Age, Race, Gender: Exploring How Demographic Cues of Virtual Influencers Shape Consumer Responses in Pro-Environmental Campaigns

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Abstract:

This research examines how virtual influencer (VI) demographic cues—age, race, and gender—shape consumer responses in pro-environmental campaigns. Moving beyond anthropomorphism, we investigate how socially meaningful demographic portrayals influence stereotype-based evaluations and downstream outcomes. Drawing on the Stereotype Content Model, we conducted two between-subjects online experiments in the U.S., manipulating VI demographic cues to examine their effects on perceived warmth and competence and subsequent purchase and pro-environmental intentions. Results show that intersecting demographic cues produce compound effects on social perception, with older racial minority/non-White female VIs eliciting higher warmth and competence, which in turn enhance both outcomes. The findings extend the Stereotype Content Model to the virtual domain and demonstrate the importance of compound stereotype research, offering guidance for inclusive and effective VI design in sustainability-focused campaigns.

Keywords: virtual influencers; stereotype content model; pro-environmental campaigns