

# Investigating the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the metaverse as a marketing channel

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the mini-dissertation submitted herewith to the North-west University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree is my own original work. It has been text-edited in accordance with professional communication standards and has not been previously submitted to any other institution for evaluation purposes.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND RECOGNITIONS**

“Daniël, this one is for you”

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel. Qualitative research examines how well digital marketers understand and are ready to adopt the Metaverse, revealing a clear gap between basic awareness and the detailed knowledge needed for practical application. While the Metaverse is recognised for its potential to create innovative marketing strategies and open new revenue streams, the findings in this study highlight a need for a deeper understanding and strategic approach to integrating this virtual space into marketing plans.

The research also explores the fundamental understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and its key technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR), which are crucial for navigating the Metaverse. It also identifies significant barriers to adopting the Metaverse in South Africa, such as high data costs and issues with technology access, indicating that while there is a basic awareness, a structured approach, backed by specific knowledge and skill development, is vital to fully utilise its potential as a marketing channel.

In addition to highlighting the potentials and challenges in the Metaverse, the study also sets the stage for future research in this dynamic area. It emphasises the need for marketers to not only understand but also skilfully navigate the technologies and skills intrinsic to the Metaverse to fully unlock its marketing potential. Moreover, the study explores various ways the metaverse can be used, navigated and optimised in the marketing field, especially within South Africa's unique socio-economic context.

## **KEYWORDS**

Digital marketing; Marketing; Metaverse; Web 3.0; Marketing 5.0; Fourth Industrial Revolution; Digital marketers, South Africa; Augmented reality; Artificial intelligence

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# CHAPTER 1 – SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE STUDY

## 1.1. Introduction

The rapid pace of technological advancements has had a profound impact on the field of marketing. The digital revolution has transformed the traditional relationship between organisations and consumers. Yet, many companies still need to fully appreciate its implications (Wind & Mahajan, 2002:53). Marketers must change with the times as new goods and services emerge faster than customers can even buy them (Alin, 2019:114; Ferreira, 2022).

Marketing 4.0 marked a significant shift towards digital marketing and automation, enabling companies to connect with consumers globally and enhance communication technologies (Yikilmaz, 2020:149-151). This transition also shifted towards customer-oriented and value-based marketing approaches (Yikilmaz, 2020:148). With the emergence of marketing 5.0, the focus has shifted towards the application of human-mimicking technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), Natural Language Processing (NLP), sensors, robotics, augmented and virtual reality, the Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain (Kotler, 2021:6). The combination of these technologies enabled by the Metaverse offers a new frontier for marketers to create, communicate, deliver and enhance value across the customer journey (Mileva: 2021).

The Metaverse can be defined as a virtual world where people can communicate with computer-generated objects and each other as avatars in a space that supports virtual reality (Park & Kim, 2022:4211; Gadekallu *et al.*, 2022:1). Users from all over the world can view it, and any changes made to the Metaverse map can be seen by everyone no matter where they are (Zallio & Clarkson, 2022:2). The Metaverse is not only a new form of marketing but a new way of living, shopping, gaming and social interaction, which many organisations, including Nike, McDonald's and Snoop Dogg have already embraced (Kotler, 2021:6).

The Metaverse is partially introduced in South Africa, but South African digital marketers must prepare themselves. This study aims to determine what digital marketers in South Africa know about the Metaverse, whether they know how to

embrace this new technology and whether they are ready to adapt to this new marketing channel. This study wants to establish what is needed to prepare digital marketers in South Africa for the future of marketing in the Metaverse.

## **1.2. Background to the study**

Several research papers and articles have provided insight into the Metaverse (Ludlow & Wallace, 2007:2; Kiong, 2022:22; Mileva, 2021). Yet not much focus has been placed on implementing the Metaverse in South Africa, nor the extent to which the Metaverse will affect a digital marketer's marketing strategies.

The Metaverse is an old term that brings new opportunities to the marketing world. It was first mentioned in 1992 by Neal Stephenson in his novel *Snow Crash*. Stephenson wrote about a day when we would log on to 3-D virtual spaces via the Internet, travel about in it, and conduct business and other essential parts of our daily routines (Ludlow & Wallace, 2007:2; Kiong, 2022:22).

The term "Metaverse" encompasses a broad spectrum of interconnected virtual environments, each with its own unique characteristics and functionalities. Therefore, a more nuanced and comprehensive exploration of the Metaverse's multifaceted nature is essential. It is crucial to emphasize that the Metaverse is not merely an established "marketing channel" but a dynamic and evolving digital ecosystem with profound implications for various industries, including marketing. Future research should consider adopting a more comprehensive and multidimensional framework for conceptualizing the Metaverse, accounting for its diverse dimensions, technological components, and social dynamics. This approach will contribute to a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the Metaverse's role in the marketing landscape and its potential for transformative impact.

If the term Metaverse has been around for a while, why have South African digital marketers been so slow to adapt to the opportunities this channel has to offer?

### 1.3. Literature review

The field of digital marketing is undergoing tremendous evolution, with firms competing for consumers' attention in their networks by strategically distributing high-quality content at optimal times (Bulunmaz, 2016:349). Consumer behaviour has also changed significantly, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with people now shopping, working, playing and learning online (Kaur and Gupta, 2021:1; Mileva, 2022). Traditional marketing methods should be improved and organisations must adapt to the digital era to remain relevant.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), or Industry 4.0, has transformed how companies operate and interact with customers. This revolution encompasses the adoption of advanced technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT)<sup>1</sup>, artificial intelligence (AI)<sup>2</sup>, and blockchain<sup>3</sup>, to name but a few (Sikder *et al.*, 2021:52-53). Marketing 4.0 transitioned from conventional to digital marketing, enabling enhanced automation and communication technologies (Yikilmaz, 2020:149-151). As companies initially underestimated the digital revolution's impact on marketing strategies, marketing has become more customer-oriented, value-focused and virtual reality-based (Yikilmaz, 2020:148). This revolution has led to significant transformations in business operations, including marketing. Marketing 5.0 is an approach that focuses on creating a human-centric customer experience and leveraging the latest technologies to deliver personalised, meaningful interactions (Kotler *et al.*, 2019). The 4IR has enabled marketers to collect vast amounts of data on consumer behaviour and preferences, which can be analysed to create more personalised and relevant marketing campaigns (Huang and Rust, 2021:36).

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<sup>1</sup> IoT is defined as the interaction and massive data exchange between machines and objects. Therefore, from a technological standpoint, the Internet of Things is described as smart devices interacting and exchanging messages with objects, surroundings, and other machine infrastructures, leading to the generation of large amounts of data and the processing of that data into practical acts that have the ability to "command and control" situations and greatly ease human life (Karimi & Atkinson, 2013:2)

<sup>2</sup> The ability of a machine to think, communicate, and function independently in both familiar and unfamiliar situations in a way to a person that is known as artificial general intelligence in the modern vernacular (Du-Harpur *et al.*, 2020:183).

<sup>3</sup> Blockchain is a cutting-edge database technology that serves as the foundation for almost all cryptocurrencies. Blockchain achieves a high level of security by dispersing identical copies of a database throughout a network, hence significantly impeding hacking or fraudulent activities (Rodeck & Curry, 2022).

As such, Industry 4.0 has paved the way for Marketing 5.0 to thrive, as businesses can now utilise advanced technologies to create a more seamless and personalised customer journey (Kotler *et al.*, 2019).

Marketing 5.0 is the next phase of marketing, encompassing human mimicking technologies such as AI, natural language processing (NLP), sensors, robotics, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), the IoT and blockchain (Kotler, 2021:6). A combination of these technologies enables Marketing 5.0, which is centered on creating, communicating, delivering and enhancing value across the customer journey. Kotler (2021:6) describes Marketing 5.0 as providing customers with a seamless, personalised experience that mimics human interactions.

Marketing 5.0 and the metaverse present a powerful combination that can help organisations connect with customers more profoundly, building lasting relationships that transcend the physical world (Singh *et al.*, 2022:3625). The Metaverse, a virtual world where people can interact with each other and digital objects in real-time, presents a unique opportunity for marketers to create immersive experiences that transcend physical limitations (Ball, 2021). By leveraging the Metaverse, organisations can create interactive environments that allow customers to engage with their products and services in new and exciting ways. This can include everything from virtual product demonstrations to branded events and experiences occurring entirely within the Metaverse (Hadi *et al.*, 2023:16; Barrera and Shah, 2023:1).

The emergence of the Metaverse, highlighted by Facebook's recent rebranding to Meta, has gained significant attention and is seen as a game-changer for the industry (Lopez-Diez, 2021:299; Kiong, 2022:10). The Metaverse is a virtual shared space where users can create their avatars, build homes and businesses, attend meetings and classes, raid 3-D villages and engage in various real-life and impossible activities (Srushti IMX, 2021).

Marketers are flocking to the Metaverse because it offers a new way of targeting their audiences and presents opportunities to reach new customers, improve customer confidence and explore new revenue streams (Faridani, 2021; Mileva, 2022). With the

Metaverse set to revolutionise various industries, including entertainment, health, advertising and business, organisations that fail to adapt, risk being left behind (Lopez-Diez, 2021:299; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023:752).

To create these customer experiences, digital marketers must adapt to a new way of thinking about marketing. The concept of the Metaverse, a virtual world that is fully immersive and persistent, is rapidly gaining popularity among digital marketers across the world as a potential new frontier for advertising and consumer engagement (Singh *et al.*, 2022:3626). With the Metaverse, marketers can create branded spaces and experiences that go beyond traditional advertising formats, allowing consumers to engage with their products and services in ways that are more interactive and immersive (Ahn, *et al.*, 2023:162). This presents a unique opportunity for marketers to develop new, innovative campaigns that capture attention and drive real engagement and loyalty (Barrera and Shah, 2023:12)

As the Metaverse continues to evolve, we will likely see more and more digital marketers exploring its potential as a powerful new platform for digital advertising and customer engagement (Ahn *et al.*, 2023:165).

#### **1.4. Problem statement**

The literature study indicated that the Metaverse has been around for the past two decades and users have moved through web1.0 and web2.0 to web 3.0, and marketing has evolved from marketing 1.0 to marketing 5.0, bringing about new technologies, opportunities and ways to connect consumers with organisations. One of these opportunities is the Metaverse.

Metaverse marketing is a broad term and although the term emerged in 1992, it seems like South Africa is only starting to pick up on the tech trend since Mark Zuckerberg announced the name change of Facebook to Meta in October 2021 (Lopez-Diez, 2021:299; Kiong, 2022:10). Given the Metaverse's intricacy and the early stages it is in, the question is whether South African digital marketers understand what it is and have the knowledge to adapt to this new marketing channel? The Metaverse, as noted in the literature review, is introducing new opportunities for digital marketers to link

customers to their brand therefore, they must be prepared and updated (Malinga, 2022).

The importance of incorporating the Metaverse into a marketing strategy is emphasised by its ability to unlock novel sources of income for firms. The Metaverse serves as a novel platform that provides an innovative channel to effectively engage potential consumers, resulting in increased brand visibility and reach (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023:754). This statement is not only hypothetical; it is supported by the actual conduct of noteworthy South African organisations. MTN and the advertising and marketing agency M&C Saatchi Abel have been at the forefront of introducing the local corporate sector to the Metaverse, representing a clear move towards this emerging marketing frontier (Malinga, 2022).

*With this background, the following research question can be asked: To what extent are digital marketers in South Africa ready to adapt to the new marketing channel called the Metaverse?*

## **1.5. Research objectives**

### **1.5.1 Primary objective**

In line with the problem statement, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel.

### **1.5.2 Secondary objectives**

To achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives are set:

1.5.2.1 To investigate what the term Metaverse means and how the Metaverse can be used as a marketing channel.

1.5.2.2 To determine what technology and skills South African digital marketers will need to implement marketing strategies through the Metaverse marketing channel.

## **1.6. Research question**

To what extent are digital marketers in South Africa ready to adapt to the new marketing channel called the Metaverse?

To achieve the primary research question, the following secondary questions are set:

6.1.1 What do digital marketers understand under the term Metaverse, and can the Metaverse be used as a marketing channel?

6.1.2 What technology and skills might South African digital marketers need to effectively implement marketing strategies within the Metaverse as marketing channel?

## **1.7. Scope of the study**

### **1.7.1 Field of study**

The focus of this study is on the topic of Marketing and Technology Management. Given that the Metaverse is a technology-driven platform widely utilised in marketing, it is important to seek consultation from various experts to explore different domains.

### **1.7.2 Sector under investigation**

This research primarily focuses on the combination of Marketing and Technology Management. The Metaverse as a developing platform represents the combination of cutting-edge technology with inventive marketing tactics. To fully understand the Metaverse and its marketing potential, it is essential to thoroughly examine both its technological complexities and its implications for marketing. Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly explore both domains to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, as they are inherently connected.

### **1.7.3 Geographical demarcation**

The geographical demarcation of the study is Gauteng. The researcher will focus on digital marketers working for companies in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

## **1.8. Research design and methods**

A literature review and an empirical study was conducted to answer the primary research question. The literature review will focus on the Metaverse as a marketing channel, followed by empirical research, focusing on whether digital marketers in South Africa are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel.

This study is investigative because there has yet to be researched on whether South African digital marketers are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a new marketing channel. Investigative research is linked to qualitative research and this study will use a qualitative research method, namely semi-structured interviews (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:102).

### **1.8.1 Literature study**

The literature review will concentrate on investigating the secondary data gathered for this study. The secondary analysis will concentrate on prior research regarding Digital Marketing, Marketing 5.0, web 3.0, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the Metaverse. No study has been undertaken to examine the preparedness of South African digital marketers to embrace the Metaverse as a marketing platform.

The following databases were consulted: Sabinet, EBSCOHost: Academic Research Premier, Communication & Mass Communication Complete, Econlit, SACat, Internet search engines and the Ferdinand Postma catalogue. There was sufficient information available to complete this study.

The literature study aims to give theoretical context to the study so that there is a foundation from which the study can be conducted. The objective of the literature

study is to give clear context on digital marketing, marketing 5.0, the Metaverse and how these can contribute to a marketing channel for South African digital marketers.

### **1.8.2 Empirical study**

The empirical study will follow an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative methodology. The research will be done through qualitative semi-structured interviews with South African digital marketers located in Gauteng, specifically in Johannesburg and Pretoria (see Appendix B).

The following will be discussed as part of the empirical investigation for this study. Research paradigm, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, and data collection and analysis techniques.

### **1.9. Ethical considerations**

The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) is a critical ethical consideration to keep in mind. All participants must give permission to participate in the study, be aware of the reason for the study, and know that their data will be dealt with confidentially and not be shared with anyone except with the researcher and the NWU Potchefstroom. The researcher ensured that participation in the study was voluntary, informed participants about the study's objectives, assured them of the study's harmlessness, and clarified that the data collected would be the property of North-West University.

The researcher will contact different companies to gain permission for access to the companies' digital marketers. The topic is not sensitive and the researcher will ensure that consent is given by each participant participating in the semi-structured interviews as required by the POPI Act.

There will be no conflict of interest between the participant and the researcher, as the researcher will use snowball sampling, using her network contacts but not knowing these participants individually.

### **1.10. Contribution**

**Theoretical:** Very few studies have been done on combining the Metaverse and marketing opportunities. This paper will contribute to the marketing field, focusing on the Metaverse, specifically in South Africa.

This study aims to explore the Metaverse as a marketing channel; a contribution can be made to the field of marketing with new suggestions for marketing.

**Practical:** This study will also contribute to the researcher's organisation. The researcher is part of a marketing division, looking for and investigating new marketing tools to stay updated on recent trends and marketing channels like the Metaverse. This research will enhance marketing by offering practical instructions and tips for utilising the Metaverse.

**Industry:** This study will contribute to the marketing field. After this study is conducted, there will be a good indication of the overall knowledge South African digital marketers have of the Metaverse. It will be apparent if digital marketers in South Africa plan to include the Metaverse in their marketing strategy and what technological knowledge is needed for digital marketers to use the Metaverse as a marketing channel.

### **1.11. Limitations of the study**

A limitation of the research is the limited quantity of data and studies carried out on the Metaverse, specifically concerning its incorporation into the marketing world. One area that needs development in the study is the participants' lack of knowledge of the concept of the Metaverse, as well as their limited expertise in using it as a marketing platform. This constraint narrows down the scope of responses collected in the semi-structured interviews.

The study's sample size can be seen as a limitation of the study as only a few semi-structured interviews will be held in the presented time frame. This study will also represent self-reported data. Self-reported data is always limited because it can rarely

be independently verified (Sacred Heart University, 2020). Therefore, it cannot be generalised.

Permission and consent are other significant limitations to the study should organisations not permit research to be done at the proposed organisations.

The topic presents an opportunity for a more in-depth and methodologically sound investigation into an exciting construct that holds immense potential for marketing and other areas of management practice.

## **1.12. Layout of the study (Chapters)**

### **Chapter 1 – Scope and nature of the study**

This chapter is the research proposal, giving the reader a brief overview of the study, what the study is about and what to expect reading through the dissertation.

### **Chapter 2 – Literature study**

This chapter will focus on the secondary data used for the study. Chapter 2 will discuss each construct identified to answer the primary research question.

### **Chapter 3 – Research methodology**

Chapter three will discuss the empirical investigation for this study including amongst other things the research paradigm, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, and data collection and analysis techniques.

### **Chapter 4 – Empirical study: Qualitative data analyses**

Chapter four will focus on giving the reader a detailed review of the results of the qualitative research, analysing and interpreting the interviews to answer the primary research question.

### **Chapter 5 – Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter will answer the primary research question, conclude the study, and recommend further marketing and information technology research.

## **1.13 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Chapter 1 establishes a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of marketing in the wake of technological progress and the digital revolution. It articulates how the progression from traditional marketing practices to the digital-centric paradigms of Marketing 4.0 and subsequently, Marketing 5.0, has underscored the necessity for marketing approaches that are not only customer-focused but also imbued with value, facilitated by the advent of advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and notably, the Metaverse.

The Metaverse, emerging as a frontier beyond conventional marketing channels, offers an immersive and interactive environment that fundamentally transforms how consumer engagement and brand interaction are conceived. This chapter aims to probe into the preparedness of South African digital marketers in leveraging the Metaverse, emphasizing the critical need for an in-depth understanding and strategic integration of this novel platform into their marketing endeavours.

The examination of the Metaverse's role in the context of South African marketing unveils a realm filled with potential yet confronted with the necessity for enhanced awareness, comprehension, and adept incorporation of this emerging technology within marketing strategies. As the Metaverse redefines digital interactions and consumer connections, it places South African marketers at a crucial crossroads, necessitating an anticipatory stance towards learning, skill enhancement, and innovative thought.

This initial chapter thus sets the stage for the subsequent research, shedding light on the pivotal confluence of technology and marketing, the transformative capabilities of the Metaverse, and the urgent need to equip South African digital marketers for the impending realities of marketing within this novel virtual domain. The insights established herein will act as a pivotal reference point for navigating the complexities

and seizing the opportunities presented by the integration of the Metaverse into effective and progressive marketing strategies.

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE STUDY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter delves into the exploration of the Metaverse, a concept that has been gaining significant attention in the digital marketing world. The aim is to provide an understanding of the Metaverse and its potential implications for digital marketing. The chapter is structured around several key themes and topics central to this study.

The first section provides an overview of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), explaining its significance and how it paved the way for the emergence of the Metaverse. It examines the integration of intelligence and networking systems, the fusion of technologies, and the rise of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies.

The second section introduces the concept of Marketing 5.0, a new marketing approach that utilises advanced technologies to create, communicate, deliver and enhance values across the customer journey. It discusses how Marketing 5.0 and the Metaverse are intertwined, focusing on creating meaningful customer experiences and interactions.

The third section explores digital marketing, discussing its role and importance in today's digital age. It further explores the role of digital marketers in the Metaverse, the challenges they may face and the opportunities it presents. This section will also help identify the skills that digital marketers need to succeed in the Metaverse. By reviewing the literature on this topic, the researcher can identify the essential skills and competencies being prioritised in the industry.

The fourth section provides a detailed exploration of the Metaverse, discussing its definitions, attributes and the technology behind it. It also examines the readiness of South Africa to adapt its marketing to fit into the Metaverse. The literature review will provide insights into the readiness of South Africa to adapt its marketing strategies to align with the Metaverse, helping to understand the current state of readiness in South

Africa and identify potential barriers and opportunities for adopting the Metaverse in the country.

The final section discusses the new skills that digital marketers need to adapt to the Metaverse. It emphasises the need for adaptability, and developing new skills and strategies to be an effective marketer in this immersive virtual world.

This literature review furthermore aims to inform future research by identifying gaps in the current literature, shaping the research objectives and questions to address them, and ensuring that the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge and has practical implications for digital marketers.

## **2.2 Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) presented significant technological developments at an unprecedented pace. Over a relatively brief span, society has transitioned from utilising dial-up internet connections to enjoying unlimited and on-demand access to the internet (Cloyd, 2022).

The 4IR is a term used to describe the current era of advanced technology transforming global business (McKinsey & Company, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023). 4IR is distinguished by the merging of the physical, digital and biological realms, facilitated by smart analytics, automation and manufacturing technology (McKinsey & Company, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023; Yoon, 2017:75; Lee and Meng, 2020:417-418). According to Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, this interconnectedness blurs the boundaries between the physical, digital and biological domains (Park, 2016:1). For more than 40 years, Professor Klaus Schwab has been at the forefront of world affairs as the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum (Xu *et al.*, 2018:90; Prisecaru, 2016:58). He is certain that a revolution is just getting underway and it will drastically alter how we interact, live and work (World Economic Forum, 2023). The 4IR extends the advancements made in the previous three industrial revolutions. Previous industrial revolutions liberated humankind from animal power, enabled mass production, and gave billions of people access to digital technology (Davis, 2016:1). But this 4IR is profoundly different. A

variety of new technologies that are integrating the physical, digital and biological worlds, affecting all disciplines, economies and sectors, and even questioning notions of what it is to be human are what define it (World Economic Forum, 2023; Yoon, 2017:75). According to Zhang (2014), Industry 4.0, also referred to as the 4IR, is the combination of networking and intelligence systems. Industry 4.0 has developed as a viable technological framework in recent years that expands manufacturing processes and responds to the demand for industrial informatisation. According to Xu *et al.* (2018:2942), this integration has boosted industrialisation and manufacturing digitisation, increasing efficiency, competency and competitiveness. Industry 4.0 links people and technology through digitalisation (Xu *et al.*, 2018:90). The effects on businesses are profound and established companies must change their approach to work.

Some of the prominent features that characterise the 4IR are connectivity by integrating physical and digital systems, exemplified by the Internet of Things (IoT) and cloud computing (Iberdrola, 2023; Lee and Meng, 2020:419); advanced analytics, including artificial intelligence (AI) and cognitive computing, to scrutinise vast data and generate predictive insights (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Iberdrola, 2023); automation to optimise operations and enhance operational efficacy (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Iberdrola, 2023); and modern manufacturing technology, including 3-D printing and cyber-physical systems, to generate novel products and services (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Iberdrola, 2023).

The anticipated impact of the 4IR on various industries is predicted to be significant. However, this transformation may vary depending on the specific technologies being implemented (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The 4IR encompasses intelligent and interconnected machinery and systems, and it is pursuing a more inclusive future based on human needs (World Economic Forum, 2023).

4IR is defined as integrating several technologies, including AI, robotics and the IoT, which profoundly impact our lifestyles and professional endeavours (Schwab, 2016). The Metaverse on the other hand, conversely denotes a collectively experienced digital environment that may be accessed over the internet, presenting novel

prospects for social engagement, commercial transactions and recreational activities (Singh *et al.*, 2022:3626).

The 4IR and the Metaverse are inherently interconnected as emergent technologies. To have a comprehensive understanding of the Metaverse, it is necessary to first comprehend the concept of Industry 4.0. The 4IR represents a significant transformation in our lifestyle, employment and social engagement. This marks the beginning of a new age in human progress, propelled by technology developments that are on par with the first three industrial revolutions (World Economic Forum, 2023; Yoon, 2017:75; Davis, 2016:1). In this setting, the Metaverse is positioned to encompass Industry 4.0, integrating our physical, digital and biological identities (Kang & Kim, 2018:2367). Convergence is crucial for the development of future methods of accessing and communicating information (Multiverse, 2021). The Metaverse functions as the virtual domain of Industry 4.0, facilitating the remote supervision and management of tangible objects. The Metaverse is an advanced version of the IoT, where all entities are connected through smart devices. It offers a revolutionary foundation for exchanging information between people, machines and objects (Multiverse, 2021).

The Metaverse is transforming how people design, manufacture and interact with physical entities across industries. It combines physical-digital fusion and human augmentation for industrial applications and contains digital representations of physical industrial environments, systems, assets and spaces that people can control, communicate and interact with (Technology Review, 2022). Some of the most significant potentials for early adoption of the Metaverse and immersive technologies lie within our economy's core industries, including manufacturing, engineering services, construction and transportation design. Collectively grouped as the Metaverse, these technologies can transform how manufacturing systems are designed and tested, products are sourced, global teams collaborate and more (De, 2023).

The 4IR has played a crucial role in establishing the foundation for the Metaverse, by providing the essential data infrastructure, technological progress and economic

systems required to facilitate its expansion (Prisecaru, 2016:60). The Metaverse, because of its transformative capacities, has the potential to completely change our methods of interacting with digital content, redefine economic operations and reshape the process of acquiring knowledge. The impact of this digital domain on our society and economy can be substantial. The Metaverse has the potential to reshape cultural norms, values and behaviours, by offering innovative modes of interaction and enabling new business opportunities. From an economic perspective, it has the potential to foster the emergence of new sectors, redefine employment functions and alter the dynamics of trade. The advent of virtual economies has the potential to generate new sources of income and disrupt conventional economic frameworks. As the boundaries between the virtual and physical realms become less distinct, societal norms may undergo changes that affect various aspects such as education, employment, entertainment and interpersonal connections. The 4IR is crucial in facilitating the development of novel business models and economic systems, such as the rise of sharing and gig economies (Kang and Kim, 2018:2367). Within the Metaverse, users have ample options for commerce and entrepreneurship, enabling them to generate and promote digital goods and services in a collective virtual environment. This setting has the potential to cultivate alternative economic systems and business models characterised by decentralisation and community-oriented initiatives. The inherent decentralised structure of the Metaverse is a crucial aspect of its design, enabling the creation and management of unique areas and experiences by different institutions or individuals. Decentralisation fosters ownership and freedom in the virtual environment, allowing people to have greater control over their digital assets, data and identities (Anderson and Rainie, 2022:40).

The growing amount of data generated by the digital realm is seen as an essential driver of the 4IR (Schwab, 2016). The emergence of the Metaverse relies on this data, which serves as the foundation for developing immersive virtual worlds driven by AI and other cutting-edge technologies (Khatri, 2022:4; Hadi *et al.*, 2023:4). Hence, the 4IR is pivotal in facilitating the Metaverse by providing the necessary computational capabilities and data infrastructure essential for its existence.

A further significant element of the 4IR concerning the Metaverse pertains to the emergence and evolution of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies (Schwab, 2016). These technologies could revolutionise our engagement with digital material, providing a more immersive and captivating experience (Murti *et al.*, 2023:187). The latter authors further state that the immersive and alternate reality aspects of the Metaverse allow organisations to surpass traditional marketing limitations, providing users with a more profound and tangible engagement with their products and stories. Hence, organisations can create virtual showrooms, product presentations and experience events, enabling people to engage with products or services in a more immersive and memorable manner (Murti *et al.*, 2023:188).

The concept of the Metaverse capitalises on this trend by establishing a comprehensive virtual environment that facilitates users' ability to engage with one another and digital entities in a manner that is unattainable inside the physical realm (Khatri, 2022:4; Hadi *et al.*, 2023:4).

## **2.3 Web 3.0**

### **2.3.1 What is Web 3.0?**

According to Chang and Chang (2011:909), Web 1.0 was characterised by a dial-up connection with an average bandwidth of 50 Kilobytes. In contrast, Web 2.0 is associated with an average bandwidth of 1 megabit, while Web 3.0 is projected to offer a consistent bandwidth of 10 megabits. This advancement in bandwidth is expected to enable the development of a fully immersive video-based web experience, often referred to as the "full video Web", which will be synonymous with Web 3.0. This implies that Web 3.0 encompasses a broader range of areas and possesses more practical uses.

Web 3.0, also known as the Semantic Web, is the next evolutionary phase of the Internet (Essex *et al.*, 2023). It aims to create a more intelligent and personalised web experience by understanding the context and meaning of data, allowing for more intuitive user interactions and intelligent data connections (Farzad *et al.*, 2019:112).

The Semantic Web is one of Web 3.0's essential pieces because it is what makes the meaning of web content and user commands comprehensible to AI, which in turn drives the greater interactivity and connectivity capabilities of Web 3.0 (Essex *et al.*, 2023; Burdova, 2022). Some of the key features of Web 3.0 include the progressive advancement of internet technologies, aiming to enhance the capacity of these technologies to produce, distribute and interlink information through search and analysis. This is achieved by comprehending words' semantic significance instead of relying solely on binary code, keywords, headers, links and other forms of metadata for meaning extraction (Expert.ai Team, 2022).

Web 3.0 aims to enhance the user experience by utilising sophisticated algorithms and machine learning techniques to provide customised information, increasing the Internet's responsiveness and predictive capabilities (Tarabasz, 2013:127). According to Burdova (2022), one of the critical characteristics of Web 3.0 is its decentralisation, which entails a structure available to all individuals and relies on blockchain technology and advancements. The concept of interactivity in Web 3.0 builds upon the principles of the Semantic Web, aiming to enhance readability, inventiveness and interactivity to a higher degree (Burdova, 2022). In the context of Web 3.0, there will be a significant increase in the capabilities of search engines, platforms and connectivity (Farzad *et al.*, 2019:112). According to Burdova (2022), computers can comprehend contextual information and accurately discern people's requirements and objectives (Nath, 2021:88).

Web 3.0 is a pivotal component of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) due to its emphasis on intelligent and interconnected systems (Lo, 2023; Ottenburger, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Web 3.0 and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**

The semantic capabilities of Web 3.0 enable a more interconnected and integrated digital ecosystem, which is essential for the success of 4IR technologies (Lo, 2023; Expert. AI, 2022). Web 3.0's decentralised nature, especially through blockchain technology, supports the 4IR's vision of decentralised and transparent systems,

whether in supply chain management, energy distribution or financial transactions (World Economic Forum, 2023; Burdova, 2022).

Web 3.0's intelligent and interconnected systems are crucial for creating smart cities, intelligent transportation systems and advanced healthcare solutions, all characteristics of 4IR (Lo, 2023). In a Web 3.0-driven world, IoT devices can communicate more effectively, understanding raw data and its context and semantics.

Web 3.0's nature makes it a pivotal component of the 4IR (Lo, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023; Expert. AI, 2022; Burdova, 2022; Singaraju, 2022).

### **2.3.3 Web 3.0 and the Metaverse**

The Metaverse, a collective virtual shared space created by the convergence of virtually enhanced physical reality and interactive digital areas, aligns closely with the principles of Web 3.0. Both concepts involve creating more immersive, interactive and personalised digital experiences (Blockchain Council, 2023; Hedera, 2023).

In the Metaverse, users can navigate digital worlds, interact with other users and establish digital economies. Web 3.0 technologies play a crucial role in this, enabling smarter interactions and transactions. For instance, blockchain, a foundational technology of Web 3.0, can authenticate digital assets, identities and transactions within the Metaverse, ensuring security and trustworthiness (Blockchain Council, 2023; Hedera, 2023; Marr, 2022).

Furthermore, the decentralised nature of Web 3.0 aligns with the vision of a Metaverse that is not controlled by any single entity but is a collaborative and open space. This decentralisation ensures that power, creativity and economic benefits are distributed among its users, fostering innovation and inclusivity (Marr, 2022).

## **2.4 Marketing 5.0**

Philip Kotler, known for his work, *Technology for Humanity*, introduces a new era in his book *Marketing 5.0* where advanced technologies that resemble human

capabilities are utilised to improve every aspect of the consumer experience. This novel approach signifies a departure from conventional marketing models that prioritised the promotion of products and services, towards a more customer-centric strategy centered on cultivating authentic relationships and providing unparalleled value (Kotler *et al.*, 2019; Kang and Kim, 2018:2368). At the core of Marketing 5.0 lies the utilisation of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. These technologies play a crucial role in understanding subtle client preferences and creating personalised experiences (Kotler *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, this method emphasises the importance of social responsibility and sustainability, challenging businesses to actively tackle urgent social and environmental issues (Kotler *et al.*, 2019; Hosany and Witham, 2019). Additionally, the Metaverse plays a crucial role in Marketing 5.0 by prioritising the development of meaningful customer experiences and interactions (Andrade, 2022). The digital arena offers marketers an unparalleled platform to engage clients through immersive and interactive methods, which redefine the limitations of conventional marketing communication (Clark, 2023; Kang and Kim, 2018:2370).

Marketing 5.0 is a customer-centric marketing strategy that emphasises the establishment of enduring customer connections rooted in shared values and experiences (Perez, 2022; Dart, 2021). As stated by Kotler *et al.* (2019), Marketing 5.0 encompasses a blend of advanced technologies such as AI, Natural Language Processing (NLP), sensors, robots, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), the Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain, all integrated inside the Metaverse (Perez, 2022). The Metaverse is an emerging platform that presents marketers with opportunities to effectively interact with customers and cultivate a competitive edge (Lu and Mintz, 2023:4). Metaverse marketing is an innovative and interactive approach that enables organisations to effectively engage with their desired consumer base (Hetler, 2022).

Nevertheless, there are inherent hazards that businesses must comprehend before venturing into a platform in the Metaverse. It is imperative for businesses to have a thorough understanding of the Metaverse and their target audience. Marketers can employ many strategies in the Metaverse to effectively target their audience, as

suggested by McNichols (2022) and Hetler (2022). The Metaverse enables marketers to shift their focus from transactional advertising to immersive user experiences (Dart, 2021). To effectively boost sales, it is recommended to provide virtual items similar to those found in physical stores. Discover a method to establish a connection between the two entities, allowing anyone to access them both virtually and physically (Hetler, 2022).

Marketing 5.0 involves the expansion of digital marketing initiatives to respond effectively to consumer reactivity (Andrade, 2022; Kang and Kim, 2018:2370). The Metaverse emphasises enhancing customer experience and fostering individualised interactions (Marr, 2022). It enables advertisers to transition from conventional transactional advertising to engaging and immersive user experiences (Dart, 2021). The process entails the integration of AI technology with customer data to enhance digital marketing strategies and optimise the entire customer experience (Petkov, 2023; Kang and Kim, 2018:2369). The marketing strategy promotes a business' services and products within the Metaverse. In this virtual reality space, users can create personalised avatars, engage in social interactions, participate in gaming activities and make digital purchases (Clark, 2023). It presents a contemporary approach to generating a captivating encounter for prospective customers (Clark, 2023).

Combining Marketing 5.0 concepts and exploiting the Metaverse marketers will be able to create engaging and immersive experiences for their customers, leading to stronger connections and increased brand awareness (Think Beyond, 2021). According to Dart (2021), utilising the Metaverse enables organisations to develop virtual encounters that facilitate client interaction with products and services in a manner perceived as more authentic and captivating. According to Dart (2021), organisations can establish their virtual worlds within the Metaverse, enabling customers to interact with and experience their products and services in a simulated environment. Interactive ads in the Metaverse allow users to engage with the material and immerse themselves in a brand experience characterised by active participation and dynamic elements (Dart, 2021).

Using immersive product demonstrations within the Metaverse is a valuable avenue for marketers to exhibit their items effectively. According to Dart (2021), customers can engage in virtual product trials, enabling them to assess the characteristics of the products visually and have a more comprehensive understanding of how these products would integrate into their daily lives.

By using the Metaverse's features, marketers can give their customers unique and memorable experiences that build stronger relationships and raise knowledge of their brands.

Advanced technologies in Marketing 5.0, such as AI and machine learning, can also play a crucial role in the Metaverse (Kotler *et al.*, 2019). These technologies can be used to understand better customer preferences and behaviours, which can inform the development of more personalised and engaging experiences.

Marketing 5.0 and the Metaverse focus on creating meaningful customer interactions and experiences (Kotler *et al.*, 2019). By leveraging the capabilities of the Metaverse and advanced technologies, marketers can create more engaging and personalised experiences that build stronger relationships with customers based on shared values and experiences (Watts, 2021).

## **2.5 Digital marketing**

Digital marketing refers to all marketing efforts that occur on the internet and leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email and other websites to connect with current and prospective customers (Alexander, 2023; Barone, 2023; Mailchimp, 2023; Patel, 2023). It aims to provide relevant and valuable information to guide customers' purchasing decisions and connect with them where they spend their time online (Alexander, 2023). Digital marketing has become essential to any business's overall marketing strategy due to the increasing number of people using digital platforms for various purposes (Alexander, 2023; Patel, 2023; Wind and Mahajan, 2002:43). By using data and analytics, digital marketers can measure the effectiveness of their campaigns and make data-driven decisions to optimise their marketing efforts (Alexander, 2023; Mailchimp, 2023).

The Metaverse and digital marketing both leverage immersive and interactive technologies to create engaging customer experiences (Mailchimp, 2023). The Metaverse provides a platform for digital marketers to create virtual worlds, product demonstrations, and interactive advertisements that allow customers to interact with organisations in a way that feels more natural and engaging (Alexander, 2023; Mailchimp, 2023). By using advanced technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), digital marketers can create immersive experiences that allow customers to visualise products and services realistically (Barone, 2023; Mailchimp, 2023). This presents digital marketers with new and exciting opportunities to engage with customers more creatively and personally (Mailchimp, 2023).

### **2.5.1 Who are digital marketers?**

A digital marketer is a professional who uses digital channels and technologies to promote a brand, product or service online. They employ various tactics such as search engine optimisation (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, social media marketing, email marketing and content marketing to reach and engage with target audiences, build brand awareness, drive website traffic, generate leads and convert leads into customers (Hudson, 2023).

Digital marketers measure the effectiveness of their campaigns using tools and techniques like analytics, conversion tracking, and A/B testing <sup>4</sup>(Forsey, 2023). In today's digital age, businesses of all sizes rely on digital marketers to help them stay competitive and reach customers online (Karjaluo *et al.*, 2015:16).

### **2.5.2 The role of digital marketers in the Metaverse**

As the Metaverse becomes more prevalent, digital marketers must adapt their strategies to leverage the opportunities and challenges of this new environment. One of the potential impacts of digital marketing is the emergence of new advertising

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<sup>4</sup> A/B testing is a method used to evaluate and determine the superior performance between two versions of something. Although commonly linked to websites and applications, this method is nearly a century old and represents one of the most basic types of randomised controlled experiments (Gallo, 2017).

opportunities. Digital marketers will likely explore avenues within the Metaverse, such as creating branded virtual environments, sponsoring events or experiences, or weaving product placements into virtual content (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Decima, 2023).

Concurrently, there will be notable shifts in consumer behaviour. As individuals spend more time immersed in the Metaverse, their propensity to engage with traditional forms of digital marketing may diminish. This shift necessitates marketers to devise innovative methods to captivate audiences and motivate them to take desired actions (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Furthermore, the Metaverse underscores the heightened significance of virtual experiences. It becomes imperative for marketers to craft compelling virtual narratives and scenarios that resonate with users and encourage them to disseminate these experiences within their networks (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Lead Genera, 2023). Additionally, the Metaverse will drive the need for refined metrics and analytics. Digital marketers will be tasked with formulating novel tools to gauge the efficacy of their campaigns within this realm, monitoring parameters such as user engagement, virtual acquisitions and other metrics tailored to this distinctive environment (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Lead Genera, 2023).

While the Metaverse offers digital marketers a substantial prospect to engage with audiences in novel and inventive ways, it also introduces many challenges that mandate meticulous contemplation and strategising (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Hetler, 2023).

### **2.5.3 Challenges for marketers in the Metaverse**

In the Metaverse, digital marketers may face several challenges when building brand awareness and effectively communicating their value proposition. Some challenges can include limited accessibility; the Metaverse is still in its early stages and not everyone has easy access. In a developing country like South Africa data costs to gain access to the Internet are still a big barrier to accessing the Metaverse (Munga, 2022), alongside the availability of reliable electricity and accessible technology (Gareeb, 2023; Ibrahim, 2023). This can hinder mass marketing efforts and make it difficult for

marketers to reach a broad audience (Kiplangat, 2022). Navigating through the Metaverse can be challenging for organisations to define their place in the virtual world. Without a clear brand presence, it becomes difficult for users to integrate naturally into the virtual world, undermining digital marketing efforts (Kiplangat, 2022). The Metaverse also has the potential to magnify social issues, hence intensifying worries. Marketers should possess knowledge about these concerns, guarantee that their marketing plans prioritise the needs of customers and effectively tackle probable challenges or complaints (Kiplangat, 2022).

To overcome these challenges and effectively market in the Metaverse, digital marketers can establish a unique brand identity in the Metaverse to create a compelling and immersive user experience. This can involve creating virtual spaces, avatars and other digital assets that align with the brand's values and messaging (Kiplangat, 2022). Digital marketers can use virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies to create immersive user experiences. This can include virtual shopping experiences, interactive product demonstrations and virtual events (Sitecore, 2023). According to a survey, a significant percentage of consumers identify as Metaverse enthusiasts and expect it to play a role in their interactions with organisations in the future. Marketers can focus on engaging with this audience and creating experiences that cater to their interests and preferences (Sitecore, 2023). Digital marketers must define new engagement metrics. With the unique nature of the Metaverse, marketers may need to redefine their engagement metrics to account for the behavioural economics at play. This can involve measuring metrics such as time spent in virtual spaces, interactions with virtual objects and user-generated content (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Digital marketers must include the Metaverse in their overall marketing strategy to effectively manage the changing digital environment. According to Philip Kotler's book *Marketing 5.0*, there is a noticeable trend toward technology that resembles human behaviour to establish stronger relationships with customers and provide greater value throughout the customer journey (Kotler *et al.*, 2019). This transition highlights the importance of adopting a comprehensive marketing strategy, where the Metaverse operates in conjunction with other marketing channels rather than independently.

Integration of various platforms guarantees the uniformity of messages, efficient allocation of resources and the enhancement of marketing endeavours (Kang and Kim, 2018:2370). Moreover, with the ongoing rapid development of the digital landscape, marked by the emergence of platforms such as the Metaverse, it is crucial for businesses to skilfully assess the influence of their Metaverse endeavours alongside other marketing endeavours to successfully determine a return on investment (ROI) (Sitecore, 2023). This comprehensive approach not only adheres to the principles of Marketing 5.0 but also enables firms to fulfil the ever-changing demands of consumers, guaranteeing a smooth and consistent experience across many platforms, including the Metaverse, social media and traditional marketing channels.

Within the expanding domain of the Metaverse, digital marketers encounter the task of skilfully establishing brand recognition and conveying their unique selling proposition. To effectively navigate this new and unfamiliar world, marketers need to develop strategies that give priority to creating user experiences that are immersive, genuine and captivating. Utilising augmented and virtual reality technologies can enable immersive virtual shopping experiences, interactive product presentations and events (Purdy, 2023; Onward Search, 2023). To effectively interact with established Metaverse communities, it is crucial to implement a content strategy that prioritises user-generated material, genuine connections and messages that genuinely resonate while distancing oneself from conventional marketing language (Betterton, 2023).

Providing distinctive digital collectibles can cultivate a feeling of exclusivity and stimulate user involvement, while including game elements can further intensify user interaction with businesses. With the emergence of the Metaverse, marketers need to reassess their metrics for measuring engagement. This involves taking into account variables such as the duration of time spent in virtual environments and the level of interaction with virtual objects (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

It is crucial to guarantee that virtual depictions of companies and products are genuine and in line with their physical equivalents. One way to accomplish this is by creating sophisticated virtual representations of brands, exploring business models that focus

on community and providing virtual products that are consistent with brand principles (Belova, 2023; Dey, 2023). Utilising user avatars in the Metaverse to test products can accurately replicate real-life situations, resulting in very meaningful feedback (Maganis, 2023).

Nevertheless, when organisations embark on their journey into the Metaverse, it is crucial for them to clearly communicate its importance to their target audience and address any misunderstandings regarding its significance. To fully capitalise on the potential of the Metaverse and enhance the user experience, organisations must have a comprehensive awareness of its features and target audience. This will enable them to effectively utilise this platform for maximum engagement (Purdy, 2023).

Marketers can create authentic and engaging experiences for users in the Metaverse and ensure their virtual representations are consistent with their real-world counterparts.

In the Metaverse, privacy and security concerns are paramount for marketers. Here are some key insights from the search results on how marketers can ensure the protection of user data and prevent unauthorised access:

- Address user concerns: Both marketers and consumers are concerned about Metaverse data privacy. Marketers must acknowledge and address these concerns to build trust with users (O'Neill, 2022). According to a survey, robust and transparent privacy and security guidelines would encourage consumers to interact with organisations in the Metaverse (Business Wire, 2023).
- Implement strict privacy standards: Marketers should implement strict and transparent privacy standards to protect consumers' rights and capitalise on the opportunities the Metaverse offers. Privacy by design approach is crucial to identify and mitigate potential privacy issues (Artzt and Weingarden, 2022).
- Adopt AI cybersecurity: Marketers can use AI cybersecurity tools to detect and alert users to abuse, misconduct and other negative behaviours within the Metaverse. This can help maintain a safe and secure environment for users (Pilay, 2023).

- Ensure data protection during transmission: There may be risks associated with data security when transmitting personal data from one Metaverse to another. Marketers should take measures to protect personal data during transmission (Business Wire, 2023).
- Stay ahead of new threats: The Metaverse brings new threats to privacy and security. Marketers must stay informed about these threats and continuously update their security measures to protect user data (Radcliff, 2023).
- Advocate for privacy regulations: Currently, there is a lack of privacy regulations specific to the Metaverse. Marketers can advocate for developing privacy regulations to ensure consistent privacy standards and protect user data (Krishnan, 2022).

Digital marketers will need to develop new metrics and analytic tools to measure the effectiveness of their campaigns in the Metaverse (Krishnamurthy *et al.*, 2022:5-6). This could involve tracking user engagement, virtual purchases and other metrics specific to this new environment. Digital marketers must be innovative and adaptable to navigate marketing challenges in the Metaverse (Ball, 2021; Jercinovic, 2021).

#### **2.5.4 Opportunities for Marketers in the Metaverse**

Rubin (in an interview with Malinga, 2022) predicts that more media agencies in South Africa will soon recognise the value of Metaverse technology. While the Metaverse has been around for over two decades in the gaming industry, it is now being adopted in other industries (Kiong, 2022:22). Despite the lack of consensus on the definition of the term, experts have agreed on several key attributes that the Metaverse should have, including persistence, immersion, presence, economic functionality, universality, interoperability and user-generated content (Ball, 2021). These attributes provide a wealth of opportunities for digital marketers to promote their organisations to consumers at a relatively low entry cost (van Belleghem, 2022).

South Africa recognises the significance of Metaverse technology, and there are signs that the Metaverse is becoming increasingly relevant in South Africa and throughout the African continent (Globe Newswire, 2023). According to Statista (2023), the

Metaverse market in South Africa is expected to reach 13,9 million users by 2030, with a user penetration rate of 6,9% in 2023. According to Globe Newswire (2023), the Metaverse industry in South Africa is projected to experience an annual growth rate of 37,2%, with a total value of US\$4,473 million by the year 2023.

Major telecommunications giants in South Africa are initiating the introduction of Metaverse platforms and organising events to promote the widespread adoption of the virtual world (Globe Newswire, 2023).

The growing interest among businesses and the launch of Metaverse platforms and events indicate media agencies recognise the value of Metaverse technology in reaching consumers and promoting their organisations (Globe Newswire, 2023; Proulx *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen *et al.*, 2022)).

## **2.6 The Metaverse**

Metaverse is a term widely used to refer to a digital virtual world that has coexisted with other worlds, such as virtual reality, virtual worlds or cyberspaces (Lopez-Diez, 2021:299). The Metaverse is described by Mystakidis (2022:486) as a post-reality universe, a perpetual and persistent multi-user environment merging physical reality with digital virtuality; it is an interconnected web of social, networked immersive environments in endless multi-user platforms. The Metaverse has been described as one of the most significant new platforms for digital marketing (Faridani, 2021; Kiong, 2022:14).

The concept of the Metaverse has been around for several decades, but in recent years, it has gained popularity and attention from various industries, including technology, entertainment and marketing (Singer, 2021). The term refers to a virtual world created by converging multiple virtual and physical realities, where users can interact with each other and digital objects in a shared space (Linden Lab, 2021).

However, the exact definition and scope of the Metaverse are still subject to debate, with different experts and stakeholders offering their interpretations and visions of what the Metaverse could be (Bailenson, 2021).

In recent academic discourse, the concept of the Metaverse has attracted considerable attention and has been subject to diverse interpretations. The Virtual World Web Project (2021) defines the Metaverse as a future iteration of the Internet that combines virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies. This allows users to engage in a fully immersive online experience that seamlessly integrates with their physical surroundings. However, Buterin (2021) defines the Metaverse as a powerful social and economic platform, highlighting its capacity for users to engage in a wide range of activities and transactions that have tangible effects in the actual world. Similarly, Somnium Space (2021) suggests that the Metaverse functions as a cultural and artistic realm, providing individuals with opportunities to express themselves and participate in innovative collaborations. Amidst these diverse interpretations, a common thread arises: a collective desire for a virtual domain that surpasses the current Internet in terms of involvement, immersion and connectedness (Bailenson, 2021).

When looking at the different definitions mentioned in the literature, the common attributes of the Metaverse are continuity of identity and objects. Most reports mention a shared environment, avatars, synchronisation, being three-dimensional, interoperability, and a user experience that is interactive, immersive and social (Jooyoung, 2021:141). Many consider the Metaverse as the next web, that is, web 3.0, which might change how we interact with the digital world (Jooyoung, 2021:141). Although the Metaverse is becoming less of a niche for the tech-savvy and more of a reality for the public, digital marketers need to reassess their previous understanding of communication and marketing theories (Chen, 2022:2).

There are still questions and concerns about the maturity of the technology and how the Metaverse will work (Weinberger & Gross, 2023:40). There are many critiques on when the Metaverse will be fully operational and if the Metaverse is just hype or whether it is happening (Proulx *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). While the aforementioned experts concur that the Metaverse is indeed present, the realisation thereof will unfold gradually. However, investors, marketers and customers must be adequately prepared.

To understand the Metaverse, one must understand the technology behind the Metaverse.

## **2.7 The technology behind the metaverse**

According to Kaur and Gupta (2021:1), Metaverse technology is the next big thing in the internet realm. The Metaverse is essentially a visual world that combines physical and digital worlds (Zhao *et al.*, 2022:56). The Metaverse is built using a 3-D structure of scenes with player characters, also known as avatars. The immersive and interactive nature of the Metaverse allows users to explore freely, providing an unmatched user experience (Zhao *et al.*, 2022:56). For marketers, the key to exploring the Metaverse is to create an exceptional user experience through interaction, accessibility, visual guidance and comprehension, as the Metaverse is a user-centric application (Zhao *et al.*, 2022:56). Organisations can leverage these elements to ensure a visible presence in the Metaverse.

The Metaverse is an immersive virtual space that integrates various technologies to create a shared user experience. As the Metaverse evolves, new technologies are being developed and integrated to enhance user experience and expand the possibilities of virtual reality. One technology that is expected to play a significant role in the development of the Metaverse is blockchain technology.

Blockchain technology is a decentralised digital ledger that allows secure and transparent data recording and sharing. It provides a platform for creating and managing digital assets and identities, which are essential components of the Metaverse. Blockchain technology enables the creation of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), unique digital assets representing anything from artwork to virtual real estate. NFTs can be bought, sold and traded, providing users with a means of monetising their digital creations and experiences (Buterin, 2014).

Another technology that is expected to play a role in the development of the Metaverse is artificial intelligence (AI). AI can be used to create intelligent virtual agents that can interact with users and provide personalised experiences. AI can also

enhance the realism of virtual environments by creating more lifelike characters and scenarios (Park & Kim, 2022:4210).

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies are also essential to the Metaverse. VR provides users with a fully immersive experience where they can interact with virtual environments as if they were in the physical world. AR, in contrast, applies virtual objects to the physical world, offering users an improved perspective of their environment. Both VR and AR can generate captivating and immersive encounters for users within the Metaverse (Kipman (2016).

In addition to these technologies, the Metaverse will require advanced networking infrastructure to support data exchange and user communication. 5G networks are expected to play a significant role, providing users with fast and reliable connectivity to the Metaverse (Far *et al.*, 2023:5).

The Metaverse is a rapidly evolving virtual space that integrates various technologies to create a shared user experience. Blockchain technology, AI, VR, AR and 5G networks are some of the technologies that will play a significant role in developing the Metaverse. As these technologies continue to evolve, the possibilities of the Metaverse will expand, creating new opportunities for digital culture and society.

## **2.8 Has South Africa adapted their marketing to fit into the Metaverse?**

There are some signs that South Africa is starting to explore and embrace the potential of the Metaverse. For example, in the gaming industry, South African companies such as Nyamakop and Free Lives have developed games incorporating virtual reality and other immersive technologies (Gaming Africa, 2021). Additionally, South African universities such as Wits University have established research programmes focused on virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), which could contribute to developing Metaverse technologies (Wits University, 2021).

MTN Group, a leading telecommunications operator headquartered in South Africa, has recently introduced its Metaverse platform, altMTN, and organised and hosted a music concert in celebration of it in November 2022. This action demonstrates MTN's

determination to utilise the immersive capabilities of the Metaverse to serve its extensive user population of 34,5 million members throughout Africa (GlobeNewswire, 2023).

In a significant move in September 2022, Nedbank, a leading financial institution in South Africa, acquired a 12×12m parcel of property in Ubuntuland (Nedbank, 2023). Ubuntuland is a virtual marketplace by Africarare, building an African Metaverse to help uncover Africa's untapped talent, creativity and innovation, and connect Africa to the global digital economy (Breitenbach, 2022).

Nedbank's objective in acquiring this company is to provide its consumers with experiences that go beyond conventional banking. Furthermore, they launched a Metaverse Golf Challenge, offering users the opportunity to partake in games, treasure hunts and trivia tests in November (GlobeNewswire, 2023; Nedbank, 2023).

In November 2022, the South African store, Game, announced its entry into the Metaverse. In partnership with Roblox, Game is preparing to release a Roblox game that carries the brand's identity (Modise, 2022). Scheduled to launch on November 21, this campaign provides gamers with an opportunity to acquire coupons valued at R70 000 in anticipation of Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Employing this agreement, Game intends to broaden its audience to untapped segments in South Africa and stimulate its expansion (Vermeulen, 2022).

Based on the present path, it is expected that other organisations will soon also enter the Metaverse, either on their own or through strategic partnerships. The implementation of these captivating experiences is projected to arouse consumer curiosity throughout South Africa, with the trend anticipated to endure and expand in the coming years.

However, challenges and barriers could hinder the wider adoption and implementation of Metaverse technologies in South Africa. These include issues around access to the necessary hardware and infrastructure, the cost of developing and maintaining Metaverse applications, and concerns around data privacy and security (Kraus *et al.*, 2022:53; Ambolis, 2023; Kaur, 2023).

Overall, it remains to be seen how South Africa will adapt to and embrace the Metaverse in the future, but there are certainly indications that the country is starting to explore and experiment with these technologies in various industries (Gaming Africa, 2021; Wits University, 2021; Globe Newswire, 2023; Modise, 2022; Nedbank, 2023; Vermeulen, 2022).

## **2.9 Digital marketers – new skills to adapt to the Metaverse**

According to (Khatri, 2022:4; Barrera and Shah, 2023:11) digital marketers must develop new skills and strategies to market effectively in this immersive virtual world as the Metaverse continues gaining popularity. This may include understanding virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies and their potential for creating engaging experiences. In addition, digital marketers may need to collaborate closely with virtual world developers to create campaigns that fit seamlessly into the virtual environment. Understanding virtual economies will also be necessary, as these will play a significant role in the Metaverse. To succeed in marketing within the Metaverse, digital marketers must be adaptable and open to developing new skills (Khatri, 2022:4; Barrera and Shah, 2023:11).

Digital marketers must be flexible and adaptable to the new challenges and opportunities presented by the Metaverse. Developing new skills and strategies will be vital in reaching audiences in this new digital landscape (Singh *et al.*, 2022:3623). Some of the skills that digital marketers may need to develop to markets in the Metaverse include creating immersive experiences that engage audiences in the virtual environment through interactive content, 3-D modelling and other tools. As Huang *et al.* (2022:1-10) noted, marketers may also need to understand virtual economies and how they can be used to drive engagement and revenue. These new skills are crucial for digital marketers to understand in this new world of Metaverse marketing.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The literature review has provided an in-depth exploration of the Metaverse and its burgeoning significance in the realm of digital marketing. From understanding the

foundational elements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to the intricacies of Marketing 5.0 and the role of digital marketers in the Metaverse, this chapter has endeavoured to offer a holistic view of the current landscape. The readiness of South Africa to embrace the Metaverse in its marketing strategies has also been scrutinised, shedding light on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Furthermore, the emphasis on the evolving skill set required by digital marketers underscores the dynamic nature of the industry and the imperative for continuous learning and adaptability. As the digital world continues to evolve, so must the strategies and approaches marketers employ. With a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature in place, the next chapter will transition into discussing the research methodology, laying the groundwork for the empirical study that seeks to delve further into the intricacies of the Metaverse and its implications for digital marketing.

## **CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

A literature review and empirical study were conducted to answer the primary research question. Chapter two focussed on the utilisation of the Metaverse as a marketing platform, subsequently delving into empirical research that examined the readiness of South African digital marketers to embrace the Metaverse as a marketing channel.

This chapter will discuss the research methods that were used in the study. This is a qualitative, investigative study (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:102) as there is no previous research on whether South African digital marketers are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a new marketing channel.

### **3.1 Literature review**

A literature review was conducted to provide background for this study. The literature review aims to give theoretical context to the study so that there is a foundation from which the empirical study can be conducted. The purpose of this study's literature review is to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital marketing, marketing 5.0, the Metaverse, and the specific technologies and abilities required by digital marketers to effectively navigate the Metaverse as a new marketing channel.

The following databases were consulted: Sabinet, EBSCOHost: Academic Research Premier, Communication & Mass Communication Complete, Econlit, SACat, Internet search engines and the Ferdinand Postma catalogue. There was sufficient information available to complete this study.

### **3.2 Empirical study**

The empirical study follows an interpretivism paradigm and a qualitative methodology. The data will be collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews with South African digital marketers, see Appendix B.

The following will be discussed as part of the empirical investigation for this study: Research paradigm, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, and data collection and analysis techniques.

### **3.2.1 Research paradigm**

According to Bryman *et al.* (2014:19), a paradigm is a cluster of beliefs that influence scientists on what should be studied, how the research should be done and how results should be interpreted. Three paradigms are relevant to most research projects; positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The quantitative approach is mostly linked to positivism and the qualitative approach to interpretivism (Babbie and Mouton, 2010:49).

Due to the nature of the objectives of this study, an interpretivist research paradigm will be used. According to Bryman *et al.* (2014:14), interpretivism refers to writers from different intellectual traditions who are critical of the scientific model to study the social world.

### **3.2.2 Research approach**

For this study, an abductive research approach was used. The use of an abductive research approach indicates a fluid and repetitive process of investigation that alternates between practical observations and theoretical frameworks (Flick, 2013:2). The abductive approach differs from simply deductive or inductive methods by enabling the concurrent investigation of observed facts and the enhancement or creation of theoretical explanations (Hurley *et al.*, 2021:67). This indicates that the investigation is not rigidly constrained by pre-established ideas or exclusively guided by empirical facts. Instead, it aims to reconcile the disparity between theory and observation, facilitating the creation of fresh perspectives, patterns and possibly innovative theoretical frameworks (Flick, 2013:2). By utilising this methodology, the study remains receptive to unforeseen discoveries and can adjust its theoretical framework in response to the depth and intricacy of the collected data, guaranteeing a more comprehensive and refined comprehension of the topic at hand (Strauss, 1988: 3).

### **3.2.3 Methodological choice**

Both a qualitative and a quantitative research design can be used for studies in the field of marketing, keeping in mind that the study's objective determines the research that must be done for the study (Mersham *et al.*, 1995:125).

With the problem statement in mind, a qualitative research design will be used for this study.

#### **3.2.3.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research, as described by Du Plooy (2009:88), is a methodical methodology designed to thoroughly analyse various aspects, including human values, needs and complex traits that distinguish entities such as groups, communities, organisations and communications. This methodology is particularly successful in unexplored areas where there is a clear lack or scarcity of previous studies. This approach goes beyond simply identifying gaps; it delves into the complex networks of behaviours, recurring patterns, dominant attitudes and multiple interactions that are relevant to the issue being examined. Bouma and Ling (2004:167) emphasise the profound nature of qualitative research, highlighting its ability to provide a comprehensive depiction of dynamic interactions, whether it be within a unified group, a flexible discourse, or a complex community.

Furthermore, this approach surpasses conventional study limitations by enabling researchers to develop a detailed and subjective comprehension. It is not merely about watching from a distance; it is about fully engaging, adopting an almost indirect experience and perceiving via the participants' point of view - a notion that aligns with the "emic" or an intimate insider perspective emphasised by Babbie and Mouton (2010:53). Babbie and Mouton (2010:35) describe qualitative research as a deeper exploration of human acts, with a focus on detailed description and deep understanding, rather than just diagnosing or predicting these behaviours.

Considering the extensive range and profound nature of this technique it is quite helpful, particularly for our research which seeks to understand the detailed

perceptions and insights that participants have about the Metaverse as an emerging but powerful marketing channel.

In this study, it is important to determine the feelings, attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of digital marketers about the Metaverse.

The table below was compiled to emphasise the suitability of a qualitative approach for this study by contrasting the strengths and weaknesses thereof against each other:

**Table 3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of a qualitative research approach**

| <b>Qualitative approach: Disadvantages</b>   | <b>Qualitative approach: Advantages</b>   |
|--|---|
| The researcher is subjectively involved in the research as the research problem is viewed through the eyes of the participant(s).            | The structure of the study is more adaptable as research progresses.  |
| Research questions can guide observation in a specific direction to, among other things, understand the communication phenomenon as desired. | The researcher is more directly involved with the participant(s).   |
| It is more difficult to test hypotheses and theories.  | The research is based on descriptions, experiences and interpretations of the participant(s).                           |
| It generally takes longer to collect data compared to quantitative research.   | More open-ended questions can be posed to collect richer data.  |
| It is challenging to make quantitative predictions.  | Data is obtained from a natural environment.  |
| Results are easily influenced by the researcher's personal preferences.  | The sampling framework is more flexible.  |
| Data analysis is time-consuming because qualitative research requires the researcher to describe the actions of the participants in detail.  | The research is inductive, meaning the research will start with observations and end with descriptions. It also focuses |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | more on in-depth interviews or content analysis. |
|--|--|

**Source: Du Plooy (2009:26-40); Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:20); Babbie and Mouton (2010:270-272).**

Bouma and Ling (2004:168) clearly state that one research method is not better than the other, but that one may be more appropriate than the other in certain studies. A qualitative research approach is more fitting for this study, but the use of quantitative electronic questionnaires will enhance the breadth and depth of the study. In the following section, the nature of quantitative research will be discussed to make it clear why quantitative research methods are also applicable to this study.

### **3.2.4 Research strategy**

Qualitative research aims to comprehend the fundamental nature of human experiences. This comprehension is essential in domains where the human viewpoint is of utmost importance. The research strategy of phenomenology is ideally aligned with this objective (Bryman *et al.*, 2010:15).

The basic aim of phenomenology is to deeply investigate and articulate the subjective experiences of individuals. It goes beyond simply listing events or behaviours and explores the fundamental nature of those experiences. This enables researchers to comprehend the profoundness, abundance and intricacy of human experiences (Babbie and Mouton, 2010:48). Phenomenology can connect theory and practice, therefore bridging the gap between them. By prioritising first-hand experiences, it provides valuable perspectives that can guide practical applications, policy-making and future investigations. These insights are based on the practical experiences of individuals, which makes them very helpful for professionals (Connelly, 2010:424).

Phenomenology provides a strong and all-encompassing method for research that seeks to comprehend the whole range and complexity of human experiences. The connection of this approach with the principles of qualitative research guarantees the accurate capture, comprehension and appreciation of the fundamental nature of human experiences (Babbie and Mouton, 2010:48). Therefore, utilising a

phenomenological research technique not only corresponds to the qualitative nature of this study but also amplifies its depth, richness and significance of answering the following research question: *What is the readiness of digital marketers in South Africa to adapt to the new marketing channel called the Metaverse?*

### **3.2.5 Study population and sampling**

#### **3.2.5.1 Sampling process**

Sampling is a critical process in research that involves choosing specific units of analysis from a larger target population (Du Plooy, 2009:108). This study aims to determine the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the Metaverse as a new marketing channel. Hence, the study sample consists of digital marketers in Gauteng who are presently working in organisations with well-established marketing departments.

To select prospective participants, the researcher created an inventory of firms that are recognised for having highly effective marketing departments. The compilation of this list was derived from a combination of online investigation and the researcher's network of industry connections, acquired through years of involvement in the marketing and communication field. The organisations identified through this method encompass a wide array of sectors, including corporate entities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and self-owned businesses.

The procedure for reaching out to participants entailed sending emails to digital marketers employed by these firms. A total of 15 digital marketers were approached for potential involvement in the study. Among these, 10 individuals responded positively, expressing their readiness to join. The participants were from many businesses such as banking sectors, marketing agencies and retail which offered a wide-ranging viewpoint on the research topic.

Before conducting any interviews, explicit consent was obtained from both the companies and the individual participants representing these companies. This measure was taken to maintain compliance with ethical standards and to guard the

anonymity of both the participants and their respective organisations (refer to Appendix A for a further explanation of the authorisation procedure).

The study seeks to collect valuable data from a diverse group of South African digital marketers, using a careful sampling process. This will provide a thorough picture of their preparedness to adopt the Metaverse as a marketing platform.

#### **3.2.5.1.1 Non-probability sample**

According to Du Plooy (2009:122), a non-probability sample is a sample that is not picked with an equal probability in a study. The sampling method employed in this study will be non-probability, as the researcher will build a non-random list. The author additionally contends that researchers may encounter circumstances in which employing a probability sample is unfeasible. The rationale for this study stems from the fact that the concept of the Metaverse is relatively unfamiliar in South Africa and is not currently being utilised. Consequently, the researcher will be responsible for assembling the roster of volunteers.

The researcher employed convenience and snowball samples, which are two distinct forms of non-probability samples, for this investigation. According to Du Plooy (2009:123), a convenience sample is a sampling technique that involves selecting units for a study based on their accessibility to information. Teddlie and Yu (2007:78) additionally contend that a convenience sample may include individuals who freely choose to participate in the study. Snowball sampling is a type of convenience sampling in which the researcher initially contacts a group of individuals who are pertinent to the research subject and then utilises these individuals to build connections with others (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:179).

#### **3.2.5.2 Sampling frame**

For the aim of this study, the population is limited to organisations in South Africa and the marketing sector.

The composition of the participants in this study predominantly featured female participants, with seven out of ten participants identifying as female, while three were male. This gender distribution provides an interesting perspective in the context of the marketing and communication industry.

All ten participants are actively engaged in roles within the marketing and communication sector. Notably, a significant portion of these professionals, amounting to six individuals, have digital marketing explicitly included in their job descriptions. This highlights their direct involvement in the evolving digital marketing landscape. The remaining four participants, although not having digital marketing specified in their job descriptions, are nonetheless engaged in marketing activities within the digital realm. This diverse range of professional experiences among the participants offers a rich and varied insight into the marketing and communication field, particularly in the context of digital marketing.

#### **3.2.5.2.1 Sample size**

According to Shetty (2022), a quantitative study is about numbers. Still, factors like quality over quantity, study design and data saturation must be considered when conducting a qualitative study. Vasileiou (2018:2) further argued that the sample size in qualitative research tends to be small to support the depth of the case-orientated analysis. Purposive sampling selects information-rich cases, so this study will focus on a sample size of N=10 participants for semi-structured interviews that were selected through snowball sampling.

#### **3.2.5.2.2 Data saturation**

The Metaverse is a new term in South Africa therefore, some answers may be the same. This possibility will keep data saturation in mind through this study's sampling and population process. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:315), many research books recommend gathering data until data saturation is reached, meaning that adding more participants will result in no new information for the study.

### **3.2.5.2.3 Inclusion criteria**

According to Connelly (2020:125), inclusion criteria specify attributes of subjects included in the research study. For this study, the inclusion criteria will be as follows:

- Organisations with a marketing department who have digital marketers working for them
- Organisations in South Africa
- Both female and male participants will be included in the study
- Participants with different levels in management will be included in the study as long as they work in digital marketing
- The organisation must have more than ten people employed
- Corporate, NGO or self-owned companies will be included in the study if they have a marketing department

### **3.2.6 Designing the measuring instrument**

Data collection instruments most used in qualitative research include individual interviews, focus groups and direct observations (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:209). This study will be conducted on raw data gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews. The researcher will depend on the willingness of the participants to share their real knowledge on the subject. The interviewer will prepare a list of questions for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B).

### **3.2.7 Collection of data**

For this study, the researcher contacted the N=10 participants identified to participate in the study personally through email, explaining the research and making 40-minute appointments for the semi-structured interviews. In the email, the researcher will present the study and the ethical considerations and obtain permission to conduct the survey by attaching a permission letter to be signed by the participant. The role of the researcher and the participant will be stated clearly in Appendix C.

### **3.2.7.1 Nature of the data**

The interviews will be conducted on Microsoft Teams. All interviews were recorded for the researcher to conduct a content analysis to contribute to the study's trustworthiness. Appendix C mentions that the participant will be notified that the interview will be recorded and the necessary permission will be obtained.

### **3.2.7.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Treadwell (2011:164) defined interviews as questions to retrieve the researcher's desired information. According to Babbie and Mouton (2010:289), interviews are one of the most common methods to obtain qualitative data. Qualitative interviews can be viewed as the interaction between the participant and the researcher. Qualitative interviews are so close to regular dialogue that the researcher needs to remember that a particular objective must be met by the end of the interview (Babbie and Mouton, 2010:289).

These interviews determine the participants' feelings and opinions on a specific subject. Semi-structured interviews, like structured interviews, have standard questions and subjects, but the researcher may deviate from the questions to ask follow-up questions to obtain a deeper understanding of the participant's view. This type of interview allows the researcher to determine a different direction for the interview. In a semi-structured interview, both open-ended and closed questions may be asked (Du Plooy, 2009:198). Semi-structured interviews allow the interview to be more conversational and free-flowing and help may help the researcher to better understand the participant's view (Bryman *et al.*, 2014:225).

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten digital marketers to determine what they know of the Metaverse, how the Metaverse, according to them, can be used as a new marketing tool and what the limitations are that digital marketers have when looking at the Metaverse as a marketing channel. The questions or the semi-structured interviews as measuring instruments were formulated beforehand to ensure the interview has structure and stays on topic. See Appendix B for the proposed interview guide.

### 3.2.7.3 Qualitative content analysis

Thematic content analysis, a method widely employed in various research contexts, is particularly suited for the analysis of qualitative data such as mass media content, group discussion transcriptions and message analysis in terms of look, timeframes, symbols and themes (Du Plooy, 2009:231). This approach is adept at uncovering and examining themes within qualitative data, like those derived from semi-structured interviews.

In this study, the researcher will utilise thematic content analysis to scrutinise the data from semi-structured interviews, which are characterised by open-ended questions. These questions are designed not to elicit singular, correct answers but to encourage participants to provide spontaneous, in-depth responses (Husain *et al.* 2012:457; Reja *et al.* 2003:161), thereby facilitating a richer exploration of the participants' perspectives.

The thematic content analysis in this research was conducted through an abductive approach. This means that while the analysis will be deductive in identifying and exploring themes based on existing literature (theoretical framework), it will also be inductive, remaining open to new, emergent themes that arise directly from the data. This abductive approach, characterised by its iterative process of moving between theory and empirical observations, allows for a dynamic interplay between the researcher's theoretical understanding and the data collected. It acknowledges that the researcher's insights evolve as they delve deeper into the data, enabling a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

Qualitative content analysis, as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1278), involves a subjective interpretation of content through a systematic classification process, identifying themes and patterns. The decision to employ thematic content analysis in this study is motivated by its compatibility with the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews and its capacity to integrate both literature-driven and data-driven themes, thus offering a holistic understanding of the data within the framework of an abductive research strategy.

### **3.2.8 Data analysis**

The data analysis process in this study follows the completion of qualitative interviews and content analysis. This phase involves a detailed examination and interpretation of the data collected.

Central to our analysis was the use of themes derived from the literature review. These themes, which encapsulate the theoretical underpinnings of the Metaverse, its requisite knowledge, and its potential applications in marketing within the South African context, served as a foundational framework for analysing the data. The literature review established an ideal or normative understanding of the Metaverse, against which the actual knowledge and adaptability of South African digital marketers to this new marketing channel were assessed.

The qualitative interviews conducted with South African digital marketers were subjected to rigorous thematic discourse analysis. Narrative discourse analysis, as described by Du Plooy (2009:227), involves the content analysis of recorded messages, focusing on their meaning, structure and functions. This analysis encompasses several levels, including presentational, stylistic, structural, thematic and interactional analysis. For this study, the researcher concentrated on thematic analysis, which entailed identifying and describing the main themes in the interview responses.

To facilitate this thematic discourse analysis, the study employed Atlas.ti, a sophisticated statistical software tool. This software was instrumental in analysing and coding the themes. Each interview was meticulously transcribed, with the researcher highlighting codes that were consistently present across all interviews. These codes were then clustered under each respective theme. The analysis involved a qualitative approach, where the findings from each participant's responses were carefully examined and interpreted in light of the identified themes.

Through this methodical process, the study aimed to bridge the gap between the theoretical constructs from the literature and the practical insights gleaned from the experiences and knowledge of the digital marketers. This approach ensured a

comprehensive understanding of how South African digital marketers perceive and are prepared to adapt to the Metaverse as a novel marketing channel.

Here are the main themes that were identified during the data analysis:

**Table 3: Key Themes Underpinning the Metaverse in Digital Marketing: A South African Perspective**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Theme 1 | The understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by digital marketers.         |
| Theme 2 | Technologies classified under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by Digital Marketers |
| Theme 3 | What is the Metaverse from a digital marketer's perspective?                              |
| Theme 4 | The Metaverse as a marketing channel.   |
| Theme 5 | Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa.   |
| Theme 6 | Knowledge and skills marketers need to use the Metaverse as a marketing tool.             |

### 3.2.9 Reliability and validity

A content analysis will determine if South African digital marketers are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing tool and to what extent these digital marketers know the Metaverse. Qualitative semi-structured interviews will be used to collect the data for this study. According to Du Plooy (2009:133), reliability and validity have different meanings when it comes to qualitative research. When working with a qualitative study, the focus will be on the trustworthiness and credibility of the procedures followed, ensuring the data interpretation and findings are accurate.

### **3.2.9.1 Reliability**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:28), reliability is the internal consistency of a study. Du Plooy (2009:131) further argues that the reliability of a study means that the measurement is stable and the same results will show consistently, even if practiced in different time slots.

### **3.2.9.2 Validity**

The validity of a measuring instrument is an indication that the instrument is measuring what it is supposed to measure (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:28). It also indicates to what level the study results can be generalised (Du Plooy, 2009:91). Validity of a study can be compromised when small sampling is being used for the study. Still, the validity can be increased when participants are being used that are very knowledgeable about the topic that is being investigated (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:102).

### **3.2.10.2 Trustworthiness**

Building on the emphasis on reliability and validity in qualitative research, trustworthiness becomes a pivotal cornerstone for ensuring the integrity and credibility of the findings. In the context of assessing the readiness of South African digital marketers to adopt the Metaverse as a marketing tool, trustworthiness extends beyond traditional measures of reliability and validity. It encompasses the authenticity and dependability of the data collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews. Ensuring trustworthiness involves employing rigorous methodological approaches and ethical considerations throughout the research process. This includes transparently documenting the research steps, maintaining a reflexive stance to acknowledge and mitigate researcher bias, and employing techniques such as triangulation, member checking, and rich, thick descriptions to provide depth and context to the findings. By adhering to these principles, the research aims to present a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the digital marketers' perspectives, thereby

contributing valuable insights into the evolving landscape of digital marketing in the Metaverse.

## **CHAPTER 4 - QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 3, I discussed the research methodology employed to achieve the study's objectives, highlighting the adoption of a qualitative research approach. This approach, particularly through semi-structured interviews with digital marketers in South Africa, was pivotal in gaining insights into their understanding and knowledge of the Metaverse. The primary research question seeks to determine whether digital marketers in South Africa are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a new marketing channel.

This chapter aims to address two critical research questions: Firstly, what do digital marketers understand by the term "Metaverse", and can the Metaverse be utilised as a marketing channel? Secondly, what technologies and skills are necessary to effectively use the Metaverse as a marketing tool?

Drawing from the main arguments in the literature review presented in Chapter 2, this chapter delves into a deeper understanding of the Metaverse and what digital marketers need to know to leverage it as a marketing channel. The data analysis revealed several key themes that are essential to understanding the readiness and capabilities of digital marketers in South Africa concerning the Metaverse. These include exploring digital marketers' grasp of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and its implications, identifying the technologies associated with the 4IR by digital marketers, uncovering digital marketers' personal interpretations of the Metaverse, evaluating the potential of the Metaverse as a novel platform for marketing activities, looking at the applicability and relevance of the Metaverse as a marketing tool within the South African context, and addressing the specific competencies and knowledge that marketers require to effectively utilise the Metaverse for marketing purposes.

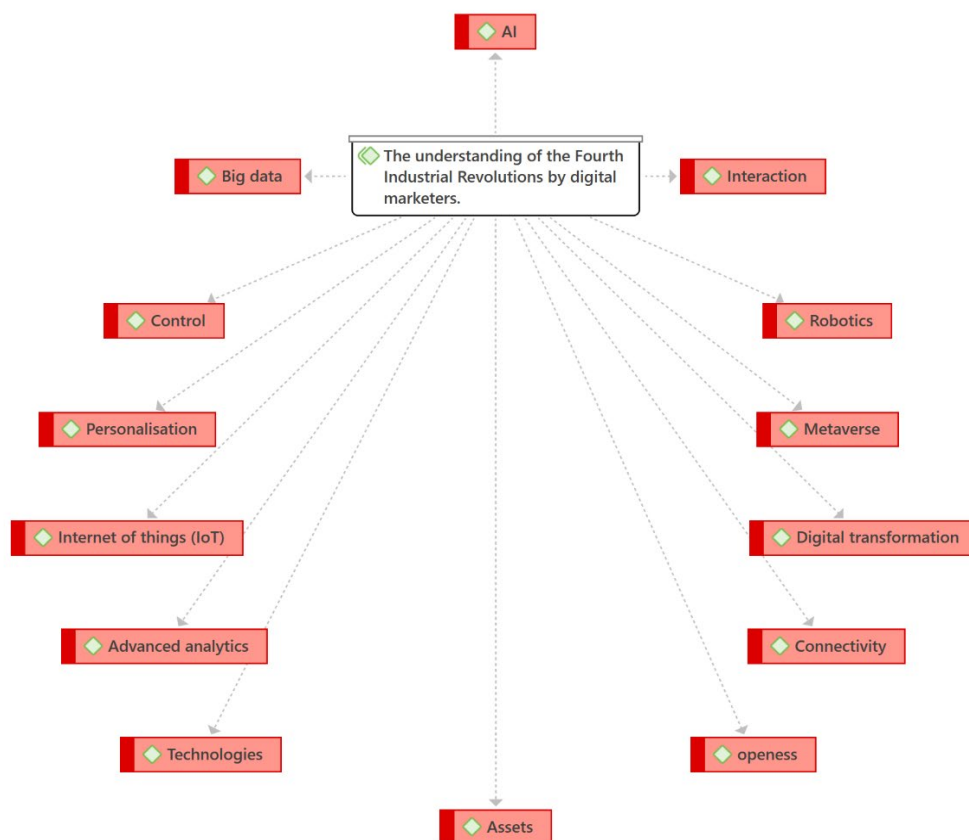
These themes form the crux of our analysis and the discussion in this chapter, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state and future potential of the Metaverse in the digital marketing landscape of South Africa.

## 4.2 Key Themes Underpinning the Metaverse in Digital Marketing: A South African Perspective

### 4.2.1 Theme 1: The understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by digital marketers.

The first theme endeavours to explore digital marketers' perception and understanding regarding the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The analysis outlined in this section will scrutinise participants' conceptualisation and interpretation of the 4IR, focusing on the technologies they associate with this paradigm shift, including AI, Big Data, Robotics and Digital Transformation. The analytical process applied to participants' quotations aims to glean insights into the perceived role of these technologies in fostering innovation and change within digital marketing, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the implications the 4IR harbours for the sector. The most common codes are indicated in Figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4.1: Digital marketers' understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**



**Table 4.1: South African Digital marketers’ understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**

| <b>Code</b>              | <b>Frequency</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Technologies             | 12               |
| AI                       | 10               |
| Digital transformation   | 8                |
| Big data                 | 4                |
| Robotics                 | 3                |
| Assets                   | 2                |
| Internet of Things (IoT) | 2                |
| Connectivity             | 1                |
| Interaction              | 1                |
| Metaverse                | 1                |
| Openness                 | 1                |
| Personalisation          | 1                |
| Control                  | 1                |
| Advanced analytics       | 1                |

#### **4.2.1.1 Technologies (12 mentions)**

The responses from the digital marketers in this study reflect a keen awareness of the integral role that various technologies play in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Their statements reveal not only an acknowledgment of technology’s importance but also an understanding of its transformative impact on digital marketing.

Participant 3’s remark about using “technology to back yourself and everything you’re doing” suggests a perception of technology as a foundational support in all aspects of marketing. This view is reinforced by Participant 4, who repeatedly emphasises the need to understand technology to effectively market to audiences. The focus on “understanding its technology and effectively getting it to the target audience” indicates a recognition that technology is not just a tool but a critical component of successful marketing strategies.

Participant 5’s comment about using “technology to improve businesses” and Participant 9’s advice to “move along with the technologies” further underscore the perceived necessity for businesses to adapt and evolve with technological advancements. Participant 9’s observation that “[i]t is the new way of interacting with technology”, and their insight into aligning marketing with the digital platforms and

technologies where clients are focused, highlight an understanding of the dynamic nature of technology in the 4IR era.

Participant 10's mention of "innovative technology" to customise and personalise customer experiences reflects a sophisticated understanding of how technology can be leveraged to enhance marketing efforts. This aligns with the views of McKinsey & Company (2022) and the World Economic Forum (2023), which emphasise the transformative nature of 4IR technologies in global business.

The participants' recognition of the need to adopt and integrate various technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and IoT, as outlined by Schwab (2016) and DiMascio (2021), demonstrates their comprehension of the technological backbone necessary for innovative marketing strategies and operations. Their insights into the rapid technological developments of the 4IR, as well as the shift from traditional internet usage to a more advanced, on-demand digital environment (Cloyd, 2022), reveal a deep understanding of the 4IR's impact on society and marketing.

The participants' responses illustrate a substantial understanding of the 4IR and its implications for digital marketing. They recognise the necessity of embracing and integrating various technologies to remain relevant and effective in the rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape. This understanding reflects a readiness to harness the power of 4IR technologies to innovate and personalise customer experiences, thereby aligning with the transformative trends in global business and technology.

#### **4.2.1.2 Artificial intelligence (AI) (10 mentions)**

AI is identified as a significant and ubiquitous technology in the 4IR.

*"AI" (Participant 2)*

*"AI" (Participant 3)*

*"I would say that AI is that headline because it's ubiquitous across every landscape on every platform." (Participant 5)*

*“AI in some form. AI is probably the top topic right now regarding the fourth industrial revolution.” (Participant 5)*

*“AI, using machine learning...” (Participant 7)*

The analysis of the responses from the participants reveals a profound and collective recognition of AI as a pivotal element in the landscape of the 4IR. The repeated mention of AI by multiple participants (2, 3, 5 and 7) underscores its perceived significance and omnipresence in the current technological epoch. This uniformity in identifying AI as a central technology reflects a shared understanding among the participants regarding the role and impact of AI in the 4IR.

Participant 5’s characterisation of AI as “ubiquitous across every landscape on every platform” and as “the top topic right now regarding the fourth industrial revolution” indicates a perception of AI not merely as a technological tool but as a fundamental driver of the 4IR. This sentiment is echoed by Participant 7, who specifically mentions “AI, using machine learning”, pointing towards an awareness of the advanced capabilities of AI, such as learning and adapting, which are integral to its transformative potential in various domains.

The emphasis on AI by the participants illustrates their understanding of its profound influence on digital marketing within the 4IR context. AI’s ubiquity and versatility are seen as enabling more intelligent and efficient marketing strategies and solutions. This perception aligns with the broader narrative of AI as a technology that is not confined to a single application but permeates various aspects of business and society, redefining how tasks are approached and executed.

The participants’ responses collectively paint a picture of AI as an indispensable and transformative force in the 4IR. Their recognition of AI’s ubiquity and its integral role in shaping the future of digital marketing reflects a deep understanding of the phenomenon. This consensus among the participants not only highlights the importance of AI in the current technological revolution but also suggests a readiness to embrace and leverage AI for innovative marketing strategies in the 4IR era.

#### 4.2.1.3 Digital transformation (8 mentions)

Participants highlight the importance of digital transformation in the context of the 4IR.

*“There’s not a massive amount of digital twin conversation going on. But I think AI has overtaken Digital Twins and every other technology we’ve discussed in that space.” (Participant 5)*

*“...implementing more digital practices.” (Participant 8)*

*“...characterised by something digital and digitised.” (Participant 10)*

*“technological disruptions.” (Participant 10)*

The insights provided by the participants in this study underscore the critical importance of digital transformation in the context of the 4IR. Their perspectives reveal a nuanced understanding of the need for a comprehensive integration of digital technologies in business operations and strategies.

Participant 5’s observation about the dominance of AI over other technologies, including Digital Twins in current conversations, reflects an awareness of the shifting focus within the digital landscape. This shift indicates a recognition of AI’s growing prominence and its potential to drive significant changes in various industries.

Participant 8’s mention of “implementing more digital practices” and Participant 10’s description of the current era as “characterised by something digital and digitised” highlight the participants’ understanding of the pervasive nature of digital transformation. These insights align with the broader narrative of the 4IR, which is marked by a fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres (Davis, 2016:1).

The concept of “technological disruptions” mentioned by Participant 10 further illustrates the participants’ grasp of the transformative impact of digital technologies.

This disruption is not limited to the manufacturing sector but extends across various industries, necessitating a versatile approach to digital integration.

From a researcher's perspective, these responses reflect a deep comprehension of the 4IR's essence, which is the thorough incorporation of emergent technologies like AI and IoT into business operations. This transformation is pivotal for enhancing efficiency, productivity and overall value delivery to customers (Tucci and Needle, 2023:2). The participants' insights resonate with the understanding that digital transformation is essential for businesses to thrive in the 4IR era. It not only involves the adoption of new technologies but also the phasing out of legacy systems and the innovative restructuring of business processes.

The participants' views suggest that they are cognisant of the multifaceted benefits of digital transformation. These include improved accessibility and transmissibility of products and services, augmented efficiency across supply chains and minimised waste, benefiting employees, stakeholders and consumers. Their understanding aligns with the broader narrative of the 4IR as an extension of the Third Industrial Revolution's technological advancements, characterised by a unique convergence of physical, digital and biological technologies (World Economic Forum, 2023; Yoon, 2017:75; Davis, 2016:1).

The participants' responses indicate a comprehensive understanding of the critical role of digital transformation in navigating the complexities of the 4IR. This understanding is crucial for organisations across various sectors aiming to adapt and excel in an increasingly digitised world.

#### **4.2.1.4 Big data (4 mentions)**

Big data is a crucial element in understanding consumers and engaging with them.

*"...big data is a lot more reliance because you need to understand the flow of information." (Participant 1)*

*“You must be practically before your consumer and use big data to get to that.”  
(Participant 1)*

*“...you have consumers with more information sharing more information about themselves than you could ever dream of.” (Participant 10)*

The participants' insights on big data underscore its critical role in the 4IR, particularly in understanding and engaging with consumers. Their responses reflect a nuanced comprehension of big data's capabilities and its application in informed marketing decision-making.

Participant 1's emphasis on the reliance on big data to “understand the flow of information” and the necessity to be “practically before your consumer” using big data, highlights the strategic importance of this technology in pre-emptively understanding and meeting consumer needs. This proactive approach is pivotal in the 4IR era, where timely and informed decision-making can significantly influence the success of business.

Participant 10's observation about consumers sharing more information than ever before aligns with the current data-rich environment. This abundance of consumer data presents an unprecedented opportunity for businesses to gain deep insights into consumer behaviour and preferences.

From a researcher's perspective, these insights illustrate the indispensability of big data in strategic decision-making during the 4IR. Big data analysis provides invaluable insights into critical components such as market trends and potential business trajectories. This analysis is fundamental in orchestrating strategic decisions, including organisational expansion, development plans and financial analysis. By aligning corporate strategies with data-driven insights, businesses can navigate the 4IR landscape more effectively (Chen, Chiang, & Storey, 2012:1185).

Moreover, big data enables the formulation of personalised marketing approaches. By acquiring an enhanced understanding of individual consumer profiles, marketers can tailor their strategies to be more targeted and resonate with the intended demographic.

This personalisation can include tailoring advertising efforts based on various factors such as age, gender, shopping propensities and geographical location, thereby increasing the efficacy of marketing endeavours (Liu *et al.*, 2021:10).

The participants' responses indicate a comprehensive understanding of big data's pivotal role in the 4IR. Big data emerges not just as a tool for gathering information but as a strategic asset that can significantly influence marketing strategies and business decisions. Its ability to provide deep insights into consumer behaviour and preferences is indispensable for businesses aiming to thrive in an increasingly data-driven and consumer-centric market landscape.

#### **4.2.1.5 Robotics (3 mentions)**

Robotics is mentioned as a part of the technological landscape of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

*"...robotics." (Participant 2)*

*"...robotics." (Participant 7)*

The mentions of robotics by Participants 2 and 7 in the context of the 4IR underscore its integral role in shaping the technological landscape of this era. These responses highlight the participants' recognition of robotics as a key driver in the ongoing evolution of industries and sectors within the 4IR framework.

The significance of robotics in the 4IR is multifaceted. As indicated by Roland Berger Strategy Consultants, industrial robots are evolving beyond traditional roles. They are now integral in a range of functions including production, logistics and office management (Oosthuizen, 2022:2). This evolution signifies a shift from robotics being mere tools of automation to becoming central components in the orchestration of more complex and integrated systems.

McKinsey & Company's insights further elucidate that the 4IR, characterised by connectivity, advanced analytics, automation and sophisticated manufacturing

technology, is transforming global business operations. Robotics stand out as a foundational technology within this era, disrupting and enhancing various aspects of the value chain. Its role is not limited to manufacturing but extends across various sectors, indicating its pervasive influence (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

From a researcher's perspective, the participants' acknowledgment of robotics reflects an understanding of its transformative potential in the 4IR. Robotics is not just an isolated technological advancement, it is a harbinger of a broader shift in how industries operate. Its impact is seen in the increasing automation of tasks, the enhancement of efficiency and productivity, and the creation of new opportunities for innovation and growth.

The participants' responses and the corroborating literature indicate that robotics is a critical component of the 4IR's technological landscape. Its role in driving innovation and efficiency across various sectors is a testament to its transformative potential. As the 4IR progresses, the impact of robotics is expected to amplify, continually reshaping the way businesses operate and compete in an increasingly automated and interconnected world.

#### **4.2.1.6 Other codes**

Other codes such as assets, Internet of Things (IoT), connectivity and interaction were also mentioned, highlighting the diverse range of technologies and concepts associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

*"...creation of assets." (Participant 1)*

*"...Internet of Things." (Participant 4)*

Within the context of the 4IR, the mentions of assets and the IoT by Participants 1 and 4 respectively, highlight the diverse range of technologies and concepts integral to this era. As a researcher, these responses reflect an understanding of the multifaceted nature of the 4IR, where various technologies converge to create a transformative impact on industries and society.

The 4IR, as described by McKinsey & Company (2022), represents a significant shift in global business paradigms, driven by enhanced connectivity, advanced analytics, automation and refined manufacturing technology. This era is not just about the introduction of new technologies but the integration and interaction of these technologies across various domains. The mention of “creation of assets” by Participant 1 suggests an awareness of the new forms of value and resources that emerge in the 4IR, where digital and physical assets intertwine to create novel opportunities and challenges.

The IoT, highlighted by Participant 4, is a cornerstone of the 4IR. It exemplifies the revolution’s emphasis on connectivity, merging physical and digital systems. The IoT’s role in transforming industries, particularly manufacturing, is profound. It enables a level of automation and data exchange previously unattainable, leading to more efficient, responsive and adaptable business models (Iberdrola, 2023; Lee & Meng, 2020:419). David *et al.* (2022:4) further emphasise the IoT’s role in catalysing the exponential technological advancement characteristic of the 4IR, influencing sectors from manufacturing to data processing and robotics.

From a researcher’s perspective, the participants’ recognition of assets and IoT, along with other 4IR technologies like augmented reality (AR), machine automation, big data and cloud computing, indicates a comprehensive understanding of the 4IR’s complexity. The 4IR is not merely a series of technological advancements but a holistic transformation of how industries operate, integrate and innovate. It’s a fusion of technologies that blurs the lines between physical, digital and biological spheres, creating a new landscape where traditional business models are redefined and new paradigms of operation emerge.

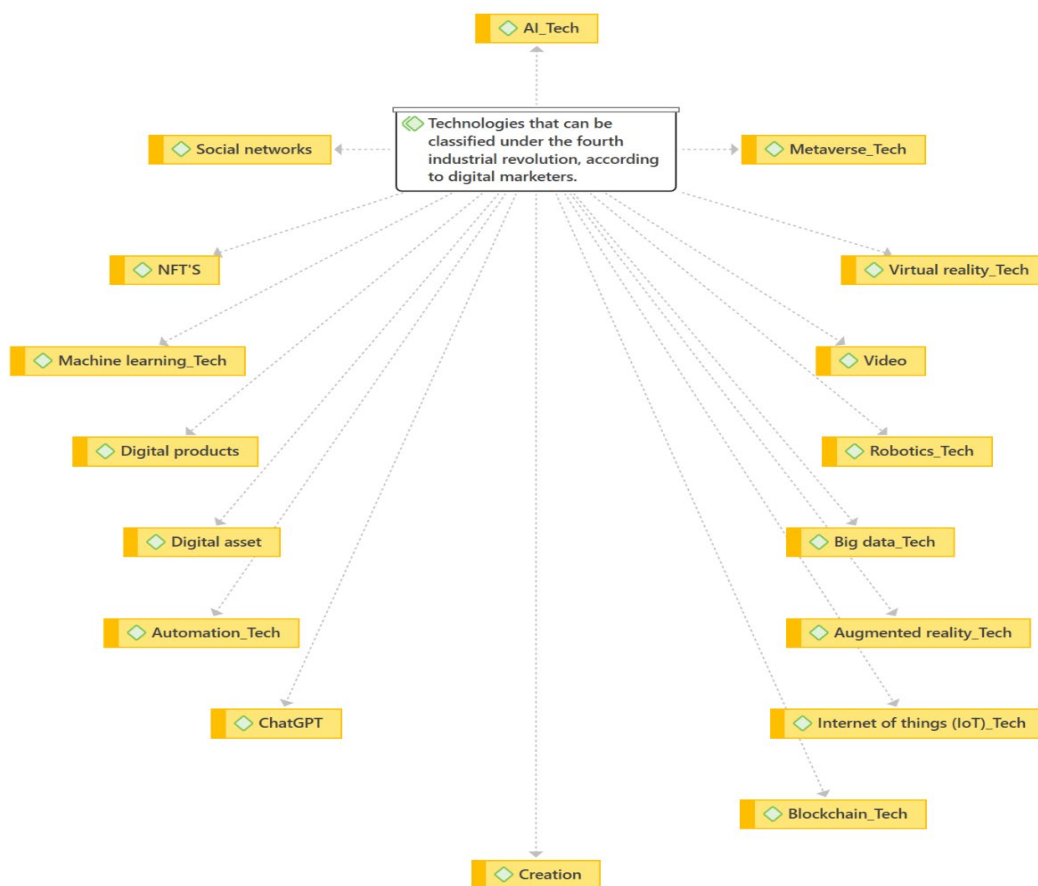
The participants’ insights, coupled with the literature, paint a picture of the 4IR as a multifaceted revolution. It’s a period marked by the convergence of diverse technologies, each playing a critical role in shaping the future of industries and society. The 4IR’s impact extends beyond mere technological change; it signifies a fundamental shift in how we perceive and interact with the world around us, driven by the seamless integration of the physical and digital realms.

#### 4.2.2 Theme 2: Technologies classified under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by digital marketers

Theme two meticulously explores the technologies that digital marketing professionals categorise under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The ensuing analysis within this section is designed to yield insights into the perception and utilisation of these technologies by industry experts. With a spectrum of technologies, including but not limited to AI, ChatGPT, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), this theme seeks to elucidate the prominence and significance each holds within digital marketing. The analysis of participants' quotations will facilitate an understanding of the practical applications and intrinsic value these technologies embed within the marketing strategies crafted by professionals.

The most common codes are indicated in Figure 4.2 below.

**Figure 4.2: Technologies classified under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by digital marketers**



**Table 4.2: Technologies classified under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by digital marketers**

| <b>Code</b>                | <b>Frequency</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| AI                         | 13               |
| ChatGPT                    | 7                |
| Virtual reality (VR)       | 3                |
| Augmented reality (AR)     | 2                |
| Automation                 | 2                |
| Robotics                   | 2                |
| Social networks            | 2                |
| Digital products           | 2                |
| Metaverse                  | 2                |
| Creation                   | 1                |
| Digital assets             | 1                |
| Internet of Things (IoT)   | 1                |
| Machine learning           | 1                |
| Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) | 1                |
| Blockchain                 | 1                |
| Video                      | 1                |
| Big data                   | 1                |

#### **4.2.2.1 Artificial intelligence (AI) (13 mentions)**

Artificial intelligence (AI), mentioned 13 times, is perceived as a leading technology in Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by digital marketers.

*“AI” (Participant 2)*

*“machine learning” (Participant 2)*

*“AI kind of tools like the imager imaging and the like Dall-e.” (Participant 7)*

*“AI assistance to help with business flow streamlining.” (Participant 8)*

*“AI would probably be the leader there” (Participant 9)*

*“general automation through AI.” (Participant 9)*

The theme focusing on technologies classified under the 4IR by digital marketers, particularly the mentions of AI, reveals a deep recognition of AI’s transformative role

in the marketing landscape. As a researcher, the repeated references to AI by participants underscore its perceived prominence and utility in the realm of digital marketing within the 4IR context.

AI, mentioned 13 times, is not just seen as another technological tool but as a leading force in the 4IR era. The participants' references to "machine learning" and "AI kind of tools like the imager imaging and the like Dall-e" (Participant 7) indicate an awareness of the diverse applications of AI in marketing. These applications range from image processing to advanced data analysis, showcasing AI's versatility. Participant 8's mention of "AI assistance to help with business flow streamlining" and Participant 9's notes on "general automation through AI" reflect a common understanding among digital marketers of AI's capability to enhance efficiency and streamline business processes.

The perception of AI as a "leader" in the 4IR by Participant 9 aligns with the broader narrative in the field of digital marketing. AI is not merely an adjunct tool; it is at the forefront of driving innovation and personalisation in marketing strategies. Its ability to process vast amounts of data and provide insights allows for more targeted, effective marketing approaches. AI's role in automation extends beyond routine tasks to more complex decision-making processes, enabling marketers to focus on creative and strategic aspects of their work.

From a researcher's perspective, the emphasis on AI by digital marketing professionals reflects a broader trend in the industry. AI is increasingly becoming integral to marketing strategies, offering solutions that are not only efficient but also innovative and customer-centric. The participants' insights suggest a recognition of AI's potential to revolutionise marketing practices, making them more adaptive, responsive and personalised. This aligns with the literature, where AI is often cited as a key driver of change in the marketing field, offering new ways to engage customers, understand market dynamics and create value (Lin, 2022).

The participants' views on AI as a critical technology in the 4IR for digital marketing highlight its significant role in shaping the future of the industry. AI's capabilities in

automation, data analysis and customer engagement are believed to be essential for navigating the complexities of the digital marketing landscape in the 4IR era. This theme underscores the importance of AI in crafting innovative, efficient and customer-focused marketing strategies, reflecting its status as a cornerstone technology in the ongoing digital transformation.

#### **4.2.2.2 ChatGPT (7 mentions)**

ChatGPT is mentioned seven times, highlighting its significance in digital marketing. According to (Duarte, 2023; Grant 2023), ChatGPT is a technology driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR is characterised by the convergence of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and ChatGPT, which are positioned as the driving forces behind this transformative era.

*“ChatGPT” (Participant 2)*

*“ChatGPT is a big one” (Participant 8)*

*“chatbots like ChatGPT” (Participant 7)*

The mention of ChatGPT seven times by participants in the context of digital marketing within the 4IR underscores its perceived significance and utility. As a researcher, these mentions are indicative of the growing importance of AI-driven chatbots in the digital marketing landscape, particularly within the 4IR framework.

ChatGPT, as highlighted by the participants, is not just another tool but a significant component of the 4IR. The references to ChatGPT by Participant 2, the emphasis by Participant 8 that “ChatGPT is a big one”, and the mention of “chatbots like ChatGPT” by Participant 7, collectively point to a recognition of its role in revolutionising customer engagement and service. This aligns with the broader narrative in digital marketing, where AI-driven tools like ChatGPT are increasingly seen as pivotal in automating and enhancing customer interactions (Viliavin, 2023).

From an analytical standpoint, ChatGPT can be viewed both as a technology under the 4IR and as part of the broader AI landscape. The 4IR is characterised by the convergence of advanced technologies, including AI, where ChatGPT stands out as a specific application of AI in the form of sophisticated chatbots. These AI-driven chatbots are not merely functional tools but are integral to the transformative era of the 4IR, driving changes in how businesses interact with customers.

ChatGPT's role in digital marketing within the 4IR context is multifaceted. It serves as an automated solution for customer service, providing instant, efficient responses and support. This capability enhances the customer experience, a critical aspect of modern digital marketing strategies. Moreover, ChatGPT's ability to engage in natural, human-like conversations positions it as a key player in personalising customer interactions, a trend that is increasingly important in the digital age.

The participants' references to ChatGPT reflect an understanding of its role as both a distinct technology in the 4IR and a part of the larger AI framework. Its significance in automating and enhancing customer service and engagement in digital marketing is clear. As a researcher, I interpret these insights as indicative of the broader trend in digital marketing, where AI-driven tools like ChatGPT are essential for businesses to remain competitive and responsive in the rapidly evolving digital landscape of the 4IR.

#### **4.2.2.3 Virtual reality (VR) (3 mentions) & augmented reality (AR) (2 mentions)**

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) have been mentioned three times, emphasising their role in creating immersive experiences. VR and AR are considered part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies. The 4IR is characterised by the convergence of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, automation and advanced manufacturing technology, transforming global business (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

*“virtual reality” (Participant 4)*

*“augmented reality” (Participant 4)*

The mentions of VR and AR by participants in the context of the 4IR underscore their emerging significance in the digital marketing realm. As a researcher, I interpret these mentions as a reflection of an awareness among digital marketers of the transformative potential of VR and AR in creating immersive and engaging customer experiences.

The references to “virtual reality” and “augmented reality” by Participant 4 are not merely acknowledgments of these technologies as part of the digital marketing toolkit. Instead, they signify a deeper understanding of the role VR and AR play in the broader context of the 4IR. The 4IR, as characterised by McKinsey & Company (2022), is marked by the convergence of advanced technologies, including AI, robotics and automation. Within this framework, VR and AR emerge as crucial components for creating innovative and interactive marketing strategies.

VR and AR’s ability to create immersive experiences is particularly relevant in the digital marketing landscape. These technologies enable marketers to craft unique, interactive content that goes beyond traditional marketing approaches. This capability is vital for deepening customer engagement and strengthening brand connections, as noted by Von der Osten (2023). The immersive nature of VR and AR allows customers to experience products and services in a more engaging and lifelike manner, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience and potentially leading to higher conversion rates.

From an analytical perspective, the inclusion of VR and AR by digital marketers in the discussions about 4IR technologies indicates a recognition of the need to incorporate these advanced tools into marketing strategies. This is in line with the evolving nature of the 4IR, where the blending of physical and digital experiences is becoming increasingly important. VR and AR offer a way to bridge this gap, providing customers with a seamless and interactive experience that leverages the best of both worlds.

The mentions of VR and AR by participants reflect an understanding of their role as integral components of the 4IR in the context of digital marketing. As a researcher, I interpret these insights as indicative of a broader trend where immersive technologies

like VR and AR are becoming essential for creating engaging and innovative marketing campaigns. Their ability to enhance customer experiences and deepen brand connections aligns with the transformative goals of the 4IR, marking them as key technologies in the evolving landscape of digital marketing.

#### **4.2.2.4 Other technologies**

Other technologies such as automation, robotics, social networks, digital products, Metaverse, creation, digital assets, Internet of Things (IoT), machine learning, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), blockchain, video and big data were also mentioned, each contributing to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) landscape (Iberdrola, 2023; Lee & Meng, 2020:419).

*“Automation of entire careers would be part of that.” (Participant 9)*

*“blockchain” (Participant 9)*

*“Internet of Things” (Participant 10)*

The diverse range of technologies mentioned by participants, including automation, robotics, social networks, digital products, the Metaverse, creation, digital assets, the IoT, machine learning, NFTs, blockchain, video and big data, collectively paint a comprehensive picture of the 4IR landscape. As a researcher, I interpret these mentions as a reflection of a deep understanding among digital marketers of the multifaceted nature of the 4IR and its profound impact on the field of digital marketing.

The mention of “Automation of entire careers” by Participant 9, “blockchain” by the same participant, and “Internet of Things” by Participant 10, are not isolated acknowledgments. Instead, they represent an acute awareness of how these technologies are integral to the 4IR. According to Iberdrola (2023) and Lee & Meng (2020:419), the 4IR is characterised by a convergence of advanced technologies that are transforming global business and societal landscapes. In this context, each technology mentioned plays a specific role in shaping the future of digital marketing.

Automation, for instance, is regarded as a key driver in streamlining processes and enhancing efficiency. This is crucial in a marketing landscape that increasingly values speed and agility. Blockchain, on the other hand, is recognised for its ability to ensure secure transactions, a vital aspect in the digital age where data security and trust are paramount. The IoT is acknowledged for its role in connecting various devices and systems, thereby enabling a more integrated and seamless digital marketing experience.

From an analytical perspective, the inclusion of such a wide array of technologies in the discussion about the 4IR by digital marketers indicates a comprehensive understanding of the revolution's scope. It suggests that professionals in the field are not only aware of individual technologies but also understand how these technologies interconnect and collectively contribute to the evolving digital marketing landscape.

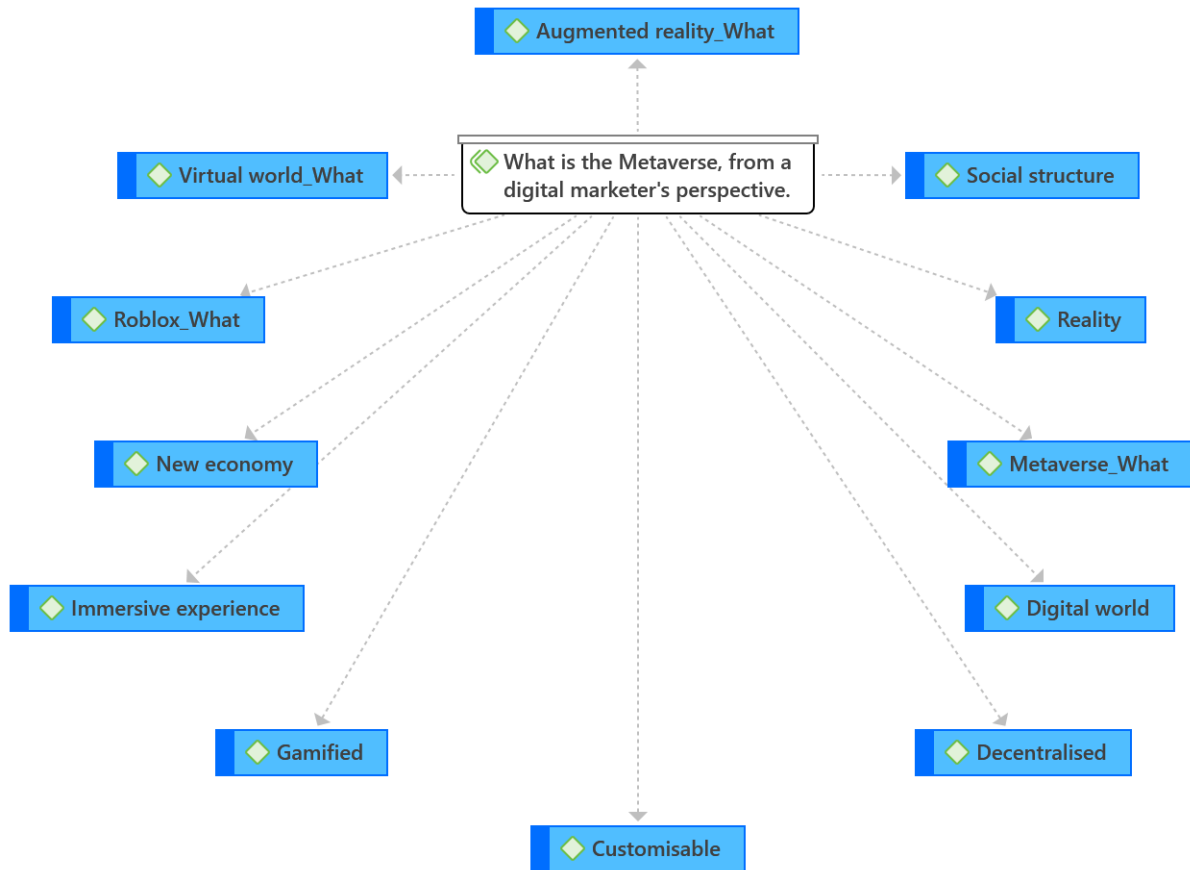
The diverse technologies mentioned by participants highlight the complex and interconnected nature of the 4IR. As a researcher, I interpret these insights as indicative of digital marketers' broad and nuanced understanding of the 4IR. They recognise that each technology, from automation to blockchain to IoT, plays a unique role in shaping the future of digital marketing. This understanding is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies that leverage the full potential of the 4IR, offering new opportunities for innovation and addressing the challenges of an increasingly digital world.

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3: What is the Metaverse from a digital marketer's perspective?**

Theme three embarks on exploring the concept of the Metaverse from the vantage point of digital marketing professionals. This section offers a detailed analytical perspective on how marketers perceive and define the Metaverse. It focuses on its constituent components and characteristics, such as augmented reality (AR), decentralisation, customisability and the inception of a novel virtual economy. Through a systematic examination of participants' quotations, this theme is set to provide insights into the perceived opportunities and challenges of the Metaverse. It

challenges underscoring its potential as a transformative platform for marketing in the digital epoch. The most common codes are indicated in Figure 4.3 below.

**Figure 4.3 What is the Metaverse from a digital marketer’s perspective?**



**Table 4.3: What is the Metaverse from a digital marketer’s perspective?**

| Code                 | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Augmented reality    | 5         |
| Customisable         | 2         |
| Decentralised        | 4         |
| Digital world        | 1         |
| Gamified             | 1         |
| Immersive experience | 1         |
| Metaverse            | 1         |
| New economy          | 2         |
| Reality              | 2         |
| Roblox               | 1         |
| Social structure     | 10        |
| Virtual world        | 5         |

#### **4.2.3.1 Augmented reality (AR) (5 mentions)**

In analysing the data regarding digital marketers' perceptions of the Metaverse, a clear pattern emerges illustrating their understanding of this phenomenon as a confluence of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). The relationship between the words used by the participants reveal a deep comprehension of the Metaverse's potential to revolutionise digital marketing through immersive experiences.

The repeated mention of "augmented and virtual reality" by Participant 2 and the emphasis on realism and immersion indicate a recognition of the Metaverse as a space where digital and physical realities coalesce. This understanding aligns with the broader industry perspective that sees AR and VR as key drivers in creating engaging and interactive digital environments. The participants' descriptions suggest a nuanced appreciation of how these technologies can transform the user experience, making it more engaging and lifelike.

Participant 2's observation about the Metaverse taking "existing reality into account" and Participant 5's view of it as an "augmented reality experience" further underscore the perceived importance of AR in the Metaverse. These insights reflect an understanding that the Metaverse is not just about escapism into a virtual world; it is about enhancing the real world with digital elements. This perspective is crucial for digital marketers, as it unlocks innovative avenues for creating marketing campaigns that are not only immersive but also grounded in the user's real-world context.

The mention of the Metaverse as a "portration of the Internet" by Participant 4 and the anticipation of it becoming a primary gateway to digital content (Anderson & Rainie, 2022:9) highlight the transformative potential of this technology. It suggests a vision of the Metaverse as an evolved form of the internet, offering a more immersive and interactive way of accessing digital content. This is a significant shift from traditional digital marketing approaches, requiring marketers to think beyond conventional online platforms.

From a researcher's perspective, the data illustrates that digital marketers perceive the Metaverse as a blend of AR and VR technologies, creating a new realm for human-

machine interaction. This perception is not just theoretical; it is grounded in a practical understanding of how these technologies can be leveraged to enhance marketing strategies. The emphasis on immersive experiences, realism, and the blending of digital and physical elements points to a future where marketing is not just about conveying a message but about creating an experience that resonates with the consumer on multiple levels.

The relationship between the words used by the participants reveals a sophisticated understanding of the Metaverse as a transformative platform in digital marketing. It highlights the importance of immersive technologies like AR and VR in creating engaging user experiences and points to a future where digital marketing transcends traditional boundaries offering new, innovative ways to connect with audiences.

#### **4.2.3.2 Decentralised (4 mentions)**

Participants highlight the decentralised aspect of the Metaverse.

*“Metaverse is the decentralisation of society.” (Participant 1)*

*“Multiple people can create their version of that space to create much more like that monetisation but on decentralised formats.” (Participant 1)*

*“Also, it’s very decentralised and somewhat entirely decentralised.” (Participant 2)*

*“It is a whole decentralised system that you can build into, and can brand into.” (Participant 3)*

The data concerning the Metaverse’s decentralised aspect, as highlighted by the participants, reveals a profound understanding of its fundamental structure and the implications for digital marketing and societal interaction. The emphasis on decentralisation by the participants underscore a recognition of the Metaverse as a transformative space that redefines traditional notions of ownership, control and community engagement in the digital realm.

Participant 1's view of the Metaverse as "the decentralisation of society" and their mention of "decentralised formats" for monetisation reflect an understanding of the Metaverse as a paradigm shift in how digital spaces are created and managed. This perspective aligns with the broader concept of decentralisation in digital environments, where control and ownership are distributed among users rather than centralised entities. The notion of multiple entities creating their versions of space within the Metaverse suggests a democratisation of digital content creation and ownership, resonating with the principles of blockchain technology, which is a cornerstone of the Metaverse's architecture.

Participants 2 and 3's emphasis on the Metaverse being "very decentralised" and a "whole decentralised system" further highlights the significance of this feature. From a researcher's perspective, these insights indicate an awareness of the Metaverse's potential to empower users, giving them unprecedented control over their digital assets and experiences. This decentralisation fosters a sense of autonomy and ownership which is crucial for engaging users in a more meaningful and personal manner.

The intrinsic decentralised architecture of the Metaverse, as noted by Anderson & Rainie (2022:40), facilitates the creation and governance of unique digital spaces by individuals or groups. This aspect is vital for digital marketers as it unlocks new avenues for user engagement and community building. The ability for users to have authentic ownership of their digital assets, as highlighted by Dwivedi *et al.* (2022:26), is particularly significant. It allows for a more dynamic and interactive digital economy, where users can trade, sell and monetise their assets, thereby creating a more vibrant and participatory digital ecosystem.

Moreover, the role of Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) in the Metaverse's governance, as mentioned by Anderson & Rainie (2022:29), points to an evolving landscape of digital collaboration and decision-making. DAOs represent a new model of collective governance and operation, which is particularly relevant in the context of the Metaverse, where traditional hierarchical structures are replaced by more fluid and collaborative arrangements.

The participants' insights into the decentralised nature of the Metaverse reveal a nuanced understanding of its potential to reshape digital interactions and marketing. The emphasis on decentralisation, blockchain technology and DAOs highlights a shift towards a more user-centric, autonomous and collaborative digital environment. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for digital marketers, requiring them to adapt their strategies to engage with a more empowered and participatory audience in the Metaverse.

#### **4.2.3.3 Social structure (10 mentions)**

The Metaverse is a platform for social interaction and connection within a digital realm.

*"It's an enablement platform that allows anyone to create a social area to construct some form of value." (Participant 1)*

*"social connection has been monetised." (Participant 1)*

*"social structure inside a digital realm." (Participant 1)*

*"and there's an interaction." (Participant 1)*

*"creating relationships that do not live in the real world." (Participant 1)*

*"I think Facebook and yeah and kind of a universe that Mark Zuckerberg and his business are trying to create." (Participant 7)*

*"But it's a digital space where people can enter, communicate, network, socialise, and play games. That's a big one as well. But you're just a digital version of the world." (Participant 8)*

*"And they can be a general metaverse where people try to reenact real life as closely as possible, which is what Facebook is trying to achieve. So that's how I understand the metaverse." (Participant 9)*

The data on the social structure of the Metaverse, as articulated by the participants, provides a rich tapestry of insights into how digital marketers perceive this emerging digital realm. The emphasis on social interaction and connection within the Metaverse underscores its potential as a revolutionary platform for community building, networking and engagement in a digital context.

Participant 1's description of the Metaverse as an "enablement platform" for creating social areas and constructing value, along with their observations on monetised social connections and the creation of relationships beyond the real world, highlights the Metaverse's capacity to foster new forms of social interaction. This perspective aligns with Henz's (2022:1) view of the Metaverse offering innovative modalities of interaction and community development. From a researcher's perspective, these insights suggest that the Metaverse is not merely a digital space but a dynamic social ecosystem where relationships, communities and economic activities coalesce.

Participants 7 and 9's references to Facebook and its vision for the Metaverse further illustrate the growing influence of major technology companies in shaping this digital landscape. The Metaverse, as envisioned by these companies, is seen as a digital extension of real life, offering a space for users to interact, socialise and engage in activities akin to the physical world. This aligns with the observation of Zhang *et al.* (2022:1) on the role of technology conglomerates in popularising the Metaverse.

Participant 8's description of the Metaverse as a digital space for communication, networking, socialising and gaming underscores its multifaceted nature. This view resonates with the concept of the Metaverse as a comprehensive digital environment that transcends traditional social media platforms, offering a more immersive and interactive experience, as noted by Henz (2022:5).

The participants' insights into the social structure of the Metaverse reveal a nuanced understanding of its potential to redefine social interaction in the digital age. The Metaverse is perceived not just as a technological innovation but as a social phenomenon that could reshape how people connect, interact and form communities

online. The potential for monetisation within these digital social networks suggests a new economic paradigm where social interactions have tangible value.

Furthermore, the anticipated integration of core features from existing social media platforms into the Metaverse, as mentioned by Henz (2022:5), indicates a convergence of traditional and emerging digital platforms. This convergence is likely to create a more enriched and engaging user experience, blurring the lines between physical and digital social interactions.

The Metaverse, as perceived by digital marketers, represents a significant shift in the landscape of social media and digital interaction. It is envisioned as a platform that not only enhances user engagement but also redefines the very nature of social connectivity and community building in the digital realm. As such, it presents both opportunities and challenges for digital marketers, who must navigate this evolving landscape to effectively engage with their audiences.

#### **4.2.3.4 Virtual world (5 mentions)**

Participants describe the Metaverse as a virtual world or digital space where various activities can occur.

*“a virtual world because it’s more than a platform that’s reasonably accessible, depending on the tools.” (Participant 2)*

*“Like you want to say, like a virtual world living on its own that can function on its own, that you can, if you wish to create, recreate your stadium or whether you want to play a concert or whatever.” (Participant 3)*

*“So it’s a portration of the Internet into a universe you can step into with VR and augmented reality to interact with the Internet and other people inside that universe.” (Participant 4)*

*“It is a virtual existence but a reflection of real life. There are real-life emotions and real-life experiences, but it’s virtually connected.” (Participant 10)*

*“The metaverse is a virtual world that connects to real-life experiences.” (Participant 10)*

The participants' descriptions of the Metaverse as a virtual world or digital space where a variety of activities can take place offer a comprehensive view of its multifaceted nature. This perception aligns with the broader understanding of the Metaverse as an expansive, interactive digital environment that transcends traditional online experiences.

Participant 2's characterisation of the Metaverse as “a virtual world” that is “reasonably accessible” highlights its potential to be an inclusive digital space. This aligns with Anderson & Rainie's (2022:12) view of the Metaverse facilitating a social experience, where users can connect with others and engage in a range of activities. From a researcher's perspective, this suggests that the Metaverse is envisioned as a digital realm that is not only immersive but also accessible to a wide audience.

Participants 3 and 4's insights into the Metaverse as a space for recreation and interaction where users can create and engage with various scenarios, reflect its potential as a platform for creativity and innovation. This is further supported by Jiaxin & Gongjing's (2022:2129) observation of the Metaverse enabling users to explore diverse virtual worlds, each offering unique experiences. This aspect of the Metaverse indicates its capacity to serve as a canvas for users' imagination, allowing them to construct and experience their own realities.

Participant 10's description of the Metaverse as “a virtual existence but a reflection of real life” underscores the blurring of lines between the virtual and the real world. This perception is crucial for understanding the Metaverse's potential impact on various aspects of life, including work, education and entertainment. The notion of the Metaverse as a space where real-life emotions and experiences are virtually connected resonates with the findings of Zhang *et al.* (2022:2) on its potential to transform remote work and education by infusing digital spaces with the intimacy of face-to-face interactions.

The participants' views also emphasise the Metaverse's potential in commerce and self-expression. The concept of virtual real estate and commerce, as discussed by Zhang *et al.* (2022:11), suggests new economic opportunities within the Metaverse. This includes virtual shopping and trading, which could revolutionise how users interact with products and services. Additionally, the ability for users to express themselves through customisable avatars, as noted by Jiabin & Gongjing (2022:2129), points to the Metaverse as a platform for personal expression and identity formation.

The Metaverse, as described by the participants, emerges as a dynamic and multifaceted virtual world. It offers a range of experiences from social networking to gaming, work, education and commerce, all within a digital milieu. This digital ecosystem mirrors and extends real-life experiences, providing a novel platform for user engagement, interaction and self-expression. For digital marketers, the Metaverse represents a new frontier with immense potential for innovative marketing strategies, customer engagement and the creation of unique brand experiences.

#### **4.2.3.5 New economy (2 mentions)**

The Metaverse is a space where a new economy can be developed, with unique financial flows and economic structures.

*“So there’s a whole new economic structure as new economic and financial flows that you can create money that’s not backed by a Gold Star for cash somewhere else.”*  
(Participant 1)

The concept of a new economy within the Metaverse, as highlighted by the participants, represents a significant shift in how economic structures and financial flows are perceived and managed in the digital realm. This emerging economy in the Metaverse is characterised by unique rules and structures, offering innovative opportunities for monetisation and value generation.

Participant 1's mention of “a whole new economic structure” with “new economic and financial flows” indicates a recognition of the Metaverse as a space where traditional economic concepts are reimagined. This aligns with the perspective of Huang *et al.*

(2022:1-10), which views the Metaverse as a confluence of platforms that connect users and developers, creating two-sided markets with distinct challenges and opportunities. From a researcher's viewpoint, this suggests that the Metaverse is not just a digital extension of the physical world but a distinct entity with its own economic dynamics.

The development of the Metaverse's economy, as discussed by Huang *et al.* (2022:2), is closely linked to the establishment of a robust infrastructure that includes payments, security, identity verification, currency exchange and credit systems. This infrastructure is crucial for integrating the Metaverse with traditional financial institutions and real-world economics, thereby facilitating the growth of its creative economy. The mention of integrating with fiat currencies and traditional financial systems indicates a recognition of the need to bridge the virtual and physical economies, ensuring a seamless transition and interaction between the two.

Awada's (2023) insights into the potential of financial services within the Metaverse, including virtual branches and the use of avatars for interaction, highlight the innovative approaches being considered for financial transactions in the digital space. The emphasis on the democratisation of financial experiences within the Metaverse highlights the importance of making these services accessible and user-friendly. This approach is key to fostering a cohesive and inclusive economic environment within the Metaverse.

Furthermore, the need for collaboration among banks, Metaverse companies, regulators and other stakeholders, as mentioned by Awada (2023), is critical for navigating the challenges and unlocking the full potential of the Metaverse's economy. Such collaboration ensures a comprehensive and regulated development of economic and financial structures within the virtual environment, contributing to the establishment of a stable and viable economic space.

In conclusion, the new economy within the Metaverse, as perceived by digital marketers, represents a groundbreaking shift in economic interactions and structures. It offers a realm where traditional economic concepts are redefined and innovative

financial practices are developed. This emergent economy is not only a space for monetisation and value generation but also a platform for reimagining how economic interactions occur in a digital context. For digital marketers, this presents both challenges and opportunities in navigating and leveraging the unique economic landscape of the Metaverse.

#### **4.2.3.6 Other codes**

Other codes like customisable, gamified, immersive experience and reality were also mentioned, emphasising the multifaceted nature of the Metaverse.

*“It’s a customisable, personalised space.” (Participant 1)*

*“immersive and exciting experiences.” (Participant 2)*

*“The metaverse is a digital alternate reality that is semi-gamified.” (Participant 9)*

*“The metaverse is a digital world created by an organisation or a group of people, and there’ll be several different metaverses, each with their own, I want to say, rules and imagination.” (Participant 9)*

The analysis of the data surrounding the multifaceted nature of the Metaverse, as emphasised by the participants, reveals a complex and dynamic digital environment that offers a plethora of opportunities for innovative marketing strategies. The emphasis on customisability, gamification and immersive experiences by the participants underscore the unique characteristics of the Metaverse that set it apart from traditional digital platforms.

The notion of the Metaverse as a “customisable, personalised space”, as mentioned by Participant 1, suggests a paradigm shift in marketing approaches. In this new realm, brands will have the opportunity to create bespoke environments that align closely with their identity and values. This level of customisation enables a deeper and more meaningful engagement with users, as they can interact with a brand in a space that feels authentic and tailored to their preferences.

Furthermore, the “semi-gamified” aspect of the Metaverse, highlighted by Participant 9, unlocks innovative avenues for engaging with audiences. By incorporating elements of gamification, brands can create interactive experiences that are not only enjoyable but also enhance brand recall and affinity. This approach can be particularly effective in a digital environment like the Metaverse, where the blending of reality and virtual elements can create unique and memorable experiences.

The immersive and alternate reality features of the Metaverse allow for a transcendence of traditional marketing boundaries. Brands can leverage these aspects to offer users more tangible and engaging interactions with their products or services. For instance, virtual showrooms and product demonstrations in the Metaverse can provide users with a more in-depth understanding and a connection to a product, far beyond what is possible in the physical world.

Moreover, the ability to create an alternate reality within the Metaverse offers brands a canvas to craft narratives and experiences that are not constrained by physical limitations. This capability is a game-changer for marketing, as it allows for the creation of compelling and innovative platforms that can captivate and engage users in unprecedented ways.

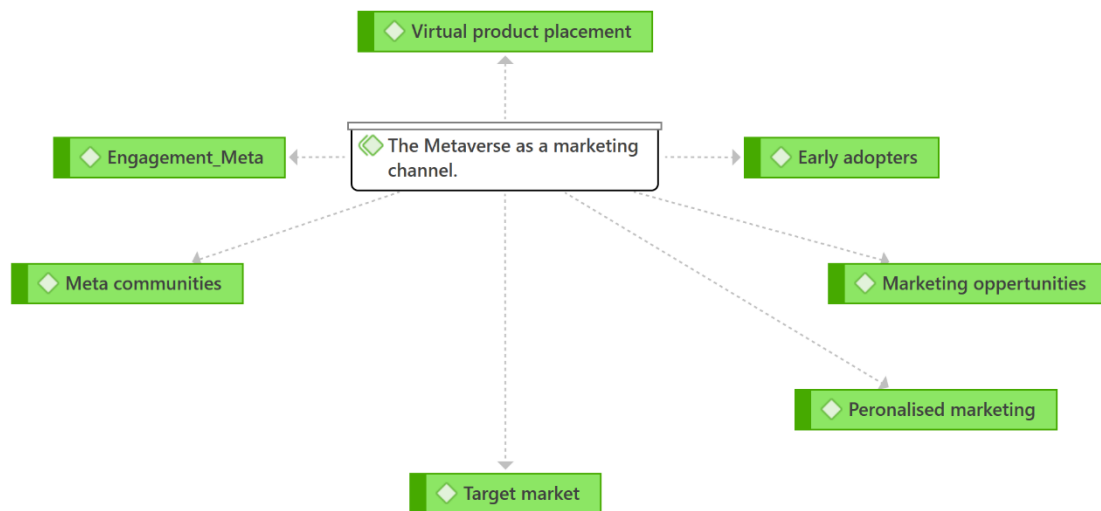
The Metaverse represents a new frontier for marketing, where traditional principles must be intertwined with the unique opportunities and challenges presented by this digital ecosystem. To be successful in the Metaverse, marketing efforts need to be immersive, interactive and closely aligned with the expectations and preferences of its inhabitants. This approach will redefine user engagement and brand experiences, setting a new standard for marketing in a digitally convergent future.

#### **4.2.4 Theme 4: The Metaverse as a marketing channel.**

The fourth theme extensively explores the Metaverse as a marketing channel, providing a panoramic view of its potential. The ensuing analysis will delve into the multifaceted aspects of the Metaverse that offer lucrative opportunities for marketing endeavours, including engagement dynamics, personalised marketing approaches, virtual product placement strategies and the cultivation of Meta communities. Through

a meticulous examination of participants' responses, this theme is poised to offer invaluable insights into the potential leverage points within the Metaverse for marketing professionals, highlighting prospective strategies and approaches that can be adeptly employed within this virtual expanse. The most common codes are indicated in Figure 4.4 below.

**Figure 4.4: The Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa**



**Table 4.4: The Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa**

| Code                      | Frequency |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Engagement                | 10        |
| Personalised marketing    | 9         |
| Marketing opportunities   | 7         |
| Meta communities          | 7         |
| Target market             | 7         |
| Early adopters            | 6         |
| Virtual product placement | 2         |

#### 4.2.4.1 Engagement (10 mentions)

Engagement is a crucial aspect of marketing within the Metaverse. The participants mentioned it ten times. McKinsey & Company (2022) agrees the Metaverse presents a promising avenue for marketing, offering opportunities for innovative approaches and experimental strategies. In this context, the level of involvement becomes a critical role.

*“Your users are using those platforms for some form of engagement.” (Participant 1)*

*“...we created a Roblox game for kids that they can play. But by doing that, we are in their space, teaching them about money there and then bringing them back to something much more tangible in our space.” (Participant 1)*

*“The metaverse creates this space where people can metaphorically interact with your product or service.” (Participant 4)*

*“You can develop buildings with your product or service in the metaverse in which you can market or have a conversation with your target audience.” (Participant 4)*

*“So, almost using the Metaverse at the very top of that pipeline to create awareness and to drive more interaction through pipeline.” (Participant 5)*

*“it would create extraordinary experiences and be able to connect with people easily.” (Participant 5)*

*“So I think this element of connection is what sometimes we lack in marketing, and perhaps the metaverse can assist in that because you can communicate with people from different countries and different areas and bring together different thinking, which as a start would,” (Participant 7)*

*“An important thing to consider is not making the advertising too invasive. It, you know, platforms still need to understand that we can’t overload users. They are in the metaverse to socialise, to play, to network. Advertising must be a secondary feature, as in the real world.” (Participant 8)*

The exploration of engagement within the Metaverse as a marketing channel, as articulated by the participants, reveals a nuanced understanding of this virtual environment’s potential for innovative marketing strategies. This analysis interprets the relationship between the participants’ words and their understanding of the phenomenon, aligning with McKinsey & Company’s (2022) perspective on the Metaverse as fertile ground for innovative marketing approaches.

The emphasis on engagement, mentioned ten times by the participants, underscores its centrality in leveraging the Metaverse for marketing. This focus indicates a deep understanding of the Metaverse as a transformative platform for consumer interaction and brand presence. For instance, the creation of a Roblox game for educational purposes or developing virtual buildings for product placement, as mentioned by Participants 1 and 4, demonstrates a strategic shift from traditional advertising to immersive and interactive experiences. This suggests a recognition of the unique capabilities of the Metaverse to foster deeper, more meaningful engagement with users.

Furthermore, the participants' descriptions reveal a multifaceted approach to engagement, ranging from educational games to virtual product placements and interactive experiences. This diversity in engagement strategies reflects an understanding of the Metaverse's versatility as a marketing channel. Additionally, Participant 8's caution about not making advertising too invasive highlights an awareness of the need for ethical marketing practices in the Metaverse. This reflects an understanding that while the Metaverse offers unique opportunities for engagement, it also requires a balance to maintain user experience without overwhelming them with marketing content.

Moreover, the mention of connecting with people from different countries and areas by Participant 7 underscores the global reach of the Metaverse. This indicates an understanding of the Metaverse as a platform that transcends geographical boundaries, offering a unique opportunity for global marketing strategies and cross-cultural engagement.

The participants' insights into engagement within the Metaverse as a marketing channel demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of its potential. They recognise the need for innovative, immersive and ethical marketing strategies that leverage the unique capabilities of the Metaverse, while also acknowledging its global reach and the diverse forms of engagement it enables. This understanding is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies that resonate within this emerging digital landscape.

#### 4.2.4.2 Personalised marketing (9 mentions)

Personalised marketing is a significant advantage within the Metaverse (Marr, 2022). Personalised marketing was mentioned nine times by the participants.

*“...you can change it every day. You immediately have that connection with your customer that you can personalise for them.” (Participant 3)*

*“...it’s an experience you can personalise for your customer and change your messaging instantly.” (Participant 3)*

*“you immediately have a more personal and direct connection with your customer instead of just going on an average website.” (Participant 3)*

*“As a customer, I can dictate how much I want to spend for my experience within your setup in the metaverse.” (Participant 3)*

*“So you can bring your product to your target market is not a physical sense, but in an Internet physical sense so that I can interact with you on the metaverse with your product.” (Participant 4)*

*“So we can start talking to people in earnest face to face and almost get back to traditional selling and marketing, where we engage customers in a more personable way.” (Participant 5)*

*“Virtual reality; I can imagine if we can showcase our new technology through virtual reality to our growers. So, we currently do four or five years of physical trials to bring a new product to market, and it’s a very long time that it takes because you can only wait for the planting season annually to showcase the technology. With virtual reality, you can shorten this time by visually showcasing to farmers the customer what the technology will bring to them.” (Participant 6)*

*“what’s incredible about metaverse advertising is that it’s highly specific and targeted, dependent on user information. So, if you and I enter the metaverse and look at a*

*building together or a billboard within the space, you could see an advert for Pampers. Let's say you know the company knows that you've just had a baby, whereas I'd see maybe an advert for light fixtures if I've just moved into a new house.” (Participant 8)*

The participants' insights into personalised marketing within the Metaverse reveal a profound understanding of its transformative potential for customer engagement and marketing strategies. This analysis interprets their perspectives in relation to the literature, particularly the works of Marr (2022), Dart (2021) and others.

The repeated mention of personalised marketing, underscores its significance in the Metaverse context. The participants' descriptions reflect a keen awareness of the Metaverse's capacity to facilitate a more intimate and direct connection with customers. For instance, Participant 3's emphasis on the ability to change messaging instantly and create personalised experiences for customers highlights an understanding of the dynamic and interactive nature of the Metaverse. This suggests a recognition of the Metaverse as a platform where traditional marketing boundaries are transcended, allowing for real-time customisation and adaptation to individual customer preferences.

Furthermore, the participants' comments indicate an appreciation of the Metaverse's ability to enhance traditional marketing methods. Participant 5's notion of engaging customers in a more personable way through the Metaverse resonates with the idea of returning to traditional selling values but within a modern, digital context. This reflects an understanding that while the Metaverse offers advanced technological capabilities, the core principles of effective marketing, such as personal connection and engagement, remain vital.

Participant 6's example of using virtual reality to showcase new technology to farmers illustrates the practical application of personalised marketing in the Metaverse. This example demonstrates an understanding of how the Metaverse can revolutionise product demonstrations and reduce time-to-market, offering customers a tangible and immersive experience of a product before its physical launch.

Moreover, Participant 8's description of targeted advertising in the Metaverse, where different users see different advertisements based on their personal information, highlights the advanced level of personalisation possible in this digital space. This indicates an understanding of the Metaverse's potential to leverage user data for highly specific and effective marketing strategies.

The participants' insights into personalised marketing within the Metaverse demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of its potential to revolutionise customer engagement. They recognise the Metaverse as a platform that enables real-time, dynamic customisation and a deeper, more personal connection with customers. This understanding aligns with the literature that emphasises the Metaverse's ability to transform marketing from transactional to engaging and immersive experiences. The participants' perspectives suggest that personalised marketing in the Metaverse is not just a futuristic concept but a tangible strategy that can significantly enhance customer experience and marketing effectiveness.

#### **4.2.4.3 Marketing opportunities (7 mentions)**

Participants identified various marketing opportunities within the Metaverse.

*"...there is an opportunity for you to put your own experiences into the metaverse that people can and very sort of gamified sort of quite interesting, unique, makes you stand up from the crowd." (Participant 2)*

*"Metaverse-type ads, concepts, demos, or something like that almost to nurture that top-of-the-funnel pipeline where we're trying to attract customers. So we all know the customers are researching before contacting the company." (Participant 5)*

*"...companies have massive potential to market physical effects within the Metaverse." (Participant 8)*

*"There's also potential for branding and marketing as you would in the real world, billboards, bus stops, all of that which we've we've already seen with in-game*

*advertising, sort of the GTA's and all of that companies are already, you know, advertising in those digital spaces.” (Participant 8)*

*“There is massive potential for collaborations between platforms and companies themselves. Nike partnered with Roblox and launched a full-on campaign where you could buy sneakers that were partnered with Euforia. Sneakers, sweaters, and digital clothes for your avatars, and that brought them massive profits not just in the space and selling those NFTs but also secondary sales.” (Participant 8)*

*“If you think about virtual worlds, a point of reference, which would be easy to think of, is just product placements in movies. So you sit in a cinema and see a lot of Pepsi or Coke or Doritos or whatever station in a film. So if you're in a virtual world and whatever would be done there, if it's gamer fire and you play games, or if you're in the virtual world for shopping, it's an essential place for marketers and for businesses to be, because they're part of a digital economy. And if they're not on it, they won't be able to get revenue and profit from that world.” (Participant 10)*

The participants' insights into the marketing opportunities within the Metaverse reveal a deep understanding of its potential as a transformative marketing channel. This analysis interprets their perspectives in relation to the literature, particularly the works of Kotler *et al.* (2019) and Watts (2021).

The seven mentions of various marketing opportunities in the Metaverse by the participants highlight their recognition of its vast potential. Participant 2's mention of creating unique and gamified experiences in the Metaverse indicates an understanding of the need for differentiation and innovation in marketing strategies within this new digital realm. This aligns with the literature's emphasis on the Metaverse as a space for creative and engaging marketing approaches that stand out from traditional methods.

Participant 5's insight into using the Metaverse for nurturing the top-of-the-funnel pipeline reflects an understanding of the Metaverse's role in the customer journey. This perspective aligns with the notion that the Metaverse can be a crucial touchpoint

for attracting and engaging potential customers, especially in the early stages of their decision-making process.

Participant 8's observations about the potential for marketing physical effects and in-game advertising in the Metaverse, demonstrate an awareness of the blurring lines between virtual and physical marketing. The mention of successful collaborations, such as Nike's partnership with Roblox, underscores the potential for cross-platform marketing strategies that leverage both the digital and physical aspects of brands.

Furthermore, Participant 10's comparison of product placements in virtual worlds to those in movies illustrates an understanding of the Metaverse as a new, essential platform for marketers. This participant recognises the Metaverse as part of a digital economy where presence and engagement can directly impact revenue and profit.

The participants' insights into marketing opportunities within the Metaverse demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of its potential to revolutionise marketing strategies. They recognise the need for innovative, engaging and differentiated approaches to stand out in this new digital environment. Their perspectives align with the literature, which emphasises the importance of creating meaningful customer interactions and experiences in the Metaverse. By leveraging the unique capabilities of the Metaverse, marketers can build stronger relationships with customers, based on shared values and experiences, thereby redefining the landscape of digital marketing.

#### **4.2.4.4 Meta communities (7 mentions)**

According to the participants, Meta communities are vital for marketing within the Metaverse.

*“Meta communities will be driven more by artificial intelligence than human intelligence because it's the first space where they can openly create and openly engage.”*  
(Participant 1)

*“meta communities”* (Participant 1)

*“It’s called Abuntu Land, the first metaverse in Africa founded by Mic Mann, the man from Man Made and what people are doing now, MTN and Saatchi Abel Enable have bought land plots in that digital space, and what happens then is you get a deed, you get rights to the area, you own the site as you would know in the real world, and you can then hold events. They are much more immersive, and experiential marketing has also moved from above the line into digital, so we cannot implement experiential marketing in that space.” (Participant 8)*

The concept of Meta communities within the Metaverse, as discussed by the participants, offers a profound insight into the evolving dynamics of marketing in virtual environments. This analysis interprets their perspectives in relation to the literature, particularly the works of McKinsey & Company (2022), Ramakrishnan (2023) and Hetler (2022).

The participants’ discussion about Meta communities underscores their significance in the Metaverse’s marketing landscape. Participant 1’s view that these communities will be driven more by artificial intelligence (AI) than human intelligence reflects an understanding of the Metaverse’s technological underpinnings. This perspective aligns with the literature’s emphasis on AI’s role in shaping user experiences in digital spaces, suggesting a shift towards more dynamic and responsive community engagement.

The mention of “Abuntu Land”, the first Metaverse in Africa, by Participant 8, illustrates a practical example of how Meta communities are forming and evolving. The participant’s description of how companies like MTN and Saatchi Abel Enable are buying land plots and hosting events in this digital space indicates a recognition of the Metaverse as a new frontier for experiential marketing. This aligns with Hetler’s (2022) assertion that the Metaverse allows for the creation of brand-specific worlds, offering immersive experiences that traditional advertising cannot match.

Furthermore, the participants’ insights suggest an understanding of the Metaverse’s appeal to younger demographics, particularly Gen Z and millennials. This is consistent with McKinsey & Company’s (2022) and Ramakrishnan’s (2023) findings, which

highlight the Metaverse's potential to engage these demographics through innovative and immersive experiences.

The participants' perspectives on Meta communities within the Metaverse demonstrate an acute awareness of the unique marketing opportunities these communities present. They recognise the potential of AI-driven engagement, the appeal of immersive experiences to younger demographics and the innovative ways in which brands can interact with consumers in these virtual spaces. This understanding aligns with the literature, which emphasises the importance of leveraging the Metaverse's capabilities to create engaging, immersive and brand-specific experiences. As such, Meta communities are poised to play a pivotal role in the future of marketing within the Metaverse, offering new avenues for consumer engagement and brand storytelling.

#### **4.2.4.5 Target market (7 mentions)**

Understanding the target market and early adopters is crucial for effective Metaverse marketing.

*“you have to be where your customers are, or you have to be where your market is.”  
(Participant 1)*

*“So, for example, what we've done in the bank is we know our youth is on Roblox. So we created a Roblox game for kids that they can play. But by doing that, we are in their space, teaching them about money there and then bringing them back to something much more tangible in our space.” (Participant 1)*

*“You'll waste your time if your audience is not ready to adopt it. So I mean, certainly company I work with, the audience is, is not everyone, and sort of we're OK with that, that's how we've built our business.” (Participant 2)*

*“where the audience is ready to accept that type of marketing. And I think that it is unfortunate currently in our country where we lack that knowledge and that education about Metaverse and how it works” (Participant 3)*

*“The most significant thing is the education of your customer and how it is large your customer because you can help the best site of the best meta world and create your virtual stadium and all of that. But if your biggest fan is a 50-year-old guy. That only sometimes can Whatsapp. You’re entirely missing your customer.” (Participant 3)*

*“But what’s incredible about metaverse advertising is that it’s highly specific and targeted, dependent on user information.” (Participant 8)*

The participants’ insights into understanding the target market and early adopters in Metaverse marketing reveal a nuanced comprehension of the strategic importance of audience alignment in this emerging digital space. This analysis interprets their perspectives regarding contemporary marketing thoughts, particularly referencing Mailchimp (2023).

Participant 1’s emphasis on being where the customers are, illustrated through the creation of a Roblox game for youth, demonstrates an acute awareness of the need to meet the target audience in their preferred digital environments. This approach aligns with the current marketing paradigm that stresses the importance of presence in consumer-favoured spaces, especially on innovative platforms like the Metaverse.

The cautionary note from Participant 2 about the readiness of the audience for Metaverse adoption highlights the importance of market segmentation and targeting. This insight resonates with the understanding that not all consumer segments may be equally prepared or interested in engaging with Metaverse-based marketing initiatives. It underscores the need for marketers to carefully assess their audience’s tech-savviness and susceptibility to new experiences.

Participant 3’s point about the necessity of educating the customer and understanding the demographic profile of the target audience further illustrates the complexity of marketing in the Metaverse. The example of a 50-year-old customer who is not tech-savvy underlines the potential disconnect between the technological sophistication of the Metaverse and the actual capabilities or interests of certain customer segments.

The mention of Metaverse advertising's highly specific and targeted nature reflects an understanding of the potential for personalised marketing in this space. This aligns with the literature that suggests the Metaverse offers unprecedented opportunities for customisation and precision in marketing efforts.

The participants' insights reveal a sophisticated understanding of the importance of being familiar with the target market and early adopters for effective Metaverse marketing. They recognise the need to align marketing strategies with the technological preferences and readiness of their audience, the importance of customer education, and the potential for highly targeted and personalised marketing in the Metaverse. This understanding is crucial for companies looking to innovate and distinguish themselves in this new digital frontier. Engaging with meta communities and leveraging their insights can provide valuable guidance for crafting tailored marketing strategies, fostering a sense of ownership and loyalty among consumers, and ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of marketing efforts within the Metaverse.

#### **4.2.4.6 Early adopters (6 mentions)**

*"...if your market was very tech-savvy gamers, which I think something like Metaverse at the moment will likely be, that's where we would expect to be the early adopters..."*  
(Participant 2)

*"I think of those people who are gamers who are very early adopters of tech."*  
(Participant 2)

*"So they will adopt it later, and once they understand it and know it's secure enough, the risks that come with it are more established."* (Participant 4)

*"I think the question should be more: do you think that it will come out of the trough of disillusionment?"* (Participant 5)

*"which seems to be the market leaders, we'll see marketing as it is in real life being marketed in the metaverse in those channels. So you can, for example, buy a massive advertisement, a billboard, or a big building-type advertisement in the metaverse."*

*There's an aim for that as it grows and its user base grows. It's now in its early adoption phase, but exceptionally, very soon, it won't be". (Participant 9)*

The participants' insights into the early adopters of the Metaverse provide a clear perspective on the demographic likely to first embrace this new digital realm. This analysis interprets their views in the context of current marketing strategies, particularly concerning the insights from "Future of Marketing" (2021).

Participant 2 identifies tech-savvy gamers as the probable early adopters of the Metaverse. This observation aligns with the general trend in technology adoption where new platforms and innovations are often first embraced by those who are already comfortable and familiar with digital environments. The identification of gamers in particular, suggests an audience that is not only technologically adept but also accustomed to immersive and interactive digital experiences, making them a natural fit for the Metaverse.

Participant 4's comment about adoption occurring once the technology is understood and perceived as secure reflects a common pattern in technology adoption. It highlights the importance of establishing trust and reliability in the Metaverse, especially considering the novel and complex nature of this platform.

Participant 5's reference to the "trough of disillusionment" is insightful, indicating an awareness of the hype-cycle often associated with new technologies. This suggests that early adopters might initially face challenges or scepticism, a phase that must be carefully navigated by marketers.

Participant 9's perspective on the evolution of marketing in the Metaverse, from its current early adoption phase to a more mature stage, underscores the dynamic nature of this platform. The mention of traditional marketing methods like billboards being adapted for the Metaverse indicates an evolution of marketing strategies to suit this new environment.

The participants' Insights suggest that early adopters of the Metaverse are likely to be individuals who are already engaged with technology, particularly in gaming. This

demographic represents a crucial target market for initial marketing efforts in the Metaverse. Understanding and engaging with these early adopters is essential for marketers, as it can provide valuable insights into the platform's potential and foster brand loyalty among this influential group. As the Metaverse evolves, so too will the strategies to engage with its users, requiring marketers to be adaptable and responsive to the changing dynamics of this emerging digital landscape.

#### **4.2.4.7 Virtual product placement (2 mentions)**

Virtual product placement is a promising marketing strategy within the Metaverse.

*"...instead of having a showroom of cars, you could enter the Metaverse with your little avatar, look at new Porsches on the markets, and display those virtual products in front of you." (Participant 8)*

*"the first one being virtual product placement." (Participant 8)*

The concept of virtual product placement within the Metaverse, as discussed by the participants, opens innovative avenues for marketing. This analysis interprets their insights in the context of the evolving digital marketing landscape, drawing on perspectives from Alexander (2023) and Mailchimp (2023).

Participant 8's envisioning of a virtual showroom for cars in the Metaverse illustrates the potential of this platform for product display and interaction. This idea moves beyond traditional online advertising or e-commerce by offering a more engaging and immersive experience. The use of avatars to explore products like Porsches in a virtual space signifies a shift from passive viewing to active engagement, allowing customers to experience products in a way that closely mimics real-life interactions.

The mention of virtual product placement as a primary strategy by Participant 8 highlights its significance in the Metaverse's marketing toolkit. This approach is not just about placing a product within a digital environment; it is about creating an experience around the product. This strategy aligns with the current trend toward

experiential marketing, where the focus is on creating memorable interactions with the brand.

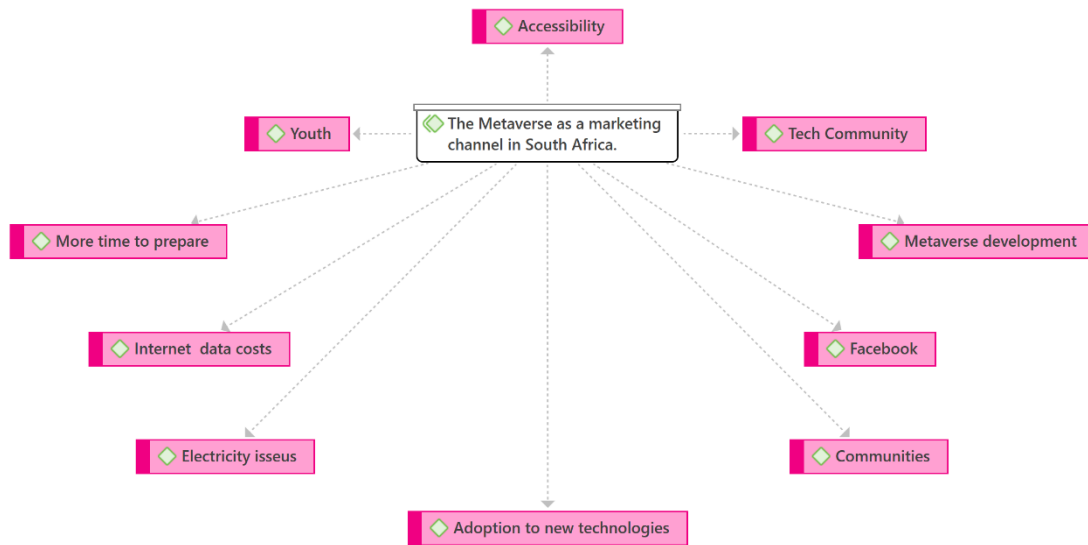
The analysis of virtual product placement in the Metaverse suggests a transformative shift in how products are presented and experienced by consumers. Organisations can leverage this strategy to not only showcase their products but also to create a narrative around them, enhancing user engagement and brand visibility. This immersive and interactive approach to product placement could redefine the consumer's journey, making it more engaging and impactful.

Virtual product placement in the Metaverse represents a significant evolution in marketing strategies. It offers an opportunity for brands to engage with their audience in a deeply immersive and interactive manner, enhancing the overall experience of the product. As the Metaverse continues to develop, the potential for innovative and effective product placement strategies seems boundless, promising a new era of digital marketing that is more engaging, experiential and impactful.

#### **4.2.5 Theme 5: The Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa**

Theme five delves into the exploration of the Metaverse as a viable marketing channel within the unique socio-economic context of South Africa. This analytical segment will scrutinise various factors influencing the adoption and efficacy of the Metaverse, encompassing technology adoption rates, internet data costs and the inherent structure of communities, among others. Through an in-depth examination of participants' quotations, this theme aims to unveil the distinctive opportunities and challenges the Metaverse presents within the South African milieu, thereby providing invaluable insights for marketers to navigate this nascent virtual domain effectively. The most common codes are indicated in Figure 4.5 below.

**Figure 4.5: The Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa**



**Table 4.5: The Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa**

| <b>Code</b>                  | <b>Frequency</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| Adoption of new technologies | 15               |
| Internet data costs          | 5                |
| Communities                  | 4                |
| Electricity issues           | 3                |
| Accessibility                | 3                |
| Metaverse development        | 3                |
| More time to prepare         | 3                |
| Tech community               | 3                |
| Youth                        | 3                |
| Facebook                     | 1                |

**4.2.5.1 Adoption of new technologies (15 mentions)**

With 15 mentions of adopting new technologies, one can see there is significant concern among participants. The literature differs from the statements that some of the participants made. South Africa’s digital marketers have adopted new technologies to stay competitive in the rapidly growing digital landscape. The country has a high digital adoption rate of 72,3% and is experiencing an increase in mobile and fixed internet connection speeds, which present significant opportunities for businesses operating in the region (HelloYes, 2023).

*“South Africa’s population differs from adopting new technologies from our international partners. We have a traditional mindset and are scared of using these new technologies.” (Participant 4)*

*“We have a traditional mindset and are scared of using these new technologies.” (Participant 4)*

*“South Africans and most South Africans have to these technologies hinders adopting it.” (Participant 4)*

*“ still remain a concept that a lot of the analysts and sort of early adopters will evangelise around.” (Participant 5)*

*“I would say a specific part of the population of South Africa has a high adoption rate.” (Participant 6)*

*“But the broad population should still be educated about what it could mean, how you access it, and how much data costs. There’s a lot of hurdles stuff.” (Participant 10)*

The exploration of the adoption of new technologies in South Africa, as it pertains to the Metaverse as a marketing channel, reveals a complex landscape. This analysis interprets the participants’ insights and contrasts them with literature findings, focusing on the unique socio-economic context of South Africa.

The participants’ observations suggest a dichotomy in the South African context regarding technology adoption. Participant 4’s comments about a “traditional mindset” and apprehension toward new technologies reflect a cautious approach prevalent among a significant portion of the population. This sentiment is echoed by Participant 10, who points out the need for education about new technologies and concerns about data costs and accessibility.

On the other hand, literature sources like HelloYes (2023) and the U.S. Department of Commerce (2023) present a more optimistic view, pointing out a high digital adoption rate of 72,3% in South Africa. This suggests that while there may be hesitancy among

certain demographics, there is also a significant segment of the population that is embracing digital technologies. This is further supported by Participant 6, who acknowledges a specific part of the population with a high adoption rate.

The contrast between the participants' views and the literature indicates a nuanced reality. While there is a growing trend towards digital adoption in South Africa, it is not uniform across all sectors of the population. Factors such as digital literacy, socio-economic status and access to affordable internet play a crucial role in shaping this landscape.

The analysis reveals that for the Metaverse to be a successful marketing channel in South Africa, strategies must be tailored to address these disparities. Marketers need to consider the varying levels of technology adoption and digital literacy across different segments of the South African population. This involves not only creating engaging and innovative Metaverse experiences but also ensuring that these are accessible and understandable to a broader audience.

The adoption of new technologies in South Africa, especially in the context of the Metaverse, presents both challenges and opportunities. While there is a significant portion of the population ready to embrace these new digital realms, a concerted effort is needed to educate and facilitate access for the broader population. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for marketers aiming to effectively leverage the Metaverse in South Africa's unique socio-economic environment.

#### **4.2.5.2 Internet data costs (5 mentions)**

As mentioned, five times, Internet data costs are identified as a barrier to the Metaverse's widespread adoption. The exorbitant expense associated with data presents a formidable obstacle for numerous individuals residing in South Africa. When considering the proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), the country exhibits the highest monthly cost for one gigabyte of data compared to other global locations (Munga, 2022).

*"Internet Also, our internet, data, and stuff cost exceptionally high." (Participant 3)*

*“if you then want everything to live in this virtual metaverse and on the blockchain things, then your essential your barrier of entry needs to be as low as possible because you can’t be like oh you have sky-high data usage.” (Participant 3)*

*“I think so when Internet connectivity is better, when it’s more readily available.” (Participant 7)*

*“But the broad population should still be educated about what it could mean, how you access it, and how much data costs. There’s a lot of hurdles stuff.” (Participant 10)*

The issue of Internet data costs in South Africa, relating to the adoption of the Metaverse, presents a significant challenge, as highlighted by the participants. This analysis interprets their perspectives in conjunction with relevant literature, focusing on how data costs influence the Metaverse’s accessibility and adoption.

The participants consistently identify high Internet data costs as a major barrier to the widespread adoption of the Metaverse in South Africa. Participant 3’s remarks about the “exceptionally high” cost of Internet data and the need for a low barrier of entry emphasise the economic challenges faced by many South Africans. This sentiment is reinforced by Participant 10, who points out the need for education about data costs and accessibility, highlighting the hurdles in adopting new technologies like the Metaverse.

Literature sources corroborate these concerns. Munga (2022) notes that South Africa has one of the highest costs for Internet data globally when compared to its GDP. This high cost significantly limits the accessibility of data-intensive applications like the Metaverse, particularly for lower-income groups.

The analysis reveals a clear need for strategies to mitigate the impact of high data costs on Metaverse adoption. For the Metaverse to become a viable marketing channel in South Africa, it is essential to address these economic barriers. This could involve advocating for more affordable data plans, optimising Metaverse applications for lower data consumption, or exploring alternative means of access that do not rely heavily on high-speed internet.

Furthermore, the insights from the participants and literature suggest that the Metaverse's success in South Africa hinges on a broader socio-economic transformation. Improving internet infrastructure and making data more affordable are crucial steps towards democratising access to the Metaverse. This would not only enhance the adoption of the Metaverse but also contribute to bridging the digital divide in the country.

While the Metaverse offers exciting opportunities for marketing and engagement, its potential in South Africa is currently hampered by the high cost of Internet data. Addressing this issue is imperative for ensuring equitable access and fostering widespread adoption of the Metaverse, thereby unlocking its full potential as a marketing channel in the South African context.

#### **4.2.5.3 Communities (4 mentions)**

As mentioned, four times, communities play a crucial role in adopting and developing the Metaverse.

*“They have small communities centrally managed, interact, and sell stuff.” (Participant 1)*

*“digital communities.” (Participant 1)*

*“It will be adopted from the local communities upwards.” (Participant 1)*

The role of communities in the adoption and development of the Metaverse in South Africa is a focal point, as indicated by the participants. This analysis interprets their perspectives in conjunction with relevant literature, focusing on the impact of local communities on the Metaverse's integration and acceptance.

The participants underscored the importance of local communities in the adoption process of the Metaverse. Participant 1's references to “small communities centrally managed” and the belief that adoption will start “from the local communities upwards” highlight the grassroots nature of this technological integration. The emphasis on

“digital communities” suggests a shift towards more interconnected and digitally engaged community structures.

Supporting literature provides a broader context for this perspective. Siddo (2022), Daniel (2022), Nzama (2022) and Malinga (2022) all point to the significant role local communities in South Africa will play in adopting and integrating the Metaverse. These communities are seen as instrumental in influencing its acceptance and use on a larger scale. The Metaverse is expected to contribute significantly to the Sub-Saharan African economy, with potential GDP growth contributions of 1,8%, equating to a \$40 billion increase.

The Metaverse’s potential impact on rural communities, particularly those reliant on farming, is noteworthy. It is poised to revolutionise these communities by fostering more inclusive digital economies and offering new avenues for business and community development. This shift towards digital inclusivity is crucial for the region’s participation in the digital economy.

Furthermore, initiatives like Meta’s \$50 million XR Programs and Research fund, which includes projects like Future Africa: Telling Stories, Building Worlds, aim to amplify African voices and narratives within the Metaverse. These efforts are essential in addressing the challenges of representation and ensuring that the Metaverse is inclusive of diverse African perspectives, moving beyond the current dominance of the white, male gamer community.

The growing interest in the Metaverse among urban South African adults also signals the potential for local market expansion. The active engagement of local communities is expected to drive this growth further, making the Metaverse more inclusive and representative of the South African populace. This engagement is not only vital for the growth of the digital economy but also crucial in creating unique African experiences within the virtual domain.

The analysis reveals that local communities in South Africa are at the heart of the Metaverse’s adoption and development. Their involvement is key to ensuring the Metaverse is inclusive, representative and beneficial for all South Africans, thereby

contributing significantly to the region's digital economic growth and cultural representation in the virtual world.

#### **4.2.5.4 Electricity and accessibility (3 mentions)**

Electricity issues and accessibility, each mentioned three times, offer significant challenges to the adoption of the Metaverse.

*“don't have electricity” (Participant 3)*

*“when there's not as much load shedding and downtime.” (Participant 7)*

*“We do have the infrastructure, considering that load shedding makes it difficult.” (Participant 10)*

The adoption of the Metaverse in South Africa faces significant challenges due to issues with electricity and infrastructure, as highlighted by the participants. This analysis interprets their views in conjunction with relevant literature, focusing on how these challenges impact accessibility to and inclusivity of the Metaverse.

The participants point out specific electricity-related challenges that hinder the adoption of the Metaverse. Participant 3's blunt statement, “don't have electricity”, encapsulates a fundamental barrier. Participant 7's mention of “load shedding and downtime” and Participant 10's acknowledgment of the impact of loadshedding, despite having the necessary infrastructure, further emphasise the critical nature of reliable electricity supply for engaging with the Metaverse.

The literature provides a broader understanding of these challenges. Gareeb (2023) and Ibrahim (2023) both stress that reliable electricity supply and accessible technology are foundational for engaging with the Metaverse in South Africa. The importance of addressing these infrastructure challenges is underscored, as they are crucial for fostering widespread adoption and ensuring the Metaverse is an inclusive and accessible platform for all users.

Gareeb (2023) specifically notes that the adoption of transformative technologies like the Metaverse is contingent on resolving these infrastructure issues. This perspective is echoed in the initiatives of companies like Facebook (the parent company of Meta), as highlighted by Bosworth & Clegg (2021). These companies are investing in research and initiatives aimed at developing the Metaverse responsibly and inclusively, with a clear recognition of the importance of infrastructure development.

These collective efforts are vital for driving digital transformation and making Metaverse innovation a reality in Africa. By addressing the electricity and infrastructure challenges there is potential to promote inclusivity and accessibility in the Metaverse. This is particularly important in a context where such technological advancements can significantly impact social and economic development.

The analysis reveals that electricity and infrastructure issues are significant barriers to the adoption of the Metaverse in South Africa. Addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring that the Metaverse serves as an inclusive and accessible platform. Efforts by companies and governments to improve infrastructure and provide reliable electricity are crucial steps towards realising the potential of the Metaverse in Africa, making it a tool for inclusive digital transformation and socio-economic development.

#### **4.2.5.5 Other codes**

Other codes like Metaverse development, more time to prepare, the tech community, youth and Facebook were also mentioned, providing additional insights into the Metaverse's potential and its challenges in South Africa.

*“South Africa has a healthy tech community.” (Participant 2)*

*“our youth is already on platforms we don't know about, like Roblox.” (Participant 1)*

This analysis interprets the participants' insights on various factors influencing the Metaverse's potential and challenges in South Africa, including Metaverse development, preparation time, the tech community, youth and Facebook's role.

The participants' statements highlight key aspects of the Metaverse landscape in South Africa. Participant 2's observation that "South Africa has a healthy tech community" points to a robust foundation for technological innovation and adoption. Participant 1's remark about the youth being active on platforms like Roblox indicates a demographic already engaged with virtual environments, suggesting a readiness for more advanced platforms like the Metaverse.

The literature provides a broader context for these observations. The Metaverse, as a significant technological development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is at an advanced stage of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) evolution. Its development and adoption in South Africa hinge on factors like research, innovation, investment and policy (Metaverse South Africa, 2023). Facebook's strategic acquisition of Oculus, as noted by Kraus *et al.* (2022:53), is a move to navigate the Metaverse's technological challenges and position it as the successor to mobile Internet.

Given the Metaverse's nascent stage, South Africa has an opportunity to prepare and strategically position itself to leverage this technology. The tech community and youth are identified as crucial drivers of innovation and adoption. This underscores the importance of educational preparation for successful engagement with the Metaverse, as suggested by Pretorius (2022). Initiatives by organisations like Metaverse South Africa are essential for bolstering community engagement and collaboration, which are key to exploring and realising the Metaverse's potential in the region.

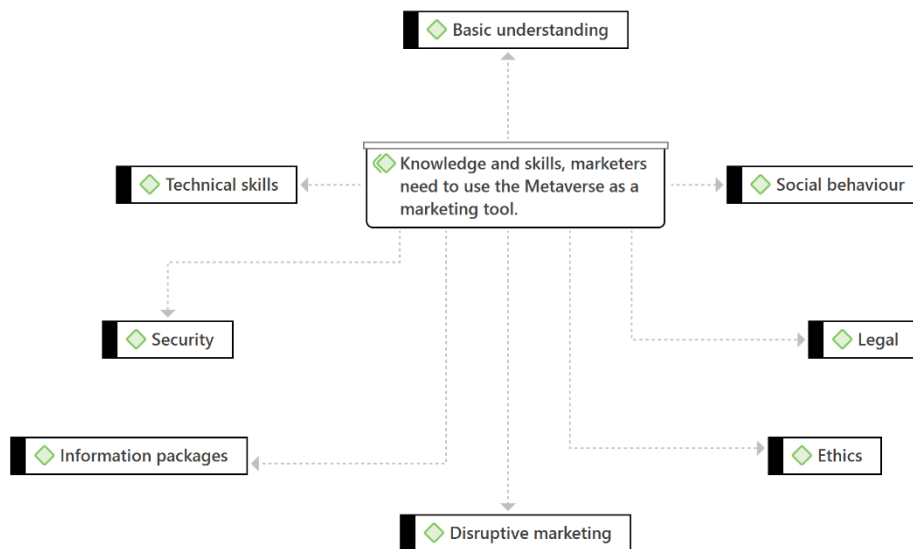
The analysis reveals that the Metaverse's development in South Africa is influenced by a confluence of factors, including a vibrant tech community, an engaged youth demographic, strategic corporate moves like Facebook's, and the need for educational and policy frameworks. These elements collectively create a dynamic environment for the Metaverse's growth in South Africa. The region's readiness to embrace this digital frontier is contingent upon harnessing these factors effectively, ensuring that the Metaverse becomes a transformative tool in the technological and socio-economic landscape of South Africa.

#### 4.2.6 Theme 6: Knowledge and skills marketers need to acquire to use the Metaverse as a marketing tool

This theme elucidates the myriad of technologies that practitioners within the digital marketing domain identify as pivotal elements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). As the study’s participants articulated, this analytical section aims to understand the technologies imperative to the digital marketing milieu comprehensively. Subsequent analysis will meticulously explore the significance of each technology, encompassing artificial intelligence (AI), ChatGPT, virtual reality (VR) and additional technologies, underscoring their frequency of mention and the context within which they are regarded as crucial. This section endeavours to illuminate the perceived relevance and practical applications of these technologies within the digital marketing sphere through a scrupulous examination of participants’ responses.

The most common codes are indicated in Figure 4.6 below below.

**Figure 4.6: Knowledge and skills needed by digital marketers**



**Table 4.6: Knowledge and skills needed by digital marketers**

| Code                 | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Technical skills     | 12        |
| Basic understanding  | 9         |
| Social behaviour     | 9         |
| Information packages | 5         |
| Ethics               | 4         |

| Code                 | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Disruptive marketing | 3         |
| Security             | 3         |
| Legal                | 1         |

#### 4.2.6.1 Technical skills (12 mentions)

When asked which upskilling and knowledge marketers need to use the Metaverse as a marketing channel, technical skills were highlighted 12 times. Participants emphasised that marketers need not be technologically adept but should understand the Metaverse’s technical nuances. Davies (2022) and Simplilearn (2023) agree with this statement. According to these authors, digital marketers are advised to acquire a foundational understanding of the essential technologies and strategies without necessarily delving into the technical intricacies of Metaverse marketing. According to an article from Simplilearn (2022), it is required that digital marketers need a basic familiarity with key concepts such as semantic content marketing, advanced UI/UX principles, immersive marketing and non-fungible tokens (NFTs) to effectively engage with the Metaverse audience.

*“I don’t think we’re heading into a space where we need to know the technicality of something.” (Participant 1)*

*“Some of it’s pretty technical. So, how do you even build something that sits in the metaverse?” (Participant 2)*

*“They would have to create something compatible with the metaverse technology that it runs on.” (Participant 9)*

The analysis focuses on the technical skills necessary for marketers to effectively utilise the Metaverse as a marketing channel, as highlighted by the study’s participants.

The participants’ insights reveal a consensus on the need for a foundational understanding of the Metaverse’s technical aspects. Participant 1’s view, “I don’t think we’re heading into a space where we need to know the technicality of something”,

suggests that while in-depth technical knowledge may not be essential, a basic understanding is crucial. This sentiment is echoed by Participant 2, who acknowledges the technical complexity: “Some of it’s pretty technical. So, how do you even build something that sits in the metaverse?” Participant 9’s statement, “They would have to create something compatible with the metaverse technology that it runs on”, further underscores the importance of understanding the technical framework of the Metaverse.

The literature supports these views. Davies (2022) and Simplilearn (2023) concur that digital marketers should acquire a foundational understanding of essential technologies and strategies pertinent to the Metaverse. Simplilearn (2022) specifically highlights the importance of familiarity with concepts such as semantic content marketing, advanced UI/UX principles, immersive marketing and NFTs for effective engagement with the Metaverse audience.

This analysis suggests that for marketers to be successful in the Metaverse, they need not become technical experts but should possess a basic understanding of the underlying technologies. This knowledge is crucial for navigating the Metaverse, engaging with its users and deploying marketing strategies that are effective within this unique virtual environment. The emphasis on technical skills indicates a shift in the skill set required for digital marketers, where an understanding of the technical nuances of emerging platforms like the Metaverse becomes increasingly important. This foundational knowledge will enable marketers to create and implement marketing strategies that are not only innovative but also compatible with the technical realities of the Metaverse, ensuring effective and resonant marketing efforts.

#### **4.2.6.2 Basic understanding (9 mentions)**

A basic understanding of the Metaverse, its mechanisms and potential implications is crucial, as evidenced by nine mentions. According to McKinsey & Company (2022), a profound understanding of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies is imperative for digital marketers engaging with the Metaverse. These technologies are pivotal in developing immersive experiences characteristic of the Metaverse. A

comprehensive familiarity with VR and AR is indispensable for marketers aiming to craft engaging and interactive campaigns within these virtual spaces.

Furthermore, McKinsey & Company (2022) underscores the significance of collaboration between digital marketers and virtual world developers. Such collaborative efforts are crucial for the conception and implementation of marketing campaigns seamlessly integrated into the virtual environments and aligning with and enhancing the overall user experience within the Metaverse. Through these partnerships, marketers can ensure that their strategic initiatives resonate with the virtual world's dynamics and user expectations, thereby maximising the efficacy of their marketing endeavours in these novel and rapidly evolving digital landscapes.

*“It goes back to like a basic understanding of what the metaverse is, how it all fits into one another.” (Participant 3)*

*“If you now study marketing or put yourself in a marketplace, you’ll need a proper basic understanding of how this world works and other possibilities.” (Participant 3)*

*“Because as good as this can be in the same, it cannot also be to your brand if you don’t implement it correctly, and if you don’t protect the information that you put out there, you save your customers that go into this world.” (Participant 3)*

*“we almost need to find an application use case whereby marketers can understand how they would use it in their day-to-day lives and, therefore, become more exposed to it.” (Participant 5)*

*“Firstly, they will need to understand the world that they are marketing in.” (Participant 9)*

The analysis delves into the significance of possessing a basic understanding of the Metaverse, its mechanisms and potential implications for marketers, as highlighted by the study's participants.

The participants' insights and the literature emphasise the necessity of a foundational grasp of the Metaverse for marketers. Participant 3's statement, "It goes back to like a basic understanding of what the metaverse is, how it all fits into one another", highlights the importance of comprehending the Metaverse's structure and interconnectivity. This viewpoint aligns with McKinsey & Company (2022), which stresses the need for a profound understanding of VR and AR technologies, pivotal in developing immersive experiences in the Metaverse.

Participant 3 further notes the importance of understanding the Metaverse's implications: "Because as good as this can be in the same, it cannot also be to your brand if you don't implement it correctly, and if you don't protect the information that you put out there, you save your customers that go into this world." This statement underscores the need for marketers to be aware of both the opportunities and risks associated with the Metaverse.

Participant 5 suggests that marketers need practical exposure: "[W]e almost need to find an application use case whereby marketers can understand how they would use it in their day-to-day lives and, therefore, become more exposed to it." This approach would help marketers to better grasp how the Metaverse can be integrated into their marketing strategies.

Participant 9 points out the necessity of understanding the marketing environment within the Metaverse: "Firstly, they will need to understand the world that they are marketing in." This understanding is crucial for creating strategies that are coherent and resonate with the Metaverse's unique environment.

McKinsey & Company (2022) also highlights the importance of collaboration between digital marketers and virtual world developers, suggesting that such partnerships are essential for seamlessly integrating marketing campaigns into the Metaverse.

A basic understanding of the Metaverse is essential for marketers. This foundational knowledge enables them to navigate the virtual space effectively, craft engaging and interactive campaigns, and understand the implications of their marketing strategies. It also allows for the exploration of innovative approaches and opportunities within this

digital realm, as noted by Öztürk (2023). As the Metaverse evolves, this understanding will be crucial for marketers to adapt and thrive in this new and dynamic marketing landscape.

#### **4.2.6.3 Social behaviour (9 mentions)**

Understanding human behaviour and social dynamics within the Metaverse is vital, with the participants mentioning it nine times.

*“The big thing is social behaviour because even in the digital space, people are still people.” (Participant 1)*

*“Psychology sociology is something that people need to know and be aware of when they’re going to that space.” (Participant 1)*

*“I think there’s also a piece around psychographics because of how people behave in a virtual reality; we’re in an augmented reality.” (Participant 2)*

*“But when it comes to cultural nuance and geopolitical and geoeconomic influences on people, I think there’s little to no data that makes that decision-making relatively easy.” (Participant 2)*

*“You have to have a greater understanding of how it works, how people view it and the risks and security issues that come with it.” (Participant 4)*

*“Agencies need to understand what it is, how we can use it to target consumers to help our clients and how we can leverage the space to boost events that agencies themselves are holding, not just for other clients, but that, you know, B to B with other agencies.” (Participant 8)*

The analysis focuses on the criticality of comprehending human behaviour and social dynamics within the Metaverse, as emphasised by the study’s participants.

The participants' insights, coupled with scholarly perspectives, highlight the necessity of understanding social behaviour in the Metaverse. Participant 1's statement, "The big thing is social behaviour because even in the digital space, people are still people", underscores the continuity of human nature and social interactions in virtual environments. This perspective aligns with Mystakidis (2022:486), who defines the Metaverse as a cosmos that blends physical reality with digital virtuality, emphasising its social aspect.

Participant 1 also notes the importance of psychology and sociology: "Psychology sociology is something that people need to know and be aware of when they're going to that space." This insight suggests that an understanding of human behaviour is essential for navigating the social dynamics of the Metaverse.

Participant 2 speaks to the complexity of human behaviour in virtual environments: "I think there's also a piece around psychographics because of how people behave in a virtual reality; we're in an augmented reality." This statement highlights the need for marketers to understand the nuances of user behaviour in these immersive spaces.

Participant 4 points out the necessity of understanding the Metaverse's broader implications: "You have to have a greater understanding of how it works, how people view it and the risks and security issues that come with it." This understanding is crucial for creating strategies that are safe and resonate with users.

Ball (2021) asserts that the Metaverse's distinctive quality is its sense of presence, enabling active engagement for all individuals. This inclusivity allows for a wide range of social interactions, from socialising to professional activities, which are central to the Metaverse experience.

Park & Kim (2021:4209) note that while the Metaverse has traditionally been focused on the construction of virtual environments, its potential for facilitating social interactions is increasingly recognised. This shift underscores the importance of understanding social dynamics within these spaces.

Understanding social behaviour in the Metaverse is vital for marketers. This knowledge enables them to anticipate and respond to users' behaviour, needs and expectations in the virtual environment. Recognising and interpreting these social dynamics is crucial as they mirror and sometimes amplify real-world interactions, providing insights into how to effectively engage with users in the Metaverse.

#### **4.2.6.4 Information packages (5 mentions)**

Five mentions underscored the importance of understanding information transfer and sharing between Metaverse ecosystems. A comprehensive understanding of the flow and dissemination of information inside Metaverse ecosystems holds significant power for marketers aiming to achieve success in Metaverse marketing. The Metaverse refers to a digital environment encompassing a range of three-dimensional (3-D) technologies, software for real-time collaboration and decentralised finance tools based on blockchain technology (Tucci & Needle, 2023). The concept of the Metaverse can be understood as a collection of diverse digital ecosystems, wherein each ecosystem can be conceptualised as an independent universe characterised by its unique material, complements and functionalities (Schöbel, 2023).

*“Not necessarily the technical side but understanding how information packages get transferred into another thing because it’s a big part of the Metaverse.” (Participant 1)*

*“And then also I think there is a lever of data, data gathering, data analysis and evidence that we’d have also to get trained on.” (Participant 2)*

*“If I put my information on there, who has access to this? How does it work? Concepts and words such as Blockchain and NFT and those are things they need to become more everyday words which everybody knows what you’re talking about.” (Participant 3)*

The emphasis on understanding the transferring and sharing of information in Metaverse ecosystems is crucial for marketers, as indicated by the five mentions in the study.

Understanding Information Flow in the Metaverse: The Metaverse, as described by Tucci & Needle (2023), is a digital environment that integrates 3-D technologies, real-time collaboration software and blockchain-based decentralised finance tools. This complex environment requires marketers to understand how information flows and is disseminated across various digital ecosystems.

Participant 1 highlights the importance of understanding the mechanisms of information transfer in the Metaverse, beyond just the technical aspects. This statement underscores the need for marketers to grasp how information is packaged and moved within this virtual space.

Participant 2 emphasises the need for skills in data gathering and analysis, indicating that marketers must be adept at interpreting and utilising data within the Metaverse. This insight points to the importance of data analytics in understanding and leveraging information flow.

Participant 3 raises concerns about data privacy and the need for a common understanding of terms like blockchain and non-fungible tokens (NFTs). This suggests that marketers need to be familiar with these concepts and their implications for information security and ownership in the Metaverse.

Conceptualising Metaverse Ecosystems: Schöbel (2023) describes the Metaverse as a collection of diverse digital ecosystems, each with its unique characteristics. Understanding how information is managed and transferred across these ecosystems is essential for marketers to effectively navigate and leverage the Metaverse for marketing purposes.

Significance for Marketers: The study's findings suggest that marketers must not only understand the technical aspects of information transfer in the Metaverse but also the broader implications, including data privacy, security and the use of blockchain and NFTs. This knowledge is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies that align with the unique dynamics of the Metaverse.

A comprehensive understanding of how information is packaged, transferred and shared within the Metaverse is vital for marketers. This knowledge enables them to effectively manage and leverage information in this complex digital environment, ensuring successful marketing strategies that resonate with the unique characteristics of the Metaverse ecosystems.

#### **4.2.6.5 Ethics (4 mentions)**

Ethical considerations and responsible marketing practices within the Metaverse were highlighted four times. One of the fundamental ethical concerns in the Metaverse is user privacy, as the Metaverse collects vast amounts of data on user behaviour and preferences, which can be used to target advertising and marketing campaigns (Ambolis, 2023; Kaur, 2023).

*“I think there’s an ethics part in this that I’m very unclear about. Like I feel very weird about it.” (Participant 2)*

*“You know, someone may not do something when they’re acting as a human, but when they’re in Avatar, I don’t know. So I feel a bit strange about that.” (Participant 2)*

*“What is unethical? Knowledge of ethics is essential in the metaverse.” (Participant 10)*

*“Marketing individuals are more responsible for understanding and using technology ethically to sell their products.” (Participant 4)*

Ethical considerations and responsible marketing practices within the Metaverse were highlighted four times, with a particular focus on user privacy. This concern arises from the Metaverse’s ability to collect extensive data on user behaviour and preferences, which can be utilised for targeted advertising and marketing campaigns. Participant 2 expressed a sense of unease and ambiguity regarding the ethical dimensions in the Metaverse, especially when considering actions taken in avatar form. This highlights the complexity and novelty of ethical issues in virtual environments. Participant 10 underscored the importance of having a thorough understanding of ethics in the

Metaverse, indicating the critical role of ethical considerations in this space. Additionally, Participant 4 pointed out the heightened responsibility of marketers to understand and use technology ethically, particularly in the context of product sales.

The literature, including works by Ambolis (2023) and Kaur (2023), echoes these sentiments, emphasising the significance of user privacy in the Metaverse. These ethical considerations are paramount for maintaining user trust and ensuring sustainable marketing practices. As marketers navigate this new and evolving terrain, it becomes increasingly important for them to operate with a strong ethical compass, ensuring that their practices not only respect user privacy but also adhere to responsible marketing standards.

#### **4.2.6.6 Other codes**

Disruptive marketing, security and legal compliance were also noted as necessary, with frequencies of three, three and one. Marketers can create authentic and engaging experiences for users in the Metaverse and ensure their virtual representations are consistent with their real-world counterparts.

In the Metaverse, privacy and security concerns are paramount for marketers. Here are some key insights from the search results on how marketers can protect user data and prevent unauthorised access (O'Neill, 2022; Krishnan, 2022; Pilay, 2023).

*“South Africa needs to catch up with these technologies... So, the security risks and all those ethical issues with new technology are significant for South Africans.” (Participant 4)*

*“Agencies need to understand what it is, how we can use it to target consumers to help our clients and how we can leverage the space to boost events that agencies themselves are holding.” (Participant 8)*

The themes of disruptive marketing, security and legal compliance emerged as significant considerations for marketers in the Metaverse, with mentions of three, three and one, respectively. These aspects are crucial for creating authentic and engaging

user experiences in the Metaverse, ensuring that virtual representations align with real-world identities.

In the Metaverse, privacy and security are of utmost importance. O'Neill (2022), Krishnan (2022) and Pilay (2023) provide insights on how marketers can safeguard user data and prevent unauthorised access. These concerns are particularly relevant in the context of South Africa, as noted by Participant 4, who emphasised the need for the country to catch up with new technologies while addressing the significant security risks and ethical issues associated with them.

Participant 8 highlighted the role of agencies in understanding the Metaverse to effectively target consumers and leverage the space for events, both for clients and business-to-business interactions. This points to the need for a comprehensive grasp of the Metaverse's capabilities and limitations, especially in terms of security and legal compliance.

Overall, these codes underscore the importance for marketers to be well-versed in the legal standards governing the Metaverse, to be aware of and mitigate security risks, and to use disruptive marketing strategies in a way that engages users effectively without causing discomfort or alienation. This balanced approach is key to successful marketing in the Metaverse, where the lines between virtual and real experiences are increasingly blurred.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of digital marketers' perceptions and understanding of the Metaverse, elucidating its potential as a transformative platform for marketing amidst the challenges and considerations it presents. The data analysed reveals that digital marketers possess a nuanced understanding of the Metaverse, recognising its decentralised structure, augmented reality (AR) components and potential to foster a new virtual economy. The Metaverse is identified as a promising avenue for personalised marketing, engagement enhancement and virtual product placement, offering unique opportunities for creating engaging and tailored experiences for target audiences.

Furthermore, the potential development of Meta communities within the Metaverse is acknowledged, which can serve as spaces for user interaction and engagement, opening new avenues for community-based economies and marketing practices. However, the Metaverse also presents challenges, including issues related to accessibility, technology adoption rates and the need for significant digital transformation. Additional considerations such as Internet data costs, electricity supply issues and preparation time are crucial in regions like South Africa. Navigating these challenges is imperative for marketers aiming to leverage the Metaverse effectively as a marketing channel, necessitating a strategic and informed approach.

The chapter also situates the Metaverse within the broader context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), highlighting the importance of technologies like AI, big data, and robotics in driving digital transformation and innovation in marketing. Understanding and adopting these technologies is vital for marketers to effectively engage with and capitalise on the Metaverse's opportunities.

As the Metaverse continues to evolve it is crucial for marketers to stay abreast of its developments and to understand its potential and limitations. The insights provided in this chapter offer a foundational understanding of the Metaverse's role and potential in digital marketing, serving as a valuable guide for marketers navigating this novel and dynamic virtual space.

## **CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter revisits the central research question: “Investigating the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel.” Initially, this section will evaluate the reliability of the qualitative research methods used in the study. The chapter will then assess how effectively the research met its primary and secondary objectives and discuss the challenges encountered during the study. Finally, actionable suggestions and thoughts on future research in this important and evolving area will be provided.

### **5.2 Validity**

Upholding the validity of the research constituted a pivotal element throughout this study. The interview protocol was meticulously formulated, drawing insights from the literature review executed in Chapter 2. Questions and themes for the semi-structured interviews were crafted to align with the study’s objectives and central research question, specifically targeting South African digital marketers. These interviews, averaging approximately 40 minutes, facilitated a thorough topic exploration.

Before conducting the interviews, the guide underwent a review process to ascertain its efficacy in capturing the nuanced insights and complexities of the Metaverse as a marketing channel. Each interview was recorded and meticulous notes were compiled during each session to ensure the accuracy of the data. After the interviews, the data underwent transcription and preparation for analysis to ensure the utmost academic rigour, language and technical editing were conducted, enhancing the validity of the findings from this study. In adherence to principles of transparency and replicability, all data procured for this research will be accessible upon request.

## **5.3 Conclusion & key findings**

### **5.3.1 Literature review findings**

In line with the problem statement, the primary objective of this study was to investigate the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel.

To achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were set:

*1.8.1 To investigate what the term Metaverse means and how the Metaverse can be used as a marketing channel.*

*1.8.2 To determine what technology and skills digital marketers will need to implement marketing strategies through the Metaverse marketing channel.*

The Metaverse, as indicated by the literature review, is a decentralised, augmented reality-enriched and socially interactive channel, offering a compelling platform for various activities, including socialising, gaming and economic transactions. The Metaverse is recognised for its potential as a marketing channel, providing organisations with unique opportunities to connect with and engage their audiences in meaningful and impactful ways. Virtual product placement, for instance, allows organisations to showcase their products within the Metaverse, offering users an immersive and interactive experience with these products, thereby enhancing user engagement and brand visibility within virtual environments.

However, while the potential and strategies for marketing within the Metaverse are acknowledged, the actualisation of this potential is hampered by tangible barriers such as high Internet data costs, electricity supply issues and accessibility to technology, particularly within the South African context.

The literature review emphasised the necessity to identify the technology and abilities that digital marketers would require to execute marketing plans via the Metaverse marketing channel.

The Metaverse demands a holistic marketing approach, intertwining traditional marketing principles with the unique opportunities and challenges it presents, ensuring marketing efforts are immersive, interactive, and inherently aligned with the Metaverse inhabitants' expectations and preferences. Technologies and skills pivotal for navigating the Metaverse, such as VR, 3-D modelling, and AI are recognised but not thoroughly embedded among marketers. Moreover, understanding and leveraging technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), such as AI, VR, AR and automation, is crucial for marketers to navigate and succeed in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. The study underscored the need for marketers to possess diverse skills and knowledge to effectively guide and leverage the Metaverse for marketing purposes. The insights from participants highlighted the complexity and multifaceted nature of the Metaverse, necessitating a well-rounded and informed approach to marketing within this space.

While the Metaverse is acknowledged and its potential as a marketing channel is recognised, the readiness among South African digital marketers to fully exploit this virtual domain is still in its infancy. The barriers, such as technological accessibility, high data costs, and a lack of specific knowledge and skills among marketers, pose significant challenges to fully adopting the Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa. A structured, strategic approach, underscored by specific knowledge acquisition and skills development, is imperative to harness its potential as a marketing channel, ensuring that marketers are aware and adequately prepared to leverage its multifaceted nature effectively.

### **5.3.2 Empirical study findings**

The empirical study aimed to delve into semi-structured interviews with digital marketers in South Africa to investigate their readiness to embrace the Metaverse as a new marketing channel.

Two secondary questions were posed to support the main research question:

*6.1.1 "What is the Metaverse according to digital marketers, and can it serve as a marketing channel?"*

### *6.1.2 “What technologies and skills are needed to utilise the Metaverse as a marketing tool?”*

The findings indicate that while marketers have a basic understanding of the Metaverse and its potential impact on marketing, highlighted by global movements like Meta’s rebranding there is a clear gap in detailed knowledge and skills, such as VR, 3-D modelling and AI, which are crucial for effectively using the Metaverse. The findings also highlight natural barriers to adopting the Metaverse in South Africa, including high Internet data costs and issues concerning access to technology. While the Metaverse is recognised as a potential platform for innovative marketing strategies, realising this potential is closely tied to a deeper understanding and strategic integration into marketing plans.

The findings suggest that while South African digital marketers have an essential awareness of the Metaverse and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), a structured approach backed by specific knowledge and skills development is critical to fully leverage its potential as a marketing channel. This requires thoroughly exploring the foundational understanding of the 4IR as a precursor to digital disruption and the subsequent emergence of the Metaverse. The study’s insights show that digital marketers have a basic understanding of the 4IR and are adopting various technologies such as AI, VR, AR and automation (Theme 2). However, there is a clear gap in the detailed knowledge needed to navigate the Metaverse effectively (Theme 6). The Metaverse, regarded by digital marketers as a decentralised, augmented reality-enriched and socially interactive space (Theme 3), offers a rich yet complex platform for various activities, including socialising, gaming and economic transactions.

Moreover, while the potential and strategies for marketing within the Metaverse are acknowledged, emphasis in the study on the importance of engagement, personalised experiences and understanding target markets (Theme 4), reveals that realising this potential is hindered by tangible barriers such as high Internet data costs, electricity supply issues and accessibility to technology, especially in the South African context (Theme 5). The findings suggest that while there is an essential awareness and

acknowledgement of the Metaverse and the 4IR among South African digital marketers a structured, strategic approach backed by specific knowledge acquisition and skills development is critical to fully leverage its potential as a marketing channel.

Thus, while readiness is partially present, the study underscored the need for a well-rounded, informed and strategic approach to marketing within the Metaverse, ensuring that digital marketers are aware and adequately prepared to effectively leverage its multifaceted nature. This study made digital marketers aware of the Metaverse as a marketing channel in South Africa, but they are not yet ready to adapt to it as a marketing channel.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

The study at present, while offering valuable insights into the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel, has its limitations. Firstly, the reliance on qualitative data, particularly from semi-structured interviews, may introduce subjectivity into the findings, as the researcher's perspective inherently influences interpretations of responses. Additionally, the sample size and demographic of participants may not wholly represent the entire South African digital marketing community, potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings.

The study also predominantly hinges upon the participants' self-reported understanding and perceptions of the Metaverse, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, or be limited by their own knowledge and experience. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of the Metaverse and associated technologies may mean that the findings are subject to temporal limitations, as advancements in this domain could quickly render current knowledge and perceptions obsolete.

Moreover, the study did not delve into specific sectors within digital marketing that might have diverse needs, challenges and perspectives regarding the adaptation to the Metaverse. The exclusion of quantitative data also limits the ability to perform statistical analyses that might offer additional insights into patterns and correlations among larger populations of digital marketers in South Africa.

The study is constrained by its geographical focus on South Africa. While it provides a valuable case study, the findings may not directly apply to digital marketers in different cultural or economic contexts. Future research endeavours might seek to mitigate these limitations by incorporating a mixed-methods approach, expanding the sample size and demographic, and exploring sector-specific impacts and strategies related to marketing within the Metaverse.

Lastly, the study may be influenced by the rapidly evolving nature of the Metaverse and associated technologies, which can quickly render specific insights or data points obsolete. The dynamic and fast-paced developments within the Metaverse and digital marketing realms may introduce new variables and considerations that were not accounted for during the study.

The study does not profoundly delve into the specific technological, regulatory and socio-economic factors that might influence the adoption and integration of the Metaverse in marketing strategies within the South African context.

## **5.5 Managerial implications**

While this study did not yield a specific section dedicated to managerial implications, the researcher can infer some managerial potential consequences based on the various insights and themes explored throughout the study. Digital marketing managers must understand these implications to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel:

- **Adaptation to new technologies:** Managers and decision-makers in the digital marketing realm must facilitate and prioritise adapting to new technologies, such as VR, AR and AI which are pivotal in navigating the Metaverse. This involves adopting these technologies and ensuring that their teams are proficient in leveraging them for marketing purposes.
- **Continuous learning and upskilling:** The rapid evolution of the digital landscape, especially with the emergence of the Metaverse, necessitates a commitment to continuous learning and upskilling among digital marketers. Managers should

foster a culture of continuous learning and provide opportunities for their teams to acquire and refine the skills needed to effectively operate in the Metaverse.

- **Strategic planning and integration:** The integration of the Metaverse into marketing strategies should be approached with meticulous strategic planning. Managers should spearhead initiatives to explore, understand and subsequently integrate the Metaverse into their marketing channels, ensuring alignment with overall organisational goals and customer needs.
- **Addressing barriers to adaptation:** Recognising and addressing the barriers to adopting the Metaverse as a marketing channel, such as high Internet data costs and technological accessibility issues in South Africa, is crucial. Managers must devise strategies to mitigate these challenges and enable their teams to leverage the Metaverse effectively.
- **Ethical and legal considerations:** Navigating the Metaverse also brings forth ethical and legal considerations, such as user privacy and data security. Managers should ensure that marketing practices within the Metaverse adhere to ethical standards and comply with relevant legal frameworks, safeguarding the organisation and its customers.
- **Customer-centric approach:** The Metaverse offers a unique platform for creating immersive and personalised customer experiences. Managers should guide their teams in developing and implementing customer-centric strategies within the Metaverse, ensuring that marketing efforts are tailored and resonate with their target demographics.
- **Innovation and creativity:** Leveraging the Metaverse for marketing necessitates innovation and creativity. Managers should encourage their teams to explore novel and engaging ways to connect with and captivate audiences within the Metaverse, ensuring that their approaches are practical and distinctive.
- **Data-driven decision-making:** The Metaverse provides a wealth of data that can be harnessed to inform marketing strategies. Managers should ensure that their teams are adept at collecting, analysing and deriving insights from data within the Metaverse, facilitating data-driven decision-making.
- **Global and localised strategies:** While the Metaverse offers a global platform, it's vital also to consider local contexts, challenges and opportunities. Managers should guide the development of globally relevant marketing strategies that are

localised to cater to the specific needs and nuances of different markets, including South Africa.

These implications, derived from the various themes and insights explored in the study, underscore the multifaceted role of managers in navigating the complexities and harnessing the opportunities presented by the Metaverse in the realm of digital marketing. Managers need to be at the forefront of guiding their teams through the evolving digital landscape, ensuring that their strategies are adaptive and innovative but also ethical, legal and customer-centric.

## **5.6 Future research**

Given the findings and limitations of the study, several recommendations and avenues for future research are proposed.

- **Upskilling and training:** There is a clear need for targeted training and upskilling of digital marketers in South Africa to navigate the Metaverse effectively. Future interventions should focus on developing and providing access to training programmes that enhance marketers' knowledge and skills in VR, 3-D modelling, coding, AI and avatar creation, among other relevant technologies.
- **Strategic Development:** Organisations and marketers should begin formulating and integrating strategic plans incorporating the Metaverse into their marketing channels. This involves understanding the technological aspects and developing strategies that align with consumer behaviour, brand identity and marketing objectives within the Metaverse.
- **Collaboration and partnerships:** Engaging in collaborations and partnerships with tech companies, developers and other stakeholders within the Metaverse can facilitate a smoother transition and adaptation to this new marketing channel. This can also aid in navigating the technological complexities and ensuring that marketing strategies are technologically sound and viable.
- **Addressing barriers:** Strategies must be developed to address the identified barriers, such as high Internet data costs and accessibility to technology for adaptation to the Metaverse as a marketing channel. This might involve

advocating for policies that reduce Internet data costs or developing solutions that make the Metaverse more accessible to a broader audience.

- Consumer research: Future research should explore consumer perceptions, behaviours and expectations within the Metaverse. Understanding how consumers navigate and engage within the Metaverse will be crucial in developing effective marketing strategies.
- Ethical and regulatory considerations: Further studies should delve into the ethical and regulatory considerations of marketing within the Metaverse, exploring issues related to data privacy, consumer protection and ethical marketing practices in a virtual environment.
- Case studies: Developing case studies of successful marketing campaigns within the Metaverse can provide practical insights and guidelines for marketers exploring this channel.

Continuous research and analysis are paramount to stay abreast of emerging trends, technologies and consumer behaviours within this innovative digital space, considering the rapid developments within the Metaverse. This will ensure that South African digital marketers can strategically and effectively leverage the Metaverse as a potent marketing channel in the future.

With these results in mind, the question is not whether marketers will learn more about the Metaverse, or whether they will use the Metaverse as a marketing tool, but rather a question about when they will use the Metaverse.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER

North-West University Business School  
2022/10/18

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct research at [insert organisation name].

My name is Lindie de Beer

I am studying for a Master's in business administration at North-West University. I am seeking permission to do research at [insert organisation name].

I am conducting research in the field of marketing with a focus on digital marketing and the new opportunities that the Metaverse can bring for marketers to expand their organisations. The Metaverse is a trending topic, and organisations are starting to experiment with the opportunities; not only is the metaverse a new form of marketing, but it will also become a new way of living, shopping, gaming, and participating in social interactions.

This study aims to understand the Metaverse and investigate if South African digital marketers are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel and to determine what digital marketers know about the Metaverse, whether they know to embrace this new technology, and whether they are ready to adapt to this new marketing channel. This study wants to establish what is needed to prepare digital marketers for the future of Metaverse marketing. The Metaverse is not entirely here, but digital marketers must be ready.

The research will entail collecting data from digital marketers.

I will invite individuals from your organisation to participate in this study, specifically focusing on digital marketers. If they agree, they will be asked to participate in online interviews. The interview will take no longer than 40 minutes and occur on a date suitable for the participant and the organisation. The participant's interview will be recorded, and they can listen to it at any given time.

Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the organisation) will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated if you are interested in the conclusion.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission during this project without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

All research data will be kept at North-West University when the study is completed.

Therefore, I request writing permission to conduct my research at your organisation.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Lindie de Beer  
084 421 0000  
lindiedebeer89@gmail.com

Dr Piet Pretorius  
piet@akademia.ac.za

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Investigating if digital marketers in South Africa are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel.**

#### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

##### **Demographical information**

1. What is the organisation's name that you work for?
2. For what type of organisation do you work? NGO, Corporate, self-employed?
3. What is your age?
4. Are you currently in a marketing or communication position?
5. What is your job title?
6. Briefly give an overview of your job description.

##### **Considering what we have discussed up to now, I would like to ask you the following questions, which specifically focus on Marketing.**

7. What is your understanding of Web 3.0?
8. What is your understanding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution?
9. In your opinion, what technologies can be classified under the wave of the fourth industrial revolution?
10. How would you say the fourth industrial revolution influenced the marketing world?
11. Would you say that the Metaverse can be classified as technology that the fourth industrial revolution revealed to the world?
12. In your own words, describe the term Metaverse
13. Do you think the Metaverse can be used as an organisations marketing tool?
  - 13.1. How?
  - 13.2. Why would you say that?
14. Stating back to your answer about technologies that came with the wave of the fourth industrial revolution, what knowledge and upskilling are needed for marketers to use the Metaverse as a marketing channel?
15. Do you think digital marketers are making enough use of these new technologies?

16. Do you think the Metaverse will happen?

16.1. When do you think the Metaverse will start to roll out in South Africa?

17. If yes, do you think South Africa is ready to use the Metaverse as a marketing channel?

## **APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM**

**Agreement between the researcher and the participant participating in the semi-structured interviews.**

***Investigating if digital marketers in South Africa are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel.***

MBA: Lindie de Beer

I am conducting research in the field of marketing with a focus on digital marketing and the new opportunities that the Metaverse can bring for marketers to expand their organisations. The Metaverse is a trending topic, and organisations are starting to experiment with the opportunities; not only is the metaverse a new form of marketing, but it will also become a new way of living, shopping, gaming, and participating in social interactions.

This study aims to understand the Metaverse and investigate if South African digital marketers are ready to adapt to the Metaverse as a marketing channel, and to determine what digital marketers know about the Metaverse, whether they know to embrace this new technology, and whether they are ready to adapt to this new marketing channel. This study wants to establish what is needed to prepare digital marketers for the future of Metaverse marketing. The Metaverse is not entirely here, but digital marketers must be ready. The research will entail collecting data from digital marketers.

By signing this consent form, you, as the participant give consent to participate in this study and state that you read through the below points and understand the extent of the study:

- The researcher gave enough information regarding the study and what the study is about.
- The researcher explained why the data is needed and where it will be used.
- I willingly agreed to take part in the study.
- I understand that I may, at any point in time, withdraw from the study.
- I understand that any personal information regarding myself will be confidential.
- I am comfortable with the idea that the interview is being recorded.
- I understand that there is NO incentive to participate in the study.
- I understand that the information regarding the study will be published and stored at the Nort-West University and that this study is the property of the Northwest University.
- I understand that the duration of the interview will be 60 minutes or less.

Thank you for participating in the study.

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Date

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Participant's signature

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Date

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Researcher's signature



## APPENDIX E: LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE

24 November 2023

To whom it may concern,

This is to certify that the paper titled Investigating the readiness of South African digital marketers to adapt to the metaverse as a marketing channel to be submitted by Lindie de Beer (21158649), has been professionally edited for spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, phrasing and overall style. The quality of the English language in this paper is affirmed, provided the editing changes are accepted and further changes made to the paper have also been professionally reviewed and approved.

Language practitioner name: Doreen Biermann

Qualifications: BA Hons Professional writing and translation (University of Pretoria)

Practical experience: 8+ years in the industry

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Doreen Biermann', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Doreen Biermann