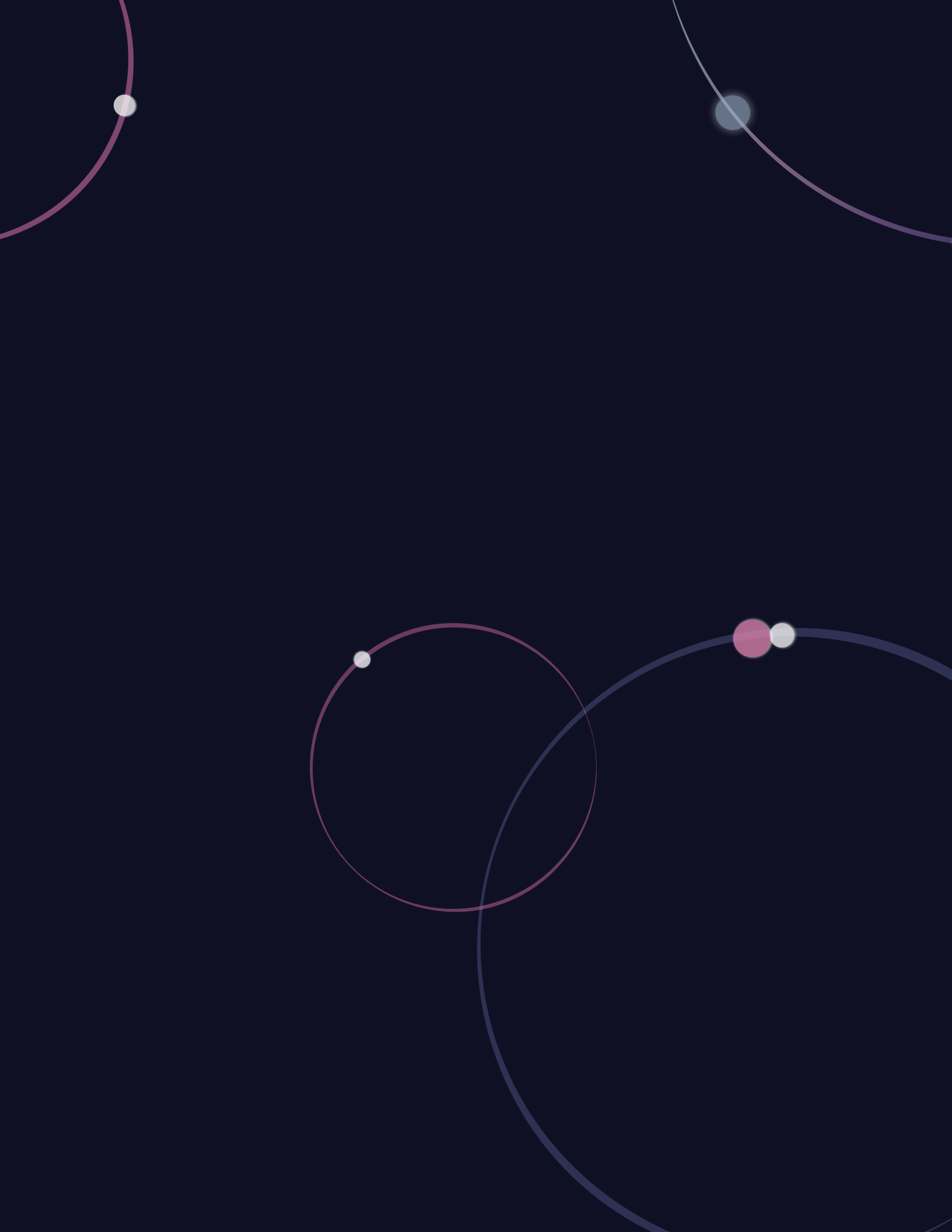
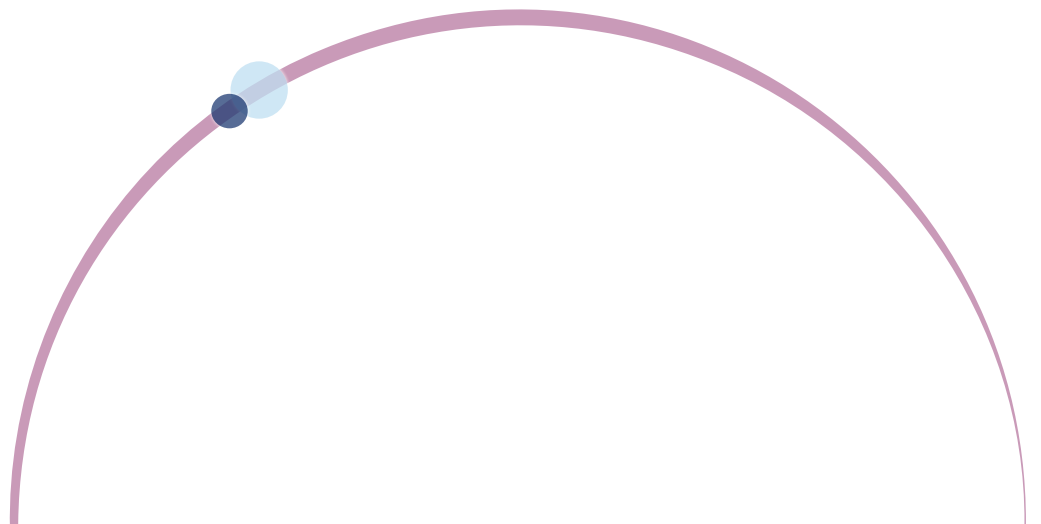
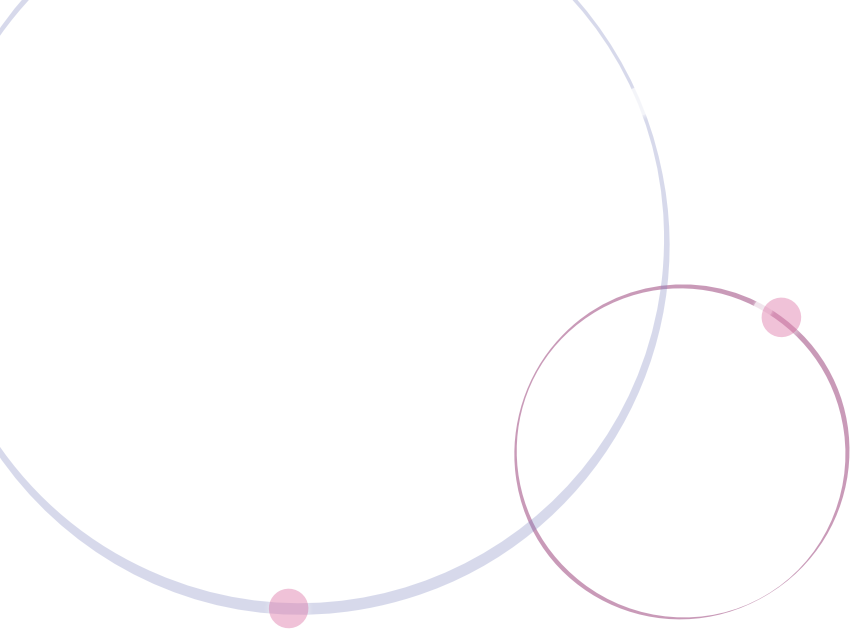


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THE FUTURE OF STORY

Insights Report
Fall 2025

SCADask

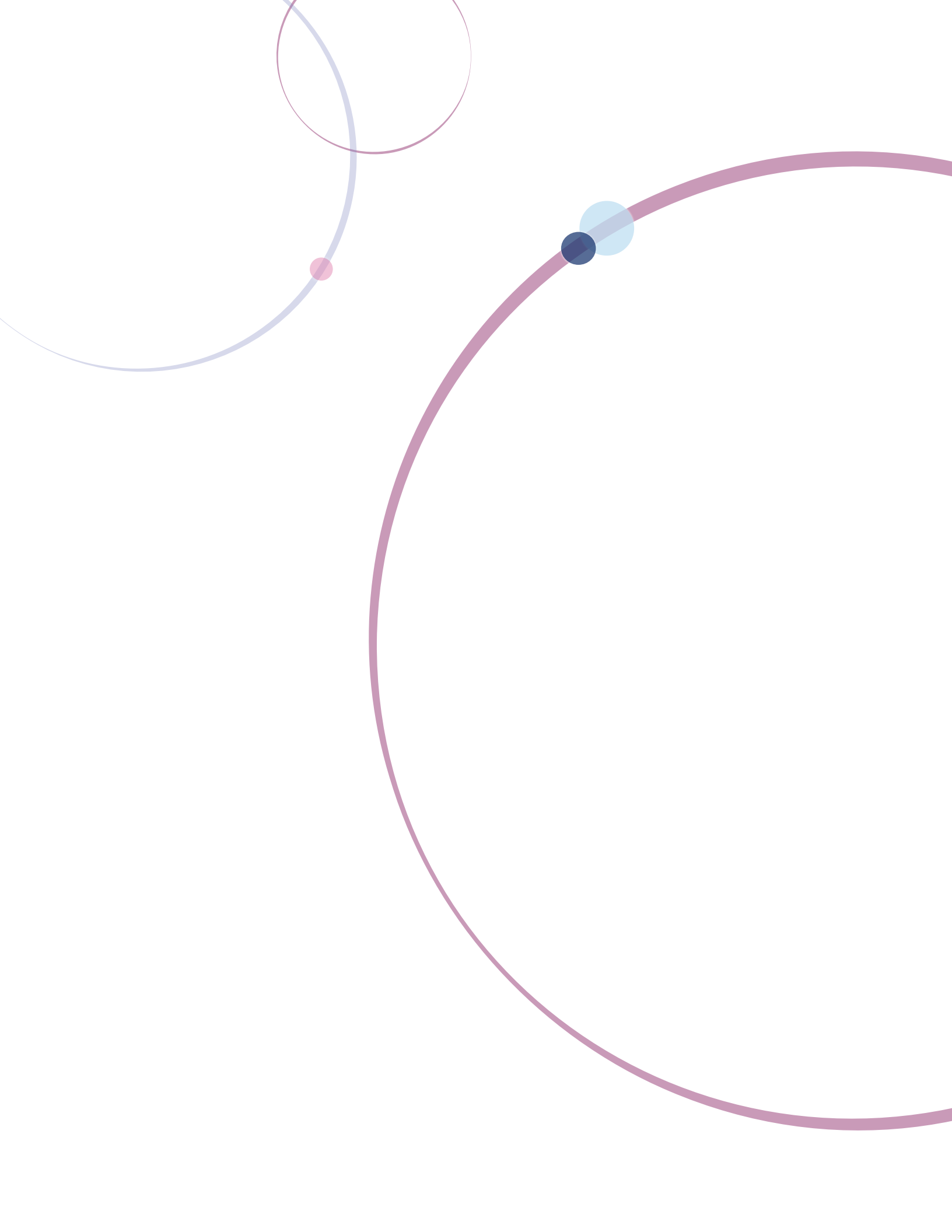


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I'd say that the number one thing I don't think changes [in storytelling] is emotion.

- Bob Weis,
Author, Speaker, and Former President,
Walt Disney Imagineering

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Never before have story consumers faced more choices and distractions. While storytelling is an ancient and enduring tradition, the future of story must navigate a unique set of circumstances to compete for, satisfy, and activate audiences. To inform this report, SCADask conducted a survey on storytelling; the results are highlighted throughout. This report illustrates—through both text and graphics—how storytellers, regardless of medium, can craft narratives that engage audiences in an active, distinctive, and fully embodied way. Such storytelling not only captures attention but also fosters emotional resonance, ultimately encouraging repeat engagement.

	Opportunities	Future Outlook
 Connection	Human beings are drawn to human stories that skillfully connect them to their multi-layered identities, each other, and the larger world.	Unique not New: Story creators will utilize expansive world-building and emotionally affective elements to (re) tell personal, yet globally accessible, stories centered on the human experience from unique perspectives.
 Varied Experiences	Advancing technologies and maximizing story consumer engagement through interactivity and multi-sensory engagement can increase repeat visitation.	Let Them In: Stories will incorporate greater levels of immersion and interactivity through general AI and multi-sensory engagement to bring consumers inside the story as truly agentive participants. More personalized and variable stories generate curiosity about paths not taken and entice guests to repeat visitation.

INTRODUCTION



(Re)activation of the Human Experience

To (re)activate a story, we must first reject the notion that audiences are passive or disengaged. Stories—whether told through text, film, games, immersive theater, museums, theme parks, or emerging media—have the power to reawaken and energize. The human experience is shaped by a rich spectrum of emotions and connections to ourselves, others, and the cultures we inhabit. For future stories to resonate, they must be as emotionally powerful and connective as the enduring masterpieces of the past—if not more so—to truly (re)ignite the human experience.



Praesance

Praesance, a term first identified in Josephine Machon's work on immersive theatre, is the "sensory state of being and feeling in the experience" of a story. According to Machon this "privileged experience" is a multi-sensory, fully-embodied, interactive engagement with story which then "generate[s] higher forms of meaning." Praesance is the visceral experience of a story consumer who is engaging with a narrative from inside the narratives.



Immersion

Immersion remains the most powerful tool for achieving praesance and (re)activating the human experience by drawing audiences into a story world. While not new, human creativity and advancing technology continue to expand the ways storytellers immerse consumers. Whether through masterful writing that evokes deep emotion and connection, or through large-scale, multi-sensory, multi-modal productions, immersive stories vary widely in form. No two are built the same, and each uses different tools to create unique, resonant experiences.



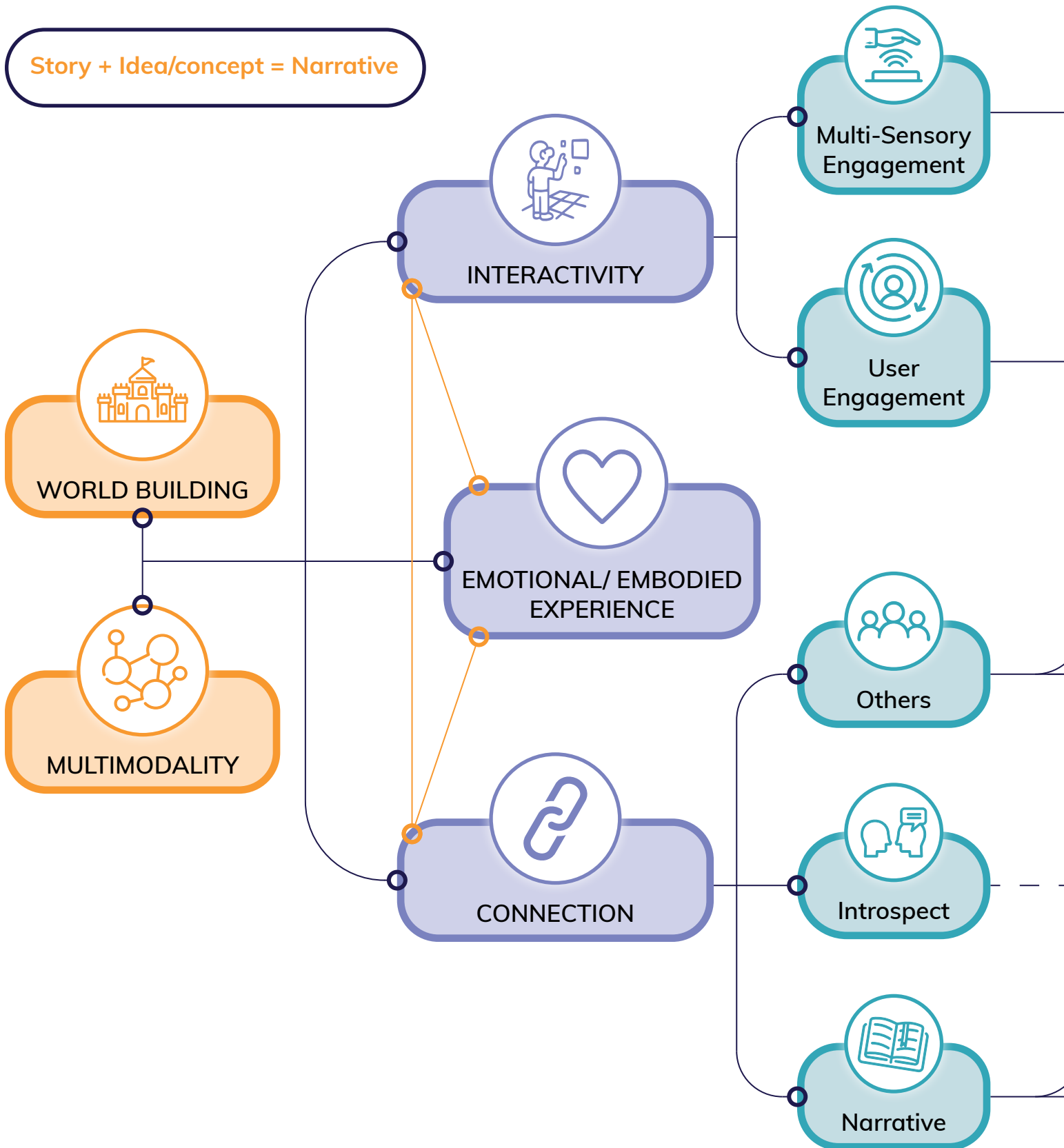
We believe...

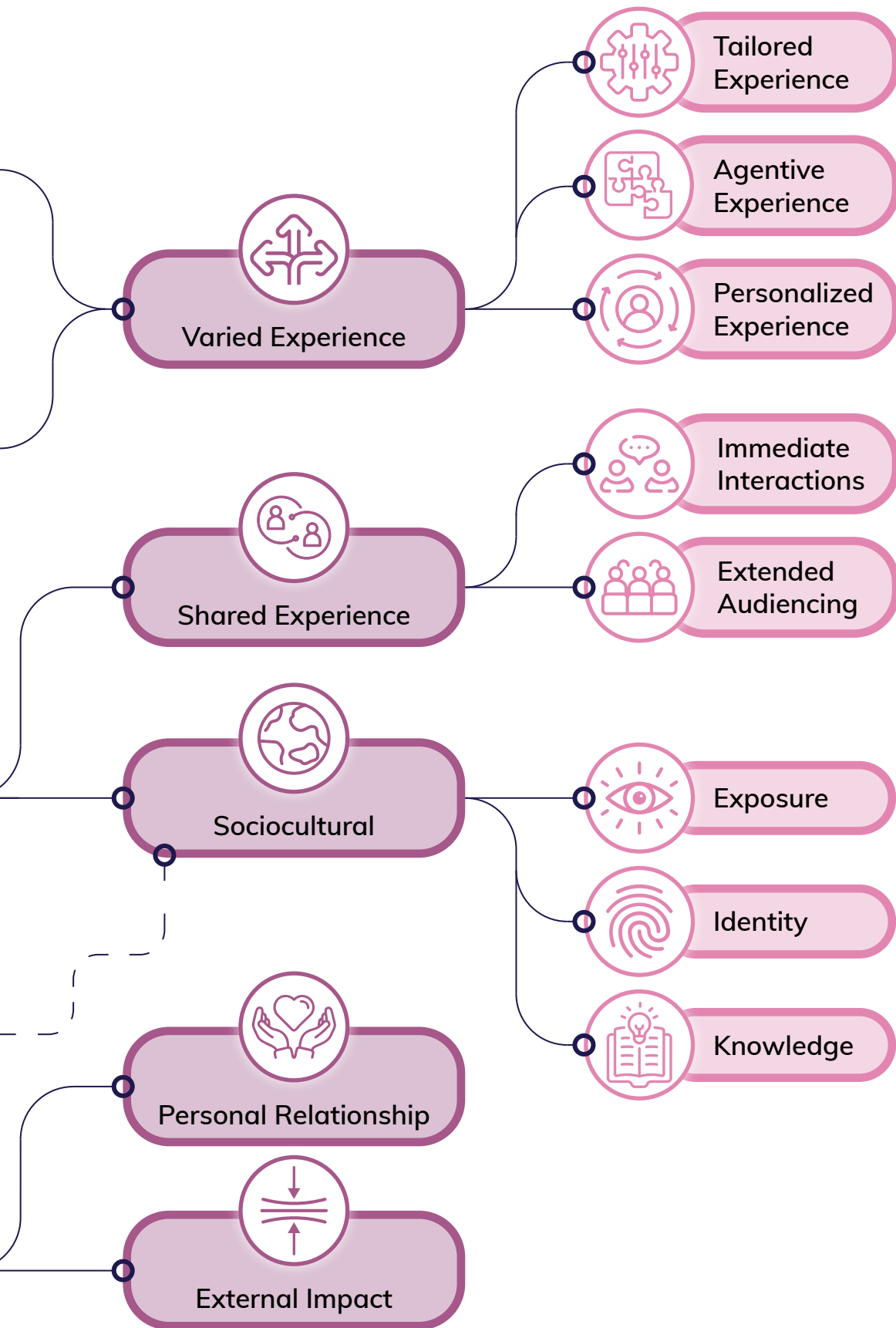
The future of story is:

***(Re)activating the
human experience
through increased
praesence via
immersion.***

CONCEPT MAP

Story + Idea/concept = Narrative



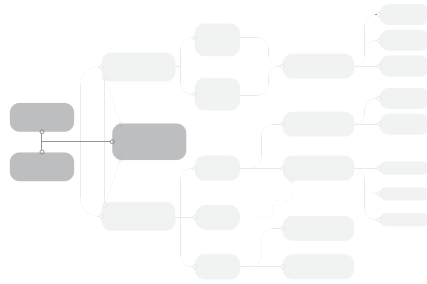




of survey respondents
enjoy stories set in
expansive worlds that
encourage continued
engagement.

CONCEPT MAP BREAKDOWN

The preceding concept map breaks down and offers guidance for the myriad ways in which stories achieve effective immersivity, create praesance, and ultimately (re) activate the human experience – with the ultimate goal that the story consumer will be compelled to revisit the story again and again.



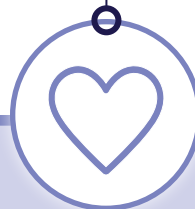
World Building

The process by which storytellers—from novelists to theme park designers—create rich, expansive settings for their narratives. It holds a foundational place on the concept map, as immersive experiences rely on well-crafted worlds. These story worlds invite repeat visitation, encouraging consumers to explore details otherwise missed on a single encounter.



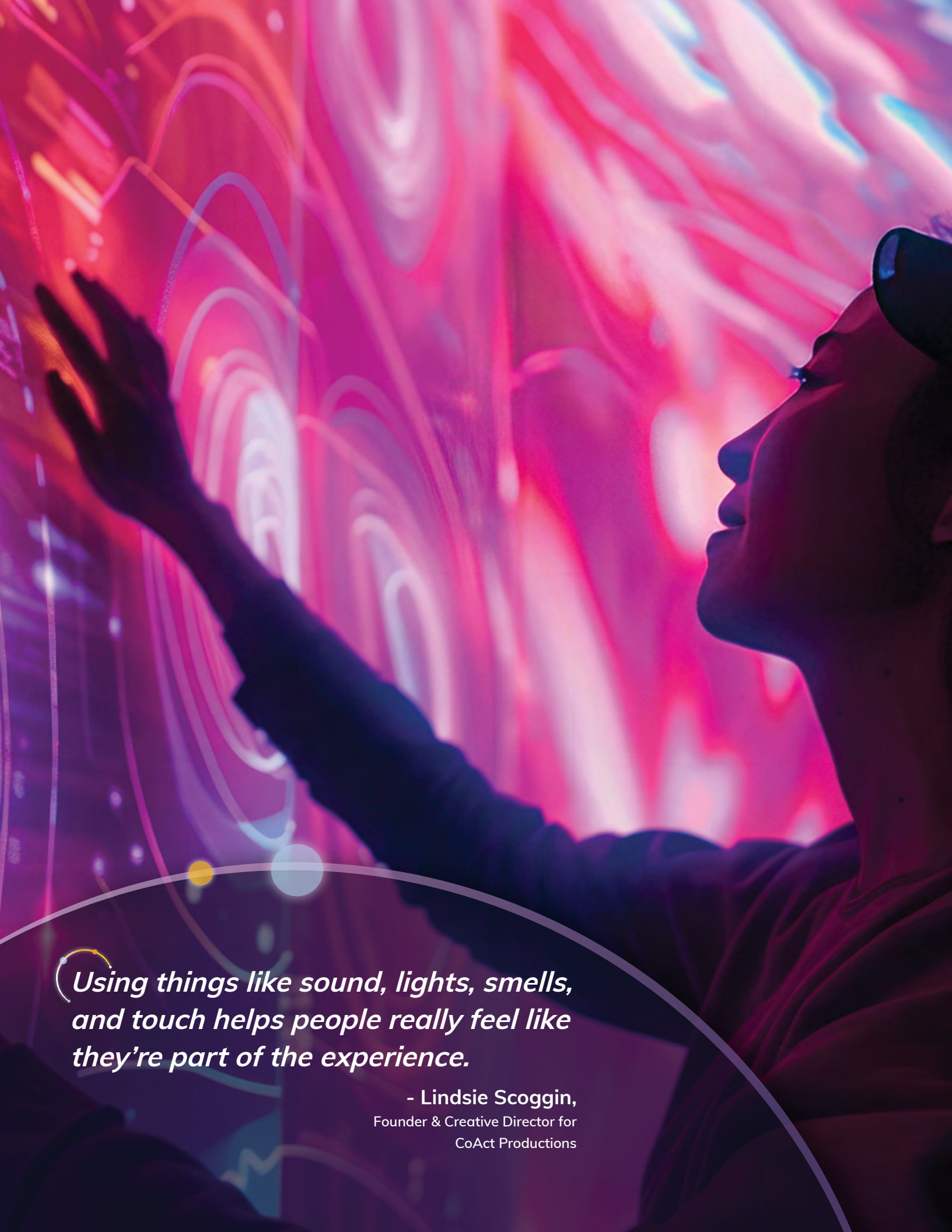
Multimodality

Combining multiple art forms to create immersive storytelling. Though not essential to world-building, it often complements it, as creators use diverse media to enrich their story worlds. Multimodal stories offer more paths to praesance and repeat engagement through emotional depth, interactivity, and connection. This is also where we see the greatest potential for innovation, especially through emerging technologies like AI.



Emotional/Embodied Experience

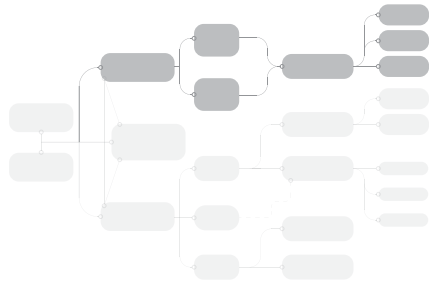
The impact a story has on a consumer's consciousness. While the mechanics of emotional resonance lie beyond this report, its importance remains timeless—stories must move us viscerally to succeed. On the concept map, it holds equal weight with interactivity and connection, as their interplay drives dynamic, immersive storytelling.



*Using things like sound, lights, smells,
and touch helps people really feel like
they're part of the experience.*

- Lindsie Scoggin,
Founder & Creative Director for
CoAct Productions

CONCEPT MAP BREAKDOWN continued



Interactivity

The degree to which story consumers can participate in or influence a narrative shifts their role from passive viewers to active participants, deepening engagement and fostering memorable, repeatable experiences.



Multi-Sensory Engagement

A resultant phenomenon of interactive storytelling, which encompasses all the ways a story may play upon a story consumer's five senses.



User Engagement

Another resultant phenomenon of interactive storytelling, which encompasses all the ways in which a consumer's actions may play within and upon the story.



Varied Experience

Varied experiences represent the peak of interactive storytelling, where each participant forms unique impressions and memories from the same story. We identify three types: tailored, agentive, and personalized.



Tailored Experience

A type of varied experience where a limited set of narrative paths are predesigned. Consumers follow similar journeys without influencing the story's outcome.



Agentive Experience

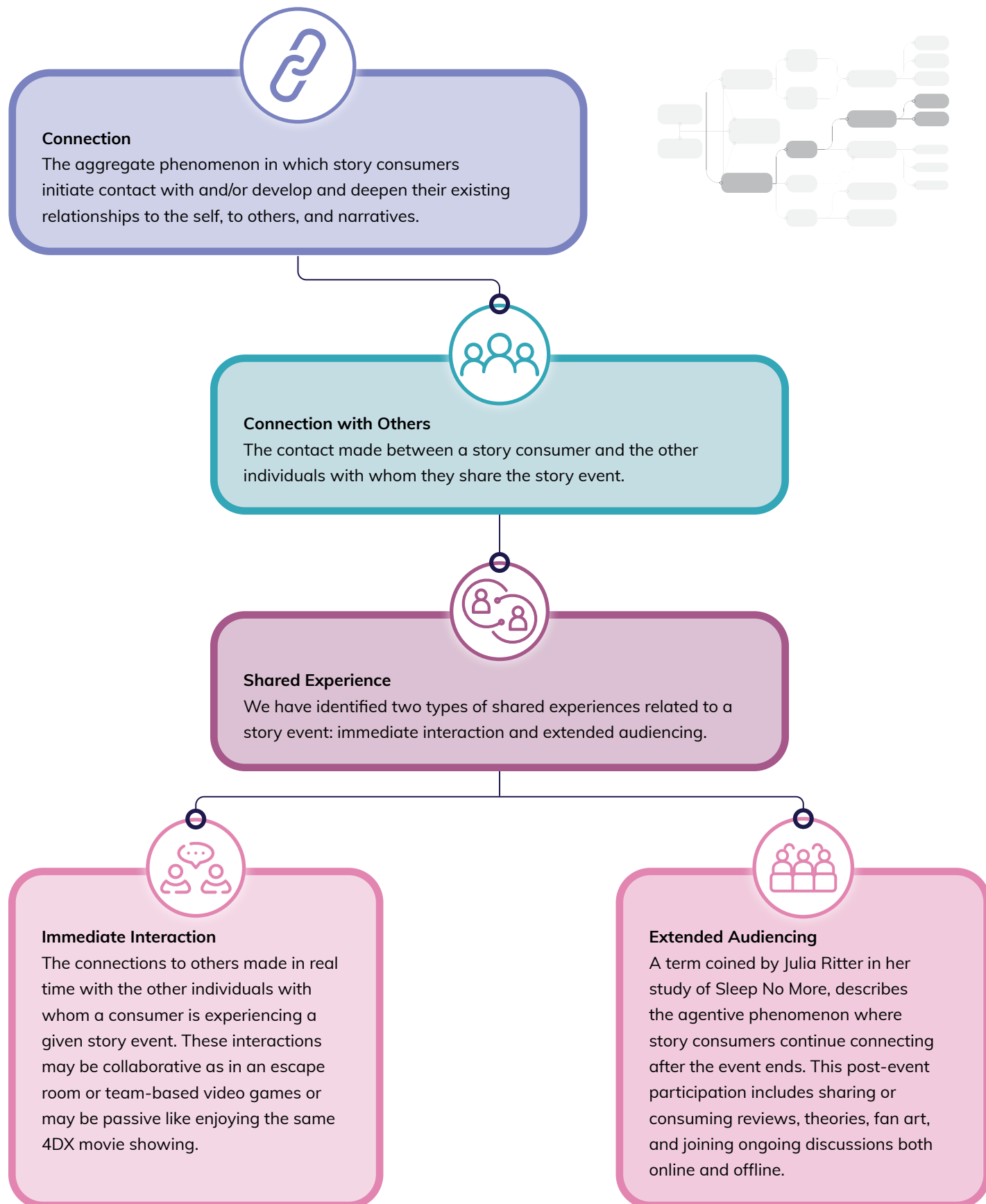
Agentive experiences let story consumers make choices that may or may not shape the narrative, often creating a stronger sense of presence than tailored experiences.



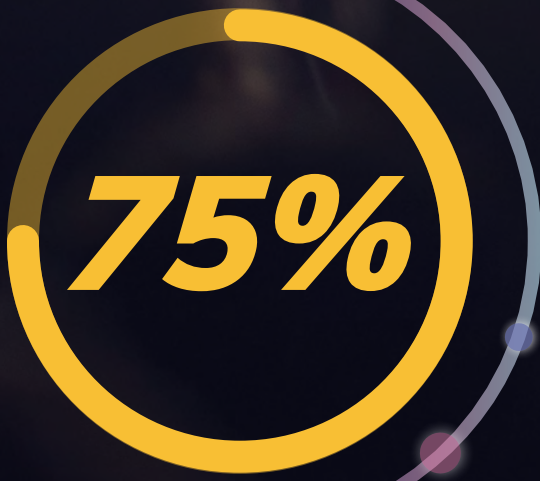
Personalized Experience

Personalized experiences are currently the least developed, but with general AI on the horizon, fully individualized storytelling may soon become a reality.

CONCEPT MAP BREAKDOWN *continued*

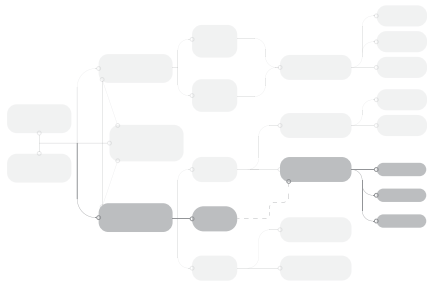






of survey respondents would like future storytelling experiences to include real-world connections, such as addressing current social issues, future trends, or historical events.

CONCEPT MAP BREAKDOWN continued



Connection

The aggregate phenomenon in which story consumers initiate contact with and/or develop and deepen their existing relationships to the self, to others, and narratives.



Connection with Self (Introspect)

The feeling of returning to one's inner world through a story event. When a consumer strongly identifies with a character or element of the story, it can prompt reflection on their own thoughts, emotions, and actions.



Interrelation of Socio-Cultural Connection with Self Connection

Self connection found through a story event often has the effect of contextualizing the individual story consumer within the socio-cultural landscape of the narrative and their larger world.



Exposure

The phenomenon in which a story brings a story consumer into contact with culture(s). These cultures include those between and among the culture(s) to which an individual belongs.



Identity

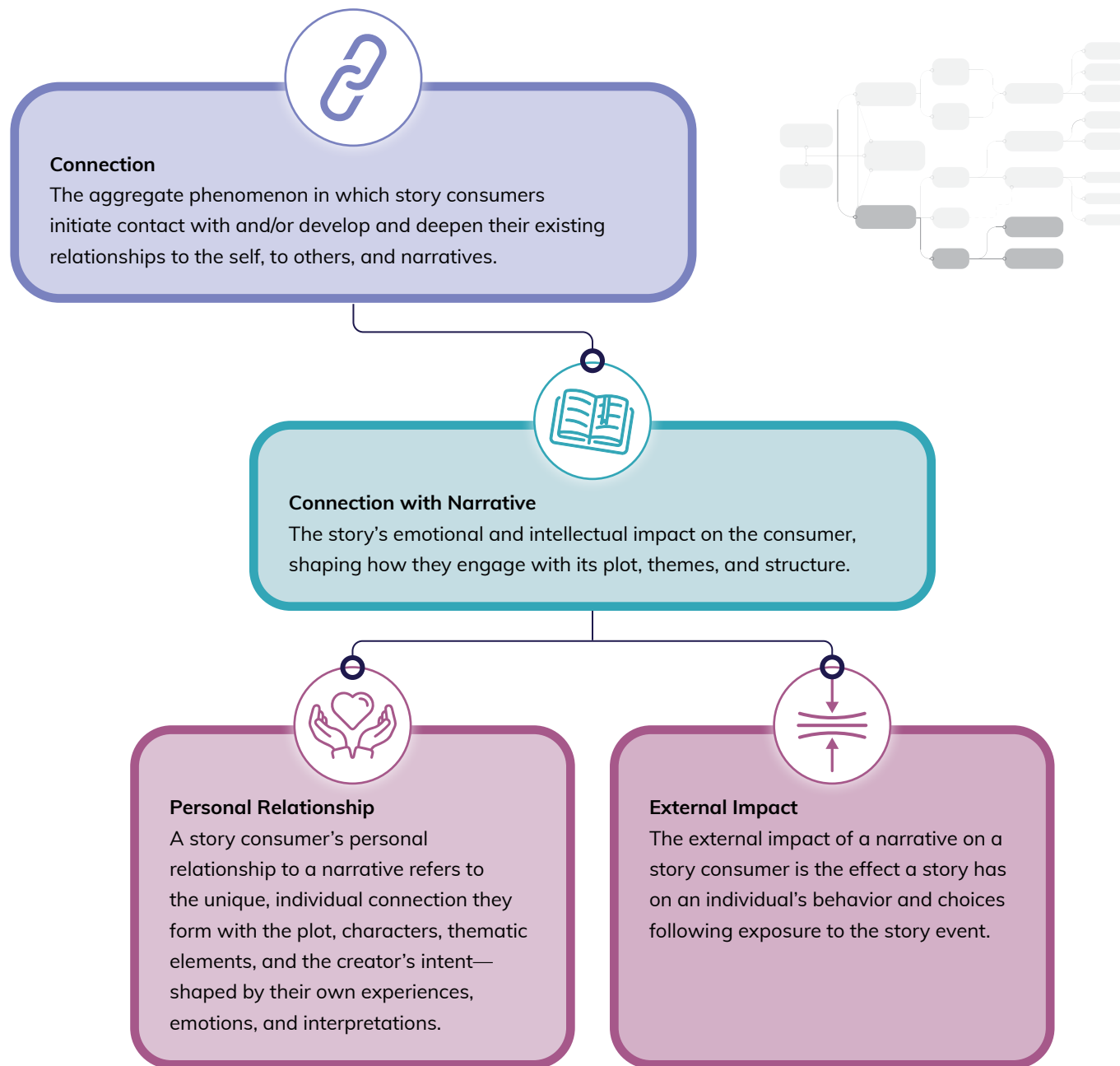
the way a story reveals layers of a consumer's self—individual, cultural, and social—through reflection on attributed, avowed, affectional, and enacted identities.



Knowledge

The awareness a story sparks in consumers—of themselves, others, and the world. It may affirm what they know, expand their understanding, and inspire a lifelong pursuit of learning and reflection.

CONCEPT MAP BREAKDOWN *continued*



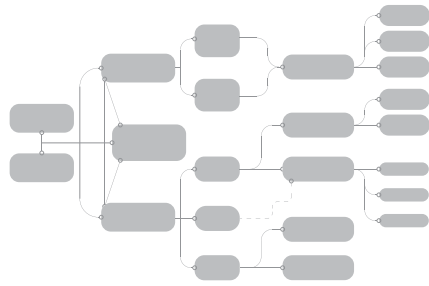


84%

of survey respondents felt a strong emotional connection to the story or its characters in their favorite story experience from the past year.



CONCEPT MAP BREAKDOWN continued



GOAL



Repeat Visitation

Repeat visitation is the ultimate goal of future storytelling. Every element of the concept map supports the creation of immersive, emotionally resonant stories that invite audiences to return. Whether it's a beloved film, a theme park, or an interactive experience like VR, immersive theater, or collaborative art, the desire to revisit stems from emotional impact, curiosity, and the potential for new choices. In future storytelling, repeat visitation will be a key marker of success.

THE STATE OF STORY

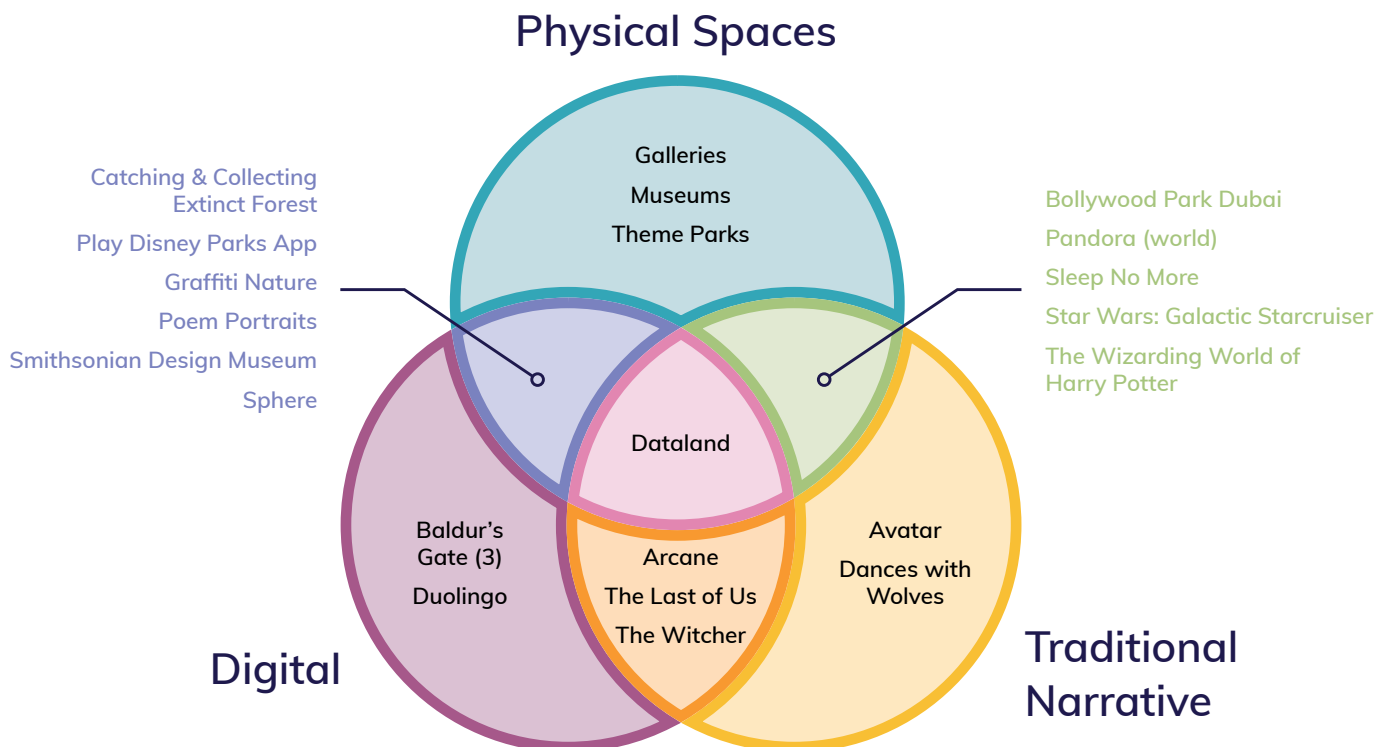
Our conceptualization of the future of storytelling, as represented in the preceding concept map, is grounded in data collected from over 500 survey respondents, six expert interviews, and extensive case study analyses.

The 19 case studies we examined span a wide range of mediums, including—but not limited to—theme entertainment, immersive theater, film, video games, educational and entertainment apps, VR/AR experiences, and AI-collaborative art installations. These examples, either completed or currently active, reflect the present state of innovative storytelling rather than speculative futures. They provide a strong foundation for comparison and insight as we look ahead.

All case studies are represented in the accompanying chart, which contextualizes

each story event's modality and maps it against the identified aspects of effective future storytelling outlined in the concept map. During this process, our research team was surprised to find that nearly every case study fulfilled all aspects of the framework.

While every concept in the map contributes to building and forecasting successful future stories, this report focuses on two key areas we believe will be especially influential: connection and varied experience. We highlight eight of the 19 case studies that exemplify either the successful application—or notable misapplication—of these concepts. Each case study was assigned based on its stronger alignment with one of the two focus areas, though many demonstrate elements of both.





People return to stories because they want to feel something again, or they want to discover new emotional layers. Emotional impact is the foundation for repeatability.

- Matthew Solari,
Vice President of Creative & Story for
BRC Imagination Arts



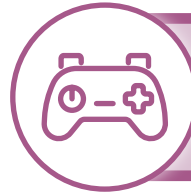
WORLD BUILDING

+

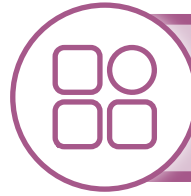


MULTI-MODALITY

Digital



Boulder's Gate



Duolingo

Narrative Driven + Digital Interfacing

Traditional Narrative Entertainment



Avatar



Dances with Wolves

Physical Spaces

Physical Spaces + Digital Interfacing

Narrative Driven + Physical Spaces

-  Arcane
-  Last of Us
-  League of Legends
-  The Witcher
-  Catching & Collecting Extinct Forest
-  Play Disney Parks App
-  Graffiti Nature
-  Poem Portraits
-  Smithsonian Design Museum
-  Sphere
-  Bollywood Park Dubai
-  Pandora – The World of Avatar
-  Punchdrunk’s Sleep No More
-  Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser
-  The Wizarding World of Harry Potter





CONNECTION

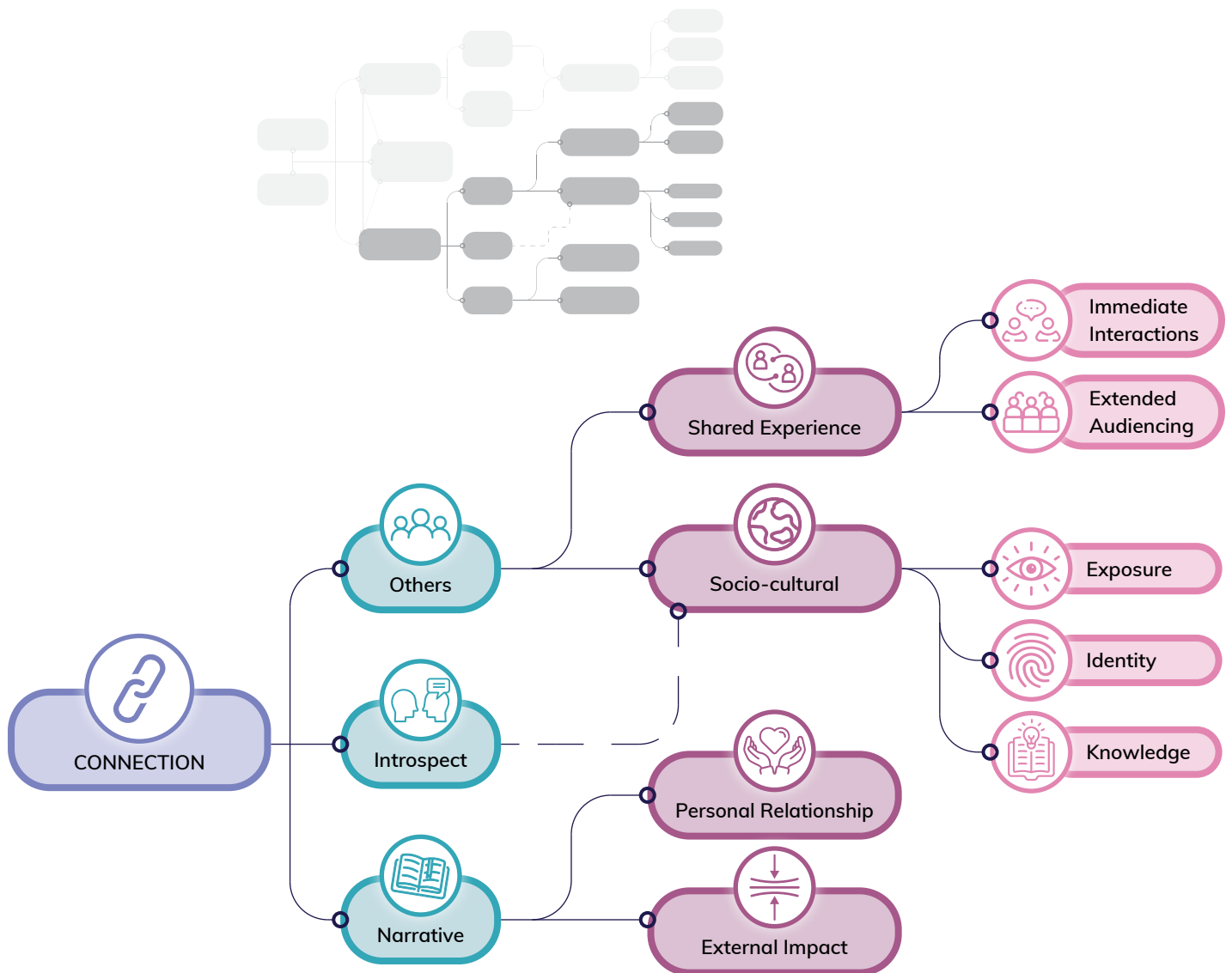


*Stay authentic, embrace technology,
but ground it in human connection.*

- Juliet Blake,
Head of Television for TED Talks

CONNECTION

Connection is the phenomenon in which story consumers initiate contact with and/or develop and deepen existing relationships to the self, other individuals, cultures, and narratives. Connection is one of the most potent tenets of effective storytelling, as powerful as it was around a prehistoric campfire as it will be well into the future. Connection (re)activates the human experience because it unites humans across and among identities, generations, cultures/creeds, and geographies. Connection compels story consumers to repeat visitation because it offers new and deepened relationships with themselves, others, and knowledge.



FILMS

Emotional Resonance Supported by Advancing Modalities

Over the last 100 years, films and cinema have become a pillar of storytelling. Though the methods by which films are shown and produced have shifted, emotional resonance keeps viewers coming back for more, even if it is a story they may have seen before. No matter what the story, how many times it has been shown, or how it was produced, moviegoers and film critics alike desire emotional connection and the core elements of storytelling that act as a catalyst for that emotive impact. Two films which embody this phenomenon perfectly are *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar*.

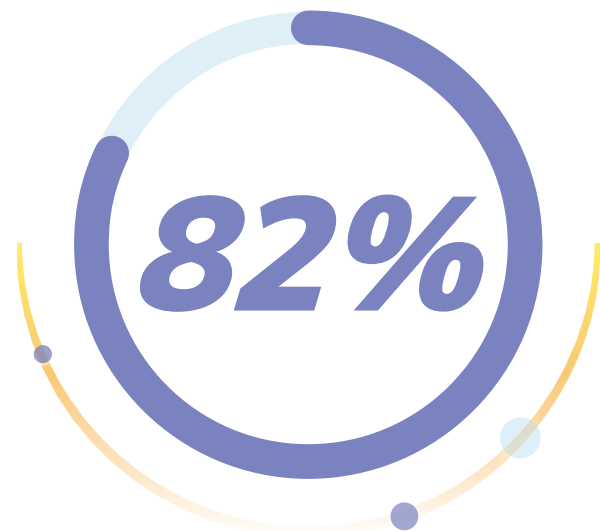
Dances with Wolves, a period drama set in the 1860s directed by and starring Kevin Costner, debuted in 1990. The film won a total of seven Oscars and was regarded both a box-office success as well as a cultural exposition for the indigenous peoples of the United States (IMDb, 1990).

James Cameron's *Avatar* is the first of a five-film futuristic sci-fi series originally released in 2009. *Avatar* is one of the highest-grossing films of all time. *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar* were released nearly two decades apart but arguably portray the same story as they share themes and core narrative elements.

Both films center around a military man, fallen from some status within society, who finds connection in an indigenous community from which he learns deeply emotional values and truths. While the

modalities and subsequent look of the two films are different, their core narrative elements still produce effective emotional resonance. Both films create opportunities for audiences to experience indigenous ideologies and perspectives they might not have otherwise. The core tenant of cultural context in both films deepens emotional connectivity across viewership.

Dances with Wolves and *Avatar* both explore complex narratives centered on indigenous identity and the tensions between positive assimilation and aggressive colonialism. *Dances with Wolves*



of survey respondents believe connecting with other people through stories can help break down social barriers.



presents a fictionalized portrayal of the Lakota Sioux during the 1860s, though it takes creative liberties by blending cultural elements from the Comanche. As noted by Pekka Hämmäläinen, “A bigger reason for the change is that the largest buffalo herd on earth is kept near South Dakota, where the film was ultimately shot, on territory the Sioux had formerly inhabited.” Yet, it’s also suggested that the Lakota—known for defeating Custer—were chosen for their cinematic appeal and box office potential.

Avatar, by contrast, draws inspiration from various indigenous cultures worldwide to create the fictional Na’vi tribes of Pandora. While not tied to a specific group, the film uses its imagined world to reflect real-

world themes of displacement, resistance, and ecological harmony. Both films construct immersive cinematic worlds that communicate universal themes and evoke strong emotional responses.

Visually, the two films differ drastically, yet they share core themes centered on empathy, transformation, and critiques of colonialism and militarism. The technology used in *Avatar* took James Cameron nearly 15 years to develop before it was integrated with traditional filmmaking practices (New York Film Academy, 2018), whereas *Dances with Wolves* relies on practical sets and costuming. Despite these differences, both films effectively communicate similar messages, emphasizing naturalism and the sanctity of indigenous knowledge.

Each film underscores the importance of recognizing multiple perspectives when addressing perceived problems, learning from history, and fostering collaboration among diverse communities and cultures. This message was as relevant in 1990 and 2009 as it is today—especially in an era where natural resources are increasingly scarce and commodified, despite the availability of sustainable, indigenous ecological and social governance methods.

Given the individual successes of *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar*, despite their essentially telling the same story, future storytelling endeavors would benefit from (re)producing emotionally resonant narratives that reflect personal and socio-cultural realities within the broader human experience.

MULTIMODAL

The Witcher: Celebrated Foundation Material and Failed Modality Advancement

The Witcher is a high-fantasy novel series based on primarily Eastern European folklore and mythology written by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. It contains a myriad of complex and multidimensional characters, deeply emotional plot lines, and fantastical creatures all interwoven in a unique universe. The novels – source material – were originally published from 1986 to 2014. Gaming developer, CD Projekt (Red) obtained licensing rights from Sapkowski and released a video game version of The Witcher in 2007. The video games follow the established canon from the source material. They are companion pieces to the original written works and are still considered a huge commercial success. The most recent addition to the game was released in 2021, The Witcher: Monster Slayer.

Given the popularity of the original novels and video game spin-off, fans and critics alike were intrigued when Netflix announced they were creating a television series adaptation of The Witcher. The first episode aired in 2019 and starred Henry Cavill – an avid fantasy fan and player of the game himself – as Geralt of Rivia.

Upon the television adaptation's release, there was an initial surge of success. Those involved with the new show were committed to preserving the spirit of Sapkowski's novels just as the video game franchise had. Henry Cavill was excited to participate in the project because he too loved the source materials and existing

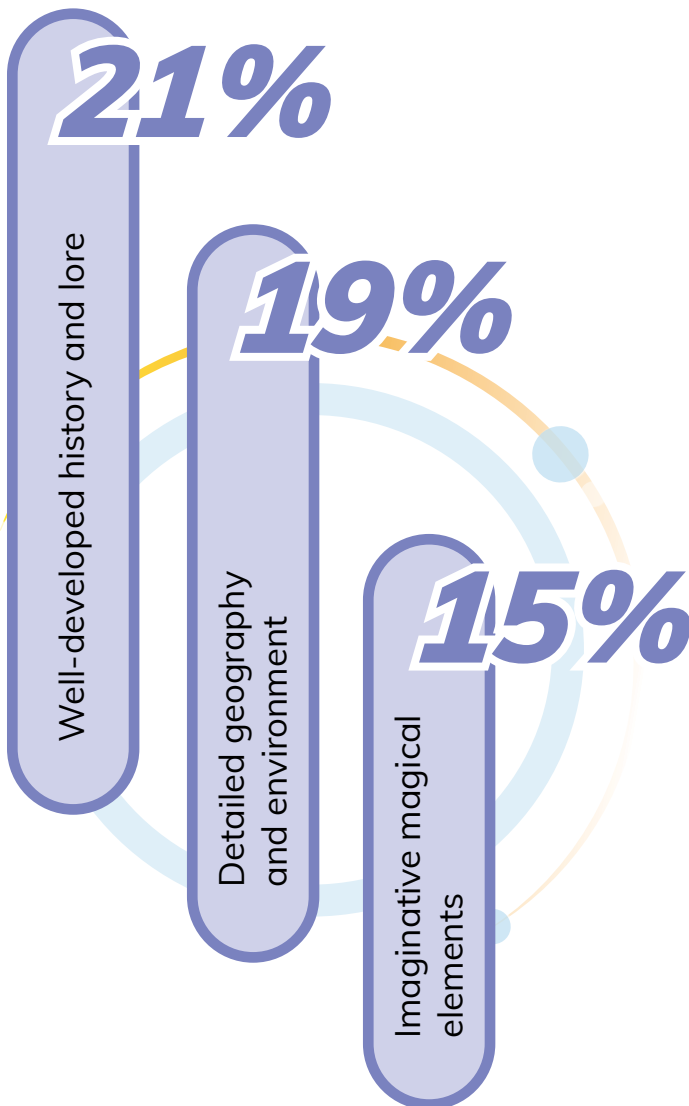
adaptations. The first season of the show garnered millions of viewers from around the world and 2.2 billion minutes of watch time in the first week of its release, with a heavy demographic presence in the United States and Poland. However, things began taking a turn once the creative team began taking too many creative liberties.



of survey respondents ranked a coherent and meaningful narrative as important aspects in story world-building.



Top 3 elements of world-building that made survey takers feel immersed in the story:



Beginning in Season 2, the show began to deviate from the source material and saw a steep fall off in viewership. One online reviewer summarized their dissatisfaction: “[The show] has no sense of consistency in its world-building. Everywhere and everyone looks and feels the same.” While the television series had a more dramatic downturn in numbers, the video games have remained a consistent success, both in their reviews and generative capacity to attract new players.

Clearly, between the video game and television adaptations of The Witcher, the one that stayed as close to the original source material, and built off of and out into its world, won in the end. Video game modality also allows for continued expansion based on the limited outcome factor within a single game as well as an entire universe of possibilities on which to hyper-fixate and thus the potential to create more personalized outcomes for players based on their preferred gameplay style and or format. This desire for cohesion and inherent depth within the overall storytelling is becoming evident across the different storytelling formats.

EMERGING TRENDS

There are numerous ways in which the future of storytelling will develop, but our research confirms stories that inspire connection to self, which subsequently generates emotions, will continue to be sought after.

Consumers will continue to seek stories that offer opportunities to connect with others through shared experiences. Connection in storytelling also provides an opportunity to connect consumers with the cultures to which they belong and those they live

between and among. Stories that rely solely on well-crafted visuals or technological innovations may be forgotten. In contrast, those that effectively use these tools to craft emotionally resonant narratives—connecting consumers to themselves, to others, and to the cultures within and around them—will endure well into the future.

ACTION GUIDE



Engaging Imagination

A powerful modality and timeless human craft enhanced by utilizing advancing technologies



Surge of Personalization

Customized storytelling consumption elaborated and explored through emerging modalities



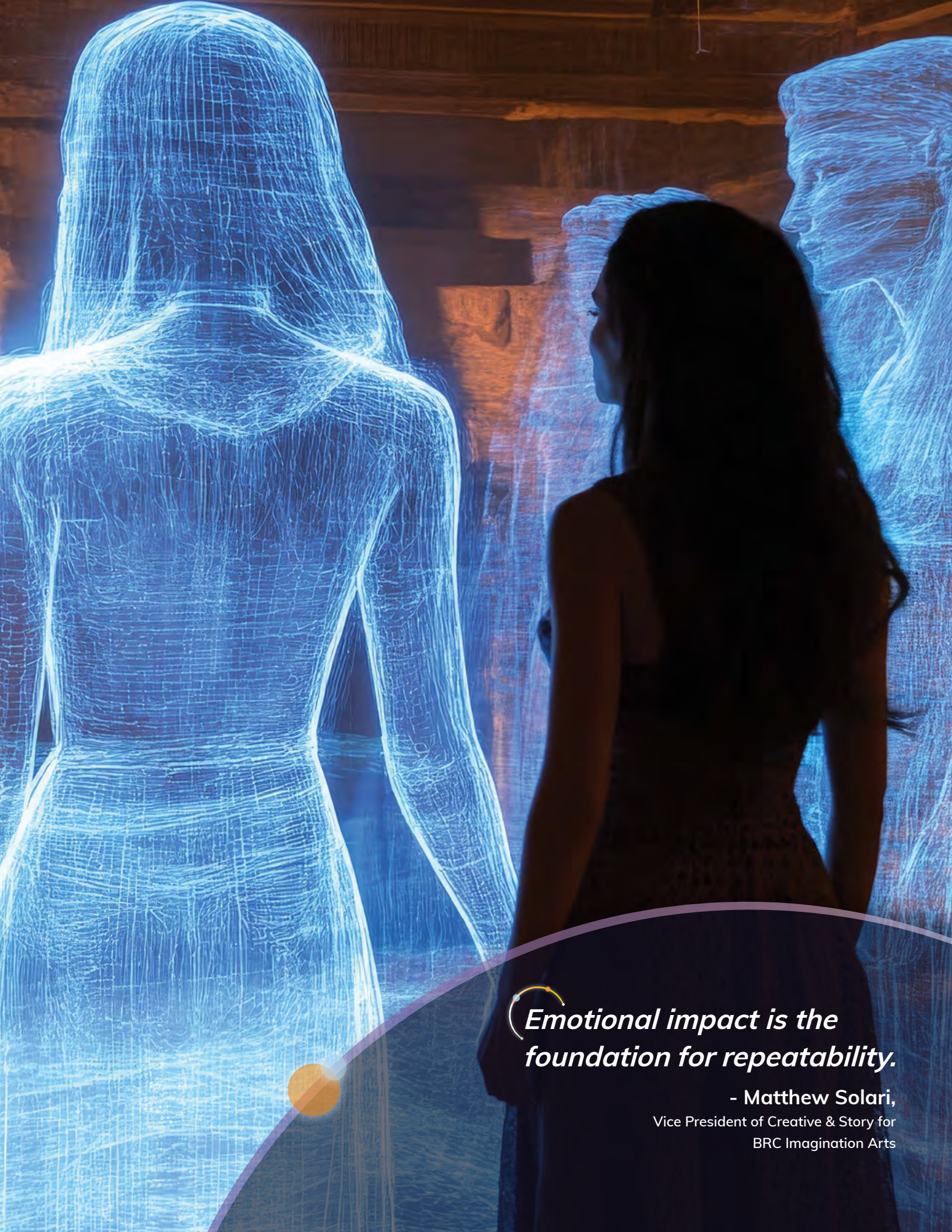
Continued World Building

An even more expansive, visceral, and quality means of escape from reality



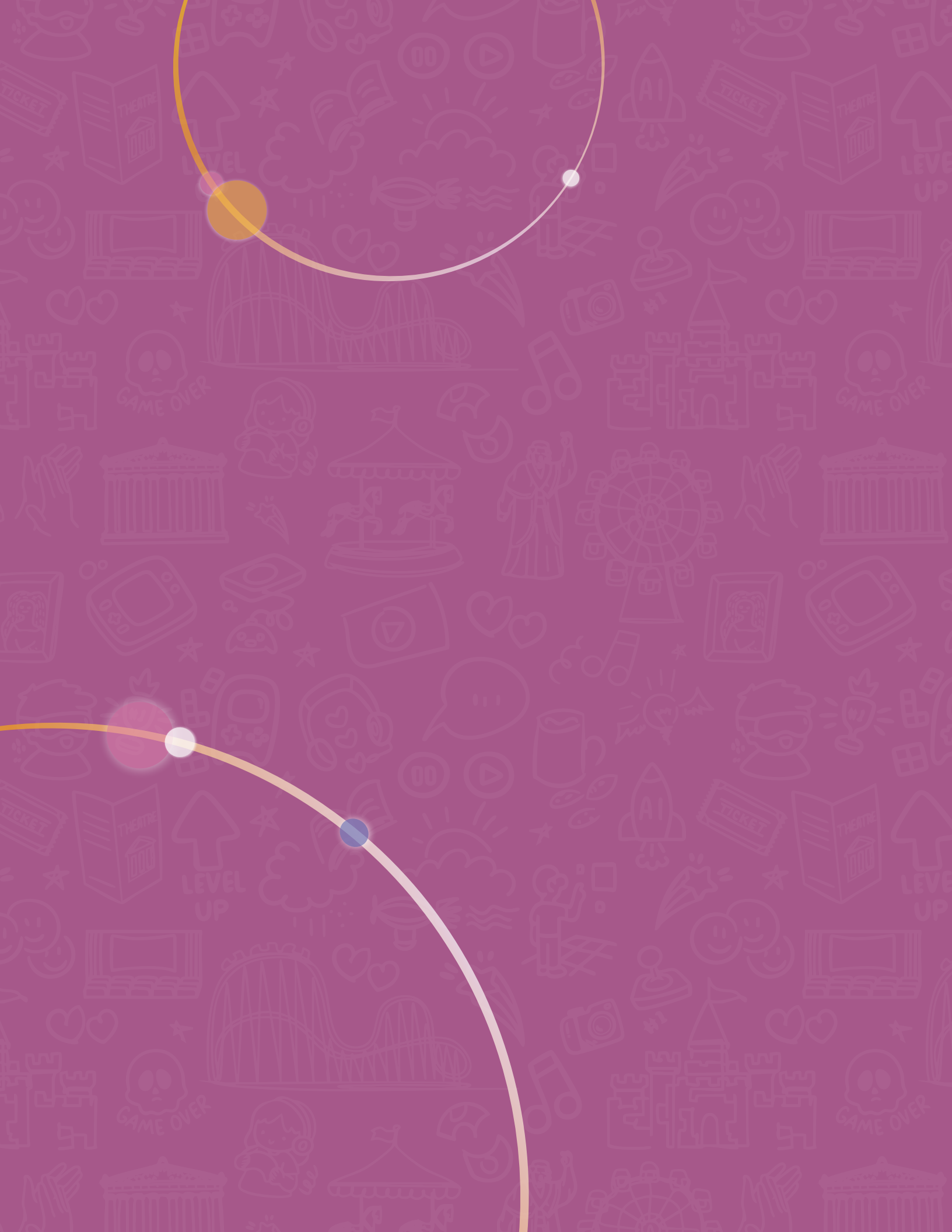
Emotional Activation

Provide audiences and consumers the ability and option to fully engage their emotional epicenters



*Emotional impact is the
foundation for repeatability.*

- Matthew Solari,
Vice President of Creative & Story for
BRC Imagination Arts



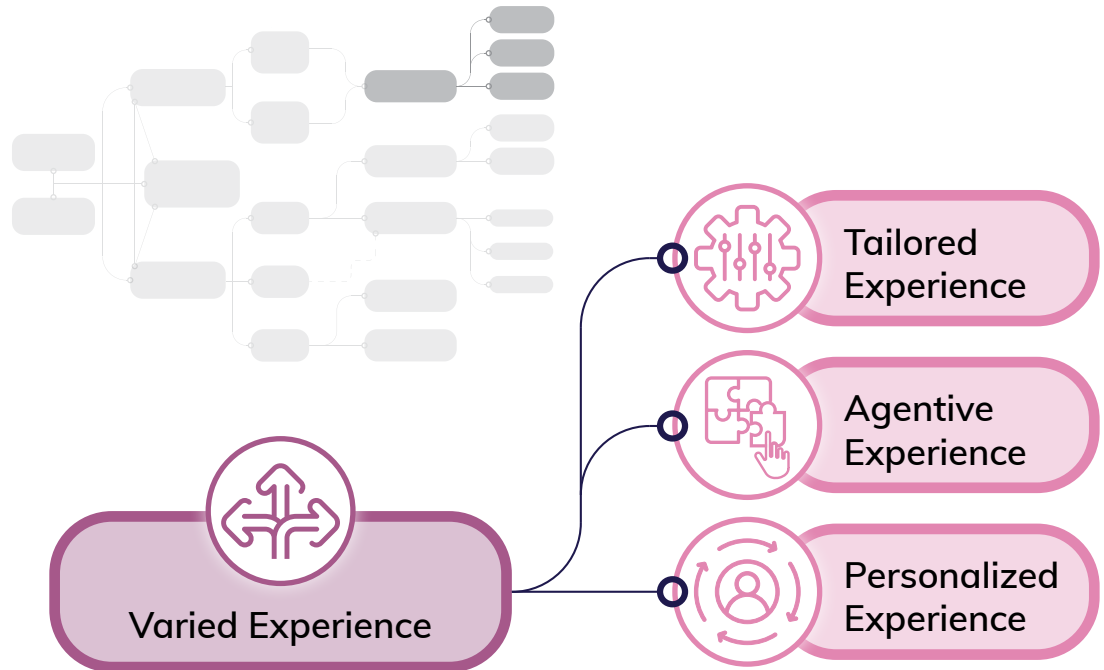


VARIED EXPERIENCE



VARIED EXPERIENCE

Varied experience is the potential for story consumers to take in the same narrative event but come away with vastly different impressions as a result of their unique sensory engagement, degree of narrative agency, and the idiosyncrasies of each storyteller’s creation. Varied experience is one of the most powerful incentives for repeat visitation because consumers who enjoyed the story will be compelled to return (with more consumers) to see and share what they’ve missed.



Generative AI

Generative Artificial Intelligence refers to a class of machine learning models designed to produce original content—such as text, images, audio, or code—by learning patterns from large datasets and generating statistically plausible outputs in response to prompts. These models, including OpenAI’s GPT-4, Google’s Gemini, and image generators like DALL-E, rely on probabilistic language or diffusion-based architectures. While powerful, they remain task-specific and lack true reasoning or understanding capabilities.

General AI (AGI)

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) denotes a theoretical form of AI capable of understanding, learning, and applying knowledge across a wide range of tasks with human-like cognitive flexibility and autonomy. Unlike narrow AI systems, AGI would generalize across domains, adapt to new environments without retraining, and exhibit reasoning, problem-solving, and self-directed learning. No AGI systems currently exist, though research efforts by organizations like DeepMind and OpenAI are directed toward its eventual development.

*Response to: “Hey ChatGPT, you are expert in technology and yourself! Do not break character. Please explain to me the difference between General AI and Generative AI. Please format your answer to be appropriate for a graduate level, academic insight report and whitepages.com.” and “condense this information into two brief definitions of Generative AI and General AI. The definitions should be appropriate to include for an academic paper and include examples.” ChatGPT. May 14, 2025.

THEATER

Sleep No More: Shakespeare Made New Via Immersion

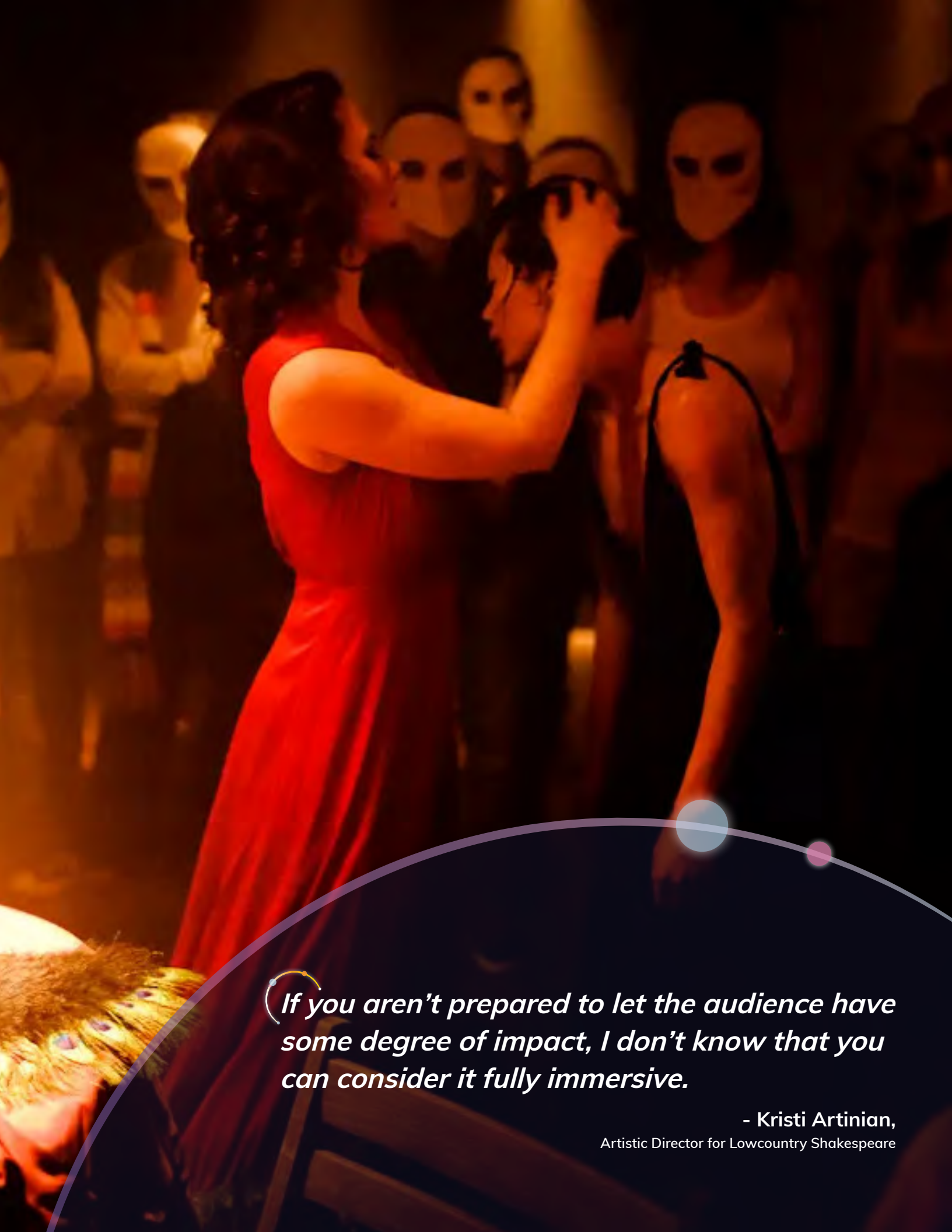
Punchdrunk, described by *Time Out* magazine as “the best immersive company in the world,” staged their adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, titled *Sleep No More*, from 2011 to 2025—making it the longest-running immersive theater production in history.

This highly successful production enthralled audiences for over a decade with site-specific world-building that incorporated elements inspired by *Macbeth* as well as the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Punchdrunk worked with New York based Emersive Productions to reinvent over six floors and 100 rooms of a Chelsea warehouse into the McKittrick Hotel, the set for *Sleep No More*. The narrative of *Macbeth* unfolded through a multimodal rendering that combined dance, theatre, music, installation art, and film inside the McKittrick.

Audiences enjoyed an agentic, interactive experience which included user engagement and multisensory engagement with the story. They were given masks and robes before entering the story and encouraged to move freely through the McKittrick as the story unfolded. The masks and robes gave audiences a degree of anonymity and autonomy which allowed them to explore their connection to self and the narrative without concern for how others would perceive their experience of the story. Consumers could choose which parts of the story they wanted to observe. Audience members were also encouraged to

handle props and interact with performers, including intimate one-on-one experiences. Though they could not change the core dances or the narrative’s ending, consumers still felt presence as they moved inside the story and expressed agency.





If you aren't prepared to let the audience have some degree of impact, I don't know that you can consider it fully immersive.

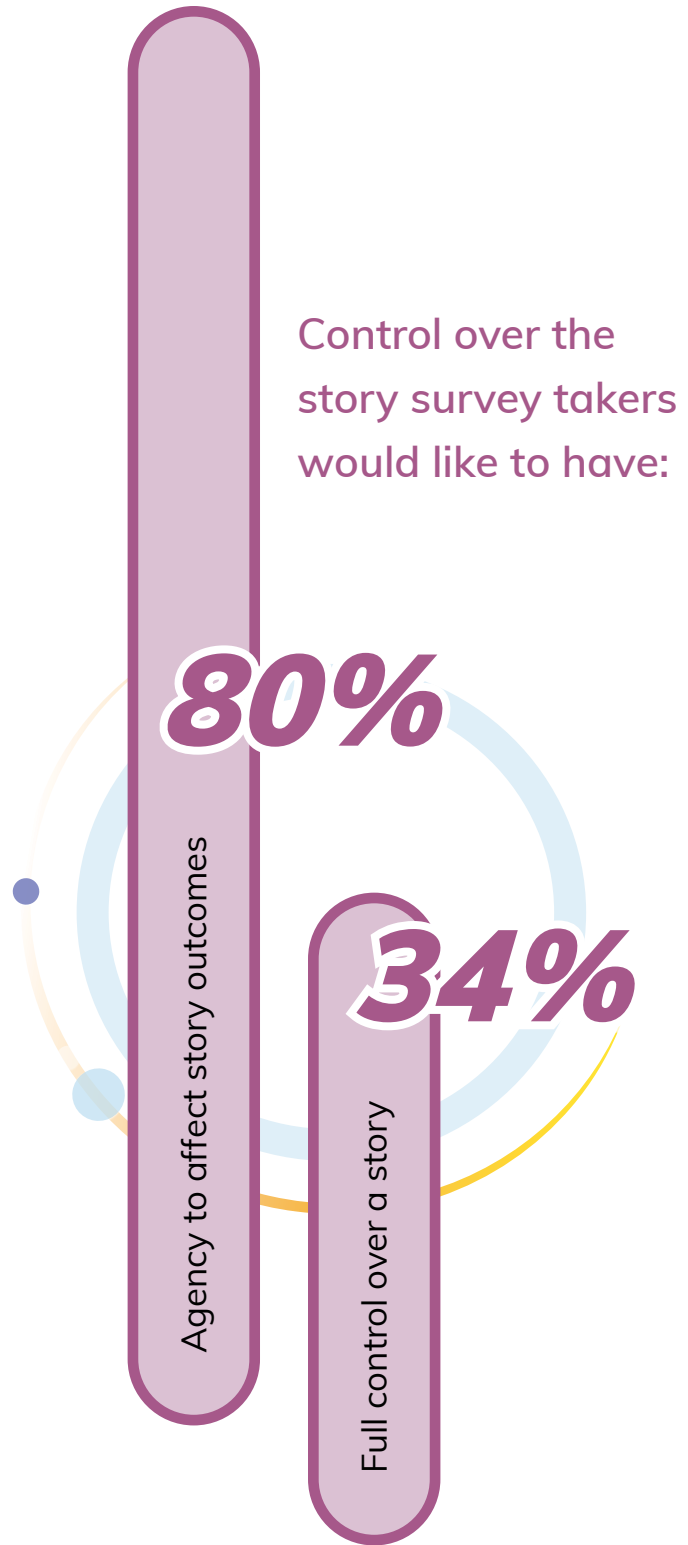
- Kristi Artinian,
Artistic Director for Lowcountry Shakespeare

Story consumers who visited *Sleep No More* explored their connection to others via immediate interactions with other anonymous patrons and online communities built to share their wide kaleidoscope of experiences with this show.

Sleep No More engendered an impressive amount of repeat visitation. Kristi Artinian, an alum of *Punchdrunk*, reported hundreds of hours of possible play within *Sleep No More*. As a result, story consumers returned several times to see what they had missed. Some folks returned hundreds of times.

Sleep No More Shanghai opened in 2016. *Punchdrunk* and *SMG Live* co-produced this award winning international iteration of *Sleep No More* and set it in 1930s Shanghai. The production boasted fresh surprises hidden in a newly-built five story building in the Jing'An District.

Punchdrunk's Sleep No More marked an exciting leap forward in the world of immersive, site-specific theater. While traditional theaters struggle to entice audiences, *Sleep No More* ran successfully for over a decade owing largely to repeat visitation. Audiences were compelled to visit *Sleep No More* again and again because the story event offered interactivity, agency, and hundreds of hours of possible play.



ART

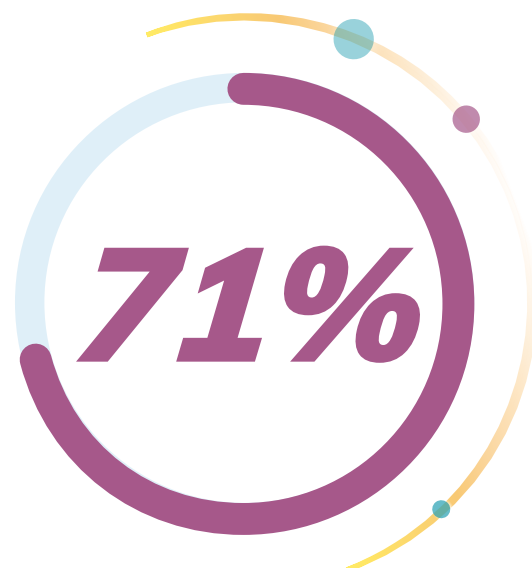
Poem Portraits: Intersection of AI & Human Creativity

Poem Portraits is a groundbreaking interactive artwork by British artist and stage designer Es Devlin, created in partnership with Google Arts & Culture Lab and AI researcher Ross Goodwin. First launched in 2019, the project merges artificial intelligence, historical poetic forms, user participation, and large-scale digital installations to redefine the role of the audience in the storytelling process. Unlike conventional narrative forms that rely on a fixed authorial voice or linear sequence, Poem Portraits generates an evolving, decentralized narrative space that is shaped directly by its participants.

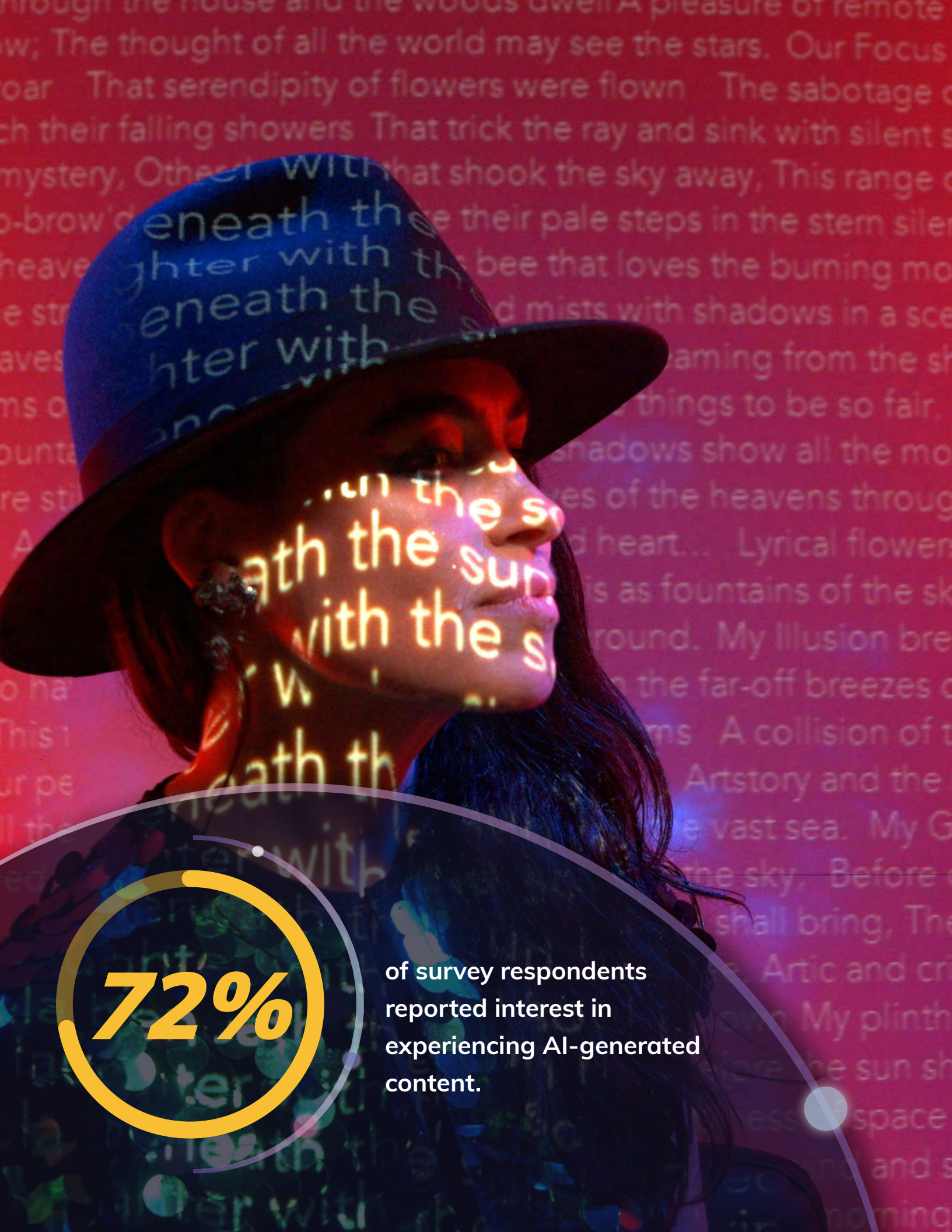
This participatory installation invites each user to contribute a single word that holds personal meaning to them. That word becomes the seed for an AI-generated poetic line created by a custom algorithm trained on 19th-century poetry. The

output is visually rendered alongside a photographic portrait of the user, effectively transforming their face and their word into a unique poetic artifact. This artifact is then integrated into a vast, collective poem composed of thousands of contributions from people around the world. The result is an ever-growing digital tapestry of language and identity, blending personal expression with machine creativity.

Poem Portraits exemplifies a shift toward participatory and democratic storytelling by transforming the audience into active co-creators. Rather than being passive consumers, users contribute a single word that meaningfully shapes the AI-generated poetic output, embedding personal intention into the narrative. This co-creative approach reflects a broader trend in digital storytelling, where user agency plays a central role. The project also challenges traditional linear



of survey respondents believe that AI and mixed reality will have a major impact on storytelling in the next decade.



of survey respondents reported interest in experiencing AI-generated content.



narrative structures by adopting an open-ended, modular format. Each contribution becomes both a self-contained poetic expression and part of a dynamic, collective archive of public emotion re-framing story not as a linear progression but as a spatial network of meanings.

By integrating the user's chosen word and facial portrait, Poem Portraits creates a deeply personalized and embodied experience. Participants are not only engaging with art—they become part of it. This convergence of identity, language, and image fosters emotional resonance and a sense of ownership. Central to the work is the collaboration between human input and AI-generated language, with the system drawing on a corpus of classic poetry to generate new aesthetic forms. This blurring of authorship highlights the evolving role of AI in cultural production and opens new possibilities for poetic expression in the age of machine creativity.

Poem Portraits is not merely an art installation—it is a bold reimagination of what storytelling can be in the digital and post-digital era. It blends user agency, personalization, emotional engagement, and AI collaboration into a unified narrative experience. Through its participatory format and poetic outputs, the project challenges conventional boundaries between artist and audience, human and machine, individual and collective. It stands as a compelling example of how storytelling is evolving from fixed narratives into dynamic, co-created, emotionally intelligent systems that reflect the complexity and diversity of human experience.

ART

Graffiti Nature: Beating Valley - Symbiotic Lives, A Whole Year per Year, Red List

Graffiti Nature by teamLab exemplifies a powerful shift from traditional storytelling to interactive, user-generated narrative systems. At its core, the installation turns every visitor into a storyteller and co-creator. Participants begin their journey by drawing animals or plants on paper or tablets, which are then scanned and transformed into animated entities projected into a digitally immersive environment. These personal creations—colored by the user’s imagination and emotion—gain life within a shared virtual ecosystem. The moment a drawing enters the space, it becomes part of a living, responsive world that reacts to human presence and movement. This act of creation is not symbolic but functional: the animals move, grow, interact, eat, or are eaten based on programmed environmental logic, giving every user a tangible sense of agency and influence over the story unfolding in real time.

Storytelling within Graffiti Nature is non-linear, ecological, and emotionally resonant. Unlike fixed narratives with a beginning, middle, and end, this experience relies on emergent storytelling, where stories evolve through the interaction of user-generated content, digital rules, and environmental feedback. For instance, when a user’s frog is eaten by another user’s lizard, it creates an unpredictable mini-narrative embedded in a larger, dynamic system. These micro-stories accumulate across time and space, creating a collaborative tapestry of action and consequence. The user is not merely engaging with an artwork—they are helping shape a world. This interaction is both playful and meaningful. Physical gestures—like walking, stepping, or pausing—affect the environment: standing still allows flowers to bloom, while moving quickly can disrupt the ecosystem. This transforms the participant’s body into a narrative tool and creates a fully embodied storytelling experience.

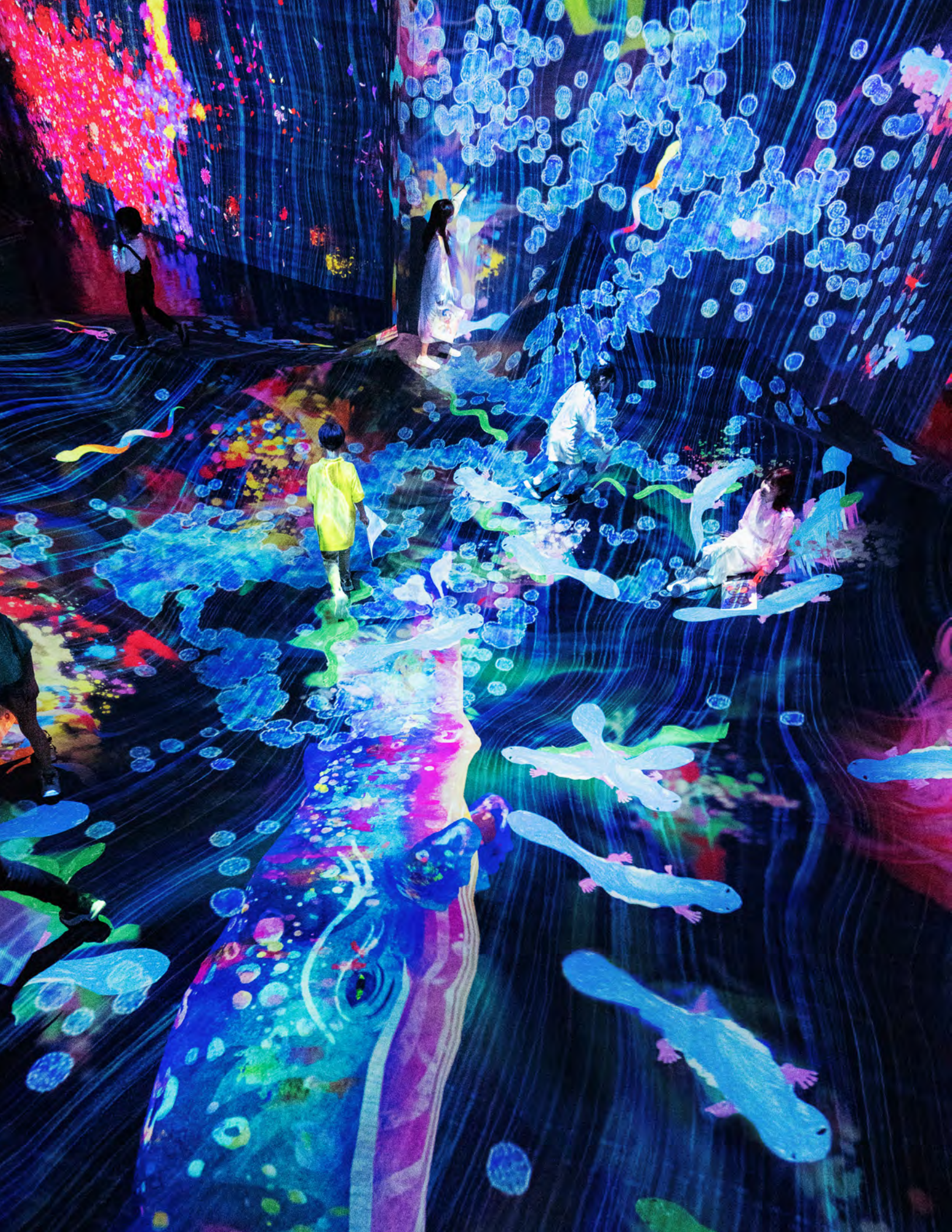


of survey respondents would like to experience personalized or tailored experience in the future.



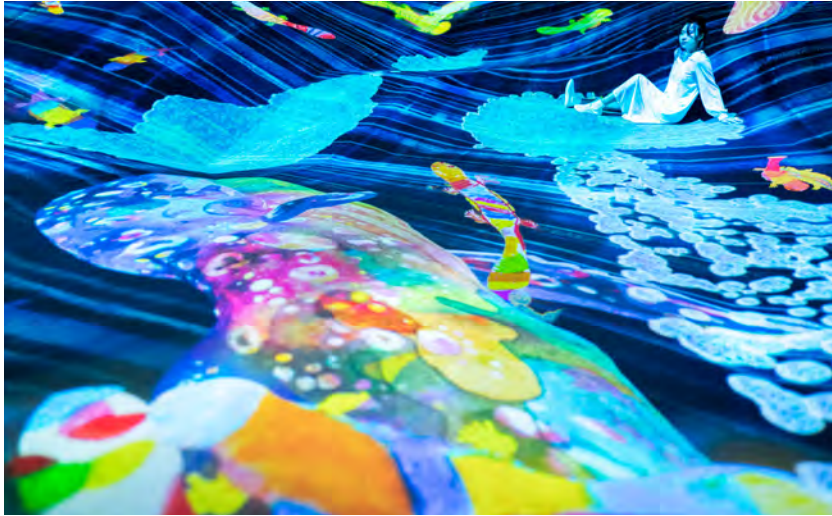
The concept is rooted in co-creation, where visitors' drawings of animals and plants are scanned and brought to life within a digital ecosystem. This interactive process allows participants to see their artwork become part of a living, evolving environment, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living things.

- TeamLab,
Art Collective



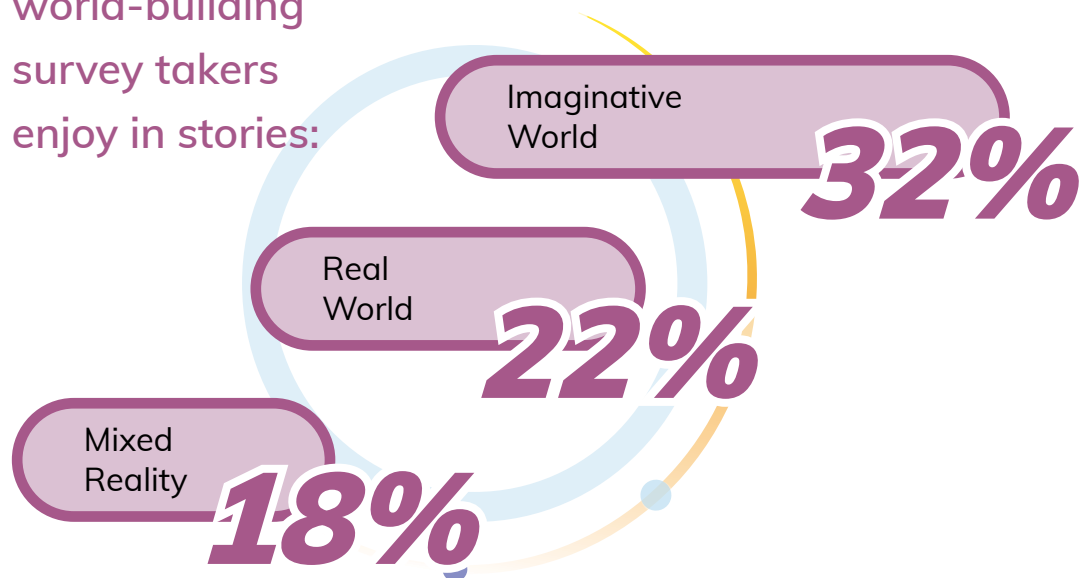
Furthermore, the emotional and ethical dimensions of Graffiti Nature elevate its impact. Many of the creatures featured are based on endangered species from the IUCN Red List, embedding real-world conservation concerns into a fantastical context. Users may begin by interacting for fun but often leave with a subtle yet powerful awareness of environmental fragility and interdependence. The artwork becomes

an educational platform, using experiential design to foster empathy and ecological consciousness. Through its seamless fusion of art, science, and technology, Graffiti Nature creates a deeply immersive narrative experience that resonates across age groups, cultures, and languages. It redefines storytelling as a system of interconnected choices, visuals, and emotions—where every participant becomes a co-author of a living digital ecosystem.



In essence, Graffiti Nature is a new form of participatory storytelling where authorship is decentralized and outcomes are ever-changing. It is not just a work of art to be viewed, but a world to be shaped. It encourages us to rethink the boundaries between artist and audience, story and system, nature and technology. The project exemplifies the future of interactive design and narrative thinking—where stories are not told to us, but with us.

Top 3 types of world-building survey takers enjoy in stories:



DIGITAL APP

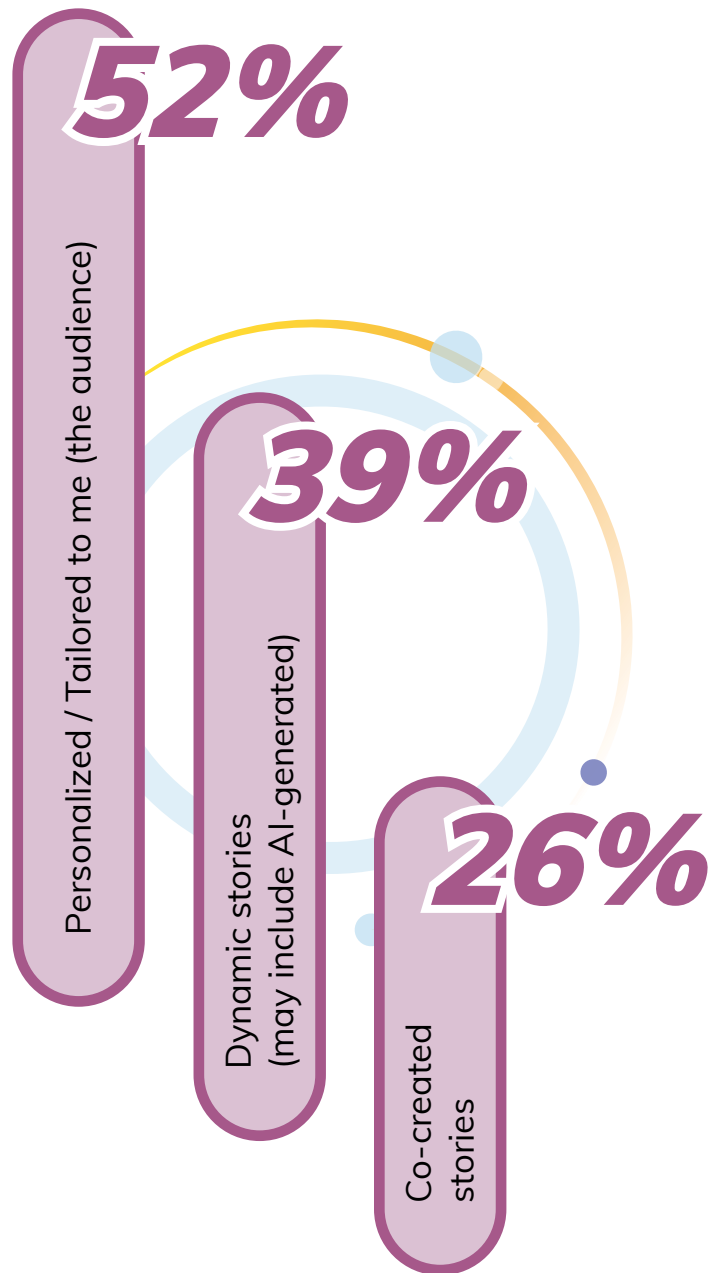
Play Disney Parks App

The Play Disney Parks app utilizes digital technology and guests' personal devices to expand visitor engagement and deepen their immersive experience of the parks. The app answers a question posed by Josh Gorin, an Executive Research & Development Imagineer at Walt Disney Imagineering: How do we let our Guests truly feel like they're in a new place, and that they have a role in that story?

Ordinarily, waiting in line is considered one of the most monotonous aspects of the theme park experience, a dreaded "deadzone." However, the Play Disney Parks app transforms this time into an opportunity for park guests to immerse themselves further in Disney's stories with active participation. While queuing, Space Mountain visitors can engage with a series of location-based puzzles through the app. Users explore symbols and props in the physical queue environment that unlock new narrative elements and gamify a former deadzone.

In Galaxy's Edge, the app turns the entire park into an interactive storytelling system in which the guests create personal avatars and express agency in their experience of the park. Guests select missions and make choices in the app. Each decision influences the direction of their unique narrative journey through the park. The way guests interact with physical props, choose story-driven tasks, and complete in-world activities cumulatively shapes a personalized story. As the guests'

Types of storytelling survey takers would like to experience in the future:





In a theme park, having complex relationships between characters helps keep the story world fresh and engaging, no matter how many times people visit.

- Bob Weis,
Author, Speaker, and Former President,
Walt Disney Imagineering

Your
Toy Story Mania
adventure begins with
Play Disney Parks.



Play Disney Parks
● Download now at
Disneyland.com/play

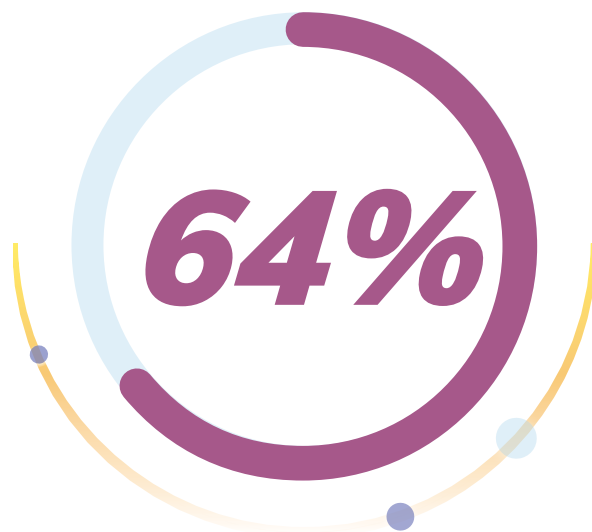
characters evolve, the world within the park responds to them. Each guest becomes the protagonist of their own unique experience.

The Play Disney Parks app also offers a rich, multi-sensory storytelling experience powered by digital technologies. Its music playback feature, for instance, allows guests to hear theme-specific tracks from Disney films or attractions based on their location, enhancing immersion. Augmented reality and QR code scanning connect virtual content directly to physical props throughout the park. This multimodal approach—blending audio, visuals, haptics,

and interactive interpretation—deepens the narrative experience and enables guests to follow personalized, memorable story paths.

The app supports thousands of guests engaging with individualized content simultaneously, all within the same physical space and using existing park infrastructure. Its digital platform allows for seamless updates, enabling storylines to evolve in real time without altering physical installations. Seasonal events, film releases, and special occasions can introduce fresh content, keeping the experience dynamic and relevant. This adaptability fosters continuous narrative development and encourages repeat visitation by offering something new with each return.

More than a companion tool, the Play Disney Parks app exemplifies the future of storytelling. By integrating digital narratives with physical environments, it transforms each guest into both a participant and a co-creator of the Disney park story. This fusion of technology and storytelling not only enhances engagement but also sets a precedent for how immersive experiences can evolve in entertainment spaces.



64% of survey respondents seek out stories that offer a multi-sensory experience.

THEME PARK

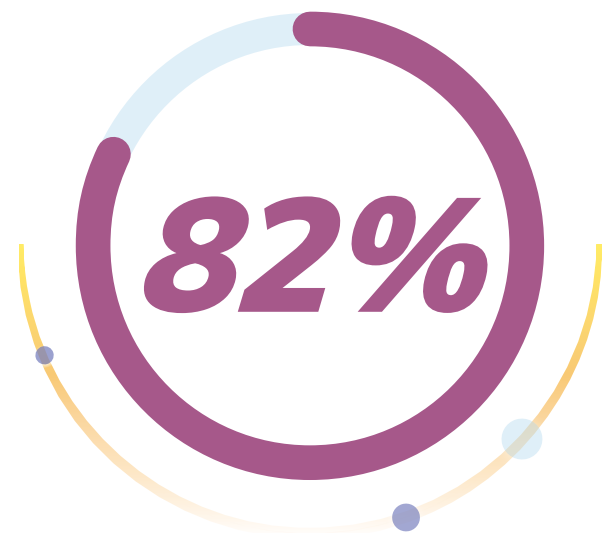
Harry Potter World

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort is a fully immersive themed environment inspired by J.K. Rowling's iconic book series and their subsequent film adaptations. This experience spans across three distinct areas in Universal Studios Florida, Islands of Adventure, and Universal Epic Universe.

Guests can experience the life of a wizard and explore different aspects of the story through themed restaurants, attractions, retail stores, interactive experiences, performances, rides, and attractions. The environments blend physical spaces with media and motion to create a multi-sensory, thrilling experience in which guests can even travel on the Hogwarts Express between Universal Studios Florida and Universal's Islands of Adventure Orlando.

Many visitors' experience of the immersive world of Harry Potter begins before they arrive at the park as they may have already engaged with the emotionally resonant source material and expansive online fandom. Fans have long sought to insert themselves into the Harry Potter world through the official website. There, they can discover their Hogwarts House, wand, and patronus— a spell which appears as a different animal for each witch or wizard. Some fans arrive at the The Wizarding World of Harry Potter already certain of their identity in this world which builds excitement, anticipation, and deepens their connection once they step into the park.

However, the park isn't just for the fans. Even those unfamiliar with the full story can enjoy the experience. The rides and attractions provide just enough context for guests to understand the adventure, making it accessible and exciting for everyone as they explore the halls of Hogwarts, ride Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, walk through Hogsmeade and enjoy a



of survey respondents enjoy experiences set in expansive worlds that encourage continued engagement—such as sequels, open-world games, extended universes, or immersive theme parks.



Storytelling will evolve to include: customization, auto generation of content based on any number of factors.

- Matthew Solari,
Vice President of Creative & Story for
BRC Imagination Arts

Butterbeer, or practice their spells at one of the many interactive wand stations throughout the World.

Both flying alongside Harry Potter on a broomstick or escaping from a dragon in Gringotts, guests engage in rich narratives in deeply immersive environments.

Interactivity is a key element of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which creates personalized experiences for

each guest. Whether on the rides or during the shows, you step into the role of a wizard within the magical realm. By utilizing interactivity, activating emotional connection, and allowing individual agency, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter elevates a theme park into an immersive and magical world and enables a deeper level of engagement with the story. Each visit is a unique experience which ensures guests come back to the park for more magic.



Meaning of world-building as interpreted by survey takers:

Stimulate imagination and creativity.

24%

Way to escape reality.

24%

Build emotional connection with characters.

23%

THEMED HOTEL

Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser

Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser is an unfortunate example of a story experience which, despite its promise of rich, varied immersion and the fulfillment of future story principles, ultimately failed.



This hotel-based story experience was only open for about 18 months. It was marketed as a three-day luxury stay in a Star Wars themed hotel at Walt Disney World with immersive gameplay and multiple possible storylines in which guests could become the hero of their own Star Wars story. In reality, guests had few chances to rest and even fewer opportunities to have a varied experience or express true agency.

Guest interactions with the story event occurred mainly through an app on their personal devices and some limited interaction with live actors, one alien and one droid. Unfortunately, the app did not always function properly and rarely affected the story. The Play Disney Parks app linked to both Galaxy's Edge and the hotel simply collected virtual stamps that did not actually impact the guest's progression inside their given narrative. Much of the three storylines, titled: Resistance, First Order, or Smuggler, were predetermined. Guests were particularly disappointed with the finale because, despite following ostensibly different storylines, the ending was universal and static. Some of the more active guests were acknowledged during the finale but a guest's participation was often dependent on how well their tech worked. Ultimately, Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser failed to empower guests with true agency and severely limited what was promised to be an immersive, varied experience.



*An experience has to truly
give the audience agency
and can't just be superficial.*

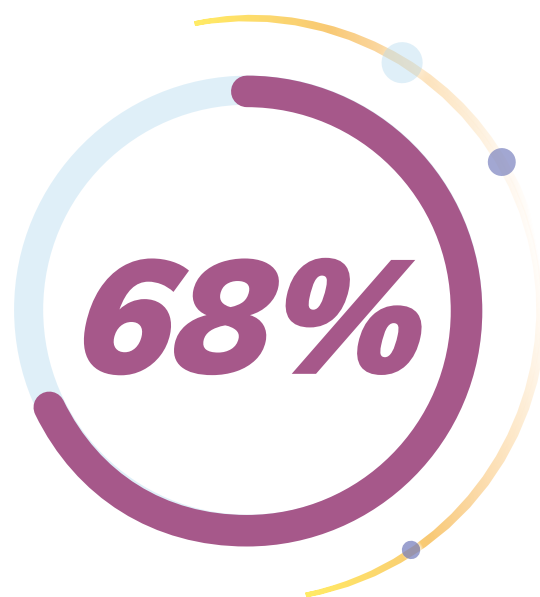
- Bob Weis,
Author, Speaker, and Former President,
Walt Disney Imagineering

Guest's agency and comfort was restricted before they arrived at the hotel and, for some, ended with cast members knocking on hotel room doors before check out to rush guests out of the experience. Guests waited in a 45-minute outdoor line just to board the Starcruiser. Once inside the experience, the app would determine a guest's storyline based on their initial actions. Guests were then given an exhaustive schedule of activities that spanned both the hotel and the Galaxy's Edge park, beginning as early as 8:40am (if guests wanted breakfast they had to plan to be up earlier) and might extend as late as 10:30pm. Most of the day's missions were app-based, involving scanning crates and following tasks through the phone. Finished missions received little to no acknowledgment. Guest satisfaction with activities was mixed and while some felt they didn't have enough time to rest and simply enjoy the space, many also felt there wasn't much to do to fill time. Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser effectively

provided only superficial chances for agency and interactivity while also restricting and disappointing their guests.

Guests paid roughly \$6,000 for their Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser experience, or about \$2 per minute during the active parts of the stay. After just six months, the hotel was running at half capacity. Staff hours were cut, and 18 months after opening, it shut down for good. Guests simply could not reconcile the cost with their experience.

Despite a promising concept, Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser failed because guests were never given anything approaching true agency or varied experience.



of survey respondents prefer storytelling experiences that focus on fictional or abstract worlds.

EMERGING TRENDS






Future storytellers will captivate audiences by offering varied experiences—immersive, multi-sensory stories that invite true agency and deeper personalization. Today’s consumers want to actively shape their experiences and explore outcomes that feel unique.


Advances in technology, especially general AI, are making this possible. While most interactive stories still offer limited choice, innovators like Operative Games are using generative AI to create responsive

characters and dynamic narratives. This shift promises more meaningful collaboration between consumer and story, though creators must also consider the ethical implications of these tools.

Regardless of technology, emotional impact remains key. Engaging multiple senses deepens connection and encourages repeat visitation. Stories that combine sensory richness, true agency, and personalization will define the most compelling and competitive storytelling of the future.

ACTION GUIDE

 <p>Embrace Tech for Hyper-Personalization</p>	<p>Take advantage of creative and technological innovations as they become available to craft collaborative, deeply specific stories for consumers</p>
 <p>Strive for True Agency</p>	<p>Responsibly build stories that offer consumers true agency by utilizing emerging technology</p>
 <p>AI Integration</p>	<p>Will become more integrated into the storytelling process as a means to enhance traditional techniques and methods</p>
 <p>Play on all Senses</p>	<p>Incorporate interactive elements of the story that affect several or all of a consumer’s available senses</p>
 <p>Retain a Passive Option</p>	<p>Provide an option for story consumers who wish to engage with innovative new stories, but prefer to be a passive observer</p>

A young child with dark hair is looking intently at a glowing, golden dinosaur skeleton. The skeleton is illuminated with a bright, warm light, contrasting with the cool blue tones of the child's face and the surrounding environment. The background is dark and filled with soft, out-of-focus lights, creating a sense of depth and immersion. The child's hands are visible in the foreground, reaching towards the glowing dinosaur. The overall atmosphere is one of wonder and discovery.

*The future of storytelling is immersive,
collaborative, and deeply personal.*

- Juliet Blake,
TV/Film Producer;
Head of Television for TED Talks



The future is going to be written by a new diverse group of storytellers... The diversity of storytelling is the future.

- Matthew Solari,
Vice President of Creative & Story for
BRC Imagination Arts




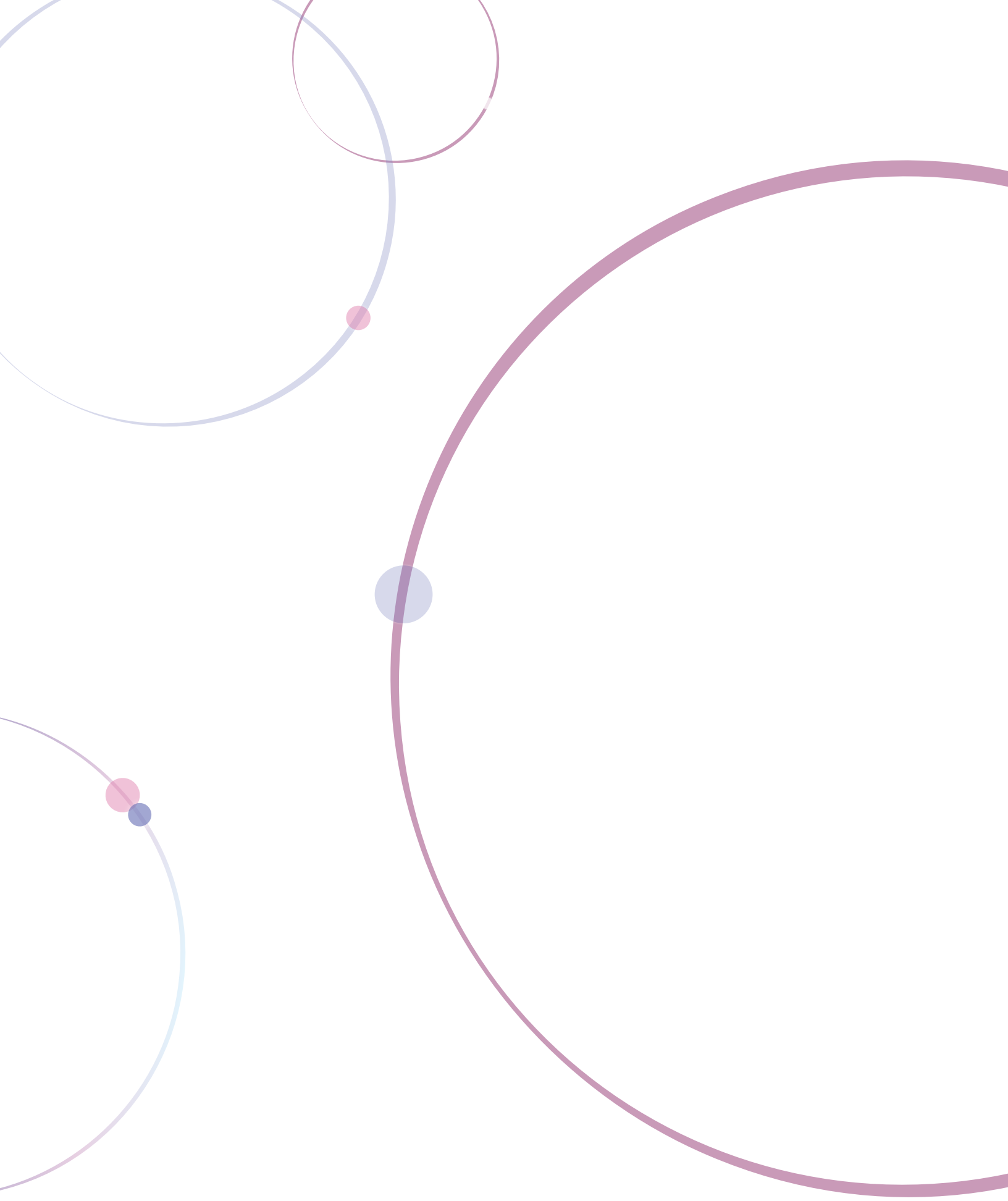
CONCLUSION

Story is timeless. It spans generations, societies, and mediums to connect people to each other, to cultures, and to themselves. Through emotional experience and interactive engagement, storytelling is one of humanity's most enduring tools to make meaning. Every story element —from multimodality to world building — holds the potential to foster connection, spark empathy, and activate memory.

As immersive technologies and human preferences evolve, storytelling becomes a space where audiences don't just receive stories but step into them. Stories are increasingly co-created through dynamic relationships between creators, audiences, and systems. This evolution invites varied experiences shaped by personal agency, multi-sensory interaction, and emerging technologies.

Looking forward, we envision a storytelling landscape where every individual can access a varied experience and build meaningful connections.





APPENDICES

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Appendix A: Research Methodology

- Raw Data Points
- SCADask Survey Responses
- Expert Interviews
- Case Studies

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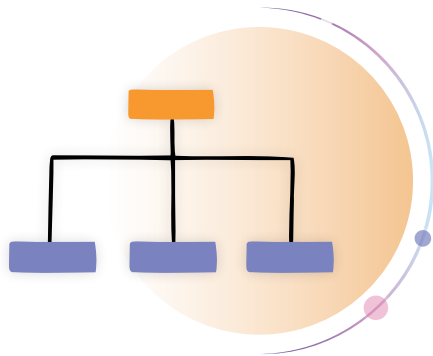
Appendix B: References

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Appendix C: Acknowledgments

- Research Team
- Experts
- SCAD & SCADnow Team

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



57,860
Raw Data Points



500+
SCADask Survey Responses



06
Expert Interviews



19
Case Studies



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p. 53	Image	Aruba, a Hewlett Packard Enterprise company. (2022, December 12). It's Out of This World: Aruba Unified Infrastructure Helps Power Walt Disney World® Resort's Newest Star Wars Vacation Experience [Press release]. Business Wire. https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20221212005117/en/Its-Out-of-This-World-Aruba-Unified-Infrastructure-Helps-Power-Walt-Disney-World-Resorts-Newest-Star-Wars-Vacation-Experience .
p. 54	Image	Schaben, Allen J. (2022, March 1). Image depicting First Order Stormtroopers patrolling through the Sublight Lounge aboard Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser. In Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser experience closing this fall at Walt Disney World Resort. Good Morning America. https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/travel/story/star-wars-galactic-starcruiser-experience-closing-walt-disney-world-99436756 .
p. 57	Image	JAHLIYA. (2025). A child interacts with a holographic dinosaur, blending technology and imagination in a vibrant, engaging environment [AI-generated image]. Adobe Stock. https://stock.adobe.com/images/1106942053
p. 58	Image	Dounonji. (2025). A child sits in awe surrounded by a myriad of glowing screens, immersed in a digital world of endless visual content [AI-generated image]. Adobe Stock. https://stock.adobe.com/images/1114158084

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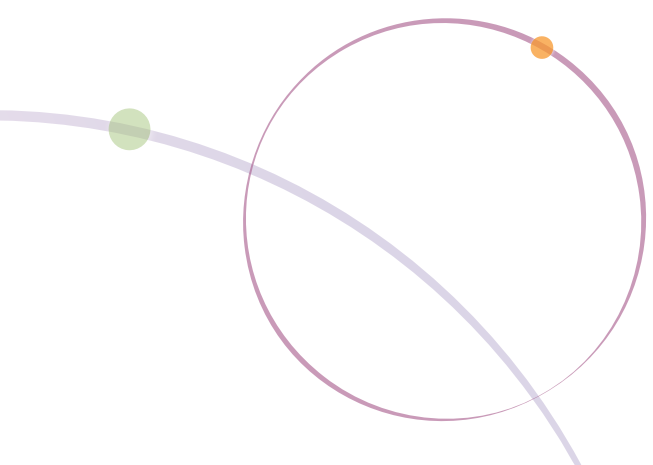
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SCADask

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