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Effects of the intensity of use of social media on brand equity
An empirical study in a tourist destination

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive research of the effects of the intensity of use of social media on destination brand equity. The authors use the schema theory and a multidimensional approach of brand equity to analyse how social media communication affects brand awareness, brand image, customer value, brand quality and loyalty.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors carried out a quantitative study through a personal survey with structured questionnaire. The study population were international tourists, over 18 years of age, who were visiting the city of Valencia, Spain. Respondents were asked to take the questionnaire upon arrival in Valencia, that is, before they had any direct experience of the tourist destination and when their knowledge of the city came only from the sources of social media information they have used. The final sample size was 249 interviewees.

Findings – Findings confirm a positive effect of the intensity of social media use on brand awareness. Results also suggest that brand awareness influences other dimensions of brand equity and highlight the influence of the destination affective image on the intention to make WOM communication.

Originality/value – Its originality lies in a unique approach for data collecting and using the schema theory of cognitive psychology to understand the phenomenon of social media influence on tourist perception of destination brands. The findings contribute to the development of better social media marketing in order to manage destination brands online.

Keywords Social media, Brand equity, WOM, eWOM, Tourism destination image

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, social media have provoked a revolution in marketing communication, offering new possibilities for interaction between user and brand. This interaction has great relevance for brands because social network users rely on the advice they receive from other users (Schmitt *et al.*, 2011), and this communication influences the decision-making process (Hinz *et al.*, 2011).

Organisations are aware of the need to understand the effects of social media on brand perception (Kumar *et al.*, 2016). While social media researchers have focussed primarily on analysing particular social networks in isolation, such as Twitter (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2015), Facebook (De Vries *et al.*, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Kumar *et al.*, 2016) and online surveys of web pages (Tirunillai and Tellis, 2012), there are few studies that incorporate different types of social networks for comparative purposes, with exceptions (Smith *et al.*, 2012; Schweidel and Moe, 2014).

Without doubt, previous studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of communication in social media (Smith *et al.*, 2012; Schweidel and Moe, 2014;

Swaminathan, 2016), but few studies analyse the interaction of consumers with brands on different social media (Anderl *et al.*, 2015). Given the large scale of use of social media, there is a lack of research analysing the influence of multiple social media on brand equity (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Keller, 2016; Gürhan-Canli *et al.*, 2016).

Taking into account the need for further research into brand equity in the digital age, and due to the lack of theoretical knowledge and empirical research on the role of social media in the formation of destination brands (Halkias, 2015; Llodrà-Riera *et al.*, 2015; MSI, 2016), the present study focusses on the analysis of the effect of the intensity of use of different social media channels on destination brand equity (Llodrà-Riera *et al.*, 2015; MSI, 2016).

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, there is a literature review of the conceptualization of brand equity and its dimensions, and the influence of social media on the dimensions of brand equity and intention to recommend the brand by word of mouth communication. Next, the methodology of the research is described and the analysis and discussion of the results is given. Finally, the main conclusions of the study are described, highlighting the managerial implications, the main limitations of the study and possible future research lines.

2. Literature review

2.1 Brand equity in tourist destinations: definition and dimensions

In the marketing literature, brand equity is a fundamental, basic concept in brand management (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993, 2003; Gómez and Molina, 2013). From a marketing perspective, following Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993), brand equity is described as the value of the brand in the consumers' minds and, in particular, is defined as the differential effect exerted by brand awareness on the response of the consumer towards the brand (Keller, 1993, 2016), or as the perceived utility and overall superiority of a product because of its brand name, in comparison with other brands (Lassar *et al.*, 1995).

Since its appearance in the 1990s (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), the concept of brand equity has become a prominent topic in tourism marketing literature (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Horng *et al.*, 2012). The first studies on brand equity in tourism were applied to hotels (Cobb-Walgren *et al.*, 1995), restaurants (Kim and Kim, 2005) and airlines (Chen and Tseng, 2010). Destination brand equity was introduced in the study of Konecnik and Gartner (2007), based on the works of Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003), and in this study brand is analysed from the consumer perspective as a multidimensional concept consisting of brand awareness, image, quality, perceived value and loyalty.

With regard to the relationships between the dimensions of brand equity, a review of the literature identifies three types of studies: research on the dimensions of brand equity as a higher-order construct (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Kladou and Kehagias, 2014); works identifying the external variables (antecedents/consequences) of brand equity (Bigné *et al.*, 2013) and works that focus on the hierarchical relationships between the dimensions of brand equity (Boo *et al.*, 2009; Pike *et al.*, 2010; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014). In this present investigation, we focus on the latter two, thus analysing both the hierarchical relationships between the dimensions of brand equity and the effect of social media as an antecedent of brand equity.

2.2 Social media, schema theory and brand equity

In order to analyse the relationship between the intensity of social media and brand equity, the present work starts from the schema theory model derived from cognitive psychology (Fiske, 1982; Mandler, 1982; Eysenck and Wilson, 1984), which forms the basis of various studies on information processing and the effect of advertising (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989; Lane and Fastoso, 2016), and, more recently, the relationship between social media and brand equity (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015, 2016).

According to the above-mentioned theory, consumers associate communication stimuli with their prior knowledge, which is organised into schemes (Puligadda *et al.*, 2012; Lane and Fastoso, 2016). Therefore, new information is not stored in a random fashion, rather it is sorted into categories that are associated with a concept in the consumer's mind (Halkias, 2015). For example, in the context of a destination as a brand, if information received is congruent with the consumer's knowledge about the destination, the information is assimilated into the existing scheme, but if the new information is inconsistent with his knowledge, the structure of the scheme changes to absorb the new data (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 1998; Lane and Fastoso, 2016).

The change in the scheme affects the upper node that, according to Keller (1993, 2001, 2016), represents the brand image. According to Bransford and Johnson (1972), Anderson *et al.* (1977) and Eysenck (2013), the process of assimilating the new information into the mind of the consumer happens so subtly that they are often unaware of changes in their mental structures. However, previous research confirms that these changes may affect consumer decision making (Puligadda *et al.*, 2012; Halkias, 2015) and their perception of brand equity (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012).

Following this line of research, the present paper argues that the intensity of use of social media influences the dimensions of brand equity. Second, we develop the conceptual model, shown in Figure 1. In this model, the intensity of the use of social media is a determinant of brand equity. Specifically, the relationships between the following constructs are analysed:

(1) analysis of the influence of the intensity of use of social media on brand awareness;

(2) analysis of the effects of brand awareness on image, quality, customer value and intention to make WOM communication;

(3) analysis of the relationship between the components of the image, cognitive and affective; and

(4) analysis of the effects of the dimensions of brand equity (image, quality and value) on the intention to make WOM communication.
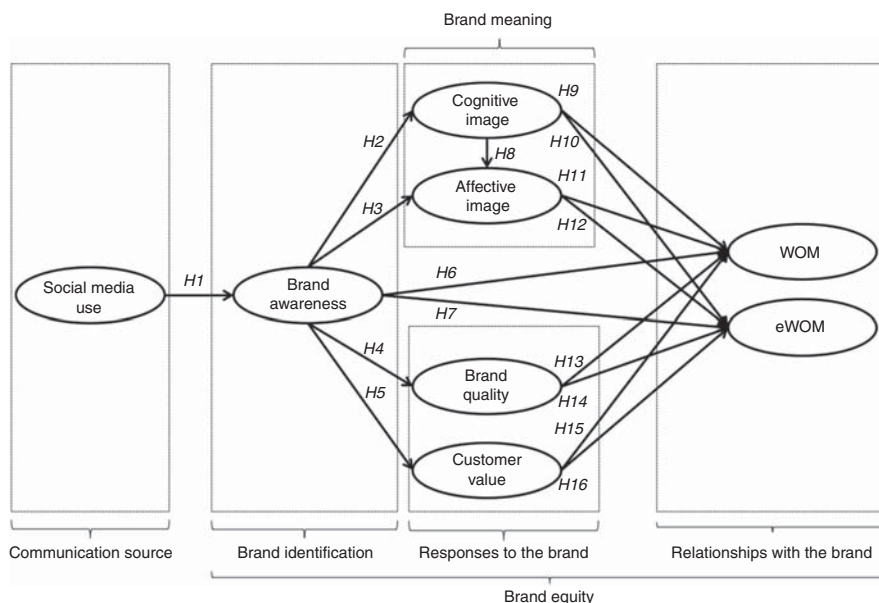

Figure 1.
Proposed conceptual
model

2.3 Conceptual model and hypotheses

2.3.1 Effects of social media intensity on brand awareness. Previous studies empirically evidence that marketing communications can reinforce brand awareness (Aaker, 1991; Yoo *et al.*, 2000). Also, more recent studies indicate that communication on social media can have the same effect, based on schema theory (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Social networking users are daily increasingly exposed to content on tourist destinations that they share with their friends (photos, videos, blogs, comments, etc.), which has a significant impact on brand awareness (Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Halkias, 2015).

Although the content generated by the company is always positive, compared to user generated content, which may be positive and/or negative, some authors argue that both types of content increase brand awareness and help the consumer in his purchase decision (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, it is considered that the intensity of interaction with the brand on social media can positively influence brand awareness of the destination at the moment of making the travel decision, proposing the following hypothesis:

H1. The intensity of social media use positively influences brand awareness.

2.3.2 Effects of brand awareness on image, quality, customer value and the intention to make WOM and eWOM. Along with brand awareness, as discussed above, brand equity comprises other dimensions such as image, quality, perceived value and loyalty (Keller, 2001). This section analyses the effect of awareness on these dimensions.

According to Keller (1993), brand awareness is necessary for the formation of image. A brand well established in the memory helps the consumer to form associations about the brand. First, the consumer recognises that a tourist destination exists and, later, a scheme or association is created in his memory that represents the image of the destination. Various studies support this analysis in the context of social networks (Llodrà-Riera *et al.*, 2015), because the content generated or shared by the other users represents the stimulus that influences the formation of the image of the destination (Keller, 1993). This process can occur in a conscious or unconscious way. In fact, Bruhn *et al.* (2012) find that content shared on social media influences brand awareness and, in turn, this influences brand image.

Based on previous research, image has two dimensions: cognitive and affective (Hyun and O'Keefe, 2012). The affective image is related to the emotional responses that the destination evokes. The cognitive image, on the other hand, can be defined as the perception of the functional and psychological attributes of the destination. The functional component is based on tangible attributes, such as tourist attractions. The psychological refers to abstract attributes such as the client's perception of quality and customer value (Bigné *et al.*, 2009).

Specifically, in the context of tourism there is a positive relationship between consumer generated content and brand image. Barreda (2014) empirically confirms the relationship between social media interaction on travel and brand awareness, and notes that awareness positively influences image. Consequently, based on the previously mentioned studies about the influence of brand awareness on image, and considering the two-dimensional nature of brand image of tourist destinations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2. Brand awareness on social media positively influences cognitive image.

H3. Brand awareness on social media positively influences affective image.

Previous research confirms that brand awareness influences brand quality (Keller and Lehmann, 2003; Pike *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, in the context of social media marketing, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) investigated the impact that communication on Facebook has on brand equity. The study analysed 60 different brands in three industries

(non-alcoholic beverages, fashion and mobile telephones) and empirically verified the positive influence of brand awareness on brand quality. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in the field of tourist destinations:

H4. Brand awareness on social media has a positive influence on the brand quality of the destination.

Some authors empirically conclude that there is a positive relationship between brand awareness and perceived value (Webster, 2000; Oh, 2000: Kwun and Oh, 2004). Extending these results to the context of tourist destinations and the influence of social media on value formation (Schau *et al.*, 2009; Tasci, 2016), the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. Brand awareness on social media positively influences customer value.

Works on destination brand equity have investigated the relationship between brand awareness and the intention to recommend (conceived as a component of attitudinal loyalty) (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Bianchi and Pike, 2011; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014; Yang *et al.*, 2015); however, the relationship between these two concepts in the social media environment has not been tested. Taking a similar approach to the studies previously discussed about brand awareness and WOM in the offline context, the influence of brand awareness on eWOM is posited. Therefore, the following hypotheses are made:

H6. Brand awareness on social media has a positive influence on the intention to develop WOM.

H7. Brand awareness on social media has a positive influence on the intention to develop eWOM.

2.3.3 Dual image of the destination. As indicated above, the present work analyses image through its two dimensions: cognitive and affective. In previous studies (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Hyun and O'Keefe, 2012), it was shown empirically that cognitive image positively influences affective image. In the field of tourist destinations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8. Cognitive image positively influences the affective image of the destination.

2.3.4 Effects of image, quality and customer value on the intention to develop word of mouth communication. In the review of the literature on brand equity of tourist destinations, several studies have found evidence of a positive relationship between affective brand image and intention to recommend (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Bianchi and Pike, 2011; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014; Yang *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, with respect to cognitive image, the study by Im *et al.* (2012) confirms that cognitive image influences the intention to recommend the destination. Consequently, it is proposed that, the greater are the values of the two components of the destination image, the greater will be the positive intention to recommend the destination, in traditional and digital ways (WOM and eWOM); thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9. Cognitive image positively influences the intention to develop WOM.

H10. Cognitive image positively influences intention to develop eWOM.

H11. Affective image positively influences the intention to develop WOM.

H12. Affective image positively influences the intention to develop eWOM.

In previous studies of brand equity in tourist destinations, it was evident that the perception of destination brand quality influences attitudinal loyalty (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Bianchi and Pike, 2011; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014). Considering that use of social media will contribute to consumers' higher valuation of quality attributes, it is expected that the

higher the level of perceived brand quality of the destination, the greater will be attitudinal loyalty; in this case, in the intention to recommend the tourist destination. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H13. Destination brand quality positively influences the intention to develop WOM.

H14. Destination brand quality positively influences the intention to develop eWOM.

Previous studies have shown the positive relationship between perceived value and attitudinal loyalty (Cretu and Brodie, 2007), and between perceived value and WOM (Oh, 1999; Olaru *et al.*, 2008).

Extending the precedent to the field of tourist destinations, it is expected that perceived customer value will have a positive influence on intention to recommend the destination; therefore, the following hypotheses are made:

H15. Customer value positively influences intention to develop WOM.

H16. Customer value positively influences intention to develop eWOM.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Study design

To test the proposed model, a quantitative study was carried out with international visitors to the tourist destination of Valencia, Spain. The choice of this destination is justified by its leading position in the Valencian Community in the use of social media as a communication tool (Invat.tur, 2015). As detailed in Table AI, Valencia has more than 160,000 followers on various social media. By way of illustration, #visitvalence has been used more than 20,000 times and #vlc more than 200,000. These hashtags represent filters that help users to research information about a destination, and are used by both brand managers and other Instagram users. These figures suggest that online communication has a great impact on potential tourists. Also, it should be noted that the use of digital media for contracting services is significant. As a specific example, 77 per cent of visitors to the city use the internet to hire transport and/or accommodation (Turismo Valencia, 2016).

3.2 Measurement scales

The intensity of social media use as a general source of information has been measured by adapting the scale of Llodrà-Riera *et al.* (2015) with three items, based on the intensity of interaction with the brand (how much content about the tourist destination did you see on social media?), applying a semantic differential scale of seven points (1 – I have not seen anything, 7 – I have seen a lot of content); the utility of the information found for the selection of the destination, applying a scale of seven points (1 – has not helped at all, 7 – has helped me a lot) and the utility of the information found for the organisation of the trip (the content seen in social media has helped in the choice of destination), applying a scale of seven points (1 – has not helped at all, 7 – has helped me a lot).

In order to measure the constructs of the proposed model, measurement scales have been used for the dimensions of brand equity: awareness of the destination brand, cognitive image, affective image, brand quality and the intention to recommend using WOM and eWOM. A seven-point Likert scale has been applied, 1 – totally disagree to 7 – fully agree. Table I shows the scale items.

It should be noted that the scale for the cognitive image of a tourism destination was adapted from the work of Echtner and Ritchie (1993), and it is a second-order construct that relates formatively to its dimensions (Laroche *et al.*, 2005; Gómez *et al.*, 2013). The attributes

Intensity of use of social media
I saw content about Valencia on the Internet
The content that I saw on the internet helped me at the moment I chose
to go to Valencia
The content helped me plan/organise my activities in Valencia

Llodrà-Riera *et al.* 2015

Destination brand awareness
Valencia has a good name and reputation
Valencia is a famous city
The characteristics of Valencia come quickly to mind
I saw a lot of publicity about Valencia

Boo *et al.* (2009)

Konecnik and Gartner (2007)

Cognitive image of the destination brand
Cultural image
  Valencia is a cultural and historic city
  The old city of Valencia is very attractive
  Valencia has a variety of interesting museums
  Valencia offers many attractive tourist attractions
Nature
  Valencia has attractive beaches
  It has very beautiful parks and nature zones
  The environment of Valencia (villages and nature) is very pretty
Attractions and Leisure
  Valencia has very vibrant nightlife
  Valencia is a city that offers many interesting events (fairs, festivals etc.)
  It has a lot of shopping facilities (shops, shopping centres)
  The local gastronomy is very rich and varied
Mediterranean city
  Valencia has a nice climate
  Valencia is a Mediterranean city

Echtner and Ritchie (1993)

Konecnik and Gartner (2007)

Echtner and Ritchie (1993)

Echtner and Ritchie (1993)

Affective image of Valencia
  Boring – Fun
  Unpleasant – pleasant
  Stressful – relaxing
  Depressing – exciting

Russel and Pratt (1980)

Quality of the destination brand
Valencia has a very good tourism offer
Valencia offers a range of lodgings
Valencia has good quality local infrastructure and transport
I believe that Valencia is a city where I will feel safe
I have high expectations about Valencia

Boo *et al.* (2009)
Konecnik and Gartner (2007)

Boo *et al.* (2009)

Customer value
Valencia has reasonably priced hotels and restaurants
I believe that I am going to get much better value for money in Valencia in
comparison to other destinations
The cost of visiting Valencia is reasonable considering the benefits I will derive

Boo *et al.* (2009)

Intention to recommend using traditional word of mouth communication (WOM)
I am going to speak positively about Valencia as a tourist destination
If I was asked I would recommend Valencia as a tourist destination
I would recommend Valencia to my friends and family

Intention to recommend using electronic word of mouth communication (eWOM)
I am going to share the details of my trip on the social media I use
I am going to recommend Valencia as a tourist destination on social media
I would recommend Valencia as a tourist attraction to my friends and family
on social media

Kim and Ko (2012)

Table I.
Measurement scales
used in the empirical
study

of the image are measured by 13 items grouped around cultural aspects, nature, fun/leisure, climate and Mediterranean identity; these dimensions are related in a reflective way with their indicators.

3.3 Data collection and profile of respondents

In order to address the objectives of the research and to verify the hypotheses, a quantitative study was developed through a personal survey and a structured questionnaire. The study population were international tourists over 18 years of age who were visiting the city of Valencia. Fieldwork took place during the months of June, July, and August 2016. Respondents were asked to take the questionnaire upon arrival in Valencia, that is, before they had any direct experience of the tourist destination and when their knowledge of the city came only from the sources of social media information they have used.

For data collection, convenience sampling was used at two youth hostels in the city centre, Purple Nest and Red Nest. This decision to use this sample was motivated by the fact that the young are most active in the use of social media as a source of tourism information (Trekksoft, 2017; Nusair *et al.*, 2013). However, this biases the sociodemographic profile of the sample that, as is shown in Table II, is thus characterised by its youth: 87.5 per cent of respondents are between 18 and 35 years old. This age distribution significantly affects the subsequent interpretation of the results, and above all complicates their generalisation. The final sample size was 249 interviewees.

3.4 Psychometric properties of the measurement model

The relationships proposed in the theoretical model were estimated using partial least squares (PLS). The decision to use PLS for the verification of the theoretical model was fundamentally due to the fact that it is an algorithm that allows the measurement of models with formative constructs, without the need for additional global indicators to identify the model. In this work, cognitive image has been incorporated as a second-order construct that relates formatively to

Characteristics of the interviewees	Categories	Percentages
Sex	Male	42.2
	Female	57.8
Age	18-24	54.2
	25-34	33.3
	35-54	6.4
	< 18	5.2
	> 65	0.8
Group composition	Solo	41.8
	Friends	40.2
	Couple	12.0
	Family	6.0
Length of stay	1-3 days	41.8
	4-7 days	26.1
	1-2 weeks	7.6
	3-4 weeks	5.2
	> 4 weeks	19.0
Place of origin	Europe	61.8
	Australia	15.3
	S. America	10.8
	N. America	10.4
	Asia	1.6

Table II.
Profile of the interviewees

its dimensions (cultural, nature, leisure and Mediterranean image); these dimensions are related in a reflective way with their indicators. This molar theoretical model structure was measured through the "build-up approach" procedure (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The software used for the estimation of the parameters was the SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle *et al.*, 2005), using a bootstrapping of 500 samples to calculate the significance of the parameters.

Before testing the structural relations of the theoretical model, it was verified that the measurement model would enjoy the proper conditions of reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The three indicators used for the validation of the reliability of the measurement instrument were the Cronbach α coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; critical acceptance value = 0.7), the composite reliability index (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; critical acceptance = 0.7) and the extracted variance index (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; critical acceptance value = 0.5).

These three reliability indicators exceed the corresponding critical values for each of the factors (except for Cronbach's α for the nature dimension of the cognitive image, which has a value slightly below 0.7). As evidence of convergent validity, the results provided by SmartPLS indicate that all loads of the items on their predicted factor are significant ($p < 0.01$), these standardized loads being greater than 0.7 (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). The average of these is higher than 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2012) and the analysis of the cross loads did not establish higher loads on the indicators over other latent variables distinct from those predicted. Also, in Table III it can be observed that all loads of the dimensions of cognitive image on the second-order formative factor are significant (Chin, 1998).

As evidence of discriminant validity, it was found that the correlations between constructs were not higher than the square root of the variance extracted between each pair of factors, as seen in Table IV.

4. Results and discussion

Table V shows the values of the standardized coefficients of the structural relationships, and the respective levels of significance of their associated t statistic. It should be noted that of the 16 hypotheses, 13 could not be rejected.

First, the effect of social media intensity on brand awareness turned out to be significant, and we could not reject *H1*. This finding is in line with the results of previous studies (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015; Barreda *et al.*, 2015).

Second, the results of the present study confirm the influence of brand awareness and cognitive image (*H2*). This finding contributes to Keller's (2001) theory of brand equity that the information that a user receives through social networks causes changes in the scheme (attributes of the image), and confirms the empirical evidence found in previous studies (Schuiling and Kapferer, 2004; Barreda, 2014).

As for the influence of brand awareness on affective image, a positive effect (*H3*) is confirmed, as well as a positive relation between the cognitive and affective dimensions of the image (*H8*), which allows us to conclude that between brand awareness and the rational and emotional components of the brand image there is a direct relationship in the form of a triangle where cognition is a precedent of affect.

Fourth, brand awareness influences brand quality (*H4*). This relationship has been confirmed in previous works by Keller and Lehmann (2003), Pike *et al.* (2010), and in Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) in the context of social media. In an analogous way, *H5* is confirmed in that awareness influences customer value. This relationship follows the same line as Dodds *et al.* (1991), in the sense that the information that the consumer stores influences his perception of value, and of Webster (2000), Oh (2000) and Kwun and Oh (2004), who confirmed the same relationship in their studies.

For its part, the hypothesis that awareness influences the intention to make WOM communication (*H6*) has not been confirmed, although in previous studies by Hutter *et al.* (2013)

Factor			Item	Convergent validity		Reliability		
				Loads (*t* Bootstrap)	Average loads	Cronbach α	CR	AVE
Intensity of use of social media (RRSS)			RRSS1	0.916 (70.319)	0.910	0.874	0.921	0.795
			RRSS2	0.891 (44.655)				
			RRSS3	0.868 (32.573)				
Brand awareness(AWA)			AWA1	0.761 (18.821)	0.747	0.737	0.833	0.555
			AWA2	0.774 (21.483)				
			AWA3	0.725 (13.907)				
			AWA4	0.718 (12.964)				
Cognitive image (2° order, formative)	0.780 (17.584)	Cultural (CUL)	CUL1	0.767 (13.525)	0.757	0.759	0.845	0.578
			CUL2	0.795 (23.170)				
			CUL3	0.662 (17.064)				
			CUL4	0.807 (23.354)				
	0.807 (13.109)	Nature (NAT)	NAT1	0.613 (9.924)	0.746	0.612	0.794	0.566
			NAT2	0.797 (22.323)				
			NAT3	0.829 (28.153)				
	0.831 (14.638)	Leisure (LEI)	LEI1	0.737 (25.673)	0.788	0.800	0.868	0.623
			LEI2	0.753 (39.075)				
			LEI3	0.826 (23.246)				
			LEI4	0.838 (21.711)				
	0.658 (10.393)	Mediteranian (MED)	MED1	0.868 (34.435)	0.878	0.705	0.871	0.772
			MED2	0.889 (53.403)				
Affective image (IMA)			IMA1	0.840 (31.429)	0.858	0.757	0.836	0.570
			IMA2	0.494 (5.775)				
			IMA3	0.856 (29.025)				
			IMA4	0.772 (15.188)				
Brand quality (QUA)			QUA1	0.804 (27.060)	0.800	0.788	0.854	0.539
			QUA2	0.702 (14.973)				
			QUA3	0.740 (18.858)				
			QUA4	0.676 (13.307)				
			QUA5	0.744 (18.658)				
Customer value (VAL)			VAL1	0.825 (24.794)	0.814	0.805	0.885	0.719
			VAL2	0.879 (44.815)				
			VAL3	0.839 (25.628)				
Traditional Word of mouth (WOM)			WOM1	0.944 (87.730)	0.918	0.911	0.944	0.850
			WOM2	0.947 (89.119)				
			WOM3	0.873 (22.143)				
Electronic Word of mouth (EWOM)			EWOM1	0.754 (12.068)	0.847	0.757	0.843	0.643
			EWOM2	0.811 (18.645)				
			EWOM3	0.838 (28.182)				

Notes: CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variant extracted

Table III.
Reliability and convergent validity of the measuring instrument

and Barreda *et al.* (2015) it was proven. However, *H7* which states that brand awareness influences the intention to make eWOM, is confirmed. Although a direct link between brand awareness and WOM has not been found, it is found that awareness influences other dimensions of brand equity (affective image, cognitive image, brand quality, customer value) that have a positive relationship with WOM. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an indirect relationship between brand awareness and WOM.

On the other hand, a significant relationship is not found between cognitive image and the intention to make WOM and eWOM communications (*H9*; *H10*), but a positive effect is observed between affective image and WOM and eWOM (*H11*; *H12*). The results allow us to conclude that a favourable cognitive image does not result in the recommendation of a

	RRSS	AWA	IMA	QUA	VAL	WOM	EWOM	CUL	NAT	LEI	MED
RRSS	*0.892*										
AWA	0.342	*0.744*									
IMA	0.209	0.305	*0.755*								
QUA	0.187	0.474	0.434	*0.734*							
VAL	0.145	0.276	0.353	0.562	*0.848*						
WOM	0.209	0.344	0.476	0.533	0.442	*0.922*					
EWOM	0.282	0.364	0.410	0.475	0.406	0.634	*0.803*				
CUL	0.236	0.383	0.322	0.594	0.425	0.442	0.351	*0.760*			
NAT	0.140	0.263	0.243	0.563	0.365	0.410	0.335	0.560	*0.752*		
LEI	0.183	0.352	0.288	0.593	0.457	0.313	0.300	0.570	0.548	*0.798*	
MED	0.181	0.359	0.328	0.491	0.416	0.356	0.243	0.398	0.389	0.486	*0.772*

Notes: The square root of the VE is shown on the diagonal in italics; the correlations between the constructs under shown under the diagonal

**Table IV.** Discriminant validity of the measuring instrument

Hypothesis	Structural relation	β	t Bootstrap	Contrast
H1	Intensity of use of social media → Awareness	0.345	6.570**	Not rejected
H2	Awareness → Cognitive image	0.412	6.625**	Not rejected
H3	Awareness → Affective image	0.199	2.911**	Not rejected
H4	Awareness → Brand quality	0.472	8.042**	Not rejected
H5	Awareness → Customer value	0.275	3.824**	Not rejected
H6	Awareness → WOM	0.072	1.123	Rejected
H7	Awareness → eWOM	0.151	2.585**	Not rejected
H8	Cognitive image → Affective image	0.255	3.212**	Not rejected
H9	Cognitive image → WOM	0.101	1.383	Rejected
H10	Cognitive image → eWOM	0.009	0.112	Rejected
H11	Affective image → WOM	0.269	4.652**	Not rejected
H12	Affective image → eWOM	0.212	2.695**	Not rejected
H13	Brand quality → WOM	0.229	2.684**	Not rejected
H14	Brand quality → eWOM	0.213	2.545*	Not rejected
H15	Customer value → WOM	0.146	2.303*	Not rejected
H16	Customer value → eWOM	0.166	2.462*	Not rejected

Notes: SRMR = 0.142; R^2 (awareness) = 0.12; R^2 (brand quality) = 0.2^2; R^2 (affective image) = 0.15; R^2 (cognitive image) = 0.17; R^2 (customer value) = 0.07; R^2 (WOM) = 0.39; R^2 (eWOM) = 0.32; Q^2 (awareness) = 0.07; Q^2 (brand quality) = 0.11; Q^2 (Affective image) = 0.07; Q^2 (cognitive image) = 0.10; Q^2 (customer value) = 0.05; Q^2 (WOM) = 0.32; Q^2 (eWOM) = 0.15. *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.01$

Table V. Contrast of the hypotheses

brand if it does not provoke emotion. Thus, the affective image that derives from the cognitive component becomes the main driver of consumer behaviour.

Finally, the relationships between destination brand quality and WOM (*H13*) and the destination brand quality and eWOM (*H14*) have been confirmed. This relationship was empirically demonstrated in previous studies of brand equity (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Bianchi and Pike, 2011; Bianchi *et al.*, 2014), although it had not been previously investigated in the context of *social media* and eWOM. Finally, *H15* and *H16* regarding the influence of perceived value on WOM and eWOM communication are confirmed and, in this sense, evidence is provided along the same lines as Bianchi and Pike (2011) and Bianchi *et al.* (2014), who verified the relationship between value and attitudinal loyalty. Figure 2 graphically illustrates the results of the model measurement.
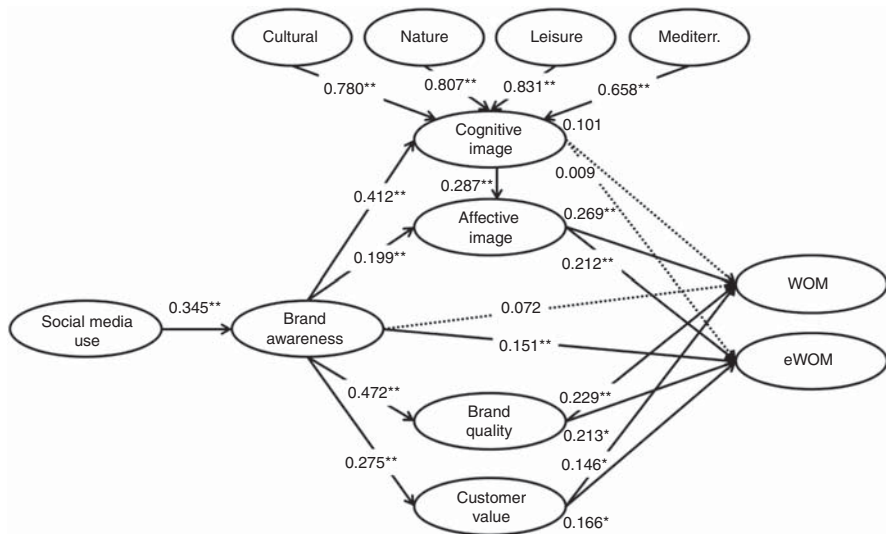
Figure 2.
Conceptual model
estimation

Notes: SRMR=0.142. *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.01$

5. Conclusions and practical implications

The present research analyses the effect of the intensity of use of different social media on destination brand equity; specifically, in the dimensions of brand awareness, image, quality, value and the intention to make WOM and eWOM communication. The results show that intensity of social media use significantly influences brand awareness. In turn, awareness has a positive relationship with cognitive and affective image of the brand, brand quality, customer value and the intention to make eWOM. As for the relationship between the two dimensions of the image, the results show that the affective image derives from the cognitive image.

The analysis of the relationship between brand awareness and the image components shows that the information that tourists find on social networks changes the cognitive image of the destination brand, but does not lead to a recommendation to visit the destination. The tourist recommends the tourist destination only if the information received provokes a positive emotion. Consequently, the affective image becomes the most important driver of prediction of consumer behaviour.

In addition, the positive relationship between brand awareness and destination quality and customer value has been confirmed. Tourists who obtain information about the tourist destination on social media have increased brand awareness and, at the same time, use quality and value as filters for the functional evaluation of the destination. A positive comparison will affect the behaviour of the tourist through his intention to recommend the destination both offline and online. Therefore, we observe an indirect relationship between the use of social media, awareness, quality, value and the intention to make WOM and eWOM communication.

Finally, it should be noted that these results constitute a contribution to the study of the effect of the use of social media on brand equity that has not previously been empirically studied in the context of tourist destinations. The verification of the hypotheses that make up the proposed model allows a better understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between social media as a source of information and its effects on the dimensions of brand equity, including the recommendation to visit the destination.

5.1 Practical implications

The results show the close relationship between the use of social networks and brand equity. If a destination is well positioned on social media it will generate greater brand awareness, which carries a significant impact on the image of the destination. In other words, the adoption of communication on social networks represents an opportunity to generate competitive advantages for the destination (Xiang *et al.*, 2015) and to improve the performance of the brand. Faced with these results two questions arise: how do social networks influence the performance of the brand? And how to develop an online strategy to manage the tourism brand?

In the first place, social media communication helps tourists to identify and know the destination much better. Consequently, destination managers committed to communicate on social networks can improve their positioning against competing destinations. To raise brand awareness, it is advisable to communicate the values of the brand's identity, through the symbology of the brand, thus generating a more attractive brand personality for tourists who are increasingly exposed to different social media content.

Second, the relationship between the cognitive and affective components of the image suggests that it is not enough only to offer content on your destination brand on social media (e.g. tourist attractions and promotions); it is necessary to promote the values of the destination that provoke a positive emotional response. Brand managers must analyse the unique personality of the brand and adopt these values in their online strategy. One of the strategies that can be applied is the so-called "Inbound Marketing", which focusses on creating value content that arouses the interest of the target audience and provokes positive emotion (Halligan and Shah, 2009). As observed in the present study, content that positively influences the affective image of the destination provokes a favourable attitude on the part of consumers and an intention to recommend the destination.

Third, it has been shown that brand identity has a positive relationship with brand quality and customer value. Tourists evaluate the quality of the destination as higher the greater their perception of quality of accommodation, tourist attractions, infrastructure and security. Therefore, it is very important, to meet tourist needs, that the destination strengthens these aspects.

Finally, it has been shown that content generated by users through the use of social media has a significant impact on destination brand equity. It is therefore recommended that destination managers incentivise tourists to generate more content on the brand by creating popular hashtags, organising photo contests, blogs, and more. In other words, a communication strategy based on active tourist participation through social media is a competitive advantage for the tourist destination, because of its relevance to brand equity.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Despite the contributions and practical implications of this study, several limitations are recognised. First, a larger sample would offer the possibility of further segmenting the results. On the other hand, the data collection was carried out city centre hostels with young people, which does not fully reflect the image of tourism in the city of Valencia and, therefore, it is not possible to directly generalise the results.

5.3 Future lines of research

The role of social media as an antecedent of the brand equity of a tourist destination is a scarcely studied theme (Keller, 2016). From the literature review and the conclusions of the present work, we suggest research lines of interest for future studies. In the first place, to give more validity to the model, it is suggested the research be extended through cross-cultural studies that would allow a comparison of the perception of tourists from different countries (Swaminathan, 2016). Second, the study might be repeated with a

EJMBE

broader sample and over a different time period to allow a generalisation of the results and to try to segment the results by analysing the data of the specific social media channels. For example, to compare visual applications (Pinterest, Instagram) with YouTube or Facebook (Swaminathan, 2016). Third, it would be interesting to include moderating variables in the model, such as age or the specific channel of social media used by the tourist, to understand their possible effects on the relationships raised in the study.

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Appendix

Social media	Name	Language	Followers
Facebook	Turismo Valencia	Spanish	42.6K
	Visit Valencia	English	16K
	Visita Valencia	Italian	39.5K
	Valencia Espagne	French	17.7K
	Viva Valencia	German	7.1K
	Valencia Spanje	Dutch	8.3K
	131.2K		
Twitter	@Valenciaturismo	Spanish	25.4K
	@ValenciaCity	English	2.5K
	@VisitaValencia	Italian	1.7K
	@ValenciaEspagne	French	0.5K
	@_VivaValencia	German	0.6K
	@ValenciaSpanje	Dutch	0.3K
	31K		
Instagram	@visit_valencia	English	2.5K
Pintarest	Turismo Valencia	International	0.4K
Google +	Turismo Valencia	Spanish	0.5K
	Valencia tourism	English	0.2K
	Turismo a Valencia	Italian	0.2K
	Valence Espagne	French	0.2K
	Valencia Tourismus	German	0.3K
	1.4K		
YouTube	Valencia Tourism	International	0.6K
Blog	Turismo Valencia	International	
Minube	Turismo Valencia		
Trip Advisor	Valencia. España	264 K comments	
PaesiOnLine	Valencia Italiano	Italian	

Table AI.
Social media official profiles of the city of Valencia

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