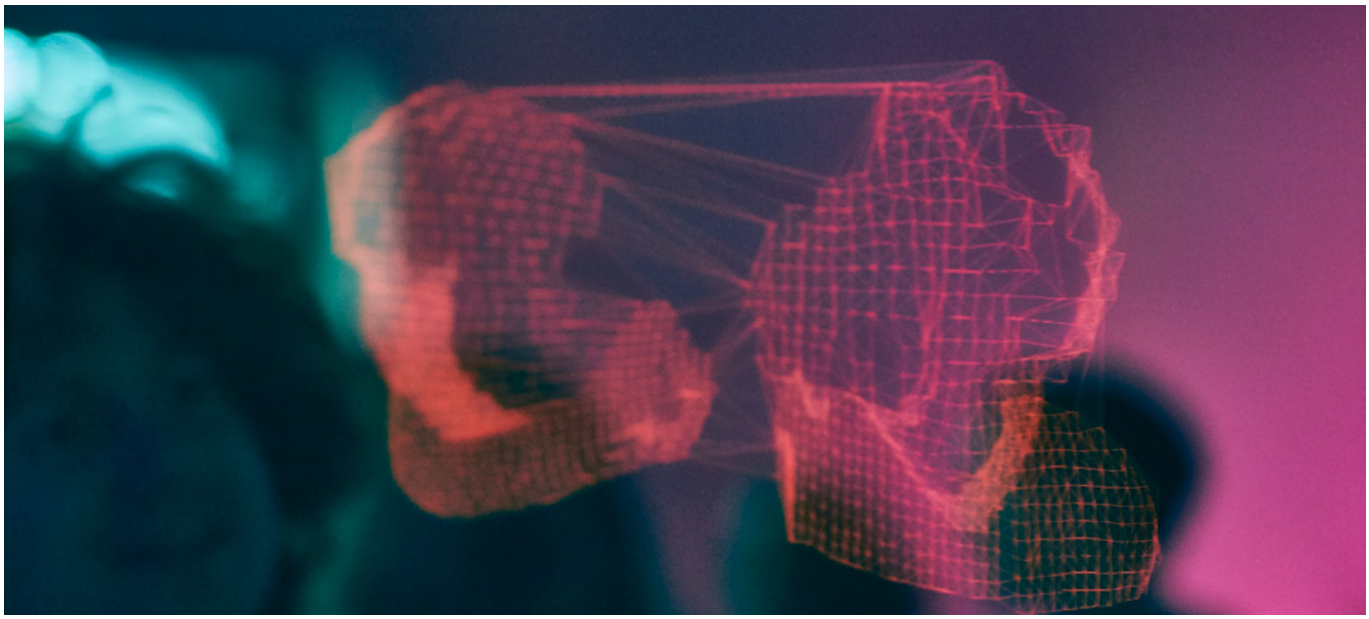
OPPORTUNITY #21

What if no one was left behind in the transition to digital realities?

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

A global task force adopts a ‘nexus’ approach to ensuring that every person on earth is included in the transition to digital realities.



MEGATREND
Digital Realities

TRENDS
Future of Purpose & Work
Immersive Technologies & Wearables
Internet of Things (IoT)
Mobilising Innovation
Virtual Reality

SECTORS AFFECTED
Communication Technologies & Systems
Consumer Goods, Services & Retail
Cyber & Information Security
Data Science, AI & Machine Learning
Education
Financial Services & Investment
Health & Healthcare
Immersive Technologies
Government Services
Professional Services
Government Services
Professional Services

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

Not everyone has access to computers or the internet. As of 2021, 57% of those living in developing countries used the internet compared to 90% in developed countries.[427] Of lower quality, a 5GB fixed-broadband connection costs 4.4% of monthly gross national income (GNI) per capita in developing countries compared to only 1.2% in developed countries.[428]

In the European Union, the current trend indicates that by 2030 only 64% of the adult population will attain at least basic digital skills (16 percentage points below the target of at least 80% of Europe's adult population). Additionally, only 13.3 million digital specialists will be employed (6.7 million below the target of 20 million).[429]

In a phenomenon known as the digital divide,[430] limited connectivity and insufficient digital skills already mean that lower-income groups may find it harder to access online learning opportunities.[431] As digital platforms evolve into digital realities, this divide may grow further, limiting people's access to both learning and work opportunities.

While the digital divide continues, the global augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) markets are expected to reach $461 billion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 42% between 2020 and 2030.[432] The global earphone and headphone market is expected to reach $35 billion by 2028, up from $22 billion in 2022 and growing at a CAGR of 8%.[433] VR and AR have the potential to add $4 billion to the United Arab Emirates' economy by 2030, i.e. 1% of GDP, compared to a global increase of 1.8% of GDP by the same year.[434]

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THE OPPORTUNITY

Digital realities have three prerequisites: access to wearables and devices, access to the internet and digital literacy. All of these are expensive and non-trivial for developing and low-income countries, and only one has been tackled through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under Goal 9: universal access to information and communications technology.[435]

A global task force with representatives from government, non-governmental organisations, multidisciplinary research institutions and technology companies could work to develop a multifaceted framework to provide access to digital realities. Identifying the most important links across various domains, the task force could develop an integrated approach to be used at local, regional and global levels to address the digital divide. While some may choose to opt out of digital realities, the associated business and living implications will be significant and being left behind may negatively impact societies.

BENEFITS

No one is left behind when digital realities become critical to life, education and work, thanks to a proactive, integrated and multidisciplinary approach.

RISKS

Evolution of the digital divide into a digital reality divide, where a more significant proportion of global society does not have access to digital realities and hence has limited income and learning opportunities. Limited adoption, funding and support.

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