

Towards Developing a Measure for Sense of Virtual Place

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

Virtual Worlds (VWs) have long been seen as a potentially compelling and engaging online environment for entertainment, education, and business. VW technology capabilities allow designers to create virtual environments that are immersive, three dimensional, and simulate experiences that can potentially generate a feeling of engagement and/or being at a place. Drawing upon the existing research on the notions of place and sense of place vis a vis physical environments, we propose sense of virtual place (SOVP) as a new construct. Sense of place has empirically been found to be useful in understanding people's engagement with a physical place. In this paper, we focus on laying a conceptual foundation for developing a scale to measure SOVP. Our definition of a virtual place includes three components: physical characteristics, afforded activities, and social interactions. Further, we have identified virtual place identity, virtual place dependence, and virtual place attachment as the three dimensions that can be used to measure a users' perceived SOVP while interacting in a virtual setting. We believe that this multidimensional conceptualization of the SOVP construct helps in capturing the manifold qualities of a virtual place including its capability to engage the users. We contend that the users' perceived SOVP while present in a virtual world setting can potentially act as a surrogate for the ability of the setting to involve and engage the user. The SOVP measure could, therefore, be useful for researchers interested in the area of design and evaluation of different types of settings in virtual worlds. The research will also contribute to practice by providing guidelines for design and development of engaging virtual settings.

Keywords

Virtual Worlds, Sense of Place, Sense of Virtual Place.