



Experts Say Metaverse Could Permanently Affect Our Mental Health

The “metaverse” is soon to be a major aspect of modern life, just as smart phones and social media are now. While the makers of this virtual reality are hyping its possibilities, some [mental health experts](#) are pausing to consider its potential consequences.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s plan for a “metaverse” — a virtual world set to encompass “gaming, social media, augmented reality and cryptocurrency” are [described](#) by the company as “the next evolution of social connection.”



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This “evolution” is not only a Facebook project. Other major tech companies, from Microsoft to Apple to Nvidia, are preparing the ground for their own virtual worlds.

Some experts shrug off concerns about the metaverse, claiming factors such as genetics and socioeconomic standing are more significant to a person’s well-being than use of technology. According to these voices, the metaverse will seamlessly integrate into our lives just as the internet and smart devices have.

Other experts, however, believe there will be challenges. They point to studies, such as a peer-reviewed article at [Psychology Today](#), that find that the overuse of technology is linked to mental health issues such as depression, psychoticism, and paranoid ideation.

Spending a lot of time in a digital environment can also result in someone preferring virtual spaces to reality, they say. Ultimately, this can “negatively impact our ability to engage in non-virtual life, whether it’s self-confidence or belonging or social anxiety,” says Rachel Kowert, research director at Take This, a nonprofit focused on mental health in the video gaming community.

Jeremy Bailenson, founding director of Stanford University’s Virtual Human Interaction Lab, similarly noted that there can be changes in a person when he or she spends a lot of time “in a world in which everyone is just perfect and beautiful and ideal.”

Meanwhile, Nick Allen, a psychology professor at the University of Oregon, says it isn’t how much time people are spending in the metaverse, but how they’re using that time.

Allen warns that when “using metaverse technologies replaces non-online behaviors that are healthy and supportive to mental health, like appropriate exercise, engagement in relationships in real life, healthy sleep, time spent in natural environments, then they can be harmful.”

Some experts argue the metaverse can have positive benefits if used in a healthy way.

Dr. Daria Kuss, who leads the Cyberpsychology Research Group at Nottingham Trent University, told [Dazed](#), “We know that particular psychotherapy formats, notably virtual reality exposure therapy, can be fantastic tools to help individuals affected by a variety of phobias.”



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on April 3, 2022

According to Kuss, mental health issues such as depression, psychosis, addiction, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder can be treated in the metaverse by “by gradually exposing [people] to the triggering, feared, or trauma-producing stimulus in a safe space (like the virtual environment).”

Peter Etchells, a professor of psychology and science communication at Bath Spa University, told *The Wall Street Journal* that he believes the metaverse can be a “tremendous force for good in terms of keeping us connected” if it is developed ethically.

And Anna Bailie, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of York who is researching mental health cultures on social media, says:

The interactive nature of the metaverse could provide a different arena for online therapy to take place, which may even improve access to therapy for disabled people with a better, more life-like experience.

The metaverse will “likely divide people further in their access to technology and therapeutic support,” Bailie maintains, adding, “Having mental health treatment instantly available in the metaverse will likely benefit the people who already have access to it.”

Citi, the latest bank to try to measure the future market size of the metaverse, estimates it will be [worth \\$13 trillion](#) by 2030. This would make it one percent of the estimated \$128 trillion global economy.

In the latest example of real money behind virtual real estate, Texas entrepreneur Adam Hollander invested \$1.2 million to create an island in the metaverse called [White Sands](#), a tropical getaway.

Per KVUE, White Sands “consists of 3,000 NFT plots of land where users can build their own empires via Minecraft. It will offer 250 pre-built luxury villas available only to current White Sands plot owners in the next few weeks. Built on NFT Worlds, White Sands will soon be connected to thousands of other worlds whose users will be able to roam, interact and enjoy the experiences created by White Sands users.”

Within 24 hours of putting the plots up for sale, Hollander sold all 3,000, raising \$4.4 million and selling an additional \$3.6 million on the secondary market.

“We’re moving really as a society towards this concept of having this digital landscape where you can do these things very much how we moved into using social media,” said Hollander.



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