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The New Television

Virtual reality systems are about to become one of the most popular and profitable entertainment mediums in our time-- the new television. Technology imagined decades ago by sci-fi writers and paranoid "crazies" is about to grace our mainstream media, and nothing can stop it. Systems range from the $600 Oculus Rift to the $4 Google Cardboard; the price determines how immersed you want to be in the simulation of your choosing. These simulations have a broad range as well. Virtual tours of museums, digitally crafted environments, and even live event viewings are only some of the examples of the ever-expanding spectrum of what VR is and will be capable of. Already, consumers have poured millions of dollars into these systems, and most of them haven't even been released yet.

The potential for VR's growth is undeniable. Major production companies like 20th Century Fox, Lionsgate Entertainment, and Netflix have announced they plan to create and release several projects utilizing VR (Shaw). John Gaudiosi, an analyst writing for Fortune Magazine, estimated that the NFL and NBA stand to gain a total of 1.7 billion dollars in revenue by 2025 if they introduce virtual seating at live games. Virtual reality is an inevitable progression of technology and entertainment. Its wide range of applications, both indulgent and practical, will ensure that these systems will slowly but surely become a staple in our society.

Despite this, VR is not without consequence. There are several psychological and physiological complications to VR's use, two of the most important being the physical addiction it may spark up and the psychological drive it might snuff out.

Virtual reality systems are cutting-edge technology, and as such the true scope of its many applications could not possibly have been predicted. The variety of simulations has expanded enormously to include numerous innovative and practical uses that will seamlessly be integrated into our daily lives. Once VR simulations hit the mainstream, live event viewing will forever be changed. The sights and sounds of a concert, sports game, or lecture can easily be simulated using a specially designed 3-D camera, and virtual tickets or subscription services that allow access to these simulations are something that the sports and music industries are seriously considering (Ozanian). Traditional methods of watching a real-time event, like TV broadcasting, will quickly be overshadowed by the excitement and immersion of a first-person, front-row viewing that VR can offer its consumers.

Immersion is virtual reality's true selling-point. The intricacy of these programs stimulates our brain almost just as much as a real life experience of the event. Thomas Hohstadt describes in his book, *The Age of Virtual Reality*, VR's unique appeal over other entertainment mediums by writing, "Virtual Reality demands more than observation-- no matter how active, committed, or [enveloped] we become." (33). He says that designers of these simulations cater to this appeal, and they innovatively design experiences that offer a chance for in-depth interaction between the user and the simulation interface. These first-person simulations offer a very unique opportunity for instructors to conduct exercises with a more efficient, more immersive method of learning from experience. Training through the use of these simulations

provides a no-risk alternative to first-hand trial and error. They also provide learners with exercises that otherwise would be impossible for them to practice in real life due to a situation's danger, cost, or accessibility (Ludlow). With simulations becoming more and more engaging, lessons and skills are becoming easier to understand and absorb by learners. Experience can easily be acquired and applied with little risk involved.

Another potentially enormous application of these simulations is VR's ability to expand religious practices and rituals to a brand new audience. VR's unique ability over every other form of communication is immersion, as such, VR consumers can utilize this immersion to fully experience traditions and customs of religious ceremonies or rituals. Restricted due to geography, hierarchy, or any other reason, anyone with one of these new systems can actively practice their faith and fully participate in, or at least experience, gatherings that they otherwise would have been unable to be a part of (Ludlow). VR gives millions of people worldwide an opportunity to gain some sort of new insight or appreciation of their faiths and beliefs. Not only will VR be successful as a medium of entertainment, but its enormous range of practical applications ensure that virtual reality will become an enormously popular tool used by millions in our future society.

VR is an emerging technology, so not only has its benefits not fully been understood, but the consequences of its use has not been completely realized as well. Unknown to most consumers, the use of virtual reality involves several complications, both psychological and physiological. One complication arises from virtual reality's main selling point: its immersiveness. There have been dozens of recorded deaths attributed to the over-consumption of modern entertainment. In South Korea there were multiple recorded deaths, whose cause

directly related to the abuse of video gaming. One of these deaths involved a man dying of cardiac arrest after a fifty-hour gaming binge. There are other accounts of infants dying of neglect due to their parents addiction to playing video games. Tim Henry, a journalist for The Reporter at Rochester Institute of Technology, also writes, VR's high-powered and visually appealing simulations would cause an even greater number of these accidental deaths.

The complete immersion these devices offer have high chances of becoming addictive, and there are several health concerns that stem from the over-consumption of entertainment. Use of virtual reality systems and other forms of media devices like television, computers, and phones, releases a chemical called dopamine into the brain. Dopamine is linked to both the stimulation of the pleasure response in the brain, but also to the cause of addiction for most drug, gambling, and video-game addicts. Because of the incredibly in-depth simulations VR is capable of projecting, Henry believes that the release of dopamine while viewing a simulation will be even greater than that of someone gambling or watching television due to how enveloped the user will be in what they're watching.

Virtual reality poses a large risk for those with addictive personalities, but its externalities extend farther than that. The psychology of the human drive for need-labor-reward has influenced humans for as long as we have existed; technology evolved to ease the process of labor, but it had not evolved into the instant fulfillment VR offers until recently. Today, virtual reality designers create increasingly intricate, visually-stunning, and reactive environments, and these environments' realism could satisfy the drive for a reward without any real effort being put into that satisfaction (Koltko-Rivera). Over time, and with enough exposure to VR's evolving uses, human nature will change to lose that drive to work for a reward. This attitude propels us

to make further progress in our society, and without it we would all become more lethargic and less driven. This complication isn't considered by most users of Virtual Reality, but its effectsimpacts could be very harmful to human progress and human nature. Since Virtual Reality is about to become an enormous part of our society and popular culture, its soon-to-be popularity may bring millions entertainment and excitement;, however, itbut may also bring thousands grief, addiction, and loss of mental drive. Consumers should understand these complications if they choose to so openly welcome this technology into our lives.

And so begins the Virtual Reality revolution. No longer in conceptual stages, the virtual reality industry is about to launch. An industry already worth millions will transform into a new entertainment giant. Already apps are in development offering Virtual Reality simulations in a manner similar to Netflix or Hulu, and you can expect apps and services like these will only accelerate virtual reality's expansion faster. The website Jaunt already offers a simulated seat at a live Paul McCartney concert, a previously described application with huge potential. Streaming services like that will quickly become just as popular as giants like Netflix or Hulu (Aaron). VR will also see widespread appeal as a tool. Its mixture of realism and interactivity will make virtual reality assisted training programs more efficient, less costly, and less risky. VR training for complex surgeries, flight maneuvers, or even driver's' ed will have their dangers and risks completely eliminated. These training simulations allow people to learn through repeatable, comprehensive situations. Virtual reality's practicality varies from sports broadcasts to religious rites, and despite its many innovative and helpful applications it is important to not underestimate the risks of its widespread use. Thomas Hohstadt starts *The Age of Virtual Reality* by firmly stating to the reader that "[VR] is 'becoming the driving wheel of the new world

economy.' And that professionals in all fields are finding VR a necessity." (2). Virtual reality IS the reality now, and it is now more important than ever to understand its benefits and consequences when considering its fate as a consumer. Its ever-expansive range of simulations, and therefore uses, will reveal whether VR will become a tool for progress or indulgence.

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