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Joseph Kaswengi
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Brand, Label, and Product Intelligence

Second International Conference, COBLI 2021

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Preface

The 2021 year represents a time where the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hit countries. It also represents a year where several changes are observed in the business environment in general, and in the marketing environment. For example, the cost of manufacturing products increases along with the increase in raw materials, workforce, product distribution, etc. This situation forces businesses to design new ways for performance as a means to survive. Brands, products, and labels have become effective tools that allow firms to differentiate themeselves in such an environment.

The second edition of the COBLI (International Conference on Brand, Label, and Product Intelligence; Orléans, France) conference took place in the context noted above and represented an opportunity to shed light on new perspectives in the matter. It is broadly defined as an interdisciplinary conference that provides a scholarly forum for sharing interesting and useful research as well as managerial insights relating to brands, labels, and products. The present book includes papers that were presented and discussed during the conference.

After its first edition in 2019, this second edition was a success since researchers and practitioners met to present and discuss original, rigorous, and significant contributions. Each paper included in this book respected a stringent review process (double anonymized peer review, with a minimum of 2 reviewers) by the committee of the Scientific Organization, comprised of 56 reputed international researchers from 13 countries.

The papers seek to deepen our knowledge of brands, labels, and products in the service of innovations and scientific promotion. They do not only consist of several themes that are interpreted very broadly, but they are also empirical, managerial, or conceptually focused. Among the areas covered by this book are consumer behavior, local brands/products/labels, distribution, tourism, territory, social media, brand personality, product quality, customer experience, and brand equity. A wide range of theoretical and methodologies were used to investigate these areas.

One of the goals of the COBLI conference was to produce and publish high-quality contributions that could help organizations, industries, managers, retailers, manufacturers, and policy makers in their decision process. Remaining a multi-disciplinary, multi-functional, and multi-contextual conference, COBLI aspires to deepen our understanding of the brands, labels, and products-related phenomena in their plethora forms. The conference pursues the same ideal for the next editions in order to advance its scope in a dynamic perspective.

Finally, we are grateful for the support of the Région Centre-Val de Loire, University of Orléans and businesses (e.g. La Pucelle d'Orléans). We are also thankful to all the authors, Scientific Committee, and the Organizing Committee.

Orléans, France

Joseph Kaswengi
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Distribution and Local Products

Chapter 1
Quality Certification in the Face of Agricultural Relocalization: Between Peaceful Coexistence and Tension—Analysis Based on Cheese Production in Occitanie (France)

Julien Frayssignes, Anne-Emmanuelle Fiamor, Michaël Pouzenc, and Valérie Olivier Salvagnac

Abstract This article aims to examine the status of products bearing an official label ('SIQO' in French) in food transition, in which the consumption of so-called 'local' products is now an unavoidable trend. Despite a situation a priori favorable, the SIQO products seem sometimes irrelevant when they are sold through short supply chains viewed as alternative food networks. The interviews with producers and consumers conducted in two French study areas (Lot and Ariège department) highlight this confrontation between 'SIQO' and 'local' products: in these two areas, two official labeled products (PDO and PGI cheeses Rocamadour an Tomme des Pyrénées) coexist with unlabeled local products. The results clearly show the existence of two opposite 'ethics of production', even if they tend to converge in certain aspects, in particular their territorial anchorage.

Keywords Alternative Agri-Food Network · Quality label · Cheese · Ethic of production · Occitanie Region · France

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1 Introduction

Year after year, opinion polls confirm the ever-growing attachment of the French—and to a lesser extent of Europeans generally—to local consumption of food products (OnePoll, 2020). This trend has been accentuated by the Covid-19 health crisis (CGAAER, 2021), judging by the positioning of large-scale food retailers,[1] and accompanies growing concerns about social responsibility and the preservation of natural resources. Reference to the 'local' is consistently apparent. Such reference is particularly evident among the strategies of producers and marketers as they brand their products with multiple labels. It is also mobilized by many local authorities, within their Territorial Food Projects (*Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux*, or PAT). Finally, this appeal to the local is also anchored in public debate, as an integral component of a transition in progress (Commission des Affaires Economiques, 2018).

The human and social sciences have long been active in this field of research. The contemporary evolution of agriculture has been notably approached through the prism of individual and collective initiatives aimed at bringing producers and consumers closer, and which are encompassed in the concept of the 'Alternative Agri-Food Network' (AAFN, Deverre & Lamine, 2010; Ilbery et al., 2005). Stakes inherent to relational dynamics (Chiffoleau, 2012; Renting et al., 2003), to the social embeddedness of production-related activities (Hinrichs, 2000; Sonnino, 2007) and to proximity (Pouzenc et al., 2007; Praly et al., 2014) have been thus widely examined. Equally fruitful, the fields of research on specific food productions (Bérard, 2012; Delfosse, 2011) have also made it possible to account for this resurgence of the local. Beyond the connection to *terroir* and territorial anchoring (Bessière, 2000; Casabianca et al., 2011), such food production has been examined from the perspective of the valuation and certification processes involved, where social links and interpersonal trust play an essential role (Goodman, 2003; Marsden et al., 2000).

In this context, production processes that are endorsed by a label certifying 'quality and origin' (*Signe d'Identification de la Qualité et de l'Origine*, or SIQO[2]) constitute a subject of particular observational interest. Conspicuous throughout the agricultural and agri-food world, such approaches have been highly successful for several decades, contributing to the economic performance of many sectors and supporting often fragile rural areas (Barjolle & Sylvander, 2002; Paus & Reviron, 2010). As many French professionals perceive it, however, this positive dynamic seems to be gradually losing steam. The reasons for this are multiple: uncertainty as to the durability of the collectives who founded these initiatives (and particularly as to

[1] See for example: https://www.capital.fr/entreprises-marches/carrefour-auchan-ou-u-ne-jurent-plus-que-par-le-produit-local-1374068.

[2] This includes the *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC, *Controlled Dénomination of Origin*), *Label Rouge, Organic Agriculture, Protected Denomination of Origin* (PDO) and *Protected Geographical Indication* (PGI).

their capacity to meet the challenges of the transition mentioned above); fragmentation in terms of family farming structures, which are typical of SIQO production (Hervieu & Purseigle, 2013); and increased competition in terms of private certification procedures.

The status of SIQO producers with respect to the issue of locality is ultimately ambiguous. The fact that the majority of SIQO products are territorially anchored seems to be an asset. Indeed, many authors include SIQO-certified products within the scope of the AAFNs mentioned above (Higgins et al., 2008). The SIQO actors, however, are far from being the only operators to claim local roots. Recent observations (Fiamor, 2014) show that the changes currently at work in many French rural areas are manifested by a multiplication of strategies for the territorial branding of products (by local authorities, professional agricultural organizations, small businesses, etc.). This tendency accentuates the competitive aspect of traditional certification-related initiatives, which in an increasingly tangled landscape are no longer necessarily considered locally as the most legitimate.[3]

If this ambiguity has already been studied (Pouzenc & Vincq, 2013), this article aims to better understand how the proliferation of individual and collective initiatives for the localized marketing of food products impacts—or even challenges—SIQO initiatives on their own territory, especially those regarding geographical certification. Using a specifically developed interpretive framework, our objective is to question the points of view of the actors behind these initiatives, and to see how they position themselves with respect to the various forms of certification. Beyond the questions of coexistence between approaches and models (Galliano et al., 2017), this article proposes to specifically consider the sometimes conflicting nature of these efforts, especially as many initiatives claiming to represent alternative models may result from a rejection of SIQO certification, which is itself now considered as part of the dominant model.

To these ends, this article is based on interviews conducted as part of a human and social sciences research project entitled VEDEMIP and financed by the former Midi-Pyrénées Region. VEDEMIP aimed to understand why and how local producers choose to engage in various promotional activities, based on two objects of study: the Rocamadour PDO (Lot department) and the Tomme des Pyrénées PGI (Ariège department). Finally, this inquiry, based on SIQO products, also questions the future of production chains and their capacity to respond to challenges for which they often appear powerless.

First, a review of the literature will provide an overview of the emergence and strengthening of professed 'local' initiatives in the agricultural world, and will then consider the ambiguous positioning of SIQO approaches in relation to them. Criteria developed for this purpose will then be used to account for the changes observed

[3] Locally, one can mention the territorial brands supported by regional and departmental authorities, and increasingly by inter-municipal structures and territorial projects (such as regional and national parks), as well as professional agricultural networks with a touristic vocation (as *Bienvenue à la Ferme* or *Accueil Paysan*).

within the two cases studied, and for the strong tensions between actors that may have emerged. Such confrontation will be discussed in Part III, especially with respect to its temporal and spatial aspects.

2 SIQOs and the Local: An Ambiguous Relationship

The dynamics of agri-ecological transition and agricultural relocalization present challenges to the SIQO enterprise, the sustainability of which is called into question by logics that are increasingly distant from SIQOs' initial principles.

2.1 The Return of the Local, a Component of Agricultural and Food-Related Transition

A broad transition in the world of agriculture is now underway: this idea has taken hold, given the multiple challenges and controversies within the agricultural field today, which are regularly echoed both in the institutional sphere (CESE, 2020) and in the field of consumer studies. A polymorphic and multiscale process, the agricultural transition—and by extension the agri-food transition—is manifested particularly in the generalization of agri-ecological practices, as in strategies for adaptation to climate change. The transition also resonates with the societal expectations of citizens and consumers with respect to biodiversity preservation, animal welfare and fair remuneration for producers. In addition, the transition provides social science research with a vast field of analysis to renew its own lines of inquiry (Arrignon & Bosc, 2020; Galliano et al., 2017).

In this context, this 'appeal to the local' appears as a component of a wider agricultural and agri-food transition. Reinforced by the current health-related context, this appeal is justified by the benefits 'the local' is supposed to generate in terms of sustainability: leaving a low carbon footprint, bringing producers and consumers together, and creating and sharing value. As a result, all of the actors among the various sectors are concerned. The recent evolution of the agricultural and agri-food landscape is thus marked by a multiplication of localized food production and distribution initiatives, the economic weight of which is no longer just anecdotal.[4] Indeed, localized short supply chains (Praly et al., 2014) or 'Alternative Agri-Food Networks' (Deverre & Lamine, 2010; Ilbery et al., 2005) are, as objects, putting into question the very principles of food production. These dynamics of agricultural relocalization are driven by a multiplicity of individual actors and agricultural collectives (Frayssignes et al., 2021; Guiraud, 2016). In France, the appeal to the local is thus

[4] According to AGRESTE data, short supply chains (as defined by the Ministry of Agriculture) concerned in 2010 about 1 in 5 farmers and 1 in 2 market gardeners, and represented about 7% of food purchases (Barry, 2012).

made by agricultural cooperatives, which see it as a way to consolidate their territorial roots through the diversification of marketing channels (stores, direct farm sales, e-commerce). Numerous initiatives are also supported by the Chambers of Agriculture, including some of the most innovative efforts such as logistic platforms or drive-through produce stores (‘*drive fermiers*‘) (Dantas Machado Bouroullec, 2020). Distributors and retailers are also reinforcing the local character of their communication, and thereby of their supplies. Even giants such as Amazon must subscribe to this approach, as evidenced by its ‘Producers’ Shop’, resolutely oriented towards local small businesses.[5]

At the national level, support for local agriculture has materialized through a succession of legislative advances[6] leading particularly to the creation and deployment of Territorial Food Projects (*Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux*). At the territorial level, this overhaul of the national food strategy has been notably managed by the Rural Development Programs (*Programmes de Développement Rural*) initiated by the various regions themselves (Wallet & Dantas Machado Bouroullec, 2021). More broadly, there are few actors within the current French administrative system (regions, departments, inter-municipal structures, PNR, Pays, PETR, etc.) who have not formalized their own food transition strategy.

Among the abundant social science literature devoted to the relocalization of agri-food systems (Deverre & Lamine, 2010), two points deserve to be emphasized: the alternative character of such systems (apparent in the competition between the different agricultural models underlying them), and the ways in which they contribute to the renewal of questions related to the valuation and certification of food products.

Firstly, the analysis of localized short supply chains has indeed provided an opportunity to re-examine in depth the divide between a dominant production model—based on conventional industrialized and globalized agriculture—and various alternative models initiated within, or reinforced by, the current transitional context (Geels, 2002). If these models were primarily engaged to recreate links between farmers and consumers, they also redefine the farming profession itself, through the process of re-peasantization (Mundler & Laughrea, 2016), as well as practices inherent to new forms of agriculture (organic, permaculture, etc.) and even those reflecting greater urban influences (Pérez-Victoria, 2015). Criticized by many researchers (Goodman, 2003; Hinrichs, 2000; Sonnino, 2007), the idea of sometimes aggressive competition between models has gradually given way to the notion of coexistence (Galliano et al., 2017; Gasselin et al., 2021).

The second dimension is bound to the question of product valuation and certification, which is central to various forms of food labelling: the local is here an integral part of the ‘quality turn’ paradigm proposed by Goodman (Goodman, 2003). The traditional process of product valuation has been augmented by new factors:

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[5] https://www.amazon.fr/b?ie=UTF8&node=14862936031.

[6] *Grenelle de l’Environnement* in 2009, *Loi d’Avenir pour l’agriculture, l’alimentation et la forêt* (creating PATs) in 2014; Information report on short supply chains and the relocalization of agricultural and food sectors presented by Brigitte Allain in 2015; *Etats Généraux de l’Alimentation* in 2017 and then *Loi EGALIM* in 2018.

beyond the classic dimensions of heritage, historical precedence and link to the *terroir* (Casabianca et al., 2011), the value of so-called ordinary products is now enhanced by geographical proximity, social connections between producers and consumers, and interpersonal trust (Delfosse, 2011). The consequences of this shift can be observed in the branding strategies for food products, which have intensified significantly over the past decade. The affirmation of locality has thus been added to the list of other promises conveyed by the wider agricultural transition, characterized with terms like *sustainable, organic, fair trade, additive-free*… If this classificatory entanglement is systematically evoked as something which produces confusion among consumers, it is also very complicated for those who implement it: the terms *multi-inscription* and *multi-membership* are used to designate the fact that an operator adds value to a product by committing to various certification procedures (Fiamor, 2018).

It is precisely from this perspective of relocalization that it seems productive to analyse labelling processes falling under the Signs of Identification of Quality and Origin (SIQO) domain, given that a good number of the products included in this category claim a territorial origin.

2.2 SIQOs and the Agricultural Transition: Between Questions and Attempts to Adapt

In France, the scope of the SIQO corresponds with products bearing one of the official European labels (Protected Designation of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, Traditional Speciality Guaranteed, Organic Agriculture) or French labels (Red Label). These labels are administered by the *Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité* (INAO), a public body in charge of implementing product valuation and certification policies. Positioned in niche markets, products benefiting from SIQO certification represent a significant share of the national agricultural and agri-food sector. In 2019, more than a third of some 430,000 French farms were engaged in PDO, PGI or Label Rouge certification processes (nearly 1100 products), and approximately 10% of farms converted to organic farming (13% of the surface area). Although it varies from one family of products to another,[7] the importance of SIQOs in French agricultural and agri-food activity is therefore not only symbolic. The 35 billion euros in pre-tax sales generated by SIQO products should be compared to the 300 billion euros earned by general agricultural and agri-food sectors in that same year.[8]

This economic weight can be explained by the undeniable success of these initiatives in the past decades (Barjolle & Sylvander, 2002), from the point of view of both operators and consumers. This success is the corollary of the benefits such efforts

[7] SIQOs are predominant in the sectors of wine (94% of sales) and fat *palmipeds* (64%), significant for cheeses (13%) and poultry (10%) and more modest for beef (3%) and fruit and vegetables (1%).

[8] Agricultural sector: 76 billion euros excluding tax; agri-food sector: 213 billion euros excluding tax. Source: consolidated data from the French Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

have wrought, whether considered in terms of economics and value creation (FAO, 2018; Perrier-Cornet & Sylvander, 2000), territorial development (Frayssignes, 2008; Paus & Reviron, 2010), collective action (Fournier, 2015) or consumer expectations (Tregear & Giraud, 2011). In addition, SIQOs have contributed to the national preservation and defence of a culinary heritage. At the European Union level, recent works highlight the relevance of the European system. The 3286 Geographical Indications registered as of January 1, 2021 thus demonstrate clear added value and protection against counterfeiting (AND International, 2021). With this perspective, INAO has been working for several years to promote the concept of Geographical Indication internationally.

However, the context of transition—combined with major trends characterizing contemporary agriculture—tends to challenge the ability of SIQOs to fulfil the missions legislatively assigned to them, i.e., quality control, regional development, and consumer information. Within the groups that support these initiatives, the feeling of a less preferable economic situation is perceptible, although the overall economic performance does not for the moment confirm this.

For new generations of upstream agricultural operators—who have a more individualized vision of market practices—membership in certain traditional professional structures (such as cooperatives) no longer arouses the same enthusiasm as it had among older producers (Barraud-Didier et al., 2012). Although differing in their organization, the SIQO producers are also affected by this crisis of legitimacy, a crisis that is aggravated by the declining demography of French farms (MSA, 2021). Further down the supply chain, references to *terroir*—as well as imitative strategies employed by national and distributor brands—are already long-standing. This competition has gradually changed in nature over the last 20 years, with the emergence of new, private certification initiatives, based on principles comparable to those of the SIQOs (i.e., criteria certified by an independent third party). Carried out by private companies or structured collectives,[9] these programs arose from the desire of operators to extract themselves from a labelling system which they considered both too rigid and unresponsive to new citizen and consumer expectations. Apart from organic farming, SIQOs have been particularly challenged on the grounds of their environmental performance (Gallien et al., 2015). Despite a long-term strategy implemented by the INAO,[10] the integration of an ecological component into SIQO specifications is far from certain (Ansaloni & Fouilleux, 2008). Finally, beyond environmental matters, issues relating to food safety and to the advocacy of 'consuming less' may also pose challenges to the values of hedonism and pleasure with which SIQOs are associated.

If certain basic trends within the agricultural transition are 'shaking up' the SIQO approach, one might think that the 'return to the local' has created, on the contrary,

[9] Among the most visible French collective initiatives: *Bleu Blanc Cœur, Vignerons Engagés, Zéro Résidu de Pesticides.*

[10] Amendment to the INAO objectives and performance contract relating to the integration of agri-ecology principles into the Signs of Origin and Quality, INAO, 2016 (https://www.inao.gouv.fr/Nos-actualites/Stephane-Le-Foll-et-l-INAO-s-engagent-pour-developper-l-agro-ecologie-dans-les-signes-de-l-origine-et-de-la-qualite).

more favourable market conditions, particularly for SIQOs based on geographic origin. Many experts in alternative marketing circuits tend to consider this question of proximity between local products and SIQO products as a single field of research and answer in the affirmative. In defining ‘Short Food Supply Chains’ (SFSC), Renting et al. propose a typology of channels designed on the basis of their organizational structure and criteria for quality. They thus distinguish between ‘face-to-face’ systems (direct sales, farm sales, farmers’ markets, e-commerce, etc.), ‘proximate SFSCs’ (farmers’ stores, collective catering, etc.), and ‘extended SFSCs’, which include certified products (Renting et al., 2003). According to this approach, SIQOs fall within the scope of food systems that have evolved from marginal channels to occupy a full-fledged place in the agricultural and agri-food landscape, while retaining their alternative character vis-à-vis the dominant model (Gasselin et al., 2021; Higgings et al., 2008).

Our analysis aims to qualify this apparent concomitance between alternative models, based on the relocalization of food systems and the SIQO approaches as they exist in France. Although inseparable, these varied approaches represent partially distinct logics that need to be characterized. Sometimes, the appeal for local products even partly conflicts with SIQO logic and contributes to a dynamic of competition, or even rejection.

2.3 ‘SIQO’ Products and ‘Local’ Products: Partially Distinct Logics

Procedures endorsed by both official and alternative certification systems are often followed concurrently by the same operator. However, it is possible to distinguish characteristics and operating principles that are specific to each. An interpretive framework can thus be proposed, integrating characteristics inherent to the nature of the concerned products, their marketing channels, the agricultural models from which they originate and the public policies that support them.

The very nature of the products must therefore be taken into consideration. Quite obviously, SIQO products are most often based on traditions rooted in rural territories and with long histories, which gives them a specific status. Conversely, products marketed within short supply circuits—while also claiming inheritance to an agrarian form of agriculture—are rather considered everyday products less marked by rurality (Guiomar, 2012). However, this divide should be qualified: historically, local products have also responded to the effects of cities, both in terms of reputation-building and commercial influence (Marache & Meyzie, 2015). In all cases, the specification and diversification strategies—particularly with respect to agritourism—are worth observing.

A second distinction concerns types of commercial channels, insofar as the SIQOs’ *raison d’être* has always been underpinned by the desire to bring products out of their region of origin, largely via long distribution routes linked to supermarkets.

More generally, SIQO products and local products seem to be organized according to different approaches to the market: While the niche strategies implemented by SIQO operators reflect their assumption that competition is a given, the approach taken by local actors, by contrast, aims to bypass such competition by positioning products within alternative circuits, by reappropriating the consumer's judgment of product quality (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013) and finally by bringing producers and consumers closer together (Godet, 2012).

Moreover, the long history of a large number of SIQO products makes it difficult to dissociate them from the general evolution of agriculture. While many certification initiatives have existed at the fringe of the dominant model, many of them remain representative of professional family farms, with two Human Worker Units, a model that has long been promoted, via the CAP, in France and Europe. This model's crisis is thus also partly the crisis of the SIQO sectors (Hervieu & Purseigle, 2013). Such mutuality explains why many groups are emerging not only in reaction to the failures of the dominant model, but also because of the real or supposed inadequacies of the SIQOs. These inadequacies may be of a technical nature (e.g., in a context of privatization of control, a labelling process perceived as too procedural or, on the contrary, overly lax) (Marie-Vivien et al., 2017), or of an economic nature (its often prohibitive costs, for example). In this respect, organic farming reveals the challenges faced by SIQOs with respect to origin: Some studies have shown, for example, that the development of organic farming can be understood as the recomposition, or even the challenging, of a system in which the concept of 'appellation' is variously remobilized by producers with their own profiles and representations (Pouzenc & Vincq, 2013).

Finally, although these forms of alternative agriculture often wish to remain outside of institutional spheres (Guiraud et al., 2014), they are paradoxically the object of increased attention from public policymakers, whether European (Jouen & Lorenzi, 2014), national (Schelcher, 2020), or regional (Naves, 2016). While recent parliamentary reports have focused on local food, the SIQOs have been seldom called upon to face the challenges associated with agricultural relocalization.[11] Legislative support for local food systems is therefore likely to be achieved at the expense of official labels. The objectives set by the EGALIM law related to collective catering call for 50% of products to be of so-called 'sustainable quality' (20% organic), of which extremely broad scope could lead purchasers to favour a cost logic.[12] Another illustration of this context is provided by the European Union's stated intention to impose the Nutriscore classification system on all food products starting in 2022.

[11] For example, the report on short supply chains and relocation of agricultural and food sectors, drafted by Parliament member Brigitte Allain (2015) includes almost no references to SIQOs, except to mention their economic weight.

[12] 'Quality and sustainable' products include all SIQO products, fair trade products, and products bearing *mentions valorisantes* ('farm-raised' poultry, HVE) (source: https://agriculture.gouv.fr/les-mesures-de-la-loi-egalim-concernant-la-restauration-collective). SIQO professionals have also expressed their frustration about this subject, denouncing a disavowal of the labels by the Ministry of Agriculture (see: https://www.pleinchamp.com/actualite/produits-labellises-ni-ratio-dans-la-loi-climat-ni-ration-a-la-cantine).

Table 1 Logics of the SIQO and local approaches—a proposed interpretive framework

Operating principles	Dimensions to be observed
Nature of the product	• *Product status (excellence/everyday)* • *Specification content* • *Strategies for diversifying tourism*
Commercial dynamics	• *Local character of marketing channels* • *Customer relationships*
Agricultural models	• *Professional identity of operators* • *SIQO representations*
Institutional backing and supporting policies	• *Relations with other actors in the territory* • *Methods of support from local public policies*

Nutritional labelling could indeed penalize so-called *'terroir'* products if it were implemented indiscriminately.[13] Thus, whatever the scale considered, the situating of approaches in terms of their relational sense (Frayssignes, 2008) is an integral component of the debate.

Formalized in Table 1, these operating principles can now be integrated into the methods for observing dynamics at work in the field.

3 SIQO Chains and Alternative Local Initiatives: A Kind of Competition?

After a brief presentation of methods, we present analysis of the patterns of competition between SIQO and local labelling efforts within two study areas.

3.1 Method

To carry out our study, we have relied on the analysis of interviews conducted as part of a research project in the humanities and social sciences, funded by the former Midi-Pyrénées Region and taking place from 2016 to 2019. Entitled VEDEMIP,[14]

[13] https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/occitanie/occitanie-nutri-score-un-classement-alimentaire-difficile-a-avaler-pour-les-produits-regionaux-2106949.html.

[14] *Valuating Local Products: The Web of Approaches and its Consequences for Agricultural and Rural Development in Midi-Pyrénées.* The project partners were members of UMR CNRS LISST (Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Solidarities, Societies, Territories), particularly teams from the

this project had two main objectives: first, to understand why and how local producers chose to implement various initiatives to promote their activities and products; and second, to identify the consequences of these supposedly overlapping initiatives on territorial development and on consumer's expectations.

Two study sites were selected on the basis of several criteria. First, it was important to locate a variety of approaches to product valuation and certification, including some adhering to SIQO regulation. Secondly, these two sites had to present diversified territorial profiles, in demographic as well as economic and social terms. We thus decided to focus on the departments of Ariège and Lot. Both territories have numerous product valuation initiatives and are characterized by the co-presence of both emblematic SIQO products (Tomme des Pyrénées PGI for Ariège, and Rocamadour PDO for Lot) and generic local products (*tomme* for Ariège and *cabécou* for Lot). That all are dairy and cheese products made it easier to compare the information presented.

Approximately 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with professional (farmers, artisanal and industrial processors) and institutional (local authorities, consular chambers) stakeholders from these two territories. Administered according to common guidelines, these interviews aimed to capture the various profiles and strategies of actors involved in the product valuation and certification process. The data collected was interpreted using content analysis (Blanchet & Gotman, 2015). A special review of the interviews was carried out with respect to the general objectives of the VEDEMIP project, which involved close attention to the positioning of SIQO products compared to those of localized alternative models, as well as to the consequences of such positioning in terms of competition between them. The different actors' points of view were analysed according to their profiles, which enabled the identification of a posteriori groups with members of similar orientation, even though actors did not necessarily belong to the same organization. The data collection was consolidated through additional bibliographic research on both departments.

Results are presented using an identical framework. A brief description of the case study and of the SIQO item's production, valuation, and distribution path precedes the application of the interpretive framework, and follows two distinct steps: first, descriptions of the various identified groups, and of their motivating principles; and second, an analysis of the power dynamics inherent in their coexistence. These various aspects are illustrated by the use of verbatim quotes from the conducted interviews.

Rural Dynamics and Social Anthropology Center, the UMR INRA AGIR (Agri-ecology, Innovations and Territories), and Odycee (Organization, Dynamics of Knowledge, and Innovations in Territories and Sectors).

3.2 The Rocamadour PDO: Goat-Farming Relocalization in the Face of Alternative Competition

An emblematic product, the Rocamadour PDO (Protected Denomination of Origin) belongs to the family of lactic goat cheeses featuring a soft paste and a bloomy rind, and with a diameter of about 6 cm. Historically, the Occitan term '*cabécou*' has designated such small goat cheeses, and is a name used throughout southwest France. Produced since the fifteenth century, *cabécou* was for a long time a supplementary, micro-scale activity. In Lot, and especially in the Causses of Quercy, the 1970s and 80s saw the first phase of goat production specialization, characterized by the 'poor man's cow' image often associated with the presence of neo-rurals who were poorly integrated into the local context. In 1981, the sector (Chamber of Agriculture, FDSEA of the Lot department) established an Economic Interest Group to pool the marketing of *cabécou* outside the department. The sector began to really take shape in 1991, with the creation of the Rocamadour Cheese Producers' Union, which brought together most of the operators in the department (farm producers, milk and curd producers,[15] artisanal ripeners). Here the first efforts toward quality homogenization were implemented, despite some mutual antagonisms, with the affirmed goal of obtaining AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) certification, in order to distinguish the local production and therefore also to encourage the development of goat-related activity in the department. The project then quickly moved towards abandoning the term *cabécou* in favour of the name 'Rocamadour,' in order to build on the reputation of the eponymous village and to avoid problems related to insufficient legal protection (Frayssignes, 2008). In addition, work was carried out to assess the autonomy of farms in order to bring specifications into line with existing practices: the use of silage and concentrated feed was thereby regulated. The AOC was finally obtained in 1996, with an appellation area centred on the department of Lot, but also covering municipalities in Aveyron, Corrèze, Dordogne and Tarn-et-Garonne.

Registered as a PDO in 1999, the production of Rocamadour (1100 tons in 2019) currently involves about 50 milk producers delivering to 3 processing companies,[16] as well as roughly 30 farm producers and 5 curd producers. This production coexists with the generic departmental production of *cabécous* provided by about 40 farm producers, using a wide range of names: Gramat, Quercy, Livernon, Cahors. Finally, it should be noted that *cabécou* has the particularity of being componential of two other specific products: the *cabécou d'Autan* Red Label (located in Tarn et Garonne and Tarn) and the *cabécou du Périgord* (Dordogne), marketed under a collective brand.

Generally speaking, the 200 goat farmers in Lot operate on some 5000 farms[17] that cover the territory (as of 2019), and which correspond to an extremely diversified agriculture. The department is also characterized by numerous alternative start-up

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[15] The curd results from the addition of lactic acid bacteria and rennet in milk. It corresponds to the first stage of cheese processing.

[16] *Etoile du Quercy, Fromagerie du Quercy, Cooperative Les Fermiers du Rocamadour.*

[17] https://lot.chambre-agriculture.fr/votre-chambre-dagriculture/presentation-du-lot/.

projects (small-acreage farms, production outside the family-farm framework and/or without classical sources of funding, short supply chains). Goat farming is a good example of such phenomena, and has emerged as a particularly dynamic direct-sale farming enterprise, now quite different from the agricultural stereotypes of the 1980s (although these have not completely disappeared): "*There are neo-rurals, but they aren't just hipsters! The biggest farms are also selling directly. And then, the short supply chains in the Lot, it's about a third of the farms*" (agricultural technician).

With respect to positioning of the SIQO product, the interviews made it possible to identify various groups of producers involved in valuation procedures; groups that, although intermingled, appear relatively discernible. The two main such groups have been referred to as 'supermarket-affiliated PDO developers' and 'agrarian activists' (Fiamor, 2019).[18]

The first group corresponds to the operators involved in the certification union (milk producers, farm producers, processing companies). Operators from this group are generally larger than average and are associated with professional family farming, backed by classic collective organizations (majority syndicates, cooperatives). The PDO sector is also characterized by close proximity with both agricultural development authorities (Chamber of Agriculture) and territorial development authorities (Departmental Council; Causses du Quercy Regional Nature Park, created in 1999).

The second group refers to non-PDO *cabécou* producers who, although heterogeneous in profile, all favour direct sales within smaller structures, and are affiliated with alternative professional organizations such as the *Confédération Paysanne* and the ADEAR Lot[19] (and therefore more distant from traditional authorities). Some of these farms have diversified into agritourism, with occasionally unique activities (accommodation in yurts, donkey rides). These producers are part of the *Accueil Paysan* network, which also arose from the *Confédération Paysanne*. Conversely, SIQO farms that have begun to diversify are affiliated with *Bienvenue à la Ferme,* the network of the Chambers of Agriculture, and by extension to official tourist institutions such as *Lot Tourisme*.[20]

In terms of practices, the so-called alternative breeders claim to be part of an agrarian tradition of agriculture that respects the natural breeding season of goats, once-a-day milking, autonomous foraging, as well as an assumed recourse to experimentation through trial and error. In doing so, they are clearly distancing themselves from the rules inherent to PDO specifications, where out-of-season breeding and foraging autonomy are regulated and once-a-day milking is forbidden.[21] Yet this

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[18] Two other groups have been identified: 'agritourism professionals' and 'non-aligned'. With respect to SIQO production, these two groups can be considered as variations of the two previously mentioned.

[19] Association for the Development of Agricultural and Rural Employment in the Lot: This structure was created in 2001 with the aim of supporting project leaders from outside the agricultural world, particularly in matters of real estate.

[20] *Lot Tourisme* corresponds to the department's tourism development agency (formerly the Departmental Tourism Committee), which bears the *'Esprit Lot'* label.

[21] Currently, 60% of the herd on a farm can be provided with hormonal treatments to be bred out of season (*dessaisonnement*). In addition, 80% of the feed (including concentrates) must come from

distancing goes even further. When analysing these producers' approach to valuation, we can see a reluctance—except in the case of organic farming—to have their products inspected by a third party: "*We let the specificities of each farm express themselves. We need diversity; there is no need for specifications*" (farm producer).

Matters of professional identity and social ties also help to distinguish the two groups. The supporters of alternative agriculture thus favour relationships of acquaintance to a greater degree, especially with respect to consumers: "*People want to know where and how the cheeses are made, how the animals are fed. We also like to welcome people because we're not from the agricultural world! No need to identify ourselves when we know everyone. We sell to people who've seen our children grow up. We know them all*" (farm producer). For their part, breeders involved in the PDO appear to be more inclined to collective action, and see themselves as the legitimate custodians of a professional sector of excellence, one that has established its own reputation and contributed to the structuring of a production unit: "*The PDO is a structuring factor: Thanks to its specifications, we have repatriated milk which is now processed here. Without it, we would only have farm producers*" (milk producer).

While local competition between PDO and non-PDO cheese producers is a long-standing phenomenon (Couzinet et al., 2002), tensions between the two have increased in recent years. This is especially so since many farmers classified in the alternative group have left the PDO sector, either out of rejection of the system or because their practices are too far removed from specifications. Our interviews thus shed light on relatively clear-cut critical visions: On the one hand, 'alternative' actors denounce systemic excesses, which are symbolized by the presence of corporate capital from outside the territory.[22] They also reject certain practices they consider incompatible with animal welfare: "*With out-of-season breeding and hormones, goats are suffering. It's not natural, it's not ethical*" (farm producer). On the other hand, PDO officials remain sceptical about the viability of dissident farms: "*We see examples of rogue settlements, which raises questions. Constantly letting goats roam free isn't realistic, it's ridiculous*" (PDO manager). Quite logically, their criticisms also concern lack of control: "*There is a form of unfair competition. We have obligations; we've built a reputation they're taking advantage of; they benefit from the atmosphere of the territory. The local without of that is a hoax*" (PDO farm producer).

Although these antagonisms are relatively clear-cut, this division has to be considered with nuance insofar as PDO and non-PDO production is indissociable for many operators. Membership in one of the two groups is also never total nor definitive.

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the PDO zone. The stakeholders are currently considering a change in the specifications: The above criteria are thus under review, as well as the releasing of animals to forage (source: *Syndicat du Rocamadour PDO*).

[22] 2 of the 3 enterprises belong to industrial groups: Lactalis and the *Société Fromagère du Livradois*.

3.3 Pyrenean Tomme PGI: Militant Actors Versus an "Out of Touch" SIQO

Uncooked pressed cheese, *tomme des Pyrénées* is intimately linked to the history of the various mountains and valleys that make up the range; its historical origins are found in the Bethmale valley, in the former small province of Couserans (Ariège department). From its origin, the product has had the particularity of being made with cow, goat or sheep milk, indifferently. The nineteenth century saw the first stage in the development of a cheese that had remained, until then, farm-made, with the emergence of artisanal activity. The sector adopted the form of *'fruitières'* (cheese factories) from the 1960s onwards, using the same model as in the French Jura.[23] The use of the name 'Tomme des Pyrénées' stabilized during this period, aligning with the gradual shift from *fruitières* to a more industrial logic.

In 1980–1981, the *Association des Fromagers des Pyrénées* (AFP) was created. Consisting of cooperative and private cheese manufacturers from the mountains, the AFP quickly obtained a regional label[24] for the production of *tomme* made with pasteurized cow's milk. In 1996, this regional label was then converted, using an accelerated procedure, into a PGI that included only a few industrial processors (SODIAAL cooperative, Matocq and Onetik cheese manufacturers). This arrangement has been challenged by a number of farmers and artisanal producers, who are demanding, on the one hand, an extension of PGI specifications to include products made from raw and thermized milk, as well as from mixed milk (sheep, goat), and, on the other hand, an expansion of the zone[25] itself. United within the *Association des Fromagers Fermiers Artisans des Pyrénées* (AFFAP, created in 1983), these actors made an official request to the INAO in 2009 to modify the regulations.

After years of conflict, the procedure finally ended in 2020. In addition to the annual production of 2500 tons of pasteurized PGI *tomme* (the equivalent of around a hundred dairy farms) was therefore added an allowance of a similar tonnage of raw milk *tomme*, produced by 350 farm producers and 10 artisanal companies collecting from 500 breeders.[26] As in the case of Rocamadour, this now-certified production coexists with a wide range of generic products that are technically very similar and usually produced by the same operators.[27] A major characteristic of the Pyrenean cheese industry, this important polysemy is coupled with forms of farm production

[23] The term *fruitière* refers to the idea of sharing the fruits of cooperative members' work.

[24] Created in 1976, regional labels were granted to French products made in certain regions, recognizing the typical, traditional, and/or representative character of these regions. This system was abandoned with the advent of the European-scale PDO-PGI (source: www.senat.fr).

[25] The original PGI area covered Ariège, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Hautes-Pyrénées, as well as parts of Aude and Haute-Garonne. Its extension aimed to encompass the Pyrenean *massifs* of the Aude and the Pyrénées-Orientales.

[26] Sources: www.irqualim.fr; www.inao.fr.

[27] Among the most frequent names: Moulis, Bethmale, Couserans, Pic de la Calabasse, Estive, Rogallais.

that have remained alive and well since the 1970s, particularly thanks to the impetus of neo-rurals.

More generally, Ariège dairy production is carried out within a territory strongly oriented towards the extensive breeding of herbivores. In 2010, some 2600 farms in the department still accounted for nearly 5% of jobs there. In this context, the dairy industry remains marginal and in crisis, with only a hundred or so collection points (compared to nearly 350 for beef cattle). The significant diversification of agriculture in Ariège is one of its main characteristics: short supply chains (33% of farms in 2010), on-farm processing (10%), agritourism, and agri-energy. Finally, the prominence of organic farming should be noted: it represents more than 16% of the total, making Ariège one of the most dynamic departments in Occitanie per these two criteria.[28]

Unlike Lot, investigations carried out in Ariège reveal not two but three main profiles. In addition to the 'agrarian activist / supermarket-affiliated PDO developer' divide, there is a third group, made up of family businesses: 'local industrial and artisanal figures' (Fiamor, 2019). The particular conditions for obtaining certification give the Tomme des Pyrénées a special status. The product appears to be very little appropriated by local actors (farm producers, artisans), even if the recent expansion of the PGI could eventually change this situation.

The 'PGI holders' corresponds to three historical operators committed in the PGI: Fromageries Occitanes—a subsidiary of the cooperative group SODIAAL (Saint-Lizier, Ariège)—and the firms Onetik and Matocq (Pyrénées Atlantiques). These actors, all of whom belong to the *Association des Fromagers Pyrénéens,* are inscribed in an industrial logic and are not deeply rooted in Ariège.[29] They interact only occasionally with other local actors. The category 'local industrial and artisanal figures' refers to a group of businesses (from 2 to 25 employees, engaged in processing and/or maturing activity). Though all of these enterprises are part of AFFAP, they do not act as a collective. Managed by local entrepreneurs and notables, they have little contact with each other and prefer to act individually, except during the long conflict that pitted them against the first group over the extension of the PGI. Their local roots are manifested by their proximity with political authorities, especially the Departmental Council. Finally, as in Lot, the 'representatives of agrarian agriculture' consist mainly of small-scale producers of generic, direct-sale *tomme,* who are members of AFFAP and close to alternative organizations (such as *Accueil Paysan, Confédération Paysanne*, ADEAR, CIVAM bio).

The analysis of practices highlights a fairly clear divide between the industrial approach employed by PGI holders (cheese-making *savoir-faire*, use of pasteurized milk and corn silage) and more traditional approaches, based on the use of summer pastures and raw and local milk. Ariège, for its part, is distinguished by the presence of a regional natural park, the *Parc des Pyrénées Ariégeoises*. Created in 2009 as part of a Social and Solidarity Economy project, the park employs a 'Regional Natural

[28] Source: *Chambre d'Agriculture de l'Ariège,* AGRESTE 2010 data.

[29] The only operator in the department, Les Fromageries Occitanes, collects milk from around 300 producers, of which less than 20 are located in Ariège.

Park Values' brand[30] to promote local raw-milk *tommes* made from grass-fed animals and with the use of summer pastures. Bolstered by an annual raw-milk Tomme des Pyrénées competition, this resolutely activist positioning is based on a vision of quality privileging the link between the product and the natural resources of the territory.

The professional identities of the different groups also appear distinct. For example, the emphasis on family reputation specific to artisanal enterprises tends to conflict with the desire to preserve farming traditions and direct contact with consumers. More generally, the department of Ariège is characterized by a certain individualism: "*Here, everyone knows each other, but no one works together*" (farm producer), although such a stance is sometimes assumed: "*The collective can be normative*" (craftsman). In this context, official institutions such as the Departmental Council appear relatively distant from the alternative sphere, even if in the Ariège case, the Chamber of Agriculture appears more favourable to it. In this regard, one can mention the positioning of the *Bienvenue à la Ferme* network or the 2012 creation of the logistics platform 'Terroirs Ariège Pyrénées', a SCIC (*Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif*) oriented towards the marketing of local products for collective catering operators.

In this context, the conflicts in play are tied to the particular positioning of the SIQO product. For many operators, generic products appear to be more legitimate at the local level than PGI products, which are considered out of touch: "*The PGI has been stolen, confiscated. It came from outside; it is a political construction*" (farm producer). The critical discourse observed in Ariège is somewhat similar to that of Lot. On the one hand, the supporters of the PGI denounce installation projects that are sometimes unviable, and consider the alternative valuation approaches (in particular those implemented under the aegis of the PNR) as unrealistic: "*To supply 100% of the milk from within the park is impossible, even less so with grass-fed cows*" (small artisan). On the other hand, farm producers condemn practices they consider unsustainable (structure sizes, non-local milk, silage) and denounce the lack of upstream involvement of the agricultural sector in the PGI.

In Ariège, therefore, SIQO production is being strongly challenged. The unique structure of the sector explains the low level of mobilization by operators who are in conflict with each other (supporters of agrarian agriculture, artisanal family businesses). From this point of view, the expansion of the PGI could lead in the medium term to a reorganization of the system of actors.

[30] Property of the National Federation of PNR, '*Valeurs Parc*' is a collective mark awarded to products and services that meet certain contractually-based requirements (source: https://www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.fr/).

4 Elements of Discussion: The Repositioning of SIQOs and the Relocalization of Agriculture

Findings from the two case studies tend to confirm the somewhat distinctive features between actors who claim to follow alternative agricultural practices and those who follow a SIQO approach. They also emphasize the importance of taking into account the spatial and temporal logics at work.

4.1 SIQO Products and Local Products: Two Different Ethics of Production

Despite the fact that they are fluid and closely intertwined, the ‘alternative’ and ‘SIQO’ agricultural models are tensely related, in terms of their productive orientations and in terms of their mutual interaction. Such tensions are particularly manifest in the form of a rejection of the SIQO model, which many actors in the alternative sphere consider to be nothing more than a variation of the dominant conventional model (Allaire, 2016). This article, which reflects the SIQO products’ ‘point of view’, also echoes the findings of the VEDEMIP project, which examined the territorialized intricacies of food product labelling processes.

First, the SIQO/local alternative distinction appears to correspond relatively closely with the two ethics of production identified during the project: a ‘certified tradition’ based upon a patrimonial register of resources, and the ‘cultural here and now’, harkening to the image of the local small-farmer (Fiamor, 2019). Defined by specific practices and representations, ethics of production are developed in particular through a certain set of relations to places (to space and to nature) and through power relations (Delfosse, 1995; Poulain, 2002). Without being total, the correspondence between the two binomials (SIQO/ ‘certified tradition’ and alternative/’cultural here and now’) is confirmed in the operators’ strategies, specifically at the point of sale. The supporters of the SIQO approach draw on the essentials of the sector (respect for tradition, independent controls). The supporters of the alternative, local approach insist on their autonomy, their direct relationship with consumers and a more professedly thorough consideration of ecological issues.

Second, these two ethics are coupled with product certification strategies which, though diverse, appear to be more structured than initially assumed. Three forms of such approaches to valuation have been identified: the accentuation of a product characteristic (for example within the framework of agri-tourism diversification), the diversification of the same characteristic (segmentation of a product within different channels, e.g. PDO, private label, and/or commercial brands), and the combination of different approaches (following multiple processes, e.g. organic and *‘Valeurs Parc’* branding) (Fiamor, 2019). The first two forms are more closely related to an ethic of tradition, and are therefore more likely to be adhered to by SIQO operators.

Conversely, the third strategy is consistent with the more alternative ethic of the ‘cultural here and now’.

Finally, if the SIQOs related to an origin (PDO, PGI) appear as a counterpoint to alternative local approaches, the category of organic farming takes on a more vague position. Our interviews show that organic producers are represented in both groups. They have different profiles (neo-rural farmers, agricultural professionals) and different motivations (activist conviction, financial opportunity). The very status of organic farming is fraught with tensions. We thus observe a more marked rejection of the conventionalization of organic farming in Ariège, while Lot is characterized by a more pragmatic and professional take. The territorial context thus gives organic farming a special status.

4.2 Between Territorial Anchoring and Convergence of Models

Generally speaking, the competition between the two models is influenced by various local configurations (professional identity of the operators, positioning of the institutions involved, commercial strategies, etc.). Consideration of the territorial anchoring of this competition thus leads to the distinguishing of resources and of the coordination of specific actors (Frayssignes & Millet, 2021). Resources mobilized in the specifications of the two SIQO products condition their relationship to the alternative sector, as we have already noted in the case of the Tomme des Pyrénées PGI, which still has a very industrial component. In addition, the proximity—or the distance—between these two models is never fixed: the Rocamadour PDO operators are now thus considering new regulation reform aimed at improving animal welfare (free roaming, abandoning the use of hormones). It might also be interesting to carry out similar analysis on territories characterized by the presence of SIQO producers who have historically followed a logic running counter to the overall evolution of agriculture (PDO Laguiole, Reblochon, Beaufort, Comté).

Observing how actors coordinate their activities has highlighted the varied positioning of regional nature parks (PNRs), which are common in both territories. We have seen that, while the Causses du Quercy PNR appears relatively closely connected to the agricultural profession (FDSEA, Chamber of Agriculture), that of the Ariegean Pyrenees has adopted a much more militant stance. Depending on the area, the park can therefore constitute a relay for the SIQO actors, or conversely, an ‘adversary’ with a more critical perspective.

Our interview results must also be looked at in terms of their temporality. On the one hand, one must recall the porosity between the two models, particularly with respect to the phenomena of multiple certification and the mobility of actors vis-à-vis valuation procedures. For example, resistance toward PDO Rocamadour requirements are thus in part due to operators who have left the sector. On the other hand, beyond individual strategies and experimentation, the dynamics of agricultural transition and relocalization are likely to increase tensions between actors engaged in disjointed models. However, territorial trajectories can also converge within the perpetual interplay of differentiation and imitation strategies. While the AOC model, which appeared to be the best promoter of *terroirs*, may have seemed threatened (Pouzenc et al., 2007), today the phenomenon of alternative farming conventionalization (Dervillé & Wallet, 2014; Poméon et al., 2017) coexists with a desire on the part of SIQO authorities to take on more environmentally friendly approaches and to relocalize their commercial strategies (short supply circuits, collective catering), while maintaining the principles of certification.

5 Conclusion

The aim of the reflection in this article was to contribute to the analysis of the tensions between SIQO initiatives and the relocalization dynamics at work in the agricultural world. Although based on a common principle of proximity between producers and consumers, these dynamics remain a heterogeneous reality that is difficult to grasp. A review of the literature on the nature of such alternative agriculture has nevertheless allowed us to propose an interpretative framework concerning the tensions between SIQO producers and local producers, and then to apply it to two objects of study: the Rocamadour PDO and the Tomme des Pyrénées PGI. Although characterized by specific forms of territorial anchoring, these two products seem to be facing comparable challenges by actors claiming different values.

Conducted from the point of view of the SIQO approaches, the re-reading of the data collected during the VEDEMIP project has thus confirmed and illustrated the existence of a new arena of opposition. While SIQOs have traditionally competed with products marketed using *terroir*-mimicking strategies, now they are also facing rejection from the alternative sector, which considers itself to be the only legitimate source of opposition to conventional agriculture.

This inquiry deserves to be further explored, on the one hand with specific interviews focusing on the profiles of actors and the factors that govern their choices, and on the other hand drawing from a wider range of territories and products. Nevertheless, it already offers a partly renewed reading of the territorial development trajectories at work, particularly in terms of conflicts between actors characterized by specific feelings of belonging (Torre, 2015). Analysing these conflicts enriches studies on the cohabitation of models, which place greater emphasis on phenomena of coexistence, convergence or porosity (Galliano et al., 2017; Gasselin et al., 2021). It should be noted that these tensions can also be considered through the lens of consumer and citizen representation. Consumer surveys conducted within the framework of VEDEMIP provide a starting point in this regard.[31]

[31] Around 50 ‘eaters’ committed to the cause of local production were surveyed; unsurprisingly, they expressed their confidence in geographical and social proximity with producers, and conversely their questions about and/or ignorance of so-called products of *terroir* (Fiamor, 2019).

Finally, the article emphasizes the unfavourable nature of certain agricultural developments for labelled products. Indeed, the logic of the link to *terroir* appears to be stifled—not to say marginalized—by a multiplicity of approaches claiming to be of more or less exact geographical origins. In this sense, the 'local alternative' logic highlighted here is part of a citizen approach, in which the territory is considered in light of its natural dimension and of the proximal relations afforded to producers and consumers (Pouzenc et al., 2007).

Because of these changes in the agricultural winds, we feel justified in questioning the SIQOs response to a shifting environment. The challenges posed by the dynamics of agricultural transition and relocalization are generating new forms of opposition. Without engaging in criticism of alternative models, which can only be harmful to the entire profession, the current context provides an opportunity for SIQOs to reaffirm the relevance of their founding principles: controlled quality, links to origin, and collective action. If local products seem to have acquired real legitimacy in the debate regarding alternative production, the bearers of official labels must find their own answers in the ongoing transition.

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Chapter 2
An Exploration of the Effect of Background Music in Retail Stores on Moroccan Consumers' Perceptions and Behaviors

Imane Sbai, Abdelaziz Bahoussa, and Chandes Gerard

Abstract **Purpose**: Previous research has demonstrated the great effects of music on consumer behavior in retail settings. However, it is not always clear whether this effect could be generalized to the Moroccan context. Researchers recommend studying other contexts to generalize results. In order to fill in this gap, the purpose of our study is to examine the effect of background music on Moroccan shopping behaviors and also to explain all possible interactions. **Design/methodology/approach**: Data were obtained from an exploratory qualitative study undertaken in two phases. The first involved conducting 10 non-participant observations in five ready-to-wear and cosmetics stores, to identify what sort of background music was being played and the interactions between background music and customers. Secondly, individual interviews with 241 customers who visit retail stores on a regular basis. This study focuses mainly on retail music. **Findings**: Results indicate that retail music positively influences mood, emotion, perception of time, perception of store and behavioral intentions. This effect is mediated by congruence and preference. Also, customers highlighted in-store playing of trendy music or trendy songs (new titles recently released). We live in a world that follows trends, signaling a high capacity to influence customer responses. **Practical implications**: For managers, results suggest that retail music may be a good option to change Moroccans' shopping behaviors. They must customize the acoustic environment according to the use of specific spaces and particular people they want to reach while striving to suit the each country's culture. Trendy songs are more appropriate for Moroccan stores that carry local music as they are expanding internationally. **Originality/Value**: This work is the first to demonstrate the effect of retail music on Moroccans' shopping behaviors, particularly in a developing country. Moreover, music trends seem to be an essential component of

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the Moroccan music environment. This particular interest in trendy music is justified by our generation's enjoyment of it, and our tendency to follow the Buzz.

Keywords Background music · Music trends · Consumer behavior · Retail · Morocco

1 Introduction

It is common for people to show different emotional and behavioral responses to atmospheric stimuli. *We use the term atmosphere to describe the conscious design of space to create specific effects in buyers. More specifically, atmosphere is the effort to design shopping environments likely to produce specific emotional effects in shoppers, which enhance their willingness to buy* (Kotler, 1973). Kotler contributed to the popularity of this notion. The atmosphere in a restaurant with gastronomic pretensions is calm and orderly. A supermarket's atmosphere is bright and noisy, depending on the place, time and day. An important distinction exists between inserted atmosphere and perceived atmosphere. It depends on the elements that contribute to configuring the whole atmosphere.

Lewin (1936) presented a formula indicating the interaction relationship between an individual and the environment: $B = f(P, E)$ (in which B = behavior; P = persons; E = environment). In this context, emerges the quest to dress up the retail offer (Rémy, 2009), paying special attention to the store layout, in order to immerse customers in its hedonic and social functions, and to maximize commercial performance (Helmefalk & Hultén, 2017; Wen et al., 2020).

Many studies have sought to evaluate the perceptual effects of different atmospheric cues. Nevertheless, music seems to be the most studied factor. Marketing researchers have indeed studied various aspects of background music such as volume (Biswas et al., 2019; Cameron et al., 2013), genre (North, Sheridan et al., 2016; Wen et al., 2020), tempo (Kim & Zauberman, 2019; Knoeferle et al., 2017), and Foreground and Background music (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990; Yi & kang, 2019).

However, variables were customized differently, leading to various contradictory results. An initial explanation is the difference between inserted atmosphere and perceived atmosphere. Perceived atmosphere favors or hinders the act of buying, especially when this act does not have a strictly functional purpose and is not immediately forced. Furthermore, researchers recommend conducting research in other contexts in order to generalize results. Perceived atmosphere results from the emergence of representations whose construction takes place under the effect of subjective feelings, which themselves result from a large number of variables, one of which is the consumer's age. Older people tend to prefer soft and relaxing music. Conversely, young people tend to like more dynamic styles. In this sense, our paper aims to study the effects of playing background music on Moroccan customers' responses. This study proposes the following main research question: **How does background music affect Moroccan customers' behaviors in retail stores?**

We are part of an exploratory research where a qualitative approach is strongly recommended in a new context with its own culture. We began our exploration with 10 preliminary non-participant observations in Tangier in five ready-to-wear and cosmetics retail stores to identify the background music being played and the interactions between background music and customers (over 10 non-successive days). Ranging from 01/09/2020 to 01/26/2020, excluding the sales period, at different times of day (Morning and Afternoon). Retail stores accommodate different socio-demographic categories, depending on times of day. For example, inactive people (Housewives, retirees, etc.) shop in the morning, while active people tend to come during rush hours. Also, stores do not play the same music all day long, and all over the week. We opted for non-participant observation in order to collect behavioral data directly, without the observed subjects being aware they were being monitored so their reactivity would not impact the data (Bouchard, 1976).

We chose stores set up both in the mall and downtown, at different times of day (3 stores in mall and 2 stores downtown). We chose Defacto and Zara for ready-to-wear because they target a large population. Similarly, Yan and One and Flormar for cosmetics because they target women but also husbands who buy gifts to their wives, sisters or mothers. We were looking for richness and depth of content. We adopted the mystery shopper position without any interaction so as not to disrupt other customers' activities. We collected observations by taking notes on phone, following an observation grid. We observed that background music was present in all five retail stores throughout the day. These stores play vocal, dynamic and stimulating music, as well as instrumental, calm and quiet muzak. They are also interested in Moroccan trendy music. Stores start the day by playing quiet music and switch to dynamic music during peak periods to attract customers. Stores receive customers of different ages. Young people tend to hum, snap their fingers, stamp their feet, and move their whole body to the beat of the dynamic music they hear. Old people smile, walk around the store, and examine different items while hearing soft, calm music. Some have made purchases. Customer reactions are not all the same. They can change depending on age and time of day. Besides, mood and pleasure may also change consumers' responses and be antecedents of the way they answer. This first step was essential to initiate our exploration and define essential elements on which to base our one-on-one interviews. The purpose of this research is first to understand the relationships between background music and consumer responses by accounting for the factors that promote this relationship from a contextualist perspective. Second, to see to what extent the Moroccan context differs from other contexts. Especially in a developing country. Indeed, previous research has raised the interest of exploring other contexts and cultures in order to generalize research findings. To our knowledge, our study is the first to explore background music in a Moroccan context. Finally, we aim to present the results of this study in order to extract empirical research proposals adapted to Morocco's specific features.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and managerial. Indeed, the literature in the field of background music played in Moroccan retail stores does not provide answers to our questions. In addition to the variety of stimuli, variety of contexts is important (Lichtlé & Plichon, 2014). We have not come across any research directly interested in this topic, except for two articles studying the overall retail store and hotel atmospheres (Aboudrar et al., 2018; Maaroufi & Abba, 2019). Internationally, there is a large literature on atmospheric factors and their influence on consumer behavior. However, little research has investigated the sole retail store background music.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Background Music as an Atmospheric Stimulus

Music is often used to set up effective marketing practices in retail environments and advertising contexts. Retailers play a variety of national and international music to attract consumers. On the other hand, advertisers use existing original or modified music in advertising (Raja et al., 2019). Current research refers to 'Music' as the background music played in stores when consumers are strolling. As an atmospheric stimulus, music refers to human compositions functioning as an ambient element in the consumption environment (Garlin & Owen, 2006).

While listening to music, consumers experience various emotional states (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974), make decisions, use services or make purchases (Garlin & Owen, 2006; Jain & Bagdare, 2011; Roschk et al., 2017). At the lowest level, music was studied by comparing its effects on customers' emotions, satisfaction and behavioral intentions when music is being played and when it is not. Music is a major source of pleasure generation and emotional self-regulation. This has been demonstrated by research in sociology, psychology (Alpert & Alpert, 1990; Cotter & Silvia, 2020; Denora, 1999; Denora & Belcher, 2000), neuroscience (Abrams et al., 2013; Levrini et al., 2019), and the phenomenology of sound (Balzani et al., 2014). "Glacial, soulless, lifeless, sad, empty, weird, bland, unpleasant, cold, dull, gloomy, monotone, soft" are the words that saturate the spiel of salesmen who work in a ready-to-wear brand during an interview with Rieunier (2000).

A generalized aversion to silence is justified even if some European luxury products retail spaces have tried experimenting silent sensory marketing (Goudarzi, 2017). Silence is sometimes so intense that it stirs anguish and imposes a feeling of absence (Rouzé, 2005). Silence is not welcome. Perceptions of quality are better felt in unknown music than silence. On the other hand, the satisfaction level is lower in the absence of music (Yi & Kang, 2019).

2.2 How Does Background Music Affects Shoppers' Behaviors?

Mehrabian and Russel (1974) introduced the S.O.R model to study store environments and describe customer responses. Many researchers used this framework to analyze shopping behaviors and confirmed relationships between atmospherics cues, emotional states and shopping behaviors.

Customers experience three emotional states while listening to retail music: pleasure, arousal and dominance. Pleasure is an affective state of feeling good, pleased or joyful (Andersson et al., 2012). Roschk et al. (2017), and Yi and Kang (2019) found that pleasure is positively and significantly related to the presence of music (Vs its absence). Arousal reflects an individual's degree of stimulation or activation (Andersson et al., 2012). Roschk et al. (2017) found that music does not generate excitement among customers. It may be due to noise, such as crowd noise. At most, Kim and Zauberman (2019) found that arousal is a key determinant of the effect of music tempo on impatience in intertemporal decisions and temporal distance judgment. Dominance is the degree to which an individual feels dominant or submissive in a retail environment (Andersson et al., 2012).

This dimension has not been retained in previous research because it was not significantly influenced by background music (Herrington, 1996; Sibéril, 1994; Yalch & Spangenberg, 1993). However, Yi and Kang (2019) found that music puts customers in control and shows the same tendency as pleasure. Otherwise, we have noticed a lack of research that highlights mood as an affect. Music has long been considered an effective and efficient stimulus to trigger moods (Bruner, 1990; Husain et al., 2002). The SOR approach has largely contributed to the enrichment of literature. It has inspired many researchers in shopping behaviors. As early on as the 1990s did researchers develop the model and introduce individuals and situational moderating variables into atmospheric research (atmospherics cues) (Fig. 1). Manipulating various properties of music (tempo, volume, texture) also comes into play. It brings a deep understanding of all distinct and possible responses (Biswas et al., 2019). However, results are still inconclusive; they might prove at times significant but also not very meaningful.

In their study, Hynes and Manson (2016) reported that customers are aware music is being played. Results showed that all customers were able to deconstruct and isolate the sounds they heard in a supermarket. Music was one among the sounds they heard. The effect of music was marginal on awareness and emotional responses, affecting only a very small number of consumers. In supermarkets, customers are unaware of music when in a rush and with a list of items to buy. Some managers believe that live music enhances customer experience. Bramley et al. (2016) found that casino managers use retail-store music (muzak) to promote the casino, accompany customers to eat and drink, to entertain them, and recorded background music to accompany participation in game activities while manipulating volume, tempo and genre. Otherwise, North, Sheridan et al. (2016) demonstrated that tempo influences time perceptions in a gym. A slow tempo results in a greater degree of inaccuracy in

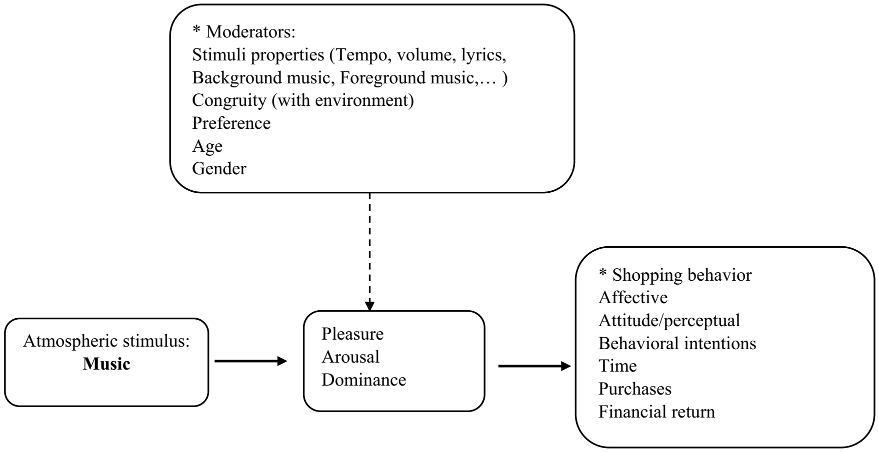

Fig. 1 The influence of retail music (*Source* Biswas et al., 2019; Garlin & Owen, 2006; Imschloss & Kuehnl, 2017; Jain & Bagdare, 2011; Rieunier, 2000; Roschk et al., 2017; Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000; Yi & Kang, 2019)

perceived time estimates than a fast tempo. This moderate effect may be caused by the congruence between music and the listening situation. Congruence defined as the fit of a stimulus to the overall store atmosphere (Roschk et al., 2017). North, Sheridan et al. (2016) sought to investigate and confirm the moderating role of congruence in the effect of background music on shopping behavior via an experiment.

Participants are more likely to choose and/or recall a product of national origin if the music played simultaneously has the same national origin (versus music with a different national origin). These participants are willing to pay more for utility products when pop music rather than classical music is playing simultaneously. Furthermore, Imschloss and Kuehnl (2017) showed that congruence moderates the effects of both stimuli: music and the floor. Their study concluded that multisensory atmospheric congruence between floor and music positively affects product evaluations by consumers. In addition to congruence, Wen et al. (2020) studied the moderating role of dinner companions in ethnic restaurants. Analysis showed that congruence between ethnic music and the theme of the restaurant had a greater effect on perceived authenticity than music pleasure itself. The effect of musical pleasure on perceived authenticity was significant for customers dining with their families, while the effect of musical congruence on perceived authenticity was significantly higher for customers dining with friends.

In contrast to several widely studied musical properties, Kang and Lakshmanan (2017) tested the effect of Background music and Foreground music on consumers' cognitive performance, based on individual differences. Foreground music (vs Background music) leads to lower cognitive and attitudinal outcomes for consumers with lower working memory capacity, but does not affect those with higher working memory capacity. The exciting nature of music makes cognitive abilities weaker. In line with this previous study, Yi and Kang (2019) studied Background music and

Foreground music in shopping malls and public spaces. Results revealed that background music could significantly enhance satisfaction, promote approach behavior, and reinforce dominance emotions, while increasing desire to further roam and explore. On the other hand, Foreground music can significantly affect arousal. Depending on their natures, background music is more suitable for a peaceful atmosphere, while Foreground music is more appropriate for a dynamic atmosphere. Interestingly, there has been a trend towards loud stores. Gyms are playing music at much louder levels than they used to, so as to make the space more appealing (Hallett & Lamont, 2015). Given the variation of volume in stores, cafes, supermarkets, Biswas et al. (2019) showed that individuals choose healthy foods when volume is low, due to the relaxation it induces. Besides, people are more excited and choose unhealthy foods when the volume is high. It should be noted that other characteristics of music (tempo, pitch, tone, etc.) could moderate this effect despite their consistency. As North, Sheridan et al. (2016) suggested, Toldos et al. (2019) studied the lyrics of music. Researchers do not know how the language of lyrics (native vs foreign) affects consumer behavior. Results indicate the following: when music is streamed in English, customers coming from a non-English speaking country are more likely to make purchases, which matches with the overall store image. This effect is mediated by time spent in the store. Interesting, but it should explore whether individual differences moderate the reported effects. Brisson and Bianchi (2020) examined the effect of changing music selection based on the identification of music taste dimensions. Results indicate that the apparent structure of musical taste is strongly affected by the variations of selected music. Indeed, identifying the structure of musical tastes depends strongly on respondents' social backgrounds and cultural capital. Moreover, Caldwell and Hibbert (2002) concluded that musical preference moderates the effect between music tempo and time spent in a restaurant. As a rule, whether or not you like music, it does affect consumer behaviors. Preference is a relative affect for certain music or artists in comparison to other music or artists, thus implying the choice of an emotional order (Day, 1985).

It was recognized that preference was subjective and could depend on music proprieties together with individual variables such as age and gender. Men have demonstrated a higher level of satisfaction and arousal than women in specific musical environments, while older people are less sensitive to music than their younger counterparts. They are also more tolerant of the environment (Yi & Kang, 2019).

Researchers continue to harness the full potential of background music. The effect is not only limited to consumer behavior but also to an intermodal effect. Research in these field shows that inputs from one sensory modality (hearing, smell, taste…) can influence the perceptions of other modalities. Hagtvedt and Brasel (2016) indicate that the intermodal correspondence between sound frequency and colors brightness can direct visual attention: high frequency (low frequency) sounds direct visual attention to light colored objects (dark colored objects). Biswas et al. (2019) contributed to the enrichment of this intermodal effect and found that music volume can influence taste outcomes related to food choice. Imschloss and Kuehnl (2019) found that soft music improves the haptic softness of tissues. An intermodal effect that occurs through a transfer of association related to the softness of the auditory modality to the haptic modality. Several research works ought to be carried out in this direction to test the whole of the sensory modalities in various contexts.

In addition to research conducted in physical environments, e-commerce has evolved at an unprecedented rate. Online stores have enabled researchers to examine the potential of applying background music in websites, for manipulation purposes. Hwang and Oh (2020) conducted an experiment on an e-commerce web site offering participants interactive music. This study found that interactive music results in a higher level of control and customers' perceived vividness of the online store. In fact, the consumer's perceived control contributes to improving emotional engagement and these dimensions in particular: novelty and enjoyment. The vividness of the web site contributes significantly to enhance emotional and cognitive engagement. Furthermore, the analysis reported the mediating effect of engagement on behavioral intention, recommendations, store perception, attitude and retail preference.

3 Research Methodology

We opted for an exploratory qualitative approach, in order to contextualize our research. The choice of a qualitative approach is motivated by the exploratory nature of this research, which aims to suggest empirical research proposals adapted to Moroccan particularities and likely to more or less reflect the reality, thereby deepening some of the elements we examined during our participant observation.

Qualitative research focuses on the meanings and motivations underlying behavior and attempts to provide an in-depth account of the facts and implications of behaviors, through the researcher's confrontation with individuals' actions, words, and ideas (Mariampolski, 2001). They are better suited to understanding the complexity of consumer behavior.

We carried out an in-depth analysis on 24 individual interviews (11 men and 13 women) (age $\geq$23 years), ranging between 03/01/2020 and 03/12/2020, on people who regularly patronize retail stores (modern ready-to-wear, traditional ready-to-wear, cosmetics, etc.) at the place that suits them. Interviews lasted an average of forty-five minutes. We selected people who had visited a retail store at least a week before our interviews and who remembered the music played during their last visit.

We chose retail stores, first, because these are likely to be more important. Customers go to a retail store to have fun, rather than to a supermarket, where customers are obliged to make purchases.

Secondly, the music played is more varied in a place where customers are known to visit with a view to strolling around and have fun. Finally, it is easier to control external variance in a retail store than a supermarket (merchandising changes, advertising campaigns…). The individual interview makes it possible to better understand the phenomenon studied as experienced, to perceive the implicit, the hidden and to decipher behavioral roots (Haddar, 2010). The choice of our sample size was made according to the saturation principle. We stopped the interviews when there was no more new knowledge to add to our study. Interviewees were selected in a non-random manner, using a snowball sampling method. This technique provided in-depth information about respondents' shopping habits as well as the attitudes that govern their behaviors. The interviewees' role was to talk to us about their experiences and describe what they thought about background music in retail stores. The guide recalls three themes: (1) Retail store atmosphere, (2) Background music, (3) Customers' responses. We chose the NVIVO International QSR 10 software, to perform a thematic content analysis. This analysis consists of a breakdown by theme and frequency of appearance of meaning units (Evrard et al., 2009). This analysis involves breaking down units of meaning by theme and frequency of occurrence (Evrard et al., 2009). Reminders were needed to deepen a number of points.

4 Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interviews enabled us to identify a number of analysis units (see encoding grid in the appendix) which will be presented as follows:

4.1 Attitudes Towards Retail Store Atmosphere

Respondents were very positively impressed and satisfied with the atmosphere of the stores they visited. It represented favorable conditions for a visit. Two respondents reported the way stores' atmospheres have evolved.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"Recently everything has changed; in stores, the atmosphere has become more pleasant and stimulating than before; it helps shopping satisfactorily without stressing out. The colors make me optimistic and happy, the design fits with the store, the music is uplifting, a mix that helps reassure the person that he/she is in the right place"*. (5)
- *"…Yesterday's shopping is not today's shopping…"*. (12)

Respondents acknowledged stores provide a friendly, pleasant and motivating atmosphere. This means that retail stores are now focusing on the renovation and design of their spaces to re-enchant their customers and become part of the new generation of stores that are transforming themselves into living spaces.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"In my opinion, atmospherics is the most important element of stores (lighting, music, design, and animation). Recently I visited MARWA, it is a very clean store with a pleasant atmosphere. I can confirm that it is a brand that ensures harmony between the different atmospherics…* (1)

- *"Most of the stores have a positive atmosphere, my latest visit was to Defacto, there were new items, a lively atmosphere. I was comfortable during my visit."* (6)
- *"We find almost the same items in many stores but I choose the store where I am comfortable or the store that offers a better atmosphere, good advisors, that are well air-conditioned, well animated…"* (8)
- *"My last visit was to Blanco …. the store atmosphere was friendly, the lighting is soft and the clean smell makes you want to stay and shop, unlike a lot of other stores …"* (12)

Here we find respondents who feel pleasure when they immerse in a pleasant atmosphere. They see "shopping" as browsing stores without necessarily buying anything. Aside from traditional stores, the newly renovated stores offer one of the few free hobby activities that are a source of entertainment.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"It's become one of the hobbies we love to do, thanks to the changing context of shopping in general … It makes me happy and gives me a source of energy…"* (6)
- *"Shopping is a daily hobby for many of us! So, in the absence of a good atmosphere, lighting, music, caring advisors who are motivated by their job, the shopping experience becomes painful, which may reduce the desire to visit these places."* (9)

In addition, half of our respondents identified the different elements of the stores' atmosphere they paid attention to: lighting, air conditioning, smell, music… Distinguishing these factors, once taken into consideration, modifies the informational environment as customers see it and their emotional state.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"The colors make me optimistic and happy; the design is well-suited to retail stores, the music is stimulating, a mixture that helps to reassure the person that she/he is in the right place."* (1)
- *"I remember my latest visit a little: it was at Stradivarius, where I bought a nice black leather jacket. The atmosphere was very exciting, the music was at an intense volume that I liked, the colors of the items were attractive; furthermore, store lighting enhanced the items on offer"*. (19)

These statements highlight the stimulation and excitement provided by the store's multi-sensory design. In a store, each atmospheric cue has its own weight and importance: stores adopt each cue according to their own identities and according to their customers' segments. However, in this study, we see the emergence of patterns (a term to be understood here as a principle of representation and organization) of transformation and stimulation that are inherent to the renewal of market interaction.

4.2 Attitudes Towards Background Music

Respondents' attitudes toward playing background music are positive. Respondents say they are satisfied with this practice and that it is not negligible compared to other factors. Music is a source of joy, energy and motivation. Respondents enjoy the presence of background music, the variety of the music they hear, the congruence of the music with the store's theme and discovering unknown musical pieces. Music contributes to their enjoyment of stores.

4.2.1 Attitude Towards the Presence of Background Music

Most respondents confirmed in their speeches that the presence of background music in the Moroccan context is becoming a necessity for retail stores. A practice that creates a pleasant atmosphere inside the store, a degree of comfort and good mood. Music is no longer just a decorative accessory; it also has attraction and emotion functions. The verbatim reported above gives an example of it: a musical background at high volume, described as "intense", supports the purchase of a black leather jacket, a material that, classically, has values of energy, strength, dynamism and sometimes-rebellious spirit attached to it.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"It's a must in large retail stores… the different sounds that resonate make for a more dynamic atmosphere."* (5)
- *"It's a very good idea; it makes the atmosphere lively and the visit fun".* (6)
- *"Very good trick for stores. It gives me energy while shopping".* (1)
- *"I really like music; it's very stimulating and motivating".* (14)
- *"I find it nice and beautiful and motivating, it's something that gives more value".* (19)
- *"Nice, it gives a degree of comfort and good mood…"* (9)

These functions are related to an aversion of respondents to two sound states of the visited place: silence and natural noises. Silence is synonymous with absence and anxiety. Respondents prefer to hear music instead of crowd noises.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"No, personally I prefer to hear music throughout my visit."* (2)
- *"No, I prefer to hear good music, silence is always oppressive in a store, and then we wouldn't like to hear what everyone else is saying, sometimes music allows us to stay more focused on the products we are looking for rather than anything else".* (24)
- *"I don't like silence; it makes me feel stressed and anxious".* (15)
- *"Otherwise, I prefer music instead of silence".* (13)

The absence of music seems to be perceived as a void, which connotes feelings of want, deprivation of being, a feeling of anemia of presence, and therefore a deficiency.

However, at the same time, the absence of music gives way to the feeling of a sound overflow produced by noise, “what everyone says”. Background music plays a reassuring role as a moderator between the perception of lacking and excess.

Reactions to the absence of background music are not entirely monovalent. We note that a quarter of respondents report the presence of silence as a breathing moment provided that it remains occasional. Human beings by nature need periods of silence to “relax ears” before hearing again. We note that 25% of respondents report the presence of silence as breather time, as long as it remains occasional.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *“…It allows the consumer to breathe a little before picking up again…Once the music is picked up again, it revives the customer’s activity, a reminder that the store has not forgotten you and is interested in setting a nice atmosphere for you.”* (5)
- *“…We need periods of silence to relax our ears especially since we hear sound everywhere, people talking, noises, honking…”*. (1)
- *“…silence when it is occasional is pleasant and give a restful break”*. (20)
- *“…Yes, listening to music is harmful for ears as well as for the head”*. (10)

For some respondents, the reaction to the absence of music is more complex than for the rest of the subjects: silence values the emergence of the music. This process is a contrastive type. It is a response to a sound saturation effect produced by the superposition of multiple sources: exterior and interior noises at retail stores, including when background music mixes with activity noises. This perceptual effect can generate an avoidance response in some customers, as verbatim 10 shows.

4.2.2 Attitude Towards Background Music Preference

The presence of music, as well as silence, is relative to matters of taste or preference. It is conditioned by pleasant or unpleasant music. One respondent indicated that hearing his preferred music is not always possible.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *“It would not be reasonable to say that we only admit to listen our preferred music. As I just explained, you have to rely on a large number of songs to increase the chances of being listened to, but even more, of seeing your products in demand …* “ (5)

Indeed, the majority of respondents indicate they can listen to their preferred music just as well as to music they are not particularly keen on. Certainly, their preferred music motivates and makes them happier.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *“Obviously hearing my preferred songs will make me happier than others will…”* (24)
- *“My preferred ones will encourage me …”* (6)

Non-preferred music can also become a preferred, a moment of discovery, a cherished object. The majority of respondents can listen a little while, as they are walking the different aisles of the store or exploring its nooks and crannies. Going to a retail store can become a moment of enrichment and the discovery of new musical pieces.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"I also prefer to discover other music that will later become my favorites…"*. (4)
- *"… this causes a vibration and a regular change of beat, creates a fluidity to the purchase and gives a charm to the whole atmosphere …"* (5)
- *"Once, at a train station store, I had the opportunity to discover the Andalusian style and it was very soothing. On the contrary, music in stores can also be an experience to discover new styles"*. (10)
- *"I also like to be surprised by the type of music being played"*. (20)

At most, three respondents highlighted the interest of playing mainly trendy or popular music. They highlight we are part of a generation that loves and is looking for the buzz. When music starts, we hear it everywhere and it makes us happy. These answers complete our group of patterns: transformation—stimulation (energy)—information. By transposing information-processing theory (Shannon, 2001) to utterances, whether textual or sound, a stimulus acquires informational value when it breaks with a familiar order, with a stabilized practice.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"…all types of music and focus on trends, because we are a generation that follows the buzz a lot…"*. (11)
- *"Regardless, I still like trendy music, it makes me happy…"* (13)
- *"Generally, I like listening to the music I prefer but actually, in stores they play songs that are well known to all"*. (21)

Respondents' preference is for a stabilized practice because it meets their expectations. The opposition between desire for surprise (discovery of the unknown) and desire for conformity "trendiness" structures the reception of background music.

4.2.3 Attitude to Stimulating/Soothing Background Music

Whatever the music played, each has a specific nature. Respondents' speeches help distinguishing between stimulating and soothing music. They report hearing both in the stores they patronize. Three respondents think stimulating music is the most appropriate, because it is a source of energy and motivation and can lead to many favorable behaviors towards the store, its services and products.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"… I have too much fun when I hear it and I wander around every corner of the store without getting bored."* (14)
- *"…because it makes me happy and it makes me dance too…"*. (11)

- *"…simply to have energy, stimulating music as its name suggests stimulates people…"* (16)

As for the music considered soothing, the answers made by ten people suggest a more complex reception. It helps to relax and concentrate. Music considered "soft and quiet" activates a pair of opposites: tension (focused on the object of desire) vs tranquility (which percolates into the state of mind). Background music generates an immersive effect whereby the subject feels music as permanently positioned on the atmospheric background (Augoyard & Torgue, 1995), a permanence that seems expected among respondents, as well as desired and soothing.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *Soothing because human beings' ears in this century are beseiged by sounds (radio magneto video…* etc.*)."* (22)
- *"Preferably soothing music, so that it does not distract me during my visit. I prefer to stay focused when looking at products".* (6)
- *"I get fun in soothing, soft and peaceful music. It relaxes me, eliminates any cause of stress. It has a wonderful effect on my mind".* (1)
- *"… soothing music is better for the ear; it gives my heart more joy."* (23)

Between stimulating and soothing music, the rest of the respondents are open to any music being played, as long as it is in harmony with the store's activity. Stimulating music may be appropriate for clothing stores and even more for sportswear stores.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found;

- *"If I want to buy clothes, I like to hear exciting music, the one that brings me happiness and fun."* (15)
- *"When it comes to buy sneakers and sportswear, I preferred to listen to stimulating music because it will motivate me more to think about sports and all that's related to this type of activity."* (4)

In contrast, soothing music is played in lingerie or cosmetics stores. These products touch areas of intimacy and soft contact with the female body, in other words, the secret and the sensual.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found;

- *"…if I wish to go and check out the lingerie, it can suit a makeup store or lingerie for example".* (13)
- *"… for cosmetic products, I like to hear soothing music in the store to relax and be in a Spa and traditional baths atmosphere".* (15)

4.2.4 Attitude Towards the Congruence of Background Music with Retail Store

Respondents point out that the background music being played must meet specific conditions. Each music must be played in the right place and at the right tempo. Background music must not only conform to store's activity but also to the store location, which is related to its style and culture, as well as the time of day. Respondents' statements show there must be congruence between the music being played and the store's activity.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found;

- *"It is relative to the state of mind during the purchase and the type of items sold. Music should be in line with the style of the store and its culture."* (7)
- *"Both: a cocktail of music or one at one time and the other at another time, better to defer the choices."* (11)
- *"In a traditional ready-to-wear store, a beautiful combination, I had the opportunity to discover the Andalusian style and it was very soothing…"*. (10)

This congruence, as highlighted by respondents proves to be a determining factor in the appreciation of stores and resulting behaviors.

4.3 Effect of Background Music on Consumer Responses

We distinguished classes of emotional, cognitive and behavioral responses. Affects are expressed by the recurrence of the terms "soothing", "pleasure", "fun", "emotion", "positive mood"… The expression "wonderful effect" seems to concentrate the effects of background music.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"…yeah, weird. It has a calming effect I didn't even realize…"* (10)
- *"….and others whose reactions are internal, they are happy and enjoy listening."* (6)
- *"…I feel pleasure listening to soothing, soft and tranquil music. It relaxes me, eliminates any cause of stress. It has a wonderful effect on my mind"*. (1)
- *"…It is a concept that arouses emotion…"* (21)
- *"Background music can foster a positive mood…"* (2)

Background music can also support cognitive function. Respondents indicate that pleasure, mood and emotion influence the way the consumer perceives, and then evaluates, stores, as it can alter the perception of the time spent, to use a Bergson expression describing concrete duration, "The self lets itself live".

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"…a mixture can reassure the person that it is in the right place."*(1)
- *"It's music… taking us back to places seen in music videos or giving us the feeling of belonging"*. (21)
- *"…I didn't feel the passing of l time, I had nothing to buy, choose or try."* (8)
- *"…a source of any kind of favorable response…like a good store evaluation"*. (11)

The behavioral response is clear from the verbatims. Respondents noted that people tend to hum, move and dance to the music. This may well increase the time spent in stores, looking for, examining more items and discovering different parts of the store. Oddly, customers may intend to purchase items and soon return to the store.

Extracts from verbatims illustrating what we found:

- *"…I want to stay longer at the store and look for other items … and it will make me want to buy" (6).*
- *"…they look at more items and shop without getting bored".* (12)
- *"I'll sing along with the music, and I can stay in the store just to listen to it…"* (4)
- *"…because it makes me happy…. it makes me dance too."* (19)
- *"…good evaluation of store…Come back again …"* (11)

Here we are witnessing the shift from the use of background music as an ornamental practice to a practice whose function is to modify and create particular behaviors. Note that the above responses are not fully stabilized. They may change depending on the individual and situational elements cited by respondents: store theme, time of day, mood, preferences, and products on offer.

To summarize, we looked at people who visit retail stores, whose socio-demographic characteristics are different, in order to identify divergences in their reactions. Throughout the interviews we conducted, we realized Moroccan customers attach particular importance to stores' atmospheres. They were able to identify various atmospheric cues. This finding corroborates with the study of Hynes and Manson (2016) indicating that customers who were aware of the music being played were able to deconstruct and isolate the sounds they heard. Respondents favor investment in layout and renovation, in order to align with new generation stores and provide a better customer experience. By developing a specific atmosphere through environmental cues, store managers provide individuals hedonic gratifications that allow them to escape the monotony of the traditional offer. Such practice provides emotions associated with the perception of the store's atmosphere and gives value to the act of shopping (Biswas, 2019; Lemoine, 2003).

Because it is an important cue atmosphere, background music was positively appreciated by 92% of respondents aged over 23 years. They expressed feeling pleasure when hearing background music. They were happy, satisfied and optimistic. Thus, music stirs emotional states in individuals. This result confirms the study by Yi and Kang (2019), conducted in the public space of shopping mall and showing significant effects on the intensity of pleasure (high/moderate) with the related promise of having good memories in store (Baker & Cameron, 1996). At the same line, these emotional states can have an informative function. Pleasant music leads customers to consider the store as more pleasant. This gives the store a good evaluation and brand image.

Furthermore, 8% of respondents aged over 50 years indicated that the presence of background music is not mandatory. Their statements were mainly related on the one hand to the ubiquity of sound. Human beings' ears are harassed by an infinity of daily sounds (music, noise …). Goudarzi (2017) appreciates moments of silence, which confirms his research. Nevertheless, our respondents can accept background music perceived as soft and calm. On the other hand, it is not so with older people. An elderly individual may indirectly impose a certain respect. The store may decrease the volume of music or shut it down. Age is the variable most related to the nature of responses to musical stimuli. From a biological perspective, it has been suggested that processing abilities decrease with age. Music, as an additional element, could clutter and disrupt message-processing (Gorn & Goldberg, 1991). At another sociological level, optimal sensitivity decreases with age. It reaches its maximum at a younger age, when artistic tastes, and in particular musical preferences, tend to crystalize (Donnat & Cogneau, 1990). Marketing readily endorses this finding: as individuals age, they prove less responsive to music, and the impact of music weakens (Russell & Lanius, 1984; Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990; Yi & Kang, 2019).

Customer responses also vary depending on gender and shopping time (situational variables). We found different individual answers. Women have highlighted the important role of mood in shopping conditions, while men are content with concentrating to get their shopping done (a task as far as they are concerned). This confirms the result of Kellaris and Mantel (1994), They found that Gender moderates the influence of mood on time perception. Specifically, women with less (or more) positive moods underestimated time perception. Furthermore, both genders (women and men) confirm that background music does not have the same effect throughout the day because the music being played is not the same in the mornings and afternoons. Sibéril (1994) confirmed our finding and stated that combinations of music styles and tempos interact with times of day. In peak periods, consumers buy more items with fast tempo variety music (stimulating music) while in off-peak periods they buy more if they hear slow tempo classical music (soothing music).

The evaluation of the retail store depends on the background music played (stimulating or soothing). Yi and Kang (2019) showed that background music could increase individuals' positive evaluation of the environment, facilitate approach behavior, and enhance pleasure and dominance emotions, while foreground music can distinctly increase arousal. Moreover, we found that the pleasure felt depends on the level of congruence between the music played and the store activity. This finding corroborates with Démoulin (2011), who demonstrated that congruence increases arousal level and pleasure consequently. In addition, North, Sheridan et al. (2016) confirmed that Participants are willing to pay more for utility products when other genres than classical music is being played simultaneously. In some comments, our respondents pay particular attention to trendy music, as our generation follows and enjoys the Buzz. It represents a variable of great interest because it attracts an important segment targeted by stores.

These states then weigh on attitudes and behaviors. It creates a desire to stay longer and examine more items. Andersson et al. (2012) have uncovered two clear effects of music on time spent and money spent in stores. Similarly, Toldos et al. (2019) indicate that customers in a non-English speaking country are more likely to shop when the music is in English. This effect is mediated by the time spent in the store. As a result, we found that respondents intend to return to the same stores and recommend them to others. These intentions arise because music acts positively on the intensity of the pleasure enjoyed during the first or the previous visit.

5 Conclusion

The reported research extends the findings of previous studies, with a view to learning more about the effect of background music on consumer responses in a new Moroccan context. We conducted an exploratory qualitative study with a sample of 24 Moroccan customers. They appreciate background music because it makes the atmosphere pleasant and dynamic. Thus, the variety of background music positively influences moods, emotions, time perceptions, store perception and behavioral intentions. This is due to the perceived congruence between the background music being played and the store theme, as well as customer preferences for the music being played, whether stimulating or soothing. Otherwise, listening to non-favorite music can become a moment of discovery, and can turn that music into a favorite. In addition, customers highlighted some trendy music or songs (from new songs recently released), because we live in a world that follows trends. It has a great ability to influence customers' responses.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This research is the first to explore background music in the Moroccan context**.** Our finding confirms the important role played by the various emotional states background music generates in customers. Our study also highlights a new variable of trendy music or songs, which are at the center of Moroccan consumers' interests. To our knowledge, no other international research has studied this independent variable. A conceptual model will be proposed by inserting this variable—which distinguishes our context—to identify Moroccan consumers' behaviors.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Our results suggest that background music has the potential to create unique consumer experiences, which will bring a unique value proposition to a brand and its products. The purpose of the reported research was to provide retailers with insights into how music played in stores affects Moroccan consumers. As retailers continue to look to foreign countries for growth, they often consider implementing strategies applied to their inevitably international expansion. Should we develop a global brand image or customize our stores to the local culture? Selecting the right music is not expensive for retailers. It could produce brand-friendly behaviors. We propose to inform designers and managers about which procedures to follow so that manipulating background music is no longer based exclusively on intuition and chance but on empirical data.

They must customize the acoustic environment according to the use of the specific space and people they wish to reach, taking into account each country's culture. Trendy songs are more appropriate in Moroccan stores that carry local music, all the more so as they are expanding internationally. The latest popular music and the most appropriate songs for young people will have significant effects on their emotions, their perception (by activating their imagination) and their behaviors. As for young people, they are more sensitive to environmental sound changes. The areas targeting this category require more attention to the designed sound environment.

5.3 Limitations and Future Studies

As with any research, a number of obvious limitations in this one must be recognized. The first shortcoming is that we did not explore the effects of musical properties (volume, tempo…). However, future research should study each characteristic separately in the Moroccan context, so as to know the Moroccan consumer's level of perception of these properties. Second, the sample used in this research is rather small (24 respondents). We recommend expanding the sample and categorizing consumers by age and gender to understand the specifics of each category and to ensure a high potential for generalization. Third, our study focused on the different types of retail stores (modern ready to wear, traditional ready to wear, cosmetics…). It is possible to have divergent results. Therefore, future research should study each type of retail store separately to avoid consumer confusion. Fourth, methodologically, our interviews were based on verbal comments. We recommend that future researchers use projective methods to disclose unconscious motivations. Finally, our proposed theoretical model must be tested quantitatively through an exploratory qualitative study in order to measure the effect on consumer behavior of the various variables we have identified.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- What are your shopping habits? (Brands or stores visited, frequency of purchase, types of products purchased, support, state of mind, the average time spent during your visit)
- First of all, I would like to know what you spontaneously want to say about the atmosphere of the stores? Can you tell us about your last visit?
- What do you think of the presence of music in stores?

- In your opinion, the music played must really match the type and activity of stores? Why?
- Would you like to listen to soothing or stimulating music? Why?
- Do you want to listen only to your preferred music or other? Why?
- What would you do if the music playing in the store disturbs you? (You leave the store, you complain, you shorten your visit…), why?
- Would you like there to be periods of silence from time to time? Why?
- What are the reactions that others may have in the presence of background music?
- What is your year of birth?

Appendix 2: Nvivo Analysis Results

See Figs. 2 and 3

Fig. 2 Tag words music

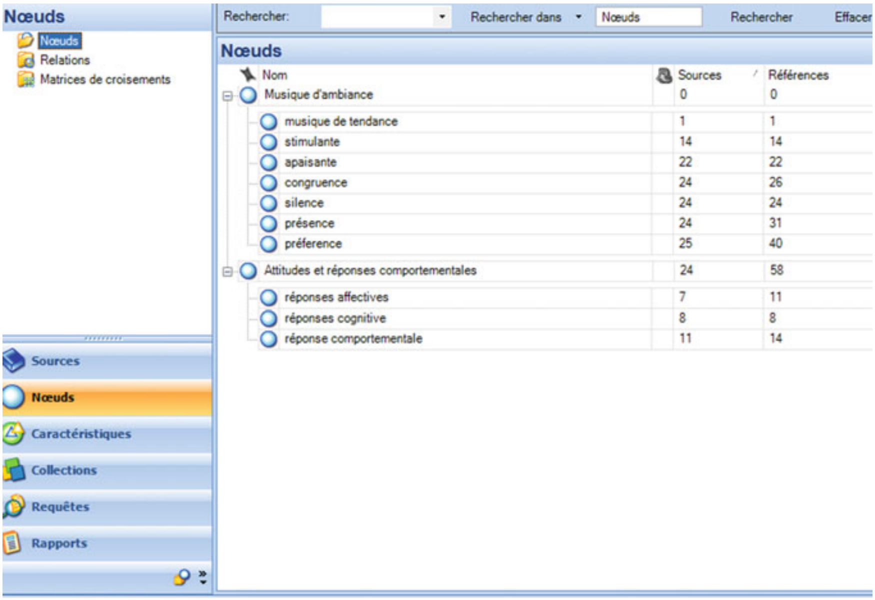

Fig. 3 The analysis grid (with nodes)

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Chapter 3
Revitalising Town Centre Commerce: An Exploratory Study of Drivers Relating to Resistance

Aurore Ingarao and Joseph Kaswengi

Abstract Several towns around the world are experiencing continuous desertification of their town centres. Even though avenues of resistance to this negative trend have been raised, there are very few empirical studies that call this phenomenon into question. Furthermore, no previous research has examined the intersection of retailer associations' and customers' perceptions of town centre commercial decline. The current study identifies and investigates the factors that contribute to resistance to the decline in centre-city patronage. According to the findings, critical drivers include the shop's certification or labelling, access capabilities (e.g., parking), digital solutions, public governance or authorities' co-participation. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords City centre · Labelling · Customers · Dynamisation · Resistance · Satisfaction · Traders' association

1 Introduction

In France, 80% of the inhabitants live in cities or on the outskirts. Added to this is the fact that 22% of the French territory is occupied by cities. This is not without many problems to solve (ADEME, 2019). Indeed, today's cities are increasingly facing problems related, for example, to demography, security, pollution, economic competitiveness, supply, trade, etc. Currently, several cities in the world are increasingly experiencing the decline of trade in their city centers. In France, in November 2017, a national program focused on city center trade emerged, then the city center was declared Great National Cause 2018 by the deputy Patrick Vignal following 2 objectives: repairing city centers and inventing the city of the future. This situation

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is particularly worrying in some cities in France, which are seeing several businesses leave town centres in favour of other entities, in particular peri-urban commercial areas (e.g. retail parks). Although it is recommended that the dichotomy of town centre versus periphery be overcome (Heitz-Spahn et al., 2019a), towns such as Châteauroux, Saint-Brieuc, Clermont-Ferrand, etc., are at the heart of this turmoil (La Gazette, 2019; La Tribune, 2019; L'echommerces, 2018; Le Monde, 2016).

Although this situation of crisis in town centre commerce is widely reported in the local and national press and recently discussed in a collective work (Yildiz et al., 2019), the viewpoints of two key players in the revitalisation of town centres are neglected. More specifically, no empirical research to date has proposed investigations that cross-reference the perceptions of retailers through the voice of their association leaders and those of customers from a comprehensive perspective in the context of a medium-sized town. However, the collective work by Hélène Yildiz et al. (2019) emphasizes the need to mobilize research in management sciences, particularly in marketing, to address the dynamics of the city centre. Deepening the exploration, understanding and crossing the visions of these two types of actors is crucial because they play a major role in maintaining supply and demand in city centres.

Not taking into account the vision of customers makes the research on the town centre incomplete. Therefore, this research focuses on the vision of retailers via their association, put into perspective by the shopper's view. More specifically, we seek to answer the following questions: How can we "energize" downtown commerce? From an inclusive perspective, what is the role of retailers, in particular their association? What are the attitudes of customers towards the actions carried out by retailers through their association? Do the two parties have the same vision?

Understanding the needs of key players such as local councillors, chambers of commerce and industry, retailers' associations and customers is crucial in designing strategies and implementing actions to revitalise town centres in the face of the commercial crisis.

Overall, we have endeavoured, in a qualitative approach, to understand how customers view the role and actions of these associations in the vitality of the town centre. Thus, 35 customers in the city studied were interviewed. In order to enrich our research, we compared the vision of the customers with that of the President of the retailer's association in the town concerned, and thus identified the constraints encountered and the objectives pursued. From a theoretical point of view, this research makes a contribution by focusing on the vision of customers, highlighting two levels of understanding of town centre dynamisation: the collective and individual levels. Furthermore, it reveals the role of the label of the traders' association in the revitalisation process. On a practical level, this research highlights the importance of pooling the resources of players such as customers, as their involvement is fundamental in fixing the trade in the town centre.

We will first present a review of the literature on the revitalisation of town centres, then present our main results. Finally, in the third part, we make our recommendations and present the main limitations of the research.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 A Review of Previous Studies

Several previous studies have looked at how the city centre should be revitalised/revitalised. The recent literature classifies the orientations of this research into four groups. These are (a) the downtown environment, (b) downtown distribution, (c) tools for downtown dynamism, and (d) implementation of downtown dynamism (Yildiz et al., 2019). Given the proximity between the last two points, we propose to retain three orientations:

Research focused on the city centre environment has included the actors of the micro-environment. For example, while Mathias Boquet (2019) focuses on (public) visitors, their characteristics, their practices, their feeling of the city centre as well as their journey through the city, Samuel Deprez (2019) draws attention to the digital as a vector of resilience for city centres.

The second stream of research, devoted to distribution, has mainly examined store formats. For example, Karine Picot-Coupey's study (2019) on "ephemeral stores" considers the latter as a factor that participates not only in the commercial offer of the city centre, but also in the development of a territory.

The last perspective of the research questions the means and the actors that should facilitate the dynamisation of the city centre trade. For Sandrine Heitz-Spahn et al. (2019b), the actions can consist of setting up inter-retailer loyalty programmes and adapted opening hours as well as organising festive events. As far as the actors are concerned, these authors insist on the involvement of actors such as retailers, centre managers, local authorities and associations. In the same perspective, Béatrice Siadou-Martin et al. (2019) have crossed the views of a representative of a retailer association and a manager of trade in a French town in order to show how much these actors count in the dynamisation of town centre trade.

These three research perspectives have the merit of having shed light not only on the tools, but above all on the actors on whom we rely to make town centre shops more dynamic. However, in spite of these efforts, the previous research has its limitations. Firstly, there are fewer studies that put several actors into perspective. Secondly, the few studies that have looked at several players do not go into much depth in their analyses. This is the case of the study by Béatrice Siadou-Martin et al. (2019), which was limited to the rough restitution of the interviews collected.

2.2 Revitalising Town Centre Trade: A Cross-Section of Retailers and Customers

The decline of the inner-city business is a major challenge facing many stakeholders. According to stakeholder theory, stakeholders are defined as "any group or individual that may affect or be affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives" (Freeman, 1984). According to R. Edward Freeman (2010), strategic management is essentially an integrative exercise. In an organization, it includes financial, marketing, accounting, human resources, etc. Strategic management of the company/organization must also be integrative because it must create value for all stakeholders, especially financiers, employees, customers, suppliers, communities, etc.

The role and diversity of stakeholders are linked to the context raised by the interest in which each of them takes part (Cazal, 2011; Coissard et al., 2016; Freeman, 1984; Kotnarovsky & Lejeune, 2018; Pluchart, 2013). We consider that the consideration of value, risk and a very broad conception of stakeholders is adequate to explain the behaviours and attitudes of stakeholders and towards local commerce in city centres. In this case, consumers and traders can contribute to creating value. Academic work on local commerce in town centres that crosses the views of such stakeholders is rare. It seems almost intuitive to think first of city governments to solve the problem of the loss of value that city centre commerce brings. However, we prefer to turn to the two above-mentioned stakeholders, as no study has looked at crossing their points of view.

Our study joins a research orientation that crosses the views of actors on the revitalization of downtown trade. In particular, we rely on the study by Béatrice Siadou-Martin et al. (2019), which crossed the views of the president of the association Les Vitrines de France and the head of city trade in the city of Roubaix in France. However, while this study has the merit of exploring and collecting the testimonies of the actors representing the shops of two different cities, it remains nevertheless limited to only one category of stakeholders, that of the trade managers. Our research, on the other hand, presents the following advances. Firstly, it seeks to deepen our knowledge of the current and future actions of retailers through their association. Secondly, it describes the evaluation that customers make of the actions carried out by the traders. Finally, the types of actors (i.e. the traders' association and the customers) belong to two different categories of stakeholders, i.e. the collective and individual levels.

3 Methodology and Results

The city of our research has obtained the status of Metropolis, and has more than 200,000 inhabitants in 22 municipalities (January 1, 2019). Its name is kept anonymous in order to preserve the anonymity of the authors. From an exploratory qualitative perspective, we interviewed two types of actors: the president of a retailers' association and then customers in the town under consideration. Conducting an interview in January 2019 with the President of the Merchants Association allowed us to identify the role of the association but also its expectations and objectives. In order to enrich our research, 35 interviews with customers from the town or surrounding communes were conducted, based on a snowball effect. We asked customers if they agreed to be interviewed as part of this qualitative research, and then asked them to recommend customers they knew, as this exploratory study did not target a representative sample. The interviews stopped when we reached semantic saturation. The interviews were conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, with an average duration of 15 min 06 per interview.

A common interview grid around major themes was created: trade within the town, knowledge and perception of the traders' association. The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and then transcribed in full.

All the data collected was subjected to thematic analysis. Conceptual grouping matrices were carried out by both authors in a double-blind fashion before being compared and mutually enriched. We conducted a thematic analysis, which is the most common practice for analysing interviews and qualitative observations (Krippendorff, 2003). We carried out an open coding, as our analysis grid had not been defined beforehand. The coding was therefore conducted inductively. We conducted a semantic analysis using key ideas as units of analysis.

3.1 The Role of the Merchants' Association

With more than 6,000 retailer associations in France, representing 465,000 retail businesses,[1] retailer associations are playing an increasingly important role in city management. From a qualitative exploratory perspective, we were interested in the perception of customers in this metropolis of over 200,000 inhabitants in France. In a second step, we cross-referenced this perception with the vision of the retailer association's representative on the strategy and actions they have carried out so far.

3.2 The Perception and Expectations of Customers

In order to obtain the perception and expectations of customers, we interviewed 35 customers, whose characteristics are outlined in Table 1.

On reading the corpus, the first result that emerges is that customers see themselves as experts on trade and very easily put themselves in the place of retailers. This finding confirms that customers must be involved as full stakeholders in town centre retailing.

3.2.1 Criteria for Describing the Dynamism of the Town Centre

The ***dynamism of the city centre***, which should reflect the status of the metropolis, is a real concern for customers who associate it with the ***presence of certain brands***: "*I think that the supply of shops is also made in relation to the status of the city, there we went to Metropolis and since then there are brands like um…Nespresso which*

[1] http://www.ffacommercants.org.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	Interviewee	Duration	Number of words	Age	PCS
1	Dylan	16′46”	5068	22	Student
2	Chloe	17′45	2234	22	Work-study student
3	Bastien	33′33”	5340	23	Work-study student
4	Camille	11′34”	952	22	School teacher
5	Franck	18′13”	2385	44	Metropolitan Agent
6	Hagera	13′16”	2128	25	Web and print designer
7	Sylvie	14′54”	1685	41	Hairdresser manager
8	Hamid	05′12”	507	27	Commercial
9	Eline	14′16”	1538	22	Student
10	Martine	15′06”	1577	63	Retired
11	Françoise	10′59”	1615	57	ATSEM
12	Charlotte	12′49”	2001	26	Project manager in the event industry
13	Isabelle	17′34”	2716	56	Insurance Consultant
14	Arthur	13′12”	1498	26	Real estate agent
15	Oceane	12′56	1278	24	Student
16	Nicolas	13′10	1396	23	Real estate agent
17	Caroline	15′16	1446	23	Student
18	Myriam	12′45	1286	52	Computer framework
19	Jeanne	8′30	1221	23	Job search
20	Laetitia	9′23	1460	22	Student
21	Philippe	13′53	2329	43	Contractor
22	Roxanne	12′22	2050	22	Student
23	Gratiane	33’	2977	24	Student
24	Benjamin	30’	3291	22	Student
25	Anne	24′29”	3777	41	Training Manager
26	Marie	27′33”	4718	25	Service Designer
27	Sarah	21′59”	3942	27	Service Designer
28	Ferriane	17′38”	2621	23	Student
29	Catherine	25′04	1636	57	Manager of a company
30	Meddi	23′01	1566	24	Commercial in the dietetics industry
31	Margaux	18′13	1001	23	Job search
32	Manon	19′23	1150	23	Student
33	Laurent	22′05	1500	39	Bank branch
34	Hélèna	17′32	1139	21	Student
35	Eléonore	29′16	2039	24	Civic service

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	Interviewee	Duration	Number of words	Age	PCS
28	Ferriane	17′38”	2621	23	Student
29	Catherine	25′04	1636	57	Manager of a company
30	Meddi	23′01	1566	24	Commercial in the dietetics industry
31	Margaux	18′13	1001	23	Job search
32	Manon	19′23	1150	23	Student
33	Laurent	22′05	1500	39	Bank branch
34	Hélèna	17′32	1139	21	Student
35	Eléonore	29′16	2039	24	Civic service

has established itself…like Starbucks too, this can also bring added value to the city and make the city centre more dynamic, since for a while there was a little problem of dynamism in the city centre” (Dylan). Overall, opinions were fairly divided between customers who identified a positive dynamism and those who felt that the city studied lacked dynamism.

When talking about the dynamism of the town centre, customers mention obstacles to this trade, such as ***parking*** and ***accessibility*** to the town centre. Perceived as costly for customers travelling by car, parking can be a real brake and leads customers to head for shopping centres on the outskirts of towns (“*People are more tempted to go to Y (a shopping centre on the outskirts of town) because it’s free, there are large car parks, whereas in the town centre it’s a real pain to park, unless you pay, so you’re covered, but then you often pay for the day. Or else you take a car park plus tram relay. In terms of accessibility for free parking, I think there’s a point to be reviewed, you know*” (Dylan). These problems lead customers to frequent the outlying shopping areas which do not have the same limitations. “*I don’t want to go into town, you have to have time. It’s more difficult to park, you have to go to a car park. On the other hand, when I want to have more choices and I have more time, I go downtown to X* (shopping centre), which *is rather far, but an area like that is nice. It’s convenient for parking, no parking fees so that’s also an advantage and then you have all the shops in X at your disposal. I think I prefer shopping centres, you can easily find the same shops as in the city centres. It’s more convenient. If I need a particular store, I’ll go where the store is*” (Oceane).

Similarly, customers are bypassing the obstacles associated with city centre shopping thanks to e-commerce.

The ***range of*** opening ***hours for*** shops is another obstacle to consumption in town centres. Some customers took the example of Paris or other countries where shops are open much later, thus allowing for real dynamism. The same idea was raised concerning ***the opening of shops on Sundays***, which appeared to be an opportunity to bring the town to life, to make it more dynamic, although some customers had an unfavourable opinion. This opening seems ideal when it is exceptional.

3.2.2 The Expected Roles of the Trader's Association

When we discuss ***knowledge of the Traders' Association***, customers have a vague idea of what it is, have already heard of it, but cannot describe it or always explain its role. This can be explained by the lack of communication decried by the interviewees. However, some of them associate the ***role of the Merchants' Association with*** relational and experiential functions:

- Strengthen the links between traders,
- structure the downtown area,
- humanly strengthen the downtown area,
- strengthen ties with consumers.

Customers' expectations are diverse. The interviewees multiply the ideas for making their town centre more dynamic *("Ideas … well, maybe opening on Sundays. Events in the town centre, free parking, super attractive loyalty cards, vouchers when you go to the checkout*" [Océane]; "*For me, they could join forces to offer discounts on parking, discounts in store, facilitate the withdrawal of gift vouchers and consider dematerialising gift cards so that people can use them for example €10 here and €10 there etc..... These are things that in my opinion are already done but not promoted enough. There is also a loyalty system common to all member stores, which I think should be developed*" [Caroline]).

Various ***technological and service expectations*** regarding the Association's role in downtown actions were identified.

First of all, customers raise ***technological expectations***. They want a link between the shops and the Internet. For example, customers would like to find a town centre loyalty card linked to a Smartphone application. They also associate service with the Internet ("*I think that today, unfortunately, the only thing that differs between the Internet and these shops is the service, so the service, apart from being friendly, smiling, etc., is limited*" (Franck). Another idea is an application that centralizes offers and information for consumers, which can also pool purchases and build loyalty. We see here that the digital aspect is essential to physical commerce, and this, through the different digital contact points.

Secondly, the customers talk about ***revitalising the city centre and working on the city's image***: "*For me, the objective would be to revitalise the city centre as I have already told you, and um, the image that it sends back um … well … given what I saw on the site … it's to … uh … give the town a sense of togetherness by bringing the different businesses together. Giving credibility to the businesses as well… The offer must be sustainable over time*" (Dylan).

The organisation of events. For customers, it's a question of bringing the city centre and the shops to life by inviting consumers to discover occasional events: "*Advantages like I said, private parties, things like that. Events, groupings with other brands, things like that. Invitations to discover other brands, for example, there are evenings where a brand invites another brand to present its products, to make the other brands that are members of the showcases a little better known…*" (Charlotte).

The opening of shops is of course part of the expectations of customers who do not understand that some shops are closed during the lunch break, or lower their curtains before the announced end of the day. "*I think that staying open between noon and 2 pm would be interesting for them as well as for us! Some do, but not all, and that's the basis of it all…*" (Caroline). Some customers also advocate extending the opening hours even further by opening on Sundays, even if this remains exceptional.

The promotional actions that could be put in place between member retailers would stimulate consumers: "*Discounts if we go to such and such a store on the same day, advantages for transport, and even parking*" (Manon).

Customers are waiting for ***communication from*** the retailers' association, through traditional media but also social networks: "*If they had an Instagram account where they could share the latest news from the shops, I'd go there without a problem, it would make my mouth water if I dare say. On this communication side I think there is some effort to be made*" (Caroline).

Concerning parking and accessibility, the customers consider that it is up to the town centre association to fight to enable customers to get to the town centre and to park easily: "*For me, a traders' association must fight to get customers to come to them. I think that the weak point of the town centre for shopping is accessibility, it's up to them to ensure that all populations can get there and consume*" (Nicolas).

Customers are really looking for different ***brands and shops***: concept stores, independent shops, 100% digital shops… Customers are full of ideas!

Finally, customers are waiting for a ***responsible commerce*** that concerns both consumers and brands. Tomorrow's commerce is as much about a sales service with delivery and respectful hours as it is about offering responsible products: "*A delivery service, adjusting the hours is something to be done. When you arrive at one o'clock in the afternoon and they kick you out, it's not pleasant, even on Mondays, and I know that financially it's difficult for them, that it represents additional costs. But I think that given what e-commerce offers, if they want to resist, there is only that and the difference, like offering made in France, or recyclable clothes, that's the consumption of tomorrow*" (Catherine).

3.2.3 The Trader's Association: A Label in Its Own Right

The logo of the retailers' association appears to be unattractive: "*The logo I find cold, almost a bit… you might think it's a logo of a computer company or something like that and I don't find it attractive in fact to uh…*" (Bastien). Beyond this communication aspect, they think that this logo would be an anchor for certain consumers, proud to consume in their city "*Like a Frenchman who likes to consume French. It's an X (inhabitant of the city) who likes to consume X (product of the city), I would say…*" (Bastien). This then leads us to wonder about the value of a mention of origin, or even of a label that such a logo can convey: "*This association is a label! It represents a label, I think*" (Océane). This notion of label appears in the discourse of several interviewees and is one of the strategic axes to be taken into account. The Larousse dictionary defines a label as: "A *special label or mark created by* *a professional association and affixed to a product intended for sale, to certify its origin, guarantee its quality and compliance with manufacturing standards*." The Consumer Code Art. L. 115-27[2] considers that the label "*Constitutes a product or service certification subject to the provisions of this section - the activity by which a body, distinct from the manufacturer, importer, seller, service provider or customer, attests that a product, service or combination of products and services complies with the characteristics described in a certification reference system. The certification reference system is a technical document defining the characteristics that a product, a service or a combination of products and services must have and the methods for checking conformity with these characteristics. The elaboration of the certification frame of reference is the responsibility of the certification body which collects the point of view of the interested parties*". After a review of the literature on the label, Fabienne Chameroy and Jean-Louis Chandon (2011) define the label as "*a symbol distinct from the brand, which can be freely refused or sought by the brand, formalising the evaluation of a trusted third party on one of the dimensions of the product or service*".

With this label concept, we also point out that the FFAC (French Federation of Traders' Associations) is organising a competition for a national label "*Local shops in the city*". This label seeks to reward a "*voluntary and consensual policy for the maintenance and development of economic activities within the community*". Although it is not a brand in its own right, the logo used to identify the Traders' Association ensures certain functions in the eyes of customers by guaranteeing a certain level of quality. Applying this label to the retailers' signs raises the question of co-branding, in the same way as applying a label of origin to an existing brand (Ingarao et al., 2020).

3.2.4 The Customer at the Heart of the Action

Customers expect to be ***questioned and involved in the life of the city***: "*Well, the inhabitants, well, we, well, they should ask us inhabitants* (i.e. the inhabitants of the city) *for our opinions more. (…) Not just that it's the managers or the salesmen who decide to install something*" Ferriane. Here, it is a question of conducting a reflection on "how to live together" (Heitz-Spahn et al., 2019b). This also refers to the human dimension necessary for city centre shops. An intelligent city cannot do without integrating the various actors that make it up, of which the shopper is a part. Moreover, as Sandrine Heitz-Spahn et al. (2019a) point out, "*if commerce structures the ways in which people buy, consume and live, it is also shaped by consumers*". It therefore seems unthinkable, at the heart of this town centre dynamic, to do without the shopper to structure it.

A selection of the verbatims associated with the identified themes are detailed in Table 2.

[2] http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr.

Table 2 Selected *verbatims*

Perception of the dynamism of the downtown area
Negative Dynamism
"*Downtown could be a little more vibrant*" (Dylan) "*Er, in terms of town centres I deplore the fact that town centres are becoming desertified, it's a shame indeed to the detriment of large, mega shopping centres*" (Myriam)
Positive momentum
"*We have a beautiful downtown area, we have to notice that a lot of work has been done and has improved a lot, I mean, the walks in the downtown area are really nice*" (Françoise)
Distinction between city centre and commercial zone
"*There are the downtown businesses in X, on the one hand, and the shopping centres on the other, since we in X are lucky enough to have three shopping centres in addition to the downtown businesses*" (Françoise)
Distinction between city centre and e-commerce
"*If I'm going to shop for clothes it's often online so um I don't have too much reason to go downtown. Online I can see lots … I can go from one site to another much easier than I would go to one store to another for example*" (Bastien)
Presence of certain signs
"*Unfortunately, we find many of the same brands. We're not lucky enough to have a variety of brands, and when a shopping centre opens, we know that we'll already have brands that we have in other shopping centres, and that's a shame*" (Françoise) "*I find that there are a lot of shops in the area. After that it's true that you often find the same shops everywhere, big brands like Jules, Celio, H&M, Mc Do, Brice, Mango, Histoire d'Or*" (Nicolas)
Barriers to city centre trade
Parking of vehicles
"*The paid parking lot is holding me back*" (Camille) "*The problem for me is the parking lots which are relatively expensive*" (Martine) "*The problem is that since the city centre car parks are paid for, um so it limits us in terms of shopping time*" (Charlotte)
Accessibility to downtown
"*The black spot, the difficulty for me is to get to the city centre. I take the tram now, since I've had, if I must tell you, some unfortunate experiences*" (Françoise) "*The difference is the accessibility, outside the city I can park wherever I want and I don't get fined. In the city it's complicated, you have to pay for parking and it's expensive*" (Meddi)
Range of opening hours
"*In fact, they (foreigners and Parisians) are so used to everything being open until 10-11 pm or even later and every day, even on Sundays, that they live continuously. That's why when they come to the provinces, they are completely lost*" (Chloé)
Opening of shops on Sunday
For the opening

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Perception of the dynamism of the downtown area
"*For me, selfishly as a consumer who works all week and Saturday is dedicated to the kids and their activities, to be able to go, to have the opportunity to go for a walk, to go shopping on Sundays in X* (i.e. the city) *would be nice. So, it would be nice, not every Sunday, but more Sundays than it is today*" (Anne)
Against the opening
"*I'm against it because I think everyone has the right to have one day a week to enjoy their family*" (Franck) "*Those who come on Sundays mean that they won't come during the week, so in the end, in terms of the economy and all that, the purchasing power, I think it's pointless*" (Sylvie)
Exceptional opening of shops on Sundays
"*So I'm not sure about that… After the idea of working on Sundays, it would be more on a voluntary basis for people if possible because it's true that it's not necessarily cool… to work on weekends*" (Charlotte) "*I am against this practice. Outside of special periods such as Christmas, I think that Sunday should be associated with something other than commerce*" (Myriam)
Knowledge of the Merchants Association
Knowledge of the logo
"*I've never seen the logo but I know I've been to their website but the logo doesn't mean anything to me but then again I've heard of it…*" (Dylan)
Knowledge of the association
"It's an 'association' that brings together shops but I don't know what it's for (…) It's to defend the small shops in X (the town studied)" (Camille) "*I don't know what it is either, but for me it's a grouping of the different businesses in X in a kind of association*" "*I have heard of X* (the merchants' association) *but I don't know it*" (Françoise)
Role of the Merchants' Association
"*The city council doesn't do much, and the fact that they're coming together to attract consumers is a great initiative. Even though they are competitors, they are helping each other for a common cause, they are coming together to boost the downtown area, it's a great initiative*" (Benjamin) "*I would say it's a grouping of downtown stores that have come together to have more leverage with consumers. To provide them with benefits to come to their stores*" (Laurent)
Communication of the Association
"*Well, there is zero communication on it, nothing, yet it is what represents the businesses*" (Arthur) "*I've heard of it on a few occasions but nothing more*" (Nicolas) "*In the works council, um, generally at the end of the year, we get cheques, um, as a Christmas bonus, things like that. And uh, and so, uh, well uh, that's how I, I heard about it*" (Sarah) "*I've never seen this badge on shop windows*" (Eléonore)
Expectations from the Association
Perception of the Association
The Association as a certification

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Perception of the dynamism of the downtown area
"*I don't understand why the label includes both small shops and large shops, because if X* (the retailers' association) *wanted to support small producers/local shops, I think it would make sense, but as it includes a lot of different things, I don't really see the point. I don't think they're consistent in their choice of shops that they accept in the label. Yeah, if it was only small shops, why not. It's better to buy in local shops, you know where it comes from, how it's made, there's a relationship of trust rather than going to the big shops*" (Eléonore) "*The aim is to support these retailers, by promoting their label, the X card (issued by the association) and even the website*" (Hélèna)
Technology expectations
"*The way I would have done it is simply to associate the loyalty card with an application. That would be nice…then there's also this digitalization that's taking place so uh…so that's important too*" (Dylan) "*Offer services related to the Internet … that they propose why not a website where people can choose, try virtually, buy…*" (Franck) "*I don't know, except for discounts and vouchers, if they have an app that tells you where there's a promotion, well, yeah, I could be interested. An app would be handy. It would push me to go to them*" (Margaux)
Dynamism and image
"*Having quality… Quality products, why not made here in this city*" (Hagera)
"*Seize the concept, no but X* (the retailers' association)*, the concept it could maybe help to introduce the local gastronomy, or I don't know, the little things from the area, it could help the tourists.*" (Marie)
Involvement of customers
"*An association of downtown merchants I would have thought of involving customers….euh…people what…who visit the downtown area….so that they can give their opinions….I think it's important…then….that's what*" (Dylan)
Pooling of purchases and loyalty
"*I would like them to propose offers such as, for example, a purchase in a partner shop with one hour's free parking or a loyalty card common to all or a gift card from the Association's shops*" (Camille) "*On a card or whatever that you get discounts in stores, that by shopping in one store you can get discounts in another. Yeah for example, it could be cool that uh you buy something and they say: Yeah, here, since you bought that you get 20% off on such and such a store*" (Bastien)
"*Just to organize stuff actually, like the exceptional opening on a Sunday, a private sale, etc. And talking about it, about… Doing events on Facebook, etc. it attracts*" (Hagera) "*Yes, there should be 'private sale' evenings, in quotation marks. So sometimes there are cocktails, or not, but here is an evening where there are discounts, small animations according to the themes, things like that*" (Charlotte) "*Yes, they could create attractive events! Have contests and give away things*" (Nicolas)
Expectations of a level of service
Wider opening of shops

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Perception of the dynamism of the downtown area
"*No, but if they opened on Sundays, here we go again, if they opened a few Sundays like that, uh, from time to time, I think it would be good…*" (Anne) "*It's the business that doesn't close between 12-2 pm and offers products that don't come from China, where you are advised and welcomed*" (Catherine)
Promotional actions
"*Well, maybe it's discounts, vouchers like I got, that can encourage you to come and discover*" (Gentian)
"*So effectively everything that is to master the notion of service because that's something I'm very sensitive to*" (Franck) "*For me, an association of downtown merchants, the role they would have is precisely to provide a service to the people of this same city and to offer them services… whether in terms of what they sell and the hours and all that, it could be interesting*" (Eline)
Communication expectations
"*Well, yes, if they made themselves known, if they organized small events, maybe that would encourage us to come, why not, yes*" (Isabelle) "*Get more publicity, or get on the radio or whatever. To be heard more*" (Jeanne)
Parking and accessibility expectations
"*Well, precisely by being all grouped together under X* (i.e. the traders' association) *and if, as I think, they are really struggling because of paid parking, they should perhaps all group together under X* (the traders' association) *and pass on the information to the town hall or the agglo…*" (Charlotte) "*There is only paid parking, so there is the Pay by Phone system now which has simplified things a little bit, but the city centre is not really accessible by car or anything else*" (Isabelle)
Sign expectations
"*It would be to have small shops of small independent brands with things that are a little bit out of the ordinary*" (Isabelle) "*It would have to be an independent, a store that goes with the times, that offers new things, services, after work, something new!*" (Arthur) "*A 100% digitalized business, a concept store even on several floors with several domains but always at the forefront of trends, the X* (city) *citadium and there I would be interested in X* (the retailers association)*, clearly!*" (Caroline)
Expectation of responsible trade: the trade of tomorrow
"*It's, if I knew, well that, uh, these shops, I don't know, they commit, commit to, I don't know, being more responsible about, uh, about their waste*" (Sarah) "*I believe that politicians have to get organised and think about the city of tomorrow. Consumers also need to take responsibility, to see how they want to buy clothes and food, and this is part of sustainable development*" (Catherine)

3.3 The Traders' Association

We chose to cross-reference the perception of customers with the vision of the president of the merchants' association, himself a merchant. The idea was to understand the role of the traders' association and the strategic vision of its representative. To do this, we interviewed him during a 38.39 min semi-directive interview. He described his association as a "*neighbourhood association of retailers, a voluntary network*", operating "*on a voluntary basis, the retailers join if they want. Afterwards, yes, we sometimes go looking for members, but it is above all on a voluntary basis.*"

3.3.1 Assessment and Directions to Take

The first assessment is that the retail profession has evolved and it is essential to "*find new services and new ways of working*". There are many directions to take: digital, customer experience, but also weaving a link with customers: in particular, "*we have to work on social networks, e-shops, e-commerce, but also create a customer experience, i.e. we have to create a community and a link with the customer by inviting them, for example, to openings that we organise in shops, things like that*".

If mobility is an important issue: "*we want to offer a card for one hour's parking to the customers of member traders*", in the long term, the aim is to "*create a platform, a market place, a digital platform where traders could sell online and offer deliveries in an hour. We can envisage a delivery platform that is to say that the customer calls or orders on the merchant's website and can be delivered within an hour by bike.*"

The idea is to create a connected world between businesses and consumers. For example, consumers who "*follow a retailer on a social network (Instagram, Facebook, Tweeter, …) would receive a discount*". Digital must be at the service of the retailer: "*We must use digital at least to bring the consumer into the store. Retailers are not obliged to go through online sales, but today the first shop window must be social networks.*" This digital objective is in line with the will of the Ministry of the Economy and the DGE, which has published a Guide that is part of the FranceNum initiative.[3] This guide, "*En avant vers le numérique!*", aimed at local retailers, seeks to support them in their growth and guide them in their digital transformation. "*You can have a great location in the city centre, if you don't have an online shop window, the shopkeeper is missing out on some of his customers.*" However, the virtual does not replace the human. Customers have a real need for a link and advice: "*The net allows people to come, but the advice is essential.*"

To date, the Association provides visibility services to merchants: "*The service we provide is the gift voucher service, we can do animations, fashion shows. For example, we have been doing an umbrella sky with a fashion show for three years. These are things that animate but I don't think it's the role of the merchants' association to do animation, it's more the city's job.*"

The idea is to create a link: "*This is really what we need to develop in terms of customer service, what we call the customer experience. Shopping centres must have a customer experience, but in the city centre the customer experience must be different. In the city centre, customers are more in search of a stroll, pleasure, the pleasure purchase.*" To do this, the Merchants Association must be there to provide

[3] Launched in the fall of 2018.

service to merchants: "*we must help them in their digital transition, in everything they don't know how to do, or for which they don't have the budget by pooling resources*." The difficulty identified to date does not lie so much in the mobilisation of tools as in getting retailers to sign up ("*We have all the tools today, but the idea is to get retailers to sign up*"). "*We are here to build together, to make ourselves known together, to do things to have a cohesion. The idea would be to work like a cooperative, to set up a cooperative company to get all the players in the city centre shops to work together: the CCI and the town hall and of course the retailers. The idea would be for everyone to have a voice in building together. On the scale of an association, this remains complicated, but we can have more impact by taking on this cooperative aspect*." For example, it is a question of creating a partnership with an online printing company to pool orders for displays at key times for all retailers: for example, Valentine's Day or the sales. Grouped orders allow for cost reductions. "*We have opened a platform with Easy Flyer as part of the mutualisation (…) retailers order on Easy Flyer and adapt their communication on the same basis. And for a price that will be negotiable*."

Another major issue is the city's image for tourism. This includes the opening of shops on Sundays, which is a major issue "*to attract tourists and keep the city alive. It is also a way of attracting newcomers*." This attractiveness of the city can be achieved through thematically thinking about trade by district, or even by street: "*Create streets with themes: a street for housing, a street for designers for example*."

Overall, the Association identifies a problem of professionalism among retailers: "Nowadays, *you can't invent yourself as a shopkeeper; you can't say to yourself, here, I'm going to open a shop: you have to be good at communicating, you have to master this trade, you have to be a professional in everything, displaying opening hours, respecting opening hours, welcoming customers, of course, but also communicating (…) It's not enough to simply manage your stocks well*". This can start with displaying schedules in the windows and respecting them.

3.3.2 The Brakes

Obstacles are appearing among retailers. Among the latter, we can note a certain resistance to change on the part of "*traders who find it difficult to adapt: for example, the opening hours, we should be able to open between noon and two. There we have to fight but the question should not arise. The city centre should function like a large shopping centre*." Culturally, "*some retailers unfortunately do not always see the point of an association. They wonder what we can do for them. Some find it hard to believe that we need to get involved to be stronger together, to give our time to make things change. Our role is not to organize events or to animate, it is more the role of the town hall*."

3.3.3 Customers' Expectations

The President of the Association has of course surveyed his customers to find out what they expect: "*Consumers expect things, new services. Often the big problem is mobility, the big obstacles are that there is not enough parking or that it is expensive, but there is nothing we can do about it, we will have to deal with it. Parking is a problem, but we also have to deal with the people who live downtown, who come by bike. People have a good image of downtown merchants, which is very positive, but we have to work on it. The big thing is to adapt to their expectations and their way of consuming today. Because people, for example, are most likely to shop between midday and midnight. And retailers continue to close between noon and two. And as long as all the retailers don't open between noon and two, we will keep this image of a provincial town.*

At the end of these analyses, it seems appropriate to us to ask about the points of convergence and divergence between these two key players in town centre commerce. We also asked ourselves which actors should be mobilised to deal with these issues, as shown in Table 3.

Figure 1 shows what we can call the golden triangle of town centre stakeholders

Table 3 Comparison between customers' expectations and the Merchants' Association's point of view

Customers' expectations	Point of view of the Merchants Association	Which actors should be mobilized?
Accessibility to downtown	Point of convergence	Public Power
Parking	Point of convergence	Traders' association and public authorities
Opening hours of shops	Point of convergence	Traders and Traders' Association
Technology expectations	Point of convergence	Traders and Traders' Association
Image of the city	Point of convergence	Public Power
Event organization & animation	Point of divergence	Public authority and traders' association
Promotional and communication actions	Point of convergence	Traders' association and retailers
Expectations of shops and signs	Not identified by the Merchants Association	Public authority
Expectation of responsible trade	Not identified by the Merchants Association	Traders and Traders' Association
The association as a label	Not identified by the Merchants Association	Merchants' Association
Involvement of customers	Not identified by the Merchants Association	Public authorities and traders' association

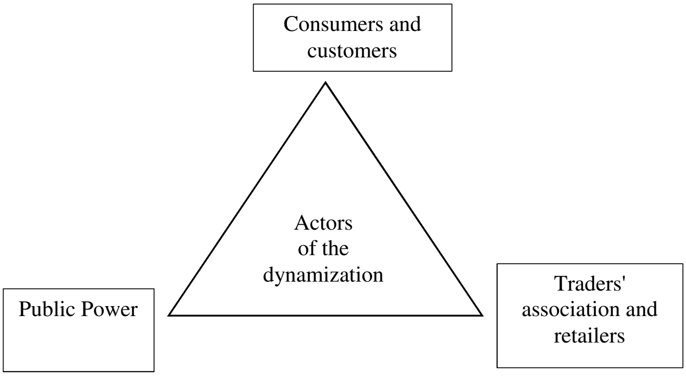

Fig. 1 The golden triangle of city centre actors

and highlights how it is built up by bringing together the three categories of stakeholders, namely traders and traders' associations, the public authorities and, finally, consumers and customers.

4 Recommendations and Limitations

In an exploratory approach, the aim of our article was to study the responses of two stakeholders in a town to the commercial decline of its town centre. These are the town centre dynamism actions implemented by a traders' association and consumers' attitudes towards these actions and the decline itself. The contributions of this work are multiple.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

Firstly, this research contributes to enriching the literature on city centre commerce. Indeed, this research adds to the line of work that focuses on the revitalization of city centre commerce (Boquet, 2019; Siadou-Martin et al., 2019).

Secondly, in the context of France, to our knowledge, no research has ever looked at the intersection of the perceptions of a retailers' association, via its representative, and those of customers on the commercial decline of town centres. However, several French towns are faced with a continuous desertification of town centres. Although avenues of resistance to this negative trend have been raised, there are very few empirical studies that question this phenomenon. Thus, the role of the shopper is added to those of actors that have been much developed such as associations.

Thirdly, contrary to previous results which found that the heads of the organisations had points of convergence on the management of town centre dynamisation

(Siadou-Martin et al., 2019), our study adds to this by showing that retailers and customers have several points of convergence. This result is crucial insofar as some might expect that the multiplicity of actors, moreover of different types, would lead to the non-convergence of the majority of visions.

Fourthly, unlike the recent study which approached the revitalisation of the town centre at the level of the managers, this research makes its contribution by analysing the views of the players at two different levels: the collective and individual levels. Behind the view of customers appears a certain idea of control of the actors' actions by the other co-actors, a kind of management suggestion or participative control.

Fifthly, this research highlights the role of ownership of one of the town centre revitalisation strategies by stakeholders. It also highlights the impact of this strategy on other stakeholders. More specifically, one of the effects of the implementation of this strategy is the awareness of the retailers' association's label among consumers. The association's label appears to be a competitive element of the city centre.

4.2 Managerial Implications

From a practical point of view, our research has drawn attention to the revitalisation of the city centre. Since the city centre is the heart of a city, we consider that if this initiative is successful, it will have a halo effect on other sectors in crisis, e.g. tourism, housing, education, etc. For example, themed streets can attract more real estate investors, and consequently, tourists, buyers.

In this research, we also discovered that beyond the points of convergence, there are divergences (e.g. event organisation). In a way, there is a problem of legitimacy in taking initiatives. This result suggests that the traders' association cannot take charge of the organisation of all the events in the town centre, although it can derive certain benefits from them, in this case certain activities. We suggest that the public authorities become more involved in the planning, organisation and monitoring of such events. Indeed, the initiative of competitiveness of a city is primarily the responsibility of its governance.

According to our interviewees, membership of a traders' association is similar to a label and must ensure a certain level of service. We therefore recommend that consumer associations engage in a certification or even labelling process to meet a certain level of service expectations on the part of customers. Considering this certification would lead the consumer association to set up a set of specifications that each member shop would have to respect (reception and support for customers, particularly through advice or timetables to be respected, etc.). Of course, this approach must be accompanied by communication from the traders' association to the traders in the town concerned.

By highlighting the visions of both the traders' association, through its leader, and of the customers, we note that there is reason to stress the importance of cooperation and the pooling of resources by the players at both collective and individual level, in terms of both strategies and actions. If, at the collective level, it is up to those in charge to lead the initiatives in terms of strategies and concrete actions of dynamisation, at the individual level, the appropriate initiatives should also intervene in all legitimacy. It is important to take into account the vision of customers, because the offer of traders depends on their needs, which consequently has an impact on the "fixation" and better durability of trade in the town centre.

Furthermore, if it seems necessary to the President of the traders' association to move urgently towards digital solutions, we note, through the discourse of the customers, expectations which may seem to be the most obvious but which have not been satisfied to date, such as the problems of parking, reception or even the opening hours.

We have shown that stakeholders' views on trade decline are different. Some may be in action, others in criticism of these actions. In particular, we have shown that consumers exercise a kind of expertise on the initiatives put in place by downtown retailers. We encourage consumers in cities with problems of commercial decline to invest in the recovery of the added value that local businesses provide. They could, for example, form recognized consumer structures and thus participate not only in the evolution of commerce, but also in the co-construction of their cities. The fact that certain expectations are not identified by retailers shows how necessary an inclusive co-construction of the stakeholders is.

Finally, satisfaction is a major issue in the field we have just explored, particularly among customers. In fact, we observe that although retailers and customers are all aiming to make the town centre more dynamic, there is still a kind of double "dissatisfaction". On the one hand, retailers express expectations of the public authorities that have not yet been fulfilled, and on the other hand, customers in turn express expectations that have not been fulfilled by retailers. This reveals the need for a kind of harmonisation or congruence of the points of view of the key stakeholders, in particular those mentioned above, with a view to better readjustment of the strategies and actions for dynamisation.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

In terms of limitations and avenues for future research, we can see that a close link to the management of the city and therefore to policies must be made. However, our research lacks the political element, especially the elected officials and their position in relation to the services provided to residents. We can also question the management of tourism in a city. Of course, an important player would be to understand the vision of the retailers on the usefulness of joining these retailers' associations. If the president of the association interviewed is himself a shopkeeper, it is advisable to deepen the knowledge of this actor, in particular their individual expectations, which constitutes a track for a next research.

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Chapter 4
Consumption Values of Organic and "Beldi" Food Products in Morocco

Salima Jazi and Ghizlane Kasmi

Abstract The investigations conducted in this exploratory research aim to understand the consumer behavior towards organic and "Beldi" food products in the Moroccan culture. Specifically, a deeper understanding of the value dimensions consumers perceive in the context of organic food products is required to evaluate the potential development of the consumption of these products. The literature review on this topic, allowed us to propose a typology of consumption values for this category of products. Through a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews, we tested the developed typology. Findings—The results from survey data indicate that the commitment values, which are in vogue among northern countries' consumer (environmental, CSR, ethical considerations and concern for future generations), are far from motivating and interesting the Moroccan consumer. In addition, the results highlight that confusion exists in the consumer's mind regarding the distinction between organic products and "Beldi" products. Efforts must be made in order to market, communicate and valorize organic products. Their inherent communication strategies have to focus more on the individual aspect of their consumption. It must also highlight the safety aspect and the natural appearance of the products not only to reassure consumers but also to incorporate the self-expression dimension.

Keywords Consumer behavior · Organic products · "Beldi" products · Consumption values

"Beldi": Arabic term referring to everything that is traditional, nationally or locally produced. The word is derived from "bled" which means country, territory or land. "Beldi" is often used as opposed to "Rumi" (imported product or Western product).

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1 Introduction

The organic market is experiencing a considerable development around the world. Morocco is not on the sidelines of this movement; today more than 9580 ha of Moroccan agricultural lands are cultivated according to the "organic[1]" principles (the Interprofessional Organic Federation in Morocco [Fimabio], in Economic Life, 13 December 2019). Most of this production is exported. However, for a sustainable development of organic agriculture in Morocco, the sector should not be entirely focused on export. The Moroccan consumer has developed over the years, the reflex to turn to the "Beldi" options. It is well known in the Moroccan culture that "Beldi" products are preferred over conventional products not only for their taste but also for their health benefits (Boulahoual & Gaber, 2016; Hamimaz, 2009). This shows that the average Moroccan is already sensitive to the food quality and is ready (maybe) to emphasize on his consciousness of the organic concepts as they are universally recognized and adopted. This exploratory research's objective is to identify the different organic and "Beldi" consumption value systems to better understand this phenomenon and to measure the relationship between these values and the consumption of the organic products. The values created are core of the decision-making and knowing them will allow the implementation of adapted marketing strategies, which are supporting the development of this market.

Through the literature review, we will propose a typology of consumption values for this product category. A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews will allow us to test this typology.

2 Literature Review

Our literature review focuses on general consumption values as well as organic food product consumption values.

2.1 The Consumption Values

The identification of consumption values has been a marketing research concern for a long time. Consumption values are considered as the "central triggers of behavior" (Gierl & Stumpp, 1999). The research in this area tends to adopt two approaches of consumption value: the first approach estimates customer value from a company perspective (Time Life Value), the second approach (the subject of our work) aims to understand the value from a consumer perspective.

[1] As formulated by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (The principle of health, The principle of Ecology, The principle of Fairness, the principle of care).

This second approach is discussed in Marketing from two perspectives: the "exchange value" and the "usage value" (Aurier et al., 2004). The exchange value (customer value) is traditionally considered a result of balancing the overall usefulness (sum of benefits) provided by the consumer experience with all of the sacrifices made to obtain this usefulness. It results from the confrontation between the benefits and the sacrifices associated with consumption. It is defined as "the overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and given" (Zeithaml, 1988) or as "the ratio between the perceived benefits and sacrifices" (Monroe, 1990). This usage value concept came to light in research projects seeking to provide an overall analysis of consumption (Holbrook, 1996, 1998; Holt, 1995). The usage value is interested in the value of consumption (consumer value) and is inherent to the experience of consumption field or the experience of possession field (Aurier et al., 1998). It is thus referred to as usage value when it is no longer the result of a calculation, but when it is a product of a consumption experience (Filser, 2000). The value does not come up directly from the product but from the experience related to the consumption (Holbrook, 1998). That is to say from the interaction between a person and object and a situation (Bloch & Richins, 1983).

In recent years, a third perspective of value seemed to emerge. This overall perceived value considers the registration of the value in the costs/benefits arbitration, as well as on the experiential paradigm. This approach aims to conciliate between the cognitive vision (based on the exchange value) and the experiential vision (based on the value of usage). This 3rd vision has been supported in particular by Aurier et al. (1998, 2004). In this perspective, the original definition of the value is retained (tradeoff or difference between benefits and sacrifices), but an enlargement of the benefits and the sacrifices of both previous approaches, till then dissociated, has been proposed: the value studied strictly from the standpoint of the product or service acquisition and the value studied from the standpoint of the consumption where the consumer's point of view is in priority considered. This approach has led to the identification of the components of the value (large families of benefits from consumer experiences) in terms of their meaning to the consumer: instrumental, hedonic, emotional, symbolic, social, political…In their synthetic work, Aurier et al. (2004) feature four families of components of value: instrumental, hedonic, communication and spiritual. The authors show how the two approaches of value can revolve within an integrated model in which the overall perceived value is a function of the components of the value of consumption (Fig. 1). In other words, the components of the value of consumption contribute in forming an overall perceived by the individual value, defined as a cost/benefit ratio (Corfman et al., 1991; Lai, 1995).

This latter design seems more relevant. It seems appropriate to consider the perceived costs of this consumption and the made sacrifices.

However, these approaches show that consumption value is a polymorphous phenomenon, hence the need to address its specific characteristics in the context of organic food products.

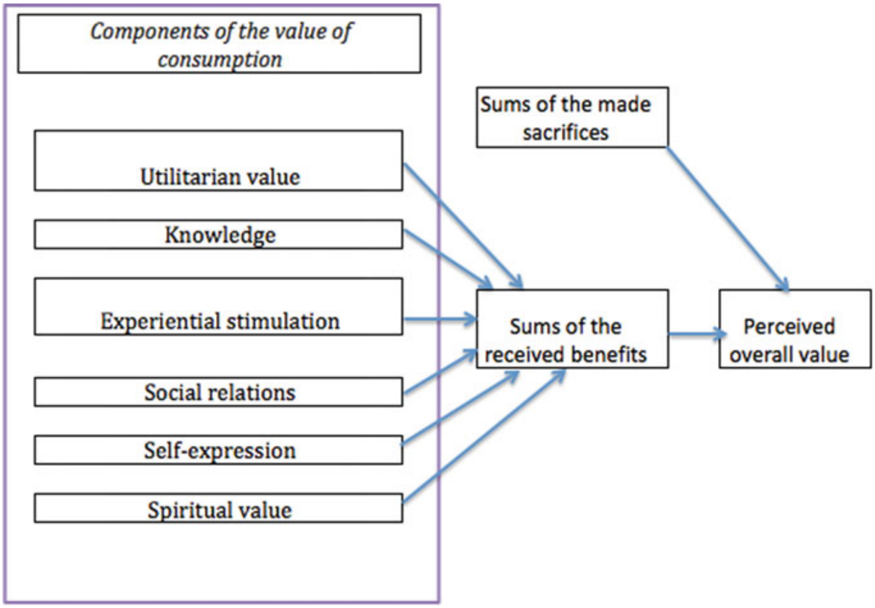

Fig. 1 Relationship between components of consumption value and overall value (*Source* Aurier et al., 2004)

2.2 *The Values of Organic Food Product Consumption*

The consumption of a food product cannot be considered trivial because it corresponds to the incorporation, by the consumer, of a foreign body (Sirieix, 1999). This principle of incorporation according to which "man becomes what he eats" (Fischler, 1996) constitute one of the food consumption's facets.

Faustine Regnier et al. (2006) claim that eating is not only incorporating food. The way men conceive the satisfaction of food needs, the way they define edible food, and how food is prepared, are all strictly social activities. For these authors, eating is also building its identity, even from an early age when children learn by imitating their parents in the kitchen to the teenage age when they get involved in cooking by experimenting new ways to cook and new food items. Food is therefore a marker of identity and social groups.

In the same way, Sirieix (1999) specifies that food consumption acts both as a "cultural" marker and, within a given culture, as a "social marker".

The values can direct consumers' attention towards products which have meanings and symbols close to their own ones (Allen & Ng, 1999). Concerning organic food products, Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998) claim that consumption is part of a specific lifestyle resulting from a particular ideology, itself linked to a distinctive value system. These different dimensions will come to influence the personality, the attitudes and the consumption behavior of the individuals who have adopted this alternative lifestyle (Hughner et al., 2007). The literature review emphasizes that consumers of organic product are mainly driven by the health value (Hutchins & Greenhalgh, 1995; Schifferstein & Ophuis, 1998; Sirieix & Schaer, 1999; Sylvander, 1999; Tregear et al., 1994; Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002). To protect themselves and those around them of the chemicals used by traditional methods of food production, consumers are turning away from conventional offers to move towards an organic consumption which is considered to be safer. In recent decades after the multiple food crises (mad cow disease, bird flu, dioxins…) this tendency has increased (Schifferstein & Ophuis, 1998; Soler et al., 2002).

Furthermore, Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998) and Wong (2004) emphasize that the hedonic value is very present in organic food consumption, mainly through the taste of food dimension.

For other researchers, the consumption of organic products responds to values such as: Protection of the environment, harmony with the universe and sustainable development (Follows & Jobber, 2000; Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; Kréziak, 1998; Sylvander, 1999; Wandel & Bugge, 1997); Altruism (relation to others, commitment to family and community) (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Pontier & Sirieix, 2003); Conservatism (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1992); Universalism (protection of living species and nature) (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1992; Soler et al., 2002; Wandel & Bugge, 1997); Volunteering (improving the well-being of individuals) (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Wong, 2004); Politics (country, respect for human rights, carbon footprint) (Honkanen et al., 2006); Spirituality (inner harmony and unity with nature) (Fotopoulos et al., 2003; Grunert & Julh, 1995; Makatouni, 2002; Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002)…

The review of the literature on organic consumption therefore emphasizes a plurality of values that can be intertwined. To structure this diversity, some authors have made a connection between organic consumption and its historical constitution. This is how Sylvander (1999) proposes a typology of consumers of organic products which reflects the values underlying the purchase of organic product. He distinguishes on the one hand the nostalgic who are seen as the initiators of the organic consumption and whose values are linked to the past with the myth of nature, and the reluctance to the progress of science. Their choices are mainly based on the health value. And the militants on the other hand who oppose the industrial production system, as defined by capitalism; They believe in protecting environment and food quality. And finally, the new customers, less informed and concerned than other types of consumers. They are primarily concerned with health values and well-being.

In the same line, Rémy (2004) distinguishes between three main phases of the organic representations' history. The political organic movement of the 60s and 70s, which takes place in response to the consumer society targeting both the individual pursuit of happiness and a community ideal. The organic utility of the 80s which focuses on the individual interests such as health and nutrition, and the organic movement of the 90s to the present days which has been nourished from the two previous historical representations of organic food. Based on that (2004) distinguishes four families of organic food consumption values: utilitarian, hedonistic aesthetics and political (Table 1).

Table 1 The four types of organic consumption

	Extrinsic orientation	Intrinsic orientation
Individual consumption patterns	**Utilitarian consumption** *Health—Accessibility* I eat organic from time to time, for example for my baby. Sometimes I buy organic product from the hypermarket. It's quite expensive and I'm not sure that this has a taste. I' m looking for organic products with the best value for their prices	**Hedonistic consumption** *Pleasure—Nostalgia* With the problems of the food industry, I tried organic. It is better. One finds the childhood flavors It is more natural, handcrafted. It has taste at least. With organic product you know the producer, you know he does not add just anything, you trust
Social consumption patterns	**Aesthetic consumption** *Dietetics—Aesthetics* In fact, the food and the health are related. I do buy a lot of food supplements. With all the scandals, I pay attention to what I eat, I want to stay healthy, in shape. I am not of those to whom we give to eat anything, as in hypermarkets	**Political consumption** *Ideology—Ecology* Today the only way of doing politics is to pay attention to what you buy. Buying organic is also fighting against globalization; it is rejecting a bit the system. If the organic ethics can help small countries or small farmers, it is great

If this typology impresses with its visibility, it remains questionable. The first criticism relates to the fact that it was built on the basis of a rapprochement between the consumption values of organic products and their historical anchoring with the French consumer. Therefore, its transposition in another cultural context could be a problem. Moreover, the author notes that "extrinsic organic consumption includes two consumption categories where consuming organic is a way on the one hand, to reassure against food crises (utility), and on the other to be in better shape and to distinguish themselves from others (aesthetics)." But when you look at the items taken by the author to support these statements, we find them confusing. The item "With all these scandals I pay attention to what I eat, I want to stay healthy, fit" was, for example, mobilized to bring an aesthetic consumption while it integrates a primarily utilitarian dimension. The author begins this last criticism by stating that, "these types of organic consumption are not entirely exclusive of each other. There are gateways of representations and practices between categories (which suggest the fuzzy boundaries of Table 1)."

Based on the analysis of Remy's typology (2004) and the various research studies that have dealt with the classification of values, we propose the following typology (Table 2):

The first axis of this typology opposes the extrinsic orientation to the intrinsic orientation: for the first one, the product (in this case an organic food product) is a way to achieve other purposes. In contrast, the intrinsic orientation considers the consumption of the product as an end. The second axis leads us to consider that

Table 2 Typology of consumption values of organic food

	Extrinsic	Intrinsic
Self-oriented	Utilitarian values (Safety, health)	Hedonistic values (Pleasure, experiential stimulation)
Oriented towards others	Expression values (Self-expression, social interaction)	Values of commitment (Ethical, political…)

Adapted from Rémy (2004) and Aurier et al. (2004)

the inherent values to the consumption of organic products have both an individual nature (hedonism, safety, health) and a collective nature (sake of future generations, preserving the environment). The utilitarian values refer mainly to the maintenance of the health capital, the nutritional balance and the research of security. They are the most dominant values when it comes to food consumption especially organic. The hedonistic values emphasize the pleasures associated with the sensory stimulation: taste, smell, sight and touch. They can also target experiential stimulation that finds its theoretical foundations in the work of Morin (1978) (cited by Aurier et al., 2004). It refers to the ability of the experience in stimulating the senses of the individual, and in absorbing them to the point where they forget about their direct physical environment and they start to feel a sense of well-being (Aurier et al., 2004). The collective values must be sought within the values of expression related to the consumption of organic products as well as in the values of commitment. The values of expression correspond to a family of "intrinsic", and "oriented towards the others" values. In this family, we suggest to distinguish the self-expression (with others or with oneself) and the social interaction. The product is considered here as a way to support the interpersonal exchange (It is a two-way communication, self to the other and vice versa). The last family of values is "intrinsic" and "oriented towards the others". We propose to include in it, the commitment in its various forms: political, ethical, supportive…

The objective of our field investigation is to verify this typology in the context of organic products consumption in Morocco. But as the phenomenon is new in this country, we propose to expand our scope of analysis to the "Beldi" product, which are considered by many consumers to be very close or equivalent to organic products. To our Knowledge in the literature no research has attempted to understand the consumption behavior towards organic and "Beldi" food products in Morocco and the value dimensions consumers perceive in this context.

3 Empirical Study

Firstly, the deployed methodology will be presented, secondly the results of the exploratory study will be developed.

3.1 Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this research, we opted for a qualitative approach via semi-structured individual interviews.

The semi-structured interviews are neither fully open nor channelized by many specific questions (Quivy & Van Campenhoudt, 2011). Therefore, their use solves the apparent dilemma between the need for more accurate information and the willingness to allow the interviewee to speak freely. With the intention of answering our research question: What are the value dimensions towards organic and Beldi product consumption In Morocco, our interviews were held using a structured …. Our interviews were held using a semi-structured interview guide around three sub-themes:

1. The definition of organic products vs. “Beldi” products.
2. The values of organic food consumption vs. the values of “Beldi” food consumption.
3. The economic and psychological costs of the consumption of organic product and “Beldi” product.

The study involved a convenience sample of 30 people, including 18 women and 12 men. During the selection of respondents, special attention to the diversity in terms of age (between 22 and 64 years), marital status (single, married, with or without children) and socio professional category (officer, employee, student, etc.) has been taken. In addition, in order to limit biases related to consumers place of residence (especially big cities vs. small towns) the geographical areas of the respondents’ recruitment were deliberately varied (Rabat, Mohammedia, Kenitra, Settat and Berrechid) (see Annex 1).

Individual interviews were fully recorded and then transcribed. The thematic analysis was selected as the content analysis technique of the collected verbatim. According to this technique, the theme or unit of meaning, is the cutting unit, coding and analysis (Evrard et al., 2003). The floating reading, has allowed to build an analytical framework that matches the themes of our interview guide. Then a thematic analysis of each interview was conducted. Based on the analytical framework developed, both horizontal analyzes (by interview) and vertical analyzes (comparison of the different stories) were conducted. The analytical work was done manually.

3.2 Results and Discussion

The analysis of verbatim was structured around three main themes in the interview guide.

3.2.1 Definition of Organic Products vs. "Beldi"

When announcing the general theme "organic and 'Beldi' products", the most recurrent answers were: "But everything is organic in our country", "there is only organic food in Morocco", "our fruits and vegetables are all organic", "in my mind, the food we consume is organic"…

However, when engaging more in the discussion, distinctions appear among most of the respondents. The main defining elements mentioned for organic products are the "pesticides and chemical-free" and the "natural" aspect. To a lesser extent, some respondents have advanced other elements, referring to the certifications and the traceability of these products.

Concerning the definition of a "Beldi" product the respondents hold several adjectives: "traditional", "natural", "homemade", "100% Moroccan", "non-industrialized" or "Moroccan organic"…

The analysis of these elements demonstrates that there are still confusions in the minds of the Moroccan consumer regarding the definition of organic products. This can be explained by the novelty of the phenomenon in Morocco as well as the lack of information on these products.

Should be noted in this regard that on the 500,000 tons of organic products grown[2] under the crop year of 2011–2012, 37,500 tons are consumed in the domestic market as "conventional farming" without labeling and therefore without valuation, according to the ministry of Agriculture and Marine Fisheries, 2012.

This is due to the absence of a legislative framework governing the sector. Should be noted, however, that a law relating to organic production was adopted on December 10, 2012 and the texts relating to its application are in the adoption circuits.

3.2.2 The Values Associated with the Consumption of Organic and "Beldi" Products

The literature on the consumption of organic food concerns both values oriented towards the individuals themselves, and values oriented towards the others (Pontier & Sirieix, 2003; Rémy, 2004). The analysis of the meaning given to the "Beldi" and organic products consumption among Moroccan consumers revealed, however, a

[2] The areas cultivated using organic farming under the 2011/2012 crop year amounted to nearly 5,000 ha. Added to this are the 600,000 ha of 'spontaneous' cultivations of which 400,000 ha of Argan trees forests and 200,000 ha of aromatic and medicinal plants.

more individualistic approach arising from the dominance of self-oriented values: utilitarian and hedonistic.

As in the literature our results show a predominant health aspect. The consumption of organic, and "Beldi" products for the Moroccan consumer is a way: on the one hand to reassure against the development of carcinogenic substances and on the other hand to be healthy.

"When I eat organic, I'm relaxed" (Sarah, Senior Manager); "We consume to avoid ingesting chemicals that may cause diseases." (Abdelkader, doctor); "They are good for health" (Hind, student); "With these products, we avoid the poisons added to food" (Zakaria, middle manager); "Your food is your medicine" (Salwa, employee).

Beyond this utilitarian aspect, hedonistic values are exclusively attached to the "Beldi" products. They are related to the gastronomic aspect and are therefore part of a search for more tasty and flavored products.

This has been clearly highlighted in the interviews. By contrast, no statements that could refer to the experiential stimulation was found.

"'Beldi' apples are sweeter and tastier" (Aicha, trader); "The 'Beldi' products have better smells and flavors" (Nadia, employee).

The consumption of organic products is also linked to certain social values (oriented towards others), but mostly extrinsic. It is considered by some as a means of self-expression, and social interaction. It should be noted however that this type of values characterizes mainly women belonging to the category of senior managers and executives.

"I consume and advises the consumption of organic products, I do advertise for organic products" (Nassima, senior manager); "Everyone consumes organic products today is fashionable" (Soumia, senior manager); "This is the trend of the moment, I am very organic driven" (Leila, senior manager); "Consumption of organic products is a way of life" (Houda, executive).

The consumption of "Beldi" products, is a way to keep a link with one's origins, traditions and culture.

"Considering my origins, I am attached to everything that is Beldi" (Saad, senior manager); "Consumption of Beldi" products reminds me of my grandmother with whom I grew up" (Sarah, senior manager).

Even if the commitment dimension hardly exists, it has been noticed however, that some consumers avoid large department stores or supermarkets and hypermarkets, and prefer to turn to traditional distribution networks (such as markets, farms or small farmers displaying their products at the edges of the roads). Some talk about solidarity, others about compassion with this form of distribution. This family of values has been mentioned only for "Beldi" products.

"I stop systematically to buy when I see a little "fellah" (Non-industrialized farmer) with their products at the edge of the road" (Meryem, student); "When we buy products from certain associations, it helps other people." (Nada, employee); "Sometimes I purchased products out of compassion" (Abdel, student).

As for the values of commitment in the sense of environmental protection, they were absent when asking the interviewees; only one out of thirty respondents had mentioned this aspect.

3.2.3 The Economic and Psychological Costs of the Consumption of Organic and "Beldi" Products

The consumption values are often linked to the required sacrifices in order to consume the products. The main sacrifice highlighted by respondents regarding the consumption of organic products, is the price. Respondents also highlighted the difficulty of accessing these products in terms of distribution channel as well as the costs associated with the search of information. However, the lack of trust in this product category has captivated us. Indeed, several respondents explained that they place more trust in "Beldi" products than in organic ones. They explain this skepticism by the various scandals that have affected the organic sector in Europe in recent years, but also by the absence of a legislative frame governing the sector in Morocco.

Note in this regard that Law 39-12 related to the organic production of agricultural and aquatic products was adopted on December 10, 2012. Published in the Official Bulletin of February 21, 2013, the decrees for its application are in the adoption circuit.

Respondents point out also that in Morocco, the population feels less concerned with organic products, because no form of social debate concerning the misdeeds of bad nutrition (fast food and GMOs) has ever taken place.

4 Conclusion

The literature on organic products is very rich in the American and European culture, but no research (to our knowledge) has focused on organic food in the Moroccan context.

Our study shows that this cultural context has its specificities, and therefore, the findings of studies developed in other cultural contexts cannot be transposed to the Moroccan cultural context. We found that the consumption of organic food by the Moroccan consumer is mainly guided by utilitarian values. However, the commitment values, which are in vogue among northern countries' consumer (environmental, CSR, ethical considerations and concern for future generations), do not currently interest the Moroccan consumer.

From a managerial perspective, the obtained results highlight that confusion exists in the consumer's mind regarding the distinction between organic products and "Beldi" products. Efforts must be made in order to promote and valorize organic products.

Their inherent communication strategies have to focus more on the individualistic aspect of their consumption. They must incorporate the self-expression dimension and also highlight the safety aspect and the natural appearance of the products to reassure consumers. It must moreover make sure to establish trust in this organic product category.

Above all, it is important to define the segment which could be more sensitive to these values before targeting it. Thereafter, it is necessary to adapt the marketing strategy to the expectations of this segment specially in terms of distribution channels choices and communication media. This strategy adaptation to the expectations of the segment could give a boost to the organic consumption in Morocco. It is also a question of properly identifying and defining the multiple obstacles to the consumption of this products category in order to counteract them.

Some limits must however be emphasized for this research: they are related firstly to the small size of our sample and secondly to the qualitative nature of our research. It would therefore be desirable to extend this research to a broader sample of consumers and to develop or adapt a measuring instrument of the overall perceived value of organic food consumption in Morocco.

Annex 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of our sample

Interviewee	Name	Age	Profession	Marital status	Dwelling place
1	Abdel	48 y/o	Doctor	Married, 2 children	Rabat
2	Sarah	29 y/o	Senior manager	Single	Kénitra
3	Nassima	38 y/o	Senior manager	Married, 2 children	Rabat
4	Soumia	46 y/o	Senior manager	Married, no child	Rabat
5	Meriem	28 y/o	Technician	Divorced, 1 child	Rabat
6	Salwa	28 y/o	Librarian	Single	Rabat
7	Laila	60 y/o	Senior manager	Married, 1 child	Rabat
8	Zakaria	30 y/o	Middle manager	Single	Rabat
9	Mohamed	64 y/o	Research professor	Married, 2 children	Rabat
10	Salima	26 y/o	Senior manager	Married, no child	Mohammedia
11	Nadia	43 y/o	Employee	Married, 1 child	Settat
12	Houda	30 y/o	Middle-grade manager	Married, no child	Settat
13	Hind	22 y/o	Student	Single	Settat

(continued)

(continued)

Interviewee	Name	Age	Profession	Marital status	Dwelling place
14	Amine	24 y/o	Student	Single	Rabat
15	Aicha	29 y/o	Trader	Divorced, no child	Mohammedia
16	Saadia	27 y/o	Housewife	Married, no child	Kenitra
17	Achraf	25 y/o	Employee	Single	Kenitra
18	Anas	28 y/o	Senior manager	Single	Mohammedia
19	Abdel	24 y/o	Student	Single	Settat
20	Nada	44 y/o	Employee	Divorced, 1 child	Salé
21	Youssef	44 y/o	Manager	Married, 2 children	Temara
22	Bouchra	43 y/o	Research professor	Married, 2 children	Rabat
23	Younes	38 y/o	Manager	Married, no child	Rabat
24	Meryem	24 y/o	Student	Single	Settat
25	Naima	42 y/o	Manager	Married	Berrechid
26	Rachida	50 y/o	Housewife	Married, 4 children	Berrechid
27	Jamila	39 y/o	Housewife	Married, 2 children	Berrechid
28	Said	56 y/o	Senior manager	Married, 2 children	Rabat
29	Saad	40 y/o	Manager	Married, 1 child	Settat
30	Rachid	46 y/o	Teacher	Married, 2 children	Settat

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Part II
Brand, Products, and Consumer Behavior

Chapter 5
Ethnocentrism Consumer Research: A Bibliometric Analysis Overview Over 1984–2021

Sara Tahali, Hélène Yildiz, and Joseph Kaswengi

Abstract This paper presents a general overview on ethnocentrism consumer research using bibliometric indicators over the period 1984–2021 from Web of Science Core Collection database. We investigate how the research on this topic is related to international trade, and how the literature has evolved with respect of keywords analysis, co-authorship, Co-citation relative to intuitions, countries and sources titles network. Firstly, our results show that the inflation of World Bank data on international trade since 2006, coincides by simultaneously increasing of the number of publications on ethnocentrism consumer during the same period. This proving that globalization has become a highly predominant phenomenon. Secondly, the keywords analysis over 1984–2021 suggest three cluster namely the process of theoretical foundations of ethnocentrism, operability of the concept of ethnocentrism and intersection between research on the operational aspect of the construct and the conceptual aspect. Finally, this previous clusters has been mutated from one sub-period to another.

Keywords Ethnocentrism · Consumer research · Bibliometric analysis · Web of Science · Overview

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1 Introduction

A fundamental movement is taking place in every continent with the serious questioning of world trade. In both the political and entrepreneurial spheres, the degree of ethnocentrism of individuals as consumers is at a peak. Indeed, the political messages (speeches by politicians like Trump and Sarkozy) and communications issued by international private groups located in various territories argued that the consumer ethnocentricity is affected (massive investments to testify to national preference, relocation announcements (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2016).

The almost exponential development of academic research over the past three years on the concept of ethnocentricity highlights a real need to understand this concept as a whole and obtain a holistic view of research on this aspect of the consumer.

Following the growth in literature on consumer ethnocentrism and the fragmentation of the theories and measures surrounding this term, this study investigates research on consumer ethnocentrism and shows how it has developed over time.

In addition, this study examines the most widely occurring topics in the literature to identify potential weaknesses and gaps in scientific research into consumer ethnocentrism. To achieve these objectives, the research consists in a bibliometric analysis that draws on data from citations of articles, books, and other material available in the Thomson Reuters' Web of Science database.

We analyze 479 pieces of research on consumer ethnocentrism dating from 1985 to 2021, thus observing that the number of publications on consumer ethnocentrism changes over time. The study deals with articles from 1984 onwards because the earliest article on consumer ethnocentrism in the Web of Science dates from that year.

Several studies exist in numerous bibliometric disciplines. These include Gurzki and Woisetschläger (2016), who review luxury research by mapping the research landscape. Ferreira et al. (2016) make a bibliometric analysis of strategic management research. Perianes-Rodriguez et al. (2016) compare full and fractional counting in the construction of bibliometric networks. Gema and Domingo (2016) analyze the international impact of business incubators through a bibliometric analysis. Mishra et al. (2017) propose a bibliometric analysis employing a green supply chain performance analysis. Samiee, S. and Chabowski, B. R. (2012) analyze the knowledge structure in international marketing using a multi-method bibliometric analysis. Eisend and Lehmann (2016) assessing the enduring impact of influential papers in the marketing and management are using impact factor, primary and secondary citations and bibliometrics analysis. In addition, Chen et al. (2017) carry out a bibliometric study from 1997 to 2014 concerning the state of the art on food waste research. However, despite the fact that consumer ethnocentrism is well established in the management literature with an increasingly growing influence, no research has so far provided a bibliometric study of the matter. Our study provides a better empirical understanding of the most influential countries, authors and channels of diffusion in research on consumer ethnocentrism issues. As a result, the scientific community will be provided with initial results that will serve as a springboard for future research in the field.

Following this brief introduction, Sect. 2 presents a review of the consumer ethnocentrism literature. Section 3 describes the study method. Section 4 discusses results of the bibliometric analysis. Finally, Sect. 5 present the conclusions arising from this study.

2 Literature Review

Research on the concept of ethnocentricity was more or less stagnant until 2006, when it took a sharp turn with a proliferation of research on the topic. Indeed, each year the number of publications doubled for the next two years, and then accelerated even more from 2008 despite the economic crisis.

In 2014, for example, the number of research papers increased from 25 to 47. These changes can easily be explained by the globalization of trade, which involved the easing of protectionist barriers around the world, including in China between 2006 and 2016.

Faced with this explosion of international trade, a key issue facing researchers and managers has been to understand and explain how consumers in different countries perceive these foreign products arriving on their domestic market. This research generally explores the issue of the effect of the country of origin on the ultimate attitude of consumer buying behavior in relation to these products. Indeed, some consumers faced with this standardization of products in globalized markets have reacted with exacerbated ethnocentricity.

Consumer beliefs could have an adverse effect on the entry of certain global foreign products into national markets. This is why researchers have looked at the concept of ethnocentrism in order to understand how these beliefs affect the purchase of products from foreign countries on a national territory.

Shimp and Sharma (1987, p. 280) were the precursors who built a scale of measurement of this concept. Ethnocentrism is defined as "consumer beliefs about the relevance or even morality of the purchase of products manufactured abroad". A more general definition of ethnocentrism is the "vision of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled up and evaluated accordingly" (Sumner, 1906, p. 13). Thus, ethnocentric consumers will evaluate the products of their own country differently from those produced in other countries (Huddleston et al., 2000). Looking more closely at the concept, ethnocentrism is characterized by a favorable bias towards one's own group (in-group) compared with others (outside group/non-group) and consists of the following properties: the distinction between different groups; the biased perception of events that favor the interests of one's own group; the perception of one's own group as the center of the universe; suspicion and disdain for other groups; the perception of one's own group as superior, strong and honest (Sharma et al., 1995, p. 27); And finally, a perception of other groups as inferior, weak and dishonest (LeVine & Campbell, 1972).

the act of purchasing foreign made products may seem "immoral" and "unpatriotic" since it does not contribute to the local economy.

Cleveland et al. (2009) pointed out that, for ethnocentric consumers, "foreign or global brands represent not only an economic threat but also a cultural threat" (p. 112). "The CET represents the beliefs of consumers about the suitability and morality of buying foreign products" (Feurer et al., 2016; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Since the 2008 crisis, a form of global retreat has generated consumer movements that have more specifically delineated the concept of ethnocentrism in its geographical dimension. Indeed, the phenomenon of regionalism has emerged.

Contrary to this early conceptualization of CETSCALE by Shimp and Sharma, CETSCALE can be a multidimensional construction, as noted by Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) and Feurer et al. (2016). Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) suggest that the CETSCALE contains dimensions such as prosociality, cognition, insecurity, reflexivity and habituation.

In a global context, the country of origin is generally considered to be focal in the group, while foreign countries represent the external groups (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Verlegh, 2007). These definitions have generated a profusion of research on this concept to understand in which and by which theoretical process ethnocentrism is related. For example, the terms "ingroup" and "outgroup" Klein (1999) presents the theory of the social identity of the individual whose ethnocentrism is related (Oyserman, 2007). Others use conflict theory to highlight the division between those who are part of the community and those outside (and Donald Levine, 1972). In this theoretical perspective, researchers attempt to explain the attraction versus repulsion of a group (Josiassen, 2011). However, despite the rich literature, the whole theoretical corpus diverges in its results and generates several types of controversy.

The first debate intrinsic to the concept is linked in particular to its measurement. It was the seminal article by Shimp and Sharma (1987) that paved the way for a multitude of research on the scale of measurement called CETSCALE. However, this measuring system, built in a US context, cannot be implemented in other countries as such, which has considerably distorted certain research results. Indeed, most articles on CETSCALE appear to represent its broad socio-normative and economic aspects, emphasizing the need to support US products while rejecting foreign products because of their adverse effects on the US economy; but as soon as the scale was taken up in another country, the results diverged. For example, research shows that the concept of ethnocentrism applied in developing countries obtained different results from the original article (e.g., India, Russia and China, emergent countries) (Kreckova et al., 2012, p. 272).

Some studies, such as Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004), conducted in developing countries have confirmed a low ethnocentric tendency among consumers, who prefer foreign rather than national products. Moreover, ethnocentric consumer trends are not always ranked as "radical". If the perception of a product is linked to a positive image of the country (e.g. level of industrialization or economic development), the ethnocentric consumer will consider that some local products are superior, and yet will positively evaluate foreign products. It was therefore necessary to make some modifications to the scale (Luque-Martinez et al., 2000, p. 1357). Furthermore, a scale comprising 13 items proved unnecessary in some cases and most research on the concept has used only a few items to measure the ethnocentricity of a consumer.

Another controversial issue is the one-dimensional scale measurement (Cleveland et al., 2009; Klein et al., 2006; Kwak et al., 2006; Netemeyer et al., 1991; Sharma, 2010; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Steenkamp et al., 1999). That is always debated when analysing recent publications on the subject (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014).

Indeed, several studies have identified several dimensions, and not just one as initially demonstrated by the precursors of the concept. Indeed, the concept of consumer ethnocentrism is a complex construction involving cognitive, affective and normative orientations towards products manufactured abroad (Shimp, 1984). Cognitive aspects are identified by a perception of the superiority of domestic products and the inferiority of foreign products (i.e., the belief that national products are the best) (Sharma et al., 1987). Second, the emotional dimension emphasizes the key role of emotions in the evaluation and purchase of products (e.g. positive affective response to value, quality, etc.). Finally, a normative dimension considers the appropriateness of purchasing products manufactured in one's own country and questions how consumers should consume in order to prevent adverse effects on national employment and well-being in their country (Vida & Reardon, 2008). Consumer ethnocentrism can also be defined as a personality trait that can affect attitudes, intentions, preferences and purchasing behaviors when choices of domestic products and services in relation to imported products are at issue (Lindquist et al., 2001).

Beyond the scope of research on the dimensions of measuring the concept, another corpus of debate confronts the evaluation of the antecedents of consumer ethnocentrism. Consumers differ in their level of ethnocentricity due to various factors underlying consumer ethnocentrism. Ethnocentric consumer trends do not develop alone, but are subject to a multitude of influences (Sharma et al., 1995, p. 27). The corpus as a whole still offers relatively divergent results concerning the different variables that accentuate or moderate the effects of ethnocentricity on the purchase of a foreign product, such as: the socio-psychological characteristics of an individual, the political environment in which an individual lives, his or her economic situation and demographic characteristics (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015).

3 Bibliometric Method

Bibliometrics is the area of research that quantitatively studies bibliographic material (Broadus, 1987; Pritchard, 1969), providing overviews of a document set.

This study uses a wide range of bibliometric indicators, including the total number of publications and citations, the h-index (Alonso et al., 2009; Franceschini & Maisano, 2010; Hirsch, 2005), the paper, the thresholds of quotations and other related indicators (Merigó, Gil-Lafuente, et al., 2015; Merigó, Mas-Tur, et al., 2015).

By doing so, the objective is to provide a general informative overview of the bibliographic material (Bonilla et al., 2015; Ding et al., 2014; Mingers & Leydesdorff, 2015). However, the rankings may be different depending on the specific indicator considered, so each reader can interpret the results according to her or his interests (Coupé, 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2008; Hsieh & Chang, 2009). The article uses the WoS Core Collection database in the search process of the information. We remark that there are other databases for dealing with academic documents (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Note that WoS is owned by the company Thomson & Reuters Corporation. The search was carried out between 1984 and 2016 and considers all the documents published in the journal since 1984, because the first scientific publications on ethnocentrism appeared in 1984.

The study focuses on the bibliometric analysis of a specific journal. This type of methodology has already been used in previous studies for other journals, including the *Journal of Business Research* (Merigó, Mas-Tur, et al., 2015), the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (Valenzuela et al., 2017), *Knowledge-Based Systems* (Cobo et al., 2015), and the *International Journal of Intelligent Systems* (Merigó et al., 2017).

To map the bibliographic material, we use the VOS visualization software (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This software visualizes the results across a wide range of bibliometric indicators, including bibliographic linking, co-citation and co-occurrence (Merigó et al., 2016). Bibliographic linkage (Kessler, 1963) occurs when two documents cite the same third document. Co-citation (Small, 1973) appears when two documents receive a quote from the same third document. Co-occurrence analyzes the most common keywords used in documents.

Observe that in this paper the focus of co-occurrence is on the keyword list of the articles provided usually at the first page of the paper. The graphical visualization is carried out through a network representation, where the size of a circle increases with an item's relevance and the network connections identify more closely linked items. The place of the circles and the colors are used to cluster the items. Note that the VOS viewer is freely available and further information can be found at: http://www.vosviewer.com/.

4 Results and Discussions

The scope of this analysis covers all documents, languages and countries available because the aim of this study is to gain an overall perspective of developments in research on consumer ethnocentrism.

The study examines research dating from 1984 to 2021. The starting year is1984, which is the date of the first article on consumer ethnocentrism in the Web of Science.

Table 1 shows that articles are the most common type of documents on consumer ethnocentrism (404 articles). Proceedings papers are the next most common with 70 publications followed by book chapters (17 publications), early access (15 publications), reviews (8 publications), meeting abstracts (2 publications), books (1 book),

Table 1 Document types

Document types	Record count	% of 479 (%)
Article	404	84.342
Proceedings paper	70	14.614
Book chapter	17	3.549
Early access	15	3.132
Review	8	1.670
Meeting abstract	2	0.418
Book	1	0.418
Editorial material	1	0.418

Table 2 Areas of research articles

Research areas	Record count
Business	332
Management	95
Economics	52
Hospitality leisure sport tourism	18
Food science technology	17
Communication	14
Agricultural economics policy	12
Business finance	11
Psychology applied	10
Psychology social	7

and editorial material (1 publication). In Table 2, the areas of research with the most research articles on consumer ethnocentrism are business (332 publications), management (95 publications), economics (52 publications), hospitality and leisure tourism (18 publications), food (17 publications), agricultural economics (12 publications), business finance (11 publications), psychology applied (10 publications), and social psychology (7 publications).

The study identifies 248 journals that publish articles on consumer ethnocentrism. Table 3 presents the top 10 journals producing research on consumer ethnocentrism. Four journals are noteworthy: *International Marketing Review* with 27 articles, *Journal of Business Research* with 23 articles, *Journal of International Marketing* with 22 articles, and *Journal of International Consumer Marketing* with 18 articles. Table 4 shows that the *Journal of Consumer Research* is the most cited journal with 2723 citations following by the *Journal of Marketing* with 649 citations, *Journal of Consumer Psychology* with 579 citations, the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* with 375 citations and the *Journal of Business Research* with 304 citations.

Table 5 shows, the most cited paper is more theoretical and was published by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998). The study analyses the assessing measurement

Table 3 The top 10 most productive journals

Source titles	Record count	% of 479 (%)
International Marketing Review	27	5.637
Journal of Business Research	23	4.802
Journal of International Marketing	22	4.593
Journal of International Consumer Marketing	18	3.758
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	16	3.340
European Journal of Marketing	12	2.505
British Food Journal	9	1.879
Journal of International Business Studies	8	1.670
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	8	1.670
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	8	1.670

Table 4 Most cited journals

Source title	Total citations	Average per year
Journal of Consumer Research	2723	113.46
Journal of Marketing	649	27.04
Journal of Consumer Psychology	579	26.32
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	375	20.83
Journal of Business Research	304	23.38
Journal of International Business Studies	258	12.29
Journal of International Marketing	256	19.69
International Journal of Research in Marketing	243	15.19
International Marketing Review	228	14.25
Journal of International Business Studies	220	11

invariance in cross-national consumer research and has 2723 citations. The second most cited article is that of Klein et al. (1998). The authors presents a model of the animosity of foreign product purchase in contrast to Shimp and Sharma's (1987) CETSCALE.

a. Publication and citation structure

The topic of consumer ethnocentrism appears in academic research between 1984 and 2021. From 1984 to 2003 was the beginning of publications around ethnocentrism, with a total of about 3 publications annually. Then, from 2004 to 2008, the average of annual publications doubled to about 6 publications per year. The period between 2009 and the end of 2011 was very productive in terms of publications. The average number of publications is about 17. The increase in publications may be due to the role played by research on consumer ethnocentrism in international trade development during the same period. As world trade increases, studies on ethnocentrism also grow

Table 5 The 10 most cited articles

Title	Total citations	Average per year
Steenkamp, J. B. E., & Baumgartner, H. (1998). Assessing measurement invariance in cross-national consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 25*(1), 78–90	2723	113.46
Klein, J. G., Ettenson, R., & Morris, M. D. (1998). The animosity model of foreign product purchase: An empirical test in the People's Republic of China. *Journal of Marketing, 62*(1), 89–100	649	27.04
Batra, R., Ramaswamy, V., Alden, D. L., Steenkamp, J. B. E., & Ramachander, S. (2000). Effects of brand local and nonlocal origin on consumer attitudes in developing countries. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 9*(2), 83–95	579	26.32
Balabanis, G., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2004). Domestic country bias, country-of-origin effects, and consumer ethnocentrism: A multidimensional unfolding approach. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 32*(1), 80–95	375	20.83
Roth, K. P., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2009). Advancing the country image construct. *Journal of Business Research, 62*(7), 726–740	304	23.38
Balabanis, G., Diamantopoulos, A., Mueller, R. D., & Melewar, T. C. (2001). The impact of nationalism, patriotism and internationalism on consumer ethnocentric tendencies. *Journal of International Business Studies, 32*(1), 157–175	258	12.29
Cleveland, M., Laroche, M., & Papadopoulos, N. (2009). Cosmopolitanism, consumer ethnocentrism, and materialism: An eight-country study of antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of International Marketing, 17*(1), 116–146	256	19.69
Alden, D. L., Steenkamp, J. B. E., & Batra, R. (2006). Consumer attitudes toward marketplace globalization: Structure, antecedents and consequences. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 23*(3), 227–239	243	15.19
Shankarmahesh, M. N. (2006). Consumer ethnocentrism: An integrative review of its antecedents and consequences. *International Marketing Review*	228	14.25
Klein, J. G. (2002). Us versus them, or us versus everyone? Delineating consumer aversion to foreign goods. *Journal of International Business Studies, 33*(2), 345–363	220	11

simultaneously. This proves that the concept of ethnocentrism began, at this time, to attract the attention of researchers more and more.

Figure 1 shows three stages in the publication trend between 2012 and 2021. After 2012, publications around ethnocentrism declined slightly in 2013 and 2014. But the increase in publications was quickly recovered 1 year later. From 2015 to 2018, publications around ethnocentrism are constantly evolving, with a slight decrease in 2017. 2019 is the flagship year of ethnocentrism studies with a total number of 74 publications and a contribution of 16% to the total number of publications. 2020 saw

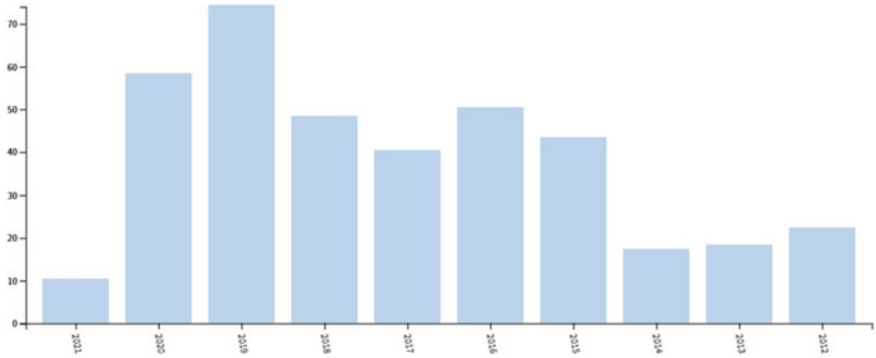

Fig. 1 Publication structure from 2012 to 2021

a slight decrease compared to 2019 in terms of publications, this could be explained by the pandemic COVID-19 and the events it caused.

b. Network analysis by keywords, co-authorship and sources co-citations

In this section, we analyze the co-authorship, countries and sources network. We divide our sample into 2 sub-periods and analyze if the research has mutated or evolved according to the period considered. The selected sub-periods are 1984–2007 and 2008–2021 taking into account the effect of the economic crisis.

Figure 2 shows the analysis of keyword classifications over 1984–2007 and suggests three major clusters. The first red-colored cluster presents keywords that describe the process of the theoretical foundations of ethnocentrism. This cluster shows that the work on ethnocentrism explains the origin of the phenomenon which is translated by key words like (country of origin, foreign product, consumer ethnocentrism, attitudes, antecedents …). The work on the theoretical exploration of ethnocentrism explains the dimensions of this concept, to define its outline to understand in which and by which theoretical process is connected ethnocentrism. The key words characterizing this cluster explain that the theoretical conception of ethnocentrism is translated into a psychological construct, describing the tendency for an individual to strongly associate with his own group, his own culture and, in opposition, the tendency to reject the other groups ("foreign product").

The second cluster in green–blue color presents the operability of the concept of ethnocentrism in terms of antecedents and fields of application, "patriotism", "materialism", "value", "culture" and "domestics products" are the keywords that characterize this group. The essential research question of this cluster is to understand how to operationalize this construct across the different continents and what are the antecedents that make up this concept around the world.

The third cluster depicted in yellow is the intersection between research on the operational aspect of the construct and the conceptual aspect. Thus, the research focuses on differences in results by country, whether in terms of its antecedents or measurement. Similarly, the ethnocentric trends of consumers are not always indicated in such a "radical" way.

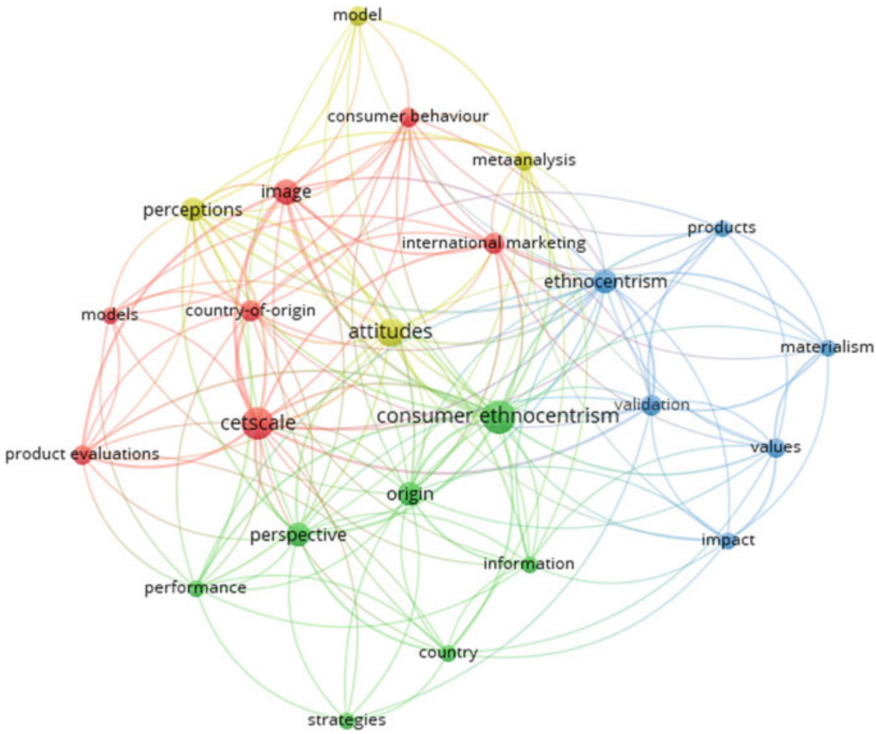

Fig. 2 Co-occurrence of Keywords from 1984 to 2007

The Fig. 3 shows results of co-occurrence of author keywords over 1984–2007. Over this period, research on ethnocentrism evaluated the product's scale of measurement. The studies provide an overview of a country's product strategy. This results in the presence of keywords such as like performance, strategy, globalization, attitude, country, perception….

However, over the period 2008–2021, see Fig. 4, the analysis is refined from the point of view of the consumer and the product.

From the consumer's point of view, research focuses on the attributes of the product which is resulting in keywords in blue color like image, attributes, quality, consumer behavior, preferences, self-esteem, nostalgia … Also the consequences of globalization is studies which results in keywords such as acculturation, animosity, identity, cosmopolitanism, trust and credibility.

On the product side, the studies focused on the attributes of the image and the perception of the quality of the product and also the determinants of the products. This manifests itself by keywords such as origin, image, country of origin, hybrid of product, attributes, and food products.

Table 6 shows the countries where authors produce the most research on consumer ethnocentrism. This study analyzed the number of articles (TP), the total number of

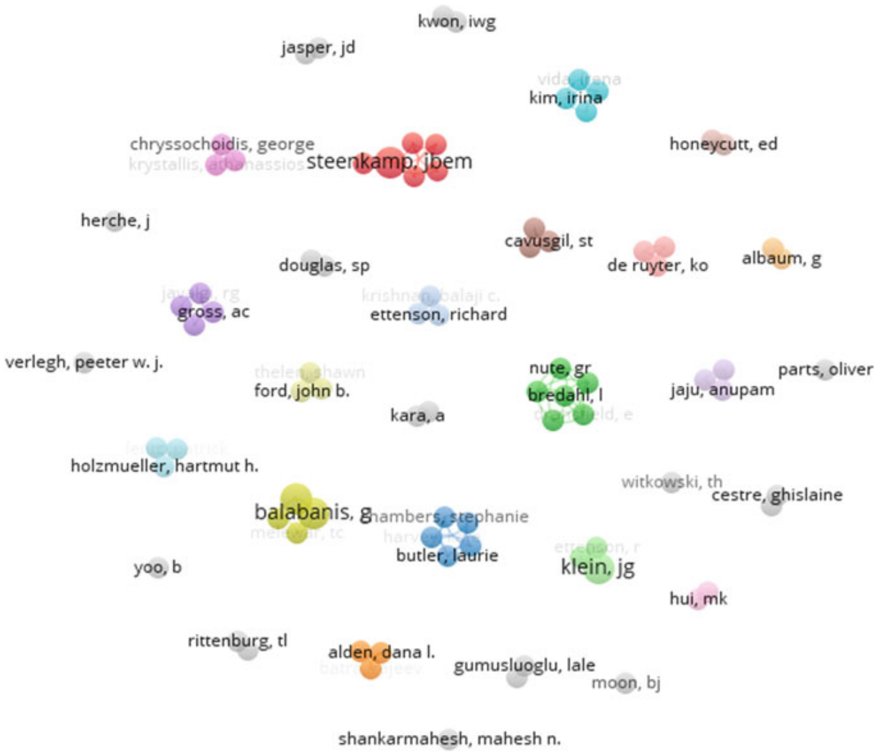

Fig. 3 Co-autorship between 1984 and 2007

citations (TC), average citations per article (C/P), and finally, the h-index, which measures the quality of research output based on the number of citations received.

The United States ranks first with the highest quantity of articles and citations, the highest average citations per article, and the highest h-index in all the three research themes.

Table 6 shows that from 1984 to 2021, scholars from the US produced 145 articles with 2738 total citations, 37.94 citations per article, and an h-index of 24. Most of these journals are US journals, and authors from the US may enjoy greater access to these journals than authors from other countries. The countries with the most publications are English-speaking countries.[1] Thus, English is the most common language for publishing research on consumer ethnocentrism. Few studies exist in other languages because of the difficulty of publishing non-English language research. Currently, most scientific conferences accept research in English only, although exceptions may exist.

The Fig. 5 shows the results of coupling of countries publication on ethnocentrism over 1984–2021. All countries around the world are represented on ethnocentrism

[1] English (466), Turkish (4), Chinese (3), Portuguese, Slovak and Spanish (2).

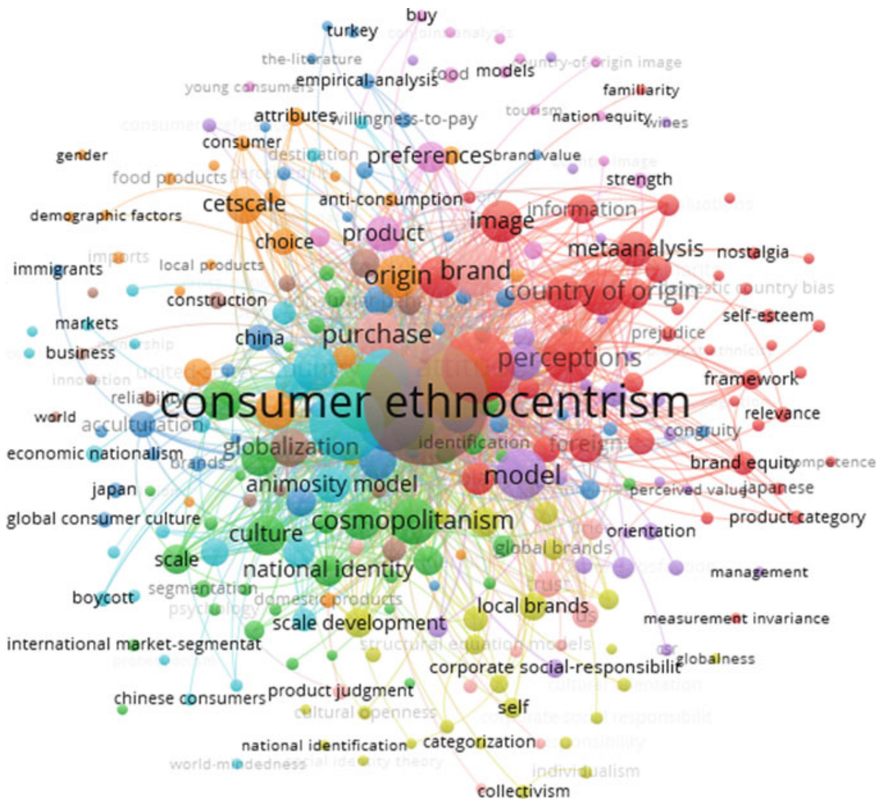

Fig. 4 Keywords Co-occurrence from 2008 to 2021

Table 6 The 10 most productive countries

Countries/regions	Record count	% of 479 (%)
USA	145	30.271
England	50	10.438
Peoples R China	47	9.812
Australia	43	8.977
Spain	27	5.637
Canada	26	5.428
France	23	4.802
Turkey	19	3.967
Austria	17	3.549
Germany	17	3.549

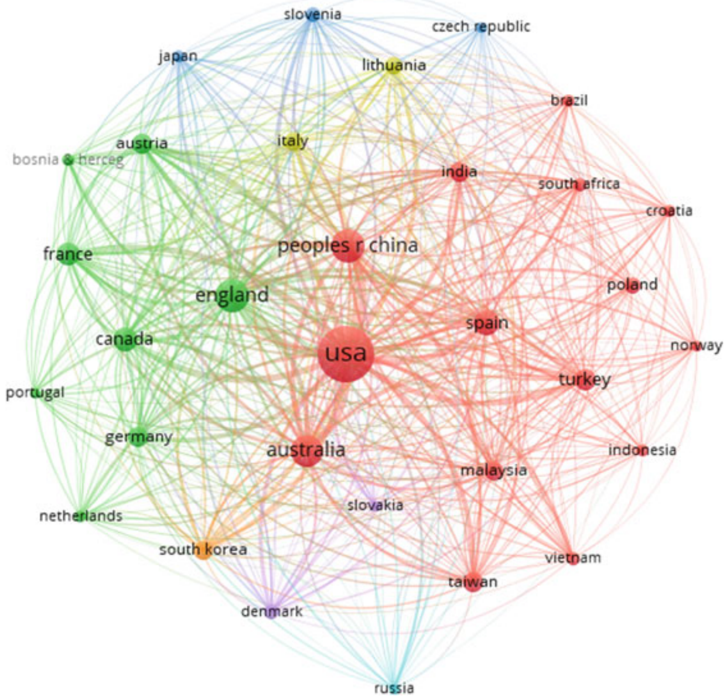

Fig. 5 Countries coupling from 1984 to 2021

researches. We noted countries like the United States, France, England, Turkey, Spain, South Africa, etc. …

In contrast, over the period 1984–2007 (see Fig. 6), there is a strong presence of developing countries such as the US, England, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Estonia, France, Denmark; and some Asian countries like Singapore, India and Kazakhstan. African countries are not represented at all. It is from 2008 to 2021 (see Fig. 7) that African countries appear, like South Africa.

The results of the co-citations journal cited on ethnocentrism over 1984–2021, 1984–2007, 2008–2021, are presented respectively by Figs. 8, 9 and 10.

We note that in 1984–2021 (Fig. 8), a heterogeneity of newspapers that publish on the theme of ethnocentrism. Marketing journals are more represented (*International Marketing Review*, *European Journal of Marketing*, etc.). Journals of business and consumer behavior (*Journal of International Consumer Behavior*, *Journal of Business Research*, etc.), Food Quality (*Journal of Food Products Marketing*), Agricultural Economics, Tourism, Global Fashion, Islamic Marketing are also noted.

However in the period 1984–2007, see Fig. 9, we mainly notice the presence of marketing journals and very few journals in psychology. But, over the period 2008–2021, the journals that publish on the theme of ethnocentrism, have diversified and we

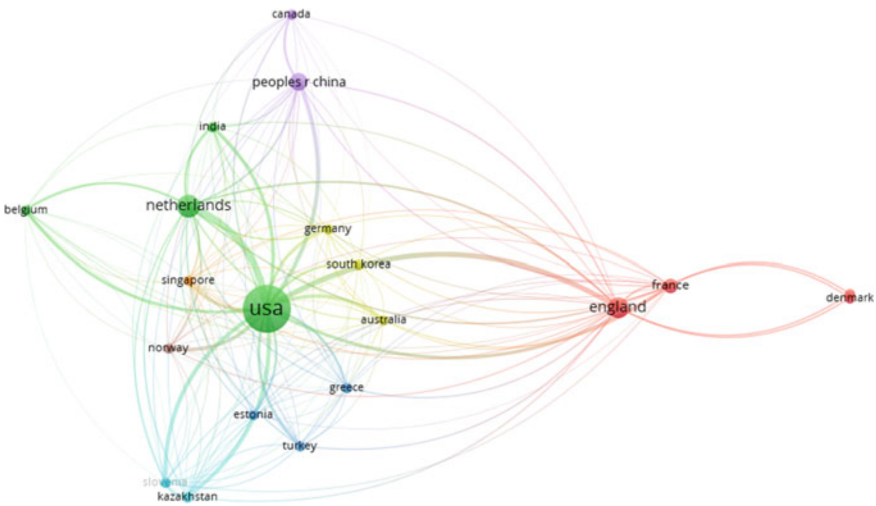

Fig. 6 Countries coupling from 1984 to 2007

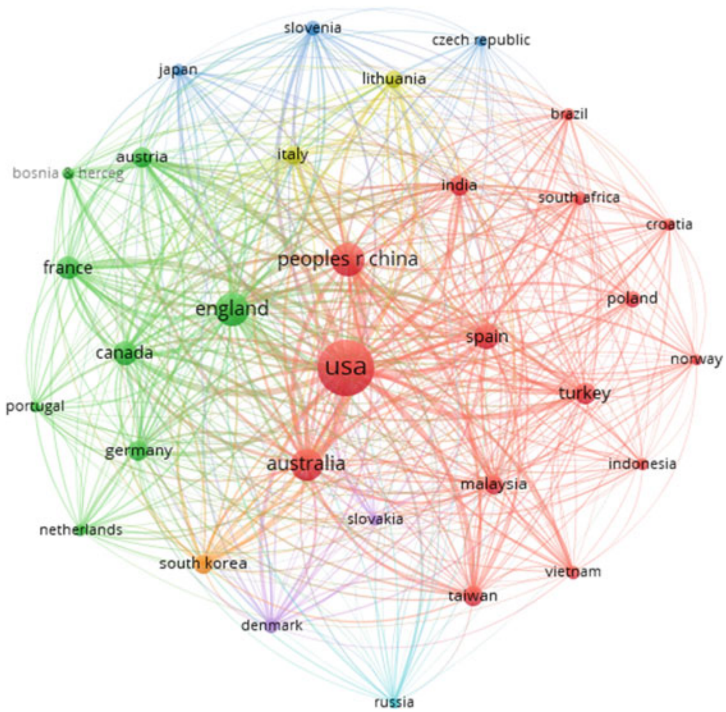

Fig. 7 Countries coupling from 2008 to 2021

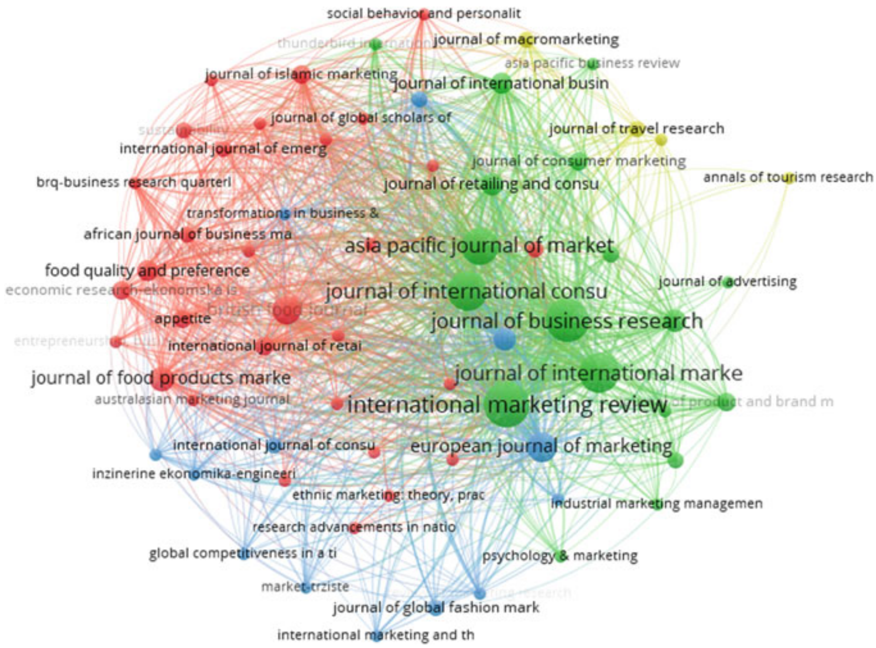

Fig. 8 Journal coupling from 1984 to 2021

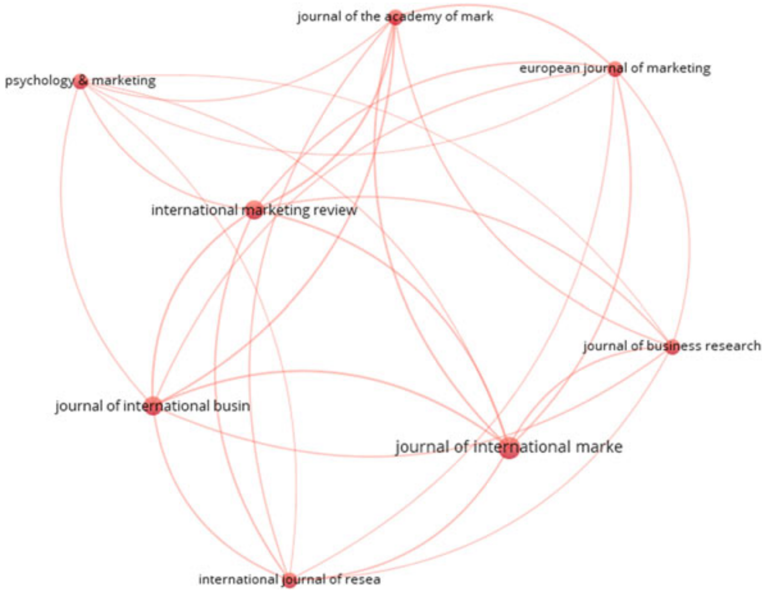

Fig. 9 Journal coupling from 1984 to 2007

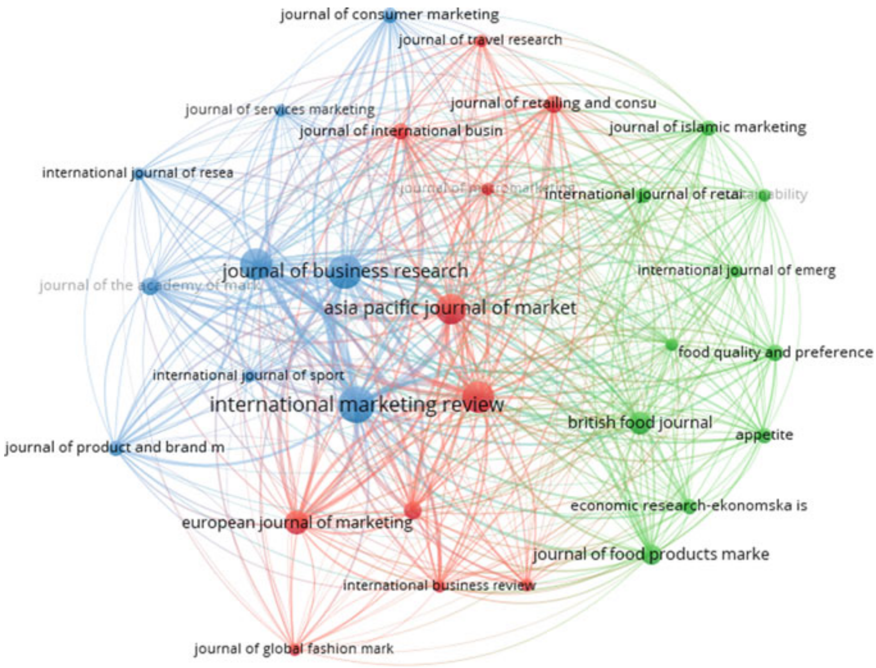

Fig. 10 Journal coupling from 2008 to 2021

Fig. 11 Co-authorship of institutions from 1984 to 2021

Fig. 12 Co-authorship of institutions from 1984 to 2007

note the presence of journals in psychology, Food Quality, Agricultural Economics, Cultural, Social, Psychological, Sensory and Physiological.

Figures 11, 12 and 13 show co-authorship of institutions publishing on ethnocentrism respectively over the periods 1984–2021, 1984–2007, 2008–2021.

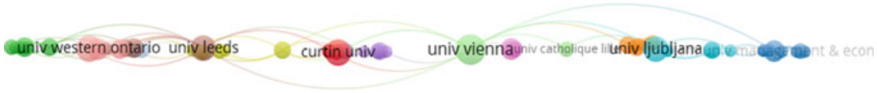

Fig. 13 Co-authorship of institutions from 2008 to 2021

Table 7 The most 10 cited 10 authors from 1984 to 2021

Authors	Record count	% of 479 (%)
Diamantopoulos A	12	2.505
Cleveland M	11	2.296
Balabanis G	9	1.879
Lee R	7	1.461
Sharma P	7	1.461
Gineikiene J	6	1.253
Josiassen A	6	1.253
Reardon J	6	1.253
Fernandez-Ferrin P	5	1.044
Laroche M	5	1.044

There is heterogeneity of universities in co-authorship publishing on ethnocentrism over 1984–2021. The so-called "elite" universities coexist together with those that are not. European, Asian universities also influence publications on ethnocentrism.

Over 1984–2007 (see Fig. 12), there is more collaboration between American universities and between very few European universities. Elite universities seem to attract and retain the most productive researchers' co-authorship over 1984–2007.

In addition, over the period 2008–2021, we note the presence of all the universities over the world. Co-authorship at distance rises steadily during the period, perhaps due to the reduced barriers stemming from innovations in communications technology. These findings are consistent with Laband and Tollison (2000), Rosenblat and Mobius (2004), Goyal et al. (2006), and Agrawal and Goldfarb (2008), who show that decreasing communication costs have increased distant collaboration in academia and opened vast research networks.

Finally, the study analyzes the impact of the most productive authors. Table 7 shows that Diamantopoulos, A. (12 articles) is by far the most prolific author because the other authors have published at most approximately half as many articles.

The authors who publish most on the topic are Cleveland, M. (11 articles), Balabanis, G. (9 articles), Lee, R. (7 articles), Sharma, P. (7 articles), Gineikiene, J. (6 articles). SteenKamp is the most cited author with 2723 citations, then Klein, J.G. with 649 (Tables 7 and 8).

Table 8 Most 5 cited authors

Authors	Total Citations	Average per Year
Steenkamp	2723	113.46
Klein	649	27.04
Batra	579	26.32
Balabanis	375	20.83

5 Conclusions

This article presents a bibliometric overview of the main trends that occurred on consumer ethnocentrism research between 1984 and 2021 using the WoS Core Collection database to collect bibliographic information and determine a wide range of bibliometric indicators.

The study also develops a cartographic analysis of bibliographic material to visualize bibliometric networks seen from different perspectives, including journals, authors, universities and keywords.

The results of the bibliometric analysis show that the number of publications on consumer ethnocentrism grows moderately. Arguably, this may be because, research on consumer ethnocentrism is in its initial stages. Research on this area is poorly represented in business, management, and economics because few reliable sources exist on the Internet. In addition, the knowledge is fragmented because many research areas mention consumer ethnocentrism and its characteristics.

The keywords analysis over the period 1984–2021 suggests 3 major clusters namely (a) the process of the theoretical foundations of ethnocentrism (b) the operability of the concept of ethnocentrism in terms of antecedents and fields of application (c) the intersection between research on the operational aspect of the construct and the conceptual aspect.

The analysis of keywords in sub-periods proposes clusters that correspond to the evolution of the history of contemporary ethnocentrism issues. Thus, over the period 1984–2007, we find research describing the evaluation of the product's scale of measurement. The studies provide an overview of a country's global product strategy. However, over the period 2008–2021, the analysis is refined from the point of view of the consumer and the product.

Furthermore, the study analyzes the trend in academic publications on consumer ethnocentrism, noting three different stages during the 33 years of publications in this field. Next, the study analyzes productivity per country, observing that the country with the largest number of publications is the United States, which may be due to the high proportion of journals in the US. Apart from the United States, nevertheless, the fact that a country has more publications does not mean that they are of higher quality in terms of the number of citations. English is incontestably the most common language in which research on consumer ethnocentrism is published. English is currently the "universal language" and gives authors many more opportunities for publication than any other language.

Most documents in the Web of Science are articles because this format allows authors to publish concise research accounts in prominent research journals. The journals with the most articles on ethnocentric consumer are the *Journal of International Marketing* with 22 articles, *International Marketing Review* with 20 articles, *Journal of Business Research* with 15 articles and *European Journal of Marketing* with 12 articles.

This preeminence may be because these journals accept a greater number of articles in this area of research. Although many publications are part of business research, articles on consumer ethnocentrism enter into many research areas.

The authors with the largest number of publications on consumer ethnocentrism are Diamantopoulos, A., Cleveland, M., Schnettler, B., Sharma, P., and Balabanis, G.

While Diamantopoulos A is the author with the greatest number of publications and the highest H-index, the others authors with the highest h-index-and therefore the greatest productivity are Riefler, P., followed by Cleveland, M., Balabanis, G., Vida, I., and Klein, J. G. This finding may be difficult to interpret due to the supposition that a higher h-index denotes that the article is more pertinent. The two most productive authors are Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) and Shimp and Sharma (1987).

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Chapter 6
The Impact of Mobile Phone Brand Personality on Brand Equity Among Albanian Consumers

Irma Shyle

Abstract Consumers buy the product or brand because of the meaning they have in the social context. Furthermore, the choice of a product or brand by the consumer is a cause of social behavior rather than a result. Consumers' feelings about themselves are often reflected in the brands they choose. One way to build a relationship between the brand and the consumer is by creating a brand personality that is as attractive as possible. This means combining human characteristics with the brand in order to make the brand as attractive to the consumer as possible. This is because personality is a set of traits such as kindness, neighborliness and responsibility, which make a person special and distinct. Numerous studies have focused on how the personality of a brand enables a consumer to express themselves, their ideal self or specific dimensions of themselves by using a brand. The telecommunications industry has been facing significant changes in regulation, technology, and customer demand. Mobile phones, as the industry's biggest revenue generators and the most used communication tools of the twenty-first century, have revolutionized the mode of communication and have made people attached to their phones. One of the reasons for this could be the fact that mobile phones are an all in one tool, including the integration of a digital camera, music and video players, a calendar, a calculator, a game console. The purpose of this paper is to study the relationship that exists between brand personality dimensions and brand equity for the mobile phone brands. The results of indicators for each mobile phone brand, such as the dimensions of sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and ruggedness will determine the impact on brand equity. In the present research paper, the mobile phone market in Albania is represented by four important brands such as iPhone (Apple), Xiaomi, Huawei, Samsung Galaxy. There were analysed 344 samples. Following research, it resulted that the dimensions of sincerity, competence and sophistication have the greatest impact on brand equity of mobile phones and the dimension of excitement and ruggedness have the least impact.

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1 Introduction

Martineau (1957) is among the first researchers to address the concept of product personality but is Aaker (1997) who provided a definition of brand personality. Studies on product brand personality began around 1960. Various researchers around these years as well as Birdwell (1964) primarily focused on the relationship between products and the concept of self. Thus, in his influential study, Birdwell (1964) investigated the relationship between the consumer's self-concept and their perception of their cars. The perceived personality of the machine was measured by using a list of bipolar elements. The adjectives used describe both the personality of vehicles and the human personality. Dolich (1969) later adapted human personality scales to product personality studies by focusing on four products (beer, cigarettes, soap, and toothpaste), focused on the relationship between the current consumer image and the ideal self-image.

However, despite research on product personality, these studies were very poor at the theories on which they were based. Thus, product personality traits may be described as a symbolic consumption of products through direct or indirect contacts (e.g., Fournier, 1998). According to Biel, brand personality is considered as the soft and emotional aspect of the brand image (Biel, 1993). Brand personality refers to a set of human characteristics attributed to a brand (Aaker, 1997). Consumers' affection of self-consistency toward a brand serves as a critical factor for achieving a positive brand personality (Lucia et al., 2011). Winchester and Romaniuk (2008) emphasized that the formation of brand personality has become the most critical task of marketing managers.

Brand personality in particular has a symbolic or self-expressive function as opposed to the utilitarian function of other dimensions of the brand image (Keller, 1993). It helps consumers to express themselves (Belk, 1988) or their ideal self (Malhotra, 1988), and thus the brand personality influences consumer choice (Sirgy, 1982). The first to define brand personality was Aaker (1997) thus defining brand personality as a set of human characteristics associated with the brand. Based on this model, Aaker presented the five-dimensional model of brand personality with the following dimensions (Aaker, 1997):

1. Sincerity with 11 dimensions (practical, honest, useful, cheerful, etc.)
2. Excitement with 11 dimensions (bold, lively, imaginary, modern, etc.)
3. Competence with 9 dimensions (reliable, intelligent, successful, etc.)
4. Sophistication with 6 dimensions (upper class, glamorous, glamor etc.)
5. Ruggedness with 5 dimensions (rough, strong, etc.).

As a result, post 1997; brand personality was tested for its potential relationship with consumer loyalty (Chung et al., 2015). Creating a strong emotional relationship with the brand is one of the main goals of companies worldwide in the present days. Emotions generated by brands are different from one brand to another, especially when consumers are emotionally attached to only a certain number of brands (Thomson et al., 2005). Brand personality or placing human characteristics on a brand is a tool in differentiating the brand from competitors. For companies it is not only important to create a strong brand personality. Companies focus on creating a personality that suits brand users, as well. This is because consumers choose those brands that have a personality, that are in harmony and fit with themselves (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). For brand managers the dilemma they face is how to build a brand personality that matches the personality of the consumers who are its buyers or users. Customer characteristics associated with a specific brand show his/her brand personality (Leckie et al., 2016).

The brand personality is regarded as one of the elements, which constitute the brand relationship being associated in this way with the brand image, perceived value, and brand differentiation versus competitive brands, country of origin or the brand credibility. Brand personality includes symbolic attributes (Aaker, 1996; Chen & Lui, 2004; Keller, 1993) which are intangible characteristics that meet the needs of consumers for social acceptance and approval, personal reflection or self-respect (Hankinson & Cowking, 1993; Keller, 1993; Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). In his study, Jin Su Xiao Tong (2015), showed that not all brand personality dimensions have the same influence in increasing the value of a sportswear brand from a consumer perspective, some dimensions being more efficient than others are.

In this way, the brand personality is considered as a key way to differentiate the product in the product category, as the main driver in consumer preferences and product use, as the common denominator that can be used in the market of an intercultural brand. More and more companies are looking for ways and means to create strong emotional connections between brands and consumers. This is because such links lead to high levels of customer loyalty, which in economic terms means increased financial performance of the company. What is evident in all the studies is the fact that brand equity is considered as a key factor that can bring to the company: high profits, brand expansion opportunities, protection against competitors, effective communication strength but also leads to the strengthening of preferences, consumer purchase intention and customer loyalty (Shyle & Panajoti, 2013).

H1 Brand personality influences on building brand equity

2 Methodology

The selection of mobile phone brands was based on a preliminary test on 20 individuals. The individuals were randomly selected. In the interviews held, the individuals were asked to specify the four most popular phone brands, desired and liked by them. The four most popular or liked brands by the consumers asked were iPhone (Apple), Xiaomi, Huawei, Samsung Galaxy. Participants in this study were asked to determine the degree of importance that each element of brand equity has or even determine the dimensions of brand personality.

The first part focuses on the personality traits and dimensions of the brand: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. The rating scale will be the 5-point Likert scale, according to which the rating will be according to the scale: with 1-extremely non-descriptive and 5-extremely descriptive. The reason we refer to the Likert 5-point rating is because it is one of the most widely used studies in measuring brand equity based on the consumer (Washburn & Plank, 2002).

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on demographic data such as: gender, age, education, income, place of birth, place of residence, etc.

The questionnaire was initially distributed to 60 people. Participants were encouraged to comment on the questionnaire if they found it reasonable and were asked about their opinion whether there were any unclear or recurring questions.

After evaluating the answers given by the selected individuals and taking into account their opinions, the final questionnaire was drafted with 42 questions, and respectively: 11 questions about sincerity, 11 questions about excitement, 9 questions about competence, 6 questions about sophistication, and 5 questions for ruggedness. In the questionnaire, the individuals were required to give their assessment for each epithet (adjective) given to the personality dimensions of the selected brands.

Malhotra et al. (1999) suggested that the minimum sample for research should be at least 200. Therefore, the sample size would be greater than 200 individuals or more precisely the number of valid questionnaires to participate in the data analysis would be not less than 200. Methodology experts were also consulted for a coverage of over 95% of the population. For this reason, for the questionnaire, the sample should be around 320. Taking into consideration incorrect filled or blank questionnaires, it was decided to distribute about 370 questionnaires. The number of valid questionnaires for the data study and analysis was 344 questionnaires.

Data analysis was conducted in SPSS statistical software. Pearson chi square analysis is used to test hypotheses but also to understand the meaning or the relationship of variables with the dimensions of brand equity. Factor analysis was used to find factors among the variables studied by reducing the number of variables and grouping the variables with the same characteristics together. Indicators were used to evaluate the model: Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) which measures the relative amount of variance–covariance, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) which takes into account the sample size, as well as Root Mean Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA) which explains how well the values of the selected parameters are approximated to the population covariance matrix.

3 Data Analysis

From data analysis, it resulted that the highest percentage of respondents belonged to the age group 18–25 years old (64% or 221 individuals) who belonged mainly to Bachelor education (53% or 183 persons). Of the 344 individuals surveyed: 43% ($n = 147$) are employed and 57% ($n = 197$) are unemployed; male 53% ($n = 182$), female 47% ($n = 162$).

344 respondents chose phone brands: 36%—Samsung ($n = 123$); 29%—iPhone (Apple) ($n = 101$); 26%—Xiaomi ($n = 90$); 9%—Huawei ($n = 30$).

The brand equity is summarized in the questionnaire through three summary questions, which according to the answers given in percentage are presented as follows:

Generalization of brand equity	Yes	No
Even if another brand has the same features as the brand X, I prefer to buy the brand X	***82.4***	***17.6***
If any other brand is no different from the brand X, then it is wise to buy the brand X	***75.6***	***24.4***
The brand X is more than a product to me	***65.7***	***34.3***

From the data provided by the questionnaires it resulted that 82.4% think that even if another brand has the same features as brand X individuals prefer to buy brand X and only 17.6% do not prefer to buy it.

Sincerity. From the group of sincerity dimensions, based on coefficients of factor weights, the categories of *small-town, family-oriented, original smartphones* are not included in the analysis. The KMO test that has a value higher than 0.8 indicates the use of factor analysis for a very suitable analysis. The Bartlett's test is also another very good indicator of the strength of the relationship between the variables. **This tests H0 according to which the correlation matrix has all the values of the principal diagonal are 1 and all other elements are 0**. For a probability of 5% or 0.05, the significance level is much smaller than the value "p" which indicates that the null hypothesis falls. By fixing the value at 0.4 to exclude all variables that have a factor weight less than this value we obtain the following table:

	Smartphone			
	Before removing the variables		After removing the variables	
Down-to-earth	*0.466*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.841*	*0.428*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.834*
Family-oriented	*0.395*	Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *893.698* *P*-value *0.000*		Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *768.997* *P*-value *0.000*
Small-town	*0.200*			
Sincere	*0.524*		*0.529*	
Real	*0.424*		*0.478*	

(continued)

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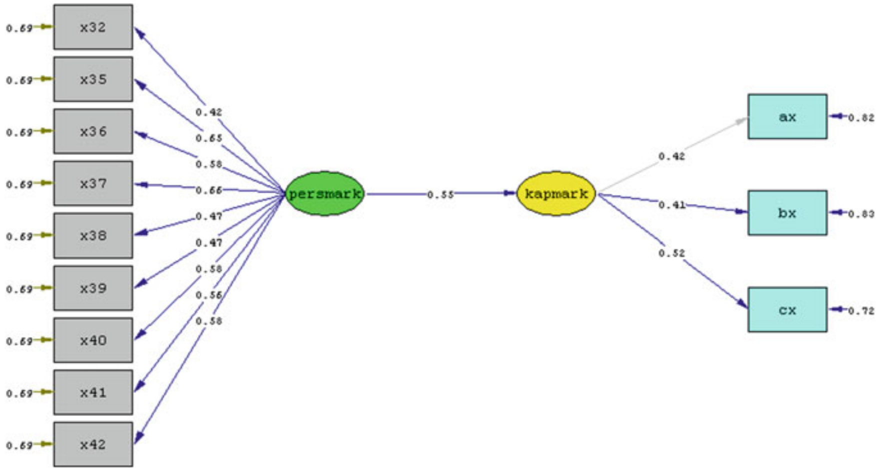
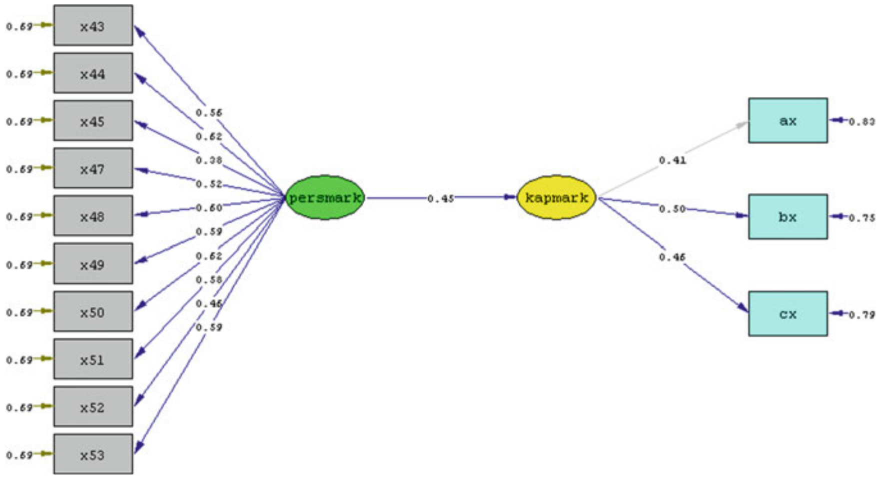
	Smartphone			
	Before removing the variables		After removing the variables	
Down-to-earth	*0.466*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.841*	*0.428*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.834*
Honest	*0.542*		*0.545*	
Wholesome	*0.500*		*0.530*	
Original	*0.342*			
Cheerful	*0.492*		*0.518*	
Sentimental	*0.654*		*0.669*	
Friendly	*0.605*		*0.617*	



The variables that express sincerity as an integral group of brand personality indicate a positive relationship with brand equity (0.55). Looking at the GFI and AGFI coefficients that are less than 0.9 indicate a moderate degree of correlation of these set of variables with the set of brand equity variables. In addition, RMSEA, which is close to 0.1, confirms the first two coefficients.

Excitement. For the second group of brand personality, namely excitement, the analysis does not include *up-to-date phones*. Based on statistical tests, both the KMO test and Bartlett's test are important for $p = 5\%$, which shows that factor analysis is also valid.

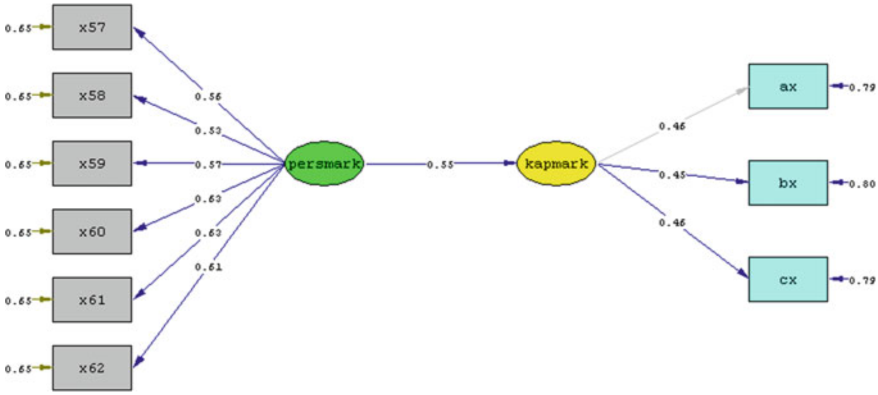
	Smartphone			
	Before removing the variables		After removing the variables	
Daring	*0.523*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.837*	*0.529*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.838*
Alive	*0.643*	Bartlett's test of sphericity	*0.669*	Bartlett's test of sphericity
Imaginative	*0.595*	Approx. Chi-Square = *883.542*	*0.630*	Approx. Chi-Square = *861.098*
Up-to-date	*0.361*	*P*-value *0.000*		*P*-value = *0.000*
Trendy	*0.642*		*0.675*	
Exciting	*0.471*		*0.499*	
Cool	*0.447*		*0.453*	
Young	*0.481*		*0.505*	
Unique	*0.626*		*0.629*	
Independent	*0.742*		*0.792*	
Contemporary	*0.547*		*0.586*	
Extraction method: principal component analysis				



Variables that explain excitement as a subset of brand personality positively affect brand equity (0.45). The RMSEA coefficient is close to 1 but slightly below 1, GFI is greater than 0.9 but AGFI is less than 0.9.

Competence. The group of competence's variables based on coefficients of factor analysis does not include the phone analysis for the following: *reliable*, *hardworking, secure*, *technical* and *confident*. The KMO test and the Bartlett's test indicate as a valid measurement the use of factor analysis and the variables relate to each other.

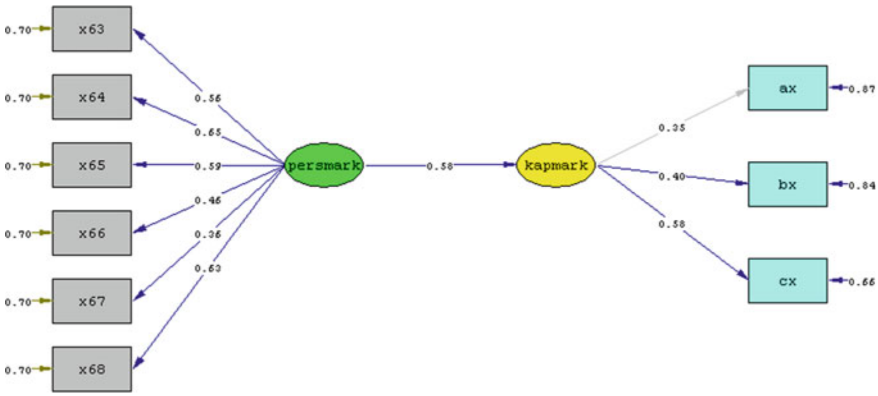
	Smartphone			
	Before removing the variables		After removing the variables	
Reliable	*0.363*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.859*		Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.720*
Hard working	*0.331*	Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *687.600* *P*-value = *0.000*		Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *220.787* *P*-value = *0.000*
Secure	*0.387*			
Intelligent	*0.402*		*0.417*	
Technical	*0.321*			
Corporate	*0.425*		*0.519*	
Successful	*0.465*		*0.588*	
Leader	*0.448*		*0.559*	
Confident	*0.396*			
Extraction method: principal component analysis				



The variables that make up the competence group have a positive effect on brand equity (+0.55). This relationship is statistically significant by analyzing the coefficients of RMSEA (<0.6), GFI (>0.9) and AGFI (>0.9).

Sophistication. For the descriptive group of sophistication for phone brands all variables are included in the analysis based on the exclusion according to the coefficients of the factor analysis. All values of the factor weights for smartphones for both groups of variables are greater than 0.4. More than 80% of the variance is calculated as a variable for phones. KMO > 0.7 indicates the use of factor analysis for a valid measurement.

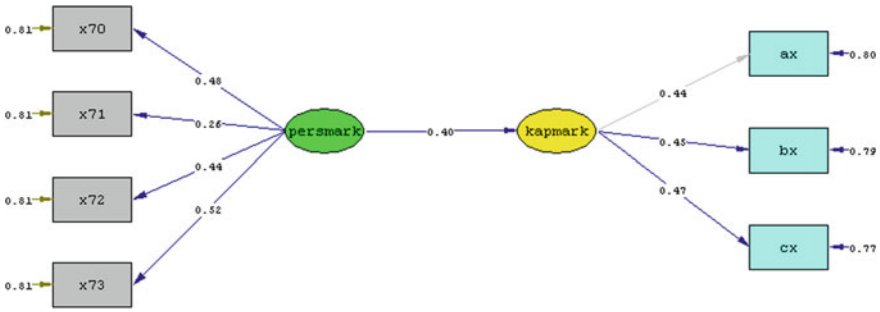
	Smartphone	
Upper class	*0.511*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.703*
Glamorous	*0.697*	Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *505.345* *P*-value = *0.000*
Good looking	*0.564*	
Feminine	*0.796*	
Smooth	*0.813*	
Charming	*0.556*	
Extraction method: principal component analysis		



There is a positive correlation (0.58) between the variables of sophistication and brand equity. This connection is not important considering the model as a whole. RMSEA coefficients (>0.1), GFI (<0.9), AGFI (<0.9).

Ruggedness. The group of ruggedness variables does not only include the variable for the following smartphones: *outdoorsy*. Factor analysis is a valid measurement based on the KMO test and Bartlett's test.

	Smartphone			
	Before removing the variables		After removing the variables	
Outdoorsy	*0.375*	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.611*		Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = *0.565*
Masculine	*0.571*	Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *131.350* *P*-value = *0.000*	*0.533*	Bartlett's test of sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = *87.933* *P*-value = *0.000*
Western	*0.707*		*0.800*	
Tough	*0.682*		*0.705*	
Rugged	*0.499*		*0.601*	
Extraction method: principal component analysis				



There is a positive correlation for phone brand (0.40) between the variables of brand personality ruggedness and brand equity. AGFI and GFI are greater than 0.9, RMSEA is less than 0.9 which explains a good model and an important relationship between the variables in the model.

The correlation coefficients for the group of brand personality variables examine three questions related to brand equity, assessing the statistical significance.

	Correlation coefficients			*P*-value		
	Even if another brand has the same features as the brand X, I prefer to buy the brand X	If any other brand is no different from the brand X, then it is wise to buy the brand X	The brand X is more than a product to me	Even if another brand has the same features as the brand X, I prefer to buy the brand X	If any other brand is no different from the brand X, then it is wise to buy the brand X	The brand X is more than a product to me
Down-to-earth	*0.118*	*0.216*	*0.158*	*0.014*	*0.000*	*0.002*
Sincere	*0.163*	*0.064*	*0.227*	*0.001*	*0.119*	*0.000*
Real	*0.166*	*0.141*	*0.216*	*0.001*	*0.004*	*0.000*
Honest	*0.177*	*0.150*	*0.238*	*0.000*	*0.003*	*0.000*
Wholesome	*0.083*	*0.231*	*0.201*	*0.062*	*0.000*	*0.000*
Original	*0.002*	*0.228*	*0.152*	*0.487*	*0.000*	*0.002*
Cheerful	*0.081*	*0.053*	*0.201*	*0.066*	*0.163*	*0.000*
Sentimental	*0.139*	*0.018*	*0.129*	*0.005*	*0.371*	*0.008*
Friendly	*0.048*	*0.044*	*0.101*	*0.189*	*0.209*	*0.030*
Daring	*0.016*	*0.148*	*0.168*	*0.382*	*0.003*	*0.001*
Alive	*0.038*	*0.094*	*0.126*	*0.241*	*0.041*	*0.010*
Imaginative	*0.059*	*0.008*	*0.104*	*0.138*	*0.441*	*0.027*
Trendy	*−0.010*	*0.084*	*0.091*	*0.430*	*0.060*	*0.046*

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	Correlation coefficients			*P*-value		
	Even if another brand has the same features as the brand X, I prefer to buy the brand X	If any other brand is no different from the brand X, then it is wise to buy the brand X	The brand X is more than a product to me	Even if another brand has the same features as the brand X, I prefer to buy the brand X	If any other brand is no different from the brand X, then it is wise to buy the brand X	The brand X is more than a product to me
Exciting	*0.089*	*0.143*	*0.143*	*0.050*	*0.004*	*0.004*
Cool	*0.027*	*0.161*	*0.132*	*0.310*	*0.001*	*0.007*
Young	*0.063*	*0.198*	*0.169*	*0.120*	*0.000*	*0.001*
Unique	*0.133*	*0.190*	*0.193*	*0.007*	*0.000*	*0.000*
Independent	*0.098*	*0.085*	*0.108*	*0.035*	*0.058*	*0.023*
Contemporary	*0.115*	*0.215*	*0.106*	*0.017*	*0.000*	*0.025*
Intelligent	*0.136*	*0.058*	*0.164*	*0.006*	*0.140*	*0.001*
Technical	*0.079*	*0.222*	*0.143*	*0.071*	*0.000*	*0.004*
Corporate	*0.134*	*0.107*	*0.156*	*0.006*	*0.023*	*0.002*
Successful	*0.130*	*0.228*	*0.150*	*0.008*	*0.000*	*0.003*
Leader	*0.175*	*0.115*	*0.189*	*0.001*	*0.016*	*0.000*
Upper class	*0.158*	*0.174*	*0.276*	*0.002*	*0.001*	*0.000*
Glamorous	*0.086*	*0.130*	*0.218*	*0.055*	*0.008*	*0.000*
Good looking	*0.087*	*0.272*	*0.224*	*0.053*	*0.000*	*0.000*
Feminine	*0.050*	*0.074*	*0.116*	*0.177*	*0.086*	*0.016*
Smooth	*−0.052*	*−0.001*	*0.094*	*0.169*	*0.496*	*0.041*
Charming	*0.025*	*0.087*	*0.257*	*0.321*	*0.054*	*0.000*
Masculine	*0.076*	*0.082*	*0.184*	*0.079*	*0.065*	*0.000*
Western	*0.017*	*0.095*	*0.129*	*0.376*	*0.040*	*0.008*
Tough	*0.034*	*0.048*	*0.022*	*0.264*	*0.186*	*0.345*
Rugged	*0.035*	*0.098*	*0.134*	*0.261*	*0.034*	*0.006*

The variables that are not group-related to other variables based on factorial analysis are excluded from this analysis. Variables: smooth and trendy with the brand equity variable “Even if another brand has the same features as the brand X, I will buy it” has a negative but not statistically significant relationship. All other variables of all the descriptive groups of brand personality positively affect the three variables of brand equity building. This confirms the hypothesis that brand personality variables have a positive effect on brand equity building. By analyzing the coefficients of the KMO, having a value greater than 0.8 and the Bartlett’s test indicates for a good measure the use of factor analysis.

4 Discussion and Implications

Aaker (1997) used personality psychology to develop “brand personality scales”, in order to identify the model of the Big Five or five dimensions, McCrae and Costa (1990).

Sincerity in the Aaker’s model consists of 11 traits. The X brand has 8 features, so, the features of: *small-town, family-oriented, original* are excluded for this dimension from the general features according to Aaker.

Brand X has 10 features for the dimension of excitement compared to the Aaker model (11 features) and the modern feature is excluded.

Competence according to the Aaker model consists of 9 features. The brand X has 5 features and the features that are excluded are the following: reliable, hardworking, secure, and confident.

Sophistication in the Aaker model consists of 6 features. The brand X has the same features and the same number, i.e. 6 features as in the Aaker model.

Ruggedness in the Aaker model consists of 5 features. The brand X has 4 features and the feature that is excluded from the Aaker model for this brand is: outdoorsy.

Meanwhile, in terms of the impact that the dimensions of brand X personality have on the brand equity X, based on correlation analysis, and factor analysis, it is clear that personality dimensions affect brand equity, but to a moderate degree.

For smartphone brands (X), the dimensions of sincerity, competence and sophistication (with indicators greater than 0.5) have the greatest impact on brand equity and the dimension of excitement and ruggedness have the least impact (with an indicator greater than 0.4 but less than 0.5).

5 Recommendations

This study makes an important contribution to the understanding of brand personality and brand equity in the context of mobile phones.

One of the recommendations that emerges from the conclusions of this paper is to conduct further studies in the future on this topic, but being specified on one age group so as to study the behavior with brands, with the loyalty in the purchase, with the dimensions of the brand capital or even with the personality of the brand, etc.

Companies should focus on building brand capital, which is very important. The difference that brands have from each other is related to their identification, combination and importance that each of the dimensions of the brand has. Brand companies should pay more attention to the elements related to packaging, packaging information or even marketing campaigns to make brands more distinctive, so that the consumer perceives the consistent quality of these brands. To stand out from the crowd each company has to develop strategies about brand personality, to understand better the personality of consumers and to offer a product/service that matches their needs.

Another company objective is to convince consumers that their brands are not only distinctive but also innovative, because the research paper clearly shows that the consumer's relationship with the brand is innovative and safe. This action helps companies to turn into loyal buyers of their products and influencers, recommending the brand bought by them. This may be achieved through mixed marketing policies, but also by differentiating their brand more distinctly from competing brands.

From the results of this study regarding the relationship between brand personality and consumer personality, product designers and marketing staff should take advantage of brand personality traits by developing a marketing plan in line with these traits. We can also emphasize that by using brand personality, a product will be differentiated from other brands. Moreover, the attraction or connection with the brand can be done better using the brand personality.

6 Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study lie in the fact that the number of respondents is small and most of them belong to the age group of 18–25 years old. Most of the respondents are residents in the capital, and the data are not representative for the whole population.

Thus, future studies may focus on greater involvement of different age groups as well as among respondents in different cities. In addition, since the brands included in the study are among the brands used in other countries, it would be interesting to do in the future a comparative study on the personality of the phone brand in 2 or more countries.

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Chapter 7
How Fair is the Handling of the Claimant Customer? A Comparison Between the e-mail and Telephone Channels

Sara Tahali and Hélène Yildiz

Abstract Context: Our study re-examines, in a comparative way, the impact of the reactivity on the satisfaction of the claiming customer from two channels: the email and the telephone.

Method: Based on the foundations of the theory of justice, we analyze which of the two channels generates better responsiveness, better justice and ultimately greater satisfaction of the claimant customers. A logistic equation was constructed from 653 customer responses following the processing of their claim, which integrated the impact of responsiveness on the three levels of justice theory (procedural, distributive and interactional).

Results: The results of this study underline a greater reactivity and a better satisfaction within the framework of the email channel compared to the telephone channel. The level of procedural fairness was found to be the most important for customers claiming via this channel.

Conclusion: This study underlines, on the one hand, the importance of the reactivity of the email channel compared to the telephone in the management of complaints. On the other hand, it shows the impact of a smooth and clear process to satisfy the complaining customer and increase his perceived justice.

Keywords Complaint · Responsiveness · Theory of justice · Satisfaction · Multi-channel · Email channel

1 Literature Review

One of the biggest developments in complaints management is the introduction of new communication channels in the handling of customer requests and complaints.

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The new technological solutions focused on the digitalization of customer relations, allow the major brands operating in this sector to better adapt their products, to be more easily accessible for consumers/customers, but also to catch the attention of a modern, connected generation that would opt more for communication channels other than voice. It is therefore a question of digitisation that has already begun but needs to be developed.

The ultimate goal behind this policy of digitalising complaint handling is customer satisfaction. In order to win back the customer after a complaint, it is necessary to detect the expectations of the complaining consumer. Davidow (2000), mentioned the principle of six dimensions affecting the overall satisfaction of claimants in the service sector, especially with regard to responses to these complaints. These dimensions are respectively: timeliness of response, facilitation, redress, apology, credibility, and attention. Speaking of responsiveness, TARP (Technical Assistance Research Program) (1981) were the first to speak of a positive relationship between speed of response and customer satisfaction. Conlon and Murray (1996), even spoke of its impact not only on satisfaction but also on consumer brand loyalty. As a result, the influence of complaint handling whether on satisfaction, loyalty, word of mouth or repurchase intention of consumers has been widely highlighted in the literature (Migacz et al., 2018). This implies that companies should take the severity of complaints seriously when adopting strategies for handling and responding to them (Crisafulli & Singh, 2017; Zhu et al., 2004). In this sense, Wies et al. (2019) noted that companies nowadays are even willing to invest more in handling complaints.

Although an unanswered complaint directly leads to reputational damage for the entity (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018). It has been proven that the speed of response and resolution of the problem positively influence the level of consumer satisfaction, regardless of the severity level of the complaint (Liu et al., 2019; Mattila & Mount, 2006). Moreover, previous studies claim that responsiveness is able to create a good reputation and improve the company's performance by increasing its sales (Xie et al., 2014; Ye et al., 2008).

Previous studies have investigated the link between responsiveness and satisfaction in an omni-channel context. On social networks, for example (Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Johnen et al., 2018), or on Facebook in particular (Rosenmayer, et al., 2018). But what about companies offering multi-channel complaint handling? The objective of this study is to analyze which of the two channels, email or phone, ensures a greater reactivity of the complaint processing, in fine the satisfaction of the claiming customer. Reactivity is an important determinant of customer satisfaction. Therefore, our research question is the following: In a multi-channel context, is the reactivity of complaint response more important for the email channel or for the telephone channel?

To answer this question, we mobilize the theory of justice, with its three levels. In the following paragraphs, a review of the literature will be presented, followed by the theoretical framework and the hypotheses of the research, the methodology and the results of the study. Finally, the different contributions will be presented, along with the limitations and future research avenues.

2 Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Research around claims has mobilized an array of theories, among others attribution theory (Swanson & Hsu, 2011), mental accounting theory (Chuang et al., 2012), equity theory (Wen & Chi, 2013) as well as the expectation disconfirmation paradigm (McCollough et al., 2000).

Furthermore, several studies have mobilized justice theory to identify the impact of complaints on customer satisfaction (Migacz et al., 2018). By adopting the foundations of justice theory, the impact of complaints on customer satisfaction has been widely endorsed in the literature (Migacz et al., 2018). However, this topic has not yet been applied in a multi-channel complaint context. So, this research aims more specifically at the impact of responsiveness on customer satisfaction by comparing between two frequent channels in complaint management: email and phone. To study this problem, this research adopts Rawls' (1971) theory of justice. The underlying principle behind the use of this theory is simple: the more the company invests and makes efforts to recover the complaining customer, the better the justice that will be rendered (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004).

According to the theory of justice, the interactions specific to claims generate evaluations of three levels of justice: procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice (Rawls, 1971). Research has proven the adaptability of this theory to several fields including politics (Schlosberg, 2013), sociology (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983), criminology (Kraska, 2006), but also the field of marketing and management (Greenberg, 1987). The use of this theory in the field of complaints is appropriate insofar as it has been mostly adopted by entities (e.g. hotels) in order to solve service failure problems (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003), or to improve the perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty of complaining customers (Liat et al., 2017).

The results of Balaji et al. (2017) emphasize the relationship between perceived unfairness and claimant customer satisfaction. This led us to closely study the responsiveness in handling the claimant customer, linking it to several other dimensions that act in the customer/firm relationship. These factors will be linked to the three levels of justice theory, namely procedural, distributive and interactional justice.

- Procedural justice refers to the procedures and decisions that a company puts in place to resolve a conflict (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). The dimension of clarity of response will cover this level of justice for our research.
- Distributive justice is the extent to which customers feel fairly treated in relation to the outcome of their claim management (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002, 241). This will be measured in this study through the claim resolution variable.
- Interactional justice, on the other hand, is associated with the relational quality provided by staff throughout the claim management process (Swanson & Hsu,

2011). Friendliness/courtesy, knowledge of the case, understanding of expectations, and the ability to adapt responses to the situation are variables we use to study the impact of responsiveness on this level of justice.

Whether the variables considered for the level of procedural, relational or distributive justice, all the measurement scales come from the literature. The table below shows the measurement scales adopted for each of the variables.

To represent and complete the level of interactional justice as formulated by the company, a scale comprising eight dimensions was used. This concerns in particular the three variables of this level of justice, namely knowledge of the file, the ability to adapt the response and the understanding of expectations. To answer the questionnaire, each of the eight dimensions was given a score between 1 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale, as for all other variables.

This study will therefore enable us to understand and analyse the behaviour of the consumer claimant, as well as his perception of the reactivity in the handling of his claim on three dimensions: the procedures put in place to resolve his claim, the relational quality with which he was taken care of throughout the process, as well as the final resolution of his claim.

Thus, the following part will expose the hypotheses developed to study this problem.

2.2 Research Hypotheses

In the world of customer relations, complaints are seen as a golden opportunity to anticipate and avoid service failures (Loo et al., 2013). Many studies have demonstrated the significant relationship between claimant satisfaction and the organizational response they received (Brock, et al., 2013; Istanbulluoglu, 2017; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Particularly, the speed of the response has shown its strong impact on the claimant's behavior both on his satisfaction and on his repurchase intention (Conlon & Murray, 1996; Smith et al., 1999), or even on his willingness to do WOM (Davidow, 2000). Contrary to these results, other researchers believe that the speed of response would only be effective in the case of a non-monetary claim (Gilly & Gelb, 1982), or only if the response provided contains the solution to the claim (Clark et al., 1992).

Complaint management is a process triggered by a complaint issue, generating a succession of interactions through which a decision and an outcome take place (Tax et al., 1998). On the one hand, it has been found that when a dissatisfied customer makes a complaint to the company, he or she expects at least a response acknowledging receipt of the complaint (Strauss & Hill, 2001). On the other hand, Urueña and Hidalgo (2016) confirmed that the non-reply or late response to a complaint can decrease the perceived justice in the claimant. For this reason, van Janda et al. (2021) emphasized that organizational response is a crucial element to achieve a better satisfaction of the claimant customer. For the same researchers, a personalized, fast and qualitative response is a key factor to achieve post-claim satisfaction. On the other hand, a late response can be perceived, by the claimant, as a lack of responsiveness and interest in his concerns (Istanbulluoglu, 2017), which is a great negative point for the company that can damage its image and reputation. So, here is another point that emphasizes the importance of responsiveness in handling complaints.

Davidow (2000) was among the first to study the importance of speed of response and its influence on post-claim behaviour (Davidow, 2003). In his model, Davidow (2000) explained that organizational responses directly influence claimant satisfaction as well as subsequent behavior expressed primarily by WOM, and repurchase intention. Indeed, through this model, the researcher presented six important characteristics of an effective organizational response to a claim. These variables are respectively (1) speed of response, (2) facilitation, (3) redress, (4) apology, (5), credibility, and (6) attention. We note the importance of speed of response which stands out at the top of the list. For Davidow, speed of response refers to "*the perceived speed with which an organization responds to or processes a complaint*" (Davidow, 2003).

With the development of online services, complaint handling and management has imposed its usefulness and importance also in the world of internet and social networks (Javornik et al., 2020). Because of this, Stevens et al. (2018) mainly studied the response to online complaints, and highlighted the significant importance of both speed, transparency and trust in handling them. According to the same study, the speed of response to online complaints mainly relies on two steps namely (1) Recruit and train the right people, and (2) respond quickly.

From these results we capitalize on the importance of the speed of response in the complaint handling process, both online and by phone. But which channel allows us to achieve better reactivity, better perceived justice and ultimately satisfaction of the claimant?

The answer to this question makes it possible to solve the problem of this article by studying which of the channels, e-mail or telephone, ensures a rapid response and therefore better reactivity and perceived justice. Indeed, the comparison between the two channels is based on two main dimensions, namely responsiveness and justice perceived by the claimant (with its three levels).

The following are the hypotheses arising from this research:

H1: The responsiveness of email is a better way to achieve procedural justice than the telephone.

H2: Reactivity on the e-mail allows, more than the telephone, to reach distributive justice.

H3: Reactivity on the e-mail allows, more than the telephone, to reach interactional justice.

3 Methodology and Results

3.1 Methodology

In order to study the problem, this research adopted a quantitative study through a satisfaction questionnaire sent automatically to the customers after finalizing the processing and closing of their claim. This online questionnaire is based on the 5-modality Likert scale and on scales from the literature. At the end of this study, 1000 returns were collected and 653 were exploited.

For this research, our quantitative study consists in exploiting a database already prepared by the company and which represents an extraction of satisfaction survey responses sent to customers after each contact by telephone or by email following a complaint. This questionnaire was adapted to add measurement scales from the literature, mainly for the variables representing the three levels of justice (Jeanpert et al., 2021; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003). The measurement scales were taken from the literature and a confirmatory validation phase was carried out. The confirmatory analysis led us to reduce the number of initial items, by removing the items presenting simultaneously high saturations on the two factors or saturations that were too low.

To assess the quality of representation of the items in relation to the components, empirical thresholds are established such that a variance of the items explained by the principal components greater than 0.80 shows that the descriptions are well represented. They are moderately well represented when it is between 0.40 and 0.65. They are poorly represented below 0.40 and should be removed (Churchill, 1979; Spector, 1994).

To measure responsiveness (the pivotal variable of the research), our study adopts the concept of CES (Customer Effort Service). The latter means "the degree of effort *customers expend to integrate company resources, across a range of activities of varying levels of perceived difficulty*" (Sweeney et al., 2015).

3.2 Results

In order to exploit the results of the quantitative study and to investigate our main research question which is the responsiveness of the email channel compared to the telephone, we used Stata software to analyse the 653 observations. A logistic regression model was built to study the different hypotheses formulated. The logistic regression is by integrating as dependent variable Telephone = 0 and mail = 1 (Table 1) and independent variables resolution_mail, interactional_mail, procedural and some control variables such as age, gender.

The results obtained from the estimation of the logistic regression model with Telephone = 0 and mail = 1 as the dependent variable are shown in Table 1.

The analysis of the results shows that email is perceived as more responsive in terms of procedural justice. Indeed, the clarity of the response is perceived more

Table 1 Results of the estimation of the logistic regression model

	Channel choice	
Variables	Coef	Effect
	estimated	marginal
Resolution_mail	0.324NS	0.612NS
	(0,596)	(0,875)
Interactional_mail	−1.3247NS	−1.3840NS
	(0,8686)	(1,67)
Procedural_mail	1,4511**	1,67**
	(0,8686)	(0,8686)
Age	−0.00032NS	−0.0012NS
	(0,596)	(0,875)
Sex	1.5324NS	0.612NS
	(0,596)	(0,875)
Constant	−1,21,499)	-
	(0,0693)	-
Model fit		
R2 = 0,1118		
LR (×2) = 7,43		
Log likelihood = 29,5377		
Probability = 0,0000		
N = 653		

Note ***significant at 1%, **significant at 5%, *significant at 10%, NS values in brackets are standard deviations

strongly by the email channel. The value of the marginal effect is evaluated at 1.67 and is significant at less than 5% suggesting that the perception of procedural justice is more important for email than for the telephone.

However, the relationship between responsiveness and the other levels of justice (interactional and distributive) is not significant (interactional “NS” and distributive “NS”).

4 Contributions, Implications and Limitations of the Research

4.1 Theoretical and Managerial Contributions of the Research

The objective of this article is to examine which of the two channels (telephone or email) ensures better reactivity and therefore better perceived justice for the claimant.

The results of this research make important theoretical and managerial contributions.

From a theoretical perspective, the study had two main contributions. The first is the mobilization of the theory of justice to study mainly the impact of the speed of response on the perceived justice of the claimant customer. Indeed, previous studies have included speed as one of several characteristics to investigate its importance in claim management and its impact on satisfaction mainly (e.g. Stevens et al., 2018). Yet no study, to our knowledge, has used justice theory primarily to analyze the impact of responsiveness on perceived justice. The second theoretical contribution of the research concerns the comparison between the two channels mail and telephone. Indeed, no study has adopted a comparative approach between two channels to study this same issue.

From a managerial point of view, we note from these results that the notion of responsiveness is more important on the e-mail channel than on the telephone channel, and is also a major element of satisfaction on this channel. We also found that responsiveness, for the claimant, is only significant in relation to the level of procedural justice. This would mean that the quality and fluidity of the procedures put in place for handling complaints are a key factor in both the responsiveness and satisfaction of the claimant client.

This could be explained by the efficiency of the procedures put in place by the company in the complaint management process, which results in a quick handling of the complaint, a better perception of responsiveness and consequently a better customer satisfaction.

This element representing the level of procedural justice is more important than the relational quality and demand resolution corresponding to the other two levels of justice (interactional and distributive).

4.2 Managerial Implications

Based on these results, some recommendations can be made to companies to improve their responsiveness in managing complaints. This could be done in particular through the following actions:

- Train staff and operational teams: as the importance of employee involvement in the success of the complaint management process has been endorsed by Wombacher and Felfe (2017). We recommend the company to train the operational teams regarding all the business procedures instituted to handle the customer's complaint effectively and efficiently.
- Improve the planning of customer advisors: A better planning of the operational teams could allow, on the one hand, to increase the availability rate of the advisor, and on the other hand, to decrease the waiting time of the customer. By acting on the planning, in addition to training, the company would have a team that is not only trained but also available and willing to take care of customer requests both by email and by phone.
- Challenge and motivate teams: Hong et al. (1995) point out that staff motivation has an impact on their productivity and performance. Indeed, a team is more productive when it is informed of the objectives assigned to it, while ensuring a sufficient level of motivation (financial and/or moral) to achieve them under the best conditions. We therefore recommend that companies put in place means to motivate teams in relation to the objectives to be reached in terms of responsiveness. We are thinking in particular of performance bonuses, challenges between teams, etc.
- Implementing the dynamics of commercial gestures: Cummings and Seitchik (2020) have shown the crucial importance of compensation in the complaint management process. Whether monetary or non-monetary, commercial gestures are a determining tool in the satisfaction and loyalty of the complaining customer (Fu et al., 2015; Kwon & Jang, 2012). Because of this, we suggest that the company implement and enforce a grid for the attribution of sales gestures. This could be done, for example, by segmenting customers according to criteria (e.g., achieved turnover and seniority) so that each gesture is offered commensurate with the importance of the customer and the harm experienced.
- Implementing a "*Community management*" dedicated to the handling of complaints: It has been proven, on the one hand, that the way in which a complaint has been handled has a strong influence on the E-Wom (Langaro et al., 2020). On the other hand, it has been concluded that E-Wom maintains a highly significant relationship with corporate reputation (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019). To avoid any adverse effect that negative WOM due to complaints may have on the company's reputation, we recommend implementing a community management strategy to have a positive online reputation and positioning. This will not only circulate a good image about the company but could also attract potential customers.
- Develop new dashboards and performance indicators based on response responsiveness: According to the results of this study, procedural justice is the most important in the eyes of claimant customers. Companies should therefore orient their policies in this direction by integrating, for example, indicators such as: processing responsiveness, respect and application of procedures, and reliability of responses. To achieve optimal results, we propose to set standards for these criteria so that advisors are challenged to achieve them. Companies could also

develop a procedural plan adapted to the nature of their business and the typology of their clients. In this way, the procedures put in place for the management of complaints would be closer to the expectations of the customers, and therefore could provide a higher level of justice and satisfaction.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

One limitation of the research is the variables studied for each level of justice. Future research could incorporate additional items and variables beyond the one used in this study to represent the three levels of justice. This study did not take into account the moderating effect of personal characteristics such as age and gender of respondents. Perhaps future research could test whether perceptions of responsiveness change with the gender of the claimant, for example. This empirical study focused on the comparison of two channels, email and telephone. Further studies could be done by applying this comparison to other channels, such as between different social networks. Perhaps responsiveness and fairness will be perceived differently between Facebook and Instagram for example. Finally, another possible research avenue is to study responsiveness in one-to-one and remote complaint situations. Perhaps human contact ensures more justice towards the complaining customers.

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Part III
Branding, Brand Equity and Social Media

Chapter 8
Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention: Case of Facebook Groups Dedicated to Purchases on Foreign Websites

Issam EZZAHI and Salima JAZI

Abstract The goal of this study is to investigate the determinants of the influence of electronic word-of-mouth by analyzing the consumer decision-making process using theories of membership in virtual communities and models of purchasing behavior. This paper proposes a conceptual model based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm that articulates a set of variables derived from a literature review. The latter variables were confirmed in a two-phase exploratory qualitative study: a nethnographic analysis of consumer exchanges on a Facebook group, followed by a qualitative study in the form of individual interviews with members of the latter group. The qualitative studies were followed by a quantitative study in the form of an online questionnaire, which collected data from 196 participants who had previously requested online opinions in Facebook groups. The research model's findings revealed that the positive valence of the messages, as well as the perceived expertise of the source, contribute to the development of consumer attitudes toward purchasing the product. The paper also emphasizes women's sensitivity to electronic word of mouth and its impact on their purchasing intentions.

Keywords Electronic word of mouth · Intention to purchase · Consumer · Nethnography · Individual interviews · Facebook groups · Source credibility · Attitude

1 Introduction

The development of online discussion platforms has redefined consumer behavior. More researchers are interested in the study of virtual communities, particularly the exchanges taking place within its spaces. Indeed, interpersonal communication provide more credibility to inquire about the products or brands to choose, because consumers perceive it as communication without commercial interest (Ouiddad &

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Sidmou, 2013). Thus, the consumer is more likely to be influenced by personal sources such as word of mouth rather than impersonal sources such as advertising.

Therefore, through an exploratory study conducted among a group of Moroccan consumers interested in "Ali Express" products within a Facebook group, we will try to determine which factors that directly or indirectly influence consumers' purchase intention.

First, we will delineate the conceptual framework of our research, highlighting a synthesis of theories, concepts or variables that have been most studied in the context of electronic word-of-mouth. Then, we will present the progress of our study, the methodology adopted as well as the results obtained, before arriving at a modeling proposal.

2 Conceptual Framework

The search for information is an important step in the decision-making process of the consumer. After identifying his need, the consumer begins his research phase in search of possible solutions to his problem. A phase during which he will collect more or less information depending on the complexity of the choice to make and its degree of involvement in order to reduce the risk of a purchase decision.

Thus, interpersonal communication allows the consumer to learn about products, especially those that require effective consumption, and have an idea about the quality and satisfaction that results.

2.1 Electronic Word of Mouth as a Tool of Influence

The word-of-mouth phenomenon is not a new concept; it has existed in history in the form of rumors, well before being considered as a subject of study by researchers and marketing practitioners (Brodin & Roux, 1990). However, with the emergence of the social sciences, it began to be associated with interpersonal communication. In addition, with the advent of the Internet, information-seeking behaviors have evolved; consumers first consult online advisories before moving to purchase.

Researchers thus approached it from different perspectives. From the consumer's point of view, the main advantage of word of mouth is the honesty of the information because the sources are independent and devoid of commercial intent (Arndt, 1967). As for the "business" point of view, word-of-mouth is an opportunity to get consumers to sellers (Bajenaru, 2010). An individual who wants to spread word-of-mouth in favor of the company's products is considered by the company as a "voluntary seller" (Duan et al., 2008).

Thus, the electronic word of mouth (WOM) has been the subject of several definitions in the literature, of which we cite below the most frequently used (Table 1):

Table 1 Definitions of electronic word of mouth

Authors	Definitions
Harrison-Walker (2001)	The WOM is considered to be an informal, person-to-person communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver interested in a brand, product, or service
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)	Any positive or negative information made by past or actual consumers about a product or company through the Internet
Litvin et al. (2005)	Any informal communications directed to consumers through Internet technology related to the use or characteristics of certain goods and services, or their vendors

In conclusion, we can say that electronic word of mouth is a virtual communication established informally between one or more individuals, devoid of any commercial intention, about a product, a brand or a company.

2.2 *Purchase Intention as a Variable to Explain*

With the proliferation of advertising campaigns that praise the merits of their products, the consumer finds himself in a situation of indecision and refers to the opinions of other consumers online to make his choice. The purchasing intention of the consumer is then influenced by the opinions and recommendations of other consumers.

The purchase intention has been described in literature as a response to a desire of a linear decision process. Therefore, three types of definitions have been proposed in the literature to explain purchase intent:

Purchasing intent as a cognitive construct (Shaughnessy, O. 1992): The result of a desire that has been cognitively treated, since that we cannot desire what we do not know and which is not part of our culture.
Purchase intention as a dynamic concept (Belk, 1985): The set of instructions that people give themselves to act in a certain way, thus considering the planning dimension of the purchase intention.
Purchase intention as probability (Dussart, 1984): The subjective probability of purchase of a given product or brand.

However, Denis Darpy (1997) has proposed to summarize all these definitions around the planning dimension, defining the purchase intention as result of a desire, or a need, treated cognitively that leads to purchase planning.

Having been the subject of several studies, purchase intention has been widely mobilized as a variable to be explained by researchers who have studied electronic word of mouth (Cheung & Thadani, 2010; Srarfi & Hamouda, 2012). For this purpose, we also retain the purchase intention as a variable to explain.

2.3 Determinants of the Electronic WOM

The review of the literature has allowed us to highlight several variables that directly or indirectly influence the purchase intention, of which we quote those that were most mobilized or defended in the study of the electronic WOM:

The credibility of the message: Tseng and Fogg (1999) have defined it as the degree of which an individual can perceive the recommendation as credible, true or based on real facts.

Age and gender: It has been demonstrated in a recent study (Hamouda & Tabbane, 2014) that women are more sensitive to the electronic WOM exposure than men. On the other hand, it also appears that young people would be more confident about online comments than adult according to a study by Gretzel and Yoo (2008).

The valence of messages: The fact that a review can be positive or negative is generally recognized as being its valence or direction of the message. There are three types of directions: positive direction, negative direction (Lee & Youn, 2009) and mixed messages (both positive and negative messages at the same time [Cheung et al., 2009; Laczniak et al., 2001]). Generally, it is recognized that the influence of negative information is greater than that of positive information (Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Fiske, 1980).

The source of the message: In the online context two components play a key role in judging the credibility of a statement: expertise and reliability (Kiecker & Cowles, 2001). Expertise is defined as sufficient knowledge about a particular subject. On the other hand, a source is considered reliable when it intends to provide truthful information (Roy Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977).

The strength of the message: The strength of the argument is the extent to which the recipient of the information perceives the message as having valid and convincing arguments (Cheung et al., 2009).

The volume of the message: The volume of the messages corresponds to the number of positive or negative recommendations. The number of recommendations posted can be considered as a signal of the popularity of the product (Park & Kim, 2008).

Attitude: It has been defined in the literature as the positive or negative rating of behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Davis, 1989). Wang and Chien (2012) found that messages of word-of-mouth that are perceived to be credible tend to generate a favorable attitude and therefore a purchase intention.

3 A Netnography to Select the Variables

In order to confirm or update the variables used in our research (ie: valence, volume, strength of argument, credibility of the source, gender or attitude), we conducted a netnographic analysis of the content of conversations made by Moroccan consumers about «Ali Express» products to see how these opinions affect consumer purchasing intention.

Kozinets (2002) defined Netnography as a qualitative research method that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study virtual communities on the Internet. It uses public information available on forums to identify and understand the behavior of online consumer groups.

Kozinets (2002) outlines a series of steps to carry out netnographic research: Entry, Data collection, Data analysis, Ethical considerations and Member control.

3.1 Entry

The first step is to identify the appropriate community. The approach consists in filtering the most relevant groups in relation to the research question, by selecting the communities that hold a regular flow of information, have several active members and present the richest data related to the problem of search.

Therefore, we opted for the discussion groups that exist on the social network "Facebook" about online shopping on international sites. Our choice was motivated by the fact that these groups have several active members who have already bought on these sites or who intend to do so (strong intention to buy), but also by the large number of interactions in it.

Then, to access its closed communities, we had to register on Facebook and apply for membership to the different groups: "AliExpress Morocco", "Amazon Morocco", "Ebay Morocco" and "Morocco Dropshipping Ebay".

However, before accessing some administrators asked preliminary questions to identify the intentions of people who wish to join their group.

For example on the group "Morocco Dropshipping Ebay", the administrators asked to know the reason which pushes us to join the group:

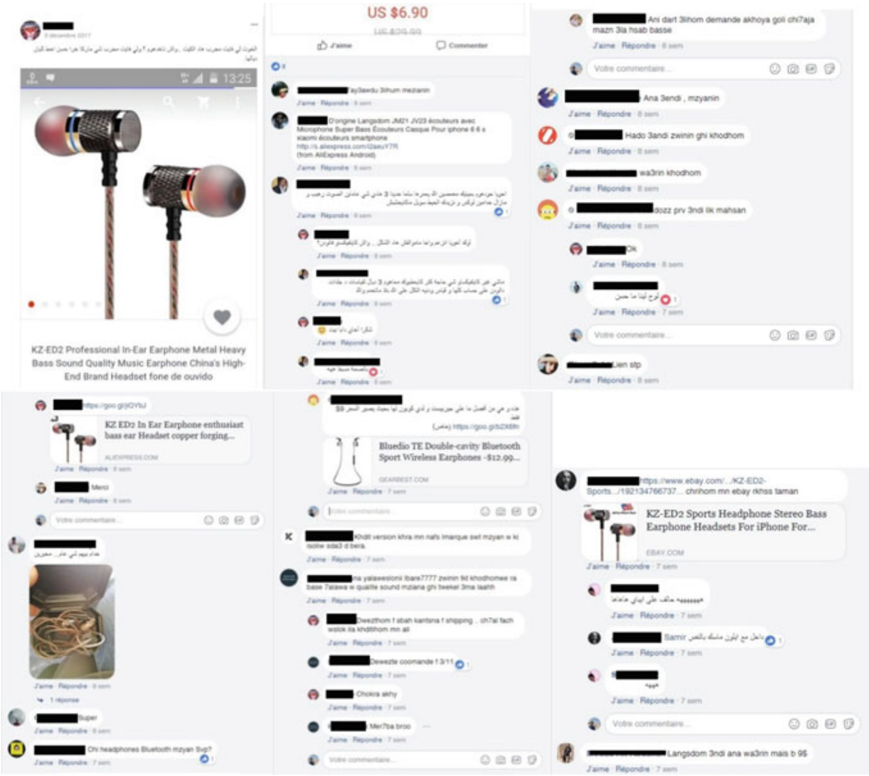
The groups also had internal rules that moderate exchanges between members and ensure the smooth functioning of the group.

3.2 Data Collection

For the collection of data, we proceeded with a non-participating observation, which consists only in reading the communications of members of a community, contrary to the participant observation that involves the researcher's participation in the discussions (Bernard, 2004).

Thus, after the acceptance of our membership requests, we began looking for exchanges that are rich in interactions and that correspond to our object of study. However, only the exchanges present on the group «AliExpress Morocco» (which is a group dedicated to the Moroccan community that makes purchases on the website Ali Express) were exploitable, because they deal with requests for advice and feedback on products available on the site, unlike other groups that deal mainly with customs and product delivery issues.

To this end, we have selected two exchanges published on the group "Ali Express Morocco" which are perfect examples to illustrate the influence of the electronic word of mouth on the purchase intention:



Successful purchase intention

The conversation took place between 3 and 4 December 2017[1] and begins with the publication of a member of the group, which we're going to name as the "Opinion Seeker (**OS**)", a request for opinion and feedback on experience (accompanied by a illustrative photo) about brand "KZ" brand headphones on sale at $ 6.90: « *الخوت لي فايت مجرب هاد الكيت .. واش ناخدهوم ? ولي فايت مجرب شي ماركا خرا حسن احط للبان ديالها*\ *My brothers, those who are already using this kit … should I take it? And if someone has already experienced a better brand, let them post their link*» The conversation generated 48 interactions, including 08 "likes" and 34 comments.

Thirty minutes later, another member of the group, called "**M2**" commented on the publication saying "*Tay3awdu 3lihum mezianin. \ They are good at what they say*".

Later in the evening, another member, that we will call "**M3**", commented also the publication and advised the **OS** to take them eyes closed. He confirms that these are very good headphones, and that he ordered 3 units of them 2 years ago and they are still working as well. They produce a very good sound and the cable with which they are designed is very flexible.

Five minutes later, the **OS** responds by saying that it will take the step and take them even if it is not used to this type of form. And from there begins an exchange between the two:

- **OS:** « *واش كايتفيكساو فالودن؟ \ Did they fix well in the ears?* ».
- **M3:** « *ماشي غير كايتفيكساو شي حاجة كتر كايعطيوك معاهوم 3 ديال لقياسات د جلدات دالودن على حساب كلها و قياس ودنيه التكل على الله بلا ماتخمم والله \ Yes they do more than fix themselves. They give with the headphones 3 additional sizes depending on the type of each ear. Go buy them without thinking* ».
- **OS:** « *شكرا أخاي دابا نيت \ Thank you, I'll do it right away.* ».
- **M3:** « *بالصحة مسبقا \ Congratulations in advance.* ».

Few minutes later, three other members respond by saying that they have the same earphones and they are good.

On the second day, another member post a photo of his headphones saying "*خدام بيهم شي عام ... مخيرين\ It's been a year since I use them ... They are very good*". Then, the **OS** replicates a few minutes later to say that the headphones are on the way. This confirms that the **OS** has purchased and ordered the headphones.

Seven hours later, new members comment the conversation by praising the sound quality of the headphones (especially in terms of external noise isolation) and prompting the **OS** to act. He replies a few minutes later to confirm that he has placed an order in the morning and asks for information on the delivery time.

[1] Link of the conversation: https://www.facebook.com/groups/AliExpressMaroc/permalink/779298062261248/.

Intention to purchase not completed

The conversation took place between October 15 and 16, 2017.[2] It begins with a request for an opinion of a member, that we will call “Opinion Seeker (**OS**)”, about a smartphone branded “vernee” on at $ 169.99 “ *الخوت شنو بان ليكم فهاد الهاتف او شكون فايت ليه مجرب هاد الماركة vernee \ My brothers, what do you think of this phone and who has already tried this brand ’vernee’*”. The conversation generated 18 interactions, including three “likes” and 15 comments.

Three minutes later, another member of the group, which we will name “**M2**”, proposes to the **OS** to search on YouTube “ *قلب عليه فاليوتوب \ Search on Youtube*”. But he responds by saying he has not found a presentation or a test of the phone “*Yes chfthom ms my kaynch review \ Yes I saw them, but there is no review.*”

Five minutes after publication of the message of the **OS**, another member of the group, which we will call “**M3**”, answers by saying “*Wa3r cheft lih videowt f youtube, 3ndak houa ola dak dogee high quality \ Very good, I ’ m I saw his videos on YouTube. There is this one and dogee of high quality*”. The **OS** replies a few minutes later by saying it’s a good phone.

Two hours later, a new member “**M4**” comment on the conversation by inviting the **OS** to see what type of processor the phone contains, as they are known to be very weak.

After the **OS** has defined the processor type, the “**M4**” member immediately replies by confirming his words, and from there begins an exchange between the two:

- **OS:** “*Njarbo my imkanch thkam 3la chi haja blama tjarbha asln ma t9darch ijiib tele fih proc hsan mn hada or bdak taman \ I will test it, because you can not judge anything until you have tested it. In addition, you will not be able to have a phone at this price with a better processor*”.
- **M4:** “*Shof lik xioami redmi 4, 7sen \ Look for xioami redmi 4, it’s better*”.

  A fifth member “M5” intervenes then in the middle of the exchange to share his experience and expertise of the phones processors:

[2] Conversation consultable sur le lien suivant (A condition d’être membre du groupe): https://www.facebook.com/groups/AliExpressMaroc/permalink/758056191052102/.

- **M5:** "*Proc dealo mazean. Mediatek P25 equivalent snapdragon 625 \ It has a good processor. Mediatek P25 is equivalent to snapdragon 625*".

The **OS** replies to the commentary of the **M3** saying he has already experimented with the "Redmi 4" and that it will be even better.

A new member "**M6**" comes to give his opinion "*Wa3r akhouya charika mzyana … \ it is very good phone my brother, very good company*" and the **OS** thanks him for sharing.

Finally, the conversation ends the next day by a comment of "**M7**" who shares with the **OS** his opinion saying "*hta ana banlia o maz3amtch 3lih 7it ba9i presale mazal my kaynch review dyalo f youtube \ I also saw it but I hesitated because it is still in presale and there is no test on YouTube*". The **OS** responds by saying that he had the same thought.

Therefore, the opinion request results in an unsuccessful purchase intention based on last statement of the **OS** with the "**M7**" member.

3.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, we opted for a thematic analysis of the content of the exchanges to highlight the elements that most determine the consumer's purchasing intention.

The process involves cutting the content of speech into units of analysis, and then ranking them in categories defined categories depending on the purpose of the research (Thiétart & Coll, 2007).

To do this, we transferred the exchange data to the Microsoft Excel software (2016 version) for easier handling of the data during the encoding phase.

Then we have one a manual encoding of the units, following the complete reading of the exchanges and the categorization of the identified themes.

The thematic analysis of the messages allowed us to highlight different variables that influenced the purchase intention of the opinion seekers. These variables were categorized then according to their level of analogy:

- The valence of the messages:
  - Positive WOM:

We first noted the effect of positive word of mouth on the researcher's (**OS**) intent to buy. Indeed, it has been illustrated through positive reviews posted by members of the group (Table 2):

The positive WOM was mentioned nine times in the first exchange (or one in four) and was able to positively influence intent to purchase of the **OS** from the 5th comment.

Table 2 Sample from the thematic coding of netnographic data relating to the positive WOM

Theme	Exchange	Transcriptions	Frequency
Positif WOM	1	**M2** : « *Tay3awdu 3lihum mezianin.\ They are good at what they say* ».	13/48
		M4 : « خويا خودهوم بعينيك مغمضين الله يعمرها سلعا \ *My brother, you can take them with your eyes closed. Very good merchandise* ».	
		M7 : « *Ana 3endi , mzyanin \ I have them, they are good* ».	
		M12 : « خدام بيهم شي عام... مخيرين \ *It's been a year since I use them ... They are very good* ».	
	2	**M3** : « *Wa3r cheft lih videowt f youtube, 3ndak houa ola dak dogee haut qualitie \ It is too loud, I saw his videos on Youtube. You have this one and the other "dogee", they are very high quality* ».	
		M6 : «*Wa3r akhouya charika mzyana... \ it is very good phone my brother, very good company* ».	

Indeed, the **OS** has declared publicly its intention to purchase: « شكرا أخاي دابا نيت\ *Thank you, I'll do it right away."* Replicating to the message of **M3** : " التكل علّى الله بلا ماتخمم والله ...ماشي غير كايتفيكساو شي حاجة كتر \ *Yes they. do more than fix ... Go buy them without thinking* ».

The following day, the opinion seeker (**OS**) confirmed the realization of his intent in the act of purchase through the statement " جايين فالطريق\ *They are on the way*" in reference to headphones. Indeed, this statement came about following the publication of a new positive opinion based on the experience of a member who has already bought the headphones and still uses them. A recommendation that was accompanied by an illustrative photo saying " شي عام ... مخيرين خدام بيهم\ *It's been a year since I use them ... They are very good*."

However, positive word of mouth did not have the same influence in the second exchange, despite the praise given to the product by the members who commented on the publication. The positive WOM was only mentioned twice in the exchange, and could not persuade the **OS** to act even if he was convinced that the phone would be much better than the "Redmi 4" that he has already experimented.

- Negative WOM:

Negative word of mouth was also noticed in this analysis. He was especially quoted in the second exchange during the discussion of the **OS** with **M3** about the performance of the phone's processor. However, the negative influence of the purchase intention cannot be attributed to the negative WOM, since it was only quoted twice. And also because the OS was convinced of the performance of the phone "*my t9darch ijiib tele fih proc hsan mn hada or bdak taman \ … You can not get a phone at this price with a better processor*" and it will be better than the "Xiaomi Redmi 4" recommended by **M3**.

Table 3 Sample from the thematic coding of netnographic data related with the trust

Theme	Exchange	Transcription	Frequency
Trust	1	**M4** : *" خويا خودهوم بعينيك مغمضين \ My brother, you can take them with your closed eyes.*	7/48
		M7 : *" ... zwinin ghi khodhom ... Take them, they are good ".*	
		M8 : *" wa3rin khodhom \ They are too strong, take them ".*	
	2	**M6** : *"Wa3r akhouya charika mzyana ... \ it is very good phone my brother, very good company ".*	

As a conclusion of this part, we can say that the valence of word of mouth can have an influence on the purchase intention of the consumer and confirms our choice to mobilize it as a moderating variable in our conceptual model.

- The credibility of the source:

If we refer to the studies conducted on the credibility of source (Kiecker & Cowles, 2001), two dimensions stand out: the trust and the expertise.

- The trust:

The positive effect of trust on the credibility of the source of the message has manifested itself in various ways in our exchanges. Indeed, we noticed that members tended to talk to each other using terms like الخوت\ *My brothers*, خويا\ *My brother*, etc. Considering the other members as a second family. A finding also confirmed through the familiar way that the messages were formulated by the members, as if they knew each other beforehand and were talking physically face to face.

The trust has been also illustrated through the positive interaction of the **OS** with the recommendations of the members. The following table presents examples of recommendations posted by members (Table 3):

Both OS have demonstrated trust in the members of the group since the publication of the opinion request. They began their messages with "My Brothers" and sought the views of other members on the product they wished to purchase:

OS 1: " الخوت لي فايت مجرب هاد الكيت .. واش ناخدهوم ؟ \ *My brothers, those who are already using this kit … should I take it?*".
OS 2: " الخوت شنو بان ليكم فهاد الهاتف ..? \ *My brothers, what do you think of this phone …?*".

This confirms that trust is well established between group members and positively influences the credibility of the source of the message.

- The expertise:

Furthermore, the level of expertise of the members of the group was revealed, through the personal experiences of each member, but also through the knowledge of the technical properties of the product. We can illustrate this by the comments published by the members (Table 4):

We also noted the attention of the opinion-seeker to the proposals and the comments of almost all the members. This shows his potential sensitivity to the members' arguments, and thus confirms the influence of the credibility of the source on his purchase intention.

- The characteristics related to the product:
  - The perceived quality of the brand:

We also noted the effect of brand equity on purchase intent. Indeed, opinion seekers have mentioned the brand since the beginning of the exchange:

OS 1: " ولي فايت مجرب شي ماركا خرا حسن احط للبان ديالها. *And if anyone has experienced a better brand, share with us it link*";
OS 2: " vernee او شكون فايت ليه مجرب هاد الماركة\ *Does anyone has experienced this brand «Vernee».*"

Then, it was taken later on a positive WOM with **M6**: "*charika mzyana… \ Very good company*". This demonstrates the importance the on the brand.

Brand equity is defined in the literature review as the benefit that a brand brings to a product or service (Aaker, 1994). It has been determined by brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other assets.

However, brand equity has been much more determined by the perceived quality of our exchanges. Which have been confirmed by the opinions (positive or negative) of the members who have already used the product or the brand.

Indeed, the perceived quality of a brand has been defined in the literature as the overall judgment related to service superiority or product performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

- Review of product attributes:

In addition, we have also noted the special attention given by members to product review videos, which gives the consumers a detailed description and a complete test of the product.

Especially when they're done by experts, which can stimulate their purchase intention.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In a concern for ethics and confidentiality of data, we have censored the names of the members and have replaced their names by with generic ones.

Table 4 Sample from the thematic coding of the netnographic data related to the expertise of the source

Theme	Exchange	transcripts	Frequency
Expertise of the source	1	**M4**: " " خدينا 3 هادي شي عامين, الصوت رهيب و مازال خدامين لوكس. و نزيدك الخيط سوبل ماكايخشبش \ *We ordered 3 units two years ago, and they are still working as well. They produce a very good sound and the cable they are designed with is very flexible.*"	10/48
		M8: "*Hado 3andi zwinin ghi khodhom \ I have them. take them, they are good*"	
Expertise of the source	1	**M12**: " مخيرين ... خدام بيهم شي عام\ *It's been a year since I use them … They are very good*"	10/48
		M14: "*Khdit version khra mn nafs lmarque swt mzyan w ki isoliw sda3 d bera. \ I have another version of the same brand. The sound is superb and they isolate the outside noise*"	
	2	**M4**: "*Shof lik xioami redmi 4, 7sen \ Look at the Xiaomi Redmi 4, it's better*"	
		M5: "*Proc dealo mazean.Mediatek P25 equivalent l snapdragon 625 \ It has a good processor. Mediatek P25 is equivalent to snapdragon 625*"	

3.5 Control of Members

Although Kozinets (2002) insists revealing its presence to members of the community studied, we have preferred not to do it, as researchers (Hallem, 2011), in order to avoid mistrust the members and because the selected exchanges were already archived and closed. As a result, we did not use member control.

Conclusion: The results of this analysis allowed us to confirm the choice of certain variables mobilized at the level of our conceptual framework (such as the valence or credibility of the source), but also to highlight new variables such as “the perceived quality of the brand”.

4 Individual Interviews

In order to counter the limit of non-participating observation and to check the other variables, we conducted a second exploratory phase in the form of individual interviews.

4.1 Methodology

With the objective of getting the participants recall the situation of the exchange, to describe how they were influenced, we decided to opt for the method of individual interviews. Indeed, the research interview is an ideal technique for getting respondents to defeat the defense mechanisms they put in place in front of the outside view (Baumard et al., In Thiétart & Coll, 2007). Then we chose to carry out our study in the form of directive interviews because they constitute an effective tool when the researcher seeks to validate results obtained with other methods (observation, experimentation, etc.) or to update knowledge of previous studies (Fenneteau, 2015).

When the researcher uses this method, he directs the interview by asking questions to the interviewees, who express themselves freely on the subject. No response or limit conditions are imposed to the respondents. The interviewer intervenes only to ask for clarification when the answers are too short, or to reframe the interviewees.

Thus, by multiplying the questions, the researcher ensures that the respondents provide the information he seeks to collect.

4.2 Data Collection

In the continuity of our study, we interviewed the members of the group "Ali Express Morocco", which had been the subject of the netnographic study. However, given the constraints of making appointments and contact that we met at the beginning of the experiment, we opted for the technique of "e-interview" with the help of the instant messenger of Facebook. Indeed, Maubisson and Abaidi (2011) confirmed through their comparative study that the results obtained with the e-interviews provides the same indications as those obtained with traditional face-to-face interviews. The main advantage of e-interviews, after the saving of time and money, is that the speech of the interviewee speaking in writing is more synthesized. Indeed, while writing messages, the interviewee must structure their ideas and use words that express the best what he thinks or what he describes.

The size of the sample questioned was determined by the principle of semantic saturation: We contacted 143 members who had already asked for advice during the month preceding the study, so that they could recover the maximum of information about their experience. However, only 34 people agreed to participate in our study, and only 11 of them answered all our questions.

4.3 Exchanges Analysis

4.3.1 Horizontal Analysis

- ***Choice of Facebook groups***:

Interviewees explain that they choose Facebook groups because the information available on them was more reliable and came from real experiences of people who have already used or bought the same product on the site.

- ***Criteria relating to the consumer***:

– Attitude: The three quarters of interviewed said that they were often quite convinced by the recommendations of the members, especially when these are mostly positive.
– Gender: We could not measure the level of influence by gender because the number of respondents was not enough representatives. However, we did not notice any particular influence for one of the genders during the interviews.
– *Criteria* related to the product:

  - *The perceived quality of the brand*: The majority of the interviewees confirmed that they favor the opinions expressed about a brand whose quality of products is recognized, and that helped them to filter the recommendations of the members. This confirms the comments of Doh and Hwang (2009), who explain that a consumer would be more sensitive to negative WOM when he has a strong prior knowledge of the product. We thus argue that the variable "Perceived brand quality" plays a mediating role in determining the most influential WOM messages.

In conclusion, we can say that these results are consistent with findings from the first study, and thus confirm the influence of "perceived quality of the brand" on the WOM produced by other consumers. As a result, we can integrate it as a mediating variable of attitude within our conceptual model.

- *Review of Product Attributes*: Only one interviewee reported using reviews on Youtube (or even comparisons with other similar products) to be able to decide between the different recommendations of members.

- ***Criteria relating to the message***:

- Valence of messages: The majority of interviewees stated that they were well influenced by the positive feedback from members, and that this encouraged them to buy the product.

  Unfortunately we could not measure the negative WOM because we did not have a feedback on it. Interviewees tended to focus on the positive WOM question rather than the negative WOM question. Several reasons can explain this: The similarity of wording with the first question or maybe the almost obvious answer to the question.

  The only information we could obtain is that for some interviewees, a single negative opinion could be enough to cancel the order.
- Strength of the argument: We had to shorten the interview guide to ten main questions, because we noticed that the interviewees made a lot of effort to write the answers and describe their experiences. Thus, we decided to lighten the interview guide by removing some questions and therefore we could not approach with them the question of the strength of the argument. However, we can come back to it in our empirical study.
- Message volume: The majority of interviewees confirm that they needed several positive opinions, sometimes accompanied by photos, to be reassured about the quality of the product. However, for some, a single negative opinion could dissuade them from not ordering the product.

  These results are in line with those from the nethnographic analysis, and confirm that the valence of electronic word of mouth and its repetition, particularly the positive WOM, have a real influence on the consumer's attitude and his intention to buy.

- ***Criteria for the source of the message***:

- Credibility of the source:

  - *Trust*: Interviewees remain divided on this subject. Some people place a lot of importance on unveiling the identity, and trust the connected members under a verified profile. While the others consider that it does not influence their confidence in the opinions, as long as they emanate from the members of the group.

- *Expertise*: The interviewees remain quite mixed as to the level of knowledge of the members of the group. There are some who find that they have quite a good knowledge base, as they are accustomed to purchase items online. As for the others, they find that it varies according to the experience of each one.

In consequence, the results of both studies converge with respect to trust in group members and their level of expertise. This reinforces our choice to mobilize the "credibility of the source" as a moderating variable in the WOM/Purchase intention relationship.

Conclusion: The results of our second phase of qualitative study support all the proposals made in our first phase of study, and we can defend the general architecture of our conceptual model.

5 Research Hypotheses

To defend the overall structure of our model, we highlight the various relationships that connect the variables mobilized at the model level, as well as their roles in explaining the phenomenon of influence. As a result, we will attempt to formulate hypotheses that could explain these relationships based on the literature review and the findings of the qualitative phase.

5.1 Variables Having a Direct Effect

eWOM is a highly effective interpersonal communication channel. Indeed, according to Wallace (1999, as cited in Ouiddad, 2014), the content of online messages influences people's behavior. This finding is supported by Gruen et al. (2006) study, which found a link between online message viewing and sensitivity to interpersonal influence. Consumers' perceptions of a product are influenced by the exchange of knowledge and experiences, which may lead them to recommend it. Similarly, East and Hammond (2008) demonstrated that positive word-of-mouth has a significant influence on purchase intention. Sparks and Browning (2011) confirmed this finding in a study on the intent to book a hotel room (good experience). Observing positive recommendations elicits positive emotions, which lead to a favorable attitude, which can lead to a purchase intention (Xia & Bechwati, 2008).

These theoretical and empirical findings appear convincing enough to support the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 The valence of the electronic WOM message influences consumer attitudes.

As a stimulus, the message's positive or negative valence would influence purchase intention by encouraging or discouraging the consumer to obtain the product.

When consumers search for information, they may encounter both positive and negative messages. Thus, the valence or nature of the messages influences individual behavior based on their volume and the strength of the arguments made.

The number of comments or messages posted by customers about a product or service is referred to as volume. As a result of the large number of comments, consumers have a good chance of finding information that will allow them to evaluate the performance and quality of the product they are looking for (Chatterjee, 2001; Park et al., 2007). They will also be more willing to accept the general consensus of other consumers (Luo et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the strength of the argument is a strong predictor of information adoption (Cheun et al., 2009). It is regarded as a deciding factor in determining the validity of communication (Hovland et al., 1953). Thus, strong arguments are founded on neutral and certified information (Fan et al., 2013), whereas weak arguments are typically founded on the message sender's interpretations or subjective judgment. As a result, strong arguments increase the perceived credibility of electronic WOM messages (Cheung et al., 2009), because they are more objective and easier to understand, and thus contribute to the development of a positive attitude in the consumer. Messages with weak arguments, on the other hand, will have less of an impact on consumer behavior.

As a result, based on the findings of our exploratory study and the data presented above, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 The valence effect of electronic word-of-mouth is assessed based on the volume and strength of the argument

H2a: The repetition of the messages positively influences the valence of the electronic WOM.

H2b: The strength of the argument positively influences the valence of electronic WOM messages.

The favorable or unfavorable evaluation of an object, idea, or service is referred to as attitude. Thus, a consumer's attitude toward a product or service influences their purchase intention, especially when it is positive (Akar & Topçu, 2011). As Spears and Singh (2004) demonstrated in their study, a positive attitude toward the hotel implies a desire to make a reservation. This finding was supported by a number of previous studies that looked into the impact of electronic word of mouth on purchase intent (Abdennadher, 2014; Ouiddad, 2014). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that a large number of negative word of mouth significantly increases the consumer's negative attitude and, as a result, the intention to reject the product (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Lee & Cranage, 2012).

As a result, these findings are consistent with the findings of our exploratory study, allowing us to propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 Favorable attitude positively influences consumer's purchase intention

5.2 Variables Having a Moderating Effect

The perceived credibility of the source is a distinguishing feature of the message's sender. It influences the message's acceptance or rejection, and thus the consumer's persuasion (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). As a result, the more credible the source, the more likely the consumer will find the message persuasive and follow the advice given (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). And, as we've above, the credibility of a source is determined by two factors: expertise and dependability. Expertise that can be measured by the degree of persuasion and the validity of the messages. Electronic WOM messages, on the other hand, are typically sent by foreign individuals who may lack product category expertise. As a result, the anonymity of communications makes it difficult for consumers to evaluate the quality and credibility of messages (Chatterjee, 2001; Schindler & Bickart, 2005).

To address this, the consumer looks to personal information about the message's sender to assess trust in the source (Luo et al., 2014). As a result, a profile picture and its reputation are typically used by consumers to assess the reliability of the source. The goal is to reduce uncertainty about the information received (Forman et al., 2008). Credibility would have an impact on the perception of the message.

Based on our observations, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4 The credibility of the source exerts a moderating effect between electronic WOM and attitude

Credibility would have an impact on the perception of the message. We decline this hypothesis in two sub-hypotheses:

H4a: The expertise of the source positively influences the attitude of the consumer.
H4b: Trust in the source has a positive impact on the attitude of the consumer.

Furthermore, several studies have shown that gender has the ability to influence consumer behavior. According to Walker (1995), women are more likely than men to use word of mouth. Indeed, Fan and Miao (2012) demonstrated that when women perceive the source of electronic WOM as relevant, they develop a greater purchasing intention than men. Other researchers (Bae & Lee, 2011; Hamouda & Tabbane, 2014) confirmed the finding in the context of their studies focusing on the influence of online comments on purchase intention, indicating that women are much more influenced by online comments than men. As a result of these findings, we maintain the following hypothesis, with the "gender" variable serving as a moderator of the electronic WOM-purchase intention relationship:

Hypothesis 5 Women are more sensitive to exposure to electronic WOM than men

Prior knowledge represents the level of prior knowledge a consumer has about a particular product or category of products. In the context of online information research, Doh and Hwang (2009) demonstrated that there is a significant link between prior knowledge and evaluation of messages. Indeed, the consumer's prior knowledge has a mediating effect on the consultation of the contents of the electronic WOM

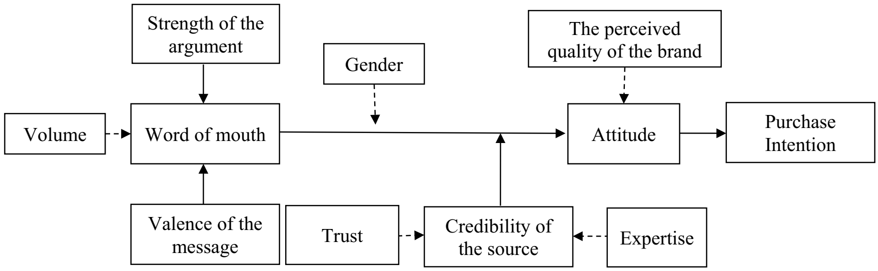


Fig. 1 Research model

and on the consumer's attitude. Therefore, the more knowledge he/she has on the product category, the more he/she will be able to assess the quality of the message (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

The observation is supported by the findings of our exploratory study, in which the majority of interviewees stated that they prefer opinions issued about a brand they are familiar with in order to filter messages from other members. As a result, this information appears convincing enough to support the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6 Prior knowledge has a positive impact on the consumer's attitude towards electronic WOM messages: The more positive the brand's perception, the more likely the consumer will favor recommendations about it

As a result of the above-mentioned research hypotheses, we propose the conceptual model (Fig. 1):

6 Quantitative Analysis of the Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention

To measure the different dimensions of electronic WOM, we identified the different measurement scales closest to our study context and we tried to adapt them. All scales used in this paper are based on existing scales (Table 5).

All items were measured using a 5 point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree".

6.1 Sampling and Method of Administration

We adopted the convenience sample. Thus, the targeted survey units were Moroccan consumers seeking opinions on products sold on foreign merchant sites at the level of Facebook groups.

Table 5 Choice of questionnaire items

Dimension	Item
Valence of eWOM	• Positive feedback convinced me more than negative feedback • Positive comments must be numerous for me to be convinced • Negative comments must be numerous for me to be convinced
Strength of the argument	• The arguments in the comments are compelling • The arguments of the comments are strong • The arguments of the comments are persuasive • The arguments of the comments are good
Expertise of the source	• The sender of the message knows all about it • The sender of the message is competent • The sender of the message is an expert • The sender of the message is qualified • The sender of the message is experienced
Trust	• The transmitter is reliable • The transmitter is honest • The issuer is trustworthy • The sender is sincere • The issuer is loyal
Prior knowledge	• Information obtained from comments contradicted what I knew prior to their consultation • Comments supported the impression I had on the product / service • The comments confirmed the information I had previously about the product / service
The attitude	• I would like to order the recommended product • I am in favor of purchasing the recommended product • I would very much like to buy the recommended product • I agree with this recommendation • I find the recommendation pleasant
Purchase intention	• This group made me want to buy this product • I will test the product on this group • If I am going to buy this product, it would be this brand present on this group

To this end, and given the nature of our field of study, we opted for online administration of the questionnaire via Google Form.

6.2 Validation of Measuring Instruments

The following table summarizes the main points of the results obtained following the confirmatory factor analysis. It thus presents the items retained for the measurement of the latent variables, which constitute our research model. We also show the reliability indices of each scale: Cronbach's alpha (α), Jöreskog's rho (AVE), as well as the rho of the convergent validity of scales (CR) (Table 6).

Table 6 Summary of the results of the confirmatory factor analysis

Scale	Items		Item	α	AVE	CR
	Title	Abbreviation				
Strength of the argument	The arguments in the comments are compelling	Argument_1	✔	,704	,796	,920
	The arguments of the comments are strong	Argument_2	✔			
	The arguments of the comments are persuasive	Argument_3	✔			
Expertise of the source	The sender of the message is competent	Expertise_2	✔	,887	,618	,933
	The sender of the message is an expert	Expertise_3	✔			
	The sender of the message is qualified	Expertise_4	✔			
	The sender of the message is experienced	Expertise_5	✘			
Trust	The transmitter is reliable	Trust_1	✔	,883	1,142	1,032
	The transmitter is honest	Trust_2	✔			
	The issuer is trustworthy	Trust_3	✔			
	The sender is sincere	Trust_4	✔			
Attitude	I would like to order the recommended product	Attitude_1	✔	,928	,924	,973
	I am in favor of purchasing the recommended product	Attitude_2	✔			
	I would very much like to buy the recommended product	Attitude_3	✔			
Purchase Intention	This group made me want to buy this product	Intention_1	✔	,900	1,151	1,054
	I will test the product on this group	Intention_2	✔			
	If I am going to buy this product, it would be this brand present on this group	Intention_3	✔			

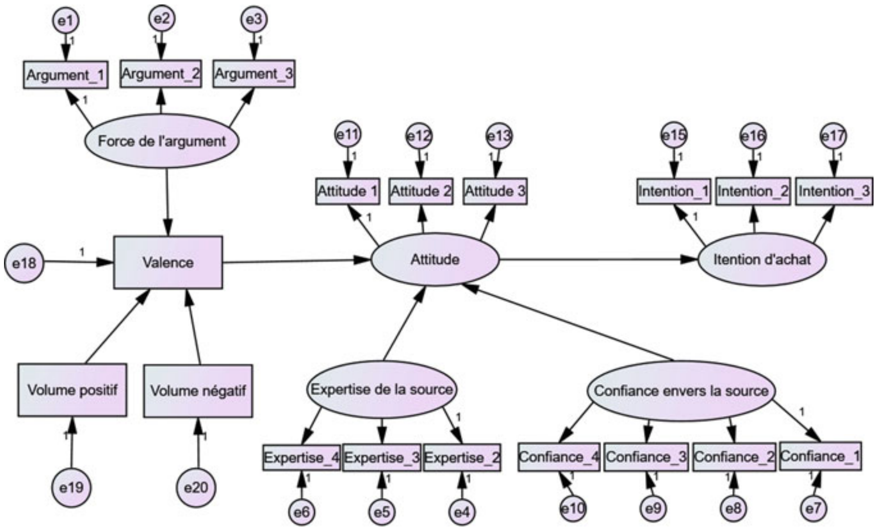


Fig. 2 Global structure of research model

6.3 Verificiation of Hypotheses and Discussion of Results

6.3.1 Direct Links

Test of the Structural Model According to the Valence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

To conduct our analysis, we use the strength of the argument as an explanatory variable and keep the respondents who said they were initially influenced by positive word-of-mouth. We then apply the same analysis model to respondents who stated that negative word-of-mouth had an impact on them (Fig. 2).

Test of the Research Model According to the Positive Valence

The test was conducted using a sub-sample of respondents who stated that they had been exposed to positive electronic WOM messages. The sub-sample consists of 98 respondents (or 50% of the total sample) who were chosen based on the scores assigned to the valence question when filling out the questionnaire. The model test results are shown in the table (Table 7):

To sum up, we can say that in the case of influence by positive opinions, it appears that it is the credibility of the source (in particular its expertise) which contributes the most to the development of the (favorable) attitude necessary for trigger purchase intention in the mind of the consumer.

Table 7 Model results according to the positive valence of eWOM

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Force_Arg	< —	Volume_P	,193	2,365	,018	✔
Attitude	< —	Expertise_Scr	1,443	7,507	***	✔
Attitude	< —	Trust_Scr	,407	4,004	***	✔
Attitude	< —	Force_Arg	1,350	1,793	,073	☒
Purchase_intent	< —	Attitude	,584	9,632	***	✔

Table 8 Model results according to the negative valence of the electronic WOM

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Force_Arg	< —	Volume_N	-,043	-,912	,362	☒
Attitude	< —	Expertise_Scr	,143	2,880	,004	✔
Attitude	< —	Trust_Scr	1,460	6,574	***	✔
Attitude	< —	Force_Arg	2,377	,864	,388	☒
Purchase_intent	< —	Attitude	,314	3,474	***	✔

Test of the Research Model According to the Negative Valence

Thus, to perform our test, we selected respondents who declared themselves exposed to negative electronic WOM messages. A sub-sample of 98 respondents was chosen based on their response to the valence question.

The following table shows the results of the test (Table 8):

In the case of the influence by the negative WOM, we can distinguish two groups of relations:

- Meaningful relationships, which link the variables measuring the credibility of the source to attitude on the one hand, and intention to buy to attitude on the other;
- The insignificant relationships which are represented by the links between the volume of negative messages and the strength of the argument on the one hand, and the attitude to the strength of the argument on the other.

As a summary, we can state that trust in the source has a greater influence on the consumer's attitude in the case of exposure to a negative valence, and that the attitude is strongly correlated with the purchase intention in the two cases.

Testing the Hypotheses for the Overall Structural Model

To test our model, we iterate to come out with statistical tests that allow us to check the links between the variables. The following table presents a summary of the results of the tests of the links between the different variables (Table 9):

Table 9 Results of the global research model

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Valence	<---	Force_Arg	,224	1,195	,232	☒
Valence	<---	Volume_P	−,222	−2,396	,017	✔
Valence	<---	Volume_N	,103	1,641	,101	☒
Attitude	<---	Valence	,230	5,047	***	✔
Attitude	<---	Expertise_Scr	1,451	7,745	***	✔
Attitude	<---	Trust_Scr	,609	7,028	***	✔
Purchase_intent	<---	Attitude	,575	12,228	***	✔

Link Between the Valence of Electronic WOM and Attitude

The "Valence" variable has a positive and significant effect on the "Attitude" variable (Coef. Reg = 0.230; CR = 5.047; p-value = 0.000). Thus, when the variable "Valence" increases, the variable "Attitude" also increases in the same direction. Therefore, when the consumer is exposed to a positive (or negative) WOM message, they will tend to develop a positive (or negative) attitude towards the desired product. **This leads us to validate Hypothesis H1**, which states that the valence of the electronic WOM message exerts an influence on the attitude of the consumer.

Effect of Electronic WOM Volume and Strength of the Argument on Valence

The variable "Volume of positive messages" has a negative and significant impact on the variable "Valence" (Reg = −0.222; CR = −2.396; p-value = 0.017). Thus, respondents need one or two comments to be convinced, when the valence of the messages is positive.

On the other hand, the variable "Volume of negative messages" has no effect on the variable "Valence" (Reg = 0.103; CR = 1.641; p-value = 0.101). Indeed, although the standardized regression coefficient displays a value slightly greater than (0.1), the value of the T test with p-value > 0.05 means that there is no relationship between the two variables.

Thus, we can state that the presence of several positive messages influences the perception of the valence of electronic WOM messages, and consequently the attitude of the consumer. Therefore, **we validate the H2a hypothesis**, which suggests that the repetition of messages positively influences the valence of electronic WOM.

Furthermore, the variable "Strength of the argument" does not seem to exert an influence on the variable "Valence" (Reg = 0.224; CR = 1.195; p-value = 0.232). Indeed, the value of the student test is less than 1.96 and the significance level is greater than 0.05. A finding also noted at the level of the two previous models. Therefore, **we reject hypothesis H2b** which states that the strength of the argument positively influences the valence of electronic WOM messages.

Table 10 Results of the test of direct relations before

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Purchase_intent	<---	Valence	,170	4,630	***	✔

Therefore, we conclude that the main **hypothesis H2 is partially validated** via the volume effect of the electronic WOM. Thus, the valence of the WOM messages is assessed as a function of the number of positive messages published.

Role of Attitude in the Formation of Purchase Intention

The “Attitude” variable has a positive and very significant impact on the “Purchase intention” variable (Reg = 0.575; CR = 12.228; p-value = 0.000). Thus, when a consumer develops a favorable attitude towards a product, it contributes to the formation of a purchase intention.

Indeed, the link between attitude and intention is also validated at the level of the models tested according to the valence of word of mouth. This leads us to conclude that, in all the models, attitude constitutes an antecedent of intention to purchase, thereby **validating hypothesis H6**.

In addition, we also test the mediating role that the “Attitude” variable can play between the independent variable (valence) and the dependent variable (Intention to purchase). To do this, we adopt the approach proposed by Roussel et al. (2002) and which takes place in four successive stages:

- Demonstrate the significance of the link between the explanatory variable X and the explanatory variable Y.
- Demonstrate the significance of the impact of the explanatory variable X on the mediator variable M.
- Demonstrate the significance of the impact of the mediating variable M on the explanatory variable Y when the impact of X on Y is controlled.
- Check the intensity of the mediation: the mediation is total if the effect of M on Y cancels the effect of X on Y, the mediation is partial if the effect of X on Y remains significant after the introduction of M.

More concretely, and using structural equation modeling, we can perform the test in two steps (Table 10):

Test of Direct Links Before Mediation

We can see from these results that the direct relationship between valence and purchase intention is significant. Indeed, the values obtained comply with the acceptability thresholds of the T test (> 1.96) and of P (<0.05). This then leads us to check the direct link after mediation (Table 11).

Table 11 Results of the test of direct relations after mediation

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Attitude	<---	Valence	,233	5,051	***	✔
Intention_achat	<---	Attitude	,581	12,127	***	✔
Intention_achat	<---	Valence	−,010	−,394	,694	☒

Testing of Direct Links After Mediation

As the results show, the direct link after the mediation relationship between "valence" and "purchase intention" variables appears to be insignificant, while the link between the mediator variable and the explanatory variable on the one hand as well as that between the mediator variable and the explanatory variable on the other hand are significant.

This leads us to conclude that the "Attitude" variable fully mediates the link between the explanatory variable and the variable to be explained, since it cancels out the effect of X on Y.

6.3.2 Moderation Links

After dwelling on the analysis of direct links between variables, in this section, we turn to the study of moderating effects of variables in order to verify the hypotheses established in this direction. Thus, the effect of source credibility on the relationship between valence and attitude will be studied first. Next, we will analyze the moderating effect of the variable "Gender" on the attitude of consumers.

Moderating Role of the Source's Credibility

In order to verify the moderating role of the source's credibility, we base ourselves on the approach of Kenny et al. (2015), adapted from Kenny and Judd (1984), which consists of:

- Ensure the quality of fit of the model;
- Evaluate the singular links between the different components of the moderating variable towards each of the components of the explanatory variable.

To do this, we consider the variable "Strength of the argument" as an explanatory variable, given its latent character, unlike the valence. The following table presents the results obtained following the test of the model (Table 12):

Thus, we can attest that the variable "Credibility of the source", measured by the variables "Expertise of the source" and "Confidence in the source", exerts a partial moderation on the link between the strength of the argument and the attitude.

Table 12 Results of the test for singular moderation links

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Argument_1	<---	Expertise_2	,139	2,369	,018	✔
Argument_2	<---	Expertise_2	,112	1,690	,091	☒
Argument_3	<---	Expertise_2	,108	1,656	,098	☒
Argument_1	<---	Expertise_3	−,052	−,902	,367	☒
Argument_2	<---	Expertise_3	−,009	−,141	,888	☒
Argument_3	<---	Expertise_3	−,049	−,754	,451	☒
Argument_1	<---	Expertise_4	−,023	−,345	,730	☒
Argument_2	<---	Expertise_4	−,079	−1,055	,291	☒
Argument_3	<---	Expertise_4	−,072	−,976	,329	☒
Argument_1	<---	Trust_1	,098	1,334	,182	☒
Argument_2	<---	Trust_1	,005	,062	,951	☒
Argument_3	<---	Trust_1	,150	1,825	,068	☒
Argument_1	<---	Trust_2	−,045	−,591	,555	☒
Argument_2	<---	Trust_2	,099	1,149	,250	☒
Argument_3	<---	Trust_2	,068	,804	,422	☒
Argument_1	<---	Trust_3	−,174	−2,546	,011	✔
Argument_2	<---	Trust_3	−,148	−1,914	,056	☒
Argument_3	<---	Trust_3	−,126	−1,651	,099	☒
Argument_1	<---	Trust_4	,245	2,907	,004	✔
Argument_2	<---	Trust_4	,172	1,806	,071	☒
Argument_3	<---	Trust_4	,113	1,201	,230	☒

Therefore, **we validate the main hypothesis H4** which suggests that the credibility of the source exerts a moderating effect between the electronic WOM and the attitude. **We also validate the sub-hypotheses H4a and H4b** in view of the results obtained at the test level of the global model. Indeed, the relationships between the source's expertise and attitude (Reg = 1.451; CR = 7.745; p-value = 0.000), as well as trust in the source (Reg = 0.609; CR = 7.028; p-value = 0.000) have significant and strong associations with attitude.

Moderating Effect of Gender on Attitude

To check the influence of gender on consumer attitudes, we performed a two-step test. In fact, we divided the sample into two parts according to the gender of the respondents and we analyzed the attitude of the respondents according to their sex. The total sample is 38.2% men, compared to 62.8% women.

Table 13 Results of the test of the global model among men

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Valence	< ---	Force_Arg	,176	,500	,617	☒
Valence	< ---	Volume_P	−,256	−1,842	,065	☒
Valence	< ---	Volume_N	−,093	−,974	,330	☒
Attitude	< ---	Valence	,151	1,727	,084	☒
Attitude	< ---	Expertise_Scr	1,508	5,153	***	✔
Attitude	< ---	Trust_Scr	,881	6,189	***	✔
Purchase_intent	< ---	Attitude	,373	5,234	***	✔

Table 14 Results of the test of the global model on women

Relation			Estimate	Test T (C.R.)	P	Conclusion
Valence	< ---	Force_Arg	,260	1,203	,229	☒
Valence	< ---	Volume_P	−,172	−1,446	,148	☒
Valence	< ---	Volume_N	,208	2,585	,010	☒
Attitude	< ---	Valence	,263	5,140	***	✔
Attitude	< ---	Expertise_Scr	1,370	5,804	***	✔
Attitude	< ---	Trust_Scr	,368	3,408	***	✔
Intention_achat	< ---	Attitude	,748	12,181	***	✔

Thus, the following table presents the results of the test on the population of men (Table 13):

It can be seen from these results that men are not influenced by the valence (Reg = .151; CR = 1.727; *p*-value = 0.000), but place more importance on the expertise of the source (Reg = 1.508; CR = 5.153; *p*-value = 0.000), more than confidence. We also notice a significant and positive relationship between attitude and purchase intention (Reg = 3.373; CR = 5.234; *p*-value = 0.000).

Thus, in order to compare the reactions of women to exposure to electronic WOM, we present the results of the model test carried out on the sample of women in the following table (Table 14):

According to the results obtained, we notice that unlike men, women were influenced by the valence of electronic WOM messages. Indeed, the relationship between valence and attitude shows a significant and positive relationship (Reg = .263; CR = 5.5140; *p*-value = 0.000). On the other hand, women also place more importance on the expertise of the source, rather than on trust, for the judgment of the word of mouth message received (Reg = 1.370; CR = 5.804; *p*-value = 0.000). Finally, we note a greater intensity and significance between the variables “Attitude” and

Table 15 Summary of the results of the hypothesis test

Hypotheses		Status
H1	The valence of the electronic WOM message influences consumer attitudes	Validated
H2	The valence effect of electronic word-of-mouth is assessed based on the volume and strength of the argument	Partially validated
H2a	H2a: The repetition of the messages positively influences the valence of the electronic WOM	Validated
H2b	H2b: The strength of the argument positively influences the valence of electronic WOM messages	Rejected
H3	Favorable attitude positively influences consumer's purchase intention	Validated
H4	The credibility of the source exerts a moderating effect between electronic WOM and attitude	Validated
H4a	H4a: The expertise of the source positively influences the attitude of the consumer	Validated
H4b	H4b: Trust in the source has a positive impact on the attitude of the consumer	Validated
H5	Women are more sensitive to exposure to electronic WOM than men	Not Verified
H6	The more positive the brand's perception, the more likely the consumer will favor recommendations about it	Validated

"Purchase intention" in women (Reg = .748; CR = 12.181; p-value = 0.000). This shows that women are more sensitive to exposure to electronic WOM and tend to develop a stronger intention to buy than men. Thus, we confirm the moderating role of the "Gender" variable and **we also validate hypothesis H3**.

Summary of the Hypothesis Test

Consequently, after having checked the links between the different variables of the model, we present in the following table a summary of the results of the test of the hypotheses (Table 15):

7 Discussion of the Results

After presenting the results obtained through our confirmatory study, we can now proceed to their discussion, by making a comparison with the literature related to our research theme.

Thus, we are first interested in the direct effects of the explanatory variables, before focusing on the results of the variables having a moderating influence.

7.1 Discussion of Direct Effects

7.1.1 The Effect of Electronic WOM Valence on Attitude

Thus, a positive review expresses a consumer's satisfaction with a product or service, whereas a negative review expresses his dissatisfaction. Indeed, valence has been studied extensively in studies of electronic word-of-mouth to explain purchasing or recommending behavior. We empirically validated this influence in our empirical study by confirming the effect of valence on attitude, particularly positive word of mouth.

These findings add to the conclusions reached during our exploratory study, in which interviewees confirmed that they were influenced by positive opinions and that this encouraged them to purchase the product in question. This finding is shared by Kaut (2016), who also concluded that the valence of a consumer review has a greater influence when it is positive. As a result, when a consumer engages in a positive act of purchase, his attitude gradually shifts in the same valence direction.

On the one hand, Sundaram and Webster (1999) have also shown that consumer attitude and the resulting purchase intention are strongly influenced by the positive valence of WOM. On the other hand, the negative WOM does not seem to have much influence on the respondents of our study. Indeed, unlike most research, our results do not follow the general trend that negative messages are more influential than positive messages. Therefore, we agree with the statements of Ouiddad (2014) who state that: "we cannot confirm that negative word of mouth has a much stronger impact than positive customer reviews, contrary to what is widely believed". Indeed, according to Doh and Hwang (2009), the presence of a few negative messages within a majority of positive messages does not affect the positive attitude of the consumer, but on the contrary contributes to a better credibility of information from the consumer Electronic WOM.

7.1.2 The Effect of the Volume and the Strength of the Argument on the Valence

This last observation leads us to focus on the determinants of the influence of valence. Indeed, within the framework of our study, the valence seems to be much more influenced by the volume of the messages than by the strength of their arguments. This finding is consistent with the results of our exploratory study, in which the majority of interviewees confirmed that they needed several positive opinions to be reassured about the quality of the product.

Thus, the more online comments there are, the more useful they will be for Internet users to assess the quality of the product or service sought. This leads opinion seekers to adopt the viewpoint held by the majority (Luo et al., 2014) or to be convinced that the product has been used by several people, which further reinforces their decisions (Park et al., 2007).

Consequently, the greater the number of messages processed by a receiver, the more it will favor the formation of favorable arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Therefore, a large number of messages generally lead to a favorable attitude on the part of the receiver.

As to the strength of the argument, our results diverge from previous studies. The participants in our study do not seem to be swayed by the strength of the argument unlike the majority of opinion seekers in the other studies. This can be linked in particular to the type of consumers questioned or to the specificity of the field of study (Facebook groups). Indeed, according to the results of the experiment of Ouiddad (2014), the group of "dissuaded", which is made up of consumers strongly discouraged by negative word of mouth messages, do not seem to be influenced by the force of the word of mouth argument in that has no direct impact on purchase intention.

On the other hand, this lack of sensitivity to the strength of the argument may also be linked to the lack of involvement of the participants in our study with respect to the desired product category. According to Soulard (2015), consumers attach more importance to the quality of arguments when they are highly involved, while they favor variables relating to the credibility of the source to assess the message when involvement is low.

Moreover, the influence of electronic WOM is determined according to Cheung et al. (2009) to the strength of its argument, and its ability to convince the consumer. This finding is also confirmed by Ouiddad (2014) paper which indicates that the positive or negative valence of comments is correlated with the strong or weak argument. Indeed, when the sales pitch is weak, the messages negatively influence the intention to buy. The same goes for strong arguments that vary positively with attitude and intention to buy.

Thus, according to findings from the literature, the valence of the messages and the strength of the argument represent characteristics of the message that can influence behavioral intentions (Bressoud, 2001; Stenger & Coutant, 2008).

7.1.3 The Effect of Attitude on Purchase Intention

One of the most widely used variables in research on consumer behavior has been intention to buy. Indeed, it has often been associated with attitude as a direct antecedent, or even confused with the cognitive dimension of attitude. Along the same lines, Chang et al. (2005) found that attitude has a significant influence on online shopping intention. In addition, Xiaofen and Yiling (2009) suggest that electronic WOM has a great influence on purchase intention, as the information received has an impact on consumers' attitude towards the product and affects positively their purchase intention.

The finding is also shared by previous research (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ouiddad & Sidmou, 2013; Zouabi & Kammoun, 2016), which validated the relationship between attitude and intention to purchase. This is in line with the results of our study since the attitude towards the product (generated by the electronic WOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention. Indeed, three quarters of those interviewed during the qualitative study said they were convinced by the recommendations of the members. However, they do not publicly declare their intention to purchase, but only thank members who have helped them and sometimes share photos of their order, in turn to help others.

Thus, our results agree with the statements of the theories of reasoned action (Fishbein, 1967) and planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) which state that attitude is a precursor of behavioral intention. Moreover, it has even been established that attitude can mediate word of mouth and intention to buy in a virtual context (Tabbane & Hamouda, 2013).

7.2 Discussion of Moderating Effects

7.2.1 The Moderating Effect of the Source's Credibility

Source credibility has been defined by O'Keefe (1990) as the judgments made by a receiver regarding the credibility of a communicator. Transposed to the virtual context, it has been defined by Kiecker and Cowles (2001) as the degree to which the receiver regards the source of the electronic WOM as having relevant knowledge, skills or experiences about a subject or a subject category in particular. This credibility is also assessed on the basis of the confidence placed in this source regarding its ability to give objective and not erroneous information.

Thus, it was shown by Petty and Cacioppo (1983) that credibility directly affects the attitude of the receiver. Indeed, if the information received online is perceived as credible, it contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards the object sought (Sia, 1999). This finding is also confirmed by Ba and Pavlou (2002) who established an influential relationship between the perceived credibility of a message and the attitude of the receiver in a virtual context. Therefore, WOM's influence on purchase intention may be greatest when the message is perceived to be credible.

Our literature review enabled us to retain the perceived credibility of the source as a moderating variable of the electronic WOM-Attitude relationship. We identified the expertise of the source and trust in the source as the main determinants of the perceived credibility of the source of influence. The expertise of the source is assessed based on the number of arguments and their objective validity. Influence is established when expertise lends credibility to the commentator. Thus, the results of our research are in line with the comments of researchers who have focused on the study of the influence of the perceived credibility of the source (Cheung et al., 2008; Huang & Chen, 2006; Kiecker & Cowles, 2001; Park & Kim, 2008), and which indicate that the expertise of the source plays a major role in explaining the credibility of the online source. Indeed, it turned out that respondents to our study place more importance on expertise rather than trust in the source.

Expertise assessed by the interviewees of our qualitative study through the level of knowledge acquired by the sender of the message through the experience of using or purchasing the product, but also through technical knowledge of the properties of the product. The finding was noted during our nethnographic analysis of consumer exchanges at the level of Facebook groups. Moreover, for Cheung et al. (2008), Huang and Chen (2006) as well as Kiecker and Cowles (2001), trust in the source of the message is the most important determinant of the influence of electronic WOM communication on consumer behavior. This result can be explained by the fact that online comments are written by anonymous persons having no relation to the receiver. Therefore, it is essential for consumers to base themselves on this dimension to judge the credibility of the issuer and to identify its expertise and knowledge (Chatterjee, 2001; Cheung et al., 2008; Park & Lee, 2009). Thus, the presence of personal information about the source of the electronic WOM could strengthen the opinion-seeker's confidence in the issuer and help to form a favorable attitude. In fact, we noted during our qualitative study that some of the interviewees place a lot of importance on revealing their identity and tend to have more confidence in members connected with a verified profile.

7.2.2 The Moderating Effect of Gender on Attitude

The literature has shown us that gender can play an important role in consumer behavior, especially in the reactions of individuals to exposure to communicational stimuli. Indeed, studies of online consumer behavior show that men spend more time shopping online than women (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Rodgers & Harris, 2003). On the other hand, the response to online comments has been shown to be greater in women (Bae & Lee, 2011). Indeed, women would develop a more emotional attitude in their purchasing decision, while men are more pragmatic (Dittmar, 2004). Consequently, intention to purchase is higher among women (van Slyke & Belanger, 2002), which is consistent with the results obtained in our analysis. Indeed, we noted that the relationship between the variables "Attitude" and "Purchase intention" was more intense in women. This implies that women are more sensitive to exposure to electronic WOM messages.

On the other hand, research by Bae and Lee (2011) found that the negative effect of an online review is greater on women. This is because a woman generally considers negative criticism to be more helpful and constructive than a man. Behavior that can be related to the way in which received messages are evaluated. Indeed, during the analysis of the data of our quantitative study, we noted that women place more importance on the expertise of the source, rather than on trust, in evaluating the message received.

8 Conclusion

Through this research, we have tried to explain the purchase intention of the consumer looking for opinions and recommendations within Facebook groups. Thus, we identified the main determinants of the influence of electronic WOM messages, in particular the influence of valence and volume on the consumer's attitude and his purchase intention, or the importance of the source expertise in the eyes of our study participants. On the other hand, we verified the moderating effect of gender on the attitude and sensitivity of women to electronic WOM messages.

Like all research, our study has a number of limitations, which are conceptual and methodological. Thus, conceptually, we have focused on the perception of messages and on the characteristics of the message source as explanatory variables of intention to purchase. However, other variables such as consumer involvement or characteristics relating to the exchange space (colors, ergonomics, interactivity, etc.) can also explain consumer behavior. Furthermore, another conceptual limitation of our work lies in the fact that we have studied intention and not actual purchasing behavior. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyze the actual or post-purchase reaction of consumers following exposure to an electronic WOM message. This could provide new avenues for better understanding the consumer's decision-making process. On the other hand, the nethnographic analysis carried out on the basis of two exchanges considerably limits the capacity of generalization of the results. Thus, it would be more appropriate to broaden the analysis over several exchanges in order to highlight the general trend of exchanges at the level of Facebook groups.

Annexes:

a) The interview guide:

Selection question:
Have you ever required the opinion of Internet users on Facebook groups to purchase an item on an international merchant site (Example: AliExpress, Amazon, etc.)?
Interview questions:

1. Why did you choose Facebook groups to make your choice?

Recovery:
- Why did you choose this group precisely?
- In your opinion, is there a difference between consulting the comments of a website and a Facebook group? If yes which one?
- How do you describe the discussion within the group? Did she have a commercial tone?

We will now talk about the advice you had:

2. Did the favorable or positive opinions encourage you to buy the article in question?

Recovery:
- What defines a favorable or positive opinion for you? Is it the price, the return on experience or something else?
- Did you need one or more positive reviews to make your choice?
If only one, why? Is it by his strong argument?
If several, why? Weak arguments?

3. Did the negative or negative opinions make you reconsider your purchase?

Recovery:
- What characterized an unfavorable opinion for you? Is it the perception of the brand, the return on experience or something else?
- Did you need several negative opinions to reject the purchase, or was one sufficient?
If only one, why? Is it by his strong argument?
If several, why? Weak arguments?

4. How do you describe the level of knowledge of the members of the group in relation to the article sought?

Recovery:
- How do you qualify the credibility of members based on their knowledge?
- Have the opinions of the expert members convinced / influenced you more than the others?

5. How does disclosure of identity affect your trust in group members?

Recovery:
- Do you have more confidence in a member whose profile information is verified rather than a member logged in under a fake profile?
- Does a member's help proposal affect your trust in the member?

Now we will discuss the features that concern you:

6. Has the prior knowledge of the brand and the quality of its products helped you to filter the opinions of the members? how?

Recovery:
- Have the filtered reviews easily convinced you? how?
- Have you tried to check the opinions that have been published?
- How? Have you opted for reviews of the product in question?

Now let's talk about the effect of opinions on your attitude.

7. Did the opinions of the members convince you to act?

- How did his opinions affect your perception of the product / item sought?
- Have the beliefs and values of the members influenced your attitude towards the product / item in question? to what degree?

We will finally address the part relating to your purchase decision

8. Have you really opted for the choice recommended by the members?

If yes
- Have you publicly declared your intention to buy it or have you kept it for yourself? Why?
- Have you already planned in the act of purchase?
- If not why?

b) Thematic coding of nethnographic data:

Theme	Exchange	transcripts	Frequency
Positive WOM	1	**M2**: “*Tay3awdu 3lihum mezianin. \ They are good at what they say*”	13/48
		M4: “*اخويا خودهوم بعينيك مغمضين الله يعمرها سلعا\ My brother, you can take them with your eyes closed. Very good merchandise*”	
		M4: “ *والله ماشي غير كايتفيكساو شي حاجة كتر .... التكل على الله بلا ماتخمم\ Yes they do more than fix … Go buy them without thinking*”	
		M7: “*Ana 3endi, mzyanin \ I have them, they are good*”	
		M8: “*Hado 3andi zwinin ghi khodhom \ These I have them, they are good takes them*”	
		M9: “*wa3rin khodhom \ They too strong, take them*”	
		M12: “ *خدام بيهم شي عام ... مخيرين\ It’s been a year since I use them … They are very good*”	
		M13: “*Super*”	
		M14: “*Khdit version khra mn nafs lmarque swt mzyan w ki isoliw sda3 d bera \ I have another version of the same brand. The sound is superb and they isolate the outside noise*”	
		M15: “*Ana yalaweslonii lbare7 zwinin tkt khodhomee ra base 7alawa w quality sound mziana ghi twekel 3ma laahh \ I just received them yesterday, they are good. Do not worry, take them. They produce a sound of good quality and they have a good bass. Go buy the*”	
	2	**M3**: “*Wa3r cheft lih videowt youtube, 3ndak houa ola dak dogee high quality \ It is too loud, I saw his videos on Youtube. You have this one and the other ‘dogee’, they are of very high quality*”	
		M5: “*Proc dealo mazean.Mediatek P25 equivalent l snapdragon 625 \ It has a good processor. Mediatek P25 is equivalent to snapdragon 625*”	
		M6: “*Wa3r akhouya charika mzyana … \ he is too strong my brother, very good company*”	
Negative WOM	2	**M4**: “*Khouya shof ashmen processor? Ra taykono na9siin \ My brother, what kind of processor does it contain? They are not usually very successful*”	2/48

(continued)

(continued)

Theme	Exchange	transcripts	Frequency
		M4: "*Na9s \ Null*"	
Trust	1	**OS 1**: "*الخوت لي فايت مجرب هاد الكيت .. واش ناخدهوم؟\ My brothers, those who are already using this kit … should I take it?*"	7/48
		M4: "*خويا خودهوم بعينيك مغمضين \ My brother, you can take them with your eyes closed*"	
		M4: "*التكل على الله بلا ماتخمم والله\ Vas buy them without thinking*"	
		M7: "*… zwinin ghi khodhom … they are good takes them*"	
		M8: "*wa3rin khodhom \ They are too strong, take them*"	
	2	**OS 2**: "*الخوت شنو بان ليكم فهاد الهاتف؟\ My brothers, what do you think of this phone?*"	
		M6: "*Wa3r akhouya charika mzyana … \ he is too strong my brother, very good company*"	
Expertise of the source	1	**M4**: "*لوكس. و نزيدك الخيط سوبل ماكايخشبش خدينا 3 هادي شي عامين, الصوت رهيب و مازال خدامين \ We ordered 3 units two years ago, and they are still working as well. They produce a very good sound and the cable with which they are designed is very flexible.*"	10/48
		M4: "*كلها و قياس كايعطيوك معاهوم 3 ديال لقياسات د جلدات دالودن على حساب \ They give with the headphones 3 additional sizes depending on the type of each ear*"	
		M7: "*Ana 3endi, mzyanin \ I have them, they are good*"	
		M8: "*Hado 3andi zwinin ghi khodhom \ These I have them, they are good takes them*"	
		M12: "*خدام بيهم شي عام ... مخيرين \ It's been a year since I use them … They are very good*"	
		M14: "*Khdit version khra mn nafs lmarque swt mzyan w ki isoliw sda3 d bera \ I have another version of the same brand. The sound is superb and they isolate the outside noise*"	
		M15: "*Ana yalaweslonii lbare7 zwinin tkt khodhomee ra base 7alawa w quality sound mziana ghi twekel 3ma laahh \ I just received them yesterday, they are good. Do not worry, take them. They produce a sound of good quality and they have a good bass. Go buy the*"	
	2	**M4**: "*Na9s \ Null*"	
		M4: "*Shof lik xioami redmi 4, 7sen \ Look at the Xiaomi Redmi 4, it's better*"	
		M5: "*Proc dealo mazean.Mediatek P25 equivalent l snapdragon 625 \ It has a good processor. Mediatek P25 is equivalent to snapdragon 625*"	

(continued)

(continued)

Theme	Exchange	transcripts	Frequency
The perceived quality of the brand	1	**OS 1**: "ولي فايت مجرب شي ماركا خرا حسن احط لليان ديالها*. And if someone has already experienced a better brand, let them post their link*"	3/48
	2	**OS 2**: "vernee او شكون فايت ليه مجرب هاد الماركة*\ And is there anyone who has experienced this Vernee brand*"	
		M6: "*charika mzyana … \ Very good company*"	
Review of product attributes	2	**M2**: "قلب عليه فاليوتوب *\ Search on Youtube»*"	3/48
		M3: "*Wa3r cheft lih videowt youtube, 3ndak houa ola dak dogee high quality \ It is too loud, I saw his videos on Youtube. You have this one and the other 'dogee', they are of very high quality*"	
		M7: "*hta ana banlia o maz3amch 3lih 7it ba9i presale mazal my kaynch review dyalo f youtube \ Me too I saw it but I hesitated because it is still in presale and there is no test on YouTube*"	

c) Vertical analysis:

Interview N°1: Interviewee indicates that she used electronic word of mouth after having a bad post-purchase product quality experiences compared to the site's photos. She explains that she solicited the opinions of the members of the group to have ideas before buying the product.

She says that the positive reviews encouraged her to order the product and that she needed several reviews to be reassured about the quality of the product.

In terms of knowledge of the product, the interviewee explains that the members of the group are not all experts in this category of product, but that they try to share their experience of purchase and use for the benefit of other members. She also explains that unveiling members' identities does not influence her confidence in the issuers of the notices, as long as they emanate from the members of the group.

Finally, the interviewee states that the opinions of the members sometimes have an influence on her intention to purchase, even if she does not declare it publicly. She only publish the photos of the product when a person ask for it or need an opinion.

Interview N°2: The interviewee explains that he used Facebook groups because he needed the opinions of other people. And to help him decide between different opinions, he usually looks for reviews of the product on Youtube, and compare them with other similar products.

Interview N°3: The interviewee says she choose Facebook groups because the personal experiences of people are more valuable than the information available on the site. She also confirms that the positive reviews encouraged her to purchase the product and that she needed several opinions to make her choice.

Regarding the level of knowledge of the members of the group, the interviewee explains that it varies according to the experience of each one. And when it comes to revealing identity, she thinks it's important, but it does not affect her trust in the group members, because she feels everyone shares her experience regardless of the type of profile (true or fake) under which it is connected.

Finally, the interviewee confirms that it favors more opinions expressed about a brand whose product quality is recognized.

Interview N°4: The respondent explained to us that it is difficult to judge a product only through the pictures available on the site. Therefore, he appealed to the members of the group for their recommendations, confident that he will find at least one person who has already ordered and tested the product.

He also confirms that the positive reviews encouraged him to buy the product and that he needed several opinions in photos to be convinced.

The interviewee declares trust in the group members and their knowledge of the product, whether they are connected under a real or a fake profile, because they are used to buy articles online.

Finally, the respondent states that he always considers the notices relating to a recognized brand to make his choice, but that he does not declare publicly his intention of purchase.

Interview N°5: The interviewee explains that she chooses Facebook groups to take the advice of people who have already bought or used the same in the website.

She stated that the positive reviews encouraged her to buy the product, but that it would take only one negative opinion to change her mind.

Moreover, the unveiling of the identity of the members (under a verified profile) is very important in her eyes, because it reassures him as to the authenticity of the recommendations.

Finally, she also considers that expert members have a lot of influence.

Interview N°6: The respondent stated that he was well influenced by the positive reviews of the members, and that it took more than one opinion to be satisfied.

He considers that the members of the group rather have a good knowledge of the product, to which he gave a score of 7 out of 10. He also explains that the preliminary knowledge of the brand and the quality of his products helped him filter the reviews.

Finally, the interviewee also confirms that the opinions of members usually convince him to act, even if he does not declare it publicly on the group.

Interview N°7: The interviewee explains that he was well influenced by the positive opinions of the members, but the number of opinions necessary to be convinced differs according to the article and its value: Sometimes one it is enough, and sometimes more.

As for the level of knowledge of the members, the interviewee remains quite mixed. He explains that there are two categories of people: true consumers who have already bought the product and used it, and those who give their opinion just to get the impression of knowing it.

Finally, he says that the members manage to convince him when the majority of the opinions are positive. However, he doesn't share his intention in public and prefers to keep it for himself.

Interview N°8: The interviewee stated that the positive feedback from members encouraged him to buy the product, and that it took several opinions to be reassured.

Regarding product knowledge, the interviewee found that group members had a fairly general level of knowledge about the article and had more confidence to members whose identity was checked.

She also explains that prior knowledge of the brand has helped her to filter the reviews and the opinions of the members have often convinced her to act. However, she does not share her purchase intention with the other members and simply thanks them.

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Chapter 9
The Impact of Digital Influencers on Consumer Behavior: Towards a Conceptual Framework of Purchase Intention

Shehrazed DADA and Salima JAZI

Abstract The impact of digital influencers on consumers' purchase intention through product and service recommendations is a phenomenon that is gaining increasing interest in marketing research. The purpose of this paper is to develop a better understanding of consumer attitudes towards digital influencers and its effect on consumers' purchase intention, and also determinants that impact the consumer's attitude towards product and service recommendations made by digital influencers. We draw a conceptual framework based on previous scientific research to explain the impact of digital influencer on attitude and purchase intention.

Keywords Influence · Digital influencers · Recommendations · Social media · Attitude · Purchase intention

1 Introduction

The way individuals communicate and receive information has undergone a radical transformation these last decades due to the emergence of social networks. The popularity of the internet and the development of web 2.0 technologies created a favorable environment for applications such as Instagram, Twitter, Youtube or Facebook to flourish. They have become a real social phenomenon. Every day, millions of people use the internet to communicate, collaborate, share information or be entertained. Social networks serve as software that allows people to share content with other people online. Blogs, forums, social networks and wikis are examples of social platforms.

Digital influencers are booming and the influencer industry will generate $ 13.8 billion in 2021 (Marketing Hub, 2021). Beyond the development of the number of influencers in the world, new entrants are emerging, making this activity more professional. In this sense, the total number of agencies and platforms of influence

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is estimated at nearly 1400 in the world. Research that focuses on the phenomenon of digital influencers has also grown in recent years. Indeed, this would be a new sub-area of Marketing, which poses new questions about the effectiveness of brand and product promotion by these new prescribers.

Our research problem is part of a wider field of research. Its aim is to have a better understanding of the influence mechanisms in the digital influencers context. We try to answer the following research question: To what extent does the digital influencer impact consumers' attitude and purchase intention? In order to define a research model, we conducted an extensive literature review on influence, digital influencers, word of mouth, recommendations, prescription, commitment, purchase intention, etc. In order to answer our research problem, we support independent and dependent variables below on the basis of theoretical models developed in previous research and that serve as basis to our conceptual framework.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Research Context

The rise of social networks has changed consumers' behavior to the point of devoting a large amount of time to it. This mainly concerns media with strong visual content that encourages and facilitates navigation and reaction like Instagram. This trend has seen a particular interest in following traditional celebrities on these platforms, as well as celebrities born in social media and digital influencers who are attracting more and more subscribers (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016) and increase their share of voice on these channels in particular. This could lead us to argue that the influence of these social media personalities diminishes the influence of "normal people" on social networks. Marketers have also realized the potential of these celebrities to endorse their products (including their products, services and ideas).

Previous research has largely encompassed celebrity endorsement (Hsu & McDonald, 2002; Ohanian, 1990), product placement (Gupta & Gould, 1997; Russell, 2002) and word of mouth communication (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Kozinets et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2010), but they do not sufficiently explain the influence of celebrities (influencers) of social networks on their subscribers and by extension, on consumer behavior. We try to answer this gap of literature through our research.

2.2 Influencers Choice

An influencer can be perceived as existing with many different definitions that describe what it could potentially mean. In addition, several types of influencers seem to exist under different names. When examining various definitions of influential individuals in social networks context, several different theoretical classifications of the concept were found, such as influencer, digital influencer, social influencer, micro-celebrity, opinion leader, maven, innovator, celebrity endorser. We retain the definition by De Veirman et al. (2017) which states that "Influencers are content creators who have accumulated a solid base of followers". By posting blogs or creating shortened content (for example, Instagram, Snapchat), they provide subscribers with insights into their daily and personal lives, experiences and opinions. We also take Chae's (2018) definition into account: «People with micro-celebrity on social media are often referred to as social media influencers (influencers)». Much research has focused on the personal and social characteristics of influencers (Ohanian, 1990; Vernette, 2006). They are classified into different categories: opinion leaders, mavens, innovators, etc. (Lester et al., 2012). If this categorization precedes the existence of social networks, we find these same characteristics among digital influencers.

2.3 Research Subject: Social Networks

During 2020, digital adoption accelerated around the world. According to the Hootsuite Global Digital Behavior Study, 4.66 billion people use the Internet, or nearly 60% of the world's total population. The average Internet user spends around 7 hours per day on the Internet, an increase of 9% compared to 2019. As for users on social networks, the penetration rate increased by 13% in 2020, bringing the global total of social media users to nearly 4.2 billion. The growth of social networks has also seen a large increase over the past three years with more than a billion new users. According to the same source, over 98% of users of a given social media platform also use at least one other social platform. In addition, 45% of Internet users worldwide now say they turn to social networks when looking for products or services. This figure is even higher among users under the age of 18, who say they are more likely to search for brands on social media rather than search engines.

Social networks have changed the way we communicate, collaborate, consume and create (Aral et al., 2013). This finding is all the more important in view of the figures mentioned in the previous paragraph. This is why marketers recognize the need to engage with influential consumers through interactive relationships that foster a relational bond and influence constructs such as consumer trust, satisfaction, engagement and loyalty (Baek & Falk, 2018; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

This is why our research focuses on digital influencers, specifically in a social media context, since these are priority communication channels for influencers and those on which Internet users consume the content created by these influencers.

2.4 Attitude & Purchase Intention

Consumers' attitude has been widely used to predict his behavior (Casaló et al., 2011). Well-known theories, such as Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior, have suggested that the behavioral intentions of individuals are influenced by their attitude towards the behavior. For example, Prendergast et al. (2010) found that a positive attitude towards an online forum reinforced the purchase intention of the products discussed. In the case of online product recommendations, Hsiao et al. (2010) also argued that attitude toward online shopping was the most important predictor of user behavioral intention. In other words, an increased positive attitude will lead to increased behavioral intention. A study of the beliefs, attitudes and behavioral responses of young social media users to social media advertising also found a significant relationship between attitude toward social media advertising and social media advertising behavioral reactions (Chu et al., 2013). A positive attitude towards social media advertising can lead to greater involvement in branding messages and information research efforts and, eventually, purchase intent. Therefore, a more favorable attitude towards the recommendations of the digital influencer will lead to a higher purchase intention.

2.5 Mobilized Theories

As part of this work, we are interested in understanding the determinants of digital influencers impact on consumer behavior illustrated by attitude and purchase intention. We mobilize several theories rooted in scientific research including the theory of usage and gratification (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), the extended model of behavior directed by a goal (Ajzen, 1991), the social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the credibility model of the source (Ohanian, 1990). In this paper, we focus on two main theories in the construction of our model. With the Usage and Gratification Theory (UGT) developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), we explain the way and the reason why individuals are actively seeking different media to satisfy their desires and needs. It is showcased in our model by the percieved usefulness and entertainment. Consumers are driven by daily goals in order to achieve optimal levels of satisfaction with their needs and wants (Rubin, 1986). Studies applying the UGT have shown that consumers are actively seeking different media to meet their information, entertainment, social and escape needs. With moderating factors in their selection of media including media efficiency, habits, antecedent attitudes, self-regulation, etc. (Dimmick et al., 2000; Ko et al., 2005). In addition, through the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990), we better understand how the percieved characteristics of digital influencers impact consumer attitude and behavior. To choose good celebrities in a marketing and advertising context, the pioneering study by Ohanian (1990) develops a scale of measurement of the credibility of the source in three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness. The scale was validated by measuring the purchase intention and perception of products quality tested by the respondents. It demonstrates high levels of validity and reliability. The Ohanian scale is based on two models of source credibility. These models are the model of source credibility and the model of source attractiveness. The model of source credibility was born in 1950s psychology research. It is known to be a groundbreaking study of Hovland and his colleagues (1953). The results of their studies highlight two significant factors that affect the perceived credibility of the communicant: the expertise and the degree of trust. The model of source attractiveness, originally derived from socio-psychological research was created as a component of a larger source valence model (McGuire, 1985). Depending on the model of source attractiveness, the effectiveness of a message is determined by the familiarity of the source, its degree of sympathy, similarity and attractiveness to the receiver.

3 Towards a Conceptual Framework of Engagement

3.1 Research Hypothesis

The aim of this research is to explain how the recommendations of digital influencers impact the purchasing intention of consumers in the context of social networks. Therefore, we study the factors that determine the influence exerted by digital influencers on the attitudinal and decision-making behavior of the consumer. In other words, it is about studying the determinants that directly or indirectly influence the intention to purchase through the exposure of consumers to content published by digital influencers.

Purchase intention is primarily a personal characteristic of the consumer which is built cognitively and which leads to purchase planning (Darpy, 1999). Based on this observation, we choose to adopt an approach centered on constructs that concern the consumer.

3.1.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as the degree of trust perceived by the receiver and the acceptance of the source and the message (Hovland et al., 1953). This is an important concept of attitude research and persuasion. A wide range of studies shows that the degree of trust in the source positively affects attitude changes and persuasion

(Friedman & Friedman, 1976; McGinnies & Ward, 1980; Miller & Baseheart, 1969). In addition, McGinnies and Ward (1980) sought to relate the source's expertise and trustworthiness to the degree of persuasion. The results indicate that when the source is expert and is considered to be trusted, the change of opinion was realized.

H1. Trustworthiness positively influences the attitude of consumers towards the recommendations of the digital influencer.

3.1.2 Expertise

According to Hovland et al. (1953) in the context of the source credibility model, the expertise is "the degree to which a communicator is perceived as a source of valid assertions". Numerous studies indicate the effect of expertise on persuasion (Crano, 1970; Crisci & Kassinove, 1973; Ohanian, 1991).

Later, the expertise was also studied in the context of celebrity endorsement. In 1996, Braunsberger demonstrated that when a celebrity has a high degree of expertise, positive attitude is more easily attained compared to weak expertise. Ohanian's (1991) results show that the perceived degree of celebrity expertise is related to purchase intention. While the other characteristics of the source, namely trustworthiness and attractiveness, are not related to purchase intention (Ohanian, 1991). Pornpitakpan (2004) comes out with the same results, which are that the support of a celebrity perceived as an expert associates positively with the intention of purchase.

H2. Perceived expertise positively influences the attitude of consumers towards the recommendations of the digital influencer.

3.1.3 Attractiveness

In the social science literature, a significant body of research indicates that a person's physical attractiveness positively impacts an individual's initial perceptions (Chaiken, 1979; Mills & Aronson, 1965). Attractive individuals reveal favorable ratings and are perceived to be more persuasive than unattractive individuals (Mills & Aronson, 1965). Moreover, Chaiken (1979) supports the same results. Chaiken (1979) found that the attractiveness was greater for women than men.

The results of attraction effect on marketing and advertising are ambiguous. Joseph (1982) demonstrates that source attractiveness (versus unattractiveness) is positively related to the opinion change and product evaluation. However, Maddux and Rogers (1980) argue in their work that physical attractiveness has no effect on the persuasiveness of communication. They suggest that the physical source attractivness is not essential to the construct of persuasion in general. It can be significant about a particular type of marketing where the audience has the power of decision (like changing TV channels or turning the pages of a magazine, if the celebrity is not attractive enough).

Erdogan (1999) summarizes this by demonstrating that the physical attractiveness of celebrity and by extrapolation digital influencers increases the degree of positive attitude, but that its impact on intention to purchase is not obvious.

H3. Percieved attractiveness positively influences the attitude of consumers towards the recommendations of the digital influencer.

3.1.4 Consumption Motivations

Perceived usefulness is related to the use of specific technology to improve productivity or performance (Davis, 1989). In the context of social networks, the aim is to connect and obtain interesting and usable information (Basak & Calisir, 2015). In addition, that can result in improved performance or decision-making. Finding useful information through an account can be seen as complete, detailed, accurate, timely, relevant, and reliable. Moreover, it may involve a product, service, advice about topics of interest to consumers or even to promote an event (Seol et al., 2016). Thus a consumer can have access to a wide spectrum of free and fast information through shared publications on social networks and in our case Instagram (Basak & Calisir, 2015).

H4. Perceived usefulness positively influences the attitude of consumers towards the recommendations of the digital influencer.

Perceived entertainment refers to the degree of entertainment a person may have from the use of a system (Van der Heijden, 2004). In the context of social networks, spending time, relaxing, or escaping boredom are the main motivations of users (Lee & Ma, 2012). As a result, they get entertainment and pleasure from their experience. In order to bring this type of entertainment, an account must offer an interesting, interactive, and personalized experience. It is in this sense that we see the importance of proliferative entertainment in the marketing literature that focuses on social networks.

H5. Perceived entertainment positively influences the attitude of consumers towards the recommendations of the digital influencer.

3.1.5 Purchase Intention

Previous consumer studies have found that there is a parallel relationship between attitude and purchase intention (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005; Ting et al., 2015). Several studies have also shown that influencers have a positive degree of influence on purchase intention (Lim et al., 2017; Lisichkova & Othman, 2017) depending on the attribute of the promotion (Korotina & Jargalsaikhan, 2016). Likewise, it has been shown that there is a positive influence of attitudes on purchase intention (Blanco et al., 2010; Lim et al., 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the attitude towards digital influencers and its effect on purchase intention.

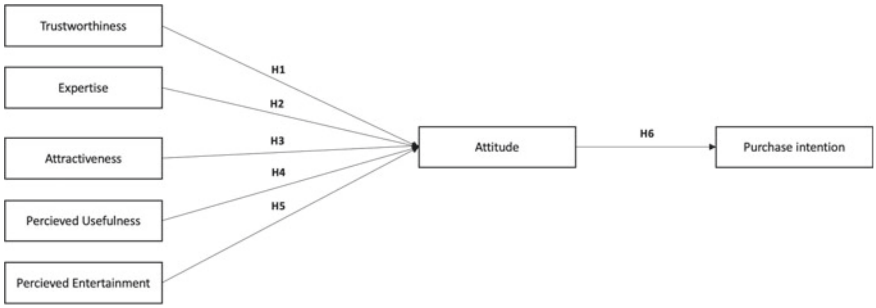

Fig. 1 Proposed research model

H6. The consumer's attitude towards the recommendations of the digital influencer positively influences purchase intention (Fig. 1).

3.2 Engagement Conceptual Framework

4 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to examine the determinants of digital influencers impact on consumers' purchase intention. Consumers follow these digital influencers on social networks and are exposed to their recommendations through the content they create. When these influencer recommendations are viewed positively as part of a positive attitude process, these recommendations can have a positive effect on purchase intention.

Therefore, the use of influencers in the context of products and services' advertising can be considered as a powerful communication channel and an effective tool of interpersonal influence which results in a positive impact on attitude formation as well as on the consumer's purchase intention.

However, due to the recency of the phenomenon, research related to influencer marketing and digital influencers are still at their premise, which explains the integration of theories relating to advertising, opinion leadership, the prescription and endorsement of celebrity to better understand the phenomenon and define our conceptual modeling variable.

We were able to draw up our conceptual model of research based on the determinants most used in research and which have had positive results.

The task now is to articulate the explanatory variables of the influence process exerted by digital influencers on purchase intention in the framework through an empirical approach in order to test our conceptual model as well as our research hypotheses.

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Chapter 10
Personal Branding of Professors in Social Media: A Choice or a Necessity in Our days?

Irma Shyle

Abstract Personal branding is the process in which people and their careers are marked as a brand. It aims to create a branded asset and equity that is related to a particular person or individual. Through personal branding, an individual strives to actively manage his skills and experiences. These accomplishments usually require extensive financial support for promotion, to create brand awareness and build up loyalty. Social media, with its ideological and technological structure, allows individuals to be promoted as a brand in a relatively cheap and efficient manner. Many scholars are not pro to the idea of their research work to be promoted in social media, for fear of being copied. Traditional marketing methods for researchers or university professors include the pursuit of conferences, publication of various articles, books, etc. They are guided by the motto: "Let your work speak for you". But this concept is rapidly becoming elusive in this digital era, because no one will be informed about your work, your researches and your professional life if you do not promote them. Personal branding in social media is already essential to long-term career success. This study explores how professors—in this case those of the Polytechnic University of Tirana—are engaged with personal branding, its impact in career development and success, as well as focuses on certain skills that influence the process and the individual outcomes from personal branding. This study also examines the growth of social media and its impact in personal branding. It describes how everything is influenced by the Internet and explains how this eventually affects professional achievements.

Keywords Personal branding · Academic staff · Social media · Promotion · Career

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1 Introduction

Personal branding is a combination of personal skills, personal interaction with others, lifestyle and personal achievements (Shyle & Azizi, 2019). Personal branding from different authors was described as: managing an extended self (Belk, 2013); planned process in which people make efforts to market themselves (Khedher, 2014); the deployment of individuals' identity narratives for career and employment purposes (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016). Every individual may influence the perception that others create around us because personal branding is self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Building personal branding is a continual process (Johnson, 2017). Personal branding in social media is the process of taking control of the impressions one is making in the virtual world (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Today people who do not develop themselves are left behind and have significantly smaller chances for professional success (Figurska, 2016). The personal branding is not about our job title; it is about the difference we bring through what we do, about the power to convince that we do it well, sustained by the received feedbacks (Petruca, 2016).

Having a strong personal brand is about projecting a strong, consistent 'personal brand' image for oneself through the way they talk, the way they behave, the grooming skills, and then taking control of their visibility to manage their own PR (Everett, 2008). With the growth of social media, spreading information about oneself and creating an online identity became a simple process. However, old generations are considered to be aware of social media, but have no knowledge or have no desire to use it.

2 Literature Review

Personal Branding is claimed to have come to light in 1997 by Tom Peters in his article "The Band Called YOU" with FastCompany (Khedher, 2014, 2015). Personal branding is a process. This process can be similar with the development of a marketing plan for a product or service (Shyle, 2015). Personal branding includes a representation of a personality through a variety of mediums. What many people do not realize is that with today's advancement of online media and the Internet in general, they may already have some form of personal brand. Personal branding has been repositioned as a process to which the input is a person's identity, the method is communication and the outcome is achieving career objectives and defined (Zarkada, 2012) as Kaputa (2005) mentioned "If you don't brand yourself, others will. You're giving the power to other people to brand you if you don't do it yourself". One can do a very good job, but if he does not know how to create a personal brand, he will benefit much less from what he does than his brand aware fellow (Jim, 2013). Personal branding is a combination of personal skills, personal interaction with others, lifestyle and personal achievements. Guaranteeing individual success and personal reputation is derivative of personal branding success. Given personal views about the personal branding phenomenon and referring to the research conducted, different scholars determine different ways to build personal branding patterns.

Close et al. (2011) defined human brand as "persona, well-known or emerging, who are the subject of marketing, interpersonal, or inter-organizational communications". While Molyneux (2015) placed an equation mark between personal branding and self-promotion. Bolino et al. (2016) view self-promotion as a distinct impression management technique, frequently used by actors "inclined to highlight their accomplishments, take credit for positive outcomes, name-drop important others, and downplay the severity of negative events to which they are connected".

Self-brands are created, not born. Making personal branding is an inevitable endeavor (Gujarathi & Kulkarni, 2018). According to Montoya (2005) personal brand is a response to questions: "who you are, what you do, what makes you different, or how to create value for your target market?". Eagar and Dann (2016) suggest three approaches to the self as a human brand: (1) "consumerist"—viewing human brands from the position of consumers, (2) "reputational"—assuming a passive approach in having a brand, and (3) "agency"—proactively creating and managing one's personal brand. Career success is defined as "the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur et al., 2005). Personal branding is still an emerging career competence (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

In their research, Gorbatov et al. (2018), propose the following way to define personal branding: *Personal branding is a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery.*

Social media is just a new set of tools beside the traditional ones such as television, print advertising and billboards that are used to connect and build relationships with people. In terms of effectivity, however, social media is the number one (Safko, 2010).

Social media provides numerous opportunities not only to build a strong personal brand, but also a successful and long-lasting one. There are many strategies to guarantee a robust social media presence in various social media platforms. Personal branding created in social media is related to personal and professional attributes of the creator. According to Aaker (1997) the personality of personal branding is intertwined with the human personality. Unlike Aaker's (1997) assertion, Keller (2006) found that personal branding personality is an expression of the brand's own personality rather than that of the creator, and meant that a brand could be branded without affecting the creator's personality. As Peters mentioned "Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me, Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You" (Peters, 1997).

According to Goffman (1959), every individual can influence the perception that others create around us. Self-presentation on different platforms of social media is one of the most essential ways in the continuation of professional progress. The concept of personal branding is self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). With minimum of effort, anybody can make an account and promote his activity in order to obtain more followers and shape the way of being perceived online.

According to Cederberg (2017), personal branding is "an active process of synthesizing and packaging a personal brand to target customers, prospective employers, and an online network of colleagues".

According to Gorbatov et al. (2018), the outcomes from personal branding are individual (intrinsic or extrinsic) and organizational. Effective personal branding leads to greater individual intrinsic outcomes such as self-evaluations, self-realization or individual extrinsic outcomes such as differentiation, reputation or prestige. Effective personal branding requires self-awareness, feedback-seeking and sense-making (Khedher, 2015). For many Faculty members, cultivating, maintaining, and being aware of their own brand may feel like self-promotion and may be quite uncomfortable. Junior Faculty members may be more comfortable with the paradigm of personal branding than those who believe, that the work must speak for itself and that any attempt to package it differently is merely self-promotion that undermines the work itself.

3 Methodology

Although there are many studies and articles related to personal branding, there are still no accepted academic definitions and there are no theoretical models.

The conceptual personal branding model used for this study is the personal branding model of Gorbatov et al. (2018) (Fig. 1).

Based on this model we will analyze: the impact of technology (social media) on personal branding, personal skills that influence the personal branding process and individual outcomes from personal branding.

The Polytechnic University of Tirana is the oldest university in Albania with the largest number of academic staff with scientific degrees. It is divided in seven faculties, but only three of them and their pedagogues will be subject to our study. These professors are accomplished professionals and already have a brand that distinguishes them as such in their field. The brands of the Faculty members represent both what their work is (what their academic products are) and what their work says about them to those who encounter them and their work. Faculty members still need to maintain an open mind about their personal brand, and adapting or rebranding may be necessary at many points in a faculty member's career (Borman-Shoap et al., 2019).

For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the pedagogues of only three out of the seven faculties of the university that also have the largest number of academic staff. We used the questionnaire as a search tool, drawn up with open and closed questions. Likert's 5-point rating was used to give their ratings.

The first part of the questionnaire contains questions regarding the faculty involved, year of graduation (referring to the 90s), place where university and postgraduate studies were completed, current scientific degree, etc.

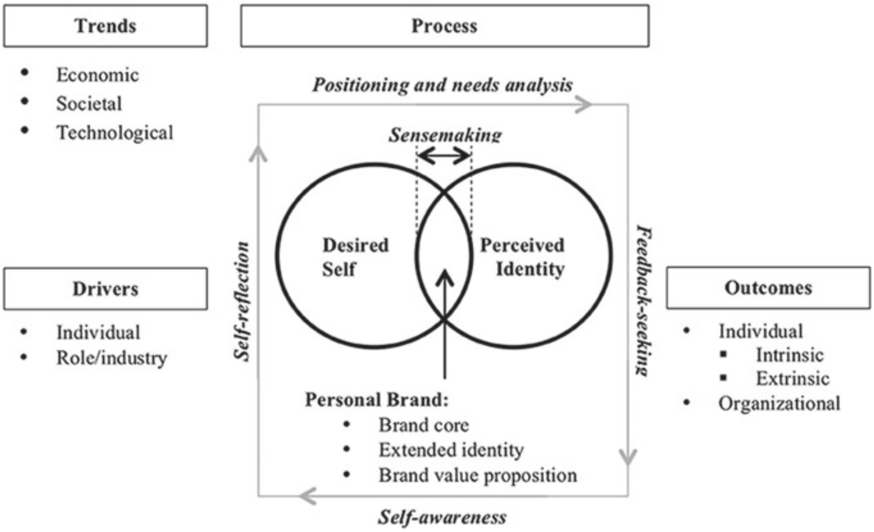

Fig. 1 Personal branding model (*Source* Gorbatov et al., 2018)

The second part of the questionnaire contains questions about personal branding. First and foremost, is the concept of personal branding acknowledged or considered relevant? Do they invest in personal branding and why? How do they value the skills and qualities that can be in advantage of personal branding (10 questions) as well as the factors that they recon to have an impact on personal branding (8 questions)?

The third part of the questionnaire focuses on the use of social media (10 questions) by the academic staff, the reasons for using or not using social media, the importance of social media influencing personal branding, the benefits of using social media, and in what degree technology affects the future on personal branding.

The study is based on the responses of 53 pedagogues of three faculties within the Polytechnic University of Tirana. The selection was random but it ensured coverage and representation from almost all faculty members. The questionnaire was physically distributed to ensure both completion and return of the questionnaire. The data collection period was 10 days (2–12 February 2020).

4 Data Analysis

The reliability coefficient of the questionnaires used in this case study was greater than 0.7, which is also the lower limit accepted by the literature on the validity of the questionnaires. This indicates that the questionnaire was understood by users and we have no problem with the reliability of the data (Tables 1 and 2).

77.3% of the academic staff responded that Personal Branding for career success is very important; 5.7%, that it is irrelevant and 17%, that it is somewhat important

Table 1 Cronbach's Alpha questionnaire reliability coefficient

	Cronbach's Alpha n = 53	Numbers of questions
Skills/qualities that can be an advantage for personal branding	0.929	9
Factors influencing the personal branding	0.794	7

Source Author's findings from the study

Table 2 Demographic data

		n	%
Faculty	Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	29	54.7
	Faculty of Electrical Engineering	10	18.9
	Faculty of Information Technology	14	26.4
	Total	53	100.0
Period of university studies	Before the '90s	6	11.3
	After the '90s	47	88.7
	Total	53	100.0
University studies	Abroad	6	11.3
	Inside the country	47	88.7
	Total	53	100.0
Place of postgraduate studies (Ph.D.)	Abroad	24	45.3
	Inside the country	29	54.7
	Total	53	100.0
Scientific degree	M.Sc	13	24.5
	Ph.D.	24	45.3
	Assoc. Prof	13	24.5
	Prof	3	5.7
	Total	53	100.0

and that the main reason to invest in Personal Branding is to generate individual outcomes (Gorbatov et al., 2018) such as:

1. Fulfillment or self-realization—creates a personal satisfaction and recognition from others 21%,
2. Differentiation—to be different from others 13%,
3. Reputation or prestige—trust and good name (positive image) 66%.

Table 3, presents descriptive data on skills and qualities that influence effective Personal Branding with an average of 1–5. The lowest average is persistence (M = 3.91, ds = 1.043) and the highest is communication (M = 4.57, ds = 0.844).

83% of respondents use social media and 17% don't.

Table 3 Skills and qualities that influence effective personal branding

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Persistence	53	1	5	3.91	1.043
Negotiation skills	53	1	5	3.94	0.929
Flexibility	53	1	5	3.96	0.999
Leadership	53	1	5	4.04	0.980
Positivity	53	1	5	4.23	0.912
Time management	53	1	5	4.26	1.041
Problem solving skills	53	1	5	4.36	0.811
Creativity	53	1	5	4.38	0.925
Communication	53	1	5	4.57	0.844

Source Author's findings from the study

32.1% use social media for personal branding and 67.9% do not use social media for personal branding.

The reasons that respondents and their colleagues do not use social media for personal branding are: lack of interest (38.8%), lack of time (25%), "work speaks for itself" and there is no need for online promotion (25%), fear that materials may be copied (stolen) by others (11.3%).

According to them, the benefits of using social media can be: partnerships (35.8%), participation in scientific projects (29.5%), internships (11.6%), participation in scientific conferences and journals as reviewers, as members of scientific committees or in editorial boards (23.2%).

The following Table 4 presents descriptive data of social media used for Personal Branding, with an average of 1–5. The lowest average is Instagram (M = 1.89, ds = 0.954) and the highest is Research Gate (M = 4.08, ds = 1.253).

Table 4 Descriptive data of social media that affect Personal Branding

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Instagram	53	1	5	1.89	0.954
Twitter	53	1	5	2.08	1.141
Facebook	53	1	5	2.19	1.075
Blog	53	1	5	2.36	1.226
You tube	53	1	5	2.72	1.524
Academia	53	1	5	3.55	1.367
Email	53	1	5	3.74	1.095
LinkedIn	53	1	5	3.74	1.243
Research gate	53	1	5	4.08	1.253

Source Author's findings from the study

37.7% of the respondents participated in online conferences, 90% of them in 1 to 3 online conferences and 10% in 4–6 online conferences. While 62.3% of respondents have never participated in online conferences. Meanwhile, information about conferences held inside and outside the country had been provided from: the Internet (55.4%), colleagues (41.9%) and other sources (2.7%).

24.5% of the respondents have personal websites and 75.5% do not have personal websites.

86.8% acknowledge the direct impact of technology in the future growth of personal branding and only 3.8% do not.

5 Are the Main Reasons for Investing in Personal Branding Affected by Age, Period of Completion of University Studies and Place of Study?

According to Table 5, Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (2) = 3.945, $p = 0.139 > 0.05$ there is no significant relationship between period of completion of university studies and the main reasons for investing in personal branding.

According to Table 6, Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (2) = 0.116, $p = 0.944 > 0.05$ there is no significant relationship between the place of competition of university studies and the main reasons for investing in personal branding.

According to Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (2) = 3.374, $p = 0.185 > 0.05$ there is no significant relationship between the place of postgraduate/ongoing studies (Ph.D.) and the main reasons for investing in Personal Branding.

According to Pearson Chi Square statistic χ^2 (6) = 4.025, $p = 0.673 > 0.05$ there is no significant relationship between the scientific degree he currently holds with the main reasons for investing in Personal Branding.

In order to understand if there is a significant link between skill/quality and personal branding importance for career success we used Pearson correlation. If

Table 5 Chi-Square test of the relationship of the period of completion of university studies with the main reasons for investing in personal branding

	Value	df	*p*
Pearson Chi-Square	3.945	2	0.139

Source Author's findings from the study

Table 6 Chi-Square test of relationship between the country of university studies and the main reasons for investing in Personal Branding

	Value	df	*p*
Pearson Chi-Square	0.116	2	0.944

Source Author's findings from the study

we take a look at Table 7, we see that there are statistically significant relationships between the two ($p \leq 0.01$).

There is a significant, positive relationship between the importance of personal branding for a successful career and negotiation skills ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.492$, $p \leq 0.01$), leadership ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.560$, $p \leq 0.01$), communication ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.375$, $p \leq 0.01$),

Table 7 Pearson correlation between skills and the importance of personal branding for career success

		Importance of personal branding for career success
1. Negotiation skills	Pearson Correlation	**0.492****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53
2. Leadership	Pearson Correlation	**0.560****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53
3. Communication	Pearson Correlation	**0.529****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53
4. Time management	Pearson Correlation	**0.465****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53
5. Creativity	Pearson Correlation	**0.375****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.006
	N	53
6. Problem solving skills	Pearson Correlation	0.218
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.116
	N	53
7. Persistence	Pearson Correlation	0.214
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.124
	N	53
8. Flexibility	Pearson Correlation	**0.543****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53
9. Positivity	Pearson Correlation	**0.550****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Source Author's findings from the study

time management ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.465$, $p \leq 0.01$), creativity ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.375$, $p \leq 0.01$), flexibility ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.543$, $p \leq 0.01$) and positivity ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.550$, $p \leq 0.01$).

The result shows that just by adding one skill/quality, the impact of personal branding in career success increases.

In order to understand (value, estimate) if there are significant links between factors that influence the development of personal branding and the importance of personal branding for a successful career, we used Pearson correlation. According to Borman-Shoap et al. (2019), by understanding and accepting that everyone has a brand, whether they own it or not, and recognizing how this end-user perception of work relates to their product, academic faculty can be intentional about auditing and reshaping their brands as an ongoing part of their professional development. Even in our study, from data analysis (Table 8), there is a statistically significant relationship

Table 8 Pearson correlation between factors that influence the development of personal brand and the importance of personal branding for career success

		Importance of personal branding for career success
1. Career	Pearson Correlation	0.368**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.007
	N	53
2. Experience	Pearson Correlation	0.269
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.051
	N	53
3. Internet and social media	Pearson Correlation	0.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004
	N	53
4. Image of the institution (UPT)	Pearson Correlation	0.276*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.046
	N	53
5. Financial support from the institution	Pearson Correlation	0.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	53
6. Personal satisfaction (ego, self-esteem, recognition)	Pearson Correlation	0.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	53
7. Increase revenue	Pearson Correlation	0.251
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.070
	N	53

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
Source Author's findings from the study

between them ($p \leq 0.01$, $p \leq 0.05$).

There is a significant, positive relationship between the importance of personal branding for a successful career with career ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.368$, $p \leq 0.01$), internet ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.389$, $p \leq 0.01$), image of the institution (UPT) ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.276$, $p \leq 0.05$), financial support from the institution ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.422$, $p \leq 0.01$) and personal satisfaction (ego, self-esteem, recognition) ($r_{(n=53)} = 0.470$, $p \leq 0.01$).

The result shows that if you increase one of the factors, you will also increase the importance of Personal Branding for a successful career.

6 Does Using Social Media Affect Personal Branding?

To see if using or not social media affects differently the impact of personal branding in career success, we used the T. test. The following Table 9 does not show statistically significant differences between users and non-users of social media, as the p value is greater than 0.05. ($t = 0.577$, $p > 0.05$).

Test T of the average differences of personal branding importance for career success, according to the use of social media for promotion suggests that, statistically, there are no significant differences between users and non-users, as the p value is greater than 0.05. ($t = 1.055$, $p > 0.05$).

According to Pearson Chi Square statistic $\chi^2(2) = 0.748$, $p = 0.688 > 0.05$, there is no significant relationship between, use of social media and the main reasons for investing in personal branding. In addition, there is no significant relationship between the use of social media for personal branding and the main reasons for investing in personal branding (Pearson Chi Square statistical $\chi^2(2) = 3.239$, $p = 0.198 > 0.05$).

According to the Pearson Chi Square statistical table χ^2 $(2) = 6.327$, $p = 0.042 \leq 0.05$ there are significant relationships between the use of social media for personal branding and the benefits of using social media. The result shows that those who use social media report a higher level of partnership (82.4%) compared to those who do not use it (55.6%). Furthermore, those who do not use social media for personal branding report a higher level of participation in scientific projects (38.9%) compared to those who use it (5.9%).

Table 9 Test T of the average differences of personal branding importance for career success according to social media use

Do you use social media		N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	*p*
Personal branding importance for career success	Yes	44	3.98	0.731	0.577	0.579
	No	9	3.67	1.581		

Source Author’s findings from the study

7 Conclusions

In order to improve career success Personal Branding amid academic staff is considerably important. The main reason for investing in personal branding is reputation—trust and good name (positive image). The most important skills and qualities that favor personal branding are: communication, creativity, problem solving skills, time management, positivity and leadership.

Technology plays a crucial role in the processes of developing a strong personal branding and promoting how others see you on various online platforms. And yet, the academic staff of the Polytechnic University of Tirana are using social media more for personal reasons than for personal branding. The reasons why they don't use social media for personal branding are: lack of interest, lack of time—work speaks for itself—and there is no need for online promotion. But even so, they consider important to use social media for partnerships, participation in scientific projects, participation in scientific conferences and journals as reviewers, members of scientific committees or in editorial boards.

From this study we can conclude that there is no significant relationship between: age, period of study (year of graduation), place of study and the main reasons for investing in personal branding.

There is a significant, positive relationship between importance of personal branding for career success and promotion, Internet, image of the institution (UPT), financial support from the institution and personal satisfaction (ego, self-esteem, recognition).

There are significant relationships between the use of social media for personal branding and the benefits of using social media. Our survey shows that, the need for social connection, technology, social media and other online platforms/apps, can lead to user addiction.

Strong personal branding combined with personal skills may positively impact your career and be crucial for professional success. However, it is important to understand that personal branding only does not make up for incompetence, does not lead to fame and does not achieve goals.

8 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Like any study, this study has its limitations. The sample size is not very large; however 53 professors can have an impact on the study results. The focus group is only one and covers only three out of seven faculties within the University of Polytechnics in Tirana. Based on such a limitation, a more general and extensive study is suggested, extending to other universities in Albania. Comparative studies that may be conducted along with professors of other universities in the region or in other countries in relation to personal branding would also be valuable.

9 Practical Implications

Personal Branding is important for career success of the academic staff. Faculty members need to maintain an open mind about their personal brand and, in many cases, adapting or rebranding is necessary. Studies related to personal branding in Albania are lacking and this study can help educators not only understand the importance of personal branding, but also help them build a personal brand. This study can serve as an indication for the development of courses or trainings for building personal branding.

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Part IV
Branding and Tourism

Chapter 11
From Chambord's Brand Equity to the Construction of a Touristic Destination's Image: A Reductive Marketing Approach

Koffi Selom Agbokanzo and Philippe Tanchoux

Abstract With the evolution of territorial marketing and strong international competition, the perimeter of territories interested in tourism development has been extended beyond the cities by the introduction of the concept of a touristic destination, i.e. a territory marketed to a public of visitors and/or tourists. Although Chambord's brand equity is well known in terms of representations to different audiences, the three inter-municipalities surrounding the castle that are seeking to become a touristic destination remain poorly identified. The strategy of constructing an image of the destination has focused on the reputation of the castle by defining a *Blois Chambord* brand. However, the destination is full of other assets that can enrich the cognitive and emotional dimensions linked to the territory. In order to understand the logic behind this strategy of constructing a destination image, a study was conducted among four groups of stakeholders: local managers (elected officials, managers of the tourist office, managers of Chambord) and local residents or visitors. The results reveal the need to better promote the territory without abandoning the contributions of the castle's brand equity to the attractiveness of the destination. This enhancement involves better management of the destination's image in order to highlight the territory's assets and meet a local, or even non-local, demand for authenticity.

Keywords Tourism · Image · Touristic destination · Brand · Brand equity · Territorial marketing · Marketing strategy

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1 Introduction

The use of territorial marketing has become increasingly justified in the current context of market openings, globalization and increased competition between cities and even regions (Benko, 1999). In France, territorial marketing has become an important part of the strategic policies of elected representatives[1] and tourism organizations,[2] within the framework of the sharing of tourism competence between local authorities since 1983, which the "*NOTRe law*" of 7 August 2015 has not changed.

In a tourism environment where competition is increasing, the elaboration of a tourism development strategy, the better management of brand equity and the construction of a destination image are becoming key elements of differentiation for territories. However, if research in tourism marketing has mainly focused, since the early 2000s, on the study of the role of brand image in the management of the brand equity of destinations (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kotsi et al., 2018; Sürücü et al., 2019), very few works question the role of the conceptual and theorical framework of Tourism Destination Image (TDI) in the study of the relationship between "*brand image vs. brand equity*". This is to some extent due to the fact that there is confusion between TDI and brand image in the literature (Hem & Iversen, 2004). This confusion is further accentuated by the "*product approach*" in the study of touristic destinations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). A touristic destination is "*a territory that is marketed as a touristic entity to multiple domestic and international markets*" (Frochot & Legohérel, 2010, p. 28).

Unlike the "*product approach*" of the territories interested in tourism development, Florek (2005) underlines the complexity of conceiving and/or approaching an object such as "the touristic destination". He mentions, among other things, the fact that a touristic destination includes both tangible elements (historical monuments, natural sites, etc.) and intangible elements (culture, customs, history, etc.). This implies the need for the researcher to have a holistic vision to grasp the complexity of this object.

Moreover, two points of view can be chosen by researchers who approach this question of the image of the destination: either that of the sender (*branding*) or that of the receiver (*brand*). Indeed, from the point of view of the consumer (visitor and/or potential tourist), with regard to its notoriety and image, the destination is a *brand* in the sense of a sign, index, signal, etc. (Keller, 2008). It is endowed with a certain capital (positive if it attracts and negative if it drives people away). From the point of view of the organizations that manage the brand, the managers are more in line with a "*branding*" logic that aims to promote the brand and/or the destination to the visitor/touristic public. In this case, the main problem is that of the management unit. Unlike a manufacturer who has control over his product (design, development, production, marketing), several difficulties arise from the co-management of the destination brand, even if it is necessary to note the presence of a pilot, often a

[1] Regional elected representatives, departmental elected representatives, municipal elected representatives, elected representatives of associations, etc.

[2] Touristic site managers, tour operators, etc.

tourist office. Our study is therefore positioned towards this second point of view, considering the disagreements that can emerge from the co-management logic of a destination brand.

Taking into account the managerial realities mentioned and the theoretical elements, our work is structured around two main research questions: (1) how can a complex "*Blois Chambord*" brand, co-constructed by stakeholders with varied, even divergent interests, be managed? (2) And how does the image of the destination co-constructed by these stakeholders enrich and/or contribute to the value of the "*Chambord*" brand?

In order to answer these questions, the conceptual fields of the brand and brand equity are mobilized. Then, we proceed to a clarification between the TDI and the brand image. Finally, a qualitative study is conducted with four groups of stakeholders of the *Blois Chambord* destination to understand the role of TDI in the relationship between "*brand image vs. brand equity*".

2 Brand, Brand Equity and Tourism Destination Image (TDI)

This first part is devoted to the conceptual and theoretical field of our research. The different concepts which structure our work are evoked: the brand, brand equity and TDI. Some reflection is also carried out to clarify the convergences and divergences between two key concepts related to this literature: brand image and TDI.

2.1 The Brand and Brand Equity

Several works have been conducted in tourism marketing literature on the tourism destination *brand image* to understand the tourism destination *brand* (Boo et al., 2009; Cai, 2002; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kotsi et al., 2018; Sürücü et al., 2019).

2.1.1 A Race from Territories to Brands

If in the field of territorial marketing, the brand has long been the privileged domain of the cities, today it is the touristic destinations that are leading this frantic race towards the creation of a brand to differentiate themselves, by focusing essentially on different approaches to the city brand. Several brands are developed in a given tourism territory, with the risk of exacerbated competition between these brands. On the basis of this observation, it therefore seemed important to us to study the literature on the city brand in order to understand the touristic destination brand.

Indeed, researchers and practitioners have developed branding approaches for the city in order to respond to the need for differentiation in an increasingly competitive tourism environment. Since the 1970s, with the appearance of the "***I love NY***" brand for the US city of New York, cities have been developing strategies with an acceleration of brand development.[3] The dominant thinking is that this brand represents an asset for cities to boost their economic dynamism. Convinced that their salvation lies in the development of brands, several cities have embarked on a brand management policy. It is one of the main entry points for tourism management practitioners to attract tourists, executives and investors. Over the last four decades or so, several city brands have emerged.

In this respect, Maynadier (2009) considers the complexity of a city[4] and the different publics linked to it. He emphasizes that branding goes beyond the management of a city as a pure touristic product or as the place of origin of a product.[5] This observation leads us to observe that the application of the concept of a brand to a city, or even to a territory, goes beyond purely "product" logic.

In fact, the territory is a complex system, in which there are several networks of stakeholders and different identities (Di Méo, 1998; Escadafal, 2015, p. 56). Three aspects are highlighted by Escadafal (2015) to illustrate this aspect of territory: (1) the political dimension created and intended by the different stakeholders, (2) the role of heritage "in a broad sense" in the construction of an identity and (3) the history linked to this heritage.

Consequently, the touristic destination is much more than a simple product, as mentioned by Baloglu and McCleary (1999). It is a particular object of study, even if the tourism products can be found within the destination. The marketing researcher must therefore avoid over-simplification in an approach to the touristic destination and tend towards systemic, even interdisciplinary, approaches to apprehend this particular object of study.

Moreover, in city branding literature, researchers have had to deal with this complexity of the city in the course of their research. The first research positioned the city brand by integrating a product brand approach, as specified by Hankinson (2001). Subsequent currents have preferred an institutional brand approach, as described by Anholt (2005) or Maynadier (2009). These institutional brand approaches seem more coherent in that they allow the brand to be understood through an institution, which carries the strategy of the territory interested in tourism development. However, one question remains unanswered and gives rise to an interesting debate in the literature: *can we apply the notion of brand to the city or to the touristic destination?*

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[3] ***Annex 1***.

[4] This is a complexity that Florek (2005) does not fail to mention in the context of territories interested in tourism development as touristic destinations.

[5] In marketing, the product represents a physical offering that can be easily modified.

2.1.2 When Can We Talk About a City Brand or Even a Touristic Destination?

Since the city can be seen as a touristic destination, let us lay the foundations for our questioning of the appropriate context for talking about a touristic destination brand on the basis of the brand approaches for the city. Although it seems to be quick and easy to draw the parallel, the researcher must however have reservations. Considering our definition of the touristic destination, the destination[6] can represent more complex entities than the cities themselves. In addition to the object under study, the complexity of the issues at stake emerges from the multiplicity and diversity of the stakeholders.[7] It can be linked to the specificities of the different touristic sites that can be identified within the object (territory interested in tourism development) as well as to the power relations that can be engaged in between the different stakeholders of the destination (for example, a will to put forward one's own touristic area rather than that of one's neighbor). Nevertheless, this parallel is interesting to us in order to illustrate the difficulties in developing and supporting a destination brand with regard to those encountered in applying the notion of "brand" to cities.

As Anholt (2005, 2007) makes clear in his work, city branding cannot be reduced to the simple creation of a logo or a slogan. The city brand goes beyond these signs, in that it also requires a real policy of brand management by one or more stakeholders in the city. The management of a city brand is first of all the management of its reputation (Anholt, 2004; Maynadier, 2009). This management, which must be strategic, not only makes it possible to plan the brand policy desired by the various managers, but also to create an experience framework for the visitors. It can even go beyond the function of experience for visitors, by fulfilling a function as a lever for the feeling of belonging expressed by residents.

Furthermore, the notion of reputation in relation to city branding has led many authors to conclude that cities are brands in essence (Anholt, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). They start from the fact that cities have a name[8] and that this name, together with an image of the city, generates a reputation, hence a brand. However, Maynadier (2009, p. 40) points out a theoretical limit to this rapid shortcut from reputation to brand. In particular, he emphasizes the fact that according to brand management theories, one cannot dissociate the brand from the intention to generate a brand:

> *In fact, the notion of reputation does not allow for the consideration of an intention to make a brand, nor of any brand project, which are fundamental notions in the literature* (Kapferer, 1991*). In the context of a city brand,* Virgo and de Chernatony (2005) *show that there is no brand without a brand project or vision.*

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[6] Seen as a department, a region, or a nation.

[7] The various managers of the touristic destination: the territorial authorities (region, departments, municipalities or inter-communalities), the elected representatives of associations, the managers of the tourist offices, the personnel of the place of strong tourist attraction (Chambord within the framework of this research), the residents, the shopkeepers, the regional visitors, the tourists, the media, etc.

[8] Big cities are taken as examples (Venice or New York); what about cities with a lesser reputation?.

In conclusion, the notion of brand cannot be applied to a city or a touristic destination if there is no will and strategy on the part of the managers to develop a brand policy. In the long term, this brand policy can strengthen the brand equity of the destination.

2.1.3 Brand Equity in the Tourism Industry

Brand equity is a fundamental concept in brand management and is widely used by marketing researchers to understand and analyze the value of brands. Two approaches are often used by researchers to study it: the first is financial (brand equity) and the second is customer-based (assessing consumer response to a brand name). In this work, we will retain the second, which is interested in customers in a general way, but with a broader vision of the different managers identified in a touristic destination (*branding*).

The study of brand equity is relevant to this research insofar as we note that it is necessary to put in place brand management policies in the territories interested in tourism development in order to be able to talk about destination brands (Maynadier, 2009). This concept is the subject of several definitions in the literature. In marketing, the dominant strand most often retains the definition of Aaker (1991) who presents it as "*all the assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name or its symbols and which bring something to the company and its customers because they give an added value or a loss of value to the products and services*". Five elements are retained to analyze the added value of the brand in the study of its brand equity: notoriety, perceived quality, brand image, loyalty and other brand assets (patents, production experience, logistics management, sales force expertise, relations with distributors, etc.).

In the field of tourism, this concept has also been used on several occasions by researchers working on tourism destination brands (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Referring to this work, brand equity can be defined as "*the overall utility that drives customers to favor a brand over its competitor*" (Boo et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Blain et al. (2005) suggest that the notion of image should be included in the definition of destination brands. While several research works have focused on the study of the role of brand image in optimizing the brand equity of a touristic destination (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kotsi et al., 2018; Sürücü et al., 2019), the literature devotes little interest to the study of the links between TDI, brand image and brand equity. This is partly due to a confusion between TDI and brand image. The second chapter of our literature review is devoted to the clarification of these two distinct but complementary conceptual fields in tourism marketing.

2.2 *TDI*

A key notion in the literature on tourism marketing, researchers have been interested in the notion of image since the seminal work of Martineau (1958). This work suggests that human behavior depends more on image than on objective reality. The origin of "image theory" postulates that the world is a psychological or distorted representation of objective reality residing and existing in the individual's mind (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 871).

TDI is defined here as a set of mental, cognitive and affective constructions that a person or a group of people make of a touristic destination over time, depending on the marketing and environmental stimuli to which they are exposed.[9] Although this concept is considered to be multiple in nature by researchers due to the different scales used for its measurement (Gallarza et al., 2002; Rodrigues et al., 2012), one of the consensuses identified in the literature is that the image is formed through cognitive and affective evaluations of the consumer or tourist (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gallarza et al., 2002). Cognitive evaluation concerns the knowledge and beliefs one has about a touristic destination; and affective evaluation is related to the feelings one has about a touristic destination.

Furthermore, Gallarza et al. (2002, p. 57) point out that the image is constantly evolving according to different criteria that we do not necessarily understand. Indeed, the images of a touristic destination are interactions between the impressions we have of the residents, the shops, the other visitors or tourists, or the staff of the sites we visit. It is in relation to this holistic nature of image that the study of this central concept in the tourism marketing literature is interesting.

2.2.1 Do Not Confuse TDI with the Brand Image

Brand image is one of the elements of brand value identified by Aaker (1992). It is also presented as an important source of brand equity (Keller, 2008). Tasci et al. (2007) state that inconsistent use of the terminology "TDI" has contributed to the use of other constructs as falling within the conceptual and theoretical field of TDI. This leads to the analysis of other constructs using measurement techniques similar to TDI. One of the explanations for this confusion can be found in the fact that most of the approaches conducted on the notion of image applied to tourism in the early 2000s aimed to understand the destination brand (Boo et al., 2009; Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2005; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). As a result, they focus on the brand image of the destination rather than on TDI, and are conducted on *branding* logic. According to Blain et al. (2005, p. 337), *destination branding* is "the set of marketing activities, which (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that easily identifies and differentiates the destination; (2) convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; (3) serve to consolidate and strengthen the emotional connection

[9] Synthesis of several definitions from the literature (***Annex 2***).

between the visitor and the destination; and (4) reduce search costs for consumers, as well as perceived risks".

Studies on *destination branding* are most often based on the premise of Baloglu and McCleary (1999). They assume that tourists perceive touristic destinations as a product (Murphy et al., 2000). This is a quick shortcut that can be detrimental in the application of the notion of image to a touristic destination. In order to support our argument, the beginning of an answer comes from the consideration of the characteristics of the object of study (the touristic destination). It is a complex system of objects and stakeholders (Escadafal, 2015; Florek, 2005), which implies that, depending on which stakeholders or objects of the touristic destination are mobilized, approaches to the construction of the image of the territory interested in tourism development are not necessarily the same. It is crucial to consider the maximum number of elements (tangible and intangible) of the touristic destination in order to define the construction of the image of the destination. In our opinion, this is where the brand image is limited in the context of applying the notion of image to a territory interested in tourism development. This image reduces the object of study to the existence of a brand, whereas TDI considers the complexity of this object of study, which is the stakeholders and the territory interested in tourism development.

Furthermore, Hem and Iversen (2004) point out that the formation of TDI is not just about the brand image, although the former is the core of the latter. They see TDI as an important prerequisite for moving towards a destination brand image. In a *branding context*, Pike (2009) considers that TDI is a pre-existing concept which is the equivalent of the brand image. The few definitions (***Annex 2***) allow us to illustrate this difference, depending on whether the author is talking about the brand image of the destination or TDI. In this respect, researchers always refer to brand associations when talking about the brand image, whereas cognitive and affective factors in relation to a place are highlighted more in the definitions of TDI. This difference confirms the need to delimit the boundaries between these two concepts in the context of work on the application of the notion of image to a territory interested in tourism development.

Indeed, according to Keller's work (2008), brand image is defined as the perception of a brand, as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer's memory. Décaudin (1996) approaches this concept in the same way: "*The brand image can be defined as the set of affective and rational representations linked to a brand*". The various authors are very clear on this subject and always link the brand image to the prior existence of a brand:

> *The brand is a concentrate of history and consumers store in their memory a brand image; that is to say, the sum of impressions, satisfactions or dissatisfactions accumulated during their use of the product or what they have heard about it through word of mouth or communication.* (Ratier, 2002, p. 12)

This observation implies that there is no perception of a brand image without the actual presence of a brand for the destination. However, there are destinations which do not have a brand (for example, the *royal palaces of Abomey* in Benin),[10] but which nevertheless benefit from an image perceived by visitors. In this case, it should be noted that the image is externally imposed and not desired by the managers. It is the intentionality that makes the difference. Other destinations may have recently developed a brand with less brand equity than the most popular touristic attraction in their area. This is the case of the *Blois Chambord* destination, which is the subject of our study.

It should be considered that the place of strong touristic attraction can be the main core of the brand image, or even of the brand equity of the destination if it has a high visibility. In this case, the brand image of the touristic attraction is emphasized at the expense of the brand image of the destination. This suggests that, depending on the context of the territory being promoted, the brand image can take two forms: the brand image of the place of strong touristic attraction or the brand image of the destination.[11] Also, this brand image, whatever it may be, is different from TDI, even if in the long run these two images are complementary in certain strategic logics of the promotion of a touristic destination.

2.2.2 Towards Complementarity Between TDI and Brand Image

The above-mentioned literature shows that TDI precedes the brand, which in turn generates a brand image. It is because a destination has a positive image that differentiates it from others that it can design a brand with a high level of awareness by implementing a management strategy. Therefore, before the brand or the brand image, TDI must constitute the core of a differentiation strategy. It has a central role for both researchers and practitioners.

Furthermore, the importance of brand or brand image in the differentiation strategy of a destination has been repeatedly demonstrated in the literature (Boo et al., 2009; Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2005; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Nevertheless, it is necessary to focus first on the source, namely TDI, especially for touristic destinations in the start-up or development phase.

3 Methodology and Interpretation of Results

Our study is conducted on the *Blois Chambord* destination, which has been working since 2012 on the development of a destination brand (Abrioux et al., 2021). In recent years, it has been considering the development of a management strategy based on the co-construction of an image of the destination by various stakeholders in the

[10] These are the institutional brands that may seem the most intangible in terms of their ability to represent complex entities (Maynadier, 2009).

[11] In a context where the whole of the territory being promoted for tourism adopts the same institutional brand through a federating institution such as an Intercommunal Tourist Office (OTI).

area. Located in the Loire Valley, within a region that has been developing several departmental or regional touristic destination brands since 2010, and supported by three inter-municipalities, it seems appropriate in this context to understand the role of TDI in the relationship between "brand image vs. brand equity". Therefore, our approach aims to answer two research questions: (1) how can a complex "*Blois Chambord*" brand, co-constructed by stakeholders with varied, even divergent interests, be managed? (2) And how does the image of the destination co-constructed by these stakeholders enrich and/or contribute to the value of the "*Chambord*" brand?

The data used in this research comes from a qualitative study conducted as part of the "Chambord Appel à Projet Régional (APR)" project between 2017 and 2019. This part of the study considers four groups of stakeholders present in the *Blois Chambord* destination: managers of the *Blois Chambord* intercommunal tourist office, managers of the *Château de Chambord*, elected representatives and local residents or visitors (***Annex 3***).

An interview guide was provided for these stakeholders, and was constantly enriched as the research progressed. The interviews lasted an average of fifty minutes and were then transcribed in accordance with the processing requirements of the Alceste software. The entire corpus was also reread with a view to manual thematic, horizontal (inter-group) and vertical (intra-group) analysis, based on the recommendations of Blanchet and Gotman (2006) in relation to content analysis. Ultimately, this work allows us to exploit the heuristic function of content analysis which enhances an exploratory discovery approach, namely content analysis to see or understand a phenomenon (Evrard et al., 2003, p. 126).

Box 1: Different Phases of the Methodology

Phase 1: Literature: Conceptual and theoretical elements.

Phase 2: Design of the interview guide (with three poles: positioning, brand equity and image of the destination, status) with adaptation of the questions for the different stakeholders interviewed.

Phase 3: Fieldwork: Identification of relevant questions based on the answers of the first interviewees = enrichment of the interview guide.

Phase 4: Transcription of the interviews—constitution of the corpus.

Phase 5: Analyses (Alceste and manual).

3.1 The Blois Chambord *Destination*

The *Blois Chambord* destination was established between 2012 and 2017 (***Annex 4***). It is promoted by the Blois Chambord-Val de Loire Intercommunal Tourist Office (OTI). Straddling the Loire, this destination in the Loir-et-Cher is remarkable both for the presence of renowned Loire châteaux—Chambord, Blois, Chaumont-sur-Loire, plus other notable châteaux such as Cheverny, Beauregard and Talcy—but also for the landscape of the Loire Valley, which was listed as a World Heritage site in 2000, and for the tradition of pleasure gardens. Moreover, a diversity of towns and villages rich in heritage and landscape are spread out between the Cisse valley and the limits of Touraine to the west, the ponds and moors of Sologne to the south-east, and the Petite Beauce to the north bordering the Vendôme region. The town of Blois, itself rich in architectural and landscape heritage, with a prestigious history, is at the geographical center of the region and is the economic hub of the area. In addition to the history of the Renaissance, the legacy of which can be perceived in this destination, the river tradition, hunting, agriculture, wine and the art of gardening have all left their mark on an area crossed by the Loire cycle routes.

RCP Marketing Agency has been working with the *Blois Chambord* tourist office since 2012. The agency has contributed to the creation of a new name and a new logo. Some of the destination's stakeholders have been developing a brand management strategy since January 2018, via the organization of strategic reflection workshops, even though the territory's strong touristic attraction (Chambord) has very significant brand equity.

3.2 An Interpretative Approach

By structuring our reflection around the elements of brand value identified by Aaker (1992), our analyses highlight a real use of the Chambord brand equity by different managers to build an image of their destination (*Blois Chambord*). This strategy proves to be double-edged in terms of strengthening Chambord brand equity.

Also, different managers of the destination do not necessarily agree on the course of action to be taken. The price of Chambord car park (presented in the sub-section on "*loyalty*") is an example. Those in charge of the castle want to charge a lot (for reasons of profitability and to achieve important objectives in relation to the self-financing threshold desired by the French government), but a high price discourages tourists from visiting the surrounding area. This option does not help the promotion of the surrounding municipalities and is detrimental to the objectives of the mayors of these municipalities.

3.2.1 The Reputation of Chambord

Chambord enjoys a very high level of recognition among the various players in the region. As a result, these groups consider it useful to build TDI based essentially on the reputation of the castle. For example, this observation can be seen in the analysis of the *verbatim reports of* the group of elected representatives: **Ind. 1**. "*We've really tried to build on the image of Chambord in our region. Our business park, which is located at the motorway exit, which leads to Chambord from the A10, was called the*

Gates of Chambord. This was not, we'll say, innocent, because we wanted to benefit from this image, known and recognized in France and abroad, to give an identity to our tourism business".

However, there is real difficulty in giving meaning to the destination by relying on the territory's assets (service offers, culture, traditions, etc.) to optimize the visitor experience and co-construct an image that goes well beyond the castle. The approach is still limited to the day-to-day management of the landscape, such as the maintenance of the area around the castle: **Ind. 2**. "*Indirectly***,** *yes, I think so, because everyone thinks well of Chambord today in the region and everyone is aware of what Chambord brings to the region. Behind this, we try to do things correctly for the communities and municipalities in the area. We take care of our town entrances, we take care of the motorway exit, we take care of the signage. We try to give back to Chambord what it can give us*".

3.2.2 Perceived Quality

The majestic appearance of the castle also evokes a form of quality. Chambord is seen as a place of excellence that contributes to the quality of the destination's offer: **Ind. 4**. "*The important thing is that it has to be well run, that's it! When you're at Chambord, you're not just anywhere; so there you go, it's a magical place, it's a place of history; so, there's respect which is there and which must be felt*".

However, stakeholders also deplore the lack of adequate service offers to meet visitors' requirements. For example, the destination has an image of an unwelcoming place which ultimately detracts from the quality of the visitor experience: **Ind. 21**. "*The tourist lodges in the area are starting to develop, they are developing more or less well. But going to people's homes, to people's houses, I don't know if they are... For example, someone who walks around with his bundle or his bike and then stops, goes door to door to try to...; I don't think that people would be able to welcome them, as we see in some countries or in some regions*".

3.2.3 Chambord's Brand Image

The distinctive elements of Chambord's brand image, especially those linked to the name and logo, are present in the representations of the different stakeholders, especially managers of the destination (Box 2). The latter do not hesitate to use them to highlight their destination.

Box 2: Some Examples of *Verbatim Reports*

Ind. 3: "*So there you have it, it's true that afterwards to answer your question on how, I think that the word Chambord can… is enough in itself. It's almost* *a brand name for the area and it's true that, as we were saying earlier about this definition of grandiose, wide open spaces, nature, with a fauna and flora quite characteristic of the Sologne in which we are, I would describe it a bit like that*"

Ind. 2: "*I am also an elected official at the departmental level and it so happens that in the logo of our department, there is the salamander which is the emblem of François Ier and which is the motif of the coffered ceilings of the Château de Chambord. So, clearly, it's Chambord! It's Chambord! But my silence and this time of reflection was to know if we could imagine another site as a high place!*"

Nevertheless, these preconceived elements can also have consequences for TDI when the managers enter into opportunistic "*naming*" logic. For example, Blois station was renamed "*Blois Chambord station*". This decision was not the subject of a real strategy that considered aspects related to accessibility such as "transport from Blois to Chambord". On the cognitive aspect, this new name has induced a certain proximity between Blois and Chambord for visitors with little knowledge of the area. However, it is far from obvious: "**Ind. 13**. *Ah, sure, clearly, physical accessibility is difficult. When you have a car, everything is fine! When you don't have a car, it's extremely complicated; you get to the station, it's another seventeen kilometers, it's not clear...*".

3.2.4 Loyalty

At the same time, certain tensions between the castle's managers and the local people have greatly damaged the image of the castle. This has generated a form of tension between them and has in some way affected the loyalty and even the willingness of the local visitors to play a full ambassadorial role (Box 3).

Box 3: Some Examples of *Verbatim Reports*

Ind. 2. "*There are indeed a certain number of inhabitants who have turned away from Chambord, who were regulars, who used to come to visit Chambord, especially in the low season when autumn and winter arrive, and there are far fewer members of the public at Chambord; well, it's the inhabitants who bring their family and friends, that's it! And in particular the shopkeepers of Chambord, well, we saw it… Well, we saw it! There was a period for years, years… Added to this was the price of the car park, I think you've heard about that? It's logical that there is a price for parking! But for the winter period, we, the elected representatives, proposed that it should be symbolic*"

Ind. 20. "*It's difficult [the work of cooperation between the estate and the outside world to make the territory's know-how visible in Chambord]. There have been various fights between the… in the estate and outside. You have to be careful because when you say the National Estate of Chambord, then there is the private side which intervenes. The Domaine de Chambord is something special with its epic status. So, it's difficult to…*"

3.2.5 Little Use of Service Offers to Strengthen Chambord's Brand Equity

Finally, the management policy for the destination must integrate a strategic approach which allows the tangible and intangible assets of the territory to be highlighted. The managers of the destination are aware of this, but are still struggling to implement this logic in the short, medium and even long term: **Ind. 3**. "*In other words, where the Director of the Estate and the President of the Board of Directors, and we, the elected representatives of the area with the Mayor of Chambord, can meet to talk about subjects that will contribute to the value of Chambord for our inhabitants, but also for the public that we are in charge of welcoming, because on questions, I don't know if it's part of your questionnaires! We mentioned the fact that the way we are welcomed is also how we arrive in Chambord! Since we are not in town, that's it! SMILE, yes, Chambord's accessibility won't be solved by itself. Obviously, we're going to have to get around the table*".

Nevertheless, we note a real effort on the part of those involved in the tourist office who are increasingly promoting a destination that has several assets: **Ind. 8**. "*I work on a destination, which is based on four major pillars: Blois, Chambord, Cheverny and Chaumont- sur-Loire. These are the strong pillars, the identity bases of the Blois Chambord destination, on which we have deployed a certain number of..., tools, actions, operational tools, so there you have it*".

3.3 Discussion

This research leads us to propose theoretical and managerial contributions, to underline certain limits in relation to our study and to highlight future research avenues which may allow us to better define the issue of TDI in the reinforcement of a destination's brand equity:

3.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, our work is situated upstream of research on the importance of the brand and/or brand image in the differentiation strategy of a touristic destination which have favored a "*product approach*" in their studies (Boo et al., 2009; Hankinson, 2005; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kotsi et al., 2018).

Indeed, the application of the notion of image in the tourism context can quickly lead the researcher and/or practitioner to a rapid simplification of reality. They may tend to confuse different existing approaches (*TDI and/or brand image*) or to favor one over the other without having first analyzed the context of the study. This is why it's important to clarify these two key concepts in the tourism marketing literature and to underline their complementarity. In particular, managers and researchers should insist on the fact that good management of TDI allows the generation of a brand (brand image) which can contribute in the medium term to the reinforcement of the brand equity of the destination. Our research therefore underlines the importance for the various managers (elected representatives, tourist office managers, tourist site managers, etc.) to work upstream on a real strategy of co-construction of TDI before moving towards strategies for creating a destination brand. This approach should enable each stakeholder, within the brand management unit, to agree with the interests of the other stakeholders, while highlighting its own interests.

In this way, it is a question of anticipating the difficulties identified in the development and steering of brand management policies. The idea of managing a destination "like a brand" was initially intended to federate all the efforts of the different managers to try to act collectively in the same direction, which is not so easily achieved. Creating a logo and advertising are not enough to make a brand. The service delivered on the spot must be consistent with the promise which requires the involvement of a much larger number of stakeholders, with varied profiles, than in the case of managing a "*product brand*" or even a "*service brand*". It should also be noted that the "*destination brand*", in terms of its management, is closer to a "*service brand*" problem than to that of a "*product brand*", with greater complexity due to the common and divergent interests of the different managers. Therefore, it is one of the limits of the analogy between a "*product brand*" and a "*destination brand*".

3.3.2 Managerial Contributions

Moreover, the study reveals the ambivalence of the strategy of the managers of *Blois Chambord* to build TDI based essentially on the brand equity of the Château de Chambord. This priority given to the castle is to the detriment of the cognitive and affective elements which also enhance the touristic area of the destination. Indeed, as the literature emphasizes, a strong brand image creates value for the destination by generating a lasting preference among tourists for the place of visit and by reinforcing the brand equity of the destination (Boo et al., 2009; Cai, 2002; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). Chambord's reputation thus contributes to the arrival of tourists and visitors to the territory of the three inter-municipalities and the positive perception of Chambord's brand ultimately reinforces the valuation of the *Blois Chambord* destination. However, by neglecting to a greater or lesser extent the cognitive and affective perception of the destination, the managers in the area damage its image and thus contribute to a devaluation of the Chambord's brand in four of the five elements of added value identified by Aaker (1992): notoriety, perceived quality, brand image and loyalty. For example, in terms of awareness, by overvaluing the brand image of the castle, the "*small heritage*"[12] of the area, the other castles in the destination—whether well or lesser known, including that of Blois, which is included in the name—the wine-growing tradition, the Loire or Sologne landscape, and even the estate's park and garden, are largely relegated to second place and are hardly visible. Moreover, by focusing on the Chambord building, the rest of the territory concerned in the destination is hardly visible: the Sologne, the Cisse valley and the Petite Beauce escape the eye. The architectural and landscape charm of Blois and the surrounding towns, the history, the human activities (festivals, markets, etc.) are not mentioned. The emphasis on the world-famous castle is aimed at attracting international and, to a lesser extent, national visitors, while the diversity of the area's attractions is neglected, even though it could attract local visitors, enrich the brand and move the image away from the "*Renaissance masterpiece*".

The study also shows, in terms of brand image, that confusion over the image maintained in communication around the *Blois Chambord brand* with competing brands promoted by the region and certain departments such as *Val de Loire*, *Châteaux de Loire* or *Touraine Loire Valley* weakens the visibility of the destination and denies its uniqueness. The overkill of identical and parallel communication leads to a rivalry of brands positioned around the same image, with the only difference being their different perimeters (the Val de Loire in two regions, *Touraine* in the Indre-et-Loire department, etc.).

Furthermore, concerning TDI, it should be noted that it is the first form of perception that is created voluntarily or involuntarily by the various stakeholders in a territory. Knowledge of its cognitive and affective determinants can help tourism promoters to structure their territorial marketing strategy on different levels:

1. In a touristic destination which does not have a destination brand or which has a destination brand that is not very well known, the managers must essentially concentrate on building a positive image of their destination by promoting better knowledge of the touristic assets of their territory and by involving the various stakeholders, especially local ones, in their tourist development project. On the one hand, this choice can generate residents' attachment to their territory, contribute to further involving them in a logic of ambassadors of the territory and thus favor a better consideration of the affective dimension in connection with the destination. On the other hand, the positive image that emerges can only be beneficial for the preference and/or choice of the destination by visitors and/or tourists, as underlined by various authors in the literature (Jenkins, 1999; Rodrigues et al., 2012; Tasci et al., 2007).

[12] "*Petit patrimoine*" in French.

2. In a destination with a high level of awareness of its destination brand, work on TDI is interesting insofar as it can help to strengthen the brand equity and/or the brand image of the destination. It can also have an influence on the preference of the various stakeholders (residents, visitors or tourists) for products bearing the destination brand. Indeed, in marketing in general and in tourism marketing in particular, several works have highlighted the influential role of image on brand equity or on the products associated with a destination brand (Kaswengi & Ramaroson, 2016; Lim & Weaver, 2014). Moreover, TDI can play an important role in the loyalty of visitors and/or tourists as highlighted by many works in the literature (Chen & Phou, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014).

Our article thus highlights the limits of the brand analogy in the sense that there is no management unit with a coherent strategy for the *Blois Chambord* destination and that the product goes far beyond the "head of the show" (Chambord). While *branding* efforts are not in vain, the challenge lies in the ability to articulate the interests of the various entities involved.

3.3.3 Boundaries

As in any study, there are certain limitations which constitute avenues of reflection for future research. For example, we may be criticized for the lack of mobilization of stakeholders external to the destination (visitors to the Centre Val de Loire region, national and/or international tourists, tour operators, etc.) who also play an important role in the construction of the image. In other words, beyond the point of view of the sender (*branding*) which is ours in this article, this study should be considered from the point of view of the receiver (*brand*).

It would also have been interesting to approach our study differently so as to consider the "sale of complementary products" which are attached to the Chambord brand. A brand, because it is the object of positioning efforts, necessarily presents a simplified image based on the salient features of the destination. We are on the verge of caricature (but this seems consistent with the tourist's system of choice, who says to himself, for example: I will go to *Blois Chambord* to see the 350+ chimneys or the double staircase of the Château de Chambord, even though the destination goes beyond this representation). But, in addition to attracting and welcoming the visitor and/or tourist, it is necessary to convince them to consume "derived products", a sort of "range extension", by going to visit, for example, the castle of Talcy. This is a slightly different issue from that of the "*product brand*" for which a manufacturer and/or producer sells his product without any other purpose. However, the managers expect a "*destination brand*" to radiate, to encourage visitors and/or tourists to spend locally and to support the local economy. The "*destination brand*" plays the role of an appealing product which must be articulated around a range, where the role of each product in the range is considered. For example, when the Château de Chambord sets the price of its car park too high, it does not play its role as a loss leader for the surrounding areas. Once again, it is an illustration of the difficulties linked to the co-management of a "*destination brand*", this time extended not only to the brand, but also to its derived products.

3.3.4 Future Research Avenues

The difficulties noted in the management unit of the *Blois Chambord* brand lead us to consider the interest that the literature on role tensions can represent in the governance of tourism development and promotion policies (Djabi et al., 2019; Rivière et al., 2019). It is essentially a question of studying the levers of analysis and action to best manage the role tensions between stakeholders managing a touristic destination.

Furthermore, considering some works in the literature on shop image and brand equity (Kaswengi, 2013; Kaswengi & Ramaroson, 2016) and the results of our research, the statistical study of a possible effect of TDI on the brand equity of the destination represents an interesting research avenue. This study will make it possible to evaluate how and in what way the image contributes to reinforcing the constituent elements of the brand equity of a touristic destination.

Annex 1: Some Examples of City Marks

The trend started in the late 1970s when graphic designer Milton Glaser launched the famous "***I love NY***" advertising campaign for New York City in the United States. It was later changed to "***I love NY more than ever***" in 2001, following the terrorist attacks. According to several New York City stakeholders, this brand was a real success, helping to revive declining tourism, attract new investors and increase residents' sense of belonging to the city. In the following decades, several cities such as Amsterdam, Lyon and Hong Kong followed this trend.

Annex 2 Some Definitions from the Literature

Brand image of a destination		
Boo et al. (2009, p. 221)	Brand image has been considered as the reasoned or emotional perception that consumers attach to specific brands (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 2003). Brand image has also been identified as an important source of brand equity (Keller, 2003; Lassar et al., 1995). Blain et al. (2005) suggested that destination image should be included in the definition of destination brands	Reasoned or emotional perception of a brand
Cai (2002, p. 723)	Destination branding can be described as a perception of a place, reflected in the brand associations held in a tourist's memory	Perception of a place based on brand associations held in memory
Kladou and Kehagias (2014, p. 3)	Destination branding can be defined as a unique identity of a destination to differentiate it from its competitors	Unique identity of destination in a logic of differentiation
Tourism Destination Image (TDI)		
Foroudi et al. (2018, p. 98)	According to the tourism literature, destination image can be defined as the sum of beliefs, feelings, conceptions, knowledge, imaginations, emotional thoughts, ideas and impressions that people have about a place or destination	Sum of knowledge, imagination and feelings about a place
Bigné et al. (2001, p. 607)	The image of the destination is therefore the tourist's subjective interpretation of reality. In this configuration, cognitive and affective factors are involved (Moutinho, 1987)	Subjective interpretation of reality (cognitive and affective)
Baloglu and McCleary (1999, p. 870)	The concept of TDI has generally been considered as an attitudinal construct, which consists of an individual mental representation of overall knowledge (beliefs), feelings and impressions about an object or destination	Attitudinal construct—representation of knowledge, feelings and impressions about a destination

(continued)

(continued)

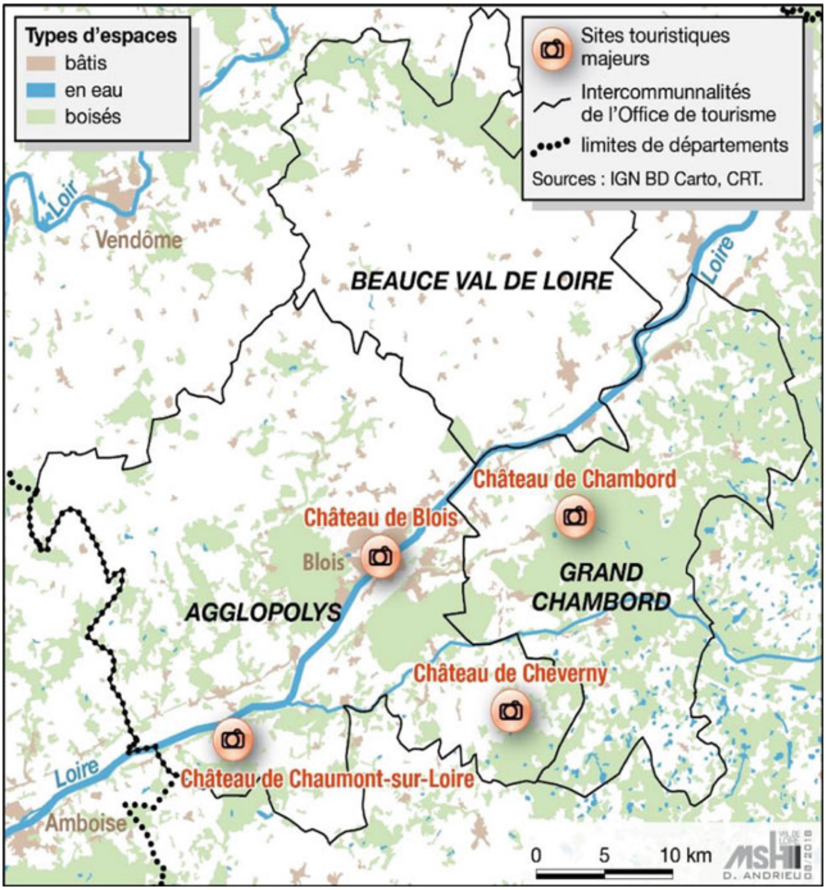
Baloglu and McCleary (1999, p. 871)	The destination image is the expression of all the knowledge, impressions and emotions which an individual, or a group of individuals, has about a particular object or place	Expression of all knowledge, impressions and emotions about a place

Source Authors

Annex 3 Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Groups	Ind	Gender	Profession	Age group
Elected officials and associations	1	M	Frame	[30–40 years]
	2	M	Elected municipal official	[60–70 years]
	3	M	Frame	[50–60 years]
	4	M	Elected association	[50–60 years]
	5	F	Trader	[50–60 years]
	6	M	Trader	[50–60 years]
Managers of the *Blois Chambord* Tourist Office	7	F	Middle management	[30–40 years]
	8	M	Frame	[40–50 years]
	9	F	Middle management	[30–40 years]
	10	M	Middle management	[50–60 years]
	11	F	Employee	[30–40 years]
Managers of Chambord	12	F	Frame	[30–40 years]
	13	F	Middle management	[30–40 years]
	14	M	Frame	[40–50 years]
	15	M	Frame	[50–60 years]
	16	M	Frame	[40–50 years]
Residents of the *Blois Chambord* destination	17	M	Middle management	[50–60 years]
	18	M	Retired	[60–70 years]
	19	M	Retired	[90–100 years]
	20	F	Middle management	[50–60 years]
	21	M	Employee	[20–30 years]
	22	F	Employee	[50–60 years]

Annex 4 Map of the *Blois Chambord* Destination



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Chapter 12
Designing Facebook Publications Focused on Hotel Customer Experience: How to Improve Brand Attitude and Booking Intention

Mónica Gómez-Suárez and Mónica Veloso

Abstract The main objective of this research was to test a model that assessed how Facebook publications related to hotel customer experience had an impact on both brand attitude and booking intention. In addition, the study identified, which types of publications focused on the different dimensions of hotel experience, provided the best results in terms of users' attitudinal responses. Data were obtained through a survey conducted in May 2020, with 264 valid responses. These data were analysed using structural equation modelling, particularly multi-group estimation. The results showed that interacting with social media content (engagement) improved both brand attitude and booking intention. In addition, publications that referred to localization were the most effective in increasing favourable attitudes towards the brand as well as booking intention.

Keywords Tourism · Brand attitude · Social networks · Facebook · Hotel brands · Customer experience

1 Introduction

The concept of experience has special relevance for the provision and promotion of services in the hotel industry and it is understood as a result of the unique combination of responses to dimensions of the physical and human environment. Previous research has focused efforts on understanding tourist experiences in general, but less attention has been given to the brand experience in hotels, even though hotels deliver one of the core services in tourism experiences (Khan et al., 2019).

The objective of the current study was twofold. First, a general model was developed to assess how users' experiences on social media had an impact on brand attitude

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and booking intention. Second, it was determined which experience dimension better reflected users' impressions. Based on a survey carried out in 2020, this pioneering research showed how the user receives information about a hotel through a social network based on publications that are specifically focused on the dimensions of customer experience (CX) adapted to the hotel context. Moreover, the results that were obtained serve to highlight the importance of the location dimension in communication with users through a social network since a publication that highlights this dimension, rather than the guest mention dimension, supports better evaluations in terms of attitudes and reservation intention.

2 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

In recent years, companies' official websites have shown decreased traffic alongside the exponential growth of publications on social networks, with a concurrent growth in the budgets allocated to these media (Vaičiukynaitė & Gatautis, 2018). To profit from these increased budget costs, it is essential to understand what type of communications are the most effective (Leung et al., 2017). With 2.8 billion monthly active users in 2020 (Statista, 2020), Facebook represents the ideal forum to share opinions, which, in many cases, helps other users in their purchase decisions (Atwood & Morosan, 2015; Hsu & Lin, 2013; Lobel Trong Thuy Tran, 2020; Madhusanka et al., 2020).

According to Meire et al., (2019 p. 25), firm-generated content (FGC) can be defined as *"a firm or brand's communication created and shared through online social network assets"*. This message strategy refers to the appropriate features for marketing communications in this channel. For some academics, this strategy should focus on content, i.e., what to say, while for others, it should not only express what to say (message content) but should also take into account how to say it (format).

In the FGC literature, there are different ways to classify the content of the message. A common classification is based on the distinction between sales/marketing messages and conversational messages (Kwok & Yu, 2013; Leung, 2019; Loo, 2020; Su et al., 2015). However, other authors focus on distinguishing the purpose of the message by identifying the type of text: informative, social, entertainment, and remunerative (Luarn et al., 2015; Vaičiukynaitė & Gatautis, 2018). More recent research simplifies this classification and differentiates between informative and emotional messages (Meire et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, none of this previous work has focused on analysing the messages from an experiential point of view. This type of approach incorporates aspects of informative or social messages, which are essential for consumers who seek information about a future stay in a hotel. This approach focuses on both the sensorial and experiential aspects that, through storytelling, try to stimulate users' senses by evoking the sensations that they will experience at a particular destination. Therefore, to develop the research hypotheses on the type of content that generates greater interaction and booking intention, this study focused on the experiential content of the message. This kind of content may be especially relevant since it appeals to the senses, and people tend to rely more on information obtained through the senses in evaluation processes, especially when there is a lack of prior experience. Therefore, it seems logical that the evaluation of a hotel with which an individual has no previous experience is influenced by these sensory stimuli (Buzova et al., 2020) and thus that focusing communication on this stimulation of the senses could improve the individual's attitude towards the brand and increase his or her chances of booking in that hotel.

Khan and Rahman (2017, p. 281) defined brand experience in hotels as "*a set of feelings, sensations, thoughts and behavioural responses toward hotel brand-related stimuli that are integral to the hotel brand's location, ambience, staff competence, website and social media presence and guest-to-guest interaction*". Based on this definition, this study used four of the experience dimensions proposed by these authors, except presence on websites and social media because our study was developed online. We define the other dimensions below, adapting them as necessary to the social media context:

- **Location**: This dimension is defined as the degree to which the location of the hotel captivated the senses of an individual. Therefore, the publications focused on this dimension encompass content closely related to areas of interest that make the individual's experience remarkable.
- **Ambience**: Khan and Rahman (2017) defined ambience as the extent to which a guest feels that the stay in the hotel was pleasant and the extent to which the atmosphere impressed his or her senses. Adapted to the social media context, these publications include content related to the decoration and ambience of the hotel and its consequent stimulation of the senses.
- **Staff:** This dimension is defined as the degree to which a guest feels that the efficiency, kindness and professionalism of the staff stimulate his or her senses. These publications include content oriented towards hotel staff.
- **Interaction:** Although Khan and Rahman (2017), defined interaction as "the extent to which the presence of other guests affects another guest", to match this dimension with the context of social media, our study focused on content generated by the guests and shared by the hotel. Hence, the guest experience is shown within the hotel environment, which affects other potential guests in an indirect way. In this research, we refer to this dimension as the **guest mention** dimension.

Related to the effect of messages on users' responses, the academic literature has shown the influence of social media on different variables that are related to hotel demand. Although the behaviour is passive (not interactive), being a fan of a certain brand implies a greater purchase intention (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Leung, 2019; Pöyry et al., 2013). Previous studies have shown that social media engagement may have positive effects on purchase intention or reservation intention (Alhidari et al., 2015; Beukeboom et al., 2015; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Specifically, in relation to tourism, Casaló et al. (2014) demonstrated that participation in online travel communities has a positive, significant effect on consumer intentions to use the community's products and services.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Interaction with experiential content on social media (engagement) has a direct positive effect on booking intention.

Attitude is a subjective concept that is formed from consumers' own perceptions, and brand attitude is focused on the subject's assessment (Liu et al., 2012). Frequent active participation increases members' knowledge about brands, which in turn forms a strong consumer-brand relationship that leads to positive and favourable attitudes (Kang, 2018). In addition, the electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) generated through social networks influences the attitude towards the brand. In this sense, the valence of the message and the popularity of the website have an influence on the brand attitude (Pahlevan Sharif & Mura, 2019). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Interaction with experiential content on social media (engagement) has a direct positive effect on brand attitude.

The objective of incorporating brand attitude into our conceptual model is to evaluate the effect of the experiential communications issued by hotels on their social networks and its consequent impact from the point of view of responses focused on the booking intention. In the context of social media, attitude is largely formed from content generated by both the company and users (Pahlevan Sharif & Mura, 2019). Since attitude has a positive impact on hotel booking intention (Ghosh, 2018; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Leung, 2019; Leung & Baloglu, 2015; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), a favourable attitude towards the brand in a social network translates into an increase in hotel booking intention. Therefore, we propose the following:

H3: Brand attitude generated through publications on social media has a direct positive effect on booking intention.

Consequently, brand attitude is also a mediator between engagement and booking intention. Thus, the hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Interaction with experiential content on social media (engagement) has an indirect positive effect on booking intention that is mediated by brand attitude.

Finally, the hotel experience dimensions could be considered moderators of the relationship. This could become one of the major contributions of this study since no previous research has tested the effect of each particular dimension. Previous analysis performed by the authors of this study pointed out that the location dimension might have the greatest impact on the customer experience (Gómez-Suárez & Veloso, 2020) since it provides more tangible information than the other dimensions. However, since these effects were not tested with social media in terms of users' attitudinal responses, it is better to formulate a proposition instead of a hypothesis:

P14: The hotel experience dimensions are moderators of the hypothesized relationships, leading to different user responses.

The conceptual model is depicted in Fig. 1.

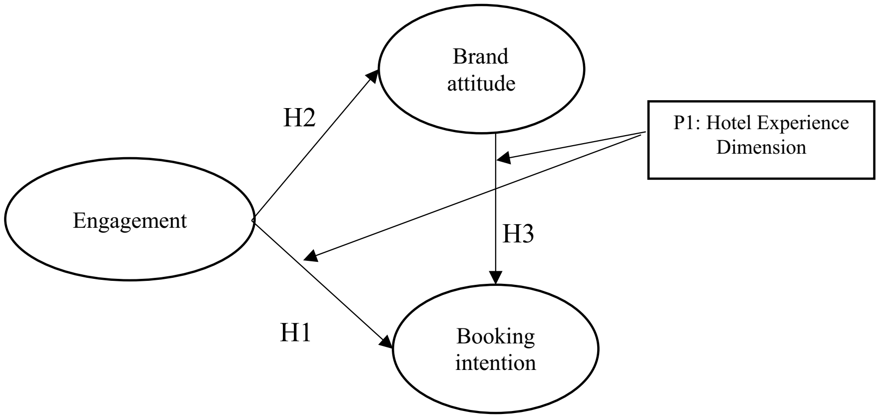


Fig. 1 Conceptual model (*Note* The hypothesis of the mediation effect of attitude is not shown in the figure)

3 Methodology and Results

A two-phase study, based first on a pilot study and then on a main survey, was conducted. In the pilot study, a survey of 60 students pursuing a tourism degree at a Spanish university was carried out. The objective of this first phase was for the participants to evaluate the publications as potential guests to identify which experiential dimensions were used. This phase was adapted to the context of social media, especially Facebook. Then, these dimensions were adapted to the posts that a fictitious hotel published on its own social media page. Each publication contained different texts (one for each dimension of the hotel experience). Annex 1 shows the post that the participants had to evaluate.

The effect of the visual stimulus was controlled by including the same image in all the publications to check only the effect of the text. The posts were classified as follows: location, ambience, staff competence and guest mention. The results of this first phase allowed us to eliminate publications that presented less interaction and then to design the main study using only those social media pages that showed greater interaction, location and guest mentions. In this way, we managed to avoid respondents becoming fatigued by exposing them to four posts with similar questions after each post, which would have increased the response time of the survey and reduced the respondents' attention and interest during the process.

In the main study, two posts about a fictitious hotel were presented. Each publication contained different texts that corresponded to experience dimensions (location and guest mentions), also controlling for the effect of the visual stimulus—the same picture in all publications—to determine only the effect of the text. In addition, previous interaction with the post was controlled; that is, both publications had the same number of likes, comments, and shares. After each publication, the respondents answered a series of questions related to the key concepts of the study.

We should clarify that this study was not an experiment, but a survey. The participants were exposed to both posts and had to rate them in terms of the output variables. In this sense, we did not test the mixed effects of the stimuli, but only the global response.

The sample of the main study was based on an ad hoc online survey carried out in Spain in May 2020 using Google Forms. It was stratified by gender and age. A total of 264 responses were obtained. Regarding Facebook, the respondents' frequency of use was high, with 39% on Facebook daily and 27.3% weekly. Only 25% of Facebook users followed a hotel account. To keep the length of the questionnaire short, no other classification variables were added.

The scales used have previously been tested and validated in the literature. The questionnaire was developed using seven-position Likert-type scales for interaction intention and brand attitude and was adapted from Atwood and Morosan (2015). To measure booking intention, the scale proposed by Leung et al. (2017) was adapted.

The data were processed with the statistical programs SPSS and Amos 26.0. Regarding the descriptive analysis, the means and standard deviations of the items are shown in Table 1. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) by dimension also suggested that the type of publication was significantly different for each of the items being analysed, except for three of them.

The reliability of the scales was verified using Cronbach's alpha; one of the booking intention items (BI2) was dropped to improve the reliability of the model because the construct with the 3 items had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient less than 0.8. When this item was eliminated, the reliability was higher than this cut-off point. Thus, the three constructs (dimensions) presented a reliable and consistent scale,

Table 1 Descriptive results

Items/Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	***F***
ENG1. Follow the hotel page	4.220	1.721	3.299**
ENG2. Like	4.920	1.799	3.693**
ENG3. Comments	2.913	1.710	0.412
ENG4. Share	2.629	1.799	2.888*
BA1. Good idea	5.311	1.404	2.485*
BA2. Wise	4.886	1.340	1.062
BA3. Nice	5.519	1.525	2.438*
BA4. Pleasant	5.557	1.483	3.914**
BI1. The probability that I would consider booking this hotel is high	5.030	1.257	2.448*
BI2. The likelihood of booking this hotel through Facebook is high	2.678	1.704	3.287**
BI3. My willingness to book this hotel is high	4.769	1.355	0.975

Note Scale from 1 to 7
*** Significant at 99%; ** significant at 95%; * significant at 10%

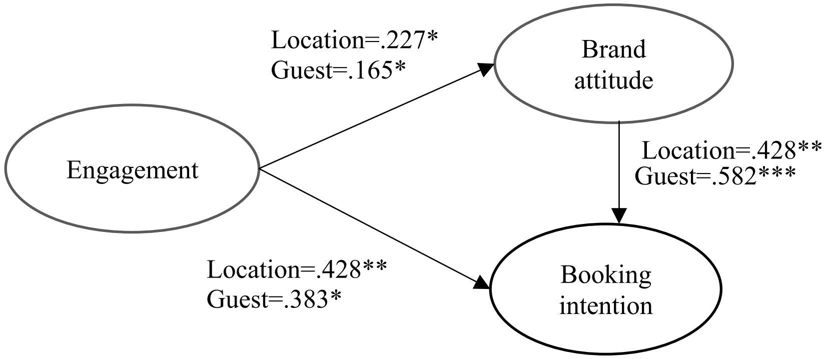
with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.8 and 0.9, higher than the critical value of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Subsequently, a principal component factor analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was carried out. Another item (ENG2) belonging to the engagement dimension was discarded because its commonality was lower than 0.6. After the PCA, three factors, corresponding to the constructs that were part of the structural model, were identified. Furthermore, this analysis proved that the model did not present common variance bias since there was no single factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed that the proposed scales complied with the psychometric properties related to validity and reliability. Once validated, the proposed theoretical model was estimated with a structural model (SEM). The goodness of fit of this model was acceptable (CMIN/DF = 2.067; CFI = 0.989; SRMR = 0.037; RMSEA = 0.064). Accordingly, interacting with content on social networks (engagement construct) had a direct and positive significant effect on attitude towards the brand (0.419). Additionally, this variable had a positive relationship with booking intention (0.559). In addition, brand attitude generated through interaction with content on social networks had a significant, direct positive effect on booking intention (0.319). The indirect standardized effect of engagement on booking intention through attitude was 0.103. Consequently, the first four hypotheses were confirmed.

To verify the proposition about the experiential dimension effect, a multi-group SEM (MGSEM) was carried out. The analysis of the invariance was performed in the AMOS 26 program by imposing restrictions to verify whether these restrictions improved or worsened the fit of the model. First, the results of the invariance test were tested with multi-group CFA (MGCFA) according to the procedures used by Hair et al. (2006) and Chen (2007). There was metric invariance since the changes in goodness-of-fit indices did not exceed the recommended values. Then, we proceeded with the estimation of the multi-group structural models (MGSEM). The differences between the nested models were not significant (ΔTLI = 0.009; ΔNFI = 0.001 ΔRMSEA = 0.002). Thus, the structure was invariant between the publications, so the different results were not a consequence of the structure but rather of the differences in the object being measured.

Figure 2 shows the final MGSEM obtained through a multi-group estimation for each of the two dimensions (location and guest mentions) using AMOS 26.0. It shows that the different content of the Facebook publications generated different levels of engagement, brand attitude and booking intention. The table below the figure represents a summary of the z-scores for the comparisons between the parameters based on the critical ratios for the differences. All of them were statistically significant. Therefore, there was a moderating effect of the experiential dimension on attitudinal responses, thus verifying the proposition formulated in the conceptual model. Engagement generated both a direct and indirect impact on booking intention when the content referred to the hotel location or guest mentions. However, the direct effects generated by interaction with social media content were greater when the content was related to the location. That is, when the publication provided information about the location, it produced greater booking intention (0.428) and improved attitude



			z-score
ATTITUDE	<---	ENGAGE	2,142**
BOOKING	<---	ATTITUDE	2,605**
BOOKING	<---	ENGAGE	2,184**

Fig. 2 MGSEM results (*Note* *** significant at 99%; ** significant at 95%; * significant at 10%)

(0.227) to a greater extent than content that mentioned other guests. Although the indirect effect on booking intention through attitude was somewhat higher when the content mentioned other guests' experiences (0.582) than when content related to the location was published (0.451), the combined effect (direct and indirect) of location on booking intention and attitude was higher.

4 Conclusions

The main contribution of this study was its incorporation of a new type of message based on concrete customer experience, with the specific dimensions of hotel experience. Additionally, by examining its impact on users' behaviours, we identified a moderating effect of experiential content, since a particular dimension—location—provided the best results regarding users' attitudinal responses and had a stronger influence on potential guests' booking intention. This content could be exploited by hotels and be more effective when social networks of hotel brands are used since it provides potential clients with valuable sensorial and experiential information.

In line with previous research in the context of hotels in social media (Leung & Baloglu, 2015), the results show that attitudes generated based on the content from social media pages increase booking intention. In addition, according to past studies (Alhidari et al., 2015; Poulis et al., 2019), we also verified the positive effect of eWOM generated through social networks on these variables since interacting with content on social networks (engagement) has positive effects on both attitude and booking intention. We also showed the effect of the experience dimensions on both variables.

In terms of management implications and given that hotels tend to prioritize consumer entertainment content on social networks, this research highlights the "underuse" of a communication tool that may help hotels reinforce their brand images by offering experiential information, which is a useful instrument to generate more reservations. Hence, in times of high demand, hotels wish to improve their customers' brand attitudes and increase their reservation intention.

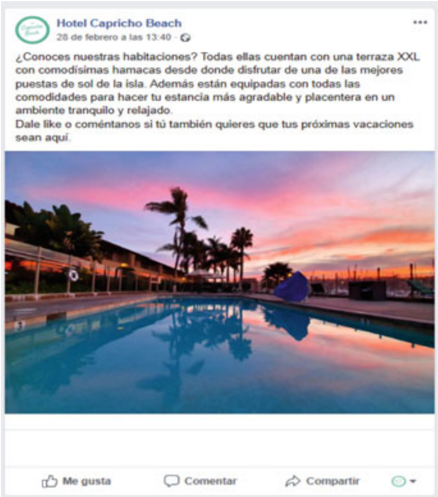
Regarding limitations, although some of the variables of the models were behavioural (mainly items related to intention to interact and booking intention), they were measured by means of a survey. Hence, future research could focus on studying customers' behaviours through an experimental methodology. In addition, although significant, the relationship between the intention to interact with content (engagement) and brand attitude was weaker than the rest of the relationships. Thus, future research could examine whether there is an additional construct/variable (for instance, attachment) that might moderate or mediate this relationship. Furthermore, it is advisable to test other moderating effects produced by sociodemographic variables, especially age. Finally, we recommend investigation of whether the perception of COVID-19-related risk has an effect on the different variables proposed in the model or on their relationships.

Annex. Design of Publications

Location

Guest Mention

Ambience



Staff

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