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## Virtual Reality Is the New Reality

VR has finally broken the jinx and is changing all norms in the tech space. It is likely to grow exponentially as it promises a whole new dimension to customer experience

Excitement around virtual reality has triggered a new revolution in the global market. Interestingly, India is at the forefront of exploiting virtual reality to its best for various industries. Deloitte had predicted in the beginning of 2016 that virtual reality would "have its first billion dollar year in 2016 with \$700 million in hardware sales, and the remainder from content." Exact figures are yet not with Dataquest about the global VR headset and content revenues. But it is believed that VR market would be closer to what Deloitte had initially presumed. Statista and Superdata report endorses this claim with relatively larger figure. According to Statista and Superdata report, the VR market is pegged between \$3bn and \$5bn currently and expected to grow to approximately \$40bn by 2020.

Games are going to complement VR research and innovation greatly. One example has been Pokemon GO which was an augmented reality game and provided small businesses with opportunities to leverage the game for their marketing. Considering the amount of innovation driven by competition, a massive influx of virtual and augmented reality into our everyday lives is expected in the very near future. "Let's start off by saying that Virtual Reality is not just a concept anymore, it's a reality and is here to stay. Virtual Reality can be for everyone," opines Ninad Chhaya, COO - WITS Interactive/Co-Founder and COO - GoPhygital.

### CONFLUENCE OF THE VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL

Content and devices will drive the adoption for VR. Experts believe that content creation is going to be further easy which will bring the virtual and the physical worlds together. Most of the researchers, innovators and experts share one common thought that VR's capability is likely to improve further over the years as processor-power improves, screen resolution increases yet further, and content creators get easy tools to generate more content. It will result in easy fusion of the virtual with physical.

"In 2016, the virtual and physical worlds continued to merge, as everyday objects and entire cities became smart and connected to the cloud. In 2017, we foresee the commercial application of this synergy between hardware and software becoming mainstream, offering novel experiences that take users to new heights of sight, sound and touch. This digital revolution will transform how most industries approach 'experiential' situations," says Sandeep Aurora, Director, Marketing and Market Development, Intel South Asia.

The confluence of virtual and physical is impacting everyone. One such instance emerged last year when Volvo launched a virtual reality test drive for their XC90 SUV in the US. According to a blogger, the experience took the user down a breathtaking country road with the feeling of being in the leather-upreared driver seat of the highly-rated, luxury sports utility vehicle. This is an example of how VR and augmented reality can be used as a great way to overcome several preliminary objections.

### RAKING IN THE MULLAH NEEDS DELIBERATION...

Any company that is considering VR in any regard has to pay a careful look at the likely addressable market. Shooting in the dark might lead nowhere and so result in losses. It was apparent in the mad rush in early 2016 when a number of mobile handset companies rolled out VR headsets with no clear vision and void of any content that could support their marketing strategy. Even Deloitte notes, "Recent breakthrough technologies that require consumers to wear something on their face have not proven to be mass market successes. While VR headsets may sell better than smart glasses or 3D TV glasses, also consider that using the technology may require a set of behavioral changes that the majority of people do not want to make."

Immense potential lies in the VR market. However, it calls for innovation and thought. It is important that companies planning to invest in VR define their objectives and then plan their further moves. "Whether you are a gamer wanting to experience the next level of immersive experience in a game, a medical professional being trained on performing complex surgeries or a teacher, teaching inquisitive minds about topics ranging from history to science, VR helps across a wide spectrum of uses," further adds Ninad Chhaya.

Indian enterprises are also manifesting leadership in using VR for their commercial purposes. PNB MetLife, an insurance firm, is taking a lead in harnessing the power of VR, AR and blockchain. "Virtual reality offers tremendous customer service possibilities as it will potentially change how one interacts with the service provider. Keeping this mind, we introduced conVRse, an experiential virtual reality platform built in collaboration between MetLife's Innovation center - LumenLab in Singapore and PNB MetLife in India," says Samrat Das, CIO, PNB MetLife.

Having spoken to CIOs from across the verticals, Dataquest realized that many verticals are trying their hands on VR and keenly looking at harnessing it and enhancing the customer experience. Shalimar Paints does have plans to leverage technologies such as AR and VR to augment customer experience. "We'll leverage new technologies such as VR and reach out to the addressable audience. Right now, we are evaluating the usage and reviewing the possibilities," divulges Ashok Jade, CIO, Shalimar Paints. It is probable that the company gives its audience true paint experience as it might look in their homes.

Among other technology firms, Intel is also working hard on innovation for VR solutions. "Last year, at IDF, we unveiled Project Alloy, an all-in-one virtual reality solution made from the ground up. A clear example of the future of merged reality today, the Alloy platform completely redefines what is possible in an all-in-one VR platform, and offers a PC-like VR experience without the need to tether the headset to a computer system. Our goal is to continue making experiences more and more real for consumers without completely blurring out the real environment," reveals Aurora from Intel South Asia.

In order to help enterprises with best VR solutions, a number of start-ups are active globally. Indian start-ups are also putting in their best to innovate and develop products. One such start-up is GoPhygital which is focused on creating immersive, experiential solutions using Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Mixed Reality. Its founder says, "We are currently in advanced stages of discussions with leading players across the media and entertainment industry, pharma and healthcare, BFSI to define and execute their VR strategy and to create VR content for providing an immersive user experience for their brands. We are also working on a VR simulator for a theme park ride and a couple of VR games."

### NARRATIVE CONTENT TO STEAL THE SHOW

At present scarcity of VR content is one of the biggest challenges. There are barely any content developers for VR. Experts believe that as the technology matures, it would need more content. At the same time, there needs to be easy tools to help users generate VR content. Several start-ups and tech companies are trying at their level to create more content. "Technology firms like Intel are already collaborating with content developers to create ultra-high resolution, six-degrees of freedom, and cinematic live-action VR captures. It is crucial to create content for global, and at a later stage, for local markets, to make VR relevant for varying needs of end users," further says Aurora of Intel.

There are other groups that believe that there is paucity of quality content. VR content being created right now is not of global quality and has to improve. "Globally, there is some fantastic work happening in the Virtual Reality space but it needs to be taken into consideration that creating a quality, immersive experience requires a good amount of investment. Not just in the infrastructure (hardware etc.) but also content creation," adds GoPhygital COO. He further stresses that VR, if executed well, can take the brand and user experience to a completely different level of engagement.

Companies looking to invest in VR as part of their marketing and engagement strategy need to be aware of the investment involved, both in terms of time and money, and then take the plunge. He warns, "A half-hearted attempt, or doing just for the sake of it can actually backfire and be detrimental to the brand."

It is also important to work with the right development partner, who not only understands the technology but also the art of storytelling. VR at its core is storytelling in an immersive format.

### MILES TO GO

The tech industry has promoted the prospect of VR for over a few decades. But it is only now that VR has started to bloom all over the world. Interest and innovation shown by global tech giants such as NVIDIA, Google, Facebook and Sony, etc has given it a fresh lease of life. And it is working. However, it is a long way for VR to become truly mainstream and yield results. Only time will tell how VR pans out in the long run.

### Benefiting Verticals

VR, according to Ninad Chhaya of GoPhygital, has uses across a wide range of verticals ranging from entertainment to education, from travel and tourism to training. Highlighting a few use cases below:

**Law:** VR could change the way evidence will be presented to the court. For example, imagine experiencing first hand a virtually created simulation of a crime case and analyzing evidence.

**Education:** VR is already being implemented in this sector. A good example of VR in education is "Google Expeditions." Through the cardboard VR headset, teachers are taking their students on virtual field trips around the world. Another example is the Apollo 11 VR experience (Mans first trip to the moon) by VR Immersive Education. You can experience this historic event through the eyes of those who lived it. Using original archive audio and film, together with accurate recreations of the spacecraft and locations, the experience educates students about the men and women who worked on the Apollo program during NASA's golden era.

**Training:** Companies in various sectors like insurance, manufacturing, law enforcement, etc. are using VR to train their employees on how to handle various scenarios. Samsung are using VR for their production line training because it not only saves on cost but it is also more efficient. Under the new VR training program, an employee uses a headset and holds a specially designed tool to work through the manufacturing processes. It allows the trainees to physically get used to the most important steps of the manufacturing process.

**Relaxation & Meditation:** Imagine removing the hassle of packing and driving/flying to your favorite relaxation/meditation spot. VR can not only save you the money, but also get the desired result.

**Medical:** Not only as a tool to train students, but VR could also change the way your doctor interacts with you. With the help of VR, he/she could show you how a disease/fracture is impacting your body. Life changing factors in my opinion.

**Tourism:** Visit a country in VR through 360o videos of the touristic hotspots and then book a trip to see them in-person.

**Real Estate:** See your next home/business and the surrounding area before you decide to buy. Time and money saving, need I say more.

Posted by Onkar Sharma  
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