

Research on Metahuman in Brand Non-Fiction Communication

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Abstract. After decades of Internet development, the boundary between virtual and reality is becoming blurred, and the sense of immersion in user experience is becoming more and more emphasized. When the sense of immersion and participation reaches its peak, Metaverse will become the “ultimate form” of Internet development. Following the “Metaverse”, the concept of “Metahuman” quickly heated up, and brands are warming to new digital marketing methods. They realize that traditional marketing tactics fail to attract the attention of the younger public, who are more likely to appear in virtual worlds and social networks. Therefore, it is crucial to adapt and deliver more innovative experiences to reach the young generation. However, related academic literature is fragmented and limited, among which there are few studies on Metahuman in brand communication. Lacking conceptual clarity, almost no research has pointed out the opportunities and dilemmas faced by Metahuman in brand communication. This article makes three contributions to the study of Metahuman in brand communication. First, to solve the ambiguity of its classification and ensure the consistency of the objects, this study systematically sorts out the brands that have held hands with Metahumans in the past two years. Furthermore, it provides Metahuman’s typology according to their scenes, functions, purposes, social attributes, and other dimensions. Secondly, a case study of AYAYI, a typical Metahuman with multiple identities and functions, analyzes the Metahuman’s opportunities and challenges in brand communication. Finally, the concept of Non-Fiction Marketing is proposed. Brands can convey scattered and fictitious aggregate cognition, including value propositions, temperament, and personality, to the audience figuratively in this Metaverse era.

Keywords: Metahuman, AYAYI, Brand communication, Non-Fiction Communication.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

Metaverse, an inter-operated persistent network of shared virtual environments where people can interact synchronously through their avatars with other agents and objects [1], became one of the hottest concepts in 2021. Character identity building is the first asset of the Metaverse. The National Library of Medicine launched the “Visible Human Project” in 1989, which first proposed the concept of virtual digital people. In the 21st century, with the breakthrough of artificial intelligence (AI), 5G, real-time rendering, motion capture technology, and the continuous rise of cutting-edge concepts such as brain-computer interface, the simulation degree of virtual digital people has also improved rapidly. In 2007, Japanese company Crypto Future Media launched the virtual voice actor “Miku” by using computer animation and speech synthesis programs, which caused a sensation. Virtual idols began to enter people’s entertainment life. iiMedia Research data show that in 2021, the market size driven by virtual idols and virtual idols’ core market size is 107.49 billion yuan and 6.22 billion yuan, respectively. The number is expected to reach 186.61 billion yuan and 12.08 billion yuan in 2022[2]. Experts speculate that in 2030, the overall market size of China’s virtual digital people will reach 270 billion [3].

Metahuman, whose etymology comes from the new creative tool “Metahuman Creator” announced by Unreal Engine (UE) in February of 2021, has been improved by leaps and bounds. It has gradually deepened from appearance digitization to behavior interaction and thought intelligence [4]. Metahumans have rolled into the public as virtual anchors, employees, assistants, reporters, and influencers. Moreover, even students have a highly realistic anthropomorphic appearance and human-like cognitive and emotional intelligence. They have shined in multiple fields, including film and TV,

games, media, culture, and finance, with diversified looks. As an indispensable mediator of Metaverse, Metahuman brings unlimited imagination to the brands.

Brand communication refers to the various direct and indirect methods by which companies inform consumers of brand information, persuade them to buy their products, and maintain brand memories [5]. From the beginning of the one-to-many one-way communication, modern brand communication later developed into one-to-many two-way communication until it evolved into the current social communication mode. It is generally believed that the brand is a collection of existing cognitions in the minds of consumers, based on the cognition formed by brand communication, so there is a difference between what the brand wants to convey and can convey. The brand itself is not objective, and brand communication is naturally fictitious and commercial-oriented. Brands output their spirit, value, stories, and other content to form a differentiated cognition to their audience and occupy a place in their minds. However, the brand is not complete and actual participation in everyone's daily life. It is hard for the audience to form accurate and vivid brand recognition.

1.2 Literature Review

As Khan Shiraz proposed, the Metaverse offers marketers next-level branding opportunities. Customers can touch and feel the products and branding collateral through virtual billboards or pop-ups and the personalized message and merchandise [6]. Scholars have classified virtual humans from different dimensions. Technically, they can be divided into algorithm-driven (AI real-time or face pinch) and real-person-driven (motion capture). Combining the factors of the styles (cartoon or realistic) and the graphic character dimensions (2D or 3D) comprehensively, the virtual human can be grouped into four types two-dimensional, 3D cartoon, 3D hyper-realism, and real image[7]. According to the classification structure, they can be divided into digital type (online user viewing) and holographic type (user live naked eye viewing). IP and non-IP are also reasonable ways to distinguish from the business model perspective. IP includes Key Opinion Leader (KOL), singer and dancer, idol type launched by entertainment companies, celebrity's avatar, and non-IP are functional, academic or identity type. Classified from the application, Metahuman includes three categories: identity type (e.g., an avatar of an actual human), service type (e.g., virtual employee), and performance type (e.g., virtual idol). Miao et al. have also made further clarifications about the avatar. According to their form and behavioral realism, avatars are labeled as simplistic, superficial, intelligent, unrealistic, and digital humans [8].

Thanks to the appeal of entertainment and diverse appearances, virtual idols and influencers are most widely discussed. These virtual humans are powered by advanced AI and attract audiences drawn to their accessibility and familiarity on social media platforms. Like Lil Miquela, a forever 19-year-old Metahuman who shares her insecurities, ambitions, vulnerabilities, and other authentic emotions on social media, she enjoys millions of followers on Instagram (@lilmiquela). Brands also have turned to virtual influencers instead of or in addition to human influencers for online marketing campaigns. Unlike human celebrities, she will never be fallible or misbehave due to the lack of agenting spontaneity, which attracts significant commercial clients [9].

1.3 Research Framework

Most of the studies mainly analyze the technology, genre, and development history of Metaverse and virtual human from a technical level, especially virtual influencers and virtual idols. This scope includes both hyper-realistic digital humans and other two-dimensional characters. Brands actively use Metahuman for communication, while academic research often lags behind business practices. Research on Metahuman is minimal and tends to be macroscopic. Few guidelines exist for the influential position and use of Metahuman in brand communication.

Beyond the hustle and bustle of the Metaverse, this study mainly focuses on the relationship between brands and Metahuman. Firstly, Metahuman's classification in brand communication is clarified from four dimensions, including publisher, purpose, function, and social attitude, based on various Metahuman in the market for the past five years. Secondly, this article analyzes the case of AYAYI, including her character setting, technical implementation, and application scenarios. This

paper further proposes the concept of non-fiction communication and explores the application value of Metahuman and the opportunities and challenges they bring to brand communication.

2. Methods

2.1 Case Study

Cases are derived from practice. Through a comprehensive, in-depth and specific analysis of an individual case, it is possible to provide an easy-to-understand explanation of the topic and empirical validity. Choosing AYAYI, the first Metahuman in China, as the typical example, this article mainly analyzes her background, the meaning of her character setting, and the roles she plays in brand communication. The research sources come from her the news reports about her, the content she released on her social platforms, comments from the public, and other avenues. She bypasses the characteristics of “two-dimensional” or “cartoon” that only belong to the standard concept of “virtual idol” and is more likely to become the latest tool for linking people and scenes. By studying the case, the researchers have learned that she has quickly attracted many fans and has gained a particular influence among the public. She gradually unlocked multiple identities, and through her corresponding communication actions, this article summarizes the entry points of Metahuman in brand communication and how they relate to the audience.

2.2 Content analysis

This article conducts a two-way content analysis of brands that have used Metahuman and Metahuman, participating in brand communication in the past two years. On the one hand, they are the Metahumans involved in brand communication, including their identity, function, timeliness, and the content posted on their social media. On the other hand, they are the brands that bind Metahuman. The headlines of the press releases they publish accurately reflect the purpose and significance of these brands' use of Metahumans. Both aspects mentioned above are stated in this article.

2.3 Category analysis

According to the purpose of the study and the common points and differences of the characteristics of the Metahumans in brand communication, all individuals are grouped into a specific layer, from the perspective of the producer, role/identity, social media, commercial cooperation brand, etc., so that they can be organized and systematized to facilitate the comprehensive study of the whole Metahuman group.

3. Results

3.1 Typology for Metahuman in brand communication

Before classifying Metahuman in the field of brand communication, this paper clarifies its essential characteristics of Metahuman. First, they appear like humans with a specific gender, personality, and other characteristics. Second, they possess human behavior, including expressing themselves with language, facial expressions, and body movements. Third, they have human thoughts, the ability to recognize the external environment and communicate and interact with people [4]. In other words, those two-dimensional images or visual hammers that are only used as mascots are not in the scope of this study.

According to the incomplete statistics of “ChinaBlockchainNews”, there are currently more than 51 Metahumen in the world, active in overseas markets. Domestic Metahuman has shown a spurt of birth in the past two years, and no one can give an accurate number for this group. Some of them are still evolving without fully possessing the characteristics of a Metahuman, and some of them have not spread and are therefore unknown. Thus, this article selects domestic Metahumans with particular popularity and have done something in brand communication. These Metahumans live in the same

marketing era with a similar level of application technology. They also share a consistent media layout and are native speakers of Chinese.

Table.1. Popular Metahumans in China Variables of technical proficiency and media environment are controlled by time and region in this article.

No.	Name	Producer	Identity	Report
1	AYAYI	RM Inc.	Principal of Tmall Super Brands Digital NFT artist Digital curator Trending brand manager	Metaverse marketing? Metahuman AYAYI joined Alibaba On the eve of Double 11, Tmall Super Brand Day joined hands with Digital Principal AYAYI to establish a digital collection. She held an unprecedented Metaverse art exhibition to detonate Double 11 in advance with a breakthrough imagination. Tmall Digital Collection creates an exclusive digital accessory, "METASENSORY" for AYAYI, and consumers must enter Taobao to search for "digital collection" and participate in the lottery to get it.
2	Ling	Next Generation, Xmov	The first Chinese style virtual influencer Spokesperson of Keep, CENTAINE, BVLGARI, Tesla, Nayuki	"Brilliant Teenager" Ling and CENTAINE, an ultra-realistic and graceful style work! Virtual KOL Ling crossed over Nayuki, incarnated as an AI tea researcher to set off a new wave of traditional futurism.
3	Liu Yexi	Create One	A virtual beauty influencer who can catch demons Spokesperson of CLARINS	Clarins invites Liu Yexi to compose a "Clarins poem".
4	ALiCE	GLA Art Group	The first domestic emotional Art Intelligence Virtual musician Virtual Trend Partner of INNERSECT International Trend Experience Exhibition Spokesperson of URBANDECAY, IWC, L'OREAL	INNERSECT's first virtual trend partner, ALiCE, invites you to step into the world of virtual fashion twins.
5	Reddi	StarHeir Technology	Product co-branding with Gucci, Max Mara, Air Jordan, Clarins,	
6	Angie	DONGTU.com	Spokesperson of Chiccream, Reflower, NOMOS	Chiccream announced its cooperation with virtual idol Angie through a fresh and sweet short film, inviting Angie to become the "Chiccream Special Invited Tasting Officer", and simultaneously launched seasonal limited "apricot milk" flavor ice cream. Virtual idol Angie endorses Reflower, the first flower shop in the Metaverse opened.
7	CELIX	Virtueal	Virtual Model Spokesperson of Alienergy Virtual player of Spartan Race 361° China Fashion Week Show Virtual Experienter	Alienergy officially announces the brand best friend virtual idol CELIX, youthful marketing of GenZ breaks the dimensional wall. Virtual idol crossover top sports events Spartan Race, adding a sense of technology and fashion to trendy sports. Invite virtual idols to talk to generation Z young consumers, 361 ° play with the national tide marketing.
8	CHUAN	MOS Meta	Spokesperson of Wonderlab, Imaginist, LANEIGE, Digital aesthetics experience officer of M WOODS Museum	The rejuvenation of the LANEIGE together with the virtual idol CHUAN led by MOS Meta, entering Metaverse

9	He Zhui	XNYY	First domestic virtual actor Product co-branding with Lenovo Special guest of comic exhibition	"National Comic Rhapsody": Lenovo Tablet and National Comic IP joint products were released in Beijing
10	May 30th	Mandrill Picture	The first virtual talk show actor Tencent News digital knowledge officer Special guest of GENTLE gala held by Esquire	Esquire × May 30th × Tencent News invite friends to explore the Metaverse and made a series of short films, discussing the challenges and opportunities that their own industry may face in the arrival of Metaverse
11	Ha Jiang	Harbin Beer	The first virtual road traffic safety ambassador A virtual entertainer performing on the opening show of the LPL final Virtual model of New York Fashion Week Warner Music's first virtual artist to sign a contract Spokesperson of Harbin Beer	As the first virtual idol released by a beer brand in China, Ha Jiang broke through the traditional idol model and became a free-spirited Slashie, with multiple identities including hip-hop dancer, e-sports anchor, national trending leader, public welfare ambassador, pop singer, etc. She is cool but affinity. In a way unique to Genz, she represents Harbin Beer's exploration and embrace of the two-dimensional world, and resonance with today's young culture.
12	Florasis	Florasis	The first hyper-realistic avatar created by a domestic makeup brand A self-built spokesperson for Florasis	She is a key figure launched by Florasis under the centennial brand vision, and an important milestone in the personification of the brand. In the future, Florasis will be dynamically endowed with richer personalities, thoughts, behaviors and values, becoming an important bridge for the brand to communicate emotionally with consumers.
13	Qian Miao	Tmall	Yee Yangqianxi's avatar Tmall's virtual spokesperson	Tmall said that he will open a young base for everyone - Tmall LXSH Parallel World, to explore the possibilities of the ideal life together. This round of official announcement of the new spokesperson's action has not only won the recognition of the fan circle, but also accompanied by a strong momentum of continuous outward expansion of influence. This parallel world, named "LXSH (Ideal Life)", was discovered and participated by more people.
14	Junjun	Baidu	Gong Jun's avatar The first domestic hyper-realistic digital person that can achieve user interaction within the APP	Baidu signed a contract with popular star Gong Jun to endorse the Baidu APP. His avatar is a voice searching assistant, which allows users to have a real-time and face-to-face conversation with him. Focusing on practical functions, he can meet the searching needs of users in multiple scenarios. He can also control the terminal functions to achieve direct access to night mode, bookshelves, games and other modules.
15	Young	Hunan TV	The first digital host of Hunan TV	Young is now positioned as an intern host, and she will appear in various variety shows and galas of Hunan TV in the follow-up.
16	AIYA	AIBANK	Virtual CMO of AIBANK The first AI Metahuman in bank industry	AIYA is the AI virtual CMO of AIBANK, and plays the role of future bank explorer and brand value communicator. She will continue to learn and evolve, improve AI computing power and financial intelligence, and be active in short videos, virtual live broadcasts, APP and other scenarios to have more warm and immersive communication and interaction with users.
17	Xiao C	CCTV	Virtual editor and reporter of CCTV	During the NPC & CPPCC National Committee annual sessions in 2021, CCTV debuted a digital virtual editor named "Xiao C", which showed people with a refreshing and capable short hair and high appearance, played the role of a reporter, and held exclusive dialogues with NPC deputies.
18	Xiao Zheng	Xinhua News Agency	Xinhua News Agency digital reporter The world's first digital astronaut	The world's first digital astronaut Xiao Zheng report from the space, floating flip "super power" interview. The digital reporter of the National News Agency

				travels through time and space to tell Chinese own space story.
19	Hua Zhibing	TsingHua University	The first original virtual student	Hua Zhibing officially debuted and entered the Knowledge Engineering Laboratory of the Department of Computer Science and Technology of Tsinghua University. Prof. Tang Jie is her supervisor and she will continue to learn and evolve. Under the joint cultivation of Zhipu AI team, Beijing Zhiyuan AI Research Institute and XiaoBing Company, she will continue to study in the field of AI, grow into a robot with rich knowledge and good interaction ability with human beings, and ultimately promote AI to serve the society in depth.
20	Sister Su	BlueFocus	The first virtual ancient character	The follow-up operation will make Sister Su a public figure in the promotion of traditional culture, participate in performances, columns, cultural tourism, and universities, and devote herself to the promotion of traditional culture.
21	Amelie	bebebus	The first Metahuman of the maternal and infant field	In the future, Amilie will work with bebebus to help new parents guard the C-shaped spine of newborns, showing the brand's humanistic care and professional image.
22	ALMA	Fiu Gallery	The world's first virtual partner of gallery	Fiu Gallery officially announces the world's first virtual partner of a gallery. Fiu is a "composite art curatorial firm" and a "multi-interactive young art space". Its collaboration with ALMA, a stylized concept of "Metaverse", will create a new communication context for Fiu Gallery and explore artistic elements from the "future world".

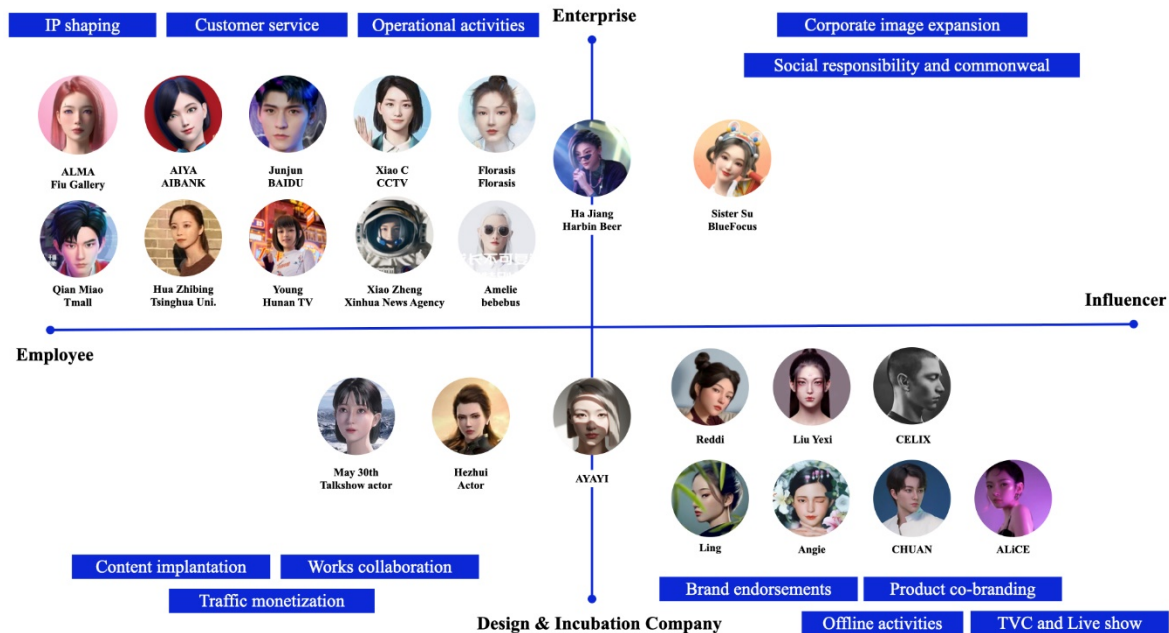


Figure 1. Typology of Metahumans in China

As seen from the table above, Metahuman applied in brand communication can be divided into 2x2 four types: 1) Versatile staff: Professionals created by enterprise, 2) Slashie youth: Influencers created by enterprise, 3) Deep creators: Professionals created by incubation company, and 4) Broker's star: Influencers created by incubation company.

The producer represents their purpose and positions, while the identity represents their function and form of presentation. Brands themselves create one to match their characteristics in the long term, and such Metahuman often plays the role of digital employee, brand spokesperson or mascot, etc. Through such figurative characteristics, enterprises build intellectual properties (IP), which are more

affinity and talk to consumers daily. Some companies also expand their roles to other fields, such as Ha Jiang. Not limited to Harbin Beer, she is also a public welfare ambassador, and Warner Music signed singers, e-sports players, fashion models, etc. Her diversified images give Harbin Beer more possibilities to dialogue with the younger generation. For enterprises, Metahumans are the grasp of their layout of Metaverse business as a part of the entire system. AIBANK, for example, is Metahuman AIYA only holds the title of CMO at present to help this Online bank communicate figuratively. At the same time, digital currency, digital assets, the Metaverse financial industry, and the digital transformation of banking are comprehensive purposes. Brands are occupying "first virtual" titles in the subdivision of many industries to compete for gimmicks related to the Metaverse and seize opportunities to expand the business and enrich the brand image.

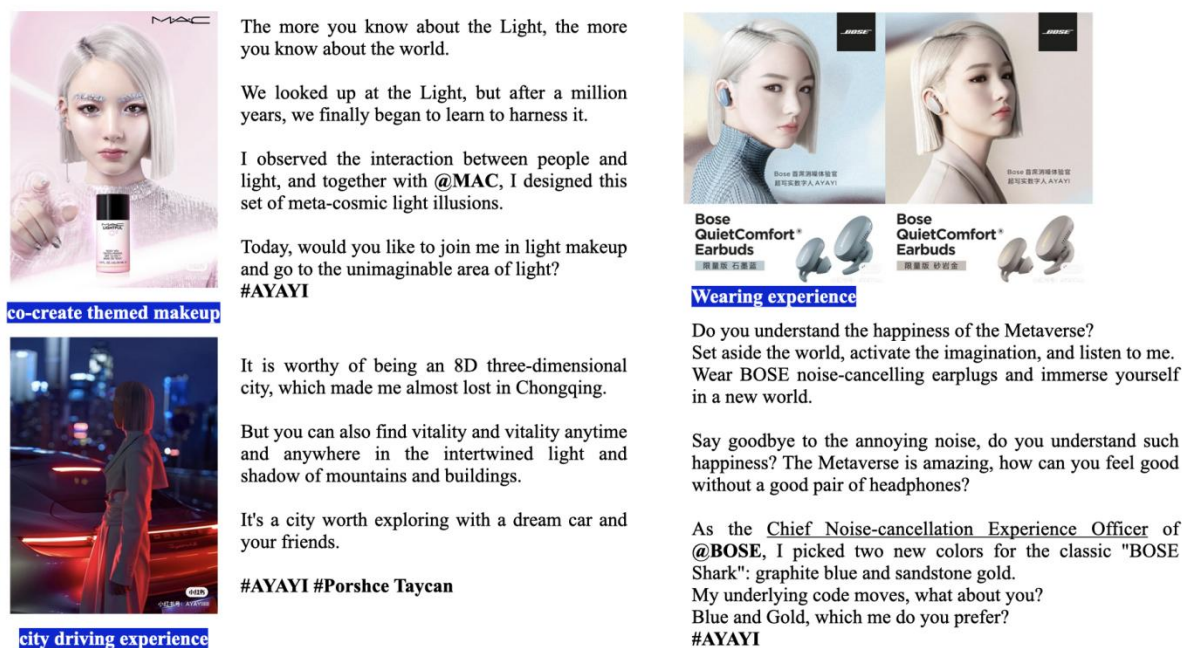
Another kind of Metahuman is developed and operated independently by an external team. They often cooperate commercially with brands based on a product or an event in the short term. Some of them have signed relatively long endorsement contracts with brands. In this case, most Metahumans are influencers and could be spokespersons for different brands, leveraging social media and brands to build themselves in return. They film TVCs and shoot pictures to show how they wear clothing or products. They are also frequently invited to offline events, including pop-ups, fashion weeks, exhibitions, product launches, etc., and express the real participation experience to the audience. The most mentioned keywords are young, GenZ, Metaverse, trending, etc., which implicates that Metahuman has become the traffic password for the brand's rejuvenation. These design and operation firms incubate Metahumans for specific professions, such as virtual singers, virtual talk show stars, and actors who attract businesses through content customization and traffic monetization.

3.2 Characteristics of Metahuman in brand communication— Case study on AYAYI

According to the above classification, this article selects AYAYI as a typical case. In May 2021, AYAYI debuted on RED, her debut post was read by nearly 3 million, and she rose by over 40,000 fans overnight. Created and operated by a Metahuman design incubation company, she is not only an idol enjoying olive branches from various brands but also a digital employee, deeply involved in Alibaba's strategic layout in the virtual scene. Compared with an ordinary star or virtual idol, she has a more aesthetic and realistic appearance filled with stories and experiences. It focuses on her identity, actions in brand communication campaigns, and voice on social media platforms. This research looks at the relationship between AYAYI and brand communication and summarizes the following three key relationships.

3.2.1 Relationship with the natural world

After her debut, she quickly cooperated with well-known brands, covering luxury goods, beauty, automobiles, alcohol, FMCG, electronics, and other fields. She promotes these brands by sharing product usage experiences, co-creating themed makeup with beauty brands, designing the outer packaging as a designer, etc. Through her social media expressions, including interaction with fans through questions and expressing her feelings in emojis, both the selling points of the products and her personality are subjectively displayed in the first person.



Source: RED @AYAYI11111

Figure 2. Part of AYAYI posts on RED

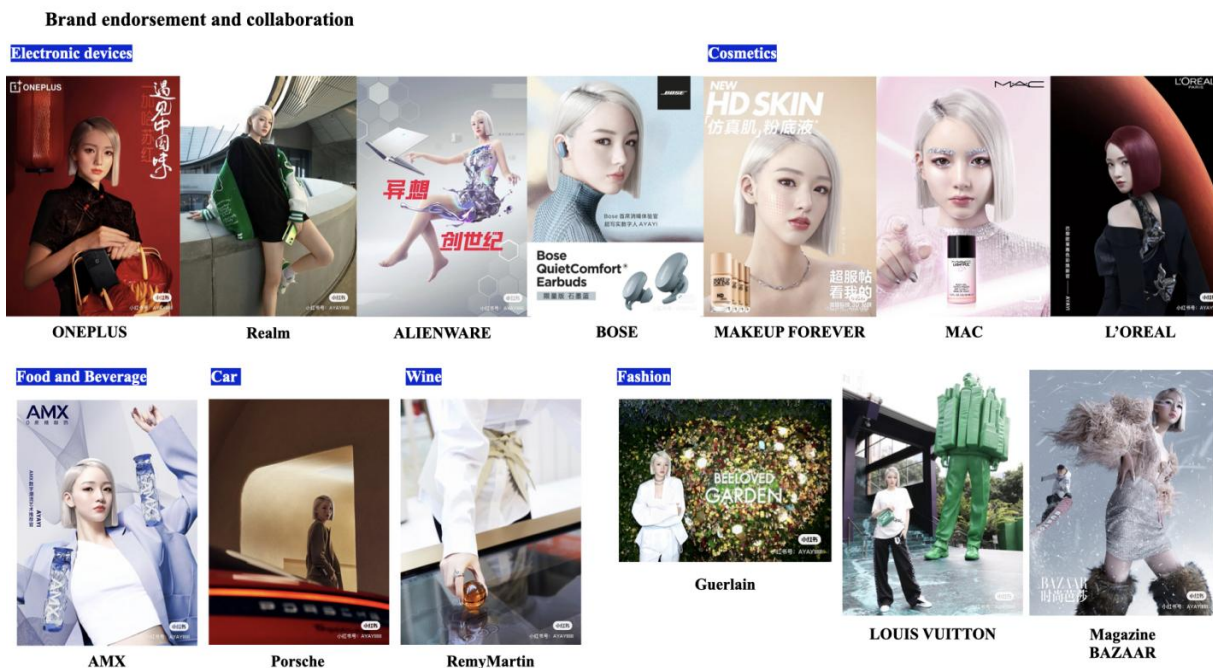


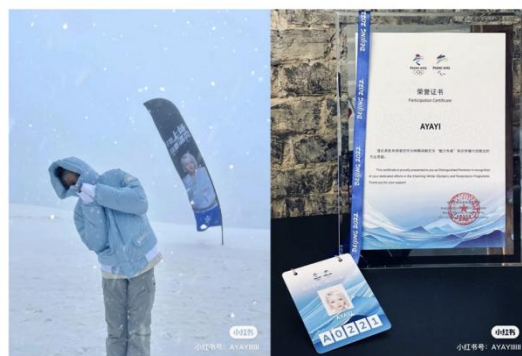
Figure 3. Brands' endorsement of AYAYI

Unlike other virtual avatars, AYAYI visited Alibaba's headquarters in Hangzhou and got her name card like other employees. Since then, she has been deeply bound to Alibaba's digital-related actions, such as selling and exhibiting digital collections, creating virtual magazines, developing holiday gift boxes, etc. She assists Alibaba, this real-world company expanding the boundaries of digital exploration and maximizing the "youthful power" better to reach the younger generation and complete brand rejuvenation.

Digital Employee and digital guide



Metahuman has today 😊
Do you think Metahuman doesn't have to work?
#AYAYI #Mydailylife



New skills will be acquired soon 🧊
During the study, my flag and I both laughed and stooped. 😊
At Genting Ski Park, which will host some of the upcoming Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, I am pleased to participate in the "Charming Winter Olympics" knowledge dissemination action, thanks to P&G for the invitation
My work card has highlights 🔍 🔍 🔍
#AYAYI #Beijing Winter Olympic #Ski #Chongli #RED Snowy Season My picture is snowing My picture is snowing ❄️

Figure 4. AYAYI as a digital employee

Taking advantage of AYAYI's characteristics of not being limited by linear time and physical space, she can freely travel through art exhibition centers around the world, bringing consumers engaging visiting impact and immersing in virtual reality experience. This mode opens up a cross-dimensional interaction between virtual consumption scenes and physical service experiences in an offline store, indeed reconstructing the virtual future digital consumption scenes.

Art and Exhibition

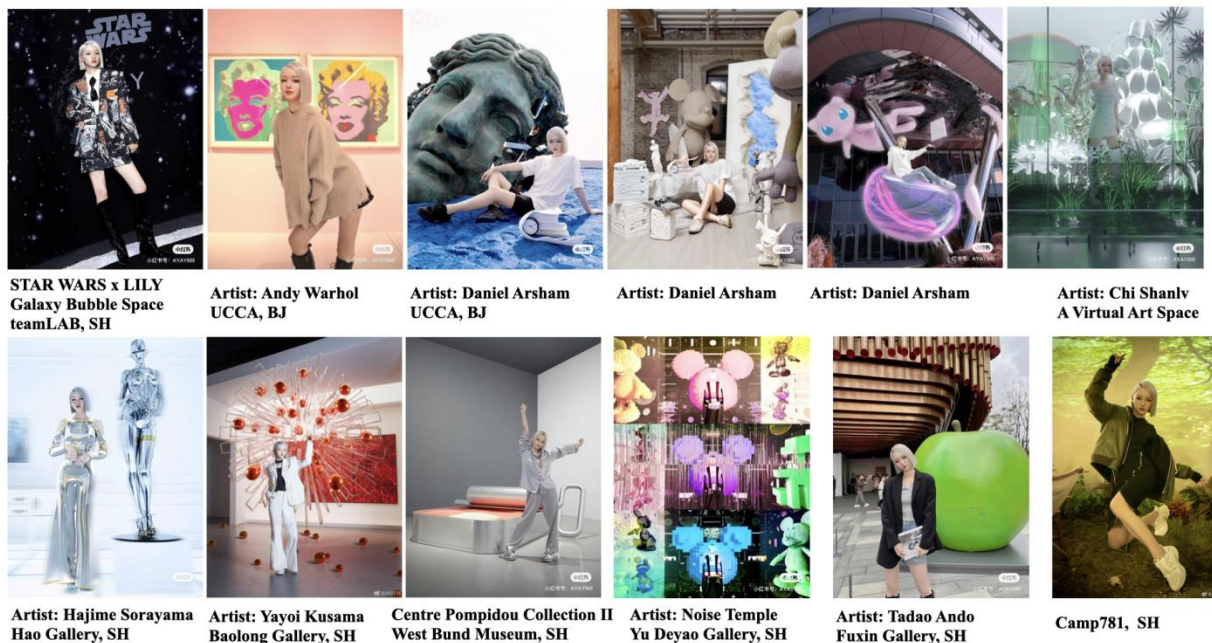


Figure 5. AYAYI's engagement in art exhibitions

In addition to commercial cooperation, she walks around the city, explores interesting stores, takes photos with human celebrities, and collects creative secondary works from fans, giving her an apparent attitude and bridging herself and the real world.

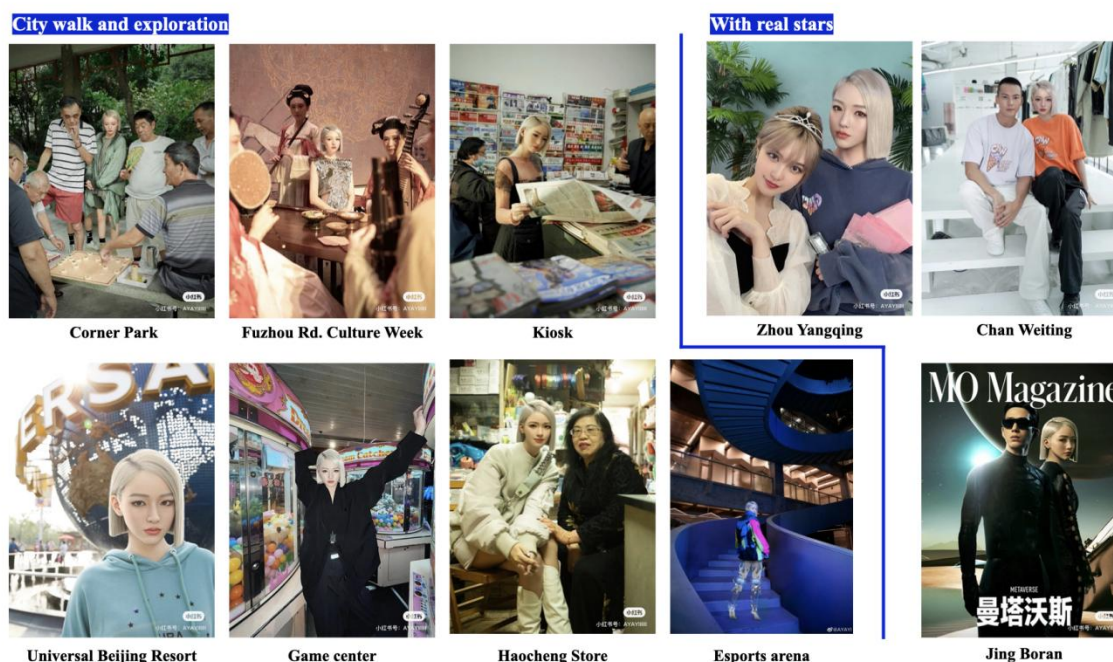


Figure 6. AYAYI's posts about real daily life

The connection with reality resonates with Metahuman and real audiences. Places real exist, products within reach, alongside real stars, are realistically related to the audience's cognition, increasing the affinity and familiarity. Through AYAYI's footprints, her followers obtain new product release information, weekend trips inspiration, and even travel destination references.

3.2.2 Relationship with elements within the Metaverse

As a Metahuman, AYAYI must give the audience a window into the virtual world to break the confines of real celebrities. As the Principal of Tmall Super Brands Digital, digital curator, and digital trendsetter, AYAYI launched plenty of virtual-themed campaigns. Especially in beauty, trends, and fashion on the mainstream social media in China, to attract online traffic and deepen the audience's understanding of her identity and function.

Non-fungible Token (NFT), a unique cryptocurrency token used to represent a digital asset, constructs the basic trading order of the Metaverse. The most common types are collectibles and artworks, objects in virtual worlds, and digitized characters from sports and games[10]. In this context, AYAYI produced an NFT mooncake gift set for the consumers, and each piece is equipped with a unique serial number, which is not tampered with and is inseparable. This innovative festival marketing achieved evident public prominence. It made AntChain, a blockchain technology provider under Alibaba, the first choice for many top digital collection IP parties to explore digital art. At the same time, the number of registered users of the consumer-oriented digital collection APP JingTan has increased significantly.

On the eve of Double 11, the biggest shopping festival in China, a digital collection was curated. An unprecedented Metaverse art exhibition was held, detonating Double 11 in advance in a breakthrough imagination[11]. Burberry, for example, continues the brand's digital IP "Bobo Deer" as a digital sprite activating in the Metaverse. Moreover, "Bobo Deer" plays the role of AYAYI's exclusive fashion consultant. The connotation of "Bobo Deer" is further enriched and extended, conveying the fashionable design aesthetics and the avant-garde spirit of innovation. This collaboration in the form of digital collections has also precipitated sustainable assets for Burberry's subsequent digital innovations.

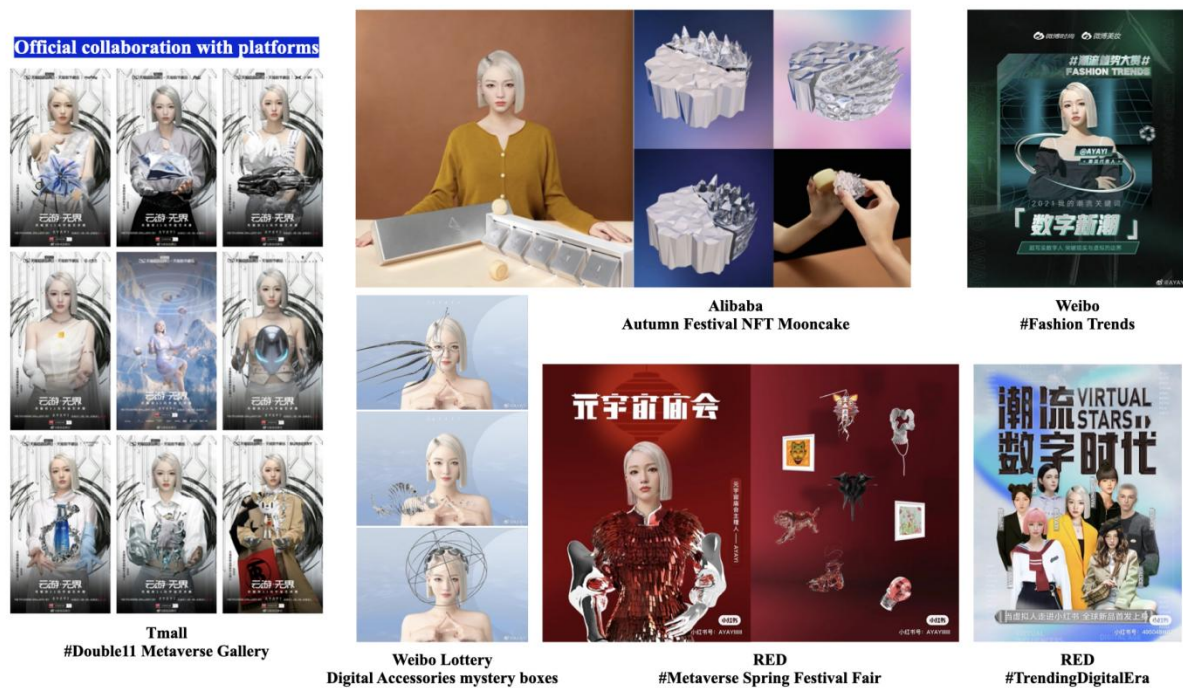


Figure 7. AYAYI's official collaboration with platforms

In addition to selling, gifting, and cooperating with NFT and digital collections, AYAYI also shares specific virtual objects during the festivals. It includes birthday cakes, New Year fireworks, Spring Festival accessories, and even Santa Claus's beard, non-traditional porridge in the traditional Chinese Laba Festival.

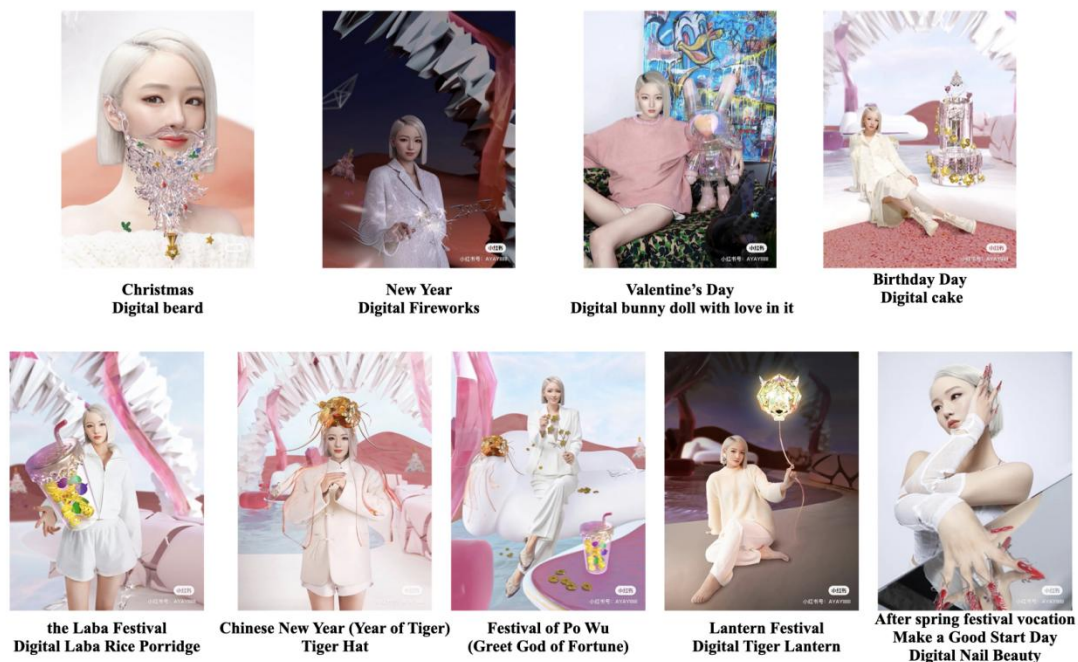


Figure 8. Virtual elements of AYAYI

Emphasizing virtual and recommending Metaverse-related concepts are the key factors in Metahuman's differentiated marketing. Boosting the audience's curiosity and gaining Gen Z's liking provide brands with more opportunities to capitalize on digital content.

3.3.3 Relationship with the audience via social media platforms

In contrast with baby boomers and Generation X consumers, GenZ, especially Millennials, have more consistent, recurrent interactions with brands and form brand loyalty through social media[12]. And this group expects brands to establish an equal and valuable dialogue with them and build long-term relationships through social media [13].

RED was chosen to be AYAYI's first social media front, where numerous fashion and trending brands, fashion influencers, and trendsetters are gathering. In other words, it is the most likely to produce a blockbuster effect. Since such commercial formats and large-scale content have not yet appeared in RED, the freshness of AYAYI is also unprecedented. RED also triggered spontaneous interaction among users to create user-generated content (UGC) such as imitation makeup, fan painting, and OOTD. From the perspective of AYAYI, a set of digital value systems from character images, background settings, and lifestyles, represents a type of woman, who is fashionable, lean, free, independent, eager to be different, and pursuing change. Her female gender, personality and characteristics, values, and aesthetic perceptions make her naturally suitable for lifestyle, art, new techs, clothing, jewelry, and beauty. She also spiritually conveys positive values of femininity, youthfulness, and technological strength. According to the data provided by RM Inc., within one month of entering RED, the number of AYAYI fans exceeded 90,000. They are mainly young people aged 16 to 27, accounting for nearly 60%. In terms of gender, nearly 80% are women.

In addition to the consistent portraits of RED users, the target audiences of AYAYI, and the potential customers of the above brand categories, the content forms of RED match the current stage of Metahuman. AYAYI's releases on RED are dominated by high-quality, beautiful pictures with lively text. So far, of the 121 notes released by AYAYI, only four are videos, and AYAYI also appeared in the form of pictures. Technically, the platform also has a relatively low entry barrier, enabling AYAYI to update at a higher frequency and maintain more sticky interactions with followers, just like real friends.

3.3 Non-fiction communication

3.3.1 Definition

In today's highly-fragmented media landscape, Metahuman's fictional identity but real presence, sociability, and interactivity allow brands to bridge the cognitive gap and provide brand communication with promising prospects.

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, "non-fiction" is defined as writing based on facts and real events rather than stories of make-believe or invented. Merriam-Webster defines non-fiction as "writing or cinema about facts and real events". Different from purely realistic content, non-fiction emphasizes storytelling and picture. Works utterly faithful to reality, such as documentary and reportage, emphasize objectivity and pertinence. In addition to realism, non-fiction allows authors to have moderate subjectivity. Fiction and non-fiction are not emerging concepts but appear more often in literature and films, and this article migrates this concept to communication.

Non-fiction communication is a communication method between reality and fiction. Brands can output brand image, value propositions, and other content in the audience's daily life by establishing genuine social relationships with users and profoundly participating in their lives. Brands can opt to create new brand narratives and original virtual characters or leverage and bring to life their already-recognizable distinctive assets within the Metaverse[14], which allows users to move from knowing the brand to owning the brand.

3.3.2 Opportunities and challenges

On the one hand, brands rushed to create or cooperate with a Metahuman in this emerging period of the Metaverse can attract the audience's attention and expectations to preempt the position in their mind. On the other hand, Metahumans can support the objective existence of the brands. For brands, the most apparent advantage of Metahuman is that they break through the limitations of the dimension barriers and have a sense of reality, storytelling, and integrity. Greater control- and operation-ability

determine that they may never opt out of some part of the collaboration or refuse to express some social brand values. At the same time, real human has such risks. The team behind them gears up metahumans' character design, personality settings, and overall worldview. The composition of RM Inc., the company behind AYAYI, includes a business development team, creative team (content, design, photography), and technical team, including screenwriters, designers, and senior practitioners from 4A advertising and MCN agencies. Thanks to the refined market-oriented design, Metahumans are safe and not easy to overturn, which theoretically perfectly fits various business scenarios. Furthermore, they can link the social connection between brands and audiences to expand the possibility of interaction significantly. Thanks to unrestricted and high safety advantages, brands have the opportunity. They are more relieved to output rich content to maintain a high-frequency correlation with the audience and achieve the possibility of penetrating their daily lives.

Anthropomorphic appearance and distinct personality allow Metahumans to optimize in the direction of becoming the audience's friends, with soft implantation and sharing. Among them, company-self-built Metahumans also undertake the function of assistants or customer service to help brands establish equal and friendly relations with their audiences. The dialogue between the two becomes equal and friendly. And as online channels, mainly social media platforms are the best medium of dialogue, the potential of social accounts is unlimited. Currently, there are few Metahumans owning millions of fans on social media. Although their registration time is not long, some are proliferating. With the maturity of the related hardware technology, brands may unlock more non-fiction communication methods in the future. The integration of Metahuman with AI, Virtual Reality, and other technologies will be more pronounced, providing more immersive virtual social identities.

However, because of their virtual identities and deterministic personalities, brands need to pay more attention to the dilemma brought about by anthropomorphism. It would be illogical for a virtual human to recommend products that require a real human feel, like skincare products. It is also inappropriate for a girl who represents Chinese traditional culture and loves Peking Opera and Tai Chi to endorse overseas cosmetics. Ignoring this, the national style virtual idol Ling recommending Gucci lipstick has caused many controversies. Therefore, a sound design and operations team is essential to unify the design and make business cooperation decisions.

Content creation and long-term operation bring non-fiction communication dilemmas and risks. Packaging, publicity, nurturing, and daily social operations determine whether Metahuman can be applied in brand communication. Coupled with the technical threshold and the labor cost of upfront investment, it is difficult for Ratio of output to input to be effectively balanced in the short term. As can be seen from the table above, many occupations such as model, actor, artist, singers, journalists have been "occupied", and Metahumans have also been found in beauty, mother and baby, finance, car, luxury, FMCG, etc. Brands are facing more intense competition for vertical operational capabilities in subdivided categories. It is necessary to continuously improve the personality and image of Metahuman according to the market positioning and goals and the target audience to strengthen the required attributes.

Metahuman mainly profits through social account operation, traffic monetization, and brand cooperation. The future breakthrough point of the Metahuman in brand communication will lie in the deep integration of Metahuman, goods, fields, and audiences.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Key findings and research value

With a 2x2 classification, this study places Metahumans into four quadrants: 1) employees created by brands for IP shaping and jobs digitization, 2) influencers created by brands for image expansion, 3) influencers developed by design and incubation companies for external commercial collaboration, and 4) professionals developed by design and incubation companies for content co-creation. This typology fills in the gaps in the classification of Metahuman in brand communication. Based on the

differences in their developers and identities, their functions in marketing have also been sorted out accordingly. After an in-depth analysis of the case of AYAYI, this article summarizes three relationships that need to be paid attention to in the marketing of Metahuman: 1) the relationship with real people, things, and scenes, 2) the relationship with elements within the Metaverse, and 3) the relationship with the audience through social media. Based on the above-motivated three relationships, this article proposes and defines the concept of non-fiction marketing. And its opportunities and challenges may bring implications to brands in the future of Metahuman communication.

4.2 Limitations

In terms of research objects, most of the Metahuman involved in this paper are domestic characters. Most of the brands are in the Chinese market, and the social media they mainly use are gathered in China, such as RED, TikTok, Weibo, WeChat Channel, etc. From this perspective, scholars can expand the scope worldwide in future research. Comparing social media usage habits and considering the actual situation of brand communication in different regions, future research may be able to analyze the impact of Metahuman on brand communication comprehensively.

From the perspective of research methods, this paper mainly uses secondary data rather than primary data, such as the content released by Metahuman and brands, etc. In the future, primary data can be obtained through interviewing Metahuman incubation and operation companies and employees in the brand department who use Metahuman for marketing.

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