



# Implementation of Augmented Reality in Smart Engineering Manufacturing: Literature Review

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## Abstract

Nowadays, we are in the period of the 4th industrial revolution, which has had a great impact on many areas. Four industrial revolution started in 2011 when this term was introduced at the Hannover Market. One of the components of Industry 4.0 is Augmented Reality (AR). The literature review was based on articles indexed by the Web of Science database, published between 2011 and 2021, and focused on implementing AR in the industry. The literature review consists of an overview, technical, application, and conceptual articles. After the analysis, we focused on the areas of AR mobile implementation in industry, technological development, and the main results created by the AR application. The advantage of this manuscript is helpful for academicians and industry as it presents the current state of the art and guides steps for designing and analyzing the AR applications created.

**Keywords** Augmented reality · Industry · The mobile display device

## 1 Introduction

The article aims to provide insight into augmented reality (Augmented Reality), henceforth AR, in engineering production. We will focus on areas in manufacturing where previous research was needed on how AR has been implemented in the manufacturing industry in general and where it has been implemented the most, and what areas of its application are still unexplored. The term augmented reality is used to refer to a combination of technologies that allow realtime mixing of computer-generated content with live video displays. AR is based on techniques developed in virtual reality (VR) and interacts not only with the virtual world but is somewhat connected with the real world [1]. It is projection or adding a layer of digital content to a real physical environment in realtime. Augmented reality integrates

digital components through applications on mobile devices into the real world, and digital content is visible through special AR glasses or using a tablet/smartphone, stationary screens, projection devices and other technologies [2]. The manufacturing industry is one of the leading areas of AR applications. Due to complex internal processes and the increasing globalization of supply chains, manufacturing companies need realtime information exchange at different stages of the product life cycle, i.e. j. design, prototyping, manufacturing, assembly, maintenance/repairs, etc. AR can be of great help in this area due to its ability to simulate, assist and improve processes even before they are carried out [3]. Virtual objects display information that the user cannot directly detect with his senses; information provided by virtual objects can help the user perform most tasks related to the product. AR applications for the manufacturing industry have been developed for several purposes, including process monitoring and control, plant and machine maintenance, product design and development, training programs, assembly, plant and building construction, and increasing industrial safety [4].

Moreover, the rapid development of mobile technologies promises to revolutionize mobile AR applications in the manufacturing industry. The primary focus of this research will be on AR applications in the manufacturing industry. Review articles, technical articles (articles whose

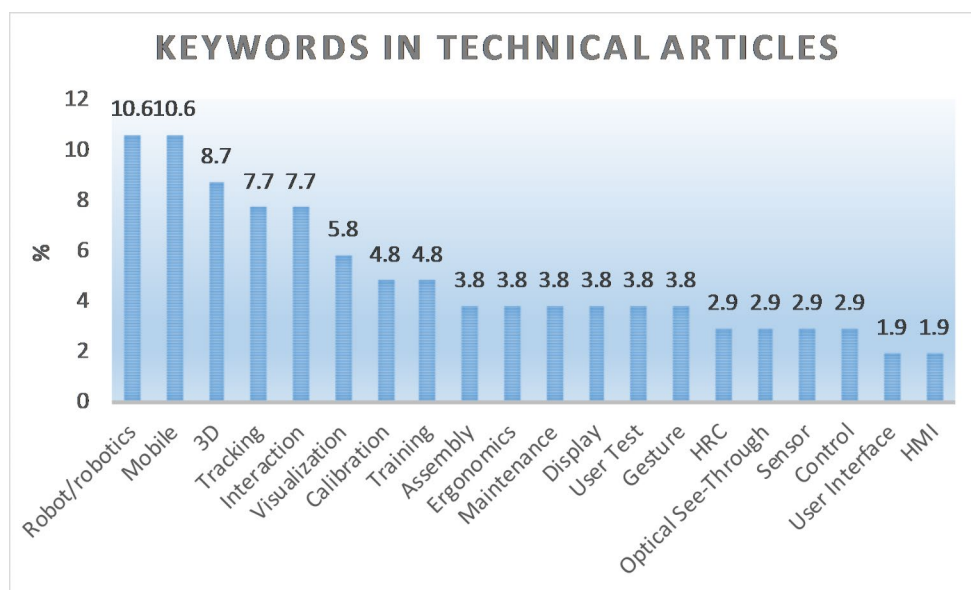
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**Fig. 1** Most used keywords in technical papers



main focus is the development or improvement (and possibly testing) of the technical hardware or software function of the AR system), application articles (works whose main focus is the development and possibly testing of an AR solution in a real or laboratory environment) and concept papers (papers that do not develop a new AR solution or apply an existing AR system, but rather discuss some specific aspects or issues of AR adoption in the industry) published between 2011 and 2021, to answer the following questions:

What is the current status of AR in the manufacturing industry?

What AR applications are the most explored/promising/popular?

What is the “research gap” in this topic, and what will be my future research direction?

What are the key methodological approaches?

The future direction in the topic “augmented reality and its implementation in production” will be chosen based on the results.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview Articles

Prehl'adové Review articles summarise existing literature on various aspects of AR solutions and applications. These articles propose general analyzes of the state of AR, focusing on major patents and AR in a manufacturing context [3]. Other studies investigate AR systems that can be used for specific purposes, such as improving human-computer

interaction (HCI) [5] or human-robot collaboration (HRC) [6]. Several articles analyze AR applications dedicated to a specific industrial task; the most researched tasks are assembly [7, 8], maintenance [9–11], design [12, 13], safety/ergonomics [14] and food logistics [15].

### 2.2 Technical Articles

The 80 professional papers written between 2011 and 2021 were analyzed. They were analyzed based on the key-words used in these articles. The focus is on keywords that are used in two or more articles. The results are shown in Fig. 1.

Figure 1 shows that the most relevant research problems of technical works focus on robots (10.6%), mobile devices/applications (10.6%), 3D (8.7%), tracking (7.7%), interaction (7.7%),

visualization (5.8%), calibration (4.8%), displays (3.8%), user tests (3.8%), gestures (3.8%), optical clarity (2.9%), sensors (2.9%) and user interface (1.9%). As for the areas of use, the developed technical solutions were primarily focused on training (4.8%), assembly (3.8%), ergonomics (3.8%), maintenance (3.8%), human cooperation and robot (2.9%), control (2.9%) and interaction man-machine (1.9%).

From Fig. 1, it is clear that for technical articles, there are several well established research topics related to robotics, 3D, tracking, interactions, visualizations, implementation of AR in assembly, and development of mobile solutions or user interfaces. From this list, it can be seen that some keywords (e.g. “tracking” or “interaction”) actually describe very general concepts or a common technical problem in the development of AR solutions, so researchers are likely to mention them more often. The use of AR for assembly

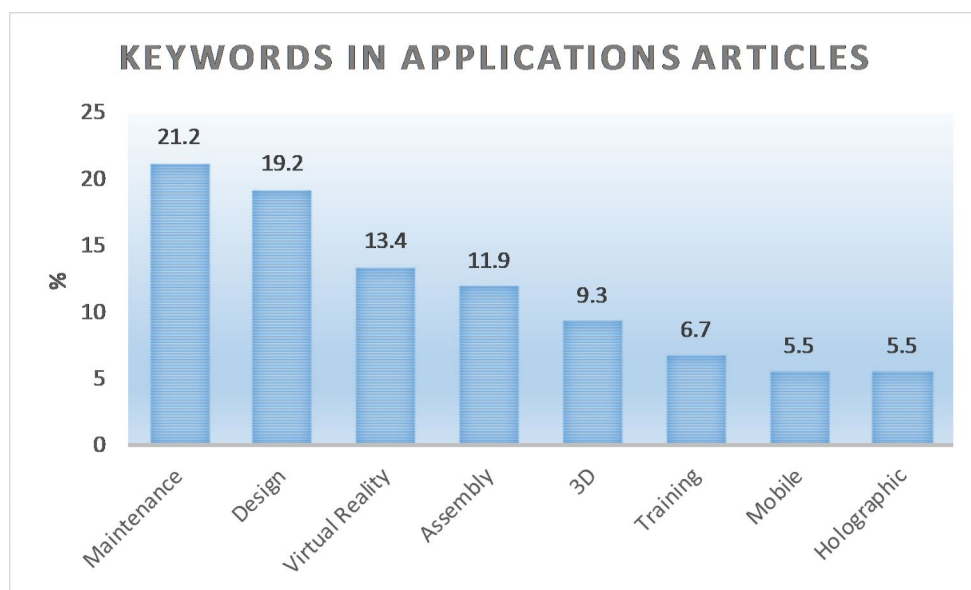
is primarily motivated by the fact that, on the one hand, assembly processes constitute a significant part of the cost of the product [15–17]. On the other hand, these costs can be dramatically reduced if the product is assembled according to a well-planned assembly sequence. AR is therefore used for this purpose in an attempt to automate the process and increase its efficiency. However, some recent papers (published since 2019) provide some interesting solutions, such as a realtime vibrotactile guidance method that potentially overcomes existing visual problems [18], a combined hardware/software solution that provides an assistance system to identify assembly errors, and product repair [19] or a hardware/software architecture that assists operators involved in manual assembly processes in realtime and has been tested in practice [20]. Technical articles also address topics related to object recognition problems caused by the specific shape of products [16, 21] or automated placement of 3D objects in an assembly system [22]. Product design is another well-established area of AR adoption; in this context, AR is usually used to customize a product [23, 24], or to interact with its (virtual) 3D components [25].

The development of the user interface for AR solutions was dealt with by Caruso et al. [25], Ajanki et al. [26], Benbelkacem et al. [27] and Ludwig et al. [28]. The development of mobile AR solutions was discussed by Mourtzis et al. [29], whose work focused on customer integration in product personalization and they proposed the design of manufacturing networks on the go, through the development of applications for Android devices, and that application was tested in the automotive industry; Verbelen et al. [30] presented a cloudlet platform; Han and Zhao [31] developed a CAD-based method for recognizing 3D objects in monocular images, and their method attempts to estimate the position of a 3D object in the camera coordinate system; Kim and Lee [32] proposed a new method to directly manipulate 3D objects in AR through touch and hand gesture-based interactions in portable devices; Shatz et al. [33] developed a technology that enables the exchange of information between multiple transmitters and multiple receivers using optical data transmission in free space; Chen et al. [34] developed a technology that enables the exchange of information between multiple transmitters and multiple receivers using optical data transmission in free space. Their work provides insights for software and hardware designers to improve augmented reality workloads on mobile platforms. Other technical paper research topics include AR applications for maintenance and telerobotics and technical issues such as developing visualization systems or sensors. Devices used in this category include HMDs, cameras, and haptic devices. Maintenance is a key process for equipment and machinery to prevent breakdowns and is often performed manually, which requires considerable time and

cost [35]. Maintenance represents an interesting problem area for the application of AR: in fact, most repair activities are performed by trained personnel who apply established procedures that can be efficiently organized into task sequences focused on a specific object, machine or location [36]. According to these arguments, in this area, AR technical solutions mainly focus on supporting inspectors during field in-spection/machine diagnostics or when performing maintenance [37], which also includes equipment maintenance [38]. AR is expected to avoid delays and possible errors during maintenance, thus reducing the associated costs [27]. Visualization issues were addressed by Stylianiadis et al. [39]. They proposed the LARA project, which uses AR technology to provide accurate location of geolocated assets and new information visualization approaches in AR to address the specifics of hidden objects. HMD (head-mounted display) is a headset (special glasses) that contains two stereoscopic displays (for each eye separately) to generate images that the user perceives as three-dimensional; Weng et al. [40] performed an exhaustive review of display systems (including HMDs) suitable for AR. Kellner et al. [41] addressed the problem of calibrating these devices for optimal use in AR and VR environments. Haptic AR systems (also called visual-haptic augmented reality) allow users to see and touch digital information embedded in the real world. These systems have also been investigated by various researchers [42]. Arbelaez et al. [18] thus developed a Haptic AR application with a low-cost configuration to evaluate the support of the vibrotactile guidance method in real time based on the Gestalt continuity principle. This application potentially overcomes the existing visual problems of AR and allows the user to focus on the task at hand and avoid overreliance on technology.

Other research topics include the analysis of body tracking technologies (e.g. eye tracking, finger or gesture detection), optical technologies (mainly OST-HMD (Optical see-through) or handheld technologies (English handheld technologies)). OST-HMD is a wearable device that can reflect the projected image and, at the same time, allows the user to see through it using AR. Moser et al. [43] investigated the technology of eye movement tracking and OST-HMD. They conducted a user study to evaluate the registration accuracy produced by three OST-HMD calibration methods from both objective (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative) perspectives. Similarly, Orlosky et al. [44] proposed ModulAR, a hardware and software application framework designed to improve the flexibility and handsfree control of transparent AR displays; the framework integrates eye tracking to control ondemand vision extensions such as optical zoom or extension field of view. Regarding gesture tracking, Kim and Lee [32] proposed a method to naturally and directly manipulate 3D AR objects

**Fig. 2** Most used keywords in application articles



through touch and hand gesture-based interactions in hand-held devices; a touch gesture is used to select an AR object, while a natural hand gesture allows for direct and interactive manipulation of selected objects. Lambrecht et al. [45] used a similar approach, i.e. a combination of tag-free gesture recognition and mobile AR, when programming industrial robots. Caruso et al. [25] proposed an interactive AR system that allows the user to freely interact with virtual objects integrated in the real environment, thus avoiding using large and heavy equipment. The adoption of AR in the vision of Industry 4.0 [46] was proposed by Yew et al. [47] to improve the perception of information about different types of worker interactions in the environment. Liu et al. [48] and Rohidatun et al. [49] instead proposed AR solutions for welder training and assembly/disassembly training. The last two research topics in technical articles were calibration and ergonomics. The calibration of AR devices was dealt with by Canessa et al. [50] for the case of a color camera, Liu et al. [51] for a guidance system for AR, Kellner et al. [41] for HMD and Eck et al. [42], Itoh et al. [52] and Moser et al. [43] for OST-HDM. Ergonomic problems were instead investigated by Schega et al. [53], who assessed how basic visual functions are affected in different HMDs and how this relates to their effectiveness in AR, and Tuma et al. [54] who used AR to assess the ergonomic status of the workplace.

### 2.3 Application Articles

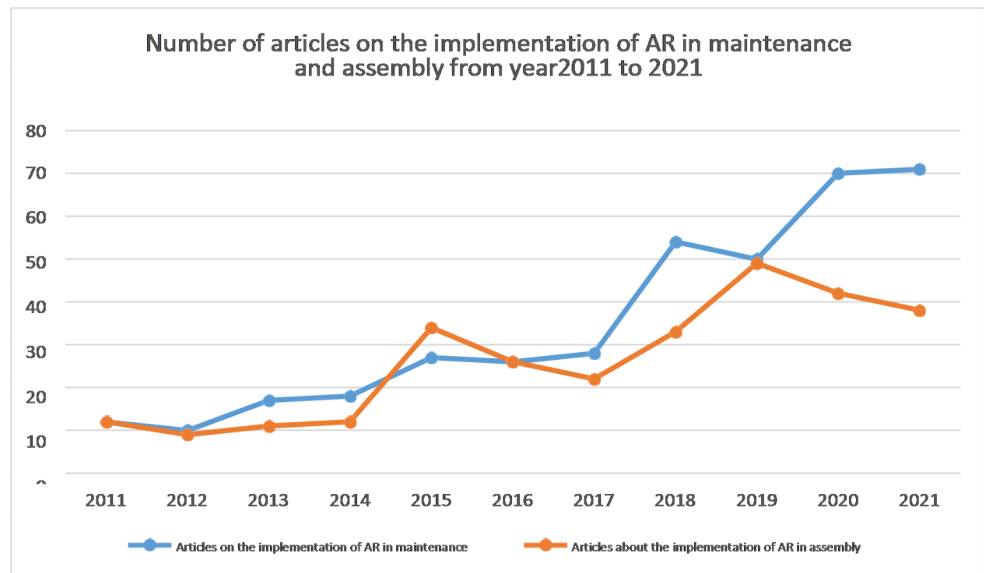
About 90 application articles were studied to find the most common keywords that showed the most popular AR application areas (see Fig. 2). The research showed that AR applications in industry are most focused on maintenance (21.2%), design (19.02%), assembly (11.9%) and training

(7.8%). VR (13.4%), 3D models (9.3%), remote support (6.7%), mobile applications (5.5%) and holographic technologies (5.5%) are the most relevant types of applications developed.

From Fig. 2, it can be seen that there are 9 well-established research topics for the application articles related to AR applications in assembly, maintenance, design/prototyping and training. Assembly has emerged as a well-established research topic for both application and technical papers. That is, many works have focused either on the development of AR hardware/software solutions for assembly or on the application of AR in guiding operators in assembly tasks. Application articles focused mainly on this last aspect [55–57]; the same approach can be easily extended to the disassembly process as done by Tegeltija et al. [59, 60]. Zhang et al. [61] integrated AR with radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to guide operators in the assembly process. Mourtzis et al. [62] presented a more advanced solution and proposed an automated approach for remote support of assembly workplaces, with operators using augmented reality technology. One of the most interesting applications of AR in assembly was presented by de Araujo et al. [63]. Their work identified the most feasible way to provide an augmented reality-based learning facility to support the development of skills among the deaf to prepare for computer assembly line jobs. Product design issues are sometimes linked to assembly issues, as both activities are critical to product development. Product design problems are sometimes integrated with assembly problems because both actions are crucial to product development [64].

AR applications that focus heavily on product design problems have been investigated by Januszka and Moczulski [65], Huang et al. [66], Luh et al. [67], Yang et al. [68],

**Fig. 3** Number of articles on the implementation of AR in maintenance and assembly from 2011 to 2021



Baron et al. [69]. Maintenance is another well-established area of use for AR technology; the purpose of implementing AR in this area can be either to train employees on maintenance tasks [70–72] or to increase efficiency and accuracy by supporting and guiding employees and avoiding errors or safety problems [73–79]. AR is particularly useful when maintenance activities should be performed in a hazardous environment [80–83] or when the machine/equipment is complex [84, 85]. Some articles have been devoted to implementing AR to improve the accuracy and efficiency of the order picking process [86, 87]. Other application articles include AR applications for CAD, quality control and tracking. In the field of CAD, Januszka and Moczulski [65] adopted AR to help designers develop machine systems; Fiorentino et al. [88] instead proposed a design inspection workspace that acquires user motion using a combination of video and depth cameras and visualizes CAD models using monitored AR. Franceschini et al. [89] proposed using AR for quality control. New research topics include the use of AR for safety, learning, training, ergonomics, remote applications (especially remote maintenance and support), and layout planning. The use of AR for occupational safety is a very current topic. The rationale for adopting AR for security is that this technology can reduce some risk factors for occupational accidents, namely insufficient training or work experience and the monotony of performed tasks. In terms of learning, AR has been adopted in e-learning [90] and mobile learning environments [91]. Vignais et al. [92] proposed an AR-based tool to assess the ergonomic conditions of workers with particular attention to potential risks for musculoskeletal disorders. Matteucci et al. [93] dealt with ergonomic problems related to an AR-based assembly process. Remote maintenance/support applications using AR were proposed by Adcock and Gunn [94],

Gurevich et al. [95], Mourtzis et al. [96] and Neges et al. [97]. SAR (English spatial augmented reality), i.e. spatial augmented reality, and MAR (English mobile augmented reality), i.e. mobile augmented reality, are among the new technical solutions. SAR increases real-world objects and scenes without using displays such as monitors, HMDs, or handheld devices; instead, it uses digital projectors to display visual information on physical objects. MAR systems use one or more tracking technologies: digital cameras and/or other optical sensors, accelerometers, GPS, gyroscopes, compasses, RFID, and wireless sensors [98]. SAR has been used to increase the accuracy of car manufacturing processes [99].

## 2.4 Conceptual Articles

Conceptual articles include mainly empirical/statistical studies and positional studies, with some exceptions, such as the study by Elia et al. [100]. They proposed a decision support system to help production managers in choosing the most effective AR solution to be used in specific production processes. Position papers usually describe the potential of using AR in various fields, including virtual manufacturing [101], “M-learning” [102] and lean manufacturing [103]. A study by Langley et al. [104] also focused on the effectiveness of AR systems for user training. Regarding statistical studies, Radkowski et al. [105] evaluated different visual properties for developing AR-based assembly instructions with increasing difficulty levels. Their hypothesis for this study was that the complexity of the optical element should correspond to the difficulty of the assembly task; therefore, the final goal was to match different types of visual properties of AR systems to varying levels of complexity of assembly tasks. Again in the field of assembly, Hou and Wang



[106] evaluated the effect of “gender” on the post-training performance of novice assemblers by analyzing the learning curves of test users with two methods of assembly (e.g., AR versus 3D manuals). Similar analyzes were performed by Fiorentino et al. [107] and Re et al. [108], who empirically evaluated the effectiveness of maintenance operations using interactive AR instructions compared to paper instructions in terms of execution time and the error rate of test users. Rehman and Cao [109] also performed a technical comparison of two solutions for AR, i.e. j. of a wearable device on the head and a hand-held device (smartphone), compared to paper solutions. Aromaa and Väänänen [110] compared an AR prototype and a VR prototype in terms of their suitability to support human factors/ergonomics evaluation during the design/prototyping phase. Some statistical studies have focused on the adoption of AR technology. Nakanishi and Sato [111] analyzed the behavioural, physiological and psychological effects of digital manuals presented with retinal imaging (RID) on workers in the manufacturing industry. Rapaccini et al. [112] provided the results of field research on the acceptance of AR by users to support the provision of services (e.g. maintenance activities) on installed products and Olsson et al. [113] conducted a similar study and evaluated user acceptance of five different mobile AR scenarios as well as explained the potential and risks of mobile AR in general.

### 3 Research and Research Task

#### 3.1 Areas of Augmented Reality (AR) Implementations in the Industry

The literature review results confirm that assembly and maintenance are the most popular AR application areas, as they are mentioned (either as primary or secondary AR application areas) in approximately 18% of the articles. In addition, all types of the paper focused on these areas, although the application and technical papers predominate. The next most widespread areas of AR adoption are training/learning, product design, security, remote assistance and robotics. It is worth noting that some application areas are often considered together: this is for example the case of assembly and training, maintenance and remote assistance, maintenance and training, safety and ergonomics, and assembly and product design. The literature review results confirm that assembly and maintenance are the most popular AR application areas, as they are mentioned (either as primary or secondary AR application areas) in approximately 15% of the articles.

Furthermore, all paper types focused on these areas, although the application and technical papers predominated.

The other most widespread areas of AR application are training/learning, product design/prototyping, security, remote support and robotics. It is worth noting that some application areas are often considered together: for example, the case of assembly and training, maintenance and remote support, maintenance and training, safety and ergonomics, and assembly and product design. A look at the development of application areas over time shows that interest in the adoption of AR in the field of assembly and maintenance (in the industry) has grown over time: from 2011 to 2016, 110 articles indexed by the Web of Science were published that contained the application of AR in maintenance and from 2017 to 2021, 273 articles were published on this topic; from 2011 to 2016, 104 Web of Science indexed articles were published that included the application of AR in montage, and from 2017 to 2021, 184 articles were published on the topic.

It means that these areas of AR application, although quite explored, are still attracting new research. Similar considerations can be made for implementing AR for training/learning purposes. Security, telerobotics/robotics, and remote support are AR application areas that have emerged recently and are now being explored with good continuity. The analysis and review of the relevant literature showed that in most cases, the implementation of AR was carried out in laboratory conditions, which prevents the possibility of identifying a specific industry. In most cases, this is the case with technical articles. However, any AR solution is ultimately expected to leave the laboratory and be used in a real industrial context; in this regard, laboratory studies usually represent a proof of concept for the usability of AR and should be considered as the first step for developing a solution. Among the studies carried out in the industrial sector, the most popular contexts in which AR has been implemented are engineering production, machine tools and equipment, control systems and the automotive industry. Other sectors that are less frequent in the studied studies are the aerospace, chemical, food, footwear and electronic industries, warehouse process management, and nuclear power plant. The cost-effectiveness, benefits and scalability of AR solutions in these contexts still need to be demonstrated. Most implementations of AR in assembly have been done in a laboratory setting or focused on the machine tool industry. AR studies in the manufacturing industry have instead primarily focused on maintenance or product design issues. Interestingly, AR studies focused on ergonomics problems were carried out in laboratory conditions, and there is still a lack of examples of practical applications in industry.

### 3.2 Technological Development of Augmented Reality

The technological solutions adopted to implement AR systems were examined as part of the literature review. Augmented Reality (AR) describes a combination of technologies that allow the real-time mixing of computer-generated content with live video displays. AR is based on techniques developed in virtual reality (VR) and interacts not only with the virtual world but is to some extent connected with the real one. The general principle of operation of augmented reality in all cases is as follows: the camera of the AR device (it can be mobile devices, computers, head-mounted displays, glasses, lenses, etc.) captures an image of a real object; the device software identifies the received image, combines the real picture with its complement and displays the resulting image on the visualization device. Each AR system consists of 3 components - hardware, software and application.

**Hardware** refers to the device through which virtual images are projected. These include mobile devices, smart glasses, head-mounted displays and web-based AR. The device must have sensors and processors that can satisfy the high requirements of AR. The key hardware components are the processor, graphics processing unit, sensors (depth sensor, gyroscope, proximity sensor, action-lerometer, and light sensor).

**Software** – the second part of the AR system. ARKit (Apple) and ARCore (Android) are some software examples and contain three basic technologies for AR. These 3 core technologies are environmental understanding, motion tracking, and light estimation.

The app is the last part of the AR system. The software allows running AR applications on the device but does not have AR functions. AR properties, such as 3D objects, come from special applications.

Most of the reviewed articles describe all components of AR solutions; however, some articles describe more than one AR application (and thus the hardware components are more numerous), while other articles (especially technical articles, overview articles, or conceptual articles) do not always focus on describing the entire AR architecture. As a result, the number of solutions described does not reflect the number of published studies.

**“Camera”** or its variant “camera connected to the monitor” is the most frequently used solution for capturing the outdoor environment scene. The monitor will display the scene to the user with relevant additional information. Another

technological solution often used for visualization purposes is the HMD. Compared to the first solution, the HMD is easier to transport and does not require the installation of cameras or monitors in the production area. HMD solutions have increased slightly over time: as of 2011, more than six papers use this solution per year. However, some authors have criticized the use of HMDs, especially for remote support [114]; in fact, using an HMD could force the worker to limit head movements to stabilize the view for the remote assistant.

According to studies published since 2011, most technological visualization solutions use tablets, smartphones or other mobile devices, such as ultra-mobile computers. In this case, the environment is captured by the device’s camera and immediately visualized by overlaying digital information on the display. Compared to HMD solutions, the use of tablets or smartphones is more socially accepted, and their advantage is even easier portability. However, mobile devices are held in hand during service, which can hinder the operator when he has to perform manual tasks (e.g. assembly or maintenance). For this reason, “bare-hand” solutions have been designed since 2011, with bare hands. Those solutions aim to develop intuitive manual interaction with virtual objects. In some articles, unconventional AR systems have been developed. Jimeno-Morenilla et al. [115] provided an example of using an unconventional system, i.e. j. infrared emitter connected to a pair of active glasses. Similarly, Liu et al. [116] described the technical problem of AR systems equipped with holographic displays. Li et al. [117] proposed a method to realize the three-dimensional transparent augmented reality in Fourier holographic displays.

Linking the technology solutions to the primary application area of AR use showed that cameras, HMDs and tablets/smartphones were adopted in almost all AR application areas. HMDs and mobile devices slightly predominate in areas where user guidance should be provided, i.e. j. assembly and maintenance. This is consistent with the fact that HMD instructions are more efficient than paper instructions and that using mobile devices reduces the risk of errors in assembly operations. An example is the application of AR in the assembly workplace of a drone factory at the Swedish National Test Laboratory [119]. The drone factory relied mainly on conventional operator support, such as paper instructions and animated visual illustrations on the monitor. This study focused on three aspects related to the new possibilities associated with the AR system. First, different ways of presenting instructions based on a structure and active diagram were included. Tablets and Microsoft HoloLens were also used in the study. Finally, two controls were included to demonstrate the instructions triggered by touch screen buttons and voice commands. Therefore, an

AR mounting support system with these features was developed and tested. The results showed that assembly operations with instructions based on the functional diagram were completed faster and with higher accuracy than the same operations were completed according to the structure diagram-based approach. Operators who used tablets performed better on average than those who used HoloLens.

Tracking systems for AR can be divided into two main categories: marker-based AR and marker-free AR. The analysis of the selected works shows that systems based on brands are the most frequently accepted solutions, as mentioned in most of the reviewed works. Marker-based AR has been implemented in both older and newer studios, with an increase in use in recent years. In these systems, tags are used to allow the AR system to recognize the object on which the title is placed and provide related information when needed. The analyzed studies used barcodes/QR codes, exit tags, optical tags, physical tags or RFID tags for this purpose. ARs without tags are mentioned in fewer articles. When tagless systems are used, several different solutions can be used to track objects. For example, Abhishek et al. [118] introduced a label-free AR virtual laboratory, Fiorentino et al. [78], and Neges et al. [120] used natural markers, i.e. Brands already available locally and that, thanks to their specific shape or colour, have great potential for optical tracking.

### 3.3 Results of Augmented Reality Implementation

Almost every study conducted either a technical test or a user study. In most articles, a user study was conducted to evaluate the benefits that arise when AR systems (instead of traditional methods) are used to assist the user in performing a task; in addition, nearly 20 articles propose a technical test of the developed application to show how it works. Most of the technical documents carried out a technical test aimed at assessing the functioning of the developed technological solutions; on the contrary, user studies are more limited in number. User tests were also performed in 12 conceptual documents and one review article. In terms of outcomes, many studies apparently measured more than one outcome produced by AR implementation. The distribution of the observed results depending on the type of test performed (either user studies or technical tests), and the classification of articles shows that specialised tests are mainly intended to evaluate the effectiveness of technical solutions. Technical studies that tested the effectiveness of the developed solution contribute to this result. The articles in which user studies were carried out focus primarily on evaluating the saving of time needed to perform a specific task. Other frequently measured results in user studies are again in the performance of the technical solution in terms of

its efficiency and ease of use and the possibility of reducing errors associated with the performed task.

By linking the results observed through user studies or engineering tests to the primary area of use for AR (if specified), it was determined that assembly and maintenance could benefit the most from performing tasks faster. Better training results are typical of an AR application targeting learning/training problems. Testing the effectiveness of a developed solution is an important aspect of many AR application areas, including assembly, maintenance, product design/prototyping, and telerobotics/robotics. Among the studies that conducted a thorough assessment of the benefits generated by AR applications, De Crescenzo et al. [80] presented a prototype based on an AR system to assist operators in performing maintenance tasks on aircraft. Their proposed system was tested with 10 operators who demonstrated better performance and satisfaction when using the prototype. Operators were asked to evaluate the system; workload, performance and satisfaction with use were rated positively. Webel et al.

[70] presented an AR system that can be used to train and guide technicians in complex assembly and maintenance tasks. The application was tested at Sidel. The results obtained with this application showed that AR positively affected the performance of maintenance tasks: technicians equipped with the application needed 14% less time to complete the assigned task. The average number of unsolved errors reached 0.30 for qualified operators and 1.30 for unequipped operators. The only drawback was that after adopting the AR application, employees' training time increased by 20%. The subjects involved in the test were of the same age and had equivalent work experience. AR also shows potential for operations requiring remote support.

For example, Gurevich et al. [95] developed a remote collaboration system called "tele-advisor" that allows an expert to remotely guide a local user who needs assistance in performing physical tasks around real-world objects. The system was tested on 24 users, of which four worked as remote assistants and 20 as local users. The participants perceived the telecounsellor prototype as having good potential to facilitate and speed up daily tasks; moreover, most of the users, acting as helpers and workers, could easily understand how to use the system.

## 4 Conclusion and Discussion

The literature review was conducted on the basis of articles indexed by the Web of Science database, which were published between 2011 and 2021 and was focused on the implementation of AR in the industry. These articles were divided into overview, conceptual, technical and



application. Review and conceptual pieces, which are fewer in number, were examined individually; application and technical articles were instead analyzed by identifying the most used keywords, which led to the identification of the main research topics and their level of dissemination in the scientific community. Further analyses were then conducted focusing on AR application areas, technology development, and the main results of AR application.

#### 4.1 The Current Position of Ar in the Manufacturing Industry

The following considerations result from the comprehensive set of analyzes performed. First, interest in using AR technology in industrial operations has been growing over time, as highlighted by the growing number of recent works focusing on using AR in industry. Second, it can be stated that AR shows great application potential in many industrial areas, especially in the field of maintenance and assembly. In addition, it has also been shown to be useful in various (less explored) areas such as remote support, training/learning, facility management or inspection, and product design/prototyping.

Most of the published work has evaluated the benefits that AR systems can generate in industry compared to traditional techniques, either through user studies or technical tests. Whenever a quantitative analysis is performed, AR applications show interesting benefits in terms of reducing the time required to complete a given task and the number of employee errors; a positive impression of the AR solution (whether in terms of efficiency, intuitiveness or ease of use) is also often observed.

#### 4.2 The Most Reviewed/Promising/Popular AR Apps

Some specific application areas of AR were explored in detail in both application and technical articles that focused on the implementation of AR in assembly, maintenance, product design and training/learning. Other interesting application areas are safety, ergonomics or remote support/remote collaboration, which are now being investigated with better continuity. However, the number of studies found is still limited and suggests that the potential of AR in these contexts has not yet been fully explored. Other aspects often discussed in the literature are technical and technological issues related to the development and implementation of AR systems intended for an industrial context.

Many articles (especially technical and application papers) describe in detail tracking technologies, visualization technologies and the rationale for choosing such technological solutions. In most of the studied studies, specialised visualization solutions use mobile devices (such as tablets,

smartphones or ultra-mobile computers) or HMDs. Additionally, tablets or HMDs are easier to carry, and employees usually have no problems using them, making these devices more likely to be implemented in these contexts. However, mobile devices are hand-held during use, which can hinder the operator when performing manual tasks (e.g. assembly or maintenance tasks, often the focus of AR applications). However, HMDs have been criticized because their use can cause ergonomic problems. Therefore, other technologies (for example, “bare-hand” solutions) have appeared to develop natural and intuitive manual interaction with virtual objects. Overall, from a practical point of view, these results suggest that the choice of implemented device ultimately depends on the field of application of the AR system. Regarding tracking technology, tag-based ARs are usually preferred, probably due to better accuracy than tag-free ARs and ease of implementation.

#### 4.3 “Research Gap” and Future Direction of Research

Many technical studies were conducted only in laboratory conditions without implementing the AR system in a real context; as a result, there is a lack of real implementations for AR solutions focused on specific areas, e.g. ergonomics. As AR solutions are ultimately expected to be used in real industrial contexts, further research activities should be conducted to develop scalable AR solutions in less explored areas.

Based on the findings from this review, it is possible to direct future research activities to research areas that were only minimally addressed in the research works. First, there is a need to further explore the industrial areas in which AR systems could be successfully implemented. For this purpose, it is necessary to focus mainly on training/learning, ergonomics/safety, remote monitoring, human-robot cooperation and production management. Secondly, although the benefits of AR adoption have been evaluated in many studies, the design and implementation of an AR system also involve high costs. Therefore, an economic assessment of the prices and savings generated by the performance of AR is needed. To this end, the development of an AR solution should be considered an investment, which means that after performance, its use will continue for several years; investment evaluation is probably the most appropriate approach to assess whether and how quickly the invested funds are invested will be returned. It is clear that carrying out such an evaluation and generalizing the results requires many AR applications in the coming years.

A third aspect that needs to be explored in future research is assessing the manufacturing industry’s interest in and knowledge of using AR solutions to improve its process

performance. This analysis should possibly focus on those countries in which a very limited number of applications of AR solutions have been found. Investigating the interest in AR solutions and the level of knowledge about these solutions can be carried out, for example, using empirical analyses, such as questionnaire surveys aimed at manufacturing companies operating in these countries. Whenever there is interest in the application of AR, the next thing to investigate is the specific application areas (e.g., logistics, production and facility management, quality and safety, or maintenance) that are considered promising for AR implementation. This can again be done using empirical research. In general, research focuses on implementing AR in assembly, maintenance, human-robot collaboration or remote support, as these are the most promising application domains, while the latter two are underexplored. Our further research focuses on implementing AR in one of these areas, taking into account the ergonomic factor and the profitability of the investment, which can bring new scientific knowledge.

#### 4.4 Key Methodological Approach and Procedure

After analyzing how AR has been implemented in various industrial areas, it is possible to outline a certain procedure for its implementation:

1. Identification of problems.
2. Analysis of needs.
3. Designing the system.
4. Development and documentation.
5. System testing.

1) *Identification of problems* - This is the first and most important stage in which specific production problems must be identified. To accurately define the scope of the problem, knowledge and experience in related production areas is required. Interviews and background checks conducted in manufacturing companies effectively identified potential problems.

2) *Need analysis* - After identifying the problem, the next phase specifies the system requirements. It includes the alignment between a technological solution and a specific issue.

3) *Designing the system* - In this phase, the information collected in the previous phases is used to achieve a logical design of the AR system, while the exact data entry procedure is defined. All cases encountered some difficulty at this stage due to the different data formats used in the existing systems. Data conversion has become a necessary step in all cases. This is time-consuming and potentially affects data quality.

4) *Development and documentation* - This phase refers to the actual work on the implementation of the AR system. Most AR implementations used the Unity3D open platform

for integration and programming. The hardware was also selected based on the area of use.

5) *System testing* - Users must then test the developed system. It can take place when the entire system has been completed or when parts of the features have been designed. In most cases described in the reviewed articles, user tests or technical tests were used, and most AR applications were implemented in laboratories. To ensure the result of the developed system, it is necessary to perform such tests several times. However, it is also about the balance between the complexity of the project and the available resources.

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