

(29) Should product involvement facilitate the experience of telepresence? The case of a quasi 3-D virtual store

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Abstract

Antecedents of telepresence could be classified into three main categories: media content and form features, and the individual's personal characteristics. Although more and more studies focus on media-related causes (e.g., mapping, screen size), there is an evident lack of results on those concerning media user. In addition, if facilitating the experience of telepresence is an explicit purpose for entertainment through new media, more and more designing such experience for business also becomes the goal (for instance, in shopping mall in MUD's). Without any advanced immersive devices (such as head-mounted displays or cyber data gloves), new media's design has to be sufficiently talented to invite a sense of presence on the consumer. Therefore, it would be crucial for companies willing a compelling presence online to deeper understand the individual's characteristics which could "naturally" enhance the experience of telepresence.

More particularly, in the light of the Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model, product – enduring and situational – involvements as motivational factors are investigated in order to have some insights to the incremental impact of user variables on the sense of "being" there. To our knowledge, very few research in telepresence-related literature have considered its particular link with product involvement. On the other hand, some pieces of research in social psychology and marketing open the door of considering a possible joint influence between various involvement types (telepresence considered here as another situational involvement type).

A laboratory experiment (two-by-two experimental design) was used to test the hypotheses. The stimulus was a quasi 3-D virtual environment that displays an outside view of a computer store. The sample was composed by 130 undergraduate students with telecommunication background.

The research results have demonstrated that personal relevance toward the brand is likely to facilitate your perception of direct experience with the product and with the environment. In addition, some evidence have been found toward an additive combination model of involvement types (i.e., the total of the individual's involvement is the sum of involvement trait and all involvement states due to the situational relevance toward the brand and due to telepresence) for the particular task assigned to the research participants.