

Seeing things clearly: the reality of VR for women

Exploring virtual reality opportunities for media and technology companies



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Our survey of adult men and women in the UK suggests that women are less likely to try virtual reality (VR) and less enthusiastic when they do. We look at why that is and what the industry can do to change the picture.

The last 12 months have seen heavy investment, major acquisitions and headline-grabbing new product launches in the increasingly popular VR sector. And there's no sign of activity slowing, with nearly US\$2b in financing going to VR-related start-ups and the technology rumor mill in overdrive about what 2017 will bring.

But consumers are yet to buy into the hype. There are many theories as to why this may be, but one thing is clear: women are the least likely adopters. We surveyed UK adults to find out more.

Three things our survey says about women and VR

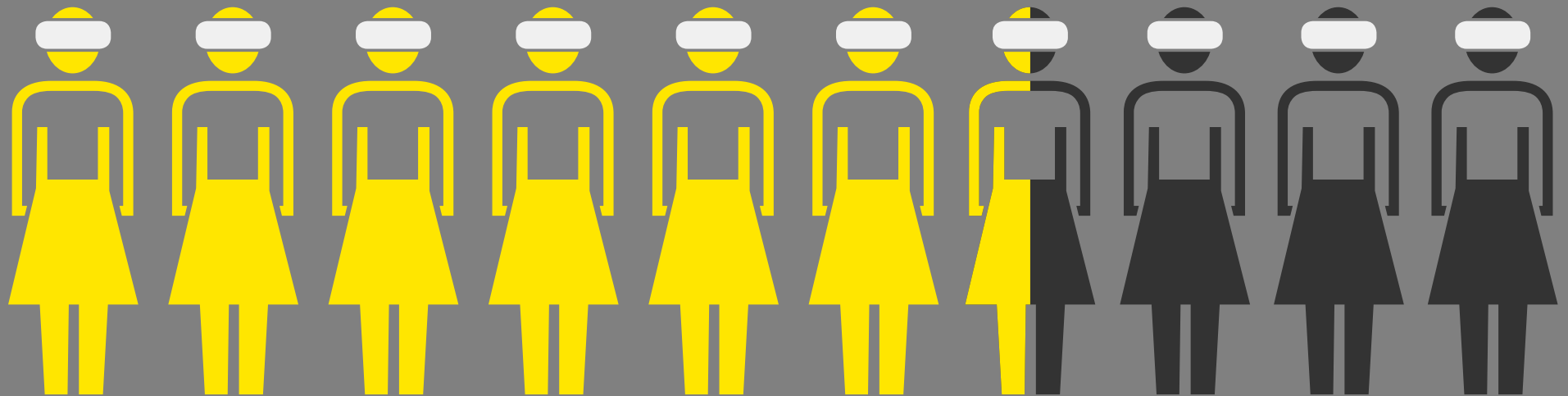


1 Fewer women have tried VR and even fewer want to in the future

Women are less likely than men to have used VR with a dedicated headset (14% vs. 20% respectively).

And it's a similar picture for VR use with a smartphone headset. These figures may reflect women's more realistic response to one of today's most hyped technologies.

Two-thirds (65%) of women we surveyed believe they are unlikely to try VR or augmented reality (AR) in the future.



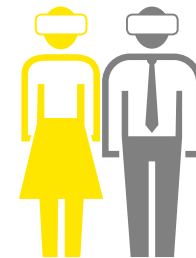
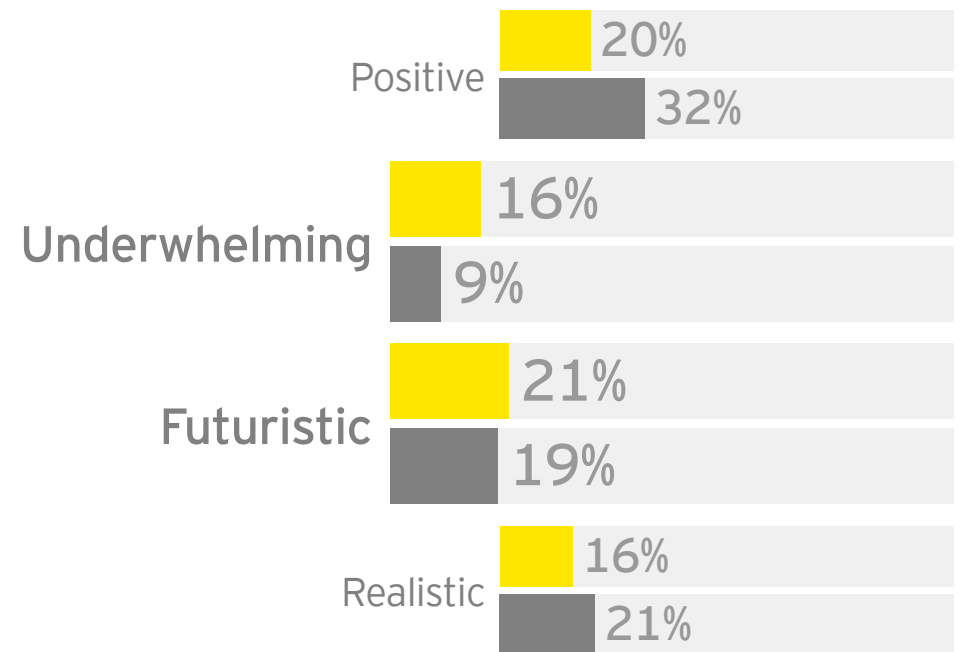
2 When they do try it, women are less impressed than men

This grounded view is reinforced by women who have tried VR. Men and women agree on some areas of the experience: both groups consider it “entertaining.”

But women are more likely to see VR as something for the future – they describe the experience as “futuristic” and “underwhelming” – while men see it as here and now, favoring terms such as “realistic” and “positive.”

Think of this in terms of the language used to inspire purchasing decisions and it’s clear that women are unlikely to be queuing around the block.

Which of the following would you say best describes your experience?

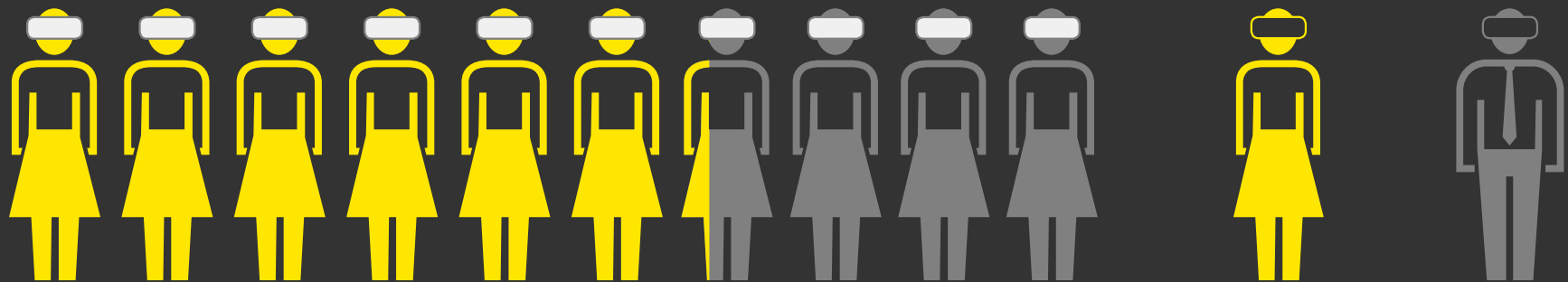


3 The multibillion-dollar brands that don't register with women

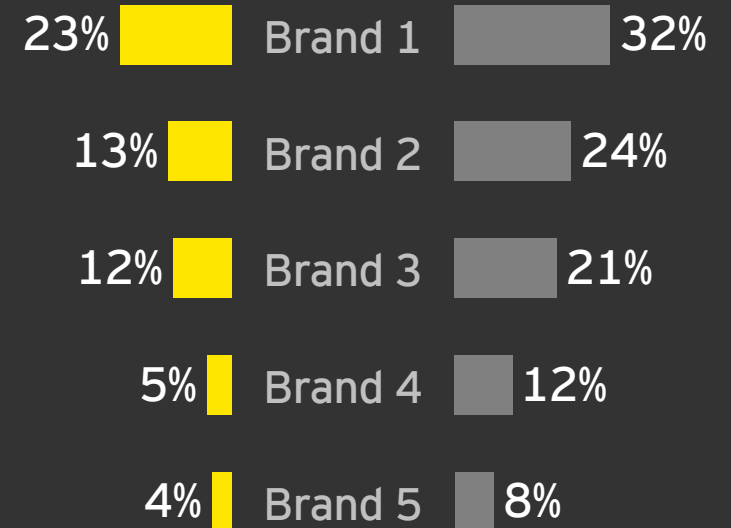
Our survey also has a message for the big players spending billions on creating VR brands: you're not on the radar for a lot of women.

Despite being brought to market by the world's leading technology companies, 63% of women had not heard of any of the top five VR brands, while the majority of men (51%) knew at least one. Looking at awareness brand by brand, in most cases, men were almost twice as likely to have heard of individual brands as women.

63% of women had not heard of any of the top five VR brands.



Which, if any, of the following VR brands have you heard of?
(Top five responses)





Three things media and technology companies can do to make VR a reality for women

1 Build out the quality of content and entertainment

If VR technology is really going to take off, more needs to be done to provide compelling content outside just gaming.

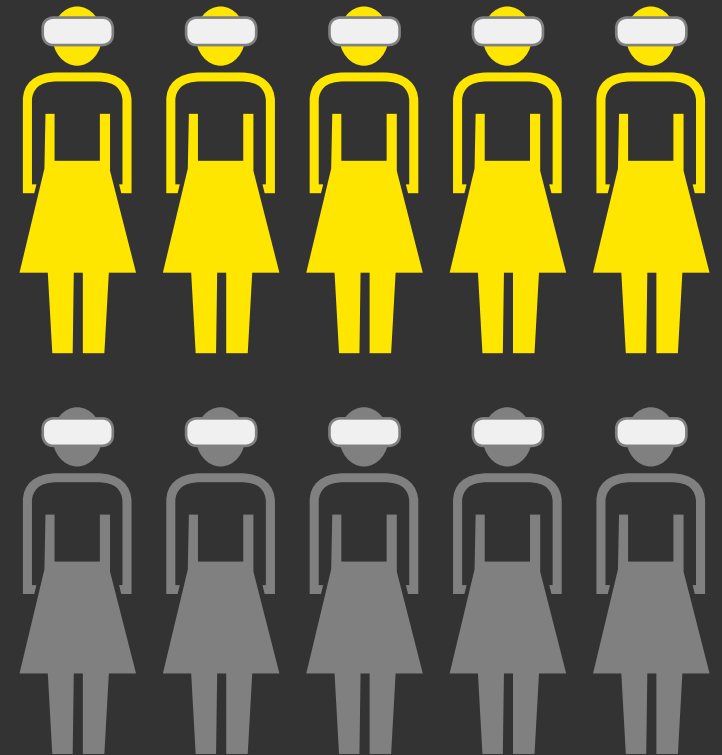
Women who had used VR cited “entertaining” as the single biggest and most enduring emotion. Yet VR entertainment represents only about one-quarter (US\$3.2b) of the value of the consumer VR market.

The experience is what matters, and underpinning this is good-quality content and storytelling. We are starting to see more studio owners investing in VR but there is still some way to go.

High-profile VR tie-ins around movies such as The Martian and Alien, or even an upcoming movie based on the Power Rangers franchise, are great examples. However, further investment in quality content is required if VR is to be considered a new revenue stream for media companies.

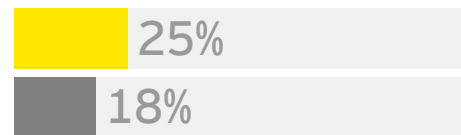
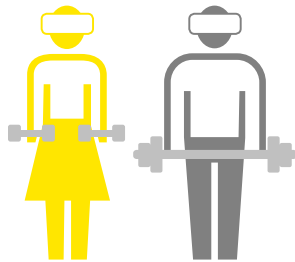
Half of women (50%)

thought the application of VR for movies and entertainment had high potential.



2 Focus on the use case, not the technology

The emphasis on content becomes even more relevant because women seem more likely to embrace VR if there is a clear use case.



There was only one use case where women's interest for VR was more than men, and this was for doing exercise or fitness. **Twenty-five percent of women vs. eighteen percent of men said they were likely to use VR for exercise or fitness.**

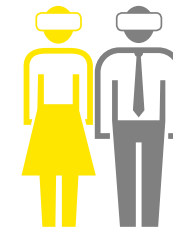
Women also emphasized areas such as tourism (26%) and communications (23%) as potential use cases.

The technology itself is of less interest to women, according to our survey. As with all new tech, there are those who dive in from the start and those who prefer to wait. When it comes to VR, the distinction is very much along gender lines.

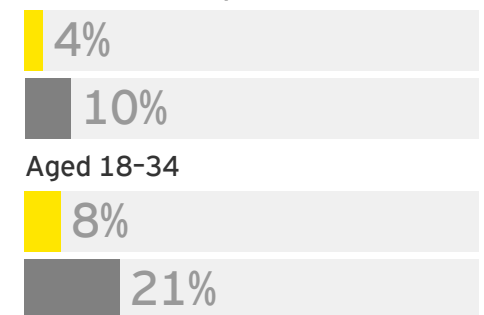
Women's willingness to invest in the very latest technology is generally lower than men and significantly lower among female millennials. This tells us that trying to sell VR to women as the very latest "must have" technology is not the solution. The focus needs to be on VR as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Which of the following would you say best describes you?

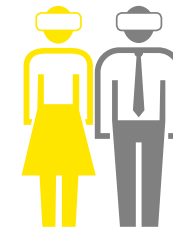
I invest in the latest technology.



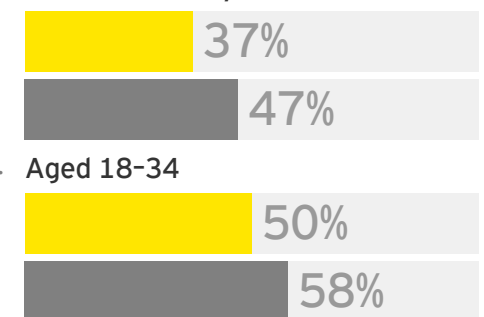
All adults surveyed



I am interested in new technology but I'll wait until the price comes down before investing in it.



All adults surveyed



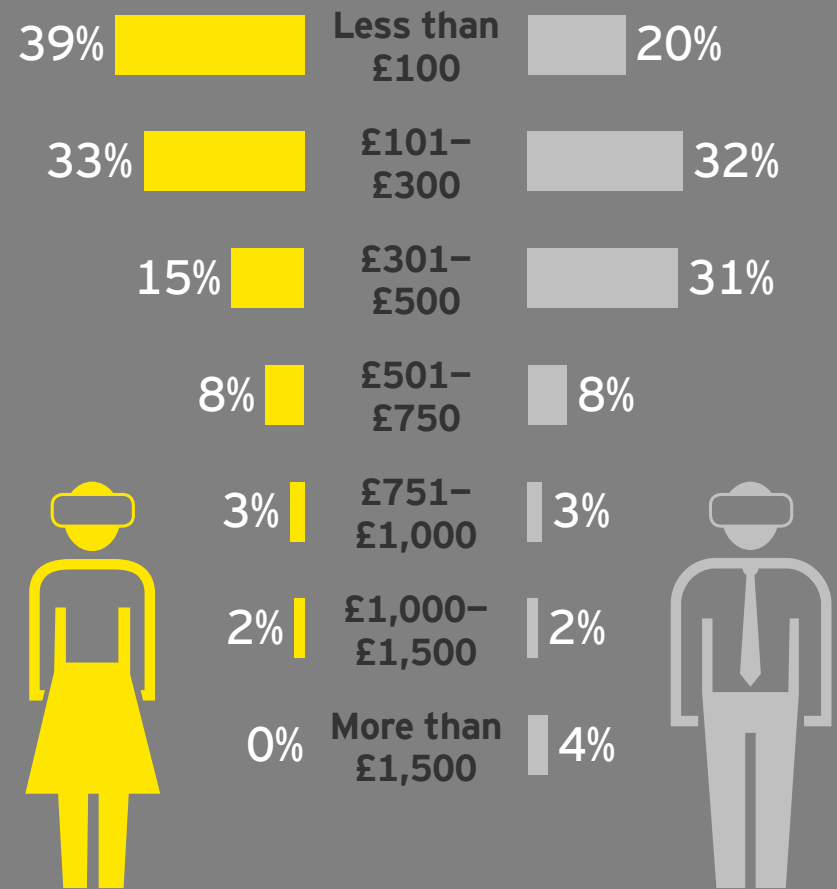
3 Find the right price points

Women's lack of enthusiasm about VR means that, unsurprisingly, they are less willing to pay for it. Those who do are likely to favor less expensive options that utilize smartphones.

Seventy-two percent of women would pay less than £300 for VR equipment. With VR headsets from the leading brands ranging in price from £349 to £804, that's problematic. Headsets for smartphone VR retail at closer to £60, much more within the range that women in our survey say they are prepared to pay.

The messaging for female audiences needs to take into account the nuances of different VR and augmented reality propositions. At the moment, there is a lack of clarity in distinguishing the different technologies so the focus tends to be on limited use cases and more expensive brands. This risks dissuading women from trying more cost-effective, entry-level options.

For your preferred VR activity, what is the maximum you would be prepared to spend on VR technology for this experience?



Looking ahead

It's not that women don't like VR, more that, so far, the majority don't see the point of it.

Existing users – male dominated – are more likely to choose VR as the latest gadget, or as a way to heighten the gaming experience. But neither group is likely to take VR where it wants to go – mainstream. That will require more entertaining and everyday uses at an affordable price.

Media companies who successfully address these customer needs will greatly increase their customer base – including more women.

**Three key questions
media and entertainment
companies need to
answer:**

1 How are you marketing VR so it appeals across both male and female customer groups?

2 When you commission VR content, are you targeting a broad enough audience mix?

3 How are you balancing talking about technology innovations with real-world use cases?

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