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The Influence of Need for Touch in Multichannel Purchasing Behaviour: An approach based on its instrumental and autotelic dimensions and consumer´s shopping task.

La influencia de la necesidad de tocar en la conducta de compra multicanal: una aproximación basada en la dimensión instrumental y autotélica y en la orientación de compra.

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the relationship between the consumer's need for touch (NFT) and the channels used during search and purchase stages. The focus is the apparel and fashion industry, characterised by offering highly hedonic products, where great importance is placed on the sense of touch. The moderating effects produced by the type of touch (autotelic/instrumental) and by the types of shopping task (goal-oriented/experiential-oriented) are also analysed. Results show that autotelic NFT becomes delimited by the instrumental one, and high NFT levels always involve a high instrumental dimension. The instrumental NFT dimension defines both the use of physical and online channels. The instrumental NFT prevails over the autotelic one, both for goal-oriented and experiential consumers. Regarding multichannel consumers, those who search or buy on the Internet show lower NFT, both overall and in its two dimensions, compared to those consumers who choose physical channels.

Keywords: need for touch, multichannel, shopping task, purchases stages.

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RESUMEN

Este documento analiza la relación existente entre las necesidad de tocar del consumidor (Need for Touch NFT) y los canales utilizados durante las fases de búsqueda de información y compra. El trabajo se centra en el mercado de ropa, caracterizado por un alto componente hedonista para el consumidor, y en el que el sentido del tacto adquiere una importancia especial. La tipología de tacto (autotélico / instrumental) y el tipo de tarea de compra (enfocada al resultado / enfocada a la experiencia) son analizados como factores moderadores. Los resultados obtenidos indican que la necesidad de tocar de tipo autotélico está supeditada a la dimensión instrumental del tacto, y que un alto NFT implica siempre valores altos en su dimensión instrumental. Esta dimensión instrumental define el uso de canales tanto físicos como online por parte del consumidor. El predominio de la dimensión instrumental del NFT sobre la dimensión autotélica se produce con independencia de la tipología de tarea de compra predominante, ya sea ésta enfocada al resultado o a la experiencia en sí. En relación con los compradores multicanal, aquellos consumidores que buscan información o compran en internet muestran menores niveles de NFT, tanto a nivel global como para cada una de sus dos dimensiones, en comparación con los compradores que predominantemente eligen canales físicos para sus compras.

Palabras clave: necesidad de tocar, distribución multicanal, tareas de compra, fases de compra

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1. INTRODUCTION

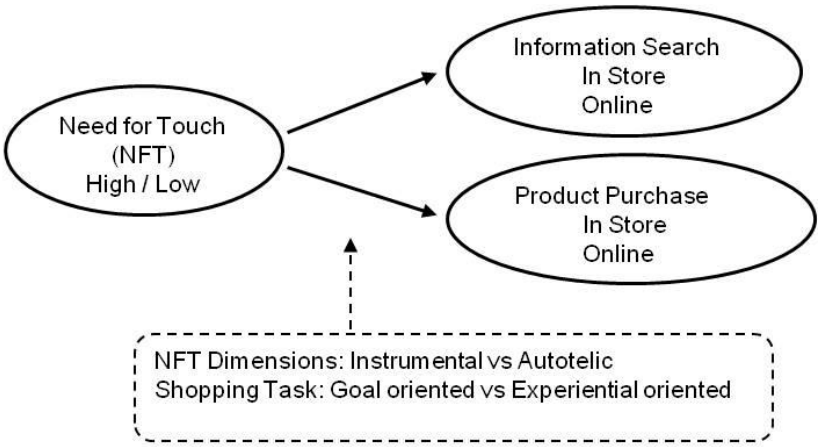
A close look at the consumer whilst shopping is enough to see how important the sense of touch is to human beings. Touching a product is an essential means of generating information or an emotion which, once integrated into shopping behaviour, aids the purchase decision, activating perceived ownership and improving its sense of value (Peck & Shu, 2009). The consumer's search for haptic information depends on the category of product in question (Citrin, Stem, Donald, Spangenberg, & Clark, 2003; Grohmann, Spangenberg & Sprott, 2007; Peck & Childers, 2003b;), the type of touch required (Grohmann et al, 2007), the type of material (McCabe & Nowlis, 2003), or the product properties (Klatzky, Lederman & Matula, 1993).

Touch has a series of differentiating characteristics with respect to the rest of the senses, since it involves physical contact and nothing comes between such contact and the product. It takes place on the basis of an active and voluntary predisposition towards the product on the part of the consumer. Additionally, touch often acts jointly with other senses, generating multi-sensory experiences at the point of sale (Krishna & Morrin, 2008; Raghubir & Krishna, 1999).

The sense of touch is critical for both manufacturers and distributors, since it operates in decisive stages of the purchasing process. It must also be satisfied in retail distribution, particularly by distributors that own physical shops where immediate contact with the product is a basic requirement in achieving differentiation. In addition, it is a sense that poses a challenge when developing options for online sales in order to continue to make this distribution format grow, both in sectors where it competes and with regard to the share of sales obtained in them.

This paper firstly analyses the relationship between the consumer's need to touch and the channels used during search and purchase stages. The focus is the apparel and fashion industry, characterised by offering highly hedonic products, where great importance is placed on the sense of touch. Secondly, the moderating effects produced by the type of touch (autotelic / instrumental dimensions) and by type of shopping task (goal-oriented/experiential-oriented) will be analysed.

Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework



2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Need for Touch NFT and its Instrumental and Autotelic Dimensions

The first attempt at developing a scale that allowed the assessment of the moderating effect of the need for touch on the part of consumers in their evaluation process of a product was carried out by Citrin et al. (2003). This scale, known as the Need for Tactile Input, was constructed on the basis of six variables with the aim of studying the relationship between Internet use as an information-seeking channel, and its use as a purchase channel.

Peck and Childers (2003b) developed a multidimensional scale known as Need For Touch or NFT, which was defined "as a preference for the extraction and utilization of information obtained through the haptic system". It covers "…the individual difference in motivation to acquire and use haptic information" (Peck & Childers, 2003a), and includes two dimensions, with six variables for each of them. One dimension is labelled instrumental and is focused on the information obtained from the physical attributes of the product, and the confidence and security derived from touch, whether referring to geometric variables, such as size or shape, or referring to material attributes, such as texture, hardness, weight or temperature (Klatzky et al, 1993). The second dimension is autotelic in nature, which is not connected directly with the purchase decision, and includes elements related to the pleasure and enjoyment the consumer feels through direct contact with the products, thus making touch an end in itself.

The NFT scale permits the classification of consumers both on an overall level (high / low NFT), and for each of the dimensions, i.e., autotelic or instrumental. Consumers with a high NFT level show differences in the use of touch as a way of gathering information. They have a greater ability in accessing haptic information, show faster memory on tactile items, and use touch at an early stage in their evaluation of products (Peck & Childers, 2003b). Equally, the level of NFT influences their perception of the product, thus generating more confidence and less frustration if they have direct access to it (Peck & Childers, 2003a). The Need For Touch also affects elements such as speed of access to tactile information (Peck & Childers, 2003b), motivation and skill in processing written messages (Peck & Childers, 2003a), the assessment and trust of the consumer, and the assessment of the quality of the product (Grohmann, et al, 2007;

Peck & Childers, 2003b).

Specifically related to the category of products chosen, namely, clothes and fashion, Voss et al. (2003) analysed the dual nature, both instrumental and hedonic, which characterises it. It is clearly a multisensory category (Eicher, 1995; Fiore & Kimle, 1997). Touch plays a key role in evaluating the physical attributes of the product, such as texture (Grohmann, et al, 2007; Klatzky et al, 1993), while at the same time, the sensations arising are related to a strong experiential content (Voss et al., 2003). This makes this category a clear example of consumers' preference for retailers which allow the products to be touched (McCabe & Nolis, 2003), as online consumers perceived tactile risks of product performance based on the evaluation of product attributes through virtual product experience (Yu, Lee & Damhorst, 2012). Simultaneously, this category has the least percentage of consumers who favour multichannel purchasing, only 13% (Konus, Verhoef & Neslin, 2008). Regarding consumer groups, fashion change agents showed a greater NFT -total, autotelic and instrumental- than fashion followers (Workman, 2010).

2.2. Need for Touch NFT and Multichannel Consumer Behaviour

The choice of purchasing channel is influenced by many different factors, which Neslin et al. (2006) summarised as the following six: retail firm marketing efforts, different channel attributes, potential channel integration, social factors, situational variables, and lastly, individual differences associated with demographic or purchasing behaviour.

In relation to the last mentioned factor, a distinction can be made between the search and the purchase phases. These can take place in the same or in different channels, and can be motivated both by factors associated with the ability of each channel to satisfy consumers' needs in a specific purchase phase, or by the synergy among them (Verhoef, Neslin, & Vroomen, 2007). The availability of information concerning the product forms part of the search phase, and allows consumers to assess the attributes and quality of the product to compare various alternatives and make a decision. Equally an attribute such as purchase risk, included in the purchase phase, can be derived from the difficulty of establishing a correct evaluation of the product and its benefits. The consumer's NFT becomes then a moderating element in the use of purchase channels. As a result of this differentiation, multichannel buyer behaviour is developed, consisting of the use of more than one channel to perform the functions of information search and product

purchase (Lee & Kim, 2005). It may refer to independent channels (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005), or to various search and purchase options in formats belonging to the same chain (McGoldrick & Colling, 2007).

The penetration of the different channels in the search or purchase are influenced by the type of products and the NFT level of the buyer, amongst other factors. High levels of NFT lead to a lower use of the Internet as a purchase channel, especially with those products that require quality to be assessed by means of touch, as opposed to only visually appraising the product (Citrin et al., 2003). Its use is conditioned by the greater predisposition of the consumer to touch products whose main features are to do with the material they are made of, as opposed to those which emphasise form, as a result of the lower ability of eyesight to compensate for the lack of the necessary information (Guest & Spence, 2003; Klatzky et al, 1993; McCabe & Nowlis, 2003). Those products which highlight sensory attributes tend to be purchased through physical channels, since they can convey their attributes more reliably (Burke, 2002) and create a better perception of the risk involved (Citrin et al., 2003). As a general rule, the consumer shows a greater preference for 'real' products as opposed to descriptions, but this difference may be reduced by the use of haptic and nonhaptic compensation tactics. Haptic compensation tactics include haptic cues, like informing the consumer of the product's characteristics in tactile terms (McCabe & Nowlis, 2003), the provision of a picture of the product (Peck & Childers, 2003a) or the stimulation of haptic imagery (Peck, Barger & Webb, 2012). Non haptic compensation tactics include quality cues like brand name and price (Olson & Jacoby, 1972), risk relievers cues like return policies (Kirmani & Rao, 2000), or the management of situational moderating factors like consumer´s mood or product expertise (Yazdanparast & Spears, 2013). For products with a mainly geometric component (size and form), if sufficient information is given, there is no clear preference for either physical or online channels (Klatzky et al, 1993). Additionally, notwithstanding the above, the use of the Internet for searching for information about the product prior to the purchase facilitates a greater likelihood of subsequently making a purchase (Citrin et al., 2003). In spite of the previous, situational factors act as moderators of the influence of the need to touch in an online context. High NFT individuals reduce their frustration of not been able to touch a product if having a positive mood, and price promotions motivates high NFT individuals to purchase online

(Yazdanparast & Spears, 2013).

From the above, the following hypotheses referred to products with a high tactile sensory component were posed:

H1a: there is a relationship between the consumer's level of NFT and the Search Channel, in the sense that, the lower the NFT level, the higher the use of online channels.

H1b: there is a relationship between the consumer's level of NFT and the Purchase Channel, in the sense that, the lower the NFT level, the higher the use of online channels.

H2a: there is a relationship between the different NFT dimensions and the Search Channel, in the sense that, the lower the instrumental and autotelic NFT levels, the higher the use of online channels; and the higher the instrumental and autotelic NFT levels, the higher the use of physical channels.

H2b: there is a relationship between the different NFT dimensions and the Purchase Channel, in the sense that, the lower the instrumental and autotelic NFT levels, the higher the use of online channels; and the higher the instrumental and autotelic NFT levels, the higher the use of physical channels.

2.3. NFT and Goal or Experiential Shopping Task

The factors that determine the choice of a channel by consumers include, among others, their shopping task and the role played by the channel. The shopping task was initially focused on specific products, but gradually expanded its coverage to refer to the global act of buying within the store environment (Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994). The consumer perceives the value brought to the purchase process in relation to its costs and benefits. With this approach, the value obtained by the consumer may be hedonic or utilitarian, but generally, to a greater or lesser extent, the consumer's entire purchase experience and the value provided by the channel covers the two types of values (Babin et al., 1994; Batra & Ahtola, 1991). Utilitarian values are related to factors to do with purchase efficiency, whilst hedonic values are more related to the entertainment provided (Babin et al, 1994; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Noble, Griffith & Weinberger, 2005).

The sense of touch is integrated in this way as a sensory element in the perception of value by the consumer. A purchase experience of hedonic value is primarily subjective

and personal, and it is focused on the generation of emotions, and influenced more by fun, entertainment and enjoyment in itself (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The overall experience is the goal itself, and becomes more important and meaningful than the purchase of individual products (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). On the contrary, a purchasing experience of utilitarian value is aimed preferably at accomplishing a task or meeting a specific set of objectives. It is primarily rational and of a cognitive nature, since the purchase is approached "with a work mentality" aimed towards a specific end result (Babin et al., 1994; Batra & Ahtola, 1991). The major factors with which it is associated are the obtaining of information, price, assortment, and the suitability of owning the product, as well as the generation of information through a sensory assessment (McIver, Luxton & Sands, 2009).

The value differences regarding the purchase and the orientation of the consumer towards being utilitarian or hedonic are related to the role played by the purchase in the choice of a specific channel and brand at a particular moment in time. There are two typologies of shopping tasks, goal-oriented and experiential-oriented (Dawson, Bloch & Ridgway, 1990; Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon., 2002; Westbrook & Black. 1985). The first is centred on a specific, predetermined objective, resulting from an analytical purchasing process, primarily utilitarian in nature, and directed to a specific category. The goal-oriented type is centred on specific product categories and its aim is to achieve an outcome to solve a problem. The second is referred more to the process than to the outcome where intuition and spontaneity were of key importance, as opposed to a deliberate decision-making process (Matwich et al. 2002). The experiential-oriented type is related to hedonic values and, without focusing on any one category or product, spontaneous and intuitive decisions are made where the search for fun and entertainment prevails (Childers, Carr, Peck & Carson, 2001). These qualifications are in line with those made by Holbrook and Hirschman (1989), who classified consumers as either problem solvers or consumers who seek enjoyment and sensory stimulation. If applied to distribution, the above correspond to the classification of shopping motives as shopping as work (Fisher & Arnold, 1990) and shopping as fun (Babin et al., 1994).

The two dimensions that form part of the NFT have been related to impulse buying, in the sense that a large autotelic NFT factor is related to higher levels of this type of

purchase, while in the instrumental factor this relationship does not exist (Peck & Childers, 2006, Peck & Childers, 2003b; Vieira, 2012). Similarly, the NFT factor is related to the purchase typology, with experiential shopping being related to autotelic NFT, but not to instrumental NFT (Peck & Childers, 2003b; Vieira, 2012).

From the above, the following hypotheses referred to products with a high tactile sensory component were established:

H3a: the different dimensions of the NFT and the shopping task are related, in the sense that those consumers who are most focused on experiential-oriented purchasing show higher levels of NFT (global, autotelic, instrumental) than those focused on goal-oriented purchases.

H3b: the different dimensions of the NFT and the shopping task are related, in the sense that those consumers who are most focused on experiential-oriented purchasing show higher levels of autotelic NFT than levels of instrumental NFT, whilst those more goal-oriented consumers show higher levels of instrumental NFT than levels of autotelic NFT.

H4a: the NFT of the various shopping task and the Search Channel are related, in the sense that, in experiential-oriented purchase types, with high NFT levels, consumers tend to a higher usage of physical channels, whilst in goal-oriented purchase types, consumers with lower levels of NFT make greater use of online channels.

H4b: the NFT of the different shopping task and the Purchase Channel are related, in the sense that, in experiential-oriented purchase types, with high NFT levels, consumers tend to a higher usage of physical channels, whilst in goal-oriented purchase types, consumers with lower levels of NFT make greater use of online channels.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

A physical questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 256 spanish university students (60% women / 40% men), aged 20-25 years old. The chosen category was apparel and fashion at large, since it is perceived as a category where greater importance is given to the tactile sensory component (Citrin et al., 2003; Grohmann et al., 2007), and additionally has strong utilitarian and hedonic components (Voss, Spangenberg & Grohmann, 2003). Fashion is referred to clothing / apparel, shoes, and accessories, without segmenting quality / price levels in the questionnaire.

With regard to the Need For Touch (NFT), the scale devised by Peck & Childers (2003b)

was used. Respondents answered the questions by way of a 7-point Likert scale, where number 1 meant strong disagreement and number 7 meant strong agreement referred to a total of 6 autotelic dimensions (A) and 6 instrumental ones (I).

Touching products can be fun. (1 A Autotelic)

I place more trust in products that can be touched before purchase (1 I Instrumental)

I like to touch products even if I have no intention of buying them. (2 A)

I feel more comfortable purchasing a product after physically examining it. (2 I)

When browsing in stores, 1 like to touch lots of products. (3 A)

When walking through stores, I can't help touching all kinds of products. (4 A)

I feel more confident making a purchase after touching a product. (3 I)

If I can't touch a product in the store, I am reluctant to purchase the product. (4 I)

The only way to make sure a product is worth buying is to actually touch it. (5 I)

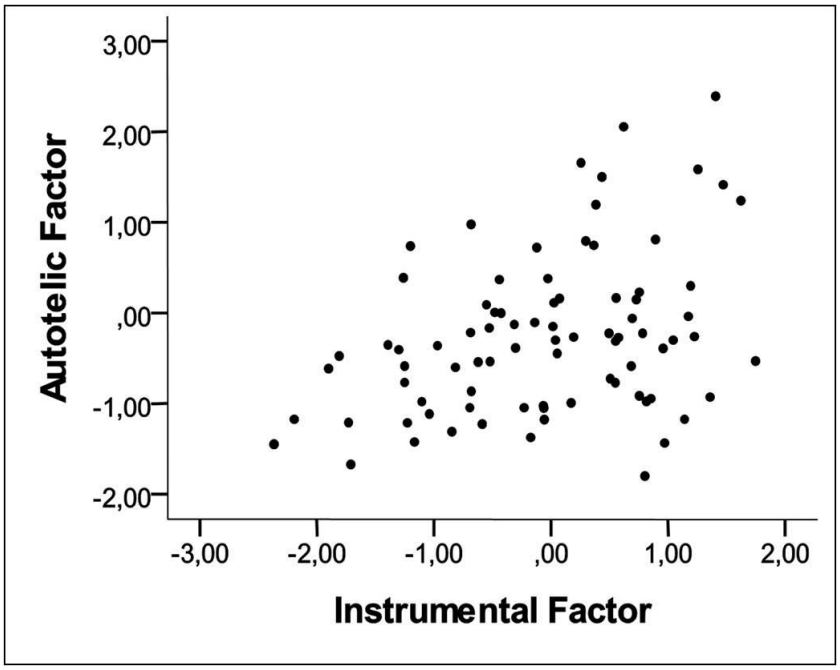
When browsing in stores, it is important to handle all kinds of products. (5 A)

I find myself touching all kinds of products in stores. (6 A)

There are many products I would only buy if I could handle them before purchase. (6 I)

Let us consider the solution provided by applying a Factor Analysis with an oblimin rotation. The first factor was associated with the autotelic dimension (*alpha value* of 0.90) and the second one, with the instrumental dimension (*alpha value* of 0.89) (Figure 2). The measure of the NFT degree was considered to be the average of the two dimensions mentioned above.

Figure 2. Need for Touch (NFT) dimensions



The measurement of channel use was based on the answers to two questions (Search / Purchase) with 3 options each (internet / physical shop / either), whilst the measurement of shopping task was made by way of an ordinal measurement scale based on the typology used by Westbrook and Black (1985), comparing the extreme purchase motives (purchasing a specific product versus visiting a shop without a clear intention of purchasing).

4. RESULTS

Hypotheses 1a and 1b established the relationship between the NFT level and the search and purchase channels. Both hypotheses were accepted, a significant relationship having been shown (F=4.625; *p*=.011 for Search / F=7.882; *p*=.000 for Purchase).The lower NFT values were found in consumers that used the Internet as an exclusive channel, either in the Search phase or in the Purchase phase. The higher NFT level was found in those consumers that included the Internet in the Search, but made their purchase in a physical shop (Table 1).

Table 1. Search and Purchase by Channel based on level of NFT

Search by Channel		Purchase by Channel			
		Internet	Indistinctly	In Store	Total
Internet	NFT Mean	-1.3815	-0.8133	0.1461	-0.5589
	N	5	6	8	19
Indistinctly	NFT Mean		-0.1297	0.2468	0.1213
	N		13	26	39
In Store	NFT Mean		0.9815	0.0415	0.0512
	N		2	192	194
Total	NFT Mean	-1.3815	-0.2192	0.0689	0.0161
	N	5	21	226	252

Note: the mean and the variance of the NFT factors are 1 and 0, respectively

The low, almost marginal weighting of the use of the Internet as an exclusive channel is to be noted, as is the greater weighting of the physical channel as a sole channel, both in the Search phase and, notably, in the Purchase phase. Despite the above, the Internet as a search channel is used by 23% of all consumers (either as an exclusive channel or shared with physical stores), a figure which decreases to 10.3% as far as purchase is concerned. On the other hand, not a single case exists of a search being carried out in a physical channel followed by a purchase on the Internet.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b establish a relationship between the two NFT dimensions and the Search and Purchase channels. Both hypotheses 2a and 2b were accepted, a significant relationship having been shown, even though it did not reach a level of $p<0.05$ in the autotelic dimension (Search: F=2.819; p=.062 Autotelic factor / F=4.450; p=.013; Instrumental factor. Purchase: F=2.827; p=.061 Autotelic factor / F=10.665; p=.000 Instrumental factor).

Figure 3. NFT Dimensions by Channel: Search

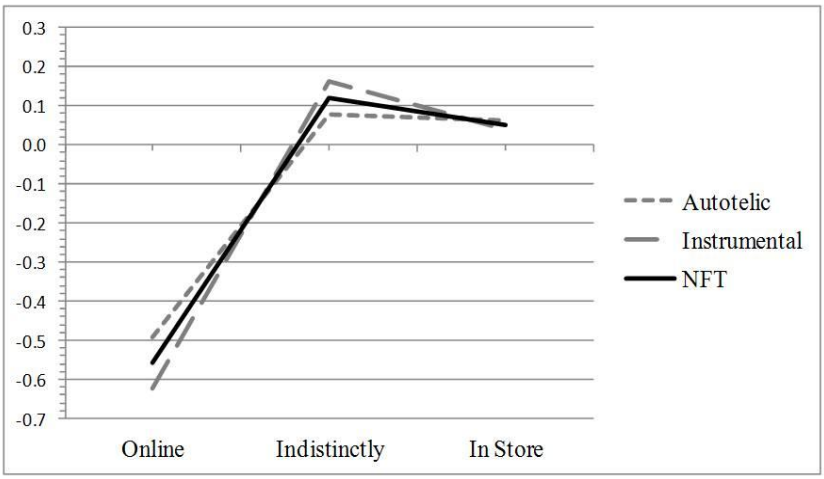
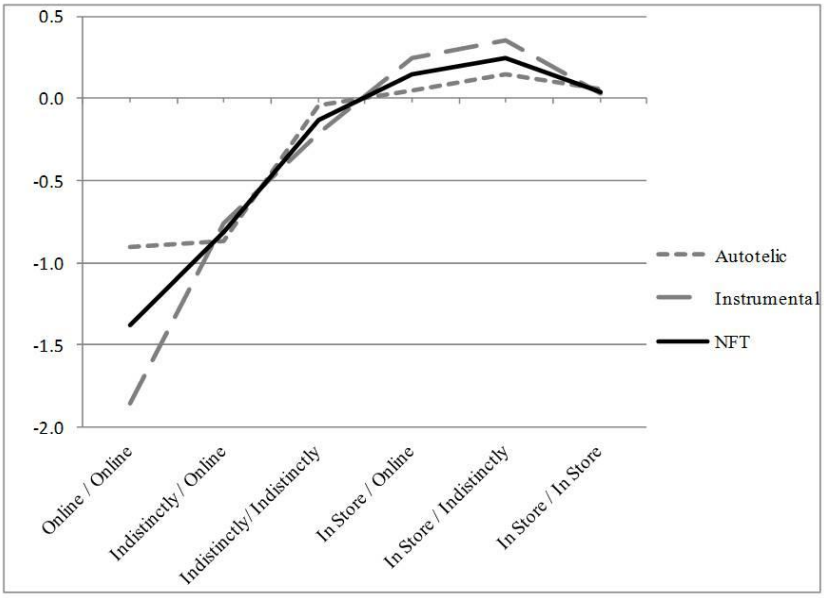


Figure 4. NFT Dimensions by Channel: Purchase

Consumers that Purchased or Searched on the Internet are characterised by a lower levels of autotelic and instrumental NFT (Figure 3 and Figure 4). As regards Internet Purchasing, it is worth noting the low levels of instrumental NFT compared to autotelic NFT, unlike the group of consumers who use physical channels and show similar instrumental and autotelic NFT levels. Combining the channels used in the Search and Purchase phases results in six distinct groups of consumers. Those groups specifically are: buy online / search online, buy in both / search online, buy in both / search in both, buy in a physical shop / search in both, buy in a physical shop / search in a physical

shop. In these, the autotelic and instrumental factors behave in a similar way, except for the group who use the Internet as an exclusive channel for both Purchase and Search (Figure 5). In this minority group, the instrumental NFT values are much lower than in the other combination of channels, particularly much lower than the autotelic NFT factor. On the contrary, the highest values of this instrumental factor are found in those groups of consumers that buy in physical shops, with these values also being above those of the autotelic factor (overall NFT: F=5.189; p=0.000 / Autotelic: F=3.256, P=0.007 / Instrumental: F=5.542; p=0.000).

Figure 5. NFT Dimensions by Channel: Purchase – Search

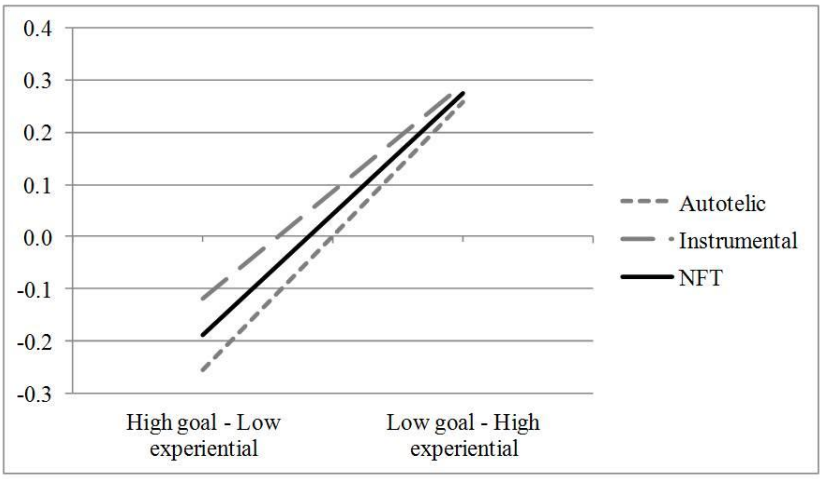


The consumers who Search online are mainly made up of two subgroups: those who have low NFT levels in both dimensions, and those who, while having a high overall NFT level, show a low autotelic level and a high instrumental level (chi-squared=19.765 / p= .003). As to the Purchase, only those consumers with a low level of NFT in both dimensions used the Internet as an exclusive channel (chi-squared= 26.202 / p= .000).

Hypotheses 3a and 3b established a relationship between NFT levels and the kind of shopping tasks. For the analysis of Hypotheses 3a and 3b, respondents were classified

into two strongly opposing groups. In one were those consumers who stated a strong preference for fashion purchases made with a clear objective in mind (goal-oriented), and in the other, those who stated a preference for not having a clear objective when they entered a fashion shop and went just to look (experiential-oriented). This resulted in a base of 124 consumers.

Figure 6. NFT Dimensions by Shopping Task



Hypothesis 3a was accepted in the research (global NFT: t=-2.395, *p*=.018 / autotelic: t=-2.472, *p*=.015 / instrumental t=-1.793, *p*=.076). In experiential purchases, all the NFT factors showed values greater than those values related to people whose purchases were focused on specific goals (Table 2 / Figure 6). With regard to hypothesis 3b, the instrumental values were greater than the autotelic ones, both in goal-oriented purchases and in experiential purchases. This is a consequence of the tendency of the instrumental dimension to have values above those of the autotelic one. These values, despite having a smaller difference for experiential purchases, do not fall below the autotelic values. This is why the hypothesis could not be verified (High Goal / Low Experiential: t=1.341; *p*=0.183; Low Goal / High Experiential: t=0.234; *p*=0.817).Table 2**.**

Table 2. NFT Dimensions by Shopping Task. NFT Mean

	Autotelic Factor	Instrumental Factor	NFT Global Factor
High Goal / Low Experiential	-0.2565	-0.1194	-0.1880
Low Goal / High Experiential	0.2584	0.2932	0.2758
Total	-0.1416	-0.0273	-0.0845

Hypotheses 4a and 4b established a connection between the NFT of the different shopping tasks and the Search and Purchase channels used, in the sense that in experiential shopping typologies, with high levels of NFT, consumers tended to use physical channels more, whilst those purchase typologies that were goal-oriented had lower levels of NFT and were related to a greater use of online channels. Hypothesis 4a, related to the Search, could not be validated, as significant statistical levels were not reached (High Goal /Low Experiential F=1.620, *p*=.023; Low Goal / High Experiential: F=0.011, *p*=.917). Despite this, results were obtained as to the approach. In the Search phase, consumers that were focused on experiential purchasing tended to use physical channels more as their NFT increased, and they totally disregarded the Internet as an option. Contrary to this, those consumers mainly focused on goal-oriented purchases who used the Internet as a search channel showed a lower level of NFT than those who used both physical and online channels indiscriminately, and these, in their turn, showed an NFT lower than those consumers focused solely on physical channels (Figure 7).

Figure 7. NFT and Shopping Task: Search

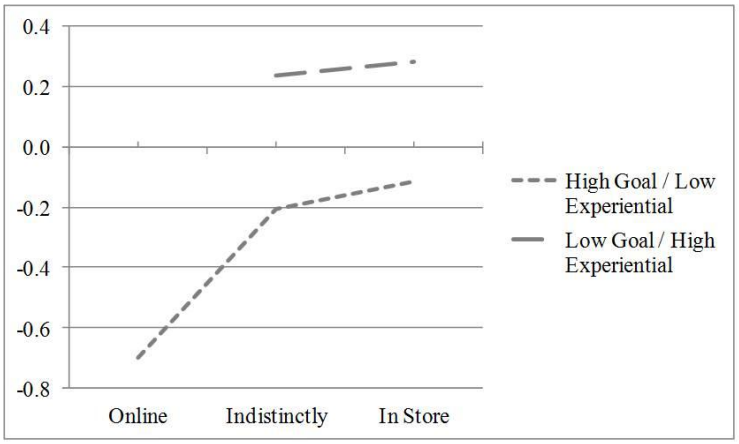


Figure 8. NFT and Shopping Task: Purchase

Finally, hypothesis 4b was partially statistically validated (High Goal / Low Experiential: F=5.554 / *p*=.005; Low Goal / High Experiential: F=0.046 / *p*=.832). Consumers focused on an experiential purchase did not use the Internet as a purchase channel, but were almost exclusively focused on physical channels (96.2%), and showed higher NFT levels as they did so. On the contrary, consumers who had a tendency towards goal-centred purchases and exclusively used the Internet as a purchase channel, showed NFT levels significantly lower than those who used physical channels (Figure 8).

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a summary, the first point to highlight in the research is the very configuration of the NFT in relation to the weight of its component dimensions. The typology of instrumental touch does not only reach average global values above the autotelic ones, but these values are equally high in almost all of the respondents. In a category with a high sensory tactile component, such as fashion, the hedonic values of enjoyment are strongly subjected to those of an instrumental nature, centred on physical elements as contributors to security and confidence in the product. So much so that, in the configuration of the overall NFT, high levels always involve a high instrumental dimension without which they do not occur. Consequently, the importance of the autotelic component becomes delimited by and subordinated to them.

The Internet acquires a marginal weight as a channel, particularly as an exclusive channel, in relation to the search for but, above all, to the purchase of products. The profile of the Internet user with a sense of touch refers to individuals with a low NFT in both autotelic and instrumental dimensions. It is necessary to emphasise the low importance those users give to tactile information referred to instrumental variables, especially in the purchase phase and, above all, in the combination of online search and purchase. The instrumental NFT dimension is what defines both the online purchase, with its lowest values, and the use of physical channels, as it has higher values than those related to the autotelic dimension.

This low valuation of the variables that define the NFT is especially relevant in those consumers who show a tendency towards goal-oriented purchases, as opposed to those who go into a point of sale without a clearly defined goal and who are more orientated towards the shopping experience itself. The instrumental dimension is prioritised in both types of purchase, although no significant statistical difference was shown in relation to the autotelic dimension.

The experiential-focused consumer avoids exclusively using the online channel, in both the search phase and in the purchase phase, but a relevant percentage of respondents simultaneously incorporate the Internet in the search phase, including those with NFT levels similar to those consumers who exclusively use physical shops in their search. In connection with the previous are the opportunities provided by online technologies in the fashion market. The developments of online communications regarding the physical elements of the product (size, form, material), linked to action taken on the brand attributes to compensate for the risks of the online medium, may serve as compensation for the NFT in its instrumental dimension, facilitating its progressive integration into the search phase, and subsequently into the purchase phase. The enhancement of this channel by important brands, such as Zara and its international expansion of its web site, are strongly contributing to the above-described developments.

5.1 Limitations of the study

The current research is not without its limitations, amongst which we highlight the need to work with data self-reported by consumers. A second limitation would refer to used

sample, as it only includes Spanish university students.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

This work opens up a number of future research options. The main line of research should focus on further exploring autotelic and instrumental NFT in multichannel purchase strategies, segmented by different purchasing behavior profiles, specifically purchasing stages (from search to purchase), shopping task (goal oriented vs experience oriented), shopping mission (from emergency purchases to stock up ones) and types of purchases (from impulsive to reflexive purchases). It would also be interesting to expand the number and type of analyzed categories to compare results based on their instrumental or hedonic component. Finally, it would be interesting to delve more deeply into the role of other moderating variables such as brand awareness and previous brand consumption.

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