Chapter 46
Virtual Worlds as Marketing Environments: The Case of Second Life

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Recent years have demonstrated how virtual worlds as entertainment and business grounds can prosper. They offer users the ability to take part in e-collaborations in gaming environments such as a Second Life and World of Warcraft. In addition, these environments offer researchers the opportunity to study the potentials of e-collaboration and e-commerce in virtual and gaming environments (Kock 2008). Virtual worlds and virtual communities can be a valid ground of business implementations and economic trials, as they reduce barriers to experimentation (Atlas 2008) and have changed not only the traditional process of trading but also the way that consumers and companies interact and communicate (Ozuem et al. 2008). Moreover, in marketing terms, "virtual worlds like Second Life are rapidly changing the brand marketing mix. Although it is an exciting time to be engaged in brand marketing given the new opportunities, it is also one fraught with uncertainty" (Combinedstory, DMD New York, Market Truths, 2007).

Second Life is just an example of the virtual communities that include everything from massive multiplayer online role-playing games (also known as MMORPGs) to virtual worlds like Second Life (Spaulding 2010). Jin and Bolebruch (2010, p. 3) refer to it as "a form of advergaming", a word that argues the importance of advertising in the actual game, and designates the consequence of marketing communications and brand management.

Literature has shed light upon the use of marketing strategies over the Internet, but has not explored in depth the reasons behind the acceptance or failure of specific types of business in the virtual worlds (Spaulding 2010) and how these special communities, that have their own culture, values and expectations, accept the companies' value proposition. This research aims at addressing this gap, by emphasizing the consumers' or gamers' perspective, and how these potential real-life customers experience the Second Life offer by the firms that are active in virtual world platforms.

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The role of virtual goods in virtual worlds has been argued extensively; some academics, as Martin (2008), insists on the symbolic value of purchasing or exchanging virtual goods among avatars, as virtual shopping is forming a widespread consumerism, due to the fact that they do not meet the users' immediate needs. Park et al. (2008) formed an academic model of brand equity in this virtual environment, based on this statement, which links the environment and business affordances to enhance the flow state in order to increase perceived brand equity.

However, as Park et al. (2008) state, there is relatively little research in identifying a full and comprehensive list of all affordances that may help businesses in enhancing an experience flow of customers and avatars, in order to increase the perceived brand equity specifically in virtual communities. Arakji and Lang (2008, pp. 215) note that real business should realize that "virtual worlds are more than just another marketing channel for real world products". These Internet-based simulated environments that imitate the real world (Hua and Haughton 2009) are excellent online shopping environments that may enhance brand marketing through "physical presence in 3D interface" (Jin and Bolebruch 2010, p. 2).

The evolution of the Internet and hence the evolution of virtual worlds has created new standards in the human interaction as well as the business growth. Halvorson (2010) presents the evolution of virtual worlds as follows (Fig. 46.1, Halvorson 2010, p. 9):

Halvorson (2010) argues that the virtual environment phenomenon has risen after the second phase of the digital world, when the revolution on the Internet begun. However, Wood (2011) states that the virtual environments have existed since the launch of the Internet, circa 1985, when multi-user dungeons, an online virtual game, started using computer graphics to represent the virtual reality and its payers.

TECHNOLOGY			INNOVATIONS
	Computer		Digital Age
Stage 1	Games	PC	Graphical User Interface
Stage 2	Virtual Reality	Internet	E-mail
		WEB 1.0	Websites
Stage 3	MMOG		VIRTUAL WORLDS including Second Life
	UCOVE		
Stage 4		WEB 2.0	Social Media, APP
Stage 5		WEB 3.0	Semantic Web
Stage 6		WEB 4.0	Virtual Reality Interface

MMOG: Massive Multiplayer Online Games, UCOVE: User Created Online Virtual Environments

Fig. 46.1 Evolution of virtual worlds (Halvorson 2010)

Wood (2011) is giving several examples of companies that are successful in Second Life and explains that the corporate world is joining the virtual gaming experience for the main reason of reaching out to their consumers; since the digital environment is more helpful in measuring the marketing effectiveness, companies take advantage of it. In addition, in a world that users find it easier to understand, companies create foster relationships with them, interact more easily and comprehend their needs, present a great opportunity for business and play an important role for marketing (Wood 2011).

46.1   Marketplaces and Metaverses

There is no doubt, however, that these Internet-based interactive marketplaces have created new forms of social communication and identity formation. Virtual communities in any form of their presence in the cybermarketscape—identified by Venkatesh (1998, p. 13) at their early appearance as "a public space, a community space, as well as a private space"—can be influenced by businesses and deliver value to the new market created by avatars. These synthetic worlds are cultivating and establishing advanced in-world economics by offering a prospective ground to users in order to develop virtual economies with their own currency and virtual business activities (Castronova 2005), that are known as virtual commerce or v-commerce (Atlas 2008; Arakji and Lang 2008; Spaulding 2010; Teigland 2010). Papagiannidis et al. (2008, p. 476) have researched this evolution of traditional in-store commerce to electronic trade and have concluded to their research about how this electronic transaction has evolved to the worlds of metaverses, "a phrase first used in Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash,* in order to describe how a virtual reality-based Internet might evolve in the future".

A definition that Cascio et al. (2007, p. 4) give for the metaverse is "the convergence of (1) virtually enhanced physical reality and (2) physically persistent virtual space. It is a fusion of both, while allowing users to experience it as either". In other words, the metaverse is exactly the usage of 3D tools that lead to the visualisation of the virtual worlds for the user and create interaction among the community. Papagiannidis (2008) refers to the rise of the metaverse by noticing that it is materialised in MMORPGs, which stimulate the user's creativity and self-expression by giving the player the freedom to create the representative character that he/she desires.

46.2   Virtual Environments and Business

Cagnina and Poian (2007), in their study, try to categorize companies that are active in virtual worlds, according to the nature of their business in these environments. The first category is real-life companies who have joined virtual worlds in order to expand their real value and coordination mechanisms mainly by providing support

to users. The second category are those companies who are real-life based but use all potentials of the virtual worlds and their communities, including applications and web tools, while they provide products and services especially developed for the Second Life residents. The third and last category consists of companies who are Second Life based, and they are fully dependent on the provider's platform. They use the Second Life Grid, in other worlds, the open-source viewer code, as their programming language, and are fully using the potentials of the metaverse shops and applications in order to do business with the residents, interact and communicate effectively with them, while collecting their data in order to enhance their digital presence.

As Tikkanen et al. (2009) highlight, marketing in virtual worlds nowadays is strictly limited to advertising and product placement. However, marketers should take advantage of the potentials of virtual environments, as customer interaction and communication tools, and create a strategy towards customer engagement in order to create value for them in the virtual framework. In response to this position, Messinger et al. (2009) have created a refined typology of virtual communities, based on Porter's typology of 2004. They suggest a number of questions in the virtual reality context, including the areas of business, advertising, market research in virtual worlds and marketing management. While replying to these questions, they have actually reformed Porter's five Ps of the virtual world marketing, which are purpose, place, platform, population and profit model, by adding five new elements in order to create more accurate and reliable results for the companies. These new questions that are added to Porter's Ps are "for what purpose", "where", "how", "who" and "how much".

The matter of brand loyalty, customer engagement and the value proposition from the organization's part to the customer—or in the case of virtual environments, to the interactive user—is discussed in Spaulding's research (2010), in the part of the marketing application to virtual reality. In interest-oriented communities, for example, brand loyalty can be effectively achieved through obtaining objective and reliable information, when it is needed. On the other hand, the author concludes that in fantasy-oriented communities, like Second Life, brand loyalty needs to be examined more closely, as it is not impossible to happen. However, it is widely highlighted that virtual realities like Second Life are used from businesses in order to be used as advertising and product placement environments, which has a negative effect on the community (Spaulding 2010; Tikkanen et al. 2009).

Literature has shown the progress and development of social behaviour over time in virtual communities like Second Life (Harris et al. 2009) and has mapped the demographics of virtual worlds (Spence 2008; Wyld 2010), proving, among others, that people under the age of 35 shape almost 60 % of the active users' population pie and that UK is the third country with most active avatars in the world (Linden Labs 2008). A reflection on the size, shape and form of virtual communities (Spence 2008) will help to discover all potential marketing prospective and target groups in which organizations wish to create brand awareness. Predominantly, what has been found in this research is that most of the functions in virtual worlds are focused on

socialization and chatting, and on these grounds, we can make a case of Kaplan and Haelein's (2009) argument that virtual worlds are first and foremost social networks used as the new social media. In addition, Spence's research in 2008 indicated that almost 60 % of the projects that he examined did not follow the strict definition of virtual worlds and gaming environments; what can be assumed from this fact is that companies can work their way in virtual reality, by using several communities provided from the emerging Web 3.0. These virtual communities are well presented by Spaulding (2010), after his theory on social contracts in virtual communities, as first presented by Rousseau in 1762, and his argument that in social contracts of that matter, trust is the most important factor among virtual community users.

46.3   Consumerism, Virtual Goods and Social Behaviour in Virtual Worlds

Consumerism in virtual communities has also been discussed (Dechow 2008), while findings have publicized that in some cases the "easy owning" of Second Life and other massively multiplayer online games can actually raise desire for real-life consumption (Landay 2008). Consumer behaviour in virtual reality environments has been examined thoroughly, as it is the basis for every marketing and business attempt in these worlds. Harris et al. (2009) have analysed this topic using formulas and keeping in mind the demographics of these environments, while Landay in 2008 has suggested several questions that need to be answered before moving forward to actually creating a digital marketing strategy of that kind, like, for example, what does it really mean to consume and own something in a virtual world. The cases of consumerism and commodification—as she calls it—are under the microscope once again. In her own words, "virtual commodification is a process of transforming experience, ideas, and ideas about the self into the quantifiable products of inworld consumer culture, and placing those products in a social context in which people define things in terms of themselves, and themselves in terms of things" (Landay 2008, p. 4), while in Second Life, users and their avatars own nothing more than their appearance and goods. On the other hand, Dechow (2008) defines this consumerism in virtual life by the term surveillance, first introduced by Giddens in 1987, and indicates that this surveillance can be used in favour of the companies in order to create tailored advertising and therefore marketing campaigns to the users of the avatars, since the avatar's history of its presence in the game has already been collected and can be used as data.

Several academics have considered and reviewed the relationship between avatars and users and their social behaviour (Messinger et al. 2008); there are yet several issues on this topic to be examined, such as why do users actively use multiple avatars. The examination of social construction on virtual communities like Second Life proves that marketers in real world can effectively promote their products in such communities by offering items and services that fit this cybermarketscape and

the avatars' special needs and wants (Boostrom 2008). Venkatesh (1998) studied thoroughly the implication of marketing in cyberspaces and cybermarketscapes, and the difference between these two parallel worlds. The definition of the cyberspace environments in their early appearance as both public or community and private spaces (Shields 1996; Turkle 1995; as cited at Venkatesh 1998) has been mentioned above. As technology has moved forward from the researcher's futuristic—at the time—theories and research, nowadays, the cybermarketscape is an emerging and fertile place for business. Boostrom (2008) is encouraging marketers of real world to invest on virtual community support of their products in these spaces, as a better approach of that kind may prove to be successful; however, he insists on creating tailored products, especially for these environments.

The role of virtual goods in virtual worlds has been argued extensively; some academics, such as Martin (2008), exhibits the symbolic value of purchasing or exchanging virtual goods among avatars, due to the fact that they do not meet the users' immediate needs and therefore a widespread consumerism is formed. This statement has already formed in literature a model of brand equity in virtual world environment (Park et al. 2008), which links the environment and business affordances to enhance the flow state in order to increase perceived brand equity. In this matter, Park et al. (2008) quote Schwarz in 2006, which is the historic point when the emerging market of virtual communities started to blossom, by pointing out that the biggest and most precious advantage of businesses being involved in virtual worlds is actually customer engagement, as marketers nowadays cannot easily attract customers' attention. The writers have shown that affordances can be used as an enhancement to customers' experience, as well as the increasing levels of enjoyment and interaction with the actual company. Through this way, brand equity can be increased. These affordances lead to certain control, content and process characteristics for people and therefore users of the virtual experiences that the company is offering, and through these characteristics and by interaction, "various outcomes of flow are possible" (Park et al. 2008, p. 13).

46.4   Real-Life Cash and Linden Dollars

Mitham (2010) presented on his paper the latest Kzero research on virtual goods revenues that reveals one of the fastest growing areas of the Internet. The results show that by 2012, the overall market revenues will reach US$14 billion (Fig. 46.2, Mitham 2010, p. 4).

Mitham (2010) argues that this profit, that derives from real-life cash that gamers are willing to spend online, is a result of the relationship between the user behind the screen and the avatar that lives the Second Life. The research of Messinger et al. (2008) presented that gamers are represented by their avatars when they are logged in to their games. They found that people customize their avatars so that they appear similar to their real lives, while gamers with less confidence in real life create more attractive avatars, spend more money for their customization and sometimes they
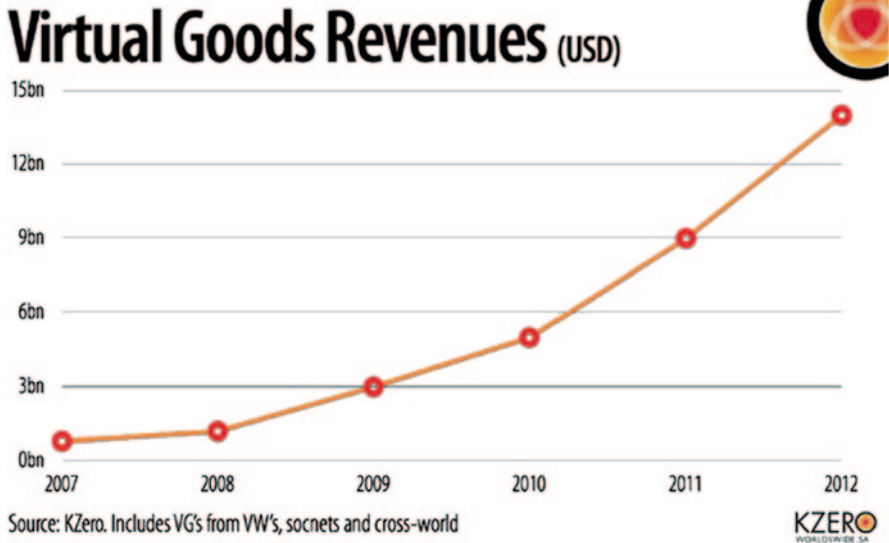
Virtual Goods Revenues (USD)

Fig. 46.2 Virtual goods revenues (Mitham 2010)

even change their gender, when playing online (Messinger et al. 2008). Salomon and Soudoplatoff (2010) present a comment on a blog, which raised the question why people pay for digital goods. The authors in their paper explain that "in our time, people buy digital goods for the same reasons they buy products in real world" (Salomon and Soudoplatoff 2010, pp. 6). They also add that the production cost of a virtual good is very low, and hence the real value of it is the perceived value from the actual user (Salomon and Soudoplatoff 2010).

Real-life economy and virtual economy is a topic that is analysed and researched by Kieger (2010) as well: He argues that entrepreneurship can indeed be favoured in virtual worlds, given the fact that all necessary conditions are fulfilled. Basically, the new technology is giving new sources of revenue, the entrepreneurs are willing to spend real-life currency and the virtual economy is well understood (Kieger 2010). Tasner (2010) adds that in addition to the comfort that virtual worlds can offer, the marketing activities in a digital environment can be measured and the return on investment (ROI) can be effectively tracked. Taylor (2006) adds that players are enlisted as unpaid, yet they form data testing samples for business, since the digital environment is an encouraging measure of analysis, and at the same time, they act as quality assurance for the game itself. Wood (2011) states that gamers are willing to spend real-life currency for their premium memberships, landownership, avatar accessories and enhancement, even tickets to their favourite events and shows.

Taylor (2006) argues that players are producers, and Castronova (2007) reinforces this idea by explaining that the basic structures of the gaming industry conclude to three layers of activity: "development, publication and retail sales" (Castronova 2007, p. 23). In virtual reality, gamers can sell their creations or skills, and on the

other hand, either they can make enough money to cover real-life expenses or the real-life income will be consumed in game expenses (Castronova 2007). Concluding, he insists on the fact that games are designed to make their users happy. The "fun economy", as he calls it on his book (Castronova 2007, Chap. 8, p. 137), can produce real-life profit if it succeeds in offering the users what games are designed to offer: fun.

46.5   Virtual Potentials

However, as Park et al. 2008) state, there has not been relatively sufficient research in identifying a full and comprehensive list of all affordances that may help businesses in enhancing an experience flow of customers and avatars, in order to increase the perceived brand equity specifically in virtual communities. Arakji and Lang (2008, p. 215) note that real business should realize that "virtual worlds are more than just another marketing channel for real world products". According to Castronova (2005, 2007), virtual worlds in their three-dimensional, interactive cyberspace represent their user through an avatar. However, businesses need to establish a more precise and accurate decisive factor for them to follow with and integrate with their real-life business. These Internet-based simulated environments that imitate the real world (Hua and Haughton 2009) are excellent online shopping environments that may enhance brand marketing through "physical presence in 3D interface" (Jin and Bolebruch 2010, p. 4). In fact, their research has proved that the vividness and realistic approach of the three-dimensional interactive space such as Second Life "can induce brand–self connection and positively affect brand credibility" through the actual physical presence of the user (Jin and Bolebruch 2010, pp. 9). Shen and Eder (2009a) enhance this idea with their study, by underlying the importance of enjoyment for gamers using the Second Life experience. In fact, marketers and businesses should keep in mind that the Second Life residents are interacting and communicating in the game for their personal pleasure, as this is a game made primarily for fun. Companies should therefore find interesting and engaging experiences for their clients and the game users if they are interested in adopting the virtual world field for business purposes.

46.6   Implications in Marketing

Until recent years, Second Life marketing has been experimental, although Internet advertising was growing fast. According to the German marketing company Komjuniti,[1] almost one third of the companies that were practising marketing activities in Second Life were not satisfied, and 7% claimed that these activities were not influencing positively their brand image or the real-life purchasing behaviour. However, this trend is

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[1] http://grassshackroad.com/second-life-komjuniti-survey.

changing year by year, as the gaming industry is a highly competitive and rewarding field in terms of marketing opportunities; in addition, the gaming industry revenues are growing faster every semester. In the USA alone, in 2010, the virtual goods revenue hit US$1.6 billion.[2] Virtual goods are products and services that do not exist in real life, but their purchase requires real-life currency. On the other hand, companies have not yet established proper virtual world marketing plans and this results to the disappointment of the gamers and users. Particularly in Second Life, residents are claiming that companies only spend money to build their virtual offices in isolation, without trying to offer something valuable to the community, or to try to engage with it (Tikkanen et al. 2009). Even though Tikkanen wrote about these residents' arguments in 2009, a research in virtual blogs can reveal that this tendency is present for most companies until today. Marketers nowadays do not understand that even though virtual worlds and games like Second Life as mediums can reach a large number of people—and hence real-life consumers—because these communities are based in loyalty and trust, they can work as a very effective and engaging tool. Therefore, companies should first understand the values and trust issues that occur in these virtual communities, as well as their demographics that arise from the anonymity, before proceeding to a virtual world marketing plan. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009b) presented the findings of their research on consumer use and customer behaviour in Second Life and showed that Second Life users consider the game and the community in all as "an extension of their Real Life" (Kaplan and Haelein 2009b, p. 99). Gamers are engaging in social and business activities and are building relationships while they are trying to earn money, and in the meantime, they are spending money for purchasing goods and services (Kaplan and Haelein 2009b).

When it comes to marketing activities, gamers are responding after gathering information from the virtual community and their virtual friends, and hence, the decision-making process is a result of word-of-mouth communication. Particularly, de Valck et al. (2009), studied the influence of the virtual communities in the consumer decision-making process and showed that customers are going through seven stages when they want to make a purchase decision: first, they need recognition from the community and then they search for information on the goods they want to purchase. Afterwards, they evaluate with others the alternatives. Then comes the stage of actual purchase and consumption, while after that, they discuss with the rest of the community the experience (post-purchase evaluation), and finally comes the stage of divestment (de Valck et al. 2009, p. 188).

46.7   The Matters of Trust in Virtual World Marketing

For virtual worlds and communities, the matter of trust plays a key role. Fullbrunn et al. (2011) studied the importance of trust and trustworthiness in virtual worlds nowadays, since these worlds are highly important due to their economic significance and the fact that hundreds of millions of users are active and are exchanging

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[2] http://venturebeat.com/2010/01/26/as-farmville-players-buy-little-pink-tractors-u-s-virtual-goods-revenue-is-expected-to-hit−1−6b/.

information every hour. Their experiment gave evidence that, even though the extremely high levels of anonymity in these environments, "a very high degree of trustworthiness seems to indicate that the Second Life population is actively enhancing a cooperative and trustworthy environment" (Fullbrunn et al. 2011, p. 57). Kim et al. argue on this matter by adding "it is directly and indirectly related to other factors such as usefulness, commitment, sense of community and loyalty" (Kim et al. 2009, p. 168).

The second element that is crucial to virtual world marketing is the feeling of comfort and loyalty in a community, hence feeling part of a community and staying engaged to the relationships that the gamer has created (Harris et al. 2009; Park et al. 2008). As mentioned before, virtual worlds and virtual reality are not only a game but also a community in which players interact and engage with each other, while at the same time, they feel as part of a group and ask for information while they are on the decision-making process. Kim et al. agree to this perspective, while the findings of their study show that when a marketer is increasing the sense of community, the chances of using these virtual groups as marketing channels are well enhanced (Kim et al. 2009). This can also be achieved by finding ways of increasing trust levels among the members of these communities (ibid.). Their study has also shown that when a marketer is providing the members with a level of reality, especially when it comes to profit-oriented virtual communities, there has been marked increase in the levels of participation and commitment (ibid.). Spaulding (2010) wrote about the correlation between virtual communities, their own social contracts and the expected trust among the members of the community, in order to create value for business. He argues that since virtual communities have their own culture and expectations and since the matter of trust is more likely a matter of predictability, some business are accepted and some are not. Virtual communities like all communities, real life or not, are subject to social contract, and trust plays a significant role on that (Smith 1999, as cited by Spaulding 2010). Some companies fail to be accepted, because they do not fulfil the requirements of these social contracts and trust. More precisely, virtual communities have created these social contracts to develop in harmony, and behavioural expectations are dictated by the purpose of the community. When they are allowing a person to join this community, they are placing some level of trust on that person that will fulfil the social contract. If that person fails to respond to the requisites of the social contract, then it is removed from the community (Spaulding 2010). This trust can lead to high levels of loyalty, but companies need to engage with gamers and users through the social contracts that they have already created.

46.8   Companies, Business and Marketing in Virtual Worlds

Virtual world residents are very demanding and keep on asking for something new and interesting, exactly the same way real-life consumers behave. One of the reasons why people are logging in to Second Life at first place is to get away from their

own real life, even though these two worlds are strictly connected to each other. As Spaulding (2010) states, Second Life is part of the MMORPGs and part of the fantasy-oriented communities. Residents are allowed to play out their fantasies, as if it is a virtual movie of themselves, while, at the meantime, they are destroying the sense of reality (Spaulding 2010). Principally, one of the most important unwritten rules of the game is that real-life information on the residents cannot be shared from others to the rest of the community, and this way, complete anonymity is secured. In their study, Tikkanen et al. (2009) have indicated several points that companies should adopt or ameliorate in order to have a successful marketing strategy in Second Life. First, companies should have representatives in the virtual offices in order to engage more with customers who want information or goods (Tikkanen et al. 2009). In fact, experience has shown that companies should also consider the time zone differences among all residents in Second Life, as this virtual world is hosting people who live in real life in many different places of the world. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009a) agreed by mentioning that their experiments have shown a strong desire of Second Life residents to find real-life products in the virtual world, and therefore, there is a correlation between these two elements, as well as a willing for purchase. However, some companies believe that by simply creating a virtual store, it will be enough virtual advertisement; Kaplan and Haenlein (2009a) disagree by insisting that setting up a virtual store is not a marketing strategy, as residents need constant attention and strong engagement, like in real life. They add that companies should create events and interesting activities in order to create value to the Second Life residents who are very demanding, and they present the case of Coca-Cola and Dell. Coke in 2007 invited some Second Life guests to the virtual premier of the *Happiness Factory* movie, while Dell launched a few months afterwards a party for its Crystal monitor that was mirroring the real-life event that was happening meanwhile (Kaplan and Haelein 2009a). Therefore, real engagement should be considered from the companies' point of view in order to have a successful virtual marketing campaign.

Second, "virtual world marketing should be integrated with other marketing channels" (Kaplan and Haelein 2009b, p. 65), and more precisely, to engage with customers in and out of the virtual world, like, for example, offering coupons for a discount from their online shop in their website and vice versa. In addition, companies should take into consideration all online tools of social networking and hence promotion and advertising that are offered through the Internet. Finally, companies should be more innovative and interesting when they are dealing with Second Life residents and virtual world users in general. In fact, Tikkanen et al. (2009) present the opinion of many bloggers who state that companies should have something interesting in their locations—virtual places in the game—in order not only to drive traffic in them but also to keep customers' interest.

Recent studies have shown that, similar to real life, Second Life users, according to their demographics, personalities, needs and wants, have different motivations when it comes to purchasing goods or services. The motivation for using Second Life does not correlate directly to particular products that the users are actually purchasing (Shelton 2010). Therefore, the consumer behaviour in virtual environ-

ments is a matter far more complicated than it seems, as it is in fact a world similar to real life, where consuming behaviours are hard to be traced. Lui et al. (2007, p. 78) state that "businesses considering entering 3D virtual worlds should consider the attributes of their products that can be experienced virtually and map out their marketing strategies accordingly".

46.9 Second Life Economics

The relationship between Second Life and real life is considerable, both socially and economically. Castronova (2005, 2007) has made an association between the economies of the virtual world and the physical world, and since economics occur, marketing emerges as well. Zachariasson et al. (2010) have shown that the virtual market structure, as far as marketing and economics are concerned, consists of:

- Money that comes from the real world and goes to the virtual world.
- Transactions within the virtual world that occur with the virtual world currency.
- Influence from the virtual world to the physical world, as previously discussed.
- Relevance to the virtual world transactions that happen only within the real world.

Contrary to other fantasy-oriented games (Spaulding 2010), like the World of Warcraft, Second Life looks like the real world and functions as a parallel world as well, which makes it easier for a marketer to interact with its residents, in addition to creating virtual value for their brand. Furthermore, as mentioned before, Second Life has got its own currency, the Linden dollars, which can be converted in real-life American dollars that have got value for the real world (Cagnina and Poian 2007). Martin (2008) began the discussion about Second Life consumerism and he insisted on the symbolic value of virtual shopping. He argued that a consumerism is formed widely, as the avatars' needs do not meet the immediate users' needs (Martin 2008). However, consumerism in virtual worlds is a reality we cannot ignore, as recent reports reveal the great economic importance of the gaming industry. Mitham (2010) presented the revenues of virtual goods and their importance to modern economy, based on the latest Kzero reports, and he argued the relationship between the real-life user and his or her avatar, when they switch roles and become Second Life gamers. Messinger et al. (2008), Mitham (2010) and Salomon and Soudoplatoff (2010) all insisted on this relationship among avatars and gamers, and discussed the reasons why gamers spend real-life money for purchasing virtual goods. They stated that users need to customize their avatars in a way that they are similar to their real selves (Messinger et al. 2008), while Salomon and Soudoplatoff (2010) through their research showed that consumerism is driving this money to be spent, similarly to real life.

Why people are willing to spend real-life money for purchasing virtual goods in Second Life? Consumerism is the driving force behind the decision of the gamers to spend their real-life money and change them into the virtual currency, Linden

dollars. Gamers like to go shopping and try different things. The gamers themselves also added that it is very important to them to look attractive and to acquire accessories and clothes that can help them enhance their creativity and fantasy. This specific virtual game gives players the opportunity to be what they cannot be in their real lives, and this makes it part of the fun experience. The "fun economy" was discussed by Castronova (2007) as well, and therefore, the findings verify partially his theory. Shen and Eder (2009b) wrote about the idea of the game enjoyment, as they suggested that marketers should bear in mind that the residents of Second Life are using this game for their personal pleasure and fun. Castronova (2007) explained that games are designed to make their users happy, and the more they succeed on their mission, the more they attract people and can be productive as a virtual world and a virtual community. In addition, Wood (2011) stated that gamers are willing to pay real-life cash in order to get land, housing and premium memberships. However, Messigner et al. (2008) argued that users of these games tend to customize their avatars in a way that they can depict their real-life selves, while on the other hand, more timid and less confident people create more attractive avatars. But gamers join the game in order to have the freedom of creation and to be in a fictional world what they cannot be in their real lives. They also tend to spend real-life money in order to acquire the accessories and clothes and avatars that they could not get for free. The big majority of the gamers admit that they have this tendency because they want to differ from other avatars, expose their experience in the game and reveal statements about their personalities, sexuality and abilities. Martin (2008), Park et al. (2008), Mitham (2010), Boostrom (2008) and Harris et al. (2009) argue that the relationship between the avatar and the real self is of extreme importance for the gamers. In fact, an avatar is an "extension of himself or herself". Salomon and Soudoplatoff (2010) concluded that "in our time, people buy virtual goods for the same reasons they buy products in real world with the difference that in Second Life, fantasy is ruling the world".

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