

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# THE ELECTRONIC BRAND EXPERIENCE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ELECTRONIC RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND ELECTRONIC LOYALTY. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS ON TRAVEL WEBSITES

*José Ramón Sarmiento Guede\**

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid

joseramon.sarmiento@urjc.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0342-0348>

*António José Ferrão Filipe*

Portucalense University, Porto, Portugal.

ferraof@upt.pt

### 1. INTRODUCTION

On April 2, 2005, the economic magazine TIME broke a tradition of almost 40 years old, and in 2006 the cover page personality was assigned to the virtual consumer instead to a specific person. In this way, the magazine described how a tool called social media was affecting the way in which the consumer communicated, made decisions, socialized, learned, entertained, interacted or made purchases. The main reason behind this migration of power from corporate websites was because consumers have unlimited access to the most reliable information thanks to the social media and through a single click.

In this research work, we will conduct a comparative analysis of two the most important digital marketing tools in the tourism sector: (a) corporate travel websites; and (b) Travel Social Media.

Travel websites can be classified into transportation websites, accommodation, travel agencies, destinations, opinion and search engines. Within these travel websites we can identify the corporate content generated by the company and the content generated by users through social media.

The choice of these tools for this research project is justified in two ways: (1) by the lack of research articles in literature on marketing issues and (2) by the different way of influencing consumer behavior. The website is a tool controlled by the organization, while social media tools are already controllable by users.

In this context and having reviewed the existing literature on the subject, we formulated the main research questions: Q1 Which is the best tool to manage relationships with

customers, corporate websites or social media? Q2 How do corporate travel websites influence the quality of the relationship and loyalty? Q3 How do the social media of travel websites influence the quality of the relationship and loyalty?

To answer the research questions previously raised, we created a model which represents the background and the consequences of the relationship quality of the travel websites. Specifically, we assumed that in electronic environments the brand experience is an antecedent and the relationship quality would be formed by the dimensions of trust, satisfaction and commitment, and therefore the loyalty is a consequent.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012: 370) define the user's electronic experience as "the combination of relational and emotional factors that an organization uses through online services to influence users' perception of the brand". Various research works such as Constantinides (2004), Cristóbal et al. (2007), Ho and Lee (2007) Chung and Shin (2010) and Moreira *et al.* (2017), identify the following dimensions as the best to define the brand experience in electronic environments, which are: (1) the design; (2) security; (3) information; (4) communication.

The concept of the relationship quality can be understood as a higher order construct formed by several components or dimensions. In this research, having reviewed the work done so far on the quality of the electronic relationship, we can argue that the most repeated, used and best defined dimensions are these three: (1) trust; (2) satisfaction; and (3) commitment; although these three different dimensions are interrelated.

Electronic trust is considered one of the essential requirements for the success of electronic commerce; specifically we can define it as the belief, benevolence and integrity of the service provider or as the reliability and integrity of a partner. After having made a review of the existing literature, we can affirm that the electronic brand experience impacts the main components of trust; that is integrity, benevolence and capacity. Therefore, when there is major level of positive perception of the electronic experience of brand, more general trust in the electronic service will correspond.

Satisfaction is defined as the assessment made by the consumer that a characteristic of the product or service; or the product or service itself, providing a result of pleasure derived from consumption, including levels below or above expected. The clearest difference between analogical and digital services lies in the substitution of human-human interaction in analogical ones for human-computer interaction in digital ones, hence, that may require new approaches to measure satisfaction. Experience is the result of stimulation and accumulation of value; therefore, the more pleasant stimulations a brand generates for a customer through the electronic experience, the higher the consumer's satisfaction with the brand and the more likely it is that he wants to use his services again.

The commitment can be understood as the will to develop and maintain a positive exchange of relationship, a permanent desire to maintain a positive relationship or an understanding as the psychological attachment to a brand. According to Chung and Shin (2010), electronic satisfaction and trust are combining to provide the necessary conditions between user / website or social media relations and to develop electronic engagement.

Electronic trust and satisfaction are considered as the antecedents of the electronic commitment. Satisfaction usually starts at the beginning of the relationship and, as the interactivity between the user and the website or social media is intensifying for specific brand, the electronic trust and, finally, the electronic commitment will be developed.

The loyalty to a brand can be understood as a deep commitment to rebuy a preferred product or service, which triggers repeated purchases in the organization, despite situational influences or marketing efforts. In this sense, the definition of loyalty is based on attitudinal and behavioral approaches, which suggests that fidelity is a sequential process that indicates what kind of preferences the consumer shows for a specific brand, which implies cognitive, affective, emotional and conative phases within the traditional scheme of purchase decision. Thus, fidelity initially includes psychological aspects of evaluation and decision-making regarding a brand or a group of similar brands, as well as attitudes and emotions that later turn into effective and repetitive repurchase behaviors. In this research, loyalty is understood as a favorable attitude toward the use of websites or organizational social media. In the literature review, it is demonstrated that there is a relationship between brand experience, trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty, but, as indicated by the researchers Prado et al. (2013), the nature of the relationship between brand experience and customer loyalty cannot be distinguished. Therefore, we cannot determine if the effect of the brand experience is directly on loyalty or if it is done indirectly through mediating variables, such as satisfaction, trust or commitment.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used to achieve the objectives and the verification of the formulated hypotheses is based on quantitative techniques. The data obtained was collected among users who frequented the websites and social travel media to analyze their brand experience and how it influences the quality of the relationship and loyalty in an electronic environment. In total, we distributed 1200 questionnaires, of which 804 were received; 35 were incomplete or negative and, therefore, eliminated. The study final sample was 769 questionnaires with a reliability level of 95%. Previously, the adequacy of the questionnaire was checked through a pre-test based on a small number of respondents (65 subjects). The sample was made between the months of May and June 2017. To build the model, a multi-item measurement scale was applied. The scales to measure the latent dimensions and to assure the validity of their content were adapted from previous studies.

To collect the information, a self-administered survey technique and its questionnaire (as a tool) were implemented. The questionnaire was composed of 29 questions related to different websites and social media. It had three sections: the first consisted of a filter question to give greater validity to our research work; the second consisted of twenty-four questions related to the dimensions of the brand experience, the relationship quality and the loyalty; and the last one were four sociodemographic questions. For our questionnaire, multiple structured, dichotomous and scale questions were included. At the time of completing the questionnaire, the respondents were provided with a technical file that clarified the difference between corporate travel websites and social travel media. Samples of websites appeared in this technical sheet.

Finally, the technique of stratified sampling and simple random sampling was conducted and, for the analysis and interpretation of the results, the SPSS 20.0 was used (frequency distribution, averages, dispersion measurements).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion of this study is that the brand experience is a very important antecedent of trust, satisfaction, commitment and brand loyalty. However, the influence of the brand experience through social media or through corporate websites is different from what was originally thought. From the proposed model, we can conclude that the brand experience through social media is the most important direct predictor of the relationship quality and brand loyalty. Nevertheless, brand experience through corporate websites does not show that significant relationship.

About the implications in the field of the electronic tourism market, we can affirm that getting new clients is more expensive and difficult than keeping existing ones. As this research suggests, dimensions such as trust, satisfaction, commitment or loyalty are important for tourism organizations to establish a database and then increase loyalty levels by customizing the service. Consequently, to increase loyalty, tourism organizations have to use tools that customers perceive as quality and thus develop a quality electronic experience, such as that existing in social media compared to those corporate websites. The higher the level of relationship quality, the higher the level of loyalty.

The tools that tourism organizations choose to manage their relationships with their clients are vitally important, because through them the first meeting with the client is carried out, the purchase process and the post-sales service are developed. During these processes of service delivery, the client looks for honest organizations that meet his needs and wants committed to it. And as this research shows, social media meets those needs.

Brand experience is a relatively new concept in marketing. It arises from the interaction of customers with brand stimuli. Brand experiences can generate loyalty or increase the perception of trust and satisfaction. As the electronic touristic travel market has undergone profound changes in recent years, it has become much more competitive and has caused tourism organizations to use corporate websites or social media to develop unique or pleasurable experiences for the consumer instead of focusing on it as a simple transaction website. Therefore, when brands offer unique and intense stimuli, using visual impact ads, eye-catching logos, interactive games, soundtracks that can generate pleasure, images or comments from other customers will make users want to repeat their experience for the lasting memory that they leave in their minds.

Brand experiences can lead to customer loyalty and increase the quality of the relationship. Therefore, they can be used by travel tourism organizations to increase the value for the provider and the client in order to work advantageously and competitively. On a market where products or services are sometimes similar and differentiation strategies are already ineffective, offering the customer pleasant experiences is an effective way to differentiate a supplier and make it unique for his client.

While doing this research, we encountered a number of limitations such as the size of the analyzed sample. Well, although it allows the establishment of a theoretically robust model,

it prevents identifying different groups of consumers of electronic tourist services. Another limitation is having applied the research to a geographical area (Community of Madrid).

For future lines of research, we recommend applying the model to the entire geographical area, such as Spain. In addition, it would be interesting to apply it to the different tourist websites, such as the transport, accommodation, meta-search, opinion or institutional websites. Finally, the need to analyze the relationship between the brand experience and the brand image (in which way the experiences change the client's perception of a brand) or the value of the brand, once the relationship between experiences and loyalty has been positively tested.