Indonesian Journal of Law and Economics Review
Vol 20 No 2 (2025): May
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21070/ijler.v20i2.1299
Article type: (Philosophy of Law)

Table Of Content

ISSN 2598 9928 (online), https://ijler.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

ISSN (ONLINE) 2598 9928
SCAN ME
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INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF LAW AND ECONOMIC
PUBLISHED BY
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SIDOARJO

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Indonesian Journal of Law and Economics Review
Vol 20 No 2 (2025): May
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21070/ijler.v20i2.1299
Article type: (Philosophy of Law)

Article information

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Check this article impact [(*)]

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[(*)] Time for indexing process is various, depends on indexing database platform

Indonesian Journal of Law and Economics Review
Vol 20 No 2 (2025): May
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21070/ijler.v20i2.1299
Article type: (Philosophy of Law)

The Legal Framework for Crimes Related to Augmented and Virtual Reality

Nidaa Mohamed Asfoor, nidaa_mohammed@wrec.uoqasim.edu.iq, (1)
College of Engineering, Al-Qasim Green University, Iraq

Zainab Kadhim Talib, Zainab.kadhim@biotech.uoqasim.edu.iq, (0)
College of Biotechnology, Al-Qasim Green University, Iraq

[1] Corresponding author

Abstract

Background: Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) era are growing notable immersive environments, collectively contributing to the burgeoning Metaverse. While providing big societal and monetary blessings, these structures also present novel avenues for crook interest. **Aims:** This studies examines the adequacy and applicability of existing prison frameworks, generally countrywide criminal statutes and international cybercrime conventions, to deal with crimes devoted interior or facilitated with the useful resource of AR and VR environments. **Method:** Employing a qualitative, doctrinal criminal analysis approach, the study scrutinizes key stressful situations consisting of the definition of damage in digital spaces, the felony repute of virtual belongings, jurisdictional complexities bobbing up from the without boundaries nature of these technology, issues in accumulating admissible digital evidence, and issues surrounding individual anonymity and avatar attribution. **Findings:** Findings mean huge gaps and ambiguities internal contemporary jail structures. Existing legal suggestions, regularly designed for tangible harms or earlier sorts of virtual interplay, conflict to efficiently embody nuanced offenses like virtual attack, harassment, or theft of virtual property. Furthermore, large procedural hurdles related to jurisdiction, proof series, and offender identification avoid powerful law enforcement. **Result:** The studies concludes that relying entirely on analogical interpretations of present legal guidelines is insufficient and doubtlessly useless. **Novelty:** It underscores the urgent need for taken into consideration prison version, whether via legislative reform, delicate judicial interpretation, or improved worldwide cooperation, to make certain consumer protection, maintain consider, and foster accountable innovation within immersive digital realms. **Impact:** This study contributes to cyberlaw scholarship by imparting a synthesized analysis of criminal law challenges specific to modern AR/VR and gives insights for policymakers, legal practitioners, and era developers navigating this evolving panorama.

Highlights:

- Existing criminal statutes are ambiguous and often inapplicable to immersive AR/VR offences.
- Significant jurisdictional and evidentiary hurdles hinder prosecution across virtual borders.
- The paper proposes an adaptive, technology-neutral legal framework that balances innovation with user protection.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Cybercrime Law, Jurisdiction, Digital Evidence

ISSN 2598 9928 (online), https://ijler.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

Published date: 2025-05-31 00:00:00

Introduction

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technology are swiftly evolving, transferring beyond niche programs in gaming and education to end up increasingly more incorporated into social, commercial, and professional elements of every day life [1]. These immersive technology create new environments, frequently referred to together because the metaverse or extended reality (XR), presenting unprecedented opportunities for interplay, communique, and commerce [2]. However, alongside these blessings, the proliferation of AR and VR additionally affords novel challenges, specially concerning user safety and conduct. As interactions migrate to those virtual and augmented spaces, traditional notions of presence, movement, and damage are being examined, elevating huge questions about the applicability and adequacy of present prison frameworks to cope with misconduct and criminal sports taking place inside or facilitated via those technologies [3]. This research seeks to discover the complex criminal landscape surrounding crimes related to AR and VR, figuring out gaps and ambiguities that need addressing to ensure duty and protect users in these emerging digital frontiers.

1. Problem Statement

The center trouble lies within the capability inadequacy and ambiguity of modern-day legal frameworks whilst implemented to crook activities within AR and VR environments. Existing laws, mainly designed for the bodily international or earlier styles of internet interplay, may struggle to successfully address particular issues springing up in immersive areas [4]. Specific demanding situations consist of: setting up jurisdiction when users and servers are geographically dispersed [5] defining and proving crook acts which includes attack, harassment, or robbery once they occur in opposition to avatars or involve virtual assets [6] attributing moves to specific individuals regularly hidden in the back of nameless avatars; and accumulating admissible digital evidence from complex, regularly proprietary, digital platforms [7]. This legal uncertainty creates a ability lacuna where harmful movements may go unpunished, undermining consumer believe and safety, and probably hindering the effective development and adoption of AR/VR technology. Without a clean and adaptable legal framework, distinguishing among permissible digital interactions and criminal behavior becomes increasingly more hard for customers, developers, and regulation enforcement alike.

2. Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is:

Secondary objectives include:

a. To identify and categorize specific types of crimes emerging or potentially emerging in AR/VR spaces (e.g., virtual assault, data theft, fraud, harassment).

b. To examine the key legal challenges associated with prosecuting AR/VR crimes, including issues of jurisdiction, evidence, identity verification, and the definition of harm.

c. To evaluate potential legal solutions or adaptations, drawing from existing cybercrime legislation, tort law principles, and proposals within legal scholarship [8], to better address criminal conduct in immersive environments.

3. Significance of the Research

This research holds significance on multiple levels. Academically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on cyberlaw, technology law, and criminology by specifically addressing the novel legal questions posed by AR and VR technologies [9]. It provides a structured analysis of a rapidly evolving area where legal scholarship is still developing. Practically, the findings will be valuable for policymakers and legislators seeking to update or create laws that effectively govern conduct in immersive digital spaces, ensuring that legal frameworks keep pace with technological advancements [10]. Furthermore, it offers insights for law enforcement agencies on the challenges and potential strategies for investigating and prosecuting AR/VR-related crimes. For technology developers and platform operators, this research can inform the design of safer virtual environments and the development of terms of service and community standards that align with legal expectations [11]. Ultimately, by clarifying the legal boundaries in AR/VR, this research aims to contribute to fostering safer, more accountable, and trustworthy immersive experiences for all users.

Method

This studies will generally rent a qualitative, doctrinal legal studies technique. This method involves the systematic evaluation and interpretation of legal assets to recognize and critique the present legal framework [12]. The primary methods will encompass:

1. Doctrinal Analysis: Examination of primary legal sources such as statutes (e.g., criminal codes, computer fraud acts, harassment laws), case law (precedents related to cybercrime, virtual property, torts in digital contexts), and relevant regulations in selected jurisdictions. This analysis will focus on how existing legal principles are being, or could be, applied to AR/VR scenarios [13].

2. Comparative Legal Analysis: Where appropriate, a comparative approach will be used to analyze how different legal systems are beginning to address AR/VR-related issues, identifying potential best practices or divergent approaches [14].

Okay, here is the drafted Literature Review section based on the structure you provided, incorporating illustrative APA 7th edition citations.

Important: The citation below [1] is example only. You must replace them with citations from the actual scholarly sources you consult for your research. The content of each subsection synthesizes common themes found in literature on these topics.

Literature Review

This segment undertakes a important overview of the scholarly literature pertinent to the prison challenges posed by way of criminal sports inside Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) environments. It commences by using detailing the relevant technological panorama, proceeds to scrutinize existing felony frameworks governing cybercrime, explores the conceptual difficulties inherent in defining crime within these novel spaces, systematically outlines key felony demanding situations formerly recognized by using researchers, and culminates in figuring out particular gaps inside the extant literature that this have a look at aims to address.

Result and Discussion

A. Technological Landscape: Understanding AR/VR and the Metaverse

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) are wonderful but related technologies situated along a "virtuality continuum" that degrees from the purely physical global to absolutely immersive digital ones [15]. AR technologies characteristic through covering computer-generated sensory input—consisting of portraits, sounds, or haptic comments—onto a user's view of the real world, thereby enhancing, but not occluding, physical reality [16]. Common delivery mechanisms include smartphones, tablets, and increasingly sophisticated smart glasses. VR, in contrast, seeks to fully immerse the user within a completely synthetic, computer-generated environment, typically utilizing head-mounted displays (HMDs) that block out the physical world and track user movement to update the virtual perspective accordingly [17]. A critical objective and effect of VR is inducing a strong sense of "presence," psychologically transporting the user so they feel genuinely located within the virtual space [18], [19]. These technologies are further converging under the umbrella of Mixed Reality (MR), which encompasses interaction with both physical and virtual elements, and contribute to the broader, evolving concept of the "Metaverse." Envisioned not as a single platform but as a persistent, interconnected network of shared, 3D virtual worlds, the Metaverse aims to facilitate diverse activities including social interaction, entertainment, commerce, education, and work in embodied virtual forms [20], [21]. The key characteristics relevant to legal analysis include the potential for deep immersion, the mediation of interactions through avatars, the persistence of virtual environments beyond single sessions, the generation of vast amounts of user data (including biometric and behavioral data from sensors), and the potential for complex social and economic systems to arise within these spaces [22], [23]. Understanding these features is foundational, as they shape user experience, behavior, and the very nature of potential harms and criminal opportunities.

B. Existing Legal Frameworks for Cybercrime

The rapid evolution of AR/VR technologies has outpaced specific legislative responses globally. Consequently, addressing misconduct and crime within these immersive environments currently relies heavily on the interpretation and application of pre-existing legal frameworks, primarily those developed for earlier iterations of computer technology and the internet [24]. This analogical application, however, is fraught with challenges.

1. National Laws (e.g., Computer Fraud, Harassment, Property Crimes)

Domestic legal systems typically attempt to address AR/VR-related offenses by stretching existing criminal statutes. For example, laws criminalizing unauthorized computer access or interference (like the US Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, 18 U.S.C. § 1030) might be applied to hacking into AR/VR accounts or disrupting platform operations [25]. Statutes addressing harassment, stalking, or threats are often invoked for abusive interactions between avatars, but require courts to determine if virtual conduct meets the legal elements designed with physical or traditional online communication in mind [26]. Similarly, applying theft or fraud statutes to the misappropriation of virtual assets (currency, items, land) often hinges on contentious interpretations of whether these intangible digital items constitute legally recognized "property" or "things of value" under specific statutory language [27]. Court decisions have been inconsistent, sometimes relying heavily on platform Terms of Service which typically characterize virtual items as licensed data rather than owned property (see, e.g., analysis of cases like *Bragg v. Linden Research* by [28]. The fundamental "analogy problem" persists: do actions within a highly immersive, simulated environment fit neatly into legal categories crafted for tangible harms and different modes of digital interaction?

2. International Conventions and Cooperation

The inherently global nature of AR/VR platforms, with users, servers, and developers potentially scattered across numerous countries, underscores the critical need for international legal mechanisms. The Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention), adopted in 2001, remains the most significant international treaty in this domain, establishing common definitions for certain cybercrimes and facilitating mutual legal assistance (MLA) among signatory nations [29]. However, its direct utility for many AR/VR-specific issues is limited. Its definitions focus primarily on core cyber-dependent crimes (e.g., illegal access, data interference, system interference) and traditional crimes facilitated by computer systems (e.g., computer-related fraud, child pornography) [30]. It does not explicitly address harms like virtual assault or harassment that lack a clear physical-world or traditional data-damage component. Furthermore, practical cooperation under the Convention faces significant hurdles, including delays inherent in MLA processes, differing national legal standards (particularly regarding dual criminality), data localization laws hindering cross-border data access, and the sheer speed at which technological capabilities evolve compared to diplomatic and legal processes [31], [32]. While efforts like the proposed UN Cybercrime Treaty are underway, achieving global consensus on governing emerging technologies remains a protracted challenge.

C. Defining Crime in Virtual and Augmented Spaces

Beyond the application of existing laws, a core conceptual challenge involves defining what constitutes a "crime" within the unique context of AR/VR. Traditional criminal law concepts often map poorly onto interactions mediated by avatars in synthetic or augmented environments.

1. Virtual Harm vs. Real-World Harm

A central debate revolves around the legal status and severity of harm experienced within virtual settings. While direct physical injury is usually impossible (barring hardware malfunction or induced real-world actions), scholars and users report significant psychological and emotional harm resulting from actions like virtual "groping," aggressive harassment, avatar violation, or exposure to traumatic content within immersive VR [33], [34]. The heightened sense of presence in VR can make these experiences feel intensely real and violative. However, criminal law traditionally requires high thresholds for recognizing purely psychological injury, often demanding proof of lasting trauma or linking it to established offenses like assault (defined by physical contact or threat thereof) or intentional infliction of emotional distress (more common in tort law) [35], [36]. The question remains whether existing criminal statutes can or should be interpreted to encompass such "virtual harms," or if new offenses specifically addressing severe psychological violation in immersive environments are necessary. Furthermore, AR introduces scenarios where virtual actions can directly precipitate real-world harm, such as distracting drivers with overlays or facilitating real-world stalking through augmented tracking [37].

2. Property Rights in Virtual Assets

The burgeoning economies within virtual worlds and the Metaverse, involving trade in virtual land, goods (like avatar skins), currencies, and user-generated creations, complicate the application of property crime laws [38]. As noted, the legal classification of these assets is often uncertain – are they property, services, or merely contractual licenses as per platform ToS? [39]. The emergence of blockchain technologies and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) purported to represent ownership of unique digital items adds further layers. While NFTs offer a form of verifiable title on a ledger, their legal relationship to the underlying digital asset (and copyright therein) and their status as "property" for theft purposes remain subjects of intense debate and vary by jurisdiction [40], [41]. The significant real-world money exchanged for these assets challenges the notion that they lack the legal status required for criminal theft or fraud charges [42].

3. Issues of Consent and Interaction

The nature of interaction in immersive spaces introduces novel complexities surrounding consent. Social norms and cues may differ significantly from the physical world, leading to misunderstandings about acceptable behavior [43]. How is consent established for proximity, interaction, or recording within a shared virtual space? Can actions performed by an avatar, potentially controlled by complex algorithms or multiple users, be legally attributed as the intentional act of a specific individual? [44]. Platform designs, community standards, and user expectations heavily influence perceptions of acceptable conduct, potentially creating gray areas where actions deeply offensive to one user are considered permissible gameplay or interaction by another, complicating the establishment of criminal intent (*mensrea*).

D. Key Legal Challenges Identified in Prior Scholarship

Building upon these definitional and conceptual difficulties, legal scholars have consistently identified several practical impediments to effectively investigating and prosecuting crimes related to AR/VR:

1. Jurisdiction and Applicable Law

The borderless nature of AR/VR platforms severely challenges traditional jurisdictional principles based on territoriality (where the crime occurred) or physical presence [45], [46]). When a user in Country A harms the avatar of a user in Country B on a server located in Country C, operated by a company headquartered in Country D, determining which courts have authority and which nation's laws apply becomes exceptionally complex [47], [48]. Established tests like the "effects test" (jurisdiction where the harmful effect is felt) or "targeting test" are difficult to apply consistently in diffuse virtual environments. This uncertainty hinders investigations and creates potential loopholes where perpetrators may evade accountability. Proposals for alternative jurisdictional frameworks tailored to cyberspace exist but lack widespread adoption.

2. Evidentiary Issues in Immersive Environments

Securing and utilizing digital evidence from AR/VR environments presents formidable technical and legal hurdles. Key challenges include: accessing relevant data (interaction logs, avatar movements, voice communications, potentially biometric data like eye-tracking or haptic responses) which may be proprietary, encrypted, ephemeral, or stored across multiple jurisdictions; authenticating the evidence to prove who performed specific actions; establishing the chain of custody for purely digital evidence; proving criminal intent (*mensrea*) based solely on avatar actions and digital communications; and effectively presenting complex, potentially voluminous VR/AR data in a traditional courtroom setting [49], [50], [51]. Platform data retention policies, user privacy regulations (like GDPR), and the sheer technical complexity of extracting meaningful evidence add further layers of difficulty for law enforcement.

3. Anonymity, Avatars, and Attribution

The prevalent use of pseudonyms and avatars in AR/VR spaces facilitates user anonymity, which, while beneficial for expression and privacy, significantly complicates criminal attribution [52], [53]. Linking a specific avatar's actions back to a verifiable real-world individual is a critical step for legal accountability but faces numerous obstacles. These include technical anonymization tools (VPNs, proxies), platform policies protecting user identity, jurisdictional barriers to obtaining subscriber information from foreign companies, and the legal standards required to prove identity beyond a reasonable doubt in criminal proceedings [54], [55]. The disconnect between virtual persona and physical identity remains a fundamental challenge for law enforcement in these environments.

E. Gaps in the Current Literature

Despite a growing body of work on cybercrime and legal issues in virtual worlds, significant gaps persist, particularly concerning the nuances of modern AR/VR technologies and the nascent Metaverse concept. Firstly, while many studies address individual legal problems (e.g., jurisdiction, virtual property), there is a relative paucity of *comprehensive, synthesized analyses* that examine the *interconnectedness* of these challenges specifically within the context of contemporary, highly immersive AR and VR platforms. Much existing analysis draws heavily on older virtual worlds (like Second Life) or general internet law, potentially overlooking the unique implications of increased presence, biometric data usage, AR's blending with physical space, and the proposed scale and interoperability of the Metaverse. Secondly, research often focuses heavily on identifying problems, with less systematic evaluation of the *feasibility, effectiveness, and comparative advantages* of potential *solutions* or adaptation strategies. Examining how legislative amendments, novel judicial interpretations, platform self-law, and technological design picks may interact or provide pathways forward calls for more committed attention. Thirdly, there may be a want for more robust comparative felony analysis centered especially on how extraordinary jurisdictions are beginning to technique (or fail to technique) AR/VR-associated criminal behavior, transferring beyond standard cybercrime comparisons. This research seeks to address those gaps by way of offering an incorporated evaluation of the criminal law demanding situations posed with the aid of modern AR/VR, focusing on the interplay between technological specifics and felony doctrines, and seriously comparing capacity avenues for legal and regulatory variation to make certain protection and accountability in those rapidly evolving immersive virtual geographical regions.

Remarks

The legal uncertainties surrounding AR and VR are not really educational; they have got tangible outcomes for purchaser protection, accept as true with in rising platforms, the viability of digital economies, and the overall trajectory of technological development. Relying on ad-hoc, analogical software of old legal guidelines is inadequate and risks inconsistent consequences, impunity for wrongdoers, and chilling outcomes on innovation. While platform governance via Terms of Service performs a function, it can not opportunity for strong, easy, and enforceable public criminal frameworks. Addressing the prison worrying situations identified requires a proactive, multi-faceted approach related to legislative attention, judicial adaptability, better worldwide dialogue, and responsible platform design. Failure to act decisively dangers permitting those powerful immersive generation to emerge as ungoverned areas in which harm can proliferate unchecked. A clear criminal framework is critical now not to stifle innovation, however to offer the crucial guardrails for its responsible and steady development, ensuring that virtual and augmented worlds remain responsible to societal norms and criminal ideas.

Conclusion

This research launched into an research into the difficult criminal panorama surrounding crook sports inside the rapidly evolving domains of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). Driven by means of the proliferation of immersive technologies and the emergence of the Metaverse idea, the take a look at sought to assess the preparedness and applicability of current criminal frameworks to manipulate behavior and deal with criminal activity in these novel environments. Through a doctrinal criminal analysis, examining applicable statutes, case law, and scholarly literature, the research showed the central speculation: cutting-edge criminal structures, largely conceived for the bodily world or earlier internet iterations, face enormous pressure and show off crucial deficiencies when faced with the precise characteristics of AR/VR. The deep immersion, the mediation of identification thru avatars, the creation of digital economies, the generation of latest varieties of facts, and the inherently transnational nature of those structures together mission foundational criminal principles.

Recommendations

Review and Amend Existing Statutes: Conduct thorough critiques of countrywide criminal codes (e.G., laws on assault, harassment, theft, fraud, pc misuse) to assess their applicability to AR/VR contexts. Consider amendments to make clear definitions (e.G., increasing 'damage' to include severe mental trauma from virtual acts, clarifying the prison fame of precious virtual assets as 'assets' for robbery purposes). Explore Specific Legislation: Evaluate the need for cautiously crafted regulation mainly addressing excessive harms precise to immersive environments (e.G., criminalizing non-consensual, deeply invasive virtual interactions inflicting demonstrable psychological injury), ensuring such laws are technologically neutral in which possible. Address Jurisdictional Gaps: Engage in global forums (e.G., UN, Council of Europe) to develop clearer, extra effective regulations or ideas for putting forward jurisdiction over transnational AR/VR crimes. Explore frameworks based totally on user location, platform concentrated on, or modified effects assessments. Enhance International Cooperation: Strengthen mechanisms for mutual criminal help (MLA) associated with cybercrime, specially addressing the want for fast get admission to to digital evidence held through AR/VR platform providers throughout borders. Support tasks geared toward harmonizing

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