

Augmented Reality Marketing and Consumer–Brand Relationships: How Closeness Drives Brand Love

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Abstract

Marketers use augmented reality (AR) to place virtual brand-related information into a consumer's physical environment. Grounded in the literature on brand love, proximity, and contextual embedding, the authors theorize that branded AR content can reduce the perceived physical distance between a consumer and a brand. This perceived closeness will subsequently drive relationship closeness in the form of brand love. Two empirical studies validated this framework. Study 1 showed that using an AR app (vs. non-AR) increases the perceived physical closeness of the brand, which in turn drives brand love (i.e., relationship closeness). Study 2 replicated this finding in a pre-/post-usage design using a makeup app. Here, high levels of local presence (i.e., the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as being actually present in their physical environment) drive perceived physical closeness, which, in turn, leads to brand love. We also found that AR's power to generate brand love increases when the consumer is already familiar with the brand. We discuss managerial implications for AR marketing today and in a metaverse future, where AR content might be prevalent in consumers' everyday perceptions of the real world.

Subject Areas: *Branding, Consumer Behaviour*

Track: Product and Brand Management