Individual Discussion
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Theoretical and Practical Contributions

1.1 Theoretical Contribution

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The study is grounded on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which will be adapted and extended from a previous study by Student FAU (2023). By applying the UGT to digital content creator in virtual worlds, this study adds to the expanding literature of research on user-generated content (UGC) in the metaverse. Although UGT has historically been used to analyse media consumption, this study shows that it may also be used to understand why people create material in metaverse environments. In addition to providing new empirical insights into the distinctive characteristics of the metaverse, this study supports previous research on user behaviour in digital environments by demonstrating that intrinsic motivation is a key factor in long-term engagement and content sharing.

The Rise of the Creator Economy

Digital content production has changed because of the creator economy's growth, making it possible for anyone to pursue content creation as a hobby or a profession. Instead of depending on mass-market appeal, Anderson (2007) describes in The Long Tail how digital platforms allow producers to target specialised audiences. This idea is relevant to Minecraft, as users share their work with active communities through content providers ranging from simple builders to professional influencers. The platform's adaptability encourages innovation by granting users the ability to create, alter, and monetize content.

This change in social media entertainment is further explained by Cunningham & Craig (2019), who highlight how digital producers profit from monetisation techniques in platform-driven ecosystems. In this study, we investigate how the motivations of Minecraft creators are influenced by both external incentives (like financial prospects and audience recognition) and internal motivators (such as enjoyment). By investigating why people decide to create in the Metaverse and how digital platforms influence their experiences, our results add to this expanding literature of study.

Audience Engagement and Community Building

Community interaction is a key component of Metaverse content creation. By examining user-generated content on Roblox, Kang et al. (2024) show how content creators affect audience preferences through social validation, interactivity, and content quality. In a comparable way, Minecraft developers create devoted communities on websites like Twitch and YouTube, where participation goes beyond just viewing content. Our study supports this

viewpoint by examining the ways in which audience engagement, and social interaction affect content producers' motivation.

Ethical Considerations and Challenges

Even with the creator economy's advantages, there are also issues, specifically in relation to data security, trust, and moral behaviour. In their discussion of human-centric platforms for customised value creation in the Metaverse, Mourtzis et al. (2022) emphasise the significance of user agency in digital environments. Significant scepticism was found in our research on survey participation, with many respondents hesitant to participate because of worries about authenticity and anonymity. This brings to light a crucial ethical issue: researchers need to be open and considerate of the concerns of digital communities.

Our work adds to the expanding conversation on ethical research practices in online creative spaces by considering these issues. Future research can create more reliable and efficient data gathering methods by taking into account the concerns and engagement preferences of creators.

The Future of Content Creation

Digital convergence and the progress of content production are closely related. According to Jenkins (2006) in Convergence Culture, conventional and digital media are becoming more and more integrated, which encourages participation. This convergence is best shown by Minecraft, which allows players to easily switch between playing, creating, and making money from their work. Our study broadens this viewpoint by investigating the ways in which this participatory culture affects creators' motives.

The future of human-centric platforms is further examined by Mourtzis et al. (2022), who propose that next-generation content ecosystems will be characterised by customisation and interaction. According to our research, the capacity to control their own digital environments and engage with audiences in meaningful ways is just as important to Minecraft developers as the desire to express themselves creatively.

1.2 Practical Contribution

Practically speaking, creators of Metaverse platforms, gaming firms, and legislators involved in the digital economy may all benefit from these findings. Given that internal motivation is the primary force behind ongoing content creation, platforms such as Roblox and Minecraft need to prioritise creating spaces that promote individual expression, community engagement, and personal fulfilment over just depending on financial rewards.

This paper additionally addresses trust difficulties in digital research and survey distribution, which are important factors for researchers and companies looking to interact with online communities. Reaching content producers poses difficulties, highlighting the importance of community integration, message personalisation, and survey reliability for effective data gathering. This highlights the need for more open and community-centered research methods and has real-world ramifications for both academia and industry.

Additionally, our research offers useful information for platforms that create content and want to improve user engagement. Platforms can incorporate features like enhanced community-building tools, better recognition systems, and ethical monetisation tactics that promote sustained engagement by responding to the motivations of creators. These factors will be crucial in forming sustainable digital economies that put audience engagement and creative happiness first as the Metaverse develops.

Limitations of the Study

2.1 Survey Challenges

The challenge of collecting survey responses was one of the study's main limitations. Response rates were poor even though content producers were directly engaged through Twitch, livestreams, Discord, Reddit, and personal outreach (sharing the survey and purpose of our study with the gamification club from my previous university in my home country). For my part, I mostly concentrated on reaching out to Twitch creators. By watching live streams, interacting with users directly in the live chat, and getting in touch with players and creators directly. The main obstacles were:

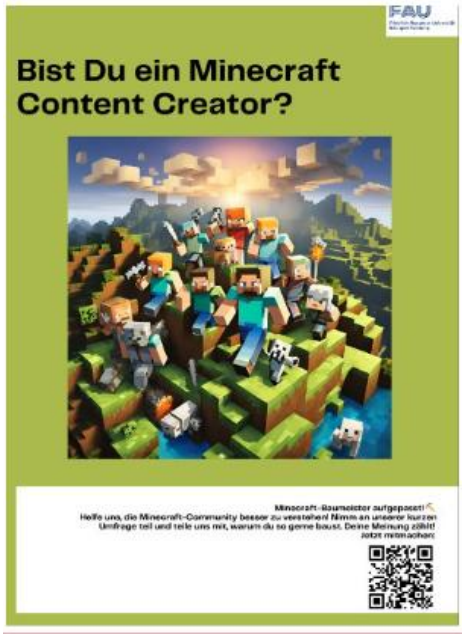
- The survey link has trust concerns; many were hesitant to participate because they thought it may be spam.
- Unsolicited communications are viewed with suspicion, which makes it challenging to build trust with possible responders.
- Time restraints and survey length: Because of the questionnaire's length or conflicting priorities, some respondents did not finish it.

The message used to contact people was:

"Hey Minecraft builders! 🏰 I'm a student from a German university working on a project investigating your community on why you choose to create content in Minecraft. I've created a survey which I'd like to share with you. ✍️ It's anonymous and a great way to leave your mark beyond the blocks! 💎 Your input would help a lot in completing my project. I think you're talented builders that inspire all of us. Click here to check it out: https://game-studies.rw.fau.de/l/index.php/749587?lang=en ."

On the other hand, we targeted students who could also be content creators by distributing a Minecraft survey poster in the Erlangen Library and FAU WiSo to increase survey outreach. I personally visited both faculty libraries and distributed posters to students. Some were hesitant to complete the survey, but it became simpler after I explained the purpose of our study and we talked about our shared interests (even common courses and exams). Hopefully,

the majority of them completed the survey or shared it with their friends. The poster aimed to draw in a wider audience outside of online forums and include university participants in the study.



The difficulties of doing online research in gaming communities were highlighted by the fact that response rates were still impacted by digital scepticism despite these measures. In order to increase credibility and participation, future research should look at different outreach techniques such as working with well-known content creators, using recognised university email domains (like the university did in our case), or integrating the survey into reliable platforms.

2.2 Methodological Limitations

In addition to survey challenges, the study has methodological constraints:

- Sampling Bias: Because the survey was voluntary, only highly involved creators may have answered, which might result in self-selection bias. This might reduce the sample's representativeness.
- PLS-SEM Assumptions: Despite the model's statistical testing using SmartPLS, the findings should be interpreted carefully because certain constructs did not fully satisfy the Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity requirement. Although PLS-SEM is a reliable technique for exploratory research, other statistical techniques can be useful in future research to further confirm results.

Future Research Directions

3.1 Broader Platform Analysis

Future research should examine if producers on other metaverse platforms display comparable motivating tendencies. A comparison of Roblox and Minecraft could shed further light on the platform-specific elements that affect content production practices. Theories of digital creativity and engagement might be improved by identifying platform similarities and differences.

3.2 Longitudinal Studies

The motivations of content creators at one particular moment are captured in this study. Longitudinal methods should be used in future studies to monitor the changes in motivation. Important questions for research consist of:

- Do external incentives cause fatigue and lower ongoing engagement?
- What effects do technology developments (such as AI-generated content and automation tools) have on the workflow and motivation of creators?
- Does the balance between internal and external motivators change over time as a result of the metaverse's changing economic model (such as play-to-earn economies)?

Personal Reflection on Contribution and Learning

4.1 Twitch Engagement and Outreach

Engaging with Twitch streamers and Minecraft content creators to share the survey and collect results was one of my main contributions to this project. This required keeping a close eye on livestreams, finding related creators, and contacting them directly. However, in order to avoid coming across as invasive or spammy, this approach was not simple. I now have a better understanding of how online content creators function and engage with their audiences because. I discovered that:

- Research studies and informal requests, particularly from unidentified sources, are frequently viewed with suspicion by creators.
- Prior to outreach, genuine interaction is necessary to build trust. Sending survey links alone didn't work; to establish trustworthiness, I had to first take part in discussions, leave comments on the material, and have conversations.
- Credibility is key to survey performance. Many creators were still hesitant to engage because of privacy concerns or bad experiences with research projects, even if revealing my affiliation with FAU gave them a certain amount of trust. This draws attention to a significant obstacle in online research: the requirement for improved techniques for establishing trust.

Despite these difficulties, my work produced insightful answers that added to our dataset. My comprehension of community-based research has improved as a result of this experience, and I have also become more competent in online interaction.

4.2 SmartPLS Analysis and Statistical Learning

In addition to gathering data, I was in charge of downloading, setting up, and running SmartPLS, overseeing every aspect of statistical interpretation, reliability assessments, and model testing. Because structural equation modelling (SEM) necessitates a thorough comprehension of intricate statistical principles, learning and implementing SmartPLS was a technical challenge. During this process, I became skilled in:

- Applications of structural equation modelling (SEM) in social science research, especially for evaluating latent variables and interrelationships across constructs.
- The robustness of our findings is ensured by data validation methods such as discriminant validity, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha.
- Using PLS-SEM results, such as path coefficients and factor loadings, to draw insightful inferences about the intentions and actions of content producers.

This part of the research was especially fulfilling as it improved my quantitative research abilities and gave me practical experience using analytical software that is often used in professional and academic research.

4.2 Academic Growth and Collaboration

I was a contributor to the theoretical foundations and related work areas in addition to data analysis. This required making sure that the theoretical framework was coherent, contextualising our study within larger papers, and combining previous research. I improved a few academic abilities as a result of this experience:

- Critical interaction with literature: I improved my ability to evaluate and use earlier study findings to support our claims and arguments.
- Coordination of research and teamwork: Being a part of a research team required managing duties well, maintaining consistency throughout the paper's many parts, and finding a balance between individual contributions and group objectives.

4.3 Key Takeaways and Future Applications

In conclusion, this project has been a great learning opportunity, providing theoretical and practical information relevant to further studies and career aspirations. These insights will be helpful in the future for positions involving digital community management, user engagement analysis, and market research, as well as for more scholarly research in the domains of behavioural sciences, digital marketing, and people analytics.

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