Understanding Emotional Engagement in Immersive VR Stress Management Programs

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1. Round 1

1.1 Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The sentence "The extent to which individuals feel emotionally immersed... varies widely..." is crucial. However, more detail on why this variation occurs (e.g., cultural background, VR exposure history) would improve theoretical depth.

The authors mention a shift toward affect-centered frameworks but do not explicitly define what an "affect-centered" framework entails. A clearer operational definition would improve conceptual rigor.

Some axial codes such as "Positive Mood Shift" and "Affective Transformation" appear conceptually overlapping. Clarifying the boundary between them would strengthen coding validity.

The statement "...mood elevation, catharsis, and reconnection with self" could be expanded with specific participant quotes to enhance authenticity and illustrate the narrative vividly.

The authors refer to "reluctance to return to the real world" as a minor finding. This is potentially important and warrants further elaboration, perhaps under a subsection titled "Risks and Overuse Considerations."

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the updated document.

1.2   Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The authors refer to "presence" as a key construct. However, it would strengthen the study if they differentiate between telepresence and social presence, both relevant to VR engagement literature.

The authors state: "Emotional engagement is a multidimensional construct..." – This claim could be enhanced by citing a foundational emotional engagement model from affective computing or psychological theory.

Although Braun and Clarke's six-step framework is cited, the actual implementation of each phase (e.g., theme naming decisions) could be elaborated for replicability.

The discussion notes that "VR provides a context for emotional exploration and healing." However, more engagement with counterfindings (e.g., participants who felt detached or overwhelmed) would provide balance and nuance.

The phrase "reflective self-awareness" is used frequently. This could benefit from integration with a psychological construct such as meta-emotion or self-schema, grounding the interpretation theoretically.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the updated document.

2.   Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.