

# Shopping online: Why do too many photos confuse consumers?

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When shopping online, we often have the option of clicking on additional product photos taken from different angles or showing additional features. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, looking at more photos when making product comparisons can ultimately inhibit us from noticing what differentiates them in the first place.

"The intuition that 'seeing more is always better' does not consider the possibility that when presented with too many product photos, the way we process information is altered," write authors Jayson Shi Jia (University of Hong Kong), Baba Shiv, and Sanjay Rao (both Stanford University).

Across six experiments, participants were shown photos of comparative products to study the impact that increasing the number of additional photos for each item had on consumer perceptions and the overall decision making process. Because products are often valued and discerned based on their uniqueness and distinctiveness, the authors predicted that participants would be subsequently less confident about their choices when exposed to more (versus less) photos.

In one experiment, participants were shown photos of two different shoes in an online shopping environment. Some participants saw only a single 'main photo' of each shoe while others were given 'additional views' for each shoe. Participants who saw the additional product photos were both less confident about their decision and liked and valued the

product less than those who saw only one photo for each shoe.

Describing this effect as a kind of visual homogenization of products that reduces our abilities to discern one product from another, results suggest one way to effectively shop online is to take a mental break—returning to the 'shopping cart' for a final decision based on what we still remember about the items.

However, the authors note that looking at more product photos is not always a bad thing. "As intuition might suggest, seeing more photos can sometimes be good for product comparisons. But this is only true for [products](#) that are distinguished on sub-components or detail-oriented features like smart phones," they conclude.

**More information:** Jayson Shi Jia, Baba Shiv, and Sanjay Rao. "The Product-Agnosia Effect: How More Visual Impressions Affects Product Distinctiveness in Comparative Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2014.

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