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IMPACT OF AUGMENTED REALITY ON GENERATION Z'S PURCHASE INTENTION
Behavioural Analysis in a Digital Environment

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ABSTRACT

Augmented reality, as a tool in digital marketing, enables the optimisation of the shopping experience. This research analyses how augmented reality influences the behaviour and purchase intention of Generation Z in e-commerce. An augmented reality tool was designed for the online purchase of glasses, and its impact was evaluated on 105 young users. The study employed a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional method. The results indicate that, despite interest in using these tools, young users do not significantly increase their purchase intention for a product through their use.

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1. Introduction

In a constantly evolving digital world, extended reality (XR) tools, and in particular augmented reality (AR), are transforming the e-commerce shopping experience. These technologies not only enable virtual elements to be superimposed on the real environment, enriching reality, but also offer unique opportunities to personalise and enhance consumer interaction. According to the Gartner Hype Cycle, a model that evaluates the maturity, adoption, and potential impact of emerging technologies, AR has reached the so-called Slope of Enlightenment since 2023, reflecting its technological maturity and ability to generate tangible benefits with low risk (Alvarez, 2024). However, its adoption has not been as widespread as might be expected, particularly among companies targeting Generation Z, a demographic group recognised for its affinity with emerging technologies and its pursuit of interactive experiences (Asenjo-McCabe & del Pino-Romero, 2024).

There is statistical evidence supporting the advancement of AR in e-commerce and in consumers' daily lives. An exponential increase in the sale of AR-enabled devices has been observed (Boland, 2021), alongside growing use of these technologies in such devices. This suggests that the availability of suitable hardware, once a significant barrier, is no longer a major obstacle. Additionally, from a scientific perspective, the Layered study, developed by Neuro-Insight, Mindshare UK, and Zappar (2018), confirms the advantages of AR in terms of neural impact. The report shows that consumer memory can retain up to 70% more information when interacting with AR experiences compared to traditional methods. This finding underscores the value of AR not only as a technological tool but also as an effective means of influencing users' perception and retention of information. Furthermore, a study by Blippar indicates that AR can increase audience engagement, with internet users interacting with AR content for an average of 75 seconds (Arenas Portals, 2023).

Since 2016, major multinationals have led the way in implementing AR, achieving promising results in terms of innovation and customer experience. For instance, Sephora launched its Virtual Artist App, integrating AR with artificial intelligence to recognise the user's face and enable them to try cosmetic products in seconds from anywhere in the world (Saucedo Leal, 2023). While numerous existing cases demonstrate AR's potential, its lack of widespread adoption raises key questions about associated barriers and challenges.

Focusing a study on Generation Z and AR allows exploration of a synergistic combination of a demographic predisposed to adopting advanced technologies and an innovation that uniquely meets their expectations. This approach not only identifies the drivers of purchase intention in e-commerce but also provides a replicable model for other generations and markets. Generation Z represents the present and future of consumption, while AR provides the tools necessary to transform the shopping experience into a memorable, trusted, and effective interaction. Therefore, studying this interaction is a critical step in understanding how to maximise the potential of e-commerce in the digital age.

Given this context, the focus is on investigating how cognitive and affective factors influence purchase intention. To this end, an augmented reality tool for the online purchase of eyeglasses was developed, and its impact was analysed after use by 105 young Generation Z individuals. Employing a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional approach, the study offers a new perspective on the application of AR in e-commerce, providing valuable insights for companies interested in integrating this technology and overcoming associated challenges.

Consequently, the general objective of the study is to assess the impact on the purchase intention of Generation Z after the use of AR in e-commerce by identifying key factors to optimise its implementation,

The specific objectives are:

- To test the hypothesis on the impact of AR on purchase intention by assessing whether the use of an AR tool designed for the purchase of a product increases purchase intention.
- To identify perceived barriers to the widespread adoption of AR by analysing the cognitive and affective factors that affect its optimisation.
- To propose recommendations to overcome existing barriers, suggesting strategies to enable more effective implementation of AR in e-commerce.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Extended Reality: The Evolution of Augmented Reality

Augmented reality (AR), alongside virtual reality (VR) and mixed reality (MR), forms part of the technologies encompassed by extended reality (XR), developed to provide increasingly immersive and intuitive experiences that blend digital and physical environments. AR, in particular, has evolved from its early stages, when it was limited to overlaying digital elements onto real images. Today, with a global total of 1.7 billion users engaging with mobile AR (Statista, 2025), it has established itself as an interactive technology enabling users to personalise and visualise products without visiting a physical point of sale, as exemplified by Ray-Ban, or to preview LEGO figures and create virtual constructions (Eagle, 2023; Seabery, 2024).

While the initial AR filters were introduced to users on social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok for entertainment purposes, the greatest potential of this technology has manifested in e-commerce. On these platforms, AR has transitioned from being an innovation to nearly a requisite for ensuring an optimal user experience. This additional functionality not only offers greater convenience to consumers by allowing them to try products from any location but also reduces uncertainties in decision-making by providing more information to the recipient (Chen et al., 2021; Zare Ebrahimabad et al., 2024).

The introduction and rise of this technology have been particularly significant in sectors such as fashion, cosmetics, and furniture, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic (Morales de la Cruz, 2020), and it has been rapidly adopted across other industries. Its evolution has marked a shift from a niche innovation to a necessity for brands aiming to remain competitive.

Currently, with just their mobile phones, consumers can virtually try on clothing through Asos's app, visualise how furniture would look in their homes via Amazon (n.d.), or experiment with various makeup combinations from brands like MAC or Maybelline (Sells, 2021).

However, the application of augmented reality extends further (Atallah, 2024). Brands can create interactive packaging capable of forging an emotional connection with consumers. For instance, a special edition of Bombay Sapphire Gin allowed users to scan the bottle's label with their mobile phones to reveal a jungle scene with moving animals surrounding the bottle, along with various recipes (Higuera, 2023).

Additionally, AR can be used to implement interactive advertising campaigns, such as Pepsi Max's "Unbelievable Bus Shelter." In this campaign, the brand employed AR at a bus stop to display striking illusions, such as UFOs and tigers, aiming to demonstrate how the extraordinary can become reality, associating this with the exceptional quality of their product (Grand Visual, n.d.).

Events can also be organised, such as the runway show during the Metaverse Fashion Week (MVFW) 2023. This event featured an AR catwalk where attendees could experience fashion shows with digital models wearing garments from renowned brands like Tommy Hilfiger and Adidas. It provided a unique opportunity for brands to showcase their collections in an immersive environment, allowing attendees to try on pieces and discover exclusive designs (Douglass, 2023).

The creation of immersive and gamified in-store experiences should not be overlooked, as exemplified by Oreo's "Let's Go Back to Class" campaign. In this instance, the brand leveraged AR to offer interactive games, surveys about the biscuit, and digital rewards such as wallpapers and AR filters that users could share on social media (3DestinyRA, 2024).

AR has also found significant use as an interactive tool in the tourism sector, creating virtual guides that provide tourists with more engaging and immersive information overlaid in real-time about the sites they are visiting. An example is "Connected Art," a project through which the streets of Zaragoza revealed their past, enabling visitors to explore monuments and historical scenes via their devices. Additionally, AR can gamify tourist visits by turning them into treasure hunts or incorporating quiz games along the route or even allowing users to "travel" to a destination without leaving home. These experiences not only enhance the user's experience and educate them but also contribute to promoting a destination, directly influencing both the consumer's purchase and recommendation decisions (Ibarra-Vázquez et al., 2024).

As introduced in the previous paragraph, AR has also proven its utility in the educational field across all levels. Examples include CleverBooks (n.d.), a tool for learning mathematics and sciences, among other subjects, through interaction with this technology, and Merge Edu (n.d.), which allows students to manipulate objects in the classroom, such as planets, geometric shapes, or anatomical models.

Finally, without exhausting its current applications, the use of AR in healthcare must be highlighted, as it is transforming both diagnosis and medical treatments. SkinVision (n.d.), for instance, utilises this technology in conjunction with artificial intelligence to analyse moles and skin blemishes, assessing the risk of cancer.

2.2. Attributes of Augmented Reality That Influence Consumers' Purchase Decisions

Augmented reality (AR) exhibits a series of technical attributes that directly influence consumers' purchase decisions, shaping both their cognitive and affective responses (Rajendran & Usha, 2024; Whang et al., 2021). Among these attributes, informative variables, real-time interactivity, ease of use, realism, and utility stand out, aligning with Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (1989). This model identifies these attributes as critical to the adoption of new technologies, with a direct impact on users' cognitive responses.

In turn, these cognitive responses influence consumers' affective responses, shaped by factors such as irritation variables, entertainment capacity, social engagement, and compatibility, which collectively contribute to a positive purchase decision. Therefore, investing in enhancing both cognitive and affective attributes is equally important to ensure a comprehensive shopping experience aligned with consumer expectations (Al Hilal, 2023).

On the one hand, among the attributes affecting cognitive responses are informative variables, which refer to the ability to provide clear and relevant product information to the user, reducing returns and increasing post-purchase satisfaction (Shih et al., 2023). An example is IKEA's AR function, which allows users to visualise furniture in their physical space, ensuring proper integration into the environment (Pastor, 2023).

Another key attribute is the real-time interactivity that such platforms provide, enhancing the user experience by allowing engagement at any time. A case in point is Porsche's virtual configurator (2020), which enables users to customise car models in real time, choosing colours, interiors, and additional features while visualising the result in a real environment. This direct personalisation increases potential customers' confidence in the brand or product (Al Hilal, 2023; Javornik, 2016).

Closely tied to the above attributes and the evolution of the technology itself is the perception of realism and utility offered by AR, which are key factors in the adoption of new technologies. These aspects enable brands to establish a closer and more informed relationship with users. Realism reflects the degree to which the experience approximates an offline environment, offering a more immersive interaction, while utility refers to how AR enhances the purchase decision process, thereby optimising consumer performance (Baek et al., 2018; Davis, 1989).

At this point, it is worth mentioning Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory (1990), which explains how users enter a state of flow when fully immersed in an enjoyable activity. In the case of AR, features such as interactivity, realism, and personalisation are fundamental to facilitating this state, creating an emotional connection that reinforces a positive perception of the brand.

Similarly, the ease of use of AR plays a crucial role. The more accessible and understandable it is to all audience segments, the greater the confidence it generates, thereby increasing its influence on purchase decisions (Davis, 1989). A clear example is the app from IWC (International Watch Company, n.d.), a Swiss luxury watch brand, which allows users to try on all its models from home, explore their features, and make a purchase.

On the other hand, certain attributes directly affect consumers' affective responses. A common issue users face is irritation caused by information overload, slow app performance, inaccurate overlay of elements, or low-quality projected images, leading to frustration during the purchase process and, upon completion, potential product returns. Thus, one notable attribute is how AR helps mitigate this effect by facilitating the selection of the appropriate product (Al Hilal, 2023). An example is Nike Fit, which, by scanning the user's feet, recommends sizes and allows users to try on a wide range of products, thereby minimising returns (Sells, 2021).

Another attribute is the technology's capacity to provide entertainment, appeal, and brand recall (Tesfaye Haile & Kang, 2020). An example is the Gucci Sneaker Garage AR app, which launched the

brand's first virtual trainers, the Gucci Virtual 25, designed by Alessandro Michele. Users can not only try them on but also take photos and videos to share on social media, thereby increasing brand visibility (Gucci, n.d.). This example introduces another attribute of the technology: social engagement. This concept refers to the extent to which a technology, by enabling users to share their brand experiences, encourages active participation on social media. Greater social engagement leads to increased reach and virality of the message (Jaffar et al., 2020).

Finally, the compatibility of AR must be highlighted. This attribute refers to the ease with which the technology integrates with existing devices and platforms without requiring additional app downloads or complex feature activations. This enables users to enjoy it quickly and easily, without technical barriers. For instance, to use Warby Parker's virtual try-on, users simply access its website (Kaur & Verma, 2023). This integration enhances the user experience by providing greater convenience, eliminating technological obstacles, and rendering visits to physical points of sale unnecessary.

2.3. The impact of AR on Generation Z's purchasing decisions

Generation Z, the segment chosen for this research, encompasses individuals born between 1997 and 2012. Their most distinctive characteristic is being considered digital natives, having grown up immersed in technology. This environment has profoundly shaped their interactions with the world, particularly with brands, as their constant connection to various devices facilitates unlimited access to information. However, this overload of digital stimuli has reduced their attention span, leading them to prefer content that is personalised, quick, and easy to consume, such as that found on social media (Shaji George, 2024). Unlike previous generations, they do not merely consume content passively but actively participate in its creation and dissemination across digital media, giving rise to user-generated content (Yim & Park, 2019). This behaviour directly impacts how brands interact with them. Generation Z does not seek merely products but rather personalised and immersive experiences that align with their digital identity (Rajendran & Usha, 2024). This more demanding and participatory consumer profile is more inclined to purchase from brands that offer added emotional value, going beyond mere commercial transactions (PuroMarketing, 2023).

Given their unique way of communicating and engaging, the impact of AR is highly relevant for this generation, which has grown up in a digitised environment. For them, AR is not merely an entertainment tool but a means to interact more effectively with brands, allowing for a more direct and meaningful experience with products (Yim & Park, 2019). A study published by Forbes reveals that 92% of Generation Z has shown interest in AR-based shopping (Atallah, 2024), underscoring the value they place on immersive experiences. In this regard, AR attributes such as instant interactivity and the degree of realism play a crucial role, enabling users to engage with products dynamically and in a visually enriched manner. Additionally, ease of use and compatibility are fundamental, as Generation Z, accustomed to simple and fast interfaces, seeks intuitive technologies that seamlessly integrate with their devices.

Informative and entertainment variables also influence their purchase decisions, as confirmed by the IABSpain study (2024) on social media usage, where AR filters are commonly encountered. AR provides a continuous flow of useful and engaging information, such as 3D product visualisation or access to virtual tutorials and demonstrations, which not only informs consumers but also keeps them entertained. This approach fosters social engagement, amplified by social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram—the most widely used by Generation Z—which strengthen the emotional connection with the brand and encourage active consumer participation.

On the other hand, it is important to note that, while AR offers numerous benefits, irritation variables can be a factor to consider. These may lead to frustration and negatively affect perceptions of the technology. However, when AR is used appropriately to provide useful experiences aligned with personal interests, its benefits outweigh potential drawbacks, increasing the likelihood that Generation Z will adopt this technology in their purchase decisions (Shaji George, 2024).

3. Methodology

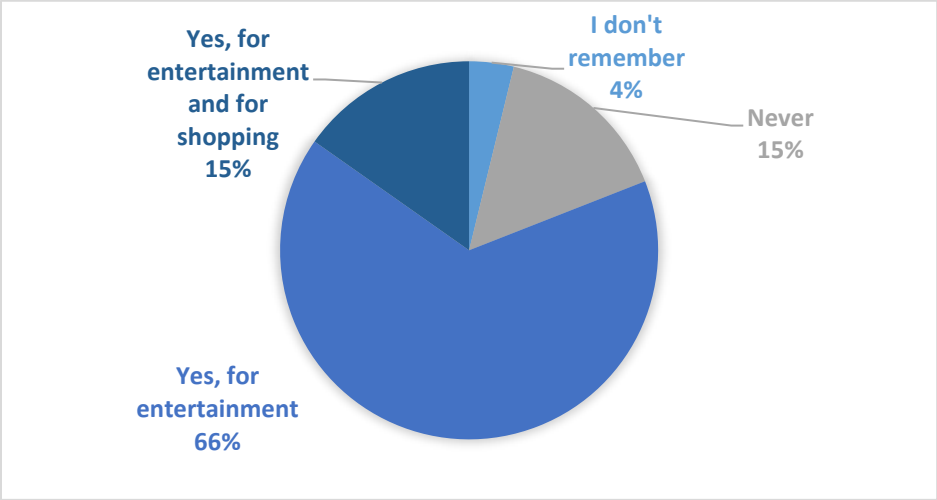
The methodology employed in this research is quantitative, based on the hypothesis that the use of augmented reality (AR) in an online purchasing process positively enhances purchase intention among

young users. To this end, an exploratory descriptive study was conducted, analysing the responses of 105 users exposed to an AR tool designed for the purchase of sunglasses. Data collection and selection took place in December 2024. Regarding the distribution, 64% of the participants were male, and the remaining 36% were female. In terms of age, the two most representative groups were those aged 18 to 20 years, accounting for 71% of the total, and those aged 21 to 23 years, representing 25% of the total young participants.

4. Results

As outlined in the previous section, the number of young people surveyed totals 105 individuals. One of the initial variables considered is prior use of AR experiences. Of the respondents, 81% had previously used AR, and as shown in Graph 1, only 15% of the total had used AR for purchasing beforehand. It is also noteworthy that 19% either do not recall using AR or had never used it.

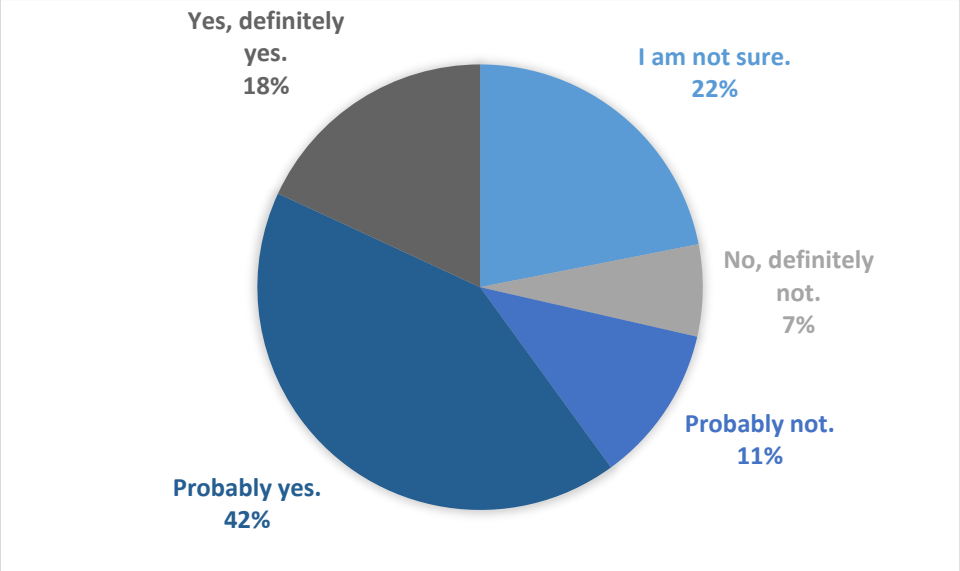
Graph 1. Previous use of AR experiences



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Secondly, it is relevant to highlight the result concerning purchase intention after using AR. Only 18% of respondents unequivocally affirmed the question, "If you had the need or desire, would you purchase the products offered by this platform?" However, 40% indicated that the use of AR had no impact and, therefore, did not improve their purchase intention regarding the product.

Figure 2. Purchase intention after using AR



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In this regard, it is noteworthy to correlate the two aforementioned variables: prior use of AR and purchase intention following its use. It is observed that among those who had not previously used AR, there is no consensus, with 50% indicating they would purchase and 50% being unsure or unwilling to do so. Conversely, among those familiar with AR, 63% expressed a positive purchase intention.

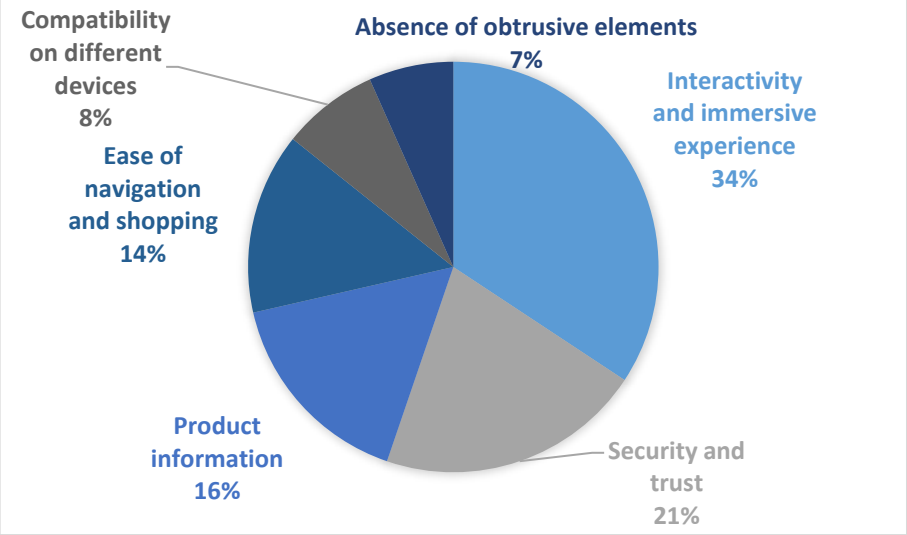
Table 1. Relationship Between Prior AR Use and Purchase Intention for a Product Through AR

Purchase intention	No previous AR use	Have previously used AR
Probably not	30%	7%
Probably yes	25%	46%
Yes, definitely	25%	17%
Not sure	15%	23%
No, definitely not	5%	7%
Total (n)	20	85

Source: own elaboration, 2024.

In this regard, respondents were asked to rank the previously discussed factors in terms of their impact on purchase decision-making in a virtual store using AR. Interactivity and immersive experience, understood as the ability to explore products interactively, stood out above the other characteristics, ranking first for 34% of users, as shown in Graph 3.

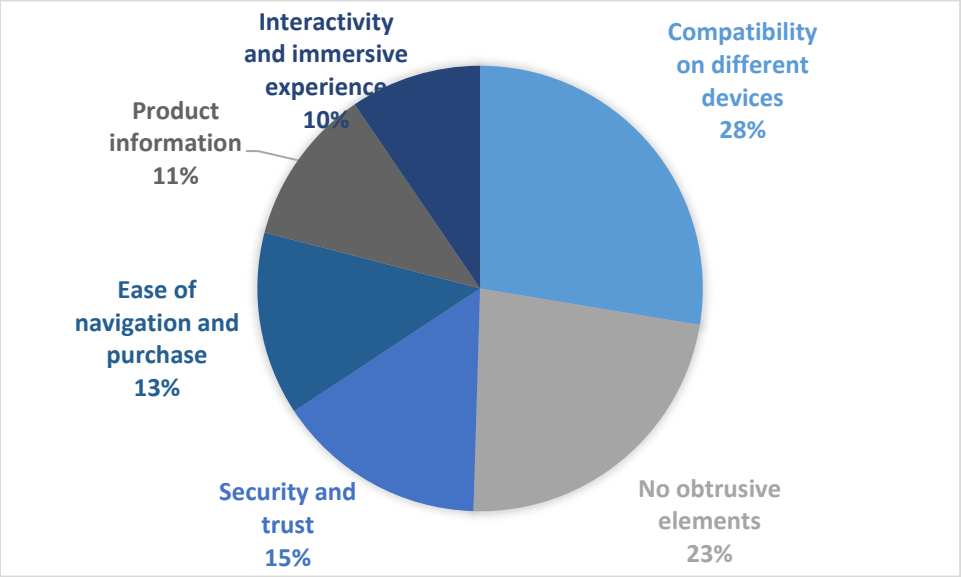
Figure 3. Number of Times Each AR Factor Is Rated as the Most Valued by Users.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In contrast, Graph 4 shows the number of times each factor was rated as the least valued by users. In this regard, compatibility across different devices, understood as the ability to use AR on mobile phones, computers, or tablets, stands out above the other characteristics, ranking last for 28% of users.

Graph 4. Number of Times Each AR Factor Is Rated as the Least Valued by Users.



Source: own elaboration, 2024.

Subsequently, differences are observed in the results combining the analysis of the most and least valued factors based on users' purchase intention following the use of AR. The most valued factor among users with purchase intention is interactivity and immersive experience, accounting for 43% of this group. In contrast, the most valued factor for those without purchase intention is security and trust regarding personal and financial data, representing 24% of this group.

Regarding the least valued factor, differences are also observed between the two groups, though these are less pronounced than for the most valued factor. Users with purchase intention consider the absence of irritating elements, such as slow loading times or intrusive advertising, and compatibility across different devices as the least valued factors, each with 25%. However, users without purchase intention solely identify compatibility across different devices as the least valued factor, with 31%.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the relationship between the most valued factor and users' prior use of AR technology. Among those familiar with AR, interactivity and immersive experience are considered the primary factor in purchase decision-making, specifically for 39% of these users. Conversely, for users who had not previously used AR, the most valued factor is security and trust, specifically for 35% of these users.

5. Discussion

The results obtained in this research highlight the growing relevance of augmented reality (AR) as an influential tool in purchase intention, particularly among young consumers. This finding is consistent with previous studies, such as those by Rajendran and Usha (2024), who note that AR not only enables immersive product exploration but also provides an interactive shopping experience capable of significantly influencing purchase decisions. This point of connection underscores the transformative role of AR in the current dynamics of e-commerce.

Regarding prior AR use and its impact on purchase intention, a key finding of this study is that users who have previously interacted with this technology are more likely to perceive it positively in shopping contexts. This result supports Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (1989), which identifies familiarity and perceived utility as critical factors in the adoption of new technologies. AR's ability to reduce uncertainty and facilitate product visualisation emerges as a key catalyst in this phenomenon, aligning with findings by Diana et al. (2023), who highlight that these characteristics increase user confidence in the technology and, consequently, their predisposition to purchase.

On the other hand, the most valued factors in the AR experience provide clear insight into users' priorities. Interactivity and immersive experience, identified by 34% of respondents as the most important aspect, underscore the significance of offering meaningful and engaging product interactions. However, aspects such as compatibility across different devices, which were less valued, present an opportunity for developers and brands to enhance technological accessibility and versatility. This

observation aligns with the analysis by Wang et al. (2022), who note that optimising accessibility across multiple platforms can improve user experience and, potentially, the widespread adoption of AR.

Nevertheless, challenges in purchase intention also emerge as a critical point. Despite the identified advantages, a significant 40% of respondents did not experience a positive impact on their purchase intention after using AR. This result reflects the need to develop more personalised strategies focused on user needs. Such resistance could partly be explained by the perception of AR as an interesting but non-essential technology, a perspective consistent with findings by Perannagari and Chakrabarti (2019), who suggest that a lack of practical relevance may hinder broader adoption.

Regarding the impact of gender and age, the study reveals no significant differences in the valuation of AR between men and women or across different age groups. Previous research, such as that by Sirakaya and Kiliç Çakmak (2018), argues that variables like gender do not substantially affect attitudes towards AR. However, the frequency of technological interaction and familiarity with such tools do appear to play a significant role in fostering a positive perception of this technology.

6. Conclusions

Overall, the results of this research confirm that augmented reality (AR) has a significant impact on the purchase intention of young people, influenced by their prior familiarity with the technology and the factors they value in the shopping experience.

Firstly, interactivity and immersive experience stand out as key elements, enabling users to engage with products in a realistic and appealing manner. This positions AR as a strategic tool for capturing the attention of a generation that prioritises personalisation and emotional connection in their digital experiences. Additionally, there is a clear relationship between prior AR use and purchase intention. Users familiar with this technology show a greater predisposition to adopt it, highlighting the importance of educational strategies and interactive demonstrations to reduce initial barriers.

However, obstacles to adoption persist. A considerable percentage of respondents did not experience an increase in their purchase intention, pointing to the need to enhance the practical utility and ease of use of this technology, which are essential factors according to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Users also prioritise different aspects depending on their purchase inclination. Those with purchase intention value interactivity, while those more reluctant highlight security in handling personal and financial data. This underscores the need for segmented strategies that address the specific concerns of each group. Technological improvements, such as compatibility across multiple devices and the elimination of disruptive elements, are also identified as opportunities to optimise the user experience.

AR has the potential to transform the online shopping experience, effectively bridging the physical and digital worlds. To maximise its impact, it is crucial to overcome perceived barriers and design personalised experiences that align with the expectations of young consumers, thereby consolidating AR's position as a key tool in e-commerce.

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