

INVESTIGATING VIRTUAL WORLD DYNAMICS USING AST: A RESEARCH AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop a research agenda that will assist in deepening our understanding of the social dynamics of virtual worlds. Virtual worlds are computer-based simulated worlds that are populated by human-controlled avatars, or graphical representations of individuals. These worlds are real-time, interactive societies based on three-dimensional Internet technology. Interaction in virtual worlds has developed a set of behaviors, which are unique to each world.

Structuration Theory and Adaptive Structuration Theory are the springboards used to uncover the social dynamics in virtual worlds in this research. Structuration Theory was developed by Giddens (1984) to explain a balance between structure and agency. According to Giddens (1984), structure is rules and resources of a society, and agency is the human action. DeSanctis and Poole (1994) extended these ideas with adaptive structuration theory to study these dynamics with the interactions of information technologies within organizations. In doing so, they examined organizational change in terms of the types of structures provided by information technologies, as well as the structures that emerge as individuals interact with these technologies (DeSanctis and Poole 1994). We take this a step further in looking at the structures developed for virtual worlds and their evolution as individuals (or avatars) interact within these worlds.

This paper develops a framework that highlights how decisions are made, as well as decision outcomes that can affect marketing in virtual reality worlds. Propositions are developed with the intention to raise questions and start a dialogue to further the research in virtual world behaviors. This should ultimately give an understanding of how marketers can pursue their programs in this new environment.

References available upon request