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Virtual reality: SKEMA leads an international consortium laying the foundations for the future of research

Photo: SKEMA's Grand Paris campus, where an international scientific conference bringing together virtual reality researchers from around the world will be held in 2027.

Published in the “Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences” (PNAS), one of the world's most prestigious scientific journals, a landmark study bringing together 41 researchers from more than 30 international institutions has established the world's first protocols for standardising virtual reality research in the behavioural sciences. This breakthrough could fundamentally transform the discipline.

While virtual reality already enables researchers to conduct immersive, highly controlled and reproducible experiments, its scientific development has until now been hindered by the absence of common standards across research teams. The study, “Creating Common Virtual Ground: Protocols to Democratize Open VR Research”, addresses this challenge by introducing the first international methodological framework for virtual reality research in the behavioural sciences.

SKEMA is represented in the international consortium by two of SKEMA's virtual reality experts: **Anand van Zelderen**, Assistant Professor and initiator of the study, and **Albert Jolink**, Full Professor and co-author. The consortium has developed a comprehensive set of protocols, along with an interactive platform enabling research teams worldwide to implement the highest scientific standards. Their approach has three key objectives: ensuring compatibility across different VR systems, harmonising experimental protocols, and encouraging the sharing of data, code and virtual environments to facilitate the replication of scientific studies.

Beyond these methodological advances, the initiative addresses one of the greatest challenges facing the behavioural sciences: the reproducibility of research findings. By enabling identical experimental conditions to be reproduced across different laboratories, virtual reality significantly enhances the reliability of scientific research while democratising access to these technologies through the principles of open science. The study is supported by the Openverse Platform, founded by van Zelderen, bringing together researchers from leading academic institutions across Europe and beyond, including Dublin City University and the University of California, Merced.

The new protocols also open up significant opportunities for artificial intelligence. By generating harmonised and internationally comparable datasets, they will enable AI models to analyse thousands of experiments, detect patterns that would otherwise remain unnoticed, identify experimental bias more rapidly, and generate new scientific hypotheses. This integration of virtual reality and artificial intelligence has the potential to accelerate discoveries in fields as diverse as management, education, mental health, public policy and human-AI interaction.

This publication also represents a major milestone for SKEMA, which, drawing on the expertise of its faculty and research teams, aims to bring together an international scientific community around these new standards. Several new collaborations are already underway, and an international scientific conference dedicated to these protocols and new developments will be held in 2027 at SKEMA's Grand Paris campus.

"Virtual reality is not simply a powerful experimental tool. Through these protocols, we are also laying the foundations for future research, supported by artificial intelligence. It is this convergence of virtual reality, open science and artificial intelligence that has the potential to transform the behavioural sciences for decades to come," conclude **Anand van Zelderen** and **Albert Jolink**.

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