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**The role of customer inspiration and relationship quality in
engaging the online experience: insights from Kuwait and
Portugal**

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Resumo

O principal objetivo de investigação desta tese é analisar a relação entre a experiência online e o compromisso do cliente, considerando diferentes moderadores e mediadores e comparando entre o Kuwait e Portugal. A tese oferece uma revisão sistemática da literatura sobre a experiência online, inspiração do cliente, qualidade de relacionamento, compromisso do cliente, e-commerce e dimensões culturais. Em seguida, realizamos entrevistas em profundidade com sete participantes do Kuwait e de Portugal, o que nos permitiu compreender semelhanças e diferenças na experiência de compra destes clientes e contribuiu para a criação do modelo conceptual a ser analisado na abordagem quantitativa. Utilizamos duas amostras de painéis da plataforma *Qualtrics* para as pesquisas qualitativas, uma com 210 participantes do Kuwait e outra com 240 participantes de Portugal.

As principais conclusões revelam que (i) o fortalecimento do cliente reforça a relação entre o valor percebido do cliente e o compromisso online, que (ii) a cooperação, o e-commerce e as percepções culturais são três fatores relevantes que contribuem para a formação de três grupos de consumidores, que (iii) tanto a qualidade da relação online como a inspiração do cliente atuam como mediadores na relação entre a experiência online e o compromisso do cliente, e finalmente, que (iv) existem diferenças entre o Kuwait e Portugal no envolvimento online, com base nas diferenças culturais. Os gestores podem beneficiar da nossa pesquisa oferecendo uma experiência online imersiva aos seus clientes. Através do estímulo de experiências online, as empresas podem informar os clientes sobre os seus produtos e serviços, educar os seus *stakeholders* sobre vários assuntos e, acima de tudo, gerir um ambiente digital colaborativo e participativo.

Palavras-chave: Customer Engagement, Online Experience, Customer inspiration, Online Relationship Quality, National culture, Firm Performance.

JEL: M14; M31

Abstract

The main research objective of the current thesis is to analyse the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement considering moderators and mediators and compare between Kuwait and Portugal. The thesis provides a systematic literature review on the online experience, customer inspiration, relationship quality, customer engagement, e-commerce, and national culture. Next, we conducted in-depth interviews with seven participants from Kuwait and Portugal, which allowed us to understand similarities and differences in online customer purchasing experience perceived by Kuwait and Portuguese customers and contributed to creating the conceptual model to be analysed in the quantitative approach. We used two Qualtrics panel samples for the qualitative research, one with 210 participants from Kuwait and another with 240 from Portugal.

Major findings reveal that (i) customer empowerment strengthens the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement, (ii) cooperation, e-commerce, and cultural perceptions are three relevant factors contributing to form three clusters of participants from Kuwait and Portugal, (iii) both online relationship quality and customer inspiration act as mediators in the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement, (iv) and finally there are differences between Kuwait and Portugal in engaging online, based on cultural differences. Managers can benefit from our research by offering an immersive online experience to their customers. Through stimulating online experiences, firms can inform customers about their products and services, educate their stakeholders about various subjects and, above all, manage a collaborative and participatory digital environment.

Keywords: Customer Engagement, Online Experience, Customer inspiration, Online Relationship Quality, National culture, Firm Performance.

JEL: M14; M31

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Glossary of Acronyms

B2B	- Business-to-Business
B2C	- Business-to-Customer
C	- Collectivism
C2C	- Customer-to-Customer
C2B	- Customer-to-Business
CBRP	- Customer-Base Relational Performance
CE	- Customer Engagement
CEmp	- Customer Empowerment
CI	- Customer Inspiration
CPV	- Customer Perceived Value
E-commerce	- Electronic Commerce
EU	- European Union
GCC	- Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
ICT	- Information and Communication Technologies
IMF	- International Monetary Fund
KW	- Kuwait Participant
LGO	- Long-term Orientation
M	- Masculinity
OE	- Online Experience
OECD	- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPEC	- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
ORQ	- Online Relationship Quality
P	- Performance
PD	- Power Distance

PT	- Product Type
PTp	- Portuguese Participant
RQ	- Relationship Quality
SET	- Social Exchange Theory
SLR	- Systematic Literature Review
UA	- Uncertainty Avoidance
UN	- United Nations
VAT	- Value-added Tax
VC	- Value Consciousness
WoS	- Web of Science

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and thesis topic

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) has grown in recent years, becoming one of the leading models of commercial operations, particularly among commercial entities. When electronic devices connect to the internet, such as laptops, smartphones and tablets, are widely used technologies, one can assume that collecting information about products, orders of goods or services, digital sales or purchases are the most common ways of doing business (Laudon & Traver, 2021). E-commerce or even online commerce means the process of buying, selling, transferring, or exchanging products, services and/or information through computer networks, including the Internet (Turban et al., 2015). Therefore, it includes customers who purchase goods and services online and firms that sell and communicate with other firms via the Internet. E-commerce can be defined as the purchase and sale of information, products and services through computer networks (Corbitt et al., 2003), and it is radically changing the dynamics of the business environment and how people and organisations trade.

E-commerce has grown, and the purchase of online products across national borders has become simple and convenient for customers, offering new commercial opportunities for national and international online stores. Online commerce helps individuals save time and energy (Turban et al., 2015). This type of activity uses Internet technology and allows an organisation or an individual to carry out activities through an electronic network (Pons et al., 2003). According to the definition of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), e-commerce refers to the exchanges of integration of open networks, including several different types of markets: enterprise to enterprise (B2B), enterprise to customer (B2C), customer to customer (C2C) or customer to the firm (C2B) (Nemat, 2011). E-commerce can be used for almost all types of goods or services (from books to music, meals, financial services or airline tickets, among others). The main aspect of e-commerce is the platform on which the trade is built (Pons et al., 2003).

Although these different stakeholders of e-commerce are linked to a particular interaction between buyers and sellers, they all have a potential role in promoting new types of international trade and transactions of goods and services (Laudon & Traver, 2021). E-commerce can be expected to become the mainstream of international trade (export and import) in the coming decades. E-commerce could be said to have the potential to add more value to businesses and

customers in developing countries than in developed countries. However, most firms in developing countries have failed to take advantage of the benefits offered by modern information and communication technologies (ICT) (Kshetri, 2007).

E-Commerce in Kuwait and Portugal

The ICT market in the Gulf (including Kuwait) is growing, driven by a strong economy and infrastructure investments in important areas such as oil, gas, energy, finance, and telecommunications (Alshubiri et al., 2019). The Gulf region offers an interesting case for the development of electronic commerce, as social and cultural factors tend to play an important role in the clash between traditional brick and mortar shops and new markets based on web development (Grab et al., 2018). E-commerce is an important part of Kuwait's economy to strengthen, modernise and grow rapidly. While many firms, organisations and communities in Kuwait are starting to tap the potential of e-commerce, the challenges still must be overcome before e-commerce becomes an advantage for all people (Alrawi & Sabry, 2009).

Recognising “*the importance of e-commerce worldwide, Kuwait has begun to pay attention to the benefits of e-commerce, including the configuration and development of measurements of e-commerce structures and configurations across the country to offer Kuwaiti firms the opportunity to reach world standards*” (Alrawi & Sabry, 2009, p. 511). In the context of the Middle East, some countries have invested and developed their digital economy to a significantly greater extent than others, including Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This development has been achieved due to some factors, including, among other aspects, the remarkable growth on the Internet in the past two decades. It is important to note that online payment in the Middle East is growing faster than anywhere else and that the online shopping market is expanding significantly faster than in other developing regions (Kamel, 2015).

Kuwait

Kuwait is rich (see Figure 0-1) and has developed a welfare state for its citizens, who enjoy a very high per capita income. After a slight recovery in 2018, Kuwait's economic growth slowed to 0.6% as lower oil production and lower oil prices offset the continued expansion of the non-oil sector. It was also well below the initial International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimate for growth of 4.1%. Growth in public spending, employment and credit is expected to support

economic activity in 2022, with growth forecast to reach 3.1% (and 2.6% in 2021). However, this will depend on stable oil prices and rising oil production for the year.

The state of Kuwait, or “Dawlat Al-Kuwait”, dates to the founding of Kuwait City in the 18th century and was officially declared independent in 1961, thus joining the Arab League. Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy with a chosen unitary parliamentary system of 17,820 square kilometres, located in the upper part of the Gulf, near Saudi Arabia in the south, Iraq in the north and Iran in the east. Kuwait was an important naval and commercial centre that declined until the discovery of oil fields, a resource that made Kuwait one of the wealthiest countries per capita in the world.

Figure 0-1. Map of Kuwait



Source: GOOGLE MAP

Official Name: State of Kuwait, دولة الكويت (Dawlat Al-Kuwait)

Capital: Kuwait City

Population: 4,044,500

Languages: Arabic

Geographic Region: Asia Western Asia Geographic Size (km sq): 17,818

Year of UN Membership: 1963

Year of Present State Formation: 1961

Current UN Representative: Mansour Ayyad Sh. Al-Otaibi

Kuwait's public finances are relatively healthy, with a 15.2% debt-to-GDP ratio, only slightly higher than the 14.7% of the previous year. However, public spending is expected to increase between plans to increase credit, employment, and wages in the coming years. At the

same time, tax collection remains low as the government has delayed the introduction of VAT and a special tax on tobacco and sugary drinks. According to IMF estimates, this suggests that gross public debt could increase rapidly to 25% of GDP by 2021. Low tax revenues and lower oil export revenues reduced the current account surplus to 8.2% of GDP in 2019 from 14.4% the previous year. This trend is expected to continue as no significant increase in world oil prices or OPEC oil production is expected, and the current account surplus may drop to 5.8% of GDP by 2021.

The inflation rose to 1.5% in 2019 from 0.6% a year earlier but was much lower than the IMF's initial estimate of 3%, as the introduction of VAT was postponed. Inflation is expected to increase gradually to reach 2.2% by 2020 and 4.2% by 2021. Kuwait's plans to introduce a new debt law continue to be delayed, and Parliament should review the plan to the law in 2020-2021. A lack of debt law means that the government has not issued debt since October 2017 and turned to the General Reserve Fund for financing purposes. The continued decline of the Fund has also weighed on the activities of the fund manager of Kuwait, despite the mandatory state transfers to its Fund for future generations.

According to the IMF, Kuwait has the seventh GDP per capita (PPP) in the world; however, most of this wealth is concentrated in the hands of local citizens, while most workers (mainly from Asia) live in poor conditions (see Table 1). The unemployment rate is almost non-existent, estimated at 1.3% in 2019 and is expected to remain stable in the following years.

Table 0-1. Kuwait GDPs during 2017-2021

Main Indicators	2017	2018	2019 (e)	2020 (e)	2021 (e)
GDP (billions USD)	119.53e	141.65e	137.59	139.57	143.42
GDP (Constant Prices, Annual % Change)	-3.5e	1.2e	0.6	3.1	2.6
GDP per Capita (USD)	26,863e	30,969e	29,267	28,883	28,875
General Government Gross Debt (in % of GDP)	20.7	14.7	15.2	17.4	25.0
Inflation Rate (%)	1.5	0.6	1.5	2.2	4.2
Unemployment Rate (% of the Labour Force)	1.3e	1.3e	1.3	1.3	1.3
Current Account (billions USD)	9.61	20.40	11.31	9.46	8.36
Current Account (in % of GDP)	5.9	11.3e	11.0	8.9	n/a

Source: IMF – World Economic Outlook Database

In 2017, there were just over 4 million Internet users in the country, making the penetration rate 98%. That year, there were 1.3 fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, which

grows fast when it comes to mobile broadband subscriptions (227.9 per 100 inhabitants). In addition, 86% of families had computers, and 99.7% had Internet access in their homes. Kuwait has shown strong growth in Internet access mainly due to the high ownership of smartphones. With mobile penetration at high levels, market attention has shifted from the fixed to the mobile data market. In 2017, e-commerce sales in Kuwait reached approximately \$ 670 million, and e-commerce penetration was 53%. Although the Middle East, in general, is a large retail market, it is still lagging in terms of e-commerce. The mall culture still prevails, and there is a general lack of confidence in online shopping in general. The high rate of smartphone penetration in the country (240%) is one of the main reasons for the growth of e-commerce in Kuwait.

The mobile operators in Kuwait offer one of the most advanced mobile networks in the Middle East, and 100% of the land area and a mobile network covers the population. Despite this, e-commerce is still mainly limited to online banking and financial intermediation services since most Kuwaiti firms do not carry out B2B and B2C online transactions. Paying bills online is the most common activity, and in 2017, 53% of e-commerce users in Kuwait made money transfers over the Internet. Although 97% of Kuwaitis use credit and debit cards, a significant portion of online customers prefers cash over all other payment methods when it comes to e-commerce. Thirty-year-olds account for 65% of all online customers. As for gender, 70% of e-buyers are men, and 30% are women. The most popular online shopping categories are clothes, electronics, and travel and accommodation reservations. Some of the most popular e-commerce websites in the country are digumz.com, xcite.com, taw9eel.com, ubuy.com, souq.com.kw, theyard-kw.com and touqi.com.

Driven by rapid urbanisation, the influx of expatriate workers, and the growing young and wealthy population, Kuwait's retail sector has grown significantly in the past ten years. The high GDP per capita and the growing popularity of modern retail concepts and formats have also helped position the country as an essential hub for global luxury brands, which has earned Kuwait ninth place among the best cities in the world for retail in 2016. However, after several years of rapid growth, moderate customer confidence eased the dynamics of the sector in 2018-2019. Between cuts in public spending, demographic changes within the expat community and inflated commodity prices, the market has collapsed in most classes and categories. Nonetheless, a large and growing range of international retailers is expected to level the market ahead of another medium and long-term retail boom. Market shares the distribution system in Kuwait is divided between shopping centres, foreign markets, and supermarket chains.

There are two types of distribution networks: cooperative and private networks. In the first, each residential area has a cooperative society which includes a set of services and a

supermarket. Most of these supermarkets are managed by the Union of Cooperative Societies. The private network represents many private actors dominating the market, including Carrefour, Sultan Centre, Gulfmart, and Lulu Hypermarket.

Kuwait is heavily dependent on foreign trade, representing 100% of GDP (World Bank), and it is OPEC's fifth-largest oil producer. Kuwait's export earnings come mainly from oil (over 90% of the total and representing almost 60% of GDP). On the other hand, the country mainly depends on imports of food, customer goods and semi-finished products. Imports have increased rapidly in recent years due to the completion of large projects in the country and strong demand for private consumption, and for 2018 they were driven by cars, radiotelephone transmission tools, medicines, and jewellery.

Kuwait exports to many countries. The mains are India (1.6%), China (1.3%), the United Arab Emirates (1.1%), Iraq (0.9%) and Saudi Arabia (0.8%). Kuwait's main suppliers are China (16.7%), the United States (8.7%), the United Arab Emirates (8.6%) and Japan (5.9%). Imports from other Gulf countries have increased since joining the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The county's exports (see Table 0-2 and Table 0-3) depend heavily on its oil production and world oil prices. In 2018, exports grew to \$ 71.9 billion from \$ 55 billion the previous year, while imports increased to \$ 35.9 billion from \$ 33.6 billion in 2018. However, this number is still low compared to 2013-14, when the country exported more than double this value. Kuwait has a structurally positive trade balance. However, the country is a net importer of services. In 2018, Kuwait's trade balance was 45.7 billion dollars against 25.6 billion dollars the previous year. According to provisional data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Kuwait, non-oil exports to non-GCC countries increased 9.2% to \$ 187.8 million in 2018.

Table 0-2 Main export partners of Kuwait

<i>Main Customers (% of Exports)</i>	2018	2019
India	1.6%	1.24%
China	1.3%	1.41%
United Arab Emirates	1.1%	1.37%
Iraq	0.9%	1.48%
Saudi Arabia	0.8%	1.02%

Source: Comtrade, 2019

Table 0-3. Main import partners of Kuwait

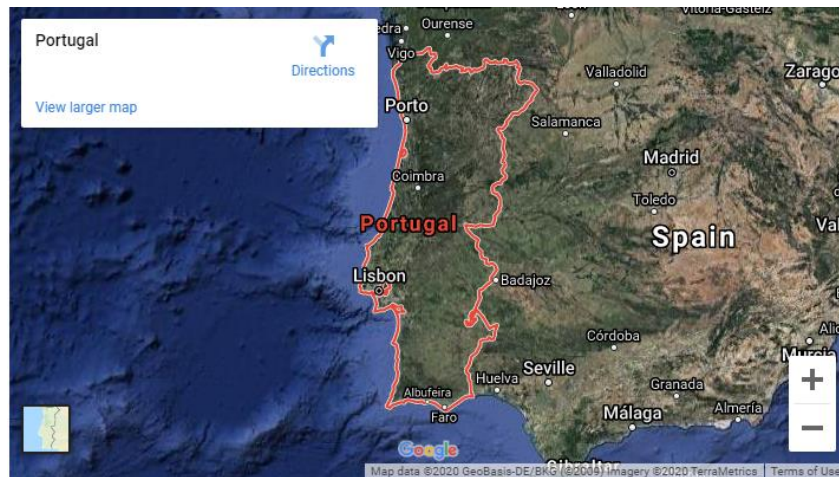
Main Suppliers (% of Imports)	2018	2019
China	16.7%	17.8%
United States	8.7%	9.1%
United Arab Emirates	8.6%	8.41%
Japan	5.9%	6.3%
Germany	5.7%	5.3%
Saudi Arabia	5.7%	5.4%
India	5.2%	5.1%
Italy	4.4%	4.4%
South Korea	3.9%	3.6%
United Kingdom	2.5%	2.8%
Others	32.7%	-

Source: Comtrade, 2019

Portugal

Portugal is in Europe (see Figure 0-2), particularly in the Iberian Peninsula. It borders Spain to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The capital of Portugal is Lisbon, which is located on the country's west coast. Portugal is a republic, particularly a parliamentary democracy, although it had been a monarchy until 1910.

Figure 0-2. Map of Portugal



Source: Google

- Official Name: Portuguese Republic
- Capital: Lisbon
- Population: 10,347,892
- Languages: Portuguese, Mirandize
- Geographic Region: Europe Southern Europe Geographic Size (km sq): 92,212

- Year of UN Membership: 1955
- Year of Present State Formation: 1,143
- Current UN Representative: Alvaro José de Mendonça e Moura

After reaching its peak of the century in 2017, the Portuguese economy continued to expand and is estimated to have grown 1.9% of GDP in 2019, from 2.4% the previous year (IMF). Growth was driven mainly by strong domestic demand, which is expected to slow in the coming years due to a reduction in job creation (partially offset by the expected rise in wages). The service and construction sectors are expected to compensate for the weakening of industrial performance, allowing the country to achieve a growth rate of 1.6% and 1.5% of GDP in 2020 and 2021, respectively (IMF forecast, while the European Commission expects a rate of 1.7% for both years).

However, the European Commission praised the Portuguese government for complying with European standards while pursuing an ambitious policy supporting growth and social justice. This recent prosperity has allowed the country to reduce its budget deficit significantly – it stood at -0.1% of GDP in 2019 – supported by higher cycle-related revenues, lower interest, and public expenditure lower than initially expected. The budget is expected to be positive in 2020-2021, reaching a surplus of 0.5% of GDP, although Novo Banco's contingent capital mechanism, with 0.6% of GDP, will have a negative impact on public finances. The debt ratio remains one of the highest in the EU. The ratio has declined in recent years, and it is expected to drop to 109.3% in 2021, from 117.6% in 2019, thanks to primary surpluses and nominal GDP growth. Despite the improvement in the economic situation, the banking system remains fragile due to the high level of impaired loans. Lower energy, public transport and telecommunications prices caused inflation to drop from 1.2% in 2018 to 0.9% in 2019 (during the third quarter of the year, the country even registered a deflation of -0.3%).

The unemployment rate dropped to 6.1% in 2019 (7% the previous year), and it is expected to decline further, but at a more moderate pace, due to the maturity of the business cycle, with services and construction contributing more to job creation. However, wages are expected to accelerate gradually, supported by the thawing of career progression in the public sector and a reduction in the slowdown in the labour market (see Table 0-4).

Table 0-4. GDP main indicators of Portugal

Main Indicators	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (e)
GDP (billions USD)	221.28e	240.90	236.41	243.23	253.00
GDP (Constant Prices, Annual % Change)	3.5e	2.4	1.9	1.6	1.5
GDP per Capita (USD)	21,483	23,437e	23,031	23,731	24,728
General Government Balance (in % of GDP)	-0.5	-0.5	-0.5	-0.4	n/a
General Government Gross Debt (in % of GDP)	123.9	120.1	117.6	114.8	109.3
Inflation Rate (%)	1.6	1.2e	0.9	1.2	1.3
Unemployment Rate (% of the Labour Force)	8.9	7.0	6.1	5.6	5.4
Current Account (billions USD)	0.99	-1.45e	-1.40	-1.73	-1.84
Current Account (in % of GDP)	0.5	0.0	-0.3	-0.6	n/a

Source: Eurostat - Statistical office of the European Union, 2021

About the Portuguese adoption of e-commerce, Gonçalves et al. (2016) report that the percentage of firms that perform electronic commerce is increasing (representing 12% of their revenues) and is greater than the verified participation in Spain or the EU average. Nonetheless, little explanation exists about that evolution for the Portuguese buyers/sellers (Gonçalves et al., 2016). Portugal's economy is open to foreign trade, representing 87% of its GDP (Fernandes et al., 2017). Although the country has traditionally exported agricultural products, textiles, and clothing, it has started to export an increasing amount of technological equipment. In 2018, the country mainly exported petroleum products, motor vehicles and their parts, footwear, and paper; Mainly imports of the same products (petroleum products, motor vehicles and parts thereof), medicines and natural gas.

In 2020, the main trading partners were Spain (25.37% of total exports), France (13.58%), Germany (11.87%) and the United Kingdom (5.7%). Portugal's main suppliers were Spain (32.41%), Germany (13.34%), France (7.46%) and The Netherlands (5.53%) (see Table 0-5 and Table 0-6 for more information).

Table 0-5. Top ten main export partners of Portugal

	2020
Spain	25.37%
France	13.58%
Germany	11.87%
United Kingdom	5.7%
United States	4.97%
Italy	4.39%
The Netherlands	3.73%
Angola	1.62%
Brazil	1.35%
China	1.06%
Others	26.38%

Source: Pordata, 2021

Table 0-6. Top ten main import partners of Portugal

	2020
Spain	32.41%
Germany	13.34%
France	7.46%
The Netherlands	5.53%
Italy	5.21%
China	4.50%
United Kingdom	2.83%
Brazil	2.35%
United States of America	1.81%
Angola	0.57%
Others	23.98%

Source: Pordata, 2021

Relations between Kuwait and Portugal

Despite 44 years of diplomatic relations between the State of Kuwait and the Republic of Portugal (early April 1975), economic relations between the two countries did not witness real and effective growth until the inauguration of the Kuwaiti embassy in Lisbon in October 2010. There was a marked increase in the volume of this exchange, which reached 17,89 million euros a year after the opening of the embassy in Lisbon (2011) and 89 million euros in 2017. In addition to trade, the Embassy promotes the potential of the Kuwaiti market, particularly after the 2010-2014 development plan (to which 35 billion Kuwaiti dinars have been awarded), which included various sectors such as oil, gas, electricity, water, and infrastructure, such as airports, schools, and service centres. The embassy invited Portuguese firms specialising in these sectors to participate and compete with local and international firms to participate in tenders offered by the Ministry of Public Works in Kuwait or other ministries and government

institutions. Portugal will contribute significantly to Kuwait's major projects and other medium-sized projects, thereby improving cooperation relations between the two countries.

There is no doubt that the Kuwaiti diplomatic representation in Portugal has given new impetus to the relations between the state of Kuwait and the Republic of Portugal, both politically and economically. All efforts to consolidate these relationships have been maintained by signing a series of agreements that both countries seek to implement, which have been concluded as follows: a) Convention "Prevention of double taxation and prevention of financial evasion in respect of income tax" (February 2010); b) Mutual promotion and investment protection (May 2011); c) Convention on the exemption of visas for each holder of diplomatic or special passports (December 2012); Agreement on cooperation in the sports sector (December 2012). The above is due to the completion of the efforts and concluded treaties, particularly the work to increase trade and increase exports and imports in the various Portuguese and Kuwaiti products, mainly because the size of this exchange is not equal to the size of the market.

Relevance of the Thesis

The main goal of this thesis is to examine the potential influence of online experience on customer engagement through customer inspiration and online relationship quality and to compare Kuwait and Portugal. A second goal is to cluster Kuwait and Portugal's perceived e-commerce firm performance. Moreover, this thesis intends to incorporate the concept of customer engagement in these relationships. Engagement is a central concept in several domains, such as psychology or marketing (Guthrie et al., 2004; Higgins & Scholer, 2009; Hsieh & Chang, 2016). Customer engagement explains how social relationships begin, last, and develop (Shiri Dalela Vivek, 2009). Additionally, this thesis proposes a conceptual framework linking online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement based on the social exchange theory (SET). The SET has four premises: (i) exchange interactions can have, in some cases, social consequences apart from producing financial results; (ii) these results are constantly assessed to understand the possible dependence between the exchangers; (iii) realising that an exchange relationship has positive effects leads to the increase of trust, commitment, and satisfaction between the parties; (iv); different exchanges establishing over the years that produce positive returns, stimulates the creation of rules that manage the transactional relationship, whether they are individuals or groups.

In this vein, the relevance of this thesis lies in (i) being the first attempts to analyse customer inspiration and online relationship quality as mediators between the online experience and customer engagement, (ii) compares the proposed conceptual framework between Kuwait and Portugal, (iii) clusters the perceived e-commerce firm performance, considering Kuwait and Portugal.

Research Problem

This thesis devotes its attention to the literature on the online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement. The literature identified a gap in terms of geographical area. Several researchers have conducted numerous studies in different countries, mainly Anglo-Saxon countries (e.g., Calder et al., 2009; Kelley & Alden, 2016; Schamari & Schaefer, 2015), but no study has been conducted in Portugal and Kuwait's. Literature reveals that prior studies conducted in the online purchase are directed to customer satisfaction, behaviour, and attitude but lack more studies to analyse antecedents of online customer engagement (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). Notably, the literature still does not offer any study regarding online relationship quality and customer inspiration as potential mediators between the online experience and customer engagement. Consequently, discovering the shift in the customer's preferences towards now prevailing online platforms also needs to be investigated, based on variables extracted from the literature.

This thesis intends to: (i) develop a systematic review of the literature covering the concepts online engagement, customer inspiration, online relationship quality, online experience, e-commerce, and national culture; (ii) preliminarily explore, through in-depth interviews, the relationship between customers and suppliers in e-commerce platforms; (iii) analyse the clusters formed based on perceived firm performance and compare between Portugal and Kuwait; (iv) analyse the mediation effect of the quality of the online relationship on the relationship between online experience and customer engagement; (v) analyse the mediation effect of the customer inspiration on the relationship between online experience and customer engagement; (vi) assess the moderating effect of national culture between the various relationships of latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework; and (vii) assess the moderating effect of Kuwait versus Portugal between the various relationships of latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework.

Research questions

The research questions are:

- 1- What research has been conducted on customer engagement, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and experience in an online context?
- 2- What is leading and relevant in the relationship between customers and suppliers in e-commerce platforms for Kuwait and Portuguese customers?
- 3- Can value consciousness, customer empowerment, product type, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance strengthen the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement?
- 4- What clusters can be formed on firm performance based on customer-base relational performance perspective?
- 5- Can Online Relationship Quality be a mediator in the relationship between Online Experience and Customer Engagement?
- 6- Can Customer Inspiration be a mediator in the relationship between Online Experience and Customer Engagement?
- 7- Can National Culture act as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework?
- 8- Can Kuwait versus Portugal mediate the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework?

Research Objectives

The main research objective is to analyse the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement considering moderators and mediators and compare Kuwait and Portugal.

This research has the following specific objectives:

- Systematically explore the extant literature on Online Experience, Online Relationship Quality, Customer Inspiration, and Customer Engagement in the online context.

- Explore the similarities and differences in customer purchasing experience perceived by both Kuwait and Portuguese customers.
- Analyse the moderator effects of value consciousness, customer empowerment, product type, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance in strengthening or weakening the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement.
- Clustering the firm performance based on the customer-base relational performance perspective and comparing between Portugal and Kuwait.
- Analyse the relationship between online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration and online customer engagement.
- Analyse the mediation role of online relationship quality in the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement.
- Analyse the mediation role of customer inspiration in the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement.
- Study the national culture as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework.
- Study the countries Kuwait versus Portugal as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework.

Research Philosophy

A research philosophy paradigm is a system of thoughts, which in scientific research aggregates a sum of principles and conventions that will guide researchers to develop their investigation, and finally, to offer new knowledge (Malhotra, 2019). The process of how the research is positioned helps shape the research questions and support the research methodology and methods employed, the applied research strategy, the data collection, and the data treatment and discussion (Azungah, 2018; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Rada & Domínguez-Álvarez, 2014). The leading research philosophies in social sciences are positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism.

Research Ethics

All the studies conducted in this thesis followed the ethical principles of science, which can be perceived as the standard practices for privacy and confidentiality protection for human subject participants (Malhotra, 2019; Malhotra et al., 2017). Based on this assumption, we have kept

these principles in mind, starting from recruitment through participation and data collection, and the dissemination of findings in a confidential, private, and respectful manner.

Research Methodology

The research approach is a systematic and logical method for unravelling the research problem. Research is a systematic investigation for acquiring relevant data, and the accomplishment of research is incredibly reliant on its procedure. The procedures or strategies used to find, select, process, and analyse a topic are referred to as research methodology. The methodology portion of a research work allows the reader to critically examine the study's overall validity and dependability. Research methodology might be comprehended regarding how the research was finished logically (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Therefore, research methodologies are responsible for managing the methodological proceedings of the present examination (Pearse, 2019). The methodology establishes the research approach while identifying the specific research problems of the research. The methodology is lexically characterised as the arrangement of standards, procedures and practices connected to a specific part of learning. It is characterised as methods utilised in a specific zone of movement. Research without a clear methodology would be lacking in its logical context (Malhotra, 2019).

Research Design

This thesis offers various studies to address the research problem and its objectives. We start by offering a systematic review of the literature, followed by three empirical studies, one using a qualitative approach and the others using quantitative methodology. The following is a brief description of the studies:

Study 1 – Systematic Literature Review

The first study of this thesis is a rigorous Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that focuses on matters that are dissimilar but, at the same time, may have hidden connections that help understand the global e-commerce phenomenon. The main topics covered are online experience, customer inspiration, online customer engagement, and firm performance. The first chapter offers this study and intends to map the literature review on these topics. The primary goal of the SLR is to assess the current state of the literature concerning the topics mentioned

above in an objective, methodical and repeatable way while trying to soften the impact of study differences, sampling variances and risk of bias (Christofi et al., 2017; Tranfield et al., 2003).

Once a proper group of articles is collected, the following steps consist of: i) investigating the distinct definitions of the mentioned concepts; ii) understanding the dimensions encompassed in each construct and how to measure them; iii) describing the usual study contexts used as a base, considering, for example, the role of national culture; iv) underlining the connections between concepts; (v) and putting in evidence of the research gaps and future research opportunities offered by the literature (Paul & Criado, 2020; Vrontis & Christofi, 2021). Scopus and Web of Science (Core Collection) are sources to gather the data, a common practice in reviewing the literature (Chavarro et al., 2018; Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, Romero, et al., 2020; Rosado-serrano et al., 2018).

Study 2 – Qualitative research

For the second study, provided in the third chapter of this thesis, we chose a qualitative research approach by using the perceptions of different interviewees collected using open-ended questions. The method is not just concerned with "what" individuals think about e-commerce platforms and the convenience they provide, but also their thoughts about their role in modern business environments. The qualitative research strategy helped us learn more about the participants' motivations and viewpoints. It also helps develop market research results by adequately understanding the target audience's decision-making process. The primary goal for using this methodology is to understand the customer's experience in online purchase platforms in both Kuwait and Portugal. The method used in the study was in-depth interviews to capture what promotes the success of e-commerce platforms and how e-commerce firms can improve their online sales and services.

Study 3 and Study 4 – Quantitative research

Studies 3 and 4 employ a quantitative approach, offered in chapters 4 and 5. Two online questionnaires were prepared using Qualtrics panel samples from Kuwait and Portugal. The questionnaire is a formal set of questions to obtain participants' information (Malhotra, 2019) to understand associations between constructs. Our studies intend to understand the role and relationships among constructs such as online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement. Target participants were individuals aged 18 or older

who purchased, sold, or created an online sales representation in the previous 12 months. Measurement scales were based on the literature and were subject to minor adjustments.

The questionnaire is the primary tool for data collection, using standardized items that follow a predetermined pattern to collect data on a specific issue. In our research, the questionnaire is designed to determine people's viewpoints about the e-commerce expansion during recent years, including the recent changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The quantitative approach aims to evaluate respondents' perceptions about a closed set of points rather than discover new concepts or ideas that have not been discussed.

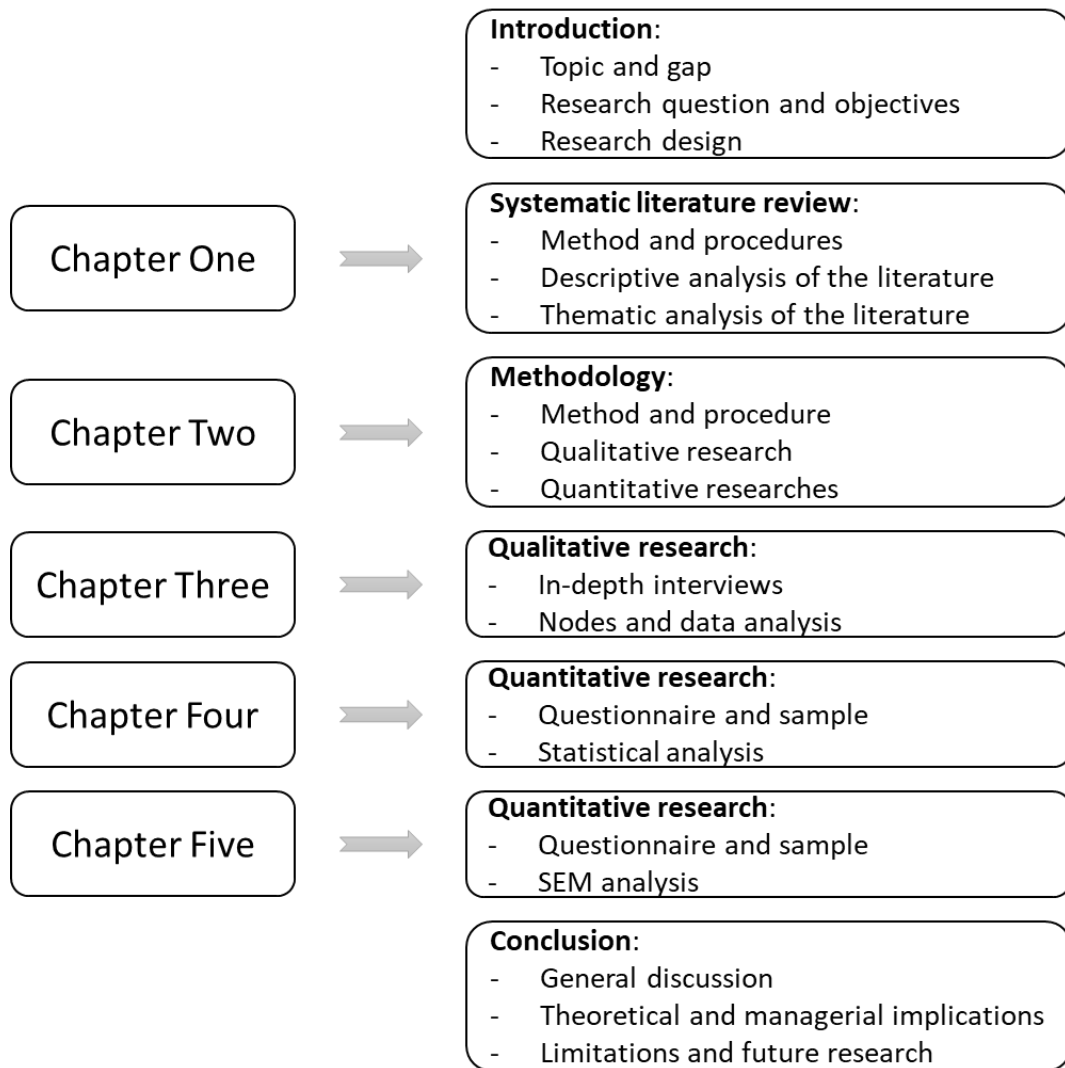
Structure of the Thesis

This thesis first section is devoted to the introduction. This section aims to introduce this thesis topic to the reader and offer information about our research's contextualization. This section also offers the thesis general goals and research questions, which will navigate the entire thesis. It also comprises the research problem, the research design and the research philosophy. The first chapter is devoted to the systematic literature review. In this chapter, we offer the methodology and procedures developed to perform this review, elaborate a descriptive analysis of the final pool of papers, and offer a thematic analysis of literature, comprising nine core topics that arise from the literature. The second chapter focuses on the methodology. In this chapter, we detail the method used both for the qualitative and the quantitative studies. We offer a helicopter view of the procedures and the samples in use.

The third chapter offers qualitative research through in-depth interviews as a primary data source. This chapter intends to capture what promotes the success of e-commerce platforms and how e-commerce firms can improve their online sales and services. The fourth and fifth chapters are devoted to quantitative research using questionnaires to collect the primary data. Two online questionnaires were prepared using Qualtrics panel samples from Kuwait and Portugal. The instrument was developed based on previously validated scales, and a conceptual model is offered and tested. Finally, we offer the conclusion section in which we discuss the theoretical contributions, management implications of this thesis, alongside its limitations and future research avenues this thesis offer.

The schematic diagram of this thesis is presented in Figure 0-3, as follows:

Figure 0-3. Schematic diagram of the thesis



Source: Own elaboration

CHAPTER 1: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is devoted to conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) to highlight the relevant literature addressing this thesis topic. The objective is to systematically explore the extant literature on the online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement in the online context. The research question of this study is: What research has been conducted on customer engagement, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and experience in an online context?

As we deal with novel topics, the extent of existing knowledge is still unclear. Therefore, we undertake this SLR to address this phenomenon by identifying and fitting in the findings of all relevant, high-quality research in the online experience, customer inspiration and customer engagement in e-commerce influenced by national culture. In this sense, this SLR offers an extensive point-of-view about the existing research that can highlight the relevant literature discussing these topics and frame the recent emergent constructs. Specifically, we intend to understand the different findings and results from the previous research, which we should use as a guide to developing this thesis.

This SLR helps us to establish and explore how the literature has already contributed to clarifying this field of research. We seek to understand how previous research defines it and identify the relationships among these constructs and how they are interconnected with the remaining marketing literature. Additionally, we intend to offer future research avenues that other researchers can explore.

1.1 Systematic Literature Review: Method and Procedures

This systematic literature review attempts to use only the most relevant research available to assure the quality and credibility of this thesis outcomes. So, we decided to only use cutting-edge research from quality papers published in top journals. We selected the Web of Science (WoS) as the platform for undertaking this exploration to act accordingly. Web of Science is a leading world publisher-independent global citation database and a powerful research engine, delivering the best-in-class publication and citation data for confident discovery, access, and assessment (WoS, 2021). This world-renowned platform connects data indexes to the Web of Science collections from distinct disciplines, with over 1,89 billion cited references from over 171 million records of more than 34,000 indexed journals. Researchers from all around the

world use and trusts WoS to ground and guide their research. The content made available from WoS collections is selective and consistent, grounded on an independent and detailed editorial process that guarantees journal quality (WoS, 2021).

We have applied several research terms in the WoS platform to undertake the research process. A first query with the phrase “Online Experience” was made, revealing 61,583 articles, and a second query with the word “E-Commerce” returned 49,559 articles. Based on these results, we found that most of these papers are from the scientific areas of Educational Research, Computer Science Information Systems or Computer Science Theory Methods and other areas not related to this thesis topic, and most importantly, not related to Marketing. Therefore, we deepened our analysis by performing several other queries.

A second search stage was made on WoS, looking for research papers related to customers. To perform this search, we use the phrase ‘Customer Engagement OR Customer Engagement’, returning 8,935 articles, and “Customer Inspiration OR Customer Inspiration”, 588 articles. By performing this analysis, we start to have a clearer vision about our research topic, allowing us to narrow down to the available research. Nevertheless, we found too many articles and decided to continue narrowing our search scope. Therefore, a third search phase was made using “Relationship Quality”, returning 235,439 articles and “National Culture”, accounting with 614,183 papers. With this first overview of the amount of research available, we could move to the next stage and create a final set of queries.

In the last stage of this process, we decided to stabilise our search with a set of queries on WoS that could frame our study. The queries were applied in the title, abstract and keywords, and terms were chosen based on their relevance to our research. Most of these keywords are followed by a wildcard to account for distinct possibilities from the root word. The final queries for our search are:

Query 1:
TS=(online experience AND customer inspiration)

Query 2:
TS=(online experience AND customer engagement)

Query 3:
TS=(online experience AND relationship quality)

Query 4:
TS=(e-commerce AND national culture)

The results from these four queries offer a total of 8 articles for query 1 (Qy1), 338 articles for query 2 (Qy2), 1,754 articles for query 3 (Qy3) and 125 articles for query 4 (Qy4). These results show important information and indicate a lack of research on these topics, highlighting the relevance of this thesis's topic. The results achieved from these queries are filtered to papers in English and made available in peer-review journals to advance our search process. At this stage, we now count with 6 (Qy1), 275 (Qy2), 1,498 (Qy3) and 94 (Qy4) articles in our pool of papers. The next stage is to perform the title reading of these papers. We kept only the related ones to our research based on this reading. At this stage, our pool of papers counts with 5 (Qy1), 188 (Qy2), 287 (Qy3) and 53 (Qy4) articles. We now move forward to the abstract reading with the same purpose, and papers that do not meet the criteria of relatedness with our research topic were dropped out. After this process, we kept in our pool of papers 5 (Qy1), 117 (Qy2), 110 (Qy3) and 37 (Qy4) (a total of 269 papers at this stage).

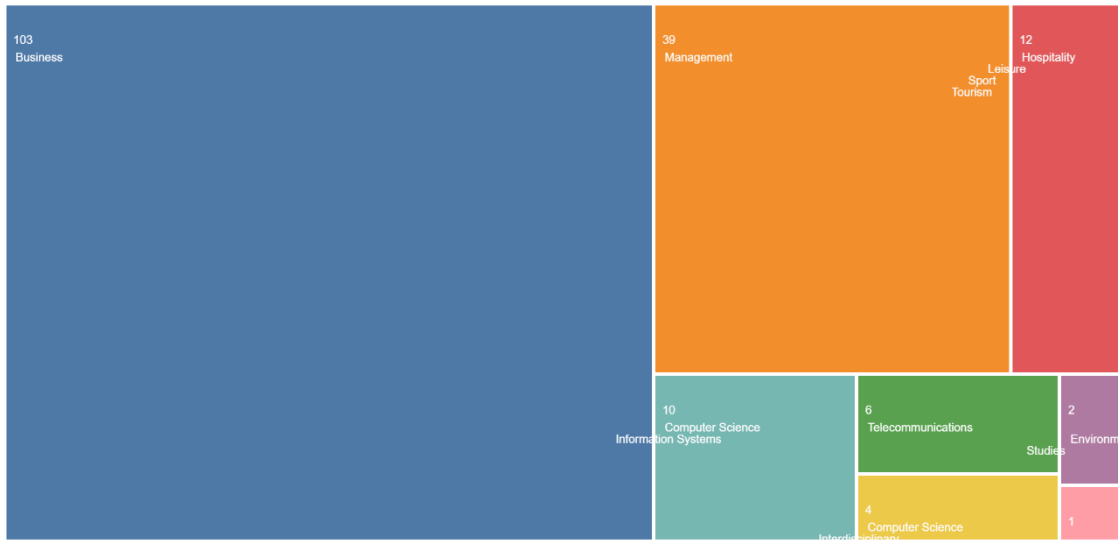
At this stage, it is relevant to understand the range of scientific areas in which these papers are published, and we perform an analysis of the papers' dispersion and the journals where they were published. This dispersion analysis shows that papers appeared in a wide range of journals scientific areas. As mentioned, from the 269 papers that comprise our pool of papers at this stage, we can see that most of those arise from the Business, Management or Computer Sciences fields. We can see the distribution of the most frequent Web of Science categories in Figure 1.1 for query 1, Figure 1.2 for query 2, figure 1.3 for query 3 and figure 1.4 for query 4.

Figure 1-1. Distribution of articles per WOS categories: Query 1



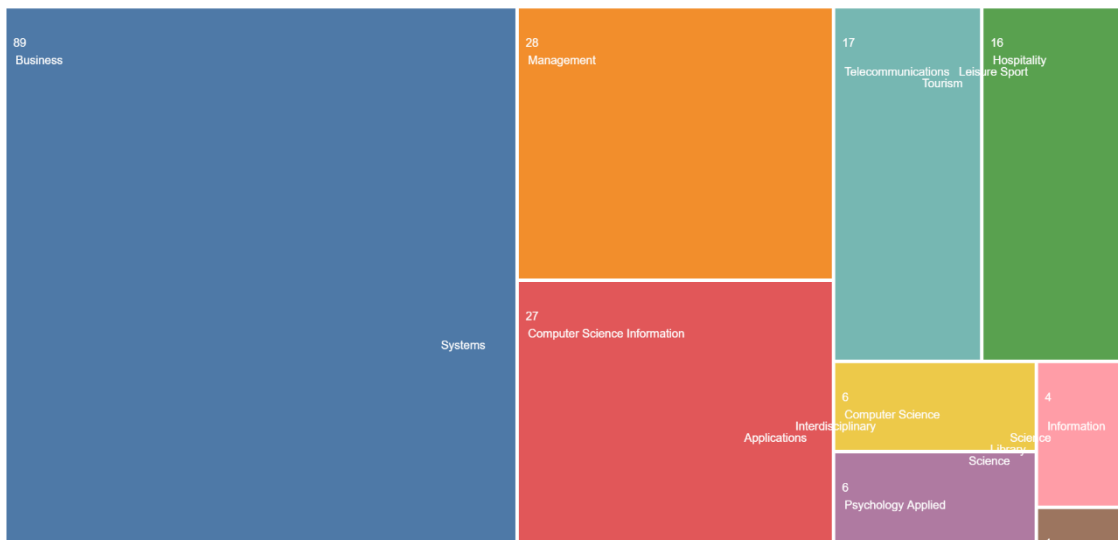
Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1-2. Distribution of articles per WOS categories: Query 2



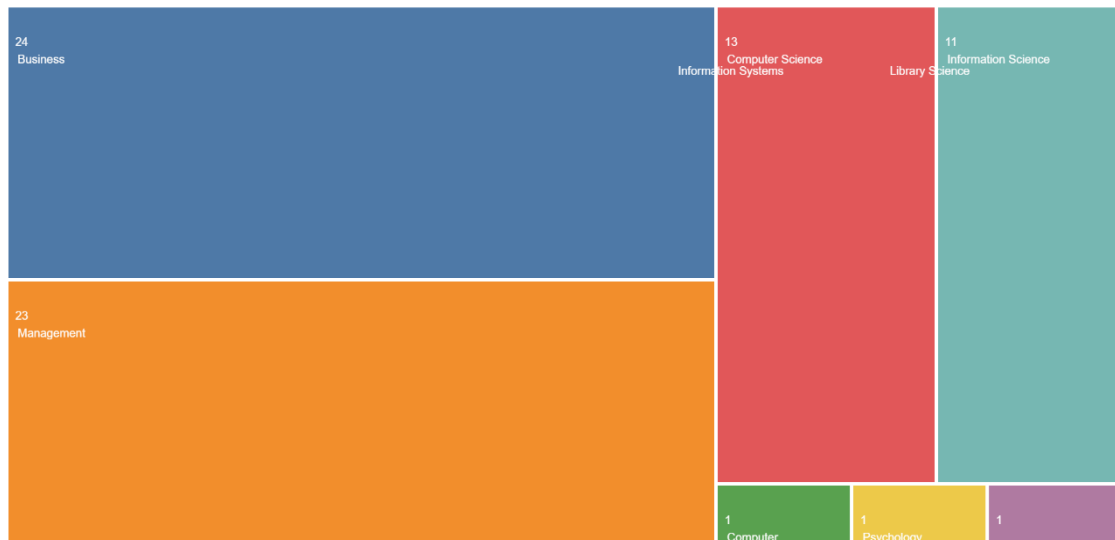
Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1-3. Distribution of articles per WOS categories: Query 3



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1-4. Distribution of articles per WOS categories: Query 4



Source: Own elaboration

These results show that the core research areas of our pool of papers are Business, Management and Computer sciences. We can also see that all queries do not present substantial differences in this concern. Once again, these results highlight the relevance and appropriateness of this thesis. After the abstract reading, we move forward to the last stage of this systematic process, the full-text reading. After this stage, our final pool consisted of 186 papers, with five from Qy1, 81 from Qy2, 68 from Qy3 and 32 from Qy4.

An overview of this process, the screening stages and the final pool of papers can be seen in table 1-1 and table 1-2:

Table 1-1. Overview of the systematic process and papers screening

#	Search	Initial search	Journal Article + Peer Reviewed	Title reading	Abstract Reading	Full-text Reading
A	TS=(online experience AND customer inspiration)	8	6	5	5	5
B	TS=(online experience AND customer engagement)	338	275	188	117	81
C	TS=(online experience AND relationship quality)	1754	1498	287	110	68
D	TS=(e-commerce AND national culture)	125	94	53	37	32
		2225	1873	533	269	186

Source: Own elaboration

Table 1-2. List of papers included in the systematic literature review

Nr.	Authors	Title	Year	Journal
1	Cassab, Harold; MacLachlan, Douglas L.	A consumer-based view of multi-channel service	2009	Journal of Service Management
2	Kao, Karen C.; Hill, Sally Rao; Troshani, Indrit	A cross-country comparison of online deal popularity effect	2021	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
3	Gefen, David; Benbasat, Izak; Pavlou, Paul A.	A research agenda for trust in online environments	2008	Journal of Management information Systems
4	Xia, Menglong; Zhang, Yang; Zhang, Chen	A TAM-based approach to explore the effect of online experience on destination image: A smartphone user's perspective	2018	Journal of Destination Marketing & Management
5	Li, Loic Pengtao; Juric, Biljana; Brodie, Roderick J.	Actor engagement valence: Conceptual foundations, propositions and research directions	2018	Journal of Service Management
6	Liao, Shuling; Chou, Cindy Yunhsin; Lin, Tzu-Han	Adverse behavioral and relational consequences of service innovation failure	2015	Journal of Business Research
7	Claffey, Ethel; Brady, Mairead	An empirical study of the impact of consumer emotional engagement and affective commitment in firm-hosted virtual communities	2019	Journal of Marketing Management
8	Frasquet-Delgado, Marta; Alarcon-del-Amo, Maria-del-Carmen; Lorenzo-Romero, Carlota	Antecedents and consequences of virtual customer co-creation behaviours	2019	Internet Research
9	Vernuccio, Maria; Pagani, Margherita; Barbarossa, Camilla; Pastore, Alberto	Antecedents of brand love in online network-based communities. A social identity perspective	2015	Journal of Product And Brand Management
10	Li, Dongmei; Han, Xiaoyun	Assessing the influence of goal pursuit and emotional attachment on customer engagement behaviors	2021	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
11	Eroglu, SA; Machleit, KA; Davis, LM	Atmospheric qualities of online retailing - A conceptual model and implications	2001	Journal of Business Research
12	Izogo, Ernest Emeka; Mpiganjira, Mercy	Behavioral consequences of customer inspiration: the role of social media inspirational content and cultural orientation	2020	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing
13	Ruiz-Equihua, Daniel; Romero, Jaime; Casalo, Luis V.	Better the devil you know? The moderating role of brand familiarity and indulgence vs. restraint cultural dimension on eWOM influence in the hospitality industry	2020	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management
14	Su, Yiran; Kunkel, Thilo	Beyond brand fit The influence of brand contribution on the relationship between service brand alliances and their parent brands	2019	Journal of Service Management
15	Khan, Imran; Hollebeek, Linda D.; Fatma, Mobin; Ul Islam, Jamid; Rahman, Zillur	Brand engagement and experience in online services	2020	Journal of Services Marketing

Nr.	Authors	Title	Year	Journal
16	Newman, Christopher L.; Wachter, Kathleen; White, Allyn	Bricks or clicks? Understanding consumer usage of retail mobile apps	2018	Journal of Services Marketing
17	Seo, Yuri; Kelleher, Carol; Brodie, Roderick J.	Broadening brand engagement within the service-centric perspective An intersubjective hermeneutic framework	2017	Journal of Service Theory And Practice
18	Mandler, Timo; Johnen, Marius; Grave, Jan-Frederik	Can't help falling in love? How brand luxury generates positive consumer affect in social media	2020	Journal of Business Research
19	Parkinson, Joy; Russell-Bennett, Rebekah; Previte, Josephine	Challenging the planned behavior approach in social marketing: emotion and experience matter	2018	European Journal of Marketing
20	Hutzinger, Clemens; Weitzl, Wolfgang J.	Co-creation of online service recoveries and its effects on complaint bystanders	2021	Journal of Business Research
21	Rosenbloom, B; Larsen, T	Communication in international business-to-business marketing channels - Does culture matter?	2003	Industrial Marketing Management
22	Ashraf, Abdul R.; Thongpapanl, Narongsak (Tek)	Connecting with and Converting Shoppers into Customers: Investigating the Role of Regulatory Fit in the Online Customer's Decision-making Process	2015	Journal of Interactive Marketing
23	Brodie, Roderick J.; Ilic, Ana; Juric, Biljana; Hollebeek, Linda	Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis	2013	Journal of Business Research
24	Martinez-Lopez, Francisco J.; Anaya-Sanchez, Rafael; Molinillo, Sebastian; Aguilar-Illescas, Rocio; Esteban-Millat, Irene	Consumer engagement in an online brand community	2017	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications
25	Marbach, Julia; Lages, Cristiana; Nunan, Daniel; Ekinci, Yuksel	Consumer engagement in online brand communities: the moderating role of personal values	2019	European Journal of Marketing
26	Martinez-Lopez, Francisco J.; Esteban-Millat, Irene; Argila, Ana; Rejon-Guardia, Francisco	Consumers' psychological outcomes linked to the use of an online store's recommendation system	2015	Internet Research
27	Schumann, Jan H.; v. Wangenheim, Florian; Stringfellow, Anne; Yang, Zhilin; Blazevic, Vera; Praxmarer, Sandra; Shainesh, G.; Komor, Marcin; Shannon, Randall M.; Jimenez, Fernando R.	Cross-Cultural Differences in the Effect of Received Word-of-Mouth Referral in Relational Service Exchange	2010	Journal of International Marketing
28	Wu, Shih-Hao; Huang, Stephen Chi-Tsun; Tsai, Ching-Yi Daphne; Lin, Pei-Yi	Customer citizenship behavior on social networking sites The role of relationship quality, identification, and service attributes	2017	Internet Research

Nr.	Authors	Title	Year	Journal
29	Carlson, Jamie; Gudergan, Siegfried P.; Gelhard, Carsten; Rahman, Mohammad Mahfuzur	Customer engagement with brands in social media platforms Configurations, equifinality and sharing	2019	European Journal of Marketing
30	Jiang, Pingjun; Rosenbloom, Bert	Customer intention to return online: price perception, attribute-level performance, and satisfaction unfolding over time	2005	European Journal of Marketing
31	Elsharnouby, Tamer H.; Mahrous, Abeer A.	Customer participation in online co-creation experience: the role of e-service quality	2015	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing
32	Abosag, Ibrahim; Ramadan, Zahy B.; Baker, Tom; Jin, Zhongqi	Customers' need for uniqueness theory versus brand congruence theory: The impact on satisfaction with social network sites	2020	Journal of Business Research
33	Liu, Yong; Gan, Wen-xue; Zhang, Qi	Decision-making mechanism of online retailer based on additional online comments of consumers	2021	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
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35	Naeem, Muhammad; Ozuem, Wilson	Developing UGC social brand engagement model: Insights from diverse consumers	2021	Journal of Consumer Behaviour
36	Bacile, Todd J.	Digital customer service and customer-to-customer interactions: investigating the effect of online incivility on customer perceived service climate	2020	Journal of Service Management
37	Wang, Ping; Li, Hongxiu; Liu, Yong	Disentangling the factors driving electronic word-of-mouth use through a configurational approach	2020	Internet Research
38	Kumar, Jitender; Kumar, Vikas	Drivers of brand community engagement	2020	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
39	Schumann, Jan H.; v Wangenheim, Florian; Stringfellow, Anne; Yang, Zhilin; Praxmarer, Sandra; Jimenez, Fernando R.; Blazevic, Vera; Shannon, Randall M.; Shainesh, G.; Komor, Marcin	Drivers of Trust in Relational Service Exchange: Understanding the Importance of Cross-Cultural Differences	2010	Journal of Service Research
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41	Wang, Jying-Nan; Du, Jiangze; Chiu, Ya-Ling; Li, Jin	Dynamic effects of customer experience levels on durable product satisfaction: Price and popularity moderation	2018	Electronic Commerce Research And Applications
42	Chen, Ja-Shen; Tsou, Hung-Tai; Chou, Cindy Yunhsin; Ciou, Ciou-Hua	Effect of multichannel service delivery quality on customers' continued engagement intention A customer experience perspective	2020	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing And Logistics
43	Punyatoya, Plavini	Effects of cognitive and affective trust on online customer behavior	2019	Marketing Intelligence & Planning

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46	Javed, Muhammad Kashif; Wu, Min	Effects of online retailer after delivery services on repurchase intention: An empirical analysis of customers' past experience and future confidence with the retailer	2020	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
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49	Blasco-Arcas, Lorena; Isabel Hernandez-Ortega, Blanca; Jimenez-Martinez, Julio	Engagement platforms The role of emotions in fostering customer engagement and brand image in interactive media	2016	Journal of Service Theory And Practice
50	Lee, Crystal T.; Hsieh, Sara H.	Engaging consumers in mobile instant messaging: the role of cute branded emoticons	2019	Journal of Product And Brand Management
51	Demangeot, Catherine; Broderick, Amanda J.	Engaging customers during a website visit: a model of website customer engagement	2016	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management
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54	Brun, Isabelle; Durif, Fabien; Ricard, Line	E-relationship marketing: a cognitive mapping introspection in the banking sector	2014	European Journal of Marketing
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60	Ting, Ding Hooi; Abbasi, Amir Zaib; Ahmed, Sohel	Examining the mediating role of social interactivity between customer engagement and brand loyalty	2021	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing And Logistics
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63	Hsiao, Cheng-Chieh; Yen, Hsiu Ju Rebecca; Li, Eldon Y.	Exploring consumer value of multi-channel shopping: a perspective of means-end theory	2012	Internet Research
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65	Chiu, Candy Lim; Ho, Han -Chiang; Yu, Tiancheng; Liu, Yijun; Mo, Yuwen	Exploring information technology success of Augmented Reality Retail Applications in retail food chain	2021	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
66	Bilro, Ricardo Godinho; Correia Loureiro, Sandra Maria; Guerreiro, Joao	Exploring online customer engagement with hospitality products and its relationship with involvement, emotional states, experience and brand advocacy	2019	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management
67	Herhausen, Dennis; Emrich, Oliver; Grewal, Dhruv; Kipfelsberger, Petra; Schoegel, Marcus	Face Forward: How Employees' Digital Presence on Service Websites Affects Customer Perceptions of Website and Employee Service Quality	2020	Journal of Marketing Research
68	Peeroo, Swaleha; Samy, Martin; Jones, Brian	Facebook: a blessing or a curse for grocery stores?	2017	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management
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70	Loureiro, Sandra M. C.; Cavallero, Luisa; Javier Miranda, Francisco	Fashion brands on retail websites: Customer performance expectancy and e-word-of-mouth	2018	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
71	Aykol, Bilge; Aksatan, Manolya; Ipek, Ilayda	Flow within theatrical consumption: The relevance of authenticity	2017	Journal of Consumer Behaviour
72	Tuzovic, Sven	Frequent (flier) frustration and the dark side of word-of-web: exploring online dysfunctional behavior in online feedback forums	2010	Journal of Services Marketing
73	Quach, Sara; Thaichon, Park	From connoisseur luxury to mass luxury: Value co-creation and co-destruction in the online environment	2017	Journal of Business Research
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79	Gao, Baojun; Li, Xiangge; Liu, Shan; Fang, Debin	How power distance affects online hotel ratings: The positive moderating roles of hotel chain and reviewers' travel experience	2018	Tourism Management
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81	Ho, Li-An; Kuo, Tsung-Hsien; Lin, Binshan	How social identification and trust influence organisational online knowledge sharing	2012	Internet Research
82	Roncha, Ana; Radclyffe-Thomas, Natascha	How TOMS' one day without shoes campaign brings stakeholders together and co-creates value for the brand using Instagram as a platform	2016	Journal of Fashion Marketing And Management
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85	Yusuf, Ali Sahabi; Hussin, Ab Razak Che; Busalim, Abdelsalam H.	Influence of e-WOM engagement on consumer purchase intention in social commerce	2018	Journal of Services Marketing
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88	Stouthuysen, Kristof; Teunis, Ineke; Reusen, Evelien; Slabbinck, Hendrik	Initial trust and intentions to buy: The effect of vendor-specific guarantees, customer reviews and the role of online shopping experience	2018	Electronic Commerce Research And Applications

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91	Bruggen, Elisabeth Christine; Post, Thomas; Schmitz, Katharina	Interactivity in online pension planners enhances engagement with retirement planning - but not for everyone	2019	Journal of Services Marketing
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148	Sabiote, Carmen M.; Frias, Dolores M.; Alberto Castaneda, J.	The moderating effect of culture on overall perceived value in the online purchasing process	2013	Service Business
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151	Blasco-Arcas, Lorena; Hernandez-Ortega, Blanca; Jimenez-Martinez, Julio	The online purchase as a context for co-creating experiences. Drivers of and consequences for customer behavior	2014	Internet Research
152	Kefi, Hajer; Maar, Daniel	The power of lurking: Assessing the online experience of luxury brand fan page followers	2020	Journal of Business Research

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154	Yasin, Mahmoud; Liebana-Cabanillas, Francisco; Porcu, Lucia; Kayed, Rasem N.	The role of customer online brand experience in customers' intention to forward online company-generated content: The case of the Islamic online banking sector in Palestine	2020	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
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158	Kang, Jin-Ae; Hong, Sookyeong; Hubbard, Glenn T.	The role of storytelling in advertising: Consumer emotion, narrative engagement level, and word-of-mouth intention	2020	Journal of Consumer Behaviour
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160	Algharabat, Raed; Alalwan, Ali Abdallah; Rana, Nripendra P.; Dwivedi, Yogesh K.	Three dimensional product presentation quality antecedents and their consequences for online retailers: The moderating role of virtual product experience	2017	Journal of Retailing And Consumer Services
161	Mosteller, Jill; Poddar, Amit	To Share and Protect: Using Regulatory Focus Theory to Examine the Privacy Paradox of Consumers' Social Media Engagement and Online Privacy Protection Behaviors	2017	Journal of Interactive Marketing
162	Fan, Daisy X. F.; Hsu, Cathy H. C.; Lin, Bingna	Tourists' experiential value co-creation through online social contacts: Customer-dominant logic perspective	2020	Journal of Business Research
163	Amed, Sultan; Mukherjee, Srabanti; Das, Prasun; Datta, Biplab	Triggers of positive eWOM: exploration with web analytics	2019	Marketing Intelligence & Planning
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165	Fang, Yulin; Qureshi, Israr; Sun, Heshan; McCole, Patrick; Ramsey, Elaine; Lim, Kai H.	Trust, satisfaction, and online repurchase intention: the moderating role of perceived effectiveness of e-commerce institutional mechanisms	2014	Mis Quarterly
166	Osei-Frimpong, Kofi	Understanding consumer motivations in online social brand engagement participation Implications for retailers	2019	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management

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Source: one elaboration

1.2 Descriptive analysis of literature

We have our final pool of 186 articles from this SLR, resulting from the four queries of this search. From this pool of papers, we find that the first article published is from 2001 (see Table 1-3) and that the majority of articles are from the last three years (2018 onwards).

Table 1-3. Article's publication year in the final pool

Year	Count	%
2001	1	0.54%
2003	1	0.54%
2005	3	1.61%
2006	2	1.08%
2008	6	3.23%
2009	6	3.23%
2010	6	3.23%
2011	2	1.08%
2012	7	3.76%
2013	4	2.15%
2014	5	2.69%
2015	8	4.30%
2016	12	6.45%
2017	17	9.14%
2018	25	13.44%
2019	27	14.52%
2020	36	19.35%
2021	18	9.68%
Total	186	100%

Source: Own elaboration

The achieved results show that these topics are very recent in the literature, and the scarcity of papers in the literature devoted to these topics underlines the relevance of this thesis and the need for further research. The findings of this systematic literature review process contribute to pointing out the need for more research dealing with online experience, customer inspiration and customer engagement, mediated by distinct factors such as national culture.

Moving forward with our descriptive analysis, we now focus on another relevant information, the published journals of our final pool of papers. This information is relevant because it helps us understand the main research outlets and their importance. Table 1-4 shows the journals that have published three or more papers from our final pool of papers. As we can see, the leading journals publishing in these topics are 'Journal of Retailing and Customer Services', 'Journal of Business Research' and 'Internet Research'. Many journals devoted

explicitly to Marketing arise in this list, such as ‘Journal of Services Marketing’, ‘European Journal of Marketing’ or ‘Marketing Intelligence and Planning’, and others. This finding shows the relevance these topics have to Marketing-devoted outlets.

Table 1-4. Journals with the most published articles from our final pool of papers

Journal Title	Count	%
Journal of Retailing and Customer Services	19	10.22%
Journal of Business Research	19	10.22%
Internet Research	14	7.53%
Journal of Services Marketing	9	4.84%
International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	8	4.30%
European Journal of Marketing	7	3.76%
Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	7	3.76%
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	7	3.76%
Marketing Intelligence & Planning	7	3.76%
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	7	3.76%
Journal of Service Management	6	3.23%
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	6	3.23%
Psychology & Marketing	5	2.69%
Journal of Interactive Marketing	5	2.69%
Journal of Management Information Systems	4	2.15%
Journal of Customer Behaviour	4	2.15%
Journal of Service Theory and Practice	3	1.61%
Tourism Management	3	1.61%
information & Management	3	1.61%
Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	3	1.61%
MIS Quarterly	3	1.61%
Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management	3	1.61%
Journal of Marketing Management	3	1.61%
Others	31	16.67%
Total	186	100,00%

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, we analyse the top authors that publish the articles in our final pool of papers, addressing the leading academics in these fields of knowledge. Our analysis showed that the papers in our final pool were authored or co-authored by 497 different researchers. We show the authors that have published at least two or more articles from our final pool of papers in Table 1-5. We can see that the authorship of these papers is very dispersed, showing that we do not have a small number of top authors but instead a myriad of authors, which is in line with the novelty of these topics.

Table 1-5. Top leading authors of the final pool of papers

Author	Count	Author	Count	Author	Count
Ashraf, Abdul R.	4	Schumann, Jan H.	2	Qureshi, Israr	2
Thongpapanl, Narongsak (Tek)	4	Alnawas, Ibrahim	2	Izogo, Ernest Emeka	2
Brodie, Roderick J.	3	Shannon, Randall M.	2	Ramsey, Elaine	2
Rahman, Zillur	3	Stringfellow, Anne	2	Jayawardhena, Chanaka	2
Cyr, Dianne	3	Yang, Zhilin	2	Rudolph, Thomas	2
Praxmarer, Sandra	2	Emrich, Oliver	2	Jimenez, Fernando R.	2
Martinez-Lopez, Francisco J.	2	Kumar, Vikas	2	Shainesh, G.	2
Li, Eldon Y.	2	Esteban-Millat, Irene	2	Jimenez-Martinez, Julio	2
Blazevic, Vera	2	Lim, Kai H.	2	Song, Jahyun	2
Nunan, Daniel	2	Fang, Yulin	2	Juric, Biljana	2
Benbasat, Izak	2	Marbach, Julia	2	Thakur, Rakhi	2
Blasco-Arcas, Lorena	2	Fatma, Mobin	2	Khan, Imran	2
Campbell, Colin	2	McCole, Patrick	2	Ul Islam, Jamid	2
Liu, Yong	2	Filieri, Raffaele	2	Kim, Dan J.	2
Cheung, Man Lai	2	Mou, Jian	2	Yoon, Sukki	2
Mosteller, Jill	2	Hemsley-Brown, Jane	2	Komor, Marcin	2
Chou, Cindy Yunhsin	2	Ozuem, Wilson	2	Zollo, Lamberto	2
Pagani, Margherita	2	Herhausen, Dennis	2		
Rialti, Riccardo	2	Pitt, Leyland	2		
Berthon, Pierre	2	Hollebeek, Linda D.	2		

Source: Own elaboration

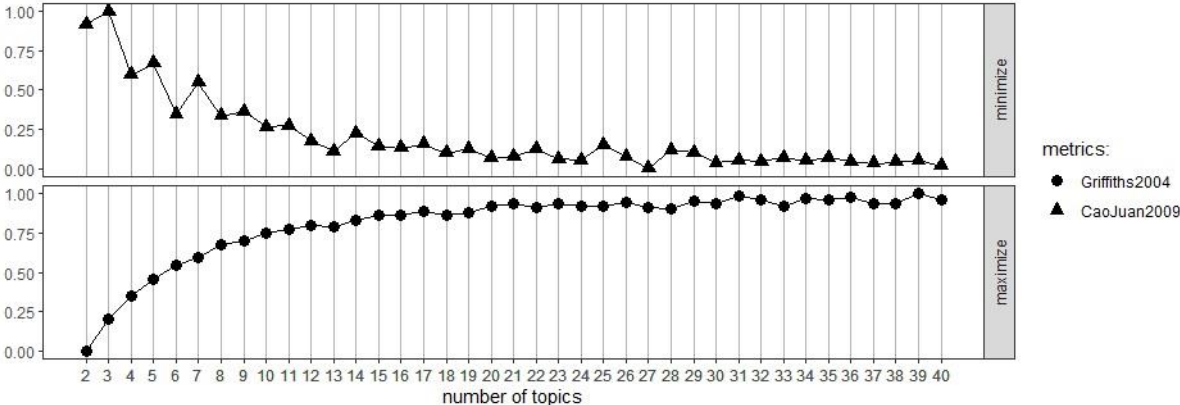
1.3 Thematic Analysis of Literature

The systematic literature review will then proceed to a content analysis of our final pool of papers to ascertain their latent subjects. We have performed a text-mining technique to continue the literature review process, a commonly used technique to uncover hidden themes in research papers (Abbas et al., 2014; Bilro & Loureiro, 2020; Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, Romero, et al., 2020; Martí-Parreño et al., 2016). We use R software to perform the text mining analysis because of its potential and previous success in similar studies (Breuer, 2017).

Researchers used R software, an open-source statistical tool for data analysis, to conduct topic analysis on the text of our final pool of papers (Breuer, 2017). A document-term matrix is generated, and topics are computed using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) technique, included in packages ‘tm’ and ‘topic modelling’ (Blei et al., 2003). In addition to changing the text to lower case and deleting numerals, punctuation, and whitespace, several more actions are performed. It was followed by removing non-analytic stop words and a stemming technique to reduce all terms to their root, such that closely similar words were not treated as separate (Z. Wu et al., 2017). A document-term matrix (DTM), a matrix-format structure, had been created from the text. To find the number of topics using the LDA algorithm, we used existing measures (Cao et al., 2009; Griffiths & Steyvers, 2004) to compute the ideal number of topics (see Figure

1-5). The set of possible topics ranges from $K=2$ to $K=40$. The log-likelihood and perplexity start establishing around $K=8$, reaching their optimal values around $K=9$ (maximise $K=8$, minimise $K=10$). To obtain the best topic number, we resort to the analysis of the proximity score when the values show a clear peak and the nearest neighbour score flattens (Grant et al., 2013). It is possible to solve the doubts about the point of flattening by comparing the measures we decide to use (see Figure 1.5). So, for this analysis, we selected $K=9$, indicating our final number of topics to be analysed.

Figure 1-5. Plot for log-likelihood of topics



Source: Own elaboration

The content analysis and data clustering of our final set of topics can now be made. Based on the final pool of papers and the ideal number of topics, we perform a content and clustering analysis to find the latent topics in the literature review through subsequent text-mining techniques. This technique is commonly used to reveal the themes in a text and is very commonly applied to scientific papers (e.g., Abbas et al., 2014; Bilro & Loureiro, 2020; Loureiro et al., 2019; Loureiro, Romero, et al., 2020).

We resort to MeaningCloud to perform the text clustering technique. The option for this technique was made as it can process and aggregate a large amount of unstructured text to extract relevant information (Fan et al., 2006). It can create groups (clusters) by analysing the text of the articles (Fan et al., 2006; Srivastava & Sahami, 2009) and perceiving a text as being in one group of concepts (known as clusters) rather than another (Spinakis & Chatzimakri, 2005). The larger clusters, with a cut-off to the larger nine, are as follows: (i) electronic commerce; (ii) online experience; (iii) online relationship quality; (iv) customer inspiration; (v) customer engagement; (vi) customer engagement and relationship quality; (vii) relationship quality and performance; (viii) customer engagement and perceived value; (ix) national and

cultural aspects (i.e., dimensions). The content of each cluster (and topic) is described and analysed in the following sub-sections.

1.3.1 Electronic commerce

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) refers to purchasing and selling goods, products, or services over the Internet (Puccinelli et al., 2009). Electronic commerce is also known as Internet commerce, and services are provided online. Online stores such as Amazon, Flipkart, Shopify, Myntra, eBay, Quikr, Olx are examples of e-commerce websites, and by 2022, global retail e-commerce sales could reach \$ 5.4 trillion (Statista, 2021). E-commerce can be classified into several categories based on the parties involved in the transactions. These transactions can be performed as business-to-business (B2B), business-to-customer (B2C), customer-to-customer (C2C), or customer-to-business (C2B) (Nemat, 2011). In B2B, firms do business with each other. The end customer is not involved. As a result, online transactions are limited to manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors. B2C is an exchange where the firm will sell its goods and/or services directly to the customer. (Pons et al., 2003) Customers can browse websites, look for products, see images, read reviews, and place orders. C2C refers to customers being in direct contact with other customers without any firm involved. Customers are selling their goods and services directly to other customers. Finally, C2B (the opposite of B2C, from customer to business) is where the customer provides a good or a little service to the firm (Laudon & Traver, 2021; Nemat, 2011).

There are differences between traditional commerce and e-commerce. Traditional commerce focuses on exchanging products and services through personal interactions and is manual, while electronic activities are online via the Internet and can be considered automatic (Hofacker et al., 2016). Traditional trade is limited to working hours, mainly during the day, while e-commerce is active 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Traditional commerce allows the buyer to inspect products and test services before purchasing physically. By contrast, with e-commerce, products and services are not physically examined (Shankar et al., 2011). When it comes to customer interactions, traditional commerce offers face-to-face interaction, and e-commerce can be called screen-to-face interaction. Traditional trade is limited to a particular geographical position, while e-commerce is global and has no physical limits. There is no uniform platform for exchanging information in traditional commerce (Keeling et al., 2013). By contrast, electronic commerce has a unified platform for exchanging information and performing trade. Traditional commerce adopts a one-way marketing strategy about the

marketing strategies, while e-commerce, on the other hand, adopts an individual marketing strategy (Shankar et al., 2011).

E-commerce offers sellers a global reach. It removes the barrier from the place (geography), and customers and suppliers can find themselves in the online world. E-commerce substantially reduces transaction costs (e.g., fixed maintenance costs for physical stores) (Keeling et al., 2013; Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). It also allows firms to enjoy a higher profit margin and provide quick delivery of goods with minimal customer effort. In addition, it saves time, energy and effort for both customers and firms. Another significant advantage is the fast communications and transactions (Corbitt et al., 2003).

About the disadvantages, the initial costs of e-commerce are high. The hardware and software configuration, the cost of employee training, and constant maintenance are expensive. Additionally, although e-commerce seems safe, this industry is at high risk for bankruptcy (e.g., many firms have failed during the dot-com wave of the 2000s). E-commerce can seem impersonal and lack interpersonal relationships, relevant for several product categories, such as luxury fashion products (Bilro et al., 2021). Security is another area of concern, and we have witnessed numerous security breaches in which customer information (tax identification numbers or credit card information) has been stolen (Lee & Cho, 2020).

1.3.2 Online Experience

The online experience is connected to customers interacting with online brands (Loureiro, Bilro, et al., 2021). New technological advances and customer acceptance have made online customer experience vital for firms to reshape the interaction and service delivery features. Organizations today need a way to make emotional connections with their customers online. The literature identifies functionality and psychological factors as the central dimensions of the online customer experience (Klaus, 2013). Online customer service experience is the mental perception of customers while interacting with the value proposition of an online brand. In turn, these mental perceptions generate a set of results, such as benefits, emotions, judgments, and intentions (Klaus, 2013). The online experience can be defined as a customer's conscious and subconscious sense of relationship with the brand based on their encounters throughout their customer's lifecycle (Lu & Yu-Jen Su, 2009). Customers' online shopping behaviour changes when they are using numerous Internet-enabled devices (Wagner et al., 2013).

Customers regularly visit the firm's Facebook pages, websites, and e-commerce sites. Consequently, any contact point (social media, website, and applications) that a customer uses to communicate and interact with a brand influences the customer's online experience (Bilgihan

et al., 2016). Understanding the optimal methods for serving customers online is critical for businesses (Wagner et al., 2013). Additionally, customers use mobile devices in their daily lives. Before purchasing, customers can collect information about product and service descriptions, compare products of the same category, and read peers reviews. Customers increasingly seek and make purchases using their smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices. The number of online transactions exceeds the entire sales generated through other channels (Wagner et al., 2013).

The customers' trust in online social connections and recommendations are also driving the customers and leading to the growth of the online shopping experience. We have witnessed dramatic changes in online customer behaviour in the past years (Mo Kwon et al., 2013). Substantial advances in mobile technologies offer customers several ways to improve their online experience, which, in turn, influences firms and brands to create more opportunities to engage with their customers (Bilro & Loureiro, 2021). As customers become more familiar with the Internet as a sales medium, they are expected to feel more comfortable and confident in online shopping. Once a customer acquires more experience with online shopping, he/she regards it as a less risky action, and it is more likely to continue shopping online (Khalifa & Liu, 2007).

After the significant changes in online shopping and the connections between customers and brands, researchers and practitioners are increasingly interested in understanding the factors that create a compelling online user experience (Loureiro, Bilro et al., 2020). The literature proposes that online customer experiences can be seen through different dimensions, such as affective, entertainment, social presence, or sensory stimuli. First, online customer interactions can elicit affective responses and be appreciated for the established relationship, regardless of functional considerations. Second, the immediate pleasure that an online experience offers can be perceived as entertainment, regardless of its ability to facilitate a specific shopping activity (Babin et al., 1994). Pleasure is a key dimension of the online customer experience. Entertainment reflects an appreciation for the online experience, involves the fun and play of online shopping and offers more than a result-oriented shopping opportunity (Kukar-Kinney & Close, 2010; Mathwick et al., 2001). Moreover, entertainment can trigger excitement for website visitors (Hsieh & Chang, 2016) and reduce cart abandonment in online stores (Kukar-Kinney & Close, 2010).

Third, to match the benefits of offline experiences, online marketing practitioners can provide a sense of social presence (Cui et al., 2010). Social presence refers to the warmth, sociability and feeling of human contact inside an online atmosphere (Gefen et al., 2003).

Existing research shows that the social presence can increase perceived tangibility and feelings of psychological closeness to a product (Darke et al., 2016). It can also increase pleasure, excitement and flow when shopping online (Cui et al., 2010), as well as purchase intentions (McLean et al., 2020) and loyalty (Shankar et al., 2003).

Finally, the sensory component of online experience includes aspects that stimulate sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch (Gentile et al., 2007). The literature suggests that sensory processing and recovery occur automatically and generate preferences (Brindle et al., 2015). In an online environment, the sensory appeal refers to the representative wealth of a mediated environment as defined by its formal characteristics (Steuer, 1992) or how an online atmosphere stimulates the senses. The perception of beauty and aesthetically pleasing stimuli are part of the sensorial charm (Brakus et al., 2009). Although the online environment limits the scope of sensory experiences, sensations can be induced through images, such as photos or videos (Elder et al., 2017). Therefore, sensorial attractiveness can affect the perception of product performance (Weathers et al., 2007) and purchase intentions (McLean et al., 2020).

1.3.3 Online relationship quality

Relationship quality is a multifaceted and integrative construct that includes loyalty, dedication, and fulfilment. The quality of relationships is a general assessment of the power and responsiveness of a relationship towards the needs and expectations of both parties based on successful meetings and activities (Gummesson, 1994; Palmatier et al., 2006). Relationship quality is a complex structure made of several aspects reflecting the general nature of the business-to-customer relationship (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). Although there is no clarity on the quality dimensions and aspects, there is broad acceptance that satisfaction, trust and commitment are crucial factors of quality in relationships (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Palmatier et al., 2006; Brun et al., 2014). The increasing relevance of e-commerce has turned marketing to focus on relationship quality in the digital world (Lee & Lin, 2005). To be more specific about the meaning of the quality of the online relationship, we may perceive it as a multi-dimensional construct mainly consisting of bilateral commitment and trust between the parties and satisfaction with the outcome of the relationship (Davis-Sramek et al., 2009; Itani et al., 2019).

The literature underlines the contribution of trust and commitment to online relationship quality (Loureiro, Japutra, et al., 2021). Online trust can be described as the interaction of favourable views or expectations about a firm's competence, honesty, and compassion in

an online environment (Kyewski & Krämer, 2018; Zhang et al., 2015), what has acquired relevance due to the increasing importance of e-commerce (Martínez-Navarro et al., 2019; Pantano et al., 2017). Trust is an essential variable predicting customers repurchase intentions and pushing retention and long-term connections. Commitment is a relationship similar to an emotional connection, leading to a desire of a customer to interact (i.e., communicate, purchase, referral) with an online brand. Relationships are formed based on mutual commitment (Kim et al., 2011), the core of long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Most studies on relationship marketing have addressed commitment as an essential feature of relationship quality since it is a fundamental element in predicting the future of customer-brand relationships (Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Raïes et al., 2015). The literature also emphasizes that commitment is an essential aspect of a successful relationship that can develop loyalty (Berry, 1995; Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Satisfaction is another essential construct while addressing relationship quality. Its importance comes from the causal relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Academics point out that in online atmospheres, satisfaction is linked to the quality and clarity of the online platform where the product is displayed than with the product itself (McLean et al., 2020). Customers' emotions and feelings are included in the definition of satisfaction as an emotive response to an event (Hamzah et al., 2021; Mollen & Wilson, 2010). The customer's thoughts, which previous experiences have already shaped, generate emotions (Morrison & Crane, 2007). The customer is satisfied if the consumption satisfies his/her expectations. The customer is exceedingly satisfied or delighted if it exceeds expectations. Customer satisfaction implies giving customers the goods and services of brands precisely as they need or desire (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

1.3.4 Customer inspiration

Customer inspiration in marketing involves different objectives, recipients, and sources of inspiration (Hall et al., 2017; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). Inspiration bridges the gap between the deliberation phase (i.e., the setting of objectives) and the implementation phase (i.e., the effort to achieve the objectives) of the objective research (Fernandez et al., 2012; Grönroos, 2004). Customer inspiration consists of an activation and intention component (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maltz et al., 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). The inspired activation status is related to the reception of a new marketing-induced idea (i.e., evocation) and the change in the customer's consciousness towards new possibilities (i.e., transcendence) (Thrash et al., 2010). In everyday

experiences, inspiration is often a moment of sudden realization and understanding (Das et al., 2021; Herhausen et al., 2019).

In a marketing context, customers often receive new ideas through the brands' efforts to promote their offers, stimulating or expanding mental horizons. The inspired state is linked to the intrinsic search for a customer-related goal. In this state, customers need to update the new idea (for example, buy and use a product) instead of extending or replicating it (Das et al., 2021; Herhausen et al., 2019). Consistent with the inspiration literature, this state is a primary motivation rather than an escape motivation (Maltz et al., 2001). The emergence of inspiration depends on the presence of an inspirational source and the characteristics of the receptor (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). In marketing, customer inspiration can result from promotion efforts, new assortments of innovative products, in-store presentations, personalized messages, among others. At the same time, individual characteristics, such as the receptor's openness to inspiration, also play a relevant role in predicting the frequency and intensity of inspiring experiences (Fernandez et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2017).

Customer inspiration conveys behavioural, emotional and attitude consequences. From a behavioural point of view, inspiration leads to an intrinsic motivation to update a new idea (Thrash et al., 2010), and the resulting behaviour depends on the content of this new idea (for example, the message of an advertisement). Inspiration may lead to the impulsive purchase of unplanned goods or services or explore the offer in any meaningful way (Brodie et al., 2011a; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Customer inspiration can also have emotional consequences. Literature highlights that positive affect is strongly related to inspiration in various ways (Thrash et al., 2010, 2014). Although research suggests that positive affect is conceptual and empirically different from inspiration (Tellis et al., 2019), the state of inspiration can induce positive affection (Thrash et al., 2010, 2014).

Moreover, customer inspiration can also trigger the emotional response of pleasure, which combines excellent pleasure (joy, euphoria) with a feeling of surprise (Oliver et al., 1997). Finally, customer inspiration can affect attitude, more steady evaluative judgments than emotions. Brands that provide stimulating and meaningful experiences can profit from increased brand attachment (Clark et al., 2020).

1.3.5 Customer engagement and relationship quality

Firms overestimate or underestimate their customers if customer engagement (CE) is not considered (Kumar et al., 2010). Through their current and future purchases, the engaged customer directly contributes to firms' performance (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). In addition,

customers can indirectly contribute to businesses' success by connecting with other customers by referring and sharing the knowledge about the firms (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Customer engagement can be defined as a second-order construct consisting of several dimensions, such as customer purchases, customer references, customer influence or customer knowledge/feedback (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). The CE results come from motivators and are manifested in customers' behaviours towards an object (i.e., a product/brand/firm) (Bilro et al., 2019; van Doorn et al., 2010).

The literature provides a multidimensional CE conceptualization to capture the complexity of the construct (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011). CE includes non-transactional and transactional interactions of customers with an object (i.e., product/brand) and other customers (S. Gupta et al., 2018). The customers interact with a brand and create value for the firm (Verhoef et al., 2010). Customer purchases (e.g., repurchase, renewals, or cross-sales) are the type of transactional interactions that have a direct effect on business sales and profits (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). CE is also related to the influence of support and advocating the brand (Bilro et al., 2018), which focuses mainly on the persuasion of social information and to influence the behaviour of others through online and offline channels: recommendations, use of social networks, blogs, ratings and comments, all that are in favour of defending the brand's offer (Clark et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014). For example, social influence can significantly influence the consumers' decision process when trying a new restaurant and revisiting it in the future (Romero, 2017).

Previous theories in the customer engagement area propose that pre-established levels of relational mediators, such as satisfaction, commitment and trust (i.e., relation quality) with a firm, can act as antecedents of CE (Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2011b; van Doorn et al., 2010). The quality of the relationship indicates evaluating several aspects of the customer-brand engagement to evaluate the overall strength of the relationship (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). In this sense, relationship quality can prompt customers to interact with the engaged object (i.e., product/brand). Customers engage with a brand/firm when the relationship is based on trust and commitment, leading to satisfactory and emotional ties (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

Whether through their purchases or other indirect activities, the engaged customer is vital for the firms' future and its growth. In today's competitive market, firms rely on customer feedback and suggestions to get relevant information, improve the overall customer experience, improve existing offerings, and develop new ones. Online or offline, exchanging data is considered an essential dimension of customer engagement. The advancement of information communication technology facilitates information to share and feedback exchange activities

(Shin et al., 2015). Marketing specialists are increasingly interested in persuading and motivating customers to share their experiences and interact online (Bilro & Loureiro, 2021). Customer feedback shared with the firm is considered a valuable resource that a firm can use to get a competitive advantage by transforming feedback and information exchanged into knowledge (Grönroos, 2012). The more knowledge customers share with firms, the more engaged they are (Beckers et al., 2018). When customers share information (experience, suggestions for improvement and complaints) with the firm, they will help them understand their specific needs, allowing them to customize and personalize their offers to meet customers' specific needs (Loureiro, Romero et al., 2020).

1.3.6 Relationship quality and performance

The vital mediation variables in the commitment-trust perspective (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) sustains that the customer trust and/or commitment to the seller are relevant. When both commitment and trust exist, the performance of the exchange produces results that promote efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness. Frequent and strong exchanges can bring parties closer and foster lasting relationships. Furthermore, the quality of interactions can facilitate interpersonal and social bonding, promoting quality. It implies that higher quality of interaction will generate higher performance (Chang et al., 2012; Nyaga & Whipple, 2011). Moreover, proximity and a high relationship expected in a higher quality of interaction improve the performance perception of the relationship (Wang & Sengupta, 2016). The quality of the relationship is defined as the customer's perception of the seller's integrity and confidence in future performance due to consistent satisfactory past performance (Itani et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the impact of the relationship quality grows as the relationship between the customer and the firm develops, namely influencing trust and loyalty. So, in addition to improving the quality of online relationships by strengthening customer retention, firms should also consider other options when dealing with online atmospheres (Keeling et al., 2013). The confidence in the early stages of the relationship is minor, but it grows over time as the relationship develops, and firms should pay greater attention to guide customers into the mature phase of their relationship (Su et al., 2016). When reaching this stage with customers, firms should maintain customer confidence and improve customer loyalty by providing more attractive services than their competitors. Firms can look for solutions to ensure long-term loyalty to attract their attention and ensure their long-term quality relations (Loureiro, Japutra, et al., 2021). Firms must identify relevant customers throughout the relationship lifecycle and

formulate appropriate marketing strategies to accommodate and develop relationships with different types of customers (Athanasopoulou, 2009).

1.3.7 Customer engagement and performance

The general purpose of relationship marketing is to improve marketing productivity and increase mutual value for the parties involved. It can improve marketing productivity and/or efficiency (Palmatier et al., 2006). However, the literature on this topic has not been straightforward towards a single vision of the problem, as the relationship between commitment and performance has been contradictory (Evans et al., 2000), and existing research does not categorically support a positive or negative relationship between commitment and performance (Gruen et al., 2000). Nonetheless, the intuitively attractive assumption implicit in the process in which psychic commitment is positively related to performance is often accepted without questioning (Evans et al., 2000; Lohtia et al., 2005). However, when a firm participates in more market-oriented behaviours, it reduces uncertainty and better understands its consumer-brand relationship (i.e., environment and business practices) (Albert et al., 2008).

By increasing the relationship between buyers and sellers, firms improve efficient and effective relationships, focusing on collaboration, reliance, and relationship commitment (Racela et al., 2007). The market orientation improves cooperation between the partners, maximizing dependency and relationship engagement. In addition, performance is higher with increased cooperation between partners as the relationship increases (Bilro & Cunha, 2021; Blonigen & Ma, 2019). In this context, relationship quality is defined as the customer's assessment of the firm's integrity and confidence in its future performance due to consistent past performance. It represents the quality of the primary relationship that each firm attempts to create. When customers perceive that firms are attempting to improve the quality of the relationship, they frequently return with goodwill or, in our instance, engagement (Bowden, 2009).

Firms must provide high-level satisfaction on the commercial transaction features, and customers must encounter the commercial needs of their partners. According to the principle of reciprocity, customers are lean-to return for good in proportion to what they receive (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Carù & Cova, 2003). Therefore, the more satisfied the customer is with the quality of the interaction, the more likely the customer will perceive the performance of the relationship

Academics argue that a higher level of relationship quality leads to a higher level of relationship performance (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). The general purpose of marketing is to improve the relationship productivity and increase mutual value for the parties involved in the exchange, potentially improving marketing productivity and/or improving efficiency. The social system of relationships can be seen as comprising interacting groups of economic and socio-political forces that influence collective behaviour and performance (Stern & Reve, 1980). Nonetheless, the intuitively attractive assumption implied in the process – according to which commitment is positively related to performance – is often accepted (Evans et al., 2000). Increasing the relationship between buyers and sellers improves efficiently and effectively (Racela et al., 2007). The main goal of relationship marketing is to increase performance while simultaneously increasing mutual value for the parties involved in the relationship (Sheth, 2002).

1.3.8 Customer engagement and perceived value

Perceived value is a relational concept defined as “consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). Slater and Narver (2000) suggest that value is maximized when customers perceive the benefits offered by firms to be greater than the costs (e.g., price, time, psychological costs). Perceived value influences customer engagement (Itani et al., 2019). Indeed, customers are more likely to be engaged with a specific firm (product or brand) when customers consider that their relationship with the firm adds value to them and the firm’s offers are valuable (Angelino et al., 2021; Sabiote et al., 2013; Song & Qu, 2019).

Value consciousness and customer empowerment can affect the strength of the relationship between perceived value and online engagement. Value consciousness is the customer’s “concern for paying low prices, subject to some quality constraint” (Lichtenstein et al., 1990, p. 56). Value consciousness is deeply associated with the intrinsic needs of customers. If a customer is very conscious of the product's value, is also more willing to search for information, think deeply, and be more rational when making decisions (Pillai & Kumar, 2012).

Customer-based relational performance is very associated with customer empowerment. Customer empowerment allows customers to make informed decisions on their own (Bowen & Lawler III, 1995). When customers feel empowered, the firms encourage customers to share opinions about the products/brands and interactively in designing the products (Fan et al., 2020; Ramani & Kumar, 2008; Zhang et al., 2018). Customer-Based Relational Performance represents the customer's level of satisfaction with the firm, the willingness to spread positive

word-of-mouth, and the interest of customers in the financial wellbeing of the firm (Briggs & Grisaffe, 2009; Ramani & Kumar, 2008).

1.3.9 National / cultural dimensions

The literature has addressed two notable questions of growing relevance in recent decades due to globalization. Do cultural aspects influence how people behave? Why do societies behave so differently from each other? One of the most famous researchers addressing this valid and relevant question is Hofstede's seminal research on culture (Hofstede, 1991). He defined five main cultural dimensions: distance from power, uncertainty avoidance, individualism against collectivism, masculinity against femininity and short- and long-term orientation. The literature is not in agreement about the number of dimensions that culture may have, with some authors disagreeing with Hofstede viewpoint, mainly with the nature, grouping, or temporality of these dimensions (e.g., House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2006).

The application of cultural dimensions in intercultural studies is broad. An intercultural study is usually designed to collect data at an individual level. The research usually extrapolates the independent variable (a cultural characteristic) from the national culture of the sample, and when data is collected, the cultural dimensions should also be assessed. Therefore, this tool can be helpful as it measures the cultural orientation of everyone who may or may not reflect their national culture. Global practitioners benefit from the tool as they can find equivalent market segments in all countries based on customer groups showing similar cultural orientations (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020; Schwartz, 2006). Therefore, they can apply a similar strategy to those equivalent customer segments in different countries to assume their responses would be similar. Notwithstanding, the literature has also focused on how different cultures connect online and on the willingness of customers to rely on these new tools and agents (Hallikainen & Laukkanen, 2018).

Several studies have adopted the cultural dimensions scale to assess their theories in which individual cultural orientations play a role. We can find it in the literature addressing effective service recovery programs (Patterson et al., 2006), service quality expectations (Yoo & Donthu, 2001), online consumer behaviour (Mazaheri et al., 2011), or e-commerce (Hallikainen & Laukkanen, 2018). In these studies, the cultural dimension scale has achieved satisfactory reliability in various countries and sample types, whose diversity shows its generalizability power. Hofstede has recognized five-dimensional cultural values (Hofstede, 1991) as the dominant culture metric, which we will use in this thesis to ground our empirical studies. Hofstede's metric has been popular for several reasons. Its cultural dimensions cover and extend

the main conceptualizations of culture developed over decades, with many similarities between the different types of culture and the dimensions captured by Hofstede's typology (Hsu et al., 2013). Additional, literature also confirmed the relevance of Hofstede's cultural dimensions to the international behaviour of businesses and customers (Soares et al., 2007).

However, unlike typical customer research – where a metric is administered to an individual to measure their differences – the Hofstede metric has been used to assign cultural indices, grouping participants based on national identity and assigning national indices to examine the effect of culture on customer behaviour (Sheldon et al., 2017). This procedure is highly acceptable when the unit of analysis is a country but may not encompass the entire frame when a study examines the effect of an individual's cultural orientation (Bragge et al., 2017). Researchers may avoid ecological error by measuring individual cultural orientations and not corresponding them to national culture, which occurs when we interpret ecological or national relationships as applicable to individuals. The use of Hofstede measurements as a contextual variable has been a tradition. It has its advantages and disadvantages but keeps mainstream using cultural dimensions scales.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This chapter is devoted to an overview of the different methodologies used in this thesis. First, and using the systematic literature review, we gathered a select group of prior research, and through its analysis, we map the road for this thesis research design. So, the first step was to perform an exploratory study using a qualitative approach. After this exploratory perspective, we performed confirmatory studies to address and analyse the proposed conceptual framework. A brief overview of the methodologies in use is offered below.

2.1 Qualitative study

This study is dedicated to a qualitative analysis from a dataset collected through in-depth interviews with participants from Kuwait and Portugal (see Appendix A and B). It intends to characterize the perceptions of e-commerce users from Portugal and Kuwait and compare perceptions and behaviour between users in both countries. In this study, seven people participated: four Portuguese and three Kuwaitis; four males and three females. There were two undergraduate students, two engineers, one insurance agent and marketing consultant, one salesman and a senior secretary. The average age was 40 years with a standard deviation of 16 years (Mean= 39,57; Standard Deviation= $\pm 16,66$), varied between 18 and 60 years old.

Table 2-1. Sample Profile

Participants	Age	Nationality	Gender	Occupation
I1	51	Portuguese	Male	Insurance agent; marketing consultant; data analyst
I2	60	Kuwait	Male	Salesman
I3	30	Portuguese	Female	Senior secretary
I4	20	Kuwait	Female	Undergraduate student
I5	49	Portuguese	Male	Engineer
I6	49	Portuguese	Male	Engineer
I7	18	Kuwait	Female	Undergraduate student

Source: Own elaboration

2.1.1 Method and procedure

The NVivo Plus software, version 11, from QSR International, was used to analyse the content of the interviews. NVivo is one of the most used software for analysing qualitative data (along with others such as WebQDA and Atlas.TI). Technological advances have provided the

development of qualitative data analysis software (interviews, focus groups, videos, and images). Its functions range from word counting to mapping existing links between coding units. NVivo allows to manage, explore, and discover patterns in the data, by integrating sources of different natures (text, image, sound and video) and by mapping codes assigned to the content under analysis, with a more intuitive interface than the other software. NVivo also allows the development of collaborative work (work teams), synchronously or asynchronously.

The NVivo coding system allows the researchers to assign codes to the content of the interviews according to their relevance to the study. The researcher determines NVivo encoding units. From nodes, child nodes can be created. The nodes (both the parent and the child nodes) are the recipients of the codification, as they will receive the “units of analysis”, that is, the excerpts from the corpus that the researcher identifies as having a certain meaning for the study. The minimum coding units, the nodes, are indivisible, exhaustive and relevant to the objectives of the analysis. The nodes must be mutually exclusive when the objective of the analysis is to identify the different knowledge and positions of the interviewees regarding the e-commerce’s perceptions and experience. A code is given to the nodes, and therefore, this process is called encoding.

In analysing the empirical data using the NVivo software, we first imported the internal sources, in this case, the interviews transcribed in Word format. In a second phase, four dimensions of qualitative analysis were defined: (i) e-commerce expansion during the pandemic of COVID-19; (ii) purchase experience; (iii) interaction with digital applications of e-commerce; and (iv) factors of organization's trust.

Each dimension is made up of analysis categories. From each category derive nodes that translate the coding and meaning units of the analysis. This organization of meanings was made based on the interview script and based on the meanings that emerged from the interviews. The coding organization is reflected in the content analysis matrix (Table 2.2). The analysis matrix guided the coding work, that is, the identification of meanings that emerged from the content of the interviews and the attribution of nodes (coding units).

Each category is made up of a set of nodes, in which we tried to represent the different experiences, testimonies, perceptions and opinions expressed by the participants. Each node seeks to identify other positions and experiences of the participants. As recipients of coding, the nodes receive excerpts from the interviews (references) that were marked by coding. To codify means to attribute a sentence or an excerpt from the corpus to a code that gives it meaning.

Table 2-2. Content Analysis Matrix

Dimension	Category	Nodes	
E-commerce expansion	Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on e-commerce	An opportunity for professional development	
		More competition	
Customer experience	Purchase experience	More digital applications	
		More safety	
	More trust		
	Transform customer behaviour and business		
	Useful to everyone		
	Already use e-commerce before the pandemic		
	Customer Engagement	Inspired by...	Ordered products
			Platforms and apps
			Prefers brands
			Customer delivery
Inspired to...	Inspired to...	Customer-first experience	
		Customer knowledge sharing	
		Customer referrals	
		Customer satisfaction	
Digital applications	Interaction with digital applications	Customer social influence	
		Trust and loyalty of brands	
		Avoid potential abuse and fraud	
		Promotes innovation and development	
		Promotes public responsibility	
		Becomes the mainstream	
		For actual needs	
		Has difficulties	
		It's easy	
		Advertising	
Factors of organizations' trust	Online relationship quality	Campaigns and promotions	
		Customer service support	
		Customers' social networking	
		Customers' testimonials	
		Delivery service	
		Devolutions and money-back guarantee	
		Expenses and fees of shipping	
		Free services	
		Internet speed	
		Quality of products	
Offer's differentiation			
Payment security			
Price			
Product quality images			
Quality for money			
Trust			
User-friendly platform			

Source: Own elaboration

The dimension of analysis offers the presentation of the results of the coding of interviews: (1) e-commerce expansion; (2) customer experience; (3) digital applications; (4) factors of organizations' trust. In each dimension, tables are offered that identify the repeated categories

and nodes, the references, and the participant's number mentioned by nationality. The number of references is presented for each node, allowing the interviewees to perceive the most frequent perceptions and experiences and, thus, identify trends and behaviours.

2.2 Quantitative studies

2.2.1 Methodology

Data were collected through two Qualtrics panels, one in Portugal and another in Kuwait. Portugal and Kuwait have different scores on the dimensions of individualism (Kuwait: 25; Portugal: 27) and masculinity (Kuwait: 40; Portugal: 32) (Hofstede, 1991). The two samples are a portion of general Kuwait and Portuguese citizens who have experience searching and purchasing products online.

The questionnaire was prepared based on well-established scales to measure the constructs in the proposed conceptual framework and a section with the socio-demographic variables (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was prepared in English then translated to Portuguese and to Arabic. Back translation was used to ensure that they communicated similar content (Sekaran, 1983). The questionnaire was prepared to minimize recall bias and common method bias to secure data quality. So, we used commitment techniques (e.g., asking for thorough responses) and attention questions (e.g., What colour is the sky? Make sure to select green so that we know you are paying attention) and provided memory aids (e.g., asking participants to think about their previous online transactions).

We also made the questionnaire to keep the items and questions simple without complex syntax or unfamiliar words, and it introduced a physical distance between items belonging to the same construct. Additionally, we built the questionnaire structure regarding three significant aspects to avoid common method bias: the items were prepared to prevent ambiguity (Tourangeau et al., 2000), all items use a Likert-type scale and maintain similarity with the original instruments (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012), and we also take into consideration the physical distance between measures of the same construct (Mackenzie et al., 2011; Weijters et al., 2009).

A pre-test of 4 Portuguese and another 4 Kuwait citizens that purchased online (personally interviewed) was used to understand if the wording of the questionnaire was clear. After all these procedures, the questionnaire was launched using an online panel distribution service provided by Qualtrics. We received from Qualtrics a sample of 210 completed questionnaires

from Kuwait and 240 from Portugal after eliminating inconsistencies or extreme multivariate outliers. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 show the profile of the samples.

Table 2-3. Sample profile for the Kuwait respondents

Gender	%	Age	%	Education	%
Female	94	44.8	18 - 24	60	28.6
					College graduate
					Doctorate (PhD, MPhil, DBA, MD)
Male	116	55.2	25-34	58	27.6
Total	210	100	35-44	38	18.1
			45-54	36	17.1
			55-64	18	8.6
			Total	210	100
					High school Graduate
					Less than high school
					Master's degree
					Professional degree
					Some college but no degree
					Total
					210 100

Source: own elaboration

Table 2-4. Sample profile for the Portuguese respondents

Gender	%	Age	%	Education	%
Female	120	50.0	18 - 24	28	11.7
					College graduate
					Doctorate (PhD, MPhil, DBA, MD)
Male	120	50.0	25-34	62	25.8
Total	240	100	35-44	73	30.4
			45-54	51	21.3
			55-64	23	9.6
			> 65	3	1.3
			Total	240	100
					High school Graduate
					Master's degree
					Professional degree
					Some college but no degree
					Total
					240 100

Source: own elaboration

Measures

The online experience was measured as a second-order construct, using a multi-dimensional scale with four dimensions based on Bleier et al. (2018): entertainment, informativeness, sensory appeal and social presence. Online relationship quality considered three constructs – trust, commitment, and satisfaction – adapted from Itani et al. (2019). Customer inspiration was

adapted from Böttger et al. (2017) with two dimensions (inspired by and inspired to). Finally, customer engagement considered four dimensions (knowledge sharing, purchases, referrals, and social influence) based on Pansari and Kumar (2017). We employed a 7-point Likert type scale for all items.

CHAPTER 3: THE E-COMMERCE PERCEPTIONS AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR FROM PORTUGAL AND KUWAIT

3.1 Objectives

This study intends to empirically understand the factors that promote the success of e-commerce platforms and ways e-commerce organizations can improve their online sales and services. One may assume that the quality of these relations is vital for the success of those platforms, and common sense tells us that numerous factors may influence these relationships. So, clarification is needed to explain the online relationship quality between customers and suppliers (i.e., brand and/or firms). What is leading and relevant in the relationship between customers and suppliers in e-commerce platforms for Kuwait and Portuguese customers? The objective is to explore the similarities and differences in customer purchasing experience perceived by Kuwait and Portuguese customers. Based on this study and using the coding procedure for the data analysis, we intend to distinguish among nationalities in terms of perceptions and experiences and to be able to cluster those coding similarities.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 *E-commerce expansion*

The e-commerce expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic is a reality recognized by all participants, but each one highlights the different effects of the COVID-19 on e-commerce development (see Table 3.1). For two participants (a Kuwait and a Portuguese), the pandemic context was an opportunity for professional development, as it facilitates meetings and, in some areas or sectors of activity, the transfer of the economic activity to the online results in an increase in sales and profit during the lockdown:

“IT [i.e., digital applications] has helped a lot, especially to develop my job. With the digital platforms, it was possible to have meetings with customers, managers, and colleagues.” (I1, PT)

“Many office workers are facing new challenges in working. Meanwhile, many firms saw their online profit increase during the lockdown that happened suddenly.” (I7, KW)

For the other two participants (a Kuwait and a Portuguese one) COVID-19 brings more competition to e-commerce with firms offering new services and facilities to differentiate their offer while reducing their logistic costs:

“As the competition increased, the firms began offering free delivery and next day delivery. For example, the largest Super Store chain in the US - Walmart - began providing curb side pickup, so you did not have to go in the store to make the purchase, you ordered online and pulled up in store parking lot to a designated parking spot, and a Walmart employee brought the groceries to your car and loaded it in the trunk of your car.” (I2, KW)

Due to the lockdown and the closure of many shops during several months, the majority of firms have turned their business online, which expanded the e-commerce offer: *“It allowed me to shop for items I didn't have at my disposal that moment and even got me to search for different firms than the ones I usually bought from.” (I3, PT).*

For a Kuwait participant, the expansion of e-commerce during the pandemic context means more digital applications: *“The e-commerce expansion helped us in using more digital applications to purchase our needs such as clothes, food, medicine and many more.” (I7, KW).* Since the Covid-19 pandemic is an issue of public health, four participants (two Kuwaitis and two Portuguese) highlight that e-commerce is more safety than traditional commerce:

“Due to the fear of getting the new coronavirus, people started ordering even their groceries from online stores, despite the grocery's stores being open.” (I2, KW)

“Using e-commerce and apps during the pandemic lockdown was very helpful, honestly. For most people, it was revolutionary because it allowed people to have access to different products without leaving the safety of their homes.” (I3, PT)

E-commerce offers customers facilities and comfort:

“E-Commerce helped us a lot to purchase our basic needs, such as food and clothes and other goods related to our basics needs and all these, imagine, without getting out of our houses and putting our lives or the others' lives in danger by dishonouring lockdown measures.” (I5, PT)

“It’s a health protection. You don’t need to go out of your home, make it available to access all the products you want/need” (I6, PT)

To a Kuwait participant, the pandemic context accelerates the expansion of e-commerce and means more trust on e-commerce platforms: *“Once they began using the online stores and discovered that it was easy to use, safe and reliable, they began using online stores more and more. (...) Covid-19 pandemic only accelerated the process and solidified the public trust in purchasing online.” (I2, KW).*

Another effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on e-commerce pointed by four participants is that it transformed customer behaviour and business since “people’s preference changed from shopping in the store to shopping online” (I2, KW). Due to the lockdown, many stores were closed and transferred their business online. At the same time, people were forced to buy several needs in e-commerce because of the curfew. This online experience gives people more confidence in e-commerce and gives businesses the motivation to introduce changes to facilitate the entire e-commerce experience, as explains one participant:

“The pandemic changed the lifestyle and habits of the entire world population. If previously e-commerce was a commodity, it now became a need. Half of the physical stores closed for several months, and the population started to use the e-commerce more and more. (...) the entire e-commerce experience/expectations are perfect, but the Covid-19 pandemic developed a lot the e-commerce, and I believe in the next couple of years all the commerce, in general, will change and the e-commerce it will be much more than traditional commerce.” (I6, PT).

Also, the majority (three Portuguese and one from Kuwait) consider that e-commerce is helpful to everyone, despite the age of the customer, for example, as explains the following testimonial:

“Not only the millennials are using the e-commerce. The covid pandemic pulls all the generations to start to buy any kind of products online. It creates a new market and new business possibilities. (...) Today does not matter if you have 18 years old or 70 years old. All the people are buying online. E-commerce is the future commerce.” (I6, PT)

In sum, the Portuguese participants highlighted the safety of e-commerce, the transformations of customer’s behaviours and business models and, mainly, the massive use of e-commerce which converted it into a practical option to everyone (all generations and all

segments). The Kuwaiti participants highlight the transformations of customers' behaviours and business models (more focused on online with a differentiated and competitive offer), the safety, more trust, and the increase of the number of digital applications.

Table 3-1. Nodes, references, and number of participants related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on e-commerce

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
An opportunity for professional development	<p>“it [digital applications] has helped a lot, especially to develop my job. With the digital platforms, it was possible to have meetings with customers, managers and colleagues.” (I1, PT)</p> <p>“many office workers are facing new challenges in working. Meanwhile, many firms saw their online profit increase during the lockdown that happened meanwhile.” (I7, KW)</p>	1	1	2
More competition	<p>“As the competition increased, the firms began offering free delivery and next day delivery. For example, the largest Super Store chain in the US -Walmart- began providing curbside pickup, so you did not have to go in the store to make the purchase, you ordered online and pulled up in store parking lot to a designated parking spot, and a Walmart employee brought the groceries to your car and loaded it in the trunk of your car.” (I2, KW)</p> <p>“It allowed me to shop for items I didn't have at my disposal that moment and even got me to search for different firms than the ones I usually bought from.” (I3, PT)</p>	1	1	2
More digital applications	<p>“The e-commerce expansion helped us in using more digital applications to purchase our needs such as clothes, food, medicine and many more.” (I7, KW)</p> <p>“due to the fear of catching the Virus, people started ordering even their groceries from online stores, despite the grocery's stores being open.” (I2, KW)</p>	1	0	1
More safety	<p>“Using e-commerce and apps during the pandemic lockdown was very helpful, honestly. (...) for most people, it was revolutionary because it allowed people to have access to different products without leaving the safety of their homes.” (I3, PT)</p> <p>“E-commerce expansion was a normal result of the strict lockdown and curfew decisions imposed by governments all over the world. (...) It facilitated so many things people were in critical need of, particularly groceries and medicines, to the extent that some governments utilized electronic platforms to</p>	2	2	4

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
More trust	<p>deliver chronic diseases medication to (1) reduce/eliminate non-emergency visits to the healthcare centres and (2) sustain the wellbeing of patients in need of such medications.” (I4, KW)</p>			
	<p>“This pandemic showed us clearly that we need E-Commerce not only in time of disaster and disease but also in peace and well-being since E-Commerce helped us a lot to purchase our basic needs, such as food and clothes and other goods related to our basics needs and all these, imagine, without getting out of our houses and putting our lives or the others’ lives in danger by dishonouring lockdown measures.” (I5, PT)</p> <p>“It’s a health protection. You don’t need to go out of your home, make it available to access all the products you want/need” (I6, PT)</p>			
	<p>“I think Covid-19 accelerated the expansion of E-Commerce by at least ten years if not more. Many people did not trust the online ordering process and were hesitant to try it out. However, after the Covid-19 lockdown occurred and all the stores closed for business, people had no other choice except to buy from the online stores. Once they began using the online stores and discovered that it was easy to use, safe and reliable, they began using online stores more and more. (...) Covid-19 pandemic only accelerated the process and solidified the public trust in purchasing online.” (I2, KW)</p>	1	0	1
Transform customer behaviour and business	<p>“Within one short year since the Pandemic hit, people’s preference changed from shopping in the store to shopping online so much so that some of the Malls in the US have not reopened. As a matter of fact, some Malls were purchased by mega-corporations and being converted to fulfilment centres for e-commerce orders. The expansion of E-Commerce was inevitable (...). Online shopping has increased substantially after COVID-19 and is here to stay. Soon it will become the main way for Commerce. Amazon.com Inc., the largest North American online retailer, continues to see increased traffic to its site even nearly a year after the COVID-19 pandemic began in the U.S. “In January, total visits to Amazon were up 20% compared with January 2020 and up 37% compared with February 2020.” (I2, KW)</p>	2	2	4
	<p>“It allowed me to shop for items I did not have at my disposal that moment (...) it is a good thing that more and more firms are pushing to have online stores.” (I3, PT)</p>			
	<p>“The world covid pandemic changes the lifestyle and habits of the entire world population. If before e-commerce, it was a</p>			

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
	commodity, it became a need. Half of the physical stores went close for several months, and the population started to use more and more the e-commerce. (...) the entire e-commerce experience/expectations are perfect, but the covid-19 pandemic developed a lot the e-commerce, and I believe in the next couple of years all the commerce, in general, will change and the e-commerce it will be much more than traditional commerce.” (I6, PT)			
	“I think the situation is rapidly changing. 2020 Was a challenging year for many. At the same time, e-commerce grew like never before.” (I7, KW)			
	“I think they are beneficial, and I depend more and more on them.” (I1, PT)			
	“It’s so useful” (I3, PT)			
Useful to everyone	“it is hard to think of how the situation would have been in the absence of online electronic/virtual points of sale.” (I4, KW)	1	3	4
	“Not only the millennials are using the e-commerce. The covid pandemic pulls all the generations to start to buy any kind of products online. It creates a new market and new business possibilities. (...) Today does not matter if you have 18 years old or 70 years old. All the people are buying online. E-commerce it’s the future of commerce.” (I6, PT)			

Note: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.

Source: Own elaboration

3.2.2 Customer experience

Two participants referred that already used e-commerce before the pandemic (see Figure 3.1), so the Covid-19 restrictions’ context did not change their habits: “I already made most of my purchases through online shops before the pandemic, so that has not changed.” (I3, PT). To another participant, all these needs were buying online: “*Except for buying food products, or big things like a car, I buy everything online.*” (I6, PT). Figure 3.1 shows the products ordered online. The most frequent were clothes, food, medication and other basic needs, supplements, mobile accessories, and staples (paper and clips, for example).

Figure 3-1. Word cloud of products ordered online



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 3.2 shows the platforms and applications used by participants in their purchase experience. Amazon is the most frequent, while the others included Walmart, Uber, Left, Doordash, Waitr, Aliexpress, Alibaba, eBay and the Prozis platform.

Figure 3-2. Word cloud of platforms and applications used



Source: Own elaboration

Still related to purchasing experience (see Table 3.2), three Kuwaiti participants stated that they prefer brands and ordered on brands platforms, since there is a great sense of trust and reliability associated with their favourite brands: *“I do care about what I order online. I normally order my favourite brands. The brands that I trust, however, I do order other brands if I find it compatible with my requirements”* (I2, KW). Furthermore, there is loyalty and online engagement to the brands, as referred by one participant: *“I am very much attached to the brand*

that I prefer, so when I see my lovely product with a discounted price, I do my purchase as quick as possible without any hesitation.” (I7, KW). Otherwise, there is more reservations and insecurities about distributors: “I rarely place orders with distributors I am not well aware of the quality of their products as I usually prefer sticking to the brand(s) I am familiar with and know the quality of their material as well as after-sale service.” (I4, KW).

Table 3-2. Nodes, references, and number of participants related to the purchasing experience

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
Already use e-commerce before the pandemic	“I already made most of my purchases through online shops before the pandemic, so that hasn't changed.” (I3, PT) “Except for buying food products or big things like a car, I buy everything online.” (I6, PT) “I do care about what I order online. I normally order my favourite brands, the brands that I trust. However, I do order other brands if I find it compatible with my requirements” (I2, KW) “I rarely place orders with distributors. I am not well aware of the quality of their products as I usually prefer sticking to the brand(s) I am familiar with and know the quality of their material as well as after-sale service.” (I4, KW)	0	2	2
Prefers brands	“Online shopping faces many issues from the customers, such as timing, prices, etc... Well, I think I should go for my favourite brand while shopping online because I know what I will be taking. (...) In case of loyalty and online engagement, I'm very much attached to the brand that I prefer, so when I see my lovely product with a discounted price, I make my purchase as quick as possible without any hesitation.” (I7, KW)	3	0	3

Note: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.

Source: Own elaboration

At least, in the context of the purchase experience, the factors that explained customer engagement were identified and analysed. The customer delivery should be short and fast. The e-commerce customers have low patience and value a fast process. A Portuguese participant points that “more than 15 days is already too much time to wait” (I6, PT). So that, e-commerce still must improve the distribution to get their customers satisfied, as explains the same participant: “if you buy Prozis online, the following day, even if it is weekend you receive the goods, but if you buy on AliExpress it could take two or three months to receive it, and somehow, it is frustrating.” (I6, PT).

The customer-first experience is the key factor for customer satisfaction and customer engagement, in other words, if the first purchase goes well, the customer will return (see Table 3.3). One Kuwait participant made a first and small purchase to know the distributor and test the process, a “cautious approach” (I4, KW) as he referred:

“I usually place the smallest order possible to minimize my risk and make sure I read all related instructions, terms, and conditions to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Based on the outcome of the initial transaction (in terms of quality and delivery), I decide whether, or not, will be future deals with the distributor.” (I4, KW).

When the customer has a good experience, such as being satisfied with the product, the delivery process, or the customer support, he/she will enter a certain kind of engagement with the e-commerce platform and/or the brand, as described by the following participant:

“Once I find a platform who answer my expectations, since that moment I know if I want to buy the x product I just need to go there. If I want to buy supplements, I use platform x. If I want to buy clothes, I use the platform y and so on.” (I6, PT).

Customer knowledge sharing allows customers to share with their social networking and with the platforms and/or brands their experience. It is common among Portuguese and Kuwaiti participants to communicate with the platform or brand, to present complaints, critics or recommendations, mainly if there is something that goes wrong that need improvements:

“If I face problems with the organization in the delivery, quality, or payment problems, I will not use this organization again and leave a bad review warning the next customer not to purchase from them.” (I2, KW)

“I communicate with the manufacturer with any comments, criticism, and/or recommendations that could contribute to the improvement of the products or the firm performance whether that was the price, material, quality, or delivery related. (...) In almost every incident I did so, I received feedback from the distributor, which enhanced my sense of attachment and loyalty to the respective product/brand.” (I4, KW)

Customer communication and knowledge are also important to share good experiences and customers satisfaction through word-of-mouth:

“Customer satisfaction can provide businesses with a big role of information to understand the meaning of success and where improvements need to be made.” (I7, KW)

“I think word-of-mouth is the most important thing to give you trust when buying something online: to know someone who had already bought there and had a positive review is extremely important for me.” (I3, PT)

This sharing was related to customer referrals and customer reviews about applications, platforms, and brands. This research is common among the platform users and e-commerce customers like the following testimonials:

“Normally I do small research about different brands, prices, products...on the YouTube, social media, and websites of the product.” (I1, PT)

“I do my due diligence and read all the reviews about the E-commerce organizations before using them. (...) I do order other brands if I find it compatible with my requirements and has good reviews.” (I2, KW).

One positive review helps customer decision, gives trust and it was a habit even when customers go shopping (physic store): *“Every application or website has different qualities, but we should see what the best reviews are. I’d rather go shopping instead of shopping online.” (I7, KW).*

Customer satisfaction is a determinant in customer engagement because it affects brand’s loyalty, trust, and customer return, as explained by a Kuwaiti and a Portuguese participant:

“If I buy a good new brand, I usually keep ordering the same brand. For example, I kept ordering different brands of iPhone charger cables on Amazon because I kept getting bad quality cables until I finally ordered and received a good brand. I have been ordering the same brand for a good while now.” (I2, KW)

“Engagement is a mutual process that goes between two, here between the organization I deal with and me. If my organization gives me satisfaction and my needs, it will certainly gain my trust, loyalty, and engagement. (...) For me, satisfaction is primordial. It is the mother of trust” (I5, PT)

Customer satisfaction and engagement depend on different factors according to the kind of products ordered:

“If I want to buy one specific t-shirt from Levi’s, I will search which platform it will be better (cheaper, faster and without paying a customs fee), but if I just want to buy paper

clips, I will only look it up where it is cheaper, and in that case does not matter for me from where it comes, which brand and how long it takes.” (I6, PT).

A satisfactory experience also gives to marketer’s important information about their customer’s needs and preferences, which is fundamental to improve and reinforce their business:

“Customer satisfaction should be considered an important role of any business because it provides marketers and business owners with a great mark that can be used to measure and improve business performance from a customer perspective or feedback. Not only does that lead the customer to repurchase target and loyalty, but it is also a great way to understand if they will become long term repeat customers or even supporter. On the other hand, it can also provide a sign that a customer is unhappy or at risk of leaving.” (I7, KW)

Another factor of customer engagement is the customer social influence, associated with the reviews and sharing customer knowledge with their social network (family, friends, and colleagues): *“I have recommended the same brand to my friends if they ask my opinion.” (I2, KW).* It also shows that customer behaviour goes in a group (of family or close friends, for example) many times: *“Many of my family and friends also buy from them, and there are no complaints.” (I3, PT).*

Table 3-3. Nodes, references, and number of participants related to customer engagement

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
Customer delivery	“E-Commerce still to have a long way to go regarding the customer satisfaction. I’m not only talking about buying online but also the distribution. For example, if you buy Prozis online the following day, even if it is the weekend, you will receive the goods, but if you buy on AliExpress, it could take two or three months to receive it, and somehow, it is frustrating. In my opinion, anything that takes more than 15 days is already too much time to wait. In that case, I will try with little things some firms and platforms of e-commerce to see how it goes and only after that I decide if it is worth it or not to me.” (I6, PT)	0	1	1
Customer first experience	“Usually, I follow a cautious approach with all my online purchases; to begin with, I rarely take risks entering in any e-commerce transaction with an unknown/untrusted distributor. If I had to do so, I would usually place the smallest order possible to minimize my risk and make sure I read all related instructions, terms, and conditions to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Based on the outcome of the initial transaction (in terms of quality and	1	1	2

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
Customer knowledge sharing	<p>delivery), I decide whether if it will be future deals with the distributor.” (I4, KW)</p> <p>“Once I find a platform who answer my expectations, since that moment I know if I want to buy the x product I just need to go there. If I want to buy supplements, I use platform x. If I want to buy clothes, I use the platform y and so on.” (I6, PT)</p> <p>“If I face problems with the organization in the delivery, quality, or payment problems, I will not use this organization again and leave a bad review warning the next customer not to purchase from them.” (I2, KW)</p> <p>“I think word-of-mouth is the most important thing to give you trust when buying something online: to know someone who had already bought there and had a positive review is extremely important for me.” (I3, PT)</p> <p>“I communicate with the manufacturer with any comments, criticism, and/or recommendations that could contribute to the improvement of the products or the firm performance whether that was the price, material, quality, or delivery related. (...) In almost every incident I did so, I received feedback from the distributor, which enhanced my sense of attachment and loyalty to the respective product/brand.” (I4, KW)</p> <p>“customer satisfaction can provide businesses with a big role of information to understand the meaning of success and where improvements need to be made.” (I7, KW)</p> <p>“Normally I do a small research about different brands, prices, products...on the YouTube, social media, and websites of the product.” (I1, PT)</p>	3	1	4
Customer referrals	<p>“I do my due diligence and read all the reviews about the E-commerce organizations before using them. (...) I do order other brands if I find it compatible with my requirements and has good reviews.” (I2, KW)</p> <p>“Every application or website has different qualities, but we should see what the best reviews are. I rather go shopping instead of shopping online.” (I7, KW)</p> <p>“If I buy a good new brand, I usually keep ordering the same brand. For example: I kept ordering different brands of iPhone charger cables on Amazon because I kept getting bad quality cables until I finally ordered and received a good brand. I have been ordering the same brand for a good while now.” (I2, KW)</p>	2	1	3
Customer satisfaction	<p>“engagement is a mutual process that goes between two, here between the organization I deal with and me. If my organization gives me satisfaction and provides with my needs, it will certainly gain my trust, loyalty and engagement. (...) For me, satisfaction is primordial. It is the mother of trust” (I5, PT)</p> <p>“If I want to buy one specific t-shirt from Levi’s, I will search which platform it will be better (cheaper, faster and without paying the customs fee), but if I just want to buy paper clips, I will only look it up where it is cheaper and in that case does not matter for me from where it comes, which brand and how long it takes.” (I6, PT)</p> <p>“Customer satisfaction should be considered an important role of any business because it provides marketers and business owners</p>	2	2	4

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
Customer social influence	with a great mark that can be used to measure and improve business performance from a customer perspective or feedback. It is leading the customer repurchase target and loyalty, but it is also a great way to understand if they will become long-term repeat customers or even supporters. On the other hand, it can also provide a sign that a customer is unhappy or at risk of leaving.” (I7, KW)			
	“I have recommended the same brand to my friends if they ask my opinion.” (I2, KW) “many of my family and friends also buy from them, and there is no complaints.” (I3, PT)	1	1	2

Note: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.

Source: Own elaboration

In sum, Kuwait and Portuguese participants evaluate customer knowledge sharing and customer referrals about platforms and brands associated with communication with firms and customer feedback supporting the purchase decision. Customer satisfaction is the key factor to customer trust and engagement.

Depending on the purchase experience, included the first ordering experience, the customer satisfaction and engagement, customer experience is inspired by trust and loyalty of brands (see Table 3.4): *“Trust is one of my basic elements to choose a firm or a brand to deal with. I think any organization should focus on this element by valuing and honouring their engagements, providing best quality products, competing prices and by shrinking delivery time to gain our trust and loyalty.”* (I5, PT).

Table 3-4. Nodes, references, and number of participants related to the customer experience is inspired by trust and loyalty

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
Trust and loyalty of brands	“one of my basic elements to choose a firm or a brand to deal with is trust. I think any organization should focus in this element by valuing and honouring their engagements, providing best quality products, competing prices and by shrinking delivery time so as to gain our trust and loyalty.” (I5, PT)	0	1	1

Note: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.

Source: Own elaboration.

In the perspective of the brands and firms, the customer experience is inspired to avoid potential abuse and fraud, since “firms need to apply better control over supply/shipping chains

and work closely with lawmakers in the countries to which they export to have clearer and more specific information about customs duties and fees to avoid potential abuse and fraud.” (I4, KW) (see Table 3.5). Otherwise, Kuwait participants highlight that customer experience is inspired to promote innovation and development:

“We live in a competitive world. Everyone must improve himself constantly to find or preserve a place by finding the best service delivered, the top quality offered and, why not, at the more competing price provided. (...) competition is the essence of our world. We need constant development, which means that any application should be developed and improved to meet our satisfaction, hence, our loyalty to the brand.” (I5, PT).

At least, customer experience is inspired to promote public responsibility because *“e-Commerce helped us specially to honour our responsibility to ourselves and towards others and that last point, in my opinion, should be an element of reflection in any further investigation concerning the role of e-Commerce.”* (I5, PT).

Table 3-5. Nodes, references, and number of participants related to the customer experience are inspired to abuse and fraud, innovation and development and public responsibility

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
Avoid potential abuse and fraud	“For this trend to continue, firms need to apply better control over supply/shipping chains and work closely with lawmakers in the countries to which they export to have clearer and more specific information about customs duties and fees to avoid potential abuse and fraud.” (I4, KW)	1	0	1
Promotes innovation and development	“We live in a competitive world. Everyone has to improve himself constantly to find or preserve a place by finding the best service delivered, the top quality offered and, why not, at the more competing price provided. (...) competition is the essence of our world. We need constant development, which means that any application should be developed and improved to meet our satisfaction, hence, our loyalty to the brand.” (I5, PT)	0	1	1
Promotes public responsibility	“e-Commerce helped us especially to honour our responsibility to ourselves and towards others and that last point, in my opinion, should be an element of reflection in any further investigation concerning the role of E-Commerce.” (I5, PT)	0	1	1

Note: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.

Source: Own elaboration

3.2.3 Interaction with digital applications

The interaction with digital applications becomes the mainstream and a habit in the actual pandemic context, according to two Kuwait and one Portuguese participant and:

“E-commerce has become more mainstream than ever, since its inception with the birth of the Internet in the late 90s. As the internet services became more widespread and reliable, they provided a more dependable and secure online ordering, leading to more people using E-commerce and online stores for ordering a variety of goods and services. One of the latest online applications are rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft, and food ordering such as Waitr and DoorDash services.” (I2, KW)

“There is no doubt that online applications have made significant developments during the last decade, and more people are reaching higher levels of comfort dealing with e-commerce applications online.” (I4, KW)

“Using an application is a must nowadays, mainly those that provide us with daily basic needs, such as purchasing foods, clothes, books, means of transportation; taxi..., or even online courses... conferences...etc. The need was huge in lockdown, and I was not an exception. (...) Most applications are helpful, not only in lockout but in our daily life” (I5, PT)

The use of digital applications was to satisfy actual needs: *“During the lockdown, I interact mainly with news applications and rarely gaming. As for e-commerce applications, I only use it upon actual need, but I do not surf it for fun or to kill time.” (I4, KW)*. For two participants of each nationality, the interaction with digital applications has difficulties. They are related to *“internet speed, the number of advertisements, hackers, the limit of choice and the lack of products that we need in certain moments” (I5, PT)*. *“The main difficulty I am facing when buying online is related to the connectivity. If we have a problem during the purchasing process, I have to go from the beginning and do it all over again.*

On the other hand, sometimes the site from where I am ordering does not send the exact product or sizes in case of clothes or shoes.” (I7, KW). While other Portuguese participant points that interaction with digital applications is easy because *“There is not any particularly difficult to interact with online applications.” (I1, PT)*. The tendency observed is that e-commerce has become mainstream in the current pandemic context (Table 3.6). So that, there was facing a great expansion of e-commerce. Online applications have had more developments in the next year than in the last decade. Despite the development of e-commerce during the

pandemic of COVID-19, there were difficulties related to internet security and good connectivity.

Table 3-6. Nodes, references, and number of participants relative to interaction with digital applications

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
	“The e-commerce has become more mainstream than ever, since its inception with the birth of the Internet in the late ’90s. As the internet services became more widespread and reliable, they provided a more dependable and secure online ordering, leading to more people using E-commerce and online stores for ordering a variety of goods and services. One of the latest online applications are rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft, and food ordering such as Waitr and DoorDash services.” (I2, KW)			
Becomes the mainstream	“There is no doubt that online applications have made significant developments during the last decade, and more people are reaching higher levels of comfort dealing with e-commerce applications online.” (I4, KW)	2	1	3
	“using an application is a must nowadays, mainly those which provide us with daily basic needs, such as purchasing foods, clothes, books, means of transportation; taxi..., or even online courses... conferences...etc. The need was huge in lockdown, and I was not an exception. (...) Most applications are so helpful, not only in lockout but in our daily life” (I5, PT)			
For actual needs	“During the lockdown, I interact mainly with news applications and rarely gaming. As for e-commerce applications, I only use it upon actual need, but I do not surf it for fun or to kill time.” (I4, KW)	1	0	1
	“We do not live in a utopia, an ideal world. Sometimes we face the problem with internet speed, interruption, the huge number of announcements, hackers, the limit of choice and the lack of some of the products that we need in certain moments...” (I5, PT)			
Has difficulties	“Ordering online seems difficult for me. However, some people may see it differently. Every application or website has different qualities, but we should see the best reviews. (...) The difficulty that I’m facing when I’m using the digital application is the connectivity of the internet when its intercept it during the final possession of the purchases, and I have to go from the beginning and do the work all over again. On the other hand, sometimes the site I am ordering	1	1	2

Nodes	References	KW	PT	Total
	from does not send the exact order or sizes in case of clothes or shoes.” (I7, KW)			
It's easy	“There is not any particularly difficult to interact with online applications.” (I1, PT)	0	1	1

Legend: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.
Source: Own elaboration

3.2.4 Factors of organizations' trust

In this section, we analyse factors that promote the success of e-commerce platforms and ways e-commerce organizations can improve their online sales and services. The online relationship quality depends on factors people have concerns about when ordering online, such as advertising – “*ad extensions and social media advertising*” (I2, KW); campaigns and promotions that “*create a sense of urgency such as limited-time price reduction and availability*” (I2, KW); a good customer service supportable to “*Reply to all customer's questions regarding the product (...) Stay connected to the customer by texting and email*” (I2, KW) and “*have a good customer service support in case there is a delay in the delivery or a problem with a product. It is good to have a fast-responding firm*” (I3, PT).

Other factors that explain the online relationship quality and organizations' trust were customers' social networking as it allows to “*create a chatline for your customers to attract new customers*” (I2, KW) and published customers' testimonials. Both nationalities value the delivery service, not only the fast delivery but also “*products are well packed, so they do not get damaged*” (I3, PT). The delivery conditions were a competitive and differentiated factor:

“*Since the Covid-19 pandemic, I have noticed that many online stores are offering next day delivery and/or free delivery to entice more customers to purchase their product/brand. The popular website and online stores such as Amazon, eBay, Alibaba, Walmart, and many other newcomers sponsored by well-known department stores or superstores have always implemented the policy of free next day delivery for their paying members and free delivery in a reasonable time frame for new or occasional customers.*” (I2, KW)

Devolutions and a money-back guarantee are other important factors related to online relationship quality, as explained by one participant: “*I make sure that they have a full proof*

return policy just in case I do not like the product, or it does not live up to its online description. (...) offer money-back guarantee if the customer is not satisfied” (I2, KW).

Expenses and fees of shipping were also important for both nationalities since “*Exaggerated shipping, customs, and clearance expenses associated with overseas orders.*” (I4, KW); offering free services, such as delivery, promotes customer purchase. The internet speed is important to guarantee a good “*Online navigation speed*” (I1, PT), and that is no bugs because “*Regarding e-commerce your patience it’s not that much.*” (I6, PT).

Quality of products, associated with accuracy and honesty in the purchase process, promotes customer loyalty, as explained by one Portuguese participant: “*Once I find a platform that answers my expectations, since that moment I know if I want to buy the x product I just need to go there. If I want to buy supplements, I use platform x. If I want to buy clothes, I use platform y and so on.*” (I6, PT). An offer's differentiation “*Provide products with tiered pricing*” (I2, KW) and allows platforms and brands “*diversify the choices (...) with fairly satisfying products that satisfied their expectation*” (I5, PT). Payment security and multiple secure payment options” (I2, KW) are valued by both Kuwait and Portuguese participants:

“The way a firm shows it is safe for payments, using PayPal for example, and customer reviews and pictures also increase the trust in them.” (I3, PT)

“The credit card security might be jeopardized in some countries due to primitive or poor associated banking procedures.” (I4, KW)

Price of the product, mainly cheaper one, is valued, as well, product quality images, such as “*3D images of the product*” (I2, KW), *quality for the money (if a first-time transaction with the distributor)*” (I4, KW). Trust on platforms is very important and is referred by two Portuguese participants:

“I trust Amazon because it is a platform that has existed for years and years now” (I3, PT)

“For me, trust is the cornerstone in any human relationship. Without it, I do not think I would deal with someone. So, yes, one of my basic elements to choose a firm or a brand to deal with trust.” (I5, PT)

User-friendly platform, “*simple and intuitive platforms to use*” (I3, PT), was an important factor of digital quality since customers have “*tried many different websites when shopping*

online and I have noticed that most of the applications are very similar in ease of use (...) Most of the time when I use a new application on a new website, I find it easy to use and trustworthy. (...) Easy to use application and easy checkout process.” (I2, KW). The platform users "do not want complicated things, we want easy, simple, cheap and fast. And if we do not find we just stop the process and find another platform that answers our expectations. For me, it cannot take more than five minutes to register everything, and it can't take more than 15 days until I get the product. If it does not answer, I just cancel and look up another alternative. (...) having an app simple and very user-friendly” (I6, PT).

In sum (see Table 3.7), the major factor related to online relationship quality was the delivery service, the payment security with multiple options, customer service support, user-friendly platform, price, internet speed, devolutions, and money-back guarantee. All factors that explain organizations' trust was related to customer engagement since these factors promote customers loyalty and engagement.

Table 3-7. Nodes, references, and number of participants related to online relationship quality

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
Advertising	“Provide more Ad extensions. (...) Increase social media advertising” (I2, KW)	1	0	1
Campaigns and promotions	“Create a sense of urgency such as limited-time price reduction and availability” (I2, KW)	1	0	1
Customer service support	“Reply to all customer’s questions regarding the product (...) Stay connected to the customer by texting and email” (I2, KW) “it's important to have good customer service support in case there is a delay in the delivery or a problem with a product. It's good to have a fast-responding firm” (I3, PT) “in a world in constant development, every firm should listen to customers’ needs (...) let them ask questions, give them answers, react with them to provide them” (I5, PT)	1	2	3
Customers' social networking	“Create a chatline for your customers to attract new customers” (I2, KW)	1	0	1
Customers' testimonials	“Publish satisfied customer testimonials” (I2, KW)	1	0	1
Delivery service	“Improvements could be made on (...) delivery times of the products.” (I1, PT)	3	3	6

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
	<p>“delivery cost and time (...) Since the Covid-19 pandemic, I have noticed that many online stores are offering next day delivery and/or free delivery to entice more customers to purchase their product/brand. The popular website and online stores such as Amazon, eBay, Alibaba, Walmart and many other newcomers sponsored by well-known department stores or superstores have always implemented the policy of free next day delivery for their paying members and free delivery in a reasonable time frame for new or occasional customers.” (I2, KW)</p> <p>“The challenges with using e-commerce are related to the delivery of products. It's essential that the products are well packed, so they don't get damaged.” (I3, PT)</p> <p>“delivery period” (I4, KW)</p> <p>“faster (...) have a good distribution / faster” (I6, PT)</p> <p>“timing” (I7, KW)</p>			
Devolutions and money back guarantee	<p>“I make sure that they have a full proof return policy just in case I do not like the product, or it does not live up to its online description. (...) Offer money back guarantee if the customer is not satisfied” (I2, KW)</p> <p>“refund policy” (I4, KW)</p> <p>“have an easy way to return the product and refund de money” (I6, PT)</p>	2	1	3
Expenses and fees of shipping	<p>“exaggerated shipping, customs, and clearance expenses associated with overseas orders.” (I4, KW)</p> <p>“without paying a customs fee” (I6, PT)</p>	1	1	2
Free services	<p>“Increase free services such as delivery” (I2, KW)</p>	1	0	1
Internet speed	<p>“Improvements could be made on online navigation speed” (I1, PT)</p> <p>“Internet speed was never a concern while placing orders online.” (I4, KW)</p> <p>“it [trust the organization] just depends if the app has one bug or if it's running well. When you use several apps regarding e-commerce, your patience it is not that much.” (I6, PT)</p>	1	2	3
Quality of products	<p>“accuracy (...) Honesty in the quality of products” (I2, KW)</p> <p>“Once I find a platform who answer my expectations, since that moment I know if I want to buy the x product I just need to go there. If I want to buy supplements, I use platform x. If I want to buy clothes, I use platform y and so on.” (I6, PT)</p>	1	1	2

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
Offer's differentiation	“Provide products with tiered pricing” (I2, KW)			
	“diversifies the choices (...) with fairly satisfying products that satisfied their expectation” (I5, PT)	1	1	2
Payment security	“Improvements could be made on (...) payment security” (I1, PT)			
	“security (...) Provide multiple secure payment options” (I2, KW)			
	“the way firm’s shows it is safe for payments, using PayPal for example, and customer reviews and pictures also increase the trust in them.” (I3, PT)	2	2	4
Price	“the credit card security might be jeopardized in some countries due to primitive or poor associated banking procedures.” (I4, KW)			
	“The price of the product” (I2, KW)			
	“cheaper” (I6, PT)	2	1	3
Product quality images	“prices” (I7, KW)			
	“Provide quality images for the product, such as 3D images of the product” (I2, KW)	1	0	1
Quality money	for “Quality for money (if first-time transaction with the distributor)” (I4, KW)	1	0	1
Trust	“I buy most of my things in Amazon because there I can find almost everything I need and it is such a simple process, it is very, very easy to shop there. I trust Amazon because it is a platform that has existed for years and years now” (I3, PT)	0	2	2
	“For me, trust is the cornerstone in any human relationship. Without it, I do not think I would deal with someone. So, yes, one of my basic elements to choose a firm or a brand to deal with his trust.” (I5, PT)			
User-friendly platform	“I have tried many different websites when shopping online, and I have noticed that most of the applications are very similar in ease of use (...). Most of the time, when I use a new application on a new website, I find it easy to use and trustworthy. (...) Easy to use application and easy checkout process.” (I2, KW)	1	2	3
	“It is good to have a (...) simple and intuitive platforms to use.” (I3, PT)			
	“If the app is very user friendly and if it is running ok, you just keep going. If it is not user-friendly or crashing, you just delete it and find another one. (...) Millennials are used			

Node	References	KW	PT	Total
	to easy things regarding the internet. We do not want complicated things. We want easy, simple, cheap and fast. And if we do not find we stop the process and try to find another platform that answers our expectations. For me, it cannot take more than five minutes to register everything, and it cannot take more than 15 days until I get the product. If it does not answer it, I just cancel and try to look up another alternative. (...) having an app simple and very user-friendly” (I6, PT)			

Legend: KW – Kuwait participant; PT – Portuguese participant.

Source: Own elaboration

A few different evaluated factors were noted while comparing Kuwait and Portuguese perceptions and testimonials (see Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4). Kuwait participants valued the increase of e-commerce applications, money-back guarantees, and brands, whereas Portuguese valued more the trust and accuracy of products. Both valued the safety and comfort that e-commerce offers in a pandemic context, the delivery service, the customer support service, customer referrals and reviews, and payment security forms. The following two hierarchy charts show more coding similarities between Kuwait and Portuguese participants than differences.

Therefore, there were more similarities between both groups than differences. The following cluster diagram based on coding similarity shows two main groups: one composed of two Portuguese and two Kuwait people, and another composed of two Portuguese and one Kuwait participant.

Figure 3-3. Hierarchy chart of Portuguese participants coding



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 3-4. Hierarchy chart of Kuwait participants coding



Source: Own elaboration

Based on the coding (see Figure 3.5), two markedly different customer profiles cannot be distinguished among two nationalities regarding perceptions and experiences. Both Portuguese and Kuwait customers shared customer behaviour in e-commerce platforms, factors of customer engagement, and factors of organizations' trust.

Figure 3-5. Dendrogram form clustered by coding similarity



Source: Own elaboration

3.3 Discussion

First, our results prove the impact of the current pandemic situation on e-commerce. Our results show that both the number of customers and competitors have risen, which can be perceived as a symptom of the essence of this dynamic environment. Due to the global lockdown, most firms have turned their business online, which expands the e-commerce offer, accelerating the expansion of e-commerce. Essentially, we can highlight several aspects of e-commerce that made it relevant during this challenging period, such as the safety of e-commerce and the transformations of customers' behaviour and business models. The interaction with online applications and e-commerce platforms is a growing trend, both for Portuguese and Kuwaiti participants. Nonetheless, the main obstacle continues to be the internet security (Carvajal-trujillo & Bons, 2015).

Our results also put in evidence the relevant role of customer experience and customer satisfaction. If it is well-known the relevance of such concepts in traditional retail and business models, and our findings underline the increased relevance for e-commerce and online retail. When a customer has a good experience, he/she will be more prone to adopt a certain type of engagement with the e-commerce platform and/or the brand/firm. Inevitably, customer experience may lead to engagement, depending on different factors according to the ordered products.

The success of e-commerce also depends on how these organizations can improve their online sales and services, answering customers' concerns such as fast delivery, customer service, devolutions and money-back guarantees, free delivery, quality of products or payment security. These factors can influence online relationship quality and explain customers' trust in e-commerce firms. As mentioned, the level of trust can be related to customer engagement, and these factors can also promote customer loyalty and engagement.

Finally, our study shows that we can find more similarities than differences between both groups: customer behaviour in e-commerce platforms, and drivers of customer engagement and firms' trust are shared by both Portuguese and Kuwaiti consumers. Nonetheless, based on the coding performed in this study, it is possible to distinguish between two different customer profiles in terms of perceptions and experiences among these nationalities.

CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING CULTURAL DIMENSIONS TOWARDS ONLINE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT CLUSTERING

4.1 Objectives

The purposes of this study are to understand the differences between cultural groups, namely between Kuwait and Portuguese online customers, and to assess and better understand the culture and its dimensions linked to customer-based relational performance. The main objective is to cluster the firm's performance based on the customer-based relational performance perspective and compare Portugal and Kuwait. The research question is: what clusters can be formed on firm performance based on customer-base relational performance perspective?

A second objective is to analyse the moderator effects of Value Consciousness (VC), Customer Empowerment (CE), Product Type (PT), Power Distance (PD), and Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) in strengthening or weakening the relationship between Customer Perceived Value (CPV) and Online Engagement. The research question is: can Value Consciousness (VC), Customer Empowerment (CE), Product Type (PT), Power Distance (PD), and Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) affect the strengthening of the relationship between Customer Perceived Value (CPV) and Online Engagement?

We used two panels of respondents, one from Portugal and the other from Kuwait, to perform the quantitative research. These two panels were obtained through Qualtrics, during the same time and using the same instrument (please see the methodology section of this thesis for more information about it). In this vein, it became necessary to fully capture these two sample groups' differences. We use statistical analysis (both descriptive and inferential) to perform this study, intending to assess differences between means. Thus, with this study, we also intended to analyse the effect of customer perceived value on the online engagement moderated by several variables: (i) value consciousness, (ii) customer empowerment, (iii) product type, (iv) power distance and (v) uncertainty avoidance. Then, we assessed correlations between variables. Finally, a hierarchical cluster analysis is made to identify the number of clusters for the performance dimension that emerges from our samples.

4.2 Data analysis

4.2.1 *Difference between the mean of Kuwait and Portugal*

An independent-sample t-test was performed to compare the perceived dimensions in Kuwait and Portugal (Table 4.1). The outcome variables are not found to be normally distributed (see Appendix D). However, appealing to the central limit theorem and observing the statistical skewness and kurtosis, less than two and nine, respectively, we can assume the variables are not far from normality to conduct a t-test.

The result Table 4.1 shows that there are significant difference in the dimension of performance ($t = -1.504$, $p < 0.01$), cognitive engagement ($t = -3.013$, $p < 0.05$), behavioural engagement ($t = -3.714$, $p < 0.01$), social presence ($t = -3.249$, $p < 0.01$), customer-base relational performance ($t = -2.739$, $p < 0.01$), power distance ($t = -5.072$, $p < 0.01$) and masculinity ($t = -6.151$, $p < 0.01$), between the two countries. The mean of performance in Kuwait ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.10$) is higher than in Portugal ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 0.71$); the mean of cognitive engagement in Kuwait ($M = 0.25$, $SD = 1.45$) is higher than Portugal ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.35$), and the mean of behavioural engagement is higher in Kuwait ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.47$), is higher than Portugal ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.22$); the mean of power distance in Kuwait ($M = 3.71$; $SD = 2.33$) is higher than Portugal ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.72$) and the mean of masculinity in Kuwait ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 2.21$) is higher than Portugal ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.71$). Thus, there is a country's significant effect in the mentioned dimensions.

Table 4-1. Differences between means of the sample population

	Measure scale Adapted from	Portugal (n = 240)		Kuwait (n = 210)		t	p-value
		M	SD	M	SD		
Performance	Theoharakis & Hooley, (2008)	5.27	0.71	5.39	1.10	-1.504	0.000
Affective engagement		5.32	1.03	5.36	1.66	-0.273	0.785
Cognitive engagement	Hollebeek et al., (2014)	4.88	1.14	5.25	1.45	-3.013	0.003
Behavioural engagement		4.55	1.16	5.02	1.47	-3.714	0.000
Value consciousness	Lichtenstein et al. (1990)	5.97	1.12	5.74	1.64	1.663	0.097
Customer Perceived Value	Slater & Narver, (2000)	5.32	1.00	5.18	1.57	1.123	0.262
Satisfaction		5.72	1.06	5.49	1.64	1.796	0.073
Trust	Itani et al., (2019)	5.55	1.13	5.34	1.64	1.552	0.122
Commitment		5.09	1.29	5.01	1.75	0.524	0.601
Online experience: Informativeness	Luo, (2002)	5.44	1.13	5.48	1.58	-0.262	0.793
Online experience: Social presence	Gefen & Straub, (2003)	4.38	1.51	4.89	1.78	-3.249	0.001
Online experience: Sensory appeal	Jiang & Benbasat, (2007)	4.87	1.19	5.09	1.72	-1.617	0.107
Customer empowerment	Ramani & Kumar, (2008)	4.93	1.27	5.10	1.81	-1.204	0.229
Customer-Based Relational Performance	Ramani & Kumar, (2008)	4.81	1.22	5.20	1.71	-2.730	0.007
National culture: Power distance		2.73	1.72	3.71	2.33	-5.072	0.000
National culture: Uncertainty avoidance	Hofstede, (1991)	5.57	1.14	5.51	1.71	0.376	0.707
National culture: Collectivism		4.83	1.31	5.06	1.76	-1.486	0.138
National culture: Long-term orientation		5.55	1.02	5.51	1.60	0.293	0.770
National culture: Masculinity		2.83	1.71	3.98	2.21	-6.151	0.000
Product type	-	4.95	1.07	5.14	1.63	-1.463	0.144

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Source: own elaboration

4.2.2 Linear Regressions Moderators

Several regression moderator models were performed to test the role of some moderators in the relationship mentioned above, assuming the effect of customer perceived value on the online engagement,

4.2.2.1 Moderation effect of value consciousness

We formulate the following hypothesis based on the extended literature provided in chapter 1:

H1: Value Consciousness can strengthen the relationship between Customer Perceived Value and Online Engagement.

A multiple regression model was performed to investigate whether the effect of customer perceived value on online engagement is moderated by value consciousness. After centring perceived value and value consciousness and computing these centred predictors into an interaction predictor variable, the two predictors and the interaction predictor were entered into a simultaneous regression model. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions. Concerning the normality, observing the histogram (Appendix F) and appealing to the Central Limit Theorem, we can assume the residual is not far from normality. The scatterplot (Appendix G) does not show a clear violation concerning residual homoscedasticity. Finally, the tolerance test shows that multicollinearity is not a problem (Table 4.2).

Results are presented in Table 4.2. A significant regression model was found ($F = 100.256$, $p < 0.01$). Through the adjusted R^2 analysis, it was concluded that 39,9% of the total variability of online engagement is explained by the predictors of customer perceived value and value consciousness. The results indicated that greater customer perceived value ($B = 0.509$, $t = 11.161$; $p < 0.01$) and value consciousness ($B = 0.199$, $t = 3.859$, $p < 0.01$) were both associated with higher online engagement. The interaction between perceived value and value consciousness was not significant, suggesting that there was not a moderating effect of the value consciousness on the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement. H1 is not supported.

Table 4-2. Effects of Customer Perceived Value and Value Consciousness on Online Engagement

	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	<i>t</i>	p-value	Tolerance
(Constant)	5.033			0.000	
Customer Perceived Value (CPV)	0.663	0.509	11.161	0.000	0.645
Value Consciousness (VC)	0.259	0.199	3.859	0.000	0.505
Interaction CPV*VC	0.041	0.039	0.918	0.359	0.740
Adjusted R² = 0.399, F (1 00.256), p = 0.000					

Source: own elaboration

4.2.2.2 Moderation effect of Customer Empowerment

We suggest the following hypothesis based on the extended literature provided in chapter 1:

H2: Customer Empowerment can strengthen the relationship between Customer Perceived Value and Online Engagement

A multiple regression model was performed to investigate whether the effect of customer perceived value on online engagement is moderated by customer empowerment. After centring perceived value and customer empowerment and computing these centred predictors into an interaction predictor variable, the two predictors and the interaction predictor were entered into a simultaneous regression model. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions. Concerning the normality, observing the histogram (Appendix H) and appealing to the Central Limit Theorem, we can assume the residual is not far from normality. About the residual homoscedasticity, the scatterplot (Appendix I) does not show a clear violation. Finally, the tolerance test shows that multicollinearity is not a problem (Table 4.3).

Results are presented in Table 4.3. A significant regression model was found ($F = 119.141$, $p < 0.01$). Through the adjusted R^2 analysis, it was concluded that 44.1% of the total variability of online engagement is explained by the predictors of perceived value, customer empowerment, and the interaction between these two variables. The results indicated that customer perceived value ($B = 0.650$; $t = 12.490$, $p < 0.01$) and customer empowerment ($B = 0.356$, $t = 6.921$, $p < 0.01$) were both associated with higher online engagement. The interaction between perceived value and customer empowerment was also significant ($B = 0.096$, $t = 2.619$,

$p < 0.01$), suggesting a moderating effect of the customer empowerment variable on the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement. H2 is supported.

Table 4-3. Effects of Customer Perceived Value and Customer Empowerment on Online Engagement

	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	<i>t</i>	P- value	Tolerance
(Constant)	5.011	0.499	102.205	0.000	
Customer Perceived Value (CPV)	0.650	0.499	12.490	0.000	0.781
Customer Empowerment (CE)	0.356	0.273	6.921	0.000	0.779
Interaction CPV*CE	0.096	0.093	2.619	0.000	0.987

Adjusted R² = 0.441; F (119.141); p = 0.000

Source: own elaboration

4.2.2.3 Moderation effect of Product Type

We suggest the following hypothesis based on the extended literature provided in chapter 1:

H3: Product type can strengthen the relationship between Customer Perceived Value and Online Engagement

A multiple regression model was performed to investigate whether the effect of customer perceived value on online engagement is moderated by product type. After centring perceived value and product type and computing these centred predictors into an interaction predictor variable, the two predictors and the interaction predictor were entered into a simultaneous regression model. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions. Regarding the normality, observing the histogram (Appendix J) and appealing to the Central Limit Theorem, we can assume the residuals are not far from normality. About the residual homoscedasticity, the scatterplot does not show a clear violation (Appendix K). Finally, the tolerance test shows that multicollinearity is not a problem (Table 4.4).

Results are presented in Table 4.4. A significant regression model was found ($F = 124.321$, $p < 0.01$). Through the adjusted R² analysis, it was concluded that 45,2% of the total variability of online engagement is explained by the predictors of customer perceived value and product type. The results indicated that greater perceived value ($B = 0.616$, $t = 11.809$; $p < 0.01$) and product type ($B = 0.405$, $t = 7.796$, $p < 0.01$) were both associated with higher online engagement. The interaction between perceived value and product type was not significant, suggesting no moderating effect of the product type on the relationship between customer

perceived value and online engagement. H3 is not supported.

Table 4-4. Effects of Customer Perceived Value and Product Type on Online Engagement.

	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	<i>t</i>	p- value	Tolerance
(Constant)	5.049		104.063	0.000	
Customer Perceived Value (CPV)	0.616	0.472	11.809	0.000	0.763
Product Type (PT)	0.405	0.310	7.796	0.000	0.771
Interaction CPV*PT	0.016	0.016	0.441	0.659	0.970
Adjusted R² = 0.452, F (124.321), p = 0.000					

Source: own elaboration

4.2.2.4 Moderation effect of power distance

We suggest the following hypothesis based on the extended literature provided in chapter 1:

H4: Power Distance can weaken the relationship between Customer Perceived Value and Online Engagement

A multiple regression model was performed to investigate whether the effect of customer perceived value on online engagement is moderated by power distance. After centring perceived value and power distance and computing these centred predictors into an interaction predictor variable, the two predictors and the interaction predictor were entered into a simultaneous regression model. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions. Concerning the normality, observing the histogram (Appendix L) and appealing to the Central Limit Theorem, we can assume the residual is not far from normality. The scatterplot does not show a clear violation (Appendix M). Finally, the tolerance test shows that multicollinearity is not a problem (Table 4.5).

Results are presented in Table 3.5. A significant regression model was found ($F = 96.280$, $p < 0.01$). Through the adjusted R^2 analysis, it was concluded that 38,6% of the total variability of online engagement is explained by the predictors of customer perceived value and power distance. The results indicated that perceived value ($B = 0.605$, $t = 16.242$; $p < 0.01$) and power distance ($B = 0.098$, $t = 2.526$, $p < 0.01$) were both associated with higher online engagement. The interaction between perceived value and power distance was not significant, suggesting that there was not a moderating effect of power distance on the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement. H4 is not supported.

Table 4-5. Effects of Customer Perceived Value and Power Distance on Online Engagement

	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	<i>t</i>	p- value	Tolerance
(Constant)	5.056		104.312	0.000	
Customer Perceived Value (CPV)	0.789	0.605	16.242	0.000	0.984
Power Distance (PD)	0.128	0.098	2.526	0.012	0.908
Interaction CPV*PD	-0.002	-0.001	-0.035	0.972	0.919
Adjusted R² = 0.386, F (95.280), p = 0.000					

Source: own elaboration

4.2.2.5 Moderation effect of uncertainty avoidance

We suggest the following hypothesis based on the extended literature provided in chapter 1:

H5: Uncertainty Avoidance can strengthen the relationship between Customer Perceived Value and Online Engagement

A multiple regression model was performed to investigate whether the effect of customer perceived value on online engagement is moderated by uncertainty avoidance. After centring perceived value and uncertainty avoidance and computing these centred predictors into an interaction predictor variable, the two predictors and the interaction predictor were entered into a simultaneous regression model. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions. Concerning the normality, observing the histogram (Appendix N) and appealing to the Central Limit Theorem, we can assume the residuals are not far from normality. The scatterplot does not show a clear violation (Appendix O). Finally, the tolerance test shows that multicollinearity is not a problem (Table 4.6).

Results are presented in Table 3.6. A significant regression model was found ($F = 99.798$, $p < 0.01$). Through the adjusted R^2 analysis, it was concluded that 40,2% of the total variability of online engagement is explained by the predictors of customer perceived value and uncertainty avoidance. The results indicated that perceived value ($B = 0.546$, $t = 13.168$; $p < 0.01$) and uncertainty avoidance ($B = 0.167$, $t = 3.905$, $p < 0.01$) were both associated with higher online engagement. The interaction between perceived value and uncertainty avoidance was not significant, suggesting that uncertainty avoidance did not moderate the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement. H5 is not supported.

Table 4-6. Effects of Customer Perceived Value and Uncertainty Avoidance

	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	<i>t</i>	p- value	Tolerance
(Constant)	5.045		106.815	0.000	
Customer Perceived Value (CPV)	0.834	0.640	15.982	0.000	0.822
Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)	0.232	0.178	4.893	0.000	0.997
Interaction CPV*UA	-0.038	-0.30	-0.742	0.458	0.824
Adjusted R² = 0.409, F (104.706), p = 0.000					

Source: own elaboration

4.2.3 Correlations

Pearson's correlation tests were applied to assess the correlations between cultural dimensions and performance and the former variables and customer-based relational performance. Results are presented in table 4.7. Power distance ($r = 0.143$; $p < 0.01$), uncertainty avoidance ($r = 0.446$, $p < 0.01$), collectivism ($r = 0.343$; $p < 0.01$), long term orientation ($r = 0.521$; $p < 0.01$) and masculinity ($r = 0.216$; $p < 0.01$) presented significant correlations with performance. These correlations were found to be positively weakly to moderately. Thus, greater cultural dimensions are associated with higher performance.

About the correlations between cultural dimensions and customer base relational performance, it was observed that these correlations were positively moderated. In fact, power distance ($r = 0.348$; $p < 0.01$), uncertainty avoidance ($r = 0.424$, $p < 0.01$), collectivism ($r = 0.431$; $p < 0.01$), long term orientation ($r = 0.505$; $p < 0.01$) and masculinity ($r = 0.312$; $p < 0.01$) presented significant correlations with customer-based relational performance. Therefore, greater cultural dimensions are associated to higher customer-based relational performance.

Table 4-7. Pearson's Linear Correlations

	PD	UA	C	LGO	M	P
UA	0.045					
C	0.269**	0.541**				
LGO	0.113	0.075	0.450			
M	0.601**	0.149**	0.288**	0.143**		
P	0.143**	0.446**	0.343**	0.521**	0.216**	
CBRP	0.348**	0.424**	0.431**	0.505**	0.312**	0.425**

** $p < 0.01$ PD: Power Distance; UA: Uncertainty Avoidance; C: Collectivism;

LGO: Long Term Orientation; M: Masculinity; P: Performance; CBRP: Customer-Base Relational Performance.

Source: own elaboration

4.3 Cluster analysis

A hierarchical cluster analysis was performed to identify the number of clusters/segments of respondents. It used ten variables of performance, age and gender as labels. Data were difficult to interpret, thus, to identify clusters/segments within the respondents. Therefore, we decided to perform a principal component analysis.

To determine the factor structure of the performance dimension, the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) technique was applied with varimax rotation. Regarding the assumptions, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test results shows that the data is suitable for factor analysis and Bartlett's test show that the variables were significant and non-zero (Table 4.8). With respect to the nine items of performance, three components (labelled as factors) were retained that explains 63% of the total variance of performance: e-commerce (items 1, 2, 3 and 4), cooperation (items 8, 9 and 10) and cultural (items 5 and 6).

Table 4-8. Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation Of The Items Of Performance

	Factor I Ecommerce	Factor II Cooperation	Factor III Cultural
Q2-E-commerce is internationalized, and buying...	.844		
Q3-E-commerce is offering new business...	.830		
Q1-E-commerce is a process of buying, selling...	.674		
Q4-I'm regularly buying, selling, transferring...	.647		
Q8-Every country has its own National culture...		.793	
Q9-Cultural dimensions are defined...		.644	
Q10-Communities perceptions towards...		.545	
Q5-The bilateral relations between the both State...			.837
Q6-Portugal is contributing a large share...			.695
Eigenvalue	3.221	1.451	1.085
Cumulative Explained Variance	35.79%	51.90%	63.19%
KMO = 0.771; Bartlett's test $\chi^2_{(36)} = 1019,220; p = 0.000$			

Source: own elaboration

4.3.1 Cluster Analyses – K Means

We performed K-Means cluster analysis to identify clusters with the above factors. Clustering is a term that refers to a collection of approaches for identifying subgroups of observations in a

data set. We want observations in the same group to be similar and observations in other groups to be dissimilar when we cluster them. It is an unsupervised approach because there is no response variable. It aims to uncover correlations between the n observations without being trained by a response variable. The most often used unsupervised machine learning approach for splitting a given data set into a set of k groups (i.e., k clusters) is K-means clustering, where k indicates the number of groups pre-specified by the analyst. It divides things into numerous groups (clusters), with objects from the same cluster being as similar as possible (high intra-class similarity) and items from different clusters being as dissimilar as possible (i.e., low inter-class similarity). Each cluster is represented by its centre (i.e., centroid) in k-means clustering, which corresponds to the mean of points allocated to the cluster.

It is possible to identify three clusters. The factor cooperation is the less important to maximize the differences that separate the individuals (Table 4.9 and Table 4.10). According to Figure 4.1, cluster one corresponds to the group of individuals with higher scores in e-commerce, cluster two correspond to the group of individuals with higher scores in cultural perceptions and cluster three to the group of individuals with higher scores in cooperation and lower scores in both e-commerce and cultural perceptions.

Table 4-9. ANOVA

	Clusters		
	Df	F	P value
Ecommerce	447	101.037	0.000
Cooperation	447	73.406	0.000
Cultural	447	354.877	0.000

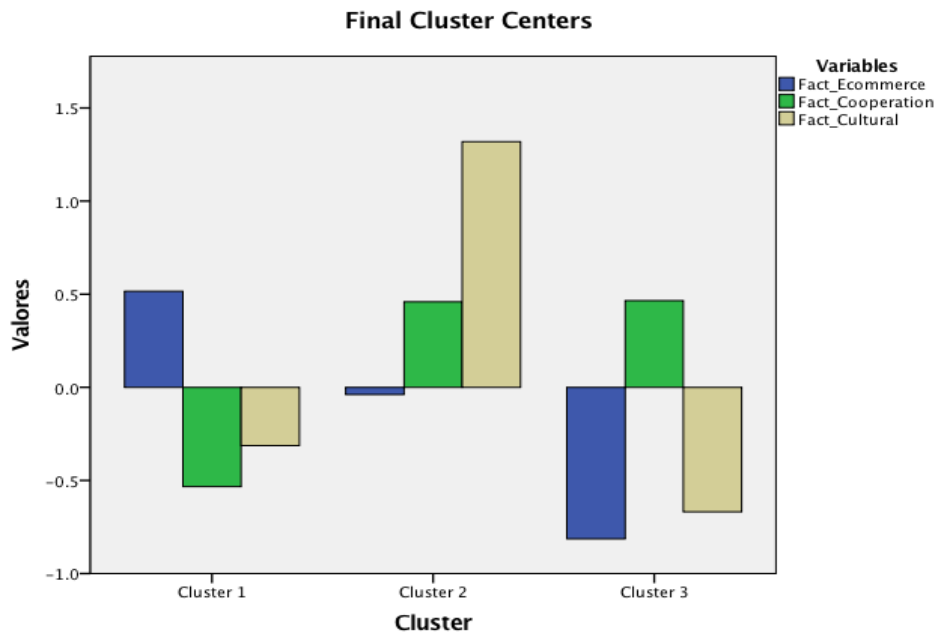
Source: own elaboration

Table 4-10. Final Cluster Centre

	Clusters		
	1	2	3
Ecommerce	0.51554	-0.03878	-0.81360
Cooperation	-0.53333	0.45947	0.462526
Cultural	-0.31309	1.31873	-0.66850

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 4-1. Final Cluster Centre



Source: Own elaboration

4.4 Discussion

First, by means of this study, we can find differences between sample means in terms of performance, cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement, social presence, customer-base relational performance, power distance and masculinity. These results show that we face a difference between samples of both countries in the mentioned dimensions, which is in line with previous research addressing cultural differences (e.g., Loureiro et al., 2018; Moro et al., 2020; Voyer et al., 2017).

Second, we assess the effect of customer perceived value on the online engagement moderated by value consciousness, customer empowerment, product type, power distance and uncertainty avoidance in the effect of customer perceived value on the online engagement. Our results show that only customer empowerment has a significant positive influence, and all the other variables (value consciousness, product type, power distance and uncertainty avoidance) do not present a significant moderating effect. We can perceive this result as the improved consumer awareness of their role in the online environment. Customers perceived their value and strength in the relationship with the brand and/or firm, creating a sense of engagement (Clark et al., 2020). On the contrarywise, power distance, product type, value consciousness

and uncertainty avoidance do not influence this relationship, which is a finding that deserves further investigation to capture its relevance fully.

Third, this study also intends to assess the correlations between cultural dimensions and performance and between the latter variables and customer-based relational performance. Our results show that power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, long-term orientation, and masculinity present significant correlations with performance, and we claim that cultural dimensions are positively associated with performance. Moreover, correlations between cultural dimensions and customer base relational performance are positively moderated, highlighting that greater cultural dimensions are associated with higher customer-based relational performance. These findings should be seen with consideration and some degree of novelty from the performance and customer-based relational performance perspective. Further investigation is needed to help us to capture the true meaning of these discoveries fully. Finally, we can identify three clusters for the performance items: (i) the group of individuals with higher scores in E-commerce; (ii) the group of individuals with higher scores in cultural perceptions; (iii) and the group of individuals with higher scores in cooperation and lower scores in both e-commerce and cultural perceptions.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSING DRIVERS OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Objectives

This chapter is devoted to analysing a model that explores the drivers of customer engagement with primary data from two countries: Kuwait and Portugal. The primary data was collected using two Qualtrics panel samples (please see the methodology section for a clear overview of this process). Four research questions are proposed:

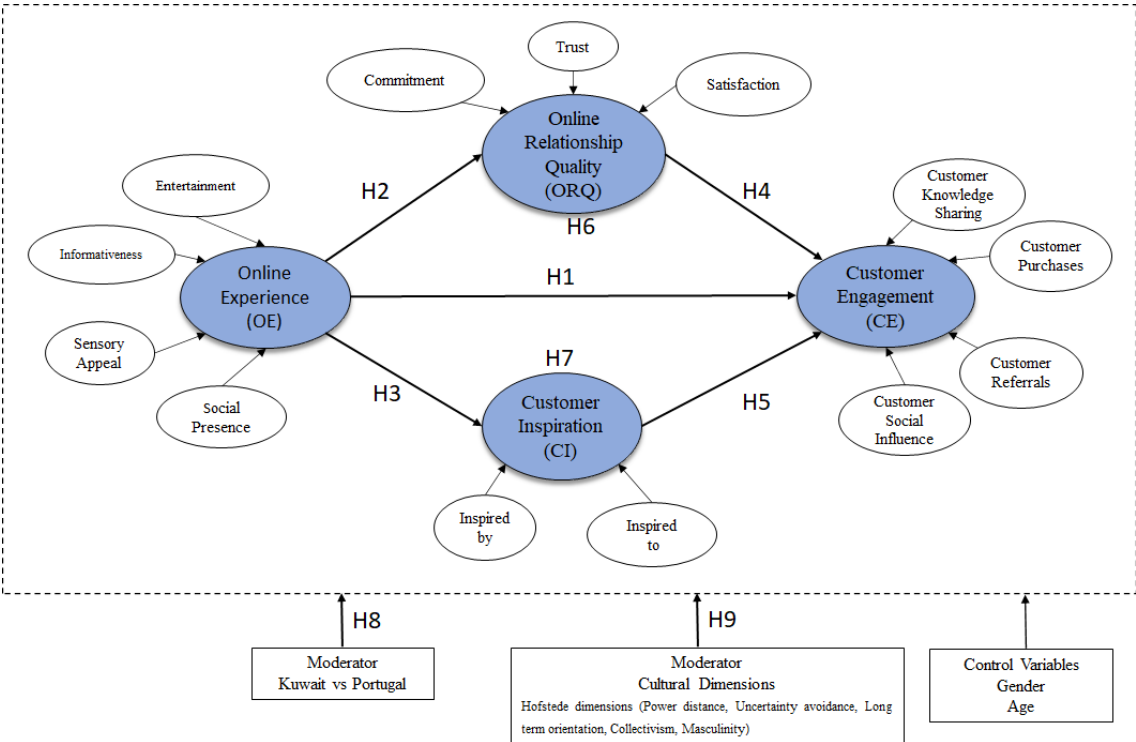
- (i) Can Online Relationship Quality be a mediator in the relationship between Online Experience and Customer Engagement?**
- (ii) Can Customer Inspiration be a mediator in the relationship between Online Experience and Customer Engagement?**
- (iii) Can National Culture act as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework?**
- (iv) Can Kuwait versus Portugal act as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework?**

The objectives are:

- Analyse the relationship between Online Experience, Online Relationship Quality, Customer Inspiration and Online Customer Engagement,
- Analyse the mediation role of Online Relationship Quality in the relationship between Online Experience and Customer Engagement,
- Analyse the mediation role of Customer Inspiration in the relationship between Online Experience and Customer Engagement,
- Study the National Culture as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework,
- Study the countries Kuwait versus Portugal as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework.

The model (conceptual framework) is created grounded on the literature review and considering all the previous studies developed in this thesis. Moreover, as exposed onwards, we ground our theoretical foundation for the model (see Figure 5.1) on the social exchange theory. The argumentation for formulating the hypotheses is also explained in this section. The model regards online relationship quality and customer inspiration as mediators. The two countries – Kuwait and Portugal – are moderators and the different cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1991). Finally, age and gender are measured as control variables since the online engagement process can differ depending on them.

Figure 5-1. Proposed model (conceptual framework)



Note: OE – Online Experience; ORQ – Online Relationship Quality; CI – Customer Inspiration; CE - Customer Engagement

Source: Own elaboration

5.1 Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory (SET) is a sociological and psychological theory that examines social behaviour by interacting two components that conduct a cost-benefit analysis to ascertain risks and advantages (Homans, 1958). Homans’ theory was based on the principles of expectation

and distribution of justice in a dyadic transaction. The author attempts to explain social interaction in small groups and the rewards earned to their expenses and investments. Homans offers three propositions to summarise the system: (i) a successful proposition (when it turns out that they are rewarded for their actions, they tend to repeat the action); (ii) stimulation proposition (the more often a particular stimulus has led to a reward in the past, the more likely it is that a person will respond to it); and (iii) deprivation-satiety proposition (the more often in the recent past a person has received a particular prize, the less valuable the additional unit of that prize will be).

The social exchange theory (SET) is one of the earliest theories of social behaviour because of the social exchange hypothesis. The exchange of goods (physical or intangible) aim that these exchanges are satisfying both parties and may develop or remain motivated to have productive connections is contemplated by individuals or groups. Nonetheless, the social result may have no material value for exchange interactions that result in social and/or economic benefits or losses (Blau, 1968). Individualistic behaviour, or on a collective/marketable road, is translated into firms that make strategic decisions based on corporate histories, such as respect and approval of colleagues obtained by acting in agreement with others (Homans, 1958; Kelly & Thibaut, 1979). Over time, the findings are compared to those of other exchange options to see any dependence between the partners. Two essential ideas are involved here: a standard benefit that a person thinks is guaranteed in a particular partner (socially or economically), and an alternative benefit that alludes to the worst-case scenario that a person can endure and still want to be a part of an association.

For the positive results that occur over time, it is important to build trust within the business partner, which can ultimately lead to a strengthened commitment, once the unknown barrier has been overcome and there is a buyback, trust, or like (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When one of the parties has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity, the commitment arises, this is the belief that this relationship is worth it, and partners start to make the maximum effort to preserve it.

According to Belau's theory, which is based on the growing social structure in small group social exchange models, this concept should examine the evolution of economic exchanges rather than emphasising psychological outcomes (Blau, 1964; Blau, 1968). The point was distinguishing between complicated and straight forward processes while still considering new qualities that may emerge in the social exchange transaction. Favourable exchange interactions for a prolonged period are responsible for creating a relational rule that regulates exchange links. Familiarizing yourself with another exchange sooner or later evolves towards the

definition of rules, controlling the power inherent in both positions and reducing uncertainty about future business (Lambe et al., 2001). Distinct research focused on these types of relations, such as organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001) or working relationships (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Importantly, research also focused on the connection between the power of e-commerce and the hybrid workforce (e.g., Park et al., 2018) and the quality of online relationships, such as the trust, commitment, and satisfaction present in online exchange relationships (Brun et al., 2016).

5.2 Hypotheses development

5.2.1 Direct effect

The online customer experience (OE) is the experience that customers have when interacting with a brand online. New advances in mobile technology and its acceptance by many customers have made it vital for firms to reshape the interaction and service delivery features to achieve an ideal online user experience. A favourable experience can increase pleasure, arousal, and flow during online shopping (Wang et al., 2007), as well as purchase intentions (Lim et al., 2015) and loyalty (Cyr, 2008).

Customer engagement (CE) is an abstract concept and is defined as a second-order construct consisting of four dimensions, customer purchases, customer references, customer influence, and customer knowledge/ feedback (Brodie et al., 2011b; Hollebeek et al., 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010). CE includes non-transactional (relational) and transactional interactions of customers with a firm, other customers and/or potential customers (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The customers involved interact with the firms to create value for the firm. Customer purchases (repeat purchases, renewals, better sales, and cross-sales) are the type of transactional interactions that have a direct effect on business sales and profits (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Whether through their purchases or other indirect activities, the customers involved are essential for the future performance and growth of the firms. Therefore, we expect a favourable online experience to influence the engagement process based on the exchange theory. Customers are more engaged when they consider having a positive experience in the online environment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1: Online experience positively influences customer engagement.

Online relationship quality comprises three dimensions: trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The quality of the relationship is expected to be positively associated with the online experience lived by customers. Indeed, a favourable online experience leads the customer to keep the relationship with the online platform and consequently with the brand (Wang et al., 2007). Therefore, the online experience is expected to affect the customer perception of the quality of the relationship, and the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Online experience positively influences online relationship quality.

Inspiring shopping experiences and transcendent moments during consumption can occur (Rose et al., 2011, 2012). However, inspiration was rarely defined, nor was its constructive validity examined within the online marketing domain. Therefore, customer inspiration (CI) adds an important in situ measure for studying customer motivation and the experiences along the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Roggeveen et al., 2020). Online shopping often comes with uncertainties that do not arise offline, affecting how particular experience dimensions influence purchase (Bleier et al., 2018; Gefen et al., 2008; Hall et al., 2017). First, online, customers cannot touch and feel the merchandise they are interested in, creating uncertainty in product assessment before purchase (Kim et al., 2016). This uncertainty tends to be more severe for experience products, for which the most relevant attributes are discovered only by direct physical contact, than for research products, whose most relevant attributes are evaluable from the information presented without physical interaction (Weathers et al., 2007). Customers interpret product information differently between search and experience products (Sia et al., 2009). Therefore, the most effective experience for selling these two types of products may differ. For example, Weathers, Sharma, and Wood (2007) show that web pages that appeal to the senses may benefit experience products whose evaluation requires sensory information. Hence satisfied the OE positively influences CI. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Online experience positively influences customer inspiration

The quality of the relationship is expected to influence the engagement process. When online customers are satisfied with the online purchase process, they trust and become committed to continuing that online relationship (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Palmatier et al., 2006; Brun et al., 2014). At the same time, the customer will be more open to interacting and

recommending the online platform for e-commerce. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Online relationship quality positively influences customer engagement

We explicitly delineate online customer engagement, a customer outcome, as distinct from customer engagement marketing (henceforward, engagement marketing), which refers to a firm's strategic efforts. Engagement marketing represents the firm's deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure a customer's voluntary contribution to its marketing functions beyond a core, economic transaction (i.e., customer engagement). It actively enlists customers to serve as pseudo marketers for the firm. Effective engagement marketing can reduce acquisition costs, promote customer-centric product innovations, and enhance post-purchase service quality (Malthouse et al., 2013). It can provide a means to monitor behaviours outside the core transaction, to capture a more holistic view of the customer and more accurate measures of customer value (Kumar, 2013), as well as enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and, ultimately, firm performance (Ranjan & Read, 2016; Rapp et al., 2014). Thus, engagement marketing enhances the product experience and facilitates the transformation of the customer into an active contributor to the firm's marketing functions.

Online customer engagement behaviours refer to engagement behaviours facilitated by an online environment, and customer engagement behaviours result from motivational drivers (van Doorn et al., 2010). Based on the extended literature, we expect that inspired customers become more engaged with the online process, and consequently, with the firm or brand. So, we propose that:

H5: Customer inspiration positively influences customer engagement

5.2.1 Mediation effects

Customer engagement is a multidimensional concept with multiple definitions covering various aspects of business and communication (Brodie et al., 2013). Previous studies have presented convincing evidence on the link between relationship quality, such as a higher-level construct consisting of trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty, and the connection between each dimension of relationship quality and loyalty. Customer interactions with online products can elicit affective responses and be appreciated for themselves, regardless of functional considerations. Entertainment, or the immediate pleasure that experience offers, irrespective of

its ability to facilitate a specific shopping activity (Babin et al., 1994), is a crucial dimension of the online customer experience. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

H6: Online relationship quality mediates the relation between the online experience and customer engagement

Inspiration in marketing involves different objectives, recipients, and sources of inspiration. The marketing domain seems sufficiently different from the previous research areas on inspiration (such as general psychology, education, or sport) to assure a specific conceptualization and measurement of the domain (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash et al., 2010). The customer inspiration consists of an activation and intention component (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Consequently, we propose that the customer state of inspiration can be crashed into an epistemic activation component and an intention component. Although previous research suggests that positive affection is conceptual and empirically different from inspiration (Thrash et al., 2014), the state of inspiration can induce positive affection (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). With social networks, firms offer their customers a platform to contact them directly to answer any customer question immediately and efficiently. Therefore, firms can easily connect with their customers personally (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018; Rose et al., 2012). They can make customers feel appreciated by offering promotions or special offers. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H7: Customer inspiration mediates the relation between online engagement and customer engagement

5.2.2 Moderation effects

The online customer experience is defined as the perception of customers, conscious and subconscious, of their relationship with their brand following all their interactions during the customer's life cycle. There was a significant increase and changes in online shopping behaviour when customers started using multiple Internet-enabled devices (Wagner et al., 2013). Additionally, cultural changes can be seen in a group's behaviour, values, norms, thoughts, and actions (Jain et al., 2021; Sheldon et al., 2017). So, we analyse the relationship between two countries and customer decision-making styles in online purchasing. Consequently, we expect that the strength of the relationships in the proposed model (see Figure

5-1) will be different due to the culture of both countries: Kuwait and Portugal. Consequently, we suggest the hypothesis:

H8: The culture of the country (Kuwait vs Portugal) moderates the strength of the path established in the model

Hofstede's recognized five-dimensional measures of cultural values (1991, 2001) are the predominantly dominant culture metric. Its measure was used as a contextual variable. However, it is often necessary to measure cultural values directly for individual customers or managers. In our study, we investigated the relationship's moderating influence on the quality effects of the relationship and its impact on customer engagement. Hence, we expect differences in the different relationships of the proposed model (see Figure 5-1) based on each cultural dimension proposed by Hofstede:

H9: The cultural dimensions moderate the strength of the path established in the model

5.3 Results

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a technique that marketing and business experts regularly use to evaluate empirically novel theoretical propositions stated through sophisticated models. The purpose of this study is to perform a thorough assessment and empirical analysis of a wide variety of classic and contemporary disputes and concerns surrounding the usage of SEM to identify problematic issues and prescribe a compendium of remedies for its appropriate implementation. The objective of structural equation modelling (SEM) is to build a theoretical causal model composed of a set of expected covariances between variables and then to determine if the model is plausible in light of observed data (Hair et al., 2016; Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2017). SEM is a quantitative research methodology that can also be used with qualitative techniques. It is used to illustrate the causal relationships between variables. SEM technique is used in this thesis to validate a research strategy rather than to investigate or explain a phenomenon.

A PLS (Partial Least Squares) model is analysed in two stages. First, the measurement model is evaluated through the reliability of the individual measures, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs. Second, the structural model is the assessment. Item

reliability, reliability, and AVE (average variance extracted) are examined (see Table 5.1, Table 5.2 and Table 5.3) to evaluate the adequacy of the measures at the first-order construct level. Item loadings of scales measuring reflective constructs should be 0.707, as it is possible to see in Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 (Wetzels et al., 2009). All Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.7, and all composite reliability values are higher than 0.8, so the constructs have reliability. All AVE values are above 0.5, demonstrating convergent validity (see Table 5.1).

At the second-order construct level, three measures should be analysed: parameter estimates of indicator weights, the significance of weight (t-values) and multicollinearity of indicators (VIF). Weight represents the contribution of each formative indicator to the variance of the latent variable (Roberts & Thatcher, 2009). A significance level of at least 0.05 (in the case of this study, a significant level of at least 0.001) suggests that an indicator is relevant to the construction of the formative index (online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration and customer engagement), and therefore demonstrates a sufficient level of validity.

The degree of multicollinearity among the formative indicators should be assessed by the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). The VIF indicates how much an indicator's variance is explained by the other indicators of the same construct. The common acceptable value for VIF is below 3.33 (Diamantopoulos & Sigauw, 2006), as seen in Tables 5.8 and 5.9.

Table 5-1. Measurement model: Kuwait and Portugal sample

Second Order Construct	First Order Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
<i>Kuwait sample</i>					
Online Experience	Entertainment	0.904	0.906	0.933	0.776
	Informativeness	0.908	0.909	0.942	0.845
	Sensory Appeal	0.827	0.828	0.897	0.743
Online Relationship Quality	Social Presence	0.862	0.864	0.916	0.784
	Trust	0.844	0.846	0.928	0.865
	Satisfaction	0.856	0.856	0.933	0.874
Customer Engagement	Commitment	0.836	0.837	0.924	0.859
	Customer Knowledge Sharing	0.908	0.908	0.936	0.784
	Customer Purchases	0.875	0.877	0.914	0.727
Customer Inspiration	Customer Referrals	0.897	0.899	0.929	0.765
	Customer Social Influence	0.859	0.861	0.904	0.703
	Inspired by	0.926	0.928	0.944	0.772
	Inspired to	0.939	0.940	0.954	0.805
<i>Portuguese sample</i>					
Online Experience	Entertainment	0.880	0.881	0.918	0.737
	Informativeness	0.896	0.896	0.935	0.828
	Sensory Appeal	0.838	0.839	0.903	0.756
Online Relationship Quality	Social Presence	0.940	0.942	0.962	0.893
	Trust	0.901	0.901	0.953	0.910
	Satisfaction	0.916	0.917	0.960	0.923
Customer Engagement	Commitment	0.811	0.820	0.913	0.840
	Customer Knowledge Sharing	0.931	0.932	0.951	0.829
	Customer Purchases	0.907	0.916	0.935	0.782
Customer Inspiration	Customer Referrals	0.913	0.914	0.939	0.794
	Customer Social Influence	0.909	0.912	0.936	0.785
	Inspired by	0.936	0.937	0.951	0.797
	Inspired to	0.931	0.933	0.948	0.784

Source: own elaboration

Regarding discriminant validity, two criteria were employed: Fornell-Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio. For the first, the square root of AVE should be greater than the correlation between the construct and other constructs in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Tables 5.4 and 5.5 shows that this criterion has been met. Considering the Heterotrait-Monotrait

ratio of correlations (see Tables 5.6 and 5.7), with all results taking values below 0.90, we can claim that the discriminant validity of the constructs has been established.

In this study, a non-parametric approach, called Bootstrap (5000 re-sampling), is used to estimate the precision of the PLS estimates and support the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2011). All path coefficients are significant at the 0.001 level, except hypothesis H4 for the Portuguese sample (see Tables 5.8 and 5.9). As models yielding significant bootstrap statistics can still be invalid in a predictive sense (Hair et al., 2017), measures of predictive validity (such as R^2 and Q^2) for endogenous focal constructs should be employed. All values of Q^2 (chi-squared of the Stone–Geisser criterion) are positive, so the relations in the model have predictive relevance (Fornell & Cha, 1994). The model also shows a good level of predictive power (R^2) as the modelled constructs explained 54.5% of the variance of customer engagement for the Kuwait sample and 53.1% of the variance of customer engagement for the Portuguese sample. Tables 5.8 and 5.9 show that the correlations between each first-order construct and the second-order construct are higher than 0.71, revealing that they have more than half of their variance in common, as expected (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Considering the weight, the recommended indicator is higher than 0.2 (Chin, 1998). Tables 5.8 and 5.9 show that all indicators are above 0.2.

Table 5-2. Cross Loadings: Kuwait Sample

	Entertain.	Informative.	S. Appeal	Social Presen.	Trust	C. Sharing	Commit.	C. purchase	C. Referrals	C.S. Influence	Inspired by	Inspired to	Sat.
AffEngInt1	0.908	0.459	0.532	0.413	0.485	0.419	0.408	0.654	0.525	0.407	0.432	0.528	0.504
AffEngInt2	0.886	0.441	0.508	0.387	0.425	0.353	0.340	0.615	0.487	0.314	0.398	0.492	0.446
AffEngInt3	0.849	0.405	0.432	0.341	0.566	0.383	0.444	0.642	0.470	0.442	0.496	0.455	0.559
AffEngInt4	0.880	0.399	0.524	0.367	0.622	0.366	0.407	0.763	0.573	0.493	0.504	0.519	0.584
CKS 4	0.378	0.467	0.471	0.579	0.457	0.879	0.582	0.549	0.492	0.572	0.561	0.419	0.396
CKS1	0.333	0.538	0.521	0.392	0.509	0.833	0.513	0.495	0.583	0.610	0.571	0.441	0.383
CKS2	0.395	0.464	0.474	0.444	0.433	0.921	0.582	0.559	0.502	0.575	0.504	0.509	0.439
CKS3	0.422	0.513	0.498	0.490	0.491	0.907	0.572	0.550	0.524	0.611	0.583	0.524	0.412
CSI1	0.518	0.539	0.672	0.482	0.540	0.566	0.539	0.599	0.651	0.860	0.590	0.630	0.488
CSI2	0.497	0.423	0.489	0.424	0.575	0.413	0.510	0.538	0.666	0.802	0.571	0.667	0.546
CSI3	0.296	0.448	0.475	0.557	0.423	0.629	0.531	0.451	0.602	0.872	0.528	0.554	0.361
CSI4	0.256	0.409	0.376	0.456	0.484	0.632	0.561	0.411	0.570	0.817	0.552	0.470	0.394
Commi1	0.349	0.547	0.466	0.592	0.683	0.642	0.924	0.467	0.506	0.591	0.586	0.608	0.619
Commi2	0.488	0.539	0.478	0.428	0.723	0.538	0.930	0.567	0.547	0.591	0.542	0.565	0.663
Cuspur1	0.730	0.374	0.403	0.339	0.604	0.433	0.487	0.838	0.566	0.480	0.410	0.478	0.637
Cuspur2	0.592	0.369	0.498	0.356	0.658	0.490	0.458	0.862	0.605	0.435	0.507	0.474	0.625
Cuspur3	0.590	0.464	0.571	0.458	0.606	0.663	0.490	0.842	0.586	0.517	0.544	0.480	0.524
Cuspur4	0.678	0.508	0.521	0.430	0.675	0.478	0.472	0.868	0.693	0.597	0.596	0.588	0.609
Cusref	0.491	0.451	0.536	0.535	0.519	0.571	0.472	0.609	0.845	0.624	0.579	0.592	0.519
Cusref2	0.507	0.505	0.571	0.525	0.676	0.486	0.511	0.657	0.880	0.668	0.584	0.640	0.529
Cusref3	0.544	0.502	0.531	0.601	0.614	0.572	0.561	0.645	0.911	0.678	0.628	0.682	0.563
Cusref4	0.498	0.367	0.510	0.559	0.557	0.441	0.439	0.608	0.860	0.624	0.627	0.634	0.481
Inform1	0.452	0.909	0.549	0.537	0.578	0.484	0.509	0.460	0.421	0.497	0.553	0.620	0.480
Inform2	0.387	0.934	0.587	0.528	0.567	0.548	0.567	0.449	0.496	0.543	0.586	0.650	0.498
Inform3	0.493	0.915	0.591	0.551	0.552	0.513	0.539	0.486	0.526	0.463	0.554	0.631	0.517

	Entertain.	Informative.	S. Appeal	Social Presen.	Trust	C. Sharing	Commit.	C. purchase	C. Referrals	C.S. Influence	Inspired by	Inspired to	Sat.
Ins-by1	0.416	0.443	0.521	0.584	0.622	0.528	0.610	0.532	0.621	0.591	0.810	0.631	0.485
Ins-by2	0.468	0.562	0.660	0.488	0.587	0.571	0.503	0.562	0.612	0.647	0.928	0.704	0.497
Ins-by3	0.440	0.533	0.592	0.603	0.560	0.564	0.554	0.545	0.656	0.590	0.913	0.724	0.490
Ins-by4	0.447	0.587	0.571	0.558	0.478	0.561	0.519	0.486	0.569	0.542	0.866	0.665	0.382
Ins-by5	0.501	0.568	0.677	0.632	0.538	0.532	0.496	0.543	0.580	0.566	0.873	0.740	0.490
Ins-to1	0.540	0.682	0.692	0.650	0.633	0.595	0.606	0.637	0.706	0.683	0.796	0.858	0.557
Ins-to2	0.551	0.647	0.660	0.660	0.540	0.475	0.569	0.544	0.654	0.640	0.684	0.909	0.525
Ins-to3	0.490	0.600	0.614	0.620	0.542	0.386	0.537	0.509	0.596	0.555	0.642	0.919	0.514
Ins-to4	0.529	0.627	0.616	0.647	0.612	0.491	0.613	0.542	0.679	0.655	0.765	0.929	0.499
Ins-to5	0.426	0.527	0.591	0.573	0.448	0.446	0.502	0.423	0.629	0.566	0.643	0.869	0.405
Satis1	0.507	0.514	0.483	0.379	0.779	0.407	0.667	0.623	0.549	0.495	0.467	0.558	0.935
Satis2	0.601	0.501	0.494	0.400	0.805	0.455	0.627	0.686	0.571	0.501	0.531	0.487	0.935
SenApp1	0.543	0.601	0.862	0.504	0.548	0.453	0.428	0.522	0.510	0.478	0.499	0.586	0.486
SenApp2	0.485	0.493	0.883	0.531	0.501	0.533	0.422	0.506	0.495	0.521	0.605	0.566	0.432
SenApp3	0.438	0.521	0.841	0.549	0.519	0.450	0.467	0.490	0.585	0.566	0.685	0.681	0.429
SocPre1	0.435	0.596	0.534	0.838	0.613	0.460	0.632	0.446	0.589	0.534	0.627	0.727	0.496
SocPre2	0.402	0.527	0.527	0.928	0.438	0.516	0.465	0.457	0.590	0.519	0.582	0.602	0.355
SocPre3	0.290	0.421	0.566	0.889	0.282	0.449	0.340	0.326	0.498	0.462	0.510	0.523	0.238
Trus1	0.581	0.542	0.565	0.424	0.933	0.488	0.704	0.688	0.615	0.545	0.541	0.581	0.843
Trus2	0.522	0.604	0.563	0.529	0.927	0.506	0.708	0.701	0.647	0.576	0.638	0.574	0.730

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-3. Cross Loadings: Portuguese Sample

	Entertain.	Informative.	S. Appeal	Social Presen.	Trust	C. Sharing	Commit.	C. purchase	C. Referrals	C.S. Influence	Inspired by	Inspired to	Sat.
AffEngInt1	0.847	0.612	0.432	0.369	0.517	0.289	0.466	0.603	0.387	0.362	0.473	0.473	0.560
AffEngInt2	0.891	0.577	0.502	0.372	0.604	0.290	0.549	0.696	0.405	0.378	0.498	0.483	0.644
AffEngInt3	0.878	0.589	0.465	0.390	0.525	0.338	0.554	0.595	0.501	0.447	0.435	0.480	0.591
AffEngInt4	0.814	0.529	0.537	0.456	0.544	0.281	0.559	0.585	0.494	0.468	0.521	0.463	0.593
CKS 4	0.305	0.267	0.505	0.636	0.215	0.914	0.438	0.183	0.629	0.747	0.591	0.478	0.191
CKS1	0.354	0.346	0.438	0.474	0.340	0.856	0.427	0.315	0.526	0.630	0.516	0.477	0.302
CKS2	0.312	0.287	0.402	0.546	0.266	0.937	0.457	0.216	0.542	0.676	0.494	0.456	0.234
CKS3	0.305	0.254	0.469	0.562	0.280	0.933	0.452	0.220	0.574	0.691	0.516	0.455	0.233
CSI1	0.508	0.397	0.527	0.579	0.359	0.655	0.571	0.426	0.731	0.920	0.628	0.561	0.384
CSI2	0.543	0.458	0.492	0.599	0.335	0.630	0.565	0.421	0.715	0.873	0.574	0.512	0.363
CSI3	0.385	0.322	0.483	0.579	0.262	0.710	0.487	0.291	0.704	0.910	0.599	0.517	0.263
CSI4	0.257	0.194	0.407	0.510	0.113	0.686	0.381	0.116	0.631	0.839	0.540	0.422	0.109
Commi1	0.522	0.496	0.568	0.609	0.557	0.534	0.906	0.557	0.647	0.633	0.646	0.635	0.563
Commi2	0.611	0.558	0.448	0.401	0.670	0.370	0.927	0.706	0.497	0.424	0.450	0.588	0.717
Cuspur1	0.633	0.521	0.408	0.308	0.642	0.227	0.625	0.867	0.430	0.311	0.351	0.486	0.709
Cuspur2	0.649	0.522	0.442	0.320	0.675	0.200	0.606	0.906	0.428	0.272	0.355	0.439	0.717
Cuspur3	0.607	0.506	0.410	0.263	0.620	0.171	0.534	0.869	0.421	0.267	0.313	0.428	0.659
Cuspur4	0.663	0.573	0.527	0.449	0.660	0.287	0.673	0.894	0.549	0.403	0.440	0.526	0.727
Cusref	0.458	0.419	0.511	0.564	0.404	0.547	0.554	0.452	0.899	0.705	0.554	0.487	0.414
Cusref2	0.560	0.428	0.471	0.515	0.454	0.517	0.612	0.578	0.871	0.715	0.554	0.585	0.495
Cusref3	0.453	0.395	0.501	0.583	0.445	0.596	0.558	0.455	0.919	0.706	0.538	0.472	0.411
Cusref4	0.383	0.355	0.426	0.517	0.385	0.568	0.477	0.371	0.875	0.673	0.471	0.412	0.305
Inform1	0.625	0.917	0.536	0.372	0.606	0.236	0.541	0.598	0.408	0.319	0.375	0.423	0.633
Inform2	0.604	0.892	0.532	0.469	0.500	0.381	0.516	0.472	0.414	0.418	0.516	0.449	0.529
Inform3	0.605	0.921	0.525	0.391	0.614	0.242	0.517	0.575	0.403	0.329	0.379	0.416	0.637

	Entertain.	Informative.	S. Appeal	Social Presen.	Trust	C. Sharing	Commit.	C. purchase	C. Referrals	C.S. Influence	Inspired by	Inspired to	Sat.
Ins-by1	0.541	0.452	0.571	0.534	0.420	0.470	0.540	0.410	0.537	0.560	0.902	0.586	0.376
Ins-by2	0.487	0.412	0.479	0.506	0.337	0.467	0.459	0.338	0.512	0.560	0.884	0.515	0.336
Ins-by3	0.460	0.403	0.523	0.572	0.338	0.605	0.510	0.299	0.551	0.651	0.922	0.614	0.310
Ins-by4	0.480	0.381	0.486	0.506	0.359	0.535	0.550	0.365	0.502	0.610	0.895	0.654	0.352
Ins-by5	0.540	0.435	0.492	0.546	0.473	0.514	0.573	0.449	0.551	0.566	0.859	0.633	0.406
Ins-to1	0.546	0.464	0.491	0.573	0.510	0.513	0.658	0.507	0.555	0.556	0.731	0.865	0.458
Ins-to2	0.534	0.416	0.449	0.482	0.507	0.390	0.577	0.521	0.471	0.460	0.525	0.907	0.486
Ins-to3	0.513	0.436	0.455	0.463	0.505	0.410	0.602	0.505	0.488	0.498	0.555	0.906	0.437
Ins-to4	0.457	0.413	0.446	0.463	0.441	0.478	0.593	0.472	0.471	0.505	0.616	0.899	0.410
Ins-to5	0.392	0.354	0.474	0.489	0.349	0.469	0.500	0.355	0.440	0.498	0.541	0.849	0.326
Satis1	0.644	0.636	0.461	0.344	0.768	0.233	0.650	0.764	0.424	0.264	0.349	0.428	0.960
Satis2	0.693	0.630	0.528	0.375	0.755	0.270	0.700	0.767	0.454	0.353	0.417	0.494	0.961
SenApp1	0.589	0.536	0.841	0.545	0.555	0.375	0.504	0.564	0.447	0.401	0.549	0.477	0.540
SenApp2	0.444	0.468	0.867	0.539	0.387	0.460	0.426	0.372	0.476	0.507	0.467	0.449	0.375
SenApp3	0.431	0.514	0.900	0.573	0.433	0.471	0.499	0.383	0.475	0.505	0.471	0.437	0.419
SocPre1	0.471	0.447	0.602	0.935	0.448	0.582	0.520	0.397	0.596	0.609	0.591	0.563	0.382
SocPre2	0.398	0.399	0.560	0.942	0.369	0.574	0.494	0.315	0.550	0.582	0.524	0.473	0.331
SocPre3	0.440	0.434	0.639	0.958	0.416	0.576	0.526	0.379	0.586	0.624	0.577	0.547	0.346
Trus1	0.591	0.599	0.484	0.404	0.954	0.258	0.637	0.707	0.461	0.291	0.390	0.486	0.767
Trus2	0.627	0.601	0.528	0.428	0.953	0.317	0.645	0.693	0.443	0.294	0.434	0.514	0.745

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-4. Discriminant validity Fornell-Larcker Criterion: Kuwait sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.Entertainment	0.881												
2.Informativeness	0.484	0.919											
3.Sensory Appeal	0.568	0.626	0.862										
4.Social Presence	0.429	0.586	0.612	0.886									
5.Trust	0.593	0.615	0.607	0.511	0.930								
6. Customer Knowledge Sharing	0.432	0.560	0.555	0.538	0.534	0.886							
7.Commitment	0.453	0.586	0.509	0.549	0.759	0.635	0.927						
8. Customer Purchases	0.758	0.506	0.587	0.467	0.746	0.608	0.559	0.853					
9. Customer Referrals	0.584	0.524	0.614	0.635	0.678	0.593	0.569	0.720	0.874				
10. Customer Social Influence	0.469	0.544	0.604	0.573	0.602	0.669	0.638	0.598	0.742	0.838			
11.Inspired by	0.518	0.614	0.689	0.651	0.633	0.627	0.608	0.607	0.691	0.668	0.879		
12.Inspired to	0.567	0.689	0.708	0.703	0.621	0.535	0.632	0.594	0.729	0.692	0.790	0.897	
13.Satisfaction	0.592	0.543	0.522	0.417	0.847	0.461	0.692	0.700	0.599	0.533	0.534	0.559	0.935

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-5. Discriminant validity Fornell-Larcker Criterion: Portugal sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.Entertainment	0.858												
2.Informativeness	0.672	0.910											
3.Sensory Appeal	0.565	0.584	0.869										
4.Social presence	0.463	0.452	0.636	0.945									
5.Trust	0.639	0.63	0.531	0.436	0.954								
6. Customer Knowledge Sharing	0.350	0.316	0.499	0.611	0.301	0.911							
7.Commitment	0.621	0.577	0.55	0.544	0.673	0.487	0.917						
8.Customer Purchases	0.723	0.602	0.51	0.386	0.734	0.255	0.694	0.884					
9.Customer Referrals	0.521	0.449	0.536	0.611	0.474	0.625	0.619	0.522	0.891				
10. Customer Social Influence	0.482	0.391	0.54	0.641	0.307	0.755	0.569	0.360	0.786	0.886			
11.Inspired by	0.562	0.466	0.572	0.598	0.432	0.582	0.591	0.417	0.595	0.661	0.892		
12.Inspired to	0.553	0.472	0.523	0.56	0.524	0.512	0.665	0.535	0.550	0.570	0.675	0.885	
13.Satisfaction	0.696	0.659	0.515	0.374	0.793	0.262	0.703	0.797	0.457	0.322	0.399	0.480	0.961

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-6. Discriminant validity Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT): Kuwait sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Entertainment													
Informativeness	0.533												
Sensory Appeal	0.654	0.721											
Social Presence	0.480	0.657	0.727										
Trust	0.681	0.704	0.725	0.590									
Customer Knowledge	0.476	0.617	0.641	0.607	0.610								
Sharing Commitment	0.520	0.673	0.613	0.640	0.803	0.731							
Customer Purchases	0.815	0.563	0.686	0.530	0.818	0.679	0.653						
Customer Referrals	0.648	0.578	0.714	0.719	0.778	0.656	0.655	0.811					
Customer Social Influence	0.532	0.615	0.714	0.663	0.708	0.757	0.754	0.685	0.845				
Inspired by	0.568	0.669	0.789	0.727	0.719	0.685	0.695	0.671	0.760	0.750			
Inspired to	0.613	0.744	0.804	0.775	0.695	0.577	0.712	0.651	0.793	0.769	0.844		
Satisfaction	0.676	0.615	0.619	0.478	0.814	0.522	0.817	0.811	0.683	0.622	0.600	0.621	

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-7. Discriminant validity Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT): Portugal sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Entertainment													
Informativeness	0.757												
Sensory Appeal	0.653	0.672											
Social Presence	0.508	0.491	0.715										
Trust	0.717	0.701	0.607	0.473									
Customer Knowledge	0.387	0.346	0.566	0.651	0.331								
Sharing													
Commitment	0.731	0.675	0.670	0.631	0.783	0.568							
Customer Purchases	0.807	0.666	0.574	0.409	0.812	0.274	0.798						
Customer Referrals	0.580	0.495	0.612	0.659	0.522	0.677	0.724	0.566					
Customer Social Influence	0.534	0.428	0.619	0.692	0.334	0.822	0.668	0.383	0.861				
Inspired by	0.619	0.509	0.643	0.636	0.471	0.622	0.685	0.447	0.643	0.716			
Inspired to	0.609	0.515	0.591	0.595	0.571	0.549	0.764	0.576	0.593	0.616	0.716		
Satisfaction	0.775	0.728	0.584	0.402	0.813	0.285	0.810	0.812	0.498	0.346	0.431	0.518	

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-8. Structural results Kuwait

	Beta	f ²	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Hypothesis
<i>Direct Effect</i>						
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.295	0.087	0.079	3.712	0.000	H1: supported
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.732	1.153	0.043	17.166	0.000	H2; supported
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.832	2.241	0.023	35.750	0.000	H3: supported
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	0.327	0.182	0.084	3.874	0.000	H4: supported
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.320	0.116	0.094	3.409	0.001	H5: supported
<i>Specific Indirect Effect</i>						
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality -> Customer Engagement	0.239		0.060	3.974	0.000	
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.266		0.079	3.362	0.001	
<i>Total Effect</i>						
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.320		0.094	3.409	0.001	
Relationship Quality -> Customer Engagement	0.327		0.084	3.874	0.000	
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.832		0.023	35.750	0.000	
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.732		0.043	17.166	0.000	
Online Experience -> Customer Engagement	0.801		0.027	29.792	0.000	
	R ²	Q ²				
Customer Inspiration	0.691	0.701				
Relationship Quality	0.533	0.723				
Customer Engagement	0.735	0.545				

<i>Second Order Construct</i>	<i>First order Construct</i>	<i>Correlation</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Online Experience	Entertainment	0.789	0.359	18.138	1.544
	Informativeness	0.825	0.312	20.037	1.901
	Sensory Appeal	0.852	0.283	18.628	2.193
Relationship Quality	Social Presence	0.787	0.277	14.327	1.801
	Trust	0.948	0.378	36.842	2.948
	Commitment	0.927	0.350	31.924	2.513
Customer Inspiration	Satisfaction	0.922	0.358	35.440	2.626
	Inspired by	0.879	0.522	40.285	2.950
	Inspired to	0.790	0.534	40.683	2.776
Customer Engagement	Customer	0.835			
	Knowledge Sharing		0.296	24.643	2.151
	Customer Purchases	0.847	0.278	23.665	3.049
	Customer Referrals	0.891	0.309	28.147	2.457
	Customer Social Influence	0.871	0.278	22.159	2.983

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-9. Structural results Portugal

Relationship	Beta	f ²	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Hypothesis
<i>Direct Effect</i>						
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.381	0.126	0.081	4.689	0.000	H1: supported
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.769	1.449	0.025	31.011	0.000	H2: supported
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.721	1.085	0.035	20.593	0.000	H3: supported
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	0.094	0.010	0.062	1.509	0.132	H4: not supported
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.402	0.210	0.065	6.216	0.000	H5: supported
<i>Specific Indirect Effect</i>						
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality -> Customer Engagement	0.072		0.048	1.524	0.128	
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.290		0.046	6.357	0.000	
<i>Total Effect</i>						
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.402		0.065	6.216	0.000	
Relationship Quality -> Customer Engagement	0.094		0.062	1.509	0.132	
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.721		0.035	20.593	0.000	
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.769		0.025	31.011	0.000	
Online Experience -> Customer Engagement	0.744		0.036	20.669	0.000	
	R ²	Q ²				
Customer Inspiration	0.520	0.654				
Relationship Quality	0.592	0.718				
Customer Engagement	0.639	0.531				

<i>Second Order Construct</i>	<i>First order Construct</i>	<i>Correlation.</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Online Experience	Entertainment	0.846	0.364	22.296	2.013
	Informativeness	0.821	0.281	23.496	2.060
	Sensory Appeal	0.833	0.267	21.129	2.143
	Social Presence	0.774	0.309	18.548	1.730
Relationship Quality	Trust	0.910	0.367	38.349	3.055
	Commitment	0.876	0.365	31.308	2.464
	Satisfaction	0.923	0.373	38.047	2.264
Customer Inspiration	Inspired by	0.892	0.559	26.074	2.228
	Inspired to	0.675	0.533	31.282	2.096
Customer Engagement	Customer Knowledge	0.835	0.321	24.024	2.507
	Sharing				
	Customer Purchases	0.788	0.212	10.561	2.386
	Customer Referrals	0.907	0.334	31.762	2.237
	Customer Social	0.914	0.333	27.410	2.212
	Influence				

Source: own elaboration

Finally, the multigroup analysis (MGA) was employed for the moderation and control variables. Regarding the difference between countries, table 5.10 reveals that the beta values are higher for Kuwait than for Portugal in the following relationships: Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement and Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration. High Power distance tends to strengthen the relationship: Online experience -> Customer Engagement. Low uncertainty avoidance strengthens the relationship: Online Experience -> Relationship Quality. High collectivism tends to strengthen the relationship: Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement. High Masculinity tends to strengthen the relationship: Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration. Considering the control variables, we cannot see a significant age difference, but the beta value of the relationship Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement is higher for the male than for the female.

Table 5-10. PLS-MGA: Country

Relationship	Path (Kuwait - Portugal)	Coefficients-diff	p-Value original 1-tailed (Kuwait vs Portugal)	p-Value new (Kuwait vs Portugal)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement		-0.082	0.759	0.481
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement		0.233	0.017	0.033*
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration		0.110	0.010	0.020*
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality		-0.037	0.769	0.462
Online experience -> Customer Engagement		-0.086	0.761	0.477

*p < 0.05

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-11. PLS-MGA: Power distance

Relationship	Path (low power distance - high power distance)	Coefficients-diff	p-Value original 1-tailed (low power distance vs high power distance)	p-Value new (low power distance vs high power distance)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement		0.113	0.127	0.255
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement		0.101	0.175	0.350
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration		-0.086	0.971	0.059
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality		0.126	0.036	0.072
Online experience -> Customer Engagement		-0.311	0.991	0.018*

*p<0.05

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-12. PLS-MGA: Uncertainty avoidance

Relationship	Path Coefficients-diff (low U. avoidance - high U. avoidance)	p-Value 1-tailed (low U. avoidance vs high U. avoidance)	original (low U. avoidance vs high U. avoidance)	p-Value new (low U. avoidance vs high U. avoidance)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	-0.254		0.873	0.255
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	-0.198		0.857	0.287
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.202	-		-
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.137		0.023	0.047*
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.280		0.100	0.199

*p < 0.05

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-13. PLS-MGA: Long term orientation

Relationship	Path Coefficients-diff (low longterm - high longterm)	p-Value 1-tailed (low longterm vs high longterm)	original (low longterm vs high longterm)	p-Value new (low longterm vs high longterm)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	0.085		0.274	0.548
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	-0.166		0.875	0.249
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.090		0.049	0.098
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.091		0.034	0.069
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	-0.062		0.632	0.736

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-14. PLS-MGA: Collectivism

Relationship	Path Coefficients-diff (low collectivism - high collectivism)	p-Value original 1-tailed (low collectivism vs high collectivism)	p-Value new (low collectivism vs high collectivism)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	-0.333	0.983	0.033*
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	0.080	0.283	0.566
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.061	0.138	0.276
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.064	0.152	0.303
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.098	0.261	0.522

*p < 0.05

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-15. PLS-MGA: Masculinity

Relationship	Path Coefficients-diff (low mas. - high mas.)	p-Value original 1-tailed (low mas. vs high mas.)	p-Value new (low mas. vs high mas.)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	-0.165	0.918	0.164
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	0.060	0.300	0.601
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	-0.092	0.985	0.030*
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	0.069	0.170	0.339
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.090	0.253	0.505

*p < 0.05

Source: own elaboration

Table 5-16. PLS-MGA: Control variables /gender and age)

Relationship	Path Coefficients-diff (Female - Male)	p-Value original (Female vs Male)	1-tailed p-Value new (Female vs Male)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	-0.249	0.991	0.018*
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	0.080	0.211	0.422
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	0.022	0.341	0.682
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	-0.064	0.923	0.153
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.131	0.126	0.251
Relationship	Path Coefficients-diff (low Age - high age)	p-Value original (low Age vs high age)	1-tailed p-Value new (low Age vs high age)
Customer Inspiration -> Customer Engagement	-0.144	0.746	0.508
Relationship Quality -> Customer engagement	0.128	0.235	0.471
Online Experience -> Customer Inspiration	-0.036	0.752	0.496
Online Experience -> Relationship Quality	-0.076	0.887	0.226
Online experience -> Customer Engagement	0.005	0.547	0.905

*p < 0.05

Source: own elaboration

5.4 Discussion

This study offers four second-order formative constructs. Although all the four indicators of online experience contribute to creating the index in both countries, in case of Kuwait, entertainment and informativeness are those with higher weights, but for Portugal, entertainment and social presence. Accordingly, the entertainment features of the websites (Kukar-Kinney & Close, 2010) - representing fun and enthusiasm for shopping - are relevant for the customer in both countries. The information about the products/firms (Verhoef et al., 2009) delivered through the websites emerged to be more effective in the case of Kuwait than in Portugal. The contribution of the three components of RQ is well-balanced in both countries, and the same is true for the index of customer inspiration. The four customer engagement indicators contributed to the constructs' index, but customer knowledge sharing, and customer referrals are the most relevant for both countries. Consequently, customers of both countries are active in encouraging others to purchase and providing feedbacks about the products/firms (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

Secondly, the effect of experience on engagement has deserved attention in previous studies (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Loureiro & Cunha, 2017; Loureiro et al., 2018). The present study is aligned with the others, as the association between the online experience and customer engagement is supported by the samples of the two countries. Thirdly, online relationship quality and customer inspiration are two potential mediators between the online experience and customer engagement. RQ reveals to be a mediator in the case of the Kuwait sample, but not for the Portuguese sample, which only supports H2 in the case of Kuwait. The indirect, specific effects allow us to claim such findings, and the Sobel test also confirms those. This finding demonstrates that the quality of the online relationship is truly relevant to encourage Kuwait customers to become engaged with a firm in an online context. Following the social exchange theory (Homans, 1958; Itani et al., 2019; Lambe et al., 2001), we can argue that the way Kuwait customers experience their purchase process online, the interaction between customers and firm online strongly affect their engagement, that is, lead Kuwait customers to be more proactive than Portuguese customers to recommend the products, firm and website to others, purchase more often and give more feedback.

Fourth, H3 is supported for both Kuwait and Portugal since the indirect specific effects are significant, and the Sobel test confirms this aspect. According to the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000b), the intrinsic motivation -expressed by the inspiration- reinforces the effect of the stimuli due to the online experience, resulting in more engaged customers. Fifth,

when analysing the VAF values, we can see that for RQ the value is higher for the Kuwait sample than for the Portuguese. Indeed, 44.8 % represent a partial mediation in the case of Kuwait, and 15.9% means the non-existence of mediation for the Portuguese sample. Therefore, H4 is supported. Kuwait's culture, being more collectivist than the Portuguese, demands an online relationship between customers and firms that provides satisfaction, confidence, and commitment. Portuguese customers are also interested in a satisfied and well-established relationship, yet RQ is more relevant in the case of Kuwait customers. One explanation is that Kuwait culture is more collectivist than the Portuguese culture.

Finally, H5 is supported. The VAF value for customer inspiration is higher for Kuwait customers than for the Portuguese. Kuwait culture is more masculine than Portuguese culture. Accordingly, the action to purchase online and be engaged can be activated through the inspiration created by the experience, which is stronger in more masculine – success-oriented-cultures.

CONCLUSION

General Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction section, this thesis examines the influence of online experience on customer engagement through customer inspiration and online relationship quality and compares Kuwait and Portugal. Moreover, we also intend to cluster Kuwait and Portugal's perceived e-commerce firm performance with this thesis. In this sense, this thesis intends to incorporate the concept of customer engagement in these relationships, as engagement has turned itself into a key concept in today's marketing (Brodie et al., 2011b; Dessart et al., 2015; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010; Santini et al., 2020). Additionally, this thesis proposes a conceptual model linking online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement based on the social exchange theory (SET).

This thesis focuses on the literature about online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement to accomplish these broader goals. The literature analysis identified a gap in terms of geographical area, as no study has been conducted in Portugal and Kuwait's. Additionally, the literature reveals that prior studies conducted in the online purchase are directed to customer satisfaction, behaviour, and attitude but still lacks more studies analysing antecedents of online customer engagement (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). Notably, the literature still does not offer any study regarding online relationship quality and customer inspiration as potential mediators between the online experience and customer engagement. Accordingly, discovering the shift in the customer's preferences towards online platforms also needs to be investigated.

We develop several studies and research activities in this thesis to accomplish these objectives. We first develop a systematic review of the literature covering the concepts of online engagement, customer inspiration, online relationship quality, online experience, e-commerce, and national culture. Second, through in-depth interviews, we embrace a study to explore preliminarily to assess the relationship between customers and suppliers in e-commerce platforms. Third, we analyse the mediation effect of the quality of the online relationship on the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement. Fourth, we examine the mediation effect of the customer inspiration on the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement and assess the moderating effect of national culture between the various relationships of latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework.

The research questions that drive our thesis, and consequently our research, are: (i) what research has been conducted on customer engagement, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and experience in an online context?; (ii) what is leading and relevant in the relationship between customers and suppliers in e-commerce platforms for Kuwait and Portuguese customers?; (iii) can value consciousness, customer empowerment, product type, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance strengthen the relationship between customer perceived value and online engagement?; (iv) what clusters can be formed on firm performance based on customer-base relational performance perspective?; (v) can online relationship quality be a mediator in the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement?; (vi) can customer inspiration be a mediator in the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement?; (vii) can national culture act as a moderator in the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual framework?; (viii) can Kuwait versus Portugal mediate the different associations among the latent variables in the proposed conceptual model?

We first conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) to highlight the relevant literature addressing the thesis topics. As we deal with novel topics, existing knowledge is still unclear. Therefore, we undertake this SLR to address this phenomenon by identifying and fitting in the findings of all relevant, high-quality research in the online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration and customer engagement in e-commerce influenced by national culture. This SLR help us to establish and explore how the literature has already contributed to clarifying this field of research. Our final pool of 186 articles results from four search queries. From this pool of papers, we find that the first article published is from 2001 (see Table 1-3) and that the majority of articles are from the last three years (2018 onwards). The SLR proceeded with a content analysis of this pool of papers to establish their latent subjects. We resort to a text-mining technique to analyse the text and categorize the text as being in one group of concepts (known as clusters) rather than another (Spinakis & Chatzimakri, 2005). The larger identified clusters, with a cut-off to the larger nine, are electronic commerce, online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, customer engagement, customer engagement and relationship quality, relationship quality and performance, customer engagement and perceived value, and national and cultural dimensions.

The objective of the qualitative study is to empirically understand the factors that promote the success of e-commerce platforms and ways e-commerce organizations can improve their online sales and services. Moreover, we intend to explore the similarities and differences in customer purchasing experience perceived by Kuwait and Portuguese customers. We may

assume that the quality of these relations is vital for the success of the online platform, and common sense tells us that numerous factors may influence these relationships. So, clarification is needed to explain the online relationship quality between customers and suppliers (i.e., brand and/or firms) (Brun et al., 2016; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2019; Wisker, 2020). Our results put in evidence the role of customer experience and customer satisfaction, underlining its increased relevance for e-commerce and online retail. When a customer has a good experience, he/she will be more prone to adopt a certain type of engagement with the e-commerce platform and/or the brand/firm. Inevitably, customer experience may lead to engagement, depending on different factors according to the ordered products.

Additionally, the success of e-commerce also depends on how these organizations can improve their online sales and services, answering customers concerns such as fast delivery, customer service, devolutions and money-back guarantees, free delivery, quality of products or payment security (Bleier et al., 2018; Gruner et al., 2014; Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). These factors can influence online relationship quality and explain customers' trust in e-commerce firms. Our study also shows that we can find more similarities than differences between Portuguese and Kuwait consumers: customer behaviour in e-commerce platforms and drivers of customer engagement and firms' trust are shared by both groups. Finally, our study also highlights the impact of the current pandemic situation on e-commerce. Due to the global lockdown, most firms have turned their business online, which expands the e-commerce offer, accelerating the expansion of e-commerce. The number of customers and competitors have risen, and several aspects of e-commerce have been pointed out as relevant, such as the safety of e-commerce and the transformations of customers' behaviours and business models.

The following empirical study offered by this thesis intends to understand the differences between cultural groups, namely between Kuwait and Portuguese online customers, and to assess cultural dimensions related to customer-based relational performance. We aim to cluster the firm performance based on the customer-based relational performance perspective and compare Portugal and Kuwait, and to analyse the moderator effects of value consciousness (VC), customer empowerment (CE), product type (PT), power distance (PD), and uncertainty avoidance (UA) in strengthening or weakening the relationship between customer perceived value (CPV) and online engagement. Our results show that we can find differences between sample means in terms of performance, cognitive engagement, behavioural engagement, social presence, customer-base relational performance, power distance and masculinity. These results show that we face a difference between samples of both countries in the mentioned dimensions, which is in line with previous research addressing cultural differences (Loureiro et al., 2018;

Moro et al., 2020; Voyer et al., 2017). Our results also underline the improved consumer awareness of their role in the online environment, as only customer empowerment has a significant positive influence. Customers perceived their value and strength in the relationship with the brand and/or firm, creating a sense of engagement (Clark et al., 2020). On the contrary wise, power distance, product type, value consciousness, and uncertainty avoidance do not influence this relationship, which is a finding that deserves further investigation.

The results also show that power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, long term orientation and masculinity present significant correlations with performance, and we claim that cultural dimensions are positively associated with performance. Moreover, correlations between cultural dimensions and customer base relational performance are positively moderated, highlighting that higher cultural dimensions are associated with higher customer-based relational performance. These findings should be seen with some degree of novelty from the performance and customer-based relational performance perspective. Further investigation is needed to help us to capture the true meaning of these discoveries. Finally, we can identify three clusters for the performance items: individuals with higher scores in E-commerce, individuals with higher scores in cultural perceptions, and individuals with higher scores in cooperation and lower scores in both e-commerce cultural perceptions.

The last empirical study offered by this thesis is devoted to analysing a model that explores the drivers of customer engagement with primary data from two countries. This conceptual model is formed based on the literature review and considering all the previous studies developed in the thesis and grounded on the social exchange theory as the theoretical foundation (see Figure 5.1). Our results show that the association between the online experience and customer engagement is supported by the samples of the two countries, which is aligned with previous research (e.g., Kefi & Maar, 2020; Pandey & Chawla, 2018). Additionally, our results put in evidence that online relationship quality and customer inspiration are two potential mediators of the relationship between the online experience and customer engagement. RQ reveals to be a mediator in the case of the Kuwait sample, but not for the Portuguese sample, which only supports H2 in the case of Kuwait. This finding demonstrates that the quality of the online relationship is genuinely relevant to encourage Kuwait customers to become engaged with a firm in an online context. We argue that the way Kuwait customers experience their purchase process online, the interaction between customers and online firms strongly affect their engagement.

Moreover, our results show that online experience positively influences customer inspiration for Kuwait and Portugal and that online relationship quality positively influences customers. Being more collectivist than the Portuguese, Kuwait's culture looks for an online relationship between customers and firms that provides satisfaction, confidence, and commitment. Portuguese customers are also interested in a satisfied and well-established relationship. Nonetheless, RQ is more relevant in the case of Kuwait customers. Finally, our results also highlight that customer inspiration positively influences customer engagement. The VAF value for customer inspiration is higher for Kuwait customers than for the Portuguese. Kuwait culture is more masculine than Portuguese culture. So, the action to purchase online and be engaged can be activated through the inspiration created by the experience, which is stronger in more masculine – success-oriented – cultures (Gupta et al., 2018).

Theoretical Contributions

This thesis demonstrates the nature and relevance of online experience on customer engagement, a general tendency for some consumers to engage with their suppliers in e-commerce platforms (i.e., brand and/or firms). Our empirical findings show that online experience influencing customer engagement is valuable for the field of marketing as it meaningfully affects consumer-relationship constructs, including customer inspiration, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Overall, our work provides important new insights into the proposition that customers can create links with brands and/or firms while in electronic relationships.

Following the previous general discussion, we outline major contributions this thesis offer for the extended literature on relationship marketing and online customer engagement. First, this thesis provides academics with a review that systematically explore the extant literature on the online experience, online relationship quality, customer inspiration, and customer engagement in the online context. This review establishes and explores how the literature has already contributed to clarifying this field of research and offers academics the understanding of how previous research defines the concepts and identifies the relationships among these constructs and how they are interconnected with the remaining marketing literature.

Second, this thesis offers key relevant factors for customer and supplier relationships in e-commerce platforms, namely what promotes e-commerce platforms' success and forms e-

commerce organizations can improve their online sales and services. When a customer has a good experience, he/she will be more disposed to adopt a specific type of engagement with the e-commerce platform and/or the brand/firm. Additionally, customer experience may lead to engagement, depending on different factors according to the business and the offer itself. Third, this thesis offers customer empowerment as an essential moderator of relationship customer perceived value and online engagement. Customers perceived their value and strength in the relationship with the brand and/or firm, creating a sense of engagement (Clark et al., 2020). We can perceive this result as the improved consumer awareness of their role in the online environment.

Fourth, we prove that power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, long term orientation and masculinity reveal significant correlations with performance and cultural dimensions are positively associated with performance. The correlations between cultural dimensions and customer base relational performance are positively moderated, highlighting that greater cultural dimensions are associated with higher customer-based relational performance. These findings should be seen with consideration and some degree of novelty from the performance and customer-based relational performance perspective. Further investigation is needed to help us to capture the true meaning of these discoveries. Fifth, we put in evidence three clusters for the performance items representing online consumers' groups associated with cooperation, e-commerce, and cultural perceptions. Sixth, this thesis highlights the relevant role of online relationship quality and customer inspiration as mediators between the online experience and customer engagement. Finally, it points out differences between Kuwait and Portugal in engaging online based on cultural differences.

Managerial Implications

The research developed in this thesis allows us to offer contributions that can be useful for managers and marketers in general and practitioners devoted to the online business environment in specific, such as online platforms, e-commerce platforms or social networking platforms.

First, managers can benefit from offering an immersive online experience, as it is crucial in promoting online products or services (e.g., product compliance, secure online transactions, product/service safety, rules and regulations). Through stimulating online experiences, firms can inform customers about their products and services, educate their stakeholders about various subjects and, above all, manage a collaborative and participatory digital environment

shared by all its stakeholders. Additionally, managers can easily collect and analyse customers' opinions about their products or services, recording customer suggestions for improvement through discussion forums or creating an environment with a real possibility for co-creation of products or services.

Second, this thesis has tried to demonstrate how different antecedents and mediators can improve customer engagement in an online environment, especially by understanding the role of customer inspiration and online relationship quality in engaging the online experience. The care and attention that managers devote to customers need to be a matter of constant dedication. Managers should create activities and environments that motivate customers to do their best in terms of performance and behaviour. Managers dealing with customer motivation and engagement – perhaps one of its most challenging daily tasks – should be aware of some available options and tools that can be implemented, knowing that properly engaged customers positively influence firm performance (Vivek et al., 2012).

Third, based on the results achieved in this thesis, we argue that managers should pay close attention to the potential of online environments and customer experience. An immersive online experience allows participants to navigate different contexts and environments, creating a desire to explore further or physically try out the products or services shown during their online experience, contributing to maximizing consumer experience and engagement. For instance, previewing products can influence customers' purchase decisions. The possibility of experiencing a product (e.g., virtually) prior to its acquisition can positively influence the purchase decision.

Fourth, our findings also propose the need for practitioners to understand how customer inspiration works to develop proper marketing strategies. Managers must appreciate the components of inspiration. The findings in this study indicate that the components are distinct from each other (inspired-by and inspired-to) (Böttger et al., 2017), which practitioners should consider when developing marketing stimuli. Managers need to pay attention to the value proposition incorporated in the stimuli. The results put in evidence that the value associated with the stimuli is connected with the likelihood the content will inspire customers. Correct framing of the content is vital, as customers are different in their value orientation. Some are more utilitarian, others more hedonic (Bilro & Loureiro, 2021). What is relevant is to ensure that each proposition value is clear and appealing to customers. The potential of customer engagement in online platforms also needs that the value is credible and achievable. Customers need to see themselves appreciating the benefits and believing that the firm is able to deliver what it promises.

Fifth, the role of cultural orientation to inspire customers is also something practitioners need to consider. The findings in this thesis show that cultural dimensions moderate the strength of the path established in the model. Managers should realize that it requires more effort to inspire individualistic consumers than collectivistic consumers, even if we know that every customer is differently predisposed to external influence.

Sixth, firms need to consider online experience while assessing their digital existence and inspire managers to engage their consumers in the co-creation process. Managers can take advantage if they incorporate customer's opinions in their experiential offer. They should involve customers in co-creative actions and activities (e.g., opinions on innovative features, products, or service enhancements). Seventh, this thesis findings may also encourage managers to take full advantage of online platforms. The online environment can be an excellent tool for customer engagement. The results of our studies reveal that firms can engage customers through the mean of online experience, customer inspiration and online relationship quality. Different stimuli seem to induce different customer engagement processes, and we argue that managers can resort to experience, inspiration, trust, satisfaction and commitment to create positive customer engagement. We recommend that managers can apply oriented activities that promote engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this thesis highlights several relevant findings that broaden knowledge for the marketing literature, it is not without limitations. The studies conducted and offered by this thesis were designed, conceived, and prepared with caution to avoid bias and be accurate. Still, as in any research, we find limitations, opening avenues for further research.

Considering the systematic literature review, the review search for papers published in English and available in WOS databases may limit the outcome. Future research could use other databases, such as SCOPUS. The choice of the keywords may also limit the search, even if based on top reference articles, and the screening process may have omitted eventually relevant research. However, we believe that the rigorous procedure of this systematic review has reduced the chance that the missing research would contain relevant information that could influence the outcome.

Second, we agree that the number of interviewees could be larger and diversified in the qualitative research. Specifically, we believe that a more comprehensive age range could cast some variety to the sample. Actually, conducting interviews was one of the daunting challenges

of this research. It is hard to find a pool of people willing to share their time with the researchers, and even when that happens, it is a struggle to find time in the interviewees' agenda, and several contacts refuse to contribute. Future research can attempt to replicate this study with a different sample (in terms of its size and characteristics) and compare the results.

Third, panels' sample size could be larger in the quantitative research. Furthermore, additional data samples could be collected to compare and analyse the model considering different national cultures as a moderator. Future research could consider other mediators between the online experience and customer engagement, such as brand attachment or perceived value. Other variables could also be tested as moderators, such as personality traits, emotional variables (e.g., pleasure, playfulness, enjoy ability), or cognitive variables (e.g., dominance, cognitively thinking). Moreover, we used a convenient panel sample that can be replaced in the future by a probabilistic sampling process.

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Annexes

Appendix A: Interviews personal datasheet

Personal datasheet

Participant Letter: _____

Date: __ / __ / _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Place where you live: _____

Highest degree / level of school you have completed: _____

Field of Study (academic): _____

Current occupation: _____

How long have you been an online user? _____

Do you usually buy/sell online? _____ Yes _____ No

For how long are you an e-commerce customer/supplier? _____

Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix B: Interview's script

Introduction	Introduction to the topic (e-commerce, online experience and customer engagement; online relationships). Brief explanation of 'online relationship quality' definition.
Opening	Please tell us your name, age, degree and academic background
Transition	Are you a frequent internet user? Are you a frequent e-commerce customer/supplier? How often?

Key-question No.1	What do you think about e-commerce expansion during the pandemic of COVID 19? Did it help us use more digital applications to purchase our needs such as clothes, foods, medicine or others? Please elaborate.
Key-question No.2	What is your opinion about the brands/firms from whom you buy online in terms of quality, delivery time, prices? Do you trust these firms?
Key-question No.3	Do you spend time interacting online in digital applications (e.g., social networking platforms, e-commerce platforms, etc.)? Have you spent more time interacting while in lockdown (i.e., Covid-19 pandemic lockdown)?
Key-question No.4	What primary difficulty do you face when making online purchases? Please elaborate about quality, price, delivery, and time-consuming, internet speed and connections?
Key-question No.5	What are the major difficulty you face when making online purchases? Please elaborate on your overall level of satisfaction, loyalty, and trust.
Key-question No.6	What is your overall assessment of digital applications? Do you see them useful? Is it something we can depend on?
Key-question N.º 7	Can you provide suggestions for this type of brand/firm to improve their service? Can you offer some concrete examples?

Conclusion	We are researching the key features for online experience influencing customer engagement in e-commerce platforms. Do you consider adding anything that could help us?
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Appendix C: Questionnaire

PERSONAL INFORMATION

A. Gender : a. Male b. Female

B. Age (Years)

- a. < 20
- b. 20-30
- c. 30-40
- d. 40-50
- e. > 50

C. Educational Qualification

- a. High school graduate
- b. Some college but no degree
- c. College degree
- d. Graduate Degree
- e. Other

D. Please state the country where you live.

When answering the following questions, please think about your previous online transactions.

The answers are built in a 7-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

I. ONLINE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

A. Attention

1. When I'm exploring the posts related to this product, my mind is only occupied with this product and not with other things.
2. Participating in this product and following its related posts takes my mind off other things.
3. When I visit social media pages related to this product and browse the posts related to the product, it is difficult to detach
4. Nothing can distract me while doing the requested activities of this product (such as creating and publishing a video).

B. Interest and enjoyment

5. I think this is a very interesting product.
6. Participating in this product is an enjoyable experience.
7. I follow the posts related to this product (e.g., posts with the hashtag #XYZ).
8. I'd like to comment on the posts related to this product.
9. I'd like to share the posts related to this product.
10. I "Like" the posts related to this product.
11. I will continue buying from this company in the near future
12. My purchases from this company make me content

C. Customer Referrals

14. I promote the company because of the benefits it provided by it
15. I enjoy referring this company to my friends and relatives whether there are referral incentives or not.

D. Customer Social Influence

16. I love talking about my experience with this company
17. I actively discuss this company on different media platforms.

E. Customer Knowledge Sharing

18. I provide feedback about my experiences with the company.
19. I provide suggestions for improving the performance of the company's products/services.

F. Value Consciousness

20. I am very concerned about low prices, but I am equally concerned about service quality.
21. When purchasing a product, I always try to maximize the quality and benefits I get for the money I spend.
22. When using a service/product, I compare the prices of different options to be sure I get the best value/benefits for the money.

G. Customer Engagement: Cognitive Processing

23. Using [brand] gets me to think about [brand].

24. I think about [brand] a lot when I'm using it.
25. Using [brand] stimulates my interest to learn more about [brand].

H. Affection

26. I feel very positive when I use [brand].
27. Using [brand] makes me happy.
28. I feel good when I use [brand].
29. I'm proud to use [brand].

I. Activation

30. I spend a lot of time using [brand], compared to other [category] brands.
31. Whenever I'm using [category], I usually use [brand].
32. [Brand] is one of the brands I usually use when I use [category].

J. What colour is the sky? Make sure to select green so that we know you are paying attention.

II. ONLINE RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

A. Customer Perceived Value

1. I feel that I am getting a good deal in using at this company
2. I might continue to use at this company, even if prices were increased a little bit
3. The services/products provided by this company are worth the cost
4. This company provides valuable food options to customers

B. Relationship Quality with Satisfaction

5. Overall, I am satisfied with this company.
6. I am happy with this company

C. Relationship Quality with Commitment

7. I am committed to this company.
8. In future, I will remain a customer of this company

D. Relationship Quality with Trust

9. The company can be trusted
10. This company can be relied on to keep its promises

III. ONLINE EXPERIENCE

A. Informativeness

1. Information obtained from the product page is useful.
2. I learned a lot from using the product page.
3. I think the information obtained from the product page is helpful.

B. Social presence

4. There is a sense of human contact in the web page.
5. There is a sense of human warmth in the web page.
6. There is a sense of human sensitivity in the web page.

C. Sensory Appeal

7. The product presentation on this web page is lively.
8. I can acquire product information on this web page from different sensory channels.
9. This web page contains product information exciting to senses.

IV. CUSTOMER INSPIRATION

A. Inspired-by

1. My imagination was stimulated
2. I was intrigued by a new idea.
3. I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas
4. My horizon was broadened
5. discovered something new.

B. Inspired-to

6. I was inspired to buy something.
7. I felt a desire to buy something.
8. My interest to buy something was increased.
9. I was motivated to buy something.
10. I felt an urge to buy something.

V. FIRM PERFORMANCE

A. Customer orientation

1. Our commitment to serving the customer needs is closely monitored

2. Our objectives and strategies are driven by the creation of customer satisfaction
3. Competitive strategies are based on understanding customer needs

B. Customer service performance

4. The speed of delivery to our customers compared to competitors
5. The degree of responsiveness to customer enquiries and requests compared to Competitors

C. Interaction Orientation and Firm Performance

6. This firm encourages customers to participate interactively in designing products and services
7. This firm encourages customers to share opinions of its products or services with other customers
8. This firm encourages customers to share opinions of its products or services with the firm

D. Customer-Based Relational Performance

10. The overall satisfaction level of our customers is higher than the satisfaction levels of these customers with our competing firms
11. This firm's customers are interested in the financial wellbeing of the firm
12. A higher percentage of our new customers come to us because of referrals from our existing customers, relative to our competitors.

VII. INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL VALUES

A. Power Distance (PO)

1. People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions.
2. People in higher positions should not ask the opinions of people in lower positions too frequently.
3. People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions
4. People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions by people in higher positions
5. People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions

B. Uncertainty Avoidance

6. It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I'm expected to do.
7. It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures.
8. Rules and regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me.
9. Standardized work procedures are helpful.
10. Instructions for operations are important.

C. Collectivism

11. Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group.
12. Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties.
13. Group welfare is more important than individual rewards.
14. Group success is more important than individual success.
15. Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group.
16. Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer

D. Long-Term Orientation

17. Careful management of money (Thrift)
18. Going on resolutely in spite of opposition (Persistence)
19. Personal steadiness and stability
20. Long-term planning
21. Giving up today's fun for success in the future
22. Working hard for success in the future

E. Masculinity

23. It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women.
24. Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition.
25. Solving difficult problems usually requires an active, forcible approach, which is typical of men.
26. There are some jobs that a man can always do better than a woman.

VII. MODERATORS

A. Product Type (Search/Experience)

1. I can adequately evaluate this product using only information provided by the web page about the product's attributes and features. (Search focus)
2. I can evaluate the quality of this product simply by reading information about the product. (Search focus)
3. It is important for me to touch this product to evaluate how it will perform. (Experience focus)
4. It is important for me to test this product to evaluate how it will perform. (Experience focus)

E-COMMERCE

1. Electronic commerce (e-commerce) is the process of buying, selling, transferring or exchanging products, services, and / or information via computer networks, including the Internet.
2. E-commerce is internationalized and buying products online across national borders has become straightforward and convenient for consumers.
3. E-commerce is offering new business opportunities for both national and international online stores with interaction of global customers.
4. We are regular buying, selling, transferring or exchanging products, services, and information via online computer networks.
5. Information technology market in the Gulf (including Kuwait) is growing, driven by a more developed economy and infrastructure investments in major areas such as oil, gas, power, financial and telecoms but rather than Portugal market.
6. The bilateral relations between both State of Kuwait and the Republic of Portugal is good and supportive.
7. Portugal is contributing a large share of the major projects and other Kuwaiti medium projects.

NATIONAL CULTURE

8. Cultural dimensions are defined as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity short vs long term orientation.
9. National culture is an eye into the way different cultures connect with the world of online commerce and how willing citizens and companies are to trust these new tools and agents.
10. Every country has its own National culture for selling of online products.

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

Appendix D – Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

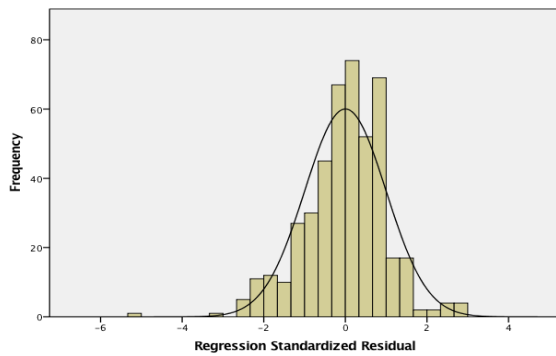
Variable	Group	Statistic	df	p value
Performance	Portugal	0,090	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,088	210	0,000
Affective engagement	Portugal	0,159	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,238	210	0,000
Cognitive engagement	Portugal	0,071	240	0,005
	Kuwait	0,143	210	0,000
Behavioural engagement	Portugal	0,063	240	0,022
	Kuwait	0,110	210	0,000
Value consciousness	Portugal	0,250	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,340	210	0,000
Customer Perceived Value	Portugal	0,164	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,191	210	0,000
Satisfaction	Portugal	0,162	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,222	210	0,000
Trust	Portugal	0,145	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,196	210	0,000
Commitment	Portugal	0,126	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,166	210	0,000
Informativeness	Portugal	0,201	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,251	210	0,000
Social presence	Portugal	0,173	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,187	210	0,000
Sensory appeal	Portugal	0,174	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,209	210	0,000
Customer empowerment	Portugal	0,161	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,215	210	0,000
Customer-Based Relational Performance	Portugal	0,201	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,235	210	0,000
Power distance	Portugal	0,209	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,193	210	0,000
Uncertainty avoidance	Portugal	0,202	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,274	210	0,000
Collectivism	Portugal	0,132	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,199	210	0,000
Long-term orientation	Portugal	0,148	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,261	210	0,000
Masculinity	Portugal	0,173	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,153	210	0,000
Product type	Portugal	0,115	240	0,000
	Kuwait	0,178	210	0,000

df: degrees of freedom

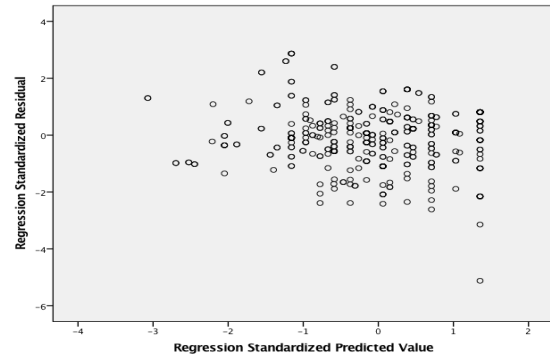
Appendix E – Descriptive Statistics by Country

Variable	Group	M	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Performance	Portugal	5.27	0.71	-0.161	0.157	4.434	0.313
	Kuwait	5.40	1.10	-0.716	0.168	0.437	0.334
Affective Engagement	Portugal	5.32	1.03	-0.145	0.157	-0.120	0.313
	Kuwait	5.36	1.66	-0.713	0.168	-0.295	0.334
Cognitive Engagement	Portugal	4.88	1.14	-0.279	0.157	-0.035	0.313
	Kuwait	5.25	1.45	-0.270	0.168	-1.028	0.334
Behavioural Engagement	Portugal	4.55	1.16	0.027	0.157	-0.127	0.313
	Kuwait	5.02	1.47	-0.223	0.168	-0.821	0.334
Value Consciousness	Portugal	5.97	1.12	-0.987	0.157	0.913	0.313
	Kuwait	5.74	1.64	-1.302	0.168	0.057	0.334
Customer Perceived Value	Portugal	5.32	1.00	-0.164	0.157	0.045	0.313
	Kuwait	5.18	1.57	-0.416	0.168	-0.532	0.334
Satisfaction	Portugal	5.72	1.06	-0.615	0.157	0.165	0.313
	Kuwait	5.49	1.64	-0.977	0.168	0.248	0.334
Trust	Portugal	5.55	1.13	-0.784	0.157	1.027	0.313
	Kuwait	5.34	1.64	-0.763	0.168	-0.138	0.334
Commitment	Portugal	5.09	1.29	-0.490	0.157	0.187	0.313
	Kuwait	5.01	1.75	-0.526	0.168	-0.567	0.334
Informativeness	Portugal	5.44	1.13	-0.497	0.157	-0.075	0.313
	Kuwait	5.48	1.58	-0.729	0.168	-0.129	0.334
Social presence	Portugal	4.38	1.51	-0.320	0.157	-0.352	0.313
	Kuwait	4.89	1.78	-0.347	0.168	-0.747	0.334
Sensory appeal	Portugal	4.87	1.19	-0.282	0.157	0.172	0.313
	Kuwait	5.09	1.72	-0.445	0.168	-0.640	0.334
Customer Empowerment	Portugal	4.93	1.27	-0.317	0.157	0.028	0.313
	Kuwait	5.10	1.81	-0.559	0.168	-0.640	0.334
Customer-Based Relational Perfor.	Portugal	4.81	1.22	-0.119	0.157	0.302	0.313
	Kuwait	5.20	1.71	-0.432	0.168	-0.814	0.334
Power distance	Portugal	2.73	1.72	0.649	0.157	-0.796	0.313
	Kuwait	3.71	2.33	0.190	0.168	-1.408	0.334
Uncertainty Avoidance	Portugal	5.57	1.14	-0.729	0.157	0.696	0.313
	Kuwait	5.51	1.71	-0.880	0.168	-0.139	0.334
Collectivism	Portugal	4.83	1.31	-0.504	0.157	0.412	0.313
	Kuwait	5.06	1.76	-0.464	0.168	-0.644	0.334
Long-term Orientation	Portugal	5.55	1.02	-0.174	0.157	-0.809	0.313
	Kuwait	5.51	1.60	-0.776	0.168	-0.259	0.334
Masculinity	Portugal	2.83	1.71	0.502	0.157	-0.858	0.313
	Kuwait	3.98	2.21	0.040	0.168	-1.306	0.334
Product type	Portugal	4.95	1.07	-0.223	0.157	0.497	0.313
	Kuwait	5.14	1.63	-0.492	0.168	-0.493	0.334

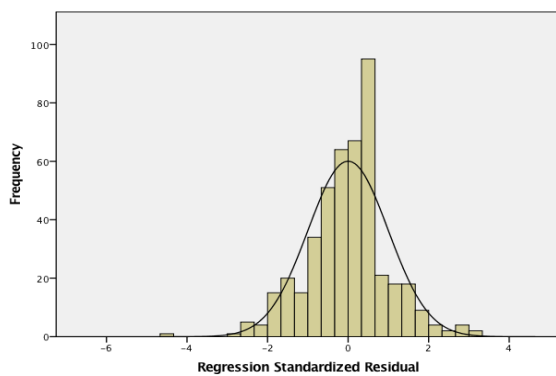
Appendix F – Standardized residual histogram - moderation effect of value consciousness



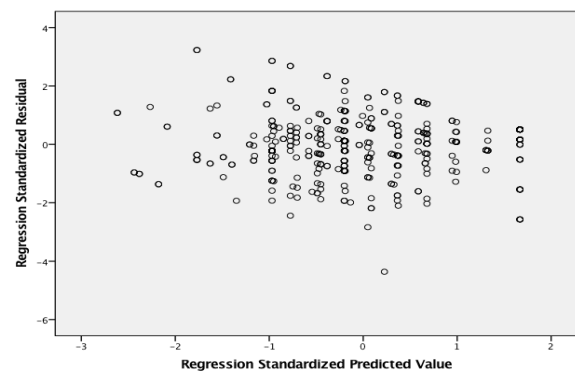
Appendix G – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of value consciousness



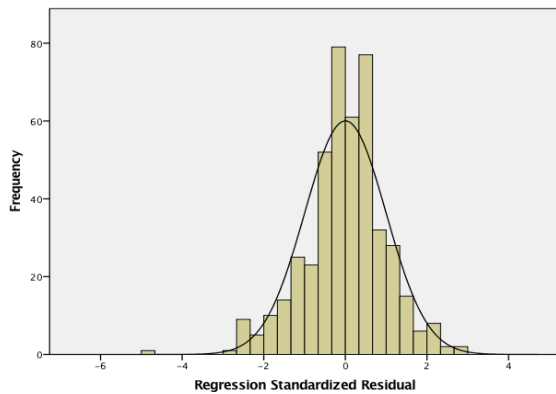
Appendix H – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of customer empowerment



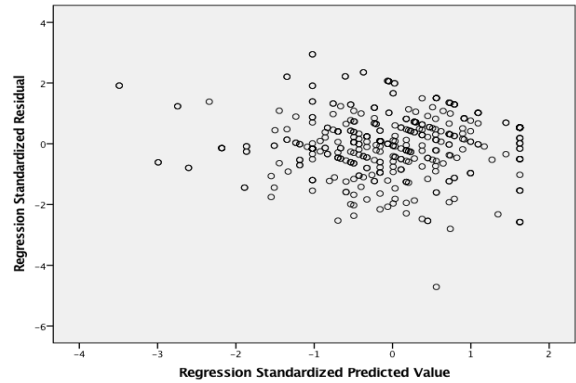
Appendix I – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of customer empowerment



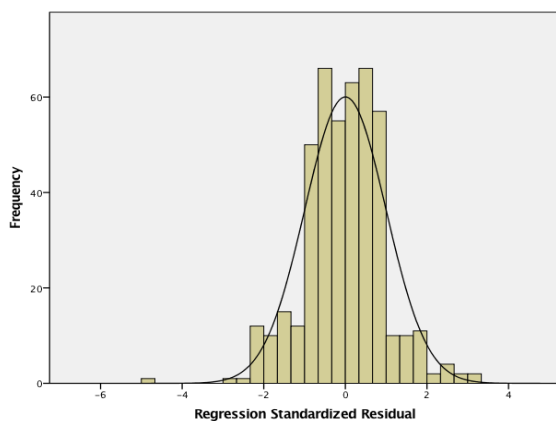
Appendix J – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of product type



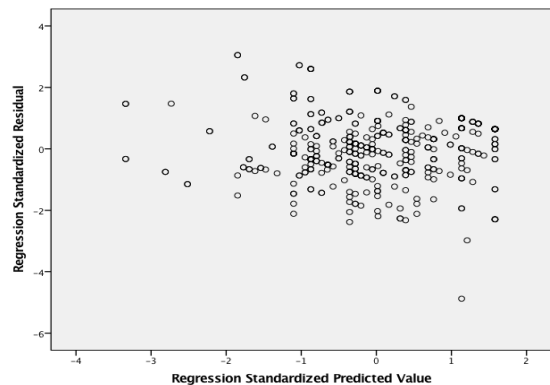
Appendix K – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of product type



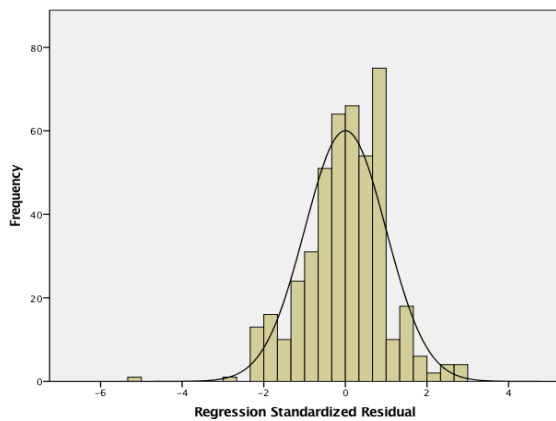
Appendix L – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of power distance



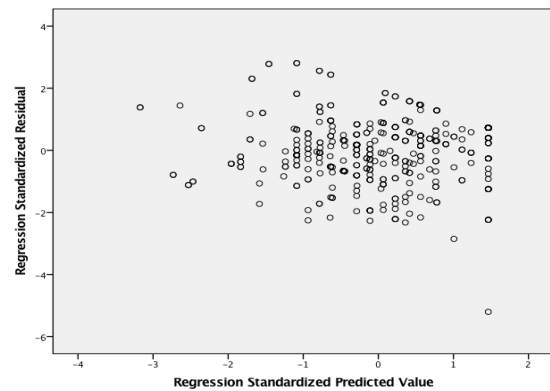
Appendix M – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of power distance



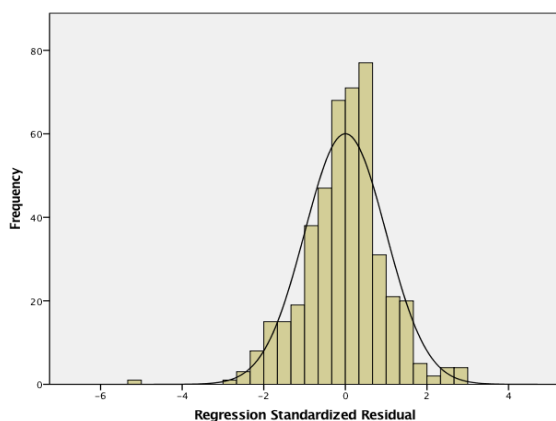
Appendix N – Standardized residual distribution histogram – moderation effect of uncertainty avoidance



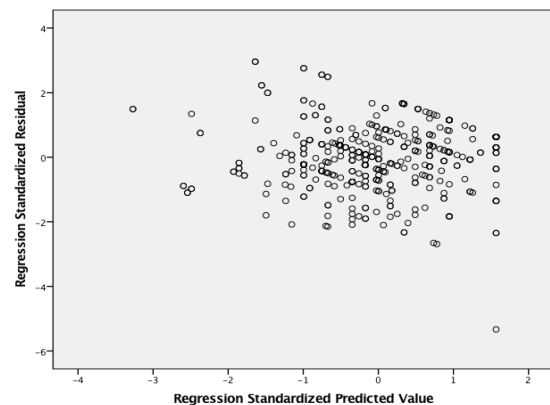
Appendix O – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of uncertainty avoidance



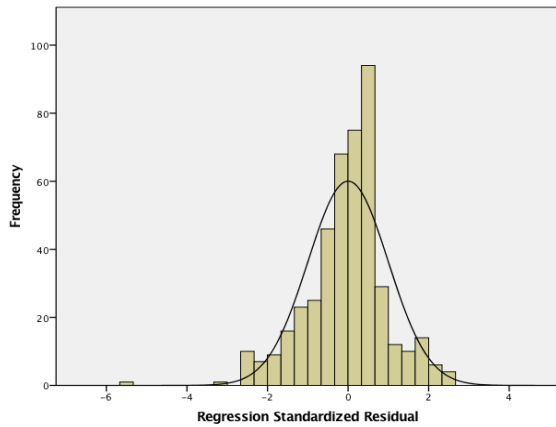
Appendix P – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of collectivism



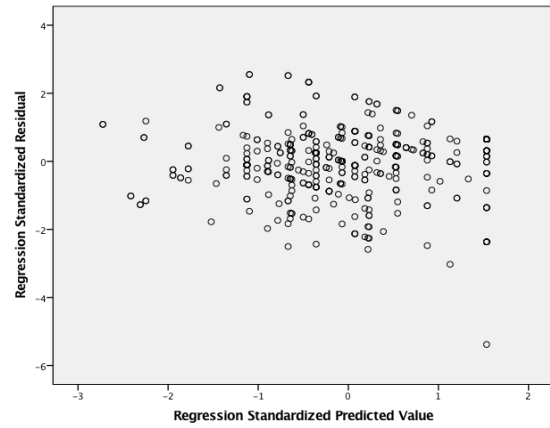
Appendix Q - Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of collectivism



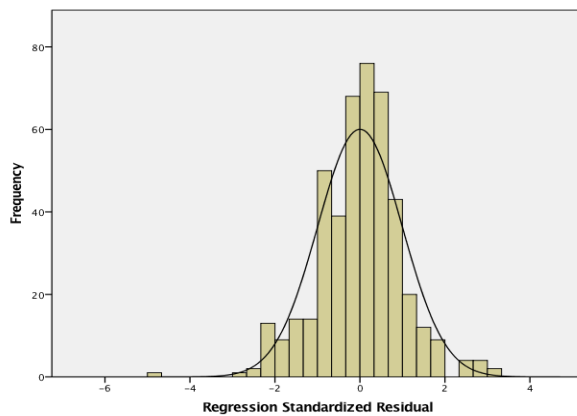
Appendix R – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of long term orientation



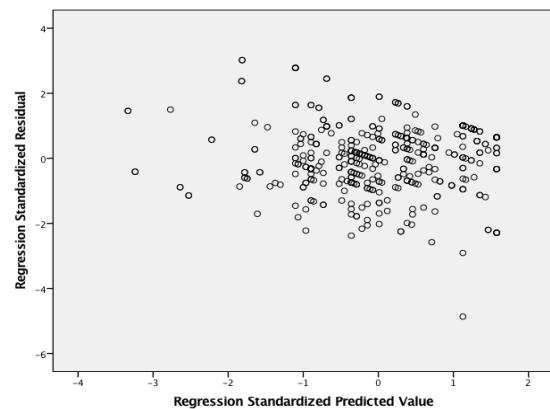
Appendix S – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of long term orientation



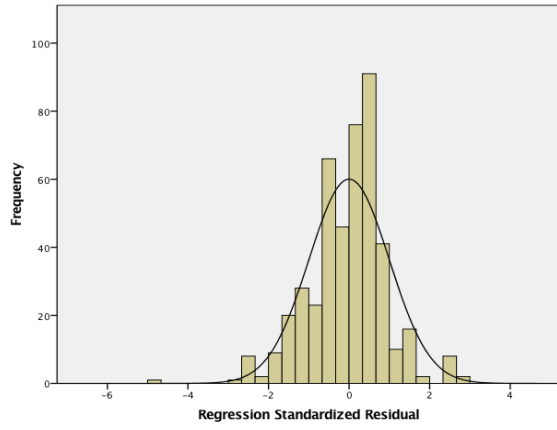
Appendix T – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of masculinity



Appendix U – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of masculinity



Appendix V – Standardized residual histogram – moderation effect of nationality



Appendix X – Standardized residuals homocedasticity scatterplot - moderation effect of nationality

