

Making VR research work: Opportunities and Challenges of VR research for Marketing

Dasha Kolesnyk

University of Amsterdam

Yvonne Everdingen

Professor of Marketing and Innovation, RSM Erasmus University

Thorsten Hennig-Thurau

University of Münster

Jason DiPalma

Aarhus University

Darius-Aurel Frank

Aarhus University

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Special Session Abstract

This Special Session brings together four *impulse talks* around a central thesis: marketing research is entering an era of immersive, embodied, multisensory virtual environments. The session showcases cutting-edge conceptual, methodological, and empirical work demonstrating how VR enables new forms of behavioral, perceptual, and social insight. A discussion with the audience aims to inspire and enable new collaborations around immersive technologies.

The Value of Virtual Reality (VR) as a Research Method

Yvonne van Everdingen & Ana Martinovici

This talk demonstrates how VR provides a unique balance of internal and external validity. The authors propose a 2×2 framework for identifying which research questions most benefit from VR and discuss practical challenges.

Touch, Trust, and Social Meaning: Why Haptics Must Become Core to VR Marketing Research

Dasha Kolesnyk

This talk presents an overview of the role that haptics in VR can play for marketing research. Integrating evidence from social haptics and product haptics in VR studies, the talk shows that even minimal or vicarious haptic cues in VR can shape evaluations, trust, and behavior. Ethical considerations surrounding virtual touch are highlighted.

AI Embodiment: Can Virtual Agents Create Value for Customer Education?

Maren Lowis, Lars Grewe, Ronny Behrens & Thorsten Hennig-Thurau

This talk examines whether embodied AI avatars enhance customer education. The authors demonstrate how social presence and technological modality jointly shape learning outcomes and attitudes. They address potential benefits of embodiment as well as risks such as the uncanny valley, offering insights into the future of AI-enabled service encounters.

Retail as a Shared World: Reclaiming the Social in Metaverse Shopping

Jason DiPalma & Thorsten Hennig-Thurau

This talk reconceptualizes immersive 3D retail as a shared social place rather than a technological novelty. The authors show that togetherness, co-presence, and expressive interaction can shift channel preferences in contexts where 2D shopping underdelivers on social value. They propose a contingency theory of immersive channel choice and outline design principles for social VR retail environments.

Demo session: VR retail environment

Demonstration: Jason DiPalma

We will invite volunteers from the audience to try out a virtual retail environment. The volunteer's live view inside the VR headset will be streamed and the audience will be invited to comment and ask questions.

Discussion

Discussant: Darius-Aurel Frank

The discussion will connect the talks by outlining how VR integration forms the next frontier of marketing research. We will offer an integrative agenda for collaborations on VR research in marketing within Europe and we hope to engage the audience into sharing their vision and needs, as well as invite larger-scale collaboration on VR projects within Europe.