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Virtual influencer in Strategic Advertising Communication: innovative blog content and audience interest parameters (the case of Miquela Souza, virtual influencer (@lilmiquela))

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Nowadays Instagram tends to be one of the mostly used social networks in the world [2], opening the new, accented entertaining and personalized epoque of communication. That is the reason for it to become an advertising platform, widely implemented by companies, who strategically tend to invest more in Instagram activities and diversify these investments into innovational communication, which includes such phenomenon as virtual influencer.

Virtual influencer is a character functioning on a base of a social network blog or any other communicational platform (e.g. website, mobile application). It consists of digital computer-generated anthropomorphic imagery and communicates with the audience as a fictional personality. As well as a real influencer, virtual influencer generates interest towards the exact topic with the power of its audience authority. [1]

In 2019 Hype Auditor reported that virtual influencer blogs on Instagram of different scales (from 1 thousand to 1 million followers) has three-time higher engagement rate than real influencer blogs. It means that Instagram users prefer virtual influencers' content more than real influencers' content.

In this study, the author attempts to identify the relationship between the basic characteristics of the virtual influencer content and the level of interest of the virtual influencer audience in this content. This will reveal a list of factors affecting the level of interest of a virtual influencer audience in its publications, making it possible to customize advertising-oriented posts as close to the audience interest as possible. The reasons for this interest are the key to successful innovative client-oriented advertising campaigns, so that what makes them important to be studied.

Instagram user's preference is usually measured via Engagement Rate [3], which shows the level of users' interest towards blog posts. This indicator reflects the reaction of the audience to blog posts, implying that more interesting publications cause more reactions, and vice versa. Usually Daily Engagement Rate (E.R. Daily) is counted, using following formula: E.R. Daily = (total reactions per day / followers)*100, where "total reactions per day" is the sum of total daily number of "likes" and comments per post, "followers" is for the number of followers, actual for the accounted date.

In connection to this the main research method is regression analysis, which shows the connection between virtual influencer Miquela Souza's posts and audience's reaction to each of them, counted via E.R. Daily, in progression. Analytic units were represented by basic characteristics of posts (including publication date, type and quality of visual content, textual contents of the post, theme, informational cause, plot twist, tags for other influencers) and objective network metrics of these publications (including number of "likes" and comments, showing the audience's reaction to these posts). During this research E.R. Daily was counted and recorded for every Miquela Souza's post published in the period of three month, starting on 01/09/2019 and ending on 31/11/ 2019.

The study revealed that audience interest of virtual influencer blogs content is mostly influenced by the following factors:

- Intervals between publication dates (which should be not less than 3 days).
- Accented photographic visual content of posts followed by highly anthropomorphic computer imagery and/or the presence of real virtual influencer.
- Engaging and emotionally attached textual content of posts.
- Plot twists embedded into the textual content of the post, including such thematic lines as "Romantic relationship", "Friendly relationship", "Art".
- Tags marking real influencer blogs.
- Real informational cause connection, e.g. Halloween, American Music Awards, Women's Cancer Research Fund collaboration.

To sum up, the basic characteristics of virtual influencer blog content do directly affect the interest of the audience of the blog. Considering the above factors enables controlling the interest level of the audience and, as a result, allows achieving the needed involvement of the audience into potentially advertising content. It makes the virtual influencer a promising innovative tool for customized client-oriented advertising communication.

Источники и литература

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