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TEXTILE HANDICRAFTS, DESIGN AND CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays the business world is very complex and competitive. Offering products with “design” and preserving cultural heritage does not present itself as an easy task for the textile craft “industry”. Portugal has a perceived increase on demand for design and easy access decorative products, defined as “modern”, instead of handmade decorative products. But what determines this change and how is the product perceived as being a “craft” by Portuguese consumers?

The purpose is to present the main results of a survey of Portuguese consumers based on the theme of textile crafts, and its representations and perceptions in terms of culture, tradition, design and quality. This paper provides a transverse attempt at understanding consumer behaviour between different age groups. The association of design and handicrafts presents a source of inspiration and creation which leads to objects more appropriate to modern life, yet rooted in the wisdom and art of the past.

FutureARTE: THE STUDY

Objectives

The objective of the study is to investigate the perceptions and representations of Portuguese consumers regarding textile handicrafts in terms of culture, tradition, design and quality. It provides a transversal attempt at understanding consumer behaviour within different age groups.

Thus, it is intended to:

- Study the attitudes to handicrafts of Portuguese consumers;
- Explore the determinants of the behaviour of buying textile handicrafts, particularly its relation to the demographic variables of age and gender;
- Understand the representations/perceptions associated with textile handicrafts.

Methodology

This investigation’s data is the result of an auto-administered questionnaire from a sample of

“convenience”. Three different locations in the north were chosen for distribution of the questionnaire, entitled “FutureARTE – Textile Handicrafts Survey”. From the total of 107 questionnaires received, all were considered valid since none contained very incomplete responses. Based on the formation of a focus group of Minho University students, the questionnaire consists of three separate parts. The first part includes questions about characteristics such as age, sex/gender and profession. The second part analyses the degree of agreement on 13 different statements related to attitudes and perceptions with regard to textile handicrafts. The degree of agreement is measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“I completely disagree”) to 5 (“I agree completely”). Finally, the third part consists of the choice of three adjectives associated with one of three photographs illustrative of Portuguese textile handicrafts.

Sample

In summary, the sample can be characterized by:

- a majority of female subjects (72.9%), resulting from the significantly greater presence of women in the locations where the questionnaire was distributed;
- ages ranging from 19 to 79 years (an average of 39.57 years of age with a median variable of 18.472 years);
- with an occupation of “student” (28.97%) or a profession described as “Technicians and professionals of an intermediate level” (24.3%).

Given the nature of the sample, it is not possible to extrapolate from the characteristics of the subjects in relation to the Portuguese population.

Attitudes and Perceptions

This section will deal more directly with the results of attitudes and perceptions associated with handicrafts. Apart from the descriptive statistics, the methodology used tests the response to the statement and to questions about demographic characteristics such as gender and age. In the presentation of the results, the average level of agreement with each statement related to handicrafts is considered, and the average profiles obtained are presented in graph form. Figure 1, which illustrates the



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average levels of agreement attributed to each of the 13 statements regarding age and gender, demonstrates the existence of a common age and gender profile but with some nuances. In relation to gender, there is strong agreement on the definition of handicrafts as “As a product, textile handicrafts respect techniques, raw materials and patterns” (item 1), on the perceived elevated value of handicrafts as a cultural heritage (item 5) and on the genuineness/authenticity of the purchase (item 11).

Although female responses demonstrated a higher/more elevated average response tendency than males, it is interesting to note the inversion related to gift purchasing (item 9), in which case men gave a more positive response.

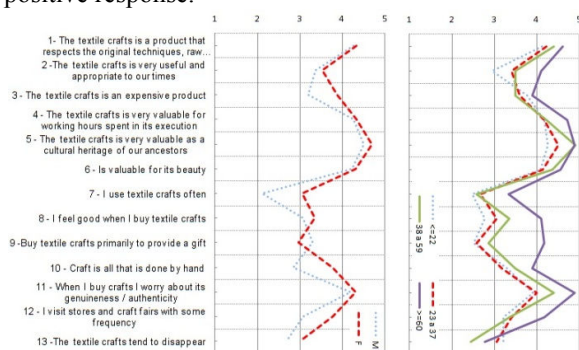


Figure 1 - Textile Handicrafts by gender and age group: profile of the average level of agreement

Figure 1 also permits an analysis by age group. From a superficial visual analysis, it is possible to observe that “60 years or older” respondents tend to concur more with the statements presented. In the opposite position, i.e., with a greater tendency towards disagreement, younger respondents with “less than or equal to 22 years of age” are found.

In the third part of the FutureArte questionnaire, each respondent was also “invited” to write three adjectives associated to each one of the three textile handicraft images/products presented. For the study of the representations, the questionnaire consisted of the presentation of six photographs of specific examples of Portuguese textile handicrafts, namely: Madeira embroidery, hand-woven Arraiolos mats, Bilros lacework, Minho Sweetheart Handkerchiefs, Monsenhor Airosa bed spreads/quilts (AMA-Braga), Castelo Branco embroidery. The choice of these six samples was based on their importance and capacity to represent Portuguese handicrafts, nationally and internationally. The results are discussed for the five most cited adjectives (Top-5). From the joint analysis, it is possible

to summarize the results obtained in Table 1. The predominance of “beautiful” and “intricate” in the examples shown is notably interesting.

Table 1 – Summary of Top 5 Adjectives

	Madeira embroidery	Arraiolos' hand-woven	Bilros' lacework	Minho Sweetheart Handkerchiefs	Monsenhor Airosa bed spreads	Castelo Branco embroidery
1	beautiful	beautiful	intricate	colorful	colorful	beautiful
2	intricate	intricate	beautiful	beautiful	beautiful	intricate
3	stunning	colorful	stunning	traditional	useful	stunning
4	expensive	expensive	original	joyful	intricate	expensive
5	delicate	stunning	traditional	romantic	comfortable	delicate

CONTRIBUTIONS

FutureARTE was based on the completion of a questionnaire specifically developed for this research survey on the attitudes and perceptions of value for Portuguese consumers. Identified in the literature, are some studies of attitude related to the mediation of tourist textile souvenirs (for example (Asplet & Cooper, 2000; Lee et al, 2009), but do not identify Portuguese case studies or studies applying theory on consumer attitudes and behaviour towards the issue of purchase of handicrafts, which supports the novelty and originality of the work in progress. These results have created the desire to exploit future works, namely: 1) the perceived value of cultural heritage, 2) the concern of authenticity and 3) the pessimistic view of the future shared by men and the younger sector. In reference to the results of the representations and perceptions associated with different examples of textile crafts, it is interesting to note the predominance of “beautiful” and “intricate”. From the standpoint of view of communication with the public, there is a widespread sense of aesthetics and effort that can be worked on.

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