



# **THESIS**

On

## **IMPACT OF DIGITAL AVATARS ON SELF-EXPRESSION**

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

**Bachelor of Arts in Journalism**

by

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Under the Supervision of

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled "**Impact of Digital Avatars on Self-expression**" submitted to the Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the **Bachelor of Arts in Journalism**, is an original work carried out by **Ms. Tanya Singh**.

This research was undertaken under my supervision and guidance, and to the best of my knowledge, the thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title at any university or institution in India or abroad.

Date -  
Place - Delhi

Dr. Nidhi Singhal  
Supervisor



## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I, Tanya Singh, hereby declare that this research paper titled “**Impact of Digital Avatars on Self-expression**” is an original work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. Nidhi Singhal, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of B.A. Hons. Journalism at Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, Delhi University.

I further declare that this paper has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or award, and that all sources used in the paper are duly acknowledged.

Date:

**Tanya Singh**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First and foremost, I bow my head in gratitude to the Almighty, whose divine grace has granted me the strength, perseverance, and wisdom to undertake and complete this research work.

I take this opportunity to express my deepest sense of respect and sincere gratitude to Dr. Nidhi Singhal, my esteemed supervisor, for her scholarly guidance, insightful suggestions, and continuous encouragement throughout the course of this research. Her valuable feedback and unwavering support have played a pivotal role in shaping the direction and quality of this study.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Neha Jingala, Head of the Department, for her academic leadership, constant motivation, and for fostering an environment of learning and research within the department.

I am also profoundly grateful to Dr. Rajiv Chopra, Principal, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, for providing the institutional support and infrastructure that made this research endeavour possible.

I would like to acknowledge the faculty members, administrative staff, and fellow students of Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, for their cooperation and moral support during the completion of my work.

Lastly, I extend my special thanks to my family and well-wishers whose unwavering faith, patience, and emotional support have been my greatest strength throughout this journey.

**Tanya Singh**

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## **ABSTRACT**

People frequently use avatars, such Bitmoji on Snapchat and Meta avatars, to represent themselves online in today's digital environment. These virtual avatars, which are particularly prevalent on social media and virtual worlds, can be characterised as a new kind of self-expression. This study examines how users choose their avatars and how those choices affect how other people see them, how they represent their personalities, or how they develop their sense of self. It also looks at whether avatars have social or psychological dangers or if they help create a more expressive and inclusive online environment.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the aspects of avatars that individuals find significant in relation to communication, identity representation, and online behaviour. In order to do my research, I created an online survey. One hundred people responded to the poll, and they all had different backgrounds and viewpoints. In order to find out more about how individuals relate to their avatar or avatars and how they use them in their regular online contacts, the questionnaire had a number of questions.

The findings demonstrate how avatars are becoming more and more significant in defining digital identity and expression. They present a lot of issues with authenticity and self-image, even while they also provide for some creative flexibility and may even promote inclusion. More research on how avatars will develop and influence future online interactions and experiences is made possible by this study.

## INTRODUCTION

*“The medium is the message.” (McLuhan, 1964)*

In the era of digitalization and its' widespread impact, our way of life evolves constantly. Technology does not just make our lives simpler but it also impacts the way we perceive and portray ourselves. Self-expression is about how an individual communicates themselves and their feelings, emotions and thoughts. Many people opt for art, poetry, fashion etc to express themselves. Nowadays, a new way has been discovered to represent ourselves online, i.e. through digital Avatars. Many social media platforms like Meta platforms (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) and Snapchat have this feature. These online figures are customizable and a person can play with their appearance, add a variety of new features and even incorporate their traits into Avatar's looks. For example, a Paragon might create an avatar that is very sleek and elegant to showcase perfection and intellect while a youngster could opt for something vibrant and with a modern style to represent passion and adventure.

In our day-to-day lives, different aspects of self-expression can be seen. This may involve the choice that people make while selecting an outfit according to their mood and occasion and the leisure activity that they prefer to do during the chill time. Similarly, self-expression in the online world is about the choices made while creating Virtual Avatars. These digital personas are used to further define ourselves whether it is a profile picture on Instagram or a Bitmoji on Snapchat. It gives an idea about the person, their personality and looks, to others, usually in ways that may differ from the real-life appearance. For example, a person might create an avatar that is energetic and full of colours to display their creativity even though they are shy or a bit lethargic in the real world. Thus, self-expression on online platforms allows us to explore ourselves in a setting that is adaptable and comfortable.

Digital avatars act as our virtual representatives, a fusion of physical personality with the online identity that we choose to portray. These self-made, customizable Avatars depict the personality, lifestyle, and desire of the user. They are not just simply the illustrations or the caricatures- they are a medium of self-expression. Different elements like facial expressions, dress sense, and dynamic gestures help in creating an Avatar that is a representation of self. While serving as a communication tool that allows people to express their emotions and showcase physical traits, these avatars pose some concerns related to self-perception,

authenticity and the relationship between real-life identity and online identity. Thus, research into virtual avatars provides us with an understanding of how people construct their identity in interconnected digital realms.

With the advancement in technology and social media platforms, virtual avatars have also been enhanced. Initially, the Avatars used to be simple and static, but as the internet evolved and improvements in design tools made, they transformed from generic images to complex figures that reflect the traits of their creators. This development is significant as it allows users to experiment with their different aspects of identity. These self-portraits not only reflect physical appearance but also discover the taste and mood of an individual. Social media sites, being a continuous evolving tool, now allow users to change the Avatar's facial expression, hairstyle, eye colour, body language, and can even add accessories, helping to create a version resonating them. This artistic imagination merges the complexity of human identity and expression. It also allows users to customize them in such a way that matches their personal narrative and cultural environment.

Many platforms serve as the foreground for digital avatars. Snapchat's Bitmoji, is a wonderful example of such digital representations. A user can customise the cartoon-like characters in whatever way they want to, suiting their mood and interests. These bitmojis can be expressive and communicate the emotions of the user. It can be cheerful, sad, angry, surprised etc. The adjustable features like eye shape, eyebrow position, mouth movement, along with animated effects like tears and hearts are used by these avatars to create a relatable sense for users. Another immersive platform that has given a space to virtual avatars is Instagram. Instagram has featured a concept of avatars which act as a stylized version of oneself. These avatars are portrayed in an entertaining way, allowing users to express their individuality and style sense. People can react, comment and chat using these avatars, reflecting their personality.

Zhang Pei, Jusang Bolong, Tham Jen Sern, and Mohd. Nizam Osman (2024) researched the gratification needs for authentic self-expression on Instagram. In this research, they identify that users are driven by a need for self-presentation and social validation, in search of places where they can present their selves in ways that are authentic as well as socially accepted. They discovered that Instagram offers users a special space for self-expression, motivated by gratification needs like validation, social interaction, and social comparison. The focus of the study on self-expression and the role of gratification needs is applicable to research on virtual avatars since both investigate how users construct and organize online identities—whether

through photos or digital avatars. *(Zhang Pei, Jusang Bolong, Tham Jen Sern, & Mohd. Nizam Osman, 2024)*

WhatsApp also has the feature of digital cartoons i.e. avatars which can be customised by changing hairstyle, skin tone, body type, clothing etc. these can be sent as stickers or used as a profile picture. This helps in making the conversations fun and engaging. Talking about the professional settings, there is another interesting example, Zoom meeting avatars. It allows users to attend meetings while maintaining a certain amount of anonymity. These figures can be dynamic, expressive and artistic at the same time. All these examples showcase that virtual avatars can be used in every aspect of our lives. These digital representations demonstrate a user-centric interaction that makes digital communication lively and personalized while projecting self-expression as it continues to evolve in the ongoing digital age.

Visser, van der Putten, and Zohrehvand's 2024 study investigated how the appearance of an AI avatar, as well as whether its inhumane identity is exposed, effects user motivation when executing virtual activities. They discovered that users' levels of involvement, effort, and perseverance vary depending on whether they perceive the avatar as human or clearly AI-operated. This is especially important in our study of the impact of Virtual avatars on self-expression because it demonstrates that digital self-representation is more than simply a cosmetic problem; it also has major behavioural effects. By relating avatar design options to user engagement, their research provides vital concrete proof for our argument that how avatars are shown may impact both users' psychological and interactive experience. *(Visser, van der Putten, & Zohrehvand, 2024)*

To understand the psychology behind creating and using digital avatars, we need to analyse the complex relationship between how someone thinks they appear to others, how they want to appear and how others influence someone to appear. Many people use these avatars to create an idealized version of themselves, exploring their favourite features and hopes. With the help of these avatars, people are able to explore the different aspects of their personality because they feel safe and secure. Things which people can't experience in real life can also be tested using avatars online. People feel validated and a boost in their self-esteem through these figures. They can project themselves the way they want, to online friends and communities. Additionally, while presenting themselves through a virtual persona, they feel psychologically protected from judgements which might come when exposed personally. Making of an avatar comes from an internal debate between our own strengths, weaknesses and acceptance from

society. These carefully designed creatures often highlight the qualities which are widely accepted by society or cherished by an individual. Thus, creating an avatar is a journey of self-discovery and growth through expressing creativity.

Digital avatars create an inclusive world where people can express themselves transcending social limits. These avatars allow users from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to portray themselves escaping existing stereotypes. This digital self-portrait builds an egalitarian society when the importance is shifted from physical attributes to creatives that represent ideals. People are able to express who they are, where do they belong and how do they feel emotionally. The anonymous nature of these avatars allows users to experiment with their gender identities as well, which they might not be able to do in real life. It creates space for people where they feel valued, seen and respected. The way Avatar changes expressions has enabled the representations to be wide and diverse. These avatars also challenge existing societal beauty standards. It provides user with variety of options in skin colour, hair styles, body structure etc. For example, an individual who is petite, has dark skin tone and chose kurti over top and jeans, can also create an avatar who is look alike. There are no barriers for any kind of choices. People can showcase themselves in whatever way they want without any judgement. Thus, avatars create an equal online world, where people from all backgrounds express themselves in harmony.

Digital avatars help in community building as well. These avatars being a symbolic figures represents the personality, traits and identity of an individual. People who share same style and creative thinking can connect with each other leading to the establishment of a digital community. The characters often humanize the interaction often creating a sense of personalisation. As users can give a human touch to these avatars, they can interact more comfortably, share common interests and ideas, which further helps in strengthening bonds created online. People can also share tips on creating an avatar and can also be an inspiration for others. Virtual avatar's creation is subjective and differs person to person. This can help in bringing diverse creative avatars together and build meaningful connections within users. Thus, creation of avatars fosters innovation and establish trends.

While serving as a medium of self-expression, these Digital avatars may lead to disconnection from real world. There is a concern that if people get overly obsessed with self-created idealised avatars, they may get isolated from society. It has greater impact on the minds of creators, contributing to issues like poor self-esteem and depression. Additionally, the digital nature of

these avatars also raises concerns about authenticity and privacy. It can also be used to mislead or deceive others, creating a sense of false trust for malicious reasons. Avatars can create unrealistic expectations for both creator and viewers. The urge to be like the idealised self may contribute to low self-esteem. The anonymity may encourage some users to engage in such behaviours which is totally unacceptable in real-time interaction. As the world gets more digitalised, the need for clear norms and mechanisms become important. Understanding the both negative and positive impact of virtual avatars can help users to negotiate in a complex world of digital identities. Thus, the research on psychological implications of users while creating avatar is important for building a safer and inclusive online world.

Digital avatars give us an opportunity to portray ourselves in a creative way to others. These avatars showcase our identity, allowing us to experiment with our personality in ways which were not possible before. Researchers focus on the psychology of people who create and use these avatars. Some believe that these avatars are not just created out of creative interest but it also showcases the deep-rooted psychological needs. People feel more accepted and confident when they are able to portray themselves through their idealised version. Social dynamics are changing as well because how others perceive and interact with you on digital platforms is now also depending on the virtual avatars created by you. The role of cultural influences and societal expectations also plays a major role. The relationship between personal desire and external influences also leads to the creation of an Avatar which is diverse, expressive and creative. This research paper will help in understanding how virtual avatars, which are prevalent in social media platforms, affects self-expression.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Different aspects of the field; Digital avatars and self-expression, have been explored in the past using experimental and philosophical frameworks, giving various viewpoints and valuable information. This chapter will include the examination of several articles and research papers by different scholars. To understand the most important contributions made so far, the researcher will try to evaluate their findings, methodologies, and conclusions. This review will act as groundwork for the current research paper by highlighting the diverse perspectives and points of view from previous literature.

1. In order to increase the realism and interactivity of virtual avatars, Zainudin, Tuli, Kim, and Lee (2025) conducted a research titled A human-centric interactive avatar creation framework using motion capture and face expression detection in metaverse. They created a system that uses MediaPipe4U with Unreal Engine to record user facial expressions and body language, enabling real-time avatar mobility. The avatars are made to accurately and latency-free represent the physical attributes and behaviours of its users. technology tests confirmed that the technology could faithfully reproduce responsive avatar movements. By creating a stronger sense of presence and connection to one's avatar identity and its digital self, they highlighted the value of lifelike avatars in promoting emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure in virtual forms, social spaces, and therapeutic contexts. *(Zainudin, Tuli, Kim, & Lee, 2025)*
2. Hsu and Lee (2024) examined whether people's aesthetic perceptions of the lip colour of actual faces are likewise the same for digital avatars in their conference paper, "Examining the Consistency of Lip Colour Impression Between Real Face and Virtual Avatar." This is a pertinent and urgent subject given the rise in virtual self-representation. 32 participants in a psychophysical experiment by Hsu and Lee evaluated 24 avatars with similar facial characteristics, three distinct skin tones, and three different lipstick hues created in ZEPETO based on five impression categories: likeable, adorable, contemporary, attractive, and pleasant. To investigate the effects of skin tone and lip colour combinations on avatar perceptions, they employed a two-way ANOVA. Although impression ratings for lip colours on actual faces and avatars were similar,

impressions did not always transfer immediately, and assessments of attractiveness were influenced by skin tone, with some skin tones being regarded much more beautiful than others. All things considered, Hsu and Lee's research presents significant issues about the constant transferability of cosmetic signals to virtual avatars, which might make self-representation in virtual environments more challenging. *Lee and Hsu (2024)*

3. The influence of avatars on student engagement in an online learning environment was the main topic of Nasir et al.'s study *Enhancing Student Engagement in Learning Management Systems by Exploration of Avatars in Virtual Classrooms: A Systematic Review* from 2024. After a preliminary search of 174 papers, the systematic review looked at 39 that evaluated avatars. Avatars in learning management systems have been the focus of a comprehensive review since 2010. The results showed that customised avatars enhanced social presence, enhanced motivation and identity, promoted immersive and interactive learning experiences, and reduced students' feelings of loneliness in virtual classrooms. Additionally, avatars helped students develop their skills by providing practice in low-stakes virtual settings. The authors came to the conclusion that avatars are a useful tool for enhancing online learning experiences, and they suggested that as avatars are integrated with technology and interactive platforms like AR and AI in the future, they could further enhance online learning experiences (*Nasir et al., 2024*).
  
4. Using photos from mobile phones and the Blender Facebuilder add-on, Chandra, Castermans, Berkaoui, Querl, and Heribert (2024) investigated the creation of lifelike 3D human avatars for social virtual settings. With far less mesh and texture extraction required, this method allows for the creation of avatars at cheaper hardware costs and produces lifelike digital faces that can be adjusted to create a character's facial motions. 22 members of the general public participated in the controlled research design, which compared the usage of realistic vs non-realistic avatars, and assessed experiences using the MyScore VR app. The preference for lifelike avatars, which improved communication, immersion, and bargaining, was strongly supported by the results. The authors draw the conclusion that the capacity to produce lifelike avatars can improve an avatar owner's capacity for self-expression and identity navigation in the virtual world. The research contributes to the discussion of avatar realism and how we are represented in digital spaces. (*Chandra et al., 2024*)

5. In their book *Avatars of Influence: Embracing Customer Experience in Virtual Spaces*, Chowdhury and Pandey (2024) examined how digital avatars affect consumer attitudes and behaviour in virtual settings. They examined how a user's emotional connection and attachment to avatars affects how their behaviour emerges, both online and offline, using self-perception theory and interdisciplinary literature. In order to secure a greater sense of personalisation, identity, and presence in domains like e-commerce and virtual collaboration, the authors describe the evolution of avatars as consumer objects from basic 2-D representations to the more sophisticated, customisable 3-D implementations in virtual realities and augmented realities. Based on an analysis of current data and a study of multidisciplinary literature, the authors found that users are more engaged when they see realistic and customisable avatars because they feel like they can express themselves more authentically. They contend that the experience of digital self-expression and interaction in virtual environments might be completely transformed by avatars. *(Chowdhury & Pandey, 2024)*
  
6. The impact of avatar human-likeness on users' perceptions of social, hypothetical, and geographical intimacy in virtual reality was investigated by Chae, Lee, and Kim (2024). They altered the look of the avatar in four experimental tests conducted in work-style and educational settings to examine the impact on user experiences. According to Study 1, participants felt more connected to more human-like avatars in general; Study 2, which used machine learning, discovered that participants physically approached the more human-like avatars. Human-like avatars were linked to more favourable sentiments in virtual reality (VR), according to Study 3. Study 4 revealed that participants were more likely to trust and return to the persons they had interacted with in VR if they felt less connected to them. Humanlike avatars provide more closeness, trust, and user acceptance, fostering more linked self-expression, agency, and engagement in the virtual world, according to research that used ANOVA and mediation. *(Chae, Lee, & Kim, 2024)*
  
7. In their conference paper *\*Towards Inclusive Avatars: A Study on Self-Representation in Virtual Environments\**, Ribeiro et al. (2024) polled 133 participants to examine how

users customise avatars in different contexts. They discovered that participants chose virtual representations that matched their real-life selves in serious, formal contexts, while in gaming and social contexts, they chose experimental or anonymous representations. They also discovered that there were limitations to personalisation options, especially for marginalised groups, such as individuals with disabilities or perceptions of themselves as indigenous peoples, and avatars that represented an intention of self-representation in a situationally changing manner. *(Ribeiro et al., 2024)*

8. Oladokun and Gaitanou (2024) address avatars as identity displays and community context in virtual library environments such as Second Life in their work *Avatars and Their Players - Art in the Libraries*. They claim that avatars, which are used for navigation in virtual environments, become cultural and personal signifiers, which in turn offer an identity claim in a hyper-real space. Limited customisation serves to further exclude underprivileged consumers, raising ethical concerns about diversity, inclusion, and participation. Their principles are generally relevant to digital identity, even if the topic is based in library and information science. For example, Bitmoji and Instagram avatars enable users to create a personal online identity. *(Oladokun & Gaitanou, 2024)*
9. The creation of AI avatars in education is discussed by Fink, Robinson, and Ertl (2024). One example is the open-source GPTAvatar, which combines lip-synched expressions and synthetic speech with spoken input that is processed by AI in a virtual 3D environment. While acknowledging certain disadvantages including false information, a lack of rapport, and privacy concerns, the authors emphasise a number of benefits that AI avatars provide, such as adaptive learning, personalised learning, and emotional support. The authors acknowledge that appropriate usage requires legal and ethical frameworks. This essay recognises the required obstacles that still need to be overcome while highlighting the tremendous potential of AI avatars for education today *(Fink, Robinson, & Ertl, 2024)*.
10. Through an experimental game-based research in Roblox, Visser, van der Putten, and Zohrehvand (2024) demonstrated how the characteristics and disclosure of AI avatars might affect user motivation in virtual worlds. Conditions included the gendering of the AI avatars and the revelation of the AI characteristic. Participants may play alone or with

AI avatars present. The findings showed that revealing the AI element boosted participants' motivation and that playing with the AI avatar was less intense, particularly if the avatar had a manly look. These findings demonstrated the potential impact of avatar and disclosure designs on user engagement and offered guidance for creating more individualised and successful virtual learning environments (*Visser, van der Putten, & Zohrehvand, 2024*).

11. Ribeiro, Vieira, Alves, and Maciel (2024) introduce VISHnu, a context-aware strategy to improving avatar personalisation for authentic self-expression in virtual environments. The study employed qualitative approaches such as focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires with developers and academics to identify the key factors influencing personalisation from technological, interactional, and contextual perspectives. The authors supplied a variety of tools for avatar building, including checklists and glossaries. Their findings showed that by including contextual information, avatars may more properly represent individuals' identities, solving concerns of limited customisation and inclusiveness. This work makes an important contribution to developing expressive and diversified avatar design (*Ribeiro et al., 2024*).
12. Wei (2023) investigated how Chinese college students used avatars to present an authentic and ideal self in various digital situations, such as social networks and gaming. Using data from 92 students acquired via online surveys, researchers discovered that participants idealised their avatars, particularly in terms of physical characteristics and personality, and were less varied in factors such as age. While Wei (2023) discovered certain contextual differences, such as idealising hair colour in single-player games, idealisation was similar across digital settings. This paper provides an important assessment of how avatars function as self-expression tools, with an equilibrium between authentic self and aspirational self-presentation, applicable to applications like as Instagram and Snapchat (*Wei, 2023*).
13. Wu et al. (2023) investigated the elements that influence avatar personalisation in digital settings, focussing on self-similarity, self-consciousness, and self-disclosure.

Participants were instructed to build avatars for either a multiplayer game or a virtual gathering. The findings indicated that in casual gaming settings, players construct avatars that are less comparable to themselves because their avatars appear to be idealised images of themselves. In contrast, avatars created for formal encounters looked to mirror their genuine identities, as impacted by their public self-consciousness. Their research focused on how digital environments impact self-expression and avatar personalisation, and it is equally applicable to social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat (*Wu et al., 2023*).

14. Paleczna, Ilczuk, and Szmigielska (2023) studied how self-esteem, gender, and personality influence avatar similarity among teenagers. In an experiment with 130 high school students using the Characterium game, they discovered that gender and extraversion strongly predicted avatar similarity, while global self-esteem did not. Boys created avatars that were less similar to girls, while more extraversion was related with greater resemblance. The authors concluded: "In a creator's setting, for adolescents, avatar making is not just about self-improvement but also about exploring identity," implying that personality qualities may play a role in digital self-representation. (*Paleczna, Ilczuk, & Szmigielska, 2023*)
15. Liao et al. (2023) created TADA, a text-driven system that generates high-fidelity, animatable avatars from text inputs. They expanded the prior constraints of text-to-3D techniques by employing an SMPL-X body model with learnable displacements to cover high-fidelity textures while overcoming geometry-texture misalignment difficulties. TADA was able to produce avatars with lifelike emotions and mobility after employing a multi-layer hidden optimisation technique and doing end-user testing. TADA offers a new standard for avatar generation using text. This framework's progress promotes promising digital self-presentation, enabling users to create more expressive, lifelike avatars with less effort (*Liao et al., 2023*).
16. Zimmermann, Wehler, and Kaspar (2022) investigated how people portrayed themselves using avatars in six online activity situations, including dating, gaming, and social networking. The authors investigated the parallels and contrasts between the actual self, avatar, and ideal self in a variety of attributes based on the results of 568 individuals. The study discovered that avatar self-representation was more closely related to

personality characteristics, gender, and online environment than global self-worth. The study emphasised the relevance of environment in creating digital identity and shown that avatars were used to explore identity rather than enhance it (*Zimmermann, Wehler, & Kaspar, 2022*).

17. According to Fokides (2020), self-perception and avatar design or attributes were investigated in two different virtual worlds. Fokides (2020) investigated how users construct avatars to enhance or modify their identities in an online world, and described avatar creation as being impacted by the user's particular personality features, gender characteristics, and self-attributes. The study included 268 students enrolled in a college-based class, and the researchers utilised a survey instrument to determine if personality factors, gender traits, and self-attributes influenced avatar character development. The study's findings revealed that avatars were frequently representations of the ideal self; males tended to increase their physical appearance (physical traits), while women sought to boost their intellectual abilities. Introverts and neurotics' avatars overrotated persons (who are normally socially weak): they generated avatars with higher social abilities, and avatars appear to have been frequently utilised to compensate for ascribed shortcomings. Overall, the outcomes of this study provided insight into avatars as a pre-existing individual knowledge of the digital self, as well as its hyperbolic or exaggerated manifestation of identity (*Fokides, 2020*).
18. Nowak and Fox (2018) performed a review of avatar usage in CMC, including summaries and implications on computer-mediated interaction. The authors offered definitions and investigated the use of avatars from its beginnings in Hindu mythology to its current use in CMC, including debate over whether avatars require realistic visual or anthropomorphic traits. The authors synthesised existing material on the usage of avatars. The authors defined avatars as a way to control information impressions and investigated how avatars affect representational or social interaction. The authors demonstrated how realism, anthropomorphism, and agency affect avatar interactions. The review explains how avatars relate to self-presentation in digital environments (*Nowak & Fox, 2018*).

19. Jiang et al. (2018) investigated Bitmoji stickers, which are used to depict personalised avatars, as nonverbal communication tools inside messaging platforms, and their influence on social behaviours. Jiang et al. (2018) used network analysis and a quasi-experimental methodology to determine that users were more likely to swap stickers with friends than non-friends, demonstrating reciprocity as well as a certain level of selectivity in their interactions. The study also proved social contagion, since utilising Bitmoji stickers increased the possibility that the user's friends would interact with them. The analysis demonstrates how customized avatars allow users to represent themselves to the audiences of the digital spaces as well as avatars as tools for communication, which contributes an understanding of avatars as a form of self-representation (*Jiang et al., 2018*).
20. In their paper, Triberti et al. (2017) intended to examine how users' opinions about avatars might change based on the weapons of the avatars in the virtual world. Participants constructed two avatars (one for leisure and one for business) and scored them based on their likeness to their current and ideal selves, beauty, and simplicity of redesign. Leisure avatars were assessed as being more personalised and similar to the actual self, whereas work avatars were rated as being further away from the ideal self, particularly for females. The study emphasised that context and individual variations, such as self-interest and gender, have a significant influence on the reconstruction of avatars and self representations in digital contexts. (*Triberti et al., 2017*)
21. Fong (2017) investigated how avatars influence user self-concept in virtual worlds. The dissertation examined four research on avatars, identity, and psychological needs. Study 1 found that avatars customised for personality were accurate mirrors of the user's personality. Study 2 established a correlation between avatar preferences and expectations based on the demand for social and competent connections. Study 3 and 4 focused on the roles of avatars in idealisation, self-enhancement, and self-evaluation. Fong's avatar study defined the role that avatars play not only as identity representation but also as self-concept, as research seeks and provides a better understanding of avatar design to improve self-representation and self-expression opportunities in virtual environments (*Fong, 2017*).

22. Triberti et al. (2017) argue that social and environmental variables influence avatar building and self-expression. Triberti and colleagues conducted a quantitative study (n=94) in which participants used the web-based platform WeeWorld to create two avatars for two scenarios (a video game scenario and a career-based social networking scenario) while considering whether the avatars' audiences were friends or strangers. The authors discovered that participants altered avatars' attire or accessories rather than their physical qualities, demonstrating how adjustable characteristics are impacted by social environment. Gender differences also appeared, with women exhibiting a greater ability to shift avatars when the audience assumed they were presenting to a friend. This study highlights the transient nature of digital self-representation and provides insight into how contextual situating influences avatars and social perception of avatars (*Triberti et al, 2017*).
23. Aymerich-Franch (2015) studied the concept of personal qualities being reflected in avatars, as well as the justification for user avatar choosing depending on social context. Aymerich-Franch conducted two investigations. In phase one, thirty people judged the extroversion levels of 40 anthropomorphic avatars. Participants' reported personality characteristics differed significantly according on how they evaluated each avatar's friendliness. In phase two, one hundred and two participants chose between two sets of avatars, one with an extroverted personality characteristic and one with an introverted personality trait, in a range of settings ranging from formal to informal. The study's findings indicated a widespread meta-preference for extroverted avatars. Given the situation, participants formally selected extroverted avatars and informally chose introverted avatars. Participants showed gender inequalities; women were more likely to choose outgoing avatars. The researchers concluded that avatar choosing required purposeful and planned social acts of self-presentation based on the social context or social explanation. (*Aymerich-Franch, 2015*).
24. Van Looy (2015) investigated how avatars in online games serve as extensions of the self and contribute to identity formation. The study discovered that users alternate between low and high identity modes, considering avatars as either tools or self- and transient centres of identification. The study relies on notions such as social learning and self-discrepancy. Van Looy discovered that users commonly developed idealised versions of themselves, utilising avatars to convey certain personal attributes and form

social interactions. Avatars serve two purposes, particularly in multiplayer games: they reflect the self and contribute to the social identity of participants. The study shows how significant avatars are in self-expression and identity formation in digital gaming environments (*Van Looy, 2015*).

25. Blanch (2014) investigated the impact of body image on self-representation through avatars in virtual worlds, using the Body Appreciation Scale as a measuring tool. Sixty-eight Second Life users who previously claimed having "personalised" their avatar answered to a question regarding their actual body image satisfaction, how much money they invested into their virtual avatar, and what their proportions were. The results demonstrated that women who reported less body appreciation developed avatars that had more idealised physical attributes than the avatars created by women who reported greater body appreciation, as well as males who reported more body appreciation. It is noteworthy that women reported substantially higher body admiration than males. The study found that avatars are unquestionably instruments for self-improvement. They are actively altering their presentation as avatars and moulding their looks and/or bodies to match their own goals, as avatars in general may be utilised to adhere to the user's beliefs. Furthermore, the study demonstrated the relationship between body image and avatar design, as well as how users employed avatars to control their self-image and identity in virtual settings (*Blanch, 2014*).
  
26. Villani et al. (2012) investigated how teenagers use avatars to express their body image and identity in virtual settings. Using a "Drawing Me" exam, 41 Italian teenagers drew self-drawn drawings and avatars that were evaluated on comparable components such as physical details and sexual traits. They discovered that avatars had more details and were always more idealised than self-drawings, but not considerably more so on contextual pieces. The girls provided more details than the boys, indicating that gender effects the details contained in self-representation. The findings reveal the efficacy of avatars for improving posture and establishing identity, highlighting the significance avatars play in teenagers' digital self-construction and self-expression (*Villani et al., 2012*).

27. Martey and Consalvo (2011) investigated how the look of an avatar in Second Life shapes and depicts the individual's and group's self-perception. They used content analysis and participant observation to investigate how people created avatars that mirrored their internal self-image and social identities. Building on features of the looking-glass self theory, the authors concluded that avatars serve as identity-negotiating tools, allowing users to show how they want to be regarded and how they identify with a certain group. The study's authors were able to highlight the role of virtual avatars in one's digital self-disclosure, as they define avatar design as intricately connected to both individual identity elements and social processes within virtual communities (*Martey & Consalvo, 2011*).
  
28. Park et al. (n.d.) offered a methodological framework for producing more lifelike avatar motions that included rigid body tracking with inverse kinematics. The authors contrasted their reduced approach to a more traditional way of whole body tracking, showing that employing fewer markers and equipment allowed for more realistic motion capture. Survey data from participants revealed that the approach accurately recorded motion, with only modest deviations in smoothness and naturalness. The study is significant because it shows how more affordable tracking equipment can be used to contribute to avatar behaviour, generate authentic and realistic movement, and thus improve digital self-expression by allowing users to behave more naturally in virtual environments (*Park et al., n.d.*).
  
29. Graber and Graber (2010) investigate avatars as extensions of self in digital settings and argue that because of their importance in self-expression and identification, avatars should be granted the same rights as actual bodies. The authors propose, using a conceptual framework, that avatars are virtual places that are inextricably linked to human identity. If a user considers an avatar as an extension of the self, it is legitimate to fight for avatar rights. This study connects avatars to self-expression by analysing the ethical and legal consequences of creating an avatar in virtual worlds, and so appears to broaden our knowledge of digital self-representation (*Graber & Graber, 2010*).

30. Vasalou et al. (2008) discovered that social media avatars may be utilised to improve the manageability of online self-representation. In this study, participants were invited to utilise Yahoo! avatars as digital e-representations, with an emphasis on three dimensions of digital identity: (1) accurate self-representation, (2) fun idealisation, and (3) embodied communications. According to the study, users updated their avatars with particular objectives, either to be real representations of themselves or idealised versions, even modifying minor avatar characteristics such as face, clothing, and accessories to reflect various parts of identity. Finally, the study reveals that avatars can be more than just superficial representations of users, since they can enable some flexibility through avatar customisation and identify as avatars in online contexts (*Vasalou et al., 2008*).

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how people use digital avatars to express and represent themselves in online environments. The key objectives are:

1. To find out how people use digital avatars to represent themselves in the online world.
2. To examine whether the use of digital avatars impacts how individuals express their personality and identity.
3. To investigate whether digital avatars contribute to a more inclusive online world where users feel represented and respected.
4. To identify the risks and challenges that can arise from the misuse of digital avatars to mislead or harm others.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** People do not use digital avatars to alter or enhance their self-representation online.

**H<sub>11</sub>:** People use digital avatars to generate a better or idealised version of themselves in the online world.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The use of digital avatars has no significant impact on how individuals express their personality and identity.

**H<sub>12</sub>:** Through digital avatars, individuals are able to express themselves more comfortably and confidently than through real images.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Digital avatars do not significantly contribute to the feeling of inclusion or representation in online environments.

**H<sub>13</sub>:** Digital avatars contribute to building a more inclusive online world where users feel represented and respected.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There are no significant risks associated with the misuse of digital avatars for deceptive or harmful purposes.

**H<sub>14</sub>:** Misuse of digital avatars can lead to social or psychological risks, including deception, identity distortion, and harm to others.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**"Your avatar is your personal brand in the digital world." – *Mark Zuckerberg***

People are using digital avatars—customizable animated figures—as tools for self-expression as digital communication advances. Digital avatars, which may be found on applications and in virtual worlds on social media sites like Meta's virtual worlds and Snapchat's Bitmoji, let users portray themselves in a unique, ideal, or genuine way. Unlike profile images or static photos, which usually only allow for a generalised view of self, platforms provide users with customisable, user-controlled representations of their identity, mood, culture, and personality by making avatars available to them.

This study examines how people use avatars to convey who they are, if avatars affect how comfortable or confidently people express themselves, and whether they promote a more welcoming online community. Concerns have also been expressed about the misuse of avatars, including deceit and misrepresentation. One hundred participants completed an online survey that offered some preliminary insights on the psychological effects of digital avatars on modern self-expression.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study examines the function of digital avatars, such as Bitmoji on Snapchat and Meta avatars, in online self-expression using a Quantitative, descriptive Survey approach. A large sample of users will be examined using structured numerical data, which will allow for the observation of patterns in the creation and use of avatars by users (Objective 1), their influence on the expression of personality and identity (Objective 2), the ways in which avatars can promote an inclusive online environment (Objective 3), and the potential difficulties resulting from avatar misappropriation (Objective 4). For this study, a survey methodology was selected since it was effective in collecting results that could be methodically compiled and contrasted. An online survey was the main tool used to collect data. Google Forms was used to create the survey, which only included closed-ended questions with multiple choice answers and a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Demographic data (gender and age group) and social media/technological use (platforms used and frequency of use) were gathered in the first part. In the next section, participants were asked if they had ever made or used a digital avatar, which one they usually used, and why. Perceptions of avatar realism, personality

alignment, self-expression confidence, and feeling represented were among the items measured. Concerns around avatar misuse and the perceived need for further online security measures were covered in the last questions.

The survey link was disseminated via social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat) using convenience sampling in order to swiftly reach a large demographic sample for the study. One hundred people, representing a range of age groups (under 18 to over 50) and general gender identification categories (male, female, non-binary/self-describe, prefer not to say), replied over the two weeks before the study's conclusion. This sampling technique made it possible to record sentiments from real users of digital avatars in real time across a variety of demographic groups.

After the response window had closed, the researcher downloaded the collected data into a spreadsheet for cleaning and processing. Duplicate responses were deleted and all replies were checked for consistency and completeness. The cleaned dataset was then analysed using descriptive statistical methods, which included computing frequencies, percentages, and mean scores for each survey item. These methodologies gave a clear way to summarise broad patterns, such as how many users believed their avatars correctly mirrored their real-world personalities, or how many agreed with the assertion that avatars contribute to a more inclusive online environment.

Utilizing closed-ended questions and a defined pool of respondents, this research design provides reliable, quantifiable data on the use and perceptions of digital avatars. In a structured survey design, all data will be collected similarly from all participants, therefore allowing for consistent comparisons and interpretations. In conclusion, this design has been a quality first step in understanding how avatars affect identity and expression online, particularly at a time when we are moving into a visual, digitally based world.

## **POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The sample for this study is made up of people who now use social networking platforms that include digital avatars, such as Snapchat's Bitmoji, Meta avatars, and similar features on Instagram or WhatsApp. According to our definition of avatars, this encompasses anybody who has the opportunity and desire to create or use an avatar for self-representation online, regardless of age, gender identity, or cultural background. The research intends to include a

wide range of experiences and perspectives on avatar development, personality portrayal, inclusiveness, and possible misuse by employing these relatively flexible boundaries.

A sample of one hundred individuals was selected from this broader community. To ensure that both younger "digital natives" and senior users are represented, these individuals were split into five age groups: under 18, 18–25, 26–35, 36–50, and over 50. Male, female, non-binary, self-described, and unlabelled gender identities were all represented in the sample. The sample is representative of many demographic groups and their attitudes towards and interactions with digital avatars because of the wide range of age and gender categories.

The sample size of 100 did not provide a complete picture of the full population of social-media-using individuals, but it did give a manageable and diverse sample for quantitative analysis. The examples and insights from the sample are not meant to capture every event capturing general trends in avatar use and bringing attention to general trends, such as confidence when expressing themselves, to more focused concerns on the idea of being safe. Those were good topics to further study.

## **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

This study employed a convenience sample in order to quickly get viewpoints from users of digital avatars. Over the course of two weeks, the online survey was disseminated across the researchers' social networks, which included Instagram stories, Snapchat connections, and WhatsApp groups. There were no quotas or random selection requirements; anybody who had experience with social media avatars and clicked the survey link was welcome to take part.

This meant we could reach many active avatar users quickly and without requiring much resource use or access. Participants self-selected themselves into the study by choosing to click the link and fill out the form. The final sample of 100 respondents automatically included people from different age brackets (under 18 to over 50), and gender identity (male, female, non-binary/self-describe, and prefer not to say).

Convenience sampling has drawbacks while being effective and useful, especially for exploratory, descriptive research. The sample might not fully reflect the broader population on social media because participants are volunteers and are probably members of the researcher's network. It's possible that smaller groups—like those who don't interact with the researcher as much online or didn't join their network—will be overlooked. However, this approach yielded

some useful first data on avatar use and perceptions, and this study may serve as a foundation for future research employing more exacting, probability-based sampling techniques.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

A structured online questionnaire was created in Google Forms to collect the data required for this investigation. In order to ensure that respondents' answers could be quantified, the questionnaire only included closed-ended responses (i.e., multiple choice items and Likert scales of five points). This allowed for description and comparison while seeking answers to the study objectives regarding how/if participants used digital avatars (with regard to the possibility of their personality and identity being represented with them), the possibility of inclusivity and/or use or misuse of avatars, and in order to report on demographic features (i.e., participants' age group and gender), as well as reported social media platforms and users' frequency of usage as a framework for interpreting the main findings.

The first question on the survey asked if participants had ever made or used a digital avatar and which kind of avatar they most commonly utilised (such as Bitmoji or Meta avatars). The following questions gauged participants' agreement with the following statements: "I feel more confident expressing myself through avatars than in real life," and "Do you feel your avatar represents your actual personality?" Participants in the poll were questioned whether they believed that avatars made the online experience more welcoming and if they believed that avatars might be used to deceive or hurt others. Last but not least, participants were asked if they thought further regulations or safeguards were necessary in relation to avatars. With the focus being placed on closed-ended items, the survey maintained clarity and brevity, taking participants approximately 5-7 minutes to complete.

Following the completion of the poll, researcher disseminated the link via WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat—three social media platforms that are heavily utilised for digital avatars. The invitation to reply said that participation in the full survey was voluntary and that answers would be kept private and anonymous. Participants may skip questions or leave the survey at any time without giving a reason, and it solely collected demographic groupings rather than personal identifiers. One week following the initial invitation, postings were published on each platform to optimise participation. The messages, which included friends,

followers, and group members, urged respondents to take part before the survey date ended at the conclusion of the two-week period.

In addition to recording each participant's response, Google Forms automatically stored each survey response with a time-stamp metadata attached that indicated the date and time the survey was submitted. Every day, the response sheet was checked for potential duplicate records (similar demographic and response patterns, etc.) and incomplete entries (entries containing important avatar-related questions that weren't addressed before the last question). To ensure that the data points honoured one participant's viewpoint, incomplete entries were separated and definitive duplicate records were eliminated.

The method openly defined an online questionnaire, administered to active avatar users through appropriate social media methods, and utilized collected responses that were monitored and cleaned for errors to provide for a clear and reliable dataset. This closed-ended design provided a quick study for participants, while providing a uniform structure to interpret how to consider personal digital avatars that could evolve self-expression, identity congruence, inclusivity, and perceived risks in the context of modern online spaces.

## **RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

This research relied on a structured online survey to collect demographic data, as well as insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and concerns about the use of digital avatars on social media platforms. The questionnaire was structured deliberately for the sake of the research objectives which were about how people use avatars to express identity and personality; the inclusiveness provided by such tools; and potential harm and mischief.

Four distinct parts that addressed different research levels were included in the questionnaire. Questions on the participants' age group, gender, and the social media sites they often use were among the demographic data collected in the first segment. The frequency with which the participants used each of these social media sites was also significant. Understanding the backgrounds of the respondents and identifying cross-group patterns required this information. Finding out how much and what sort of avatars people were using was the goal of the survey's second segment. Participants were asked if they had ever created or utilised a digital avatar (such as Bitmoji on Snapchat or Meta Avatars on Facebook and Instagram) in this area. Participants were also asked to rank the type of avatar they most commonly used and the reasons they used one, including whether it was for fun, privacy, creativity, or self-expression.

The popularity and intent of utilising avatars among various people were discussed in each of these comments.

The psychological and individual effects of avatars were examined in greater detail in the third portion, with a focus on identity and self-expression. Respondents were asked if their avatar accurately represented their personalities and if it looked like them in real life. With response options on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the study also looked at the emotional comfort that comes with using avatars. For example, it asked, "I feel more confident expressing myself through avatars than in real life." Whether users believed their avatars were well reflected in terms of skin tone, haircut, attire, and other traits was another crucial topic in this part. This section of the survey was essential for learning how avatars affect a person's capacity to express their uniqueness and feel included in the digital space.

The last section tackled concerns about the misuse of avatars and online safety. Participants were asked whether they believed digital avatars could be used to mislead or harm someone, what misuse they believed were possible (e.g., impersonation, deception, harassment), and whether they believed there needed to be more rules or safety features of the platforms with avatar creation. Questions were asked to begin to investigate the ethical and/or social concerns concerning avatar use... the ethical and social elements of the study was a key portion of the aims of the study.

The questions were done using Google Forms which provided participants with easy access to a questionnaire that they could complete conveniently. Each of the questions was closed-ended, providing clearly defined expectations for participant response, and enabling the collection of quantitative data in the form of counts and percentages. The arrangement of the form encouraged rapid completion and provided this study with highly effective data collection, along with qualitative information about the use and impact of digital avatars. Overall, the questionnaire instrument was structured to ensure that each research question was answered with relevant, clearly worded, questions that could be presented in an uncomplicated, appealing format.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

An investigation of how individuals utilise digital avatars and how they serve as models for self-expression, identity, inclusivity, and safety in an online setting was conducted using the data gathered for this project. In order to report on the general ways media users interact with

avatars both individually and collectively, the questionnaire results were combined and analysed.

Responses to several questionnaire parts, such as demographics, their regular avatar use, their answers to conceptualising self-representation, and the level of worry surrounding avatar misuse, were compiled before the analysis started. Each of these parts offered valuable insights that helped to address the goals of the study.

Several fundamental types of descriptive analysis were used to the data. Examining frequencies, comparing responses from various groups, and closely describing the prevailing viewpoints were all part of this. For instance, the answers to the questions about identity and confidence were analysed to see if users felt more at ease expressing their identities through avatars rather than their actual photos.

The information was also used to investigate how effectively these digital platforms foster inclusion and how much users feel represented in the way they may personalise their avatars. In order to determine the degree of worry participants had and if they thought additional safety measures or disclaimers would be beneficial, the research also examined the answers to questions about danger and possible abuse of avatars.

Taken together, the data was analyzed to make basic but profound conclusions regarding how online avatars are affecting how people represent themselves and how they interact with others online. The findings from this analysis are included within the upcoming chapters; findings will also be discussed based on the scope of the study and the study's research questions.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study was conducted with full adherence to ethical research standards to ensure participants' rights, privacy, and dignity were protected at all times. Since the research involved human participants, care was taken to maintain respect, voluntary participation, and confidentiality throughout the process.

Participation was entirely optional, and respondents were informed that they could exit the questionnaire at any time without any pressure or consequences. A brief introduction explained the purpose of the study and assured participants that all responses would remain anonymous and be used solely for academic purposes. No personally identifiable information—such as names, contact details, or addresses—was collected.

The questionnaire avoided sensitive, intrusive, or offensive questions. All items focused solely on digital avatars and online behavior, minimizing any risk of emotional discomfort.

The collected data was securely stored and not shared beyond the scope of this research. The researcher took full responsibility for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

The study was conducted with fairness, honesty, and integrity, in line with ethical academic practices.

## DATA COLLECTION AND INTERPRETATIONS

The chapter presents the results of a defined online questionnaire administered to all participants. The primary goal of this chapter is to analyse the data gathered from the questionnaire in connection to the study's research objectives, which are to understand the influence of digital avatars on self-expression, identity, inclusion, and potential risks. The data was analysed using SPSS software to determine frequencies, percentages, and, where applicable, statistical connections between variables. Each category of replies was explored, with brief explanations of how participants believe their digital avatars impact their behaviour and expression in online places. The findings are also topically organised based on the questionnaire to provide consistency and clarity of participant replies.

### A. DECOGRAPHIC PROFILE

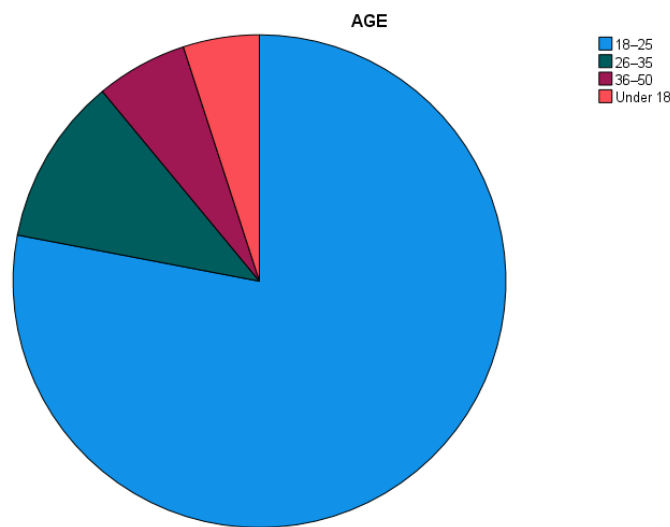
#### QUESTION 1. What is your age group?

- a) Under 18
- b) 18–25
- c) 26–35
- d) 36–50
- e) Above 50

INTERPRETATION:

Age Group	N	%
18–25	78	78.0%
26–35	11	11.0%
36–50	6	6.0%
Under 18	5	5.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 1. Distribution of Participants by Age Group*



***Figure 1. Distribution of Participants by Age Group***

The survey results illustrate where the participants fell on the age range. Of the 100 participants, 78.0% fell in the 18 - 25 age range) this indicates that the majority of the participants were likely young adults. The next largest group was the 26 - 35 age group (11.0%). Those in the 36 - 50 age group made up 6.0%, and the least represented group were those under 18 (5.0%).

This demographic distribution indicates that the responses reflect the outlooks, practices, and preferences of younger individuals, with a strong emphasis on 18-25-year-olds. Digital avatars are typically used on social platforms, which are frequently heavily utilized by younger people, so this demographic representation is valid for the purposes of this study as digital avatars are mostly related to young people. However, this also means that while the study findings may be representative of younger users' experiences with digital avatars, the experiences reported by older participants are limited.

This age-related classification will assist with identifying which segments of the demographic sample are more cognizant and engaged with digital avatars for self-expression. It also adds context to help provide meaning to other questions on social media behaviours, identity expressions, and avatar preferences, all of which are likely to vary considerably by age of respondent.

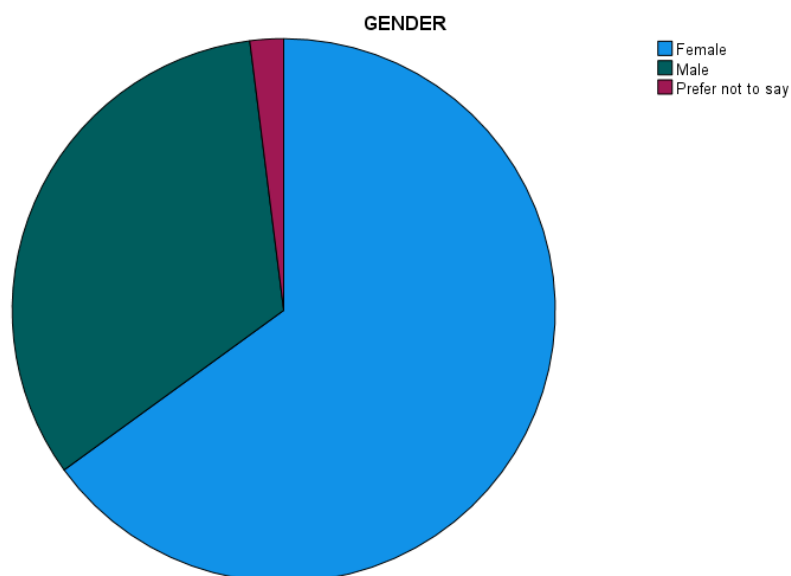
**QUESTION 2: What is your gender?**

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Non-binary / Self-describe
- d) Prefer not to say

**INTERPRETATIONS:**

Gender	N	%
Female	65	65.0%
Male	33	33.0%
Prefer not to say	2	2.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 2. Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents*



*Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents*

The distribution of gender in the sample is informative of the sample heterogeneity. There were 100 respondents total, of whom 65 were identified as female (65.0%), 33 as male (33.0%), and 2 respondents (2.0%) selected "Prefer not to say" meaning that they were comprised of a small

number of participants who either did not disclose their gender identity or selected "Prefer not to say."

Providing multiple options for respondents to indicate their gender, and to be able to indicate they preferred to remain anonymous and not indicate their gender location in this study was ethical, tortious, and respected participants' autonomy. This reflects the broader purpose of the study to understand how avatars can be considered a form of self-expression in a digital space, and one area that is strongly linked to identity, representation and comfort of self-presentation. When analysing avatar usage answers, it is necessary to include gender breakdown. Gender may influence how respondents create avatars and personalise them with options such as hairdo, dress, or body form and shape—characteristics that frequently transmit parts of identity in online spaces. These distinctions provide valuable background for examining how gender influences digital self-representation and engagement with avatars across social media platforms.

The replies of both male and female respondents, as well as those who decided not to identify as male or female, contribute to a rich data set. This contributes to a deeper and more feminist knowledge of how people with different gender identities view and use avatars in online settings.

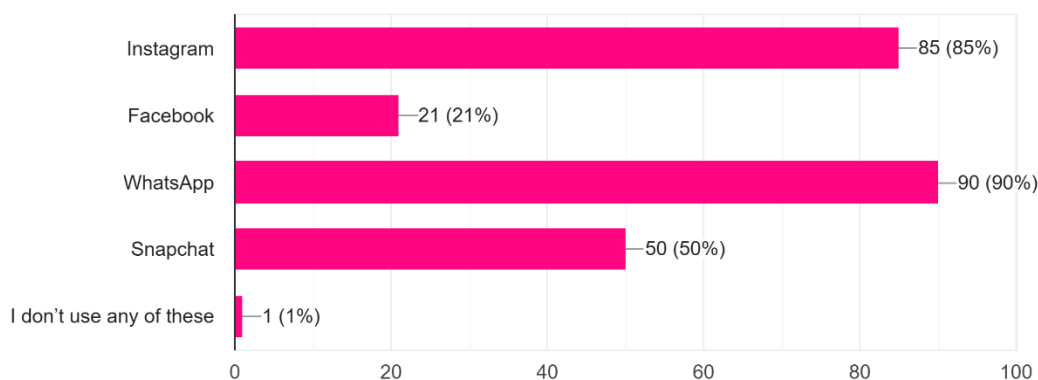
**QUESTION 3: Which social media platforms do you use regularly?**

- a) Instagram
- b) Facebook
- c) WhatsApp
- d) Snapchat
- e) I don't use any of these

## INTERPRETATIONS:

Which social media platforms do you use regularly?

100 responses



**Figure 3: Regular Use of Social Media Platforms Among Respondents (N = 100)**

Platform	N	%
Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat	30	30.0%
Instagram, WhatsApp	26	26.0%
Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat	15	15.0%
WhatsApp	13	13.0%
Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp	5	5.0%
Instagram, Snapchat	5	5.0%
Instagram	4	4.0%
Facebook, WhatsApp	1	1.0%
I don't use any of these	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 3: Combination of Social Media Platforms Regularly Used by Respondents**

The data shows a clear trend in which platforms the respondents preferred to use. Instagram and WhatsApp were likely the most used social media platforms, as multiple survey responses identified these platforms in the various combinations presented. The highest number of respondents (30.0%) reported using Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat together. This shows

their preference for the visual and instantaneous nature of these platforms. The combination with the next highest number of responses was Instagram and WhatsApp (26.0%), confirming again that these two platforms dominate users' daily digital habits.

Notably, 15.0% of respondents reported using all four platforms: Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, indicating a higher and more active participation across social media channels. Meanwhile, a tiny percentage of participants (13.0%) reported using WhatsApp in solitude, indicating that digital platforms are used for functional rather than social purposes.

A mere 1.0% of the sample indicated using none of the provided platforms, illustrating how prevalent social media consumption is amongst this demographic. Instagram was almost featured in every combination of responses, validating its prominence in digital communication, especially among younger people.

These preferences in online platforms have a significant influence on person-to-person contact online, particularly in terms of how people represent their identity and use avatars. Instagram and Snapchat, which emphasise visual communication and personalisation, are significant contexts for engaging with digital avatars and self-representation. Identifying the most commonly used platforms will help us better understand the other findings on avatar use and online identity.

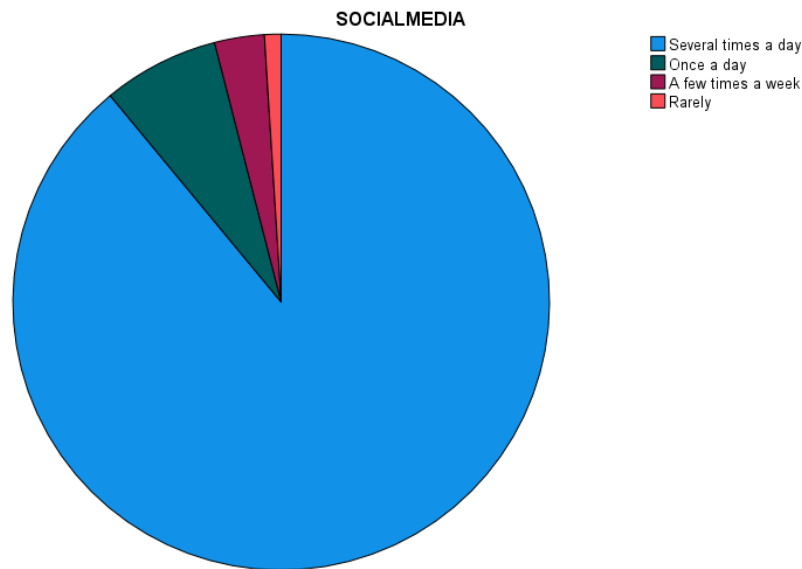
#### **QUESTION 4: How often do you use social media?**

- a) Several times a day
- b) Once a day
- c) A few times a week
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

INTERPRETATIONS:

<b>Social Media Usage</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Several times a day</b>	89	89.0%
<b>Once a day</b>	7	7.0%
<b>A few times a week</b>	3	3.0%
<b>Rarely</b>	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*Table 4: Frequency of Social Media Usage Among Respondents*



***Figure 4: Frequency of Social Media Usage Among Respondents***

The findings collected about social media usage frequency-related behaviour suggests that these participants are very avid users of social media. The majority (89%) of respondents said that they used social media several times a day, indicating just how glued they are to social media platforms. This high usage suggests that social media is central to participant's communication, entertainment and expression.

Only a tiny fraction of individuals said they never or seldom utilised the website. In reality, just 7% of participants reported using social media once a day, 3% reported using it a few times a week, and even fewer (1%) reported using it only sometimes. The low number of responses to restricting site usage illustrates how rare limited use is in this group.

The findings of this item provide credence to the claim that the majority of participants use social media regularly, particularly those who are younger and more tech-savvy. Furthermore, high use frequency may indicate greater exposure to the normalising presence of these kinds of tools, particularly the banal features of Instagram and Snapchat, if frequency of use is a measure of exposure to things like "digital avatars," filters, and virtual representations of identity.

Evaluating usage frequency puts the broader findings about avatar preferences and digital self-representation in context. Because they were more likely to be exposed to these features and the persuasive nature of digital space's social and cultural practices that frame the contexts in which avatars, or identity representations, are used, users who access social media

multiple times a day are also significantly more likely to have experimented with avatars or features that allow visual personalisation.

## B. AVATAR USAGE

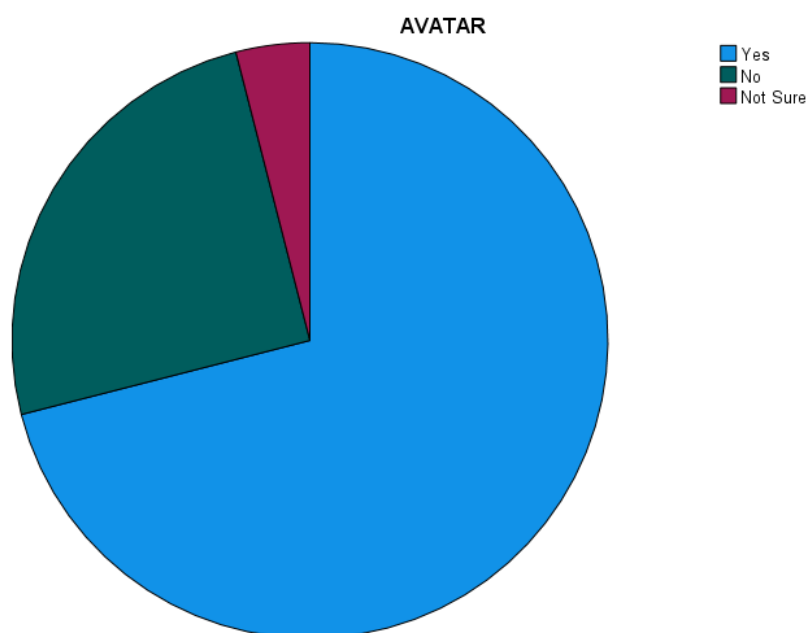
**QUESTION 5: Have you ever created or used a digital avatar (like Bitmoji or Meta Avatars)?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not Sure

INTERPRETATIONS:

Response	N	Percentage (%)
Yes	71	71.0%
No	25	24.0%
Not Sure	4	4.0%
Total	101	100%

*Table 5: Respondents' Use of Digital Avatars*



*Figure 5: Respondents' Use of Digital Avatars*

The results show that 71.0% of respondents have used or created digital avatars, such as Bitmoji or Meta Avatars. This aligns with a larger trend where digital characters, that are personalized in some significant way, have become much more common on online platforms. With the ever-increasing trend of social media use, many users appear, at the very least, comfortable with digital self-representation as many have created an avatar at some point when online.

In contrast, 25.0% of respondents said they'd never used a digital avatar. This fraction may include those who are disenchanted with avatar-enabled social networking sites or who prefer not to personalise their digital identity. Furthermore, 4.0% of respondents said they weren't sure, which might imply doubt or confusion regarding what defines a virtual avatar.

These results are especially relevant to the main focus of the study. The high proportion of avatars utilized indicates the presence of digital avatars in people's online engagements and their role in users' self-presentation. This indicates that users' methods of employing avatars as a medium for identity projection, emotional expression, and communication in virtual environments require further study.

Furthermore, given a large cohort of educated responders, we should be able to use data from this cohort to provide more detailed insights about user usage and perception. The answers to this question give a good foundation for researching users' reasons for creating avatars, as well as whether and to what degree avatars represent their identity and are used in sociopsychological situations.

#### **QUESTION 6: Why do you use avatars?**

- a) For fun
- b) To express moods/emotions
- c) To show my personality
- d) Because others use them
- e) I don't use avatars

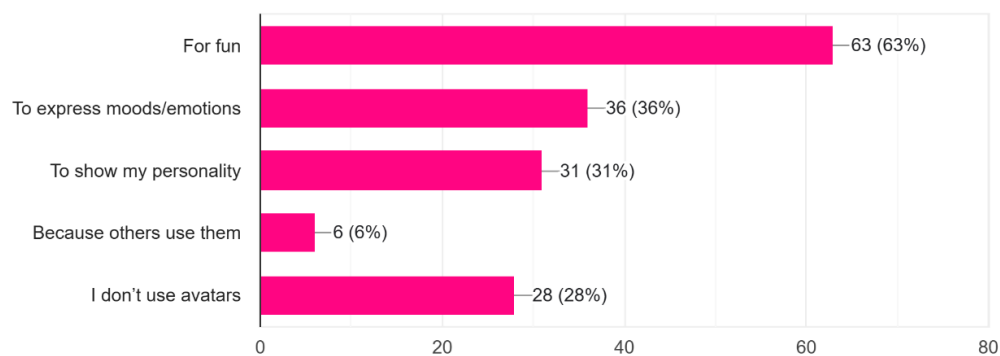
## INTERPRETATION:

Reason	N	%
I don't use avatars	28	28.0%
For fun	24	24.0%
For fun, To express moods/emotions, To show my personality	16	16.0%
For fun, To express moods/emotions	10	10.0%
For fun, To show my personality	8	8.0%
To express moods/emotions	4	4.0%
To express moods/emotions, To show my personality	3	3.0%
For fun, To express moods/emotions, To show my personality, Because others use them	2	2.0%
Because others use them	1	1.0%
For fun, Because others use them	1	1.0%
For fun, To show my personality, Because others use them	1	1.0%
To express moods/emotions, Because others use them	1	1.0%
To show my personality	1	1.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 6: Reasons for Using or Not Using Digital Avatars Among Respondents*

Why do you use avatars?

100 responses



*Figure 6: Reasons for Using or Not Using Digital Avatars Among Respondents*

The responses to the question examining the justification for adopting digital avatars provide important information about users' motives and forms of involvement. The largest answer group (27.0%) stated that they do not use avatars at all. This group makes up a considerable portion of the sample and reflects people who may not consider avatars to be an important or engaging component of their online presence, or who are not active on platforms where that feature is usually available. The most commonly cited reason for engaging with avatars was enjoyment, as stated by nearly a quarter of respondents (24.0) who engaged with avatars "for fun", pointing to a playful and entertaining aspect of digital avatars. A significant proportion of responders (16.0%) stated they were also playful, expressing moods/emotions and displaying personality, which may suggest for many, avatars have more than an entertainment function. Other combinations also emerged. For example, 10.0% of respondents say they use avatars for fun and to express their moods or emotions, while 8.0% say they use them to convey their personality. A little more than a third (4.0%) use avatars just to portray emotion, whereas 3.0% use avatars to represent both mood and personality. Notably, only a small percentage of answers (approximately or below 2.0%) included the avatar because others did. While peer influence exists, it is not the driving factor. The patterns imply that avatars often serve light-hearted engagement purposes, but they can also serve for deeper self-expression. Many people use avatars to express elements of their personality or feelings in a more approachable, creative manner. The variability shows that avatar use is unique to the person, representing their own motivations and comfort with digitized self-representation.

**QUESTION 7: Which avatar type do you use the most?**

- a) Instagram/Facebook/WhatsApp Avatars
- b) Bitmoji (Snapchat)
- c) None

## INTERPRETATION:

Avatar Platform Used	N	%
Instagram/Facebook/WhatsApp Avatars, Bitmoji (Snapchat)	30	30.0%
Instagram/Facebook/WhatsApp Avatars	22	22.0%
Bitmoji (Snapchat)	23	23.0%
None	25	25.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*Table 7: Platforms Used for Digital Avatars Among Respondents*

Throughout the discussion of avatar platform choices of the participants, we see the growing acceptance and use of digital avatars or representations across the various social media platforms. The avatar usage of the 100 participants is identified in the previous two observations - the most frequent answer was using both Instagram/Facebook/WhatsApp avatars and Bitmoji on Snapchat. In this case, 30% of the respondents reported engaging with avatars in more than one style or social media. This indicates that for this group of users, avatars on social media are now embedded within the users' social media practices.

For 22% of the sample, the second most prevalent response was to use solely Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp avatars. Thus, Meta's built-in avatar capabilities are quite popular on their own, most likely because to their visibility and acceptance by users, as well as their ease of access and usage on major platforms like as Instagram and WhatsApp.

23% of respondents reported using Bitmoji (Snapchat) avatars independently. The Snapchat platform is well-known for its Bitmoji feature, which reveals that independent use indicates a sustained interest in cartoon avatars, particularly among younger viewers. Interestingly, 25% of the participants did not use any type of digital avatar. This reflects around a quarter of the population that either do not believe it is necessary to visually represent oneself or do not use platforms that encourage avatar usage. This also suggests that, while digital avatar representation is becoming more popular, not all users are interested in it, which might be due to individual tastes, familiarity with the platform, or the utility of the avatar photos.

In summary, the data depicts a varied overview of avatar use, with most people engaging with one or more avatar platforms. This supports the significance of examining avatars as part of identity, expression, and digital communication.

## C. IDENTITY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

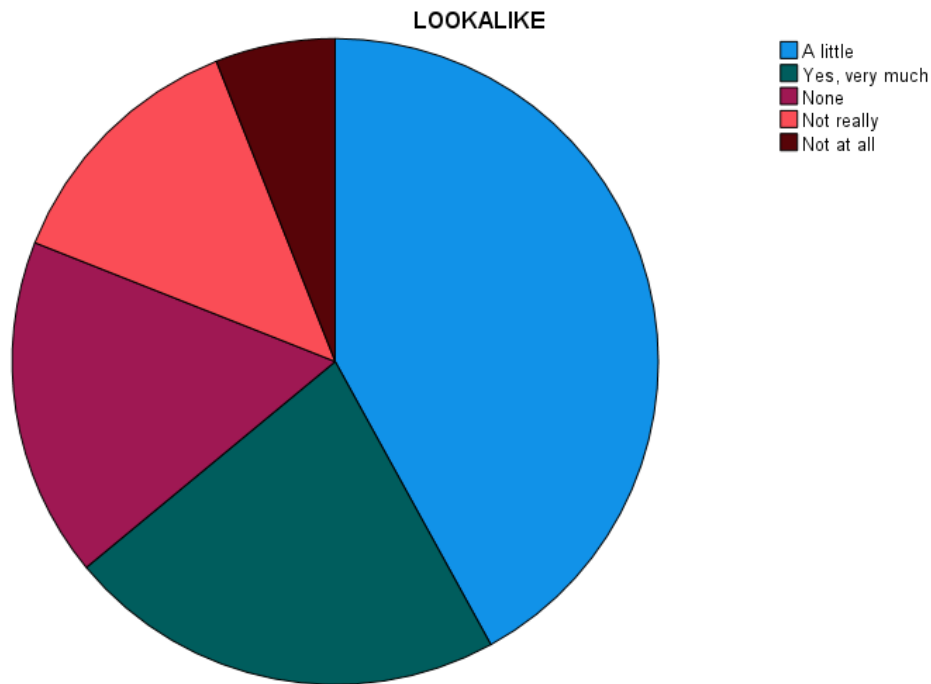
### QUESTION 8: Do you think your avatar looks like you?

- a) Yes, very much
- b) A little
- c) Not really
- d) Not at all
- e) None

INTERPRETATION:

Resemblance to User	N	%
A little	42	42.0%
Yes, very much	22	22.0%
None	17	17.0%
Not really	13	13.0%
Not at all	6	6.0%
Total	100	100%

*Table 8: Resemblance to User (Avatar Survey Results)*



***Figure 7: Resemblance to User (Avatar Survey Results)***

The user response data regarding their avatars likeness to themselves exhibited quite a difference, those users who chose strongly agree represent the least among the users chosen for the research. The largest group, 42%, claimed their avatar looked "a little" like them. This would suggest that when looking at avatars themselves, for a lot of users an avatars resemblance to their real life version only holds first hand value, and acquiring the likeness shouldn't try to be exact. They may enjoy there avatars to look like them but leaving enough room for exaggeration, customization, or personal value as they make them up.

A smaller proportion, 22%, stated that their avatars look "very much" like them. This implies that a sizable proportion of users prefer avatars that closely resemble their real-world looks, highlighting the extent to which digital avatars function as an actual extension of a person's identity online. These people are prone to prioritise authenticity and representation in their digital lives.

Conversely, 17% indicated that their avatar naturally does not resemble them at all. This potentially indicates that some users elect to choose avatars that look nothing like their real-life appearance, either because they want to experiment with their identity or they just thought it would be funny. This also indicates that some respondents may not be as concerned with realisim when creating their avatar.

Furthermore, 13% of participants said "not really" when asked if their avatar looked like them, demonstrating a little discrepancy between their self-representation through avatars and their actual appearance. Finally, to a lesser extent, 6% stated that their avatar does not resemble them at all, implying a more fun or creative usage of avatars, in which the avatar is more of a dream or a completely separate persona.

Overall, the data suggest that while many users do see some likeness between themselves and their avatars, others seem to choose to create avatars that are stylized, fantastical, or otherwise abstract representations of their identity. This potentially speaks to the range of how avatars are being utilized in regards to self-expression.

**QUESTION 9: Do you feel your avatar shows your true personality? (LIKERT SCALE)**

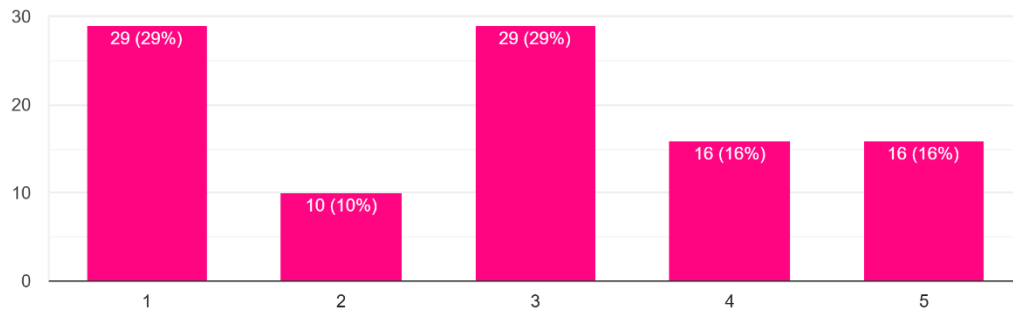
1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

**INTERPRETATION:**

<b>Response Option</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1 – Strongly Disagree</b>	29	29.0%
<b>2 – Disagree</b>	10	10.0%
<b>3 – Neutral</b>	29	29.0%
<b>4 – Agree</b>	16	16.0%
<b>5 – Strongly Agree</b>	16	16.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

***Table 9: Survey Results: Do You Feel Your Avatar Shows Your True Personality?  
(Likert Scale)***

Do you feel your avatar shows your true personality?  
100 responses



**Figure 8: Survey Results: Do You Feel Your Avatar Shows Your True Personality?**  
(Likert Scale)

The answers to the question "Do you feel your avatar represents your true personality?" provide a mixed but informative picture of how people understand their digital avatars as related to their inner selves.

A total of 39% of participants responded with Strongly Disagree (29%) or Disagree (10%), implying that many users believe their avatar does not accurately reflect their true personality, or that some users see avatars as nothing more than a fun or more identifiable way of representing themselves. It may also represent the limited capability required in customising various avatars, making it difficult to express personal attributes like as humour, intellect, or introversion.

In addition, 29% of participants selected Neutral, which indicates some indecision, or neutral apathy. These users may either, found personality not worthy of forming strong attitudes, or these users, do not actively consider personality when forming avatars.

Notably, 32% of survey respondents agreed (16%) or strongly agreed (16%) that their avatar is a true reflection of their personality. This shows that avatars can be a genuine tool for about one-third of users to convey aspects of their personality other than their physical appearance, such as their vibe, mood, or hobbies. Overall, while some people feel a personality link to their avatars, a huge percentage either do not or are unclear. These findings show that avatars are utilised or perceived in a variety of ways, ranging from light-hearted and enjoyable to expressive and intimate.

**QUESTION 10: I feel more confident expressing myself through avatars than in real life. (LIKERT SCALE)**

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

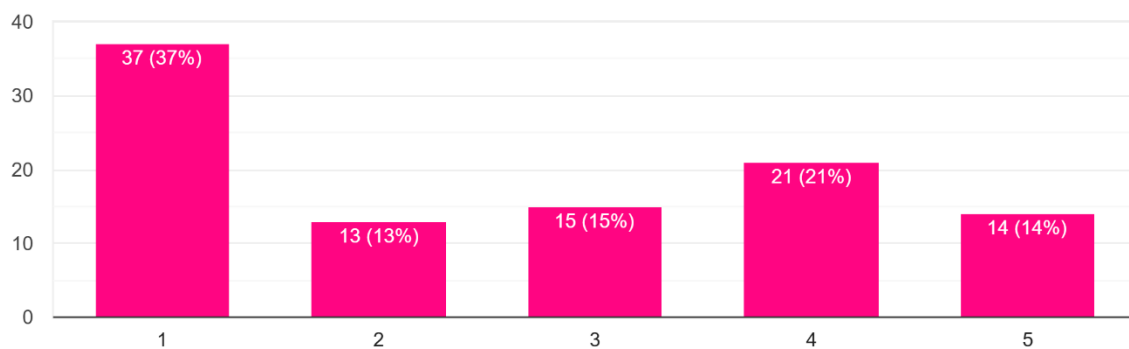
**INTERPRETATION:**

Response Option	N	%
1 – Strongly Disagree	37	37.0%
2 – Disagree	13	13.0%
3 – Neutral	15	15.0%
4 – Agree	21	21.0%
5 – Strongly Agree	14	14.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 10: Survey Results: Confidence in Expressing via Avatars*

I feel more confident expressing myself through avatars than in real life.

100 responses



*Figure 9: Survey Results: Confidence in Expressing via Avatars*

The feedback to the statement “I feel more confident expressing myself through avatars than in real life” demonstrates a diverse breadth of opinions among the participants that were, on the whole, a bit of a disagreement.

A sizable proportion of the sample—37% strongly disagreed and 13% disagreed—with 50% saying they did not feel more confidence in expressing themselves through avatars. As a result, half of the participants reported no improvement in confidence or comfort while expressing themselves through an avatar. These people may just prefer more direct or face-to-face engagement, or they may believe avatars fail to adequately portray their feelings, ideas, or personalities. It's also possible that they see avatars as a fun or decorative tool rather than a serious communication tool.

Conversely, 21% agreed and 14% strongly agreed, giving a total of 35% who do feel that avatars give them the confidence to express themselves better than they do in their real lives. This group likely finds avatars to be a valid way to a manner in revealing parts of themselves that they otherwise would not reveal. This may be showing some creativity, expressing their mood, or even exploring new appearances or identities. For shy, reticent, or introverted people, avatars may provide a greater ability to be seen and heard in an online space.

15% of respondents answered Neutral, indicating that they do not have strong feelings one way or the other. They may be apathetic and not perceive a difference between avatars and real life, or they could be utilising avatars in a very casual manner and therefore not giving much thought to their self-expression. Overall, the data shows that certain avatars gain confidence while others feel more comfortable expressing themselves in a face-to-face, real-world context.

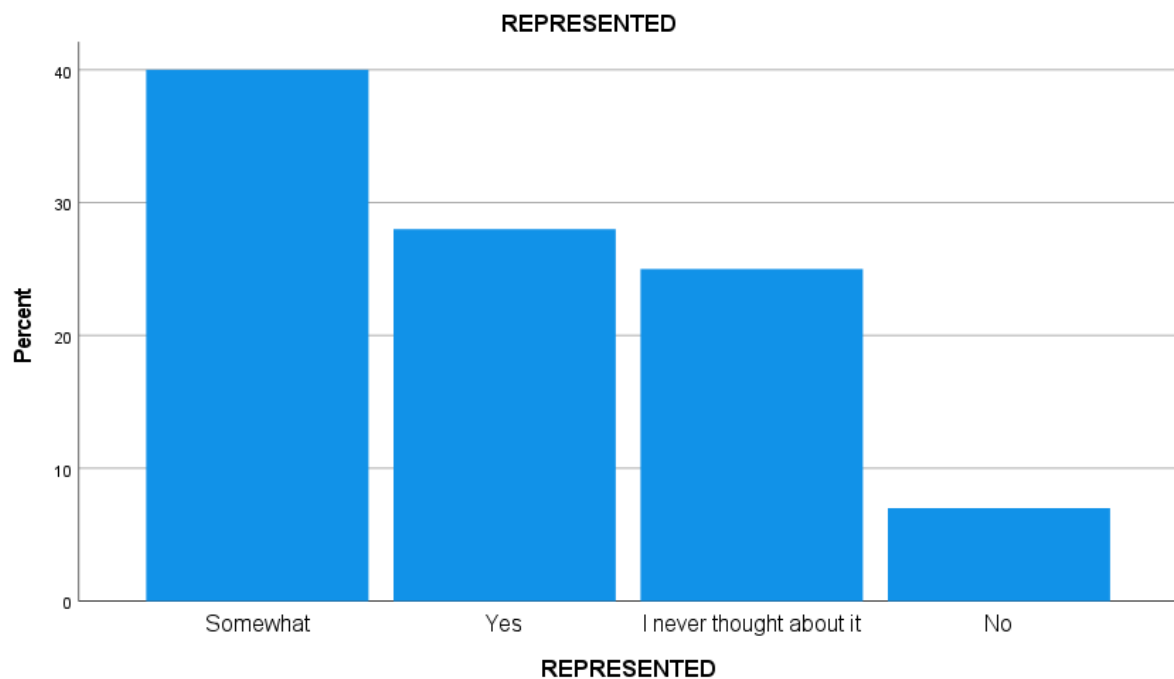
**QUESTION 11: Do you feel represented when creating your avatar? (e.g., skin tone, hairstyle, clothes)**

- a) Yes
- b) Somewhat
- c) No
- d) I never thought about it

INTERPRETATION:

Response Option	N	%
Somewhat	40	40.0%
Yes	28	28.0%
I never thought about it	25	25.0%
No	7	7.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 11: Survey Results: Feeling Represented When Creating Your Avatar*



*Figure 10: Survey Results: Feeling Represented When Creating Your Avatar*

In regards to the question “Do you feel represented when creating your avatar?”, the feedback indicated some combination of awareness, satisfaction, and opportunity for improvement in regards to users' digital self-representation.

The largest answer group, including 40% of participants, chose "Somewhat". This tends to imply a perceived amount of possibilities that may reflect their identity (e.g., skin tone, hair style, clothing options), as well as options that work for their identity but are not a perfect fit

or cannot represent the complete range of options available to others. Some parents may have felt confined by the number of alternatives provided by avatars in their search for an image that accurately represented their look, cultural background, or general style.

An additional 28% of respondents answered "Yes," which is encouraging. The respondents who do feel represented by their avatars probably found attributes to closely match their real-world identity. Their real-world identity could include attributes such as skin color, hair type, body shape, religious wear, or even gender expression. For this item, avatar platforms should be commended for providing enough diversity to represent an individual's identity.

Another 25% of respondents answered "I never thought about it." This is interesting, because it may indicate that representation is not an important factor for a quarter of users creating an avatar. Perhaps those participants view the avatars as casual and intended for enjoyment or creativity, with little concern for matching their real life appearance.

While just 7% voted "No," that suggests they do not feel represented at all. There are obvious gaps in targeted avatar customisation, particularly for those with unusual or under-represented traits.

Overall, users feel at least partly represented; yet, the results highlight the need to make avatar creation more inclusive and reflective of identity variety.

## **D. RISKS AND CONCERNS**

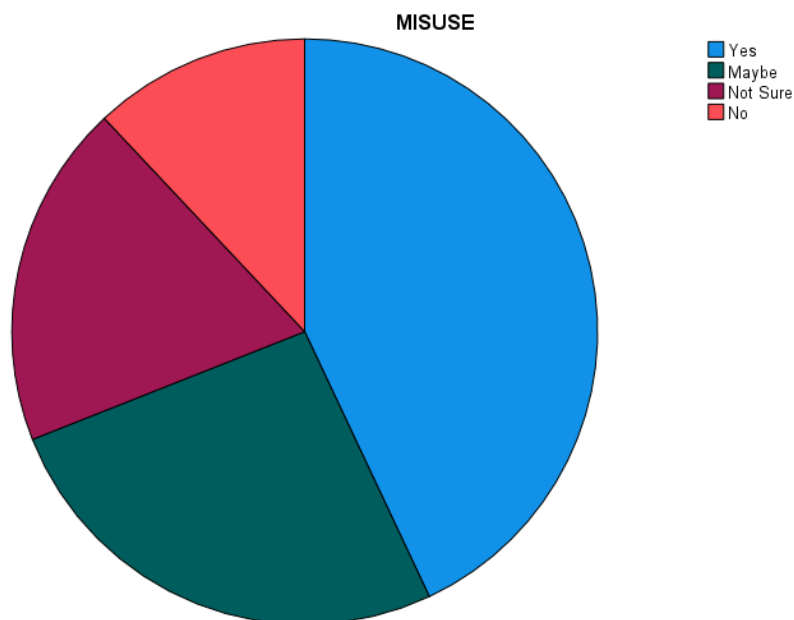
**QUESTION 12: Do you think avatars can be misused to trick or harm others?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe
- d) Not Sure

## INTERPRETATION:

Response Option	N	%
Yes	43	43.0%
Maybe	26	26.0%
Not Sure	19	19.0%
No	12	12.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 12 : Survey Results: Misuse of Avatars*



*Figure 11: Survey Results: Misuse of Avatars*

Responses to the question "Do you think avatars can be misused to deceive or hurt others?" demonstrated a wide range of awareness of the potential dangers of avatars and some ambiguity about how significant the dangers might be.

A significant 43% of participants responded "Yes" when asked whether they think avatars can be misapplied to deceive or hurt others. This newly acknowledged concern indicates a general awareness of the possibility of avatars being applied to cause negative behavior like impersonation, catfishing, or identity theft. Given the range of users in varied online environments that employ avatars—social media outlets, gaming, and virtual reality—users might have an encouragingly healthy awareness of the potential dangers associated with

publicly "being" a representation of oneself. A misrepresentation of a person could mean digitally affecting their physical outline, or being a completely made-up person with nothing real to represent in order to defraud, abuse, or tease others. This indication denotes certain concerns about avatars, which many users are brought up to recognize with consciousness as they enter a progressive degree of "online".

At the same time, 26% of the respondents chose "Maybe." This demonstrates some ambiguity, but it is important in demonstrating that participants were aware of the possibility for misuse, but were not fully sure avatars are hazardous, or were not completely convinced that avatars are misused on a wide scale. They may simply believe that, while avatars have the potential to be exploited in bad ways, the issue is insignificant or irrelevant, or that it is only relevant in a certain circumstance. Those individuals may regard avatars as a harmless and enjoyable instrument for communication or self-expression, rather as a possible vehicle for deceit.

A smaller percentage 19% of responders answered "Not Sure." It's likely these respondents have not given too much thought to avatar misuse or they do not see it as a significant problem. This group may also be uncertain regarding the implications of avatar use, possibly because they haven't personally witnessed avatar misuse or abuse, therefore do not have anything to draw on to form an opinion.

Finally, 12% of respondents said "No" when asked if avatars might be exploited, indicating that they did not believe avatars could be misused. It is likely that these respondents feel avatar platforms are secure or well-regulated, or that they have had favourable encounters with avatars that did not engage in risky behaviour. Avatars are most likely a "safe" and entertaining method for these people to express their personalities, with little perceived danger.

In general, the research shows that, while most users understand that avatars may be exploited, a sizable proportion of respondents either admit to being unclear or feel avatars are pretty innocuous. These findings suggest that, while worries regarding avatar use are valid, potential users could raise their knowledge and maybe improve safety precautions and procedures so that avatars can continue to be a useful tool for self-expression in the digital world.

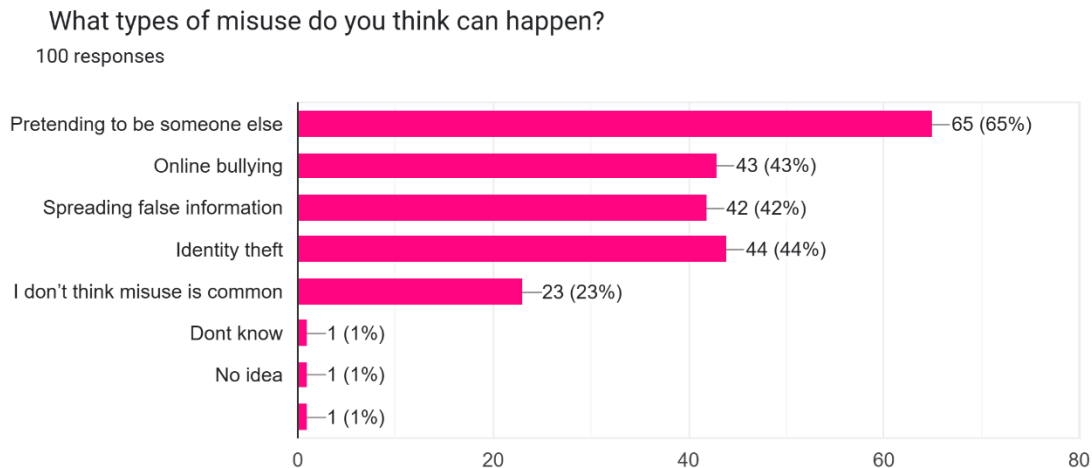
### **QUESTION 13: What types of misuse do you think can happen?**

- a) Pretending to be someone else
- b) Online bullying
- c) Identity theft
- d) I don't think misuse is common
- e) Other

## INTERPRETATION:

Misuse Type	N	%
Pretending to be someone else, Online bullying, Spreading false information, Identity theft	27	27.0%
I don't think misuse is common	19	19.0%
Pretending to be someone else	12	12.0%
Pretending to be someone else, Identity theft	8	8.0%
Pretending to be someone else, Online bullying	6	6.0%
Spreading false information	5	5.0%
Identity theft	4	4.0%
Pretending to be someone else, I don't think misuse is common	3	3.0%
Pretending to be someone else, Online bullying, Spreading false information	3	3.0%
Pretending to be someone else, Spreading false information	3	3.0%
Online bullying	2	2.0%
Don't know	1	1.0%
I don't think misuse is common,	1	1.0%
No idea	1	1.0%
Online bullying, Identity theft	1	1.0%
Online bullying, Spreading false information	1	1.0%
Online bullying, Spreading false information, Identity theft	1	1.0%
Pretending to be someone else, Online bullying, Identity theft	1	1.0%
Pretending to be someone else, Spreading false information, Identity theft	1	1.0%
Total	100	100.0%

*Table 13: Survey Results: Types of Avatar Misuse*



**Figure 12: Survey Results: Types of Avatar Misuse**

The responses to the question "What types of misuse do you think can happen with avatars?" noted a number of concerns regarding misuse of digital avatars, with some users indicating they were more aware of the potential risks involved while others were less concerned about misuse.

The most popular response (27%) identified pretending to be someone else, online abuse, disinformation, and identity theft as the most significant concerns linked with avatars. This shows that a large number of users recognised that avatars may be abused and used for malicious, misleading, or harmful objectives, such as creating a false avatar in an impersonation attempt, distributing disinformation in a deceptive manner, or harassing or bullying others using avatars. This response demonstrates a very comprehensive understanding of how avatars may be linked to harmful activity, particularly in online situations where the anonymity of avatars and digital representations can alter conceptions of authenticity.

Also, 18% of respondents said they do not think misuse occurred, which demonstrates that some users may believe that avatar misuse is not at a common level (or they may not have experienced avatar misuse). Therefore, it is possible that avatars are more of a form of self-expression and fun, rather than concern!

Other inputs suggest even more interesting responses, e.g. pretending to be someone else (12%), identity theft (4%), and online bullying (2%), that show respondents had differing levels of concern in reference to these types of avatar misuse. A few respondents in the Data and

Methodology section replied they were unsure or did not know (1% each), which could suggest that they may not be aware, or engaged with avatar misuse.

Overall, while many users are aware that avatars are being exploited, there is a sizable group of users that consider avatars as a means of avoiding the major hazards associated with misusing them. In certain aspects, the users in this research appear to believe that one set of users is aware of possible misuse while other groups are not, striking a balance between a cautious approach and the overall perception of avatars as harmless digital graphics.

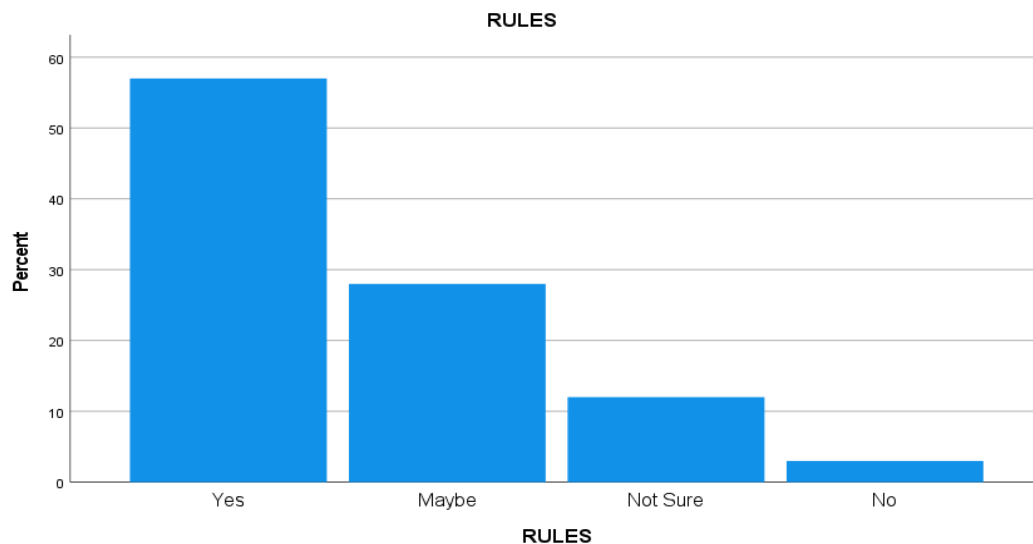
**QUESTION 14: Do you think we need more rules or safety features for using avatars online?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe
- d) Not Sure

**INTERPRETATION:**

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	57	57.0%
<b>Maybe</b>	28	28.0%
<b>Not Sure</b>	12	12.0%
<b>No</b>	3	3.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 14: Survey Results: Need for Avatar Safety Features*



***Figure 13: Survey Results: Need for Avatar Safety Features***

The data on whether additional rules or safety features for avatars online shows a clear trend, indicating that most participants feel that more regulatory measures are warranted. 57% of respondents responded with a firm "Yes". In total, a majority of respondents indicated that they feel there is a need for added safety features or more regulations governing avatars. This indicates that many users are aware of the potential for misuse of avatars or the negative implications surrounding the use of avatars. This concern may grow as digital self-representation continues to amplify in relevance.

Also, 28% of respondents said "Maybe," indicating that they are open to extra restrictions or safety features but do not feel as strongly or understand the scope of the problem. This shows that some users are concerned but are confused about how to take action or what policies would be effective. Twelve percent of those surveyed stated that they were "Not Sure" if further regulations were necessary. People who are either ignorant of this subject, do not frequently think about avatar misuse, or need to think about how avatar usage in the online sphere is linked to harm may be indicated by this response option. Lastly, just 3% of respondents said "No," indicating that they do not think further regulations or safety measures are necessary. Though the great majority of users may be aware of the hazards associated with avatar misuse, only a tiny fraction of respondents feel that rules currently exist, and even fewer believe that more laws are necessary. This is indicated by the small percentage of respondents who are saying "No." To sum up, the data shows a substantial preference for the idea that additional regulations or security measures ought to be put in place to guarantee that avatars are used sensibly and don't encourage negative online conduct.

In summary, the results from the data collections and analysis have led to interesting findings regarding the use of digital avatars, and although the data indicate the use of avatars is prevalent, there is considerable concern regarding any misuse. Most participants indicated the use of an avatar spanning multiple social media applications, with most cases indicating self-expression and representation of identity positively. However, for participants, there is a clear awareness of some of the risks provided when using an avatar, such as impersonation, online bullying, and identity theft. Many participants provided a desire for additional rules or safety features with avatars; this shows how users are aware of their responsibility when using an avatar in digital spaces. The results provide worthwhile insights considering the complexity of avatar use in an online setting, particularly balancing personal expression against some type of safety.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

The results of the data collected from the structured questionnaire that was distributed to participants are presented in this chapter. This chapter's goal is to examine and summarise the replies in light of the study's goals about the usage of digital avatars on social media platforms with relation to perceived abuse, self-embodiment, and self-representation. Each question is presented with a detailed analysis and parsing of the responses, including noteworthy trends, patterns, and emergent observations. The overall analysis is presented thematically, starting with demographic data to understand the sample context, followed by usage patterns and experiences of using digital avatars.

This chapter also makes an effort to take into account these analyses in light of the research objectives and if they may contribute to our understanding of how groups interact with and experience avatars in relation to their importance and applicability in the digital sphere. Further insights on assessing avatars in online environments may be formed by drawing on the material offered here, which acts as a cathartic process of meaning generation.

### **1. Demographic Profile of Respondents**

The data was collected from 100 participants, and exploring and analyzing their demographics can provide the necessary context for understanding the demographic background of people who stemmed the responses that led to the findings. It can help us to understand who is engaging in the dialogue around digital avatars and social media behaviours and the extent to which age and gender inform possible perspectives.

#### **A. Age Distribution**

Four age groups were created from the participants: under 18, 18–25, 26–35, and 36–50. Even in this case, the majority of respondents (78%) are between the ages of 18 and 25, confirming that this demographic represents the study's main voice. A cognitive map of this age group is crucial since they were raised in an era of social media, cellphones, and the internet, making the majority of them digital natives. They may be more adept at navigating the features and applications of the media, such as personalised stickers, digital avatars, and more, to express their identities, which will affect their reactions and comprehension of the subject.

Ages 26 to 35 accounted for 11% of all replies, making them the second most prevalent category. The majority of these respondents belong to the millennial generation, and like the

other generations mentioned above, they use social media extensively and are at ease using digital communication methods, though maybe not as much as their younger counterparts.

Participants aged 36-50 represented 6% of the sample. Though this group has fewer respondents, their inclusion is important because they came from an older generation and some differences in perception and use of digital avatars will be established here. Finally, 5% of the respondents were under 18, meaning it is clear that a small proportion of younger users engaged with the survey. Though overall few, the under-18 respondents may be indicating patterns that are emerging for even younger digital users.

This age distribution includes a large number of young users, which is in line with the study's goal. In that regard, this demographic is unquestionably relevant to the study because avatars are frequently placed in settings that are mostly visited by younger demographics on websites like Instagram, Snapchat, or gaming.

### **B. Gender Distribution**

Of the respondents, 33% were men, 65% were women, and 2% chose not to disclose their gender identification. The large proportion of female responses indicates a strong emphasis on women's perspectives and might offer a unique chance to influence how women interact with and perceive digital avatars. For instance, this study may support earlier findings that female users express themselves more completely online by utilising customisation options like avatars and profile-based aesthetic choices.

The presence of male respondents (33%) allows for comparisons to be made and provides a more comprehensive understanding of avatar use from multiple gender identities. The 2% selecting prefer not to say preserves ethical constraints by allowing participants not to disclose their identity, which supports respect for autonomy and the individual's own comfort in the research process.

The research has a solid demographic foundation thanks to the age and gender demographic data combined. The research will most likely report on the behaviours, experiences, and preferences of this digitally savvy generation, as shown by the preponderance of younger users. However, the inclusion of older participants and gender diversity ensures that the study's scope is not unduly constrained. These demographic specifics will be useful for comparing answers in subsequent study report parts about the use of avatars, the use of digital personas to convey emotions, and opinions of online representations.

## **2. Social Media Usage**

This section takes a closer look at the social media platforms that respondents use often and how often they use them on those presented platforms. Understanding these platform preferences and frequency of use provides valuable insight into their social interactions with their digital avatars and self-representation in online contexts.

### **A. Platforms Frequently Used**

Among participants in this study, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat were the most prevalent social media platforms. 30% of respondents indicated using a combination of platforms above; specifically, Instagram has established itself as a site of visual self-expression through the use of avatars, custom stickers, and other personalized elements, and is the focus of this study; WhatsApp, while a messaging application that is primarily used as a communication platform or group chat; and Snapchat, a platform that is characterized by its emphasis on visual content that is created and shared in a fleeting manner, and offers the opportunity for creative expressions (e.g., avatars).

Additionally, 26% of respondents stated that they mainly use WhatsApp and Instagram together. This suggests that consumers' everyday interactions use both interaction-based and more visual platforms. The majority of respondents used some combination of platforms and regularly interacted with various platforms that offered chances for avatar usage and social interaction, as evidenced by the 15% of respondents who said they used Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Snapchat.

With 13% of respondents stating that they solely used WhatsApp, we may see interaction that is more communication-based. While avatars are still a component of personalisation on WhatsApp, they may be less prevalent than on more visually-oriented platforms like Instagram or Snapchat. Although tiny, the fact that 1% of respondents said they did not use any of the networks mentioned suggests that some respondents may be disengaged from mainstream social media or at least that particular platforms.

### **B. Frequency of Social Media Use**

The fact that 89% of participants said they used social media at least a few times a day suggests that digital platforms were a normal part of their life. The high frequency of use suggests that social media is probably an essential part of many respondents' daily routines and not just an extra perk. The high frequency findings align with digital natives, whose personal and professional definitions mediate regularity of usage. The frequency of everyday usage also

raises the possibility that, among their variety of online contacts, digital avatars are a recurring and continuous phenomena.

The less-used categories of engagement are those who indicated that they used social media only once a day (7%) and just a few times a week (3%). The proportions are small, but it is interesting that only 1% of the respondents engaged with social media categories rarely, indicating the minority users who are not as immersed in the digital ecosystem. The findings contribute to the understanding of the different levels of engagement related to the use of social media platforms that potentially equate to a lower level of digital avatar use as part of their online experience.

The data strongly demonstrates that social media-related sites (e.g., Instagram, WhatsApp, or Snapchat), and the very visual aspect of social media, are overtly important to a respondent's online activity. The relatively frequent social media use, in particular to the younger respondents, suggests digital avatars are frequently central to some respondent's daily online activity. Rather than being purely a personalizing tool, avatars are an integral dimension of how individuals interact with their online identities.

### **3. Avatar Awareness and Usage**

The participants' knowledge of digital avatars and their usage of these virtual symbols in their online activities are investigated in this section. Whether utilised through third-party apps or on social media platforms like Instagram or Snapchat, avatars are becoming a more popular means of emotional communication and self-representation. The results showed that participants' knowledge levels, usage patterns, and reasons for utilising avatars in digital interactions varied.

#### **A. Experience with Digital Avatars**

Avatars are evident in our daily digital interactions, as seen by the participants' answers to the questions about whether they had ever made or used a digital avatar. A significant role that avatars are playing in online spaces, particularly as digital representations in our online lives, is demonstrated by the fact that 71% of participants had either used or created a digital avatar in the form of Bitmoji or Meta Avatars.

Looking at the other side of the coin, 24% never reported having used avatars, while 4% were unsure. This small number (24% and 4%) of uncertain or no users may represent those who are less involved in platforms that have highlighted use of avatars, or those who may have used

the features but did not actively engage (i.e., they viewed others avatars though did not engage in creating or using their own). Regardless of this finding, it was established through rate of affirmation that digital avatars seem to be an increasingly mainstream component of online behavior, especially for those who partake in a literate digital world.

### **B. Reasons for Using Avatars**

When participants were asked why they use avatars there were many different motivations articulated, providing insight into how avatars are used and for a variety of practical and emotional reasons. An impressive 24% of participants selected "for fun" as the only reason they employed an avatar — suggesting that for many users, avatars are a playful aspect of online communication. This option was followed closely (16%) by "fun", "mood/emotion", and "showing personality" giving us further evidence that avatars are used for multiple reasons. Another 10% used avatars for mood/emotion expression and for fun, while 8% said fun and showing personality. Other smaller combinations — including mood/emotion expression alone or use of avatars influenced by peers — suggest a complex ecosystem of avatars that are being adapted for several different purposes and within different social contexts.

It's important to note that 28% of the sample said they don't use avatars of any sort because they prefer alternative modes of communication or feel that avatars are useless. This demonstrates that although avatars are utilised, not everyone adopts them; user preference is still a significant component of the experience of creating a digital identity.

### **C. Preferred Avatar Types or Platforms**

Regarding the platforms, responses were split between those that use Meta's avatars (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp), and those that favored Bitmoji, which is associated with Snapchat. About 30% of the respondents identified that they use both, suggesting some overlapping use of platforms and ability to engage with avatars.

Of the sample, 22% identified that they favored only Instagram/Facebook/WhatsApp avatars, while 23% solely used Bitmoji avatars. Finally, the remaining 25% reported that they did not use avatars, which closely correlates with the previous question on usage. This pattern speaks to the idea that while preferences differ, generally most users are aware of and using avatar platforms - especially those linked to highly visual and expressive platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram.

Collectively, these findings suggest that results from respondents reveal a strong cultural understanding of avatars. The data supports the argument that avatars not only exist within cultural context, but that their roles vary greatly from a casual pastime to tools of emotional

self-expression. This section provides a contextual basis for understanding how users create digital identities in avatar-constructed spaces, as a cultural collective understanding of a form of embodiment appears to exist, while users draw upon socially constructed abstractions to adapt features available to them based on platform, purpose, and individual preference.

#### **4. Representation and Identity**

This section takes a closer look at the expressive aspects of avatar use, primarily on how users relate to their avatars in relation to their physical self, personality, and identity. It aims to investigate how digital avatars can be used as more than playful or functional objects but are used as complex instruments of self-representation and identity performance.

##### **A. Resemblance Between Avatars and Users**

Participants were then asked if they felt that their avatar looked like them in physical appearance. Although only 22% circled "very much," a sizable amount of respondents — 42% — said it looked "a little" like them. Together, this means that close to two-thirds of users wanted at least some visual continuity between their physical self and their digital self.

Remarkably, 17% of respondents said "none," and another 19% said "not really" or "not at all," suggesting that a sizable portion of users either intentionally choose to be clearly distinct from their real-world identities or do not care about being a physical depiction of themselves. The fact that some users strive for realism and similarity while others want a more abstract, fictional, or unrecognisable representation of their personality further illustrates the synergistic nature of avatars.

The fact that users may want to look like their avatars but are constrained by the features offered by the tools (such as limited options for body types, hair textures, or cultural attire) may also be a reflection of the limitations of the avatar-building tools. This relates to a later discussion of representational fidelity.

##### **B. Personality Projection Through Avatars**

Responses were split on question designating whether or not their avatar represented their personal personality. Of the responses, 32% agreed or strongly agreed avatars represented their personality. This means people who disagreed were almost equal (29% strongly disagreed and 10% disagreed, leaving 29% neutral).

This range of answers highlights the complexity of avatar-based expression; although some participants view their avatars as complete digital representations of who they are, complete with character-appropriate attire, behaviours, and styles, others might not feel a strong bond between their personality and their avatar. Perhaps because participants use avatars in a very

casual way with little personal engagement, neutral replies indicate some uncertainty or disuse.

Avatars serve as a concrete and significant indicator of identity, whether it be humorous, curatorial, or emotive, even if the results indicate that they do not always communicate or signify the inner world of many users.

### **C. Confidence and Comfort in Digital Expression**

To investigate the emotional consequences of avatar use, we asked participants if they felt much more comfortable expressing themselves digitally through avatars than in real life. 37% strongly disagreed, with an additional 13% disagreeing. A total of 35% (21% agreed and 14% strongly agreed) reported feeling more confidence in their digital self-expression.

This demonstrates a major emotional disconnect: while some users appear empowered and freer to express themselves behind the mask of a digital avatar, others express a preference for real-life representation or do not see any significant boost in confidence from using virtual tools.

Such variation may reflect personality traits, social anxiety, body image views, or platform dynamics. As a result, it highlights how digital environments can be both empowering and constraining to people depending on their specific circumstances.

### **D. Representational Accuracy and Inclusivity**

Participants were also asked if they felt represented while making avatars, especially regarding attributes such as skin tone, hair type, clothing, and other markers for identity. Only 28% said “yes,” while most respondents chose “somewhat” (40%) or “I never thought about it” (25%). Notably, only 7% stated that they did not feel represented.

This information is significant for a variety of reasons, including the limits of existing avatar systems. It is obvious that a sizable proportion of users either do not find the representational tools offered in avatars appropriate, or have never been forced to consider representation at all. This may indicate a greater need for inclusive and customisable avatar-building features, particularly to accommodate the various variations in race, body types, gender identity, and cultural expression.

On the whole, the data shows that while avatars are being used as representations of elements of participants' personalities and appearances, the tools might not fit the emotional and representational specifications of all participants. Some engage with avatars as genuine representations of themselves when they can express themselves and conceptually engage with

these items. Others seem to be more superficial of their engagement with the avatar, or feel blocked in their self-representation.

## **5. Risks and Ethical Concerns Related to Avatar Use**

As digital avatars start to find wider usage across social platforms, discussions about their ethical use, or potential for misuse, are developing. In this section, we will explore responses to views on potential misuse, risks both imagined and real, and also safety. These insights are important for understanding concerns users may have regarding avatars and perceived forms of manipulation or weaponisation in online contexts.

### **A. Perceptions of Misuse and Risk**

Regarding the question of misuse toward harm or deception, 43% of respondents stated yes, clearly showing a degree of awareness on the part of users of the more shadowy potentialities of digital identity. Furthermore, 26% chose "Maybe", and 19% selected "Not Sure", both of which indicated some caution or tacit wariness. Only one in eight respondents responded "No" to directly oppose the potential for misuse.

Researcher understand this to suggest that more than two-thirds of the sample population is concerned or unclear about the possibility of misuse, lending credence to the notion that avatar-based interaction is not entirely descriptively secure. Most significantly, the data indicates not just a plain conviction about danger, but also uncertainty and concern, which are essential emotive cues in the study of digital behaviour. These findings imply that, while people continue to engage in informal online environments, there is a growing awareness of how avatars may be deliberately employed to mislead, misinform, or damage trust and safety among other online users.

The anxiety may arise from avatars' power to conceal legitimate identities, therefore causing distance and sometimes anonymity between people and their actions. Avatars can thus produce certain behaviors and obfuscation of accountability that may also indicate that avatars, can be misused/misapprehended as weapons or as vehicles for social manipulation.

### **B. Specific Types of Misuse**

To gain further insight into these concerns, participants were asked to identify the types of misuse they thought were either the most likely or possible. Responses reflected a layered, complex understanding of potential harm.

The most cited response, accounting for 27% of participants, included multiple types of misuse at once — pretending to be someone else, online bullying, identity theft, and spreading false

information. This reflects an understanding of avatar misuse as part of a converging problem rather than a single issue threatening online avatars.

Additional insights from this question indicate that:

The concern about impersonation (pretending to be someone else) emerged as the most significant, directly cited or indirectly referenced in the vast majority of combinations of responses.

Online bullying and identity theft also appeared frequently, indicating that users recognize the ways in which avatars could be utilized to bully or impersonate others in ways that are harmful to these individuals either psychologically or with regard to their reputation.

Misinformation — although cited less frequently in isolation — was emphasized frequently when appearing together with any others, indicating that avatars might play a role in propagating false narratives.

Interestingly, 19% of respondents said that usage is not an issue at all, implying that portion of the public either views avatar contact as mainly benign, or that they have been fortunate enough not to experience misuse in person. However, this acknowledges that this is still a minority compared to the 81% who expressed some direct or indirect worry.

This spread of responses highlights the diversity of perceived avatar misuse, ranging from passive deception to active undermine. The virtual representation creates a psychological distance that may depersonalize the interaction, which increases the likelihood of users behaving in ways they might avoid if they were communicating face-to-face.

### **C. The Demand for Rules and Digital Safety Features**

When we questioned participants if there should be additional rules/safety features in the usage of avatars in online venues, 57% replied "Yes." A total of 28% said "Maybe," implying that there was room for regulatory reform, while 12% were unsure, and just 3% outright rejected to answer by rejecting new norms of conduct.

There is a recorded strong demand for greater digital safety features related with avatars, which might be seen as evidence of a more conscious public. This is especially important for our younger users, who are the most passionate avatar makers and have the most flexibility to social experiment in digital places.

This finding supports more general conversations around digital ethics and platform governance around the need for moderation tools, privacy protections, reporting features, and identity verification systems. Responses from participants signal a general appetite for not only passive safety features (e.g., privacy settings), but very likely active safeguards — including

community guidelines, learning aid, and "design features" that restrict harmful engagement with avatars.

Additionally, the finding that only 3% stated they opposed more rules shows that common society is accepting of intervention and boundaries in virtual spaces. This acceptance may arise from lived experience, second-hand accounts, or perhaps an intuition about avatars engaging unaccountably in social space.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The findings identified significant trends of digital usage of avatars among mainly young social media users aged 18-25 who engage heavily with social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. A larger majority (71%) have created or used an avatar and used them largely for fun, emotional expression and personality display. The avatar may be popular, but avatars are not able to fully reflect user appearance and personality - only 22% felt their avatar closely reflected their appearance, with only 32% saying they expressed their true self with their avatar. Also concerning was the confidence in self-expression using avatars - the respondents varied widely from feeling no more confidence online than IRL. Representation features like skin tone and hairstyle were partially successful, and many of the sample experienced only moderate inclusion. Finally, despite the use of avatars, concerns of misuse were high. Impersonation, identity theft, and cyberbullying were seen as major risks, with 57% also suggesting stronger rules and safety in avatar use spaces.

## **HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

This section will now examine the statistical interpretation of the data collected during the study, with an emphasis on whether the earlier defined hypotheses can be rejected or accepted. The hypotheses are related to the research's core objectives regarding the use, affect, and perceptions of digital avatars by users of social media. While the data has been summarized using descriptive statistics in earlier sections, this chapter will take it one step further by interpreting the patterns of the responses in relation to the stated hypotheses. The data is analyzed in a basic inferential manner to determine if digital avatars are purely tools of self-expression, affective communication, and inclusion for social media users, or if there are some other concerns (i.e., misuse and distortion of identity) that are also valid. Using this approach, the data give us more insight into the possible psychological and social implications of avatar use in digital contexts.

### **HYPOTHESIS 1:**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** People do not use digital avatars to alter or enhance their self-representation online.

**H<sub>11</sub>:** People use digital avatars to generate a better or idealised version of themselves in the online world.

To determine if users engage with digital avatars to enhance or alter their self-representation online, we analyzed the participants' feedback related to their intent for engaging with avatars. We classified the feedback based on whether participants used the avatars for entertainment, to express moods or emotions, to depict an aspect of their personality, or some mix of the three. These purposes are all related to the construction of a desired or ideal self within the online context.

The null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) was that individuals do not use avatars to enhance or alter their self-representation, while our alternative hypothesis (H<sub>11</sub>) asserted that avatars are used for to create a better or ideal version of oneself.

Among the responses received, a distinct majority of respondents, approximately 71%, indicated that they wanted avatars for reasons including pleasure, to express emotions, or to show personality (these reasons are directly related to enhancing one's self-image and identity or fitting a particular identity). Only a smaller group of 27%, indicated they did not use avatars at all. A very small percentage indicated ambiguous or mixed explanations.

Because the great majority of avatar users engage with it on purpose for expressive or identity purposes, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So we'll go with the alternate premise that people create digital avatars to show a better or idealised image of themselves in the digital realm. This shows that digital avatars play an active role in online self-presentation. Digital avatars are more than just fun aspects of online presence; they can serve as important instruments for personal expression.

## **HYPOTHESIS 2:**

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The use of digital avatars has no significant impact on how individuals express their personality and identity.

**H<sub>12</sub>:** Through digital avatars, individuals are able to express themselves more comfortably and confidently than through real images.

We measured participants' self-reported comfort and confidence while using avatars vs actual photographs to see if avatars influenced how they express their identity and personality. The hypothesis states that avatars provide the most comfortable and confident way of self-expression when compared to actual photographs because avatars allow users to manage and customise their online portrayal.

The null hypothesis (H<sub>02</sub>) claims that digital avatars have no influence on how individuals depict themselves and personality. The alternative hypothesis (H<sub>12</sub>) states that avatars allow users to express themselves in a more comfortable and confident way.

The data indicates some mixed but indicative patterns. When asked whether they felt more confident expressing themselves using avatars than in real life, only 21% of respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed with the idea that avatars make them feel more confident. In contrast, 37% of participants disagreed with the idea that avatars can make them feel more confident, although a significant proportion of participants feel comfortable and confident using avatars, it also suggests that they were far more comfortable not having avatars used to represent them. An interesting statistic, 37% of participants indicated that they did not feel as though they had been more self-confident either with the avatar, or without the avatar as opposed to their real-life image. Obviously if the same individuals felt they were not gaining extra self-confidence with avatars, it suggests there was limited, if any, unique self-advantage engaging people with avatars, rather than real-life images.

More importantly, when thinking about whether avatars are representing a person, whether avatars made it easier to express themselves, a high percentage of respondents indicated they

feel more comfortable using avatars than showing their real-life image. Using avatars for some individuals clearly provides an important contextual space and a powerful resource for personal expression, especially for individuals who may not feel capable, or where believed others would expect the use of any real image, for digital contextual space.

Given the data, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_{12}$ ) has some merit because many users do feel more at ease expressing themselves through avatars rather than actual images. However, this is not the case for all participants, as a sizable portion do not perceive a significant difference in self-expression as a result of avatars.

Since avatars have a favourable impact on self-making for a subset of users but not for everyone, we reject the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) and accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_{12}$ ).

### **HYPOTHESIS 3:**

**H<sub>03</sub>:** Digital avatars do not significantly contribute to the feeling of inclusion or representation in online environments.

**H<sub>13</sub>:** Digital avatars contribute to building a more inclusive online world where users feel represented and respected.

We looked at participants' answers to the question of whether they thought their avatars accurately reflected them based on characteristics like skin tone, hair, and attire—all of which are generally significant components of an individual's identity—in order to assess whether digital avatars help users feel included or represented.

Null Hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ): Feelings of representation and inclusion are unaffected by avatars. According to the alternative hypothesis ( $H_{13}$ ), avatars might contribute to the creation of a more welcoming online community by making users feel valued and represented.

These findings provide a playoff of the situation. The specific data is ambiguous on this point. About 28% of participants felt they were "fully" represented when they designed their avatars, and many more indicated that they felt there was an aspect of identity for them in that avatar. However, we also had 40% of respondents indicate they were "somewhat" represented; this seems to indicate that avatars may offer many users an experience of inclusion, but that does not equate to universality when it comes to how fully users feel they are represented.

On a different note, 25% of respondents had never thought about whether their avatars were representative of themselves, meaning that they haven't considered adding additional thought into what their avatars represent. Additionally, 7% had avatars that did not represent anything,

or was not representational of them. This suggests that for certain users generally, avatars as tools for identity representation, or as an inclusion option, are relatively unimportant or perhaps they were unaware that avatars could have been given the potential for that consideration.

These findings imply that while many users may benefit from digital avatars in terms of online representation and inclusion, this is not a universal experience. This disparity highlights the need for more avatar system revisions in order to more effectively promote inclusion and representation of diverse identities. Thus, it seems sense to conclude that the alternative hypothesis ( $H_{13}$ ) has some evidence to support it. Despite the fact that many users may find that digital avatars help them feel more inclusive and represented, a sizable percentage of the sample felt either under-represented or unconcerned about how avatars affected their online representation.

In summary, we can partially reject the null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ), and decry that although for many users digital avatars can support some experience of inclusion and representation; that this can vary based on individual context and interpretations of the availability of avatars and diversity of avatar features available.

#### **HYPOTHESIS 4:**

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There are no significant risks associated with the misuse of digital avatars for deceptive or harmful purposes.

**H<sub>14</sub>:** Misuse of digital avatars can lead to social or psychological risks, including deception, identity distortion, and harm to others.

In order to explore the possible risks associated with the misuse of digital avatars, we focus on participants' perceptions of if avatars can be used to mislead users or cause harm. We specifically looked at perceptions of the misuse of avatars in ways that could include pretending to be someone else, online cyberbullying, identity theft and visible misinformation.

The null hypothesis ( $H_{04}$ ) is that there are no significant risks associated with the misuse of digital avatars. The alternative hypothesis ( $H_{14}$ ) states that avatars misuse can result in harm on society or individuals emotional or psychological status via deception, identify misrepresentation or harm associated with online use.

The information shows a high level of knowledge regarding the possible abuse of avatars. It appears that usage is a real problem for those who replied, as many respondents (43%) believed that avatars may be abused and used to trick people, while 26% were not sure. Given that

avatars allow users to create digital representations that do not necessarily reflect their true selves, the data suggests that respondents were aware of the potential for avatars to be misused in a deceptive and harmful way. Twelve percent of respondents thought that avatars could be used for malicious, harmful purposes, such as identity theft or impersonation.

Respondents named "pretending to be someone else" and one named "online bullying" as their top worries when asked about particular cases of misuse. For example, 27% of participants said that avatars might be exploited for impersonation, bullying or disseminating false information, all of which is extremely likely to lead to social and psychological effects. Respondents also highlighted that the lack of robust rules might lead to an increase in abuse. It should come as no surprise that 57% of respondents said that more regulations or security measures should be implemented to prevent avatars from being used for malicious purposes.

The evidence supports the alternative hypothesis,  $H_{14}$ , which seemed to imply that avatars could in fact be used for harmful or deceptive purposes. It also demonstrates a very clear understanding of the risks associated with avatars, particularly with regard to deception and harm. Therefore, it is evident that strategies to mitigate these potential risks are needed. In all respects, the null hypothesis ( $H_{04}$ ) has been disproved. There is a compelling case for increased awareness and preventative actions to address these problems in online contexts, since data suggests that the abuse of avatars does pose social and psychological hazards, such as deceit, identity distortion, or injury to others.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research examined how digital avatars act as means of identity construction, self-expression, and social interaction across a variety of contexts in the online environment. By analyzing participant responses from a sample of 100 participants we found that avatars are generally understood as meaningful configurations of users' identity and selves, rather than decorative components.

A few noteworthy discoveries were made over the course of the investigation. First, there was a substantial correlation between the participants' self-identity and the avatars they chose, as they reported utilising them mostly for enjoyment, emotional communication, and personality expression. Second, there were instances of "aspirational representation" where users saw their digital avatars as an improved or idealised version of themselves, even though many users stated that there was a high degree of congruence between their avatars and their real-life personalities. Third, many participants reported feeling at least somewhat represented, even when the particular customisation possibilities did not entirely suit their demands. This implied that inclusive design was being approached in little increments and that significant work still needs to be done in several areas of design.

Participants, for instance, discussed the possible abuse of avatars (identity theft, deceit, impersonation, cyberbullying, etc.) and requested that the platforms offer improved security and management tools for avatar identity activities. The study's findings suggest that platforms should develop more user-friendly avatar creation tools that take into account a variety of identities and cultural expressions.

To reduce avatar misuse, platforms must also implement stronger security measures (verification, improved reporting procedures, and digital literacy). Lastly, the study should advocate for additional, more thorough scholarly investigations into the longer-term psychological effects of avatar use on body image, digital wellbeing, and self-perceptions of digital identity.

The study highlights the ethical issues surrounding the creation and usage of digital avatars and offers a deeper understanding of avatars as "tools" for the construction of digital identities.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although this study on avatar identity provides useful insights into digital self-representation, it is important to acknowledge several methodological limitations. First, we mostly represented younger users (18–25) in our sample of 100 participants. This restricts our capacity to extrapolate results beyond demographics related to age and culture. Even if this probably represents avatar platform users, it still remains a significant knowledge vacuum on how older groups use digital identity technologies.

The utilisation of data from self-reported questionnaires is another drawback. This participant-reported approach may still be influenced by social desirability or a lack of self-reflection, yet being helpful for collecting impressions. Other qualitative mixed methods techniques, such as focus groups or interviews, might have enhanced our study and would have revealed subtleties in participant connections with avatars that a questionnaire was unable to capture.

Additionally, the study concentrated on perceptions rather than actions while utilising platforms. We are unable to determine how patterns of avatar involvement evolve over time or how those changes relate to more general concerns about identity development, community belonging, and the likelihood of developing digital tiredness because we lack observational and longitudinal methods. Cases are particularly pertinent for vulnerable groups like young users or marginalised communities that may become entangled in a digital space that may pose higher risks, and the research's brief discussion of online safety may raise the possibility for a more thorough investigation into the psychological effects of avatar deceptions, impersonations, and catfishing.

Future studies should use mixed-method techniques, increase multidisciplinary collaboration, and diversify the participants. Our knowledge of digital embodiment and identity formation in increasingly complex virtual worlds might be substantially improved by looking into avatar use in next-generation settings like virtual reality, immersive gaming environments, and metaverse platforms.

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## APPENDIX

4/22/25, 12:25 AM

Avatars & You: Self-Expression in the Digital World

### *Avatars & You: Self-Expression in the Digital World*

This short survey is part of a research study about how people use digital avatars (like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp avatars, or Bitmoji on Snapchat). Your answers will help us understand how avatars affect self-expression and identity online. The survey is anonymous and will only take a few minutes. Thank you for your time!

\* Indicates required question

1. **What is your age group? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–25
- ☐ 26–35
- ☐ 36–50
- ☐ Above 50

2. **What is your gender? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / Self-describe
- ☐ Prefer not to say

4/22/25, 12:25 AM

Avatars &amp; You: Self-Expression in the Digital World

3. **Which social media platforms do you use regularly?** \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ I don't use any of these

4. **How often do you use social media?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Several times a day
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

### Avatar Usage

5. **Have you ever created or used a digital avatar (like Bitmoji or Meta Avatars)?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

4/22/25, 12:25 AM

Avatars &amp; You: Self-Expression in the Digital World

**6. Why do you use avatars? \****Check all that apply.*

- ☐ For fun
- ☐ To express moods/emotions
- ☐ To show my personality
- ☐ Because others use them
- ☐ I don't use avatars

**7. Which avatar type do you use the most? \****Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Instagram/Facebook/WhatsApp Avatars
- ☐ Bitmoji (Snapchat)
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Identity & Self-Expression****8. Do you think your avatar looks like you? \****Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, very much
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not really
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ None

4/22/25, 12:25 AM

Avatars &amp; You: Self-Expression in the Digital World

9. **Do you feel your avatar shows your true personality?** \**Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Completely

10. **I feel more confident expressing myself through avatars than in real life.** \**Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Stro	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

11. **Do you feel represented when creating your avatar? (e.g., skin tone, hairstyle, clothes)** \**Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

☐ I never thought about it

**Risks & Concerns**

4/22/25, 12:25 AM

Avatars &amp; You: Self-Expression in the Digital World

12. **Do you think avatars can be misused to trick or harm others?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Not Sure

13. **What types of misuse do you think can happen?** \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Pretending to be someone else
- ☐ Online bullying
- ☐ Spreading false information
- ☐ Identity theft
- ☐ I don't think misuse is common
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. **Do you think we need more rules or safety features for using avatars online?** \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Not Sure