Haptic ads
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As media consumption moves to mobile devices and brands seek any edge to stand out on small screens, haptic technologies, which communicate with users using the sensation of touch, are getting renewed attention.

Haptics technology has existed for years in various forms, but is quickly gaining ground in the consumer electronics industry. A 2016 market report by Technavio estimates that the haptics technology market in consumer electronics will grow at a CAGR of 21.1% from 2014 through 2019. Meanwhile, a new study by IPG Mediabrands and Immersion Corporation has quantified the effects of haptics on consumer perceptions of advertising.

At CES 2017, at least two startups were showing haptic touchscreen technologies that used friction to create textures on screens. Tanvas announced TanvasTouch, a programmable surface haptic technology that modulates electric fields to create textures on screens as users swipe their fingers. Another startup, Hap2U, showed screens that replicate textures using ultra-sonic vibrations.

Technology like TanvasTouch could help add life-like physical sensations to our digital interactions, creators say. “The ability to simulate texture and fabric on smartphones and tablets is a breakthrough for online shopping, connecting the physical and digital worlds,” said Dominique Essig, chief experience officer at Bonobos, in a statement on behalf of Tanvas. Such technology “has the potential to bring an intimate retail experience to every touchscreen device,” she said.
In the nearer term, existing media can be scored with haptic content and played on many mobile devices. The study by IPG and Immersion, titled “Ads You Can Feel,” investigated TouchSense, one of Immersion’s proprietary technologies, which works using the vibration functions of any Android device. Vibrations can vary in intensity, representing pops, explosions, or rumbles.

The study paired TouchSense with ads for brands representing different consumer verticals, including BMW, Royal Caribbean, Arby’s, and Truvia, finding that ads with haptics outperformed traditional ads on a number of indicators.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSw018b8pSA

For example, 13% of respondents said that a tested brand was exciting was after viewing standard ads, but this rose to 19% for haptic ads. Thirty-seven percent felt happy during standard ads, while 44% felt happy during haptic ads.

Perhaps most significantly, while haptic ads had no extra impact on purchase intention among existing consumers, they outperformed standard ads among potential new customers by a wide margin. Twenty-five percent of new customers viewing haptic ads indicated purchase intent or consideration, compared to 15% of new customers viewing standard ads.

Study creators explained the difference in terms of emotion. “The connection between touch and emotion is universally understood as an innate part of how people perceive the world around them,” said Dmitry Lipkin, senior director, global marketing at Immersion. “Brands can leverage this technology to create deeper, more meaningful consumer experiences.”

As both eyeballs and media spending move increasingly toward mobile devices, brands should be doing everything possible to stand out in a crowded media environment. Haptics should be part of the strategy.

For more technology insights, read our roundup of key trends from CES 2017.

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