

Department of Business & Management

Chair of International Marketing

**“Autotelic versus Instrumental Need for Touch:
Empirical Evidence from a Field Study”**

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Product attitude is influenced by a person's innate need to touch, which consequently plays a fundamental role in consumer behavior. Effective Marketing, therefore, needs to study the implication of differing needs to touch. Firstly, there is a desire to examine the consequences of need for touch on product evaluations so that concepts can be integrated accordingly within successful marketing strategies. Secondly there are two inherent needs to touch instrumental or autotelic. The former explores product attributes in order to evaluate their functionality aimed at purchasing. The latter involves touching a product for the sole purpose of experiencing sensory enjoyment without a purchasing goal. The need to touch can vary depending on person, products, or situation.

This thesis, which is part of a research project undertaken by Professor Matteo De Angelis and Professor Cesare Amatulli of the Management Department of Luiss University, Rome, endeavors to highlight evidence of the effectiveness of need for touch impacting customer attitudes and behavior when evaluating different categories of products: consumer electronics and fabrics. Two experiments were conducted to examine how different levels of instrumental or autotelic touch, and differing conditions can impact product attitudes and evaluation.

Need for touch literature is inherent to the current development of sensory marketing, which is explored in the first chapter of this thesis. Not only have sensory marketing strategies gained ground amongst firms, but also we are witnessing a paradigm shift. Originally we saw a transition from transactional to relational marketing. Nowadays, firms are tending towards a more sensory marketing framework. The senses have recently emerged as being the dominant factor in shaping customers' perceptions regarding products and brands. Sensory marketing, contributes substantially to the development of both brand and marketing management by using sensorial strategies based on cognitive, emotional or value-based elements. Firms can differentiate brands and products and challenge the individual mind in a highly personalized way, thus impacting on consumer behavior.

In the field of marketing, touch is the least explored sense, and the most complex to define and analyze since there is no graded objective lexis available. Despite its complex nature, a deeper understating of tactile marketing could seriously impact future paradigms allowing brands to be engaged in communication by tactile means. To explore the opportunity offered by tactile marketing it is important to

examine the NFT literature, which provides relevant insights into the consequences of product touch.

A scientific analysis of sensory marketing remains illusive; however, in its practice since consumer reaction is dictated by subconscious stimuli which scientific research has yet to explore thoroughly. So far contribution to marketing research has been furnished by questionnaires, which do not take into account the complex nature of individual's decision-making faculties. Neuromarketing has launched a new approach toward future development in sensory marketing, by taking into consideration the subconscious.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the marketing literature available on product touch to which, the main contribution was provided by Peck and Childers, who developed a scale to measure individual differences in need for touch. Their research has been one of the bases for the studies to follow, in which the impact of NFT on consumer attitude and behavior is explored. For example, consumers with a high need for touch were found to be more frustrated and less confident about products that they were unable to touch; thus, impeding the decision to buy process.

Chapter three moves onto the detailed description of two on field studies, which in line with previous research, confirm that touch impacts attitudes towards products whether instrumental or autotelic. A pillow and a scientific calculator were chosen for the experiment since they are familiar products and possess material properties whose salience is not comparable. In fact, for a pillow pre purchase touch is particularly important, whereas this does not seem to be the case for a scientific calculator.

The first study showed the moderation effect of instrumental touch on attitude towards the scientific calculator, through the mediation effect of perceived ease of use. The second study showed the moderation effect of Autotelic Touch on attitude towards the pillow, through the mediation effect of sensory enjoyment.

This thesis concludes with a description of the implication of the aforementioned studies together with the previous marketing research on Need for Touch in chapter four. Successful retailers such as Gap, Hollister and Abercrombie have been actively engaged in adopting retail settings encouraging touch where merchandise is readily accessible. This has contributed to their success and distinguished their shopping experience in terms of style. However touching

products does not necessarily guarantee sales. Retailers must be aware of the limitations of touching products particularly in lower quality goods and commodities, where touch may well decrease evaluation and deter sales.

In advertising the tactile feel is evoked through pictures and written descriptions and sometimes tactile sensations can be simulated through the use of synesthetic association.

Online retailers should not ignore the effect and implication of need for touch, seeking strategies to overcome the practical barriers of their shopping forum. The lack of opportunity to touch can be effectively offset by non-haptic cues such as low price or the launch of a new product. Since interfaces able to effectively simulate touch sensations are not yet available, retailers must ease the return or refund of merchandise in order to consolidate customer confidence.

Thus, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the research on NFT and its practical implementations will ever increasingly become a necessary tool in marketing.

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