



The Psychology of Touch:

Touchscreens and the Saavy Marketer

Touchscreens are omnipresent in our lives these days, and with good reason. There is an overwhelming amount of research being done on the effects of touch in marketing, as well as its close cousin, haptic feedback.

According to JCDecaux, “Touch is an instinctual action so unsurprisingly it prompts an emotional reaction.” The more emotions are involved, especially when it comes to purchasing behaviors, the more impulsive buyers tend to be, which is good business!

With that in mind, let’s explore the psychology behind touch as it relates to marketing, and what it ultimately means for your business and the future of economics.

Interactivity in the online marketplace is a relatively new phenomenon, but as the technology grows, more and more businesses are adopting it. Is touch just the latest trend? Luckily, there is a lot of research to back up interaction and specifically physical interaction with digital properties. Retailers, in particular, dealing with flagging sales and closing physical stores, have looked to touch to recent years to influence purchase decisions in the digital environment. According to a study done by several top universities in the UK, the ability to physically manipulate items on a screen led to greater user engagement across the board.



Shoogleit multi-gesture interface on touch screen (Orzechowski et al, 2012).

Another study found that using touch for ordering food leads to greater purchases of what is called “hedonic” food, or more pleasurable or luxurious over necessity. This is particularly good news for businesses in non-essential categories, which traditionally have taken a hit when the economy is in a downturn. Incorporating touch-screen displays into a high end retail store, like Rebecca Minkoff has done in their flagship store, can lead to greater in-store engagement, time spent in store, and ultimately higher dollar amounts purchased.



Rebecca Minkoff Flagship store touch screen (courtesy of WSJ.com)

The psychology behind these studies, for as new as this technology is, is surprisingly older-fashioned. Psychological principles like the [endowment effect](#), [curiosity](#), and the [IKEA effect](#) all come into play with touch-enabled marketing. Touching and interacting physically with a product (either on-screen or off) convinces the human mind that they are invested in that product. They may value it more highly, or feel more compelled to buy.

The best news for businesses is that consumers want to have touch-enabled experiences. A [recent survey of 1,000 consumers](#) revealed that interactivity leads to greater engagement, more brand loyalty, and a higher open and click through rate when used in conjunction with regular email. Customers are asking for these experiences, and the brands that give them are more likely to be remembered and purchased from.

Touch and the importance it plays in purchase decisions cannot be overestimated. Using touch with your products forms an emotional bond with your consumer that lasts long beyond the initial interaction. Forming emotional connections with your audience can impact loyalty, brand recognition and recall, and more.