

September 28, 2017

## **THEY'RE FAMOUS—BUT THEY'RE NOT HUMAN**

THEY'VE GOT MILLIONS OF FANS AND FOLLOWERS, AND THEY'RE MADE OF PIXELS. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER TECH ARE CREATING A NEW KIND OF CELEBRITY, AND THEY'RE PLAYING NEW ROLES IN ENTERTAINMENT AND MARKETING...

At the beginning of this year, [we told you](#) that the robots are coming, with artificial intelligence powering a wave of toys and devices that interact with their human owners. What we didn't tell you was that the AI celebrities were coming too—but amazingly, that's what we're starting to see signs of. Thanks to digital animation, elaborate online personas, and in some cases artificial intelligence, a new kind of fame is being created. These new celebrities might have humans pulling the strings, but they're not actually real individuals. Instead they exist only virtually. The trend continues to blur the lines between real and digital, though with 58% of 13-35-year-olds telling us that online friendships are just as real as friendships made offline (from our upcoming [Friend Request trend research](#)) is it that big a leap to say that celebrities that exist only online are just as real as those that exist offline as well? Here are three digital individuals that might make you think so:

### **ALEX HUNTER**

Coca-Cola is getting in the (video) game by sponsoring FIFA's most famous soccer player—even though he's not a real athlete. Alex Hunter made a name for himself in the storyline of FIFA 17, one part of the prodigious sports game series. According to [Adweek](#), Millions of avid FIFA fans followed his personal road to glory on and off the digital field, making him perhaps “one of the most popular young soccer players today,” even compared to actual athletes competing off screen. Coke partnered up with EA Games to embed themselves in the storyline for FIFA 18, where Hunter signs an ad deal to promote Coca-Cola Zero Sugar. The spot is a recreation of the 1979 classic “Mean Joe Greene” commercial, but as a “modern touch,” Hunter takes a selfie with a fan instead of tossing him a jersey. Characters and ad deals like this one really blur the lines of who we're defining as a “celebrity” these days.

### **LIL MIQUELA**

Instagram's latest “It Girl” is trendy and talented—but not human. That's right, [@lilmiquela](#) is a digitally animated celebrity with hundreds of thousands of followers. [Vogue](#) reports that like the Gorillaz and Hatsune Miku before her, she's making people question what it means to be a celebrity—but mostly, she's making everyone wonder who she is. Dubbed “Instagram's biggest mystery” by *The Washington Post*, she's hot off the release of her first single, “Not Mine,” and not dropping any hints as to “who's pulling her strings.” We know someone is though, because an email is listed in her profile—but when *Vogue* reached out for an interview, Miquela refused to break character. She discussed her goals, dreams, plans for dinner to go to the local pupuseria...sounds like the stuff of real life. But we can promise you one thing: you're not going to run into her on the streets of LA, and if you ran into her creator, you'd never know. So, for now, this mystery remains unsolved and leaves us scratching our heads at how fame can be formed from some clever Photoshop.

### **XIAOICE**

Millions of people are chatting with a 17-year-old Chinese girl on Weibo, and they don't care that she's a robot. Xiaoice [is reportedly](#) the sixth most active celebrity on the chat app, and has had 10 billion conversations with users, who ask for advice about their personal lives and confide in the artificial intelligence teen. She even offers a breakup therapy course, and can respond to images accurately. Instead of being "precise and repetitive," Xiaoice is emotional and answers differently depending on context. And if she's too upset or unsure? She'll refer you to her father: the Microsoft Application and Services Group East Asia. Many users don't "necessarily care that they're chatting with a machine," seeing her simply as a supportive friend. And her conversations will only get better with time because she's "entered a self-learning and self-growing loop," evolving from each conversation to the next to the point that she can knowledgeably take part in over half of all "common human conversations."

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