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The Dramaturgy of Roblox User Identity: Avatars as Self-Performance and Dual Backstage

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Abstract

Communication has evolved significantly, with online messaging now perceived as more intimate and allowing individuals to control their public image, leading many people to navigate both the digital world and actual world. Roblox as an online platform offers a second life through the use of avatars, allowing users to represent themselves according to their preferences. This study aims to analyze how Roblox users manage their avatars from the perspective of Erving Goffman's dramaturgy. The research subjects in this study are avatar user's self-representation through interpersonal communication on the Roblox. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using netnography (virtual ethnography). Data analysis was conducted using a triangulation of methods, including in-depth interviews, online participatory observation, and supporting field documentation. The findings indicate that users consciously engage in front-stage practices when they are on the Roblox stage, using their avatars as masks and identities. Back-stage activities, on the other hand, occur when users take off their masks, engage in real-world activities, and relax in other spaces to prepare for their next performance. This study is expected to provide insight into how users manage interpersonal communication through avatars on the Roblox online platform.

Keywords: Dramaturgy, Avatar, Roblox, Interpersonal Communication

INTRODUCTION

(West & Turner, 2021) In the digital age, communication has undergone significant changes with the exchange of messages no longer limited to face-to-face interactions. Now taking place through online platforms, such as messaging apps, social media, and digital spaces. According to APJII, there will be 229,428,417 people connected to the internet by 2025 a figure representing 80% of Indonesia's population (2025). Interactions in the online world have become more inclusive because individuals have the freedom to express themselves and can build virtual connections without being constrained by physical conditions or social identities. Walther emphasizes that online communication can be both interpersonal and hyperpersonal, as it knows no boundaries and is perceived as more intimate than face-to-face communication (West & Turner, 2021).

The phenomenon of hyperpersonal communication is widely experienced by people in the digital age, as communication media have evolved into tools that are used almost daily to convey messages. As a result, hyperpersonal online communication leads to the manipulation of many communication elements. There are four aspects of hyperpersonal communication, the receiver, the sender, the channel, and feedback. Of these four aspects,

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the sender is the component most susceptible to identity manipulation as the sender can control their self-image when communicating via a computer (Tiffany, 2025).

The freedom to interact without seeing how individuals are visually represented in Roblox. Roblox offers complex dynamics of interpersonal communication, particularly through the use of avatars as a medium for self-expression that can be freely customized. Avatars which serve a players' digital representation can be extensively customized from skin tone, and facial features to body shape, and specific cultural elements. Advances in generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology are increasingly enhancing the flexibility of avatars in expressing users' identities and preferences.

According to the official Roblox Studio website, 274 million users updated their avatars in a single day. The data is detailed in the findings of the Roblox 2025 Digital Expression Report, with surveys conducted in May and August 2025 indicating that 84% of their physical style is influenced by their environment in the digital space. Meanwhile, 87% said that expressing themselves in an immersive space helped them feel more comfortable (2025). A scientific study by Nurul support the data above, demonstrating that avatars are used as a means of representing identity in social interactions (Sudirman, 2025).

In addition to Roblox, there are two digital platforms with immersive spaces that facilitate social interaction. Meta Horizon Worlds is an immersive space that offers free virtual world interactions, complete with avatars and in-world economy. However, Meta Horizon Worlds is currently only accessible in major countries such as the United States (2024). When examining multiplayer-based immersive spaces, researchers compare them to Minecraft. Minecraft is an immersive space focused on sandbox survival gameplay that generates video content (2023). However, the differences in the level of accessibility and flexibility of avatars across platforms indicate that Roblox offers a unique approach to self-representation that warrants further study.

Erving Goffman's theory of dramaturgy in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), comparing a performance in which an individual acts as a strategic actor, portraying a specific "character" or image by wearing a "mask" to meet the expectations of the "audience". In the context of avatars in Roblox, researchers highlight the use of avatars as a mask for social interaction in virtual space.

Several scientific studies have examined avatars in Roblox. Research by Nurul Ilmi explores the role of avatars in self-expression and as a tool for symbolic communication in digital spaces. The results indicate that avatars serve three functions : as a means of representing identity and social status, as a tool for nonverbal communications, and as a medium for fostering social relationships that feel real even though they occur in the virtual world (2025). According to Ajeng's research (2025), Roblox is a space for creative exploration that can shape one's identity through self-discovery via avatars.

This study offers a novel approach by applying Erving Goffman's concept of dramaturgy to the context of immersive virtual spaces through the identification of two groups the "front stage", which positions the avatar as a visual representation of the self and serves as a performative device that integrates symbolic expression, communication strategies, and identity construction into interpersonal interactions on Roblox. The

“backstage” in this papers refers to the actual world and the digital backstage (AFK). This study extends the dramaturgical approach from face-to-face interactions to avatar-based performative practices within the metaverse ecosystem. This study aims to analyze the dramaturgical practices of Roblox users in managing their identities through avatars, as well as to identify the dynamics of the front stage, back stage, and impression management in interpersonal communication within virtual spaces.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using netnography method. The method, developed by Robert Kozinest is applied to real-life situations and online activities facilitated by infrastructure. This method used to understand the social interaction practices of Roblox users within the context of virtual communities (Eriyanto, 2022).

The research data was obtained from two main sources : primary and secondary data. Primary data is data collected through unstructured interviews, online observations, and accompanying documentation. Secondary data, on other hand is data collected from books, article and journals on relevant studies. The study involved seven informants selected using purposive sampling on three criteria there are having actively used Roblox for at least one year, being involved in social interactions on Roblox. and using an avatar as a means of self-representation. Participatory observation was conducted from November 2025 to April 2026, involving repeated interactions within a social network (hangout). In this study, the researcher acted as a participant-observer who was directly involved in the virtual community's interactions.

The data will be analysed using the Miles and Huberman model that is data obtained from online participant observation, supplemented by interviews and supporting documentary material, will be examined on an ongoing basis until saturation is reached. Data reduction involves summarising, selecting and focusing on the data by identifying themes and patterns. Data presentation involves displaying, analysing and linking data across categories, with the aim of making it easier to understand what is happening and presenting it in a narrative form (2025). The final step in the conclusion is verification, or a preliminary conclusion that is still provisional and may change at any time in the light of strong and mutually supportive evidence the conclusion will provide an answer to the research question.

The validity of the data is assessed using triangulation. This involves combining several data collection techniques using the same source. The researchers conducted observations until saturation was reached, followed by interviews until saturation was reached, and supported by documentation. The aim is to collect data whilst verifying its credibility and ensuring that it comes from the same source (Donkoh, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Roblox as an Immersive Space

Roblox is a digital platform in the form of a multiplayer game that comprises a vast community known as a virtual ecosystem where culture is simulated, revolutionised and developed. The phenomenon of virtual world communication is also evident on Roblox, which serves as a second life for Robloxians. The components of Roblox consist of creators who build maps, developers who manage the maps, and users who act as agents of social interaction within Roblox. The interactive experience on Roblox is dominated more by representation than by reality (Yuyus, 2025).

Some of the communication features that facilitate interaction on Roblox include global chat and voice chat, avatars and User-Generated Content (UGC), maps, party chat, communities, and friend connections. There is a wide variety of activities you can do on Roblox, ranging from outdoor adventures such as mountain climbing or summiting, battles, and agility challenges such as obstacle courses, to role-playing. Roblox is therefore described as a hybrid social platform that focuses on interaction patterns centred on building friendships between users, which stems from social activities on Roblox (Darmayunita, 2025).

In this study, the informants consciously regard Roblox as a second world for them a place where they can do everything they cannot do in actual life, and a means of escaping the demands of society. Roblox is evolving into a virtual communication space that fosters interpersonal relationships within the metaverse (Azzahra dkk., 2025)

Teori Dramaturgi Erving Goffman : Landasan Prinsip Analisis

Erving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) states :

"Each person in everyday social intercourse presents himself and his activity to others, attempts to guide and control the impressions they form of him, and employs certain techniques in order to sustain his performance, just as an actor present a character to an audiences. The front stage is where individuals perform roles for an audience, adhering to social norms and managing impression. The backstage is a private area where actors step out of character, relax, and prepare for future front stage performance"

Goffman likens an actor preparing for a performance to having two stages the "front stage" and the "back stage". In this study, the analogy is described in six key principles namely: Life as a Robloxian, the front stage performance, the avatar as a personal front and role, the backstage when AFK, impression management, and the map as a setting. Goffman's concept of dramaturgy is at play in Roblox, where users engage in the practice of role-manipulation. In this context, avatars function as Goffman described and evolve into performative devices that shape patterns of social interaction. Furthermore, avatars enable users to conceal their identities and construct alternative social realities that are negotiated through symbols, visuals, language and behaviour. It causes users to use avatar customisation as a mask when playing a certain role. The research findings indicate that the seven informants, aged between 18 and 24, have different avatar characteristics; the researcher has therefore grouped them according to their avatar characteristics in Table 1.

Table 1. Roblox Users by Avatar Character

Informant's Name (Anonymised)	Avatar Character (On Roblox)	User Identity (In actual life)
Johan	Animal	Human
Danar	A five-year-old boy	Adult man, aged 23
Bobby	American Disco	Cafeteria attendant
Nike	Adult woman wearing hijab	A sensually dressed adult woman
Alana	Adult woman wearing hijab	A sensually dressed adult woman
Ara	Adult woman wearing hijab	A sensually dressed adult woman
Janike	Adult man	Adult woman

Source: Compiled from primary data

Life as Robloxian

On average, the informants have been socially active on Roblox for over a year and have accessed more than five maps as performance spaces. The first principle of dramaturgy is performance, namely the consistency of an individual's actions over a given period, characterised by their continuous presence before a specific group of observers and their influence on those observers (Goffman, 1959).

Based on the research findings, differences in avatar usage among informants not only reflect visual variations but also represent distinct identity orientations within Goffman's dramaturgical framework. The researchers identified three main patterns: the avatar as an escape identity, the avatar as the ideal self, and the avatar as a means of identity exploration. The differences in avatar representations among informants suggest that identity in the digital realm is fluid and not bound to reality, thereby extending the concept of performativity in dramaturgy into the virtual environment. All informants exhibited differences that were the inverse of those in real life. The researchers narrowed these down into two groups: the Roblox as a virtual life and the actual life. In the Roblox environment, Roblox users' performance was characterised by social interactions within the Roblox map.

"Well, I'm actually quite shy, but on Roblox, for some reason, I'm a bit more extroverted and open when people chat to me" (Interview with Nike, 28 January 2026).

"In real life I'm an introvert, so in games I'm a bit more extroverted. My avatar's a cute little kid, so I'm a bit of a troublemaker in Roblox, whereas in real life I'm not." (Interview with Danar, 14 April 2026.)

"I use a male avatar on Roblox, so I can be a bit aloof and just use text chat rather than voice chat, but I'm actually a girl" (Interview with Janike, 18 April 2026.)

In the first group, users consciously act in accordance with the preferences they wish to establish. Roblox as an immersive digital space, serves as a platform for user expression all the behaviours that cannot be realised in the actual life are ultimately expressed on Roblox and manifest as a fantasy life. The roles played by users in the Roblox world are said to involve

manipulation in terms of avatars, language and identity formation. The combination of avatar customisation influences others' perceptions of the informant. Other people's perceptions can be influenced through effective communication (2025), which leads to avatar customisation.

In the actual life, users act in accordance with their real identities.. For example, as human beings, students, adults, women who wear the long hijab (religious women), and people whose gender identity aligns with their biological gender of whom live as part of normal society in real life. Real life activities take place in the same way as a student would in teaching and learning activities, interacting within a circle of friends with an introverted personality type, and socialising in the community whilst communicating in moderation. These findings suggest that the boundary between virtual identity that which is performed on the front stage and actual identity that which is performed on the back stage is becoming increasingly clear in immersive spaces (Goffman, 1959).

The Front Stage Performance

The dual-world lifestyle turns users into digital actors, giving them two spheres: ⁴the Front Stage and the Back Stage. The front stage refers to the situation where users are immersed in the Roblox world, in which they must meet the social expectations of the digital community (other users). This aligns with Goffman's view that every individual constructs a persona to present to others, with the aim of creating a certain impression when interacting with an audience (Goffman, 1959).

When on a public server, users who are actively creating performance scenarios can choose "with whom" they will act, "where" they will perform, and "what" they will be. The digital space can foster greater self-expression, as identity can be controlled and shaped through various elements. For instance, when Janike was portraying a man with a cold demeanour, this was conveyed through minimal verbal interaction via voice chat, relying instead on brief messages in the global chat. Alana and Ara, meanwhile, evolved into sensual women through their attire and striking body language. Bobby and Danar, on the other hand, used emojis as a form of non-verbal expression to create the impression of being expressive and engaging in their communication.

These practices demonstrate that users do not merely represent themselves but actively construct different identities for each performance they are about to stage. Roblox is an exploratory world where users can do all the things they can't do in actual life (Yuyus & Nanang, 2025).

The Avatar as A Personal Front and Role

In the context of Roblox, an avatar is a mask that serves as a channel of self-representation, which can be customised to reflect the image one wishes to present to other users. This aligns with the view put forward by Bullingham & Vascomelos known as self-presentation theory that self-presentation is the result of dramaturgy, which is the analysis of interpersonal interactions and an individual's efforts to project a visual image of the self they wish to present on a stage (Jin dkk., 2022).

"I used to use this male avatar on the Koplo map, and I was following the dance leader. Suddenly, Bella (a pseudonym) came up to me and said I was handsome; I was completely taken aback. Well, not long after, she suddenly told me she was in a situation she couldn't really explain basically about her relationship with her

Roblox boyfriend, who's now her ex. In real life, Bella is already married. And it turned out her ex-boyfriend was right there with us. So she asked me to pretend to be a man" (Interview with Janike, 18 April 2026.).

"Oh, how cute there's a capybara, but Ustadz!" (Primary research data, 2026.)

Janike's interesting experience demonstrates that avatars serve as a personal front, presenting visuals that shape the interpretation of impressions. Meanwhile, during participant observation, the case of Johan's avatar showed that other users' initial perceptions were formed even before any verbal interaction took place. Spontaneous reactions to avatar appearances suggest that visual elements serve as the primary medium for interaction in Roblox. The phenomenon of avatar customisation is particularly common in Roblox, especially in hangout maps, as these maps consist solely of social gatherings without any challenges, thereby shifting the focus away from the surroundings and allowing users to concentrate on their appearance. This makes it easy for Robloxians to receive compliments or be subject to 'Copy and Paste' (CNP) due to their avatar's appearance.

In addition to avatars, Roblox features accessory items there are User-Generated Content (UGC) avatar items is can only be found on specific maps. *Danau* map's offers UGC items such as swimwear, sunglasses, beach hats and other summer accessories (*DANAU VOICE CHAT di Roblox.*). The avatar serves as a symbolic tool that conveys a first impression whilst reinforcing the user's social presence on the front stage. In this research, all informants used avatars as a means of self-representation; everything from the choice of clothing and skin colour, to the postures adopted as body language, and even the communication tools used, had an impact on their personal image.

On the other hand, avatars is the characters users create in Roblox come with their own set of expectations that users have for them. In dramaturgy, a role is a publicly defined expectation that is performed by an actor in a production (2021). Researchers categorise roles into two aspects: role expectations and role reality. Role expectations refer to the perceptions held by other users when they view the avatar characters that users employ. Johan states :

"I started using this because, during Ramadan, I'd go to religious study sessions at the masjid map early in the morning. Well, on HO (Hangouts), I just wanted to come across as pious and well-mannered. And it turns out that people who see my profile often call me 'Ustadz'." (Interview with Johan, 18 April 2026.)

Johan expects his avatar to be a religious scholar who adheres strictly to religious rules and performs his prayers with devotion. Reality is the perception users derive from their environment. Meanwhile, the reality as observed by Johan is that he is regarded as a religious teacher by other users who see his avatar's character. From the above description, the personal front is the visual representation displayed by the user. Meanwhile, the role refers to expectations and reality. Both can change at any time depending on the avatar character being used.

The Back Stage when Away From Keyboard (AFK)

Actors have a space of their own self in dramaturgy this is known as the backstage. Backstage is divided into two groups, the first group is the real world. In the real world, users go about their daily activities, such as being active students, women

wearing the khimar (religious), and workers in food stalls. The audience they encounter behind the scenes comprises their social circle, classmates and work colleagues. This is in line with Goffman's concept of the "backstage" where an actor removes their mask and takes a brief respite to prepare for the next performance (Goffman, 1959).

The backstage is an authentic identity that cannot be manipulated, whether in terms of attitude or appearance, because it represents the very essence of the user's life, which cannot be scripted, Danar stated in an interview:

"Well, in real life I'm actually not as mischievous as I am on Roblox, I only speak when necessary, but on Roblox I just can't help wanting to play pranks on people. Once, on the Hangout map, I even played a prank on a couple who were dating, and I've also eavesdropped on people before". (Interview with Danar, 18 April 2026.).

"Actually, I just run a shop in my day-to-day life I just wanted to look cool by using an avatar like an American DJ. I also feel like I have a bit of a "star syndrome", I want to be noticed and feel cool, so I sometimes act a bit showy on other accounts, but in reality I'm just an ordinary person, not particularly good-looking and pretty average.". (Interview with Bobby, 25 January 2026.)

It can be concluded from the informants' statements above that when they are in the real world, they go about their daily activities. Roblox users are aware that Roblox is a virtual world in which they take on the role of another person when interacting on the platform.

The second group consists of users who are AFK. Users who are AFK take off their masks and feel more relaxed. AFK users make use of other apps, such as Discord, to communicate more casually outside of Roblox. Johan and Danar are part of the same Discord community, which consists of the *inpokan tugas* channel containing information about real-life assignments as students, the *mabar* channel containing information about interactions on Roblox, the *santuy* channel for everyday chat, the *random* channel for miscellaneous topics, and the *nobar* channel for group film watching sessions. Janike used Instagram to create a scenario in which she pretended to be Bella's boyfriend. Meanwhile, Alana and Ara used WhatsApp to interact as friends in real-life outside of Roblox. AFK can also serve as a way to prepare for a performance, users will Be Right Back (BRB) to the map once they feel they have rested sufficiently.

Impression Management

An avatar, as a form of self-identity, can shape perceptions, allowing users to conceal their true identity from others. This aligns with the principle of impression management, which involves maintaining one's self-image by managing the impressions one makes, in the hope that the audience will perceive the user in a desired light. (Dita & Gustaman, 2025).

Research findings indicate that the practice of impression management is carried out deliberately through various symbolic strategies. Users utilise visual avatars, including AI-generated elements, as the primary means of constructing a specific image. Furthermore, the use of gestures, communication styles, and the choice of language and vocabulary are tailored to the interaction partner to reinforce the consistency of the character being portrayed. Ultimately, the

identity present in the virtual space is not merely a reflection of the self, but a constructed result designed to meet social expectations.

The Map as a Setting

A map is a virtual space that enables users to interact with one another, whether individually or in groups the existence of a map is a crucial aspect, as users can only act through it. In dramaturgy, there is a physical setting that must be present, which is the place where an actor performs; this is called the setting. Without a setting, an actor cannot perform. (Goffman, 1959).

"I spend most of my time in the fishing map, where I often use cute avatars, whereas if I use a cute, glowing avatar in other maps, like the Freelance district, which is dark, people have actually been criticised there for using bright avatars because the map is meant for completing assassination missions" (Interview with Nike, 26 January 2026)

Building on Nike's concept of the platform, the map serves as the focal point for how users will interact within it. The map influences the choice of avatar, the language used, the attitude adopted, and the selection of the audience to be engaged.

This study suggests that digital actors possess a private sphere, from a dramaturgical perspective in managing their identities within virtual spaces. Informants present themselves through avatars as a 'immersive virtual spaces. The flexibility of communication gives rise to fluid identities, where the boundaries between actual identity and virtual identity are strategically negotiated according to the context of the interaction. Turning to the digital realm, Roblox has transformed the nature of interaction by presenting identities that are not fixed but can be continually produced, maintained and negotiated within the dynamics of the digital space.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified a phenomenon of performance on the Roblox platform involving interpersonal communication through avatar customisation by users. Analysis of these findings, linked to Erving Goffman's theory of dramaturgy, demonstrates that Roblox users consciously manage their impressions through avatar customisation on the Roblox platform utilising both the "front stage" and "back stage". On the front stage, users employ several elements in their performance: the avatar as a visual front persona, and the avatar as a role that represents both constructed expectations and lived reality. In this study, the avatar functions as a mask. Through non-verbal means, the avatar enables the practice of impression management and shapes users' perceptions.

And the "backstage" refers to the moment when users take off their theatrical masks and pause briefly to prepare for the next performance. Backstage is divided into two categories: the real-life category, where users remove their masks to go about their daily activities; and the AFK category, where Robloxians gather on other platforms such as Discord, WhatsApp and Instagram whilst AFK to devise strategies and prepare for the next performance.

Previous research has shown that this study not only confirms findings regarding virtual communication and avatars in interpersonal communication, but also expands the

study of avatars in the context of interpersonal communication through user-driven dramaturgical theory, demonstrating a “front stage” during interactions on Roblox and a “back stage” whilst preparing for the next performance. This research makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to the development of communication studies, particularly in the field of interpersonal communication in avatar-based virtual spaces. It is hoped that this study will serve as a reference for future research, providing an in-depth understanding of intrapersonal communication patterns in identity formation on the Roblox online platform.

GLOSARIUM

Avatar avatar	: A virtual character that represents the player within the game. This can be fully customised using clothing, accessories, hairstyles and animations from the Marketplace to create a unique look.
Map within the	: A virtual world, arena or experience created by users (creators) Roblox platform, where players can go on adventures, role-play or hang out.
Role Player	: Role-playing where players take on the role of specific characters and interact within a narrative scenario. Players act as if they were those characters, just like other people in the virtual world.
Discord voice	: A free communication platform that allows users to chat via text, and virtual communities known as ‘servers’. Originally designed for gamers, it is now popular with a wide range of communities (education, work, hobbies) its advanced features, such as screen sharing and instant voice channels.
Robloxian	: A nickname for someone who is playing Roblox.
Obby	: Obstacle courses are a popular type of map on Roblox.
AFK	: <i>Away From Keyboard</i> , when users take a break from the game for a short while.
CNP they	: <i>Copy and Paste</i> , a term used to mock other users because the avatars use seem boring.
BRB	: <i>Be Right Back</i> , when players are about to return after a short break.
UGC can	: <i>User-generated Content</i> , accessories provided by a specific map and only be used on that map.

Source : (Roblox Slang Words – What Your Kids Are Really Saying – Game Quitters, t.t.)

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