

# Immersive Technologies and Journalistic Content of Virtual Reality

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## ABSTRACT

The author of this article examines the interpretation of theoretical approaches to immersive journalism by foreign media scientists. There are many ways to achieve an immersive effect. One of them is the use of technologies of the virtual world, that is, immersion in the environment of virtual life. Virtualization technologies have a history of several decades. The improvement of this technology will be reflected in the future as a universal media communication channel. This article examines the results of scientific studies that show that immersive journalism is an effective direction for the development of journalism in general. The author emphasizes the need to pay serious attention to the training of specialists on this platform. The article argues that studies show the consequences of virtual reality and its "immersion" in human consciousness, the positive results of which require the introduction of certain ethical standards in their application. Also, VR technology, as a fundamental medium of a new direction in journalism, is the main object of study from a theoretical, scientific, practical and psychological point of view, which must be analyzed in domestic scientific research.

**KEYWORDS:** *immersive journalism, VR technology, virtual reality, digital media technology.*

Immersive journalism has become a topic of discussion for media researchers and representatives of other industries. In the course of studying the scientific research of Western scientists in this field, we have witnessed that the new approach to presenting information, that is, a panoramic view, provides an opportunity to interpret information to the consumer as a direct participant in reality. In the course of our work, we became interested in the scientific research of scientists from neighboring Central Asian countries, in particular, the research conducted by Professor G.Zh. Ibraeva and others, which helped us to clarify the results of this study. In his article, the author describes in detail the work of companies, universities, centers, research of individual applicants who conducted practical research and developed information products with an immersive effect. Another important source was the study of a group of Russian researchers such as Kachkaev A., Smolin A.A. and Zhdanov D.D.

Nonny De la Peña is considered by many researchers to be the pioneer of "immersive journalism". She is a professional journalist and researcher of this new field of journalism and communication. Her first experiments with virtual reality were full of trial and error. Usually the immersion effect was used in movies or games, but not in journalism. "Her experiments were received negatively and critically by her colleagues. Her first story was about hunger.

In Los Angeles, there was a long line for free food as usual, a tired woman at the distribution point couldn't cope and started screaming: there are too many people here! Suddenly, one man standing in line fell down, and panic began. It turned out he was a diabetic. Not having received food on time, the man fell into a coma in front of a crowd of people. This is how the plot was created. In the video, there is a line of virtual people. The scene is recreated as much as possible. But the voices are real. One person is having a seizure. He is lying down. A person in the studio with a virtual helmet approaches him, which allows you to create a sense of reality of what is happening. The person in the studio tries not to step on the fainted person, who is not really there. All the people who later participated in the virtual viewing bent down, tried to help the person, wherever this plot was shown. Leaving the stage, one woman said: Oh my God, I couldn't help him at all! And another just cried».

Immersive technologies are able to transform the consumer of information from an external observer into a participant in the event, using images from the reporter's immediate perspective. Thus, immersive media increases the psychological credibility of the narrative in full perfection. In accordance with the concepts of new media studies, immersive journalism refers to a digital information technology that provides the information needed by the user in a virtual environment. Typically, it is a set of VR displays in the form of glasses or helmets that are attached to the head using special devices - (gloves, trackers) and HMD devices, in addition to graphic structures designed with perfect accuracy.

The general goal of immersion technology is to establish a direct connection between the content and its recipient, full immersion in the eventfulness of what is happening in the virtual world. The rules of the existence of the immersion effect - immersion leads to the fact that the observer analyzes the media event not from his (real life) position, but from the position of a direct participant in reality. At the same time, a number of psychological effects create an interactive environment of artificial communication (one-sided existence, that is, observation of reality, in it you can feel yourself, but not the ability to influence what is happening). However, some media experts consider the media reality of virtual communications as a natural phenomenon of the evolution of traditional mediation.

Security of information and content infrastructure includes protection of information and content from potentially harmful impact on the owner or users of the infrastructure of an accidental or intentional nature. Based on this, we can say that the task of journalism is to protect the interests of society, and even in the new virtual world it is unchanged.

But the language of VR and its mechanisms are not so much in harmony with the principles of realism and transparency. The art of creating a VR effect is limited only to creating the illusion of the environment and authenticity. That is why there is a lot of debate among the manufacturers of this system about technologies that lead to a "consensus of hallucinations", that is, the technology of manipulating the brain and deceiving the senses. Therefore, for the media of any generation, the problem of protecting the critical thinking of users from the "magic" of technology remains the most pressing problem of ethical standards.

One of the NYT materials created using virtual reality technologies is dedicated to the anti-terrorist operation in the city of Fallujah [Denton, 2017]. It enhances the recipient's involvement, since sensory information complements the narrative, the user is given the illusion of real participation in a firefight between the Iraqi army and ISIS militants, and the viewer can examine in detail the living conditions of refugees in the suburbs of Baghdad. All these details of the environment: sounds, the fear that grips the body cannot be conveyed through newspaper text. Only virtual space creates a high degree of social presence, when the author of the material can use all kinds of signals. Researchers from Stanford University tested the potential of virtual reality for its "saturation" as a media and the ability to evoke real, natural sensations. The study involved elementary school students who swam with whales in a virtual ocean. The results showed that five days after the experiment, the children increasingly recalled their experience of communicating with marine mammals as reality. Thus, the formation of false memories is a powerful resource of the virtual environment, which is perceived by the user as an authentic tangible world. At the same time, in 2016, scientists from Stanford University released a guide to using the virtual environment in journalism, "Journalism Program's guide to using virtual reality for storytelling – dos & don'ts" [Migielicz, Zacharia, 2016], in which they argued that the issue of using traditional journalistic video technology in this space is extremely controversial both from the point of view of ethics and from the position of narrative.

The emerging shift towards immersive technologies requires the creation of increasingly resource-intensive formats with a deep immersion function. A new trend in journalism has become volumetric shooting (volumetric capture). In this case, an object is filmed by several cameras at once from different sides, after which the resulting images are combined into a single three-dimensional image. As media analytics shows, the situation of forced self-isolation has led to an increase in the popularity of such content - virtual tours and excursions around the world (Revrine), museum exhibitions (Hermitage), makeup apps (Cosmia AR), trying on clothes (Lamoda) and sports (VR Sport). During the coronavirus pandemic, QR code technology has reached a new stage of development due to its use in tracking population movements, access to test results and vaccination certificates. The tool makes it possible to go digital and open extended content. Moreover, QR codes can act as tags for linking augmented reality objects. The technology is used, in particular, by Esquire and Snob magazines.

Another area of application of immersive technologies is the film adaptation of a literary work. The pioneer of this genre is the NYT newspaper, which transferred part of Bernie Saunders' novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* into the world of virtual reality. In order not to violate the copyright of the book, the

creators of the project classified it not as an adaptation, but as an auxiliary element of the story. This approach to the production of an information product can be certified as transmedia storytelling - a process in which individual fragments of a story are presented to users through various platforms in order to create a single monolithic work. As a result of the study, we found out that the most frequently used VR content are stories related to the reconstruction of historical events, film adaptations of literary works, or news materials that require social presence. The described stories really require maximum immersion of the audience in the context and content of the story and give the viewer the opportunity to experience a truly strong emotional experience. The use of sound, visual signals and 3D effects in ordinary news events is inappropriate.

So, immersive technologies give journalists the opportunity to rethink the principles of organizing and constructing stories. However, AR and VR will not replace traditional news formats: they are a breakthrough in people's desire to get closer to the event that interested them. Modern interactive virtual space, where the differences between the distant and the close, the external and the internal, the biological and the automatic disappear, gives rise to new opportunities for spectacle and involvement, stimulating the interpenetration of traditional genres and new digital technologies. Immersive journalism as a growing ecosystem will develop in direct proportion to the level of demand for new formats due to the improvement of the technical equipment of editorial offices and the target audience.

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