VR is an amazing technology and every week there seems to be a new trick to make the virtual world feel even more real.

It’s full of new experiences that I desperately want to share with other people. But accessing a virtual experience is inherently antisocial: once you strap on a VR headset, you’re cut off from the outside world. The headset blocks your vision; special 3D audio headphones block out sound. You’re alone, regardless of who else is in the room.

VR is all about immersion — that sense that you’re actually there, in the place to which your senses are transporting you. And adding a social component to a virtual experience — whether that’s interacting with an artificially intelligent character or another person playing the same game — deepens those feelings of immersion. Frank Biocca, a Syracuse University human-computer interaction researcher who authored Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality, says that interacting with someone a player already knows is the most powerful version of the experience. Bringing real connections into VR increases users’ connection to the virtual world, he says, making it feel more emotionally authentic.

There’s a feedback loop that reinforces our urge to laugh, cry, or groan. Adding a social element amplifies our experiences—and that applies to VR too.

As social apps get more popular the opportunities to connect them to VR become more exciting. Facebook believed in VR enough to buy Oculus back in 2014, with the intent of creating a social experience. “This is really a new communication platform,” Mark Zuckerberg [wrote on](https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10101319050523971) Facebook to explain the purchase. “By feeling truly present, you can share unbounded spaces and experiences with the people in your life.” And last week, ahead of expectations, Facebook delivered its first social experience: Oculus Rooms and Parties. Rooms, which is now available for Gear VR headsets and will become available for Rift in 2017, lets users start a voice chat within virtual reality. Parties lets their avatars hang out in virtual rooms where they can talk, play games and watch movies together. It’s a lot like existing social spaces such as AltspaceVR, with the additional ability to customize avatars’ expressions.

In the coming year, companies are expanding this principal beyond gaming. Sansar, a platform for building virtual worlds from the company behind Second Life, is expected to launch in 2017 and Second Life’s original creator is creating another rival virtual universe, High Fidelity.