Social Virtual Worlds: 
Marketing Applications and Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

Social virtual worlds (SVWs) are 3D Internet-based simulated environments that mimic the real world and their content is user-generated, that is, users can create any object from scratch. Users (called ‘residents’) living in-world using a 3D virtual character ‘avatar’ can own a house, a car, work, join events, buy or sell objects and interact with others in real time. SVWs (such as Second Life) have recently emerged as attractive venues for conducting various business and marketing activities. Since their emergence researchers as well as interested companies have been raising questions about SVW users and the potential of the platform. This dissertation aimed to extend our knowledge on SVWs with a focus on marketing applications and consumer behavior. In this dissertation we offer answers to questions like, why SVW users are spending millions of real Dollars on virtual products? And are they willing to purchase real products from the metaverse channel?

In this dissertation, we conduct the first study on the potential of SVWs in the internationalization process of small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, we conduct the first empirical study on SVW users' motivations. Further, we study users' shopping perceptions, motivations, and behavior regarding virtual products. And finally, on a large scale, we reveal users' willingness to purchase real products from the virtual world channel and study perceived benefits and drawbacks from a customer perspective.