

IS THE METAVERSE OUR FUTURE?



Metaverse is a mysterious but trendy word. Coined by Mark Zuckerberg, who borrowed it from a science fiction novel from the 90s for a relaunch of Facebook-related activities, the idea has sparked the interest of

other major players on various online platforms who have directed billions of dollars towards similar projects. For example, Microsoft, Google, Apple, Amazon, and Sony promote metaverse projects. But not just them, as we will see shortly. The name *metaverse* is associated with many other technological innovations as well, such as the cloud (a network of remote servers that can store data and provide computing services), blockchain (a digital ledger that records transactions in secure and transparent ways), or NFT (a digital method to certify something as unique). Even though they have no actual relationships, they create a collective imaginary of expectations for the future.

Metaverse is a magical word that promises many different things, all related to virtual reality with three-dimensional characteristics, shared online, in which users have “immersive” experiences within a reality “augmented” by digital features. The intent is to

make users’ online experience more attractive and to keep them there as long as possible in an environment that reproduces reality or creates an imaginary one, so much so that metaverse is now considered the term to indicate the future of the Internet.

How the metaverse is presented often leads to identifying every form of virtual reality with it. However, the metaverse assumes different characteristics in its other application sectors: commerce and professional services, entertainment and gaming, education, distance meetings, and conferences. With Roblox, Fortnite, and Minecraft as the leading producers, the gaming sector offers solutions for virtual reality “designed” instantaneously based on gaming situations. For commerce, virtual showrooms are available – exhibition halls where items for purchase are faithfully reproduced and accompanied by pages of detailed information. Professional services are provided online, customized to the user’s personalized needs, adding a touch of authenticity for a faithful simulation of a “personal” meeting with the interlocutor or instead with their “avatar,” the visual version of the increasingly popular voice assistant. The same is true for conferences and meetings. The field of education aims to use the metaverse to make learning experiential. And, of course, the world of art and museums can transfer their exhibitions to the metaverse’s virtual environments.

Many sectors, many metaverses. Vincenzo Cosenza’s OsservatorioMetaverso.it





counts more than 40, which benefit from a multiplying effect of public attention, even if different from each other.

IS THE METAVERSE ALREADY ALL AROUND US?

Although widely discussed, only some of the technical solutions necessary for spreading the metaverse are currently available. In particular, immersion in virtual reality still requires special visors and glasses to wear to see around oneself for the reconstruction of a virtual world. Soon, however, glasses may no longer be necessary. Still, there are other critical aspects to consider.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES ON THE ROAD TO THE METAVERSE?

The main difficulty is the definition of *standard technologies* to allow users to move from one environment to another, from one world to another, without difficulty due to which company created the various metaverses. To this end, a consortium with over 30 participating companies has been formed, which brings together all the major manufacturers except for Apple, Roblox, and Niantic. However, the main difficulty seems to be the lack of content and the cost required to produce it. Rebuilding a historical scene in virtual reality, for example, requires considerable work, especially if you want to achieve a realistic effect. And many fields of learning, such as surgery, are linked to increasingly sophisticated machines that today develop training courses in a virtual environment that tomorrow may be interested in developing on metaverse platforms.

Despite this, *user interest* is still a gamble. Except for the gaming sector, it is not yet determined if users prefer virtual reality solutions to meet, socialize, and learn. Perhaps only in the commercial and professional services sectors can we predict its popularization, provided that companies know how to change their *strategies and business models* to adapt to the new reality, in which purchasing is just one moment in a continuous relationship between customer and supplier, who then become part of an ecosystem made up of virtual environments.

ARE AVATARS THE FUTURE?

Continuous innovation is a requirement for the development of technology, including economics, that increasingly invades our existence. The metaverse promises to enclose us in a virtual world, ensuring that the encounters and social experiences we will have there will be equivalent to real ones. Looking at the recent past, the failure of “Second Life” suggests that the metaverse will not achieve all its expected results. But the idea of it creates a striking image of an impactful future we will increasingly have to deal with in our individual and social lives.

Editor's note: Although AI, or artificial intelligence, is not mentioned in this article, AI and the metaverse have many points of intersection and are likely to become more closely integrated as the technology behind both continue to evolve.

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