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The effect of online and offline experiential marketing on brand equity in the hotel sector

El efecto del marketing experiencial en el capital de marca

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Abstract

Propose – This paper aims to measure the relationship between online experiential marketing (during the purchasing process involving information search and booking) and offline experiential marketing (during the stay) with hotel brand equity. In addition, the study attempts to determine if there is a significant link between the online hotel experience and the subsequent offline hotel stay experience.

Desing/methodology/approach – A self-report survey was conducted in a series of four-star hotels in Granada city. The questionnaire was focused on measuring online experience, offline experience and brand equity. For the analysis of the data, a structural equations model was developed.

Findings – The results suggest that the experience during the hotel stay, contrary to that of the online purchase process, has an influence on hotel brand equity. Nonetheless, the online experience has a significant impact on the hotel stay experience.

Practical implications – This study is of particular utility for hotel management given that, although it is a sector that for several years has integrated experiential marketing in its service strategy, there is little research analyzing the impact of such actions on the variables that are of interest to the hotel.

Originality/value – There are no hotel sector studies that have jointly analyzed the role of the online and offline tourist experience and its role in contributing to brand equity. Recognizing the previous notions will allow hotels to identify where to focus marketing efforts so as to increase brand equity.

Keywords Experiencia online, Experiencia offline, Capital de marca, Marketing experiencial

Paper type Research paper



Resumen

Objetivo – Esta investigación pretende medir la relación existente entre el marketing experiencial online (durante el proceso de compra online) y offline (durante la estancia), con el capital de marca del sector hotelero. Además, busca identificar si existe relación significativa entre la experiencia online y la experiencia offline.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Se pasó un cuestionario autoadministrado a turistas alojados en hoteles de cuatro estrellas de la ciudad de Granada. El cuestionario medía la experiencia online, la experiencia offline y el capital de marca. Para el análisis de los datos se desarrolló un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales.

Resultados – Los resultados indican que la experiencia vivida durante la estancia tiene influencia en el capital de marca, mientras que la experiencia durante la compra online no presenta relación con el capital de marca. Sin embargo, esta experiencia online tiene impacto en la experiencia vivida durante la estancia.

Implicaciones prácticas – Este estudio es de particular utilidad para la gestión hotelera dado que, aunque el sector desde hace años ha integrado el marketing experiencial en su estrategia de servicio, pocas investigaciones analizan el impacto de dichas acciones sobre las variables que les interesan.

Originalidad/valor – Dentro del sector hotelero no hay estudios que analicen conjuntamente el papel de la experiencia turística online y offline y su papel en la contribución al capital de marca. Este conocimiento permite determinar dónde enfocar los esfuerzos de marketing para aumentar el capital de marca.

Palabras clave – Experiencia online, Experiencia offline, Capital de marca, Marketing experiencial

Tipo de artículo – Trabajo de investigación

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, the concept of experience has been the object of a great deal of marketing research. [Holbrook and Hirschman \(1982\)](#), in a pioneering study on experiential consumption, advanced the belief of the development of experience based on consumption through pleasure, a notion that contrasts with the traditional conception of consumption rooted in processing cognitive information. According to these authors, this type of consumption seeks amusement, entertainment, fantasy, interest and sensory stimulation. Thus, one of the elements behind the growth of academic interest in this subject is the recognition that offers based on experience are founded on the consumer's intrinsic and personal recall through time that proffers an increase in value to the offer ([Rivera et al., 2015](#)).

Business strategies based on consumer experience in today's market have become a source of competitive differentiation as they provide the possibility of creating a unique brand by nurturing participation and an emotional link with the consumer ([Berry et al., 2002](#); [Meyer and Schwager, 2007](#); [Pentina et al., 2011](#)). Many of the fastest-growing sectors in the global economy are linked to experiential consumption ([Oh et al., 2007](#)). An example is in tourism, a sector with a great projection, where experiences are fundamental ([Uriely, 2005](#)). The experiential dimension of tourism, in fact, has seen a great boom due to its link to nurturing the psychological well-being of tourists and their personal development ([Hoffman et al., 2012](#); [Tinsley and Tinsley, 1986](#)).

A fundamental element in the tourism sector is the hotel. Tourists spend a great amount of time searching for information to select the hotel that best suits their tastes and needs. [Mcintosh and Siggs \(2005\)](#) suggest that hotel clients are concerned with the personalization of their experiences and fancy hotels to be unique and welcoming. Currently, more than 50 per cent book accommodations directly online ([Segittur, 2014](#)). Hence, their first contact with the hotel is through the internet. Because of information and communication technologies, consumers are increasingly empowered and more connected with each other and with suppliers. Hotel businesses together with tourists therefore have the option of co-creating the consumer experience ([Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2003](#)). In this sense, it is the service-dominant logic ([Vargo and Lusch, 2004](#)) that offers the conceptual framework of this collaboration between providers and clients most often facilitated by technology. Hence, the customer's experience with the hotel is not only generated exclusively during the stay but also during the initial information and booking process. This situation therefore leads to the distinction between the online and the

offline experiences (Rose *et al.*, 2011). Consumers increasingly revert to the internet to complete different phases of the purchasing process. Thus it is necessary to provide a unified customer experience throughout the online shopping process (Bilgihan *et al.*, 2016).

When measuring the results of the tourist experience, it is necessary to take into account that brand equity is critical to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing efforts (Aaker, 1996). To attain brand equity, a feature must be valued positively by the consumers. Hence, a brand's power is the result of what the consumer has viewed, learned, felt and heard about it over of time (Keller, 2003). Thus, the experiences of consumers bear an influence on brand equity (Xu and Chan, 2010). Moreover, to build brand equity, it is recommended that an emotional consumer/brand link should be established (Cai and Hobson, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2005).

Based on the notions in the above paragraphs, this research aims to analyze the contribution of the experience perceived by the tourist during the online shopping process (information search and reservation) and the subsequent offline hotel stay in developing brand equity in the hotel sector. Travel derives from different motivations such as business, health, education and leisure or vacation. In this study, we chose to focus on leisure tourism, as this type leads to pleasant emotions and feelings (Williams, 2006). The specific service within the tourism industry subject to analysis is that of the hotel sector, as it is common for these businesses to attempt to enrich their services by offering tourists moments of entertainment, fun and sensory stimulation that will bolster client recall of the experience over the long term (Oh *et al.*, 2007). In addition, this sector is ideal to analyze online experiences as the largest number of searches and hotel reservations are currently carried out by internet, and online tools such as TripAdvisor, social networks and hotel webs are increasingly gaining clout in tourist decision-making (Segittur, 2014).

This study is of particular utility for hotel management given that, although it is a sector that for several years has integrated experiential marketing in its service strategy, there is little research analyzing the impact of such actions on the variables that are of interest to the hotel. These are brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations that are generically englobed in the concept of brand equity. Furthermore, as the relationship between the tourist and the hotel is initiated when the tourist is searching for information about accommodation, for the most part over the internet, it is necessary to identify whether the use of the pleasure experienced during the search, the interaction with other tourists or the usability of the service generates a first level of experience, online in this case, that will also affect the stay and brand equity perceived by the tourist. Along this line, there are no hotel sector studies that have jointly analyzed the role of the online and offline tourist experience and its role in contributing to brand equity. Recognizing the previous notions will allow hotels to identify where to focus marketing efforts so as to increase brand equity and thus develop valuable and memorable long-term links with their clients.

2. Literature review

2.1 Brand equity: definition and relevance in the hotel sector

The *brand equity* concept, introduced by Aaker, is defined as:

[...] the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand – its name and symbols – that add value to, or subtract value from, a product or service (Aaker, 1991).

This author differentiates four facets: brand loyalty, brand associations, brand awareness and perceived quality. In spite of other approaches to developing brand equity in the literature, especially certain lines of thought that consider the four variables as antecedents of brand equity (Im *et al.*, 2012), these variables are usually retained as dimensions of brand equity.

Appendix 1, in fact, lists a series of relevant studies published in the past 25 years that reveal a high coincidence among the brand equity dimensions. Regarding their definition,

brand loyalty is the link that a consumer develops with a brand, leading to attitudinal or behavioral resistance to change. On the other hand, perceived quality is the perception among clients as to the total quality or superiority of the product or service. Moreover, brand associations are defined as any element connected to memory (Aaker, 1991). In the case of hotels, the associations are its physical appearance, the logo, the number of stars, brand history and reputation, relative price, country of origin, hotel location and image (Ford *et al.*, 1990; Srinivasan and Till, 2002). Finally, brand awareness refers to the ability of the consumer to identify a brand from memory, increasing the likelihood that it can be recalled with or without external aids (Franzen, 1999; Keller, 1993).

The concept of brand equity subsequently became linked to the consumer, as defined by Keller (2003) as: “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.” Furthermore, brand equity must be understood as the favorable or unfavorable attitudes and perceptions that form in the consumer’s mind and influence his/her behavior (Prasad and Dev, 2000). Thus, positive brand equity occurs when the consumer responds favorably to a brand’s marketing activity, as compared to where the same activity is carried out for the same product or service devoid of a brand name. Therefore, a positive brand equity for the consumer leads to an increase in revenues and profits (Atilgan *et al.*, 2005; Keller, 2003) as it will influence consumer preferences, purchase intentions and the choice of brand (Cobb-Walgren *et al.*, 1995). This explains the relevance of evaluating the effectiveness of experiential marketing.

The importance of brand equity in services is linked to its inherent characteristics such as intangibility. Thus, a service with strong brand equity, besides offering a promise of future satisfaction, increases the customer’s confidence in the purchase of a product they cannot see (Berry, 2000). In the case of the tourism sector, it must be noted that hotels see brands as a quick way for customers to identify and differentiate them (Prasad and Dev, 2000). This identification thus results in hotels associated with a chain bearing positive brand equity to have higher occupancy and income levels (Forgacs, 2003), generating a positive relation between brand equity and financial returns (Kim and Kim, 2005). Thus, higher financial returns are behind greater preferences and purchase intentions generated by hotels with greater brand equity (Cobb-Walgren *et al.*, 1995; Fung and King, 2010).

Regarding brand equity development, Yoo and Donthu (2001) advance that it is a result, among other factors, of the initial purchasing experience. In addition, Fernández and Delgado (2011) note that it is necessary once the product or service is in use to offer additional value so as to nurture deeper links with the client. Experiential marketing in this sense can provide this value (Cleff *et al.*, 2014). For this reason, the following sections analyze the relationship between the experience during the hotel stay (offline) and during the internet purchase process (online) in the development of hotel brand equity.

2.2 Consumer experience in hospitality and tourism

Experiential marketing consists of offering original activities linked to the senses that are conducive to experimentation and action. These include an environment and design fostering interactions with employees and other reference groups, and the development of attributes of quality/price/promotion in its products or services (Vázquez-Casielles and Cachero-Martínez, 2014). Once the concept of experience is defined, it is necessary to identify its contribution to the service and to the marketing action itself. Furthermore, services are based on attributes and are evaluated by different agents such as the business itself, customers or suppliers. By contrast, experience is more holistic and is evaluated internally by each client (Otto and Ritchie, 1996). To the economic rationality of services, the marketing of experiences serves as an addition to the value of hedonic and memorable

sensations (Davis, 2014; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). On the other hand, marketing requires identifying and cost-effectively meeting the demands of people and society (Kotler and Keller, 2006). To this end, experiential marketing adds to generating sensorial, emotional, cognitive and relational values among consumers (Williams, 2006).

Otto and Ritchie (1996), in one of the first studies defining the dimensions of customer experience, developed what they labelled a “Service Experience Scale” to measure the leisure and tourism experience. It comprises four dimensions: hedonism, peace of mind, involvement and recognition. Pine and Gilmore (1998) subsequently proposed a scale often adopted in later research comprising four dimensions:

- (1) education and previous knowledge of the tourist;
- (2) visitor need of escapism;
- (3) location esthetics; and
- (4) entertainment.

Aho (2001), in turn, developed a theory marked by four basic tourism elements: emotional, learning, practical and transformational experiences.

Brakus *et al.* (2009), based on the previous offline experiential marketing research, developed a scale of 12 items revolving around the following four dimensions: behavioral, sensory, affective and intellectual. The behavioral dimension refers to physical actions and behaviors stimulated by a place or environment. The sensory dimension is perceived, among others, through the senses and includes decorative and architectural elements, lighting, fragrances, flavors, sounds and music. The affective dimension, in turn, is related to the feelings and attitudes evoked by a brand that give rise to emotions such as moods or feelings (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Finally, the intellectual dimension arises when the proposals of design, leisure activities, advertising or interaction with employees help stimulate the curiosity and creativity of the consumer, leading to thought and reflection. Hence, the Brakus *et al.*'s (2009) proposal of dimensions for the offline service experience, in addition to being more complete, is widely cited in recent literature.

Regarding the effects of experiential marketing actions, businesses gain competitive advantage in the marketplace when they focus on developing memorable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Rivera *et al.*, 2015) that cultivate consumer loyalty (LaSalle and Britton, 2004; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Consumers, in fact, tend to be loyal to a brand that provokes hedonic emotions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Thus, following the notion that consumer experience is 85 per cent emotional (Shaw and Ivens, 2002), businesses that offer this type of experience will generate greater loyalty.

Experience not only influences the dimension of loyalty but also has a positive influence on brand associations (Chang and Chieng, 2006). Thus, marketing experiences can increase brand associations by altering consumer perceptions (Smilansky, 2009). It is thus possible to affirm that the knowledge acquired by the tourist after “seeing, feeling and hearing” a hotel will engender associations with the brand, leading to a specific behavior (Bailey and Ball, 2006).

In general terms, the more positive experiences (memorable, unique and sustainable) induced by brands, the more consumer satisfaction and the more development of strong brand equity (Kumar, Dash and Purwar, 2013). Thus, the experience generated by the service has a significant influence on brand equity (Chaudhuri, 1995; Shamim and Muhammad, 2013; Spry *et al.*, 2011), leading to the following hypothesis:

- H1. The experience of a tourist during a stay in a hotel influences his perception of brand equity.

2.3 Online experiential marketing in hospitality and tourism

The internet is becoming an indispensable source of information in tourism, particularly for reservations, as the percentage of individuals booking online exceeds that of other means (Segittur, 2014).

Online experiential marketing in the hospitality sector can develop in different environments such as hotel websites, virtual communities (e.g. TripAdvisor), hotel searchers (e.g. Booking.com) and social networks offering comments on the hotel. Although the hotel does not maintain full control over all of these platforms, it can act to improve the customer experience by uploading photographs and information, responding to customers in social networks and, of course, by the design and content of the corporate website. With these actions, the hotel strives to attain a good position with respect to competition and carefully look after its image while receiving continuous user feedback. Thus, experience in an online environment is defined as the global experience deriving from consumer interactions with different platforms where the tourist seeks to find hotel information. This is characterized by high levels of emotion, challenge, skill, control and interactivity (Novak *et al.*, 2000) and is reflected in emotions and impressions based on the virtual interactions (Nambisan and Watt, 2011).

The process of buying online, in turn, can be differentiated into three major phases regarding the development of consumer experiences: information search, purchase and delivery of the product (Rose *et al.*, 2011). As the current paper focuses on the online experience in the hotel sector, without transport and delivery of product, it is the first two phases that generate an experience as defined in the previous paragraph. It would be complex, even excessive, to try to separate the experience that the customer perceives in the information search and purchase phases. Thus, Constantinides (2004) indicates that the online experience covers elements such as search, navigation, identification, selection, comparison and evaluation of information, as well as interaction and transaction with the online provider. In the same line, in the review of the literature carried out by Rose *et al.* (2011), a significant portion of research focuses on studying the behavior of the consumer regarding the activities of information search and purchase online from the standpoint that they are linked. That is, the online experience of the tourist is developed by different electronic platforms throughout the purchase process.

Regarding the dimensions of the online experience, Pentina *et al.* (2011) start from the classic dimensions of experiential marketing and analyze their application to the online environment. Nambisan and Watt (2011) and Salehi *et al.* (2013) coincide on four dimensions of the online experience medium: pragmatic, hedonic, sociability and usability. Yet, in this case, the pragmatic dimension refers to behavioral orientation and inform, based on interactions in the virtual community, if users have found the online experience useful or valuable (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001). The hedonic experience refers to the intrinsic value given by users to experience. Hence, when positive, the feelings are emotional and entertaining. Yet, when the interaction is negative, boring or frustrating, then the hedonic experience is negative (Voss *et al.*, 2003). The sociability dimension, in turn, arises when the consumer interacts with virtual communities, leading to a perception of sociability, friendliness and courtesy. Finally, the usability dimension consists in the experience of users during Web navigation and application of different virtual tools.

Consumers measure their online experience according to their interactions, which leads to a good idea of the quality of the service, in this case of the quality of the hotel, according to the associations engendered. An association of positive experiences indicates that the hotel offers its clients good quality, while negative association is tantamount to poor quality (Salehi *et al.*, 2013). As a result, the evaluation of the service, both during the online purchase

process and offline use, has direct and positive effects on brand equity. Therefore, improvements in brand equity can be carried out through investing to improve both online and offline service experience (White *et al.*, 2013). In this sense, a positive mark of the tourist leads to an increase in the knowledge and the image of the brand, while the consumers associate the perception of the service as excellent or superior, resulting in the future choice by the consumer of that particular brand above the competition (Yoo *et al.*, 2000). In short, the interactions that users have with the brand in real-time generate online experiences that affect the perception of brand equity (Chen, 2012; Christodoulides and De Chernatony, 2004). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2. The experience of the tourist during the online purchase process influences hotel brand equity.

Experiences arise in different ways in both indirect and direct manners. Indirect experiences take place when consumers are exposed to intangible aspects of marketing, while direct experiences occur when consumers buy or consume a product or service (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Both types of experience must be taken into account if businesses want to gain an advantage over competition. Thus, Wu *et al.* (2004) indicate that brand experience through the online channel leads to experiential responses similar to those created offline. As consumers interact with brand-related stimuli on the online channel, this experience will contribute to the total brand experience (Shim, 2012). Therefore, it is expected that the consumer experience in different channels (e.g. online) will influence related experiences (offline) and the connection with the brand (Huang *et al.*, 2015). This leads to proposal of the following hypothesis:

H3. The experience of the tourist during the online buying process influences his/her hotel stay experience.

Based on the hypotheses proposed, we propose the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

3.1 The sample

A convenience sample was carried out on tourists lodging in four-star hotels in Granada, Spain. Four-hotels were selected because of the requirement that the sampling must be homogeneous (offering similar services and features). In addition, four-star hotels have sufficient resources to properly manage their online services. This is also the hotel category with the highest number of rooms in Spain (52 per cent) that accommodate the largest number of travelers (53 per cent) (INE, 2016). The purpose of their stay had to be vacation, and their search for hotel information had to have been carried out via the internet. Furthermore, their stay in the hotel had to be their first and

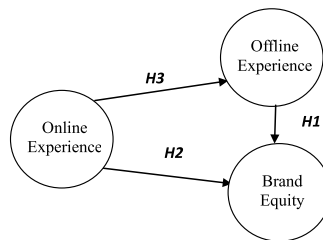


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

have lasted at least 24 h. Along these lines, based on data from Segittur (2014), 53.4 per cent of tourists hire hotel services via the internet, a figure far beyond that contracted by travel agencies (12.7 per cent).

A total of 153 self-report surveys were conducted in a series of four-star hotels on different days and at different times for a week. Next, 10 were eliminated as they did not meet the requirements cited above, thus reducing the sampling to 143. Permission was granted to conduct the interviews in the hotel's lobby by the hotel's commercial managers under the condition they be provided with the results. The hotels participating in the project were NH Hesperia, Hotel Carmen, Hotel Gran Luna of Granada, Hotel Abades Recogidas and Hotel Corona.

The questionnaire was designed in Spanish and English as the population included tourists from Spain and other countries. Its first section comprised classification questions such as the purpose of the trip, hotel name, number of days of the visit, number of previous stays, search and reservation, amount of time spent in consulting the information, data about fellow travelers, general budget of the trip, nationality, age and gender. The rest of the questionnaire was focused on measuring online experience, offline experience and brand equity. The online experience of the tourist encompasses the entire purchase process, comprising the search for both information and reservation. In addition, this experience was not only limited exclusively to the hotel website but also included social networks and evaluation-booking websites (such as TripAdvisor or Booking), which were consulted to gather more data on the hotel.

With regard to the sociodemographic profile of the respondents (Table I), the results point to a slightly higher percentage of women (55 per cent). The age groups indicate that more than 50 per cent are between 36 and 55 years of age. As to nationality, the majority are Spanish (31 per cent), followed by Americans (14 per cent), Latinos from Argentina and Colombia (8 per cent) and British (6 per cent). The remaining one-third are atomized in different nationalities. They travel with their family (30 per cent), in couple (29 per cent), with friends (26 per cent) or alone (15 per cent).

Variable	Categories	(%)
Gender	Male	45
	Female	55
Age (years)	18-25	17
	26-35	15
	36-45	26
	46-55	25
	56-65	11
	More than 66	6
Nationality	Spain	31
	USA	14
	Columbia	8
	Argentina	8
	England	6
	Other	33
Type of travel group	Family	30
	Couple	29
	Friends	26
	Alone	15

Table I.
Sociodemographic
characteristics of the
sample

3.2 Measurement scales

A discussion of each of the intrinsic variables to consider regarding the different dimensions is presented in the literature overview section. Thus, we choose to adopt measurement scales that take into account the multidimensionality of the online, offline and brand equity experience and group these variables through second-order constructs (Appendix 2).

The online experience was measured by a seven-point multi-item semantic differential scale developed by Nambisan and Watt(2011). It consists of dimensions such as pragmatic and hedonic adapted from studies by Mathwick *et al.* (2001) and Voss *et al.*(2003), sociability from Gunawardena (1995) and, finally, usability initially used by Brooke (1996). The offline experience (the hotel stay), in turn, was measured using a seven-point Likert scale made up of sensorial, affective, behavioral and intellectual dimensions adapted from the study of Brakus *et al.* (2009) and later put to use by Beckman *et al.* (2013).

The final section of the questionnaire focuses on hotel brand equity measured using a seven-point Likert scale proposed by Kim *et al.* (2008) made up of four dimensions. Loyalty, associations and awareness are adapted from the original scale by Yoo *et al.* (2000). The fourth dimension, perceived quality, is borrowed from the SERVQUAL, the most common research tool to measure consumer perceptions of a service. Yet, for this study, we applied an abbreviated version inspired from SERVQUAL designed by Kim *et al.* (2008) with each of its five items referring to the scale’s five dimensions.

This was followed by an analysis of the psychometric properties of the measurement scales. First, reliability is assessed in two stages: the first with the individual reliability analysis of each indicator by using confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) and the second through the analysis of internal consistency, composite reliability and extracted variance. The Lavaan 0.5-20 package developed for R by Rosseel (2012) served for all the cases of reflective scales. Table II lists the adjustment indicators of the CFA, suggesting an acceptable adjustment of the measurement model.

The CFA data lead to the elimination of items BEA2, BEA3 and BEL3 as their individual reliability is far from the value of 0.5 (0.093, 0.091 and 0.064, respectively). This implies leaving only one indicator for the associations dimension. Although there are other items slightly below 0.5, these are not eliminated as the indicators of composite reliability and extracted variance are within the limits indicated by the literature and avoid affecting the content validity of the measurement scales.

Table III shows that once the items indicated above are eliminated, each of the dimensions of the constructs (online, offline and brand equity) reaches satisfactory values for the indicators of Cronbach alpha, composite reliability and extracted variance. Descriptive indicators such as the mean and standard deviation calculated from the average scales are also listed.

Table II.
CFA adjustment
indicators

Adjustment indicator	Value
χ^2 S-B	1,312.34
Degrees of freedom	837
<i>p</i> -value	0.000
χ^2/df	1.57
CFI	0.870
RNI	0.912
AGFI	0.934
GFI	0.947
RMSEA	0.063

Furthermore, if we analyze the indicators of composite reliability and extracted variance for the three second-order constructs, we conclude that they also have satisfactory values as evidenced in Table IV.

Finally, as shown in Table V, there is discriminant validity in all dimensions as all the values of the main diagonal (extracted variance) are superior to all the squared correlations that are in the same row and column for each dimension (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4. Results

For the analysis of the data, we developed a structural equations model including the dimensions of each construct. Online experience, offline experience and brand equity served as second-order constructs. Figure 2 illustrates the scheme.

As the variables in the model do not follow the assumed normal multivariate distribution, we opted to develop a robust maximum likelihood estimation. As listed in

Scale	Dimension	Composite reliability	Extracted variance	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	σ
Online experience	Pragmatic	0.87	0.53	0.86	6.14	0.71
	Hedonic	0.94	0.72	0.93	5.46	0.97
	Sociability	0.91	0.72	0.90	5.73	1.03
	Usability	0.92	0.65	0.91	6.13	0.75
Offline experience	Sensory	0.90	0.74	0.89	5.75	0.99
	Affective	0.84	0.64	0.82	4.71	1.31
	Behavioral	0.89	0.74	0.88	4.14	1.64
	Intellectual	0.91	0.77	0.90	4.47	1.54
Brand equity	Loyalty	0.88	0.79	0.87	4.83	1.76
	Awareness	0.81	0.59	0.79	5.25	1.50
	Quality	0.90	0.64	0.88	6.03	1.01
	Associations	–	–	–	5.24	1.68

Table III.
Mean, SD and indicators of reliability for measurement scales

Scale	Composite reliability	Extracted variance
Online experience	0.82	0.54
Offline experience	0.89	0.67
Brand equity	0.80	0.52

Table IV.
Reliability indicators for the constructs

	PRAG	HED	SOC	USAB	SEN	AFF	BEH	INT	LOY	AWA	QUA
PRAG	0.53										
HED	0.30	0.72									
SOC	0.33	0.28	0.72								
USAB	0.37	0.17	0.15	0.65							
SEN	0.17	0.13	0.07	0.05	0.74						
AFF	0.09	0.09	0.06	0.00	0.52	0.64					
BEH	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.02	0.14	0.45	0.74				
INT	0.08	0.14	0.14	0.00	0.32	0.55	0.70	0.77			
LOY	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.00	0.34	0.55	0.25	0.41	0.79		
AWA	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.07	0.22	0.36	0.25	0.16	0.59	
QUA	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.22	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.24	0.15	0.64

Table V.
Discriminant validity

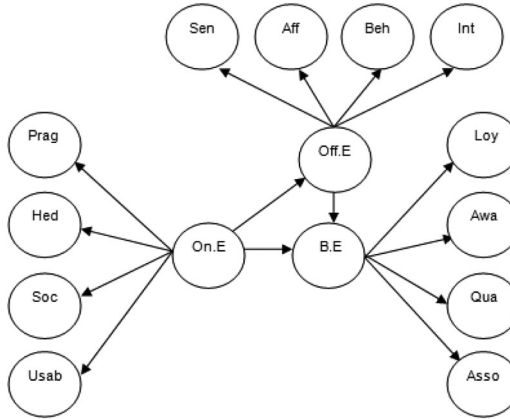


Figure 2.
Model of structural equations

Table VI, the Satorra–Bentler χ^2 test is significant despite that the normalized χ^2 is within the range of values accepted in the literature (Hooper *et al.*, 2008). It can be concluded from the analysis of the other adjustment indicators that the model's fit is acceptable. Thus, the goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.944 and its adjusted version (AGFI) is 0.935, while the relative non-centrality index (RNI) is 0.892 and the CFI is 0.84. Finally, the RMSEA indicator's value of 0.068 is within the generally accepted limit of 0.08.

The analysis of the relationships between each construct and its respective dimension (Table VII) indicates that the relationships are all positive and strong, with standardized coefficients in all cases of above 0.5. The exception is the relation between brand equity and the quality of service, that is near the value (0.48).

This was followed by an analysis of the standardized coefficients, the non-standardized coefficients and their respective *p*-value for the structural model, as listed in Table VIII. First, the offline experience reveals a strong and positive influence on the brand equity of hotels with a standardized coefficient of 0.703 (*p*-value < 0.001). This offers empirical support for *H1* and is consistent with the literature regarding the relationship between service experience and the different facets of brand equity (Chaudhuri, 1995; Kumar *et al.*, 2013; Spry *et al.*, 2011). The relationship between online experience and brand equity of hotels, in turn, is not significant (*p*-value = 0.956), so *H2* does not obtain empirical support. These results suggest that the offline experience is more important than the online experience when it comes to engendering brand equity. Bhatnagar *et al.* (2003) attained

Table VI.
Model adjustment indicators

Adjustment indicator	Value
S-B χ^2	1,471.316
Degrees of freedom	888
<i>p</i> -value	0.00
χ^2/df	1.67
CFI	0.840
RNI	0.892
AGFI	0.935
GFI	0.944
RMSEA	0.068

Construct	Dimension	Standardized coefficient	<i>p</i> -value
Online Experience	Pragmatic	0.891	<0.01
	Hedonic	0.673	<0.01
	Sociability	0.727	<0.01
	Usability	0.610	<0.01
Offline experience	Sensory	0.624	<0.01
	Affective	0.824	<0.01
	Behavioral	0.858	<0.01
	Intellectual	0.934	<0.01
Brand equity	Loyalty	0.571	<0.01
	Perceived quality	0.483	<0.01
	Awareness	0.890	<0.01
	Association	0.847	<0.01

Table VII.
Relationship between dimensions and their construct

Relation	Standardized coefficient	Unstandardized coefficient	<i>p</i> -value
Online experience → offline experience	0.365	0.324	0.013
Online experience → brand equity	-0.005	-0.008	0.956
Offline experience → brand equity	0.703	1.300	<0.001

Table VIII.
Structural model relationships

similar results along the lines of quality of service as did [Hahn and Kim \(2009\)](#) and [Mohammad and Mouakket \(2012\)](#) in the context of online services where interaction with staff is more relevant than the website operation. Finally, the relationship between the online and offline experiences is significant as seen through the standardized coefficient of 0.365 (*p*-value = 0.013), empirically bolstering *H3*.

5. Conclusions and practical implications

Experience is considered one of the most essential aspects that managers should take into account when developing their marketing mix strategy ([Brakus et al., 2009](#); [Chang and Chieng, 2006](#)). Experiential marketing retains customers by providing more personal, memorable and valuable interchanges ([Vázquez-Casielles and Cachero-Martínez, 2014](#)).

The present study attempts to offer a vision of how the online and offline experience of the tourist affects hotel brand equity. The approach to both of these levels of experience is through their dimensions, as well as the brand equity itself. In addition, the study attempts to deepen the relationship between the tourist’s online and offline experience.

The results point to a strong and positive relationship between the level of experience garnered in the stay and the hotel’s brand equity. This relationship is supported by recent studies advancing that consumers prefer to choose a brand mainly based on their experiential benefits and indicate that there is a direct and causal link between the service experience and its ability to generate consumer brand equity ([Brembeck and Ekstrom, 2004](#); [Hulten, 2009](#); [Ratneshwar and Mick, 2005](#); [Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010](#)). Managers are thus encouraged to increase their efforts in designing memorable experiences for tourists as they represent investments generating brand equity.

The online brand experience, nonetheless, is not proven to be directly linked to brand equity, suggesting that the offline experience is more important than the online experience in generating brand value. This was already noted in previous work ([Hahn and Kim, 2009](#);

Mohammad and Mouakket, 2012). On the other hand, the effect of online experience on the offline experience is significant and positive. Thus, although the online experience is not a direct antecedent of brand equity, it is significant in conditioning the tourist experience during the stay, probably because it offers a better knowledge of the resources, activities and initiatives that the hotel offers. This notion is backed by recent research demonstrating that the online experience influences customer behavior in the offline channel (Gabisch, 2011).

This study brings to light the importance of experiential marketing both offline and online when attempting to establish a robust brand in the hotel sector. Yet, to develop valuable brand equity, hotels must offer a pleasurable consumer experience to differentiate them from their competition (Berry and Carbone, 2007; Kumar *et al.*, 2013). Consumer strategies based on consumer experience have become a source of competitive differentiation, providing the potential to create a unique brand through consumer participation and emotional attachment (Berry *et al.*, 2002; Schwager, 2007; Pentina *et al.*, 2011). Positive multichannel (online and offline) experiences also reinforce consumer relations for future purchases. Yet, many brands do not attempt to provide integrated experiences across all channels (Huang, 2011; Rangaswamy and Bruggen, 2005). It is therefore necessary to pay attention to experiential marketing not only in the hotel itself, but to promote the development of marketing strategies interconnected with these two channels to generate higher brand equity (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012).

6. Limitations and future lines of research

The results of this study must nonetheless be interpreted in the framework of a series of limitations. First, this paper focuses exclusively on four-star hotels. Although this category has the highest number of rooms and overnight stays in Spain, the services and the investment that generate experiences can change depending on hotel type. Hence, further research should expand to other types of accommodations and tourist services.

The size of the sampling may also affect the accuracy of the test and the ability to extrapolate the results. Future studies should thus broaden the sampling and expand into different geographic contexts.

With regard to the model applied, the experiment depends on the expectations that are determined by the market conditions, competition and the personal situation of each consumer (Kumar, Dash, and Purwar, 2013; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Therefore, future lines of research should explore the moderating effects of market conditions and personal variables in the relationship between experience and brand equity.

Finally, the means of measuring brand equity could be improved in future research along two lines. The first should include other dimensions of newly incorporated brand equity such as perceived value, while the second should improve the measurements of the brand association dimension that in the current paper is represented by a single item.

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Table A1.
Articles that coincide in the dimensions of brand equity with those proposed by Aaker (1991) (by author)

Dimension	Leading authors
Loyalty	Aaker (1991), Yoo <i>et al.</i> (2000), Washburn and Plank (2002), Pike (2007), Boo <i>et al.</i> (2009), Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) and Zavattaro <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Perceived quality	Aaker (1991), Cobb-Walgren <i>et al.</i> (1995), Yoo <i>et al.</i> (2000), Washburn and Plank(2002), Boo <i>et al.</i> (2009), Gartner and Ruzzier (2011), Bianchi <i>et al.</i> (2014) and Zavattaro <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Associations	Aaker (1991), Keller (1993), Kapferer (1994), Cobb-Walgren <i>et al.</i> (1995), Yoo <i>et al.</i> (2000), Washburn and Plank (2002), Pike (2007) and Zavattaro <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Awareness	Aaker (1991), Keller (1993), Cobb-Walgren <i>et al.</i> (1995), Yoo <i>et al.</i> (2000), Washburn and Plank (2002), Pike (2007), Boo <i>et al.</i> (2009), Gartner and Ruzzier (2011), Bianchi <i>et al.</i> (2014) and Zavattaro <i>et al.</i> (2015)

Appendix 2: Scales

- (1) Online experiential scale (Nambisan and Watt, 2011)
 - Pragmatic dimension
 - Not Useful/useful (OP1).
 - Unproductive/productive (OP2).
 - Not valuable/valuable (OP3).
 - Impractical/practical (OP4).
 - Not informative/informative (OP5).
 - Irrelevant/relevant (OP6).
 - Hedonic dimension
 - Annoying/pleasant (OH1).
 - Not fun/funny (OH2).
 - Not Exciting/exciting (OH3).
 - Not captivating/captivating (OH4).
 - Boring/entertaining (OH5).
 - Not passionate/passionate (OH6).
 - Social dimension
 - Not friendly/friendly (OS1).
 - Impersonal/personal (OS2).
 - Not collaborative/collaborative (OS3).
 - Not inviting/attractive (OS4).
 - Usability dimension
 - Difficult/easy (OU1).
 - Exhausting/not exhausting (OU2).
 - Stressful/not stressful (OU3).
 - Confusing/not confusing (OU4).
 - Complicated/Simple (OU5).

- Inconsistent/consistent (OU6).
- (2) Offline experience scale (Brakus *et al.*, 2009)
 - Sensory dimension
 - This hotel impressed me visually (OFS1).
 - I find this hotel interesting in a sensory way (OFS2).
 - This hotel is attractive to my senses (OFS3).
 - Affective dimension
 - This hotel induces me to have positive feelings (OFA1).
 - I have an emotional bond with this hotel (OFA2).
 - This hotel generates emotional experiences (OFA3).
 - Behavioral dimension
 - I participate actively in the activities organized by the hotel so as to have a complete experience (OFC1).
 - I have lived experiences in this hotel that develop my bodily senses (OFC2).
 - This hotel is action oriented (OFC3).
 - Intellectual dimension
 - I have many thoughts about my visit to this hotel (OFI1).
 - This hotel makes me think (OFI2).
 - This hotel stimulates my curiosity (OFI3).
- (3) Brand equity scale (Kim *et al.*, 2008)
 - Brand loyalty
 - I am loyal to the hotel where I stayed (BEL1).
 - When it comes to choosing hotel in Granada, this would be my first choice (BEL2).
 - In the future, I could change this hotel for one that runs promotions (BEL3).
 - Perceived quality
 - The physical facilities at the hotel are visually appealing (BEC1).
 - From the outset of my stay the hotel offered a good service (BEC2).
 - The hotel staff is always willing to help me (BEC3).
 - The hotel staff stands out for their courtesy toward guests (BEC4).
 - The hotel staff understand my specific, individual needs (BEC5).
 - Brand awareness
 - Before traveling, I had knowledge of the physical appearance of the hotel (BECO1).
 - I am aware of all the hotel services (BECO2).
 - I can recognize the hotel among other competing brands (BECO3).
 - Brand associations
 - Some hotel features come to my mind quickly (BEA1).
 - I quickly recall the hotel logo or symbol (BEA2).
 - I have difficulty imagining the image of the hotel (BEA3).

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