Does Diversity Representation Matter?

Examining How Parasocial Interaction and Influencer Virtuality Shape Dual Attitudes

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Traditional advertising has been criticized for limited diversity and the stereotyping or underrepresentation of minority groups. In response, brands increasingly collaborate with diverse influencers to signal diversity, equity, and inclusion. While prior research has explored how human influencers present diverse identities, virtual influencers introduce a new, technologically-mediated form of diversity representation. Despite individuals may explicitly endorse inclusive values, implicit stereotypes can still persist, and this dissociation has rarely been studied in diversity-related influencer contexts. This study examines whether influencer diversity influences attitudes toward both the represented group and the associated brand through parasocial interaction. An experiment (N = 136) using a 2 (influencer diversity) x 2 (influencer virtuality) between-subject design was conducted. Both self-repeated measures and implicit association tests were used to measure attitudes. Results show that parasocial interaction plays a key but context-dependent role in shaping attitudes, and that diversity effects do not differ between human and virtual influencers.

Keywords: virtual influencer; parasocial interaction; diversity; dual attitudes; IAT