VISUAL REVIEW | Vol. 18, No. 6, 2026 | ISSN 2695-9631
International Visual Culture Review / Revista Internacional de Cultura Visual
https://doi.org/10.62161/revvisual.v18.6400

FASHION AVATARS AS COMMUNICATIVE SUBJECTS IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

BELEN RODRÍGUEZ CÁNOVAS [1]
brcanovas@ucm.es
ALFREDO GUZMÁN RINCÓN[2]
alfredo.Guzman@asturias.edu.co
[1]Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España
[2] Corporación Asturias, España

KEYWORDS
Digital avatars
Virtual fashion
Digital identity
Digital credibility
Artificial intelligence
Visual communication
Digital culture

ABSTRACT
Avatars and virtual models in fashion are changing how we understand image, credibility, and online identity. They're not mere illustrations: they act as real characters on social media, posing and communicating. This study examines how these digital figures, created through AI or design, redefine concepts like authenticity and trust. Unlike real influencers, avatars generate credibility through their aesthetic and visual narrative rather than lived experiences. Fashion becomes a laboratory where new forms of media presence are tested, bringing profound transformations to digital culture.

Received: 25/ 05 / 2026
Accepted: 10/ 08 / 2026

1. Introduction

Fashion has historically been much more than the production of clothing. It has functioned as a unique space for visual experimentation around the body, identity, and desire. From fashion photography to the runway show, the image has been the primary vehicle through which aesthetic, social, and cultural values have been created. In the contemporary digital context, this centrality of the visual is not only maintained but intensified.

In recent years, a phenomenon has emerged that introduces a significant change in the digital environment of fashion. This phenomenon will have an even greater presence in the future and refers to the emergence of avatars, virtual models, and virtual influencers created through artificial intelligence, design, and animation technologies. These figures are not real and do not have real experiences, yet they behave as if they were. They pose, interact with others, and communicate on social platforms such as Instagram. In this way, they are occupying an increasingly important place in how we think about fashion. Unlike people who are models or influencers, virtual influencers or avatars do not have a personal history, have not lived experiences, and do not have a physical body. However, they function symbolically as presences that audiences recognize and consider stable.

Much of the research on the digitalization of fashion has focused primarily on concepts such as the metaverse, Web3, or NFTs, approaching these new phenomena from a mainly technological or economic perspective. However, these lines of work do not address, within fashion communication, other recent phenomena in the digital environment, nor do they discuss what happens when fashion begins to communicate through subjects that do not physically exist but operate as credible presences.

This study does not focus on the technological dimension. The focus is on the communicating subject. Fashion avatars are not merely visual images. They are like actors who change the way we tell stories and think about the body, presence, and credibility in the digital culture that surrounds us.

From this perspective, fashion is a place where new ways of being in the media are experimented with. The value we assign to certain things is used to make these new forms accepted. Fashion avatars are a form of expression that reflects changes in society. These changes are reflected in the way people see themselves and express themselves through clothing and style. Fashion moves forward and shows what may happen in the future in terms of visual culture.

The objective of this study is to analyze how fashion avatars operate as communicative subjects on Instagram and what implications their use has for the construction of authenticity, trust, and the relationship with the audience. To this end, a qualitative study is conducted based on the visual and discursive analysis of a selection of fashion avatars with an active presence on this platform.

2. Virtual Avatars and Digital Influencers: Beyond Technological Representation

The phenomenon of virtual avatars in digital marketing is a recent but underexplored trend (Audrezet et al., 2025). With the advancement of artificial intelligence, the presence and influence of these figures will increase. New technologies will bring new opportunities to make them more attractive, interactive, and scalable.

Virtual avatars consist of digital representations that, beyond being simple images created through computer design, act as communicative subjects with symbolic agency (Nowak & Fox, 2018). These characters are conceptualized as "computer-generated influencers" (CGI influencers) and imitate human communicative strategies while introducing distinctive elements (Moustakas et al., 2020). Unlike earlier conceptualizations that understood avatars as extensions of human users in digital environments, current virtual influencers operate as autonomous entities with their own personality, biography, and style, without a physical existence (Audrezet & Koles, 2023). Some cases, such as Lil Miquela, with 2.3 million followers on Instagram, or Shudu Gram, have collaborated with luxury brands such as Balmain and Prada. These collaborations demonstrate that these synthetic characters go beyond technological curiosity and represent potential strategic communication tools capable of generating significant brand impact.

Academic research has approached the phenomenon of avatars from different perspectives. From the field of marketing, studies have primarily focused on the advertising effectiveness of these digital characters compared to human influencers. Belanche et al. (2024) reveal that virtual influencers are perceived as more suitable for utilitarian products, whereas human influencers are more effective for hedonic products. Meng et al. (2024) also demonstrated that consumer preferences for self-

improvement products such as functional beverages increase when they are promoted by a virtual influencer.

The results are paradoxical. Although consumers recognize the artificial nature of these characters, many show responses that are comparable to, or even greater than, those generated by human influencers. This challenges traditional theories of persuasive communication, which assumed that credibility depended exclusively on the humanity of the source.

Anthropomorphism emerges as a central concept for understanding the communicative effectiveness of virtual avatars and their impact on relationships with followers (Liu & Wang, 2025). Studies show that when these digital entities display anthropomorphic characteristics such as human-like appearance, recognizable emotional expressions, or natural communication patterns, users tend to process them through interpersonal schemas similar to those activated in human relationships. Perceived humanity, attractiveness, and an element of mystery influence the strength of parasocial relationships. This effect is mediated by trust and illusory identification, while the autonomy of the virtual influencer acts as a moderating variable. This phenomenon generates what Hennig-Thurau et al. (2023) refer to as "digital social presence," a perception of psychological closeness that transcends the physical materiality of the body. However, this artificial humanization also produces tensions. The concept of the "uncanny valley," proposed by Masahiro Mori in the field of robotics, becomes particularly relevant in the study of virtual avatars (Baake et al., 2025). When the realism of these characters reaches a critical point, being too human to be perceived as cartoons, yet not sufficiently human to be mistaken for real people, responses reveal degrees of discomfort and rejection. This conflict between formal realism and perceived authenticity constitutes one of the main challenges for the industry and an area of intense academic research.

The fashion industry has shown openness to the adoption of virtual influencers and is currently the sector with the highest penetration of these technologies (Audrezet et al., 2025). Brands such as Gucci have experimented with digital collections on platforms such as Roblox and Decentraland. Likewise, iconic haute couture houses such as Dior have integrated CGI avatars into their brand communication campaigns. This adoption is not coincidental, given that the fashion industry is fundamentally visual and symbolic, and virtual influencers represent the ideal tool for experimentation without the physical limitations of the real world. The advantages that virtual influencers offer brands are multiple. On the one hand, they allow total control over image and message; on the other, they ensure constant availability without saturation or personal controversies; and they also enable visual experimentation without physical constraints (Liyanaarachchi et al., 2024). However, as Koles et al. (2024) point out, similarly to what occurs in the metaverse, there are challenges related to the perception of authenticity, consumer trust, and the ethical implications of presenting artificial entities as if they were real people.

2.1. Authenticity, Trust, and Credibility in Digital Environments

In brand communication, authenticity is key in any context; in the case of virtual influencers, even more so. Understanding whether something entirely artificial can be perceived as authentic is therefore possible and relevant (Yoo et al., 2023, 2025).

Based on the Entity-Referent Correspondence Framework of Authenticity proposed by Moulard et al. (2021), Koles et al. (2024) analyze how different forms of authenticity are configured in the case of virtual influencers. Through interviews with consumers and industry experts, the authors show that the three dimensions of authenticity, faithfulness to the ideal, faithfulness to facts, and faithfulness to oneself, can also manifest in these digital characters. Their findings suggest that, contrary to traditional approaches, the ideal referents used to evaluate authenticity do not have to be exclusively human, but may also include virtual entities or fictional characters. This perspective challenges the classical uncanny valley theory (Mori et al., 2012), which assumes the human being as the only legitimate referent for evaluating non-human entities. What matters is not whether the character is real, but whether it acts consistently, recognizably, and generates meaning (Thomas & Fowler, 2021).

On the other hand, Song et al. (2024) found that brands endorsed by virtual influencers tend to be perceived as less authentic than those associated with human influencers. This effect is largely explained by the lower level of authenticity attributed to the virtual influencer itself. However, the study identifies two conditions that qualify this result. First, the negative perception is mitigated when avatars incorporate aesthetic imperfections that bring them closer to more human visual codes. Second, the

effect may even reverse when these characters promote multiple brands, introducing a certain inconsistency that, paradoxically, reinforces their credibility.

Thompson et al. (2025) also explore the processes through which followers construct meaning and identity in relation to virtual influencers. The authors show that users routinely anthropomorphize these digital figures, interacting with them as if they were social actors. This process fosters the creation of a sense of shared reality and emotional connection, partly driven by dynamics of digital escapism. The study calls into question traditional conceptions of authenticity and realism, demonstrating how virtual influencers, despite their artificial nature, can generate intense affective and identity-based responses and transform contemporary forms of influence and self-expression in digital environments.

Studies highlight that trust acts as a mediator between the perception of authenticity and consumer response. In this context, Luo et al. (2025) distinguish between cognitive trust, based on perceptions of competence and reliability, and affective trust, grounded in emotional connections and empathy. Their results reveal that both facets are complementary. Cognitive trust generates rational evaluation, whereas affective trust fosters deeper emotional bonds that lead to brand love and loyalty. In particular, Yu et al. (2024) show that the ability of avatars to express emotions convincingly significantly influences user response. However, this emotional expressiveness must be balanced, as overly exaggerated or mechanical emotions may trigger warning signals that reduce trust.

Another relevant aspect concerns how to build an avatar's credibility. A study by Kim and Park (2024) shows that the credibility of celebrity-type avatars can be explained through three dimensions: attractiveness (both physical and personality-related), expertise (the extent to which they are knowledgeable about the products and brands they represent), and trustworthiness (their degree of integrity and honesty). If avatars display these three dimensions, results comparable to those of human influencers can be achieved.

Social media platforms introduce additional complexity. Avatars represent an optimal tool for use on platforms such as Instagram. This social network has consolidated its position as the leading platform for fashion communication, with 98% of brands in the sector maintaining an active presence on it (Park et al., 2021). Its fundamentally visual nature makes it the ideal ecosystem for an industry in which image is paramount. Through Instagram, it is possible to communicate visual aesthetics effectively, shape and control content, and at the same time create aspiration (Jin & Ryu, 2019). However, the high level of visual and communicative perfection achieved through an avatar may be counterproductive. In this regard, Bonilla et al. (2024) refer to "calculated imperfection": when content displays signs of imperfection and spontaneity, emotional connection and brand attachment increase, as excessive perfection is not perceived as credible.

Another relevant area is transparency. According to Lim and Lee (2023), revealing the artificial identity of a virtual influencer has contrasting effects. For some users, it is perceived as a signal of corporate honesty and authenticity, whereas for others, it leads to disappointment and disillusionment with the brand.

2. Objectives

Despite the growing interest in virtual influencers and fashion, current studies present certain limitations from a communication perspective. Most research has focused on measuring how well advertisements perform, whether consumers like them, or whether they generate engagement. However, less attention has been given to analyzing avatars as subjects that communicate effectively and possess their own presence and voice online. Furthermore, the literature has addressed authenticity and credibility in general terms, but it remains necessary to further understand how these dimensions are constructed visually and discursively within the specific context of fashion and platforms such as Instagram. Additionally, there are limited qualitative studies that examine the communicative practices and narratives of fashion avatars beyond technological or marketing approaches, in order to understand the changes they entail in digital visual culture.

The objective of this study is to explore how fashion avatars act as communicative subjects in digital environments, specifically examining how they construct presence, embodiment, and credibility through images. It seeks to understand how these figures, which do not have physical bodies or real-life histories, manage to occupy a recognizable and legitimate place in digital spaces. It also aims to examine the role of fashion as a site for the experimentation of new ideas, where new forms of representing the body and identity are tested on social media platforms such as Instagram.

Based on these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following question: How do fashion avatars construct their visual presence and credibility?

This question makes it possible to approach the phenomenon of avatars from a visual and communicative perspective, focusing on the aesthetic and narrative resources that sustain the avatar's presence and on the transformations they generate in the digital environment and culture.

3. Methodology

With the aim of understanding how fashion avatars act as communicative subjects in digital environments, this study conducts qualitative research through a visual and narrative analysis of fashion avatars in digital contexts. This type of methodology, consistent with other visual studies and digital cultural analyses (Kozinets, 2015; Rose, 2022), responds to the objectives of the study, which seek not only to examine image content but also to address forms of presence.

To this end, a convenience sample of fashion avatars with an active presence on Instagram was selected. The platform was chosen for its relevance in contemporary visual communication and its central role in the dissemination of digital aesthetics linked to fashion (Duffy, 2021). Five avatars recognized in the field of digital fashion were selected, based on criteria of aesthetic diversity, degree of humanization, and continuity in content production. The avatars analyzed are: Shudu, Noonoouri, Bermuda, Lil Miquela, and The Fabricant. This selection makes it possible to compare different modalities of avatars, ranging from highly humanized figures to proposals centered on the body as an object of design (Table 1).

Table 1. Avatars Analyzed

Avatar	Handle	Followers	Bio	Positioning
Shudu	@shudu.grpam	239K	The World's First Digital Supermodel	Luxury editorial digital model
Noonoouri	@noonoouri	477K	@noonoouri_worldwide @theanatomyofme #NSFW	Cartoon digital icon, activism
Bermuda	@bermudaisbae	207K	Robot Queen	Provocative avatar, Miquela's sister
Lil Miquela	@lilmiquela	2.3M	22, LA, Robot	Activist virtual influencer, pioneer in fashion avatars
The Fabricant	@the_fab_ric_ant	118K	Always Digital	Digital fashion house, not an individual avatar

Source(s): Author's own elaboration, 2025

Ten recent posts were selected from each avatar, resulting in a total of fifty units of analysis. This selection is considered sufficient to identify recurring visual and discursive patterns, in line with qualitative approaches in visual studies, where the focus lies on the construction of meaning rather than statistical representativeness. To ensure coherence and comparability, the following criteria were applied in selecting the posts: a) the ten most recent posts at the time of data collection were selected; b) reposts or images in which the avatar did not clearly appear were excluded; c) posts displaying different types of scenes were included; d) posts providing information about the avatar's voice, tone, and presence were retained. Screenshots were systematically stored during the month of December 2025. Both the images and their accompanying texts were archived, as well as visible metadata (date of publication and follower metrics).

A codebook was developed to analyze the units according to the four dimensions identified in the literature review: elements of embodiment (based on digital presence theory, Biocca et al., 2003), visual presence (grounded in the literature on visual identity in social media, Marwick, 2015), voice construction, and authenticity strategies (Koles et al., 2024). Two researchers familiar with the theoretical framework worked independently in order to minimize individual interpretive bias, following Miles and Huberman (1984).

4. Results

The analysis of the fifty Instagram posts corresponding to the five fashion avatar cases (Shudu, Noonoouri, Bermuda, Miquela, and The Fabricant) reveals that fashion avatars are configured on Instagram as stable visual presences whose credibility does not depend on reference to a physical body, but rather on the aesthetic and narrative coherence they sustain over time. The results are organized according to the four dimensions described in the objectives: representation of the body, visual representation of presence, voice construction, and authenticity management. Table 2 presents a summary of the communicative profile identified. Figures 1, 2, and 3 provide visual examples of these avatars. The findings for each of the dimensions analyzed are described below.

Table 2. Findings: Communicative Profile

Avatar	Form of Presence	Voice	Embodiment	Model of Authenticity
Lil Miquela	Everyday (real spaces, cultural events, travel)	High: first person, personal narrative, opinion	Humanized, realistic, everyday	Narrative (simulated biography, emotions)
Shudu	Editorial, distant (campaigns, studios, runways)	Low: institutional, descriptive	Model: hyperrealistic, idealized	Aesthetic-editorial (brand legitimation, visual coherence)
Noonoouri	Editorial-narrative	Medium: cultural references	Stylized	Character-based (the persona is recognized)
Bermuda	Provocative (selfies, gestures, mirror)	High: irony, confrontation	Exaggerated	Ironic (plays with her own artificiality)
The Fabricant	Conceptual, abstract	Low: institutional, descriptive voice	Non-anatomical; the body as a support for the garment	Aesthetic-conceptual (coherence with the design)

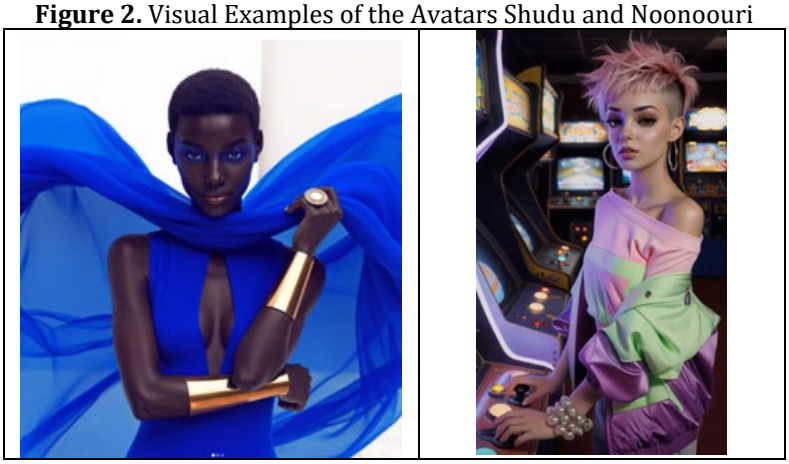
Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025

Figure 1. Visual Examples of the Avatars Miquela and Bermuda



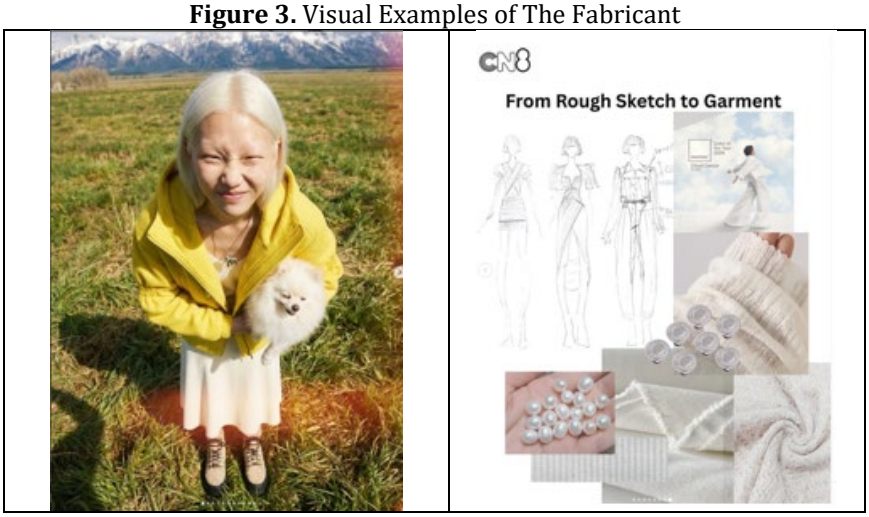
Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025

Figure 2. Visual Examples of the Avatars Shudu and Noonoouri



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025

Figure 3. Visual Examples of The Fabricant



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025

4.1. Embodiment: Representation of the Body

In all the avatars analyzed, the body appears as a controlled visual construction, without references to personal experiences. However, clear differences can be observed in the way each of them communicates. Shudu presents a model-like body that is used to display high-quality fashion garments, serving aspirational fashion imagery. Lil Miquela and Bermuda have highly humanized and realistic bodies that simulate social life. Noonoouri has a stylized and illustrated body, reinforcing her identity as a cultural character. The Fabricant opts for real bodies as a base to showcase digital garment designs. In none of the cases does the body function as evidence of real experience, but rather as an aesthetic element and as a sign of visual identity.

4.2. Forms of Presence

The avatars fill Instagram with codes and styles characteristic of fashion photography. They use editorial poses similar to those found in magazines, perfect framing, and highly elaborate settings. Even when they appear to emulate everyday situations, the staging remains visually controlled. The presence of the virtual influencer is constructed through the repetition of stylistic and aesthetic patterns that build the avatar's identity and make it recognizable, rather than through direct interaction with other subjects. Three main presence strategies can be observed: 1. Everyday or hybrid presence, predominant in Lil Miquela and Bermuda. The avatar appears in everyday scenes such as events and travel (California, Dubai) to reinforce the idea of "being in the world"; 2. Editorial or magazine presence, dominated by Shudu, where the image constitutes a controlled fashion piece with no reference to everyday life experiences; 3. Conceptual presence, in the case of The Fabricant, where the visual scene focuses on the digital garment and the body does not acquire central prominence. Noonoouri combines editorial presence with narrative and cultural elements, functioning more as a creative character than as a conventional influencer. It is therefore evident that Instagram allows avatars to choose whether to appear close or distant.

4.3. Voice Strategy

Clear differences can be observed in the construction of voice and in the way the avatars speak. A distinction can be made between a strong voice (avatars constructed as "someone" speaking in the first person) and a subdued voice (avatars functioning as an editorial piece). Lil Miquela and Bermuda more frequently use a first-person voice, expressing what they think or how they feel. This contributes to creating a close and recognizable presence that makes the audience feel connected to them. Lil Miquela uses the first person in 90% of her posts. Her tone resembles thinking aloud and combines glamour with vulnerability. Posts about cultural events alternate with moments of reflective solitude. She constructs a complex identity, and her voice not only communicates but also takes ideological positions on issues such as the celebration of diversity and social justice activism. She presents herself as a character who "lives." Bermuda uses a provocative register. She shares her thoughts on cultural events and also speaks about moments of solitude in which she reflects. This shows that she is a complex character with many

facets. Her way of speaking not only recounts events but also conveys her views on important issues such as celebrating diversity and fighting for social justice. Bermuda presents herself as someone who lives life to the fullest. By contrast, Shudu speaks in a more subdued and calm tone. Her posts focus on describing elements and giving credit to the people who work with her, such as photographers, brands, and stylists. Shudu does not share personal stories, which differentiates her from Bermuda. There is no speaking "I"; the institution speaks. Noonoouri occupies an intermediate position, combining cultural and creative references with a controlled voice. The Fabricant presents a technical-corporate voice linked to the design process and to the digital garment as an object. It uses an institutional "we" that declares a manifesto ("Always Digital," democratization of fashion, sustainability) rather than a personal narrative.

4.4. Management of Authenticity

Regarding the identification of strategies to manage authenticity in a paradoxical way, different results are observed. In her biography, Lil Miquela states that she is "22, LA, Robot," establishing transparency about her artificial and synthetic nature. Her posts project humanity in the form of emotions (reflecting at sunrise), social life (sitting on benches with friends), travel (Dubai), and moments of introspection. This combination of being artificial and human at the same time constitutes her brand identity. Miquela is "authentically artificial." Bermuda relies on imperfection, using less polished poses to appear more real. Shudu, through her biography "The World's First Digital Supermodel," presents herself as the first digital supermodel in the world and demonstrates transparency about what she is and how she operates as a model. The authenticity of her brand identity lies in the fact that she is not real but is consistently perfect in her modeling function; she represents the technical perfection required in the world of editorials and runway shows. The case of Noonoouri introduces an intermediate model of authenticity management. In contrast to Lil Miquela, Noonoouri does not construct a narrative of everyday life nor simulate personal experience; and unlike Shudu, she does not limit herself to a purely editorial function. Her authenticity is grounded in a creative and cultural identity, built on the coherence of the cultural character and the constant reference to artistic, musical, or fashion projects. Noonoouri does not aim to appear real, but rather to remain consistent with herself as a creative figure, generating a sustained form of authenticity over time. The Fabricant constructs authenticity in a different way, through the democratization of fashion. The results show a predominance of aesthetic authenticity, based on visual coherence, character stability, and narrative continuity. In summary, biographical authenticity appears in simulated form in Lil Miquela and Bermuda. This form of authenticity does not seek to conceal artificiality but to integrate it as part of communicative identity. In the other avatars, credibility is constructed through cultural or creative legitimation.

4.5. Relationship with Fashion

Fashion functions as the central axis of communication, although it is used in different ways. In Shudu, fashion is presented as aspirational. In Noonoouri, a creative editorial aesthetic predominates, as if it were a work of art. In Lil Miquela and Bermuda, fashion is part of everyday life. In The Fabricant, fashion is presented as something digital that exists on its own; it is not about an avatar; fashion is everything. All of them engage in collaborations with prestigious brands. For example, Shudu has worked with Kim Kardashian and Balmain. Miquela has participated in events such as the Sundance Festival and art galleries. Noonoouri has collaborated with brands such as Dior and Balenciaga. Overall, fashion acts as a visual language through which avatars construct presence and credibility.

5. Discussion

The results obtained allow for further understanding of fashion avatars or virtual influencers not as mere technological devices, but as communicative subjects operating according to their own logics within digital visual culture. Far from imitating the human influencer model, avatars develop differentiated strategies of presence, voice, and embodiment that reconfigure the ways in which credibility is constructed on Instagram.

One of the most relevant findings is that the credibility of the avatar does not depend on its degree of realism or resemblance to humans, but on the coherence between image, scene, and discourse. Virtual influencers such as Lil Miquela and Bermuda, who combine everyday presence with a first-person

narrative voice, generate a sense of closeness supported by the simulation of lived experience. In these cases, credibility is constructed through a communicative "I" that, although fictional, is stable and recognizable. This pattern confirms that authenticity in digital environments is not necessarily based on biographical truth, but on narrative continuity and consistency.

In contrast, avatars such as Shudu adopt a clearly editorial, runway-based strategy, in which voice is subordinated to image and presence is articulated through distance. Here, credibility is not grounded in identification with a subject, but in visual prestige and the aesthetic legitimation characteristic of luxury fashion. This result shows that the absence of voice does not imply communicative weakness, but rather a strategic option consistent with certain brand values and with an aspirational conception of fashion.

Noonoouri introduces an intermediate model that is particularly relevant from a communicative perspective and represents a form of authenticity that does not seek to appear human, but to remain consistent with herself as a creative figure, expanding the possibilities of mediated subjectivity beyond the human/editorial binary.

The case of The Fabricant introduces a third model, in which presence is no longer organized around the body as subject but shifts toward the digital garment as the central object. In this context, the avatar functions more as a design support than as a narrative entity, challenging traditional notions of body and representation in fashion. This strategy demonstrates how digitalization allows fashion to progressively detach from human corporeality without losing communicative capacity.

Overall, the comparison of the five avatars analyzed confirms that Instagram does not impose a single form of presence for fashion avatars, but rather operates as a flexible ecosystem in which strategies of proximity, distance, and abstraction coexist. Due to its visual and symbolic nature, fashion proves to be an especially suitable field for experimenting with these forms of subjectivity, normalizing bodiless presences and redefining the criteria of credibility in contemporary visual culture.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that fashion avatars on Instagram function as subjects that communicate in a different and effective way. They are capable of constructing presence, credibility, and relationships with the audience without relying on a physical body or on real human life stories. Through the analysis of five avatars and fifty posts, it has been demonstrated that the credibility of these virtual influencers is not grounded in authenticity understood as real experience, but in aesthetic coherence, narrative stability, and the type of visual presence that each avatar sustains over time.

The results allow the identification of at least three models of virtual subjects in the digital environment: the influencer-profile avatar, which emulates everyday experiences through voice; the editorial or magazine avatar, which prioritizes image and distance; and the conceptual avatar, which shifts the focus toward digital fashion as an autonomous object. These models should not be understood as a hierarchy or in terms of relevance, but as communicative strategies adapted to different conceptions of fashion and to different audience expectations.

From a broader perspective, this work contributes to visual communication studies by showing how the image ceases to function as an index of a prior reality and becomes instead a device of autonomous presence. Fashion avatars thus anticipate deeper transformations in digital visual culture, where credibility is constructed without the need for bodily reference and subjectivity in digital environments is articulated through repetition and visual coherence.

As a limitation, the study focuses on a reduced sample and on a single platform. Future research could expand the analysis to other cultural contexts, platforms, or types of virtual influencers, as well as explore how audiences perceive and receive them. Nevertheless, the results obtained allow us to affirm that fashion avatars are not a temporary phenomenon, but a stable form of visual communication that is redefining the relationships between image, body, and credibility in contemporary digital environments.

References

Audrezet, A., & Koles, B. (2023). Virtual influencer as a brand avatar in interactive marketing. In *The Palgrave handbook of interactive marketing* (pp. 353-376). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Audrezet, A., Koles, B., Moulard, J. G., Ameen, N., & McKenna, B. (2025). Virtual influencers: Definition and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research, 200*, 115647. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115647

Baake, J., Schmitt, J., & Metag, J. (2025). Balancing realism and trust: AI avatars in science communication. *Journal of Science Communication, 24*(2), A03.

Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., & Flavián, C. (2024). Artificial influencers in marketing: The impact of virtual influencers on brand trust and attitudes. *Journal of Business Research, 165*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113967

Biocca, F., Harms, C., & Burgoon, J. K. (2003). Toward a more robust theory and measure of social presence: Review and suggested criteria. *Presence: Teleoperators & virtual environments, 12*(5), 456-480. https://doi.org/10.1162/105474603322761270

Bonilla-Quijada, M., Olmo-Arriaga, J. L. D., Adreu Domingo, D., & Ripoll-i-Alcon, J. (2024). Fast fashion consumer engagement on Instagram: a case study. *Cogent Business & Management, 11*(1), 2322111. DOI:10.1080/23311975.2024.2322111

Duffy, V. G. (2021). Digital human modeling in design. *Handbook of human factors and ergonomics*, 761-781.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Aliman, D. N., Herting, A. M., Cziehso, G. P., Linder, M., & Kübler, R. V. (2023). Social interactions in the metaverse: Framework, initial evidence, and research roadmap. *Journal of the academy of marketing science, 51*(4), 889-913. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00908-0

Jin, S. V., & Ryu, E. (2020). "I'll buy what she's# wearing": The roles of envy toward and parasocial interaction with influencers in Instagram celebrity-based brand endorsement and social commerce. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 55,* 102121. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102121

Kim, H., & Park, M. (2023). Virtual influencers' attractiveness effect on purchase intention: A moderated mediation model of the Product–Endorser fit with the brand. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 143, 107703. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107703

Koles, B., Audrezet, A., Moulard, J. G., Ameen, N., & McKenna, B. (2024). The authentic virtual influencer: Authenticity manifestations in the metaverse. *Journal of Business Research, 170*, 114325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114325

Kozinets, R. (2015). Management netnography: axiological and methodological developments in online cultural business research. T*he Sage handbook of qualitative business and management research methods*, 384-397.

Lim, R. E., & Lee, S. Y. (2023). "You are a virtual influencer!": Understanding the impact of origin disclosure and emotional narratives on parasocial relationships and virtual influencer credibility. *Computers in Human Behavior, 148*, 107897. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107897

Liu, F., & Wang, R. (2025). Fostering parasocial relationships with virtual influencers in the uncanny valley: anthropomorphism, autonomy, and a multigroup comparison. *Journal of Business Research*, 186, 115024. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115024

Liyanaarachchi, G., Mifsud, M., & Viglia, G. (2024). Virtual influencers and data privacy: Introducing the multi-privacy paradox. *Journal of Business Research, 176,* 114584. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114584

Luo, X., Tong, S., Fang, Z., & Qu, Z. (2025). Machines that feel? Cognitive and affective trust in AI-generated brand interactions. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 53*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-024-00943-2

Marwick, A. E. (2015). Instafame: Luxury selfies in the attention economy. *Public culture, 27*(1), 137-160. doi 10.1215/08992363-2798379

Meng, L. M., Bie, Y., Yang, M., & Wang, Y. (2024). Watching it motivates me to become stronger: Virtual influencers' impact on consumer self-improvement product preferences. *Journal of Business Research, 178*, 114654. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114654

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods.

Moon, W. K., Song, Y. G., & Atkinson, L. (2024). Virtual voices for real change: The efficacy of virtual humans in pro-environmental social marketing for mitigating misinformation about climate change. *Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans, 2*(1), 100047. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbah.2024.100047

Mori, M., MacDorman, K. F., & Kageki, N. (2012). The uncanny valley [from the field]. *IEEE Robotics & automation magazine, 19*(2), 98-100. https://doi.org/10.1109/MRA.2012.2192811

Moulard, J. G., Raggio, R. D., & Folse, J. A. G. (2021). Disentangling the meanings of brand authenticity: The entity-referent correspondence framework of authenticity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 49*(1), 96-118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-020-00735-1

Moustakas, E., Lamba, N., Mahmoud, D., & Ranganathan, C. (2020, June). Blurring lines between fiction and reality: Perspectives of experts on marketing effectiveness of virtual influencers. In *2020 international conference on cyber security and protection of digital services (cyber security)* (pp. 1-6). IEEE.

Nowak, K. L., & Fox, J. (2018). Avatars and computer-mediated communication: a review of the definitions, uses, and effects of digital representations. *Review of Communication Research, 6*, 30-53. https://doi.org/10.12840/issn.2255-4165.2018.06.01.015

Rose, G. (2022). Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials.

Song, X., Lu, Y., & Yang, Q. (2024). The negative effect of virtual endorsers on brand authenticity and potential remedies. *Journal of Business Research, 185,* 114898. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114898

Thomas, V. L., & Fowler, K. (2021). Close encounters of the AI kind: Use of AI influencers as brand endorsers. *Journal of Advertising*, *50*(1), 11-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1810595

Thompson, J., Igarashi, R., Krowinska, A., & Logan-McFarlane, A. (2025). Is it real or not? construction of meaning and identity in virtual influencer marketing. *Journal of Business Research, 194,* 115362. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115362

Yoo, J. J. (2023). Visual strategies of luxury and fast fashion brands on Instagram and their effects on user engagement. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 75, 103517. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103517

Yoo, J. W., Park, J., & Park, H. (2025). How can I trust you if you're fake? Understanding human-like virtual influencer credibility and the role of textual social cues. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 19*(4), 730-748. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-02-2024-0092

Yu, M., Pang, D., Kang, Z., Sun, Z., Lv, T., Sheng, J., & Liu, Y. J. (2024, October). ECAvatar: 3D avatar facial animation with controllable identity and emotion. In *Proceedings of the 32nd ACM International Conference on Multimedia* (pp. 10468-10476). https://doi.org/10.1145/3664647.3681328