

Chapter 2

Virtual Reality and the New Dimensions of Visual Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to examine how technologies create new dimensions in media production at the intersection of virtual reality and visual media. The rise of virtual reality (VR) technologies is transforming visual media experiences, offering innovative interaction spaces for both content creators and viewers. The goal of the study is to explore how these technologies are changing the effects on visual media, media perception, and audience engagement, and to discuss VR's potential impact on the future of media. The methodology will involve a review based on technology-based content analyses and media theories, along with a literature review on the effects of VR experiences on media consumers. The study will focus on the use of virtual reality applications in the media industry, with limitations that only certain VR platforms and media formats will be analyzed, excluding other media forms that reach broader audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, people obtain almost all information about their environment and the world through the media, apart from basic daily life practices, and internalize information about facts and events as much as and in the way they appear in the media (Akmeşe, 2020, p.38). The media provide individuals with various experiences to rationally comprehend individual, social, national and international issues and to make the necessary decisions (Yurdigül & Yurdigül, 2014, p.122).

Transformations in visual media technologies have added a new dimension to traditional media such as cinema and television with virtual reality. Virtual reality is an environment that offers a 360° experience by immersing the viewer in the content, thus radically changing visual storytelling. Historically speaking, cinema's transition from silent to sound, from black-and-white to color, and from two to three dimensions has always been part of a quest to offer the audience a “more real” experience. Indeed, as Lev Manovich points out, from the invention of photography in the 1840s to the emergence of virtual reality in the 1980s, every new visual media technology has come up with the claim of representing reality more directly (Manovich, 2001). The current resurgence in popularity of virtual reality continues in this vein, but the interactivity and spatial depth offered by this technology creates new aesthetic and narrative possibilities that are different from traditional media (Manovich, 2001). Virtual Production is the digitalization of traditional production techniques. With this technology, physically built set environments are replaced by virtual set environments designed in a computer environment. Virtual set environments are created in predetermined virtual spaces. The basic components are LED walls and ceilings, unreal engine, motion capture, digital environment and 3D design (Çelik & Bolat, 2025).

Marshall McLuhan's famous expression “The medium is the message” gains a special meaning in the age of virtual reality. According to McLuhan, communication tools transform society not only with the content they transmit but also with the sensory/perceptual environment they create. As a matter of fact, virtual reality-based media, also called spiral media, completely integrate the audience with the message transmission environment, making communication highly personal and impressive (Arıkan, 2023). In McLuhan's distinction between “hot” and “cold” media, virtual reality can be considered an example of “hot” media with its high-resolution, multi-sensory structure that encompasses the perception of the participant (Ashley, 2015). On the other hand, visual culture theorists such as W.J.T. Mitchell discuss how images redefine the perception of reality in today's digital visual environments (Mitchell, 2005). The concept of “*pictorial turn*” put forward by Mitchell can be said to have reached its climax with virtual reality: Images are no longer merely representations, but are transformed into spaces that are experienced through virtual reality.

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