Towards a framework for virtual consumer behaviour: A Delphi perspective on virtual identity and symbolic consumption in the metaverse

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Abstract:

The metaverse is reshaping consumer-brand interactions by creating immersive, interactive environments that redefine traditional marketing paradigms. Grounded in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and Extended Self Theory, this study explores consumer behaviour in the metaverse, focusing on identity construction, symbolic consumption, and emotional engagement. Using a Delphi methodology, we engaged a multidisciplinary expert panel to identify key themes influencing consumer engagement in virtual spaces, including flow, immersion, avatar personalization, trust, and ethical considerations. The findings reveal that immersive experiences and symbolic consumption drive emotional connections, while avatars enable identity construction, reinforcing the extended self. However, challenges such as cybersickness and privacy concerns highlight the need for ethical design and trust-building practices. This research contributes to understanding how virtual environments shape consumer behaviour.