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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Instagram overuse to instastress and emotional fatigue: the mediation of addiction</td>
<td>Silvia Sanz-Blas, Daniela Buzova and Maria José Miquel-Romero</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents and consequences of luxury brand engagement in social media</td>
<td>Amélia Brandão, Eva Pinho and Paula Rodrigues</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing rural destinations’ loyalty through relationship quality</td>
<td>Helena Alves, Ana María Campón-Cerro and José Manuel Hernández-Mogollón</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of environmental CSR practices on the formation of behavioral intentions in a certified hotel context: exploring the moderating effect of customer involvement in the buying process</td>
<td>Patricia Martínez García de Leaniz, Ángel Herrero Crespo and Raquel Gómez-López</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents of brand hate in the fast food industry</td>
<td>Sharizal Hashim and Sheraz Kasana</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effect of cognitive absorption on marketing learning performance</td>
<td>Miguel Guinaliu-Blasco, Blanca Hernández-Ortega and José L. Franco</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of SMEs strategy on loyalty: the hairdresser case</td>
<td>Ángel López-Jauregui, Mercedes Martos-Partal and Jose María Labeaga</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediating model of brand equity and its application</td>
<td>Umesh Ramchandra Raut, Prafulla Arjun Pawar, Pedro Quelhas Brito and Gyanendra Singh Sisodia</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Richard Bagozzi
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From Instagram overuse to instastress and emotional fatigue: the mediation of addiction

Del uso excesivo de Instagram al instastress y a la fatiga emocional: el papel mediador de la adicción

Silvia Sanz-Blas, Daniela Buzova and María José Miquel-Romero
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Abstract

Purpose – Today’s society interest in mobile photography drives consumers’ and brands’ growing usage of Instagram. This paper aims to address the consequences of excessive use of Instagram on the negative feeling of losing information when not connected and the emotional fatigue resulting from an overcharge with new information. The mediating role of addiction between Instagram overuse and the two outcomes is also analyzed.

Design/methodology/approach – Data from 342 active Instagram users were used to test the proposed model, applying the partial least square equation modeling method (SmartPLS 3).

Findings – Addiction partially mediates the impact of overuse on emotional fatigue and instastress. Addiction to Instagram was mainly due to respondents’ lack of control over the time spent on it resulting in incapability to reduce its usage.

Social implications – Social networking site managers, educators, families and public institutions should promote an adequate use of Instagram, making users (especially the young) aware of the potential threats of its excessive usage. The control on the amount of time devoted to Instagram is a key factor for detaining overuse and addiction, as well as avoiding the negative outcomes analyzed in this research.

Originality/value – The findings contribute to the extant knowledge on the negative side of the digitization of the individual, as little is known about it to the best of the authors’ knowledge.

Keywords Emotional fatigue, Instagram, Addiction, Overuse, Social network site, Instastress

Paper type Research paper

Resumen

Propósito – La presente investigación aborda las consecuencias del uso excesivo de Instagram relacionadas con el sentimiento negativo de pérdida de información, cuando no se está conectado, y la fatiga emocional...
1. Introduction
Social media may still be at its infancy, but it has already become an integral part of consumers’ everyday life activities. The proliferation of social networking sites (SNS) has made it easy for individuals to find a social platform that is suitable to his/her interests or needs: e.g. Facebook for those who seek to keep up with what is happening with friends and brands, Twitter for users who want to share ideas and information instantly, or Instagram for the ones keen on capturing and sharing their everyday life moments. The variety of activities offered by the diverse SNS attributes give them the power to engage users, with the amount of time people spend connected increasing each year. A recent report published by Nielsen (2017) showed that adults spent an average of 5 h and 30 min per week in 2016, a 36 per cent growth rate as compared to 2015. However, millennials are the ones spending the most time on social media (6 h and 19 min weekly); they spend on social media a 24 per cent of their total time spent on media, whereas that percentage reduces to 20 per cent when talking about adults 50 years and up.

Previous research has established that social media use may enhance human interaction and psychological well-being (Baumer, 2013), as well as improve users’ civic engagement (Obar et al., 2012) and learning processes (Garrett and Cutting, 2012). Besides, social media has also been found to constitute an important tool for creating and maintaining customer–brand relationships through improving brand loyalty (Baumöl et al., 2016), brand awareness (Hutter et al., 2013), brand engagement (Schultz, 2016) and emotional attachment (Hudson et al., 2015), among others.

Nevertheless, questions have recently been raised about the “Janus face” of SNS (Mäntymäki and Islam, 2016), drawing attention to the possible negative outcomes of social media overuse and even addiction. Overuse refers to an excessive medium use and is associated with an immoderate amount of time spent online (Kubey et al., 2001). Previous research on internet use has documented a relationship between the amount of time spent online and a problematic internet use, resulting in negative cognitive and behavioral outcomes (e.g. interpersonal, educational, professional, etc.) (Caplan, 2002; Morahan-Martin and Schumacher, 2003). In the aforementioned studies on “the dark side” of social media, various adverse effects of the excessive SNS use have also been reported such as social comparison (Fox and Moreland, 2015), jealousy (Muise et al., 2009), interpersonal problems and loneliness (Song et al., 2014; Zheng and Lee, 2016), or even family and work conflicts (Zheng and Lee, 2016).
Although those consequences are not to be underestimated, one of the most significant perils of social media is its potential as a source of addiction, which has been subjected to considerable discussion lately (Carbonell and Panova, 2017; Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018; Yang et al., 2016). SNS addiction happens when the user has a problematic dependency on SNS usage (Turel and Serenko, 2012; Yang et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2016). In fact, research posits that social media is one of the most addiction-generating technologies, in general (Andreassen et al., 2017; Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018; Yang et al., 2016), interfering negatively not only in users’ daily activities [e.g. poor work and study efficiency (Andreassen, 2015)] but also in their human functions [e.g. low self-esteem (Hawi and Samaha, 2016)].

Drawing on these considerations, the present research addresses specifically the consequences of Instagram excessive use. The interest in that particular SNS is motivated by several reasons. First, it is the fastest growing mobile social platform worldwide, whose active users increased by 25 per cent last year, thus reaching 1 billion users in the beginning of 2019 (We are social, 2019). Instagram is also the SNS which is most frequently accessed by Spanish users, who spent an average of 57 min per day on that SNS (IAB Spain, 2018). Moreover, its popularity among young adults (71 per cent of online users aged between 18 and 34 use Instagram - Statista, 2019), makes it an attractive communication channel for retailer and fashion brands targeting that segment (Enberg, 2018). Finally, Instagram is the most used SNS platform by opinion leaders (Markets Insider, 2017), with 78 per cent of them using it when collaborating with brands (eMarketer, 2017). To the best of the authors’ knowledge, little is known about what negative implications may the Instagram overuse have. Provided that Instagram users are young “digital natives”, who share pictures as a way of self-digitization (Kretz, 2010), they would be more likely to experience its adverse effects.

Given the paucity of research on this topic, the main aim of our study is to gain new insights into Instagram users’ excessive use phenomenon. The present investigation explicitly considers the mediating role of addiction in determining Instagram users’ emotional fatigue and the stress triggered by Instagram (i.e. instastress) as a result of heavy Instagram usage. As far as the authors’ knowledge, this is the first research exploring the mediating effect of addiction in the context of Instagram as a social media platform and the first one that examines SNS usage applying the paradoxes of technology framework proposed by Mick and Fournier (1998). The research contributes to the extant knowledge on the dark side of Instagram, which has been scarcely investigated. The findings add to the emerging line of research on understanding addictive SNS behavior, not only at the personal level, which has received more research attention, but also regarding the relationship between users and brands.

The paper is structured in the following way. Section 2 addresses research on Instagram and its negative side, as it is the key SNS of the present study. After that in Section 3, the relevant literature on negative outcomes of SNS overuse is presented, focusing on the constructs of instastress, emotional fatigue and addiction. The research hypotheses are developed and the proposed theoretical model is presented. Next, the methodological approach and research design are described in Section 4. Section 5 presents the findings of the research and the paper closes with discussion, practical implications, limitations acknowledgement and future research lines.

2. Instagram: what we already know about its dark side
As mentioned before, Instagram is one of the most popular SNS worldwide. Its success is based not on the features of uploading and liking pictures, but on the fact that it constitutes a platform for users to gain instant and convenient popularity among other users, as well as co-create value with opinion leaders (Casaló et al., 2018). That is why Instagram engagement...
rate is higher, compared to other SNS (Locowise, 2017). According to its website, the platform is continuously offering users new ways to interact and form deeper connections with their friends or celebrities/brand they might follow. These features, together with the recently launched Instagram shopping tool, provide both, entertainment and utility to users, which results in increased satisfaction and intention to follow and recommend the Instagram account (Casalo et al., 2017a).

Instagram has received increasing attention from scholars and practitioners (Dumas et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Kircaburun and Griffiths, 2018). Casaló et al. (2017b) identified three main research lines on Instagram: the type of content uploaded and its behavioral consequences, users’ personal feelings, and the main motivations and gratifications of using Instagram. Within those research streams, there is scarce literature examining the negative aspects associated with the use of Instagram. In this regard, Dumas et al. (2017) highlighted a relevant emerging segment of adults engaged in what they refer to as deceptive like-seeking behaviors (i.e. buying likes or changing one’s appearance in photos using specific software), that turned out to be linked to users’ narcissistic personality and a weak sense of peer belonging. Instagram use had also been previously related to depressive symptoms (Lup et al., 2015) among the same target. Similarly, Yang (2016) associated Instagram broadcasting with higher loneliness among undergraduate students, whereas Frison and Eggermont (2017) uncovered that Instagram browsing was related to future increases in adolescents’ depressed mood, which, in turn, was related to future increases in Instagram posting.

In light of the above, the consequences of Instagram overuse have barely been addressed. Addiction, but not overuse, was analyzed by Kircaburun and Griffiths (2018), reporting that it is positively associated with digital Internet use and negatively related with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and self-liking. To deepen in the analysis of overuse and addiction to Instagram, we tapped into the body of knowledge on the negative consequences of Internet use in general, given that research has been more prolific in this domain. Therefore, the following section reviews the existing literature from a broader perspective (i.e. internet), drawing relevant conclusions and applying the findings to the specific context of our research: Instagram as a social media platform.

3. Literature review: instastress, emotional fatigue and addiction

There is no doubt that internet has brought a radical change in the way companies and individuals communicate with each other, and within this context, the role of social networks has been largely acknowledged. However, not everything is rosy when individuals’ behavior on the Internet is concerned. While there is plenty of evidence showing that companies can benefit from online customer relationships, past research has also pointed out the dark side of the Internet, though empirical support in this regard is scarcer. In this line, previous studies suggest the need to analyze “the role SNS users’ feelings play in forming their overall SNS usage experiences” (Zhuang et al., 2013, p. 34), as those feelings are a key aspect in their experiences (Muise et al., 2009).

To analyze the negative consequences of the Internet usage in general, as well as of those regarding the context of SNSs, several researchers have considered the paradoxes of technological products framework proposed by Mick and Fournier (1998). According to these authors, technology itself is paradoxical as each of its specific characteristics, can have both, a positive and a negative side at the same time, leading to individuals’ anxiety and stress. Adopting a holistic approach, they suggest eight paradoxes of technology: control/chaos; freedom/enslavement; new/obsolete; competence/incompetence; efficiency/inefficiency; fulfills/creates needs; assimilation/isolation and engaging/disengaging. Among
them, control/chaos, freedom/enslavement and competence/incompetence can be applied in the study of SNS usage. Though technology can facilitate order (control), independence (freedom) and feelings of intelligence (competence), it “can also breed [...] upheaval and dependency”, and lead to feelings of ignorance (Mick and Fournier, 1998, p. 128). Within the context of SNSs, Utz and Krämer (2009) and Zhuang et al. (2013) also refer to those paradoxes to denote some of the counterproductive effects of individuals’ engagement with SNSs, calling for more research on how the paradoxes of technology may influence individual experience.

3.1 Social networking sites overuse and instastress

In today’s society, a widely recognized phenomenon is stress, a feeling that endangers the peace and wellbeing of the individual; however, discussions about technostress, a term coined by Brod in 1982, are less common. As a sub-dimension of stress, technostress refers to the negative effects that the use of computer-based information and communication technologies directly or indirectly generate on individuals’ attitudes, thoughts or behaviors (Weil and Rosen, 1997). Technostress has been researched mainly in the context of human resources and business organizations management, due to its impact on diverse organizational processes and outcomes (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Shu et al., 2011; Tarafdar et al., 2007); however, it has recently attracted an increasing interest in other areas of research such as smartphone usage (Lee et al., 2014).

In 1984, Brod suggested two possible trigger mechanisms for technostress:

1. the struggle to accept computer technology, which generates pressure on the individual to accept and use computers; and
2. the overidentification with computer technologies, which unconsciously make users behave as machines, looking always for efficiency and speed.

In the context of the present research, the second mechanism suggested by Brod (1984) results relevant. Individuals and especially young adults have to face an extensive amount of incoming information, and, as a consequence, the information and communication technologies are widely integrated into their daily routine. As the use of new technology increases, the amount of accessible information may exceed what individuals are able to absorb, resulting in informational anxiety (Wurman, 1989; Peljto et al., 2012). Under this scenario, users can experience a negative feeling of losing information (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008), heightened levels of physiological activation, as well as tension and discomfort when dealing with these technologies (Negahban and Talawar, 2018; Salanova et al., 2013). Accordingly, among the core factors influencing technostress, suggested by the literature, are technology usage experience (Brod, 1982), sense of invasion due to the possibility of being reached anytime (Tarafdar et al., 2007), information overload (Harper, 2000; Tarafdar et al., 2007), complexity resulting from users’ need to invest time and cognitive resources (Tarafdar et al., 2007), and technology overuse particularly when it is not primarily task-related (Brooks and Longstreet, 2015). For example, extant research highlighted that the possibility of using smartphones for checking emails can turn those devices into a source of stress (Barley et al., 2011). Smartphones actually favor the sense of overloading, as the volume of received emails increases continuously.

SNS are supposed to be used for fun and relaxation or in general, to provide pleasure to users in a voluntary manner, but they can as well be a source of stress (Maier et al., 2012). If we translate the above ideas into the specific context of SNSs, and particularly Instagram, it is expected that the novel information, which is continuously made available on the platform can make heavy users experience technostress (e.g. instastress), as they are aware of the
vast amount of information that they need to access not to feel incompetent and keep up with what is going on in the SNSs. It follows that users may experience the competence/incompetence paradox, suggested by Mick and Fournier (1998). With this as a foundation, we propose the following hypothesis, applied to Instagram:

\[ H1. \] The higher the overuse of Instagram, the more probable it is for individuals to develop instastress.

### 3.2 Social networking sites overuse and emotional fatigue

The term fatigue has usually been associated with health issues and though it has been widely related to the use of information and communication technologies, studies on internet-related fatigue are lacking. In this regard, research on hospital nurses reported a positive relationship between Internet addiction and fatigue (Lin et al., 2013). In a similar vein, Gerrard et al. (2006) found that information technology fatigue was among the primary reasons for consumers not to use internet banking.

Yang and Wu (2005) defined fatigue as “a subjective state of an imbalance in the availability of inner resources needed to perform physical or mental activities” (p. 1357). The authors claim that fatigue is determined not only by the availability of inner resources, but also by the physical and/or mental demands of the activities individuals have to perform. In the context of the information and communication technologies, Lewis (1996) highlighted the relevance of the information fatigue syndrome as a specific type of fatigue associated with information overload. As evidence suggests, individuals’ relationship with computer technologies may result in informational fatigue (Weil and Rosen, 1997; Brod, 1984), as novel information is constantly updated on the Internet and users have to manage it. Though anxiety and fatigue are the most common affective variables regarding the use of information and communication technologies (Dhir et al., 2018; Salanova et al., 2013), and in the present SNS context both of them refer to availability of information, they should be regarded as different concepts. In particular, while instastress addresses the need to stay updated so as not to miss any relevant information, emotional fatigue refers to managing the information overload.

In this study, we focus on the mental demands that SNSs may request from users. In the case of SNSs, the amount of information offered is being constantly updated, which may result in informative chaos according to the terminology of the paradoxes of Mick and Fournier (1998). Thus, heavy SNSs users may experiment emotional (mental) fatigue due to being overcharged with new information. So, we posit that:

\[ H2. \] The higher the overuse of Instagram, the more probable it is for individuals to develop emotional fatigue.

### 3.3 The mediating role of social networking sites addiction

There is extensive literature addressing the consequences of Internet usage, with its level of use being among the most researched topics when its negative outcomes are concerned. In fact, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the relationship between the level of internet use and individual’s well-being, examining some social and psychological variables such as depression, loneliness, isolation and self-esteem, among others. However, results are inconclusive: while there is evidence demonstrating a positive relationship (Kraut et al., 2002; Pierewan and Tampubolon, 2014), there are also studies reporting a
negative one (Ybarra et al., 2005; Stepanikova et al., 2010) or even indicating no relationship at all (Gross et al., 2002; Pierewan and Tampubolon, 2014).

Although in general terms addiction is related with an excessive and dependent use/consumption, in our context of SNS, that conceptualization is too simple. According to LaRose et al. (2003) and van der Aa et al. (2009), it is not a question of the level of internet use, but of how it is used. In the same vein, Caplan (2002, 2005) distinguished between excessive internet use and compulsive internet use; he claimed that they constitute different concepts, though being quite similar in terms of behavioral patterns. While the author referred to excessive use as a level of internet usage, that is higher than what could be considered as a “normal” one, compulsive internet use is related to individuals’ inability to control his/her own internet behavior. According to the literature (Caplan, 2002; Van den Eijnden et al., 2008; van der Aa et al., 2009), both behavioral patterns can result in negative outcomes for the individual, though compulsive use is claimed to be a more powerful predictor. So, a maladaptive internet use may contribute to low individual well-being (van der Aa et al., 2009). Nie et al. (2002) maintains that internet overuse can disrupt individuals’ normal life, when users dedicate their time to the Internet instead of passing time with family and friends, which, ultimately, would lead to narrower social circles and loneliness. Though, as mentioned, the counterproductive effects of internet use are not exactly a synonym to increased level of usage, the study conducted by van der Aa et al. (2009) demonstrated a strong and positive relationship between daily internet use and compulsive internet use. One could expect that the higher the internet use, the more inclined users are to adopt compulsive behavior, as they can develop dependence towards it, as Mick and Fournier’s (1998) paradox suggested (enslavement).

Compulsive internet behavior has been considered as one of the most relevant dimensions of internet addiction (Lortie and Guitton, 2013), with past studies using both internet addiction and compulsive Internet use to refer to the same phenomenon (Lin et al., 2013). Previous research has demonstrated that addiction can be generated not only to internet usage, in general, but also towards specific SNS sites, with compulsion being one of its underlying components (De Cock et al., 2014; Kang et al., 2013). This is justified by the premise that cyber-relationships addiction is one of the specific subtypes of Internet addiction (Young, 1999). Therefore, we assume that compulsive use can be interpreted as a proxy for addiction.

Van der Aa et al. (2009) reported that compulsive internet use or addiction mediates the relationship between daily internet use and negative outcomes such as low well-being (measured as loneliness, low self-esteem and depressive moods).

In the context of SNSs, it is quite intuitive to expect that users may get engaged with them more easily than with internet in general, due to the specific benefits they offer. The possibility to connect with other users, share different type of information, and help people and companies on diverse issues have made SNSs the fastest-growing Internet applications in the last two decades (Zhuang et al., 2013). On the basis of van der Aa et al. (2009) finding that compulsive internet use mediates the relationship between daily internet use and negative outcomes, we formulate the following hypotheses applied to the context of Instagram:

\[ H3. \] Instagram addiction mediates the relationship between Instagram overuse and instastress.

\[ H4. \] Instagram addiction mediates the relationship between Instagram overuse and emotional fatigue.
The hypothesized relationships to be tested in this study are depicted in Figure 1.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection
A self-administered questionnaire survey was designed to collect empirical data. The questionnaire was pre-tested by 30 respondents and revised accordingly so as to ensure content validity. As a result, the wording of some of the items was modified to improve the clarity of the questions.

The study universe included young Spaniards aged over 18, who access Instagram on a daily basis and stay connected for more than an hour. Respondents had to meet this minimum time requirement, as the “Annual study of social media use” in Spain elaborated by IAB Spain (2018) revealed that users spent 57 min on average on Instagram. As the present study aims at understanding the overuse SNS behavior, we were only interested in those Instagram users who spent more than the average amount of time connected to that social network.

The rationale behind choosing that particular population was that it is more susceptible to developing problematic behaviors associated with technology overuse (Renau et al., 2015).

The field research was conducted by a market research company with experience in online studies, employing a non-probability sampling method. Overall, 360 questionnaires were collected, though some of them had to be discarded because of extreme values. Finally, data from 342 respondents were used to test the proposed model, with an effective rate of 95 per cent.

As for the characteristics of the sample, it should be noted that the number of female respondents was significantly greater than the number of male respondents (70.5 and 29.5 per cent, respectively). Besides, the average age of the interviewees was 22 years and most of them were students (85.7 per cent). Regarding the frequency of Instagram usage, the respondents declared checking the Instagram application 32 times per day, spending approximately 2 h and a half connected on average.

The control variables tested (respondents’ age and frequency of Instagram access) did not produce any effect on the constructs in the structural model.

4.2 Common method bias
Common method bias was assessed through Harman’s single factor test. The indicators of all the constructs in the proposed structural model were included in an exploratory factor analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Evidence of common method bias is found when:

- a single factor emerges; or
- one factor explains the greatest part of the covariance between the dependent and independent variables.
According to Podsakoff and Organ (1986), the latter is a concern when the first of all factors with autovalues greater than 1, explains more than half of the variance of the extracted factors. In our case, the principal component analysis with Varimax rotation showed the existence of four factors, with the first one explaining 30 per cent of the total variance (80.1 per cent). Hence, common method variance is not a concern in this study.

4.3 Measures
The variables included in the proposed theoretical model were assessed on a five-point Likert scale (from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”). All measurement scales were obtained through literature revision and were already verified by past studies.

Instagram addiction was measured by eight items, developed by Lu and Wang (2008). To assess Instagram overuse, three items were used from the subscales of the Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale (GPIUS) (Caplan, 2002). Emotional fatigue was operationalized with four items using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, developed by Maslach et al. (1996). Instastress was measured with two of the items of the Techno-invasion scale by Tarafdar et al. (2007), which were adapted to the context of the present research. Some of the items of the previously published measures of emotional fatigue and instastress were eliminated, as they were incompatible with the study context.

While addiction is posited as a formative construct, all other constructs in the presented theoretical model are designated as reflective ones.

4.4 Data analysis
To test our model, SmartPLS3 was used for assessing both, the measurement instrument and the structural model (Ringle et al., 2014). Partial least square (PLS) modelling is an alternative method to covariance-based structural equation modeling, which unlike traditional SEM, does not report the same goodness of fit index for the research model (Rigdon, 2005). PLS is especially recommended when there are formative constructs included in the model (Roldán and Sánchez-Franco, 2012), as it is the case in the present study.

5. Results
5.1 Measurement model
Before testing the hypotheses, the construct reliability and validity were assessed for the reflective constructs to ensure the appropriateness of the research instrument.

The internal consistency for reliability of the measurement models was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table I indicates that Cronbach’s alpha and the composite reliability of the scales exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Churchill, 1979), thus showing adequate internal consistency.

Convergent validity was evaluated through examining the item loadings and their associated t-values, as well as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index. All indicators resulted greater than 0.70 (Chin, 1998), except for EF4 which had to be eliminated, and the AVE values for the three measurement scales were above the minimum threshold value of 0.50, indicating that convergent validity (Table I).

When testing the formative measurement scale of the “addiction” variable, the recommendations of Diamantopoulos (2008) were taken into account. In this regard, considering that none of the formative indicators could be eliminated as this would affect the
content validity of the construct, the possible multicollinearity problems were assessed through calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which were below the recommended threshold of 5 (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001).

Two tests were applied to assess discriminant validity (Table II). The first one posits that the square root of the AVE of each construct should be greater than its correlations with the rest of the variables in the proposed model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This criterion is fulfilled in the present study since the square roots of AVE are greater than the inter-construct correlations. The second approach is the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015), whose values should be less than 0.90 for discriminant validity to be demonstrated. As showed in Table II, this condition is also satisfied for all assessed constructs.
5.2 Direct effects

Table III provides the standardized structural path coefficients ($\beta$) with their corresponding $t$-values. Following Hair et al. (2017), bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was used to generate $t$-statistics.

Four of the five direct effects described in Table III resulted significant, while the $H1$ was not confirmed, as the direct relationship between overuse and instastress was found to be non-significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 1.10$). Nevertheless, the results confirmed the hypothesized direct positive relationship ($H2$) between overuse and emotional fatigue ($\beta = 0.48$, $t = 4.89$). The rest of the constructs in the proposed model were also found to be relevant antecedents of their respective dependent variables. The latter was supported after examining the Cohen’s values (effect sizes), which are well above the recommended limit of 0.02 (Roldán and Sánchez-Franco, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Addiction</th>
<th>Overuse</th>
<th>Emotional fatigue</th>
<th>Instastress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overuse</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional fatigue</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instastress</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Diagonal values represent AVE square root; values below the diagonal reflect latent variable correlations; above the diagonal are HTMT ratios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ho</th>
<th>Direct effect ($\beta$)</th>
<th>Weights (loading)</th>
<th>$t$-value (bootstrap)</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$Q^2$</th>
<th>$f^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overuse $\rightarrow$ addiction</td>
<td>0.78***</td>
<td>0.78***</td>
<td>36.81</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overuse $\rightarrow$ Instastress</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Non accepted</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overuse $\rightarrow$ emotional fatigue</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction $\rightarrow$ emotional fatigue</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction $\rightarrow$ Instastress</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Formative measures**

| Addiction1 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.18** | 2.79 |
| Addiction2 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.20*** | 3.83 |
| Addiction3 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.01  | 0.43 |
| Addiction4 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.16*  | 2.07 |
| Addiction5 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.37*** | 7.49 |
| Addiction6 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.11*  | 2.22 |
| Addiction7 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.67*** | 12.91 |
| Addiction8 $\rightarrow$ Addiction | 0.02  | 0.38 |
| Addiction                   | 0.61   | 0.18 |
| Emotional fatigue           | 0.61   | 0.31 |
| Instastress                 | 0.31   | 0.11 |

**Notes:** *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$ (based on t(4999), one-tailed test); SRMR= 0.041 The items Addiction3 and Addiction8 were not eliminated, as, though their weights resulted non-significant, their associated loadings were found significant ($\beta = 0.228$; $t = 3.337$ and $\beta = 0.419$; $t = 7879$ respectively)

Table II. Discriminant validity

Table III. Direct effects tests
In addition, $R^2$ and $Q^2$ parameters were used to evaluate the structural model. The value of $R^2$ was examined as an indication of the overall predictive strength of the model, with a threshold of 0.10 (Falk and Miller, 1992). In our case, $R^2$ values of addiction (0.61), emotional fatigue (0.61) and instastress (0.31) indicated that the exogenous variables of the constructs explain approximately 61, 61 and 31 per cent of their variances, respectively. As for measures of predictive relevance of the dependent variables in the proposed model, the $Q^2$ test was used. The values of $Q^2$ for addiction (0.18), emotional fatigue (0.31) and instastress (0.11) were all greater than zero, thus indicating predictive relevance and the ability to explain the endogenous latent variables. Lastly, we report the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of the model, which indicates the difference between the observed correlation and the expected correlation matrix (Henseler et al., 2016). SRMR values that are lower than 0.08 are indicative of good model fit. In our case the SRMR criterion is met, as its value amounted to 0.041 (Table III).

In the present study, addiction is conceptualized as a construct with eight items which shape a general perception of the addiction to Instagram in a holistic way. As can be seen from Table III, six out of the eight addiction items exerted a significant influence on the construct, though their weights were found to be quite different. The results showed that addiction to Instagram was mainly due to the fact that the respondents spent more time on Instagram than initially intended, which results in their incapability of reducing its usage. However, the risk of losing a significant relationship, job or career opportunity was not found to be a significant consequence of their addictive Instagram usage.

### 5.3 Indirect effects

A mediation analysis was conducted to test the indirect effects in the model (Table IV). To estimate the mediation effect, all the direct, indirect and total effects between the variables in the model were assessed.

As Table IV shows, overuse had a significant total effect on instastress. When the mediator was introduced, the path from overuse to instastress was no longer significant, thus supporting $H3$. To evaluate the strength of the mediation effect, the variance accounted for (VAF) index, which determines the size of the indirect effect with respect to the total effect, was calculated. As the VAF score is 77.41 per cent, which is close to 80 per cent, partial mediation can be inferred.

On another note, Table IV indicates that the relationship between overuse and emotional fatigue is significantly reduced introducing addiction in the model. The beta coefficient for the relationship between overuse and emotional fatigue dropped from 0.75 ($p < 0.001$) to 0.48 ($p < 0.001$), thus supporting $H4$. The VAF value of 36 per cent indicates that the mediation is no longer full, but partial.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ho</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>Direct effect</th>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>VAF(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overuse → Instastress</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overuse → Addiction → Instastress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overuse → Emotional fatigue</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>24.23</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overuse → Addiction → Emotional fatigue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. Mediating effect tests  
**Notes:** ns: not significant (based on $t$ (4999), one-tailed test). VAF: variance accounted for
6. Conclusions, implications, limitations and future research

Nowadays social media usage has become a common daily activity for young adults. Though SNSs may generate gratifications, their usage can also trigger negative consequences such as addiction. An addictive behavior, in turn, may result in users losing control of their social media usage, being completely absorbed by that activity and ultimately, suffering disorders in their daily life.

This study aimed to examine Instagram addiction in greater depth, by analyzing its antecedents and outcomes. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this is the first investigation into the mediating effect of addiction in the context of Instagram as a social media platform and the first one that examines SNS usage applying the paradoxes of technology framework proposed by Mick and Fournier (1998).

The approach herein is to place overuse at the beginning of the process, as a main antecedent of emotional fatigue and instastress, while addiction plays a mediating role in the relationships between overuse and emotional fatigue and between overuse and instastress. The results show that addiction partially mediates the impact of overuse on emotional fatigue and instastress.

Our results are in line with past research indicating that SNS can be a source of stress (Brod, 1984; Maier et al., 2012; Weil and Rosen, 1997), as we conclude that Instagram overuse results in emotional fatigue. The findings are also consistent with Van der Aa et al. (2009)’s research regarding the mediating role of Internet addiction.

The findings of the present study offer relevant theoretical implications. Importantly, the research contributes to the extant knowledge on the dark side of Instagram, which has been scarcely investigated. The findings also add to the emerging line of research on understanding the mechanisms underlying addictive SNS behavior, not only at the personal level, which has received more research attention, but also regarding the relationship between users and brands.

The present study has significant implications not only for addicted Instagram users, but also for families, educators, SNS managers and public institutions. Being aware of the negative consequences of excessive Instagram use, as well as the role of Instagram addiction on those negative consequences, e.g. instastress and emotional fatigue, preventive measures should be taken. These implications can be organized into two groups: treatment and prevention strategies.

As for treatment, our results highlight that overuse and addiction are different constructs, but both can lead to negative individual consequences. Thus, whereas Instagram addiction has a direct effect on instastress and emotional fatigue, overuse has been found to affect only emotional fatigue. Accordingly, a higher level of Instagram overuse favors addiction, which, in turn, results in reducing user’s universe to a function of the constant filter of the SNS, displacing face-to-face interactions in the background and generating instastress and emotional fatigue. SNS addiction could be viewed as a new type of pathology that requires comprehensive treatment by professionals, and addicted users should look for help from these professionals.

Measures for reducing Instagram usage should not be taken only when the user has developed an addictive behavior, but also when excessive use is observable, given its considerable negative consequences. Ideally, the users should not reach that point, and therefore, implementation of prevention strategies is imperative. On one hand, as overuse and addiction to Instagram can both lead to adverse outcomes such as instastress and fatigue, users should be adverted about the possible addictive facet of Instagram usage. In this regard, social network sites managers should offer that information in the process of account creation and every time new features are promoted, users should be required to read
about them and accept the “potential side effects of an excessive use”. On the other hand, users’ role should not be overlooked, even though they can be more or less keen on implementing the preventive measures. In the case of young Instagram users, teachers and parents can serve as significant role models, playing a crucial role for toning down excessive SNS use. Parents (and teachers) should not only teach the youngest how to use SNS, but should also lead by example regarding the use of new technologies and SNS, in particular. Accordingly, it is advisable that parents make use of social media in a responsible manner and dictate or negotiate rules with their young adults about when or how much time they can devote to SNS use. For instance, it should not be allowed to use smartphones during family gatherings, so that family time has a priority over SNS use, thus not hindering family relationships. The parental control has to be done carefully, as youngsters may consider such attempts an intrusion into their autonomy and privacy (Valkenburg and Peter, 2011). Another course of action would be to help young adults enhance face-to-face communication abilities. In this regard, activities such as fostering social relationships, encouraging new “offline” hobbies (e.g. reading, cinema and other cultural activities), enrolling in sport and group activities or enhancing family communication and relationships, among others, are recommended. However, if regardless of following these guidelines parents and educators identify an increasing abusive SNS use, it is also advisable to look at other potential problems camouflaged under the overuse of the SNS; as literature suggests, psychosocial problems that originate through online communication often resemble those found in the “offline” lives (e.g. disappointing friendships or social exclusion) (Valkenburg and Peter, 2011). All these actions could be reinforced by media campaigns in by public institutions and social organizations. Following the example of government-sponsored campaigns on traffic accidents prevention or responsible alcohol consumption, public institutions should increase awareness in societies about the negative consequences of SNS excessive use, identified in this research.

In the case of middle-aged users, other actions can be suggested to prevent Instagram overuse and addiction. One possible alternative is the use of web or smartphone application trackers that provide information on the amount of time spent on each particular online platform. Additionally, turning off the notifications about other users’ activity on Instagram would be another possible means for reducing instastress.

Based on the results of this study, new lines of research can be proposed to further explore the possible negative consequences of the Instagram use. At the user-level, a fruitful area of future research would be to investigate the possible moderating role of SNS users’ socio-demographic, psychographic and technological traits on the theoretical relationships of the proposed model. Besides, further research could also assess other moderating variables related to SNS use, such as frequency or amount of time spent on using the SNS. As far as user-brand relationships are concerned, it would be interesting to analyze to what extent the level of engagement and the relationship between the consumer and the company through SNS could be damaged as a consequence of Instagram overuse and addiction. Previous studies have explored only the benefits of SNS usage for companies, disregarding the possible negative role of excessive SNS consumption.

The results of the present study are subject to certain limitations. One source of weakness in this research, which could affect the generalizability of the findings, is that it only examines one SNS in particular - Instagram. Thus, future work might test the proposed model in other SNSs, such as Facebook or Twitter, so that the results can be compared and relevant conclusions drawn. The greater presence of female respondents in our sample can also be regarded as a limitation of the research, although recent studies evidence that this SNS has increasingly more female than male users.
Another limitation of the study is that it is focused on a small subset of antecedents and negative outcomes of Instagram addiction. In this regard, additional precursors and consequences would be worthy to explore.

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Antecedents and consequences of luxury brand engagement in social media

Antecedentes y consecuencias del compromiso con la marca de lujo en las redes sociales

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Faculdade de Ciências da Economia e da Empresa, Universidade Lusíada Norte, Porto, Portugal

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to analyse the antecedent (Consumer Involvement) and the consequences (Brand Connection and Brand Usage Intent [BUI]) of the three dimensions of Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) (Cognitive Processing, Affection and Activation) in luxury brand engagement on Facebook.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through an online questionnaire completed by fans/followers of luxury brands’ Facebook pages. The empirical study was conducted using structural equation modelling.

Findings – Consumer Involvement has a positive impact on the three dimensions of CBE (Cognitive Processing, Affection and Activation). This leads to the conclusion that Affection and Activation have an impact both on Self-Brand Connection and on BUI. Moreover, it was found that Cognitive Processing impacts only on BUI.

Practical implications – The results identified the factors which brand managers should focus on to increase CBE on Facebook.

Originality/value – This study is a pioneer, as it extends the consumer engagement model to the social media context in a hedonic and conspicuous consumption category which includes luxury brand products.

Keywords Facebook, Social media, Luxury brands, Consumer brand engagement, Luxury brand engagement

Paper type Research paper

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Resumen

Propósito – Esta investigación analiza el antecedente (compromiso del consumidor) y las consecuencias (conexión con la marca e intención de uso de marca) de las tres dimensiones del compromiso del consumidor con la marca (procesamiento cognitivo, afectivo y activo) en el compromiso con la marca de lujo en Facebook.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Los datos se obtuvieron a través de un cuestionario online de los seguidores de varias páginas de marcas de lujo en Facebook. El estudio empírico se realizó utilizando un modelo SEM.

Hallazgos – El compromiso del consumidor tiene un impacto positivo en las tres dimensiones del compromiso del consumidor con la marca (procesamiento cognitivo, afectivo y activo). Esto lleva a concluir que los procesos activo y afectivo tienen un impacto tanto en la conexión con la marca como en su intención de uso. Además, se constató que el proceso cognitivo sólo afecta a la intención de uso de la marca.

Implicaciones prácticas – Los resultados identificaron los factores en los que los directores de marca deberían centrarse para aumentar el compromiso del consumidor hacia la marca en Facebook.

Originalidad/valor – Este estudio es pionero, dado que extiende el modelo de compromiso del consumidor al contexto de las redes sociales en una categoría de consumo hedónico y ostentoso que incluye a bienes y servicios como las marcas de lujo.

Palabras clave – Compromiso con la marca de lujo, Compromiso del consumidor con la marca, Marcas de lujo, Redes sociales, Facebook

Tipo de artículo – Trabajo de investigación

1. Introduction

The last worldwide economic recession forced many companies to change their strategic and communication plans and to reduce their budgets. On the other hand, sales of luxury brands have increased, and this industry does not seem to have been as badly affected as many others (Cristini et al., 2017; Parrott et al., 2015).

In parallel, we have observed a strong growth in access to new technologies and the Internet, the widespread use of smartphones and apps and escalation in the use of social media, especially of networking websites (Cristini et al., 2017). Consequently, companies are now looking at social media differently by giving increasing emphasis to these platforms and integrating social media strategies into their overall communication strategies (Singhal, 2016).

The commitment to customer engagement on social media has shown such growth that companies aggressively acquire fans and followers on platforms, such as Facebook, by investing heavily in commercials on the platform (Lee et al., 2014).

Luxury brands came later to these platforms, compared to other brands, due to their unique features, such as exclusivity and high status (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2018). However, luxury brand companies eventually realised that social media can have a positive impact on brands and that they needed to be part of this new world, and thus began to explore ways to exploit these new media.

In this context, it is imperative to examine, quantitatively, the effects of social media on luxury brands in terms of the brand themselves and in terms of their relationships with their consumers (Kim et al., 2013; Gallant and Arcand, 2017). This study aims to bridge the academic gap in the research into luxury brand management in the social media context. In addition, this study aims to increase the understanding of what leads to consumer engagement with luxury brands on social media, especially Facebook, and the consequences of that engagement.

The model used in this research into social media engagement was originally created by Hollebeek et al. (2014), and has been adapted to the present study of Facebook pages and luxury brands. This model was chosen based on the call by the original authors to validate their scales in another country and context. This research aims to contribute to the
management of luxury brands and to provide insights into how to increase e-engagement in the luxury brand market through the emotional and affective appeal of consumer brand relationships.

From the theoretical point of view, this research is pioneering by extending Hollebeek et al. (2014)'s model to the social media context in the hedonic conspicuous consumption category of luxury brand products.

The structure of this paper is as follows: it begins with a literature review; second, the hypotheses are formulated; third, the research design is presented; fourth, the results are presented; last, there is the discussion and consideration of the implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Luxury consumer–brand management

Studies into luxury brands and their consumption have proliferated in the last years (Hung et al., 2011), with a particular focus on fashion brands. The survival and growth of these brands during the most recent global economic recession has aroused great curiosity (Hung et al., 2011) and resulted in increased research in the area.

To better understand what a luxury brand is, it is important to take as a starting point the etymology of the word. Luxury derives from the Latin word “luxus”, which means “indulgence of the senses”, regardless of cost (Nueno and Quelch, 1998).

In the literature review luxury is defined as the goods of a special brand whose simple use or display provides the owner with esteem (Wiedmann et al., 2007). They satisfy their owners' psychological and functional needs (Wiedmann et al., 2007). It is in this context that the main distinctive feature of luxury goods comes into comparison with non-luxury, or counterfeit, products: luxury goods satisfy psychological and functional needs, the psychological benefit distinguishing them more (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

Values such as high status (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), exclusivity and quality are traditionally associated with luxury brands (Jin, 2012; Atwal and Williams, 2009). However, due to changes that have occurred in consumer behaviour in western societies, a new sense and perception of luxury has emerged (Atwal and Williams, 2009). This “new luxury” has been defined as all products and services that have higher levels of quality than other products in the same category, but are neither tremendously expensive nor out of reach of the average consumer (Atwal and Williams, 2009). In fact, there is a growing global desire for luxury goods, reflecting an era of “democratization of luxury” (Tsai, 2005; Hennigs et al., 2012).

Luxury is understood to be composed of elements that appeal more to emotions than rationality. These are characterised by originality, creativity, skill, precision, emotional appeal, a prominent image, exclusivity, high quality and premium price (Okonkwo, 2009b). The consumer buying a luxury brand does so for personal pleasure, attracted by the exclusivity of the name, which, in turn, might be assumed to denote his/her social status (Munster, 2014).

The concept of rarity is intrinsic to luxury brands and forms the basis of a great contradiction they face. When brands increase their exposure and sales, they must at the same time maintain the perception of limited supply (Okonkwo, 2009b), a key factor in the management of luxury brands. On the other hand, “luxury brands engage consumers through the force of enchantment or charisma” (Kim et al., 2016, p. 304), created through storytelling in advertising; this is another key factor in luxury brand management.

There is a growing number of studies in the area of luxury brand management, but there is much yet to learn, essentially with regard to the motivations behind the intention to
purchase luxury brands (Okonkwo, 2009a). This point is of great importance for the management of luxury brands and for their sales performance and customer engagement.

Social media have brought new challenges to the managers of luxury brands; hitherto they have been very reluctant to engage with the mass media involvement associated with the development of social networks (Okonkwo, 2009b; Dhaoui, 2014; Parrott et al., 2015). However, luxury brands now actively make use of social media in their advertising and marketing strategies (Kim and Ko, 2012; Dhaoui, 2014).

Although there is a great deal of academic literature on the importance of consumer engagement in social media, there appears to be limited academic research about social media marketing in the context of luxury brands (Chu et al., 2013; Juric et al., 2012; Dhaoui, 2014).

2.2 Social media: definitions and consumption
The concepts of user-generated content and social media are related to Web 2.0; they are often confused and need to be distinguished (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media have their roots in the emergence of blogs, increasing access to high-speed Internet and the creation of social networks (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In practice, they are a set of online applications built on the Web 2.0 base, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro, 2012; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The latter concept is categorised as all forms of content produced by consumers and available to the public (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media can take different forms, but is normally in text, image, video, audio and community/social media formats (Zhang, 2013, cited by Munster, 2014; Berthon et al., 2012). Social networks are the most recognised example of social media, consisting of platforms whose services connect friends, co-workers and organisations (Berthon et al., 2012; Munster, 2014). Specifically, social networking sites are applications that enable users to create and share information and send messages (Berthon et al., 2012; Kirtiş and Karahan, 2011) on the basis of social or professional interactions (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012). Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn are three examples of social networks. They have the capacity to leverage the power of relationships and collective knowledge (Berthon et al., 2012), created not only by companies, but also by consumers.

Social networks are some of the most popular forms of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and Facebook, in particular, is the preferred social network for consumers to engage with brands (Headstream, 2015).

In this world of social media, the consumer has complete control over the messages (s)he receives. It is (s)he who decides how to interpret them, whether (s)he considers them legitimate, or not, whether (s)he shares them, or not, and whether (s)he opens a discussion on them (Munster, 2014; Okonkwo, 2009b). From the perspective of companies, social media represent a revolutionary trend and it is certainly in their interests to be active in this area (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) to get closer to their customers.

The literature suggests that managers must recognise that social media are the most effective means at their disposal to communicate with the increasing numbers of consumers who spend a large part of their time online (Munster, 2014). In addition, social media enable companies efficiently to directly engage end-users in real time at a lower cost (Kirtiş and Karahan, 2011, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) than traditional media (Kirtiş and Karahan, 2011).

In the Facebook world, everything starts with the “like” button. When individuals put “taste” on a brand page, they are not only demonstrating their approval for the brand, but also to anyone in their “friends” network, that is, the Facebook network (Mariani
and Mohammed, 2014). This process is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), one of the most important and effective marketing tools (Mariani and Mohammed, 2014).

In terms of the use of Facebook by brands, particularly retailers, the results have been very positive. According to previous studies, about 20 per cent of consumers are influenced in their purchasing decisions by Facebook brand pages (Hodis et al., 2015). It has also been verified that a greater level of engagement with brand pages is associated with a greater degree of loyalty. Obviously, loyalty has a very positive effect on consumer commitment (Hodis et al., 2015). It should be noted that the intensity with which consumers use these pages directly and indirectly affects loyalty by increasing engagement with the brand (Hodis et al., 2015).

2.3 Conceptual model and hypotheses

Interest in consumer engagement in the literature has evolved parallel to the growth of the Internet and new digital technologies and the tools (Sashi, 2012) included in Web 2.0 (Hollebeek, 2011). Marketers now realise that they have to be where their consumers and potential consumers are, and this is on social networking sites.

The concept of engagement is not recent. It has been of interest to professionals for some time and fundamentally for academics in disciplines such as sociology, psychology and organisational behaviour for the last decade (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Brodie et al., 2011; Bowden, 2009). According to the most recent literature review, there is no consensus as to its definition (Hollebeek, 2011); different interpretations are proposed according to the context, for example education or business.

The concept has been most studied in marketing literature (Hollebeek, 2011), based on its greater plurality and wealth of information. Consumer engagement, through its ability to enhance consumer loyalty, is increasingly viewed as a variable capable of increasing brand power (Brodie et al., 2013, Hollebeek, 2011; Bowden, 2009). More specifically, the consumer engagement process is presented as being related to, but distinct from, a final state of consumer loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011; Bowden, 2009).

In the marketing context, Relationship Marketing is more focussed on the concept of consumer engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2016). Thus, in this dimension, the academic focus considers engagement, loyalty (Bowden, 2009), trust and value creation as the drivers of engagement and the basis of the company-consumer relationship. (Gambetti and Graffigna, 2010).

Several research frameworks have been used to examine the concept of consumer engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2014; Baldus, Voorhees and Calantone, 2015; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016; van Doorn et al., 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Demangeot and Broderick, 2016). Dessart et al. (2016) developed a method of conceptualisation and operationalisation of consumer engagement in the context of online brand communities; they proposed seven sub-dimensions of consumer engagement and developed a new set of scales to use in all contexts.

Pansari and Kumar (2017, p. 295) defined customer engagement as “the mechanics of a customer’s value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution”. Their framework focussed on the customer engagement process, showing how customer engagement can be gained – through satisfaction and emotion – and then linked the direct and indirect contribution of customer engagement.

The Demangeot and Broderick (2016) framework focussed on website customer engagement underpinned by relational and communication knowledge. The authors defined customer engagement as “the process of developing a cognitive, affective and behavioural
commitment to an active relationship with the website” (Demangeot and Broderick, 2016, p. 819).

In the present study we follow the Hollebeek et al. (2014) framework because there is little focus on luxury brands in previous studies into customer engagement. Moreover, the conceptual model proposed in the present study is already complex and introducing measures from the Demangeot and Broderick (2016) framework would make it even more complex.

Some studies suggest that consumer engagement can be explained by the emergence of interactive experiences and value creation in consumer–brand relationships (Brodie et al., 2011). In addition, it has been suggested that an engagement strategy is strategically imperative for the achievement of better company performance, not only at the level of competitive advantage but also of sales growth and profitability (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Tsai and Men, 2014; Brodie et al., 2011). These advantages are based on the fact that the consumers involved play a very important role in so-called viral marketing by providing recommendations for products, services and brands to other consumers (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Brodie et al., 2011).

Thus, consumer–brand engagement is an interactive process and can have different levels of intensity at different times (Brodie et al., 2013, Hollebeek, 2011). This phenomenon, therefore, reflects different stages of engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011). The starting point of this process is, in most cases, the consumers’ need to seek information (Brodie et al., 2013, Hollebeek, 2011) from various platforms.

As for the consequences of consumer engagement, some authors cite as examples the concepts of trust (Hollebeek, 2011), commitment, emotional connection, empowerment and loyalty (Bowden, 2009). It should be noted that loyalty, commitment and empowerment are the most prominent concepts in the context of online brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013). The existing literature refers also to another consequence of consumer engagement, consumer satisfaction. This is the consumer’s assessment of the performance of a product or service, and is seen as a consequence of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011, cited by Hollebeek et al., 2014).

In this context, Hollebeek et al. (2014), in their study of Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) in social media, considered three generic dimensions related to the cognitive, emotional and behavioural nature of engagement: Cognitive Processing (CP), Affectivity and Activation.

The CP dimension is defined as “a consumer’s level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). The Affectivity dimension is the “degree of positive affectivity of the consumer related to the brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). Finally, the Activation dimension is the “level of energy, effort and time spent by the consumer with a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154).

It is important to highlight the concept of the brand adopted by Hollebeek et al. (2014), taking into account the concept of CBE, and not just Consumer Engagement. Thus, the brand is taken into account from an integrated perspective, which consists of the utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic aspects perceived by the consumer (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The concept of consumer engagement is closely linked to the theory of relationship marketing (Ashley et al., 2011), where it is recognised that consumer behaviour is influenced by the experiences taking place in an increasingly complex environment. Thus, one can assume that the consumer engagement concept centres on specific interactive consumer experiences (Brodie et al., 2011).
Hollebeek (2011, p. 6) defined “customer brand engagement as the level of a customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in brand interactions”. Mollen and Wilson (2010, p. 5) defined “brand engagement” within a specific online context as “the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value”. These authors suggested that a consumer’s brand engagement extends beyond mere involvement, as it encompasses an interactive relationship with the object of engagement, and is related to his/her perceived experiential value, in addition to the instrumental value obtained from interaction with a specific brand.

Moreover, the literature review suggests that customer engagement focuses on consumer satisfaction, because consumer satisfaction provides the brand with a higher value than its competitors’ brands (Sashi, 2012). According to Hollebeek et al. (2014), Consumer Involvement (CI) is an antecedent of CBE. CI was explored by Zaichkowsky (1985) and Mittal (1995) and has been defined as “an individual’s level of interest and personal importance in relation to a focal object/decision in terms of his or her basic values, goals, and self-concept” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 163); in this case, engagement with a specific brand. The term “engagement” has several definitions and measurements due to its different possible applications. In addition, it can be said that different people and different contexts result in different levels of engagement (Houston and Rothschild, 1978). Thus, it was necessary to create an engagement measuring method that could assess differences between people, objects and contexts.

Engagement is a multidimensional concept that includes cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). On the other hand, “long-term involvement and engagement create brand commitment and, similarly, being committed to the brand can result in affective and enduring involvement and engagement”, as Parrott et al. (2015, p. 363) argued.

Hence, based on the study of Hollebeek et al. (2014), we suggest that CI is directly connected to the three CBE factors – more specifically, CI is an antecedent of CBE. In this context, the first three hypotheses are posited:

\[ H1a. \] CI through a luxury brand’s Facebook page has a direct positive impact on the CP of CBE.

\[ H1b. \] CI through a luxury brand’s Facebook page has a direct positive impact on the affection dimension of CBE.

\[ H1c. \] CI through a luxury brand’s Facebook page has a direct positive impact on the activation dimension of CBE.

As consequences of CBE, Hollebeek et al. (2014) selected Self-Brand Connection (SBC) and Brand Usage Intent (BUI).

A number of works have suggested that consequences of consumer engagement include trust and reputation (Casaló et al., 2009; Flavían et al., 2006; Hollebeek, 2011), satisfaction (Bowden, 2009), consumer value (Gruen et al., 2006; Schau et al., 2009) and loyalty (Schouten et al., 2007).

In addition, the literature review suggests that customer engagement is a set of measurable actions/behaviours that consumers exhibit on social media in response to brand-related content (Barger et al., 2016). Recent research has suggested that the way that consumers interact with social media can allow companies to analyse the engagement that these consumers have with their brands (Schivinski et al., 2016; Casaló et al., 2007).
SBC is a concept created by Escalas (2004) in the context of consumer brand and product use; consumers seek to create a desired self-image to present to others. SBC has been defined as “the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept” (Escalas, 2004, p. 170). Specifically, this concept is based on what a brand means to the consumer, in part as a consequence of narratives that the consumer builds over time and that incorporate the brand through mental associations.

Thus, SBC can be built based on the objectives, actions and results (perceived psychological benefits) contained in the narrative process of brands. It is assumed that, in individuals’ memories, stories tend to be related to the individual him/herself. So, when a brand tells a story, the individual might mentally create a connection between him/herself and the brand (Escalas, 2004). At the same time, consumers also value psychological and symbolic benefits, as these help them build the self-image, or self-identity, which they present to others. The choice of certain brands influences this whole scenario and coherence is created between the brands and consumers’ self-image and expressed publicly or privately (Escalas, 2004).

SBC is not based on the discrepancy between user image and brand image; instead, it encompasses the degree to which a given brand is incorporated into the self-concept (Dwivedi et al., 2015). Consumers frequently engage in a process of defining their self-identities and desired self-images (Escalas, 2004). Certain products, luxury brands, have symbolic associations that are crucial to the consumer’s sense of self. These brands develop strong emotive bonds with consumers over time, which generally results in an increase in positive brand attitudes and behavioural intentions (Escalas, 2004).

From Hollebeek’s et al. (2014) perspective, SBC is a consequence of CBE, and thus related to its three constituent dimensions. Based on this premise, the following research hypotheses are posited:

$H2a$. The CP dimension of CBE has a direct positive impact on the connection with the luxury brand/luxury brand’s Facebook page.

$H2b$. The affection dimension of CBE has a direct positive impact on the connection with the luxury brand/luxury brand’s Facebook page.

$H2c$. The activation dimension of CBE has a direct positive impact on the connection with the luxury brand/luxury brand’s Facebook page.

Hollebeek et al. (2014) proposed that BUI is an additional consequence of CBE; this was initially denominated “Overall Brand Equity” by Yoo and Donthu (2001). It has been defined as the “consumers’ differential response between a focal brand and an unbranded product when both have the same level of marketing stimuli and product attributes” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 163). This concept aims to address the notion of brand equity and to understand if consumers prefer a product with a brand name to an unbranded product which has the same features (physical attributes, quality and price). According to these authors, the difference in consumer response to a brand or an unbranded product can be described as the Brand Equity of the focal brand (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). This is the basis of BUI, used and reinforced by Hollebeek et al. (2014) as a consequence of CBE and its three constituent factors. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

$H3a$. The CP dimension of CBE has a direct positive impact on BUI/the luxury brand’s Facebook page.
H3b. The affection dimension of CBE has a direct positive impact on BUI/the luxury brand’s Facebook page.

H3c. The activation dimension of CBE has a direct positive impact on BUI/the luxury brand’s Facebook page.

3. Research design
To test the hypotheses we analysed luxury brands on Facebook. The reasons for choosing this networking website as the study object were very clear: Facebook is one of the most famous platforms and has the most users (Coutinho, 2014). With over 1.3 billion active users, this platform is a dominant player (Hodis et al., 2015).

The luxury brands chosen for the study were selected based on a financial evaluation taken from the Top 7 Best Global Luxury Brands 2014 Interbrand’s ranking[1]. We chose this ranking because Interbrand is one of the largest and more important brand-evaluation consultancies. Thus, the following brands, in decreasing order of value, were analysed: Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Hermès, Cartier, Prada, Tiffany and Co. and Burberry.

The conceptual model used in Figure 1 was adopted from Hollebeek et al. (2014) and demonstrates the connections between the studied variables. The research hypotheses are also presented.

3.1 Survey context and data collection
For the present study, keeping in mind the technological evolution represented by social media in the company–consumer relationship, we chose a quantitative method with a non-documentary indirect observation technique: the online questionnaire. Consequently, we designed seven online questionnaires with the same questions – only the object was different, based on the selected luxury brand.

The questionnaire used closed, mandatory questions, so that they would all be answered. The final section collected demographic information about the respondents.

To control for common bias, the present study followed Podsokoff et al. (2003). The respondents were unaware of the purpose and context of the research and knew nothing about the constructs under study. They were assured about the anonymity and

![Conceptual model and research hypotheses](image-url)
confidentiality of their answers and that no judgments would be made based on their answers. Prior to online publication, the questionnaire was pre-tested on 25 subjects. The aim of this pre-test was to assess question formation and content, correct possible errors, check for unfamiliar words and to understand if the order of the questions was optimum. The subjects made a number of comments and necessary changes were applied.

The survey was available for Portuguese consumers on the Facebook social media brand sites. The luxury market in Portugal is stable in terms of consumer behaviour. The data were collected from Facebook users only. Three assumptions were made:

1. The individual was a follower/fan of one of the seven luxury brands’ Facebook pages.
2. The individual was a user of the brand selected.
3. The individual was aware of and/or had a positive image of one of the selected brands.

The data were collected between June and July 2015. A filter question was included to guarantee the first requirement to take part in the study, that is, that the participants were followers/fans.

From a total of 222 participants, 71 responded for Louis Vuitton, 41 for Burberry, 33 for Prada, 27 for Tiffany and Co., 22 for Gucci, 15 for Hermès and 13 for Cartier. It is important to note that, just as the largest number of people responded to Louis Vuitton in the questionnaire, this was the brand with the largest number of Facebook followers. The lowest number of responses was for Hermès and Cartier, which also have the smallest number of Facebook followers. The results also indicated that the majority of the respondents (69.8 per cent) were 25 to 50 years old and 92.3 per cent were women. Most of the respondents had a university degree (55.4 per cent) and were employed.

3.2 Measurement scales
We considered six variables, based on the Hollebeek et al. (2014) model:

- (1) CI;
- (2) CBE CP factor;
- (3) CBE affection factor;
- (4) CBE activation factor;
- (5) SBC; and
- (6) BUI (Table AI).

New scales were developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014) – these have not yet been applied in other studies. The scales were translated into Portuguese as accurately as possible. This was done to avoid deviations from the original context and meaning and to make them easier for the respondents to understand.

The latent variables were all measured by seven-point Likert-type scales, with (1) being “Totally Disagree” and (7) being “Totally Agree”. The CI scale was adapted, taking into account that the previous measurement was a semantic differential scale that included extremes with bipolar terms. Consequently, to meet the technical requirements of the Likert scale, only positive words were used for the assessments. The CBE Activation factor scale was amended by the inclusion of an extra item: “When I use social media associated with [brand], usually it’s the Facebook page.” This item was added to complement the previous item “When I use social media, usually it’s the Facebook page of [brand].” This, in addition,
allowed us to determine whether the respondent was an occasional user or a fan/follower of the Facebook page.

3.3 Method
With the main goal of this research in mind – understanding CI’s impact on CBE and the impact of its 3 constituent factors on both SBC and BUI – we used structural equation modelling (SEM).

The present study used SEM to test the conceptual model and research hypotheses, using SPSS/AMOS 24 software and the procedures proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). This procedure has two phases: first, a confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the measurement model; second, we estimated the hypotheses of the conceptual model by the maximum likelihood method. SEM was chosen because it facilitates the testing of hypotheses which propose complex relationships, defined in conceptual models, based on empirical measures. This is in line with Kaplan (2009).

4. Findings
Cronbach’s alpha was used to ensure the internal consistency and reliability of the scales. This procedure aims to demonstrate if the scales are credible and reproducible in different contexts, looking for their consistency (Marôco, 2010). In this context, Cronbach’s alpha, which shows the average of all the scale items, is the most used coefficient. It ranges from 0 to 1, with values below 0.6 demonstrating unsatisfactory reliability (Malhotra, 2009). Kline (2011) stated that, if internal consistency is low, the content of the items will be too heterogeneous. Hair et al. (2010) suggested that the minimum threshold for Cronbach’s alpha should be 0.7. The sample size for the present study was based on the rule that the number of respondents should be five times greater than the number of variables under study. However, some authors propose different minimum thresholds for SEM depending on the representativeness of the population. The most common procedure applied is maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). Some studies have suggested that, with MLE, samples with only 50 cases can provide stable and valid results (Hair et al., 2010). However, it should be borne in mind that these were different types of studies are carried out with less than ideal conditions.

For example, it has been suggested that one should think about recommended sample sizes in more absolute terms. Thus, the most commonly used dimension in studies using the structural equations model is 200 cases (Kline, 2011; Hair et al., 2010). However, a sample size of 200 may be too small if the model is very complex (Kline, 2011), which is not the case here. Hair et al. (2010) proposed some minimum sample size numbers based on characteristics of the measurement model. Thus, they argued that if a model contains “seven or fewer constructs, reasonable commonalities (0.5) and no unidentified constructs” (Hair et al., 2010, p. 662), the minimum sample size should be 150. As the present study examines six model constructs, there are high commonalities (above 0.6), and 222 individuals responded, it can be stated that the sample size is acceptable.

After the Exploratory Factor Analysis, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out. It is a technique that “seeks to confirm whether the number of factors (or constructs) and the results of the variables (indicators) observed in them obey what is expected based on theory” (Malhotra, 2009, p. 725). Thus, the CFA specifies which variables define which construct (Malhotra, 2009), and at the same time allows us to confirm the measurement of the constructs used in the conceptual model (Hair et al., 2010). First, normality was assessed using skewness and kurtoses analyses and the values were above ± 2 and ± 7, respectively.
Based on the recommendations of most fit indexes used in academia to measure model goodness of fit (Hair et al., 2010), we can conclude that model has good fit: $X^2/\text{df} = 2.173$, RMSEA = 0.073, CFI = 0.939, TLI = 0.929 and IFI = 0.940. So, the $X^2/\text{df}$ is lower than 3, the RMSEA is lower than 0.08 and CFI, TLI and IFI are above the 0.9 cut-off value.

According to Hair et al. (2010), CR should be greater than the AVE and the AVE should be greater than 0.5 to confirm convergent validity. The reliability constructs all present values greater than 0.9., except activation, which has a value of 0.893. We also undertook a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the measurement quality of the variables, using convergent and discriminant validity. The results indicate that the AVE is greater than 0.65 and that CR is greater than 0.9 for all constructs.

Discriminant validity can be confirmed through the analysis in Table I. We observed that the values of the square root of the AVE, presented diagonally in the matrix, are higher than the correlation values. Thus, the validity of the scales is proven.

We tested the validity of the research hypotheses using SEM.

The model fit is good: $X^2/\text{df} = 2.092$, RMSEA = 0.070, CFI = 0.943, TLI = 0.934 and IFI = 0.943, in accordance with most common index used in the SEM approach (Hair et al., 2010).

Based on the results shown at Table II, we can validate the following hypotheses:

- **H1a**: proposed a positive impact of CI on CP. This hypothesis was confirmed ($\gamma = 0.740; p\text{-value} < 0.001$).
- **H1b**: proposed a positive impact of CI on the Affection factor. This hypothesis was also validated ($\gamma = 0.35; p\text{-value} < 0.001$). The loading of $\gamma$ supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CP</th>
<th>AF</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>SBC</th>
<th>BUI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>CI</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>0.66*</td>
<td>0.88a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>Affection (AF)</td>
<td>0.66*</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
<td>0.94a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>Activation (AC)</td>
<td>0.58*</td>
<td>0.48*</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
<td>0.83a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>SBC</td>
<td>0.65*</td>
<td>0.56*</td>
<td>0.73*</td>
<td>0.77*</td>
<td>0.83a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>BUI</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.48*</td>
<td>0.61*</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
<td>0.56*</td>
<td>0.93a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Constructs validity

Notes: *Square root of AVE in the diagonal; *correlation is significant at level 0.01 (bilateral); CR (Composite Reliability > 0.7); AVE (Average Variance Extracted > 0.5) and CR > AVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Standardised estimates</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Adjustment indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a: CI → CP (+)</td>
<td>0.740***</td>
<td>10.863</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>$X^2 = 736.283$, df = 352,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: CI → Affection (+)</td>
<td>0.355***</td>
<td>4.679</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>$p\text{-value} = 0.000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c: CI → Activation (+)</td>
<td>0.248***</td>
<td>3.448</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>RMSEA = 0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a: CP → SBC (+)</td>
<td>0.107*</td>
<td>1.721</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>CFI = 0.943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b: Affection → SBC (+)</td>
<td>0.252***</td>
<td>3.055</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>TLI = 0.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2c: Activation → SBC (+)</td>
<td>0.566***</td>
<td>7.058</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>IFI = 0.943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a: CP → Brand usage internet (+)</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>1.137</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b: Affection → Brand usage internet (+)</td>
<td>0.247**</td>
<td>2.201</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3c: Activation → Brand usage internet (+)</td>
<td>0.503***</td>
<td>4.771</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Results of SEM estimation

Notes: ***$p\text{-value} < 0.001$; **$p\text{-value} < 0.05$; *$p\text{-value} < 0.1$; $X^2$ (Qui-square), df (degree of freedman); RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation); CFI (Comparative Fit Index); TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index); IFI (Incremental Fit Index)
hypothesis $H1c$, – the impact of CI on the Activation factor; this hypothesis was also confirmed ($\gamma = 0.248; p$-value < 0.001).

Research hypotheses $H2a$, $H2b$ and $H2c$, – the relations between the CP, Affection and Activation dimensions and SBC – were validated ($\beta = 0.107; p$-value = 0.085; $\beta = 0.252; p$-value = 0.002 and $\beta = 0.566; p$-value < 0.001, respectively).

Last, research hypotheses $H3b$ and $H3c$ were also confirmed – the impact of Affection and Activation on BUI was validated ($\beta = 0.247; p$-value = 0.028 and $\beta = 0.503; p$-value < 0.001 respectively). However, the impact of CP on BUI was not confirmed ($\beta = 0.097; p$-value = 0.255).

The indirect effects (standardized) of the antecedents of CI on the consequences of CBE reveal significant impact for both constructs, 0.475 for BUI and 0.577 for SBC. In addition, the most important mediator effect was with the affection construct for both outcome variables, follow by CP. CI has no indirect effect on SBC and on brand use intent through CBE (Table III).

5. Discussion
The first three research hypotheses related to the impact of CI on the three dimensions of CBE; they were validated with good results. These three positive inter-construct relationships were expected as they were proved by Hollebeek et al. (2014). We conclude that CI is a crucial antecedent of consumer engagement with brands – in this particular case, with luxury brands’ Facebook pages. This engagement is related to the level of the consumer’s interest in, and personal importance that (s)he gives to, the brand, when using its Facebook pages. Thus, involvement has a great impact on subsequent consumer engagement. This will, in turn, facilitate increased consumer engagement.

It should be noted that, of the three CBE factors, CI had the greatest impact on CP. However, in Hollebeek et al. (2014) it was not the most important mediator of CBE. To explain this difference one might distinguish between the objects under study and their basic functions. In the present study, the object was specific, luxury brands’ Facebook pages. Thus, the interest and personal importance given by consumers to these brand pages on this social network - that is, their involvement – has a great impact on thought, the cognitive side of engagement. This result is to the detriment, as noted, of the impact on the more emotional side of engagement, despite its overall positive impact. Therefore, the differences found between the results of the present study, about the impact of CI on the dimensions of CBE, and the results in Hollebeek et al. (2014), are acceptable.

The present study confirms the hypotheses about the mediator effects of CBE between CI and SBC and BUI, which is in line with Hollebeek et al. (2014). However, hypothesis $H2a$ was accepted at a $p$-value inferior or equal to 10 per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CP</th>
<th>Affection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>0.338 [0.214; 0.481] $^a$</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>0.321 [0.209; 0.489] $^a$</td>
<td>0.332 [0.213; 0.532] $^a$</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Usage Internet</td>
<td>0.475 [0.464; 0.769] $^a$</td>
<td>0.178 [0.089; 0.388] $^a$</td>
<td>0.278 [0.209; 0.574] $^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBC</td>
<td>0.577 [0.336; 0.602] $^a$</td>
<td>0.209 [0.082; 0.350] $^a$</td>
<td>0.349 [0.196; 0.499] $^a$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $^a$Bootstrapping 95% with 1000 iterations

Table III. Indirect effect (standardized)
The relationship between CP and BUI was rejected. The present study confirms the conclusions of Hollebeek et al. (2014). CP was shown to impact on BUI based on the usage intent of luxury brands’ Facebook pages. Specifically, the cognitive and thinking dimension of CBE has an influence on the changes in the consumer’s usage of the brand. SBC was influenced more by the Activation and Affection factors, by order of importance. In Hollebeek’s et al. (2014) study, of the dimensions of CBE, Affection was found to exert the greatest impact on SBC. In the present study, Activation was found to be the dimension with the greatest impact on SBC. On the one hand, Affection is related to the positive feeling, or even happiness, felt towards a brand – in this case, towards the luxury brand’s Facebook page – that is created as the consumer interacts with it. Hence, Activation is related not only to time spent but also to the effort and energy dedicated by the consumer to these pages. Thus, the interaction time spent with luxury brands’ pages on Facebook leads to stronger relationships and to greater feelings of Affection. The more time and attention the consumer allocates to these pages, the more easily (s)he will introduce them into her/his self-concept – that is, (s)he will identify himself/herself with those pages and might even use them to present himself/herself to others.

In addition to the observation that Activation has great influence on SBC, we also confirmed the direct positive impact of Affection on SBC, as demonstrated in Hollebeek et al. (2014).

As for the consequences of BUI, we established the correlation between it and Affection. That is, if the consumer feels good when using a luxury brand’s Facebook page and there is a greater call to his/her emotional side, this will influence both the importance the consumer gives to the platform and his/her choice of that platform over others. This is in line with Hollebeek et al. (2014). Nevertheless, Affection was not found to exert a strong impact on BUI. Moreover, Activation was found to have a direct and strong impact on BUI. Thus, the time and effort allocated by the consumer to his/her interaction with luxury brands’ Facebook pages has a great impact on his/her choice of one platform over another. By visiting and interacting more frequently with luxury brands’ Facebook pages, the consumer favours these platforms over others with the same features and functions.

The present study diverges from Hollebeek et al. (2014) in that we argue that the CP of luxury Facebook pages is not an important antecedent of BUI. This result is due to luxury brand awareness. Moreover, when a consumer is a fan or a Facebook brand follower, (s)he already has knowledge about the brand. Thus, the present study emphasises the importance of affection and activation in the context of luxury BUI.

In accordance with previous studies, by visiting and interacting more often with luxury brands’ Facebook pages, the consumer prioritises this social network, even if others contain the same features and functions. Thus, hypothesis $H3c$ was validated, also in accordance with Hollebeek et al. (2014).

In contrast to Hollebeek et al.’s (2014) study, the indirect effect of CI on SBC was mediated only for two of the three CBE mediators, CP and affection. CI has no indirect effect on either SBC or BUI through the CBE mediator effect.

6. Conclusion and implications

Presence on social networks is now mandatory for brands and companies worldwide. The reason is simple: the consumers are there. In fact, brand pages on social networks, such as Facebook, have quickly become the preferred platform for consumer-company interaction (Tsai and Men, 2013).

The revolution brought by social media to this consumer–brand relationship is profound, and goes much further that the technological evolution of the websites. More specifically,
some publications have reported that consumers more frequently use social networks to search for information about a company, brand or product, than they use official websites (Dei Worldwide, 2008, cited by Tsai and Men, 2013).

Thus, brands must direct and invest their efforts towards social networks, which in themselves provide various advantages and opportunities. The social, participatory and community environment of these platforms makes them the perfect place for brands, in interactive and intimate ways, to communicate and engage with their consumers (Tsai and Men, 2013). In this way, they might activate and reinforce engagement, a crucial factor that involves the cognitive, emotional and behavioural side of consumer–brand interactions (Hollebeek \textit{et al.}, 2014). In addition, the added value of engagement lies in its contribution to the nature of consumer relations, which are increasingly interactive and experiential.

However, social networks can also have disadvantages for brands. The creation and diffusion of negative word-of-mouth about the brand is just one example (Brodie \textit{et al.}, 2013). Therefore, brand managers should take special care of how they contextualise their messages on social media and focus on building closer customer relationships (Tsai and Men, 2014).

Luxury brands are a rather special case for social media. They joined these platforms later in the light of their characteristics and many are still discovering the benefits of belonging to social networks. However, luxury brands no longer question whether they should be online; the pertinent question today is how they should present themselves online (Munster, 2014).

The present study emerged with the purpose of exploring one of the crucial elements of brand presence on social networks: CBE. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to understand the impact of CI (antecedent) on engagement with luxury brands’ Facebook pages, and to understand the impact of engagement on the two consequences of Brand Engagement, SBC and BUI, from the consumer’s point of view.

The results obtained proved the reliability and validity of the proposed conceptual model, and confirmed almost all of the research hypotheses.

The present study concluded that the consumer activation process in the context of luxury brands’ Facebook pages is the more important antecedent of the two constructs. CI, which translates into the personal importance given by the consumer (Mittal, 1995) to the Facebook page of the luxury brand, is a key antecedent of engagement with these pages. The more involved the consumer is, the greater will be his/her cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement and relationship with the brand, and even his/her loyalty towards it.

CI has a higher impact on CP, which means that involvement reinforces the thinking of the consumer towards the brand’s Facebook page. That is, the more the consumer is involved with the page, the more his/her CP will increase, the more (s)he will think about it, and the stronger will be his/her engagement. This conclusion enhances the academic and managerial knowledge of luxury CBE. An individual, whether or not a luxury brand consumer, who interacts with a luxury brand’s Facebook page, will increase his/her engagement with the brand based on this interaction. The emotional and behavioural dimensions, in turn, have a smaller impact on CI; and the importance of the impact of the behavioural dimension on CI is less than the impact of the emotional dimension.

The consumer’s cognitive processes cause him/her to make a personal connection with the Facebook pages of the luxury brand, based on the psychological and symbolic benefits that (s)he derives from the brand and which helps to reflect his/her self-image (Escalas, 2004) – nor do they intend to use the Facebook page of the luxury brand over pages on other social networks. The present study shows the importance of the Activation process.
in the context of consumer luxury brand social media engagement. Thus, brands “act as symbols of personal fulfilment, provide self-esteem, allow each individual to differentiate and express individuality” Escalas (2004, p. 170). Therefore, it is the behavioural aspect of engagement that suggests that, if consumers spend more time and energy on the pages of these brands on Facebook, they are more likely to mirror their self-images and they are more likely to identify with the luxury brand.

The present study concludes that the time and dedication given by consumers to luxury brands’ Facebook pages influences their current, and probably future, intentions to continue to use the pages of this social network instead of those of other networks. It is further concluded that, in the context of luxury CBE, the CP dimension is not sufficiently important to link the consumer him/herself to the brand.

The next section examines the practical and theoretical contributions of the present study.

In managerial terms, it is crucial to understand the importance of CI on Facebook pages for creating and boosting CBE. This engagement is closer to the CP factor – the rational dimension of engagement. On the other hand, for CBE, the Activation factor better explains SBC via the luxury brands’ Facebook pages and BUI through the use of these pages.

We conclude that managers should create storytelling that engages the consumer, and should stimulate CP by sharing the stories on their Facebook pages - specifically, accurate and unambiguous messages. For this, managers should focus on the structure of their messages, so that the recipients observe, understand and respond positively to them. If they exercise some kind of influence, for what purpose they use the pages, among other possible issues.

To improve the proposed model it will be important to examine other possible antecedents and consequences of engagement in social media and to seek out the true motivations of the consequences of consumers’ use of luxury brands’ Facebook pages. Loyalty, satisfaction, trust and commitment have been identified as possible consequences (Brodie et al., 2013).

It would be very interesting to explore other luxury brands and social networks, for example, luxury car brands. In addition, it would be interesting to replicate this study with other social networks and to compare the differences to Facebook, for example with Instagram. This social network has grown exponentially over the last two years, essentially by attracting young people. Focussing on photography and videos, Instagram is a simple and much sought-after platform, for example, by photographers. Thus, brands, even luxury brands, are being attracted on a large scale to Instagram, which can generate up to 15 times the level of engagement of luxury brands compared to Facebook.

Note

References


## Table AI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Not important – Important</td>
<td>Zaichkowsky (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boring – Interesting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irrelevant – Relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tedious – Exciting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It means nothing to me – Means a lot to me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not appealing – Appealing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common – Fascinating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worthless – Valuable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not involving – Involving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not needed – Needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Using Facebook gets me to think about Facebook</td>
<td>Hollebeek et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think about Facebook a lot when I'm using it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using Facebook stimulates my interest to learn more about Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>I feel very positive when I use Facebook</td>
<td>Hollebeek et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using Facebook makes me happy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel good when I use Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm proud to use Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>I spend a lot of time using Facebook compared to other social media</td>
<td>Hollebeek et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whenever I'm using social media, I usually use Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook is one of the brands I usually use when I use social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBC</td>
<td>Facebook reflects who I am</td>
<td>Escalas (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can identify with Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel a personal connection to Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use Facebook to communicate who I am to other people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think Facebook helps me become the type of person I want to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consider Facebook to be “me” (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook suits me well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Usage Internet</td>
<td>It makes sense to use Facebook instead of any other brand, even if they are the same</td>
<td>Yoo and Donthu (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even if another brand has the same features as Facebook, I would prefer to use Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If there is another brand as good as Facebook, I prefer to use Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If another brand is not different from Facebook in any way, it seems smarter to use Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Enhancing rural destinations’ loyalty through relationship quality

La mejora de la lealtad a los destinos rurales a través de la calidad relacional

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Abstract

Purpose – The literature on the factors generating loyalty towards tourism destinations has seldom focussed its attention on relationship marketing, which has left a gap in the understanding of destination loyalty. This paper aims to examine the influence of relationship quality on rural destination loyalty, approaching this through the variables of trust, attachment and satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used a quantitative methodology based on an on line survey conducted in Spain. The sample consisted of 464 tourists who participate in rural tourism. The analysis of the proposed model was carried out based on the partial least squares method.

Findings – The results confirm that the model has a substantial to moderate explanatory capacity for overall satisfaction and loyalty, in which overall satisfaction acts as a mediator between the variables that make up relationship quality in reference to loyalty.

Research limitations/implications – The main limitations of this research arise from the scarcity of works which aim to understand relationship quality in tourism destinations. To broaden results, it should be applied in other tourism destinations, products, services and experiences.

Practical implications – Destination managers should give relationships a special role in their tourism development programmes in rural tourism contexts.

Social implications – Rural tourism destinations and companies are generally small-sized organisations that need managerial tools. These can benefit from developing sustainable relationships.

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Originality/value – The significant role played by relationship quality regarding destination loyalty is studied in detail in this model.

Keywords Loyalty, Relationship marketing, Relationship quality, Partial least squares PLS technique, Rural destinations

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Since the 1990s, relationship marketing has attracted the attention of academics and professionals (Palmer, 1995), who have focussed on studying the relationships between marketing actors, describing these relationships as contacts between two or more people or between people and objects, symbols and organisations (Gummesson, 1996). However, a relationship strategy can be achieved not only through a mutual interest in maintaining relationships but also by the development of long-term, interdependent relationships, which differentiate this strategy from transactional marketing (Blois, 1996), focussing the attention on a single exchange. Then the relationship approach recognises that retaining and developing relationships over time is critical (He et al., 2018).

Managing customer relationships in service businesses such as tourism is vital due to the intangibility and heterogeneity of the service delivered. This makes organisations more dependent on relationships (Cheng et al., 2008). The challenge is to understand why customers stay longer with a service provider, having relationship quality as a key driver (Walter et al., 2003). Relationship quality refers to the customer’s perceptions and their evaluations of an individual service involving feelings and emotions (Kim and Cha, 2002), which results in the customer intention to rely on providers’ integrity and future performance (Kim et al., 2001). To this end, recognising and fulfilling the needs of people is the main objective of building relationships (He et al., 2018).
Empirical studies applied to relationship marketing in service organisations are scarce (Sin et al., 2006), although the hospitality industry has identified the benefits of establishing relationships with their customers (Oh, 2002). In the late 1990s, the tourism industry introduced customer relationship management (CRM) (Baksi, 2014) in response to greatly increased competition in the tourism market that made developing and maintaining long-term relationships between the relevant stakeholders essential (Radosavljevic and Borisavljevic, 2014). Thus, dealing with customer relationships effectively has become vital to a firms’ survival in today’s competitive markets (Yen et al., 2015). Maintaining ongoing relationships with customers is crucial for sustaining a competitive advantage (Kim et al., 2006), as it is less expensive to retain customers than to acquire new ones (Kim and Cha, 2002). As a result, research focussed on relationship marketing cause-effect models in tourism has increased noticeably, although these models have mainly been applied in the hotel industry (Radosavljevic and Borisavljevic, 2014).

Relationship quality appears as an emerging concept in the literature on tourism relationship marketing (Moliner et al., 2007). Theory about this topic has been overlooked (He et al., 2018), and limited empirical research in this context focusses on the predictors and outcomes of relationship quality (Kim et al., 2006).

An explanatory model of tourism destination loyalty, based on a relational approach to marketing, was applied in the setting of rural tourism destinations, as these are understood as an interesting context. According to Maggon and Chaudhry (2015):

Maintaining relationships with customers and employees is a fundamental activity for almost every hospitality organization, whether it is a small or large hotel, a travel agency, a restaurant, a casino, or an airline (p. 54).

Therefore, it should be possible to confirm the importance of applying the relational approach of marketing, especially in rural tourism destinations and companies which are generally small-sized organisations. According to Van Zyl and Mathur-Helm (2007), small tourism companies can benefit from developing sustainable relationships with stakeholders, thereby improving their business performance.

Thus, this paper’s objective is to explore the role of relationship quality in tourism destination loyalty enhancement, using an innovative approach assented in trust, attachment and satisfaction with relationships, in the specific context of rural tourism, a type of tourism in which relationships can be fostered. The study described sought to determine the capacity of relationship variables to generate loyalty, which helps to foster ties between tourists and destinations. Relationship quality development in this framework can be understood as a tool to increase the profitability of the benefits that rural tourism offers to these particular destinations and their small-sized organisations.

2. Relationship marketing and its applications to tourism destinations: the relevance of relationship quality and destination loyalty

Quality is a key concept in tourism because it is understood as an indicator of success and profitability in businesses (Rivera and Croes, 2010). In the 1980s, the research on quality in tangible goods was dealt with in depth. However, some difficulties existed regarding the definition and measurement of services. To complete this approach, it was necessary to take into account its main characteristics, those being intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability (Parasuraman et al., 1985). According to Žabkar et al. (2010) quality in tourism is “created by the processes of service delivery (e.g. friendliness, courtesy, efficiency, reliability, staff competence) and outcomes of services (e.g. accommodation, food, leisure
In this sense, Murphy et al. (2000) affirm that at the moments of truth the encounter with the destination and its service infrastructure leads the traveller to an overall perception of service quality. The more positive the encounter with the service, the greater the perceived quality. According to Su et al. (2016), service quality is conceived as an overall evaluation of a firm performance, whereas relationship quality is considered as a strategic orientation centred on enhancing customer relationships.

The tourism sector has been in the vanguard of those sectors adopting a relational approach. However, limits can be found on this strategy’s application in tourism. Clients may not want a relationship with the service provider. Many organisations cannot apply loyalty strategies when they already operate in markets with small profit margins. Some tourist segments are not attracted by the idea of visiting a place for the second time, and, finally, the intention to create relationships with clients can be blocked by organisational structures, processes and values that are not customer-oriented, as well as a lack of cooperation between organisations (Palmer and Mayer, 1996). Sin et al. (2006) stress that relationship marketing is suitable for the hotel industry, due to its close interaction with customers. However, tourism destinations have taken advantage of the benefits offered by adopting a relationship strategy, although not without encountering problems, such as those described by Palmer and Mayer (1996). Even so, a good understanding of how relationships can be developed to create destination loyalty is important to both researchers and practitioners (Su et al., 2017). Regarding destination marketing, there is a lack of conceptual application of the relationship management paradigm (Choi and Cai, 2017).

Along these lines, Murdy and Pike (2012) developed a study on the introduction of a relationship marketing approach in international tourism destinations. They identified three aspects that need improvement. These are:

1. clarifying objectives of marketing to encourage visitor acquisition and retention;
2. upgrading interdepartmental communication; and
3. supporting top management.

The cited authors also found areas in which destination managers are doing well:

- rapid responses to visitors’ requests;
- employees willing to help tourists responsibly;
- fast service;
- an understanding of the needs of key customers;
- proper treatment of key clients; and
- efforts to find out what customers need.

Overall, these positive points overcome any drawbacks regarding the performance of relationship marketing strategies in tourism destinations.

Murdy and Pike’s (2012) findings reveal that tourism destinations can create long-lasting relationships with high-value tourists. Similarly, Su et al. (2017) claim that the relationship marketing approach is vital for tourism destinations. In addition, Pike et al. (2011) suggest that research on the repeated behaviour of tourists in destinations should be done to foster greater satisfaction and loyalty, which translate into profits.

Similarly with the conceptualization of products’ and services’ quality, relationship quality arises (Lo and Im, 2014), which is generally accepted as the key driver for developing loyalty (Walsh et al., 2010).
In this context, Maggon and Chaudhry (2015) recently developed a study on the state of the art of relationship marketing and CRM research published in top tourism journals from 2001 to 2013. The results show that relationship quality is a key theme in tourism research, scarcely applied to destinations.

The literature review done in previous studies of the determinants of loyalty to destinations, accommodations and other tourism products (Campón et al., 2012) was updated for the present study within the area of tourism destinations and related topics. This review made it clear that relationship constructs such as trust and commitment have seldom been taken into account. Su et al. (2017) also observed this gap, identifying a lacuna in the published empirical research on relationship variables and destination loyalty.

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), the presence of commitment and trust is fundamental to the success of relationship marketing. The need for commitment and trust are the key to motivating marketing managers to cooperate with exchange partners, to resist attractive short-term solutions and to be cautious about believing that all parties avoid acting opportunistically. Therefore, when both commitment and trust are present, efficiency, productivity and effectiveness are enhanced. According to Gundlach et al. (1995), commitment between all parties is an important sign of relationship quality and lays the foundation for building trust.

Relationship quality theory proposes that customers offer value over the time they interrelate with an organisation and vice-versa (He et al., 2018). However, the discussion regarding the conceptualisation and the measurement of relationship quality is still unsolved (Cheng et al., 2008; Lo and Im, 2014). Many authors have suggested a few definitions, but there is no agreement about which is the most appropriate, and the constructs for its measurement have significantly increased (Loureiro and Cunha, 2017). Thus, some authors suggest that relationship quality lacks both formal definition as well as consensus about what dimensions involve. It is recognised that it is formed as a higher-order construct (Su et al., 2016).

Garbarino and Johnson (1999) define relationship quality as an overall evaluation of the strength of relationships. Cheng et al. (2008) add that relationship quality is achieved when the customer’s needs and wants are fulfilled. According to Radosavljevic and Borisavljevic (2014), relationship quality starts with customers’ perceptions and evaluations of criteria such as respect, sincerity, kindness, support and help given to buyers. In short, the concept “captures the essence of relationship marketing” (Jap et al., 1999, p. 304).

Regarding the measurement of relationship quality, depending on which author is consulted, it is shaped by commitment, trust and satisfaction (Tsai, 2015; Walsh et al., 2010; Yen et al., 2009) or a combination of these. Lo and Im (2014) affirm that relationship quality is mainly composed of trust, commitment and satisfaction, and these three constructs are frequently used as its higher-order dimensions in hospitality research. The present study, therefore, chose to designate relationship quality as a combination of the three variables.

Although the literature considers the construct of commitment a crucial element in relationship quality, Lee et al. (2007) offer a theoretical rationale based on which commitment can substitute for place attachment when applied to a place or destination, a conceptualisation that was adopted in the present study. Along these lines, Chen and Phou (2013) equate relationships with tourism destinations with the concepts of satisfaction, trust and attachment.

Therefore, based on these previous studies, a gap needs to be filled in the existing literature on loyalty to tourism destinations with a focus on relationship marketing by developing a model that involves relationship quality. According to Su et al. (2016), relationship quality is accepted as an important antecedent of post-purchase behaviour and
a key driver to develop loyal customers. Thus, the model proposed in this study tries to shed new light on the effects of relationship quality in enhancing destination loyalty.

3. The relationship approach in rural tourism: is it possible to achieve loyal rural tourists?

The tourism industry has benefited from relationship marketing (Oh, 2002), but its application to rural tourism has been scarce, although authors such as Thomas et al. (2011) have proposed more research on tourism marketing for SMEs, as rural tourism organisations are these. Loureiro (2010) emphasises that rural tourism has to face the challenges of an increasingly competitive market, so it is interesting to maintain loyal visitors to guarantee the long-term success of rural tourism organisations and destinations.

The question that can arise at this point is if rural tourism has the possibility to implement relationship marketing. First, Palmer and Mayer (1996) underline the special ability that small, local and family-run businesses have in developing relational behaviours. Small-size and self-managed companies, which is the typical business model in rural tourism, achieve emotional loyalty more easily than larger companies. Second, McKercher and Guillet (2011) argue that short-haul travellers seek the familiarity of known destinations, which could explain higher levels of intention to revisit a place. This is an important factor in rural tourism, as stays are usually short (Cánoves et al., 2005b). Finally, McKercher et al. (2012) affirm that tourists who appreciate diversity in their trips look for different experiences in each occasion. Very diverse activities can be experienced at different locations at the same destination. In this line, rural tourism can satisfy the wonderlust of the modern traveller, as rural areas usually boast a wide variety of micro-destinations and experiences.

The study of loyalty in rural tourism is an area of great interest that needs additional research (Loureiro and Kastenholz, 2011). Loureiro and Miranda (2008) contend that the findings of previous researches on destination loyalty are not helpful for rural tourism managers because the special features of this type of tourism are not included in these studies.

4. Theoretical model and research hypotheses

The research on relationship quality in the hospitality industry is scarce (Castellanos-Verdugo et al., 2009), while relationship quality has been widely studied as an antecedent of behavioural intentions (Han and Hyun, 2013; He et al., 2018; Su et al., 2016). Hospitality literature reveals that high levels of relationship quality lead to high levels of satisfaction, trust and commitment (Lo and Im, 2014) as well as loyalty, that is considered as an essential element for a successful relationship marketing strategy (Kim et al., 2006).

The sections below detail the theoretical model and research hypotheses. The discussion places a special emphasis on the definition of the variables that make up relationship quality and their relationships with overall satisfaction and destination loyalty. To obtain a more comprehensive result of the relationships established in the model, their hypotheses were described according to their variables’ dimensions.

Yüksel et al. (2010) define place attachment as “the process by which humans form emotional bonds” (p. 275). This concept is considered a key element in a full understanding of tourists’ intentions and behaviours (Stylos et al., 2017) because it can increase visitors’ willingness to return to destinations (Chubchuwong et al., 2015).

The importance of destination attachment has meant that this concept has attracted the interest of researchers (Reitsamer et al., 2016), but contradictory approaches have been used
to analyse the dimensions of place attachment. The most recognised measurement approach to this concept includes two dimensions:

1. place identity, which refers to emotional attachment; and
2. place dependence, which serves as functional attachment (Stylos et al., 2017; Williams and Vaske, 2003).

The present study followed this approach. The Social Identity Theory can also offer support for this construct. This theory provides a framework to understand group participation in many fields and a better comprehension of visitors’ attitudes and behaviours in tourism, as tourists’ recommendations to visit a destination can become a reliable information source that promotes travel decisions (Chiang et al., 2017).

Yüksel et al. (2010) and Prayag and Ryan (2012) confirmed the mediating effect exercised by overall satisfaction between attachment and loyalty/behavioural intentions, as revealed by revisits and recommendations. Based on these assertions, the first hypothesis in the present study was defined as:

\[ H1. \text{ Destination attachment has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.} \]

\[ H1_A. \text{ Destination identification has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.} \]

\[ H1_B. \text{ Destination dependence has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.} \]

The experiential value offered by destinations provides a suitable context in which to develop loyalty (Su et al., 2017). According to Oppermann (2000), “destination loyalty essentially places the emphasis on a longitudinal perspective, looking at lifelong visitation behaviour of travellers rather than just at a cross-sectional perspective” (p. 78). However, an inherent problem in the analysis of destination loyalty is measuring the length of time for each purchase period and determining the length of time that indicates a tourist is loyal (Oppermann, 2000). This is why loyalty is measured not only by repeated visits but also by recommendations to others (Chen and Phou, 2013; Mechinda et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2013; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Su et al., 2017).

A variety of empirical evidence supports positive impacts on the relationship between attachment and loyalty (Chen and Phou, 2013; Mechinda et al., 2009; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012; Xu and Zhang, 2016; Yüksel et al., 2010). This led to the development of the second hypothesis of the present study:

\[ H2. \text{ Destination attachment has a positive effect on loyalty.} \]

\[ H2_A. \text{ Destination identification has a positive effect on loyalty.} \]

\[ H2_B. \text{ Destination dependence has a positive effect on loyalty.} \]

In the specific case of satisfaction with tourism destinations, Su et al. (2017) conceptualise satisfaction as “a tourist’s overall evaluation of a destination”.

According to Choo and Petrick (2012), few studies have examined the interpersonal relationships that clients experience when receiving services. The cited authors’ research results indicate a need to expand the scope of customer-focussed relationship marketing to include all relationships produced by interactions with other parties involved in providing services, as these are significant in this context. Kim et al. (2006) highlight that relationship marketing drives long-term interactive relationships between the service provider and the customer.

Another important aspect on which the success of tourism relies is the hospitality of residents and their goodwill (Gursoy et al., 2002). Residents’ unfriendly behaviour towards
visitors can be a drawback, while kind attitudes can generate good experiences for tourists (Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016).

Choo and Petrick (2012) sought to examine the interaction between satisfaction with relationships with providers and overall satisfaction and succeeded in proving the existence of this interaction. Alegre and Cladera (2009) ascertained the significance of the relationship between satisfaction with hospitality and overall satisfaction. Based on these findings, the third hypothesis in the present study was formulated as follows:

\[ H3 \]

- **H3A.** Satisfaction with relationships with tourism service providers has a positive effect on destination overall satisfaction.
- **H3B.** Satisfaction with relationships with residents has a positive effect on destination overall satisfaction.

The proposal of two dimensions related to satisfaction with relationships with tourism service providers and with residents implies testing the well-known and accepted relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Chen and Phou, 2013; Mechinda et al., 2009; Su et al., 2017; Yüksel et al., 2010) in a more specific context. This led to the fourth research hypothesis:

\[ H4 \]

- **H4A.** Satisfaction with relationships with tourism service providers has a positive effect on destination loyalty.
- **H4B.** Satisfaction with relationships with residents has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

Trust is one of the most widely studied and accepted concepts in relationship marketing (Tsai, 2015). Su et al. (2017) define trust “as the belief that a party will fulfill his or her obligations in the relationship and specifically examine trust toward destination service providers in a tourism context” (p. 184). Few studies have specifically studied trust in tourism destinations. For example, this variable’s antecedents were identified in Chen and Phou (2013) and Tsai’s (2012) research. Some studies also have examined trust in terms of tourism service providers (Su et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2009). The present study chose to evaluate these two perspectives to deepen the understanding of this variable in the context of loyalty and tourism destinations.

The link between trust and satisfaction is clear in the concept of relationship quality (Yen et al., 2009). Chen and Phou (2013) and Yen et al. (2009) also examined the influence of satisfaction on trust. Given these findings, the fifth hypothesis was formulated as follows:

\[ H5 \]

- **H5A.** Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on destination trust.
- **H5B.** Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on trust in tourism service providers in destinations.

The direct impact trust has on loyalty also needs to be examined, to develop relationship strategies that achieve their central objective of greater loyalty. Authors such as Chen and Phou (2013) and Yen et al. (2009) found proof of the direct impact of trust on loyalty. In
particular, Su et al’s (2014) and Su et al’s (2017) studies found empirical support for the effects of tourists’ trust in destination service providers on word of mouth but not on revisit intentions. And Kumar and Kaushik (2017) obtained empirical evidence for the relationship between destination trust and destination loyalty. The sixth hypothesis was based on these results:

\[ H6. \] Trust has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

\[ H6_A. \] Destination trust has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

\[ H6_B. \] Trust in tourism service providers has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

Relationship quality is an important outcome of behavioural intentions and, from the consumer’s perspective in tourism, it tends to be associated with tourists’ loyalty to the destination (Hopeniené and Rutelioné, 2016). The relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty has been widely studied, including in the studies of those factors generating loyalty to tourism destinations including some relationship variables. These include, for example, research in the context of attachment (Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Yüksel et al., 2010) or trust (Chen and Phou, 2013; Mechinda et al., 2009; Su et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2009). However, this relationship has only rarely been examined in the context of rural tourism destinations (Phillips et al., 2013). Given these theoretical constructs, the seventh hypothesis in the present study was formulated as follows:

\[ H7. \] Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty to rural tourism destinations.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model.

5. Methodology

This study used a quantitative methodology based on an on line survey conducted in Spain. According to data collected by Spain’s National Institute of Statistics, since 2001 to 2017, rural tourism has tripled in size in terms of supply and demand, experiencing an extensive expansion that makes it a suitable setting for the present research. In Spain, rural tourism emerged as a response to the stagnation of the traditional model of sun and sea. As a consequence, rural areas have experienced the benefits of tourism. Rural tourism development allowed for a valorisation of local natural and cultural heritage, while offering new tourism destinations in line with a changing demand made by travellers who seek tranquillity, along with motivating, authentic, educative and personalised experiences during their holidays (Cànoves et al., 2005a).

The scales used to test this model were inspired and validated by previous studies. These scales were adapted in this study for the context of rural tourism. They were next validated in a pretest with twenty researchers and professionals specialising in this area (Table I).

The questionnaire was designed using the scales cited in Table I. Seven-point Likert scales were applied as they are recommended by Cummins and Gullone (2000). Participants were asked to answer the questions keeping in mind their last rural tourism destination visited.

Before the questionnaire’s final distribution, a pilot study was done with a small, selected subsample of the target population to confirm definitively the corrections made in this instrument. A digital version of the questionnaire was distributed by e-mailing, social networks, a website and a blog. The reasons why this research used an on line survey lies in the advantages pointed out by Hung and Law (2011) regarding the geographical coverage and the possibility of identifying specific audiences, such as tourists who usually engage in...
rural tourism. The authors also mention some limitations of this method, which are the sample representativeness, the low response rate, technical difficulties and inactive or inaccurate e-mail addresses. Another problem identified by Baena et al. (2010) is if people answer the online questionnaire more than once, considerably altering the survey’s results.

### Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Based on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destination dependence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Williams and Vaske (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with relationships</td>
<td>With tourism service providers</td>
<td></td>
<td>De Wulf et al. (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>In the destination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chen and Phou (2013) and Tsai (2012). Proposal of three indicators based on Ganesan (1994) (two components of trust: credibility and benevolence) and Tsai (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In tourism services providers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Verhoef et al. (2002)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Legend: DID-Destination identity, DDE-Destination dependence, RPS-Relations with tourism service providers satisfaction, RRS-Relations with residents satisfaction, TDE-Trust in the destination, TPR-Trust in tourism services providers
According to Reips (2002), it is estimated that the probability of occurrence of this problem is less than 3 per cent in the majority of the studies, which is not a threat for the research’s reliability. Taking into account these limitations, it was understood that the pros outweigh the cons, and the risk that could be introduced by the usage of an online method is assumable.

This study’s population universe was composed of people who regularly participate in rural tourism (i.e. at least once every two or three years). The fieldwork was done from 22 April 2013 to 18 June 2013, resulting in a non probability convenience sample of 464 valid completed questionnaires. The sample reached a great geographical representativeness, with all the Spanish regions being represented with the exception of one.

Regarding the respondents’ profile, 41.2 per cent are men and 58.8 per cent women. Respondents between 26 and 55 years of age made up 85.6 per cent of the sample. In addition, half of the sample (49.8 per cent) participates in rural tourism regularly (“once or twice a year”), which confirms this sample’s suitability.

The analysis of the proposed model was carried out based on an evaluation of structural equation modelling using the partial least squares method, as this is particularly appropriate for exploratory studies with predictive goals, as is the case of the present research (Hair et al., 2011).

6. Results

The measurement model contains constructs made up of reflective indicators that, therefore, needed to be evaluated for reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2011). The analysis of individual reliability showed that the factor loadings have a weight above 0.707 (Barclay et al., 1995; Hair et al., 2011), with the exception of DDE1, DDE6, OVS6, LOY1 and LOY2. However, this guideline does not need to be rigidly followed in the first stages of scale development or the times at which these are applied in different contexts, so loadings of 0.50 or 0.60 can be considered acceptable (Barclay et al., 1995) (Table II).

Table III shows that the constructs’ internal consistency was verified, falling within the parameters considered acceptable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The proposed model also showed convergent validity, as the average variance extracted (AVE) values are above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011). The analysis of discriminant validity was done by demonstrating that the correlations between constructs are lower than the square root of the AVE which is shown diagonally and in italics (Barclay et al., 1995) (Table III).

To evaluate the structural model, the $R^2$ was analysed for each dependent construct. The statistical significance of the paths was also analysed using bootstrapping (Hair et al., 2011).

The proposed model’s dependent constructs possess a moderate to substantial explanatory capacity for overall satisfaction (62.8 per cent) and a moderate capacity for destination trust (49.8 per cent), trust in tourism service providers (41.0 per cent) and loyalty (58.6 per cent) (Table IV).

The variance explained in an endogenous construct by another latent variable was also presented following Falk and Miller (1992) (Table IV).

An analysis of the statistical significance of the paths revealed that the majority of the research hypotheses developed are supported by the results, with the exception of $H4_A$, $H4_B$ and $H6_B$ (Table IV and Figure 2).

The theoretical model proposed in this study showed a good fit in the measurement model, and it was empirically validated in relation to the hypotheses developed, except for $H4_A$ (RPS $\rightarrow$ LOY), $H4_B$ (RRS $\rightarrow$ LOY) and $H6_B$ (TPR $\rightarrow$ LOY). The model can explain 62.8 per cent of overall satisfaction and 58.6 per cent of destination loyalty, revealing a moderate to substantial explanatory capacity of its relationships. Overall satisfaction is shown to unify all the effects relationship quality has on loyalty.
## Table II. Measurement model assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs and indicators</th>
<th>Loading ((\lambda))</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destination identity_DID</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9473</td>
<td>0.7499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DID1_I feel it is a part of me</td>
<td>0.8609***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DID2_It is very special to me</td>
<td>0.8792***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DID3_I strongly identify with it</td>
<td>0.8867***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DID4_I am very attached to it</td>
<td>0.8987***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DID5_Visiting it says a lot about who I am</td>
<td>0.8102***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DID6_It means a lot to me</td>
<td>0.8572***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination dependence_DDE</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.8643</td>
<td>0.5155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE1_It is the best place for engaging in rural tourism</td>
<td>0.6591***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE2_No other rural tourism destinations can compare to it</td>
<td>0.7357***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE3_I prefer to visit that destination more than any other</td>
<td>0.7613***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE4_For me it is more important to do rural tourism there, than in any other place</td>
<td>0.7558***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE5_It is an irreplaceable place</td>
<td>0.714***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE6_I don't have the same enjoyment in a similar place</td>
<td>0.676***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with tourism service providers satisfaction_RPS</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9102</td>
<td>0.7718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPS1_I have a high-quality relationship with the tourism enterprises</td>
<td>0.8815***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPS2_The tourism enterprises treat regular customers especially</td>
<td>0.8411***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPS3_I am satisfied with the relationship I have with tourism enterprises</td>
<td>0.9115***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with residents satisfaction_RRS</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9356</td>
<td>0.7842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRS1_I receive kind treatment as a customer from residents</td>
<td>0.8888***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRS2_I am satisfied with the local people's hospitality</td>
<td>0.8994***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRS3_I am pleased with the residents' willingness to solve problems, incidents or setbacks that I could have</td>
<td>0.8811***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRS4_I am satisfied with the residents willingness to offer information</td>
<td>0.8727***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in the destination_TDE</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9278</td>
<td>0.7199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDE1_Sense of trust</td>
<td>0.8524***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDE2_Confidence and security</td>
<td>0.8999***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDE3_Sense of security that I will find everything I need in my stay</td>
<td>0.8566***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDE4_Sense of security that I will find all the information needed for my trip</td>
<td>0.8081***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDE5_Sense of security that I will enjoy a pleasant experience</td>
<td>0.864***</td>
<td>0.9601</td>
<td>0.8574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in tourism service providers_TPR</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9312***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR1_They keep their promises</td>
<td>0.9169***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR2_They put the customer's interests first</td>
<td>0.934***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR3_They keep the promises that they make to me</td>
<td>0.9312***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR4_They provide a good service</td>
<td>0.9215***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall satisfaction_OVS</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9403</td>
<td>0.7266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS1_I had a good experience</td>
<td>0.8716***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS2_I made a wise choice</td>
<td>0.9098***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS3_I found exactly the rural tourism destination that I was looking for</td>
<td>0.8803***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS4_I feel satisfied with my decision to visit it</td>
<td>0.8992***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS5_My expectations were fulfilled at all times</td>
<td>0.883***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS6_I feel it is a close-to-ideal destination</td>
<td>0.6393***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty_LOY</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.8584</td>
<td>0.5561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY1_I consider myself a loyal visitor</td>
<td>0.5628***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY2_I will visit it in my next rural tourism trip</td>
<td>0.5822***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY3_I will visit the destination again in the future</td>
<td>0.8089***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY4_I will recommend it to people who ask my advice</td>
<td>0.8632***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY5_I will tell other people positive things about it</td>
<td>0.8517***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Critical t-values: *\(p < 0.05\); **\(p < 0.01\); ***\(p < 0.001\); ns not significant (based on \(t(4999)\), one-tailed test); \(t(0.05;4999) = 1.645\); \(t(0.01;4999) = 2.327\); \(t(0.001;4999) = 3.092\)
Regarding the variables included in relationship quality, trust and overall satisfaction are strongly linked, as indicated by the value of $\beta$ for the relationships OVS $\rightarrow$ TDE ($\beta = 0.7054^{***}$) and OVS $\rightarrow$ TPR ($\beta = 0.6405^{***}$). In addition, the two variables contribute to the explained variation of both path dimensions, although more to trust in destinations (49.8 per cent) than to trust in tourism service providers (41.0 per cent). Destination attachment has a significant impact on the formation of overall satisfaction, as shown in previous studies (Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Yüksel et al., 2010), contributing more to destination dependence (10.5 per cent) than to destination identification (5.6 per cent). The influence of these dimensions of attachment on loyalty also proves to be relevant, which agrees with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DID</th>
<th>DDE</th>
<th>RPS</th>
<th>RRS</th>
<th>TDE</th>
<th>TPR</th>
<th>OVS</th>
<th>LOY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DID</td>
<td>0.8660</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDE</td>
<td>0.627</td>
<td>0.7180</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPS</td>
<td>0.4375</td>
<td>0.4687</td>
<td>0.8785</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRS</td>
<td>0.4152</td>
<td>0.4895</td>
<td>0.5687</td>
<td>0.8856</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDE</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.5414</td>
<td>0.5282</td>
<td>0.6112</td>
<td>0.8485</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPR</td>
<td>0.3638</td>
<td>0.4367</td>
<td>0.5629</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>0.6686</td>
<td>0.9260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>0.5741</td>
<td>0.5683</td>
<td>0.7401</td>
<td>0.7054</td>
<td>0.6405</td>
<td>0.8524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOY</td>
<td>0.5282</td>
<td>0.6293</td>
<td>0.4524</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>0.6061</td>
<td>0.5151</td>
<td>0.7022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Legend: DID-Destination identity, DDE-Destination dependence, RPS-Relations with tourism service providers satisfaction, RRS-Relations with residents satisfaction, TDE-Trust in the destination, TPR-Trust in tourism service providers, OVS-Overall satisfaction, LOY-Loyalty

### Table III. Discriminant validity analysis

### Table IV. Effects on endogenous variables and structural model results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Direct effect ($\beta$)</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Explained variance (%)</th>
<th>$t$-value (bootstrap)</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>0.6281</td>
<td>0.1115**</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.5025</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H1_A$: DID $\rightarrow$ OVS</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.1832***</td>
<td>0.5741</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>4.3593</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H3_A$: RPS $\rightarrow$ OVS</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5284***</td>
<td>0.7401</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>12.8355</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H3_B$: RRS $\rightarrow$ OVS</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.4525***</td>
<td>0.6405</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>19.9731</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.4975</td>
<td>0.7054</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>26.5797</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H5_A$: OVS $\rightarrow$ TD</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.4102</td>
<td>0.6405</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>19.9731</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H5_B$: OVS $\rightarrow$ TP</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.3903***</td>
<td>0.7022</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>5.8933</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loyalty</strong></td>
<td>0.5861</td>
<td>0.1106**</td>
<td>0.5282</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.5732</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H2_A$: DID $\rightarrow$ LOY</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2583***</td>
<td>0.6293</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>5.6433</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H4_A$: RPS $\rightarrow$ LOY</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0249ns</td>
<td>0.4524</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.4888</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H4_B$: RRS $\rightarrow$ LOY</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.1263***</td>
<td>0.6061</td>
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<td>2.3756</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>$H5_A$: TDE $\rightarrow$ LOY</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.036ms</td>
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<tr>
<td>$H7$: OVS $\rightarrow$ LOY</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.3903***</td>
<td>0.7022</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>5.8933</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Legend: DID-Destination identity, DDE-Destination dependence, RPS-Relations with tourism service providers satisfaction, RRS-Relations with residents satisfaction, TDE-Trust in the destination, TPR-Trust in tourism service providers, OVS-Overall satisfaction, LOY-Loyalty; *Critical $t$-values: $^*$p < 0.05; $^{**}$p < 0.01; $^{***}$p < 0.001; ns not significant (based on t(4999), one-tailed test); t(0.05; 4999) = 1.645; t(0.01; 4999) = 2.327; t(0.001; 4999) = 3.062
other research (Chen and Phou, 2013; Mechinda et al., 2009; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012; Xu and Zhang, 2016; Yüksel et al., 2010), with destination dependence contributing 16.3 per cent to loyalty and destination identification 5.8 per cent.

While the results confirm the impact of destination trust in destination loyalty, an insight in accordance with Kumar and Kaushik’s (2017) study, trust in tourism service providers is not shown to have the expected value regarding its impact on loyalty. This last differs from the results obtained by Su et al. (2014) and Su et al. (2017). As trust is a key variable in relationship strategies and, according to Palmer (1994), loyalty is their primary objective, a greater weight would be expected for trust in terms of loyalty – in the dual dimensions proposed in the present study.

The case of satisfaction with relationships with both tourism service providers and residents is paradigmatic, as these are shown to be significant in terms of their relationship with overall satisfaction and quite important in terms of satisfaction with relationships with residents (39.1 per cent), as these are the primary antecedents of satisfaction. Although previous studies did not include satisfaction with relationships with residents as an antecedent of overall satisfaction – or did so in a quite limited way – this variable appears to be an appropriate choice when explaining tourists’ satisfaction with destinations.

However, these dimensions of satisfaction do not turn out to be significant in their influence on loyalty. In this sense, further reflection is needed on why relationships and trust in tourism service providers do not encourage greater destination loyalty. The answer to this question might be found in the context in which this research took place – rural tourism. As indicated by Polo et al. (2012), rural tourism companies tend to be customer-oriented due to their strategy of specialising in a niche market. However, one explanation of the lack of support for $H_{4A}$, $H_{4B}$ and $H_{6B}$ is a possible lack of orientation towards relationships in

**Figure 2.** Graphical results of model assessment

**Notes:** Legend: DID-Destination identity, DDE-Destination dependence, RPS-Relations with tourism service providers satisfaction, RRS-Relations with residents satisfaction, TDE-Trust in the destination, TPR-Trust in tourism service providers; $R^2$ = variable’s explained variance, $\lambda$ = item’s loadings, $\beta$ = direct effect
tourism-oriented small and medium-sized and micro-enterprises operating in rural tourism destinations. Regardless, relationships with residents have been shown to be significant in the creation of overall satisfaction, although they do not contribute to destination loyalty in rural tourism destinations.

Regarding the relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty, $H7$ has empirical support in rural tourism contexts, a result that is consistent with a long list of studies in other contexts (Mechinda et al., 2009; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Williams and Soutar, 2009; Yüksel et al., 2010). This is the most important causal factor in the creation of loyalty because of its capacity to explain 27.4 per cent of variation in loyalty. However, the direct effect of overall satisfaction on loyalty must be supplemented by the indirect effects of the variables that make up relationship quality.

In light of these results – and despite the non-significant relationships revealed – the results obtained confirm the structure of the proposed theoretical model, including the impact of relationship quality on overall satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, the findings have a moderate to substantial explanatory power for the variables. This finding could contribute to an improved understanding of the phenomenon of loyalty to tourism destinations, stimulating further reflection about rural tourism destinations.

7. Conclusion
The present research examined the influence of relationship quality (i.e. trust, attachment and satisfaction with relationships) on overall satisfaction and destination loyalty, more specifically, in rural tourism destinations. The results confirm that the model has a substantial to moderate explanatory capacity for overall satisfaction and loyalty, in which overall satisfaction acts as a mediator between the variables that make up relationship quality in reference to loyalty. These variables are relevant in the creation of overall satisfaction and the direct generation of loyalty – with the exception of satisfaction with relationships and trust in tourism service providers.

The main theoretical contributions of this study are threefold. First, the significant role played by relationship quality regarding destination loyalty, studied in detail in this model, can be considered the main contribution of this work. These results are in accordance with Su et al.’s (2017) findings, which underline the importance of managing quality relationships to create loyalty. Thus, this model provides theoretical and empirical support to enhance destination loyalty, specifically in the context of rural tourism, through the relational approach of marketing. Another contribution is the proposal of an innovative approach to the measurement of satisfaction and trust, that is more appropriate to explain relationship marketing in the context of rural tourism. Finally, a novel approach to understanding relationship quality in tourism destinations was proposed. Based on the theoretical rationale provided by Lee et al. (2007) and Chen and Phou (2013) commitment was substituted by attachment. The results offer empirical support to apply this innovative tridimensional measurement of relationship quality to tourism destinations.

Regarding practical implications, destination managers should take into account the results obtained in this study and introduce them in their tourism development programmes in rural tourism contexts, giving relationships a special role. Phillips et al. (2013) highlight that information about intention of returning or recommending a rural tourism destination is very relevant for supporting the marketing planning or for having an effective usage of the limited resources.

According to Maggon and Chaudhry (2015) introducing CRM strategies, which root in relationship marketing, could improve “profitability in the long run by shifting from transaction-based marketing” (p. 55). Destination managers need to be able to count not only on entities that coordinate initiatives at the level of destination and marketing
strategies but also on the involvement of institutions, businesses and residents, all of which take into account the relational approach of marketing as a key driver. Therefore, destination managers have to take into account the development of relationship quality. Su et al. (2017) call attention to the importance of monitoring satisfaction and trust as a way to improve tourists’ experiences of high-quality relationships. Moreover, the cited authors propose creating a tourist-centred service culture based on the relationship marketing approach to foster sustainable competitive advantages for tourism destinations. On the other hand, Li et al. (2010) found that tourists who visit rural tourism destinations are more motivated by affective features than by physical ones. Therefore, rural tourism communication strategies should focus more on emotional elements than on natural and cultural attractions.

The main limitations of this research arise from the scarcity of works which aim to understand relationship quality in tourism destinations. More studies of this type should continue to delve into those factors that generate destination loyalty and, more specifically, loyalty to rural tourism destinations. In addition, this study was applied to Spain. The cultural features of the country, as well as the particularities of its rural tourism development could introduce some biases.

To broaden results, it should be applied in other tourism destinations, products, services and experiences, in which the contact between the customer and the provider is high. Also longitudinal studies could be relevant to better understand the relationships that tourists establish with rural tourism destinations, monitoring their behaviours through CRM tools. In addition, new relationships could be tested using other relevant variables to understand destination loyalty (e.g. authenticity, quality of life, involvement, etc.), as well as delving into the relationships established in the present model, and into the knowledge about the relationships between the variables that build up relationship quality and its dimensionality. In short, it should be relevant to continue researching into the relationships that emerge between tourists and destinations to promote destination loyalty and, therefore, the profitability that tourists offer over the time.

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The role of environmental CSR practices on the formation of behavioral intentions in a certified hotel context

Exploring the moderating effect of customer involvement in the buying process

El papel de las prácticas medioambientales de RSC en la formación de intenciones comportamentales en un contexto hotelero certificado

Explorando el efecto moderador de la involucración del consumidor en el proceso de compra

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the relationships among green practices, environmental corporate social responsibility (CSR) image, customers’ trust and their behavioral intentions in a certified hotel context and examine the moderating effect of customers’ involvement in the buying process.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was used to collect data from Spanish hotel customers. A structural equation model was developed to assess the research hypotheses.
Findings – Consumers’ trust on environmentally certified hotels has a direct effect on their behavioral intentions. Environmental CSR image has a direct effect on consumers’ trust on environmentally certified hotels, but it does not exert significant influence on consumers’ behavioral intentions. Additionally, the results support a positive and significant influence of consumers’ perceptions of green practices on the environmental CSR image of hotels. Finally, there is not a moderating effect of consumers’ involvement on the effects of green practices on CSR environmental image and of this variable on behavioral intentions.

Research limitations/implications – To cross validate the results of this study, it is recommended that the formation of behavioral intentions in various types of environmentally certified hotel settings be investigated in future research.

Practical implications – Hospitality managers should design strategies to raise the perception of the green-related features of environmentally certified companies.

Originality/value – No prior study investigates the relationship between green practices, customers’ trust, their degree of involvement in the buying process and their behavioral intentions in relation to companies’ environmental CSR image in the hotel sector.

Keywords Certified hotels, Hotel green practices, Environmental CSR image, Trust, Behavioral intentions

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Certification is a popular subject in tourism and hospitality. Certification is defined as a voluntary procedure that assesses audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process or service meets specific standards. Within the hospitality industry, quality
certifications (Iglesias et al., 2018) and environmental schemes (Martínez et al., 2018) have received the attention of academics and professionals. Given the ecological problems that plague the world (e.g. global warming, environmental degradation, habitat destruction, air and water pollution and resources depletion), environmental certifications have gained substantial popularity as a way to promote sustainable tourism. Growing environmental awareness has made customers change their attitudes and increasingly demand that the hospitality industry provides products and services that are ethically correct and environmentally friendly. This sector faces increasing pressure to operate in a more eco-friendly manner given its negative influence on the natural environment. This pressure does not come only from external imposed government regulations but also stakeholders’ demands are becoming an important stimulator. The industry’s impact on the natural environment includes habitat destruction and water and energy over-consumption, as well as soil, water and air contamination (Bohdanowicz, 2005). For these reasons, a number of stakeholders have called for the hospitality industry to actively engage in addressing environmental issues.

Hospitality managers need to find effective ways to respond to these demands since perceived deficiencies of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be damaging to corporate image and profitability (Benavides-Velasco et al., 2014). CSR has transformed from an interesting ideology to a realistic necessity for modern business (Marín and Lindgreen, 2017). As environmental CSR is considered to be one of the most important aspects of a tourism company’s responsible behavior, hospitality companies cannot afford the financial and reputational risks associated with lack of environmental commitment. With regard to this, previous scholars acknowledge that different dimensions of CSR can exist in the minds of consumers (Martínez et al., 2013; López et al., 2017; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). In this study, the authors’ purpose is to concentrate on the concept of environmental CSR image (as perceived by customers) as the expectations and opinions of this collective are considered to directly influence the design and effectiveness of corporate strategies (Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013).

To promote CSR and engage environmentally conscious consumers more and more hotels are implementing environmental schemes. Environmental certifications act as a means to promote the voluntary implementation of sustainability and CSR practices in hotels while distinguishing genuine eco-friendly companies from “green-washed” products and services (Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016). Environmental certifications ensure that environmental sustainability criteria are satisfied by certified hotel businesses. For example, the Green Building Council offers an initiative called Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) which certifies resource-efficient constructions. Another environmental certification growing in importance is the environmental management system ISO 14001, which is an international standard for sustainable operation. Large tourism business, such as the Hilton group, has initiated their own environmental schemes (we care!). Similarly, large hotel groups such as the state-owned Paradores de Turismo (Spain) are part of the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS).

Environmental schemes have been the subject of many studies. Claims about environmental certifications’ positive influence on financial performance, differentiation advantage achievement in green niche markets and improvement of green corporate image and reputation are well documented (Albertini, 2013; Heikkurinen, 2010). Other academics have also explored the motivations to put into practice these schemes (González-Benito and González-Benito, 2005) or even the cost of their implementation (Darnall and Edwards, 2006). Previous studies have also explored managers and operators’ perceptions of these systems (Geerts, 2014). Despite all this research, there is insufficient evidence about
customers’ perceptions regarding these schemes and how these certifications might relate to customers’ behavior. For example, although many studies observe an increased understanding of environmental issues, confirmed by an increase of consumers’ engagement in pro-environmental purchasing decisions (Di Pietro et al., 2013; Chan, 2013; Han et al., 2011; Kang et al., 2012; Millar et al., 2012), others maintain that demand for environmentally certified hotels is limited and emphasize that little progress has been made in modifying consumer behavior (Baker et al., 2014; Levy and Park, 2011; Line and Hanks, 2016). Such inconsistencies indicate a partial understanding on the aspects influencing green consumer behavior and emphasize the need for further research in this area. The authors suggest that these mixed findings may be partially ascribable to the mediating and moderating factors that significantly affect customers’ decision processes regarding green products and services.

The present paper attempts to explore the conditions under which customer’s perceptions about green practices lead to favorable behavioral intentions toward certified hotels by considering the influence of environmental CSR image and customers’ trust and the moderating effect of customers’ involvement in the buying process. Existing studies in environmental psychology and consumer behavior have shown that environmental CSR image, trust and customers’ involvement in the buying process are fundamental concepts in explaining green consumer behavior (Chen, 2010; Chen and Chang, 2013; Huang et al., 2014; Jeong et al., 2014; Kim, 2017; Lee et al., 2010; Martinez, 2015; Martinez et al., 2018; Namkung and Jang, 2013; Wong et al., 2015). However, previous research has had an inclination to investigate these variables separately. Therefore, it is obvious that hospitality theory and practice must include these essential factors as central constructs to explain customers’ behavioral intentions regarding green lodging products to promote sustainable tourism and develop effective green marketing strategies in a hotel context. To conclude, this paper addresses the calls for green marketing issues to be incorporated into the hospitality marketing literature (Chan and Hsu, 2016) and for the analysis of the relationship between environmental activities and corporate image and its outcome variables in explaining customer behavioral intentions (Yadav et al., 2016).

Section 2 provides an overview about the influence among green practices, environmental CSR image, customers’ trust and their behavioral intentions. Section 3 describes the methodology, including measures of variables, data collection procedures and sample characteristics. The results are then presented in Section 4 followed by the discussion of theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, research limitations and future lines of research are outlined in Section 5.

2. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

Issues related to the environment and the term “green marketing” are currently one of the most commonly discussed topics in academic research. This concept comprises:

All activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occur with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment (Polonsky, 1994, p. 2).

With environmental issues becoming of significant concern for society, the majority of firms all around the globe (and those in the hotel industry are no exception) are admitting their environmental responsibility and showing this by making a green commitment to adopt ecological initiatives voluntarily (Kim et al., 2016). One of the main expressions of this commitment is through environmental certification programs. Environmental certifications are considered to improve environmental performance by helping firms to focus on
environmental management and also to enhance the internal supervision of environmental performance (Darnall and Sides, 2008). Environmental schemes also benefit consumers by providing a guarantee of quality and reliability (Esparon et al., 2014). When adopting an official third party environmental certification, hotel companies obtain access to the knowledge of the certification institution, which provides them with personalized information about the implementation of environmental practices. Hoteliers reduce claims of “green-washing” in this way. Companies attempting to “green-wash” their corporate image selectively disclose favorable information about their environmental performance while omitting to make negative facts public (Rahman et al., 2015). Certification bodies establish pre-defined rules and goals and assess whether an audited hotel complies with them (Font, 2002). Third-party environmental certification therefore gives credibility to claims about corporate environmental performance and sustainable practices adopted by hotel companies.

Although green marketing initiatives are gaining popularity as a strategic advantage in the hospitality industry, there is a lack of studies analyzing the effect of corporate images on consumer behavior from a green marketing perspective (Yadav et al., 2016). As far as the authors know, no previous studies have explored the consequences of a hotel’s environmental CSR image and its role in developing F behaviors in a certified hotel context. Consequently, this research bridges the gap by investigating how to develop favorable customer behavioral intentions toward an environmentally certified hotel, based on the hotel’s environmental image, customer trust as well as their level of involvement.

2.1 Green practices and environmental corporate social responsibility image

Before explaining the notion of environmental CSR image and its link with green initiatives in a certified hotel context, it is necessary to briefly explain the concept of overall image. This notion is a multidimensional construct that refers to the perceptions a group of stakeholders has of a company (Fombrun, 1996). Keller (1993) defines this notion as a set of perceptions about a company reflected by firms’ associations in consumers’ memory. When it comes to understanding the dimensionality of this construct, researchers commonly differentiate between two main dimensions: corporate ability (CA) and CSR image (Brown and Dacin, 1997). CA refers to the perception of a company’s expertise and skills in producing and delivering product and service offerings, whereas CSR image refers to the perception and knowledge of a company’s activities and status relating to its societal and stakeholder obligations (He and Li, 2011).

The increasing academic interest in the concept of CSR has led to the proposition of several methodologies to measure stakeholder perceptions of this strategy. With regard to this, there is a growing interest of marketing academics within the hospitality field in studying CSR as perceived by customers (Martínez et al., 2013; Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015). In this sense, CSR image is defined as stakeholder perceptions of corporate responses to the general social concerns of stakeholder groups (Lai et al., 2010). Following this framework, previous scholars acknowledge that different dimensions of CSR can exist in the minds of consumers (Martínez et al., 2013; López et al., 2017; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). One-dimensional proposal applied to the study of CSR image is the sustainable development approach (van Marrewijk, 2003). From this perspective, CSR image is composed of the environmental, economic and social dimension of companies perceived by their stakeholders. The special relevance that the environmental domain holds in this perspective makes its use more focused on the study of those industries that have a special impact on the physical surroundings of the companies, such as tourism.
As previously mentioned, CSR image has been conceptualized by considering multiple dimensions such as environmental, economic and social domains (Martínez et al., 2013; López et al., 2017; Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017). Despite the attention to multiple dimensions of CSR image in the tourism and hospitality context, the need to address it has traditionally focused on each dimension separately. Environmental CSR image has become increasingly relevant since the 1980s when consumers become aware of environmental issues and their consequences for the planet. Accordingly, tourism companies are developing new corporate approaches such as green marketing strategies to please environmental requirements for customers (Polonsky, 1994). Green marketing literature remains focused on environmental concerns as well as consumer behavior. Based on the previous definition by Keller (1993) and considering a green marketing perspective, environmental CSR image is defined in this study as a set of perceptions of a firm in consumers’ mind that is linked to environmental commitment and concerns.

Therefore, a company’s environmental CSR image involves environmental or green-related attributes of the firm that its stakeholders come to perceive (Castro et al., 2016). Specifically, a hotel’s green image can be described as consumers’ mental perceptions of the hotel company that are linked to environmental concerns, and it can be expressed as a function of the most important green attributes of the hotel (Jeong et al., 2014). Similarly, customers’ perceptions of the green image of a hotel can be measured by the function of green practices that are important for the evaluation of the greenness of the hotel. A good environmental CSR image acts as a clear signal of a firms’ environmental commitment towards its key stakeholders and represents an effective means to improve not only environmental differentiation but also profitability (Heikkurinen, 2010). Hospitality companies promote their environmental CSR image to show their actual commitment towards sustainable issues, demonstrating to stakeholders their achievements in natural environmental protection.

Previous research indicates that the green initiatives of environmentally certified hotels can be a relevant factor to develop the green image of firms (Boiral, 2011; Heikkurinen, 2010; Jeong et al., 2014; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). These studies propose that these practices make a company’s products and services distinct, enhancing the firm’s environmental CSR image. For instance, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) demonstrate how a positive environmental image can be created through the implementation of environmental systems. In a similar way, Boiral (2011) reports that the adoption of environmental certifications helps firms to build their environmentally friendly image. Consequently, it seems obvious that these ideas should be extrapolated, and to propose that green practices in the hospitality industry can influence a customer’s environmental CSR image of a particular certified hotel. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

\[ H1. \] Customer perceptions of green practices positively affect the environmental CSR image of environmentally certified hotels.

### 2.2 Environmental corporate social responsibility image and behavioral intentions

The concept of a company’s image has been the focus of great interest among academics and practitioners because of its effects on customers’ behavioral decisions (Lin et al., 2007; Han et al., 2009; Jeong et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Ryu et al., 2012; Martínez, 2015; Martínez et al., 2018). Building customers’ positive intentions is an important goal for hospitality business since these intentions will ultimately increase customer retention rated and profits (Han et al., 2009). Consumers’ behavioral intentions represent the likelihood of consumer engagement in a specific behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Behavioral intentions are the
closest antecedents of actual behavior when examining individuals’ decision making-processes. This implies that scholars are able to predict specific behaviors with considerable accuracy from intentions to engage in the behavior under consideration. Behavioral intentions have been studied by examining three key dimensions; willingness to repurchase products or services from a company, to pay a premium price for these products and to recommend the company or to say positive comments about the company’s services (Zeithaml et al., 1996; Gao et al., 2016).

Previous studies in the tourism and hospitality context have traditionally devoted greater attention to exploring the influence of CA associations (quality service, professionalism of employees, etc.) on consumer behavior since these perceptions seem to have stronger connection with profitability and performance than CSR (Briggs et al., 2007; Wu and Chen, 2015; Tung et al., 2017). However, not only hospitality companies but also firms from other tourism subsectors are under increasing pressure to enhance their socially responsible behavior since CSR is an ethical standard for contemporary society and because it has implications for consumer behavior and corporate financial performance (Inoue and Lee, 2011). With regard to this, the authors have identified a growing interest of tourism and hospitality scholars in studying CSR as perceived by customers (e.g. CSR image) (Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015). These stakeholders have received special attention as their expectations and opinions are considered to have a direct impact on the design and effectiveness of corporate strategies. Focusing on the hospitality context, past researchers have found that customers’ responses to CSR image influence not only their levels of satisfaction, trust and identification with the company but also their loyalty towards hotel companies (Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013).

By concentrating our analysis on the environmental domain of CSR image, previous studies support the influence of environmental CSR image on customers’ behavior. In the hospitality setting, Lee et al. (2010) support the relationship between a green cognitive and affective image and customers’ behavioral intentions (in terms of intention to revisit, intention to offer positive recommendations and willingness to pay a premium). Liu et al. (2014) found that perceived environmental CSR can enhance perceived brand quality and brand preference. In the same vein, Martinez (2015) shows that green overall image has positive direct effect on customers’ trust, satisfaction and loyalty. Kim (2017) demonstrated that environmental CSR programs perceived by restaurants’ consumers generate favorable attitudes and intention to purchase from these companies. Therefore, this study proposed the next research hypothesis:

H2. Customers’ perceptions of a hotel’s environmental CSR image positively affect their behavioral intentions.

2.3 Environmental corporate social responsibility image and trust

Perceptions of CSR image can enhance trust on the part of customers (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Lacey and Kennett-Hensel, 2010). Marketing academics suggest that CSR influences customer attitudes and behaviors through trust (Vlachos et al., 2009). In this sense, trust is the “expectation by one person, group or firm of ethically behavior” (Hosmer, 1994, p. 399). Therefore, CSR should be closely related to develop moral capital “placing trust, a moral value construct, as central in evaluating the performance of CSR” (Vlachos et al., 2009, p. 173). Previous research has demonstrated that trust mediates the effect of perceived CSR on customer behavioral intentions because perceived CSR send important signals to customers about a firm’s ethical stance and moral values, and therefore the extent to which it can be trusted (Chen, 2010; Chen and Chang, 2013; Lin et al., 2011). In line with these ideas,
marketing academics propose that stakeholders resolve to trust companies based upon their evaluation of those companies’ values and ethics (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Extant research in the hospitality context supports this effect. For instance, Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) found that the perception of CSR initiatives build customer trust in a hotel company which in turn positively impacts customer loyalty. Focusing our attention of the environmental dimension of CSR, we propose that:

\[ H3. \] Customer perceptions of a hotel’s environmental CSR image positively affect their trust.

2.4 Trust and behavioral intentions
Trust is considered by many scholars as the pillar of relationship marketing since this construct produces several outcomes that encourage productivity, efficiency and effectiveness (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Previous literature in the hospitality sector recognizes trust as the primary indicator of customer exchange relationships and consequently facilitating favorable customer behavioral intentions (Vlachos et al., 2009). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22), trust is “central to successful relationships marketing because it encourages marketers to work at preserving relationships investments by cooperating with exchange partners”. More specifically, Mouzas et al. (2007, p. 1016), in support of relationship marketing theory noted, “trust is perceived in the marketing literature as a significant, if not pivotal, aspect of business relationships”. Within the context of this research, customer trust based on environmental aspects can be identified as the tendency of a customer to believe that a firm keeps its promises regarding green performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). If one party trusts the other, the intended behavior will be aligned positively. Previous studies have demonstrated that trust is an important mediator between corporate activities (e.g. CSR) and consumer behavior (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Pivato et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2011). The suggestion from the foregoing discussion is that customer behavioral intentions are influenced by customer trust. Then, the following hypothesis is proposed:

\[ H4. \] Customer trust positively affects their behavioral intentions.

2.5 The effect on customer involvement in the buying process on the relationship among green practices, environmental corporate social responsibility image and customer behavioral intentions
The information processing theory provides a theoretical foundation on which to explore the moderating effect of customer involvement on the relationship between green practices and a hotel’s environmental CSR image and of this variable on customer behavioral intentions. One general model offered by social psychology literature which describes how information processing takes place is the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980). This framework suggests that individuals process new pieces of information either heuristically or systematically. Heuristic processing is based on shortcuts, clues or proxies to evaluate a situation, requiring less cognitive than deeper processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The disadvantage of using heuristic is that the process is less detailed and can result in less accurate conclusions, resulting in potentially incomplete gathering of information. On the other hand, systematic processing is a deeper and more cognitive processing of information (Chaiken, 1980). This kind of processing entails gathering a plethora of information, analyzing it, and using it to obtain a conclusion. This process is much more time-intensive,
effortful and cognitively demanding that heuristic processing, but the result often leads to a more accurate conclusion or evaluation.

Previous research supports the idea that systematic information processing is used by high involved individuals while heuristic processing strategy is used by low involved individuals (Chaiken, 1980). The concept of consumer involvement is “a person’s perceived relevance of the consumption object based in inherent needs, values and interests” (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). It is worth noting that a widely used classification of involvement divides it into two types: product involvement and purchase-decision involvement. We are concerned with purchase-decision involvement in this study. Consumers are involved with the purchase process when they perceive the decision as corresponding to something of considerable value or fundamental importance in their lives. Consequently, a consumer’s level of involvement depends on the degree of personal relevance that the purchase-decision holds for that consumer. When customer involvement in purchasing a certain product (e.g. hotels) is high, customers show much interest in their decision-making process and seek a lot of information on the product or service (e.g. characteristics of hotels including green-attributes). Therefore, as involvement increases consumers have greater motivation to comprehend and elaborate on information salient to the purchase, resulting in a greater depth of information processing and more extended decision making (systematic processing). Therefore, high involved customers will create more durable and resistant images and attitudes, less prone to change and more indicative of future behavior. Consequently, in the context of this research, for high involved hotel guests the influence of hotels’ green practices on their environmental CSR image will be stronger that for less involved guests. Therefore, it is proposed:

**H5.** When customers have high levels of purchase-decision involvement, the relationship between green practices and the perception of a hotel’s environmental CSR image will be stronger than for those customers with a low level of purchase-decision involvement.

In a similar way, research has shown that involvement plays an essential part in altering consumers’ attitudes and purchase behaviors (Slama and Tashchian, 1985). So that, consumers who are more involved in the purchase-decision process of an environmentally certified hotel may be more likely to consider the environmental CSR image of the firm when they make a lodging decision than those who are low involved. Similarly, the influence of environmental CSR image on their behavioral intentions will be stronger. Accordingly, it is postulated that:

**H6.** When customers have high levels of purchase-decision involvement, the relationship between the perception of a hotel's environmental CSR image and their intentions will be stronger than for those customers with a low level of purchase-decision involvement.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Measures

To fulfill our research objectives, one questionnaire was developed aimed at guests staying at Spanish environmentally certified hotels. For each item respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (or disagreement) using a seven-point Likert scale. Green practices were measured following Jeong *et al.* (2014). Four items based on Jeong *et al.* (2014) were used to measure hotels' environmental CSR image. To assess trust, four items based on the
study by Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) were used. Behavioral intentions were measured with three items based on Gao et al. (2016). Finally, customer involvement was measured following Jung and Yoon (2012). The Appendix shows the scales used for each factor.

Participants were introduced with general information about environmental certifications and their goals to ensure that respondents were able to manifest their judgments about these schemes. In addition, the survey solicited information regarding respondents’ demographic and traveling characteristics including gender, age, level of education, occupation, purpose of travel and previous experience with a certified hotel.

3.2 Data collection and sample profile
A sample of hotel customers in Spain was surveyed using a structured questionnaire to test the research hypotheses. Given that Spain has a substantial number of certified hotels and is a global leader as a tourist destination, and given also the international presence of Spanish hotel chains, this country can serve as an interesting context in which to test the research model. The sample used in the research was formed of consumers of hospitality services in general (hotel guests), and the survey did not refer to any specific level of hotels. This is justified for two main reasons. First of all, we intended to study the perception and dispositions towards environmentally certified hotels in general, avoiding the possible influence of linking the research to specific hotel categories (e.g. luxury, standard or comfort hotel companies). Additionally, we decided to study hotel guests to guarantee that the individuals interviewed have sufficient knowledge of hospitality services and are used to make-decisions on hotel booking, so that they can take into account (or not) the fact that a hotel is environmentally certified. Personal surveys were carried out in respondents’ homes to ensure their comfort and make sure that they took time to answer the questions calmly and thoughtfully. The length of the interviews averaged 10-15 min to avoid fatigue in the respondents.

To design the research sample, a non-probability sampling procedure was chosen (Trespalacios et al., 2005). Specifically, a convenience sample was used, as the researchers did not have access to a census of environmentally certified hotel guests in Spain, and it was not possible to determine the probability of any particular element of the population being chosen for the sample. Thus, to ensure a greater representation of the data, a multistage sampling by quotas was made by characterizing the population according to two criteria relevant to the investigation: the gender and the age of the respondents, which are included in the National Statistics Institute (2016). Thus, our sample replicates the real profile of the population. Table I displays the profile of the respondents.

To explore the issue of non-response bias, the authors tested for differences between early and late respondents. As recommended by Weiss and Heide (1993), early responses were defined as the first 75 per cent of returned questionnaires. The last 25 per cent were considered late respondents and representative of individuals that did not respond to the survey. Early and late respondents were compared on gender, age, education and occupation using a t-test and no significant differences were found suggesting that non-response bias was not an issue. Additionally, to control for social desirability bias anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized orally (Chung and Monroe, 2003). As well as anonymity and confidentiality, we emphasized that there is no right or wrong answers to further decrease social desirability bias.

4. Results
A covariance-based structural equations model (CB-SEM) approach is used to test the research hypotheses, using a robust maximum-likelihood estimation procedure, to avoid
problems of non-normality of the data. First, the measurement model was estimated with confirmatory factor analysis to test the psychometric properties of the measurement scales (reliability and validity). Next, the structural model was estimated to contrast the direct causal effects established in research hypotheses $H1$ to $H4$. Finally, the moderating effect of customer involvement is tested through a multi-group analysis to check if the influence of green practices on environmental CSR image and of this variable on behavioral intentions is affected by the degree of consumers’ involvement in the hotel purchasing process.

4.1 Estimation of the measurement model
The results obtained for the goodness-of-fit indexes show a correct specification for the measurement model. The results summarized in Table II confirm that the Bentler-Bonett normed fit index (BBNFI), Bentler-Bonett non-normed fit index (BBNNFI), incremental fit index (IFI) and Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI) statistics clearly exceed the recommended minimum value of 0.9. RMSEA is located within the maximum limit of 0.08, and normed $\chi^2$ takes a value clearly under the recommended value of 3.0 (Hair et al., 2010).

The reliability of the measurement scales is evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha, compound reliability and AVE coefficients (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The values of these
statistics are, in every case, clearly above the required minimum values of 0.7 and 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010), which supports the inner reliability of the proposed constructs (Table II). The convergent validity of the scales is also confirmed (Table II), as all items are significant to a confidence level of 95 per cent and their standardized lambda coefficients are higher than 0.5 (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991).

Discriminant validity of the scales is tested following the procedures proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), and Fornell and Larcker (1981). The approach proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) is based on the analysis of confidence intervals for the inter-construct correlations. According to this method, the discriminant validity of the measurement instruments used in this research is supported, given that none of the confidence intervals for the correlation among pairs of factors contains value 1.0 (Table III). The procedure proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) is based in the comparison of the variance extracted for each pair of constructs (AVE coefficient) with the squared correlation estimate between these two constructs. If the variances extracted are greater than the squared correlation, this is evidence of discriminant validity. Only one pair of constructs did not pass the test (environmental CSR image – Green Practices), although the difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Stand. Coeff.</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Goodness of fit indices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral intention (BI)</td>
<td>BI1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>Normed $\chi^2 = 2.26$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BI2</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BBNFI = 0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BI3</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BBNNFI = 0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRU1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>CFI = 0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRU2</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IFI = 0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRU3</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RMSEA = 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRU4</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental CSR image (ECI)</td>
<td>ECI1</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECI2</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECI3</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECI4</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green practices (GPR)</td>
<td>GPR1</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPR2</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPR3</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPR4</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement (INV)</td>
<td>INV1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INV2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INV3</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INV4</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INV5</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INV6</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II.
Measurement model
(confirmatory factor analysis)

Table III.
Confidence intervals for the correlation among pairs of factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavioral intention (BI)</th>
<th>Trust (TRU)</th>
<th>Environmental CSR image (ECI)</th>
<th>Green practices (GPR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust (TRU)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental CSR image (ECI)</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green practices (GPR)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement (INV)</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 = 2.26$, BBNFI = 0.93, BBNNFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05
between the AVE coefficient and the squared correlations in this case is very small (Table IV). According to these results, there is reasonable support for the discriminant validity of the scales used in this research.

4.2 Estimation of hypothesized structural model

Once the psychometric properties of the scales were tested in the previous stage, the structural model formed by direct effects proposed in H1 to H4 was estimated, using Robust Maximum Likelihood. The results obtained in the first estimation of the model support all the causal effects proposed, except the influence of environmental CSR image on behavioral intentions (H2). Therefore, and following the model development approach (Hair et al., 2010), the original model was reformulated to exclude the non-significant relationship. Figure 1 summarizes the results for the estimation of the revised model, including $R^2$ statistics for each dependent variable, standardized coefficients for each relationship, and the statistical significance of each effect. The goodness-of-fit indices support the correct definition of the revised model (normed $\chi^2 = 2.2$; BBNFI = 0.97; BBNNFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99; IFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.05), and $R^2$ statistic takes values over 0.40 in all cases, which shows that the theoretical model proposed provides a substantial explanation of the variance of the dependent variables.

The empirical evidence obtained confirms that consumers’ trust on environmentally certified hotels has a direct effect on their behavioral intentions, thus supporting $H4$. Regarding environmental CSR image, according to the results obtained, this variable has a direct effect on consumers’ trust on environmentally certified hotels ($H3$ is supported), but this variable does not exert significant influence on consumers’ behavioral intentions ($H2$ is not supported). Therefore, the influence of environmental CSR image on consumers’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral intention (BI)</th>
<th>Trust (TRU)</th>
<th>Environmental CSR image (ECI)</th>
<th>Green practices (GPR)</th>
<th>Involvement (INV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral intention (BI)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust (TRU)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental CSR image (ECI)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green practices (GPR)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement (INV)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $a = $AVE Coefficient for the construct. Off diagonal elements are the squared correlations among constructs.

Table IV. Results for Fornell and Larcker’s criterion for discriminant validity

![Figure 1. Structural model (causal effects)](image-url)
behavioral intentions with regard to environmentally certified hotels is totally mediated by trust perceptions. Finally, the results obtained support a positive and significant influence of consumers’ perceptions of green practices on the environmental CSR image of environmentally certified hotels (H1 is supported).

4.3 Moderating effect of involvement: multi-group analysis
A multi-group model was developed to check if the influence of green practices on environmental CSR image and of this variable on behavioral intentions is affected by the degree of consumers’ involvement in the hotel purchasing process (H5 and H6). Specifically, the multi-group models allow analyzing the equality of the parameters considered in a structural model between different groups. Thus, the multi-group models allow evaluation of the structural parameters for each sub-group, as well as compare the obtained value for each causal relation using the LM test. In particular, the differences among groups using the statistics $\chi^2$ with a degree of freedom are analyzed comparing the restricted and non-restricted models.

For the purpose of segmenting customers based on their involvement in the purchasing process, a K-means cluster analysis was carried out. Results showed that customers should be classified in two different subsamples depending on their Involvement in the purchasing process: high involvement (61.6 per cent) and low involvement (38.4 per cent). The results of the ANOVA test confirm the existence of significant differences between the two groups identified for all the items forming the scale used for the measurement of involvement in the purchasing process (p-values < 0.05 in all cases). The results for the multi-group analysis developed based on customers’ involvement in the purchasing process are summarized in Table V.

The goodness-of-fit indexes of the multi-group model are clearly within the recommended values, confirming the fit of the model to data (normed $\chi^2 = 2.3$; BBNFI = 0.91; BBNNFI = 0.94; CFI = 0.95; IFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.05). The results from the Lagrange Multiplier test (LM test) show that there are significant differences between the sub-groups of low involvement vs. high involvement in the purchasing process (p-values < 0.05) for the influence of environmental CSR image on behavioral intentions (H5). However, this direct effect is non-significant for both subsamples, so the moderating effect of Involvement is irrelevant in this case. Additionally, the results from the LM test show that there are no significant differences between the sub-groups of low involvement vs. high involvement in the purchasing process (p-values > 0.01) for the effect of green practices on environmental CSR image (H6). In consequence, according to the empirical evidence obtained, there is not an effective moderating effect of consumers’ involvement on the effects of green practices on CSR environmental image and of this variable on behavioral intentions.

5. Conclusion
This research is interested in customers’ responses toward environmental practices in a certified hotel context, which stakeholders consider to be the most important aspect of tourism companies’ CSR image. As recent studies recognize a discrepancy between environmental perceptions and actual purchases of sustainable products and services, this research contributes to our understanding of the disconnect between environmental perceptions and behavior when it comes to the consumption of green hotel services by examining the alignment of customers’ perceptions on the perceived performance of certified hotels.

This research makes theoretical contributions to the sustainable tourism literature in general and hospitality literature in particular through the convergence among different
research streams such as environmental psychology and consumer behavior. By considering the degree of customers’ involvement in the buying process and their perceptions of green initiatives with the idea that hotels’ environmental CSR image and customers’ trust are important constructs for understanding green consumer behavior, this research suggests a research framework to delve into customers’ behavioral intentions toward environmentally certified hotels. This study presents additional theoretical contributions to academic literature. First, no prior study investigates the relationship between green practices, customers’ trust, their degree of involvement in the buying process and their behavioral intentions in relation to companies’ environmental CSR image in the hotel sector. Our study enriches hospitality literature by integrating in the same proposal green practices, environmental CSR image and pro-environmental behaviors, in which customers’ involvement in the buying process plays a moderation role for the linkage between environmental CSR image and customer’s behavioral intentions.

Second, it demonstrates that environmental CSR image becomes a powerful tool for developing favorable pro-environmental behaviors. By implementing green practices, environmentally certified hotels can motivate customers to shape a mental image of a particular hotel’s level of commitment toward environmental issues and the way in which the company presents itself with respect to its social responsible activities, which is consistent with previous research (Martínez et al., 2018). In this sense, this research demonstrates that customers’ perceptions of green practices act as a major driver when choosing a certified hotel. In addition, the environmental CSR image emphasized in this study facilitates an improvement in customers’ perceptions regarding environmentally certified hotel attributes that serve to develop favorable customer responses. With regard to this, this study did not find empirical support for a direct effect of environmental CSR image on consumers’ behavioral intentions. However, it is demonstrated that this influence is mediated by consumers’ trust. According to this research, having a positive environmental CSR image is a clear incentive for consumers to believe that companies keep their promises regarding their green performance, but it does not necessarily determine their purchase decisions. The reason for this result may be the lack of communication regarding specific environmental initiatives from the hospitality industry to their consumers which may be preventing consumers from engaging actively in pro-environmental behaviors.

To conclude, there is not an effective moderating effect of consumers’ involvement on the effects of green practices on CSR environmental image. For guests with high levels of purchase-decision involvement, the influence of hotels’ green practices on their environmental CSR image is not stronger that for less involved guests. This may suggest that the information processing is similar for both types of individuals (high involved vs low involved guests). As noted in the previous literature, highly involved individuals tend to engage in extensive prior thinking through searching product relevant information. Nevertheless, our results show that the knowledge about green-related features of environmentally certified hotels is not as profound as we may expect from a systematic process of information. Thus, in this study, guests seem not to have developed sufficient knowledge and become highly familiar with environmentally certified hotels as the levels of involvement elevate.

\[
\begin{array}{l|c|c|c}
 & \text{Standard. coef} & \text{Standard. coef} & \text{LM test} \\
 & \text{Low involvement} & \text{High involvement} & \text{p-value} \\
\hline
H5. \text{Green practices } \rightarrow \text{Environmental CSR image} & 0.79 & 0.80 & 0.19 \\
H6. \text{Environmental CSR image } \rightarrow \text{Behavioral intentions} & 0.07 & 0.06 & 0.02 \\
\end{array}
\]
These findings have important managerial implications for hospitality companies. First, as not all customers are familiar with the advantages and operation mechanisms of environmentally certified hotels, strategies to popularize these firms and encourage consumers to visit them are important. Therefore, hospitality managers should design strategies to raise the perception of the green-related features of environmentally certified companies. Second, hoteliers should improve their hotel’s environmental CSR image and increase the level of consumer trust. Our results show the importance of environmental certifications to do so and demonstrate that green issues are a key strategic tool for certified hotels to incorporate into their management strategies and policies. Several international organizations offer third-party environmental certifications, such as AENOR (The Spanish Association for Standardization and Certification) that offers the ISO 14001 certification helping hotel companies to evaluate, manage and improve their environmental performance. Hoteliers should also promote environmental campaigns to highlight the significance of ecological problems, which then may help to build up their hotels’ environmental CSR image. Practitioners can use multiple channels to publicize the advantages of environmentally certified hotels and explain their goals to make the consumers understand the ideas behind operating certified hotels and trigger favorable behavioral responses. With regard to this, managers should emphasize the benefits of implementing these certifications and the achievements obtained after their implementation. For instance, advertising, public relations or social media should be valuable to increase the exposure of environmentally certified hotels and encourage customers to believe that these hotels make a difference in protecting and improving the environment. Possible channels through which managers may do this include media advertising, speeches, reports, press releases, Web pages, announcements, newsletters, articles and CSR reports. In addition, social media channels, notably, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, are increasingly popular. Managers may also easily add in information to their booking confirmation to interest and engage guests. Nevertheless, these communication techniques need to convince consumers that environmentally certified hotels make a difference in protecting the environment, in order that consumers do not become skeptical. Through effective communication strategies promoting the achievement of official third-party environmental certifications, hoteliers can show how they make a genuine commitment to the environment and reduce ambiguity. Consequently, hotel guests would not under-perceive the environmental CSR image of certified hotels, and would thereby develop positive behavioral intentions. Additionally, hoteliers should develop specific programs to increase customer and employees’ knowledge about environmental issues to increase their trust.

To conclude, the results of this study have identified two types of consumers regarding their level of involvement with the purchasing process (low vs. high involvement). As previously explained, each group processes the information received in a different way (systematic vs heuristic processing). So that, professionals are recommended to design different communication messages considering this aspect. Therefore, for high involved consumers it is recommended to design communicative messages including detailed information about green-related aspects of environmentally certified hotels (e.g. benefits of implementing these certifications) in an attempt to uncover all of the reasons in support of the purchase decision (e.g. to stay in an environmentally certified hotel) and the merits of this decision (e.g. contribute to the reduction of environmental degradation). On the other hand, for low involved consumers, it is recommended to use simple cues. For instance, it would be interesting to make visible the logos of environmental certifications implemented by hotel companies in different displays (e.g. corporate webpages or information brochures) or considering additional aspects such as visual appeal to emphasize benefits of
environmentally certified hotels (e.g. photographs and images to increase perception of green practices).

The study is not without its limitations. First, it was performed in the Spanish hotel context, so that future lines of research could focus on other hospitality sectors (e.g. restaurants, managed food service, event planning, travel agents or tour operators) or other countries with a longer tradition in sustainable and green issues, to generalize the results presented here. In this sense, since this study focuses on customer behavior in a specific segment of the accommodation industry (e.g. hotels), the findings in other hotel contexts may be different. Therefore, future research should also examine the relationships among the study constructs in various types of hotel settings (e.g. suite hotels, resort hotels or casino hotels) to validate the current model. Third, a non-probability sampling procedure (e.g. a convenience sample) was used. Given the unavailability of a reliable hotel decision-maker profile, the sample obtained was distributed similarly to the Spanish population as potential decision-makers of hotel purchases. Fourth, this study was designed to examine general hotel customers’ intention formation towards environmentally certified hotels. Different groups of customers may have different decision-making processes. For example, hotel guests in the economy segment of the hotel industry may not be consistent with luxury hotel customers’ intentions. Thus, to cross validate the results of this study in each segment of hotels, it is strongly recommended that the formation of behavioral intentions in various types of environmentally certified hotel settings be investigated in future research. It should also be interesting to combine the use of traditional techniques to collect data (e.g. questionnaires) with neurophysiological tools to support a more holistic understanding of pro-environmental behavioral intentions.

References


Appendix

Table AI.
Measurement scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Construct/item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BI1</td>
<td>I intend to stay in an environmentally certified hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI2</td>
<td>It is acceptable to pay more to stay in an environmentally certified hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI3</td>
<td>I often recommend environmentally certified hotels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU1</td>
<td>I trust that environmentally certified hotels are competent at what they are doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU2</td>
<td>I feel that environmentally certified hotels are trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU3</td>
<td>I feel that environmentally certified hotels are of very high integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU4</td>
<td>I feel that environmentally certified hotels are very responsive to customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECI1</td>
<td>Environmentally certified hotels behave in a socially responsible way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECI2</td>
<td>I think that environmentally certified hotels are responsible regarding environmental issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECI3</td>
<td>I believe that environmentally certified hotels are concerned about environmental conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECI4</td>
<td>I think that environmentally certified hotels not only care about generating profits but also about the environment and consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPR1</td>
<td>I believe that environmentally certified hotels use recyclable disposable containers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPR2</td>
<td>I believe that environmentally certified hotels recycle their waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPR3</td>
<td>I think that environmentally certified hotels have equipment to reduce water consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPR4</td>
<td>I think that environmentally certified hotels have equipment to reduce energy consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV1</td>
<td>I like being involved in making the decision of choosing a hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV2</td>
<td>Purchases decisions for hotels are very important to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV3</td>
<td>I attach great importance to choosing a hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV4</td>
<td>I place great value in making the right decision when it comes to hotels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV5</td>
<td>Making purchase decisions for hotel selection is significant to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV6</td>
<td>I think a lot about my choices when it comes to hotel selection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Behavioral intentions (Adapted from Gao et al., 2016)
Trust (Adapted from Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002)
Environmental CSR image (Adapted from Jeong et al., 2014)
Green practices (Adapted from Jeong et al., 2014)
Involvement in the buying process (Adapted from Jung and Yoon, 2012)

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Antecedents of brand hate in the fast food industry

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of brand hate in detail which is the extreme negative emotion toward brands, by giving a comprehensive explanation concerning how brand hate evolves in consumers. More specifically, antecedents of brand hate are empirically assessed in this study.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used primary data from 250 fast food brand consumers in Pakistan. Multiple regression analysis in SPSS was used to test the hypotheses related to the antecedents of brand hate.

Findings – Results indicate that brand hate is instigated by five antecedents, which are negative past experience, symbolic incongruity, poor relationship quality, ideological incompatibility and rumor, with rumor being the biggest instigator.

Originality/value – Antecedents of brand hate are assessed theoretically and empirically in this study which helps in understanding the true form of brand hate. More specifically, poor relationship quality and rumor are presented as the antecedents of brand hate according to the recommendations of the theory of hate.

Keywords Brand management, Brand hate, Customer brand relationship

Resumen
Propósito – El objetivo de este trabajo es explorar en detalle el concepto de odio a la marca, que es la emoción negativa extrema hacia las marcas, dando una explicación completa sobre cómo evoluciona el odio a la marca en los consumidores. Más específicamente, en este estudio se evalúan empíricamente los antecedentes de odio a la marca.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Este estudio utilizó datos primarios de 250 consumidores de marcas de comida rápida en Pakistán. El análisis de regresión múltiple en SPSS se utiliza para probar las hipótesis relacionadas con los antecedentes del odio a la marca.

Hallazgos – Los resultados indican que el odio a la marca viene motivado por cinco antecedentes que son una experiencia pasada negativa, la incongruencia simbólica, la mala calidad de la relación, la incompatibilidad ideológica y el rumor negativo, siendo el rumor el mayor antecedente.
1. Introduction

In today’s world, companies have started to realize the importance of their brands and consider them as their high-end assets (Keller, 2013). As the traditional marketing methods have changed, so has the relationship between brands and their consumers, which is more of a relationship-based interaction rather than transaction-based (Aaker et al., 2004; Fournier, 1998; Fournier et al., 2012). This relationship-based interaction with brands differs significantly in different consumers (Fournier, 1998; Alvarez and Fournier, 2016). Some consumers may have feelings of love for their brands while others might have feelings of hate for specific brands (Khan and Lee, 2014). The research related to negative emotions toward brands is insubstantial as stated by Romani et al. (2012) that “brand research has provided scant information on the negative emotional states that consumers experience in relation to brands.” Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015) also expressed the same views and stated that “specifically extreme negative emotions or the “dark-side” of consumer brand relationships need further investigations.”

It is quite a revelation that research related to negative relationships between brands and consumers is scant, as previous research in psychology (Briscoe et al., 1967; Ito et al., 1998) and consumer behavior (Banister and Hogg, 2004) shows that instead of remembering positive events people recall negative events more quickly and more often. Moreover, Baumeister et al. (2001) explained that if people encounter both positive and negative experiences of the same strength then it is more likely that people share the negative experience first or give negative reviews about the brand and may forget the positive experience. Looking from a business point of view, this negativity in consumer–brand relations can cause troubles for companies and their brands (Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Kucuk, 2008; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009).

While recent studies related to negative relationships between brands and consumers have discussed various aspects, they have not used quantitative data in doing so, except Hegner et al. (2017) and Zarantonello et al. (2016), who discussed the extreme negative emotion known as brand hate. Kucuk (2016) also gave an in-depth conceptual explanation regarding brand hate and its determinants. Hegner et al. (2017), Kucuk (2016) and Zarantonello et al. (2016) are among the first researchers who investigated the concept of brand hate in detail and found certain factors that can instigate the feelings of hatred among consumers. But there is still a gap in the theory regarding the factors that can generate feeling of hatred and also the previous studies have put great emphasis on further investigation into this extreme negative emotion (cf. Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Park et al., 2013). Moreover, from a business perspective, previous research on anti-brand websites reveals that there is a huge negative impact of brand haters on companies, resulting in heavy loss (Kucuk, 2008; Kucuk, 2014; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009).

This study follows the footsteps of Hegner et al. (2017) and Zarantonello et al. (2016) and contributes in explaining the concept of brand hate by empirically assessing the antecedents of brand hate. This study covers the limitations of the previous studies on brand hate where only three factors were discussed while there can be more factors that triggers brand hate. To deal effectively with brand hate, first, one must know each of the factors that influence brand hate and, therefore, this study explains and discusses the antecedents of brand hate in more depth. Antecedents of brand hate are discussed under the umbrella of a well-known theory, i.
e. theory of hate (Sternberg, 2003). First we reviewed the existing literature in this regard and further, to accomplish our goals, we collected primary data from Pakistani consumers of fast food brands. In the end theoretical along with managerial implications are discussed.

2. Theoretical background

Theories of consumer resistance and anti-consumption show us the way brands are rejected by consumers for several reasons. Zavestoski (2002) defined anti-consumption as showing hostility, hatred or non-acceptance toward consumption. Anti-consumption can be related to various research topics such as consumer resistance (Fournier, 1998; Sheth, 1981), non-consumption (Stammerjohan and Webster, 2002), brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a), consumer cynicism (Odou and de Pechpeyrou, 2011) and consumer boycotts (Klein et al., 2004). In opposition to research on traditional consumer behavior, which focuses on why certain brands are consumed or preferred by the consumers, research on anti-consumption emphasizes on why certain brands are not consumed or rejected by the consumers (Lee et al., 2009b; Lee et al., 2009c).

Anti-consumption can be perceived as a movement against mass consumption of brands to achieve goals that are sometimes personal or sometimes societal (Iyer and Muncy, 2009). Therefore, anti-consumption helps consumers to reveal their emotions, feelings, identities and beliefs (Cherrier and Murray, 2007). Consumers having extreme anger, hostility and hatred are the ones that move toward anti-consumption. Sternberg (2003) has explained these extreme negative emotions in detail and form the theory of hate which provides in-depth understanding of hate. Sternberg (2003) presented five declarations regarding the concept of hate: first is that hate and love are interconnected because generally the feelings of love can be converted quickly into feelings of hate and sometimes even the perceptions of one's actions can lead to hate. Second, hate does not mean inverse of love or lack of love. Because of the fact that hate has many sides, it cannot be wrong to say that hate and love can survive at the same time and sometimes only one exists. Third, just like love, hate has a triangular formation; both love and hate have three components which are almost the same with different directions, i.e. love components are intimacy, passion and commitment (Sternberg, 1986, 1988a, 1998b, 2006) while negation of intimacy, passion and commitment are known as hate components (Sternberg, 2003, 2005; Sternberg and Sternberg, 2008). The fourth declaration of the theory of hate explains that just like love, hate can be originated from the stories related to the targeted object. Sternberg (2003) argued that stories can generate feelings of love and hate and those stories then keep spreading. Fifth, hate is a predecessor of massacres, terrorism and genocide. So, the central point is that as love and hate are interrelated, it would be easy to understand one with the help of another.

Based on Sternberg's conceptualization of hate, we consider brand hate as a more negative and intense emotion than brand dislike, as suggested by Sternberg (2003), that hate between people, i.e. interpersonal or social hate, is also a conceptually and empirically distinct construct rather than only an intense form of disliking. According to the existing marketing and psychology literature, there are three determinants of hate, i.e. consumer's dissatisfaction related to the performance of product or service, incongruence between brand image and self-image and finally the unacceptance of organizational behavior related to moral corporate wrongdoings (Bryson et al., 2013; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016). But this study contributes further in this regard and conceptualizes brand hate to be triggered by five antecedents rather than only three.

The two new antecedents, i.e. rumor and poor relationship quality, are added on the basis of strong recommendation of the theory of hate (Sternberg, 2003). The theory of hate claims that besides direct personal experiences, indirect non-personal experiences (e.g. rumors) can
also generate the feelings of hatred, which implies that rumors in marketplace can trigger brand hate among consumers of a brand. Furthermore, theory of hate claims that a poor quality of relationship leads to hatred between two parties. Also, according to the theory of consumer–brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), a good relationship quality leads to love and a bad relationship quality can destroy that love relationship between consumer and brands and further lead to hatred. Besides this theoretical discussion, let us have a look at brand hate in more detail from the perspective of research scholars in the field of psychology and marketing.

2.1 Brand hate

The previous literature in psychology shows that generally hate is considered in interpersonal relationships, while there is another perspective which is hatred toward objects and object hate is not like interpersonal hate. In view of Opotow (2005), majority of students link their hate more with an object instead of a person. There is scarce research on object hate in behavior theories, consumer psychology and general psychology (Kucuk, 2016). According to Fournier (1998) people see brands as humans and connect with them as their companions and show feelings and emotions toward their favorite brands which are characterized as human. By using the conceptualization of Sternberg (2003), Kucuk (2016) defined the concept of brand hate in three constructs, which are cold brand hate, cool brand hate and hot brand hate.

According to Kucuk (2016), cold brand hate is the early notion of brand hate which is not much severe, which is why it is considered the passive form of brand hate and conceptualized as the absence of relationship between brand and the consumer. Consumers just ignore the hated brand and leave it behind by considering it worthless (Kucuk, 2016). Cool brand hate is more than just avoiding the hated brand because the feelings are stronger, resulting in complete dislike, dissatisfaction and unhappiness given by the brand. According to Kucuk (2016), cool brand hate includes feelings of disgust which result in stronger emotions and sharper behaviors. Kucuk (2016) further explained hot brand hate as the severe anger and anxiety feelings toward the target brand. Hot brand hate occurs when one feels frustration and helplessness after experiencing some failure from the brand (Kucuk, 2016). The same happens when there is an utmost service failure (Johnson et al., 2011; Gelbrich, 2010) and occasionally immoral acts by the firms or brands create these negative feelings in consumers who then want to hurt those brands (Sweetin et al., 2013). These are regarded as the antecedents of brand hate, which are explained in more detail in the next section.

3. Theoretical model

Research related to negative relationships between brands and their consumers focused originally on anti-consumption (Hogg, 1998; Iyer and Muncy, 2009; Cromie and Ewing, 2009) and boycott (Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009) while more recently shifting the focus specifically to brands such as brand rejection (Nenycz-Thiel and Romanuik, 2011; Sandikci and Ekici, 2009), brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a), brand dislike (Romani et al., 2009), brand sabotage (Kahr et al., 2016), anti-branding (Romani et al., 2015) and brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017; Kucuk, 2016; Zarantonello et al., 2016; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). A detailed overview of the literature regarding antecedents and outcomes of negative emotions and behaviors is presented in Appendix 1. Based on these studies and theoretical discussion, we have identified five antecedents of brand hate, namely, negative past experience, symbolic incongruity, poor relationship quality, ideological incompatibility and rumor. These five factors have been declared as the antecedents of brand hate according to the theory of hate
theory of consumer–brand relationship (Fournier, 1998) and previous studies on brand hate. There could be more antecedents which require further assessment of the theories in the field of marketing and psychology. Let us shed some light on the antecedents of brand hate.

3.1 Negative past experience
Negative past experience (NPE) refers to the bad experiences that consumers face from the products of a brand. Many factors can lead to these negative experiences such as product failures, dissatisfied offerings or other negative associations. Consumers have different reasons for purchasing different brands but mostly the expectations or preferable factor is the performance of the product or service (Lee et al., 2009a). After using the products and services, expectations are compared with the actual performance and at this point consumers come to know their level of expectations being met (Halstead, 1989; Oliver, 1980). If the expectations are met during the consumption process then consumers become satisfied, but if expectations are not met then dissatisfaction prevails, resulting in a bad experience (Oliver, 1980). Negative past experience with a simple product is slightly different from a brand’s product because in case of the brand, the consumers’ attitudes will affect all other products that come under the same brand that gave them a bad experience, resulting in hateful emotions on a big scale.

Earlier Bryson et al. (2013) identified in his study of luxury brands that dissatisfaction is one of the causes from which brand hate develops. More recently Hegner et al. (2017) and Zarantonello et al. (2016) proved empirically that negative past experience has a positive effect on brand hate. Zarantonello et al. (2016) used the term “violation of expectation” while Hegner et al. (2017) used it as “negative past experience.” In a study of brand avoidance by Lee et al. (2009a) respondents were asked about their negative experiences with the brands and results showed that brands that do not meet customer expectations face rejections and avoidance from customers; one respondent narrated his story regarding McDonalds: “I just remember the first time I tried McDonalds. It was probably in '93 when I arrived in New Zealand. I remember I expected more of it because it seemed such a cool thing but then it was really horrible when I tried. I was really surprised at the size of it, for my dad or for any bigger man it's like two bites, you can't really have a proper meal and it was tasteless.” So, it is evident that if brands do not meet the desired expectations, then these failed experiences lead to hatred whether in a product context or service context. Hence, it is safe to say that among various factors, negative past experience is one of the motivators of brand hate.

H1. Negative past experience leads to brand hate.

3.2 Symbolic incongruity
When a brand does not truly represent itself in accordance with the consumers’ image, the concept is called symbolic incongruity (SI). According to Khan and Lee (2014) customers purchase those brands that are identical with their image or meaningful in their daily lives. Zarantonello et al. (2016) in their study of brand hate identified symbolic incongruity as a predictor of brand hate, and they used the term “taste system” rather than “symbolic incongruity” in their study. More recently Hegner et al. (2017) also identified symbolic incongruity as an influencer of brand hate. Therefore, this congruence of images is important to build a good consumer–brand relationship; otherwise it can generate negative emotions and lead to brand hate.
The undesired self or the unwanted soul (Ogilvie, 1987) appears to be the most suitable psychological element in self-concept toward brand hate. As argued by Bhattacharya and Elsbach (2002), according to the disidentification theory, to create self-concepts, people try to disidentify themselves from the brand that has an undesired image which is inconsistent with their personality. Consumers also avoid particular products and brands because of the brand’s representation of negative and unenthusiastic reference groups (Hogg, 1998; Englis and Solomon, 1995). Lee et al. (2009a) identified that symbolic incongruity is one of the causes of brand avoidance. A respondent in the study of Lee et al. (2009a) said that “we always laugh about it, but we would never buy cheap toilet paper, because that just says something, you just think if you walk into a bathroom and there’s cheap toilet paper. It says something about you, how you portray yourself. I guess it is important because that’s how you see yourself. I am not cheap and nasty. I think it’s a reflection of my childhood as well, because I had three brothers and one sister so we are quite a big family. I mean having the budget stuff and I want to get away from that, you leave all that behind.” On the basis of these points, it is proposed that symbolic incongruity is an antecedent of brand hate.

H2. Symbolic incongruity leads to brand hate.

3.3 Poor relationship quality
Poor relationship quality (PRQ) refers to the negative relationships customers have with their brands for reasons other than past performance, image incongruity and ideological incompatibility. PRQ is linked with the concept of relationship equity which puts all the emphasis on the relationship stickiness. Lemon et al. (2001) did a study on customer equity and suggested that relationship equity is a part of customer equity and they further defined relationship equity between brand and its consumers as “the tendency of the customer to stick with the brand, above and beyond the customer’s objective and subjective assessments of the brand.” According to Lemon et al. (2001) a brand cannot make good relationships based on only brand equity or value equity; relationship equity is equally important to make better relationships through loyalty programs, affinity programs, special recognitions and the programs that help in community and knowledge building.

Relationship equity becomes crucial when the actual reward given to a customer in a loyalty program is less in value than the perceived value of reward. Here comes the opportunity for companies to enhance relationship equity by giving big incentives to the customers as a future investment (Lemon et al., 2001). Relationship equity also becomes critical when the particular community of a brand or product is also important and customers want to be members of that community. To get memberships customers begin to increase their purchases of those brands associated with the community; for example, a member from a Harley-Davidson group will never switch to some other brand because of their fierce loyalty (Lemon et al., 2001). Third, need for relationship equity increases when there is an opportunity to make customer relationships based on learning processes. Firms become important to the customers when they take care of the buying patterns and preferences of the customers, which results in increased retentions with almost zero chance of transferability (Lemon et al., 2001).

Relationship quality is concerned with value exchanges that are perceived as long-terms, but if instead of equity there is inequity perceived by customers or the company in value exchanges then desire for alternatives will increase from either the customer or the supplier (Low and Johnston, 2006). According to Hatfield et al. (1979) and Sollner (1999), the more
inequitable the relationship the more dissatisfaction and distress prevail. There are increased levels of anxiety and betrayals among the offended parties and things starts to get worse as this relationship of poor quality prolongs, resulting in the selection of new vendors who treat better (Dorsch et al., 1998). The concept of poor relationship quality till date has not been used as an indicator of extreme negative emotion toward brands despite its importance in triggering harmful effects. Hence, it is proposed that poor relationship quality is an antecedent of brand hate.

\[ H3. \text{ Poor relationship quality leads to brand hate.} \]

3.4 Ideological incompatibility

Ideological incompatibility (II) refers to the contextual issues in the society. Companies that are not acting accordingly with the consumer’s perceptions regarding moral, legal and social issues are said to be ideologically incompatible with consumers. Deceptive communications, moral misconducts and inconsistent values of companies and brands cause this incompatibility which leads to negative emotions and hatred toward brands. Hegner et al. (2017) labeled this term as ideological incompatibility because consumers have certain beliefs which are not compatible with the beliefs of brands committing wrongdoings in a society. Ideological incompatibility is beyond the self-image or mere product performance as these beliefs are for the greater good, focusing on the societal and moral issues (Nenycz-Thiel and Romaniuk, 2011; Lee et al., 2009a). Business practices that are unethical lead to consumer boycotts (Friedman, 1985; Micheletti et al., 2008; Sandikci and Ekici, 2009) and just like that, brands that are disgusting and disrespectful to the environment and the society are disapproved by the consumers.

Based on these concerns of moral, legal and social issues when a company or a brand behaves irresponsibly then it is perceived as ideologically incompatible by the consumers (Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016; Romani et al., 2015; Bryson et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009a). Zarantonello et al. (2016) referred ideological incompatibility as corporate wrongdoings in their study on brand hate and found this to be one of the predictors of brand hate, just like Hegner et al. (2017). Lee et al. (2009a) found that ideological incompatibility also leads to moral avoidance. One respondent in their study (Lee et al., 2009a) talked about labor used by Nike and said: “You can’t really say they had a choice. They were basically selected and taken to the Nike factories. As far as the relative payment goes, I can’t believe someone is happy or better off working under those conditions and probably still only eating and living in conditions that they had before. I don’t think they have really improved their lot. It’s just now someone comes along and said ‘work in this factory or you can’t even have what you had.’ I know we do look at it comparatively to the west, the people working in the factories are actually now being made subservient to a capital system, whereas their neighbors are probably still living that village life, it’s not easy to compare the two maybe they are eating and living just as well in the village lifestyle than the workers. But again it goes back to the children and choice, and how we should really be educating them.” This quote is regarding a typical issue of labor which is studied widely in the literature of consumer resistance (Klein, 2000). From the above discussion, it is evident that ideological incompatibility can lead toward brand hate.

\[ H4. \text{ Ideological incompatibility leads to brand hate.} \]
3.5 Rumor

According to Difonzo and Bordia (2007), to influence the opinions of others, the propagandists use rumors deliberately through propaganda campaigns and misinformation. Initially, when a propaganda rumor spreads, people believe it because it is followed by selective information which plays as a support to the rumors, compelling people to believe. Not much emphasis has been laid on this, but the literature of rumor shows that the spreading of rumor is connected with harmful, motivated and murmuring campaigns (Allport and Postman, 1947; Kapferer, 1990; Rosnow, 2001). Allport and Postman (1947) viewed rumor as a tool to discourage the enemies. In earlier times rumors were considered just a “talk factor” or a conversation on daily basis (Wilson, 1994). Definition of rumor is different with respect to different authors. Rosnow and Kimmel (2000) defined rumors as an unproven proposal spread to believe by the people and meet the requirements of the disseminator. Kapferer (1990) referred to rumors as the development and movement of information in a society without confirmation from official authorities. An older version of the definition is by Allport and Postman (1947), which is also the most cited one, that a statement with the absence of evidence “passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth” is called rumor.

Rumors can be positive and negative depending upon the purpose of the disseminator. Negative rumors are usually disseminated more than positive rumors. It was found in the study of Knapp (1944) that from the overall reported rumors in USA during Second World War, 90 per cent were negative rumors having negative consequences while only 2 per cent had pleasant consequences. Also in the marketplace, negative rumors are the ones that are more prevalent and catch the attention of the masses (Kamins et al., 1997). Moreover, stories related to flaws and failures of the product are easy to remember and are more vivid as compared to the stories related to positive attributes of a product (Herr et al., 1991; Folkes, 1988). It implies that negative rumors catch the attention of the consumers more than the positive rumors, therefore negative rumors are more circulated. There are lot of examples in the business world where rumors have caused so much harm to the brands, and in the result, brands have to face rejections, boycotts and hatred from the consumers.

Kimmel (2004) mentioned an example of rumor in the business world and its effects. It is regarding Procter & Gamble (P&G) which is one of the leading manufacturers in consumer goods (p. 4). Rumors against P&G started in 1979 that P&G is controlled secretly by the “Moonies. Moonies were the followers of Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church.” This misconception was developed because of the logo of P&G in which there is a man on the moon. As people were against Moonies and when they heard that P&G was controlled by them, they became relentless and started contacting the company’s officials to authenticate the news. First, the company ignored the rumor but they did not know that this matter would catch fire soon. This rumor was so contagious that later on P&G used to receive 12,000 queries per month. Even the rumors regarding an announcement were out that the company’s ownership has declared that they are in partnership with the devil church. The results of this rumor were devastating. Consumers started to boycott the products of P&G and further spread negative word of mouth. Finally the company was left with no choice except to justify its position, so the company spread the word through media that they are fake news and the company also e-mailed 45,000 churches claiming their innocence and declaring no connection with the church of devil and explained their logo publically that their logo is simply a man on the moon with 13 stars representing the 13 colonies of America. But still they kept on receiving queries and criticism. After extreme patience the company decided to adopt aggressive strategy by filing lawsuits and attacking the sources of rumors. Serious actions were taken against the people who were spreading rumors until they finally managed to stop the rumors (Kimmel, 2004, p. 9).
Kimmel and Audrain-Pontevia (2010) explained that rumors in the marketplace are considered as a competitor to information exchange, as there is information from the company side and rumors against it on the other side, so these rumors pose a threat to the marketing managers and decision-makers, and it is a challenge for specialists in the company to make strategies effective enough to respond and give explanations against rumors in a better way. While talking about the frequency of rumors, Kimmel and Audrain-Pontevia (2010) said that brokers and buyers in the marketplace used to hear rumors few times in a week regarding professional relevance and the rise in these rumors is spontaneous. On the other hand Difonzo and Bordia (1998) while investigating organizational rumors among professionals in public relations who serve *Fortune* 500 companies, found the frequency of rumors on a weekly basis which means every week a rumor came up and results in low morale, employee stress and loss of trust among staff, coworkers, management and customers. So it is evident that very limited empirical thought has been given to rumors, their impacts and nature in the marketplace (Kimmel and Audrain-Pontevia, 2010) and according to those limited studies rumors are mostly negative in their setting. According to different case studies and stories, rumors can cause too much trouble to the companies and can be a tool to destroy brand image, consumer loyalties and credibility of the companies, resulting in boycotts from consumers and losses in financial markets (Koenig, 1985; Kapferer, 1990; Kimmel, 2004). Despite the fact that rumor leads to brand destruction, marketing scholars have neglected this issue while measuring the extreme negative emotion, i.e. brand hate among consumers. Therefore, it is proposed that rumors can lead to brand hate.

**H5.** Rumor leads to brand hate (Figure 1).

### 4. Methodology

Before conducting the main survey, a pre-test was carried out (*n* = 25) to examine the internal consistency (inter-item reliability) in the questionnaire. To collect data for the main survey, self-administered questionnaires were distributed among fast food consumers in Pakistan. Questionnaires were distributed in different fast food restaurants and respondents were offered free drinks to take part in the survey. But only those respondents were selected for the survey who hate any fast food brand. This selection is made because of the reason that brand haters can give more appropriate response to measure brand hate instead of non-

![Theoretical model](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model

Brand hate in the fast food industry
haters. Out of 400 questionnaires, 250 were selected (62 per cent completion rate) for the main study as they were complete with no missing values and having no issues of suspicious response patterns (i.e. straight lining). Respondents were 72.4 per cent males (181) and 27.6 per cent females (69). A total of 89 per cent respondents were in the age group of 20-40 years with 40 per cent of respondents having a master’s degree. Of the respondents, 32 per cent were earning above Rs 50,000. One question regarding “your hated brand” was asked in the questionnaire. Many fast food brands were rated as the worst, but the most hated one was KFC for reasons unknown to this study.

The items used in the questionnaire were adopted from different studies. Items for negative past experience, symbolic incongruity and ideological incompatibility were adopted from the study of Hegner et al. (2017), who also conducted the study on brand hate. Items for poor relationship quality were adapted from the study of Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011). Items for rumor were adopted from Kimmel and Audrain-Pontevia (2010). Items for the endogenous latent variable, i.e. brand hate, were also adopted from Hegner et al. (2017). Appendix 2 shows the measurement items of each construct used in this study. Likert scale was used for the items in the questionnaire with five points, i.e. from strongly disagree (SD) to strongly agree (SA).

A total of 250 respondents took part in the survey, which satisfies the 200 sample rule (Kline, 2011) and the ratio from sample to item is 6.25:1, which is above the acceptable criteria of 5:1 (Gorsuch, 1983). This shows that sample size is adequate to conduct this study. Moreover, we calculated two tests for measuring sampling adequacy, i.e. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999). The KMO showed a value of 0.906 (>0.5) while Bartlett’s Test of sphericity was significant at 0.000 (p < 0.05). Now we can safely say that the data are good for undertaking multiple regression analysis.

5. Results
5.1 Reliability and validity tests
After the data were ready we performed multiple regression analysis to examine the ability of the model in predicting the outcome. But first, to check the internal consistency reliability, the traditional approach of Cronbach’s alpha was used according to which all the scales were reliable (>0.70), i.e. negative past experience (0.83), symbolic incongruity (0.85), poor relationship quality (0.81), ideological incompatibility (0.91), rumor (0.92) and brand hate (0.82). To assess the reliability of indicators’ loadings, factor analysis was performed. Factor loadings must be 0.512 or above and the values below 0.512 should be deleted only if the sample size is greater than 100, otherwise they can be retained (Stevens, 2002). Considering this statement two items from poor relationship quality scale and two items from rumor scale were deleted. Variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to assess the issues of multicollinearity. According to Myers (1990), Menard (1995) and Field (2009), while using SPSS if the tolerance value is 0.20 or below and the VIF value is 10 or above, then it indicates potential issues of collinearity. In this study all the values of VIF are below 5, more specifically they ranged from 1.36 to 2.92 which are considered unproblematic.

5.2 Hypothesis testing
Table I shows the correlation matrix which displays the Pearson’s correlation values between each pair of variables along with the correlation significance values. As can be seen in Table I, the highest correlation is present between brand hate (BH) and rumor (R), i.e. \( r = 0.698, p < 0.001 \), followed by brand hate (BH) and poor relationship quality (PRQ), having a correlation of 0.516 \( p < 0.001 \). All the Pearson’s correlation values representing the
hypothesized relationships were above the value of 0, showing a positive relationship between brand hate and its antecedents.

Table II shows the model summary which helps in understanding whether the antecedents successfully predict brand hate. The value of multiple correlation coefficient between brand hate and its predictors shown in the table is \( R = 0.799 \). The value of \( R^2 \) tells us that all five antecedents of brand hate account for 63.8 per cent (\( R^2 = 0.638 \)) of the variation in brand hate. Moreover the adjusted \( R^2 \) value (Adj. \( R^2 = 0.630 \)) seems to be quite close to the value of \( R^2 \) showing a difference of 0.008 which suggests that if the model is to be derived from the whole population then there would be less variation of 0.8 per cent in the resulting outcome. The change statistics are also shown in the table which tells us whether there is a significant change in \( R^2 \) (i.e. 0 – 0.638) based on the calculation of F-ratio which seems to be quite significant (i.e. \( p < 0.001 \)). Finally the assumption of Durbin–Watson has also been met which predicts whether independent errors assumption is justifiable. The value of Durbin–Watson statistic shown in the table is 1.934 which is very close to 2 and hence justifiable (Field, 2009). Table III displays the ANOVA which tells us if the model predicts the outcome significantly by using only “mean.” The value of F-ratio shown in the table is 85.897 which is significant at \( p < 0.001 \). It shows that the model’s ability in predicting the outcome variable has been improved significantly.

Table IV shows the model parameters. All the \( b \)-values depicts a positive relationship between brand hate and each of the antecedents. Moreover \( b \)-values depict the degree to which each antecedent affects the resulting outcome if all other antecedents are kept constant. The values of standard errors associated with each \( b \)-value indicate the extent to which these values may vary when subjected to different samples. The \( t \) and \( p \) statistics in the table show that the standard errors successfully determine that the \( b \)-values significantly differ from zero. Hence, it is proved that all the five antecedents are significant predictors of brand hate, with rumor being the biggest predictor.
6. Conclusions and discussion

The present study contributes to the literature of negative relationships between brands and consumers by introducing “direct personal” and “indirect non-personal” antecedents of brand hate. The literature review presented in this research work shows that there are five factors that can trigger brand hate in consumers. Among those five factors or so-called antecedents of brand hate, three antecedents (negative past experience, symbolic incongruity and poor relationship quality) are directly related with the consumers, while the other two antecedents (ideological incompatibility and rumor) are something that consumers do not experience directly. That is why these five antecedents are categorized as direct personal and indirect non-personal antecedents of brand hate. The results of the study demonstrate that the biggest influencer of brand hate is rumor. It is also evident from the examples of McDonalds and P&G mentioned in the study that a single rumor can destroy even the most recognized brands. Kapferer (2004) also concluded that rumors lead to brand destruction and result in poor corporate reputation. Our results further indicated poor relationship quality as the second biggest influencer of brand hate which is kind of obvious because the quality of relationship decides if it is good or poor; if it is poor then it leads to hate (Fournier, 1998).

This study explains the concept of brand hate which is also a sub-topic of anti-consumption. It can be perceived from the discussed examples in this study that the concept of anti-consumption is sometimes useful as it creates awareness against an unethical, immoral and irresponsible brand. But anti-consumption must be differentiated from pro-social consumption which can be said as ethical, conscientious (Shaw et al., 2006), or sustainable (Murphy and Cohen, 2001). In general anti-consumption on a larger scale can be perceived as opposite to consumption while on a small scale certain actions become apparent against consumption (Cherrier et al., 2011). This rejection for consumption is related strongly to consumer’s individuality which includes socio-environmental and self-serving interests (Cherrier et al., 2011). Indicating the ongoing circumstances and upcoming outcomes of consumption actions, consumers embrace anti-consumption principle as a lifestyle and a philosophy of existence (Amine and Gicquel, 2011).

Although the research regarding consumers’ negative emotions resulting from poor performance and quality of products has been carried out extensively, not much literature is present on extreme negative emotions resulting from other consumer-related and company-related factors, except few studies (Hegner et al., 2017; Kucuk, 2016; Zarantonello et al., 2016). Even these studies do not provide a holistic view on how brand hate evolves, while the present study has managed to demonstrate the factors that were of serious concerns but not discussed previously, to the best of the authors’ knowledge. The antecedents of brand hate (negative past experience, symbolic incongruity and ideological incompatibility) that are discussed previously are found to be less effective in influencing brand hate than the antecedents introduced in this study, i.e. rumor and poor relationship quality, which implies the importance of these factors as the tools for spreading hatred. Given that we have discussed five antecedents of brand hate, it must be noted that with the advancement in online spaces related to social media, it is hard for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>53.937</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.787</td>
<td>85.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>30.643</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84.580</td>
<td>249</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. ANOVA

Notes: aDependent variable: BH; bPredictors: (constant), R, II, PRQ, SI, NPE
companies to manage brands effectively. Therefore, it is advised to have effective complaint mechanisms and surveillance procedures for social media.

6.1 Managerial implications

To deal with consumers who have become brand haters, it is essential for companies to carefully monitor the interaction of employees and consumers. It will be helpful in dealing with the brand haters who experienced poor quality of relationship which is the first interaction of consumers with the brands. Hatred on social media and other online spaces must be handled by making active and diligent teams which are available anytime for responding to the queries and more importantly observing the experiences, attitudes and behaviors of consumers regarding the brands. Companies must stalk their consumers on social media to know their preferences so that brands can meet consumers’ expectations to avoid any uncertainty at the first place.

This study presented five antecedents of brand hate and each of the antecedents has different characteristics and hence different methods to manage them. For example, improving the customer’s experience by making a good-quality product does not mean that it will also change the perception of customers regarding employees’ rudeness. In the same way, minimizing brand hate by offering compensation against a service failure does not mean that it will minimize the hatred caused by rumors or incompatible ideologies. Therefore, for each of the antecedent there is a different management process which must be selected carefully by the companies after observing what the actual reason for hatred is. Kucuk (2016) suggested few steps for managing brand hate which are listening, engaging and negotiating. Companies must have listening tools to listen to the customers and then engage with them regarding their complaints and in the end negotiate with them on the compensations against the failures. Yet, these steps cannot explain how to manage brand hate caused by ideological incompatibility or rumors.

Another study by Ahmed and Hashim (2018) discussed the factors that could minimize brand hate resulting from negative past experience and found that apology, explanation and compensation act as brand hate recovery process. Companies should also consider these factors while dealing with brand haters developing from negative past experience, symbolic incongruity, poor relationship quality, ideological incompatibility and rumors. Apology and compensation work fine for negative past experience and poor relationship quality, while for managing brand hate caused by symbolic incongruity, ideological incompatibility and rumors, companies need to give explanations on different platforms such as social media, print media, electronic media and also through e-mails. A little ignorance on the company’s side can produce more haters; therefore, companies must assemble a team of professionals to answer the frequent queries from the customers. Usually the queries come from the most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPE</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRQ</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV: Coefficients

Note: *Dependent variable: BH*
loyal customers in case of allegations regarding immoral activities or some rumor against the companies. These queries must not go unanswered because sometimes the most loyal customers turns into brand haters (Gregoire and Fisher, 2008).

Moreover, the companies’ concerns regarding social, societal and environmental activities, integration of positive reference groups and fair employee treatment can be helpful in reducing the number of brand haters. Having said that, it is not necessarily true that all the target market, including non-consumers and consumers, can be satisfied. Sometimes the problem is with the narcissistic personality of the consumer which forces him/her to remain a brand hater (Kucuk, 2016). But companies must be able to manage brand hate in any case regardless of the consumers’ rigidness by using the strategies mentioned above or devise some plan of action according to the severity of the situation.

6.2 Limitation and future research
Research in the field of negative relationships between consumers and brands and consumers’ negative emotions is getting the attention of scholars, which indicates that there are still various issues which need to be investigated. Our study discussed only one aspect of the brand hate process, i.e. antecedents of brand hate. Various other aspects such as the outcomes of brand hate and the management process of brand hate need further discussion. The first limitation of this study is that it does not explain the factors that can reduce the impact of brand hate. Ahmed and Hashim (2018) and Kucuk (2016) explained few strategies that are helpful in handling brand hate, but there is room for more research in how to handle brand hate effectively because each of the determinants of brand hate requires a different recovery process.

Second limitation is regarding the context of the study, as this study used fast food brand consumers in Pakistan, but in different regions and cultures these results may differ. Therefore it is necessary to conduct more studies on brand hate in different cultures to completely understand the negativity behind brand hate and its consequences. Third limitation of the study is that the data were collected from the respondents who had a bad experience with some brand in the past, instead of collecting the data from all consumers. Future research should also incorporate the point of view of non-haters or loyal customers of the brands.

Fourth limitation of this study is that it does not discuss the issues related to the personality of the consumers, such as narcissism, selfishness and rudeness. Companies make mistakes and face rejections and boycotts, and some companies try their best to resolve the issues of the consumers, but the personality issues of some of the consumers prevent them from reconciling with the companies. Kucuk (2016) discussed the consumer-related antecedents of brand hate, but no other study empirically proved those antecedents to be the influencer of brand hate, including Kucuk (2016). Future research must address this issue to completely understand the factors than can trigger brand hate among consumers.

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Further reading


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### Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and year</th>
<th>Discussed concept</th>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stammerjohan and Webster (2002)</td>
<td>Non-consumption</td>
<td>Individual trait, Product characteristics</td>
<td>Ignoring Delay, Self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein et al. (2004)</td>
<td>Consumer boycott</td>
<td>Desire to make a difference, Self-enhancement, Counterarguments, Constrained consumption</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregoire and Fisher (2008)</td>
<td>Perceived betrayal</td>
<td>Service failure, Interactional, procedural, and distributive fairness</td>
<td>Complaining, Negative word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogg et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Brand avoidance</td>
<td>Marketing environment, Social environment, Consumer’s individual environment</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romani et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Negative brand emotions</td>
<td>Symbolic cultural object, Physical object (functions and attributes)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandikci and Ekici (2009)</td>
<td>Brand rejection</td>
<td>Organizational disidentification, Image congruency and undesired self</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009)</td>
<td>Brand hate</td>
<td>Ideological incompatibility, Market-level dissatisfaction, Transactional dissatisfaction</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee et al. (2009a, 2009b, 2009c)</td>
<td>Brand avoidance</td>
<td>Moral avoidance, Identity avoidance, Experiential avoidance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregoire et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Desire for revenge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marketplace aggression, Negative word of mouth, Complaining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and year</th>
<th>Discussed concept</th>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nenycz-Thiel and Romaniuk (2011)</td>
<td>Brand rejection</td>
<td>Moral rejection</td>
<td>Complaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative past experience</td>
<td>Negative word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Switching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romani et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Negative brand emotions</td>
<td>Image incongruence</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative product experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussan et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Brand divorce</td>
<td>Negative past experience</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryson et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Extreme negative emotions</td>
<td>Negative past experience</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moral wrongdoings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joireman et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Desire for revenge</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Negative word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Brand Attachment–Aversion Model</td>
<td>Inconsistent moral values</td>
<td>Negative word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative group associations</td>
<td>Complaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failure to meet expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan and Lee (2014)</td>
<td>Brand avoidance</td>
<td>Negative social influence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undesired self</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived animosity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmeling et al. (2015)</td>
<td>Agonistic and retreat emotions</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Negative word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Product avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kavaliauske and Simanaviciute (2015)</td>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
<td>Unmet expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic incongruence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ideological incompatibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kucuk (2016)</td>
<td>Brand hate</td>
<td>Transactional</td>
<td>Negative word of mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(dissatisfaction related to product failure)</td>
<td>Complaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Market-industry (related to irresponsible practices)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ideological (related to social change)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer personality issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarantonello et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Brand hate</td>
<td>Violations of expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taste system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate wrongdoings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegner et al. (2017)</td>
<td>Brand hate</td>
<td>Negative past experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic incongruity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ideological incompatibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table AI.

Brand hate in the fast food industry
### Appendix 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative past experience</strong></td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The performance of products of brand X is poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand products are inconvenient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My hate for this brand is linked to the bad performance of this product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am dissatisfied by brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic incongruity</strong></td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The products of brand X do not reflect who I am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The products of brand X do not fit my personality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not want to be seen with brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This brand does not represent what I am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This brand symbolizes the kind of person I would never want to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor relationship quality</strong></td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand X does not give me a feeling of confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the feeling that the brand X is not trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand X has not been courteous and friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have a commitment toward the brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I certainly do not like the brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideological incompatibility</strong></td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my opinion, brand X acts irresponsible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my opinion, brand X acts unethical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company violates moral standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand doesn’t match my values and beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rumor</strong></td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever I hear a rumor about a brand, I tend to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay attention to the rumor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek out additional information to confirm or disconfirm the rumor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycott the brand involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not repurchase from the brand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase from a competitor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose trust in the brand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spread counter rumors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wait for a while before repurchasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to hurt the company by repeating the rumor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to hurt the company through physical actions (e.g. graffiti)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage people not to purchase from the company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel anger, guilt or embarrassment regarding my relationship with the company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand hate</strong></td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am disgusted by brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not tolerate brand X and its company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world would be a better place without brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am totally angry about brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand X is awful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate brand X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table AII.**

Measurement items of the constructs
The effect of cognitive absorption on marketing learning performance

El efecto de la absorción cognitiva en los resultados de aprendizaje de marketing

Miguel Guinaliu-Blasco, Blanca Hernández-Ortega and José L. Franco

Department of Marketing, University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse the individual’s experience during the use of Pinterest in a marketing learning process. This experience is a fundamental starting point from which to develop marketing learning processes that flow naturally. Thus, it is necessary to examine the components that determine the individual’s experience and to explore consequences such as collaborative learning and marketing learning performance.

Design/methodology/approach – To conceptualise the individual’s experience, this study focuses on her/his state of cognitive absorption (CA) and establishes a second-order formative structure made up of five components: heightened enjoyment, curiosity, control, temporal dissociation and focused immersion. The model is estimated with partial least squares modelling, using SmartPLS 2.0 software.

Findings – The results confirm the significant weights of the components, with the exception of focused immersion, and support the influence of overall CA on the proposed outcomes. They also confirm that collaborative learning exerts a positive influence on the individual’s performance.

Originality/value – This study makes three contributions. First, it holistically examines the individual’s experience during marketing learning and the importance of its constituent components. Second, it establishes what the consequences of the marketing learning experience are, taking into account both social and individual factors, that is, collaborative learning and individual performance. Third, Pinterest is proposed as a social network with great potential in marketing learning. It is a well-known network which includes very interesting features for learning contexts. Nevertheless, it has been little studied in research.

Keywords Social networks, Experience, Cognitive absorption, Pinterest, Marketing learning performance

Paper type Research paper
**Resumen**

**Propósito** – El objetivo de la presente investigación es analizar la experiencia del individuo durante el uso de Pinterest en un proceso de aprendizaje de marketing. Este experiencia es un punto de partida fundamental para que el proceso de aprendizaje de marketing se desarrolle de manera fluida. Así, es preciso examinar los componentes que determinan la experiencia del individuo y explorar las consecuencias, como por ejemplo, el aprendizaje colaborativo y los resultados del aprendizaje de marketing.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – Con el objeto de conceptualizar la experiencia del individuo, este estudio centra su atención en la absorción cognitiva (AC) y propone una estructura formativa de segundo orden compuesta por cinco componentes: mayor disfrute, curiosidad, control, disociación temporal e inmersión enfocada. El modelo es estimado mediante el uso de Modelización de Mínimos Cuadrados Parciales, empleando el software SmartPLS 2.0.

**Hallazgos** – Los resultados confirman el significativo peso de los componentes, con la excepción de la inmersión enfocada, y apoyan la influencia de la AC general sobre las consecuencias propuestas. Estos resultados también confirmar que el aprendizaje colaborativo tiene una influencia positiva sobre los resultados del individuo.

**Originalidad/valor** – Este estudio ofrece tres contribuciones. En primer lugar, se examina de manera holística la experiencia del individuo durante el aprendizaje de marketing y la importancia de sus componentes. En segundo lugar, se establece cuales son las consecuencias de la experiencia de aprendizaje de marketing; teniendo en cuenta factores sociales e individuales, es decir, aprendizaje colaborativo y resultados individuales. En tercer lugar, se propone a Pinterest como una red social con un gran potencial en el aprendizaje de marketing. Se trata de una red que incluye interesantes características para los contextos de aprendizaje. A pesar de ello, ha sido escasamente estudiada por los investigadores.

**Palabras clave** – Experiencia, Absorción cognitiva, Pinterest, Resultados de aprendizaje de marketing, Redes sociales

**Tipo de artículo** – Artículo de investigación

1. **Introduction**

   The popularity of social networks in learning processes has led to new interactive environments that modify traditional approaches. Social networks combine education with entertainment, promote bidirectional communication and facilitate a wide variety of activities (Wang et al., 2012; Zhang and Daugherty, 2009). They enable learners and teachers to work together within a supportive community and build up appropriate knowledge through active participation (Ryu and Parsons, 2012). In this way, social networks create unique experiences, develop so-called “social learning”, and promote the generation of benefits beyond traditional outcomes (Park et al., 2010).

   From the marketing point of view, the use of social networks in the learning context has important advantages for customers (i.e. individuals) and for firms (i.e. educational institutions). Some studies have demonstrated that social networks improve the individual’s consumption of learning services and optimize learning outcomes. For example, Abney et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of tools such as Twitter for stimulating debate between students and teachers in marketing learning. Kurthakoti et al. (2013) verified that using social networks increases the performance of work teams, while McCorkle and McCorkle (2012) concluded that LinkedIn helps individuals to acquire transversal skills, such as social communication and creativity. Social networks improve the quality of the relationships that educational institutions establish with students, because they enhance the effectiveness of communication strategies (Clark et al., 2017; Peruta and Shields, 2017). Similarly, some authors have examined the role played by social networks in the recruitment and retention of students by educational institutions (Constantinides and Zinck Stagno, 2011; Galan et al., 2015). These authors noted that the combination of asynchronous communication tools, such as Facebook, and face-to-face classes, fostered student-institution engagement (Northey et al., 2015). Overall, it has been found that social networks improve the
individual’s cognitive processes, boost her/his satisfaction and, in the context of educational institutions, generate various benefits, for example, customer engagement, long-term relationships and positive word of mouth.

Despite the opportunities that social networks offer in the learning context, research into their significance and influence is scarce and has focused usually on very few platforms, for example, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. This previous research has generally applied a technological approach, studying consequences such as the user’s perceptions about technology (e.g. ease of use, usefulness, enjoyment, etc.), attitude, satisfaction and intention to continue to use it (Chintalapati and Daruri, 2017; Milosevic et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2016). In spite of the differences among the proposed models, in terms of the specific factors and relationships posited, there is consensus that the individual’s perceptions of a technology are significant predictors of use. Nevertheless, this prior research has overlooked the importance of the individual’s experience of social networks in learning processes. This prior experience might explain why the same network may provide effective learning in certain situations but not in others. Therefore, the concept of experience emerges as a key factor for understanding customer behaviour and optimising the learning process.

Experiences originate from a set of interactions between the individual and a product, an activity, a firm, or any other stimulus that provokes a reaction (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005). They are personal in nature and involve the individual at different levels, including the rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual. In the learning context, several conditions determine whether experiences are successful. For instance, technological dimensions, the types of knowledge sought, and the methodologies applied, differentially influence the individual’s cognitive processes and experiences (Gupta and Bostrom, 2009). Experiences can manifest themselves in several ways, such as enjoyment (Lin et al., 2012; Lin and Gregor, 2006), authenticity (Hall, 2009; Herrington et al., 2010) and emotions (Baumeister et al., 2015; Finch et al., 2015). Learning experiences in social networks differ from other computer-mediated experiences because of their dual character. On the one hand, social networks foster experiences in which the individual exhibits immersive behaviour and independently frames her/his own learning. On the other hand, social networks provide experiences that engage several actors in shared activities, supported by group collaboration. Educational institutions should take this dual nature into account in managing individuals’ reactions and the relationships that develop through social networks.

The aim of the present study is to analyse the experience of the individual during the use of a social network in marketing learning. This experience is a fundamental starting point from which to develop a cognitive process that flows naturally. In this context, it is necessary to address two important issues. First, this study conceptualizes the marketing learning experience. To do so, it focuses on the individual’s state of cognitive absorption (CA), taking the definition proposed by Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) as a starting point, and examines what components determine the experience. Second, it analyses the consequences of the marketing learning experience, exploring whether the CA that the individual feels leads her/him to participate in collaborative learning and, in turn, improves her/his performance. The social network studied is Pinterest, which differs from other social networks because it is principally based on images. Thus, the cognitive processes and the marketing learning that individuals experience with Pinterest are very different from those analysed in previous literature.

This paper has three main implications. First, in contrast to previous research based on the technological acceptance of social networks, it holistically examines the individual’s experience during marketing learning and the importance of its constituent components. Second, it establishes what the consequences of the marketing learning experience are,
taking into account both social and individual factors, that is, collaborative learning and individual performance. Third, Pinterest is proposed as a social network with great marketing learning potential. It is a well-known network, but little studied in marketing learning research. It has a highly visual character and, as discussed below, includes a set of very interesting features for marketing learning contexts. Figure 1 depicts these contributions. Moreover, the findings of the present study provide important managerial contributions that may guide educational institutions in the design of their learning services and the definition of their marketing strategies.

2. What is Pinterest? An ideal marketing learning tool
Pinterest is a social network and smartphone application that enables its users to publish visual bookmarks and content links, called “pins”. These “pins” can be images, pictures, diagrams, videos and infographics, either created by the user or obtained from other websites. Publications are organised on boards, categorised by topic; they can be individual or collective and private or viewable by other Pinterest users. Individuals can “follow” other users, allowing them to view automatically updated “pins” feeds posted by fellow users (Kim et al., 2017). The relationships among Pinterest users are asymmetric; individuals can “follow” other users without their consent or reciprocity (Ottoni et al., 2013). Moreover, Pinterest offers users several options to share and manage content, including re-send (re-pin), likes, shares in other networks, save and comment.

Although Pinterest is one of the youngest social networks, having been launched officially in 2010, it is one of the most globally popular. It has more than 250 million monthly...
active users (Griffith, 2018) who have published more than 175 billion pins on more than 3 billion boards (Omnicore, 2019). Thus, Pinterest is one of the most intensively used social platforms. It is an environment in which users spend a lot of time sharing aspects of their personal life and “curing” images published by other users (Golbeck, 2015). This activity is especially popular among women and millennials (Aslam, 2017; Guimarães, 2014).

Some Pinterest characteristics differentiate it from other social networks and make it an interesting tool for marketing learning. First, Pinterest is primarily based on visual content, which allows users to transmit complex ideas and concepts visually. This feature greatly simplifies communication and fits well with the fact that 40 per cent of college students prefer visually-based learning (Clarke et al., 2006). Second, Pinterest is a very simple tool that provides several functionalities. It enables users to intuitively compile contents, organize and store ideas, and comment on other users’ contributions. Third, Pinterest establishes easy and fast connections between users who are invited by the board creator to be collaborators and to add contents. In these cases the board is collaborative in nature because multiple users contribute and share knowledge in a community. Fourth, Pinterest boards stimulate ideas and inspire users as a consequence of the personalisation of the content and the organisation of the information (Caines, 2012). Pinterest is an environment where users discover and save creative content to access later.

Pinterest boasts several examples of interesting learning practices. Point Park University uses this social network to share visual content and develop collaborative exercises. Similarly, students at the University of Minnesota publish examples of designs and graphic works on Pinterest to generate new ideas. Finally, the University of Southern California has an official profile on the social network that publicizes different USC activities and topics. It also uses Pinterest in its entrepreneurship classes to enrich their traditional contents and examples. Thus, it can be concluded that Pinterest is an ideal tool to promote communication, to enhance individual creativity and to improve the marketing strategies of educational institutions.

3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The present study proposes a conceptual framework related to the application of Pinterest in marketing learning. This framework establishes that learners experience cognitive absorption (CA) during the use of this social network through different drivers. This experience acts as the starting point for the collaborative learning that ultimately enhances performance. Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the conceptual framework.
3.1 Cognitive absorption

Delivering superior and memorable experiences is one of the primary goals of marketing and a critical factor for the achievement of companies’ long-term success (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Marketing Science Institute, 2016). Experiences offer a solid base from which to understand value creation and other outcomes (Gummerus, 2013; Papagiannidis et al., 2017), so academics and practitioners have emphasised the necessity of studying how experiences develop (Grönroos, 2015). Nevertheless, the complex nature of experiences leads to many definitions and concepts that should be examined when addressing this psychological process.

Cognitive absorption captures the state of deep involvement or the holistic experience that the individual feels during her/his interaction with a technology (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Saadé and Bahli, 2005). This concept is supported by three interrelated theoretical pillars. First, the theory of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), described as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter” (p. 4). Flow state includes intense concentration, a sense of control, a loss of self-consciousness, and the transformation of time. It may occur when the individual is performing physical activities and when (s)he is interacting with symbolic systems. Second, cognitive absorption is connected with a personality trait dimension related to the individual’s intrinsic propensity to be engrossed with an experience (Tellegen and Atkinson, 1974). This propensity leads the individual to experience episodes of total concentration where all one’s resources are consumed by the object of attention. Third, cognitive absorption is related to the notion of cognitive engagement (Webster and Ho, 1997). Engagement has been defined as a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses the individual’s intrinsic interest, curiosity and attention focus. It involves the individual filtering out irrelevant perceptions and thoughts, having control over the environment and losing self-consciousness (Liu et al., 2009).

Cognitive absorption is crucial in the learning context because it leverages individual intrinsic motivation during the process and promotes behaviour formation (Benbunan-Fich and Hilz, 2003). Previous research has analysed CA to understand the individual’s learning experience with different technologies, such as online platforms (Saadé and Bahli, 2005; Leong, 2011), virtual worlds (Goel et al., 2013), virtual communities (Lin, 2009) and mobile technologies (Reychav and Wu, 2015a). Nevertheless, CA has rarely been used to study the experience of using social networks in learning.

CA in social networks reflects the psychological process through which an individual is absorbed, is involved with other users, shares activities and generates computer-mediated experiences. Research into the individual’s CA during the use of social networks is still young. To the best of our knowledge, the few existing studies apply a flow-based approach and use different components to measure the concept. Zhou et al. (2010) explored the influence of perceived enjoyment, control and attention, focusing on mobile social networks. Wu and Wang (2011) examined the perceived enjoyment, concentration, social interactions and escapism that the individual feels when using social networks. Finally, Kwak et al. (2014) studied the importance of the focused immersion, enjoyment, curiosity, telepresence and time distortion felt when using Facebook. It should be taken into account that these studies tested incomplete models; they considered the effects of only some of the CA dimensions proposed by Agarwal and Karahanna (2000). Thus, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive model specifically to measure the CA experienced in the employment of social networks in marketing learning.

The present study takes as its starting point the revised definition of CA proposed by Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) and, in contrast to previous research that considered experience as a one-dimensional factor, it breaks the concept down into five components. It
combines an affective component, namely, heightened enjoyment, and four cognitive components, namely, curiosity, control, temporal dissociation and focused immersion (Wakefield and Whitten, 2006). These components reflect different kinds of experience that the individual can have during her/his interaction with a social network, and they exert different impacts on the formation of the overall state that the individual feels during learning. The present study advises that CA should be conceptualised as a second-order formative factor, shaped by first-order components that determine different kinds of experience. Other studies that have also examined the formative structure of CA are Pelet et al. (2017) for social media and Pallud (2017) for the role of interactive technologies in stimulating learning experiences. In accordance with their ideas, the present study tests the importance of each CA component during the employment of Pinterest and proposes different hypotheses for each of these components.

Heightened enjoyment captures the pleasurable aspects of an interaction, regardless of the performance consequences resulting from the use of the technology (Akman and Mishra, 2017; Domina et al., 2012). It addresses the hedonic benefits derived from the employment of specific technologies. Its effect has been included in the technology acceptance model, being compared with other extrinsic motivations, such as perceived usefulness and ease of use (Hsu and Lin, 2008; van der Heijden, 2004). Given the importance of this factor, some authors, for example, Weniger and Loebbecke (2011), have argued that enjoyment is more than a mere dimension of cognitive absorption and recommend that it should be studied as a separate construct. The present study proposes that the higher is the individual’s feeling of enjoyment while using a social network in learning, the higher is her/his CA. Thus, the following hypothesis is stated:

**H1a.** The heightened enjoyment experienced by an individual while using Pinterest in marketing learning positively determines her/his overall cognitive absorption.

Curiosity refers to the extent to which an experience arouses an individual’s sensory and cognitive interest (Rouibah, 2008). It addresses the individual’s recognition, pursuit and desire to explore novel, uncertain, complex and ambiguous events. Curiosity combines the inquisitiveness and technical competence that the individual feels while (s)he is engaged in an action, including her/his desire for deeper insights into a subject (Kashdan et al., 2018; Moon and Kim, 2001). If the individual experiences curiosity in the employment of social networks during the learning process, (s)he will be motivated to continue the process to discover what happens after each interaction. Thus, the present study proposes that curiosity increases overall cognitive absorption:

**H1b.** The curiosity experienced by an individual while using Pinterest in marketing learning positively determines her/his overall cognitive absorption.

Control represents the individual’s perception of being in charge of a situation. It refers to the individual’s perception of her/his ability to successfully employ a technology and how the technology responds to her/his inputs. This perception is derived from the individual’s beliefs about the presence or absence of her/his own skills, opportunities and resources necessary for the development of the analysed behaviour (Ajzen and Madden, 1986). If the individual feels that (s)he is controlling her/his interaction with the social network, (s)he will be relaxed and feel greater cognitive absorption. The following hypothesis is thus posited:

**H1c.** The control experienced by an individual while using Pinterest in marketing learning positively determines her/his overall cognitive absorption.
Temporal dissociation addresses the individual's inability to register the passage of time while interacting with a technology. It is connected with flow constructs, such as telepresence and time distortion (Rutkowski et al., 2007) and transformation of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Individuals who are in a state of temporal dissociation perceive that time seems to stand still while they are engaged in an action (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Lee et al., 2012; Skadberg and Kimmel, 2004). Hence, although objectively time is measured by the clock, these individuals perceive time subjectively (Lobler et al., 2011; Tan et al., 2015). Therefore, the individual's belief that a short amount of time has passed is directly correlated with the fact that a longer amount of time has actually passed (Brooks and Longstreet, 2015). The present study proposes that the temporal dissociation that the individual feels during her/his interaction with the social network increases the cognitive absorption that (s)he experiences during the learning process. So, the following relationship is hypothesised:

\[ H1d. \] The temporal dissociation experienced by the individual while using Pinterest in marketing learning positively determines her/his overall cognitive absorption.

Finally, focused immersion represents the complete immersion and engagement that the individual experiences during an interaction, during which other attentional demands are ignored. If the individual feels focused immersion, her/his attention is completely taken up by the action and nothing else matters (Pelet et al., 2017). Thus, the greater the focused immersion the individual experiences during her/his interaction with the social network, the more attention (s)he will pay to the learning activity and the greater will be her/his cognitive absorption. The following hypothesis is thus stated:

\[ H1e. \] The focused immersion experienced by the individual while using Pinterest in marketing learning positively determines her/his overall cognitive absorption.

### 3.2 The relationships between cognitive absorption, collaborative learning and marketing learning performance

As already explained, the present study considers that CA is the psychological state that the individual experiences during the employment of a social network during learning. In this context, CA involves the learner going through a cognitive experience that flows naturally, characterised by the presence of, and collaboration with, other users, and that promotes her/his active participation and conditions her/his behaviour (Reychav and Wu, 2015a). Specifically, the present study analyses the influence of CA on collaborative learning and marketing learning performance.

Collaborative learning is defined as a teaching and learning philosophy that involves sharing knowledge, experiences and authority, in which students teach and learn from each other and which generates positive interdependence (Panitz, 1996). It occurs when students work together in small groups towards a common goal, construct meaning, explore topics and improve skills (Harasim et al., 1995; Miranda and Saunders, 2003; Prince, 2004). According to connectivism theory, collaboration in learning involves the distribution of knowledge across a network of connections, so results depend on individuals' ability to traverse these networks (Al-Abri et al., 2017). This kind of learning increases the individual's ability to think critically, to solve problems and to acquire specialist expertise (Angeli et al., 2003; Garrison et al., 2001). Moreover, it encourages students to participate by providing examples, explaining concepts and justifying their opinions (Lantz, 2010). Therefore, collaborative learning enables students to become active agents and to collaborate in knowledge creation (Draper et al., 2002; Dufresne and Gerace, 1996; Kennedy and Cuts, 2005).
Social networks offer enormous possibilities to connect people through chats, discussions and forums, promoting enhanced collaborative learning experiences (Al-Abri et al., 2017; Al-Khanjari et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the relationship between CA and collaborative learning in social networks has yet to be explored. Some studies have examined the relationship between cognitive engagement, the precursor concept of CA, and learning outcomes in technology-mediated environments (Blasco et al., 2013; Webster and Hackley, 1997). They demonstrated that the greater the individual’s engagement during learning, the better will be the obtained outcomes. The present study proposes that this relationship also exists for CA; the social experience of the individual during her/his interaction with other learners in social networks will encourage collaborative learning (Goel et al., 2013; Reychav et al., 2015; Reychav and Wu, 2015b). Social networks allow the individual to have experiences in which learners and teachers converse with each other, ask questions and share descriptions of the learning content, in a socio-dialogical process (Ryu and Parsons, 2012). The greater the absorption the individual experiences during the marketing learning process, the more (s)he participates and the better (s) he performs. On the contrary, if the individual does not experience cognitive absorption during her/his interaction with others on the social network, the less (s)he participates in the process, collaborative learning is inhibited, and the individual has poorer marketing performance. The following relationships are hypothesised:

**H2.** Cognitive absorption as a result of using Pinterest improves the individual’s collaborative learning.

**H3.** Cognitive absorption as a result of using Pinterest improves the individual’s marketing learning performance.

Previous research has demonstrated that collaborative learning influences outcomes to a greater extent when it is combined with the use of social technologies (Huang et al., 2014; Reychav and Wu, 20015 b; Stowell and Nelson, 2007). Their research assumes that, as people learn or work together and use technologies, the instantaneous nature of the technologies improve learning outcomes. For instance, Alavi (1994) showed that students using group decision support systems had greater interest, developed more skills and reported higher overall evaluations. Technologies encourage critical thinking and facilitate the understanding of educational materials (Agarwal and Venkatesh, 2002). In this context, social networks provide complete platforms that mediate the communication between actors, improve their coordination and provide interesting knowledge-generation opportunities. So, learners are impelled to generate knowledge not only for themselves but also for others, to jointly develop shared meanings and to achieve common goals (Jonassen and Land, 2000).

The present study agrees that interactions through technology, in general, and through social networks, in particular, are essential in collective learning. Nevertheless, the authors go further by proposing that collaboration between marketing learners also encourages the positive consequences that the individual derives from the learning activity. The individual’s experience integrates collaborative learning with internal cognition, making her/him more aware of her/his mental processes and, thereby, enhancing relevant mental activities such as thinking, feeling and remembering (Ryu and Parsons, 2012). Consequently, individuals who use technologies to develop collaborative learning tend to experience a higher level of cognition (Pallud, 2017; Yoo et al., 2002). In accordance with these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4.** Collaborative learning undertaken using Pinterest improves the individual’s marketing learning performance.
4. Method: procedure, participants and measures

This study was developed from an academic activity based on Pinterest. The activity was carried out by university students enrolled in marketing degree courses at a major Spanish university during eight weeks in March and April 2017.

During the first week, teachers introduced the activity over several classes and explained the objectives, rules and schedule. The students interested in participating had two weeks to register by filling out a Google Drive form. They took part voluntarily and worked in groups of two or three.

The activity, which had a contest format, was related to three new marketing trends, viral marketing, cause marketing and experiential marketing. The teachers created a Pinterest board for each trend, registered the participants and sent an invitation e-mail to each group. The groups then had four weeks to search outside the class for real business examples and to find practices related to these marketing trends. When they found examples, the students captured them through photo or video and published them on the Pinterest board. Although the three boards could be viewed by other Pinterest users, only groups that had accepted the invitation could post material. Each group had to pin a minimum of one publication on each marketing trend board.

As the effectiveness of Pinterest for enhancing learning depended to a great extent on the examples published by the groups, special attention was paid to this stage. The contents were evaluated by the teachers very soon after publication, so the students knew, almost in real time, whether the example was suitable. Moreover, students could interact with, and give their opinion on the examples of, their peers by sharing, commenting on or re-pinning them. These interactions were very important; the students evaluated the work of their peers and learned through the examples found by others. For this reason, the teachers constantly encouraged the students to evaluate and revise the pins of the other groups and to ask questions about the examples. The interactions between peers and the teachers were aimed at improving the students’ understanding of the marketing trends and enhancing their capacity to apply their knowledge to real situations.

The results were very positive: 190 students, who formed 84 groups, participated in the activity. The viral marketing trend board received 213 pins and 106 followers (https://es.pinterest.com/mkviraluz/marketing-viral/), the experiential marketing trend board received 237 pins and 110 followers (https://es.pinterest.com/Experiencialmar/marketing-experiencial/), and the cause marketing trend board received 187 pins and 108 followers (https://es.pinterest.com/fdfhfjjj/marketing-con-cause/).

During the last week of the activity, an e-mail survey was undertaken to assess the students’ opinions about the use of Pinterest. In total, 157 valid responses were obtained, that is, an 82.6 per cent response rate. Of these, 55.4 per cent were between 19 and 23 years old and 76.4 per cent were women. It should be noted that, although the percentage of women may appear high, Pinterest is used more by women than men. Therefore, this percentage increases the significance of the sample. It should also be highlighted that only 5.7 per cent of participants were regular users of Pinterest, compared to the 83.4 per cent that used other social networks several times daily. This adds value to the activity because very few were accustomed to using Pinterest.

A literature review was carried out to measure the constructs used in the study (Table I). Seven-point scales were used in all cases. Measures of factors that determine cognitive absorption, that is, heightened enjoyment, control, curiosity, temporal dissociation and focused immersion, were obtained from Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) and Reychav and Wu (2015b). Collaborative learning was measured by adapting the scales of Blasco et al.
(2013) and So and Brush (2008). Learning performance was assessed following Blasco et al. (2013) and MacGeorge et al. (2008).

5. Measurement model assessment, second-order formative factor and results
To estimate the proposed model the reliability and validity of the measurement model was first evaluated. Given the size of the sample and the second-order formative factor proposed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
<th>Boots t-value</th>
<th>CRC</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heightened enjoyment (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Reychav and Wu, 2015b)</strong></td>
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<td>During the realization of this activity . . .</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENJ1 . . . I enjoyed interacting in Pinterest</td>
<td>0.91*</td>
<td>15.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENJ2 . . . Pinterest provided me a lot of enjoyment</td>
<td>0.92*</td>
<td>13.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENJ3 . . . I had fun</td>
<td>0.93*</td>
<td>14.73</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>CRC = Composite reliability coefficient; AVE = Average variance extracted *p &lt; 0.01</td>
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<td><strong>Curiosity (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Reychav and Wu, 2015b)</strong></td>
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<td>The realization of this activity . . .</td>
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<td>CUR1 . . . excited my curiosity</td>
<td>0.83*</td>
<td>12.02</td>
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<td>CUR2 . . . aroused my imagination</td>
<td>0.86*</td>
<td>11.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUR3 . . . made me curious</td>
<td>0.80*</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.69</td>
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<td><strong>Control (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Reychav and Wu, 2015b)</strong></td>
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<td>During the realization of this activity, I felt that . . .</td>
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<td>CONT1 . . . everything was under control</td>
<td>0.80*</td>
<td>13.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONT2 . . . I had control of the situation</td>
<td>0.94*</td>
<td>16.46</td>
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<td>CONT3 . . . I controlled my interactions in Pinterest</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td>11.40</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td><strong>Temporal dissociation (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Reychav and Wu, 2015b)</strong></td>
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<td>During the realization of this activity . . .</td>
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<td>TEDI1 . . . time appeared to go very quickly</td>
<td>0.91*</td>
<td>15.15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TEDI2 . . . time flew</td>
<td>0.97*</td>
<td>20.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEDI3 . . . I lost track of time</td>
<td>0.78*</td>
<td>12.69</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<td><strong>Focused immersion (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Reychav and Wu, 2015b)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>During the realization of this activity . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI1 . . . I was able to block out most other distractions</td>
<td>0.84*</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI2 . . . I was absorbed in what I was doing</td>
<td>0.86*</td>
<td>14.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI3 . . . my attention did not get diverted very easily</td>
<td>0.85*</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative learning (So and Brush, 2008; Blasco et al., 2013)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During this activity with Pinterest, I felt that . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL1 . . . I actively collaborated in my learning experience</td>
<td>0.87*</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL2 . . . I had free rein to co-create my own learning experience</td>
<td>0.94*</td>
<td>13.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL3 . . . I had freedom to participate in my own learning experience</td>
<td>0.92*</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning performance (MacGeorge et al., 2008)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider that my participation in this activity has allowed me . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP1 . . . to improve my comprehension of marketing concepts</td>
<td>0.82*</td>
<td>10.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP2 . . . to understand marketing activities carried out by real firms</td>
<td>0.85*</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP3 . . . to identify marketing strategies and techniques in the real world</td>
<td>0.92*</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP4 . . . to increase my marketing knowledge</td>
<td>0.88*</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Scales and confirmatory analyses
to measure cognitive absorption, partial least squares modelling was used (Tenenhaus et al., 2005) with SmartPLS 2.0 software.

Table I shows the results of the evaluation of reliability and convergent validity. The indicators show high internal consistency. In all cases, the composite reliability coefficient, which represents the variance shared between indicators measuring the same construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), reached the minimum value of 0.70 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the value of 0.50 for all constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

As evidence of convergent validity, the results show that all the indicators are significant ($p < 0.01$) and their standardised loadings are higher than 0.70 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Discriminant validity was evaluated (Table II), confirming that the squared root of the AVE (reported on the diagonal) of one construct is always greater than the inter-construct correlations (the off-diagonal) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Thus, it can be concluded that the scales used to measure the reflected first-order constructs exhibit sufficient evidence of reliability and convergent and discriminant validity.

The next step examined the formative second-order construct of cognitive absorption. First, the correlations among the first-order constructs (i.e. heightened enjoyment, curiosity, control, temporal dissociation and focused immersion) were examined. High correlations suggest that first-order constructs are measuring the same aspect of the construct, so they should be reflective (Peter et al., 2007). As shown in Table II, this was not the case for the first-order constructs that determine cognitive absorption because the correlation between them is always less than 0.80 (Pavlou and El Sawy, 2006). Second, the multicollinearity between the first-order constructs is tested to ensure the model is not destabilised (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001) and cause the weights to be to be non-significant (Hair et al., 2011). To ensure that multicollinearity was not present, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was calculated for the means of the first-order constructs. The values obtained varied from 1.04 to 2.55, which is far below the common cut-off threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2011). Thus, it can be stated that the second-order construct for cognitive absorption is formative, as theoretically proposed (Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010).

Figure 3 shows the results of the analyses carried out to test the proposed hypotheses. In line with the recommendations of Hair et al. (2012), bootstrapping was applied (5,000 sub-samples of the same size) to obtain standard errors and $t$-values to evaluate the significance of the parameters.

Regarding cognitive absorption, the weights of all the first-order constructs are significant (Chin, 1998; Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001; Hair et al., 2011) (Table III).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enjoyment</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Curiosity</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Control</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Temporal dissociation</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Focused immersion</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Collaborative learning</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Learning performance</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table II.**

**Correlations and discriminant validity**

**Notes:** In italics, the square roots of average variance extracted. The correlations among constructs are below the diagonal elements.
Nevertheless, it should be noted that focused immersion has a weight of less than 0.1; thus, it is rejected. The other constructs obtained a weight above the limit of 0.1, so their effects on cognitive absorption were confirmed, heightened enjoyment and curiosity being the most important drivers. H1a, H1b, H1c and H1d are supported, but H1e is rejected.

The indirect and total effects of all the constructs on learning performance were also examined, because they provide interesting information about cause–effect relationships (Table IV). The effect of cognitive absorption on collaborative learning is highly significant ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), as is the total effect of the former on learning performance ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$).

### Table III.
Weights of the first-order constructs on the second-order construct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second-order construct</th>
<th>First-order constructs</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>$t$-statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive absorption</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>14.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>11.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>5.11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporal dissociation</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>11.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused immersion</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.75*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** ***Significant at 0.01 level based on 5,000 bootstraps; **significant at 0.05 level based on 5,000 bootstraps; *significant at 0.1 level based on 5,000 bootstraps

### Table IV.
Direct, indirect and total effects on learning performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Direct effects</th>
<th>Indirect effects</th>
<th>Total effects</th>
<th>$t$-Statistic (total effects)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>8.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>7.06***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>4.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal dissociation</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>7.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused immersion</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.74*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive absorption</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>8.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.99**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Learning performance: $R^2 = 0.41$; $Q^2 = 0.33$; Collaborative Learning: $R^2 = 0.51$; $Q^2 = 0.44$; ***Significant at 0.01 level based on 5,000 bootstraps; **significant at 0.05 level based on 5,000 bootstraps; *significant at 0.1 level based on 5,000 bootstraps
Finally, collaborative learning also significantly influences individual learning performance ($\beta = 0.33; p < 0.05$). $H2, H3$ and $H4$ are confirmed.

Although the $R^2$ of the dependent variables exceeded the value of 10 per cent suggested by Falk and Miller (1992), power analysis was also tested by G*Power (Paul et al., 2007) to confirm the endogenous constructs’ predictive relevance (Cohen, 1988). The positive blindfolding $Q^2$ statistic obtained by collaborative learning and learning performance demonstrates the predictive relevance of the proposed model (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974).

6. Conclusions: discussion, managerial contributions, future research lines and limitations

6.1 Discussion

As more and more educational institutions integrate social networks into their marketing learning systems to enhance the learning process, it becomes increasingly necessary to thoroughly understand the mechanisms behind the effect of these networks on the individual’s performance. Although there has been a recent increase in research into the influence of social networks on student learning, several gaps remain and prevent us from having a complete understanding of this phenomenon, offering researchers new opportunities.

The primary objective of the present study is to analyse the effect of the learner’s experience during the use of a social network in her/his marketing learning process. Drawing upon previous research, a conceptual framework was formulated in which the components and nature of experience were addressed through the concept of cognitive absorption. This concept, which influences collaborative learning and marketing learning performance, is made up of five components, heightened enjoyment, curiosity, control, temporal dissociation and focused immersion. The framework was tested through a teaching activity based on Pinterest that encouraged the learners to identify real marketing examples. The model was tested by a survey answered by 157 marketing degree undergraduates. The results obtained from the empirical analyses provided strong support for the proposed model and enable important conclusions to be drawn.

The results demonstrated that four of the five components of CA significantly determine the individual’s experience when using Pinterest in marketing learning, the most important being heightened enjoyment and curiosity. Thus, it can be stated that, when the individual enjoys interacting on the social network and is curious about the activity and the content generated, (s)he has a rewarding experience and achieves greater cognitive absorption. These findings are similar to those obtained in previous research (Pallud, 2017; Pelet et al., 2017), which highlights the importance of these factors as antecedents of the individual’s cognitive engagement with interactive technologies in the learning context. The importance of enjoyment and curiosity is consistent with the significant role of the emotional processes that explain the student’s continuance intentions in online learning (Guo et al., 2016; Rodriguez-Ardura and Meseguer-Artola, 2016). Moreover, “enjoyment of using digital learning” is one of the “four blue ocean themes” that Liu (2008, p. 745) identified as deserving of more detailed examination. Therefore, by testing the role of enjoyment and curiosity, the present study impacts not only on marketing but also on educational theory.

Feelings of control and temporal dissociation are also important for the individual to experience cognitive absorption. Findings are consistent with previous studies that demonstrated that individuals should feel capable of controlling their own actions in learning processes (Esteban-Millat et al., 2014; Reychav and Wu, 2015a). These studies verified that perceived control is an important driver of the individual’s emotions (Pekrun, 2006), academic motivations (Martinez, 2003) and performance (Ruthig et al., 2008).
Similarly, the significance of temporal dissociation is associated with the alteration of the passage of time perceived by individuals when going through certain learning processes using technologies. This perception is related to the high level of concentration that individuals feel during the interaction, which makes them cut off temporarily, as demonstrated by Lee (2010). Temporal dissociation will make the individual think (s)he has finished a task in less time than it actually took (Saadé and Bahli, 2005).

Otherwise, focused immersion is not important in the configuration of CA. This finding is in significant contrast to other works that have highlighted the importance of focused immersion in technology use, such as mobile multimedia and online learning (Esteban-Millat et al., 2014; Pallud, 2017; Reychav and Wu, 2015a). This difference probably exists because communication in social networks has a community structure that leads the individual to continuously interact with other users during the experience and thus not totally focus on the learning activity. On the contrary, processes supported by other asynchronous technologies, such as emails, forums and bulletin boards, allow individuals to take only one action and to focus on their own learning. These technologies do not require simultaneous interactions with other actors.

A noteworthy result of the present study is the recognition of the importance of CA in the improvement of the individual’s learning performance. Baker et al. (2017) confirmed the importance of the individual’s feeling of CA for causing positive perceptions about learning, CA being generated through interactive participation. Similar results were obtained by Reychav and Wu (2015a) in a study about the role of CA in a mobile learning environment (a similar context to the present research, since Pinterest can be a mobile app). These authors noted that “the theory of cognitive absorption contributes to further understanding improvements in learning outcomes” (p. 343). CA is crucial to effective training, because it fosters individual motivation during the learning process and improves learning outcomes (Tharenou, 2001). It acts as the starting point of the cognitive process that influences the individual’s learning and behaviour. Therefore, the greater is the CA experienced, the greater will be the collaboration of the individual with other users during marketing learning, and the better will be the final performance.

Moreover, the relationship between collaborative learning and individual learning performance is remarkable. As the learner interacts with her/his peers and with the marketing teacher through the social network, (s)he feels active in the marketing learning process and perceives that her/his contribution is building new knowledge. The collaborative learning that takes place on the social network allows the individual to create social bonds and encourages her/him to make the most of herself/himself. In this way, collaborative learning not only improves the group’s performance but also optimizes the individual’s performance. This finding is consistent with previous research (Blasco et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2015; Sung and Hwang, 2013).

It is important to point out that the individual’s experience and its consequences depend on the social network used and the design of the activity. Pinterest is characterised by its originality and novelty, which influences the individual’s overall evaluation of her/his experience and, especially, the enjoyment and curiosity that determine her/his cognitive absorption. The possibility of transmitting ideas through images, its ease of use, the organisation of themes by boards, and the interconnection between group members, make Pinterest an ideal social network for the development of marketing learning based on collaboration. Therefore, both the characteristics of Pinterest and the design of the activity motivated the marketing learners, improved their collaborative learning and optimised individual performance.
In summary, it can be concluded that Pinterest is an interesting marketing learning tool through which to develop experiences based on enjoyment, curiosity, temporal dissociation and control. These experiences give rise to cognitive processes based on active student participation and collaborative learning, which improve individual performance.

6.2 Managerial contributions
The present study addresses the influence of Pinterest on marketing learning processes and demonstrates that this social network provides several benefits to learners and educational institutions. The findings enable several managerial contributions to be proposed. First, proposals are made about improvements that Pinterest may make to the services offered by educational institutions. These services are, in fact, the product that educational institutions offer to satisfy customer needs and to differentiate themselves from their competition. Second, proposals are made for managerial contributions related to the use of Pinterest to upgrade the marketing strategies of educational institutions.

Educational institutions might use Pinterest in the design of interactive, unique and pleasurable learning services. In recent years, individuals have become more likely than ever before to rely on pictorial information, so educational institutions should exploit the possibilities offered by new social networks, such as Pinterest, to redesign their learning services. Taking learners out of their comfort zones and breaking conventional structures increases their interest in learning. Pinterest can support the incorporation of several novelties: in the work space (out of the class), in the objective of the activity (real examples obtained from the internet), and in how results are presented (published on the social network). These developments allow institutions to create unique learning services to increase the individual’s motivation and improve individual performance. For example, a student might carry out a study into a brand, create a board on Pinterest about the brand, collect related images and videos and thereby develop an entertaining and useful learning experience.

Educational institutions might apply Pinterest to develop learning processes based on the individual’s cognitive absorption. Pinterest may lead individuals to feel enjoyment, curiosity, control and temporal dissociation during learning, thus experiencing a state of involvement that positively affects their performance. Thus, Pinterest should not be used only to achieve particular results, but also to develop enriching processes based on the individual’s cognitive absorption. This form of learning process optimizes the individual’s experiences and differentiates apparently similar services. For example, https://pingroupie.com is a tool that uses predefined filters or direct search to find boards on any subject. This not only allows interesting information to be obtained, it also facilitates the establishment of contacts with subject specialists.

Educational institutions might take advantage of the collaborative nature of their learning services and apply social networks, such as Pinterest, to promote a collective identity. Social networks encourage individuals to participate and create collaboration-based cognitive processes. This collaboration is achieved when all the elements that shape the learning experience are properly combined; in this, social networks can play a key role. Collaboration not only improves the group outcome as a whole but also enables each marketing learner to maximize her/his individual performance.

Educational institutions might disseminate their marketing strategies using social networks frequently used by their target audience as communication channels. Social networks that some years ago were considered fundamental to any marketing strategy, such as Twitter and Facebook, are becoming obsolete among young people. On the contrary, social networks based on photographs and images, such as Pinterest and Instagram, are
emerging with real force and are frequently used by learners. They allow institutions to establish a direct dialogue with the learners. Moreover, they facilitate the dissemination of experiential messages, which increase the individual’s enjoyment, curiosity and/or temporal dissociation during interactions. For example, Drake University has a complete profile on Pinterest (www.pinterest.es/drakeuniversity/) that includes several boards on different topics, such as life on campus, lifestyle and sports.

6.3 Future research lines and limitations

This study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the sample consisted only of students using Pinterest in their learning, and thus no comparisons were made with a control group not using Pinterest. This prevents the elimination of other potential explanations for the obtained results, such as the affinity of students for the subject. Thus, future research should develop a quasi-experiment to test the proposed framework across two different marketing learner groups, Pinterest users and non-users.

Second, given that this activity is a pioneer in the study of Pinterest in this marketing degree, the results may reflect, in some way, its novelty. None of the respondents had previously used this social network in learning. Consequently, their experience was conditioned by positive factors, such as curiosity, variety-seeking or the need for cognition, and by negative factors, such as laziness, the fear of making mistakes or lack of familiarity. Future research should examine the effect of Pinterest longitudinally to determine whether the effects obtained diminish as individuals’ experience with this social network increases.

Third, the present study examines the Pinterest application. However, in recent years, similar applications have emerged, such as Snapchat and TikTok, as have new features in consolidated applications, such as Instagram stories. These applications have achieved great acceptance, especially among the young, and are characterised by the generation of private experiences – as opposed to the concept underpinning public social media platforms – of ephemeral duration, through the use of short videos or images that are erased within just a few hours. In future research, it would be interesting to evaluate the use of these applications in the development of successful marketing learning services and to compare the findings with those of the present study.

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**Further reading**


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Impact of SMEs strategy on loyalty: the hairdresser case

Impacto de la estrategia de la PYME en la lealtad: el caso de las peluquerías

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to propose a theoretical framework and provide empirical evidence on the most successful marketing strategies for obtaining behavioural loyalty in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Design/methodology/approach – The data are based on 475 telephone surveys conducted among Spanish hairdressers. The authors have used ordinary least squares to estimate the empirical model.

Findings – Pricing, services and communication (Web page and in-store communication) are the main drivers of customer loyalty. SMEs have to be cautious with the use of social networks to avoid damaging loyalty. In addition, those positioned at high-price segments should pay more attention to communication on the Web, and all companies should find a balance between in-store communication and the sale of products for use at home.

Research limitations/implications – Further research should try to replicate the findings with data from consumers and firms.

Practical implications – Service managers need to understand the optimal strategy to succeed in the market. The key insights of this study could also apply to other sectors, such as health, personal care and wellness services.

Originality/value – Previous research focussed mainly on large companies, while the role of loyalty in the success of SMEs has been poorly studied, with focus only on the antecedents and the measurement of loyalty.

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This research was partially supported by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad, Grant ECO2017-82107-R (Mercedes Martos-Partal) and Grant ECO-2015-70349-P (José María Labeaga).
This study contributes to the previous research by analysing the effect of the strategy (price, range of services, communication, size and location) in the achievement of loyalty in SMEs.

**Keywords** Loyalty, Small and medium businesses, Hairdresser, Marketing strategy, Salon

**Paper type** Research paper

**Resumen**

**Objetivos** – Este trabajo propone un marco teórico y aporta evidencia empírica sobre las estrategias de marketing más exitosas en la consecución de lealtad comportamental en PYMEs.

**Metodología** – Se ha realizado una encuesta telefónica a 475 peluqueros españoles. El modelo utilizado para la estimación es el de mínimos cuadros ordinarios.

**Resultados** – Precio, servicios, y comunicación (página web y comunicación en la tienda) son los principales generadores de lealtad. Las PYMEs tienen que ser cautelosas con el uso de las redes sociales para evitar dañar la lealtad. Además, aquellas posicionadas en altos precios deben prestar más atención a la comunicación en la web y todas deben encontrar un equilibrio entre la comunicación en el tienda y la venta de productos para su uso en casa.

**Limitaciones** – Investigaciones futuras podrían replicar este estudio usando datos de consumidores y de empresa.

**Implicaciones prácticas** – Los gerentes necesitan entender la estrategia óptima para tener éxito en el mercado. Las ideas claves de este trabajo podrían aplicarse a otros servicios personalizados de salud y bienestar.

**Originalidad/valor** – La investigación previa se centra principalmente en grandes empresas mientras que el papel de la lealtad en el éxito de las pymes ha sido escasamente investigado y se ha centrado en los antecedentes y la medición de la lealtad. Este estudio realiza una contribución al analizar el efecto de la estrategia (precio, surtido de servicios, comunicación, tamaño y localización) en la consecución de la lealtad en las pymes.

**Palabras clave** – Lealtad; pequeñas y medianas empresas; Pymes; peluqueros; estrategia de marketing; salon

**Tipo de artículo** – Artículo de investigación

1. **Introduction**

Customer loyalty is one of the most debated subjects in marketing (Kamran-Disfani *et al.*, 2017; Serra-Cantallops *et al.*, 2018; Watson *et al.*, 2015) and has interest among academics and practitioners (The Economist, 2016) who want to understand the effect of strategy on customer loyalty and performance, given that achieving customer loyalty is a primary marketing goal (Watson *et al.*, 2015).

Building and maintaining a loyal customer base creates multiple potential benefits for firms and brands. Loyal consumers remain with a company because they are pleased with the service and therefore are more likely to buy additional services and spread favourable word-of-mouth communication (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). The literature of services state that customer loyalty drives firm performance (Hogreve *et al.*, 2017; Coviello *et al.*, 2006). First, loyal customers amplify sales through frequent repurchases and customer referrals (Kamakura *et al.*, 2002). Second, loyal customers reduce service costs and marketing expenditures because they are familiar with service provider’s processes and are reluctant to switch (Anderson, 1998).

In the rich history of loyalty, the empirical research has mainly been undertaken on large organizations, and there is a gap concerning the role of loyalty in the management and success of small businesses (Mostajer Haghighi *et al.*, 2014). The scarce literature on loyalty in the small business services are focussed mainly on the antecedents and measurement of loyalty (Bove and Johnson, 2006, 2009; Mostajer Haghighi *et al.*, 2014; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2007; Wiid *et al.*, 2016; Yim *et al.*, 2008), whereas marketing
strategy remains less studied. While some aspects of the strategy on loyalty have been studied as loyalty card programme adoption (Hutchinson et al., 2015), brand management decision and brand experiences (Mitchell et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2018), changes in different attributes of a service (Lam et al., 2009) and other components have been left out. Price, store format, product quality, human interactions, store image, among others, are key elements of the whole strategy that have not been investigated on SMEs and affect to retail patronage and loyalty (Gauri et al., 2008; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Kamran-Disfani et al., 2017).

Bove and Johnson (2006, 2009) and (Yim et al., 2008) analyse the achievement of loyalty, from a consumer perspective, in a sector mainly composed by SMEs, the hairdressing salon market. These authors found that trust, commitment and interactions (loyalty to service workers) are key drivers to engage customer loyalty. However, we propose that other factor to explain loyalty, the marketing strategy. Could managers choose a strategy to engender loyalty? This research question remains unanswered because other elements of the strategy, such as pricing, assortment of services and communications, are out of the scope of these studies, at least in their potential role of the components of the strategy such as moderators to generate loyalty. Therefore, this paper adopts a managerial perspective trying to fill the gap and contributing to the previous literature through the analysis of the effect that the SMEs marketing strategy exerts on customer loyalty.

The hairdressing salon market is a business-to-business-to-consumer (B2B2C) model whose core stakeholders are manufacturers, hairdressers and consumers. The hairdressing salon market represents more than 3.5 million salons worldwide. More than 800 million customers make use of hairdressing services annually, making 6 billion visits to hairdressing salons (Machek, 2010). Worldwide, seven out of ten women regularly attend hairdressing salons, visiting them, on average, five times per year. Overall, these figures show the potential of this market (GFK, 2016).

According to Key Stone (2016), in Spain, the hairdressing market employs 200,000 people directly and 35,000 people indirectly. It is highly fragmented with 50 K salons representing the highest concentration within Western Europe – one salon per 1,000 inhabitants on average. It is estimated that this business generates around €3,300m per year, 0.3 per cent of the Spanish GDP. In this market, more than 80 manufacturers and importers operate with 140 different brands. From a manufacturer standpoint, hairdressing salon market in Spain accounts for €520m.

We contribute to the previous literature by adopting a managerial view, and with this aim, we ask hairdressers about the strategies they implement and about the consumer loyalty in their salons. Thus, the study has two main purposes:

1. to establish a suitable theoretical framework; and
2. to provide empirical evidence related to the most successful marketing plan in the achievement of behavioural loyalty in SMEs in the hairdressing salon market.

2. Theoretical framework
A retail strategy is the overall plan guiding a retail firm. It influences the firm’s business activities and its response to market forces, such as competition and the economy. The implementation of the strategy involves the choice of factors such as the store location, the range of services, pricing and communications to achieve objectives of the firm (Berman et al., 2018).

The fundamental assumption of our set-up is that the goal of hairdressing salons seeks to build loyalty through the combination of different elements of the marketing strategy such
as price, customer service such as breadth of services, unisex services and sales of professional products to use at home, loyalty to leader supplier, communication (Web page, social media and in-salon support material), number of employees and location. In Figure 1, we present the conceptual framework proposed in this paper.

2.1 Salon loyalty
To measure loyalty, three different perspectives have been used in the literature: behavioural, attitudinal and mixed (Watson et al., 2015). The behavioural perspective focuses on measuring behaviours such as repeated purchasing, which has obvious benefits for a firm’s financial performance. Because we adopt a managerial perspective, we measure loyalty from a behavioural perspective (Hult et al., 2017; Larsson and Viitaoja, 2017; Wiid et al., 2016). In the current study, we measure salon loyalty from a hairdresser perspective as the share of frequency of visits of the clients to the salon (Ailawadi et al., 2008).

2.2 Pricing positioning
Pricing positioning is a central strategic decision for all companies. Pricing constitutes a critical marketing strategy because it is the only variable that ultimately generates income (Monroe, 1979). The retailer’s price positioning is an important factor in store choice and loyalty (González-Benito and Martos-Partal, 2012) and an important element of the retailer strategy (Gauri et al., 2008). Therefore, we expect that it will constitute an important factor for salon strategy to drive loyalty.

According to the classical economic theory, a higher price increases perception of monetary sacrifice, implying a negative relationship between price and the purchase probability. At the same time, for many services a higher price increases perception of quality, and thus it positively affects the purchase probability (Rao and Monroe, 1988). Monetary savings often represent a key motivation for purchase, especially for consumers sensitive to price and promotions. Store loyalty might diminish monetary savings though because customers must waive the advantages of offers and promotions provided by different retailers. Price-focussed consumers who perceive significant benefits from comparing prices across brands and stores likely spread their purchases among various stores to obtain the benefits of the best deal. Therefore, it is common in the retailing industry to find a negative relationship between consumer...
price sensitivity and store loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2008; Martos-Partal and González-Benito, 2013; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006).

Moreover, hairdressing services differ from other retailing sector services, in that the former are perceived as a greater involvement in the purchase decision, both in experience quality and intangibility. The prices of hairdressing services are difficult to comprehend as these services cannot be kept, demonstrated, returned or resold. Furthermore, the experience of consumers with the service they receive in the hairdressing salon is intangible, and, as such, it cannot be sold or transferred to a third party.

Therefore, we expect higher prices in salon to increase the perception of service quality and thus to have a positive effect on loyalty. Hairdressing salons that are positioned in the high-price segment can generate more confidence and attract a clientele that is less sensitive to prices and, consequently, less willing to change their hairdressing salon. Previous literature also finds empirical evidence that higher prices generate loyalty (Dawes, 2009; Sayman and Hoch, 2014). If customers trust a particular stylist with a high standard quality, they will be willing to pay the price it costs. Hence, we propose as hypothesis that higher price positioning provides greater customer loyalty:

\[ H1. \] A salon with higher price positioning engenders more customer loyalty.

2.3 Positioning in service and assortment

Product/service selections (or assortment) is defined as the number of different items in a category (Levy et al., 2012). The breadth (number of brands) and depth (number of stock-keeping units) of an assortment offered in a shopping centre help retailer to meet the heterogeneous tastes of their customers (Dhar et al., 2001).

Store formats refer to competing categories of retailers that match varying customer needs and shopping situations, and it is related to store assortment (González-Benito et al., 2005). A format with a higher assortment (such as hypermarkets) can provide a one-stop shopping convenience for their customers and could meet more heterogeneous needs (González-Benito et al., 2005). For example, Finn and Louviere (1990) found that different apparel shopper segments tend to choose shopping centres that they associate with different combinations of features. Shopping centres that provide good services and a wide selection, but with less emphasis on low prices, are more likely to fall into the shoppers’ consideration set. Moreover, previous literature in retailing finds evidence of a positive relationship between greater assortment or store format and loyalty (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; Kamran-Disfani et al., 2017).

Therefore, we expect that salons with greater assortment and more services (such as unisex salons or salons with major breadth of services) could meet more heterogeneous needs and show higher loyalty levels. A hairdressing salon has two different sources of income: services and professional products to use at home. Professional products have higher prices than retail alternatives because they have an exclusive distribution and high-tech and high-quality products, and they are highly intensive in capability training and education of hairdressers (Machek, 2010). Therefore, we consider as part of salon assortment both the professional products sold at the salon, as well as the hairdressing services.

Loyal customers are more likely to buy additional services (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Therefore, the number of products or services a customer buys are critical factors that impact on the depth of the customer-company or brand relationship. One way to intensify the depth of this relationship is to increase the amount of retained products (Bolton et al., 2004).
Previous arguments are consistent with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964); firms which offer more services to customers provide concrete benefits to them and explain why customers engage in repeated exchanges and behave in response to being bestowed with benefits by an exchange partner. Based on the previous reasoning, we propose as hypothesis (H2) that higher service positioning such as unisex services or salon with higher breadth of services and professional products to use at home deliver higher customer loyalty to the hairdressing salon:

H2. The number of services offered and customer loyalty have a positive relationship. In particular:

H2.1. Unisex salons have higher customer loyalty.
H2.2. Salons with a major breadth of services reveal higher customer loyalty.
H2.3. Salons with high sales of professional products to use at home show greater customer loyalty.

2.4 Loyalty to leading providers
Peculiarities of these professional products sold at the salon made it difficult for the hair stylist to switch to another provider because of the high switching costs, which will drive higher relational exchanges between the manufacturer and the hairdressers (Zeithaml, 1981).

According to Trout and Ries (1986) and the double jeopardy theory (Martin, 1973), history shows that the first brand in the brain gets on average twice the long-term market share of the second brand and, again, twice as much as the third brand. Hence, the leader gets almost all the material advantages. This thought matches one law-line generalization in marketing; the double jeopardy effect. According to double jeopardy effect, larger brands win twice; they have more buyers and these buyers tend to buy more often (Ehrenberg et al., 1990). Consequently, these brands generate brand loyalty, which is one of the key elements of brand equity (Aaker, 1991).

The professional products sold in the salon are important elements in the hairdresser strategy, and the hairdresser makes the decision about the brand to include in the assortment. Consumers, however, visit the salon mainly for the service and stylist expertise and not for the product (Bove and Johnson, 2006, 2009). Brands with higher equity could drive more customer loyalty for hairdressers more concerned about building image and reputation (Aaker, 1991). If we rely on the image transfer theory (Park et al., 1996), hairdressers must consider that an image transfer could occur between the brand sold and their salons, which would help building salon image and trusting, as it happens with co-branding. Consequently, we expect that salons loyal to leading brands generate higher loyalty.

H3. Loyal salons to leading brands show higher customer loyalty.

2.5 Communication strategy: Web page, social media and in-salon communication activities
According to the economy of information theory (Nelson, 1970, 1974), consumers have uncertainties about the attributes and benefits of the products and services they aim to purchase because of imperfect or asymmetric information, which characterises most markets. Consumers can search for information about products and services to compensate for this lack of knowledge. Communication is an informative tool and a key element in the strategy of a firm (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010), and then the hairdresser has to choose right
communication policies to inform consumers. Communication causes consumer trust, which stimulates commitment to the relationship and loyalty to the firm (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ball et al., 2004).

Nowadays, the first-place search for consumers is the internet. They look for either information about businesses to shop online or simply primary information such as the address or phone number of a hairdresser salon. Therefore, building an online presence is critical for hairdressing salons, not only to share information with consumers, but also to gain credibility and trust. As outlined by Verisign (2013), 56 per cent of consumers declare that they do not trust a business without a website. In addition, today consumers like to connect and communicate with companies more than ever. In this sense, establishing an online presence through a website or social networks is an excellent platform to achieve this goal. Maintaining ongoing communication and providing updates on company initiatives, news and events through digital channels helps companies reach a broader audience to create and strengthen relationships and to build trust, which is critical for the loyalty to the company.

Communication in the store is a key retail mix element (Berman et al., 2018). Moreover, the physical environment is influential to communicate the firm’s image and its purposes to customers. In fact, physical setting may also influence customer’s ultimate level of satisfaction with the service (Bitner, 1992) and provoke loyalty. In this paper, we focus on in-salon communication activities, specifically display and advertising in the salon. Display activity improves in-store visibility, gaining consumer attention to the category and, therefore, positively influences in-store purchase decisions (Dhar et al., 2001).

According to the previous arguments, we focus on the most used communication tools in the hairdressing salon (Web page, social networks and in-store communication), and we propose that the use of those tools (online, offline) ensures higher customer loyalty.

\[
H4. \text{ More communication activities and consumer loyalty have a positive relationship.}
\]

\[
H4.1. \text{ Salons with Web page engender more customer loyalty.}
\]

\[
H4.2. \text{ Salons with social media generate more customer loyalty.}
\]

\[
H4.3. \text{ In-salon communication activities lead to more customer loyalty.}
\]

2.6 Number of employees
Consistent with the social exchange theory, we expect that the higher the number of employees, the greater is the loyalty. Moreover, given that in this sector the average number of employees is low, more employees could serve more customers, which, as time goes on, could get interactions with indirect effects on loyalty. Previous research found that in personal service contexts, loyalty to service workers are key drivers to engage customer loyalty (Bove and Johnson, 2006; Yim et al., 2008; Ganesh et al., 2000). This means that loyalty to the employee translates into behavioural loyalty to the firm, a channel explained by the closeness and interaction of service workers and customers. Thus, we postulate that:

\[
H5. \text{ The number of employees and customer loyalty are positively related.}
\]

2.7 Location
One of the more critical decisions that a small retail establishment makes is the choice of its location (Kuo et al., 2002). It is not possible to determine how many businesses with positive potential fail because of the entrepreneur’s failure to find an adequate location for the
business survival (Scarborough and Zimmerer, 2006). Even minor differences in location can have a significant impact on market share and profitability (Craig et al., 1984). Therefore, the choice of the location of the salon can help making or breaking the business. In fact, location decisions are more difficult to change (in comparison to pricing or services) because retailers make important investments to purchase and develop real estate or commit to long-term leases with developers (Berman et al., 2018). These authors distinguish three types of locations: the isolated store, the unplanned business district and the planned shopping centre.

Consumers go to shopping centres to have an experience of leisure, family time and enjoyment (Berry, 1996). The act of purchase is only one of the aspects to consider and the border between commerce and leisure has been diluted. Shopping centres are no longer a place just to buy but also to put the desire for “fun” into the context of successful retail value propositions (Howard, 2007; Wakefield and Baker, 1998). This evidence matches with the motivation theory, which proposes that the value of the shopping/service experience has not only a utilitarian but also a hedonic dimension (Babin et al., 1994). Hedonic benefits are experimental and affective, i.e. consumers appreciate them for their own qualities, not as the means to an end (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

Based on the previous premises, we propose that consumers in shopping centres are less loyal than consumers in any other location. It can be justified by two reasons. One, the motivation of consumption is different because they seek leisure or relaxation rather than a pure functional cutting and colour service in a street salon. Second, their main goal or plan is not to visit the shopping centres salons, but because they are there, they take advantage of the time and enjoy the experience that this type of salons can offer.

\[ H6. \] Location at shopping centres has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.

2.8 Moderating effects

Worldwide, there is a current premiumization trend at beauty markets (Euromonitor, 2017). Thus, the evolution to upper pricing positioning over different salons could have consequences for consumers’ motivations to repeat the visit. Hence, the price itself can be one of the factors that moderates the effect of other marketing strategies on customer loyalty. Specifically, we propose that price positioning could moderate the effect on consumer loyalty of the size of the hairdressing salon measured by the number of employees and the effect of Web page communication. Bove and Johnson (2006) find that the number of workers moderates the transference of positive attitudinal loyalty for the service worker to attitudinal loyalty to the service business. The transfer is stronger when the service business has only one or two workers, as these personnel represent the service business to the customer. They argue that in a company with one or two workers it is likely that they may be partners in the business. Even if they are not partners, each one is a larger portion of the “business” than when there is a medium or high number of service workers. We go further and propose that price positioning moderates the relationship between the number of employees and customer loyalty. At price-oriented salons, customers’ motivations to keep loyal relate more to low prices than to quality perceptions. In contrast, at high priced-oriented salons, customers’ motivations focus more on quality and trust, so the importance of perceived quality may be higher, and the heterogeneity of service could become a problem when the number of employees increase because a higher number of employees could also imply a lack of personalization or lower emotional link with consumers. Each day more, consumers like to be treated in a special and personalized way and their desire is stronger to the extent that they pay more.
Heterogeneity is one of the characteristics of services and concerns the potential for high variability in the performance of services. The quality and essence of a service can vary between producers, customers and time (Zeithaml et al., 1985). Therefore, even if more employees could serve more customers, time can make it translate, first, to employee loyalty and, then, to customer loyalty. In salons with high-price positioning, customers expect high service quality, high employee capability and more experience of the stylist. Customers pay the price for the trust to a particular stylist with a high-quality standard. However, as the number of employees increases, it becomes more difficult to keep the same standard across employees, which could damage the loyalty to the firm. This is explained because customers are not going to be willing to pay the same price for stylists with lower quality levels. Then, we expect that:

\[ H7. \] Salons’ price positioning moderates the relationship between the number of employees and consumer loyalty, so the relationship between loyalty and size in high-price salons is negative.

On the other hand, because salons must align their price positioning with their marketing actions, we propose that price positioning of the salon moderates the relationship between the most important communication activities to build salon image (Web page) and customer loyalty. Communication is key to build image and engender trust and loyalty to the firm (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ball et al., 2004) and Web page is the key tool to do it (Verisign, 2013). Given that customers’ motivations focus more on quality and trust in high-price salons, the effect of Web communication to generate loyalty ought to be more important for these types of salons. However, firms and, more specifically small firms, have difficulties to develop integrated marketing communication between online and offline strategies. Therefore, high-price salons are going to have more difficulties to satisfy the needs of consumers that are paying more for services, i.e. consumers that expect the same quality and trust in the salon than in the available information on the Web:

\[ H8. \] Salons’ price positioning moderates the relationship between Web page communication and consumer loyalty, so the relationship between Web page communication and consumer loyalty in high-price salons is negative.

Moreover, we propose that the proportion of customers who bought professional products to use at home moderate the effect of in-salon communication on customer loyalty. As previously argued, display activity improves in-store visibility, drawing consumer attention to the category and thereby positively influencing in-store purchase decisions (Dhar et al., 2001). According to Valenzuela and Raghubir (2009), shoppers are more likely to purchase an item when they can easily see from the aisle, demonstrating a need for more visible and eye-catching displays. Therefore, display of professional products to use at home could damage the loyalty to the salon because if more customers buy these products, they are going to use them at home and, therefore, the number of visits to salons will be reduced:

\[ H9. \] Proportion of customers that bought professional products to use at home moderates the relationship between in-salon communications and customer loyalty, so the higher the proportion of customers using products to use at home, the lower the consumer loyalty through in-salon communication activities.
3. Empirical model

3.1 Research method and measures

We provide empirical evidence of the conceptual framework proposed in Figure 1 in a sector characterized by SMEs, the hairdressing industry. The population of interest was defined as hairdresser’s owners or salon managing directors. We conducted a survey in Spain in 2013, whose respondents are a sample of the population of interest. The data were gathered by a marketing research company with high reputation and specialization in the industry. The data collection was Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). We used a stratified sampling method across Spanish regions. We obtained 475 completed questionnaires and validated 463 questionnaires after dropping observations with missing information across multiple items. Sample size represents approximately 1 per cent of total Spanish salons (53,061) according to Key Stone (2016) and are representative of the salons market population across Spanish regions. It was found that 97 per cent of the Spanish salons were not affiliated at a national chain and the average sample salon age is 10 years.

In the survey we use single item measures for two reasons. First, we try to minimize respondent refusal given the difficulty to get responses by owners and directors of firms. Second, because we measure concrete singular objects and attributes, it is recommended to use single item measures instead of multiple items measures for this kind of construct (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007; Bergkvist, 2015). All items and sources used to build the variables and their descriptive statistics are reported in Table I.

3.2 Loyalty to the salon measure

We adopt a behavioural perspective on service loyalty. Specifically, we follow Ailawadi et al. (2008) and focus on the share of shopping trips to the salon. The item used was: “Considering all your customers, what percentage would have weekly frequency?” Therefore, the variable “loyalty” represents the percentage of weekly visits (over total visits) to the hairdressing salon by an end-consumer as declared by the hairdresser. This variable is thus bound between 0 and 1, and the mean value is 0.23.

3.3 Pricing strategy

The “pricing” variable was seized from the following item: “What is approximately the average value (in €) of the ticket in your salon for hairdressing services and products?” We imputed missing cases (30) of this variable by calculating the weighted average ticket at the Spanish province where the salon belongs. The average price per salon is €23.5.

3.4 Services strategy

“Unisex” measures hairdressing salons with unisex services using the survey question: “What kind of clients do you attend to in your salon?” The variable takes three possible answers (100 per cent men dedicated; 100 per cent female dedicated or unisex), which were transformed to a scale (1, 0) being 1 unisex and 0 “not unisex”. Of the sample, 87 per cent are unisex salons.

The “service” variable measures breadth of services and it was built using the survey question: “Do you have the following services at your salon?” The hair-care services asked in the survey were: hair colour, hair beauty treatments including nutrition, hydration, volume, repair, specific treatments for hair care (fall, dandruff, grease, etc.), haircut and styling and straightening/permanent. The aesthetic services include waxing, manicure, pedicure, massages, nail reconstruction, anti-aging treatments, make-up services and other aesthetic treatments. Answers to previous questions were transformed to (1, 0) dummies being 1 Yes/0 No. Once transformed to a dummy, we compute the variable as the sum of...
hairdressing salon services multiplied by $\chi$, ($\chi$ being the percentage of hair services invoice sales over total salon sales as declared by respondents to the survey) plus the sum of all the aesthetic services multiplied by $1-\chi$. The variable has an average sample value of 4.48.

Sales of professional products to use at home were measured by “product purchase” variable. The item was: “Could you tell me what percentage of customers who come to use salon services also buy the products?” On average, 12 per cent of consumers purchase professional products to use at home.

Hairdresser loyalty to leading supplier is measured by the variable named “leader loyalty”. One common measure of behavioural loyalty considers the expenditure

Table I.
Variable definition
distributions across stores/brands and define the preferred store as the store that gets the greatest expenditure from the consumer (Bustos-Reyes and González-Benito, 2008; González-Benito and Martos-Partal, 2014). Therefore, we compute the variable considering the percentage of purchases in professional products that hairdressers acquire for their salon to measure behavioural loyalty to the supplier. It was computed considering the item: "According to volume of purchase: who is your main supplier?" There is a high market concentration from suppliers as the premium segment accounts for 41 per cent of the market ($219m). This is the major battlefield to compete where L’Oréal Company and Coty Company together account for 51 per cent of the total premium segment. Overall L’Oréal is the market leader with 34 per cent share, while Coty is the second player (17 per cent) (Kline, 2016). Therefore, we consider L’Oréal as the leader supplier brand and, then, we distinguish between salon loyal to the leader brand, then when the salon points out as main supplier to L’Oréal, and in this case the leader loyalty variable takes a 1 value and 0 otherwise. 23 per cent of the sample has L’Oréal as their main supplier.

3.5 Communication strategy
The survey items related to Web page and social media activity use dichotomous answers: "Yes/No". For Web page communication, we compute the variable "Web page". This variable captures the results of the item: "Has the hairdressing salon a website?" and for social network communication we build the variable "rrss". This variable is computed using the survey question: "Has the hairdressing salon activity in social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.?” In both cases, the answers were transformed to a scale (1, 0), “Yes” to 1 and “No” to 0. In-salon communication activities are computed in the “animation” variable, which capture the animation effort in the salon. We measure the effort on a ten-point Likert scale (from a minimum effort of 1 to a maximum of 10). We find that salons made more effort in-store communication (6.90 on average), whereas the internet presence is low (18 per cent of the salons have Web page and only 7 per cent have social network presence).

The size of the hairdressing salon was measured by the variable named “employees”. It was constructed considering the number of full and part time employees attending to answers to the following two questions: “How many full-time employees, owner or manager included, do you have in your salon?” and “How many part-time employees, owner or manager included, do you have in your salon?” We use the common rule in the sector (Key Stone, 2016) to have a comparable base on equivalent employees. A part-time employee represents one third of a full-time one. So, the final variable is computed as the weighted sum of full- and part-time employees declared by hairdressers. The average size of the salon in the sample is 2.36 employees.

Finally, location of the hairdressing salon is measured by “location”, which is calculated from the answers to the following item: “Where is your hairdressing salon located?” Four answers were possible: street level, shopping centre/mall, apartment or other. Because we are interested in the effect of location at shopping centres, the previous answers were transformed to a (1, 0) dummy being 1 if the salon is located at shopping centre and 0 otherwise. Of the salons, 3 per cent are located in a shopping centre.

4. Analysis and findings discussion
Our dependent variable, \( \pi_i \), is defined as the share of weekly visit of customers to hairdressing salon \( i \) and, therefore, it measures the per cent as estimated by the hairdresser. The independent variables relate to marketing strategies. Because our loyalty measures range from 0 to 1 we transform the dependent variable to log-linearize
the relationship between the dependent variable and the explanatory variables, where \( \ln \left( \frac{\pi_i}{1 - \pi_i} \right) \) represents the logit transformation of the dependent variable and we estimate the model using ordinary least squares (OLS). In the 17 cases in which \( \pi_i \) was equal to 0, we approximate the log by 0.01 to preserve the full sample. Thus, we assume a zero-weekly frequency of visits to a salon as an error in the variable. Then, our specification is expressed as:

\[
E \left[ \ln \left( \frac{\pi_i}{1 - \pi_i} \right) \right] = \alpha + \beta X_i
\]

Where \( \alpha \) is a parameter estimating the average share of weekly visits to hairdresser salons; \( X_i \) is a vector of variables measuring the marketing strategies of hairdressing salon \( i \); and \( \beta \) is a vector of the parameter to be estimated, capturing the effect of the marketing strategies on the proportion of weekly visits. As usual, we assume that, on average, the model does not make mistakes, i.e. the error has zero mean. In Table II we report the estimation results.

We estimate two specifications. A first model (model 1 in Table II), where vector \( X_i \) is composed by pricing, unisex, service, product purchase, leader loyalty, Web page, rrss, animation, employees and location. This model allows us to test H1-H6. Model 2 in Table II is proposed to additionally test the moderation hypothesis (H7 to H9). This second specification adds to the previous determinants of loyalty, the three moderator variables (pricing \( \times \) employees; pricing \( \times \) Web and animation \( \times \) products purchase). “Pricing \( \times \) employee”, “pricing \( \times \) Web” and “animation \( \times \) products purchase” are the interactions of “pricing” and “employees”, “pricing” and “Web page” and “animation” and “products purchase”, respectively.

Before presenting the results, we analyse if collinearity is an issue in our model. We test for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factors (VIF). The VIF identify both correlation and its strength. The diagnostics in our estimated models does not reveal important multicollinearity problems (all VIFs are below 1.54 in model 1 and below 1.75 in model 2).

The direct effect of salon strategy through “pricing” on customer loyalty in the simplest model is positive and significant. Therefore, salons positioned at higher prices do generate more customer loyalty in support of H1. Hairdressing salons positioned at high prices could generate more confidence and attract a less price sensitive clientele, and, therefore, they will be less willing to change their salon. While superior product performance translated into higher price services must be a concern, consumers wishes would seem to be related more to final look or services satisfaction. Therefore, higher prices positioning could help to increase consumer confidence and become a powerful marketing strategy for retaining customers.

We find a significant and positive relationship between unisex and loyalty, providing support to H2.1. Nowadays, specialization is crucial and critical as a benefit to deliver prestige to the hairdressing salon. The raw data show that most Spanish salons – 87 per cent – are unisex and the estimation results confirm this marketing specialization strategy to increase loyalty. We also find a positive and significant coefficient between customer loyalty and service variable, supporting H2.2. Moreover, the standardized coefficients in Table II show that the breath of service is the strongest force driving loyalty (0.193), pricing being the second (0.178) and unisex the third one (0.146).

Our results do not support that the service of sale of professional products to use at home generates customer loyalty (H2.3). These results could be explained by two core drivers explaining the cannibalization from professional market to retail market:

1. According to the recessionary environment during the past years, the price gap between professional products and products sell at the retailer have increased.
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<th>Standardized COEF</th>
<th>Z</th>
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<td>Pricing</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unisex</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.394</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product purchase</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.363</td>
<td>4.466</td>
<td>0.555</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader loyalty</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web page</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>1.107</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRSS</td>
<td>-0.450</td>
<td>-0.103</td>
<td>-2.37</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>-0.503</td>
<td>-0.115</td>
<td>-2.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>4.05</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td>0.336</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pricing × employees</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pricing × Web page</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>-0.326</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.326</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Animation × product purchase</td>
<td>-0.555</td>
<td>-0.554</td>
<td>-2.98</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Goodness of fit**

| F test            | P value = 0.000 |
| Adjusted $R^2$    | 0.229          | P value = 0.000 |
| Adjusted $R^2$    | 0.265          |
The development of online channels (e-commerce) has cannibalized part of the volume that consumers purchased at the salon (offline) and, therefore, they have now access and purchase these products at lower prices.

H4 proposes that hairdresser loyalty to leading supplier brands drives customer loyalty, but our results do not support it. Customer loyalty to the salon does not seem to be generated by hairdresser fidelity to leading manufacturers (L’Oréal). Therefore, consumers visit the salon for the service and hairdresser expertise, and the hairdresser decides the brands used in his salon (Bove and Johnson, 2006, 2009). Another possible explanation could be that there are brands belonging to other companies that also are symbols of prestige and quality performance. Therefore, hairdressers could change to others market players without any cost to the loyalty of their consumers.

Regarding communication strategies, our results support H4.1 (Web page) and H4.3 (in-salon communication), whereas H4.2 (social media) is not supported. We find a positive and significant relationship between loyalty and the use of Web page by the salon; this insight constitutes an opportunity for salons that do not currently use it or those underusing this marketing tool.

Regarding social networks communication, our finding shows opposite results to our proposal in H4.2 (results in line with Trainor et al., 2014). Thus, social media presence damages customer loyalty. Although digital communication is a reality that hairdressers cannot ignore in business, it looks like current social media digital strategies are not engendering customer loyalty. We can explain this result because despite thousands of hairdressing salons have opened profiles in social networks, most of them do not know how to manage them. They understand the need to have presence in social media, but it looks like they do not use it as an additional tool to the business. Therefore, we can summarize that the path to digital failure is to have presence without an integrated strategy, without providing value, with no coherence and integration with the business itself and with no link with the offline strategy.

The estimated coefficient of the variable animation is positive and significant, thus supporting H4.3. Therefore, the investment in store communication looks a good strategy to drive loyalty. Moreover, the standardized coefficients in Table II show similar importance across communication to engender/damage loyalty. The estimated coefficient of the number of employees is not significant, so, it does support H5. The number of employees is not related to behavioural customer loyalty. One possible explanation for this result is the small variation of the variable impeding a proper identification of its effect. According to descriptive statistics, 95 per cent of the salons have a number of employees in the range [1, 4, 5].

We do not find support for H6 in our data. Location of the salon at shopping centres does not have any effect on customer loyalty. This result is consistent with Jones et al. (2003), who provide empirical support that location is less important for small convenience stores offering less standardized and more personalized goods and services. Moreover, Bove and Johnson (2009) state that convenience, location and accessibility are the most frequent reasons for changing stylist and salon. Therefore, hairdressing salons at shopping centres do not generate less consumer loyalty. Consumers choose the salon considering a convenient location and for some consumers shopping centres could be a good one, as they make “shopping” while they find time for themselves.

To provide empirical evidence for the moderating effect of salon strategy on customer loyalty, we analyse the estimated results under the heading model 2 in Table II, which includes the interactions already mentioned. We propose that higher priced salon diminish the relationship between the number of employees and customer loyalty (H7). However, we find that the interaction of price with employees has a negative but insignificant coefficient.
and it does not support $H_7$. Price does not moderate the relationship between number of employees and customer loyalty. This result implies that heterogeneity of the service and the lack of training in small firms are not important issues in this sector.

Regarding $H_8$, we propose the relationship between Web page communication and customer loyalty is negative in high-price salons. The interaction variable has a negative and significant effect, thus supporting $H_8$. Therefore, having online presence without an integrated strategy with the offline strategy damage loyalty for salons with higher prices because the website could not be signalling enough differentiation between higher price and lower prices salons, which could be damaging the trust towards the salon. Considering that an important reason of Web page communication strategy is to differentiate and build image vs core competitors, luxury or prestige hairdressing salons with no differences in communication hurt the loyalty of their consumers (Seringhaus, 2005).

Finally, we propose that higher proportion of customer using products to use at home, diminish the positive relationship between in-salon communication activities and customer loyalty ($H_9$). In this case, the interaction variable has a negative and significant effect, so, our finding supports $H_9$. Hence, hairdresser needs to be cautious with the sale of professional products to use at home. If they emphasize the communication on these products, they could lose the customer loyalty to salon as a result of having a lower frequency of visits. This is explained as these products could be used as substitutes for visits to the salon.

5. Conclusions and implications
This study proposes a theoretical framework and provides empirical evidence related to the most successful marketing strategies in obtaining behavioural loyalty in SMEs. The empirical results show that pricing, services and communication (Web page and in-store communication) are key elements of the strategy, which help in the consecution of customer loyalty. On the other hand, SMEs need to have caution in the way of using social networks to communicate with consumers to avoid damage to consumer loyalty. Moreover, SMEs positioned in higher price segments could damage their loyalty when they do not get enough attention to Web page communication. In addition, SMEs need to keep a balance between sales of products to use at home and in store communication to prevent hurting loyalty.

SMEs positioned at high prices can generate more confidence and attract less price-sensitive clientele and, therefore, consumers that are less willing to change. Second, service positioning is a key element to keep customer loyalty, firms with higher number of services allow serving more consumer needs, which implies higher loyalty. About communication and beyond the “word-of-mouth” offline strategy needed by SMEs, they must focus on communication strategies online and offline to retain customers and to attract new ones. Online presence is key to engendering loyalty while salons need to devote further efforts in the way they use social networks. The key for using social media communication for top-of-mind awareness is to deliver content that is consistent, relevant and helpful. Online communication should be linked to offline communication with special attention to in-salon communication. The effective combination of these two strategies, as well as best-in-class execution, could increase customer loyalty. Finally, the training to the staff is key to keep loyalty to the firm. Capability and capacity strategies to staff will ensure and increase cross-sales via professional products sales to use at home, amplify the breadth of services and optimize social media strategies to overall increase customer loyalty.

5.1 Managerial implications for manager of small and medium enterprises
Our findings drive interesting implications to hairdressers and to other sector characterized by SMEs. While loyal consumers go to the firm for the service and employee’s expertise, also
marketing strategies affect customer loyalty and customer loyalty build up is a sum of multiple effects. As a potential watch-out, we want to highlight that even though the high-price predisposes the consumer at first, repeated experience will lead her to dismiss her firm in the mid/long term, as the price is not in line with her service quality expectations. A high-quality service perceived at a high price accordingly would be the perfect combination. Therefore, quality service can afford to be marketed in a higher price segment. Moreover, the manager needs to make good decisions about the service offered in the firm because, as the number of services offered increase, the cost could also increase, and it could be covered from a wide base of loyal consumers. Moreover, it would also constitute a mistake not to offer customers everything they demand in relation to services and sales of products to use at home.

Managers also need to focus on engendering digital communication capabilities because the level of knowledge in digital marketing could make a clear difference within SMEs. Digital marketing is much more profitable than traditional marketing because it needs few resources to generate measurable results. Moreover, it is a convenient tool to attract the youngest audience with service proposals adapted to them. The cost of SMEs not being at social media is higher than that of being; the non-presence in these platforms/social networks could generate distrust to the consumer and it could suggest a lack of closeness. At the same time, the manager can benefit from the positive opinions and word-of-mouth. To do so, the manager needs good capabilities on digital communication, or he could externalize communication activities to satisfy consumer needs in the new digital era.

Another issue that managers should not forget is in-store communication, which is the last opportunity to communicate with customers to take a last-minute service consumption option. SMEs require agile communication media and capable of attracting attention: a good product or service deserves a good exposure. Firms should determine the location of the different communication actions chosen but they should also be concerned with easing orientation and increasing the average customer’s ticket without damaging the brand-equity of the firm.

Regarding sale of professional products to use at home, firms should understand the changing and competitive economic environment where profits may decrease so they need to find sources of additional economic growth. However, they also must balance the impact on damage loyalty when the firm made a big effort in store communication about professional products to use at home. By applying direct marketing techniques, a proper training of the firm team and an increase of the promotion of the products intended to sale could easily facilitate the sale of these products without damage loyalty.

6. Limitations and future research
This study also suffers from limitations that suggest further research. First, one important difference between the hairdressing salon market and mass distribution market is the difficulty to obtain scanner data with real consumer purchases. This has been our main reason for conducting a survey. Moreover, we did not have access to objective income data from the firm. Future research containing this variable should analyse the effect of the strategy on firm’s profitability. Second, in this paper we adopt a managerial perspective to analyse loyalty. The proposed model does not reflect the reasons why end-consumers motivate choosing a firm. Further research could adopt both the manager and the consumer perspectives to analyse all the drivers of customer loyalty (Hult et al., 2017). Then, it would be possible to analyse geodemographic, socioeconomic and psychographic characterizations of different loyalty profiles, for instance. Moreover, it would be possible to study alternative methods of exceeding consumers expectations at salon such as the physical setting and spatial layout of the store (Lee et al., 2006) or how “servicescape” (Bitner, 1992) could impact consumer loyalty. Third, in this paper we focus on the number of employees; however, it would also be interesting to analyse
the level of training of employees. Fourth, to generalize our findings, future research could test the proposed model on data from other countries or data from other sectors with similar characteristics.

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Further reading


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Mediating model of brand equity
and its application

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the mediating role of brand satisfaction and brand trust in brand equity antecedents and outcomes through an empirical investigation of brand equity elements.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was conducted in Pune and Mumbai, two prominent cities of India. A structured questionnaire focused on garnering responses on measuring brand equity antecedents and outcomes was circulated to the cell phone users. The questionnaire aimed to assess the role of two additional variables, namely, brand satisfaction and brand trust, in the existing conceptual model of brand equity (Keller, 2001). Based on the data analysis, a structural equations path and the mediating model were developed.

Findings – The findings of this study show that the new brand equity model is highly relevant in predicting brand equity as compared to the existing brand equity model (Keller, 2001). The brand equity mediation model clearly elucidates the role of brand trust and brand satisfaction.

Research limitations/implications – With reference to a theoretical contribution, the study broadens the existing hypothetical model of brand equity. The findings of this research provide a strategic and analytical model for brand managers to build brand relationships among their consumers.
Originality/value – The present study challenges the existing model of brand equity (Keller, 2001) and further makes an effort to fill in the gaps in the existing theoretical model of brand equity.

Keywords Brand satisfaction, Brand equity, Path analysis, Brand trust, Mediation analysis

Paper type Research paper

Resumen

Propósito – Este documento tiene como objetivo examinar el papel mediador de la satisfacción con la marca y la confianza con la marca en los antecedentes y resultados de la equidad de marca a través de una investigación empírica de los elementos de equidad de marca.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Se realizó una encuesta en Pune y Mumbai, dos ciudades prominentes de la India. Se distribuyó a los usuarios de teléfonos móviles un cuestionario estructurado centrado en obtener respuestas para medir los antecedentes y resultados del valor de marca. El objetivo del cuestionario era recoger información para evaluar el papel de dos variables adicionales, la satisfacción con la marca y la confianza en la marca en el modelo existente y conceptual del valor de marca (Keller, 2001). El análisis de datos se llevó a cabo a través de la metodología de ecuaciones estructurales y modelo de mediación.

Hallazgos – Los hallazgos de este estudio muestran que el nuevo modelo de equidad de marca es muy relevante para predecir el valor de marca en comparación con el modelo de marca existente (Keller, 2001). El modelo de mediación de la equidad de marca aclara el rol de la confianza y la satisfacción con la marca.

Limitaciones/implicaciones – En relación a la contribución teórica, el estudio amplía el modelo existente de valor de marca. Los resultados de esta investigación proporcionan un modelo estratégico y analítico para que los gerentes creen relaciones de marca entre sus consumidores.

Originalidad/valor – El presente estudio desafía el modelo existente de equidad de marca (Keller, 2001) y además hace un esfuerzo por llenar los vacíos en el modelo teórico existente de equidad de marca.

Palabras clave – Equidad de marca, Satisfacción con la marca, Confianza en la marca, Análisis de ecuaciones estructurales, Análisis de mediación

Tipo de artículo – Artículo de investigación

1. Introduction

Creating an effective brand is a challenging endeavour (Klink, 2003; Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Consumers form relationships with brands because they serve a purpose (Fournier, 1998) and brands help consumers to communicate about themselves (Dibb and Simkin, 2008). Brand resonance is the extent to which a consumer develops strong behavioural, psychological and social bonds with the brands he/she consumes (Keller, 2001; Rindfleisch et al., 2006).

Brand equity has been examined from two different perspectives – financial and customer based (Keller, 1993; Lassar et al., 1995). Keller (2001) introduces the customer-based brand equity model, which drives customers from brand identity to brand relationship. There has been significant work done in the field of consumer brand relationships in the past few decades and it is still an emerging research area. Brand Relationship allows one to understand how people make long-term commitments to inanimate objects that they buy and consume (Kumar, 2006). On the backdrop of the available literature on brands and branding, the present study aimed to explain the application of a conceptual model, to comprehend the selection of brand by customers which is crucial for realising the concept of brand resonance in the arena of brand management.

The contribution of this study to the literature is twofold; first, the present study examines the existing and conceptual models of brand equity (Keller, 2001, 2016). Second, the study has introduced a new model in the area of brand management. The model is anticipated to have significant utility value for both, brand managers and research scholars, who need to investigate the level of brand equity among their consumers. With the expanded brand equity model, that manager can predict the bearing that antecedents and
mediators of brand equity have on the brand equity outcomes of their respective brand/s. The findings of the present study wherein, the influence of two new variables namely brand satisfaction (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and brand trust (Selnes, 1998; Moisescu and Allen, 2010) was tested, may help brand managers to augment a consumer’s attachment to a brand, thereby providing a boost to brand equity outcomes as a whole. Marketing professionals too, can employ the conclusions of this study for developing better branding strategies.

Further, present empirical research is structured as follows: The next section present an overview of the relevant literature from which the research framework and research assumptions are derived. Further, the methodology used to guide this study is briefly reviewed, and the research findings are outlined. Study also presents a discussion of results and managerial implications with conclusion. Finally, research limitations and future research scope are highlighted.

2. Theoretical framework of the study
Keller (1993, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2016) made a significant contribution to the theory of branding with the introduction of the concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) or brand resonance and brand hierarchy. Brand equity is the effect that brand knowledge has on the consumer’s response to the marketing of a brand, observed when the brand becomes known and when the consumer possesses favourable, strong and unique brand associations. The Customer-Based Brand Equity model identifies four steps that symbolise the questions asked to customers and represents a ‘branding ladder’, where fulfilment of each step was subject to the achievement of the previous one (Keller, 1993, 2001). These steps are construed out of the six brand building blocks, inclusive of a few sub-dimensions. A strong brand is built at the pinnacle of the pyramid where a harmonious relationship exists between ‘customers’ and ‘brand’. It is understood that brand resonance encompasses a wide range of brand-related activities and orientations – from mere repeat purchase to deep emotional ties (Aaker, 1995; Keller et al., 2011).

According to Keller (2001, p.19), brand resonance is characterised by intensity or depth of the psychological bond that customers have with the brand and the level of activity engendered by this loyalty. Brand resonance therefore refers to the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand. It plays a crucial role in customer relationship management and the development of sustainable brand equity between customers and a brand (Moore and Wurster, 2007). The above literature on brand resonance equates it with brand relationship; and it has been observed that management researchers often use the concept of brand resonance interchangeably with brand relationship (Keller, 2001; Moore and Wurster, 2007; Keller et al., 2011; Ruževičiūtė and Ruževičius, 2010; Aziz and Yasin, 2010; Pawar and Raut, 2012).

2.1 Brand equity model
Brand equity has been discussed extensively in various marketing literature (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2001; Sriram et al., 2007; Park et al., 2010; Davcik et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016; Mohan et al., 2017) which outlines the different perspectives on the factors that influence brand equity. Indeed, academic debate is inconclusive about the conceptual foundations affecting the factors and measures of brand equity (Davcik, 2013). There is a lack of clarity in the varied branding literature regarding how managers may utilise brand equity constructs to measure and improve the efficiency of various brand equity elements. Prior literature on the crucial conceptual model is indicative of the fact that
its application has not yet been considered in analysis of the general brand relationship practices (Keller et al., 2011; Davcik, 2013; Raut and Brito, 2014).

Each element of brand equity is important in building up brand equity among consumers (Keller, 2001, 2011). According to Kim (2012), the multi-dimensional prospect of brand experience can be manipulated through brand resonance constructs. Brand experiences also provide an insight into the hierarchical composition of the customer’s cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions too which helps to build positive brand equity (Mohsin et al., 2017; Castañeda García et al., 2018). For instance, Choudhury and Kakati (2014) concluded that with reference to the brand equity model, brand experience, brand loyalty and brand performance contribute positively and there is a definite relationship between various brand elements and brand equity.

Figure 1 depicts the Keller (2001) model of brand equity. The first step in building brand equity is to create brand saliency in the mind of the consumer. Brand salience or brand awareness refers to aspects of awareness of a brand, such as top-of-the-mind awareness of a brand, retrievability of a brand, and the overall strength of awareness. A brand with high awareness is characterised as having great depth and breadth of brand awareness (Keller, 2001); yet brand awareness alone, may not be a sufficient driver for consumers to purchase. For instance, Clark et al. (2009) found a relationship between perceived quality and brand awareness. Brand awareness also acts as the starting point for cognitive building of the meaning of brand among the consumers (Keller, 2001). The second step in building brand equity is the creation of a product that meets or exceeds the functional, psychological or social needs of the consumer. Optimal performance of a brand vis-a-vis its image is the key to achieve a strong brand relationship. On the whole, greater brand knowledge leads to a better understanding of the meaning of brand for consumers (Keller et al., 2011). The third step in building brand equity is eliciting consumer responses to a brand, using brand judgments and brand feelings. Brand judgments refer to the cognitive evaluation of the overall superiority, quality, credibility, and consideration of a brand. Brand feelings refer to the evocation of the feelings and emotions of consumers to themselves and others due to the brand (Keller, 2001, 2016). Obviously then, the aspect of brand response evaluates the impact of functional and symbolic aspects of the brand on its consumers. The judgments and feelings of consumers about the brand influence the relationship and level of identification that they have with the brand.

The final step in the consumer-based brand equity model refers to the characteristics of the relationship between the consumer and the brand. This fourth dimension of brand

![Figure 1. Conceptual model of brand equity](source: Author's own elaboration)
equity is labeled as brand resonance which comprise brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand community, and brand engagement. Brand loyalty and brand attachment are distinguished as the psychological bond the consumer shares with the brand, as well as the intensity with which the consumer intends to consume the brand. Brand community signifies the level of connection or engagement that the consumer shares with other consumers of the brand. Engagement with these brand communities illustrates the affinity and level of effort the consumer is willing to engage in, on account of the brand. Finally, Brand engagement refers to the resources that consumers are willing to invest, on behalf of the brand, beyond purchase and consumption (Keller, 2001; Keller et al., 2011).

From the literature mentioned above it may be surmised that brand resonance is related to brand relationship (Rindfleisch et al., 2006; Bourbab and Boukili, 2008; Keller et al., 2011; Stratfold, 2012). Management researchers define brand resonance as the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand (Keller, 2001; Keller et al., 2011). They also perceive it as the association between consumers and their brand (Stratfold, 2012) or a strong behavioural, psychological and social bond between consumers and their brands (Rindfleisch et al., 2006). Brand resonance is also understood as the level of identification that a consumer has with a brand (Bourbab and Boukili, 2008).

2.2 Outcomes of brand equity
Brand loyalty is viewed as a distinct component of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1995; Anderson and Kumar, 2007; He et al., 2014) and has been repositioned as a potential consequence of brand equity. Nonetheless, Keller (1993) did not include brand loyalty as a distinct component of brand knowledge. He believed that brand knowledge notably consisted of brand associations and brand awareness. According to Kuikka and Laukkanen (2012), brand satisfaction is the most influential factor in building brand loyalty. Ferreira and Coelho (2015) found that price perception has a significant relationship with brand loyalty, but not always as expected. Yoo et al. (2000, p. 205) noted that brand loyalty might be more related to brand equity than some of the other components.

Brand attachment represents a particular kind of consumer-brand relationship (Belaid and Behi, 2011). Brand attachment is the strength of the bond connecting the ‘brand’ with the ‘self’ (Park et al., 2010). The consumer buys the same brand almost exclusively, when he/she is attached to the brand (McQueen et al., 1993). It was found that the brand attachments can influence brand outcomes (Fournier, 1998; Dwivedi et al., 2018). Brand attachment constitutes the fundamental element of the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier and Yao, 1997), which leads to strong brand equity (Keller, 2001).

Brand communities are most likely to form around products that are consumed publicly and they include consumers who share a high level of commitment to the target brand (Muniz and Guinn, 2001). Authors have posited that there is a link between consumer loyalty and brand community (Oliver, 1999; Muniz and Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). Sharing is a strong expression in social media and it is a method by which online brand community members exchange experiences and ideas, or just interesting content (Dessart et al., 2015). Empirical evidence has shown that a brand community may share a robust relationship with brand equity and its dimensions (Yoo et al., 2000).

Brand engagement can be a strong indication of strong brand loyalty; this is when consumers are willing to put in their time, effort and money in pursuit of consuming the brand (Keller, 2001). Such expenditure exceeds the average amount spent to consume the brand and indicates a willingness to give up aspects of personal performance in the dogged pursuit of a single target brand. This concept is similar to Oliver’s (1999) description of an action loyalty. Action loyalty represents the highest stage of consumer loyalty toward a
product and is characterised by intense oppositional brand loyalty. Brand-engaged consumers offer word of mouth support on social media for a brand, if the brand resonates with their inner selves (Wallace et al., 2014). Brand resonance is reflected in awareness, brand performance, brand image, brand feelings and brand judgment, while brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand community, and brand engagement are considered as outcomes of brand equity (Keller, 2001; Keller, 2008; Kumar et al., 2013; Raut and Brito, 2014). In line with existing research, it is assumed that:

RA1. A brand equity antecedent has a positive effect on brand equity outcomes.

2.3 Conceptual mediating model of brand equity
The construct of brand equity was first highlighted by Keller in 1993. He later explained brand equity with his consumer-based brand equity model (Keller, 2001, 2016). Various cross-sectional studies have focussed on the brand equity construct with online companies (Rios and Riquelme, 2008), higher education (Mourad et al., 2011; Herrero-Crespo et al., 2016), politics (Phipps et al., 2010), services (Krishnan and Hartline, 2001), logistic services (Yasin et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2009; Loureiro and Kaufmann, 2017), social media (Dwivedi et al., 2018), hotels (Castañeda García et al., 2018), banking and financial services (Mohsin et al., 2017; Loureiro, and Sarmento, 2018), retail (Çifci et al., 2016) and fashion brands as well (Ekinci et al., 2017). From among the various studies conducted on brand equity, a few lay emphasis on the mediating role of diverse factors of brand equity including consumer brand experience (Sheng and Teo, 2012; Choudhury and Kakati, 2014; Mohsin et al., 2017; Castañeda García et al., 2018), quality of service (He and Li, 2010) and brand image (Gill and Dawra, 2010).

Literature from various fields such as relationship marketing, branding and retailing, is illustrative of the fact that there is a significant relationship between satisfaction and trust (Johnson and Auh, 1998; Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007; Veloutsou, 2015). The findings of Garbarino and Johnson (1999, p. 80) highlight the fact that satisfaction leads to trust in different ways in different products and services. If consumers are satisfied with a product or service, they are likely to trust that particular product or service (Ganesan, 1994; Geyskens et al., 1999). Selnes (1998) espoused that satisfaction has a significant effect on trust.

Brand trust and brand satisfaction develop brand reliability (Blackston, 1992; Kumar et al., 2013). Given that satisfaction and trust are responsible for building a relationship (Larzelere and Huston, 1980; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Fuentes-Blasco et al., 2017), it leads to an increase in the value of that relationship (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Moisescu and Allen, 2010). The existing literature on branding is suggestive of the idea that brand trust is based on the consumer-brand relationship (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995) and that brand satisfaction also affects the brand relationship similar to brand trust (Moisescu and Allen, 2010). Brand trust is a dimension which has received wider attention from researchers to assess customer-based brand equity (Kumar et al., 2013). The brand satisfaction continues to be well-researched and there is a general agreement that brand satisfaction is positively affect brand equity (Pappu and Quester, 2006). The findings suggest that there is a healthy positive relationship between brand trust and brand relationship (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and brand trust affect the brand equity as well (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005). Across disciplines, there is also an agreement that trust is intrinsic in an uncertain and risky environment. Brand trust is most relevant in a risky situation when the outcomes of a particular decision are uncertain, yet vital for the individual or organisation (Matzler et al., 2006; Kumar et al., 2013). Its antecedents explain the variation in brand equity...
to some extent, and there may be other factors that may explain brand equity differently in the context of different goods and services (Gautam and Kumar, 2012).

The analysis of moderation or mediation effect is generally attempted in conceptual ground, but it ought to be accompanied with a strong theoretical perspective. Unfortunately, this is often not the case, and many a times, it is the researcher’s call to attempt to build a conceptual model rather than to simply test it on theoretical grounds (Fraser et al., 2004). In many studies, it has been observed that researcher has tried to analyse whether the construct can act as a moderator or a mediator, knowingly or unknowingly to the theoretical foundation (Venkatraman, 1990). Present study tested the brand equity model in the present market setting, by adding brand satisfaction and brand trust, two variables to known their mediating role with brand equity antecedents and outcomes (Keller, 2001; Pappu and Quester, 2006; Moisescu and Allen, 2010; Raut and Brito, 2014). Notwithstanding, the literature on branding rarely focuses on the mediating role of two important relationship metaphors i.e. brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Huang, 2017) and brand satisfaction (Szymanski and Henard, 2001; Moisescu and Allen, 2010). Therefore the prime objective of the present study is to identify the mediating role of brand trust and brand satisfaction vis-à-vis the brand equity antecedents and outcomes. In the light of the above arguments the following assumptions have been made:

RA2. Brand satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes.

RA3. Brand trust mediates the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes.

The above Keller (2001) model of brand equity (Keller, 2001; Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007; Keller, 2008) designates the relationship between brand equity antecedents and outcomes. It also revealed the mediating role of brand satisfaction and brand trust between brand equity antecedents and outcomes. It was crucial to determine the effect of brand satisfaction and brand trust on brand equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Matzler et al., 2006). The present study empirically analysed the existing (Keller, 2001) and the mediating model of brand equity to ascertain the role of brand satisfaction and brand trust on brand equity antecedents and outcomes.

3. Methodology

This study aimed to show the efficacy and applicability of the extended conceptual model, based on prior brand equity studies (Keller, 2001; Park et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2015; Mohan et al., 2017). Over the last two decades, India has already witnessed a steady influx of ‘foreign brands’ (Mukherjee and Patel, 2005). The success of brands in India has been depends on how brands are perceived and used by Indian consumers. A few studies have been conducted on Indian consumers’ decisions regarding brands (Batra et al., 2000; Kinra, 2006); however, these studies failed to investigate the aspect of how Indian consumers build brand equity. Though Kumar et al. (2009) examined Indian consumers’ perception of various brands, their research did not employ brand equity as a dominant construct. Furthermore, many of the accepted brand relationship concepts were not applied to Indian consumers (Sahay and Sharma, 2010). A developing market like India has five distinct features – market heterogeneity, socio-political governance, chronic shortage of resources, unbranded competition and insufficient infrastructure, that are quite different from the developed economies (Sheth, 2011). Given the fact that the Indian consumer base is different from rest
due to rapidly increasing middle class consumers, development of modern urban lifestyles and increasing purchasing power, thus consumers research in this area may lead to different results (Lee et al., 2010; Sahay and Sharma, 2010). Eventually, it is also a contribution to the existing body of literature.

3.1 The approach

The current study was executed in two phases. In the first phase, this research adopted and validated the measures from the original scale (Table AI) through a pilot study which confirmed the statistics for reliability and validity of accepted measures as the basis for the final study. For pilot study total sample of 240 respondents were used (Kline, 2015; Lee and Song (2004). The pilot data were collected in December 2017. The pilot data were collected from two metropolitan cities of India, namely, Pune and Mumbai.

In the second phase, study used a direct approach and formulated a well-structured questionnaire with the use of measures validated in the pilot study. A tentative set of assumptions was tested on statistical grounds. The questionnaire developed with validated measurement scales from the pilot study, was used as the research instrument. All responses were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The purpose of the study was explained in brief to the respondents at the beginning of the data collection process. This was followed by the delivery of the questionnaire and collection of the duly filled in questionnaires.

3.2 The sample

Currently, India is a hub for luxury brands, and a majority of Indian consumers are likely to be concerned about social status when considering a brand (Shukla et al., 2015). The study conducted by O’Cass and Lim (2002, p. 65) argued that consumers from different cultural origins hold different perceptions of brands, proposing a culture of origin as a crucial intrinsic cue in the evaluation of brands. The present research considered the Indian consumer as the ‘universe’ and ‘cell phone consumers’ as the sampling unit. The survey was undertaken in several shopping malls in Pune and Mumbai where cell phone users were easily accessible. The convenience sampling method was applied to identify and choose the respondents. A total of 600 personal surveys were conducted with the help of well-structured questionnaire. Later on, 40 responses were eliminated on account of incomplete information or visible manipulations in data (Wingersky and Lord, 1984) thus reducing the sample size to 560 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970; The Research Advisors, 2006). The final data were collected in the month of January and February of 2018. Demographic information such as gender, age, education profession and income of the respondent was considered. The demographic characteristics of the sample indicate that males and females were 56.2 and 43.8 per cent, respectively. The comprehensive demographic profile of respondents and results are reported in Table I.

For structural equation modelling, it is expected that the minimum sample must have at least five times as many observations as there are variables to be analysed, while a higher acceptable size would be a ten-to-one ratio (Hair et al., 2013). Based on the scale of items (Table AI), a sample size of 560 was deemed appropriate. Prior permission of the shopping mall managers was sought before conducting the survey. A systematic procedure based on the below mentioned criteria was followed for selection of the product category and identification of the cell phone as a product:
The category should have the possibility of being repurchased (Dwivedi et al., 2015).

A particular category should be affordable for the middle class of the society (i.e. the middle class must have a definition associated to it.). The idea was to ensure adequate market coverage of brands (Sahay and Sharma, 2010).

The selected product category should be relevant to both male and female consumers to negate the impact of gender as an independent variable (Moore and Wurster, 2007).

The cell phone as a product, met the three conditions of a possible repeat purchase. Product affordability and gender neutrality were prominent considerations in the final survey too. Additionally, the “cell phone” has been predominantly used in previous brand research as well (Martensen, 2007; Petruzelli, 2010; Alamro and Rowley, 2011; Hamid, 2013).

3.3 The measurement scale
A discussion regarding each of the intrinsic variables that need to be considered with reference to the different dimensions has been already presented in the section titled ‘Literature review’. The present study chose to adopt measurement scales that took into account the multi-dimensionality of the brand equity, brand satisfaction and brand trust (Table AI). The questionnaire utilises brand equity measurements using a seven-point Likert scale proposed by Keller (2001; 2003; 2008). Brand satisfaction (Kuikka and Laukkanen, 2012) and Brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) were adopted as mediators from the original scale. The confirmatory factor analysis, reliability and validity analysis was done for the scale as the intent of this study was to analyse the existing and extended brand equity model.

In the confirmatory model testing, study achieved a fairly good model fit on indices. The correlation between all latent variables is at a moderate level, which suggests that latent variables are associated but, still fit the norms of discriminant validity (Brown, 2006). All loadings and correlations between latent variables were significant ($p < 0.05$). With the standard (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007), all factor loadings were considered from “very

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>188</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Above 40</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Below Graduation</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-graduation and above</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
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<td>182</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govt. Employee</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
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<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Class</td>
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<td>162</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>240</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 hundred thousand INR to 10 hundred thousand INR</td>
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<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 10 hundred thousand INR</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Author’s own calculations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
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<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
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<td>Above 40</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Below Graduation</td>
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<td>Businessman</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>11.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>89</td>
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<td>Less than 1 hundred thousand INR to 3 hundred thousand INR</td>
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<td>240</td>
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<td>6 hundred thousand INR to 10 hundred thousand INR</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 10 hundred thousand INR</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own calculations

Table I. Demographic profile of respondents

303
good” to “excellent.” Confirmatory factor model achieved a good model fit on indices such as $\chi^2(N = 240) = 2184.255, DF = 805, p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.921, AGFI = 0.914, PGFI = 0.908, NFI = 0.906, RFI = 0.903, IFI = 0.938, TLI = 0.929, CFI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.055. Considering Kline (2015) and Hair et al. (2013) recommendations for assessing acceptable model fit criteria; the confirmatory model is a good acceptable fit.

The composite reliability value exceeds 0.70 and the AVE is not less than 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Experts in the area (Kidader and Judd, 1986) of brand management have assessed the content validity of the measures, through examination. For convergent validation, study analysed Item-to-Total Correlations between the same construct and it exhibited high correlations (greater than 0.8) between the same construct items (Hair et al., 2013). Verified divergent validation through correlation between different construct items shows low correlation (less than 0.6) between different construct items (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Additionally, an exercise to map the efficacy of brand satisfaction and brand trust as the mediators between brand antecedents and outcomes was undertaken, while analysing the extended brand equity model. The data analysis was executed with the help of AMOS-22.

4. Results
To begin with, present study extracted the observed variables to measure eleven latent variables from past studies (Keller, 2001, 2002; Gordon Fullerton, 2005; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Keller, 2016), also study tested the existing model of brand equity. The study further analysed the brand equity model with two new added variables, i.e. brand satisfaction and brand trust. Finally, present study conducted a series of path model analyses to test the mediating role of brand satisfaction and brand trust within the brand equity model. The analysis of the model, as seen in Figure 2, used the latent variables.

The Keller (2001) brand equity model, as represented in Figure 2 and SEM data analysis output in Table II elucidates that the paths considered by the researcher according to the theory of brand equity, are valid paths. The analysis revealed that only four paths out of twenty-seven paths of the brand equity model (BI-BL BA-BAT BP-BAT BF-BE) were not significant. However, these paths were found significant when considered with other associated latent variables.

In addition, Figure 2 and Table II illustrated the SEM model fit achieved $\chi^2(N = 560) = 1572.455, DF = 497, p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.912, AGFI = 0.908, PGFI = 0.902, NFI = 913,
RFI = 911, IFI = 0.920, TLI = 0.910 CFI = 0.920, RMSEA = 0.062. The model fit indices are at or above the recommended 0.90, and the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is 3.1 (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2013; Kline, 2015). This confirmed the acceptance of research assumption RA-1 (excluding the path BL ← BI; BAT ← BA; BAT ← BP; BE ← BF of RA1), which assumes that a brand equity antecedent has a positive effect on brand equity outcomes.

4.1 Mediating regression analysis
To ascertain the role of brand satisfaction and brand trust in brand equity, study tested the mediation model of brand equity. Table III and Figure 3 both depict the mediation model of brand equity with direct effect and found that the three paths (BF-BT, BS-BC, and BT-BE) showed an insignificant relationship between antecedents and outcomes when considered with forty-six paths of mediation brand equity model. The amount of variance in outcomes, explained by each antecedent of mediation brand equity model ranges from brand image 34 per cent to brand trust 87 per cent. The model fit indices proved the statistical fitness of the model as they achieved $\chi^2(N = 560) = 2369.634$, DF =
<table>
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<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>β-COS</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>C.R.</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BP ← BA</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>11.812</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BI ← BP</td>
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<td>0.079</td>
<td>9.902</td>
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<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BJ ← BI</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>12.689</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BF ← BJ</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>13.829</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>BS ← BA</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>2.876</td>
<td>0.041*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>BS ← BP</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>7.530</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>BS ← BI</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>5.492</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>BS ← BJ</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>4.552</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>BT ← BA</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>1.965</td>
<td>0.049*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>BT ← BP</td>
<td>0.267</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>3.649</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>BT ← BI</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>1.542</td>
<td>0.063*</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>2.297</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.297</td>
<td>0.019*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.149</td>
<td>2.342</td>
<td>0.018*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.412</td>
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<td>3.143</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>0.198</td>
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</tr>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>2.873</td>
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<td>0.071</td>
<td>1.859</td>
<td>0.063*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>BAT ← BP</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>1.992</td>
<td>0.048*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>BAT ← BS</td>
<td>0.100</td>
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<td>2.522</td>
<td>0.028*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>BAT ← BF</td>
<td>0.194</td>
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<td>2.693</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.059</td>
<td>7.738</td>
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<td>0.059</td>
<td>7.738</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>BAT ← BS</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>2.510</td>
<td>0.012*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>BC ← BA</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>2.515</td>
<td>0.012*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>BC ← BP</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.842</td>
<td>Not-Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>BC ← BI</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>5.517</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>BC ← BF</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>2.005</td>
<td>0.045*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>BC ← BJ</td>
<td>0.350</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>2.768</td>
<td>0.006**</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>BC ← BS</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.184</td>
<td>1.106</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>Not-Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>BC ← BT</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td>2.095</td>
<td>0.027*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>BC ← BAT</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>10.126</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>BE ← BA</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>2.017</td>
<td>0.038*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>BE ← BP</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>1.998</td>
<td>0.046*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>BE ← BI</td>
<td>0.341</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>2.890</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>BE ← BF</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>2.493</td>
<td>0.035*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>BE ← BJ</td>
<td>0.683</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>5.083</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>BE ← BS</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>0.160</td>
<td>2.510</td>
<td>0.031*</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>BE ← BT</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.973</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>Not-Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>BE ← BC</td>
<td>0.683</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>10.284</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Method = Maximum Likelihood Estimates ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, NS = Not significant (p > 0.05) Chi-square = 2399.634 Degrees of freedom = 770 Probability level = 0.000; List of abbreviations: BA – Brand Awareness; BP – Brand Performance; BI – Brand Image BJ – Brand Judgment; BF – Brand Feelings; BL – Brand Loyalty; BAT – Brand Attachment; BC – Brand Community; BE – Brand Engagement; BS – Brand Satisfaction; BT – Brand Trust

**Source:** Author’s own calculations
770, \( p < 0.001 \), GFI = 0.910, AGFI = 0.902, PGFI = 0.906, NFI = 0.908, RFI = 0.902, IFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.901 CFI = 0.911, RMSEA = 0.061. The model fit indices are at or above the recommended 0.90, and the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is 3 (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2013; Kline, 2015). All values of paths are significant at 95 per cent of confidence level, which leads to the acceptance of research assumptions RA-2 and RA-3. The existing brand equity model explains more than 50 per cent of variance of outcome variables. The mediating brand equity model is statistically a good fit as compared to the existing model as each antecedent of the model except brand image explains more than 60 per cent of variance of the outcome variables.

Table IV shows the mediation path analysis of brand trust and satisfaction. Mediating hypothesis asserts that brand satisfaction and brand trust mediate the relationship between brand equity outcomes and brand equity antecedents. Analysis of the SEM model shows that the model provides a fit with the data but does not directly prove the hypothesis. A series of hierarchical regression was conducted to test the mediating role of brand satisfaction and brand trust in the brand equity model. To analyse the indirect effect, present study performed a bootstrap with 500 bootstrap samples at 95 per cent of bias-corrected confidence interval. The \( \beta \)-coefficient and \( p \)-values proved that brand satisfaction and brand trust play the role of mediating variables in the brand equity model. As a result of the existing and mediating SEM – path model analysis output, it has been confirmed that all the three research assumptions are duly supported.

**RA1.** A brand equity antecedent has a positive effect on brand equity outcomes.

**RA2.** Brand satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes.

**RA3.** Brand trust mediates the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes.

The results illustrated in Table IV of the structural equation modelling confer that the present study model fits statistically with our data. Having achieved all acceptable fit values, the study accept the model of brand equity for the cell phone product category, which considers brand satisfaction and brand trust as mediating variables.
5. Conclusions and implications

Most of the previous studies have neglected the mediating effects of brand trust and brand satisfaction on the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Pappu and Quester, 2006;...
Kumar et al., 2013). This study aimed to examine the mediating role of brand trust and brand satisfaction in the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes in the context of consumer durables in India. This study also intended to provide an extended version of Keller’s (2001) brand equity model to foster future research and application within highly competitive markets. With the help of structural equation modelling, the present study tested the existing brand equity and mediating brand equity model. The present study proves the efficacy of brand trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Huang, 2017) and brand satisfaction (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Szymanski and Henard, 2001; Pappu and Quester, 2006; Moisescu and Allen, 2010) as mediators in the conceptual mediating brand equity model. Consistent with previous studies, the findings of the two structural models confirm that brand trust significantly influences brand equity (Mishra et al., 2014; Veloutsou, 2015) and that brand satisfaction too influences brand equity (Çifci et al., 2016; Fatma et al., 2016; Elsaßer and Wirtz, 2017; Popp and Woratschek, 2017).

The results of this study show that the existing (Keller, 2001), as well as the mediating model of brand equity (Keller, 2001, 2002; 2008; Kumar et al., 2013), represents a good fit for the data. The outputs of existing brand equity model confirm the low effects of brand image on brand loyalty are similar to the findings of Stocchi et al. (2015). Findings of existing brand equity model analysis reveal the positive relationship between brand image and brand judgment (Abosag and Farah, 2014), brand awareness and brand performance (Huang and Sarigöllü, 2012), brand image and brand community (Gensler et al., 2015), brand performance and brand image (De Vries and Carlson, 2014), and brand judgment and brand loyalty (Abosag and Farah, 2014).

Incorporating brand satisfaction (Çifci et al., 2016) and brand trust (Mishra et al., 2014) into the model emphasise the higher variability of brand equity when compared to the existing model (Keller, 2001). These noteworthy findings further illustrate the importance of brand satisfaction and brand trust from the standpoint of marketing (Lee et al., 2015). When two new variables were added to the brand equity model namely brand satisfaction and brand trust, it was noted that only three paths showed an insignificant relationship between antecedents and outcomes, when compared with 46 paths of the new brand equity model. The results indicated that the antecedents of brand equity such as brand awareness, brand performance, brand image, brand judgment and brand feelings, significantly affect the brand equity outcomes (Keller, 1993, 2001; 2002, 2008; Kumar et al., 2013). In this case, there are indications that the mediation is complete. The mediating role of brand trust and brand satisfaction proposed from the findings is consistent with the findings of research suggesting that the brand trust (Morgan, and Hunt, 1994; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005) and brand satisfaction (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Pappu and Quester, 2006; Moisescu and Allen, 2010) acts as a mediator in the formation of brand equity (Kumar et al., 2013).

Previous research has been unable to inter-relate brand satisfaction, brand trust, and brand equity in this manner. In the present study, it was found that brand satisfaction (Moisescu and Allen, 2010; Kuikka and Laukkanen, 2012) and brand trust (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005) play the role of mediating variables that arbitrate the relationship between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes (Kumar et al., 2013). As for the indirect effect, among the nineteen highlighted relations, the new variable, brand trust, is involved in eight of the indirect relations, while the new variable brand satisfaction is involved in eleven of the nineteen highlighted relations. Brand trust has a higher direct and mediation effect within the revised model, while brand satisfaction has a larger indirect effect (Caceres and
Paparoidamis, 2007). The indirect interaction between brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes with the help of brand satisfaction and brand trust is more effective than the direct interaction of brand equity antecedents and brand equity outcomes. Finally, the relationship between the two impacting variables, i.e. brand satisfaction and brand trust implies that efforts to foster any one will have a direct positive impact on the other and on the effort of brand equity development, as a whole.

The present study could be of immense help to marketers and brand strategists, who could contemplate and consider the influence of brand satisfaction (Raut and Brito, 2014; Fatma et al., 2016; Fuentes-Blasco et al., 2017) and brand trust (Mishra et al., 2014; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005) on the brand equity construct. The present research also shows that the brand equity model works in a manner befitting its theoretical description. By testing the existing and the enhanced mediation brand equity model in the present study, it was found that brand equity is built in a gradual step-by-step manner and every antecedent indirectly (mediation) and directly affects the outcomes of brand equity (Keller, 2001, 2002; 2008; Kumar et al., 2013).

All parameters of model fit also support the high predictability of the new brand equity model as compared to the existing one. It is indeed a challenge for a brand manager to develop and maintain brand equity. The managerial perspective of the present study seeks to provide a guideline to the manager/s while trying to understand the significance of each element of brand equity. The brand equity mediation model will enable a brand manager to conclusively identify the role of brand satisfaction (Pappu and Quester, 2006) and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005) in the overall development of brand equity. The currently propositioned mediating model of brand equity is likely to prove beneficial for the purpose of brand tracking as well (Keller, 2016).

This study proposes a new model for consideration in the domain of marketing for both, brand managers and research scholars potentially enabling them to analyse the level of brand equity among their consumers and respondents. With this extended brand equity model, managers can effectively anticipate the impact of different antecedents and mediators of brand equity on the outcome of brand equity vis-à-vis their brand. The findings of this study reinforce the assertion that brand satisfaction and brand trust need to be proactively considered for their ability to influence brand equity (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Pappu and Quester, 2006; Moisescu and Allen, 2010; Li et al., 2015). The extended brand equity model also provides marketers with two additional tangible goals to achieve with regards to their brand-building activities i.e. brand satisfaction and brand trust. Brand managers can use this extended model to analyse the level of attachment of a consumer with a brand. The findings of this study, particularly the significance of brand satisfaction and brand trust in building brand equity may be leveraged by brand managers to further enhance consumers’ attachment with their brands and brand equity outcomes as a whole. The present research will also prove to be a significant contribution to branding theory and practice on account of its empirical investigation and in-depth analysis leading to a comprehensive and actionable brand equity model that moves away from the inference that the brand equity model is latent and unified (Keller, 2001, 2002; 2008).

5.1 Limitations and scope for future research
Present study acknowledges a few limitations of our research that may elicit potential avenues for future research. The decision to force consumers to focus on a specific brand in the study represents an inherent limitation as regards the cell phone brands chosen in the product category. Hypothetically, some respondents may not be familiar with either brand. Researchers can replicate the study in other contexts, like, focussing on the brand that was
last purchased by the respondent. With reference to the methodological choices, data was collected for only one product i.e. cell phone, rather than a broad range of products. Therefore, it would be useful to replicate the study with different product brands as well, to establish generalizability of the present study.

One of the potential limitations of this research relates to the representativeness of the sample and the influence of demographic differences in the results of the study. As data for the present study were collected from only two prominent cities of India, surveying a larger, more diverse pool of respondents would allow further generalisation of the findings. In this study, the respondents chose their preferred brand of product, which indicates a strong relationship between respondents and the selected brands. Hence, the results may not be accurate for circumstances where weaker relationships with the brands are evident, or for brands that the user may not wish to introduce in their consideration sets. In future research, the prospective researchers might want to replicate this study in other cultural settings, as inter-cultural differences may lead to different brand equity context.

Our analysis is based on the brand equity paradigm, its dimensions and the mediating role of brand satisfaction and brand trust. Hence the researcher might test the mediating role of brand satisfaction and brand trust in the formation of “brand value”. Future research may test the new model of brand equity in different geographic, demographic and psychographic contexts. The researcher can test a similar mediation model with control effect of consumer demographics. Further study could examine other factors that could be antecedents and outcomes of brand equity such as brand reliability, brand experience, perceived quality, brand credibility or other dimensions of brand equity.

References


Kumar, R. (2006), Marketing and Branding: The Indian Scenario, Pearson Education India, Delhi.


**Further reading**


**Corresponding author**

Umesh Ramchandra Raut can be contacted at: ur.raut@gmail.com
## Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct and measurement item source</th>
<th>Measurement items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Awareness</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>This brand is very easy to recognise&lt;br&gt;This brand is popular&lt;br&gt;I know where I can buy this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Performance</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>Compared with other brands in the product category, this brand satisfies my basic needs&lt;br&gt;This brand is reliable for me&lt;br&gt;I like the look, feel and other design aspects of this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Image</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>I like the people who use this brand&lt;br&gt;I feel that I grew up with this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Judgment</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>This is the good value brand&lt;br&gt;This is very innovative brand&lt;br&gt;Personally this brand is relevant for me&lt;br&gt;This is unique brand&lt;br&gt;This is superior brand as compared to other brands in the product category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Feelings</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>This brand gives me a feeling of fun&lt;br&gt;This brand gives me a feeling of security&lt;br&gt;This brand gives me a feeling of social approval&lt;br&gt;This brand gives me a feeling of self respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Loyalty</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>I consider myself loyal to this brand&lt;br&gt;I buy this brand whenever I can&lt;br&gt;This is the one brand I would prefer to buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Attachment</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>I really love this brand&lt;br&gt;This brand is special to me&lt;br&gt;This brand is more than a product to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Community</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>I really identify with people who use this brand&lt;br&gt;I feel as if I almost belong to a club with other users of this brand&lt;br&gt;This is a brand used by people like me&lt;br&gt;I feel a deep connection with others who use this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Engagement</strong> Keller (2001; 2002; 2008)</td>
<td>I really like to talk about this brand to others&lt;br&gt;I am always interested in learning more about this brand&lt;br&gt;I am proud to have others know I use this brand&lt;br&gt;I like to visit the Web site for this brand&lt;br&gt;Compared with other people, I follow news about this brand closely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Satisfaction</strong> (Kuikka and Laukkanen 2012)</td>
<td>I am pleased with this brand&lt;br&gt;I am happy with this brand&lt;br&gt;I am contented with this brand&lt;br&gt;Overall, I am satisfied with this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Trust</strong> (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001)</td>
<td>I trust this brand&lt;br&gt;I rely on this brand&lt;br&gt;This is an honest brand&lt;br&gt;This brand is safe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A1.

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Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC

Number 2

142 Editorial advisory board

143 From Instagram overuse to instastress and emotional fatigue: the mediation of addiction

Del uso excesivo de Instagram al instastress y a la fatiga emocional: el papel mediador de la adicción
Silvia Sanz-Blas, Daniela Buzova and María José Miquel-Romero

163 Antecedents and consequences of luxury brand engagement in social media

Antecedentes y consecuencias del compromiso con la marca de lujo en las redes sociales
Amélia Brandão, Eva Pinho and Paula Rodrigues

185 Enhancing rural destinations' loyalty through relationship quality

La mejora de la lealtad a los destinos rurales a través de la calidad relacional
Helena Alves, Ana María Campón-Cerro and José Manuel Hernández-Mogollón

205 The role of environmental CSR practices on the formation of behavioral intentions in a certified hotel context: exploring the moderating effect of customer involvement in the buying process

El papel de las prácticas medioambientales de RSC en la formación de intenciones comportamentales en un contexto hotelero certificado: explorando el efecto moderador de la involucración del consumidor en el proceso de compra
Patricia Martínez García de Leaniz, Ángel Herrero Crespo and Raquél Gómez-López

227 Antecedents of brand hate in the fast food industry

Antecedentes del odio a la marca en la industria de comida rápida
Sharizal Hashim and Sheraz Kasana

249 The effect of cognitive absorption on marketing learning performance

El efecto de la absorción cognitiva en los resultados de aprendizaje de marketing
Miguel Guinaliu-Blasco, Blanca Hernández-Ortega and José L. Franco

273 Impact of SMEs strategy on loyalty: the hairdresser case

Impacto de la estrategia de la PYME en la lealtad: el caso de las peluquerías
Ángel López-Jáuregui, Mercedes Martos-Partal and Jose María Labeaga

295 Mediating model of brand equity and its application

Modelo mediador del valor de marca y su aplicación
Umesh Ramchandra Raut, Prafulla Arjun Pawar, Pedro Quelhas Brito and Gyanendra Singh Sisodia

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