

AUTOMOTIVE

Porsche turns to virtual influencers to reach Asian drivers

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Virtual influencer Imma.gram with her Taycan. Image credit: Porsche

By SARAH RAMIREZ

German automaker Porsche is expanding its digital expertise, joining fashion labels and retailers in leveraging virtual influencers to engage tech-savvy consumers.

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In late 2021, Porsche Ventures made a strategic investment in Chinese technology startup iMaker, which specializes in virtual influencers and digital ecosystems. The partnership allows Porsche to accelerate its work with virtual influencers, which especially resonate with Asian consumers.

"With our collaboration with iMaker, we have consistently expanded our expertise in a strategic growth area," said Ostin Gong, lead in partnering and venturing at [Porsche Ventures China](#), in a statement. "iMaker can help us create a highly exciting and immersive brand experience for our future customers."

Virtual drivers

According to Chinese market researcher iiMedia Research, China's virtual influencer industry is expected to trip from 860 million euros, or \$968.5 million at current exchange, in 2021 to 2.8 billion euros, or \$3.15 billion, in 2023.

As these CGI influencers become more popular, especially among younger consumers, they become more enticing to luxury brands looking to make headway in the Chinese market. According to Porsche, the average age of its customers in China is 35.



Chinese virtual influencer Ayayi with a Porsche Taycan. Image credit: iMaker/Porsche

"It is critical for us to understand the values, hobbies, habits and consumer behavior of the young population in China," Mr. Gong said. "iMaker is hitting a sweet spot in terms of interacting with Gen-Z through the introduction of its avatars."

The automaker began working with virtual influencers as early as **fall 2019**, tapping self-described Japanese "virtual girl" Imma to promote the Taycan. The electric vehicle debuted in the Japanese market in December 2020.

For the partnership with Porsche, Imma "drove" the Taycan around Japan, posting about the trip on social media. Some of the images were later used for out-of-home advertising, extending the campaign's reach.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by imma (@imma.gram)

Virtual influencer Imma next to her billboards, featuring the Taycan

Porsche has also worked with **Ayayi**, a virtual influencer created by iMaker. In November 2021, the avatar took to her social media channels to post digitally rendered photos of her adventures in the Chinese city Chongqing with a red Taycan.

Other automakers have worked with virtual influencers as well.

In addition to Porsche, Imma, who has more than 356,000 Instagram followers, has featured Italian automaker Lamborghini in multiple social media posts.

U.S. automaker Tesla tapped Ling, a Chinese social media influencer who is powered by artificial intelligence, for a [dedicated post](#). Ling has more than 625,000 followers on Weibo and has worked with several brands, including Bulgari and Este Lauder Asia Pacific.

Next steps for virtual players

Outside the automotive space, several luxury brands have been working with virtual influencers for several years drawn to the cost-effectiveness and malleability of virtual collaborators.

Moncler and Prada are among the brands that have worked with Lil Miquela, a computer generated Instagram star with an audience of more than 2.7 million, to debut products or build hype around an event ([see story](#)). Noonouri, a virtual personality known for her collaborations with fashion and luxury brands, is a less human-like take on CG influencers ([see story](#)).

More recently, luxury travel retailer DFS Group tapped two hyper-realistic virtual idols, Reddi and Vila, for a new consumer experience in the metaverse for Lunar New Year. Both Reddi and Vila have become leading metaverse influencers with millions of fans and have worked with several top brands ([see story](#)).

Virtual influencers are expected to become even bigger in the metaverse and other areas that are becoming more digitized. This is evidenced through Porsche's relationship with iMaker.

"We strongly believe that in the near future, the car will become a very important third space' next to the home and the office where much of our digital life will take place," Mr. Gong said. "Interactive and more personalized virtual assistants are being conceptualized for this third space."

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