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Abstract

This paper firstly analyses the relationship between the consumer's need for touch and the channels used during search and purchase stages. The focus will be the 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) and by the types of shopping task (goal-oriented / experiential-oriented) are also analysed.

Results show that autotelic NFT becomes delimited by, and subordinated to, the instrumental one, as in the configuration of the overall NFT, high levels always involve a high instrumental dimension without which they do not occur. The instrumental NFT dimension defines both the online purchase, with its lowest values, and the use of physical channels, as it has values as high as those related to the autotelic one. The instrumental NFT dimension prevails over the autotelic one, both for goal-oriented and experiential consumers. Regarding multichannel shopping, those consumers who search or buy on the Internet show a lower level of NFT, both overall and in its two dimensions, compared to those consumers who choose physical channels. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the purchase phase.

Key words: *need for touch, multichannel, shopping task*

Introduction

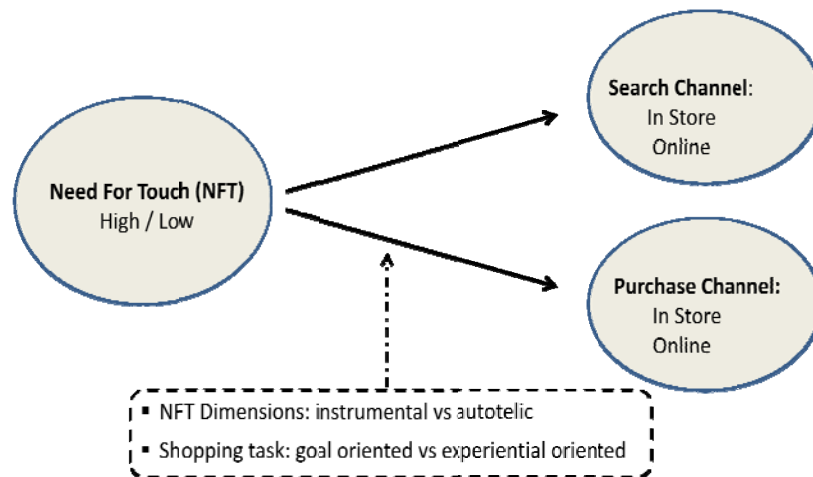
A close look at the consumer whilst shopping is enough to see how important the sense of touch is to human beings. Touching a product is an essential means of generating information or an emotion which, once integrated into shopping behaviour, aids the purchase decision, activating perceived ownership and improving its sense of value (Peck and Shu, 2009). The consumer's search for haptic information depends on the category of product in question (Grohmann, Spangenberg and Sprott, 2007; Peck and Childers, 2003b; Citrin et al., 2002), the type of touch required (Grohmann, Spangenberg and Sprott, 2007), the type of material (McCabe and Nowlis, 2003), or the product properties (Klatzky and Lederman, 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 (Raghubir and Krishna, 1999; Krishna and Morrin, 2008).

The sense of touch is critical for both manufacturers and distributors, since it operates in the most 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 will firstly analyse the relationship between the consumer’s need to touch and the channels used during search and purchase stages. The focus will be the 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 the types of shopping task (goal-oriented / experiential-oriented) will be analysed.

Conceptual Framework



Theoretical background and hypothesis

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 (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 and 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 and Lederman, 1993). The second dimension is autotelic in nature, and includes elements related to the pleasure and enjoyment the consumer feels through direct contact with the products.

The dual character - instrumental and autotelic - of the NFT is the result of the individual's motivation to analyse a product in a haptic manner. On the one hand, this refers to physical characteristics, in order to obtain information to facilitate a decision, whilst on the other, it is related to the very pleasure of touching for entertainment without it being directly related to a purchasing decision. This dual motivation for the use of the sense of touch is what brought Peck and Childers (2003b) to include two different components in their scale. One of them is an instrumental factor, which is focused on the reading of the physical characteristics of the product, such as texture, hardness, temperature or weight, and is intended to obtain information that promotes a feeling of trust and security in the purchase decision. The other component is the autotelic factor, which is not connected directly with the purchase decision, but with the very pleasure of touching, 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 and 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 and Childers, 2003a). The Need For Touch also affects elements such as speed of access to tactile information (Peck and Childers, 2003b), motivation and skill in processing written messages (Peck and Childers, 2003a), the assessment and trust of the consumer, and the assessment of the quality of the product (Grohmann, Spangenberg and Sprott, 2007; Peck and Childers, 2003b).

Specifically related to the category of products chosen, namely, clothes and fashion, Voss (2003) analysed the dual nature, both instrumental and hedonic, which characterises it. It is clearly a multisensory category (Eicher, 1995; Fiore and Kimle, 1997). Touch plays a key role in evaluating the physical attributes of the product, such as texture (Klatzky and Lederman, 1993; Grohmann, Spangenberg and Sprott, 2007), 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 and Nolis, 2003), whereas, simultaneously, this category has the least percentage of consumers who favour multichannel purchasing, only 13% (Konus et al. 2008).

Need for Touch NFT and multichannel consumer behaviour

The choice of purchasing channel is influenced by many different factors, which Neslin (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 actual synergy among them (Verhoef, Neslin, and 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 and Kim, 2005). It may refer to independent channels (Kumar and Venkatesan, 2005), or to various search and purchase options in formats belonging to the same chain (McGoldrick and 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 (McCabe and Nowlis, 2003; Klatzky and Lederman, 1993; Guest and Spence, 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 and Nowlis, 2003), the provision of a picture of the product (Peck & Childers, 2003a) or the stimulation of haptic imagery (Peck, Barger and 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, A. and Spears, N. 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 and Lederman, 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, A. and Spears, N. 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.

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 et al., 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 and 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 and Hirschman, 1982; Noble et al., 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 and Hirschman, 1982). The overall experience is the goal itself, and becomes more important and meaningful than the purchase of individual products (Arnold and 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 and 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 and 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 (Mathwick et al., 2002; Dawson, Bloch and Ridgway, 1990; Westbrook and 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 (Mathwick 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 et al. 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 and 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 and 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 and 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 specific, 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.

Research Methods

A physical questionnaire was distributed to 256 Spanish university students who were studying for Economy and Business degrees (60% women / 40% men).

The chosen category was fashion, since it is perceived as a category where greater importance is given to the tactile sensory component (Grohmann, Spangenberg and Sprott, 2007; Citrin et al., 2003), and additionally has strong utilitarian and hedonic components (Voss et al., 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 and Childers (2003b) was used (Exhibit 1). Respondents answered the questions by way of a 7-point Likert scale, where number 1 meant strong disagreement and number 7 meant strong agreement (Figure 1).

Exhibit 1. NFT scale: Autotelic (A) and Instrumental (I) dimensions

1. Touching products can be fun. (1 A Autotelic)
2. I place more trust in products that can be touched before purchase (1 I Instrumental)
3. I like to touch products even if I have no intention of buying them. (2 A)
4. I feel more comfortable purchasing a product after physically examining it. (2 I)

5. When browsing in stores, I like to touch lots of products. (3 A)
6. When walking through stores, I can't help touching all kinds of products. (4 A)
7. I feel more confident making a purchase after touching a product. (3 I)
8. If I can't touch a product in the store, I am reluctant to purchase the product. (4 I)
9. The only way to make sure a product is worth buying is to actually touch it. (5 I)
10. When browsing in stores, it is important for me to handle all kinds of products. (5 A)
11. I find myself touching all kinds of products in stores. (6 A)
12. There are many products that 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) (Fig.2). The measure of the NFT degree was considered to be the average of the two dimensions mentioned above.

Figure 1. NFT Dimensions

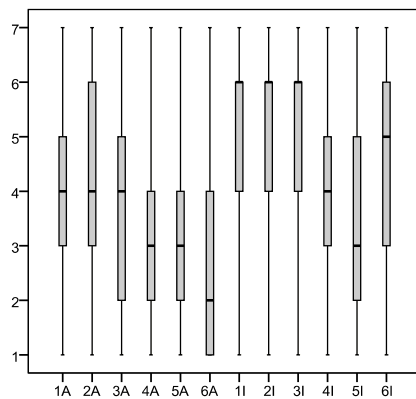
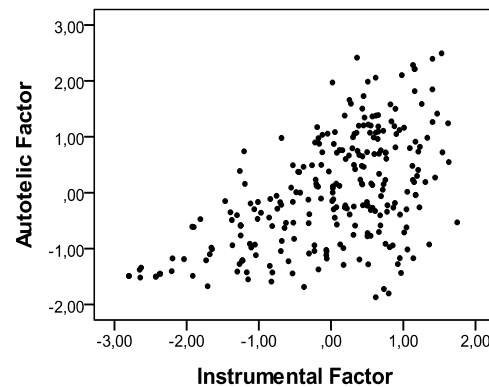


Figure 2. NFT Dimensions



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 orientation 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).

Results and Conclusions

Hypotheses 1a and 1b established the relationship between the NFT level and the search and purchase channels. Both hypotheses were proved, 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 vs. Purchase by Channel based on level of NFT¹

Search by Channel		Purchase by Channel			
		Internet	Indifferently	In Store	Total
Internet	NFT Mean	-1.3815	-.8133	.1461	-.5589
	N	5	6	8	19
Indifferently	NFT Mean		-.1297	.2468	.1213
	N		13	26	39
In Store	NFT Mean		.9815	.0415	.0512
	N		2	192	194
Total	NFT Mean	-1.3815	-.2192	.0689	.0161
	N	5	21	226	252

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 (Table 1).

Hypotheses 2a and 2b establish a relationship between the two NFT dimensions and the Search and Purchase channels. Both hypotheses 2a and 2b were proved, 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).

¹ The mean and the variance of the NFT factors are 1 and 0, respectively.

Figure 3. NFT Dimensions by Channel: Search

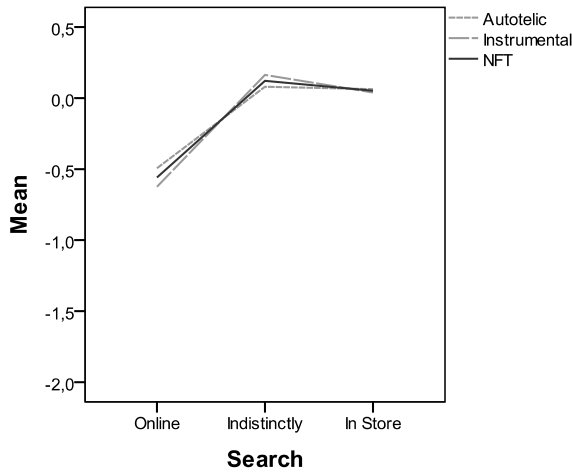
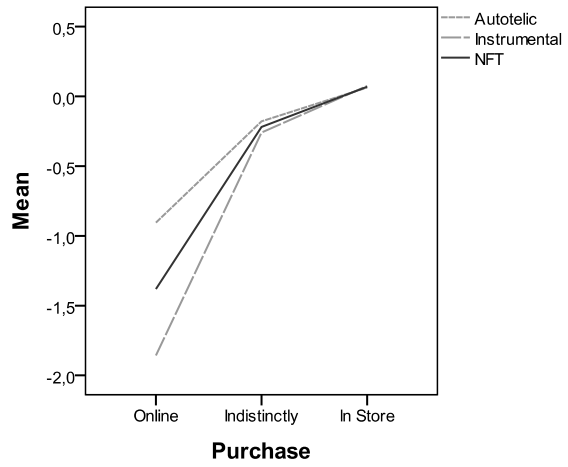


Figure 4. NFT Dimensions by Channel. Purchase

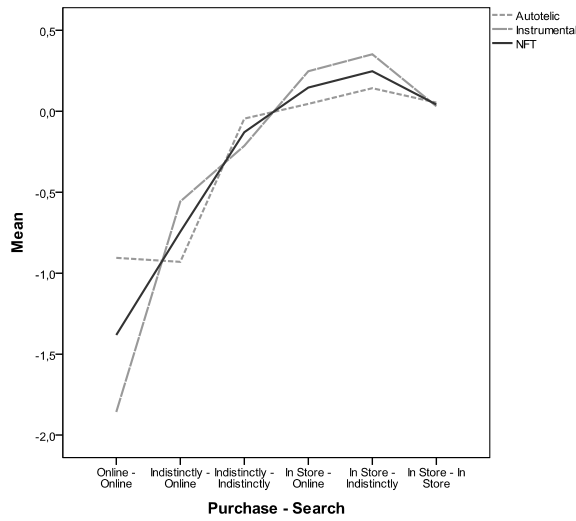


Consumers that Purchased or Searched on the Internet are characterised by a lower levels of autotelic and instrumental NFT (Figures 3 and 4). As regards Internet Purchasing, it is worth noting the low levels of instrumental NFT compared to autotelic NFT, unlike the group of consumers who use physical 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 consumers². 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: $F=5.542$; $p=0.000$).

² Groups: 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.

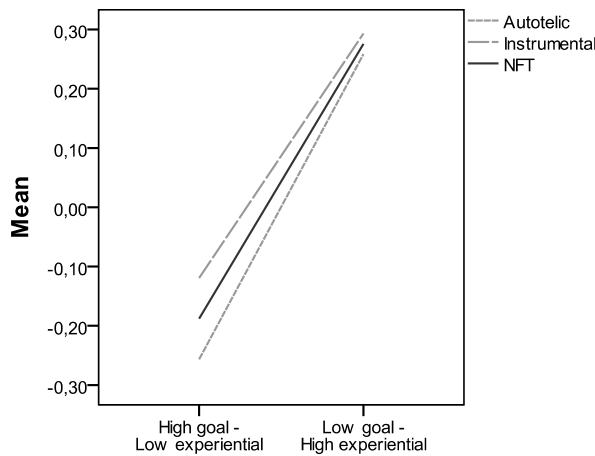
Figure 5. NFT Dimensions by Channel. Purchase / Search



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 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 by Shopping Task



Hypothesis 3a was proved 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. NFT Dimensions by Shopping Task. NFT Mean

	Autotelic Factor	Instrumental Factor	NFT Global Factor
High goal - Low experiential	-.2565	-.1194	-.1880
Low goal -High experiential	.2584	.2932	.2758
Total	-.1416	-.0273	-.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 Orientation. Search

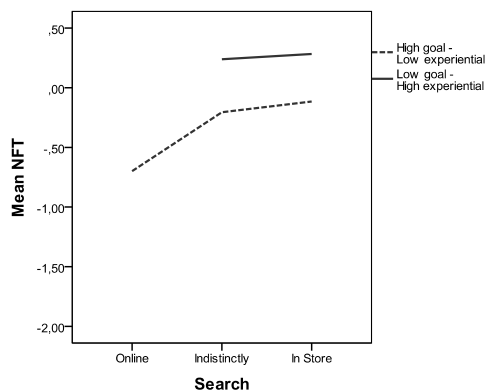
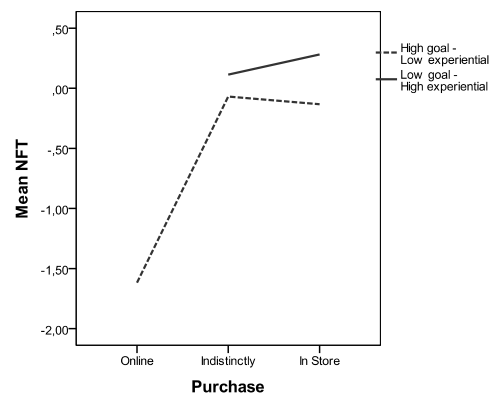


Figure 8. NFT and Shopping orientation. Purchase



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).

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 above are the opportunities provided by online technologies in the fashion market. The developments of online communication 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 the progressive integration into the search phase, and subsequently into the purchase phase. The enhancement of this channel by important brands, such as Zara and the international expansion of its online shop, are strongly contributing to the above-described developments.

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