

# THE METAVERSE AS AN INFLUENCER MARKETING PLATFORM: INFLUENCER-BRAND COLLABORATIONS OF PARIS HILTON WITH 'SUPERPLASTIC', 'BOHOO', AND 'LEVI'S'

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*This study complies with research and publication ethics.*

## Abstract

With the opportunities offered by *Metaverse*, brands operate in a market area that tends to expand and become more interactive. In such a market, the interaction between influencers and their followers takes place within the framework of a new business model. In this study, in order to evaluate the influencer marketing activities in *Metaverse*, the brand and influencer collaborations of Paris Hilton with *Superplastic*, *Bohoo*, and *Levi's*, were examined with the case study and the semiotic analysis method of Roland Barthes. The analysis results showed that influencer marketing in *Metaverse* seems to be more creative and flexible with higher interaction due to the vast opportunities offered as a consequence of using the virtual worlds and avatars on different platforms. When it comes to users, it is observed that followers are given a real-time interaction opportunity in online virtual environments, that content forms are created in a way which is experienced through gamification; and that further opportunities are offered to develop a closer interaction between the user and the influencer avatars, and other possibilities such as purchasing digital assets and winning awards. In the Metaverse, brands appear to benefit from such opportunities as developing parallel marketing strategies between the physical world and the virtual world, preparing effective advertising campaigns with the creative potential of the virtual world, coming up with solutions to difficulties such as payment problems and counterfeiting in influencer marketing by relying on blockchain technology on the basis of Web 3.0 infrastructure, apart from selling digital products and NFTs.

**Keywords:** *Metaverse*, influencer, influencer marketing, Paris Hilton, *Superplastic*, *Bohoo*, *Levi's*.

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# INFLUENCER PAZARLAMA ORTAMI OLARAK METAVERSE: PARIS HILTON'UN 'SUPERPLASTIC', 'BOHOO' VE 'LEVI'S İLE INFLUENCER-MARKA İŐ BİRLİKLERİ\*

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*Bu çalışma araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.*

## Öz

*Metaverse*'ün sunduğu olanaklar dahilinde markalar sınırları genişleyen ve daha interaktif bir pazar alanında faaliyet göstermektedir. Bu pazarda influencer ve takipçi etkileşimi yeni bir iş modeli çerçevesinde gerçekleşmektedir. Bu çalışmada, *Metaverse*'teki influencer pazarlama faaliyetlerini değerlendirmek amacıyla Paris Hilton'un *Superplastic*, *Boohoo* ve *Levi's* ile marka ve influencer iş birliği durum çalışması, Roland Barthes'ın gösterebilimsel çözümleme yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular sonucunda, Influencer pazarlamada *Metaverse*'te farklı platformlardaki sanal dünyaların ve avatar kullanımının sunduğu imkanlar doğrultusunda daha yaratıcı, esnek, yüksek etkileşimin gündeme geldiği görülmektedir. Kullanıcı bağlamında, takipçilere çevrimiçi sanal ortamlarda gerçek zamanlı etkileşim fırsatı sağlandığı, oyunlaştırılmayla deneyimlenen içerik formları oluşturulduğu, influencer avatari ile kullanıcı avatarına yakın etkileşim olanağı tanındığı ve dijital değer satın alma ve ödül kazanma gibi fırsatlar yaratıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. *Metaverse*'te markalar açısından ise fiziksel dünya ve sanal dünya arasında paralel pazarlama stratejileri geliştirildiği, sanal dünyanın yaratıcı potansiyeli ile etkili reklam kampanyaları hazırlandığı, influencer pazarlamada karşılaşılan ödeme sorunları ve sahtecilik gibi zorluklara Web 3.0 teknolojik alt yapısı ile blokzincir teknolojisiyle çözüm sağlandığı, dijital ürün, NFT satışı gibi imkanların sunulduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Metaverse*, influencer, influencer pazarlama, Paris Hilton, *Superplastic*, *Boohoo*, *Levi's*.

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## Introduction

Being frequently on the agenda with the investments, activities and applications made by global companies in different sectors today, the *Metaverse* offers its users the opportunity to transform and enrich their daily life practices and experiences. Depending on its Web 3.0 infrastructure, artificial intelligence, blockchain technology and VR/AR/MR technologies, etc., the *Metaverse* paves the way to a secure and decentralized universe that both connects with the physical world and is open to interactions and experiences that move beyond the physical world. The opportunities offered by the *Metaverse* introduce further innovations in the world of marketing as well. From this standpoint, in this study, influencer-brand collaborations in *Metaverse* between Paris Hilton and the brands *Superplastic*, *Boohoo*, *Levi's* were examined through a case study and Barthes' semiotic analysis method in order to evaluate the innovations offered by *Metaverse* for brand, influencers, and consumers in the context of influencer marketing activities. This study is also focused on exploring how influencer marketing works in the *Metaverse*, its changing dimensions, the opportunities it offers, and its structure regarding user experience. To this end, first of all, the literature review on influencer marketing, the *Metaverse*, and influencer marketing activities in the *Metaverse* is presented. The literature review is followed by the analysis, results, evaluation, and conclusion sections with respect to influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*.

## Influencer Marketing

Influencers are often referred to as 'opinion leaders' in online communities. Especially those operating on social media are influencers with the ability to persuade a certain segment of society. By sharing their own experiences and views, they interact with the audience they have influence over and ensure that their views are discussed (Creatorden, 2018). In today's consumption society, influencers are believed to exhibit opinion leader behaviour on social media platforms and have even replaced the opinion leaders. As a consequence of the development in mass media, opinion leaders now appear in online environments after mass media such as television, newspaper, and radio (Dalaylı, 2021).

Influencers can be world-renowned celebrities with millions of fans, or those who gain trust and reach a high number of followers with the remarkable content they produce. Currently, famous influencers and people who have become well-known due to being influencers, seem to differ in the way they reach the point of influencing people. Content producers have to regularly prepare new posts, follow marketing techniques, and adapt the prepared post according to different social media platforms so that their followers request more posts and the bond of trust between them can be maintained (Hennessy, 2018). Lou & Yuan (2019, p. 59) described influencers as "content creators with celebrity status".

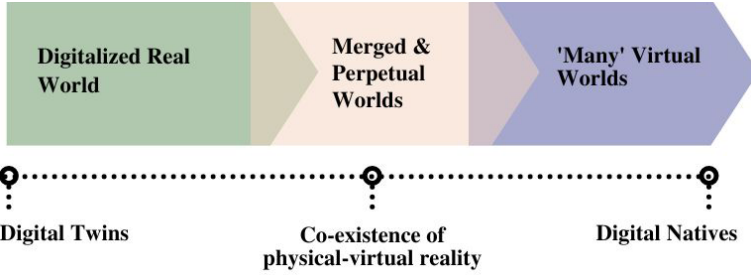
Li (2018) emphasized that internet celebrities, that is, today's influencers, should have features such as reaching a certain number of followers, ensuring high profile interaction, and promising business value in the future and make 5 different inferences about internet celebrities, which can be listed as follows: content value (producing creative, consistent, and interesting content), technology value (keeping pace with the technological developments that progress in parallel with social media platforms), social value (paying utmost attention to the relations with followers and social media famous people), emotional value (the followers' feeling of intimacy with the influencer without feeling pressured and distant), and symbolic value (leading the followers and increasing the potential to be followed by displaying an image that makes a difference).

### ***Metaverse***

Defined as a community of experience-oriented, interconnected 3D virtual worlds, the *Metaverse* is associated with Web 3.0 technology, which has been brought forth with the development of the Internet. The *Metaverse* provides users with the opportunity to create an Internet economy and real-time socializing with the creation of a permanent virtual world that encompasses the digital and physical world (Grider, 2021). Well-known virtual reality applications are confused with the *Metaverse* by many, causing the *Metaverse* to be perceived in an incomplete context. The *Metaverse* can also be likened to a virtual layer and a cyberspace realm that sits on top of physical reality with the support of technologies such as VR/AR/MR, which covers all of the existing virtual reality technologies, fictional virtual game worlds, and teleconferencing applications.

In this connection, Lee, et al. (2021) stated that the *Metaverse* would develop in three stages, which are: 1) Digitalized Real World, 2) Merged and Perpetual Worlds, and 3) Many Virtual Worlds. The first stage includes the digitalization of physical reality and the creation of digital twins, which are renewed at regular intervals in a way that the changes are reflected. The digital twins copy physical environments as multiple virtual worlds and users represented by their avatars work as digital natives in this new virtual space. At this stage, such virtual worlds are considered to have limited connection both with each other and with physical reality, however they will connect with each other in an increasingly larger framework. Finally, with the combination of the digitalized physical world and the virtual worlds, a final stage is initiated, which is described as the surreal existence arising from the coexistence of the physical and the virtual. In this way, the interconnected physical-virtual world creates a permanent and 3D cyberspace realm, that is, the *Metaverse*, leading to an increase in unprecedented new demands.

Figure 1. Digital twins-native continuum, (Lee et al., 2021, p. 1)



While it is partially true that current technologies offer a variety of options such as embodying users through avatars with unlimited customization options, providing the opportunity to create content with social networks, developing increasingly realistic video games or user-generated 3D environments, and using online meeting platforms, they are still considered insufficient despite all being in the form experiences close to the *Metaverse*. Apart from these existing technologies, if the *Metaverse* is to be fully actualized, areas such as advanced VR and AR technology, high-speed networks, edge computing, blockchain and artificial intelligence, which are all regarded as the basic elements of the *Metaverse*, must be taken into account. Video games are still far from working with each other, online meeting platforms are far from being permanent since they disappear after the meeting, AR games are far from presenting the principles of digital twins by connecting to physical reality, and avatars are far from providing a representation between virtual universes. The *Metaverse* should actually provide interoperability, simultaneity, continuity, and shareability between different virtual worlds (Lee et al., 2021).

Raz-Fridman (2022) emphasized 3 main elements to be considered in the context of the *Metaverse*. The first element is that *Metaverse* technology, which is to emerge with the combination of different technological infrastructures, creates immersive virtual environments that allow transition between experiences. The second important element- sociability- allows millions of users to come together and interact in a single virtual event. Thirdly, the *Metaverse* provides users with unlimited power of expression, and thus, through avatars, people can find the opportunity to express themselves in creative and different ways, independent of real life. Given the social opportunities and freedom of expression provided by the *Metaverse*, it appears that people are offered equal conditions in the *Metaverse* environment.

The World Wide Web Consortium<sup>1</sup> (W3C) standards are important for understanding Web 3.0 technology. The W3C considers Web 3.0 as an extension of the Web technology standard (Butler, 2022). Web 3.0 is also called the 'Semantic Web'. Another area where the W3C has worked on for many years is developing the standards that aim to connect data and content in a semantic

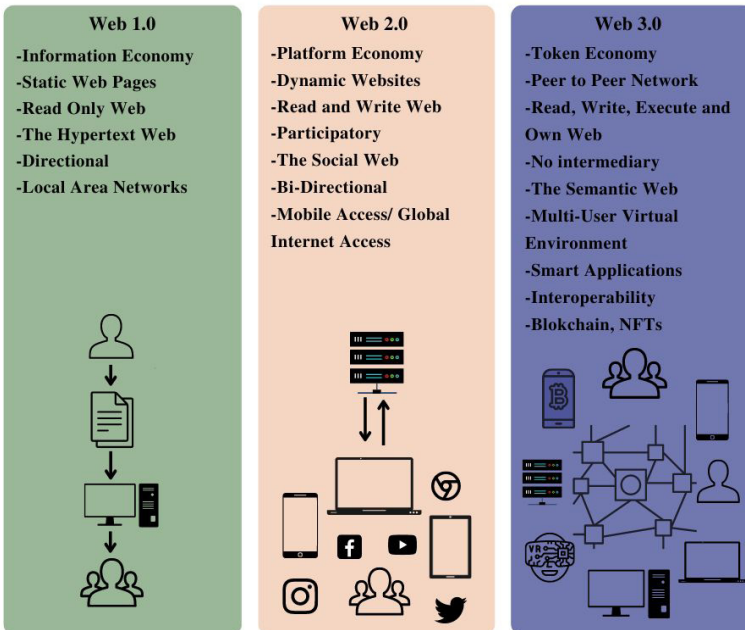
<sup>1</sup> The International World Wide Web Consortium, founded by Tim Berners-Lee to develop open Web standards and bring the Web to its full potential (W3C).

layer through artificial intelligence (Kerner, 2022). The concept of the Semantic Web is a concept put forward and devised by Tim Berners-Lee. In a 1998 article, in which he voiced his own views on the development of the Web, Berners-Lee mentioned that intuition and understanding are not merely human characteristics, but are also used for the design of Web languages that are processed by machines for operations such as sorting, classifying and paying for information, underlying the potential of the mixture of humans and machines working together (Berners-Lee, 1998).

The standards developed by the W3C in an effort to benefit everyone overlap with the basic principles of Web 3.0 in the form of an infrastructure. The principles aimed to be created with Web 3.0 technologies, which are decentralized, provide maximum benefit to users, and where democratic and interpersonal trust are guaranteed, intersect with W3C standards. Social relations and social connections are gradually changing through the possibilities provided by the Web. The element of trust, which is critically important to the W3C, also forms the basis of Web 3.0. This element of trust in interpersonal communication in Web 3.0 is based on the blockchain technology.

It is not appropriate to perceive the *Metaverse* as a virtual reality device. As is not the case with the Internet, the *Metaverse* is not a device, but users can access the *Metaverse* through virtual reality glasses, computers, game consoles, mobile devices, and other tools (Raz-Fridman, 2022). The features of Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 are summarized in the *Table 1* below.

Table 1. Properties of web. 1.0, web 2.0 and web 3.0



Blockchain is building an infrastructure that demonstrates the uniqueness of digital assets and emphasizes security. It arises from the coexistence of interdisciplinary fields such as distributed computing, software engineering, and cryptography.

Blockchain has a decentralized structure in the political axis as it is not under the control of a single institution or person. It is not centralized in the architectural axis either. From architectural perspective, its existence is not dependent on a single terminal/computer. However, blockchain is central to the logical axis. There is a state of balance that everyone agrees on, and the system works as a whole, not in a way that does not have a unique form (Güven & Şahinöz, 2022, pp. 255-256).

The concept of decentralization refers to the absence of control over the processing of records by a single structure/institution/unit (Güven & Şahinöz, 2022, p. 254). Other advantages of the Web 3.0 are that digital assets owned as NFTs (non-fungible tokens) can be exchanged between users, transferred to different digital experiences, and converted into money through its free economy system (Grayscale, 2021).

Table 2. Metaverse building blocks: A framework (Bhatia, 2021)

User Experience and use Cases	Interface and Access	Virtualization Engines	Infrastructure
<p><b>Experience:</b> Content, Events, Gaming, Work, with a thriving Creator economy and 3D ad networks</p> <p><b>Asset Markets:</b> Exchanges to sell and buy digital goods</p> <p><b>Payments:</b> Fiat and digital currencies, payment networks</p> <p><b>Financial Services:</b> Bulk of these focused on Decentralized Finance applications</p>	<p><b>Hardware:</b> Mobile Devices, VR/AR, Smartglasses, Displays</p>	<p><b>Virtual Platforms:</b> Future of platforms having large ecosystem of developers and content creators</p> <p><b>Programming Engines:</b> Developer focused 3D engines, geospatial mapping, voice and gesture to generate experiences</p> <p><b>Asset Creation:</b> Tools to produce virtual assets such as NFTs</p> <p><b>Computing:</b> Computing requirements for the Metaverse (Cloud, Edge, Blockchain computing)</p> <p><b>Avatars:</b> Virtualization of users</p>	<p><b>Network &amp; Hardware Chips:</b> High bandwidth, low latency network capabilities; high performance and miniature hardware</p>
<b>Tools &amp; Standards</b>			

### Metaverse and Influencer Marketing

Ball (2020) defined the *Metaverse*- a product which will be the source of many new technologies, protocols, companies, and innovations- as a structure that will slowly develop over time with the blending of different products, services,



and capabilities, instead of considering it as a product having a clear breaking point between the future and the past (making a distinction between pre-*Metaverse* and post-*Metaverse*).

The number of *Google* searches for the concept of the *Metaverse*, which attracts more and more attention with each passing day, increased by 7200% in 2021. *McKinsey's* latest research has shown that the *Metaverse* has the potential to generate up to \$5 trillion of value by 2030. It is also predicted that a significant portion of the interesting and innovative experiences for the sake of influencer marketing in the *Metaverse* will come from content creator users (McKinsey, 2022). Designed to sustain influencer marketing activities in the *Metaverse*, "Metafluence" is the first influencer-centred *Metaverse* platform that brings together influencers, followers, and brands. The *Metafluence* is the virtual *Metaverse* city developed by the creators of "Keepface" to adapt influencer marketing to the virtual world. *Keepface* is an influencer marketing platform that has been carrying out influencer marketing activities since its establishment in 2017 and has collaborated with big brands with its database of more than 500 thousand influencers (MTS, 2021). The aim of the *Metafluence* is to take influencer, brand and audience interaction to the next level by bringing such an interaction to the world of the *Metaverse*. Setting out with the idea of 'influence-to-earn', the *Metafluence* aims to come up with necessary solutions to existing problems in influencer marketing such as lack of data, fraud, payment problems, by using Web 3.0 technology, and to create a sustainable environment that will enable influencers to earn money through their potential to influence. Unique features are offered for influencer marketing with functional areas, where different activities can be organized, such as *Metahuts* (functional homes where *Metaverse* events will take place in an event room, a shopping room, and an NFT room), *Metaclans* (where micro-influencers join forces to raise awareness for various campaigns or events), and *Metarooms* (rooms inside the *Metahuts* for influencers to sell their NFTs, chat, and meet up).

Organized as the personal space of influencers in the *Metafluence*, *Metahuts* provide the opportunity to trade virtual or physical products in shopping rooms through collaborations with brands, to sell, display, and exchange NFTs in NFT rooms, as well as to organize events such as product launches and company collaborations in event rooms. The nature of the *Metafluence* offers the opportunity to embody the privilege to be a pioneer in many current and future Web 3.0 worlds, such as earning *Metafluence* currency- \$METO- by renting property, getting involved in management, partnering with brands, interacting with other clan members through clans, organizing events, selling event tickets as NFTs (*Metafluence*, n.d.). The *Metafluence*, which brings influencers to the *Metaverse*, transforms social media influencers into the *Metaverse* entrepreneurs (*Metapreneurs*) through the influence-to-win platform and offers solutions to effectively bring together influencers, brands and audiences using Web 3.0 technology (Keepcoin Corporatin, 2021). The main benefits that



the *Metafluence* ecosystem will provide to the parties of the influencer marketing triangle (influencer-brand-audience) are listed as follows (Keepcoin Corporatin, 2021):

*Influencer benefits*

- Unlocking more channels to monetize SM influencer
- Synchronized promotion through *Metaclan* influencer members
- Exposure to more advertisers and brand sponsorships

*Brand benefits*

- Ability to work with the most relevant influencers
- Ability to work with influencers on performance-based models
- More reach within the *Metafluence* community

*Audience benefits*

- Better influencer engagement
- Community participation and rewards
- Community reputation and perks

The *Metafluence* provides an effective example of how influencer marketing can be used in the *Metaverse* by creating a new universe where influencers can showcase their impressive power. In the *Metafluence* project, influencers who have reached a certain number of followers on various social media platforms such as *TikTok*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, or *Instagram* in real life are represented by their avatars in the *Metafluence* universe, and those specialized in different fields can come together under one roof and have the opportunity to interact with their followers in an unprecedented way.

Within the scope of influencer marketing activities, many brands and companies that enter the *Metaverse* are seen to have created new concepts by using the words 'Metaverse' and 'influencer'. For example, Ilonsi, the influencer marketing platform working on brand influencer collaborations, has named the digital NFT characters it has created in order to move e-commerce to a decentralized area as 'Meta-Fluencer'. Influencers participating in the *Metafluence* project have *Metahuts* and are called *Metahut* owners. The *Beymen* brand, as an example, calls the avatar created for influencer purposes in *Decentraland*<sup>2</sup> as "meta-influencer". Moreover, some virtual influencers created with *CGI* technology seem to have been introduced as meta-influencers. Unlike an ordinary digital character that can be integrated into virtual worlds and 3D movies, India's *CGI* character *Kyra*, for example, has been introduced in the *Metaverse* as a Meta-influencer with the ability to produce content on her own, based on the trends she follows via artificial intelligence technology.

## Analysis for Influencer Marketing in the *Metaverse*

### Method

This study examined influencer marketing in the *Metaverse* with the case

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<sup>2</sup> *Decentraland* is a 3D virtual world powered by *Ethereum* blockchain technology (Balis, 2022).

study method and Barthes' semiotic analysis theory. In a research design, questions to be asked about the subject to be studied should be determined with the aim of finding answers to the research questions with the data collected, and at the same time, collecting data on subject matter other than research questions should be avoided (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 289). This study conducted a case study by considering the selected influencer and the campaigns of the brands that the influencer cooperates with in the *Metaverse*. In order to evaluate the denotative and connotative meaning of the signs in influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*, the data obtained from the visual documents in the selected campaigns were analysed by Barthes' semiotic analysis method. The visual documents of the examined seasonal/periodical campaigns were accessed from *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram* accounts. The examined influencer marketing examples in this study are kept limited to the campaigns on the *Metaverse* platforms. Considering the technological infrastructure and nature of the *Metaverse*, criteria to be applied in influencer marketing in the *Metaverse* (*Metaverse* platform, NFT use, avatar use, Crypto/virtual currencies use, Virtual reality technology (VR, AR, XR), user interaction, connection with the physical world, social media connection) were determined. Such criteria were taken into account in the interpretation of the data obtained from the analysis of the campaigns.

### **Research questions**

The research questions are listed below:

- How does influencer marketing work in the *Metaverse*?
- What are the changing dimensions of influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*?
- What are the opportunities the *Metaverse* offers in influencer marketing?
- How does the user experience change in influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*?

### **Sample selection**

Typical case sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods of the qualitative research tradition, was used in the sample selection of this study. In general, purposive sampling method is used in order to thoroughly analyse and discover situations and phenomena that are considered to have rich information content (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 118). With typical case sampling, it is aimed to provide information on the subject matter by studying the cases determined from the facts and events to be introduced, without making a generalization (Patton, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The present study analysed the collaborations of the selected influencer with brands on the *Metaverse* platforms in the context of influencer marketing. The sample selected to examine comprises the brand collaborations of Paris Hilton, who is among the first examples of influencer marketing figures, being active even

before the concept of influencer appeared in social media, and who has recently focused on the world of Web 3.0 and the *Metaverse*, by displaying her own lifestyle and image on the *Metaverse* platforms.

## Results

### ***Superplastic, Boohoo, Levi's and Paris Hilton in the context of influencer marketing in the Metaverse***

In the context of influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*, *Superplastic*, *Boohoo* and *Levi's* have business collaborations with Paris Hilton. It is obvious that she has had an intense interest in the *Metaverse*, Web 3.0, and NFT fields along with her initiatives and active work in them. Considered as a famous Web 3.0 investor and NFT influencer, Hilton also stands out in the Web 3.0 world with her particular support for female artists.

Born on February 17, 1981 in New York, Paris Hilton is one of the heirs of the *Hilton* hotel fortune (Biography, 2021). The 41-year-old Hilton has been a media attention-grabber with her luxurious lifestyle since her teenage years. She is leading an active life in both social and business life, attending charity events, fashion shows, and world-class parties. She has worked in many fields by modelling, writing, acting and DJing and has established her own brand and media company. Despite coming from a wealthy family, she has created her own wealth with her investments in various fields due to her independent character (Felbin & Sabrina, 2022).

Many describe Paris Hilton as the 'original influencer'. Long before the influencer industry emerged as a result of the widespread use of social media, Paris Hilton started to earn financial gain by making her own name and image a brand value with her lifestyle (Simonetti, 2022). With her successful attempts to turn the intense interest of the media into cash, Hilton currently owns 19 product groups and more than 50 boutiques around the world (İçözü, 2022, May 13). She is considered a trendsetter by achieving works ahead of time and has recently been among the leading entrepreneurs of the technology world with its investments and activities in the *Metaverse*, NFT and Web 3.0. After a meeting with the founder of *Ethereum* in 2016, she started investing in *Ethereum* and *Bitcoin* and spent time in the *Clubhouse* application and connected with the leading names of the NFT world (Ward, 2022).

Adapting to the feature of *Twitter*, which makes the NFTs the profile picture, Hilton put the NFTs of the inaugural collection named "You", which was launched by the *BFF*<sup>3</sup> to celebrate the uniqueness of female and non-binary friends in the Web 3.0 world, as the profile picture (Hilton, nd.).

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<sup>3</sup> BFF is an open access community with a mission to help support, empower and train women and non-binary individuals in their communities in the Web 3.0 world (mybff, n.d.).

Using her reputation and platform, Hilton stated that she wanted to show her support for female artists in the field of NFT and Web 3.0. Moreover, she showed her support to female artists by taking part in a joint project with the non-profit organization called *Seven Foundation*, which aims to glorify emerging artists in the field of NFT, and by organizing an exhibition called “Empowered by Paris”, which features 163 works of art, all of which were female artists (Ward, 2022). On April 17 2021, Hilton collaborated with female designer Blake Kathryn to launch her first NFT collection, called “Planet Paris”, consisting of 3 NFTs from Hilton’s comfort zone and put on sale at *Nifty Gateaway* (Art Girls Jungle, 2021).

### **Collaboration between *Superplastic* and Paris Hilton: NFT collection**

Having worked with many famous brands, *Superplastic* has launched a partnered NFT collection in collaboration with Paris Hilton. *Superplastic* is a globally renowned entertainment brand that makes products and animations of the characters it creates such as *Guggimon*, *Janky*, *Dayzee* and *Staxx*, and *Kranky*, which all have *Instagram* and *TikTok* accounts with high follower counts. *Superplastic* has so far collaborated with many famous people and brands such as *J. Balvin*, *Volkswagen*, *Gucci*, *Gorillaz*, and *Rico Nasty* (*Superplastic*, n.d.). The characters created by *Superplastic* have *Instagram* accounts; *Guggimon* has 1.5 million followers, *Janky* 1 million, and *Dayzee* 728 thousand followers. Paris Hilton launched her second NFT collection, called “Past Lives, New Beginnings”, in partnership with *Superplastic*. After having collaborated with Blake Kathryn on her first collection, Hilton then collaborated with *Superplastic*’s synthetic female superstar, *Dayzee*, stating that she was honoured to work with female figures in the community. That NFT collection signifies the end of a period in Hilton’s life and the transition to a new one, as well as her past, present and future symbolized in her journey of more than 20 years in the eyes of the public. Hilton explained that she felt liberated when she had decided to reveal an abuse she was exposed to in her youth, of which only a small part of her true identity is known, apart from the limited information reported in the media. She also said that using her reputation and her platform to help others and inspire by sharing her own story gave her a wonderful sense of power (Hilton, 2022a). This artwork created by Hilton has the theme of regaining power, clarifying the truth, and celebrating one’s own love story (Nicolle, 2022). The collection, which includes 4 NFTs, was included on the NFT platform, *Origin Protocol*. The first piece, titled “My Forever Fairytale”, contains a collage made by Paris Hilton herself, featuring photographs telling her love story with her husband, Carter Reum. She stated that she wanted to convert this collage to NFT in order to make it permanent on the blockchain forever. Those who purchase the NFT, worth \$11.11, will get the chance to win one of the bonus rewards and experiences such as meeting Paris Hilton in person in Los Angeles, meeting and greeting her online, winning a signed edition of the work, being

followed on Hilton's *Twitter* account, or earning *Origin Tokens* (Hilton, 2022b).

The other 3 NFT Superplastic characters in the collection include *Dayzee* and *Guggimon*. In each of the 3 NFTs, *Guggimon* appears in the iconic shiny grey dress Paris Hilton wore on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and the motto "The Truth Will Set You Free" is written on *Dayzee's* T-shirt and seen on TV (Rasmussen, 2022).

### **Semiotic Analysis of *Superplastic* and Paris Hilton collaboration and of the NFT collection in relation to influencer marketing**

The collaboration between *Superplastic* and Hilton has been initiated with the NFT collection they have jointly released. The collection includes NFTs, where *Dayzee* and *Guggimon*, who have become virtual influencers created by *Superplastic* with a large number of followers, have taken part together with Paris Hilton. Considering the high number of followers of both Hilton and these virtual influencers, it is not surprising that the collection has a high potential of reaching a wide audience.

The inclusion of *Dayzee* and *Guggimon* as animated characters in the NFT collection, offered for sale, exemplifies the active participation of these characters in real life and the world of Web 3.0. The cross-platform presence of virtual influencers allows users to experience an alternative reality that connects with the real world (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021).

There are 4 NFTs in the collection. The NFT named "Tabloid Dysphoria" in the collection named "Paris: Past Lives, New Beginnings" is in animated GIF format (*Superplastic*, 2022). In the front, *Guggimon* is dressed in the iconic shimmering grey dress Hilton had on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. With a collar around his neck, *Guggimon* smokes a cigar and blows his smoke, while *Dayzee*, sitting behind him on a stack of magazines, hits him with the leash, and inflicts physical violence. Then the two look at each other, smiling. The magazines on which *Dayzee* sits and the TV screens in the background represent the life of Paris Hilton, who has always come forward through the tabloid news. Dissatisfied with this situation, Hilton's related feeling of being under control is represented by the collar on *Guggimon's* neck.

In Paris Hilton's description for this piece of the collection on her website, she referred to it, saying: "We've got this tabloid fodder by the leash. Loves it". The concept of "Tabloid" refers to a press format used in the newspaper industry, which is approximately A3 in size, preferred by newspapers that give sensational tabloid news.

The TV screens in the background represent Hilton's fame and life in sight. The motto "The Truth Will Set You Free" seen on the TV screen signifies that Hilton will be liberated, in a way, by revealing the facts of her past life on television.

This NFT titled "All Eyes on Me" in the "Paris: Past Lives, New Beginnings"

collection is also in GIF format (Hilton, 2022c). In the background are old tube TVs stacked on top of each other to form a picture of Hilton. Some televisions have no signal, tingling with pink screens. *Dayzee* sits on *Guggimon*'s back, standing on his hands and knees on the floor in front of TV screens. While smoking, *Dayzee* blows smoke and shakes off the ashes on *Guggimon*'s head, seemingly inflicting physical violence on *Guggimon* with this gesture. *Guggimon* is wearing Hilton's iconic outfit and being subjected to physical violence by *Dayzee* represents Paris Hilton's youth when she was the subject of tabloid news in the media. The text "The Truth Will Set You Free" on *Dayzee*'s T-shirt conveys the message that Hilton feels to be liberated by revealing the truth.

In the NFT named "Truth is Freedom" contained in the collection (Origin Protocol, 2022), *Guggimon* appears with the same outfit as in other NFTs. In the NFT, *Guggimon* seems to be struggling to carry several televisions and *Dayzee* sitting between televisions. *Dayzee* greets the audience first. Afterwards, *Guggimon* struggles and falls to the ground, with *Dayzee* kicking him in the head and nudging him. In this NFT in GIF format, it is obvious that *Dayzee* physically abuses *Guggimon*, and then the motto, "Nobody can tell your story better than you. The truth will set you free" is voiced by Paris Hilton. Here, it appears that Hilton wants to tell her true story herself, leaving aside the misleading news of the media.

### ***Boohoo* and Paris Hilton collaboration and semiotic analysis of campaign in the context of influencer marketing in the *Metaverse***

Launched in 2006, the British fashion brand, *Boohoo* takes part in various social responsibility activities on women and the environment. At the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Paris World Fashion Show, held between 14 and 19, February 2022 at Paris World, which is owned by Paris Hilton, the *Bohoo* brand took its place on the billboards in the entrance area and became part of the event in the *Roblox* game platform (Hilton, 2022d).

Opened to the public on February 18, the fashion week event then continued with a virtual fashion show on February 19, which was publicly broadcast on Paris Hilton's *YouTube* channel. *Boohoo* was the first brand to advertise during fashion week (Ping, 2022). *Boohoo* collaborated with the media company, *MilkMoney*, to be featured on billboards at this event (Astill, 2022). The collaboration between Hilton and *Boohoo* can be considered as an example of influencer marketing carried to the *Metaverse*. It is known that there has been previous cooperation between Hilton and *Boohoo* before. One of the collections of *Boohoo* has featured some of the favourite items (her love of Beverly Hills, dogs, and slogans) from the fashion icon Paris Hilton. With this campaign, *Boohoo* allowed consumers to adopt Paris's style without paying huge sums (Colon, 2018).

In the video (Hilton, 2022d), it is noteworthy that the avatars have different appearances such as women, men, etc. Usernames are placed on the av-

atars. Avatars' interest in Paris Hilton is evident from the fact that they are gathered around her. This event offers Hilton fans the opportunity to connect with her via their avatar. In the background, behind the avatars, there are billboards with *Boohoo* adverts on at the entrance of the event area.

### **Semiotic analysis of neon carnival event in relation to the collaboration between Levi's and Paris Hilton in the Metaverse**

The journey of the *Levi's* began in 1873 with the production of the first waist overalls, now known as blue jeans, for American workers. Being the leader in the jean industry in the world, *Levi Strauss & Co* has more than 500 stores globally and its products are sold in more than 100 countries (*Levi's*, n.d.). The Neon Carnival in Paris World on *Roblox*, sponsored by *Levi's*, also exemplifies the new opportunities the *Metaverse* offers in the context of influencer marketing.

The Neon Carnival is an event that takes place on the first Saturday of *Coachella*<sup>4</sup> every year in Thermal, California. Created by Los Angeles night-life entrepreneur, Brent Bolthouse, and brought to life with *Best Events*, this event is known as the most sought-after unrivalled, open-air dance party in the world (Hoffower, 2019).

In collaboration with Brent Bolthouse, Paris Hilton brought the Neon Carnival to Paris World on October 6, 2021 in *Roblox*. Hosting the Neon Carnival, Paris Hilton has made this event of special guests a public experience in the *Metaverse*. In this connection, Bolthouse stated that he had shared his plans for the Neon Carnival with *Roblox*. This suggests that the Neon Carnival held in Paris World closely matched the real party that took place in the Coachella Valley (Taylor, 2022). Paris World on *Roblox* created a kind of digital twin of the real carnival, and non-celebrities had the opportunity to participate in the Neon Carnival virtually. While attending the party as an invitee every year, Paris Hilton has attended as an avatar this year, and 400,000 *Roblox* users have visited the virtual Neon Carnival. This number is about 40 times the number of people attending the carnival in real life (Kelly, 2022). The Neon Carnival organized by Paris Hilton at *Roblox* is an exact representation of the Neon Carnival in the real world. Many of the events in the carnival area also exist in the real world. The slide, Ferris wheel, concert area, and dance area are in *Roblox* also located in the real world event area.

The similarity is drawn between the activities in the physical world and the virtual world in terms of appearance (the Ferris wheel, neon lights, and the event being held on the island, etc.) and content, indicating the emphasis of parallel experiences to the physical world in the *Metaverse*.

The similarity between the real (Freccero, 2022) and virtual event (Hilton, 2022e) signify that the participants are presented with the virtual alternative

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<sup>4</sup> *Coachella* is a music festival held annually in Indio, California, the USA, where popular artists from different genres such as hip hop, rock, and pop perform (Dictionary, n.d.).



of carnival activities that they can actually experience in real life at the *Neon Carnival*. In *Roblox*, it appears that *Levi's* ads are displayed on billboards and in the form of paddle ads, as in real-life outdoor advertising.

Paris World *Neon Carnival*, sponsored by *Levi's*, offers its visitors such opportunities as visiting the virtual store, buying virtual clothes, and winning certain prizes. There is a win-as-you-play system in the *Metaverse*. In the context of the *Neon Carnival*, it appears that the players are offered the opportunity to win various awards and digital *Levi's* products during their time on the platform. The game also includes the *Neon Carnival Paris World Store*, where players can purchase *Neon Carnival* items and souvenirs. *Levi's* has offered the same products that it launched for *Roblox* at the *Neon Carnival* in real life.

The video called "Paris Hilton Hosts Neon Carnival in the *Metaverse* for the First Time Ever in Paris World" had been broadcast on Paris Hilton's own *YouTube* channel and was used in this study for the semiotic analysis of the *Neon Carnival* at Paris World in *Roblox*. The length of the video is 5 minutes and 13 seconds. The video, which received 13,467 views, was broadcast on April 24, 2022.

In the virtual carnival, the Ferris wheel with *Levi's* logo on is the digital representation of the Ferris wheel in the real-world *Neon Carnival*, created at Paris World in *Roblox*. In the lower right corner of the picture, the avatar of Paris Hilton is riding the Ferris wheel with the avatar of a *Roblox* user. As an influencer with whom *Levi's* collaborates, Paris Hilton seems to experience the *Neon Carnival* at *Roblox* with her own avatar. The visual representation of the carnival area in *Roblox* mirrors the carnival in the real world.

In the video (Hilton, 2022e) avatar of Paris Hilton, dressed in pink, running to the pink bus with 'Neon Carnival' and 'Levi's' written on the door. Having come to *Paris World* by plane in the background, the avatar of Paris Hilton then appears next to the bus. Transportation to the *Neon Carnival* event area in the real world is provided by bus as in the video. The avatar of Paris Hilton, as the influencer that directs the users to the carnival experience in *Roblox*, also heads for this bus to go to the event area. In the video, Neon Carnival is written on the door of the bus along with the *Levi's* logo.

In the *Roblox* representation of the *Neon Carnival*, which actually takes place in the desert in real life, also illustrates a road in the desert and billboards with *Levi's* advertisements on this roadside. In the video (Hilton, 2022e) the avatar of a *Roblox* user trying on *Levi's* branded virtual clothes sold at the *Paris World Store* in *Roblox*. The sweatshirt seen on the avatar is also available for sale in the real world on the *Levi's* online store.

## Evaluation

Considering such problems as regards payment, data control by central au-

thorities, and fake follower numbers, etc. in influencer marketing activities on social media platforms, it is obvious that influencer marketing operates within the framework of the opportunities provided by the platform and is subject to some limitations. The literature review of this study on the research question of how influencer marketing operates in the *Metaverse* and the relevant examples shed light on the possibilities offered by new technologies in this field. In this context, it is notable that the *Metaverse* platforms provide decentralized and secure communication and interaction supported by new technological tools between brands, influencers and users on the basis of Web 3.0 infrastructure and blockchain technology, and that these platforms have the potential to strengthen the effect of influencer marketing. The influencer marketing activities in the *Metaverse* show that real-time interaction, temporary or continuous events provide consumers with different experiences through new technologies. *Roblox*, which is one of the top *Metaverse* platforms discussed in this study, includes examples of how influencer marketing operates in the *Metaverse* (timely events, digital product sales, etc.).

In order to examine the changing dimensions of influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*, an issue which is among our research questions, this study discussed the campaigns in which Paris Hilton collaborates with such brands as *Levi's*, *Superplastic*, and *Bohoo* on the *Metaverse* platforms and acts as an influencer. The data for these 3 campaigns analysed comparatively are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Evaluation of brands collaborating with Paris Hilton in influencer marketing on metaverse in the context of metaverse ecosystem and technology

<i>Metaverse</i> Ecosystem and Technology	<i>Bohoo</i>	<i>Levi's</i>	<i>Superplastic</i>
<i>Metaverse</i> Platform	✓ <i>Roblox/Paris</i> World	✓ <i>Roblox/Paris</i> World	
Use of NFT			✓ "Past Lives, New Beginnings" NFT Collection
Use of Avatar	✓ <i>Roblox</i> Avatar	✓ <i>Roblox</i> Avatar	
Use of Crypto/ Virtual Currencies		✓ Robux	✓ <i>Ethereum</i>

Virtual Reality Technology (VR/AR/XR)	✓ VR	✓ VR	
User Interaction	✓ Fashion Week Event at Paris World	✓ Neon Carnival at Paris World	
Physical World Connection	✓ Advertisement of physical world products on <i>Metaverse</i>	✓ Representation of the physical world carnival in the <i>Metaverse</i>	✓ Paris Hilton's meeting with the person who bought her NFT
Social Media Connection	✓ Sharing the campaign on social media	✓ Sharing the campaign on social media	✓ Sharing the campaign on social media

Based on the findings, it appears that *Boohoo* and *Levi's* have preferred Roblox, one of the *Metaverse* platforms, in their campaigns. Moreover, Paris Hilton also seems to carry her own style, preferences, taste, and lifestyle in the physical world to her private space, which she calls "Paris World" in the *Metaverse*. From this point of view, it is clear that the personalization seen in the shares of the influencer on social media platforms has turned out to have been carried over to the *Metaverse*. In the campaigns examined, "Paris World" was preferred as the venue in the collaborations of Hilton as an influencer with *Bohoo* and *Levi's* in the *Metaverse* platforms. At the same time, the visual content of the NFT collection, prepared in collaboration with *Superplastic* and Paris Hilton, includes particular sections from Hilton's real life.

When the possibilities offered by the *Metaverse* to influencer marketing are examined within the scope of research questions, it is possible that the *Metaverse* will create different areas of use that exist and will develop in the future. As Jeff (2022) stated, advanced blockchain usage, virtual work and learning spaces, virtual business and markets, expansion of social media platforms, and new marketing opportunities are examples of different usage areas. Looking at how the user experience tends to change in influencer marketing in the *Metaverse*, an issue which is among the questions addressed in this study, we have encountered many factors with respect to real-time interaction in influencer-follower communication such as participation in events from different parts of the world simultaneously, meeting influencers through avatars, offering mixed experiences and various awards to consumers, etc. The use of avatars plays a major role in the *Metaverse*. In the campaigns examined in this study, it appears that the followers are offered the opportunity to experience the digital twin of Hilton's real-world mansion in Beverly Hills, as designed in Paris World in *Roblox*, through their avatars. There is no doubt that,

in influencer marketing, followers are offered/promised mixed experiences extending to social media in connection with the *Metaverse*. In the example included in this study, i.e. the sale of the NFT collection prepared in cooperation with *Superplastic* and Paris Hilton, potential buyers are offered different face-to-face or online rewards and experiences, such as meeting Paris Hilton in the real and virtual world or being followed on Hilton's *Twitter* account.

Since Hilton's collaborations with *Superplastic* and *Levi's* include the sale of NFTs, cryptocurrencies are used in the sale of such virtual products. The *Metaverse* promises to make the experience more immersive by using virtual reality technologies. For example, by enabling the use of VR glasses, *Roblox* offers the opportunity to experience *Paris World* more realistically. Paris Fashion week and *Neon Carnival at Paris World* show that *Roblox* has now turned into an experience platform rather than a gaming platform.

## Conclusion

It is suggested that the *Metaverse*, the infrastructure of which is formed by Web 3.0 technology, is likely to transform the life practices of individuals. Based on experiential and 3D virtual worlds, the *Metaverse* offers its users new experiences in different fields such as business, education, entertainment, and marketing. It also brings new opportunities in connection with social media in terms of influencer marketing activities. In this respect, this study examined the advertising campaigns in which some brands operating in the *Metaverse* (*Superplastic*, *Boohoo*, *Levi's*) collaborated with the influencer Paris Hilton.

In this regard, it seems obvious that physical reality and virtual spaces are intertwined and the *Metaverse* leads brands to develop up-to-date ways and formulas for alternative advertising methods. The influencer marketing activities of brands in the *Metaverse* clearly demonstrate a well-established connection with the physical world. The influencer Paris Hilton carries her style (clothing and preferred colours, etc.) and lifestyle (*Paris World* in *Roblox*) to the *Metaverse* by establishing brand collaborations in parallel with the real world. An updated post made by *The Sandbox* (2022) has noted that Paris Hilton will expand her presence in the *Metaverse* with the cooperation of the *Sandbox* and *11:11 Media*.

The connection established with the physical world in the campaigns of the brands in the *Metaverse* sometimes reveals itself in the events held. The *Neon Carnival at Paris World* in *Roblox* examined in this study is a digital representation of the Neon Carnival held every year in California in real life. The carnival held at *Roblox* turns out to be a digital twin of the *Neon Carnival* in California in terms of its visual design, content, and experiences offered.

It is evident that influencer marketing campaigns in the *Metaverse* are progressing in connection with the influencer Paris Hilton's own social media ac-

counts. Hilton uses her social media accounts to encourage her followers to use the *Metaverse* platforms (Hilton directs its followers to the *Metaverse* via *Twitter*), to promote these platforms, and to invite her followers to the events in these platforms.

It can be assumed that meta-influencers will also become widespread in the near future. It is suggested that the projects such as *Metafluence* project and influencer agencies that bring people together to establish cooperation between brands and influencers will also be moved to the *Metaverse*, or that new influencer agencies will be established so as to enable influencers to connect with new audience in the *Metaverse*. All these developments will ultimately affect influencer marketing in the *Metaverse* and will bring new and current research issues to the agenda.

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