Future of Storytelling Performances

Augmented Reality (AR) enables us to leverage contextual information and augment the experience in real-time. In a conventional storytelling scenario, with a sole narrator and multiple audiences, the narrator, along with AR, can scaffold the performance's script to facilitate interaction with the audience. Some examples of these interactions include the audience participating in the story as characters, movement in the environment to interact with and actuate digital objects, and leveraging physical objects in the surroundings as props in the story plot.

While sharing the same space, the audiences may choose their preferred sequence or end in the story, similar to the choose-your-own-adventure books and movies. With AR, storytellers and performers can unlock a whole new experience to engage and interact with their audience.

Scenario

A couple visits a new age theatre for an evening of immersive storytelling experience in AR. The show promises a personalized experience for each audience based on their social and neurological input received from their social media profiles and an implanted Brain-Computer Interface (BCI) respectively. The performance commences with a curated set of ads and trailers to gauge the individual interests for the audience members.

The story starts by exporting the setting and performers to a location familiar to the couple obtained from their photos on social media. The performer imbibes the qualities of the viewer's partner into the protagonist to make them amicable. While the script of the story is mostly premeditated, the performer can alter the content if the audience finds it unengaging or inappropriate.

Concerns

The realization of this experience, however, poses implications that should be taken into account and evaluated. We discuss some of the concerns below:

First, the availability of devices varies across social classes. Even with an accessory as common as mobile phones, vast chunks of the world are still not subscribed to a mobile network service. Hence, factors such as geographical location, economic feasibility, and societal perception impact such technologies' usage across different communities.

Second, while sharing the physiological input with the performers allows for a truly immersive and engaging experience, there is a possibility of using the viewers' data for malicious purposes. The storyteller may influence the performance to further their personal or professional agenda. Issues such as influencing elections by weaving a positive story around a candidate or recruiting members for a radical organization/cult would pose serious consequences.

Third, the augmentation in stories with characters in the form of role-playing, even though with a good intention, may prove to be disastrous for a viewer. Putting the context of a story around the already formed perception of a person may forcefully alter one's views. Consequently, the viewer would undergo behavioral changes which would eventually worsen the social relations. For instance, viewing one's partner with someone else in the performance may prompt a suspicion of infidelity among the couple.

The innovation in technology with AR and BCIs offers a promising future with countless applications. However, the creation has to be pegged back by the implications of a solution as the technology itself may prove detrimental and lead to a dystopian future.