

# Extended Reality

## The Advancement of Tourism and Heritage Preservation



By Baseem Mayala



Stories allow us to discover our world, understand its workings, and learn what we need to advance and develop. Audiovisual storytellers connect with their audiences through creative storytelling with compelling

and engaging audiovisual narratives. They bring forward their passion, expertise, and the right technologies to make stories mesmerizing experiences. But with the rapid evolution and disruption of consumer technologies and the vast audiovisual content we are exposed to in our daily lives, it is becoming a real challenge to impress and amaze us with the standard two-dimensional visual options. Moreover, we are becoming interactive human beings: we want not only full control of the flow of narratives provided to us but also to be immersed in the story and surrounded by its landscape and action. Full interactivity is what we seek.

Advancements in computer vision, graphical processing, display technologies, input systems, and cloud computing have created over the last 10 to 15 years a paradigm shift in the way we perceive the world around us. This has enabled us to be true magicians; we are not only displaying audiovisual content, we are now able to create new realities, new layers of real-life and imaginary environments. These features are available now with extended reality (XR) technologies: virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR).

Mixed reality is going to be the next big thing for both consumers and businesses alike. It liberates us from screen-bound experiences by offering instinctual interactions with data in our living spaces, in our familiar surroundings, and with our friends.

The metaverse is the latest development in extended reality. When big tech companies start investing massively in a new technology, you can be sure that we, as consumers, will be forced to buy it, even if it is a hoax. The metaverse

is the new trend, and it seems that everybody is gearing up to ride this wave. It is promoted as an alteration of the internet that allows us to manufacture immersive digital spaces for a variety of human activities and desires. It is The Matrix and we are the Neo's in it. But beyond this futuristic prediction, and on the other hand, the metaverse has the potential to disrupt the norms, values, and ethics we are used to and upon which we human beings have built and advanced our civilizations throughout the ages. How many physical human connections, communications, and experiences of

**Virtual reality (VR) uses computer technology to create a simulated environment. Unlike traditional user interfaces, VR places the user inside an experience. Users are immersed and able to interact with 3-D worlds.**



presence we are left with by the time the metaverse is forced upon us is a question that we need to keep asking as we advance into virtual super humans.

Extended reality is an amazingly innovative and flexible technology that can be applied in various sectors and industries such as tourism, education and training, health care, real estate, and entertainment. Our focus in this article will be on Palestinian tourism and heritage preservation and promotion. With extended reality applications and solutions, we will be able to tackle the accessibility problems inherent in the Palestinian tourism sector, find new audiences, and trigger the attention and interest

of our communities. These tools allow us to be more involved in preserving and strengthening our heritage and cultural history.

In a rapidly changing world, tourism and cultural heritage promotion should be continuously developing to keep up with emerging ways of knowledge transfer and new promotional tools. Creative storytelling and engaging interactivity are among the essential components when it comes to promoting tourism in Palestine and showcasing our heritage and cultural history. Access – Interact – React is the way to go when it comes to knowledge transfer related to tourism and heritage preservation.



We have been missing out on attracting visitors to our mesmerizing historic sites, introducing audiences to our rich culture, and engaging listeners with our deep-rooted stories due to the lack of resources and the limited access to effective promotional tools. We are now presented with a golden opportunity to undo this shortcoming and use innovation and affordable and accessible technologies to advance tourism in Palestine, truly showcasing and promoting our heritage and cultural history.

In Palestine, we have history, stories, and tourist attractions. But more importantly, we have an army of talented Palestinian youth who are eager to excel if provided with the right guidance, training, and motivation. I know this because I have personally met and worked with university students and fresh graduates during my collaborations with Palestinian universities and institutions. There is a great untapped potential when it comes to applying innovative technologies and creating platforms to excel and prosper, thus strengthening our economy and advancing our communities.

In order to develop a working formula for innovation and productivity, certainly in important economic sectors such as tourism and heritage preservation and promotion, three key

**Augmented reality (AR) is the integration of digital information with the user's environment in real time. Unlike virtual reality, which creates an artificial environment, AR uses the existing environment and overlays new virtual information on top of it. Through the use of screens on mobile phones, tablets, or even smart glasses, the digital information is revealed.**

players should join forces and work together to achieve a healthy and sustainable platform for innovation: academia, the private sector, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Academia to encourage, train, and provide the raw talent; the private sector to provide

**Mixed reality (MR) combines the technologies of VR and AR to merge the real and virtual worlds to produce new environments and visualizations, where physical and digital objects coexist and interact in real time. It is a blend of physical and digital worlds, unlocking natural and intuitive 3-D interactions between humans, computers, and the environment.**



advanced training and guidance to innovative youth and develop feasible and impactful tourism projects; and finally, governmental and nongovernmental organizations to facilitate the needs for these projects. This approach is essential not only in efforts to revive and strengthen the tourism sector in Palestine but also to provide the Palestinian youth and young innovators with opportunities to excel, thrive, and be exceptional.

*Baseem Mayala, the creative director and concept developer at InterTech, has more than 28 years of experience in conceptualizing, envisioning, and directing interactive multimedia and audiovisual productions. With*

*his major in film direction and screenwriting from Amsterdam University of Art, Baseem applies his knowledge of storytelling to every project. In 2014, Baseem shifted his career focus to developing content for the new emerging and interactive audiovisual technologies such as virtual, augmented, and mixed reality.*

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