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Virtual Reality Will Make Shopping Simpler With ‘Try Before You Buy’ Test Drives Available 24/7 – Wherever You Are

- Future virtual reality technology offers a more convenient way to “try before you buy”
- Test drives from home could be desert drives in an SUV – or doing school run in your PJs
- Shoppers suffer “decider’s dilemma” and want to sample products and services
- Ford foresees consumers could one day try any car, anywhere, and for as long as they want
- Company makes extensive use of virtual reality tech for design of the all-new Ford Fiesta

cologne, Germany, March 29, 2017 – The advent of virtual reality (VR) technology is predicted to fundamentally change the way we live over the coming decades. *

Cinemas will immerse audiences in VR movies, patients will undergo VR treatment and customers will enter the world of the products or services they are interested in, enabling a whole new dimension to the idea of sampling, or trying new things out. Cars are no different.

More than ever before Ford is integrating VR into the way it designs its vehicles. And the company is now starting to explore how the technology could change the retail experience.

“It really is a blank canvas. It is easy to imagine that someone who wants to buy an SUV could experience taking that car for a test drive over desert dunes without leaving the comfort of their home,” said Jeffrey Nowak, global digital experience chief, Ford Motor Company. “Likewise, if you’re in the market for a city car you could be at home, relaxing in your PJs and fit in trying out the peak-time school run after you’ve put the kids to bed.”

Shoppers online can already try before they buy to find out how new glasses or clothes might suit them, or even what a new car might look like outside their home. But according to Sheryl Connelly, Ford global trend and futuring manager, they are also

sometimes baffled by an overwhelming choice that leads to “Decider’s Dilemma”. **

“With the internet, consumers face an abundance of choice – impacting their attitudes toward commitment,” said Connelly. “Products and services are adapting to accommodate a ‘sampling society’ that prioritises trying over buying.”

The biggest trigger of car sales, after practical financial issues, is “purely emotional” *** and the test drive can be a crucial “first date” for the shopper and their potential next car. By enabling customers to try out different models at a time and place to suit them – and for as long as they want – VR could also mean customers have a much clearer idea of which car they want before they even step into a dealership. It could even enable customers to experience the unique new car smell of their preferred vehicle.

Ford is currently exploring the potential of a range of virtual and augmented reality technologies to layer digital holograms onto the real world that could within the next decade allow people to interact with every aspect of products at their convenience.

“We envisage that one day a customer could identify the model they are interested in – from the colour, to the exact finish of their interior – and the time and place they would like to simulate. That scenario could then be recreated on a bespoke basis,” said Nowak. “There really is no limit to the depth of detail. The possibilities are endless.”

Ford already makes extensive use of VR in design. A state-of-the-art facility within the Design Studio, in Cologne, in Germany, allows designers to fully experience a vehicle without the need for a physical prototype. This enables them to perfect the look of high quality materials, craftsmanship and finish more quickly and efficiently. For the all-new Ford Fiesta, designers were able to experience and confirm location of vehicle controls, dashboard layout and seating positions.

“People decide within three minutes if they love a product or not, and it is the same for your car,” said Amko Leenarts, Ford’s head of global interior design operations. “From the moment you get in, you form connections with the smell, the feel of the surfaces, or the sound of the car door closing and it’s very powerful if we – as designers – can help create the perfect experience for the customer.”

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* <https://www.thebigbangfair.co.uk/media/49557/the-future-of-shopping-compendium-final.pdf>

** <https://media.ford.com/content/fordmedia/feu/en/news/2016/12/07/amidst-unprecedented-change-and-uncertainty--ford-trend-report-h.html>

*** <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2014/the-heart-of-the-issue-emotional-motivators-rev-up-automotive-purchase-intentions-around-the-world.html>

