

Chapter 6

Sensibility of the Customer to the Marketing Strategies of Nordic Companies in Spain: The Case of the ‘Gruen Effect’ in IKEA Stores

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Introduction

In the last years many important efforts have been made in order to identify the customers’ profile according to socio-economic, cultural, and education levels – as well as through their región or country of origin. From the perspective of Behavioral Economics (BE), some advances have been made in the construction of tools that can accurately predict the personality of each customer and the motivational factors that result in the purchase of any product. In the case of the Swedish manufacturer IKEA, these become very important due to the size of the stores and the specific display that they make of their products.

The empirical research in this chapter focuses in the validation of three hypotheses: i) IKEA visitors are aware that the ‘tour’ that they have to do when they enter the store – the ‘Gruen Effect’ – has the purpose of influencing them on their purchase decisions; ii) such manipulation is assimilated as a cognitive bias, and iii) the cognitive bias strenghtens in time.

In order to identify and describe the criteria and to identify the correlation that exists among variables, the multi-dimensional analysis is used; the results reached were analised through a polynominal regression function.

Customers are aware of selling strategies

From an economic point of view, most customers accept – consciously or unconsciously – the fact that they try to be ‘convinced’, or even accept the fact that they might be clearly manipulated, before making a purchase. The promotional campaigns during Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Singles’ Day, Christmas... or simply during end-of-season’s sales, prove it. Each person defends his/her right to prevail his/her individuality, but there is also a strong inner desire to become part of a group in which all members have elements in common. These elements include behavioral and moral guidelines which lead to emotions. Therefore, it is valid to affirm that some main emotions are the result of a specific culture in which all people’s emotions are similar, while, on the other hand, it may happen that the same emotions and the way to express them are completely different in another culture. Besides from basic emotions such as happiness, anger, sadness, desire, and fear, there are other ‘collective’ emotions, such as solidarity, pride, and the sense of belonging, and sometimes the basic and the other emotions mix together. All of them can be manipulated

In many cases consumers do not choose the best purchase option for them; in fact, they are frequently led to make the decisions that is the less convenient for their interests (Akerlof & Shiller, 2016). The purposes of the manipulation processes differ; one of them is to make people feel ‘momentaneously’ or superficially happy, while another is to force people to make a purchase decision in a rush and in that way prevent the customer to truly meditate on the convenience of buying that product, or not. The contemporary culture imposes the *obligation* to become happier in the fastest possible way and one of the ways of achieving it is through the act of buying. Davies (2015) calls it «emotional capitalism».

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The research in this chapter focuses in the validation of three hypotheses: i) IKEA visitors are aware that the ‘tour’ that they have to do when they enter the store – the Gruen Effect – has the purpose of influencing them on their purchase decisions; ii) such manipulation is assimilated as a cognitive bias, and iii) the

cognitive bias strengthens in time. To find out the answers, a total of 430 customers who visited the IKEA stores in Madrid – located in Ensanche de Vallecas (211 questionnaires), San Sebastián de los Reyes (166 questionnaires), and Alcorcón (53 questionnaires) – were asked to fill out a concise and direct questionnaire. Field work was carried out between the second week of January and the last week of March, 2019.

In order to identify and describe the criteria and to identify the correlation that exists among variables, the multi-dimensional analysis is used; the results reached were analyzed through a polynomial regression function.

Manipulation and cognitive bias in purchase decisions

The first grounds of BE were elaborated by Simon (1955). By creating the concept of «limited rationality», he incorporated behavioral factors in which he repeatedly proved that the customers in general are blind at the future; this means, in short, that their decisions are not completely rational. Cognitive bias are deviations; individual behaviors that deviate in a systematic, predictable way and that cannot be explained with the principles of mainstream economics.

On the other hand, Neoclassical Economics (NE) has tried to minimize rationality and relativise those problems derived from asymmetric information. Instead, NE assumes that consumers tend to choose whatever is most convenient for them in each moment. On the other hand, in some contexts – and even when they are free to choose – individual consumers face several difficulties that somehow limit their alternatives. Like, for instance: i) when the options available are unacceptable; ii) when the information is available only sporadically; iii) when the information is accessible but also incomplete; iv) when the information is incorrect or contradictory, or v) when decisions are taken in a hostile environment or under extreme pressure. Due to these varied complex scenarios, it is fully justified to study the processes involved in the purchase decisions made by the customers from perspectives that are far from those of mainstream economics (and even when the confrontation is eventually unavoidable).

Besides from the cognitive bias, in the manipulation processes involved in purchase decisions the ‘rules of thumb’ are also important, as they are «cognitive shortcuts», used individually or collectively in order to simplify decisions. Whether it is due to a poor cognitive level or to a partial/total lack of knowledge on a specific subject, individually or collectively there is a tendency to accept the external influence or those who are supposed to know more about something.

The ‘Gruen Effect’

The study of marketing implies to take again the concept of cognitive bias and the ‘rules of thumb’ to develop their own techniques, called «effects». The ‘Gruen Effect’ was named after his creator, the Austrian architect Victor Gruen (1995 a & b), who was also a designer of commercial and shopping centers. In his early designs of beautiful storefronts in the Fifth Avenue of Manhattan, New York, he created one of the first and more remarkable window-shopping experiences, by reducing the threshold between passerby and store products (Waters, 2018). Soon those pedestrians became impulsive costumers as they entered the store attracted by this new displays and the possibility of having the products at the reach of their hands.

In the decades of 1950s and 1960s important changes were implemented in the socio-economical environment of the United States; from a urbanistic level, it meant that young middle-income families with higher economic aspirations moved from the city centers to the suburbs, in search of safer and bigger areas in which they (and their descendents) could enjoy of bigger, more comfortable homes surrounded by natural environments. This tendency brought along the demand for other services associated to consumption. In a first moment, these services (clothing stores, restaurants and groceries, to name a few) were identical to those in the city centers. However, the rapid population growth and the increasing size of the neighbourhoods in which they lived in, soon made it necessary to create immense commercial areas strategically located, so that several residential areas could easily have access to them – as a result, a new model saw the light: the *Mall*. Unlike the European cities, which had many urbanistic limitations, in the United States these new commercial edifications were able to ‘expand’ as much as their consumption and economic needs made it necessary.

To elaborate his urban model, Victor David Gruen (1903-1980) found inspiration in the popular markets in Europe that since the Middle Age surrounded abbeys and cathedrals and that were visited by the citizens to buy or exchange goods and to offer their work services. Following this logic, the commercial centers designed by Gruen in 1964 were his particular way to ‘update’ those old popular markets through these, back then new and innovative, techniques.

In practical terms, the ‘Gruen Effect’ is a combination of little subtle guidelines and small commercial tactics intended to *move* the customer to act precipitately and purchase goods in a way that otherwise he would not buy *motu proprio* (Gruen, 1997). The Swedish multi-national company IKEA has made from the ‘Gruen Effect’ one of its main identity signs and also one of its basic strategies. From the moment they enter an IKEA store, customers are physically ‘forced’ to walk a complete tour through the store – that is, through all their departments – no matter

if their initial intention was to buy only a product that they already have in mind. This allows the company to show to their potential customers all the products that they manufacture in an attractive way and to make the customers go the longest possible way inside the store before they go to the register area. In this shrewd strategy, low prices and modern and attractive designs also play an important role.

However, as the ‘store tour’ in IKEA is not designed as a straight line – but instead with curves, obstacles, and some carefully-planned stops that help customers not to feel ‘caged’ or ‘caught up’ inside the store – IKEA not only gives the impression that this is some sort of *ginkana*, far from a boring commercial tour, but it has also taken the ‘Gruen Effect’ to the next level. Many department stores are organized in aisles in which fresh products and most-demanded goods are located at the end – something that forces customers to go to the end of the store and walk in the different areas. However, the Swedish company modifies the ‘store tours’ continuously – between 30% and 60% in every change of season. By doing it in this way, visitors may find a substantially different ‘tour’ next time they visit the IKEA store.

Object of study and hypothesis

In the decision-making process, customers analyze, hesitate, meditate, change their mind, and finally they choose (eventually, they might even regret their choice). In the last years, research works carried out in the disciplines of Marketing and BE have focused in identifying the consumers’ profile, according to characteristics such as age, gender, and socio economic, cultural, educational, or geographical levels. In this research work we go beyond these basic variables and analyze the sensibility of the customers to other, less-studied variables, like the ‘Gruen Effect’ in the IKEA stores in Spain.

The positive psychological message of IKEA’s advertising campaigns

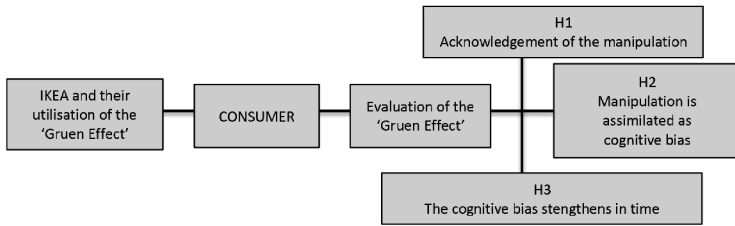
One of the pillars of IKEA’s success is the continuous search for balance and compatibility between their Nordic designs (and names) and the needs, preferences, and budgets of consumers who live in countries in four continents. IKEA sells furniture, decoration, accessories and groceries initially thought for Sweden, but currently manufactured in developing countries for a global market. Very often, their advertising campaigns focus on families and single people living on their own (and their indoor lives) from the perspective of positive feelings, like happiness, independence and optimism. This is also true in the case of their advertising campaigns in Spain, a country in which IKEA arrived

officially in 1996¹. Generally speaking, it is well perceived and recognised as a store with acceptable-quality products that they sell at low prices. Their 2007 campaign «*Bienvenido a la república independiente de mi casa*» («Welcome to the independent republic of my house») also became a logo that was printed on IKEA doormats sold at 12 Euro each, and not only it was positively commented by the Spanish people, but they also broke the record of sales of doormats in Spain (there exists no empiric evidence on this, unfortunately, but this fact is popularly commented in several decoration and consumers’ sites). Initially the production was 20.000 units with the logo in three of the official languages: Spanish, the official State language, and the regional languages Catalan and Euskera (oe Basque). However, after they sold 15.000 units in the first seven weeks, they decided to double the production, and they sold all of them (Oneto, 2017). To this day, more than twelve years later, this product is still available at their web site (ikea.com/es), as we accessed it on January 2020.

It is accurate to affirm that their main customers, at least in Spain, are young people (mostly families) with middle budgets who implicitly accept that when they visit IKEA, they will be conducted through the entire store following the ‘tour’ that the company has designed for their customers.

FIGURE 1

A. Hypothetical construct



Source: Authors

B. Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H1): IKEA visitors acknowledge that the ‘store tour’ has the main purpose of influencing them on their purchase decisions.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Manipulation is assimilated as cognitive bias, which distorts the critic evaluation capacity on the purchase decisions.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Cognitive bias strenghtens in time.

SOURCE: elaborated by authors

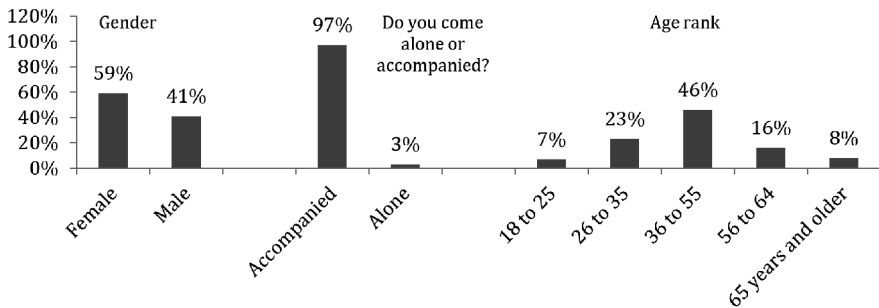
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Based on these theoretical grounds, the hypothetical construct utilized, together with the research hypotheses, are specified on page 154.

To find out the answers to the hypotheses in a most accurate way, a concise and direct questionnaire was elaborated and answered by the customers who visited one of three largest IKEA stores in Madrid located in: Alcorcón, San Sebastián de los Reyes, and Ensanche de Vallecas.

- The fieldwork was carried out during eight sessions, between 15:00 and 17:00 hrs. In all cases the day was a Saturday – a weekend day in which the number of visitors to the store increases considerably.
- The starting period was the first weekend of January 2019 and the last weekend was the last of March 2019. Total numbers of weekends included in the fieldwork was thirteen.
- In all cases, the questionnaire was distributed near the main entrance doors to the IKEA store and in the parking area closer to the entrance doors.
- In total, 430 persons answered the questionnaire (approximately 33 persons per weekend).
- When it comes to the details of the persons who answered the questionnaire, they are specified in Figure 2 below.

FIGURE 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PEOPLE WHO ANSWERED THE QUESTIONNAIRE



SOURCE: elaborated by authors

Method

The empirical work has been structured into two parts. The evaluation of the ‘Gruen Effect’ (questions 1 to 6) was made through the Analytic Hierarchy

Process (AHP), while the validation of hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3 – questions 7 to 10), was made through a polynomial regression function.

The AHP allows the assignation of numerical values to the existing criteria, from a maximum to a minimum evaluation, according to the preference or probability in each one in the given criteria. It was originally studied by Simon (originally in 1947, then in 1955 and 1957) and Miller (in 1956), and later confirmed by Kahl (in 1970), Kahneman & Tversky (in 1979) and Saaty (in 1980 and from thereon). The elaboration of the decision matrix made it possible to: i) assign a value to each cell; ii) make parallel tests among the different alternatives, criteria, and iii) to organise hierarchically the alternatives, from the most wanted to the less wanted.

Due to space limitations, if you would like to know more about the entire statistical model utilised, please consult the work of Berumen & Llamazares (2007), followed by Llamazares & Berumen (2011). Both are included in the Bibliography at the end of this chapter².

In order to validate H1, H2 y H3 and arrive to conclusive information, the data obtained were analysed by a polynomial regression function:

$$Z = b_0 + b_1V + b_2V + b_3V^2 + b_4V*V + b_5V^2$$

where: i) $N = 430$, and ii) Z is the measure of the result (that is, the validation of the hypothesis), b_0 is the intersection, b is the result of the intensity of the evaluation (V). Results were contrasted through the linear contratation method of the procedure PROC MIXED. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) allowed to validate the model, where:

$$X^2(19) = 108.032, p < .001; RMSEA = .051; pClose = A1; CFI = .991; TLI = .987; AIC = 142.08$$

In all cases, results showed a figure above their respective factors 0. In order to verify the results, all the procedure was carried out twice from the beginning. Lastly, it was confirmed that there exists a correlation between the ‘Gruen Effect’ and the cognitive bias, and that this correlation gets stronger as the number of visits to the store increases.

Results

Figure 3 summarizes the results reached in the evaluation of the ‘Gruen Effect’. Before going in search of the answer to the hypothesis formulated, it became

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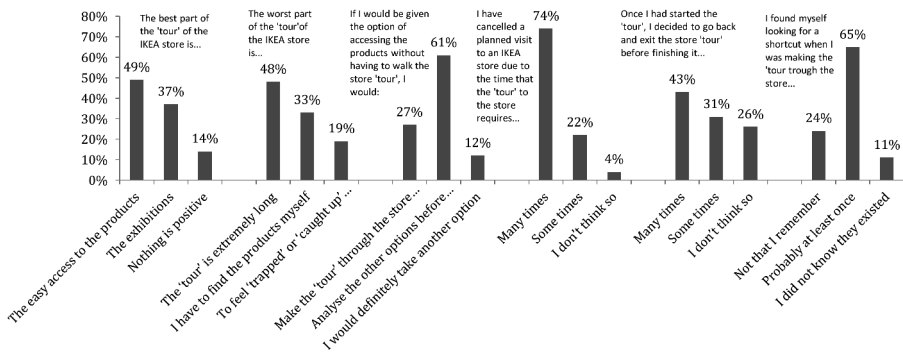
necessary to identify through a quantitative method if IKEA visitors establish an interrelationship between the ‘tour’ to the store that they have to make in order to buy products, and a defined company strategy designed by IKEA.

In the first group the options were three (one notably in favor, another one neutral, and finally another one clearly against) due to the necessity to identify in the clearest possible way the sensibility of the visitors to the object of study of this research (Questions 1 to 6 in the questionnaire – Figure 3).

The first three questions were designed to find out which are the things most and least appreciated of doing the complete ‘tour’ of the store. Conclusions showed that 86% of the visitors valued positively the complete ‘tour’ of the store because of the easy access to the products displayed and the ways in which products are ‘settled’ into decorative scenarios that emulate the interior of a house or an office – something that lets them appreciate how the products would actually look in their own homes and/or offices – while only 14% of the visitors evaluated this display negatively.

This is opposite to the negative evaluation of the necessity to make the complete ‘tour’ of the store (Question 2), where the worse result was related to the long extension in distance (48%) and in time that the ‘tour’ takes (33%). Furthermore, 19% of the visitors marked the option «I felt like in a cage / I felt caught up». This is a considerable percentage as it means that almost one fifth of the visitors added a lesser or greater level of stress to their visit to an IKEA store. It is also noticeable that this answer is similar to the 14% of visitors who answered «Nothing is positive» to the previous question.

FIGURE 3. EVALUATION OF THE ‘GRUEN EFFECT’ – QUESTIONNAIRE (QUESTIONS 1 TO 6)



SOURCE: elaborated by authors

In general terms, Questions 1 and 2 show that most visitors have a positive evaluation of the ‘tour’ through the store in their shopping experience, but approximately one fifth of the visitors consider their visit to an IKEA store as negative. Visitors share the reasons why they like the store ‘tour’ («Easy access to the products» and «The decorative way in which products are displayed» – both answers sum up 86%). Question 2 analyzes and the reasons why they do not like the ‘tour’ («The length in distance and time that the tour takes», and the need of «To have to make the entire complete ‘tour’»).

Question 3 asked if customers would rather have access to the products without having to walk the whole ‘tour’ in the store. In this respect, only 27% of the visitors appreciate the fact that they have to make the whole ‘tour’ to the store in order to have access to the specific products that they were interested in. Evidently, those visitors who would appreciate not having to make the whole ‘tour’ to the store to access to the products they are interested in, as well as those who do not have a clear answer to that question (by marking the option: «It would depend on how tired I am on that day»), are the majority of the visitors (73%). This shows that approximately one third of the visitors agrees with the company strategy to show all their products through a necessary ‘tour’ of the store, while the rest of them hesitates about that option or simply do not like it that way.

The second part of the questionnaire includes three questions, addressed to go further in the critic evaluation of IKEA’s strategy. Question 4 intends to find out if the customer decided to cancel or unexpectedly stop their visit to an IKEA store due to the time needed to complete the ‘tour’ of the store. As an answer to this question, 26% of the visitors do not recall that this was the cause why they quitted their visit to the store; however, when it comes to the options «Some of the times» and «Many times» the percentage went up to 74% – something that is indicative that the visit to an IKEA store is not a part of everyday buys.

At the same time, it is relevant to point out that the answers in the questionnaire were gathered during the same week-end day (Saturday) every time, as this is a day of massive affluence to the IKEA stores in Madrid. Given that normally Saturdays are a non-working day in Spain, it is also frequent that people who visit an IKEA store are accompanied by either several family members or by friends. That is why it is highly probable that, in the event that this questionnaire would have been answered in any other day of the week, the results would have been partially different.

Questions 5 and 6 are truly important, as the main objective of the fieldwork was to identify some sort of «rebel attitude» of the customer against the established «order» promoted by IKEA. When there is a direct question that refers to the number of times in which the customer decided to go back and exit

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the store before finishing the ‘tour’, or to seek for any ‘shortcuts’ instead, the customer tends to make a critic evaluation of the ‘tour’ through the store, even when this evaluation does not refer to the global positive perception that the customer has towards the store and the brand ‘IKEA’. Moreover, some of the customers (11%) did not even know or realized that there was a way to exit the store before finishing the ‘tour’, even when they had visited an IKEA store several times. By analyzing these exits, we found out that there is a big difference between those few ‘shortcuts’ (only three or four) clearly signalled to indicate the way to exit the complete ‘tour’ before finishing it, and those ‘shortcuts’ that seemed to be ‘invisible’ to the customers as they are just doors with the ‘Emergency Exit’ sign on it, but that are actually ‘shortcuts’ to go to the next section of the IKEA store (not to the exit of the store).

Pictures 1 and 2 show the difference between the two types of ‘shortcut’ alternatives in an IKEA store.



A shortcut alternative inside the IKEA store is visibly indicated with an arrow in the door frame



A shortcut alternative here is not so clearly indicated. The sign in green reads 'Emergency Exit', even when it takes to another section of the IKEA store. The sign in blue means "Book shelves" in Spanish

Results of the answer to Question 5 clearly indicate that 76% of the visitors do not recall having gone back to exit the store once they had started the 'tour', while 26% admits that they did that once or more than once. This information is relevant as the percentage of acceptance is very high. This means that even when the visit demands time, customers have accepted the company policy through the 'tour' of the store – in other words, the 'Gruen Effect'.

Even more conclusive are the results of the next question, which aimed to determine if visitors who visited the IKEA store and made the store 'tour' tried to look for any 'shortcut' with the clear intention of shortening the length and duration of the 'tour'. In this case, 24% of the visitors admitted that they never did that before, while 11% affirmed that they did not even know that these 'shortcuts' even existed.

The first results show that customers are completely aware that the 'tour' to the store established by IKEA as the only way to visit the store has the clear

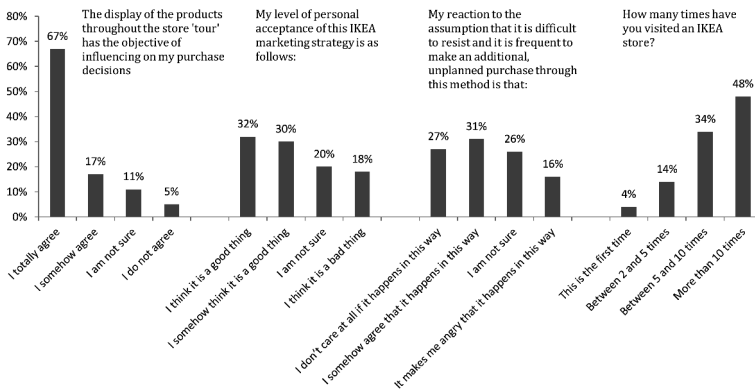
intention of influencing them on their purchase decisions, and this subtle ‘manipulation’ has a negative impact on 34% of the visitors (answers to Questions 8 and 9 together) to the IKEA stores in Madrid.

Validation of the Hypotheses

The next step of the research was to focus on the three hypotheses formulated. In Figure 4 the results of H1, H2, and H3 are shown. These are derived from three specific questions: i) the acknowledgement of the fact that the ‘tour’ through the store has the main purpose of influencing customers on their purchase decisions; ii) the level of acceptance from the customers of this ‘tour’ store – the ‘Gruen Effect’ – as a strategy from the store easily identifiable, and iii) the frequency in which the IKEA stores in the Madrid area are visited; in this case there were several options as an answer, in order to identify the small shades in each of the answers provided.

As a global result, 67% of the visitors acknowledged that when they do the ‘tour’ through the store there is an undeniable intention of influencing on their purchase decisions. When it comes to the acceptance of this strategy, 17% of the visitors manifested their agreement with this strategy. On the other hand, 16% of the visitors «I am not sure» and «I don’t think so». When compared to the previous result, this is a considerable minor level of acceptance; however, it is also remarkable as it demonstrates that nowadays there are potential customers who do not acknowledge that some companies try to influence them in their purchase decisions. These results confirm the validation of H1.

FIGURE 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE ‘TOUR’ THROUGH THE STORE, DISTORTION OF THE CAPACITY OF A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THIS FACT AND CONSOLIDATION IN TIME OF THE COGNITIVE BIAS – QUESTIONNAIRE (QUESTIONS 7 TO 10)



SOURCE: elaborated by authors

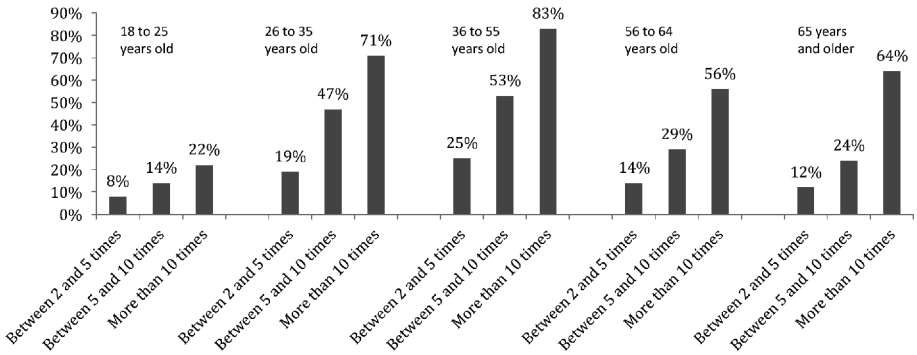
Questions 8 and 9 were written to confirm H2, as the main aim to confirm that manipulation has been assimilated as cognitive bias. Both questions are similar in order to confirm the result without hesitation and, in effect, given the answers obtained it is possible to say that they have been confirmed. In both cases there is a similarity between the two most positive ones («I think it is a good thing», «I somehow think it is a good thing» and «I don't care at all if it happens in this way », «I somehow agree that it happens in this way»), the neutral («I am not sure») and the negative ones («I think it is a bad thing» and «It makes me angry that it happens in this way»). These results, together with the answers shown in Figure 3, provide a complete view because, even when there is a need for the customers to make the whole 'tour' through the store and this may not be pleasant and probably demands a certain amount of time, it also allows an easy access to the products in the store (which are attractive in their design and price). On the other hand, in each of the more critical questions answers percentages were 16% and 18%, a considerable amount of customers who chose the third option as an answer (e.g. «Nothing is positive» and «I feel trapped or caught up»).

Finally, in Question 10 customers were asked for the number of times that they had visited an IKEA store. The options provided were «Between two and five times », «Between five and ten times» and «More than ten times». In order to have less dispersed answers, 4% of the customers who indicated that when they answered the questionnaire it was the first time that they entered an IKEA store were discarded. Surprisingly, almost half of the customers who answered the questionnaire (48%) admitted that they had visited an IKEA store in more than ten occasions, 34% answered that between five and ten times, and only 14% responded that between two and five times. This information was very relevant to validate the main hypotheses of our research.

In Figure 5 the final results of our research are displayed (H3). With the aim of objectively acknowledge the assimilation of the cognitive bias, the answers obtained were divided according to the age ranks specified in Figure 2. As it can be appreciated, in all age ranks there is a positive correlative response that goes up as the number of visits to the IKEA store also increases. This definitively confirms the following facts: i) The majority of visitors to an IKEA stores are very much aware that the store 'tour' based on the 'Gruen Effect' has the clear purpose of influencing them on their purchase decisions (H1), and ii) in time, this manipulation is assimilated by the visitors to the store as a cognitive bias, and this distorts the critic evaluation capacity in the purchase decisions of the customers (analysed in Figure 4, Questions 7 to 10 – H2).

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FIGURE 5. RESULTS: THE 'GRUEN EFFECT' AND THE ASSIMILATION OF A COGNITIVE BIAS



SOURCE: elaborated by authors

Discussion and conclusions

Amos Tversky devoted his life to study the reasons why and how people make certain decisions instead of others. Together with his collaborator, Daniel Kahneman, he entered the universe of the *rules of thumb* (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Their valuable discoveries encouraged us to find out more about the human behaviour when it comes to easily identifiable commercial strategies like the 'Gruen Effect' and their actual influence on the purchase decisions of today's customers. In particular, we were interested to find out if the subtle manipulation derived from the 'Gruen Effect' consolidates as a cognitive bias when the number of visits to a certain store – in this case, the three largest IKEA stores in the Madrid area – increases. In practical terms this would mean that when the number of visits to the IKEA store increases, the customer becomes «tamed» and accepts to make the 'tour' through the store, no matter how long it may be and how much time it demands from the customer, who finally assimilates that there is nothing he can do to avoid the 'tour'.

The assimilation of the 'Gruen Effect' is an example that shows that emotions play an important role in the purchase decisions; also, that emotions are contagious. Most emotions need some incentive or motivation to be unleashed or expressed.

Firstly, in this case this role is played in the IKEA stores by the 'tour' through all the displays and exhibitions that allows them to show all their products – even the ones customers did not know yet or were not initially interested in – while, at the same time, they are physically unable to go back or abandon the 'tour' of the store at any moment they wish.

Secondly, we confirmed that the emotional reaction provoked in the IKEA potential customers strengthens by the way in which products are displayed in the store. This happens as the information gathered by the human senses is sent to the limbic system of the brain, where a meaning is given, and from there on the cognitive bias gets strengthened through the secretion of substances like oxytocin and dopamine.

Thirdly, the «contagious effect» is stimulated by the massive number of people who make the same purchase activity; the bigger the predisposition (once more, as a result of the strengthening of the cognitive bias) the easier and faster will be the transmission of this effect among the visitors to the IKEA store.

It has been fully acknowledged that the act of consumption is a social act. To consume a good or a product when surrounded by people who share cultural similarities with us is part of an adaptive process of social cohesion. This «collective» act of consumption generates a feeling of euphoria in the human brain (first) that tends to become hypnotic (later on), and that is similar to that one produced by anxiolytics (that usually have benzodiazepine as main ingredient, intended to unchain sensations of placidness in the human brain). This therapy tends to be addictive to its user(s), in a way that is similar to the addictive process experienced by compulsive gamblers. The cognitive bias, the rules of thumb and the «effects» – all of them are tools which serve economic purposes and that, as such, lack any moral responsibility as they can be used to achieve good purposes like, for instance, to help customers make good purchase decisions (through the distribution of clear information, for example) as well as bad purposes (through manipulation strategies, such as the ‘Gruen Effect’).

As a last word, we also must indicate that the manipulation that customers experience nowadays is far from being induced only by the ‘Gruen Effect’, nor by the IKEA stores. The advance of technological devices is designed to ‘chase’ all our digital steps and follow our commercial preferences in order to present unsolicited «offers» of products we might be interested in. Still, we believe that customers should also be aware of the processes that serve commercial purposes, both digitally and through ‘tour’ stores like the ‘Gruen Effect’, that have the first and ultimate goal of influencing them on their purchase decisions.

Notes

1. Even when they had opened a small store in the Canary Islands since 1978, their opening year is considered to be 1996, when they opened one of their big stores in Badalona, Catalonia.
2. Statistical data of the description of the ‘Gruen Effect’ and its relation to the cognitive bias is available upon request by contacting the authors.

ANNEX I - QUESTIONNAIRE

Evaluation of the ‘Gruen Effect’

(Note: The three hypotheses were not included in the original questionnaire)

1. The best part of the 'tour' of the IKEA store is:

The easy access to the products	The exhibitions	Nothing is positive
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2. The worst part of the 'tour' of the IKEA store is:

The 'tour' is extremely long	I have to find the products myself	To feel 'trapped' or 'caught up' inside the store
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3. If I would be given the option of accessing the products without having to walk the store 'tour', I would:

Make the 'tour' through the store anyway	Analyse the other options before making a decision	I would definitely take another option
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4. I have cancelled a planned visit to an IKEA store due to the time that the 'tour' to the store requires:

Many times	Some times	I don't think so
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5. Once I had started the 'tour', I decided to go back and exit the store 'tour' before finishing it:

Many times	Some times	I don't think so
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6. I found myself looking for a shortcut when I was making the 'tour' through the store:

Not that I remember	Probably at least once	I did not know they existed
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H1: IKEA visitors acknowledge that the ‘tour’ has the main purpose of influencing them on their purchase decisions.

7. The display of the products throughout the store 'tour' has the objective of influencing on my purchase decisions:

I totally agree	I somehow agree	I am not sure	I do not agree
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H2: IKEA Manipulation is assimilated as cognitive bias, which distorts the critic evaluation capacity on their purchase decisions.

8. My level of personal acceptance of this IKEA marketing strategy is as follows:

I think it is a good thing	I somehow think it is a good thing	I am not sure	I think it is a bad thing
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9. My reaction to the assumption that it is difficult to resist and it is frequent to make an additional, unplanned purchase through this method is that:

I don't care at all if it happens in this way	I somehow agree that it happens in this way	I am not sure	It makes me angry that it happens in this way
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H3: The cognitive bias strenghtens in time.

10. How many times have you visited an IKEA store?

This is the first time	Between 2 and 5 times	Between 5 and 10 times	More than 10 times
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