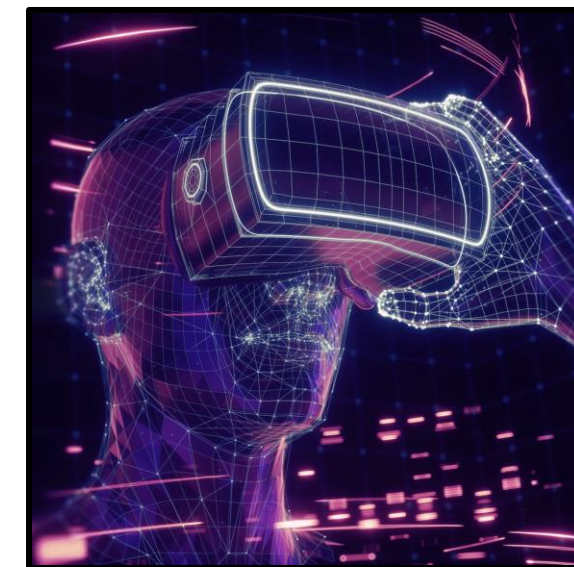


ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF REPRESENTATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE METAVERSE

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INTRODUCTION

- The rapid growth of the metaverse has raised concerns about the potential for misrepresentation, cultural appropriation, and perpetuation of inequalities and discrimination towards individuals and groups within the metaverse.
- Our research project aims to raise important questions and stimulate critical thinking about the complexities of cultural representation in the metaverse.



WHO SHOULD BE REPRESENTED IN THE METAVERSE?

- Should we represent cultures associated with oppressive or discriminatory issues, historically or currently?
- Should we rely on members of a particular culture to create or design avatars for individuals from that culture, and if so, how can we ensure that such representations are authentic and nuanced?



REPRESENTATION OF THE INVISIBLE?

- Nearly 3.6 billion people still lack access to the internet, which indicates that a significant number of cultures are excluded from the metaverse.



- Including these cultures could help bridge the digital divide and reduce social inequalities, but it could also give rise to appropriation and biases that could further harm these groups.
- According to the World Economic Forum - "*Persistent digital divides based on access, literacy, and connectivity could exclude certain groups from the benefits of the metaverse, exacerbating inequalities and misrepresentation.*"

WHAT IS CULTURAL REPRESENTATION?



- Refers to the accurate and respectful portrayal of different cultures, their values, beliefs, practices, forms of expression and identity.
- Provides opportunity for appreciation cultural differences and fosters respect and understanding for diverse groups and accounts for sense of community, self-expression and validation among underrepresented groups.
- "Culture" represents more than geographic distinction – important to represent subcultures such as gaming culture, art culture, etc. *Why?* Art culture represented as a predominantly elite, Eurocentric, and academic community reinforces class and cultural biases
- Visual representation goes beyond facial features and skin tone – inclusive of body language, music, dialect, traditions, customs, costumes, interactions in a community.

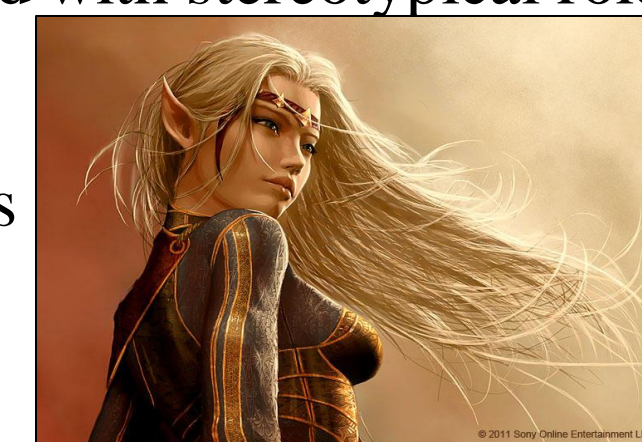
CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?



- The Japanese tea ceremony *Sado* is a traditional practice rooted in Zen Buddhism and emphasizing simplicity, mindfulness, and respect for others.
- Its VR portrayal is exoticized using stereotypical representations of Japanese culture, caricatures of people, geishas, or samurais, without acknowledging its historical and cultural significance reducing it to a mere entertainment product, undermining the cultural heritage and dignity of the Japanese people.

REINFORCING STEREOTYPES?

- Black avatars tend to be portrayed as aggressive and violent compared to other avatars and are commonly associated with stereotypical roles such as athletes or musicians.
- East Asian avatars are commonly depicted as hyper-sexualized or subservient, reinforces negative stereotypes about Asian women.
- The portrayal of Middle Eastern cultures as oppressive and outdated in media coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis can perpetuate harmful biases within the metaverse and contribute to discrimination against Middle Eastern avatars.



CONCLUSION

- Cultures are complex and multifaceted - imperative to ask these difficult questions about representation before embrace the metaverse and its potential impact on different facets of our lives.
- By exploring the relationship between visual representation power dynamics, and stereotypes, we hope to encourage a more thoughtful and inclusive approach to cultural representation in virtual spaces.

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