

Metaverse: Deconstruction and Differentiation of Identity Under the New Media Environment

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Abstract

The meta-universe is a new media scene based on VR and other technologies. Whether it will cause greater estrangement between people or even social disintegration or high-latitude healing in the future, the key lies in understanding the inner path of people's spiritual communication. From the perspective of the critical school, based on identity, this paper systematically analyzes and demonstrates the performance, causes, and risks of the deconstruction of identity by new media scenarios through a questionnaire survey on the correlation between virtual identity and real identity and adopts the interview method, to explore the social management of the metauniverse under the perspective of identity. By revealing the interaction between the virtual symbolic identity and the real identity, the paper seeks the value compliance of shaping a positive international image of the world with the help of the meta-universe. The research finds that: the hyperreal experience allows users to create and identify with a new self, the role deviation brought by the utopian world affects identity, the privacy leakage in the real world depends on the degree of identity, and the metauniverse challenges the national discourse system.

Keywords: meta-universe; Media scenario theory; identity.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

Background of Meta-Universe Research

What is a metaverse? The word Metaverse is made up of the prefix meta (meaning "beyond, meta") and the root verse (from the universe), which translates literally as the Metaverse. The concept is first used in Neil Stephenson's 1992 science fiction novel *Avalanche*. In 2021, giants such as Facebook and Microsoft announced that they would build a "meta-universe," which the industry believes indicates the future development direction of virtual and real interaction and virtual practice for human beings. 2021 is therefore known as the first year of the Metaverse.

As the highest product of embodied media, the meta-universe breaks the traditional social communication structure. While dividing the communication structure into virtual and real levels, it also closely connects the two worlds through the economic system. From the perspective of embodied communication, the networked body, which is connected to the network, becomes an extension of the network and integrates with the network, influencing and participating in the material foundation construction of the network [1]. Although human beings cannot get rid of the system and order of the whole society at the present stage, in the future metaverse scenario, the body is no longer a simple material construction tool. Still, it becomes an individual symbol to shape virtual space and culture. In the Metaverse, the arbitrary construction and identification of the imaginary self-extend new social relations and emotional connections inwardly on the spiritual level. It means that the human spirit has entered a "super real" state and is divorced from reality, and the national discourse system and a series of identity ideas face transmutation.

The Role of "Media Scenario" on Identity

In the 1980s, communication scholar Joshua Merowitz proposed the media scenario theory, pointing out that each behavior needs a unique situation. Electronic media can promote separating and merging the different original situations, leading to new situations [2]. From the broad communication field perspective, media is a unique information environment that affects people's communication activities to some extent. It is more than just a tool for information acquisition and sharing.

Identity can be summarized as an individual's self-cognition, emotional belonging to the group, and behavioral acceptance. Information sociologist Manuel Castor argues that identity is the source of people's life meaning and experience, and it is an individual's consistent experience of self-identity, status, interests, and belonging. The theory of self-development is of great significance for exploring identity. Psychologist Allport pointed out that the development of the ego state includes three necessary processes: physiological self, social self, and psychological self [3]. Establishing the social and psychological self is closely related to maturity, the individual's interpersonal communication in society, and the discourse environment provided by the media. Developmental psychologist Erikson proposed the theory of self-identity, arguing that individuals at different stages should have continuity and consistency in their definitions of self [4]. At present, however, the Internet age is just like what Castor called "fluid space," where the speed of group gathering and dispersing, anonymous speaking, and online social networking make it difficult for people to maintain a unified self-identity from beginning to end.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

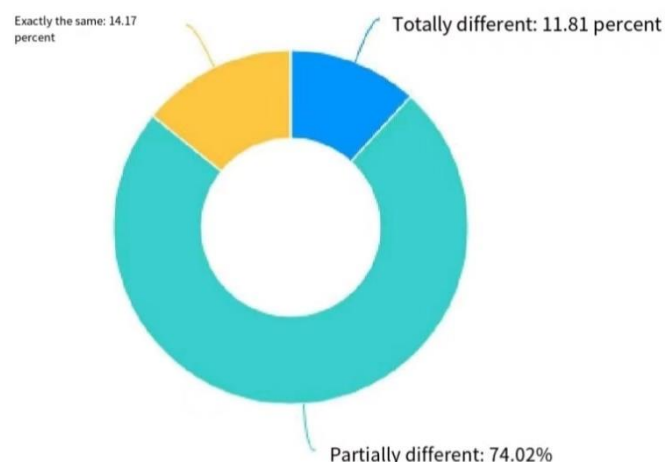
This study will adopt the empirical research method to explore the relationship between the new identity and the real identity in the meta-universe virtual environment, as well as the influence of the virtual identity of the general tendency on the real identity, and some audiences will be investigated and analyzed by questionnaire survey and interview. The questionnaire consists of 12 questions, including applying the NPS scale. 127 valid questionnaires were collected, including 28 male and 99 female students, accounting for 22.05% and 77.95% of the total sample. From the age distribution, 11-30 was the largest, accounting for about 92% of the total sample. Most people with undergraduate Education were above college level, accounting for 88.19% of the total number of samples; In addition to the questionnaire survey, four interviewees were interviewed in this study.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The Hyperreal Experience of The Meta-Universe Allows Users to Create and Identify with A New Self Due to the great pressure in modern society and the increasing alienation of interpersonal relationships, people's emotional investment in the virtual network environment is increasing. On the one hand, they seek interpersonal network communication; on the other hand, they also enjoy the pleasure of virtual and real role conversion. The two kinds of roles have a certain assimilation in emotional and behavioral aspects. Players project part of their self-consciousness in the real world into the virtual identity in the meta-universe, freely construct the ideal individual image, and obtain the feeling of "life again."

The survey shows that 11.81% of people construct virtual identities completely different from reality. As shown in Figure 1, personality, gender, and country are the key points for most people to distinguish their identities. Respondent A said that when designing virtual identities, she deliberately chose the image opposite to the real gender to satisfy the curiosity psychology and release the repressed personality in real life. To place the expectation of self-worth. The interviewee admits that his virtual identity is an idealized upgrade of his real identity. He chooses a perfect body and thinks it brings him positive emotions such as pleasure and confidence. Interviewee C said he entered the meta-universe mainly to experience his ideal professional identity and escape reality's boring and repetitive work. Most people think their virtual images are based on their real selves and regard them as a "complementary relationship." However, interviewee D is different. Her identity in the virtual world is the same as reality, to verify whether she will have a different fate in the parallel world.

In the age of traditional media, although mass media confuses the boundaries of different situations, the overlap of different situations is still dominant, so the real identity occupies an absolute position in identity cognition. However, the coming of the meta-universe is about to change the weight of virtual identity in people's hearts. More and more real virtual means more and more virtual reality.



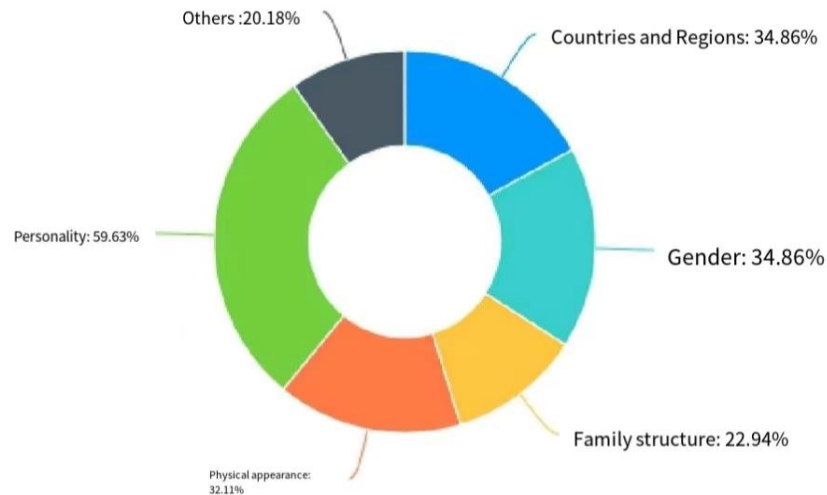


Figure 1. Difference between virtual identity and real identity



Figure 2. The relationship between virtual identity and real identity

Role Deviation Brought by The Utopian World Affects Identity

People in the metauniverse interact with virtual identities, resulting in the propagation effect of treating the virtual as reality, resulting in the question of body and soul. The Metaverse adheres to the "decentralized" operating rules, and people who put on virtual identities enjoy the equality that is missing in the real world. The concepts of "user-created content" and "shared resources" advocated in the Metaverse have largely diluted the competitive relations and conflicts of interest between people and given people the right to break free, emancipate themselves, and freely express their individuality. The Metaverse has become a "utopia" in many people's hearts to regain their ideals, a refuge to escape from the "inner volume," and a

"dream-making space" to satisfy their desires. The charge and enjoying the flowers and applause in the virtual world form a distinct role deviation from that of the "worker" in the real world, which also challenges the identity in reality to some extent.

In the questionnaire survey, the influence degree of virtual identity on real identity is mostly in the range of 4-6, as shown in Figure 3. The changes brought by virtual identity on the concept of identity are mainly reflected in living habits, country, ethnicity, language, etc., as shown in Figure 4. Interview A expressed that the virtual identity she designed in the meta-universe was more in line with her ideals and expectations of self-construction. When she returned to reality, she would inevitably feel a gap and dissatisfaction with her real identity. This gap makes her psychologically close to the virtual world and produces the idea of "staying in the virtual world forever"; Interviewee C expressed that on some private occasions in reality, she would fill in the identity in the meta-universe because she believed that the real identity was formed under the restrictions of various objective conditions.

In contrast, the virtual identity was fully created based on the subjective will of the individual so that the individual could willingly recognize it. Some interviewees said that the metauniverse is essentially a human-designed digital program consistent with the running logic of the network games that people are currently familiar with. It satisfies the human desire for leisure and pleasure and has certain addictive properties.

The chaos caused by the "super real" experience in the meta-universe makes it difficult for human beings to stay awake all the time. The role deviation brought by the utopian world inspires people's idealism. The slack exploration of objective laws and material and spiritual wealth in the real world weakens people's ability to create labor, resulting in stagnation of real life, which leads to more serious negative emotions on real identity and high dependence on and identification of virtual identity. Therefore, the metauniverse presents the trend of alienation of human beings, which has the risk of confusing self-cognition and interpersonal communication barriers in reality.

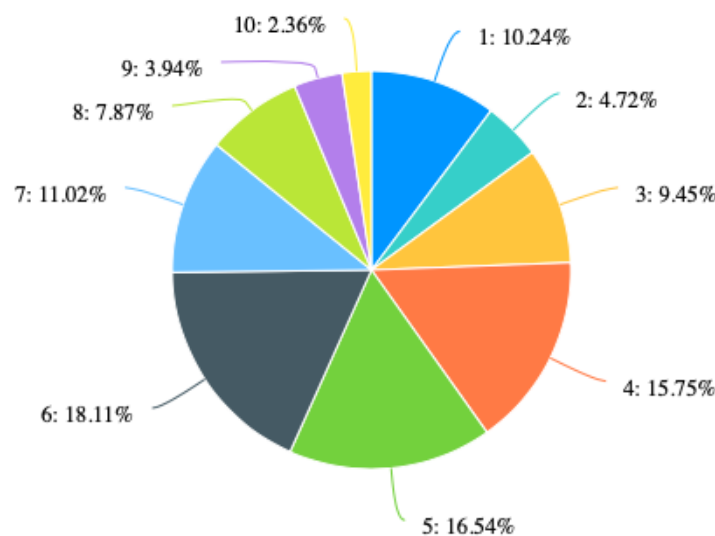


Figure 3 Influence degree of virtual identity on real identity

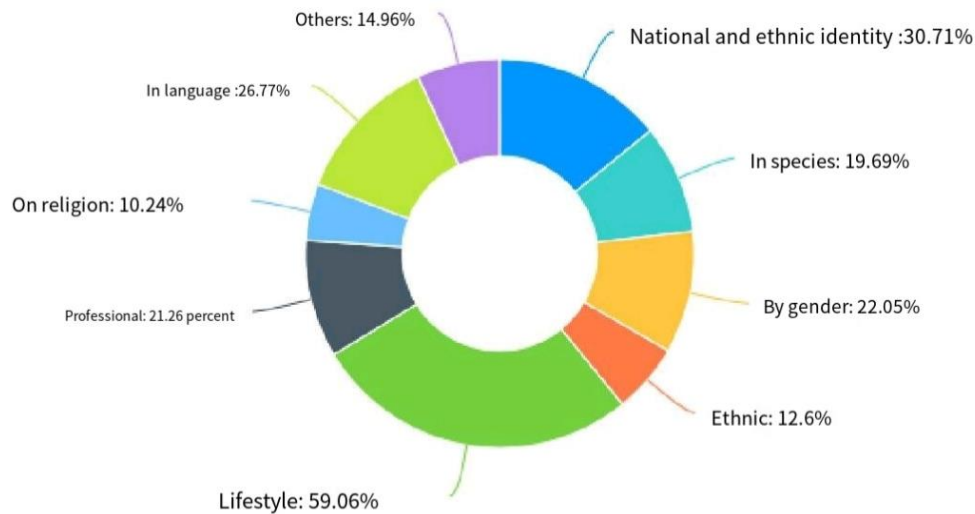


Figure 4. Changes of virtual identity to the real identity

The Meta-Universe Challenges the National Identity System

In theory, social interaction in the metauniverse can eliminate class, language, gender, country, and other barriers in reality, which contributes to constructing a community with a shared future for humankind. However, the basic framework of the operation of the meta-universe society has yet to be established and improved. At present, the governance mode of the meta-universe is more inclined to "joint autonomy" and "equal individual participation." The establishment and maintenance of the order largely rely on the players' awareness of rules and self-control ability. Players equally participate in rule-making and opinion decision-making, which can easily cause the breeding of "anarchism"; The breaking of time and space limits shocks the concept of state; The monopolistic genes inherent in the Metaverse are vulnerable to capital manipulation. If measures are not taken in time, the scientific and technological political power of the Metaverse giant companies may even threaten the nation-state's security shortly.

The research shows that 34.86% of the respondents tend to show unreal geographical locations in the virtual network environment, as shown in Figure 1; 30.71% of respondents believe that virtual identity in the meta-universe has an impact on their national and ethnic identity, as shown in Figure 4. With the advent of the new media era, the popularity of global cultural exchanges has also brought about the fragmentation and identity crisis of national cultural identity. The intensified "re-tribalization" in cyberspace undoubtedly brings great risks and challenges to national unity and stability. Interviewee A said that the meta-universe had expanded its channels to recognize the cultures of all ethnic groups worldwide. However, because the system is too large and lacks subject supervision and legal regulations, the phenomenon still exists that is not conducive to forming a sense of community in the Chinese nation. The metauniverse has a strong ideological attribute in nature. The Western metauniverse is the ideological integrator of Western capitalism and a new tool for Western countries to carry out digital colonization. With the development of the digital economy and the innovation of content technology, the ecological landscape of the Metaverse is constantly

expanding. Based on the mimicry environment created by the technological media of the Metaverse, cultural imperialism can secretly "grow barbarously" by relying on its space-time field interwoven with reality and virtually. The interviewee, as a "network native," believes that with the in-depth development of media technology, Western ideology invasion is becoming increasingly obvious, and heterogeneous values are penetrating people, especially teenagers, through various forms. On the one hand, the output of such cultural "homogeneity" weakens the mainstream cultural identity of nation-states; on the other hand, it intensifies social differentiation and interpersonal estrangement. In particular, the youth community, as the main audience of the meta-universe, is dominating the alienation trend of youth core value identity with an immersive experience and "unlimited" freedom.

INTERVIEW AND REFLECTION

Break Fear, Rationally Accept and Change the Unpleasant Reality

To some extent, the virtual space of the meta-universe makes up for the unbeauty of the objective world and gives people a field to escape from. However, the meta-universe is doomed to be unable to break away from the media foundation of reality, and the rules in the media scene are still derived from the audience groups of different strata in reality. With the merging of virtual and real public discourse fields, the residents of the meta-universe must increase real communication, break their fear of real life, rationally accept the imperfect reality, and actively seek change.

Laws Should Be Formulated, and Multiple Subjects Should Cooperate in Governance

As cutting-edge concepts, meta-universe and NFT have not been regulated by laws and regulations at home and abroad. Still, the national supervision and protection of virtual property have already begun. With the continuous development of science and technology, the meta-universe will no longer be limited to social entertainment, but through the integration of power subject resources, committed to the establishment of a complete currency and trade system of the business ecosystem, the ensuing digital divide, privacy invasion, protection of minors and other new hidden dangers need to be jointly solved by the government, developers and participating metauniverse residents.

National and Ethnic Boundaries in The Virtual World Are Difficult to Predict

Although the Metaverse has a strong Chinese element due to adding Chinese users, everyone can feel it deliberately lightened the national and ethnic boundaries. Many interviewees expressed that they still worry about each other's national and ethnic identity in reality when socializing in the metauniverse, taking into account the different historical backgrounds and cultural differences of each ethnic group and even being influenced by stereotypes in reality. Other respondents said that they would not consider the existence of national and ethnic boundaries at all, preferring to refer to the residents of the metauniverse as "local people" and regard them as residents independent of all real countries. In their view, the Metaverse is "an experimental field where ethical rules are shed, and human nature is used to establish order."

CONCLUSION

Through the correlation analysis of relevant data and the summary and grasp of the law of correlation transmission, we can predict the influence of the development of the future metauniverse on human identity. The emergence of the metauniverse has shaken people's recognition of real identity to a certain extent but also brought more challenges to the social

management of various countries and has a huge uncontrollable influence on the political security of various countries. Faced with the change of identity brought by the meta-universe, the government needs to develop a series of preventive countermeasures, such as promoting collaborative governance, strengthening international cooperation, exploring new forms of identity, designing and improving the corresponding mechanism of virtual identity, realizing the orderly docking with the real world, and finally establishing a reasonable identity integration and reconstruction system.

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