

HOW THE EXPOSURE TO A COMMODIFIED EXPERIENCE MAY UNDERMINE ITS PERCEIVED COMFORT

Sandra Carmona, Cinta Lajara, Anna Torvà, Maria Trobat

Gert Cornelissen

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ABSTRACT

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The role of commodification in different fields has been subject of several studies in the past. There is yet no evidence that the exposure to a commodified situation may undermine how comfortable people feel, in contrast to their perceived level of comfort in the same, non-commodified situation. Results suggest that a drop in comfort occurs when brands are used to commodify a meaningful experience. One possible explanation to this phenomenon could refer to the extrinsic motivation entailed by commodified experiences. In addition, evidence shows that this reduction is highly correlated with the level of affinity people have with brands and that it is presumably independent from their personality traits.

Keywords: *consumerism, commodification, experience, level of comfort, market values, non-market values, communal relationships, exchange relationships, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Surrounded by an increasingly consumerist world, experiences are gaining importance in the market sphere. Not only are brands offering experiences as consumables, but they are also using them to build settings around the purchase of material goods, hence upgrading the whole buying experience. It is often believed that creating this bond with consumers seduces them. But could it be the case that commodifying meaningful experiences to serve commercial purposes triggered a sense of discomfort?

Given our previous interest in Consumer Behavior, this question awakened our curiosity and became the central focus of our project. A principal hypothesis arose as trying to find an answer to the main question, and two secondary hypotheses emerged when digging into the key question.

The first hypothesis claims that people feel uncomfortable when they are exposed to commodified situations or experiences that entail a mix between market and non-market values, leading to a decrease in their worth. An experiment has been run to test this hypothesis, where participants watched videos showing meaningful experiences. At the end of some of them, a brand would prominently appear as if it was sponsoring the experience.

Seizing the opportunity to further expand our research, two additional hypotheses arose. They both assume the veracity of the first one and revolve around the possible effects that may influence the drop in perceived value. As for the second hypothesis, a correlation between the decrease in the level of comfort and certain personality traits is alleged. Our beliefs are that pragmatic individuals are less susceptible to commodified situations, thus feeling more comfortable than emotional people. The third hypothesis builds on the potential impact that the affinity towards a brand may have in the stated level of comfort from commodified experiences involving that brand.

The project is structured in two main sections. In the first one, some background literature is reviewed and two different theories are considered to provide a theoretical explanation to our findings. In the second section, a detailed description of the experiment is presented and its results are carefully examined.

Finally, interpretations on the results obtained are included in the conclusions, where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are used as an approach to explain the reasons why our hypothesis is confirmed.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, some background literature and supporting theories to our hypothesis are discussed to provide a basis for our study.

2.1. BACKGROUND LITERATURE

2.1.1. CONSUMERISM AND EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

It is undeniable that we live in a consumer society, where the acquisition of goods and services is encouraged and presented as the driving force for economic growth. However, this has not been the case for most of history; until the 18th century, economies were based on agrarian production and poverty was the rule. For over seven centuries, GDP in the UK remained almost unchanged (Broadberry, 2015) and luxuries were strictly reserved to ruling classes. With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, production became more efficient, which led to the growth of businesses. Wages began to increase and urban areas expanded, which transformed consumption in a social activity available to the masses (White, 2009). This very early form of consumerism, understood as a “society in which many people formulate their goals in life partly through acquiring goods that they clearly do not need for subsistence or for traditional display” (Stearns, 2001), already had its opponents. They disapproved of the vanity of this new economic order, as shopping for pleasure was considered to be only addressing superfluous needs.

After World War II, another wave of mass consumption emerged in a period of strong economic growth. Not only did consumers mainly base their consumption choices on their *wants* rather than their *needs*, but they started giving social and symbolic meaning to their purchases as well (Douglas & Isherwood, 1980). Analyzing goods in terms of their social and emotional worth marks a turning point in society, as “values are transferred from intellectual, moral and social spheres to the market” (Butnaru, 2009). As consumers’ identity and well-being started being shaped by their buying decisions, businesses shifted their focus from product-oriented to consumer-oriented. Organizations have developed networks to boost and serve consumerism, with advertisers, store assistants and product designers.

Paradoxically, the rise of consumerism has blurred the limits of what is considered to be the object of our consumption. In a goods-based economy, people acquired commoditized goods on the basis of price and consumers obtained what they paid for. As highly standardized industries increased competition, companies realized they needed to differentiate their offerings from the rest. Additional services were included in the product

until transitioning to our current service economy, where services are the company's most valued offerings. Nowadays, consumers expect a satisfactory customer service, but desire an experience. The latest consumer trends indicate that consumers prioritize experiential value in the market and want to be co-creators instead of merely consumers (Aida & Sasaki, 2014). Accordingly, the key characteristic of an experience as opposed to previous offerings is that it engages the customer, which is now the guest. Businesses create experiences when they make use of their services and goods to engage individual customers and create a memorable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), personal to each participant. There was a time when the experience economy was reserved to Walt Disney, but now the whole world is a stage for business from all industries alike. For instance, Starbucks Reserve Roastery stores in Seattle, Shanghai and Milano are not cafés, but a multi-sensory experience where guests can drink their favorite coffee, watch it being roasted, buy a cup and bring it home or experience Augmented Reality through an app in their mobile devices. As customers seek experiences, authenticity has become the buying criteria. More precisely, it is *perceived authenticity* what matters to them (Pine, 2004).

A final remark should be made in the field of experiences; while some companies are moving towards the experience economy, others are still offering their traditional products disguised as an experience to trigger an emotional response and sell them better. Customers want brands to make them part of experiences specially curated for them, but do they have the same perception when a brand uses his previous non-marketable experiences for commercial purposes with no actual experience being provided?

2.1.2. COMMODIFICATION

The concept of commodification is closely related to Marxist theory and refers to the assignment of monetary value to a good, concept or relationship that was not treated in economic terms before. Any object can be subject to commodification if it enters the economic circuit - knowledge, friendship, women, culture... - and its inherent worth is replaced by extrinsic economic value (Felluga, 2015). Commodification is a social construct and there are two sociological processes that appear in several commodified situations and lead to its acceptance. The first one, *diffusion*, is "the process of spreading styles, ideas, values and norms into a wider society" (Haenfler, 2017) and it succeeds when individuals embrace the promotion of the commodified object. For example, the uprising branding of feminism is taken by some as an example of commodification and considered to constrain the power of the social movement (Zeisler, 2016). The second process is

defusion, “depoliticizing the values, meanings, ideals and subversive potential of a group” (Haenfler, 2017). The commodification of cultural heritage is thought by some to alter and destroy local culture (Greenwood, 1989), which is claimed to undermine the authenticity and value of the experience (Klieger, 1990).

One of the collectives which are most often commodified are subcultures, a cultural group within a larger culture with interests that differ from those of the society it belongs to. When subcultures are marketed they become mainstream, thus decreasing the meaning of a subculture as more people consume it (Sayers, 2012). Subtler is the presence of this “marketable” perspective in several other nonbusiness fields, from government agencies to universities treating their citizens and students as consumers (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Creating a consumption situation where there was none has important implications for the individuals involved, as it is believed that people’s behavior is influenced by the consumption or non-consumption situation they are in (Folkes, 2002). Taking into account the above-mentioned view of commodification, further research will be carried out in this project to prove if the previous negative effects also apply to different commodified situations.

2.2. SUPPORTING THEORIES

As it has been stated in the Introduction, our hypothesis claims that people feel uncomfortable when they are exposed to commodified experiences or situations that entail a mix between market and non-market values, hence resulting in a decrease in the perceived comfort from those experiences. Still, no theoretical explanation has been given so far to justify the reason behind this alleged drop in perceived comfort.

The upcoming section tries to give two different explanations to this phenomenon, both based on the idea that the perceived value of an experience goes down when a mix between market values and non-market values is produced.

2.2.1. COMMUNAL AND EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS

A popular model in social psychology, developed by Margaret S. Clark and Judson Mills in 1979, distinguishes two types of relationships based on the rules governing the giving and receiving of benefits. They are both interpersonal relationships, but depending on people’s appraisal of and response to social exchanges, they can be distinguished as exchange relationships or communal relationships.

In an exchange relationship, there is expectation of receiving a comparable benefit in return of the benefit given. These types of bilateral sequences are based on the reciprocity principle, which states that we pay back what we receive from others. Each participant is concerned with how much she has received in order to repay an obligation, and with how much she has given in order to estimate the amount of her compensation. However, the true intention of members in exchange relationships is frequently that of maximizing one's individual outcome rather than trying to equalize the other party (Fiske, 1992). Exchange relationships are associated with market values, as most times they involve an economic exchange in which what people give and receive has a monetary value that can be calculated (Heyman & Ariely, 2004). The relationship between a consumer and a seller, and that between an employee and an employer are both examples of exchange relationships.

In a communal relationship, the basis of benefit is concern for the other's welfare. In this type of relationships, the motivation is different, as members seek to benefit the other party when a need for the benefit arises without trying to assess imbalance. That is, they give benefits non-contingently because they are less concerned with perfect balance between partners. Individuals trying to achieve mutual responsiveness characterize communal relationships (Lemay & Clark, 2008). The relationship between friends, family members and romantic partners are all examples of communal relationships.

In brief, while in a communal relationship the receipt of a benefit does not induce a sense of moral obligation, in an exchange relationship a benefit must be reciprocated by giving a comparable benefit.

However, the effects of receiving a benefit and a request for a benefit differ depending on the type of relationship a person has with another person. M. S. Clark and J. Mills hypothesized that "the receipt of a benefit after the person has been benefited leads to a greater attraction when an exchange relationship is preferred and decreases attraction when a communal relationship is desired". The model states that it is inappropriate and it may create conflict if a person is paid back in a communal relationship, as it may suggest that the original benefit was not given to satisfy a need but rather in response to the benefit that was previously received. Similarly, when people are looking for an exchange relationship, they may feel upset if the other person does not pay back. Therefore, treating the relationship in terms of exchange is not opportune in a communal relationship while it is in an exchange relationship. In other words, people feel uncomfortable when exchange relationships – associated with market values get mixed with communal relationships – associated with non-market values.

The same reactions might appear when any of the two types of relationships are expected but do not yet exist. Receiving a benefit from a person with whom it was desired to have a communal relationship should create dissatisfaction. Instead, if an exchange relationship was desired, receiving a benefit would result in a greater level of satisfaction.

2.2.2. INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

The second theory goes back to the definition of commodification as a phenomenon where “[...] things as friendship, knowledge [...] are no longer treated as things with intrinsic worth but as commodities. They are valued, that is, only extrinsically in terms of money” (Felluga, 2002).

Following this direction, an approach is raised on how the conflict between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation might be analogous to the incompatibilities between market and non-market values.

The SDT or Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) claims that motivation can be regarded as intrinsic when it refers to performing a task per se or experiencing a situation in its essence, as it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, leading to a sense of inner satisfaction. A person that is intrinsically motivated will tend to engage in amusing, curiosity-driven spontaneous behaviors even without the presence of any stimulus or reward (White, 1959), treating the task or the activity as an end in itself that is not driven by any additional instrumental reason.

On the contrary, extrinsic motivation refers to performing a task or undergoing a situation that is treated as a means to an end, as it pursues the achievement of a separable outcome that has an instrumental value.

In short, intrinsic motivation is expressed in behaviors that emanate from one’s sense of self, while extrinsic motivation is present in those that are not representative of one’s self (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Some social and environmental factors are believed to facilitate or undermine the expression of intrinsic motivation in individuals. Specifically, the CET or Cognitive Evaluation Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) describes two fundamental factors that enhance intrinsic motivation. According to the CET, both competence and autonomy must be experienced for intrinsic motivation to be maintained. As for competence, people should seek challenges that are optimal for their capacities (Deci, 1975) and activities that allow them to master problems or skills (MacTurk & Morgan, 1995). As regards autonomy, also

referred to as *reflective autonomy* (Koestner & Losier, 1996), individuals should experience self-determined behavior and freedom of choice. For instance, some studies show that autonomy-supportive teachers enhance a relatively higher level of intrinsic motivation, curiosity and eagerness to take on challenges than controlling teachers (Deci, Nezlek & Sheinman, 1981; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986).

Yet, it is essential to bear in mind that people do not show a uniform pattern of motivation towards activities or experiences. For example, an activity can induce a high level of intrinsic motivation in individual A and a very low level in individual B. These differences depend on the extent to which people perceive an activity as inherently enjoyable and appealing.

The conflict between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation arises when an extrinsic input or reward that is placed into an activity or situation undermines the intrinsic motivation to engage in that activity (Deci et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This could also be explained using a *pollution* metaphor, where the introduction of extrinsic inputs *pollutes* the intrinsic motivation towards the eagerness to experience a specific situation.

Specifically, research shows that external inputs undermine individuals' psychological sense for autonomy (Deci, 1975; Deci et al., 1999), which is one of the two fundamental factors facilitating intrinsic motivation. According to CET, people experience these extrinsic inputs as controllers of their behavior (Reeve & Deci, 1996).

The tension between the two types of motivations resembles the conflict that occurs when market and non-market values are mixed.

Apart from enhancing intrinsic motivation, the presence of autonomy also characterizes those situations in which non-market values are evoked, where commodification is absent and freedom of choice is reinforced. Conversely, lack of autonomy is more typical of situations that elicit market values, where exogenous inputs in the form of brands or money contribute to the commodification of an experience and are likely to undermine the intrinsic motivation towards it.

Thus, the analogy between the conflicts within these two dimensions –intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation and market vs non-market values relies on the role that autonomy plays in both relations. While the presence of autonomy is found in both intrinsic motivation and non-market values, lack of autonomy is characteristic of both external motivation and market values.

Intrinsic motivation towards the execution of a task or inherent eagerness to experience a situation usually entail the desire to achieve an associated intrinsic goal, and the same holds true for extrinsic motivation and its correspondent goals. Intrinsic goals are based on the needs for competence, autonomy and community feeling (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman & Sheldon, 2004), while extrinsic aspirations are related to financial success, image and popularity (Grouzet et al., 2005). As with the conflict produced between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, research also shows that goals in these two different directions are not compatible.

According to SDT, when people achieve intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals they attain a greater level of well-being (Bandura 1989; Locke & Latham 1990). In a study conducted by Kasser & Ryan (2001), people with a high achievement of extrinsic aspirations reported a lower quality of friendships than people with a high achievement of intrinsic goals. Overall, results of the study suggested that “the attainment of intrinsic aspirations is beneficial for well-being and social functioning whereas the attainment of extrinsic aspirations is largely unrelated to psychological health”.

The correlation between intrinsic motivation or goals and greater well-being has been tested in several studies. For example, in an experiment conducted by Niemiec et al. (2006), high-school students with a high level of autonomy and self-determination also reported “[...] higher well-being (vitality, life satisfaction) and lower ill-being (depression, externalizing problems)”. In another study, Black & Deci (2000) found that students with a higher sense of autonomy in the learning process of organic chemistry perceived the course material to be more interesting and enjoyable.

3. EXPERIMENT

In the following section, the three hypotheses in our study are reviewed. Also, the materials and methods used to conduct the experiment are described in detail. Finally, the results obtained are analyzed separately for each hypothesis.

3.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Our first hypothesis stated that people feel uncomfortable when they are exposed to commodified experiences or situations entailing a mix between market and non-market values. After reviewing some theoretical concepts on the topic and trying to find an explanation to this phenomenon, an experiment has been carried out to corroborate or reject our first hypothesis.

Furthermore, two more associated hypotheses have been studied to analyze additional external factors that may influence the extent to which people feel uncomfortable when being exposed to commodified situations. The second hypothesis claims the possible existence of a correlation between personality types and the level of comfort and lastly, the third one suggests there might be a dependency between the degree of affinity with a brand and the stated level of contentment from experiences involving that brand.

To better assess the hypotheses stated above, we also measured whether people experiencing this exposure to commodified situations, perceived less of the essential values that are generally associated with these experiences.

3.2. METHODOLOGY

3.2.1. SURVEY

The experiment was presented to participants in a survey (see Annex 1) framed through the platform *Qualtrics*, presented in two different conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to these conditions - the control group and the experimental group. Accordingly, some parts of the survey had a general nature and were presented to both groups, while others were specific to each condition.

The questionnaire was originally written in Spanish to reach a higher level of participants, but the questions asked and the scales that were used by respondents have been translated to English for the purpose of this analysis.

The first two questions in the survey were general and they asked about the age and gender of the participant.

After that, respondents were shown four different self-made videos – the first displayed some emblematic buildings of Barcelona, the second exhibited natural scenic views and rural villages, the third presented mums taking care of their newborns and the fourth video showed the effort exerted by *Castellers* when building a human tower, which is part of a Catalan tradition. The control group viewed the four experiences in their original format, whereas the experimental group watched all of them in a commercial context. At the end of the video, a brand would prominently appear on the screen. This made it look as if those brands were sponsoring the experiences. This way we created a sense of brands appropriating those experiences.

From now on and for the rest of the experiment, we will refer to the four videos as the *Barcelona* video, the *Nature* video, the *Newborn* video and the *Castellers* video. Following

the visualization of each video, all participants had to answer a couple of questions. The first one was specific to each video and it made explicit reference to the values associated with each one of the videos –fascination, peace, tenderness and admiration/strength respectively. Conversely, the second referred to the level of comfort evoked by the video and was common in all of them. As an example, after watching the *Barcelona* video, participants were asked to evaluate, on the one hand, the fascination they felt when viewing it, and on the other hand, the level of comfort that was conveyed by the video. As stated above, the latter was common for all videos. Such evaluation was made by using a scale from 0 to 10, where “0” represented “minimum fascination” and “not comfortable at all” and “10” denoted “maximum fascination” and “extremely comfortable”, respectively.

Subsequently, after responding the questions associated with the four videos, five common personality statements were evaluated by each participant in both conditions. As our second hypothesis claims the possible existence of a correlation between personality types and the level of comfort, all respondents were classified in two different groups according to personality types. This was done to assess if one of the groups had a higher tendency than the other to state a higher level of comfort when experiencing a mix between market and non-market values. The chosen personality types were extracted from the “Energy scale” in the 16 Personalities Test based on Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & Briggs, 1944). This scale classifies individuals into *observant types* and *intuitive types*. *Observant types* are believed to be more interested in facts and focused on what it can be observed and empirically proved. *Intuitive types* are said to be visionary, curious and more interested in ideas. Specifically, *observant types* are likely to be more pragmatic and may see the mix between market and non-market values as a harmless way of promoting a brand. Differently, *intuitive types* are more likely to focus on the feelings of discomfort generated by the commodification of important experiences.

The statements evaluated by the participants were also extracted from the original 16 Personalities Test and reflected whether an individual was more of an *observant type* or more of an *intuitive type*. Respondents had to grade how much they agreed with each of them in a scale from 0 to 10, where “0” represented “complete disagreement” and “10” denoted “complete agreement”.

Before concluding with the survey, in order to assess the validity of our third hypothesis, all participants were asked to rank their affinity with the brands appearing in the videos: *McDonald’s*, *Fotocasa*, *Securitas Direct* and *Adidas* using a scale from 0 to 10, where “0” was “no affinity at all” and “10” represented “complete affinity”.

3.2.2. SAMPLING

Our random sample consists of a total of 480 respondents - 288 of them are female and 192 are male. Regarding their age ranges, 4% are under 18 years old, 35% are between 18 and 25, 10% are between 25 and 40, 45% are between 40 and 60 and only a 6% is over 60 years old.

The minimum sample size needed for our results to be significant was computed through the platform *Qualtrics*. Assuming a population of 47M (the total population of Spain) and setting a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, 385 respondents was the minimum sample size to achieve significance. As more than 385 participants responded our survey, a reliable interpretation of results is guaranteed.

3.2.3. TOOLS FOR STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The statistical tools that have been used during the analysis of the obtained set of data are instrumental in determining the validity of our three hypotheses.

The mean has been regularly used in estimating the level of comfort experienced by different groups taken from our sample. On the other hand, the median has been helpful in dividing our sample into different groups when testing our second and third hypotheses.

To test the second hypothesis, a new scale has been created, where “0” represents “extremely *intuitive* personality” and “10” stands for “extremely *observant* personality”. This required reversing the scores on some of the questions. We calculated a score for each participant by taking the mean of all answers. Next, in order to divide participants in *observant types* and *intuitive types*, we calculated the statistical median score on this scale: 5.60. Participants with a score equal or lower than 5.60 have been considered to be *intuitive* types, while those who scored higher than 5.60 have been identified as *observant* types.

Regarding our third hypothesis, respondents from the experimental group have also been classified into two different groups: those with high and low brand affinity. As “0” represented “no affinity at all with the brand” and “10” stood for “complete affinity”, data from these questions has been aggregated as well and the statistical median has been computed. Based on the mean, we classified participants as having a high versus a low affinity with the brand. As an example, the median in the *Barcelona* video, featuring the brand McDonalds, has a value of 3, meaning all individuals who recorded a score equal or lower than 3 have been considered as having a low affinity with McDonalds, while those

who scored higher than 3 have been identified as having a high affinity with McDonald's brand.

Next, the tool that has been used to corroborate or reject all our initial hypotheses is the T-Test, which compares two different means and assesses the similarity between each other. If the means are unequal, it provides information on how significant their differences might be, indicating whether the results obtained from a sample are likely to have happened by chance or if, on the contrary, there is an existing correlation between the variables studied. Specifically, a high t-score indicates that the two contrasted groups are reliably different, whereas a low t-score reflects that they are similar.

Yet, the most determinant tool to confirm or refute our hypotheses has been the p-value, which is inextricably linked to the t-score. This value shows the probability of finding the observed results when the null hypothesis of a study is true. Therefore, a low p-value indicates that the null hypothesis is very unlikely to happen, while a high p-value means the opposite. Typically, the null hypothesis will be rejected when the p-value is lower than the critical value, which has been established to be of 0.05 for this experiment.

3.3. RESULTS

3.3.1. FIRST HYPOTHESIS: ANALYSIS BY OVERALL LEVEL OF COMFORT

The main focus of our study is to compare the general feeling of comfort of participants in the control and experimental conditions by conducting an unpaired two-samples T-test with unequal variances.

The aim of this test has been to prove or refute the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups, that is, that the level of comfort when watching the videos with no brand is the same as when a brand is shown. To perform such analysis, the data set that has been used is the average of the scores given by respondents to each of the four displayed videos.

As seen in the graph below, a mean of 8.13 has been obtained for the control group and a mean of 6.63 for the experimental group. These two values reflect the overall comfort of participants in a situation where only non-market values appear compared to the second case where a commercial element interferes with the experience. This gives us a first insight that participants feel more comfortable when non-commercial experiences are not mixed with brands. However, this reasoning is not strong enough to reject the null hypothesis.

To better determine if this result is statistically significant, the p-value and the t-value have been computed. Given a t-value of 10.58 and a p-value of $2.53e^{-23}$, which is lower than the critical value of 0.05, it can be concluded that our null hypothesis can be rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the results of the control group and the experimental group. Participants in the control group feel more comfortable than participants in the experimental group, and these results can be extrapolated to the whole population. This gives solid evidence to our project's hypothesis that people's perceived comfort decreases when they experience commodified situations that entail a mix between market and non-market values.

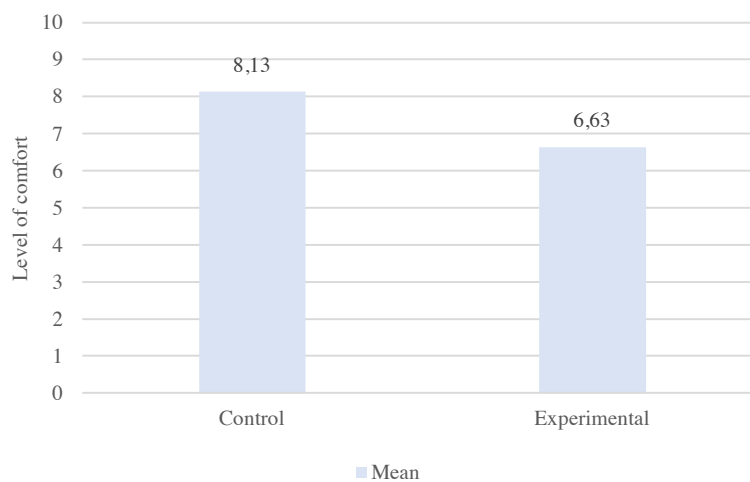


Figure 1. Overall level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition, aggregated from the four videos

3.3.1.1. ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF COMFORT BY VIDEO

Next, an in-depth analysis of each of the videos has been carried out to observe if the individual situations give different results. As stated before, two different questions have been considered. This study begins by testing the difference in the level of comfort of participants in each of the conditions and expects to further confirm or refuse the outcome obtained in the above mentioned overall test. The results of the analysis are presented in a blue-colored graph shown below.

The first video to be examined is the *Barcelona* video, which is associated to McDonald's brand in the experimental condition. The results from the overall test are further confirmed with a p-value of $8.02e^{-22}$. Moreover, the average level of comfort in the experimental group is 5.54, 2.24 points lower than the mean of 7.77 in the control group (see Annex 2).

This reduction confirms that individual's response to a non-commodified experience when linked to the brand is negatively affected.

In the second scenario, the *Nature* video has been studied with *Fotocasa* brand included in the experimental condition. After conducting the T-test, a p-value of $9.44e^{-20}$ refutes the null hypothesis and reinforces our previous conclusions that the comfort differs between the two groups. The average level of comfort of participants falls from 8.57 in the control group to 6.84 in the experimental group (see Annex 3).

With regards to the third case, the *Newborn* video is examined with *Securitas Direct* as the brand used in the experimental condition. In this analysis, the average level of contentment for the control and experimental group are 8.48 and 6.47 respectively (see Annex 4). Furthermore, a p-value of $7.00e^{-20}$ gives strong evidence that the alternative hypothesis is supported and there is a significant difference in the contentment level in both cases.

The last video that has been tested is the *Castellers* video, the objective of which has been to evaluate the reaction of participants when a cultural event is commercialized by a brand. The brand chosen to conduct such experiment is Adidas. When comparing the means of the two conditions, it can be observed that the average level of comfort slightly decreases by 0.11, from a mean of 7.69 in the control group to 7.58 in the experimental group (see Annex 5). It can clearly be seen that the effect of the brand in the average score of the participants is lower in this case. Moreover, a p-value of 0.59 strongly confirms the null hypothesis and contradicts the previous results. Despite there exists a difference in means, the p-value shows that the difference is not statistically significant to extrapolate the results to the whole population.

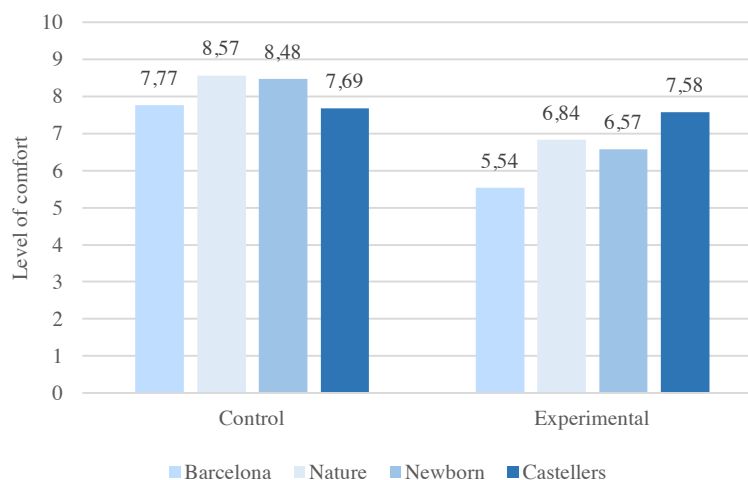


Figure 2. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition, for each video

3.3.1.2. ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES BY VIDEO

Our research follows with the analysis of a chosen attribute specific for each video and inherent to the images of it. This second analysis intends to prove if the value given to these four different qualities diminishes when the brand appears. The attributes are strongly related to each of the situations: fascination for the *Barcelona* video, calmness and harmony for the *Nature* video, tenderness for the *Newborn* video and respect towards the transmitted values for the *Castellers* video.

In the first three cases, with p-values lower than 0.05 (see Annex 6), there is statistical difference in the valuation of the attributes between the two conditions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the presence of the brand negatively affects the evaluation of the qualities proposed for each video. However, it should be remarked that the difference between means is lower than the difference when analyzing the average level of comfort (see Annex 7). As with the previous analysis, the outcome of the *Castellers* video differs from all the rest. In this last video, results demonstrate that respondents show higher respect to the transmitted values in the experimental condition where Adidas brand appears, with 0.23 points higher in the experimental than in the control group. Furthermore, we have obtained a p-value of 0.15 from the T-Test, which confirms the null hypothesis. Therefore, it can be stated that the brand has no significant effect in the valuation of the attributes nor the comfort of the participants.

The previous results of the evaluation of the four specific attributes are exhibited in the following graph, where each pair of columns refers to a specific attribute linked to a video. In light grey and dark grey, the average responses of the control and experimental group are shown, respectively.

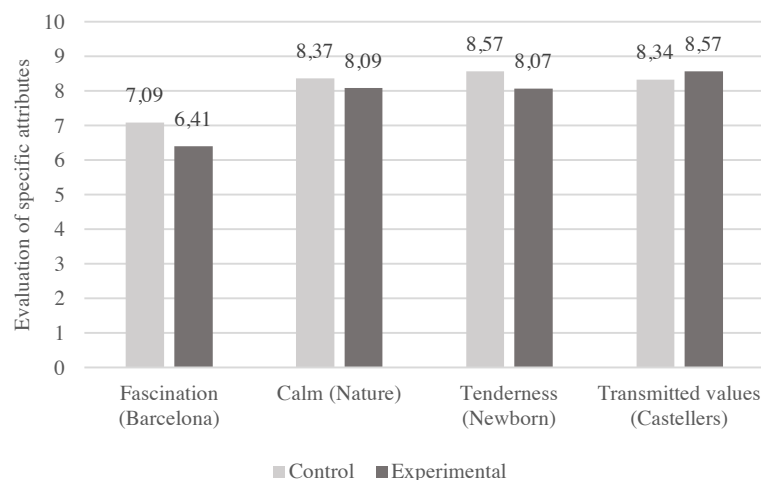


Figure 3. Evaluation of specific attributes associated to each video by participants in each condition

3.3.2. SECOND HYPOTHESIS: ANALYSIS BY PERSONALITY

Observing that participants in the experimental group felt less comfortable than those in the control group, there is yet no further knowledge on what additional external aspects influenced their responses. As it has been previously stated, personality traits might have affected the extent to which participants felt more or less comfortable when experiencing the commodified situation. This is, according to our expectations, it could be the case that an *observant* personality type was influenced by commodification to a lower extent than an *intuitive* personality type. If our initial beliefs were confirmed, the null hypothesis would be rejected, as there would be statistically significant differences in the means from the respondents with varying personality types.

Following the five chosen questions to assess each respondent's personality traits, a thorough analysis has been conducted to compare the level of comfort experienced by *observant* and *intuitive* types within each condition. Specifically, each chart extracted from our set of data integrates the level of comfort from *observant* types in light green, and that from *intuitive* types in dark green. Each pair of *observant-intuitive* types is grouped according to the condition they belong. The two columns shown at the left relate to the stated level of comfort by respondents from the control group, while the two columns at the right belong to those from the experimental group.

For the first of our analysis, a comparison was done on how comfortable respondents felt at a general level. The graph below shows the difference in the aggregate level of experienced comfort for both personality types, which has been averaged from the four videos displayed in the experiment.

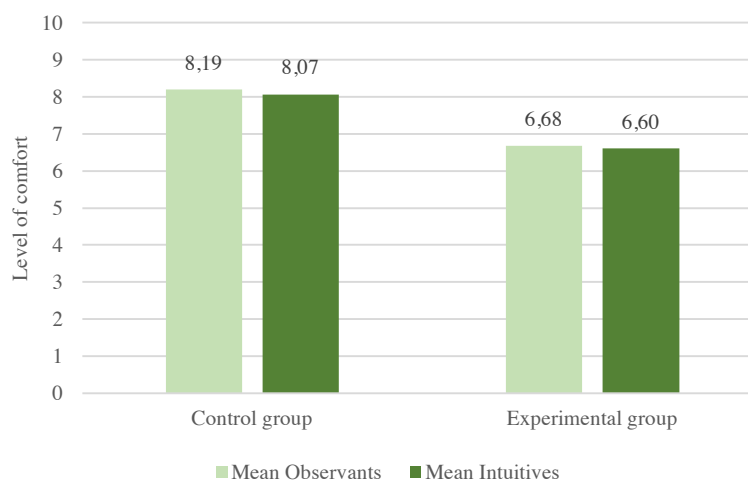


Figure 4. Overall level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition and each personality type, aggregated from the four videos

As it is observed, the level of comfort is not significantly affected by the character of each participant neither in the control group nor the experimental group. Indeed, after conducting a T-Test analysis on this set of data, the p-value obtained has been of 0.43 and 0.75 respectively, which exceed the critical value of 0.05 and validate the null hypothesis. This means there are no grounds for believing that a relationship between the level of comfort and the participants' personality exists in any of the conditions. In other words, *observant* types who watched the videos without brands experienced a similar level of contentment to that of *intuitive* types who watched the same videos. For those participants who viewed the videos with brands, an analogous pattern has been observed.

Regarding the specific analysis for each of the four videos, a similar pattern has been again identified (see Annexes 8, 9, 10, 11). It has been observed that the p-values for each condition exceed the established critical value in most of them (see Annex 12), which implies that the null hypothesis is supported one more time.

However, in the *Nature* video (see Annex 12), a divergent trend occurs, as a p-value of 0.0003 has been obtained in the control group. This suggests that our observed set of data would be unlikely to have happened if the null hypothesis were true. In this particular case, *observant* types stated a significantly higher level of comfort than *intuitive* types.

Overall, aside from this particular event, no general correlation can be established between the studied personality types and the level of contentment experienced by respondents.

3.3.3. THIRD HYPOTHESIS: ANALYSIS BY BRAND

Proceeding with the examination of additional external aspects that may have influenced participants' responses, their affinity with the four brands has been tested to assess if there is an actual correlation between the level of affinity and the stated level of comfort.

To achieve this, the sample size has been reduced to the 232 individuals that conform the experimental group, as the other respondents did not watch the videos with brands.

As it is shown in the chart below, each participant has been classified as having *high affinity* or *low affinity* with each brand, indicated in light and dark yellow respectively. These have been grouped according to the video they belong, obtaining four pairs of columns, which reflect the level of comfort experienced by respondents after watching the videos with brands.

All the means follow a decreasing trend when individuals go from having high affinity to low affinity with the brand, and most of the p-values are lower than 0.5 (see Annex 13).

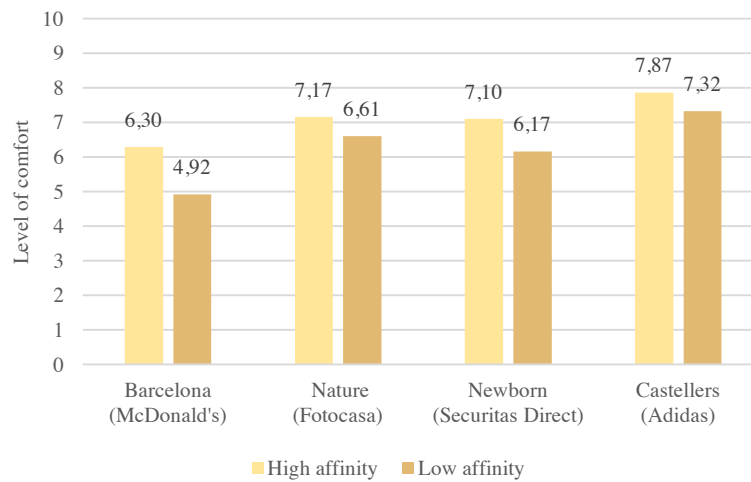


Figure 5. Level of comfort experienced by participants in the experimental group for each video, depending on their level of affinity with the brand

Still, there is an exception in the *Nature* video, for which the p-value exceeds the critical value and hence, there is not enough statistical significance to claim that there exists a correlation between the variables studied. In other words, the stated level of comfort in each video is always positively correlated with the level of affinity with the brand, except for the *Nature* video. In the latter, participants' level of comfort is independent from their affinity with the *Fotocasa* brand, even if the trend followed by the means suggests the opposite.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Back to our initial hypothesis, some solid conclusions can be drawn on how commodification affects the stated level of comfort by individuals, and some potential causes can be linked to this phenomenon as well. Results from the survey confirm our central claim, corroborating that on average, individuals from the experimental group felt less comfortable than those in the control group. Such inference is made on the grounds of findings from the experiment, which show enough statistical significance to allege that a commodified situation elicits a remarkably lower level of comfort than a non-commodified experience.

Separate results for the first three videos further confirm our hypothesis that commodified experiences undermine the perceived level of comfort; in the case of the *Barcelona*, *Nature* and *Newborn* videos participants felt less comfortable when a brand was sponsoring each of the non-commercial experiences. However, the *Castellers* video disclaims the previous findings, as the difference in means obtained in both conditions is not significant enough to support our hypothesis. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the presence of Adidas in such experience reduced its perceived value to the viewers. One of the potential explanations for this change of pattern in the results of our experiment could be that disregarded external factors came into play, strongly influencing the judgement of participants. People were likely to give an excessive weight to political, cultural and demographic factors when estimating their total level of comfort after watching the *Castellers* video.

Other conclusions from the study can be derived when comparing the level of comfort registered by participants and their evaluation of the specific attributes for each video in both conditions. The drop in the evaluation of the specific attributes when a brand appears is in none of the cases as strong as the decrease in perceived comfort in the same scenario (see Annex 7). It could be argued that the brand itself does not considerably alter the perception of an attribute; in fact, brands constantly use relatable experiences and emotional involvement as a strategy to strengthen their image. Most probably, when a specific question about an attribute is asked, people tend to focus only on that attribute. On the contrary, when people are asked about the level of comfort, they may evaluate the whole video and the interaction between the video and the brand. In any case, further research should be carried out to confirm this line of reasoning.

As for the second hypothesis, findings suggest that the stated level of comfort by participants from both conditions does not depend on their personality traits. Still, limitations on this matter may have affected this conclusion, which should be taken with a

grain of salt. For instance, respondents were classified into two different groups according to their answers in five multiple-choice statements (see Annex 1), limiting the analysis of personality to the study of two specific attributes in isolation. Reducing the whole spectrum of personalities to such a narrow view has led to obtaining results that are not conclusive enough to determine whether personality plays an important role in how commodification is perceived. For this reason, a possible expansion of this project could include a more extensive analysis of personality to test the hypothesis again and extract more solid conclusions.

The third hypothesis proves a positive correlation between the stated level of comfort from participants in the experimental group and their level of affinity with the related brand. Respondents having a high rather than low affinity towards a commercial brand indicated significantly larger levels of comfort after watching the video in which the brand was prominently displayed. Indeed, the role of some brands in mitigating the *pollution* effect that is generated by commodification could be subject of further research. In this way, a more accurate approach could be established to determine which variable alleviates the negative effects of market values to a higher extent - is it the preference for a brand or the appeal towards a certain situation that carries the higher weight in avoiding a strong decrease in the level of comfort?

Finally, a suggested approach on the validity of our central hypothesis lies on the similarity between conflicts in two different dimensions. Knowing that people do feel uncomfortable when experiencing a commodified situation, some insights on one of our supporting theories can be useful in understanding why. The incompatibilities that arise between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation better resemble the conflicting mix that is produced between market and non-market values in the videos shown to participants from the experimental group. According to the Cognitive Evaluation Theory, the introduction of an extrinsic element (the brand) at the end of each video was likely to cause a decrease in respondents' intrinsic motivation. As research shows, people with intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation tend to be happier. In this direction, a decrease in intrinsic motivation could be perceived as a corresponding drop in the stated level of comfort. The parallelism between intrinsically enjoyable situations and non-commodified experiences is based on *autonomy*, as individuals reflect self-determined behavior and deliberate choice when experiencing inherently interesting activities that are free of any extrinsic, market-related contribution.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1

¡Hola! Somos cuatro estudiantes de International Business Economics en la UPF y estamos realizando nuestro Trabajo de Fin de Grado.

Tus respuestas son de vital importancia para las conclusiones de nuestro trabajo, y por eso te pedimos que contestes con la **máxima sinceridad** posible. No hay respuestas **correctas ni incorrectas**, solamente queremos conocer tu opinión.

¡Muchas gracias por participar!

- Edad:

- < 18
- 18 - 25
- 25 - 40
- 40 - 60
- > 60

- Sexo:

- Mujer
- Hombre

A lo largo de esta encuesta, te mostraremos cuatro **breves vídeos** (15-20 segundos) que debes escuchar con **volumen**. Para cada uno de ellos, deberás valorar tu reacción respecto a diferentes atributos utilizando una **escala del 0 al 10**, siendo 0 la mínima intensidad y 10 la máxima.

IMPORTANTE: Si estás realizando esta encuesta desde tu teléfono móvil, colócalo en posición horizontal para una correcta visualización de los vídeos.

1. Presta atención a este breve vídeo. Es importante que lo visualices de principio a fin.

- Experimental group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiTn65C4lcw>

- Control group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqRcO9IgbpE>

- Valora la **fascinación** que sientes al ver este vídeo

Mínima fascinación					Máxima fascinación					
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Puntúa qué tan **cómodo/a** te sientes con lo que transmite este vídeo

Nada cómodo/a					Extremadamente cómodo/a					
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Presta atención a este breve vídeo. Es importante que lo visualices de principio a fin.

- Experimental group: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX2q_B8qgMs

- Control group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlzaqoac7ek>

- Valora la **paz/calma** que te inspira este vídeo

Mínima paz/calma	Máxima paz/calma
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

- Puntúa qué tan **cómodo/a** te sientes con lo que transmite este vídeo

Nada cómodo/a	Extremadamente cómodo/a
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

3. Presta atención a este breve vídeo. Es importante que lo visualices de principio a fin.

- Experimental group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3D3TK-tK98M>

- Control group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBbaptczqHs>

- Valora la **ternura** que te transmite este vídeo

Mínima ternura	Máxima ternura
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

- Puntúa qué tan **cómodo/a** te sientes con lo que transmite este vídeo

Nada cómodo/a	Extremadamente cómodo/a
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

4. Presta atención a este breve vídeo. Es importante que lo visualices de principio a fin.

- Experimental group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CJBwbghowI>

- Control group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBT4SuOW-3o>

- Valora tu **admiración** hacia los **valores** mostrados en este vídeo

Mínima admiración	Máxima admiración
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

- Puntúa qué tan **cómodo/a** te sientes con lo que transmite este vídeo

Nada cómodo/a	Extremadamente cómodo/a
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

A continuación, deberás indicar qué tal **de acuerdo** o en **desacuerdo** estás con las **siguientes afirmaciones** utilizando una escala del 0 al 10, siendo 0 “totalmente en desacuerdo” y 10 “totalmente de acuerdo”.

- Te consideras más práctico que creativo

Totalmente en desacuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	

- Si tu amigo/a está triste, es más probable que le ofrezcas soporte emocional que le sugieras maneras de solucionar el problema

Totalmente en desacuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
0 1 2 3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

- Tu mente siempre está explorando nuevas ideas y planes

Totalmente en desacuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
0 1 2 3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

- Ser capaz de desarrollar un plan y adherirse a él es la parte más importante de cualquier proyecto

Totalmente en desacuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
0 1 2 3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

- Sueles confiar más en tu experiencia que en tu imaginación

Totalmente en desacuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
0 1 2 3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Antes de finalizar la encuesta, deberás **puntuar tu afinidad** hacia las siguientes **marcas comerciales** utilizando una escala del 0 al 10, siendo 0 “baja afinidad, indiferencia hacia la marca” y 10 “alta afinidad, vínculo a nivel personal hacia la marca”.

- Adidas

Baja afinidad, indiferencia	Alta afinidad, vínculo a nivel personal
0 1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

- Fotocasa

Baja afinidad, indiferencia	Alta afinidad, vínculo a nivel personal
0 1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

- Securitas Direct

Baja afinidad, indiferencia	Alta afinidad, vínculo a nivel personal
0 1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

- McDonald's

Baja afinidad, indiferencia	Alta afinidad, vínculo a nivel personal
0 1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

¡Muchas gracias por tu tiempo!

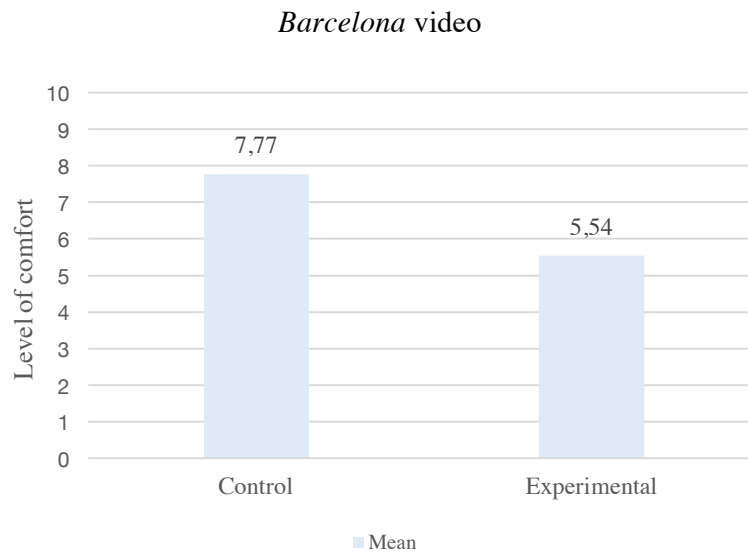
Annex 2

Figure 6. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition from the *Barcelona* video

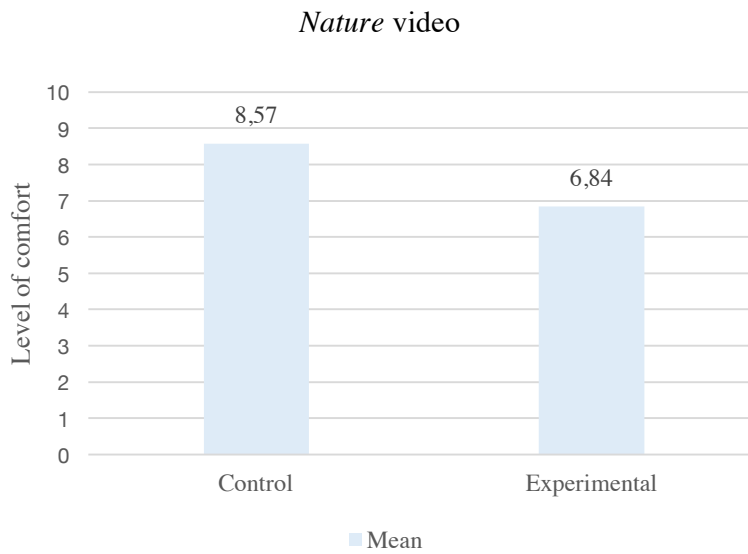
Annex 3

Figure 7. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition from the *Nature* video

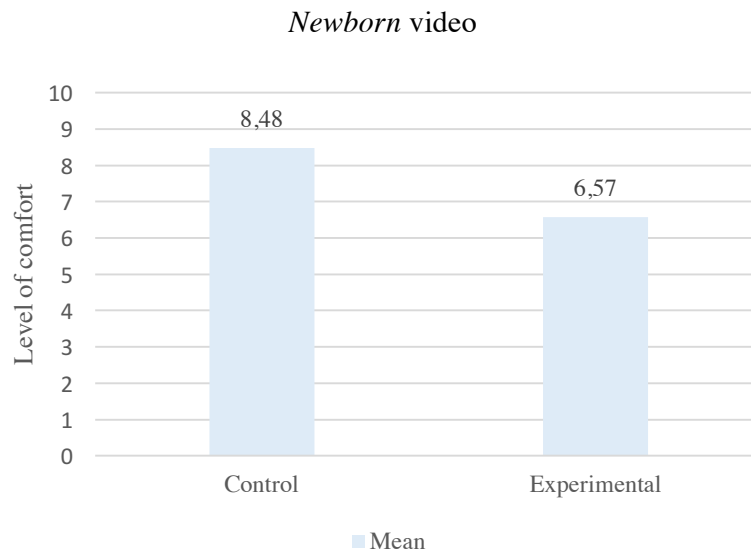
Annex 4

Figure 8. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition from the *Newborn video*

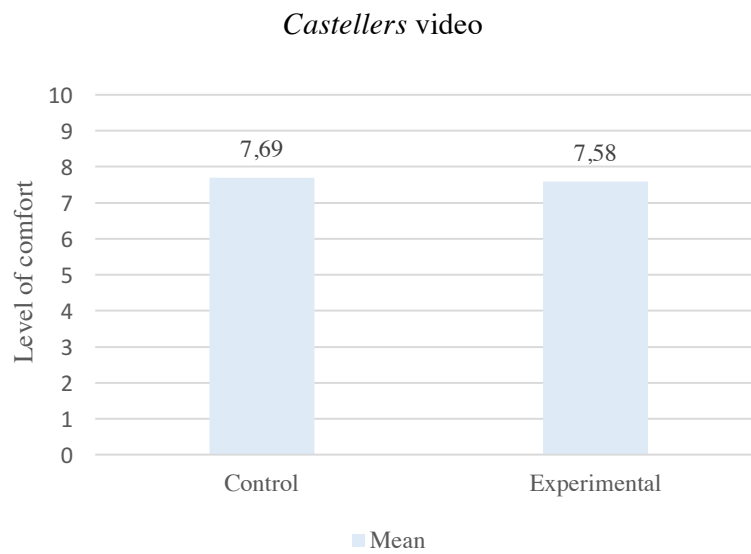
Annex 5

Figure 9. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition from the *Castellers video*

Annex 6

	P-values
<i>Barcelona</i> video	0.0006
<i>Nature</i> video	0.0396
<i>Newborn</i> video	0.0026
<i>Castellers</i> video	0.1571

Table 1. P-values obtained for each video when comparing the evaluation of specific attributes between the control and experimental conditions

Annex 7

	Level of comfort	Specific attributes
<i>Barcelona</i> video	2.24	0.68
<i>Nature</i> video	1.73	0.28
<i>Newborn</i> video	1.91	0.50
<i>Castellers</i> video	0.11	-0.23

Table 2. Difference in means between the control and the experimental condition obtained for each video regarding the level of comfort and the specific attributes. A positive value indicates that the mean in the control group is greater than the mean in the experimental group.

Annex 8

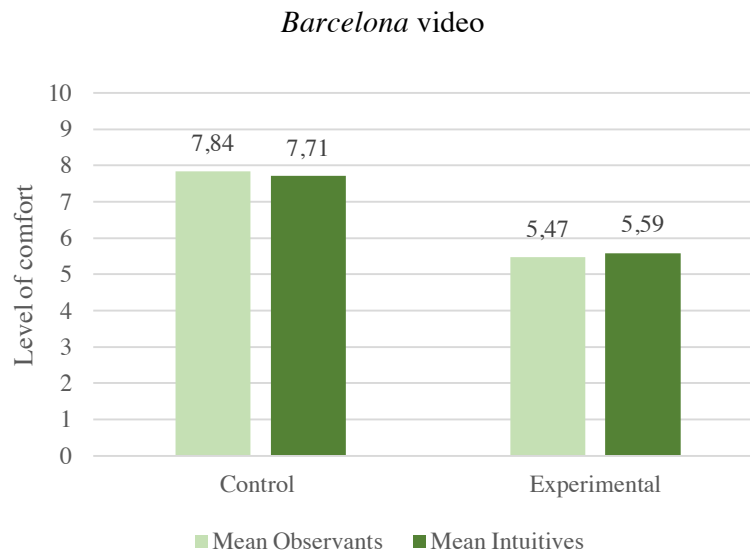


Figure 10. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition and each personality type from the *Barcelona* video

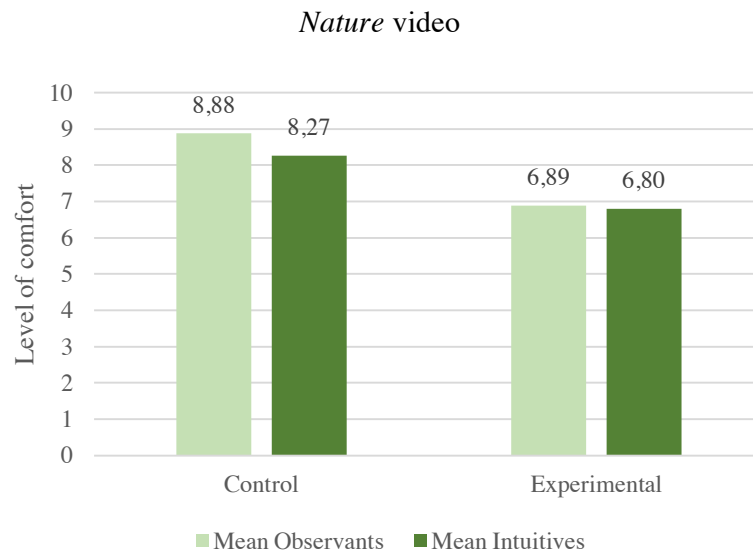
Annex 9

Figure 11. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition and each personality type from the *Nature* video

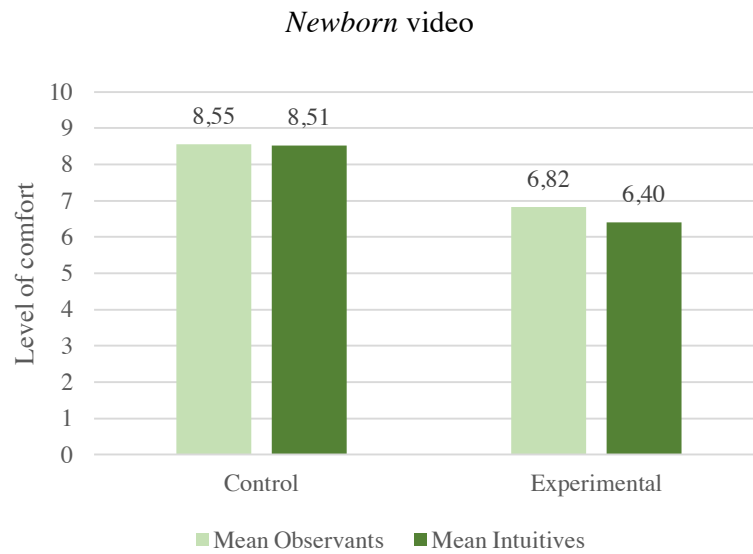
Annex 10

Figure 12. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition and each personality type from the *Newborn* video

Annex 11

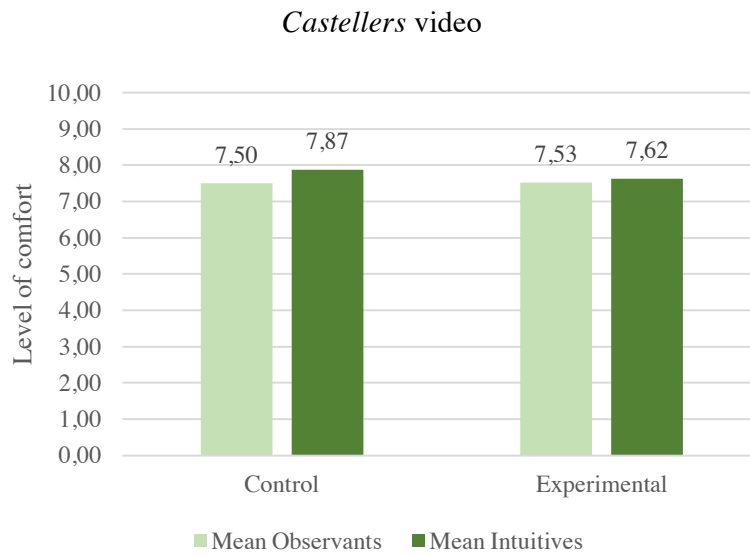


Figure 13. Level of comfort experienced by participants in each condition and each personality type from the *Castellers* video

Annex 12

	Control condition	Experimental condition
General	0.4319	0.7473
<i>Barcelona</i> video	0.5821	0.7465
<i>Nature</i> video	0.0003	0.7786
<i>Newborn</i> video	0.8393	0.2123
<i>Castellers</i> video	0.1990	0.7542

Table 3. P-values obtained for each video when comparing the level of comfort of observant and intuitive types within each condition

Annex 13

	Experimental condition
<i>Barcelona</i> video (<i>McDonald's</i>)	0.0001
<i>Nature</i> video (<i>Fotocasa</i>)	0.0702
<i>Newborn</i> video (<i>Securitas Direct</i>)	0.0055
<i>Castellers</i> video (<i>Adidas</i>)	0.0466

Table 4. P-values obtained for each video when comparing the level of affinity with the brand within participants from the experimental condition