

EVALUATION RESOURCES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE CERAMIC PRODUCTS: A USER STUDY

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Spanish ceramic sector has produced much and well. We can consider the offer of Spanish tiles in the marketplace to be abundant and of quality. In this "society of abundance" (products and services) the consumer has become the most prized resource. We are going from a market of demand to one of supply, in which the capacity to offer products will no longer lag behind demand.

To date the ceramic sector in Spain has unceasingly generated new strategies based on periodic modernization of its production structure. The differentiation of its products by investments destined to intangibles has been designed to assure the presence of our companies in international scenarios, where new players are gradually appearing, countries, particularly Asian, which have revolutionized the global production order.

In the 90s, marketing was the main interpreting activity of the market, consisting of recording and monitoring consumer needs. So-called traditional mass marketing was based on the interpretation of "the truth" of the market, by splitting it up into hermetic niches based on the needs of consumer "tribes" and on the permanent knowledge of the action environment. Once the segment had been delimited, a research report was drawn up, whose results were considered representative of the market and consumer needs, and hence unquestionable.

But the consumer has changed. The consumer is no longer content with satisfying his/her needs, but has adopted a multidimensional and transverse position to the society of abundance: the consumer demands more quality, more service, more differentiation, products in closer affinity with his/her personality. We have passed from the segmentation of the market to the fragmentation of the individual, i.e., to the cancellation of the unity of the individual. As Morace states *"consumption cycles become reflexive and product selection is directed towards identity and not image, as occurred in the past. The evaluation of alternatives, calculation or programming, and the total conviction in the decisions of each individual are gradually spreading. The consumer, unable to ignore the increasing volume of communication, products and stimuli, reacts by weighing up and evaluating, seeking his/her own ideal of quality and reducing the space for impulsive purchase. Product selection, rather than a creative and theatrical construction of an image, is directed to confirming the "identity" of the consumer."*⁽¹⁾

In this context, a loss of security in the principles of mass marketing can be perceived, with the simultaneous affirmation of the importance of reconsidering approaches in consumption studies and the conception of marketing in plurality. One of the numerous predictive techniques, focusing on demands, expectations and preferences of this new melting pot of eclectic clients, is what is referred to as a *user study*.

Companies must continuously take decisions to design new competitive strategies, whose consequences appear in the short, medium or long term. In order to decide between different alternatives we need information, and a part of this information requires techniques and methodologies that capture this "first hand", a system of collection of tracks available for a first approach to the users: the first qualitative breeding ground where not only are market needs fulfilled, but also the tendencies that the society displays in which the consumers live.

We wish to note that the methodology which we now set out is a technique that is nourished by the subjective opinions of a group, without interacting with its

members, and that does not have a defining character but is rather an introduction to later foresight study systems based on panels of experts developed in the companies (nominal group techniques (NGT), Delphi, Crossed impact method (CIM), etc.). A group system of experts has more logistic resources, other types of motivations and implications, and data fusion with controlled retroaction or feedback techniques, which may allow a better understanding of the problem and a statistical group response. With our methodology we set ourselves the task of establishing *the problem(s)*, that is, the questions raised by the conventional user of ceramics and his/her new consumer yearnings; for this we use the technique of individual foresight, in this case, the survey.

With this, we wish to define the complementary character of this study and its intention to design another avenue through which the manager can articulate other foresight systems that allow focusing his decisions in an environment of accelerated change such as the present one, where uncertainty has come to settle.

As business organizations become large, they must operate in more complex scenarios, and their management becomes more rational and dynamic. The proliferation of prospective analysis methodologies and instruments for obtaining information has contributed to this, mainly with regard to future tendencies, to feed new models of management and decision. Paradoxically, the increase of the need for foresight at this time of uncertainty, due to the versatility of the environment, has led to reduced accuracy in the prediction of the scenarios in which the markets are located.

The use of techniques such as the one we now propose would be incomplete without other implicit instruments of foresight in the company organizational chart, based on panels of experts and committees of validation. This evaluation system is based on the subjective information of the user of ceramic tiles, which is filtered and tabulated by an individual or group of individuals, taking into account user beliefs, expectations and opinions, as well as cumulative experiences and data. Given the nature of this information, the design of a methodology is required, capable of articulating and structuring these value judgments and making them operative, so that the expert can make his forecast or draw up qualitative support for later predictive systems.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN: BASIC STAGES

All research requires establishing a design or plan that serves as a guide for data collection and analysis (Churchill, 1987.1988). Research design involves the specification of the methods and procedures to acquire the necessary information to structure or solve problems (Green, Tull and Albaum, 1988). The research plan includes a set of activities that start by identifying the problem to be researched, subsequently proceeding with the definition, classification and measurement of the variables set out in a form or questionnaire, and ending with data analysis and results interpretation.

Identification of the problem requires starting off with a clear and accurate definition of the problem to be studied. It also includes the specification of the research objectives, i.e., determination of which phenomena are to be researched (behaviours, opinions, attitudes, perceptions, intentions, etc.), which relations among these are to be analyzed and which hypotheses are to be verified.

The type of research design is derived from the class of problem to be studied and from the research aims. There are three basic types of research design:

- Exploratory studies.
- Descriptive studies.
- Experimental studies.

In our research we will use the descriptive or correctional study. This is designed to describe the characteristics of certain groups, determine the frequency with which something happens, and estimate the relation between two or more variables or perform predictions. The survey is a very common method of acquiring information in social and market research. It is generally based on large representative samples of the population to be studied. The data are obtained by communication, through personal interviews, as is our case, by mail or telephone, and by a questionnaire. It is also known as quantitative research because statistical techniques are used to analyze the data.

3. SPECIFICATION OF THE HYPOTHESES

A hypothesis is an unproven affirmation or proposal concerning a phenomenon, the behaviour of one or more variables, or the relation between two or more variables. Hypotheses highlight what is being sought and anticipate the possible responses to the questions raised in the research. The results of the study will need to confirm or reject the hypotheses.

In the section dedicated to design in the questionnaire, we shall see that a series of hypothetical commentaries is enclosed beneath each question for each response, which will lead to the confirmation or cancellation of our general hypothesis.

4. SAMPLE SIZE

The determination of the sample is based on budget and available time, as well as the error that is admitted in the data obtained. We wish to note that our proposal is not a conclusive work, but a minor example of evaluation resources for the development of innovative ceramic products based on a user study.

For this we have been able to count on the collaboration of the company SALONI Cerámica, which has selflessly set its store in Valencia at our disposal for three days to perform our sampling. We conducted a total of 24 interviews in a period in two afternoons and one complete day. Evidently, this number of users would be insufficient for any probabilistic type of study, but the intention of this communication is the presentation of this tool as an effective methodology for establishing orientational support in later prospective studies, based on panels of experts or other group techniques.

5. LIST OF OBJECTIVES

Before launching upon the preparation of a questionnaire we need to create a list of objectives that defines the information we wish to obtain with the study, either in the form of specific questions or of any other type, this being the list that will form the

basis of the document to be drafted. We shall distinguish between the objectives specific to each question and the general objectives, which will be explained and clarified after tabulating and coding the specific objectives.

The questions launched by the general objectives are answered by the specific objectives of the questions, subsequently delimited by classification questions (age, sex, activity, etc.). This strategy however does not prevent us from drafting a general list of questions or intentions that our work wishes to approach "a priori".

6. GENERAL OBJECTIVES

When approaching a task of evaluation on issues of use or usability, it is not enough to assure a good battery of significant questions; it is necessary to take into account a series of requirements to largely avoid interferences, delays, ambiguous results, etc. Good planning will spare us setbacks, and will assure a certain order on executing the tasks.

First we shall need to fix certain objectives, a work purpose. But before explaining the purpose of the study to be conducted, it is necessary to define what is going to be the object of the study, the reference point around which the entire project will revolve, that is: *ceramic tiles for domestic use*.

However, this evaluation target can be addressed in terms of two categories: an abstract category, i.e., an overall conception of the object to be studied, or a concrete category, where we would try to test a model, a series, a service or a specific publicity campaign.

With our work we wish to emphasize the fundamental character of knowing the **user profile**. The better we know the consumer, his/her reluctances and needs, the greater can the resulting benefits be, both at the time of making the product planning, cleaning out and taking down those obsolete references, as well as in our enterprise strategies, where we find coherent innovation support with the detected prospective potentialities. It is evident that knowledge of revealing signs of some inertia in the tendencies will never be detrimental to operational capacity in production, but will in any case always help to channel this.

Our methodology has followed a "mixed" model. There is one first battery of questions (so-called thematic questions), which serves to define the prospective potentialities regarding the real needs of the user of ceramic tiles for domestic use:

- The real vision of the consumer towards this type of products,
- Its decorative and functional possibilities.
- The aesthetic tendencies or styles that somehow set out a critical way along which to project an operative line for later group techniques.

New flexible horizons are opened, characterized less and less by rigid rules, by oriented, winning strategies from the outset. First hand knowledge of the concerns and yearnings of the conventional user of ceramic tiles for domestic use will serve as a necessary base for the new projectional marketing, in which research into the tendencies and new sociocultural perspectives could be the obligatory step for a new system of anticipations of needs and desires. The work is intended to underpin the aesthetic tastes, semantic connotations based on the demands and the resistance of the

user towards the material, bringing out the nuances, purifying these and trying to reach a prospective vision, always from an overall conception of the product (abstract category).

A second battery of questions (also called thematic) refers to the experiences of the consumer at the sales outlet, stemming from the act of acquisition or desire. These are questions regarding services, impressions and evaluations of the sales outlet and products on show there, his/her resistance and concerns. The point is to encourage consumers to adopt an active role in the acquisition process. Clients express their impressions based on their own decisions and their own sensitivity in a concrete scenario.

This work has offered us the possibility of establishing a new link between the sales outlet and the consumer. The sales outlet is not only a dispensing point where the consumer must feel at ease, be taken into account, a spacious place in which to browse freely or where he/she is offered a series of after-sales services or requirements. This has become a laboratory for experimentation, a place where the consumer gives free rein to his/her senses and the store must use sensitive factors to provoke positive relations in the consumers. The sales outlet must know how to transmit the effort of enterprise strategies with ethical objectives; it must be the village of a community of individuals around a trademark or a product. Giulio Ceppi^[2] describes the relation of the user to the product at the sales outlet in this way: *"In this scenario, the weight of the instruments that the trademark has at its disposal to manifest its presence and offer in the market changes radically. For example, sales outlet and distribution acquire a new role, converting themselves fully into centres of physical and real experience, thus setting themselves against the extensive dissemination of the virtual, and the sensorial promises filtered by the technological mass media. Distribution becomes the centre of a second production, which gives the consumer the opportunity of perceptively trying out not only product qualities, but also the identity of the trademark, which finally materializes in its physical dimension. At the sales outlet, the consumer steps out of the sphere of the five senses, going beyond all synesthesia. A kind of sixth sense is created: the subliminal exchange between the trademark and the consumer, which leads to total fidelity to the trademark "*.

We have thus verified the "mixed" character of our evaluation. On the one hand, it performs an abstract evaluation of our study reference, and on the other, it sets this reference in an action scenario, converting it into tangibles that the client can appreciate by means of supports and tools that the seller provides. It is an aprioristic relation that the tile consumer establishes through the perceptive relation of environments, panels and other types of inert supports, which will help form the real image of the product, which is no other than the definitive space of the client's bathroom or kitchen.

The mixed character of our work is a manner of establishing relationships with the consumer in different ways. For this reason a flexible and open methodology is involved, focused on knowledge and interpretation of the reality of the market and society in a specific, step by step, fashion.

7. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The questionnaire is the form that contains the questions or variables of the research, where the responses of the persons interviewed are recorded. Designing the questionnaire is not simple and presents some difficulties. Although asking is relatively easy, asking good questions is an art that requires imagination and

experience (Simon, 1969). For appropriate questionnaire design, the following three requirements must be met:

- Correctly defining the problem to be researched.
- Accurately formulating the hypotheses.
- Suitably specifying the variables and measuring scales.

Questionnaire design can be simplified in five key points:

- Creation of a list of objectives. The previous section has already set out most of the general questions. The specific objectives will arise from the concerns and needs of those general questions launched aprioristically. These specific objectives will take shape in the form of thematic and tabulated questions and will be classified through the sieve of a section of classification questions. These will be specified in the questionnaire draft, beneath each concrete question.
- Consideration of the data collection method. It is necessary to consider the survey format; this will involve taking into account the following questions:
 - a) Are we really obtaining response to the objectives set in the study?
 - b) Are all the questions included in the document necessary?
 - c) Will the interviewees be able to answer the questions? Will they be willing to answer them?
 - d) What is the best moment to carry out the survey, before or after the moment of consumption?

And there are other questions referring to the rhythm, to the reasonable size of the questionnaire, or to its wording:

- Writing of the first draft of the questionnaire.
- Search of the critical contrast in the questionnaire by people not involved in the research (who could raise objections at least to the way in which it has been drafted)
- Running as many questionnaire trials as necessary, making the relevant modifications.



Saloni Cerámica store in Valencia. Space where the survey was conducted.

8. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS SECTION

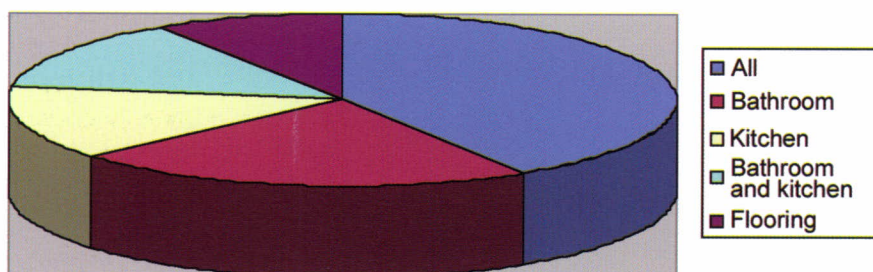
These open questions allow us to determine whether the person we are speaking to responds to the profile or has the characteristics sought in the study. In many cases, some reply to these questions makes the interviewee unsuitable, upon which he is thanked for his/her cooperation and the interview ended. These first questions focus fundamentally on this idea of business need:

"Those companies move better in the field of replacement that can add more to their product. Not only can a better product be sold, but there are also more options to extend it by various efforts, supporting or by-passing the intermediaries. In order to compete successfully in replacement, companies are forced to offer an attractive range, to constantly present new collections, invest in displays, advertise in magazines, update catalogues, etc."^[3]

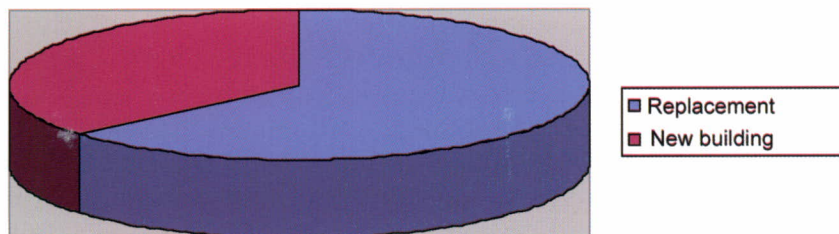
This questionnaire is directed to the so-called "private market", i.e., individual clients, fundamentally end-users, disregarding specifiers or installers. In this market the distribution channel is usually longer and the purchase is highly conditioned by issues of fashion or specification.

Regarding which opinion prevailed in the couple at the time of decorating their house, **68%** of the interviewees shared the task of deciding on the point of home decoration. Of this **68.18%**, **60%** were **women**. **27.27%** considered his/her opinion to prevail over that of the partner. Of this **27.27%**, **100%** were women. **4.54%** thought that it was his/her partner that decided in the decoration. Of this **4.54%**, **100%** were men.

Regarding whether the product sought at the sales outlet was tile for the bathroom, kitchen, floor or every type, **40.9%** of the interviewees were interested in both wall tile and floor tile for the bathroom and the kitchen, as well as for other areas of their home. That is to say, **they wanted ceramics for their whole home**. **22.72%** sought wall tile for their bathroom. **13.63%** wished to find wall tile for their kitchen. The same percentage (**13.63%**) was interested in wall tile for the bathroom and for the kitchen, and **9.09%** was exclusively looking for floor tile.



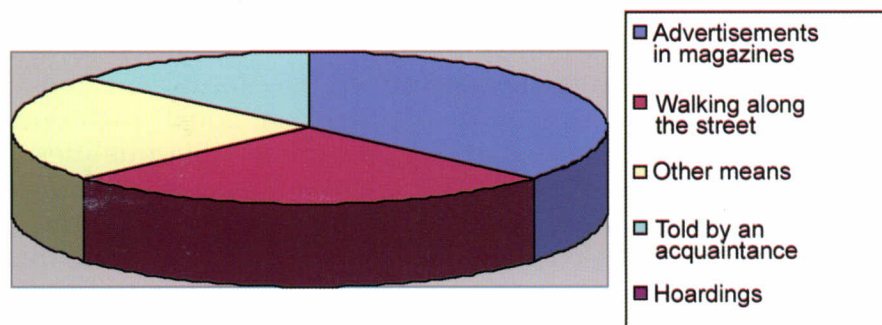
Regarding whether the product was for replacing bathroom or kitchen tiles, or for a new building, **63.63%** of the product requested by the interviewees was destined for replacement. **36.36%** of the remaining demand was for new buildings. These data are consistent with those that appeared in the Initiative held at Castellón on "Distribution and marketing model of the ceramic sector" between the months of July 1998 and February 1999^[4]. In this initiative it was estimated that the data established the amount of product destined for replacement between **60** and **65%**, and sales for new building between **35** and **40%**, a percentage that would tend upwards in favour of new building construction with a strong expansion of the construction sector, as is presently the case.



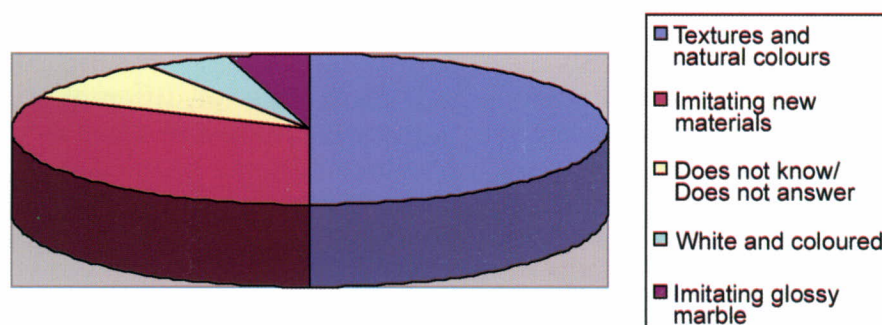
9. SECTION OF THEMATIC QUESTIONS

This refers to the block(s) of questions that are the object of the study. These are evidently the questions that form the body of the questionnaire and that could possibly generate the greatest stress and fatigue in the interviewee.

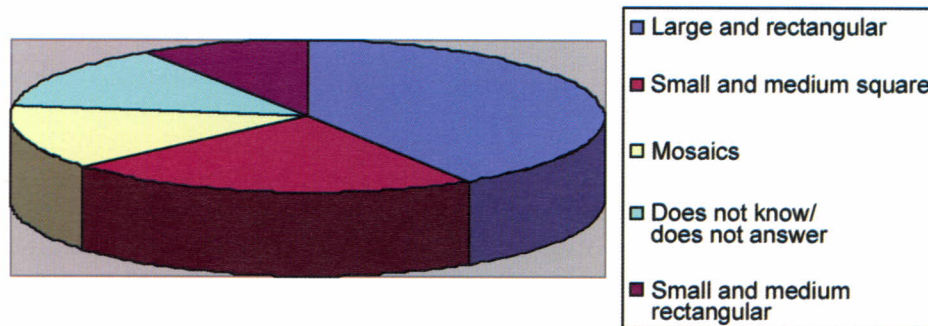
The first question posed referred to how the consumer had learned of the existence of the trademark. **36% of the interviewees learned of the existence of the trademark by advertisements in magazines. 27.27% had noticed the existence of the trademark when walking down the street and coming across the sales outlet.** In these cases, the location of the sales outlet was on the commercial downtown route. 22.72% discovered this by other means; fundamentally those circulating in professional fields (trade fairs, building companies, etc). In 13.63% of the cases, this was by "word of mouth" or some remarks by an acquaintance. None of the interviewees had paid attention to the advertisements on the hoardings around the city. This leads us to reframe the effectiveness of this media tool.



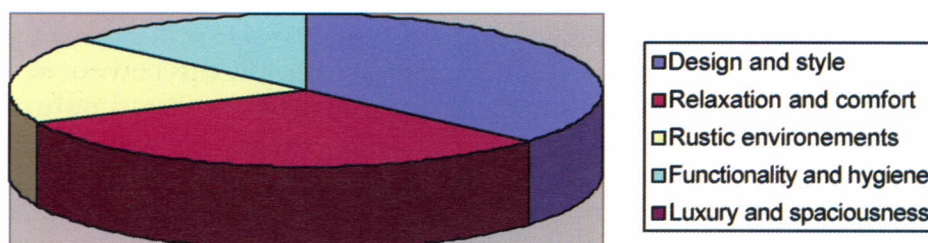
With regard to apparently subjective criteria on the perception and aesthetics of the product, the criteria of the consumer regarding tiles in the bathroom or kitchen produced the following results. **50% of the interviewees preferred natural textures and colours. Of this 50%, 45.45% found in design and style the main quality that their "ideal" bathroom or kitchen should display,** with a 36.36% second place for references to rustic worlds in the yearnings of those that preferred natural textures. 31.81% preferred ceramics that imitated novel materials, like steel, glass or dark wood. 9.09% was still undecided. 4.54% preferred white or coloured tiles. The same percentage (4.54%) was fascinated by glossy tiles that imitated marble.



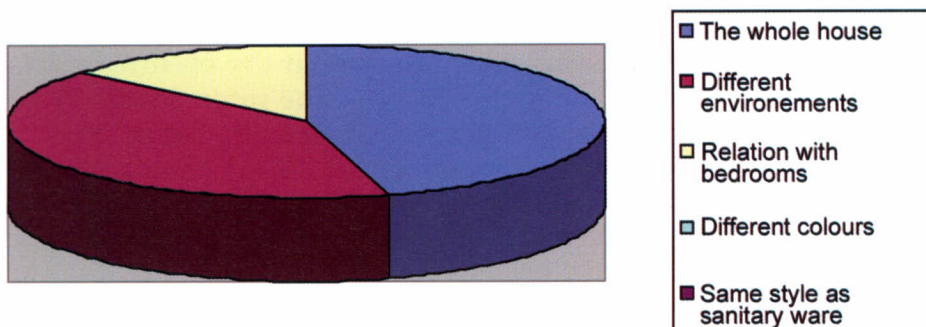
Concerning the preferred shape of their tiles, **40.9%** of the interviewees preferred **large rectangular sizes**. Of this percentage, **55.55%** preferred **natural textures** and **33.3%** would like this size for pieces that imitated novel materials. Going further with the users that favoured large rectangular sizes, **the sample indicated that 44.4% of these users would like a decorative coherence throughout the home**, whereas **33.3%** preferred to recreate different environments in each bathroom. **22.72%** would tile their walls with small or medium square sizes. **13.63%** felt attracted by ceramic mosaic or pieces that imitated this. The same percentage was assigned to the group of the undecided. **9.09%** was in favour of small or medium rectangular sizes.



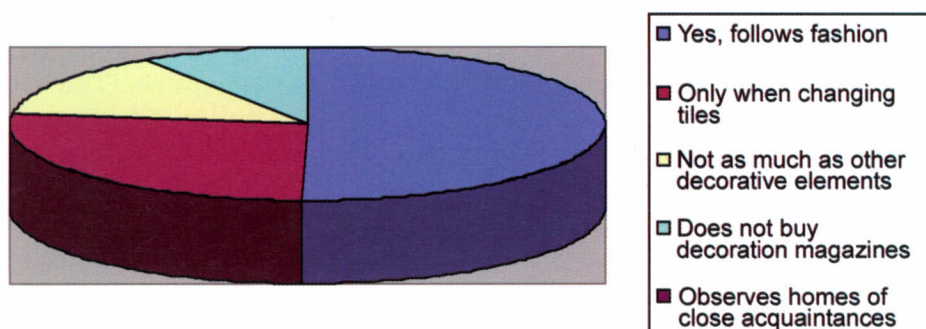
Proceeding further with aspects of a perceptive type, we sought a response to their "ideal bathroom". **36.36%** of the interviewees found in **design and style** the most valued quality when imagining their bathroom. Of this percentage **65%** were women, **62.5%** had higher education, a quarter was between 25 and 35 years old and **37%** were over 55. **25%** of this percentage said they were private business persons and the same number worked in the public administration. **31% of the interviewees preferred qualities relating to relaxation and comfort**. **18.18%** found the most "inspiring" element to lie in rustic references when imagining their "ideal" bathroom. **13.63%** of the interviewees placed functionality and hygiene above other qualities. This section mainly refers to the functional definition related to cleaning and maintenance properties. This point relates closely to the one concerning the effort involved in performing the tasks of the user. Finally, none of the interviewees decided on quality related to the luxury.



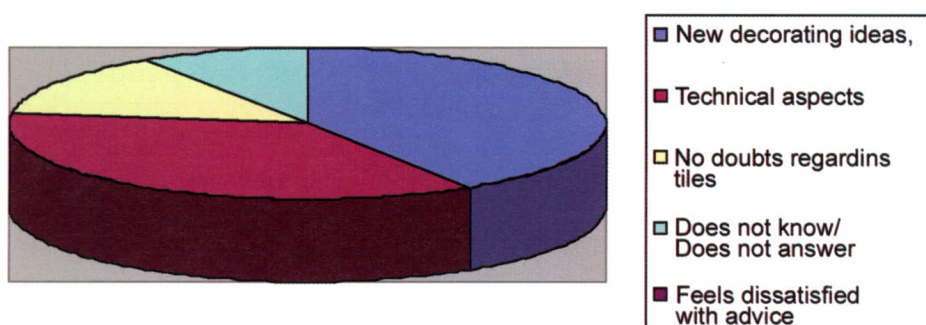
We insisted on a space like that of the bathroom in the home, and **45.45%** of the interviewees noted that they preferred this space to follow an image of **decorative homogeneity for the whole home**. This was closely followed by **40.9%**, who favoured **recreating different environments**, i.e., using various themes for the different areas of the home, dividing the habitat into small recreations of different styles. **13.63%** declared they preferred a decorative symbiosis with the nearest bedrooms. None of the interviewees declared themselves in favour of colour as the only differentiating element of the environments, which suggests considering other decorative strategies that contribute added value, replacing the merely chromatic value, perhaps in contrasts with new materials or new graphic repertoires, etc. Nor did anybody opt for a decorative approach in coherence with the sanitary ware.



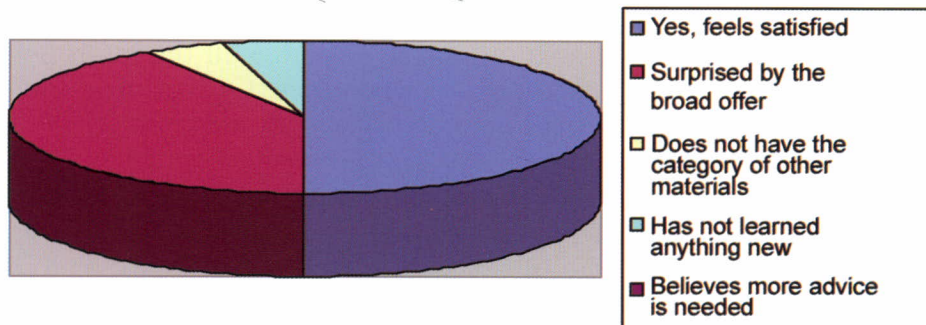
We also tried to detect whether the user had information sources that were highly influenced by the world of fashion or decoration. Half the interviewees (**50%**) declared they were **followers of decoration magazines**. Of this percentage, 45.45% were 25 to 35 years old and 27.2% over 55. 72.7% were women and 36.3% had higher education. 27.2% of all the interviewees were only interested in tiles in the decoration magazines when they were considering changing these. 13.63% recognized their greater interest in other decorative elements and accessories such as furniture, lighting or textiles. 9.09% of the interviewees did not usually buy decoration magazines. None of interviewees took the decoration of other houses of friends or relatives as a paradigm.



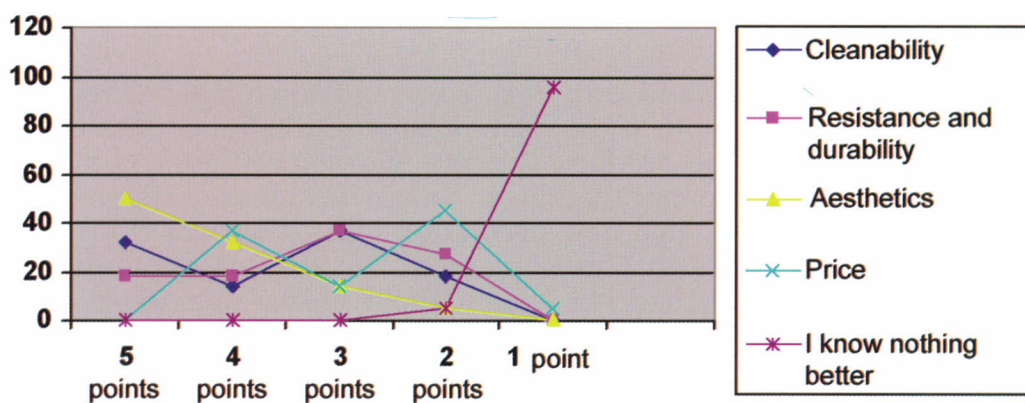
Another element that would help us discover unknown features regarding the importance of the sales outlet, was the relation between the seller and the user, the structuring and layout of the product, and the information received at all levels. **40.9%** of the interviewees thought that the environments, display stands and sellers at the sales outlet had contributed **new decoration ideas**. This was closely followed by **36.3%** of the interviewees that were pleased with the contributions regarding **technical aspects** which they had not known about by the sales assistant. 13.63% declared they were experts on ceramic wall and floor tiles, and had no doubts on this point. 9.09% belonged to the group of doubters. None of the interviewees felt dissatisfied with the service.



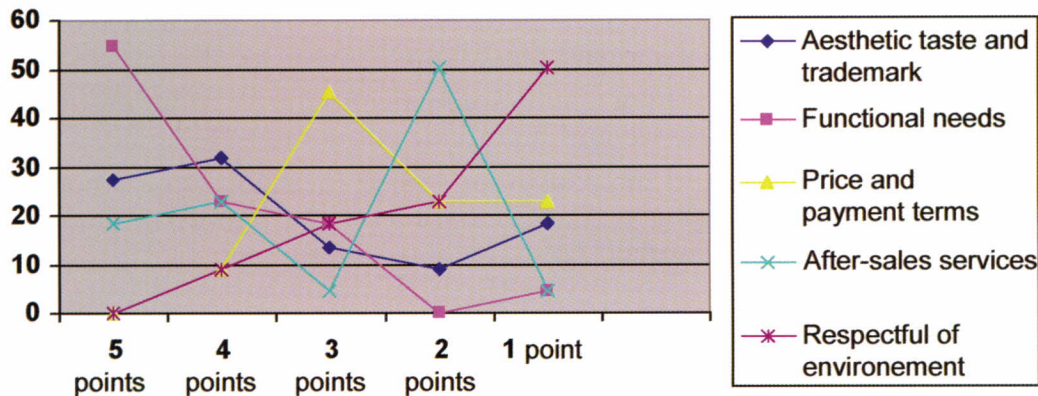
We also measured the knowledge of the product offer, because we often did not recognize if this information was available, and if the existing market offer of tiles satisfied the aesthetic tastes of the user. **50% of the interviewees declared they were satisfied with the present existing offer of tiles in the market. 40.9% felt overwhelmed and surprised by the broad offer. These two data indicate the extensive offer and quality of architectural ceramics in our country.** 4.5% thought that ceramic materials did not have the qualitative features of other materials. The same percentage (4.5%) confessed that they had not learned anything they did not know before. None of the interviewees declared needing further advice from experts.



And finally we evaluated the purchase option when deciding on tiles for the bathroom or kitchen. As the graph shows, **the most highly valued characteristic when deciding on tiles for bathroom referred to aesthetic aspects.** The second most prized quality by the interviewees was cleanability, followed very closely by resistance and durability. Although price reached higher levels in the second position of evaluation, it did not achieve any maximum score, which is why this adversely affected the overall score. It would occupy the fourth place in the overall evaluation. Finally the option "I know nothing better" would occupy the fifth position.



In the case of trademarks and their degree of recognition, the purchase option inclines, as the graph shows, **towards functional needs, independently of the tile trademark.** Secondly there is the aesthetic taste, endorsed by a trademark as a quality assurance, which scores the second best evaluation in the sample. Thirdly, price and payment terms would occupy the parameters that indicate the third best evaluation by the interviewees. The fourth place would be occupied by after-sales services, reserving the last position for those environmental values which the interviewee confessed were not appreciated in the product, not because of lack of eco-mindedness, but because of ignorance.



After conducting this sample, we need to reflect the most usual user profile that we have analyzed. The user's age was between 25 and 55, although we are generally speaking of young people. These were mainly women, whose profession was usually that of a small or medium business person, liberal professional, or had some position of responsibility. We found a relatively important number that only worked in the home. They lived in urban surroundings, and many had higher education. The majority lived as couples, with an average of two children.

10. PARTIAL CONCLUSIONS

Through the questionnaire we have recognized the delimitation of the aesthetic tendencies. It reports on the knowledge by consumers of the different tendencies and materials. It codes the different routes or paths of the tendencies:

- The route of clarity, of the sharply defined tile, lacking referential values or mimetic intentions towards other materials.
- The way towards the "natural" or the yearning for the recreation of bucolic or traditional environments. Solutions that help us to reencounter artisanal signs that recall the gestures of effort and "handcrafted" work.
- The confrontation with novel materials, with industrial patinas, surfaces coming from warmer worlds such as textile or leather. Wooden appearances, transgressors from the nostalgic-affective discourse that receive a new material sense as such.
- Glossy and pristine marbles, the latest burgeoning of sophisticated signs. Paradigms of a classic and inexhaustible avenue. Doubts awaiting explanations, which lead us to envisage a consumer eager to acquire more than just products, seeking experiences with which to identify his/her style of life, his/her way of being.

Delimitation of the tendencies in tile size and their repercussion or importance in the final decision:

- Affective avenue, or avenue of desire, based on the tendency of consumers to acquire products or services by the emotional experiences deriving from the act of acquisition and desire, rather than because of their real characteristics. From the need to construct a scenario for "his/her" moment of privacy and mental escapism.
- The tendency of the consumer to reconstruct the circumstances of the past in the present world by the nostalgic operation of questing after authenticity in traditional reference points.

- The prioritization of functional aspects above other values, as a result of new, faster and much more dispersed lifestyles.
- A classic vision, where luxury and sophistication are synonymous of social prestige, imposing presence and hierarchic etiquette.
- The object of design and the consumer's need for signs of personal identity, of a differentiating value no longer based on the hierarchic image of the product but on the consumer's own ideal of quality.

Regarding the individualization of bathrooms, customization and recreation of different atmospheres. The domestic habitat has disintegrated as the family unit, the inhabited space has become atomized; each area tends towards a thematic definition. This will require taking into account:

- Colour as an element of harmonic differentiation, without breaking the decorative criterion of all the areas of the bathroom. Colour is the metaphor of classified structural meanings. At the poorest level, the symbolism of colours is lost in the psychological: passionate and aggressive red, blue a sign of calm, optimistic yellow, etc.
- The bathroom as a reflection of the inhabitant of the bedroom, the customary user, the sophisticated bathroom of the bedroom, the informal bathroom of the children, where playful aspects are valued with the imaginary colouring of childhood, the guest bathroom, etc.^[3]
- The symbiotic dependence on sanitary ware, authentic drivers of decision, advanced reference points of our yearning for differentiation.
- Decorative compaction of the inhabitable space, tendency towards encapsulation of the domestic habitat, which works as a whole without any possible fissures. Each room has a strict destiny, which corresponds to the various functions of the family cell, and this conveys us further, to a conception of the person in whom this is seen as a balanced set of different faculties.
- Confirmation of monitoring by the ceramics user of the decorative tendencies of ceramic tiles and their location and positioning with regard to other sectors of design. Effect on the consumer of the different sources of information. Evaluation of "word of mouth", and affective engagement.

On the other hand, the communicative relation, the dialogue between buyer and seller is a determining factor. From the presentation of the object by itself in a panel display, we thus pass on to its presentation through a human intermediary with a true verbal-gestural dialogue (interpersonal seller-buyer communication).

The seller becomes the receiver of the concerns of the client who enters his sales outlet. The client displays these concerns, preoccupations or desires which the seller must vehicularize and settle by means of a communication strategy. The client could have had a first contact with the product through the mass media. The seller must act as an intermediary in this change of scale in the perception of the object. Passing from the media perception to the interpersonal perception involves a radical transformation of the paradigmatic model. The seller must "get down to earth" by a double strategy of persuasion-information about the object. This involves a communicational operation that induces the client to acquire a product with the smallest risk of frustration in his/her future functional relation with the object. That is, in this operational, utilitarian interaction, led by the expectation of product performance or satisfaction.

The relation of the user to the product at the sales outlet, i.e., in the scenario of the "live presentation/demonstration" is different from that which the user can establish with another type of product, because of its semi-processed nature. The perceptive relation is more complex, because the object never appears in its definitive form. Its constructive intentionality must be guessed in the demonstration by means of supports and tools that the seller provides for the user.

It is an aprioristic relation that the tile consumer establishes through the perceptive relation of environments, panels, and other types of inert supports, which will somehow help to form the real image of the product, which is no other than that of the definitive space in his/her bathroom or kitchen. A translation occurs of a physical experience at the sales outlet to a virtual experience in his/her domestic space. The tile consumer really does not know what he/she is buying until the product is installed in the bathroom. The new perspective forces to us to understand that we will no longer be selling tiles, if we wish to be different.

Everybody can sell tiles. We make wall tiles or floor tiles but we must sell something else: offer them in the best way to the buyer we target.

For this reason merchandising is important; for this reason the closer we approach the true end product: complete environments, the more we have to gain; for this reason we must seek aspects that are valued in the unfinished product we sell.

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- [3] POLLERAS BAILLO, David (Consulter), *Cluster Competitividad "El modelo de distribución y comercialización del sector cerámico"*. Cerámica Información. nº 261, March 2000. Page 71
- [4] The Autonomous Government of Valencia, from its Head Offices for Economy and Industry, and BANCAJA, undertook an initiative entitled "Initiative to reinforce the Competitiveness of the tile Cluster in Castellón", and involved tile manufacturers and suppliers in a process of strategic reflection that enabled enterprise, institutions and the Administration to orient their decisions in the most convenient direction with a view to addressing the challenges of the future with assurance, to sustain the development of the tile manufacturing region of Castellón.