Article
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Metaverse and The Future of Cinema

'Metaverse' is the new term of 2021, which is gaining popularity worldwide. However, this is not a new concept. If you go through the history, you can easily find its origin in the fictional novel 'Snow Crash' written by Neal Stephenson in 1992. He described that the real living world is almost dead, where people live their lives virtually through technology & addicted to it in their homes/rooms. It is a dystopian world that is not real but a place for escapism.

If we split the word 'Metaverse,' 'Meta' is derived from Greek meaning 'Beyond,' usually, a prefix, and the word 'Verse' is populated from the Universe. The word means beyond the universe where it is true. It is a mix of Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), Blockchain technology, etc.

Now the question is how the film is the matter of this discussion? Here is why, in Virtual Reality, a movie or cinema is also considered a product or platform. First, we must clear our whole idea about that technology & then discuss how it affects or changes the dimension of cinema. According to Oxford Dictionary, Virtual Reality is 'the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional & 360-degree image or environment that can be interacted with in a seemingly natural or physical way by a person using special electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen inside or gloves fitted with sensors. This is a mix of animation. CGI, artificial intelligence, user's action, etc. So, in simple words, a user or in the film environment an audience can enter into the cinema, focus on what they want, and feel the touch or the exclusive film environment, etc. But for all these, you must wear a headset (nowadays), but as per the prediction, an optical is enough to taste this VR where technology is fast moving towards it. You can access the film, content, social media, etc., through this headset or optic set (for example, Google Glass). Now, we have to understand the difference between Virtual Reality & Augmented Reality. Augmented Reality is like VR, but the significant difference is users' interaction with this dystopian

world is limited where not all things are virtual. Sometimes, it is a mix of artificial things & the real world. The best example of this AR is the Pokémon Go mobile game where people can see Pokémon in the mobile camera/interface in the real world, but the truth is that it is not real.

In terms of Blockchain Technology & Artificial Intelligence, both are different but linked. Blockchain is a technology used to stop the duplicity of any product or service. It is a vast subject, but in simple terms, it is mainly made by digital and unique blocks that create a chain for any product or service to authenticate its value or proportion. This is an unbreakable and non-hackable technology, primarily used in digital transactions like cryptocurrencies (for example, Bitcoin, Ethereum, etc.). Recently it has been used in good governance like Government Identity Card schemes, Food Distribution, digital currency conversion, or transactions other than cryptocurrencies like smart contracts for land identification and security. 'Artificial Intelligence is the most widely used technology by the big corporates, and many small enterprises/start-ups are using it to analyze and evaluate the customer's behavior for data mining. Data mining is used primarily to understand or predict a product's current and future demand, approximate supply strength, customer or consumer's real-time behavior about their demographics, interests, unique points, etc.

How Cinema is being Affected by Virtual Reality:
There was a time when 3D cinema became more popular when we used to see 2D cinema. IMAX, 3D, 6D is a step towards virtual reality in my point of view, where the main target is to give a realistic experience of films and their environment to the audience. But the 360-degree experience was missing, though the feel, smell, or touch are very subtle but only available on 6D or 7D movie theatres. Gradually it became popular worldwide (mostly 3D cinemas), but, these films have been losing their popularity in the past few years. Because, in 3D, the dimension is not three dimensions as it claimed. People want more unique features, and many big corporates are fulfilling these demands in the name of Virtual Reality. It is a significant invention to get a taste of a utopian world through a headset. The most vital part is that the film subject or the filmmaker's view is not very important. The user's experience & how they will react to it is of utmost importance. The audience can see their own choice of focus, and it comes with great power where the audience is not bound to watch the film in the conventional 2D way.

Advantages of VR Films:
The user or audience controls the filmmaker or production house in selecting location, mode, and film to watch. Cheap headsets and VR-related technology make way to experience escapism from real-world problems. High-End graphics (VFX) modern technology enables people to think beyond the conventional cinema model. It creates many business opportunities worldwide to rethink film viewing experiences and platforms. It helps create employment for many technical posts in this new-age storytelling platform.

Disadvantages of VR Films:
Virtual Reality films are too expensive & as per the data by Hollywood Reporter, it takes $10000 per finished minute.

Metaverse Competition:
Tech Giants like Meta (formerly Facebook), Microsoft, Apple & many others are in this 'Metaverse Competition' to grab the future market. Facebook recently announced their new name 'Meta' & their future business plan of a metaverse in October 2021 had added fire on this topic. Facebook and other giants are creating their metaverse platforms for users to create virtual avatars and do as they wish in this

dystopian world. It comes with a great business idea like online store, online games, already a popular and established genre among youngsters, virtual mall and virtual cinema theatre, etc. Although this technology is in the early stage of development, a famous apparel brand H&M opened their virtual store in metaverse and Samsung with their digital store. They wish to stay ahead in terms of their competitors in the market. Shortly, we can see that Marvel Studios will rent a metaverse movie theatre. Disney has already created their metaverse platform for its testing. South Korea has officially started VR movie theatres to attract an audience. It is creating a price trigger for all the companies related to Virtual Reality to launch their expensive product, software, services, etc. Oculus, a company that dominated the VR headset market, is priced at nearly USD 480, which is insanely high. To create a metaverse's bubble or artificial popularity, people buy digital land through NFT (Non-Fungible Token) using blockchain technology. They are building malls buildings for future rent to the brands, attending VR concerts or events, playing games, etc., on this land.

Out of Regulations:
We have discussed that the concept is early, but there is a question mark regarding responsibility. Recently, in Facebook Metaverse called 'Horizon,' a British girl was molested by other male users on the same platform. But as it was out of regulation, she couldn't file any complaint against this incident which led her into depression. There are several restrictions regarding cryptocurrency usage in various countries. Though, few countries like El Salvador approved Bitcoin as their national currency, whereas on the other hand, China and Russia banned the use of cryptocurrencies for transactions. Even in India, the government has put multiple sanctions on cryptocurrency transactions and holdings with the high tax rate in the recent budget. So, Metaverse is facing problems with transactions along with a code of conduct issue. As per assumptions, a general guideline of using metaverse will be published after a few years.

Role of Film Festivals & Markets:
The most exciting and concerning aspect is that various top-notch film festivals worldwide promote VR films with other conventional films. A separate VR corner is dedicated to these sections of filmmakers (mostly studios, production houses, agents, etc.) in these festivals like Sundance, Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, Tribeca, Busan, etc. But if you think closely at those sections, they are primarily corporate-funded sections to promote VR films. This is a severe threat to the conventional film or a new filmmaking journey, and significant funding comes from those big institutions to these festivals. But soon, those films will become part of the general sections which means an invisible comparison between two techniques of films will start among the audience. Few established filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino Christopher Nolan opposed this VR idea early. Still, as we can see, other notable filmmakers like Oscar-winner Kathryn Bigelow moved to VR storytelling in 2017. Alejandro G. Inarritu bagged an Oscar for his VR installations. It is suitable for the business perspective, but the general film lovers are not welcoming it these days. Virtual Film is a reality that we can't deny and have to accept. But the main issue is a studio era will disrupt the market again with a lot of monetary domination and influence. But we can call it the future because of its largeness & multi-dimensional approach.

Reference: - Indiewire.com , techrader.com. Wikipedia, Raindance Film Festival

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