PWPA President Speaks on the Future of the Metaverse

Frank Kaufmann
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On September 15, 2022, Dr. Frank Kaufmann, President of PWPA, offered brief thoughts on the future of the Metaverse at an online event sponsored by the Pew Research Center and Elon University. Dr. Kaufmann was one of six experts invited to speak at the Twitter Spaces audio program, "Hype, Hope or Hell?: The Metaverse in 2040", hosted by Lee Rainie and Janna Anderson.

Transcript

Dr. Frank Kaufmann:

I'm the head of Twelve Gates Foundation [which] is rooted in interreligious relations. My relationship with this particular work is the interface between technology and technological development and private and public morality. And so my thoughts about the emergence and potential of the Metaverse is related to this issue of that particular interface. I believe that human beings are limitless in their creative capacity, and that is an unstoppable thing. I think it's deliberate about us.

I think the fact that every human being has a dark side is not an original intention. And so the inexorable evolution from drudgery to absolute creativity that happens by its natural force of technological development, but tragically, morality and virtue has does not keep pace with the inevitability of technological development. So I believe that regardless of how, and some of the commentary here this afternoon, has been positively frightening for me to listen to. But that notwithstanding and the warnings

we've had from every speaker, nevertheless, nothing will stop this technology from advancing as far as it possibly can. And even beyond what we might imagine.

So, if we look at the progress from drudgery, namely working to survive toward the liberation of creativity, namely working to create what we end up with, obviously, are creators and consumers. And what we end up with is instruction and entertainment. So basically creators are producing instruction and entertainment, and consumers are seeking both, but at any one time seeking either one of these two things. So the dark side of that reality is that we don't only just come up with a greater capacity to instruct and inform, and a greater capacity to learn and grow, or a greater capacity to create entertainment that's more wondrous, more wanting, more vaulting, more delightful.

Not only do we create both and consume both, but likewise, the dark side of human reality is that the instruction we create can be more profoundly imperfectly demonic in its capacity, and the entertainment we create likewise, similarly, and the instruction, and the information we seek, likewise can either seek to enhance our glory or to degrade us to the depths of depravity. So we can seek instruction on how to amplify a demonic or dysphoric side of ourselves. We can seek entertainment, and this has been alluded to, that is positively degrading and abusive. So, my view on the matter is, and I appreciate every speaker, anticipating this, recognizing this, and even acting to create such things as the XR Guild and I think it was Louis who spoke about the urgent need for regulation on platforms and so forth.

But my view is that what's additionally needed are systems that are capable of forging virtue and morality in individuals. I don't believe it can be regulated. I believe that what once functioned as classical, religious and spiritual obligations on people, these were where they started or were able to keep in check the departure from the basic human qualities with which we need to treat one another as several of the speakers have also pointed out. And so the rear view mirror that, I believe it was Toby that just mentioned, it's not available in technology, it's also not available in spiritual and religious life. So if we look at the radical force, the radical, the juggernaut or the speed at which technology is developing, there needs to be developed likewise, systems for the creation of virtue.

That is every bit, not competes with, but as every bit as exquisite, as masterful, as remarkable in its capacity to speak to the human being as a spiritual entity. While all this is happening, I don't believe that it can be stopped. And I don't believe that regulation has the capacity to hold in check the reproduction of both incredible good and incredible evil. The last thing I'd like to say is that one of the good models, I think, when we're looking at the dangers of the Metaverse and AR and VR and so forth. The dangers is that if we shift our look away from ourselves, and as the object of the dangerous, but rather to the ones we love as the ones in danger. How do I feel, as Louis described, about the capacity to build every single thing about our lives? That's horrible for myself.

How do I feel about that happening to my wife all the time, or to my young daughter all the time? How do I feel in my confidence to create the capacity for intimacy with my conjugal partner over against the amount of the subtlety of knowing everything about this about my partner? Because of what people are doing? Well, I'm trying to live my life and so forth. So I think part of the additional way of enhancing our determination or our pursuit of having moral and virtual building within human beings is adding this net of where our passions lie. It's kind of like, take my life, but don't touch my child. And so if that can be embedded into how we are considering how to protect the human experience against the emergence of what will happen, even greater and harder than much of which has been introduced already.

Imagining the Internet | A HISTORY AND FORECAST

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Expert Event: Hopes and Fears for 'the Metaverse'

Online audio event with Avi Bar-Zeev, Kelly Bates, Louis Rosenberg, Andre Brock, Toby Shulruff and Frank Kaufmann

Elon University and Pew Research invited six of the experts who participated in their 2022 survey on the future of the metaverse to a Twitter Spaces session in which they discussed where they expect that extended-reality tools will take society by 2040

In 2022, in our 14th canvassing on the potential future of digital life, we asked thousands of experts to share their thoughts on the likely "**Future of the Metaverse in 2040.**" Six of the participants in that study joined Pew Internet director Lee Rainie and Imagining the Internet director Janna Anderson a few months after the release of that report, on September 15, 2022, for a 60-minute Twitter Spaces discussion of the big issues they see emerging as humanity delves deeper into adopting and adapting to XR tools.

Click here to hear the full 60-minute program: https://youtu.be/EyKAvJKJ3uw

Find shorter breakout recordings of individual contributions here:

Avi Bar-Zeev, founder and CTO of RealityPrime, is an XR pioneer who played important roles in developing and creating the technology of HoloLens, Google Earth and Second Life and has worked with Microsoft, Google, Apple, Amazon, Disney VR and more. Hear his part of the conversation: https://youtu.be/jz84NoaIVro

Kelly Bates, president of Interaction Institute for Social Change. She has been the director of four nonprofits, working as a civic leader and lawyer who has led advocacy, organizing, racial justice and women's organizations for more than 25 years. Hear her part of the conversation: https://youtu.be/SbHLch2CvwU

Louis Rosenberg is CEO of Unanimous AI. His doctoral work at Stanford University resulted in the virtual fixtures system for the U.S. Air Force – an immersive augmented-reality system built in 1992, and he has been fully immersed in the business of advancing XR tools over the decades since. Hear his part of the conversation: https://youtu.be/lW29a5QKyug

Andre Brock is an associate professor of literature, media and communication at Georgia Tech, award-winning author and adviser to the Center for Critical Race Digital Studies. His article "From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation" challenged social science research. Hear his part of the conversation: https://youtu.be/6q8tcrS5IFA

Toby Shulruff is a futurist and senior technology safety manager at the Safety Net Project of the National Network to End Domestic Violence. She has worked with advocates at the national, state, territory, tribal and local levels to prevent violence since 1997. Hear her part of the conversation: https://youtu.be/8LdxT3KpbTo

Frank Kaufmann is president of the Twelve Gates Foundation and of the Values in Knowledge Foundation and editor-in-chief of New World Encyclopedia. He is known globally, specializing in the promotion of harmony, religion and peace for more than four decades. Hear his part of the conversation: https://youtu.be/YwvIH65x1eE

The full, 200-page report these experts discussed is an analysis of more than 600 experts' responses to questions asking them to consider how people define 'the metaverse' in 2022 and to imagine the most likely evolution of extended-reality tools by 2040. We asked:

> *Will the metaverse be a much-more-refined and truly fully-immersive, well-functioning aspect of daily life for a half billion or more people globally by 2040 – yes or no? Tell us how you imagine that the shift of many online activities into more-fully-immersive digital spaces and digital life is likely to take place. Regardless of how you see the timing of this, how might it change human society? What are the likely positives of this transition? What negatives may emerge? How might it change the daily lives of the connected? And how will this transition change the way we think about our world and ourselves? We are also interested in hearing your thoughts about the role blockchain and its applications might play in this evolution of online life by 2040.*

The result was a fairly even statistical split. **54%** said by 2040 the metaverse WILL be a much-more-refined and truly fully-immersive, well-functioning aspect of daily life for a half billion or more people globally. **46%** said by 2040 the metaverse WILL NOT be a much-more-refined and truly fully-immersive, well-functioning aspect of daily life for a half billion or more people globally.

The simple quantitative results are not fully indicative of the full complexities of the topic. The important findings are found in the respondents' rich, deep qualitative replies. **Read the report for full details.**

The introductory remarks in this Twitter Spaces session by Lee Rainie and Janna Anderson outline a few of the most commonly occurring themes among the hundreds of expert responses. Here's a short transcript of what they said:

Lee Rainie: I'm delighted to be part of this event with my colleague, Professor Janna Anderson, director of Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center. For the past 19 years we have been canvassing experts about the biggest issues involving the future of the internet.

This past winter, we invited thousands of experts to share their views about the future of the metaverse by the year 2040, specifically, whether a sophisticated, fully-immersive metaverse will be a key part of the daily life for a significant part of the global population.

All told, 624 experts responded and the split quite evenly: half thought a well-functioning and fully-immersive metaverse would be an aspect of daily life for many people and half thought such a metaverse would not have that role in daily life.

In July 2022, we reported those findings and curated the experts' extensive open-end responses to our question. Even though there was sharp disagreement about how the metaverse would evolve, both sides mostly agreed on two big ideas:

First, Augmented- and mixed-reality applications will dominate over virtual-reality advances. Most of these experts said they expect that broader adoption of virtual reality (VR) will be limited to enthusiastic but smaller user bases, especially gamers and entertainment seekers and in select business, medical, education and training settings.

Second, they argued that the next-generation networked-knowledge ecosystem can be built in ways that better serve people than the current Web does. Now, Prof. Anderson will give a quick rundown of the core arguments that both sides made in our report. Janna, over to you.

Janna Anderson: There were four big themes expressed by those who said they DO expect a well-functioning and much-more broadly adopted metaverse to be a key part of daily life by 2040 …

- They said profit motives will drive huge investment in the rapid development of extended-reality spaces, access and tools.
- They said the technology – the software, hardware, user interfaces and network capability to create an immersive universe is possible by 2040.
- They said the COVID 19 pandemic gave XR development a boost, as more people became more accustomed to immersing themselves in online interaction.
- And they said the metaverse will be developed enough to be a truly useful place in people's daily lives in many new settings by 2040.

Among the major themes expressed by those who said they think a widely-adopted and well-functioning metaverse will NOT emerge by 2040 …

- They don't expect that people will find it to be useful in daily life and think it will remain a niche space for a limited number of activities.
- They expect that the necessary software, hardware, user-interface and network improvements and capacity will NOT be available nor affordable by 2040.
- They said humans generally will continue to prefer to live their lives in real reality, using augmented or mixed-reality layers rather than full immersion in VR.
- They said fully-immersive spaces will magnify all of the problems arising out of digital life today and also predicted that people may avoid engaging in spaces that are operated in the service of surveillance capitalism and open to abuse by authoritarian regimes.

See the full 200-page report here: https://www.elon.edu/u/imagining/surveys/xiv-2022/future-of-metaverse-web3-2040/

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