

K-Pop and Fortnite: The Revolution of Virtual Concert Experience

Elyse Jackson

Once COVID-19 reached American shores, many aspects of our daily lives began to change.¹ Many of us distanced ourselves from our families to protect others or switched to remote work for the first time. Classes were taught via Zoom and entertainment ventures were temporarily postponed. Although I understood the necessity of isolation, life became a monotonous routine of working and sitting around at home. Concerts and events I planned were promptly and appropriately canceled. That is, until entertainment companies introduced virtual concert experiences. With a good internet connection, a Zoom account to video chat with friends, and maybe twenty bucks for the ticket, you too could see your favorite artist(s) virtually! Many fans, including myself, quickly found ourselves immersed in the virtual concert experience from the comfort of our homes beginning with the Korean pop (K-pop) group Monsta X. No traffic, no hotel rooms, no crowds, no large expenses. Just music and fun.

Virtual and VR concert experiences have exploded since the days of quarantine.² Especially in K-pop, the lockdowns produced virtual concert experiences from groups like BTS, NCT 127, (G)I-dle and Twice.³ For many, this online experience was widely successful as BTS broke Guinness World Records from the success of their virtual concert experience called “Bang Bang Con.”⁴ It boasted the biggest audience for a paid virtual experience with 756,000 concert goers in attendance.⁵ With each ticket costing about \$33 for non-fan club members, HYBE (BTS’s label) made approximately \$18.8 million.⁶

You may be thinking that relative to an in-person experience, online concerts must be of significantly poorer quality. On the contrary, the online platform allowed for a great deal of creativity and performances that engages fans.⁷ BTS, for example, used CGI and XR effects to create the appearance of BTS on an elevator going up and stopping at different levels.⁸ Additionally, the use of AI has added an immersive virtual reality experience that adds realistic avatars, and interactive environments in the digital space.⁹ In other words, when concerts take place in the digital space, such as in video games or the meta verse, AI plays a tremendous role in creating an immersive fan experience. When the artists are physically performing but

¹ Stephen Schramm, Jack Frederick & Leanora Minai, *Three Years Later: How the Pandemic Changed Us*, DUKE TODAY (Mar. 8, 2023), <https://today.duke.edu/2023/03/three-years-later-how-pandemic-changed-us>.

² Ryan Faughnder, *What Zoom Fatigue? Pandemic Virtual Concerts May Have Changed Live Music Forever*, L.A. TIMES (June 24, 2021), <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2021-06-24/what-zoom-fatigue-virtual-concerts-may-be-here-to-stay>.

³ Lucy Jeong, *How BTS, Exo, (G)I-dle and NCT 127 Changed The Future Of Live Music: Covid-19 Forced K-Pop Concerts Online – Are In-Person Gigs A Thing Of The Past?* SCMP (Aug. 7, 2020), <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/news-trends/article/3096338/how-bts-exo-gi-dle-and-nct-127-changed-future-live>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Ikran Dahir, *BTS's Virtual Concerts Connected People On A Global Scale Not Seen Before The Pandemic*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Oct. 15, 2020), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ikrd/bts-map-of-the-soul-one-concert-experience>.

⁹ David Henkin, *Orchestrating The Future—AI In The Music Industry*, FORBES (Dec. 5, 2023, 12:00 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhenkin/2023/12/05/orchestrating-the-future-ai-in-the-music-industry/?sh=1d52de94f643>.

broadcasting live in the virtual space, AI has driven technologies such as smart cameras, lighting adjustments, visuals, and chat box monitoring.¹⁰ In the VR space, Oculus has partnered with performance like Billie Eilish to broadcast her performance at the Governors Ball in a 180-degree virtual experience.¹¹

The virtual concert experience does not end there. On the other end of the spectrum, holographic live performances can be enjoyed in physical spaces thanks to developments in AI.¹² For example, Dr. Dre created a hologram of Tupac for Coachella in 2012.¹³ This technology allows for the enjoyment of artists that have passed away or to enjoy artists that only exists in the virtual space.¹⁴ Artists like Hatsune Miku, a beloved Japanese performer and singer, does not exist in reality.¹⁵ She is a creation of a Vocaloid program that uses synthesizer technology to create human-like voices.¹⁶ She has a distinct physical appearance with long blue hair and technology integrated teal, black and silver uniform.¹⁷ Despite her virtual limitations, however, Hatsune Miku holds holographic concerts and is currently on tour sponsored by Crunchy Roll called the “Miku Expo”.¹⁸

Since the explosion of virtual concerts during lockdown, there has also been an emergence of concerts taking place in video games.¹⁹ Ariana Grande and Travis Scott held an interactive concert experience in Fortnite featuring new maps inspired by the artists and mini games for fans to interact within.²⁰ There were also many concerts held on Roblox with similar elements.²¹ Two companies called Digital Ocean and Cloudflare helped to pioneer the first virtual concerts by organizing the web infrastructure within server spaces.²² This is crucial, because before concerts can even begin, servers must be set up to accommodate the participants. The obvious downside to these experiences is that you do not actually see the artist, only the avatar of the artist made in the game. However, this helps to break down geographical and financial barriers that prevent many fans from concert experiences.

Some consider this level of connection to artists through AI and advanced technology to be reminiscent of “Black Mirror”.²³ It may seem rather chilling to be able to experience a concert online and see an avatar of your favorite artist or see actual performances mixed with virtual effects from the comfort of your home. While it may sound a little unreal, there are many advantages of virtual concerts.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Ashley France, *World Wide Web3 | Virtual Reality and AI Allow Music Fans to Experience Artists in a New Way*, REVOLT (Aug. 19, 2022), <https://www.revolt.tv/article/2022-08-19/187301/artificial-intelligence-virtual-reality-technology-in-the-music-industry/>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ CRYPTON FUTURE MEDIA, INC, https://ec.crypton.co.jp/pages/prod/virtualsinger/cv01_us (last visited Feb. 1, 2024).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ MIKU EXPO, <https://mikuexpo.com/about> (last visited Feb. 1, 2024).

¹⁹ Tom Regan, *From ‘Fortnite’ to ‘Roblox’: The Best In-Game Concerts Ever, Ranked*, NME (Aug. 20, 2021), <https://www.nme.com/features/gaming-features/fortnite-roblox-best-in-game-concerts-2021-3021418>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² Mat Ombler, *Are Video Games the Future of Live Music?*, NME (June 10, 2020), <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/are-video-games-the-future-of-live-music>.

²³ *Id.*

Some of the major advantages of having concert experiences virtually according to the *South China Morning Post* is “no queuing for toilets, no paying for overpriced drinks and in theory a show can’t be sold out...”.²⁴ Another key advantage is the use of AI generated CG effects that results in a blending of real and virtual elements that create a unique experience for viewers.²⁵ This produces a safe but immersive concert experience for fans at a significantly cheaper price than an in-person experience.

As technology rapidly advances and there are attempts to seamlessly integrate AI into the entertainment industry, it is of great significance that the entertainment industry considers all the pros and cons of virtual experiences. They must respond to issues as they arise and not discard them in favor of expanding avenues for profit. The meta universe has the potential for limitless creativity and growth but can also be the grounds of cyber warfare. There must be adequate safeguards in place to protect users and artists from the pitfalls of expansion in cyberspace. It is my hope that in the future, both virtual and in-person experiences will be streamlined for safe experiences for fans and spectators and will foster a new form of creativity in entertainment.

²⁴ Jeong, *supra* note 3.

²⁵ *Id.*