

Frame ambiguity and deception in a virtual world

Since 2003, Linden Lab's Second Life (SL) has given users a foretaste of what a metaverse could be: a contiguous virtual space in which residents create their own goods and represent themselves - through their avatars and their communities - in a myriad of ways. With few norms related to how closely one's SL self should represent one's offline persona, the potential for both intentional and unintentional deception is ever-present. Borrowing elements from Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman's conception of framing, and utilizing survey and interview data from Second Life residents, this paper attempts to delineate several ways in which the SL platform is used – as a chat room, as a space for role-play or identity exploration and as a 'game'. This ambiguity as to what frame is being used in a given interaction can both be a loophole to justify actions by bad actors and can also simply cause unintended friction between those unaware of interlocutor expectations and unexpected emotional responses.