Adello

BY LAB51

Edition No. 38

TOP 50

BUSINESS & MARKETING *visionaries*

ATHENA DEMOS

Co-founder & CEO at BigRock Creative, Presence Creator, PX Advisor, Futurist

LOOK WHAT YOU MADE ME DO

Taylor Swift Is Creating Her Own Metaverse

EMBRACING *WEB3* COMMUNITIES

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear reader,

Communities are the heart of Web3 and the metaverse. They have the power to drive innovation, create value, and shape the future of these emerging technologies. Whether it's a group of developers building decentralized applications or a community of gamers exploring virtual worlds, the shared vision and collective effort of a community can amplify the impact of individual contributions.

The decentralized nature of Web3 and the metaverse also makes it easier for communities to form and collaborate without being constrained by geographic boundaries or centralized control and, hopefully, take a big step toward humanity, equity, and inclusion.

One of the brightest visions of Web3 communities, in my opinion, belongs to Athena Demos, the driving force behind the hybrid Burning Man experience. It was an absolute pleasure meeting her last year during one of the conferences dedicated to the metaverse and then at the Adello Switzerland Christmas dinner.

Learn more about the inspiring concept of Web3 communities, their roles and goals in this exclusive interview by LAB51.

Yours,

Anna Pak

Head of Marketing at Adello and LAB51

Photo from Big Rock Creative

Weekly Highlight

Towards Web3 Communities

INTERVIEW WITH ATHENA DEMOS

The metaverse is attracting people with its potential for communities and experiences. The future of the metaverse is focused on creating a space where people of all backgrounds can come together, while accessibility and data autonomy are keeping the focus on humanity, not technology. Burning Man is an example of this, with its virtual version, BRCvr, created to bring the community together, even during a pandemic. Join us as we journey across an innovative virtual space where digital platforms provide endless opportunities for collaboration and inclusion. Learn how the Burning Man community has evolved into a decentralized ecosystem of interconnected experiences and explore the potential of NFTs to authenticate identities and control data in the metaverse. Plus, find out how the Burning Man experiment is shaping the future of humanity!

What is your view on the future of communities in the metaverse, and how do you think they will exist in Web3?

I don't think there is a metaverse without communities. It is a requirement. Everything we build, we're building for people to come and interact with it. That's why I'm trying to change the paradigm around user experience to participant experience, because we are designing for how people will participate in the metaverse. That participation isn't singular.

Nobody likes hanging out in digital space by themselves. That's actually true of the physical spaces as well. If you walk into an empty room, you won't stay for very long unless you have a specific purpose for being in that room. It's all about your friends, your community, your coworkers, and how you connect with other people, and engage with each other, and the space in which you're with them. Bringing that value into a digital space, like we did with Burning Man, is a part of it. So, the metaverse is not a single-participant experience but rather multi-participant.

Photo from Big Rock Creative

How do you translate participant experience from the physical to the digital realm?

A user is a passive consumer. User experience can be compared to eating fast food: You're eating it, and it instantly makes you feel good. But if you go to a dining experience where a chef takes a lot of effort, puts the flavors together in a certain way, and serves it to you - it is a participant-engaging experience. You share this experience together with the chef, staff around you, and other guests.

So, if you are by yourself, what do you do? You take photos and post them on your social media to share and engage with others in your experience. Same with the metaverse: It is where physical and digital meet.

It's important to remember that the metaverse doesn't really exist now and has various forms of interpretability. But If we could transfer the physical experience into the digital and have it seamlessly exist between these worlds, we would be able to connect communities and have a shared experience.

Think about sports. People get together in sports bars to enjoy the game together because the experience of togetherness matters. If it didn't, we would watch the games at home.

So, what is this original vision of transforming Burning Man into a digital event, and what was the final idea behind it?

So there wasn't an actual vision of what this digital Burning Man experience was going to be. All we knew was that the physical event couldn't happen [due to the pandemic]. But the Burning Man community needed to get together, not only in the US, but all over the world.

We already started a virtual project many years ago. But it was a single-user experience. When technology developed further, we were able to create BRCvr for a large number of burners to come together and collaborate in the digital space.

During talks at the summits in Europe, participants were asked if they had visited Burning Man in the US. Very few people raised their hands, and it's understandable. It's hard to get there and very expensive coming from overseas. But my second question was how many people went to Burning Man digitally, and approximately 10 people raised their hands. It's not about going to the middle of the desert and surviving the heat, it's about community. All we wanted to do was create a space where people would feel welcomed. We created BRCvr for anyone who wants to join.

Photo from Big Rock Creative

The Burning Man event that happens at the end of August in Black Rock City has a population of 80,000. The infrastructure that leads to that area of the desert cannot support anything larger than that. Even though we have people on waiting lists, we are limited by location-based size. The virtual world opens the possibility of participation for everyone who wants to.

My future goal for 5-8 years is to connect a physical and digital space so that the ~ 3 million people who try to get tickets every year are able to go. There will be 40,000 people physically in the desert, and the other 2.9 million joining virtually. And when you're at the physical Burning Man, you would be able to put on VR glasses and go to specific areas, see the people that are in the digital space, and have conversations with them. Human connection across the metaverse.

What platform do you use, and how easy is it for users to interact with it?

All these years, we've been on the Microsoft AltspaceVR platform. We like that it's accessible by most VR headsets and on Mac and PC desktops. We wanted to create a place where people could come together without technology restrictions. Sadly, AltspaceVR was sunset on Mar 10, 2023. But we were already in our planning process for what was next for us.

In 2022, we went to Black Rock City and filmed it in 360 and 180 3D formats. Now participants can move in the fully navigable world and interact with 3D art while being immersed in a moment in time that happened at Burning Man 2022. We interviewed many people to talk about the art and tell the story of community.

Now we are in the process of putting all the 3D content from the past 3 years and the new filmed content into one stand alone app. While we build that, we will be producing community gatherings on various immersive social VR platforms.

Do you intend to use other Web3 experiences like blockchain, decentralization, crypto, or NFTs?

Burning Man follows the principles of unconditional gifting. So, incorporate any sort of cryptos we find unnecessary. Buying tickets with crypto would be a huge barrier to entry since it applies too many steps for the user. In the future, perhaps, but not at the moment. Since VR is still nascent technology, we need to keep the barrier to entry as low as possible.

Now, NFTs. I believe that in the Burning Man community, it's unnecessary. If you have a gift, it doesn't need a certificate of authenticity. You would only need it to resell it in the future, but it's a gift!

As I see it, the only possible way is to use NFT as tokens to authenticate who we are. So in the physical world, your main ID is your DNA. If you leave it behind, people know you were there. In the digital world, your DNA is your data. NFTs connected to your identity and data can give you more control over it. If you go to the platform where your NFT shows your identity, you can select how you want your data to be stored and used. Data control via NFT authentication.


Photo from Big Rock Creative

We can see how the metaverse can help with equity and inclusion. How confident are you about it?

Unfortunately, most of these companies are run by people who think in social-normative constructs. For example, when you register for a platform and set up your avatar, you are often asked to choose between male, female and sometimes other. On AltspaceVR, you only need to choose your body shape. We shouldn't be restricted by the confines of gender in the virtual space. For Big Rock Creative, we look to platforms that are more open and accepting of how you choose to radically express yourself. I love seeing participants express themselves with purple or green skin and pink hair or whatever they choose. It's not about being black or white, male or female, it's about being YOU.

We don't force labels and define things, since they are stopping us. Not defining things opens us to new possibilities and opportunities.

Photo from Big Rock Creative
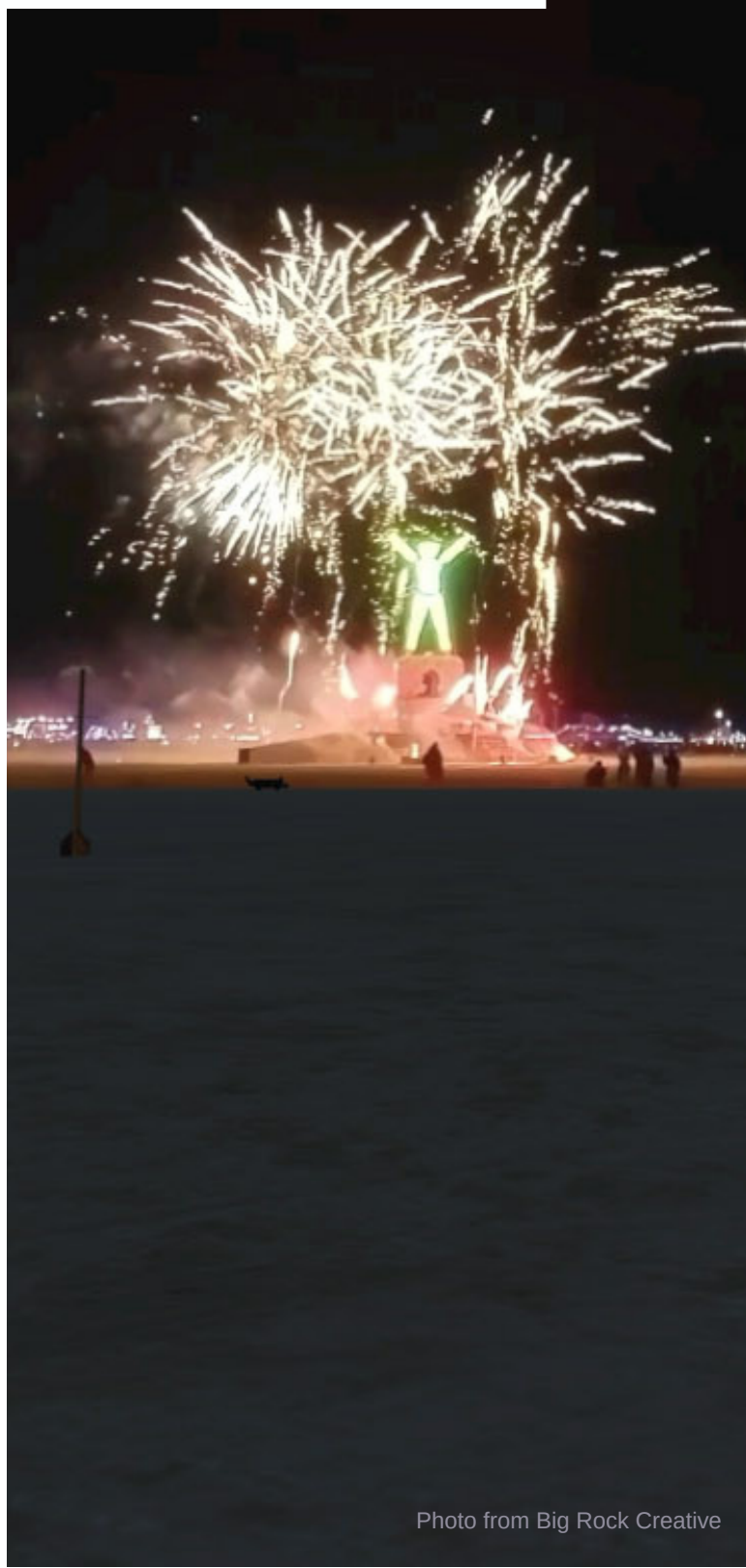
What are your thoughts on metaverse laws as we progress toward decentralization, data protection, and anonymity? Who will be held accountable in criminal cases, and who will enforce the prevention rules?

We, ourselves. The "Big WE", the "Huge WE". We will. The Burning Man community has no laws. And for almost 35 years now, we don't have a governing body. There is an organizational body that pulls permits and puts the infrastructure together for the event to happen. Yes, we obey Nevada and United States laws, but the organization itself has no laws. Instead, we have principles that the community respects. These are guidelines that describe what it means to be a Burner, not define us.

The community very much takes care of itself and each other. And it's possible when you have a set of principles for everyone. If the community sees that another member is doing something wrong, they will hold them accountable. We do it out of the principles of humanity. And I believe that when we build a strong foundational fabric with these principles in the metaverse, we will evolve from community to humanity.

Burning Man is a great social experiment. And when you experiment, you have to allow for trying. Everyone has an opportunity to try, and that's how we learn. Try to live in the desert, try to build art, try to be a part of a team, try to build an entire city, and remove it as if we were never there. Just try. The same is true of the metaverse. When building a whole digital world, we try something new, make mistakes, course correct, see what works, and build again, etc. With the inclusion of the principles, We are practicing being humane beings.

So let's continue that social experiment. We have this opportunity to evolve into humanity, and the metaverse will give us a platform to try that.

#persona

Photo: Heather White, New York, US
Style: Gabriella Ravello of London UK

ATHENA DEMOS

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Athena Demos is co-founder and CEO of Big Rock Creative (BRC), an award-winning XR experience company creating groundbreaking experiences for global clients. Big Rock Creative won the Producer's Guild Award for Innovation, the Aurea Award for creativity, the No Proscenium award for Best VR experience of 2020, the Hermes' Platinum Award, and the Auggie Award for Best Societal Impact of 2022. With over 20 years of experience producing iconic events, like the LA Burning Man Decompression Arts and Music Celebration, as well as the Art of Change Inaugural Ball for President Obama in LA, she transitioned to the metaverse to produce BRCvr (Black Rock City Virtual Reality). BRCvr is an official virtual Burning Man Experience whose scope is unprecedented in the VR space. Athena produced internationally recognized social impact projects such as Breonna's Garden, which premiered at SXSW 2022, and Pride has no borders, which was a finalist in the VR Awards. She has developed a philosophical approach to guiding humanity to build a foundational fabric for creative collaboration in the metaverse. As a result, she has been quoted in leading books, articles, delivered key notes, and spoken at leading industry events and universities across the globe.

In August of 2022, Athena and the BRCvr team went to Burning Man in the Black Rock Desert to film the community, art, event, and ethos in 360 and 180 3D formats to combine with the VR worlds and models they cultivated the past two years. Currently, in post-production, she plans to deliver a new format for storytelling that brings them all together into one participatory experience.

She spent 8+ years as the PM of two time Academy Award-winning documentary film company, Moriah Films.

Look What You Made Me Do. Taylor Swift Is Creating Her Own Metaverse.
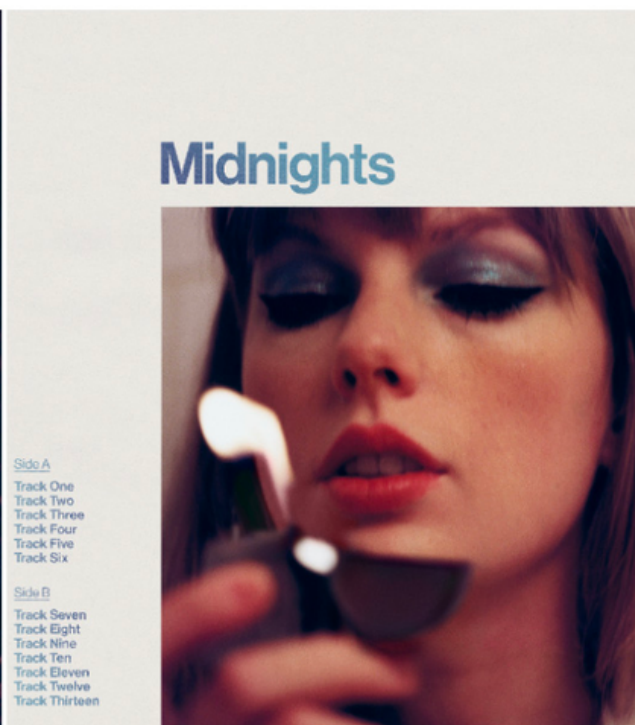
Taylor Swift's meticulous online rollout for her new album, Midnights, culminated last night with a "special very chaotic surprise" at 3 a.m. ET. The artist previously revealed the 13 track titles in a TikTok video series called *Midnights Mayhem With Me* and shared a full release schedule with fans on Instagram. Fans can now listen to the long-awaited album, which was released after weeks of anticipation.

In order to promote her album, Taylor Swift has created a comprehensive virtual universe for her fans to engage with her music and to share and discuss her work. Through her puzzles, secret messages, and clothing, she has created a constantly active online environment of tens of millions of fans who eagerly follow her every move. They went so far as to crash Spotify!

Taylor Swift has been able to cultivate a passionate online fan base through her music and videos, with fans interacting with the star and each other through a variety of digital platforms. While this fan experience is not a full-fledged metaverse, it is similar to the metaverse vision of a shared online experience.

Sometimes completely unexpected cases provide us with an example of how things work. This case prompts us to consider three points:

- What the metaverse actually is
- What is the role of influencers while creating a community
- How gamification benefits engagement

Let's dive into this case and allocate what brands can learn from it.

The actual meaning of the metaverse

The term "metaverse" is abstract and quite new, so it still has to be defined or may have different meanings depending on the standpoints.

Technically, the metaverse is not only Web3. It is a public blockchain platform that supports several protocols, such as Web3, ERC20, and ERC721. Aside from that, the common tools of Web2, such as PC screens and mobile, are often used to enter the metaverse. It also lets users issue and trade digital assets using the Metaverse Digital Asset Protocol (MAP).

From a cultural point of view, the metaverse can be considered an ecosystem inhabited by a certain community. Taking the case of Tailor Swift as an example, her ecosystem was mostly made up of Web2 elements. Indeed, the community interested in and interoperating with the different platforms was the main component of what we called a "metaverse" here.

Thus, surprisingly, for brands to create a metaverse, building a whole new 3D world with complex technical requirements is unnecessary. Instead, it is more helpful in creating a strong community around the brand. But wait, that wouldn't be enough, though. Brands are also responsible for developing continuous experiences through the different platforms for the communities, like creating a small universe for them to interact and interoperate. Here is a reminder that interoperation is one of the main traits of the future metaverse.

In order to find the right path for implementing the metaverse in your business you can ask us for a consultation. LAB51 together with Adello organizes panel discussions and educational events for other companies, and also personal consulting for those who are interested in Web3 and the metaverse.

People instead of brands?

We see how loyal communities (fan bases) are getting created around celebrities in show business. Brands can use this strategy to implement it in their businesses.

Today, if you want to be successful, you need to build communities and encourage real communication between your brand and your customers. A good way to reach potential customers is to sell through someone who is already well-known in a community or on social media. Influencer and social media marketing are still alive and can be great tools for connecting with consumers on a personal level. Instead of relying solely on mass communication, making people the face of your brand by putting real people at the forefront of your messaging can create trust and loyalty.

Brands can use the opportunity to forefront their business with a representative that can be an influencer who represents a brand. Nikes are not bought from Nike but from Cristiano Ronaldo; jeans and jackets are not sold by Tommy Hilfiger but by Gigi Hadid; and lipsticks and foundations are sold not by Kylie Cosmetics but by Kylie Jenner.

Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that quality marketing requires a holistic approach, and not only social media and influencer marketing.

Gamification

You would agree that there would be a big difference if Taylor Swift would just drop an album or if she played a game with her fan base, giving them hints about the upcoming songs. That kept the Swifties (fans of Taylor Swift) tensed and excited. Taylor created for them a continuous journey from the announcement to the album release. That made the fans follow the process. The question is: How can the brands learn from this?

We all love games. And if you are aware of the recent trends, gamification is one of them. Gamification can be a very powerful way for brands to connect with their customers and give them rewards. Brands use gamification to encourage customers to interact with their product or service in a fun and exciting way and to reward them for their loyalty. Using things like points, levels, leaderboards, and rewards, brands can get people to act and get involved, build customer loyalty, and connect emotionally with their customers. By leveraging gamification, brands can also capture valuable customer data as customers interact with the game and reveal more about their wants and needs. This zero- and first-party data can then be used to improve the customer experience and personalize future interactions.

It's amazing how much can be learned from cases from show business. The example with Taylor Swift showed how the latest marketing trends are penetrating different areas and influencing consumers. Stay tuned and observe the world to see what differences it brings today!
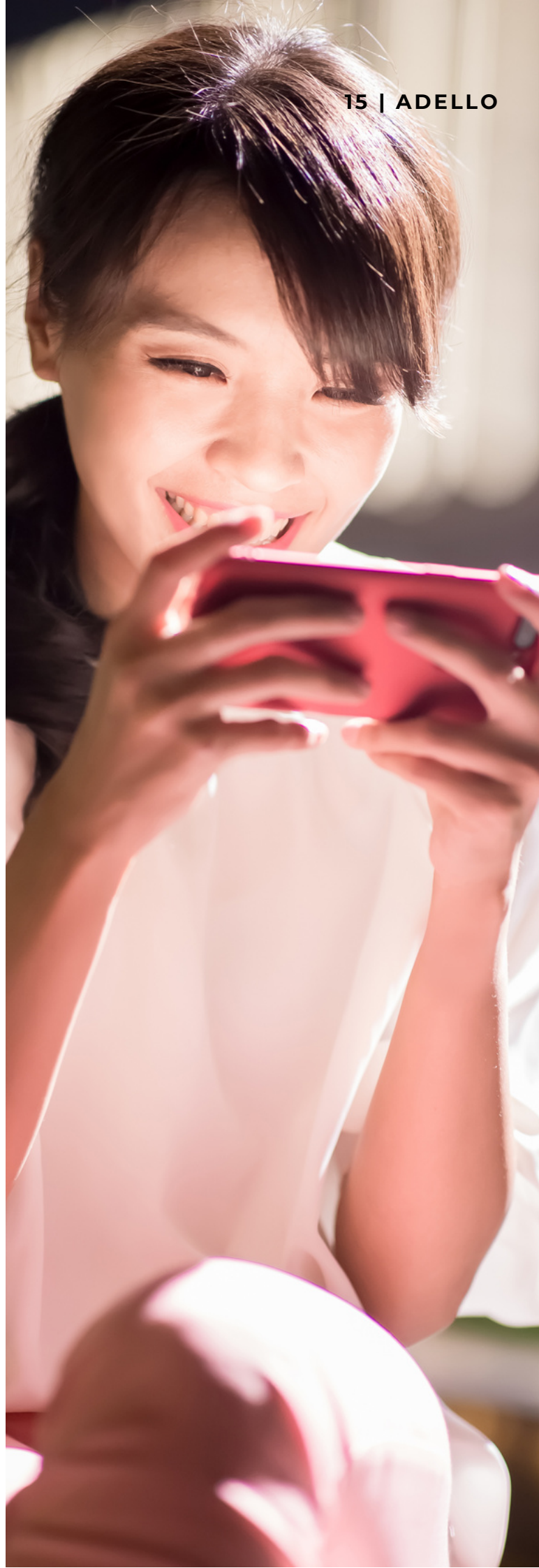
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