

# **Abstract**

## **The Rise and Development of Avatars and Online Communities**

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The number of people using avatars in games and online communities has grown considerably over the last number of years with over 11.5 million users in World of Warcraft alone (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010). This report reviews the history and development of avatars and constructed narrative in online communities, in particular the immersive worlds of World of Warcraft and Second Life. Through the use of participant observational research and in depth interviews with users, experts and authors, the research has provided an insight into why people enter virtual worlds and why they construct core and alternative avatars to represent them in this realm.