



Manifestation of Self-image in the Zepeto Avatar

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Abstract. Initially online games appeared as video games. As a new media, video games are a representation of reality that is created and transferred through the coding of a reading system through a sign system, coupled with sound. A video console system, defined as a television and console unit, directs the user to different positions. Video games offer users an active role-playing setting, directed by the user. One of the aspects that makes video games interesting is their ability to provide players with an immersive experience. In video games, players can feel themselves as the main character in the story being told, able to choose the course of the story, make decisions, and face the consequences. Based on this, we researched the Zepeto game, a world simulation platform based on games and social media that functions to interact and create using avatars. Through Zepeto, players can create 3D avatars that are connected to chat rooms that allow users to create and customize their own 3D avatars and interact with other users in various virtual worlds. Creating avatar characteristics in Zepeto is usually an ideal depiction of the physical figure that the user wants to attract the attention of other users so that they can interact in cyberspace, as well as increasing the user's self-confidence in interacting with fellow users. The fact that Zepeto has become a "copy" in the real world is what attracted us to research the players using a Literary Reception and Sociology of Arts approach.

Keywords: Game, Zepeto, Self-Image, Avatar

1 Introduction

The world of fiction is always changing and developing. There are at least three things that influence this change, namely politics, economics and technology. The political line of a country/regime certainly influences every existing policy, including in the realm of culture in general. Likewise with economic factors or commercial aspects. A work of fiction, apart from being an artistic product, is also a product or trading commodity. There are producers who bet on the sales level of a fictional product, whether it is a novel, poetry or comic.

Likewise, technological factors mean that the media of fiction always changes, from oral literature, written literature, printed literature, to hybrid literature. Through technology, a work of fiction also changes and develops according to its vehicle. Changes in consumption of works of fiction have also changed. With the technological

model that has an influence on the emergence of hybrid literature, readers are no longer passive when responding to the works of fiction they read. Hybrid literary readers are “interactive humans” with nonlinear narrative and poetic choices.

The concrete product of this hybrid literature is online games. With increasingly massive internet penetration and increasingly cheap devices, online games have become the latest hybrid literary product that has the largest consumers. Initially online games appeared as video games. As a new media, video games are a representation of reality that is created and transferred through the coding of a reading system through a sign system, coupled with sound. A video console system, defined as a television and console unit, directs the user to different positions. Video games offer users an active role-playing setting, directed by the user [1].

One of the aspects that makes video games interesting is their ability to provide players with an immersive experience. In video games, players can feel themselves as the main character in the story being told, able to choose the course of the story, make decisions, and face the consequences. This interactive game pattern is in line with the concept of Ergodic Literature in which there is interaction between producers (read: writers) and consumers (read: readers). In Ergodic Literature, every reader is free and free to choose which characters and plot to read first [2].

From the explanation above, we will next examine Zepeto, a world simulation platform based on games and social media that functions to interact and create using avatars. Through Zepeto, players can create 3D avatars that are connected to chat rooms that allow users to create and customize their own 3D avatars and interact with other users in various virtual worlds. In this chat room, players can interact with other players like in real life.

2 Methods

The basis of this research is sociological which moves according to qualitative research. The approach used is the Sociology of Art, especially discussing or studying people with specific involvement in artistic activities, and other communities outside of art activities in cultural phenomena that then affect art activities. The main study is about society as connoisseurs, observers, reviewers, researchers, educators (consumers), and art managers which are the components of the art creation process [3] [4] [5]. In addition, we use Erving Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory to explain the relationship between Zepeto players' self-image in the real world and its manifestation in the Zepeto world [6].

Zepeto itself is in the role playing game category, where in this type of game, each player can become a fictional character in the game as desired. The fact that Zepeto has become a "copy" in the real world is what attracted us to research 78 Zepeto players using the Literary Reception approach [7] and Sociology of Art [5].

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Zepeto Avatar and Self Image

This study is a preliminary study and produces several results that can be followed up by further research in the future. The first result is about the "relationship between Zepeto avatars and Zepeto players self-image". 11 respondents (14.1%) answered strongly agree and 9 respondents (11.5%) answered agree if the avatar in Zepeto represents their self-image in the real world. The answers are balanced with the answers of respondents who tend to disagree if the Zepeto avatar represents their self-image in real life, namely 14 respondents (17.9%) answered disagree and 4 respondents (5.1%) answered strongly disagree.

With these results, Zepeto avatars do not necessarily truly represent the self-image of players in the real world. The results above are further emphasized by the statement that Zepeto players are "satisfied with their body condition in the real world". More than half of the respondents are satisfied with their body condition with the results of 29 people answering strongly agree (37.2%) and 30 people answering agree (38.5%). With few people having problems with their body condition in the real world, Zepeto players feel safe and can explore more freely in creating Zepeto avatars that represent their self-image. Zepeto players can interact comfortably and do not feel insecure when communicating with other players. In fact, Zepeto players tend to communicate more easily with fellow Zepeto players than with friends or relations in the real world.

Traditionally, the body in sociology is understood as a physical entity involved in social interactions. Our bodies in the real world play an important role in how we are perceived, how we behave, and how we form relationships with others [8] [9]. However, in online games like Zepeto, the physical body is not directly involved in the interaction. Instead, the avatar we create becomes a representation of our body in the virtual world.

In Zepeto, users design their avatars with various physical options: height, body shape, clothing style, facial expressions, and so on. These avatars function as body proxies that become a medium for interacting in digital social spaces. This brings us to the idea that the body in online games is something that can be designed, modified, and changed according to the user's wishes.

In Zepeto, players experience disembodiment (the release of the body from physical reality). Their bodies do not move directly in the game, but rather they control an avatar which is a digital representation. However, at the same time, players also experience re-embodiment through the avatar. Even though the avatar is just a digital image, players "feel" as if they are connected to the avatar and have control over it, creating a new embodied experience in a digital context.

This phenomenon could have emerged because Zepeto players tend to look for other players who have "similar interests". Something that is easier to happen on the Zepeto platform compared to the real world. This condition is emphasized by the results of 36 people answering agree (46.2%) and 15 people answering strongly agree (19.2%).

On the other hand, although Zepeto users feel no problem with their body condition in the real world, they also do not hesitate to spend their money to dress up their avatars. The number is very significant, up to 55 respondents (25 agree/30 strongly agree). This phenomenon is also helped by the large number of Zepeto users who have different avatar characters for each slot they have in Zepeto.

Zepeto avatars are real representations of their users. Avatars become a kind of new image for the user's personality [10]. Zepeto avatars also become a medium for escapism in the form of social interaction in the virtual world.

3.2 Zepeto and Social Interaction

Social interaction on the Zepeto platform is an added value compared to similar applications. Zepeto itself, apart from being a game, is also a metaverse application. The interactive game pattern in Zepeto and the metaverse concept are in line with the concept of Ergodic Literature. In Ergodic Literature, each reader is free and at liberty to choose which character and plot to read first. Ergodic Literature itself is a term created to describe literature that requires "unusual" efforts for readers to explore the text. This term comes from the Greek *ergon*, which means "work", and *hodos*, which means "path" [2]. The freedom of readers to negotiate the text has actually been going on for a long time, as old as the work of fiction itself. So it is not a monopoly of fiction based on cutting-edge technology, like computer games. Ergodic Literature can be found in temple or pyramid reliefs, where visitors can choose and sort which images to see first [11].

The opinion above is in line with the results of this study. Through Zepeto, users use it as an alternative platform to find a life partner, although with not too many results. Only 10.3% (8 respondents) use it for dating purposes.

In addition to specific purposes such as dating, Zepeto is a platform that is truly a social interaction platform. The human need to speak and have their opinions heard is found in this platform. Almost half of the respondents feel that their friends on Zepeto are willing to listen to their complaints (20.5% strongly agree and 24.4% agree).

Referring to Goffman [6], although Zepeto appears to be entirely a “front stage” world, there are “back stage” aspects involved. Before a user decides how their avatar will look or act, they may engage in personal reflection—crafting the image they wish to project in the virtual space. This is a behind-the-scenes process where individuals can more freely shape their digital identities, without the direct supervision of a virtual audience.

Zepeto can be seen as a stage where users manage their digital identities in the presence of others. They operate on the “front stage” with their avatars, playing roles that conform to the social expectations of the game, while planning and experimenting with identities on the “back stage”. Impression management, situation definition, and role flexibility are key to understanding social interactions in virtual platforms such as Zepeto.

This shows how the virtual world offers a new space for creating and controlling identities, in line with Goffman’s theory of self-presentation in the social realm.

4 Conclusion

Zepeto is one of the latest games with the concept of role playing game and metaverse. Zepeto has unique interactions in the metaverse environment, specific characterization, and game rules that are easy for players to follow. This convenience is obtained because the Zepeto universe is an imitation of the real world. The metaverse in Zepeto offers choices to players and Zepeto enthusiasts, an abundant and easily accessible 'narratology' offering. In Zepeto, players are both consumers and producers of content. With the nature of the Zepeto platform which is open to creativity and interactivity among its users, the matter of self-image manifestation and social interaction is a necessity.

This research is a pilot study. It is hoped that after this further research can be conducted regarding Zepeto with all its dynamics.

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