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NICK KOLENDA

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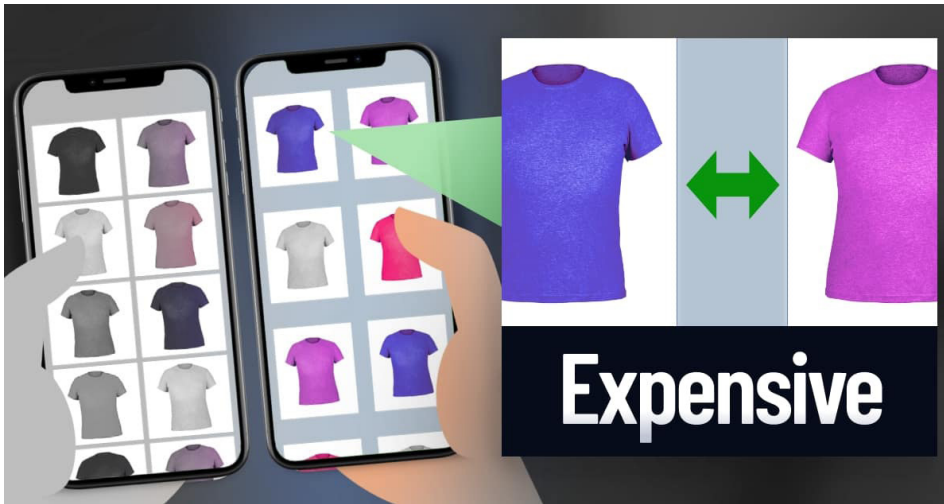
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1

PRODUCT CATALOG





MINIMIZE PADDING IN CHEAP CATALOGS

Real estate is expensive in physical stores, and this idea persists in digital stores.

Do you have a digital catalog?

In physical stores, the amount of space influences prices: A lot of empty space? Managers need to raise prices to pay for this real estate.

Ironically, customers bring this logic into digital catalogs. Online products seem more expensive when surrounded by more padding, even though this space doesn't cost anything (Huang et al., 2019).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Restrict Padding to Convey Good Deals.** Cluttered websites sometimes convert better—and now it makes sense. Low prices are found in messy stores, and customers bring this idea into online shopping.

→ **Expand Padding to Boost Quality.** Do your customers prioritize quality over price? Embrace the free real estate in your ecommerce store.

→ **Adjust Padding in Catalogs and Images.** The space between rows and columns, along with the space around product images.

→ **Charge Precise Prices in Tight Catalogs.** Prices like \$18.49, \$23.99, and \$19.01 convert better than \$18.50, \$24.00, and \$19.00 when catalogs have less padding (Hou & Gong, 2024).

EXAMPLES

→ Walmart crams four products in each row.

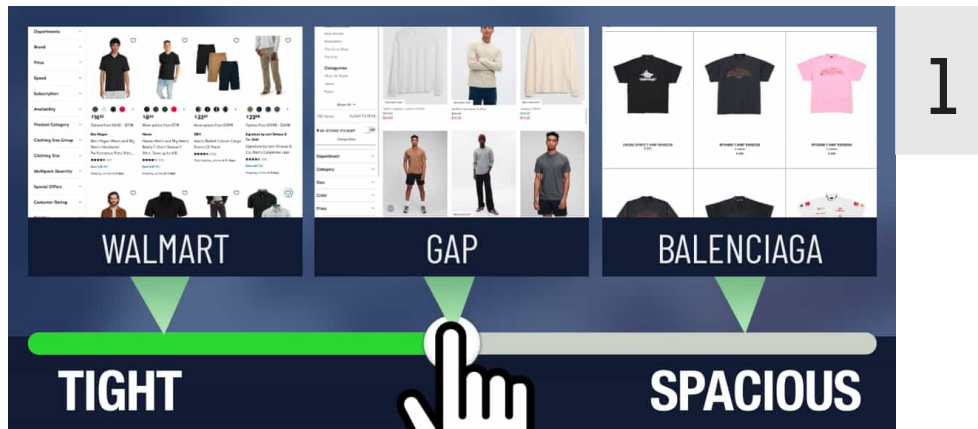
→ Gap shows three products.

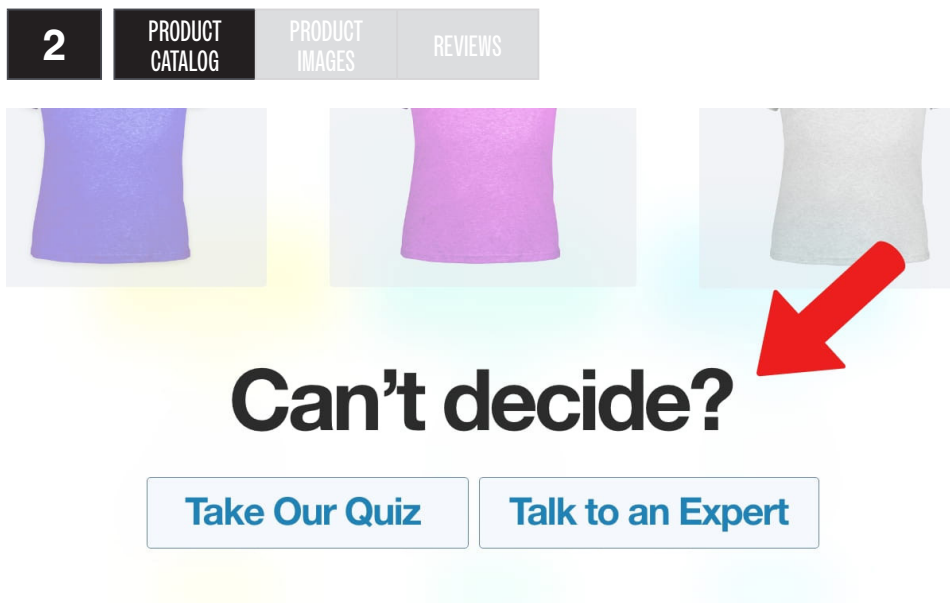
→ Balenciaga shows three products, but adds more space in the images.

(see fig 1)

Huang, Y., Lim, K. H., Lin, Z., & Han, S. (2019). Large online product catalog space indicates high store price: Understanding customers' overgeneralization and illogical inference. *Information Systems Research*, 30(3), 963-979.

Hou, N., & Gong, H. (2024). Precision makes tightness better: the interactive effect of interstitial space and number precision on purchase intention. *Marketing Letters*, 1-14.





JUSTIFY WHY CUSTOMERS REACHED THE END OF A CATALOG

Otherwise customers might infer that products are unappealing.

Humans *seem* rational.

Feel hungry? You eat something.

But this sequence can be flipped:

Eat something? You *infer* hunger. But was it? Maybe it was stress or boredom.

Humans often act, *then* justify with logic. This fallacy—*rationalization*—can be seen in cognitive dissonance and other pivotal theories (see Cushman, 2020 for a review).

It also happens in ecommerce.

If a customer reaches the end of your catalog, they

might infer: *Hmm, I reached the end without choosing a product. Guess I don't like any of them.*

But were they disinterested? Or merely indecisive?

Help customers rationalize this behavior. At the end of your catalog, insert a statement to shift their rationale from *dislike* to *indecision*:

- Can't decide? Take our quiz to find the right product.
- Can't decide? Let our experts help.
- Can't decide? Build your own bundle.

This framing will justify their behavior: *Hmm, I reached the end without choosing a product. Oh, it's because I can't decide. All the products are good.*

Cushman, F. (2020). Rationalization is rational. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 43, e28.

Choose a style



ACTIVATE A WHICH-TO-CHOOSE MINDSET

A single choice primes people to make more choices.

Prime customers to choose.

For example, which animal do you prefer: elephant or hippo?

In one study, people who answered this question were more likely to buy a computer (Xu & Wyer, 2008).

You can blame three stages of buying:

- **Stage 1:** Whether to buy
- **Stage 2:** Which to buy
- **Stage 3:** How to buy

Any choice (elephant vs. hippo) activates a “which-to-choose” mindset. Customers skip the first stage of “whether” to buy, proceeding immediately to the second stage of “which” to buy.

Stating a preference appears to induce a which-to-buy mindset, leading people to think about which of

several products they would like to buy under the implicit assumption that they have already decided to buy one of them. (Xu & Wyer, 2007, p. 564)

When you’re a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

When you make a choice, everything looks choosable.

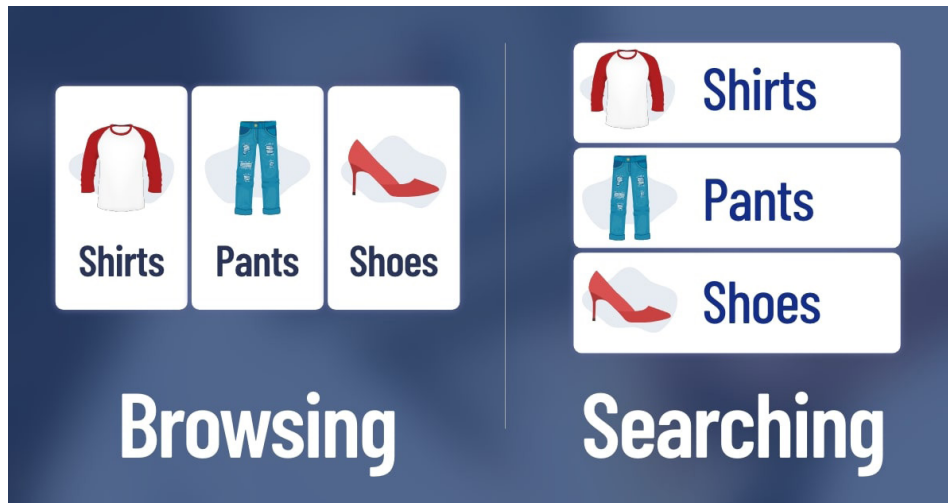
STRONGER FOR

→ **Visual Choices.** Humans prefer choosing from visual graphics, especially in the early stages of a decision (e.g., browsing (Townsend & Kahn, 2014)

Townsend, C., & Kahn, B. E. (2014). The “visual preference heuristic”: The influence of visual versus verbal depiction on assortment processing, perceived variety, and choice overload. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(5), 993-1015.

Xu, A. J., & Wyer Jr, R. S. (2007). The effect of mind-sets on consumer decision strategies. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), 556-566.

Xu, A. J., & Wyer Jr, R. S. (2008). The comparative mind-set: From animal comparisons to increased purchase intentions. *Psychological Science*, 19(9), 859-864.



ARRANGE PRODUCTS HORIZONTALLY FOR BROWSING

Customers browse horizontally, but they search for specific products vertically.

Customers browse horizontally.

Human eyes are aligned in a horizontal line, which makes it easier to scan horizontal assortments (Deng, Kahn, Unnava, & Lee, 2016).

On Amazon, a general search—*books*—shows a horizontal list of books:

(see fig 1)

Vertical lists help customers find specific options. Thanks to the left-alignment, it's easier to look for specific words.

If you search for a *specific* book—*Methods of Persuasion*—Amazon shows a vertical list:

(see fig 2)

Plus, these options now appear at the top—in the exact location of the customer's gaze. Less relevant products will be hidden below, especially on mobile devices (Huang, Juaneda, Sénécal, & Léger, 2021).

Walmart follows this strategy, too. Recent searches are vertical, but trending searches (which encourage browsing) are horizontal:

(see fig 3)

Deng, X., Kahn, B. E., Unnava, H. R., & Lee, H. (2016). A "wide" variety: Effects of horizontal versus vertical display on assortment processing, perceived variety, and choice. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 53(5), 682-698.

Huang, B., Juaneda, C., Sénécal, S., & Léger, P. M. (2021). "Now You See Me": the attention-grabbing effect of product similarity and proximity in online shopping. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 54(1), 1-10.

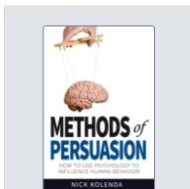
1

You searched for **"books"**



2

You searched for
"Methods of Persuasion"



Methods of Persuasion

Nick Kolenda



3

Vertical

Horizontal

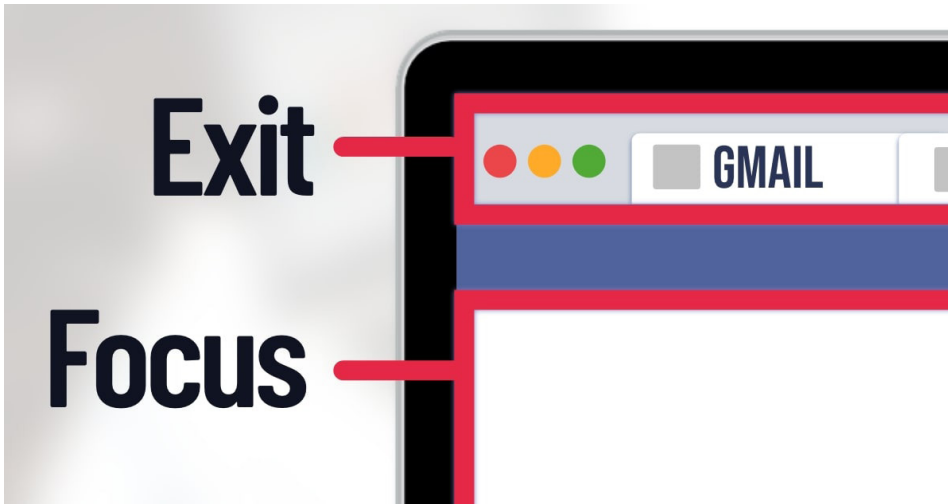
Search everything at Walmart online and in store

Your recent searches

- stock pot
- workout bench
- blender

Trending

- toddler toys
- dawn dish soap liquid
- starbucks coffee beverage



DARKEN THE TOP BORDER OF THE INTERFACE

A dark border separates the exit tabs in the browser from the main interface.

White interfaces are good for actions (e.g., purchases).

But there's a problem. Look at these rectangles:

(see fig 1)

Thanks to the “gestalt” principles of similarity, your brain sees two clusters of squares.

The same effect occurs with tabs in your browser. Look at your tabs right now. What color are they? They're usually white or grey.

But if your website has a white background, then visitors will group your website with those tabs.

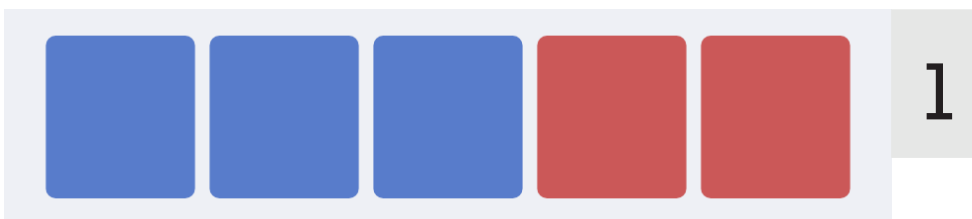
And that's bad.

If visitors click one of those tabs, they will leave your website. You need to push those tabs outside of their attention.

Perhaps designers could darken the top border of the interface. This dark bar becomes a conceptual bar that keeps their attention fixated on the website. Visitors will be less likely to click a tab (and leave your website).

(see fig 2)

Caveat: It depends on the browser. Dark tabs would need the opposite color (e.g., white border at the top).





EXIT TABS
OUTSIDE FOCUS



EXIT TABS
INSIDE FOCUS

2





ADD VIBRATIONS TO PRODUCT SELECTIONS

Customers are more likely to buy products when they feel a vibration or see a visual change while selecting them.

Vibrations are deceptively persuasive.

In an online grocery store, customers bought more items when they felt vibrations while adding items to their cart (Hampton & Hildebrand, 2021).

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Classical Conditioning.** Vibrations often co-occur with social messages. Therefore, vibrations feel good because these sensations have been frequently paired with hits of dopamine (Hampton & Hildebrand, 2021).

→ **Perceived Ownership.** Vibrations mimic touch, as if you are physically touching an item on your device. And touch is key to ownership (Li et al., 2024; Peck et al., 2013).

HOW TO APPLY

You can add vibrations to *any* desired action, like upsells:

(see fig 1)

Haptic sensations feel rewarding, so users feel compelled to repeat these actions.

What's the optimal length for vibrations? Try 400ms:

(see fig 2)

But what if you sell products on desktop?

Instead of using vibrations, try animating products upon selection.

- Move items into the basket
- Shake from side to side
- Grow and shrink

Help users see a physical consequence of their virtual action.

You'll increase their perceived touch (thus ownership).

CAVEATS:

→ **Avoid Vibrations During Payments.** Otherwise you shift attention toward the payment, which feels painful (Manshad & Brannon, 2021).

→ **Best for Multi-Selections.** Might work best for grocery retailers that handle many selections within a single session.

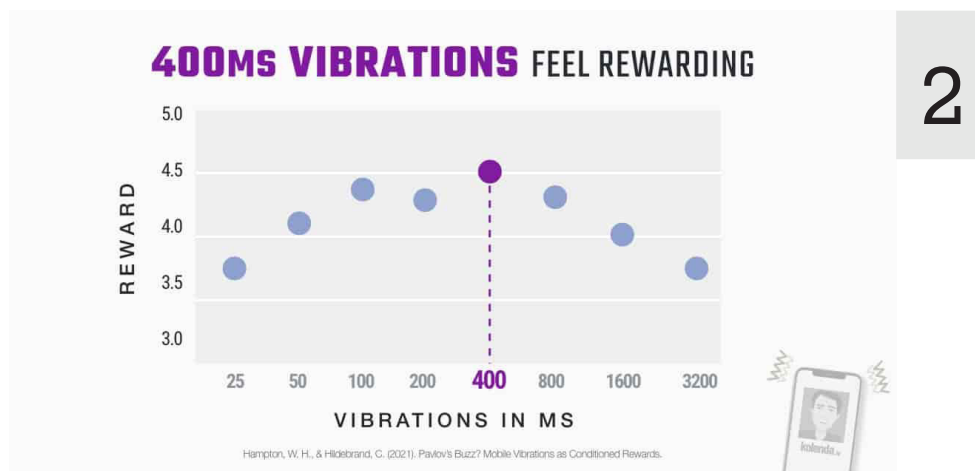
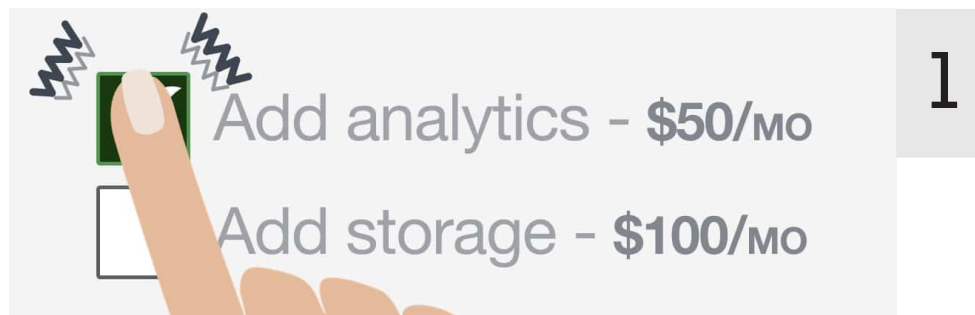
→ **Mostly Affects Impulsive Customers.** Perhaps we need regulation over these innocent sensations.

Hampton, W. H., & Hildebrand, C. (2021). Pavlov's Buzz? Mobile Vibrations as Conditioned Rewards.

Li, J., Cowan, K., Yazdanparast, A., & Ansell, J. (2024). Vibrotactile feedback in m-commerce: Stimulating perceived control and perceived ownership to increase anticipated satisfaction. *Psychology & Marketing*.

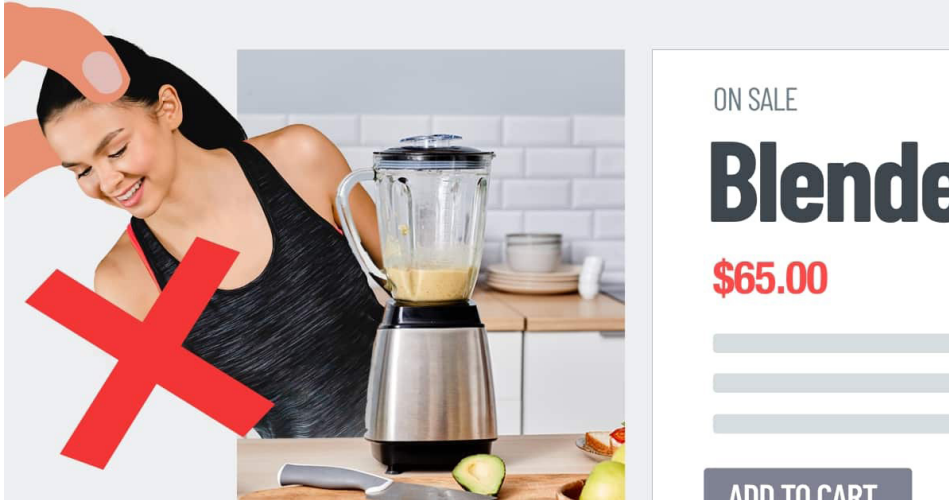
Manshad, M. S., & Brannon, D. (2021). Haptic-payment: Exploring vibration feedback as a means of reducing overspending in mobile payment. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 88-96.

Peck, J., Barger, V. A., & Webb, A. (2013). In search of a surrogate for touch: The effect of haptic imagery on perceived ownership. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 23(2), 189-196.



2

PRODUCT IMAGES



IMPLY THE PRESENCE OF HUMANS IN PRODUCT IMAGES

Humans can reduce conversions because they distract from the product.

Should you display people in product images?

Yes—if they convey quality (e.g., apparel, beauty, jewelry; see Hassanein & Head, 2005).

Otherwise, try removing people.

Across 10k+ photos on Instagram, travel destinations received fewer likes and reduced sales if they showed somebody in the photo (Lu et al., 2023).

WHY IT WORKS

- **Lack of Ownership.** It's *their* product. Not *my* product (Lu et al., 2023).
- **Distracts From Products.** Customers fixate on the person (Kalkstein et al., 2020).
- **Contamination.** Products seem inferior when other people touch them (Argo et al., 2006).

HOW TO APPLY

Humans have the potential to boost conversions because they generate positive emotions, but they often reduce conversions because they distract from the product.

But there's a solution: *Imply* the presence of a human (Poirier et al., 2024).

Add various cues:

- **Nearby Traces.** A blender next to sliced fruit.
- **Slight Disturbances.** A pillow that is slightly crumpled.
- **Mid-Actions.** A chair in mid-swing.
- **Environmental Imprints.** Footprints in the sand.
- **Less Salient Humans.** Cropped head or reflection in a mirror.

These examples can give you the emotional benefits of humans without the attentional drawbacks.

STRONGER FOR

→ **Used Products.** Seeing the previous owner can backfire (Kim, 2017).

CAVEATS

→ **Appearance Products.** Show people if they are crucial to product quality.

→ **Service Providers.** You can show home inspectors because they don't symbolize the customer.

→ **Guilty Pleasures.** We feel justified buying cookies if we see other people eating them (Poor et al., 2013).

→ **Humans Grab Attention.** They can still work in adverts.

Argo, J. J., Dahl, D. W., & Morales, A. C. (2006). Consumer contamination: How consumers react to products touched by others. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(2), 81-94.

Hassanein, K., & Head, M. (2005). The impact of infusing social presence in the web interface: An investigation across product types. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 10(2), 31-55.

Kalkstein, D. A., Hackel, L. M., & Trope, Y. (2020). Person-centered cognition: The presence of people in a visual scene promotes relational reasoning. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 90, 104009.

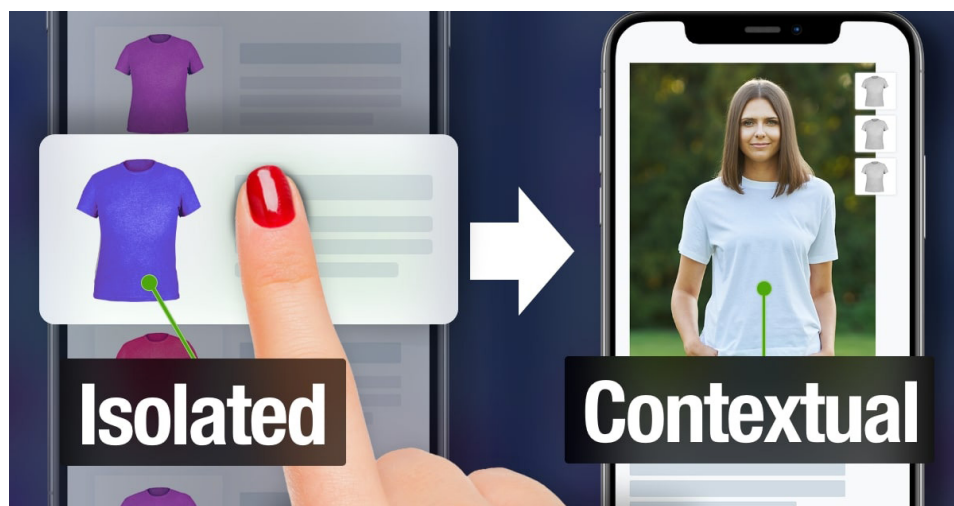
Kim, J. (2017). The ownership distance effect: the impact of traces left by previous owners on the evaluation of used goods. *Marketing Letters*, 28, 591-605.

Lu, Z. Y., Jung, S., & Peck, J. (2023). It Looks Like "Theirs": When and Why Human Presence in the Photo Lowers Viewers' Liking and Preference for an Experience Venue.

Poor, M., Duhachek, A., & Krishnan, H. S. (2013). How images of other consumers influence subsequent taste perceptions. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(6), 124-139.

Poirier, S. M., Cosby, S., Sénécal, S., Coursaris, C. K., Fredette, M., & Léger, P. M. (2024). The impact of social presence cues in social media product photos on consumers' purchase intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, 185, 114932.





SHOW AN ISOLATED PRODUCT BEFORE CONTEXTUAL IMAGERY

Isolated photos help customers choose. Contextual photos help them buy.

Should product images be *isolated* or *contextual*?

In other words, should they be depicted with an empty background? Or realistic scenario?

Show both. Isolated *then* contextual.

Customers prefer this sequence (Lee et al., 2024).

WHY IT WORKS

Customers buy in two stages:

1. **Do I want to *evaluate*?** While browsing a catalog, customers are choosing which products they want to assess in more detail. By showing the product—and *only* the product—isolated photos ease this decision by helping them compare products to each other.
2. **Do I want to *buy*?** Once customers visit a product, contextual photos help them imagine using this product.

For example, researchers tested images of clothing: *isolated vs. headless vs. human*:

(see fig 1)

Customers chose an isolated shirt when asked to indicate their *preference*.

But they chose a shirt with a human model when asked to indicate their *buying intention* (Bagatini et al., 2023).

Show isolated photos in early stages, yet contextual photos in later stages.

CAVEAT

→ **Show Humans When Necessary.** Human models can improve product assessments in clothing, jewelry, and other appearance-related categories. But if you don't need these quality assessments, remove humans from your images because they can reduce conver-

sions. It feels like *their* product, not *my* product (Lu et al., 2023).

Bagatini, F. Z., Rech, E., Pacheco, N. A., & Nicolao, L. (2023). Can you imagine yourself wearing this product? Embodied mental simulation and attractiveness in e-commerce product pictures. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 17(3), 470-490.

Lee, J. E., Shin, E., & Kincade, D. H. (2024). Presentation-order effect of product images on consumers' mental imagery processing and purchase intentions. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.

Lu, Z. Y., Jung, S., & Peck, J. (2023). It Looks Like "Theirs": When and Why Human Presence in the Photo Lowers Viewers' Liking and Preference for an Experience Venue.



1



SHOW CONTEXTUAL IMAGES TO FEMALE CUSTOMERS

Men prefer isolated backgrounds, whereas women prefer realistic backgrounds.

Men and women process information differently:

...females' processing often entails substantial, detailed elaboration of message content...males' processing is more likely to be driven by overall message themes (Meyers-Levy, & Maheswaran, 1991, p. 68)

Women prefer images that show more context.

Researchers tested this idea by showing a pair of jeans in two styles: (a) plain white background, or (b) a model wearing the jeans outside. Women preferred

the contextual image, whereas men were unaffected (González, Meyer, & Toldos, 2021).

And the effect was additive: *More* context triggered *more* sales.

Follow-up studies suggested that men slightly prefer isolated backgrounds, but the effect was weaker.

González, E. M., Meyer, J. H., & Toldos, M. P. (2021). What women want? How contextual product displays influence women's online shopping behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 123, 625-641.

Lu, Z. Y., Jung, S., & Peck, J. (2023). It Looks Like "Theirs": When and Why Human Presence in the Photo Lowers Viewers' Liking and Preference for an Experience Venue.

Meyers-Levy, J., & Maheswaran, D. (1991). Exploring differences in males' and females' processing strategies. *Journal of consumer research*, 18(1), 63-70.



HELP CUSTOMERS IMAGINE TOUCHING THE PRODUCT

Customers simulate this interaction.

Product touch is persuasive.

Here are solutions that can help you simulate this touch in digital interfaces.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Orient Graspable Cues Toward the Right.** Most people are right-handed, so interactions seem easier with the right hand. Mugs were preferred with handles on the right (Elder & Krishna, 2012).

(see fig 1)

→ **Place Small Objects Next to Flat Products.** Wall decorations were preferred with a small glass on the right because it eased the difficult graspability of these flat products (Maille et al., 2020; Leng et al., 2022).

(see fig 2)

→ **Show 3D Visuals of Digital Products.** These depictions also seem more valuable (Atasoy & Morewedge, 2018).

(see fig 3)

→ **Show Close-Up Photos of a Product Touch.** Customers simulate the ownership of these hands, as if *they* are touching the product: "observing a hand engaging in touch can increase the perception that the virtual hand is actually the consumer's own hand... [it] increases the psychological ownership of the product" (Luangrath et al., 2022, p. 306-307).

(see fig 4)

Argo, J. J., Dahl, D. W., & Morales, A. C. (2006). Consumer contamination: How consumers react to products touched by others. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(2), 81-94.

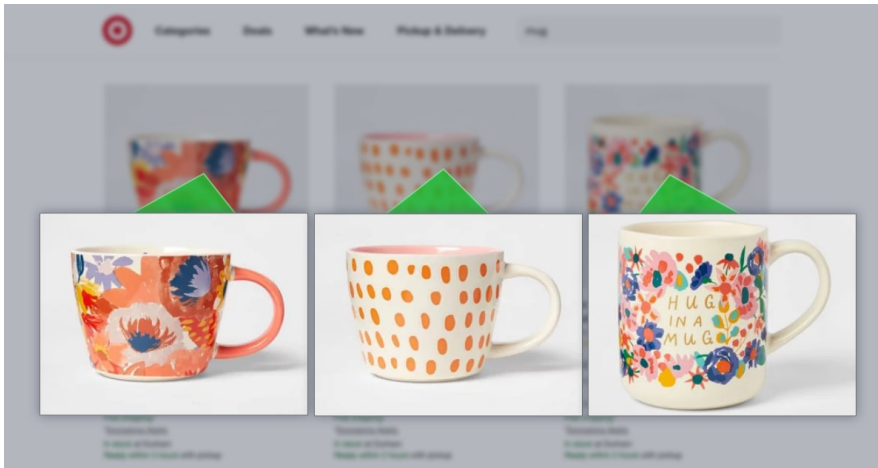
Atasoy, O., & Morewedge, C. K. (2018). Digital goods are valued less than physical goods. *Journal of consumer research*, 44(6), 1343-1357.

Elder, R. S., & Krishna, A. (2012). The "visual depiction effect" in advertising: Facilitating embodied mental simulation through product orientation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(6), 988-1003.

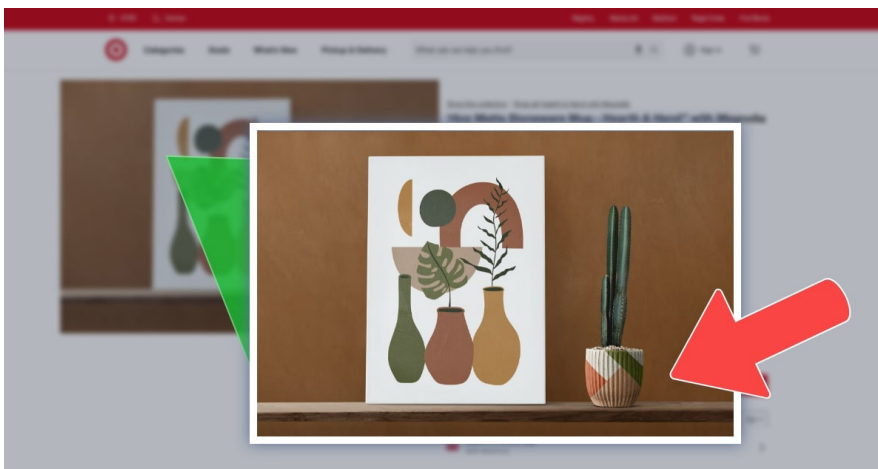
Leng, X., Zhou, X., Wang, S., & Xiang, Y. (2022). Can visual language convey tactile experience? A study of the tactile compensation effect of visual language for online products. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1034872.

Luangrath, A. W., Peck, J., Hedgcock, W., & Xu, Y. (2022). Observing product touch: The vicarious haptic effect in digital marketing and virtual reality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 59(2), 306-326.

Maille, V., Morrin, M., & Reynolds-McInay, R. (2020). On the other hand...: Enhancing promotional effectiveness with haptic cues. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(1), 100-117.



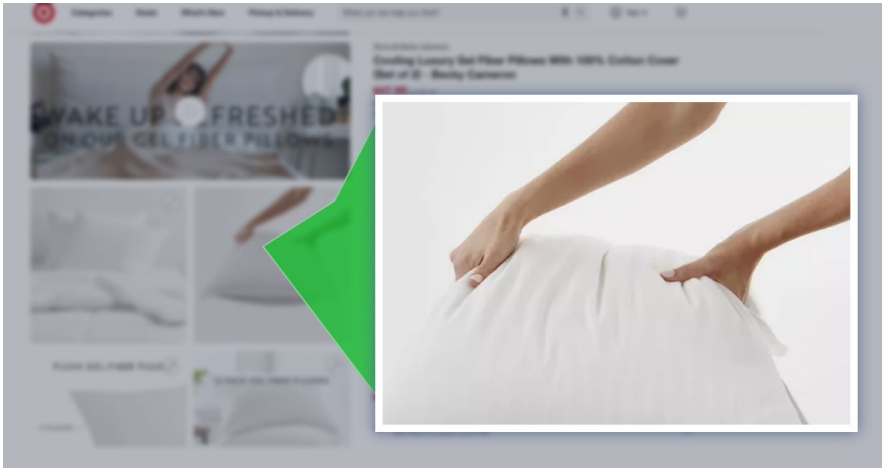
1



2



3



4



IN 1 DAY



IN 100 DAYS

REDUCE COLOR FOR DISTANT EVENTS

Customers prefer grayscale images for future purchases because they imagine these events with less color.

Should your images be color or grayscale?

It depends on *psychological distance* (Lee et al., 2017).

Researchers manipulated the start date of a charity event:

- *Grayscale* ads converted better when it was occurring *in a few years*.
- *Color* ads converted better when it was occurring *in a few days*.

And they replicated this effect with the launch date of a hoverboard.

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Alignment With Mental Imagery.** We visualize future events in grayscale. Researchers asked people to fill a blank drawing of a housewarming party with color—if this party was occurring in five years, people

used more variations of grey because their mental imagery was less colorful (Lee et al., 2017). And fMRI studies confirmed this effect (Stillman et al., 2020).

(see fig 1)

REDUCE SATURATION FOR

→ **Future Purchases.** Like a concert in a few months (vs. few days).

→ **Distant Receivers.** Are customers buying gifts? Intensify color for close recipients like friends or family, and desaturate color for distant recipients like colleagues.

→ **Luxury Brands.** Customers imagine luxury brands with more psychological distance, so they prefer these brands with more spatial distance—like standing further away. Same with grayscale images: A Tiffany watch seemed more luxurious in black-and-white because it felt further away (Wang et al., 2022; Chu et al., 2021).

STRONGER FOR

→ **Active Imagination.** This effect didn't manifest in brain patterns during passive viewing. It only happened when customers actively imagined these events (Stillman et al., 2020).

Chu, X. Y., Chang, C. T., & Lee, A. Y. (2021). Values created from far and near: Influence of spatial distance on brand evaluation. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(6), 162-175.

Lee, H., Fujita, K., Deng, X., & Unnava, H. R. (2017). The role of temporal distance on the color of future-directed imagery: A construal-level perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(5), 707-725.

Stillman, P., Lee, H., Deng, X., Unnava, H. R., & Fujita, K. (2020). Examining consumers' sensory experiences with color: A consumer neuroscience approach. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(7), 995-1007.

Wang, Y., Wang, T., Mu, W., & Sun, Y. (2022). What is the glamor of black- and- white? The effect of color design on evaluations of luxury brand ads. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 21(5), 973-986.





ORGANIZE COLLAGES FOR NEW CUSTOMERS

New customers prefer "untouched" collages because they haven't interacted with this content yet.

Do you show a collage of images?

Should it be *clean* or *messy*?

It depends:

- New customers prefer organized collages.
- Existing customers prefer messy collages.

WHY IT WORKS

In physics, "entropy" is the amount of disorder.

Over time, entropy only increases. Stephen Hawking said:

You may see a cup of tea fall off a table and break into pieces on the floor ... but you will never see the cup gather itself back together and jump back on the table (A Brief History of Time).

This law of entropy has been drilled into your brain: You prefer ads that depict the future in a pristine and

untouched condition because your brain is conceptualizing the future with this cleanliness (Biliciler et al., 2022).

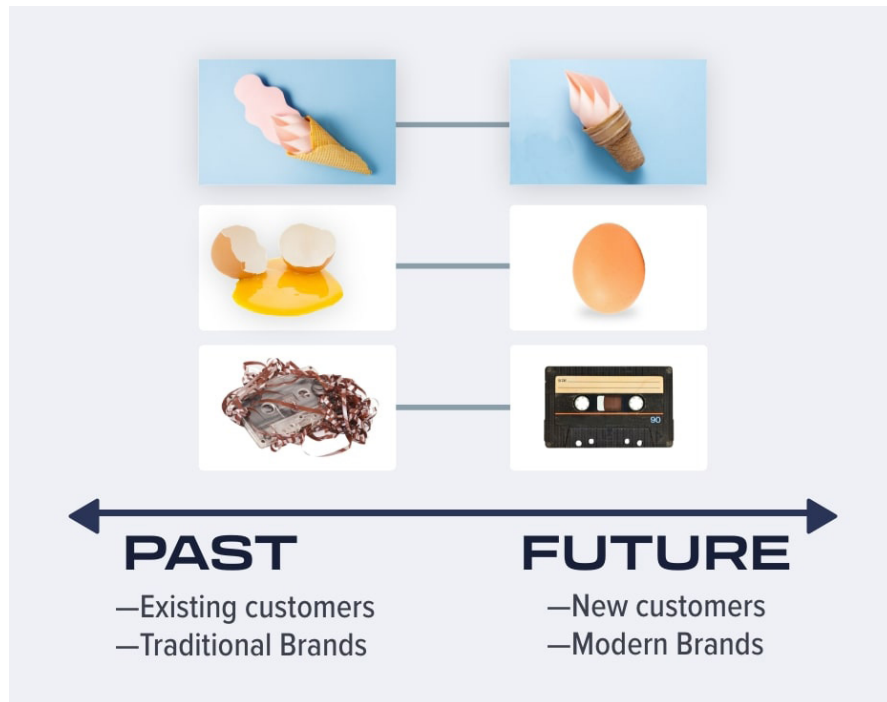
HOW TO APPLY

→ **Adapt Collages.** Consider an email to subscribers. New subscribers haven't "touched" your content yet. An organized collage of your content should perform better in the header of a confirmation or welcome email because they are conceptualizing your content in a pristine condition. However, a messy collage should perform better in the header of a regular campaign or remarketing ad after these people have interacted with your content.

→ **Insert Any Entropy.** It's not just collages. An ad for modern kitchen tools converted better with a fully intact egg, whereas an ad for traditional cooking tools converted better with a broken egg:

(see fig 1)

Biliciler, G., Raghunathan, R., & Ward, A. F. (2022). Consumers as naive physicists: how visual entropy cues shift temporal focus and influence product evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(6), 1010-1031.





ROUND PRODUCTS SEEM FRIENDLY

Tall and skinny products seem rational, while round products seem friendly and emotionally gratifying.

What's the best shape for your product?

It depends. Do customers want:

- ...a rational solution?
- ...an enjoyable experience?

Each mindset prefers a different shape.

WHY: STEREOTYPE CONFLATION

We confuse products with people.

In one study, people were asked to give products (e.g., lamps, perfumes) to other people.

Interestingly, they chose round products for heavier recipients because their brain confused this shared roundness (Vallen et al., 2019).

Products seem humanlike. And naturally, they inherit traits from people they resemble.

Like what? Well, there's a stereotype model *warmth-competence* on which we judge people, including different body weights:

- Heavy people seem friendly (e.g., jolly stereotype).
- Tall and skinny people seem competent.

Therefore, products inherit these traits when they resemble these body shapes (Shi, Mai, & Mo, 2023).

For practicality, let's refer to these traits as *emotional* and *rational*.

EXAMPLE: SHAMPOO

Launching a shampoo brand?

Customers preferred:

- Round bottles with emotional copy (e.g., soothing, moist, etc.)
- Skinny bottles with rational copy (e.g., remove dandruff, etc.)

I searched for shampoos on Target, and most listings seemed consistent.

- Round bottles were emotional (e.g., *rich* moisture)
- Skinny bottles were purposeful (e.g., *daily* moisture).

(see fig 1)

RATIONAL IS ANGULAR

Did you notice the skinny shampoo was also rectangular?

In daily conversations, we describe rationality in terms of angularity:

- Smart people are "sharp"
- Useful statements "make a point"
- Clever people "cut through" BS

Coincidence? Maybe.

But sensory metaphors often emerge in language because they resemble the way in which our brain is conceptualizing these abstract ideas.

So I would group tall, skinny, *and* angular in the same bucket.

TAKEAWAYS

→ **Create Separate Brands.** Consider launching round products for emotional customers, yet tall products for rational customers. Or a balanced version if you need both segments.

→ **Also Happens With Prices.** Rational products perform better with *sharp* prices (e.g., \$39.57), while emotional products perform better with *round* prices (e.g., \$40; Wadhwa & Zhang, 2015). Though another study failed to replicate it (Harms, Genau, Meschede, & Beauducel, 2018).

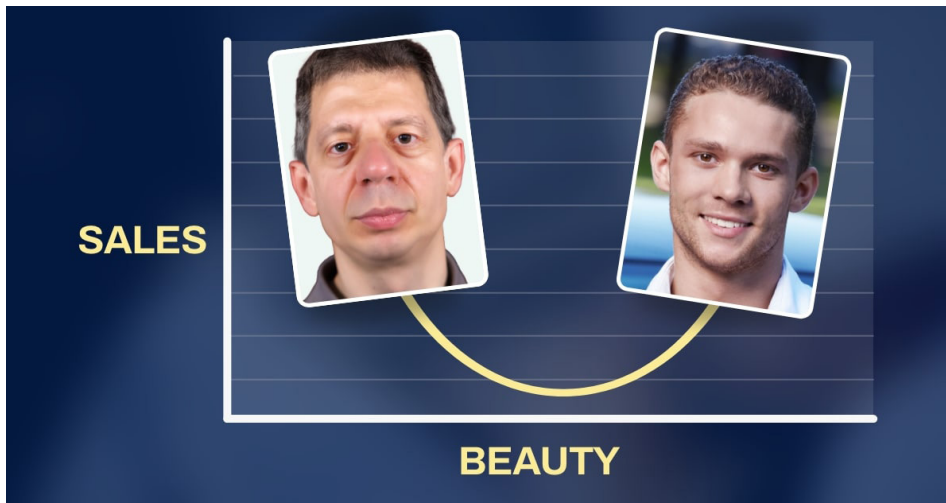
Vallen, B., Sridhar, K., Rubin, D., Ilyuk, V., Block, L. G., & Argo, J. J. (2019). Shape- and trait- congruency: Using appearance- based cues as a basis for product recommendations. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 29(2), 271-284.

Shi, B., Mai, Y., & Mo, M. (2023). Chubby or thin? Investigation of (in) congruity between product body shapes and internal warmth/competence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 29(1), 95.

Wadhwa, M., & Zhang, K. (2015). This number just feels right: The impact of roundedness of price numbers on product evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(5), 1172-1185.

Harms, C., Genau, H. A., Meschede, C., & Beauducel, A. (2018). Does it actually feel right? A replication attempt of the rounded price effect. *Royal Society open science*, 5(4), 171127.





UGLY FACES INCREASE SALES

Customers believe that unattractive people are more competent.

Most people are familiar with the *beauty bias*.

Beautiful people seem credible, honest, and trustworthy. Something "feels good" about them, and we attribute this impression to their personality.

So, what about ugly faces—wouldn't they seem inferior? Actually, no.

Across 10k+ Airbnb listings, hosts sold more occupancies when their photo was (a) visible, (b) high-quality, and (c) smiling. But most interesting, sales increased for beautiful *and* ugly faces (Peng, Cui, Chung, & Zheng, 2020).

Similar effects happened in 5miles, a peer-to-peer marketplace.

(see fig 1)

In both platforms, average-looking people sold the least.

But it depends on the product. Beautiful sellers were most effective for visual products (e.g., bags), while ugly sellers were most effective for technical products (e.g., electronics).

What's causing these effects? My guesses:

→ **Stereotypes.** Beauty and intelligence seem mutually exclusive (e.g., dumb blonde). If beauty is low, we allocate these credits to a "competence" category. Ugliness premiums might disappear when they're self-inflicted (e.g., sloppiness) because they would no longer boost competence.

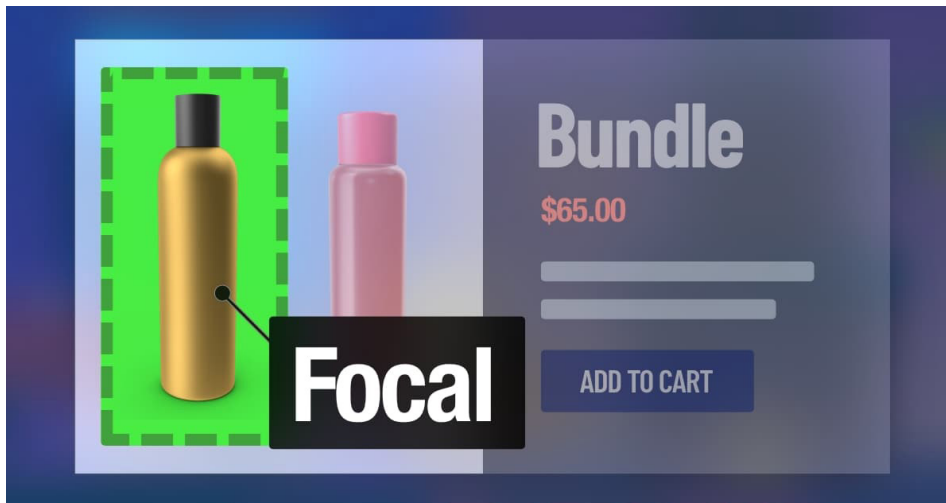
→ **Symbolic Confusion.** Want beautiful products? You prefer beautiful sellers because you confuse this facial beauty for the product. Same with ugly sellers. Need a complex service? Your brain will be seeking a complex and disfluent stimulus. In one study, customers who evaluated a complex service preferred a font that was difficult to read because of this matching complexity (Thompson & Ince, 2013). If you need a complex service, an ugly face matches this trait.

Peng, L., Cui, G., Chung, Y., & Zheng, W. (2020). The faces of success: Beauty and ugliness premiums in e-commerce platforms. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(4), 67-85.

Thompson, D. V., & Ince, E. C. (2013). When disfluency signals competence: The effect of processing difficulty on perceptions of service agents. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(2), 228-240.



1



DISTINGUISH THE FOCAL ITEM IN BUNDLE IMAGES

If you read from left to right, you evaluate other stimuli in this pattern.

Bundled items are valued differently.

Push attention toward whichever item is strongest.

For example, customers prefer focal items on the left because they view this location first (Mittelman & Andrade, 2017).

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Reading Directionality.** Customers imagine themselves consuming each item. If they read from left to right, they start imagining the leftmost item. Hmm, not

appealing? They feel lackluster emotions, discouraging them from evaluating the subsequent items.

(see fig 1)

STRONGER FOR

→ **2 Items.** I suspect the position effect is weaker with 3+ items because of the *central fixation bias* (i.e., people would view the middle option first).

→ **Variety Bundles.** Like size, flavor, color, etc. Customers fixate on the first item they see because they're not looking for a particular item.

Mittelman, M., & Andrade, E. B. (2017). Product order affects consumer preferences for variety bundles. *European Journal of Marketing*, 51(5/6), 869-884.

If you read from left to right...

1

Frequently bought together



+



+



Total price: **\$31.38**

Add all three

...you focus on leftmost items

nick.kolenda



CHOOSE THE BEST VERTICAL ANGLE FOR PRODUCT IMAGES

Upward angles look effective, luxurious, and authoritative. Downward angles look easy, portable, and sustainable.

What's the optimal angle for product images?

It depends. Do customers want:

- ...a powerful product?
- ...to *feel* powerful?

Consider movies.

Upward angles convey power.

Downward angles convey a *lack* of power.

(see fig 1)

Products seem powerful with upward angles. Even mundane products like white rice (Van Rompay et al., 2012).

So upward angles must be better, right?

Not necessarily. Sometimes you can boost sales by

depicting products in a weaker light because it shifts power toward the customer.

For example, customers prefer downward angles of anthropomorphic products because it feels like they're looking down at this entity from a high location, which makes them feel dominant over it (Xuan, Chen, Lin, & Huang, 2023).

So which angles are better for which products?

Downward Angles:

- **Easy to Use.** Products will seem easier to control (e.g., self-assembly)
- **Portable.** Products will seem lighter or smaller (e.g., travel kits)
- **Sustainable.** Products will seem soft or natural (e.g., cleaning solution)

Upward Angles:

- **Effective.** Products will seem powerful (e.g., lotion)

- **Luxury.** Products will seem high status (e.g., handbag)
- **Experts.** Products (or people) will seem authoritative (e.g., influencer)

Consider these listings for a portable washing machine.

(see fig 2)

Most customers want *portability*.

In the downward angle, customers feel like they're looking down at the machine. So it feels smaller (and thus portable). Exactly what their brain is seeking.

Customers who want a *powerful* machine would be drawn toward the machine with an upward angle because their brain is monitoring for traits that convey power.

WHY IT WORKS

As children, we look up at adults who exert power over us.

Two concepts—UP and POWER—repeatedly fired

together in our brain, binding these two ideas. Today, activating one concept will activate the other (see The Tangled Mind).

And these ideas are reinforced every day. Look *down*. You'll probably see objects that you can grasp, manipulate, and control.

OTHER TAKEAWAYS

→ **Works With Any Location.** It occurs with products on a low or high shelf. Or the location on a webpage.

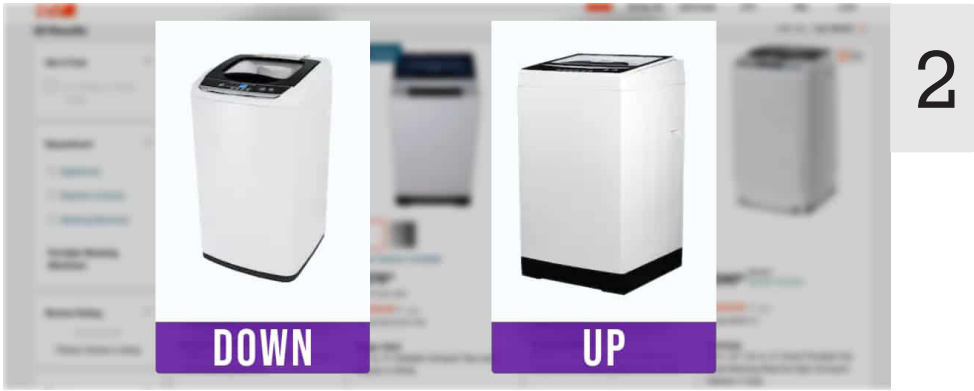
→ **Applies to People.** Subjects look better when photographed from above, but this angle might sacrifice their perceived authority and expertise.

→ **Use *Slight Upward Angles*.** Don't overdo it. Products are typically viewed from above, so downward angles will be more familiar. Keep any angles within the confines of a typical viewpoint.

Xuan, C., Chen, R., Lin, S., & Huang, H. (2023). Looking Up or Down? The Effects of Camera Angle on Evaluations of Anthropomorphized Products in Advertisements. *Journal of Advertising*, 1-19.

Van Rompay, T. J., De Vries, P. W., Bontekoe, F., & Tanja- Dijkstra, K. (2012). Embodied product perception: Effects of verticality cues in advertising and packaging design on consumer impressions... *Psychology & Marketing*, 29(12), 919-928.





**NOW****FUTURE**

PAIR ZOOM LEVELS WITH TIME LENGTHS

Customers prefer zoomed-in images for immediate actions because they imagine these actions with a close proximity.

What's the best zoom level for images?

It depends.

In the sensory world, objects get bigger as they approach us.

Would this NEARBY = BIG relationship also happen with time? For example, do we imagine future events to be bigger as they approach us?

Researchers tested this question by adjusting zoom levels for products that varied by time, such as discount length (Ho et al., 2024).

Sure enough, customers preferred:

→ ...zoomed-in images for short durations (e.g., 30 min).

→ ...zoomed-out images for long durations (e.g., 8 days).

(see fig 1)

WHY IT WORKS

Humans learn abstract concepts (e.g., time) by injecting them with tangible elements from the sensory world (e.g., spatial distance).

We say that a future event is "far" and "distant" because our brain is using spatial distance to breathe life into this intangible idea of time.

Consequently, time inherits the traits of spatial distance: Since objects get bigger as they approach us, future events get bigger as they approach us.

Customers prefer images that match these subconscious portrayals because something "feels right." And they blame the content inside these images.

HOW TO APPLY

Use distant zooms for:

→ **Preorders** - New phone launching next month

- **Long Promos** - Discount that expires in 5+ days
- **Future Events** - Conference or workshop next month
- **Luxury Brands** - Handbag that looks distant and unattainable
- **Broad Thinkers** - Leaders, creatives, strategists

Use close zooms for:

- **Urgent Frames** - Only 2 items in stock
- **Food Menus** - Dine-in or fast delivery
- **Close Events** - Local workshop or immediate webinar
- **Haptic Products** - A pillow which involves close physical touch
- **Concrete Thinkers** - Scientists, engineers, analysts

You should also consider the *type* of image.

For example, depict a concert based on distance:

- **Distant Concert**: Show the *outcome* (e.g., venue with attendees).
- **Approaching Concert**: Show the *process* (e.g., physical tickets).

CAVEATS

- **Use Various Zooms and Framing**. Emphasize whichever image is most relevant based on distance,

and if possible, include alternative images nearby to handle different mindsets.

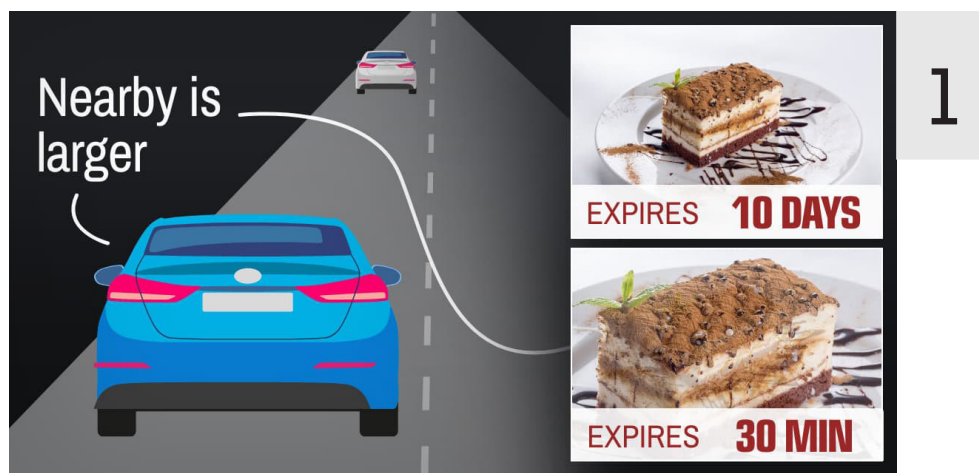
RELATED APPLICATIONS

- **Word or Google Docs**. Use zoom levels in documents to shift mindsets and boost productivity. Zoom out for broad tasks (e.g., outlining, brainstorming), and zoom in for concrete tasks (e.g., editing, proofreading).
- **Menu Links**. Want people to explore your app or website? Try enlarging navigation links so these destinations seem closer.
- **Copy**. Customers seek certain information depending on their buying stage. Early stages should convey *desirability* (e.g., overall style), while later stages should convey *feasibility* (e.g., purchase steps).
- **Color**. Grayscale images boost conversions for distant events because customers are imagining these events with less color (Lee et al., 2017).

(see fig 2)

Ho, C. K., Kuan, K., Liang, S., & Ke, W. (2024). Effects of temporal features and product image zooming in online time scarcity deals: A construal fit account. *Information & Management*, 61(7), 104019.

Lee, H., Fujita, K., Deng, X., & Unnava, H. R. (2017). The role of temporal distance on the color of future-directed imagery: A construal-level perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(5), 707-725.



BEST IMAGES?

2

NOW

URGENCY
FOOD MENUS
CLOSE EVENTS
HAPTIC ITEMS
CONCRETE TASKS



PROCESS



ZOOMED IN



COLOR



FEASIBILITY

DISTANT

PREORDERS
LONG PROMOS
FUTURE EVENTS
LUXURY BRANDS
BROAD TASKS



OUTCOME



ZOOMED OUT



GRAYSCALE



DESIRABILITY

KOLENDA.IO



SHOW THE ANATOMICAL LAYERS OF YOUR PRODUCT

Layered images boost the expected performance of products.

Show the inside layers of your product.

Across multiple studies, these images boosted click-through rates and willingness to pay (Kang et al., 2024).

Examples:

(see fig 1)

Why do they work?

Customers imagine these layers merging into a unit, which increases their confidence in the performance of the product. It's called *simulated assemblage*.

But layers aren't enough. You also need space between them:

(see fig 2)

You need spacing so that viewers can imagine the convergence.

REQUIREMENTS

→ **Rational Products.** Layered images boost *performance*, so your product needs a functional purpose that can benefit from this enhancement. A wireless speaker seemed *functionality* superior with layered images, but not *aesthetically* superior (Kang et al., 2024).

STRONGER FOR

→ **Concrete Thinkers.** A separate study validated the effect and showed that it's stronger for customers who are focused on details (Cheng & Zhang, 2023).

Cheng, P., & Zhang, C. (2023). Show me insides: Investigating the influences of product exploded view on consumers' mental imagery, comprehension, attitude, and purchase intention. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 70, 103168.

Kang, S. Y., Kim, J., & Lakshmanan, A. (2024). Anatomical Depiction: How Showing a Product's Inner Structure Shapes Product Valuations. *Journal of Marketing*, 0(0).

3

REVIEWS





SHOW RATINGS IN A VISUAL FORMAT

Visual ratings are more persuasive because of anchoring and momentum.

How should you display ratings?

Short answer:

- Don't show *number* ratings (e.g., 3.5/5).
- Show *visual* ratings (e.g., 3.5 stars).

Visual ratings boost purchases because they seem higher (Abell, Morgan, & Romero, 2024).

Why? Because of *left-digit anchoring*: A 3.8 rating feels like 3.0 because customers ignore the rightmost digits.

But I'd also blame *momentum*.

For example, participants guessed where a moving box disappeared, and they consistently guessed locations that were further ahead (Hubbard, 2005).

(see fig 1)

We displace forward motion.

You'll find this effect with *any* motion. Even abstract motion.

Imagine a Top 10 ranking.

Customers prefer items that ascend from 6th to 4th (vs. descend from 2nd to 4th). Despite the same rank—4th place—items *feel* closer to 1st place if they're moving toward that direction (Pettit, Sivanathan, Gladstone, & Marr, 2013).

Same with star ratings. Customers might imagine forward motion of these visual ratings, so they feel even higher.

But if that's true, then star ratings might be suboptimal too.

Star ratings are discrete icons, so there's less motion.

Perhaps *continuous* ratings feel highest:

(see fig 2)

Therefore, try continuous ratings when:

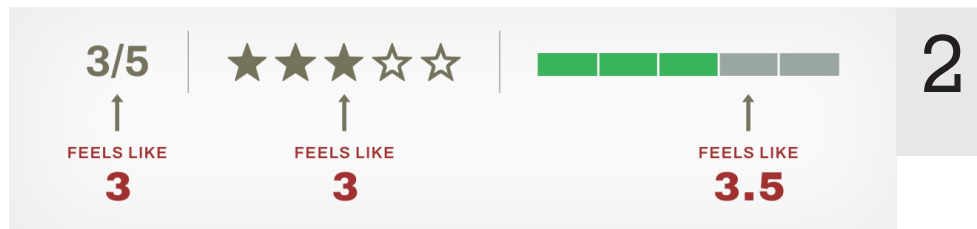
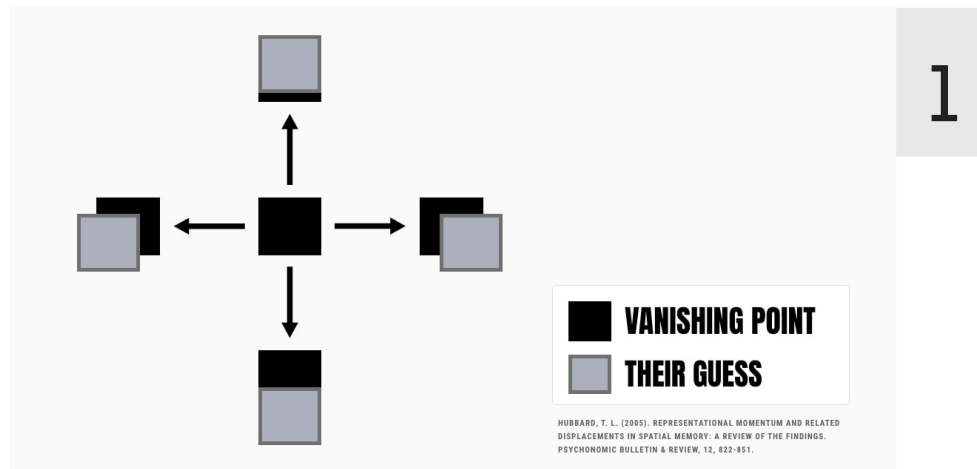
- Ratings are important

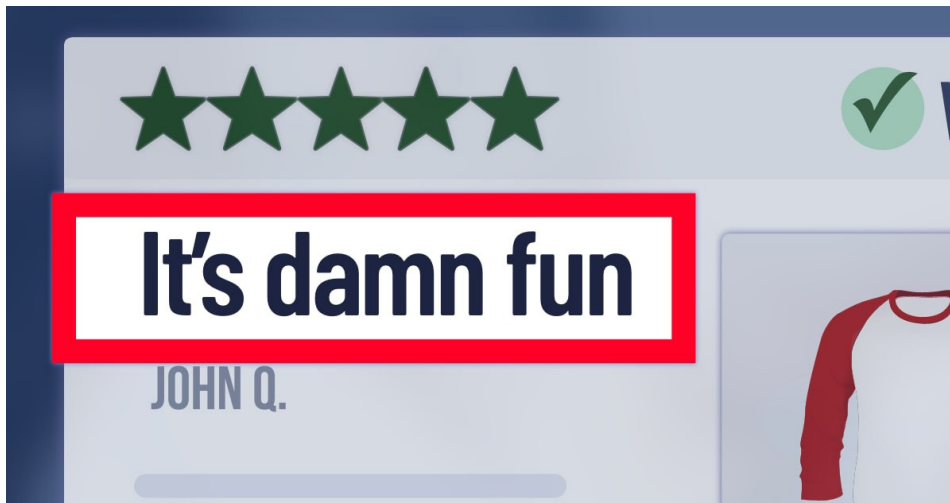
→ You display multiple ratings (e.g., price, quality, service)

Abell, A., Morgan, C., & Romero, M. (2024). EXPRESS: The Power of a Star Rating: Differential Effects of Customer Rating Formats on Magnitude Perceptions and Consumer Reactions. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 00222437241240694.

Hubbard, T. L. (2005). Representational momentum and related displacements in spatial memory: A review of the findings. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 12, 822-851.

Pettit, N. C., Sivanathan, N., Gladstone, E., & Marr, J. C. (2013). Rising stars and sinking ships: Consequences of status momentum. *Psychological science*, 24(8), 1579-1584.





REVIEWS WITH SWEARS ARE MORE PERSUASIVE

Profanity communicates stronger feelings about products.

Based on 300,000 customer reviews, profanity is damn persuasive: Reviews with profanity received more helpful votes (Lafreniere, Moore, & Fisher, 2022).

Why?

→ **Stronger Meaning.** *Damn* communicates more intensity than *very*.

→ **Reviewer is Passionate.** Taboo words are socially risky, so the reviewer seems more passionate about their feelings by taking this risk.

Practical ideas:

1. ALLOW PROFANITY

Some websites (e.g., Amazon, TripAdvisor) don't allow profanity, but research shows that it could be helpful.

2. TELL USERS IF YOU CENSOR REVIEWS

Otherwise, they might believe that a censored statement (e.g., d*mn) was written by the reviewer, which weakens the emotion.

3. CENSOR WITH MULTIPLE ASTERISKS

If you need to censor, use multiple asterisks (e.g., holy s***) to grab more attention than a single asterisk (e.g., holy sh*t).

Lafreniere, K. C., Moore, S. G., & Fisher, R. J. (2022). The power of profanity: The meaning and impact of swear words in word of mouth. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 59(5), 908-925.



Not good.

Response from Owner

Sorry to hear that :(

RESPOND TO NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Only 4 percent of businesses respond to negative reviews, yet these responses boost sales.

Responding to negative reviews can help in various ways.

- Hotel bookings increased by 60% (Ye, Gu, Chen, & Law, 2008)
- Ratings increased 20% (McIlroy, Shang, Ali, & Hassan, 2015)
- Review volume increased by 17% (Xie et al., 2016)

Yet less than 4 percent of businesses respond to

negative reviews (Xie et al., 2016). That gives you an opportunity to stand out.

McIlroy, S., Shang, W., Ali, N., & Hassan, A. E. (2015). Is it worth responding to reviews? studying the top free apps in google play. *IEEE Software*, 34(3), 64-71.

Xie, K. L., Zhang, Z., Zhang, Z., Singh, A., & Lee, S. K. (2016). Effects of managerial response on consumer eWOM and hotel performance: Evidence from TripAdvisor. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.

Ye, Q., Gu, B., Chen, W., & Law, R. (2008). Measuring the value of managerial responses to online reviews-A natural experiment of two online travel agencies.



INSERT PERSUASIVE CONTENT INTO REVIEWS

Reviews are more persuasive when they show the reviewer's name, verification status, and product imagery.

What should you include in customer reviews? Here are some tips:

- **Detect and Fix Typos.** Reviews are less persuasive with spelling or grammar errors (Schindler & Bickart, 2012).
- **Monitor Expletives.** Censor your f**king reviews. C'mon now. You'll look more professional. Plus, angry reviews are less helpful (Lee & Koo, 2012).
- **Reward Users Who Add Media.** Customers prefer reviews with images (Cheng & Ho, 2015) or video (Xu, Chen, Wu, & Santhanam, 2012).
- **Display Real Names.** Real names (e.g., Joe S.) are more persuasive than usernames (e.g., jschmo; Liu & Park, 2015).
- **Show Proof of Consumption.** Show reviews from "verified" purchasers (Bjering, Havro, & Moen, 2015). Or incentivize customers to upload selfies (Yang, Chen, & Tan, 2014).
- **Review Multiple Dimensions.** Ask users to rate the price, quality, aesthetics, and any other relevant dimensions (Hong, Chen, & Hitt, 2012).

Bjering, E., Havro, L. J., & Moen, Ø. (2015). An empirical investigation of self-selection bias and factors influencing review helpfulness. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 10(7), 16.

Cheng, Y. H., & Ho, H. Y. (2015). Social influence's impact on reader perceptions of online reviews. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(4), 883-887.

Hong, Y., Chen, P. Y., & Hitt, L. M. (2012). Measuring product type with dynamics of online product review variance. In *Implications for Research and Practice, Proceedings of the 33rd International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS)*, Orlando, FL.

Lee, K. T., & Koo, D. M. (2012). Effects of attribute and valence of e-WOM on message adoption: Moderating roles of subjective knowledge and regulatory focus. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1974-1984.

Liu, Z., & Park, S. (2015). What makes a useful online review? Implication for travel product websites. *Tourism management*, 47, 140-151.

Schindler, R. M., & Bickart, B. (2012). Perceived helpfulness of online consumer reviews: The role of message content and style. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 11(3), 234-243.

Xu, P., Chen, L., Wu, L., & Santhanam, R. (2012). Visual Presentation Modes in Online Product Reviews and Their Effects on Consumer Responses.

Yang, L., Chen, J., & Tan, B. C. (2014). Peer in the Picture: an Explorative Study of Online Pictorial Reviews.



SHOW IMPERFECT REVIEWS

Imperfect ratings are more persuasive.

Perfect ratings are overrated—literally.

Customers prefer moderately high ratings (4 to 4.5 stars; Maslowska et al., 2017). And they prefer reviews with benefits *and* drawbacks (Doh & Hwang, 2009).

...providing consumers with positive information followed by a minor piece of negative information appears to enhance their overall evaluations of a target (Ein-Gar et al., 2012, p. 855.)

WHY THEY WORK

→ **More Credible.** Reviews seem fake if they're overly positive (Jensen et al., 2013; Maslowska et al., 2017).

→ **More Comparable.** The number 0 is hard to evaluate because any number is infinitely larger—

for example, 0g of fat can seem larger than 1g of fat (Palmeira, 2011). Same with perfect 5-star ratings: You prefer 4.9 because this slight imperfection creates a ratio in which a fraction of negativity is dwarfed by enormous positivity.

Doh, S. J., & Hwang, J. S. (2009). How consumers evaluate eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) messages. *Cyberpsychology & behavior*, 12(2), 193-197.

Ein-Gar, D., Shiv, B., & Tormala, Z. L. (2012). When blemishing leads to blossoming: The positive effect of negative information. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(5), 846-859.

Jensen, M. L., Averbeck, J. M., Zhang, Z., & Wright, K. B. (2013). Credibility of anonymous online product reviews: A language expectancy perspective. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 30(1), 293-324.

Maslowska, E., Malthouse, E. C., & Bernritter, S. F. (2017). Too good to be true: the role of online reviews' features in probability to buy. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(1), 142-163.

Palmeira, M. M. (2011). The zero-comparison effect. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 16-26.

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