

IOANA MOLDOVAN¹

CHRISTOF AMRHEIN. 2024. *Immersive Journalism and 360-degree Videos. An Experimental Approach and the Perspective of the Experts*. Cluj-Napoca: Accent. 128 p.

Christof Amrhein's book, *Immersive Journalism and 360-degree Videos. An Experimental Approach and the Perspective of the Experts*, was published in 2024 by Accent, Cluj-Napoca. The book analyses thoroughly the effects of users' engagement with 360-degree or immersive videos, as well as the prospects for the future development of 360-degree videos, especially for journalism and cinematic storytelling. According to the author, in today's society, due to the latest technological developments, there has been a significant shift concerning how people search for information and engage with it. Therefore, the central issue addressed in this book is the "phenomenon of communication through 360-degree or immersive videos (IV)" (p.11). This review aims to analyze and summarize the book, highlighting its strengths and areas for improvement.

The book is structured in seven chapters. The first chapter of the volume begins with an overview of the development of virtual reality technology over time. The author also emphasizes in this chapter the various applications VR technology and 360-degree videos can have in different domains such as advertising, marketing, journalism, healthcare, tourism, or education (p. 22). For instance, the author discussed the relevance of

¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3618-0474>, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, ioana.palade@fspac.ro

VR technologies for healthcare. VR technology can be used to train doctors or educate patients about their health conditions. Also, the author emphasized the fact that psychologists and psychiatrists already use this technology as an instrument against depression and anxiety. Furthermore, according to the author, this technology can also be applied in destination marketing and tourism. Additionally, VR technology can be applied in the field of education. Pilots learn how to fly using *VR technology-based simulations*. Training for “handling critical situations for military and civilian population are performed in VR environments” (p. 22). Moreover, museums and other cultural institutions offer nowadays virtual tours using VR technology (p.23). VR technology is slowly becoming an important part of our everyday lives.

Furthermore, this book analyzed immersive journalism. In the first chapter, the author also discussed current developments in journalism and environmental communication in the context of climate change.

The second chapter of the volume begins by outlining the theoretical framework on which the study is based on. Thus, two main paradigms are discussed here: technological determinism and constructivism. In the next part of this chapter, the author defines the main concepts involved in the reception process in VR media: immersion and presence. Furthermore, the author also addresses some theoretical models explaining how users engage with and experience immersive content. *Thus, “the immersive communication model, the two-level model for the emergence of spatial presence, the Modality-Interactivity-Agency-Navigability (MAIN) model”, and “the conceptual model of immersive journalism”* are outlined here (pp. 47-53). However, the author states that *the Two-Level Model for the Emergence of Spatial Presence* and *the Modality-Interactivity-Agency-Navigability (MAIN) model* are relevant to his research on immersive journalism.

In the third chapter of the book, the author focuses on detailing the impact of VR technologies on immersive journalism, as well as the challenges and opportunities of immersive journalism. Previous research emphasized that immersive media impacts the level of empathy, information processing, or media credibility (p. 14). Also, the most important asset of VR technology is the experience of presence (p. 67). The fourth chapter of the book outlines the mixed-methodology involved in conducting the research: an experiment and a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with experts from

Austria and Germany. The experimental-based findings regarding cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of user engagement with 360-degree videos are presented and discussed in the fifth chapter of the book, while the results concerning the perspective of the experts regarding the applicability of 360-degree videos and the future opportunities for this kind of communication are illustrated and discussed in the sixth chapter of this study. The final chapter of the book is dedicated to concluding remarks, limitations of the study and future research perspectives.

In my opinion, the book has some major strengths, such as the clear structure of the study and the mixed methodology that includes both a factorial experiment and some semi-structured interviews with experts working in academia and in VR and filmmaking industry (p. 77). The expert insights provide valuable information about “the applications and relevance of VR technologies, the future of this technology, the elements that distinguish immersive media from 2D media, spatial and self-presence, *and* the cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcome of user engagement with immersive media” (pp. 102-106). The results from the experiment emphasize the impact of 360-degree videos, and based on the study results, the author recommends that 360-degree immersive videos should be used to raise awareness of environmental topics (p. 100).

An additional strength of this book is its comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach since the author skillfully integrates technology and communication concepts into his study. Furthermore, the author succeeded in building a strong systematic literature review that contributes to a better understanding of VR technology and 360-degree immersive videos.

Another strength of this book is its historical perspective on the development of VR technology. This perspective helps readers familiarize themselves with the topic of VR technology and better understand how this type of technology impacts journalism. The author also presents the implications and applications of VR technology and 360-degree videos in different domains, such as health, marketing, or education.

However, in my opinion, one of the major strengths of this book is the fact that in the third chapter of the book, the author included a critical reflection on the challenges the field of journalism faced over the last decade due to the rapid technological development of our society. In the past years, technology has greatly developed, impacting not only

how people communicate but also how they search for information and engage with it. Thus, the journalism field was also affected by this great technological development. Nowadays, people read news articles on mobile devices rather than buying printed newspapers or magazines. Also, the contemporary mobile user has a very different media consumption pattern from the one people used to have years ago. Now, our social media feed offers a wide variety of information, from news articles about conflicts around the world and politics to information about a close friend's holiday (p.30). In this context, the *platformization* of today's society has also greatly influenced journalism (p. 27). It changed the journalistic profession, and it also created new professions, such as *content creators*, *social media influencers* or *bloggers*. Furthermore, as a result of this great shift regarding people's engagement with journalistic content and how people consume media, *clickbait journalism* emerged in social media. Moreover, social media platforms use AI-based algorithms to curate information displayed on a user's feed based on their preferences and online behavior (p. 28). These AI-based algorithms transformed how social media users consume journalistic content because individuals receive news articles in their social media feeds that are in accordance with their political views, preferences, and online behavior.

This book provokes the reader to contemplate the current state of journalism and how technological development influences how people produce and consume information. Moreover, Amrhein's book significantly contributes to the study of immersive media, offering valuable insights into its potential to reshape journalism and communication. This book is essential for scholars, students, and practitioners working in communication and journalism. It also provides valuable guidance for those interested in leveraging immersive technologies for educational and social purposes.