Dec 28, 2021,10:30am EST|1,393 views

**Digital Identity In The Metaverse**

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With Facebook’s recent rebranding announcement, many have been asking “What is the Metaverse?” The Metaverse is an immersive digital representation of an environment that can either mirror a conventional environment or be a completely fictional environment (think *Star Trek: The Next Generation*’s holodeck).

It’s a logical progression from a traditional console or PC video game to augmented and virtual reality. Many video games are linear and involve completing tasks and missions with little flexibility within that world. First-person shooters and role-playing games are immersive and give you more flexibility within the game universe, but your field of view is limited. With the Metaverse, you are fully realized and represented in that environment with endless possibilities. It won't be complete VR from day one, because there's just not enough computing power to keep everyone engaged and running at the same time. But, in short, the Metaverse is going to be an immersive platform people can participate in, socialize through and become a part of.

There will not be one Metaverse, just as there isn’t one website or one country. There might be interconnected Metaverses where you can travel from one to another. Some Metaverses will be thematic. A school, or a college or university, could be a Metaverse. We might even have a Megaverse — a collection of Metaverses that are interoperable, allowing you to bounce back and forth like a browser experience. The Metaverse will become a virtual experience where no one needs to leave their home. It's going to create the next level of experience on the internet — the most integrated and immersive experience we’ve ever seen.

In the Metaverse, you're going to create and become a digital version of yourself that can move around and do things, which brings digital identity to the forefront. Digital identity, unlike the real world, uses a cryptographic Root of Trust, rather than a humanistic Root of Trust. When we operate in the real world, I see you, I know you, therefore I trust you. Online, these essential components are missing. As a very old meme says, “On the internet, no one knows you're a dog.” You don't know the person you’re engaging with is real at any point in time. When I come across you online, there’s a leap of faith where I believe you are who you say you are. That leads to potential fraud. The solution is to enhance human trust with digital cryptographic credentials that use industry-leading technologies and protocols. If we extend digital cryptographic credential-enhanced human trust into playable areas where people will congregate — chatrooms, social media, messaging apps and all the things we do online — we’re adding a measure of safety, security and privacy controls.

I believe the Metaverse deserves authenticity from its infancy. That doesn't mean that you need to know that I'm David Lucatch when you encounter my persona in the Metaverse. You just need to know that my persona is backed up by a real person's identity. It's not about disclosing one's identity; it's about being granted access only if one is authenticated as a real individual. Again, it’s about safety, security and privacy controls. (Full disclosure: My company, as well as others, does this kind of authentication and management of digital identity.)

I couldn't go into a brick-and-mortar store today and say, “I forgot my wallet. Sorry. Here's my credit card number, write it down, and here's my expiry date and my security code. Now give me that television.” Yet, it seems to work that way on the internet. Let’s say I have a virtual shop. Authenticated digital identity assures me that I'm dealing with real people in a virtual world. Verifying that people are real reduces the fraud and identity issues that come with every online interaction. The Metaverse offers a heightened level of engagement we’re not accustomed to. Shouldn't we start from the beginning, start fresh, knowing the tools for digital identity exist?

We're going to effectively live in two worlds, one of them a digital world where we can be whatever we want and even accentuate or accelerate our qualities and abilities. We're already starting to see not just goggles, but glasses with heads-up displays.In a sense, this new and exciting virtual world is already starting to take hold. What will it look like in the next three, five, 10 or even 20 years? The promise of these new experiences and technology will accelerate faster than all technology has in the last 50 or even 100 years.

Human interaction will evolve in the Metaverse as it has in the physical world, and just like in the physical world, it’ll be important to know who you, as a business or individual, are interacting with.

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