

# Thoughts

Reflexion and Analysis for the Indian Market

August 2020

## Digital reality, COVID-19 and Story Telling



## Foreword

The rapid advancement of digital reality has ushered in a new age of storytelling for many brands. As technology often blurs the line between storyteller and listener, how can marketers use digital reality to their advantage during the pandemic?

Now, with the rapid advancement of digital reality, we appear to be at the beginning of a new era in storytelling. Through increasingly immersive and self-directed experiences, digital reality—augmented, virtual, and mixed reality, and 360-degree videos—is cracking wide open our understanding of storytelling due to its unique ability to merge the roles of the listener and the storyteller. As a result, the emotional responses have been shown to be much more powerful than any other storytelling medium that has come before. And while the elements that make stories resonate aren't likely to change, for marketers to fully realize the opportunity digital reality presents, we may need a new storytelling language—one that deconstructs and recomposes the elements of story for this new and powerful medium.

Ultimately, digital reality could push us to tell brand stories even more through influence, than control. To navigate this shift, marketers will likely need a clearer understanding of the elements and layers within and around stories, so they can reconfigure how they apply them with digital reality. By forcing us to deconstruct our understanding of stories, digital reality may actually help us become better storytellers for our customers, no matter which medium we choose.

## Connecting experience, story and narrative

Because the customer is gaining increasing control of a brand story's outcome through digital reality, marketers should become much more attuned to which stories their customers will want to complete, and then create experiences that help them get there. But first, what is a story, really? For this discussion, we define a story as a series of experiences that moves a person from one state—whether emotional, physical, or psychological—to another (see sidebar, “The connection between experiences, story, and narrative”). Traditional media has only allowed us to recount stories. Now, with digital reality, we can create stories that unfold in real time, where context matters and the participant can “tell their own story” in an interactive and immersive way.

Regardless of medium, experienced brand storytellers know how to align their brand with stories and larger narratives—systems of stories that establish broader meaning or



identity. Digital reality takes this to another level of importance by merging listener and storyteller. So, to be successful in building brands with this medium, marketers will likely have to select experiences that can influence or fulfil a story their customer wants to participate in. Why is this important? Research has shown that the more closely connected a customer's identity is to the brand, the more loyal they are likely to become

## The Hero is your customer

Creating experiences that place your brand within your customer's story can clearly be powerful. However, just because you can identify the link to a powerful story doesn't mean you should play a role in it. Identifying the right story and the right role for your brand to play within can be critical. Choosing the wrong story or the wrong role for your brand to play can appear tone-deaf, inauthentic, or (at worst) could turn a brand storytelling effort into a cringe worthy viral sensation.

To avoid that, brands should select the story and role that they play based on three key qualities: credibility, permission, and authenticity.

Of course, just because your customers care about a story does not mean that they want you to participate in that story. This is where it's important to be realistic about the level of permission your brand carries. Recently, we've seen many stumbles as it's become more common for brands to try and align themselves with social movements. Such attempts can typically be successful only when a brand has an authentic role to play—for example, Dove's Real Beauty campaign aligned with the body positivity movement that has been growing over the last decade.

By trying to position itself as a brand that contributes to self-care and aims to reveal inner beauty, instead of only surface-level appearance, their customers could resolve their own tension between the two messages circulating socially.

Finding the role your brand has permission to play can be easier when you remember that your customer is the hero of your brand narrative, not the other way around. And so, among the vast number of stories your customer cares about, recognize that positioning your brand in the hero role should be rare. Look for opportunities in those where your customer already sees you playing a supporting role—these will likely be more powerful.

## Digital Reality drives marketing results

Digital reality storytelling is still very much in its early days, but it is already demonstrating big results for many marketers and businesses that are using this medium to build their brand. Compared to traditional media, stories told with VR are often rated to be more trustworthy, and that the more immersive the experience, the stronger the emotional reactions typically are to that experience. This holds a lot of opportunity for marketers. But of course, the danger of experimenting with new technologies is that if you aren't thoughtful about the application, it can lead to damage. Therefore, a balance of brand storytelling fundamentals and a re-orchestration of its elements is important to be successful. And so, as you're experimenting with this potential, remember to consider the following:

- Be thoughtful in applying digital reality to a larger story
- Understand which layer of story you are connecting to
- Make sure your customer has a reason to be invested in the story you are aligning your brand with
- Don't try to make your brand fit into a story or role it doesn't have permission for
- Ensure that the way your brand is showing up aligns with the broader brand narrative, even if you might have permission to be there

As digital reality technology matures, customers are expected to increasingly find themselves in the driver's seat of brand experiences; marketers will likely find themselves in even less control of the stories they want to tell. Clinging tightly to the understanding that story should unite all your brand experiences could help maintain the guardrails that may be needed to explore the power of digital reality for connecting with customers.



---

## **About Nymex Consulting**

Nymex Consulting is one of the fastest growing management consultancy firm providing growth management, market expertise and a solid return of investment. Our sector focus includes FMCG, Retail, Food & Beverage, E-Commerce, Distribution and Outsourcing.

Our functional expertise entails Strategy, Marketing, Sales & Distribution, Operational Efficiency, Risk Management and overall Project Management Office including topics such as Business transformation, Customer Base Management, Channel Management and Organizational redesign.

We work with leaders and challengers combining our strategic vision for growth with a pragmatic and solution-oriented approach in our projects, delivering sustainable growth.

For more information, please visit [www.nymex-consulting.com](http://www.nymex-consulting.com)

