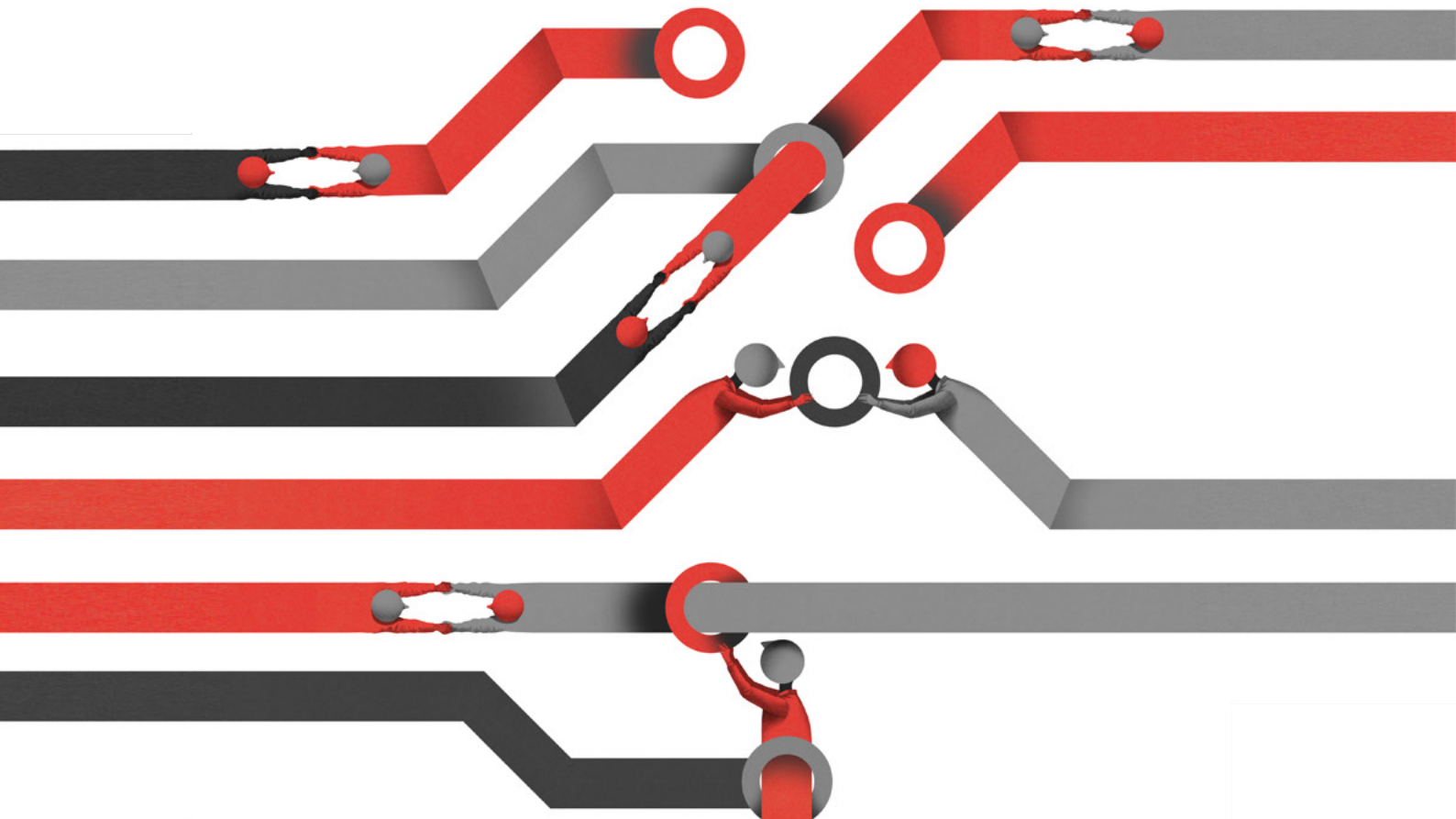
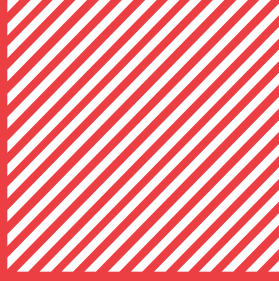


Ogilvy



Digital Empathy

Can virtual
interactions
create meaningful
connections?



Foreword by

Emily Poon

President, Ogilvy PR & Influence, Asia

The Metaverse. NFTs. Virtual humans. There's no small amount of hype around these new forms of digital engagement, but how should brands use these tools to influence people effectively?

The new wave of digital tools is designed to transport us to virtual realities; a world of digital people, possessions, and spaces. The tools may be new, but the art of storytelling is not. It has always been about creating meaningful human experiences through virtual realities. Every work of fiction, from the books we read as children, to the video games we play today, to the best films we watch, presents a world inhabited by characters who exist only in the shared imaginations of creator and audience, a world where we forge powerful emotional bonds.

For the savvy communicator these manufactured worlds present opportunities for very real emotional impact and genuine human connection.

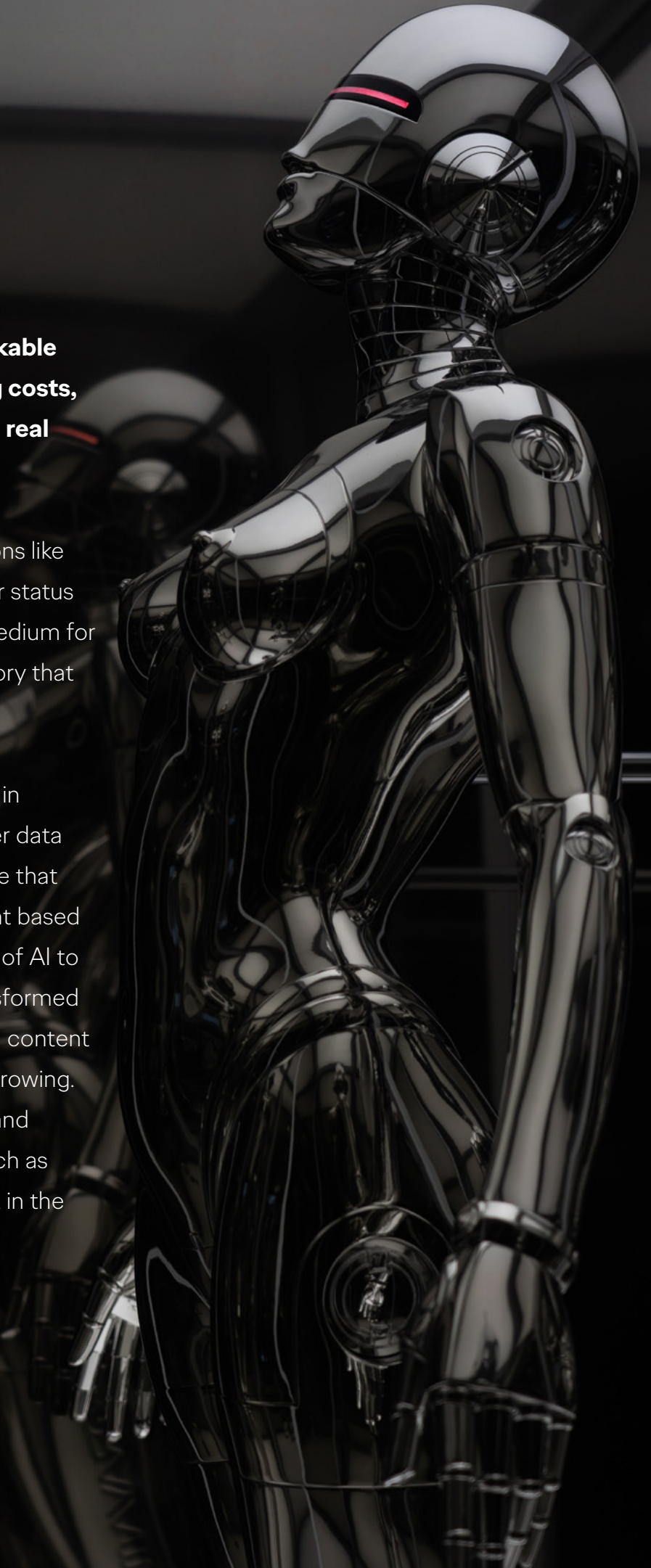
The platforms we tell stories on are changing, but success still depends upon the bedrocks of influence, creativity, and empathy.

These new storytelling vehicles - be they digital people, digital possessions, or digital spaces - feed into the fundamental human desire to learn through empathy. Empathizing through stories is part of our nature as social beings, but making meaningful connections requires skilled creators, with deep insights into the lives of the people they are trying to engage. We borrow meaning from a wealth of life experiences, and from cultural immersion, to bring these stories to life, and the expression of that authentic connection is the key to influence. Just as it always has been.

Technology now enables us to personalize these storytelling connections, unlocking remarkable creative possibilities, lowering costs, and enabling engagement and real time reach.

The real value of digital possessions like NFTs, for instance, lies not in their status as objects but in their role as a medium for connecting people in a shared story that evolves as people engage.

This is possible due to innovation in artificial intelligence. AI can gather data from users on a vast scale, analyze that information, and generate content based on people's behaviour. The ability of AI to learn and create has already transformed the way we produce personalized content online, and that potential is only growing. AI is getting more sophisticated and opening the door to creations such as meta-humans, and generative art in the world of NFTs.



When strategizing the creation of digital influencers or other digital communications programs, brands should consider what communities they can borrow influence from, and what team capabilities they will need in order to create the right cultural codes.

A good starting point for brands to begin with is empathy, taking care to feel what audiences are themselves feeling, and using new digital capabilities to offer relevant and meaningful experiences. Whether the connection is digital or analog, empathy is what makes it real.

Here are three points of view on how brands can successfully deploy digital humans, digital possessions, and digital spaces to engage communities and craft stories that create positive impact for consumers and brands.

1. AI Influencers

Digital Humans

2. NFTs

Digital Possessions

3. Metaverse

Digital Spaces



Ogilvy's very own AI Influencer - **E.M.** - available to be tailored for brand engagements.

1. AI Influencers

Digital Humans

Big idea

Digital humans are not replacements for humans, but their emotional connection with consumers can be powerful, and astonishingly real.

AI influencers, AI avatars or *'meta-humans'* are computer generated simulations of people, and they can become new characters within a communications medium. The temptation is to think their appeal lies in novelty. But the reality is more complex, and more meaningful.

In China and Japan, meta-humans have been popular for years, one notable example being singer and celebrity Hatsune Miku. Miku is a personified software voice bank, and entirely fictional character, with 1.5 million followers and counting on YouTube. Customers might be skeptical about interacting with virtual humans initially, but these trend-leading markets should encourage marketers to experiment with the approach, says Andréanne Leclerc, Head of Social & Performance, Asia at Ogilvy.

“China and Japan have always been very avant-garde with virtual humans, and culturally there are [fewer] barriers,” says Leclerc. *“There is so much competition in this region, and it’s a market of billions of people. That’s why we are more willing to embrace technology, as we need to continuously find ways to reach people at this scale.”*

As the AI technology behind meta-humans becomes more affordable and effective, we can even create virtual versions of real celebrities to scale their engagements. Ogilvy was able to launch just such an AI influencer campaign for Clear Shampoo featuring their celebrity endorser Toc Tien in Vietnam (more on this case later).

The influence of virtual humans comes from the aspirations and societal tensions they reflect and the empathy they elicit; the same as that of all public figures we connect with, be they fictional or real. The advantage of AI influencers is that they make use of artificial intelligence to react and respond to people at a remarkable scale, as well as being tailored to fit the desires of specific audiences and individuals, thus creating deeper relevance. They can even interact with people in the same digital spaces as human influencers such as social media and live streaming platforms and do so at greater scale and speed.

This means AI influencers can be employed to create not only awareness but also as personalized customer care or sales agents that strengthen relationships and generate leads. Years ago, Virgin Airlines co-opted the traditional airline educational video to create engaging brand content with surprising creativity, and a distinctive brand voice. The moment is ripe to disrupt automated customer service in a similar way, going from interactions that are serviceable but unremarkable to connecting with characters our customers will love. Instead of behaving like a chatbot, AI influencers can be programmed to be entertaining, surprising, empathetic, and relatable. They can be emotionally aware and respond in turn if you seem happy or sad based on the way you responded. AI influencers can be end-to-end solutions, generating awareness and interest as well as leading to greater conversion and loyalty.

“We can create an AI influencer that starts as a brand ambassador but evolves into a brand and product consultant.”

DieuCam Nguyen

Influence Lead, Asia, Ogilvy PR



“We can create distinct versions of a celebrity tailored to different customer personas to provide the right information, in the right way, as part of the communications journey and purchase cycle: very personalized for groups of customers with diverse needs.”

What’s more, these interactions can extend beyond virtual reality. Hatsune Miku performs at live stadium shows, and the AI influencers we create can live in hybrid environments – much like the people who interact with them. Look at how esports events blend digital and real-world experiences. Part of what makes AI influencers so attractive is their ability to cross over and influence our experiences in surprising ways.

But these new tactics do not mean brands can sidestep the longer process of building communities and connections around the brand, says Daniel Young, Managing Director – Brand Marketing, Ogilvy PR ANZ.

“We can’t just flick a switch and create brand advocates” he points out.

“Digital activations can’t just be a tactic. There has to be a strategy, and that comes back to your product, your brand essence, and what you stand for.”

Daniel Young

Audiences in Asia do not mistake these experiences for real human interactions, and neither should brands consider them a replacement for partnerships with human influencers. Creating digital humans complements traditional influencer engagements and should be considered as part of a brand’s overall influencer engagement strategy and outreach to build communities and connections, providing the speed and flexibility to create meaningful and personalized engagements at scale.

Digital advantage

AI influencers can learn about their audiences and respond one-to-one at speed and scale

Powered by AI, digital humans can collect and analyze vast amounts of data in order to respond in the most relevant way possible based on the context. This is a story that adapts itself to the audience one-to-one. When done well these interactions can surprise, delight, and touch hearts.



Digital watch out

Invest in the insight and creativity behind your characters' stories or you might end up with a chatbot

Virtual humans allow for a remarkable new scale of interactivity, but these interactions must be relevant and fresh. Building characters that people will embrace demands more than just the science of AI. It requires the art of storytelling and a team that not only creates the AI but guides it as it learns and forms its identity through the initial stages of learning and development.

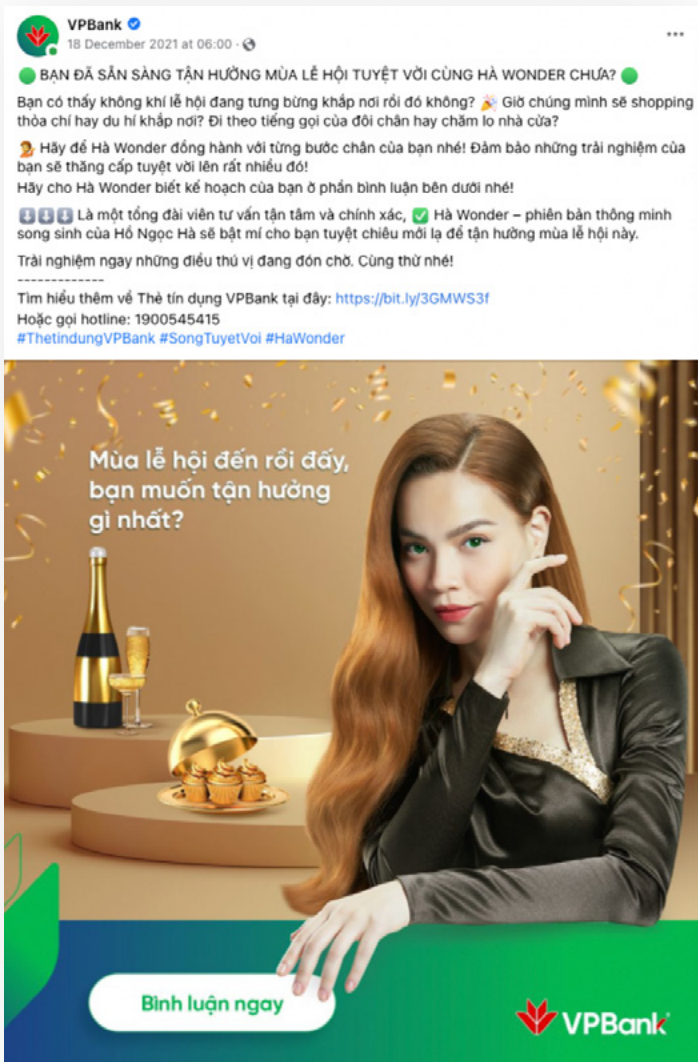
Organisations investing in AI need to be mindful of the way AI influencers learn and watch out for the unintended biases that can be imprinted on its 'consciousness' based on the data that is used to train the AI as it 'grows up.' Brands must take care to ensure the data and inputs the AI is taught from is balanced, inclusive and unbiased and is in line with the brand's purpose and values.

Ogilvy case

Toc Tien Clean Head—digital version of a real celebrity and influencer

In 2020, Ogilvy Vietnam had to pivot an entire summer campaign for Clear Shampoo due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With people stuck at home and no live activations possible, they turned to artificial intelligence instead and created an AI powered digital version of popular celebrity and influencer Toc Tien. Digital Toc Tien was able to engage people online at a scale and speed beyond what was possible for the human Toc Tien. She searched for conversations on Facebook with keywords related to summer heat, found the right context and moments to introduce the brand and product, and would interject with comments that were fun, unexpected, and eminently shareable on social media. The campaign was a big success, providing significant ROI, in the form of 1.1 million interactions with AI Toc Tien. This led to a 3.3% increase in market share and the brand becoming the top e-commerce brand in terms of value share in June and July of 2020.





AI influencers can also engage people in real spaces. Ogilvy created an AI influencer for VP Bank based on a real personality in Vietnam—Ho Ngoc Ha. Adapting her sophisticated persona and lifestyle to the AI influencer Hà Wonder, Ogilvy built five different versions of her representing the bank’s diverse credit card offerings.

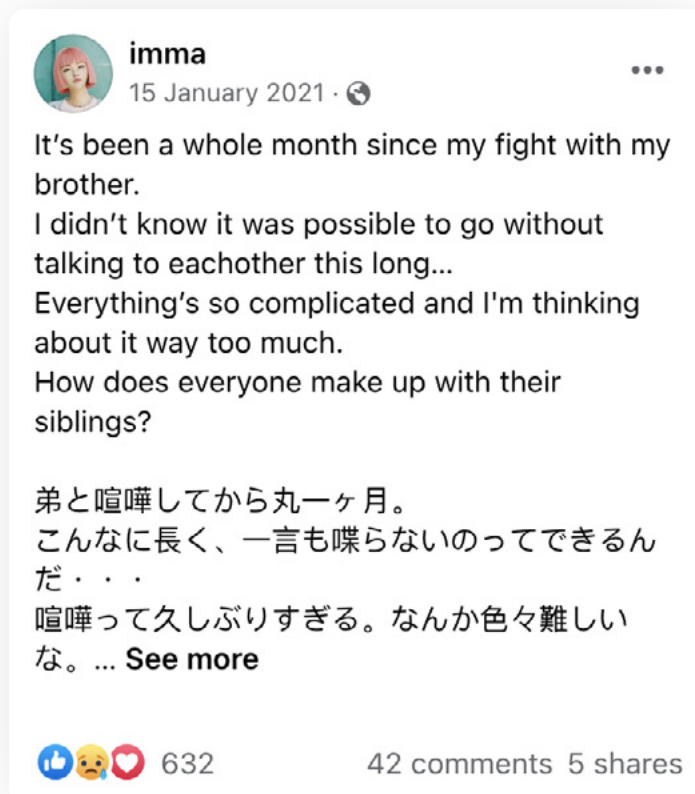
Each AI persona matches a distinct card offering and interacts with the card’s target audience segment to provide tailored customer care services. Although their first interaction was virtual, over 15,000 consumers had a chance to meet Hà Wonder face to face at a concert and millions of others viewed her live performance online via multiple digital channels in April this year.

Virtual humans imma and Zinn

imma and Zinn are digital models created by Aww Inc., Japan's first virtual human production company. They are also brother and sister.

[imma](#) was created in 2018 and has since collaborated with Porsche Japan, IKEA, Dior, Nike, Valentino, and Amazon, among others. [Zinn, or Plusticboy as he was originally called before revealing his 'real' name.](#) is her younger brother and has over 50,000 followers on Instagram.

The digital siblings follow each other on social media and interact with one another like real brother and sister. Take for example this Facebook status update from imma in January 2021:



imma
15 January 2021 · 🌐

It's been a whole month since my fight with my brother.
I didn't know it was possible to go without talking to each other this long...
Everything's so complicated and I'm thinking about it way too much.
How does everyone make up with their siblings?

弟と喧嘩してから丸一ヶ月。
こんなに長く、一言も喋らないのってできるんだ・・・
喧嘩って久しぶりすぎる。なんか色々難しいな。... **See more**

👍🥲❤️ 632 42 comments 5 shares



Chidozie Shurshboi Ezeala
Swallow your pride and give him a phone call, even if it's his fault try and meet up with him. Go out and have a talk about other stuff. He's all you got I presume. Please take care



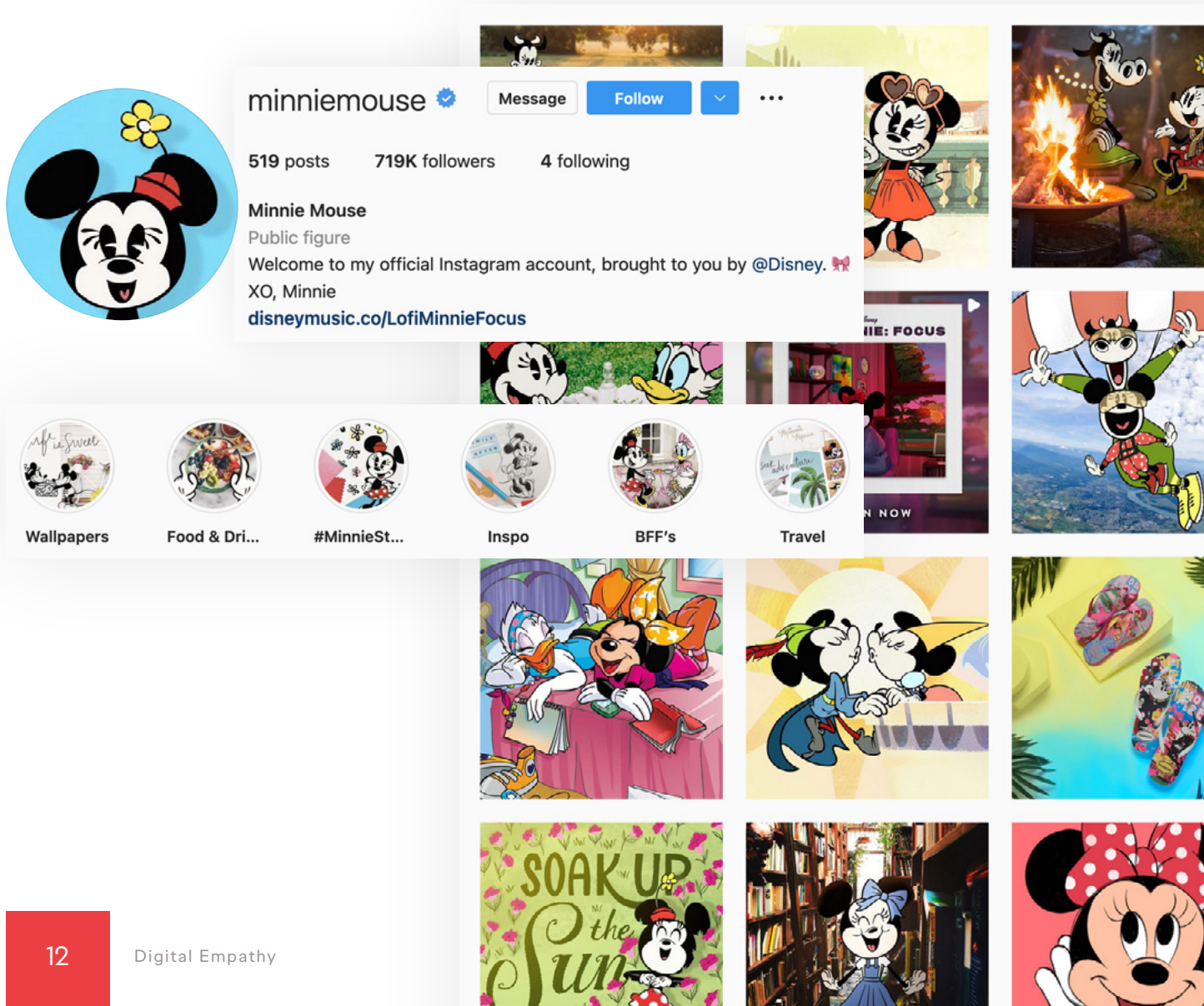
윤애리
We just forget about it like small kids. But maybe you can cook him his favorite meal.

Her followers know she is not real, but by responding to imma's request for advice they can learn useful things about themselves and how they feel about close relationships and family. The relevance of the story that imma is telling evokes real empathy from her followers.

Key takeaways

Your brand story can now feature compelling characters who connect with and respond to people personally.

Barbie and Minnie Mouse are examples of brands activating their existing assets to create virtual influencers on social media. If your brand has characters (or even celebrity endorsers) already established with your customers, consider how activating them as digital humans could lead to great ROI on social, from awareness through the entire customer journey to generating leads and sales and creating more scale and speed with your engagements.



Developing your strategy for activating AI influencers is not so different from planning for other communications.

Make sure you have enough culture to borrow from to drive the appeal of your digital human - a relevant source of meaning for the technology to amplify. This can be in the form of replicating a celebrity endorser or creating a new character based on insight into your brand culture and audiences. The technology can be activated within a relatively short timeframe, but earning influence is a journey that requires ongoing commitment and effort. Make sure you have a strong strategy and team of creative and influence experts in place in order to ensure good results.

2. NFTs

Digital Possessions

Big idea

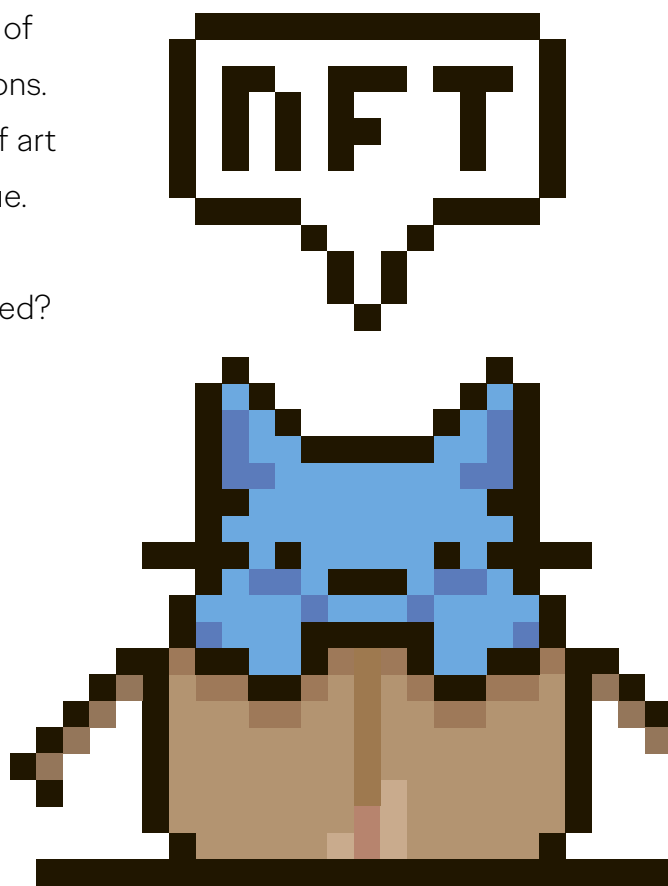
Digital possessions build our uniqueness within real human communities

The idea of digital products is not new. For years, people have purchased digital goods and services such as movies, songs, online courses... the list goes on.

What is new with the advent of NFTs is the possibility of totally unique and entirely uncopyable digital possessions. Now digital possessions can be more like rare works of art – collectible, tradable, and laden with speculative value.

What good is a digital work of art that cannot be framed?

Or a digital steak you cannot eat?



Much of the confusion around NFTs comes from comparing them to real world possessions, because in that light they seem to provide so little utility.

Some brands have fed into this perception by releasing NFT versions of their physical products. In the most successful NFT projects, however, the tokens function more like passports that unlock exclusive abilities and experiences within communities managed by the project owners. Using metaphors of real-world possessions to understand NFTs is a limiting concept because the possibilities for community engagement are so great, according to Dickon Laws, Head of Innovation for Ogilvy EMEA.

“NFTs and the smart contracts that sit behind them are radically transformative technologies,”

Dickon Laws

Global Head of Innovation, Ogilvy Experience

“And yet the way we have associated them with digital art is the equivalent of mankind inventing the wheel and then wearing it as a hat! There are so many creative possibilities out there and potential for such a wider range of application. We are only just scratching the surface of what’s possible.”

Engagements around NFT ownership include early access to launches, invitations to social events, and the gifting of real-life swag. These activities are designed to create social capital for token owners, the basis for interaction and connection with other owners. The rarer your NFT, the greater the benefits and social capital you receive, the more enticing it is for other owners to trade with you. Your digital possession might be one of a kind, but that uniqueness serves to connect you with other people.

While launching an NFT project today might not be an immediate endeavour for most brands, the popularity of this new technology provides a valuable insight into how rarity, uniqueness, and exclusivity can drive digital engagement and social connection. Providing digital possessions that are unique to the user is one half of the influence equation - brands should be considering how that uniqueness translates into social capital and connection for their audiences.

“Creating value for these assets in a very competitive environment depends on cultural resonance,” says Young. *“Nobody wants a free NFT. It’s all about the excitement of trading and being part of the action with that community.”*

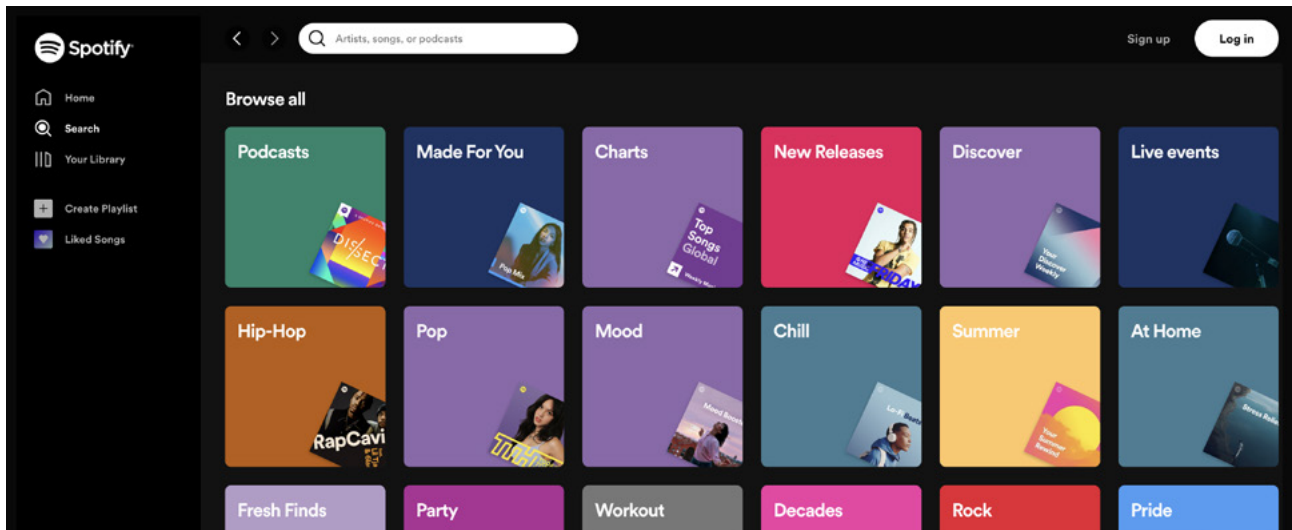
Brands should be clear about their strategy for creating social capital and ensure they have enough resources to manage their communities in order to take advantage of digital possessions.

“We can’t use technology like makeup, just as decorative detail,” says Cam, *“There is no purpose using tech just to spice up a campaign. We need to have a clear idea of its value.”*

Digital advantage

Digital possessions can be unique to the owner

With generative technology and AI, brands can create tens of thousands of versions of a digital asset and infinite possibilities for content personalized to the user. Think about the videos that Facebook or Spotify create for their users based on each one's unique behaviours. It is now feasible for you to do the same in your community engagement and outreach. Personalization creates the potential for surprise, talkability, and social engagement around exploring the campaign more deeply, as it becomes more about exploring yourself and your advocates than just the brand.



Digital watchout

Even the coolest digital swag can fail to get traction without the right community connection

Brands can offer people as many customized avatars and members-only benefits as they want. But without helping to connect users to a community they care about (even their own friends), those unique assets will have very little value or meaning to people.

Volkswagen Polo

To launch the new Volkswagen Polo, a car aimed at the digitally-connected Gen Z audience, Volkswagen (VW) worked with Ogilvy Cape Town to launch their first NFT release, cleverly hidden in an advertisement. During the campaign, VW announced that its brand film about a futuristic race through a cyber city contained clues for the audience to locate. The reward for finding them? An NFT. This drew a community of NFT enthusiasts into the campaign as they scrolled back and forth through the marketing collateral to find the hidden assets - giving a huge uplift in views and enhancing brand engagement as the audience spent up to four times longer in the digital environment that the brand created than they would have typically.



Coca-Cola Lunar New Year

Coca-Cola has long been a brand that's all about connection, and in collaboration with Ogilvy Shanghai via WPP's OpenX, they've taken that ethos into the world of digital possessions with a Lunar New Year NFT giveaway based on the big idea of creating a unique and personally relevant series of Chinese zodiac tigers that created talkability and tapped into a sense of community and identity among its Chinese customers during the Lunar New Year celebrations.



Digital culture case

Nike: RTKFT

The Nike acquisition of the RTKFT NFT studio in 2021 created a Web 3.0 super brand. RTFKT is a studio that uses the latest in game engines, NFT, blockchain authentication, and augmented reality to create one of a kind sneakers and digital artifacts. Nike acquired them in 2021 and together the brands have now released a series of 'Cryptokicks' NFT drops, including a collaboration with the highly regarded contemporary artist Takashi Murakami. Behind the hype and stunning aesthetics, the real value lies in the way Nike have used the technology of digital wallets and NFTs to build a database of their most

engaged, influential and aspirational audience, without infringing on their privacy. After all, maintaining anonymity is one of the core values expressed in digital wallets and Web 3.0 technology. Nike has shown how NFTs can be used to achieve brand building and community growth goals in this new transformative age.



Key takeaway

Build customer communities with exclusive and unique digital possessions.

Your digital content can be more valuable to people than you realize. Unique content can become social capital when enhanced with exclusive benefits and community management.

This insight can be applied to your advocacy and loyalty programs to come up with a more compelling and rewarding approach for customers. Think beyond incentives and redemptions to creating exclusive access to a desirable community, where personalized perks and insider invitations create social value for users who engage.



3. Metaverse

Digital Spaces

Big idea

Digital spaces provide freedom to reinvent ourselves and limitless possibilities for events

Why opt to live in a parallel world instead of the real one? As culture has changed, even the elderly are getting used to interacting in digital spaces, but this is not a new thing for youth in Asia. Gen Z shifts seamlessly between interacting digitally and IRL, with much of their work life, personal relationships, and commercial transactions existing in cyberspace.

Otaku culture, or immersion in fantasy worlds related to manga, anime, and gaming, has long been part of youth culture. The power of these fantasy worlds lies in creating freedom for people to reinvent themselves without the restrictions imposed by real life. Now, more and more people are looking for new ways to escape, and experience digital worlds are maturing at exactly the right moment to accommodate them.

This desire to spend more time in virtual worlds is likely to spread to more segments, according to Leclerc.

“Entertainment, fashion and gaming, that’s where it’s bubbling, and the reason why it’s already so popular in Japan is this madness about cultural output like anime,” says Leclerc. *“There’s a context for imaginary worlds, a second reality or fantasy, so people are more receptive to something created out of thin air.”*

In the world of digital, people can mix and match culture codes in any way they like, to come up with versions of themselves that satisfy deep desires for self-actualization. Connecting with others in places where you are freer to be your true self can be deeply satisfying, even if the experience is virtual.

When a fantasy world is mapped in 3D digital space, a metaverse is born. A metaverse is a network of 3D virtual worlds focused on social connection, and a VR headset is not required. Metaverse platforms are likely to become a channel with \$1.3 trillion potential by 2030¹. These digital spaces represent the next step in this cultural trend with the application of augmented and virtual reality to make these spaces more immersive and sensorial.

Besides the environment we construct to engage audiences, brands should also consider how people’s identity transforms as they enter the metaverse, for instance in the avatar they construct or the special abilities they acquire. It is possible now to produce events that connect thousands, maybe even millions of people, in shared experiences where they can participate in their preferred fantasy forms.

¹ <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/metaverse-market-report>

“The metaverse brings the potential for new experiences, a new kind of feel, new locations, new ways you can shape brands and people.”

Andreeane Leclerc

Brands should be looking at metaverses less as a new platform or channel and more as emerging experimental spaces to learn about the desires of their customers and innovate new tactics in the spaces where they are spending time.

Kaare Wesnaes, Head of Innovation, Ogilvy PR, North America, adds: *“The introduction of the metaverse allows for completely new ways of engaging and interacting with consumers. You have to know your audience. We look for angles to insert brands in authentic and unexpected ways that have meaningful context. By creating experiences worth talking about, the approach is naturally earned first, about earning attention and influence among the communities that brands are communicating to.”*

“You have these really tight close-knit communities of people, connected by shared values, behaviours, and interests, with a high degree of passion and involvement with the brand,” says Young. *“That’s an opportunity to find what’s interesting about what drives that group and use that as a focal point for a campaign that has mainstream appeal. Beyond learning about your customers, you can also learn about the culture of connection relevant to these spaces,”* Leclerc suggests.

“There are always culture codes of how you communicate and do things within a specific platform - like Instagram being different to TikTok,” continues Leclerc.

“When you look at the metaverse, there will be new cultural codes in that space, new principles for how brands gain visibility and how you can expand yourself in this new world.”

With the uncertainty of our world today, and the unreliability of planning for live experiences such as travel, metaverse events will likely be increasingly adopted and valued in various markets.

“The scalability of these new experiences is a benefit for consumers,” says Cam.

“We can involve millions of very young, tech savvy people; customers who are very connected to e-commerce and create something very rewarding for them that also drives the business. It’s all about experience and consistency of brand purpose and messaging across different touch points.”



Virtual Shibuya - one of the world’s first ‘linked cities’ in the Metaverse, created by Geometry Ogilvy Japan.

In the coming years, as people begin to spend more time in digital spaces and discover new empowerment to be who they want to be at virtual events, it will be important for brands to let go of real-world limitations and reimagine themselves in new, emerging alternate worlds. Practice now and have your recipe for success later.

Digital advantage

Digital spaces have far fewer rules and more options for creativity

Even the rules of physics need not apply, and so hosting a brand experience within a digital space means the identities and experiences you create can be wildly imaginative.

Things to watch out for

Digital spaces get their meaning from the people who choose to spend time there

Creating a new digital space is the same as starting a Facebook page - designing the space is only part of it. Attracting the right people to hang out there is even more important. Brands considering metaverse projects should think about earning attention through grassroots influencer strategy and community values they can speak to.





Ogilvy case

Cadbury Dairy Milk Valentine's Day

As the climax of a successful digital Valentine's Day campaign in India, Cadbury and Ogilvy India took one couple on a date experience that was literally out of this world. The stunt was an exclusive invitation for one couple to have Valentine's Day dinner on the moon, a virtual environment within the metaverse and the first such experience in India. In this fantasy space, couples or singles alike had freedom and greater empowerment to express their inner feelings of love for the ones they care about. The campaign earned much attention and delivered a reach of 163 million and 360 million impressions on social.

Digital culture case

Ariana Grande Fortnite Concert

In the past several years, popular cross-platform video game Fortnite has been hosting events such as concerts within the game universe, and one of the most ambitious examples is the Ariana Grande concert in 2021.

Before the concert was officially announced, a flying saucer landed at the center of the virtual island where the Fortnite game takes place and displayed a countdown clock teasing a mysterious event to take place on August 6th.

On the day of the concert, players were ushered through a portal, where a giant version of Grande appeared to guide concert-goers through a surreal musical experience with giant bubbles, glittering llamas, and alien invaders.



Following the concert, Grande's look was made available for purchase as a skin, and a series of in-game quests based on the show were also released.

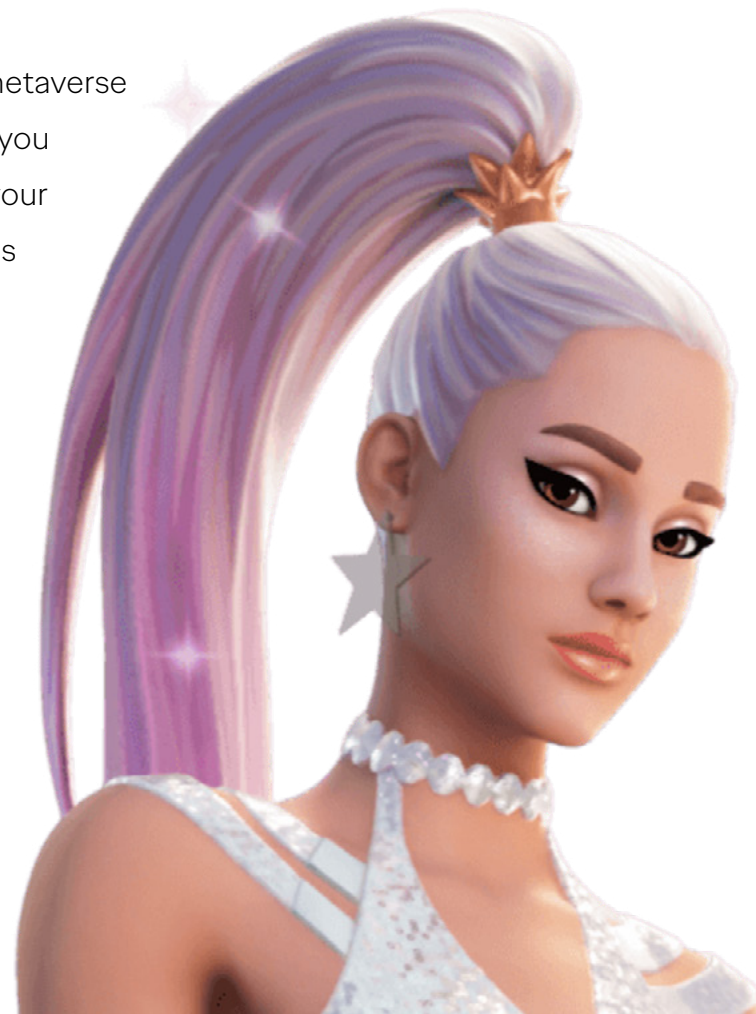
The environments were spectacular, but so too were the ways in which Grande could engage her audience in the Fortnite universe. Concertgoers could battle bad guys, travel through portals, and get smashed by giant hammers all as part of the show.

The metaverse context for the concert allowed Grande to execute breakthrough creative ideas for concert experiences for her fans.

Key takeaway

Find the digital spaces where your customers connect best for deep insights into how your brand role translates to the fantasy world.

You might not achieve mainstream scale with metaverse projects right now, but by being early adopters, you can experiment and gain valuable insights into your brand role in this brave new world. Experiment as your customers experiment and be where your customers are spending time, and you will have first-mover advantage when the next major metaverse platform blows up. Get in on the ground floor now to shape your strategy, and you will be able to hit the ground running with successful metaverse events.



Conclusion

Digital worlds, possessions, and people can and do provide meaningful connections, but only when automation tools are applied with genuine empathy by the right team, working with an insightful community strategy.

Technology can provide scale, speed, and cost efficiency. Success, however, depends on the humanity you bring to these projects. If we open our hearts and explore what our customers desire most, we have remarkable new freedom to respond and connect digitally.



DIGITAL HUMANS are a tool for storytelling and as always, depend on artistry and sensitivity to craft characters that culturally and empathetically resonate with audiences. The difference is that now we can reach and respond to people with remarkable speed and scale.

DIGITAL POSSESSIONS can be personalized for users in tens of thousands of ways, but the value of that uniqueness depends on creating social capital and connecting us with other like-minded individuals. Go beyond right-place and right-time relevance to right-relationships by connecting people based on ownership and a common identity.

DIGITAL SPACES provide venues for brand experiences with almost no limitations. Understanding who consumers want to be provides the essential guardrails around that creative freedom. Learn the deepest motivations of your customers in metaverses now, and you will be well-positioned to futureproof your brand and scale up ground-breaking digital influence events in the future.

Certainly, these technologies will become more commonplace and shift into the fabric of our lives just as smartphones have. In a future that becomes increasingly virtual, and shaped more and more by technology and artificial intelligence, the importance of empathy will only grow.

As long as creators have compelling truths to share, then living in the stories we share, no matter the platform, will always be a meaningful experience.

Empathy at the heart of technology, is the key.

No matter where you are in your journey toward bringing digital empathy to your brand, sooner or later digital spaces, digital humans, and digital possessions will become a significant part of how your brand greets consumers. Manage it well - with a mix of creativity and empathy - and you'll be delivering experiences at scale that bind your customers to your brand.

We can help you get started.
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