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METaverse: PERSPECTIVES FROM INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A LIQUID SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how interpersonal relationships are configured within the metaverse in the context of a liquid society, drawing upon Bauman's theoretical framework. Through a qualitative approach, emergent categories associated with avatar use were identified, including social interaction, creative expression, anonymity, and digital representation. The findings reveal that while the metaverse enables novel forms of connection, it also reproduces the fragile and transient dynamics characteristic of liquid modernity. Despite fostering global connectivity and personalised identity construction, significant challenges remain regarding authenticity, emotional wellbeing, and the sustainability of interpersonal bonds. The study concludes that maintaining a balance between virtual and physical spheres, alongside the development of communicative competencies, is essential to cultivating meaningful interactions in these emerging digital environments.

KEYWORDS: Metaverse, Interpersonal Relationships, Liquid Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The metaverse represents a significant contemporary digital achievement, as it functions as an immersive virtual reality platform in which people interact through avatars. The aim of this research focused on analysing the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in a liquid society, with a particular emphasis on the exploration of the metaverse along with theoretical contributions [5], most importantly the resistance and struggle against injustice, the application of technology and innovation in times of great uncertainty that represents and determines a society and also identity constantly explored from the duality between the public and the secret identity.

This phenomenon disrupts conventional modes of communication and raises critical enquiries into the essence of interpersonal relationships in the context of the liquid society articulated by Bauman. The analysis begins with the metaphor of liquidity, which facilitates the interpretation of the challenges and discontents afflicting modern society. Within this framework of understanding, it seeks to elucidate the reconfiguration of interactions between subjects within the metaverse, as well as the critiques and controversies that arise in relation to the vulnerability of human connections in virtual realms.

Accordingly, Bauman demonstrates five fundamental concepts inherent in the traditional narrative -emancipation, individuality, time/space, labour and community- and seeks to elucidate the evolving nature of the human condition within the current capitalist social structure where solids maintain their form and endure over time and therefore persist, while liquids represent a flux and are perpetually transformed by flowing, consequently, these aspects are linked as deregulation, flexibility or market liberalisation. In this context, it is essential to express that, through the notion of liquidity, Bauman characterises contemporary society as individualistic and ruthless, advancing at a rapid pace, but lacking a clear direction and showing compulsive changes that lack consistency [16]. With regard to interpersonal relationships within a liquid society, he posits that interpersonal relationships have become increasingly volatile and transitory, which is attributed to the absence of solid social structures and the proliferation of individualisation.

In this framework, the term metaverse is defined as a shared, collective, three-dimensional virtual space in which physical and digital realities converge, allowing users to interact with each other and the environment through personalised avatars.

Notably, authors such as Stephenson [32], introduced the term metaverse in his science fiction narrative *Snow Crash*, characterising the metaverse as a virtual reality universe in which individuals interact as avatars within an immersive digital landscape. In this domain with respect to the metaverse, three essential characteristics are identified, the first identified as interactivity, whereby users can communicate and exert influence over the environment and other users; the second corporeality, whereby the environment adheres to physical laws and is governed by finite resources; and the third and final persistence, which indicates that the metaverse continues to exist and function even when users are not actively connected.

On the other hand, the metaverse represents an advanced synthesis of multiple technological developments that, taken together, are shaping a structural change in the forms of interaction between humans and digital interfaces [1]. This convergence has the potential to progressively displace conventional devices such as mobile phones, radically transforming the way in which people access, communicate and participate in digital environments. In parallel, there has been a significant deployment of promotional strategies that have contributed to positioning the metaverse as a central axis of contemporary technological innovation. This phenomenon is similar to the growing enthusiasm generated by artificial intelligence, whose expansion has stimulated a strong demand for more efficient, accessible and accurate technological tools, especially oriented towards the early identification of behaviours linked to mental health disorders, which is evidence of a growing interest in integrating these technologies in areas of high social and clinical impact.

In this scenario, within social communication, the metaverse is conceived as an internet that facilitates more immersive and participatory experiences, thus redefining the modalities through which people interact, collaborate and socialise in digital spheres. However, by fusing real and virtual elements, mixed reality technologies generate an augmented perception of the work environment and, consequently, an enriched experience in the execution of collaborative tasks. This approach raises a need to rethink the traditional categories of bonding, affectivity and presence, in a scenario where the boundaries between the real and the virtual are progressively blurring. Thus, the metaverse emerges not only as a technological environment, but also as a socio-cultural laboratory in which new forms of human connection are tested,

in the midst of the fluidity and relational fragility of a liquid society. In this sense, the study proposes a critical and reflexive look at how these digital platforms are shaping interpersonal relationships, tensions, possibilities and limits, in an era marked by constant social reconfiguration.

1.2. Study Problem

The problem of this study arises from the growing concern about the effects of advanced digitalisation on the quality of interpersonal relationships, especially in contexts where human interactions are progressively shifting towards virtual environments such as the metaverse. Today, we observe an accelerated change in the modes of social bonding, driven by immersive technologies that offer new forms of presence, communication and socialization, but which also generate tensions around authenticity, the stability of affective ties and the construction of identity. From the perspective of the proposed liquid society, these digital environments reinforce the fragility of relationships, characterised by their transience, emotional disconnection and superficiality, especially affecting young people, who adopt these platforms with greater intensity [7]. Recent research warns that, in the context of a liquid society, the digital environment is a source of fragility.

Recent research warns that while the metaverse offers innovative opportunities for social encounters, it can also foster ephemeral ties, promote idealised representations of identity and provoke a disconnection with traditional forms of face-to-face interaction. This phenomenon demands a deeper understanding of how interpersonal relationships are shaped in these virtual spaces and how they are affected by the dynamics of the liquid society.

This study seeks to answer the following central question:

To what extent does the metaverse transform the configuration of interpersonal relations in the context of a liquid society?

From this main question, the following specific questions are derived:

1. How do metaverse users perceive the authenticity and durability of the ties they establish in virtual environments?
2. Which elements of social interaction in the metaverse reflect characteristics of the liquid society, such as fluidity, fragmentation, or instability?
3. What emotional and psychological implications emerge from prolonged participation in avatar-mediated digital

relationships?

4. What strategies might promote more meaningful and sustainable interpersonal bonds within the metaversal environment?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW (THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK)

This research is based on the innovative theories and doctrines that arise from the study of the Metaverse, and the generation of digital platforms, taking into account the contributions [4; 9; 27]. Throughout history, humanity has evidenced an intrinsic need for communication, propagation of knowledge, emotional expression and exchange of experiences. With the emergence of the metaverse, this need acquires a great magnitude in which expression and interaction are facilitated through digital avatars, generating an alteration in the established communicative norms, presenting new challenges related to authenticity, empathy and perception of others within a digitised scenario. Furthermore, the inclusion of digital technologies aimed at strengthening educational quality and providing innovative pedagogical experiences has increasingly become a prominent focus within educational institutions [10; 11; 16]. In this context, the strengths of the metaverse in generating virtual environments that allow users to socially interact, collaborate and acquire knowledge through the creation of high quality immersive experiences have positioned it as a viable alternative source of content for learners [15; 24].

Also, immersed in the metaverse, communication is eminently interactive; however, its technological mediation weakens the strength of social connections. Consequently, the processes of innovation, search and retrieval of information continue to be primordial activities, although at the beginning of the 21st century these efforts are carried out in a cyberspace that challenges the traditional frameworks of knowledge socialization. In this sense, liquid modernity configures a social fabric where human connections become unstable and fragile, giving rise to interpersonal relationships of a transient and flexible nature, which adjust to an environment dominated by uncertainty and constant change. [35]

However, the metaverse exacerbates this liquid condition by providing an environment in which identity and interaction can be transformed at the user's discretion. Moreover, the flexibility of connections within the virtual environment leads to further exasperate emotional detachment and diminish commitment in interpersonal relationships,

asserting questions about the transitory nature of human bonds in the digital modernity scenario [26]. On the other hand, in the analysis of the social transcendence of the metaverse [19], they point to the metaverse as a utopian social vision that goes beyond. Thus the transition from Neal Stephenson's notion of liquid modernity to [5; 6]. Neal Stephenson's metaverse illustrates a compelling transformation in cultural memory and social organisation. Bauman's theoretical framework underscores the fluidity and precariousness of contemporary social constructions, while the metaverse embodies a novel digital environment that reconfigures interactions and identities, in which the ramifications of these alterations are clearly observable.

In this sense, in terms of identity fluidity, it refers to the fact that modern identities are gradually characterised by instability, influenced by ephemeral social relations and economic conditions. Likewise, in the evolution of cultural memory, the metaverse provides innovative modalities for the preservation and dissemination of cultural legacies, thus contesting conventional forms of representation [35]. In addition, the economy of experience allows for an economy of experience, which is a form of cultural memory. Furthermore, the experience economy enables organisations to adapt to the tenets of liquid modernity by cultivating environments that emphasise flexibility and experiential interaction, often generating a disparity between elite and marginalised workers [3].

From what has been analysed, it is recognised that the metaverse operates within supratemporal and supraterritorial dimensions, transcending the physical limitations of space and time. This condition enables forms of interaction and identity that emancipate themselves from the restrictions imposed by traditional geographical, social or cultural contexts. Moreover, the immersiveness of these environments intensifies emotional persuasion, raising the degree of affective involvement of users and transforming the way they perceive, experience and value cultural artefacts. In this scenario, the expansion of the metaverse can also be interpreted from the perspective of digital humanism, as its development aligns with the principles that place the human experience and the dignity of the subject at the centre of emerging technologies, thus highlighting the need for digital environments oriented towards well-being, participation and personal fulfilment [20].

Consequently, while Bauman's liquid modernity accentuates instability and uncertainty, the

metaverse offers potentialities for novel forms of connection and identity. However, this digital progress also generates fears regarding authenticity and the possibility of further social fragmentation.

3. RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE METAVERSE

From the perspective of global connectivity, the metaverse facilitates real-time interaction with people from all over the world, regardless of their physical location, which expands the possibilities of establishing relationships with people from diverse backgrounds and cultural experiences, thus enriching interpersonal relationships. In terms of improving accessibility, the metaverse has the ability to mitigate certain physical barriers, such as geographical distance or mobility restrictions, allowing people to seamlessly connect and maintain relationships with people who would otherwise be inaccessible. In terms of increasing diversity, through the engagement implicit in the metaverse, it facilitates the acquisition of a wider range of experiences by fostering connections with people from diverse backgrounds and different points of view, enhancing understanding and inclusion while fostering more enriching and tolerant interpersonal relationships.

Hence, the collaborative opportunities provided by the metaverse allow people to jointly participate in projects, disseminate knowledge and collaborate efficiently, without physical limitations, enhancing working relationships and promoting creativity and innovation. Therefore, personal development within the metaverse presents a platform for users' experimentation and self-expression, which contributes to personal enrichment. Through interactions with various avatars, people can explore alternative identities, improve their emotional and social competences and maintain greater self-confidence.

Conversely, in terms of its social implications, a deficiency in communication would lead to precipitating heterophobia or a rejection of the unknown. Initial mistrust is often the cause of this phenomenon, leading to stereotypical perceptions. Since effective communication requires a basis of mutual trust, alienation can be exacerbated over time, while ignorance perpetuates negative stereotypes. As a result, people may come to perceive others as potential adversaries, despite the absence of substantive justifications for such beliefs [7].

While the metaverse has advantages in the context of interpersonal relationships, it is not without its pitfalls, one of which is disconnection from reality,

where the metaverse can serve as a means of escape and lead to a detachment from the real world. There are people who overuse virtuality, thus neglecting their relationships in reality and losing the essence of authentic human interaction. The metaverse, despite its innovative potential, presents a number of limitations and risks that affect the quality of the communicative and relational experience. One of the main challenges is communicative inadequacy, as interactions are often restricted to text and lack essential non-verbal elements such as facial expressions or body language, thus hindering emotional understanding and the building of authentic bonds. There is also a latent risk of addiction, as some users may become overly dependent on the virtual environment, to the detriment of their relationships and well-being in real life. Another critical aspect is the deficiency in the authenticity of digital representations: avatars, by not accurately reflecting users' real identities, can hinder the development of sincere relationships.

The metaverse poses privacy and security concerns due to personal data exposure and risks like cyberbullying and impersonation. Virtual relationships in a liquid society are fragile and transient, showing characteristics of instability and adaptability within highly connected digital environments. Online interactions can be superficial and ephemeral, with people easily moving on to alternative connections, fostering an illusion of intimacy while leaving individuals feeling lonely and disconnected. Virtual spaces often showcase idealised profiles, lacking authenticity and hindering the formation of genuine and long-lasting relationships. This highlights the challenges and implications of engaging in virtual relationships within the evolving landscape of digital platforms and social networking sites.

Controversial perspectives on virtual relationships suggest the vulnerability of human connections, with meta-verses as virtual environments reshaping communication paradigms. Virtual relationships often lack depth and authenticity compared to face-to-face interactions due to limitations like superficiality, absence of physical contact, and restricted access to emotional cues. These challenges highlight how virtual interactions in the metaverse may prompt a shift in online communication norms and lead to a reassessment of the value and significance placed on such relationships. In addition, there is a growing tendency toward idealised self-representation through avatars, which may lead to the construction of fictitious identities and a lack of authenticity in

interpersonal exchanges, thereby undermining trust and intimacy. Excessive engagement in such relationships can result in technological dependency, leading to the neglect of in-person connections and the erosion of face-to-face communication skills. Moreover, continuous exposure to digital stimuli tends to fragment attention, diminishing the capacity for sustained concentration and adversely affecting the quality of relationships in real-world settings.

Online relationships may indeed hold significant value, particularly for individuals facing geographical or physical limitations. Nonetheless, it is essential to maintain a healthy balance between virtual interactions and direct human contact in order to foster interpersonal bonds that are more genuine, resilient, and emotionally grounded [18]. Consequently, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge that such critiques do not imply that virtual relationships are inherently harmful. Online connections can also hold considerable meaning and value, particularly for individuals facing geographical or physical constraints. However, it remains essential to strike a sensible balance between virtual interactions and in-person relationships in order to foster strong and authentic human connections. Moreover, it is imperative to emphasise that the metaverse may offer new opportunities for cultivating meaningful relationships. Through virtual communication within metaversal environments, individuals can engage with others who share similar interests, thereby enriching their social experiences. While the metaverse may provide a favourable digital setting for interpersonal interaction, the development of effective communication skills and empathy continues to be crucial for establishing genuinely meaningful connections.

The metaverse has emerged as a central axis in contemporary debates regarding its implications for communication and interpersonal relationships. Advocates emphasise its potential to foster social inclusion, facilitate the expression of diverse identities, and enable new modes of interaction and belonging within virtual environments. However, critical perspectives caution that such forms of interaction may intensify the superficiality of human connections and give rise to isolation in the physical sphere. In this regard [8], argues that while technology allows for constant connectivity, it simultaneously undermines the quality of face-to-face encounters and may engender a paradoxical sense of loneliness amidst hyperconnectivity. Complementarily, although focused on the effects of the internet on attention and reflective thinking, it is

noted that digital communication often replaces deeper, more meaningful interactions, thereby diminishing the richness of human relationships. Consequently, technological mediation may restrict the capacity to experience genuine emotions and to forge lasting bonds, resulting in a transient form of communication prone to abrupt disconnection

3.1. Methodological Construct

This study seeks to understand behavioural patterns and relational dynamics within virtual environments by offering a critical interpretation of the metaverse through the lens of Bauman's theory, particularly his concept of liquid modernity [3; 4; 5]. Central to this analysis is the subject-to-subject model of interactive communication, which is considered a salient contemporary form of relational engagement, articulated through avatars—widely recognised as digital representations of the self in immersive contexts.

The research was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, employing a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach that conceives understanding as a fundamental mode of human existence [28; 34]. A descriptive-interpretive design was adopted and enhanced through the application of discourse analysis, focusing on a case unit comprising three informants who actively participate in virtual platforms. In parallel, a quantitative content analysis technique was incorporated to determine the frequency index of emergent categories associated with avatar usage.

Within this framework, particular emphasis is placed on the dynamics of subject-to-subject bonding mediated by avatars—understood as symbolic and visual extensions of identity. These avatars not only facilitate user engagement in virtual experiences but also act as customised digital embodiments through which individuals negotiate, express, and reconfigure affective and social ties. In this way, avatars become socially recognisable presences that substitute physical corporeality while sustaining relational significance in the metaverse.

The categorisation process followed a structured protocol consisting of five analytical phases:

Phase 1 involved the design and development of three analytical matrices—one per informant—each structured into two columns: the first presenting the verbatim discourse, and the second assigning interpretative categories or semantic units that synthesise the social representations articulated by the participants.

Phase 2 focused on assigning meaning to each discursive unit by identifying the most relevant

semantic components within the text, thereby filtering out peripheral content and isolating the core elements of the discourse.

Phase 3 implemented category triangulation. A two-axis matrix was constructed, with the horizontal axis representing the informants and the vertical axis listing the interview prompts. This allowed for the comparison of categorical consistencies across different participant narratives.

Phase 4 introduced an additional interpretive filter to identify overlapping semantic dimensions across informants, ensuring analytical robustness and thematic convergence.

Phase 5 entailed the interpretation of emergent macrocategories. These final constructs represent a synthesis of complex, multilayered meanings that frame the phenomenon under investigation, offering a comprehensive lens through which to understand the digital relational experiences mediated by avatars in the context of a liquid society.

This multi-phased analytical structure ensured methodological rigour and interpretive depth, enabling the emergence of categories that not only reflect users' lived experiences in immersive digital environments but also resonate with the broader theoretical concerns of fluid identity, transitory social bonds, and emotional dynamics characteristic of liquid modernity.

3.2. Findings and Interpretation

The metaverse represents a digital innovation that has reshaped existing paradigms, distinguished by its immersive ecosystems in which users interact through avatars. This virtual realm enables a wide range of experiences, encompassing social interaction, educational activities, and commercial transactions. Simultaneously, it presents substantial challenges concerning privacy and accessibility.

Adopting a qualitative approach and based on the analysis of interviews with key informants, several categories emerged that reflect significant dimensions associated with navigating virtual environments through an avatar. These categories provide insight into how identity, relationality, and expression are configured within the metaverse from the perspective of the participants themselves [29]. The category of digital identity and representation refers to how users construct and personalise their avatars as symbolic extensions of the self. This representation serves as a digital image of the individual, enabling the expression of personal traits that may not find space in everyday life. With respect to anonymity and privacy, informants indicated that avatars offer a sense of protection against exposure,

facilitating freer participation in virtual environments. This form of digital presence allows users to maintain confidentiality and exercise a degree of control over their disclosed identity, thereby generating a perceived sense of security in online interactions [31]. In addition, a category emerged linked to creative and personal expression, wherein the avatar functions as a medium for aesthetic exploration of personality, preferences, and emotions. Participants emphasised the opportunity to experiment with different identities, roles, and styles, contributing to a more open and flexible process of self-exploration within these environments.

Social interaction and participation in virtual communities emerged as another prominent category. Users recounted social experiences that transcended physical boundaries, facilitated by their avatars in environments such as video games, forums, educational platforms, and social networks. These interactions enable the formation of meaningful bonds and foster a sense of belonging within like-minded communities, thereby redefining traditional notions of proximity and companionship. Regarding interaction with others through virtual environments, informants described a wide range of

immersive experiences – digital events, explorations of virtual worlds, and group dynamics – that enriched their emotional and relational lives beyond the constraints of physical space [33].

Another category to emerge was the overcoming of personal limitations. Participants acknowledged that the use of avatars could alleviate difficulties associated with social anxiety, insecurity, or physical impairments. This form of digital mediation allowed them to engage in interpersonal connections and access spaces that they might otherwise avoid or find inaccessible in the physical world. Closely related to this was the category of wellbeing, understood as the subjective pleasure derived from interacting through one's avatar [34]. Users described feelings of joy, satisfaction, and positive escapism associated with their time spent in the metaverse, underscoring the emotional impact these virtual spaces can exert on their inhabitants. Taken together, these categories reveal the complexity of the psychosocial processes that are activated when inhabiting virtual worlds through avatars. The following figure provides a visual synthesis of these dimensions, offering a comprehensive overview of the emerging forms of subjectivity, relationality, and self-expression within cyberspace.

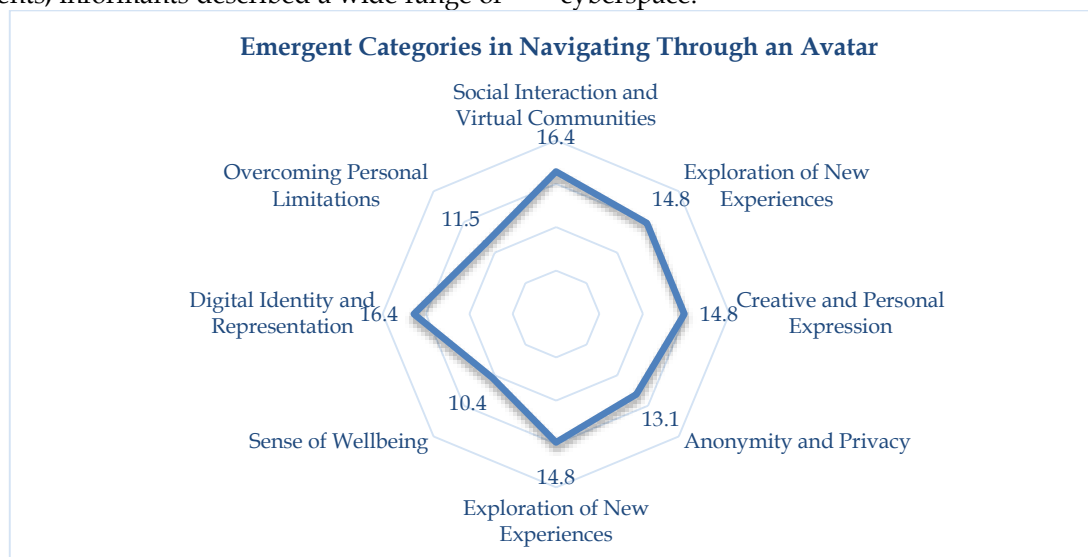


Figure 1: Categories Shows the Complexity of Psychosocial Processes in Virtual Worlds through Avatars.
Author's own elaboration (2025).

The figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of key categories emerging from the qualitative analysis of user experiences within the metaverse, specifically focusing on the role of avatars as mediators of interaction. Social interaction and virtual community engagement emerged as the most prominent category (16.4 %), indicating that interpersonal connectivity remains central to users' digital engagements. This is closely followed by both

the exploration of new experiences (14.8 %) and creative and personal expression (14.8 %), which reflect users' interest in aesthetic experimentation and identity play within immersive environments.

Anonymity and privacy (13.1 %) and sense of wellbeing (10.4 %) also feature prominently, underscoring the importance of emotional security and personal freedom in digital self-representation. The dimension of digital identity and representation,

representing 11.5 %, highlights the avatar's symbolic function as an extension of the self. Overcoming personal limitations (11.5 %) suggests that the metaverse is perceived as a space of empowerment, particularly for users navigating social or psychological constraints in physical settings.

Altogether, these categories demonstrate that the metaverse operates not merely as a platform for communication, but as a multifunctional environment where affective, social, identity-related, and cognitive dimensions converge. The avatar thus emerges as a pivotal medium that not only facilitates interaction but redefines the ways in which individuals represent themselves, form relationships, and project their identities within a liquid society increasingly shaped by digital dynamics.

In this way, the metaverse is configured as a complex ecosystem where various key categories converge to define both its scope and transformative potential. In terms of social interaction, it enables users to communicate in real time and to build relationships through avatars, thereby enriching relational experiences within virtual environments [14]. From an economic perspective, the metaverse fosters innovative models based on the exchange of digital goods and decentralised systems, opening new avenues for entrepreneurship and the creation of emerging markets. In the educational sphere, it facilitates immersive experiences that are revolutionising traditional pedagogical methods and enhancing professional development in specialised fields such as healthcare [12].

Its operation is sustained by advanced technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and blockchain, all of which enable highly complex interactive environments [15]. Nevertheless, this landscape also presents significant challenges, particularly the imperative to ensure equitable access and to address, with ethical responsibility, concerns related to privacy and the protection of personal data [13]. Based on the aforementioned information and the theoretical framework developed by García-Valdecasas [15], concerning liquid modernity, several emergent categories have been identified through the analysis of the metaverse. The most salient of these is the fluidity and instability of identity. Participants described how, within the metaverse, identity does not appear as a fixed attribute, but rather as a mutable, dynamic, and adaptive construct. The ability to assume multiple forms, styles, and roles reflects a continuous process of reinvention of the digital self, wherein the notion

of a singular or coherent identity dissolves in the face of the environment's inherent flexibility.

With regard to interpersonal relationships, informants indicated that these tend to be volatile and transient, characterised by a superficiality that impedes the formation of lasting bonds. The category of social tie volatility captures this perception, whereby the dynamic nature of the metaverse often prevents the consolidation of meaningful relationships, accentuating the fleeting and fragmented nature of encounters with others. A recurring experience identified was one of alienation and emotional disconnection. Users described subjective feelings of detachment—a sense of being present in a space saturated with stimuli yet devoid of stable emotional or symbolic anchors. This disconnection was linked to the difficulty of locating consistent points of reference within an environment perceived as fragmented, chaotic, and at times emotionally barren.

The category of experiential fragmentation refers to the way in which interactions within the metaverse are often experienced as isolated episodes, lacking narrative continuity or depth. Testimonies revealed that the construction of a coherent personal experience is hindered by the multiplicity of scenarios, the brevity of interactions, and the limited consistency in social dynamics, resulting in a persistent sense of discontinuity. A transversal category identified by participants was that of the metaverse as a reflection of liquid modernity. Their accounts acknowledged that the social dynamics present in virtual environments reproduce the core patterns of contemporary life: instability, constant adaptation, absence of certainty, and ongoing transformation. In this regard, the metaverse is not perceived as separate from reality, but rather as an expanded projection of its most profound logics.

These categories together articulate a critical reading of the ways in which individuals inhabit and relate within digital environments, revealing not only expressive and creative opportunities, but also structural tensions that challenge the robustness of identity, affective bonds, and subjective experience in the era of liquid virtuality. In light of the theoretical frameworks explored throughout this study, the emergence of the metaverse constitutes a turning point in the evolution of contemporary communicative practices. As a three-dimensional and immersive digital environment, it not only introduces novel technological affordances but also profoundly reshapes how individuals relate, construct meaning, and participate socially. Interaction increasingly shifts from two-dimensional

media to shared virtual spaces, rendering communication more sensorial, participatory, and situated.

This transformation compels a rethinking of traditional paradigms of mediation, language, and symbolic representation, paving the way for new modalities of presence, community, and identity. The integration of personalised avatars enables users to creatively express the self, transcending physical embodiment and fostering a more dynamic and emotionally engaged mode of communication. By facilitating intercultural exchanges and geographically unbound collaboration, the metaverse promotes transnational communities grounded in shared affinities and goals. Such environments expand the performative and experiential dimensions of communication, where users co-create symbolic spaces and engage in real-time social interaction. The response from media systems has been to develop immersive formats that turn audiences into active participants. However, this transformation also raises pressing concerns about digital governance, data protection, ethical use, and equitable access.

Ultimately, the metaverse represents a transformative shift in how communication, interaction, and information consumption are conceived. As this technology becomes increasingly accessible, its influence is expected to grow—necessitating frameworks that prioritise human dignity, emotional wellbeing, and responsible innovation. Within the context of the metaverse and immersive digital environments, the use of avatars not only redefines the way individuals interact but also gives rise to new forms of identity, communication, and social presence. Navigating through an avatar brings forth key categories that illuminate how individuals construct and experience their digital selves. These categories encompass critical dimensions such as digital identity and representation, anonymity and privacy, as well as creative and personal expression. Moreover, avatars facilitate complex dynamics of social interaction, encourage the formation of virtual communities, and allow relationships to be explored through novel sensory and emotional perspectives. These environments also offer opportunities to overcome personal limitations and promote a subjective sense of wellbeing by providing safe, adaptable, and potentially therapeutic spaces. Each of these categories is explored below to illustrate how they shape user experience.

Similarly, through interpretative analysis of the interviews conducted, a set of categories was

identified that captures how users perceive and assign meaning to their participation in virtual environments within a society characterised by fluidity, transience, and constant transformation. These categories help elucidate the tensions and challenges embedded within digital relationships and identities in the metaverse, positioning it as a space that both reproduces and amplifies the conditions intrinsic to liquid modernity.

4. DISCUSSION

It is of paramount importance to recognise that, while the metaverse presents innovative and ostensibly advantageous opportunities for the construction and enhancement of interpersonal relationships, it also introduces a range of structural, emotional, and ethical challenges that must not be overlooked. The promise of immersive interaction, global accessibility, and expressive freedom within three-dimensional virtual environments must be critically assessed in relation to the inherent limitations of these technologies. Although the virtualisation of human connections expands the possibilities for social engagement, it can also give rise to forms of interaction marked by fragmentation, superficiality, and emotional immediacy—phenomena that are exacerbated within a liquid society, where, as Bauman asserts, stability and enduring commitment have become increasingly rare.

From this perspective, it is imperative to maintain a healthy balance between digital immersion and relational experience grounded in the physical world. This entails not only the conscious self-regulation of the time and intensity invested in virtual platforms but also a critical examination of the modes of representation, identity, and connection that are projected and reproduced within such environments. While interaction in the metaverse enables new forms of presence and expression, it does not replace the sensory, emotional, and ethical dimensions inherent to direct human contact. This reality calls for a reflective and discerning stance on the scope and limitations of virtual engagement [17].

Moreover, interacting within the metaverse can be an enriching experience, provided it is grounded in a balanced relational perspective and that digital connections are complemented by tangible, situated relationships. Acknowledging that relationships formed through avatars do not inherently guarantee emotional depth or authenticity allows for the establishment of more realistic expectations and helps prevent distortions in the perception of intimacy or attachment [28]. In this regard, the

development of robust communicative competencies, empathetic understanding of others, and the capacity to critically interpret the dynamics of the virtual environment are essential factors for fostering meaningful and sustainable connections – both in the digital realm and beyond.

Ultimately, if the metaverse is understood as an extension—rather than a replacement—of human relational experience, it becomes possible to harness its potential without abandoning the core principles of interpersonal communication. This requires the promotion of critical digital literacy that enables users to navigate between virtual interaction and real life without losing sight of relational ethics, affective responsibility, and the recognition of the other as a fully realised subject beyond their digital representation. Only through such an integrated understanding can a virtuous relationship between technology and humanity be cultivated—where the metaverse serves as a relational complement, not a substitute, for the richness and complexity of real human bonds.

5. CONCLUSION

The convergence of social networks and the metaverse is redefining the foundations of contemporary communication, dissolving spatial and temporal boundaries and giving rise to immersive experiences that prioritise active and

emotional participation. This integration constitutes a new communicative paradigm—one that transcends the two-dimensional logic of the screen and engages symbolic embodiment within shared digital environments. However, this transformation also reveals the underlying tensions of the liquid society described by Bauman, wherein the ease with which relationships are established and dissolved in virtual contexts undermines the construction of authentic and enduring bonds, fostering ephemeral, adaptive, and emotionally unstable connections.

While the metaverse offers novel opportunities for social engagement and identity expression, it demands a critical reflection on the quality of the relational ties it fosters and their psychological implications. Prolonged hyperconnectivity may lead to anxiety, dissociation, or frustration, particularly among emotionally vulnerable individuals. Accordingly, it is essential not only to consider the communicative potential of such environments but also to account for their affective impact. The findings of this study suggest that interpersonal relationships within the metaverse reflect liquid dynamics, characterised by idealised self-representations and emotional fragmentation. It is therefore crucial to promote communicative competence, ethical awareness, and emotional literacy in order to cultivate meaningful and sustainable interpersonal connections within immersive digital settings.

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