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What If Your Avatar Looks Like You? Dual-Congruity Perspectives for Avatar Use

Kil-Soo Suh, Hongki Kim, and Eung Kyo Suh

Abstract

As broadband Internet access and virtual reality technology rapidly expand, virtual worlds and three-dimensional avatars will become more pervasive and widely adopted. In virtual worlds, people assume an identity as an avatar and interact with each other. The objective of this study is to theorize how users form attitudes and intentions regarding avatars in realistic, task-focused virtual world settings. To investigate these effects, this study proposes a conceptual framework based on dual-congruity perspectives (self-congruity and functional congruity). The results show that the more closely an avatar resembles its user, the more likely the user will be to have positive attitudes (e.g., affection, connection, and passion) toward the avatar, and the better the user is able to evaluate the quality and performance of apparel products. In the end, these positive attitudes toward an avatar and its usefulness positively affect users' intentions to use the avatar. Based on this study, we propose that avatars representing users' actual appearance may be helpful in experiencing and evaluating some business areas related to users' lives in the real world (e.g., virtual apparel shopping, matchmaking, plastic surgery, fitness clubs, etc.); utilization of such avatars may be a new business opportunity likely to thrive in virtual worlds.

Keywords: Virtual worlds, self-concept, self-congruity, functional congruity, avatar similarity, avatar identification