

## New Players in the World of Social Media Opinion Leaders: How Uniqueness Shapes Opinion Leadership

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### Abstract:

For decades, traditional advertising relied on mass media channels such as billboards, television, and radio ads, which reached a broad audience but lacked opportunities for engagement or opinion leadership. The rise of social media has opened up new possibilities for communication, enabling closer and more personal relationships with consumers. Influencers quickly leveraged this potential, revolutionizing the way brands connect with their audiences by providing authentic content and fostering engagement, thus becoming key opinion leaders.

Influencers offer numerous advantages to brands - they can effectively reach niche groups, enhance the credibility of messaging, and build lasting relationships with their followers. Their growing importance has created new opportunities in marketing while also raising questions about the boundaries and future of this form of opinion leadership. In this context, virtual influencers have emerged—AI-generated personas that combine creativity with advanced technology, bringing new dimensions to the phenomenon of opinion leadership.

Virtual influencers offer something that traditional creators often cannot—complete control over their image. Created by teams of specialists in computer graphics, programming, and marketing, they can operate without temporal or geographical limitations. While their operations are currently costly, as seen in examples like Fit\_aitana (developed by the Spanish agency The Clueless) or Lil Miquela (created by the American company Brud), technological advancements and increased accessibility to digital content creation tools are likely to reduce these costs in the future. As opinion leaders, virtual creators are setting new directions in marketing communication, offering brands innovative ways to engage with their audiences.