

Snapchat leads augmented reality gains: researchers

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Augmented reality is seeing strong gains among Americans thanks to social networks like Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook, a market research firm said Monday.

A new report by eMarketer said some 40 million Americans will engage with augmented reality monthly in 2017, up 30 percent over last year.

Virtual reality is also growing, but at a slower pace, according to the researchers.

The report said growth in augmented reality is being fueled by Snapchat Lenses, Facebook Stories, and Instagram Stories, while [virtual reality](#) usage is driven by 360-degree videos on social networks.

"Users of Snapchat Lenses comprise the vast majority of our AR estimates," said eMarketer forecasting analyst Chris Bendtsen.

Lenses is the system enabling users to add [special](#)

[effects](#) to video messages sent over Snapchat.

"Snapchat growth will continue to contribute to AR users in the future, but in the next several years eMarketer also expects Facebook and Instagram Stories to be significant growth drivers of AR usage," Bendtsen added.

Facebook Stories and Instagram Stories offer "filters" which allow users to add special effects to photos and videos, a feature widely seen as copying Snapchat's augmented reality offerings.

Augmented reality gadgetry overlays holograms on the real world in view, while [virtual reality devices](#) such as those from Facebook-owned Oculus and Sony's PlayStation unit immerse users in fantasy worlds, often for gaming.

The research firm said that by 2019, the number of [augmented reality](#) users is expected to top 54.4 million, or nearly one in five internet users.

Virtual reality, meanwhile, has been slower to catch on and will not reach mass adoption in the US in the foreseeable future, according to eMarketer.

The group said 22.4 million people in the US will use some form of virtual reality monthly in 2017, double the number from 2016.

The category is being driven mainly by 360-degree photos and videos on Facebook and YouTube.

The gaming industry is driving the growth of [virtual reality headset](#) usage, according to eMarketer, which said around 2.9 percent of the US population will use a VR headset this year, a figure expected to grow to 5.2 percent by 2019.

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