

New research: What does your avatar say about you?

July 26 2010

Old or young, beautiful or sinister - the choices are endless when designing an avatar or a virtual alter ego. In the end, do people choose one that is really different from themselves? Usually not, according to new Concordia University research that shows in most cases, avatars reflect the personality of their creators.

The study, published in next month's issue of *Psychology and Marketing*, has implications for real-life companies who would like to reach both the virtual and real-world markets.

"It is estimated that by 2011, 80 percent of Internet consumers and Fortune 500 companies will have an [avatar](#) or presence in a virtual community," says Dr. H. Onur Bodur a professor at the Concordia John Molson School of Business. "There is limited research about these environments thus we undertook the task of understanding the consumers behind avatars."

Second Life a burgeoning virtual world

Dr. Bodur and a former graduate student, Jean-Francois Belisle, studied the avatar-creator behaviour in the virtual community [Second Life](#). "This [virtual world](#) stands out because it has its own economy, where real-money transactions occur," says Belisle. "Membership in the avatar world has increased more than twentyfold between 2006 to 2009 and has reached about 15 million."

Avatar-creators were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their personalities and these characteristics were compared with the impression their avatars made on viewers. Physical traits such as hair length and colour, [body shape](#), style and type of clothes provided visual clues about the human behind the avatar.

"Overall, the impressions made by the physical traits of the avatar match certain dimensions of the true personality of the creator," says Dr. Bodur. "For example, attractive avatars with stylish hair and clothes were perceived to be extroverted. This was confirmed by the personality measures obtained from Second Life participants."

"This correlation between avatar and creator helps identify the consumers behind the avatars and will lead to improved avatar-marketing strategy. Our findings will also help guide the choice of visual cues in the design of corporate avatars representing real-world companies."

More information: Psychology and Marketing:
www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/35943/home

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: New research: What does your avatar say about you? (2010, July 26) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-07-avatar.html>

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