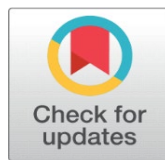


# SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING REDEFINED: THE ROLE OF CHATBOTS AND VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS IN AI-DRIVEN INFLUENCER MARKETING

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## ABSTRACT

Social media marketing emerged as a popular and effective strategy for companies to promote their products due to the rapid development of digital technology. This approach of marketing has been utilising more by businesses as it offers target audiences more choices. Social Media Marketing or SMM use the power of social media influencers in building and maintaining a strong relationship with the audience. Influencer marketing is a collaboration between a brand and an online personality, known as Social Media Influencer or SMI who will endorse and promote products, services, ideas or brands to their followers. Technological advancements in the form of artificial intelligence (AI) is also a recent trend in influencer marketing which is used in the form of chatbots and virtual influencers. These digital personalities are used in influencer marketing to support brands and increase their marketing efforts. For the brands which are constantly looking for innovative ways to engage with their target audience, introduction of chatbots and virtual influencers has opened new possibilities. This research focuses on the role of chatbots and virtual influencers in influencer marketing and examines how they impact consumer engagement, trust and brand perception. For the purpose of this study, qualitative research method is adopted to examine consumer attitude towards chatbots and virtual influencers. Researchers collected data from reviewing existing literature and semi-structured interviews to understand consumer perception. The study also explains the methods such as creating personal experience and automated interactions through which the brands strengthen their online presence. This study also provides valuable information on the effectiveness of chatbots and virtual influencers in influencer marketing which adds to the expanding knowledge of digital marketing. It also stresses on the opportunities and challenges to integrate these technological advancements in the marketing efforts of the brands. The study provides recommendations for brands to strengthen customer engagement by maintaining trust and authenticity.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Virtual Influencers, Chatbots, Artificial Intelligence



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing is a subset of digital marketing where companies use social media platforms to boost website traffic, sales, brand image, etc. With the use of social media, users can establish social networks that allow them to exchange text, image, audio, video and many other multimedia content. Businesses and brands use these networks for

a variety of marketing objectives such as raising brand awareness, fostering customer loyalty, interacting with their target market and attract new customers. [Bellesen and Gloppen \(2023\)](#) These modern face of marketing helps the brands even to create data analytics and enable them to monitor the effectiveness of their marketing efforts by incorporating more strategies for involvement. Businesses also use social media to create visually appealing materials, execute campaigns, and assist customers by directly interacting with them. In addition, these platforms enable businesses to collect immediate feedback, which will help them to improve the customer experience. Consumers are also impacted to a great extent by the user ratings and suggestions on social media. This allows them to make more improved purchasing decisions. This digital platform overrules traditional marketing media like newspapers, radio, and television as it can reach a mass audience, especially a more targeted audience. Collaborating with influencers has also become a trend-setting marketing technique brands use, giving rise to another subset of marketing known as influencer marketing. These influencers typically have many followers and can influence the target audience's product preferences and purchasing decisions. They create sponsored content such as social media posts, videos, and blogs to introduce products and brands to their followers and encourage them to take action.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) further enhanced the face of social media marketing by increasing the medium's capabilities through better efficiency and personalisation [G \(2023\)](#) Today, businesses depend primarily on AI to refine their marketing strategies, understand consumer behaviour, and streamline their business operations. One of the crucial roles played by AI in businesses is the automated tasks they perform, apart from audience analysis and strengthening brand engagement. Research also shows that integrating AI into marketing boosts organizations' performance, increases profit, and improves competitiveness. Companies rely on AI for targeted advertising and personalized product recommendations based on consumer data. AI is shaping the future of advertising and marketing with its efficiency, ease of use, and vast applications.

While the concept of robots taking over the world was once confined to science fiction, these technological advancements, especially in AI, have brought us closer to an era where human-robot interaction has become a reality. Even though fully autonomous robots may still be years away in everyday life, social media has already become a hub for these interactions. A new wave of digital personalities known as Virtual Influencers (also referred to as CGI influencers) has emerged on various social media platforms, captivating audiences worldwide. They are digital characters or computer-generated personalities with human-like traits and carefully crafted narratives, created by artists, designers, or agencies. Unlike traditional human influencers, they exist solely online, engaging with audiences across the globe through social media [Jhawar et al. \(2023\)](#). Virtual Influencers stand out with their unique appearance, ranging from highly realistic to imaginative and eye-catching. Despite being digital, they are managed by real people who create content, interact with followers, and maintain their online presence.

Chatbots are computer programs designed to simulate human-like conversations. They are now essential to customer support, handling tasks like answering common user questions and guiding them through complex decisions. This ensures customers receive quick, accurate, and consistent responses at any time of the day. At the same time, it reduces the workload of human customer service agents. With chatbots, businesses can improve customer satisfaction, cut operational costs, and stay competitive in today's digital world.

The rise of virtual technology has completely transformed the advertising world by making social media marketing a key trend in the industry. Influencer marketing impacts consumers' purchasing decisions to a great extent. However, its effectiveness largely depends upon influencers, who are authentic, trustworthy, and create high-quality content [Lazar and Arockia \(2023\)](#) Digital marketing efforts, such as influencer marketing, are all about using online platforms like search engines, websites, social media, email, and mobile apps to promote products and services. One of its key benefits is targeting large audiences and tracking campaign performance in real time. "Strategies like search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing help businesses attract potential customers and drive sales", [Hiren \(2022\)](#).

In today's digital world, influencers do more than just advertising. They also shape consumer decisions by looking into psychological factors influencing purchasing behavior. This shift has transformed how brands connect with their target audiences [Varadarajan et al. \(2022\)](#) In contrast to traditional advertising, influencer marketing completely depends upon the trust and credibility that the influencers have established with their followers over time. Social media has also changed the way consumers interact with brands. Instead of simply receiving information, people now engage with brands, share opinions, and advocate for their personal choice of favourite products. The power of social media influencers has been recognized by many companies who offers these influencers freebies or free products and payments

to promote their brands and products [Xuan et al. \(2023\)](#). As influencers and their followers play a key role in shaping brand perception, these collaboration with influencers helps brands to build a strong online presence. Virtual influencers are becoming more popular in advertising and marketing as they engage with audiences almost equally as human influencers [Sorosrungruang et al. \(2024\)](#) The human-like qualities of these digital personalities is the primary reason for their success. Adding to it, their social presence helps brands to build trust, shape brand perception and influence purchase decisions. Virtual influencer can effectively engage with diverse set of audiences especially younger consumer segments as they always seek new and specific experiences. The study highlights the necessity of a clear understanding of the functionality and impact of virtual influencers on consumer behaviour. It also underscores the transformative potential of virtual influencers in the marketing landscape.

The development of chatbots and virtual assistants for customer service have changed the way companies engage with their customers. The interactions they make are faster, efficient and easily scalable than that of humans. Researches highlights the increasing importance attached to chatbots and virtual influencers in marketing, especially in the customer service sector. AI-powered chatbots provide personalized responses and relevant answers in real-time. They ensure that the problem is solved effortlessly for the customers thereby improving the customer experience [Nicolescu and Tudorache \(2022\)](#)

The functional features of chatbots, along with users' perceptions and situational contexts, significantly shape customers' attitudes and behaviours. The study also highlights the complexities of customer interactions with chatbots. It illustrates how these interactions can lead to positive or negative feelings, ultimately influencing customers' willingness to engage with the technology and their purchasing behaviours.

The users' familiarity with technology primarily affects customer expectations and needs in customer support. Because of this, personalization in chatbot interactions is crucial as it can also enhance the user experience [Polzehl et al. \(2022\)](#) This highlights the need to understand user behaviour and preferences to make chatbots and virtual influencers more effective and, at the same time, engage in digital marketing efforts of organizations and brands.

## 1.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

RO 1: To examine the role of artificial intelligence in developing social media marketing.

## 1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) Do chatbots and virtual influencers help consumers get the information they need?
- 2) How do AI-powered chatbots and virtual influencers redefine consumer-brand interactions in digital marketing?
- 3) What role does user experience and interface design play in determining the success of AI chatbots in customer service?
- 4) What are the future trends in AI-driven marketing?

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative method to understand human experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena by non-numerical data analysis. The flexibility of the qualitative research helped researchers comprehensively understand the emerging patterns in the field of study. The researchers used a systematic literature review to gather in-depth ideas and information relevant to the context of the research topic. A systematic literature review is a comprehensive and methodical technique to synthesize various existing research data on a specific topic of study. It involves formulating a straightforward research question, methodologically looking for the most relevant studies, evaluating their quality, and integrating the results to reach conclusion based on evidence. This enhances the quality of the output by minimizing the bias and providing evidence for the findings. A total of 30 reviews has been selected based on the factors identified for the study.

### **3. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **3.1. PERSONALISED EXPERIENCE THROUGH AUTOMATED INTERACTIONS**

Personalization is one of the most advantages for companies and brands when using chatbots and virtual influencers. It enhances user engagement by facilitating interactions based on individual preferences. The behaviours of past interactions is also a contributing factor to this. The advanced AI algorithms analyse user data and offer customized responses in a conversational style. It also gives the target audience relevant recommendations they require. This personalised communication style also makes the interactions more human-like and meaningful. Hence, brands are using chatbots and virtual influencers for a more personalised method of marketing. This in turn improves customer satisfaction and strengthen brand loyalty. To further maintain user trust and credibility, brands should consider privacy and data security.

The more time-consuming communication process is streamlined with the help of chatbots and virtual influencers through automated interactions and hence reduces the response time. These AI-powered assistants can handle multiple tasks and queries simultaneously due to their efficiency and automation. This will also help businesses by reducing the operational costs.

#### **3.2. STRENGTHEN ONLINE PRESENCE**

Chatbots and virtual influencers are digitally created human-like assistants who have a strong digital presence which they maintain through continuous audience engagement. The time constraints of human influencers and customer care executives are eliminated by these digital characters as they can work 24/7. They can interact with the audiences, generate content and respond to queries anytime of the day. Their ability to create visually appealing content and added with interactivity make them invaluable assets for brands to expand their reach on various social media platforms. As a modern marketing method, these digital strategies can effortlessly boost brand visibility, reach, and engage with large audiences quickly.

#### **3.3. USER INTERFACE AND USER EXPERIENCE**

Social media marketing depends upon user experience (UX) which is further created with the help of chatbots and virtual influencers. To an extent this is influenced by factors such as the accuracy in response, ease of interaction, and appeals used by these virtual personalities. A well-designed chatbot should provide quick, real-time, and relevant responses by maintaining a flow in the communication. Similarly, virtual influencers should offer engaging and interesting content to their followers and audiences that goes with the audience's expectations.

User interface (UI) is an inevitable aspect of marketing communication, as a well-structured interface ensures ease of navigation for the users. This enhances the use of chatbots and virtual influencers which leads to better engagement. UI elements such as conversational design, button-based options, and visually engaging chat windows contribute to better interaction with chatbots. Virtual influencers, on the other hand rely more on realistic avatars, expressive animations, and high-quality visual storytelling to captivate the minds of the audience. Integrating these user-friendly features improves accessibility and interaction rates for these digital personalities.

#### **3.4. INFORMATIVENESS OF THE AI CHATBOTS**

Chatbots are designed to offer precise answers and real-time solutions from customer support to educational assistance. The informativeness of a chatbot is determined by its knowledge database, ability to understand any communication context accurately, and its effectiveness in retrieving useful information for its target audience. Informativeness greatly depends upon the chatbot's capability to integrate with reliable data sources and provide relevant, accurate, and contextually appropriate information to the information seeker. The knowledge base should also be constantly updated to respond instantly to user queries. Industries such as banking, tourism, fashion, e-commerce, and customer service rely heavily on chatbots to provide support for troubleshooting, product recommendations, personalized assistance, and much more to their customers.

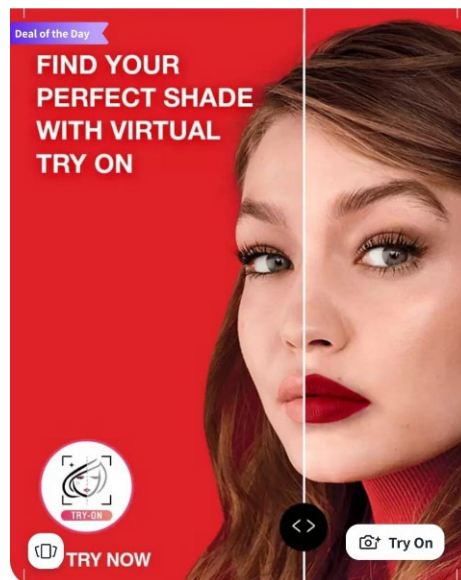
### 3.5. TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CONTENT EFFECTIVENESS

One of the key factors in the success of chatbots and virtual influencers is providing trustworthy information to customers. Users are more likely to accept these digital characters only if the AI-driven content or information they provide is credible, authentic, and unbiased. Overuse of automation without human oversight can also lead to confusion. Hence, brands need to maintain a balance between automated AI-driven interactions and human-assisted customer engagement.

Highly effective audience engagement is a significant result of virtual influencers' use of compelling content. The content that effortlessly blends realism with digital creativity and the AI-driven interactions of these scripted personalities allows brands to craft consistent narratives. Such narratives can also resonate with specific target groups more easily. The effectiveness of these digital personalities depends on reliability, storytelling, and emotional connection with their followers. This improves consumer interest towards the brand, boosts brand engagement, and influences the target audience's purchasing decisions.

### 3.6. AUGMENTED REALITY & VIRTUAL EVENTS: THE TRENDSETTERS

Brands always experiment with new opportunities to engage with their audiences to get better results for their marketing efforts. Modern digital marketing offers such possibilities to brands in the form of augmented reality (AR) and virtual events. From virtual product launches to brand activations, and further interactive experiences allow companies to reach global audiences without the hassle of organizing in-person events. These features of artificial intelligence combined with AR add another level of excitement to the customers by letting them interact with products creatively, like virtually trying on the clothes and accessories, or visualizing furniture in their living room. These technology-driven customer experiences make branding more dynamic, fun, and memorable.



**Figure 1** Picture Courtesy: Maybelline New York Liquid Lipstick, from Myntra

Indian fashion e-commerce company Myntra introduced a virtual try-on feature that helps customers simplify the shopping process and enhance the beauty shopping experience. This new tool enables customers to select the most suitable colours from the homegrown and international brands from the Beauty and Personal Care (BPC) category. Results show that this feature alone led to a 1.5x jump in product considered for purchase and a 2x jump in total customer conversion on the BPC category. Indian jewellery brand Bhima also uses this technology to offer virtual try-ons so that customers can choose from different styles from the comfort of their homes and the best-suited ornaments.



Figure 2. Picture Courtesy: [www.financialexpress.com](http://www.financialexpress.com)

Similarly, Titan Eye+ used an innovative technology in the form of a live out-of-home advertising at Phoenix Mall in Mumbai, featuring Ayushman Khurrana. This live kiosk featured a realistic image of the actor, which comes alive, allowing shoppers to have a real-time conversation with him about the brand’s new line of products launched recently.

### 3.7. AI AS THE FUTURE OF BRANDING

AI has transformed from just a tool for data analysis to an inevitable part of branding to manage their image and connect with customers. Companies can easily find out customers' preferences with the help of AI. For example, Netflix uses AI to find out the viewing habits of each of its users, to suggest shows and movies based on this data, and to bring them back for more. This clever use of artificial intelligence helped Netflix build an even more loyal fan base. It is not just confined to streaming platforms, but businesses across the globe use AI to create a strong connection with their customers.

### 3.8. CHATBOTS: THE GAME CHANGERS

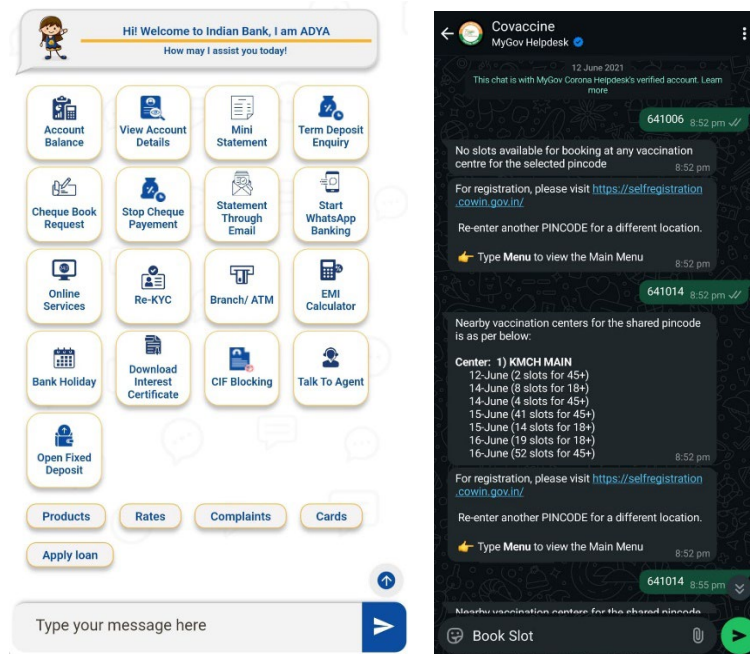


Figure 3 Picture Courtesy: Screenshot from Indian Bank Mobile Banking App & Mygov Helpdesk Whatsapp

Chatbots are AI-driven tools that can chat with customers, answer their queries, and help to create strong customer relations. Almost all business sectors worldwide currently use these chatbots to build and maintain customer relations, and a developing country like India is also using its full potential. For example, Indian Bank's chatbot named 'Adya' is a virtual banking assistant helps in creating a more convenient banking experience, 'Elena' by Indian School of Business (ISB) allows students with the admission process and provide course-related information, MyGov Corona Helpdesk was developed as a reliable source of information about COVID-19 related queries. Similarly, many such chatbots assist customers with travel advice and financial information, clarifying questions, and even managing crisis communications in real-time. This level of automation makes the public relations of the brands and companies smoother, faster, and more accessible.

### 3.9. VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS: THE FUTURE OF BRANDING AND MARKETING



Figure 5 Picture Courtesy: From Instagram profiles of *lilmiquela* and *naina\_avtr*

The AI-created characters called Virtual influencers act just like authentic human influencers and are entirely controlled by brands. Unlike human influencers, they can engage with followers, promote products, and even take stands based on the audience feedback, making the companies take complete control over their message. For example, virtual influencers like Lil Miquela collaborated with top brands like Calvin Klein, Prada, etc. This trend extends to Southeast Asia, Singapore and Thailand where brands experiment with similar digital personalities. These virtual influencers are a safer alternative for brands than traditional influencer partnerships, making them an attractive option for brands looking to innovate and still have complete control over them.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The future brand experience is more exciting with state-of-the-art technology such as Augmented Reality Events, Chatbots, Virtual Influencers, and all other possibilities of artificial intelligence. This helps to create and maintain a significant and meaningful relationship with its customers. Recent years of this fast-paced digital world have witnessed some advanced innovations in social media marketing in the form of artificial intelligence (AI). Future research should focus on measuring the effectiveness of the AI tools and their ethical implications by ensuring that consumer trust is the top priority in this ever-changing digital environment [Nicolescu and Tudorache \(2022\)](#) Chatbots and virtual influencers are transforming social media marketing and customer engagement by providing brands more better and innovative ways to easily get in touch with their audience. AI-driven automation enables businesses to provide more personalized experiences and uninterrupted interactions. This enhances convenience and pave way for better engagement with the

target audience. A well-designed interface and user experience ensure that AI chatbots deliver informative communication by maintaining consumer trust. Virtual influencers are becoming powerful marketing tools through improved content, effectiveness in execution and strengthening brand presence in the digital space. Integrating AR and VR events further expands opportunities for better immersive and interactive brand experience [Alcañiz et al. \(2019\)](#). As AI advances, its marketing role will become even more significant. Positioning AI-powered chatbots and virtual influencers as the most prominent component of digital marketing and customer engagement is also a new strategy of modern marketing. This integration of chatbots and virtual influencers into modern marketing ecosystems emphasises the potential of AI. These AI-driven technologies have the power to create meaningful connections and deliver exceptional customer experiences that traditional marketing cannot offer. AI tools such as chatbots and virtual influencers are utilized by the brands in their full potential to connect with people more excitingly than human-to-human interaction. What once seemed merely as a science fiction idea or dream has become an inevitable part of modern branding techniques. This in turn help companies build stronger and personal connections with their audience.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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