Augmented Reality: A Sustainable Marketing Tool?

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Abstract

Purpose - The present research aims to look at the ways in which Augmented Reality Experiential Marketing (AREM) is beneficial for companies and brands not only on short-term - the "shiny object" syndrome, but also on the long-term, contributing to the creation of customer satisfaction, as other forms of experiential marketing have done, which can lead to an increase in customer loyalty, intention of repetitive purchasing, positive word-of-mouth (WOM) or a greater market share. Based on the aim of this research paper and on the literature review, three measures of the perceived value have been chosen – enhancing convenience, influencing enjoyment and affecting brand attitude.

Design/methodology/approach - Because this research focuses around the concept of perceived experiential value, the methodological approach chosen will be interpretative "underpinned by the belief that social reality is not objective but highly subjective – shaped by our perceptions". Focus groups will be the method used for this qualitative study because they are dynamic group discussions much like real unconstrained everyday conversations which have the capacity of surfacing meanings and emotions about AR experiential marketing applications that might not be articulated elsewhere. A semi-structured approach informed by the previous-mentioned objectives will be used in conducting these focus groups being rather flexible but also overcoming the researcher's inexperience in research studies which, in the case of an unstructured approach, might become risky leading to serious deviation from the subject.

Findings - There is little understanding of the long-term effects of AR marketing due to scarceness in benchmarks, measurable elements and research studies. Based on these findings, this paper explores the ways in which AREM leads to the creation of perceived experiential value, and thus contributing to the development of customer satisfaction. Glasses Direct is the brand chosen for this research because it is one of the few companies that uses AR as an ongoing marketing process, not just as part of one particular campaign, being very often given as a positive example of how brands should undertake AR technologies to enhance customers' experience and drive long-term brand benefits. Focusing on a particular case also makes the abstract concept of AREM operational in terms of participants' understanding of the subject and the researcher's analysis of the results.

Research limitations - The lack of any AR experiential marketing research studies and the few mainly quantitative experiential marketing studies have led the researcher to take an exploratory qualitative approach which will also extend marketers' understanding of AR experiential marketing's effects on experiential value. This approach will allow a deeper mining into the participants' mind and will provide a more accurate representation of consumers' subjectivity. Also, this lack of any research studies on AR experiential marketing, the inadvertences, ambiguities and the predisposition towards quantitative methods in the aforementioned experiential marketing research related to customer satisfaction are only a few of the rationales behind this research project. Moreover, controversies and the problem of limited knowledge arise with the question of "what are the long-term effects of AR experiential marketing on our business?" even for marketing practitioners.

Practical implications - Because this is a qualitative study where researcher's personal thoughts and opinions about AR could affect the credibility of the analysis and of the results, several elements have been used for the pilot and will be used for further researches to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The pilot study itself helped to amend any leading questions and to test the methodology's accuracy and appropriateness, while helping discover new themes which will be included in further researches. Peer checking has also been useful for finding any 'blind spots' and for checking the questions' effectiveness and it will also be considered in further studies. Member checking was furthermore used to verify the accuracy of the coding and to get valuable feedback from focus group members after the research, thus ensuring a clear understanding of the themes discussed, so no personal ideas would infiltrate in their explanation. To ensure a good transferability of the findings, a rich description of the participants and of the case study used in the focus groups will be provided for further papers.

Originality/value - The use of Augmented Reality as a form of experiential marketing during the past two years has been raising numerous controversies regarding its long-term benefits, extending from AR being only a promotional tool, to AR effectively contributing to a positive customer-brand relationship and to customer satisfaction through the creation of perceived experiential value. The way in which AR has been used in marketing campaigns can be seen as a form of experiential marketing because it focuses not only on a product/service, but also on an entire experience created for the customers. Although more marketers are inclined to consider AREM a serious direction for their brands' future, the lack of any research studies in this area, complemented by the rapid adoption of this trend and the expected increasing value of the AR market urge the need for a prompt clarification of the effects of this form of experiential marketing, consequently demonstrating the value and originality of the present paper. However, more research is needed to replicate these findings on other cultures and to further investigate the connections discovered, through qualitative studies. The relationship between values and customer satisfaction is additionally supported by different research findings who suggest that experiential marketing should deliver experiential value - emotional and functional value, and positive customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Marketing Strategies, Promotional Tool
Paper type: Research Paper

Introduction

Entering into a toy shop and being able to see the contents of a box 'assembled' on a screen in real-time only by pointing the box to a webcam and even interacting with the 3D representation by moving the packaging is surely an unforgettable experience (Web-Strategist, 2009). This type of application and many others have invaded the world of marketing in the last one and a half years (Woods[a], 2009) due to what is known as Augmented Reality (AR).

Originating from military aviation (Lamantia, 2009), this concept has been defined in numerous ways by practitioners and academics, however all agree that it incorporates a series of technologies which allow a real-time mix between the real world and digitally-generated layers of information and imagery enhancing the specific reality (Clawson, 2009; Lamantia, 2009; Shute, 2009)

The use of augmented reality (AR) as a form of experiential marketing during the past two years has been raising numerous controversies regarding its long-term benefits, extending from AR being only a promotional tool (Grimes, 2009 cited in Woods, 2009), to AR effectively contributing to a positive customer-brand relationship (Owyang, 2010) and to customer satisfaction through the creation of perceived experiential value (Chou, 2009; Yuan and Wu, 2008).

The way in which AR has been used in marketing campaigns can be seen as a form of experiential marketing because it focuses not only on a product/service, but also on an entire experience created for the customers (Yuan and Wu, 2008; Schmitt, 1999). This is further supported by Tony Effik (CSO at Publicis Modem) who argues that "AR has the potential to provide consumers with an experience they want and they will tell their friends about" (Benjamin, 2009, p.41).

Although more marketers are inclined to consider AR experiential marketing (AREM) a serious direction for their brands' future, the lack of any research studies in this area, complemented by the rapid adoption of this trend (Woods, 2009) and the expected increasing value of the AR market (ABI Research, 2010) urge the need for a prompt clarification of the effects of this form of experiential marketing.

With the launch of the first experiential marketing campaigns incorporating AR technology, brands and agencies have been rushing to explore the possibilities of augmented reality in a bid to catch the consumers' attention (Clawson, 2009). Big international companies like Procter&Gamble or Wal-Mart have been using this technology to promote their brands (Farhad, 2009). And this trend is not expected to stop - according to ABI Research (2009), the total market for AR marketing applications is projected to grow from $6 million in 2008 to more than $350 million in 2014.

Nevertheless, there is little understanding of the long-term effects of AR marketing due to scarceness in benchmarks, measurable elements (Farhad, 2009) and research studies. Based on these findings, this paper aims to explore the ways in which AREM leads to the creation of perceived experiential value, and thus contributing to the development of customer satisfaction.

Glasses Direct (Appendix 1) is the brand chosen for this research because it is one of the few companies that uses AR as an ongoing marketing process, not just as part of one particular campaign (Woods, 2009), being very often given as a positive example of how brands should undertake AR technologies to enhance customers' experience and drive long-term brand benefits (Owyang, 2010; Clawson, 2009; Woods, 2009).

Focusing on a particular case also makes the abstract concept of AREM operational in terms of participants' understanding of the subject and the researcher's analysis of the results. Therefore, the aim of this study is to look at the ways in which AR experiential marketing is beneficial for companies and brands not only on short-term - the "shiny object" syndrome (Owyang, 2010) but also on the long-term, contributing to the creation of customer satisfaction, as other forms of experiential marketing have done (Yuan and Wu, 2008), which can lead to an increase in customer loyalty, intention of repetitive purchasing, positive word of mouth (WOM) or a greater market share (Bearden and Teel, 1983; Fornell, 1992; Fornell et al., 1996).

Based on the aim of this research paper and on the literature review, three measures of the perceived value have been chosen - convenience, enjoyment and brand attitude - which inform the objectives:

1. To explore the ways in which Glasses Direct's AREM can enhance convenience.
2. To explore the ways in which Glasses Direct's AREM influences enjoyment.
3. To explore the ways in which Glasses Direct's AREM affects brand attitude.

An exploratory qualitative research method in the form of homogenous semi-structured focus groups will be used for achieving the previously-mentioned objectives. Four focus group discussions will be conducted, each comprising between five and six 18-30 years-old UK students at Bournemouth University.

Before undertaking any further researches, a pilot study has been used to gain prompting, probing and accuracy experience (Bell, 2005) and to discover any potential "blind spots" in the creation of the methodology tools, which in turn contributes to the trustworthiness of this study. Furthermore, the pilot can inform the researcher of different themes/issues that can be further explored in future researches.

Literature Review
Because of a scarcity of academic literature and research studies on AR experiential marketing, this literature review will start by focusing on the little research and small number of papers

concerned with experiential marketing in general which build the rationale and the components of this research study.

Experiential Marketing and Customer Satisfaction

Economists posit that the contemporary world finds itself in the "experience economy" (Yuan and Wu, 2008; Pine and Gilmore, 1998) where customers do not always focus on products but on experiential consumption "where functional utility is either taken for granted or seen as irrelevant" (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, forthcoming 2010, p.9).

At this stage, experiential marketing comes in, treating consumption as a holistic experience and recognizing both the emotional and rational drivers of consumption (Schmitt, 1999). The importance of experiential marketing is recognized as a means of creating value for the end consumer (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) which would be the future competitive edge for companies (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000) and will motivate customers to make faster and more positive purchasing decisions (Williams, 2006).

However, although this new marketing orientation is widely agreed to represent the future of marketing, (Williams, 2006; Schmitt, 1999), it is still not fully comprehended and, as such, requires a more diverse range of research methods and research studies to better understand consumers (Williams, 2000).

The creation of experiential value referring to customers' perceptions of products/services through direct use or indirect observation (Mathwick, Malhotra and Rigdon, 2001) has been recently demonstrated by two quantitative studies (Chou, 2009; Yuan and Wu, 2008) focused on American brands and their customers' perceptions in the Taiwanese market. Furthermore, these studies have shown that the experiential value created can induce customer satisfaction (Chou, 2009; Yuan and Wu, 2008).

However, more research is needed to replicate their findings on other cultures and to further investigate the connections discovered, through qualitative studies. The relationship between values and customer satisfaction is additionally supported by different research findings (Martensen et al., 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; Ennew and Binks, 1999; Fornell et al., 1996) and Schmitt (1999) who suggests that experiential marketing should deliver experiential value - emotional and functional value, and positive customer satisfaction.

Despite a clear widely agreement on the direct relation between value and customer satisfaction, there is no consensus regarding the elements which create the customers' perceived value, each of the previously-mentioned studies being based on a different model of customer satisfaction index.

Conversely, many scholars believe that customer satisfaction has a crucial role in the success of any business and it is essential in increasing the overall profitability (Yuan and Wu, 2008; Kotler, 1991). If the consumers are satisfied with a certain product, generally they "will buy the product again, be inclined to promote the product to other people, ignore competing brands' advertisements, and refrain from purchasing from competitors" (Yuan and Wu, 2008, p.2). However, customer satisfaction should not be taken for granted but reinforced and reassured continuously (Ehrenberg, 2000) and a good way of doing this would be through valuable experiences provided by experiential marketing.

Customer Satisfaction and AR Experiential Marketing

Customer satisfaction is often seen from two different perspectives: transaction-specific and cumulative aspects (Johnson, Herrmann and Gustafsson, 2002). If the transaction-specific refers to the perceived value customers obtain after they finish one specific transaction (Yuan and Wu, 2008), the cumulative aspect comprises the customers' overall measurement of all their experiences with a company's products at all stages of the purchase process (Patterson and Spreng, 1997; Fornell, 1992).

Consequently, although the cumulative aspect of customer satisfaction is considered a complete state only after purchase (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001), a perceived value occurs at various stages of the purchase process, including the pre-purchase stage (Woodruff, 1997).

For this research, AR experiential marketing will be considered to mainly affect the pre-purchase stage (Figure 1) due to the fact that, by its current nature, AR has the most impact at the pre-purchase stage. At this step, according to the buying decision-making process (Fill, 2009) the consumer is evaluating their choices before taking the purchase decision (Fill, 2009) and AR has the power to "put the product in the hand of the users" (Woods[a], 2009, p.37) giving them the opportunity to test the product as they would already own it, enticing the prospect to commit more time or even trigger a purchase (Owyang, 2010).

Therefore, this research study will focus on exploring the ways in which AR experiential marketing determines a perceived experiential value during the pre-purchase stage of the buying process, thus contributing to the development of customer satisfaction.

The lack of any research studies on AR experiential marketing, the inadvertences, ambiguities and the predisposition towards quantitative methods in the aforementioned experiential marketing research related to customer satisfaction are only a few of the rationales behind this research project. Moreover, controversies and the problem of limited knowledge arise with the question of "what are the long-term effects of AR experiential marketing on our business?", even for marketing practitioners.

If some of them see AR only as a promotional tool, not an enduring marketing opportunity (Grimes, 2009 cited in Woods[b], 2009), the PR buzz being everything that some brands want (Clawson, 2009), others believe that it contributes to the development of a positive customer-brand relationship and influences purchasing decisions (Owyang, 2010; Murray, 2009 cited in Clawson, 2009). Because, as previously-discussed, the AR market is expected to grow exponentially in the next four years, and because "so far we have seen only 5 to 10 percent of what AR can be used for" (Uzzan, cited in Woods, 2009), companies need to know what directions they should follow in order to ensure a positive outcome from their AR experiential marketing.
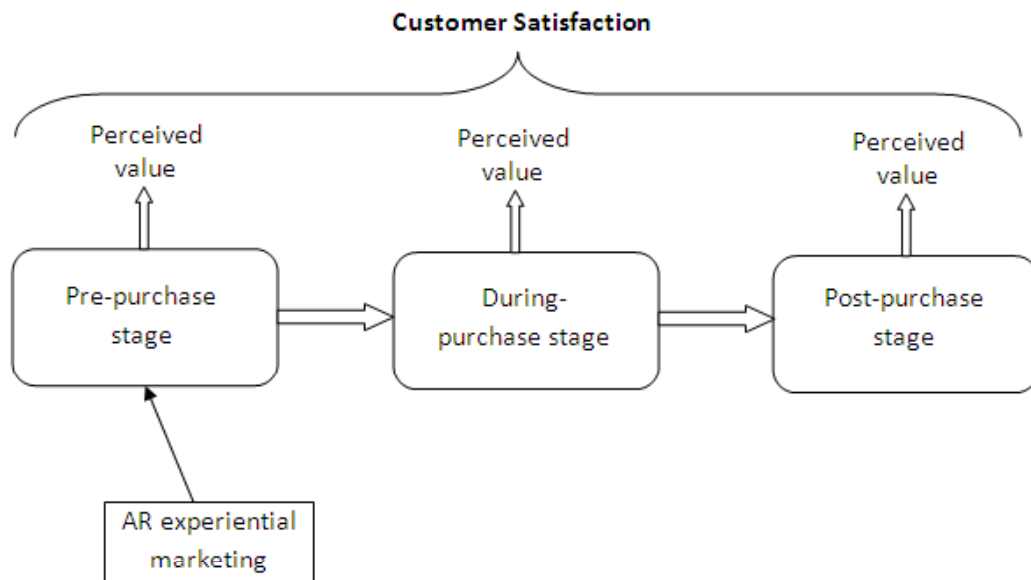
Figure 1: Customer Satisfaction and Purchasing Stages (Adapted from Fill, 2009; Woodruff, 1997)

Aim and objectives

According to the issues discussed in the literature review, the aim of this research paper is to look at the ways in which AR experiential marketing leads to the creation of a perceived experiential value, which is widely accepted to contribute to the development of customer satisfaction (as shown in the literature review).

The objectives for this study will focus on two areas agreed by most scholars to be the main components of experiential value: functional and emotional (Berry et al. 2002; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Mathwick, Malhotra and Rigdon, 2001; Schmitt, 1999). The three objectives are as follows:

- *Objective 1: To explore the ways in which AR experiential marketing can enhance convenience.*

  The first objective is looking at convenience defined for this study as the functional value offered by the opportunity to experience the brand/product before buying it, therefore providing an answer to questions like "how time and cost efficient is this application for consumer?", "how many functional aspects of the product can the consumer experience through AR?". Convenience was demonstrated to be a key issue in increasing the purchase consideration (Bigham, 2005) and therefore determining the movement of consumer from the pre-purchase stage to the during-purchase stage, having a major contribution to the cumulative aspect of customer satisfaction (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Mathwick, Malhotra and Rigdon, 2001).

- *Objective 2: To explore the ways in which AR experiential marketing influences enjoyment levels.*

  Enjoyment is considered by many academics as one of the most important emotional values (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001) and the prime aspect searched by consumers when engaging in a consumption experience (Firat and Dholakia, 1998 cited in Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, forthcoming 2010). This is also one of the primary links between experiential marketing outcomes and customer satisfaction (Chou, 2009; Yuan and Wu, 2008).

- *Objective 3: To explore the ways in which AR experiential marketing affects brand attitude.*

  Attitude as an emotional value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001) was chosen for this paper because brand attitude is always a communication objective in marketing and if there is no positive attitude towards the brand among the target audience, then there is little purchase likelihood (Percy and Elliott, 2005), which will bring to an end the customer's purchasing process and therefore not creating any customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

Because this research focuses around the concept of perceived experiential value, the methodological approach chosen will be interpretative "underpinned by the belief that social reality is not objective but highly subjective – shaped by our perceptions" (Collis and Hussey, 2009, p. 56). The lack of any AR experiential marketing research studies and the few mainly quantitative experiential marketing studies have led the researcher to take an exploratory qualitative approach (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005) which will also extend marketers' understanding of AR experiential marketing's effects on experiential value. This approach will allow a deeper mining into the participants' mind and will provide a more accurate representation of consumers' subjectivity (Wright and Crimp, 2000).

Focus groups will be the method used for this qualitative study because they are dynamic group discussions much like real unconstrained everyday conversations (Churchill and Iacobucci,

2005) which have the capacity of surfacing meanings and emotions about AR experiential marketing applications that might not be articulated elsewhere (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). They also help in identifying particular attitudes and behaviours, being one of the popular methods of gathering consumer responses to marketing communications (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). Because the objectives of this research are related to functional and emotional values perceived by consumers, the interaction with other group members may motivate the participants to expand and refine their own ideas and perceptions of AR experiential marketing (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

A semi-structured approach informed by the previous-mentioned objectives will be used in conducting these focus groups being rather flexible but also overcoming the researcher's inexperience in research studies which, in the case of an unstructured approach, might become risky leading to serious deviation from the subject (Bell, 2005). Before starting the actual data collection, a pilot focus group will also be conducted, in order to gain prompting, probing and accuracy experience (Bell, 2005) and to discover any potential "blind spots" in the creation of the methodology tools.

The number of focus groups which will be used for this research will be four (a reasonable number for the relative small scale of the research), divided as following: two focus groups consisting only of male participants and two focus groups consisting only of female participants. This separation between genders is the result of the nature of this research. Because the subject of this study is not only related to marketing but also to technology (AR), the researcher wants to avoid a discussion monopolized by men (Daymon and Holloway, 2002) who historically speaking are more attracted to technology than women. This structure of focus groups is only designed to create a more complete view of the topic and is not intended to assess gender specific answers.

However, if the analysis will show such an important difference, one of the recommendations for further research will be to look deeper at the way in which different genders perceive AR experiential marketing communications. Each group will have five or six members, a size which is neither too small and easy to dominate by one member nor too large and characterized by boredom and frustration (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). The sample chosen for the study will consist of young English and international Bournemouth University students aged 18-30 years because this age group is usually targeted by AR applications (Owyang, 2010) and mixed nationalities for a better understanding of the AR experiential marketing effects across different cultures and to inform future research directions.

At the end of each focus group the discussion will be transcribed and coded – the first step in creating categories, patterns and concepts (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). Some ideas may emerge after each focus group which will be tested as the research process progresses. The findings will not only be compared between focus groups but also with the literature related to experiential marketing; peer checking and member checking will also be used in order to avoid overlooking important elements (Daymon and Holloway, 2002).

Data Analysis
The sample for the pilot focus group includes one UK and three international postgraduate students at Bournemouth University (Appendix 2). Initially, they have been handpicked based on the criteria of wearing prescription glasses (the product category of Glasses Direct); however, due to a last-minute cancellation and the increased time-pressure, a replacement was found in a person who does not wear prescription glasses but often wears sunglasses. The pilot's sample is similar to the one which will be used for the main research but not identical, as nationality was not considered an important factor for the purpose of the trial focus group.

The semi-structured focus group was held in one of the university's private rooms and all members were provided with snacks/drinks for relaxing and 'opening-up' the atmosphere in

order to obtain deeper insights. The focus group lasted for 35 minutes (without the introduction) and was recorded in a digital audio format from which the main parts could been transcribed and coded. One major problem with the data collection was determined by some unforeseen Internet-related problems which did not allow the researcher to conduct a live demonstration of Glasses Direct's AR application. This was therefore replaced by a video demonstration and some extra information added by researcher during the discussion. Alternatives should be considered for the main research to anticipate any similar potential problems.

It is important to note that the results of this trial focus group are not considered definitive conclusions, having the sole purpose of clarifying/changing the directions followed by the main research and of ensuring operability of the method/tools used.

Because of the small scale and time constraints of this project, only 15 minutes from the focus group could been transcribed and open-coded according to trends/themes and the literature review (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Nevertheless, the transcript includes all the main points considered relevant in relation to the objectives of any further studies and pertinent for the purpose of this pilot. Consequently, three major themes emerged, related to (a) perceived benefits of AREM for Glasses Direct, (b) brand attitude creation and (c) perceived drawbacks of AR in relation to glasses (product category for Glasses Direct).

a) Perceived Benefits of AREM for Glasses Direct

The first impression of the AR application among the participants was very good, leading to the identification of several functional benefits, such as time-saving, practicality and convenience (70.P1,P2,P3,P4) which confirm the literature review findings regarding experiential marketing in general (Schmitt, 1999):

> *Very practical. You don't actually need to go to the shop anymore (3.P2)*
> *It's like you're really wearing them so you don't need to go to the shop anymore. Especially if you don't have time or if you live far from the town centre.... (20.P1)*

Despite the previously-mentioned advantages, there are some controversies regarding their application – one of the participants (P4) was initially against the use of Glasses Direct's AR, however, in the end, he agreed that he might consider it, but only for sunglasses:

> *I personally wouldn't use it because I think ... I don't know... I can't see it overtaking the actual process of going in a shop and trying the glasses on yourself in real life. (8.P4)*

> *Yeah, like I said... I think I... certainly with sunglasses, I'd probably consider it... (173.P4)*

Similar uncertainties arose during the discussion with other members (P1 and P3), thus indicating some possible shortcomings holding the participants back from using and relying on the AR application, which should be further investigated in the main research study.

Some emotional benefits also emerged in the discussion, mostly related to this AREM tool's perceived playfulness (44.P1, 46.P4), a main component of enjoyment, which, in turn, is the prime aspect searched by consumers when engaging in a consumption experience (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, forthcoming 2010; Yuan and Wu, 2008).

However, the focus group's findings do not show a clear delimitation between the short-term enjoyment determined by the wow factor (Lieb, 2010), which wears-off very quickly (Clawson, 2009), and the long-term enjoyment which contributes to the creation of brand attitude and leads to customer satisfaction (Mathwick et al, 2001):

Do you find the use of this augmented reality application enjoyable? (23.I)
Very much, it's about the user's experience I think. (24.P2)
Yeah. (25.P1)

Versus

What do you enjoy? (29.I)
Just the fact that is very cool... (31.P1)

You can try all of them on and it's kind of a new experience. Like I said before, I didn't know it so... it's quite ... yeah... a new thing, a new technological thing. (32.P2)

This confusion comes mainly from the questions used to identify perceived enjoyment, therefore further attention should be given to the questions' phrasing and to the prompts used in the main research to ensure a clear understanding of the differences between the long-terms/short-term concepts. The new and the amended questions can be found in Appendix 3.

b) Brand Attitude Creation

Another major theme surfaced during the discussion is related to the elements that contribute to the creation of brand attitude – the primary emotional value which affects purchasing decisions and therefore customer satisfaction (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

One of the primary elements of brand attitude – motivation that drives someone's behaviour (Percy and Elliott, 2005) - emerged in the form of reliability and trustworthiness of the AR application in relation to Glasses Direct. Participants felt a sense of trust towards the brand because it allows them to personally try the products without "having it presented to you in an advert" (82.P2), which made them declare that "I would rely on it to be honest" (17.P2).

Although the element of motivation was present in the pilot study, other elements such as participants' cognitions and feelings about the brand (Percy and Elliott, 2005) could not be measured as no member of the focus group had any awareness of the Glasses Direct brand beforehand. This might seem beneficial for this research as there was no pre-formed attitude bias; nevertheless, the lack of any brand awareness is a serious obstacle in creating brand attitude (Percy and Elliott, 2005) in a short period of time as the duration of a focus group. Therefore, before conducting main research focus groups, a 5 minutes-slot should be allocated for participants to familiarize themselves with the Glasses Direct brand by navigating through their website.

Furthermore, questions should be more focused and more prompts should be formulated in order to explore all the elements that contribute to brand attitude development and follow any useful leads (Appendix 3).

c) Perceived drawbacks of AR in relation to the product category (glasses)

Because of the lack of research in the AR area, possible drawbacks were not known at the moment of the literature review discussion; however, some of them emerged in the pilot focus group and proved of high importance because of the influence they have on the three perceived values covered in the objectives. These drawbacks usually emerge from the difference between the real shopping experience and the AR online experience.

The haptic experience seems to be an important issue when buying glasses especially because the 'feel' of the glasses is considered a proof of their quality:

Ok, that might be a negative aspect actually, because you can't actually know how it feels like, how the quality is, so yeah that's probably a negative (97.P2)

and of their personal fit:

Sometimes it just doesn't feel right on your nose or it's too tight... that's also true yeah (108.P2).

Moreover, the service offered by in-store opticians is not replicated through the AR application - "well, it doesn't offer any service" (100.P1); however, there seems to be a degree of uncertainty regarding its perceived importance:

Quite, yeah, because we don't ... in some ways, we don't get to have the salespeople to advise us or anything, but in other ways, like P3 said, it would be good because you can rely only on your personal taste and judgment of how you look, so it's a bit tricky.(103.P1)

Another possible drawback regarding the AR application is related to its ease-of-use, as the steps required for its installation were perceived by some participants as quite difficult and annoying:

I don't know how simple it is to configurate it [the application] because you also need to... . (49.P2)

But there is no web application where you can actually use it directly from there [without downloading the application]? (53.P2)

These elements need to be further explored in the main research as they could seriously affect brand attitude development, terminate the purchasing process and therefore not create any customer satisfaction (Percy and Elliott, 2005).
Overall, the initial questions prepared for the pilot have worked well, surfacing important issues regarding the three proposed objectives; however, new questions should be added for a deeper investigation of the emerging themes (Appendix 3).

Trustworthiness
Because this is a qualitative study where researcher's personal thoughts and opinions about AR could affect the credibility of the analysis and of the results (Silverman, 2006) several elements have been used for the pilot and will be used for further researches to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Daymon and Holloway, 2002).
The pilot study itself helped to amend any leading questions and to test the methodology's accuracy and appropriateness, while helping discover new themes which will be included in further researches. Peer checking has also been useful for finding any 'blind spots' and for checking the questions' effectiveness (Daymon and Holloway, 2002) and it will also be considered in further studies.
Member checking was furthermore used to verify the accuracy of the coding and to get valuable feedback from focus group members after the research (Silverman, 2006), thus ensuring a clear understanding of the themes discussed so no personal ideas would infiltrate in their explanation. To ensure a good transferability of the findings, a rich description of the participants and of the case study used in the focus groups will be provided (Daymon and Holloway, 2002) for further papers.

Conclusions & Reflections
Despite the initial thoughts, the research proved to be more complicated and time-consuming, raising different challenges for the researcher. Although the subject was not difficult to choose

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because of researcher's interest in technology, especially in AR, finding the relevant literature and relating it to different marketing theories was the most complicated stage, due to the lack of research in this area. This, corroborated with the researcher's inexperience, led to much time being lost until a connection with other topic (experiential marketing) could be made, which represented the starting point of the literature review.

Extensive reading, tutorials, general class discussion and learning group's help were invaluable in achieving the previously-mentioned goal and also for narrowing down the literature to three focused and relevant objectives. Peer checking and tutorials proved also very helpful for checking the questions prepared for the focus group to ensure they had no bias, that they were in line with the objectives and that they were clearly formulated. Lesson learnt – talking to anybody about your research study can be very beneficial and can save time which would have been spent afterwards to correct all the mistakes done at this stage.

Unforeseen events can occur and for this case technology was a big issue. Low battery voice recorder, poor Internet connection and non-working AR applications came as a wave of bad luck upon the pilot focus group. Spending more than 15minutes trying to solve the problem was not only time-consuming, but also stressful. In the end, although solutions were found, having a plan B for future research would be much useful.

Furthermore, gathering people for the focus group was another difficulty as many of the participants (students) had very busy schedules during the period in which the pilot has been conducted. The lack of researcher's experience regarding these situations and the short-notice resulted in a low-response/attendance rate, therefore careful planning of all major steps of the research project should be considered for the future and prospective participants should be contacted well in advance of the focus group.

When coding and analysing the data from the pilot, several problems emerged in relation to the way in which the focus group discussion has been conducted. There are different moments when prompts would have been needed in order to deepen the researcher's understanding; some questions may be considered leading because of the way they are formulated (e.g. 26.I); other questions were not very clear as prompted by the participants (e.g. 56.I) and at least once the researcher may have been a little bit pushy in one of his answers (60.I).

Nonetheless, conducting a pilot proved very useful for understanding what questions need to be amended, what approach should be taken and what skills need to be improved. Exercising these skills in other pilot studies before doing the main research can enhance the chances of getting appropriate and relevant answers from the participants.

Lastly, because of the aim of this research study which does not require any confidential or personal data from the participants, no important ethical issues need to be considered for further researches.

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Appendix
Appendix 1: Glasses Direct
According to their website (www.glassesdirect.co.uk):

> *Glassesdirect.co.uk is the largest online opticians in the world.*
> *Until we started causing a stir in a stuffy industry in 2004, buying prescription glasses was expensive - up to £400 for designer spectacles. Not any more. Through us, you can buy the frames and lenses you'll find on the high street, but from £24. Which means you can now afford to have fun with your glasses, buying your favourite in several colours, and different styles for different occasions.*
> *Because we don't have to pay for middlemen, stores, or the expensive machinery needed to offer eye tests, we save our customers a small fortune. We use the same frames, lenses and laboratories that the big opticians do, and all our dispensing opticians are registered with the General Optical Council, so quality is guaranteed. You just pay less, and have more choice. A win/win situation if ever we laid eyes on one.*
> *We've had to battle to get here. The big high street opticians didn't like the look of us at all. But we turned a blind eye to their threats, and we've so far saved the spectacles-savvy British public an estimated £20m. Things are looking good.*

> **Approved by opticians**
> *We have revolutionized the way people buy their glasses with the help, advice and approval of registered opticians. Now, we make sure that every order is looked after by an optician. In fact, when you call you might even be talking to one.*

The AR application used by Glasses Direct takes live video from the shopper's webcam and allows them to see how the most popular frames would suit them. "The app allows customers to get an idea of how a pair of glasses will look on them by using facial recognition software, which superimposes images with 3D models of the glasses. Customers can move their faces to see how they would look from different angles" (Clifford-Marsh, 2009).

Appendix 2: Pilot Sample – some more details
The sample for the focus group was composed of one British man and three international women. They are all aged 22-25 years, undergoing the same marketing related course at Bournemouth University. None of them have heard of Glasses Direct brand before and also they did not know anything about augmented reality and how this technology is currently being used in marketing. Furthermore, they all knew the researcher beforehand so their openness was not an issue in getting deep insights.

Appendix 3: Initial vs. New and Amended Questions
Initial Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions
1. Have you ever heard of Glasses Direct until now? If yes, what do you know about this online optician?

I will present them the website and the augmented reality application.
2. What is your first impression about this application? (Prompting: like it/ don't like it/ any opinions)
3. Do you find the use of this ARP enjoyable? In what ways? (Prompting: absorbing activity/ active engagement/ playful)

4. Do you think it's useful for consumers? Why? (Prompting: time-efficient, easy to use, cost-effective)
5. What kind of information about the product do you think this ARP provides compared to a common advert (TV, magazine etc.)? (Prompting: extra information/ can try it on)
6. What are the reasons for which you normally choose a certain store/ optician to buy your glasses from? (Prompting: quality, price, loyalty, popularity etc.)
7. Do you think this augmented reality application influences any of your previously-mentioned reasons? In what ways?
8. Would you consider buying glasses that you have experienced through an AR application like this one? Why?

New Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions
1. Have you ever heard of Glasses Direct until now? If yes, what do you know about this online optician?
I will present them the website and the augmented reality application.
2. What is your first impression about this application? (Prompting: like it/ don't like it/ any opinions)
3. Do you think it's useful for consumers? Why? (Prompting: time-efficient, easy to use, cost-effective).

Differentiating between the wow effect and long-term enjoyment:
4. Do you find the use of this AR application enjoyable? In what ways? (Prompting: absorbing activity/ active engagement/ playful)
5. How much time would you spend using this application? (Prompting: only one or two minutes/ more than 10 minutes)
6. Would you use the application only when you need to buy glasses? Why? (Prompting: use it for fun/ use it only for its practicality)
7. Do you think Glasses Direct's AR application is engaging? If yes, in what ways?/ If not, why not?

Comparing the perceived benefits of AR with other forms of media used for marketing communications:
8. What kind of information about the product do you think this AR application provides compared to a common advert (TV, magazine etc.)? (Prompting: extra information/ can try it on)
9. What are the reasons for which you normally choose a certain store/ optician to buy your glasses from? (Prompting: quality, price, loyalty, popularity etc.)
10. Do you think this augmented reality application influences any of your previously-mentioned reasons? In what ways?

Exploring motivation:
11. Would you consider the Glasses Direct's AR application reliable? Why?
12. Do you think that your image wearing the glasses (shown through the AR application) is a real representation of how you would actually look with those glasses? Why? (Prompting: trust)

Exploring feelings:
13. What are your current feelings towards this brand based on everything you experienced today? (Prompting: positive/negative, personal)

14. Do you think that this AR application played any role in your current feelings towards the Glasses Direct brand? In what ways? (Prompting: influence your image of the brand)

Exploring the AR's drawbacks and AR's disadvantages in relation to the product category – glasses:

15. Do you see any drawbacks in using this application? If yes, which are they? (Prompting: technology limitations, difficulty to use)
16. What do you think these drawbacks are related to? (Prompting: the technology used (AR) or the purpose for which AR is used – to sell glasses)

Exploring cognitions:

17. After this discussion and after experiencing the Glasses Direct's AR application, what is your overall opinion about this brand? (Prompting: high/low quality, it is/it is not for you)

Exploring the overall attitude on AR and its effects on purchase decision:

18. Would you consider buying glasses that you have experienced through an AR application like this one? Why/why not?

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