

AI-Generated Avatars on Social Media And Indian Brands: An Analysis of Impact, Risks and A Governance-Ready Adoption Framework

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Abstract: *AI-generated avatars, meaning computer-generated personas that behave like social media influencers, have become an established though still niche tool in Indian brand communication since the launch of Kyra in 2022. This study examines their use by Indian brands and analyses their impact on engagement, credibility, purchase intention, brand safety and regulatory exposure. It follows a doctrinal, qualitative and interpretive design built entirely on secondary sources: peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2025, Indian regulatory instruments, and trade and industry reporting on documented Indian cases, including Kyra, Naina, Myntra's Maya and Manforce's Myra Kapoor. No primary data were collected, and every figure reported is attributed to its source. The findings indicate that avatars reliably attract attention and give brands creative control, but the evidence on persuasion and conversion is mixed. Industry data reported in 2025 show lower engagement and audience credibility for avatars than for leading human creators, whereas a survey-based academic study identifies credibility as the strongest driver of engagement and purchase intention. The paper also maps the disclosure duties that Indian regulators place on virtual influencers. It closes with a five-stage framework covering purpose, persona, proof, disclosure and measurement, and calls for controlled, India-specific field research.*

Keywords: AI-generated avatars; Virtual influencers; Influencer marketing; Indian brands; Consumer trust; Advertising disclosure.

I. INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is now a routine part of brand communication on Indian social media, and a new kind of creator has entered it: one who is not a person. Virtual influencers are fictional, computer-generated characters with human-like looks and personalities that post, endorse and interact the way human creators do. The Department of Consumer Affairs' 2023 endorsement guide names virtual influencers as a distinct category of endorser alongside celebrities and human influencers (Department of Consumer Affairs, 2023). Early examples relied on computer-generated imagery (CGI) and 3D production pipelines; more recent ones use generative AI (Forbes India, 2026). The literature separates CGI-based from AI-based virtual influencers (Jayasingh et al., 2025). This paper uses "AI-generated avatars" and "virtual influencers" interchangeably for personas that are created and operated by a team but presented to audiences as social media characters.

India's market took shape quickly. Kyra, created by FUTR Studios (SheThePeople, 2024), has been on social media since January 2022 (ThePrint, 2022), and her debut collaboration with boAt was reported to have crossed 20 lakh Instagram views within a fortnight (ThePrint, 2022). Naina Avtr, created by AVTR Meta Labs, followed in late 2022, and Myntra's brand-owned avatar Maya in 2023 (Forbes India, 2026). In September 2025 Manforce Condoms, a Mankind Pharma brand, announced an AI-generated model, Myra Kapoor, as its brand ambassador in a television campaign (Exchange4media, 2025; Manifest, 2025). Both Kyra's and Naina's backers have described their creations as India's first; this paper does not adjudicate that claim (ThePrint, 2022; CB Insights, 2024).



Enthusiasm has outrun evidence. Trade reporting in 2025 quoted an influencer-marketing executive as saying that returns from virtual influencers trail those of human creators (Financial Express, 2025), while a peer-reviewed survey of Indian social media users found that AI influencers' credibility strongly predicts engagement and purchase intention (Jayasingh et al., 2025). At the same time, the regulatory setting has tightened, through the 2023 endorsement guide, updated ASCI rules and the 2026 amendments to the IT Rules. Brand managers therefore lack an integrated view of what avatars deliver and what they require. The study addresses four questions:

What does documented evidence show about the effect of AI-generated avatars on engagement, credibility and purchase intention for Indian brands?

What benefits and risks do Indian brands face when they use such avatars?

What disclosure and compliance obligations apply?

What framework can guide responsible adoption?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

2.1 International evidence on virtual and AI influencers

Thomas and Fowler (2021) reported in two studies that AI influencers can produce brand benefits similar to those of human celebrity endorsers, but that they can also commit transgressions that damage the endorsed brand. Consumers were less likely to see an AI influencer as a unique entity, so a transgression by one was more likely to be generalised to AI influencers as a class; replacing a transgressing AI influencer with a celebrity endorser reduced negative brand perceptions, while replacing it with another AI influencer did not (Thomas & Fowler, 2021).

Later findings are mixed. As summarised by Jayasingh et al. (2025), Lou et al. (2023) found that virtual influencers can build brand awareness and a positive image but fall short of persuading consumers to buy because of perceived lack of authenticity; Sands et al. (2022) are cited for the finding that consumers' openness to following AI influencers resembles that towards human influencers; and Shen (2024), studying 33 virtual influencers on Instagram, found higher engagement on non-sponsored than on sponsored posts. Agnihotri et al. (2024) report, per the same summary, that credibility significantly affects followers' buying behaviour through virtual engagement. Allal-Chérif et al. (2024) argue that luxury brands use virtual influencers partly to avoid being tied to human influencers whose reputations can collapse overnight, and they also examine the limits of that appeal. Other work addresses authenticity (Koles et al., 2024), the uncanny valley (Gutuleac et al., 2024), parasocial interaction (Stein et al., 2024), human-versus-virtual comparisons (Belanche et al., 2024), and whether virtual endorsers are "novel and effective" or "uncanny and deceiving" (Franke et al., 2023).

2.2 Indian evidence and commentary

The main peer-reviewed Indian-context study located is Jayasingh et al. (2025). Its India-based authors surveyed 414 respondents by convenience sampling, aged 18 to 37, using the Indian AI influencer Naina's Instagram page as the stimulus, and tested a structural model of informative value, entertainment value, attractiveness, human-likeness and credibility. Outside academia, Forbes India (2024) lists lower authenticity, a missing "human touch" and ethical concerns over bias among the limitations of AI influencers. The Swaddle argues that avatars such as Kyra are calibrated to aspirational urban aesthetics, in contrast to creators from smaller towns and villages whose real lives remain visible in their work. Financial Express (2025) reports vendor data comparing avatars with human creators (Section 4).

2.3 Theoretical lenses

Studies of AI influencers draw on source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), the uncanny valley (Mori, 1970), the Computers Are Social Actors paradigm (Nass et al., 1994) and the advertising value model (Ducoffe, 1995), as applied by Jayasingh et al. (2025). These lenses structure the discussion in Section 5.

2.4 Research gap

Based on the sources reviewed, four gaps stand out. First, most experimental evidence on virtual influencers comes from outside India. Second, the Indian academic evidence located rests on a convenience sample of mostly young respondents and a single avatar as stimulus. Third, Indian performance figures come largely from vendor or executive



statements in the trade press rather than audited, replicable data. Fourth, the effectiveness literature and the fast-changing Indian disclosure rules are seldom analysed together. This paper addresses the last two gaps by synthesising documented Indian cases, attributed metrics and regulatory instruments into one framework.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study is doctrinal, qualitative and interpretive. The doctrinal element analyses regulatory instruments and guidelines governing endorsements and synthetic content in India. The qualitative element is a thematic synthesis of academic studies and documented Indian brand cases. Sources were read against eight analytical themes: attention and reach, engagement, credibility and trust, purchase intention, brand safety and control, cost and scalability, representation and ethics, and regulation.

3.2 Nature of the Study

The study is descriptive (documenting who the Indian avatars are and how brands use them), analytical (examining what the evidence implies for impact) and evaluative (assessing the strength of that evidence and proposing a framework). It is not an experiment or survey, and it generates no statistics of its own.

3.3 Sources of Data

All data are secondary. Peer-reviewed sources include journal articles and conference papers from 2021 to 2025, together with foundational theory papers. Regulatory sources include the Department of Consumer Affairs' endorsement guide, the Central Consumer Protection Authority's 2022 guidelines, ASCI's influencer guidelines and the 2026 IT Rules amendments, read through law-firm and trade summaries because full official texts were not all accessible. Industry sources include national business and marketing media and company press releases, reviewed up to September 2026. Evidence was weighted by type: peer-reviewed findings and regulatory text ranked above trade reporting, and executive statements and press releases are treated as claims, not verified outcomes. Numbers are reported only as attributed to the original source and date.

3.4 Scope and Limitations

The scope covers AI-generated or CGI-based avatars used as brand-facing characters on social media in India, with Instagram as the dominant platform in the sources; chatbots and internal avatars are excluded. Limitations are as follows. (i) No primary data were collected, so causal claims are not made. (ii) Platform metrics such as follower counts and engagement rates are third-party snapshots that vary by source and date and were not independently verified. (iii) Indian cases are documented mostly in trade press and company statements, and successful campaigns are more likely to be publicised, which introduces survivorship bias. (iv) Regulatory analysis relies on secondary summaries; some websites report specific penalty figures for avatars that could not be confirmed in primary text and were excluded. (v) The rules are evolving, and this paper is not legal advice.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 The documented Indian landscape

Table 1 summarises four avatars that recur in the reviewed sources. Reported Instagram followings differ across outlets and dates: Kyra's following is reported at roughly 2.3 to 2.6 lakh in the sources cited here, and higher on some listing sites, which illustrates why metrics here are treated as indicative.



Table 1: Documented Indian brand-facing avatars

Avatar	Created or owned by	Launch	Documented brand associations	Reported Instagram following
Kyra	FUTR Studios (founders George Tharian and Himanshu Goel)	Jan 2022	boAt, Amazon Prime Video, Titan Eye; L'Oréal, realme, American Tourister and CaratLane also reported	More than 2.55 lakh (Forbes India, 2026)
Naina Avtr	AVTR Meta Labs	Late 2022	Nykaa, Puma, Pepsi	More than 3.77 lakh (Forbes India, 2026)
Maya	Myntra (brand-owned)	2023	Myntra (owner)	Crossed 1.55 lakh (Forbes India, 2026)
Myra Kapoor	Manforce Condoms, Mankind Pharma; conceived and executed by Grapes Worldwide	Sep 2025	Manforce television commercial and the "India's Most Desirable" digital contest	Not reported in sources reviewed

Sources: Forbes India (2026); Outlook India (2024); SheThePeople (2024); Exchange4media (2025); Manifest (2025); Kolsquare (2026). Follower figures are as reported, not verified.

4.2 Thematic findings

Finding 1: Attention and brand association are achievable. Kyra's boAt debut drew over 20 lakh Instagram views within a fortnight (ThePrint, 2022), and Forbes India (2026) quotes Kyra's creator as saying brands needed convincing at first but audiences and brands eventually accepted the concept. The Manforce campaign was reported to have cast its avatar in a public contest against human participants, in which she won an online public vote (Manifest, 2025); this is a promotional claim, not independent evidence of effect.

Finding 2: Industry data point to a credibility and engagement gap. The co-founder and head of brand alliances at influencer platform Qoruz told Financial Express that leading human creators show engagement of 3 to 5 per cent against about 1.2 per cent for AI-led profiles such as Kyra, and audience credibility above 80 per cent for humans against roughly 50 per cent for virtual influencers (Financial Express, 2025). A separate vendor, Kolsquare (2026), lists a credibility score of 49 for Kyra. These are vendor-scale measures with undisclosed methods. The same report claimed that boAt, realme and Titan Eye had not collaborated with Kyra again, but other sources list later associations such as CaratLane (Kolsquare, 2026), so that claim is contested.

Finding 3: Academic evidence is mixed and consistent with the credibility theme. In the survey of Jayasingh et al. (2025), credibility was the strongest predictor of engagement ($\beta = 0.600$) and of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.554$). Informative value and human-likeness raised both. Attractiveness and entertainment value raised engagement but did not raise purchase intention directly; entertainment value showed a negative direct association with it. The sample was a convenience sample, 86 per cent aged 18 to 27, and only about 20 per cent of respondents said they currently followed AI influencers. Internationally, the pattern of strong attention but weaker persuasion appears in Lou et al. (2023), as summarised in the same paper.

Finding 4: Brands use avatars for control and for category constraints. Myntra owns Maya (Forbes India, 2026). Mankind Pharma's managing director said Myra Kapoor was conceived because A-list celebrities were reluctant to endorse condom brands, and that the persona was developed over about a year through multiple agencies and shoots (afaqs!, 2025). Allal-Chérif et al. (2024) similarly link avatar use to reputational-risk avoidance.

Finding 5: Representation and authenticity concerns persist. Commentators note that avatars' diction and looks are tuned to aspirational urban aesthetics (The Swaddle) and that lower authenticity and bias are recognised limitations



(Forbes India, 2024). Reported comments on Naina's posts include users asking whether she is real (Outlook India, 2024), which suggests ambiguity about non-human status at the audience level.

4.3 Regulatory findings

Table 2: Indian instruments relevant to AI-generated avatars

Instrument	Date	Relevance to avatars (as summarised in cited sources)
CCPA Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements	9 Jun 2022	Set criteria for valid advertisements and endorser duties, including due diligence and disclosure of any material connection (Khaitan & Co, 2023).
Department of Consumer Affairs, Endorsements Know-hows!	20 Jan 2023	Covers celebrities, influencers and virtual influencers. Disclosures must be prominent, clear and in the language of the endorsement; terms such as "advertisement", "ad", "sponsored", "collaboration" or "paid promotion" are accepted; endorsers should not endorse what they have not personally used or experienced or done due diligence on (Khaitan & Co, 2023; Deccan Herald, 2023).
ASCI influencer advertising guidelines	Draft 22 Feb 2021; updated since	As reported in 2026, for virtual influencers ASCI requires a clear disclosure that the consumer is not interacting with a real human, in addition to standard advertising disclosures (Campaign Asia, 2026).
IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026	Notified 10 Feb 2026; in force 20 Feb 2026	Brings synthetically generated information within intermediary due diligence; permitted synthetic content must be clearly and prominently labelled, with metadata where feasible (Freshfields, 2026). The definition turns on synthetic media that realistically appears to be a real person or event and can deceive (Khaitan & Co, 2026), and digital-rights groups criticised the breadth of the definition in the draft rules (Internet Freedom Foundation, 2026).

Whether a given, openly disclosed brand avatar falls within the synthetic-content rules is a case-specific legal question not resolved in the sources reviewed.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Attention is not persuasion. The strongest convergent signal is that avatars attract attention more reliably than they convert it. Debut view counts (ThePrint, 2022), the entertainment-versus-purchase split in Jayasingh et al. (2025) and the authenticity shortfall in Lou et al. (2023) all point the same way. Read through source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), the mechanism is plausible: an endorser with no personal experience and a brand-controlled script may struggle on trustworthiness even if she scores well on attractiveness. This reading is the author's interpretation, not a tested finding.

Credibility is the shared variable. The academic survey names credibility as the most influential factor, and the industry data quoted by Financial Express find credibility to be where avatars lag. The two sources measure different



things by different methods, so they cannot be reconciled quantitatively. Together they suggest that credibility work (accurate information, substantiated claims, consistent character) deserves more investment than further visual polish.

Risk shifts rather than disappears. Avatars remove talent-scandal risk (Allal-Chérif et al., 2024) but add others. Thomas and Fowler (2021) show that consumers generalise one avatar's misstep to avatars as a class, so a badly handled campaign can hurt the category. The Indian rules add compliance risk: a brand must disclose both the commercial relationship and the avatar's non-human nature (Campaign Asia, 2026). There is also an interpretive tension, flagged here as this paper's own reading: guidance that endorsers should not endorse what they have not personally used (Deccan Herald, 2023) sits awkwardly with an entity that cannot use anything. Brands should therefore keep avatar claims to information the brand can substantiate and avoid invented first-person experience. Ownership of the character and its data also sits with a studio or agency unless contracts say otherwise.

Cost claims are unresolved. Jayasingh et al. (2025) list both lower cost and high development cost among the features of AI influencers, and a ClanConnect executive quoted by industry press argues that virtual campaigns look cheap but return less (CB Insights, 2025). No audited Indian cost-per-outcome comparison was found.

Transparency is a design choice. Both Indian disclosure rules and the Thomas and Fowler finding on category-level spillover make concealment costly. Brands that treat disclosure as part of the persona's story, rather than a legal footnote, are better placed. Finally, the Swaddle critique raises a representation question for a multilingual market: a persona tuned to one urban aspiration may under-serve audiences it claims to reach.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FRAMEWORK

The framework below is the author's synthesis of the reviewed evidence. It has not been empirically validated and should be treated as a structured checklist for decision-making and future testing.

Table 3: Five-stage framework for Indian brands using AI-generated avatars

Stage	Recommended actions	Evidence basis
1. Purpose	Assign the avatar a defined funnel role (attention, product visualisation, category storytelling) instead of assuming it can replace a trusted human endorser. Decide whether the brand owns the character.	Attention versus persuasion gap; brand-owned Maya; category constraint at Manforce.
2. Persona	Build a consistent, culturally grounded persona and language mix; audit for bias and narrow aspirational calibration.	Forbes India (2024); The Swaddle.
3. Proof	Lead with informative, substantiated content; avoid personal-experience claims; document claim substantiation.	Credibility as the strongest driver (Jayasingh et al., 2025); consumer-affairs endorsement guide.
4. Disclosure and compliance	Label posts as advertisements and label the avatar as non-human, on the content itself; check the synthetic-content labelling rules with counsel; contract for IP, takedown and liability with the creator studio.	Department of Consumer Affairs (2023); Campaign Asia (2026); Freshfields (2026).
5. Measurement	Set KPIs beyond likes: engagement rate, audience credibility, conversion, sentiment. Test against a human-creator or no-creator baseline and record the method.	Vendor metrics not comparable across sources; no audited Indian cost data.

For researchers, the priority is controlled field or experimental studies with Indian audiences, several avatars and product categories, measuring actual conversion rather than intention alone. For regulators and industry bodies,



published examples of compliant avatar disclosure would reduce uncertainty, especially on how synthetic-content labelling interacts with advertising disclosure.

VII. CONCLUSION

AI-generated avatars have secured a place in Indian brand communication, from Kyra's 2022 debut to Myra Kapoor's television campaign in 2025. The documented evidence supports a measured conclusion. Avatars offer creative control, protection from talent-related scandals and a novelty that attracts attention. However, industry data reported in 2025 indicate lower engagement and audience credibility than leading human creators, the academic evidence makes credibility the pivotal variable, and no audited Indian evidence shows that avatars outperform human creators on conversion or cost. They also bring disclosure obligations under consumer-affairs, ASCI and IT Rules regimes. Brands that assign avatars clear roles, invest in credibility, disclose openly and measure honestly are best placed to benefit. The study's limits, notably its reliance on secondary and partly vendor-reported data, mean that its conclusions are provisional pending controlled Indian research.

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