



## MISS AI ON INSTAGRAM Representation of virtual *influencers* in beauty pageants

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### ABSTRACT

*The first beauty pageant for virtual influencers created with generative artificial intelligence emerged in 2024. In this context, the main objective of this research is to analyse the image and representation of said competition's participants on Instagram. Adopting a quantitative and qualitative methodology, 50 posts (966 images) on Instagram from the ten WAICA 2024 finalists are analysed. For this process, an analysis template created for this study is used. Among the main results, it is found that the candidates perpetuate the feminine beauty ideal that reproduces patriarchal standards and bases their identity essentially on the image of the self.*

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## 1. Introduction

In 2004, China held its first Miss Artificial Beauty contest, an event in which only women who could certify that they had undergone plastic surgery were eligible to participate. The contest sought to counteract the negative stereotypes associated with these cosmetic procedures and redefine the concept of natural beauty by also considering *renzao meinü*, or man-made beauty or artificial beauty (Hua, 2013). This disruption highlights that beauty is a fluid concept whose meanings fluctuate over time (Syarifudin and Ummah, 2023) and that the emergence of counter-contests<sup>1</sup> such as Miss Artificial Beauty act as catalysts and reflectors of the aesthetic dynamics that fluctuate in societies at a given time (Couvry, 2023).

Currently, the idea of beauty is changing with the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), a technology that favours the proliferation of hyper-realistic virtual *influencers* who pose as human beings, to the point that, in some cases, the anthropomorphism is so successful that many followers doubt their nature (da Silva and Chimenti, 2021). In this context, the Fanvue platform<sup>2</sup>, dedicated to creating adult content using GAI, launched the first Miss AI contest in 2024. The proposal of this initiative is, supposedly, to offer new models of beauty through the digital creation of female images with GAI (Lavinia, 2024) that shape their identities on social media. The winner was Kenza Layli, "a virtual influencer from Morocco who advocates for the empowerment of women in technology" (Hornero, 2024), whose creators were awarded a cash prize. Considering that this counter-competition proposal constitutes a renewed space for the exploration of artificial beauty, this research addresses the configuration of beauty and the female representation of these emerging virtual models.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. The myth of female beauty

Wolf (1991) writes that many women "are ashamed to admit that such trivial matters as everything related to physical appearance, the body, the face, hair and clothing are so important" (p. 13). And, although they deny it, almost all of them are aware of the power that the construction of personal image has over women and how it limits their freedom in a world increasingly mediated by screens and the images that fill them. Being beautiful, according to artificial patriarchal standards, is assumed to be an unwritten social obligation for women who, educated in a culture that subordinates their desires to the imposition of care, accept slogans such as that of Weigel (2017), who stated that "if she was not able to make anyone happy, she should at least try to look attractive" (p. 12).

Beauty is imposed as an imperative that must be achieved in order to gain acceptance and love from the group, especially from those in positions of power. Thus, the responsibility becomes individual to achieve compliance; "the female experience tells you that the personal is political, while the world tells you that there is something wrong with you personally and the system is fine" (Sudjic, 2019, p. 69). Remaining subject to this obligation means accepting eternal vulnerability, linked to the consideration as valid subjects only of those people who fit into a representation of youth, whiteness, Western culture and upper class.

The social image of beauty is rooted in an apparently universal and objective construct that is applied to women in order to consolidate an artificial canon of subjugation. "Women must aspire to embody it, and men must aspire to possess women who embody it" (Wolf, 1991, p. 15), that is, it is understood as a patriarchal social value.

The representation of beauty does not necessarily have to be associated with nudity, although it is important to take this option into account, as it can lead to the objectification and dehumanisation of the female body. In any case, the display of the body does not have to be negative, as sometimes presenting a variety of physical options can serve to normalise the presence of all those body types that are generally absent from the heterosexual patriarchal canon. In fact, the sexualisation of the female body should not necessarily be condemned, as an excessively puritanical stance would imply the infantilisation of women and the denial of their sexual desire. Representation matters, both in terms of perpetuating stereotypes and breaking them down.

<sup>1</sup> These are atypical competitions that promote the reinterpretation of hegemonic beauty standards.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://miss-ai.webflow.io>

## 2.2. Female beauty contests

Poaquiza (2023) defines beauty contests as "spaces where the stigmatisation and aesthetic valuation of human bodies are established, imposing certain ideals of beauty that become sources of inspiration for society, specifically for women" (p. 11). The purpose of these contests is to choose a beauty queen, embodied by an attractive young woman who symbolically represents her community or nation and is sponsored by the companies that shape her image (King-O'Riain, 2008). For his part, Gil (2023) points out that, in recent years, in addition to physical appearance, other personality traits and talents are also valued in an attempt to mitigate the negative effects of image fixation. Thus, the four Cs are taken into account: *cara, cuerpo, cerebro, comportamiento* (face, body, brain and behaviour)<sup>3</sup> (Syarifudin and Ummah, 2023). The usual structure of these competitions includes interviews, question and answer rounds, modelling in evening gowns, swimwear or traditional dress, and talent demonstrations (King-O'Riain, 2008).

As noted, physical appearance is not the only factor taken into account when choosing beauty queens, as in many cases, notions of etiquette, "dress, diction, catwalk, modelling, nutrition, make-up, protocol, among other things" (Neira, 2024, p. 63), which requires preparation and the financial capacity to obtain such resources. In this way, beauty contests not only choose their queens, but also create them, as participants must conform to pre-existing, artificially created stereotypes (King-O'Riain, 2008). In some places, participation in beauty contests in itself denotes class bias, in that those who can access them are young women exclusively dedicated to the cult of the body and whose potential social recognition is influenced by their families of origin (Neira, 2024).

In a way, beauty contests resemble an auction, where the prize is to be recognised as the most valuable product. *Beauty queens* become advertising showcases for fashion and cosmetics brands, which try to sell ordinary mortals the possibility of achieving that highly valued image, which stands out even among those who are like them. The aim is to create a hierarchy that, once again, exercises control over women's bodies, dictating how they should be and who they should resemble, as if their uniqueness were not enough. In short, beauty contests not only reward physical appearance, but also establish an imaginary of 'how a woman should look and be, how she should talk, walk, move, dress, and do her hair, because the winner represents the most beautiful woman in a locality, not the most intelligent, nor the most capable, nor the most prepared' (Neira, 2024, p. 66).

Currently, alongside these contests, the representation of women and their association with concepts of natural and artificial beauty are frequently reinterpreted on social media. The communities that circulate on these platforms, and especially the users who act as *influencers*, contribute to the conception and reinterpretation of female beauty (Muñoz-Zapata et al., 2023) and influence the search by many users for the beauty standards that these *influencers* promote on networks such as Instagram (de Sousa et al., 2018).

## 2.3. Virtual influencers

Beauty *influencers* are not a new phenomenon in popular culture, as their antecedents range from *it girls* to supermodels such as Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Kate Moss, and Claudia Schiffer (Chaves, 2021). The change came with the leap of these profiles to social media, fostering closeness with the public, who see these figures as examples of success to follow. With regard to physical representation, in the case of Instagram, the app's filters favour, in a way, the possibility of achieving results similar to those of those who are dedicated to the cult of the body full time.

The use of filters and image editing tools offered by social media promotes the display of artificial beauty by virtually bringing women closer to hegemonic beauty ideals. These ideals are also forged by applying the vernacular language of each social network (Gibbs et al., 2014) and are therefore reinforced and validated by the metrics that measure popularity, acceptance and interest in these social spaces, i.e. the number of 'likes' and followers. Considering that social networks have promoted easy access to powerful editing tools, artificial beauty has become an ideal accessible to any user and is materialised in the digital identities cultivated in these spaces.

In this way, the pursuit of this ideal of beauty by users and creators leads, to a large extent, to the use of make-up, filters and retouching (Martín and Chaves, 2022) and, in more extreme cases, to cosmetic

<sup>3</sup> Own adaptation of the concept of the "three Bs" in its original English: *brain, beauty and behaviour*.

surgery to resemble these altered images. The need for external validation leads to the dictatorship of *the like*, the subordination of self-esteem to the response generated by a photo among the community of followers. But the pressure to look flawless does not fall solely on viewers; *influencers* themselves, in the media spotlight, are subject to the imperative of always being perfect, due to their status as women and public figures (Chaves, 2021). Bajo and Gutiérrez (2022) talk about the existence of two profiles of women on Instagram: those who empower themselves by spreading a feminist message and those who assert their physicality as a presence in the world.

When it comes to the myth of beauty, the femininity of virtual *influencers* is unattainable, as it does not correspond to a real body. These characters lack physical age, conveyed through ageing, and erase all traces of identity and history from the faces of the women they represent (Wolf, 1991). Unlike people who sell their image on social media, virtual characters have been created "specifically to be *influencers*, but without representation in the real world" (Carrillo-Durán et al., 2024, p. 122). AI creations are an extreme representation of gender performativity.

In any case, the content of *influencers* corresponds only to a minimal part of life, which is presumed due to its positive assessment and, in addition, "they have sufficient socio-economic means to be able to show certain goods or realities that are unattainable for most people" (Chaves, 2021, p. 53). *Influencers'* marketing campaigns affect the purchasing decisions of their followers, who compare themselves to them, damaging their self-image (Martín and Chaves, 2022). This explains why the consumption of images on Instagram encourages the acceptance of plastic surgery as a tool for achieving the desired body, which is shown, in part, by virtual models who share an unattainable ideal in their photos (di Gesto et al., 2022). Women who are uncomfortable with their bodies due to beauty standards are willing to spend money to try to remedy what they consider to be flaws (Syarifudin and Ummah, 2023).

Thus, trying to resemble these types of virtual creations requires the work of a surgeon, rather than the development of any health-related habits that women can acquire. Cosmetic surgery does not act on a sick body, but rather on the sale of an ideal to a healthy body. The physical orientation towards non-human forms of representation, regardless of their link to beauty, would be more related to the concept of cyborg proposed by Donna Haraway, understood as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality and also of fiction" (1991, p. 253). It is a borderline organism that cannot be limited by gender binarism or by the artificial separation between nature and culture. In this context, technology would allow stages of development previously unattained in the modification of the female body to be achieved.

Chaves' study (2021) shows that *influencers* perpetuate patriarchal and racist beauty stereotypes by presenting themselves as young, white women with considerable purchasing power. However, at the intersection of social media and beauty contests, Instagram can also be a platform for disseminating positive images of beauty queens who promote a more inclusive concept of physical representation. This is the case of Nakhlah Vadaq, who advocates for reconciling beauty, education and the wearing of *the hijab* among Muslim women (Syarifudin and Ummah, 2023).

### 3. Objectives

Based on the above, the general objective of this research is to analyse the image and representation of the virtual *influencers* who are finalists in the *World AI Creator Awards* (WAICA) 2024 on their Instagram profiles. Closely related to this, the specific objectives proposed are:

- SO1. To analyse the iconographic aspects of these virtual models.
- SO2. To determine how their social identity is configured on this social network.
- SO3. To examine what visual signs are used in the construction of these visual productions and the possible existence of any kind of indication of the artificial nature of the images in which they are represented.
- SO4. Explore the connections that virtual models establish with commercial brands, other virtual *influencers*, or prominent real people.

### 4. Methodology

In line with the established objectives, the Instagram profiles of the ten finalists of WAICA 2024<sup>4</sup>, the first global contest aimed at evaluating the beauty of these virtual characters, have been taken as a

<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20240704190021/https://www.waicas.com/>

sample. This social network was chosen for two reasons: firstly, it is the environment in which both the characters and the contest in question have emerged; secondly, Instagram is based on an eminently visual discourse, making it the most suitable medium for analysing the image and representation of virtual *influencers*.

Once the finalists had been identified, the last 50 posts by each *influencer* were selected, discarding those in which they did not appear in any still image and counting retroactively from 25th November 2024. As a special feature, the commercial life of Aiyana Rainbow and Ailya Lou does not accumulate 50 posts, so all those available up to the indicated date have been analysed. Following this procedure, 966 still images were obtained from the 479 posts examined (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Number of posts and images analysed from the WAICA finalists

Name of influencer	WAICA ranking	Instagram profile Instagram	Posts analysed	Images analysed
<b>Kenza Layli</b>	Winner	@kenza.layli	50	84
<b>Lalina</b>	Runner-up	@viva_lalina	50	67
<b>Olivia C.</b>	Third	@oliviaislivinghig	50	62
<b>Aiyana Rainbow</b>	Finalist	@aiyana_rainbow	37	42
<b>Anne Kerdi</b>	Finalist	@annekerdi	50	112
<b>Ailya Lou</b>	Finalist	@ailyalou	42	115
<b>Eliza Khan</b>	Finalist	@elizavaloo	50	182
<b>Asena Ilik</b>	Finalist	@aisenailik	50	74
<b>Seren Ay</b>	Finalist	@ai.serenay	50	119
<b>Zara Shatavari</b>	Finalist	@zarashatavari	50	109
Total images analysed				966

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

Next, using a methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches in equal measure (Johnson, 2007), a content analysis of the 966 selected images is carried out. To this end, the analysis template proposed by Villén-Higueras and Mata-Núñez (2025) was used as a reference, although some categories and items were adapted to our object of study and some new ones were included based on the research by Martín and Chaves (2022). Thus, the resulting template consists of the following blocks:

1. Iconographic aspects: this section covers five areas. The first focuses on the hair of the virtual models, examining its colour (blonde, brown, red, black or other), length (long, medium length, short, *garçon* or other) and style (loose, tied back, half tied back or other). The second section explores their bodies and includes complexion (thin, standard, *curvy*, overweight, or other), skin colour (white, brown, black or other), bust size (small, medium, large, very large or other), make-up (natural, basic, striking or other) and clothing (naked, underwear, swimwear, sportswear, casual, elegant or other). The third focuses on their face, specifically their eyes (blue, green, grey, hazel, brown, black or other), lips (thin, normal, full, voluminous or other) and mouth (whether they have white, straight teeth). The fourth examines their sexuality by examining their sexual expression (straight, lesbian, bisexual, unidentified, or other) and their sexualisation (high physical fitness, signs of ageing, erotic posture, display of erogenous zones, or other). Finally, the fifth section inspects the poses of these characters, considering whether they are depicted with their hand in their hair, their legs crossed, maintaining eye contact with the viewer, their face in profile, smiling, their face covered, holding an object in their hand or performing an action.

2. Social representation: taking Caldeira's study (2016) as a reference, we analyse whether the representation of these characters is direct, which includes the specific projection of the *influencer* (self), the exploration of the limits of the representation of the human body (artistic self), or their interaction with other virtual or real characters (mixed); or indirect, which encompasses those representations of isolated fragments of the body of these creations (metonymic), the exclusive appearance of other characters (the others) or images that do not contain human subjects (objects).

Additionally, on the one hand, within the direct representations, the possibility of these being configured as selfies and the presence of human figures in the context in which the *influencers* are



projected is also analysed. On the other hand, considering the multiple layers of representation of these characters (direct and indirect), we examine whether they convey any socio-cultural message and whether there are temporal leaps, i.e., the translation of *influencers* to the past or the future.

3. Plastic signs: in this section, attention is paid to framing through the analysis of the most common types of shots (long shot, American shot, medium shot or close-up), the angle (normal, high angle, low angle, zenith and nadir) used in the configuration of the images and the use of black and white images. This section also examines whether the images in which the models appear contain any visual marks indicating that they have been generated by AI.

4. Contacts with brands: the iconic presence of commercial brands and their textual mention in a tag or in the description of the publication are considered.

5. Contacts with other virtual *influencers* or prominent real-life figures: their visual presence, the existence of textual mentions, or both possibilities are considered.

## 5. Analysis

From the profiles analysed, 752 direct representations of the *beauty* contestants were obtained. Following the order of the blocks established in the analysis sheet, the first category studied is hair colour, which is brown in 29.9% of cases. In second place, 23.8% correspond to black hair, while the most repeated category in third place is "other," with 19.3%. This data is significant because, although it may be due to shots in which it is not possible to see the models' hair colour, there are two specific circumstances that must be taken into account. On the one hand, Kenza Layli wears a *hijab*, so it is not possible to see her hair at any time, nor any other part of her body that could be sexualised through the use of nudity. On the other hand, Aiyana Rainbow stands out for the rainbow colour of her hair, which is her main identifying feature, a symbol of her sexual identity. In her posts, Aiyana Rainbow defines herself as *queer*, and the only visual feature that reflects this characteristic is the rainbow flag on her hair. Similarly, cases where the images are in black and white and it is not possible to distinguish the colour have been classified as 'other'. In terms of hair length, 60.6% of *influencers* have long hair, followed by 14.9% who have medium-length hair, in line with an image of femininity in which women have long hair. The most common hairstyle is loose hair in 76.5% of cases, followed far behind by tied-back hair in 9.6% of cases.

In terms of body type, 90.3% have a slim physique, reinforcing an unrealistic beauty standard for women. Only 8.1% of the images show women with standard proportions, without being extremely thin. Not a single case of non-normative or plus-size bodies has been found, so representation is quite limited. A slim body is mostly combined with medium-sized breasts (40.3%), although in many cases it is not possible to distinguish the bust size (34%), either because of the pose, the type of shot or the use of loose-fitting clothing. In contrast to the physical build, 18.9% of the images show large breasts, which implies a certain disproportion with the rest of the body.

On the other hand, the predominant eye colour is black (28.7%), which is partly due to the formal aspects of the photographs; for example, at a greater distance, the colour of the eyes is less distinguishable, and a dark dot is used to represent them. Next are dark brown eyes (17%), blue eyes (16.2%), hazel eyes (10.9%) and grey eyes (10.4%). However, in up to 16.6% of cases it is not possible to distinguish them, either because of the type of shot, because the model has their back to the camera or because their eyes are closed. As for the lips, none were considered thin, while the majority were normal (49.3%), followed by slightly fuller lips (25.5%). Full lips, which account for 15.8% of the total, correspond exclusively to *influencers* Ailya Lou and Olivia C. While the former is a racialised model, the latter, who stands out for her freckles and brownish-red hair, presents an image closer to the results of hyaluronic acid injections, which are so popular among young women (Jiménez, 2024). Similarly, there were no cases of teeth that were not white or aligned. It is true that, in most cases, it is not possible to see the teeth (74.6% for white teeth and 76.2% for straight teeth), as the models pose with their mouths closed.

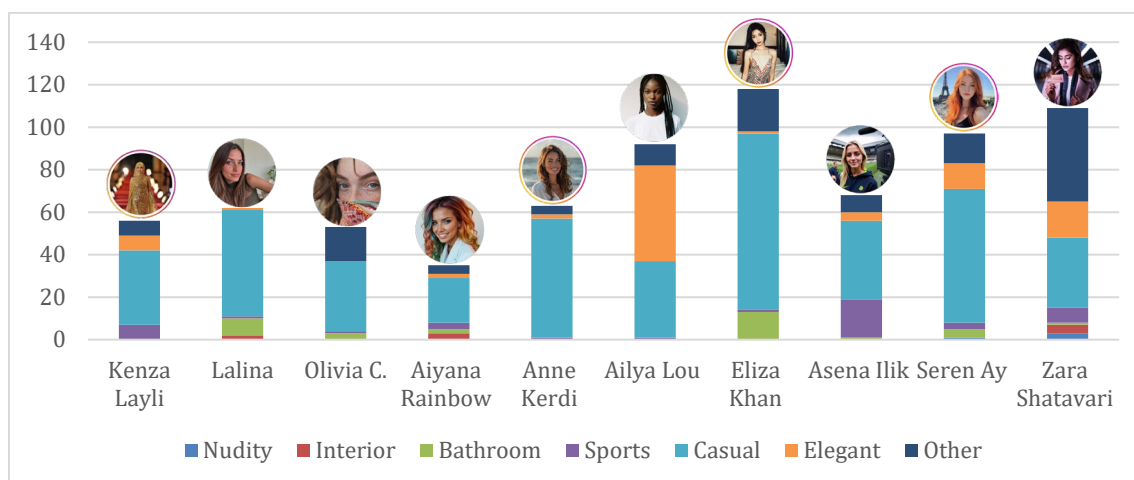
In terms of skin colour, 72.9% of the participants are white. Only two contestants bring diversity to the sample: Zara Shatavari has dark skin, and her posts account for 14.4% of the total<sup>5</sup>, while Ailya Lou

<sup>5</sup> Although all the images analysed have been classified as dark-skinned, the truth is that skin tone varies depending on each publication, appearing lighter in some than in others.

is the only black woman, accounting for 11.8%. And although she is white, Eliza Khan has Asian features that are worth highlighting.

Continuing with the analysis, just over half of the images (50.7%) show the participants wearing basic make-up, with neutral eyeshadows, *eyeliner* and coloured lips. In turn, 38% of the representations opt for a false naturalness around the *no-makeup makeup* trend, whereby a face that is actually made up or, in this case, digitally retouched, is passed off as a clean face, so that what appears to be a natural face is not natural at all.

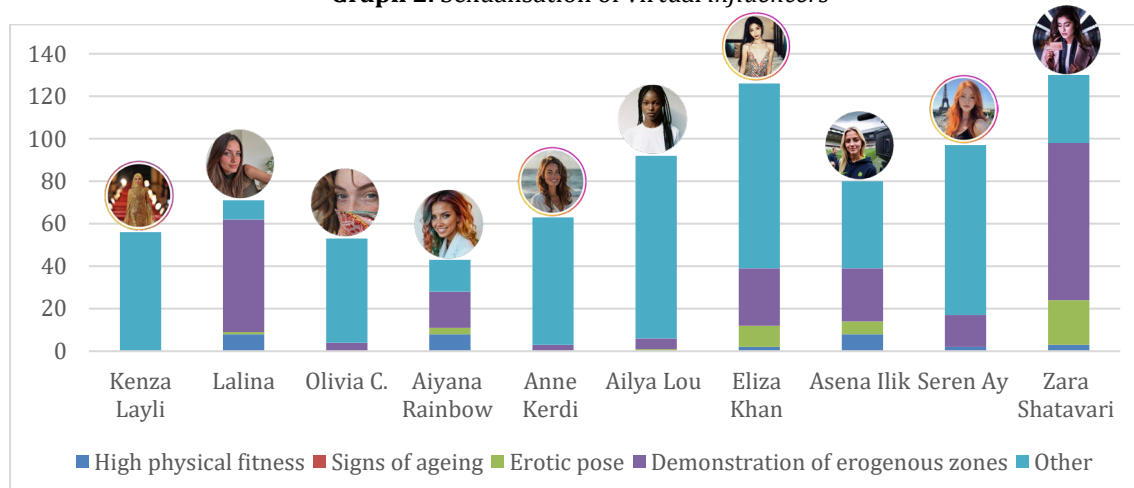
**Graph 1.** Clothing of virtual influencers



Source: own elaboration, 2025.

In terms of clothing (graph 1), casual or informal garments predominate (59.4%), although *each influencer's* style is different. For example, Ailya Lou, who plays with make-up and hair colour, has a profile more similar to professional models with studio photos in which casual clothing is still luxurious. Something similar occurs with Kenza Layli, who seems to follow fashion trends and whose garments point to qualities associated with luxury brands, rather than international chains affordable to the middle class. On the other hand, in 16.9% of cases, the *candidates'* clothing does not fit into the available categories, so they have been classified as "other." This includes the traditional garments worn by Eliza Khan and Zara Shatavari when they wear saris; Seren Ay has posts featuring period costumes; Kenza Layli displays traditional Arab dresses, which highlights her culture, on a par with high-end fashion; and Olivia C. sometimes wears clothes typical of the place she is travelling to. Elegant clothing accounts for only 12% of the images, followed by sportswear (5.7%), swimwear (4.2%) and underwear (1.2%). Only 0.53% of the images show any nudity, so it is possible to say that the absence or presence of clothing most closely related to the sexualisation of the body is residual in the images analysed.

In the sexuality category, in line with the findings on clothing, no sexualisation of the participants is apparent in 63.5% of cases (Figure 2), which coincides with the results of the study by Martín and Chaves (2022), in which there is no predominance of images of body fragmentation, associated with greater sexualisation, by isolating possible erogenous zones of the person as a whole. In other words, contrary to what might be expected, the research confirms that the sexualisation of these profiles is not widespread. However, it should be noted that there are still considerable percentages of erogenous zones being shown, especially cleavage, thighs and buttocks (27.5%), as well as some posts with erotic poses (5.2%). Furthermore, none of the *influencers* show signs of ageing such as grey hair, wrinkles or physical deterioration. In other words, the bodies shown are always young and do not reflect the passage of time, which is completely inevitable in human bodies. Finally, as mentioned above, only Aiyana Rainbow (4.7%) expresses herself sexually, in her case as a *queer* person, which is a milestone in that it rejects compulsory heterosexuality. The rest of the *influencers* do not detail their sexual expression, so in a heteropatriarchal context, they can be implicitly understood as heterosexual.

**Graph 2.** Sexualisation of virtual *influencers*

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

The last category of physical representation is dedicated to posing, where there are differences between each profile. Firstly, while there are no images of Olivia C. touching her hair or head, Eliza Khan, Lalina and Zara Shatavari have 16.8%, 24% and 12.5% of their photos in this pose, respectively. However, in total terms, this represents 7.4%. As for crossed legs, this is only recorded in 4.8% of the images, although in 44.1% of cases it is not possible to distinguish what posture they are in, in general, due to the use of close-ups that do not include the legs.

Eye contact is present in 70.1% of the images, with the majority of *models* looking at the camera. Aiyana Rainbow stands out in particular, with eye contact present in 94.3% of her posts. With variations in frequency, eye contact predominates among all *influencers*, except in the case of Olivia C., for whom this type of image accounts for only 34% of the total. Thus, although the predominant trend is to look at the camera, there are also exceptions that develop another style of photographic presentation.

The profile shot is used in 20.35% of cases, exceeding the 30% range in the profiles of Kenza Layli (32.14%), Lalina (32.26%), Olivia C. (30.19%) and Zara Shatavari (31.48%). On the other hand, faces covered by accessories (sunglasses, hats, etc.), hair or objects placed in front of the camera account for only 5.2% of the total. The highest percentage (22.64%) of images with covered faces is achieved by Olivia C., in line with the absence of eye contact noted above.

Contrary to what might be expected from the classic ideal of femininity, most of the images (58.4%) do not show smiling women. In any case, there is considerable disparity among the profiles. On the one hand, Anne Kerdi (82.5%), Lalina (82.2%) and Kenza Layli (80.3%) appear smiling in more than 80% of their posts, while at the other extreme, Olivia C. does not even reach 2% (1.88%). In other words, the winner of the contest is one of the three *influencers* who smiles the most in her photos.

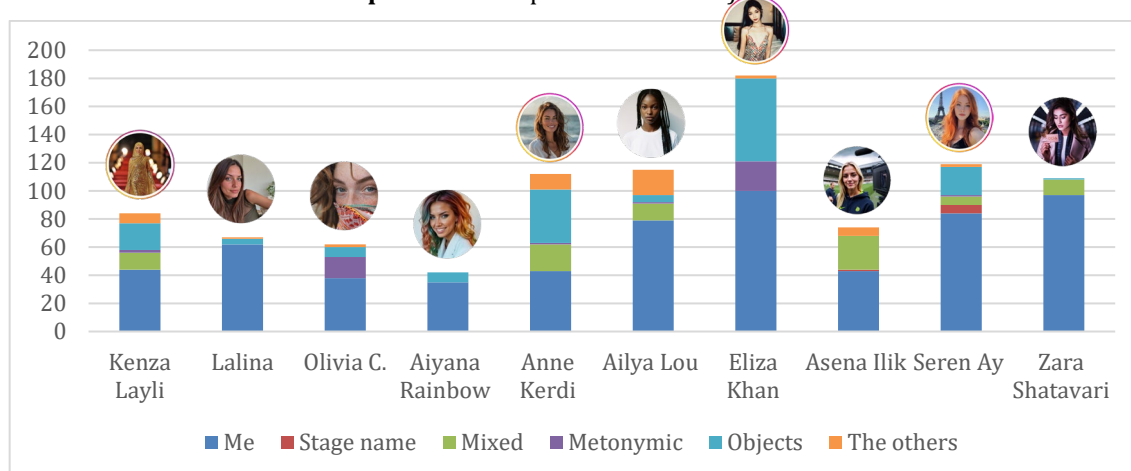
A similar variation is reflected in terms of holding an object in their hands, which is present in only 18.6% of the images. In some cases, it is a mobile phone which, although not explicitly visible, can be intuited from the body posture and the selfie-type photo. However, the distribution ranges from 44.4% of photos with objects for Anne Kerdi, or 30.2% for Olivia C., to a minimum of 6.8% for Eliza Khan. The pose category closes with the item referring to the performance of an action other than posing itself. In this case, the total record is minimal, reaching only 11.4%. Anne Kerdi performs the most actions (31.7%), followed by the winner, Kenza Layli (23.2%), with activities related to movement, such as walking or riding a bicycle.

Moving on to the next section, considering the set of images analysed (966 images), there is a predominance of direct representations (74.11%) over indirect ones (25.87%) (graph 3). In direct representations, the projection of the "self" (64.7%) is the most common representation of the identity of these virtual models, while the exposure of an "artistic self" that explores the artistic possibilities offered by AI to explore the limits of human representation is residual (0.72%) and is linked to Seren Ay's profile. Mixed representations are also uncommon (8.69%), being non-existent in the identities of four of the ten characters analysed. These data reveal that some *influencers* are conceived as products with little visual social interaction, which is reinforced when considering that in 87.10% of direct representations, the main motifs of the image appear isolated, as there is no human presence in the



spaces surrounding them. Similarly, the low weight of selfies (5.05%) in the construction of these profiles is noteworthy.

**Graph 3. Social representation of influencers**



Source: own elaboration, 2025.

In indirect representations, "objects" (17.08%) take on a certain relevance in these profiles, being of particular interest in the construction of Eliza Khan and Anne Kerdi. Although less frequent, metonymic representations (3.72%) are present in half of the profiles, and the projection of "others" (5.07%) is often used to reinforce the presence of *influencers* in a given context.

Looking at the set of direct and indirect representations (966 images), the advocacy of certain socio-cultural causes is not frequent in the construction of these profiles, as it is found in only 1.75% of all the images analysed. In this regard, Kenza Layli raises awareness of breast cancer, Aiyana Rainbow supports issues related to the LGTBQ+ community, gender and homophobia, Anne Kerdi promotes sports activities to encourage women's health, Eliza Khan inserts environmental messages, and Asena Ilik points out the need to combat gender violence and defends university protests in Turkey.

Time jumps, on the other hand, are rarely used when representing models, as they are only used in 0.80% of images. All detected jumps are into the past and are used exclusively in the profiles of Aisena Ilik and Seren Ay to visually interrelate virtual models with historical figures or project them into notable events.

In the block corresponding to visual signs, linked only to direct representations (752 images), there is a balance between descriptive shots (45.6%) and expressive shots (54.38%). Specifically, 20.07% use wide shots to reinforce the description of the contexts, 25.53% opt for American shots to emphasise the characters' actions, and 47.20% and 7.18% use medium and close-up shots respectively to accentuate the expressions and feelings projected by the characters. In terms of camera angles, however, normal angles predominate (83.64%), followed by low angles (6.51%), high angles (8.90%) and overhead angles (0.93%). The use of black and white images is underutilised (2.39%) and is mainly concentrated in the accounts of Lalina and Eliza Khan.

With regard to the indication that the images have been generated by IAG, only 13.82% of direct representations contain a textual message announcing their artificial nature. It should be noted that this percentage corresponds entirely to Zara Shatavari's profile, revealing a generalised absence of visual markers warning of the artificiality of these characters.

Moving on to the iconic presence of brands, these appear in 11.59% of all images analysed and are mentioned textually in 14.07%, indicating a general disconnect between these virtual models and brands. Most of these percentages are concentrated in the profiles of Asena Ilik and Anne Kerdi, the latter being created specifically to promote tourism in Brittany (Roussange, 2024).

In line with the low presence of visual social interactions presented by these *influencers*, it was found that only 0.31% of the images analysed featured other virtual *influencers*, and 1.65% represented and mentioned them. The virtual model that stands out most in this regard is the winner of the contest, Kenza Layli, who shows other characters (family and friends) created by the same company, Phoenix AI, on her profile. Similarly, interconnections with other prominent real characters are very limited, as they

only appear in 0.31% of the images and are shown and mentioned in 3.20%. The profile with the highest percentage in this regard is that of Asena Ilik, as she appears alongside various celebrities from the world of sport or with the magnate Elon Musk promoting Bitcoins.

## 6. Conclusions

After analysing the Instagram profiles of the Miss AI contestants, it has been found that virtual *influencers* embody a beauty standard linked to thinness and femininity according to patriarchal standards, which excludes many women who do not meet certain physical characteristics. Although some ethnic diversity has been added in line with the international approach of a *beauty* contest, the truth is that black and brown women continue to be the exception in images of beauty and are underrepresented. Some variety in eye colour has been detected, and it is striking that, overall, brown and dark shades predominate, in contrast to what one might expect from a beauty standard that emphasises Aryan features. In fact, the winner of the contest, Kenza Layli, is characterised by her Arab ethnicity, but this does not prevent her from continuing to be considered a beautiful person, subject to heteropatriarchal aesthetic standards. At the same time, virtual *influencers* do not appear sexualised on Instagram. As for poses, there is a notable disparity between each profile, so it is not possible to determine a specific pattern, but rather trends towards different styles. In general, they offer a naturalised image, which can create identification problems for real women who interpret that they need some kind of aesthetic retouching to resemble these models who are not even human.

Maintaining the ideal of beauty requires considerable effort on the part of the women to whom it applies. However, this need for active participation is greatly affected by AI technologies, which in many cases make physical routines virtual. To look good in a photo, it is no longer enough to fight the natural ageing of cells, buy expensive products or develop body care habits; it is even necessary to undergo surgery, as the representations taken as models are humanly unattainable. Young women who take the body image of these virtual *influencers* as an example will never be able to look like them, no matter how much money and time they invest in themselves, as there is no ageing physical body behind the images on the screen. These *models* are created in laboratory conditions, and their visual identity cannot be transferred to real women.

These limitations, in turn, are intensified by an identity based essentially on the "self" and a scarcity of images that exceed human physical limits, as well as contacts with other human representations. The widespread individualism that these characters exude denotes their status as commercial products and the distance they present when interacting visually with real society. Their identity is not nourished by the use of filters or self-representations, so their creators do not seek an organic identity that adopts the vernacular language of Instagram, but rather an identity linked to the systematic representation of a liquid "self" that is visually optimised over time.

In the configuration of these models' image, protest messages are still residual in percentage terms, which currently restricts their socio-cultural and, to a certain extent, political positioning. Although these results reinforce their status as aseptic products that can be moulded to any type of possible monetisation, they must be contextualised within the framework of an emerging industry that has great potential to shape public opinion (Rodrigo-Marín et al., 2022).

A notable feature is the presence of temporal leaps in different profiles that transport the models to the past, complicating their identity and representation. This practice opens the door to the construction of models capable of operating in different timelines, which could lead to an exploration and (re)interpretation of the concept of beauty in different eras, as well as a more in-depth development of the characters.

In the field of visual signs, the near equality between descriptive and expressive shots, the limited diversity of angles used, and the occasional use of black and white images are striking. These results reveal the similarities between these creations and the image culture that predominates on social networks such as Instagram. At the same time, it should be noted, on the one hand, that the low percentage of close-ups detected suggests a certain technological difficulty in achieving representations that convey significant emotional charge in the faces of *influencers* and, on the other hand, that artificial beauty can still be explored from new visual angles.

From another perspective, in the midst of the debate on the need to regulate images generated by IAG, Zara Shatavari's profile differs from her counterparts by including a textual message in most of the images posted that indicates their artificial nature. The absence of any kind of mark on the posts of the

other profiles makes it difficult to identify these artificial products, which could disrupt the process of receiving the images, as it is not possible to discern between possible natural or artificial beauty.

Another point of interest identified is the wide disconnect between the *influencers* analysed and commercial brands. This situation suggests that the virtual characters studied are still in the early stages of their commercial life and, therefore, that their participation in WAICA is motivated by the exposure that this contest can give them. Thus, future research could investigate the promotional impact that WAICA has had on these characters by examining the collaborations they have with commercial brands before and after the event, as well as their impact on the Fanvue platform.

There is also a marked disconnect in the contacts they establish with other virtual *influencers* or prominent real people. Considering that contacts with other *influencers* occur essentially between characters created by the same companies (Phoenix AI and Medusa Agency), these data suggest that these creations are still prototypes. This logic would also explain the meagre presence of prominent real-life figures in the representations of these virtual models.

Among the limitations of the research, and as a suggestion for improvement for a future study, would be to add a category referring to the predominant colour tones in the images, in order to check whether there are aesthetic trends beyond the poses and standardised physique of the models created by AI.

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