EXPERIENCING ACTIVISM THROUGH VIRTUAL REALITY NARRATIVES: THE THEME OF "SISTERHOOD" AND THE SAMPLE OF FIGHT BACK VR

SANAL GERÇEKLİK ANLATILARINDA DENEYİM AKTİVİZMİ: "KIZ KARDEŞLİK" TEMASI VE FİGHT BACK VR ÖRNEĞİ

Ümmühan MOLO [iD][1]

[1] Istanbul Yeni Yuzyil University, Faculty of Communication, Istanbul Türkiye

ABSTRACT

The continuous diversification of new narrative tools due to technological advancements highlights the significance of content and form issues in fiction, as these tools gain social functionality. Each new tool possesses distinct features that imbue it with meaning. The strong relationship between technological tools and society brings the social benefits of these tools to the forefront. Among the hotly debated topics is the impact of virtual reality technologies on communication. Virtual reality creates an immersive experience, enveloping individuals within compelling narratives. Consequently, understanding the structure of the existing content becomes crucial, particularly in the transformation of social issues into experiential Virtual Reality (VR) narratives. This study focuses on exploring the connection between virtual reality technologies and society, as well as the potential of VR content to contribute to social benefit. The chosen sample for analysis is "Fight Back VR," which employs a 360-degree narrative format to address gender-related themes. The determined sample is analyzed through Greimas' Actantial Model, which is a structural semantics analysis method. The results indicate that VR's effects, such as immersion, presence, embodiment, and experiential engagement, enhance the narrative content, converting it into semantic benefit. "Fight Back VR" addresses gender issues through the lens of women's experiences and positions the participant as a heroic figure. The participant's struggle within the narrative creates a sense of action, which plays an educational role both within the story and the individual lives of the participants. Thus, although virtual reality narratives create a personalized experiential space, they also embody the concept of "experiential activism" through their narrative subject matter and distinctive features. Because it positions the participant as a part of the story, and even as a guide.

Keywords: Actantial model, Activism, Experiential activism, Greimas, Virtual reality

ÖZET

Teknolojik gelişmelerle birlikte devamlı çeşitlenen yeni anlatı araçları, bu araçların toplumsal işlerlik kazanmasıyla birlikte, içerik ve biçim kurgusu konularını önemli hale getirmektedir. Çünkü her yeni araç, kendinde ona özgü nitelikler barındırmakta ve o nitelikler etrafında anlam kazanmaktadır. Teknolojik araçların toplumla olan güçlü ilişkisi, ortaya konulan aracın toplumsal faydasını da gündeme taşımaktadır. Sanal gerçeklik teknolojileri ve iletişime olan etkileri, gündemdeki tartışma konularından biridir. Çünkü sanal gerçeklik teknolojisi bir deneyim etkisi yaratmakta ve bu etkide deneyimleyen kişiyi güçlü bir anlatı içinde var kılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla mevcut içeriğin hangi yapıda neyi kapsadığı gibi bir soru önemli olmaktadır. Bu önem kendisini, SG (Sanal Gerçeklik) anlatılarında işlenen toplumsal meselelerin deneyime dönüşmesi ile göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, sanal gerçeklik teknolojilerinin toplumla kurduğu ilişkiye ve SG içeriğinin toplumsal faydaya dönüşebilme potansiyeline odaklanmaktadır. Böylece, toplumsal cinsiyet konusunu, 360 derece anlatı biçimiyle aktaran "Fight Back VR" çalışmanın örneklemini oluşturmaktadır. Belirlenen örneklem, yapısal anlambilim çözümleme yöntemi olan, Greimas'ın Eyleyensel Modeli üzerinden analiz edilmektedir. Analizden elde edilen sonuca göre, SG'nin daldırma, mevcudiyet, bedenleşme ve deneyim gibi etkileri, ortaya konan anlatı içeriğini anlamsal faydaya dönüştürmektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyet meselesini kadın sorunları üzerinden ele alan "Fight Back VR" katılımcıyı, "kahraman" olarak konumlamakta ve kahramanın anlatı içindeki mücadelesi eylemsel bir etki yaratmaktadır. Bu etki hem hikâyede hem de katılımcının bireysel yaşamında eğitici-öğretici bir rol üstlenmektedir. Böylece sanal gerçeklik anlatıları, bireysel bir deneyim alanı yaratmasına rağmen, anlatı konusu ve özellikleriyle "deneyim aktivizmi" kavramını ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aktivizm, Deneyim aktivizmi, Eyleyensel model, Greimas, Sanal gerçeklik

Sorumlu Yazar / Corresponding Author: Ümmühan MOLO, Assistant Professor, Istanbul Yeni Yuzyil University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio TV and Cinema, Istanbul Türkiye. **E-mail:** ummuhanmolo@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have brought about profound changes in various aspects of life. Nowadays, technology's pervasive influence can be observed in nearly every sphere. Consequently, social events and phenomena from the past have found new avenues for expression, adapting to the emergence of novel technological forms. This paper aims to explore one such phenomenon, namely social events, and its interaction with modern technology. By analyzing the impact of technology on social events, we can gain insights into the evolving landscape of human interactions and experiences.

Activist movements have emerged as responses to various societal issues, highlighting present-day problems in diverse forms and endeavoring to find solutions. However, such movements do not always necessitate physical demonstrations or street protests. The pervasive presence of digital media in modern life has expanded the scope of responses to social problems, just as it has in other areas. While traditional activist methods persist, the digital dimension of these problems should not be underestimated. It plays a crucial role in drawing attention to issues, shaping public opinion, and ultimately driving transformative change.

Digital activism, rooted in social media platforms, has become a potent tool in driving societal mobilization. It has also witnessed innovative additions to its repertoire, one of which is virtual reality (VR) technologies. VR introduces a novel approach to addressing social issues, offering immersive experiences that can foster empathy and understanding among participants. By leveraging VR's interactive capabilities, activists can create impactful narratives that resonate deeply with the audience and stimulate meaningful engagement with the issues at hand. This integration of virtual reality technologies into the realm of digital activism opens up new avenues for activism and augments its potential to drive social change.

The concept of virtual reality has found its place in both sociological and philosophical discussions, and its technological aspect has gradually cemented its presence in daily life. This technology is no longer merely a theoretical topic but has become a practical instrument with effective visibility. Virtual reality (VR) applications are now wearable, integrated into the human body, and they elicit unique effects through the immersive experiences they create. Through features like immersion, presence, and interaction, VR elevates narratives beyond mere spectacle and makes them truly experiential.

As a result, we can observe the emergence of a distinct form of narrative and experiential technology. The pervasive presence of technological innovations in our lives, combined with the intertwining of social issues with these advancements, has led to the inclusion of activism within VR narrative content. The content of these VR narratives transforms experiences into active actions, exemplified by the "Fight Back VR" narrative that processes the theme of gender. This integration of activism within the realm of virtual reality keeps the field of VR closely connected to activism. Hence, understanding the narrative characteristics of VR and its underlying structure will shed light on how experiences can be transformed into activism. Through Greimas's actantial model, the narrative structures can be dissected, and the dynamics that drive the concept of experiential activism can be revealed. This analysis will unveil the intricate details of how VR narratives facilitate the transition from passive experiences to active engagement and activism.

1. VIRTUAL REALITY TECHNOLOGIES AND EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVISM

The concept of virtual reality has become a focal point of discussions in society, particularly due to the rapid advancements in technology. Beyond being a mere technological marvel, virtual reality has evolved into a subject of philosophical inquiry, captivating attention with its unique narrative potential shaped by its technical and technological components. The narratives facilitated by virtual reality technologies demand exploration and expansion, particularly concerning the immersive experiences they offer. As virtual reality continues to push boundaries, it brings about novel definitions and possibilities for itself as a concept. The experiences it engenders through its immersive titles lead to a reimagining of traditional storytelling and create a new realm of narrative possibilities. The evolving nature of virtual reality contributes to its continuous redefinition, transforming it into an increasingly dynamic and significant aspect of contemporary discourse. As technology and human experience continue to converge, the impact of virtual reality's narrative form on society is set to further expand and redefine our understanding of storytelling and human interaction.

The concept of virtual reality (VR) is best understood by considering its essential elements, such as computer technologies, a three-dimensional universe, the effect, and presence (Bryson, 2013). Describing VR entails referring to a sophisticated technological system, which typically involves wired gloves and a head-mounted stereoscopic display computer for visual output (Steuer, 1992). Additionally, with the aid of head-mounted screens, suitable sounds can be delivered to the user through headphones in real-time, enhancing the immersive experience (Reaney, 1999). VR, with its ability to engage the user's senses through such features, provides an interactive environment that sets it apart from other traditional narrative methods like television and books (Schuemie et al., 2001). The primary objective of VR applications is to emulate the real world as convincingly as possible. This pursuit of realism has been a driving force in the historical development of VR technology, pushing for faster computers, more powerful software, and higher-resolution screens. As a result, VR has been able to convey intricate details of the real world with increasing fidelity (Reaney, 1999).

The feeling of immersion within a VR experience is closely tied to the concept of belief. Primarily, this phenomenon arises from the inherently virtual nature of the experience itself. Consequently, a key challenge revolves around participants potentially succumbing to the illusion of presence, despite their cognizance of its virtuality (Slater, 2018). To address this, the VR environment necessitates a sophisticated human-computer interface that convincingly simulates reality. The central objective is to engross the participant within the virtual environment, creating a seamless experiential engagement (Latta & Oberg, 1994). As a result, participants tend to disregard the intermediary presence of the computer and directly interact with the three-dimensional surroundings (Coelho et al., 2006). This achievement of presence in virtual reality, commonly referred to as telepresence, effectively transports the participant to a different spatial location beyond their physical reality (Boas, 2013). This process involves strategically appealing to the senses while blocking real-world stimuli, thereby fostering an immersive VR encounter (Biocca, 1992). Moreover, interactive communication within the virtual world constitutes a vital aspect of this system (Pares & Pares, 2006).

These changes provided by virtual reality technologies completely transform the content transferred to the participant. First of all, even the way of seeing the content has become instrumental, but this instrumentality has provided itself with the disappearance of distance. Consequently, the act of experiencing a narrative through traditional media, such as television or cinema, has undergone a substantial metamorphosis. With these advancements, traditional narrative transmission to individuals is no longer the norm. Despite all the advances, VR technologies are not accessible to everyone. Every act of viewing integrates the observed content with the medium's characteristics and the viewer's perception, thereby venturing beyond customary encounters and exploring novel dimensions of coherence. Because, as Crary contends, the person who observes/sees is within some limitations and possibilities of seeing (Crary, 2004). Therefore, the change of possibilities with this limit means a change in the act of seeing. This transformation imbues the act of seeing with active agency, influenced by various factors like experience, interaction, and presence. Consequently, the structural construction and content coverage of narratives become more crucial in light of the participant's active involvement. Participants now assume a liberated role within the narrative, often difficult to control, and predominantly driven by their unique perspective. This profound effect on the participant is as vital as the narrative's impact itself. As emphasized by Chatman, seeing transcends mere observation; it encompasses cultural and psychological inclinations (Chatman, 2009). Thus, it is undeniable that VR narratives will revolutionize the act of seeing. The active and, at times, unbounded observation has dispelled the passive role of individuals within the narrative. This transformative shift is not without criticism, yet for narratives that aspire to convey fundamental aspects of life, this potent influence introduces a novel concept: experiential activism.

Communication and media, play a vital role in various social movement theories, each operating within distinct frameworks. In the context of collective behavior theory, the media wields significant influence over the management and shaping of public perceptions, ideas, and emotions (Lievrouw, 2016). Technological advancements have directly impacted the field of communication, particularly with the emergence of interactive communication facilitated by new technologies, enabling broader access to information and fostering dialogue within large societies (Sert, 2016). The proliferation of new media platforms has empowered users to explore the potential of this realm, leading individuals to assert their rights and advocate for social issues through their own media channels, thereby altering the trajectory of social movements (Göksu and Bektaş Durmuş, 2019). In the digital age, media culture has

undergone profound transformations, becoming more personal, skeptical, ironic, fragile, volatile, collaborative, and unquestionably diverse (Lievrouw, 2016).

Activism, in its broadest sense, encompasses engaging in a persistent struggle driven by the desire for societal transformation (Gürel & Nazlı, 2019). As such, it signifies the presence of deliberate and organized movements with the objective of effecting change (Sert, 2016). Central to this notion is the role of activists, who actively champion their causes and endeavor to broaden the influence of their endeavors. These activists dedicate themselves to advocating for social issues and striving to amplify the impact of their efforts.

The success of activist movements relies on the harmonious interplay of several critical components. The interactions among the individuals engaged in the movement, their engagement with the broader society they aim to influence, and their strategic use of media tools hold immense significance in achieving their intended goals (Yıldırım, 2019). Activist movements are not static entities; rather, they evolve in response to societal changes. Consequently, it is accurate to assert that contemporary activist movements exhibit a heightened inclination toward technology and digital platforms (Gürel & Nazlı, 2019: 188). This observation introduces a distinct facet that diversifies the concept of activism: digital activism.

Digital activism can be understood as an online propaganda approach that incorporates both mass communication elements and personalized communication strategies (Işık, 2020). By leveraging virtual actions, it endows social movements with a transnational dimension, unbound by physical space (Bektaş Durmuş, 2020). Consequently, existing activist movements have adapted to this new digital landscape, diversifying and broadening their impact. As a result, variations exist in how activism is practiced, as well as in the array of activist movements. Passive activism stands out as one of these variations.

Indeed, the term "activism" typically conveys the notion of action, leading to some confusion when applied to the concept of passive activism. However, passive activism does not imply complete inaction or doing nothing. Instead, it refers to forms of activism that manifest in different, less overtly active ways compared to traditional activism (Gündüz, 2016). These actions can be seen as reactions to certain issues, without necessarily involving extreme or radical behaviors commonly associated with activism. Passive activism encompasses various methods of engaging in reactive actions aimed at instigating change. These methods need not be radical; they can range from small, conscious actions like closing an app to sharing a photo or digital media that aligns with a social cause. These seemingly mundane activities can be linked to activist movements, especially in the digital realm where information dissemination and awareness-raising have become highly accessible.

2. GENDER AS AN "EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVISM" THEME

Gender is a concept characterized by relationality and historicity, in addition to the biologically assumed gender category in the body, which makes it a relevant subject in gender studies and social sciences (Köse, 2013: 40). In this context, where culture emerges as a significant factor, social realities, which are part of the social construction process, are perceived as entirely natural. However, this situation involves continuous change, and each new generation transmits accumulated knowledge regarding social construction based on their own experiences. All these aspects represent both the past and the present, contributing to the fundamental components of future structures. All meanings related to gender describe a process-oriented transmission (Bayhan, 2013). The visibility of gender is related to the coherence and legitimization of these long-term actions (Taburoğlu, 2013). Existing norms are not independent of human perception and meaning fabrication. People acquire their personal knowledge and experiences from society. Clarity can only be achieved within a certain group and society (Doğan, 2000). Like all cumulative perceptions of life, gender has always existed in a state of constancy and change (both in the past and the present). However, it is the inequality of meaning between genders that makes this concept subject to debate. All meaning constructions that persist as if they are natural have turned into a form of domination, especially concerning women, and addressing this issue has become possible after enduring numerous processes.

In a society dominated by patriarchal values, the concept of femininity is constructed within the confines of these criteria. The dominant code is the masculine code, and deviating from the prescribed model of acceptable femininity results in significant consequences. Primarily, any portrayal of womanhood that falls outside the established framework poses a substantial threat to the patriarchal

order (Oktan & Küçükalkan, 2013). Consequently, masculinity never signifies otherness for women. In fact, the male-dominated structure makes such a notion inherently impossible from the outset (Bora, 2005), and unequal gender values consistently position men above women (Agacinski, 1998). In this context, the fundamental construct for women revolves around their roles as mothers and wives. Women associated with the domain of "home" derive their productivity and value from this sphere (Kuşçan, 2010). Femininity is grounded in anatomical reality; however, it is accompanied by spirituality and social dimensions. The entire process related to distinctions such as little girls, young girls, and women is determined by societal imagination (Habip, 2009). Instead of creating a true self and building trust, masculinity is associated with domination and femininity with obedience. This situation raises concerns about the distinction between self and others, reinforcing visible differences that may be perpetuated in future generations (Keller, 2007). Thus, stereotypes serve various functions, including conformity, approval-seeking, enhancement of self-worth, and the creation of a positive social identity (Dökmen, 2012). This creates a sense of comfort and belonging for individuals, as being accepted in society fulfills significant psychological needs. However, it is crucial to carefully consider the destructive effects of stereotypes. Addressing the detrimental effects of gender-related patterns on women is not an easy task, as these patterns manifest in various meaning constructions. In contemporary times, discussions on gender concepts, academic studies, and feminist movements have undoubtedly contributed to changing the notion of womanhood. Feminism, as highlighted by Berktay, has played a crucial role in revealing that the supposedly neutral concept of "human" has never truly existed in the past or present and that drawing attention to the formation of gender-based female and male identities in society (Berktay, 2006). The influence of communication technologies today is highly effective in challenging dominant stereotypes and amplifying the voices of social issues. Opposition to imposed norms and rebellious actions have transformed the need for physical activism into new forms of resistance. Digital activist movements, in particular, have become widespread and impactful in this regard. Positioned as an extension of feminist movements, digital activism has emerged as a new communication platform to highlight gender-related impositions.

The article titled "Examining Digital Feminism in The World and In Turkey: Digital Activism Experiences of The Young" examines Twitter hashtags and conducts in-depth interviews with 30 men and women aged 20-25. The research results indicate that the #susmabitsin hashtags demonstrate a determination to continue fighting against sexual harassment in all aspects of life, despite pressure to remain silent and forget. The emphasis on solidarity is evident, with examples of women no longer keeping quiet. The interviews reveal that social media serves as an instructive platform for women's issues, offering significant potential to disseminate and shape feminist ideas. These digital spaces give rise to new forms of gender discourse and creative modes of protest (Gedik, 2020). In another study titled "Social Media and Feminist Activism: The Activism Forms of Feminist Groups in Turkey," the impact of social media on feminist group activism is explored. The research focuses on Twitter shares of feminist groups like "Mor Çatı", "Uçan Süpürge", and "Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi". The findings show that these groups use social media to express their reactions to issues such as violence against women, rape, and murder. These platforms also become venues for issuing calls to action. As a result, the analyzed accounts not only address women's issues but also generate an activist movement (Şen & Kök, 2017). Digital networks contribute to the creation of cultural forms known as "digital sisterhood," where feminist groups and women seek support (Gedik, 2020). The emergence of virtual reality (VR) narratives that explore gender issues represents a novel form of activism, enabled by advancements in communication technology and narrative techniques. While this form of activism may not have the same widespread impact as social media, VR narratives possess unique narrative features that have the power to immerse individuals into hyper-realistic experiences, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. As a result, individuals become active participants in a simulated world, taking on roles that involve surveillance and utility within the virtual environment. This transformation of existing content into a personal and interactive hyperreal experience allows VR narratives to offer a distinctive approach to addressing gender-related themes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the subsequent phase of the research, the 360-degree virtual reality narrative, which aligns with the concept of experiential activism, will be analyzed using the designated research method and sample. The primary objective is to investigate how the theme of gender is portrayed within the narrative,

employing new communication technologies. Additionally, the study aims to uncover the elements of "activism" that emerge through the virtual reality "experience." The analysis will focus on understanding how the virtual reality experience contributes to promoting activism in the context of gender issues.

3.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate virtual reality environments, a cutting-edge aspect of new communication technologies. By focusing on these virtual reality (VR) environments, the study aims to shed light on the active agency effect that VR narrative characteristics have on participants. While VR narratives encompass a wide range of experiences and themes, they particularly emphasize a sense of action, especially in content dealing with social issues. This study seeks to explore a novel form of activist action termed "experiential activism," which emerges through the content and interactive elements of VR narratives, engaging participants actively in the experience. Understanding the potential of new communication technologies, particularly VR, and how they can shape social issues is crucial in unveiling the transformative potential of VR narratives. This research seeks to underscore the importance of VR narratives in addressing social issues and advocating for change through immersive and interactive experiences.

3.2. SAMPLE AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The selected sample for this research, which investigates the concept of experiential activism through virtual reality technology, is the 360-degree VR narrative called "Fight Back VR". This virtual reality narrative centers on the theme of gender and explores the concept of "sisterhood," engaging participants in an interactive narrative world. The research employs the actantial model of Greimas and the structural semantics analysis method for analyzing the selected VR narrative. These analytical tools will help to uncover the underlying structures, roles of actors, and narrative elements present in the "Fight VR Back" narrative. By utilizing these analytical methods, the research aims to reveal the ways in which the virtual reality experience contributes to the concept of experiential activism, particularly in the context of gender-related themes.

Greimassian semiotics is a general theory of meaning (Hobyane, 2015). Greimas, through his work titled "Du sens. Essais sémiotiques," which was published in 1970, provided a definite trajectory connecting lexicology to semantics and from semantics to semiotics. Subsequently, he published a paper of significant theoretical value in his work titled "Sémiotique narrative et textuelle," which encompasses elements like actants, actors and figures. In this analysis, the study concentrates on the units of "sender/receiver; subject/object; helper/opponent actors," and the manifestations of these units in discourses, such as actor, figures (Rifat, 1998). Greimas made reference to the method followed by Propp in analyzing the structure of fairy tales, and he adapted and applied his approach in certain aspects. In the field of semiotics, Greimas focused not on the meaning of literary or non-literary texts/discourses but on providing tools for analyzing the construction of meaning (Güneş, 2013). In this context, Greimas conceived the narrative as a four-stage process. These stages consist of the principles of "contract", "acquisition of competence", "performance", and "sanction". The "contract" represents the first phase of the narrative, where events begin. In the "acquisition" stage, the protagonist undergoes tests with their innate or acquired abilities. The "performance" stage characterizes the protagonist's taking action after acquiring the necessary abilities, while the "sanction" stage expresses the success or failure of the protagonist (Soydan, 2007). Greimas evaluates a person not based on their identity but on their actions. In the model he developed, he combines six actantial classes in pairs: subject-object opposition on the desire axis, sender-receiver opposition on the communication axis, and helper-blocker opposition on the power axis (Parsa, 2008).

**Figure 1.** Actuational Model of A. J. Greimas (Venancio, 2016, s. 3)

The actantial model, employed by Greimas as an analysis method that focuses on meaning, is deemed suitable for analyzing the selected sample in this study for several reasons. Firstly, the "Fight Back VR" narrative positions the participant as the hero within the story, making them an active agent rather than passive recipient of the narrative. Consequently, the semantic extensions of the structure to be analyzed are constructed from the perspective of the active protagonist embedded in the narrative. Analyzing this installation in the context of features introduced by new communication technologies will establish a connection between narrative and technological innovation. As a result, the transformation of the attributes of the virtual reality narrative into experiential activism will be identified.

4. *FIGHT BACK VR* NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

"Darkness is only the absence of light."

The narrative of Fight Back VR is interaction-based storytelling. In the analysis section, this narrative, which will be thoroughly discussed, primarily focuses on women's stories. However, the narrative progresses and culminates based on the participant's actions. The participant is an integral part of the story and assumes the role of a hero for the sisters awaiting rescue.

Stage 1 Contract: This stage marks the initiation of the narrative, where the story commences. In this initial phase, there is a requirement for both the subject and the sender to progress further in the storyline. In "Fight Back VR" developed utilizing the 360-degree technique, the subject of the narrative is the participant. This aspect sets apart the VR narrative from other formats right from the outset.
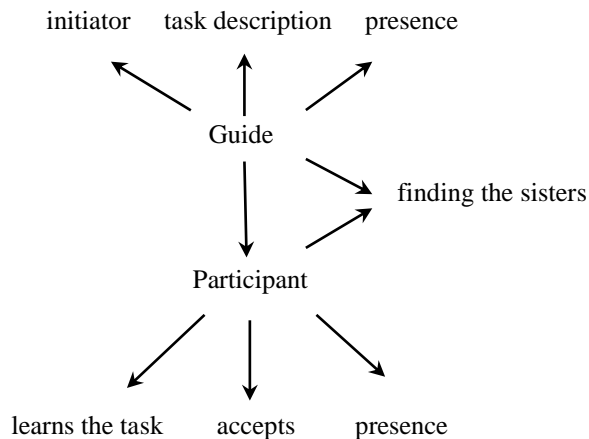
Sender
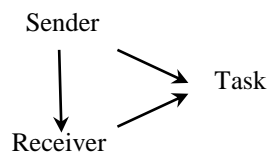
Task

Receiver

Figure 2. The contract stage in the narrative

The common goal shared by the Sender and Receiver, which is an essential dynamic of the narrative, is the assigned task. In this narrative, the guide person takes on the role of assigning the task, while the subject, who accepts the task, can be anyone. This dynamic is established right from the moment the participant puts on the VR headset. The positioning of the subject in the virtual space becomes crucial at this stage since the action originates from a specific place that includes the participant. Moreover, the setting in this narrative is a spatial one. As a result, a strong narrative is established from the very beginning, even before the story delves into the area where the conflict is most intense. Additionally, the virtual space in this story is interactive, and the participant is not merely an observer but an active experiencer within this environment. The initial information that immerses the subject into the narrative is conveyed through a voice-over, saying, "Congratulations for your reincarnation as a newborn star." This moment serves to inform the subject about their identity within the virtual world. Given that the subject is an actual person, understanding their role within the narrative becomes crucial. The voice-over emphasizes that the subject was a part of another world in a previous life and now travels between different realities, which adds complexity to the narrative.

In this narrative, the voice initially presents itself as the agent and later transforms into the inner voice of both the guide and the participant. It starts the action by integrating with the participant, assuring the hero that it will keep them safe. The hero is depicted as the most recent star born in the universe. As the story progresses, the guide gradually provides information about the plot and outlines the hero's task step by step. The narrative revolves around a battle between light and darkness. Just before the mission begins, the guide warns the hero that their current location is dangerous. The subsequent stages of the experience are approached with the idea of finding the hero's captured sister, who belongs to a constellation that might provide protection. The ultimate goal is to find the sister and ensure their safety while navigating through the challenges. This stage of the narrative integrates the hero's task with interactive content, enhancing the immersive experience. The guide, who initiates the action, takes on the roles of both the sender and the guide throughout the story. Due to this dual role, the guide

accompanies the hero numerous times, providing guidance and support. In the virtual reality environment, the task diagram created during the action phase can be outlined as follows:

initiator   task description   presence

Guide

finding the sisters

Participant

learns the task   accepts   presence

Figure 3. The relationship between the participant and the guide in the narrative

Indeed, the place holds significance in the initial phase of the narrative. It represents a void space created by the virtual reality universe, acting as a gateway that transports the hero from real life into the virtual world. This space is seamlessly integrated into the narrative using the VR storytelling technique.

Stage 2.-3. Acquisition and Performance:

After the guide explains the purpose of the task, the contract phase gives way to the acquisition phase. During this stage, the protagonist's abilities and powers are highlighted, equipping him to confront the challenges that lie ahead. The guide plays a crucial role in detailing these powers bestowed upon the protagonist within the narrative. However, unlike before, the guide now takes on a tangible form rather than remaining an abstract entity. This visibility is intended to demonstrate to the upcoming shadow battle participant how to develop a defense mechanism.

In the story, this phase is not a discrete and linear process; rather, it serves as an instructive and continuous learning experience, often repeating over time. The hero's achievements are not all revealed and completed at once; they unfold gradually, and the intensity of the hero's struggle increases progressively. As a result, the hero must continually acquire new skills and accomplishments to keep up with the escalating challenges. This phase also serves as an interactive stage, facilitating the transition to the next phase of the story. The hero's actions and movements in the physical reality have a direct impact on the virtual reality he navigates. Therefore, the participant must acquire the necessary skills and knowledge here to protect themselves within the virtual world. To this end, the guide provides essential information about the upcoming battle with the shadows. The guide assures the hero that while the initial stage of the fight may be perilous, there will be no physical harm involved. This assurance is vital, given that the hero is a real person immersed in a virtual life. The first task for the hero is to create a circle of protection, and the guide provides instructions on how to do so. The hero's hands, visible in his invisible virtual body, play a fundamental role in forming this protection circle. These actions simultaneously propel the story into the active stage, as the hero's initial task involves rescuing the first sister, and the stages of acquisition and performance unfold in parallel.

As the story progresses, the guide, now rescued by the hero, imparts new information to the protagonist. The hero's mission is to assist a star team of four sisters who have all been captured by the shadows. Each sister the hero rescues becomes a helper and guide for the others who are still trapped in darkness. It becomes evident that every light rescued from the darkness takes on a supportive role for those who are in deeper peril. This aspect of the story highlights the interconnectedness of the characters and their roles. The attainment of knowledge and skills by the hero is closely tied to their actions and the guidance provided by the rescued sisters. There exists a complex and intricate relationship between the guide and the hero, as the guide not only imparts crucial knowledge but also plays an active part in the hero's journey as a rescued character. Throughout the narrative, the hero's acquisition of new

abilities and accomplishments is intertwined with the support and guidance offered by the rescued sisters. This interplay between the hero, the guide, and the rescued characters adds depth and complexity to the story.

Stage of Acquisition and Perform

Guide *Character*

Heroic *Participant*

Guide *Rescued*
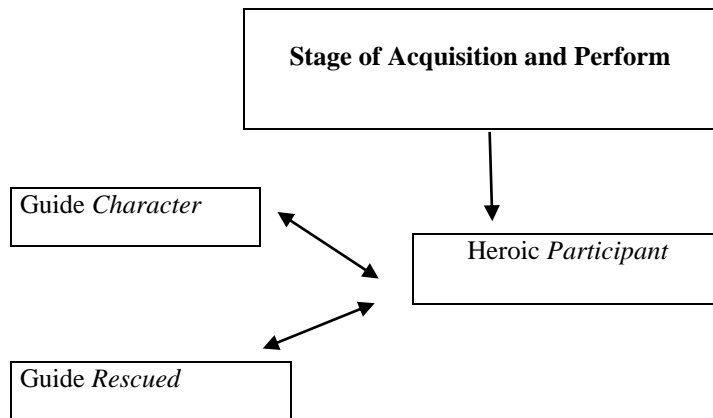
Figure 4. The function of the guide and the participant's acquisitions and perform in the narrative

The hero, stands at the pinnacle of the journey, commencing the task, acquiring abilities, and facing challenges. This elevated position allows the hero to explore their true potential and grow stronger with each new ability gained from every person rescued.

Table 1. The Hero's (participant) acquisition and performance stage beginning

	The Hero's Acquisition and Performance Stage Beginning
The Primary Objective	Rescue the sisters
First Acquisition	Acquire hands
First Performance	Create a circle of protection

With the guidance of the rescued sister, a new stage of performance commences, and the hero actively engages in battle with the shadows. Each subsequent act signifies a progressively more arduous struggle. Additionally, a new guide, recovered and integrated into the narrative, accompanies the hero through each challenge. Every newly rescued individual serves as an assistant for the next ordeal. As the hero advances to the second stage of the struggle, the protective circle acquired in the previous stage proves inadequate. Hence, the hero's acquisition and performance stages recur multiple times. Before confronting the shadows, the hero acquires fresh powers through the practical teachings of the guide. This process renders the upcoming challenges even more demanding. However, the hero continues to practice the guide's instructions until mastering the required actions. Once prepared, the hero initiates the battle, which involves both saving the sisters and safeguarding their own well-being. Consequently, a two-stage process ensues. This two-stage dynamic also extends to the guide, who comprises both the rescued individuals and the hero's inner voice.

Establishing the Helper Character in the Narrative

Inner Voice   Rescued Sisters
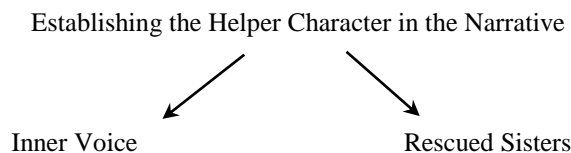
Figure 5. The Role of the Helper in the Narrative

The hero's subsequent stage involves transitioning from defense to offense. Now confronted with more potent shadows, relying solely on defensive measures from previous achievements proves insufficient. Consequently, the hero embarks on learning offensive techniques through new acquisitions. Throughout this process, the guide remains a constant source of guidance and motivation during the attack. The guide provides encouraging statements, urging the hero to persist in the battle and

discouraging thoughts of retreat. Thus, the entirety of the hero's acquisition and performance scheme can be outlined as follows, leading up to the final stage known as the "sanctions" stage:

Table 2. The acquisition stage of the hero in the virtual reality narrative

The Hero's Interaction-Based "Acquisition" Process	
Defense-Oriented	**Attack-Oriented**
1. Protection Circle 2. Shield	1. Double targeting and striking the weak point. 2. Targeting and striking the weak point three times from high and low

Stage 4 Sanction:

This is the stage where the hero's journey of struggle culminates in either success or failure. Having overcome all the stages in the quest, the hero reunites with his rescued sisters and learns about their individual stories. This serves as a reward for his successful completion of the journey. Until the very last moment, the hero remains unfamiliar with the true identities of the people who saved him and provided guidance. Nevertheless, the triumph of his journey signifies an opportunity to acquaint himself with those benevolent souls who aided and supported him along the way.

With the phrases "You made it. You liberated us you let our light shine again." the rescued women start forming a circle around the hero. Gradually, the first woman steps forward, revealing her true silhouette before the hero. The first woman to introduce herself is Florence, hailing from one of Africa's most impoverished slums. Florence recounts the frequent attacks on elderly women in her community, which prompted them to learn self-defense. She guides the protagonist to meet the other sisters after providing some essential information. The hero's task now is to hold the hand of the next person in line. In this hyper-reality moment of heightened interaction, the next woman introduces herself as Margaret Garrett. Born in Victorian England, she was a prominent advocate fighting for women's suffrage. In response to the oppression and animosity they faced, Garrett established a union where she trained her fellow sisters and engaged in activities focused on self-preservation. Next in line is Captain Lakshmi, a valiant fighter for India's independence and leader of the women's union. Lakshmi recounts her experiences as a doctor, assisting those in need after the war. She emphasizes the necessity of reacting and fighting for the defense of rights. As the introductions continue, Telescilla steps forward. She played a crucial role in gathering women to defend Argos, ultimately saving her city. Following her, NC Mui from China makes her presence known. Mui created a new martial art called Wing Chun, showcasing her incredible prowess and skill. By rescuing these individuals, the hero learns the courageous stories of women who fought bravely. In turn, the hero liberates these women from their dark past and gains invaluable skills and knowledge from each encounter.

**Table 3.** The rewards and acquisitions the hero achieves at the end of the narrative.

Hero's Rescue Action and Achievements	
Rescued Sisters and Heroic Tales	
Florence	fought for elderly women who lived in Africa and faced attacks.
Margaret Garrett	lived in England and fought for women's suffrage rights.
Captain Lakshmi	lived in India, fought in the army for independence, and became the leader of a women's union.
Telescilla	lived in Greece and gathered women to fight in order to defend her city.
NC Mui	lived in China and created a new martial art called Wing Chun.

The narrative ends with the sentence, "A safer world for women within reach. This game taught you some basic self-defenses moves. Be part of the solution."

4.1. THE FEATURE OF VR NARRATIVE TO CREATE EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVISM

In the preceding section, the narrative of "Fight Back VR" was subjected to analysis using Greimas' Actantial Model. The primary objective of this study is not only to uncover the narrative structure within the aforementioned work but also to discern the divergences introduced by VR (presumably a specific element or technology) and emphasize its impact on the overall narrative.

The analyzed narrative of "Fight Back VR" incorporates an interactive virtual reality environment, which sets it apart right from the outset. The immersive nature of the interaction with the participant gives rise to various effects. One particularly remarkable aspect is the participant's strong sense of "presence" within the virtual world. This positioning of the participant as a first-person character in the "Fight Back VR" experience directly drives the progression of the story. Despite following a classical narrative structure, comprising introduction, development, and conclusion, this narrative's essential transformation occurs not in its construction but rather through the influence of the participant's experience. Consequently, the key element leading to experiential activism in the context of VR content lies in the installation of empathy and the immersive effect it creates.
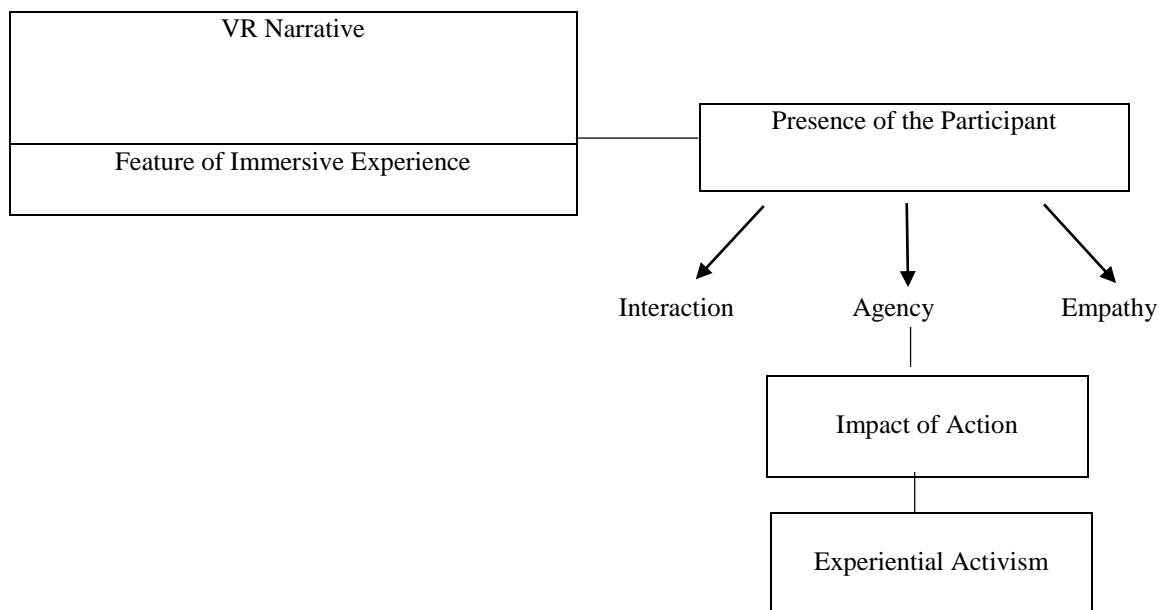
Figure 6. Experiential Activism Process in VR Narratives

The form or genre of a narrative can introduce various ambiguities in content produced by virtual reality technologies. The interactive, experiential, and immersive impact of VR blurs the boundaries between formats such as movies, games, or videos. "Fight Back VR", for instance, incorporates a gamified storyline, where the game's defining characteristic arises from the transformation of actions into meaningful effects through user interaction. However, without active participation from the user, merely watching or playing in two dimensions results in an ordinary experience. A 360-degree VR narrative becomes possible when the person is involved and actively influences the story. Therefore, the effectiveness of VR headsets in distancing individuals from physical reality becomes crucial in elevating the virtual environment to a hyper-realistic dimension. This shift is more about the context of the virtual experience rather than just the individual's physical presence. In this context in VR, the "who" and "what" questions are not necessarily the same as in real-life stories or experiences. While real-life narratives are intimately tied to the individual's identity, the virtual environment not only allows a person to be represented but also adds the feature to embody various identities. For instance, in the "Fight Back VR" narrative, the participant assumes the roles of both a hero and a newborn star, existing in a visually captivating space. By experiencing this, the person disconnects from their physical reality and immerses themselves in the virtual reality. Such an experience empowers the person to take action in the unfolding story. The essence of interaction is pivotal for the story's progression, and its conversion into action is essential to reach the goal. Consequently, the participant becomes the virtual character situated at the center of the story. Without transforming the elements of interaction into actions, the participant's journey cannot advance. As a result, each element contributing to the narrative's transformation into activism is interconnected.

The information acquired by the participant at the beginning of the story, the purpose of their journey, and the guidance provided by the guide all translate into benefits, thanks to the interactive nature of VR. The information obtained by the participant at the beginning of the story, the purpose of

the journey, and the guidance, result in benefits due to the interactive feature of VR. These benefits become intertwined with the hero role bestowed upon the participant over time. The interaction enabled by VR fosters empathy with the characters in the story. As a result, the hero (participant) becomes the one who fights for the purpose of their journey. This struggle gains significance through identification, even in a two-dimensional game or movie experience. However, the fact that this identification arises from real movements and actions in the virtual environment strengthens the sense of empathy, thanks to the effect of embodiment.

The stages that generate the effect of experiential activism are undoubtedly closely interconnected, but the process of transforming action into effect extends beyond these stages. In this context, not only the technological narrative features of VR play a role but also the subject matter of the experienced story holds significant importance. Otherwise, any narrative that achieves a high level of immersive power could have activist potential. "Fight Back VR," by focusing on women's issues through the theme of gender, converts all interaction-action stages in the narrative into a meaningful endeavor. By assigning the participant the role of the hero, the story elicits a profound impact on the individual, culminating in the person's actions leading to a meaningful resolution. Additionally, the participant gains knowledge about the art of defense and attack, which they acquire during the narrative journey. As a result, the experienced narrative acquires an educational aspect that not only serves the purpose of the story but also prepares the individual for potential situations they may encounter in their daily life.

CONCLUSION

As communication technologies continue to advance alongside an increasing array of tools, their presence significantly impacts our processes of perception and sense-making in life. Each new tool introduces a fresh transfer of meaning. Throughout history, the media has consistently assumed a prominent role in transforming societal events into news content and disseminating it widely. However, in contemporary times, this phenomenon has transcended physical boundaries, thanks to digital technologies and communication tools, leading to the emergence of virtual environments as shared communication spaces.

This study explores the connection between virtual reality technologies and activism within the context of social events, focusing on an analysis of the actional model of the "Fight Back VR" narrative. The research aims to reveal the narrative's structure, the sequence of events, and the variables involved, while also exploring the impact of the VR environment on the narrative. "Fight Back VR" employs a 360-degree narrative structure, placing significant importance on the experience of the narrative, particularly concerning women's issues. The participant assumes the role of the hero in this narrative setup. The VR environment transforms the traditional storytelling experience, allowing the participant to not only witness the effects of the hero but also directly experience and embody the hero's position. This immersion creates a unique sense of otherness, emphasizing a direct and intimate engagement with the narrative content. In the narrative, events follow a classic progression of introduction, development, and conclusion. The participant's role gains utilitarian integrity within the narrative, as they actively contribute to solving the issues presented in the story, especially related to women's issues. The hero's journey is supported by other characters within the narrative, such as the guide person, the sender, and the blocker, who assist and influence the hero's progress. Overall, "Fight Back VR" offers an engaging and empowering experience, where the participant's active involvement and the narrative's focus on women's issues serve as the foundation for addressing and resolving the problems depicted in the story. The integration of VR technologies into activism narratives like this presents to create immersive and impactful experiences for participants.

Another significant difference lies in the 360-degree setup of the narrative, providing the participant with freedom of perspective and enhancing the sense of reality within the experience. This departure from traditional two-dimensional storytelling introduces a novel content setup. As a result, the hero's spatial experience encompasses a 360-degree area, resembling their physical life. This emphasis on space brings the virtual experience closer to reality and imbues the hero's actions within that space with meaningful behavior. However, it is essential to recognize that not all VR narratives exhibit this utilitarian attitude. The aforementioned situation primarily applies to VR narratives addressing social issues. While all narratives can elicit emotional responses like catharsis, identification, and empathy, VR's unique features make these emotional states much more compelling. One such feature is the

participant's ability to embody any identity and be present anywhere within the narrative. In the examined sample, the hero's location is in the galaxy, interacting with mystical beings representing light. An opposing force, represented by shadow enemies, seeks to extinguish this light. In this way, real-life problems are transformed into a mystical story within the virtual environment, finding expression through metaphors. However, the magical environment allowing the participant to immerse themselves in the story can be disrupted by the hero's physical-real movements. These bodily movements become crucial in shaping the hero's struggle within the narrative. The embodiment of the hero's actions intensifies the participant's emotional engagement in the story, creating a more profound impact compared to traditional storytelling methods.

In the research analysis, all the elements proposed by Greimas – sender, receiver, task - were clearly seen. The narrative begins with the participant, putting on the VR glasses, and being directed by the guide person who initiates the events in the story. This guide serves as the narrator and initiator of the narrative. Additionally, the hero has an inner voice that also acts as a guide throughout the journey. The actor, which is the participant, takes on the role of the hero, and the task at hand is to fight against the darkness that seeks to extinguish the light and liberate the captive "sisters." Each rescued woman possesses her own unique story and strength, adding depth to the overall narrative. These stories are unveiled as the hero progresses, and each rescued person imparts a new fighting technique to the hero, enhancing their abilities. Consequently, the hero's journey is enriched by the experiences of various individuals, leading to a newfound strength and determination in the fight against the darkness. The presence of multiple guides not only diversifies the hero's experiences throughout the story but also results in a power gain for each rescued sister. This progression allows the hero to grow stronger and fight more ardently against the adversities encountered. The overall structure not only enriches the narrative but also symbolizes the importance of collective support and empowerment in the face of challenges.

According to the findings obtained from the analysis, all the elements proposed by Greimas – "contract", "acquisition", "performance", and "sanction" - in the four stages of the narrative are indeed present. However, there is an intriguing observation that the "acquisition" and "performance" stages exhibit a more intertwined unity, although they are still successive in nature. In the narrative, each rescued person brings about a new achievement, leading to a repetition of increasingly powerful heroic acts. This repetition of achievements and heroic actions creates a sense of progression and growth in the hero's journey. The "acquisition" and "performance" stages are interactive and rely on the real-time actions of the protagonist (participant) within the VR environment. The VR technology enables the detection and translation of the participant's real-time movements into actions within the virtual world. This seamless integration of real and virtual actions allows for an immersive and engaging experience, empowering the participant to actively influence the narrative's outcomes. The interactive nature of the "acquisition" and "performance" stages, made possible by VR technology, enhances the participant's sense of agency and involvement in the narrative. This integration of real-time actions and virtual consequences creates a compelling storytelling experience, blurring the lines between the physical and virtual realms. The dynamic and intertwined setup of these stages contributes to the overall effectiveness and impact of the narrative.

Indeed, the interaction feature of VR is indeed crucial in advancing the narrative through the hero's journey and translating their experiences into meaningful actions and benefits. The "sanction" stage, where the hero achieves success and receives rewards, marks the completion of the narrative's purpose and meaning. In this phase, the hero directly interacts with the faces of the saved sisters and listens to their stories, which are essential to the transformation of the struggle into a form of activism. Each of these women has faced struggles stemming from problematic perceptions of women in society. Through their individual experiences, they have endeavored to benefit society by expanding their collective struggle. The hero's intimate engagement with these women, through physical interaction and attentive listening, enables the hero's personal struggle to evolve into a form of activism. The core element underlying this transformation into activism is experience. The immersive and interactive nature of VR allows the hero (participant) to deeply empathize with the narrative's content and characters, fostering a powerful emotional connection. This integration of experience with other elements such as immersion, presence, interaction, and empathy further strengthen the narrative's impact. Through the VR narrative, real behaviors are translated into meaningful benefits in the virtual realm. However, it is crucial to highlight that this transformative effect is instructive, as it revolves around addressing real-time

problems presented in the narrative. The narrative's content revolves around activism, signifying the struggle against societal issues. Ultimately, the interactive and experiential features of VR, along with the instructive effect of the narrative, allow for a transformation towards activism, where real-world problems are addressed, and the hero's journey takes on a meaningful and impactful trajectory within virtual reality.

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