

Effects of Non-Diagnostic Haptic Information on Consumers' Product Judgments and Decisions

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Abstract : A physical touch of a product can provide ample diagnostic information about the product attributes and quality. However, consumers' product judgments and purchases can be erroneously influenced by non-diagnostic haptic information. For example, consumers' evaluations of the coffee they drink could be affected by the heaviness of a cup that is used for just serving the coffee. This important issue has received little attention in prior research. The present research contributes to the literature by identifying when and how non-diagnostic haptic information can have an influence and why such influence occurs. Specifically, five studies experimentally varied the content of non-diagnostic haptic information, such as the weight of a cup (heavy vs. light) and the texture of a cup holder (smooth vs. rough), and then assessed the impact of the manipulation on product judgments and decisions. Results show that non-diagnostic haptic information has a biasing impact on consumer judgments. For example, the heavy (vs. light) cup increases consumers' perception of the richness of coffee in it, and the rough (vs. smooth) texture of a cup holder increases the perception of the healthfulness of fruit juice in it, which in turn increases consumers' purchase intentions of the product. When consumers are cognitively distracted during the touch experience, the impact of the content of haptic information is no longer evident, but the valence (positive vs. negative) of the haptic experience influences product judgments. However, consumers are able to avoid the impact of non-diagnostic haptic information, if and only if they are both knowledgeable about the product category and undistracted from processing the touch experience. In sum, the nature of the influence by non-diagnostic haptic information (i.e., assimilation effect vs. contrast effect vs. null effect) is determined by the content and valence of haptic information, the relative impact of which depends on whether consumers can identify the content and source of the haptic information. Theoretically, to our best knowledge, this research is the first to document the empirical evidence of the interplay between cognitive and affective processes that determines the impact of non-diagnostic haptic information. Managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords : consumer behavior, haptic information, product judgments, touch effect

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