

Chapter 15

Visual Journalism and the Future of News Consumption

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the rise of immersive technologies, with a particular emphasis on visually immersive forms that have only begun to be implemented in newsrooms and social media platforms over the past decade. The road leading to today's technology has been a long and winding one, and it will likely take a while before the public views news as an immersive experience. This chapter will also serve to introduce the customization and personalization of new technologies in the future, as well as the problems that may accompany them over the next 20 to 40 years and beyond.

IMAGINE...

Despite her best efforts, Sabrina could not shake rush hour traffic. The city's explosive growth in population has made it increasingly difficult to access downtown within a reasonable amount of time, pushing many suburban commuters to move into the city and further exacerbate the issue. This was not abnormal but distinctly inconvenient on the day of her long-awaited interview with Mayor Gomez. As she helplessly watches the clock grow closer to her scheduled time slot a news notification appears on her wrist watchface with screaming red letters. It was an evacuation order for her apartment complex, now the second bomb threat this month. She sighs, forwarding the notice to her station with a voice command and then leaning back into the well-worn bus seat. Homelessness and unemployment were disproportionately high in the city, and those who find/afford a permanent residence do so at great expense. Far greater than it is worth, she mused, dreaming idly of this city's future until arriving at her stop.

One brisk walk and two security checkpoints later, she is inside admiring the mixed-use high rise all the way up. The initial proposal for this complex was made three years ago by Mayor Gomez following a vacation in Europe where he saw green architecture greatly benefiting local urban communities. Once on the 20th floor, she meets her VR film crew and examines their current setup. All cutting-edge tech-

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nology, of course, with tiny camera lenses capturing high-fidelity footage and re-creating the confines of the environment with the help of an advanced onboard algorithm. Each setup linked to simulate the space, even down to the mid-morning sunshine glaring through the windows. Exceptional tech, but quite normal these days. As soon as the Mayor is ready and the cameras are calibrated, the interview begins with a wide shot of the city skyline. This angle allows the audience to lean forward with their virtual reality headsets and see out to the streets below, or up at the aircraft soaring above. No matter where one is within this building, greenery is visible. This building has vertical gardening boxes rising from the floor to the ceiling, hydroponic modules jutting from the side of the structure, and a diverse selection of plant life that optimizes energy and water usage. Drone footage offers a beautiful look at the whole building, once a brutal concrete spire, now a resource-efficient, mixed-use structure housing thousands and feeding even more. Sabrina asks the Mayor about the advanced tenants living nearby and their apartment buildings. Sabrina's crew follows the two as they approach the living spaces, and the Mayor knocks on one of the doors. On-the-fly re-calibration allows the crew to keep filming, despite the challenging environment, in full, perfect 360-degree video. Two children run past one of the VR cameras, their footsteps silent as the algorithm-backed microphones capture only the interview subjects. This family had been homeless, they tell Sabrina, and were selected by lottery to live in the new building. Cameras capture the mother's emotions peeking through in stark detail when she thanks the Mayor for this opportunity. This was the first green building in the city, says the Mayor, but it will not be the last.

Sabrina took an air taxi home, not content with sitting on the bus for another two hours. By the time she is home she can see the interview on the sides of skyscrapers, displayed on digital facades and no-doubt captivating the entire city, or so she hopes. After a bit of prep for that night's dinner, Sabrina dons her virtual reality headset and explores that day's interview keen on revisiting the building's interior. She plops her virtual self-down at the windowsill and admires the rich green beauty contained within the communal garden plots, to which she leans in closer. If she looks hard enough, Sabrina can see a small bulb of this plant's first fruiting tomato. She reaches in to touch it but... it is not real. Taking off the headset, Sabrina just smiles. Around the city over five-hundred thousand residents share a similar experience, walking through the halls of their city's first green building and feeling like they are really there. Some think the project is incredible, others see it as a waste of taxpayer money, but all feel as though they were standing there with Sabrina and Mayor Gomez overlooking the city. If this is the modern standard for immersive content, what great innovations lay in wait for future generations of content creators?

INTRODUCTION

With the integration of emerging visual technologies into everyday life, the term “pivot to video” has been coined to indicate the transition from print to visual mediums in journalism. Today, the way that we tell stories relies significantly less on text and increasingly more on short-form video content. This form-shift to what is appropriately titled “visual media” combines images, video, sounds, and more to increase sensory engagement with a viewer, surpassing the former exclusively print media. The turn of the century and the popularization of the Internet catalyzed rapid evolution in technology, developing new ways to both distribute and consume information. Visual intricacies enhance content, allowing for quicker, more efficient communication of complex subject matter and have been particularly useful for content creators in online digital spaces. Since the start of the mobile revolution, our heightened exposure

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