MEHMET AKİF ERSOY ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ DERGİSİ
Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Social Sciences Institute
e-ISSN: 1309-1387
Sayı/Issue: 42 Yıl/ Year: 2025
ss./pp.: 52-69

USE OF AI AND REALITY TECHNOLOGIES IN EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN TÜRKİYE

TÜRKİYE'DE DENEYİMSEL PAZARLAMA STRATEJİLERİNDE YAPAY ZEKÂ VE GERÇEKLİK TEKNOLOJİLERİNİN KULLANIMI

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Araştırma Makalesi
Research Article

DOI: 10.20875/makusobed.1681897

Geliş Tarihi/*Received*	22.04.2025
Revizyon/*Revision*	05.08.2025
Kabul Tarihi/*Accepted*	09.08.2025
Yayın Tarihi/*Publication Date*	30.11.2025

Cite this article:
Koca, B. (2025). Use of ai and reality technologies in experiential marketing strategies in Türkiye. *Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, (42), 52-69.

Atıf:
Koca, B. (2025 Türkiye'de deneyimsel pazarlama stratejilerinde yapay zekâ ve gerçeklik teknolojilerinin kullanımı. *Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (42), 52-69.

Abstract

With the developments in digital technologies, experiential marketing has evolved into a more personalized and interactive structure. This study examines the applications of artificial intelligence and reality technologies in the context of digital experiential marketing in Türkiye. The potential of these technologies to provide interaction-based, sensory and personalized product and service experiences is evaluated. Another aim of the research is to reveal in which ways the practices in Türkiye differ from the examples abroad. Within the scope of qualitative research method, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 senior officials operating in the field of artificial intelligence and reality technologies. The findings reveal that virtual reality applications provide intense emotional experiences, augmented reality offers personalized and interactive content, and artificial intelligence applications strengthen brand-consumer interaction through creative content generation and chatbots.

Keywords: *Digital Experiential Marketing, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Sensory Experience, Artificial Intelligence.*

Öz

Dijital teknolojilerdeki gelişmelerle birlikte deneyimsel pazarlama, daha kişiselleştirilmiş ve etkileşimli bir yapıya evrilmiştir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de yapay zekâ ve gerçeklik teknolojilerinin dijital deneyimsel pazarlama bağlamındaki uygulamalarını incelemektedir. Söz konusu teknolojilerin, etkileşim temelli, duyusal ve kişiye özgü ürün ve hizmet deneyimleri sunma potansiyeli değerlendirilmektedir. Araştırmanın bir diğer amacı, Türkiye'deki uygulamaların yurt dışındaki örneklerden hangi açılardan farklılaştığını ortaya koymaktır. Nitel araştırma yöntemi kapsamında, yapay zekâ ve gerçeklik teknolojileri alanında faaliyet gösteren 10 üst düzey yetkili ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bulgular, sanal gerçeklik uygulamalarının yoğun duygusal deneyimler sağladığını, artırılmış gerçekliğin kişiselleştirilmiş ve etkileşimli içerik sunduğunu, yapay zekâ uygulamalarının ise yaratıcı içerik üretimi ve sohbet robotları aracılığıyla marka-tüketici etkileşimini güçlendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dijital Deneyimsel Pazarlama, Artırılmış Gerçeklik, Sanal Gerçeklik, Duyusal Deneyim, Yapay Zekâ.*

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerindeki gelişmeler, eğlence, marka üstünlüğü ve çift yönlü etkileşim gibi unsurlar üzerinden deneyimsel pazarlamanın gelişimini desteklemiştir (Schmitt,1999). Deneyimsel pazarlama, müşteri ihtiyaçlarını öngörerek çift yönlü iletişim ve marka kişiliği aracılığıyla değer sunmayı amaçlar (Smilansky, 2009). Dijitalleşme ise, kişiselleştirilmiş deneyimler ve duygusal bağlar oluşturarak bu süreci güçlendirmektedir (Koca, 2024).

Bu araştırmada, Türkiye'de yapay zekâ (YZ) ve gerçeklik teknolojileri kullanılarak gerçekleştirilen dijital deneyimsel pazarlama uygulamalarının tespiti ve bu uygulamaların duyusal deneyim, interaktif içerik, iki yönlü etkileşim ve kişiselleştirilmiş içerik sunumu açısından ürün ve hizmet deneyimine etkileri değerlendirilmektedir. Ayrıca, Türkiye ve yurt dışındaki uygulamalar arasındaki farklılıklar karşılaştırılmıştır. Araştırma, sektörde çalışan bireylerin Türkiye'deki dijital deneyimsel pazarlama stratejilerini geniş bir perspektiften analiz etmesine ve yeni fikirler geliştirmesine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Kavramsal Çerçeve

Schmitt (1999), işletmelerin müşterilere farklı deneyimler sunabileceği "Stratejik Deneyimsel Modül"ü beş boyutta sınıflandırır: duyusal, duygusal, bilişsel, davranışsal ve sosyal kimlik deneyimleri. Smilansky (2009) ise deneyimsel pazarlama için "BETTER" adlı bir beyin fırtınası modeli geliştirmiştir. Bu model, marka kişiliği, duygusal bağ, hedef kitle, iki yönlü etkileşim, tetikleyici unsur ve erişim gibi unsurları içerir.

Deneyimsel pazarlama etkinliklerinin başarısı, ürünün doğası, izleyici ve faaliyetlerin birleşimine bağlıdır. Yeni ürün lansmanlarında çok duyulu deneyimler müşteri etkileşimini artırır. Teknolojilerin kullanımı marka konumlandırmasını güçlendirir ve tüketici ilişkilerini iyileştirir. Dijital araçlar, kişiselleştirilmiş deneyimler ve etkileşimli teknolojilerle müşteri etkileşimini geliştirir. Sanal ve artırılmış gerçeklik, çevrimdışı ve çevrimiçi markalar için önemli deneyim alanları sunar (Urdea & Constantin, 2021; Urdea vd., 2021). Duyusal pazarlama çevrimdışı ve çevrimiçi deneyimler arasında geçişi kolaylaştırır (Petit vd., 2022).

Üretken yapay zekâ, kişiselleştirilmiş hikâyeler oluşturma fırsatı sunar (Mayahi, 2023). YZ destekli artırılmış nesneler, karma gerçekliğin (KG) mekânsal derinliğini artırarak etkileşimi güçlendirir (Sung vd., 2021). YZ, öngörücü analiz ve müşteri segmentasyonu ile hedefli pazarlama stratejilerini geliştirirken, artırılmış gerçeklik (AG) kullanıcı merkezli deneyimler sunar. Sanal gerçeklik (SG) ise sanal turlarda büyük potansiyel taşır. Her iki teknoloji, pazarlamanın farklı alanlarına entegre olabilir (Ahmed, 2022; Verma vd., 2021). SG, duyusal, bilişsel ve davranışsal deneyimleri daha etkili geliştirir (Bogicevic vd., 2024).

Yöntem

Araştırma, durum tespiti çerçevesinde nitel bir çalışmadır. Araştırma kapsamında, Türkiye'de gerçeklik teknolojileri alanında ulusal ve uluslararası faaliyet gösteren 5 üst düzey yönetici ile yapay zekâ teknolojisini kurumsal firmalar için kullanan veya geliştiren 5 üst düzey yöneticiyle yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşülen yöneticiler, sundukları artırılmış gerçeklik ve yapay zekâ tabanlı çözümleri doğrudan nihai tüketiciye değil, diğer işletmelere sunan sağlayıcılar konumundadır. Bu nedenle örneklem, B2B (Business-to-Business) bağlamında değerlendirilmiştir. Görüşmeler katılımcıların onayı doğrultusunda kayıt altına alınmış ve görüşmeden elde edilen veriler yazılı belge haline getirilmiştir. Verilerin içerik analizi yapılarak araştırmanın amacı ve görüşmeden elde edilen veriler doğrultusunda kategoriler ve kodlar oluşturulmuştur. Araştırma, İstanbul Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından, E-35980450-663.05-2564319 sayılı karar ile etiğe uygun görülmüştür.

Bulgular

SG ve AG teknolojileri, dijital deneyimsel pazarlamada interaktif içerik üretimi ve ürün-hizmet deneyiminin zenginleştirilmesinde etkili bulunmuştur. AG teknolojileri, gözlük gerektirmemesi nedeniyle kişiselleştirilmiş içerik sunumunda daha geniş bir kullanıcı erişimi sağlamaktadır. SG uygulamaları, sanal showroomlar ve etkileşimli ürün tanıtımları ile kullanıcı deneyimini desteklerken, AG teknolojileri sensör destekli ekranlar, mobil AG uygulamaları, AG filtreleri ve Web Tabanlı AG çözümleri üzerinden çeşitli deneyimler sunmaktadır. Türkiye'de KG uygulamalarının ise sınırlı düzeyde kullanıldığı belirlenmiştir.

YZ, içerik oluşturma ve kişiselleştirilmiş reklam sunumu ve sohbet robotları aracılığıyla ürün ve hizmet deneyimini geliştirmektedir. YZ temelli veri analitiği ve kişiselleştirme teknikleri, dijital pazarlama süreçlerinde etkileşimi artırmaktadır. Bulgular, üretken YZ teknolojilerinin pazarlamacılara güçlü, kişiselleştirilmiş hikâyeler oluşturma konusunda önemli fırsatlar sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Uzman görüşlerine göre, Türkiye ve yurt dışındaki dijital deneyimsel pazarlama uygulamaları yaratıcı ve kaliteli örnekler sunmaktadır. Türkiye'de finans, turizm ve otomotiv sektörleri inovasyon yatırımlarında öne çıkarken, YZ destekli film ve animasyon üretiminin sınırlı olduğu görülmüştür. Türkiye'nin pazarlama projeleri ise uluslararası platformlarda başarı elde ederek küresel rekabet gücünü göstermektedir.

Sonuç ve Öneriler

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de gerçeklik ve yapay zekâ teknolojilerinin dijital deneyimsel pazarlamada önemli fırsatlar sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. SG, ürün tanıtımı ve sanal showroomlar aracılığıyla deneyim zenginliği sağlarken, AG sosyal medya üzerinden etkileşim ve marka sadakati yaratmaktadır. YZ içerik üretimi ve kişiselleştirme süreçlerinde etkili olmakla birlikte, fiziksel deneyim sunmada yetersiz kalmakta; bu da YZ ve gerçeklik teknolojilerinin entegrasyonunun daha gerçekçi deneyimler yaratma potansiyelini göstermektedir. Türkiye'deki uygulamalar sonuç odaklı bir yaklaşım sergilemekte ve özellikle finans, otomotiv ve turizm sektörlerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bu bulgular, şirketlerin teknolojik yatırımlara öncelik vermesinin ve yenilikçi stratejiler geliştirmesinin önemini göstermektedir.

Araştırmacılara yönelik olarak; YZ'nın yeni nesil cihazlarla kullanımına ilişkin uzman görüşleri incelenebilir, farklı teknolojilerin entegre edildiği deneyimsel pazarlama örnekleri analiz edilebilir ve Türkiye'de nesnelerin interneti, 3 boyutlu yazıcılar gibi teknolojilerle gerçekleştirilen uygulamalar araştırılabilir.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social transformations accompanied by technological developments have shaped production processes and transformed economic offerings into commodities, products, services and experiences. Experience is the fourth economic offering that the consumer expects from the business, different from products and services, and unlike the previous economic offerings of commodities, products and services, it is personal in nature. Every experience arises from the interaction between the individual's mental state and the event on the stage (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 98). The consumer's interaction with the product and service gives rise to sensory, emotional and cognitive states that differ from person to person (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The experience that touches the inner world creates an emotional bond between the consumer and the organization.

Developments in information and communication technologies, brand superiority, entertainment phenomenon and two-way consumer interaction have been effective in the emergence of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999). This strategy involves designing a company's environment and processes to create a holistic customer experience, covering pre- and post-purchase stages (Yuan & Wu, 2008, p. 388). Consumers' demand for personalized, quality-oriented products has shaped new consumption patterns. To meet expectations for emotional and cultural experiences, organizations must engage audiences with competitive, compelling scenarios (Tao et al., 2023, p. 616). Digital experiential marketing achieves this through personalized, interactive, and multi-sensory content. Digital experiential marketing aims to create positive experiences and emotional connections with customers through digital technologies. Successful strategies require holistic experiences that reflect brand personality in physical and digital spaces. Digital experiential marketing takes place on social media, websites, mobile apps or in physical spaces with digital technology.

Virtual reality (VR) technology provides users with an interactive and immersive experience in real or fully designed spaces, using digital environments generated by computer technologies. Augmented reality (AR) combines the real and virtual worlds to provide users with enriched, sensory experiences that increase engagement with the product and accelerate purchase decisions (Aytekin et al., 2020; Manuri & Sanna, 2016). Artificial intelligence (AI) offers creative and personalized solutions in marketing. It improves customer experience with functions such as decision-making, personalization, and emotion analysis (Bayuk & Demir, 2019; Cannella, 2018). Product or service experience with digital technologies includes two-way interaction, sensory experience and personalized content delivery (Cannella, 2018; Rajput & Dhillon, 2013; Schmitt, 1999; Smilansky, 2009).

This research evaluates the current state of digital experiential marketing practices in Türkiye in the context of AI and reality technologies. The other aim of the research is to determine the differences between the practices in Türkiye and their counterparts abroad. Within the scope of the research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 5 senior managers operating nationally and internationally in the field of reality technologies in Türkiye and 5 senior managers who use or develop AI technology for corporate companies. The research enables individuals operating in the marketing sector to examine digital experiential marketing strategies in Türkiye from a broad perspective and to develop new ideas for their organizations.

2. EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

The concept of experiential marketing has its roots in the 1982 study by Morris Holbrook and Elizabeth Hirshman, “The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun,” which established the connection between experience and consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Later, Bernd Schmitt formally introduced the term "experiential marketing" to the academic literature with his 1999 article, “Experiential Marketing” (Schmitt, 1999).

Experiential marketing, which creates an emotional attachment to the brand, prevents traditional marketing from seeing the customer only as a rational decision maker. According to experiential marketing, customers are not only rational but also emotional beings who make decisions based on their emotions and fantasies. Live brand experience, which refers to two-way communication face-to-face or remotely, is the essence of experiential marketing (Smilansky, 2009, pp. 5-6). Experiential marketing strategy, which creates consumer satisfaction with the product or service through the experience of the customer, is related to the stages of customer perception, experience, emotional feelings, actions and association with the brand (Rajput & Dhillon, 2013, p. 714).

2.1. Strategic Experiential Marketing Modules

Schmitt (1999) classifies experiences, also called the "Strategic Experiential Module" that businesses can use to offer different experiences to customers, into five dimensions. "Sensory experiences, emotional experiences, cognitive experiences, behaviors and lifestyles, and social identity experiences arising from a relationship with a reference group or culture" serve as a guide in the process of creating brand experiences (pp. 60-67).

Sensory experience is obtained through the five sense organs (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch). Of these five sense organs, smell is the most powerful. Since the olfactory nerve is directly related to the emotion and memory part of the brain, smell affects mood, emotion, memory and concentration. Research conducted by the "Sense Of Smell Institute" has shown that people remember 50% of the images they see after three months and 65% of the odors they smell after one year (Scent Marketing Research, n.d.).

Auditory experiences are important in the context of branding strategy with their positive effects in creating brand awareness and brand loyalty. The "ta-dum" sound used in Netflix at the entrance to the platform identifies with the brand as a familiar sound for users (Türkyılmaz, 2023, p. 44). The experience obtained through the sense of touch reduces the distance between the product and the consumer and increases the interaction of the consumer with the product. Haptic technologies will have a major role in digital fashion and luxury communication in the future (Ornati & Kalbaska, 2022). Emotional experiences evoke feelings towards the brand; global brands succeed by feeling like local (Baştuğ, 2018). Cognitive experiences encourage consumers to think, as in the Nike Sub 2 example (Demirtaş, 2017). Behavioral experiences aim to influence lifestyle; they are motivating with role models (Schmitt, 1999). Relational experiences lead to an ideal personality with a sense of belonging; it offers a lifestyle like Harley-Davidson.

2.2. Smilansky BETTER Model

Smilansky developed a brainstorming model called "BETTER" for the emergence of successful experiential marketing ideas (Smilansky, 2009, pp. 52-53). The "BETTER" model, which is exemplified in Table 2 by using the initials of "Brand personality, Emotional connection, Target audience, Two-way interaction, Exponential element", is a method that facilitates the emergence of innovative ideas in the process of creating experiential marketing campaigns.

Table 1. *BETTER* Model

Brand personality	Three brand values that convey the human qualities of the brand.
Emotional connection	Emotional connection through personalized experiences that appeal to the senses and create positive associations.
Target audience	Lifestyles, wishes and expectations of the target audience.
Two-way interaction	Combining stages B, E and T to deliver a live brand experience in physical and virtual environments.
Exponential element	Encouraging consumers to share their experiences.
Reach	Enabling word-of-mouth marketing through two-way interaction and strengthening consumer touch points.

Source: (Smilansky, 2009)

The BETTER model includes the steps of building brand personality, creating sensory experiences, understanding the target audience, delivering an interactive experience, spreading the trigger and strengthening reach.

2.3. Digital Transformation of Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing strategies have been digitalized in parallel with technological developments and implemented with new generation technologies. The experience carried to digital environments has become much more interactive and personalized with the developments in communication technologies. Digital experiential marketing is a marketing strategy that personalizes the interaction with the target audience through digital technologies and focuses on creating emotional bonds through positive experiences. Digital experiential marketing can be utilized before, during or after the purchase of a product or service.

Both utilitarian value and sensory pleasure can be obtained in actions performed with digital technologies. Utilitarian value refers to the productive features of the user, such as being able to easily

compare the products they want to buy regardless of time and place, shopping without leaving the comfort of their home, and thus saving time. Sensory pleasure refers to the hedonic value derived from the experience offered by that technology (Xue et al., 2019, p. 31). At this point, this dual value offered by digital technologies brings about a transformation in the industrial and marketing field. Industry 4.0 accelerated the development of reality technologies, internet of things (IoT) and AI by targeting efficient production. In Industry 5.0, personalization, green products and human-technology interaction stand out (Y. Zengin & Zengin, 2022). Marketing 5.0 uses technologies such as AI, sensors, AR, NLP, robotics, blockchain and IoT as a human-centered and sustainable process. Marketing 5.0 aims to create and deliver value in the customer journey with technologies that mimic human beings such as AI (Kotler et al., 2021).

In its research on customer experience predictions in 2030, SAS (Statistical Analysis System) revealed that smart machines will be the driving force in brand and customer interaction by 67% and that emerging technologies will form the basis of brand success. In 2030, the factors that will be effective in ensuring brand loyalty of consumers will be mobile applications, shopping with smart home systems and fast access, according to the research results (Newman & McClimans, 2019).

- 62% rely on voice-based AI technology to improve customer engagement and customer support strategies,

- 58% to voice-based AI assistants for marketing and sales,

- 54% to augmented and virtual reality technology,

- 53% to embedded AR/VR tools to improve product usage and user experience,

- 83% are investing or planning to invest in holographic technology for in-store advertising, interactive games and events.

Experiential marketing success depends on the alignment of product, target audience and planned activities. Offering a multi-sensory experience in new product launches increases customer engagement. Reality and AI technologies enable the target audience to appeal to their senses across multiple touchpoints. The integration of these technologies has a positive impact on the consumer with hyper-personalized applications. AI-powered augmented objects strengthen engagement by enhancing MR's sense of depth and fun (Sung et al., 2021). Intelligent use of technologies and entertainment strengthens brand positioning and improves the brand-consumer relationship. Digital tools such as mobile platforms, AI, VR and AR enhance communication before, during and after the event (Urdea & Constantin, 2021). In this context, it is not merely the presence of technologies but how they are integrated into the brand’s experiential strategy that becomes decisive in shaping user perception.

Digital tools increase customer engagement and loyalty through personalized experiences and interactive technologies. Multisensory online experiences strengthen consumer loyalty (Urdea et al., 2021). Sensory marketing facilitates the transition between offline and online experiences by encouraging online shopping (Petit et al., 2019). Extended reality (XR) technologies enrich the consumer experience by creating virtual environments similar to physical store experiences (Alcañiz et al., 2019). AR-enabled experiential marketing improves brand attitudes and increases usage/purchase intentions, for example, Guilin Museum's AR application (Zhu & Wang, 2022). In this respect, experiential technologies may be considered not only attention-grabbing tools but also transformative elements that shape consumer behavior.

AI-powered virtual assistants (Siri, Google Assistant) positively impact customer satisfaction and technology acceptance (Akköz, 2021). Generative AI offers the opportunity to create personalized and compelling stories (Vidrih & Mayahi, 2023). While AI enhances targeted marketing strategies, AR strengthens brand engagement with user-centered experiences. This distinction also points to the importance of aligning each technology’s unique affordances with specific experiential goals.VR has great potential in product promotion and virtual tours with immersive environments. While AI can be integrated into almost any area of marketing, AR and VR focus on more specific areas. While VR offers the most immersive experience, it is not as widespread as AI and AR (Ahmed, 2022; Verma et al., 2021). VR enhances sensory, cognitive and behavioral experiences more effectively than static images and 360-degree tours (Bogicevic et al., 2024). These distinctions highlight how the selection and implementation of each technology must align with strategic goals and audience expectations, rather than relying solely on technological novelty.

2.3.1. VR and Experiential Marketing Applications

VR technology offers a unique user experience through digitally created environments generated by computer technologies. These digital spaces are either real or designed spaces. VR is a technology that allows an individual's physical world to be replaced with a digitally designed world through the use of software and headset equipment (Mozumder et al., 2022, pp. 258-259). VR technology has three features: immersion, interaction and imagination. The immersion feature refers to the fact that the three-dimensional world of the virtual environment transforms its users into participants. Imagination represents the virtual environment created by VR technology. This can be either a place that exists in the real world or an artificially designed place. Interaction defines communication and feedback in the virtual world (Qin & Lei, 2019).

The foundations of VR were laid in 1838 when Charles Wheatstone invented the Stereoscope, which created a sense of depth (Künüçen & Samur, 2021, p.40). In the early 1960s, Morton Heilig developed the Sensorama, an immersive experience machine, and the Telesphere Mask, the first VR headset. In 1965, Ivan Sutherland designed "The Ultimate Display" that appeals to the senses of sound, smell and taste (Sutherland, 1965). These developments laid the foundation for today's VR technology.

VR applications are important for experiential marketing strategies because they move the customer from passive participation to active participation. VR technology increases the customer's interaction with the brand and enables a participatory experience. Red Bull's Air Race Live VR application, developed in integration with Google Daydream, and Marriott Hotel's virtual reality postcards created in partnership with Samsung offer a 360° VR experience (Kabadayı, 2020; Niyego, 2015; Rietze, 2017). Samsung and NASA have developed "A Moon for All Mankind" (AMFAM), a 4D VR experience to give the feeling of walking on the moon (Güngörmez, 2018). The "IKEA VR Experience" application, with HTC Vive, has allowed users to explore a virtual kitchen and examine different kitchen layouts. Mercedes-Benz offers its customers the opportunity to explore their vehicles in a virtual environment thanks to the VR showroom simulation (Marr, 2023). When examining experiential marketing applications implemented with VR technology, it is seen that interaction, participation, immersive experience and personalized content come to the forefront.

2.3.2. AR and Experiential Marketing Applications

Azuma, (1996) defines AR based on three characteristics: combining real and virtual environments (objects), real-time interaction, and three-dimensionally registered systems. AR enhances the user's perception of the real world and their interaction with it (p. 356). AR, which enriches the real world with virtual data and is formed by the combination of virtual and real, offers its user a participatory experience (Çabri, 2019; Manuri & Sanna, 2016; Somyürek, 2014). Computer Scientist Ivan Sutherland, during his professorship at the University of Utah in 1968, developed the first known successful AR headset, "The Sword of Damocles," with his student Bob Sproull. The Sword of Damocles creates the image entirely with computer graphics, without being connected to any camera (Doma, 2020).

AR, as a term, was first used in 1990 by Boeing engineer Tom Caudell for the glasses-like device he developed. Caudell described the device, which helped workers in the aircraft assembly process by showing the tasks to be done as a digital diagram, as "augmented reality" (Altun, 2021, pp. 70-71; Göçmen, 2018, pp. 176-177). The use of AR technology with mobile devices integrates this technology into daily life and makes its use more widespread. The first applications of AR technology were carried out in the military field. The technology was later used in the fields of health, industrial, entertainment and marketing (Krevelen & Poelman, 2010, p. 10; Türkyılmaz, 2023, p. 81).

AR applications significantly shape consumers' behavioral intentions by positively influencing both their utilitarian and hedonic perceptions (Yang, 2021). Brands are using AR technologies to offer their customers more interactive and engaging experiences. Amazon AR View and Ikea's AR application allow customers to have a preview of the product by showing how home and office furniture will look in a real environment before purchasing (Ong, 2017; Thompson, 2017).The GAP brand's AR application shows how three-dimensional clothes look on different bodies, giving the customer the freedom to try on the garment or not (Budak, 2017). Pepsi Max offered an immersive experience to those waiting at the bus stop by using three-dimensional digital images in its award-winning Unbelievable Bus Shelter campaign (Unbelievable Bus Shelter, n.d.). Nike has developed a FIT application that helps users take their foot measurements and choose the most suitable shoe by offering digital shopping assistance with the Nike FIT application

(Yalçınkaya, 2019). Porsche's "Mission E AR" app allows users to virtually experience their vehicles with 3D product display and virtual test drives (Porsche Presents the “Mission E Augmented Reality” App, 2018). KFC's "KFC AR Game Filter" on Instagram offers an AR game experience, allowing users to interact with the brand (Teji, 2023).

It is observed that experiential marketing applications created with AR technology have interactive, customizable, customer-oriented, experience-providing, engaging, and life-facilitating features. Interactive augmented reality applications, where user experience is at the forefront, allow the user to interact between the real world and the virtual world, get more detailed information about the product, change, control, and share the content in the digital environment.

2.3.3. Experiential Marketing Applications with AI

AI is the ability of a computer or computer-assisted machine to perform logic-requiring features that are unique to humans, such as learning from past experiences, understanding, problem-solving, and generalization. It is the ability of a system to correctly interpret external data, learn from the data obtained, and use what it has learned in a flexible and adaptable way for specific purposes and tasks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Keleş et al., 2017).

The concept of AI was first introduced at the Dartmouth Conference in 1956. Scientists from various fields, such as John McCarthy, Nathaniel Rochester, Marvin Minsky, and Claude Shannon, who aimed to improve the thinking skills of machines and enable them to solve problems, accelerated the research in this field by working together (Binbir, 2021, p. 315). Alan Turing, John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Herbert A. Simon and Geoffrey Hinton are pioneers who have made significant contributions to the field of AI. Turing discussed whether machines could think like humans with the “Turing Test”. McCarthy was the first to use the term “artificial intelligence” and developed the Lisp programming language. Minsky worked in the fields of cognitive science, AI and robotics. Simon conducted research on AI, decision making and problem solving. Hinton is known for his work in artificial neural networks and deep learning.

Deep learning is a sub-branch of AI that analyzes complex data with multilayer artificial neural networks. It is used in areas such as image processing (e.g. Facebook's face recognition feature), natural language processing (NLP) and voice recognition (Kuruca et al., 2022). NLP is an AI technology that offers the ability to understand, interpret and process human language. Digital assistants such as Siri and Alexa respond to voice commands using technologies such as NLP and deep learning (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019).

The widespread use of AI in the field of marketing can be listed as personalization (recommendation engines) and hyper-personalization, providing predictions, content creation, segmenting customers, image recognition (object and face recognition), speech recognition technology (voice assistants and chatbots), and emotion recognition (image-based and voice-based). Hyper-personalization is the creation of a unique experience for customers as a result of real-time monitoring and analysis of data with AI. Communication is established with each customer independently of other customers (Belhadj, 2022, pp. 12-13).

Netflix offers hyper-personalized content based on the user's viewing history, preferences and other factors with artificial intelligence-supported algorithms (Zengin, 2021, p. 722). It also selects cover images that will attract the user with AI (Türk, 2019). Personalization is done by editing cover images according to the genres and actors that the user watches (Akdağ, 2020, pp. 183-184). Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri are AI-powered assistants that perform tasks through voice commands. Siri performs functions such as getting information and setting alarms, while Alexa controls smart home devices and orders products from Amazon. Duolingo has developed chatbots for students to practice languages. Kellogg's aims to improve its marketing strategies by analyzing consumer emotional reactions (Ahramovich, 2023). It is observed that AI technology is most commonly used in the context of digital experiential marketing strategies for the purpose of providing personalized products, content or services and establishing interaction.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine the use of AI and reality technologies in digital experiential marketing practices in Türkiye. The methodology is designed to address the research objectives and questions based on qualitative data collected through expert interviews. The section is structured into two parts: research objective and research methodology.

3.1. Research Objective

Digital experiential marketing is a marketing strategy that focuses on providing positive experiences to the target audience through digital technologies. As a result of the evaluation of literature findings, no research has been found that evaluates the experiential marketing applications created with reality and AI technologies in Türkiye through expert opinions.

The main objective of the research is to identify the digital experiential marketing applications made with reality and AI technologies in Türkiye and to evaluate the potential of these applications to provide product and service experience with their features of offering sensory experience, interactive content, two-way interaction and personalized content presentation. Finding the differences between digital experiential marketing applications in Türkiye and abroad constitutes the other objective of the research.

Research questions were formed within the framework of the *Emotional Connection* and *Two-Way Interaction* stages in the "BETTER" brainstorming model developed by Smilansky for the emergence of successful experiential marketing ideas, and Schmitt's strategic experiential modules (Schmitt, 1999; Smilansky, 2009).

In this context, the research will seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the AR and VR applications implemented in Türkiye, and how effective are they in providing product and service experiences through two-way interaction, interactive content, sensory experience, and personalized content presentation?
- What are the AI applications implemented in Türkiye, and how effective are they in providing product and service experiences through two-way interaction, interactive content, sensory experience, and personalized content presentation?
- In what ways do the digital experiential marketing applications implemented in Türkiye differ from those implemented abroad?

3.2. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research conducted using a case study design. Qualitative research aims to explore a phenomenon in its natural context, focusing on realistic and holistic understanding (Aydın, 2018, p. 61).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data. This method helps understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and thoughts in detail, and allows new insights to emerge (Uslu & Demir, 2023).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences at Istanbul University (Decision No: E-35980450-663.05-2564319). Participants were informed via email about the study and signed consent forms before the interviews.

Interviews were held with 10 senior managers: five from reality technology firms and five from companies developing or using AI-based solutions for corporate clients. These firms offer technologies such as augmented reality and AI to other businesses rather than to individual consumers, so the sample represents a Business-to-Business (B2B) setting. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise.

The interviews were conducted online between May 14 and May 30, 2024. All sessions were recorded with participant consent and transcribed.

The number of participants was limited to 10 based on the principle of data saturation, which is a key criterion in qualitative research. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the goal was to obtain rich, conceptually meaningful data. As defined by Morse et al. (2002, pp. 18–19), saturation is reached when the categories used in the analysis are fully developed and the data are sufficiently comprehensive to allow for reliable and valid interpretation. In this study, the recurrence of similar themes across interviews signaled that no significantly new information was emerging, indicating that thematic saturation had been achieved.

A content analysis was carried out on the data. Codes and categories were developed based on the research objectives, relevant literature, and interview content. The coding process followed an inductive content

analysis approach, allowing codes to emerge directly from the data rather than relying on a predefined framework. However, the formation of categories was also informed by theoretical models used in the construction of the interview questions, such as Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules (1999) and Smilansky's BETTER model (2009). This ensured a theoretical alignment between the research structure and the analysis process. Codes were iteratively refined during repeated readings of the interview transcripts, with close attention to recurring themes and meaningful expressions. The coding and analysis process was conducted manually, without the use of qualitative data analysis software.

Table 2. Participants and Specialties

Participant	*Specialization*	*Area*
P1	Creative Director	Reality Technologies
P2	Creative Director	Artificial Intelligence
P3	Customer Experience General Assistant M	Artificial Intelligence
P4	XR Specialist	Reality Technologies
P5	Design Lead and Project Manager	Reality Technologies
P6	Creative Technologist	Reality Technologies
P7	Creative Director	Reality Technologies
P8	AI Practitioner	Artificial Intelligence
P9	AI Advisor	Artificial Intelligence
P10	Art Director	Artificial Intelligence

4. FINDINGS

The findings obtained within the scope of the research are included under the headings of Experiential Marketing Applications Made with Reality Technologies in Türkiye, Experiential Marketing Applications Made with AI Technology in Türkiye, and Differences of Digital Experiential Marketing Applications in Türkiye from Applications Abroad.

4.1. Experiential Marketing Applications Made with Reality Technologies in Türkiye

A theme and category structure was developed based on the research objectives, questions, and theoretical framework, while the codes were generated inductively from the interview data. Drawing on recurring patterns in participant statements, the following codes were identified: "VR product and service experience," "AR product and service experience," and "MR training application." These codes reflect how reality technologies are used in experiential marketing to deliver interactive, sensory, and personalized content experiences. Table 3 presents these codes, the participants who referred to them, and the frequency with which each code appeared in the dataset.

Table 3. Experiential Marketing with Reality Technologies

Theme	Category	Codes	Participant IDs	Frequency
Digital Experiential Marketing	Product and Service Experience through Reality Technologies with Personalized Content Delivery, Two-Way Interaction, Interactive Content, and Sensory Experience	VR Product/Service Experience	P1, P4, P5	5
		AR Product/Service Experience	P4, P5, P7	4
		MR Training Application	P7	1

Some of the participant statements regarding the VR product and service experience code, which includes digital experiential marketing applications such as virtual showroom, fun and practical VR product experience, and training that conveys corporate culture and operation, are as follows:

P4: "...When you put on the VR headset, you see yourself in a virtual environment and in the car as if it were in front of you, and you can virtually change everything about this car's colors, rims, and interior upholstery."

P1: "...We have prepared a VR culinary adventure experience for a knife manufacturing company that includes creativity, entertainment and education."

P1: "...Interactive narratives give people multiple choices. It allows consumers to draw their own paths, their own routes on the story."

A participant statement regarding the possibility of using VR applications to enrich the sensory experience of customers who want to see the product physically closer or touch the product is as follows:

P6: "…If you have a VR application made for the gallery, you can see the other colors of the vehicle, etc. with the VR headset. In other words, VR can also be used to reinforce the product and service experience."

Since it is not possible to fit all the colors or features of the car in the gallery, the customer will be able to digitally see all the variations of the model they like, as well as experience it physically. Another application that offers a VR product and service experience with interactive content is based on a virtual driving story in an enclosed environment. A realistic city where drivers travel has been created, and in this virtual city, visitors have driven cars. The application, which also utilizes augmented reality technology, enriches the experience while promoting the digital application.

P4: "...When the Türkiye-based technological communication operator company needed to exhibit its real-time automotive information application in an enclosed environment, we utilized VR technology, which also incorporates augmented reality, to provide an immersive driving experience."

AR technology can be used within a VR application or experienced as a concept with glasses, a tablet, a phone, or a large screen. Some of the participant statements regarding the AR product and service experience code, which includes AR application examples, are as follows:

P4: "...Children see themselves on a large screen, and suddenly animals like lions and zebras pass in front of them, they pet them, then something else happens, it was an interactive AR experience where we also included sensors."

Interactive AR experiences conducted from a large screen are implemented in areas such as shopping malls without the need for any hardware, using cameras and sensors. Another example of interactive experiential marketing is the AR mobile application.

P4: "...We developed an AR mobile application that a private bank generally uses to increase sustainability at university events. A question-based scenario was created to raise awareness about people's daily routines and their consequences in line with the sustainable city concept."

P7: "...We have a 3D Customizer service that we offer in terms of providing product and service experience."

P7 stated that they made WebAR experience possible with the 3D customizer service they offer. Users experience personalized content presentation by seeing different colors of the product in their homes.

P5: "...AR filters provide personalized content presentation. We organized eye-catching campaigns on social media by developing AR applications for a chips company."

When content created with an AR filter is shared on social media platforms, it can encourage many people to try this filter and interact with the brand. In Türkiye, in addition to AR and VR technologies, experiential marketing applications are also carried out with MR technology, of which participants gave few examples. The following is a participant statement regarding the MR training application code developed using the Hololens headset:

P7: "...We developed an application for a brand using the Hololens headset. They were learning how to operate a washing machine with the headset."

Evaluation: According to the participant statements, VR and AR technologies used in digital experiential marketing were found to be effective in enhancing product and service experiences through interactive content. This observation supports Schmitt's (1999) emphasis on sensory experience as a key

experiential module influencing consumer engagement. Furthermore, the interactive nature of these technologies aligns with Smilansky's (2009) concept of two-way engagement, as users actively participate in shaping their experiences through digital interfaces. AR has an advantage over VR in offering personalized content to wider audiences as it can be experienced without glasses. While virtual showrooms and fun applications are prominent in VR, large screen interactions with sensor technology, mobile applications, AR filters and WebAR are common in AR. WebAR and AR filters stand out in AR with personalized content delivery. Except for P7 developing an educational application with Hololens, the fact that the other participants did not give any examples of MR shows that the use of mixed reality (MR) is low in Türkiye.

4.2. Experiential Marketing Applications with AI Technology in Türkiye

A theme and category structure was created based on the research objectives and theoretical framework, while codes were derived inductively from the interview data. These codes represent various ways AI technologies are used in experiential marketing, such as content personalization, two-way interaction, and creative content generation. The codes include: "Audio Creation," "Visual Creation," "Chatbot and Text Generation," "Data-Driven Content," "Face Swap," "Video and Animation Creation." These reflect the diverse applications of AI in enhancing customer engagement and delivering tailored digital experiences. Table 4 presents the codes, corresponding participant references, and their frequencies across the dataset.

Table 4. Experiential Marketing with AI

Theme	Category	Codes	Participant IDs	Frequency
Digital Experiential Marketing	Product and Service Experience through AI-Driven Personalized Content Delivery, Two-Way Interaction, Interactive Content, and Sensory Experience	Audio Creation	P9, P10	2
		Visual Creation	P1, P2, P10	3
		Chatbot and Text Generation	P3, P8, P10	3
		Data-Driven Content	P2, P3	2
		Face Swap	P4	1
		Video and Animation Creation	P10	1

Some of the participant expressions regarding the voice creation code, which includes voice, sound and music production applications through AI applications, are as follows:

P10: "...For music, we use paid tools like Suno, Udio."

P9: "...The applications we mostly do are on content production with AI. Such as visual image creation and sound production."

Suno and Udio are tools that enable music creation with AI. They are applications that make it possible to create unique songs based on a text system.

Some of the participant statements regarding the visual creation code are as follows:

P1: "...we prepared special digital visuals that we produced with the support of AI, introducing the products, and they were shown on large LED screens throughout the launch."

P2: "We had keywords containing children's dreams designed with AI. On April 23, we shared 5-6 designs made with the title 'children took over our account'."

P10: "...We realized the AI designs of both the bottle and the backgrounds of a fruit juice brand."

When the statements of the participants are analyzed, it is seen that visual content in AI is mostly used for product promotion. P1 stated that product visuals designed in AI for digital experiential marketing purposes met with visitors in a physical space through an LED screen. Furniture designed by telling children's dreams to AI met with users through social media channels. In both examples, sensory experience was provided through AI application.

Participant statements regarding the chatbot and text creation code are as follows:

P3: "...When you say your own requests in Turkish or in a different language and say I want a hotel with the following features in Antalya or Uludağ between the following dates, can you offer me the suggestions here, the chatbot can offer you those suggestions."

P10: "...Applications such as ChatGPT provide a service experience. The service provided by AI bots instead of call centers is an example of a similar service experience."

AI applications that interact with the consumer in line with the questions asked and the topic discussed both provide interaction and offer personalized content. However, there are also participant opinions that find the ability of AI in two-way interaction limitedly effective and think that it will be more effective in the future.

P8: "...do I find it effective in providing interaction, I find it half and half. We use chatbots within the company; but of course, they have the potential to develop further with new language models."

The presentation of personalized content to the target audience with AI is also done for advertising purposes, apart from chatbots that produce text content. It is aimed to provide positive experiences by presenting content that will attract the customer's interest in line with their data and to interact with the brand. Some participant opinions on the content code suitable for the data are as follows:

P2: "...AI is very effective for personalized content presentation. We can reach different types of people with different messages."

P3: "...Brands benefit from AI to present content tailored to the target audience. It is based on the person's past habits and past interactions with the brand."

The participant statement regarding the face-swapping code for personalized content created with AI face-swap technology is as follows:

P4: "...We also present personalized content with AI. AI Photo Booth (artificial intelligence photo booth), we do. With AI face-swap, you settle on the face of a superhero."

Participant statements regarding the code for creating videos and animations are as follows:

P10: "...A company asked us to prepare a personalized video for each job applicant. His portrait photo is uploaded, the city he lives in is visualized with AI, and his superpower enters the universe..."

P10: "...We had a project to transform a ready-made video into an animation style with AI. We have projects to convert image to video, text to image and text to video."

Evaluation: When the participant statements are analyzed, it is seen that AI is used intensively for content creation. Visual, audio, text and video content created in AI applications meet the target audience through digital channels such as physical or social media channels. Chatbots that enable two-way interaction and data-driven personalized content, which is mostly used for advertising purposes, are examples of product and service experience with AI. These practices align with Schmitt's (1999) notion of affective and sensory experience, while chatbot and personalized content applications resonate with Smilansky's (2009) emphasis on interactive, two-way engagement.

4.3. Differences of Digital Experiential Marketing Practices in Türkiye from Practices Abroad

This section explores how digital experiential marketing practices in Türkiye differ from those abroad, based on the research questions. The theme and category structure was developed in alignment with the research questions, while the codes were generated inductively from the participants' responses through content analysis. The key emerging codes include "Creativity and Practice," "Investment Difference," "Technological Infrastructure," "Consumer Habit," "Innovative Sectors," "Result Orientation," and "Viewpoint." These codes highlight contextual contrasts between Türkiye and global markets in terms of budget allocation, innovation capacity, and technological adoption. Table 5 presents the codes, participant identifiers, and their frequencies across the dataset.

Table 5. Differences from Practices Abroad

Theme	Category	Codes	Participant IDs	Frequency
Digital Experiential Marketing	Differences from Practices Abroad	Creativity and Practice	P10, P4	2
		Investment Difference	P3, P4, P6, P7, P8	5
		Technological Infrastructure	P2, P7	2
		Consumer Habit	P2, P7	2
		Innovative Sectors	P3, P8	2

	Result Orientation	P6	1
	Viewpoint	P4	1

Some of the participant statements regarding the investment difference, perspective and result orientation codes are as follows:

P4: "...The reasons for the lack of investment are Türkiye's economic situation and brands' perspectives on technology. The budget allocated to digital experiential marketing is less in Türkiye.

P3: "...The budgets allocated to digital technologies in Türkiye are very low. The phones and computers purchased are hardware, the budgets allocated to software are incredibly low. This is the most important difference.

P6: "...There are not many large-scale projects in Türkiye due to budget constraints. They question how much return I can get from this, they are result-oriented. Abroad, they are not directly result-oriented, they have the vision that let's build the infrastructure and then it will make its own advertisement."

Considering the statements of the participants, the budgets allocated to digital in Türkiye are lower compared to abroad. Investments in both digital technologies and digital projects are limited. Türkiye's economic situation and companies' perspectives on technologies are the reasons for budget constraints. This hinders the emergence of large-scale projects. While in Türkiye there is an approach that wants to get an immediate return on their investment, abroad there is an aim to establish technological infrastructure and to make the experience heard. At this point, emotional connection with the brand, which is the essence of experiential marketing, is emphasized.

Some of the participant statements regarding the creativity and implementation code are as follows:

P4: "...The quality of work, marketing idea, engineer, content producer, PR team in Türkiye can compete with the global quality. We had a Roller Coaster experience in Cevahir Shopping Mall with VR technology and we received 2-3 awards with this project. In the fairs I went abroad, I saw that very bad applications were made for very serious brands at very serious prices."

P10: "...Abroad, open source code, creativity and language advantage are utilized more. In Türkiye, tools with simple ways of use are generally used in AI. There is a big difference in film and animation."

A professional investment required for a professional job provides opportunities for global level businesses. Receiving 2-3 awards for reality technologies is proof that successful work is being done in Türkiye. Creative examples in the field of AI are generally realized with tools that require simple use. While there is no difference between Türkiye and abroad in creating visuals, there is a difference in creating movies and animations with AI.

Some participant statements regarding the technological infrastructure and consumer habits codes are as follows:

P2: "...Especially in countries such as America and Japan, etc., this experience can be provided more easily because their internet infrastructure is better. Since these countries started earlier, their target audiences, i.e. their customers, are more accustomed to it."

P7: "...Innovative work is done more intensively in the US, UK, Japan, China and Korea. The budget allocated for innovative technologies, the technological infrastructure of the country, and whether it is a society prone to technology affect this."

The fact that consumers are accustomed to technology increases their expectations from companies against innovative practices. When purchasing a product or choosing a brand, consumers do not only pay attention to quality, but also make a choice based on how the brand makes them feel.

An innovative sector code was created for sectors that are innovative and prioritize customer experience. In Türkiye, finance, tourism and automotive sectors stand out in terms of innovative practices. Some participant statements regarding the innovative sectors code are as follows:

P3: "...2-3 sectors in Türkiye are at the forefront in terms of innovation, the finance sector is one of them. For about 20-30 years, banks in Türkiye have been able to develop more innovative, digital solutions than their counterparts in Europe or America. There are similar examples in tourism and some in the automotive sector."

P8: "...We are at the same point with the world in terms of AI applications, maybe the budgets are different. I can say that we are at the same point in terms of the finance sector."

Evaluation: Digital experiential marketing budgets in Türkiye are limited, which leads to differences. Although software investment is low, the finance, tourism and automotive sectors are ahead in innovation. While a results-oriented brand identity approach prevails in Türkiye, technological infrastructure and experience are prioritized abroad. Türkiye focuses less on AI-powered film/animation production. However, Türkiye's marketing ideas, engineers, content producers and PR teams are producing award-winning applications that can compete globally.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore digital experiential marketing practices in Türkiye using reality and AI technologies, focusing on product and service experiences shaped by sensory engagement, interactivity, two-way communication, and personalized content delivery. A secondary aim was to identify how these practices differ from those abroad.

The findings indicate that VR technology is primarily used in Türkiye for virtual showrooms, interactive entertainment, and training experiences, emphasizing immersive and interactive content (Code: VR Product/Service Experience). In contrast, AR applications, such as mobile apps and WebAR, focus more on personalization and interactive product display (Code: AR Product/Service Experience). The limited adoption of MR technologies, largely due to hardware costs, was also noted (Code: MR Training Application).

AI technologies were found to be mainly used for creative content production, including chatbots, visual assets, and audio generation (Codes: Chatbot and Text Generation, Visual Creation). However, there are almost no AI-generated film and animation projects in Türkiye, which indicates a limited use of AI for advanced immersive storytelling. Furthermore, the lack of three-dimensional immersion was seen as a limitation when compared to reality technologies. The combination of AI with AR/VR was highlighted as a promising way to enhance hyper-personalized and immersive experiences, aligning with consumer expectations.

In terms of global comparisons, while Turkish brands display strong creative capacity, budgetary constraints and a result-oriented mindset limit the scale and continuity of digital experiential projects (Codes: Investment Difference, Result Orientation). Despite this, some sectors such as finance, tourism, and automotive are advancing in adopting these technologies (Code: Innovative Sectors). Participants also emphasized that technological infrastructure and consumer habits differ significantly between Türkiye and technologically mature markets like the US, UK, or Japan (Codes: Technological Infrastructure, Consumer Habit).

To improve the adoption and impact of experiential marketing in Türkiye, it is essential to invest in long-term strategies, strengthen sectoral collaborations, and support innovative projects that integrate AI and reality technologies through user-centered and strategically aligned approaches.

6. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This study limits digital experiential marketing practices to reality and AI technologies and excludes other digital technologies (internet of things, gamification, etc.). In addition, collecting data by interviewing 10 Istanbul-based companies operating in the field of reality technologies and AI in Türkiye limited the sample size and diversity. The sample was limited to Istanbul-based companies due to their national and international activities. Conducting the interviews between May 14-30, 2024 is also a temporal limitation of the study.

Researchers can explore the use of AI in digital experiential marketing through emerging technologies and devices, examine integrated technological applications, and investigate experiential marketing practices involving IoT, 3D printers, and similar innovations in Türkiye.

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