

# A Study of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) in Social Media Influencer Marketing

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to gain a better understanding of Millersville University students' awareness of CGI influencers and how they respond to and engage with CGI influencer marketing compared to traditional human influencer marketing. Through this research, I answered the following questions: How aware are Millersville University students of the presence of CGI influencers on social media; how do they respond to marketing content shared by CGI influencers; and how do these responses differ from their responses to human influencer marketing? In order to answer the proposed research questions, I conducted empirical research with Millersville University students. I ran an online survey from November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. I received 141 responses from both male and female participants between the ages 18 and 55. The study showed that students are more aware of human influencers than CGI influencers and are more likely to interact with and take actions such as purchasing and recommending a product after seeing a human influencer-promoted ad as opposed to a CGI influencer-promoted one.*

The primary purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of Millersville University students' awareness and feelings towards computer-generated imagery (CGI) influencer marketing versus human influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a form of marketing in which brands utilize influential online personalities to increase brand awareness and encourage engagement from a niche audience of social media users (Kádeková and Holienčinová, 2018). Influencers are individuals who possess the power to impact the lives of people who they have formed a relationship with through their social media platforms (Kádeková and

Holienčinová, 2018). CGI influencers that look extremely similar to humans have been created to promote brands on social media just as human influencers do. Companies create them using advanced technology to look like and act like their human counterparts on social media (Hsu, 2019). Influencer marketing has been the subject of various research projects and has proven to be successful for a number of brands. CGI influencer marketing, on the other hand, is less researched since it is a more recent trend and the technology is quite new. The lack of academic research on the subject is what enticed me to conduct my own research on

CGI influencers and understand how students view them in comparison to human influencers.

### **Research Methodology**

I developed survey questions by analyzing preexisting surveys on influencer marketing. I then used Qualtrics, a survey software, to create and distribute the survey electronically. I recruited respondents for this survey by contacting Millersville University professors and asking if they could email the survey to their students. I also contacted the Dean of The Lombardo College of Business who gave me three \$25 Amazon gift cards to offer to students as an incentive to take the survey. The Administrative Assistant of The Lombardo College of Business sent my survey to all business majors via email. The survey was conducted from November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. One hundred sixty-seven participants started the survey and 141 completed it, which means my survey has a completion rate of 84%. I reported on the data collected from the 141 participants who fully completed my survey.

### **The Sample**

Out of the 141 participants who completed the survey, 67% were females, 31% were males, and 2% classified as “other”. Eighty-eight percent of participants were between the ages of 18 and 24. The other 12% were between the ages of 25 and 55. When asked what college they were in, 54% of participants said they were students in The Lombardo College of Business, 18% were in the College of Science and Technology, 14% were in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, 10% answered “N/A” or “Not Applicable”, and 4% were in the College of Education and Human Services.

### **Results**

One of the main objectives of the survey was to gain a better understanding of

students’ awareness of CGI influencers. When asked about their awareness of CGI influencers, 52% of participants said they had never heard of CGI influencers before. Forty-five percent of participants said that they had heard of CGI influencers but did not follow them on social media. Only four of the 141 participants (3%) said that they followed CGI influencers on social media. The respondents were more familiar with human influencers; only 9% said they had never heard of human influencers, 36% said they had heard of them but did not follow them, and 55% did follow human influencers on social media. Since there is a much greater number of human influencers on social media than CGI influencers, these differences in awareness levels were anticipated.

Participants were shown two similar video advertisements for Samsung’s “Do What You Can’t” campaign and were asked to answer a series of questions based on the videos. One of the advertisements featured Ninja, a human influencer, and the other featured Miquela, the most popular CGI influencer to date. Participants were asked to rank how likely they would be to purchase the product based on the ad, recommend the product based on the ad, and engage with the ad on social media. For the Ninja advertisement, 72% of participants said they were either not likely (38%) or not likely at all (34%) to purchase the product based on the ad. Similarly, when asked how likely they were to recommend the product based on the ad, 38% and 33% of participants were not likely or not likely at all to recommend it, respectively. In regard to whether or not participants would engage with the ad, 30% said not likely and 47% said not likely at all. These results show that the ad was not perceived well by the student participants.

For the Miquela advertisement, 29% of participants said they were not likely to purchase the product based on the ad and

44% said they were not likely at all to do so. These percentages are the same for the likelihood of students' recommending the product based on the ad. When asked how likely they would be to engage with the ad, 28% said not likely and 45% said not likely at all. Participants were then asked which of the video advertisements they preferred. One hundred two students, or 72% of respondents, said that they preferred the Ninja ad and 39 students, or 28% of respondents, preferred the Miquela ad.

### **Discussion**

Based on the results of my survey, it can be inferred that Millersville University students are more aware of human influencers than CGI influencers. This study is worth replicating to see if students' awareness of CGI influencers increases as

advertisers begin using them more. The study also showed that students are more likely to engage with and take actions as a result of seeing human influencer-promoted ads. The majority of respondents expressed a preference for the video advertisement featuring a human influencer compared to one featuring a CGI influencer. However, the results did not vary significantly when students were asked to rank the likelihood that they would purchase or recommend the product in both ads and the likelihood that they would engage with the ads on social media. Overall, the results showed that most students were not likely to purchase the product, recommend the product, or engage with the ad upon viewing it. Additional research should be conducted to conclude why students expressed these opinions.

## References

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