

RBH Mindset

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**not as
popular
as many would
imagine**

**mixed
reality
technology**

**We've seen the
metaverse
- and we don't want it**

**smart
glasses**

**reluctant
to immerse
themselves**

Taking it back to

1992



Taking it back to 1992, an American author, Neal Stephenson published his sci-fi novel Snow Crash. A cyberpunk story where the aptly named Protagonist jumps between Los Angeles and a fully virtual world. It was here that the word 'metaverse' was created for this virtual space. A space where characters appeared in avatar form by putting on special goggles to experience the digital world through the first person.

But now? The word metaverse has been popularised through Mark Zuckerberg's rebrand of Facebook to Meta. And his vision? To bring the virtual world to life. Ongoing promotions for the metaverse show people moving to and from the virtual space. From socialising and working, to gaming and learning together, Zuckerberg's plan to use a mix of both cartoon-style avatars and realistic holograms creates a whole new way of life.

The metaverse as presented by Mark Zuckerberg – a totally open virtual world

where realistic holograms can take their digital belongings from one virtual place to another – does not yet exist. However, digging deeper, it's argued that metaverses of some sorts have been around for decades already. You see, the definition of a 'metaverse' is very loose, and under most descriptions, VR (virtual reality) and MMOs (massively multiplayer online games) can be understood as metaverses in themselves.

The idea of a metaverse as a virtual platform using avatars is nothing new. Using this definition, metaverses in the form of MMOs such as World of Warcraft, Second Life, and even Club Penguin have existed long before Zuckerberg's vision. Using these platforms, players can enter a virtual world using a fully customisable avatar, interact with others across the globe, play games, create a 'home space' and even earn and spend currency on completely digital items such as new clothes for their avatar or home décor for their virtual living space.

MMOs Fortnite, Minecraft and Roblox even hosted concerts during the lockdown, with acts such as Ariana Grande, Travis Scott, and Lil Nas X taking to the virtual stage where players would log onto the platforms to watch them perform.

So, it seems as though the metaverse proposed by Meta is similar to the format of MMOs but utilising the technological advancements of VR. However, the technology imagined by many is simply not there. VR tech itself has not yet been fully streamlined – headsets are awkward and clunky, and the user experience is flawed. In fact, poor user experience is one of the largest barriers to VR adoption. And don't forget the many generations who are reluctant to immerse themselves in VR technology.

reluctant to immerse themselves

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Metaverse



Currently, Gen X (born 1966-1980) hold 51% of all leadership positions globally. That means, when talking about using the metaverse for business, these are surely the demographic Meta want to target.

However, the idea is not as popular as many would imagine. With only 23% of Gen X willing to attend a work conference in the metaverse, and only 22% willing to participate in a virtual metaverse office space, there's a clear disjoin between those who would be most willing to spend time in the metaverse, and those who would be using the metaverse for business. Not to mention that it's also been found that the VR experience peaks with those aged 25-34 and drops significantly as the age groups go up. With the majority of Gen X in the 45-54 age bracket, studies show that only 12% have engaged with VR technology.



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Gen Z prefer a sense of **community**

So the image of businesspeople sat in a virtual conference room surrounded by holograms in a Jedi Council-style meeting is probably not on the horizon. But, with the huge uptake of video conferencing, why is this further inclusion of VR necessary? Currently, 78% of corporate companies use video-calling software and a huge 86% of companies conduct employee interviews over video – so we can already talk, work, and collaborate with people and companies all around the world.

This being said, older Millennials and Gen X (those less willing/able to participate in the metaverse) currently hold the most spending power, shaping the economy. Nonetheless, as these generations grow older and the digital natives of Gen Z gain more leadership roles and spending, will this increase the possibility of a future for the metaverse?

Drapers 2022 Consumer Research Report found that where Millennials value convenience and speed, Gen Z prefer a sense of community, control, and co-creation – it's the perfect match for a life in the metaverse! Taking a closer look at Gen Z, they're often found to be in touch with technology and willing to trust new advances due to having never really known a life without the internet. As we know, online shopping exploded during Covid-19, and the trend has not died down with the virus. In fact, 71% of consumers say they plan to shop the same amount or more online compared to how they shopped in the pandemic.

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However, this doesn't mean that Gen Z is happy to live in a totally digital world. Consumers still enjoy shopping in physical stores for example, appreciating the social and experiential aspect of retail. In reality, consumers prefer a mix of both physical and digital interaction – pointing to a more 'phygital' or mixed reality dominant future. This can be as simple as ordering an item online and then picking it up in store, or being able to scan a product tag with your phone to view its environmental impact. A more sophisticated example of a phygital experience is the new Amazon Go store. The concept looked to blend the benefits of physical grocery shopping with the convenience of a checkout free payment – sounds pretty perfect to us.

Right now, mixed reality gives us many of the benefits that the metaverse offers without having to immerse yourself in a totally digital environment – it combines what is real with what is possible. Technology such as Google Glass allows the user to see aspects of augmented reality (AR) within the physical environment. Google Glass came on the market in 2013, offering consumers wearable glasses with a small camera and projection device attached to the front. This allowed the wearer to see digital images projected onto the glasses whilst moving around in a physical space, for example having maps and step-by-step navigation appear in front of you, or being able to look at your notifications without reaching for your phone.

The public **weren't** ready

Unfortunately, Google Glass never took off and was discontinued just two years later. The public weren't ready for people to be walking around with small computers on their face – it was just too big of a step. Ultimately, the headwear was still clunky, unnatural to use, and carried a hefty \$1,500 price tag. That was more than enough to put people off. But it doesn't stop there. People began to raise safety concerns as it was impossible to know whether the head-mounted camera was recording, and therefore the tech was banned from many public spaces.

Taking a look at mixed reality tech however, we've uncovered several useful applications, such as experiential workplace training with minimal risk, seeing blueprints or project designs in 3D, seeing if a new sofa will fit in your living room, or even virtually trying on outfits. In fact, although Google Glass was pulled from the consumer market in 2015, it did remain available to businesses for training purposes, and is being used within companies to this day.

mixed reality technology

A more modern, popular application of mixed reality most people will be familiar with is Pokémon Go. The mobile game that uses mixed reality in order for players to 'catch' digital Pokémon from their physical environment. This is a perfect instance where mixed reality technology was seemingly more seamless and accessible than VR technology. And because of that, Pokémon Go reached 147m users in May 2018.

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But digital enthusiasts haven't stopped there. Wearable mixed reality tech appears to be making a comeback. Snapchat have introduced their new 'Spectacles' which are not yet available to consumers – instead they are “built for creators looking to push the limits of immersive AR experiences”. Breaking the mould, Snapchat is inviting creators to make new 'lenses' for the spectacles.

So what now? People from across the globe are creating different lenses for a variety of applications such as practicing accuracy in sport, viewing maps in 3D, and providing education about environments like coral reefs or mountain ranges which would normally be inaccessible. These wearables look a lot more like a normal pair of glasses.

This technology can also be found in the Ray-Ban Stories collection. The designer eyewear brand has in collaboration with Meta launched their 'smart glasses' with integrated cameras, speakers and microphones. This technology allows the user to take phone calls, listen to music, take photos and videos as well as sharing them directly to social channels. But this isn't mixed reality. Smart Glasses is an extension of handsfree technology which does point to a market that is more accepting of and ready for wearable tech.

As the trend catches on, it's been reported that Apple are also working on a VR headset – supposedly a precursor to Apple Glass – wearable mixed reality glasses. Bloomberg's Mark Gurman reports that Apple are decisively not joining the metaverse with their VR and AR technology, stating that a self-contained, totally digital world is "off-limits" for Apple. Instead, it's going down the route of a mixed reality device that can be realistically worn all day, bringing digital aspects to the physical world without taking people out of their natural environment.



smart glasses



So, are we likely to be
**living and
working in the
metaverse**
in the next few years?

Meta and other businesses have turned the word metaverse into a buzzword, used across all sectors without staying true to its meaning – Coca-Cola recently launched a ‘pixel flavoured’ drink that was ‘born in the metaverse’.

The word is being added to all sorts of products in order to create hype and PR opportunities when at the moment it could be argued that the metaverse is just a way for Mark Zuckerberg to sell us virtual clothes. One writer even goes so far as to say that the metaverse is a way to push us all into a “black hole of consumption” where a single entity sells you everything from entertainment to antifreeze.

It’s unlikely.

In reality, metaverses have existed in the gaming sector for decades, and instead of using VR to immerse ourselves fully into these digital platforms, current trends suggest that mixed reality is a much more likely step forward. Mixed reality tech is much more streamlined and practical than VR, and generally provides a much higher user experience. The versatility of mixed reality also allows for a greater acceptance among older generations and tech sceptics, as it can be integrated into technology with which they are already familiar, such as the smartphone. Overall, rather than moving our physical selves into a digital metaverse, it seems the more logical answer is to bring digital aspects into our physical environment.

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your brand working smart
and turn these insights
into something powerful,
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