IS THE METAVERSE FOR TEENS? A PROFILE ANALYSIS OF METAVERSE USERS

AUTHORS

Research fellow Suhyoung Ahn PhD
Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, Republic of
sahn9@ncsu.edu

Professor Byoungho Jin PhD
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA
bejin@ncsu.edu

KEYWORDS

Metaverse, Gamification, Social interaction, Avatar-related behavior, Consumer behavior

ABSTRACT

The metaverse, a virtual space where people explore and interact with others virtually (Bosworth & Clegg, 2021), has emerged as an innovative platform, revolutionizing the way people engage with the digital realm. Contrary to perception, the utilization of the metaverse has incredibly diverse usage across generations (Aiello et al., 2022; Beasley, 2022). Not only Generation Z but a considerable number of Millennials and Generation X individuals have participated in making purchases in the metaverse (Carufel, 2022). While the user base encompasses a broad age spectrum, currently, there is limited evidence to suggest generational differences in consumer behavior. Could there be variations in purchase and avatar-related behaviors, such as avatar identification, ideal-self congruence, self-disclosure, avatar customization, and exhibitionism, by generations? To answer these questions and enhance the understanding of consumers in the metaverse, this study categorized consumers based on their primary activities within the metaverse, namely gamification and social interaction, and profiled each group based on MANOVA analysis.

This study conducted online surveys among 247 U.S. and 253 Korean consumers over 18 years of age, who had experience using metaverse platforms (e.g., Roblox, Zepeto, Minecraft, etc.). The results were as follows. First, participants were categorized into four groups based on their engagement with gamification (F=484.43***) and social interaction (F=463.31***): Subtle Observers (Group 1), Social Gamifiers (Group 2), Questful Explorers (Group 3), and Interactive Players (Group 4), in the metaverse. Social Gamifiers (Group 2) exhibited high levels of both gamification and social interaction, while Subtle Observers (Group 1) demonstrated low levels for both factors. Questful Explorers (Group 3) showed slightly elevated gamification, whereas Interactive Players (Group 4) displayed slightly higher social interaction. Second, the demographic variables did not yield significant differences among the four groups. Third, a MANOVA analysis was employed to examine disparities in consumers' avatar-related behavior (Avatar identification, ideal-self congruence, self-disclosure, avatar customization, exhibitionism). While Social Gamifiers (Group 2) exhibited elevated tendencies across all aspects, Subtle Observers (Group 1) displayed consistently lower levels. Questful Explorers (Group 3) and Interactive players (Group 4) appeared relatively similar in between Social Gamifiers (Group 2) and Subtle Observers (Group 1); however, Questful Explorers (Group 3) showed lower levels of self-disclosure and exhibitionism than Interactive Players (Group 4). Fourth, Interactive Players (Group 4) exhibited a higher propensity to purchase virtual items, compared to Questful Explorers (Group 3).

The findings suggest that the assumption that metaverse users are predominantly young consumers seeking gam-

ing experiences is misguided. It is inferred from the lack of discernible differences based on demographic variables, which emphasizes that the diverse patterns of gamification and social interaction in the metaverse are not strictly tie to particular age groups or other demographic characteristics. Differences emerged were mainly due to the extent of engagement of metaverse users in gamification and social engagement. Since Interactive Players exhibited a greater inclination toward virtual item purchase, compared to Questful Explorers, enhancing social functions within the metaverse is recommended. This study contributes to an improved understanding of the metaverse consumers and emphasizes the need for tailored experiences.