

Gavin Poole of Here East asks if technology is killing entertainment?

From holographic concerts to immersive exhibitions, entertainment has become more accessible, wide-ranging, and innovative than ever before – but as we look towards the next phase of technology's disruption, with artificial intelligence developing at an unprecedented speed, a critical and contentious question arises: is technology changing the world of entertainment for better or worse? And what does its future hold?

The evolution of the entertainment industry

From Netflix's supersession of Blockbuster to an explosion and expansion in content and special effects, the entertainment landscape is always shifting to meet new developments and demands. Recent innovations exemplify the global excitement, such as East London's own Abba Voyage and the new Las Vegas Sphere currently hosting U2. The avatar projections of the Abba pop stars and U2's use of the world's largest LED screen have delighted audiences

all over the world with their immersive experiences. Alongside this, live-streamed and recorded concerts, such as Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, have brought events to fans inside their own homes, making performances increasingly accessible and inclusive.

Advancements in Generative AI are also revolutionising the gaming industry. With the ability to generate text, images, and audio in response to prompts, the technology is providing game developers with new opportunities to create dynamic effects and experiences. Non-playable characters (NPCs), for instance – with their predictable behaviour and stilted dialogue – are already being enhanced by AI tools to have more natural gestures and authentic speech, enriching interactions within the game world.

Generative AI's ability to generate large amounts of content, shaping entire cities, landscapes and their inhabitants, is creating more expansive and immersive gaming environments than ever before. Tailoring quests and storylines based on individual player preferences and skill levels, the technology is elevating the quality and depth of user experiences, signalling a new era in which every player's journey is unique and deeply personalised.

Whether it's exploring ancient civilisations through AR-enhanced museum exhibits, or stepping into the shoes of a character in a VR game, there is no doubt that technology is enhancing entertainment in new ways – personalising experiences, adding new dimensions, and creating competitive edge by differentiating itself from more antiquated forms of media. Just as Spotify trumped iTunes, which usurped CDs, which replaced record players – innovation always prevails, and oftentimes improves.

Has technology gone too far?

However, the rapid speed at which Generative AI is developing has sparked concerns about whether technology has gone too far in the realm of entertainment, and whether it will overtake and ultimately destroy human creative processes. While AI has the potential to revolutionise content, streamline production, and customise consumer experiences, there are growing apprehensions regarding job displacement, data privacy, and the loss of human creativity.

Two major events last year brought this technology debate to a tipping point. Writer and actor strikes in Hollywood coincided with lawsuits by major record labels such as Universal Music Studios; protests which demanded increased regulation and protection around the use of AI in entertainment. Just this month, renowned filmmaker Martin Scorsese issued concerns that technology's offerings are detracting from the quality of films – stating that immersive and 3D screenings are likely to lead to a loss of artistic nuance and subtlety.

As these voices from within the industry express anxieties around technology overshadowing creativity, it becomes increasingly clear that AI's deployment must be carefully monitored and regulated to ensure that human creativity remains at the heart of the entertainment industry.

Striking a balance

It was promising to see the Hollywood strikes concluding with a landmark agreement designed to protect creatives from AI encroaching on their work. Echoing the sentiments of the UK's AI Safety Summit earlier last year, the deal signalled a pivotal moment in the ongoing dialogue surrounding technology's impact, emphasising the importance of guidelines in fostering innovation without stifling creativity.

Rather than replacing our creatives, technologies such as Generative AI should instead be employed to streamline production and enrich audience connection. With safeguards in place, they can be embraced as tools for artists and creatives to enhance their processes, not supersede them.

Fostering growth in the sector

In addition to supporting and optimising creative processes, the integration of cutting-edge technology in musical performances and immersive experiences also has the potential to stimulate significant economic growth for the sector. Attracting larger audiences, inviting investment, and personalising experiences, the regulated use of advanced and AI-powered technologies is essential not only for the industry's expansion, but for the UK's global edge.

Last year, for instance, Abba Voyage alone contributed £322M to London's economy, while £150M was invested into the UK's film and TV production industry to develop the next generation of AI-powered special effects. These investments underscore the vital role that technology plays in driving economic growth in the entertainment sector. It is crucial that we embrace such innovation to not only bolster the financial vitality of the industry, but facilitate an environment in which creativity can continue to flourish.

Navigating the way forward

Responsible innovation and collaboration are key in ensuring that the creative arts continue to evolve and succeed in an increasingly digital landscape. In order to rise to the ever-changing demands of audiences worldwide, the sector must learn to not only work alongside technologies such as Generative AI, but to harness their potential. If the entertainment industry is to continue growing –

and indeed, if London is to remain a *leading centre* for film, TV, and music – then a balance must be struck between technological progression and human operation. The future of entertainment looks more exciting, accessible and immersive than ever – that is, if the people at the heart of this creative vision are prioritised and protected.

Gavin Poole is the CEO of Here East.

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