



METaverse: AN EXPLORATION OF VIRTUAL REALITY IN NEAL STEPHENSON'S SNOW CRASH

P. Kowsalya* & Dr. Santhosh Priyaa J**

* Ph.D Research Scholar (English), PSGR Krishnammal College for Women,
Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

** Assistant Professor, Department of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women,
Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: P. Kowsalya & Dr. Santhosh Priyaa J, "Metaverse: An Exploration of Virtual Reality in Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash", International Journal of Scientific Research and Modern Education, Volume 7, Issue 1, Page Number 46-47, 2022.

Copy Right: © IJSRME, 2022 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract:

This paper explores online addiction and its consequences in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992). He has predicted the concept of Metaverse in this novel. The study reveals the impact of virtual shared platform through the concept 'Digital Addiction' in Cyber psychology. Through this concept the interaction of characters in the virtual world and their real life is analysed psychologically. The physical and mental illness of Da5id, a character in *Snow Crash*, is analysed through Cyber psychology's 'Digital Addiction'. As a science fiction novel, Stephenson has brought out the virtual traps like spreading of viruses and hacking in the plot.

Key Words: Cyber Psychology, Digital Addiction, Metaverse, Avatars.

Technology is intertwined with the life of human beings. The separate concept of human beings and machines gets blended together and it becomes inseparable. Human beings escape from the real world by getting into the world of computers and internet, which are technologically enhanced. A simulated environment, created by using computer technology is known as Virtual Reality, where human beings are the visual creatures. It becomes a major concept in post modernism. Neal Stephenson, an American Novelist, has used the concept of Virtual Reality in his novels. He has coined the term 'Metaverse' in his novel *Snow Crash*. Metaverse represents a collective virtual space, which is full of daemons and user controlled avatars. Daemon, a computer program, is run in the background of Metaverse. Neal Stephenson explains this sub-culture that the people remain in Metaverse with their goggles.

This paper focuses on Metaverse, a virtually shared space in the computer world in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* through the Cyber psychological concept 'Digital Addiction'. Neal Stephenson is known for his speculative fiction. His writings have blended numerous technological and sociological ideas together. His first novel is *The Big U* (1984), which depicts students' satirical life in college. All his writings have some science fiction elements. His third novel *Snow Crash* (1992) portrays the themes like anthropology, cyber space, religion, linguistics, culture, corruption and humanity. Neal Stephenson has predicted the possible cyber future before two decades. The imaginary technological developments in the field of virtual reality and its impact are discussed through the Cyber psychological concept 'Digital Addiction'.

Cyber psychology, also called as 'Digital psychology' or 'Web psychology', is a psychological interaction of people with digital technologies like internet, virtual reality and artificial intelligence. Cyber psychology is defined as "the study of how new communication technologies influence, and are influenced by, human behaviors and subjectivities"(Harley). The digitalized technological enhancement makes mankind to get addicted to it and it becomes difficult to come out of the addiction. 'Digital Addiction' is a concept of cyber psychology. It refers to "an impulse control disorder that involves the obsessive use of digital devices, digital technologies, and digital platforms, i.e. internet, video game, online platforms, mobile devices, digital gadgets, and social network platform" (Singh). People become addicted to certain digital platforms or devices by over using them. It makes them to drop their control in handling the digital platform or device. In the contemporary life, the concept of getting addiction becomes increased. The digital addiction in recent years is described as "almost every activity has been a prey to make it look addictive, which has resulted in new disorders musical activity addiction (or musicorexia), food addiction etc" (Starcevic 919-920). The digital addiction results in certain disorder which can be avoided only if the person comes out of that addiction.

This article attempts to highlight the characters in *Snow Crash*, who are addicted to Metaverse and its consequences. Metaverse is a "collective virtual shared space, created by the convergence of virtually enhanced physical reality and physically persistent virtual space" (Smart). In Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, Metaverse looks like an urban environment which has a hundred meter wide road and a street which runs to 65536 km circumference. The people can access Metaverse with their laptop or system by connecting it to high quality goggles. Monorail is used for transportation within Metaverse. The user can appear as an avatar in any form without restriction. An avatar is merely similar to a cyborg in reality. It is very interesting to learn about avatar. This is explained in an article as:

The term came to popular consciousness with the success of Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash*. Discussions of the nature of the avatar are often mixed with current cyborg theory. Although the avatar and cyborg share numerous social constructions and identity politics, in the interest of developing an understanding of an avatar, it is necessary to distinguish from its cousin, the cyborg. (Morningstar 275)

People find to relax themselves in virtual world by disconnecting from real world. Hiro, the protagonist, enters into the virtual world called Metaverse often. It is depicted as "He's in a computer-generated universe that his computer is drawing on to his goggles and pumping into his earphones" (Stephenson22). Metaverse has everything as in the real world except the laws, government and death. People inside Metaverse are the software pieces in the form of avatars. They can take any form as they want to look like, beautiful or ugly, fat or lean and tall or short.

In Metaverse, Hiro is given a file called Snow Crash but he has not heard the name so far. He assumes that it can be linked with computer virus. He says that "It means a system crash – a bug – at such a fundamental level that it frags the part of the computer that controls the electron beam in the monitor, making it spray wildly across the screen" (Stephenson 39). The same black and white person in the Metaverse has offered Da5id a hyper card. Initially Hiro warns him not to open because it can contain any harmful virus. But Da5id laughed at him and said he has got so much contaminated stuff like this from many hackers. Da5id said working in his system is like "it's like working in a plague ward" (Stephenson 67). Later Hiro is informed that Da5id is admitted in hospital and they put him on a temporary pacemaker. The doctor says "he's got such bad cardiac arrhythmia" (Stephenson 176). Hiro takes Da5id's goggles which are on the floor and looks through it. He identifies that Da5id's computer is affected by Snow Crash and he can see the black and white wall on the monitor.

The digital form of the Snow Crash virus looks like a series of binary information which appears as a bitmap image full of black and white pixels. It is explained that "The virus that ate through Da5id's brain was a string of binary information" (Stephenson 329). The black denotes one and the white denotes zero. Not only Da5id's system software is poisoned by Snow Crash but also his brain. Jaunita explains that "Da5id had a snow crash last night, inside his head ... That digital information was going straight into Da5id's optic nerve" (*Snow Crash* 186). She further explains that when the system gets affected by a virus like Snow Crash, the system flashes with zeros and ones with huge digital information. This digital information enters the brain through the optic nerve so that the person's brain stops working.

The characters in *Snow Crash* escape from reality by getting into the world of Metaverse in the form of avatar. They do not use Metaverse for relaxation but they imagine that it is their world. Mankind becomes prey to online addiction. They consider lingering in virtual world as a necessary one in the digitalized world. Not only Metaverse, but there are so many things in the cyber world that make human beings to get into addiction. It does not merely end in addiction but result in some adverse consequences like mental disorders, health issues and also affects the familial bonding. In this novel, Da5id's optic nerve got affected by using Metaverse. Thus, according to cyber psychology, due to interaction with Metaverse, the life of Da5id gets affected. He started to live in Metaverse more than in the real world. This addiction made him to believe people in Metaverse than in the real life. Through the concept of Digital Addiction, it is explored that Da5id got addicted to Metaverse and his lethargic way of handling it resulted in losing his consciousness. The enhancement in technology is appreciable for its good cause. The over utilization of any technology has its negative side also, which is to be avoided for the betterment of the mankind and environment.

References:

1. Harley, D., Morgan, J., and Frith, H. *Cyber psychology as everyday digital experience across the lifespan*. Springer (2018).
2. Morningstar, Chip and F. R. Farmer. "The Lessons of Lucas Film's Habitat". *Cyberspace*, In Benedikt, ed., 273-301.
3. Singh, Amarjit Kumar, and Pawan Kumar Singh. "Recent Trends, Current Research in Cyber psychology: a literature review". (2019).
4. Smart, J.M., Cascio, J. and Paffendorf, J., *Metaverse Roadmap Overview*, 2007. Accelerated Studies Foundation, 2010
5. Starcevic, Vladan, Joël Billieux, and Adriano Schimmenti. "Selfitis and behavioural addiction: A plea for terminological and conceptual rigour". 919-920. (2018).
6. Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. Bantam Books: New York, (1993). Print.