

Enhancing Online Shopping Experience: The Effect of Deliberate vs. Automatic Haptic Imagery in Consumer Reactions: An Abstract

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent changes in consumer habits and preferences boosted online shopping. However, a perceived barrier in the shopper's online path to purchase is the lack of sensory input, physical inspection, or even trial opportunities for the products offered online, creating uncertainty in product assessment (Kim & Krishnan, 2015). As consumers can't physically inspect and try the product in an online store environment, they tend to depend on mental imagery. Mental imagery is "a prospective, multi-modal sensory and cognitive representation formed from memory that is evoked automatically or deliberately" (Elder & Krishna, 2022). Browsing through the online store environment, consumers imagine product interactions and sensory experiences (i.e., how the product feels, looks, smells, sounds, tastes).

This research examines the effect of sensory imagery on consumer reactions in the online store environment. Our objective is to develop a better understanding of the different types of sensory imagery. Understanding the differences between these different types of imagery is crucial for comprehending how our minds operate and how they influence our thoughts, behaviors, and decision-making processes. Previous research identified two types of sensory imagery: deliberate imagery (i.e., the consumers are instructed to form an image) and automatic mental imagery (i.e., more spontaneously, for example, by reading a description; Elder & Krishna, 2022). The effects of these two types of imagery are mostly studied in isolation (Elder & Krishna, 2022). However, research comparing these types of imagery in terms of formation and consequences is lacking.

The study aims to distinguish between deliberate and automatic mental imagery and their respective effects on perceived ownership, processing fluency, attitudes, and behavioral intentions while taking into account consumers' imaginativeness. A controlled experiment was conducted on 161 female participants in an online store featuring a beauty product. The findings reveal that deliberate mental imagery instructions significantly improve mental imagery processing, but only for consumers with high levels of imaginativeness. Parallel serial mediations indicate that enhanced mental imagery increases perceived ownership and processing fluency, which in turn elevate attitudes toward the product and purchase intention. These results shed light on the role of mental imagery in online shopping, benefitting both marketing theory and practical strategies to enhance the online shopping experience.

Keywords: mental imagery; online shopping; e-commerce; perceived ownership; processing fluency

References Available Upon Request