



Does Avatar Use Increase Communicative Events: Girls Yes, Boys No



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Abstract: This paper examines the use of avatars by adolescent chatroom participants and asks the following questions: Does the utilization of an avatar increase the number of communication interactions? Is there a gender difference in interaction levels between and among avatar and non-avatar users? This report looks at preliminary results from data consisting of 2031 posts over 3:03:10 hours. The use of an avatar appears to positively enhance the female's attractiveness to other communication partners at a higher rate than males who use avatars. In light of previous work based on purely text-based asynchronous CMC systems, the finding that females with avatars receive more contact than males with avatars is interesting. Males without avatars receive more contact than females without an avatar and more contact than those using avatars. The preliminary findings in this study are a first step in evaluating the effects of avatar use, as an additional communication channel, in communicative interactions between chat space participants.

Methodology:

Site

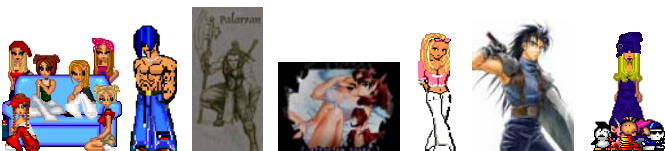
- The adolescent chat space used for this study is part of a chat site consisting of 181 chatrooms, 24 of which are designated for General Chat and populated by adolescents.
- Each room has a capacity of 30 participants.
- The chat site utilized is synchronous HTML based communication. The HTML functionality supports text, graphics, sound, and film.
- Messages are presented as one-way communication and are posted in their entirety.
- The site has a low persistence level, it is not archived.

Room

- One General Chat room was selected for this study based on the consistent use of avatars and the presence of 10 or more participants around the clock.
- The total sample was taken September 1, 2001 with a total of 3:03:10 hours collected.
- The data corpus consists of 2031 public posts.

Content Analysis Coding Scheme

- Presence/Absence of an Avatar
- Gender of the User
- Message addressing structure was analyzed.



Discussion

	Count	%	Response	%
Males without	313	37.7%	434	39.1%
Females without	313	37.7%	385	34.7%
Females with	131	15.8%	199	17.9%
Males with	74	8.9%	91	8.2%
Totals	831		1109	

Table 1

Comparison of Responses Verses No Response

	Respsns	%	No Respsns	%
With Avatar	205	24.7%	924	76.4%
Without Avatar	626	75.3%	285	23.6%
Total	831		1209	

Table 2

With Avatars

	Count	%	Responses	%
Females	131	63.9%	199	68.6%
Males	74	36.1%	91	31.4%
Totals	205		290	

Table 3

Without Avatars

	Count	%	Responses	%
Females	313	50.0%	385	47.0%
Males	313	50.0%	434	53.0%
Totals	626		819	

Table 4

Females

	Count	%	Responses	%
With Avatars	131	29.5%	199	34.1%
Without Avatars	313	70.5%	385	65.9%
Totals	444		584	

Table 5

Males

	Count	%	Responses	%
With Avatars	74	19.1%	91	17.3%
Without Avatars	313	80.9%	434	82.7%
Totals	387		525	

Table 6

Frequency of the Number of Responses												
	N=	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Males without Avatars	313	233	56	16	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Females without Avatars	313	257	43	10	3							
Males with Avatars	74	59	13	2								
Females with Avatars	131	96	14	12	7	1	1					

Table 7

Preliminary Interpretation

- Males without avatars receive more contact than any other category.
- Females with avatars receive more contact than males with avatars.
- Females without avatars received more contact than females without.
- More message posts do not receive response publicly. It is unclear if they receive response at all.
- More messages posted by participants using avatars receive no public response.
- More messages posted by participants not using an avatar receive public response.

