

ADVERTISING

Do 360-degree videos improve or detract from viewing experience?

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Screenshot from Mercedes-Benz 360-degree video

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Recent months have seen a proliferation of 360-degree videos, but how much does the technology actually do for consumers?

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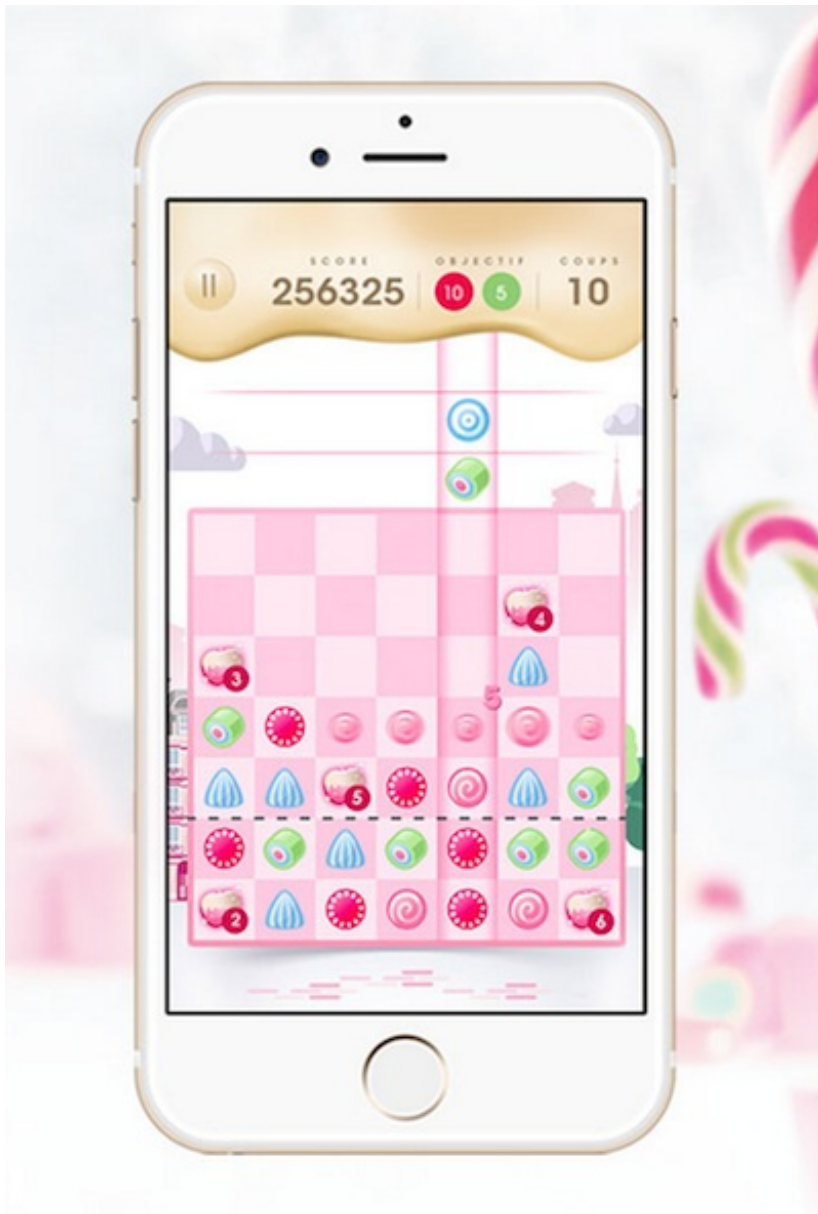
The videos, which allow the viewer to click-and-drag the mouse to see all-around the “camera,” are especially popular in the automotive industry but have also seen use among other brands, including luxury conglomerate LVMH and U.S. apparel label Michael Kors. At this point in time, however, the technology often feels like a gimmick rather than a fully integrated marketing tool.

World turning

Three-hundred-sixty-degree videos afford the viewer agency in viewing a video, but it often comes at the cost of a story and, paradoxically, engaging visuals. Viewers often engage with video because of the emotional pull they support and its predisposition to narrative storytelling, but those are the same qualities that are sacrificed in these videos.

While the appeal of videos is partly a result of the viewer’s passivity, the opposite can be seen in games, which appeal precisely because of the agency they allow the players.

Many brands, particularly retailers such as Harrods and fashion labels like Nina Ricci and Hermès are incorporating games into promotions knowing that the interactivity and agency given to the player will forge active bonds with the brands.



Les Délices de Nina mobile game

Unlike games, 360-degree videos do not give users objectives or goals, but they do not provide narratives like standard videos, either. A recent video posted on Mercedes-Benz' Facebook page allows viewers to look around the brand's showroom at Frankfurt, but turning mostly reveals architectural details of the showroom; cars are usually too far away in almost every direction to allow a better look.

Moreover, the camera is moved along the showroom at a pre-determined pace, with dissolves cutting every so often to new scenes, possibly before the viewer was done looking at everything.



Screenshot from Lexus 360-degree video

At the same time, despite being accosted in one direction, it is never clear if Mercedes is advertising a particular product. In an exceptional moment, the viewer is transported to the interior of a car, free to look around the much tighter space for several seconds.

It is in these moments where 360-degree videos are most useful, allowing a better visualization and feel for the room in a particular car than photographs provide. Perhaps for this reason, Bentley, in its video promoting the new Bentayga SUV, situates the user from within the car for the “test drive” and from within the hub, where clicking on different parts of the car reveal new information.

Still, the test drive portion, in which the car cruises seamlessly on the road, offers little to engage viewers.



Bentley Bentayga interior

A recent video from Jaguar is similar. It situates the viewer on the sidelines as the car races by, first on the road and then through a rollercoaster loop, but considering there is nothing to see all around, all the user can do is click-and-drag to keep the car in frame, and such a task feels more like a chore than an opportunity. Only the brief foray into the vehicle has obvious benefits.

Another key element of many games is that they give players the chance to control time and set their own pace. Videos do the opposite, bringing the viewer into its own time. By straddling the line between the two, 360-degree videos give the user both too much time and not enough.

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/RtoCUeiiNjY>

Jaguar 360-degree video

By turning the “viewer” into a “player” and granting the ability to walk around the Mercedes-Benz showroom, consumers would be discovering the brand on their own. Isn't that what all brands should want? At least as they stand now, 360-degree videos mistake agency for immersion.

Tech-savvy

Luxury automakers have made the most of other new technologies as they have become available.

For example, British automaker Bentley Motors is promoting its new Bentayga SUV with a new mobile application responsive to consumer emotion.

The “Inspirator” app shows a series of images ranging from beaches, surfing and yachting to music and dancing to chinaware and furniture to parties and discos in four separate chapters, using facial and emotional recognition technology to capitalize on the viewer's preferences as it goes on, generating a custom Bentayga for the viewer at the end. The app represents a technologically innovative and creative way for the brand to promote its new model ([see story](#)).

Brands in other sectors have also begun incorporating technologies that augment reality to sell products.

French fashion house Christian Dior is exploring the parallels between technology and couture with the introduction of in-store virtual reality headsets.

The LVMH-owned house worked with DigitasLBi Labs France using a 3D printer to develop its Dior Eyes experience. By placing Dior Eyes in a number of its boutiques, Dior will maintain its relevance as the retail landscape acclimates to the changes in consumer behavior and mobile readiness ([see story](#)).

Final Take

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