The Identity Expression Behavior between Eastern and Western Gamers Using Stimulated
Digital Fashion

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In early 2020, there was a societal lockdown worldwide due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online or live-streaming video game networks played an influential platform at this point in communication and interaction between people. Different scholars defined *gamification* as a rule-based artificial platform allowing players to engage and interact for quantifiable outcomes and assign values among optional and negotiable activities (Juul, 2003; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). The term "fashion gamification" existed after the collaboration of fashion brands and the video gaming system and is recognized as a marketing strategy applying elements like point scoring and competition to encourage gamers' engagement with a fashion product or related services (Reydar, 2020). The concept of fashion gamification arises by integrating the non-gaming context into gaming elements and accelerating the interaction and engagement of gamers with fashion brands (Wibawa et al., 2020). It is a remarkable concept, shaping and shifting many fashion luxury brands' communication channels to digital platforms during the decline of consumption because of social distancing (Phillips, 2020; Silvestri, 2020).

Animal Crossing - New Horizons, which has sold 38.64 million copies globally as of March 2022 since its release in March 2020 (Statista, 2022), is one of the most popular social simulation video games for fashion communities. The game features customization control, interactivity, and self-expression. The *Animal Crossing: New Horizons (AC: NH)* version on Nintendo Switch supports twelve languages, including Eastern and Western countries. Undoubtedly, this simulation game successfully created a digital interaction experience for the fashion and non-fashion communities under the fashion gamification concept. Gamers can customize, purchase, trade, and showcase their stimulated digital fashion choices when they connect to their friends through the game's internal platform (Yotka, 2020). There are abundant choices of stimulated digital fashion outfits for gamers to dress up for their virtual social lives (Gündüz, 2017). Since AC: NH's communication channel is a global platform, the stimulative digital fashion adopted identifies and symbolizes the gamers' cultural and social identity differences (Akdemir, 2018). For example, some Japanese gamers customized their outfits with a crossover with another online game, *Genshin Impact*, which demonstrates the gamer's cultural and social preferences through the simulation avatar (Landaverde, 2022).

Various real-time socialization happened based on this fashion gamification experience, such as dress code parties, pro-democracy protests, and virtual fashion shows (Yotka, 2020). Gamers experienced the joy of dressing up or styling their avatars through stimulating digital fashion outfits within the virtual gaming platform. They demonstrated aesthetic and sensory perception during the interactive engagement (Silvestri, 2022). The adoption of stimulated

fashion outfits at *AC: NH* then pushes and accelerates digital fashion design collaboration and co-creation between fashion brands and gamers, enhancing innovation possibilities and fashion value, such as the limited collection from Osborne and the esports gamers (Biondi, 2020; Nobre & Ferreira, 2017). Many fashion-related brands and companies, such as Pandora, Gucci Beauty, and Net-A-Porter, have also put their market focus on virtual fashion platforms at *AC: NH* as the appropriate strategy (Grace, 2022) and led *AC: NH* as one of the best-selling global social stimulation video games.

The success of *AC: NH* was mainly regarded as its 'right timing' release during the pandemic lockdown (Khan, 2020). However, the digital social platform provided gamers not only a shelter to escape from the pandemic but also the experience of virtual real-life memories to hang out with friends during different ceremonies and events (Zhu, 2020). Stimulated digital fashion was vital in illustrating the gamers' identities during these social connections. Many scholars have found that gamers use an avatar image to reflect and express their perspectives (Axelsson, 2002; Vasalou & Joinson, 2009). Unlikely, different arguments indicate that informative and narrative elements of stimulated digital fashion outfits can depict gamers' identities by who they may be, want to be, or pretend to be (Di Summa-Knoop, 2018). Therefore, under the virtual expression platform at *Animal Crossing: New Horizon*, gamers who can customize their gender and outlook through stimulated digital fashion have more potential and freedom to make choices and decisions based on their preferences and cultural backgrounds. Even though there has been a decline in AC: NH gamers after the pandemic, the fashion gamification concept developed by the game-inspired fashion brands, such as the digital experience provided by Balenciaga on Earth Day in 2023, allowed their customers to access an augmented reality universe to learn the caring of the ecosystem in order to protect the ecosystem with latest strategies after analysis (NSS, 2023).

Moreover, with the help of universal settings in *AC: NH*, potential fashion customers are not divided by geographical location but by a unified gaming space setting. Therefore, many investigations on stimulation games focus on gamers as a whole, but none of the studies compare the differences in self-identification of gamers between Eastern and Western countries (Di Summa-Knoop, 2018; Vasalou & Joinson, 2009). However, geographical and cultural differences could affect digital fashion choices in identity expressions, such as the difference in silhouette, texture, colors, and aesthetic acceptance. An investigation of the impact of culture on digital fashion choices could sustain the fashion gamification concept and provide more opportunities for the fashion industry.

In the post-pandemic era, the Metaverse phenomenon was proclaimed by industry experts as a potential marketing opportunity for digital fashion through augmented and/or virtual reality in recovering different sustainability concerns in the digital production process (Stock, 2022). Moreover, there are various new opportunities for business models in virtual clothing, which were expected to be worn in virtual environments, such as online video games, which are popular in the growing global digital fashion market (Kumar, 2023). Thus, there is a need to investigate the differences in identity expression behavior between Eastern and Western Gamers using Stimulated Digital Fashion.

An exploratory study was suggested for future Fresearch to identify the virtual identity expression between online gamers in Eastern and Western countries in using stimulated digital fashion. Interview-based qualitative research could help to understand the needs, reasons, experiences, and further insights of online gamers to foster and sustain the fashion gamification concept in the fashion industry globally. Both online gamers and fashion professionals' insights should be considered for the credibility of the insights collected. Furthermore, theoretical frameworks from Uses and Gratification Theory and the Theory of Cultural Values were recommended to explain and compare the gamers' identity expression influenced by Eastern and Western cultural differences.
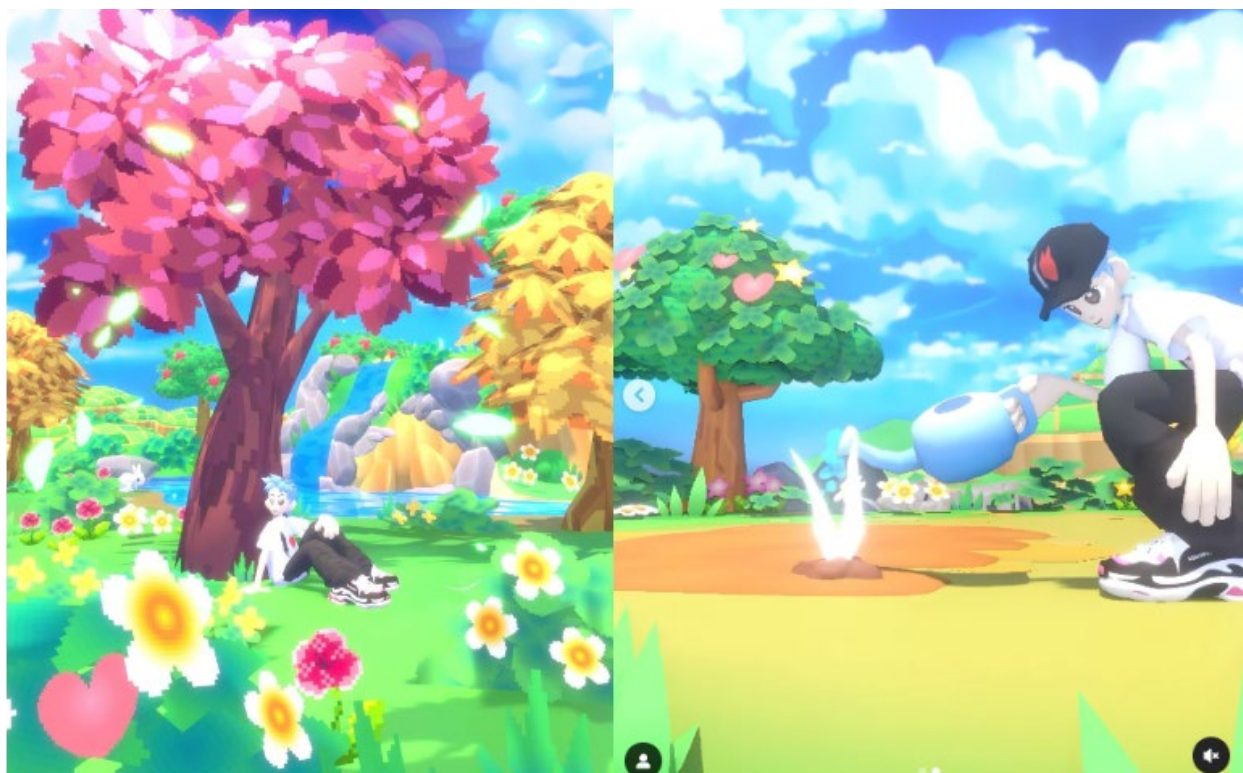

Figure 1a & b. The digital fashion experience was developed by Balenciaga for Earth Day 2023 in the post-pandemic era.

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