Virtual influencer vs. human influencer: The impact of fitspiration content on well-being and a healthier lifestyle

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Fitspiration might be suitable to nudge Instagram users towards a healthier lifestyle and overcome several diseases, on the one hand. Several studies, on the other hand, have shown that exposure to fitspiration images can pose risks. With the emergence of human-like virtual influencers, new opportunities for the advertising industry arise. However, research investigating the impact of content created by human influencers (HI) vs. human-like virtual influencers (HVI) on well-being and a healthier lifestyle is rare. Thus, we developed a conceptual model and conducted an empirical study between November and December 2025 with a final sample of n=388 female respondents. Results show that each dimension of credibility of fitspiration posts has a different effect on the intention to exercise, partly driven by comparison processes and well-being as mediators, which can further strengthen healthy eating intentions. We also found moderating differences between HVIs and HIs. Implications and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: fitspiration, Instagram, well-being, virtual influencer

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