

# THERE'S NO METAVVERSE, BUT IT'S FUN TO IMAGINE THERE IS

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The problem started, as so many do, with Mark Zuckerberg. When he made the announcement that Facebook (the company) would change its name to Meta, with a new focus on building the metaverse, it started a cyclone of news and hype that still hasn't abated.

Now everyone is talking about the metaverse: "Brand X prepares to enter the metaverse!", "New fashion line for the metaverse!", "Retailer X opens metaverse store!". Brands from Balenciaga to Walmart announced their metaverse plans, while Adidas called its first digital collection *Into The Metaverse*.

## **BUT – I'M SORRY TO INFORM YOU – THE METAVERSE DOESN'T EXIST.**

At least, not yet. Not in the way that it's defined by technologists, rather than brands, marketers or journalists.

In the "purest" conception, like Ready Player One's *The Oasis*, The Metaverse (singular, like The Internet) is an always-on, fully immersive virtual space, a series of interconnected destinations and experiences between which users, represented by their avatars, can move freely.

This will probably never happen. There are too many companies, organisations, and nations with a vested interest in keeping their parts siloed.

The technologists' conception of the metaverse is more like "*what comes next*". It's a broad, vague, collective term for a future upgrade to the internet where people spend more time in more immersive, collaborative, and social virtual spaces. It is, as Leo Lewis put it in the Financial Times, where "'realities' are defined by experience rather than physicality". It's the culmination of many trends, in hardware, software, and behaviour, from augmented reality to decentralised infrastructure to spatial audio to massively multiplayer online gaming.

This version of "the metaverse" is a possibility space. It's an array of competing visions (like Zuck's) where no-one knows what the eventual outcome will be. It might not end up being called "the metaverse" at all.

To (most) brands, marketers and journalists, the metaverse is today's visible surfaces; it's gaming and immersive spaces like Roblox and Fortnite and Decentraland, it's NFTs, it's virtual reality. This is, I should make clear, entirely understandable; it's easier to imagine from what you can see than an intangible future that may not come to be.

I'm a big fan of what Roblox is doing, but if that's the limit to what the immersive future of the internet can be, then something's gone wrong.

I get asked why I'm hesitant to call what we have today "the metaverse", and my answer is: because I don't know what the metaverse will be, but it isn't *this*. Roblox is not the metaverse. VR is not the metaverse. NFTs are not the metaverse. But each has a role to play in what the metaverse (or whatever we end up naming it) might be one day.

## **ROBLOX IS NOT THE METaverse. VR IS NOT THE METaverse. NFTS ARE NOT THE METaverse.**

There's so much we can learn from the platforms and services we have at hand. We can learn about mass socialisation in immersive spaces from Fortnite and Horizon, about community and fandoms from Discord and Twitch, about virtual identity from Snapchat and Zepeto, about digital economies from OpenSea and Roblox. The tools of today can help us shape the metaverse of tomorrow.

So while the technical infrastructure continues to emerge, I encourage brands and businesses to keep up the playful participation in immersive social communities.

At VCCP we've gained so much from launching The O2 in Fortnite Creative and reimagining our offices in Roblox. I want to see more like Chipotle and Hyundai in Roblox, more like Carrefour and ITV in Fortnite, more like Ralph Lauren in Zepeto, more like Samsung in Decentraland, more like the Adidas collab with Bored Ape Yacht Club. More fun, more experimentation, more learning about how we engage with communities in the spaces of the immersive internet of the future.

Just don't call it the metaverse. Yet.

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