

# Chapter 4

## Reconstruction and Performance of Self Within Virtual Environments

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Virtual environments operate as dynamic social systems in which technological affordances structure self-processes and social relations. Affordances such as visibility, persistence, editability, and scalability enable communication and actively configure how individuals perceive, perform, and internalise aspects of self. Users co-construct their self-concepts within sociotechnical boundaries through mechanisms such as social feedback, algorithmic curation and audience management. These affordances have been shown to amplify reflexivity and self-awareness, whilst introducing pressures of coherence and performativity across contexts. This chapter utilises sociological and cyberpsychological frameworks to propose that virtual environments have the capacity to reconfigure self-organisation processes by integrating identity negotiation into continuous interaction loops between technological design, social norms, and individual cognition. The self is thus understood as a relational, adaptive construct that is subject to continuous reconfiguration by virtual social systems.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Virtual environments operate as dynamic social systems in which technological affordances structure self-processes and social relations. The self, as understood through classical social psychological theories, is recognised as a socially constructed and dynamic entity that is emerging from interpersonal interaction and is shaped by cultural contexts and performed according to situational norms (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In offline contexts, identity is shaped through interpersonal interactions, bodily presence and group-based social norms and dynamics. However, as human interactions shift from face-to-face to digitally mediated environments, with affordances such as visibility, persistence, editability, and scalability enable communication and actively configure how individuals perceive, perform, and internalise aspects of self. Users co-construct their self-concepts within sociotechnical boundaries through mechanisms such as social feedback, algorithmic curation and audience management. These affordances have been shown to amplify reflexivity and self-awareness, whilst introducing pressures of coherence and performativity across contexts. This chapter utilises sociological and cyber-psychological frameworks to propose that virtual environments have the capacity to reconfigure self-organisation processes by integrating identity negotiation into continuous interaction loops between technological design, social norms, and individual cognition. The self is thus understood as a relational, adaptive construct that is subject to continuous reconfiguration by virtual social systems.

The present chapter is theoretical in nature and does not rely on primary data collection. Instead, it draws from peer-reviewed psychological literature, digital sociology, and cyberpsychology, synthesising research across disciplines to offer a conceptual framework for understanding identity in technologically mediated contexts. The information has been sourced from various journal databases, including PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, and adheres to the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition referencing standards.

## **CYBERSPACE AS A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) in recent times, has taken the front stage in human interaction, evolving from simple impersonal e-mails to instant messaging, social media, video conferences, as well as virtual worlds with immersive and embodied interactions, enabling users to interact in environments they aren't physically present in (Schroeder, 2008; Slater & Sanchez-Vives, 2016). The term "cyberspace" is often used while exploring human interactions in the context of virtual environments. Cyberspace is described as a conceptual space where digitally

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