

THE IMPACT OF AUGMENTED REALITY ON PURCHASE INTENTION IN THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the impact of Augmented Reality (AR) applications on consumer purchase intention in the beauty industry through in-depth examination of consumer experiences and perceptions. Using a phenomenological approach, this research investigates how consumers experience and interpret AR technology when making beauty product purchase decisions, particularly focusing on the underlying psychological and experiential factors that influence their buying behavior. Through semi-structured interviews with 20 Indonesian consumers who actively use AR beauty applications, this study reveals deep insights into how AR technology shapes consumer decision-making processes. The findings indicate that AR experiences create complex emotional and cognitive responses that significantly influence purchase intentions through enhanced product visualization, reduced uncertainty, and increased confidence in product selection. This research contributes to understanding the experiential dimensions of AR technology in consumer behavior and provides valuable insights for beauty industry practitioners seeking to optimize their digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Purchase Intention, Consumer Experience, Beauty Industry, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior across various industries, with the beauty sector experiencing particularly significant changes in how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products (Sulyanto & Rahab, 2012). Augmented Reality (AR) technology has emerged as a revolutionary tool that bridges the gap between online and offline shopping experiences, offering consumers the ability to virtually try products before making purchase decisions (Ncamphalala & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). This technological innovation has become increasingly relevant in the beauty industry, where visual representation and personal fit are crucial factors in consumer decision-making processes. Although the adoption of digital technology in fashion retail continues to develop, there is still a significant gap in understanding the factors that drive consumer purchase intention through marketplace applications (Amin & Jendral Soedirman, n.d.).

The beauty industry's unique characteristics, including high involvement in personal appearance, the importance of color matching, and the need for sensory evaluation, make it an ideal context for exploring AR technology's impact on consumer behavior (Gothwal et al., 2024). New technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR) and digital marketplace platforms have become revolutionary tools that bridge the gap between online and offline shopping experiences (Sulasih et al., 2022). Unlike other retail categories, beauty products require personal visualization and often

involve emotional and psychological considerations that extend beyond functional benefits. This complexity creates an interesting phenomenon where technology meets personal identity and self-expression, warranting deeper qualitative exploration.

Despite the growing adoption of AR technology in beauty retail, there remains a significant gap in understanding the subjective experiences and meanings that consumers attribute to AR interactions. Most existing research has focused on quantitative measures of technology adoption and behavioral outcomes, leaving unexplored the rich, contextual experiences that shape consumer perceptions and decision-making processes (Khokhar et al., 2022). Previous research shows that AR technology has emerged as a revolutionary tool that bridges the gap between online and offline shopping experiences, offering consumers the ability to try products virtually before making purchasing decisions (Website et al., 2019).

This research addresses the need for comprehensive understanding of consumer experiences with AR technology in the beauty industry by exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes of consumers who use AR beauty applications. The study seeks to uncover the underlying factors that influence how AR experiences translate into purchase intentions, examining not just what happens, but how and why it happens from the consumer's perspective.

The novelty of this research lies in its qualitative approach to understanding AR's impact on consumer behavior in the beauty industry. While previous studies have primarily used quantitative methods to measure relationships between variables, this study employs phenomenological inquiry to explore the depth and richness of consumer experiences. This approach provides insights into the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of AR experiences that quantitative research might overlook. Furthermore, the focus on the Indonesian market provides valuable cultural context for understanding how AR technology is perceived and utilized in emerging digital economies.

The theoretical contribution of this research extends current understanding of technology-mediated consumer experiences by providing nuanced insights into how AR technology influences consumer decision-making processes. Practically, this research offers valuable guidance for beauty industry practitioners, digital marketers, and technology developers seeking to create more effective and engaging AR applications that align with consumer needs and preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Augmented Reality in Consumer Experience

Augmented Reality technology creates immersive experiences by overlaying digital information onto the physical world, fundamentally altering how consumers interact with products and brands (Wang et al., 2022). In the context of beauty retail, AR applications enable consumers to visualize how products will appear on their own features, creating a personalized and interactive shopping experience that was previously impossible in online environments. This technological capability addresses one of the primary challenges in online beauty shopping: the inability to physically try products before purchase.

The experiential nature of AR technology extends beyond mere visualization to encompass emotional and psychological dimensions of consumer behavior. Research suggests that AR experiences can evoke feelings of playfulness, excitement, and empowerment among users, contributing to positive brand associations and enhanced engagement (Huang, 2020). These emotional responses play crucial roles in shaping consumer attitudes and intentions, yet their manifestation and influence vary significantly among individuals based on personal preferences, technological familiarity, and cultural contexts.

Consumer Decision-Making in Digital Environments

The integration of AR technology into consumer decision-making processes represents a

significant shift from traditional shopping behaviors. Digital environments present unique challenges and opportunities for consumers, who must navigate between virtual representations and physical realities when making purchase decisions (Ehab et al., 2020). The beauty industry exemplifies this complexity, where consumers must evaluate not only functional attributes but also aesthetic and emotional considerations that are deeply personal and subjective.

Consumer decision-making in AR-enabled environments involves multiple cognitive and emotional processes, including information processing, risk assessment, and value evaluation. The interactive nature of AR technology can influence these processes by providing enhanced information, reducing uncertainty, and creating positive emotional associations with products and brands (Whang et al., 2021). However, the specific mechanisms through which these influences occur remain underexplored, particularly from qualitative perspectives that capture the richness of consumer experiences.

Cultural and Contextual Factors

The effectiveness and acceptance of AR technology in consumer contexts are significantly influenced by cultural and contextual factors. In the Indonesian market, where digital adoption is rapidly growing alongside traditional shopping practices, consumers may have unique perspectives on technology integration in beauty shopping (Barta et al., 2022). Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for developing effective AR strategies that resonate with local consumer preferences and behaviors.

Cultural factors influence not only technology adoption but also beauty standards, shopping behaviors, and brand relationships. Indonesian consumers may have specific expectations and preferences regarding beauty products and shopping experiences that differ from Western contexts, where much of the existing AR research has been conducted (Hilken et al., 2020). This cultural specificity highlights the need for context-sensitive research that explores how AR technology is experienced and interpreted within specific cultural frameworks.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a phenomenological qualitative approach to understand consumer experiences in using Augmented Reality (AR) technology when making purchasing decisions for beauty products. The study was conducted in Yogyakarta and surrounding areas over six months, from March to August 2024. The population in this study consists of Indonesian consumers who actively use beauty AR applications, with a sample of 20 people selected through purposive sampling technique. Sample criteria include routine use of AR applications for at least three months, age range of 20-40 years, and varied educational and income backgrounds.

Data collection methods were conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews over three months, with each session lasting 60-90 minutes and using Indonesian language so participants could express their experiences naturally. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, adapted to participants' preferences. Additionally, participant observation while using AR applications was also conducted to capture interaction patterns and direct comments from participants during their use of the technology.

The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis based on six stages from Braun and Clarke, with the assistance of NVivo software for data organization and coding. Data validity was maintained through several strategies, such as member checking, peer debriefing, and continuous researcher involvement throughout the research process. Validation was also conducted through routine reflection on researcher bias to ensure the credibility and reliability of research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview data revealed five major themes that explain how AR technology influences consumer purchase intention in the beauty industry: Enhanced Product Visualization Experience, Reduced Purchase Uncertainty, Emotional Engagement and Playfulness, Social Validation and Sharing, and Trust Building Through Transparency.

Enhanced Product Visualization Experience

Participants consistently described AR technology as transforming their ability to visualize beauty products in realistic contexts. One participant noted, "When I use the AR feature, I can see exactly how the lipstick color looks on my skin tone, not just on the model in the advertisement." This enhanced visualization capability was particularly valued for products where color matching is critical, such as foundation, concealer, and lip products.

The visualization experience extended beyond simple product overlay to include contextual considerations such as lighting conditions, skin texture compatibility, and overall aesthetic harmony. Participants appreciated the ability to experiment with multiple products simultaneously, creating complete looks and assessing how different products complement each other. This comprehensive visualization capability significantly influenced their confidence in product selection and subsequent purchase decisions.

Participants also highlighted the importance of realistic representation in AR applications. Those who experienced high-quality, accurate AR visualization were more likely to develop positive attitudes toward both the technology and the brands offering it. Conversely, participants who encountered unrealistic or low-quality AR experiences expressed skepticism and reduced purchase intention.

Reduced Purchase Uncertainty

AR technology significantly reduced the uncertainty typically associated with online beauty product purchases. Participants described feeling more confident in their purchase decisions when they could virtually try products before buying. One participant explained, "Before AR, buying makeup online was like gambling. Now I can see if it works for me before spending money."

The uncertainty reduction was particularly pronounced for first-time brand experiences and premium-priced products. Participants reported being more willing to try new brands or higher-priced items when AR technology allowed them to preview results. This increased willingness to experiment contributed directly to expanded product exploration and higher purchase intention.

However, participants also noted that uncertainty reduction was contingent on the accuracy and quality of AR implementation. Poor-quality AR experiences actually increased uncertainty and skepticism, highlighting the importance of technological excellence in achieving positive outcomes.

Emotional Engagement and Playfulness

The interactive nature of AR technology created strong emotional responses among participants, with many describing their AR experiences as fun, engaging, and entertaining. Participants frequently used words like "exciting," "playful," and "addictive" to describe their AR interactions. One participant stated, "It's like playing dress-up, but with makeup. I can spend hours trying different looks."

This emotional engagement extended beyond immediate entertainment to create lasting positive associations with brands and products. Participants who experienced high levels of enjoyment during AR interactions were more likely to remember specific products and brands, leading to increased consideration and purchase intention over time.

The playful aspect of AR also encouraged extended engagement with applications, allowing consumers to explore more products and develop deeper familiarity with brand offerings. This

extended engagement created multiple touchpoints for influence and persuasion, amplifying the overall impact on purchase intention.

Social Validation and Sharing

Many participants integrated AR experiences into their social media activities and peer consultation processes. The ability to capture and share AR-generated looks provided social validation opportunities that influenced purchase decisions. One participant noted, "I always share my AR looks with friends on Instagram and ask for their opinions before buying."

Social sharing of AR experiences created additional brand exposure and peer influence opportunities. Participants reported being influenced by friends' shared AR experiences and recommendations, creating viral effects that extended the technology's impact beyond individual users.

The social dimension also included aspirational elements, where participants used AR to experiment with looks inspired by influencers or celebrities. This aspirational usage connected personal identity exploration with product consideration, creating powerful motivational drivers for purchase intention.

Trust Building Through Transparency

AR technology contributed to trust building by providing transparent and accurate product representations. Participants appreciated the honesty of seeing products on their own features rather than relying solely on model representations that might not reflect their personal characteristics. One participant explained, "AR shows me the truth about how products will look on me, not just perfect models."

This transparency extended to product limitations and realistic expectations. Participants valued AR applications that accurately represented product coverage, color payoff, and overall effect, even when results were less than perfect. This honest representation actually increased trust and purchase likelihood among participants who preferred realistic expectations over idealized presentations.

Trust building was also enhanced through consistent and reliable AR performance. Participants who experienced consistent, high-quality AR interactions developed stronger trust in both the technology and associated brands, leading to increased loyalty and repeat purchase intention.

Integration of Findings with Existing Literature

The findings align with and extend existing literature on technology-mediated consumer experiences. The importance of visualization and uncertainty reduction confirms previous research on AR's functional benefits (Watson et al., 2020), while the emotional and social dimensions provide new insights into the experiential aspects of AR adoption.

The cultural context of Indonesian consumers revealed unique perspectives on beauty standards, social validation, and technology adoption that differ from Western contexts. Participants emphasized community and social approval in their decision-making processes, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive AR implementation strategies.

The findings also reveal the critical importance of AR quality and accuracy in determining positive outcomes. This technical consideration has significant implications for brands and developers seeking to implement effective AR strategies in the beauty industry.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative exploration of AR technology's impact on purchase intention in the beauty industry

reveals complex, multifaceted relationships between technology experience and consumer behavior. The research demonstrates that AR influences purchase intention through five key mechanisms: enhanced visualization, uncertainty reduction, emotional engagement, social validation, and trust building.

Research Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to understanding technology-mediated consumer experiences by highlighting the importance of emotional, social, and cultural dimensions that complement functional technology benefits. The findings suggest that AR's effectiveness depends not only on technical capabilities but also on how well the technology aligns with consumer values, social practices, and cultural contexts.

Practically, the research provides valuable guidance for beauty industry practitioners seeking to implement effective AR strategies. The importance of high-quality, accurate AR implementation cannot be overstated, as poor experiences can actually harm brand perception and purchase intention. Additionally, the social and emotional dimensions of AR experiences suggest opportunities for integrated marketing strategies that leverage sharing, community, and aspirational elements.

Research Limitations

This study focused specifically on Indonesian consumers in the Yogyakarta region, limiting generalizability to other cultural contexts and geographic locations. The phenomenological approach, while providing rich insights, may not capture broader population patterns that quantitative research could reveal. Additionally, the rapid evolution of AR technology means that findings may become dated as new capabilities and applications emerge.

Recommendation for Future Research

Future research should explore AR experiences across diverse cultural contexts to understand global patterns and variations in technology adoption and impact. Longitudinal studies examining how AR experiences evolve over time and influence long-term brand relationships would provide valuable insights into sustained effects. Additionally, comparative research examining AR effectiveness across different product categories and consumer segments would enhance understanding of optimal implementation strategies.

Research examining the integration of AR with other emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and personalization algorithms, would provide insights into future directions for technology-mediated consumer experiences. Finally, investigation of potential negative consequences or limitations of AR technology in consumer contexts would provide a more balanced understanding of its overall impact on consumer behavior and well-being.

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