NEXT ERA IN HUMAN-MACHINE PARTNERSHIPS

Entertainment & Media: Embodied Fandom

This brief is one of a four-part series in which we take a deeper dive into the impact that humanmachine partnerships will have in four industries over the next 15 years: entertainment and media, health care, financial services, and manufacturing. For a more detailed explanation on human-machine partnerships, please download the full report, *The Next Era of Human-Machine Partnerships*, <u>here</u>. Emerging technologies, such as Robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), and Cloud Computing, stand to reshape how many of us live, work, and play over the next two decades. They will upend the way in which we coordinate our daily lives, learn new skills, make personal and professional decisions, and take care of ourselves and others. They will also change the way we are entertained.

As described in the full report, *The Next Era of Human-Machine Partnerships*, the most transformative role that today's emerging technologies will have over the next decade will be in underpinning the formation of new human-machine partnerships. These partnerships will enable us to digitally conduct our lives and learn in-the-moment, which, in turn, will reset our expectations for how we spend our time.

While these partnerships will make their way into every facet of our lives, as with all transformations, the full impact of human-machine partnerships will vary across geographies and industries. As science fiction author, William Gibson, so aptly pointed out, "The future is here. It's just not evenly distributed yet."

So, what does the next era of human-machine teams mean for media and entertainment by 2030? How might these emerging technologies influence the way we consume media and participate in live events? How will human-machine partnerships intersect with explosive growth in video game play and e-sports viewership to re-invent the fan experience?

This brief offers a first-person view of how the next era of human-machine collaborations and co-dependencies may reshape how people spend their leisure time. This foresight vignette is not intended to be a prediction of future behavior. Rather, its objective is to provoke us to think creatively about the future possibilities—and potential pitfalls—generated by the next era of human-machine partnerships.



Embodied Fandom | 2030



Wang was only a little girl when her father took her to Seattle's Key Arena to watch The International Dota 2 Championship in 2015. The video game tournament was, at the time, considered the Superbowl of e-sports and the 17,000 tickets issued for the event sold out in minutes.

Signal of Change



With a prize pool of over \$US20 million, in 2017, tickets to The **International Dota 2** Championship 7 sold out in less than one minute.1

Fast-forward 15 years and Wang is in the running to participate in The International. After rising to a top performer in Dota 2 as a young teenager, Wang was awarded a scholarship to a fouryear university. She continued to perform exceptionally well in the collegiate leagues, and signed big sponsorship deals with global brands the minute she turned professional.

Signal of Change -



In 2014, Robert Morris **University became** the first college in the United States to award athletic scholarships to gamers.

courtesy of Billie Whitehouse / Wearable Experiments ftf.org/future-now/article-detail/feeling-the-rush/

Of course, video game tournaments are no longer 'borrowing' sports stadiums, concert halls, or even opera houses as they were 15 years ago. Cities have invested large sums of money to build e-sports theme parks that include state-of-the-art arenas to attract the millions of fans who travel the world to celebrate the highest level of game play, and immerse themselves in video game-related content.

Signal of Change



In 2014, Tencent signed an agreement with the city of Wuhu in China to build an e-sports town, to include a theme park, university, and cloud data center.²

Wang is aware of the millions of spectators that will watch her play if all goes well and she qualifies. However, she is acutely focused on her 1.2 million 'connected fans' whose feelings of excitement, disappointment, anticipation, and jubilation she can feel. Literally. Her 'connected fans' are outfitted with clothing, jewelry, or even an ingested technology that create feedback loops between the fans and Wang. If the majority of her 'connected fans' are happy with her play, she'll feel a rush of good will. Conversely, if she is not playing well, she'll feel that her fans are a mix between nervous, frustrated, and mad. Fans, linked directly to Wang's bio-psychological data streams are fully informed of her emotional state, as well.

Signal of Change



Working with a companion app called FoxTel that collects and transmits data feeds, the Alert Shirt transforms emotional data into physical sensations that are felt by the person wearing the shirt.3

Feeling the emotional data of game play is not the only aspect of haptic and sensory computing experienced by these 'connected fans.' Some of her most fearless fans link up directly with the game characters. As a result, they feel the elation of flying, leaping, and successfully battling the game's foes. Of course, they also intimately experience the characters' missteps—crashing, smashing, and getting punched in the stomach.

By 2030, feeding information through human senses is just one technological evolution that has converted twodimensional, passive entertainment into full-body, highly active experiences. Not only do almost all sports (traditional athletics and e-sports) include ways for fans to experience the emotional thrills as though they were the players themselves, almost all fans use immersive technologies to watch the events. For instance, by the 2026 World Cup, fans were using VR technologies to view a football match from the perspective of the goalkeeper, or even the ball itself.

Signal of Change



In 2016, NextVR and Fox Sports presented the opening match in Germany's highly popular football league, Bundesliga, in VR. VR technology has also transformed the social elements surrounding sports events. Evidence shows that the line between physical and digital spaces has completely blurred. For instance, the virtual halftime show at the Superbowl in 2028 was not only attended by millions around the world, but also by more than half of the spectators in the stadium. In other words, even the ticketholders at the game preferred to experience the digitally-enhanced version of the halftime show.

Wang's corporate sponsors know that a centralized set of channels to broadcast The International no longer exists. The hundreds of millions of people that will watch the tournament will be distributed across thousands of gaming communities and platforms. Smart algorithms have helped them pinpoint through which microcasts (as opposed to broadcasts) and fanouncers (as opposed to announcers) her 'connected fans' will view her play. However, powerful influencers in game viewing are popping up all the time, and they are actively seeking out new voices and channels to grow her fan base.

Signal of Change -



Known as PewDiePie, Swedish gamer Felix Kjelberg's commands significant influence as an online video game player. His YouTube channel presently has more than 56 million subscribers.

For Wang Fang's generation, the separation between traditional athletics and e-sports that existed 15 years ago seems as foreign as the distinction between online and offline activities. In both cases, there is no division by 2030. Wang identifies as a professional athlete; she trains as relentlessly and competes as fiercely as any other top performer. She feels a real connection to her fans, many of whom she has never seen physically. After all, while she may not know them by face, she feels their emotions during every match.

Endnotes

- 1. "The International 7 ticket sold out in under a minute" in *Esports Matrix* (April 6, 2017) http://dota2. esportsmatrix.com/en-US/News/Detail?id=3376
- 2. "Tencent companies to build the city together to build a gaming town" in *Wuhu Daily* (May 12, 2017) http://www.wuhu.gov.cn/content/detail/591793457f8b9a0658dfbfdd.html
- 3. "Feeling the Rush" in *Future Now: The IFTF Blog* (June 7, 2017) http://www.iftf.org/future-now/articledetail/feeling-the-rush/

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