CGI-generated: Lu do Magalu (I1), Thalasya (I2), LilMiquela (I3),
AI-generated: Rory S (I4), Aitana Lopez (I5)
Source: Author's own research

Table 3: Results of multiple linear regressions between overall trustworthiness variables of artificially created virtual influencers and selected personality factors of recipients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
trust_RoryS and IM	-.072	.025	-.345	-2.900	.004**
trust_Thalasya and IM	-.078	.031	-.310	-2.519	.013*
trust_I_Lu_of_Magalu and F	-.077	.030	-.282	-2.563	.012*
trust_AitanaLopez and F	-.077	.026	-.321	-2.919	.004**
trust_LilMiguela and IM	-.068	.032	-.263	-2.142	.034*

Note. We have summarized only statistically significant results in the table.
Legend:
IM = Impression Management scale
F = "Liveliness" scale (full of life vs. serious)
Source: Author's own research

The next research question (QP5) focused on the relationships between personality traits of recipients – young adults – and their perception of trustworthiness in virtual influencers. We first identified personality dimensions according to the 16-factor personality questionnaire (Cattell et al. 1997); the results are presented in Appendix 3, Table B. We converted raw scores to stens for interpretation. Respondents in the studied sample of university students were dreamy, imaginative, idea-oriented (M+), emotionally unstable, reactive (E-) – in this factor, the sample was relatively more heterogeneous (relatively higher sd), sensitive, perceptive, sentimental (I+) (although here, there is also a higher SD). They are also open to changes (Q+), full of life, vibrant, and spontaneous (F+), but at the same time fearful and self-doubting (O+), tense, and internally restless (Q4+). These last three traits could have been reflected in the perception of virtual influencers – on one hand, openness to change and new technologies; on the other hand, a certain ambivalence expressed as distrust. Respondents also tended personally toward a type that adapts rules and is nonconformist (G-). The IM score was 9.45 (out of 24), suggesting a tendency to be willing to admit undesirable attributes or behavior.

We confronted findings regarding personality variables with perceived attributes of trustworthiness of virtual influencers by recipients (QP5). We recorded significant negative linear regressions (relationships) between the IM factor (creating a good impression; as mentioned, our respondents scored low on this dimension, thus admitting their own undesirable behavior) and

the overall score of perceived trust in influencers Rory S, Thalasya, and Lil Miguela. This means that the higher the distrust in influencers, the higher the IM (socially desirable behavior), indicating that low trust in VI is associated with admitting one's own socially undesirable behavior. Similarly, respondents who are more spontaneous have lower trust in virtual influencers.

Research limitations

The research provided stimuli for the field of media communication; however, given some specifics, we can interpret these results only with great caution. In the research, we included only artificially created female influencers (girls), so the findings do not represent the perception of artificially created influencers in general. At the same time, the question of gender needs to be kept in mind regarding the target groups of these influencers, even though in our research, we did not focus on their persuasiveness in marketing communication or other similar contexts; it can be assumed that men will perceive them differently from women recipients. The research sample was not gender-balanced and was relatively small. Given the limited possibilities of purchasing a panel of respondents, this study included young adults attending universities, so the sample does not cover young adults outside university education.

The results, therefore, cannot be generalized to the entire population of young adults; rather, the data represent a specific group of university students studying in Slovakia. The presented findings should thus be interpreted within this context. Future research could address these limitations by conducting surveys on a randomized representative sample. We consider this study a pilot for further research in this area.

Conclusion

The pilot study brought some indicated directions of perception of artificially created influencers in a group of young adults studying at universities in Slovakia. The results showed that:

- the perception of credibility of artificially created influencers is individualized;
- influencers are perceived as rather untrustworthy, rather undependable, and rather insincere;
- the credibility profiles are most similar for influencers Rory S (I4) and Thalasya (I2);
- the credibility profiles of Lu do Magalu (I1) and Aitana Lopez (I5) differ;

- the compared influencers differ most significantly in the attributes dependable and honest;
- influencers generated by CGI and influencers generated by AI do not differ in perceived credibility by recipients (young adults);
- of the 16 personality factors from Cattell's questionnaire, only two (factor IM – impression management and factor F – liveliness/spontaneity) correlate with the perception of trust in virtual – artificial influencers (both CGI and AI types);
- there is a significant correlation between recipients' self-admitted socially undesirable behavior and low trust in influencers Rory S (AI), Thalasya (CGI), and Lil Miguela (CGI), i.e., a low score value in the impression management factor (IM) correlates with a low value of trust in virtual influencers (I4, I2, I3);
- there is a significant correlation between higher spontaneity of recipients (factor F) and lower trust in virtual influencers in general.

Virtual, artificially created influencers are becoming an increasingly common reality, providing new opportunities for targeted marketing communication. Their main advantage is that marketers have full control over the content of communication, as well as customization of appearance, behavior, and reactions.

Digital influencers have seemingly created a close relationship with their audience, which differs from that of traditional celebrities. Their recommendations are perceived as authentic rather than as advertising (Moreira et al. 2021), although, as the results of the present study have shown, they still have certain shortcomings in the area of trust-building. Only one of the examined influencers was perceived as dependable and sincere.

Our research supports previous studies (e.g., Qu & Baek 2024; Choudhry, Han, Xu, & Huang 2022; Muniz, Stewart, & Magalhães 2024) and shows that if virtual influencers are to match their human, tiring, and not always predictable predecessors in the future, it is necessary to work on building trust in them. They still have significant room for improvement in this area, regardless of whether they visually perfectly copy human models (VIs created by AI) or there are still noticeable inaccuracies (VIs created by CGI). On the other hand, results indicating a certain degree of distrust among young people towards VIs likely demonstrate their caution and developed critical thinking, which is welcome in times of media manipulation and deep fakes.

In this regard, it is also necessary to take into account the ethical context of this form of marketing communication. From this perspective, the use of AI influencers in the public sphere poses a significant problem, particularly in terms of transparency and the potential manipulation of recipients. Prokopowicz and Matosek (2024) point out that if it is not clearly disclosed that the entity is artificially created, it may lead to a deliberate distortion of

reality and deception of the audience, which stands in direct contradiction to the principles of media ethics. Within a broader philosophical framework, these phenomena can also be interpreted through the lens of posthumanist discourse, as discussed by Haraway (1991), who highlights the blurring of boundaries between humans and technology and the emergence of new forms of digital identity, the authenticity and accountability of which remain subject to debate. Questions of appropriate regulation through clear guidelines (such as Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of June 13, 2024) are becoming increasingly pressing, ensuring consumer protection on the one hand, while on the other hand allowing the potential of this form of communication to be effectively implemented into brand strategies.

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Appendices

Figure 1: Images of artificial influencers used in the research

Lu do Magalu (I1)	Thalasya (I2)	Lil Miquela (I3)
Rory S (I4)	Aitana Lopez (I5)	

Note. Source:
Lu do Magalu (I1) https://www.virtualhumans.org/human/lu-do-magalu,
Thalasya (I2) https://www.virtualhumans.org/human/thalasya,
Lil Miquela (I3), https://greenparrot.pl/blog/czy-w-reklamie-bedzie-dziwniej/,
Rory S (I4) https://framerusercontent.com/images/TiAecv1KXP8qs0R6bPs21BdNBU.png,
Aitana Lopez (I5) https://static.euronews.com/articles/stories/08/05/91/16/1920x1080_cmsv2_df1bbc67-2d7e-5b78-bcdc-4321fd474aad-8059116.jpg

Table A: Significance of differences between individual attributes of perceived trustworthiness by respondents for the influencers compared

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sg (2-tialed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	I4_1 - I2_1	.08889	1.54759	.13320	-.17455	.35233	.667	134	.506
Pair 2	I4_2 - I2_2	.12687	1.35125	.11673	-.10402	.35775	1.087	133	.279
Pair 3	**I4_3 - I2_3**	-.34328	1.59465	.13776	-.61576	-.07081	-2.49	133	.014*
Pair 4	**I4_4 - I2_4**	-.25185	1.26207	.10862	-.46669	-.03702	-2.32	134	.022*
Pair 5	I4_5 - I2_5	-.04444	1.44484	.12435	-.29039	.20150	-.357	134	.721
Pair 6	I4_1 – I1_1	-.11852	1.44063	.12399	-.36375	.12671	-.956	134	.341
Pair 7	I4_2 - I1_2	.05970	1.34757	.11641	-.17056	.28996	.513	133	.609
Pair 8	I4_3 - I1_3	.23134	1.60785	.13890	-.04339	.50608	1.666	133	.098
Pair 9	I4_4 - I1_4	.08148	1.46630	.12620	-.16812	.33108	.646	134	.520
Pair 10	I4_5 - I1_5	.14074	1.56531	.13472	-.12571	.40719	1.045	134	.298
Pair 11	**I4_1 – I5_1**	.50370	1.35423	.11655	.27318	.73423	4.322	134	.000***
Pair 12	**I4_2 - I5_2**	.45522	1.34676	.11634	.22510	.68534	3.913	133	.000***
Pair 13	I4_3 - I5_3	.03731	1.47870	.12774	-.21535	.28998	.292	133	.771
Pair 14	I4_5 - I5_5	.07407	1.40696	.12109	-.16543	.31357	.612	134	.542
Pair 15	**I4_1 – I3_1**	.33333	1.50621	.12963	.07694	.58973	2.571	134	.011*
Pair 16	**I4_2 - I3_2**	.36567	1.51455	.13084	.10688	.62446	2.795	133	.006**
Pair 17	I4_3 - I3_3	.11194	1.49516	.12916	-.14354	.36742	.867	133	.388
Pair 18	I4_4 - I3_4	.08889	1.41667	.12193	-.15226	.33004	.729	134	.467
Pair 19	I4_5 - I3_5	-.01481	1.48115	.12748	-.26694	.23731	-.116	134	.908
Pair 20	I2_1 - I1_1	-.20741	1.37730	.11854	-.44186	.02704	-1.75	134	.082
Pair 21	I2_2 - I1_2	-.06667	1.44139	.12406	-.31203	.17869	-.537	134	.592
Pair 22	**I2_3 - I1_3**	.58519	1.44235	.12414	.33966	.83071	4.714	134	.000***
Pair 23	**I2_4 - I1_4**	.33333	1.33830	.11518	.10552	.56114	2.894	134	.004**
Pair 24	I2_5 - I1_5	.18519	1.48718	.12800	-.06797	.43834	1.447	134	.150
Pair 25	I2_1 - I5_1	.41481	1.56637	.13481	.14818	.68145	3.077	134	.003**
Pair 26	I2_2 - I5_2	.34074	1.46177	.12581	.09191	.58957	2.708	134	.008**
Pair 27	I2_3 - I5_3	.40000	1.53662	.13225	.13843	.66157	3.025	134	.003**
Pair 28	I2_4 - I5_4	.30370	1.39976	.12047	.06543	.54198	2.521	134	.013*

Pair 29	I2_5 - I5_5	.11852	1.49153	.12837	-.13538	.37241	.923	134	.358
Pair 30	I2_1 - I3_1	.24444	1.40610	.12102	.00509	.48380	2.020	134	.045*
Pair 31	I2_2 - I3_2	.25926	1.43497	.12350	.01499	.50353	2.099	134	.038*
Pair 32	I2_3 - I3_3	.47407	1.46517	.12610	.22467	.72348	3.759	134	.000***
Pair 33	I2_4 - I3_4	.34074	1.37224	.11810	.10715	.57433	2.885	134	.005**
Pair 34	I2_5 - I3_5	.02963	1.53536	.13214	-.23173	.29098	.224	134	.823
Pair 35	**I1_1 - I3_1**	.45185	1.34785	.11600	.22242	.68129	3.895	134	.000***
Pair 36	**I1_2 - I3_2**	.32593	1.45494	.12522	.07826	.57359	2.603	134	.010*
Pair 37	I1_3 - I3_3	-.11111	1.51444	.13034	-.36891	.14668	-.852	134	.395
Pair 38	I1_4 - I3_4	.00741	1.49375	.12856	-.24686	.26168	.058	134	.954
Pair 39	I1_5 - I3_5	-.15556	1.45513	.12524	-.40325	.09214	-1.24	134	.216
Pair 40	I5_1 - I3_1	-.17037	1.41179	.12151	-.41069	.06995	-1.40	134	.163
Pair 41	I5_2 - I3_2	-.08148	1.48652	.12794	-.33452	.17156	-.637	134	.525
Pair 42	I5_3 - I3_3	.07407	.86066	.07407	-.07243	.22058	1.000	134	.319
Pair 43	I5_4 - I3_4	.03704	.85000	.07316	-.10765	.18173	.506	134	.613
Pair 44	I5_5 - I3_5	-.08889	.85052	.07320	-.23367	.05589	-1.21	134	.227

Note. Legend:
Lu do Magalu (I1), Thalasya (I2), LilMiquela (I3), Rory S (I4), Aitana Lopez (I5)
1 = Dependable - Undependable
2 = Honest - Dishonest
3 = Reliable - Unreliable
4 = Sincere - Insincere
5 = Trustworthy - Untrustworthy
Source: Author's own research

Table B: Average scores of personality factors of recipients

	A	B	C	E	F	G	H	I	L	M	N	O	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	IM
AM	14.35	8.33	9.19	12.39	12.35	11.36	8.73	15.01	12.75	11.47	11.95	14.07	17.70	11.43	11.85	12.80	9.45
Sten*	*5*	*5*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*6*	*7*	*6*	*6*	*6*	*6*	*5*	*6*	*38*
sd	*3.85*	*2.06*	*4.72*	*3.87*	*3.93*	*3.79*	*5.72*	*4.25*	*3.33*	*4.68*	*4.15*	*3.98*	*4.49*	*4.57*	*4.28*	*4.26*	*4.32*

Note. Legend: * for IM, stanines are not available, but the percentile is
Source: Author's own research

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe and critically evaluate the continuity of the development of influencers (both real human influencers and digitally created ones – so-called artificial influencers) with contexts involving a deeper exploration into the issue of simulation (simulacrum) and the human desire for extraordinary stimuli. The contribution includes not only a critical reflection on the development and changes in the field of influencers, but also a pilot study where the aim is to determine whether young adults perceive virtual influencers (CGI and AI) as trustworthy and, simultaneously, whether there is a relationship between personality traits and trust in artificially created influencers (virtual influencers). The study involved 135 respondents, and we used Cattell's 16 PF questionnaire (1997) and a polarity profile inspired by R. Ohanian (1990). The results showed, among other things, that VIs are perceived as rather untrustworthy, rather undependable, and rather insincere. At the same time, we found that influencers generated by CGI and influencers generated by AI do not differ in perceived credibility by recipients. Of the 16 personality factors in Cattell's questionnaire, only two – factor IM (impression management) and factor F (liveliness/spontaneity) – correlate with the perception of trust in virtual or artificial influencers (both CGI and AI types). The results are discussed not only in the context of media practice but also in the context of the critical thinking of young people in the era of media manipulation.

Słowa kluczowe: influencerzy, sztuczni influencerzy, symulakrum, cechy osobowości, zaufanie

Keywords: influencers, artificial influencers, simulacrum, personality traits, trust

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