



Research Article

The Customer Experience is a Key Factor at Every Stage of the Transaction: Before, During, and After

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the influence of three dimensions of customer experience — sensory, cognitive, and emotional — on purchase commitment to Fair Trade products. In addition, the influence of commitment on word of mouth, repurchase intentions and willingness to pay more for Fair Trade products was measured. A theoretical model estimated data obtained from 345 Spanish Fair Trade buyers, using CB-SEM. The seven hypotheses proposed were accepted, which reaffirms the importance of the sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions for forming commitment and positive behavioral responses. The study raises theoretical and managerial implications for Fair Trade marketers, which can strengthen it to meet consumers' needs. Finally, limitations and future research directions are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Customer Experience, Fair Trade, Commitment, Sensory Marketing, Emotional Marketing

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I. Introduction

Think about how you look at the details of the products you buy, how you touch and smell them, how you close your eyes to imagine yourself using them, and how exciting this is. The sensations that products awaken in people's senses, emotions, and thoughts help build the customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) and play a fundamental role in building commitment and positive behaviors towards different types of consumption, as well as towards ethical consumption (Yoganathan et al., 2019), including Fair Trade products (Lange et al., 2015). Fair Trade products are goods produced in poor countries, with the target market being buyers in wealthy countries (Renard, 2003).

Taking account of the sensations, cognition and emotions that make up the customer experience is

key to organizations' pursuit of competitive advantage (Eyvazpour et al., 2020). This experience paradigm arises from the need to develop company-customer relationships, for example, by differentiating product design, service provision, and brand commitment (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Turkson et al., 2022).

The customer experience can be addressed in different retail contexts. In the Fair Trade context, if one thing has characterized the distribution of Fair Trade products in recent years, it has been the substitution of the main sales channel. At the beginning of the century, Fair Trade-focused and specialty stores were the main distribution channels for Fair Trade goods but, today, large stores (i.e., supermarkets and hypermarkets) are the most important channels (Gigliotti & Runfola, 2022).



This phenomenon worries Fair Trade organizations for several reasons: first, because the final benefits that producers derive are reduced due to the increased number of participants in logistics chains and the quality certification demands imposed by large supermarkets (Öberg & Aronsson, 2022). Second, the “alternative” and transformative aspects of the Fair Trade movement risk being overshadowed as Fair Trade products are increasingly perceived as similar to those offered in large supermarkets (Bezençon, 2011). Third, when consumers distance themselves physically from Fair Trade stores, these stores lose their sociocultural role (Bellucci et al., 2012) of raising awareness and promoting this alternative commerce model, leading to lower consumer commitment to Fair Trade.

A Fair Trade store is a shop that promotes equitable and sustainable commercial conditions, ensuring fair treatment for producers and respect for the environment. It focuses on offering ethical and eco-friendly products that support farmers, artisans and communities, contributing to a positive change in global trade (Bellucci et al., 2012). In the context of this study, Fair Trade products are identified by consumers through visible certifications on the packaging, such as the Fairtrade International logo. This seal guarantees that the products meet Fair Trade criteria, which include fair payment to producers, decent working conditions, and sustainable environmental practices. The presence of these seals on packaging builds trust among consumers, who often assume that all products in a Fair Trade store meet these standards. As highlighted in the work of Schouteten et al. (2021), Fair Trade labels can influence consumer perceptions of food products, indicating that certification labels serve as a significant cue for consumer trust and decision-making in retail environments.

The previous literature has established that consumer commitment to Fair Trade is a first-order psychological link that precedes the development of ethical purchasing behaviors and recommendation intentions (Hassan et al., 2022; White et al., 2012). In this work we propose that the sensory dimension involved in the purchase of Fair Trade products

(controllable, and a priori more powerful in Fair Trade stores than in large stores) is an important precursor of the thoughts and emotions aroused by the Fair Trade shopping experience (Yoganathan et al., 2019). In turn, these cognitive and emotional dimensions determine consumers’ commitment to Fair Trade, and their subsequent behavioral responses.

Thus, based on the theoretical proposals about customer experience dimensions made by Lemon & Verhoef (2016) and Schmitt (1999), the present study theoretically proposes and tests a model to investigate the influence of the sensory dimension of customer experience on the purchase of Fair Trade products on the cognitive and affective dimensions of the customer experience, and how these influence the consumer’s commitment and behaviors, such as word of mouth, repurchase intentions and willingness to pay more.

Although there is a robust body of research on customer experience in traditional retail contexts, the specific impact of the sensory dimension in the context of Fair Trade has not been sufficiently studied (Yoganathan et al., 2019). Previous literature has mainly addressed emotional and cognitive aspects but has overlooked the role of the physical environment and specific sensory stimuli in Fair Trade stores, although this element has been considered for ethical products (Pecoraro et al., 2021). Therefore, this study specifically aims to fill this gap by arguing that well-designed sensory elements in Fair Trade stores can have a significant impact on consumers’ emotional and cognitive connections, thereby strengthening their commitment and other behaviors.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, the conceptual framework of the study and the theoretical model are presented, followed by the methodology and the analysis of the results. Finally, conclusions, managerial implications, the study’s limitations, and possible future research lines are discussed.

2. Literature Review: Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Dimensions of the Customer Experience

The customer experience can be understood as a holistic process that involves an individual’s cognitive,

emotional, sensory, social, technological, and physical responses to a given event (Pekovic & Rolland, 2020). These responses can occur in pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption stages, and can be internalized subjectively and objectively to leave an imprint on long-term memory (Pizzutti et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2009).

The customer experience process aligns with these principles, covering pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase phases in a dynamic, iterative cycle. Pre-purchase involves all interactions between the buyer and brand, including need recognition, alternative search, and selection. During the purchase phase, activities such as selection, ordering, and payment occur. Post-purchase covers buyer interactions after the purchase, including product use, consumption, participation, and service requests (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This research analyses three of the dimensions proposed by Lemon & Verhoef (2016) and Verhoef et al. (2009), namely, the sensory, emotional, and cognitive.

2.1.1. Sensory Dimension

The sensory dimension relates to sensory perceptions associated with the shopping environment, products, and services (Brun et al., 2017; Li & Kallas, 2021) and is linked to the perception of experiences through the senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell (Fornerino et al., 2006). These perceptions can transform a physical environment and make it more pleasurable for the consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

For example, in Fair Trade stores, one witnesses many environmental cues that attract consumers: ethnic and/or popular music, which aims to evoke the environments of countries to the south of the planet; dim lighting in certain spaces, and strong lighting in others, to encourage the turnover of certain products; decoration based on the seasons of the year; Fair Trade-focused information to stimulate awareness of this type of alternative trade; soothing scents that provide a characteristic note to these specialty stores (Biswas, 2019; Li & Kallas, 2021).

2.1.2. Emotional Dimension

The emotional dimension relates to the arousal of feelings/affective states. This alternative approach may be linked to specific feelings (Krishen et al., 2023). Emotional experiences linked to brands range from mild positive moods to strong emotions, such as pride and joy (Schmitt, 1999). The emotions associated with Fair Trade are based on the consumer's understanding of the contribution they make to impoverished communities when they buy one of their products. These purchases can give the consumer high levels of pride, enthusiasm, happiness, joy (de Pelsmacker et al., 2005), and hedonic gratification, and increase their sense of equality and social justice (Ladhari & Tchegnina, 2017).

2.1.3. Cognitive Dimension

This dimension relates to the consumer's cognitive processes. It is linked to the consumer's thinking and creativity, in terms of the surprise, intrigue, and involvement that a purchase experience generates (Fornerino et al., 2006). In other words, the experience should educate the consumer, provide him/her with a sense of discovery, and hone his/her skills (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). In Fair Trade, the consumer must be aware of, and understand, the needs and problems of the producers of the products. Thus, in Fair Trade stores, volunteers and point-of-purchase communications explain the producers' situations in detail, which makes customers empathize with them, such that the price of the products is not their main concern, that is, their main focus becomes understanding what benefits the producers derive, and how these benefits are used (Letto et al., 2021).

These three dimensions align with the broader conceptualization of customer experience proposed by Verhoef et al. (2009), who emphasize that customer experiences are multidimensional and encompass not only sensory, emotional, and cognitive responses but also depend on the context in which they are generated. Choosing these three dimensions in a Fair Trade context allows for capturing the fundamental aspects of the shopping experience that have a direct impact on perception and ethical decision-making by consumers.

2.2. Commitment to Purchase Fair Trade Products

Commitment has been described as affective/emotional attachment to an organization, in a scenario where the committed individual identifies, participates and enjoys belonging to the organization, as well as maintaining a long-term relationship (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Amin et al., 2021; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment has also been described as related to the psychological bonding that arises because of feeling a sense of obligation to a brand (Paluri & Mishal, 2020).

In the Fair Trade context, commitment is imperative as consumers develop an emotional attachment to the principles of the business system (De Gelder, 2022). The literature indicates that the higher the consumer's level of commitment towards the Fair Trade movement, the more favorable will be their perceptions of and responses to Fair Trade products (de Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Inoue et al., 2017). In short, higher-order mission-driven buyers are motivated by alternative norms based on social, ecological, and local concerns (Raynolds, 2009).

2.3. Behavioral Variables

In this study, we analyze three behavioral responses. The first is word of mouth (WOM), which has been defined as a process that allows consumers to share their views and direct other consumers to favor or oppose specific products (Park et al., 2021). WOM can include informal communications and positive and negative customer evaluations (Ihtiyar et al., 2018). Second, we analyze repurchase intentions, the consumer's intention to repeat the behavioral action of buying a brand (Hellier et al., 2003). Third, we look at willingness to pay more for Fair Trade products, which has been defined as the amount a customer is willing to pay for his/her preferred brand over comparable brands (Li & Kallas, 2021).

2.4. Proposed model

Herein, we investigate the sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) to empirically determine whether the sensory dimension positively influences the emotional and cognitive dimensions of experience and whether these latter two dimensions mediate the influence of sensory customer experience on commitment to Fair

Trade. Finally, it is proposed that this commitment makes the consumer willing to recommend, pay more for, and repurchase Fair Trade products (See Figure 1).

The literature proposes that sensory attributes (i.e., visual, auditory, tactile) stimulate the individual's senses and evoke emotions, creating positive moods that influence future behavioral decisions (Brun et al., 2017; Yoganathan et al., 2019). Similarly, there is evidence showing that sensory experiences impact emotions and that such stimuli positively influence memories (Ahn & Yang, 2021). These findings provide an important understanding of the internal mechanisms that stimulate sensations and awaken new positive feelings (Spence et al., 2014). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1. The sensory dimension of customer experience positively influences the emotional dimension of customer experience in the purchase of Fair Trade products.

Lee & Gretzel (2012) proposed an analysis to explain the influence of sensory stimuli on the attention and immersion of consumers exposed to particular content. These authors demonstrated, using printed/narrated texts, photos, videos, and images, that specific representations can be activated in the minds of consumers. In some environments, consumers seek and receive information from almost independent sensory channels (audio/visual), under so-called sensory memory (Harati & Isfandyari-Moghaddam, 2023). On the other hand, Chhaya (2024) demonstrated that performance in complex cognitive tasks is often sensitive to low-level sensory and perceptual factors, showing that relationships exist between task performance and sensory function. Therefore, the following is proposed:

H2. The sensory dimension of customer experience positively influences the cognitive dimension of customer experience in the purchase of Fair Trade products.

Rajaobelina et al. (2018) argued that the emotional dimension has a positive influence on commitment. This is manifest when enjoyment, interest, fun, and curiosity combine to create a meaningful experience in a Fair Trade specialty store. This playful, hedonic value is associated with the positive emotions felt by cus-

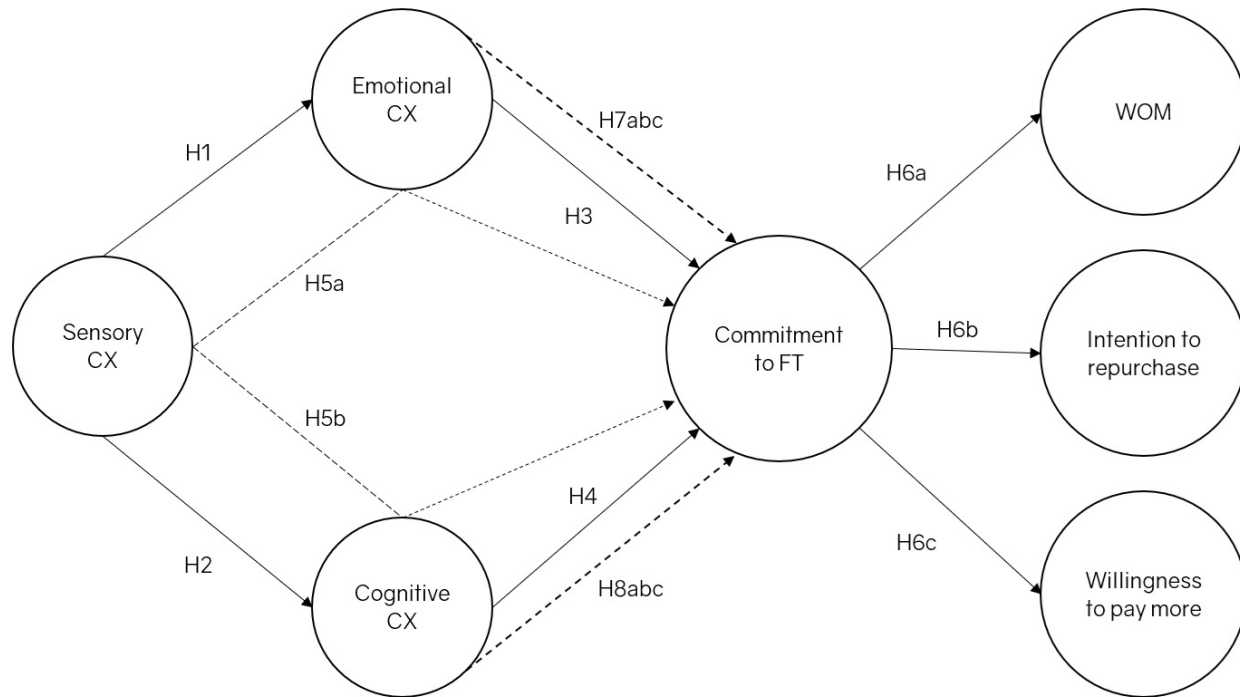


Figure 1. Model of the Proposed Hypotheses. Source: Authors

tomers (Tsai & Wang, 2017), which influence intrinsic enjoyment and commitment. Thus, we propose that:

H3. The emotional dimension of customer experience positively influences commitment to Fair Trade.

Similarly, it has been shown that providing an exceptional experience has a strong impact on people’s memories and commitment (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). This is possible because, today, information is available in many online and offline formats, which allows consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions and gives them more rewarding cognitive experiences as well as increased levels of trust and commitment (Ahn & Yang, 2021). For these reasons, it is proposed that:

H4. The cognitive dimension of customer experience positively influences commitment to Fair Trade.

Also, we formulate hypotheses about the expected effects of cognitive and emotional customer experience mediators of the positive relationship between

sensory customer experience on commitment to Fair Trade. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (Bigne et al., 2020; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974a), environmental stimuli, such as sensory elements in a physical store, generate emotional and cognitive reactions in consumers, which subsequently translate into specific behaviors, such as commitment to Fair Trade products. Our hypothesis suggests that this sensory stimulus only provokes effective commitment insofar as it first enhances the consumer’s emotional and cognitive experiences.

In line with this, Abdolmohamad et al. (2022) demonstrate that sensory stimuli such as sound, color, or smell affect consumers’ emotions and cognitive perceptions, significantly impacting their commitment and overall experience. This study reinforces the idea that the sensory stimulus does not directly influence commitment but does so through the prior activation of emotional and cognitive responses, a process particularly relevant in physical store environments,

such as Fair Trade stores.

Similarly, according to [Spence et al. \(2014\)](#), integrated sensory stimuli not only create a more enriching experience in the shopping environment but also generate greater emotional and cognitive activation in consumers. These coordinated sensory cues—such as music, scents, and colors—are complementary and strengthen affective and cognitive responses, which is particularly relevant in physical Fair Trade stores where the goal is to maximize consumer engagement through an immersive experience. This hierarchy of effects leads us to propose the mediation hypotheses H5a and H5b.

H5a: The emotional dimension of customer experience exerts an indirect-only mediation effect in the influence of sensory customer experience on commitment to Fair Trade.

H5b: The cognitive dimension of customer experience exerts an indirect-only mediation effect in the influence of sensory customer experience on commitment to Fair Trade.

Finally, we propose that higher commitment to Fair Trade is associated with positive behavioral responses. First, there is evidence that committed customers contribute to organizational success by influencing others, through referrals and WOM ([Fernandes & Moreira, 2019](#)). Second, committed consumers tend to see strong connections between themselves and brands, and consider the brands to be part of their lives ([Fatma et al., 2021](#)), which increases the likelihood of repurchase. Finally, a consumer committed to a cause or brand is more willing to pay higher prices ([Rodrigues et al., 2011](#)). Based on these points, we hypothesize that:

H6abc. Commitment to Fair Trade has a positive influence on a) WOM b) repurchase intentions and c) willingness to pay more for Fair Trade products.

Similarly to H5ab, we also propose that commitment mediates the relationships between the emotional and cognitive dimensions and the behaviors of Fair Trade buyers. First, [Syed & Shanmugam \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that customer commitment acts as a mediator in the relationship between corporate social responsibility and word of mouth (WOM), confirming that committed consumers tend to share their posi-

tive experiences. This finding supports the idea that commitment to Fair Trade can mediate the relationship between emotional customer experience and WOM.

Secondly, [Poushneh & Vasquez-Parraga \(2019\)](#) found that cognitive commitment has a positive mediating effect on the willingness to pay more for products perceived as valuable, supporting the cognitive dimension's mediation hypothesis on the willingness to pay more. And thirdly, according to [Das et al. \(2019\)](#), brand experience significantly impacts customer commitment, which in turn reinforces loyalty behaviors such as repurchase. This shows that strong emotional commitment, derived from a positive brand experience, fosters repeat purchases. For these reasons, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7abc. Commitment to Fair Trade exerts a complementary mediation effect in the influence of emotional customer experience on a) WOM b) repurchase intentions and c) willingness to pay more for Fair Trade products.

Furthermore, it can be expected that commitment has a mediating effect between the cognitive dimension and the behavioral variables studied. First, this is demonstrated in [Izogo's \(2017\)](#) study, where commitment partially mediates the relationship between customer experience in the telecommunications sector and WOM. Secondly, according to [Chandrashekar et al. \(2007\)](#), cognitive experiences not only strengthen consumer commitment, but this commitment also has a direct impact on loyalty and repurchase intentions. This demonstrates that cognitive customer experience plays a key role in generating repurchase behaviors through commitment.

And thirdly, [Zerbini et al. \(2019\)](#) confirm that Fair Trade claims, along with the emotional and cognitive commitment of the consumer, significantly increase both purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium for such products. This demonstrates that prosocial campaigns and positive perceptions of ethical products have a direct effect on consumers' willingness to pay more, reinforcing the impact of commitment generated by cognitive experiences. With this, we can hypothesize that:

H8abc. Commitment to Fair Trade exerts a complemen-

tary mediation effect in the influence of cognitive customer experience on a) WOM b) repurchase intentions and c) willingness to pay more for Fair Trade products.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Fieldwork

The present study proposes that the sensory dimension is a precursor of enjoying better emotional and cognitive experiences when purchasing Fair Trade products, and that these experiences influence buyers' commitment and behaviors. These relationships were evaluated based on the estimation of the theoretical model proposed in [Figure 2](#). The fieldwork was carried out in various Spanish cities. The same multimodal (online and in-person) structured questionnaire was addressed to Fair Trade buyers, who provided specific information about their shopping experiences in physical stores during the last year.

In the online mode an invitation, accompanied by a link, was posted on various social networks. Fair-trade Ibérica (through its newsletter), the State Coordinator of Fair Trade of Spain (through its official networks) and Oxfam Intermón, the largest importer of Fair Trade products in Spain (through its corporate WhatsApp channel) supported the data collection. In this modality, 247 responses were obtained. For the in-person interview mode, an interviewer was hired to approach people outside of Oxfam Intermón stores and in Fair Trade-selling supermarkets/hypermarkets in a large city in eastern Spain. In this modality, 98 responses were obtained.

Prior to the fieldwork, a pre-test was carried out with a sample of 34 individuals to confirm that the items were comprehensible, clear, and unambiguous, thus mitigating/eliminating acquiescence bias ([Winkler et al., 1982](#)). To avoid common method bias (i.e., CMB; [MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012](#)), the scale items were separated by including filler questions and randomizing the order of items, reducing the probability of respondents guessing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. A total of 407 consumers of Fair Trade products were surveyed between February and March 2023; the model was estimated using only 345 participants, as 62 stated

they had not purchased Fair Trade products in the previous year and were therefore excluded from the study.

3.2. Metrics

The questionnaire used a 7-point Likert-type response format, where 1 represented total disagreement, and 7 total agreement. The sensory dimension was measured on a 5-item scale developed by [Brun et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Brakus et al. \(2009\)](#). The emotional dimension was measured on a 6-item scale; the first three items were adapted from [Dedeoglu et al. \(2018\)](#), the next two from [Lee and Park \(2019\)](#), and the last from [Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles \(2021\)](#). The cognitive dimension was measured using five items based on proposals made by [Brun et al. \(2017\)](#), [Brakus et al. \(2009\)](#) and [Rajaobelina et al. \(2018\)](#).

The commitment variable was measured using four items drawn from [Pounders et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Allen & Meyer \(1990\)](#). The 3-item scale used to measure WOM was adapted from [Ihtiyar et al. \(2018\)](#). Repurchase intentions were measured with three items adapted from [Kaatz et al. \(2019\)](#). Finally, three items taken from [Konuk \(2019\)](#) were used to assess willingness to pay more. The items are detailed in [Table 2](#).

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

The sample's sociodemographic profile and Fair Trade-product purchasing habits are provided in [Table 1](#). The sample is gender-balanced. More than half were between 29 and 48 years old and most had studied at university. In addition, most respondents earned between 12,000 and 36,000 euros per year. It should be noted that the Fair Trade movement's concern about shopping in large stores is well-founded, as 41% of respondents said they preferred to buy Fair Trade products in supermarkets and hypermarkets. The most purchased product categories were cocoa and coffee. More than 50% of the sample buys Fair Trade products at least once a month, and two-thirds of the sample, on average, spent between €1 and €40 on each purchase. Given that the study is multimodal (online and in-person), we checked that the two subsamples did not differ significantly on demographic variables, run-

ning an independent t-test for age and c2 for gender, educational level and income. Results showed a significant age difference (online= 41.50, in-person = 49.17, $t = 3.70$, $p < .01$; $d_{Cohen} = .49$), but differences in gender, educational level, and income.

Table 1. Sample Profile

Category	Response
Gender	Men: 52.3% Women: 45.5% Other: 2.2%
Age	39-48 years: 31% 29-38 years: 19.2% 49-58 years: 17.4% 18-28 years: 17.2% Over 58 years: 15.2%
Educational Level	Baccalaureate/University: 76.6% Secondary/High School: 15.5% Primary/Elementary: 7.9%
Income	Between 12,000 and 36,000 € p.a.: 58.8% Less than 12,000 € p.a.: 23.2% More than 36,000 € p.a.: 18.0%
Purchasing Location	Super/Hypermarket: 41.1% Specialty Stores: 32.9% Oxfam Intermón: 23.48% Carrefour: 13.62% Consum: 13.62%
Category/Type of Product Purchased	Cacao/Chocolate: 16.36% Coffee: 16.21% Clothes/Textiles: 12.6% Tea/Infusions: 12% Sugar: 11.7%
Frequency of Purchase	Once a Year: 44.35% Once a Month: 30.72% Once Every Three Months: 18.26%
Average Price Paid in Previous Purchase	From 1 to 20 euros: 44.06% From 21 to 40 euros: 32.17% More than 40 euros: 23.77%

4.2. Psychometric Properties of the Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) containing all the multi-item constructs in our model was estimated using the Covariance-Based (CB-SEM) module of Smart PLS 4.1 software (Ringle et al., 2024) to assess measurement reliability and validity. While refining the scales, we eliminated items COG2, SEN3 due to convergent validity issues, and ITR2 and ITR3 due to discriminant validity problems with the recommendation construct. Results of the final CFA are reported in Table 2 and suggest that our final measurement model provides a good fit to the data ($\chi^2=1005.83$; $df=255$; $p<.01$; $RMSEA=.06$; $NFI=.85$; $TLI=.86$; $CFI=.88$). As can be seen in Table 2, the model's constructs obtained values greater than 0.7 for both Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and for composite reliability (Henseler et al., 2015); this suggests the model has adequate internal consistency for each construct, and for each item individually. These two indicators, together with the AVE values, which in all cases exceeded 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), suggest that the model has good reliability and convergent validity.

Following this analysis, discriminant validity was addressed. It was confirmed that the AVE of each pair of factors was greater than the square of the inter-construct correlations, except marginally for the pair COG-EMO. In addition, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of each factor was calculated (Henseler et al., 2015), with all values being below .90 (Table 3).

The fit of the model that included substantive and random (unmeasured) variable factors ($\chi^2=1009.04$; $df=259$; $p<.01$) was not significantly different than the fit of the model that included only the substantive factors ($\chi^2=1005.83$; $df = 255$; $p<.01$; $\chi^2 \text{ diff} = 3.21$; $df = 4$; $p > .05$). This result allowed us to conclude that the measurement model did not present CMB issues.

Finally, in this type of research design, common method bias (CMB) may arise (Podsakoff et al., 2024). To detect it, we used the unmeasured latent variable technique.

Table 2. Reliability, Internal Consistency, and Convergent Validity of the Measurement Instrument

Factor	Indicator Item	Convergent validity		Reliability			
		Load	t value	CA	CR	AVE	
Sensory customer experience	SEN1	I find the store where I buy Fair Trade products to be interesting in a sensory way	.84	18.01	.84	.85	.58
	SEN2	My visual sense is stimulated in the store where I buy Fair Trade products	.71	14.22			
	SEN3	My sense of hearing is stimulated in the store where I buy Fair Trade products*	-	-			
	SEN4	My sense of touch is stimulated in the store where I buy Fair Trade products	.74	14.95			
	SEN5	My sense of smell is stimulated in the store where I buy Fair Trade products	.75	15.33			
Emotional customer experience	EMO1	Buying a Fair Trade product was nice	.82	18.17	.92	.91	.65
	EMO2	Buying a Fair Trade product made me feel good	.84	18.81			
	EMO3	Buying a Fair Trade product gave me pleasure	.71	14.93			
	EMO4	Buying a Fair Trade product induces positive thoughts	.78	16.95			
	EMO5	Buying a Fair Trade product makes me proud	.83	18.60			
	EMO6	When I buy a Fair Trade product, I feel happy	.85	19.24			
Cognitive customer experience	COG1	When I buy Fair Trade products, I engage in a thought process	.86	18.98	.84	.83	.56
	COG2	When I buy Fair Trade products, I'm really focused and fascinated*	-	14.92			
	COG3	When I buy Fair Trade products, I have the impression that I am learning something	.73	-			
	COG4	It stimulates my curiosity and engages me in problem-solving situations	.71	14.59			
	COG5	It stimulates my creativity (new achievements or ideas)	.70	14.17			
Commitment	COM1	I feel emotionally attached to Fair Trade producers	.80	17.43	.88	.88	.65
	COM2	Fair Trade products carry a lot of meaning to me	.86	19.39			
	COM3	I have a strong sense of belonging to the Fair Trade movement	.78	16.56			
	COM4	I really believe that the problems of Fair Trade producers are my problems	.77	16.48			

Continued on next page

Table 2 continued

Word of mouth	WOM1	I will say positive things about Fair Trade products to other people	.80	17.19	.85	.85	.66
	WOM2	I will recommend Fair Trade products to people who seek my advice	.85	18.83			
	WOM3	I will encourage friends and family to purchase Fair Trade products	.79	16.76			
Intention to repurchase	ITR1	I intend to purchase Fair Trade products in the coming years	1.00	26.27	n/a	n/a	n/a
	ITR2	I consider Fair Trade products to be my first choice for future purchases*	-				
	ITR3	I would be inclined to repurchase Fair Trade products*	-				
Willingness to pay more	WPM1	I'm willing to spend more to buy Fair Trade products	.84	18.96	.91	.91	.77
	WPM2	It is acceptable to pay a premium to buy Fair Trade products	.85	19.18			
	WPM3	I'm willing to pay more for Fair Trade products	.94	22.80			

$\chi^2(255df)=1,005.83$, $p=.00$; NFI=.85; CFI=.86; TLI=.88; RMSEA=.06

CA = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; *Items eliminated due to low factor loading.

4.3. Tests of the Hypotheses

Table 4 shows that all the proposed relationships are statistically significant at 99% confidence ($t > 2.58 = p < .01$; see Table 4). Figure 2 presents graphically the test of the direct effects hypotheses.

To test the mediation hypotheses, we estimated a new model to assess only the direct effects of sensory customer experience on commitment, and emotional and cognitive customer experience on the three behavioral responses before introducing the mediator variables. Then, we estimated another model with the direct and indirect effects. Table 5 shows the analysis of these mediation effects. First, as can be seen, emotional customer experience exerts an indirect-only mediation effect on the influence of sensory customer experience on commitment (H5a supported); we obtain the same result for the analysis of the mediating role of cognitive customer experience (H5b supported). Second, we found that commitment exerts a complementary mediation effect in the influence of emotional customer experience on the three behavioral responses analyzed (H7abc supported). However, and contrary to our predictions, our findings suggest the existence of a competitive mediation effect of commitment in the influence of cognitive customer experience on WOM, repurchase intention and WPM (H8a, H8b, and H8c not supported), since there is a negative direct influence of cognitive customer experience on these three behavioral outcomes.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

First, the positive influence of the sensory dimension on emotional and cognitive experience in the purchase of Fair Trade products was confirmed. Based on these relationships, this research determined that integrated sensory stimuli produce much richer experiences than do individual stimuli. Thus, integrated sensory modalities better activate the emotional and cognitive aspects of the shopping experience (Spence et al., 2014). Therefore, we suggest that coordinated sensory cues impact on these experience dimensions and that the different sensory cues are complementary.

In detailed analyses, research shows that certain

sensations—such as store temperature (Ackerman et al., 2010), product tasting (Turner, n.d), and the ability to touch merchandise (Underhill, 1999)—can subtly influence consumer emotions. Additionally, pleasant, brand-congruent aromas (Parsons, 2009), immersive ambient sounds (Spence et al., 2014), and evocative visual designs that convey semantic meaning (Schmitt, 1999) also contribute to shaping emotional responses. These coordinated sensory cues have been found to complement one another, creating richer emotional and cognitive experiences. In line with these findings, our research suggests that such coordinated sensory cues in Fair Trade stores may encourage consumers to engage with store employees to learn more about Fair Trade products, ultimately enhancing their overall experience.

Second, the emotional dimension was found to influence the commitment of consumers motivated by social responsibility and altruism (Shaw et al., 2006). Third, the positive influence of the cognitive dimension on commitment was verified. In this regard, Bateman & Strasser (1984) and Keiningham et al. (2017) argued that commitment begins with a process of rationalization, through which meaning is given to a situation consistent with the ability to be interested in and be part of something (e.g., fairtrade system). Thus, commitment is a subjective state, which includes both cognitive and emotional components, that influences different behaviors, for example, positive WOM (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001).

Additionally, in our study we demonstrated that emotional and cognitive customer experience exert an indirect-only mediation effect on the influence of sensory customer experience on commitment to Fair Trade. This confirms our predictions that the influence of the sensory experience in a Fair Trade store on commitment to Fair Trade follows a hierarchy of effects mechanism analogous to the S-O-R theory (Bigne et al., 2020; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974b): the sensory experience (stimulus) in the store only improves commitment (response) if it is previously able to activate a positive cognitive and emotional experience in the customer (organism).

Fifth, it was shown that commitment positively

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	SEN	EMO	COG	COM	WOM	ITR	WPM
Sensory customer (SEN)	.76	.55	.62	.41	.34	.23	.12
Emotional (EMO)	.52	.81	.81	.74	.61	.56	.52
Cognitive (COG)	.58	.82	.75	.75	.47	.43	.38
Commitment (COM)	.40	.74	.75	.80	.74	.54	.59
Word of mouth (WOM)	.32	.60	.49	.75	.81	.61	.73
Intention to repurchase (ITR)	.23	.55	.45	.54	.80	1.00	.62
Willingness to pay more (WPM)	.12	.51	.41	.58	.74	.62	.88

Note: values on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVEs. Lower triangle: latent variable correlations; Upper triangle: HTMT ratios

Table 4. Estimation of the structural model

Hypotheses	Std β	Test
H1: Sensory → Emotional	.60*	Supported
H2: Sensory → Cognitive	.66*	Supported
H3: Emotional → Commitment	.58*	Supported
H4: Cognitive → Commitment	.29*	Supported
H5a: Commitment → Word of mouth	.81*	Supported
H4b: Commitment → Intention to repurchase	.64*	Supported
H5c: Commitment → Willingness to pay more	.65*	Supported

χ^2 (269df) = 1,395.63 ($p = .00$); NFI = .79; CFI = .80; TLI = .82; RMSEA = .11

R²: Emotional = .36; Cognitive = .44; Commitment = .56; Word of Mouth = .66; Intention to repurchase = .40; Willingness to pay more = .42.

* = $p < .01$

influences WOM. Committed people make positive recommendations. In addition, WOM makes the Fair Trade movement better known (Anastasiiei & Dospinescu, 2019). Furthermore, good commercial practices that generate consumer commitment increase repurchase intentions (Fatma et al., 2021). Also, it was confirmed that greater commitment to Fair Trade makes consumers willing to pay more for Fair Trade products (de Pelsmacker et al., 2005). Thus, this work demonstrates that commitment exerts a complementary mediating effect on the influence of emotional customer experience on the three behavioral responses analyzed. Some previous studies (Rajaobelina et al., 2018; Tsai & Wang, 2017) have demonstrated the direct influence of a better emotional experience on consumer behavioral responses, such as purchase intention, WOM, or WPM; in this sense, the significant indirect effect of commitment complements and reinforces those positive outputs of

a better emotional customer experience.

However, this does not occur with cognitive experience. Interestingly, in our study, a better cognitive experience in the Fair Trade store exerts a significant, but negative, direct effect on WOM, intention to repurchase and WPM. The indirect effect on the three outcome variables through commitment is, on the contrary, positive and significant. This is an interesting result. This finding shows that a certain level of improvement in the customer’s cognitive activation in the Fair Trade store (“I engage in a thought process”, “I’m learning something”, etc.) leads to an improvement in commitment to the Fair Trade movement, but to a negative effect on WOM, intention to repurchase and WPM. This phenomenon may be explained by an information oversaturation effect of the consumer (Eppler & Mengis, 2004), such that beyond a certain level of cognitive activation, negative behavioral responses are manifested in the store (e.g., the desire

Table 5. Mediation Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis- Relationship	Direct effect before introducing mediator β	Direct effect after introducing mediator β	Indirect effect β	Type of mediation
H5a. Sensory customer experience → Commitment	.80*	-.12	Mediator: Emotional customer experience .24*	Indirect-only
H5b. Sensory customer experience → Commitment	.80*	-.12	Mediator: Cognitive customer experience .46*	Indirect-only
H7a. Emotional customer experience → WOM	.95*	.17*	Mediator: Commitment .51*	Complementary mediation
H7b. Emotional customer experience → Intention to purchase	.87*	.31*	.35*	Complementary mediation
H7c. Emotional customer experience → WPM	.85*	.21*	.39*	Complementary mediation
H8a. Cognitive customer experience → WOM	-.39*	-.83*	Mediator: Commitment .88*	Competitive mediation
H8b. Cognitive customer experience → Intention to purchase	-.37*	-.68*	.62*	Competitive mediation
H8c. Cognitive customer experience → WPM	-.42*	-.72*	.69*	Competitive mediation

* = $p < .01$

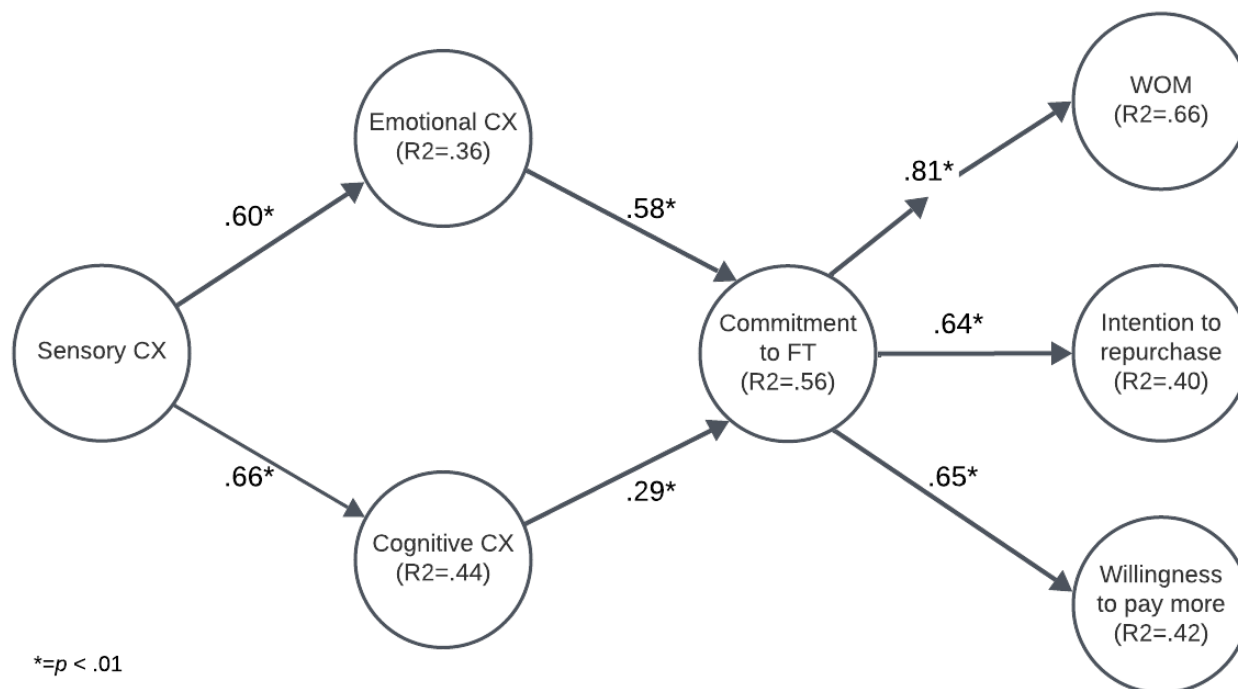


Figure 2. Tests of the Direct Effects Hypotheses. Source: Authors

to “escape” from the store). Future studies should investigate this phenomenon further.

5.2. Managerial Implications

This research supports the proposal that customer experience should be a long-term project for brands, especially in terms of commitment to the Fair Trade movement (Chang & Zhang, 2016). As to the sensory dimension, the focus should be on how to develop an environment based on multiple sensations, where positive thoughts will evoke purchase intentions (Spence et al., 2014). From a practical viewpoint, auditory and visual signals should be used to attract customers. The stimuli should be congruent but differ based on their novelty, promotions, time of year, product turnover, or, simply, brand image (Brun et al., 2017).

As to the emotional dimension, staff should be courteous, competent, and well-trained; this will ensure they quickly and effectively evoke favorable emotions in the consumer (Chang & Zhang, 2016). In addition, vendors should touch the customer’s heart through

sponsorship of the social causes supported by the Fair Trade movement (Rather, 2021), and by demonstrating that the benefits of sales reach the producer communities (Pujastuti et al., 2017). Turning to the cognitive dimension, it would be useful to promote relevant learning and discovery from testimonials (Brun et al., 2017) as this approach may awaken the customer’s curiosity and provoke reflection. That is, actions could be taken to create an atmosphere that awakens the consumer’s investigative instincts (Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2021).

5.3. Limitations

A limitation of this research is that the measurement of the customer experience was carried out through self-reports. Evolving biometric-based research techniques could provide interesting results about the sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of the consumer’s purchasing experience of Fair Trade products. Another limitation of this study is the absence of a baseline measure regarding respondents’ under-

standing of Fair Trade principles, particularly concerning supply chain equity and social/health welfare. Without this baseline, it is difficult to determine whether the respondents shared a similar understanding of Fair Trade or if this varied by factors such as age, education, or the mode of data collection. Future studies should assess respondents' knowledge and perceptions of Fair Trade to ensure consistency across demographic variables and modes of data collection. This would provide a clearer interpretation of the results and offer more insights into how these factors may influence the respondents' views on Fair Trade products.

5.4. Future Research

The model could be estimated in different cultural contexts. Moreover, buyers' experiences could be measured in real-time, using mobile technologies, to understand their experiences. Another suggestion is to investigate the possibility of applying this model in B2B relationships for Fair Trade. Similarly, the research could be expanded to include other behavioral variables and other dimensions of the customer experience, such as technological, behavioral and social dimensions, trust, purchase motivations for, attitudes towards, and perceptions of, Fair Trade products. Finally, incorporating moderator variables into the model would be valuable. For example, possible gender differences (de Leeuw et al., 2014), that could impact the direct and mediation effects should be studied.

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LUMINOUS
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