

# Social VR in Higher Education in times of pandemics

Some preliminary insights

# Motivation

- Negative impact of **social distancing** on university students (isolation, stress, anxiety, motivation...)
- **Social VR** technology available
  - Feelings of **social presence**



# Objectives

- **Can we use social VR to reduce the impact of social distancing?**
- **Project goals**
  - Conduct a pilot test on the use of social VR in the classroom and its effects
- ***How to integrate social VR in the classroom?***
- ***Benefits in terms of wellbeing?***

Project Title

**“Acceptability and Effects of Social-VR as a Tool for Overcoming Social Distance in Higher Education”**

Funded by **ZonMw** – *Covid-19 Science for Practice call*

July to December 2020

Partners:





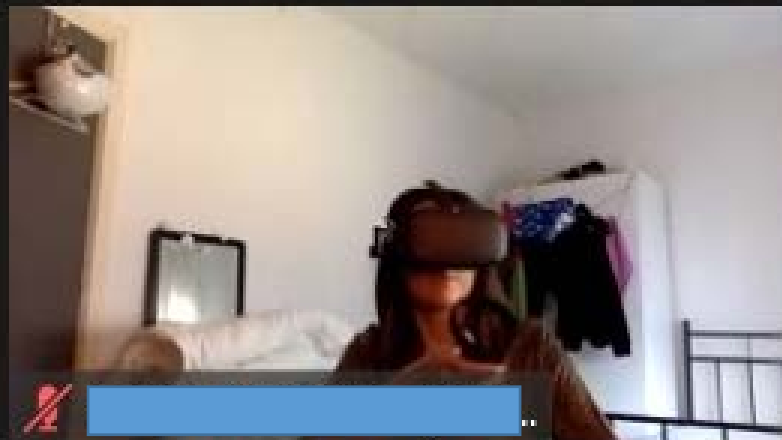
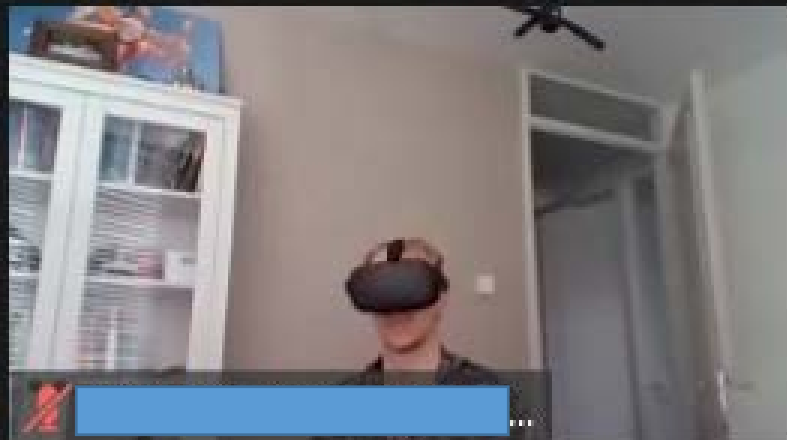
# Social VR in the classroom

- M.A. course on media psychology, Effects of New Media (30 students)
- Workshops on psychology of social VR
  - AltspaceVR
  - “VR Campus”
- **Each student borrows an Oculus Quest** (November-December 2020) to use it at home



Tilo

Miguel



# Ethnography of social VR?

Let's go for a field trip!

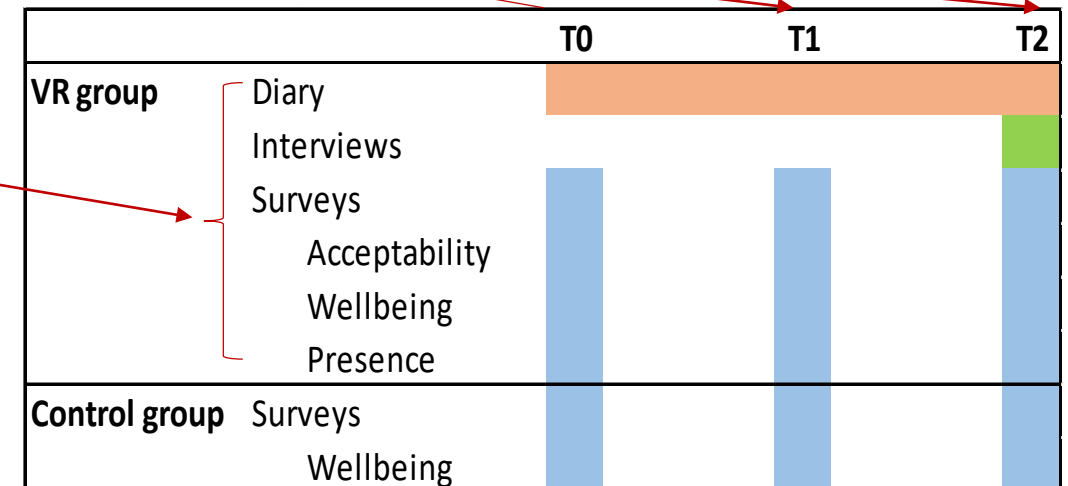
- With your group, select a world / hub space
  - Menu > Discover > Featured Hub Spaces (e.g. Campfire)
  - Menu > Worlds > Featured / Popular
- Adopt a "participant observation" approach to ex
- Let's meet back in Zoom in 30 minutes



# Pilot study

Mixed-method experiment

- Participants: **25 students** (17 female, 8 male,  $M_{age} = 24.25$ ;  $SD = 1.65$ )
- Three 'waves':  $T_0$  (Oct.),  $T_1$  (Nov.),  $T_2$  (Dec.)
- Measures
  - **Diary of use**
  - **Qualitative interviews** ( $T_2$ )
  - **Surveys** ( $T_0$ ;  $T_1$ ;  $T_2$ )
    - Acceptability of the technology
    - 'Wellbeing' (to be compared against a **control group**)
      - Sense of community, relatedness, anxiety
    - Feelings of presence



# Initial impressions

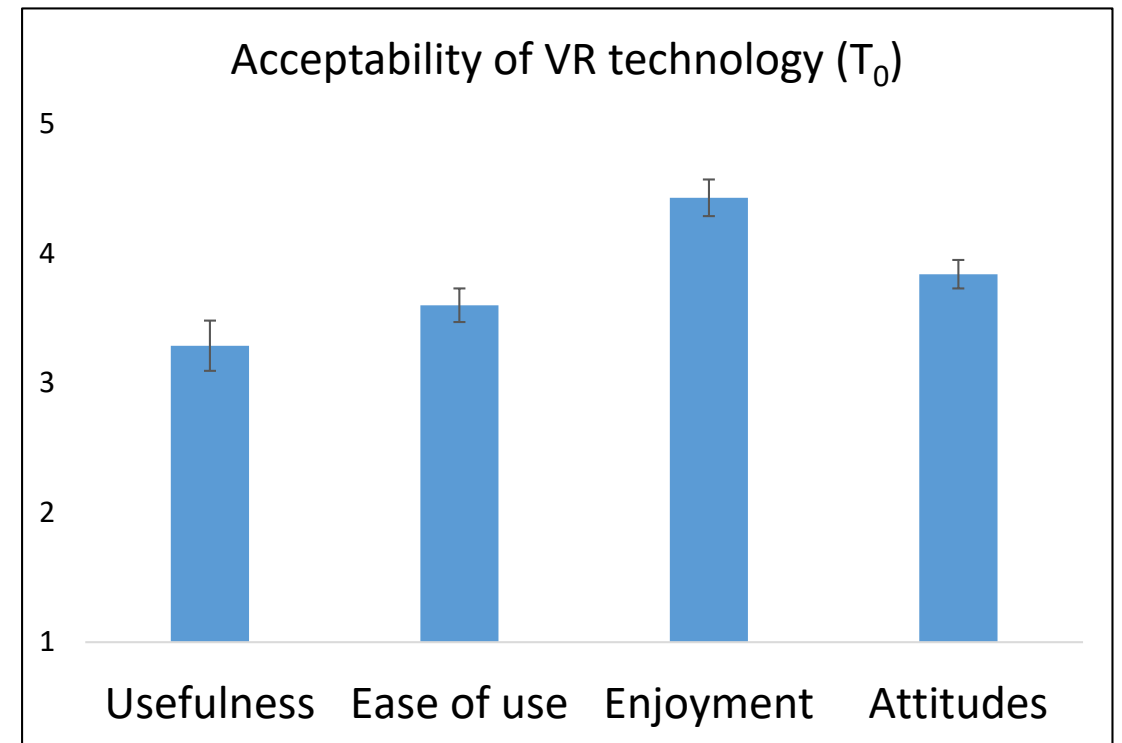
- “Wow” effect
- Positive impressions **social presence**
- Some concerns:
  - Identity “hidden” behind an avatar
  - Issues with non-verbal communication (missing facial expressions)
  - Cybersickness

“I had a lot of fun”.

“Really excited to explore more because I love using it. It's a whole new world”.

“It keeps surprising me”.

( $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ ?)





# Use diary

- Data from first two weeks
- About half of the participants only used it for the obligatory class activities
- But there are a few **heavy users**
  - Issues with reporting?



# Initial insights – Next steps

- First impressions
  - Wow effect
  - Highly acceptable
  - Really useful?
- Apparently limited engagement
  - Just a wow effect?
- Next steps
  - Evaluation after longer use
  - Effects on feelings of community & relatedness?

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Thank you very much for your  
attention! Questions? Comments?

