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Harassment in the Metaverse: A Systematic Review of Immersive Virtual Environments, Harms and Governance Challenges

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1 Abstract

The fast growth of immersive virtual worlds, otherwise known as the Metaverse, has redefined digital interaction where users can interact in virtual worlds through embodied avatars. These platforms, as much as they are innovative, creative and offer economic opportunities, have also led to other forms of harassment that are disrupting the current legal frameworks of operation. There have been rampant acts of sexual harassment, virtual assault, stalking, hate speech and mental intimidation which are prevalent throughout all virtual reality platforms and there have been serious concerns regarding consent, dignity, bodily autonomy and mental health. A systematic legal investigation into the topic of harassment in the Metaverse is presented in this paper, which will focus on the type of damages that users face, the sufficiency of both domestic and international laws, governance problems in transnational and decentralized virtual space. The study estimates by examining statutory provisions, judicial interpretations, platform policies and new regulatory discussions that the existing legal frameworks cannot be used to effectively solve immersive digital harms. The paper concludes by giving normative legal principles and governance reforms that will guarantee accountability, user protection and human rights adherence in the developing Metaverse ecosystem.

Keywords: Metaverse, Virtual Harassment, Cyber Law, Digital Governance, Human Rights, BNS 2023

1.2.2 Introduction

The necessity of the rapid development of digital technologies has fundamentally changed the essence of human relationship, social being and legal control. Over the recent past, immersive virtual worlds that are collectively referred to as the Metaverse have become a novel vanguard of social, economic and cultural activity. The Metaverse allows real-time, embodied communication by digital avatars in virtual spaces that are persistent due to the use of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence and blockchain infrastructures. In contrast to traditional internet-based products, which use text or two-dimensional visual communication as the main means, immersive environments replicate the notion of presence, proximity and physical movement, thus giving the user the impression that what they are engaging with is psychologically real. Even though these advancements have been largely hailed by their capability of causing a communication revolution, education, entertainment and business, they have also spawned complicated legal issues especially concerning harassment and abuse in online environments. Online harassment in the Metaverse is a major step forward of the other types of misbehavior on the Internet. With immersive environments, users are not passive consumers of content they are instead engaging digitally in a body and are being spatially engaged with others as well as violated in a way that is largely similar to real-life interactions. Cases of virtual sexual harassment, non-consensual touching of the avatars, stalking, verbal abuse, hate speech and coordinated intimidation have brought to the fore some serious issues about user safety and psychological well being. Legally, such occurrences put the distinction between physical and virtual harm into question and force lawmakers and jurists to rethink such fundamental principles like consent, autonomy over the body, dignity and personal safety. The law that has traditionally been based on physically observable, territorially bounded behavior now has to face the types of harm that take place within deterritorialized, digitally constructed spaces, but has physical emotional and psychological effects. The urgency of the problem is increased by the fact that harassment within the context of immersive virtual environment is disproportionately high in the case of women, children and marginalized communities. Research and end user reports show gender-based harassment and sexualized abuse is widespread on virtual reality platforms, and tends



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to replicate and increase offline power dynamics. This casts important doubts on equality, non-discrimination and the right to live with dignity in digital spaces. In case the Metaverse has to exist as the continuation of the social life, as opposed to the fictional world of its own, then the harms that one experiences in the former will have to be discussed as the socially and legally relevant. The inability to work on such harms will lead to the normalization of violence and exclusion in new digital societies at the expense of the protective role of law in the protection of basic rights. Current legal systems, however, seem to be poorly placed to react to this problem. Majority of the cyber statutes and criminal acts were intended to control previous kinds of digital malpractices, including electronic fraud, identity theft, cyberstalking or the distribution of obscene content. Such laws generally define harm using the concept of data abuse, content of communications, or monetary damage, but not realized experience. This means that immersive harassment has been known to be within grey areas of the law, with neither the traditional criminal law nor cyber law providing direct solutions. An example is that the physical contact requirement of sexual offence jurisprudence, or the focus on written or visual communication of such in the cyber harassment statutes, restrict the application to spatially practiced virtual abuse. Procedural challenges Decisions on content removal, user bans, or reporting processes are usually discretionary and unequal, and victims have very few methods of redress. In addition to this, privatization of the governance also creates normative issues about delegation of quasi-judicial powers to corporate bodies whose main motive might not be in support of human rights protection.

Literature Review

Tiwari, Jadamba and Hsu (2025)¹, One of the latest and original scholarly studies of governance failure and harms in immersive virtual worlds is in their peer-reviewed article *Metaverse Policing: A Systematic Literature Review of Challenges and Recommendations*, published in *Computers in Human Behavior* (Elsevier). The authors review the current research related to misconduct in the metaverse, such as harassment, sexual abuse, stalking, identity-based intimidation and psychological harm of embodied interactions of avatars, in a structured manner. Their conceptualization of the metaverse is a persistent and immersive transnational digital environment in which the traditional models of law enforcement are not much use in the face of anonymity, jurisdictional fragmentation and platform-mediated evidence systems. Their discussion reveals that harassment within immersive contexts can be actually both psychologically and emotionally harmful, just as abusive in the real world, and is however, poorly covered through current criminal and cyber law provisions.

Rigotti and Malgieri (2024)², their authoritative report on legal research *Sexual Violence and Harassment in the Metaverse: A New Manifestation of Gender-Based Harms* is one of the most comprehensive and original attempts to analyze through the prism of human rights and legal governance the issue of harassment in immersive virtual environments. The authors brainstorm the metaverse as a digital world that is immersive, persistent and avatar-centered and which fundamentally changes the experience of harm, perception and regulation of the same. They use the international human rights law, the feminist theoretical approach to law, and the cyber law literature, which contributes to the notion that harassment in the metaverse is not a new and specific phenomenon but an extension of gender-based violence. This research contextualizes virtual harassment as a part of the wider issue of online, technology-mediated violence against women, which focuses on the fact that immersive technologies heighten psychological presence and embodiment, thus increasing the magnitude of harm even without the need of any physical interaction.

Karácsony (2023)³, in his academic paper *Are Virtual Persons (Avatars) Subject to Human Rights Protection? Should They Be?*, presents an intense juridical and human-rights-driven analysis of actions that take place in immersive virtual spaces, and, specifically, harassment, stalking and dignity violation in the metaverse. The author views the metaverse as a continuum of an avatar-driven digital environment that delivers users a sense of immersion with a strong attachment to their real-life identity and psychological health. He states that even though

¹ Tiwari, R., Jadamba, S., & Hsu, C. (2025). Metaverse policing: A systematic literature review of challenges and recommendations. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 145, 107708.

² Malgieri, G., & Rigotti, G. (2024). Sexual violence and harassment in the metaverse: A new manifestation of gender-based harms. *Human Rights Law Review*, 24(1), 1–29.

³ Karácsony, A. (2023). Are virtual persons (avatars) subject to human rights protection? *International Journal of Law and Information Technology*, 31(2), 112–134.



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avatars are not legal entities per se, they act as digital alter ego via which human subjects claim identity, personality and social presence. As a result, any damages done to avatars e.g. harassment, intrusion to personal space or non-consensual sexualized behavior can either directly or indirectly breach the core rights of the human users who own it.

Akgün and Atıcı (2022)⁴, their meta-analytical and meta-thematic research published in Participatory Educational Research, investigate the impacts and nature of immersive virtual reality environments and offer an essential conceptual base of the harm in the metaverse. Their results confirm that immersive VR is inherently interactive, first-person and embodied, mediated predominantly with the head-mounted displays and that the high levels of immersion contribute greatly to the psychological presence of the users. This observation holds directly legal relevance to metaverse harassment studies, since the feeling of presence is the reason why harmful behavior within an immersive virtual environment like spatial intimidation, stalking, or sexually intrusive behavior can generate actual emotional distress, fear and psychological harm even in the absence of a physical interaction. The authors also admit that immersive environments increase affective and behavioral reactions and, thus, can produce something negative, such as anxiety and discomfort, and thus understand the predictable risks involved in these technologies. Despite the fact that the research is set in an educational setting, its fundamental theoretical input that immersive virtual space crosses the line between virtual communication and experience offers a solid academic foundation to project criminal law, cyber law and human rights studies on harassment in the metaverse.

Zaki, Santo and Hendra (2022)⁵, they discuss in their academic paper International Labour Law Perspectives on the Metaverse the metaverse as a post-reality, immersive experience combining real world physical reality with digital virtual reality with the help of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and extended reality (XR). They imagine the metaverse as a continuous multi-user environment where people can communicate with each other via avatars, and thus the boundary between the real and virtual social relations diminishes. Legally, the authors believe that like this kind of immersive environment interferes with conventional legal categories that are founded on territoriality, physical presence, and identifiable actors. In their analysis, they point out that as work, social interaction and identity expression transpire more via avatars, the current legal frameworks especially in the labour and the private international law fail to effectively control the behaviour. This observation can be directly applied to the research on metaverse harassment, since the act of harassment, intimidation, or abuse via avatars can produce real psychological and dignity based harm, but it may be not covered by the traditional definitions of such in the physical space.

Zaki et al. (2022)⁶ additionally highlight that virtual interaction based on immersion and avatars escalates the psychosocial risks, such as cyberbullying, harassment and abusive behavior in virtual workplaces. According to the authors, the introduction of AI-based surveillance tools, algorithms surveillance, and avatar mediation are able to replicate or even intensify unhealthy workplace relationships in virtual offices. Notably, they note that the current anti-harassment and anti-discrimination statutes especially those that do not strictly apply to physical workplaces can be applied to virtual spaces, thus justifying that the legal relevance of the physical workplace harassment standards to the metaverse.

Bower and Jong (2020)⁷, in their peer-reviewed article Immersive Virtual Reality in Education, published in the British Journal of Educational Technology, offers an authoritative and original scholarly basis of comprehending the legal applicability of immersive virtual setting. The authors theorize about immersive virtual reality (IVR), which refers to a technology, providing a high degree of presence, and thus allowing the user to feel and behave as though physically located in a virtual environment created by the computer. They underline that IVR is defined by a first-person interaction, and real-time responsiveness and embodied interaction, which is usually mediated by head-mounted displays and immersive systems. This idea is essential to legal research on the metaverse since the sense of presence is what defines why the experiences in virtual worlds are viewed as real and personally significant as opposed to symbolic or distant.

⁴ Akgün, E., & Atıcı, B. (2022). The effects of immersive virtual reality environments on learning outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Participatory Educational Research*, 9(3), 1–22.

⁵ Zaki, M., Santo, J., & Hendra, R. (2022). International labour law perspectives on the metaverse. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Law and Society*, 1–15.

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⁷ Bower, M., & Jong, M. S. Y. (2020). Immersive virtual reality in education: A meta-analysis. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 51(6), 2006–2030.



Conceptualizing Harassment in the Metaverse

1.2.2 The definition of a Metaverse harassment is any type of unwelcome, intrusive, abusive, or coercive behavior conducted in immersive virtual spaces and infringing the dignity, autonomy, mental integrity, or the perception of personal security by an individual. In contrast to traditional online harassment, which consists of mostly text or visual elements, harassment in the Metaverse is embodied through digital interaction, where participants interact with each other through avatars, which mimic physical presence, movement and proximity. These environments enhance the experiential effect of misconduct making such actions psychologically real even though they are in a virtual environment. In terms of law, harassment in the Metaverse is a problem because it contravenes the conventional definitions that are based on physical proximity, spatial jurisdiction or apparent physical injuries. The construct hence needs a broader conception of harm one that acknowledges psychological injury, breach of consent and infringement of digital bodily autonomy as legally pertinent harm. In that regard, Metaverse harassment lies in an in-between place between the realm of cybercrime and the realm of crimes occurring in the physical world and requires a redrawing of the traditional legal classifications (Karácsony, 118).

1.2.2 Conceptualizing Harassment in the Metaverse

1.2.2 In the immersive worlds, harassment is defined as intrusive or annoying behavior or conduct that is unwanted and violates the dignity of an individual, his or her autonomy and mental integrity. The difference between traditional online harassment and Metaverse harassment that occurs via embodied communication with avatars that mimic physical presence and proximity is that, unlike traditional online harassment, which is more text-based, the psychological effects of abuse are compounded by being simulated physically. Legally, it has been difficult because such harassment does not fit the traditional sense of physical contact or geographical borders. Nevertheless, the Indian constitutional jurisprudence encourages the broad interpretation of harm. In *Vishaka v. The State of Rajasthan* (1997) the Supreme Court also concluded that equality and dignity is infringed by sexual harassment even in cases where physical harm is not proven but the resultant effect is on personal autonomy and not the nature or place of the action. On the same note, in *Shreya Singhal v. The Court* identified that harassment and intimidation in electronic environments are actual harm (Union of India 2015), although it is important to note that laws should be specific in their regulation. All these ideas are reasons to consider harassment in immersive virtual worlds as legally cognizable harm, based on psychological injury, breach of consent and digital bodily autonomy, placing immersive virtual environment harassment offenses in a gray area between cybercrime and offenses in the real world (Karácsony, 118).

1.2.2 Virtual Sexual Harassment

Virtual sexual harassment is any sexually explicit, unwelcome or non-consent actions in the immersive virtual environment that break the dignity, autonomy and mental integrity of an individual. This harassment is not only verbal and visual but also embodied and made possible by avatars, spatial closeness, simulation of gestures and voice communication in the Metaverse. In contrast to the conventional on-line sexual harassment, which tends to be textual or pictorial, virtual sexual harassment is real-time and in 3 dimensional spaces, so users will have a greater experience of presence and body identification with their avatars, thus increasing the psychological damage (Rigotti and Malgieri, 7). Legally, this defies traditional conceptions of sexual offences that involve physical contact. But the Indian jurisprudence is already in favor of a wider concept of sexual harassment. In *Vishaka v. The State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Supreme Court affirmed that sexual harassment is a contravention of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution, and encompasses any unwelcome, sexually determined conduct with or without physical contacts and said that the determinant determination of sexual harassment is the act of disturbance of dignity and not the actual physical contacts. This rule specifically applies to immersive environments, in which sexual motions, vocal explicit expression or imitation of touching avatars can generate a degrading and hostile feeling. The Court also reinforced this strategy in *Apparel Export Promotion Council v. A.K. Chopra* (1999) by the view that physical contact is not a condition to prove sexual harassment and that even sexual coloured conduct or even attempts to abuse the dignity of woman is legally adequate. The Court identified the concepts of dignity and modesty as psychological and moral terms, which presented a solid doctrinal foundation in the identification of avatar-based sexual misconduct as legally actable. Combined, these cases allow acknowledging virtual sexual harassment as a factual and legally recognizable damage based on the violation of consent, dignity and digital bodily autonomy.



1.2.2 Virtual Assault and Spatial Intimidation

1.2.2 Virtual assault and spatial intimidation are violent, threatening or coercive behavior performed by immersive virtual environments by manipulating digital space, avatars movement and the appearance of virtual bodies, with the aim or the effect of causing fear, anxiety or submission to another user. In contrast to traditional online harassment, which is more communicative, virtual assault appropriates space and embodied aspects of the Metaverse where the offenders can employ the elements of proximity, obstructing other users, and aggressively moving or coordinating actions with the victims to take control or intimidate them. This behavior can include the application of walls around an avatar, blocking virtual escape routes, ganging the avatar, or pretending to a violent action. Such acts do not involve any physical contact in the conventional meaning of this word but they create a sense of being in danger that is very similar to physical assaults, thus, questioning the law in its dependence on physical bodily harm as the main signifier of violence (Karácsony, 124). Legally speaking, the meaning of assault has always involved the causes of creating a reasonable fear of imminent harm even without bodily contact. This theoretical knowledge substantiates the idea that virtual assault should be considered as legally pertinent behavior since immersive spatial intimidation may break personal space and pretend to be physically aggressive, resulting in fear and psychological trauma. The mental effects of such behavior panic, loss of orientation and permanent anxiety help to demonstrate that virtual assault is a violation of individual security and psychological integrity, but not just symbolic damage. A victim-oriented legal theory thus suggests that psychological injury be considered a viable ground to legal protection and compensation, without necessarily the use of physical force (Citron, 61).

1.2.2 Stalking and Persistent Surveillance

1.2 Virtual assault and spatial intimidation are violent, threatening or coercive behavior performed by immersive virtual environments by manipulating digital space, avatars movement and the appearance of virtual bodies, with the aim or the effect of causing fear, anxiety or submission to another user. In contrast to traditional online harassment, which is more communicative, virtual assault appropriates space and embodied aspects of the Metaverse where the offenders can employ the elements of proximity, obstructing other users, and aggressively moving or coordinating actions with the victims to take control or intimidate them. This behavior can include the application of walls around an avatar, blocking virtual escape routes, ganging the avatar, or pretending to a violent action. Such acts do not involve any physical contact in the conventional meaning of this word but they create a sense of being in danger that is very similar to physical assaults, thus, questioning the law in its dependence on physical bodily harm as the main signifier of violence (Karácsony, 124). Legally speaking, the meaning of assault has always involved the causes of creating a reasonable fear of imminent harm even without bodily contact. This theoretical knowledge substantiates the idea that virtual assault should be considered as legally pertinent behavior since immersive spatial intimidation may break personal space and pretend to be physically aggressive, resulting in fear and psychological trauma. The mental effects of such behavior panic, loss of orientation and permanent anxiety help to demonstrate that virtual assault is a violation of individual security and psychological integrity, but not just symbolic damage. A victim-oriented legal theory thus suggests that psychological injury be considered a viable ground to legal protection and compensation, without necessarily the use of physical force (Citron, 61).

1.3 Legal Analysis: Applicability of Existing Laws



1.4 The legal aspects of harassment within the Metaverse can also be analyzed through the prism of determining whether the current criminal and cyber and human rights regulations can be applied to combat the wrongdoing that may occur in the immersive virtual worlds. Because the Metaverse is a technologically developed but theoretically under-theorized domain, the relevance of existing statutes is subject to governance by the legal systems on the interpretation of notions like harm, consent, bodily autonomy, jurisdiction as well as liability within the digital realm. The majority of the current legal systems have been written in such a way that they focus on governing either the offenders in the physical world or some previous way of interacting online, and thus they do not directly consider the embodied virtual behavior. This part is the critical assessment of how current domestic and international legal systems should be extended, modified, or revisited to tackle harassment in immersive space and also pinpointing gaps in the doctrine and limitations of the regulation (Florida, 52).

1.5 List of Cases

- **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997) 6 SCC 241**

The Supreme Court believed that sexual harassments infringe the basic rights to dignity, equality and personal liberty in Articles 14, 15 and 21. The Court made it clear that the definition of harassment is based on its effects on dignity and not limited to physical contact, which forms the basis of defining non-physical and virtual forms of sexual harassment.

- **Apparel Export Promotion Council v. A.K. Chopra (1999) 1 SCC 759**

The Court made the ruling that physical contact is not necessary to demonstrate sexual harassment and that even the behaviour or majorities that are sexually coloured and attempts to outrage the dignity of a woman are enough. This ruling acknowledges dignity as a psychological term and this is why it is directly applied to avatars-based sexual misconduct.

- **Bodhisattwa Gautam v. Subhra Chakraborty (1996) 1 SCC 490**

The Supreme Court acknowledged that sexual abuse brings about immense psychological and emotional trauma, but not physical harm. The case advocates legalization of mental and emotional injury, and this is the main theme to grasp what immersive virtual harassment entails.

- **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) 10 SCC 1**

The Court made the right to privacy a more basic right under Article 21, which included physical integrity, psychic space and autonomy of decision making. Constant online or other digital or virtual monitoring is against this right and thus avatars tracking and immersive stalking are constitutionally invalid.

- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015) 5 SCC 1**

Although the Court invalidated Section 66A of the IT Act, on the basis of its vagueness, it recognized that online harassment, intimidation and abuse are actual and legally recognizable harm. The decision reaches the conclusion that the sphere of the internet can be regulated by the law under the conditions of the threat to the individual dignity and safety.

- **Avnish Bajaj v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2008) 150 DLT 769**

Delhi High Court looked at the issue of the online distribution of obscene material and concluded that the online intermediaries could not fully escape liability in the event that illegal content was being distributed using their systems. This case contributes to the extension of intermediary responsibility to Metaverse.

- **State of West Bengal v. Animesh Boxi (2018 SCC OnLine Cal 474)**

Court acknowledged digital sexual abuse as a major offense that resulted in severe psychological trauma and sentenced it heavily. The verdict confirms that it is possible to commit sexual violence online and applies to immersive virtual abuse.

- **K.U. v. Finland (2008) ECtHR 2872/02**

The European Court of Human Rights believed that states have a positive duty of defending individuals and, in particular, minors against online harassment and continuous digital intrusion. The case validates the role of states in controlling immersive platforms to ensure there are no stalking and surveillance.

- **Delfi AS v. Estonia (2015) ECtHR 64569/09**

The Court has ruled that online platforms can be responsible in the event that they have failed to block or take off offensive materials. The case highlights the responsibility of platforms to combat harassment in the online and immersive space.

- **Campbell v. MGN Ltd. [2004] 2 AC 457 (HL)**

The House of Lords stressed that one of the fundamental legal values, which should be safeguarded, is dignity and privacy. The principle strengthens the fact that the violation of personal dignity is a guideline in the digital or virtual realm, which becomes legally relevant.



1.2.2 Applicability of Criminal Law to Metaverse Harassment

1.6 How criminal law applies to harassment in the Metaverse presents challenging doctrinal and interpretative problems, most fundamentally due to the fact that the conventional criminal jurisprudence has been established in relation to physically observable behavior, the territorial jurisdiction and material damage. The criminal law is deeply focused on safeguarding the basic legal interests including bodily wholeness, individual security, dignity and social tranquillity. Even though the damage in the immersive virtual world is not related to any physical contact in its traditional meaning, the behavior tends to create tangible psychological pain, fear, humiliation and trauma. Such conducts as virtual sexual harassment, physical intimidation, stalking, and threats cause reasonable apprehension of personal injury and infringe the victim sense of personal safety, thus attracting the protection reason of the criminal law. In this light, the fact that the physical contact was not involved should not necessarily eliminate criminal responsibility especially in situations whereby the necessary elements of intent, absence of consent and harmful effect are evident (Citron, p. 63). Existing criminal law principles already offer a degree of conceptual plasticity which can be applied to the Metaverse. As an example, the crime of assault has always been interpreted to encompass acts that cause the reasonable fear of a likelihood of harm despite the absence of a real physical harm. On the same note, crimes involving criminal intimidation, harassment and stalking are concerned with the impact of the behavior on the victim and not necessarily on the method used. These principles when applied intentionally may involve immersive behavior, in which a criminal moves an avatar, brings it close to another user, makes gestures, or organizes various actions to intimidate or coerce a different user. This first person customary of virtual communication lends more credence to the fact that these occurrences are not symbolic or trivial but rather experiential damage that is subject to criminal prosecution.

1.7 Nonetheless, there are major drawbacks in the implementation of criminal law in Metaverse harassment. Most statutory rules are worded in a manner that assumes a physical presence, territoriality, or physical contact and hence they may be applied inconsistently and ambiguously in virtual worlds. The prosecution is complicated further by the evidentiary issues, where immersive harassment can be based on digital records, video recordings or data of the specific platform, which are governed by private organizations. The enforcement is also compromised by jurisdictional ambiguity especially in cases where the victim, the offender and the platform are situated in each legal territory. Due to this, though the concepts of criminal law can theoretically be applied to the harassment in the Metaverse, it does not practically do so as it needs to be clearly pointed out by an act or redefined by the courts. Essentially, criminal law continues to be normative relevant in the regulation of harassment in the Metaverse since the harms of fear, coercion, violation of dignity and psychological injury all are in line with the interests that criminal law attempts to safeguard. The distance between what the doctrines can possibly be and how they are actually being applied however points to the necessity of adaptive interpretation and, where necessary, statutory reform. It is necessary to acknowledge that immersive harassment is a valid one to be the subject of criminal liability to ensure that the Metaverse does not turn into a legal vacuum in which major misconduct can go unpunished (Karácsóny, 129).

1.8 Important Articles

- **Karácsóny, A. (2023). *Are virtual persons (avatars) subject to human rights protection?***
This article serves the basic conceptual basis by claiming that avatars serve as appendages of the human self. Avatar harassment hence infringes upon dignity, bodily autonomy and psychological solitude of the users; hence, immersive harassment is a legal and ethical matter of concern.
- **Rigotti, G., & Malgieri, G. (2024). *Sexual violence and harassment in the metaverse***
It is the most significant literature on virtual sexual harassment. It places Metaverse harassment in the spectrum of gender-based violence and shows how the immersion and embodiment contribute to the significant escalation of mental damage even without physical touch.
- **Tiwari, R., Jadamba, S., & Hsu, C. (2025). *Metaverse policing***
This systematic review is an analysis of harassment, abuse and governance breakdown in the virtual immersion world. It points out lapses in enforcement, issues with jurisdiction and inefficiency of legal machinery in place and, of utmost importance to the study of governance.
- **Floridi, L. (2022). *Metaverse governance: Ethical and legal challenges of virtual worlds***
The conceptualization presented in this article views the Metaverse as a new socio-legal space and takes an imperative look at ethical, legal and regulatory issues. It gives a solid ground on the argument of governance and regulatory reform.
- **Citron, D. K. (2014). *Hate crimes in cyberspace***
The article confirms that psychological and dignity-related harms on the online platforms exist and can be considered by the law. It promotes that immersive harassment should be appreciated as an offence but not a minor online misbehavior.



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1.2.2 Cyber Law and Digital Offences Framework

1.2.2 The main legal framework used to deal with wrongdoing in digital environments is cyber law; thus, it is vital in the process of solving a case of harassment in the Metaverse. Conventionally, cyber laws have been drafted to control such offences like online harassment, cyberstalking, identity theft, publication of obscene materials, misuse and abuse of data due to the use of computers and communication systems. These laws define harm to a large extent as misuse of electronic communication or distribution of illegal material and therefore offer a partial and initial framework on which to deal with immersive harassment (Solove, 94). This framework is limited by the aspects of the immersive virtual environment, wherein misconduct is performed using embodied avatars of interaction, spatial movement and presence in real time as opposed to text and image only. Consequently, virtual sexual touching, spatial intimidation, and avatar-based stalking tend to fall within a grey area of doctrines of cyber crime and crime of the physical world. Cyber law, which enforces its rules through the medium of the platform, also makes redressing it difficult because the outcomes are often limited to termination of an account or the deletion of the content instead of the actual liability in court (Suzor, 102). The Indian jurisprudence does acknowledge, however, that there is harm in the digital space, and it can be cognized in legal terms. In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court made it emphatic that online harassment, intimidation and abuse can pose a threat to dignity, personal security and the overall order and, in that case, is within the law to be controlled through specific and proportionate means (Union of India, 2015). This acknowledgment applies directly to the Metaverse, where abusive speech and sexualized verbal behavior and threats made via voice chat and avatar communication are all forms of digital crime as opposed to inconsequential virtual behavior. The problem of platform responsibility was also explained in *Avnish Bajaj v. The Delhi High Court* (2008) (State (NCT of Delhi)) which researched the distribution of obscene material over the internet concluded that digital intermediaries cannot fully abdicate liability in cases where the illegal content is transferred via their systems, specifically where the intermediaries have reason to know or control the transfer of the obscene material. The assumption of this principle is even greater importance in immersive virtual worlds where virtual worlds design, host and moderate user interaction actively. Combined, these rulings can be seen as a move to apply the principles of cyber law to the Metaverse by affirming the existence of digital harm and the duty of the platforms to prevent and respond to abusive behavior that takes place on their technology platform.

1.2.2 Platform Liability and Intermediary Responsibility

1.2.2 One of the primary legal concerns of examining the question of harassment in the Metaverse is platform liability and intermediary responsibility which are constructed, owned and regulated by the same private technology companies that are the majority of the design of immersive virtual environments. They can be seen as middle layers which enables interaction between users via digital infrastructure, software architecture and algorithmic structure. Conventionally, intermediary liability regimes have attempted to strike the right balance between the protection afforded to the user and the encouragement of innovation and free speech by capping the legal liability of platforms towards user-generated content. Nevertheless, in the Metaverse, this equilibrium is complicated further since platforms are no longer just a container of content but an actively influential user experience due to immersive design, spatial architecture and interaction mechanics. Consequently, the line between passive mediator and active mediator is perceived to be blurred. Legally, the liability of platforms in immersive spaces goes beyond the issue of content moderation and also involves the questions of duty of care and foreseeability of harm (Suzor, p. 134).



1.2.2 Metaverse platforms are conscious of the increased danger of embodied interaction, such as sexual harassment, spatial intimidation and stalking. In cases when platforms do not apply proper safety measures, including the personal space boundaries, the consent-based interaction controls, or the proper reporting functions, they can lead to the continuation of harm. This brings normative issues concerning whether platforms are more responsible in preventing predictable harassment and defending against the dignity and autonomy of users. The use of internal community norms and discretionary application may lead to mixed outcomes, less transparency and poor solutions to victims. The transnational character of the Metaverse makes the issue of intermediate responsibility more complicated. Platforms cross cross-jurisdictions, and invoke safe-harbor provisions of a number of national cyber laws to protect themselves against liability. Whereas these protections aim to ensure that excessive censorship and liability burden is avoided, in strict application to immersive harms, they may also cause accountability gaps. Several victims of Metaverse harassment often find themselves in the scenarios where the sites say they do not do it, indicating that user activity and legal limitations must handle the risk, which leaves the responsibility of protection on users. Essentially, platform liability in the Metaverse demands a remodeling of intermediary responsibility that is in line with the immersiveness and experience of virtual worlds. Laws should cease being content hosting centric and should acknowledge the place of platforms as creators of the digital space as well as their duties to maintain safety, dignity and rights preservations. In the absence of more detailed benchmarks of accountability in platforms, the regulation of harassment in the Metaverse is likely to be incoherent and insufficient to maintain the trust of the users themselves and the safeguarding role of the law (DeNardis, 176).

1.2.2 Governance Challenges in the Metaverse

The governance of the Metaverse can be described as the legal, institutional and regulatory frameworks in which the behavior, rights and responsibilities are organized and executed in immersive virtual environments. The Metaverse is dominated by the internal rules and technological design and algorithmic controls of its operators, unlike the traditional physical spaces that are largely governed by the state law. This privatized and more of a hybrid type of government makes it extremely difficult to achieve accountability, consistency and protection of the fundamental rights. The transnational and immersive quality of the Metaverse also makes governance harder because the current laws can hardly control behavior that cuts across borders and encompasses both digital interaction and embodied experience (Floridi, 48).

- **Jurisdictional ambiguity** is a very basic problem with proper governance in the Metaverse. The virtual interaction is in most cases attended by users in various countries and platforms serving under various legal systems which complicates the process of establishing the jurisdiction in which the law should be applied. Such ambiguity undermines enforcement, procrastinates legal measures and allows criminals to take advantage of the regulatory loopholes.
- **Platform-dominated private governance** is also another significant issue, since the spaces in the Metaverse are mostly dominated by corporations by terms of service and community rules. This type of private regulation is not democratically accountable, tends to favor commercial interests above other user safety and protection of rights, and thus, inconsistency and secrecy in the enforcement practice are the results.
- **Inadequate consent and safety-by-design mechanisms** also weaken the effectiveness of governance. Most of the immersive platforms lack powerful tools that enable the user to manage personal space, limit unwanted interaction, and avoid embodied harassment. When safety is considered as an option to design instead of part of design, governance is reactionary instead of proactive.
- **Weak enforcement and victim redressal systems** substantially restrict access to justice of victims of harassment in the Metaverse. The reporting systems are frequently complicated, the reaction to the problem is slow, and the options to the internal platform punishment is minimal. There is no standardized practice and legal enforcement that will encourage reporting and strengthen impunity.

- **Power asymmetry between users and platform operators** is a form of structural governance problem. The platforms do not lose the unilateral power in making and enforcing the rules, and the user continues to rely on the platform-controlled systems as an element of protection and participation. Such an imbalance limits the agency of users and compromises the achievement of rights in virtual environments that are immersive.



1.2.2 Human Rights Implications

Nobody can be sure of their own safety as harassment in the Metaverse raises human rights issues to a deeper level, given the fact that immersive virtual environments are becoming more and more an extension of social, cultural and economic life. The law of human rights is based on the defense of the inherent dignity, equality and personal autonomy and these principles do not lose their application simply by the fact that contacts take place in the digital or virtual space. Whenever people are harassed, intimidated, or abused by immersive settings, the trauma, which is psychological, emotional and social, is authentic and long-lasting. The law should therefore acknowledge the fact that human rights are involved whenever the individuals interact meaningfully with other people even in the virtual worlds (Karacsony, 131). The right to dignity is one of the greatest human rights implications to the issue of Metaverse harassment. Sexual harassment, spatial intimidation and stalking, dehumanize people to the worst victim and destroy their self-esteem. The latter are frequently perceived as highly personal and invasive in immersive environments where the person feels immersed in the world of avatars and their experience of being. Dignity loss in virtual places is not only damaging to people but also condones demeaning behaviors, which could lead to the erosion of the moral principles of the new digital societies. Equality and non-discrimination are also essential rights that are involved. There is evidence that women and gender minority and other marginalized groups are disproportionately harassed in immersive virtual worlds. This reflects offline trends of structural inequality and gender-based violence, which means that virtual spaces are not natural but socially created.



1.9 Harassment that unfairly leaves certain groups out of the digital life will be an indirect discrimination that will reduce the possibilities of equal access to technology. There is a positive duty of states under the human rights law to avert such marginalization and enforce substantive equality even where digital is involved. Another influential element of human rights is privacy and personal autonomy. Constant monitoring, following of avatars and unauthorized capturing of virtual communication violate the right of people to privacy and regulation of personal space. Immersive technologies can gather sensitive behavioral and biometric data, and this increases the potential of abuse and infiltration. In situations where privacy protection fails to prevent harassment, it is not only a personal vice but also a structural breakdown in government and control. The right to mental integrity and psychological well-being is another victim of harassment in the Metaverse. Immersive abuse often leads to anxiety, fear, trauma and withdrawal in both virtual and real-world social interaction by the victim. Mental health is gradually becoming a part of human rights frameworks to the right to health and personal security. The inability to treat psychological damage in online spaces will lead to a danger of excluding the victims and downplaying the experiences that they have gone through (Malgieri, 22).

1.10 References

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