Social Networking in a Virtual Environment

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Facebook, the leading social network service (SNS), has been integrating its social networking experience into the Virtual Reality (VR) environment. It bought Oculus Rift for $2 billion in 2014 (Dredge 2014) and currently has a number of apps available in the Oculus store.

VR is currently being used to transport individuals to collaborative spaces, allowing them to engage in social experiences. For instance, virtual project rooms have been introduced by apps such as Facebook Spaces (Neubauer et al. 2017). Facebook also allows live-streaming of 360 degree videos and has an app in the oculus store that enables one to experience 360 videos and images using immersive VR glasses. Market volume worldwide for these devices are expected to increase from 9.6 million units in 2016 to over 110 million units in 2020 (Hartl and Berger 2017).

There is clearly an opportunity here for other social networking companies to use the virtual reality experience to grow their user base, increase user satisfaction and user retention and give their users an enriching social experience unlike the experience on a traditional website or mobile app. However, there are challenges which companies will have to face when migrating their services to the virtual realm. Research which looks at the use of social networking applications in an immersive virtual environment is lacking.

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors which influence SNS members to continuously engage in social networking activities within a virtual environment.

This research addresses the following research questions: (1) What factors influence the reuse of social networking applications via VR glasses? (2) What social networking features are suitable for an immersive virtual environment?

Expected contributions of this research are as follows. SNS Companies will gain knowledge about the various characteristics related to the users, social networking apps and VR glasses which play a role in determining the continued use of social networking applications via VR headsets. SNS companies will gain knowledge about the features of social networking applications that users like and dislike. This should help give them insight into the SNS features worth investing into and developing within the virtual environment.

References

