The Moderating Role of Need For Touch and Product Involvement: The Influence on the Relationships between Cognitive and Conative Responses in Online Shopping Environments

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In consumer behavior, evidence has been found for individual differences in product involvement (i.e., the degree of personal relevance to a product) and need for touch (i.e., a preference for the utilization of touch information). In online shopping environments, the lack of direct sensory experience make it difficult for apparel shoppers to assess product quality and make a purchase decision of a product. The present study expect that online shoppers' cognitive and conative responses toward a product would vary according to the interpersonal differences. The purpose of the study was to investigate the moderating role of need for touch and product involvement in the relationships between cognitive (mental imagery, product quality) and conative (behavioral intention) responses. The hypotheses of the study addressed the positive effect of mental imagery on perceived product quality (H1), the positive effect of perceived product quality on behavioral intention (H2), and the moderating role of need for touch and product involvement on the relationships among mental imagery, perceived product quality, and behavioral intention (H3-H6). A simulated online apparel shopping web experiment was conducted with a 3 (pictorial information: low, medium or high imagery) × 2 (verbal information: low or high imagery) between-subjects factorial design.

American college women (N=639) participated in the experiment. The results of the study were summarized as followings: A structural equation modeling revealed the positive relationships among mental imagery (imagery elaboration and vividness), perceived product quality (performance, usefulness, aesthetics) and behavioral intention. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. Multiple sample analyses found that need for touch moderated the effect of imagery elaboration on perceived product aesthetics and the effect of vividness on perceived product performance and perceived product aesthetics. Multiple sample analyses also revealed that product involvement moderated the effect of imagery elaboration on perceived product usefulness, the effect of vividness on perceived product performance and perceived product aesthetics, and the effect of perceived product aesthetics on behavioral intention. Therefore, H3 through H6 were partially supported.