Virtual Second Life Affects the Existence of Arab Residents

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Abstract—The 3D virtual community known as Second Life (SL) which is available on the Internet (www.secondlife.com) represents the latest online services for business, learning, training, and entertainment. People, regional and ethnic groups, business organizations, social activities, and various societal environments populate this world. People who live in this virtual world, known as residents, use personal avatars to declare themselves. People from the Arab region also exist in this world, and they practice their activities as human beings, emotions, and actions. For the Arab residents, there is no escape from living in these communities, like others, using this unlimited space and time. The SL Societies honour their own traditions, ethics, and behaviors as personal values. And since Arab society, in particular, has its own values, traditions, and ethics, could there be a significant reflection of these values in the Second Life Society? This paper aims to pinpoint the possible consequences that certain ethical attitudes attribute to Arab residents, while also posing the crucial question of whether these values and ethics align with the diverse societies within the SL realm. The paper identifies the possibility of a decline in the popularity and population of SL with the reluctance of Arab societies, although, a large number of Arabs have access to Internet services as enriched with technical issues and Internet provision in most Arab countries.

Keywords—Internet; second life; virtual worlds; Arab; values; ethics

I. INTRODUCTION

Linden Research, Inc. owns Second Life (SL). In 2003, it was opened to the public; in 2013, there were more than one million monthly residents; in 2017, there were at least 600,000 active residents; in 2018, that number dropped to around half a million active monthly residents; in 2019. As of August 7, 2020, at 14:20:03 SLT, the total number of residents stands at 64,167,367, with an additional 47,696 residents accessing the site online [1] [32]. After 20 years, and close to the 21st birthday of the second life, from 21st June 2024 through until 21st July 2024 Rachel Douglass reported on July 28, 2023 [34], that there are still about 74.7 million active residents in SL (https://gridsurvey.com/), with an average of 200000 daily access, but Second Life Grid Statistics on June 20, 2024 Update [35] listed a decrease in residents concurrency levels in SL Life regions, now statistics account a total of 67,862,439 residents.. Linden owns intellectual property rights, forms requirements, terms of service in this world directives, and licenses virtual lands. SL residents can interact with others through their avatars to socialize and participate in the live components that exist in this world: conversations, trading, simulation sex, rape, or even marriage and divorce, as well as

having fun and sharing their knowledge. So it's fully a pseudo-reality of the real world, but with a high level of privacy in creating what you desire, including potentials, resources, and behaviors, starting with selecting your personality, identifying your features, and choosing to communicate and visit as many places as you want. Hence, social virtual worlds in SL represent the real world digitally, so it is necessary to meet legal and ethical situations as in real life. In this paper, we perform an extensive analysis of the existence of Arab avatars in SL and how their ethics and values affect these worlds negatively or positively, Also, this noticeable decrease in the number of Second Life residents, are they part of it?

II. OBJECTIVE AND METHOD

This paper follows the investigative approach to ensure the existence of Arab content, personalities, and sciences in SL environment that does not revolve around the barrier of language or moral legacies, customs, and beliefs, so that this environment is an uncomfortable place and does not continue to accept and be in it, this was done by examining the Arab presence in the SL environment actually, and through the publications of Arab and non-Arab residents in it related to these axes, and the paper tried to summarize this with all transparency in the quest to try to understand the Arab presence, investigating the withdrawal of a large number of them from this virtual world, and whether this is their own or it is a general issue that affected all other nationalities. Taking into account the noticeable decrease in resident numbers, we cannot deny that Arabs are part of this decrease. The paper also seeks to confirm that Arabs are an indispensable nationality that has a share of this decrease.

A. The Arab Identity

Arab identity as a reality, not a choice, depending on state of birth, lineage, legacies, and place of birth, and upbringing and coexistence with family and peers have linked it to the culture of the surrounding environment. In virtual worlds such as SL, the origins of this identity, its legacies, and its behaviors are very far from reality. Rather, it is a natural reflection in which a resident's practice differs according to his origin, or he seeks to escape from the real world, which causes him some complications that are not commensurate with what he is expect. Arab identity is the people who exist within the Arab region, which includes the 22 countries spreading from the Atlantic to the Arabian Gulf, and the predominant language in it is Arabic in both speech and writing. Interestingly, they have different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds [2] [3]. Otherwise, they may exist outside the Arab region while

maintaining an attachment (stuck) to their culture and heritage. Fig. 1.

Google Trends (https://trends.google.com/trends/) reveals that the interest in SL among Arab individuals in the Arab region over the past five years, across four states or more in each country, has resulted in the numbers shown in Table I. These numbers indicate the rate of interest in the web search for "Second Life" term specifically, and we calculate this rate by comparing it to the highest point in the graph for the specific region and period, i.e. the value "100" represents the peak popularity of the search term compared to other search words in the same region, while the value "50" represents half the popularity of this phrase. For absent countries, there is not enough data available for this search term.

Fig. 1. Arab region map. Source: League of Arab States (LAS) [4].

TABLE I. INTEREST IN SL TERMS AMONG ARAB COUNTRIES, LISTED ON TUESDAY, MAY 14, 2024

Country	Number of sub-regions	Level of interest by sub-region (mean)
Algeria	4	91.50
Bahrain	4	92.50
Egypt	4	56.25
Iraq	4	79.00
Jordan	4	65.00
Kuwait	4	78.25
Lebanon	3	79.30
Libya	3	96.67
Mauritania	1	100.00
Morocco	4	70.50
Qatar	4	75.25
Saudi Arabia	4	53.75
Somalia	1	100.00
Syria	2	100.00
Tunisia	4	81.25
United Arab Emirates	4	93.75
Yemen	1	100.00

B. Second Life's Terms

Residents are expected to adhere to a set of community standards as part of their agreement with Second Life's Terms of Service (ToS). The Terms of Service (ToS) outline the actions that can restrict your access to the service, including the possibility of terminating your membership. These actions can include racism, intolerance, harassment, abuse, intimidation, disrespect for space and privacy, sharing inappropriate content, doing suspicious things, being in places that are allowed for people of a certain age and status, like adult areas, as well as keeping data private and not sharing information in harmful or other ways that bother other residents, or being hostile or acting in a subversive way [5]. The ethics in Second Life's Terms cover social and commercial activities, property rights, and their legal review [6]. As a result, forms of virtual crime, such as murder, theft, and harassment, have emerged as a likely sign of moral disorder in virtual life similar to real life. For instance, a woman in Japan faced arrest after her husband killed her Avatar in a virtual environment [7], while a woman in Delaware faced accusations of plotting to kidnap a real life from a loved one she had met through an SL [8]. In SL, morality presents a vast, large, and complex landscape, which is interesting in many ways. Second-life science of personality and its ills often links these moral issues to real-life practices. This is especially true in a world that fails to meet all control standards, including restrictions on access to pornography and inappropriate content, online gambling, and the promotion of violence, harassment, and bullying.

C. Arab Ethics and Values

Ethics is the noble characteristic of the human being that makes him appreciated and respected, and the people of the Arab region derived some characteristics from their environment. Cultural and religious beliefs often deeply root these ethics, shaping how people interact, make decisions, and approach various aspects of life. Some key elements of Arab ethics and values are sincerity; they tend to adhere to the teachings, which are characterized as divine, comprehensive, and stable; the mind accepts them and stimulates responsibility and public interest; they watch the person inwardly and outwardly; and they seek to control their instincts and passions. Therefore, they are characterized by good hospitality, honoring the guest, forgiving when able, providing relief to the needy, relief of the distressed, acumen, and inspiration. In terms of chastity, the characteristics of the Arabs include generosity, kindness, modesty, help, piety, lack of greed [9], respect for elders, respect for parents, caring for children and relatives, and maintaining family unity, all of which are considered important values. It may clash with a virtual reality in which there are all types of people and morals, as well as a lot of ethnic, creedal, and customary variations, such as the Second Life society. Furthermore, the majority of Arab societies maintain a conservative view of women, which varies significantly depending on the culture, traditions, and values of each Arab country. Even within each country, there may be differences between urban and rural societies, as well as between different generations. Women's rights and opportunities to participate in public life, including education, work, politics, decision-making, and mingling with men, reflect ancient traditions and inherited concepts. In a global space like SL, these boundaries

and separations may be absent, which is reflected in the behavior of the Arab individual before or after the rejection of certain stances and behaviors, which directly affects his presence or non-existence within this society.

III. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Second Life Grid Statistics for June 2024 show that the grid has remained above the 30,000 region mark since May 2024, with private estates increasing slightly. Linden regions have remained the same for the past month, indicating no significant developments on the Bellisseria continent. The development work for Linden regions has slowed down due to the upcoming opening of SL21B to the public. Second Life daily user concurrency has risen slightly in recent weeks, with daily concurrency levels bouncing back. The monthly maximum concurrency trend started higher during the first three months of 2024 but has declined since April 2024. The trend might improve in late 2024/early 2025. Maximum peaks for Second Life during 2023 were higher at the start of the year but decreased slightly with a slight increase at the end of the year. The overall trend for max peaks in 2023 is similar to last year, with the highest peak occurring in January 2023 [38].

Hassan Hamidoui [10] noted that over 25,000 avatars have visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia island in Second Life, while another 25,500 avatars have journeyed to the Middle East, the most favored among the thirty-six Arab islands in Second Life. Also, he mentioned that these avatars can engage in activities they might not be able to do in real life, like celebrating Western holidays such as Valentine's Day, receiving gifts from the opposite genders, and even dancing to DJ music. To prevent illicit relationships or indecent clothes according to its religion and values, this island posted an ethical logo.

Güzel and Aydin [11], studying the effect of second life on speaking achievement, concluded that if avatars joined speaking classes, they could increase their speaking achievement in one of these ways: traditional speaking activities, speaking proficiency levels, or appropriate responses to situations that indicate improvement.

Smith and Berge [12] concluded in social learning theory in SL that people live in multiple interconnected worlds, similar to hyperlinks. In those worlds, in the future, we can expect to smell and feel things. Therefore, educators must reconsider their approaches to guiding learners; additionally, Bandura's social learning theory suggests that we can only relinquish our attitudes and emotional behaviors in these worlds, while accomplishing all other tasks.

When Kusumo and Endriastuti [7] studied the mental synthesis identity in Second Life, they came to the conclusion that, because SL residents feel free to create new identities with specific appearances and life goals, the attraction between the cyberghetto and cybertopia paradigms is never inevitable.

A study by Abdallah and Douglas [8] involved questioning a group of 45 mature undergraduate students at one of the universities in the United Arab Emirates. Abdallah and Doudlas asked the students to freely explore this environment over a period of several days. Students' engagement with Second Life averaged 4 hours, with some students clocking 15

hours. 34% of students identified the 'socializing' aspect of Second Life as their primary attraction, while 11% acknowledged the educational benefits of using it. However, 4% expressed dissatisfaction with SL's features and expressed negative sentiments about the appearance of naked women and men. The cultural, technical, and complexity barriers prevent students from returning to Second Life.

Pohlke's master thesis [13] discusses Second Life's (SL) language, citing nine different languages on the SL platform and approximately 38 languages spoken by residents (http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysreqs.php). This diversity allows residents to communicate and respond positively to the challenges posed by a multicultural society. The thesis concluded that the SL is not only a meeting space for people with different cultural backgrounds but also a social space where cultures of their own have evolved and may or may not offer a suitable test case for real-life cultures [31].

A. Avatars Talks

There was a lot of talk about the Arabic language, and Arab residents in the second life, MH [14], wondered about the presence of Arabs and the disappearance of the Arab Forum in Kuwait Virtual City and the other 100 region estates, which are inhabited by more than 50,000 active daily people. Kuwait City boasts 190,000 daily active users. What's happened to this? Erica Jameson [15] conveyed her fascination with the Arab lifestyle, particularly the marriage between a white girl and an Arab resident, and questioned if this could be considered a form of enslavement. Meanwhile, Aura [15] concentrated on gathering authentic feedback from the Second Life community regarding the issue of Arabs and Arabic in particular, the issues raised about it, the subsequent ban or closure of accounts, the potential bias against those who don't speak Arabic, and whether the language barrier is a contributing factor. Blocking and closing accounts? Sammantha Koppel [15] expressed his skepticism about bans based solely on English language proficiency. Mansour Riler [15] questioned why Linden Labs does not recognize the Arabic language. However, Linden Labs recognizes most other major languages. Void Singer responds, "Is this because more than one Arabic nation blocks access to SL, thereby reducing the number of people who speak it?" In contrast, Void Singer [16] asserted that the issue facing Arab residents stems from a significant volume of content theft in certain Arab societies, leading to user bans, often without their knowledge. On the other hand, the observers in the LL are not as numerous as to ascertain the Arabic writings and their significance, and this has been compared to other foreign language societies, such as Brazilian society, with little such a problem in French, German, and Italian societies. Muhammad Ahmad posted on Tuesday, June 23, 2015, at 02:21 AM [17]. Of all the communities, it was the most ignored by the SL owners. For years, other residents faced severe discrimination against most Arabs due to their limited English proficiency. People think it's simple to learn English when many are in nations that frown on western culture and ideas, so when one starts typing or speaking English, the censors take notice of you and your family. That's why they chose not to learn or speak about it on unprotected channels. Indeed, the absence of translation among viewers and the stricter regulations over the past three years have led them

to explore alternative online content. Even the owners of Second Life (SL) desired our departure, prompting the largest communities to convene a large meeting where elders cast votes to determine the winner. We asked SL's staff to attend the meeting, but we received a phone call informing us that no one was available. They expressed concern that others might perceive them as barbaric and doubt their humanity based on linguistic and religious differences rather than their character. Despite this, they continue to spend more money and lease more land than any other community. On Tuesday, June 23, 2015, at 06:04 AM, Rin posted that the marked decline in Arabic-speaking and regional participation in SL is a result of various developments in the Arab world. Sadly, almost all authoritarian regimes have leaped on any sign of uncontrollable online freedom of speech or service that may allow the dissemination—for them—of dangerous material and ideas. We wouldn't be surprised if SL followed suit, given its current state, although the exact extent of this decline remains unclear, as evidenced by the numerous comments in the SL community and New World Notes [17].

B. Arab Communities on SL

In the Arab region as a whole or the Middle East region, there are some Arab communities and gatherings that are popular and frequented by a significant number of residents. Here, we will examine some Arab Sims and societies that accurately portray the Arab individual and their activities, as evidenced by their message and behavior, and provide commentary on how these align with moral values and expected behaviors, such as:

Arabian Nights: Inspired by the tales of "One Thousand and One Nights," its themes encompass a large tent, featuring fictional or mythical elements such as magic jinn, flying carpets, beautiful palaces, bustling bazaars, and exotic landscapes like deserts and oases. Residents share activities that promote this, centered on Arab folklore or indigenous figures with a reputation and inherited history, such as adventurers, kings, merchants, and Sufis, and are full of events, concerts, and cultural performances. These events provide opportunities for socializing, creative expression, and immersive experiences in the Arabian Nights. Fig. 2(a) shows inside the buildings and aesthetic sites described in the tales of "One Thousand and One Nights" [18].

Dubai Event: This is a monthly shopping event that starts on the 20th of each month. It refers to a virtual event or series of events hosted within the platform that revolve around Dubai, the city known for the UAE, with its modernity, luxury, and cultural vitality, and reviews futuristic architecture, luxurious lifestyles, desert landscapes, traditional Arab culture, popular activities and attractions such as the Burj Khalifa, cultural performances such as music and dance performances, and interactive experiences related to Dubai's industries such as aviation, finance, and tourism. [19]. Fig. 2(b).

Habibi: Habibi Club is a Middle Eastern oasis on SL, a place or community where people interested in Arab culture gather. This oasis is characterized by Arab-style landscapes, buildings, and activities that reflect the richness of Arab heritage and aesthetics. This oasis provides a variety of activities, including listening to exotic music, watching belly dancers, listening to Arabic music such as traditional oud or contemporary pop, participating in storytelling sessions, and engaging in language exchange activities where participants can learn or practice Arabic [20] as shown in Fig 2(c).

Middle East: It reviews the art of Arab architecture and authentic Arabian horses to indicate equestrianism with Arab costume (jilbab and shemagh) as well as displays religion through the prayer of Muslims, and then displays Arab art, especially for the Levant region, which is famous for Dabke, and does not miss the scene of modern architecture high such as Burj Al Arab and Burj Al Faydaliya in Saudi Arabia, Burj Khalifa, Kuwait Towers, Sheikh Zayed Mosque, palms, and the sea, all of which came together in a painting that shows the beauty of the Middle East. As for personal values, modesty is observed for men and a reduction of nudity for women, such as very rare tattoos, chains, belongings, and attachment to liquor. As for fashion design, in the construction and empty design of the houses, it is noted that tents, the Bedouin environment, beauty, desert backgrounds, and sand are shown on the one hand, and the other hand, buildings with arches and long columns appear [23] as shown in Fig 2(d).

Sami (samiq8) created the Arab Market, a virtual marketplace or area within Second Life that specifically caters to Arab culture, products, and experiences. It includes virtual representations of traditional Arab markets where users can interact, trade, and engage in cultural activities [22], Fig. 2(e).

Antara Ansar founded the Arabesque group for artists and creators of Arabic aims intending to unite all lovers of Arabic and Islamic art and calligraphy [21] as shown in Fig. 2(f).
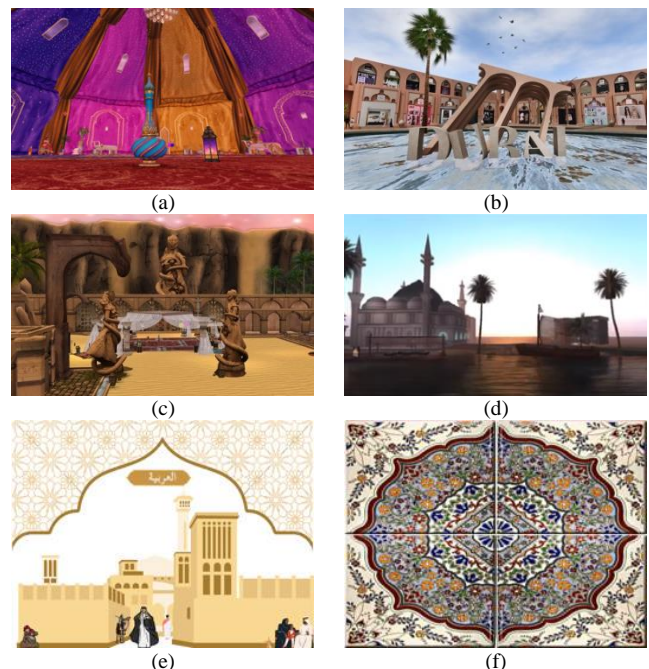

Fig. 2. Various images of Arab communities on SL: (a) Arabian Nights tent, (b) Dubai Event, (c) Habibi Club, (d) Middle East, (e) Arab Market and (f) Arabesque.

IV. DISCUSSION

Arab values manifest in the virtual cyber society through a complex interplay of offline culture being enacted online, counteracted online, and online culture being enacted offline. The digital transformation has impacted Arab and Islamic societies, blurring distinctions between traditional values and modern influences [24] and [25]. Arab youth, with their progressive civic outlook and digital engagement, show promise for better governance, embracing diversity, co-existence, women's empowerment, and innovation [26]. Arab women have used cyberspace to advocate for women's rights, fostering collective identity and solidarity through cyberfeminism [27]. The Internet-influenced Arab media landscape strikes a balance between preserving cultural norms and modern influences, catering to diverse audiences, and engaging in both conformity and resistance to traditional authorities [28]. This dynamic interaction reflects the evolving nature of Arab values in the virtual realm.

SL is a virtual Cyber Society community that provides users (residents) with a vast array of material for creation, modification, and reuse. Hence, the residents can program different communication routines, verbal and non-verbal, to engage with others. According to Bandura's social learning theory, avatars have the power to influence their learning in new situations by controlling the environment around them (Bandura, 1999). (Hathaway, Muse, and Althoff, 2007, p. 3) anticipates Arab avatars to scrutinize the actions of others, initiating the learning process through assimilation and imitation. However, the question arises: to what degree does this behavior align with their values? Or add positive experiences for them? To answer these questions, we must remember that the Arab avatar typically refers back to his family's education and traditions for guidance before deciding whether or not to imitate the observed behavior. Also, we cannot ignore the sight of his emotional response and his whims.

SL terms formed many rules to prevent the unauthorized use of protected content and avatars from violating each other or harming them psychologically. Therefore, Arab avatars must adhere to these rules and avoid expulsion due to their transgressions, particularly those involving extremely violent and sexual content.

If we assume that the behaviours, values, and morals of the avatars in Second Life mirror their real-life values, then we expect them to act in accordance with their legacies and education. Then, if we concede that the Arab avatar in SL is meager compared to other ethnicities, taking into consideration their total ability to buy and own lands, including the wealth and emptiness among some, then why is this meager presence? Even though it may be an open window to a freer life for those who live with many restrictions because of laws, traditions, and religious values, why not make this spacious space the safest haven and a spacious chest for them? In this paper, we made some assumptions to analyze Arab avatar actions:

- We can attribute this to Second Life's lack of language translators or the cancellation of the free Google Translate service. Arab avatars faced significant discrimination from other residents due to their limited English proficiency. On the other hand, people often perceive Arabs as savages based solely on their language and faith, rather than their character. As a result, Arabs have suffered significant financial losses, with land rental costs exceeding those of any other community. In addition, the wide range of freedom in SL makes it dangerous for many Arab cultures that survive on fear and guilt! According to religious regulations.

- Some land creators, like Abu Fahd al-Jassem, creator of the Middle East, seek a world that captures the real lives of people in the Middle East to be a meeting point for them [10]. So in the context of the speech, he talked about the difference in values between Arab reality and the created world on SL, where females feel spatially that they are somehow free [33].

- SL enabled users to do most real-life activities, including sexual activities with other avatars, since each avatar represents a real human being, but it prevented users from touching in general except the users of the SexGen bed, so SL encroached on real-life for many avatars, including Arab ones.

- SL is not free of technical, legal, or ethical criticisms, including all activities done by residents as undesirable content in adult activities that may interfere with Arab values.

- By understanding that SL is a new world synonymous with reality, the Arabs, most of whom are Muslims, return all their activities in this world to the Islamic values and teachings that they have received from their educational institutions and their environment.

- There are many interesting areas in SL that touch on many ethical problems that are also often associated with real life, like access to pornography and inappropriate content, online gambling, the promotion of violence, and online harassment. These activities motivate Arab avatars, especially those who coexisted in reality with a closed environment and a blockade with issues of religion and demerit culture, to try these activities.

- Katherine Smith: Our project does not support the Arabic language at the moment, but earlier this month, the Linden Lab introduced the source code for the SL program, which allows users to modify and develop it to suit their needs, including the introduction of new languages. Certainly, the Arabic language will undoubtedly have a clear imprint given the technological boom that the Arab region is currently experiencing. I am almost certain that there are Arab developers who can introduce many modifications and other options in addition to the language element https://aitnews.com/2007/01/25/3882/.

- Last Thursday, at 8:00 PM, 2024, Oberwolf Linden posted the following: We are committed to creating a richer, more immersive, and safer environment for everyone, and we are sharing many important updates

and developments that not only aim to improve SL, but updates include mobile and desktop fronts to make SL safer. We will enhance the protection of society in a safe environment while preserving the freedom of expression that makes our virtual world so special, and we also feel that it is crucial to reinforce our stance that sexualized ageplay is strictly prohibited. One of the consequences of auditing and improving is to review the Child Avatar Policy to ensure a clear separation and to safeguard all community members [29].

- Second Life has officially launched Physically Based Rendering (PBR) Materials after November 29, 2023, a new feature that allows users to use PBR Materials in the Second Life viewer. This project aims to increase visual realism, keep up with industry standards, and bring GLTF content into Second Life. PBR Materials mimic how our eyes learn to identify surfaces, providing a step up in the appearance of the Second Life world. These new features may be an incentive for new residents to join the Second Life world, including Arab citizens [36]. Furthermore, Second Life is launching the Second Life Community Exhibition (SLCE) to connect newcomers with active in-world communities. The exhibition will feature a diverse range of communities during the earliest moments of the new resident journey, with 11 initial participants in phase one. The exhibition will be updated regularly with a mix of community showcases [37].

V. CONCLUSION

The entire Arab community has vanished! Does this imply that they failed to coexist with other societies, that the environment did not meet their needs, or that the manufacturing of SL components was weak? According to the aforementioned narrative, the actual presence of Arab residents and their worlds in SL has decreased. Our observations, follow-ups, and comments from the Avatars reveal that, despite the beauty, creativity, and diversity of this sphere space, the Arab resident did not find SL a comfortable place to coexist and perceive himself as an authentic citizen. This conclusion is based on a few statements and observations:

- They consider it a world that is only an alternative to their reality, in which they find only what is different from their daily lives.

- They did not find what they could create in terms of interaction, behavior, and alternative virtual living due to the limited options in light of the morals and values that restrict them.

- They only considered it an escape—a place where there is fun and reality that has no place in their real lives, and no physical gender spacing [30].

- They did not find enough time to live in it because they must interact with behaviors and personalities that those around them find out of the ordinary, which puts them in a state of hiding from the eyes of their parents and guardians.

- They expect a sense of guilt and a violation of recognized values and ideals when they go to clubs, discos, and bars.

- Commercial practices, land ownership, sale, and trade exchange take place in an environment where there is no solution for halal and haram according to their beliefs, resulting in a reluctance to interact well with them.

- The SL environment needs technical equipment because of the speed of the Internet and because the quality of the display cards is not available to most people in the region.

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