

Augmented reality: reaching consumers

By [Lara-Anne Derbyshire](#)

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Until Pokémon Go became a viral phenomenon by amassing more than 100 million downloads in a few weeks, augmented reality (AR) was confined to tech types and sci-fi fiends. However, thanks to the game, many have now tried AR for the first time.



Image by 123RF

Pokémon wasn't the first company to try AR, in the US, Macy's and Starbucks were early adopters and received mixed results – Pokémon Go just ended up being the breakthrough effort. Given its success, naturally, other brands and agencies are scrambling to figure out how they might try it. And one sector thinking ahead is FMCG.

FMCG brands are thinking ahead; they're finding new ways to interact with consumers. Through AR, brands are engaging their customers with enticing interactions. AR is making shopping much more meaningful and interactive – it's the *wow* factor.

It isn't just a narrative; it's an immersive, emotional experience that's memorable in a way that most of the time a written story can't be. This new wave of technology is playing a significant role in successfully marketing and selling to a growing market of tech-savvy consumers, and helping manufacturers bring even more products to retailers and expand into new markets successively, and impressively.

One of the best uses of this comes from the label of [Heinz Ketchup](#) bottles. The label launches a quiz game, often played when waiting for food in the restaurant, creating meaningful family time while also establishing a connection with Heinz products.

Changing consumer behaviour

Research at the UNSW Business School has suggested that AR can be used to change consumer behaviour, for example, to encourage healthier eating.

Mathew Chylinski, a senior lecturer in the school of marketing at the UNSW Business School, created a smartphone app which, as shoppers walk around a supermarket, only shows healthy products in colour and the rest in black and white, neutralising the influence of packaging.

So using AR, the consumer can change the way they experience the physical environment at the point of sale. Chylinski's experiments show that consumers using augmented reality are a lot more consistent in ensuring their shopping matches their goals. Test subjects, who viewed products via the screen of a mobile device in a simulated supermarket, made healthier eating choices after the device removed colour from all but the healthiest options.

So AR can take away packaging's impact as well as add it to, and therefore affecting the consumer's decision-making.

"People know they should eat healthily, but they get distracted at the point of sale. We're trying to give people the tools to empower them to change the stimuli and the information that they react to, when they make these decisions," Chylinski remarks on the finding.

So the rise of (AR) applications requires marketers to understand how the technology impacts consumer responses in a commercial setting. AR distinguishes itself from other interactive technologies by its significant impact on emotional and behavioural responses. More experimentation and research needs to be carried out about its role in packaging – but it's certainly the way we're heading.

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