

Research Findings

# THE METAVERSE USE CASES FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION



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The metaverse is on the verge of transitioning from a futuristic vision to a concrete reality. This shift promises to revolutionize the way companies communicate and collaborate. A pioneering research project explored various use cases and the willingness of employees to adopt metaverse applications. The findings indicate that communication leaders must act decisively if they want to position themselves as frontrunners in this emerging field.



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## ENTERING A NEW ERA

Once confined to the pages of science fiction, the concept of the metaverse is now on the cusp of reality. Representing a new evolutionary phase of the internet extending into a three-dimensional realm (Smart et al., 2007), the metaverse will enable immersive experiences in virtual worlds through virtual reality (VR) technology, allowing interaction with people in the form of avatars. Moreover, augmented reality (AR) technology will enhance physical spaces, objects, and people by overlaying virtual information, thus creating a new layer of virtual existence within the real world. The concept of a metaverse goes far beyond standalone applications. It envisions an entire network of interconnected virtual worlds – a post-real universe where virtuality and reality increasingly merge (Mystakidis, 2022). Or at least, that’s the idea – because the metaverse doesn’t yet exist in this form.

*The metaverse will offer  
a unique avenue to make  
corporate messaging  
more palpable.*

Ever since the beginning of the discourse surrounding the metaverse, the communication profession has been abuzz with discussions on its relevance and potential applications. At first glance, the possibilities for internal corporate communications (Ruck, 2020) appear vast: from virtual town hall meetings and team gatherings to a three-dimensional intranet. As the work environment evolves towards greater hybridity, the metaverse will offer a unique avenue to make corporate messaging more palpable, facilitate change, and forge stronger connections among employees globally. It could thus emerge as a key tool in transcending the boundaries between screens and enhancing personal involvement, which is now more crucial than ever.

## EXPLORING MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

The implications of adopting the metaverse in this context were researched in a multi-method research project. Drawing on relevant literature as well as insights from two focus groups comprising internal communication experts as a first empirical study, a detailed framework was developed (Benz, 2024). This framework outlines the metaverse's potential, application scenarios, challenges, and conditions, all derived from the objectives and functions of internal communication. As the success of any new technology largely depends on the target audience's willingness to engage with it, this aspect was assessed through a second study – a representative online survey of private sector employees across Germany.

## POTENTIALS ENVISIONED BY COMMUNICATORS

The metaverse presents exciting opportunities for enhancing all aspects of internal communication (Fig. 1). The communication experts surveyed in the focus groups identified its most significant potential as fostering authentic social interaction in digital settings, thereby creating a robust sense of (social) presence. One expert stated in the focus groups: "When it comes to interdisciplinary collaboration, I also think about having creative spaces or new meeting places where people can meet and work together on topics, where I don't just put the ball pit and elaborately colorful furniture, but can also try out different scenarios".

This foundation paves the way for strengthening communal bonds, more effectively conveying corporate culture and values, positively influencing employee identi-

fication and dedication, and consequently enhancing the company's public image. Furthermore, the metaverse can improve motivation-boosting strategies – such as showing appreciation and offering constructive feedback – through the unique shared (spatial) experiences it provides.

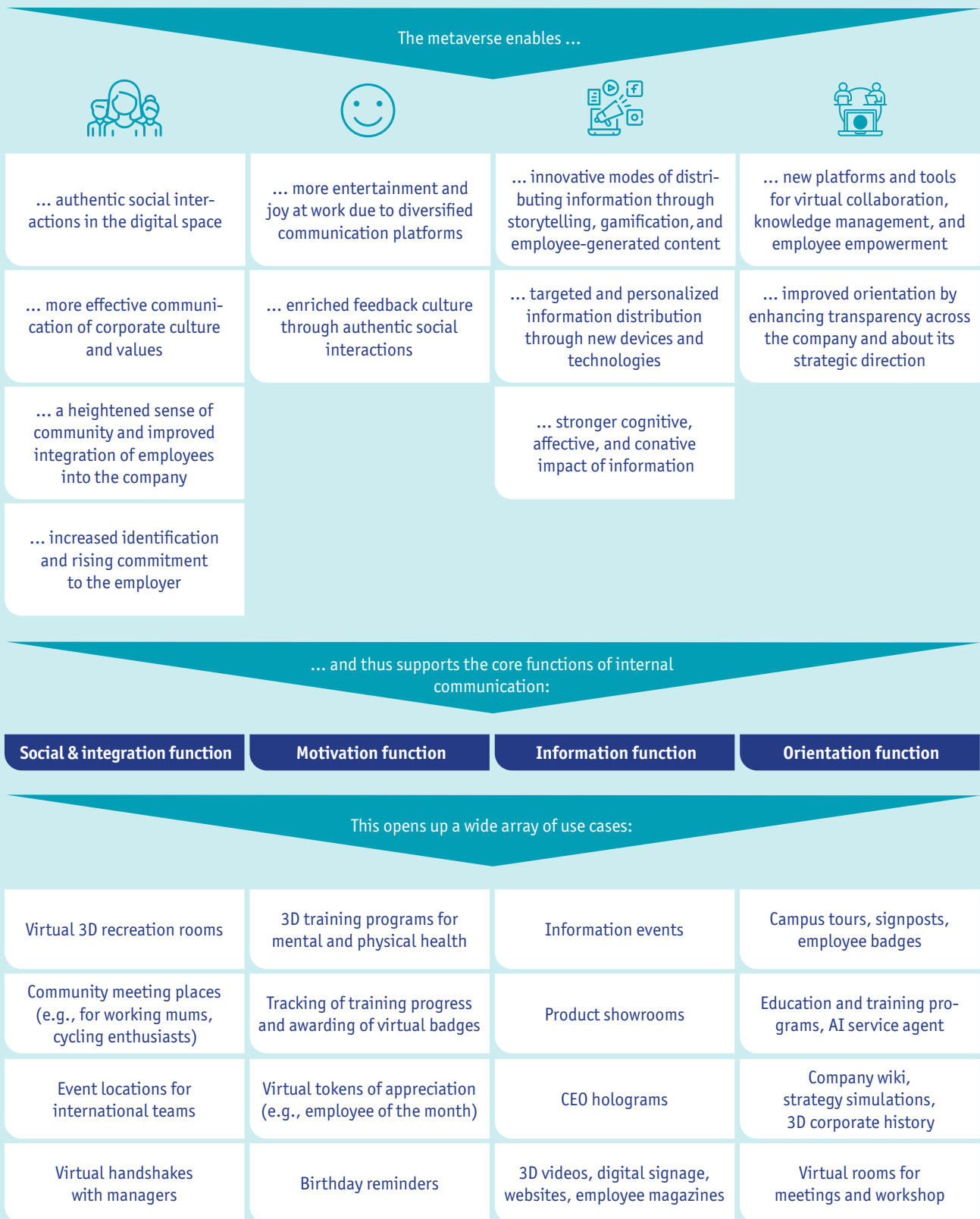
The inherently three-dimensional nature of the metaverse introduces innovative approaches to creating communication content, including digital storytelling, gamification, and employee-generated content. Diversifying content presentation can inject entertainment and fun into the workplace, boosting engagement with internal communication formats. Three-dimensional content design also amplifies the impact of information, with the potential to enhance knowledge transfer (cognitive), emotional engagement (affective), and employee activation (conative).

Moreover, the metaverse revolutionizes how content is distributed, allowing for the personalization of messages and their delivery to specific internal target groups through new devices and flexible technologies. For instance, white-collar employees might receive company news via VR headsets, while blue-collar employees could get the same information via holograms. This ensures equitable information access for all, regardless of where employees work.

*The metaverse can improve motivation-boosting strategies.*

The metaverse also enables better orientation within a company. New platforms for virtual collaboration, cross-organizational knowledge management, and initiatives empowering employees in digital realms are invaluable in the era of hybrid workplaces. The metaverse also promises greater transparency within companies, for example by offering virtual insights into various departments and teams, and providing a clearer picture of the company's strategic direction.

Fig. 1: Potentials & use cases for using the metaverse in internal communication



## USE CASES FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Leveraging its vast potential, the metaverse unfolds a plethora of use cases for internal communication (Fig. 1). Social interactions could be enhanced through the creation of virtual lounges, community hubs, or spaces designated for team gatherings. This is especially relevant for teams working across boundaries, as shown by another quote from the focus groups: “When it comes to innovations that really have global relevance and where employees perhaps also need to understand products that are a little more complex and complicated – this can be imagined as an important area of application.”

Innovative formats, such as digital handshakes with managers or virtual coffee chats with senior management, are also enabled using digital 3D spaces. Furthermore, the metaverse could host new offerings aimed at mental and physical wellness, including counseling sessions and fitness classes. Virtual awards for achievements or milestones as well as other appreciation measures like the virtual “Employee of the month” can foster motivation across distances. The metaverse enables informational events to be held such as town hall meetings, journal fixes, or all-hands meetings in virtual settings. Showrooms within the metaverse allow new products to be announced and even tried out.

Holograms present an opportunity to elevate internal CEO communications to a new level, authentically projecting the management team and their messages throughout the organization. Traditional print media – such as employee magazines, flyers, and poster – gain a new dimension of interactivity when enhanced with virtual elements. A navigable intranet, videos, digital signage, and websites could all be realized within the metaverse. Tools like immersive campus tours, virtual signposts, and AR employee badges can improve navigability and orientation within a company. Collaboration, training, and further education can be moved to metaverse-based meeting rooms and workshop spaces. Augmented service agents operated by artificial intelligence

or an AR company wiki can provide readily accessible information on the company or topics of internal communications. This reduces the informational load for employees and simplifies their access to information. Moreover, corporate strategy and history could be rendered into immersive experiences through simulations or digital storytelling.

## REQUIREMENTS AND RISKS

The deployment of any new technology, including the metaverse, must satisfy critical conditions, ensuring users’ mental and physical well-being, safety, privacy, and data protection while adhering to ethical, moral, and ecological standards. In the focus groups, an experienced communicator mentioned: “What do we do with people with visual impairments, hearing impairments and other medical conditions? [...] People at risk of epilepsy simply can’t wear these VR glasses. [...] That’s why I think it would be dangerous to use this as the default solution and the only possible way to communicate internally. Because the risk of losing a whole lot of people [...] is simply far too great. At the moment at least.”

*Potential risks remain due to the social dimension of new communication practices.*

These problems might be solved if the technology advances further. In the end, both the organization and its members must be ready and willing to embrace this new technology. Nevertheless, potential risks remain due to the social dimension of new communication practices. The introduction of a domain where virtuality and reality increasingly merge might overwhelm employees or blur the boundaries between their professional and private lives. The persona of an employee’s avatar in the metaverse may differ from the individual’s real-life character, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to real and virtual interactions.

From a management perspective, reservations about the metaverse might stem from a lack of in-company expertise, leading to outright rejection. These concerns need to be addressed proactively. Even then, there’s still the risk of alienating individuals due to limited accessibility or a poor cost-benefit ratio.

## ARE EMPLOYEES READY?

Despite the enthusiasm for the metaverse among communicators revealed in a first step, the feedback from employees surveyed in the second part of the research provide a more muted picture. A representative sample of 1,000 employees working in private sector companies across Germany was surveyed. The field work has been conducted by a market research company (Civey).

*Concerns about security, privacy, and data protection loom large.*

The majority of employees in German companies express clear reservations about adopting the metaverse for internal communication purposes (Fig. 2). While there is a notable willingness to engage in two of the metaverse application scenarios presented to the respondents (town hall meetings that include product

demonstrations and onboarding processes with virtual site tours), there is resistance to the widespread use of the metaverse in the workplace. Many employees see little value in employing the metaverse for core internal communication functions, like disseminating important information or facilitating casual interactions with colleagues.

The most useful functions to which the metaverse could be put are viewed as virtual collaboration and virtual training sessions – aspects which directly benefit the survey participants themselves. On the other hand, concerns about security, privacy, and data protection loom large, hindering widespread acceptance.

Fig. 2: What employees think about using the metaverse in internal communication



### PREREQUISITES

When would you consider using the metaverse for your work?

#### 44 % if it makes my work easier

- 18 % if necessary devices are comfortable
- 18 % if it is easy to use
- 15 % when it's fun to use
- 6 % if co-workers use it as well
- 4 % when the employer explains it well



### CHALLENGES

What potential problems are most likely to prevent you from using the metaverse?

#### 52 % Security, privacy, and data protection

- 23 % Unethical behavior of other users
- 22 % Physical or mental health risks
- 13 % Sustainability issues (e.g., energy use)
- 5 % Lack of barrier-free access



### USE CASES

For what purposes would the metaverse be most useful in internal communication?

#### 36 % Education & training

#### 31 % Virtual collaboration with co-workers

- 12 % Informal exchange with other colleagues
- 11 % Recruitment & training of new employees
- 11 % Information dissemination & discussion
- 7 % Speeches by top management or leaders
- 6 % Conveying the corporate strategy



### OPPORTUNITIES

What would you hope to gain from using the metaverse for internal communication?

#### 17 % More intensive knowledge transfer

#### 17 % Simplification of work processes

- 13 % Better communication with co-workers
- 12 % More diversified internal comms
- 7 % Increased motivation and engagement
- 4 % Better insights into the company

Source: Survey of 1,000 employees in German companies who are familiar with the metaverse (representative sample); multiple answers possible.

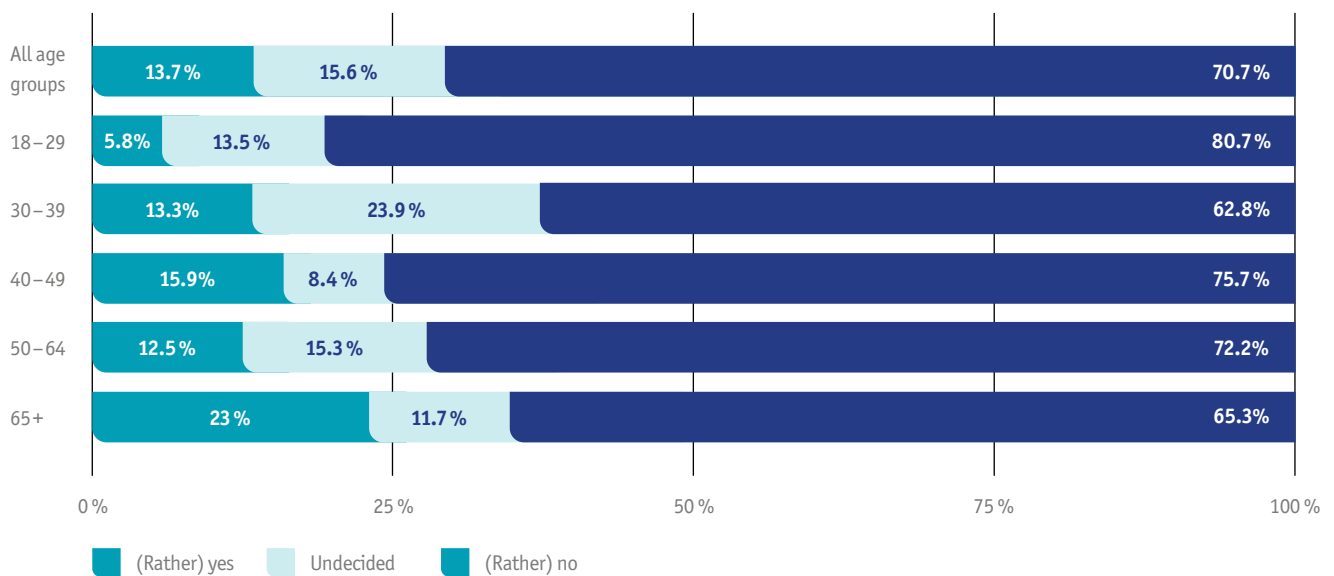
## SKEPTICISM AMONG YOUNGER EMPLOYEES

It's particularly noteworthy that skepticism towards the metaverse is most acute among the 18–29 age group, a demographic typically seen in other studies as more receptive to digital innovation (Fig. 3). This suggests that young people may be particularly wary of exacerbating their already high levels of media and information consumption. This reluctance could also

partly stem from unfamiliarity with AR and VR technologies and a limited ability to envisage their practical use. Herein lies an opportunity for communicators to develop the necessary skills in order to make the transition into the metaverse – where it offers genuine value – as seamless as possible.

**Fig.: 3 Attitudes towards the metaverse in internal communication across different age groups**

Would you like your employer to use the metaverse as a new technology for internal communication?



Source: Survey of 1,000 employees in German companies who are familiar with the metaverse (representative sample); multiple answers possible.

## OUTLOOK

Even though the metaverse might still be a few years from becoming an integral part of everyday internal communications, it's wise to start exploring its potential now. The framework outlined provides initial guidance for selecting appropriate use cases. It can serve as a roadmap for identifying and implementing poten-

tial pilot projects. In the interim, leveraging AR and VR technologies can help develop the required expertise among communication managers and employees ahead of time. By engaging with the concept of the metaverse today, individuals and organizations can take on a pioneering role in this future domain.

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**ABOUT** The research has been conducted by the first author at the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at Leipzig University under the supervision of the second author.



**MORE INFORMATION** An extensive description of the research project described in this article in German language can be found in the book by Larissa Benz (publication planned for 2024).



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