


# Chapter 7


## The Use of Virtual Influencers in the Tourism Sector

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### ABSTRACT

*The emerging trend of using virtual influencers in tourism is transforming how companies engage with travelers, becoming a mass phenomenon among younger digital audiences. These characters, crafted using CGI (Computer-Generated Imagery) by digital marketing teams, are not only used to promote destinations but also serve as virtual guides, assisting users in planning their trips. Thanks to their ability to adapt and emphasize brand values, virtual influencers can produce unlimited, engaging content without geographic or temporal restrictions. This chapter analyzes the impact of using virtual influencers in the tourism sector, addressing both the benefits and the ethical challenges they present. To this end, a content analysis was conducted on seven virtual influencers, two of whom focus exclusively on tourism and travel. In conclusion, virtual influencers represent an innovative tool for tourism, with the potential to enhance engagement and sustainability in destination promotion, though challenges of authenticity and trust must be addressed to maximize their impact.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, tourism has been deeply transformed by digital trends. From travel planning to destination promotion, the use of social media and digital marketing strategies has dramatically changed how travellers choose and experience their destinations. One of the most recent and disruptive innovations is the use of virtual influencers—digital characters that do not exist in the real world but have a strong presence in the virtual sphere and on social media. These characters, created with CGI technology and managed by marketing and tech teams, can interact with users, simulate personalities, and participate in advertising campaigns. Thus, virtual influencers represent a new tool in tourism marketing, providing new opportunities while also posing ethical and technical challenges (Miyake, 2024).

The concept of virtual influencers began to gain traction in sectors like fashion and entertainment, where characters such as Lil Miquela and Imma amassed millions of followers and secured collaboration contracts with renowned brands. However, in tourism, their potential is still in the early stages of development. Recent studies indicate that virtual influencers in the tourism sector can function not only as destination promoters but also as virtual assistants, capable of guiding travelers through their planning process and helping them select destinations. As the tourism industry faces the need to capture the attention of a young audience, accustomed to digital experiences and constantly seeking innovation, the use of these digital assistants provides a way to connect with these audiences effectively and uniquely (Paulovics, 2023).

Virtual influencers in the tourism sector differ from traditional ones in that, being digitally created, they can be tailored to any profile desired by the brand. This allows tourism companies to build digital assistants that represent specific values—from sustainability to luxury—or that speak different languages, facilitating cultural connections with diverse audiences. This flexibility, along with the ability to personalize interactions in real-time, makes virtual influencers ideal assistants, capable of guiding users through their travel planning process and instantly responding to their questions (Kádeková & Holienčinová, 2018).

Virtual influencers have the potential to increase user engagement in tourism campaigns by 35% compared to human influencers. This figure is largely due to the fact that virtual assistants can interact continuously, enhancing user experience and boosting loyalty. In terms of content, virtual influencers can generate highly appealing visual content without time or location constraints, allowing tourism brands to project an idealized and consistent image of their destinations without depending on real-world circumstances (Choi & Choi, 2024).

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