

Why Immersive Narratives (iNarratives) is not the next big breakthrough in film and TV

I believe Immersive Narratives will be a big part of our future wearable technology spectrum. iNarratives will be as present in our daily life as smart phones and smart watches. It will give the opportunity to experience the world in a totally new way, and will change how we socially interact with others. Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, believes greatly in the future of immersive virtual reality, and is working towards creating social experiences which build around virtual reality devices like the Oculus Rift. This proves how soon virtual reality will be a big part of our daily social life. There is no doubt in my mind that iNarratives will be a big breakthrough in social media, but I do not believe it will be the big breakthrough in film and TV.

Today's virtual reality devices often use head mounted display setups. The past has shown that head mounted and eye wearing setups for tv and film are not sustainable. 3D cinema using 3D glasses have never become a success, despite that the quality of the productions have in some films, like Avatar, been quite high. Most of us have watched a 3D movie, but I believe few have watched many 3D productions. Watching a movie at the cinema or at home is supposed to be a relaxing and stress-free experience. To use wearable technology which is mounted on your head and covering your eyes will never be comfortable enough to give this experience.

Producing material for film and TV using Immersive Narratives is adding an extra layer of complexity to the production. One of the simplest methods today to produce 360 degrees material today is using six GoPro cameras attached spherically to be able to film all parts of the 360 degrees. This material must be edited using a software program which stitches together the six separate videos into one 360 degrees video. The cost of six high quality cameras, the camera rig and necessary software will be high for a low cost film or TV production. To provide the immersive production to a user, the user will need a device like Oculus Rift or Samsung Gear which is today rather expensive equipment. The consequence of the added complexity and cost of the production I believe will be that immersive productions will only be relevant for very few specialised film and tv productions.

The way we watch film and TV have been slowly developing in the last 50 years. The technology have drastically changed over this period. Technology have moved us more and more away from traditional TV channels to on-demand streaming applications. We can watch a wide selection of TV shows and films at any time using numerous different devices. Even so, I do believe that we as users are not ready for the new way of experiencing TV and films, which immersive narratives provide. The technology is still too complex to comprehend for most users, and the setup of it all may be distracting from the production itself. I think it will be difficult to make a virtual reality setup for TV and film which is intuitive to use for many users.

Immersive film and TV productions will have much higher requirements to content quality than exists today. Streaming providers like Netflix have revolutionised the industry, and changed the way we consume film and TV. Netflix is so easy to use and works on all our media devices. The consequence of this is that we more often than before watch movies and TV shows while doing other activities and daily chores in parallel. While watching my favourite television show or movie I want to have the opportunity to talk to others, chat or surf the web. Watching a film or TV using a head mounted display will be all-consuming of the users attention. The users total attention will be dedicated to the movie or television show, and the content quality needs to be high enough to keep the interest of the user throughout the whole experience. I do not believe today's film and TV watchers want a device which requires our full attention at all time, and limits the possibility to do something else or be socially active while watching.

Today commercial TV screens have very high quality, and can in terms of resolution and picture quality compete with some cinema screens. Despite of this, cinema is still a popular activity amongst most age groups. I believe this is because the quality of experience of watching a movie is enhanced by sharing the experience with others. Traditional TV and film gives opportunity to make watching a movie or going to the cinema a social activity. An activity which can help build new relations or maintain old friendships. Immersive TV and film productions is an individual movie experience, which is difficult to share with others. It might be shared using social media between two users. This will be natural for instance for Oculus Rift to be connected to social media as they are owned by Facebook. Still in my view social media is pseudo-social experience which never can fully replace direct social contact. I believe that Immersive Narratives will not be able to compete with the experience of watching a good movie with friends or partner.